

**Extending Moral and Religious Verse for
Children from Puritan Adults' Warnings to
Romantic Children's Insights:
Ann and Jane Taylor's Pedagogic Achievements
in *Hymns for Infant Minds* (1810)**

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"Twinkle, twinkle, little star" has been one of the most recognizable verses in the English language since it was first published in 1806. Certainly, by 1865, the song was known well enough to be parodied in *Alice in Wonderland*. Asked by the Mad Hatter if she knows "Twinkle, twinkle, little bat! / How I wonder what you're at," Alice answers to the delicious amusement of every educated child reader: "I've heard something like it" (Carroll 63-64). Today, the poem originally entitled "The Star" is even more famous, having become a staple nursery rhyme around the world. Despite its phenomenal and enduring success, however, few today would be able to identify its author, Jane Taylor

(1783-1824), or her sister Ann Taylor (later Gilbert, 1782-1866), with whom she published bestselling books for children during the early years of the nineteenth century. For over a century, the Taylor sisters' pioneering achievements were recognized as important contributions to the history of children's literature. For instance, E. V. Lucas (1868-1938) declared that "as writers of poetry for children the Taylors have never been excelled or equalled" (216). At the height of their popularity in the Victorian era, admirers explained their success as children's lyricists in gendered terms. Writing in 1889, William Garrett-Horder pronounced that, "it was not till Women, with their deeper insight into, and tenderer sympathy with child life, entered on this field, that anything like adequate or suitable provision was made for children's song. [...] The new era dawned in 1810, when Ann and Jane Taylor issued their 'Hymns for Infant Minds'" (437-38). While this assessment is debatable for its essentialist assumptions about the perceived affinity between women and children emanating from the female capacity for biological maternity, it does astutely link the Taylors' success with their sustained efforts for greater "sympathy with child life." This paper argues that Ann and Jane Taylor's "sympathetic" outlook was less the result of their biology than of their more benevolent Romantic-era perceptions of the child and student-centred pedagogy, in which the child's perspective was privileged. These aspects were their greatest achievements in the development of moral and religious verse writing for children. In order to assess these innovations, Ann and Jane Taylors' hymns will be appraised in relation to works from *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children*

(1715) by Isaac Watts (1674-1748), the groundbreaking collection that laid the foundations for the genre and remained the only significant antecedent of hymnody for children before the sisters entered the field.

The Taylors of Ongar and the Special Influence of Isaac Watts

Ann and Jane Taylor were the daughters of Isaac Taylor (1759-1824), a copperplate engraver and Congregational minister, and his wife Ann Martin Taylor (1757-1830). The sisters were the eldest of six surviving children in a devout dissenting family that became a literary dynasty. "The Taylors of Ongar," as the family came to be known, published nearly a hundred books among them (Stewart xv). "[S]ocially isolated and somewhat cut off from their families of origin by their fervent religious commitment and from their neighbours by their superior education," as Davidoff and Hall have assessed (68), the Taylor family became a self-sustaining unit preoccupied by the spiritual health and moral welfare of all the children. The parents led the way in their conscious decision to educate their children with kindness, as Isaac Taylor Jr. (brother of Ann and Jane) recalled their mother stating in *The Family Pen*:

our two little girls, Ann and Jane, had attained that age when the work of education must commence; a task, it must be confessed, in which we had more zeal than knowledge. What I had witnessed at home from the

injudicious indulgence of my brothers and sisters, determined me, if ever I became a mother, to adopt a different plan, and made me resolve, on the other hand, that my children should never suffer under the oppression which had so afflicted my own childhood and youth. My husband, too, had been trained under the boasted system of "a word and a blow, and the blow first;" so that we had not the advantages of example to assist us in our new and important undertaking. (Isaac Taylor 92-93)

So, it was the parents who first sought a new, more generous approach to education. That their children became as keenly engaged in the issue of child-rearing—becoming disciples spreading the example of compassionate teaching that their parents had established—is indicated by the fact that all the Taylor authors wrote for children.

Ann and Jane Taylor displayed their imaginative powers early. A poem composed by Jane at about the age of nine is recorded in her posthumously published memoirs, and, in her autobiography, Ann Taylor Gilbert recalls composing her first poems at around the age of seven in imitation of Isaac Watts's *Divine Songs*:

The time at which I began to string my thoughts (if thoughts) into measure I cannot correctly ascertain. It could not be after I was ten years old, and I think when only seven or eight, and arising from a feeling of anxiety respecting my mother's safety during illness. Not wishing (I conclude) to betray myself by asking for paper at home,

I purchased a sheet of foolscap from my friend, Mr Meeking, and *filled* it with verses in metre imitated from Dr Watts, at that time the only poet on my shelves.
(Gilbert 1:124)

