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I begin with some words by J. Ernest Rattenbury, from his pioneering book on The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley of 1948, in which he described what he saw as the difference between Charles Wesley and his principal source, Dr. Daniel Brevint's The Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice:

Charles Wesley gives Brevint wings, and adds very significantly the confirmation of Methodist experience to Brevint's doctrine. In some of his verses he turns the devotional theology of a High-Church Caroline divine into the flaming Methodist Evangel without losing Anglican values.¹

Rattenbury is not very specific here, and a bit misleading. The sub-text of his commentary is the superiority of Methodist worship over Anglican; in the process he makes Brevint sound like a dry-as-dust writer, which (as anyone who reads John Wesley's abridgment of Brevint must acknowledge) he is not: he is impassioned, prayerful, and psychologically perceptive. Rattenbury is right, however, to emphasise these qualities in the Wesleys' own work, too: and what follows is a sustained attempt to try to tease out a bit further what is meant by "gives Brevint wings" and "the flaming Methodist evangel." What are these elements, and where do they come from?

It will be the argument of this study that these constituents of Hymns on the Lord's Supper are the result, firstly, of the use of poetic language rather than prose; and secondly, of the accumulation in that language of a rich compendium of literary and religious experience. The two are, of course, inter-connected: as I have said to this society before, mature poets steal (according to T. S. Eliot) and it is one of Charles Wesley's most distinctive features as a hymn-writer that his lines are loaded with references to the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, and to all the writers he had read. The intertextuality of his work is something that has been widely recognized: the point I am trying to make is that this intertextuality is not so much a conscious taking over of the work of others as a natural way of writing, a deep expression which comes from what Roland Barthes (in a sentence which I shall quote from more fully in a moment) has called "the innumerable centres of culture."² Into that process of writing come all the phrases, impressions, vividnesses of all the works that Charles Wesley ever read; in his poetry they are fused into the excitement of the verse, the movement of words within the line, the transference of idea from its prose statement into something else. This

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process occurs everywhere in Charles Wesley’s work, but is seen at its most vivid expression in those hymns where he follows Brevint closely. One example is Hymn 116, at the beginning of Part IV, “The Holy Eucharist as it implies a Sacrifice”:

Victim Divine, thy Grace we claim
While thus thy precious Death we shew,
Once offer’d up a spotless Lamb
In thy great Temple here below,
Thou didst for All Mankind atone,
And standest now before the Throne.

(116:1)

Brevint’s section IV, paragraph 5, has the words—

This Victim having been offered up in the Fulness of Times, and in the midst of the World, which is Christ’s Great Temple, and having been thence carried up to Heaven, which is his Sanctuary; from thence spreads Salvation all around, as the Burnt-offering did its Smoke. And thus his Body and Blood have every where, but especially at this Sacrament, a true and Real Presence.

Wesley’s rendering of this is in a solemn 88.88.88, containing a quatrain and a final couplet. The quatrain allows the idea to expand, the couplet encourages it to contract; together they set up a movement in the mind which is both supplementary to Brevint and a pithy summary of it, and in rhythm and rhyme which alters the reader’s perception. “This Victim having been offered up in the Fulness of Times” becomes the beautifully rhythmical (phrase, pause, supplement) opening of “Victim Divine, thy Grace we claim.” The word “Divine” introduces what is almost an oxymoron, and certainly a phrase that is calculated to surprise, gently—a *divine* victim, a sacrificed God; we claim Grace from this victim, as Brevint’s ablative absolute becomes a sentence with an indicative in it. That sentence is given rhetorical power by being turned round. In prose it would be “We claim thy grace, divine victim”; but the inversion makes the “Victim Divine” more prominent, so that it becomes the initial point from which all the rest follows. Then, after the comma, the rest of the line runs to the end as if it were a complete sentence, only to make the reader change his mind when it is seen to be connected with the next adverbial clause—“While thus thy precious Death we shew.” This is taken by Wesley from the Prayer of Consecration, which is appropriately (for his purposes) a reminder of Christ’s sacrifice: “who made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world; and did institute, and in his holy Gospel command us to continue, a perpetual memory of that his precious death, until his coming again.” It is slipped in here as a neat allusion, expanding Brevint by way of the Book of Common Prayer. In Wesley’s version, however, the act of “shewing” the precious death becomes an opportunity for
claiming the divine grace. It is made the more remarkable by the introduction of
the idea of the “spotless Lamb” offered up in the great temple of the world. The
world as the temple of God is from Brevint, but the spotless Lamb is Wesley’s
addition (it is found also in Hymn 2). It appears as if between two commas (as it
is punctuated in modern editions) as a defining supplement to “Victim Divine”;
the verse thus expands the first statement, and the Long Metre four lines allow a
complex and subtle combination of ideas from the several sources. Then, just as
the mind is getting used to one rhythm, the couplet at the end produces a dif­
erent effect: the contrast between the two lines, between the suffering and the glory,
is sharpened by the strong rhyme “atone/Throne,” which finishes the stanza with
a surprising flourish. The reader has followed the movement of thought from
“Victim” to “Throne,” in a very satisfying poetic form, with pauses, rhythms, and
lines working together to form a lyric verse. It is all very different from Brevint’s
prose matter-of-factness (at this point): it turns statement into a grave and
thoughtful dance.

