A STUDY OF THE LANGUAGE AND MAJOR THEMES OF CHRISTOPHER SMART'S RELIGIOUS POEMS

An Abstract of a Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

University of Manitoba

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

---

by

Barbara Rose Davies

October 1966

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A study of Christopher Smart's religious poetry best reveals the style and themes of his work. This thesis considers language and major themes in the following religious poems and groups of poems--The Seatonian Poems, Jubilate Agno, Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Hymns for the Amusement of Children, and A Song to David. It examines the types of imagery Smart preferred and how he employed elements of the Elizabethan "world picture" to add force to the language of his poetry. It attempts to explain, in this way, his interest in puns and other word relationships.

This thesis also considers how Smart's religious poetry consists largely of variations on a single theme: the goodness of God and the necessity of praising Him. These poems, it finds, over-emphasize the goodness and beauty of the world; Smart's refusal to deal with evil except in supernatural terms weakens his poetry. Smart allows no element of doubt to enter his religious outlook, and his poetry consequently lacks the complexity which arises from the facing and resolving of such doubt. A tone of rapture infuses his poetry, but its cumulative effect is not convincing. His religious poetry, however, abounds in rich and varied catalogues of the wonder of Nature. His descriptions of very small things are the most delightful and most clearly show how Smart's vision of a universe united in the praise of God includes all created things.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Christopher Smart was born in 1722 at Shipbourne Fairlawn in Kent, a premature baby who remained in delicate health throughout his childhood. He lived at home and received his education from his father. When he was eleven, his father died, and the family moved to Durham where the family received the protection of Lord Barnard. In Durham the poet attended grammar school. He entered Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, in 1739, and was allowed an annual pension of forty pounds by the Duchess of Cleveland, a relative of Lord Barnard. He was awarded a classics scholarship in 1743, and was elected a fellow in 1745, holding several college appointments after this. In his college days Smart developed a taste for drinking and got into considerable debt. He published a good deal of Latin verse, and also wrote and produced a farce, A Trip to Cambridge. In 1747, he was arrested for debt, and was saved only through the efforts of college friends who got together to make up the amount of the debt, about 350 pounds.

In 1749, Smart moved to London and became a hack writer for John Newberry, writing for, and probably also editing two of the latter's magazines, the Student and the Midwife. He was involved in several Grub Street literary

quarrels, one of which, with Sir John Hill, inspired the Hilliad, a mock-epic in the tradition of Pope's Dunciad. Up until about 1756, when Smart was confined as a madman, he was quite a well-known figure in London literary circles. His verse appeared in the Monthly Magazine and the Gentleman's Magazine. He was friendly with such people as Samuel Johnson and Dr. Burney. In 1750 he won the first annual Seatonian prize for a poem about God, a feat which he repeated four times in the following five years. In 1753, he married Anna Maria Carnan, Newberry's stepdaughter, apparently with some attempt at secrecy, since he wished to keep his name on his college books in order to be allowed to compete for the Seatonian prize. Around 1756, he began to suffer from ill health, and it appears that it was also around this time that he began to show the signs of a religious fanaticism which led to his confinement as a lunatic. Between 1756 and 1763, Smart spent time in public and private institutions for the insane. Although he had had a reputation for drunkenness and improvidence since his college days, it seems to have been his religious zeal which led to his confinement. A frequently quoted passage from Johnson indicates that this was the reason:

> Madness frequently discovers itself merely by unnecessary deviation from the usual modes of the world. My poor friend Smart shewed the disturbance of his mind by falling on his knees, and saying prayers in the street, or in any other unusual place. Now although, rationally

> speaking, it is a greater madness not to pray at all, than to pray as Smart did, I am afraid there are so many who do not pray, that their understanding is not called in question.[1]

Smart was released in 1763, and soon after published A Song to David, on which his reputation since his death has chiefly rested. His longest work, Jubilate Agno, half poem and half journal, was written during his confinement and was not discovered until 1939. His verse translation of the Psalms was published in 1765, along with his Hymns and Spiritual Songs. Dates of composition of the last four mentioned works are not known, but it is possible that all were written during the same period. Smart's versification of Christ's parables appeared in 1768. The poet did not live with his family after his release from confinement. He was arrested for debt in 1769 and taken to King's Bench Prison, where he wrote his Hymns for the Amusement of Children, which appeared in 1770. In 1771 he died in prison.

Smart wrote a great many other things in his lifetime, including his fables, a verse translation of Horace, a great deal of occasional poetry, two operas, and Latin verse translations of Pope's Essay on Criticism and Milton's "Il Penseroso." Some of his work may even lie undiscovered in

---

[1]G. B. Hill, ed., Boswell's Life of Johnson, Revised edition (16 Vols.) (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1934), I, pp. 397.

the pages of the many magazines of the period. This study, however, will deal only with religious verse--the five Seatonian poems, Jubilate Agno, the Hymns and Spiritual Songs, the Hymns for the Amusement of Children, and A Song to David.

Smart's religious poetry consists of variations on one major theme--the goodness of God, and the necessity and joy of praising Him. Corollary to this, he sees the beauty and variety of creation as a monument to God's skill and goodness. Further, nature is seen as united and animated in praise of God. This basic theme of praise is supplemented by a wide and often strange erudition.

Smart's ideas fit into no one philosophy ancient or modern. He has many odd and often charming ideas that are probably uniquely his. There is, however, a unifying philosophical pattern which can be traced in his poetry, especially in Jubilate Agno. The assumptions about man and the universe underlying his poetry are not Augustan, nor are they those of the "nature" poetry of Wordsworth, which some of Smart's poetry resembles. These assumptions, in fact, have a more marked affinity with the earlier Elizabethan world view.

This world view has been carefully explored and illustrated, notably by Marjorie Nicolson (The Breaking of the Circle), E. M. W. Tillyard (The Elizabethan World

Picture), and Joseph Anthony Mazzeo (Medieval Cultural Tradition in Dante's Comedy). The basic element of this "world picture" may be generally identified as the doctrine of universal analogy, stemming initially from Plato's Timaeus, but having many accretions, especially those which it acquired from Ptolemaic-Aristotelian cosmology. It also incorporated the concept of an animate universe, a retention from the philosophy of Thales of Miletos (c. 585 B.C.). This complex of philosophical thought, which for convenience will be termed "universal analogy," provided a special body of metaphor which had for both poet and scientist (to the extent that they were separate at this time) the force of objective truth.

This body of metaphor was based on the idea that man, the world, and all things in the universe were created on the same model, and must therefore be analogically related. Man was seen as a copy and "epitome" of an animate world and an animate universe. Features shown to exist in man the microcosm could by analogy be shown to exist in the earth and in the macrocosm. There was plenty of fairly obvious common-sense evidence to support this idea. It seemed self-evident that the rivers of the world were analagous to man's blood vessels, that rocks were the bones of the earth, and that soil was its flesh. The idea of correspondences between man and the macrocosm was bolstered

by the retention of the concept of the universe as a great living organism. It was also reinforced by the widely-accepted Ptolemaic-Aristotelian cosmology, which presented a model of a universe composed of a vast system of concentric spheres, with man and the earth occupying a central position. The planets and the stars were thought to revolve around a fixed earth, each in its own sphere, and the rubbing together of these spheres was supposed to produce a celestial harmony, the Pythagorean "music of the spheres."

Another Pythagorean retention in Aristotelian cosmology was the theory that everything in the universe is composed of four "elements"--earth, air, fire, and water--analogous to the four "humours" which were thought to determine human personality. The introduction of a fifth element to the spheres beyond the moon was made by Aristotle, who thought that this fifth element made these spheres perfect and immutable. Everything below the moon was, he thought, imperfect and subject to change. (In this rather static philosophy, before the invention of the concept of progress, all change was considered undesirable and was equated with decay.) All these views, combined in varying proportions depending on individual education and religion, were incorporated into a very pervasive doctrine of universal analogy which had become a part of Western

Christian thought.

Man's position in this universe was quite a high and flattering one. In Aristotle's great ascending chain of being, man occupied the highest earthly place, beneath only God and the angels. On earth man alone possessed the tool of reason. There seemed to be a great deal of evidence that man was the favoured creation of God, for whose use the world and all its material benefits had been made. Man's habitation, the earth, was at the very centre of the universe, and all the heavenly bodies turned about it daily in a splendid display. The stars and planets, although remote and immutable, nevertheless busied themselves about human concerns, directly influencing man's personality and daily activities. And the very shape of man's head was a sign of God's favour--it was analogous in shape to the immutable celestial spheres.

This was, however, a two-sided philosophy. It also had a dark side, the idea of earthly decay. Since man's fall, both the earth and its inhabitants were thought to have become steadily more corrupt. Man had decayed in stature, age, and morality. The earth was heading for a stern day of judgment, which many people, judging by the rate of man's increase in moral corruption, expected might occur at any moment. Rather than an orderly progression towards some earthly ideal of perfection, Elizabethans saw a chaotic

regression away from a heavenly ideal of perfection. The positive and negative co-existed quite comfortably in the Elizabethan world view; which side was most emphasized varied from person to person and from time to time, a fact which can be amply illustrated from the poetry of Donne and George Herbert. Man might be disgusted with his own corruptibility, or consoled by his own undoubted correspondences with those immutable spheres beyond the moon, the assurance of God's good will towards him.

These correspondences were very important to Elizabethan man, and it was with eagerness and delight that he sought to "discover" them and apply them to himself. Where today we use analogy to illustrate, the sixteenth century fused the two things being compared. What was in fact analogy was seen as identity:

> What once seemed "identicals" have become in our modern world only "similars." Metaphor based upon accepted truth, inscribed by God in the Nature of the universe, has given way to simile.[2]

Because for Elizabethan man analogy was reinforced by such an influential body of religious and philosophical thought, he used it in naive and often uncritical ways:

> Although modern thought is fully aware of the tentative nature of analogical reasoning, earlier thought tended to consider an analogy as an end in itself and to rest

---

[2]Marjorie Hope Nicolson, The Breaking of the Circle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 7.

> content in an aesthetic and essentially poetic awareness of the feeling of understanding the analogy brought.[3]

Nicolson, using illustrations from the works of Donne and other poets, has shown how seriously analogies were taken. Not only were similarity of shape or function seen as evidence of some underlying relationship, but even similarity in the sounds of words. This explains, for example, the delight Shakespeare and Donne took in punning, a delight which we cannot equal today. To the Elizabethans, the pun was neither trivial nor "the lowest form of humour." That all types of similarities seemed to indicate relationships is shown by a passage in The Breaking of the Circle, in which the author quotes Henry More, the Cambridge Platonist:

> Quinces, said More, are a downy and hairy fruit; what more logical than that a "decoction of Quinces" should prove "good for the fetching again of Hair that has fallen"?. . . . Scorpion grass, formed like the crooked tail of a scorpion, should prove specific against the bites of poisonous insects.[4]

More concludes that in this way "did Divine Providence by natural Hieroglyphicks read short Physick Lectures to the rude wit of man."[4]

This interest in what might be referred to as visual puns is based on the Paracelsan doctrine of signatures,

---

[3]Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, Medieval Cu tural raditi on in Dante's Comedy (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1960), pp. 135-136.

