

THE BULLETIN

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COVER *Poetry Collection: Congregational Library and Archives.*
Photograph by: Sari Mauro

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Photography

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The Congregational Library and Archives strives to enliven a tradition of care for the world's future by preserving and interpreting the stories of the past and to serve anyone desiring to learn more about one of the nation's oldest and most influential religious traditions and has been since its founding in 1853. The Library is located just down from the Massachusetts State House in Congregational House at 14 Beacon Street, Boston, Massachusetts.



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FROM THE DIRECTOR



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Margaret Bendroth

Poetry isn't probably the first thing that comes to mind about Congregationalists. There's that nearly indelible image of Puritans frowning at anything happy or fun—far from the truth of course—and then the generations that followed, staunch social reformers and theologians, missionaries and ecumenists, all in all fairly serious folk.

But as we learn in this issue of the *Bulletin* poetry is at the heart of our tradition. Puritans like Edward Taylor, who is featured in this edition, wrote achingly beautiful expressions of devotion to God, as did other colonial-era figures like Anne Bradstreet and the African-American poet Phyllis Wheatley. The same was true on the other side of the Atlantic: we can claim John Milton and John Bunyan, but also, as British scholar George Southcombe tells us, scores of lesser-known

Dissenters whose angular and angry writings skewered the unwary and unjust. The list goes on: Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning, Katherine Lee Bates, who published the text to “America the Beautiful” in the *Congregationalist* in 1895, and if we stretch things a bit, even Emily Dickinson.

The spiritual tradition continues today, and in this issue is the contemporary example of Charles Harper, who gave a reading in the Library this past fall. Without a doubt there are many more poets out there, some lost to historical obscurity and others, perhaps even now watching sunsets or walking through the woods, waiting for the right inspiration. We hope that the small sampling of Congregational poets we offer here, from both the past and present, will provide just that.

Margaret Bendroth

“THY LOVE ENFLAME IN MEE”

How a Puritan Pastor’s Poetry Shaped My Life

CHARLES E. HAMBRICK-STOWE

The meditative poems of Edward Taylor (1642-1729) grabbed my attention from the start. It was their intensity, enhanced somehow by their antiquity. Their contemplative quality, their intimate expression of hunger for God, were reminiscent of John Donne (as in “Batter my heart, three person’d God”) and the metaphysical poets of England. The first of Taylor’s “Preparatory Meditations” – prayerful exercises on Saturday night in anticipation of preaching and administering the Lord’s Supper in the Congregational church at Westfield, Massachusetts, where he was pastor – set the tone.

What Love is this of thine, that Cannot bee
In thine Infinity, O Lord, confined,
Unless it in thy very Person see,
Infinity and Finity conjoyn’d?
What hath thy Godhead, as not satisfied
Marri’de our Manhood, making it its Bride?
(I:1:1-6)¹

Taylor’s blend of scripture, the earthiness of human experience, and ethereal yearning for divine love resonated with me at a deep level. As he wrote that first meditation late on July 23, 1682, Taylor was consumed with grief, his eleven-month old daughter Abigail on her deathbed, the second child he and his wife Elizabeth would have to bury. One can imagine Taylor by the hearth in prayer. While his poems follow a metric formula, at their best they are not formulaic. By the last stanza, we know his desperation was real.

Oh! that thy Love might overflow my Heart!
To fire the same with Love: for Love I
would.
But oh! my streight’ned [constricted] Breast! my
Lifeless Sparke!
My Fireless Flame! What Chilly Love, and
Cold?
In measure small! In Manner Chilly! See
Lord blow the Coal: Thy Love Enflame in
mee. (I:1:13-18)

¹ Quotations from “Preparatory Meditations before my Approach to the Lords Supper” are from Donald E. Stanford, ed., *The Poems of Edward Taylor* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1960). The Roman numeral in each reference indicates the series, followed by the number of the poem and lines within the poem. Thus, I:1:1-6 signifies Series I, Meditation 1, lines 1-6. Spelling has not been modernized. Definitions in brackets are my own.

He would compose 215 more poems like this, along with many others on various themes, often prompted by specific occasions, personal crises, or ecclesiastical issues, until retirement at age 83 in 1725.

