LITURGY TRANSLATED: LANGUAGES OF NATURE, MAN AND GOD IN SMART'S *JUBILATE AGNO*
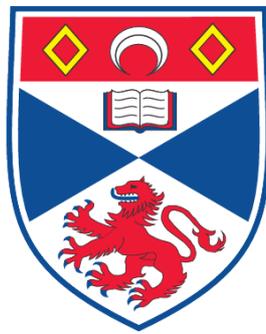
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LITURGY TRANSLATED: LANGUAGES OF NATURE, MAN AND GOD IN
SMART'S *JUBILATE AGNO*

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Abstract

This thesis explores Christopher Smart's search for an ideal language of religious expression and its presentation in *Jubilate Agno*. The concept of translation is utilised as an interpretative tool to explore the poet's understanding and manipulation of languages. My investigation of Smart's translation in *Jubilate Agno* is divided into three categories: the language used to describe nature, the language of man and the language used to describe God. Chapter One explores Smart's poetic emphasis on reading the world correctly. The analysis concentrates on four themes: the inability to express the divine and the risk of vanity in science in the early poems, anti-Newtonianism, Smart's rejection of scientific language, and the poet's catalogic and categorical impulses in *Jubilate Agno*. Chapter Two is concerned with human communication through reading, writing and speaking. I investigate how the religious poet aims to create a new kind of universal language as he attempts to dissolve the dichotomy between divine and human expression. Chapter 3 explores the poem's "extra-lingual" modes of communication and Smart's interest in other ways of reading, interpreting and communicating to achieve sublime, divine language through depictions of artistic beauty. The thesis concludes by comparing Smart's poem to other liturgical forms.

I Rosalind Powell hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 40,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September 2007 and as a candidate for the degree of M.Phil. in September 2008; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2007 and 2008.

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I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of M.Phil. in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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Contents

<u>References and Abbreviations</u>

Quotations from the Bible are from the New King James Version.

The following abbreviations are used throughout:

JA, Fragment line number   Christopher Smart, *Jubilate Agno*, The *Poetical Works*, ed. by Karina Williamson and Marcus Walsh, 6 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1980-1996), vol. I.

PW, volume number (date), page number   Christopher Smart, *The Poetical Works*, ed. by Karina Williamson and Marcus Walsh, 6 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1980-1996).

OED   *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) < http://www.oed.com> [accessed 14 August 2008].

INTRODUCTION: CHRISTOPHER SMART AND TRANSLATION IN THE EIGHTEENTH

CENTURY

> For lo! there's not a word or name,
> These organs of my voice can frame,
>   But thou, O Lord, canst tell;
> Ere yet my tongue itself prepare,
> To give the measur'd accents air,
>   Thou understandest well. (Psalm 139, 13-18) [1]

In Psalm 139 the attitude of the Old Testament towards the omniscience of God

is presented in a context of the poet's linguistic incapacity. Christopher Smart's

own rendering of the biblical verse emphasises a feeling of expressive

inadequacy that plagues the poet's early work. This thesis will explore how the

later work of *Jubilate Agno* banishes the sense of poetic bashfulness in its

exploratory attitude towards finding the correct language for religious

expression. The writer of Christian poetry is unusually concerned with language.

The creation of a poetic form and language to describe and praise God does not

involve merely the careful choosing of the correct words: in keeping with the

orthodox Christian doctrine of language as given or revealed to man by God,

words themselves carry a divine weight and religious language must also have a

universal application. Connections that are forged in this study rest upon Murray

Cohen's account of linguistic practice in the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries, which aligns language development with epistemological progression,

linguistic taxonomy with the order of the world, and which establishes the

relationship between language and reality to explain how knowledge of both the

material and the divine is attained through language.[2] Throughout the thesis,

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[1] *PW*, III (1987), p. 358.
[2] Murray Cohen, *Sensible Words: Linguistic Practice in England 1640-1785* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), *passim*.

Smart's poem is viewed as a possible substitute for part of the traditional

Anglican liturgy,[3] and as such, its language is compared with the *Book of*

Common Prayer as the standard text for public devotion. Smart presents a new

canticle for communal praise that is balanced between public and private modes

of communication; I will make explicit comparisons between *Jubilate Agno* and

traditional liturgical texts of Anglican worship in the conclusion.

An important critical starting-point for this thesis is Geoffrey Hartman's

essay on 'Christopher Smart's "Magnificat"', which addresses many central

themes in the poem.[4] The focus of the article is Smart's use of language, and

Hartman's combination of nature and speech in the trope of a Great Chain of

Language justifies my own exploration of a language of natural history. Hartman

explores poetic punning in *Jubilate Agno* to uncover the poet's framing of liturgy

as both benediction and euphemism. The critic draws the twin ideas of dying

language and dying nature together under the heading of 'depletion anxieties' (p.

433). His inspection of Smart's religious enthusiasim within the *Jubilate* leads

him to an assessment of the poet as 'critical rather than crazy' (p. 437), an

opinion that is central to the current reading. Two sources of difficulty are

unearthed: the ineffability of God and the limitation of language. These two

problems form the basis of my own inspection of Smart's late poem, which

attempts to explore and go beyond the themes set out in the earlier critic's short

article.

Language, then, is key and linguistic communication is a subject of

interest for other Christian writers beside Smart. In Paul's letter to the

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[3] Defined as 'the prescribed services of the church, as opposed to private devotion' and 'the written texts which study these' in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. by E.A. Livingstone, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[4] Geoffrey H. Hartman, 'Christopher Smart's "Magnificat": Toward a Theory of Representation', *ELH*, 41, 3 (1974), 429-54.

Corinthians, where the apostle explains the value of prophecy over speaking in tongues, we are reminded of the significance of language and the importance of clear speech:

> So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air […]. Therefore if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me.[5]

The communal focus here is evident; similarly, Smart's presentation of *Jubilate Agno* as a new Anglican canticle of praise does not serve for the spiritual edification of himself alone, but also for the improvement of 'Nations, and Languages, and every Creature' (A2), and the poet prophesies to all 'that the praise of God will be in every man's mouth' (C62). That the poem was composed during a period of incarceration might have some impact on its structure and the grand ambitions that Smart expresses for his work.

Importantly, whilst stressing the clear necessity of successful communication through languages, Paul also celebrates the 'many kinds of language in the world' (verse 10). This New Testament celebration of language in the context of Pentecost is reflected in the eighteenth-century poet's hymn for Whitsunday. Here, the multiple languages are seen as a sign of possibility for the universal praise of God:

> That thy praises might prevail
> On each note upon the scale,
> In each nation thou hast nam'd,
> On each organ thou hast fram'd.[6]

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[5] 1 Corinthians 14:9 and 11.
[6] *PW*, II (1980), 'Hymn XV: Whitsunday', p. 62, lines 9-12.

The repeated adjective switches focus in each line, enhancing the impression of a multitude of praising voices and celebrating the many divinely created languages. This excitement and hopefulness in response to God's gift of speech is reflected in the opening lines of *Jubilate Agno*, where the poet evokes a universal chorus of praise:

> 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.[7]

From these opening lines, it is clear that the poet's attitude toward man's expressive capacity is not clouded by the doubts of psalmodic humility. Moreover, the array of different creatures and nations is grouped together, before anything else, as 'tongues'. Smart identifies everything in the later poem through its language; all things, from flowers to fish have their own vocabulary in which to praise God. Like the Anglican canticle, the 'Benedicite, omnia opera',[8] the focus is on God's power as creator. The Johnian image of Christ the creating Logos is evoked repeatedly in this poem and the biblical image of God as Word[9] emphasises the importance of the actual language with which Smart is working.

Smart's awareness of the divine origin of the language in which he writes permeates *Jubilate Agno* and the poet frequently mentions the necessity of using words correctly: 'For all good words are from GOD, and all others are cant' (B85). Where the poet's interpretation of Pentecost prompts a celebration of the multiplicity of languages and the miracle 'that millions might be taught' because

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[7] *PW*, I (1980), Fragment A, lines 1-2.
[8] *The Book of Common Prayer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).
[9] John 1:1.

of them (Hymn xv, line 18), it also serves to emphasise the dichotomy between the creating Word and created man. Even with the benefit of linguistic expression, there are 'secret things' (Hymn xv, 31) that are reserved for God alone. This is a subject to which Smart returns repeatedly in his poems and which appears in *Jubilate Agno* through the trope of 'more letters in all languages not communicated' (C40). We might, then, consider the Babel myth in Genesis, the first division and confusion of tongues, which signifies the loss of a pure Adamic language and comprehension. Smart's hymn for Whitsunday appears to celebrate the division of languages as a 'great miracle' that enabled men to speak tongues 'untutor'd' (7) and to communicate together 'that millions might be taught' (18). The collapse of the tower of Babel and the ensuing confusion is presented as a prefiguration of the enhanced understanding at Pentecost and the creation of Smart's own beloved English language. Nevertheless, the poet also recognises the division implicit in the speaking of many languages and yearns for the unity of a 'mother tongue […] that seraphs use' (Hymn xxiii, 37-8).

It is in *Jubilate Agno* that the poet makes his most persuasive bid towards achieving a universal language of praise that can be shared, spoken and comprehended by all. Hebrew occupies an important place in the exploratory expression of *Jubilate Agno*. It is recognised by the majority of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century critics as both the original language of direct signification and as the ideal language of the sublime. Most important for our purposes is William Warburton's *The Divine Legation of Moses*, in which the author emphasises the Jewish root of Christianity whilst at the same time presenting writing as a tool that developed gradually from hieroglyphics to characters. In Smart's poem, Hebrew is afforded prime position as a pure, original language and the visual

symbols of its alphabet are utilised when no other verbal expression is possible

and the poet turns to 'the letter ל which signifies GOD by himself' (B477). George

Steiner describes the perfect signification of this ideal tongue in modern idiom:

> The vulgate of Eden contained, though perhaps in a muted key, a divine
> syntax – powers of statement and designation analogous to God's own
> diction, in which the mere naming of a thing was the necessary and
> sufficient cause of its leap into reality.[10]

Smart strives to recreate this 'divine syntax' in *Jubilate Agno* through a language

and structure of ordering and cataloguing. The multilingual (many-tongued,

many-voiced) Magnificat that results from this writing effort might also be seen

as some kind of attempt to restore the lost purity of the original language. The

poet's religious works answer a challenge set up by the dissolution of the

'Ursprache': to 'rebuild the tower of another Babel'.[11] As Willis Barnstone

suggests, 'the act of translation is the other Babel, that impossible tower'. Smart,

then, answers the call for a modern rendering of God's sublimity into the

vernacular beyond classical texts. In this introduction, I will further explain the

eighteenth-century vocabulary of the sublime for thinking and writing about

God, thereby revealing why special language is acutely important in the

composition of poems that are proposed for liturgical use. Secondly, I shall

present translation as a process through which Smart's production of laudatory

language in the *Jubilate* can be understood and analysed. Finally, I shall outline

the main areas of Smart's language to which translation as critical tool can be

applied; this shall form the framework of my argument.

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[10] George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 58.
[11] Willis Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 3.

The Sublime

In the Seatonian Poems, God's attributes are reflected through the poet's awed response: 'I thy servant, like the still profound,/ Astonish'd into silence muse thy praise!'[12] Christopher Smart's early poetic reaction to God is defined by the popular eighteenth-century concept of the sublime. From the French translation of 'Longinus'' *Peri Hupsous* in 1674 to the new writings of Dennis, Stackhouse and Burke in the eighteenth century, Smart's contemporaries were constantly trying to pin down a definition of the human reaction to great things in nature, literature and the contemplation of the divine. Longinus identified 'five very copious sources of the sublime':[13] boldness and grandeur; raising the passions to a violent degree; skilful use of language; noble and graceful expression; and, finally, dignity and grandeur of structure. However, every commentator since has noted that reducing the sublime to such categories does not explain its effects any more conclusively. An indispensable property of the sublime is that it is not fully understood: this is why it inspires awe and wonder and why modern critics return to it so frequently in relation to the eighteenth century. Smart's early poetry is routinely connected to the concept of the sublime and Alun David even prefaced his doctoral study on Smart and Hebrew with an entire chapter on this subject.[14]

The religious sublime, which is the linguistic reaction to the divine and a symptom of involved praise, is integral to the present study of Smart's language.

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[12] *PW*, IV (1987), 'On the Immensity of the Supreme Being', pp. 185-8, lines 49-50.
[13] 'from *Dionysius Longinus on the sublime* tr. William Smith (1743)' in *The Sublime: A Reader in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, ed. by Andrews Ashfield and Peter de Bolla (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 22-9, (p. 23).
[14] Alun Morris David, 'Christopher Smart and the Hebrew Bible' (unpublished doctoral dissertation: Cambridge University, 1994).

This concept explains why it is necessary to overcome to expressive anxiety of the Seatonian Poems and to use a special kind of language to describe and address the divine in *Jubilate Agno*. The mood of the earlier poems fulfils Edmund Burke's roughly contemporaneous assessment of 'whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror' as 'a source of the *sublime*'.[15]

The Seatonian Poems constantly reflect upon the power of God and the comparative littleness of anything mortal. As he tries to evoke the unimaginable greatness of God, the poet calls upon his reader to imagine the most powerful aspect of nature and to magnify it to an inconceivable degree:

> What, Aetna, are thy flames to these? – No more
> Than the poor glow-worm to the golden Sun. ('Eternity', 83-84)

The rhetorical question and its negative response stress the limitations of both imagination and description. The sublime in language comes from the fact that all is not known and that there is mystery where words are lacking. In the early poems, Smart describes an inability to express that is redolent of Augustine's *Confessions*:

> Can any man say enough when he speaks of you? Yet woe betide those
> who are silent about you! For even those who are most gifted with
> speech cannot find words to describe you.[16]

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[15] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas on the Sublime and the Beautiful*, ed. by J.T. Boulton, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 39.
[16] Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. and trans. by R.S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin: 1967), p. 23.

As the poet moves away from a traditional Augustinian viewpoint, the religious sublime in language is communicated in *Jubilate Agno* through tropes that refer to another language, 'the poetry of Christ' (B506), beyond that which is used for mortal expression. A linguistic conception of God can be envisaged because 'there are signs of speech too precious to be communicated for ever' (C45). Importantly, this mystery is a matter for celebration and a signification of worth, of things that are 'too precious to be communicated'. What is, perceived formally, an incomplete description actually signifies something that is more than complete. Burke insists that poetry is not just 'the power of raising sensible images'[17] that can be seen or felt. Because it might be able to reach beyond sensory experience, poetry is the ideal medium for this kind of translation as it accepts that not everything needs to be described or written in full. Thomas Stackhouse defines the sublime as 'a lively and perfect Imitation either of Nature, or of what surpasses it.'[18] In the expression of 'what surpasses it', the critic seizes upon the most apt description of Smart's creative process in *Jubilate Agno*.

Translation as Descriptive and Critical Device

The pure, direct language that Smart seeks to present in his liturgy is achieved through a new kind of universal tongue. It must be noted at once that this study of Smart's poetry utilises "translation" as an abstract term. This thesis is not an exploration of the poet's translations of Horace, Phaedrus or the Psalms, neither

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[17] Burke, p. 170.
[18] Thomas Stackhouse, *Reflections on the Nature and property of Languages*, ed. by R.C. Alston, English Linguistics 1500-1800, 111 (Menston: Scolar Press, 1968; London: J. Batley, 1731), pp. 134-5.

is it greatly concerned with translation theory. These themes appear only as they

relate to translation in the phenomenal context of an exploratory idiom. The term

"translation" refers to interpretation through language as writer, reader and

speaker, the process from exegesis to the description of texts and objects, and

translating experience into expression. Within a liturgical context, where words

are used to address God, the use of a translating approach to language is

important because the idea of a direct and pure language of signification also

suggests a clearer understanding. Even with the miracle of Pentecost, the need

for an interpreter and prophet is not obsolete: God does not speak clearly, for 'in

the spirit he speaks mysteries' (1 Corinthians, 14:2). The language of God is not

comprehensible to ordinary mortals; St Paul suggests that a speaker of tongues

might intercede as interpreter between God and man. The apostle puts himself

forward as prophet, Smart himself suggests that he too is a kind of prophet for his

time, 'the Reviver of ADORATION amongst ENGLISH-MEN' (B332). Because Smart

presents himself as a prophet, the idea of translating the language of God, and

therefore the language of nature, clearly and correctly is of vital importance in

Jubilate Agno. As Harriet Guest notes:

> Language becomes nature translated and interpreted, and as the system of
> nature can be understood as a mediated revelation of the immanence of
> the deity, so language too can be understood as a potential source of
> revelation.[19]

This assessment works into the tradition that begins in John's Gospel of thinking

of God in terms of language itself, what Henry More describes as 'that

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[19] Harriet Guest, *A Form of Sound Words: The Religious Poetry of Christopher Smart* (Oxford:
Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 169.

everlasting Logos.'[20] Moreover, the interpretation and translation of the *liber naturae* and the Bible through a kind of linguistic exegesis must end in a kind of revelation. The figure of the book of nature is described in full in 'On the Eternity of the Supreme Being', as depicting the name of God:

> Deep in the human heart, and every atom
> The Air, the Earth or azure Main contains
> In undecipher'd characters is wrote. (2-5)

In *Jubilate Agno*, Smart endeavours to interpret and translate these 'characters' to achieve revelation and a new divine language. Christopher Smart, then, is a translating poet. The meanings and implications of this statement are both many and varied as the writer in question embraces the whole spectrum of literary translation, to include interchange both within and between languages in the search for clear expression.

At the beginning of Fragment B of *Jubilate Agno*, Smart presents an account of his translating endeavours as a poet. These efforts are revealed to be both physical and spiritual and words are presented as both physical weapons and infinitely translatable spiritual tools. Translation affords gain for both poet and reader:

> Let Libni rejoice with the Redshank, who migrates not, but is *translated* to the upper regions.
> For I have *translated* in the charity, which makes things better and I shall be *translated* myself at the last. (B11, my italics.)

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[20] Henry More, *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings*, 2nd edn (London: Fletcher, 1662), p. v.

The poet refers to his translations of the Psalms and Horace elsewhere in the

Jubilate, but this description in Fragment B is the main instance in which

translation is connected explicitly with the new Magnificat. Clement Hawes

describes the importance and use of such a definition thus:

> [T]hese passages simultaneously validate Smart's claim to a sublime and
> ineffable experience and ask for generosity as regards his particular
> attempt to render the "incommunicable letters" of that experience.[21]

If this account of Smart's translating endeavour is accurate, it will be necessary

to examine the 'ineffable experience' of translation and the more concrete

rendering of poetry. To do this, it is possible to look at the three different kinds

of translation to which Smart refers. First is the example of the Redshank 'who

migrates not but is translated to the upper regions.' Here, the poet's subject is

that of natural history used as illustrative (or empirical) proof. In Smart's poetry,

the physical movement of the bird is translated into a religious context: migration

becomes something spiritual. The poet reflects natural kinesis in a similar way a

little later in the poem as a spiritualising process: 'For there is a traveling [sic]

for the glory of God without going to Italy or France' (B35). Here, travelling is

transformed by its objective 'for the glory of God' and, similarly, the Redshank's

physical translation is transformed by the rejoicing of Libni into something that

is concerned with the spirit, not the flesh of a bird offered in sacrifice.

Smart's spiritual translation also has a personal focus: writing and

preaching clearly for the edification of others might answer the poet's hope for

personal salvation 'that [he] shall be translated at the last.' The meaning of this

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[21] Clement Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style*: *The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 170.

verb is explained in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as the 'removal from earth to heaven, originally without death, as the translation of Enoch; but in later use also said figuratively of the death of the righteous.' Smart, the prophesying poet and 'scribe-evangelist' hopes to be counted among the righteous and to achieve this spiritual end. The reference to natural history reminds the reader of the linguistic, and therefore poetic, origin of Smart's endeavour and this is recalled in the idea of translated articulation: 'For the praise of God can give to a mute fish the notes of a nightingale' (B24). Indeed, the key aim of Smart's translation in *Jubilate Agno* appears to be that of articulation so that all are equipped with the means to praise God sufficiently. As mentioned above, Smart must write and preach clearly through his poetry. The poetic corpus of translated psalms, renderings of the works of Horace and Phaedrus, epistles, hymns and creative verses represent how Smart has 'translated in the charity'. The works display charity in different ways through the educational value of ancient texts, the devotional spirit of Psalms and hymns, and the provision of entertaining secular verse.

Smart's own presence in these descriptive lines is notable; the poet is the subject of each of the 'For' lines. Geoffrey Hartman might suggest that the presentation of translation in the poem is fraught with anxiety and 'the artist's sense that he is disturbing the "holy Sabbath" of creation by his recreation; that he is trespassing on sacred property or stealing an image of it or even exalting himself as a maker.'[22] The lines describing translation exist within the *Jubilate* as a defence against accusations of creative vanity. A prayer is embedded in the poet's hope for his own translation and Smart's charitable act of writing is presented as something natural and driven by God. In this way, the translating

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[22] Hartman, p. 432.

endeavour of *Jubilate Agno* is justified as a vital, non-creative element of the

poet's physico-theology: whilst it is creative in literary terms, Smart understands

that his prophetic endeavour is something to which God presses him, and it is not

of his own invention. The poet's presentation of himself as 'scribe-evangelist' is

defiant of the contemporary vision of an independent writer. Robert Wokler

describes the development of a secularised view of manufacture:

> [T]he human race came to be recognised as the author of its own world,
> as creator […] no longer shaped in the image of God but rather according
> to his own design.[23]

The poet's emphasis on his writing as translation emphasises the fact that he is

not really an author, in the sense that he writes nothing new. The translations in

the *Jubilate* come from the divine text and cannot expand beyond it or even

achieve a complete rendering of the original. In this way, Smart locates himself

in the role that is ideal for a translator whose work is purely linguistic: his own

voice must remain essentially silent. The *Jubilate* is simply a frame for the

presentation of God's *systema naturae* that Smart 'preach[es] without comment'

(B9). It is in the justification of his translating endeavour alone that the poet is

able to speak. Richard Kroll reminds us that such an explanatory episode is

necessary:

> Translation is both act and criticism: to operate at all, it negotiates a
> method, but almost inevitably at some historical or logical point it
> encourages a discussion of its own method.[24]

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[23]Robert Wokler 'Anthropology and Conjectural History', in *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-Century Domains*, ed. by Christopher Fox, Mary Porter and Robert Wokler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 31-52, (p. 34).
[24] Richard W.F. Kroll, *The Material World: Literate Culture in the Restoration and Early Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 87.

Smart's method here discussed involves the negation of 'comment' and the recognition that words are both material and spiritual. Most of all, the reader must recognise that translation 'creates a difference':[25] no translation can be identical to the work of the original author. There is an inevitable space between the original text and its new rendering in all translations and this is exacerbated when divine "writing" is in question. Smart's only solution for this is to present the translation of *Jubilate Agno* to God as liturgy, an imperfect act of praise: 'For I pray the Lord to translate my MAGNIFICAT into verse and represent it' (B48).

Necessarily, then, translation both into and within the English language forms the basis of Smart's search for religious expression. The problem that the poet faces is how he might express his canticle in English; translation, with its conjoined inferences of interpretation and understanding, provides some kind of solution. The translating endeavour of *Jubilate Agno* concerns several different kinds of language in a commentary on contemporary views of God and science, language and ordering. A useful way of viewing the translating process in Smart's works can be summarised in George Steiner's description of the 'hermeneutic motion' of translation.[26] In this account, which will be a recurring theme in the thesis, translation consists of four stages that illustrate well Smart's poetic process: trust, aggression, incorporation and restitution. First, the trust in the text from which Smart is translating is evident in every pore of the *Jubilate*: 'For it is the business of a man gifted in the word to prophecy good' (C61). This also demonstrates a second kind of trust: the trust of the poet in his own

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[25] Barnstone, p. 18.
[26] Steiner, pp. 297-413.

prophecy and thus in the language through which he expresses it. The second action of aggression is that which binds the translation of the Psalms to the translation in *Jubilate Agno*. In the Psalms, the 'creative violence'[27] of translation is found in the Smart's Christianising of the text. The parallel for this in the *Jubilate* is the categorising and ordering of Christ the *logos*, the language to describe God and the language of his creation, into poetic order. This violence is somewhat healed by the incorporation that is the celebration and exploration of multi-lingual possibilities in the poem 'for a NEW SONG also is best' (B390). Finally, the restitution is found not only in the completed translation of the text, but also in the articulation that the new language affords. Most important is the spiritual restoration of the poet, who hopes to be 'translated […] at the last' (B11).

Outline of the Argument

My investigation of Smart's translation of language in *Jubilate Agno* is divided into three categories that reflect the chief preoccupations of eighteenth-century writers: the language used to describe nature, the language of man and the language used to describe God. The nature of Smart's verse necessitates a certain degree of repetition of material, and subjects such as Kabbalah and letters will be explored in more than one chapter.

The first chapter concerns Smart's physico-theological language in *Jubilate Agno* and places it in the context of the Seatonian Poems and the restrictions of empirical science. Smart's own reading of Newton's *Principia* and

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[27] Alan Ingram, *Patterns of Madness in the Eighteenth Century: A Reader* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998), p. 129.

Opticks, as well as the physico-theological writings of Burnet,[28] Derham and

others, are used to gauge the poet's position in the climate of the new science.

Translation is utilised here in the context of a language of catalogue and

measurement compared to that of Newton and Linnaeus, and the idea of reading

the world correctly. Indeed, for Smart, a misunderstanding of the world is bound

up with a misinterpretation of origins (especially of language), which can then

lead to mistranslation. The implicit connection between the world and text is

important. As Harold Bloom reminds us, '"interpretation" once meant

"translation" and essentially still does.'[29] The poet finds such mistranslation in

the writings of both the ancients and of his own contemporaries. Smart's critique

of Newton in *Jubilate Agno* is that he is misreading the world and thereby

translating it into the wrong language: 'For Newton nevertheless is more of error

than of the truth, but I am of the WORD of GOD' (B195). In contrast. the structure

of *Jubilate Agno* suggests that there is a correct way of cataloguing the universe.