Two observations are worth drawing out from this passage: firstly, Ann turned to verse for solace at a time of childhood insecurity, and, secondly, Watts's *Divine Songs* was *the* formative poetic influence on the Taylor children. In fact, a connection may be drawn between these two points with information supplied later in the same autobiography. Ann writes of "a legend in our family ... that one of our great grandmothers was, when a child, taken on the knee of Dr. Watts and presented with a copy of his 'Divine Songs for Children'" (Gilbert 1:170). This incident was clearly a matter of family pride and honor; Isaac Watts was a dissenting hero, an Independent minister (much like Congregational minister Isaac Taylor, who may even have been named after him) who defended religious dissent and was a key figure in the development of the English hymn for congregational worship - to this date, he is known as the Father of English hymnody. For the Taylor children, Watts's poems were evidently self-defining both in terms of their peculiar - by which I mean set part - family identity and personal sustaining faith.

Watts's *Divine Songs*, which emerged at the time when "children began to be recognized as distinct and separate creatures, with particular needs and tastes, and as consumers of reading matter, commercially speaking" (Briggs 67), was a foundational text of moral and religious education for children in

England. In his preface addressed “To all that are concerned in the Education of Children” (15), he made a case for the aptness of poetry as a medium for children’s religious education, asserting that verse was “designed for the Service of God” pointing out that the “Children of Israel were commanded to learn the Words of the Song of Moses, Deut. xxxi. 19, 30” (16). Watts identified four advantages of verse as a medium for children’s religious instruction: first, the diverting and amusing nature of rhymes and meter; second, its mnemonic quality; third, related to the second point, that memorized, it “will be a constant Furniture for the Minds of Children” encouraging religious thought and piety; and, finally, that, written in the commonest psalm meters, it could be sung in family worship to “the most usual Psalm Tunes” (16-18). Ann’s memories intimate that, in the Taylor family, Watts’s *Divine Songs* fully realized their potential.

In light of Watts’s widely-acknowledged virtuosity, Ann and Jane Taylor took pains to present themselves as extending his practice rather than countering or replacing it in their advertisement to the first edition of *Hymns for Infant Minds*:

THE “Divine Songs” of Dr. Watts, so beautiful, and so universally admired, almost discourage, by their excellence, a similar attempt; and lead the way where it appears temerity to follow. But as the narrow limits to which he confined himself excluded a number of useful subjects, the following Hymns, though with much diffidence, are presented to the Public. The most obvious and interesting topics were already engaged; but if it appears that this volume of HYMNS FOR INFANT

MINDS, fulfils its humble promise, and adapts evangelical truths to the wants and feelings of childhood, in language which it understands, further apology may not be required. (iii-iv)

The fact that *Hymns for Infant Minds* so explicitly follows Watts's model, which shaped their childhoods and literary development, indicates that it was an especially ambitious and meaningful project for the Taylor sisters, more so perhaps than their earlier, less specifically religious productions including *Original Poems for Infant Minds* (1804-5) by several young persons and *Rhymes for the Nursery* (1806), "the book that awoke the nurseries of England, and those in charge of them" (Darton 181). Indeed, the complexity of their feelings regarding this work is evident in their apology above: they exhibit authorial anxiety for the "temerity" to emulate Watts and seek to deflect potential accusations of pride by stressing that they publish as an act of service; yet, they also draw attention to the limited scope of *Divine Songs* in order to make room for their own work and intimate that they seek a fresh, more generous pedagogic approach in their *Hymns for Infant Minds*. At this point, it is necessary examine the methods and patterns that Watts established in *Divine Songs*, which the Taylor sisters were responding to.

**The Father of Children's Hymnody:
Isaac Watts, an Heir of Puritanism and Disciple of Locke**

Watts published *Divine Songs* eight years after his first hymnic collection, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707). Although he never had children of his own, the songs were written for real children, the three daughters of Sir Thomas and Lady Abney, at whose country estate he stayed during a period of ill health. *Divine Songs* was later published with the view of encouraging children's piety more widely. The collection remained a ubiquitous nursery classic in English-speaking countries for nearly two centuries. In 1868, Isabella L. Bird claimed in *The Sunday Magazine* that the "sale of these in England and America is from 80,000 to 100,000 copies annually" (430). However, critics today view the work as being pedagogically problematic. Although significantly more understanding and less Puritanical than earlier moral writing for children, such as James Janeway's notorious *A Token for Children: Being an Exact Account of the Conversion, Holy and Exemplary Lives and Joyful Deaths of Several Young Children* (1671), many of Watt's *Divine Songs* were still written, as J. R. Watson discerns, within a "culture of fear" that "seems to us now to be highly damaging psychologically" (Watson, "The Child's Christian Year" 22). One of Watts's most notorious works, "Obedience to Parents" preaches that wayward children will meet terrible divine retribution:

Let Children that would fear the Lord
Hear what their Teachers say;

With Rever'nce meet their Parents' Word,
And with Delight obey.

