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# Talking to the Holy Spirit and Growling with the Bears

## Singing Child Characters in Eighteenth- Century Hymn Books for Children

ULRIKE KRISTINA KÖHLER

In this article I explore the construction of singing child characters in Isaac Watts' *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (1715) and Christopher Smart's *Hymns for the Amusement of Children* (1771). The first part focusses on the nature of the lyrical persona within the lexical fields »voice and vocal sound« and »religion« and also looks at the possible addressees. The second part examines stylistic, phonetic, and formal elements, and explores their role in constructing the ›singing I‹. To show the potential of Watts' »Against Quarrelling and Fighting« to function as an invitation to playfully adopt behaviour opposed to Christian norms, the article examines a performance of *Let Dogs Delight to Bark and Bite*, a chorale by Matthew J. Zimnoch, whose text is taken from Watts' hymn. Combining approaches from research on children's poetry with ones from the interface of children's literature and hymnody, the article also integrates a digitally supported close reading. The hymn texts were inputted into f4analyse, a software used in text linguistics and the social sciences, which allows for the assignment of categories, such as positive self-connotation of the ›singing I‹ or rhyme patterns. In conclusion, the article evaluates the potential of such a digitally supported research methodology for future research at the intersection of children's literature and digital humanities.

### Introduction

Isaac Watts' *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (1715) and Christopher Smart's *Hymns for the Amusement of Children* (1771) are touchstones of children's hymnody (see Clapp-Intyre 2016, p. 4). Isaac Watts, an English Puritan, is acknowledged as the founder of the genre, and his 1715 collection of hymns was issued in twenty editions during his lifetime (see Hunt 2003, p. 163). The collection of hymns was written specifically for a young readership during an age when the first stirrings of an understanding of childhood as a separate phase in life were beginning to occur. Watts was motivated by the Christian concept of original sin, whereby all humans are presumed to be born in a state of sin (see Heywood 2001, p. 66). The only path to release from this state was believed to be education, an idea echoed in Watts' hymn »Advantages of Early Religion.« Here the child singer articulates explicitly that instruction is the key to salvation:

- 1   HAPPY the child, whose early years
- 2   Receive instruction well;
- 3   Who hates the sinner's path, and fears
- 4   The road which leads to Hell. (Watts 1811, p. 24)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Typography, punctuation and emphasis are as per the original texts of the hymns.

Christopher Smart, a High Church Anglican, had long been involved in the publication projects of his father-in-law, John Newberry, the prominent English publisher of children's books. Smart's collection of hymns was popular well into the nineteenth century and available in multiple editions. While he worked »in the same tradition as [...] Watts« (Styles 1998, p. 18), his predecessor's »fire-and-brimstone theology« (Clapp-Intyre 2016, p. 6) receded as a pedagogical tool to the background in Smart's hymns. Smart is »a more tolerant and less exacting Christian ethic« (Styles 1998, p. 18). The religious and didactic impetus remains nonetheless evident. The child singer in »At Dressing in the Morning« reveals who the best teacher is:

- 13 Let me from Christ obedience learn,
- 14 To Christ obedience pay;
- 15 Each parent duteous love return,
- 16 And consecrate the day. (Smart 1791, p. 48)

Despite the evident wish to subordinate children and to impart religious doctrines and morals, Isaac Watts' hymns were »an early and outstanding attempt to write verses for children which should give them pleasure [...]« (Hunt 2003, p. 163). Christopher Smart promises just this when he announces a wish to amuse children in the title of his collection. In fact, both hymn books offer a »poetic as well as [a] religious experience« (Arnold 2012, p. 24), as Richard Arnold remarks regarding Isaac Watts. When sung, the hymns also offer a musical experience. Watts' hymns (and probably also those of Smart) were intended for the family circle, where they could be sung to well-known tunes (see Watts 1811, p. vi). A glance into the database [Hymnary.org](http://Hymnary.org) reveals that, since originally being published, the hymns from both collections have been set to music by several composers and included in the hymn books of various denominations.

In this article, I examine the singing child characters in Watts' and Smart's hymn books and the textual elements that interplay to construct them. Analogous to the ›lyrical‹ in poetry, I call the singing child character the ›singing I.‹ For the purpose of my analysis, I will look at the manifest content, the elements which are »physically present and countable« (Lune/Berg 2017, p. 186). In the case of Watts' and Smart's hymn books, these are the explicit representations of the singing I and the characters that are addressed by it. My focus will then shift to the latent content, that is to elements which can create a subtext (see *ibid.*). These are the features of the hymns which identify them as sung religious poems, including stylistic, formal and phonetic ones. My analysis will also shed light on the extent to which the analysed elements constitute a framework for the confident expression of faith.

To show the potential of Watts' hymn »Against Quarrelling and Fighting« for setting up animal characters as identification figures for the playful acting out of behaviour regarded as inappropriate, my analysis will include an extratextual level. I will look at the musical score and the performance of *Let Dogs Delight to Bark and Bite* (2016), a chorale by the contemporary US American composer Matthew J. Zimnoch, who has put Watts' hymn text to music.<sup>2</sup> A rendition of it being sung and performed by the [American Poquessing Middle School Select Choir](#) is accessible online.