Smart claims to have achieved a correct ordering of the world through the 'WORD

of GOD' which, it would seem, Newton's own empiricism does not account for

sufficiently. In this section, I will explore how Smart creates a language to

express God through a categorising translation that effects a fusion of science

and faith by using the ordering language of empiricism.

The second chapter places Smart's work in the context of seventeenth-

and eighteenth-century theoretical works on language and language origin. The

establishment of Smart as a "Renaissance poet", based upon his view of language

and the position of a poet is the best starting-point for the assessment of his new

liturgy. First, Smart writes in the face of a contemporary trend towards the

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[28] Listed in Marcus Walsh, 'A Cambridge College Library in the Eighteenth Century: Christopher Smart's Borrowings at Pembroke', *Library*, 12, 1 (1990), 34-49.
[29] Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 85

demystification and classification of language, represented by the word-lists of

Comenius' *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* and Locke's assessment of the signification

of names and the limitation of words in his *Essay Concerning Human*

Understanding. The poet's approach to language, it can be seen, has more in

common with sixteenth-century mystical readings and use of language, where:

> Behind each text, however limited or corrupt it might be, stood this ideal
> of a perfect, comprehensive, consistent, and edifying Book authorised by
> God's Word, and waiting to be uncovered, discovered, or reconstructed
> by mankind.[30]

Second, the concern with purity of writing in *Jubilate Agno* reflects a Sidneian

sense that poetry is a lost art that needs to be recovered and redeemed. Abraham

Cowley's 1656 Preface to his poems, which is listed amongst Smart's library

borrowings, describes the same notion:

> It is time to recover it [poetry] out of the *Tyrants* hands, and to restore it
> to the *Kingdom of God*, who is the *Father* of it. It is time to baptize it in
> *Jordan*, for it will never become clean by bathing in the *Waters of
> Damascus*.[31]

Smart shares the view that a directly signifying Adamic language is unattainable,

but he still aims to create a pure, new kind of language that mimics it and

attempts to dissolve the dichotomy between divine and human expression.

The third and final chapter explores the "extra-lingual" modes of

communication in the poem and Smart's interest in other ways of reading,

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[30] James J. Bono, *The Word of God and the Languages of Man: Interpreting Nature in Early Modern Science and Medicine*, *Volume I Ficino to Descartes* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), p. 4.

[31] Abraham Cowley, 'The Preface to the Poems, 1656', in *The Essays and Other Prose Writings*, ed. by Alfred B. Gough (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), pp. 1-17, (pp. 14-15).

interpreting and communicating to achieve sublime, divine language. Smart's

interest in Kabbalah and his use of Hebrew characters will be explored. Again,

the latter can be connected to the poet's own reading of Robert Lowth's *Lectures*

on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews and polyglot bibles. Karina Williamson

explains Smart's interest in alphabets and Hebrew characters as part of an

ongoing development of the poet's ideas about language and meaning:

> While it is true that some of his ideas patently have their source in
> Hermetic Cabbalist tradition, it is notable that these ideas are not
> distributed evenly throughout *Jubilate Agno* […]. Smart's expression of
> these ideas is singularly free from the jargon of the occult, in contrast to
> his liberal use of scientific terminology.[32]

In this reading, Kabbalistic theory is understood as part of Smart's solution to the

problem of scientific expression alongside the poet's use of images and words

from music, art and nature. This study of Smart's translation in *Jubilate Agno*

explores the progression of thought from the Seatonian Poems and the creative

achievement of a new kind of religious language.

This thesis will uncover Christopher Smart's ordinary and extraordinary

modes of reading and writing and their relation to contemporary language

debates to evaluate the poet's aspiration of creating a universal canticle of praise.

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[32] *PW,* I (1980), Introduction, p. xxx.

CHAPTER I: SMART'S *SYSTEMA NATURAE*: ANTI-NEWTONIANISM AND THE

CATEGORICAL IMPULSE IN SMART'S *JUBILATE AGNO*

This chapter examines Smart's creation of a liturgical physico-theology of

scientific structures and expression in *Jubilate Agno* as part of his endeavour to

portray divine attributes successfully and to emulate a kind of divine language.

Physico-Theology is described in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'a theology

based on the constitution of the natural world, especially on evidences of design

found there'. This theology is demonstrated in William Derham's highly popular

work, *Physico-Theology: or a Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God

from the Works of Creation*, where the author considers elements of the

'Terraquaeous Globe',[33] considering the ''Usefulness' and 'Necessity' of

elements (p. 14), and the providence of the Earth's order. Derham proclaims his

physico-theology as scientific exploration that is carried out with a view to

praising God:

> Let us with the greatest Accuracy inspect every Part thereof, search out
> the inmost Secrets of any of the Creatures; let us examine them with all
> our Guages, measure them with our nicest Rules, pry into them with our
> Microscopes, and most exquisite Instruments, till we find them to bear
> Testimony to their infinite Workman. (p. 38)

Physico-Theology, albeit one that is not based upon measurement and prying and

is more concerned with outward appearance, is important for Smart because a

scientific and poetic approach allows him to reflect the same 'Testemony' of

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[33] William Derham, *Physico-Theology: or a Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God
from the Works of Creation*, 7th edn (London: W. & J. Innys, 1727), p. 4.

God's presence and to enliven it so that it is actively spoken as laudatory verse in *Jubilate Agno*. The refusal to pry is important, because this is what sets the religious poet apart from the scientific activity of his contemporaries. We will explore how Smart rejects empirical science, which is 'founded upon experiment and observation',[34] involving the measurement of and interaction with elements of the earth, in favour of appreciation at a distance.

In this chapter, I will establish the necessity for an examination of Smart's version of physico-theology by showing the clear connection between science and religion within Smart's canticle. I will then explore the highly original manner in which the poet joins in the contemporary fervour for using the rhetoric of science to show 'evidences of the wisdom of God in nature.'[35] Prompted by Clement Hawes' assessment that 'the full meaning of Smart's use of science […] remains to be settled',[36] I shall explore this physico-theology and its language of expression on four different themes that trace a development in the relation between scientific exploration and religious expression through the poet's oeuvre: the inability to express the divine and the risk of vanity in science in the early poems, anti-Newtonianism based upon evidence of Smart's scientific reading in his library borrowings at Cambridge, the poet's rejection of the language of science, and, finally, his catalogic and categorical impulse in *Jubilate Agno* demonstrated through the culmination of the argument in a close-reading of Smart's depiction of flowers and the catalogue of Fragment D.

It is necessary first to establish why a discussion of science should have a place in Smart's poetic reflection of the religious sublime. *Jubilate Agno* as

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[34] *Oxford English Dictionary*.

[35] William Powell Jones, *The Rhetoric of Science: A Study of Scientific Ideas and Imagery in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 41.

[36] *Christopher Smart and the Enlightenment*, ed. by Clement Hawes (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), Introduction, p. 4.

poetic endeavour presents the interpretation of nature, which can be its

appreciation alone and not necessarily the complete understanding of processes,

as an activity of reading and transcribing. Harriet Guest addresses the duality of

such an exercise:

> [N]atural philosophy is described in *Jubilate Agno* not simply as a means
> of understanding the physical world, but as a metaphor or analogy in
> terms of which spiritual experience may also be comprehended.[37]

The poet's physico-theology is pitted against orthodox empirical science in the

context of linguistic activity, with nature as text. Because of this context,

translation is a convenient metaphor to describe a study of non-verbal spiritual

experience that is written in poetry. The concepts of the Book of Nature and

magnification provide a meeting place between religion and reason in the poem.

The first theme emerges from a Renaissance reading of creation as *liber naturae*,

God's legible means of communication with man. John Newton, who was

Cowper's partner in the *Olney Hymns*, wrote a useful account of God's books in

his 'Plan of a compendious Christian Library'. In this work, he advocates the

four books of God – the Bible, the book of nature, the book of providence, and

the book of human nature – as material for study superior to human writings.

Newton's description of the *liber naturae* is particularly useful:

> The lines of this book, though very beautiful and expressive in
> themselves, are not immediately legible by fallen man. The works of
> creation may be compared to a fair character in cypher, of which the
> Bible is the key; and without this key they cannot be understood.[38]

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[37] Guest, p. 196.

[38] John Newton, 'Plan of a compendious Christian Library', in *The Works of the Reverend John Newton* (London: Bohn, 1865), pp. 62-64, (p. 63).

The poet and the hymn-writer find a meeting point in the idea of interpreting God's written 'character'. Where Smart and John Newton diverge is in the tools (beyond that of the Bible) that they use to read the cipher and in the different structures that they use to present their translations of the *liber*. Smart's overarching concern with language is clear; it is not the vocal, expressive side of language, but that of reading signs and interpreting that is important. A secondary parallel for Smart's reading of the world is located in the tradition of Hebrew exegesis, where the Torah is not only a physical book, but also 'the blueprint of creation'.[39] Through this metaphor of linguistic copying, the workings of Creation can be assimilated into the poetic pattern of Smart's physico-theology, which is itself only a (linguistic) reflection from which creation can be reconstructed in full awareness of its original, divine author.

The second metaphorical theme binding science and religion together in poetry is taken from the other book of God, the Scriptures. In this sacred, literary context, the key to understanding and praising Creation can be found in the term 'magnify', which defines through its several meanings the ideal focus for both composition and comprehension. The opening line of the poem demonstrates this: 'Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together' (A3). Echoing the instructions of the Benedicite, a canticle of praise from the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, this imperative call brings together several implications for the poet's and the praisers' actions. First of all, this expression opens the subject out from the singular 'my soul' of the Biblical Magnificat.[40] The change of subject from first person singular to 'man and beast' is significant:

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[39] Susan E. Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Hebraic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), p. 38.
[40] Luke 1:46-55.

Hartman writes of the necessary sublimation of the self and the disapproval of the egotistical in religious poetry of the eighteenth century.[41] The collective focus of the *Jubilate* is both an affront to what Smart sees as the singular vision of the vain scientist and a call for correct reading. The choice of the word 'magnify' to signal praise is important because of the many suggestions that it brings to the action of the poem. First of all, Harriet Guest suggests that such magnification implies a 'reciprocal relation with God'.[42] Indeed, this sense of communication is shown later in *Jubilate Agno*:

> For the moon is magnified in the horizon by Almighty God, and so is the sun.
> For she has done her day's-work and the blessing of God upon her, and she communicates with the earth. (B428-29)

Creation does not only magnify and glorify God; God himself magnifies creation, and the sun and the moon are brought to vision (magnified) in God's creation of light in Genesis. As a more active and vocal genre of religious poetry, the idea of reciprocity is important for liturgy. Moreover, a near contemporary reference in Robert Nelson's *Companion for the Fasts and Festivals* suggests that magnification is the human effort to repay God for his creation:

> Though we cannot add to his greatness, yet we are then said to *magnifie the Lord*, when we publish and proclaim to the World our Sense of his mighty Perfections.[43]

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[41] Hartman, p. 432.

[42] Guest, p. 139.

[43] Robert Nelson, *A Companion for the Fasts and Festivals of the Church of England*, 16th edn (London: A. and J. Churchill, 1705), p. 168.

This description of magnification as a communal activity seems to shadow the public show of evangelism that Smart would support in his exuberant praying and praising of 'God before every man's eyes' (B360). The public expression and translating endeavour of *Jubilate Agno* proclaim this sentiment through the magnification of God and Nature.

It follows from Nelson's interpretation that magnifying is also connected to the idea of exegesis and understanding. In Smart's physico-theological account, to magnify is to explore. The direct scientific application of the term is suggested in Smart's own descriptive presentation of natural history:

> Let Ethan praise with the Flea, his coat of mail, his pincer, and his vigour, which wisdom and providence have contrived to attract observation and to escape it. (A36)

With the correct application of the magnifying spy-glass, even orthodox scientific knowledge can be used to enhance the praise of God and the appreciation of creation. The idea of correctness is key: magnification is not conducted by the single person, and it is done with the object of praise in view. Smart's celebration of 'providence' in the minute and his presentation of obscure mystery that escapes 'observation' demonstrate the use of physico-theology to strengthen a sense of God's sublimity. David B. Morris' account of the origins of the religious sublime recognises this duality of exploration and limitation:

> The general relationship between sublimity and religion has been attributed in the past to three main causes: the impact of Newtonian

science, the influence of physico-theological thought, and the implications of Lockean epistemology.[44]

The frustrated efforts to achieve scientific description and discovery, and the resolution of physico-theological thought in the focus on God as origin result in a sense of wonder at the mysterious workings of the sublime. This suggestion that a sense of the sublime comes in response to exploratory insight shall be revisited in Smart's negation of a certain kind of scientific magnification in the Seatonian Poems. In contrast, Smart as scientist is a spectator, interpreter and 'a communicant in the mystery of God's continuous presence in nature'[45]: he does not intrude, but partakes in the already established tradition of praising the evidence of God's design. The opening lines of the *Jubilate* set this as the tone for the rest of the liturgy. The vocal mode that Smart introduces through his initial command to 'rejoice' represents a balance between the orthodoxies of science and faith. Smart's opening command to 'magnify his name together' can be interpreted in a number of ways which place the poem as an example of physico-theology, where the precedent of praising liturgy governs the poet's presentation of creation.

Smart's Seatonian Poems: Restriction and Scientific Vanity

In *Jubilate Agno*, the limit that is imposed upon scientific investigation also implies a limit on the poet's linguistic expression of the obscure, inexplicable

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[44] David B. Morris, *The Religious Sublime: Christian Poetry and Critical Tradition in Eighteenth-Century England* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1972), p. 2.
[45] Morris, p. 171.

sublime. The presentation of all the 'tongues' of creation poses a great challenge

for the poet:

> For nature is more numerous than observation tho' observers be
> innumerable. (B53)

In this linguistic context, Smart finds himself in the same predicament as the

categorising empiricists of his age who also seek to name and to order living

things in a form that is comprehensible. Locke voices an anxiety that is common

to both science and poetry when he suggests that 'it is beyond the Power of

humane Capacity to frame and retain distinct *Ideas* of all the particular things we

meet with.'[46] To some extent, Smart answers this challenge in the *Jubilate*

through a syntax and structure of statements without explanation regarding flora

and fauna. For example, the inner workings of the flea are celebrated

unquestioningly in A36 as the product of God's 'wisdom and providence' that

man cannot comprehend. The ordering, or 'framing' of the poem is presented as

a celebration that Smart does not achieve on his own: the named flora and fauna

of creation appear in the poem 'without comment' because the signifiers that

represent them are also enabled by language that is divine in origin, not invented

by man.[47] The simplicity of expression that is reached in *Jubilate Agno* is

obtained as a final result of Smart's long struggle with poetic utterance

throughout his earlier works. The Seatonian Poems represent Smart's thoughts

on contemporary science and the poetic expression of human knowledge in a

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[46] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Peter Nidditch, *Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke*, 15 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), I, p. 409.
[47] See, for example, James Beattie, *The Theory of Language*, ed. by R.C. Alston, English Linguistics 1500-1800, 88 (Menston: Scolar Press, 1968; London: Strahan and Cadell, 1788), p. 100.

form that is less developed. We must explore the outright derision of the vanity

of science in these poems to understand the expressive advancement of the

Jubilate Agno, the challenges that the poem answers, and the implicit arguments

that the new liturgy embodies.

The first of the Seatonian Poems, 'On the Eternity of the Supreme Being',

is seemingly hindered by the poet's sense of bewilderment and his inability to

interpret the divine subject of his verse. This failure of confidence at the

beginning of the poem interrupts a traditional Miltonic panegyric on the

'wondrous Being' of the creator. The sudden awareness of inarticulacy takes the

reader aback and creates a response of humility:

> INCOMPREHENSIBLE! – Oh what can words
> The weak interpreters of mortal thoughts,
> Or what can thoughts (6-8)

The emphasis upon the paucity of words is important: poetry is the ideal medium

in which to celebrate the one whose name 'in undeciphered characters is wrote

[sic] […] deep in the human heart, and every atom' (lines 5 and 3). The two

languages of 'incomprehensible' divine communication and 'mortal thought' are

not the same: the divine script cannot be read by mortal eyes and the 'feeble

voice' of the poet cannot enunciate sufficient words to praise. The 'youthful,

uninspired Bard' (13) is compared unfavourably with the immortal 'GREAT POET

OF THE UNIVERSE' (21). The tentative call on a muse to aid his verse further

undermines the narrator's authority as he is unable to compose unaided. The use

of a conditional clause in the request for inspiration 'if Thou […] uplift th'

unpinioned Muse' (18-20) deflates the poet's own power of expression. Smart

therefore relinquishes the special 'perspective denied to the audience'[48] that is a poet's prerogative. The Miltonic command of muses is replaced by a nervous humility against presumption and the result of this is inarticulacy. Harriet Guest suggests that these opening lines show a debate between 'explanatory' didactic and 'exemplary' modes of religious poetry (p. 73). The didactic teaching of divine grandeur is exemplified by stark contrasts in expression and the poem advertises its own necessary tendency towards conjecture instead of fact. Although Smart uses the Seatonian Poems to attack science through imperatives and invective against his contemporaries, the tone used to describe God and nature remains one of humility and not ordering. In the first of these poems, any complete expression that is achieved brings with it a reminder that 'all were vain/ To speak Him as he is, who is INEFFABLE' (139-40).

'Yet what we can [speak], we ought' (131): although a poet must be aware of his expressive limits, Smart suggests that this should not inhibit his art completely. The poet celebrates his own ineptitude because of the comparative glory that his imitation reflects onto the divine poet. A correlative for this can be found in Augustine's questions in *On Christian Teaching* regarding the impossibility of speaking adequately of God:

> Have I spoken something, have I uttered something, worthy of God? No, I feel that all I have done is to wish to speak; if I did say something it is not what I wanted to say. How do I know this? Because God is unspeakable.[49]

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[48] Guest, p. 71.

[49] Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, ed. and trans. by R.P.H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 10.

The final statement makes it plausible that bewilderment and celebration are twin symptoms of an author confronting the sublimity of God. The negative descriptions in 'Eternity' – 'incomprehensible', 'immeasurably', 'innumerable', 'inconceivable' – mount up to display not only the limits of human assessment, but also the grandeur of that which is not expressed. The obscure deity of Smart's celebratory verses cannot be quantified adequately and this is the sign of its potency. The obliquity of language in the Seatonian Poems recalls the Burkean sublime of vast, obscure mystery.[50] Further, the humility of religious expression common throughout Smart's work preserves the wonder of this obscure and unexplored territory and prevents scientific and expressive vanity.

The inarticulate response, exemplified by the narrator of 'On the Immensity of the Supreme Being' who is 'astonish'd into silence' by creation (50), is endorsed by the Old Testament. In the Book of Job, the human subject's desire to 'reason with God' (13:3) is confronted by evidence of his lack of wisdom in comparison to the creating deity. God thunders to Job out of the whirlwind, and Job has no response, he is absented from any kind of discussion through impossible rhetorical questions: 'Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?' (38:4). The denial of expression in Job is imitated in *Jubilate Agno*:

> Let Iddo praise the Lord with the Moth – the writings of man perish as the garment, but the Book of God endureth for ever. (A68)

In Smart's view, man's expressions are essentially futile and the sublime grandeur of God's creation and language belittles him to the state of the

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[50] Burke, p. 58.

inglorious moth, his man-made language becomes like perishable cloth. In the Seatonian Poems, the bewildered reaction to obscurity takes the Book of Psalms as its exemplum and focus. In 'Immensity', Psalm 139 is rewritten as the awareness of God's 'residence' and prescience in all areas of man's quest for knowledge defines Smart's condition of humility:

> Oh! cou'd I search the bosom of the sea,
> Down the great depth descending; there thy works
> Wou'd also speak thy residence. (lines 46-8; cf. Ps.139:9)

The biblical verses posit the 'darkness' of human blindness against the light of divine knowledge. Even where man cannot see or measure, objects continue to 'speak' the language of divine creation. The language of the omniscient being is truly universal and this is a source of comfort for those who are overwhelmed by a sense of mortal ignorance. The immovable presence of God finds its place in *Jubilate Agno* through a mixing of Old and New Testament imagery:

> For the Glory of God is always in the East, but cannot be seen for the
> cloud of the crucifixion.
> […]
> For due East is the way to Paradise, which man knoweth not by reason of
> his fall. (B167-8)

We find here a curious mix of images where the vanity of the scientist is implied by his human blindness. First, Smart seems to be chastising man for his assumption that north is the 'true' polar direction, then, this fault of ignorance is explained away as having a theological precedent: man cannot know the way to Paradise because of the punishment in Genesis. Moreover, Smart suggests that the darkness of man's eyes cannot bear the brightness of God's glory, which

must be translated into a human context through the *humilitas* of the crucifixion. These lines translating the points of the compass into a divine context recall Eric Auerbach's writing on Christianity. The modern critic characterises the incarnation as 'a *humilitas*' born out of necessity, 'for men could not have endured the splendor of Christ's divinity.' [51] A parallel to this passage is found later in the poem, where the points of the compass are aligned with the 'twelve cardinal virtues' (B355-8). By condemning human vanity and positing humility in its place, *Jubilate Agno* attempts to find a new understanding and expression of the divine in nature that rejects the traditional assumptions and the 'stud and mud' of scientific conjecture (B174) in favour of the 'miraculous cast' of God (B173).

Even in the Seatonian Poems, Smart is fully aware of the necessity for some kind of human expression: a silent poem is no poem at all. In 'Eternity', the poet imagines the activities of the divine mind. However, it remains that even such visions must be curbed with an awareness of limitation:

> [A]ll's conjecture here below,
> All ignorance, and self-plum'd vanity. (57-8)

In fact, even the prying scientists that Smart decries can be seen to work with an awareness of the restrictions placed upon them. In the introduction to *The Origin of Forms*, Robert Boyle defines his own position and purpose as that of a scientist concerned with physical entities:

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[51] Erich Auerbach, *Literary Language and its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 51.

> [One] whose business […] is to discourse of things as a naturalist, without invading the province of divines by intermeddling with supernatural mysteries.[52]

This limitation is vital and it represents the kind of distance that Smart might endorse. Indeed, our poet is not the only writer of the Enlightenment to suggest caution and a policy of 'remaining humble in the face of nature'.[53] The scientist, as Boyle sees him, should only be concerned with what can be measured and observed. Even in the General Scholium to the *Principia*, although he also reveals a strong sceptical streak regarding the nature of God, Newton comments that man is limited by his sensory judgements:

> In bodies, we see only their figures and colors, we hear only the sounds, we touch only their outward surfaces, we smell only the smells, and taste the savors; but their inward substances are not to be known either by our senses, or by any reflex act of our minds; much less, then, have we any idea of the substance of God.[54]

Empirical science, based as it is on observation, cannot reveal everything. This obscurity is shown by the dark imagery of the bottom of the sea in Smart's poem, out of which the only 'happy Conjecture' (B173) can be the presence of God. Recourse to a deity might itself be seen as a kind of 'reflex act' on the part of man. As Newton reminds us, God is only known through his 'dominion' or creation (p.544). Smart's preoccupation with truth and conjecture is directed

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[52] Robert Boyle, 'The Origin of Forms and Qualities', in *Selected Philosophical Papers of Robert Boyle*, ed. by M.A. Stewart (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), pp. 1-96, (p. 8).

[53] Carson Robert Bergström, 'The Rise of the New Science: Epistemological, Linguistic, and Ethical Ideals and the Rise of the Lyric Genre in the Eighteenth Century' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Edinburgh University, 1995), p. 84.

[54] *Sir Isaac Newton's Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy and his System of the World, Translated into English by Andrew Motte in 1729*, ed. by Florian Cajon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), p. 546.

towards his own endeavours. As such, the constant awareness that it is impossible to articulate God's sublimity, through science or otherwise, instructs and limits the poet's own linguistic expression. Although it is the express aim of the *Jubilate*, man's magnification of God is restricted in the new liturgy also. Conversely, Smart shows that God's magnification can command sun and moon and his 'wisdom and providence' have contrived the microscopic intricacies of the flea.

William Powell Jones suggests that scientific writing of this period met with the approval and encouragement of its poetic documenters as long as it acknowledged the precedence of the Creator:

> Most of the poems, it can now be clearly seen, treated the idea of the limitation of science as part of a larger effort to make man see that nature reveals the wisdom of God.[55]

According to Smart's poetic account, the mere scientist is not supposed to meddle with the 'mystery of numbers', or to hypothesise about anything that his mind's eye cannot already magnify in some way. The vanity of scientists is explored through satire in the Seatonian Poems and the crossing of certain boundaries in natural philosophy is also a popular subject in the work of Smart's contemporaries. The Seatonian Poems are much more direct in their criticism of this vanity than the *Jubilate*, the optative syntax of which assumes that 'all tongues' will praise and magnify God when they are commanded. In 'On the Immensity of the Supreme Being', Smart is outright in his challenge to religious heterodoxy:

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[55] Powell Jones, p. 62.