Have you not heard what dreadful Plagues
Are threaten'd by the Lord,
To him that breaks his Father's Law
Or mocks his Mother's Word?

What heavy Guilt upon him lies!
How cursed is his Name!
The Ravens shall pick out his Eyes,
And Eagles eat the same.

But those who worship God, and give
Their Parents Honour due,
Here on this Earth they long shall live,
And live hereafter, too. (11-16)

Although some attempts have been made to address children suitably (Watts has selected simple lexicon, utilized the easily chantable iambic metrical pattern: "The **Ravens shall pick out his Eyes,** / And **Eagles eat the same,**" and attempted to capture the child's attention with the use of animal imagery), ultimately, the hymn's stance is not sympathetic towards the young. The assumption is that children must be threatened and rebuked into good behavior. The work is actually a paraphrase of Proverbs 30:17: "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it." Watts's use of this source reveals his

Puritan heritage. Independent churches followed a modified Calvinism and Watts himself was proud of this identity, urging in 1731, “let us not be ashamed to distinguish ourselves as the offspring of the Puritans, and as Protestant Dissenters, who have learned of our fathers to pay a religious reverence to all that is holy” (quoted in Spurr 103). In Protestant traditions, the Bible has been “elevated above all authorities as supreme in the church” since Luther (Hendrix 46). It is, therefore, not surprising that Watts looked to illuminate the topic with the divine authority of the Bible – indeed, hymns in the eighteenth-century were often paraphrases of the scriptures (Watson, “Eighteenth-Century Hymn Writers” 329-344) – but his privileging of the Proverbs 30:17 in particular out of the whole Bible to teach about filial submission reveals that his understanding of children was fundamentally shaped by the doctrine of Original Sin. In fact, Watts captured his views about this doctrine in Hymn 57 of his *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707):

Conceiv'd in Sin, (O Wretched State)!
 Before we draw our Breath;
 The first young Pulse begins to beat
 Iniquity and Death. (9-12)

The authoritarian adults in “Obedience to Parents” communicate their shared view of children’s innate postlapsarian wickedness. They admonish their young charges because they are understood as delinquents whose rebellious flesh must be mortified. In Lacanian terms, the Law of the Father is laid down to the

individual child-reader by bigger, older, multiple teachers. Child readers may well infer that they are inherently corrupt through being indoctrinated in this Puritan view of humanity as “shapen in iniquity” and conceived in sin in the mother’s womb (Psalm 51:5).

In fact, Watts was also capable of writing gentler and more-nurturing children’s verse influenced by Locke’s pedagogical principles. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), Locke visualized the mind of the newborn child as a smooth waxen tablet upon which impressions would be made with experience. Believing that the child must be treated as a rational being, his philosophy of discipline, rewards, and punishments was to be, in Edgar Bradshaw Castle’s words, “associated with sentiments of esteem and shame, with approval of their virtuous behavior and disapproval of their faults, in the background of a family life where sympathy and understanding have secured their confidence” (129). In *Discourse on the Education of Children and Youth*, Watts agreed with Locke, asserting that “[c]hildren should be instructed in the art of self-government. They should be taught, as far as possible, to govern their thoughts: To use their wills to be determined by the Light of their understandings, and not by headstrong and foolish humour” (Watts, *Discourses* 368). Indeed, it has already been outlined that his hymns were written with the purpose of initiating piety and training moral behavior early, and Katherine Wakely-Mulroney has further specified that the “‘easy language’ of the *Divine Songs* grows out of Locke’s stricture that instruction ought to be suited to the ‘Capacity and Notions’ of its intended audience” (3). Although “Obedience to Parents”

displayed little evidence of the author's belief in childhood innocence or self-governance, Watts did also write hymns in which Lockean ideas are manifest.

"Cradle Hymn," published as the ultimate hymn in the eighth edition of 1727, may be viewed as the culmination of Locke's pedagogical thinking in Watts's *Divine Songs*. From the very first verse, the hostile voice of rebuke encountered in "Obedience to Parents" is replaced by an intimate and familiar speaker who values the child as a sacred being:

Hush! my Dear, lie still, and slumber!
 Holy Angels guard thy Bed!
 Heavenly Blessings, without Number,
 Gently falling on thy Head. (1-4)

As the title clarifies, this hymn is also a lullaby and it utilizes the situation of bedtime to plant religious knowledge. The quiet soothing sounds of the first line, opening with the lingering onomatopoeic "Hush" and sibilant "still" and "slumber," simultaneously evoke the silent sleep being invoked by the speaker and function to calm the imagined infant in her cradle. Instead of the unsympathetic voices of stern teachers who expect the worst of their charges, Watts replicates the mother's voice of assurance. This point is clarified in the seventh verse, which contains the lines "Soft, my Child! I did not chide thee, / ⋯ / 'Tis thy Mother sits beside thee, / And her Arm shall be thy Guard" (25, 27-28). The reader easily discerns that innumerable blessings descend "gently" because the child is beatified, cherished, and

requiring of special care and attention. The implication is that the child is profoundly precious.

