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Holy Larceny?
Elizabeth Rowe's Poetry in Charles Wesley's Hymns

James Dale*

When 'Omer smote 'is bloomin' lyre,
He'd 'eard men sing by land an' sea;
An' what he thought 'e might require,
'E went an' took—the same as me!

The market-girls an' fishermen,
The shepherds an' the sailors, too,
They 'eard old songs turn up again,
But kep' it quiet—same as you!

They knew 'e stole; 'e knew they knowed.
They didn't tell, nor make a fuss,
But winked at 'Omer down the road,
An' 'e winked back—the same as us![1]

So speaks Kipling's surrogate, the soldier-singer of *Barrack-Room Ballads;* Kipling did, after all, have some Methodist ancestry, and hymns and ballads are both varieties of popular verse which can say a lot more than one expects. Surely, though, one can't connect the hoarse rough verse for "single men in barricks"[2] with the lyrical utterance of the greatest of English hymn-writers? Well—yes. I take the ballad just quoted to be an admission of Kipling's great debt to other writers, ancient and modern. (Horace and Browning are two of the more obvious sources.) And a lot is already known of Wesley's habit of lifting phrases or whole lines from Milton, Dryden, and other predecessors. This is considered normal poetic practice, and is given elegant names like "allusion" or "intertextuality."[3] By associating his work with that of great poets of the past, the poet gives it added dignity; it gains in weight and substance. But what happens when a writer borrows—or steals—sizable quantities of verse from a contemporary, and one whose literary status is in some doubt? Might this lay the poet open to a charge of plagiarism—a deplorable activity which suggests a notable lack of originality in the borrower?

Before considering the horrific possibility that Charles Wesley may indeed have indulged in plagiarism, we ought to have a look at a poet whose work he may have used to excess. That fascinating repository of eighteenth-century information, opinion and chitchat, *The Gentleman's Magazine,* includes in its listing of deaths for 1737:

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*McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

[1]*Rudyard Kipling's Verse: Definitive Edition* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1940), p. 349.

[2]"Tommy," *op. cit.*, p. 397.

[3]Of course, with Charles Wesley there is an enormous amount of biblical allusion in the hymns. This adds even more weight and authority to them.

> Feb. 21. Mrs. *Eliz. Rowe,* formerly *Singer,* the widow of Mr. *Thos. Rowe,* Author of the Supplement to *Plutarch's* Lives. She was the Ornament of her Sex, and the Honour of the County of *Somerset,* and oblig'd the World with *Friendship in Death,* Letters moral and entertaining, besides several excellent Poems in the Miscellanies.

This genteel tribute rather misses the mark, though it does indicate the general esteem in which Elizabeth Rowe was held. She gets much fuller treatment from Roger Lonsdale in his recent ground-breaking anthology, *Eighteenth Century Women Poets.*[4] Admittedly, Lonsdale only selects four of Rowe's poems for his anthology, but even the once-celebrated and immensely learned Elizabeth Carter (1717–1806), friend of Dr. Johnson and Hannah More, is only allotted three poems—one of them a brief elegy "On the Death of Mrs. Rowe" (p. 167).[5] But Lonsdale includes almost a hundred poets (among them Hetty Wesley, represented by four poems), and had to be rigorously selective. One of the best things about the anthology is its provision of quite detailed biographical and critical headnotes (in agonizingly small print) for each poet, and the one on Rowe (pp. 110–111) is very helpful. Lonsdale acknowledges (p. 517), among other sources, the biography of Rowe by her brother-in-law Theophilus Rowe and Henry Grove in the posthumous *Miscellaneous Works* of 1739, and there is in the Methodist Archives a 1769 printing of the biography which was in Thomas Jackson's library; unfortunately for my thesis there is no indication that it ever belonged to a Wesley. (*Miscellaneous Works* was obviously popular; in the Rare Books collection at McMaster we have the 1739 first edition and reprints dated 1749, 1750, and 1756.)[6]

Much of what Lonsdale says about Elizabeth Rowe in his headnote is drawn from the Rowe-Grove biography, so in what I have to say about her life I go back to that as well as making use of Lonsdale's information. She was born in Somerset in 1674, the eldest of three daughters of Walter Singer, a former dissenting minister. (She remained a staunch Dissenter all her life, despite her friendships with some exalted Anglicans.) She began to write verse at the age of twelve, and was taken under the wing of the family of Viscount Weymouth at Longleat, where the venerable Bishop Ken was living. Lord Weymouth's son taught her French and Italian, and, says the biography, "In a few months she was able to read *Tasso's Jerusalem* [*Gerusalemme Liberata*] with great ease."[7] The lively young Elizabeth Singer, under the pen-name of Philomela, became one of the group of wits who contributed to John Dunton's *Athenian Mercury;* the elder Samuel Wesley who was

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[4]Oxford University Press, 1989. (Rather oddly, though the title-page carries the title *Eighteenth Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology,* the Cataloguing in Publication data on the verso gives the title as *Verse by eighteenth-century women: an Oxford Anthology,* thus providing a nice puzzle for bibliographers.)

