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CHRISTOPHER SMART--REVIVER OF ADORATION

by

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the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to trace the evolution of Christopher Smart's conception of himself as the divinely-selected "Reviver of ADORATION amongst ENGLISH-MEN" and the concurrent development of his distinctive poetic style, from the Seatonian prize poems to its culmination in A Song to David.

The first chapter discusses the Seatonian prize poems, and the Hymn to the Supreme Being, On recovery from a dangerous fit of illness, and considers to what extent these poems are conventional or unusual in regard to contemporary themes and poetic style. It pays particular attention to the beginning of Smart's identification with King David, the psalmist of the Old Testament, and to his personal dedication of his life and talents to the glory of God.

The second chapter considers Jubilate Agno, Smart's "mad" poem, showing the further identification of himself with David, and examines Smart's conception of his psalmistic mission in eighteenth-century England. It discusses his belief that all created phenomena are actually alive with spiritual significance, usually for good, but occasionally for evil; that is, that all phenomena are instinct with God's power, and are not merely symbols for it. It also examines Smart's conception of the role of man, and particularly the poet, in this world-view.

The third chapter deals with the theory of language developed in Jubilate Agno. It discusses Smart's belief in the spiritual power of the phenomenon of language, and examines some of the idiomatic peculiarities of the poem in the light of certain major influences on Smart's

work.

The fourth chapter is an analysis of A Song to David, attempting to demonstrate how Smart uses language to communicate with great immediacy an intensely vivid impression of his particular world-view. This chapter examines themes and images common to the Song and Jubilate Agno, and discusses significant stylistic differences in their presentation. It also discusses Smart's idea of the poet as a positive force for good through his praise of God, and the ultimate identification of himself and David with Christ, the supreme poet.

CHAPTER I

The Seatonian Prize Poems

Five of the six religious poems which Christopher Smart composed before he was confined for insanity were, to an extent, written to order; that is, they were composed as entries to the Seatonian Prize competition at Cambridge University, and their subject, the attributes of the Supreme Being, was prescribed by the donor of the prize, Thomas Seaton.¹ A critical examination of them, therefore, must take into account that they are not entirely spontaneous outpourings of Smart's innermost convictions; nevertheless, these poems, together with the Hymn to the Supreme Being, On recovery from a dangerous fit of illness, which can be considered as a lyric coda² to the others, provide early evidence of concerns that were to obsess Smart in later years, as well as hints of the distinctive poetic style that he was to develop.

Smart won the Seatonian competition for Pembroke College in 1750, the first year it was held, with his poem On the Eternity of the Supreme Being, and repeated this success in 1751, 1752, 1753, and 1755, with poems on the immensity, omniscience, power and goodness of God. The University, and even the general public, became so accustomed to Smart's winning the prize that in 1754, the one year he did not enter the contest, the Gentleman's Magazine felt compelled to explain that "This prize has for many years been constantly assigned to the ingenious Mr. Smart, who was not this year among the competitors."³

These Seatonian Prize Poems proved to be exceedingly popular. The first poem had three editions at Cambridge, and all the others except On the Power of the Supreme Being went through two editions. In 1756, John Newbery, Smart's Grub Street employer and father-in-law, brought out a third edition of On the Immensity of the Supreme Being, and in 1758 a second edition of On the Power of the Supreme Being. One critic, George Dyer, declared that

had Mr. C. S. written nothing but his five Seatonian prize poems, he would have been entitled to be ranked among the poets of this country, beyond some who are admitted into Dr. Johnson's Lives of the English Poets.⁴

Most twentieth-century critics would agree that this is extravagant praise indeed of these rather conventional poems. W. H. Bond judges them to be "uninspired but technically proficient."⁵ J. B. Broadbent criticizes the "archaic and neologising tendencies of diction . . . said to be symptomatic of paranoia" although he admits that this technique is occasionally effective, as in the "coarse ruttling" of the "invoking ravens" and the "surly" roar of lions.⁶ Christopher Devlin objects to the "very slipshod blank verse" although he is impressed by the "intimate ease and genuine fervour with which Smart handles his difficult and abstract subject."⁷ Arthur Sherbo deplores the Miltonic influence which led Smart to write in blank verse which he had insufficiently mastered.⁸ Norman Callan, however, finds that "there are few of Smart's early pieces . . . where the delicacy of ear, which is one of the essential qualities of a true poet, is not evident."⁹

