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Charles A. Green
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The Charles Wesley Society
Archives and History Center
Drew University
Madison, NJ 07940

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Songs of the Heart

Hymn Allusions in the Writings of Early Methodist Women

Paul Wesley Chilcote

Introduction

For some years now I have been working with early Methodist women's documents. They have been an amazing window into the life and mission of Wesleyan Christianity. While working on an anthology of early Methodist women's writings, hopefully to be published under the title *Her Own Story*, I could not help but notice the pervasive quotation of hymns in these little known diaries, journals, letters, and theological works. I solicited the assistance of members of The Charles Wesley Society and began to identify as many of these hymn allusions as I could. In this brief essay I would simply like to reflect upon some of my findings.

I need to make several quick disclaimers at the outset. First, this is not a scientific study; rather, it is impressionistic in nature. Neither is the research here exhaustive in any sense. While I have combed the work of many eighteenth-century English women affiliated with the Methodist movement, I have only really skimmed the surface of a huge body of material that begs for much more attention. So I can only hope at broad generalizations; observations based on the impressions I have made through my journey in this material. Moreover, I am an historian and make no claims to expertise in literary criticism; the majority of my reflections, therefore, revolve around theological issues and concerns. I will begin with some general observations, but spend the bulk of the essay on the "life of the hymns" in the narrative context of the writings of early Methodist women. Finally, I make no claim to any surprises. I simply want to share what has been an absolutely fascinating pilgrimage for me. Perhaps, best of all, I invite you to sing some of the hymns to which the women most frequently allude.

General Observations

The Women's Sources

Now I turn to some comments about the women's sources. The random selection of women's writings I have included in this study include the works of well-known women, such as Grace Murray, Sarah Crosby, Hester Ann Rogers, and Hannah Ball, as well as more obscure figures such as Sarah Colston, Isabella Wilson, Ann Gilbert, and Bathsheba Hall. All together, for the purposes of this impressionistic sketch, I have consulted the writings of some twenty-five women. (For the sake of simplicity, I have gathered the quoted sources, with abbreviations, in an appended bibliography.) These works include accounts of religious experience, diaries, journals, memoirs, and other autobiographical materials, theological, homiletical, and poetical writings, prayers, accounts of death, and cor-

respondence. It is, in many ways, a hodgepodge of material, random and not comprehensive in any sense at all; nonetheless, broadly representative of the eighteenth-century period of Methodist origins.

Any reader who has familiarity with this territory at all will have marveled at the fact that the name of Mary Fletcher (*née* Bosanquet), perhaps the most famous of all early Methodist women, was conveniently omitted from the list of the note worthies mentioned above. To put it bluntly, here is a treasure too monumental in scope to mine and plunder for my purposes here. Two points or observations will have to suffice here concerning Mary.

1. While most of the other women allude only to Wesley hymns, Mary's references are broad in scope and include, in addition to John and Charles of course, well-known literary figures such as Watts, Addison, Austin, and Norris.

2. A second, more illustrative observation. In the original material which makes up the bulk of Henry Moore's *Life of Mary Fletcher*, comprising some 360 pages in the edition I possess, there are no fewer than 120 allusions to hymns or sacred poems. You will find the verses of a hymn (more often than not, simply a couplet, irritatingly drawn from the center of a more obscure hymn, making it virtually impossible to identify until the computer catches up to my quest) quoted on every third page. I find that to be rather phenomenal. It is simply illustrative of the centrality of hymnody to the early Methodist people. Mary will have her day in due course, but today is not that day.

The Corpus of Hymns

I turn now to some general observations about the corpus of hymns quoted in these writings. With the help of members of the Charles Wesley Society, I was able to identify 61 out of 66 hymns alluded to in the restricted and extracted materials I have surveyed.

1. Non-Wesleyan Hymnody

The non-Wesleyan hymnody among these quotations is very slight and very predictable.