This is a feature of Charles Wesley’s treatment of Brevint’s work that might be
illustrated from almost any of the places where he uses the actual language and
phraseology of Brevint; but, of course, the combination of poems, in their differ­
et metres and different moods, multiply this effect many times. It is as if
Brevint’s work had been a beginning, but Charles Wesley’s imagination had done
the rest. It is this imagination which is the subject of the second point of the argu­
ment. I shall argue that it is made up of remarkable layers of apprehension and
that it has multiple origins, so that Charles Wesley brings to the text not only his
ability as a lyric poet but also his sensibility as an eighteenth-century writer. To
quote Barthes again—“the text is . . . a multi-dimensional space in which a vari­
ety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quo­
tations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.”

I wish to illustrate this by referring to Hymn 21, “God of unexampled Grace,”
where the word “unexampled” itself (meaning “unprecedented, having no other
similar example”) is a characteristically arresting word for the first line. It opens
a hymn which is an extraordinary example of Charles Wesley’s art: even more
than most of his hymns it is dramatic, impassioned, and densely allusive. In it he
exclaims, cries out, feels the mortal smart, shares the hour of darkness, breaks his
heart, weeps, blesses, and worships. And as the text is an extraordinary combi­
nation of mood and temper, so too it includes, under strong pressure, a dense web
of Christian and classical sources. The narrative is Christian, but against it
Charles Wesley places another narrative, from his reading of Latin literature. The
two play against each other, strike sparks off each other, and enrich each other.
They are integrated, moreover, in ways which are consonant with eighteenth-cen­
tury critical theory, as I hope to show.

3 Ibid., 170.
The art of combining Christian teaching with pagan patterns of mythology and with classical literary forms was very common in the Renaissance. It occurred very obviously in Milton, whose *Lycidas* is a Christianized pastoral elegy, and whose *Paradise Lost* is a Christian epic. Douglas Bush has summed up this fusion, which he calls “Christian humanism,” as

a label for the medieval and Renaissance synthesis, the result of the long effort, which began with some of the Church Fathers, to reconcile and fuse the natural wisdom of the pagans with the supernatural illumination of Christianity.4

Thus the teachings of Holy Scripture were supplemented and given energy by the ethical teachings of Cicero and Seneca, and Christian poets would take over classical forms and patterns of rhetoric and use them for their own purposes. Patterns of classical myth were pressed into service, turned into metaphors for Christian experience. Hildebrandt and Beckerlegge identify several examples in the 1780 *Collection*: one of them, which I choose at random, is from Hymn 456:

Their selfish will in time subdue,
And mortify their pride
And lend their youth a sacred clue
To find the Crucified.

The clue (or “clew”) is the ball of thread, the word used in English from Chaucer onwards to suggest a means of getting through a maze, and referring back (as the editors suggest) to the story of Theseus and the labyrinth in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* Book VIII. It is used in this sense in John Pomfret’s “On a Marriage,” published in 1699: “And treads the maze of life without a clue.”

The example is an indication of this widespread habit of thinking about morality in terms of classical myth and legend; and for Christian poets there was plenty of material that had come down to them from classical times. The challenge was to find a Christian use for originally pagan material: Abraham Cowley, in his “Preface, of the Author” to his *Poems* of 1668 referred to this in a discussion of his *Davideis*, subtitled “A Sacred Poem to the Troubles of David.” Cowley commended this subject, and in the process poured scorn on profane English poetry of the time—“the wicked and beggerly Flattery of great persons, or the unmanly Idolizing of Foolish Women, or the wretched affectation of scurril Laughter, or at best the confused antiquated Dreams of senseless Fables and Metamorphoses.” The last word suggests that Cowley was thinking of Ovid, and the need to replace the *Metamorphoses* with something more edifying. It was time, he suggested, to recover poetry out of the devil’s hands, and to “restore it to the Kingdom of God, who is the Father of it.” Since Apollo was traditionally the God of poetry, Cowley was here snatching back poetry from Apollo to God, and at the same time demanding biblical rather than classical subjects:

Does not the passage of Moses and the Israelites into the Holy Land, yield incomparably more Poetical variety, then the voyages of Ulysses or Aeneas? Can all the Transformations of the Gods give such copious hints to flourish and expatiate on, as the true Miracles of Christ, or of his Prophets, and Apostles?

