

8-2014

Isaac Watts and the Culture of Dissent

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ISAAC WATTS AND THE CULTURE OF DISSENT

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Andrew Eli M. Yeater

August 2014

ISAAC WATTS AND THE CULTURE OF DISSENT

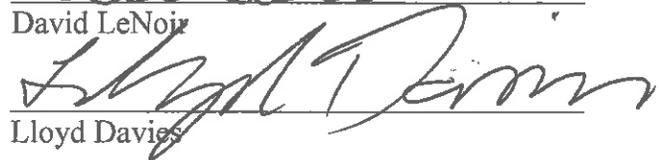
Date Recommended July 30, 2014



Chris Ervin, Director of Thesis



David LeNoir



Lloyd Davies



8-14-14

Dean, Graduate Studies and Research Date

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Christopher Ervin for his guidance in directing this thesis. I would also like to thank the faculty at Western Kentucky University who have instructed me during my time here, helping me to develop a greater appreciation for literature and an understanding of rhetoric. To the faculty of Florida College, I thank you for helping mold my body, soul, and mind.

PREFACE

When I approached the idea of writing this thesis, the idea of writing about hymns entered my mind. Singing hymns has always been a part of my worship to God, and the thought of writing about hymns intrigued me. Beyond that, I was not completely sure where to take my idea. Then, I remembered a friend—who, oddly enough, is hymn writer—who once told me how Isaac Watts’ “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” was an excellent hymn. I then remembered that, some time ago, I had learned in history class that Isaac Watts was known as “The Father of the English hymn.” I started researching Isaac Watts, and, over time, this thesis emerged from my studies. It has been a long journey writing this thesis, and I have found many hymns by Watts that I never knew existed. I hope that readers will come to appreciate Watts’ genius as I have. His hymns are still alive and circulating, and just as they have impacted religious cultures for centuries past, they will continue to impact religious cultures for centuries to come.

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August 2014

82 Pages

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Although Isaac Watts wrote hymns in the early eighteenth century, some of his hymns, such as “Joy to the World,” “Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed?,” and “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” survive today as well-known hymns. However, little has been written about the rhetorical effects of his hymns. This thesis demonstrates that, like any other literary work, Watts’ hymns can be analyzed rhetorically. This thesis analyzes Watts’ hymns with the aid of Louis Montrose’s New Historicism, showing how Watts’ hymns were impacted by the English culture in which he lived and how they impacted the religious culture to which he belonged and preached: the Dissenters.

Watts’ hymns were not the only texts that had an impact on the Dissenters. The psalters were considered by many (Calvin, in particular) to be the only acceptable songs for use in worship. Watts responded to this belief with his hymns, showing that God could be praised in other reverent ways. Watts’ hymns were successful for many reasons, including their easy-to-understand language, their vivid images, and their ability to focus on the heart of man. Watts used his hymns to help Dissenters keep away from error, particularly the new religion of Deism and the sin of pride.

Looking through the lens of New Historicism, Watts’ hymns are rhetorical texts, impacting the culture of Dissenters and responding to the larger English culture. Watts possessed great skill as a writer, poet, and preacher, and this thesis shows how his hymns had a thorough impact on the Dissenters’ culture.

Chapter 1

Introduction:

History and the Life of Isaac Watts

In the study of English hymnody¹ Isaac Watts is at the forefront. As a composer of hymns, Watts contributed over 600 (Clark 70). In comparison to other hymn writers, Watts has actually written a small amount, yet he is remembered as “the father of the English hymn” (Marshall and Todd 28). He must have made some great strides as a hymn writer to be remembered with so fond a title, and indeed he did. Isaac Watts lived from 1674 to 1748 (“Isaac Watts”). Riding on the coattails of the Protestant Reformation, Watts’ hymns reflect the changing religious thoughts of his day and exhort a continuation in following the Word of God. This is achieved through the rhetoric of Watts’ hymns. Sam Leith defines rhetoric “in its basic sense [as] one person trying to persuade another person of a truth or of an ideal” (10). He explains, “Rhetoric is a field of knowledge: that is, something susceptible to analysis and understanding in the same way poetry is” (2). If Watts’ hymns are viewed as a type of poetry, they can, of course, be analyzed in a literary way; however, as rhetorical texts, they can be analyzed as a type of persuasion, specifically, persuasion “of a truth or of an ideal” (Leith 10). As a writer of Biblical doctrine and thought, Watts is working in the realm of what he believes to be true, and he gives his readers ideals to strive towards. Still, in order to best influence and persuade with his hymns, Watts has to keep his audience in mind. As a preacher, Watts had plenty of practice relating to an audience and influencing them. Selma Bishop declares, “Watts

¹ According to Benjamin Brawley, author of *History of the English Hymn*, “Hymnody is an expression of the lyric impulse that is innate in the heart of humanity, and that is especially strong when directed to the worship of the Supreme Being.” He also makes an effort to distinguish between “hymnody” and “hymnology,” clarifying, “Hymnody . . . has reference to hymns themselves, and hymnology . . . to the science or study of hymns” (1).

knew the power and importance of rhetorical and philological principles” (25). In fact, his works “on reading, writing, and spelling together with his *Logick* and *Improvement of the Mind* were so thoroughly accepted and respected that they were used in academies or in Cambridge and Oxford respectively for over one hundred years” (Bishop 29). As a result, his hymns reflect his keen knowledge and skill of writing (Bishop 29). Whether Watts is reminding Dissenters not to be prideful, influencing a Deist that deism is wrong, or simply exhorting Dissenters to remain faithful, he knows that he must choose his words—his rhetoric—carefully to accomplish his goals.

Watts’ England

In order to understand the significance of Watts’ works in his time, the religious and political history of his England must be understood. During the Protestant Reformation, the teachings of John Calvin and Martin Luther were spreading across Europe, and people were reconsidering the power and authority of the Catholic Church. In England, King Henry VIII decided to remove England from Papal authority to appease his desperation to have a male heir by divorcing his wife Catherine and marrying Anne Boleyn (Cairns 321-322). In 1533, Henry VIII decreed that England was an empire; and, a few years later, both Ireland and Wales came under Henry’s jurisdiction (Armitage 11, 21). The Act of Supremacy of 1534 declared Henry “the ‘only supreme head’ of the church of England” (Cairns 323). At the end of the sixteenth century, England’s power and influence were spreading because she was colonizing both in America and in the Caribbean (Hull 61).

While Ireland and Wales came under the king’s rule, Scotland was another matter. John Knox brought Calvin’s doctrine to Scotland, and, under his guidance, the Scottish

Parliament ended the Pope's power over Scotland in 1560 (Cairns 313). In 1568, Mary Stuart was forced to abdicate the Scottish throne, which gave the middle class more power. As a result, England and Scotland were no longer divided religiously and politically, so "the two lands were united under the same ruler in 1603 and became one kingdom with one Parliament in 1707" (Cairns 314).

We shall see later that the hymns of the Puritans influenced some of Watts' hymns, so let us turn to the history surrounding the Puritans. The Puritans were not a group of people who wanted to leave the Church of England; rather, they were a group within "the Anglican church who . . . wanted a Presbyterian or . . . a Congregational state church" (Cairns 328). It was to a subgroup of the Puritans, called the Independents (Cairns 328-329), that Watts' father belonged (*The Eighteenth-Century* 77). But the Independents are different than the Separatists, "who wanted separation of church and state and congregational government of the church" (Cairns 329). It was to this Separatist group that William Bradford belonged (Cairns 331). The Puritans knew what it was to be alienated, and their hymns and, consequently, the hymns of Watts inspired by the Puritan hymns reflect this alienation from the world.

The Protestant Reformation began a series of events that changed political and religious affairs. No longer did the Roman Catholic Church reign in every nation. Wherever Protestantism took hold, "national Protestant state churches" sprang up. In England, there was the Anglican state church (Cairns 349). The doctrinal changes the Protestantism brought did not only affect people spiritually; they also affected people physically. Luther's teachings of being saved by faith only created a sense of religious individuality, an idea that did not exist in the Middle Ages because the belief was that

every person should belong to the church. The new belief was that “Man now could have direct personal access to God” (Cairns 349). This is not to say that people thought being a part of a church was irrelevant. Most placed great importance on the church, but it was a church that was characterized by preaching from the word of God (Cairns 351).

The Dissenters

Harry Escott points out that Watts lived in a period that was perfect for experimenting with hymn writing (77). But, in order to understand the effects Watts’ hymns had, we must identify the audience for which he wrote. In Watts’ time, “the success of the Anglican religious societies induced dissenting bodies to form similar societies in London, mostly after the death of Queen Anne” (Escott 77). Watts identified his congregation as Dissenters, and his writings clearly show what they were dissenting from. In “A Serious Address to the People,” Section III, “The Advantages of Dissenters in Matters of Religion,” Watts addresses Dissenters with the phrase “you protestant dissenters enjoy” and distinguishes them from their “brethren of the church of England” (“Serious Address” 3: 52); and, in Section IV, “Of the Obligations of Protestant Dissenters to Greater Degrees of Holiness,” Watts affirms, “The most considerable and most universal reason why you profess to dissent from the established church, and to separate from them, is, *that you may make better improvements in religion than if you continued in their communion*” (“Serious Address” 3: 67). This is the group of people Watts speaks to in his hymns, so while his works have ties to seventeenth-century Anglicanism, they also have their own unique purposes (Escott 78).

Although Watts gets credit for the rising of the English hymn, he could not have been so accomplished were it not for the events and people leading up to him. Watts lived

in a time when experimenting with hymn writing was possible. One notable writer who helped pave the way was Richard Baxter. He was the first hymn writer to hold sway in the Dissenter group that included Watts. Baxter's work helped bridge the gap between "the poets and hymnists of the English Church" (Escott 81). His work made it possible for Watts to bring his creativity into the songs used in English worship. Baxter's work also borrowed ideas from the Puritans' teaching: "emphasis on the legitimacy of appealing to the worshipper's emotion and experience," something that Watts would do later (Escott 83-84). Davie points out that one reason Watts' poetic status is in question is because of "a similar ambiguity in the official or received version of English culture when it comes to assessing the contribution to that culture of Puritanism in general and of nonconformists in particular" (*Gathered Church* 3). Regardless, with the work of Baxter having paved the way, Watts' works had an influence on the Dissenters.

Reasons for Writing and Biography

As Deism was a powerful religious belief in Watts' time, some of his hymns show signs of preventing Dissenters from getting carried away by the false teachings of Deism. There was a "rise of empirical science" and scientific discoveries around Watts' time (Cairns 351). As a result, there were some religious people who were looking for a religion that incorporated elements of the physical world along with the spiritual. Watts believed this new religious view to be an error, and some of his hymns work against by using the first person, something that is different about Watts' hymns, and by the way the hymns adore the Lord. Davie notes that "We love what we can understand; we adore what passes understanding" (*The Eighteenth-Century* 34).

Madeleine Marshall and Janet Todd state the “the father of the English hymn” needed to “belong to a denomination unbound by church hierarchy, with its need to be persuaded” (28). No one else would be able to experiment and formulate the new genre of the hymn. Watts belonged to the group of Dissenters, thus meeting the first criteria. Marshall and Todd also say “the father of the English hymn” needed to be pious, fearless, and understanding of the immensity of the task of writing the hymn (28). Furthermore, he needed to be a remarkable poet, a preacher, and a teacher (Marshall and Todd 28). Watts was all of these, and that is why he was able to formulate the tradition of the English hymn.

When Watts was an infant, his mother took him with her to the prison where she would visit her husband. During the reign of Charles II, the elder Mr. Watts had been imprisoned for his religious teachings (*The Eighteenth-Century* 77). Because Watts’ father was a preacher for the group called Independents, “[he] was continually aware of the nonconformists’ notion of ‘a gathered church,’ a minority gathered *from* the world and therefore necessarily in tension with society at large” (*The Eighteenth-Century* 77). Growing up with an imprisoned father, Watts had a personal example of what it means to be completely devoted to God, and the same religious convictions were instilled in him. As a result, when contending with issues of his time, his hymns exhort Dissenters to remain steadfast and dedicated, regardless of what the world around them might do. The idea of being separate from the world is exemplified in Watts’ hymn “We are a garden wall’d around,” as well as others (*The Eighteenth-Century* 77).