> Thou ideot that asserts, there is no God,
> View and be dumb for ever –
> Go bid Vitrivius or Palladio build
> The bee his mansion, or the ant her cave. (lines 119-22)

The vitriolic diction of the first two lines leaves no ambiguity. The labouring, presumptuous scientist is rendered speechless by the workings of natural artistry in creation. This exclamation is similar to Pope's emphatic imperatives in *An Essay on Man*:

> Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
> The proper study of mankind is man.[56]

In the same work, Pope satirises and exemplifies such an approach with his anatomy of man made up of conflicting impulses of reason and passion. The vanity of man's reason and presumption does not qualify him to reach towards divine knowledge and the mocking image of futility works in Pope's satire to unhinge any respect for the foolish scientist who treads too far. The Smart of the Seatonian Poems would join his peer in goading the scientist to 'measure earth', to 'instruct the planets' and to 'regulate the sun', knowing that, in sight of God, little man is no more than 'a fool'.[57]

The positing of futile human endeavour against animal instinct is a useful tool for Smart's quelling of scientific vanity. In 'On the Omniscience of the Supreme Being', the nightingale Philomela's migration is described like the

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[56] Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, ed. by Maynard Mack, *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. by John Butt, 11 vols (London: Methuen, 1961-69), IIIi (1951), Epistle II, lines 1-2.
[57] Ibid, II, i, 20-22.

journey of a 'heav'n-taught voyager' (89). Smart's use of the allegorical name

for the bird heightens the comparison that is drawn out:

> Her science is the science of her God.
> Not the magnetic index to the North. (86-7)

Again, the implied littleness of man recalls God's questions to Job that deflate

his sense of reason or wisdom: 'does the hawk fly by your wisdom,/ and spread

its wings toward the south?' (Job 39:26). Smart's Christian focus and his

denigration of vain industry might also be linked to the religious valuation of

grace as a more important indicator of faith. The poet suggests that misdirected

learning can be more misleading than ignorance; a parallel for this is found in

The Dunciad where Pope warns against the dull, misplaced wisdom of hack

writers: 'Ah, think not, Mistress! More true Dulness lies/ In Folly's Cap, than

Wisdom's grave disguise.'[58] Translated into a scientific context, the comparison

between man's industry and beasts' instinct affords an attack on futile scientific

investigation. The poet argues that if some particular behaviour is naturally

intuitive, like migration is to the bird, it requires no name. This concept remains

in the Seatonian Poems as a temporary measure within Smart's development of

his own language of physico-theology, where we find anxious bewilderment and

a sense of wondering defeat. In this way, the dismissal of man in The Seatonian

Poems is based upon unfavourable comparison with the bestial. By the time of

writing the *Jubilate,* the presentation of men and animals as sharing the same

capacities is habitual enough to evolve out of verbal punning: 'Let Jubal rejoice

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[58] Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad in four books*, ed. by Valerie Rumbold (Harlow, NY: Longman, 1999), 1V, 239-40.

with Caecilia, the woman and the slow-worm praise the name of the Lord' (B43).

Although, the image of a worm appears frequently in the Psalms to describe

man's humility, its appearance here is surprising. A pun that affords the pairing

of a saint of music and a blind, dumb animal cannot come from a writer with

scruples about (social, not scientific) class and order. Linnaeus' more secular

rival, the Comte de Buffon, finds a certain enlightening truth in his studies of

classification as related to man:

> The first truth which issues from this sober examination of nature is a
> truth which is perhaps humbling to man. This truth is that he ought to
> range himself in the class [classe] of animals, which he resembles in
> everything material. Even their instincts will perhaps appear to man even
> more certain than his own reason, and their industry more admirable than
> his arts.[59]

There are striking similarities in the Seatonian Poems with the French botanist's

valuation of beasts' instinctive 'industry' over man's 'arts'. In these early verses,

Smart's attack on the vanity of man is palpable. From the outset of *Jubilate*

Agno, the poet creates a framework for his own physico-theology that embraces

the equal placing of men and beasts that brings to life the prophecy of the wolf

lying with the lamb in Isaiah 11. Chris Mounsey reminds us that such

development in the new Magnificat is a natural deviation from traditional

Seatonian thought:

> Smart's view [of nature] is contrary to that of Seaton, who argued that
> animals could not praise God since they had no reason.[60]

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[59] Quoted and translated in Philip Sloan's 'The Gaze of Natural History', in *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-Century Domains*, pp. 112-51, (p. 112).

[60] Chris Mounsey, *Christopher Smart: Clown of God* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2001), p. 211.

In this, the poet makes a definitive move away from the attitude displayed in the Seatonian Poems, in which he has a sense of the vacuity of human languages, to a greater sense of the plenitude of God's expression through creation in the *Jubilate*.

Smart's Anti-Newtonianism in *Jubilate Agno*

Karina Williamson's interpretation of Smart's anti-Newtonianism in *Jubilate Agno* serves as the starting-point and basis for my investigation. 'Smart's Principia'[61] reassesses Smart's position with regard to contemporary science. Through comparison with the writings of his contemporaries, Williamson establishes Smart's position as a general reader of science but insists that he is no expert on the subject. The critic explores the traditional Augustan orthodoxy that is evident in the Seatonian Poems and its transformation into 'anti-science' in *Jubilate Agno*. This change is ascribed to the revelation of Newton's Unitarianism and the emergence of Hutchinsonian thought after the scientist's death. Williamson concludes that the *Jubilate* is a fragmented work that lacks a structuring system. These claims deserve further exploration. *Jubilate Agno* clearly represents a shift in Smart's thinking: the earlier bewilderment and inability to articulate in the Seatonian Poems is replaced by the poet's sense that his position as poet is justified and that linguistic and artistic humility might allow him to articulate in God's language. Throughout the new liturgy, the poet's physico-theology is pitted against the prying measurement of modern

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[61] Karina Williamson, 'Smart's Principia: Science and Anti-Science in *Jubilate Agno*', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 30, 120 (1979), 409-422.

science in the context of linguistic activity. Here we must return to the metaphor

of the *liber naturae*. Smart characterises Newtonian science as a misreading of

the world and its mistranslation into the 'cant' of vain human language:

> Let Barsabus rejoice with Cammerus – Newton is ignorant for if a man consult not the WORD how should he understand the WORK? – (B220)

In Smart's critical reading, the 'WORD' that must be a touchstone for the analysis

of God's created 'WORK' leads him back to the divine, both through the creating

word of God as the origin of the earth, and in the *logos* of Christ made flesh. The

'WORD' and the' WORK' also represent the Bible and the Book of Nature, both of

which have physical and spiritual elements. Smart discovers a linguistic context

for scientific writing and he suggests that Newton's 'ignorant' reading of the

physical world neglects the vital element of the divine. The poet posits that such

misreading of the world might lead to mistranslation into the wrong sort of

language, which does not take account of the decree that 'all good words are

from God.' A development can be seen from the Seatonian Poems, where man is

denied wisdom and articulation; in the *Jubilate*, Smart's criterion for correctness

shifts to the display of plenitude in creation. The essential distinction between

empiricism and Smart's alternative is that the poet creates an accumulative

catalogue of 'tongues' created by God, whereas Newton's work is a causal model

of scientific principles: 'For Newton nevertheless is more of error than of the

truth, but I am of the WORD of GOD' (B195). Smart claims to have found in his

verse a correct ordering of the world, for which Newton's own empiricism

cannot account. For Smart, the scientist's error is in seeking to provide human

solutions for the plenitude of creation by translating it into a series of explanatory

clauses. The new expressive confidence of *Jubilate Agno* is founded upon the assumed superiority of the religious writer as 'scribe-evangelist' and the denigration of a labouring empiricist.

The poet's critique of Newtonian science deserves further inspection, not least because Smart's terms of non-interference differ so radically from the typical physico-theology of the age that embraces the new science. As noted above, although Derham's *Physico-Theology* is based on the observation of the Creator's deisgn, Smart's theology differs because of his refusal to 'pry'[62] into the works. On the face of it, there should be little disagreement between the poet, who utilises the diction of natural history to praise God, and the scientist, who 'was best known for proving what the poets already believed, that God had created an orderly universe.'[63] The fierce religiosity of *Jubilate Agno* carries the implication that empirical science tries to eliminate the divine presence. Smart's main accusation regarding Newton is that he is 'ignorant'and 'more of error than of truth.' The criteria for this judgement expose the poet's limited reference: even the most perfunctory glance at the *Opticks* or the *Principia* would reveal that the scientist has a great deal of knowledge. 'Truth', with its trappings of belief and faith, implies something very different to the neutrality of proven fact**.** Moreover, as the poet's dismissive attitude shows, the new Magnificat utilises a diction that is primarily artistic and a scale of judgement that is suited to theology and 'preach[ing] without comment'. In fact, Smart's basis for praise and accusation of the new science is rarely the science itself. Newton is at once (and mistakenly) dismissed for his failure to allow room for God in his science, and blessed for his chastity:

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[62] Derham, p. 38.
[63] Powell Jones, p. 10.

> For CHASTITY is the key of knowledge as in Esdras, Sir Isaac Newton and now, God be praised, in me. (B194)

It would seem from Smart's assessment that the scientist is both 'ignorant' and full of 'knowledge'. That 'chastity' becomes a category for approval shows that Smart is not overly concerned with the scientific labours of man. The *Jubilate* endorses a Godly life, free from vanity, over the pursuit of knowledge through investigation. The fact that Newton is described in this contradictory manner shows the difficulty of assessing Smart's point of view. The turbulence of the text and the instability of references make any effort to prove Smart right or wrong irrelevant to the present study. Whether or not Smart's accusations are correct, the most interesting aspect of the poet's anti-Newtonianism is how it affects his language in the effort to present the natural word in an ordered fashion that is not framed by orthodoxy and the prying experiments of scientific measurement.

John Arthos suggests that 'the names science and poetry find for things will coincide when science and poetry share a common view of nature.'[64] However, *Jubilate Agno* is linguistically peculiar for its time; the failure to adopt scientific diction can be seen as a conscious act against experimental methods. If we take for an example the useful lists of 'certain words significant in eighteenth-century poetry' and scientific periphrases in Arthos' overview of natural description,[65] we will find that few terms mentioned here actually appear in *Jubilate Agno*. Instead of using scientific words in a poetic context - 'briny',

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[64] John Arthos, *The Language of Natural Description in Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1949), p. 67.
[65] Ibid, pp. 99-392.

'glassy' 'humid' 'incumbent' 'lambent', all of which occur in Thomson's

Seasons, the touchstone for contemporary writing about the religious sublime -

Smart preserves the inexplicable, suggesting that true scientific knowledge can

be understood from its root in the Word (λογος) alone:

> For Newton's notion of colours is αλογος unphilosophical.
> For the colours are spiritual. (B648-9)

In these lines, Smart enters into the contemporary debate regarding the spiritual

property of colour, illustrated in Chambers' *Cyclopaedia*, where conflicting

scientific and religious definitions are given with the suggestion that '*Colour*

may be defin'd a Sensation of the Soul' in spite of its new scientific

explanation.[66] The liturgical poet reacts against a scientific diction of analysis;

Smart's stance differs from other physico-theological verse which places

emphasis on natural religion, particularly of the spectrum's part in nature. In

contrast with James Thomson's enthusiasm for the unravelling of mystery,

'Untwist[ing] all the shining Robe of Day,'[67] Smart attests to the 'spiritual'

mystery of colours. D.J. Greene[68] draws parallels with Berkeley's *First Dialogue*

between Hylas and Philonous, where apparent colours exist only in the mind in a

reality that is far more important than the materially tangible measurements of

science. The spectrum presented in the *Jubilate* consists of eleven colours,

ranged at random from white to 'pale', within which further 'distinct sorts' can

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[66] Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopaedia or, A Universal Dictionary of Arts*, 2 vols (London: Knapton and others, 1728), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/HistSciTech.Cyclopaedia> [accessed 1 August 2008], I, 258.
[67] James Thomson, 'A Poem Sacred to the Memory of Isaac Newton', in *'Liberty', 'The Castle of Indolence' and Other Poems*, ed. by Alan Duguld McKillop (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 149-56, line 98.
[68] D.J. Greene, 'Smart, Berkeley, the Scientists and the Poets: A Note on Eighteenth-Century Anti-Newtonianism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 14, 3 (1953), 327-352, (pp. 338-40).

be found (B650-60). Thomson, on the other hand, depicts the spectrum in refractive order, from 'the flaming RED/ Sprung vivid forth' to the 'last gleams of refracted Light/ Dy'd in the fainting VIOLET away.'[69] Smart's religious poetry is concerned with aesthetic appreciation, where 'yellow […] is more excellent than red' (B655), which he posits as more 'philosophical' than the reductionist spectrum of measurement. The unscientific language of 'truth[ful]' natural description in *Jubilate Agno* defies the measurement of colours and other features in favour of celebrating creation on a scale measured by beauty.

The inaccuracy of the poet's dismissal of Newton as 'ignorant' prompts an assessment of Smart's familiarity with the methods of empirical investigative writing. The listing of Newton's *Principia* amongst Smart's college library borrowings[70] might suggest a passing knowledge of the scientist's works, but this does not necessarily put the poet in a position to dismiss them completely. Greene, with reference to the poet's office as Praelector in Philosophy at Cambridge, asserts that 'Smart was probably as well qualified in science as any poet before or since.'[71] As Karina Williamson shows, this assumption is not completely verifiable: if Smart can be called 'the earliest of the outright rebels against Newtonian and Lockean "rationalism"',[72] his position is only noticeable because of his failure to adopt the methods current in the poetry of his contemporaries, rather than any informed argument against specific theories. Even though an understanding of the principles of contemporary science required no specialist learning, it would seem that Williamson's later assessment of

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[69] 'A Poem Sacred to the Memory of Isaac Newton', ll. 102-4 and 110-11.
[70] 'A Cambridge College Library in the Eighteenth Century', p. 37.
[71] Greene, p. 336.
[72] Ibid, p. 328.

Smart's knowledge in this area as 'shallow, inaccurate, and often out of date'[73] is most appropriate. The predominant attitude displayed in *Jubilate Agno* endorses the validity of such a view through the poet's refusal to go beyond shallow quotation: 'For I preach the very GOSPEL of CHRIST without comment and with this weapon shall I slay envy' (B9). As far as the Bible is concerned, Smart advocates unquestioning acceptance and keeping a distance in order to 'slay envy'. By breaking with contemporary norms and failing to adopt a scientific lexis of expression in *Jubilate Agno*, the poet distances himself from the vanity of deep scientific enquiry.

Smart's unquestioning, somewhat archaic and unscientific physico-theology totally opposes Newtonian thought in the mixing of myth and proven fact: the poet's liturgy is a shallow although varied compendium of scientific knowledge old and new and not always established, rather than a treatise or investigation of new theory. As a result, the poet's argument against science is weakened as it embraces the main error that Newton decries in the *Principia* by 'relinquish[ing] the evidence of experiments for the sake of dreams and vain fiction of our own devising.'[74] Indeed, in regurgitating myths of Pliny and other pre-modern "scientists", Smart does not concern himself with the 'true constitution of things': the 'science' of *Jubilate Agno* is rather more like a 'romance'.[75] In this catalogue of nature, we find facts that are certainly out of date in the presentation of 'the Silver-Worm who is a living mineral' (B88), the 'Buteo who hath three testicles' (B80; from Pliny), and as we are taught that 'men in David's time were ten feet high in general' (C91). All this appears, apparently without any sense of contradiction, alongside the modern science of

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[73] Williamson, 'Smart's Principia', p. 410.
[74] Newton, *Mathematical Principles*, p. 398.
[75] *Mathematical Principles*, Cotes' Preface, p.xx.

the 'capillary tube' (B208) and 'longitude' (B190). A survey of the content and form of this liturgy, that disallows measurement in favour of mystery and association, will reveal that the poet's frame of reference is significantly different to that of science.

In her study of Smart's attitude towards empirical science, Karina Williamson suggests that for our 'fundamentally unscientific' poet, religion is not a subject for discussion because 'the authority of the word of God sweeps away all empirical objections.'[76] In the *Jubilate*, Smart actually celebrates the 'mystery in numbers' and he shows an unwillingness to explain everything through concrete measurements. Newton perceives a solidity in numbers as he maps the world through laws of physics, whereas Smart's vision is at all times fixed upon God the original and the conviction that 'Vain were th' attempt, and impious to trace/ Thro' all his works th' Artificer Divine.'[77] This point of contention against investigative science is also found in Pope's portrayal of the gloomy clerk 'sworn foe to Myst'ry' in the *Dunciad*.[78] In his note to the episode, the elder poet, who was greatly esteemed by Smart, satirises the dangers of exploring the 'high Priori Road' of 'second causes' in nature that can lead to an ignoring of the 'first cause' of the divine creator (l.471 and n). Pope's call to preserve mystery in favour of praising the creator differs from the scientific confidence displayed in the Preface to Newton's *Principia*:

> The business of true Philosophy is to derive the natures of things from causes truly existent, and to enquire after these laws on which the Creator actually chose to found this most beautiful Frame of the World.[79]

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[76] Williamson, p. 411.
[77] *PW*, IV (1987), 'On the Immensity of the Supreme Being', lines 127-8.
[78] *Dunciad*, IV, 459-60.
[79] Cotes' Preface to Newton, *Mathematical Principles*, p.xxvii.

Cotes' account of philosophy suggests that there are no limits on human exploration. The prospect of the world's 'frame' suggests that this is something that can be reached and that the Creator's domain can be mapped out entirely. This exemplifies the vanity against which Smart rails throughout his theology. In spite of an incomplete reading of empirical science, the religious poet's maintenance of mystery and ordered beauty stands as an important affront to scientific investigation.

The nearest that Smart gets to a physico-theological science are the two arguments for God's existence set out in Fragment B:

> For the Argument A PRIORI is GOD in every man's CONSCIENCE.
> For the Argument A POSTERIORI is God before every man's eyes. (B359-60)

These arguments form an interesting context for a final analysis of Smart's misreading of empirical science as incomplete reading. The *a posteriori* argument runs along the lines of most physico-theological writings of the period, such as Derham's *Physico-Theology*, which shows God as he appears 'when clearly discovered to us' in nature.[80] As Derham repeatedly tells us, if a certain property of nature is considered closely, then 'it will appear to be a Matter of Design, and the infinitely wise Creator's Work' (p. 4). Returning to Newton's *Principia*, the scientist's own conclusions appear to come from the same evidence:

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[80] William Derham, *Physico-Theology: or a Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God from the Works of Creation*, 7th edn (London: W. & J. Innys, 1727), p. 1.

> This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being.[81]

The presentation of 'God before every man's eyes' in creation is the inspiration for the works of both scientist and poet. In this light, Smart's critique of Newton is not founded upon any misunderstanding or misreading of the scientist's work, but upon an incomplete reading. This adds weight to Williamson's suggestion[82] that the poet's limited grasp of scientific concepts is derived from reading such summaries as Chambers' *Cyclopaedia*. Finally, in replicating the *a priori* and *a posteriori* proofs in God's existence, Smart himself uses a kind of methodising by reducing his subject to a universal law of religion.

Flowers and Botanical Empiricism

Smart's methodising also finds its way into *Jubilate Agno* through much more explicit channels. The poet's physico-theology works through a distinct kind of categorising, ordered by the 'imaginative association'[83] of praise and aesthetic consideration. Here, Smart follows in the tradition of Thomas Burnet and John Abernathy in showing how a theory of God's attributes can be derived from observing the wonders of nature. Harriet Guest's identification of natural philosophy as 'a metaphor or analogy in terms of which spiritual experience may also be comprehended'[84] is significant as it suggests that the poet's method of organisation reflects his spiritual state and its relation to contemporary ideas.

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[81] Isaac Newton, *Mathematical Principles*, p. 544.
[82] Williamson, 'Smart's Prinicpia', p. 410.
[83] Greene, p. 334.
[84] Guest, p. 196.

Smart's compendium of botany is notable because of the comparison that can be drawn with the language of classification emerging in the eighteenth century. This is particularly important in the spiritual meditation upon flowers in Fragment B. Where the diagnostic nomenclature of Linnaeus' botanic system describes each plant's anatomy and working, Smart is concerned with aesthetic and spiritual qualities. These vastly different readings of the *liber naturae* reveal the differing linguistic properties that are required of scientific and poetic accounts. Whereas Linnaeus' natural descriptions must rely upon what can be proven and diagnosed, Smart's account concentrates upon the non-invasive linguistic depiction of the 'elegant phrases' and 'poetry' of flowers. The obscurity of the latter is advantageous for the presentation of the sublime in nature; however, Theodore Savory reminds us that any linguistic exchange in science must be concealed:

> The most important quality in a scientific translation is no more than that the clearness of the original should shine with equal clearness in the translation.[85]

Although the critic writes here of the translation between languages, this is a neat analogue to the metaphorical translation employed by Smart. A botanist translates the physical attributes of plants into diagnostic phrases that can be fitted into a system of naming; this should be equally workable in any language. Poetic works such as *Jubilate Agno* employ a different register, communicating 'beyond the height that science kens' (Hymn XI, 93). The poet's classification

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[85] Theodore H. Savory, *The Language of Science: Its Growth, Character and Usage* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1958), p. 115.

and categorisation of flowers assumes another level that is non-visual, dictating

the structure of Smart's *systema naturae*.

The poet's meditation upon the presence of God 'on the fibre of some

leaf in every Tree' (B447) and the 'gardners talent' (B492) becomes a

consideration of flowers in a poetic garden:

> For the flowers are great blessings.
> For the Lord made a Nosegay in the meadow with his disciples and
> preached upon the lily.
> For the angels of God took it out of his hand and carried it to the Height.
> For a man cannot have publick spirit, who is devoid of private
> benevolence.
> For there is no Height in which there are not flowers.
> For flowers have great virtues for all the senses.
> For the flower glorifies God and the root parries the adversary.
> For the flowers have their angels even the words of God's Creation.
> For the warp and woof of flowers are worked by perpetual moving spirits.
> For flowers are good both for the living and for the dead.
> For there is a language of flowers.
> For there is a sound reasoning upon all flowers.
> For elegant phrases are nothing but flowers.
> For flowers are peculiarly the poetry of Christ.
> For flowers are medicinal.
> For flowers are musical in ocular harmony. (B493-508)

Smart's use of a floral category is significant. Originating in the 'first garden' of

Genesis, gardening and the tending of flowers are presented as an Adamic

activity throughout the literary canon, most evocatively in the 'fresh

employments […]/Among the groves, the fountains and the flowers'[86] of Adam

and Eve in *Paradise Lost*. Less than two decades after the publication of Milton's

great poem, William Temple mused upon horticulture, concluding that 'We must

allow that God Almighty esteemed the life of a man in a garden the happiest he

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[86] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Alastair Fowler, 2nd edn (Harlow: Longman, 1998),Book V,
ll. 125-6.

could give him, or else he would not have placed Adam in that of Eden'.[87] The

garden that Smart depicts in *Jubilate Agno* might then be seen as a perfect place

for Smart to consider God's attributes. More than this, language has a special

place here as Eden was the place of the first naming (Genesis 2:19-20). Adamic

naming, through which miraculous language process 'whatever Adam called

each living creature, that was it's name', exists in the poem as a foreshadowing

of Smart's post-lapsarian, post-Babel attempts to find correct religious

expression. In the New Testament, Jesus was buried in a garden (John 19:41);

here, too, he was resurrected. The garden of Paradise is a place of retreat, healing

and revivification; in Smart's garden, also, 'the flowers are medicinal.' Indeed,

the accumulation of flowers in these lines generates the possibility of a new place

to worship and contemplate the divine as well as a new language of expression.

The theme of a 'medicinal' garden of retreat has its precedents in seventeenth-

century thought and is suggestive also of a rising conflict with empirical science.

Temple's depiction of environments that 'favour and improve both

contemplation and health, the enjoyment of sense and imagination, and thereby

the quiet and ease both of the body and mind'[88] reinforce this sense. Smart's

interest in horticulture might reflect the idyllic gardens and grottos of Pope's

"Palladian" gardening that recalled the 'scene for contemplation'[89] of the

classical golden age. In this tradition, the garden might exist as a landscape of

and for the mind given to solitary reflection. On the other hand, the categories of

Smart's flower garden may suggest the empirical botanic gardens in which

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[87] William Temple, 'Upon the Gardens of Epicurus, or, Of Gardening in the Year 1685' in *The Works of Sir William Temple in 4 Volumes* (Edinburgh: Hamilton & Balfour and others, 1754), II, pp. 182-225, (p. 194).
[88] Temple, pp. 193-4.
[89] John Dixon Hunt 'Pope, Kent and 'Palladian' gardening' in *The Enduring Legacy: Alexander Pope Tercentenary Essays*, ed. by G.J. Rousseau and Pat Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 121-31, (p. 128).

'flowers as such no longer "solicited the regard of their Creator."'[90] The poet endeavours to preserve this 'regard' through the study of beauty and language; a spiritual act is maintained in the scientific environment of a botanical catalogue. Flowers and language are inextricably bound by the trope of Adamic naming and the structure of the anthology of praise.

The linguistic focus of the poet's categorising is reinforced by the combination of the book of nature and the book of God in the poetic trope of the 'nosegay'. Smart introduces this by depicting a quasi-biblical scene: 'the Lord made a Nosegay in the meadow with his disciples and preached upon the lily' (B494). The use of the noun 'nosegay' is significant here because it ties in with the common usage of 'posy' or 'garland' to denote an anthology of verse. This floral focus can be traced to the etymology of the word 'anthology' that brings together the Greek words for 'flower' and 'collection'. Indeed, the list of figurative definitions in the *Oxford English Dictionary* records an explicitly religious use of such imagery in the title of 'An extract of some sweet flowers from the Scriptures.' The non-Biblical verse that occurs in collections that are so named is often religious, and emphasis is often placed upon beauty and direct comparison with the virtues of flowers. This is visible in the front matter of G. Gnapheus' *Comedy of Acolastus* (1540), quoted again in the *OED*:

> I esteme that lytell volume to be a very curious and artificiall compacted nosegay, gathered out of the moche excellent and odoriferouse swete smellynge gardeynes of the moste pure latyne auctours.

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[90] Arthos, p. 82.

Smart's anthology of the 'poetry of Christ' focuses similarly on such themes of
virtue, beauty and music. In comparison with Gnapheus' secular text, however,
the *Jubilate* is not 'artificiall': the Book of God transcribed is explicitly natural.
And the only construct is the poet's intervention. Indeed, the structure of Smart's
study, with its insistent anaphora and end-stopped lines creates the sense that it
cannot be annotated and that the poem catalogues nature 'without comment'.

