CHAPTER THREE

Smart’s Poetry and the Radical Quest for Religion

The Puritan paradigm of radicalism

In the eighteenth century the term ‘radical’ – meaning ‘relating to roots’ – simply signified the idea of going to the roots of a matter. Its association with a particular kind of political agenda only begins with the nineteenth century usage of the word, possibly to differentiate the British radicals from the revolutionaries in other parts of Europe. Yet nineteenth century usage suggests that:

Radicalism is not tearing things up by the roots, but getting down to the roots of things and planting institutions anew on just principles.265

Conal Condren has noted – at least in an early modern context – a ‘whole penumbra of unstable associations’ of the term radical with ‘democratic, laudable, edifying, progressive and worthy’.266

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Mid twentieth century literary historians like Christopher Hill had identified British radicalism with left wing Puritanism in the seventeenth century, which was recognized as a common ideology shared by many different sects. L. J. Trinterud claimed that:

The radical left-wing Puritan groups, the Fifth Monarchy men, the Levellers, the Diggers, the Baptists, and the other left-wing religious and political groups took the road of radical revolution through the destruction of all old authorities, and a return to the state of nature.267

Christopher Hill similarly identified as radicals:

those who rejected any state church: both separatist sectaries, who opposed a national church on religious principles, and others – Levellers, Diggers, Fifth Monarchists, Ranters, etc. – whose opposition was part of a more general political, social and economic programme.268

Radicalism is thus understood by these historians as a tendency to oppose the government and the state church. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century context the word radicalism has two dimensions, political and religious. The use of the term ‘philosophical radicalism’ only emerged in the nineteenth century, even if it was in the background of Enlightenment political discourse.

Judging from this historiography of seventeenth-century British radicalism, Smart would qualify neither as a political nor as a religious radical in his early classical and later religious poems. But he did get himself and his publisher Newbery into trouble for criticizing government policies in his satires written and performed in the role of Mrs. Mary Midnight. These and other writings (written under various pseudonyms) published in two journals named the *Student* and the *Midwife* might be interpreted as seditious – despite their subtle ambivalence which Chris Mounsey unravels in his biography of Smart. Soon after this, Smart was drawn into in a paper-war with other writers who had provoked him into lampooning them in his literary satires. But as Mounsey observes, Smart disappeared from the London literary scene in the mid 50s, and when he came back after his illness in 1756, his publisher and step-father-in-law Newbery was already contriving ways to get rid of him. There is no evidence to prove that Smart was incarcerated the following year for offending the government. Newbery made a scandal campaign of the infidelity and cruel neglect to which his step-daughter had been subjected by Smart, publishing obscene innuendos about Smart’s alcoholism and homosexuality before he could be ordered to an asylum by a Lunacy Commission. Smart’s internment under the treatment of the progressive psychiatrist Doctor William Battie was ostensibly intended to bring about a permanent cure in his drinking habits.

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270. Chris Mounsey describes the ‘cat-and-mouse game’ (p. 181) of Newbery with Christopher Smart on pp. 179-201. Cf. reference above.
Both Smart and his contemporary poet-satirist Charles Churchill were good friends of the radical politician John Wilkes\textsuperscript{271} who was elected Member of Parliament in 1757, the very year in which Smart was confined at St. Luke’s hospital. In 1763, the year of Smart’s release from Mr. Potter’s asylum, Wilkes was charged with seditious libel for criticizing King George III’s speech in an article of issue 45 of \textit{The North Briton}, meant to remind the reader of the Jacobite Rising of 1745.\textsuperscript{272} His arrest and imprisonment in King’s Bench prison in 1768 prompted a riot and Wilkes was soon restored to his seat by virtue of his parliamentary privilege. Smart, on the other hand, died in 1771 while imprisoned for debt in King’s Bench prison. Despite the popularity that Wilkes continued to enjoy till the end of the 1780s his enthusiasm for civil liberty was often carried to the suspicious point of ‘libertinism’, but Wilkes always professed to remain a constitutional radical and was known for his slogan ‘Join loyalty with liberty.’\textsuperscript{273}

In more general terms, however, English radicalism has also been defined as ‘the attempt, in theory or practice, to subvert the status quo and replace it,

\textsuperscript{271} Smart composed a birthday ode to Wilkes which was performed with music at the Devil Tavern, Temple Bar, in 1769 (the poem is now lost). Karina Williamson, “Christopher Smart – Wikipedia.” See also Mounsey, p. 240, for the Churchill and Wilkes connection, and p. 18, for the comment that Smart ‘took up enthusiastically the Wilkesite cause of liberty and reform.’

