Adam Boyd's Elegy Upon the Death of Ann Ivy Moore: An Example of the Southern Elegaic Tradition

by Richard Rankin, Ph.D.

(The following article was written by an assistant professor of history at Queens College. Dr. Rankin recently published a book through the University of South Carolina Press entitled Ambivalent Churchmen and Evangelical Churchwomen: The Religion of the Episcopal Elite in North Carolina, 1800-1860. Additional writings on Episcopalianism in the Lower Cape Fear by Dr. Rankin are housed in the Society's Archives and one paper, 'Profile of an Anglican Congregation During the Revolutionary Era: St. James Church, Wilmington, North Carolina, 1765-1785,' contains the following passage: "Although no evidence remains to indicate the cost of pews, almost certainly the price decreased as one moved farther away from the pulpit. If difference of wealth and status stratified St. James from front to rear, ties of blood and marriage crisscrossed the church. Brothers William and George Hooper, and presumably their families, shared pew 38 which allowed them to view the profile of George's father-in-law Archibald MacLaine (pew 52). James Hasell (pew 36) could turn his head slightly to the right and watch granddaughter Mary and her husband
John Ancrum (pew 51.) These sort of kinship networks could be repeated for many members, but perhaps the Moore family (pews 7, 28, and 54) best exemplifies the complicated family relationships. The various Mooses could exchange glances with their cousins: The Quinces (pew 15), the Swanns (pews 16 and 48), the Drys (pews 3 and 4), the Ashes (pews 36 and 54), and the Howes (pew 28.) A Sunday gathering at St. James was primarily a service of worship, but it also had some of the qualities of a family gathering.

This was the world of the Reverend Adam Boyd who frequently occupied the pulpit of St. James and who married the widow of Dr. Moses John deRosset, thus making him a part of Wilmington's labyrinth of the privileged and interrelated.

Adam Boyd's parents, Adam and Jan Creaghhead Boyd emigrated from Balleymoney, Northern Ireland to Montour County, Pennsylvania at least as early as 1743 when the elder Adam was granted power of attorney by John McCay, an Ulster Scot living in Charleston. The Boyds made sure that young Adam had a classical education and were proud that he went into the Presbyterian ministry.

When Adam Boyd arrived in Wilmington, sometime around 1764, he shed his vestments for a business suit. Five years later, at the age of 31, he purchased an antiquated printing press from Andrew Stuart and began publishing the Cape Fear Mercury, a hugely successful newspaper which included a mixture of current events, advertisements, fiction, and rambling anonymous essays which frequently sound as if they were written by a man firmly in possession of the somewhat unusual combination of robust appetites and a vivid spiritual awareness.

After Boyd married Mary Ivy deRosset in 1774 he became a close friend of patriots Cornelius Harnett, William Hooper, Archibald MacLaine, and James Moore, his brother-in-law. Because of the dangerous conditions in Wilmington, Mary Ivy Boyd stayed at the home of her sister, Ann Ivy Moore, on the Northeast Cape Fear River while the Reverend Mr. Boyd served in the American Revolution as an ensign, second lieutenant and brigade chaplain. He also officiated as a military court judge and was instrumental in organizing the North Carolina chapter of the Society of the Cincinnati. For his efforts during the war, Boyd was awarded 7,200 acres in Tennessee.

Adam Boyd spent his later years as an Episcopalian minister in Wilmington, Augusta, and Natchez, Mississippi. In 1799 he preached the first sermon ever delivered by an Episcopalian minister in Knoxville and Nashville. He survived his wife by five years and died in the midst of writing a series of booklets for children in Natchez in 1803. He was buried in an unmarked grave.

Adam Boyd was survived by two step-children: Armand John deRosset and Magdelen Mary deRosset Toomer, wife of Henry Toomer. The Reverend Boyd also had two step-grandchildren: Moses John deRosset and Lewis Toomer.

