

Edward Taylor's Elegy on Deacon David Dewey

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AMONG THE MATERIALS recently recorded by the staff of the North American Imprints Program at the American Antiquarian Society is a unique copy of a small, eighteenth-century pamphlet containing various prose meditations by Deacon David Dewey of Westfield, Massachusetts, three pages of 'Some Exhortations, Pen'd and Left . . . as a Legacy to His Children,' and a concluding elegy on Dewey of ninety lines.¹ The author of the elegy is identified in the salutation at the end of the poem: '*Sic flevit mastus amicus, E.T.*' 'E.T.' is almost certainly Edward Taylor. The poem contains evidence of the close personal relationship between Taylor and Dewey, a deacon in the Westfield Church; it is also characteristic of Taylor's writing. And it is, of course, the first extant published poem of Taylor's, one that he apparently provided to the family with the knowledge that it would be printed in the collection of Dewey's meditations.² Taylor may even have been involved in assembling the manuscript and arranging for its publication.

The pamphlet, called *Meditations*, is incomplete, beginning at page three and lacking the title page and whatever prefatory material it might have originally had. All of 'Meditation 1' and

¹ I am indebted to Mr. Michael Zinman, owner of the Dewey pamphlet, for permission to publish the selections in this essay; and to Mr. Keith Arbour, head of readers' services at the American Antiquarian Society, for providing me with a copy of the work and responding to my requests.

² Apparently without Taylor's knowledge, two stanzas of 'Upon Wedlock, & Death of Children' were published in Cotton Mather's collection of funeral sermons, *Right Thoughts in Sad Hours* (London, 1689). For a discussion of the circumstances, see Thomas M. and Virginia L. Davis, eds., *Edward Taylor's Minor Poetry* (Boston, 1981), p. 299.

perhaps half of 'Meditation 2' is missing, as is any material that may have followed the elegy (which ends on page 20), although it is likely that the poem was intended as the final part of the work. The pamphlet measures $5\frac{3}{4}$ by $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches. It is in three parts. The largest section, pages 3–14, contains sixteen prose meditations (missing of course the first and part of the second); each is slightly less than a single page, and each contains approximately two hundred words. This first part concludes with Dewey's name and the date, June 20, 1708. The second part, some three pages, contains the 'Exhortations' to his children, and was apparently added to the group of meditations after his death. There is no further identification or date at the end of this middle section. Taylor's poem takes up the last part of the pamphlet, covering nearly three pages (pages 18–20). It is possible that the pamphlet was printed early in 1713, in Boston or New London. Without the front material and any prefatory remarks, the date and place of publication will have to remain conjectural, as well as the identity of the editor—if there was one.

The Dewey family originally came to this country in the early 1630s, settling first in Dorchester, Massachusetts, and then moving with the Reverend John Wareham and his congregation to Windsor, Connecticut, in 1636–37. The patriarch of the clan, Thomas Dewey, Sr., died in 1648, and three of his sons, Thomas, Jedidiah, and Josiah, moved to Northampton; Israel, the oldest—and father of David—remained in Windsor. After a short residence in Northampton the three brothers established a mill at Two Mile Brook north of Westfield and moved with their families to Westfield in the late 1660s.³

³ I am indebted to Mr. Franklin P. Taplin, director of the Westfield Athenaeum, for confirmation of the Dewey genealogical details. For further information on the Dewey family in Westfield, see John H. Lockwood, *Westfield and Its Historic Influences*, 2 vols. (Springfield, 1922); Thomas M. and Virginia L. Davis, eds., *Edward Taylor's 'Church Records' and Related Sermons* (Boston, 1981); and especially Walter L. Powell's excellent edition of the Westfield town records in 'Edward Taylor's Westfield: An Edition of the Westfield Town Records' (Ph.D. diss., Kent State University, 1983).

