

Psalm Exercise

ENG299H/MUH299H
January 2009

In this traditional hymody exercise, you will learn how to (a) versify or paraphrase a text into a hymn text, and (b) how to write a hymn tune to a given hymn text. Although it is logical to start with part (a), we will do part (b) first because tune crafting is easier than textual adaptation.

Part 1: Melodic Setting of a Hymn Text. You will make up a tune to a given poetic text.

Select one of the versified psalms we have been comparing in class: Psalm 23 or Psalm 100. Read the versified psalm out loud several times, getting a sense for its flow, tone, meaning(s), genre, settings, and rhetorical purposes. Then, make up several kinds of tunes that could appropriately set the words. Settle upon a tune of your design. If you are able, write the tune down; if not, have a peer or friend help you notate your tune.

Part 2: Poem to Hymn Text. You will compose your own modern version of one psalm such that it will fit to a pre-existing tune of your choice.

Select one of the non-versified psalms that we have been comparing directly from the Bible: Psalm 23 or Psalm 100. Then, think of popular songs not normally used for hymn singing but that you believe would be suitable for setting (e.g., “Happy Birthday”). Write down this tune; or, if you’re unable, have a friend notate it for you.

Now, observe the wording, emphasis, and meaning of the original biblical psalm (in English translation). Work with alternate wording, phrasing, meter, rhymes, imagery, metaphor, and paradoxes. Use this as a miniature workshop in the rhetorical devices listed in our textbook (SWU pp. 20-26). Lastly, fine tune your selections of wording by finding meters, syntax, phrasing, and rhymes, that fit the tune you have selected. Since the tune and not the words is the fixed element in this exercise, you will need to make the final adjustments and choices to your original wording.

Further Directions: (1) Show your work by keeping copies of drafts and discarded ideas, (2) Keep a copy of the original unaltered tune or text along with anything submitted, (3) Clearly identify the sequence of your drafts up through your final version, and (4) Bring everything to class to display it and get group feedback.