As Watts grew older, there was more religious freedom in England, and his father was released from prison and continued preaching (Clark 69). It was at this young age

that Watts reached the conclusion that the songs they sang as a part of worship were not very good, and he let his father know how he felt about them. The older Mr. Watts replied, “Make some yourself, then” (Brawley 69). With that bit of “encouragement,” Isaac set pen to paper and composed his first hymn, “A New Song to the Lamb that was slain” (Brawley 69). It begins,

BEHOLD the glories of the Lamb
Amidst his Father’s throne :
Prepare new honours for his name,
And songs before unknown. (“Hymn 1” 4: 1-4)

This new hymn received praise, and Watts’ congregation was clamoring for more hymns. From that moment, Isaac Watts was on his way to becoming a hymnist, and today he is known as the “Father of English Hymnody” (Kolodziej 236). Willie Thorburn Clark mentions that “At an early age young Isaac developed a genius for verse making, and manifested his tendency in this direction by making so many rhymes that his father deemed it advisable to curb his youthful exuberance in this field” (69). When his father threatened him with punishment, young Watts’ response was, “Oh, father do some mercy take, / And I will no more verses make” (qtd. in Clark 69). When he was twenty-four years old, Watts followed in his father’s footsteps and entered the ministry (Clark 69). After some time, he had to resign for health reasons. He then stayed in the home of Sir Thomas and Lady Abney for over thirty years, during which time he wrote many of his hymns (Blanchard 139).

Keeping this brief historical and religious review in mind, let us focus on the more specific information that each chapter will cover. Chapter three discusses the

textual background for Watts' time period, dealing specifically with the psalters, the worship songs that were widely used at the time. John Calvin believed it was better to sing only from the Psalms of the Old Testament because that would guarantee singing the inspired word of God, and his belief circulated in the form that any good church used the Scriptures as the final authority (Cairns 351). Long had men been under the belief that "the decrees of councils, the writings of the Fathers, and the bulls of the popes," were the authority, but the Reformation created the thinking that men could understand the Bible for themselves (Cairns 351). Everyone believed that they could interpret the Bible, and "Almost all the Reformers themselves or their colleagues translated the Bible into the vernacular languages" (Cairns 351). Watts believed in the authority of the Bible; however, for various reasons, he opposed Calvin's teaching that the Psalms were the only acceptable source from which to sing in worship. As a result, Watts set out to write hymns that were not as close to scripture as the psalters. Watts' ideas were radical for the time, but through his "moral theology and in poetic theory, [his work] yielded the English hymn" (Marshall and Todd 59). Watts did not abandon the book of Psalms entirely. The use of the psalters was deeply rooted in England, and they continued to be "sung throughout the century" (Marshall and Todd 12). Watts did seek to make the psalters better, so he "paraphrased the psalms, a task that [he] viewed as part of the hymn-writing venture" (Marshall and Todd 12). Watts did much hymn writing with the Psalms, but his work with original hymns changed the type of song that was used in worship. His hymns show the inadequacy of using psalters exclusively as Calvin instructed.

Chapter four shows how Watts' hymns are effective in reaching his Dissenter audience. Watts indicates in the preface of the *Horae Lyricae* that his "faith in the

evangelical power of stirring poetry supersedes his own distrust of the world of sinful flesh and the tempting Fancy” (Marshall and Todd 56). There may be skeptics who doubt the validity of Watts’ place as persuasive poetry writer. Watts’ hymns “make visible the invisible, make his singers respond to that to which they had formerly been indifferent, and clarify certain doctrinal points”; thus, his hymns, as poetry, do more than what “most of us ask of ‘odes’” (Marshall and Todd 57). Watts’ hymns can hold their own, and their rhetorical effects on Dissenters are analyzed in the coming chapters.

Although even the mere existence of Watts’ hymns stands in opposition to Calvin’s teachings, Watts’ hymns do incorporate and teach Calvinism. His hymns clearly communicate one of the pillars of Calvinism, total hereditary depravity. This separation from God was also an issue that arose from the deism that was widespread in Watts’ day (Marshall and Todd 37)—but more on that in chapter five. It is through the Calvinistic teaching of separation from God that Watts is able to appeal to men’s passions, hoping to bring them closer to God (Marshall and Todd 58). Many of Watts’ hymns cause singers to reconsider their relationship with God. J. R. Watson makes the point that “The religious poems of Donne and Herbert and others encouraged, as the psalms did, the expression of the believer’s spiritual state, and of his or her relationship with God,” and “It was at this point in the history of the English hymn that Isaac Watts forged the different traditions into one art” (133). The way his hymns cause Dissenters to look to their own passions and reflect on their relationship with God is like a devotional or a sermonette. These hymns differ “from the Anglican tradition through [their] preference for experience over formality, decorum, or wit” because they are concerned “with the individual and with the religious society, but above all with the individual and the grace

of God” (Watson 132). Recognizing this is important because it helps “clarify the religious world view of Watts and the place of hymns within it,” and knowing the place of hymns in the world helps clarify how Dissenters were responding to Watts’ hymns (Marshall and Todd 44). Watts’ work demands our respect—or at least our sympathy—because of Calvin’s hard-pressed teachings. According to Calvin, “The poet who was a good teacher would go to heaven, while the poet who neglected his calling and lured his readers into vice would be damned” (Marshall and Todd 30). What is novel about Watts’ work is that it “is attuned to contemporary self-consciousness of the Puritans” where “The promotion of virtue depended on the poet’s capacity to move his reader, to inspire feelings conducive to virtue and piety” (Marshall and Todd 30). Watts’ hymns stir up Dissenters’ feelings to drive them in their quest, or pilgrimage, to a better relationship with God. This will be further explained in chapter five.

The Significance of this Study

Of course, if hymns are to be studied, it is first necessary to understand their use during the time period in which they were written. There is some discrepancy as to how hymns were used in Watts’ time. Donald Davie contends that whole congregation would never sing hymns: “Watts . . . must have had in mind readers, far more than congregational singers” (*The Eighteenth-Century* 72). Davie asserts that the genre of the hymn is “essentially *public*; and even though Watts . . . must have known that [his] psalms would be read mostly by solitary individuals in private, [he] observed decorum so as to write *as if* for public, communal occasions” (*The Eighteenth-Century* 73). Davie is confident in his position that Watts never intended for his hymns to be sung; however, he is alone in his position. If his statement is accurate, no other author that I have studied

feels that this fact is worth mentioning, which is remarkable, considering that most people today consider hymns as something to be sung. But even if Davie is right, Watts' hymns should still be examined. They were intended to be used by others; whether they were sung or read during Watts' lifetime, they were used, and believers took the words of hymns to heart. In fact, people would carry around pocket-sized hymnals, and children were encouraged to memorize and recite hymns (Hersey). Regardless of how the hymns were passed on, whether through singing or reading, their rhetoric endures. At the conclusion of this study, the value of examining the rhetoric of Isaac Watts' hymns should be clear.

One might ask what value there is in studying hymns, so the merit of this study must be defended. If hymns are to be analyzed, the question arises as to what kind of literature they are, and the natural answer is poetry. If hymns can be thought of as poetry, what effects do Watts' hymns have on readers, and what do they reveal about readers in the time Watts wrote them? Marshall and Todd say that, "As poetry, the hymns employ linguistic coloring and metaphorical suggestion that help us to appreciate Watts's poetic resources and his public's taste" (44). However, hymns do more than that because of the way they are used: "As participatory literature, they are filled with indicators of the response to his subjects that Watts felt to be right and natural" (Marshall and Todd 44). These subjects will come up in multiple chapters, but especially in chapters five and six. While Marshall and Todd say hymns have poetic aspects, others claim "that hymns are somehow unpoetical, partly because they are designed to function as an element of a church service, and partly because they have to be simple, orthodox, and able to be sung" (Watson 2). Davie would agree with this, referring Watts' hymns as "axiomatic" because,

as they are based on thoughts from the word of God, their truth “persists, whether or not human beings acknowledge it” (*The Eighteenth-Century* 33). Axioms do “not have to be re-experienced, not in poetry nor anywhere else except (ideally) in the act of worship,” so “for Christian poets like Dryden and Watts, poetry is distinctly *not* worship, though it may be an adjunct to worship or a component of it” (*The Eighteenth-Century* 32). Hymns are really their own genre, though they can use poetic elements to their advantage. And while hymns may be simple in their nature (discussed more in chapter four), it does not mean that there is no value in studying them rhetorically. After all, if the hymns of Watts and future hymn writers did not affect anyone in any way whatsoever, they would serve no purpose, and they would fall out of use.

Thus far it has been argued that there is value in studying Watts’ hymns, but some may still object to it because Watts’ hymns, like other religious topics, are antiquated. The world has changed much since the time of Watts, and people in the United States do not feel or experience the same situations as citizens of England in the time of Watts. But Davie argues that “the most modern mind, if (perhaps perversely) it chooses to set itself the task, *can* still enter the imaginative world of Watts,” a world of absolute truths, and Davie suggests that a way to accomplish this is to enjoy, as much as possible, the “(aesthetic) pleasures that only the world of the axiomatic can supply” (*The Eighteenth-Century* 38). The barriers can be torn down.

All this, then, means that the question is not, “What is the value of studying hymns?” but, “What can be learned from studying hymns?” In the case of Watts, his “hymns were among the earliest designed for congregational singing,” and “they demonstrate the relationship between metrical psalms and hymns and help us understand

the controversy surrounding the revolutionary departure from English tradition” (Marshall and Todd 10). This movement will be examined in chapter three: “The tension reflected in both the language and content of Watts’s hymns between . . . conventional eighteenth-century values and poetic taste” (Marshall and Todd 10). This study of Watts’ hymns will also reveal the “conviction of human depravity and the appeal of asceticism [that] necessarily encourages us to reconsider the religious and poetic options of the times” (Marshall and Todd 10). Watts’ work differed from the traditional approach to worship, and the work he started with hymn writing continues today. His hymns started the tradition of hymn writing. Davie asserts, “The passing of values judgments is not an unwarranted intrusion on texts from our past; on the contrary, it is what they implicitly demand, and deserve” (*The Eighteenth-Century* 86). With this motivation, let us turn now to an examination of the works of Isaac Watts.

Chapter 2

Critical Theory: New Historicism

The theoretical framework by which Watts' hymns will be examined is New Historicism. "Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture," by Louis A. Montrose, provides the frame of reference from which Watts' hymns will be examined. Although he is dealing specifically with the Renaissance, he demonstrates what New Historicism is and how it works. Furthermore, throughout his essay, he discusses how New Historicism, as he presents it, lends itself to rhetorical analysis; so, while New Historicism is normally considered a literary theory, it can be used effectively as a tool for rhetorical analysis.

Background to New Historicism

Stephen Greenblatt, the most prominent name in New Historicism, admits that the name "New Historicism" was his desperate attempt to formulate a title ("Towards" 1). He writes, "new historicism, as I understand it, does not posit historical processes as unalterable and inexorable, but it does tend to discover limits or constraints upon individual intervention"; thus, actions that are thought to be isolated can actually have an impact ("Stephen Greenblatt" 55-56). Because social and political events and the people who take part in them are so fluid, "there are no guarantees, no absolute, formal assurances that what seems progressive in one set of contingent circumstances will not come to seem reactionary in another" ("Stephen Greenblatt" 56). It is because of this fluidity that New Historicism "rejects the ideal of 'History' as a directly accessible, unitary past, and substitutes for it the conception of 'histories,' an ongoing series of human constructions, each representing the past at particular present moments for

particular present purposes” (Cox and Reynolds 4). New Historicism takes forces, whether they are “social, economic, political, biographical, psychological, sexual, [or] aesthetic” (Cox and Reynolds 3) and examines how they impact texts that are written. All social forces have an impact on texts, and vice versa, so it is possible to interpret a text as it relates to specific social forces that were happening at the time a text was written.

New Historicism was originally “identified with studies in the Renaissance and Romanticism” (Cox and Reynolds 3), and it is in the first of these that Montrose uses New Historicism. Although his work is in New Historicism, “Cultural Poetics” would be a better term to use. He references Greenblatt, who, “in Renaissance literary studies, has himself now abandoned it in favor of ‘Cultural Poetics,’ a term he had used earlier” (Montrose 17). Since New Historicism deals with how social interactions influence texts, it stands to reason that cultural interactions, the way of life of a group of people, also influence texts. Montrose points out that there is a mutual impact between social circumstances and language: “the social is understood to be discursively constructed; and . . . language-use is understood to be always and necessarily dialogical, to be socially and materially determined and constrained” (15).