[4]Nicolson, pp. 38-39.

which held that many medicinal herbs were stamped with a sign indicating their use. Thus in the example quoted, the plant referred to was made by God to resemble a scorpion as a means of letting people know that it was good for the bite of a scorpion. This doctrine seems to have originated with Paracelsus, and here is his description of it:

> I have ofttimes declared, how by the outward shapes and qualities of things we may know their inward Vertues, which God hath put in them for the good of man. So in St Johns wort, we may take notice of the form of the leaves and flowers, the porosity of the leaves, the Veins. 1. The porositie of the leaves, signifie to us, that this herb helps both inward and outward holes or cuts in the skin. . . . 2. The flowers of Saint Johns wort, when they are putrified they are like blood; which teacheth us, that this herb is good for wounds, to close them and fill them up. . .[5]

This doctrine was also developed by the fifteenth-century herbalist Giambattista Porta, who also thought that the healing powers of plants were revealed by outward signs.

> He supposed, for example, that long-lived plants would lengthen a man's life, while short-lived plants would abbreviate it. He held that herbs with a yellow sap would cure jaundice, while those whose surface was rough to the touch would heal those diseases that destroy the natural smoothness of the skin . . . . It will be recognized from these examples that the doctrine of signatures was remarkably elastic, and was not fettered by any rigid consistency.[6]

Another Pythagorean retention which found its way

---

[5]Quoted in Agnes Arber, Herbals, Their Origin and Evolution (Cambridge: The University Press, 1912), pp. 207-208.

[6]Arber, p. 208.

into the complex of thought which may be termed "universal analogy" was an interest in mystical numbers, which had, by the time of the Renaissance, taken on Christian meanings, especially in the significance of the number three which had come to symbolize the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The belief in the mystical meaning of numbers and the way in which this was worked into the analogical framework is well illustrated by the following passage from Dante's La Vita Nuova. Dante tells how the mystical number nine has always accompanied Beatrice, which, he says, "clearly could not happen without a reason." He first explains this as a sign that the nine spheres were in perfect relationship at the time of her birth; he also sees a further reason:

> . . . according to infallible truth, she and this number are actually synonymous; that is, through an analogy. What I mean to say is this: the number three is the root of nine, for without any other number, multiplied by itself it gives nine, as we plainly see that three times three is nine. Therefore if the sole factor of nine and the sole factor of miracles is three, that is, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, who are three in one, then this lady is accompanied by the number nine so that it may be understood that she was a nine, or a miracle, whose root, namely of the miracle, is the miraculous trinity alone.[7]

People searched quite seriously to discover these signs and

---

[7]Dante Alighieri, La Vita Nuova of Dante Alighieri, trans. Mark Musa (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Cornell University Press, 1957), p. 61.

clues which would reveal relationships in the universe. It was a very natural mode of thinking to Elizabethans, and Marjorie Nicolson explains their use of the "conceit" as a result of the belief in and search for correspondences:

> Indeed the figures were often not conceits but metaphors drawn from a pattern of the universe which seemed to the poets inevitable, in which the little body of man corresponded exactly to the larger body of the world, and that in turn to the still larger body of the universe. . . The pattern of three inter-locking worlds was not invented by the poets avid for novelty. It was inscribed upon man, world and universe in which design, plan and repetition of motif were everywhere apparent.[8]

This world view has been largely lost. (Vestiges of it remain in our speech in such common expressions as an "artery of traffic" or the "bowels of the earth.") The geocentric universe and the supremacy of the circle as a symbol of perfection had begun to break down even in Donne's time. By the eighteenth century this older world picture had been so far lost that Johnson in his criticism of the metaphysical poets had no inkling of it, and was consequently led to misinterpret them, thinking that they sought only to display their wit and learning.

In Smart's writing, there are many of the features of the analogical Elizabethan outlook, an outlook which was very congenial to a poet who wished to see all the universe as related and united in a single principle. In fact, his

---

[8]Nicolson, p

poetry takes on greater meaning and beauty when viewed against the background of the Elizabethan "world picture."

CHAPTER II

THE SEATONIAN POEMS

In 1750, the Seatonian prize was created at Cambridge for the best work on one of the attributes of God, a prize which Smart won five times between 1750 and 1756. Although he had left Cambridge by this time, he was allowed to keep his name on the college books in order to compete for the prize. The poems are written in Miltonic blank verse, and they partake both of its grandeur and its possibilities for bombast. They also grapple with the considerable problem also faced by Milton of picturing the majesty of a tremendously vast yet somewhat anthropomorphic God in terms which convey that majesty without becoming ridiculous in the process.

The first Seatonian prize poem, "On the Eternity of the Supreme Being" (1750), suffers from this awkwardness arising from the description of God in human terms. One passage illustrates both the merits and the flaws of the poem's style. Smart, having affirmed that God has always existed even before Biblical creation, considers whether this has been the total extent of God's creation:

> But is the era of Creation fix'd
> At when these worlds began? Cou'd aught retard
> Goodness, that knows no bounds, from blessing ever,
> Or keep th' immense Artificer in sloth?
> Avaunt the dust-directed crawling thought,
> That Puissance immeasurably vast,
> And Bounty inconceivable cou'd rest
> Content, exhausted with one week of action--

> No--in th' exertion of thy righteous pow'r
> Ten thousand times more active than the Sun,
> Thou reign'd, and with a mighty hand compos'd
> Systems innumerable, matchless all,
> All stampt with thine uncounterfeited seal.
> (31-43)[1]

The passage has some success in expressing Smart's awe at the immense power of God and the plenitude of His creation, the "systems innumerable." However, the passage is weakened by the implied assumption that God's creation is somehow analogous to human work, and that for God not to create is analogous to human laziness. Nothing, he says, could "keep th' immense Artificer in sloth;" the mental picture of sloth on divine proportions breaks down the image of grandeur and wisdom which the poet tries to build up. Similarly, in the following verse paragraph, Smart allows himself speculations about whether God, too, sometimes rests after work:

> Perhaps wrapt up in contemplation deep,
> The best of beings on the noblest theme
> Might ruminate at leisure, Scope immense
> Th' eternal Pow'r and Godhead to explore,
> And with itself th' omniscient mind replete.
> This were enough to fill the boundless All,
> This were a Sabbath worthy the Supreme!
> (46-52)

The attempt to describe God's self-meditations breaks down under the almost comic pressure of a lurking image, that of God creating endlessly for millions of years and occasionally

---

[1]This and all succeeding quotations from Smart's Seatonian poems are taken from The Collected Poems of Christopher Smart, ed. Norman Callan (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949).

taking out a day to "ruminate" about what He has done. Perhaps the poet, too, feels the weakness of the passage, for he dismisses his speculations with a somewhat lame, "perhaps--but all's conjecture here below,/ All ignorance, and self-plum'd vanity" (58-59). This has the unfortunate effect of reminding one that God also must be "self-plum'd." The same sort of difficulty arises in Smart's description of judgment day when earth and everything on it will perish, "nor leave behind ev'n Chaos" (64). In his attempt truly to stagger the intellect, the poet leaves a vacuum in which there is little left to describe. Things, he says, will "vanish into void" (70), void being about the only thing left after Chaos for things to vanish into. A description of the tremendous destruction of earth, sun, and moon unfortunately builds up a picture of an unreasonable and destructive God who builds in order to tear down. "The air/ With all the elements must pass away,/ Vain as an ideot's dream;" this makes Smart's God seem even more capricious.

It is difficult to justify the ways of this God; to bring his poem to a happy climax, Smart points out that man will share eternity with God after judgment day, and will enjoy "the everlasting calm of heav'n." By this time, however, Smart's God has both alienated Himself because of His destructiveness and lost majesty by stooping to a too human appearance, and it is hard to share the triumphant

conviction that one ought to praise this God.

"On the Immensity of the Supreme Being" (1751) is a more effective poem. The Miltonic manner is somewhat less strained, and Smart is able to employ the sprightly description of nature at which he excels. The poem is strengthened by the paradox of God's omnipresence--He dwells in heaven, yet He is equally present everywhere on earth. Norman Callan has noted that Smart "is a miniaturist rather than a painter of broad effects,"[2] and this talent is employed here in Smart's wonder at the presence of God in His tiniest creations. The theme of God's omnipresence is perhaps an easier one to handle gracefully than that of eternity; at any rate, it proves more suitable to Smart's special talents.

"On the Immensity" is a more successful poem from its very beginning, having a more appealing invocation:

> Once more I dare to rouse the sounding string,
> The poet of my God--Awake my glory,
> Awake my lute and harp--my self shall wake,
> Soon as the stately night-exploding bird
> In lively lay sings welcome to the dawn.
> List ye! how Nature with ten thousand tongues
> Begins the grand thanksgiving. . .
> (1-7)

The last two lines show Smart in his element. His most persistent theme is that of the whole universe praising God. It fills him with wonder, and he never tires of cataloguing

---

[2]Introduction, p. xxxi.

God's wonders. The tone of amazement is continued in his statement of God's omnipresence, the paradox of God's presence in heaven and throughout the universe:

> Albeit he there /in heaven/ with Angels, and with Saints
> Hold conference, and to his radiant host
> Ev'n face to face stand visibly confest:
> Yet know that nor in Presence or in Pow'r
> Shines he less perfect here; 'tis Man's dim eye
> That makes the obscurity. . .
> (21-27)

The description of God as "face to face" with the angels is still anthropomorphic, yet it is much more successful than in the first poem. God's face amid heavenly radiance is immensely more attractive than the image of God's sloth. And there seem to be echoes here of I Corinthians, 13:12: "for now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face." Another successful description of God in human terms probably also gains force through Biblical associations:

> Or whether on the Ocean's boist'rous back
> Thou ride triumphant, and with out-stretched arm
> Curb the wild winds and discipline the billows,
> The suppliant sailor finds Thee there, his chief,
> His only help--when Thou rebuk'st the storm--
> It ceases--and the vessel gently glides
> Along the glassy level of the calm.
> (39-45)

In this case the picture of God riding the waves helps give personality to the abstract concept of God. Further, God seems to become transmuted from the Zeus-like rider of the waves into the gentle Christ. When God "rebukes" the storm and the boat "gently glides/ Along the glassy level of the

calm," we are reminded that Christ once rebuked a storm at sea (Matthew; 8:26):

> And he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

In this poem, Smart takes a trip throughout creation to reveal God's presence everywhere. He begins by moving through the "spangled sky" (22), then to "the Ocean's boist'rous back" and then he descends beneath the sea:

> Oh! cou'd I search the bosom of the sea;
> Down the great depth descending; there thy works
> Wou'd also speak thy residence; and there
> Wou'd I thy servant, like the still profound,
> Astonish'd into silence muse thy praise!
> (46-50)

The poem is also effective in permitting Smart to utilize his miniaturist's talents to convey his wonder at the great beauty and variety of God's works, effects which he often underlines with paradox. Smart speaks of the beauties which would astonish him into silence on the ocean floor:

> Behold! behold! th' unplanted garden round
> Of vegetable coral, sea-flowers gay
> And shrubs of amber from the pearl-paved bottom
> Rise richly varied. . .
> (51-54)

Here the garden is "unplanted," the coral seems lifeless, but is really alive and growing ("vegetable"), and the living shrubs have the appearance of lifeless amber. Smart's eye for the tiny but lovely detail is evident in his description of the patterns in agate and jasper which often form outdoor scenes, a detail which he is probably the only poet

to have noticed:

> nature in them both
> Delights to play the mimic on herself;
> And in their veins she oft portrays the forms
> Of leaning hills, of trees erect, and streams
> Now stealing softly on, now thund'ring down
> In desperate cascade, with flowers and beasts
> And all the living landscape of the vale.
> (72-78)

Smart effectively contrasts the greatest works of man with the smallest works of God, awed by the infinite superiority of God's artistry, and here the miniaturist's eye is again displayed:

> what are yon tow'rs
> The work of lab'ring man and clumsy art
> Seen with the ring-dove's nest--on that tall beech
> Her pensile house the feathered Artist builds--
> The rocking winds molest her not; for see;
> With such due poize the wond'rous fabrick's hung,
> That, like the compass in the bark, it keeps
> True to itself and steadfast ev'n in storms.
> (111-118)

This poem, then, is more successful because Smart is able to employ his special talents in it. It is particularly well suited to his favourite theme of an animate universe actively praising God. The images, especially those involving his ability to paint small pictures, are more pleasing than those of the first Seatonian poem. The tone of wonder carries the poem to a more convincing emotional climax which asserts his desire to praise the God who has created such wonderful works for the use and enjoyment of man:

> I see, and I adore--O God most bounteous!
> O infinite of Goodness and of Glory!
> The knee, that Thou hast shap'd shall bend to Thee,

The tongue, which Thou hast tun'd shall chant thy
praise,
And thine own image, the immortal soul,
Shall consecrate herself to thee forever.