[5]In the elegy, Carter seems to echo the death notice in *The Gentleman's Magazine.* "She was the Ornament of her Sex" becomes "Farewell, our sex's ornament and pride!" (line 8).

[6]McMaster also has seven printings of the three-volume *Friendship in Death;* the latest one is dated 1795.

[7]*The Life of the Late Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe* (London, 1769), p. 6.

related to Dunton by marriage, was one of the correspondents and gave advice to Philomela on occasion. Her first book of poems, still under the Philomela pseudonym, came out under Dunton's auspices in 1696, when she was twenty-two. In 1703 she met Matthew Prior at Longleat, and a rather ambiguous friendship ensued. "But," says Lonsdale, "she took the opportunity to use his influence in getting some of her translations of Tasso into Tonson's *Poetical Miscellanies*" (p. 45).

In 1709, Elizabeth Singer met the young scholar Thomas Rowe at Bath. (He was about thirteen years younger than Elizabeth.) The godly and learned young man—a fellow-Dissenter—made a great impression on her, and they were married the next year. The marriage seems to have been a very happy one, and the couple apparently spent a good deal of time in London. After the sadly early death of her husband in 1715, Mrs. Rowe "indulg'd her unconquerable inclinations to solitude, by retiring to *Frome* in *Somersetshire,*" say the early biographers (p. 15). They add, further on, "The love of solitude, which seems almost inseparable from a poetic genius, discovered itself very early in Mrs. *Rowe,*" but this has to be qualified: "She did not fly to desarts that she might wholly resign herself to sloth, and a monastic kind of devotion unprofitable to the world" (pp. 30, 31). Indeed, she was very active in good works,[8] carried on with her writing, and kept up her friendship with Isaac Watts, who had addressed a poem to her in the second edition of *Horae Lyricae* (1709). Rather to his alarm, she made Dr. Watts her literary executor, but he carried out his duties promptly and thoroughly, publishing in 1737, the year of her death, *Devout Exercises of the Heart, / in Meditation and Soliloquy, / Prayer and Praise, / By the late pious and ingenious / Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe. / Reviewed and published, at her Request, / By I. Watts, D.D.*

Watts felt it necessary to utter a caution in the Dedication to *Devout Exercises of the Heart:* ". . . some of her expressions [are] a little too rapturous, and too near akin to the language of the mystical writers" (p. iv). But long before, in his 1706 poem "To Mrs. Singer, On the Sight of some of her divine Poems, never printed," (the one published in the second edition of *Horae Lyricae*) he had said:

> 'Twas long ago I broke all but th'immortal strings;
> Now those immortal strings have no employ,
> Since a fair angel dwells below,
> To tune the notes of Heav'n, and propagate the joy.
> Let all my powers with awe profound
> While PHILOMELA sings,
> Attend the rapture of the sound,
> And my devotion rise on her seraphic wings.[9]

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[8]After her father's death in 1719, her inheritance made her well-to-do, but she gave half her income to charity every year. (Lonsdale, p. 46)

[9]*Horae Lyricae* (Berwick, 1793 [?]), p. 202. (This is a very odd edition in my possession, which claims to be the sixteenth.)

It has been alleged that Watts carried out an unsuccessful courtship of Philomela—who had apparently shown him some of her poems—and this strongly personal utterance has the quality of a love poem. That his admiration was intellectual as well as emotional and spiritual is evident from his Preface to *Devout Exercises,* where he virtually negates the unease expressed in the Dedication:

> Here are none of those absurd and incomprehensible phrases which amuse the ear with sounding vanity, and hold reason in sovereign contempt. Here are no visionary scenes of wild extravagance, no affections of the tumid and unmeaning style, which spreads a glaring confusion over the understanding;[10] nothing that leads the reader into the region of those mystical shadows and darkness which abound in the Romish writers, under the pretence of refined light and sublime ecstasy (pp. x–xi).

Not only did Elizabeth Rowe have Watts's vigorous assertions to recommend her to the Wesleys; there was also the evidence of the works which were published in her lifetime. In the best tradition of modern academic skepticism, Lonsdale doesn't think much of these:

> In the years following her husband's death, she was much occupied with the series of rapturously pious prose works for which she was to be celebrated, notably her *Friendship in Death, or Letters from the Dead to the Living* (1728), dedicated to Edward Young, and her *Letters Moral and Entertaining* (1729–32). Her *History of Joseph,* a poem in eight books on a biblical subject [!] begun some years earlier, appeared in 1736 (reissued in 1737 with two extra books) . . . (p. 46).