Louis Montrose’s New Historicism

New Historicism has connections to other literary theories, including deconstruction and Marxism. Marxism, of course, accounts for social and economical structures, and it discusses the complications for those repressed by social structures. Louis Tyson says, in this way, New Historicism often deals with marginalized groups of people, seeking to make their history known (288). New Historicism works well with a study of Isaac Watts’ hymns because he was writing for a group of people who felt

separated from the larger culture. To this discussion of theory, Montrose adds “that ‘theory’ does not reside serenely above ‘ideology’ but rather is mired within it” (16). Within writing there are depictions of the world that shape the discourse of the social realm. Thus, writers and readers partake in the world of writing and the world that writing influences (Montrose 16). “Ideology” has been defined as “the system of ideas, values, and beliefs common to any social group”; however, over time, “ideology” has come to mean, generally speaking, the way in which subjects of the social world are created, recreated, and act within the world (Montrose 16). An understanding of ideology is important when reading texts through a New Historical lens. Montrose makes the point that the one in touch with ideology not only uses “his or her socially constructed subjectivity—but [he or she also] actively instantiates those values, beliefs and experiences” (Montrose 16).

New Historical theory has varied connections with Marxist theory. Edward Pechter finds that Marxist theory looks at “history and contemporary political life as determined, wholly or in essence, by struggle, contestation, power relations” (qtd. in Montrose 17). But while Pechter ties New Historicism to Marxism, “some self-identified Marxist critics are actively indicting New Historicism for its evasion of both political commitment and diachronic analysis” (Montrose 19). In other words, they do not consider it to be authentically historical (Montrose 19). And, the truth is, a critic using New Historicism would say it is not possible to arrive at true history because New Historicism is “a matter of interpretation, not fact” (Tyson 283). Despite the lack of one, authentic history, Montrose firmly states that “though perhaps not yet adequately

articulated or theorized, [New Historicism] is a conviction that formal and historical concerns are not opposed but rather are inseparable” (Montrose 17).

Typically, in the study of English Renaissance literature, Montrose explains rhetorical analysis is combined “with the elaboration of relatively self-contained histories of ‘ideas,’ or of literary genres and” rhetorical conventions (17). Rhetorical analysis is then a natural extension of New Historicism, so it can be appropriately applied rhetorically to the hymns of Isaac Watts. Montrose then declares that there are two main ways of applying New Historicism to Renaissance literary studies:

one comprises those commentaries on political commonplaces in which the dominant ideology of Tudor-Stuart society is misrecognized as . . . stable, coherent, and collective . . . , a picture discovered to be lucidly reproduced in the canonical literary works of the age; and the other [which] seeks to fix the meaning of fictional characters and actions in their reference to specific historical persons and events. (18)

He also points out that New Historicism is “new” because it does not make “distinctions between ‘literature’ and ‘history,’ between ‘text’ and ‘context’” (Montrose 18).

Therefore, when reading any text through the lens of New Historicism, readers are, in effect, reading history through the author’s perspective.

New Historicism is important because it is a study of aspects of literature that cannot be left unaddressed:

Among them, the essential or historical bases upon which ‘literature’ is to be distinguished from other discourses; the possible configurations of relationship between cultural practices and social, political and economic

processes; the consequences of post-structuralist theories of textuality for the practice of an historical or materialist criticism; the means by which subjectivity is socially constituted and constrained; the processes by which they may be contested; the patterns of consonance and contradiction among the values and interests of a given individual, as these are actualized in the shifting conjunctures of various subject positions.

(Montrose 19)

New Historicism concerns itself with the way in which texts affect a specific culture, a specific group of people. Within every culture, there are texts that are unique to that culture and reveal details about it. However, by looking at a culture in history through that culture's texts, it is not possible to get an accurate portrayal of that culture. There are assumptions that the critic who is using New Historicism has to make, including that the endurance of a particular culture "must rather presume to be at least partially consequent upon complex and subtle social processes of preservation and effacement; and secondly, that those textual traces are themselves subject to subsequent textual mediations when they are construed as the 'documents' upon which historians ground their own texts, called 'histories'" (Montrose 20). Hayden White states that using textual histories will never perfectly reveal the history they wish to reveal (51).

New Historicism is not just about the culture examined. New Historicists also bring their own culture into their textual analysis. However they might try to do an effective New Historical analysis, the way they interpret this history is ultimately subject to the critics' own particular ideological lenses. After all, they themselves are influenced by the cultural forces of their time; therefore, the way they read texts is distorted

(Montrose 23). Yet, New Historicism allows for rhetorical analysis that is different from traditional literary analysis (Montrose 23-24). Because critics bring in their own historical circumstances, it is necessary to apply New Historicism to the present as well as to the past. Historical events of the past have led to events in the present, so, not only does the present influence how the critic views the past, but the past also influences how critics view the present. As a result, the texts of a culture and the social forces of a culture are in an ongoing conversation (Montrose 24). This is why, in chapter one, I argue that there is value in studying hymns in today's world and culture. Scholars might not see the value of such an exercise, but, like other rhetorical analyses, it has its place.

New Historicism has its imperfections, which is why Montrose proposes that looking at "histories" is a process. Two forces that are a part of this process are subjectification and structuration. Subjectification is the shaping of people based on their consciousness and the actions they take and people subject to cultural forces beyond their ability to understand. Structuration refers to the structure and the political forces at work within a culture. Structure is continuously evolving through interactions of the people within a culture. The New Historicist, analyzes actions that people take in various places and times in history to show how they reconstruct, or limit the reconstruction of, a culture in response to its social forces (Montrose 21). Isaac Watts' hymns allow for an individual to have a relationship with God, but the hymns limit that relationship to what Dissenters who are influenced by Calvinism believe is necessary in a relationship with God.

Montrose continues to discuss ideology, explaining that "an ideological dominance is qualified by the specific conjunctures of professional, class, and personal interests of individual cultural producers (such as poets and playwrights)" (22), or, in our

case, Isaac Watts. This ideology is also limited by the social position of audiences or readers—in our case, singers in the social structure. Finally, the ideology is limited by the limitations of the culture in which the medium is spread (22). For Watts, these limitations would be the limitations of his Dissenting culture. Some important limitations are the genres and prominent rhetorical figures of the culture (22). This is why, whenever this thesis will quote the Bible, it will use the King James Version—the genre, so to speak—of Watts’ day and not a modern translation because the King James Version is the version that was used in Watts’ Dissenting culture.

Raymond Williams, author of *Marxism and Literature*, discusses the existence, at any moment in history, of values and beliefs that are current and those that are opposed to other values, as well as the values and beliefs that are growing and the exercising of values and beliefs (Montrose 22). With the changes that take place during a time period, values are constantly redefined and constantly defended (Montrose 22). This response to changes in a culture and its ideology invites a study of texts and practices within that culture (Montrose 22-23). This is why New Historicism is perfect for a rhetorical study of Isaac Watts’ hymns. Watts lived in a time when there was an abundance of new practices and beliefs, both religious and political. Some of these enabled him to begin his work as a hymn writer, whereas others, once he began writing hymns, Watts sought to disparage in his hymns. Davie is so passionate about the possibility of doing a rhetorical analysis because of these religious and political changes that he exclaims, “Watts’ career, more than any other, compels [the] recognition” of cultural significance (*The Eighteenth-Century* 29).

When the critic constructs history through New Historicism, comparing texts to the social world, the results can be devastating for the lover of literature, for New Historicism strips literature of its autonomy, its recordings of what are believed to be true events (Montrose 23). Because New Historicism dictates there is not one definite history, it must assume that texts are *relatively* autonomous, rather than autonomous, before it can examine how they have an impact on a specific culture and those who live in it. Montrose asserts, “to speak of the social production of ‘literature’ or of any particular text is to signify not only that it is socially produced but also that it is socially productive—that it is the product of work and that it performs work in the process of being written, enacted, or read” (Montrose 23). New Historicism is not only about how texts shape a culture and those within it; it is also about how the culture shapes texts. It is a continuous cycle. Reading and writing continue throughout history, but they are done during particular moments in time and for particular moments in time (Montrose 23). This is why we can look at how Watts’ hymns are a reaction to what is happening in English culture as well as how they shape the Dissenters’ culture.

New Historicism in Relation to Watts’ Hymns

New Historicism rebels against the traditional view of literary studies, that writing, reading, and teaching are all modes of action (Montrose 26). This is not to say that examining action is without value. After all, if historical figures were passive and inactive, nothing of consequence would have happened. Texts may be studied in and of themselves, but greater value lies in seeing how those texts shaped a culture. The following rhetorical study shows how Watts’ hymns are a reaction to the cultural and religious forces of his time and how his hymns are an encouragement for the culture of

the Dissenters. I have attempted to show how religious culture in England was heavily influenced by Calvin, reflected in the texts known as the psalters and how Watts' hymns are a direct result of the beliefs surrounding the texts of that culture. Watts' hymns are also a product of a belief that arose out of the Protestant Reformation: anyone can have access to God. Watts makes his hymns understandable, even to the most humble of minds. I also show how Watts combats a religion of his day, Deism, through his hymns and how he combats one of the oldest of sins, pride.

Chapter 3

English Psalters: Their Challenges and Help in Leading up to Watts

Texts and culture continuously impact each other in a never-ending cycle. Each affects the other. Before Watts was writing hymns that affected his Dissenting culture, English religious culture as a whole was under the influence of texts called psalters. Both Dissenters and Anglicans used the Psalter—a book containing the psalms from the Old Testament—as their foremost hymnal because they were reluctant to sing any song that came directly from the Bible. According to Benjamin Kolodziej, “all English hymnists subsequent to Watts, owe him for having established hymn-singing as normative” (237). Watts ventured to a place no writer of religious poetry dared to go, taking Dissenters by storm, showing them new and acceptable ways to sing praises to God.

The Reformation and John Calvin’s Teachings

The thought that singing anything that was not a word-for-word translation of the Bible was wrong was a product of the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation gave believers something they did not previously have: the word of God written in their own language. This new blessing was so well received that nothing that could tear God’s word away from them. Therefore, singing directly from the psalms was a natural by-product of not wanting to relinquish the Bible (Escott 67). Besides, if hymns “written by modern human beings can be admitted into the church service, where and what are the criteria for exclusion of liturgical material?” (Arnold 7-8).

Not only did the believers' reaction to the Reformation bring about the use of psalters; the leaders of the Reformation perpetuated the idea as well. Davies reveals that Calvin encouraged his followers in Geneva to use metrical psalmody because he "had used such psalms when in exile at Strasbourg"; thus, in 1539, he published *Aucun Pseaumes et Cantiques mys en Chant* (Watts and Wesley to Maurice 308). Calvin clung to the belief that psalter was "inspired by the Holy Spirit; to depart from it in themes as well as words, except insofar as the exigencies of rhyme and metre dictated, was presumptuous" (Davies, *Watts and Wesley to Maurice* 380). Luther, on the other hand, was "more liberal where music and the arts were concerned, [and] allowed the use of hymns, and gave a lead by writing them" (Escott 67). Harry Escott adds that, at first, England and Scotland both liked Luther's work as a result of Coverdale and the Wedderburns introducing German hymns; however, "neither of these early hymn collections was authorized for ecclesiastical use" (67). Thus, Luther's hymns and Calvin's teachings created, for a while, conflict amongst Christians as to which version of song was acceptable for use in worship: "This seesaw movement was a purely English phenomenon: Scotland under the leadership of [John] Knox adopted Calvin's standards of Church praise" (Escott 67). It is quite possible that it was Calvin's belief in the depravity of man which caused him to disapprove of men writing hymns; if man was a depraved sinner, he could never hope to write praises for God (Arnold 4). Another cause for psalters to be so readily embraced in England was many of the English reformers—Hooper, Horne, Cox, and Traheron—were friends to Swiss reformers, including Calvin (Arnold 7). The influence on the texts of the time did not lie only with the Reformers; there was political involvement in religion as well. Because there was "an anti-Papal

sentiment . . . in England at this time” and some hymns were an important part of Catholicism, King Edward VI banned anything in the Church of England, including hymns, that would cause division amongst members (Arnold 7). Worshippers in England were torn in their preferences of songs; consequently, the various editions of the song book *Old Version*, published between 1561 and 1566, strove to include both paraphrases of Bible passages as well as hymns (Escott 67).

However, Watts had to persuade the strict followers of Calvinism to accept his hymns. In William Romaine’s *Essay on Psalmody*, published in 1775, Romaine, influenced by Calvinism, asks, “Why should Dr. Watts, or any hymn-maker, not only *take precedence of the holy Ghost*, but also thrust him entirely out of the church? Insomuch that the rhymes of a man are now magnified above the word of God” (Romaine qtd. in Arnold 27, italics mine). Calvin’s followers thought the most appropriate course of action was to stick to strict translations of scripture, and although many of Watts’ hymns are clearly influenced by scripture—“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” for example—they are far from English translations of the original languages of the Bible, Hebrew and Greek.