Among the original grantees, each of the brothers became substantial and influential members of the Westfield community. Thomas Dewey, for example, was the messenger selected to go to Cambridge in 1670 to locate a minister for the frontier settlement; Josiah was one of the foundation men of the Westfield Church and served as deacon from 1692 to 1696, when he moved with his family to Lebanon; and Jedidiah served in various capacities in Westfield until his death in 1718.⁴ As the second son of Israel, David (born on January 11, 1676), like his uncles before him, apparently moved to Westfield to establish himself there, rather than remaining in Windsor. Exactly when David moved to Westfield is not clear; the first reference to him as a resident of the village appears in the minutes for a town meeting on March 6, 1699, when he was granted twenty acres of land ('Town Records,' page 238). He may have assisted his uncles in the work at the mill or helped in other Dewey enterprises. At any rate, he soon established himself in Westfield and held a succession of public offices—assessor, surveyor, constable (1705), selectman (1708, 1709–10), and schoolmaster (1707–8), during the time he composed and dated the meditations. According to entries in the Westfield 'Church Records,' he became a full member of the church in

⁴ The events of Taylor's meeting with Thomas Dewey and their journey to Westfield are in Francis Murphy, ed., *The Diary of Edward Taylor* (Springfield, 1964), pp. 38–39.

Deacon Josiah Dewey may have also written some things that are now not extant. Taylor copied into his 'Commonplace Book' an oral account of 'Some Speciall Observances of Brother Josiah Dewy upon the Death of his Daughter Hepzibah Who Died of a Putrid Fever in Child Bed. . . .', containing the following striking incident:

The next day after her death, being alone to meditate & pray over Gods Dispen-sations tords us in removing her from us . . . as I was meditating & musing these thoughts came in. Oh what a refreshing thing would it be to see or heare her among the Saints in heaven singing those heavenly Hallelujahs & immediaty hereupon there began to spring up in me a Strong perswasion that thro the wishes of Gods grace it was so. . . & casting mine eyes towards heaven me thought I saw her there in the middst of that heavenly company in that happy world, & more plainly, than any of the rest tho not with bodily eyes. But now my heart was filled with joy unspeakable, & all runing over in such a way as I know not how to express it: something like a Pot over a fierce fire that will soon run all [over.] . . & being sensible my poore fraile body could not hold this long my lips mooved therefore thus LORD IT'S ENOUGH: I KNOW NOT HOW TO BEARE ANY MORE. (pp. 57–59)

September of 1700 (his wife Sarah in 1709) and was, with Thomas Noble, ordained Deacon on May 25, 1712, only six months before his death at age 36.⁵

Taylor was almost twice Dewey's age, yet their relationship seems to have been more than simply that of pastor and parishioner; the evidence suggests that they were also good friends. Such a closeness would normally be implicit in Dewey's role as deacon in the Westfield congregation. But Taylor also was one of the four witnesses to Dewey's will, drawn up on November 26, 1712, four days before his death.⁶ And lines 40–46 of the elegy indicate that he was present during Dewey's final illness:

Some hours before it [death] siez'd thy house of Sorrow,
Thou said'st, *Ob Sir, I'st be with Christ to Morrow*. . . .
And some few hours thence, ere day did break,
Thy Soul did from its Tabernacle leap.

The elegy itself, made available for publication, is also a testimony to the regard Taylor had for the younger man. The conventional sentiments one usually finds in elegies of this period are not extensive; rather, Taylor's expression is often direct and personal. Dewey may be another of God's chosen ones departing, but the focus of the poem is more on personal matters than on the public loss of another of New England's saints.

Dewey's prose meditations are in the same tradition as Anne Bradstreet's 'Meditations Divine and Moral.'⁷ Although they do not have the same imagistic quality as Bradstreet's work, they are often reminiscent of her subjects, which is to say that they are preoccupied with many of the basic Puritan temptations—the war between flesh and spirit, the disparity between

⁵ See Davis, *Edward Taylor's 'Church Records,'* pp. 167, 170, 173.

⁶ Manuscript, *Hampshire County Register of Probate*, 2:95. I am indebted to Walter L. Powell for a transcription of the probate records of Dewey's will; this and other manuscript volumes are held in Springfield, Massachusetts. Dewey's estate was valued at nearly six hundred pounds.

⁷ Jeannine Hensley, ed., *The Works of Anne Bradstreet* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 272 ff.

things of this world and things above, and so on. And like Bradstreet's, Dewey's meditations are designed to provide instruction for his children. Dewey may have also used such passages as the following from his *Meditations* in his classes in the village school:

The Ninth Meditation.

When I consider of *Beauty*, how glorious it makes every Subject in which it is an adjunct; how is the Eye Enamored with it? and the Affections Delighted with it? When I see the beauty that is in the objects here below, it puts me in mind of the Beauty of Holiness, in which I ought to Praise God. Are the things that are here, all beautiful in their Season; how beautiful then is our Glorious Redeemer? who is altogether Lovely & Beautiful; who is the Head of Excellency? Blessed Lord, let my desire be unto Thee, let me evermore love and adore Thee, who art every way Beautiful and Desirable.