Admittedly, much of Rowe's prose is heavy going for the modern reader—but so is Milton's, unless one has been trained to read it. As for *The History of Joseph,* I rather doubt if Lonsdale had time to read it in the midst of his multifarious labors. Towards the end of last year, I surprised myself by offering to give a paper on this biblical epic to our Eighteenth-Century Studies Association at McMaster; I'd only glanced at it before, but it looked interesting, especially to someone with a long familiarity with Milton's great and unsurpassed *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained.* The trouble is that any post-Miltonic attempts at epic seem anticlimactic, as anyone who has tried to read Blackmore's well-intentioned efforts[11] can attest. Still, Elizabeth Rowe escapes the weighty hand of Miltonic blank verse, writing instead in the heroic couplet as perfected by Dryden and Pope and doing a very competent job.

If one uses the opening invocation of the poem as an example of its manner and method, after the almost inevitable reminiscences of the beginning of *Paradise Lost,* complete with calling on the Heavenly Muse (explicitly equated

[10]*Cf.:* "Here are no *cant* expressions, no words without meaning . . . . We talk common sense . . . both in verse and prose." (John Wesley, Preface to *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists.*)

[11]Or even C. S. Lewis's *Dymer,* in this century.

by Rowe with the Holy Spirit), she moves into her own matter: something a little less exalted than the great Mosaic theme of creation:[12]

> But thou, propitious Muse, a gentler fire
> Didst breathe, and tune to softer notes the lyre,
> When royal *Lebanon* heard the am'rous king
> The beauties of his lov'd *Egyptian* sing:[13]
> The sacred lays a mystick sense infold,
> And things divine in human types were told.
> Disdain not, gentle pow'r, my song to grace,
> While I the paths of heav'nly justice trace;
> And twine a blooming garland for the youth,
> Renown'd for honour, and unblemish'd truth.
>
> Let others tell, of ancient conquests won,
> And mighty deeds, by favour'd heroes done;
> (Heroes enslav'd to pride, and wild desires,)
> A virgin Muse, a virgin theme requires;
> Where vice, and wanton beauty quit the field,
> And guilty loves to stedfast virtue yield.[14]

I could present a lengthy disquisition here—but fortunately for my audience, who are waiting patiently for Wesley, I won't—on the literary contexts of this poetry, and on the quality of the verse. Still, I must at least comment on how well heroic couplets are handled here, and with what Augustan conciseness—and a typical moral "aside"—the concepts are presented. For instance, one is aware that neither the line nor even the couplet is the main unit; the first six lines of the passage are an integrated whole preparing the way for the narrator's plea to the muse and the promise of achievement in the next four lines. This paragraphing, characteristic of the mature poetry of Pope, provides something of the continuity of narrative blank verse without succumbing to its discursiveness. It is strengthened by the precise punctuation; there are only two periods in the first section of the passage quoted, and they mark precisely the end of each sub-topic treated.

The Augustan undercutting moral comment, coming in parentheses after "mighty deeds, by favour'd heroes done;" is mordantly concise and all the more effective for that. The caesura, the normal break in an iambic pentameter line, is used effectively here: "Heroes enslav'd to pride, // and wild desires." The second part of the line reinforces and enlarges the meaning of the first part. It was an important part of Augustan poetics that the caesura should be shuttled up and

[12]She calls Moses (assumed, of course, to be the author of the Pentateuch), "the noble bard" who "sung in lofty strains."

[13]The reference is of course to the Song of Solomon, traditionally regarded as an allegory of the love between Christ and the Church. (Matthew Henry's famous *Commentary* has a skillful, ingenious, and moving introduction to the Song of Solomon in these terms.)

[14]*The History of Joseph: A Poem in Ten Books* (London, 1737), p. 3. (The title page only gives Rowe's name in a coyly indirect way: "By the Author of *Friendship in Death.*")

down, partly for variety so that readers didn't nod off in long poems, but chiefly for emphatic purposes. One can work this out for oneself in lines such as "The beauties // of his lov'd *Egyptian* sing." "The beauties," followed by the slight pause of the caesura, creates an implicit question—"Whose beauties?"—followed at once by the answer. The suggestion of contempt in "Let others tell," in its obscurity, makes one wait for the clarification of the object of contempt: "ancient conquests won"—by implication the celebrated victories of Homer's and Virgil's heroes. Rowe knows what she's doing, she does it well, and it is accessible and meaningful to an eighteenth-century reader and to any modern reader who tries to think about it.