Why Calvin was so firm in his stance is easily tacit. The Reformation created the mindset that anyone could have access to God and understand the Bible. That is why men such as William Tyndale translated the Bible into English (Cairns 321). The Reformation showed people that they no longer needed the Church to tell them God’s will. In England, this barrier was torn down on a political level when Henry VIII removed England from the Pope’s authority, but it was also torn down on the commoner’s level with the writing of the English Bible. People were no longer cut off from God linguistically; they could

read the Bible and find out for themselves. Unfortunately, when Henry VIII became the head of the English Church through the Act of Supremacy in 1534 (Cairns 323), he created a state church with just as tight a grip as the Catholic Church on religious matters. Watts' group of Dissenters moved away from the Church of England, which gave Watts the opportunity to write hymns, a unique form of songs for a different religious culture.

However, the psalters were already an established part of even the Dissenters' worship. Men fought and died to create opportunities to understand the Bible. The idea that anyone, such as Watts, would want to paraphrase or re-work the Psalms was ludicrous. Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology* speaks of the practice of pursuing a less formal rendering of scripture, exclaiming that "such liberties [are] plainly licentious," and that "such anachronistic modernizing, whether covert or declared, is inseparable from translation considered as an imaginative endeavour" (*The Eighteenth-Century* 71). To seek to write anything other than a simple translation of psalms was not only considered by some to be error, it but also a juvenile dream. During this time, a hymn writer could not hope for his or her songs to take hold in churches when the psalters were considered to be backed by the Bible "as both source-book and supreme authority" (Watson 45). What Calvin failed to understand, however, is that although the psalters were in English, they were more poetic and more difficult for the commoner to understand. Thus, while trying to stay true to the word of God, the psalters actually prevented the commoner from having access to God.

Watson comments on the reception and effects of the psalters, noting that the songs contained in the psalters were not only viewed as an expedient aid to worship, but, because they were taken directly from the book of Psalms, they were also revered as the

greatest kind of poetry (45). John Donne went so far as to say that “a better Poet than Virgil” wrote the Psalms (qtd. in Watson 45). This is, perhaps, the best representation of the belief with which Watts has to contend. But the psalters were not highly regarded only because of their standing in the Bible; they were regarded “as the finest compendium of lyric poetry” (Watson 45). In the preface to *Eclogues, Epytaphes, and Sonetes*, published in 1563, Barnaby Googe contends that the Psalms were written in meter (Watson 45), and “George Wither, in the early seventeenth century, was less certain about the exact form, but equally clear that the psalms had been written in some kind of metre” (Watson 45). These two great English poets contended that the psalms were, on some level, poetry, and holy poetry at that. This brought about the belief that converting the Psalms from Hebrew meter into English meter was best because it provided the closest possible translation (Watson 45).

Watts’ Response to the Psalters

The child Watts’ desire for better hymns came from the use of Psalters for singing in worship, whose “translations were not always the smoothest” (Kolodziej 237). Kolodziej quotes the preface to *The Bay Psalm Book*, published in 1640, to illustrate this point:

If therefore the verses are not alwayes so smooth and elegant as some may derive or expect; let them consider that Gods Altar needs not our pollishings. For wee have respected rather a plaine translation, then to smooth our verses with the sweetness of any paraphrase, and soe have attended Conscience rather than Elegance, fidelity rather than poetry, in

translating the Hebrew words into English language, and Davids poetry into English meter. (qtd. in Kolodziej 327)

Benjamin Brawley points out that Watts, of course, does not object to using the Psalms as the base texts from which to sing in worship (70). He does object, however, to using psalters exclusively. The basis for this objection was that singing from the Psalms prevents Dissenters from singing songs related to New Testament stories and practices. This is evident from Watts' very first hymn, "A new Song to the Lamb that was slain." It begins,

BEHOLD the glories of the Lamb
Amidst his Father's throne :
Prepare *new honours* for his name,
And *songs before unknown*. ("Hymn 1" 4: 1-4, italics mine)

It is obvious that Watts felt a need for worship songs to tell about New Testament concepts, which is something worshippers were not getting from the psalters used when Watts was a child. One of Watts' biggest regrets from using only psalters is that it prevents Christians from singing about Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

The significance of this is best illustrated in a comparison of psalters in Watts' day and his revision of them. Tate and Brady's English version of Psalm 97 begins "Jehovah reigns, let all the Earth / In his just Government rejoice (qtd. in Watson 153). Watts, however, changes it to "He reigns ; the Lord, the Savior reigns ; / Praise him in evangelic strains" ("Psalm 97" 4: 1-2).

Another example is Psalm 98. Tate and Brady's version reads,

Let therefore Earth's Inhabitants

Their cheerful Voices raise,
And all with universal Joy
Resound their maker's praise. (qtd. in Watson 153)

Watts, however rewrote it and made it about the birth of Christ:

JOY to the world ; the Lord is come ;
Let earth receive her king ;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing. ("Psalm 98" 4: 1-4)

In his imaginative writing, Watts takes a Psalm from the Old Testament and puts a New Testament application to it, thus making it more suitable for his Dissenting Christians to use in their worship (Watson 153). He did not think Christians should be restricted to the psalters, expounding upon John Patrick's position: "I have been long convinc'd, that one great Occasion of this Evil arises from the Matter and Words to which we confine all our Songs. Some of 'em are almost opposite to the Spirit of the Gospel: Many of them foreign to the State of the New-Testament, and widely different from the present Circumstances of Christians" (qtd. in Brawley 69). He concludes that "our Spirits [are] ruffled before we have time to reflect that this may be sung only as a History of antient Saints" (qtd. in Brawley 70). Indeed, for Christians, the language of the Old Testament is just that—"old" (Marshall and Todd 14). Watts' grief over Christians trying to make the Psalms wholly applicable to themselves cannot be plainer:

by keeping too close to *David* in the House of God, the Vail of *Moses* is thrown over our Hearts. While we are kindling into divine Love by the Meditations of the *loving kindness of God, and the Multitude of his tender*

Mercies, within a few Verses some dreadful Curse against Men is propos'd to our lips . . . which is so contrary to the New Commandment, of *Loving our Enemies*. (qtd. in Brawley 70)

As un-Christ-like as the mentality Watts describes is, it is one that he has to confront. John Hull points out that the Psalms from the Old Testament were at anchor in the hearts of English citizens: “a study of the English Psalter from the middle sixteenth century up to the work of Watts in 1719 reveals the power over the English imagination of the Hebrew kingdom” (62). With this profound influence, backed by Calvin, hymn writers needed to defend not only their hymns, but also the act of hymn writing. Watts argues, “*David* would have thought it very hard to have been confin'd to the Words of *Moses*, and sung nothing else on all his Rejoycing-days but the *Drowning of Pharaoh in the Fifteenth of Exodus*” (qtd. in Marshall and Todd 14). Thus, if the greatest Psalm writer, David, was not limited to certain passages of scripture for source material, then hymn writers should not be restricted to the book of Psalms for their source material (Marshall and Todd 14).

In further defense of hymn writing, some of the songs in the psalters are historical, but beyond that, they are of little value to worshipers. In the preface to *Psalms of David*, Watts said that with all the psalters he encountered, “they all seem to aim at this one point, namely, to make the Hebrew psalmist only speak English, and keep all his own characters still” (*The Psalms of David* 4: 113). While translating the Hebrew verse into English is not without imperfections, changing the voice of the Psalmist is more troubling still, for the occasion for which a psalm was written may not be applicable to an English-speaking Christian Dissenter. Followers of the New Testament need to focus on Christ,

and the only way a Christian using a Psalter could sing about Christ's sacrifice is if he or she is singing a Psalm that is Messianic.² However, of the 150 Psalms, only a few are Messianic ("The Messianic Psalms"). The crucifixion is one of the most well-known New Testament stories, and to be able to sing about it would enable Dissenters to focus more on Christ's sacrifice. If Calvin and others looked closely at the writing of the apostle Paul, they may have found a double meaning in Colossians 2:14, which reads, "[Christ] took it [the Old Testament] out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (*King James Version*). Songs for worship should not be restricted to the book of Psalms; Watts knew this, and he knew the importance of Christians meditating on Christ's death. It makes sense, then, that some of Watts' surviving hymns are "Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed?," "Am I a Soldier of the Cross?," and "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," the last of which is arguably his most popular hymn.

The Benefits of the Psalters

Because of the psalters, Watts had to work much harder to get worshippers to accept his hymns. However, although psalters and hymns are completely different—one is more concerned with Biblical phrasing, the other with Biblical ideas and concepts—both helped "to establish a temper of mind that was to have a profound significance for political events in the seventeenth century" in the ways they influence the hearts of believers (Watson 53). Psalters helped to usher in the age of hymns, occasionally bringing their phrasing to the world of hymns. Some examples include: "From age to age', 'Ye servants of the Lord', [and] 'His mercy faileth never'" (Watson 53). On the other hand, the strong sense of verse format had a more profound effect on hymns than

² As the word suggests, "Messianic" has to do with the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Therefore, Old Testament writings, including some of the Psalms, that talk about the coming Messiah can be referred to as "Messianic."

the surviving phrases. The songs in the psalters “rely heavily of rhyme and on syllabic counting, and [they] accommodate the original sense of the psalm into a simple and singable verse form” (Watson 53). Psalters placed both worshippers and hymn writers into a verse mindset, a mindset that enabled Christians to comprehend more easily the structure of hymns and a mindset that enabled hymn writers, like Watts, to more easily write hymns. In addition, while the psalters were held in high esteem for accurately translating the scriptures, Marshall and Todd point out that they were far from perfect translations; in fact, they were sometimes more concerned with being poetic than accurately translating the scriptures, depending on the church’s adoption or rejection of them (16). Again, this poetic language actually worked against the spirit of the Reformation, making it more difficult for the commoner to understand the message of the Bible. But more than that, “A brief comparison of the language of the Old and New Versions [of the psalters] will yield information about the trend . . . toward more modern, more Christian, more poetic church song” (Marshall and Todd 16). Thus, while the English Christians may not have realized it, their psalters were becoming more like hymns than pure translations of scripture, and the psalters were paving the way for the future hymn and hymnists. These texts helped to place the Dissenters’ culture where it needed to be for Watts to start shaping that culture by writing his own texts, his hymns.

Furthermore, the psalters’ influence reached outside the four walls of the church. Believers did not use them solely for worship; they also used them outside of the worship service to aid with devotional periods (Marshall and Todd 29). This helped the hymn to take root because it “guaranteed a place for poetry in the lives of all believers” (Marshall and Todd 29). By using psalters outside of the church, Christians were perpetuating the

Reformation belief that anyone can have a personal relationship with God. All Watts and other hymn writers needed to do was to demonstrate that hymns, as poetry, are acceptable for service to God (Marshall and Todd 29). Psalters also helped to usher in the age of the English hymn because they instilled the practice of congregational singing (Watson 53). Psalters also “expressed spiritual problems, hope, fears, and individual emotions”—feelings that Watts’ hymns also came to express (Watson 53). Although clinging to the psalters prevented Watts’ hymns from being quickly spread and used, the psalters themselves cultivated worshipers’ minds, eventually making them ready to receive the hymn. In the psalters, there is “not only the birth of a new and recognizable rhetoric, but also the beginnings of the art form that we later recognize as hymnody” (Watson 53). Watts holds nothing against the psalms. In fact, he converts several of the psalms to hymns. The key is that he causes others to accept a more poetic form that is less concerned with translating Hebrew into English.

In his hymns, Watts is not trying to assert his power over the organization of the church or even over the psalters. He desires a better way to worship, a way that is more fitting to Dissenting Christians, followers of the New Testament, not of the Old Testament and its Psalms. By writing English hymns, Watts strengthens the fellowship among English speaking Christians, creating a circumstance that “whenever and wherever a Christian hymn is sung throughout the English-speaking world with gladness and sincerity . . . it is humanly and historically speaking his triumph that we are celebrating” (Escott 131). In a broad sense, this is what the rhetoric of Watts’ hymns accomplishes—the unity of a body of believers that exists separated from the established Church. But, of course, each hymn, as Escott explains, has humane and historic

ramifications. Perhaps the greatest historical ramification is that Watts helps usher in a new age of hymns where, once, only psalters were allowed. Some of Watts' hymns are sparked by events in Watts' time, and others remind worshippers of the human and the spiritual qualities that they should possess.