- *Isaac Watts*. Five allusions come from two principal collections of Isaac Watts's *Hymns and Spiritual Songs of 1707* and *The Psalms of David* (1719).

- *Edward Young*. The only other non-Wesleyan poet alluded to in this sampling is Edward Young. Given the widespread popularity of his *Night Thoughts* throughout the century and its pervasive use among the Wesleys, it is no surprise to find allusions to the Fourth Night on "The Christian Triumph."

2. Wesleyan Hymnody

But all other allusions are to hymns in the Wesleyan corpus. It should be no surprise, here as well, that the vast majority of hymns quoted come from the various editions of *Hymns and Sacred Poems*: 1739 (9), 1740 (4), 1742 (9), and

1749 (14). Other collections of hymns with more than two references drawn from their pages include *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* (1745), *Redemption Hymns* (1747), *Funeral Hymns* (1759), and *Scripture Hymns* (1762).

Among these various hymns, of course, there were favorites. As indicated above, you will be invited to sing (or simply read) several of the most quoted hymns (an eighteenth-century women's hymn-sing of sorts). One conspicuous favorite excluded from these selections, however, is "Wrestling Jacob" which seems to pop up quite frequently.

Preliminary Impressions

I am going to step out where angels fear to tread, especially with the extremely random sampling of material in mind, and attempt four generalizations, realizing, in fact, how dangerous this is. The first two observations have to do with "when" women tended to quote hymns, and the second set of two with "how" they quoted them. I will illustrate the latter set more fully.

1. Women seem to quote hymns earlier in the century rather than later. I am not at a point where I would like to hazard an explanation for this impression, but it might very well have to do with the function of "autobiographical literature" within the life of the Methodist movement. And this is, in fact, related to my second impression.

2. The more autobiographical the genre, the more likely you are to find hymns. As one of my students said with little concern for tact, "Well, . . . Isn't that just common sense?" Well, yes! You can expect to find more use of the hymns in writing that tends to lean in the direction of spirituality, of the autobiographical religious account, or spiritual direction based on personal experience, for instance, in correspondence. Hymns expressed the experience of early Methodist people in terse, clear, and memorable ways. They both articulated and shaped experience.

3. Of more interest, however, are questions concerning "how" the women use these hymns. It is not unusual for the women to quote first or last stanzas of hymns, *i.e.*, the most memorable lines. Sarah Crosby, for example, concludes a prayerful meditation in her diary, "O my Jesus, thou art my all in all!"

Sink me to perfection's height,
The depth of humble love!¹

In an ecstatic moment at the communion rail, Sarah Ryan cries out,

Lift your eyes of faith, and look
To the signs he did ordain!²

¹Crosby, 518; the hymn allusion in *HSP* (1749), vol. I, Part I, no. 91, "After a recovery," v. 18; *Poetical Works*, 4:447. Note the paradoxical imagery reminiscent of the radical reversals in the writings of St. Augustine. Sarah quotes the concluding lines of the final stanza.

²Ryan, 304; hymn allusion from *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* (1745), Hymn CV, v. 1; *cf. Collection* (1780), Hymn 73, v. 1 and *Works*, 7:172.

Isabella Wilson simply exclaims: “‘O Love Divine, what hast Thou done’ for me, an unworthy worm.”³ Likewise, it is not unusual to find any one of these women, at the conclusion of a particularly moving account, “lost in wonder, love, and praise.”

4. The women feel free to manipulate the texts of the hymns to suit their various circumstances. Two different women subjected the climactic lines of “Sinners, obey the gospel word” to interesting permutations, changing

“The speechless awe that dares not move,
And all the silent heaven of love,”⁴

into a “sacred awe” in one instance and a “solemn awe” in another, refitting the text to their peculiar contextual situations.⁵

Changes, however, are much more often those of person and tense, again depending on the personal context and the purpose of the quotation: “O what are all my sufferings here” becomes “all our sufferings” in a literary act of Christian solidarity.⁶ More frequently still, the movement is in the opposite direction toward the first person singular to emphasize, as it were, the momentous nature of enpersonalized faith. “For more *we* ask, *we* open *then*” becomes “For more *I* ask, *I* open *now*; /My heart to embrace thy will.”⁷ In both of these instances I don’t think there is any question that the women were conscious of their editorial work and the significant transmutations of the texts.