<sup>2</sup> I would like to express my sincere thanks to the composer Matthew J. Zimnoch, who kindly and generously sent me the score of his chorale *Let Dogs Delight to Bark and Bite* for research purposes.

In 2016, his composition won the Choral Composition Contest of the American Choral Directors Association, Pennsylvania Chapter.

This article combines approaches found in children's literature research and in publications at the interface of music and literature. My essentially hermeneutic research methodology includes a digitally supported close reading of Watts' and Smart's hymn texts. For this purpose, f4analyse, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) used in social sciences and in linguistics (pragmatics), was employed. I work with this tool because f4analyse allows the allocation of words or passages into categories and subcategories. The allocated words or passages can then be easily transferred to the spreadsheet software Microsoft Excel, which facilitates the counting of these words and passages as well as the generation of respective charts. The charts assist in demonstrating conclusions about the two hymn books in their entirety. Categories that I have extrapolated from the two hymn books are, for example, the self-referencing of singing child characters, references to self-control or addressees, and the frequency of rhyme patterns. The charts highlight where the two hymn books concur with or deviate from each other. The methodology employed is primarily inductive as it extrapolates categories from the data, namely, from the two hymn books (see Silver/Bulloch 2018). Accordingly, it is based on »summative content analysis, which starts with counting words or manifest content, then extends the analysis to include latent meanings [...]« (Manimozhi/Srinivasan 2018, p. 633). The categories which resulted from the analysis of Watts' *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* were applied to Smart's *Hymns for the Amusement of Children*, and vice versa, in order to compare Watts' and Smart's hymn books statistically as well as in terms of their content. In conclusion, I evaluate this methodology with regard to future research.

### The singing I and its counterparts: analysing key elements of the manifest content

The characters in Watts' and Smart's hymn texts are children, singing and worshipping children, but also ones that lie, steal or plunder birds' nests. The Christian context is provided by supernatural beings associated with Christian belief and personages from the Bible, such as Samuel in »Examples of Early Piety« (see Watts 1811, p. 28), David in »Plenteous Redemption« (see Smart 1791, p. 50), Hanna in »Hope« (see *ibid.*, p. 2) and Abraham, who is referred to in »Faith« as the »great Patriarch« (*ibid.*, p. 1). Animals and plants feature in both collections as well. Animals appear as victims of children's mistreatment, such as a captured bird or a mistreated horse in »Good Nature to Animals« (see Smart 1791, pp. 37–38). Animals and plants serve as images to illustrate moral values, such as the busy bee in »Against Idleness and Mischief« (see Watts 1811, p. 36), birds who praise God with their singing in »Mirth« (see Smart 1791, pp. 34–35) or »[f]lies, worms and flowers« (Watts 1811, 40), who the singing I presents in »Against Pride in Clothes« as more beautiful than itself.

A notable feature of the two hymn books is the frequent use of the first person subjective and first person possessive pronouns, both singular and plural. The correlation of these pronouns with the lexical field »voice and vocal sound« reinforces the analogy between the singing child character and the ›lyrical I‹ in poetry, which I have termed the ›singing I‹. My analysis of the construction of the singing I is guided by the following questions: What functions do self-references in the lexical fields »voice and vocal sound« and »religion« in the hymn texts fulfil? What role do aspects of communication play? More precisely, does the singing I directly address supernatural beings or is the singing I the addressee?

## The singing I: the ideal Christian child

In the hymns, children sing, shout and quarrel. They employ their breath in praying and use their lips for the appraisal of God. Thus, the action and behaviour of children are described with words belonging to the lexical fields »voice and vocal sound« and »religion,« which here overlap. These encompass verbs that indicate the use of the voice or nouns that denote body parts indispensable for vocal expression. In Fig. 1, the first and second columns show that this is indeed a salient feature of both hymn books.