Chapter 4

Language for the Common Man and Dramatization in Hymns and Inward Focus

Encouraged

The psalters greatly influenced the culture in which Watts wrote. Calvin encouraged the use of psalters for their closeness to the original message of the Bible. However, he failed to see that their poetic language made it more difficult for the common man to comprehend their message. Watts' hymns amend this problem. His success as a hymn writer can be attributed to the messages of his hymns; he writes in a way that even the commoner can understand. To write poetry with a simple approach to language might at first glance appear to be the opposite of successful. In fact, Davie points out that Watts' way of speaking so straightforward has lead some readers to dismiss his work as dull and displeasing (*The Eighteenth-Century* 31). Yet, his straightforward messages in hymns like "I'm not Ashamed to Own My Lord" and "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" still survive, and the latter of these two hymns is arguably Watts' most popular. Watson affirms that Watts' hymns are easily recognized because "they are so direct, and so unwilling to be deflected from their subject" (143), and Wordsworth declared, "they keep their eye on the object and are not deflected" (Watson 143). Watts thinks "a wise and judicious Writer directs his Expression generally toward his designed End . . . he treats of it distinctly and professedly . . ., in mystical or metaphorical Terms . . ., in plain and literal . . ., in an oratorical, affecting or persuasive Way, or a doctrinal, instructive Way" (qtd. in Bishop 27). These statements are especially true of "When I Survey." Watson observes that this hymn is a "part of a tradition which was very old, but which was constantly being modified to suit the historical

circumstances. . . . Watts's hymn is addressed to all, and is closer to Herbert and the medieval tradition, especially in its use of visual techniques" (164). Dissenters in Watts' time and believers today look at the cross at the beginning of the song and then are driven to reconsider their values throughout the rest of the hymn. Watts is a preacher as well as a hymn writer, so he knows the importance of effectively communicating to an audience with his rhetoric.

Language Anyone Could Understand

To the educated reader of Tennyson and Homer, Watts may be unchallenging, but that does not mean Watts is an incompetent writer; in fact, there is evidence to the contrary. He wrote much about the art of writing.³ Although Watts possessed the capability to write finer hymns, he tried to write them so that even a commoner could comprehend their meaning, just like Tyndale published the English Bible so every Englishman could understand it. However, Watts did so not without difficulty. He admitted, "It was hard to restrain my verse always within the bounds of my design; it was hard to sink every line to the level of a whole congregation, and yet to keep it above contempt" (qtd. in *Gathered Church* 24). Watts explained further, "I have aimed at ease of numbers and smoothness of sound, and endeavoured to make the Sense plain and obvious. If the verse appears so gentle and flowing as to incur the censure of feebleness, I may honestly affirm, that sometimes it cost me labour to make it so" (*Hymns and Spiritual Songs* 4: 255). Watts had great experience, and he knew the "importance of

³For more on this see Isaac Watts. *The Works of the Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts D.D., Containing, besides His Sermons and Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects, Several Additional Pieces, Selected from His Manuscripts by the Rev. Dr. Jennings and the Rev. Dr. Doddridge, in 1753: to Which Are Prefixed Memoirs of the Life of the Author, Compiled by the Rev. George Burder.* Ed. George Burder. Vol. 4. London: J. Barfield, 1810. Print. 6 vols.

rhetorical and philological principles,” which is evident from his revisions where he makes spelling, capitalization, and punctuation changes (Bishop 25).

According to Benjamin Brawley, Watts “felt that he had the strength of a religious poet and might well address critical minds, [but] he also had deep sympathy with the plain people, and he did not intend to pitch his work on too high a plane for the ordinary intellect” (78). Watts was writing after England had been through tremendous religious reform. England worked her way out from under the heel of Catholicism. The common man no longer needed a priest to tell him what the Bible said. As the Bible became increasingly available, understanding of the scriptures developed. Thus, anyone could have a relationship with God. Watts’ hymns help encourage the common man’s comprehension of the Bible. Watts’ rhetorical situation required writing so that the poorest Dissenter could understand and benefit from his message; therefore, his clear, unwavering style was the logical choice. Clark finds that Watts’ “words and sentiments” speak to all believers because he speaks in “the universal language of the heart”; “He wrote the profoundest truths . . . but he used such clarity of expression that the humblest traveler along life’s highway hears and understands the call to higher things” (71). In “When I Survey,” this is best illustrated in Watts’ metaphors, particularly the metaphor of blood. The word “blood” appears only once in the hymn, in the phrase, “I sacrifice them to his blood” (“Hymn 7” 4: 8). According to 1 John 1:7, “the blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanseth us from all sin” (*King James Version*), so both the blood and what it represents are already important to Watts’ audience. As such, Watts actually continues to mention the blood of Christ throughout the hymn, but he does so poetically, yet in a way that anyone can understand. In the third stanza he urges, “See from his head, his hands, his

feet, / Sorrow and love flow mingled down” (“Hymn 7” 4: 9-10). Just as the “love,” a word often associated with happiness, and “sorrow” is a combination that does not quite work, so is the Dissenter’s attitude toward the cross: “It is a very complex mixture of prohibition and permission—‘God forbid that I should glory, save’” (Watson 165). In the final stanza, Watts uses the word “present”: “Were the whole realm of nature mine / That were a present far too small” (“Hymn 7” 4: 17-18). Watson declares this is a “deliberate refusal to give way to high emotional impulses, the grave and serious employment of simple language” (169). The reason for plain language here is understatement because the death of the Lord demands something colossal (Watson 169). Dissenters are able to grasp the concept of a present, but they also recognize that the occasion calls for a greater gift: “my soul, my life, my all” (“Hymn 7” 4: 20).

Watts explains his reasoning for writing with clarity is because “some persons have made themselves rich in words, and learned in their own esteem ; whereas in reality their understandings have been poor, and they knew nothing” (*Logick* 5: 46). Even those who are learned can benefit from a plain message. However, it is possible to overemphasize the clarity of Watts’ hymns. Watson contends, “an analysis of Watts’s hymns that stresses their clarity can easily prejudice a full understanding of his art, because it ignores the radical, experimental, and adventurous side of his work” (143). So while it is notable that Watts can simplify complex ideas and make them effectual for his congregation’s offering up of praise, his hymns have other significance: “At the centre of Watts’s assurance and praise is the grace of God and person of Christ, and his redemptive action: ‘Christ and his cross is all our theme’” (Watson 152). Watts’ simplicity is

important for understanding his rhetorical situation, but we must now examine his more creative side, a side that is not damaged through his simple and straightforward approach.

Dramatizing Hymns

Watts knows the power of rhetoric, and how to use it effectively. Through his hymns, he seeks to bring forth this truth with clarity and to take away “obscure and confused ideas” (Watson 138). His hymns are “not difficult or spectacularly metaphorical so much as attentive to the need to find the correct word ‘in the discourse in which it stands’ without destroying the rhyme or the rhythm” (Watson 139). He lifts the fog, making the image of his hymns clear. Watson explains, “[Watts’ hymns] enact a drama in which the soul, if it could see God or heaven clearly, would at once become ordered, secure, settled” (138). This is one of Watts’ more experimental sides, enacting drama through poetry; however, the end result is that Dissenters have a better view of God, which helps them to be more at rest as they live their lives in service to the Lord.

Marshall and Todd state that Watts appreciated dramatic literature, which might seem ironic, considering the fact that “the Puritans had closed the theaters in the preceding century and Watts had written of the ‘open War’ between stage and pulpit” (34). In spite of this, Watts is able to take inspiration from the stage and transform his hymns. Even if Watts had not written some of his hymns in this way, hymns already share several similarities with plays: they depend on public approval to keep them alive, they have to keep a large audience enthralled, and they depend on factors beyond their own text, music in particular (Marshall and Todd 34).

Watts’ “God the Thunderer” showcases the effectiveness of “staging” a hymn:

His sounding chariot shakes the sky,

He makes the clouds his throne;
There all his stores of light'ning lie,
Till vengeance dart them down.
His nostrils breathe out fiery streams,
And from his awful tongue
A sovereign voice divides the flames,
And thunder roars along. (“Hymn 62” 4: 5-12)

Of course, the main result of drama is entertainment, and this hymn does entertain, no doubt keeping audiences captivated, but the most notable accomplishment of this hymn is that it “stocked the minds of the singers with memorable pictures” (Marshall and Todd 35). Watts uses three basic types of scenes as locations for the plays acted out in his hymns: depictions of God and what happens in heaven, stories from the Bible, and characteristics of the way Christians respond to the world (Marshall and Todd 35). The latter two both happen in “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” where there is a depiction of Christ on the cross, followed by a depiction of how Dissenters are to respond to the picture of Christ on the cross. A depiction of God occurs in hymn 26. The second and third stanzas read:

Infinite leagues beyond the sky
The great Eternal reigns alone,
Where neither wings nor soul can fly,
Nor angels climb the topless throne.
The Lord of glory builds his seat
Of gems insufferably bright,

And lays beneath his sacred feet

Substantial beams of gloomy night. (4: 5-12)

When singing these stanzas, Dissenters' minds would be filled with an awesome image of God in heaven, which they would not soon forget.

Images of God in heaven are pleasant ones, but Watts' dramatization does not stop there. Watts' hymns also help Dissenters to remember the grotesque scene of Christ's death on the cross. Hymn 21 acts out the scene of the crucifixion with dialogue for Christ. To write unique words for Christ clearly protests against Calvin's belief that only scripture may be sung. Nevertheless, Watts believed in his ability to aid Dissenters in their worship, and he boldly wrote words for Jesus (Marshall and Todd 38). Stanza nine of hymn 21 showcases this dialogue:

'But while I bled and groane'd, and dy'd,

'I ruin'd Satan's throne,

'High on my cross I hung, and spy'd

'The monster tumbling down. ("Hymn 21" 4: 33-36)

The verbs of this stanza (and of the entire hymn) are very graphic. In this stanza alone are terrible verbs: "bled," "groan'd," "dy'd," and "hung." But hymn 19 is even more graphic:

He spoke, and straight our hearts and brains

In all their motions rose ;

' Let blood,' said he, ' flow round the veins,'

And round the veins it flows. ("Hymn 19" 4: 17-20)

Singing about brains, veins, hearts, and blood creates memorable visions of the cross for Dissenters to contemplate.

The grotesque is also in Watts' "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." With the images it reenacts for its singers, it is easily remembered. Davie asserts that "it is precisely that atrociousness that grips us and spellbinds us – a less atrocious subject would not hold our attention so rapt" (*The Eighteenth-Century* 42). Marshall and Todd add that "One might be inclined to argue that the flowing wounds in the third stanza and the robe of crimson in the fourth are not meant to be visualized . . . , not intended to startle or to bother the mind's eye. The injunction to 'See' and the vividly pictorial quality of Watts's other hymns indicate the contrary" (45). These manifestations are designed to be viewed, but for those with weaker stomachs, there is some relief in the first line of the hymn. There is significance in that the first verb in the hymn is "Survey." Davie points out that "The word is 'survey'"; Watts could choose from many other words about looking, but he does not choose "'behold' nor 'discern', no 'observe' nor 'perceive'" (*The Eighteenth-Century* 39). *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines "survey" as "To look at from, or as from, a height or commanding position; to take a broad, general or comprehensive view of; to view or examine in its whole extent" and "To take a comprehensive mental view of; to consider or contemplate as a whole" ("Survey"). It has been a common practice for many hymnals to omit the fourth stanza of "When I Survey." This tradition started with George Whitefield's hymnal published in 1757 ("Baroque" 333). The complete fourth stanza reads,

His dying crimson, like a robe
 Spreads o'er his body on the tree,
 Then I am dead to all the globe,
 And all the globe is dead to me. ("Hymn 7" 4: 13-16)

This description is a little too graphic for some worshipers, and no doubt why Whitefield omitted the stanza. The social preference of his day created a new hymn that continues to impact worshippers differently than Watts' original. However, Davie suggests that if worshippers understood the word "survey" in the first line according to the definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, they would realize that the word prevents getting uncomfortably close to the gory scene of the cross (*The Eighteenth-Century* 40). Further distance from the grotesque is created in the words "whole realm of nature," as singers back away to take in an even larger view (Watson 168-169). It is from a general view of the crucifixion, where a worshipper—and one of Watts' Dissenters—" (who is now in the place of a fellow-onlooker) . . . discovers (literally and metaphorically) 'where he stands'"; "He is a watcher, but at the same time a feeling participant, given to exclaim and question: 'Did e're such love and sorrow meet? / Or thorns compose so rich a crown?'" (Watson 162). Thus, Dissenters would come to have the feeling they were to have all along: "Love so amazing, so divine / Demands my soul, my life, my all" ("Hymn 7" 4: 19-20).