As I worked with Taylor over many years, what I learned from him and his discipline of spiritual writing helped shape my own life, personally and professionally. I wanted that kind of spirituality for myself and I wanted to share it with others, in both the academic and the church circles in which I moved. All this began in the late-1970s when I was engaged in research for my Boston University doctoral dissertation on Puritan devotional practices, under the guidance of David Hall, who had written *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century* (University of North Carolina Press, 1972).

While most of my digging into early New England religious life involved diaries, sermons, and other primary resources preserved at the Congregational Library and Archives, Taylor's poetry was available in a recent critical edition. He had written in secret, intending that nobody but God would know his work. The manuscripts were brought to light only in 1937 after Thomas H. Johnson uncovered and began publishing selected poems, culminating in *The Poetical Works of Edward Taylor* (Princeton University Press, 1943). The definitive complete edition of *The Poems of*

Edward Taylor was transcribed and edited by Donald Sanford (Yale University Press, 1960). In those days, Taylor was a whole new subject in the field of American literature and scholars were trying to figure him out. How could a Puritan be so, well, almost mystical? What excited me was his perfect fit with my conviction that, whatever else it was as an intellectual, ecclesiastical, and revolutionary social movement, Puritanism at its heart was a devotional movement, rooted in spiritual experience.

Edward Taylor's meditative poetry, along with that of Anne Bradstreet, America's other great colonial poet, opened a window into the soul of those early Congregationalists as I completed *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (University of North Carolina Press, 1982). Their private writing helped shed light on other Puritan writings and on the Puritans themselves as people of faith. I went on to explore their personal spiritual experience more particularly in *Early New England Meditative Poetry: Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor*, in the Sources of American Spirituality series published by Paulist Press (1989).

This academic work coincided with trends during the late-1970s and 1980s in the life of the church and the practice of Christian faith. Protestants eager to embrace spiritual practices looked everywhere for models, from non-Christian religious traditions to Roman Catholic practices rooted in monastic spirituality. Notwithstanding the popularity of books like the Quaker evangelical Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (HarperCollins, 1978), many assumed that their own history was devoid of useful examples or even antagonistic to contemplative spirituality. Puritans like Edward Taylor

PURITANISM AT ITS HEART WAS A
DEVOTIONAL MOVEMENT, ROOTED IN
SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE.



demonstrated that Protestant exemplars were right under our noses, if we but knew our history, and had much to offer the contemporary practice of personal faith. How I longed to recover and make others aware of their gift.

Passionate love for Christ marked Taylor's piety, but even stronger was his conviction of God's passionate love for humanity and for himself as one small human being. Many of his poems are based on texts from the Song of Solomon (Canticles, the Puritans called it). They echo verses he wrote about love for his wife and even call to mind the sensual Catholic mysticism of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. On February 11, 1682, for example, Taylor prayed, "Lord, breake thy Box of Ointment on my Head" and concluded:

**HOW I LONGED TO RECOVER AND MAKE
OTHERS AWARE OF THEIR GIFT.**



My Soule shall in thy sweets then soar to thee:
I'll be thy Love, thou my sweet Lord shalt bee.
(I:3:37, 41-42)

He could be graphic:

And stick thy Loveliness upon my heart,
Make me the Couch on which thy Love
doth ly.
Lord make my heart thy bed, thy heart
make mine.
Thy Love bed in my heart, bed mine in
thine. (I:35:45-48)

Contemplating Christ as "the lily of the valley," he begged, "Let me thy Vally, thou my Lilly

bee" (I:5:10). The sexual imagery that pervades many poems is matched by joy in other earthly delights, as when he meditated on Christ as "Living Bread," imagining the loaf he would break and distribute in the Lord's Supper as "Soule Bread." Jesus invites us, "Eate thy fill. Its Heavens Sugar Cake" (I:8:27, 30). Likewise, he praised God who "makest Glory's Chiefest Grape to bleed / Into my cup" (I:9:35-36), exuberantly proclaiming,

Yet were thy silver skies my Beer bowle fine
I finde my Lord, would fill it to the brim.
(I:10:39-40)

Taylor employed all manner of homespun imagery to describe God working his way into his soul. Although "the serpent" has put "A Lock of Steel upon my Soul" (I:49:7) and "Sin rusts my Lock all o're" (I:42:8), he would pray confidently for God to "pick't: and through the key-hole make thy way / And enter in" (I:49:7-8).