Let us return to the first few lines of the section on flowers. The origin of
Smart's depiction of Christ 'in the meadow with his disciples' is an important
feature of the floral catalogue. The poet's description evokes Matthew's Gospel:

> Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;
> and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed
> like one of these. (Matt. 6:28-9)

The Scriptural account that flora 'neither toil nor spin' touches upon an important
part of Smart's physico-theology. The poet attributes the flowers' virtues to the
'perpetual moving spirits' that work on them. As in the earlier Seatonian Poems,
Smart implies a comparison of the laborious exercises whereby man acquires
knowledge with the natural reflexes and instinct of flora and fauna**.** Similarly, the
implied contrast between man's artistic endeavour and natural beauty is
unfavourable: 'for the flowers have great virtues for all the senses'. The flowers
of Smart's description achieve an "artistic" expression simply by existing. In this
particular way, they are 'the poetry of Christ', creating images that man's verse
cannot achieve without toil. In his end-stopped statements, Smart recognises the
labour and limits of his own self-conscious poeticising. The writer of this

physico-theological canticle is caught between the post-lapsarian necessity of expressive labour and the aesthetic, poetic beauty of creation.

Smart's consideration of the natural world is imbued with the theme of artistry; in Hymn XII, flowers occur in divine artwork as 'painted beauties' that are 'coloured by the master's hand' (15-16). The privilege of such art over human (scientific) industry represents a 'sound reasoning' within *Jubilate Agno*. The effortless communication of the divine through nature surpasses normal language, producing an overwhelming attack on the senses, 'musical in ocular harmony', that cannot be translated fully into verse. This aspect of Smart's catalogue alludes to the explicitly non-empirical, unmeasurable property of beauty in Smart's botany that provides 'virtues for all the senses'. It might be suggested that the expression of aesthetic appreciation attains a sublimity that the structures of science cannot express. Savory addresses the absence of this from traditional scientific discourse:

> Flowers are among the most beautiful objects that nature produces […]. Yet no authoritative botanical work with which I am acquainted mentions their most conspicuous characteristic. Flowers are fully described as things of a certain structure and a certain function.[91]

In his consideration of flowers, Smart presents a non-hierarchical study of natural history that can be compared usefully to Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae*. The religious poet employs descriptive language to characterise flora, anatomising the beauty of religion by referring to aesthetic features and spiritual actions: 'For the flower glorifies God and the root parries the adversary' (B499).

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[91] Savory, p. 110.

This depiction utilises traditional associations of darkness and light to bring moral bearing on Smart's spiritual garden. The poetic anatomy of flowers is concerned more with 'God' and 'the adversary' than with diagnosis. This latter theme is seen in the alliteration throughout the line: in religious poetry, the beauty of language, as a reflection of the beauty of the metaphorical *liber naturae*, is as important as its subject. More specifically, the opposition between the flower and the root might be seen as an alternative to the distinction between male and female organs that is central to the classification of flora in the work of Carl von Linnaeus. However, the defining features of Smart's opposition are not tangible or quantifiable. Similarly, the poet's language lacks the specificity of Linnaean nominal diction of 'diagnostic phrases, not arbitrary references'.[92] That which is order for the botanist is plenitude for the religious poetry. Smart's catalogue of flowers is not written to identify the 'blessings' of flowers, rather to celebrate them. This is reflected in Smart's license with fact throughout the poem. The variety of possibilities is celebrated in this poem and proof of such 'reasoning' is unnecessary.

Linnaeus' somewhat sterile form of organisation recalls the attitude of other contemporary scientists towards words as classifying signifiers. Newton's 'Of an Universall Language', a juvenile attempt to create an artificial mode of communication, suggests the construction of words from something akin to mathematical symbols: 'as of Instruments with s, beasts with t, the soul Passions with b'.[93] The proposition of such a piecemeal language to replace an insufficient vernacular represents the same methodical construction and

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[92] Lisbet Koerner, *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 45.
[93] Ralph V.W. Elliot, 'Isaac Newton's "Of a universall language"', *Modern Language Review* 52, 1 (1957), 1-18, (p. 5).

application as Linnaeus' botanical classification. Interestingly, however, Linnaeus' work is actually defined by a Lutheran concern with the Book of Nature and its worship. Paul Farber explains the physico-theological foundation of the botanist's work: 'Linnaeus's conception of order reflected his vision of Creation as a balanced and harmonious system. Classification, he thought, could reflect that harmony.'[94] In the *Systema Naturae*, the botanist concentrates on the abundance of nature, seeing himself as retracing the Old Testament in affording names to the objects of his contemplation. To this end, the epigraph to Linnaeus' work is a paraphrase of Psalm 103:

> O Jehova
> Quam ampla sunt Tua Opera!
> Quam sapienta Ea fecisti!
> Quam plena est Terra possessione Tua![95]

Smart's description of a flower garden in *Jubilate Agno* is a more active realisation of this expression of praise. The botanist's analysis of forms and structures is translated in Smart's poem into the analysis of poetic structures for expression. Verse is also an ideal medium for a Christian categorising because of the allowances of metaphor and synaesthetic imagery that give the possibility of retaining some obscurity. As Ian Ramsey explains, this obscurity is an essential part of poetry and the reason why it is *not* science: 'religious language has to be logically odd to be appropriate currency for such an odd situation as religious

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[94] Paul Lawrence Farber, *Finding Order in Nature: The Naturalist Tradition from Linnaeus to E.O. Wilson* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 11.
[95] Carolus Linnaeus, *Systema Naturae: A Photographic Facsimile of the First Volume of the Tenth Edition (1758)* (London: British Museum, 1956).

people claim to speak about.'[96] *Jubilate Agno* uses the translation and articulation of new tongues to afford a voice for all of its subjects[97] and although Smart does not probe into a stock language of description, some kind of classification is clear in the obscure categories of languages, spirits and poetry that flora present.

Smart's Own Empiricism and Category

Smart's catalogue of flowers does not rely on any scientific uniformity of language. However, to some extent, *Jubilate Agno* is structured and categorised through the poet's use of anaphora, alphabets and through linguistic associations between the books of nature and God, Creation and the Bible. This is an ideal topic on which to conclude a study of Smart's natural history because it is through such ordering that Smart resolves the bewilderment of the Seatonian Poems. The ordering of nature in *Jubilate Agno* presents a physico-theology that creates a new kind of catalogue where beliefs and language can be assimilated into a pattern. In the 'Let' verses of the poem, the genealogy of the Old Testament is melded with the classifying ordering of science and the sacred and secular are fused. Smart's ordering impulse is most evident in the alphabetical listings in the poem and in the descriptions of minerals, plants and birds in Fragment D. In spite of his rejection of the new science, Smart appears to be attracted to its orderly translation of the world. Applying this order with a full awareness of 'the WORD' of God, the poet works toward a new syntax of divine expression and the ordering of creation in the eyes of uncomprehending man. The use of catalogue in the *Jubilate* can therefore be seen as an ordering of

[96] Ian T. Ramsey, *Religious Language: An Empirical Placing of Theological Phrases* (London: SCM Press, 1957), p. 90.
[97] See Hartman.

religious argument in the face of the new science: the 'Systems innumerable, matchless all,/ All stampt with thine uncounterfeited seal'[98] are catalogued into a poetic form of praise. Smart reinforces the Christian focus of his category of 'systems' through the creation of ordering associations throughout the text. In part of Fragment B, the apostles are paired with fish in the presentation of all the 'tongues' of the world giving 'glory to the Lord, and the Lamb': Smart's version of scientific measurement thus orders plenitude as an act of praise.

The three lists of 'alphabetical particles'[99] are the most noticeable examples of catalogue in the poem. The imposition of a strict form in these passages is akin to Linnaeus' categorising 'to bring order to the otherwise overwhelming variation found in nature.'[100] The letters give the impression of simplicity instead of the otherwise overwhelming variety of learning material:

> For A is the beginning of learning and the door of learning.
> For B is a creature busy and bustling. (B513-14)

The memorisable nature of this catalogue recalls a child's reading primer and the onomatopoeic imagery of the second line emphasises a possible didactic method. This structure appears to have a precedent in Comenius' *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* of 1705. At the beginning of this linguistic 'help for schools', each letter is aligned to the call of an animal:

> The crow crieth   á á | Aa
> The lamb blatteth   bé é é | Bb

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[98] 'Eternity', lines 41-2
[99] Guest's phrase.
[100] Farber, p. 2.

The grasshopper chirpeth   cì cì | Cc[101]

Interestingly, the focus on letters has a religious implication, because 'for

Comenius, proper language learning would lead to language learning, grammar

to God.'[102] Smart's poem also manipulates structure as an aid to religious

learning. The exploration of individual letters is not the only instance of

onomatopoeic word use in the *Jubilate*. The poet chooses words for their aural

effect alone to signify the sound of 'spiritual musick' (B582) as another category

of expressive praise: 'For the trumpet rhimes are sound bound, soar more and the

like' (B585). This orderly presentation reminds us that the categorising alphabet

is never focused on the letters themselves. *Jubilate Agno* is not a didactic

textbook; the mnemonic effect of the letters is more like the categories of natural

history, where the word signified by each letter, or the organism defined by each

of Linnaeus' binominal indicators, is most important:

> For D is depth.
> For E is eternity – such is the power of the English letters taken
> singly.
> For F is faith. (B516-18)

The 'power of the English letters' seems to exist both in communicating ideas

otherwise incomprehensible to man and in ordering them in his mind. The

influence of contemporary natural history on *Jubilate Agno* is most evident when

Smart's language is pared down to its essential form of single letters and

phonemes. Scientific method creeps into the poem in several ways. The poet

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[101] Jan Amos Comenius, *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*, ed. by R.C. Alston, trans. by Charles Hoole, English Linguistics 1500-1800, 222 (Menston: Scolar Press, 1970; London: J. Kirton, 1659), p. 4.
[102] Murray Cohen, p. 19.

presents the letters as a kind of proof of the divine: 'For P is power and therefore he is God' (C8). Three of the great divine attributes from the Seatonian Poems – Eternity, Power, and Goodness - appear in the alphabetical lists. The 'for…therefore' structure of these lines enables the presentation of quasi-scientific "equations" for the existence of God. Harriet Guest's assessment of the poem is particularly applicable to this context:

> The primary issue is the structure of the poem, for this structure is informed by the nature of Smart's faith – it is the appropriate "vehicle" for the expression of that faith.[103]

This predominance of structure over theme is more evident in the later stages of the poem, particularly in Fragment D, where the antiphony disappears and the liturgy evolves into a descriptive list. The cataloguing 'Let' verses, having been little more than instruments of proof and praise in earlier stages of the poem, now take a more central role in the classification of gems and plants in Fragment D.

Clement Hawes characterises Smart's new Magnificat as the "botanizing" of devotional poetry, 'from the languages of field guides, horticultural manuals, and pharmacopoeias; and from textbooks on geology, optics, zoology and mineralogy'.[104] This endeavour reaches its apogee in the final section of the poem, where the language of measurement and explanation unites science and faith. In spite of his rejection of Newtonian vanity and his maintenance of mystery in the praising liturgy, Smart utilises a kind of simple stock diction to describe the sublime. This can be identified through the application of two modern accounts of stock diction. The first is Thomas Quayle's list of the chief

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[103] Guest, p. 124.
[104] *Christopher Smart and the Enlightenment*, p. 11.

features of scientific language: 'compound epithets; latinisms; personifications of abstract ideas; archaisms; and technical terms.'[105] The second reference is William Powell Jones' comparable list of the key themes of physico-theological writing: 'order', 'plenitude', 'providence', 'puzzles of nature', 'the limitations of science', and the 'patriotic praise of Britain'.[106] Order and plenitude have already been discussed at great length and only really emerge as overarching aspects of the poetic mode of *Jubilate Agno*. A single line from Fragment D will suffice to demonstrate the other features of Smart's physico-theological verse:

> Let New, house of New rejoice with Nasamonites a gem of a sanguine colour with black veins. (D3)

The celebration of the 'house of New' recalls the genealogy lists of the Israelites in the Old Testament. Translated into English, the focus on familial names signifies a patriotic praise of new generations in Britain. Turning to Quayle's list, the scientific elements of this line are as follows: 'Nasamonites' is a technical term, Greek in origin, for a kind of gem, taken from Agricola's study of minerals. Smart's line is almost a direct translation of Agricola's description: 'Nasamonitis sanguinea est nigris venis.'[107] Consequently, the Latinism 'sanguine' has an archaic ring, suggesting poetic periphrasis through the compounded description of colour. Different examples of standard descriptive language are employed through Smart's catalogue as each line displays the variety of creation.

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[105] Thomas Quayle, *Poetic Diction, A Study of Eighteenth Century Verse* (London, Methuen, 1924).
[106] Powell Jones, pp. 28-30.
[107] Agricola, *De Natura Fossillium,* trans. by Mark Chance Bandy and Jean A. Bandy (New York: The Geological Society of America, 1955): 'nasamonites has a red groundmass cut by black veins' p. 6.

Of course, when the final fragment of the *Jubilate* is considered in its entirety, it will become clear that the order of the verse is by no means strictly defined. This is most clear when the descriptions are most scientific and yet there is no clear connection between different lines. As Williamson concludes, there is no real 'system' in the natural history of the poem; Smart 'was clearly not attempting to answer the scientists on their own ground.'[108] *Jubilate Agno* remains an unscientific poem and humble bewilderment in the face of God and creation is maintained through the chaos of association that is its overarching structure. In this way, Smart does not reject empirical science entirely, but the ordering categories are found to be insufficient for the 'immensity' of his subject. The plenitude of creation is shown to supersede human comprehension and expression; the liturgy of the *Jubilate* goes some way towards tackling this problem, yet the poet is constantly aware of the need to avoid exploratory and expressive vanity. The 'systems innumerable' of God's *liber naturae* cannot be translated in any final sense.

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[108] Williamson, 'Smart's Principia', p. 412.

CHAPTER II: *JUBILATE AGNO* AND THE HUMAN TEXT

Throughout *Jubilate Agno*, Smart proclaims himself as a vocal poet of

prophecies: 'I prophecy that there will be Publick worship in the cross ways and

fields' (C63). Coming from a poet calling aloud within and beyond his verse,

liturgy is reinvigorated as a peculiarly linguistic medium in *Jubilate Agno*. This

investigation into Smart's use of human languages will show how the poet's own

exploration of expression in his new 'Magnificat' encompasses the multifarious

implications of many 'tongues' communicating. My argument will be structured

around the oral, written and interpreting forms of language within the poem.

First, I shall explore Smart's self-presentation, optative syntax and the psalmodic

structure of the lines in the *Jubilate*, all of which suggest an oral tradition of

language. This tradition is endorsed by the poet's own public prayer, the writing

of hymns and the translation of psalms, which he 'pray[s] for a musician or

musicians to set' (D217). I shall look at the quasi-improvisatory liturgy that

emerges from Smart's composition and the subject of articulation in the poem.

Secondly, the self-referentiality of the last fragment of the poem emphasises an

anxiety concerning the permanence of language: writing (poetry) is to translate

ideas, to order them, to write them in script and to transmit them in print. This

latter theme also introduces the more material implications of writing and the

printing process. From this vision of permanent expression, words become

physical objects in Smart's work, which can be viewed as liturgy that goes

beyond the esoteric. Here, I shall consider the implications of writing and the

printing press and the significance of the written word. Finally, the poet's

language will be reviewed in the context of reading and its extended meanings of

interpretation and prayer (for to read Smart's work should be, in a sense, to

pray). I shall look at Hebrew and Christian traditions of interpretation and their presentation in Smart's canticle.

Interpretation

The final two language categories of reading and writing meet and merge in the context of characters, signs and translating, and the trope of linguistic interpretation that is so central to Smart's exploration of expressive possibilities in the poem. An important part of this study of human language rests upon the myriad versions of religious 'translation' that bring the whole thesis together. The subject of language interchange is vital to the poet's inspection of human language in particular because translation takes place not only between different languages, but also within English itself as a mode of interpretation. George Steiner's aforementioned description of the four stages of translation – trust, aggression, incorporation and restitution – provides an accurate illustration of Smart's poetic process.[109] The exploration of human languages in *Jubilate Agno* can be understood through these stages of manipulation and communication. The boundaries of conventional language are tested in the course of Smart's "translation" of signs and tongues, which seeks to express the divine in a human language. As Daniel Matt reminds us, such translation is especially contentious within a religious context:

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[109] Donald Davie uses a similar comparison in relation to Steiner's four stages and a comparison of Watts' and Smart's translations of the Psalms. *The Eighteenth-Century Hymn in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 83-6

> All translation is inherently inadequate, a well-intentioned betrayal. In the words of the second-century Rabbi Yebudah, "One who translates a verse literally is a liar; one who adds to it is a blasphemer." [110]

Smart endeavours to surmount this difficulty of pure presentation through an interpreting liturgy that goes beyond the literal meanings of both words and letters. The poet's translation is a search for pure expression that 'adjust[s] real vision to right language.'[111] It is necessary to question whether trust in the original divine text and the restitution of a human text is achieved in the resultant multi-lingual praise poem of *Jubilate Agno*.

In this chapter, Smart's human language is understood as the vehicle for a proclamation of praise that enumerates what is in reach rather than attempting to reach beyond to the unknown entity of God. I am interested in how the poet uses language in a self-conscious recognition of the limits and possibilities of verbal expression. In 'On the Eternity of the Supreme Being', the poet characterises words as 'the weak interpreters of mortal thoughts' (line 7), suggesting by this that human languages are not as stable as the public and devotional context of liturgy may require them to be. *Jubilate Agno* represents Smart's mature attempt to push the interpretation of mortal thoughts to its limits. An important precedent for the poet's version of linguistic liturgy lies in the discussions of language origin and use that were prevalent during the eighteenth century. The views of contemporary grammarians and lexicographers regarding the reaches and boundaries of language form an important context for Smart's account of a divine, universal language. The latter category of lexicographers is particularly

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[110] 'Translator's Introduction', in *The Zohar*, 3 vols (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004-6), I, xv-xxv, (p. xviii).
[111] Robert Browning, 'With Christopher Smart', 'Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in their Day', in *The Poems*, ed. by John Pettigrew, 2 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), II, pp. 796-802, l. 151, cf. 'lit language straight from soul' l. 114.

relevant because the dictionary can be seen as an analogue to Smart's alphabetical listings in Fragment B. Ephraim Chambers' *Cyclopaedia*, which provides explanations and definitions of contemporary terms, might be considered as a particularly wide-ranging sort of dictionary. In the preface to his work, the author analyses the connection between language and knowledge:

> *Words* are the next Matter of knowledge […]. We should have known many Things without Language; but it would only have been such Things as we have seen or perceived ourselves.[112]

Language can describe the unseen; however, the encyclopaedist also suggests that something named must have been 'seen or perceived' by the person who originally assigned its name, if not 'ourselves'. The communal focus of Chambers' view is important, but it is clear that a writer of liturgy must expect language to go beyond a focus on sensory experience and knowledge. Smart's poetry requires language to reach beyond 'the depiction of sensible images'[113] and distinct ideas. Locke's idea that there are 'in all Languages, certain words, that if they be examined, will be found […], not to stand for any clear and distinct Ideas'[114] endorses the possibility of this depiction. In this view, man can name things which he does not understand because it is not necessary for him to see the subject or object of which he speaks.

This indeterminacy, although necessary for much successful communication and even the composition of religious poetry itself, is a subject much discussed during the eighteenth century. The opening premise of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* illustrates the poet's predicament of

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[112] Chambers, *Cyclopaedia*, II, 379.
[113] Burke, p. 170.
[114] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p.490.

possibility and limitation: 'It is impossible that every peculiar Thing should have a distinct peculiar Name.'[115] In short, the signifiers that we use in writing and speech may either trail behind or reach beyond the things that they strive to depict. Later in his work, Locke stresses the important difference between the 'nominal' and 'real' essences of things and explores the idea that words are often used that do not signify the 'real' essence of anything (p. 356). Into this group fall non-representational words such as conjunctions, certain verbs, such as 'to think', and names for concepts that have no tangible or visible existence. Just as the action of thought has no tangible essence, the thought itself may need no image. In comparison with this, Berkeley suggests the impossibility of forming an idea of something without forming a precise picture of it. This poses a problem for abstract nouns that do not represent visible objects, such as 'God' or 'grace'. A solution may be found in Burke's work: '[T]here are many things of a very affecting nature, which can seldom occur in the reality, but the words which represent them often do.'[116] In the context of this assessment of meaning, Smart's *Jubilate Agno* answers the challenge to fuse objects and signifiers together to produce a clearer understanding of the divine and the most satisfactory form of laudatory language.

The Vocal Language of the Vocal Poet

Articulation is central to the very structure of *Jubilate Agno*. The opening lines of Smart's liturgy emphasise the primacy of (particularly oral) communication.

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[115] Locke, p. 409.
[116] Burke, p. 173

> Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues; give glory to the Lord, and the Lamb.
> Nations and languages, and every Creature, in which is the breath of Life.
> (A1-2)

This address displays a primary concern with language and Smart's diction reflects the precedent of the *Book of Common Prayer* in an inclusive call to worship, setting the tone for an extended and personal account that embraces the traditions of the Benedicite and the Magnificat. Smart's poem is an improvisatory, exploratory version of traditional liturgical antiphony. The imperative or optative clause 'Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues' recalls Psalm 100, the Jubilate Deo, and its authoritative command in liturgical diction positions Smart as omniscient writer. In like manner, the original author(s) of the traditional hymn of creation adopt an imperative mode of address: 'O All ye Works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord.' In the insistent command of his address, Smart posits himself as an authoritative writer (more on this idea later) in the Renaissance tradition of the poet as prophet.[117] The grammatical and outright statement of authority from a 'scribe-evangelist' bolsters the poet's experiments with language throughout the rest of the *Jubilate*.

The insistent imperative and optative verbs that structure the poem demonstrate the urgency of a new approach towards expression and finding the correct words to articulate the praise of God. Geoffrey Hartman finds a basis for the exploration of language in the parallelism of the 'Let' and 'For' lines that structure the poem:

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[117] Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry*, ed. by Jan Van Dorsten (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 4.

> Though they "generate" sentences, they are really a *stutterance*: a verbal compromise-formation which at once "lets" (hinders) and forwards his song.[118]

Even within the poem itself, articulation is recognised as a challenge. The parallel lines, with their constantly contrary motions, allow for a continually evolving language of praise. The optative structure of this opening may have further implications for the rest of the poem and for how it is to be read and it might be posited that 'Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues' works as an introductory clause for each line of the canticle. First and foremost, Smart identifies the readers and congregation that infiltrate the poem as 'Tongues'. This new Magnificat is much more active than its original source in traditional Anglican liturgy. In *Jubilate Agno*, a chorus of praise is drawn from every link of the Great Chain of Being in the accumulation of 'star – word – herb – gem' (D51). The Benedicite is similar in its exhortation of animate and inanimate properties of the earth, 'Sun and Moon', 'Showers and Dew', 'Lightnings and Clouds', to praise God. However, the predominance of animate beings and the pairing of the articulate with the inarticulate in Smart's poem render the praise more convincingly vocal. The oral form of linguistic praise enables a kind of universal articulation that goes beyond the presentation of fauna: 'For the praise of God can give to a mute fish the notes of a nightingale' (B24). The prominence of language in the new canticle owes much to Smart's view of the divine. As Donald Davie explains, the poet 'directs his praise not in the first place to God the Redeemer, nor to God the Judge, nor to God the Protector of His Faithful (which last is the characteristic emphasis of the Hebrew psalms), but to God the

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[118] Hartman, p. 447.

Creator.'[119] The hymn of praise is written with the awareness that Creation was

fulfilled in Genesis by the spoken Word of God. In fine symmetry, the 'Tongues'

of the created beings celebrate the divine Creator through words as Smart

searches for his own human lexis of expression. The liturgical background of

congregational praise leads the reader into an interpretation that focuses upon the

poet's language and the primacy of oral communication, particularly in the

context of psalmody, where 'the almost ineffable sublimity of the subject is fully

equalled by the energy of the language, and the dignity of the style.'[120] The

invocation of 'Nations and Languages' and all the 'Tongues' of creation within a

liturgical poem concerns not only the inevitable limitations of language, but also

celebrates upon the plenitude of expression and the articulation that it affords.

Plenitude of expression is reached in *Jubilate Agno* through a negotiation

of boundaries that are represented by the conflicting motions of 'Let' and 'For'

verses. Smart's quasi-improvisatory style evolves out of an Augustinian anxiety

regarding verbal expression. 'God should not even be called unspeakable,

because even when this word is spoken, something is spoken'[121]: this anxiety is a

theme to which Smart comes repeatedly in the Seatonian poems, where the

'feeble voice' of the human poet is compared with that of the 'GREAT POET OF

THE UNIVERSE' ('Eternity', lines 17 and 21). It is clear from the opening lines of

the *Jubilate* that the later poem is not restricted by an inability to articulate: the

word 'rejoice' appears in almost every line of the poem to demonstrate and to

encourage expression. The insistent optative verbs in the poem's opening reveal

a poet no longer submitting to the bounds of language. In this new canticle, the

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[119] Donald Davie, *A Travelling Man: Eighteenth-Century Bearings*, ed. by Doreen Davie
(Manchester: Carcanet, 2003), p. 112.
[120] Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, trans. G. Gregory. 2 vols
(London: Johnson, 1787), I, p. 37.
[121] Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, p. 10.

comparison of speaking men and dumb beasts evolves into a celebration of all

the various works of creation and their methods of articulating praise. In the

initial lines of Fragment A, the pairings seem like an extended sacrificial offering

as Abraham presents a Ram (A5) and Nimrod 'bind[s] a Leopard to the altar'

(A9). However, as the poem develops the animals become increasingly active:

the Levites 'take the Beavers of the brook alive into the Ark' (A16) and attributes

of each individual animal, such as the fox's craftiness (A24), are depicted. As

traditional forms of worship are disregarded, the non-rhyming, alternative

structure of the opening lines of Smart's liturgy also differs greatly from the

conservative rhythmic and thematic order of Augustan verse. Indeed, it might be

placed in the category of 'Whitmanesque free verse'[122] that Robert Alter

advocates as the ideal form for poetry that seeks to express the divine in nature.