Significantly, Watts points out analogues between the child of the hymn and the infant Jesus throughout the hymn:

How much better thou'rt attended
Than the *Son of God* could be,
When from Heaven he descended,
And became a Child like thee! (9-12)

Although a shift has occurred in this verse, the lullaby having moved into the didactic mode with the teaching of the theology of the incarnation, the instruction is conveyed in a manner that does not undermine the child's confidence. Rather, the child's condition of being little, weak, and unknowing is identified as being shared by God. In this way, the child's self-image is strengthened. In "Obedience to Parents," children were viewed as inclined to ungodliness, and, thus, far from God's holy character. However, in "Cradle Hymn," the infant Christ is identified as resembling the child in the cradle. Here, Watts is writing about the divine in humanity in a manner resonant of Blake in his "The Lamb," albeit seven decades before the publication of *Songs of Innocence* (1789), as observed by several critics (England and Sparrow, Pinto, Hilton). Indeed, Watts's child in the cradle is not a sinful being that must be chastened but a sanctified one that must be shielded from harm:

Sleep my Babe; thy Food and Rayment [*sic*],

House and home, thy friends provide;
 All without thy Care or Payment,
 All thy Wants are well supply'd. (5-8)

So, Watts did produce some gentler verse for children, setting precedents for the Taylors to follow. Yet, as Castle has observed, he “can seldom refrain from concluding even his mildest verses with reference to a hell of whose reality he was convinced and from whose torments he was so concerned to steer sinful childhood” (166). This characteristic is demonstrated all too well in the last verses of “Cradle Hymn”:

'Twas to save thee, Child, from dying,
 Save my dear from burning Flame,
 Bitter Groans and endless Crying,
 That thy bless'd Redeemer came.

May'st thou live to know and fear him,
 Trust and love him all thy Days!
 Then go dwell fo rever near him,
 See his Face, and sing his Praise. (45-52)

Evidently, Watts's pastoral responsibility persistently pushed even his most tender works to become terrifying didactic warnings. As such, although devoting the majority of the poem to teaching about God in benevolent terms of love and protection, Watts ends “Cradle Hymn” by preaching a similar message to that of “Obedience to Parents,” namely, that there are dire eternal penalties for neglecting God.

***Hymns for Infant Minds* and Nineteenth-Century Hymn Culture**

Although Ann and Jane Taylor's *Hymns for Infant Minds* (1810) was published almost a century after *Divine Songs* (1715), they were among the earliest to follow Watts's pattern of hymn-writing for children. As Ann Taylor observed in her autobiography:

It has often surprised me, how successful were these early efforts, but we had the advantage of being almost first in the field. Dr. Aikin, Mrs Barbauld, and others, had written well for children, but mostly in prose; since the days of Dr. Watts there had scarcely been, I will not say a Poet, but a Rhymster on the ground, and therefore the road was open to a humble popularity. (123-24)

The first edition contained seventy hymns on diverse subjects including: God's Creation ("About God, who made the Sun and the Moon"), personal and moral behavior ("Against Anger and Impatience"), the care of siblings ("To A little Sister, on Her Birthday"), God's character ("Though the Lord be High, Yet hath He Respect Unto the Lowly"), worship ("On Attending Public Worship"), death ("A Child's Lamentation for the Death of a Dear Mother"), the importance of the scriptures ("The Bible"), sickness and recovery (For a Very Little Child, Upon Getting Well"), and eschatology ("Time and Eternity"). As was normal practice for the time, *Hymns for Infant Minds* was published without prescribed music. Written in common meters, like ballads, the hymns could

be sung to any number of appropriate tunes. For instance, the first work entitled "A Child's Hymn of Praise," written in common meter, could be sung to the music of "Greensleeves," "Yankee Doodle," or "Amazing Grace":

I thank the goodness and the grace
Which on my birth have smil'd,
And made me, in these christian [*sic*] days,
A happy English child. (1-4)

This in-built versatility, which would have allowed children to sing poems to their favorite tunes, no doubt contributed to their popularity and endurance throughout the nineteenth century, the golden age of hymn-singing in Britain.

Indeed, *Hymns for Infant Minds* became a publishing phenomenon of nineteenth-century children's literature. In 1845, the thirty-sixth edition was printed with an additional previously unpublished twenty-three hymns. Further revisions were made in the fiftieth edition of 1886: the editor, Josiah Gilbert (Ann Taylor's son), removed ten hymns from the 1845 version, but added twenty-one works from later hymnbooks including Ann and Jane Taylors' *Original Hymns for Sunday Schools* (1812) and Ann Taylor's *Hymns for Infant Schools* (1827). This edition is most significant for ascribing the authorship of each hymn.