There is certainly little out of the ordinary in the general themes of the Seatonian Poems nor, for the most part, in Smart's treatment of them. Moira Dearnley has shown that the attributes of the Divinity was a very common theme in seventeenth and eighteenth-century poetry, and mentions, among other works, the prose tracts Discourse Concerning the Being and Attributes of God, by Samuel Clarke and Traité de l'Existence et des Attributs de Dieu by Fénelon; and in verse, John Pomfret's Upon the Divine Attributes, Elizabeth Rowe's poem of the same name, Samuel Boyse's Deity and William Hayward Roberts' Poetical Essay on the Existence of God.¹⁰ Robert Saltz claims that the "latinate diction and complex rhetoric" which were stylistic fundamentals of almost all such poetry are attributable largely to the influence of John Dennis' work of 1704, Ground of Criticism in Poetry, which "advocated a sublime poetry of natural philosophy incorporating 'the wonders of the universe' in the lofty numbers of the Miltonic style."¹¹

Smart's talents unfortunately were little suited to the sublime style, particularly to the cadences of blank verse. Ainsworth and Noyes claim that "Smart often counted syllables as painstakingly as a schoolboy practising the heroic couplet,"¹² and one is tempted to accept this judgement in light of the awkwardness of lines such as

She Heav'n-taught voyager, that sails in air,
Courts nor coy West nor East, but instant knows
What Newton, or not sought, or sought in vain,¹³

or the mannered effect of the contractions in the following:

. . . before Light
 Herself 'gan shine, and at th' inspiring word
 Shot to existence in a blaze of day. (Eternity, p. 223)

Nor does Smart's use of inverted syntax always produce happy results, leading sometimes to distinctly unharmonious phrases--"din outrageous," "conflict dreadful," "quakes Appenine" (Power, p. 237). Smart's style at times inadvertently weakens the force of his imagery--for example, in this image intended to convey the awesomeness and might of God's presence:

Albeit He there 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; (Immensity, p. 227)

The impression of power is weakened by the subjunctive mood of the first three lines and the negative construction of the last two. The last line, beginning with the inversion of subject and object--"Shines He"--followed by the negative phrase "less perfect here" accentuates the unfortunate subversion of Smart's purpose. The positive connotation which Smart evidently intended these lines to carry is still discernible, but it is not as clearly and dramatically apparent as it might be. At times the syntax is so complicated that it is difficult to follow the meaning of a sentence, for example:

But yet (if still to more stupendous heights
 The Muse unblam'd her aching sense may strain)
 Perhaps wrapt up in contemplation deep,
 The best of beings on the noblest theme
 Might ruminare at leisure, Scope immense
 Th' eternal Pow'r and Godhead to explore,
 And with itself th' omniscient mind replete. (Eternity, p. 224)

The poems suffer too from the stale poetic diction which Wordsworth deplored--"finny race" and "feathered matron," "illustrious monarch of the day" and "fair queen of night" (Eternity, p. 225) had by this time become merely thought-evading devices and their use adds nothing to the poems. The frequent archaisms--"Nathless," (Immensity, p. 239) "knewst," (Omniscience, p. 231) "avaunt," (Omniscience, p. 235) and the elaborately contrived phrases--"Her pensile house the feather'd Artist builds," (Omniscience, p. 230) "When Zephyr faints upon the lilly's breast," (Power, p. 237) also contribute to a general impression of affectation.