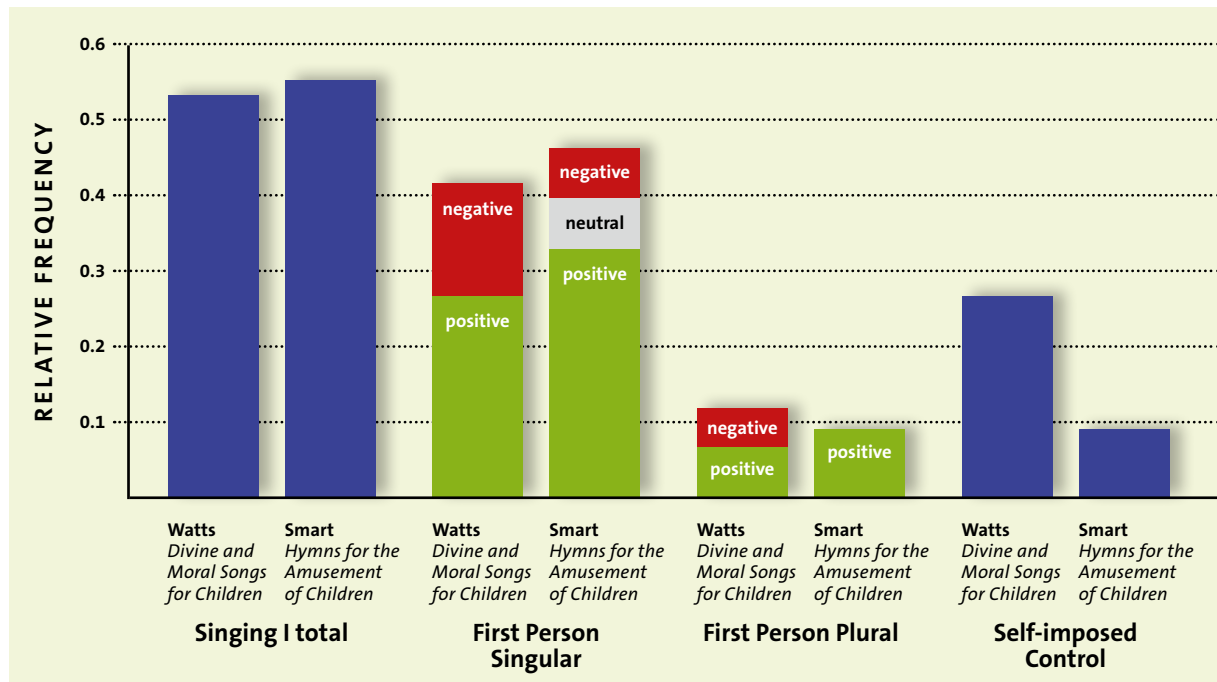


Figure 1 shows the relative rather than the absolute frequency. The formula is  $x=100: n \cdot h$ . The variables are defined as follows:

$x$  = relative frequency

$n$  = number of all words making up the hymn texts

$h$  = the frequency of hits

In »Solemn Thoughts of God and Death,« the singing I pronounces »with my lips I sing his praise« (Watts 1811, p. 22), and in »The Advantages of Early Religion,« it requests »[l]et the sweet work of prayer and praise / Employ my youngest breath« (ibid., p. 25). In Smart's »Watching,« we hear the singing I announce »For pray'r and hymns are mine employ« (Smart 1791, p. 27), and in »Mirth,« it proclaims, »I give the praise to Christ alone« (ibid., p. 35). Phrases and passages like these have been assigned for both hymn books to the category positive self-connotation of the singing I associated with the first person singular. Their relative frequency is shown in the green-coloured parts of the third and fourth columns in Fig. 1. The green-coloured parts in the fifth and sixth columns in Fig. 1 present the relative frequency of a positive self-reference in which the first person plural occurs. One instance of phrases assigned to this category is »Our tongues were made to bless the Lord« (Watts 1811, p. 33) from »Against Scoffing and Calling Names.« An example from Smart's collection are the following lines from »Prayer«:

- 13 'Tis peace, 'tis dignity, 'tis ease,
- 14 To bless the Lord upon our knees; (Smart 1791, p. 24)

Fig. 1  
The ›singing I‹  
in Isaac Watts'  
Divine and Moral  
Songs for Children  
(1715) and Chris-  
topher Smart's  
Hymns for the  
Amusement of  
Children (1771)

However, the singing I also refers to itself in a way that reveals its awareness of its inherent sinfulness. In Watts' »Praise for Creation and Providence,« the singing I asks itself »Why do I then forget the Lord« (Watts 1811, p. 9). An example from Smart that has been allocated to the same category is »If I of honesty suspend« (Smart 1791, p. 15) from »Honesty.« The red-coloured parts, in the third and fourth columns, indicate the relative frequency of such negative self-references in which the first person singular is used.

Figure 1 demonstrates that the singing I appears as a fervent worshipper proclaiming its faith with ardour and striving for mildness and modesty. The references connected to the first person singular pronoun characterise the singing I as a subject responsible for its own spiritual welfare. The height of the third and fourth columns in Fig. 1 illustrate that this aspect is of great significance in both hymn books. The first person plural pronoun situates the singing I within the congregation of singing and worshipping children, an aspect which, as the fifth and sixth columns in Fig. 1 illustrate, plays a comparatively minor role. In the context of the first person plural, positive (green) and negative (red) self-references are almost balanced in Watts' hymn book, whereas in Smart's collection there are no negative references.

Particularly in Watts' collection, the singing I worries about the danger of self-pollution, which is expressed in the phrase »defile my tongue« (Watts 1811, p. 38) from »Against Evil Company.« Correspondingly, it feels an urgent need to exercise control over its voice with the help of God. In »Against Scoffing and Calling Names,« it begs »teach me how / To tame and rule my tongue« (ibid., p. 34). This passage, and the ones quoted below, have been assigned to the category self-imposed control. The verb »to tame« suggests that the child singer perceives itself as unruly, as something almost beastlike that needs to be trained to become a Christian. In »A General Song of Praise to God,« the body part that is indispensable for the pronunciation and modulation of language features again, and here it appears to be under control: »My heart resolves, my tongue obeys« (ibid., p. 8). Self-control that is linked to an introspection, and guided by the conviction of the subject's own sinfulness, is to be found in the line »Lord, I repent, and seek thy face« (ibid., p. 22) from »Solemn Thoughts of God and Death.« Similarly, the singing I vows »[t]hat I may break thy laws no more« (Watts 1811, p. 47). The phrase »[m]ine anger to controul [sic]« (Smart 1791, p. 16) from »Honesty« and the lines from »Moderation« quoted below are among the few examples from Smart's collection in which the singing I exercises vigorous control over itself, expressing this in an explicit, rather harsh diction:

- 5 And yet I will my thoughts suppress,
- 6 And keep my tongue from censure clear; (Smart 1791, p. 11)

In Smart's »Temperance,« the focus lies on religious rituals, and we can hear the singing I request of itself:

- 15 O may I keep the body cool,
- 16 By fasting on my knees;
- 17 And follow strict religion's rule,
- 18 Those days the church decrees. (Smart 1791, p. 9)

This prescribed conformity with religious rituals differs in quality from the submission demanded in Watts' more than half-century older collection. Smart's hymn lacks a

threatening edge; in his hymn book, as a whole, the need for self-control is less prevalent. In contrast to this, Watts' collection clearly reflects the concerns of eighteenth-century Puritan educationalists that the mental world of children might have nooks and crannies beyond the reach of adult intervention. This »distinct apprehensiveness concerning child interiority« (Wakely-Mulroney 2016, p. 104) has receded to the background in Smart's collection, a change which has an impact on the construction of his child characters. Watts' singing I is characterised as a child whose nature has to be kept in check, whereas this aspect is less prevalent in Smart's collection. Moreover, Watts' singing I seems to keenly feel its sinfulness and its need for spiritual guidance resulting from it.

### Addressing supernatural beings

Virtually omnipresent in the two hymn books is the one God who, according to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, exists in the three divine persons of the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit. Angels and cherubs, winged creatures with a lionlike body and a human face, which feature in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, also appear (see Riede 2011, p. 1). In »The Excellency of the Bible,« the singing I requests »Lord, make me understand thy law, / Show, what my faults have been« (Watts 1811, p. 17), and »[c]ome, Cherub, come, possess my soul« (Smart 1791, p. 8), is requested in »Mercy.« In Smart's *Hymns for the Amusement of Children*, a hymn is dedicated to each of the Christian virtues. These consist of »the chief virtues related to human action: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance« (Regan 2005, p. vii), whose conceptualisation dates back to ancient philosophy. These are complimented by »theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity« (ibid., p. xvii). Smart personifies prudence in »Prudence« (Smart 1791, p. 5–6) and, in »Charity,« addresses the theological virtue as follows:

- 1 O queen of virtues, whose sweet pow'r
- 2 Does o'er the first perfections tow'r,
- 3 Sustaining in the arms of love
- 4 All want below, all weal above. (Smart 1791, p. 3)

By populating the environment that surrounds the singing I, these supernatural beings connote it as a Christian one. Beyond this function, they appear as counterparts in communication with the singing I. Incidences from Watts' hymn book, in which the singing I talks to God, addressing one or more of the three divine persons who make up the Trinity, include »Lord, how thy wonders are display'd« (Watts 1811, p. 9) from »Praise for Creation and Providence« and »GREAT GOD, to thee my voice I raise« (ibid., p. 13) in »Praise for Birth and Education in a Christian Land.« In »At Dressing in the Morning,« the singing I approaches God with the following words: »NOW I arise impow'r'd by thee« (Smart 1791, p. 48), in »Charity« Jesus is requested: »Then guide, O Christ, this little hand« (ibid., p. 4). The Holy Spirit is asked for guidance in »Taste«:

- 1 O Guide my judgment and my taste,
- 2 Sweet Spirit, author of the book. (ibid., p. 19)

These examples suggest a greater variety in Smart's collection. Regarding the frequency with which the singing I addresses a supernatural character, Fig. 2 reveals that Smart's singing I is also slightly more communicative.

Figure 2 shows that the communication is largely one-sided, since the singing I turns to the supernatural beings, and the address is, as the passages quoted above indicate, marked by reverence. However, these beings do not, in their turn, enter into a dialogue. Figure 2 demonstrates that Watts' collection contains no value at all in this category; in Smart's it is below 0.1. In »Gratitude« a cherub calls out to children:

- 9 Hear, ye little children, hear me,  
10 I am God's delightful voice [...];  
(Smart 1791, p. 30)

Although the superiority of the cherub as a supernatural being is apparent, here its tone and address is benign and trust inspiring: »[d]read not ye the tempter's rod« (ibid., p. 31). Taken together, the addressing of supernatural beings sharpens the outline of the singing I as a fervent worshipper who actively appeals to God and Christ, or less frequently to the Holy Spirit. Due to the tone of the addresses, the supernatural beings appear more approachable in Smart's collection than they do in Watts' hymn book.