She is a far from contemptible poet in *The History of Joseph,* but is Charles Wesley justified in lifting this phrase from one who was not a recognized "Classic"? "Inspired by thee, *the first-born sons of light* / Hail'd the creation in a tuneful flight" (p. [1], sig. B; my emphasis). Compare with this two well-known lines from number 141 ("O love divine, how sweet thou art!") in *A Collection of Hymns:* "The first-born sons of light / Desire in vain its depths to see. . . ."[15] There is a gap of over ten years between the second edition of *The History of Joseph* and the publication of the 1749 *Hymns and Sacred Poems,* in which the Wesley hymn was first published, but "the first-born sons of light" is a striking phrase which might well have stuck in Charles Wesley's amazingly retentive memory—so much so that it reappears in the 1749 *Hymns and Sacred Poems,* at the beginning of the second stanza of "Meet and right it is to sing, / In every time and place."[16] Before I read *The History of Joseph,* I thought "the first-born sons of light" was derived from Book V of *Paradise Lost,* but, since I have as yet found no other explicit Wesleyan "borrowing" or acquisition from all the ten books of the *History,* perhaps both authors used another source.

Much more evidence of Charles Wesley's reading and using Rowe is found in John Wesley's *Collection of Moral and Sacred Poems, from the most Celebrated English Authors,* published in three handsome volumes in 1744. I won't go into the agitation caused by the publisher Dodsley, who accused John Wesley of piracy and had to be pacified. (Dodsley published, among many other books, Rowe's posthumous *Miscellaneous Works.*) Of more interest is a copy of *Moral and Sacred Poems* in the Methodist Archives at the John Rylands Library,[17] in which all three volumes have on their flyleaves, in Charles Wesley's hand, "C & S Wesley." It seems likely, on this evidence, that Charles Wesley acquired this copy after his marriage to Sarah Gwynne, but he could have read, and probably did read, all or most of the works in *Moral and Sacred Poems* before their publica-

[15]F. Hildebrandt, O. A. Beckerlegge and J. Dale, eds., *A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists* [1780] (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 258. (Hereinafter referred to as *Collection.*)

[16]*Collection,* p. 346 (No. 212).

[17]MAW/CW59, 60, 61. [Old cataloguing.]

tion in the anthology. (Indeed, he might well have helped his brother select the poems, including his own *Elegy on the Death of Robert Jones,* which I have long admired as a fairly early example of Charles Wesley's skill in writing heroic couplets.) Anyway, it was in looking over volume I of *Moral and Sacred Poems* that I first began to see Mrs. Rowe as a poetic precursor of Charles Wesley, and I base the following comments on her poetry as given in that volume.

Mrs. Rowe's "Hymn,"[18] in seven Wattsian quatrains, is a striking anticipation of "Christ, whose Glory fills the Skies."[19] In comparison to Wesley's hymn, Rowe's is diffuse and repetitive—though the repetition of "In vain" is of course intentional; he says more in eighteen lines than she does in twenty-eight. However, what seems to be happening in the Wesley hymn is a possibly deliberate reworking of Rowe. One may assume that Rowe's morning hymn was popular in educated Christian circles; her readership of earnest Dissenters and "serious" members of the Church of England might well have also been readers of the numerous *Hymns and Sacred Poems* put out by the Wesleys, including the 1740 volume of that name, in which "Christ, whose Glory fills the skies" first appeared. What I am working towards, in this crab-like way, is that Charles Wesley *might* be indulging in the venerable practice of "imitation," in which one mimicked the manner, content, and sometimes even the form, of an admired predecessor, while at the same time trying to "overgo" one's predecessors, modern and ancient. Thus Milton in *Lycidas* produced a pastoral elegy to outdo Theocritus, Virgil, the Italian poets, and even the much-admired Spenser, and in *Paradise Lost* what was intended to be the greatest of all epics—though that didn't stop people trying to imitate *him,* sometimes disastrously. Pope's "Imitations of Horace" are a celebrated eighteenth-century example: Horace brought up to date and perhaps even excelled. Maybe Charles Wesley is following the rhapsodic manner of Rowe, but disciplining it. In any case, it's worth looking at some of the more striking resemblances between the two hymns.

If one assumes, rightly or wrongly, that Wesley had Rowe's morning hymn in front of him or at least partially in his mind when he composed "Christ, whose Glory fills the Skies," it can be seen how economically he condenses Rowe's first three and a quarter stanzas into his first line, and alters the emphasis from the absence of Christ to his presence—albeit a presence yet to be felt in the speaker's soul. I think that what both Rowe and Wesley are doing, consciously or otherwise, is following the tradition of the *aubade,* or morning hymn to one's beloved.[20] The best-known English examples are Donne's "The Sun Rising" and

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[18]Text from J. Wesley, ed., *A Collection of Moral and Sacred Poems* (3 vols., Bristol, 1744), I, 215–216. (See Appendix, p. 21.)