These last few comments do begin to move us into the central concern of this essay, namely, what kind of life these allusions take on within the context of a narrative. Without question, the most exciting discoveries here relate to how the women use the hymns—how they bring them to life or allow them to sing—in their own narratives.

The Contextual Setting of the Hymn Allusions

In my analysis of this limited sampling, I have discerned at least five basic settings for the textual allusions. There are no surprises to anyone well-versed in the study of early Methodism. In the writings of these women, the hymns function as *promise*, as *illustration*, as *catalyst*, as *prayer*, and as the *language of the heart*. I will illustrate each of the motifs in sequence.

1. First, *the hymn as promise*, more properly the promise of redemption. This category gathers together a number of elements related to promise, both God’s to us and ours to God. Sometimes the promise is directly linked to a scriptural text,

³Wilson, 517; the opening line of Charles Wesley’s famous hymn, first appearing in the 1742 collection of *HSP*; Hymn 27, v. 1 in the *Collection* (1780); cf. *Works*, 7:114.

⁴*HSP* (1749), vol. 1, Part II, “Sinners, obey the gospel word”; *Poetical Works*, 5:63.

⁵Ann Gilbert and Hannah Ball respectively.

⁶Harrison, 367; *Funeral Hymns*, 2nd Ser. (1759), Hymn 3, v. 9; *Poetical Works*, 6:219.

⁷Crosby, 420; *HSP* (1739), Part 1, “Grace after Meat,” IV. 4, p. 37; *Poetical Works*, 1:34.

little more than an extension of the biblical testimony, as in the case of Sarah Crosby's reflections on Psalm 116:13, quoted in part above:

"The Lord is still my salvation. He hath helped me through various trials,
I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the Name of the Lord for more.
For more I ask, I open now
My heart to embrace thy will."⁸

A hymn, however, can also signal an act of dedication, recommitment, or promise to God, as in the case of Bathsheba Hall:

"The Lord has been gracious to me this day.
Thou art my King! And lo! I sit
In willing bonds beneath thy feet!

I feel, that thou art still the Lord of every motion in my soul."⁹

More often than not, the hymn functions as a sign or a seal of God's promise, a reminder of God's faithfulness and a source of encouragement for the future. For Sarah Crosby a hymn could proclaim the promise of eternal life: "I . . . prayed he would stamp me with his Spirit's seal, and speak to my soul at his table, and was refreshed with these words:

There, there we shall stand,
With our harps in our hands,
Interrupted no more,
And eternally sing, and rejoice, and adore!"¹⁰

"A day of painful and gloomy temptations," wrote Hannah Ball, "But love can burst the shades of death,/And bear me from the clouds beneath,/To everlasting day."¹¹ Hester Rogers makes the point explicitly and introduces us to the first of the hymns to be sung:

"Reading the word of God in private this day was an unspeakable blessing. O! how precious are the promises. What a depth in these words: 'For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him, amen, unto the glory of God.' Yes, my soul, they are so to thee! The Father delights to fulfil, and the Spirit to seal them on my heart. O that dear invaluable truth!

Ready art thou to receive;
Readier is thy God to give.

The Lord poured his love abundantly into my soul while worshipping before him. And I was enabled to renew my covenant, to be wholly and for ever his!"¹²

⁸Crosby, 420.

⁹Hall, 94. It has not been possible to identify these lines of hymnic verse.

¹⁰Crosby, 565. This hymn is yet to be identified as well.