Documentation is scarce on Boyd's sister-in-law, Ann Ivy Moore, but in 1981, local historian Delmas Haskett interviewed a ninety-year-old tenant farmer who plowed land that had once been part of the Pender county Moore Plantation, "The Vatts." The elderly farmer told Mr. Haskett that he had been taken in to the field by his own grandfather at the age of twelve and was instructed as to the proper way to
The poem is significant for several reasons. First, since the poem follows an English form commonly employed throughout the colonial South, it indicates that Boyd was a participant in the literary styles of southern and English high culture. Second, the poem is a representative source for the history of the family in early America since it so graphically illustrates the growing important of romance within marriage, in this case the marriage of Ann Ivy Moore and James Moore (1737-15 January 1777).2

Writing poetry in early America was a genteel pursuit, and as newspaper editor and husband of a Wilmington dowager, Adam Boyd clearly moved in the town’s most aristocratic circles. The technical form of the 38-line poem is interlocking rhyme and iambic pentameter. The style is the distinctive southern elegy, a poetic tradition present in the southern colonies as far back as seventeenth-century Virginia and gaining its greatest popularity during the neoclassical period. Southern poets derived their poetic ethos from the moderate Anglicanism of contemporary English elegists. Consequently, southern elegies, unlike New England’s Puritan counterparts, exhibited less obsession with religion.3

Boyd’s poem is clearly a part of the southern elegiac tradition. Even with his emphasis on God and the afterlife in the concluding four lines of the poem, Boyd’s elegy gives more attention to the character of the couple and their marriage than to religious themes. It also contains more classical than biblical allusions. One might have expected more piety from a Presbyterian minister whose religious tradition was related to New England Puritanism. In this regard, however, Boyd’s marriage to the staunchly Anglican widow, Mary Ivy deRosset, in 1774 and his switch to the Episcopal ministry in 1786 suggest that his sympathies increasingly lay with that faith.

Boyd must have been deeply moved by his sister-in-law’s untimely death to compose an elegy. Leaving four orphans, Ann or “Amanda” expired shortly after

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2 The other two Boyd elegies were written after Adam Boyd left Wilmington to serve Episcopal parishes in Georgia. A portion of the John Boyd elegy and the complete Mary Ivy deRosset Boyd elegy, a brief eight-line epitaph, are reproduced in Stokes, “Adam Boyd, Publisher, Preacher, and Patriot,” pp. 3, 18-19.


the death of her husband, General James Moore or "Honoria" in 1777. From a prominent family herself, Ann married into one of the wealthiest and most distinguished planter families in the Lower Cape Fear. James Moore's impeccable reputation can be judged from the remarks of the Scottish visitor, Janet Schaw, who described him as a person of "most unblemished character (and) amiable manners; and a virtuous life had gained him the love of everybody, and his popularity is such that I am assured he will have more followers than any other man in the province." A leader in the Whig resistance movement from the time of the Stamp Act Crisis, Moore directed the victorious Whig forces at Moore's Creek in February 1776 and afterwards was promoted to the rank of brigadier general by the Continental Congress. He died in Wilmington in January 1777 as he prepared to march north and rendezvous with Washington's main force.4

Boyd's description of the Moore's marriage perfectly fits the new conjugal ideal that developed in the years after 1750. As they chose a partner for life, couples were giving greater and greater weight to romantic considerations and less and less to wealth and dynastic alliances. Married life was more than just strategic unions of money and power, and husbands and wives were more than just helpmates: often they were friends and lovers.5

The original copy of the Boyd poem does not survive, but a later handwritten copy, apparently made by one of the surviving orphans, Mary Ivy Moore Watters, lies among the Quince-Watters Papers at the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Much of Boyd's original punctuation, lost in the transcription, has been resupplied for clarity's sake.