Lord ope the Doore: rub off my Rust, Remove
My sin, And Oyle my Lock. . . .
My Wards [lock's inner workings] will trig
[trigger] before thy Key: my Love
Then, as enliven'd, leape will on thyselve.
(I:42:13-16)

Astonished that despite his sin "all the Beams of Love upon me shine," Taylor rejoiced with decidedly unpuritanical ebullience:

But that there is a Crevice for one hope
To creep in, and this Message to Convey
That I am thine, makes me refresh. Lord ope
The Doore so wide that Love may Scip
[skip], and play.
My Spirits then shall dance thy Praise. I'me
thine.
And Present things with things to come are
mine. (I:36:65, 73-78)

Persistence in this practice of meditation and writing over the duration of his ministry, a long and steady effort, makes Edward Taylor a powerful model. He identified the first 49 meditative poems as a set, composed from 1682 through 1692, precisely the decade of his 40s. He may have considered this “First Series” as complete because of the ten-year period or because of the symbolism of seven times seven, but Taylor would not abandon the practice. One engine driving such sustained commitment, ironically, was Taylor’s humility, his sense of the inadequacy of language in the face of divine reality. On Saturday night, October 26, 1701, for example, he began by confessing:

When, Lord, I seeke to shew thy praises, then
 Thy shining Majesty doth stund [stun] my
 minde,
 Encramps my tongue and tongue ties fast my
 Pen,
 That all my doings, do not what’s designd.
 My Speeche’s Organs are so trancifide
 [stupefied]
 My words stand startld, can’t thy praises
 stride. (II:43:1-6)

Although “My muddy Words so dark thy
 Deity, / and cloude thy Sun-Shine, and its Shining
 Sky,” his faith simply had to find expression.

Yet spare mee, Lord, to use this hurden ware
 [coarse fabric].
 I have no finer Stuff to use, and I
 Will use it now my Creed but to declare
 And not thy Glorious Selfe to beautify.
 (II:43:23-28)

Taylor’s persistence was also propelled by the regularity of sharing the Lord’s Supper and his vocation to prepare for its administration. His astonishment at God’s grace at the Table never

diminished. “What? Bread, and Wine, My Lord! Art thou thus made? / And made thus unto thine in th’Sacrament? (II:104:1-2). Nor did the ardor of his prayer subside:

Stir up thy Appetite, my Soule, afresh,
 Here’s Bread, and Wine as Signs, to signify
 The richest Dainties Cookery can Dress
 Thy Table with, filld with felicity.
 Purge out and Vomit by Repentance all
 Ill Humours which thy Spiritual Tast
 forestall. (II:104:7-12)

Finally, the enduring power of Christian theology undergirded, shaped, and fueled Taylor’s meditative poetry. Modern readers may be put off by his constant confession of sin, but his penitent remorse was always more than overcome by the glory of God’s grace in Christ. His poems express the classical Christian theology of the Reformed or Calvinist tradition that characterized Puritan faith across the Presbyterian-Congregationalist-Baptist spectrum, the “Augustinian strain of piety,” as Perry Miller put it. Those who think of themselves today as “spiritual but not religious” falsely assume that “dogma” is the enemy of spirituality. Every

THOSE WHO THINK OF THEMSELVES AS
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“ ”

modern practice from yoga to popular forms of meditation also has defining assumptions running through it. For Taylor the fundamental theological understanding that catalyzed his meditation was

the doctrine that he termed “Theanthropy,” Christ as fully divine and fully human. As he meditated on how “The Word was made flesh”:

Things styld Transcendent, do transcend the
Stile [staircase]
Of Reason, reason's stares [stairs] neere
reach so high.
But Jacob's golden Ladder rounds do foile
All reasons Strides, wrought of
THEANTHROPIE.
Two Natures distance-standing, infinite,
Are Onifide [one-i-fied], in person, and
Unite. (II:44:7-12)

... HIS MEDITATION WAS THE DOCTRINE
THAT HE TERMED “THEANTHROPY”