### Latent content and performance

Various forms of repetition are recurrent stylistic devices in both Watts' and Smart's collections. The lines follow fairly regular metre and rhyme patterns and the words are vowel intense. These features identify the hymns as sung religious poems. In terms of the representation of characters, they can be understood as latent content. A key question to consider is how these features might affect the construction of the singing I. Might they even create a subtext that runs contrary to what is expressed by the manifest content? A further issue is the way in which the features may also – at least in one hymn – play a role in setting up animalistic characters as identification figures for the playful acting out of unsanctioned behaviour. Might this then leave a mark on the singing I and its construction? To answer these questions, I will look at aspects of Matthew J. Zimnoch's chorale *Let Dogs Delight to Bark and Bite* – score and performance – whose text is taken from Watts' »Against Quarrelling and Fighting.«

### The function of stylistic, phonetic and formal elements for the construction of the singing I

The recurrent forms of repetition we find in the two hymn books are anaphora, alliteration and parallelism. For example, in Watts' »Praise for Creation and Providence,« lines two and three begin with the same word and demonstrate alliteration:

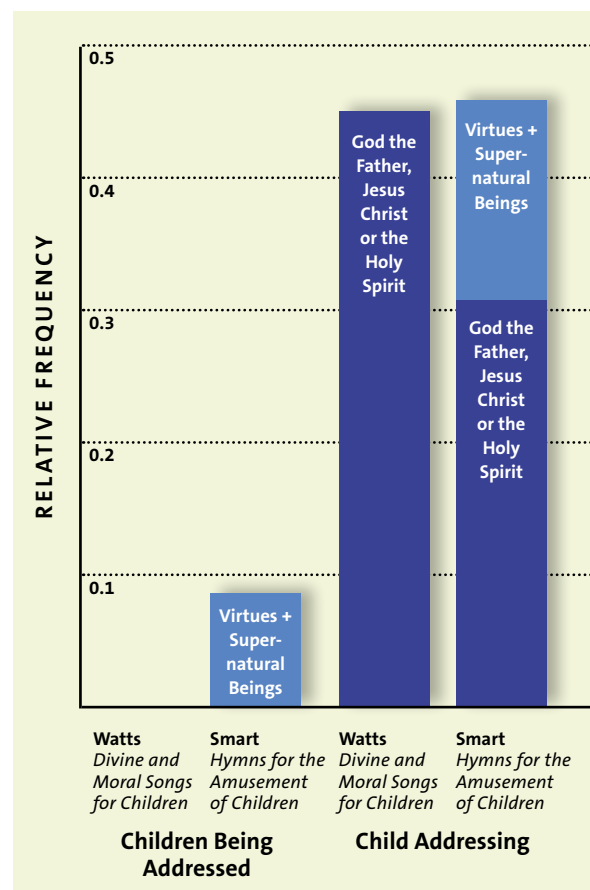


Fig. 2  
Children being addressed and child addressing in Isaac Watts' *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (1715) and Christopher Smart's *Hymns for the Amusement of Children* (1771)



- 1 I SING the Almighty *power* of God,
- 2 Which made the mountains rise;
- 3 Which spread the flowing seas abroad,
- 4 And built the lofty skies (Watts 1811, pp. 8–9).

Similarly, Smart's »Taste« is full of repetition both with regard to lexis and structure:

- 5 O let me muse, and yet at sight
- 6 The page admire, the page believe;
- 7 »Let there be light, and there was light,
- 8 »Let there be paradise and Eve! (Smart 1791, p. 19)

The word »let« is repeated thrice and in lines seven and eight employed anaphorically. Line seven quotes the *King James Bible* description of the creation of the world (Genesis 1:3). The parallel grammatical structure in line six suggests that the pages (Holy Scripture) are equally to be admired and believed. Here as elsewhere, both Watts and Smart avail themselves of elements in the »accomplished poet's toolkit« (Coats 2018, p. 117) that also characterise »*infant-directed* speech and young children's first utterances« (ibid.; [emphasis in original]). Language acquisition is a cognitive process strongly linked to sensual and bodily experiences; the repetition of sounds and movements »are often [...] self-calming behaviours, since they serve to introduce regular patterning to the chaotic experience of unregulated sensation,« as Karen Coats (2013, p. 135) points out. At an age at which they can read or sing hymns, children are probably unable to remember anything about their early process of language acquisition. Through it, however, they are intuitively familiar with variations of repetition, which make these elements in the hymns easily accessible for them. This also holds for the rhyming patterns that structure the hymns formally into stanzas. Similar to the use of stylistic devices employing repetition, the hymns offer some variation here as well. Figures 3a and 3b show the different rhyme patterns and demonstrate that cross-rhyming quatrains are the predominant patterns in both Watts' and Smart's hymn books.