Devotion to the Lord and Watts' Use of First Person

Watts' use of drama not only fixes images in worshippers' minds; it also helps worshippers continue in their increased devotion to God through simple language and through beginning the hymns with basic truths (Marshall and Todd 44). The hymns then help Dissenters to "dig deeper" and search out the full meaning of that truth in three main ways that are very similar to the types of scenes acted out in Watts' dramas: "vignettes of heaven, biblical events, or familiar experiences" (Marshall and Todd 44). Hymn 156 begins with a fact about Satan: "The Serpent takes a thousand Forms / To cheat our Souls

to Death” (4: 3-4). Then, moving from this statement, Dissenters are enthralled when they see themselves in the fourth and fifth stanzas: “[Satan] bids young sinners” and “[Satan] tells the aged” (“Hymn 156” 4: 13, 17). But, despite Satan’s efforts to make mankind sin, God conquers in the last stanza in a kind of vision of heavenly events:

Almighty God, cut short [Satan’s] power,
Let him in darkness dwell ;
And, that he vex the earth no more,
Confine him down to hell. (“Hymn 156” 4: 25-28)

When singers reach the final stanza, they are reminded that there is victory in the Lord. Therefore, increased devotion to God is shown to be important because it is God who wins.

Any Christian can easily forget the necessity of remaining devoted to God. The apostle Paul observed that the Galatians quickly forgot their devotion (Gal. 1:6, *King James Version*). Watts’ hymns helped prevent Dissenters from forgetting their devotion to God by making scenes and thoughts from the Bible real. Watts made “visible and immediate what through time or distance or distraction may have become obscured” (Marshall and Todd 56). Hence, through his clear and dramatic language, Dissenters could see God in heaven or Christ on the cross; these images then created “in the singers the pious passions of love, fear, hope, desire, sorrow, wonder, and joy,” in a way that the English layman could understand (Marshall and Todd 56).

In addition to creating vivid images in Dissenters’ minds, Watts’ hymns also helped Dissenters with their unique use of first person, personal addresses to God. Benjamin Kolodziej shows that addressing God in this personal way is “only *natural*”

because Watts' hymns "are often an individual's supplication to God, or perhaps an observation of God's mighty acts" (239). This is best illustrated in Watts' hymn, "I Sing the Mighty Power of God." The hymn begins,

I sing th' almighty power of God,
That made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad,
And built the lofty skies ("Song 2" 4: 1-4);

it then moves to,

Lord, how Thy wonders are display'd
Where'er I turn my eye !
If I survey the ground I tread
Or gaze upon the sky ! ("Song 2" 4: 13-16);

and begins to close with,

Creatures (as num'rous as they be)
Are subject to thy care ;
There's not a place where we can flee,
But God is present there. ("Song 2" 4: 21-24)

This unashamed addressing of God is a result of mankind marveling at God's creation, and, with the use of first person, the hymn helps Dissenters to have a closer, more devoted relationship with God.

Later, John Wesley revised Watts' hymns, removing expressions of endearment such as "Dear" used to address God. Wesley did this for the sake of formality, but, in so doing, he indirectly demonstrates the uniqueness of Watts' style (Kolodziej 239). As

those in Watts' congregation increased in their understanding of the importance of knowing God, it was natural for Watts to take "a more 'subjective' approach to hymnody" (Kolodziej 239). This is why he uses words like "I," "me," and "my" in his hymns (Kolodziej 239). Of course, not all of Watts' hymns are in first person; there are many that are in third. Kolodziej points out that "This is consistent with his more 'humanistic' or 'sociable' view of hymnody being humanity's expression of faith toward God" (240). However, many of Watts' hymns are not about responding to God; instead, "They are confessions of faith to each other" (Kolodziej 240). This is another reason why Watts' hymns have a special use of first person, as seen in phrases like, "Were the whole realm of nature mine" ("Hymn 7" 4: 17) and, "Our God, our help in ages past, / Our hope for years to come" ("Psalm 90" 4: 1-2). These words encourage Dissenters to build up each other's faith through a deeper understanding and appreciation of God. Dissenters' thoughts are transferred away from themselves to their place in the world, relating to God and fellow man. Hymns like "I Sing the Mighty Power" and "When I Survey" start off personally, but, in the end, turn Dissenters' thoughts toward ordeals far greater than themselves (Kolodziej 241):

Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were a present far too small ;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all. ("Hymn 7" 4: 17-20)

Though some of Watts' hymns cause Dissenters to think beyond themselves, some of Watts' other hymns cause Dissenters to think inward. Marshall and Todd find that Watts' hymns bring out the feelings of love, fear, hope, desire, sorrow, wonder, and

joy in their singers (56). This speaks of Watts' "strong emphasis on the inwardness of religious experience," specifically a focus on passion, which has a strong bond with religion (Marshall and Todd 58). In "A Serious Address to the People," Section III, "The Advantages of Protestant Dissenters in Matters of Religion," Watts proclaims to the Dissenters, "*You are not in so much danger of taking up with the outward forms of religion, instead of the inward power and more spiritual parts of it*" ("Serious Address" 3:53). Some of his hymns cause Dissenters to turn inward, using their passions to drive them, so it appears that Watts had great faith in the ability of passion to guide people to a deeper understanding of their faith (Marshall and Todd 58).

Devotional Hymns

Watts' hymns help Dissenters stay devoted to God, reminding Dissenters that they are to be dedicated to Him. However, Watts' hymns also act as devotionals, or sermonettes. Some of them just speak of God's presence and of what it means to be a Christian, without overtly compelling a closer relationship with God. Hymn 26 is a good example of this. This hymn focuses on the greatness of God, though it never mentions a personal relationship with Him. In fact, a close relationship appears nigh impossible; the second line confesses, "We can't behold thy bright abode" ("Hymn 26" 4: 2). This appears to be Watts' Calvinism—which we will examine momentarily—and its doctrine of the depravity of man creeping through. Yet, for Dissenters, the hymn encourages thinking about God; and, by the end of the hymn, Dissenters are made to adore the Lord in the line "Yet we adore, and yet we love" ("Hymn 26" 4: 16). Marshall and Todd state that the hymn accomplishes this by "transcending the singers' inability to see (blindness

and vision taken as the central metaphors of the hymn), by means of detailed vision of God in heaven” (37). Once again, Watts’ details do all the work.

However, common experience, more so than pictures of heaven or Bible stories, is more suitable for a devotional hymn (Marshall and Todd 40). After all, it was through parables, common everyday stories, that Jesus taught many of His lessons. He explains in Matthew 13:14 that He did this because there were those who although “seeing . . . shall see, and shall not perceive” (*King James Version*). Watts’ hymns help people to see what they could not otherwise see. For example, hymn 26 starts in a state of blindness, but ends in a clear picture of God.

The use of human experience is a feature of Watts’ “violent” hymns as well as his ascetic hymns (Marshall and Todd 49). Examples of this are hymn 18 and “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past.” Hymn 18 is a “violent” hymn about the body of Christ. The fourth stanza reads,

Carnal provisions can at best
But cheer the heart or warm the head,
But the rich cordial that we taste
Gives life eternal to the dead. (“Hymn 18” 4: 13-16)

Stanza six of “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past” proclaims,

The busy tribes of flesh and blood,
With all their lives and cares,
Are carried downwards by the flood,
And lost in following years. (“Psalm 90” 4: 21-24)

Both of these human experiences bring about greater comprehension and appreciation for their topics. Hymn 18 creates a deeper appreciation for Christ's sacrifice and the memorial of the Lord's Supper. Marshall and Todd reveal that in these ascetic hymns "the pleasures and pains of common life are recalled for purposes of comparison and contrast" (49). In "Our God, Our Help in Ages Past," Dissenters are reminded of the insignificance of everyday trifles in comparison to the glory of God.

These hymns, through their use of human experience, create for Dissenters a private focus that "is generalized by virtue of its collective expression, and the singers practice parallel inward turnings" (Marshall and Todd 49). Before Watts, the Protestant Reformation was a time when people were in a desperate search for God. Watts' hymns help Dissenters find God by "relating him to human life, a solution with implications for our understanding of devotional attitude in Watts's other hymns" (Marshall and Todd 49). When Watts had several of his hymns published, he said of them, "The Reason that sent these out first, and divided them from their Fellows, is, that in most of These there are some Expressions which are not suited to the plainest Capacities, and differ too much from the usual Methods of Speech in which Holy Things are propos'd to the general Part of Mankind" (qtd. in Escott 37). Watts tried to create something for worship that would help people find God.

Devotionals, or sermonettes, are helpful to Christians because they cause them to look inward and reevaluate how they are doing in their service to God. Watts' hymns, through the lens of Calvinism, create this inward looking. At first, this seems ironic, considering that Calvin himself and Reformed churches were opposed to hymns, arguing that "Christian song must confine itself to biblical texts, the proper piety of which was

guaranteed by divine revelation” (Marshall and Todd 28). However, after hymns became accepted for congregational use, they could be used to speak Calvinistic doctrine; and we have just seen how Watts’ hymn 26 does this in the line, “We can’t behold thy bright abode” (4: 2), communicating a “common sense of inferiority and distance from God,” otherwise known as Calvinism’s total depravity (Marshall and Todd 37).

In Watts’ time, asceticism was a means through which some sought to decrease the gap between themselves and God that was the result of man’s depraved state. However, with the rise of Protestantism, shutting oneself inside a monastery was no longer considered a viable option. Furthermore, the idea of forsaking any display of passion—a practice which Watts’ hymns reject, as seen in their pouring out of emotions—was no longer accepted by the English. Since abandoning society to connect with God was not an option, “Watts proposed an alternative retreat from the world, into the self, where we find the God and heaven of the mind.” The usefulness of getting worshippers to look inward to themselves is that their “feelings . . . become the raw material of faith”; then, the expression of those feelings “in song [is] a useful exercise toward growth in faith” (Marshall and Todd 52). Because Calvinism asserts man is separated from God, looking inward becomes a necessity (Marshall and Todd 52). “When I Survey” “is in certain ways an exploration of the same theme of the self: it begins in apparent self-sufficiency and ends in a recognition of the need for surrender,” finding real sufficiency in God (Watson 161). Watts’ devotional hymns were very practical, and a reviewer praised Watts’ work, maintaining that “it needed the genius of a Milton to adopt the cant of Calvinism, and yet maintain the dignity of poetry” (qtd. in Arnold 75).

Watts' success as a hymn writer rests on the fact that anyone can understand his words. However, understanding does not benefit if there is no remembrance. Watts' clear language enacting scenes from the Bible, especially the crucifixion, and scenes from heaven, encourages a deeper understanding and appreciation of God, His word, and what He has done. Yet, despite these representations of God, Watts' Calvinistic beliefs make separation from God a harsh reality. To minimize this separation and increase dedication to God and strengthen the Dissenters' relationship with Him, Watts' hymns not only lead Dissenters to wonder at God's glory, but also cause Dissenters to look into themselves, in spite of their sin, and discover God's grace in their hearts. The result is a faith that is real and, therefore, a devotion to God that is real.

Chapter 5

Deism and Dissenters and the Puritans

In the centuries prior to Watts were many revolutionary scientific discoveries. Nicholas Copernicus and Galileo Galilei showed that the sun was actually the center of the solar system, and later, Isaac Newton formulated the laws of gravity. This was the age of discovery of natural laws in which “The principle of natural laws discovered by reason were applied to many other areas of knowledge, such as political science, economics, and religion” (377). Furthermore, trading with different cultures caused people to compare other religions to Christianity, where, finding “similarities in principles,” they began “to wonder whether there was a basic natural religion that all men had apart from the Bible” (Cairns 377). Eventually, this curiosity and the scientific discoveries led people to Deism, “a religion both natural and scientific” (Cairns 377). It was also supported by the philosophy of René Descartes, who “believed that by reason alone he could accept the existence of God and the soul” (Cairns 378). The shift in this way of thinking resulted in “the idea of the omnipotence of the state because men such as Rousseau insisted that the state was of natural origin. The state originated, so the argument went, in a social compact among sovereign people who chose their rulers” (Cairns 380). Deism caused religious people to place more faith in men than they did in God. It was the belief that “God left His creation to operate under natural laws,” thus creating no need for the Bible (Cairns 378). Deism carried the spirit of the Reformation, that anyone can have access to God; however, this access came through reason, not through the Bible. Brawley adds, “A spirit of self-interest pervaded both church and state, and principle was subordinated to expediency” (67). The time of the Puritans had ended, and, with all the religious reform

that had taken place, religious people became complacent, which allowed them to be carried away by the doctrine of Deism (Brawley 67). In response, Watts' hymns (and some of his sermons) try to get people to abandon their trust in nature and in man, and, instead, put their trust back in God.