\textsuperscript{272} Kathleen Wilson, however, notes a certain revival of civil war political rhetoric by about 1770. The radical Whig followers of John Wilkes, though eschewing enthusiasm, engaged in ‘a sustained effort to reinvent the events of the Civil war and Revolution as part of a legitimate indigenous radical tradition that justified the people’s right to resist tyranny in the present.’ See Kathleen Wilson, \textit{The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p 215, cited in Hawes, “The Utopian Public Sphere,” fn. 10, p. 209, \textit{Enlightenment}.

rather than simply to improve or amend it. Smart may thus be considered a political radical in the more dangerous sense in which the editors of the *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century* describe radicals:

> those who sought fundamental change by striking at the very root of contemporary assumptions and institutions, often in order to revert to what they judged to be the proper historic roots.

Equally, Smart does not fit into the stereotype of the religious radical in terms of his sectarian allegiance. He was never suspected to be a free thinker or a deist – positions which directly challenged the established religion of the Church in any European country. The two dissenting religious sects in Smart’s own time were the Methodists and the Evangelists. In her Introduction to *Jubilate Agno* Karina Williamson observes that Smart remained faithful to the Anglican Church and never showed any inclination for dissent in either Methodist or Evangelist direction. Yet Smart’s primary purpose was to write *Jubilate Agno* as a new Canticle on a grand scale: ‘my MAGNIFICAT,’ Smart calls it (B43). His second purpose was evangelistic: ‘For I preach the very GOSPEL of CHRIST’ (B9). But his evangelism is intensely patriotic:

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the English are the seed of Abraham (B433), St. Paul is the Agent of England (B225), and the Church of England is one of the seven churches of the Revelation (B126).276

Smart also felt that ‘he had a prophetic and apocalyptic mission’ against contemporary philosophy, as Karina Williamson remarks:

He takes upon himself the task of demolishing the false philosophy of his time and replacing it with a theory of the universe that is consonant with the scriptures. If the Old Testament furnished Smart with models for his role as prophet and seer, the New gives him in St. Paul a model of the Christian controversialist: ‘For I…defend the philosophy of the scriptures against vain deceit’, he declares (B130), echoing St. Paul’s words to the Colossians.277

Thus even though Smart’s radicalism is essentially religious it cannot be called either religious radicalism or radical religiosity. And certainly it does not qualify as ‘irreligion’ which, according to Christopher Hill, is the common link of ‘Puritan’ radicalism that he sees as connecting the similar historical patterns of the English, French and Russian Revolutions.278 According to J.F. McGregor and Barry Reay, radical religion during the English Revolution consisted of ‘religious movements and ideas which were fundamentally in conflict with official, institutionalized, established religion and theology’.279 Nigel Smith singled out three distinguishing features of English ‘radical religion’ evident to

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different degrees and in a variety of ways: the ‘rejection of idolatrous “externals’”; ‘the assertion that the believer is made perfect through the freely given grace of God’; the ‘feeling that the gift of the Holy Spirit ... could fall upon any individual’. Going by these criteria, *Jubilate Agno* might almost be identified as a text of radical religion in the seventeenth century tradition – excepting that Smart’s religiosity is distinctly different from that of any seventeenth century devotional poet or radical protestant. However, if the mark of radical patriotism is a desire for suffering and martyrdom, *Jubilate Agno* does carry a strong sense of the poet’s pride and glory in it. As Albert J. Kuhn points out,