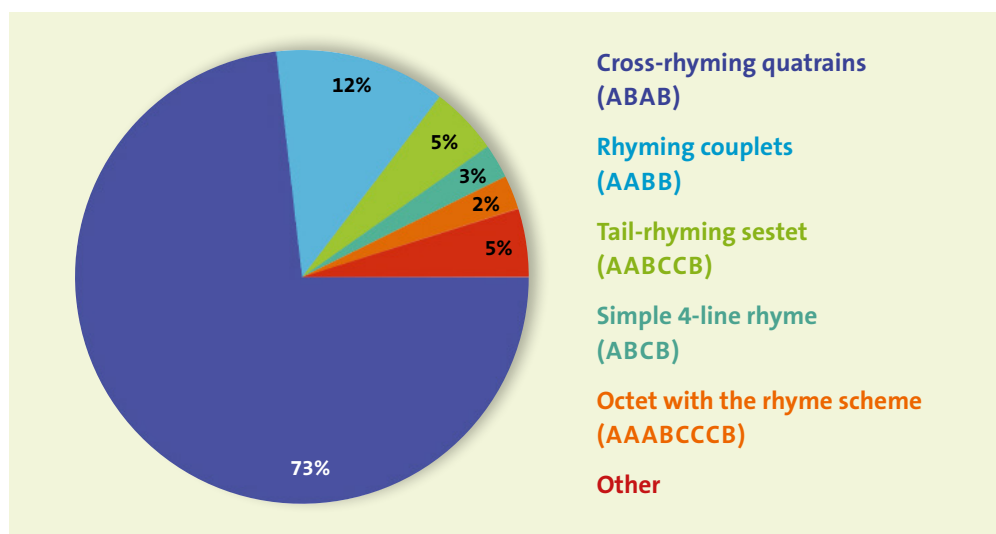


Fig. 3a  
Stanzaic forms  
and rhyming  
patterns in Watts'  
Divine and Moral  
Songs for Children  
(1715)

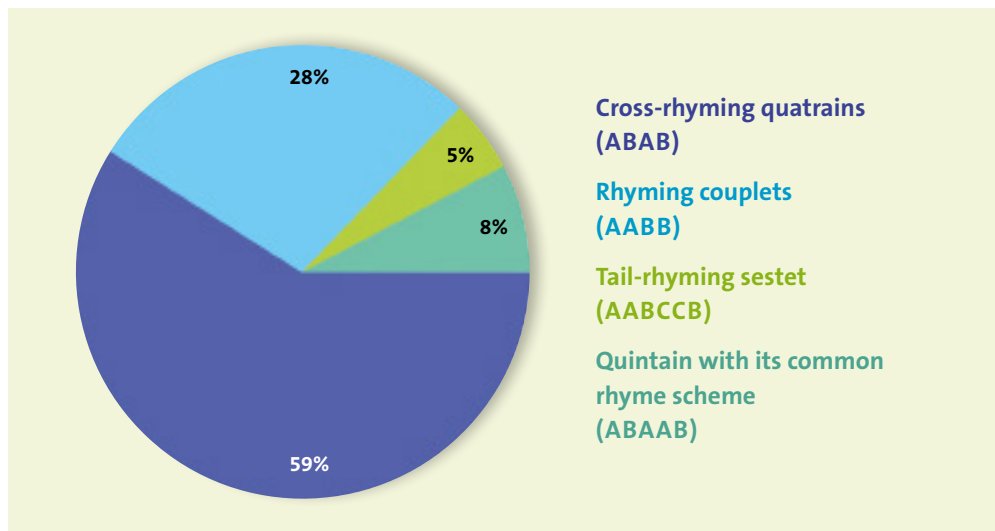


Fig. 3b  
Stanzaic forms  
and rhyming  
patterns in Smart's  
Hymns for the  
Amusement of  
Children (1771)

These stylistic and formal elements are employed as a didactic strategy that aims to instil the lesson of Christian norms with the help of aesthetics. This is further enhanced by the underlying metre. The lines from Watts' »The Allseeing God,« cited below, show the inherent sinful nature of the singing I. The lines are rendered in alternating iambic tetrameters and iambic trimeters. The metrical structure seems to literally hammer in the notion of being evil to the core, since it ensures that the relevant words are accentuated:

- 5 There's not a sin which we commit,
- 6 Nor wicked word, we say,
- 7 But in thy awful book ,tis writ
- 8 Against the judgment day. (Watts 1811, p. 20)

The »rigorously disciplined singsong meter [...] and forceful monosyllabic diction« (Booth 1999, p. 68) which, according to Mark Booth, are characteristic for Smart's hymns, are also a salient feature in those by Watts. Predominantly monosyllabic words, the smoothly running iambs and the occasional trochees and dactyls emphasise words that are meaningful within the religious context. By utilising these tools, the words are arranged in a way that allows for the religiously significant ones to coincide with the stressed unit in the foot. This minimalistic technique becomes an instrument »to accommodate the child's unique rhetorical needs and enable his or her participation in the Christian faith« (Wakely-Mulroney 2016, p. 107). This observation about Watts' hymns also applies to those by Smart.

In »Plenteous Redemption,« the iambic tetrameters affect the stress of »Christ« and »King,« words paramount in Christian faith:

- 3 And thus I'll say, and thus I'll sing,
- 4 In rapture unto Christ my King. (Smart 1791, p. 50)

The metrical structure of an iambic tetrameter affects the stress of the voice-related verbs »say« and »sing« in line three. Since they are coupled with the first person pronoun, they implicitly encourage children to employ their voice joyfully in worship; an encouragement also conveyed through the parallelism that makes use of closely related words by framing the two voice-related verbs »say« and »sing« in the same grammatical

order. In terms of the phonetic characteristics, it is noticeable that the words are vowel intense, which make them easy to sing because vowels are responsible for transmitting the sound of the voice. The plosive »k«, an ejective glottalic consonant, helps to accentuate the key words of Christian faith, »Christ« and »King.« We can discover similar characteristics in Watts' »Against Lying«:

- 1 O 'tis a lovely thing for youth
- 2 To walk betimes in wisdom's way:
- 3 To fear a lie, to speak the truth,
- 4 That we may trust to all they say. (Watts 1811, p. 29)

The plosive »t« occurring several times directly before a vowel assists here in structuring the phrase and in the sonic hammering in of the moral message.