[19]Text from F. Baker, ed., *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1962), p. 19. (See Appendix, p. 23.)

[20]The term *aubade* is usually associated with the Provençal troubadours of the Middle Ages. However, in the Renaissance the forthright language of Ovid's love poems was appreciated and imitated; Donne's "morning" poems are thought to derive from Ovid.

"The Good-Morrow." Conventionally, the *aubade* is a plaintive song of regret at the lovers' separation, which must come with the dawn; Donne, however, strikingly modifies the convention by celebrating the continuing love he and his beloved experience. In "The Sun Rising," the sun, which intrudes on the lovers at dawn, is dismissed as inconsequential compared to the greatness of their love, and in "The Good-Morrow" the dawn is not an occasion for parting. Rather, as the sleeping lovers come to consciousness their *souls* greet each other: "And now, good morrow to our waking souls."[21] Dawn is the time of the soul's awakening.

Isaac Watts Christianizes the delight and yearning of lovers in his Hymn LXX, derived from part of the second chapter of the Song of Solomon:

> Till the day break, and shadows flee,
> Till the sweet dawning light I see,
> Thine eye to me-ward often turn,
> Nor let my soul in darkness mourn.[22]

Rowe enlarges this, and follows the *aubade* tradition of emphatic repetition: "In vain, in vain, in vain. . . ." Wesley returns to Wattsian brevity and is characteristically Christocentric, but the element of longing for illumination is still there. He uses Rowe's "sullen shadows" and "sullen shades": they become "the Shades of Night." The soul of Wesley's singer is oppressed by "the Gloom of Sin, and Grief;" Rowe speaks of a "drooping Soul" loured over by "gloomy Clouds." And "Arise, my bright immortal Sun!" in Rowe's poem mutates easily into "Sun of Righteousness, arise," where Wesley can also make use of a favorite passage from Malachi: "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings" (4:2). (Both writers are able to use the Sun/Son pun beloved of Donne.[23])

A short addendum here: the opening of the beautiful hymn "Light of those whose dreary Dwelling," which first appeared in the 1745 *Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord,* surely owes something to Rowe's:

> In vain! unless my Saviour's Face
>   These gloomy *Clouds* controul.
> And *dissipate* the sullen *Shades*
>   That press my drooping soul.

Compare this with:

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[21]Abrams, M. H., *et al.*, eds., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature,* 6th ed. (2 vols., New York: Norton, 1993), I, 1083.

[22]Stanza 7. Isaac Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs,* ed. T. Cloutt (London, 1818), p. 50.

[23]See "A Hymn to God the Father," ll. 15, 16: "Swear by thy self, that at my death thy Son / Shall shine as he shines now and heretofore." (*Norton Anthology,* I, 1121)

Light of those whose dreary Dwelling
Borders on the *Shades* of Death,
Come, and by thy Love's revealing
Dissipate the *Clouds* beneath.[24]

I have deliberately emphasized "clouds," "dissipate," and "shades." "Shades" and "clouds" are pretty common in eighteenth-century poetic diction, but that there should be this conjunction with the somewhat rarer word "dissipate" is striking. In each case, the words appear close to each other, not casually strung out through the hymn. Is Charles Wesley borrowing or stealing or simply recollecting in a way that would not demand acknowledgment?[25]

Soon after the morning hymn reprinted in *Moral and Sacred Poems* there comes "A Pastoral on the Nativity of our Saviour," (I, 218) which obviously owes a great deal to Milton's superb *Nativity Ode,* itself only partly—and literally—pastoral. But there are a couple of obviously non-Miltonic phrases which seem to have been picked up by Charles Wesley. In the thirty-first line of the *Pastoral* Rowe says, "What Joy these long-expected Tidings bring!" "Long-expected" seems to have been a favorite locution of hers; you will note that it occurs in the last stanza of the morning hymn; here, however, the Nativity context makes me wonder if it was picked up in the 1745 *Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord:* "Come Thou long-expected JESUS, / Born to set thy people free."[26] And in line twenty-nine of the same poem we have: "The great MESSIAH born! transporting sound!" This finds an echo in *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love,* published in 1742 at a time when I assume Charles may have been helping his brother in selecting works for *Moral and Sacred Poems,* which came out two years later.[27] Perhaps Charles Wesley carried over "transporting sound" into the second stanza of the hymn "Let earth and heaven agree," where the second stanza begins: "Jesus, transporting sound! / The joy of earth and heaven!" Even the exclamation mark is reproduced!