¹¹Ball, 40; *HSP* (1749), "O God, my faithfulness I plead" from the section "In Temptation."

¹²Rogers, 132; the concluding hymn of *HSP* (1739), based on John 16:24, and related to the covenant renewal; *Poetical Works*, 1:192.

I invite you, now, to read one of the early Methodist women's favorite hymn allusions that illustrates this theme. Note the decidedly Trinitarian form of the hymn!

Rise, My Soul, with Ardour Rise
(John XVI. 24)

1. Rise, my soul, with ardour rise,
Breathe thy wishes to the skies;
Freely pour out all thy mind;
Seek, and thou art sure to find.
Ready art thou to receive?
Readier is thy God to give.
6. Since the Son hath made me free,
Let me taste my liberty,
Thee behold with open face,
Triumph in Thy saving grace,
Thy great will delight to prove,
Glory in Thy perfect love.
8. Abba, Father! Hear Thy child,
Late in Jesus reconciled!
Hear, and all the graces shower,
All the joy, and peace, and power,
All my Saviour asks above,
All the life and heaven of love.
12. Holy Ghost, no more delay;
Come, and in Thy temple stay;
Now Thy inward witness bear,
Strong, and permanent, and clear:
Spring of Life, Thyself impart,
Rise eternal in my heart!

2. Not only do the hymns proclaim God's promise, they actually function as *catalysts for transformation, conversion, and spiritual renewal*. Sarah Colston identifies singing the words of a hymn as a critical turning point in her spiritual journey:

"after you had praied and were singing these words of the hymn:

Jesus come thou serpent bruser:
bruse his head womans seed:
Cast down the acuser.

I felt such a power and love of God in my soul that I did not know how to live.
When I came home I was praying and singing all day long."¹³

¹³Colston, 4; *Psalms and Hymns* (1741); "A Prayer for One that is Lunatic and Sore Vexed," v. 4. Orig. "Jesu, help, Thou serpent-bruise;/Bruise his head, woman's seed,/Cast down the accuser." *Poetical Works*, 2:30.

For Ann Gilbert, the devotional use of a hymn became the means of experiencing God in a new and vital way. She writes:

“While I was riding, I endeavoured to exercise my mind with the Lord, by repeating ‘the humble Suit of a sinner,’

Thou seest the sorrows of my heart,
My grief is known to thee, &c.

All on a sudden I received such a manifestation of the power and presence of God, that I cried aloud, ‘Lord, if I should die this moment, I shall go to heaven.’”¹⁴

Sarah Ryan encountered Christ anew at the sacrament one Easter Eve at the West Street Chapel in London, a hymn consummating the promise from Jesus which she sought:

“Just as I came to the rails, God spoke these words to my soul,
Lift your eyes of faith, and look
To the signs he did ordain!
Thus the bread of Life was broke!
Thus the Lamb of God was slain!
Thus was shed on Calvary,
His last drop of blood for *thee!*”¹⁵

In similar fashion, on March 29, 1771, Good Friday, Bathsheba Hall contemplated the cross and experienced Jesus’ death as she had never done before:

“I feel to-day, a solemn spirit; a sacred awe broods over my soul. I seem to have a more realizing view than ever, of Jesus on the Cross. And

Faith cries out, ’tis HE! ’tis HE!
My GOD that suffers there.”¹⁶

J. Ernest Rattenbury described the Charles Wesley hymn, and this verse in particular, as the “Protestant Crucifix.”¹⁷

God of Unexampled Grace

1. God of unexampled grace,
Redeemer of mankind,
Matter of eternal praise
We in Thy passion find:
Still our choicest strains we bring,
Still the joyful theme pursue,
Thee the Friend of sinners sing,
Whose love is ever new.

¹⁴Gilbert, 43. Searches through the Wesleyan hymn corpus have been unsuccessful in identifying this hymn text.