Cowley was being polemical here about three of the most important classical poets to the Renaissance reader, Homer, Virgil, and Ovid. His tone was slightly shrill because he recognised the power of those writers on the imagination, and understood the widespread preoccupation with classical myth as a subject-matter for poetry. What he failed to take account of was the fusion that Douglas Bush writes of, the transformation of classical myth in the service of Christianity. The figure of Pan, which Charles Wesley uses in this hymn, is a good example. Pan was the God of flocks and shepherds. He makes a highly appropriate entry into Milton's account of the Incarnation in his ode “On the Morning of Christ's Nativity,” stanza VIII:

```
The Shepherds on the Lawn,
Or e'er the point of dawn,
    Sate simply chatting in a rustick row;
    Full little thought they than,
That the mighty Pan
    Was kindly come to live with them below.
```

Milton is here thinking of the old myths of Pan, who often frightened people by appearing suddenly, thus causing the state of fear which is referred to by the word “panic.” The gospel account says of the shepherds that they were “sore afraid” when the glory of the Lord shone round about them, whereupon the angel said unto them “fear not”: do not panic: this is a benign arrival, that of a new and more wonderful Pan. In this context it is interesting to see that the cult of Pan developed into a mysterious association with the life that exists in all things (by association with the Greek word pan/all) so that it became a prototype of the idea of a divinity which was manifested in the created world, a combination of the spiritual and the physical.5

5 See, for example, Mircea Eliade, ed., The Encyclopaedia of Religion, II.160.

Pan was thus a figure who combined the material and the spiritual. Virgil wrote of him as the God of the countryside in the Georgics (II.493–4):

```
fortunatus et ille deos qui novit agrestis,
Panaque Silvanumque senem Nymphasque sorores.
```

6 Translation: “Blessed is he who knows the gods of the fields, Pan and old Silvanus, and the sister nymphs.”
Dies the glorious Cause of All,
The true Eternal Pan.
(Hymn 21:5,1–2)

It is a reference that engages multiple areas of experience and reading. The Pan who dies on the cross was the Pan who created the world, not the classical Pan but the Christian version. Charles Wesley would have been aware of this kind of conflation from his reading (for example) of Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender*, another pastoral, where Pan makes an appearance in April. Spenser was flattering Queen Elizabeth and her father and mother, Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, in a song that is sung by a shepherd, who naturally thinks of Pan and Syrinx:

Of fayre Eliza be your silver song,
that blessed wight:
The flowre of Virgins, may shee flourish long,
In princely plight.
For shee is Syrinx daughter without spotte,
Which Pan the shepheardes God of her begot:

Spenser adds a note to this passage, to indicate the parallel:

by Pan is here meant the most famous and victorious King, her highnesse Father, late of worthy memorye K. Henry the eyght. And by that name, oftymes (as hereafter appeareth) be noted kings and mighty Potentates: And in some place Christ himself, who is the verye Pan and god of Shepheardes.

"The verye Pan": Charles Wesley takes up the idea almost identically with "The true eternal Pan." It seems to have been quite acceptable to think of God as Pan, the figure who united material and spiritual, and the power behind all. John Pomfret, writing *A Pastoral Essay on the Death of Queen Mary, Anno 1694*, imagines the late queen entering heaven. Because she had been a virtuous woman in this life, she (in Pomfret's words)

knew what best great Pan would please
And still performed it with the greatest ease.

The point of these citations is that they show Charles Wesley making use of a tradition in which a reference to 'the true eternal Pan' would have profound and complex suggestions. Pan/Christ is here "the glorious Cause of All," the Creator but also the Creator-spirit (as in Dryden's translation of the *Veni Creator Spiritus*). Dryden, of course, was one of the last great translators of Ovid, where Pan appears in Books I and VIII of the *Metamorphoses* (and also in the *Fasti*).

It is hard to know where to draw the line in discussing the influence of Ovid on a poet such as Charles Wesley (all the present essay can do is make a few tentative suggestions). He would have read Ovid at school, almost certainly with
pleasure, because Ovid is the most enjoyable and lively of Latin poets. As L. P. Wilkinson has observed, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Shakespeare, and Milton admired him, and he exercised a pervasive influence on the poets and painters of the Renaissance. He was an important influence on Shakespeare (perhaps in Golding's translation, which is echoed in The Tempest) and on Milton, who read his work as a boy. Isaac Watts echoed him in "O God, our help in ages past." Dryden's Fables, published in 1700, were largely taken from Ovid, and in 1717 there appeared a magnificent translation of the Metamorphoses by Dryden, Congreve, Addison, and others. While Ovid's star was waning by this time (Dryden's translation was, in Wilkinson's words, "the last great English monument of his former glory"), it was nevertheless a major literary event in the school-time of John and Charles Wesley.