The third Seatonian poem, "On the Omniscience of the Supreme Being" (1752), is charming in much the same way as the second. It employs again Smart's talent for seeing the miraculous in God's smallest creations. The poem achieves its success by altering its stated theme of God's omniscience to suit the author's talents. Smart begins the poem with a brief invocation, and then tells how before his birth, God knew him completely--"when in my mother's womb conceal'd I lay/ A senseless embryo, then my soul thou knewst" (18-19). As he grew older he learned by virtue of God's gift of reason the perfection of God's wisdom, that,

what of knowledge in my mind was low,
Imperfect, incorrect--in thee is wondrous,
Uncircumscrib'd, unsearchably profound,
And estimable solely by itself.

What is that secret pow'r that guides the brutes,
Which ignorance calls instinct? 'Tis from thee,
It is the operation of thine hands,
Immediate, instantaneous; 'tis thy wisdom,
That glorious shines transparent thro' thy works.
(27-35)

These lines show the thematic transition of the poem, for they speak of the various types of knowledge possessed by God and His creations. God has perfect knowledge; man's knowledge is imperfect as a result of the fall, but is aided by the blessed gift of reason; animals in their God-given instinctive knowledge in some ways far exceed man's

plodding scholarship, yet they are subordinate to man because they were created for him.

Smart, then, deftly changes his topic to suit his talents, and is able to spend most of the poem describing the wonders of instinct in many creatures, where he is, again, the talented painter of miniature portraits. In each case, he compares the instinctive knowledge from God with man's imperfect knowledge:

> Who taught the pye, or who forewarn'd the jay
> To shun the deadly nightshade? tho' the cherry
> Boasts not a glossier hue, nor does the plumb
> Lure with more seeming sweets the amorous eye,
> Yet will not the sagacious birds, decoy'd
> By fair appearance, touch the noxious fruit.
> (36-41)

Man however, has not this knowledge, and may therefore be deceived by appearance:

> Full many a race has fall'n into the snare
> Of meretricious looks, of pleasing surface,
> And oft in desert isles the famish'd pilgrim
> By forms of fruit and luscious taste beguil'd,
> Like his forefather Adam, eats and dies.
> For why? his wisdom on the leaden feet
> Of slow experience, dully tedious, creeps,
> And comes, like vengeance, after long delay.
> (46-53)

The comparison with "his forefather Adam" underlines the reason for man's imperfect knowledge--man had this knowledge once, but lost it through Adam's transgression, as is made clear later in the poem:

> Woful vicissitude! when Man, fall'n Man,
> Who first from Heav'n, from gracious God himself,
> Learn'd knowledge of the Brutes, must know by Brutes,
> Instructed and reproach'd, the scale of being.
> (160-163)

Smart's portrayal of animals and birds as God's lessons to man contains two of his charming miniatures. He writes of the ant who is wise in providing for her winter needs, although she "presumes not by the solar orb/ To measure time and seasons, nor consults/ Chaldean calculations for a guide" (116-118). In preparation,

> all her subterraneous avenues,
> And storm-proof cells, with management most meet
> And unexampled housewifry, she forms,
> Then to the field she hies, and on her back,
> Burden immense! she bears the cumbrous corn.
> (129-133)

With the same eye for small details, he writes of the bee, whose

> pellucid populous hive presents
> A yet uncopied model of the world!
> There Machiavel in the reflecting glass
> May read himself a fool. The Chemist there
> May with astonishment invidious view
> His toils outdone by each plebeian Bee,
> Who, at the royal mandate, on the wing
> From various herbs, and from discordant flow'rs
> A perfect harmony of sweets compounds.
> (145-153)

Again the superiority of nature's works to man's is made clear, for man's greatest skill is confounded by them. Picturing them at human tasks, as housewives and chemists, humanizes them, yet they excel man at these tasks. While man's inferior knowledge, compared with that of the "brutes," is a reproach to him, they nevertheless offer him great pleasure and consolation:

Still with ten thousand beauties blooms the Earth,
With pleasures populous, and with riches crown'd.
Still is there scope for wonder and for love
Ev'n to their last exertion--show'rs of blessings
Far more than human virtue can deserve,
Or hope expect, or gratitude return.
(171-176)

The last lines end on a confident and triumphant note, for man is blessed by God even though he is fallen, and his task is therefore to praise God (177-188).

This poem, "On the Omniscience," is more sophisticated than the two earlier Seatonian poems, for it approaches its subject in a less direct manner. It develops a greater complexity of thought in its three-fold comparison of the knowledge of God, man, and other creatures. There is a paradox inherent in the comparison--man is above the others in possessing the power of reason, yet they are closer to God in their possession of instinctive knowledge. Unlike man they continue to live in an unfallen state of grace, yet man is comforted by the knowledge that they were created for his pleasure and use. Although this is the best developed of the three poems considered, it too depends for much of its effect on the purely emotional response Smart's images evoke, such as the provident ant or the industrious bee. His ability to notice and juxtapose the most compelling details about his subjects is what most captures one's sympathy.

Smart's fourth Seatonian poem, "On the Power of the

Supreme Being" (1754), swings back to an overly-ornate Miltonic style which weakens the poem. He is again betrayed into gauche anthropomorphisms which tend to deflate his grand style. In his attempt to picture forcefully the infinite power of God, Smart attributes so many natural calamities to God that He emerges as a wrathful and a capricious God unleashing senseless and destructive power. The stupendous leaves Smart at a loss for effective description, where before he had so sensitively treated the tiny. Attempts at large effects often fail, as when he says that at the sound of God's "terrific voice" (8) [the thunder], all nature hears and trembles. Even mountains respond to God's call:

> Behold! quakes Apennine, behold! recoils
> Athos, and all the hoary-headed Alps
> Leap from their bases at the godlike sound.
> (13-15)

The image of animated mountains leaping from their bases simply requires too much imaginative effort. Even if one does manage it, the picture is simply ludicrous. The same sort of imaginative jarr occurs when Smart describes earthquakes as being caused by God:

> oft, enraged with his intestine thunders,
> He harrows up the bowels of the earth,
> And shocks the central magnet--Cities then
> Totter on their foundations, stately columns,
> Magnific walls, and heav'n assaulting spires.
> (32-36)

The reference to God's "intestine" thunders weakens the

whole passage; Smart may have thought the word ennobling because of its Latin origin; however, it has the unfortunate effect of suggesting huge divine intestines, an incongruous image at best. Following this passage is a horrific catalogue of the destruction wreaked by God during earthquakes. While it does succeed in demonstrating divine power, it does little to justify the ways of God to man, for it leaves the distasteful picture of a cruel and unreasonably destructive God. The unlovely first half of the poem ends in a macabre exhortation to God's agents of destruction to worship Him:

> Wherefore ye objects terrible and great,
> Ye thunders, earthquakes, and ye fire-fraught wombs
> Of fell volcanoes, whirlwinds, hurricanes,
> And boiling billows hail! in chorus join
> To celebrate and magnify your Maker,
> Who yet in works of a minuter mould
> Is not less manifest, not less mighty.
> (73-79)

Fortunately this passage signals the end of Smart's attempts at huge effects and allows him to turn to the consideration of God's "minuter" works, at which he is much more at home. A tone of greater tenderness comes into the poem: "Survey the magnet's sympathetic love,/ That wooes the yielding needle; contemplate/ Th' attractive amber's power (80-82). These wonders, as always, delight and amaze Smart, and his amazement is expressed in an especially fine simile which depicts a personified Philosophy bewildered at the beauty and profusion of God's works:

> baffled here
> By his omnipotence, Philosophy
> Slowly her thoughts inadequate revolves,
> And stands, with all his circling wonders round her,
> Like heavy Saturn in th' etherial space
> Begirt with an inexplicable ring.
> (85-90)

This passage is practically the only saving grace of the poem, which is elsewhere marred by a too-inflated Miltonic style, e.g.,

> Need I sing
> The fate of Pharoah and his numerous band
> Lost in the reflux of the watry walls,
> That melted to their fluid state again?
> (100-103)

Smart tries to bring the poem to a triumphant climax by placing at the end his consideration of man's redemption through Christ as the ultimate evidence of God's power (110). The introduction of Christ presents the loving and tender side of God, but this image of gentleness is not sufficient to dispel the troubling vision of the earlier God of earthquakes, volcanoes, and destruction.

Because of these flaws, "On the Power" is the worst of the Seatonian poems. It is plagued by bombastic language and tortured syntax, and it presents a decidedly unpleasant picture of God.