The collection's success is further indicated by the inclusion of individual works in church hymnals. In 1892, John Julian listed twenty-four works by the elder sister and fourteen by the younger as having been included in hymnbooks (1116-17). In fact, as the

Taylor's hymns were often included in Sunday school anthologies, often without attribution (Feldman 732), the circulation of their work is likely to have been broader. As Ian Bradley has observed, hymns were a ubiquitous part of nineteenth-century British material culture; they appeared "on postcards and tombstones, on framed posters to be hung at home and in school reading books. Their tunes were played by brass bands and barrel organs and formed the largest single category of subject matter for pianola rolls" (xiii-xiv). It is likely that the hymns would have been memorized too. The practice of memorizing hymns, especially on the Sabbath, was a common feature of nineteenth-century childhood experience, as illustrated in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) when Graham Bretton asks little Polly Home to recite a hymn:

"Have you learned any hymns this week, Polly?"

"I have learned a very pretty one, four verses long. Shall I say it?"

"Speak nicely, then: don't be in a hurry." (86)

This fictional depiction of hymn recitation was mimetic of Victorian culture. For instance, as a child, Thomas Hardy, faithfully recited Watts's "An Evening Song" from Watt's *Divine Songs* at every sunset (Tomalin 23).

The Pedagogic Effects of Sympathy for Children

Like Isaac Watts, Ann and Jane Taylor were also

preoccupied by the issue of how to teach good moral behavior. Yet, their writings display a divergence in the way they sustain their image of the child as innocent and deserving of dignity throughout their works. Their pedagogical approach was imbued with Romantic-era sympathy for the child, which led them to imagine a different audience of children to Watts. Ann recalled in her autobiography:

We kept the little one for whom we were writing, so far in view as to write honestly for its benefit, but it was an object that had to grow with the consciousness that the benefit was felt, and widening. I have heard Jane say, when sitting down to our new evening's business,—"I try to conjure some child into my presence, address her suitably, as well as I am able, and when I begin to flag, I say to her, 'There love, now you may go.'" (124)

This excerpt suggests that, in contrast to Watts's one-directional didacticism, Jane imagined interaction with a rational being worthy of respect. Ann's remembrance of her sister's imaginative relationship with her child audience—particularly her intimate address of the child as "love"—is revealing of the sisters' emotional investment in their project. This extract is especially fascinating in terms of Jane Taylor's purposeful discarding of male-gendered language and worldview; at a time when the everyman and every-child would have been referred to as male, it seems that Jane consciously envisaged her child-reader as female. The infant girl, occupying one the lowest positions in society—lacking strength, status, and knowledge—is treated as one whose

opinions and feelings matter. This approach was new in children's verse, and, in reflecting on this aspect of their writing, Harvey Darton suggested, "That was perhaps the secret of the Taylors' freshness, which still lingers in the best of their children's verse, though the mode is nearly outworn" (184).

On the subject of filial obedience, it has been demonstrated that Watts attempted to chastise his child audience into submission. As the title signals, Jane Taylor's hymn on the same theme, "Love and Duty to Parents," utilized an altered pedagogical approach developed from a more generous view of children's rational capabilities. Here, duty is united with love and, more than this, love is the precursor of filial submission:

My Father, my Mother, I know
 I cannot your kindness repay;
 But I hope, that, as older I grow,
 I shall learn your commands to obey.

You lov'd me before I could tell
 Who it was that so tenderly smil'd;
 But now, that I know it so well,
 I *should* be a dutiful child. (1-8)

In striking contrast to Watts's speakers, who are condescending adults or transgressive youths, Jane Taylor's speaker is a well-intentioned child, whose words are affectionate and persuasive. The child's own voice is valorized and used as the instrument of reason. The tenderness of Watts's mother in "Cradle Hymn" may well be an influence, but, in this work, the gentle

and lucid thoughts belong to the young not their caretakers.

Utilizing this child-centered educational technique, Jane Taylor is able to communicate complex ideas in an accessible way. For instance, in the verses above, the ventriloquized “good” child speaker persuades readers that parents deserve to be loved and obeyed because they cared for us first. This beautifully simple logic of reciprocity actually replicates a principle argument of St. John’s gospel and the Johannine epistles that “We love him because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Jane’s seemingly facile children’s hymn thus teaches about the profound Christian theology of the “debt of love.” Thus, through their vision of the innocent and intelligent child, the Taylors managed to extend Watts’s discussions in several directions.

In “Love and Duty to Parents,” another departure from Watt’s portrayal of obedience is the idea that learning moral behavior is an ongoing, self-governed process:

I am sorry that I ever should
 Be naughty, and give you such pain;
 I hope I shall learn to be good,
 And so never grieve you again.