What attracted youthful poets to Ovid has been described by Wilkinson as "his fertility of invention, his power of conjuring up vivid pictures, his unphilosophic gusto, his preoccupation with love, and his knowledge of the human heart." And in the preface to the Epistles, Dryden described Ovid thus:

If the imitation of Nature be the business of a poet, I know no author, who can justly be compared with ours [Ovid], especially in the description of the passions. . . . His thoughts, which are the pictures and results of those passions, are generally such as naturally arise from those disorderly motions of our spirits.

It may seem fanciful and impressionistic, but I think that one of the reasons why Charles Wesley is such a great hymn-writer and such a lovable one is that he is good at exactly these things, the description of the passions, the fertility of invention, and the knowledge of the human heart; even, also, "the disorderly motions of our spirits." Perhaps it was these things that Rattenbury was unconsciously admiring when he wrote of the "flaming Methodist evangel": clearly Charles Wesley's hymns were those of a convert, an enthusiast, and a missionary, but the self that was a part of these things was also a self that had been educated in the classical authors, and they would have included Ovid.

The charge against Ovid, of course, was that he was, in some of his poetry, lascivious. The young John Wesley, fresh from the Holy Club in Oxford, and impatiently waiting at Gravesend for the Simmonds to sail to Georgia, wrote to his brother Samuel:

7L. P. Wilkinson, Ovid Recalled (Cambridge, 1955), 405. Wilkinson goes on to describe Ovid's influence as 'paramount' (408), and notes in passing that at Elizabethan banquets select transformations from Ovid's Metamorphoses were exhibited in confectionery.
9Ibid., 440.
10Ibid.
11Ibid., preface, xv.
Elegance of style is not to be weighed against purity of heart. . . . Therefore whatever has any tendency to impair that purity is not to be tolerated, much less recommended, for the sake of that elegance. But of this sort . . . are most of the classics usually read in great schools; many of them tending to inflame the lusts of the flesh (besides Ovid, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and Terence’s *Eunuch*), and more to feed the lust of the eye and the pride of life.

Later, however (in 1759) we find him quoting Ovid in a letter to Sir James Lowther;¹³ and selections from Ovid were permitted on the curriculum of Kingswood School.

The great theme of the *Metamorphoses* is change, the transformation of bodies, as the first lines have it, into shapes of a different kind:

\[
\text{In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas corpora.} \quad 14
\]

In Charles Wesley’s *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* this is made clear as early as Hymn 2:

And lo! my Lord is here become    
The Bread of Life to me!    
(2:5,5–6)

Transformation is at the center of the Holy Communion—both the transformation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, and also the transformation of the sinner into the guest at the heavenly banquet. Christ plays many roles in the process, changing (as the astonishing first verse of Hymn 5 describes) to become both Victim and Sacrifice, Offering and High Priest, one after the other:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{O Thou eternal Victim slain} \\
\text{A Sacrifice for guilty Man,} \\
\text{By the Eternal Spirit made} \\
\text{An Offering in the Sinner’s stead,} \\
\text{Our everlasting Priest art Thou,} \\
\text{And plead’st thy Death for Sinners now.}
\end{align*}
\]

(5:1)

At another point Christ is changed into the Lamb of God, “whose bleeding love / We thus recall to mind” in Hymn 20, and he becomes the “Rock of Israel, cleft

---

¹³Wesley thought that a Christian was one who might say “Non me, qui caetera, vincit / Impetus; et rapido contrarius evehor orbii” (*Metamorphoses*, II. 72–3: “Nor does the swift motion which overcomes all else overcome me”—Loeb Library translation). Towards the end of his life, in a letter to the editor of the *Bristol Gazette*, 7 September 1789, John Wesley used Ovid again in a discussion of the taste of beer (Wesley liked his beer made with malt and not hops): “Bibendum Dulce dedit, tosa quod coxerat ante polenta” (*Metamorphoses*, V. 450).

for me” in Hymn 27. Human beings, very dramatically, have the power to be metamorphosed in Hymn 39:

Rise, ye Worms, to Priests and Kings,
Rise in Christ, and reign with God.

(39:3,5–6)

Similarly, Charles Wesley prays in Hymn 87:

To thy foul and helpless Creature,
Come, and cleanse All my Sins,
Come and change my Nature.

