

Christopher Smart, *Hymns for the Amusement of Children* (3rd ed.). London: T. Carnan, 1775. 4 3/8 inches x 3 inches (112 mm x 75 mm), 84 pages, 37 woodcuts.

Hymns for the Amusement of Children (1770) is the final known work by Christopher Smart (1722–1771), the English poet best remembered for his work *A Song to David*, as well as institutionalization for bouts of madness. While undeniably religious to the point of obsession, Smart was defended as sane by his sensible friend Samuel Johnson. The poet was also troubled by alcohol abuse and debt. (In fact, Smart wrote the *Hymns* while in debtors' prison). The book, which he dedicated to Prince Frederick, Bishop of Osnabrug, contains a series of thirty-nine hymns all but two of which (“At Dressing in the Morning” and “At Undressing in Evening”) are accompanied by a small, oval-shaped woodcut illustration. In these verses, Smart covered such topics as hope, prudence, temperance, moderation, beauty, learning, and charity; he wrote each hymn as a series of quatrains (AABB or ABAB) without musical notation. These poems were set to music by Conrad Susa (b. 1935) in 1972, whose work was later choreographed by James Sewell.

Christopher Smart's father, the steward of Viscount Vane, died in 1733 after which his family was supported by the Vanes. Smart lived up to his surname, academically speaking, and his education at Cambridge was sponsored the Duchess of Cleveland, a relation of Lord Vane. He made his mark there, winning the Seatonian Prize on five occasions, but developed a reputation for rash behavior. In 1753 Smart was clandestinely married to Anna Maria Carnan, the step-daughter of John Newbery and sister of Thomas Carnan, who published this edition of the *Hymns*. His marriage caused him to lose his employment at Cambridge, and he found low-paid work as a writer for his father-in-law John Newbery and others. Smart also produced a popular translation of Horace (1756) from which he received little income. Despite assistance from such friends as the renowned Shakespearean actor David Garrick, the writer Oliver Goldsmith, and music historian Dr. Charles Burney, Smart was frequently in financial straits; his debts coupled with intemperate drinking led his wife Anna Maria to leave him, moving to Ireland along with their two daughters. Smart was confined because of mental illness three times from 1756 to 1763, and during these periods he wrote *Jubilate Agno*, *A Song to David*, and

portions of his *Translation of the Psalms of David*. Smart's ecstatic style gained him favor among the Romantics, and he is considered by some to be a precursor of that artistic movement. He died in King's Bench Prison in 1771.

This book was published by Thomas Carnan who was the stepson of John Newbery (1713–1767), the Englishman considered by some to be the inventor of children's literature and by others to have been the first to recognize its commercial potential. After Newbery's death in 1767, the publishing business was continued by two separate firms, one headed by Newbery's son Francis and Thomas Carnan, and the other by Newbery's nephew Francis and Francis' wife Elizabeth. Relations between the competing firms were not friendly, and Carnan and Newbery's partnership dissolved after a time, with Carnan continuing to publish and Francis selling patent medicines, which were part of his father's business.

This copy of *Hymns for the Amusement of Children* is now in the Douce Collection at the Bodleian Library. The collection is named for Francis Douce (1757–1834), a British antiquary and the Keeper of Manuscripts at the British Museum from 1807 to 1811. His bequest of more than 19,000 volumes contained printed books from various periods, including nearly 500 incunables, as well as roughly 425 manuscripts. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century children's books numbered among Douce's wide range of collecting specialties. This book is bound in plain paper printed with full-page woodcuts and a linen spine. On the reverse of the front free endpaper is the inscription "Lydia Heaton | Dec^r. 29 1790"; the title page is also signed by Lydia Heaton and bears the stamp "EX DONO FR. DOUCE | BIBL. BODL."

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