Taylor embraced God's saving and sanctifying power in a phrase that resonates with ancient Eastern Christian doctrine: “Oh! Dignifide Humanity indeed: / Divinely person'd: almost Deifide” (II:44:25-26). So Puritan spirituality offers at least a glimpse of “deification” this side of heaven. Many years after my first encounter with Edward Taylor, I still hope to emulate this “practice of piety.” With Taylor I plead, “Unite my Soule, Lord, to thyself, and stamp / Thy holy print on my unholy heart” (II:44:49-50), that I might join all the saints in God's eternal praise. With Taylor I still marvel that God has “Marri'de our Manhood, making it its Bride,” and pray, “Lord blow the Coal: Thy Love Enflame in mee.”



Charles Hambrick-Stowe is pastor of the First Congregational Church of Ridgefield, Connecticut. He previously served as dean and vice-president for academic affairs at Northern Seminary in Lombard, Illinois, and as director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. He has also pastored churches in Westminster, Maryland, and Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Dr. Hambrick-Stowe is the author of several books on the religious experience of New England Puritans (to which he refers in his article); a biography, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism* (Eerdmans, 1996); and many journal articles and book chapters on Jonathan Edwards and other topics related to religion and American culture. He has been connected with the Congregational Library for virtually his entire career. While a student in the American Studies Ph.D. program at Boston University, Charlie published his first article in the *Bulletin of the Congregational Library* (fall 1977), on Washington Gladden. Subsequent articles in the *Bulletin* have appeared in 1989, 1998, and 1999. Dr. Hambrick-Stowe serves on the board of the American Congregational Association.

POETRY OF DISSENT

An interview with

GEORGE SOUTHCOMBE

George Southcombe is Director of the Sarah Lawrence Exchange Program at Wadham College in the University of Oxford, where he is also a Lecturer in History. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. Southcombe's special interest is the English dissenters—the English cousins of the American Puritans—and their creative and powerful use of literature. Most of us are familiar with John Milton and John Bunyan, but few have heard of amazingly prolific and controversial figures like the Baptist Benjamin Keach or the Presbyterian Robert Wild. Southcombe's three-volume set of *English Nonconformist Poetry, 1660-1700*, published by Pickering and Chatto in 2012, was the first scholarly edition to bring these authors to light, a diverse group of relatively unknown but important writers, "silenced voices," as one review describes them, now "recovered and studied in their own right." Among the many interesting comparisons between English and American Congregationalists, the use of poetry is one of the most striking. We are fortunate to have Professor Southcombe, the leading authority on this dissenting poetry, to introduce us to this fascinating and important subject.

QUESTION: *In the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries, American Congregationalists became the established faith of New England, a kind of state religion, but in England they were known as "dissenters." Why was this? What were some of the main characteristics of the dissenting tradition in England?*

ANSWER: England's republican period proved remarkably brief. Charles I was executed in 1649 but after only eleven years the monarchy was restored, and his son Charles II reclaimed the throne. England had fundamentally changed by 1660, however, and this was nowhere more apparent than in its religious composition. Over the 1640s and 1650s a number of new religious groups had sprung into being – most notably the Quakers – and other groups – Baptists, Independents, Presbyterians – gathered strength. Initially it had seemed that the Restoration religious settlement might be generous, and that Presbyterians might have been comprehended within the Church of England, while the other groups might have been tolerated outside it. Such hopes remained unfulfilled, and the Act of Uniformity of 1662 meant the ejection of a large number of clergymen from their livings (around 2,000 from an overall body of around 9,000). Worship outside the Church was proscribed, and a body of legislation sought to penalize any who refused to accept this state of affairs. These were the dissenters or nonconformists.

In some ways, to write about the main characteristics of dissenters is misleading. They retained distinct identities and some – in particular Baptists and Quakers – engaged in very public, vitriolic controversies with each other. However, the dissenting groups were all forged in a period of persecution, and as a result they developed some similar strategies that would allow them to resist their persecutors and endure in the time of trial. These included the provision of social support for their members within local contexts, and the use of print both to provide pastoral materials to their communities nationally and to challenge their political and religious enemies.

