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The Experimental Eighteenth-Century Hymn.

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John William Knapp's *Fiddled out of Reason* approaches the seemingly staid eighteenth-century hymn from a surprising direction. Much scholarship on the topic has focused on the influential hymns that emerged among Dissenting and Nonconformist communities, where the genre was at the heart of worship. Knapp instead looks for the hymn where it should not exist--among the Anglican poets and readers whose established Church would not begin to permit the use of hymns in public worship until the 1730s. "Unlike the direct hymnic engagements that occurred on the Dissenting side," Knapp writes, "period explorations within Anglicanism tended to occur on the periphery of the institution" and "in nonliturgical works only alluding to Church interests," such as Joseph Addison's *Spectator* (24). Yet this pseudo-hymn's peripheral status proved a benefit, Knapp argues, for it gave poets such as Addison room to innovate freely with their hymnic experiments "before generic and performative expectations had hardened into convention" (19). Knapp's approach offers a new way to appreciate hymns and their significance during the period. First, it develops a more capacious definition of the genre: "far from conceiving of the hymn as a prescribed church song keyed to scripture or fueled by divinity itself," Knapp contends, eighteenth-century poets and readers understood the genre "to be incredibly flexible and accommodative, associated with non-Christian or extrareligious traditions of praise, and unfixed in form and structure" (15). (For these reasons, Knapp avoids the term "hymn," with its strict expectations about meter and form, and instead opts for the more flexible term "hymnic.") This novel approach to the hymn uncovers, in turn, a different kind of reading experience. The hymnic verses Knapp explores "were composed primarily for the silent contemplation of readers well outside the cathedral, parish church, or meeting house" and thus "demanded deliberation, critique, and evaluation on the part of those who 'voiced' them" (120). In Knapp's telling, hymnic verse was a capacious, contemplative, and experimental genre that enlisted readers' ratiocinative powers in pursuit of spiritual progress.

The book consists of three parts. In the first, Knapp locates the origins of hymnic verse in the elaborate anthems, canticles, and orchestral compositions associated with the Chapel Royal and festivities such as St. Cecilia's Day and National Thanksgiving Day services at the end of the seventeenth century. Although these church-adjacent experiments were short-lived--welcome under the indulgent rule of James II, they withered with the arrival of William III's austere Protestantism--Knapp argues that they migrated to secular spaces outside the Church of England and continued to inform emerging conceptions of the hymnic. Knapp largely focuses on four odes written for St. Cecilia's Day: the two famous pieces composed by John Dryden and two lesser-known contributions by the young Joseph Addison. He argues that Dryden and Addison shaped the still nascent genre of the Cecilian ode into an "accommodative" (70) model of hymnic verse that, in its mingling of the pious and erotic, the devotional and nondevotional, sought to unite classical and Christian theories of the hymn. Addison's odes sing the "power of the hymnic to lift up mere mortals by means of their most earthly appetites, to ignite the nondevotional passions of listeners and raise those passions into higher service" (73); in so doing, the odes model a theory of hymnic poetry that would preoccupy and entice Addison throughout his literary career.

In Part II, the book narrows its focus solely to Addison and surveys his evolving understanding of the hymnic in the years between the ornate Cecilian odes of his youth and the mature hymns he wrote for *The Spectator*. Knapp glances (too briefly, I think, to add much to the book's larger argument) at the elevatory and salvific role of sacred song in Addison's libretto for the poorly received opera *Rosamond*. He then explores how Addison used *The Spectator* to disseminate and discuss important hymnic works, such as Ambrose Philips's translation of Sappho's "Hymn to Venus," Alexander Pope's "Messiah," and Isaac Watts's version of Psalm 114. Addison employed these issues of *The Spectator*, Knapp argues, to chart a via media for the hymnic, one that could accommodate a wide variety of genres, modes, and confessional influences (as evidenced by the presence of Pope and Watts, for instance). Lastly, this section examines the influence upon Addison's writing of *The Christian Life* (1681-86) by John Scott, a latitudinarian clergyman whose progress-centric account of the soul's journey through life would be central, Knapp argues, to Addison's hymns. Although the three chapters in this section don't entirely cohere--one looks back to the operatic world of the Cecilian odes while two look ahead and lay the groundwork for the next part of the book--they ably demonstrate that Addison's evolving, complex understanding of the hymnic was the fruit of serious literary and theological reflection.

The focus narrows even further in the third and final part of the book where Knapp offers an extended and complex close reading of the five hymns Addison published in *The Spectator* between July and October of 1712. One might fairly ask whether these five brief hymns, with a combined length of a mere 164 lines, merit the degree of scrutiny lavished upon them in this seventy-three-page section. Yet Knapp--sifting through them as meticulously as one might poems by Emily Dickinson--makes the case that their apparent simplicity conceals unplumbed depths of poetic and theological complexity. He argues that Addison's hymns form an intentional, highly wrought sequence that "can be read as a double progress detailing not only the spiritual maturation of an individual soul, as in John Scott's *Christian Life*, but also the rota Virgiliana-like development of a poet" ascending through pastoral, georgic, and epic modes of hymnic imagination (136). Addison's ambidextrous hymns do double duty. On the one hand, they dramatize the different phases of Scott's theory of spiritual development, thereby reflecting Addison's investment in a fundamentally Whiggish theology predicated on notions of human progress; on the other hand, they dramatize the malleability and progress of poetry itself as it evolves historically and generically. In this way, Knapp argues, Addison conceives of the hymnic as a simultaneously poetical, political, and spiritual "means of human advancement" (130) implicitly allied to Enlightenment beliefs about the liberatory power of reason to advance life and society.

The book's strengths flow from its innovative treatment of the hymn as a flexible mode rather than a set form. Knapp's capacious concept of the "hymnic" offers scholars a valuable means of breaking down the traditional generic and confessional boundaries that keep us from appreciating the hymn's complexity and wide-ranging influence during the eighteenth century. For instance, it is stimulating to find Pope and Watts--who are often made to seem residents of different centuries and literary traditions by our usual critical categories--recognized as fellow practitioners of a shared poetic mode. Yet one odd feature of the book is its choice to survey this vast and fascinating terrain through the rather narrow aperture of Joseph Addison's literary career and, primarily, the five brief hymns he published during the summer months of 1712. This narrow focus occasions a few oversights. More could have been said, for instance, of Elizabeth Singer Rowe, whose contributions to hymnic verse are acknowledged as "significant" and then quickly set aside (5-6). Known in Addison's time as the "Pindarick Lady," Rowe might have offered an ideal case through which to consider connections between the irregular ode and the wider world of nonconformist hymns in a manner that seems more relevant to this study and the current state of the field than the faint allusions to hymnody that Knapp locates in Addison's little read *Rosamond*. One wishes, at times, that Knapp would embrace some of the flexibility he ascribes to the hymnic and allow his gaze to drift away from Addison. Ultimately, though, Knapp's *Fiddled out of Reason* represents a valuable contribution to our understanding of the hymn as a literary and cultural phenomenon. It makes a convincing case that eighteenth-century poets and readers perceived the hymnic mode to be a dynamic, experimental site of intellectual and spiritual progress, and it invites scholars to explore the hymn's reach into other areas of the period's literature and culture.

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