Smart's use of an antiphonal form in the shape of vocal responses is more

lively than the automation of prayer-book recitation and Smart's improvisation is

emphasised by the constant present tense of the utterance. This theme of ever-

possible articulation results in the grouping of 'man and beast' side by side

throughout the poem. In the poet's view, all created beings are united in 'the

breath of life': Smart emphasises the importance of the unseen and divine spirit.

As ever, the earthly creatures of the poem recall their creator, 'For H is a spirit

and therefore he is God' (C1). The 'breath' that enlivens the summoned creatures

recalls the creative act in Genesis 2:7:

> And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed
> into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

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[122] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), p. 62.

The sense in Smart's interpretation is that the inspiration of articulation influences all the 'Tongues' of creation when they gather to 'Rejoice in God'. To pray aloud is aligned with breathing; *a*spiration brings divine *in*spiration. Although it draws on all the works of creation, *Jubilate Agno* is concerned with particularly human communication as a channel through which the divine might be reached. This focus is necessary owing to the human and literary form of liturgy. Because of this, Smart's illustration of non-verbal, bestial "language" is purely descriptive:

> Let Hillel rejoice with Ammodytes, whose colour is deceitful and he plots against the pilgrim's feet.
> For the praise of God can give to a mute fish the notes of a nightingale.
> (B24)

The grammatical form, by which the preposition 'with' leads to the ammodytes as secondary subject, emphasises that the main focus is on the human Hillel. Moreover, the meanings of the nouns in this line are significant: Hillel, as 'he that rejoices', is placed alongside a serpent 'indistinguishable from the sand in which it lives.'[123] The unheard serpent is barely seen and the nightingale is mute; man's rejoicing in God enlivens these creatures. Smart thus suggests a reciprocal relationship in articulation within the oral present, where creation is counted both in and as language.

Writing Liturgy

An insight into Smart's view of himself as writer, and of the writing process itself, provides much information regarding his attitude towards language and the choices that he makes in the search to express the sublimity of God. The poet

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[123] Williamson's note.

appears to be recalling the Humanist ideal of a Renaissance writer utilising the

measured language of the Ancients. The Seatonian Poems in particular reflect

Philip Sidney's conviction in the 'divine force' of verse in their opening calls to

'unpinion'd' muses. In the *Jubilate*, the good poet is said to take his authority not

from Horace and Homer, but from the 'WORD of GOD' (B195). That Smart views

his incarceration as a sign of his call to write becomes clear in an

autobiographical line from the poem:

> For I am not without authority in my jeopardy, which I derive inevitably
> from the glory of the name of the Lord. (B1)

There are several terms of interest here. In the context mentioned above, the most

important are the twinned concepts of 'authority' and jeopardy'. Smart appears to

be presenting himself as the archetypal poet in crisis with a vital message to

deliver. The portrait of a poet's position in jeopardy might also be reinterpreted

in view of written language evolving from situations where oral expression is not

permitted. The derivation of Smart's writing from 'the glory of the name of the

Lord' recalls the poet's actual exclusion from public discourse in St James' Park

(B89). Furthermore, the reference to the poet's vociferous preaching might also

be connected to Sidney's humanist justification of a poet's authority, or right to

write:

> Among the Romans a poet was called *vates*, which is as much as a
> diviner, foreseer, or prophet.[124]

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[124] Sidney, p. 21.

Banished from the oral tradition of praise, Smart resorts to script and print; the

poet presents himself as a prophet for the restoration of the church as centrepiece

in English society. As Albert Kuhn reminds us, 'it is in *Jubilate Agno*, a fragment

composed wholly or for the most part while he was in an asylum, that Smart was

obsessed by the idea of messianic mission and martyrdom.'[125] The poet's serious

claim of authority is laden with implications for a prophesying writer and the

invocation of 'the glory of the Lord' – the original author – looks towards the

recognition of many different and powerful types of writing.

The silencing of an oral poet and the response of a writing one recalls the

'ministry of books' carried out by those preaching from within closed monastic

orders and the comparable dissemination of religious dissent through printed

pamphlets during both the Reformation and the Interregnum. Smart's example

recalls Alexandra Walsham's depiction of the torturing of religious speakers

during the Reformation:

> In a context of persecution, where the ordained clergy were molested,
> muzzled, imprisoned, deported, and even put to death, written and printed
> texts could likewise operate as a proxy and prosthesis for the living
> voice.[126]

Smart's *Jubilate* may be seen as a similar preaching without speaking. Moreover,

the reader will remember the poet's bleak depiction of the madhouse, where

"curative" torture results in creative praise:

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[125] Albert J. Kuhn, 'Christopher Smart: The Poet as Patriot of the Lord', *ELH*, 30 (1963), 121-136, (p. 122).

[126] Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham, eds, *The Uses of Script and Print, 1300-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 211-12.

> For they work me with harping-irons, which is a barbarous instrument,
> because I am more unguarded than others.
> […]
> For the blessing of God hath been on my epistles, which I have written
> for the benefit of others. (B124-5)

There is an implied connection between these consecutive lines and the barbarity of the material world that is transcribed into blessing in the spiritual world. The idea of a silenced writer thus remains poignant, especially when considered in the light of manic enthusiasm. Indeed, Smart does seem to present himself as a kind of religious journalist: 'I am the Lord's News-Writer – the scribe-evangelist' (B327). The poet's impetus for change, for a 'New Song' and the Christianised Psalter emphasises his reforming instinct. Clement Hawes seizes upon Smart's self-identification as a prophet as an illustration of religious enthusiasm comparable with the writings of seventeenth-century pamphleteers. The critic notes that Smart is actually reacting against the Popean disdain for Grub Street writing, redeeming its reputation:

> Smart deliberately glosses the Greek roots of "evangelism" as a kind of journalism: the subliterary task of news-writing is thus assimilated to the divine task of spreading the "good news" of the gospel.[127]

The use of the term 'scribe-evangelist' is particularly significant for this champion of the printed word as it also recalls the work of a scribe for the Hebrew Bible, for whom it is imperative that the words are written correctly, precisely and without a single error. Smart is a faithful scribe: he documents and preaches 'without comment' (B9) to disseminate the evangelical 'Word' of God

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[127] Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style*, pp. 135.

in human language. Smart's proclamation of himself as an evangelising prophet is a justification for his writing and a defence of his medium: 'For it is the business of a man gifted in the word to prophecy good' (C57).

In fact, the printing press emerges as a central metaphor for Smart's entire writing endeavour. The background to this can be found in the poet's preface to his translation of the works of Horace, where 'impression' is identified as the indescribable quality of good writing. Here, Smart posits that classical, non-Christian, poetry is still worthy of translation and dissemination because it is cryptically reflective of sublime language:

> *Impression* then is a talent or gift of Almighty God, by which a Genius is impowered to throw an emphasis upon a word or sentence […].This power will sometimes keep it up thro' the *medium* of a prose translation; especially in scripture.[128]

Smart offers no explicit working-out of what this expression of 'talent' might actually be. Akin to the mysterious topics of inquiry in much eighteenth-century criticism – genius, energy, strength - 'impression' is a term as intangible as the sublime: it cannot be completely rationalised. Donald Davie has already identified the clear connection between Smart's 'power' of writing and the Longinian sublime. The poet's preface to Horace, like Longinus' analysis, gives Hebrew examples for the special kinds of writing that each identifies. '"Longinus" also, by implication suggests that sublimity can persist through translation.'[129] Our poet seems to suggest that it is possible, though difficult, to

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[128] *PW,* V (1996), 'Preface', lines 94-99.
[129] Davie, *A Travelling Man*, p. 127.

translate the talent of impression into different languages and to bring the power

and purity of biblical Hebrew to English poetry.

It is clear that this property of sublime verse is not made from words

alone and that it goes beyond the written letters that make up language. The

esoteric language of religion may have certain parallels in the kinds of text that

Smart envisions as being (im)printed: impression appears demonstrated in both

his sacred and profane texts. The description in *Jubilate Agno* is the first use of

the image, where Smart's claim for such a talent of his own might suggest that he

intends the reader's experience to extend beyond mere reading:

> For my talent is to give an impression upon words by punching, that
> when the reader casts his eye upon 'em, he takes up the image from the
> mould which I have made. (B404)

Elaborating on the theme in the Preface to Horace, the English poet earmarks not

only sacred Hebrew writings as significant examples of impression but also

Roman 'eulogies of patriotism' (p. 7). As both are important themes in Smart's

work, it might be suggested that patriotic impulse and the religious sublime form

the two greatest moulds for impression in *Jubilate Agno*. Indeed, Smart's

emphasis on the improvement of human expression creates a peculiarly

nationalist flavour through its emphasis on the 'English tongue'. The poet

suggests that his nation has important roots in the Old Testament 'For the

ENGLISH are the seed of Abraham' (B433), and that Rome should be removed

from its position at the head of the Catholic Church. Smart's patriotic enthusiasm

as 'the Reviver of ADORATION amongst ENGLISHMEN' (B332) emerges most

clearly in his promotion of the English language: 'For every word has its marrow

in the English tongue for order and for delight' (B595). Clearly, Smart sees great

potential for the introduction of his native tongue as a language of divine

expression. In his Hymn for Whitsunday, the poet suggests that the reformation

of Babelic murmurs can be achieved by Englishmen: that 'their language may

suffice/ To make nations good and wise.'[130] The potential of English as a

universal language of religious communication permeates Smart's religious texts

as part of a divinely-inspired creation of images.

The printing metaphor fits neatly into the aforementioned context of

Smart as a religious journalist prophesying through the medium of print. In his

survey of theoretical writing on language in the mid seventeenth-century,

Richard Kroll aligns the appearance in the eighteenth century of texts on the

origins of language and primers for language learning with 'an epistemological

shift, which conscripts print culture as an instrument of a sceptical, empirical

view of knowledge, in which the natures of things are at best only indirectly

available to the human mind.'[131] Notably, the works of religiously sceptical

scientists were disseminated through printed treatises, yet it also is true that

Smart himself utilised print and writing in order to demonstrate indirectly the

nature of God through description. The difference is that, for Smart, the direct

words to describe God did not exist in human language. The controversy to

which Kroll refers involves a crossing of boundaries, where the sacred and

secular can be blurred together. This is exactly what emerges from a complete

portrait of Smart's endeavours in print, where the patriotic and the religious, the

classical and the Christian merge in union. The poetic 'scribe-evangelist' is also

involved in the wholly secular focus of popular print. Contemplating the merging

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[130] Hymn XV, lines 27-8.
[131] Kroll, p. 184.

of sacred and profane in Smart's work, Lance Bertelsen envisions a grotesque

scene:

> [T]he Nobody Smart praising the Lord and beckoning others to join him –
> in effect, presenting the best impromptu Oratory in London – while the
> well-dressed Somebodies, horrified at this violation of their sanctuary,
> scatter down the Mall. [132]

Smart's midwife persona – the religious poet's *alter ego* as satiric journalist and

cross-dressing stage character – is the transgressive twin of the evangelising poet.

As printed journalist, Smart occupies the mythical sub-culture of Grub Street. Pat

Rogers shows how this is fitting: 'Grub Street, to the eighteenth-century

observer, had windows that looked out both on Bedlam and on to a

churchyard.'[133] Smart's 'random hybridization'[134] and occupation of both sacred

and secular fields in the world of print emphasises the dissenting aspect of the

mass medium. The manic enthusiast of Clement Hawes' envisioning is full of the

energy of production, both satirising modern society and creating plans for the

'English Tongue' in poetry and the religious liturgy that it has the potential to

express.

The physicality of the printing metaphor in Smart's description reinforces

the sensory impact of the new Magnificat. In Smart's extended depiction of the

reading process, the idealised image of the reader as he 'takes up the image from

the mould' looks forward to the effect of the *Jubilate* as active liturgy.

Interestingly, the poet's choice of the words 'image' and 'mould' seems to

contradict Burke's contemporary idea that words are not directly related to

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[132] Lance Bertelsen, 'Journalism, Carnival and *Jubilate Agno*' *ELH*, 59, 2 (1992), 357-384, (p. 371).

[133] Pat Rogers, *Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture* (London: Methuen, 1972), p. 45.

[134] Bertelesen, p. 357.

images. Initially, this might be seen more as a restriction upon expression. However, the mould of impression that the poet refers to might be something intangible, only signified by the physical presence of words on a page. The 'mould' of 'Genius' in sublime poetry might be seen as the occult "image" of the words seen through the underlying significance of the letters themselves. As we have seen, impression does not involve the choice of specific words, but a kind of imprint or weight that is added onto each expression in varying degrees. The poet envisions the words of sublime poetry boring into the parchment of a text, creating a tactile impression on the reader, in the manner of a kind of sacred Braille. The perfect poetic expression produces an impression of God's seal (B363) on the wax tablet of the reader's mind. Smart's intricate and obscure description resembles the description of sight in George Berkeley's *New Theory of Vision*. The philosopher rejects present theories of vision on the grounds that visual objects cannot be perceived or felt, maintaining also that 'a man no more sees and feels the same object than he hears and feels the same thing.'[135] Berkeley presents the world as a text composed out of non-verbal signs, where: 'What we do perceive – properly speaking – is a succession of signs, a system of symbols, based on which, through habit and repetition, we can get a certain degree of understanding of the world around us.'[136] In *Jubilate Agno*, Smart suggests that we find the same thing as he commands the reader to look beyond the meanings of the words themselves to something deeper and more enduring. The verbal focus, and the identification of 'impression' as non-verbal yet dependent upon words, contributes towards the mutual dependency of reading

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[135] George Berkeley, *A New Theory of Vision and Other Writings*, *The Works*, ed. by A.A. Luce & T.E. Jessop, 9 vols (London: Nelson & Sons, 1949), I, p. 189.
[136] Costica Bradatan, *The Other Bishop Berkeley: An Exercise in Re-enchantment* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), p. 72.

and writing in interpreting the world. The endurance of a new interpretation, such

as *Jubilate Agno*, rests upon its ability to make an impression on the reader and

to teach him how to interpret the human text as a cipher for the world.

This latter theme of endurance is essential to the work of Smart and his

contemporaries. For many writers, print signifies permanence. As Geoffrey

Hartman notes, Smart demonstrates a desire for scripted immortality through

representing 'depletion anxieties' that both nature and language may die out:

> The anxiety for survival has associated itself with an anxiety for
> language-source, liturgy, and the entire process of representation. [137]

Poets are often determined to leave a lasting 'impression' in the minds of their

readers. If a poet, such as Horace, has a talent for impression, then the effect of

'the finest lines of all heathen antiquity'[138] will last for generations. The

difficulty in composing such expression in modern verse remains. In *Jubilate

Agno*, the limitation imposed upon human writing is represented as a failed bid

for immortality:

> Let Iddo praise the Lord with the Moth – the writings of man perish as
> the garment, but the Book of God endureth for ever (A68).

If we look to the origin of this trope in the Book of Job, the influence of a

Biblical theme of man's humility in the face of the immortal 'GREAT POET OF THE

UNIVERSE' ('Eternity', 21) is clear: 'Man decays like a rotten thing, like a

garment that is moth-eaten' (Job 13:28). Smart's adaptation of these lines is

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[137] Hartman, p. 435.
[138] *PW*, V (1996), 'Preface', line 170.

significant because the text becomes centred on language and the poet himself.

More than this, the presentation of God as divine author moves the focus away

from the horror of human demise towards the celebration of God's enduring

language of creation. A kind of challenge is set up in the dichotomy between

divine and human expression and Smart hopes that his new liturgy will outlive

other human attempts to articulate because the force of its praise and the purity of

its focus will promote its longevity. Like the Christianised translation of the

Psalms that replaces the violence of Hebrew retribution with the grace of the Son

of God, Job's anguish is thus reflected in a light of hopefulness. In spite of the

perishable quality of his writings, Smart continues to write. Perhaps, then, the

poet's aspiration for 'impression' is to write in characters as permanent and

immovable as God's 'seal': 'For a CHARACTER is the votes of the Worldlings,

but the seal is of Almighty GOD alone' (B363). The *Oxford English Dictionary*

identifies an obsolete meaning for vote as 'a prayer or intercession.' With this in

mind, Smart can be seen to identify men (the 'Worldlings') by the non-permanent

language through which they communicate with God. In contrast, the divine

response, engraved in the immovable work of Creation is a fixed seal. God the

original can create meaning *ex nihilo*: man can only rearrange pre-existing

letters. Smart's rearrangement takes place in full knowledge of this, yet the poet

works towards the creation of a new kind of permanently impressed 'seal' in

Jubilate Agno.

We can see from Smart's approach to the smallest elements of language

that his focus on the alphabet and methods of writing springs from a concern

about the origins and ends of language, which also determine the reaches and

bounds of human expression: 'For Christ being A and Ω is all the intermediate

letters without doubt' (C18). The poet's alteration of the line from Revelation

draws the focus back to language. The addition of 'all the intermediate letters'

places an emphasis not just on the beginning and the end, but also on all parts of

writing. As the inclusion of Hebrew characters might suggest, this importance of

letters can be related to all languages. Smart's multi-lingual approach in the

Jubilate might be seen as an attempt to restore the lost clarity of pre-Babelic

human expression through a new awareness that letters might achieve pure

signification. Translation is important in this activity of reading and writing.

Smart's religious poetry answers a challenge set up by the dissolution of the

'Ursprache' and it might become one of those 'ever-changing places where new

Babels will temporarily be reconstructed.'[139] Smart, then, answers the call for a

rendering of God's sublimity into the vernacular. However, before this Ω (end)

of multi-lingual translation can be achieved, the A (beginning) must be mapped

in the poem. This inspection of original language is essential to Smart's

translating endeavour. As Kroll reminds us, 'translation is both act and criticism

[…] it encourages a discussion of its own method.'[140] A description of the origin

of language does not appear in Genesis: Smart enters, therefore, into the lively

contemporary discussion of linguistic beginnings. Unsurprisingly, the poet aligns

himself with the conventional Christian view ensconced by John Wilkins in his

Essay towards a Real Character (1668) that: 'to us, who have the revelation of

Scripture, these kind of scruples and conjectures are sufficiently stated. And 'tis

evident enough that the first Language was con-created with our first Parents.'[141]

Furthermore, Smart's interest in Hebrew characters suggests that he may support

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[139] Barnstone, p. 3.
[140] Kroll, p. 87.
[141] John Wilkins, *An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language,* ed. by
R.C. Alston, *English Linguistics 1500-1800*, 119 (Menston: Scolar Press, 1968; London:
Gellibrand & Morton, 1668), p. 2.

the traditional Christian notion that Adam invented this mode of writing. To Smart, the Hebrew character comes directly from God, 'Hebrew מ is the direct figure of God's harp' (B524) as a kind of divine realisation. Because they originate from such exact signification, it is vital that these pure characters be used correctly.

Although the key aim of Smart's work is to achieve the immortality and dissemination of praising poetry in print, the linguistic focus of the poem rests upon the natural form of written 'character' or script. The poet shares in the fervour of his contemporaries for the mystery of written language and its origins. The *Jubilate* is structured around an examination of human language, both through its composition in a spirit of awareness regarding articulating 'tongues' and through the 'alphabetical particles' that are woven into fragments B and C. Drawing on the old tradition of the *liber naturae*, coupled with the Renaissance institution of linguistic exegesis, Smart manipulates letters as signifiers that have far greater import than words themselves. 'Litterae sunt ex quibus gloriosissimum domini Dei nomen:'[142] these words attributed to Francis of Assisi, can be employed to support a view that the literal letters of Smart's poem are akin to the letters of the world. In the same way, Smart finds writing, and thus the sacred, in every part of creation, 'on the fibre of some leaf in every Tree' (B477). Hartman suggests that *Jubilate Agno* might present the reader with an overtly religious Great Chain of Being that is made up of characters:

> In Smart's "consideration" everything stars; and the elation, or jubilation, of speech seems to sustain a demand put on it by the Book of God or the "cunning alphabet" of the Book of Nature.[143]

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[142] 'Letters are the things from which the most glorious name of God is composed.' Quoted in Bradatan, p. 71.

[143] Hartman, p. 442.

Through a focus on the alphabet, the praising theme of the Benedicite is renewed

and enlivened in the context of man's ability to express. Moreover, with the

focus on the simplest 'atoms' of language as parts of nature, Smart simplifies his

liturgy 'as if to provide the Church of England with a Book of Common Prayer

genuinely "common"'[144] that all may comprehend.

The practice of Smart's liturgy is a learning process towards a better

understanding of creation. The characters in *Jubilate Agno* are set out in the

manner of an aid to learning, an alphabetical language primer:

> For A is the beginning of learning and the door of heaven.
> For B is a creature busy and bustling. (B513-4)

It is immediately clear that the poet's listing differs from any traditional spelling

book of the eighteenth century, as it does not seek to clarify language through the

presentation of words in alphabetical order. Smart's linguistic liturgy is not

concerned with teaching how to read; instead, the poem presents a new way of

reading to gain insight. In this way, the *Jubilate* cannot be classed as a didactic

poem because the letters are not simplified but complicated by their associations.

The reader must grapple with large concepts of 'eternity', 'identity' and 'truth' as

Smart proves the 'power of the English letters' (B517). The poet seems to

concentrate upon the *re*mystification of language and interpretative reading as a

backlash against the scientific influences of the seventeenth century, reinstating a

category of symbolism that empiricists such as Bacon and Galileo found

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[144] Hartman, p. 441.

anathema. Through this, the Renaissance fascination with letters and hieroglyphics comes into play in Smart's exploration of human signification. Murray Cohen demonstrates the contrasting approach of the poet's empiricist contemporaries: 'Letters, which for seventeenth-century linguists had seemed the key to the meaning of the world, are here arranged in merely instructional, not interpreted or wittily imagined or pictorially reinforced lists.'[145] Against the current trend, Smart's alphabets constitute more than the methodical listings of language and grammar; they are suggestive of some 'profound significance.' The alphabetical particles work in this way as a kind of catechism of faith. The 'power of the English letters' seems to be in both communicating ideas otherwise incomprehensible to man and in ordering them in the poet's mind. In returning to the simplest blocks of language, Smart seeks to instil the linguistic 'votes of the Worldlings' with the sacred. The future of human expression, especially as communication with God, is thus determined as the choosing of correct letters.

Translation, Interpretation, Reading

Smart's interest in human writing and the importance of naming correctly by spelling in God's communicative characters encompasses both the subject of reading and interpretation and the creative process. It would be useful at this point to return to translation as a theme central to Smart's linguistic composition. The poet presents a description of translation to define the linguistic and spiritual aims of his new Magnificat:

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[145] Cohen, p. 46. Cohen's 'here' refers to the tabular depiction of letters in Charles Gildon's *A Grammar of the English Tongue* (1711).

> Let Libni rejoice with the Redshank, who migrates not but is translated to
> the upper regions.
> For I have translated in the charity, which makes things better and I shall
> be translated myself at the last. (B11)

In the context of human language and expression, the actual linguistic translation 'in the charity' is the most significant. Smart appears to be referring to his main poetic endeavour, both for the *Jubilate* and throughout his entire corpus. If we look at Smart's more obvious translating endeavours in the Psalms and in the works of Horace, the poet's language exchange might well be seen as charitable because of its didactic purpose and because it is written for the improvement of his readers. When he exclaims that he has 'glorified God in GREEK and LATIN, the consecrated languages' (B6), Smart may also be referring to the translations of Horace, the accompanying notes of which represent Smart as a Christian poet committed to the elimination of 'cant'. The Christian impulse permeates even the most secular of Smart's works and in this context of purity and good language the reader is reminded again of the poet's identification of 'impression' within works of Classical poetry.

For Smart, the correct interpretative translation of Horace is important because of the need to preserve the non-verbal and essential sublimity of the text. A concern with expressive sublimity and the Christian perception of the divine origin of language permeates the modern poet's version of Horace's first book of satires. Karina Williamson draws attention to Smart's 'eccentric rendering' of the Roman poet's description of language origin. In the original text of the third Satire, Horace tracks the development of human interaction with reference to communication and conflict. The poet traces a development from the exchange

of blows to the exchange of words through an increasingly precise articulation of

sounds. This description of language beginnings recalls Epicurean thinking in its

emphasis upon gradual learning.[146] Horace's poetic description stresses the

brutish nature of early man:

> [D]onec verba, quibus voces sensusque notarent, nominque invenere
> (until they found words and names, with which they might give meanings
> to their cries and feelings).[147]

The existence of an interpretative barrier when dealing with heathen texts is

reflected in the Christian poet's modern rendering, where men are clearly

differentiated from beasts because of their intellect:

> Till words at length and names they found,
> To ascertain their thoughts by sound. (I,iii, 194-5)

The 'cries and feelings' of the original become 'thoughts' in Smart's translated

version: cognitive man is recognised as set apart from beasts from the very

beginning. The modern interpretation is not completely clear in meaning:

'ascertain' may indicate two possibilities: either, men already had the thoughts,

and just made them secure through words, or, that they could not really be sure

they had thoughts until they had words to articulate them. Nevertheless, Smart's

version, in which meaning somehow exists without expression, stresses the

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[146] cf. Lucretius' version of this theme: 'practical convenience that gave form to the names of objects' and 'Therefore, to suppose that someone on some particular occasion alloted names to objects, and that by this means men learnt their first words, is stark madness.' Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, ed. by John Godwin, trans by R.E. Latham (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 155.