QUESTION: *We often think of the Puritans as dry and dull, but as Charles Hambrick-Stowe's article on Edward Taylor illustrates, they produced some beautiful poetry. What can you tell us about the poets in the dissenting churches, famous or perhaps not so famous? Why was poetry so important to them? How did they use it?*

ANSWER: The importance of poetry to dissenters is in respects linked to the importance of print (and much dissenting poetry was published). To write a poem was in the late seventeenth century a typical form of political action, and a number of dissenters wrote in order to attack their persecutors. It is quite right to say that the stereotype of the puritan killjoy collapses in the face of some of the poetry produced in this period. The Presbyterian poet Robert Wild, for example, wrote robust satire that often revealed in bodily humor. Not all dissenting poetry was of this kind, of course (although much had a political edge even if it was not directly engaged in specific political commentary). Other poets – like the Quakers John Perrot and Mary Mollineux – used their works to map spiritual journeys, and others produced material with a didactic emphasis. The Baptist Benjamin Keach aimed a number of his lengthy poems directly at the youth of the day, and sought to instruct them in moral living and Calvinist theology.

QUESTION: *Please tell us something about your own work and how you became interested in this poetry and these poets. What do you find most compelling about them?*

ANSWER: I was an undergraduate at Keble College in Oxford, and I studied what is there the relatively rare degree of Modern History and English. As part of this course, I took a paper on religion and literature in early modern England. This was taught in part by my College tutor Nigel Smith (a leading

expert on Andrew Marvell) and my future graduate supervisor Clive Holmes. Nigel and Clive matched profound knowledge with supreme enthusiasm in their teaching of the religious radicalism of the 1640s and 1650s. Much of what I have written about since has followed directly from that course, and their influence. Both Nigel and Clive had written with acute sensitivity about religious dissent, and, while Nigel had left for Princeton by the time I had become a graduate, Clive guided me through my doctoral thesis on Restoration nonconformity.

Beyond the influence of Nigel and Clive, I think that I am most attracted to the history of dissent because I am instinctively drawn to the study of outsiders: those who challenge authority and refuse to conform despite facing persecution. I am also particularly interested in a period in which literature was frequently used, and recognized, as a potent political weapon.

QUESTION: *Where might our readers find examples of this poetry? Any suggestions about ways to learn more?*

ANSWER: Any reader who has access to an academic library may find that they are able to use the wonderful Early English Books Online, which contains a huge amount of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century printed material. They will find copies of works by all the poets I have named on this site. Readers who have a particular interest in understanding the exact historical, literary and theological contexts for dissenting poetry may wish to consult my *English Nonconformist Poetry* (2012), which collects together three volumes of nonconformist verse and provides full scholarly apparatus. Two brilliant books on dissenting literature are N.H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity* (1987) and Sharon Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England* (2003).

From Whence Comes A POEM?

by Charles Harper

From whence comes a poem? How does it move from original idea/inspiration onto the page? These are questions poets frequently encounter from people who are curious about our craft.

Some claim a poem simply drops out of nowhere. I like this response. It speaks to the surprise sometimes experienced as I look at what quickly and effortlessly appears on my yellow lined tablet. But I believe a more accurate response is that a poem materializes out of everywhere. Everywhere I have ever been, every experience, every relationship, every conversation, every idea, every bit of information taken in. The first line written comes from my conscious memory. But frequently as the writing progresses, something stored away in the subconscious emerges onto the page. Poets, like all human beings, are walking encyclopedias. We possess vast stores of information, some of it at a conscious level, huge portions in the unconscious. During the composition of a poem, a long forgotten experience will suddenly emerge. It is exactly what the poem needs. For example, the love poem, "Enchanted," found in my most recent book, *Fragments*, had its origins in reflections about a fierce December snow storm a couple of years ago. As I wrote, something triggered the memory of a song that was popular many years earlier during my late teen years. Phrases from "Some Enchanted

Evening" were incorporated into the poem. The song also provided the poem's title.

Many years ago, my wife, Pat, gave me a small memo pad. At the bottom of each page was this motto, "Write in order to learn what you know." There is a lot in me that is unconscious, inchoate, conflicted, contradictory, longing for a modicum of coherence and meaning. Writing poetry gives voice to that longing. It gathers my inner incoherence into an ordered way of making my worldview known to myself and available to others. My poetry is a journey of self-discovery leading to an act of witness.