Such subjects as the shortness of life, the unendingness of eternity, the treasure of the world, the ages of man, etc., provide the subject matter of the various meditations. The brief collection seems to be ordered to reflect the passage of human life and its basic concerns: beginning (in 'Meditation 2') with the nature of God, followed by a meditation on mortality and original sin ('Meditation 3'), and ending in meditations on death (no. 14), love (no. 15), and rest (no. 16). They are gracefully written, quiet in tone, and, while the subjects are characteristically Puritan, the expression is distinctive enough to suggest the nature of Dewey's quiet, assured faith.

The *Meditations* proper were completed as Dewey indicates on June 20, 1708. The section on 'Exhortations, Pen'd and Left . . . as a Legacy to His Children' was apparently attached to the *Meditations* after his death, although his comments in this work indicate that he intended the 'Exhortations' to be part of the *Meditations* too:

I thought meet to lay before you some of my Meditations, and also some Instructions and Exhortations, which if ever you come to the Sight of, I charge you seriously consider of the same. (p. 15)

What follows are three brief admonitions, similar to the statements of a catechism, focusing on the injunction 'Remember your Creator in the Days of your Youth.' In the final paragraph of the 'Exhortations,' Dewey cautions his children regarding careful study of the Bible, conscientious service to God, and the proper observance of the Sabbath:

You must not Play nor tell Stories on the *Sabbath-Day*: but read your Books, and Pray to God, and mind what the Minister sayes. (p. 17)

Unlike the more general meditative voice of the first section, the 'Exhortations' are addressed to younger children, presenting clear and simple advice, in a tone of gentle admonition.⁸

Taylor's elegy is relatively subdued, quiet, more directly focused on the actual events and significance of the deceased's life than is true of his other elegies of this period, the more formal one on Samuel Hooker and the one on his sister-in-law, Mehetable Woodbridge.⁹ In fact, the tone of the Dewey elegy is much closer to Taylor's 'A Fig for Thee Oh! Death' than to the conventional elegy. As in that poem, in the Dewey elegy there is no hesitation in claiming the ultimate victory over death and assuming a rightful place with Christ in heaven. The poem is also concerned primarily with the personal events in Dewey's life. Taylor refers, for example, to the last 'private' fast that he seems to have observed with Dewey, to the 'Dewy Rhymes' of the meditations left for his children, to the specific events of Dewey's deaconry, and to the final hours of his life. The second part of the poem (lines 47 ff.) is a more general account of Dewey's struggles with the temptations of this world, but even here the focus is on Dewey as an individual, and the poem does not turn—as elegies of this period often do

⁸ Dewey's five children were young when he died; David, Jr., was twelve years old, Charles eight, Nathaniel five, Isaac four, and Sarah only nineteen months. Whatever sickness killed Dewey may also have claimed his infant daughter Sarah. She died only two weeks after he did.

⁹ See Davis, *Edward Taylor's Minor Poetry*, pp. 116, 124. The two versions of 'A Fig for Thee Oh! Death' are on pp. 261-64.

—to the broader concerns of the death of another of New England's faithful. It is the expression, as Taylor says, of a good friend.

It would be too easy to overemphasize the significance of this poem, not as poem itself but as evidence of Taylor's attitude toward publication, of his distinction between the public and private voice, and of his contemporary reputation as a poet. In one sense, elegies—as early as the ones he wrote while at Harvard—were 'published,' public poems, and in that context he was a public poet and known as one. And throughout his life he wrote elegies on other of his friends, copies of which were no doubt presented to the families of the deceased and therefore existing in a 'published' mode. He may have viewed this simply as a normal expression of his sympathy for the survivors. Furthermore, the elegy on Dewey is a relatively late poem, and one should be quite cautious about any reevaluation of earlier attitudes or works on the basis of a single poem. At any rate, perhaps the most important aspect of the discovery of this poem is its discovery and the nagging question it raises: how many more—published or unpublished—of Taylor's works are still to be unearthed?