Smart's fifth and last Seatonian poem, "On the Goodness of the Supreme Being," won the prize in 1756, probably the year when Smart was first confined for madness. It is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving, and has the simplest

structure of any of these poems. It develops not by logic, but by association of ideas. The invocation is followed by the poet's statement of his wish to praise God; then he asks what his subject ought to be:

> Where shall the tim'rous bard thy praise begin,
> Where end the purest sacrifice of song,
> And just thanksgiving?--The thought-kindling light,
> Thy prime production, darts upon my mind
> Its vivifying beams. . .
> (21-25)

After letting his subject virtually suggest itself, Smart expands on the theme of light. It is an instance of God's great goodness to man because it enables him to see all the wonderful things He has created:

> Without the aid of yonder golden globe
> Lost were the garnet's lustre, lost the lilly,
> The tulip and auricula's spotted pride:
> Lost were the peacock's plumage, to the sight
> So pleasing in its pomp and glossy glow.
> O thrice-illustrious! were it not for thee
> Those pansies, that reclining from the bank,
> View through th' immaculate, pellucid stream
> Their portraiture in the inverted heaven,
> Might as well change their triple boast, the white,
> The purple, and the gold, that far outvie
> The eastern monarch's garb, ev'n with the dock,
> Ev'n with the baneful hemlock's irksome green.
> (32-44)

Light suggests to the poet all the things that light enables man to see, and allows him to begin one of his characteristic catalogues of the beauties of nature. He lets the poem ramble on in this way, one image suggesting the next. From flowers he turns to birds, for without the light birds would remain silent--"the tribes of woodland warblers wou'd remain/

Mute on the bending branches, nor recite/ The praise of him who . . . bade them call for nurture" (46-49). This reminds him that God feeds the birds, and that their songs are sung to Him in gratitude:

> He hears and feeds their feather'd families,
> He feeds his sweet musicians,--nor neglects
> Th' invoking ravens in the greenwood wide;
> And though their throats coarse ruttling hurt the ear,
> They mean it all for music, thanks and praise
> They mean. . .
>
> (54-59)

God is also good to his other creatures, and especially to man for whom all else was made:

> O he is good, he is immensely good!
> Who all things form'd, and form'd them all for man;
> Who mark'd the climates, varied every zone,
> Dispensing all his blessings for the best
> In order and in beauty:--raise, attend,
> Attest, and praise, ye quarters of the world!
> (82-87)

This is Smart's main theme in all his religious poetry, and he seeks to work it in whenever he can. The passage quoted marks a transition point in the poem; the second half is devoted to exhortations to God's creatures to praise Him. Again the idea that small things reveal God's skill as well as larger ones is emphasized--God is "as great, as perfect and as good/ In his less-striking wonders, till at length the eye's at fault and seeks the assisting glass" (92-94).

This final Seatonian poem is a recapitulation of the important concerns of the earlier poems. The Miltonic style is considerably muted, and the rhythm flows swiftly and

smoothly to the poem's climax, a climax which is achieved through the emotions rather than through logical development. The poem contains some beautiful images, but it lacks complexity of thought. It has no glaring faults, but is simply not very interesting. It strips to the bones Smart's chief preoccupations, the things he really wants to talk about in his religious poetry--the beauty and plenitude of creation, the concern of God for man and all of nature, the poet's own delight in these creations, and his conviction of the necessity of praising God. Smart manages to work these themes into each of his Seatonian poems. He is, in fact, at his most effective when he is writing about them. He most excites sympathy and admiration when he is marvelling at nature, especially when his eye catches moving details about very small things. The best and most tender descriptions involve one with his religious outlook, whether it is accepted intellectually or not.

CHAPTER III

JUBILATE AGNO

Smart's poetry contains much that is very beautiful and much that is very strange. This strangeness has interested critics in itself, and also because his poetry seems so very different from other eighteenth-century poetry. Many passages may even seem incomprehensible, and yet still have a certain compelling charm; one may be delighted without knowing precisely why. Nowhere is Smart more delightful and strange and elusive then in his longest poem, Jubilate Agno. Smart's known poetry fills two volumes, and a careful study of it yields considerable information about his writing. But Jubilate Agno is a much more fruitful study because it reveals the poetic and philosophical assumptions which colour his images.

Jubilate Agno was discovered in 1939 in a private library by William Force Stead, in Smart's autograph. Stead's edition (1939) represented an attempt to arrange the poem chronologically. Except for a few coherent parts, the work seemed very chaotic, and was assumed to be the curious product of the poet's madness. In 1954, however, W. H. Bond published an edition of Jubilate Agno in which its original structure was restored. Bond, using textual and bibliographical methods, discovered that the poem has

an antiphonal structure. It consists of passages which begin with the word "Let" and others which begin with the word "For." In Stead's edition, the "Let" and "For" sections are arranged separately. Bond was able to show, however, that the "Let" verses have corresponding and usually related "For" verses. Some of the verses were either lost, not completed, or not composed in this manner, for a perfect correspondence could not be made; nevertheless, a large proportion of the work was matched up in this manner in Bond's edition.

The relationship revealed between the sets of verses made Jubilate Agno seem a less chaotic work, and a new richness was revealed in the poem. A single example shows the importance of Bond's discovery. These two verses were considered lovely even separately, but their impact is tremendously heightened when they are read together:

> Let Hushim rejoice with the King's Fisher, who
> is of royal beauty, tho' plebeian size.
>
> For in my nature I quested for beauty, but God,
> God hath sent me to sea for pearls.
> (B_1, 60)[1]

Placing these verses as a unit adds a wealth of association

---

[1]All quotations from Jubilate Agno are from Bond's edition (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954). Capital letters (A, B_1, B_2, C and D) refer to the fragments of the manuscript; the numbers refer to the actual lines.

to them. Smart becomes identified with the kingfisher; both are of "plebeian size" (we know that Smart was very short), and both are nonetheless beautiful. The poet likens his quest to diving for pearls, while the kingfisher also "dives" into the sea to catch the fish it eats. And finally, one catches a hint of the idea that he wished to be a "fisher of men," an idea quite consistent with his claim, "For by the grace of God I am the Reviver of ADORATION amongst ENGLISH-MEN" (B_2, 332). Elsewhere he says "the Lord make me a fisher of men" (B_1, 110). The discovery of the antiphonal structure of the poem, then, showed it to be a saner and more meaningful work than it had first appeared.

The rhythm of the work was also shown to be much more sophisticated and pleasing than it had previously seemed. Each pair of verses has a rise and fall, a separateness, which is much more pleasing than reading the long series of "Let" and "For" verses independently.

Jubilate Agno is, nevertheless, still a poem in an embryonic state. It does not seem to have been seriously intended for publication, and appears to have become in part a journal for Smart during his years of confinement (from late 1756 to early 1763). There is practically no evidence of revision, and much of the work is rough and unorganized. The poem does, however, contain many beautiful passages and

single lines, and it is also a rich source of information about the poet's religious philosophy.

This philosophy has room in it for contradictions because it is an eclectic accumulation, in which odd things often appear as a reflection of the poet's reading material at a particular time. One source of influence may be important for a while and then give place to a new. And all his sources are worked upon by his own peculiar logic, so that they often look very different when he is through with them. His religion and his poetry are intimately connected. The most important thing about Smart is his childlike delight in beautiful things, a delight he makes a part of his religious outlook. He likes pretty things, especially if they are strange and exotic. To Smart, the very names of unusual birds and animals have a delicious flavour. Gems he finds wonderfully sensuous. Fish are like gems or precious metals, and are usually described as silver or gold. His love of naming these things is evident throughout Jubilate Agno as he exhorts people to worship with flowers, gems, herbs, birds, fish, and animals. In Smart's religious view, these things exist to glorify and praise God. They fulfil their duties by performing the roles set them by God. This is evident inasmuch as Smart mentions not only "benevolent" animals, but also those which are useless or even harmful to mankind. A few examples will illustrate this point.

> Let Ehud rejoice with Onocrotalus, whose braying is for the glory of God because he makes the best music in his power.
>
> (B_1, 19)

> Let Hilkiah praise with the Weasel, which sneaks for his prey in craft, and dwelleth at ambush.
>
> (A, 50)

> Let Maaseiah bless with the Drone, who with the appearance of a Bee is neither a soldier nor an artist, neither a swordsman nor smith.
>
> (A, 98)

It can be seen, then, that these creatures serve God simply by being themselves, and in their variety they reveal the great skill of God. Both these meanings are, perhaps, contained in the line, "For all the animals mention'd by Pliny are somewhere or other extant to the glory of God" (B_2, 622). Smart makes it clear that all these creatures are dear to God, and he always interprets them as good when possible. Hence the life of the beetle is "precious in the sight of God, tho' his appearance is against him" (A, 38). The crocodile is "pleasant and pure, when he is interpreted, tho' his look is of terror and offence" (A, 46). Dogs are faithful (A, 56) and cats knock over idols (A, 57). The wolf is simply "a dog without a master" (A, 76) and a wasp is "the Lord's architect, and buildeth his edifice in armour" (A, 101). Smart's love of animals and his belief that they are close to God has, as is the case with many of his ideas, a basic sanction in the Bible. God's love for sparrows is mentioned in Luke, 12:6-7:

> Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.

Smart was familiar with this passage,[2] and it is especially appropriate in that Smart particularly loved small birds and animals, such as "the King's Fisher, who is of royal beauty, tho' plebeian size," because he was himself a very small man.[3]

Flowersalso are dear to God. They have a real function, for while their flowers show a beautiful face to God, their roots literally do combat with the devil--"for the flower glorifies God and the root parries the adversary" (B_2, 499). Smart notes that Christ "made a Nosegay in the medow with his disciples & preached upon the lily" (B2, 494), and that "flowers are peculiarly the poetry of Christ" (B_2, 506). These lines most likely have as their background the following passage from Matthew 6:28-30:

> And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to-morrow is cast into the

---

[2]Cf. "Let Shimron rejoice with the Kite, who is of more value than many sparrows."(Italics added) (B1, 47).

[3]Elsewhere in Jubilate Agno, he says, "For I am a little fellow" (B_1, 45). He also wrote a poem "The Author Apologizes to a Lady for His Being a Little Man" (in Callan).

> oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

This passage, which considers colour as the clothing of grass and flowers, also gives a certain Biblical basis for Smart's treatment of colour. His passage on colours in Jubilate Agno describes it as something dropped by God as a "blessing."

> NOW that colour is spiritual appears inasmuch as the blessing of God upon all things descends in colour.
>
> For the blessing of God upon the human face is in colour.
>
> (B_2, 664-665)
>
> For the blessing of God upon the grass is in shades of Green visible to a nice observer as they light upon the surface of the earth.
>
> For the blessing of God unto perfection in all bloom and fruit is by colouring.
>
> (B_2, 670-671)

The last two lines, referring to grass and "bloom," seem to be the same grass and lilies mentioned in the quotation from Matthew. Smart is alluding to the same Biblical grass and lilies in Hymn II ("Circumcision"),[4] where he speaks of the "herb of ever-grateful green" and of lilies:

---

[4]From Hymns and Spiritual Songs in The Collected Poems of Christopher Smart (2 Vols.), ed. Norman Callan (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949), pp. 790-792. All quotations from poems other than Jubilate Agno are from this edition.

> Ye lilies of perfume,
> That triumph o'er the loom,
> And gaudy greatness far outshine.
> (36-39)

This is an example of how Smart amplified what he found in the Bible to form theories which seemed lovely to him. He did not contradict scripture, but he did alter it by the addition of his own ideas. Holding this charming theory of colour it is little wonder that Smart rejected Newton's colour theory as "unphilosophical" (B_2, 650). He would not allow a scientist with a prism to upset his lovely world in which everything united to praise God. Smart's religion invested his natural love of beauty with a much deeper significance, which is one of the ways in which the following line may be read:

> For in my nature I quested for beauty, but God,
> God hath sent me to sea for pearls.