¹⁵Ryan, 304; *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* (1745), Hymn CV, v. 1; cf. *Collection* (1780), Hymn 73, v. 1; *Works*, 7:172.

¹⁶Hall, 148; *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* (1745), Hymn 21, v. 3. Cf. J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (London: The Epworth Press, 1948), 20–30.

¹⁷“God of unexampled grace,” Rattenbury, 22–23.

2. Endless scenes of wonder rise
 With that mysterious tree,
 Crucified before our eyes
 Where we our maker see:
 Jesus, Lord, what hast Thou done?
 Publish we the death Divine,
 Stop, and gaze, and fall, and own
 Was never love like Thine!

3. Never love nor sorrow was
 Like that my Jesus show'd;
 See Him stretch'd on yonder cross,
 And crush'd beneath our load!
 Now discern the Deity,
 Now His heavenly birth declare;
 Faith cries out, Tis He, tis He,
 My God, that suffers there!

3. The women also used the hymns as *illustrations of Christian theology and praxis*. Isabella Wilson alludes to one hymn and quotes another (yet to be identified) in an effort to articulate the mystery of the Incarnation and Jesus' self-sacrificial love for all: "He doth all things well. He is the lover of our souls,¹⁸ or would he have left the glories of heaven to take our nature upon him, and become a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief? He saw our condition, came to our relief, and shed his precious blood that we might be reconciled to God, and made meet to reign with him in glory.

Amazing stoop of Majesty divine,
 Here love doth in its utmost lustre shine,
 O let it raise esteem in mortals higher,
 And my whole soul with holy raptures fire."¹⁹

During a time of increasing division within the Christian community at large and within Methodism in particular, Frances Pawson drove home the ecumenical imperative by reference to Charles's hymn on Isaiah 11:13: "The object of his sermon was to promote a friendly union between the Methodists and the Dissenters. There was an uncommon degree of unction attendant on his word. I wept much and felt my affections expanded to all the children of God. The whole congregation was affected.

¹⁸See the Charles Wesley hymn, "Jesus, Lover of my soul," perhaps the most famous of all his hymns, first published in the 1739 collection of *HSP*. A hymn rooted essentially in the psalmist's cry (17:8; 27:5), the description of Jesus as the "lover of souls" (Song of Solomon 11:26) rests ultimately in the remembrance of his promise of eternal life.

¹⁹Wilson, 465.

Happy day of union sweet;
Lord, when shall it appear!
When shall all thy people meet,
In amity sincere!
Tear each other's flesh no more,
But kindly think and speak the same;
All express the meek'ning power,
And spirit, of the Lamb."²⁰

Hester Rogers frequently found herself in situations where it was necessary for her to defend Wesleyan conceptions of the Christian life and to persuade antagonists of the truth of their claim. In the quintessential evangelistic moment, she argues the need for entire sanctification and the realization of perfect love.

"Art thou a child of God, a believer, and feelest his Kingdom in a measure set up in thy heart? Dost thou know, 'he hath loved *me* and given himself for *me*' and yet dost thou feel the remains of anger, pride, self-will, inordinate desires and affections? Then thou knowest the meaning of those words

'Tis worse than death my God to love
And not my God alone."²¹

Elsewhere, she illustrates the potency of her own experience of God's grace in her life, introducing us to a third hymn "For Believers," for your singing.

The love of God shed abroad in my heart was now my meat and drink, and the thoughts of the amazing depths of grace which had plucked me as a brand from the burning quite overcame me!—me, the most obstinate offender, who had so long and so repeatedly resisted, and grieved his Holy Spirit! This love of my God and Saviour, so unmerited and free, overflowed my soul, nor had I for eight months any interruption to my bliss.

Not a cloud did arise, to darken my skies,
Or hide for a moment my Lord from my eyes.²²

Note Hester's editorial work on the fifth verse, just quoted.

All Praise to the Lamb!