Watts' father was imprisoned for his religious beliefs when Watts was an infant, so Watts grew up very familiar with the concept of persecution (Davie, *The Eighteenth-Century* 77). This could be why he was so influenced by the songs of the Puritans. As Watts grew, however, he was in "the age of philosophical and religious thought which was dominated by Newton and Locke" (Watson 133). Watts had a great appreciation for science and nature, which is clear from his hymns. Watts followed the work of many men who were making scientific discoveries in his day, including Robert Boyle, John Ray, Henry More, John Howe, Archbishop James Usher of Armagh, and Gilbert Burnet (Watson 134). Watts loved the beauty of the world God created, and his love for it was a direct result of reading the works of men such as John Ray (Watson 134).

However, despite his love for nature, Watts knew that men's reasoning, which Deism promoted, had its limitations. According to Watts, Deism was not completely destructive because Deism is knowing God by knowing nature, and once a person knows God, he or she will come to Christianity ("Caveat against Infidelity" 4: 75). The problem is that Deism glorifies man's reason, making it god-like. Christianity condemns this, decreeing that "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (*King James Version*, Prov. 14:12). As a Calvinistic Dissenter, Watts believed in the depravity of man, that there is nothing he can do to save himself. Deism sprang out of a time of many new religious ideas, so it would have been difficult for

religious individuals to know what was actually Truth (Watson 134). In his sermon, “A Rational Defence of the Gospel: Or, Courage in Professing Christianity,” Watts asserts to his congregation, “The light of nature and reason is a poor dark bewildered thing, if it hath no commerce or communication with persons who have been favoured with divine revelation” (“Sermon XVI” 1: 178). The intent of Watts’ rhetoric, both sermons and hymns, is to get Dissenters to see the dangers of Deism.

Watts’ Sermon 45, “The Knowledge of God by the Light of Nature, Together with the Uses of It, and Its Defects,” discusses the benefits of Deism, including knowing God, praising the beauty of His creation, and understanding how man, as a part of the creation, is supposed to respond to God. However, Christianity allows for all of these, some of which Watts does in his hymns. In Watts’ own words, one of the greatest dangers of Deism is that “it gives but feeble influences to repentance and holiness, and very doubtful and uncomfortable ground for a sure and satisfying hope to rest upon” (“Sermon XLV” 1: 506). Watts found Deism not to be an assuring faith, yet he appreciated the Deists’ application of reason to faith because Watts did not see Christianity as a faith without logic or reason. In his mind, Deists just needed grace, and he supposed that the reason some Deists rejected Christianity is because of the ruin man’s reasoning brought upon the church (“Sermon LIII” 1: 583). In professing this, Watts admits that some aspects of religion cannot be explained, but he asserts his position that just as some parts of nature have not been fully revealed, so some parts of religion that have not been fully revealed. He is, however, of the opinion that even if man knew all of nature, he still would not be able to know all about God (Watson 135). This is because if man knows everything about God, it is implied that he has come to this knowledge

through his own reason and intellect (“Sermon XV” 1: 167). However, according to Calvinism, man’s reason and intellect cannot be good because man himself is sinful.

Because Watts believed that reason has a place in religion—just not that it is all-powerful—his hymns encourage Dissenters in the idea that reason and faith can go together in a way that is still the Truth. His hymns commemorate “the glory of God in the created world, but [they do] not stop there, because [they insist] on the importance of revealed religion and on the saving grace of Jesus Christ” (Watson 135). As Watts was creating a new genre to praise God, his writings focused on Jesus, which the Psalters were never able to do. The third book in Watts’ *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* series, for instance, is solely reserved for hymns “Prepared for the Lord’s Supper” (Watson 136).

Watts responded to Deism in hymn 26. Deism sought to provide access to a distant God through nature, but this hymn, Calvinistic in nature, acknowledges separation from God (Marshall and Todd 37):

Lord, we are blind, we mortals blind,
We can’t behold thy bright abode ;
O ’tis beyond a creature-mind
To glance a thought half way to God. (“Hymn 26” 4: 1-4)

However, the hymn does not leave believers in this state, cut off from God. The last stanza of the hymn replies,

Yet, glorious Lord, thy gracious eyes
Look thro’, and cheer us from above ;
Beyond our praise thy grandeur flies,
Yet we adore, and yet we love. (“Hymn 26” 4: 13-16)

According to Davie, Watts' view is that "it is when our minds are 'overmatched', that we can only *adore* (as angels do)" (*The Eighteenth-Century* 35). The second stanza of the hymn explains that

The great Eternal reigns alone,
Where neither wings nor souls can fly,
Nor Angels climb the topless throne. ("Hymn 26" 4: 6-8)

Even the angels are incapable of knowing God entirely, so believers cannot hope to know God entirely. As a result, believers do not adore "God's goodness nor His power, not His mercy nor His justice, but His Glory – which brings together all His other attributes in a combination we can apprehend but not explain" (*The Eighteenth-Century* 35). The hymn shows Dissenters that reason and logic have their place: the logical course of action is to be in awe of God's glory. Ultimately, it is not within man to find God; God finds man, expressed in the words "glorious Lord, thy gracious eyes / Look through and cheer us from above" ("Hymn 26" 4: 13-14). This is the grace that Deists need but are unaware exists.

Another hymn, "I Sing the Mighty Power of God," combats Deism; the hymn looks to nature, but then praises God rather than glorifying nature as a means of knowing God. The hymn begins,

I sing th' almighty power of God,
That made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad,
And built the lofty skies. ("Song 2" 4: 1-4)

The fourth stanza reads,

Lord, how Thy wonders are display'd
Where'er I turn my eye !
If I survey the ground I tread
Or gaze upon the sky ! ("Song 2" 4: 13-16)

Then, the hymn reaches a strong conclusion:

There's not a plant or flower below,
But makes Thy glories known, . . .
Creatures (as num'rous as they be)
Are subject to thy care ;
There's not a place where we can flee,
But God is present there. ("Song 2" 4: 17-18, 21-24)

All of the aspects of nature are turned around to praising the Creator. The hymn is not about finding God through nature, but already knowing He is there to praise for the world He has made.

Both Hymn 26 and "I Sing the Mighty Power of God" are very personal hymns. The former incorporates the first person plural, and the latter the first person singular. These hymns encourage a looking inward into man, but not in the same way Deism does. Deism promoted the innate goodness of man (Cairns 380), but these hymns encourage Dissenters to be humble in their small place in the world of the Creator. The frailty of nature to provide an understanding of and access to God is best summed up in the closing lines of "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross": "Were the whole realm of nature mine / That were a present far too small" ("Hymn 7" 4: 17-18). There can be no doubt for

Dissenters: even a full understanding of reason and nature cannot be enough to truly know the Lord.

Scientific Discoveries

The previous chapter showed how some of Watts' hymns enact a drama to help the Dissenters focus on images of Biblical stories and of heaven. While Deism was a result of new scientific discoveries, Watts' hymns also show the influence of scientific understanding, particularly related to the human body. The previous chapter notes how Watts' hymns shock Dissenters with images that they will remember. Because of the scientific discoveries of the day, some of Watts' hymns about the crucifixion contain shocking images.

In 1616, William Harvey discovered blood circulation ("William Harvey"), and its impact on Watts is all too obvious. Hymn 19 is somewhat grotesque:

He spoke, and straight our hearts and brains

In all their motions rose ;

' Let blood,' said he, ' flow round the veins,'

And round the veins it flows. ("Hymn 19" 4: 17-20)

The fifth stanza of "Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed?" is less intimidating, but it also hints at the flowing of blood:

Thus might I hide my blushing face

While his dear cross appears,

Dissolve my heart in thankfulness,

And melt my eyes to tears. ("Hymn 9" 4: 17-20)

The content of these hymns is somewhat alarming, discussing the workings of brains, veins, and blood, yet their impact on Dissenters is helpful because the hymns remind Dissenters of the cross of Christ and of how they ought to respond to it.

Puritan Influence

The previous chapter also discussed how some of Watts' hymns have a devotional aspect that encourages Dissenters to look inward, which is Calvinistic in origin, but his process of turning inward also has roots in Puritan hymns of the seventeenth century that encouraged Puritans to find a close relationship with God. When addressing his Dissenting group, Watts even refers to the Puritans as "Our ancestors, the puritans and nonconformists" ("Serious Address" 3: 77). Watson asserts that Puritan hymns "are at their finest when they are the hymns of the inner self," so there is a clear influence on Watts' hymns from those of the Puritans (131). Puritan hymns are also about the right "of pilgrimage, tried and tested on the journey by suffering and deprivation" (Watson 131). These types of hymns are concerned "with the individual and with the religious society, but above all with the individual and the grace of God" (Watson 132). This influence is seen in Watts' "Come We That Love the Lord," also known as "Marching to Zion." The last stanza reads:

Then let our songs abound,
And every tear be dry ;
We're marching thro' Immanuel's ground,
To fairer worlds on high. ("Hymn 30" 4: 37-40)

These lines bear the idea of going on a pilgrimage, and, once again, Watts' words point Dissenters to heaven, this time contending that songs of worship, perhaps his own hymns,

ought to abound and continue to encourage Dissenters to persist in their journey to heaven.

As Dissenters look inside themselves and see their wickedness, they know how much they need to accept God's grace. By accepting God's grace, then, as revolutionized in the Protestant Reformation, there is no need for a bishop or the Book of Common Prayer because God is now found in the heart of each believer (Watson 132). Watson notes that "This heart-religion can exist by itself, but in this transitory life it takes comfort in the fellowship and common suffering of the like-minded believers, whose duty it is to live, love, and suffer together; and it is these Saints who sing the hymns of the Puritan tradition" (Watson 132). This finding of God's grace is achieved in "Marching to Zion" in the lines "[God] shall send down his heav'nly powers, / To carry us above" ("Hymn 30" 4: 17-20).

Children's Songs

The tradition of songs for children began with the Puritans, and Watts wrote hymns specifically designed for children. As Calvinism dictates that children are separated from God, it is, therefore, necessary to bring them back to God. Milton said this is why the Puritans placed such high importance on education: educating them so they could come to know God and then try to be like Him in His righteousness (Escott 199). Literature requirements for the education of Puritan children included The Bible, the Singing Psalms, and *Song of Songs*, written in verse (Escott 199).

Escott reveals that, in the seventeenth-century church, the Puritan view of childhood dominated (202). Milton said, "we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary.

That vertue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evill . . . is but a blank vertue, not a pure” (qtd. in Escott 202). A little one born with sin would have a most difficult time finding God in a world full of sin. In order for parents to raise their children to find God, they had to deny their children of all their whimsical pleasures (Escott 202). Religious values were conveyed not only in the church, but in children’s books as well. Most of these books were published after the passing of the Act of Uniformity in 1662, which re-introduced the Prayer Book (“Act of Uniformity”), and these books taught Calvinism in the English Church (Escott 203). The books, however, were so strong and so forward in their doctrine that they were almost not suitable for children. Some of the books took the approach of scaring children into doing what was right (Escott 203).

But then Watts came along with his *Divine and Moral Songs for Children*, which could serve multiple purposes (Escott 207). It functioned as and included a “metricized catechism, an anthology of religious poems for children, a series of moral lessons in verse, and a small collection of children’s hymns” (Escott 207-208). The dedication indicates “that some of the hymns were written for the Abney children, who had shown much fondness for the adult praise in *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*” (Escott 208). These children were the offspring of Sir Tomas Abney whom Watts stayed with during his old age (Blanchard 139). The *Divine Songs* were never intended to be used for public worship, “but for private meditation and family worship” (Escott 208). This makes perfect sense, considering that the songs followed the Puritan tradition of songs to help raise children to be devoted to the Lord.

Watts' *Divine Songs* were better suited for small children than many of the religious children's books of the time because the songs were designed to be both enjoyable and spiritually educational (Escott 208). Because Watts was a Dissenter, he did not conform to what the rest of the religious community was doing with their books for children; he created his own way to give children moral instruction. Dissenters' children would not be scared into doing what was right; they were encouraged to take joy in doing what was right. Escott describes the hymns of *Divine Songs*: "[They] manifest more than once a serene kindness, and attempt to make religious instruction through verse, not an imposition, but a delightful, cheerful and natural pursuit" (213). The best example of this is "Marching to Zion," which, in the second stanza, proclaims,

The sorrows of the mind
Be banish'd from the Place!
Religion never was design'd
To make our pleasures less ("Hymn 30" 4: 5-8).