(87:7)

The ability to change is indicative of hope, of new life, as it is to the man at the pool of Bethesda in Hymn 58:

Thou seest me lying at the Pool,
I would, Thou knowst, I would be whole,
O let the troubled Waters move,
And minister thy Healing Love.

(58:5)

Similarly, change fascinated Ovid, as it fascinated the early Greeks from whom he took so many of the myths and legends that made up the *Metamorphoses*. They often come from ancient folk-lore, and have something mysterious about them, perhaps springing from some deep psychological need. As Herman Frankel has written; “The theme [of metamorphosis] gave ample scope for displaying the phenomena of insecure and fleeting identity, of a self divided in itself or spilling over into another self.”15 So Charles Wesley recognizes his own inconstancy and instability in Hymn 80:

Nail to the Posts of Mercy’s Door
My poor unstable Heart.

(80:3,5–6)

His mysterious and wonderful transformation is from the self that is sin into the self that is “in full Conformity” (Hymn 130) with Christ:

If so poor a Worm as I
May to thy great Glory live,
All my Actions sanctify,
All my Words and Thoughts receive:
Claim me, for thy Service, claim
All I have, and all I am.

(Hymn 155:3)

15Herman Frankel, *Ovid, a Poet between Two Worlds* (Los Angeles, 1945), 99.
We live in the hope of such change, both here and hereafter: the death of the old self leads to life in the new. This is the subject of what is probably Charles Wesley's most famous hymn, and certainly his most Ovidian:

\[
\text{Changed from glory into glory,} \\
\text{Till in heaven we take our place,} \\
\text{Till we cast our crowns before thee,} \\
\text{Lost in wonder, love, and praise.}
\]

This was not in the 1745 book, but published very soon afterwards, in *Hymns for those that seek, and those that have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ* of 1747. It begins with another Ovidian moment:

\[
\text{Love divine, all loves Excelling,} \\
\text{Joy of heaven, to earth come down,} \\
\text{Fix in us thy humble dwelling.}
\]

Quite possibly, I suggest, this comes from the touching story of Baucis and Philemon in *Metamorphoses* VIII.611ff., the legend which describes Jupiter and Mercury wandering on the earth (“to earth come down”) and finding the doors of all the wealthy houses closed to them:

\[
\text{Iuppiter hoc specie mortali cunque parente} \\
\text{venit Atlantiades positis caducifer alis.} \\
\text{mille domos adiere locum requiemque petentes,} \\
\text{mille domos clausere serae.}^{16}
\]

They come to a poor cottage, where Baucis and Philemon make them welcome and spread a simple meal before them:

\[
\text{tamen una recepit} \\
\text{parva quidem, stipulis et canna tecta palustris.}^{17}
\]

It was a famous episode, and I find it hard to think that Charles Wesley did not have it in his mind; just as I think it likely that the 1745 book was dominated by the idea of change.

If Charles Wesley was writing with Brevint and the Christian tradition in mind, and if he was (as I have argued) using Latin poetry as well, the mixture was determined also by eighteenth-century poetic theory. This may be seen in Wesley’s treatment of the human heart. Ovid, as Dryden pointed out, was also the poet of the human heart, of passion and feeling. Brevint, too, writes of the heart:

\[\text{Translation: } \text{“Hither came Jupiter in the guise of a mortal, and with his father came Atlas' grandson, he that bears the caduceus, his wings laid aside. To a thousand homes they came, seeking a place for rest; a thousand homes were barred against them.” It is possible that Mercury laying aside his wings (“positis alis”) was the source of “Mild he lays his glory by” in “Hark, how all the welkin rings.”}\]

\[\text{Translation: } \text{“Still one house received them, humble indeed, thatched with straw and reeds from the marsh.”}\]
“Blessed Jesu, strengthen my Faith, prepare my Heart, and then bless this thine Ordinance” (Section II, paragraph 9); “O my God, accept of a Heart, that sheds now before Thee its Tears, as a poor Victim does its Blood” (Section VII, paragraph 12); and Charles Wesley, of course, is pre-eminently the hymn-writer of the human heart. It occurs everywhere in his verse as the seat of the affections, the center of the thinking and feeling consciousness. The point does not need to be labored: we may see an example in Hymn 21, verse 7:

See Him hanging on the Tree—
A Sight that breaks my Heart!