Rowe obviously likes "transporting sound," because she also uses it in her *Devout Soliloquies:* "O how I long to hear that Word Divine! / When that transporting Sound shall bless my Ear." This too is in *Moral and Sacred Poems* (I,

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[24]*Representative Verse,* ed. Baker, p. 63.

[25]The words at the beginning of Rowe's sixth stanza, "When, when shall I behold thy Face / All radiant and serene?" forcibly suggest *her* indebtedness to earlier writers, in this case Tate and Brady's 1696 *New Version* of the Psalms:

For Thee, my God, the living God,
My thirsty soul doth pine;
O when shall I behold Thy face,
Thou Majesty divine!

(This is the second stanza of the paraphrase of Psalm 42, "As pants the hart for cooling streams," as given in the 1933 *Methodist Hymn-Book,* No. 455.)

[26]*Representative Verse,* ed. Baker, p. 62.

[27]Why should wild and unsupported suppositions be left only to biblical scholars?

241), and in the same Soliloquy is the line: "My soul shall antedate immortal Joys." This leads inexorably to the striking line in a love-feast hymn from 1740, "Antedate the joys above" (*Collection,* No. 505, p. 695). *Pace* my note in the 1983 edition of the *Collection* attributing the usage of "antedate" to Pope's "Ode for Music, on St. Cecilia's Day," it now seems more likely to me that Rowe got the usage from Pope and passed it on to Charles Wesley.

Still in the *Moral and Sacred Poems,* Rowe's paraphrase of Psalm 63 includes: "Open the boundless Treasures of thy Grace, / And let me once more see thy lovely Face" (I, 234). Here is another possible source for a famous Charles Wesley line (one I've often thought a little extreme for John Wesley's taste, but which he nevertheless included in the great 1780 *Collection,* where it is number 150):

O disclose thy lovely face!
  Quicken all my drooping powers!
Gasps my fainting soul for grace
  As a thirsty land for showers.
(p. 268)

That grace/face rhyme is bound to attract a writer's attention, if he/she is dealing with much the same subject-matter as a predecessor has done. (It is perhaps worth remarking that Rowe probably lifted the "lovely face" expression from Watts, who uses it at least twice, once in *Horae Lyricae*[28] and again in the second of his *four* paraphrases of Psalm 63,[29] whence no doubt it jumped into Rowe's mind as she was doing her own version of the same Psalm.) When it comes to hymns or hymn-like writings, everyone steals from everyone else, apparently. (As far as I can see, though, Watts doesn't rhyme "grace" and "face.") Certainly there are no lovely faces in the King James Version, just a reference in verse 2 to seeing God's power and glory.

As his intriguing annotations in his copy indicate, John Wesley strongly disapproved of some of the *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures,* published by Charles in two volumes in 1762 *without* the elder brother's editorial oversight. This scandalous omission did not prevent John from making use of a number of the *Short Hymns* in the great *Collection,* including one ostensibly on Leviticus 8:35, "Keep the charge of the Lord, that ye die not." Certainly the hymn does begin, "A charge to keep I have," but what follows relates to the Parable of the Talents, as here: "Oh! thy servant, Lord, prepare / A strict account to give." Matthew Henry's *Commentary* is very properly cited in a note on the hymn in the 1983 edition of the *Collection* (No. 309; p. 465), but although Henry does say, "It is the charge of the Lord and Master, who will shortly call us to an

[28]See the note on p. 268 of the 1983 edition of the *Collection.*

[29]T. Cloutt, ed., *The Psalms of David, Imitated in the Language of the New Testament* (London, 1818), p. 112.

account about it," the expression "*strict* account" is found in Rowe, not Henry. Here she is in one of her Blank Verse Soliloquies—yes, she wrote competent blank verse, too:

> . . . the strict Account I have to give
> Remains uncancell'd; yet my Pardon stands
> Perhaps unseal'd, or not to me confirm'd.
> (*Moral and Sacred Poems,* I, 252)

These seem strangely Arminian sentiments from one presumably brought up a Calvinist, but that—fortunately—is beyond my scope here. Of course, what I am struck by is the close correlation of "strict account I have to give" (Rowe) with "a strict account to give" (Wesley). There's a big gap in time between the *Moral and Sacred Poems* of 1744 and the *Short Hymns* of 1762, but if we had Charles Wesley's rough draughts and foul papers readily available, we might well find that the hymn-commentary that emerges as "A charge to keep I have" had its genesis in the 1740s or even earlier.[30]