Smart loves beautiful things, and he dearly loves miracles; Jubilate Agno and his hymns are full of references to the miracles of Christ, which he accepts completely and literally. He refers to the fish which Christ predicted would bring a shekel in its mouth to pay taxes for Himself and Peter (mentioned in Matthew 17:27):

> Let James the less, rejoice with the Haddock,
> who brought the piece of money for the Lord
> and Peter.
> (B_1, 131)

The tone of delight in miracles is also evident throughout

his hymns. Hymn VI, "The Presentation of Christ in the Temple," celebrates the miracle of Christ's appearance on earth:[5]

> That God should in the world appear
> Incarnate--as a child--
> That he should be presented here,
> At once our utmost doubts to clear,
> And make our hearts with wonder wild.
> (37-41)

Smart also accepts more secular "miracles" when they fit into his plan of the universe, whether they might be "all the animals mention'd by Pliny" or a newly discovered scientific fact or theory. On the other hand, he will reject without any need of proof new theories which he does not find esthetically pleasing, for example Newton's colour theory mentioned above. Once he has accepted an idea, he clings to it, for he has the conviction of a member of the elect that he knows and understands things. He sees himself as a God-inspired prophet in the tradition of David; having God to show him the truth, he feels able to reject Newton outright:

> For Newton nevertheless is more of error than
> of truth, but I am of the WORD of GOD.
> (B_1, 195)

Elsewhere he says, "for I am the Lord's News-Writer--the scribe-evangelist" (B_2, 326). However, when new theories

---

[5]Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Callan, pp. 796-799.

enhanced or did not conflict with his ideas, he often accepted them quite readily. For example, he mentions as fact a theory then newly advanced by Benjamin Franklin on the benefits of electricity on paralysis:

> For it [an "electrical spirit"] is good to quicken in paralytic cases being the life applied unto death.
>
> (B_1, 267)

For Smart, life is a great struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness. There is a real devil (called "the adversary" in Jubilate Agno), and there are also witches, constantly trying to woo man away from God and righteousness. All God's creatures have their part in repelling the devil, or as Smart usually puts it, "parrying the adversary."

> For the flower glorifies God and the root parries the adversary.
>
> Let Jehoida bless God with an Hare, whose mazes are determined for the health of the body and to parry the adversary.
>
> (A, 22)
>
> Let a Little Child with a Serpent bless Him, who ordaineth strength in babes to the confusion of the adversary.
>
> (A, 90)
>
> Let Rebekah rejoice with Iynx, who holds his head on one side to deceive the adversary.
>
> (B_1, 17)

He uses the imagery of light and dark to symbolize the forces of good and evil. This is a very conscious use, and there are some implied references to Milton, as well as the

use of the phrase "visible darkness."[6] He does not use light and dark merely to symbolize good and evil, however. He sees them as actual forces produced by God and the devil.

> For LIGHT is propagated at all distances at an instant because it is actuated by the divine conception.
>
> (B_1, 284)

> For the SHADE is of death and from the adversary.
>
> (B_1, 286)

> For the devil hath most power in winter, because darkness prevails.
>
> (B_1, 296)

> For the ECLIPSE is of the adversary. . .
>
> For the Shadow is his and the penumbra is his and the perplexity of the phenomenon.
>
> For the eclipses happen at times when the light is defective.
>
> For the more the light is defective, the more the powers of darkness prevail.
>
> (B_2, 312-315)

> For the SHADOW is of death, which is the Devil, who can make false and faint images of the works of Almighty God.
>
> (B_2, 308)

It can be seen from these quotations that the meanings attached to light are meant to be taken quite literally. (The last verse quoted seems to refer to Satan's false kingdom in Paradise Lost.) Darkness is from the devil;

---

[6]"For the malignancy of fire is oweing to the Devil's hiding of light, till it became visible darkness." (B_2, 373).

light is from God, and "LIGHTNING is a glance of the glory of God" (B_1, 271).

As noted in the Introduction, one may find in Jubilate Agno many passages which reveal Smart's affinity with the earlier Elizabethan "world picture," a view of life which adds force and beauty to many of his images. For Smart, as for the Elizabethans, the universe and the world are animate. Stones, metals, fish, gems and even colours are pictured as alive and actively worshipping God. Gems, for example are exhorted to worship God--"O all ye gems of the mine bless ye the Lord, praise him & magnify him for ever" (D, 73). There is a hierarchy of metals, the best of which are gold and silver. The colours of these metals are given to fish as a means of allowing them to worship God: in A Song to David, Smart sees "silverlings" and "crusions" who are "for ADORATION gilt" (342). There is also a hierarchy of living colours--"for white is the first and best" (B_2, 652), and yellow is "more excellent than red" (B_2, 657), because according to Smart's colour theory it is closer to white. This hierarchy is not seen as a continuum from highest to lowest, however, but is rather circular--it begins with white, moves through silver, grey, blue, green, yellow, red, and black; the black shades into purple, which "works off to BROWN which is of ten thousand acceptable shades" (B_2, 661). Brown is one of his more "desirable" colours,

for after it comes "pale," good because it "works about to White again" (B_2, 662). Smart's colours are decidedly animate, as demonstrated by the startling line,

> For black blooms and it is PURPLE.
> (B_2, 660)

Colour, as mentioned earlier, is literally dropped to the earth by God as a means of showing His favour:

> For the blessing of God upon the grass is in shades of Green visible to a nice observer as they light upon the surface of the earth.
>
> For the blessing of God unto perfection in all bloom and fruit is by colouring.
>
> For from hence something in the spirit may be taken off by painters.
> (B_2, 670-672)

Because he sees it as separate and animate, Smart treats colour in a unique way--it is as if God gently dropped colour onto the black and white of a sketched picture, an almost quicker-than-the-eye operation which is nonetheless visible to a "nice" observer.

Another feature of the late medieval and Renaissance system of universal analogy, number mysticism, also appears in Smart. Fragment C of Jubilate Agno contains a very explicit statement of Smart's interest in numbers:

> For there is a mystery in numbers.
>
> For One is perfect and good being at unity in himself.
>
> For Two is the most imperfect of all numbers.

For everything infinitely perfect is Three.

For the Devil is two being without God.

For he is an evil spirit male and female.

For he is called the Duce by foolish invocation on that account.

For Three is the simplest and best of all numbers. (19-26)

This is the only definite reference to number mysticism in Smart's poetry. It is also apparent, however, in the arrangement of A Song to David. The stanzas of this poem are arranged in groups of three, seven, and their multiples. Number mysticism also seems evident in Hymn XVI, "Trinity Sunday":[7]

O THREE! of blest account
To which all sums amount,
For if the church has two
The work of pray'r to do,
God himself, th' Almighty word,
Will be there to make the third.
(13-18)

Smart's writing also shows familiarity with the doctrine of signatures. One interesting example parallels Henry More's ideas about scorpion grass:

Let Codrington, house of Codrington rejoice with Thelyphonon an herb whose root kills scorpions. (D, 149)

Thelyphonon is a plant with some resemblance to a scorpion,

---

[7]Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Callan, pp. 819-821.

which is what its name means. The same idea operates in another example:

> Let Potts, house of Potts rejoice with Ulex
> an herb like rosemary with a quality of
> attracting gold.
>
> (D, 130)

This example initially seems unfruitful; however, rosemary was considered to be capable of attracting gold because of its yellow flowers, another example of God's natural "Hieroglyphicks," this time involving what may be termed a visual pun. The following example contains a simple pun on names:

> Let Balsam, house of Balsam rejoice with Chenomycon
> an herb the sight of which terrifies a goose. . . .
>
> (D, 133)

The Latin roots of "chenomycon" mean "goose fungus;" hence it is only "natural" that this plant would frighten a goose. Another possibility allowed in the doctrine of signatures was that the cure for bites or stings might actually be found within the creature or plant which caused them. This idea, too, is expressed in Jubilate Agno:

> For the bite of an Adder is cured by it's greese
> & the malice of my enemies by their stupidity.
>
> (B_1, 118)

The Elizabethans, as noted in the Introduction, had a penchant for puns, and seemed to get much more out of them than anyone is able to do today. In Jubilate Agno, there is a real preoccupation with the relationships between words, on the level of simple puns and also of more developed

relationships. Smart shares the Elizabethan tendency to identify rather than simply to compare things which are analogous. Sometimes there is a sort of rambling free association in which one word suggests another, without apparent connection. At other times, the "puns" develop a real relationship to the point where the things compared become fused.

What might be called the "lowest" type of pun in Jubilate Agno is well illustrated by the following example:

> Let Noah rejoice with Hibris who is from a wild boar and a tame sow.
>
> For I bless God for the immortal soul of Mr. Pigg of DOWNHAM in NORFOLK.
>
> (B_1, 116)

There does not appear to be any deeper meaning here; "boar" has simply suggested to the poet the name of his friend Mr. Pigg. Yet even such simple relationships may have had meaning for Smart, for he writes earlier in the poem:

> For I have a providential acquaintance with men who bear the names of animals.
>
> For I bless God to Mr Lion Mr Cock Mr Cat Mr Talbot Mr Hart Mrs Fysh Mr Grub, and Miss Lamb.
>
> (B_1, 114)

This suggests that Smart considered it in some way lucky to know people with these animal names. Another example is a pun, yet it carries a greater meaning than just the casual association of identical sounds:

> Let Eliada rejoice with the Gier-eagle who is swift and of great penetration.
>
> For I bless the Lord Jesus for the memory of GAY, POPE and SWIFT.
>
> (B_1, 84)

Here "swift" is not only a pun for "SWIFT," but these authors are also "of great penetration." Further, the eagle is an appropriate bird to symbolize the writers he admires.

Sometimes an otherwise incomprehensible passage may be deciphered simply by looking for word relationships, e.g.,

> Let Gilead rejoice with the Gentle the Lord make me a fisher of men.
>
> For I bless God in all gums & balsams & everything that ministers relief to the sick.
>
> (B_1, 110)

These lines appear to be unrelated; the clue, however, is in the word "Gilead," which suggests "balm of Gilead" which in turn suggests "all gums & balsams & everything that ministers relief to the sick." The reference is to Jeremiah 8:22: "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?"

At best these word relationships develop into a virtual fusion of the two things compared. A good example of this is in the previously quoted example:

> Let Hushim rejoice with the King's Fisher, who is of royal beauty, tho' plebeian size.
>
> For in my nature I quested for beauty, but God, God hath sent me to sea for pearls.

As noted, Smart becomes identified with the kingfisher. Both are small and beautiful. The bird dives for fish; Smart, for more spiritual nourishment. The pearls of his quest are also important, for pearls play an important part in Smart's imagery, and are used to symbolize very precious things. They appear again in A Song to David where they are used to symbolize penitence:

> Precious the ruby's blushing blaze,
> And alba's blessed imperial rays,
> And pure cerulean pearl.
>
> Precious the penitential tear;
> And precious is the sigh sincere,
> Acceptable to God.
>
> (484-489)

In this example the "pure cerulean pearl" becomes fused with the "penitential tear," a very effective image because of the visual similarities of the tear and the pearl, and because both are precious to the poet.

Another jewel image involves the same kind of fusion of the things compared:

> Let Hamul rejoice with the Crystal, who is pure and translucent.
>
> For sincerity is a jewel which is pure & transparent, eternal & inestimable.
>
> (B1, 40)

This is more than a simple pun, although the original point of contact may seem small--crystal is translucent, and sincerity is transparent, in the sense that one is able to "see through" the guileless person. The two are analogous

in other ways, however, for both are pure and both are precious. The two become what Nicolson calls "identicals."