More appropriate to the characters, or to the context, are the conceits which image Smart’s martyrdom, his confinement, to which he refers more than once as his “jeopardy.” Like the parading partridge, “who is a prisoner of state and is proud of his keepers,” [B 1] Smart is proud of the authority his Christian name confers upon him in his own confinement: “For I am not without authority in my jeopardy, which I derive inevitably from the glory of the name of the Lord” (B1, 1). No doubt, too, he was remembering his own jeopardy when he has “Savaran bless with the Elephant, who gave his life for his country that he might put on immortality” (A. 80), wherein the reference is to Eleazar, surnamed Savaran, who, in slaying an enemy elephant he thought was the king’s, was himself killed.281

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Puritanism and the Rhetoric of Mania

The most comprehensive discussion so far of Smart’s radicalism is to be found in Clement Hawes’ *Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart*. Following Christopher Hill’s analysis of radical Protestant religious discourse in *The World Turned Upside Down*, Hawes reads the manic rhetoric of Smart’s poetry as representing a voice of ‘alternative modernity,’ related to ‘the process of plebeian struggle at different historical moments,’ which exhibits the following features:

(1) a preoccupation with themes of socio economic resentment; (2) a leveling use of lists and catalogues; (3) an excessive, often blasphemous wordplay; (4) a tendency to blend and thus level incongruous genres; (5) a justification of symbolic transgression, especially in the context of lay preaching, as prophetic behaviour; and (7) imagery of self fortification against persecution and martyrdom. The latter, all too often, is related to actual or threatened incarceration...prison is thus often both a *topos* of martyrdom and an actual place.

Hawes also thinks that the rhetoric of manic enthusiasm in Smart’s religious poetry should be read as a strategy of radical writing handed down by radical Protestant groups like Ranters and Levellers, instead of being viewed as a personal or pathological eccentricity of style.

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282 ‘Smart’s act of utopian imagining in *Jubilate Agno* thus conjures up an apparition seldom entirely welcome in contemporary versions of the history of modernity: the specter, that is, of an alternative modernity.’ Clement Hawes, “The Utopian Public Sphere,” *Enlightenment*, p. 204.

Manic enthusiasm is a particular strategy for speaking and writing with an authority otherwise unavailable to those assigned a lowly social identity. What makes manic writing deviant is not merely “pathology,” as if the subjective crisis it dramatizes were finally merely a matter of individual misfortune. It is, rather, the formal projection of an oppositional, sometimes subversive ideology at the level of the subject: the ideology of the “world turned upside down.”

Hawes applies his hypothesis of manic enthusiasm as a strategy for subversion in the case of Smart by showing how his poetry incorporated elements of Methodist and evangelical belief shaped “from below” – as if he ‘belonged to a social and doxological borderland’:

His plans for radical liturgical reform…; his celebration of street preaching; his interest in congregational hymn singing; his evangelical emphasis on free grace, experiential zeal, and national purification; his belief in witchcraft; his “Bibliolatry”; his fascination with ecstatic dancing; and even his indignant outbursts at social stratification…

Hawes admits that Smart cannot be called a sectarian because he never intended to stray from the Church of England. But although Smart ‘does not voice a fully coherent system of alternative doctrines,’ he has ‘eclectically adopted many elements of an available and durable enthusiastic rhetoric.’ Thus for Hawes the peculiar achievement of Smart in Jubilate Agno is ‘to reopen a dialogue with a subterranean manic counter-discourse that reaches back to seventeenth

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284 Clement Hawes, “‘Howle, you great ones’: enthusiastic subjectivity as class rhetoric,’ Mania and Literary Style, p. 28. As the title of Hawes’ chapter seems to suggest, a code word for manic enthusiasm is ‘Howl,’ as in John Perrot’s imperative: ‘Howle, Howle & wepe, a day of Woe & misery is at hand and the Terrible Arme of the Lord is stretched foorth…’ (quoted as epigraph in Hawes, p. 25).
286 Ibid.
century enthusiastic prophecy.

In the Introduction to his edited volume *Christopher Smart and the Enlightenment* Hawes further explains:

Smart thus positions himself as a scapegoat whose mediating sacrifice opens up a space of redemption for a reader mired in workaday secular concerns. The prophet in his zeal must risk all and assume the stigmatized identity of fool or madman.