The stylistic, formal and phonetic elements in Watts' and Smart's hymns are representative of characteristics for children's poetry, which Karen Coats states »not only mediate [...] or invoke [...] sensual experience but actually produce [...] it as well« (Coats 2013, p. 133). Beyond accommodating the needs of the actual child singer of hymns, they affect the construction of child characters by sharpening the outline of the singing I as drawn on the level of the manifest content. Since it is the singing I that stresses the significant words of faith and worship, its pious nature is thereby implicitly highlighted, and it appears all the more as a fervent worshipper. Interestingly, however, Watts' collection offers a potential exception to this rule.

### **Watts' »Against Quarrelling and Fighting«: the potential of performance**

The stylistic and formal elements of the hymns identify them as poems, and especially their metrical structure can easily work as a musical feature. The monosyllabic and vowel-intense words make them suitable for singing, and thereby for performance. During the eighteenth century, children would most likely have been reprimanded if they had publicly expressed their interpretation of a religious hymn with bodily movements, or if they had joyfully impersonated a character that symbolised the opposite of piety and morality. This circumstance, however, does not mean per se that children would have stopped their imagination from flowing freely or that they might not have accompanied their singing with bodily expression when unobserved. I would like to demonstrate this supposition by looking at the latent content of Watts' »Against Quarrelling and Fighting«, in order to identify how stylistic and formal elements present an invitation to both sing and to enjoy enacting the characters that are meant to function as a contrast to the well-behaved, pious child.

In this hymn, the voice of an adult warns against quarrelsome behaviour. To convey its message, it establishes animals as the negative counterpart to children. Dogs, bears and lions are depicted as physically strong but irrational creatures. Children, on the other hand, appear physically weak, but are endowed with a moral understanding that can be appealed to. The latter trait renders them, in turn, superior to animals.

- 5 But children, you should never let
- 6 Such angry passions rise;
- 7 Your little hands were never made,
- 8 To tear each other's eyes. (Watts 1811, p. 31)

As in the hymns mentioned so far, here, too, the stylistic devices – alliterations, anaphora and parallelisms – create the tonal and structural patterns which encourage vocalisation. In the verbs »bark« and »growl,« onomatopoeia invites children to imitate the animalistic sound. In addition, the open vowels [a:], [ɒ] and [aj] facilitate singing:

- 1 LET dogs delight to bark and bite,
- 2 For God has made them so;
- 3 Let bears and lions growl and fight,
- 4 For 'tis their nature too. (ibid., pp. 30–31)

A twenty-first century composition and its performance help to shed light on the eighteenth-century hymn text and its potential regarding vocal and bodily expression as well as the playful performance of purportedly inappropriate behaviour. As the title of Matthew J. Zimnoch's *Let Dogs Delight to Bark and Bite* indicates, this piece foregrounds animals and their unruly behaviour. The piece is set in E flat major to piano accompaniment. The first part (bars 1–63) is set in five-four, three-four and two-four time. Accents and hand clapping evoke a lively and energetic rhythm, which supports the playful representation of ferocious animals (Zimnoch 2016). During their performance of *Let Dogs Delight to Bark and Bite* the Poquessing Middle School Select Choir is divided on stage into two groups that face each other. As indicated in the score, the performing children not only sing about dogs, bears and lions, but also humorously imitate their sounds and represent them with hand gestures. The following is a transcription of the first part of the chorale and a description of the sounds and gestures the children make during the performance. The directions »right« and »left« refer to the groups' positions on stage from the audience's perspective:

Dogs bark! Dogs bite! They fight! [clap, clap]  
 Bears growl! Lions roar! They fight! [clap, clap]  
 They bark! They bite! They growl! They roar! They fight, they all fight!

The children on the right side turn to and bark at the children opposite. The children on the left side answer with a lower »woof.« Next, the children on the right side, growl and then imitate a lion's roar. The children on the left side reply with one roar. This is repeated once before the chorale continues with a variation. The second part picks up Watts' didactic text (Watts 1811, p. 31):

But children you should never let, never let, never let,  
 But children you should never let such angry passions rise;  
 Your little hands were never made, never made, never made,  
 Your little hands were never made to tear each other's eyes.  
 For God hath made, God hath made, God hath made you so;  
 For God hath made, God hath made, God hath made you so.

Here, the didactic nature of the text is humorously mirrored in the music (Zimnoch 2016). A fairly steady three-four time, with minims and crotchets replacing the syncopated crotchets and quavers of the first part, creates a calm and almost passive mode. Moreover, the two facing groups now sing together in a two-part homophonic way, that is, in a parallel rhythm. After this didactic second part, the animal characters are again

featured, and after having finished the song, the two groups face each other with their hands in the air, playfully simulating a bear attack.