Most of the imagery employed is also extremely conventional--"verdant vallies" in "meek submission," (Eternity, p. 225) the invocation to the muse Urania "with new strains/ To hymn thy God, and thou, immortal Fame,/ Arise, and blow thy everlasting trump" (Omniscience, p. 231), and Philomela preparing her annual flight "e'er the cold domain/ Of crippled winter 'gins t' advance" (Omniscience, p. 233). Not only are the images well-worn, they often suffer from a lack of concreteness. For example, when Smart is describing the destruction of the earth at the day of judgement, he declares,

. . . it shall come,
 When the capacious atmosphere above
 Shall in sulphureous thunders groan, and die,
 And vanish into void; the earth beneath
 Shall sever to the center, and devour
 Th' enormous blaze of the destructive flames. (Eternity, p. 224)

The triteness of "capacious" and "sulphureous," the unlikely personification of the atmosphere, the abstractness of "vanish into void",

all contribute to the general impression of vagueness and the failure to build up tension in this passage. The same tendency to imagistic vagueness is found in On the Immensity of the Supreme Being, where

. . . the mind along the spangled sky
Measures her pathless walk, studious to view
Thy works of vaster fabric . . . (Immensity, p. 228)

and in On the Omniscience of the Supreme Being:

When up the imperceptible ascent
Of growing years, led by thy hand, I rose,
Perception's gradual light, that ever dawns
Insensibly to day, thou didst vouchsafe. (Omniscience, 232)

There are instances, however, when Smart succeeds in creating images of unusual succinctness and brilliance. The characterization of the cock as "the stately night-exploding bird" (Immensity, 227) contrasts favourably with the portrait of Philomela the nightingale, mentioned above. The strange fanciful vision of the "unplanted" under-sea garden "Of vegetable coral, sea-flow'rs gay,/ And shrubs of amber from the pearl-pav'd bottom" in On the Immensity of the Supreme Being, is extremely effective in its concise and pointed use of significant detail. There are also instances of skillful use of alliteration-- "Swift on the winnowing winds they work their way," (Omniscience, p. 232) and "Up the huge hill she hardly heaves it home" (Omniscience, p. 235).

Robert Saltz has pointed out that the Seatonian poems comprise

a comprehensive speculum naturae, each part of which develops one aspect of the dominant physico-theological theme within a unifying survey structure. Establishing first the temporal limits of the world between "the two Prime Pillars of the Universe,/ Creation and Redemption," Smart traces God, the architect or

artificer, in the hierarchy of forms from the bottom of the sea through the plants and animals upward to man, the final act of the creative week and highest proof of his wisdom 13

and that this motif was altogether within the contemporary tradition of sublime poetry. Smart's tone, however, even at this early stage, is exceptionally jubilant in his celebration of God's presence in nature, and he is emphatic about the extreme importance of human gratitude for this evidence of God's benevolence:

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. (Omniscience, p. 236)

Here also are indications of Smart's conviction, made more explicit in Jubilate Agno and A Song to David, that the functioning of nature is in itself a direct and meaningful expression of praise. In On the Immensity of the Supreme Being, he exclaims,

List ye! how Nature with ten thousand tongues
Begins the grand thanksgiving, Hail, all hail. (Immensity, p. 227)

The linnet praises God in her tuneful song, but the ravens' "coarse ruttling," though it hurts the human ear, is praise also, for "They mean it all for music, thanks and praise . . ." (Goodness, p. 242).

For Smart, the single most conclusive proof of God's being is in the soul of man--he claims in On the Omniscience of the Supreme Being that even if no animal, vegetable or mineral phenomena existed on earth, "Yet man at home, within himself, might find/ The Deity immense . . ." (Immensity, pp. 230-231). It is ironic, therefore, that man is

the only creature who ever seems oblivious of God's presence:

. . . 'tis Man's dim eye
That makes th' obscurity. He is the same,
Alike in all his Universe the same. (Immensity, pp. 227-228)

"Thou ideot," exclaims Smart, "that asserts there is no God,/ View and be dumb forever" (Immensity, p. 230). Man, obsessed with the technical and intellectual abilities which raise him above the beasts, too often fails to recognize the divine spirit actuating them, and consequently his praises are less effective than those of the lower orders--the ravens "leave ingratitude to man" (Goodness, p. 242). In Smart's view, the bee, who "from discordant flow'rs/ A perfect harmony of sweets compounds" (Omniscience, p. 235) far surpasses the wonder of the chemist's laborious calculations. The nightingale's inborn sense of direction, which guides her on her yearly migrations, is evidence of a more awesome power than the admittedly "vast genius" of the greatest human scientist, Isaac Newton.