Conversely, however, Edward Joseph Katzz suggests that ‘the poet-prophet shapes his verse out of what Alter identifies as a “rhetoric of entrapment”, in which the poet’s listeners are caught up in their guilt.’ But the ‘rhetoric of entrapment’ does not call for a gesture of rejection, even though Williamson notes that ‘Smart aligns himself with Paul’s admonition, in Colossians 2:8 to shun “the tradition of men” and “the rudiments of the world,” in favour of Christ.’ Rather, as Katz sees it,

The poet places himself in a sympathetic relation to his audience: both are imprisoned, though the meaning of this fact may be different for each of them. For Smart, even more than for the prophets of the Old Testament, the rhetoric of entrapment forms the basis for common feeling between the prophet and humankind.

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289 Edward Joseph Katz, “‘Action and Speaking Are One’,” *Christopher Smart and the Enlightenment*, p. 57.
Jubilate Agno is often supposed to be a private spiritual diary, but, as Katz points out, Smart sees himself as ‘the Lord’s News-Writer’ and derives his authority directly from Christ. ‘For I am not without authority in my jeopardy, which I derive inevitably from the glory of the name of the Lord’ (B1). The authority is particularly strong because Christ too was accused of madness: Smart identifies his condition with that of Christ: ‘For I am under the same accusation with my Saviour – for they said, he is besides himself’ (B151) Accused with his Saviour, Smart joins him on the margins.290

‘God’s scribe, in his ecstatic strangeness, exists on the social, cultural and political margins.’ He is prepared to play a sacrificial role: ‘For I have adventured myself in the name of the Lord, and he hath mark’d me for his own.’ (B21) The poet-prophet is willing to ‘be called a fool for the sake of Christ.’ (B51) He knows, moreover, that his desire for spiritual ascent through madness and martyrdom is a matter of ‘policy:’ “I wish to God and desire towards the most High, which is my policy” (B156) 291 M. A. Screech, in his article “Good madness in Christendom,” draws attention to the fact that Christianity itself has been traditionally interpreted as madness, notably in I Corinthians I, where Paul “seems quite prepared to accept that the ‘preaching of the Cross’ should be ‘foolishness’ to them that are perishing – a stumbling block for most of his

290 Ibid.
fellow Jews, ‘and unto Gentiles foolishness’. Screech suggests, however, that Paul goes even further than that and insists that Christianity is ‘the foolishness of God.’

Apart from the ‘fool-for-Christ topos,’ Hawes convincingly identifies in Jubilate Agno many other elements which are akin to the Puritan rhetoric of radical enthusiasm. One enthusiastic topos that Hawes finds in Jubilate Agno, for example, is that of inner illumination. ‘Twice in the Jubilate Smart…insists on the centrality of unmediated revelation, affirming that “ignorance is a sin because illumination is to be had by prayer.”’ (B 421 and C 570)

The same topos appears in Smart’s ‘heavily evangelical translation of Psalm XXXIV:

Illumination beams on all
    That to the Lord aspire:
And, when they to the godhead call,
   Nought can abash them, or appal
     In such a duty and desire.

A second enthusiastic topos that Hawes mentions is Smart’s ‘magnification’: ‘that paradigmatic act of thanksgiving by which Mary celebrated the

annunciation of her destiny.’

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294 Clement Hawes, Mania, pp. 139-142.
295 Clement Hawes, Mania, p. 140.
296 Christopher Smart, Psalm XXXIV cited in Hawes, Mania, p. 140.
Let Jubal rejoice with Caecilia, the woman and the slow-worm praise the name of the Lord.  
For I pray to Lord Jesus to translate my MAGNIFICAT into verse and represent it. (B 43-44)²⁹⁷

According to Hawes, this *topos* serves to “magnify” not only God, but also the dispossessed. The levelling sense of magnification emerges in a ‘potent, possibly blasphemous pun by which Smart names his poem – among other things, a tribute to his feline companion Jeoffry – a “Magnifi-cat”:’

For he is of the Lord’s poor and so indeed is he called by benevolence perpetually – Poor Jeoffry! poor Jeoffry! the rat has bit thy throat. (C740)²⁹⁸