Matthew J. Zimnoch's chorale is a musical composition of the twenty-first century, but its text is clearly inspired by Watts' »Against Quarrelling and Fighting.« The analysis of aspects of both the musical score and its performance reveal the scope of possible interpretations present in the eighteenth-century hymn. My reading of it postulates that the characters set up as contrasting foils for the ›good‹ Christian child can evoke pleasure in young singers. Beyond offering the opportunity to playfully enact ferocious animals, the hymn has a further dimension. In the eighteenth century, the naming of dogs, bears and lions was apt to trigger associations of aggression and crude entertainment. At that time, animal fights already had a long tradition. Around 1700, animal fights to the death between bears and specially bred dogs were popular spectacles, which were organised in arenas built for this purpose. Even if bear- and bullbaiting were cultural practices of previous centuries, dog fights were only legally banned in England in the nineteenth century.

The didactic lines quoted above »[b]ut children, you should never [...]« suggest that eighteenth-century children were familiar with this form of entertainment and might have even enjoyed it. In »Against Quarrelling and Fighting,« the Puritan educationalist's dichotomous image of the child again emerges: one whose behaviour conformed to Christian expectations, and one whose intrinsic nature they feared. The ideal of a morally superior, self-controlled being is opposed to the idea of an unruly young person in need of spiritual guidance through God and an adult teacher. The gap between these complimentary images, together with the stylistic, phonetic, and formal elements offers a space (at least mentally) to act out what is forbidden.

## Conclusion

In both Watts' and Smart's hymn books, the interplay of manifest and latent content constructs the image of the singing I, with the features of self-referencing and the blend of a voice-related and religious lexis performing a key function. At its core, the singing I resembles the Christian ideal of what a child should be: pious, God-fearing and morally incorrupt. However, in Watts' collection particularly, this presentation is only one side of the coin. The expressed need for self-control, the other side of the coin, points to the anxiety that children may exhibit the opposite features, against which they need firm spiritual and moral guidance. This also accounts for the fact that the singing I is placed at a greater distance to God in Watts' than it is in Smart's collection.

Young children do not yet have the faculties and the knowledge to challenge the social and religious norms of the society in which they live. Eighteenth-century children who were raised in a Christian milieu probably accepted the religious premises permeating their social environment. Against this backdrop, the two hymn books analysed here offered eighteenth-century children a figure of positive identification and a secure context in which to raise their voices.

The elements of latent content help to turn the positive image of the singing I into a figure of identification that serves as a bridge between the textual level and the reciting or singing of the hymn texts. In performance, this figure can be fully impersonated, because through singing and bodily enactment, the singer can slip into the role of the singing I. And in Watts' collection, occasionally the singer can also slip into the roles of figures which were meant to function in contrast to the image of the ideal Christian

child. The fierce animal figures are tied to a religious frame, therefore allowing children to adopt those roles without censure.

In their introduction to *The Aesthetics of Children's Poetry*, Katherine Wakely-Mulroney and Louise Joy (2018, p. 9) engage in the current discussion of distant and close reading, stating that scholarship on children's literature has a tradition of employing a distant reading approach. They strongly advocate close reading in children's literature research. My research methodology, which included a digitally supported close reading, is a positive response to this plea, and my findings support this decision. At the same time, the computer-based distant reading of entire literary systems as undertaken by Franco Moretti (see, for example, Moretti 2003) inspired me to look at Watts' and Smart's hymn books as miniature literary systems whose investigation would benefit from a digitally supported research methodology. I employed a digitally supported close reading to assist in extracting the image of child characters for the two hymn books and to identify the elements evoking them.

Children's literature research has long been responding to the fact that children's literature itself is on the »digital move« (Wolf 2014, p. 416). Meanwhile, the same also holds for the scholarly interest in children's literature as respective publications and conferences indicate (see for example Schmideler / Helm 2019 and University of Antwerp 2020). My article seeks to contribute to this discourse. This also includes pointing out the limitations of digitally supported methodology. First of all, coding the material is a time-consuming procedure, even if f4analyse assists in speeding up the process. Hymns, as pertains to any other kind of literature, cannot be sorted into rigid boxes. Consequently, categories should always exhibit a certain elasticity. Following a hermeneutic approach, they need to be revisited after coding. If a restructuring of the categories appears necessary, the entire process has to be repeated in order to achieve reliable results. Above all, charts are no substitute for text interpretation. What they can do, however, is to back up text interpretation; the charts generated with my applied methodology show concurrences and differences at one glance. Moreover, they assist in demonstrating comparability between bodies of texts.

With regard to research on eighteenth-century literature, an investigation using a digitally supported method, like the one I have proposed, would help to shed new light on *Hymns for Children and Others of Riper Years* (1768) by Charles Wesley, »the other pillar of Protestant hymnody« (Clapp-Intyre 2016, p. 6). Applying the categories I extrapolated from Watts' and Smart's collections to the Wesleyan hymns with their »emphasis [...] on a deeply personal and expressive recognition and articulation of the vicissitudes of his face-to-face relationship with the Deity« (Arnold 2012, p. viii) renders the possibility to show how the construction of child characters in Wesley's hymn book concurs with, or deviates from, the collections explored in this article. I only touched upon the aspect of denomination, that Watts was a Puritan and Smart a member of the Anglican High Church. A comparison between their hymn books and that of the Methodist Wesley could also shed light on the question as to how their denominations are reflected in their hymn books, and what impact this might have had on their construction of child characters.

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