But for fear that I ever should dare
 From all your commands to depart,
 Whenever I’m saying my pray’r,
 I’ll ask for a dutiful heart. (1810: 9-16)

Importantly in terms of child psychology, “Love and Duty to Parents” educates that loving parents may be approached for

mercy if one does transgress in a moment of weakness. The penitent soul will not be cast out irrevocably from their love. Thus, Jane Taylor's more generous perception of the child's mental capacity means that, as religious poetry, her work is more intricate in its Christian theology.

As moral literature, "Love and Duty to Parents" is also more developed than Watts's "Obedience to Parents." Specifically, Jane Taylor is able to masterfully manipulate the formal constraints of the hymn to lay stress on key principles relating to inter-personal behavior. In the third verse, through her use of the tetrameter scheme in long meter, she creates the line "Be naughty, and give you such pain," which isolates the crucial principle that iniquitous behavior causes suffering to those who love the offender. In other words, the idea that individual actions have social consequences is accentuated in a way that it could not be in prose. That Jane purposefully constructed such succinct and cogent lines is supported by Isaac Taylor Jr's observations that: "If one might judge by the appearance of the manuscript copy of these hymns—its intricate interlineations, and multiplied revisions, it would seem that, many of them cost the author more labour than any other of her writings" (1:116). Through the refined force of this line, Jane Taylor appeals to the child's sense of guilt – regret about wrongdoing – not only to encourage good behavior but to develop empathy and, by extension, social responsibility. In fact, this is a technique which modern child psychologists advocate regarding the enforcement of moral behavior. Whereas shame is understood as a devastating emotion upon the child's core self-image, guilt is seen, in Adam Grant's words, as "a

negative judgment about an action, which can be repaired by good behavior" ("Raising a Moral Child"). In fact, it is noteworthy that, in these terms, Watts's "Obedience to Parents," in which adults express wrath and threaten with irreparable punishment, would be deemed far more harmful in shaming the child and potentially creating a damaged, negative self-image (Eisenberg 667-69). Writing from the perspective of children, who they understood as benign and rational beings, the Taylors carefully extended Watts's discussion of obedience to parents in multiple significant ways: first, they taught that, rather than slavish submission, filial duty is a fruit of love; secondly, that, even when children make mistakes, a contrite heart provides a way back to love and acceptance; and thirdly, that individual actions have interpersonal consequences.

Disseminating Romantic Views of Childhood in Children's Literature

Repeatedly in the Taylors' hymns, children's voices are valorized and their thought-lives are empathetically imagined. The sisters' mindfulness of infant speech and inner life suggests that they sympathized with the Romantic vision of childhood as articulated, for instance, by William Wordsworth in his poems about children's fresh perceptions of the world such as "Anecdote for Fathers" and "We are Seven." Indeed, these works, first published in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), attempted to represent the

language and thought-processes of real children over a decade earlier than the Taylors. Wordsworth's earlier attempts to capture childish tones is recorded in "We Are Seven:"

"Their graves are green, they may be seen,"
The little Maid replied,
"Twelve steps or more from my mother's door,
And they are side by side.

"My stockings there I often knit,
My 'kerchief there I hem;
And there upon the ground I sit,
And sing a song to them. (33-40)

In fact, however, the Taylor sisters' admiration for Wordsworth is difficult to establish. Ann's autobiography contains five verse epigraphs taken from his poetic corpus, but these may have been added by her posthumous editor, Josiah Gilbert, as they are extraneous to the body of the text. While no direct reference is made to Wordsworth in either sister's life accounts, Isaac Taylor Jr. does state in Jane's memoirs that, until the composition of *Hymns for Infant Minds*, "Jane had written chiefly as an expression of spontaneous feeling" (113). This remark suggests that she was influenced by Wordsworth's theory that "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," as expounded in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800).

The sisters may also have been influenced by William Blake. Jane Taylor's "The Beggar Boy," for instance, first published in the

Minor's Pocket Book (1804), seems to borrow from the social conditions and milieu of Blake's *Songs of Experience*:

I'm a poor little beggar, my mammy is dead;
 My daddy is naughty, and gives me no bread:
 O'er London's wide streets all the day long I roam,
 And when night comes on, I've got never a home.

...

In the evening I wander, all hungry and cold,
 And the bright Christmas fires thro' the windows behold:
 Ah, while the gay circles such comforts enjoy,
 They think not of me, a poor perishing boy!

Oh had I a coat, if 't were ever so old,
 This poor trembling body to screen from the cold;
 Or a hat from the weather to shelter my head;
 Or an old pair of shoes, or a morsel of bread!

(Jane Taylor 2:64: 1-4, 33-40)

Here, Blake's sensitivity to, and advocacy of, the vulnerable young, who live in the urbanized capitalist world, is reflected in Jane's composition. In fact, the Taylor sisters are commonly acknowledged to be significant as early disseminators of Blake's work, as they reproduced "Holy Thursday" in their *City Scenes; Or, A Peep into London* (1818). They may have encountered his work through the family's movement in metropolitan, non-conformist engraving circles, or, as Haggarty and Mee

suggest, from Benjamin Heath Malkin's *A Father's Memoirs of His Child* (1806), in which four of Blake's songs were reproduced (25).