Hawes reads such lines as a dynamics of ‘class struggle without class’ after E. P. Thomson²⁹⁹. But there is an obvious slippage of meaning between the first capitalized ‘Poor’ and its repetition in small letters in the next exclamation, which prevents the reader from making a literal or class-based interpretation of the word and suggests a pun that points to the word’s symbolic meaning as one who is oppressed, and thus belonging to a hierarchical category still lower than the class that may be represented as ‘the Poor’. The clause which then explains why Jeoffry is called ‘poor’ provides a further qualification. Jeoffry is the

²⁹⁷ Christopher Smart, quoted in Hawes, *Mania*, p. 142.  
poorest of the poor because his inferiors are out to destroy him. The final clause might even suggest a bloodthirsty turnaround in those whom Jeffrey has hunted till date, in which case the class signification of the epithet ‘Poor’ shifts to the rat.

Hawes applies a Marxist ideological tool to analyze the following lines as an attempt to ‘wrestle with the enormous gap between Smart’s degraded social position and his aspirations’:

Let Hushim rejoice with the King’s Fisher, who is of royal beauty, tho’ plebeian size.
For in my nature I quested for beauty, but God, God hath sent me to sea for pearls. (D148)

This is how Hawes explains the lines:
Smart finds an apt emblem for social contradictions in the tiny King’s Fisher who is nevertheless of “royal beauty.” Hushim, little more than a name in various Biblical genealogies, is listed in 1 Chronicles 7:12 among “mighty men of valour.” One chain of associations links royalty and Smart’s natural quest for beauty, implying that Smart has suffered an “unnatural” social degradation. God, for his own mysterious reasons, has degraded Smart totally, has sent him out “to sea.”

On another axis of associations, however, Hawes finds that Smart is contrasting his ‘plebeian size’ (to be understood both literally and metaphorically, for he was a short man) with ‘the awful sublimity of his quest for pearls’. While the

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300 Clement Hawes, *Mania*, p. 144.
301 Clement Hawes, *Mania*, pp. 144-145.
images of solitude and sphericity ‘suggest that for Smart the human world is dangerously remote’ Hawes thinks that

Because of this acknowledgement, indeed, the lines about Smart’s quest for the pearl of great price produce the poem’s most convincing image of Smart’s ‘election’.

As Hawes’ explanation remains primarily an analysis of rhetoric it loses sight of the tone of bewilderment in the second half of the last line; instead he assumes that it is an exclamation of superiority or triumphant assertion of Smart’s ‘election.’ The line is deeply ironic because the poet cannot understand why, when he was always given to the pursuit of beauty as an aesthete and a libertine, God should have reclaimed him to be sent out to the sea in search of truths/words that lie too deep for his ken – even if he had once masqueraded as a scholar-poet. Hawes also reads the figure of ‘election’ in the words King’s Fisher as referring to ‘a water bird whose name combines both aristocratic and peasant associations,’ but signifying the ‘alienating unrelatedness’ of ‘a sort of plebeian “fishing” and… a noble quest even more severe than the quest for beauty.’ The meaning of this distinction, as Hawes sees it, is sublimated into a realm of spiritual values where the real King is Christ and the real fishers are disciples, or ‘fishers of men.’ But again this figure must be read along with the image of diving under the sea for pearls (rather than fish), which, as I have

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302 Clement Hawes, Mania, p. 145.
303 Ibid.
tried to show in my earlier reading of Smart’s Seatonian poem *On the Omniscience of the Supreme Being*, is a metaphor for the strange paths of knowledge that open up into the profound humility of unknowing.

Another passage in which Hawes locates a ‘similarly keen pathos of social distance’ and even social resentment is the following:

Let Jemuel rejoice with Charabdrius, who is from the HEIGHT and the sight of him is good for the jaundice. For I look to heaven which is my prospect to escape envy by surmounting it.

Hawes explains:

Charadrius is the golden plover: a bird, according to folklore, which upon being seen by a person ill with jaundice would itself absorb the disease, leaving the person cured. “Jaundice,” which makes one turn yellow, here stands metonymically for envy. The proud gaze of social superiority generates the complementary gaze of jaundiced resentment from the oppressed underdog – and then a hope of triumphant transcendence through looking forwards, through curative “prospects.” Smart links these prospects to the meaning in Hebrew of *Jemuel*, which is “day of God.”