Other passages indicate Smart's interest in the sounds of words. An example is that on the "rhimes" of various instruments in Fragment B_2:

> For the spiritual musick is as follows.
>
> For there is the thunder-stop, which is the voice of God direct.
>
> For the rest of the stops are by their rhimes.
>
> For the trumpet rhimes are sound bound, soar more and the like.
>
> For the Shawm rhimes are lawn fawn moon boon and the like.
>
> For the harp rhimes are sing ring, string & the like.
>
> For the cymbal rhimes are bell well toll soul & the like.
>
> For the flute rhimes are tooth youth suit mute & the like.
>
> For the dulcimer rhimes are grace place beat heat & the like.
>
> For the Clarinet rhimes are clean seen and the like.
>
> For the Bassoon rhimes are pass, class and the like. . .
>
> (584-594)

The dancing rhythm and the suitability of the "rhimes" to the instruments creates an almost musical effect. Even the pitch on which one speaks each rhyme seems suitable to the instrument described--"pass" and "class" for the bassoon are

uttered on a lower note than "ring" and "string" for the harp.

He explores words in other ways, probably also as a result of his analogical habits of thought. He often achieves interesting effects by interchanging parts of speech. In the section on Smart's cat Jeoffry, for example, a noun is borrowed to serve as a verb--"for he camels his back to bear the first notion of business" (B_2, 756). He also uses an adjective as a verb--"for he counteracts the Devil, who is death, by brisking about the life" (B_2, 722). This type of freedom is unusual in the eighteenth century, and seems to anticipate the looseness of twentieth-century usage. A further step away from conventional speech is taken in the admirably compressed line, "for the Cherub Cat is a term of the Angel Tiger" (B_2, 725). In strictly grammatical terms, this line makes no sense, yet it does convey its meaning almost intuitively. As the cherub is a small angel, so is the cat a small tiger, almost as if the cat were a mathematical factor of the tiger.

Other unusual constructions may be grouped under the general term "synesthesia," or description of one sense experience in terms of another. In the passage on flowers, for example, Smart says:

> For flowers are musical in ocular harmony,
> (B_2, 508)

that is, they are "musical" in the harmony of their colours, the sense of hearing being substituted for the sense of sight. Another example comes from the description of fish:

> For the praise of God can give to a mute fish
> the notes of a nightingale.
>
> (B_1, 24)

We have been told that fish praise God by means of their deirable colours ("for ADORATION gilt"), which are seen here in musical terms. Another interesting example is in Smart's use of the word "candied." "For FROST is damp & unwholsome air candied to fall to the best advantage" (B_2, 325), and snow "is the dew candied" (B_2, 339). Water allowed to form a fountain will "prank itself into ten thousand agreeable forms" (B_1, 210).

Another interesting link between Smart and the Elizabethan poets is his mention of the theme of decay. Probably the most familiar Elizabethan treatment of this theme is in Donne's First Anniversary, where the decay of man in stature, age, and morality is lamented. The same theme occurs in Jubilate Agno:

> For I prophecy that men will live to a much greater age, this ripens apace God be praised.
>
> For I prophecy that they will grow taller and stronger.
>
> For degeneracy has done a great deal more than is in general imagined.
>
> For men in David's time were ten feet high in general.

For they had degenerated also from the strength of their fathers.

(C, 88-92)

It would be foolish to make too extravagant claims about the worth of Jubilate Agno, since it is not a finished work and has no orderly structural development. Much of it seems incomprehensible. Nevertheless it contains very good poetry--the passages on flowers and on Smart's cat Jeoffrey, for example, are able to stand alone as fine poetry, and there are shorter passages of great beauty. Jubilate Agno is also interesting as a document of an unusual man's eccentric erudition, and it is a source of biographical detail about the poet. And strange and surprizing as some of its statements are, it does not conflict with either his earlier or later poetry, but rather offers an elaboration on and explanation of his imagery and of his dominant theme of praise of God. It is especially important in revealing Smart's close affinity with the Elizabethan world view which gives force to so many of his images. At first appearance a chaotic and undecipherable work, Jubilate Agno proves, upon close study, to have meaning in relation to Smart's poetry, and as a document of the mind in the process of creation.

CHAPTER IV

HYMNS

In his hymns, Smart pursues the themes of his other religious poems. They present a picture of a beauteous and richly varied nature which God has created for man's use, and which is seen as animate and actively engaged in praise of God. Like A Song to David, Smart's masterpiece, the hymns attempt a note of sustained ecstasy. Some do succeed well in producing this high pitch of emotional excitement; others are less successful. The cumulative effect of a reading of all the hymns is an almost suffocating feeling of having been confined in a hothouse, a special world where everything is as Smart wishes it to be. Edith Sitwell says of the Song that "the flowers are brighter than they are in earthly meadows; there is no room in the Heaven of this madman's mind for cruelty or injustice, or for anything but love."[1] This is basically true of both the Song and of the hymns, and it is by no means entirely fortunate that it is true. There is an imbalance in this poetry, an insistent optimism which begins to cloy when one reads all the hymns. Most of them deny evil, and when it

---

[1]Edith Sitwell, The Pleasures of Poetry (London: Duckworth, 1934), Introduction, p. 84.

is admitted, it is seen only in terms of the devil, a living personage seeking to lead men away from God. Because Smart never allows his faith to waver, at least consciously in his verse, the poems lack the complexity of thought which arises from questioning and the need to resolve doubt.

Smart feels no need to justify the ways of God, and this narrows his poetic scope--he speaks only of the resolution, the note of joy present when all doubt is absent. His acceptance of God is emotional--there is no intellectual presentation of God's existence or goodness. Unfortunately, this poetry, especially with the dozens of repetitions of the same theme which can be found in the hymns, is not the most interesting poetry. Smart's religious belief cannot grow, for there is never any intellectual re-assessment. For this reason, his hymns depend on the emotional force of his imagery and on the conviction of his rapturous tone. In the better pieces these are enough to carry the reader, but there is no use pretending that there is not a great deal left out of his poetry. To see what it is, one need only look at some of the great English religious poetry. In Paradise Lost, Milton's very attempt to justify the ways of God to man suggests at least by implication that those ways are perplexing enough to require explanation. Beneath the texture of the poem, one can sense Milton grappling with doubts and inconsistencies and trying to resolve them. In

Herbert's religious poems, such as "The Collar," in which the poet's rebellion towards God is resolved, there is a tension which greatly enriches the poetry. The same is true of the religious poetry of Donne, e.g., in "Batter my heart, three-personed God." But this sort of creative tension is almost totally absent from Smart's work. He does as much as is possible writing from a static viewpoint of rapturous conviction. The result is often charming poetry, but it is not interesting poetry in which the mind faces the issues which have always troubled poets. And because it is perhaps not really healthy to be so convinced, to so reject all possibility of doubt, Smart's garden cannot help somewhat resembling a hothouse; as a result, some of his images, like hothouse flowers, have a not quite natural, almost forced quality.

Hymn XXIV, "Melancholy," is one of Smart's rare looks at the darker side of life.[2] It is interesting because it shows the power Smart's poetry might have had if he had allowed himself to question, and developed this questioning into poetry.

> O PLUCK me quick the raven's quill,
> And I will set me down,
> My destin'd purpose to fulfil,
> But with this interrupted skill,
> Of thought and grief profound.

---

[2] Hymns for the Amusement of Children, Callan, Vol.2, pp. 986-988.

How to begin, and how depart,
  From this sad fav'rite theme,
The man of sorrow in my heart,
I at my own ideas start,
  As dread as Daniel's dream.

As soon as born the infant cries,
  For well his spirit knows,
A little while, and then he dies,
A little while, and down he lies,
  To take a stern repose.

But man's own death is not th' event,
  For which most tears are due;
Wife, children, to the grave are sent,
Or friends to make the heart repent,
  That it such blessings knew.
(1-20)

The poem shows that Smart could feel bewilderment at man's misery, but it is a bewilderment which does not allow him to question God's ways. There is no doubting, no irony, no reformer's zeal in his work. The difference that indignation and irony can make to this sort of poetry can be well illustrated in Blake's poetry, e.g., in "Holy Thursday" (Songs of Experience).[3] Blake is not content humbly to accept misery, especially that of innocent children; he strikes out at it:

Is this a holy thing to see
In a rich and fruitful land,
Babes reduced to misery,
Fed with cold and usurous hand?

---

[3]In The Norton Anthology of English Literature, (2 Vols.) ed. M. H. Abrams et al (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1962), Vol. 2, p. 54.

Is that trembling cry a song?
Can it be a song of joy?
And so many children poor?
It is a land of poverty!
(1-8)

Smart, on the other hand, allows neither doubt nor accusation to enter into his poetry; he can only appeal to Christ to explain his lonely sorrow, for Christ has experienced it too:

O thou, which on the mountain's brow,
By night didst pray alone;
. . . . . .
Tell us, for thou best can tell,
What Melancholy mean?
. . . . . .
Say, didst thou solitude desire
Or wert thou driv'n away,
By rank desertion to retire,
Without or bed, or food, or fire,
For all thy foes to pray.
(21-35)

Smart is unable to bring the poem to any real conclusion--he can only note that although Christ suffered, He looked forward to future happiness, and he asks to share Christ's serenity:

Yet thou didst preach of future bliss,
Peace permanent above,
Of truth and mercy's holy kiss,
Those joys which none that love thee miss,
O give us grace to love.
(36-40)

This poem is the most despairing of Smart's hymns. It contains some effective writing, but is, on the whole, unable to deal intellectually with its subject. The appeal to Christ can hardly satisfy the reader. Smart asks why misery is

visited upon us, but can find no real answer; nor is he so bold as to cry out because he can find no answer.

Smart's only other treatment of melancholy in his hymns produces a brief and pleasant allegorical poem (Hymn XXXII, "Against Despair"):[4]

A RAVEN once an acorn took
From Bashan's tallest stoutest tree;
He hid it by a limpid brook,
And liv'd another oak to see.

Thus Melancholy buries Hope,
Which Providence keeps still alive,
And bids us with affliction cope,
And all anxiety survive.

It is a witty allegory, short and to the point. However, it lacks deep feeling and represents no real probing of its subject.

Most of the other hymns maintain an exalted tone, a high level of emotional fervor which might almost be built from the suppression of unpleasant thoughts. "Mirth" (Hymn XXV)[5] proclaims again the triumphant note of praise:

If you are merry sing away,
And touch the organs sweet;
This is the Lord's triumphant day,
Ye children in the galleries gay,
Shout from each goodly seat.

---

[4]Hymns for the Amusement of Children, Callan, Vol.2, p. 996.

[5]Loc. cit.

It shall be May to-morrow's morn,
  A field [sic] then let us run,
And deck us in the blooming thorn,
Soon as the cock begins to warn,
  And long before the sun.
(1-8)
With white and crimson laughs the sky,
  With birds the hedge-rows ring;
To give the praise to God most high,
And all the sulky fiends defy,
  Is a most joyful thing.
(21-25)

This is the Smart that the reader finds attractive. It is easy to enter into the joyful spirit of the poem. The simple joy of Smart's "For Saturday"(Hymn XXXIII)[6] is very like the tone of Blake's Songs of Innocence; one can only regret that with Smart there are no songs of experience to balance the picture:

NOW'S the time for mirth and play,
  Saturday's an holiday;
Praise to hean'n unceasing yield,
  I've found a lark's nest in the field.