Here now, still from the Blank Verse Soliloquies in *Moral and Sacred Poems,* is a passage to intrigue all those who know and love one of the greatest of the Wesley hymns, which is really more a meditative poem than a congregational hymn, "Wrestling Jacob": "I will not let thee go without a Blessing. . . / Regard my Sighs, / My Secret Pantings to be near to thee!" (I, 256) Here, though, the Genesis 32 narrative is obviously a common source for both writers; the most one can say is that reading the Rowe passage may have triggered Charles Wesley's interest in doing something similar—and better. But, as the note in the 1983 edition of the *Collection* points out, the wrestling Jacob story was a favorite preaching topic for Charles Wesley in any case from 1741 to 1749 (p. 250) and maybe later.[31] The two recorded Genesis 32 sermons for 1741 may naturally have led to the writing of "Wrestling Jacob" for the 1742 *Hymns and Sacred Poems,* where it first appeared.

A consideration of John Wesley's editorial methods is a study in itself; we know he could be very arbitrary with his brother's hymns, and he seems to be doing much the same thing with some of Rowe's Devout Soliloquies when he anthologizes them. Here is the John Wesley version of some lines from what he identifies as Soliloquy X:

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[30]Many years ago when I worked my way through the elegant calligraphy of the MS *Hymns on the Four Gospels and the Book of Acts,* closely related to the *Short Hymns,* I was well aware that, fortunately for my eyesight, I was looking at a fair copy, not the original "work in progress."

[31]The much-lamented fragmentary state of Charles Wesley's *Journal* is of course the problem here; he probably went on preaching about Jacob's saving struggle with the Angel for the rest of his life.

JESUS! my only Hope, my Advocate,
My gracious Mediator, O defend
My trembling guilty Soul, from all the Storms
Of Wrath Divine! be thou a hiding-Place,
A Covert from the Wind, a safe Retreat
From all the Terrors of avenging Pow'r,
And Justice infinite! Thy Blood can cleanse
My deepest Stains, and purify my Soul.

(I, 257)

When I came to examine the original posthumous *Miscellaneous Works* of Rowe, in the 1739 first edition which was presumably John Wesley's source, these lines are found in Soliloquy XXXIII, *not* X:

Thou covert from the storm, a hiding place
From the black tempest of avenging wrath!
. . . I see my guilt,
But see it cancell'd by redeeming blood.[32]

The rest of the wording in the Wesley version is apparently culled from other parts of the Soliloquies; it is neatly packaged for "improving" reading, while avoiding some of Rowe's prolixity. John Wesley's reworking of Rowe's poem partly[33] provides, I would suggest, a place from which his brother can launch one of the greatest hymns in the English language, "Jesu, Lover of my soul."[34] Despite its mauling by various editors, many of whom strangely find it necessary to change "Jesu" to "Jesus," among other things, this is such a well-known hymn that I hardly need to quote it *in extenso.*[35]

I do not mean to imply that "Jesu, Lover of my Soul" *derives* from Rowe in a large-scale way; much of the language and imagery is clearly scriptural. Thus, the "Fountain" of the fifth stanza comes from Zechariah 13 and Revelation 21 (at least), and the lover of the soul originates in the traditional interpretation of the Song of Solomon as a celebration of the love of Christ for the church, his bride. (Typically, Charles Wesley individualizes the love, making it more personal; the singer of the hymn is the beloved of Jesus.) Still, "tempest," in the fourth line of stanza 1, is a word used by Rowe in Soliloquy XXXIII, where she also speaks of Christ as a "covert from the storm." John Wesley's version of Rowe lacks the word "tempest," but the word "Soul" is repeated and "Storms" are there in the

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[32]Theophilus Rowe, ed., *The Miscellaneous Works in Prose and Verse of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe* (2 vols., London, 1739), p. 229.

[33]I say "partly" because it looks to me as if Charles Wesley did read at least some of Rowe in the original *Miscellaneous Works* text, which is where the word "tempest" (*cf.* the fourth line of Wesley's first stanza) occurs.

[34]See Baker, *Representative Verse,* No. 15 (pp. 22–23) for the full text of the hymn and its original title, "In Temptation."

[35]But see Appendix, p. 20, for the appropriate stanzas.

plural. Even Rowe's reference, in both versions, to the redemptive shed blood of Christ is there by implication in "Jesu, Lover of my soul," because the Fountain of Life in the hymn is the "fountain . . . for sin and uncleanness" of Zechariah 13:1. Matthew Henry says of this verse that the Lamb of God "takes away the guilt of sin by the blood of his cross." Those who have their sins pardoned will have "their consciences . . . purified by the blood of Christ," and "this *fountain opened* is the pierced side of Jesus Christ."[36] We know, thanks to Kingsley Lloyd, how much Charles Wesley used and valued Matthew Henry's *Commentary,*[37] the normative Protestant interpretation of Scripture for almost two centuries, so it is not unreasonable to think of Henry's comment as a not too deeply hidden subtext. (The reference to the "fountain of the water of life" in Revelation 21:6 is obvious, unlike much in the Book of Revelation.)