and Hymn 21 shows how passionately Charles Wesley could write, how he seems at times to choose a passionate mode. In this he followed the Isaac Watts of Horae Lyricae (1707, 1709), rather than the Watts of Hymns and Spiritual Songs, where Watts kept a tight rein on his adventurous muse. His preface to Horae Lyricae, however, was an attack on some modern poetry, following the example of Cowley. Watts lamented the way in which modern poetry had developed, so that “this Profanation and Debasement of so divine an Art has tempted some weaker Christians to imagine that Poetry and Vice are naturally akin.” Watts pleaded for them to acknowledge the strength of religious verse, superior in inspiration, he argued, to Homer and Hesiod: they write of Jupiter and of the clouds, “But a Divine Poet makes the Clouds but the Dust of his Feet, and when the highest gives his Voice in the Heavens, hailstones and Coals of Fire follow.” In this preface, described by Hoxie N. Fairchild as “one of the most significant documents in eighteenth-century literary criticism,” Watts quotes with approval John Dennis’s The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry (1704). Dennis, like Watts, admired enthusiasm in poetry, the expression of strong passion; and he suggested that there were six principal enthusiastic passions: Admiration, Terror, Horror, Joy, Sadness, Desire. If we now return to Hymn 21 in Hymns on the Lord’s Supper, we can see how closely Wesley conforms to these eighteenth-century ideas, combining the conscious turning of poetry to Christ (from Watts) with energy and passion (from Dennis). Key words show how close Wesley is to Dennis: in the first verse, for instance, we have Joy—“the joyful Theme”; in the second Wonder—“Endless Scenes of Wonder”—which turns to Horror—“Jesus, Lord, what hast Thou done!” This is followed by Admiration—“Was never Love like Thine!”, and in verse 4 Terror—“Nature in Convulsions lies.” Verse 6 contains Sadness—“Silence saddens all the Skies”—and the crucifixion is, in verse 7, “a Sight that breaks my Heart!” That leaves only Desire from Dennis’s six passions. It comes last in his list and last in Wesley’s poem, where, in the final verse, the singers are

18 Isaac Watts, Horae Lyricae (1709), preface, vi.
19 Ibid., x.
21 Ibid., I.187.
Now it would be absurd to suggest that Wesley was writing this poem as an exercise in conforming to Dennis's theory and including all his enthusiastic passions, as if Dennis's essay were some kind of poetic cookery book from which Wesley created his work (or this hymn, at least). It would be more in keeping with the facts if we acknowledged that throughout his writing Wesley brings to the composition of hymns a complex inheritance of his reading in classical literature, in modern poetry, and in critical theory.

Let us take, for example, the Sublime. Watts's preface to *Horae Lyricae* was well aware of the importance of this, quoting Longinus *On the Sublime* and going on to demonstrate the magnificence of divine terror: “When he arises out of his Place the Earth trembles, the Foundations of the Hills are shaken because he is wroth.” This is the kind of terrifying natural phenomenon which Wesley associates with the crucifixion in Hymn 21: Christ's expiring groan is one that “Tears the Graves and Mountains up” so that “Nature in Convulsions lies.” This astonishing image, of nature in some kind of writhing fit, would have originated in the Old Testament sublimities cited by Watts, and, of course, in Matthew 27:51—“the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened.” Even more astonishingly, Jesus’s expiring groan “Tears the Graves and Mountains up”: the action may remind us of any violent moment, perhaps most memorably found in Book IX of *The Odyssey*, where the Cyclops, in his rage, breaks off the peak of a mountain and hurls it in the direction of Odysseus and his escaping men.

I would suggest, therefore, that Charles Wesley’s Hymn 21 is extremely complicated in its intertextuality, and that elements of its individual expression come from the brilliant fusion of many different sources. Evidence of his wide reading and of the assimilation of ancient and modern texts is found everywhere. In Hymn 63, for example, we sing:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{No Local Deity} \\
\text{We worship, LORD, in Thee:} \\
\text{Free thy Grace and unconfin'd.}
\end{align*}
\]

(63:2,1–2)

We are back with the idea of Jesus as the true eternal Pan, the unconfined, the all, but here expressed differently. Charles Wesley is remembering the universal practice of praying in classical times to the local gods. Aeneas prays to the

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{geniumque loci primamque deorum} \\
\text{Tellurem.}\footnote{Aeneid VII.136. Translation: “To the genius of the place, and Earth, first of gods.”}
\end{align*}
\]
and in the Georgics Virgil summons

vos, agrestum praesentia numina, Fauni,
Ferte simul Fannique pedem Dryadesque puellae.\textsuperscript{23}

These Gods and spirits of the place had a limited geographical range—the Tiber, for example, was especially sacred to Romans, and Aeneas is spoken to by the god of that part of Italy: “huic deus ipse loci fluvio Tiberinus amoeno” (VIII.31) (“the very god of the place, Tiberinus of the pleasant stream”).\textsuperscript{24} The contrast is, of course, with Wesley’s favorite adjective for the love of God, “unconfined”:

\begin{quote}
Thy sovereign grace to all extends,
Immense and unconfined.