Influences on my poetic style and content are legion, far too many to include in a brief essay. I will mention only a few poets. I was initially pulled into the world of poetry at the age of nineteen, during my sophomore year in college. At that time I found, or perhaps was found by, two poems of Alfred Lord Tennyson: "In Memoriam" and "Ring Out, Wild Bells." This Nineteenth Century English poet reached across an ocean and century, speaking to my deepest spiritual hungers. The theology of these poems spoke powerfully to me. Like many college students, my childhood faith was being fundamentally challenged by my academic experience. The worldview in Tennyson's poetry was broad and evolving. It contrasted sharply with the conservative evangelical persuasions of my upbringing.

Tennyson did not convert me to an expansive, irenic theology. Rather, I found in his verse an affirmation of faith that seemed to coincide with new paths I was exploring. I had found a soul mate.

“Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell;
That mind and soul, according well,
May make one music as before”¹

My earlier passions for theology and philosophy were now enriched by a love of poetry. Seven years later, as I finished preparation for ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ, I was delighted to discover “Ring Our, Wild Bells” was a hymn in the *Pilgrim Hymnal*, as were selected verses from the prologue of “In Memoriam.”

The poetry of Czeslaw Milosz has tutored me in the art of political/cultural critique. Mary Oliver is a premier poet of Nature. Carl Sandburg celebrates urban life while Robert Frost muses on life in the small town and countryside. Emily Dickinson is the master of brevity, surprise and originality of style. Walt Whitman sings of the micro, the macro and everything in between. The Thirteenth Century mystic, Rumi, is the most read poet in America. He touches a hunger in a culture increasingly alienated from traditional religious institutions and theologies.

The Nineteenth Century German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, claimed that his only good ideas were those that came to him while he was walking. Weather permitting, I hike most days on woodland paths near my home or along beaches only a few miles away. These outings are a holistic, integrating experience for me, a time when

body, mind and soul move together in a harmonious interdependence. Many poems have their beginning here. A small note pad and pencil accompany me on the trail. Occasionally I stop, jot down an idea or a first line. Some of these jottings subsequently go into the wastebasket. Others are wrestled into a poem a few days later – sometimes months later. Occasionally a poem will be completed on a walk. Usually poems take their final form, after several drafts, at my desk. Frequently a poem, with which I am having problems of one kind or another, is taken for a stroll. Here the body-mind-soul flow helps me discern where the poem wants to go. Some people walk their dogs. I walk my poems.

For the past dozen years I have been a member of a writing group, the Tidepool Poets. We meet once a month to critique each other’s work and enjoy the company. At each gathering we assign ourselves a theme around which to compose a poem for our next meeting. The supportive, yet critical, work of this group is an invaluable resource for my writing.

Czeslaw Milosz said his poetry was “a passionate pursuit of the Real” (note the upper case “R”).² There are, of course, numerous vehicles we humans have devised for use in our search for the Real. Poetry is central to my own quest. The search is interminable, yet at the very heart of what defines us as a species. The final poem in my book, *Fragments*, puts it this way:

The grail
is never found.
The quest never ceases.
What would become of us without
the chase?

¹ Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, from the prologue.

² Czeslaw Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry*, p. 56. Harvard University Press, 1983

FRAGMENTS

My world
Reveals itself
In small fragments

a bird-song here
a headline there
a thought

daffodil
dream
dung hill

you know-
Each a jagged shard
with puzzle edges

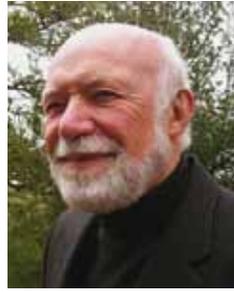
hints
it is part
of something

Big



wide-eyed
astonishment
gift and burden to those
who dare open their hearts to life
on earth

*Charles Harper, Fragments
(USA: Power Horn Press, 2014)*



Chuck Harper began writing poetry soon after his graduation from Yale Divinity School and it quickly became a passion. His poetry is seen regularly in journals, including *Mobius*, the *Aurorean*, *Avocet*, *The Lyric* and *The Deronda Review*. He is the author of four poetry books: *Sorting Things Out* (2008), *Making A Life* (2010), *Gratitude* (2012) and *Fragments* (2014). A resident of Plymouth, MA, he is a member of the Tidepool Poets, a frequent participant in *POETRY*, *The Art Of The Word*, and leads poetry appreciation workshops at the plymouthpubliclibrary.org. To learn more about Chuck and read examples of his work, go to harperpoetry.com.

