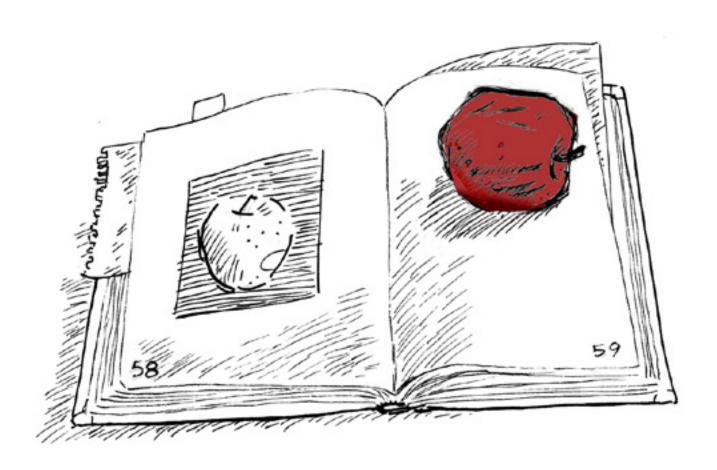
Edward Taylor



Edward Taylor is considered one of the finest poets in Early New England—his work was hidden and never published in his lifetime. As a minister by career he felt poetry's notions of decorative embellishments and emphasis of personal thoughts were not proper to share publicly.

Another way of viewing his mindset, a minister's public focus should be with his congregation. If Taylor sought out recognition as a poet, his attention would become diverted from matters of the Divine.

- His poetry exist as *private* meditations for a conversation between himself and God alone.
- His work was discovered in the 1930s; the complete text was not published until 1960s.

A Brief Overview:

- Considered a member of the second generation of Puritan settlers.
- Taylor was born in England in 1642.
- After Charles II restored the monarchy, Taylor emigrated to the colonies in 1668.
- Keep in mind, once Charles II was made king, the Church of England once again held authority over religious matters.
- In the English colonies, Taylor changed vocations from teaching to ministry.
- Today he is considered one of the greatest Puritan writers.

Since these are private creations, they do take slight diversions from the Puritan Plain Style.

On occasion Taylor even offers an experimental metaphysical approach utilizing puns and phrases with double meanings.

Follows Puritan Plain Style:

- carry strong didactic themes
- religious subjects and concerns
- emphasis placed on the greatness of God and the lowly stature of
- humanity due to original sin
- often resorts to utilizing typology— which is the concept of taking an image out of everyday experience and tying it as a symbol to the divine element

Breaks Puritan Plain Style tradition:

- the personality of Taylor is easily discernible
- emotive work which channels his feelings— sometimes the *emotions* seem more in control than the minister himself; rather than suppressing passions and ecstasies, he embellishes their presence
- exposes a questioning, yet humble mind
- at time he evokes the senses, placing an emphasis on being human
- within his most metaphysical work, he often uses a strong mystical theme which implies it is possible to achieve unity with God, creating a sense of euphoria or religious rapture within the average church member

Critic E. F. Carlisle suggests "there is little question now that one must read Taylor as both a *Puritan* poet and as a *poet* if he wishes to understand him at all" (147). What results, Carlisle states, is that there is a problem defining the relationship Taylor himself built within his two vocations: *public* minister, *private* poet.

- Critics often discuss which role was the more prominent in his life in the settlement of Westfield, Massachusetts.
- Carlisle also states:

"The purpose and function of Taylor's poetry as meditation, the resulting essential connection between his sermons and his poems, the entire body of his writing and, of course, the Puritan structure make up the complex of sources, influences and achievements we must understand and relate to reach that fuller comprehension" (148).

E. F. Carlisle. "The Puritan Structure of Edward Taylor's Poetry." American Quarterly 20.2, Part 1 (1968): 147-163. JSTOR. Web. 03.04.12.

"Prologue"

Compare Anne Bradstreet's "Prologue" with Edward Taylor's version.

How do these poems differ in themes and structures?

Taylor, "Prologue"

Compare Anne Bradstreet's "Prologue" with Edward Tylor's version.

How do these poems differ in themes and structures?