1. All praise to the Lamb!
Accepted I am,
I am bold to believe on my Jesus's name.
5. Not a doubt can arise
To darken the skies,
Or hide for a moment my Lord from my eyes.

²⁰Pawson, 95; *Scripture Hymns* (1762), Hymn 1096 [Isa. 11:13], v. 1; *Poetical Works*, 9:388.

²¹Rogers, 49; *HSP* (1740), "The Resignation," Part I, v. 4; *Poetical Works*, 1:267.

²²Rogers, 32; *HSP* (1749), "For Believers;" *Poetical Works*, 5:25.

7. My cup it runs o'er,
I have comfort and power,
I have pardon—what can a poor sinner have more.
8. He can have a new heart,
So as never to start
From Thy paths: he may be in the world as Thou art.
11. The promise is sure,
It shall always endure,
And I as my God shall be spotless and pure.
15. Thee, Lord, I receive,
And to me Thou shalt give
A power, without sin in Thine image to live.
16. Thine image is love,
And I surely shall prove
That holy delight of the angels above.
18. I am sure it shall be,
I shall walk before Thee,
And be perfect as God, when my God is in me.

4. Fourth, we look at the hymn as *prayer and praise to God*. If the statement attributed to Augustine is correct, that “to sing is to pray twice,” then it would only seem natural for a prayerful narrative to move, even imperceptibly at times, into hymns of prayer and praise.

Sometimes a hymn allusion is referred to explicitly as a prayer, as is the case with this quotation from Mary Stokes’s journal:

“My every power gasped for God, But instead of crying, ‘Lord, cleanse thy temple;’ these blessed memorable lines, were my whole prayer,

Now thine inward Witness bear,
Strong, and permanent, and clear?”²³

Her prayer later answered, she could proclaim with joy:

“The clog,—the hindrance, was gone; and my soul hung on it’s Beloved. With what transport did I often cry,

Jesus! Thee alone I know,
Monarch of my simple Heart.

I found him, indeed, my King.”²⁴

²³Stokes, 101; *HSP* (1739), “John 16:24.” *Poetical Works*, 1:194. The middle of verse 12, which reads in its entirety: “Holy Ghost, no more delay!/Come, and in thy temple stay!/Now thine inward witness bear,/Strong, and permanent, and clear,/Spring of life, thyself impart,/Rise eternal in my heart!”

²⁴Stokes, 101; *HSP* (1749), vol. 2, Part I, “On the Loss of His Friends,” Hymn 6, v. 5; *Poetical Works*, 5:185.

In typical fashion, at the close of a long day of service to Christ, Sarah Crosby articulates the prayer central to the heart of every Wesleyan Christian:

I have been all this day kept in perfect peace, and in the evening was much drawn out in prayer for myself and all my dear friends. O my Jesus, thou art my all in all!

Sink me to perfection's height,
The depth of humble love!²⁵

Ironically, having opened this section with reference to Augustine, I close with another Augustinian/Pauline theme in this hymn, namely, the paradoxical reversals in the reign of God: great is small and small is great; down is up and up is down.

After a Recovery

9. Infinite, unexhausted love!
Jesus and love are one:
If still to me Thy mercies move,
They are restrain'd to none.
11. What shall I do my God to love?
My loving God to praise?
The length, and breadth, and height to prove,
And depth of sovereign grace?
12. Thy sovereign grace to all extends,
Immense and unconfined;
From age to age it never ends;
It reaches all mankind.
17. Come quickly then, my Lord, and take
Possession of Thine own;
My longing heart vouchsafe to make
Thine everlasting throne.
18. Assert Thy claim, receive Thy right,
Come quickly from above,
And sink me to perfection's height,
The depth of humble love.