A POEM, upon the Death of
Deacon DAVID DEWEY of *Westfield*,
Deceased, *Novemb.* 30. 1712

David by Name, David by Nature, shew
Thou art Belov'd (if that thy Name say True)
By God and Christ, who in thee gave a Place
Unto his Image brightly laid in Grace;
And of his holy Angels, who did tend 5
Thee all thy days, until thy Life did end,
And of his Saints, who gave thee welcome cheer
According as the Dewy drops that were
Dropt from the Cloud of Grace besprinkled thee,
Making thy branch graciously fragrant be. 10
Those Dewy Tears that trickled down thy Cheeks
In thy Confession and thy Spirit's recks [recks?]
On our last Fast for Zion's cause attended
In private-wise up with thy Heart ascended:
In which were lodg'd that Sacred Treasure most 15
The rich Embellishments of the Holy Ghost.
That Sacred Lodging, gloriously gilt o're
With Sparkling Grace which issued out at door
Then of thy Lips ere gave Direction meet
Unto thy Senses; Eyes, Ears; Hands, and Feet. 20
Hence sweetest Breathings in thy Closet still'd
And Family, like Incense, Christ's Ears fill'd.
Thy Lips dropt Dewy Rhymes, which then did fall
In Admonitions, on thy Offspring all:
To bring them up to Christ, as Dews in th' Morn 25
Do hang bright dangling Pearls on ears of Corn.
This Grace's Dew too drencht thy Consort's heart
In influences of an holy Art: [18/19]
Whom, with thy little Stems which thou dist leave
Thou dists, ere thou departst, to Christ bequeath [.] 30
Thy Grace did make thy Township Neighbourhood

Among us, very pleasant, usefull, good.
 Thy Conversation with us gave a Shine
 Of Prudence, Peace, and Piety Divine.
 That when grim death our Deaconry laid void, 35
 Thou call'd wast to, and in that work employ'd.
 Untill thy Person was dichotomiz'd
 By death's sharp Sword, and by the same surpriz'd.
 Some hours before it siez'd thy house of Sorrow,
 Thou said'st, *Oh Sir, I'st be with Christ to Morrow;* 40
That is far better. Soon did'st after hear
 The Wind, by Shuffs that boisterous did appear,
 Repli'dst thus, *The Wind is high,* quoth thee,
But by to Morrow I'st above it be!
 And some few hours thence, ere day did break, 45
 Thy Soul did from its Tabernacle leap.

Thus parted, and departed thus thou art,
 And at like distance standeth part from part.
 As far well nigh by death's cold cruel hand,
 As doth the *Zenith* from the *Nadir* stand. 50
 Thy noble Soul refin'd, all bright, doth swim
 In fulgent Glory, fill'd with Bliss to th' brim,
 In Heaven above, with Saints, and Angels bright,
 And Christ Himself thy Lord, Light, and Delight.
 But Oh, thy Body, that incarnate Dust, 55
 Is dropt below, under Earth's surface thrust,
 Once was a Seat of Sin, Corruption's nest,
 Rebellion's Kennel, Disobediences Chest;
 Soil of Iniquity, wherein each thing
 Of Spiritual Evil rooted was, and Spring 60
 Would certainly, and treacherously would act,
 Hadst thou not Cudgeld it, or raine ere slack'd. [19/20]
 True only to Untruth, and truthless view,
 Unfaithfull, Stubborn, truly all Untrue:
 Backward to Good; it's easier to bring 65

Bears to the Stake, than make it cease to Sin [.]
 Yea, at the best, it was a Seat of Sorrow,
 Diseases, Sickneses, and Pains that Borrow:
 All Weariness and Griefs that tend the same,
 That indispos'd it to a gracious frame. 70
 Hadst thou not wed its garden mortifi'd
 And held it to, and in Christ's Work, it playd.
 But now thou hast it with its adjuncts all
 Both good and bad put off, and so to fall
 Into the Grave, there t' ly a mellowing: 75
 Thus farewell, Sorrows, Sighings, Tears, and Sin.
 But being here, the Soul's choice Mate, and hand,
 When well subdu'd by Grace, and at Command;
 Shall at the Resurrection of the Just
 In Robes of Glory rise out of the Dust, 80
 Transcending brightest Gold, and shining Sun
 In Glory clear; to which thy Soul shall run
 And reunite, and perfectly repair
 Thy Person spoild while 'ts parts asunder are.
 For, both together Serving Christ as one, 85
 Shall both together reign with Christ in's Throne,
 And perch with Saints and Angels in the Ring
 Of Everlasting Glory Praise to Sing.
 While we thy Coffin's Cambarick do borrow
 To wipe off of our Eyes the Tears of Sorrow. 90

Sic flevit mastus amicus,

E. T.

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