While it was once thought that the path to righteousness was devoid of pleasure, this hymn teaches Dissenters' children that following religion is not meant to be bitter, for joy comes from obeying God. The second song in *Divine Songs*, described as "Praise for Creation and Providence" ("Song 2" 4: 393), is also known by its first line as "I sing the Mighty Power of God," combats Deism and shows children, before they grow older and in their reason and understanding, the way for a Christian ought to respond after viewing God's creation. Watts built upon the Puritan idea for educating children in the way of the Lord, but he did so in a way that was different. His hymns were more "human and

childlike” (Escott 216), rather than overly Calvinistic. Just like his adult hymns, the children’s hymns help find the best way to praise God (Escott 216).

The Puritans were not the only ones interested in education. The Reformation created a need for learning because great importance arose for everyone to be able to read the Bible for themselves (Cairns 351). Thus, “All the Reformers gave considerable attention to the founding of schools on the three levels of elementary, secondary, and university education” (Cairns 351). In these schools, Watts’ hymns would eventually become a part of the required curriculum. In *Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady*, published in 1766, Wetenhall Wilkes gives instructions to allow Psalms and hymns “and petitions [to] intervene through all your thoughts, even when at your work” to “add to the spirit of devotion” (qtd. in Arnold 85). Wilkes also states that it is shocking that some would find that these Psalms and hymns cannot “have a more agreeable influence over the mind, or infuse into it a greater variety of sublime pleasures” (qtd. in Arnold 85). Furthermore, in a tract titled *Sunday Schools Recommended, in a Sermon preached at the Parish Church of St. Alphage, Canterbury*, published in 1786, George Horne reveals that, as a part of Sunday School, “little ones are employed, as in the morning, in spelling, or reading, or repeating prayers” or reading the “divine songs of the pious and excellent Dr. Watts” (qtd. in Arnold 89). Thus, over time, the hymn was viewed not only as acceptable for worship, but also for the moral instruction of children.

Chapter 6

National Pride and Closing Remarks

“Perhaps no hymn is more forceful in creating an atmosphere of worship, and in fixing the minds of the congregation upon the sacrificial mission of Jesus Christ than the hymn, ‘When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.’” – Willie Thorburn Clark

As our study of the rhetoric of the hymns of Isaac Watts comes to a close, one more issue surrounding the Dissenting culture to consider, and that is pride. With passages like Proverbs 16:18, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall,” (*King James Version*) it makes sense that Watts’ hymns would encourage an attitude of humility. It is clear that he felt it was a subject that needed to be addressed in Dissenting culture because he wrote much and preached much on the subject; his *Works* includes sections titled “Rules to Subdue Pride and Scorn” and “Humility Represented in the Character of St. Paul, &c.” Two of his most famous hymns dealing with the subject of humility are “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past” and “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.”

Pride in England and Watts’ Reply

In order to appreciate the way hymns respond to pride, it is first necessary to get an overview of what was going on in England culturally. In 1533, Henry VIII decreed that England was an empire; and, a few years later, both Ireland and Wales came under Henry’s jurisdiction (Armitage 11, 21). At the end of the sixteenth century, England was colonizing both in America and in the Caribbean, expanding her power (Hull 61). In Watts’ time, one of the results of the Reformation was increased capitalism. People insisted “on thrift, industry, and separation from costly worldly amusements [that] resulted in the creation of savings that could be used as capital for new economic

ventures” (Cairns 351-353). Those left impoverished by the confiscation of church property were in need of help, which resulted in the formation of the welfare state (Cairns 353). All of these political and economical changes made England the greatest nation on earth. The Dissenting culture could not be ignorant of the greatness of the English kingdom. Watts’ hymns reminded them not to take pride in this, for there was a greater King and Kingdom still.

“Psalm 90,” also known as “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past,” from Watts’ *The Psalms of David, Imitated in the Language of the New Testament*, has many personal applications for Dissenters who might have been tempted to feel pride in the greatness of the British Empire. They would no longer feel pride when they sang

Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.
Under the shadow of Thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is thine arm alone,
And our defense is sure. (“Psalm 90” 4: 1-8)

The realm of men has no place for pride, for true safety and comfort lie in the eternal Kingdom. Later stanzas contrast “God-like stability with the transient busy-ness of human life” (Watson 159):

The busy tribes of flesh and blood,
With all their lives and cares,

Are carry'd downwards by the flood,
And lost in following years.
Time, like an ever rolling stream
Bears all its sons away ;
They fly forgotten as a dream
Dies at the opening day. ("Psalm 90" 4: 21-28)

When Dissenters focus on God while singing this song, the British Empire seems more like a dream, but God and His care for His people becomes increasingly real (Watson 159).

"When I Survey the Wondrous Cross"

Any study of Watts' work would be lacking without sufficient discussion of his most popular hymn, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." The hymn was written in 1707, but it was not set to music until 1824 by Lowell Mason ("When I Survey"). It contains at least one imperfect rhyme—"God" and "blood" in stanza two—and omits syllables—"e'er" in stanza three and "o'er" in stanza four—to retain its 8.8.8.8 meter, yet it remains a well-loved hymn. The scripture that the hymn is based on is Galatians 6:14, which reads, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (*King James Version*). The first stanza reads,

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the prince of glory dy'd,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride. ("Hymn 7" 4: 1-4)

Here is the first reference to pride. The second stanza also discourages pride in the line “Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast” (“Hymn 7” 4: 5). These lines encourage the Dissenting culture to remain pure of the sin of pride in the culture that surrounded them as England’s power grew.

This exhortation in Watts’ hymns not to be prideful recalls the psalters. Hull states that “It was during this first period of British imperialism . . . that the Psalms of the Hebrew Bible exercised a profound influence upon the spirituality of the British people, and upon the ideology of empire” (Hull 61). Indeed, because many Psalms call on God to bless the nation of Israel, the idea of God blessing England in the same way opens up new possibilities to the vast empire. Hull elaborates,

the English monarchs had for centuries been regarded as occupying the throne of David. In the Psalms, Israel is seen as the people of God, looking to its faith in God to bring victory and prosperity, and often surrounded by hostile powers. The . . . glorious sense of divine protection that kept Israel alive was attractive to a Protestant people, whose theology of election was forming the national consciousness of mission. (62)

With their growing power and the idea of God being on their side, the English people are in a mindset that they are invincible and that nothing can bring them down. Furthermore, England is equating her throne with the throne of David, and since Jesus was a descendant of David, England might have thought of her empire as greater than the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. The Psalters do not abolish this prideful mindset, but bolster it.

With colonies in different parts of the world, the English people may have thought of themselves as better than those whom they were colonizing. But Dissenters who sang

“When I Survey” focused on the cross “On which the prince of glory dy’d,” they would have remembered that, in the Lord’s Kingdom, no citizen is greater than any other (*King James Version*, Gal. 3:28). Singing from the Psalms would not have helped remind Dissenters this because, when the Psalms were written, the Israelites were the Lord’s chosen people, a special people, set apart from everyone else. Watts expresses his fear that

by keeping too close to *David* in the House of God, the Vail of *Moses* is thrown over our Hearts. While we are kindling into divine Love by the Meditations of the *loving kindness of God, and the Multitude of his tender Mercies*, within a few Verses some dreadful Curse against Men is propos’d to our lips . . . which is so contrary to the New Commandment, *of Loving our Enemies*. (qtd. in Brawley 70)

This is what makes Watts’ “Psalm 90” so interesting: he took a Psalm from the Old Testament, the very works he had problems with, and reworded it with language that a Christian could sing without hesitation and not fill his or her heart with pride.

In Sermon XXXIII, “The Universal Rule of Equity,” focused around the Golden Rule, Watts contends, “all the actions and duties that concern our neighbours . . . [are] not confined merely to the practice of justice, but [they extend] much wider and farther: [They are] of mighty influence in the direction and practice of meekness, of patience, of charity, of truth and faithfulness, and every kind of social virtue, and a most happy guard against every social vice” (“Sermon XXXIII” 1: 355). Christians trying to spread goodness and truth needed a new type of praise to exhort them. The psalters were not

helpful, but Watts wrote hymns that encouraged the proper mindset. One such hymn is at the end of Sermon XXXIII, which contains the following stanzas:

How bless'd would every nation prove,
Thus rul'd by equity and love!
All would be friends without a foe,
And form a paradise below.
Jesus, forgive us that we keep
Thy sacred law of love asleep ;
And take our envy, wrath and pride,
Those savage passions, for our guide. ("Hymn for Sermon XXXIII" 1: 17-24)

These stanzas clearly show the need for love of enemies, as well as the removal of pride.

Not all the songs in the Psalters had such negative effects, but those about God blessing Israel and conquering enemies could cause English Christians to puff themselves up with pride, rather than maintain the humble mindset exemplified in the Bible. Watts' second half of Psalm 72 reminds Dissenters of the greatest King who ever lived and Who ever will live in the lines "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun / Does his successive journeys run" ("Psalm 72" 4: 1-2). The hymn also shows every nation in Europe offering respect to Jesus: "And Europe her best tribute brings; . . . / To pay their homage at His feet" ("Psalm 72" 4: 6, 8). Thus, even if the English crown sits on the throne of David, the Crown of Christ's Kingdom is still mightier. "When I Survey" shuts down pride instantly, forbidding Dissenters from boasting, "Save in the death of Christ" ("Hymn 7"

4: 6). Focusing on Christ in “Psalm 72” and on the cross in “When I Survey” causes all Dissenters to “pour contempt on all [their] pride” (“Hymn 7” 4: 4).

In the fourth stanza of “When I Survey” are the words “I am dead to all the globe, / And all the globe is dead to me” (“Hymn 7” 4: 15-16). This also comes from Paul’s letter to the Galatians. These words show Dissenters just how insignificant everything in the world is. England was foolish to compare her Empire to Israel; the glory of Israel was no more. Even if the British Empire were to have owned the whole world (just like the eternal Kingdom already did), the hymn shows that “the whole realm of nature . . . [is] a present far too small” for the King of kings (“Hymn 7” 4: 17-18). After singing both “Psalm 72,” where all of Europe pays homage to Christ, and “When I Survey,” Dissenters are reminded that the only homage to be given to the Lord is their soul, their life, their all (“Hymn 7” 4: 20). This conclusion leaves no room for pride. Pride is held in contempt, and humility is praised (“Hymn 7” 4: 4).

Proper Patriotic Praise

Although English Dissenters needed a reminder to cast off pride in the greatness of the nation, this does not mean that Dissenters were not patriotic. They “made a particular point of insisting that they were patriots and Protestants second to none of His Majesty’s subjects” (Davies, *Watts and Wesley to Maurice* 109). Dissenters held two dates in great historical significance: “the failure of the Catholic Guy Fawkes to blow up Parliament and the accession of William of Orange that guaranteed a Protestant throne in England” (Kolodziej 242). In *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, there are, for both of these events, hymns that “are preface/entitled, ‘Popish idolatry reprov’d: composed for the 5th of November,’ ‘The church saved and her enemies disappointed: composed for the 5th of

November, 1694,' and 'Power and government from God alone: applied to the Glorious Revolution by King William or the happy accession of King George to the throne'" (Kolodziej 242). At least two of these hymns are Psalms (Watson 155). A good example of a Psalm with a more national tone is Watts' revised version of Psalm 67. It reads,

Sing to the Lord, ye distant lands,
Sing loud with solemn voice ;
While British tongues exalt his praise,
And British hearts rejoice. ("Psalm 67" 4: 13-16)

Hymns like this show that England may be incorporated into worship in a way that does not encourage pride. In Psalm 67, in particular, all of England is praising and rejoicing in *God*.

Closing Remarks

This thesis has examined only a few of the 600 hymns that reflect the changing religious culture in which Watts lived and wrote, and the hymns show how Dissenters are supposed to fit into that larger culture. His hymns were greatly influenced by the Puritans, and although Watts disagreed with Calvin on the boundaries of what praise could be, his hymns teach important Calvinistic doctrine. As the reformation perpetuated the belief that everyone can understand the Bible and have a relationship with God, Watts wrote hymns they could easily understand, helping them to grow in their relationship with God. Watts constantly worked with a group of Dissenters, leading them in the truth. His hymns helped them by showing the dangers of Deism and the sin of pride. Some may readily dismiss the value of analyzing Watts' works just because they are religious. However, we have shown that they can be effectively analyzed rhetorically. Watts was an

incredibly accomplished, learned man. He was a poet and preacher, and he understood the immensity of the task of writing hymns (Marshall and Todd 28). This is why he is known as “the father of the English hymn.”

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