Having served the Boston area, as an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, Chuck was the founding Executive Director of the Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries. The C.M.M. is an inter-faith collaboration of urban and suburban congregations working to address critical social justice issues.

Chuck serves on the Congregational Library and Archives Advisory Circle.

CONGREGATIONALISTS IN LONDON

Photos courtesy of Dr. Williams Library. Photos by: Jane Giscombe.

by Margret Bendroth

The first Congregational Library opened its doors, quietly, in the middle of a busy London neighborhood in 1831. No pictures survive of the original building or even of the first benefactor, Joshua Wilson. “J.W.,” as he often signed his name, was the son and biographer of Thomas Wilson, the “colossus” of English Congregationalism, but he never sat for a portrait or sought any kind of public recognition. His own dream was a library preserving nonconformist history, the story of the Congregationalists who stayed in England and endured the upheavals of civil war, increasing legal restriction and marginalization by the established Church of England.



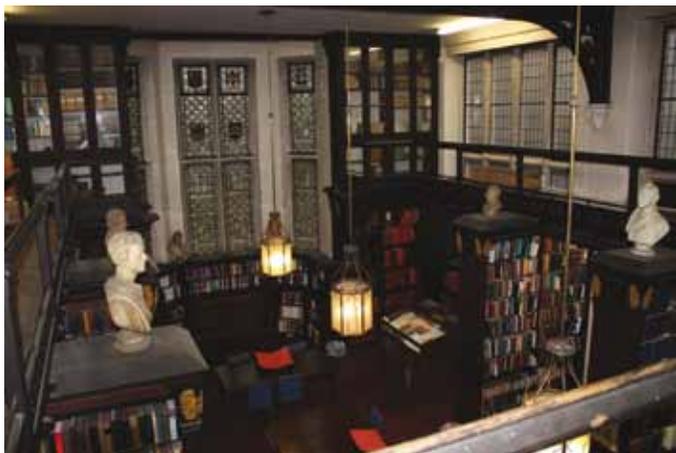
They also needed a place to call home. While Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Unitarians all had libraries, museums, and meeting

places, Congregationalists, Wilson said, were gathering “chiefly at taverns,” an arrangement that was not only a general inconvenience but also diminished the “credibility and respectability of the denomination.” When the Congregational Library in London opened on May 9, 1831, then, it was both a repository of historic books and a central location for scattered church agencies. In fact, the Congregational Union of England and Wales was formed the very next day, in the Library.¹

Twenty years later much the same thing happened on the other side of the Atlantic: another Congregational Library was organized in 1853, a year after American Congregationalists met together for the first time since the Cambridge Synod of 1648. The Albany Convention of 1852 would prove the first step in a long journey toward national denominational unity. Like its London counterpart, the Congregational Library in Boston came with a building—or better plans for a building—to house all the denominational agencies scattered around the city, serving as an unofficial headquarters.

¹ This story and the quotations are found in John Creasey, “The Congregational Library,” published by the Congregational Memorial Hall Trust in 1992.

Over the years both libraries endured a series of moves to new, sometimes better buildings. The Congregational Memorial Hall and Library opened in 1875, funded by donations from benefactors and, it was hoped, by rental income from tenants. The Congregational House in Boston, completed



in 1898, operated much the same way, housing an always changing mix of denominational offices, secular tenants, and the Library.

The collections are also roughly parallel, both including denominational records and printed works as well as extensive archival material. The London Congregational Library has an extensive manuscript collection which includes an original copy of the Solemn League and Covenant from 1643 as well as many sermons and diaries, correspondence and lectures by nonconformist ministers and scholars—noteworthy like educator and hymn-writer Philip Doddridge, the Bible scholar Matthew Henry, and even the eighteenth-century evangelist George Whitefield.