5. A fifth category of hymn usage is by far the most predominant, namely, the hymn as the *language of the heart*. What I mean by this terminology is the use of a lyrical form to describe an experience of God for which normal discourse is simply inadequate. It may refer to an overwhelming sense of God's presence or the gift of overflowing love. In either case, it is the language of the heart filled with love—filled with God. Oftentimes, the quotation of the hymn is even preceded by an explicit reference to this kind of interiority, as is the case with another hymn quoted by Hannah Harrison:

²⁵Crosby, 470; *HSP* (1749), vol. 1, Part 1, no. 90, "After a recovery," v. 18; *Poetical Works*, 4:447.

“Thursday morning following, when at private prayer, I was so overwhelmed with the divine presence, that I cried out, ‘Lord, can what I feel proceed from any but thee?’ and the language of my heart was,—

[Nay, but]—I yield, I yield,
I can hold out no more,
I sink,—by dying love compell’d,
And own Thee Conqueror.”²⁶

Isabella Wilson is equally explicit in her description of the close communion with God that she felt:

“I was brought into closer communion with the God of my mercies, and I was more determined for heaven than ever. The language of my heart was,

O may I breathe no longer than I breathe
My soul in praise to him, who gave my soul
With all its infinite of prospect fair.”²⁷

Mary Langston piles image upon image and then bursts into song concerning her vision of heaven:

“I see fountains upon fountains. O what rivers of pleasure are there! How shall I swim in those *oceans of love* to all eternity! I am overcome with love! Oh . . . how would I sing!

No need of the sun in that day,
Which never is followed by night,
Where Jesus’s beauties display,
A pure, and a permanent light:
The Lamb is their light and their sun,
And lo! By reflection they shine,
With Jesus ineffably one,
And bright in effulgence divine.”²⁸

In one of her celebrated letters, published by John Wesley in the 1782 edition of the *Arminian Magazine*, Jane Cooper describes her unrelenting quest for perfect love and turns to “Pleading the promise of sanctification,” Charles’s lyrical formulation of Ezekiel 36:23ff.

“My soul is broken before my Lord, and desires to follow him as the shadow follows the substance. He has my heart, and reigns the Lord of all my wishes and desires. I need no change of place, person or thing to raise or increase my happi-

²⁶Harrison, 321; *HSP* (1740), Part I, “The Resignation,” v. 16; *Poetical Works*, 1:268. Cf. *Scripture Hymns* (1762), Hymn 1313 [Jer. 13:27], v. 1; *Poetical Works*, 10:24. The opening lines of this hymn read: “Now, ev’n now, I yield, I yield, / With all my sins to part.”

²⁷Wilson, 414; Edward Young, *Night Thoughts*, Night IV, 378–80. Edward Young (1683–1776), a popular poet of the mid-eighteenth century, is remembered primarily for this work. One of Charles Wesley’s favorite poets, the hymn-writer transcribed *Night Thoughts* during the summer of 1754 and incorporated many of its lines into his own poetic expression. Cf. Henry Bett, *The Hymns of Methodism* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1913), 104–108.

²⁸Langston, 8; *Funeral Hymns* (1759), Hymn 8, v. 4; *Poetical Works*, 6:198.

ness. The presence of Jesus is sufficient. His will is my resting-place, and his love my delight. But my joy is not every moment full, though in general I can say,

My *full* soul doth still require
Thy whole eternity of Love."²⁹

Praise and prayer, grace and promise all combine in Isabella Wilson's bursting heart of faith:

"All glory be to God for persevering grace and more conformity to him in all things. Oh! the unbounded love of Jesus to my soul. His promises are all precious. My peace flows as a river while he teaches me the lessons of his grace, of faith and holiness. My soul is athirst for all the mind that was in him.