One Romantic-era author, who is known to have been admired by the Taylor sisters, is Anna Letitia Barbauld (1743-1825). Ann even met the author on a visit to London in 1807:

I cannot forget ... the strange feeling of unearthly expectancy with which, in a small parlour, I waited her appearance. At length the door opened, - for she did not float in on a cloud or a zephyr, - and a small plain, lively, elderly lady made her appearance; but it was Mrs Barbauld, and that was enough! (182)

Like Wordsworth and Blake, Barbauld believed in the innocence of children. Although, significantly for the Taylors, also a dissenter, Barbauld offered a different theological model to Watts's Calvinist Puritanism. Growing up in the progressive educational environment of the Warrington Academy—one of the educational institutions established for religious dissenters, who were barred from Oxford and Cambridge—where her father was a teacher, her beliefs were shaped by a range of Enlightenment thinkers including John Locke (1632-1704), Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) and Joseph Priestley (1733-1804). In particular, she developed benign religious views from the benevolist philosophical ethics of Hutcheson, who held a hopeful view of humanity built on the understanding that people are the worthy creatures of a loving creator (Barbauld 235). This sympathetic belief shaped her

understanding of children and pressed upon her the importance of educating through nurture. From this standpoint, she authored a number of sympathetic works for children's education, many of them stressing the social significance of the mother as educator in the formation of future citizens.

The most significant work by Barbauld to have influenced the Taylor sisters is *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781). From "Hymn I," Barbauld voices a gracious child:

I will praise God with my voice; for I may praise him,
though I am but a little child.

A few years ago, and I was a little infant, and my tongue
was dumb within my mouth:

And I did not know the great name of God, for my
reason was not come unto me.

But now I can speak, and my tongue shall praise him; I
can think of all his kindness, and my heart shall love him.
(239)

Although written in prose, Barbauld's child, like the Taylors', speaks with reason and grateful reciprocity for God's kindness. In "Hymn VI," where Barbauld utilizes a catechistic dialogue form between a mother who asks probing theological questions and her sensitive child cognizant of natural beauty:

Child of reason, whence comest thou? What has thine eye
observed, and whither has thy foot been wandering?

I have been wandering along the meadows, in the thick grass; the cattle were feeding around me, or reposing in the cool shade; the corn sprung up in the furrows; the poppy and the harebell grew among the wheat; the fields were bright with summer, and glowing with beauty. (245)

Barbauld's influence is most evident in Ann Taylor's hymn "About God, who made the Sun and the Moon." Its stimulus seems to have been the opening lines of Barbauld's "Hymn I" about God's Creation: "Come, let us praise God, for he is exceedingly great; let us bless God, for he is very good. / He made all things; the sun to rule the day, the moon to shine by night" (238). This hypothesis is supported by the fact that Ann Taylor's hymn is written in the mode of a conversation between "Mamma" and "Child," which replicates Barbauld's formal construction in "Hymn I":

Child

I saw the glorious sun arise
 From yonder mountain grey;
 And as he travell'd through the skies,
 The darkness fled away;
 And all around me was so bright,
 I wish'd it would be always light.

But when his shining course was done,
 'The gentle moon drew nigh,
 And stars came twinkling, one by one.
 Upon the shady sky. ----

Who made the sun to shine so far,
The moon, and ev'ry twinkling star?

Mamma

'Twas God, my child, who made them all,
By his almighty hand:
He holds them, that they do not fall.
And bids them move, or stand:
That glorious God, who lives afar,
In heav'n, beyond the highest star. (1-18)

Like Barbauld's "Child of reason", Ann Taylor's child speaker is sentient and attuned to the wonders of nature. Thus, in terms of literary influence on the Taylors, Barbauld offered, *in prose*, examples of a benevolent, intelligent, and rational child's voice being used for religious and moral education. The Taylors drew from Barbauld's sympathetic view and pedagogic application of the intelligent child presented in *Hymns in Prose for Children* and applied it successfully to their verses. At this point, Donelle Ruwe's comments about Wordsworth's extraordinary influence in the history of children's poetry seems applicable; "his influence derives not from whatever children's poetry he might have written but rather than from the Romantic ideology of the child that he fostered" (9-10). While Ann and Jane Taylor did not originate the Romantic view of the precious and innocent child of wonder, they were the ones, not "the visionary company" (Bloom), who spread this concept in literature that children actually read.