Smart, taking his cue from Pope's Essay on Man, advises man to observe and learn from the natural piety of the animals. Where Pope, however, was more concerned with practical competence--

"Go, from the Creatures thy instructions take:
Learn from the birds what food the thickets yield;
Learn from the beasts the physic of the field;¹⁴

--Smart's hope is that man will increase in godliness:

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;
By slow degrees from lowly steps ascend,
And trace Omniscience upwards to its spring! (Omniscience,
p. 235)

Smart presents himself as one man who has humbled himself this way, and who has learned the joy of unqualified, all-absorbing praise.

In On the Immensity of the Supreme Being, he exclaims:

Ye tenants of the forest and the field!
My fellow subjects of th' eternal King,
I gladly join your Mattins, and with you
Confess his presence, and report his praise. (Immensity, p. 222)

To "confess his presence, and report his praise" was to be Smart's poetic purpose for the rest of his life, being the dominant theme of Jubilate Agno and A Song to David, as well as of the Hymns and Spiritual Songs.

In these early poems, however, he appears to be much less sure of his ability to offer suitable praise than he was to become. In On the Eternity of the Supreme Being, he asks,

May then the youthful, uninspired Bard
Presume to hymn th' Eternal; may he soar
Where seraph, and where Cherubin on high
Resound th' unceasing plaudits, and with them
In the grand Chorus mix his feeble voice? (Eternity, p. 223)

This theme is repeated in On the Goodness of the Supreme Being:

Where shall the tim'rous bard thy praise begin,
Where end the purest sacrifice of song,
And just thanksgiving? (Goodness, p. 241)

and in On the Immensity of the Supreme Being, where he declares:

Vain were th' attempt, and impious to trace
Thro' all his works th' Artificer Divine. (Immensity, p. 230)

This attitude, of course, may be no more than a conventional acknowledgement of the Miltonic tradition, but it is an interesting contrast to Smart's later tone. In Jubilate Agno, for example, he makes an emphatic although implicit assertion of his position as leader of the

"Nations, and languages, and every Creature" which he calls to worship.

It is quite clear, however, that even at this early stage, Smart felt himself called to dedicate his talents to God's praise. He calls himself at one point "th' anointed poet" (Power, p. 236) and at another, "The poet of my God" (Immensity, p. 227). In On the Immensity of the Supreme Being, he pledges,

The knee, that Thou has shap'd, shall bend to Thee,
The tongue, which Thou has tun'd, shall chant thy praise,
And thine own image, the immortal soul,
Shall consecrate herself to Thee for ever. (Immensity, p. 231)

This vow is repeated even more strongly in the next Seatonian poem:

Thou too, my Heart, whom he, and he alone,
Who all things knows, can know, with love replete,
Regenerate, and pure, pour all thyself
A living sacrifice before his throne. (Omniscience, p. 231)

Smart's idea of the sublime poet par excellence was the Old Testament Psalmist, King David. His fascination with this figure is hinted at in the opening lines of On the Goodness of the Supreme Being, where he invokes the mythical poet, Orpheus, and identifies him with David:

Orpheus, for so the Gentiles call'd thy name,
Israel's sweet psalmist (Goodness, p. 240)

This interest in David and the identification of him with Orpheus was not peculiar to Smart. The question of King David's morality was the subject of a contemporary controversy that produced several books and pamphlets. Smart referred to one of these in a note which he appended to the lines quoted above in the original edition of the poem: "See this conjecture strongly supported by Delany in his Life of David."¹⁵

Robert Brittain has explained that Smart is referring to An Historical Account of the Life and Reign of David King of Israel, by Patrick Delany, published in London, 1740-42, and he points out that