A lark's nest, then your playmate begs
  You'd spare herself and speckled eggs;
Soon she shall ascend and sing
  Your praises to th'eternal King.

The hymns provide many passages with this happy tone and many of the charming miniature descriptions which one sees in the other poems. Many are very pleasant, and at least as many are mediocre. The constant variations on a static theme reveal their weakening imbalance.

---

[6]Ibid., p.997.

CHAPTER V

A SONG TO DAVID

A Song to David is the poem on which Smart's reputation has chiefly rested. It has a force and brilliance which have led to enthusiastic praise without much close analysis of the poem, and to an emphasis on the Song resulting in the neglect of Smart's other poetry. It has been called his "one bright flower budded in madness"[1] and a poem "bathed in the everlasting light of heaven,"[2] judgments which are representative of the type of enthusiasm felt for the Song. There is, however, evidence which confirms Norman Callan's view that the "almost universal praise lavished on the Song" "has not been well considered" and that "it is questionable how far many of its encomiasts really understand it."[3] For example, until 1938 no one had looked at the poem closely enough to discover its structure--the stanzas are arranged in groups of three, seven, and their multiples.[4] The poem's "encomiasts" have usually expressed

---

[1]Cyril Falls, The Critics Armory, quoted in Callan, Vol.1, "Critical Comments," p.xlix.

[2]Sitwell, p.84.

[3]Callan, Vol.1, Introduction, p.xxxiv.

[4]R.D. Havens, "The Structure of Smart's Song to David," RES, XIV, 1938, pp.178-182.

an essentially emotional reaction to the poem, and have done very little probing beneath the surface.

The poem undoubtedly has emotional power. Its religious ecstasy is very convincing. Strongly defined rhythms sweep the reader along unconcernedly through its less comprehensible sections. The evident sincerity of the poet and the many charming descriptions of nature also play an important part in ensnaring the reader's attention.

What really makes the poem succeed, however, is a great deal of interesting subtlety and sophistication in its use of language. At first glance the diction of the Song appears to be quite different from that of "typical" eighteenth-century poetry, from, for example, the tight, compressed heroic couplet of Pope. But Smart's use of language has a great deal in common with that of his contemporaries. It is full of easily-missed nuances and nice distinctions, and the subtle use of parallelism, antithesis, and paradox. These devices are very carefully employed to imply or illustrate elements in Smart's philosophy.

A Song to David contains many very delicate contrasts. Smart juxtaposes widely differing or opposing details to suggest the variety of nature. A good example is in stanzas 21 to 36, where Smart describes the subjects of David's poetry. David writes of:

The world--the clust'ring spheres he made,
The glorious light, the soothing shade,
   Dale, champaign, grove and hill;
The multitudinous abyss,
Where secrecy remains in bliss,
   And wisdom hides her skill.

Here, by means of the great distance between the things contrasted, Smart manages to suggest the tremendous variety present in the universe. The comparisons have real surprise value--"glorious light" and "soothing shade" have imaginative impact whether one realizes it or not. The next two lines maintain the contrast of light and shadow. "Dale, champaign, grove, and hill" are words very commonly used in poetry describing the countryside--they suggest a sunny pastoral setting and condition one to expect the following line to continue in the same vein. Instead, the "multitudinous abyss" is juxtaposed, suggesting a creation so vast and various that opposites are subsumed in it.

In the next stanza, Smart continues to enumerate David's themes:

Trees, plants, and flow'rs--of virtuous root;
Gem yielding blossom, yielding fruit,
   Choice gums and precious balm.

Smart is indulging his love for miracles--here it is the miracle that so many wonderful things could come from a single seed. Identifying the seed with "gem" carries the miracle one step further--not only does the seed become precious like a jewel, but there is also the miracle of life springing from the inanimate. Again the effect is to

suggest the beauty and multiplicity of God's creation, this time exhibited in a single example, the plants.

The same kind of contrast is continued in stanza 23, where juxtaposition of different or opposite qualities is used. David sings:

> Of fowl--e'en every beak and wing
> Which cheer the winter, hail the spring,
> That live in peace or prey;
> They that make music, or that mock,
> The quail, the brave domestic cock,
> The raven, swan, and jay.

Here the long succession of near-antitheses builds up an effect of wonder at the great diversity of nature. The implied contrasts are each of a slightly different type. Some birds cheer winter, and some hail spring; winter and spring are near-opposites, while hailing and cheering are analogous. "Peace" and "prey" are opposites. "They that make music" and "they that mock" are far different, yet are not opposites. The quail and the cock are compared because one is wild, one tame; the cock is called "domestic," but Smart leaves the reader to supply the implied contrasting adjective, "wild," to the quail. The final contrast between "raven, swan, and jay" is one of brilliant, and in the case of the raven and the swan, opposite, colours. The total effect is, once more, emphasize the great diversity of nature.

In stanza 24, the poet uses a similar process. David's

songs were also:

> Of fishes--ev'ry size and shape,
> Which nature frames of light escape,
> Devouring man to shun:
> The shells are in the wealthy deep,
> The shoals upon the surface leap,
> And love the glancing sun.

In describing fishes, Smart choses the most striking contrast he can find--some fish live at the bottom of the sea, and others leap upon the surface and "love the glancing sun." And all the fishes mentioned are connected by their ability to escape "devouring man." Stanza upon stanza, the poet piles up examples of the marvels of God's creation, and these have a tremendous cumulative impact.

In stanza 27, the effect of David's singing is emphasized by an arresting paradox:

> Blessed was the tenderness he felt
> When to his graceful harp he knelt,
> And did for audience call;
> When Satan with his hand he quelled,
> And in serene suspense he held
> The frantic throes of Saul.

The phrase "serene suspense" is doubly effective here, for it is at once a paradox and an interesting ambiguity--"suspense" also has the meaning of something motionless and hanging in the air.

Paradox and an attendant sense of the miraculous also tive impact to stanza 33:

> Eta with *living sculpture* breathes
> With *verdant carvings*, flow'ry wreathes
> Of *never-wasting bloom*.
>
> (Italics added)

These lines picture vividly the paradox of living sculptured pillars. The effect is to point up the glory of God in whom such paradoxes may be resolved.

In the *Song*, as in his other religious poems, Smart loves to show nature praising God. In stanza 40 this is underscored by an effective paradox:

> "Tell them I am JEHOVAH said
> To MOSES, while earth heard in dread,
> And smitten to the heart,
> At once, above, beneath, around,
> All nature, *without voice or sound*
> Replied, "O Lord, THOU ART."
>
> (Italics added)

In this stanza, "all nature" becomes a single animate entity. The contrast between the thundering voice of Jehovah and the soundless reply of nature is a startling one.

It should be stressed that these effects are not accidental. Smart uses all the skills developed in his long and varied poetic career. A quite breathtaking and obviously conscious effect is obtained in stanza 66, where he compares the stupendously great and the infinitesimally small:

> For ADORATION, in the skies,
> The Lord's philosopher espies
> The Dog, the Ram, and Rose;
> The planet's ring, Orion's sword;
> Nor is his greatness less adored
> In the vile worm that glows.

One instant the poet ranges through space, viewing vast constellations; the next he is on the ground at the level of the worm. The comparison misses being ridiculous because Smart has carefully built up the image of a miraculous, purposeful, heaven-praising creation, to the point where the reader accepts this miracle as well.

As in Jubilate Agno, Smart sees God's creatures as good. Whether or not they are of benefit to man, they are "good" in that they perform the roles set them by God, and in that manner praise Him. And as in Jubilate Agno, these creatures are humanized to a degree, and given human actions and concerns. At the same time, however, the idea is implied that although man is ostensibly the apex of natural creation, he is nonetheless morally lower than other animals.

That all creatures in nature are the concern of God and that all are deemed worthy is evident throughout the poem. It is explicitly stated in stanza 41, where "all nature" replies to God "O Lord, THOU ART," and continues:

> Thou art--to give and to confirm,
> For each his talent and his term;
> All flesh thy bounties share.
> (Italics added)

The humanization of the animals and birds is implicit. For example, Smart tells of the acts of creation which took place on the sixth day:

> Sigma presents the social droves,
> With him that solitary roves,
> And man of all the chief.
> (stanza 36)

The inclusion of man in these "social droves" brings them closer to human status. (The "social droves" are identified in Genesis as, for example, cattle.) In Stanza 42, men are commanded to:

> Be good to him that pulls thy plow,
> Due food and care, due rest, allow
> For her that yield thee milk.

The use of the pronouns "him" and "her" tend to humanize the cattle here, as do the words "food," "rest," and "care," terms which generally apply to humans.

In stanza 53, we are shown plants and birds who fulfil their appointed tasks of adoration in typically human terms:

> Rich almonds colour to the prime
> For ADORATION, tendrils climb,
> And fruit trees pledge their gems;
> And Ivis with her gorgeous vest
> Builds for her eggs her cunning nest,
> And bell-flowers bow their stems.

All these living things are invested with purpose and volition--they willingly glorify God, as is the case with the ripening almonds. Ivis (the hummingbird) wears a "gorgeous vest," typically human apparel. In stanza 62, pheasants, ermine, and sable, endowed with the most beautiful coats in nature, are pictured meticulously keeping their clothes clean in God's honour:

The pheasant shows his pompous neck;
And ermine, jealous of a speck,
  With fear eludes offence;
The sable with his glossy pride,
For ADORATION is descried,
  Where frosts the wave condense.

We are introduced to "the cheerful holly" and the "pensive yew" who renew their trim to praise God (stanza 63); we meet in stanza 65 the "scholar bullfinch" and the "daring redbreast," all of whom have somehow or other taken on a measure of humanity.

Balanced against this humanization of birds and animals is the idea, implicit in the Song, that these creatures are morally superior to man. In several instances they are represented as escaping from immoral man. We are told of fishes "which nature frames of light escape,/ Devouring man to shun"(24). Gems are "hid in earth from man's device"(26). Stanza 35 refers again to the fish who "in thankful safety lurks." And a fortunate bird is able to escape:

And, careless on the hazel spray,
The daring redbreast keeps at bay
  The damsels greedy clutch.
(Stanza 45)

A Song to David also derives force from the Biblical allusions behind many brief references in the poem. The more familiar one is with the Bible, the greater the impact of these allusions. The mention of David's constancy "to Johnathan his friend"(14) calls up many beautiful passages

in the Bible, especially the lament for Saul and Johnathan, "How are the mighty fallen" (Kings 19-27). When Smart says that David's emblem is "the lion and the bee" (38), the association is made with the passage where Samson, finding honey in the carcass of a lion he has killed, proposes the riddle, "Out of the strong came forth sweetness (Judges 14: 14). When the poet says that David took "Against the boaster, from the brook,/ The weapons of the war" (6), he need not even name the "boaster" because the story is so familiar. Over and over the poem is reinforced by this sense of something silently understood; the Song is enriched by allusion to Biblical imagery, and also seems to absorb by association some of its religious authority.