Conclusion

Ann and Jane Taylor's phenomenal triumph in their own time is evidenced by the fact "*Hymns for Infant Minds* brought in £150 in 1810, more than most curates and country schoolmasters could command in a year" (Davidoff and Hall 67). Despite their popularity throughout the nineteenth century, they are now largely unknown literary figures. The hymns' disappearance from literary history and popular culture may be elucidated by William McCarthy's insights that literary survival depends on key factors including gender, genre, religion, and advocacy (165-91). Firstly, like many female productions, the works were neglected by the male academics who established the canon of English literature; secondly, as simple verse writings for infants, they were not considered great literature; and thirdly, during the increasingly secular twentieth century, religious and didactic poetry in general disappeared from popular children's literature. Indeed, the Taylors' hymns have not even survived in the church's core repertoire of devotional songs, perhaps because none were included in the "most important and influential hymn book of the Victorian age, and arguably of all time, *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, published in 1861" (Bradley, *Lost Chords and Christian Soldiers* 65). The fact that the sisters were dissenters may also be significant. Several of Cecil Frances Alexander's (1818-1895) *Hymns for Little Children* (1848) are among the best-loved hymns in Britain today, but she was the wife of an Anglican bishop, and, therefore, an establishment figure with the most powerful advocates in British religious culture.

In their original advertisement, Ann and Jane Taylor

apologized for their “temerity” to follow Watts; yet, moving beyond the restrictive moralism of Watts and echoing the Romantic-era view of innocent childhood experience, they were able to produce children’s literature that was progressive in learner-centered education and healthy psychological development. Their greatest achievements were in their attempts to privilege the “good” child’s voice, replicate the tones of childish loquacity, and reason with loving encouragement rather than frighten with disturbing threats. Remarkably, considering their early-nineteenth-century origins, these practices remain sound pedagogically today. Consciously imagining a benevolent and rational child audience, Ann and Jane Taylor were able to make huge advances in writing moral and religious verse for children. The pervasiveness of their influence on the religious culture of nineteenth-century Britain as may be evidenced in two quotations printed in the advertisement to the forty-seventh edition of *Hymns for Infant Minds* (1868):

“The knowledge and the love of Christ can nowhere be more readily gained by young children than from the Hymns of this most admirable woman” (Ann Taylor). ---
Extract from Sermons by the late Thomas Arnold, D. D., Head Master at Rugby School.

“A well-known little book, entitled ‘Hymns for Infant Minds,’ contains (Nos. 14 and 15) a better practical description of Christian humility, and its opposite, than I ever met with in so small a compass. Though very intelligible and touching to a child, a man of the most mature understanding, if not quite destitute of the virtue

in question, may be the wiser and better for it."-- *Extract from Archbishop Whately's Essays on Christian Faith, &c.*

Remarkably, in these quotations from two great Anglican clergymen who were immensely influential in British educational terms during the nineteenth century—Arnold was a great reformer of the English public school system (the beloved headmaster as depicted in Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* [1857]) and Whately was himself an educational innovator in devising a scheme for non-sectarian religious instruction in Ireland during his tenure as Archbishop of Dublin—identify the hymns of non-conformist women as exemplary religious pedagogic models. Given the fact that both men were members of the established Anglican church and that women were officially excluded from theological teaching in their time in accordance with St. Paul's prescription in 1 Timothy 2:12 that "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man," these pronouncements are extraordinary. The sisters' enduring success in articulating "truths to the wants and feelings of childhood, in language which it understands" is indicated by the way new editions continued to appear throughout the nineteenth century not only in Britain, but also in America. Their greatest achievement, however, was their creation of the affectionate and receptive child's voice through which they disseminated their sympathetic Romantic-era perception of the child in poetry that children actually read. Utilizing this effective child-centered pedagogic instrument, they taught children that their voices are valuable and that their thoughts are worth listening to.

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**Extending Moral and Religious Verse for Children from
Puritan Adults' Warnings to Romantic Children's Insights:
Ann and Jane Taylor's Pedagogic Achievements
in *Hymns for Infant Minds* (1810)**

Abstract

Nancy Jiwon Cho

This paper examines the literary, cultural, and pedagogic achievements of Ann and Jane Taylor in their generic development of moral and religious verse writing for children. Examining representative works from their *Hymns for Infant Minds* (1810) and comparing them with *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* (1715) by Isaac Watts (1674-1748), the only significant antecedent for children's hymnody before the Taylors, this paper argues that the sisters' Romantic-era sympathetic perceptions of the child and child-centred philosophy led them to innovate on the hymnic form in progressive pedagogical ways. In terms of content, they displayed psychological sensitivity by endeavoring to explain difficult ideas gently and rationally; filial duty is explained as a response to parental love, "naughty" behavior is explained as potentially hurting those who care about us, and a contrite heart provides a way back to acceptance and love. In terms of style, they developed effective new narratological techniques in their replication of childlike tones and thinking, and the development of a "good" child speaker who teaches by example encouraging the child reader rather than frightening it with warnings of hellfire and eternal punishment.

Key Words: Ann Taylor, Jane Taylor, Isaac Watts, Children, Hymns, Moral Verse, Religious Verse

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