. . . in the seventeenth chapter of Book I, there is a great deal of solemn argument to the effect that the Orpheus myth is a degenerate form of the Scriptural story of David.¹⁶

John Block Friedman claims furthermore that "Orpheus and David were frequently identified . . . in the visual arts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."¹⁷

We know, then, that Smart was not eccentric in his conflation of David and Orpheus as types of the sublime poet of praise, but his concern with these figures here is important for the insight it provides into the growing conviction of his own psalmistic mission. For there are indications in the Seatonian poems that Smart is beginning to identify himself with this archetypal figure. The invocation to David-Orpheus, for example, concludes:

. . . so shall the muse
Above the stars aspire, and aim to praise
Her God on earth, as he is praised in heaven. (Goodness, p. 241)

The identification is more implicit in the opening lines of On the Immensity of the Supreme Being, where Smart calls for his lute and harp, the instruments of the psalmist.

The theme of poetic mission is developed more fully in the Hymn to the Supreme Being, on recovery from a dangerous fit of illness, composed around August, 1756.¹⁸ Evidence that Smart intended it as a sort of culmination to the earlier poems is found in the tenth stanza, where he names the

subjects of four of the Seatonian poems in the order of their composition:

All glory to th' ETERNAL, to th' IMMENSE,
All glory to th' OMNISCIENT and GOOD. (Hymn, p. 246)

The opening lines make reference to the thirty-eighth chapter of Isaiah, which tells how King Hezekiah, on his death-bed, prayed to God to restore him to health and was granted another fifteen years of life. Smart obviously felt that his own recovery from illness was a direct answer to prayer, and proof of God's goodness and mercy. Since he felt that he had no particular moral superiority to recommend him, he was convinced that he had been saved for a purpose--to magnify God's name on earth, in effect to take on the role of David the psalmist in eighteenth-century England. Although the identification with David is not made explicitly, it in fact becomes closer "because of their common election and their similar fall and rise. Smart begins to see himself as the penitent who with God's help rises again, as David rose after his fall. By humbling himself in penitence, he may become sublime."¹⁹

Smart does declare explicitly in this poem his intention to devote the rest of his life to God's service and praise. After God has bestowed "a second birth . . . of joy" (p. 247), Smart commands:

Ye strengthen'd feet, forth to his altar move;
Quicken, ye new-strung nerves, th' enraptur'd lyre;
Ye heav'n-directed eyes, o'erflow with love;
Glow, glow, my soul, with pure seraphic fire;
Deeds, thoughts, and words no more his mandates break,
But to his endless glory work, conceive, and speak. (p. 247)

Perhaps because of the intensely personal subject of this Hymn, it reveals a much more direct and effective handling of language than the earlier works. There are still some remnants of stylistic affectation--"The virtuous partner of my nuptial bands," (p. 246) "My little prattlers lifting up their hands," (p. 246) and there are some abrupt transitions--for example, from stanza 14, where Smart extols the virtue of penitence, to stanza 15, where he rejoices in "the creative goodness of God, manifest in the sovereign creatures of each class of being"²⁰--but overall, the style is much more forceful and direct. Freed from the heavy Miltonic rhythms of the Seatonian poems, and writing of an agonizing personal experience, Smart presents a chilling picture of the horrors of mental illness:

When reason left me in the time of need,
And sense was lost in terror or in trance,
My sick'ning soul was with my blood inflam'd,
And the celestial image shrunk, defac'd and maim'd, (p. 245)

and an equally striking impression of health returning:

But soul-rejoicing health again returns,
The blood meanders gentle in each vein,
The lamp of life renew'd with vigour burns,
And exil'd reason takes her seat again. (p. 246)

Through a bitter irony, Smart was to become insane again only a few months after the composition of this poem. On May 6, 1757, he was admitted into St. Luke's Hospital, and although he was released on May 11, 1758, he was confined as a religious maniac, in the homes of friends and in a private madhouse²¹ until January, 1763. While mental illness is unquestionably a personal tragedy, we must confront the aesthetic judgement that it may result in public good.²² In Smart's

case, his period of mental imbalance jolted his poetic style out of the tired post-Augustan conventions, and allowed him the freedom to experiment widely with form and idiom. Most of all, it crystallized his poetic purpose. Jubilate Agno, the record of these madhouse years, confirms Smart's absolute commitment to his role as an eighteenth-century David.