Again Hawes elides the crucial word ‘escape’ – which suggests that it is not just the speaker’s own ‘jaundiced resentment’ that he strives to overcome by looking to heaven, but the envy of those who have infected him with the disease. It is not a triumphant anticipation of the ‘prospects’ of the day of

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Judgement, but a desperate longing to get away from emotional suffering. Also, the word which Smart uses is ‘prospect,’ not ‘prospects.’ Hawes’ use of the term in the plural has a strong connotation of ‘chances’ or ‘financial expectations, especially of success.’ But Smart is looking forward to a cure through the vision of heaven that has been presented to his eye (only in this sense does ‘prospect’ tally with ‘sight’), and the bird itself is a metaphor of Christ whom Smart seeks to imitate by absorbing the envy of others and bringing about their cure – even if as a future, ‘prospective’ possibility.

**Not a rhetoric of mania but a subjectivity of unreason**

In this section I will argue that Smart’s poetics is not entirely strategic or political, as Hawes seems to suggest when he denies Smart a subjectivity of unreason. In his later essay, “The Utopian Public Sphere,” Hawes attributes to Smart ‘elements of quasi-theatrical performance and self-making’ which ‘point to an enlarged understanding of intersubjective dynamics.’ My reading of Smart is that he is desperately struggling to salvage a sense of individual selfhood that is constantly pushed to the margins by the dynamics of intersubjectivity. Ironically, Hawes himself seems to suggest as much in his sensitive analysis of Smart’s coining of the nonce word ‘existimation.’
Let Schlemuel rejoice with Olor, who is of a goodly savour, and the very look of him harmonizes the mind. For my existimation is good even among the slanderers and my memory shall arise for a sweet savour unto the Lord. (B 3)

The word ‘existimation’ is borrowed from Latin existimatio and fuses ‘existence’ with ‘estimation.’ Hawes interprets this word as referring to ‘a self, an “I” seen entirely as an object of discourse,’ and this means, according to Hawes that ‘Smart identifies his living, breathing, embodied self entirely with the words of his own text.’ However, as Hawes points out It is an “I” already viewed, already judged, already estimated, already esteemed. Smart’s “existimation” thus foretells his posthumous translation into aname, a specular or mirrored identity, linked with praise. Smart thus becomes, at the very instant of his writing, what he imagines he will have been to his readers in the future. While the private life is effectively nullified, Smart “existimates” already as an object of public remembrance.305

Hawes consistently ignores the idea of a lost ‘self-esteem’ as the estimation of the self that has to be vindicated to posterity, even though this idea is more prominent in these lines than the wish to be remembered as the author of a memorable work. Moreover, the word ‘existimation’ raises the question of

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existence as distinct from knowledge, which becomes a vital concern of Smart’s radical poetics in *Jubilate Agno*, as I shall argue in the last chapter.

There are two problems about Hawes’ reading of Smart’s rhetoric of mania in *Jubilate Agno*. The first has to do with his assumption that what is unproblematically reflected in Smart’s sympathy with the poor, proletarian and subaltern classes is a “plebeian, heretical ‘third culture’” of the Puritan radical Protestants, as Christopher Hill had suggested. Nicholas McDowell, in his introductory essay to *The English Radical Imagination*, critiques the view that ‘Poor illiterate men turned the world upside down’ which Clement Hawes adopts from Hill. According to Hill:

> Emphasizing ‘reliance on the holy spirit within one, one’s own experienced truth as against traditional truths handed down by others’, the radicals violently rejected the notion that a university education and a facility in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew conferred superior spiritual knowledge upon a separate clerical caste.

> In *The World turned Upside Down* (1972) Hill talks about the lowly intellectual background of the radicals of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. Hill sees radical ideas and writings as an expression of a popular culture that evolved outside the institutional educational and cultural structures of early modern England.