And finally both Libraries have had to adjust to changing times and economic challenges. In 1982 the English Congregational Library took up residence in Dr. Williams's Library in Gordon Square, London. Dr. Williams himself was a

relatively unknown benefactor, a nonconformist minister who in 1711 bequeathed his personal library of 7,600 books and a trust fund toward the education of clergy and the housing of books. Over time this Library became a Unitarian repository, and garnered its own impressive collection of papers and manuscripts, including those of Joseph Priestly, George Herbert, and the original minutes of the Westminster Assembly of 1643.

Executive Director Peggy Bendroth had an opportunity to visit the Dr. Williams's Library this past fall, traveling to a meeting on preserving church records with James Cooper, now leading our program on New England's Hidden Histories. The event was memorable in many ways—no doubt the founders of both Libraries were smiling somewhere to see the twenty-first century reunion—but Jane Giscombe's photographs document the surprising similarities in our two spaces. Dr. Williams's Library is a wonderfully diverse array of priceless archival material, with a dedicated and hardworking staff, but perhaps most wonderfully a gracious reading room with high ceilings and tall windows. It is a quiet reflective space in the middle of a busy city neighborhood, still welcoming anyone wanting to learn more about our storied and deeply influential spiritual tradition.



by David M. Powers

in BANNED BOSTON

A “New” Volume for The Library & Archives

With the recent acquisition of a book printed in 1655, The Congregational Library is in the unique position of having the most pertinent publications by New Englanders involved in a Bay Colony religious controversy during the first quarter-century of the Commonwealth’s life.

The dust-up began with the unexpected appearance in October 1650 of William Pynchon’s *The Meritorious Price of Our Redemption*. Pynchon was a layman and entrepreneur who founded Springfield, Massachusetts. In good Congregational fashion he decided to express his own theological notions, including some variant claims about the Atonement which he based on idiosyncratic scholarship of the era. The Massachusetts Legislature promptly voted a “Protestation” to condemn his book, and ordered it to be burned. The officials were worried that Pynchon’s somewhat off-kilter opinions would reflect badly on the colony back in England, and they wanted to nip potential criticism of Congregational Massachusetts in the bud. This was the first book banned and publicly burned in British North America. The Library has one of nine known copies in the world.

In response to Pynchon’s book and at the behest of the Colony government, the Rev. John Norton, Teacher of the Church in Ipswich, tried to convince Pynchon to drop his most awkward claims. He also wrote an official, impeccably orthodox reply, published in 1653: *A Discussion of that Great Point in Divinity, the Suffering of Christ*. The Library Archives has this, too.

Later the Rev. John Cotton, the preeminent Teacher of the First Church in Boston, mentioned the controversy briefly (but without naming Pynchon) at the end of his 1657 preface “To the Judicious Reader” in Norton’s *The Orthodox Evangelist*, is also part of the Library’s collection.

Now, the Library & Archives has acquired William Pynchon’s response to Norton’s response! Its look-alike title has fooled some into thinking it is

THIS WAS THE FIRST BOOK BANNED
AND PUBLICLY BURNED IN BRITISH
NORTH AMERICA.

“ ”

simply a recast version of Pynchon's original book. But *The Meritorious Price of Mans Redemption* -- also (and perhaps more accurately) known as *A Farther Discussion* -- is a long, painstaking parsing of Norton's careful analysis of Pynchon's original book. Suffice it to say the two disagreed dramatically, and quite possibly did not like each other very much.

Three authors -- four books -- one big mess. The episode sent Pynchon, the founder of both Roxbury and Springfield, Massachusetts, back to England under a cloud of suspicion of heresy. He went on to write two more and increasingly lengthy volumes on the same theme. He never did change his mind.



David M. Powers is the author of *Damnable Heresy: William Pynchon, the Indians, and the First Book Banned (and Burned) in Boston* (Wipf and Stock Publishers; coming in 2015). For more on the controversy, see David M. Powers, "William Pynchon and The Meritorious Price: The Story of the First Book Banned in Boston and the Man Who Wrote It," *Bulletin of the Congregational Library*, Spring 2009, pp. 4-13.

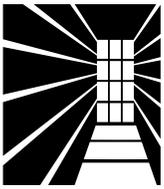
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