One can say, then, that certain elements in "Jesu, Lover of my soul" could at least be suggested as having originated, in one way and another in the poetry of Mrs. Rowe. But Wesley does not so much imitate an admired predecessor, still less plagiarize her and thereby become second-rate,[38] as absorb her material into his consciousness. There, it becomes something to be used by the transformative creative energy of the artist, the maker, who takes the materials that come to hand and makes them her or his own. Insofar as Charles Wesley does make use of Rowe in "Jesu, Lover of my soul," he also transforms her work: the terror of judgment and damnation in the Blank Verse Soliloquies passage(s) is changed into a longing for union with Christ and a lively hope of acceptance by him—in this life as well as the hereafter.

Wesley's affiliations with Mrs. Rowe still need a lot of examining; I have barely touched on them here, and there is much more work to be done on them, *and* on a considered reassessment of Rowe's poetry, which I have at least started on in my study of *The History of Joseph.* But, as I emerge out of this particular mine shaft, my lamp slightly askew and my limbs weary, I hope I have come out with at least this nugget: Charles Wesley really doesn't steal from Mrs. Rowe, whatever may be appearances to the contrary; he takes into himself what he can make use of and discards the rest, or keeps it for another time. Then the wonderful creative imagination of the true poet seizes on everything available to it, and transforms it into lasting beauty.

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[36]Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), p.1591.

[37]A. Kingsley Lloyd, "Charles Wesley's Debt to Matthew Henry," LQHR CLXXI (1946), 330–7.

[38]"Any plagiarism must be second-rate." (Fay Weldon, *Worst Fears* [New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1996], p. 171.)

Appendix: Passages for Reference

From Mrs. *Eliz. Rowe.*

Hymn[39]

I

In vain the dusky Night retires,
  And sullen Shadows fly:
In vain the Morn with Purple Light
  Adorns the Eastern Sky:

II

In vain the gaudy Rising Sun
  The wide Horrizon [*sic*] gilds,
Comes glitt'ring o'er the Silver Streams,
  And chears the Dewy Fields:

III

In vain, dispensing Vernal Sweets
  The Morning Breezes play;
In vain the Birds with chearful Songs
  Salute the New-born Day:

IV

In vain! unless my Saviour's Face
  These gloomy Clouds controul,
And dissipate the sullen Shades
  That press my drooping Soul.

V

O! visit then thy Servant, LORD,
  With Favour from on high;
Arise, my bright immortal Sun!
  And all these Shades will die.

VI

When, when, shall I behold thy Face
  All radiant and serene,
Without these envious dusky Clouds
  That make a Veil between?

VII

When shall that long-expected Day
  Of sacred Vision be,
When my impatient Soul shall make
  A *near Approach* to thee?

[39]Text from *A Collection of Moral and Sacred Poems*, I, 215–216.

Morning Hymn[40]

1 CHRIST, whose Glory fills the Skies,
  CHRIST, the true, the only Light,
Sun of Righteousness, arise,
  Triumph o'er the Shades of Night:
Day-spring from on High, be near:
Day-star, in my Heart appear.

2 Dark and Chearless is the Morn
  Unaccompanied by Thee,
Joyless is the Day's Return,
  Till thy Mercy's Beams I see;
Till they Inward Light impart,
Glad my Eyes, and warm my Heart.

3 Visit then this Soul of mine,
  Pierce the Gloom of Sin, and Grief,
Fill me, Radiancy Divine,
  Scatter all my Unbelief,
More and more Thyself display
Shining to the Perfect Day.

[40]Text from Baker, *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley*, p. 19.

"In Temptation" ("Jesu, Lover of my Soul"), stanzas 1, 2 and 5[41]

1 JESU, Lover of my Soul,
Let me to Thy Bosom fly,
While the nearer Waters roll,
While the Tempest still is high:
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
Till the Storm of Life is past:
Safe into the Haven guide;
O receive my Soul at last.

2 Other Refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless Soul on Thee:
Leave, ah! leave me not alone,
Still support, and comfort me.
All my Trust on Thee is stay'd;
All my Help from Thee I bring;
Cover my defenceless Head,
With the Shadow of thy Wing.

5 Plenteous Grace with Thee is found,
Grace to cover all my Sin:
Let the healing Streams abound,
Make, and keep me pure within:
Thou of Life the Fountain art:
Freely let me take of Thee,
Spring Thou up within my Heart,
Rise to all Eternity!

[41]Text from Baker, *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley,* pp. 22–23.