Lord, take my heart and let it be
For ever clos'd to all but thee:
Seal thou my breast, and let me wear
That pledge of love for ever there."³⁰

I conclude with the following hymn:

The Resignation

4. The daily death I prove,
Saviour, to Thee is known:
Tis worse than death, my God to love,
And not my God alone.
8. I long to see Thy face,
Thy Spirit I implore,
The living water of Thy grace,
That I may thirst no more.
15. And can I yet delay
My little all to give?
To tear my soul from earth away,
For Jesus to receive?
16. Nay, but I yield, I yield!
I can hold out no more;
I sink, by dying love compell'd,
And own Thee conqueror.
20. My Life, my Portion Thou,
Thou all-sufficient art;
My Hope, my heavenly Treasure, now
Enter, and keep my heart.

6. Finally, given the fact that the early Methodist people were noted for dying well, it should not be a surprise to find multiple references to hymns in the *ars*

²⁹Cooper, Jane. "Christian Experience," *Arminian Magazine* 5 (1782): 409; *HSP* (1742), "God of all power."

³⁰Wilson, 564; *HSP* (1740), Part I, translated by John Wesley from the German.

moriendi literature of the women. Hester Ann Rogers produced a fascinating little document entitled *The Dying Bed of a Saint and Sinner Contrasted*. In the span of a few short, concluding paragraphs she creates a catena of hymn allusions. Drawn from the 1749 *Hymns and Sacred Poems* and *Redemption Hymns*, these carefully selected stanzas ultimately lift the reader into the ranks of the angelic choir, where all praise of God bursts into song!

This corruptible body, this tottering house of clay, which now cannot sustain this weight of love, shall soon be made a glorious body incorruptible:

Shall the stars and sun outshine,
Shout among the sons of glory;
All immortal, all divine!³¹

And able then to enjoy the full fruition of my God. Yes, I shall soon see him as he is; not through a glass darkly, but face to face. The beatific sight

Shall fill the heavenly courts with praise,
And wide diffuse the golden blaze
Of everlasting light.³²

Waiting to receive my spirit,
Lo, my Saviour stands above;
Shows the purchase of his merit;
Reaches out the crown of love.³³

Angels surround my bed to carry me away. I come, I come, blest messengers of my God! Haste and convey me to his loved embrace! My faith already beholds the crucified Redeemer; methinks I see him smile, while around him stand the heavenly host exulting! O glorious train of blood-bought souls! What an innumerable company! And I shall join the choir,

Shall shout by turns the bursting joy;
And all eternity employ,
In songs around the throne.³⁴

A foretaste now I feel! Nay, so am I filled with glory and with God, that more I could not bear and live! O may I ever feel the sacred flame, and through eternity proclaim the depth of Jesus' love! Amen and amen.

Conclusion

As we have seen, early Methodist women sang their faith. Hymns were both the means by which they "learned" the faith and the medium through which they transmitted their received faith tradition to others. Whether a hymn proclaimed God's promise, illustrated an important aspect of doctrine, provided the impetus for transformation, functioned as an act of prayer, or simply expressed the language of the heart, in the hands of these women, it became a potent form of the

³¹HSP (1749), "Hymns for Christian Friends."

³²HSP (1749), "Come on, my partners in distress," from "For the Brotherhood."

³³HSP (1749), "For one departing."

³⁴Redemption Hymns (1747), "The Musician's Hymn."

Wesleyan lyrical theology. Hymns punctuated the lives and the writings of the women who followed the Wesleys. But more importantly, hymns shaped the way they understood and lived their faith in Jesus Christ. The hymns provided a lyrical framework that helped to define who they were. It is no exaggeration to say that the women lived as they sang; and as they lived, so too they died.

Appendix

Hymns at the conclusion of each section may be sung to the following tunes:

- “Rise, My Soul, with Ardour Rise”
sung to Dix (“For the Beauty of the Earth”)
- “God of Unexampled Grace”
sung to Amsterdam (“Praise the Lord Who Reigns Above”)
- “All Praise to the Lamb!”
sung to Christmas Song (“There’s a Song in the Air”)
- “After a Recovery”
sung to Azmon (“O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing”)
- “The Resignation”
sung to Dennis (“A Charge to Keep I Have”)

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