[147] Quoted and translated by Karina Williamson in her notes to *PW*, V (1996), Horace Satires I,iii, pp. 423-4, lines 194-5.

temporal dichotomy in the Latin poet's vision of linguistic development. Smart's emphatically Christian note to these lines labels Horace's supposition of gradual human invention as 'benighted', his argument echoing the earlier *Jubilate*: 'The Lord is the WORD, and all good words proceed from him, as sure as nonsense and cant are derivable from the Adversary.'[148] As this version of the satire is a didactic translation, explicitly written 'for the help of students', an emphasis on the *divine* origin of language is a clear necessity. Smart's alteration of Horace's account may serve to correct one of the 'passages of Offence'[149] that the translating poet proposes to eliminate in his Preface. The 'consecrated language' from which Smart is working does not excuse all errors and this secular poem serves as an exemplum for how to interpret a non-Christian text through the language of God by preserving 'impression' and eliminating pollution.

Smart might be said to have 'translated in the charity' more directly through his anglicised version of the Psalms. The nature of these works suggests to us the type of linguistic work that Smart would envision as good, pure translation that reflects the expressive possibility of human language. These Psalms are clearly not literal renderings either in their form or in their words and themes. The poet's changed version evidently endorses Isaac Watts' horror at the idea of insincere praise: 'can we believe this be the best method of worshipping God, to sing one thing and mean another?'[150] Smart's radical alterations to the Psalms involve a very different kind of reading-praising-praying and they present a completely different interpretation of the verses. The Old Testament themes are reconciled with the sentiments of the New and 'all expressions, that seem

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[148] Ibid, Smart's note to these lines, p. 179. cf. 'For all good words are from GOD and all others are cant.' (*JA* B85) which precludes any real idea of human invention.
[149] *PW*, V (1996), 'Preface', line 86.
[150] Watts, *An Essay toward the improvement of Psalmody*, p. 279.

contrary to Christ, are omitted […] with an especial view to the divine service'.[151] To this end, 'Lord' is sometimes exchanged for 'Christ' and the historical vengefulness borne out of the context of persecuted Israelites is replaced by Christian compassion. Smart 'translated in the charity' for the benefit of the Church of England in the terms set out by Watts:

> There are other divine songs which cannot be properly accommodated to our use, and much less be assumed as our own without very great alterations, namely, such as are filled with some very particular troubles or enemies of a person, some places of journeying or residence, some uncommon circumstances of a society, to which there is scarce any thing parallel in our day or case.[152]

The Book of Psalms forms a reliable text from which Smart's translation of a new liturgy can begin, for not only is *Jubilate Agno* filled with the psalmodic rhetoric of praise, but it also mirrors the Biblical structure of parallel lines. In the new Magnificat, Smart's charitable translating might be visible in the translation into English of Hebrew ideas of symbolism and Kabbalah that are not fully interpreted but only transcribed as the language of divine communication. The real translation of the Psalms is an exercise in interpretation and Smart's Christianising of the poems demonstrates the possibility of altering the language of the source-text whilst also preserving its essence and overall impression. The purity of impression is thus preserved through the correct interpretation of ancient and inspired poetry.

Smart demonstrates that any subject can be rendered acceptable for God's sight because 'there is a traveling for the glory of God' (B35). The subject of

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[151] *PW*, III (1987), p. 4.
[152] Watts, p. 278.

Smart's secular renderings and the Christianising of the Psalms highlights an important facet of the debate regarding different types of human texts and their significance. Smart's Old Testament-related version of the Magnificat expands to encompass Christ, and the division between Hebrew and Greco-Christian thought is smoothed over in *Jubilate Agno* through the poet's utilisation of both Old and New Testaments and, especially, his invocation of both Cyrillic and Hebrew characters as units of divine expression comprehensible to man. However, an interesting contrast is set up regarding the interpretation of human texts through words and symbols. This debate between different traditions of reading Holy Writ can be seen to inform Smart's attitude towards human writing and Scriptures. Susan Handelman describes the formation of an essential dichotomy between the traditions of direct signification and metaphor: 'It was precisely this original unity of word and thing, speech and thought, discourse and truth that the Greek Enlightenment disrupted.'[153] *Jubilate Agno*, then, is concerned with two enlightenments: one of science and measurement, the other of language and interpretation. In the latter debate of signification, Smart does not reach a conclusive answer but draws equally on both Hebrew and Greek traditions of reading and writing. Handelman describes the difference between the two traditions as the alternative significance of words alone, or Jesus as Word become flesh (John 1:14):

> For the Greeks, the culmination of theology was a wordless vision of divine being, for the Jews it was commentary on the divine word, deeper immersion in the text, further interpretation of Scripture. (p. 84)

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[153] Handelman, p. 4.

By breaking expression down into single letters, maintaining a strict antiphonal structure, and by directing the verse through Biblical names, Smart's liturgical writing seems to recognise the pure simplicity of language that is needed in order express the Word become flesh. The New Testament does not invite extensive exegesis: the Synoptic Gospels in particular are written in a lowly narrative style and they are not concerned with the same degree of linguistic and numerical symbolism as the Old Testament. The simplicity of this new language has a narrative focus and is less of a historical mapping of tribes and generations.

Smart believes Christ is the Word made flesh, and he also believes that human languages, given by God, are themselves powerful and significant. The image of the Son of God occurs throughout Smart's poem, where flowers speak the ineffable 'poetry of Christ' and everything is composed out of Christ's letters. At the same time, the poet's interest in the 'character' of the 'Worldlings' is too important for the dismissal of Hebrew thought. The alphabetical lists of the *Jubilate* seem to refute the teachings of Paul on the new Covenant of the Spirit that 'the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life' (2 Corinthians 3:6). In Smart's interpretation, we find a conbination of the two traditions of reading. Letters both Hebrew and Cyrillic are invested with life and life is made up of letters. The question central to the work is how these letters are to be interpreted. The necessity of reading these letters is explained in a meditation on the *lamed* that shows the letters of God throughout creation: 'the letter ל which signifies GOD by himself is on the fibre of some leaf in every Tree' (B477). In the alphabetical listings that follow Smart's method is akin to an example of Jewish *Midrash*,[154] interpreting the other book, the *liber naturae*. As each word in Scripture can have

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[154] 'A Rabbinic homiletic commentary on a text from the Hebrew Scriptures, characterized by non-literal interpretation and legendary illustration. Also: the mode of exegesis characteristic of such a commentary.' *OED*.

innumerable meanings, each of the letters existing in Creation can be read through myriad interpretations. The introduction of letters into nature recalls the weighty importance of a book in the Hebrew tradition, where the Torah is not merely a text, but exists in direct correlation to the created world: 'the world can be read out of the Torah, and the Torah read from the world.'[155]

The importance of single letters in Smart's poem leads on to the idea of a possible Kabbalistic exegesis. As Handelman reminds us, the text (or letter) is the only thing necessary for Jewish devotion: 'with the proper methods of interpretation, one can unlock the mysteries of all being' (p. 38). A visual dimension is added to Smart's poem through these characters, affording a possible insight into creation. The *lamed* image in *Jubilate Agno* recalls the tradition of illustration in Hebrew Bibles. The portrayal of images being discouraged because 'the second of the Ten Commandments seemed to proscribe the depiction of living creatures',[156] scribes would decorate the pages with lines of the *Masorah*[157] twisted into the intricate forms of animals and flowers. Smart also utilises Scripture in order to endorse the vision of nature created out of letters. George Steiner describes a particular mode of linguistic exploration that might relate to Smart's use of characters in *Jubilate Agno*:

> Via arcane images, Cabbalistic and emblematic constructs, through occult etymologies and bizarre decodings, the argument on Babel will feel its way […] towards carnal insight.[158]

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[155] Handelman, p. 38.
[156] Christopher de Hamel, *The Book: A History of the Bible* (London: Phaidon Press, 2001), p. 43.
[157] Rabbinical rules on methods of reading Scripture.
[158] Steiner, p. 57.

The twinning of 'carnal insight' with cold letters might explain Smart's own interest in the Kabbalah as a possible language for the expression and ordering of the religious sublime. In Jewish mysticism Creation is expressed as a combination of letters:

> Twenty-two elemental letters. God engraved them, carved them, weighed them, permuted them, and transposed them, forming with them everything formed and everything destined to be formed.[159]

The letters in *Jubilate Agno* are weighty and, as we have already seen, they refer to significant and difficult concepts. However, in spite of this, it can be seen that the Hebraic tradition is not the only governor of Smart's exegesis in the poem: the poet's alphabet is also a structuring device, a didactic tool and a mode of expression.

The alphabetical particles in *Jubilate Agno* explore not twenty-two, but twenty-four 'elemental letters' (where J and U are omitted). The move towards a Christian comprehension of language and communication through metaphor is suggested by the fact that the letters are pronounced alongside qualities 'without comment' or explanation. The Christian tradition is more imitative than its predecessor; as Smart's poetry demonstrates, not everything is mapped out:

> For there is a language of flowers.
> […]
> For flowers are musical in ocular harmony. (B503, 508).

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[159] Daniel C. Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 102.

The poet recognises the existence of an ineffable language, where the synaesthesia of the last line can remain linguistically mysterious in a system of unexplained symbols and signs. The Augustinian tradition is an apt template for Smart's version of exegesis. In a discussion of language, the ancient writer posits that 'All teaching is teaching of either things or signs, but things are learnt through signs.'[160] The sign comes first; that is, the word precedes the concept. The figurative meanings of things are not usually worked out in Christian interpretations. Indeed, in the same work, Augustine explains the importance of symbolism and the importance of reading the Old Testament figuratively in order to place it within the context of Christ's coming. In Christian readings, the Hebrew text is understood through the New Testament and Augustine recommends that his readers be aware that the Latin text is indeed a translation and that 'metaphorical signs […] must be investigated partly through a knowledge of languages, and partly through a knowledge of things' (p.43). It is perhaps because of this indispensable knowledge that Smart utilises human alphabets and numbers as new metaphorical signs in *Jubilate Agno*. There is a Hebraic twist at the very centre of Smart's version of Latinate Christianity as letters and number exist in his new liturgy with the same importance as in the Old Testament or Pythagorean theory:

> For there is a mystery in numbers.
> […]
> For One is perfect and good being at unity in himself. (C19-20)

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[160] *On Christian Teaching*, p. 8.

The end-stopped lines, common throughout *Jubilate Agno*, are important here because they signal that the explanation is finished. The poet does not try to relate the mystery to anything earthly or Biblical. Similarly, Smart suggests that beyond the letters that he utilises in *Jubilate Agno* there are 'more letters in all languages not communicated' (C40). The poet's new Magnificat, then, is undeniably Hellenised, derived as it is from the New Testament. Moreover, the letters that Smart uses are not divine. Unlike the Hebrew Bible, the letters do not hold some great significance independent of other words. Beyond the letters listed in Smart's liturgy, there are only more which are uncommunicated and more words to express the divine sublimity of God.

Smart's exploration of the various kinds of human text in the *Jubilate Agno* is an active endeavour. The poet presents himself as writer, speaker and interpreting reader; this position is reflected onto the reader's own involvement in active liturgy. Because of this direct involvement, the oral character of the poem is vital and the grammatical structure of the work places it firmly in the context of present translation into current language. The poet's reading of the *liber naturae* and the Book of God, interpreting the linguistic and numerical signs therein, leads to his own writing. Necessarily, then, translation forms the basis of Smart's search for religious expression. Interpretation provides a solution for the ineffability of the divine and the limits of the human text. Far from being a piously protective systematising of the formal properties of Biblical language, Smart's effort to transcribe the 'impression' of divine sublimity is not so different from the manipulative imitation and paraphrasing of the Psalms. It is key that both texts are informed by the origin of language in God. In this light, both kinds of interpretation are distinguished as correct translation and not the

'cant' that Smart despises. The poet's chief concern with human articulation is to rescue the purity of language. The risk of tainting through translation can also be aligned to a contemporary sense of the decline of language. Jonathan Swift's concept of 'the spoiling of the English Tongue'[161] by degrees since the Restoration is poignant, especially when considered in terms of the rise of Grub Street language during this time. It may be suggested that Smart shares a similar concern for purity of expression. The insistent imperative and optative verbs of *Jubilate Agno* demonstrate the urgency for a new attention towards expression and towards finding the right words to express God: 'For all good words are from GOD, and all others are cant' (B85). A sense of the strident and violent enthusiast comes out in the struggle between Christian and Hebrew tradition regarding interpretation and the Jewish requirement that a text must not be polluted or embellished. The self-referentiality of the final fragment of the poem emphasises an equally violent and persistent anxiety concerning the permanence of language and its use in a more enduring arena. Fully aware of the context of his own language, Smart hopes that he can go beyond the limitations of human expression. The human text of *Jubilate Agno* is committed to the use of translation and interpretation to push the boundaries of expression, embellishing the 'text' without polluting or blaspheming, Smart's liturgy is part of an endless process which never alters the nature of the original text of the Bible and the *liber naturae*, but which continues to enhance human understandings of these two texts through language, 'For all the inventions of man, which are good, are the communications of Almighty God' (B401).

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[161] Jonathan Swift, *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue*, ed. by R.C. Alston, *English Linguistics 1500-1800*, 213 (Menston: Scolar Press, 1969; London: Tooke, 1712), p. 22.

CHAPTER III: NEGOTIATING THE SUBLIME: DIVINE LANGUAGES IN *JUBILATE AGNO*

'May then the youthful, uninspired Bard/ Presume to hymn th'Eternal[?]'[162]

Smart's expression of religious sublimity appears between contradictions and

paradoxes, limits and boundaries, between the idea of divine intent and the

portrayal of human act. The approach to the new Magnificat involves the

working out of an innate paradox in religious poetry, where the inability to

articulate is confronted by its necessity. Even in his own Seatonian Poems, Smart

emphasises the futility of human expression and the limits imposed upon human

language. Words, 'these weak interpreters of mortal thoughts',[163] are not

sufficient to translate God into something comprehensible or legible. The poet

imposes limits on expression that echo the sense of inarticulacy that is found in

Psalm 139, where the all-encompassing presence of the divine is both comforting

and suffocating: 'Such knowledge is too wonderful for me' is the Psalmist's

protest (verse six). Smart himself endeavours to present the 'knowledge' of

God's attributes and divine communication through human language. Inevitably,

however, something is missing: the language, syntax and structure of the *Jubilate*

embody a sense of mystery and the poet writes 'without comment' because the

liturgical language cannot describe everything. Alongside the purely linguistic

elements of the new Magnificat, Smart refers to other modes of communication

that might reflect divinity more successfully beyond the poem. In this search for

special language, the poet seeks to create a sacred liturgy that not only describes

God but also reflects its own origin in divine creation. An analysis of Smart's

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[162] 'Eternity', ll. 13-14.
[163] Ibid, line 7.

new "languages" of divine significance can be broken down into three sections.

The first part concerns the innate meaning of certain characters and numbers.

Smart asserts that 'Christ being A and Ω is all the intermediate letters without

doubt' (C18); working from the poet's assumption that letters have divine

import, I shall explore how the application of Kabbalistic theory and Pythagorean

thought to Smart's system reinforces the basis for a divinely pure language for

praising the Creator through the description of his creation. Secondly, I shall

consider the language of aesthetic communication through eyes and ears. Music

is especially important to the poet as an ever-present dimension of the new

Magnificat: 'For it woud [sic] be better if the LITURGY were musically

performed' (B252). Further, I will investigate how art and colours are

manipulated throughout the poem to suggest the visual expression of beauty as a

possible reflection of God's sublimity that is within the grasp of man's

comprehension. The final divine language that will be explored in *Jubilate Agno*

is made up of the signatures of God inscribed throughout creation, and more

specifically the sublime power of tempests, which is presented throughout the

Old Testament to signify God's communication with mortals.

     The concept of incomplete translation can be applied to the poet's

transcription of divine language and 'signs of speech too precious to be

communicated for ever' (C45) into the infinitely interpretable forms of alphabets,

beautiful artworks and the violence of nature. As Steiner reminds us, the

religious poet is circumscribed by difficulties both practical and ethical: it would

be not only 'sacrilegious and radically inaccurate to transpose or paraphrase'[164]

such language which God's mysterious communication might suggest, but it

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[164] Steiner, p. 249.

would also be impossible. The non-lingual symbols and references within

Jubilate Agno – colourful flowers, musical sounds and "supra-lingual" letters -

are afforded by a kind of transliteration of what the poet sees as divine

communication into something that is (in part) utterable and comprehensible.

This transliteration into poetic language can be understood through the common

practice in polyglot Bibles produced during the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries, whereby each translation from the Vulgate was then translated back

into Latin.[165] Although the linguistic text remained essentially unaltered, a

greater degree of insight into the original book could be achieved. In *Jubilate*

Agno, the comparable *liber naturae* requires transliteration into the form of

letters. As Augustine admits, 'even the divinely given signs contained in the holy

scriptures have been communicated to us by the human beings who wrote

them.'[166] The communications of the divine to the mortal are necessarily

conveyed through a process whereby the symbols in creation are transliterated

into the human realms of language about art and nature. It is useful to see this

incomplete translation in Berkeleian terms of incomplete vision. In the *Three*

Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous, Berkeley posits the differing

perspectives of God and man as a proof of divine existence:

> Men commonly believe that all things are known or perceived by God,
> because they believe the being of a God; whereas I, on the other side,
> immediately and necessarily conclude the being of a God because all
> sensible things must be perceived by him.[167]

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[165] A polyglot bible is listed in Smart's library borrowings ('A Cambridge College Library in the Eighteenth Century', p. 44). Walsh suggests that this might be Brian Walton's *Biblia sacrapolyglotta, 6* vols (London: Raycroft, 1655-57).
[166] *On Christian Teaching*, p. 31.
[167] George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, *The Works*, II, p. 212.

Here, God is presented as the cause of ideas and as He who understands these

ideas unconditionally. In *Jubilate Agno*, a parallel is found in language, where

God can see and speak through the 'letters […] not communicated' (C40) that

man can neither read nor write. Following this, poetry is a necessary

transliteration of the 'real vision' (into 'right language'),[168] and the arts produce

an ideal medium for the reflection of the divine through beauty.

   We shall therefore see that, in spite of his own warnings against vanity,

and the knowledge that 'the writings of man [will] perish', Smart continues in his

endeavour to create a clear, pure liturgy. The *Jubilate* thus presents the

'authority' of a prophetic poet and the endurance of art through human language.

Of course, language (whether as a transcribed version of the extra-lingual or

otherwise) is the only possible medium for comprehensible human

communication. Language is necessary and powerful:

> God exists before and beyond language, and is by no means the product
> or the captive of the poet's medium. But God manifests Himself to man
> in part through language, and necessarily His deeds are made known […]
> chiefly through the mediation of language.[169]

The idea of man's approach to God through words recalls Psalm 30, with its

vocatives in the first person, 'I cried out to You', and the presentation of divine

act to respond to human utterance 'and You healed me'.[170] The other 'part' of

God's communication occurs through symbols. Throughout the Old Testament,

men communicate to God in their own languages, and the response comes

through signs, actions and sounds (the whirlwind in Job, the burning bush in

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[168] Browning, '*Parleyings*', l. 151.
[169] Alter, pp. 13-16.
[170] Ps. 30:2.

Exodus, and the recurring use of significant numbers throughout Scripture). In *Jubilate Agno*, Smart adopts his own system of signs: the *lamed* interlude, the never-ending spectrum of colours and a special language of musical sounds reflect this divine kind of communication in the poem and effect a directness and purity of human expression to praise God. This new divine transcription of music, letters and natural signs goes some way towards overcoming the paradox of communication in religious poetry.

A Negotiation of Boundaries

As is the case with the careful language of Bible translation, the "divine language" of Smart's poetry – or the language that he uses to approach God – is reached via a negotiation of boundaries that both protect divinity and limit expression. We have met these poetic restrictions already in our consideration of the human language of *Jubilate Agno*. Pure language is important for Smart especially because it carries the possibility of direct signification. Purity of language suggests its freedom from corruption and suitablility for praising God: 'For all good words are from GOD, and all others are cant' (B85). The poet implies a dichotomy between good language and 'cant'. Smart's use of 'cant' to describe the wrong sort of language may be connected to the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of 'affected or unreal use of religious or pietistic phraseology'. This meaning of insincere, unholy language is intensified in Smart's poetry to mean all language with which it is improper to address God. The purity of Smart's laudatory language is considered in comparison with the

'cant'[171] that might be used to communicate with the 'Adversary'.[172] The use of the word 'cant' im opposition to purity is also significant as, in conjunction with its *OED* definition as 'singing, musical sound', it might suggest jarring notes outside of 'God's natural key' (B364), upsetting the harmony of joyful praise. In the context of transcribing divine signs, the idea of purity is bound up with humility: the word 'pure' abounds in the book of Job where God and man are compared. In the *Jubilate*, 'purity' is placed between goodness and sublimity as one of the twelve 'cardinal virtues' (B355), bringing with it connotations of cleanliness in the Hebrew law outlined in Leviticus and Numbers. In the *Jubilate*, Smart presents this virtue within the realm of language to suggest that we should, like Eleazar, 'serve the Lord decently and in purity' (A17). Only 'good words' are suitable for the new liturgy that Smart aims to present, as he wishes to approach God in a language of divine origin, not one of impure manufacture.

Smart's suggestion that the divine language can be regained is not original. In the twelfth Psalm, God's language is celebrated as something for the impure speech of humans to strive towards: 'The words of the LORD are pure words.'[173] The concept of a universal language of pure expression and the possibility of its retrieval is common in the linguistic theories of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In particular, James Beattie[174] and John Wilkins[175] call upon two Biblical accounts of language which close the dichotomy between spiritual and temporal: the destruction of the Tower of Babel in the Old Testament (Genesis 11) and Pentecost in the New Testament (Acts 2). Both

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[171] Roger R. McCutcheon, 'A Note on Cant', *Modern Language Notes*, 36, 1 (1921), 22-31.
172 *PW*, V (1996), p. 179.
[173] Ps. 12:6.
[174] James Beattie, *The Theory of Language*, ed. by R.C. Alston, English Linguistics 1500-1800, 88 (Menston: Scolar Press, 1968; London: Strahan and Cadell, 1788), p. 103.
[175] Wilkins, p. 13.

episodes are concerned with multiple languages: the Old Testament story tells

how the impure presumption of man 'confused the language of all the earth'

(Genesis 11:9), whereas the Pentecostal narrative describes the linguistic effect

of the Holy Spirit on the apostles, when 'the multitude came together and they

were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language' (Acts

2:6). The linguistic symmetry of the two passages is also significant: Babelic

confusion ensues after the loss of the original language; Pentecostal confusion

presents a solution for this in a universality of language and comprehension.

Alan Jacobs characterises the possibilities and limitations of language in these

Biblical terms:

> Ultimately, any poet who seeks to be faithful both to Christian doctrine
> and to personal experience must (consciously or unconsciously) situate
> his discourse along an axis between Babel and Pentecost.[176]

If Jacobs is correct, Smart might be said to align his reading with the possibility

of Pentecost and the end of the curse of Babel through the purification of the

'cant' of human expression. In his new Magnificat, the poet emphasises the hope

of spiritual tongues at Pentecost alongside the importance of pure speech:

> For St Paul was caught up into the third heavens.
> For there he heard certain words which it was not possible for him to
> understand.
> For they were constructed by uncommunicated letters.
> For there are signs of speech too precious to be communicated
> for ever. ('for' lines C42-5)

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[176] Alan Jacobs, 'Diagnosing Christopher's Case: Smart's Readers and the Authority of
Pentecost', *Renascence*, 46, 2 (1994), 83-103, (p. 83).

In the corresponding Biblical account (2 Cor. 12:2-4), Paul writes of the 'inexpressible words' heard by the apostle. Mysterious language is taken by Smart as a sign of possibility, not limitation and Smart's description of characters 'too precious' conveys trust in the potential of even 'constructed' letters to express the divine.

In Smart's later Hymn for Whitsunday, multiple languages are seen as a sign of possibility both for the furtherance of the English tongue and for the continuation of communication with God:

> While the tongues of men transfus'd
> With thy spirit should be loos'd,
> And untutor'd Hebrew speak,
> Latin, Arabic, and Greek.[177]

The miraculous speaking of tongues 'untutor'd' expands the possibility of praising the creator of language. With the hope of Pentecost at one end of the poet's 'axis' of pure language and with horror of the 'cant' and pollution of Babel at the other, *Jubilate Agno* emerges with the vision of one pure lexis of praise for the future: 'For I prophecy that the praise of God will be in every man's mouth in the Publick streets' (C62). Smart views prayer as a kind of pure language where direct signification is possible and which can be promoted by its pronunciation in public. The poet echoes the prophecies of Zephaniah that pure language shall be restored: 'For then I will turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call on the name of the LORD' (3:9). Importantly, it is through language itself that God is addressed and the purification of language stands as a purification of the people because it creates a new channel to God.

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[177] *PW*, II (1980), 'Hymn XV: Whitsunday', lines 5-8.

'For the AIR is purified by prayer which is made aloud and with all our

might' (B224). The question of how Smart's boundaries of purity and pollution

might be obeyed in language calls for a return to the estimation of Smart as

translating poet. It might be useful to re-place our appreciation of *Jubilate Agno*

within the context of the religious sublime and the 'certain eminence or

perfection of language'[178] of which Longinus writes. Contemporary

commentators on the sublime routinely ascribe a special position to the

Scriptures as the acme of writing. This is particularly interesting in the context of

translation. Walter Benjamin's investigation of the linguistic process dismisses

an understanding of translation as the communication of information from one

party to another. Instead, he proclaims a series of pithy maxims describing the

'kinship of languages'[179] and the purity that is attained in 'the language of truth'

(p. 77), which is arrived at through 'the great motif of integrating many tongues'.