CHAPTER II

Jubilate Agno

Jubilate Agno, published for the first time in 1939, was composed, as nearly as can be determined, between January, 1759 and January, 1763¹ when Christopher Smart was confined in a London madhouse. Critical interpretation of the poem has posed problems partly because only about one-third of the manuscript has survived, but also because the abrupt transitions and illogicalities in many passages vividly reflect the mental imbalance of the author. Even a reader unbiased by the knowledge of Smart's madness is likely to have difficulty finding rational significance in lines like "Let Ross, house of Ross rejoice with the Great Flabber Dabber Flat Clapping Fish with hands. Vide Anson's Voyage & Psalm 98th ix."² Obviously, any understanding of this strange and wonderful work requires a reader receptive to all possible associations of words and ideas, and unusual twists and tricks of language, as has been proved by the several valuable studies of the poem that have been produced, particularly since W. H. Bond's illuminating edition appeared in 1954.

Smart called the poem "a psalm of my own composing" (Bl, 32), and it begins, sanely enough, as a recognizable example of this genre:

Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues; give the glory to the Lord, and the Lamb.

Nations, and languages, and every Creature, in which is the breath of Life.

Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together. (A, 1-3)

These lines are, in fact, an adaptation of the opening of Psalm lxvi:

"Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands:/ Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious."

For Smart to write a hymn of praise was not at all unusual; Jubilate Agno is striking, however, in its vast range of characters and the intensely personal nature of its tone. The lines, each one beginning either with "Let" or "For," exhort all manner of men, from Biblical figures to eighteenth-century Englishmen, and all manner of creatures,³ from the ram to the French turnip and even to the inanimate emerald and opal, to join in the hymn, led by Smart--"the Lord's News-Writer--the scribe-evangelist" (B2, 327). Smart himself evidently intended his effort to be unique among hymns of praise, and saw himself divinely selected to compose it for a particular purpose:

For by the grace of God I am the Reviver of ADORATION amongst ENGLISH-MEN. (B2, 332)

An important and generally-accepted theory as to the form of the poem was advanced in 1954 by William H. Bond, who first recognized a thematic correspondence between many of the "Let" and "For" lines, for example:

Let Magdiel rejoice with Ascarides, which is the life of the bowels--the worm hath a part of our frame.

For I rejoice like a worm in the rain in him that cherishes and from him that tramples. (B1, 37)

Bond concluded that the poem had originally been designed as a responsive

reading, with all the lines beginning "Let" to be spoken by the first reader, and all the lines beginning "For" to be spoken by the second reader, who Bond assumed was to have been Smart himself. Bond suggests that Smart was influenced in this design by Bishop Robert Lowth's study of the poetry of the Bible, De sacra poesi Hebraeorum, first published in 1753. Lowth emphasized particularly the antiphonal or responsive nature of Hebrew poetry--"One of the choirs sung a single verse to the other, while the other constantly added a verse in some respect correspondent to the other"⁴--and it is known that Smart knew and admired Lowth's work.

Bond also notes that Smart "had been giving serious thought to a reformation of the Anglican liturgy,"⁵ and that when his version of the Psalms was later published, it was with the express purpose of effecting such a reform. Bond concludes that "it is more than probable that Jubilate was initially conceived as the opening move in this campaign,"⁶ a conjecture which accounts not only for the appropriateness of Lowth's principles but also for the close parallels in parts of the poem to the Anglican Order for Morning Prayer and the Psalter. Smart never directly claims that Jubilate is an attempt to reform the liturgy, but the poem does show evidence of his preoccupation with this subject: he observes, for example, that "it would be better if the LITURGY were musically performed" (B1, 252) and "it were better for the SERVICE, if only select psalms were read" (B2, 511).