Help us thy mercy to extol,
Immense, unfathomed, unconfined.
\end{quote}

The first of these is from \textit{Hymns and Sacred Poems}, 1742, the second from \textit{Hymns on God’s Everlasting Love}, 1741; but the return of the word “unconfin’d” in Hymn 63 of the 1745 book is a reminder of the idea’s continuing imaginative possession of Charles Wesley’s mind. That possession, I would argue, has been sharpened by the contrast of the unconfined with the local, the Christian taking over from the classical.

These are some of the underlying imaginative preoccupations which lie behind \textit{Hymns on the Lord’s Supper}. To them must be added the structures, less deep but equally interesting, of scriptural idea, church history, and liturgical practice. They can be seen to be more superficial, less part of the deep structure of the book, because they are often signaled by spectacular words, or unusual rhetoric. The unexpected vocabulary is noticeable, for example, in Hymn 145:

\begin{quote}
Take when Thou wilt into thy Hands,
And as Thou wilt require;
Resume by the Sabean Bands,
Or the devouring Fire.
\end{quote}

(145:4)

This is a very difficult verse, but I take the verb “Resume” to mean “take up again”: and if the poem is about surrender, a prayer to God to take back his own, then the devouring Fire could be the Holy Spirit. The Sabean Bands are more difficult. They may be the Sabeans who stole Job’s oxen and asses (Job 1:14–15), so that Wesley is praying to God to take his soul by force if necessary. They may also be the Sabeans who were star-worshippers, in which case Wesley is contrasting the devouring fire with the aspiring soul of the star-worshipper. Wesley would have found a reference to them in Humphrey Prideaux’s \textit{Old and New}

\textsuperscript{21}ibid., 1.10. Translation: “Shades of the fields, Fauns and Dryad maidens, come together.”
Testament Connected, in the History of the Jews and Neighbouring Nations . . . to the Time of Christ (1716–18). Prideaux remarked that the Sabeans were traditionally the best astronomers, “For the stars being the gods they worshipped, they made them the chief subject of their studies” (l.140). Prideaux was a well-known Orientalist, who became Dean of Norwich, and who wrote a popular book entitled The True Nature of Imposture fully display’d in the Life of Mahomet. If this was Charles Wesley’s source, it is evidence of his reading in the controversial and historical literature of his own time. Similarly, his admiration of Edward Young’s Night Thoughts is shown in the unusual verse of Hymn 45:

Our Souls Eternally to save
More than ten thousand Worlds he gave;
That we might know our Sins forgiven,
That we might in thy Glory shine,
The Purchase-Price was Blood Divine,
And bought the Aceldema of Heaven.

The Aceldama (as it is more usually spelled) is the field of blood which was bought with the thirty pieces of silver which Judas threw away. The word is found in Night the Sixth, which had been published only the year before Hymns on the Lord’s Supper, in 1744. Young writes of Love Divine, Wesley of “Blood Divine,” but both are celebrating the miracle of salvation. Young sees earth as the field of blood because it is a place of misery and suffering: in it we find the great mystery of the Redemption, which Young describes ironically as

No Mystery—but that of Love Divine,
Which lifts us on the Seraph’s flaming Wing,
From Earth’s Aceldama, this Field of Blood,
Of inward Anguish, and of outward Ill,
From Darkness, and from Dust, to such a Scene?

Wesley is much more daring. Christ’s blood becomes the purchase price, and what it buys for us is heaven, which becomes the “Aceldama,” that which was bought with the price of blood: Wesley’s transformation of Young’s pedestrian lines is astonishing and exciting, the language making the singer think through the difficulties to a new awareness.

If Young was one influence, Herbert was another. Hymn 9 is based on Herbert’s “The Invitation,” and Hymn 160 on “The Banquet.” I leave these on one side, partly because they are so clearly a re-writing of Herbert, and partly because the re-writing may have been done by John Wesley, in the same fashion as his alteration of Herbert for the 1737 Psalms and Hymns. But if we are dealing with the way in which Charles Wesley’s unexpected vocabulary reveals his debt to other sources, then Hymn 46 has interesting uses of typology:
HOW richly is the Table stor'd
Of Jesus our Redeeming Lord!
Melchisedec and Aaron join
To furnish out the Feast Divine.

Aaron for us the Blood hath shed,
Melchisedec bestows the Bread,
To nourish this, and that 't atone;
And both the Priests in Christ are One.