Although the achievement of this prospect seems as unlikely as the eighteenth-

century linguists' projection of a universal language, Benjamin locates a textual

possibility for this universality in 'Holy Writ':

> Where a text is identical with truth or dogma, where it is supposed to be
> 'the true language' in all its literalness and without the mediation of
> meaning, this text is unconditionally translatable. (p. 82)

Indeed, this eminently translatable text forms the basis of the *Jubilate*, which,

from its opening line recalls the book of Psalms. The poem's self-conscious

replication of Hebrew poetry through the *lamed* sequence and the overarching

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[178]'from *Dionysius Longinus on the* sublime', in Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, eds, *The Sublime: A Reader in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 22-29, (p. 22).
[179] Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico 1999), pp. 70-82, (p. 73).

structure of parallel lines points towards Scripture. The 'force of composition'[180] that Lowth admired in the Hebrew verses is replicated in Smart's new Christian liturgy. Robert Alter[181] writes of the 'impulse to intensification' that drives expression through Biblical poetry. Smart uses the same artifice to effect an accumulation of praise with the mounting crowd of animals and personal associations that he connects together through *Jubilate Agno*. The process of constant development between the 'Let' and 'For' lines of Smart's quasi-Biblical verse echoes the intensity of Job and the Psalms. The model of Biblical poetry works as a highly personal, yet also universal form for Smart's expression. In spite of the expressive restriction of language, the new Magnificat presents something appropriate for the description of God, because it reflects the original creation in the book of nature and the Scriptures: 'It is indeed most true, that sacred Poetry, if we contemplate its origin alone, is far superior to both nature and art.'[182]

An innate paradox at the centre of Smart's work is that, although the whole poetic endeavour is fraught with contradiction and paradox and bounded by concerns for the right kind of expression, language is the only possible route for the evocation of the religious sublime in liturgy. Liturgy goes beyond the words on the page; Smart writes in a language that is concerned with the mind that it affects as opposed to the information that it transmits. This special position occupied by language recalls Edmund Burke's account of the sublime in terms of obscurity and incomplete description: Smart's 'uncommunicated letters' refer to something beyond the alphabets that he supplies. Poetry is an ideal form because

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[180] Lowth, I, p. 307.
[181] Alter, p. 11.
[182] Lowth, p. 44.

it also works with the uncommunicated. The "language" used to express the divine in *Jubilate Agno* differs from the "human text" already explored because it goes beyond the direct significance of words. To some extent, Dennis Costa is accurate in his assessment of the *Jubilate* as a 'Babelic poem.'[183] However, Smart is not only concerned with the purgation of polluted language and the impossibility of human expression. This purgation is the precondition for the transcription of other divine languages, represented by art, music, hidden signatures and special letters, into the best possible form of human language

Kabbalah, Pythagoras and the Transliteration of Signatures

In the description of flowers in *Jubilate Agno*, Smart introduces what might seem to be an inventive metaphor:

> For elegant phrases are nothing but flowers.
> For flowers are peculiarly the poetry of Christ. (B505-06)

However, the poet may envision the 'poetry of Christ' to be something that is in fact real and only symbolised by the flowers as a kind of tangible explanation. I suggest that the real content of this divine language (incarnated in poetry) might be a certain phrasing, vocabulary and system of signs. Smart's adoption of Pythagorean and Kabbalistic systems of reading involves another kind of transcription. Already, letters and numbers take on specific properties whatever their actual context within the poem, and they add another layer of meaning onto

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[183] Dennis Costa, 'Language in Smart's *Jubilate Agno*', *Essays in Criticism* 52, 4 (2002), 295-313, (p. 296).

the words of ordinary expression. Alun Morris David identifies this as a

peculiarly eighteenth-century phenomenon: 'In a manoeuvre familiar from

Christian Kabbalism, Jewish mystical practice is assimilated into the orthodox

identification of Christ with *logos*.'[184] Just as the poet Christianises the Psalms in

his translation, so he utilises the symbolism and language of Judaism and

Ancient Greece in the articulation of praise for a specifically Christian God. A

precedent for this can be found in Henry More's *Cabalistica Conjectura* of 1653,

which also combines the Mosaic with the Christian. This earlier work is more

explanatory than the *Jubilate*, as More carries out a threefold exegesis of

Genesis, demonstrating man as a microcosm of the created world. The earlier

work is a reading based not on numbers and signs but upon introspective reading

and the allegory of God's signature as 'a certain Key to enter Man into the

knowledge and use of the Treasures of Nature.'[185] In *Jubilate Agno*, Smart

depicts the divine through his own system of reading, in which things are both

what they seem, 'For I is the organ of vision' (B546) and totally

'INCOMPREHENSIBLE!'[186] obscure to sense and dependent upon reading through a

kind of Christian Kabbalah, as the invisible 'letter ל which signifies God by

himself (B477). Hartman notes in his summary of 'the ways of Smart with

language'[187] that each letter of *Jubilate Agno* is resonant with meaning because it

can be linked to any signifier through poetic punning – linguistic similarity

suggests an essential parallel. This peculiar focus shadows the search for

language origins in seventeenth century and the poet writes to rekindle the

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[184] David, *Christopher Smart and the Hebrew Bible*, p. 115.
[185] Henry More, *Conjectura Cabbalistica, or, A Conjectural Essay of Interpreting the Mind of Moses according to a Threefold Cabbala* (London: Fletcher, 1653), p. 56.
[186] *'Eternity'*, line 6.
[187] Hartman, pp. 150-51.

possibility 'that man would know the nature of things by learning to speak and write'[188] a language of direct signification.

In *Jubilate Agno*, the introduction of the alphabet as 'the beginning of learning' focuses upon the mystical and infinitely possible significance of letters. This subject turns eighteenth-century linguistic theory upon its head; the focus is reverted from syntax to characters, from discourse to writing, and from instruction to interpretation.[189] In Smart's new Magnificat, Creation is structured by linguistic puns and significant characters that lead back to the Creator. An exegesis of the innate meaning of language is found in Fragment B, where Smart asserts that 'the power of some animal is predominant in every language' (B625) as a secondary sign of God's own creation of language. The poet thus finds a basis for language in the creatures of creation and, through this, words are directed back to the divine:

> For the Mouse (Mus) prevails in the Latin.
> For Edi-mus, bibi-mus, vivi-mus – ore-mus. (B636-37)

In the second line, the mouse appearing as creature is of no consequence, it is simply a vehicle for linguistic play. Such punning develops the theory of signification from single letters to formed phonemes. The stems of the verbs in the second line are more important than the grammatical ending that defines their subject(s). Simple, universal actions – eating, drinking, living – are resolved into the all-encompassing action of the poet's vision: 'let us pray'. Likewise, Smart identifies a comparable rule as 'the Bull and the Dog prevail in the English/ For

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[188] Murray Cohen, p. 6.
[189] This is a reversal of the developments described in Cohen, p. 44.

all the words ending in –ble are in the creature. Invisi-ble, Incomprehensi-ble, ineffa-ble, A-ble' (B643-4). Again, the theme of the second line refers to God through his attributes. This theory can be extended through the rest of Smart's liturgy as a new way of reading whereby words such as 'bless' and 'invincible' (A31) carry the extra weight of God's presence. Through this, the author's emphatic concern with etymology works to reinforce the motif of belief in the *Jubilate* and Smart's conviction in the divine origin of language. Rothstein's perception of such linguistic study is relevant to Smart's endeavour: 'The very word "etymology" (from *etumos*; true, real), by the testimony of its own origins, seems to offer insight into true meaning: origin defines essence.'[190] The essence of this new laudatory expression is the language of God, which the poet endeavours to capture through ideas of universal and mystically pure signification.

The theme of reversal is important: Smart's work sits more comfortably amongst theories of the Renaissance than within his own enlightened climate. Echoes of Henry More's account of a century before, describing 'providence by natural hieroglyphicks'[191] can be traced as the poet pares down language, 'removing the dead husk of mere fallen and corrupt language' to reveal in a series of puns and divine letters 'the living kernel of the Word within.'[192] James Bono's use of natural imagery to describe this linguistic process is significant, because Smart's poetic endeavour is so closely tied to an appreciation of God's creation. Indeed, the unusual syntax of the *Jubilate* is formed upon a distinctly non-empirical system of ordering, where 'the names and numbers of animals are

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[190] Marian Rothstein, 'Etymology, Genealogy, and the Immutability of Origins', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 43, 2 (Summer, 1990), 332-347, (p. 332).

[191] Henry More, *An Antidote Against Atheism*, in *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings*, 2nd ed. (London: Fletcher, 1662), p. 57.

[192] Bono, p. 11.

as the name and number of the stars' (B42). Language is *re*mystified into a system of new meanings that weave together God's creation. Furthermore, the 'power of the English letters' is located in both communicating ideas otherwise incomprehensible to man and in ordering them in the poet's mind. Letters and numbers form a structural basis for much of the new Magnificat. The poet's categories of order (the letters A to Ω) resolve in the divine object of the poem's praise, and the whole poem expands upon the theme of the Anglican Benedicite, to 'praise Him and magnify Him for ever.' Smart utilises the symbols of letters and numbers to perform an exegesis of God's signatures upon nature. As Clement Hawes recognises, this has boundless possibilities:

> [A]ttempting to read the *Jubilate* with a full awareness of its echoes and puns, its miraculous casts into Scripture and other texts, induces something like a "reader's sublime," a state of absolute metaphor in which anything can potentially stand for anything else.[193]

In reading this new language of divine signification, we are drawn into a new realm of interpretation where the possibility of portraying the pure Word is knit into the poem's structure.

The extended meanings and puns on the alphabet in *Jubilate Agno* are authorised by Kabbalistic and Pythagorean theory, which structure the 'reader's sublime' into an already accepted form of human language. Indeed, the name 'Kabbalah' itself carries authority because it 'signifies *Tradition*: whence the verb לכק *Kibbel* to receive by tradition.'[194] In the original Kabbalistic tradition, Creation, both as action and result, figures as a combination of the 'twenty-two

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[193] Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style*, p. 169.
[194] Chambers, *Cyclopaedia*, p. 137.

elemental letters'.[195] Smart adopts this idea of letters throughout the poem, presenting the *systema naturae* as a code of expression and understanding. The image of the Hebrew *lamed* inscribed 'on some fibre of every leaf of every tree' (B477) presents a literalised version of notaricon, the system by which individual letters signify entire words. More than adopting Jewish mysticism, the poet seeks to translate it into his own experience through language central to liturgy, revelling in 'the power of the English letters taken singly' (B517). The poet presents English as a divine tongue that carries innate spiritual meaning. Smart's reforming, categorising translations thus relay a prophetic impulse for the foundation of England at the head of the Catholic Church: to begin at the root of language posits an infiltration of traditional ecclesiastical religious hierarchy via a living mode of communication. To this end, the integration of twenty-four 'elemental letters' in English presents no difficulties.

In *Jubilate Agno*, all letters have a divine significance. This significance is reinforced by reference to further letters that are inaccessible to mortals, or beyond the current capacity of human language: 'For there are more letters in all languages not communicated' (C40). It might be suggested that 'letters' taken individually are significant entities and not just the building blocks for linguistic communication. Kabbalistic theory reinforces this heightened significance because the divine origin of characters signals subsequent divine possibility. The posited existence of more characters beyond the twenty-four that are spoken and written refers to a mysterious symbolism, a further "text" for exegesis. In this way, the original letters exist as a transliteration of more letters, translated for the comprehension of Smart and his readers. Kabbalistic writings are in some sense

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[195] Matt, p. 102.

'not communicated' because they remain secret from those who are not followers of rabbinical doctrines. The new reading of letters proposed by Smart might refer to a new system whereby anybody who reads carefully (prayerfully) enough will perceive an otherwise unseen language of divine communication. The poet appears to suggest that such communication is too pure for clear revelation in public liturgy. The beginning of the search for divine language is thus carried out through the adoption and transcription of current reading systems.

In the same way that Smart alludes to the possibility of a divine language located through the exegesis of letters and mysterious words, he also suggests that numbers provide more than empirical measurement: 'For there is a mystery in numbers' (C19). Smart adopts commonplace elements from the numerological tradition that pick up on both Pythagorean and Biblical forms of symbolism. The 'mystery' of numerals is important for two reasons. First, the measurement and exegesis of numbers corresponds to the equally revelatory reading of letters. Second, we come again to the theme of an author praising his own Author: the idea of an overarching structure in the poem that is determined by sequences of numbers and letters has both a divine end of praising God in the new liturgy, and a divine origin because the characters come from God and can be read as the source of His own language. As the poet unweaves the meaning of numbers, he focuses on perfection and purity:

> For everything infinitely perfect is Three.
> […]
> For the Devil is two being without God. (C22-3)

In Pythagorean theory, the triad is the first perfect number, although not the most (this position is reserved for the number ten, which is not mentioned in Smart's poem). In a Christianised reading of measurement, reached through Augustine's discussion of ratio, everything returns to God: the 'great harmony' of the Trinity is qualified by the beauty of ideal proportion (1+2=3), in which the extremes (1+3=4) are equal to the mean (2+2=4).[196]

As the simplicity of this mathematical demonstration suggests, Smart does not push the reading of numbers beyond the most basic of observations. More interesting than this assessment of good and bad numbers is the poet's reading of an absence of numbers, where ciphers are manipulated into a proof of God's existence:

> For innumerable ciphers will amount to something.
> […]
> For infinite upon infinite they make a chain. (C35-7)

These lines seem to allude to the nothingness at the beginning of Genesis before the creation. The poet demonstrates mysterious creation through something comprehensible to man: the zeroes signify nothing when alone, but as they multiply, they create a (transcribed and) tangible chain. When it is written, the cipher is indistinguishable from the letter O, which Smart characterises as similarly hollow and 'open'. The visual effect of this is like a literal Great Chain of Being created *ex nihilo* through numerical and visual proof. The poet translates this letter of Christ into a material form that is comprehensible to man

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[196] St Augustine, *De Musica*, trans. by Robert Catesby Taliaferro, in *Writings of St Augustine*, vol 2 (New York: CIMA 1947), The *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, ed. by Ludwig Schopp, pp. 153-379, (pp. 198-9).

and applicable to current physico-theology. The Great Chain of Being originates

in Plato and is described at length in Pope's *Essay on Man*:

> Vast chain of being! which from God began;
> Natures ethereal, human, angel, man,
> Beast, bird, fish, insect, who no eye can see,
> No glass can reach; from infinite to thee;
> From thee to nothing. (I, 237-11)

A poet can create a chain out of nothing(s); God can create the whole of creation

ex nihilo. As Pope cautions his readers: 'but a part we see, and not a whole' (60).

Smart's chain of ciphers figures as a translation of the figurative into the

material. The letters and numbers of *Jubilate Agno* share this duality of spiritual

and physical meaning that reinforces both their divine origin and their human

significance.

The sublime and the beautiful: music and art as aesthetic languages of the divine

The uncommunicated letters of Smart's Christian Kabbalah are not the only

mysterious signs in the poet's liturgy. As I have already suggested, these 'signs

of speech too precious to be communicated' (C45) to which the poet alludes are

not necessarily linguistic in origin. In fact, the poet develops the suggestion that

language might exist beyond words in a form akin to the powerful

communication of music and art. In the *Jubilate*, the poetry of Christ is

illustrated as flowers 'musical in ocular harmony' and the senses are an

important beginning for the comprehension of divine language. Where the

human language of religious poetry is inevitably concerned with themes of the Longinian sublime found in perfect rhetoric (which is located most frequently in Milton's *Paradise Lost*), divine language that is transcribed into artistic expression is automatically associated with the idea of beauty.

Let us first consider this assumed dichotomy between the sublime and the beautiful. Burke expresses the difference in terms of scale 'sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones are comparatively small.' [197] To some extent, this definition is accurate because the perimeters of Smart's liturgy cannot expand to fit the vastness of divine language. Furthermore, Smart's transcription of the same into artistic beauty that is comprehensible to human readers is a solution for this shortcoming. It might be posited that human expression cannot reach the level of the sublime and that beautiful writing is the zenith of poetic expression of the divine. However, at the same time, the possibility of transcription and even the mention of 'precious' signs in *Jubilate Agno* might suggest that the use of beauty to describe special language cannot be conceived in terms of size alone. Here, John Milbank's comparison might be drawn upon to reassess the Burkean distinction. Milbank identifies beauty as something that is perceived, an 'aura of invisibility hovering around the visible'.[198] Fittingly, the use of the word 'aura' recalls Walter Benjamin's modern writing on the authenticity of reproducing art-works to draw them closer through the 'ritualistic basis' of beauty.[199] Conversely, the sublime is described as 'an experience of the ineffable and overwhelming.' Such an 'experience' is not possible to transmit in

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[197] Burke, p.124.
[198] John Milbank 'Beauty and the Soul', in *Theological Perspectives on God and Beauty*, ed. by Joh Milbank, Graham Ward and Edith Wyschogrod, (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), pp. 1-34, (p. 3).
[199] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, pp. 211-244 (p. 217).

liturgy, but the poet's perception of beauty can be depicted more easily. Within a linguistic, poetic context, this can be taken further: Smart aligns the poetry of harmonious nature with 'Christ', the Logos and the incarnation with which man can share reciprocal communication.[200] As Aidan Nichols suggests, Christianity lends itself to the aesthetic: 'a faith based on divine incarnation will eventually find expression in the realm of the visible.'[201] The sublime does not offer the same tangibility. Viladesau's adoption of 'aesthetic beauty as a means of the mind's "ascent" to God – or, from another point of view, as a medium of divine self-revelation'[202] is thus vital to an understanding of Smart's manipulation of artistic forms to represent divine language in *Jubilate Agno*.

It is unsurprising, then, that beauty reaches beyond superficial appreciation in Smart's poem of multiple languages to become an aim of his verse: 'For in my nature I quested for beauty, but God, God hath sent me to sea for pearls' (B30). The Biblical resonances of this line emphasise the value of expressive beauty. The poet reverses the parable of the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45-6): and Smart himself is presented as an unwilling seeker of pearls, cast out 'to sea' in his search. The parable in Matthew's Gospel presents an allegory to demonstrate the great sacrifice that is required to enter the kingdom of Heaven. The merchant in the tale 'sold all he had' to gain the pearl of heaven; Smart suggests that he has sold all he has (of sanity, possessions, or of poetic license?) in his quest to achieve beauty of expression and a true transcription of Christ's poetry. As Clement Hawes notes, Smart's status as translating poet is one of privilege: 'though seemingly degraded, [he] is in reality

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[200] Compare Auerbach's idea of '*humilitas*' in *Literary Language*, p.51.
[201] Aidan Nichols, *Redeeming Beauty: Soundings in Sacral Aesthetics* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2007), p. 21.
[202] Richard Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts: encountering God through Music, Art and Rhetoric* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), p. 4.

magnified by his divinely enforced quest.'[203] If we return to the original subject

of artistic creation we find in Erik Routley's account a less ethereal explanation

for the poet's sense of sacrifice:

> It is not perhaps quite fair to say that to its maker the picture presents itself as a series of blobs of paint, the music as a series of marks on paper, or the church as a heap of stones. But any artist who has mastered to any degree the very arduous business of translating his conception into communicable form will tell you that the process of *making* involves very little, or any, thought about beauty.[204]

In essence, Smart's struggle is no different from that of any artist trying to find

directness and purity of expression in words, notes, shapes or colours. The poet

resorts to the presentation of all art forms through the medium of words. The

consciousness that beauty, as the human version of sublime expression, must be

achieved in his writing presents a challenge and necessitates sacrifice.

Smart is by no means the only writer to find an important link between

poetry and the art of music. Indeed, the burst of activity in hymn-writing and

translating the Psalms, led by Isaac Watts[205] and his contemporaries, in the

eighteenth century suggests that a new awareness was developing with regard to

music as a channel for communicating with God. Watts' *Essay toward the*

improvement of Psalmody is significant because of the importance that the writer

accords to singing:

> To speak the glories of God in religious Song, or to breathe out the joys of our own spirits to God with the melody of our voice, is an exalted part of divine worship.[206]

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[203] Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style*, p. 145.
[204] Erik Routley, *Church Music and the Christian Faith* (London: Collins, 1980), p. 33.
[205] C.S. Philips, *Hymnody Past and Present* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 166.
[206] Watts, *An Essay toward the improvement of Psalmody*, IV, p. 273.

Watts supports this view with an exhaustive study of the instances of singing in the New Testament to justify the wholehearted integration of newly Christianised psalms into liturgy. In *Jubilate Agno*, this 'exalted part' of worship is not only concerned with the participation of singers in hymns and psalms in church, it also includes the involvement of all the 'tongues' of creation in the harmony of divine praise. The poem's structure of a rejuvenated Benedicite through Biblical paraphrase and reference is reinforced by the presentation of the 'numerous' congregation of nature joined in song. This is where the subject of transliteration arises again, for even though the poem is written in human languages, bestial communication is implicated as the origin of praising speech: 'For my seed shall worship the Lord JESUS as numerous and musical as the grasshoppers of Paradise' (B100). As generations of men sing a myriad of notes in praise of God, the sound that they create achieves harmony akin to the pure, 'direct' sound made by insects. The curious power of a hymn, in which the congregation is found singing the same words simultaneously, arises in *Jubilate Agno* as a special form of language. Smart thus uses song and instrumentation to create a new language of praise which forms the meeting point between spoken word and the inability to express.

The 'pure evangelical language'[207] of music is central to Smart's new liturgy and the poet even voices the possibility of the poem itself being set to music. Moreover, he suggests that the new hymn of praise might be the very one sung around the Lamb's throne in Revelation:

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[207] Watts, p. 275.

> For a NEW SONG also is best, if it be to the glory of God; and taken with the food like the psalms. (B390)

This proclamation places the *Jubilate* in an important position of praise. The theme of a 'new song' recalls the vision of a New Jerusalem in Revelation, where the 144,000 saved sing a hymn to God:

> They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. (Revelation 14:3)

In 'On the Eternity of the Supreme Being', Smart looks forward to this time when 'the human tongue new-tun'd shall give/ Praises more worthy the eternal ear' (129-30). Likewise, the special language and syntax of mystery throughout the *Jubilate* may be aligned to the reference to John's vision and a preliminary effort towards expressing pure praise. The idea that 'no one could learn that song' except for the singers is akin to the exclusive Kabbalistic readings of the initiated. Smart suggests that special insight is needed to create divine music: 'For there is a note added to the scale, which the Lord hath made fuller, stronger and more glorious' (B33). The letters 'not communicated' of the alphabet also appear in the notes of the scale. The exegetical readings of Smart's Christian Kabbalah and the special harmony of praise are both attainable through the mysterious purity of music in the new Magnificat. However, there is a polluting 'cant' that must be kept out of the sung communication 'to the Glory of God.' In the 'Ode for Music', Smart proclaims music as a 'celestial art'[208] that originates

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[208] *PW*, IV (1987), 'Ode for Musick On St Cecelia's Day', line 39.

in the divine. The condition that the new song be 'taken with the food' is interesting: the poet seems to suggest that his new Magnificat should be simple and free from musical pretensions. The kind of music that is envisioned is natural and clear, hardly distinguishable from the sounds made by the grasshoppers and other natural musicians.

A concern with purity and the natural can also be identified in Smart's fascination with instruments and instrumental sound. The very special position of certain instruments such as the harp and the trumpet in *Jubilate Agno* has a scriptural precedent. Indeed, these two musical instruments carry biblical connotations: the trumpet appears throughout the Old Testament in ceremonial contexts whereas the harp is inextricably linked with David and the Psalms. Importantly, both instruments also have significance in the heavenly music of the Book of Revelation. This background is especially important for the figure of the harp, which emerges in *Jubilate Agno* through the Kabbalistic reading of letters: 'For M is music and Hebrew מ is the direct figure of God's harp' (B524). The harp is closely associated with the divine throughout Smart's Magnificat and it becomes a symbol of pure, powerful, reactive sound:

> 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. (B246-7)

The inexplicable actions of the deity are translated into a musical context as something that is comprehensible to man, and the 'stupendous magnitude and melody' appears to refer to 'extra note[s]' beyond the usual tones of music. The

new dimension of a musical language is tied up with creation that is described as a mysterious sleight of hand. Just as Smart is able to create new language in the visible word-play of an alphabetised liturgy, the divine can create 'angels' through his 'tune'. In this way, music is introduced into the poem to afford a closer walk with God. Richard Viladesau is correct: 'music does more than convey a message about God: in its highest forms it brings the hearer face to face with the reality of God's presence-in-absence and absence-in-presence.'[209] The echo of instrumental sound suggested in *Jubilate Agno* resonates throughout the liturgy with a sense of divinely-created beauty.