A further clue to Smart's conception of his role and the purpose of his poem is found in two figures who, as we have seen, appeared in

the Seatonian poems and the Hymn to the Supreme Being, and who feature prominently in Jubilate's chorus of praise--David, the Psalmist of Israel, and Orpheus, the archetypal poet. The eight references to David, and the passage of several lines dealing with Orpheus, all emphasize the poet-singers' musical skill which is dedicated to the general chorus of praise. As in the earlier poems, Smart presents David and Orpheus as a single poet-figure who unites the pagan and Christian worlds in praise of the one true God:

For the story of Orpheus is of the truth.

For there was such a person a cunning player on the harp.

For he was a believer in the true God and assisted
in the spirit.

For he played upon the harp in the spirit by breathing
upon the strings. (C, 52-55)

Smart's identification of himself with David is continued in Jubilate Agno. He worked out a fanciful genealogy whereby he was actually descended from David, claiming "I am the seed of the WELCH WOMAN" (B1, 91) (his mother was Welsh), and that "the WELCH are the children of Mephibosheth and Ziba with a mixture of David in the Jones's" (B2, 435). Smart is evidently associating the Old Testament King with David, the Patron Saint of Wales, and drawing into this pattern of reference the fact that David and Jones are very common Welsh names. Later, he relates the two Davids more directly, when he exclaims, "Let Bilshan rejoice with the Leek. David for ever! God bless the Welch March 1st 1761. N. S." (C, 18). The first

reference is obviously to the psalmist, while the date, March 1st, is St. David's Day. Moreover, the manner of the poem's opening, already mentioned, indicates that he saw himself as a sort of eighteenth-century David, calling Englishmen everywhere to join with him in praise.

The poem's first reference to David offers an important insight into Smart's peculiar vision of the universe, and of the psalmist's place in it. He commands:

Let David bless with the Bear--The beginning of victory
to the Lord--to the Lord the perfection of excellence--
Hallelujah from the heart of God and from the hand of the
artist inimitable, and from the echo of the heavenly harp
in sweetness magnifical and mighty. (A, 41)

Smart here "connects David's musical skill with the creation of the universe by the 'artist inimitable'"⁷ and seems to envision the cosmos itself as a great Hallelujah proceeding from the heart of God. That is, Smart appears to see God as an all-powerful musician, and the entire universe as the majestic musical harmony which He creates. This view is stated more explicitly later in the poem, where Smart declares:

For GOD the father Almighty plays upon the HARP of Stupendous
magnitude and melody.

For innumerable Angels fly out at every touch and his tune
is a work of creation. (Bl, 246-247)

For this was spiritual musick altogether, as the wind is
a spirit.

For there is nothing but it may be played upon in delight.
(Bl, 254-255)

Paradoxically, while this cosmic harmony is composed of God's

creatures, they make a positive contribution to it through praise of Him:

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

Actual music is obviously not only what Smart has in mind; music for him is found in every type of praise, and he sees praise of God in most types of natural activity:

Let Ehud rejoice with Onacrotalus, whose braying is
for the glory of God, because he makes the best musick
in his power. (Bl, 19)

From this perspective, the psalmist, of whom David is the archetype and Smart the conscious imitator, assumes a position of profound significance, for it is he who invites all creatures to praise and who in effect leads that part of the cosmic harmony which is composed of creatures rendering thanks. In other words, Smart sees himself as a vital agent uniting the created orders with the Creator.

Music provides the key also to the particular moral world-view presented in Jubilate Agno. For Smart, harmony represents good, and discord represents evil. He declares, for example,

For all whispers and unmusical sounds in general are of the
Adversary. (Bl, 231)

While the tone of the poem, as its title suggests, is predominantly jubilant, even ecstatic, in its praise of God's goodness, evil is not ignored; it is, in fact, recognized throughout in the character of the Adversary. Although Smart declares that when God plays upon His harp,

. . . malignity ceases and the devils themselves
are at peace (Bl, 248)

the power of evil to disrupt the cosmic harmony is an important theme in the poem.