Charles Wesley is here referring to two Old Testament figures who were widely known in Renaissance literature and iconography as types of Christ: Aaron, the priest, from Exodus 28, and Melchisedec the “King of Glory, King of Peace” of Herbert’s poem, who “brought forth bread and wine” and blessed Abraham (Genesis 14:18). Wesley would have known the two figures from his reading of the Old Testament: but it is significant that he draws on the typological tradition which is used by Herbert (among others). In Herbert’s poem “Aaron,” the garments of the priest become metaphors for the preparedness of mind, with Christ as his head, his heart and breast; in another poem, “Peace,” Herbert describes Melchisedec:

There was a Prince of old
At Salem dwelt, who liv’d with good increase
Of flock and fold.

He sweetly liv’d; yet sweetnesse did not save
His life from foes.
But after death out of his grave
There sprang twelve stalks of wheat:
Which many wondring at, got some of those
To plant and set.

The crop “prosper’d strangely,” and was soon found through the whole earth, where those who tasted it found in it “a secret vertue”; and the poem ends with the invitation from the Holy Communion:

Take of this grain, which in my garden grows,
And grows for you;
Make bread of it: and that repose
And peace which ev’ry where
With so much earnestnesse you do pursue,
Is onely there.

Herbert’s poem ingeniously sees the death of Melchisedec as a type of the death of Christ. In Charles Wesley’s hymn, Aaron the high-priest and Melchisedec the victim are joined. Aaron-Christ sheds the blood; Melchisedec-Christ bestows the bread; in Christ both are joined (as they are in the verse from Hebrews 7), to nour-
ish with the bread and atone with the blood. Hebrews 7:11 describes the old order of priesthood:

If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood . . . what further need was there that another priest should arise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?

The priest who arose was Jesus, “made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Hebrews 6:20), who is “the mediator of a better covenant” (8:6) and who becomes “an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands” (9:11). The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is engaging here in a discussion about figures or types, providing a schema which both Herbert and Wesley seize on. In Wesley’s daring and witty line, both the priests in Christ are one, as he fuses Herbert’s two poems, “Aaron” and “Peace” into one; as his first line says—“how richly is the Table stor’d!”—how richly not just in the great gifts of bread and wine but in the richness of meaning, the multiple traditions and significances gathered into the person and witness of Jesus, sacrifice and priest. How richly, too, the hymn itself compresses the meaning of the Old Testament passages, and the elaborate discussion of them in Hebrews!

The key to this discussion in Hebrews is the understanding of the Old Testament description of the priest in the temple as a figure—what the epistle calls “a figure for the time then present” (9:9); and Charles Wesley’s imagination leaps to enjoy the additional significance which this gives. In Brevint’s book (section VII, paragraph 2), the figure of Aaron appears as a simile, just for comparison:

As Aaron never came in before the Lord, without the whole people of Israel, represented both by the 12 Stones on his Breast, and by the two others on his Shoulders: So Jesus Christ does nothing without his Church.

This depends upon discerning a simple likeness between the Aaron of Exodus 28 and Jesus Christ as the high priest of the church; Charles Wesley takes the image and makes it wonderfully more complex: Melchisedec and Aaron join, because both the Old Testament priests are figures or types. They apply a “double Grace” of Bread and Wine, but because Jesus is figured by them, so the Bread and Wine also figures the Flesh and Blood of verse 3. So too, in Hymn 118, we who receive the Holy Communion are the chosen Tribes of Israel:

All our Names the Father knows,  
Reads them on our Aaron’s Breast.

In this way the poetic imagination becomes itself an aid to understanding, as the mind which allows metaphors to develop, allows unexpected fusions and connections, is the mind which also apprehends the great mystery at the heart of the Lord’s Supper, in which material substances are transformed. Charles Wesley
realises the centrality of the argument about figures in Hebrews chapters 7 to 9, and demonstrates its importance in Hymn 123. Speaking of the “Legal Offerings” (from Hebrews 9:10), he writes:

Those Feeble Types and Shadows Old  
Are all in Thee the Truth fulfill’d,  
And thro’ this Sacrament we hold  
The Substance in our Hearts reveal’d.

For Charles Wesley to have had such a perception he would have had to have the imagination of a poet. He would have had to believe that things could be changed—the elements, and people too—the “mutatas formas” of Ovid. And he would have had to believe, also, not in religious formulas or legal offerings, but in a religion which involved the passions and touched the human heart. All these are found in Hymns on the Lord's Supper of 1745; and our awareness of them is sharpened, if we can perceive the range of reading and interpretation which Charles Wesley brought to Daniel Brevint’s The Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice. Truly, there was a flaming Methodist evangel; but it was one which brought to the work of the seventeenth-century divine not just a Methodist spirit, but a wide acquaintance with Renaissance poetics, a knowledge of great Latin poetry, and a dynamic imagination.