Paul Westermeyer suggests that it is possible to gain greater insight through the musical setting of a work because 'music is also the means to interpret a text.'[210] Yet in *Jubilate Agno* music becomes a sort of 'language' to be interpreted. Where English is broken down into letters for the minute exegesis of words, Smart dissects the sounds of music in the search for meaning and form in an onomatopoeic presentation of 'spiritual musick':

> 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 and the like. (B585-87)

As with the explanation of letters through poetic notacarion, the plethora of articulative sounds does not make the musical expression any less mysterious because no actual explanation is provided. However, the transcription of sound vocalises the music into poetic form and an instrumental hymn of praise is created within Smart's unsung Magnificat. The monosyllabic 'notes' of the

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[209] Viladesau, p. 46.
[210] Paul Westermeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music: A Textbook, A Reference, An Essay* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), p. 28.

instruments' sound illustrates the heavenly quality that the poet praises in the trumpet, 'the most direct and acceptable of all instruments' (B244). Directness or purity of sound correlates to pure expression in the spoken word. Here, the risk of 'cant' is perhaps more dangerous in the context of aesthetic temptation and the possibility that music might also divert the praising focus away from the Spirit of God towards the carnal musician. The Platonic concept of the struggle between word and flesh, instrumental in the polemic over the use of music in early Christian tradition, lurks in church music of the eighteenth-century and the debates over the clearness of liturgical texts with new settings involving instrumental music and sung melisma. In his Epistle to Burlington, Pope satirises the composition of 'quirks of musick' that are improper in church and written for flamboyant show.[211] Similarly, *An Essay on Criticism* mocks those that 'to the church repair,/ Not for the doctrine, but the music there.'[212] Smart's solution for the correct introduction of music into a liturgical setting is found in the promotion of musical instruments that require the least human interference. Both the harp and the trumpet, Smart's instruments of special choice, are in some sense pure instruments that involve no artifice in playing. The trumpets of the Psalms and instruments up to the 1830s were played without valves so its notes were truly 'natural' and produced by variation of breath (spirit). Likewise, the harp has a string tuned to each note and its 'rhimes' are played from these perfect ratios.[213] In this way, the music that Smart values most highly is that which achieves 'God's natural key' with the least intervention from man.

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[211] Pope, *Works*, III, ii (1961), pp. 127-156, line 143.
[212] Pope, *Works*, I (1961), ll. 342-3.
[213] Compare Augustine's idea of beauty in *On Music*.

Smart celebrates each creative act of God with zeal, transcribing it into a correlative language of artistic creation that his readers might be able to comprehend:

> 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. (A41)

God figures in *Jubilate Agno* as the creator of language, the creator of music and the 'artist inimitable'. Further, God is able to create through the 'echo' of his own heavenly speech that is transcribed into human measures through the sweet notes of the harp. Smart's poetic construct of communication is important because it translates an important sense of sublime ('magnifical') mystery that is otherwise inaccessible. Artistic beauty stands as the human correlative of the divine and sublime; Creation is achieved in and through the alphabet, the logos of Christ, the notes of the harp and the painted colour of the flowers. All of these chime in with the 'liberal disciplines' approved by Augustine in *On Christian Teaching* as they teach the reading of signs and 'provide an excellent ladder for the soul's ascent' to God.[214]

The connection of art with written language is not unusual and the development of a parallel appreciation of poetry and painting can be seen from the writing of Dryden through to the eighteenth century. The earlier poet draws connections between the two art-forms as similar modes of expression:

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[214] Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, p. 65.

> To make a Sketch, or a more perfect Model of a Picture, is in the
> Language of Poets, to draw up the Scenery of a Play.[215]

In this way, the structure or syntax of writing might be connected with the arrangement or ratio of objects on a canvas. Dryden extends this allusion to poetic writing in particular: 'Expression and all that belongs to words, is that in a Poem, which Colouring is in a Picture' (p. 71). The link between colours and words explains Smart's interest in creating a new spectrum ranging from 'white' to 'pale'. The attack on the Newtonian spectrum in Fragment B of *Jubilate Agno* is not simply an onslaught on empiricism. The poet suggests that there might be correct colours for depiction and that only "good colours" may be used in the verbal painting of liturgy. As Philip Shaw recognises, sublimity defeats the senses and expression, 'yet through this very defeat, the mind gets a feeling for that which lies beyond thought and language.'[216] In 'On the Immensity of the Supreme Being', Smart portrays the instinctive humility of a mortal artist:

> In vain thy pencil Claudio, or Poussin,
> Or thine, immortal Guido, wou'd essay
> Such skill to imitate – it is the hand
> Of God himself – for God himself is there. (79-82)

Because of this underlying feeling that even prominent painters must adopt a special mode for divine illustration, the colours in the new Magnificat cannot be restricted to seven hues: in brown alone there are 'ten thousand acceptable shades' (B369). To restrict the artist's colouring would lessen his ability to form an accurate impression of the divine artist and his work. A final reason for

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[215] John Dryden, 'Preface' to *De Arte Graphica* in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. by Alan Roper, 20 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), XX, p. 68.
[216] Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 3.

Smart's preoccupation with colour can be found in contemporary aesthetic

theory:

> Until the latter half of the eighteenth century, colour was considered a
> mere appendage to the linear design; and this fact could be paralleled in
> poetry, for words were likewise an extrinsic beauty.[217]

Smart routinely commandeers the 'extrinsic' as an unseen, mysterious element

that is essential to divine language. In the *Jubilate*, beauty is the human indicator

that something close to divine expression may have been achieved in art. In its

position as a quality that cannot be measured empirically but only through

examples, beauty is an analogue to God, who, in the Seatonian Poems, is only

described through his attributes.

Signatures of nature – tempests and the voice of God

Artistic beauty is used to represent a significant facet of divine language in

Jubilate Agno, where expressions of music, art and writing are all concerned with

the creative act. However, the overarching precondition of expressive purity in

the poem determines that there is not only a generative language of godly

cleanness, but also a language that is violent, threatening and purgative to

maintain it. In 'On the Eternity of the Supreme Being', the poet calls upon God

to 'purge thou my heart' so that his praising 'sacrifice' is fruitful (lines 131-5). In

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[217] Cicely Davis, 'Ut Pictura Poesis', *MLR*, 50, (1935), 159-69, (p. 162).

Smart's later liturgical text, this violence emerges in the language of destructive

nature and the divine voice that is located in tempestuous noise:

> For THUNDER is the voice of God direct in verse and musick.
> For LIGHTNING is a glance of the glory of God. (B271-2)

Noah Herringman locates the most common eighteenth-century response to

natural catastrophes in sermons and in the return to physico-theological

writing.[218] In *Jubilate Agno*, anti-Newtonian physico-theology is transported into

a literal and linguistic context to produce a vocal version of the *liber naturae*.

Here, Smart calls upon the senses that are utilised in the appreciation of human

creativity to recognise another facet of 'direct' poetry and music. In 'On the

Power of the Supreme Being', Smart compares the divine 'musick of

omnipotence' (7) sounded through earthquakes and tempests with the 'poor

providence of human art' (41). The demonstration of God's language in *Jubilate

Agno* reminds us of the potency of divine art and its overwhelming impact upon

the human: God can generate expression *ex nihilo*, but even the indirect

reworkings of mortal creativity and communication cannot reproduce or even

imitate the 'direct' sound of thunder and lightning. The poet merely presents

incomplete "quotations" from this sublime expression of God's power. As the

beautiful is creative, the sublime product of God's 'glance' can be destructive;

this is the purest example of divine communication in Smart's liturgy as it can

have no mortal intervention and the poet can only describe because there is no

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[218] Noah Herringman, 'The Style of Natural Catastrophes,' *The Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 66, 112 (2005), 97-133, (p. 109).

correlative system for transliteration. For example, the idea of terror in the face

of nature resonates through Kant's account of the sublime:

> We are wont to represent God in the tempest, in the storm, the earthquake, and the like, as presenting Himself in His wrath, but at the same time in His sublimity.[219]

Smart raises this sense of terror and wonder through the depiction of violent

nature, responding to a rhetorical tradition of God's violent language that is clear

throughout the Old Testament. These lines from *Jubilate Agno* are especially

effective because of the emphasis on the 'direct' and uncontrived ease with

which God makes violent proclamations through an 'utterance' or a 'glance.

The presence of God's direct voice in thunder and lightning and the

purgative violence of much divine communication are actually celebrated in

Jubilate Agno. Smart exhorts his readers to praise the omnipotent, omniscient,

immense, eternal, good God of the Seatonian Poems, the language of whom is

foreign, violent and which denies dialogue, as well as the incarnate and human

God of the Christian Psalms. It is possible that the purity of divine expression in

the illustration of tempests is an unveiled example of the language that is avoided

and transcribed throughout the rest of the poem. Smart rejoices in the language of

pure destruction because its result is pure expression, which is related in lesser

human terms as beauty. David Morris compares the scribe-evangelist's outlook

to that of a mystic:

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[219] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, ed. and trans. by J.C. Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 122.

> Since all nature is of God, it is therefore suffused with the spirit of God; from the vast to the minute, from the angelic to the brutish, from the comprehensible to the mysterious, nature is not simply matter in motion but the manifestation of the divine spirit.[220]

This summary explains Smart's celebration of even the destructive elements of divine speech. The celebration of divine purgation is found throughout the Book of Psalms, where the violence of God's communication is a weapon against the enemies of the Hebrews. The Christian poet translates this into a context whereby thunder and lightning represent the sublime wonder of God and the divine power to destroy vanity and to impose humility on the expressions of man. In *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, John Dennis raises the Book of Psalms as an example of sublime poetic utterance that illustrates the natural language of God's power. The critic refers to the inspiration and 'Passion' of the eighteenth Psalm, which shows the expression of God in a language similar to Smart's presentation:[221] 'Then the earth shook and trembled [...]. The LORD thundered from heaven, and the most high uttered His voice' (verse 7 and 13). The physical and aural magnitude of God's speech in the Scriptures[222] demonstrates why Smart locates pure divine speech in tempestuous nature. Early in *Jubilate Agno*, Job is set forth as a demonstration of the humility with which God should be approached: 'Let Job bless with the Worm – the life of the Lord is in Humiliation' (A51). Recalling the episode in Job 37 where God speaks out of the whirlwind in response to Job's human complaint, Smart suggests that this is one area of divine language that cannot be replicated, transcribed or transliterated in liturgy. In this depiction of downtrodden man, the

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[220] Morris, p. 171.
[221] John Dennis, *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* in *Critical Works*, ed. by Edward Niles Hooker, 2 vols (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1939), I, pp. 197-278, (pp. 268-9).
[222] Instances of which are called upon in 'Power' lines 100-107 (*PW*, IV (1987)).

poet shows that his search for beauty is vain and a quest for God alone is both awful and necessary. It remains that such humility is the governing principle of the human writer trying to relate divine expression. In *Jubilate Agno*, the transcription of beauty is the limit of religious expression: 'God thunders marvellously with his voice; he does great things which we cannot comprehend.'[223] The lamb of the poem's title centres the praise on the incarnate Christ and the *humilatas* of mercy and beauty, but this can only be reached through the mystery of signs and the purgation of violence.

As this exploration has shown, there is always a paradox regarding divine poetry and the ability to express. It is therefore necessary to establish what use there may be in writing about Smart's exegesis of the Bible and the book of nature in terms of language. To read the poet's imagery of characters, music, colours and tempests as examples of individual divine languages is to read his liturgy in *Jubilate Agno* as an important text about purity, pollution and the appropriate religious expression for the imitative artist. It is possible to locate Smart in Akenside's description of privileged poets:

> To these the Sire Omnipotent unfolds
> The world's harmonious volume, there to read
> The transcript of himself. On every part
> They trace the bright impressions of his hand:
> In earth or air, the meadow's purple stores.[224]

In *Jubilate Agno*, Smart's original text is the 'transcript of Himself', the *liber naturae*. Through an exploration of language forms and symbolic systems, the poet creates a literal version of divine 'impression'. Fittingly, these forms are

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[223] Burke, III, p. xxvii.
[224] Mark Akenside, *The Pleasures of Imagination*, (London: Cadell and Davies, 1795; repr. Otley, Washington DC: Woodstock Books, 2000), I, 99-103.

hinted at in Akenside's poem: the 'transcript' of letters and numbers,

'harmonious' music and the 'stores' of artistic beauty, and the purging, powerful

violence of the 'Sire Omnipotent' in tempestuous nature.

CONCLUSION: *JUBILATE AGNO* AS LITURGY

'When we sing, especially unto God, our chief design is, or should be, to speak our own hearts and our words to God.'[225] God must be approached through language; this means speaking, writing or reading of God in our 'own hearts and words' and through the structures that linguistic communication imposes. Speaking of God involves a kind of humanising of the divine as it is drawn within the sphere of human understanding through the imposition of a proper name, 'God', and by placing Him within traditional familial and feudal structures as our 'Father' and 'Lord'. This study of *Jubilate Agno* shows how Christopher Smart goes further in his writing and imagines the sublime language of God with the ideal aim of approaching the Creator to praise him in his own universal tongue. What results is a poetical response to the question prompted throughout the Old Testament, most notably in the book of Job: 'If we could actually hear God talking, making His will manifest in words of the Hebrew language, what would He sound like?'[226] Just as the idea of God is commonly approached through the *humilitas*[227] of human structures of patriarchy and naming, the idea of God's language has its correlative in the most beautiful expressions that man can achieve through his creative and artistic works. This thesis has explored how Smart manipulates languages and structures in *Jubilate Agno* in order to represent the natural world and a creating God, and to go some way towards producing a direct, pure, and universal language of divine praise. An important premise upon which this study is founded is Smart's concept of his work as liturgy when he 'pray[s] the Lord Jesus to translate my MAGNIFICAT into verse

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[225] Watts, p. 297.
[226] Alter, p. 141.
[227] Auerbach, p. 51.

and represent it' (B43). The identification of Smart's poem as a liturgical canticle for the eighteenth century has strong grounds: the poet's own framing of his work and the similarity of its title to the canticle *Jubilate Deo*, the communal focus of the work and its optative opening and overarching structure, the absence of any specific reader, the orality of the poem and, finally, its structure and Biblical language. Like Jean Murray Walker, we can compare the *Jubilate* with psalms and canticles to render the poem 'more explicable.'[228]

Throughout this study of Smart's work, the overarching structure and the lack of narrative line in the poem has been explained by the alternating 'Let' and 'For' lines that create intensification through the verse. A secondary feature of this is the chaotic association between lines that is based around an unscientific catalogue of categories to present language and the natural world. Robert Lowth's identification of parallelism as an essential element of Hebrew poetry is important in showing how closely Smart associates his own writing with Biblical diction and style. Geoffrey Hartman's idea of a "stutterance"[229] between the lines of the poem, whereby the verse attempts to move forward through imperatives which also choke the narrative impulse of the 'for' lines, is true only in part. Of course, there is a clear articulative challenge in writing religious poetry, an awareness of which must form a backdrop to any study of the *Jubilate*. However, the similarity of the 'Let … For' structure to the format of liturgical responses might also reveal a more certain progression through Smart's poem. Jean Murray Walker asserts this:

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[228] Jean Murray Walker, '"Jubilate Agno" as Psalm', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 20, 3 (1980), 449-59, (p. 449).
[229] Hartman, p. 447.

> The "For" section follows a psalm-like progression of attitudes while the "Let" section exists as an eternal, omnipresent answer. In "Jubilate Agno" it is through music that the public and the private and the future, the question and the answer, are finally merged.[230]

The 'omnipresent' voice of the 'let' verses is clear because the authorial presence is hidden behind optative clauses, whereas the focus of the 'for' verses is more personal and explanatory, only occasionally continuing a line of thought from one response to another.

A comparison with the traditional preces and responses of Anglican liturgy will emphasise the significance of Smart's antiphonal verses. In the 1662 services for Morning and Evening Prayer, the following exchange takes place between priest and congregation:

> O Lord open thou our lips.
> *Answer.* And our mouth shall shew forth thy praise.
> *Priest.* O God, make speed to save us.
> *Answer.* O Lord, make haste to help us.[231]

In this context, the priest acts as intercessor; the anonymised poet adopts this same role in the 'Let' verses of *Jubilate Agno*. The second imploring emphasises the personal focus of those praying. This interplay between private and public modes is also clear in Smart's poem:

> Let Mary rejoice with the Maid – blessed be the name of the immaculate CONCEPTION.
> For I am in twelve HARDSHIPS, but he that was born of a virgin shall deliver me out of all. (B139)

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[230] Jean Murray Walker, p. 459.

[231] *The Book of Common Prayer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1662, rev.1968), pp. 4 and 19.

In both examples, man communicates with God through praise and rejoicing with the hope of receiving help or deliverance. Articulation assisted by God is important and this is demonstrated in Smart's verse through playful punning on the words 'conception' and deliverance', which makes a connection between the divine conception and the resultant deliverance, or saving, of mortals. Clearly, the formal focus and delineation of speakers is lacking in Smart's new Magnificat, but it is possible to identify linguistic and structural parallels. As with other canticles of the traditional Anglican liturgy, the *Jubilate* is not narrative writing, Hartman's "stutterance" is clear in the lines from the *Book of Common Prayer*, where the congregation responds by reinforcing the priest's petition with the substitution of 'make haste' and 'help' in a manner similar to the static progression of Smart's poem.

In *Jubilate Agno*, Smart seeks to go beyond purely human bounds of traditional liturgy by creating a sense of sublimity that transcends the words on the page. The *Jubilate* is presented as a new canticle to form part of a universal liturgy that has been achieved through the threefold translation of languages: the *liber naturae*, tongues of man, and the language of the sublime understood through artistic beauty and the power of nature. This study extends and explains Smart's description of the poem as a Magnificat that has been 'translated in the charity' (B11). A comparison with two central canticles from the daily services of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, the Benedicite and the Magnificat, contextualises Smart's poem as liturgy concerned with the natural world and human language and the final 'translation' of divine expression can be seen as the aim of the new praise-poem.

Jubilate Agno is a poetical work of physico-theology where the creatures,

plants and minerals of the created world are included as proof and in praise of the

creator. Every part of creation, from the flea to the moon, is given a voice in

Smart's hymn of praise. In this sense, we find a vocalised, extended version of

the Benedicite that is introduced by the call to praise, 'Rejoice in God, O ye

Tongues' in the opening line of Smart's poem:

> O all ye Works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify
> him for ever.
> O ye Angels of the Lord, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him
> for ever.
> O ye Heavens, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever.
> O ye Waters that be above the Firmament, bless ye the Lord : praise him,
> and magnify him for ever.
> O all ye Powers of the Lord, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify
> him for ever.
> O ye Sun and Moon, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for
> ever.
> O ye Stars of Heaven, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for
> ever.
> O ye Showers and Dew, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him
> for ever.
> O ye Winds of God, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for
> ever.
> O ye Fire and Heat, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for
> ever.[232]

Smart takes the themes of the traditional hymn of creation and extends the scope

of his verse to present the voice of each beast as it 'praise[s] him, and magnif[ies]

him for ever.' In both old and new canticles, the focus is on God as creator. In

the Benedicite, this is emphasised through the repeated genitive clause 'of the

Lord'. Although the structure of *Jubilate Agno* is less repetitive, the plenitude of

creation is still an important focus. The cumulative intensity of writing is evident

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[232] 'Benedicite, Omnia Opera', *BCP*, pp. 8-10, lines 1-10.

in both poems. The repetitive structure and identical punctuation of the Benedicite creates an escalation of fervour in the expression of praise. Similarly, the greater variety of line structures in the later poem represents the variety of the *liber naturae* whilst the anaphora creates the effect of a list. Smart introduces each 'Work' with the imperative or optative 'Let', whilst the persona of the poet is maintained in the response lines. This individual focus allows for a discussion of method within the poem itself.

My investigation into Smart's creation of a system of nature began with a challenge in the impossibility of articulating God and its solution in speaking of the divine through reference to his creation. I have documented how the poet overcomes his inarticulacy and sense of impropriety in the Seatonian Poems to achieve expression in *Jubilate Agno* through a categorising language that provides a middle way between the presumptious conjecture of empiricism and the inability to express caused by excessive humility. Catalogue and categorising are the defining elements of Smart's praising physico-theology. However, Smart's organisation is incomplete: the strict structures of presumptious empiricism are not possible and the non-visual, unelaborated lists of the Benedicite fail to embrace the subject of creation. What issues from Smart's interrogation of the language of natural description is Alter's ideal 'Whitmaneque free verse' in a catalogue ordered by anaphora and verbal sound to represent the ordered chaos of man's representation of plenitudinous creation. Smart's physico-theological canticle is thus ordered around a human view of God's endless 'names and numbers' (B42).

As we have seen, Smart adopts translation as a solution for expressing the ineffable divine in his canticle. Although the poet claims that '[nothing] is so real

as that which is spiritual' (B258), the contemporary printing press remains

important for Smart's work as a writer, both in Grub Street journalism and

through the image of 'impression', which extra-lingual aura the poet seeks to

conjure up in his work. *Jubilate Agno* is, of course, preoccupied with real, human

languages:

> For I have glorified God in GREEK and LATIN, the consecrated languages
> spoken by the Lord on earth. (B6)

The traditions, both sacred and secular, from which Smart's writing originates

are rooted in these consecrated languages, particularly in view of humanist

scholarship written in Latin and the importance of Greek as the language of the

New Testament. Smart confirms that these languages continue to have

significance: 'For the Greek and Latin are not dead languages, but taken up and

accepted for the sake of him that spake them' (B645). Furthermore, although he

does not write the *Jubilate* in either of these languages it might still be posited

that the poet uses his own 'heart and word' according to Isaac Watts' precept for

praise. Importantly, Biblical English is also promoted as a consecrated language.

It is the language of Smart's evangelism and that of the Anglican liturgy that he

attempts to emulate. *Jubilate Agno* as new Magnificat must look back to the

original liturgical translation:

> My soul doth magnify the Lord : and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my
> Saviour.
> For he hath regarded : the lowliness of his handmaiden.
> For behold, from henceforth : all generations shall call me blessed.
> For he that is mighty hath magnified me : and holy is his Name.
> And his mercy is on them that fear him : throughout all generations.

> He hath shewed strength with his arm : he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
> He hath put down the mighty from their seat : and hath exalted the humble and meek.
> He hath filled the hungry with good things : and the rich he hath sent empty away.
> He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel : as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever.[233]

It is easy to see why Smart identified his poem with this canticle in particular. Both 'magnify' and 'rejoice' are important keywords in Smart's poem, not least because they represent the poet's activity. Also, the Magnificat explores themes of human humility and divine greatness that resonate throughout both the Seatonian Poems and the *Jubilate*. It might be argued that Fragment C, which is dominated by antiphony and linguistic exploration, is the most liturgical. Allan Christensen's analysis of this section is important: 'The fragment as a whole reinterprets liturgical themes by making them relevant to the artist as well as to Christ and the ordinary believer.'[234] On the subject of relevance, Smart takes the theme of 'Abraham and his seed' and anglicises it to encompass Englishmen as descendents of Christ, and their language as a consecrated tongue of praise.

The second chapter of this thesis has explored Smart's use of written language in the context of contemporary language theories and the Biblical accounts of the tower of Babel and Pentecost. An important conclusion to issue from this study is that Smart's theological background is Augustinian with Judaic overtones. That is, the new Anglican liturgy that the poet presents remains firmly rooted in linguistic and sacrificial traditions of the Old Testament, whilst focusing on the Lamb of God as the object of praise. The poet takes the

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[233] *BCP*, pp. 19-20, Luke 1:46-55.
[234] Allan C. Christensen, 'Liturgical Order in Smart's 'Jubilate Agno': a study of fragment C', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 6 (1970), 366-75, (p. 371).

Magnificat from Luke's gospel as a premise for the exploration of laudatory

language but uses figures from the Old Testament to illustrate his praise. The

result is a fusion of Hebrew and Greco-Christian worlds in the attitude towards

language and God. Robert Alter identifies the Hebrew Psalms as 'an instrument

for expressing in a collective voice (whether first person plural or singular) a

distinctive, sometimes radically new, sense of time, space, history, creation, and

the character of individual destiny.'[235] Smart's Christianised psalms achieve the

same in translation and *Jubilate Agno* finds new words to create an extended and

original 'collective expression' reached through purity of language and the

elimination of cant.

Finally, the climax of this study of Smart's canticle concerns the divine

kind of language that is the result of the poet's exploratory writing. As already

mentioned, there is no prayer or canticle in the *Book of Common Prayer* that

correlates with this central element of Smart's poem. In *Jubilate Agno*, the poet

reaches beyond traditional linguistic communication and utilises Kabbalistic

interpretation and theories of letters and numbers to suggest something beyond

normal words. Furthermore, creative art and music are identified as another kind

of divine communication to be located in the new liturgy of Smart's work. The

beauty of human creativity is presented as a parallel to God's sublime creation:

'For all the inventions of man, which are good, are the communications of

Almighty God' (B401). In *Kabbalah and Criticism*, Harold Bloom writes of

'zimzum', or the limitation on man, that is central to Smart's own laudatory

verse: 'In this sense, liturgy recognizes a lack or defect in language that mirrors

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[235] Alter, p. 114.

(or is mirrored by) a lack or defect in the self.'[236] Smart's warnings against presumption in the Seatonian Poems ensure that such defects are not dismissed in the *Jubilate*. However, the poet's refence to 'letters in all languages not communicated' (C40) suggests that the challenge to a religious poet comes not from the language itself, but from the writer's own understanding of language.

Jubilate Agno rejoices in and magnifies God as creator of language and writer of the *liber naturae*. Because of this, the division of languages at the tower of Babel in the Old Testament and the speaking of multiple tongues at Pentecost in the New Testament are important touchstones for Smart's sense of language and communication. In the final chapter of this study, which itself both issues out of, and forms the conclusive climax for, the entire study, I explored how Smart achieves an expression of the religious sublime through the description and imitation of beautiful arts and powerful nature. This imitation engenders a constant sense of humility that is bound up with the necessity of purging and purifying expression so that the imitative artist can go some way towards recreating an idea of God's own linguistic expression through the reflection of the created world. Robert Alter suggests that the voice of God speaking out of the whirlwind to Job represents 'the kind of verse a poet of genius could persuasively imagine God speaking.'[237] *Jubilate Agno* reflects this idea of a powerful God in nature, 'the voice of God direct in verse and musick' (B271), through tempestuous nature. In the poet's system of nature, there is an important sense that praise is limited to description and that 'thunder' and 'musick' of the sublime deity cannot appear fully in the liturgy. The purest human language is not powerful enough The *Jubilate* is thus to be understood as a translation that is

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[236] Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1983), p. 77.
[237] Alter, p. 96.

complete in its incompleteness and in its preservation of the uncommunicated,

untouched *logos* of Christ.

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