A Song to David, finally, is successful in its presentation of a rich and sensuous nature. Colours, textures, tastes, odours, and sounds are very skillfully described, and are arranged in such a grand profusion that the senses are fairly inundated by them all. The catalogue of creation presented in this poem is very intoxicating fare, and one is continually bombarded by new delights. These delights are not only sensuous, however, but quite often reflect God's purpose and plan in Nature. Although it may appear simple, there is often a great complexity behind Smart's description, for example, in stanza 52:

For ADORATION seasons change,
And order, truth, and beauty range,
  Adjust, attract, and fill:
And grass the polyanthus checks;
And polished porphyry reflects,
  By the descending rill.

Beneath the surface simplicity, there lies a subtle paradox. There is tension between order and disorder. Order, truth, and beauty, supposedly absolute standards, do not after all remain absolute, but rather "range,/ Adjust, attract, and fill." There is the same sort of tension, on a greatly reduced scale, in the next line, where the wild grass is inhibited by the more civilized polyanthus. (It is also an interesting ambiguity, as Frank Brady and Martin Price point out,[5] since "check" may also suggest that a checkered pattern is imposed on the unruly grass.) The last two lines continue the contrast between the wild and the orderly in Nature. Beside the unfettered descending rill, Nature has provided that instrument of vanity, the mirror, whose "polished" surface is at once a part and a denial of the wildness of the scene.

The same sort of tension is evident in stanza 60, where "marshalled in the fenced land,/ The peaches and pomegrantes stand,/ Where wild carnations blow." Here again

---

[5]Frank Brady and Martin Price, eds., English Prose and Poetry, 1660-1800 (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1961), p.297.

Smart has made his Nature much more complex and interesting by juxtaposing the wild and the ordered. Stanza 67 makes its effect by means of contrasting the magnitudes of sounds:

> For ADORATION on the strings,
> The western breezes work their wings,
> The captive ear to soothe.
> Hark! 'tis a voice--how still and small--
> That makes the cataracts to fall,
> Or bids the sea be smooth.

The mind is challenged by the changes in magnitudes of the sounds. The western breezes are so vast that their music soothes the "captive ear," captive presumably because this stupendous music will necessarily be heard by everyone. The next line introduces the contrast of the still, small voice of God, paradoxical in its softness, which nevertheless has the power to make cataracts fall (suggesting the beginning of loud, crashing sounds) or to bid the sea be smooth (suggesting the immediate cessation of loud sound).

It is, then, Smart's very skilled and sophisticated use of language which makes A Song to David as successful as it is. However, the poem does have real faults, which tend to be obscured by its beauties of language. The elaborate structure of the Song, with its groups of three, seven, nine, or fourteen stanzas, has been mentioned. This structure is so clear that it seems obvious that it was conscious and deliberate. On the surface, this complex structure might be thought to be an indication of the poet's regained sanity.

It might, however, be an indication of just the opposite, for it is almost obsessive and serves little esthetic purpose in the poem. It is a pattern which seems to be imposed on material which was then made to fit into it; the material itself makes no logical demand for this particular form. For example, between stanzas 29 and 30 there is a definite break in the logic of the poem for which one is quite unprepared. The first thirty stanzas contain the invocation to David (1-3), the description of David (4-17), the enumeration of his poetic subjects (18-26), and the effects of his singing (27-29). Then without any sort of transitional preparation Smart begins the passage "The pillars of the Lord are seven." There is no justification for this abrupt change of subject, and it takes several stanzas before one is able to recapture the mood of the poem. Indeed, the only thing linking these two parts together is the continuation of the ecstatic tone. This tone and the undoubted beauties of the language are sufficient to sustain emotional interest in the poem, but it is more or less at the sacrifice of the logic.

Another logical break occurs immediately following the passage on the seven pillars at stanza 39. Smart's outline of the poem announced that this passage was to be "an exercise upon the decalogue," although in reality it is more a general summation of various injunctions in the Old Testament. In any case, very little preparation is given for the

switch in topic. It just happens, and one is left to adjust to the puzzling change and once more to absorb oneself in the poem's charming imagery. Neither is the rest of the poem integrated in any logical way--after the "exercise upon the decalogue" come the long "For ADORATION" sections, followed by groups of three stanzas each developing a single adjective ("strong," "beauteous," "precious," and "glorious"). The poems builds up to a great emotional climax, which gives one the false idea that some sort of logical conclusion has been reached. One is likely to be deluded in this way because the emotional pitch sustained throughout this long poem demands some sort of release. It is the great achievement of the Song that Smart does bring about this purely emotional climax, in the mounting crescendo of the last three stanzas, ending with the triumphant lines:

> And now the matchless deed's achieved,
> DETERMINED, DARED and DONE.

It is a fine achievement, but it is one in which the intellect is not actively engaged.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Smart's religious poetry continually repeats one basic theme: God is good and should be constantly praised. His creation is beautiful, animate, and various; living creatures and even gems are seen as actively praising Him. All the beauties and comforts of nature have been created for man's use and pleasure. Thus man is assured of God's favour, although the instinctive knowledge of the beasts reproaches man, who lost this knowledge through the fall. No matter what his stated subject is, Smart tries to work it around to this basic theme of praise, as is illustrated by the Seatonian poems.

Smart writes his religious poems as an ecstatically convinced Christian. His purpose is not to convince either himself or his reader of the existence or goodness of God; these are assumed. His poems, therefore, lack the interesting complexity which results from the poet's attempt to resolve his doubts. This is especially evident in the hymns and in A Song to David, poems which lack logical structure stemming from the development of ideas. Smart is obsessed by a single theme; his poems are amplifications of the one idea of incessant praise.

Because of this lack of logical structure, Smart's

poems depend for their effect on the conviction of his exalted tone and on the beauty of his images. The reader's response is inevitably an emotional reaction to Smart's own delight. This emotional response is the reason for the success of A Song to David.

Probably the most delightful aspect of Smart's religious verse is that it is filled with charming pictures of nature. His talent is chiefly as a miniaturist; his sympathy is with the smaller members of creation. He has an eye for sensuous details, and a very subtle ability to juxtapose them effectively. He loves the variety of nature, and he especially loves exotic things; he even delights in uttering their names. And all of God's creatures are seen as good in themselves. In fact, the happy and the good are so obsessively emphasized, for example in his hymns, that the poetry is very unbalanced. The almost complete denial of evil, except in the form of an anthropomorphic devil, gives these poems a very unsatisfying quality. Smart's happy world of bright flowers, worshipping animals, and gorgeous birds praising God in song is isolated from reality. It is a static world, and lovely as it is, it is confining and prevents any thematic development in Smart's religious verse. The very lovely Song is not a break from the other poetry; it is rather only the best of a long line of poems similar in tone, theme, and imagery.

Jubilate Agno is a separate case. It is full of strange and unexpected ideas, and appears to be very different from anything written before or after. However, it contains nothing to contradict Smart's basic ideas and themes in the other religious poems; rather it reinforces them. It emphasizes the same theme of God's goodness and the need to worship Him. It speaks repeatedly of the beauty and plenitude of nature in which everything is animate and actively worshipping. And it contains many of the beautiful descriptions of nature which illuminate his other religious poems. But while the themes and ideas of Jubilate Agno do not contradict those of the other poems, they do alter our ways of looking at them. Jubilate Agno reveals a literal quality behind Smart's images that would have been unknown if this long poem had not been discovered. For example, in the Seatonian poem, "On the Power of the Supreme Being," Smart refers to thunder as God's "terrific voice" (8). This may strike the reader as fairly ordinary poetic imagery. Jubilate Agno shows, however, that this is not meant simply metaphorically, but quite literally. Smart rejects contemporary scientific theories about thunder and lightning, seeing them as the actual voice and glance of God:

> For the School-Doctrine of Thunder & Lightning is a Diabolical Hypothesis.
>
> (B_1, 269)

> For THUNDER is the voice of God direct in verse and musick.
>
> For LIGHTNING is a glance of the glory of God.
> (B_1, 271-272)

This literal quality is a part of Smart's affinity with the earlier Elizabethan outlook on life. Like the Elizabethans, Smart sees the universe as animate. Analogy becomes fused into identity in Jubilate Agno as in the case of the transparent crystal and the translucent "jewel," sincerity. This leads to many lovely and forceful images, and is part of the poet's insistent interest in puns and other word relationships. It probably also explains Smart's ability to use language with a freedom and flexibility which foreshadows twentieth-century poetry.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

WORKS BY CHRISTOPHER SMART

Smart, Christopher. The Collected Poems of Christopher Smart. Edited by Norman Callan. 2 vols. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949.

_____. Jubilate Agno. Edited by W. H. Bond. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954.

_____. Rejoice in the Lamb, A Song from Bedlam. Edited by William Force Stead. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1939.

_____. Selected Poems by Christopher Smart. Edited by Ruthven Todd. London: Grey Walls Press, 1947.

_____. "A Song to David," in Eighteenth-Century Poetry. Edited by Patricia Meyer Spacks. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964. [with notes]

_____. "A Song to David," in English Prose and Poetry, 1660-1800. Edited by Frank Brady and Martin Price. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1961. [with notes]

SECONDARY SOURCES

Abbott, C. D. "Christopher Smart's Madness," Publications of the Modern Language Association, 45:1014-1022, 1930.

Arber, Agnes. Herbals, Their Origin and Evolution. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912.

Babb, Lawrence. The Elizabethan Malady. East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State College Press, 1951.

The Holy Bible. King James Version.

Boswell, James. Boswell's Life of Johnson. Edited by G. B. Hill. Revised edition. 6 vols. Vol. 1: The Life 1709-1765. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934.

Browning, Robert. "With Christopher Smart," in Parleyings with Certain People. In The Poetical Works of Robert Browning. Vol. 8. 17 vols. New York: Macmillan and Co., 1894.

Campagnac, E. T. The Cambridge Platonists. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901.

Chalmers, Alexander, editor. The Works of the English Poets, Vol. 16. 21 vols. London: J. Johnson, 1810.

Cragg, Gerald R. Reason and Authority in the Eighteenth Century. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964.

Craig, Hardin. The Enchanted Glass; The Elizabethan Mind in Literature. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960.

Crane, William G. Wit and Rhetoric in the Renaissance. New York: Columbia University Press, 1937.

Dante Alighieri. La Vita Nuova of Dante Alighieri. Trans. Mark Musa. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1957.

Devlin, Christopher. Poor Kit Smart. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1961.

Donne, John. The Poems of John Donne. Edited by Herbert J. C. Grierson. 2 vols. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1912.

Grigson, Geoffrey. Christopher Smart. London: Longmans, Green, 1961.

Havens, R. D. "The Structure of Smart's Song to David," Review of English Studies, 14:178-182, 1938.

Housman, A. E. The Name and Nature of Poetry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933.

Macklem, Michael. The Anatomy of the World. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1958.

Mazzeo, Joseph Anthony. Medieval Cultural Tradition in Dante's Comedy. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1960.

Muirhead, J. H. The Platonic Tradition in Anglo-Saxon Philosophy. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1931.

Murry, John Middleton. Discoveries. London: W. Collins Sons and Co., 1924.

Nicolson, Marjorie Hope. The Breaking of the Circle. Revised edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 1962.

_____. Newton Demands the Muse. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1946.

Sitwell, Edith. The Pleasures of Poetry. London: Duckworth, 1934.

Tillyard, E. M. W. The Elizabethan World Picture. London: Chatto & Windus, 1943.