Lines written by the Revd Adam Boyd upon the death of Mrs. James Moore

Near the famed Clarendon's meandering side
Whose silver winding waves roll gently down,
While in rotation mystic flows its tide,
the neighboring farmers ampest wish to crown,
Amanda lived - or rather say - she shined
Of beauty and the graces all possessed,
With generous sentiments, replete her mind,
And virtues favorite seat, her lovely breast,
Her lovely features regularly placed,
Formed to delight the eye - the mind to please.
Blest in herself, and in her lover blest.
Honoria of noble generous soul,
His fame unsullied by the slightest stain,
Above vice or envy's base control,
Sigh'd for this beauteous fair - nor sigh'd in vain.
Their souls congenial felt the mutual flame;
They soon were hailed! The truly happy pair.
To their blest nuptials loves and graces came;
Hymen with his brightest torch was there.
No jars - or jealous friends disturbed their joy.
'Twas worse than death their tenderest care employ.
Blessing and blest! O 'twas a heavenly scene!
But Oh! What happiness beneath the sun.
Death, envious death, the dear connection broke.
Honoria fell err half his race was run,
Nor could Amanda long survive the stroke.
Plaintive and sad she mourn'd the livelong day.
Her widowed heart deep pierced - dissolved in sighs,
Nor cou'd a sister's love her grief allay.
Crop't in full bloom - thus mourns the flower dies,
Thus all the beauties of the Vale shall fade,
Thus all the splendid glories of the East.
Seek them - Oh seek! - the Almighty Sovereign's aid!
Sure by his grace to be forever Blest.
There from eternity hath Seraphs shown.
There she shall shine immortal with her God.
From *An Account of the Province of Carolina in America* together with an abstract of the Patent and several other necessary and useful Particulars, to such as have thoughts of transporting Themselves Thither. by Samuel Wilson. (London, 1682). Harvard University Library:

"There is in Carolina at the mouth of the Rivers or in the lakes near the sea, a creature called the Alligator or Crocodile, whose Scaly back is impenetrable, refusing a Musket bullet to pierce it, but under the Belly that or an arrow finds as easy passage to destroy it; it lives both on land and water, being a voracious greedy creature, devouring whatever it seizes on, man only excepted which on the land it has not the courage to attack, except when asleep or by surprize: In the water it's more dangerous; it sometimes grows to a length of 16-20 feet, having a long mouth, beset with sharp, keen teeth, the body when full grown as large as a horse, declining towards its tail; having no joints in the vertebrae or back bone, but with its whole length is unable to turn which renders it less mischievous; yet nature by instinct has given most creatures timely caution to avoid them by their strong, musky smell, which at a considerable distance is perceivable, which the poor cattle for their own preservation make good use of: their flesh cuts are very white; the young ones are eatable; the Flesh of the older ones smells too strong of musk that it nauseates; their stones, at least so called, are commended for a rich lasting perfume."

"There are also in Carolina great numbers of fire Flies, who carry their lanterns in their Tails in dark Nights, flying through the Air, shining like Sparks of Fire, enlightening it with their Golden Spangles.

From *A History of New Bern and Craven County* by Alan D. Watson New Bern, 1987:

"(1764) New Bernians in an attempt to move the seat of government from Wilmington to their town stated that the fork of the Neuse was better than Cape Fear, a Place within Fifty miles of the south boundary of a Province almost 300 miles wide, and the passage to it gloomy and dismal, through hot parching Sands, enliven'd now and then with a few wire grass ridges, and ponds of stagnant water...and the inflated prices there are a terrible horribility!"

From a letter written by Cornelius Harnett while imprisoned in York, Pennsylvania to a friend in Wilmington, 20 December 1777 (Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina):

"Tell Mrs. Harnett (for I forget to mention it to her) that 2 or 3 gallons of pickled oysters would be the greatest rarity she could send me."

A headline from the *Wilmington Messenger*, 21 September 1861:

"Men Blown to Pieces as a result of a dynamite explosion, six men are dead ... Some dynamite had been placed about the stove to thaw out."