Anne Bradstreet	Edward Taylor
• audience primarily of men critical	• audience primarily directed to God
of her talent; her worth as poet;	requesting to be considered worthy
individualistic, sarcastic,	enough to write of His glory,
mock humility:	extreme humility, self-demeaning
"my mean pen" (3)	"if its Pen" (7; my emphasis)
"My obscure lines" (6)	"I am this Crumb of Dust" (13)
• iambic pentameter / sestet stanzas	• iambic pentameter / sestet stanzas
• feminine public tone	masculine private tone
• emotive, intellectual	• passionate, emotive
 lacks metaphysical conceit 	metaphysical conceit
• function serves as introduction to book	• function serves devotional meditation
not intended for publication	not intended for publication
 mentions the Greek muses and her 	asks God for inspiration
own personal, blemished Muse	
In the end, she knows her worth.	He questions his worth.

Taylor constructs an interesting metaphor within this short work.

What results, an intricate formula is constructed, one that relies on heavy symbolism.

- Taylor meekly refers to himself as a Crumb of Dust; to the Eternal God, humanity would appear as lowly as motes of dirt or as miniscule beings.
- The poet becomes an instrument of God; the Pen represents either
 the poet's soul or perhaps the poet's faith, which generates a working hierarchy
 in a sense: God > Poet > Pen > Poem (Glorification of God)
- The Pen in effect stands in as a representation of the Poet himself:
 as a literary device this is called a **synecdoche**, similar to a metaphor,
 a small aspect of an object (or person) represents the whole object (individual).
- Likewise, pay attention to how Taylor diminishes his own form in the opening line as a Crumb, which in tun magnifies God, in a reverse logic.

• He also uses a technique Bradstreet utilizes in her poem "A Letter to Her Husband," namely causing a brief pause within the iambic structure of a line by placing the word "nay" for emphasis. Line two reads:

Outmatch / all moun / tains, *nay*, / the Cry / stal sky?

The positioning of the word adds more psychological relevance to his comparisons of a Crumb to the glory of the rest of Creation.

- Later in line eleven he will use the reverse wording— "yea" as another break.
- Aside from rhythm control, Taylor has a strong talent for manipulating sounds and tonal qualities within individual lines. By using **alliteration**, a sense of musical qualities can be added to a verse. Again, line eleven for example:

It would <u>but bl</u>ot and <u>bl</u>ur, yea, jag, and jar.

Another important element, Taylor shows a strong strategy in the slow developmental transformation of his poet-speaker.

Notice at first he uses "a crumb of dust," (l 1) but later in the poem he states "this crumb of Dust" (l 21), later "Thy dust," and "Thy Crumb of Dust" (ll 22, 24, 25).

- Progressively, the speaker is working through building a strong connection to the Divine but submitting humbly while in meditative prayer, and at the same time asking for pardon.
- Line twenty-one asks for inspiration to properly address God and thus in turn emphasizes that he is attempting to be a devout follower, despite his humanly flaws.
- Throughout the poem he continually refers to himself as "it"—like an insect.
- Once stanza four shows admission of failings, *then* the transformation occurs, he considers himself a part of the whole of the Divine.

Ultimately, notice how God appears in multiple roles here.

The relationship between God and the poet blur into many categories.

- On one level the only **audience** *is* the All Father. This is a private piece after all. Taylor wrote these as a means of bridging himself to a greater awareness of spirituality.
- On another, He acts as a **muse** to the poet as well. The poet requests inspiration generating the typical prayer to an unseen source of imagination.
- On a third analytical approach to the poem, God represents a **critic-reader**, a strong-willed state of perfection who slowly takes the poet into a higher plane of artistic reality. God is the embodiment of Idealism, Taylor only a mere flawed-mortal product.

Finally, notice the thematic movement in the poem likewise transitions the main image of the work.

By the last stanza, the subject shifts from the controlling image of a pen to the image of a valuable stone, a gem.

- In the second stanza, the poem shows a Angel's Quill which is "sharpened on a Precious Stone ground tight" (18).
- And then in the third stanza the poet-speaker declares he "would gladly grind [his imagination]/ Unto an Edge on Zion's Precious Stone" (ll 15-16).
- These phrases prepare the reader for the final image of a jeweler.
 To use a common cliché Taylor is himself a diamond in the rough.