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Mc. Dowell shows in his book that ‘many of those who made important contributions to the extraordinary radical ferment of these years possessed a considerable degree of formal education’ and that the radical rhetoric of Puritanism developed not so much by an opposition as by an interaction between popular and educated cultures.\(^\text{309}\) In the case of Smart, the situation is further complicated by Smart’s repeated references to his role as a translator and a scholar of God.

In the previous section I have tried to show that if Smart has been largely acclaimed as a religious poet, it can hardly be construed as an injustice to him because that is how he wanted to be remembered in history. On the whole, Smart follows Anglican conventions of prayer in his poetry. But this does not mean that Smart was not also a product of Enlightenment scepticism. Rosalind Powell suggests that Smart wrote *Jubilate Agno* as a possible substitute for part of the traditional Anglican liturgy, in a language comparable with the *Book of Common Prayer*, to strike a balance between public and private modes of communication and address a communal need for Prayer in a universal language.\(^\text{310}\) Powell refers to Hartman’s reading of *Jubilate Agno* as a “Magnificat”, which leads him to an assessment of the poet as ‘critical rather than crazy’ (p. 437) and to unearthing two sources of difficulty in the text’s

\(^{309}\) McDowell, ‘‘Illiterate Mechanick Persons’’, pp. 5, 8.

representation of religion – the ineffability of God and the limitation of
language.\textsuperscript{311} But \textit{Jubilate Agno} also follows the tradition of the Benedicite.

Smart found the source of his universal language in nature and sought to
communicate in his native English tongue ‘the voice of God direct in verse and
musick (B271)’ -- as individually and collectively uttered by ‘Nations, and
languages, and every Creature, in which is the breath of Life.’

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’,\textsuperscript{8} the focus is on God’s power as creator.\textsuperscript{312}

Smart’s perception of his vocation as a tremendous task of translation
based on the comparison and compilation of ‘the original’ Word of God from a
Babel of tongues is comparable to the aims of one of the greatest scholarly
enterprises of the seventeenth century – as explained in the full title of the \textit{King
James Authorized Version of the Bible}:

\textsuperscript{311} Rosalind Powell, “Liturgy Translated,” p. 2.
\textsuperscript{312} Rosalind Powell, “Liturgy Translated,” p. 4.
"THE HOLY BIBLE, Containing the Old Testament, AND THE NEW: Newly Translated out of the Original tongues: & with the former Translations diligently compared and revised, by his Majesties special Commandment". 313

The opening stanza of *Jubilate Agno* refers back to that scholarly mission as much as it echoes Psalm 100 in its exhortation to Thanksgiving:

Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands
Serve the LORD with gladness:
come before his presence with singing.
Know ye that the LORD he is God:
   *it is* he *that* hath made us, and not we ourselves;
   *we are* his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter into his gates with thanksgiving,
   *and* into his courts with praise:
   be thankful unto him, *and* bless his name.
For the LORD is good;
   his mercy is everlasting;
   and his truth *endureth* to all generations. 314

Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues; give the glory to the Lord, and the Lamb, Nations, and languages, and every Creatures, in which is the breath of Life.
Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together. 315

In neither case does *Jubilate Agno* present itself as a critique or a travesty of the ‘original.’ As many critics have noted, the audacity of Smart’s madness lies in his taking his task entirely seriously. Just as the *Authorized Version* was expected to replace the Vulgate and curb the popularity of Wycliff’s fifteenth

314 “Psalm 100- KJV – Online Bible Studies” at http://www.biblestudytools.com/kjv/psalms/100.html
century translation which was used by the Lollards and still secretly read by Puritans in the seventeenth century, Smart’s poem was undertaken as the audacious venture (or ‘adventure’, as he calls it) of achieving a more comprehensive and inclusive compilation of the ‘Original tongues’ of all living creatures – and not simply men. Smart is also more alive than the Bible translators to the complexity of his task. In *Jubilate Agno*:

> 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.  

At the level of addressing his contemporary reader,

> 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.  

But Smart is faced with a more radical task than simply the translation of scriptural texts. He is attempting to clearly and correctly translate the language of God from the language of nature. Therefore, as Harriet Guest says:

> 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.

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At still another level the ‘scribe-evangelist’ also knows that he must limit himself by the traditional authority of the scriptures:

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.319

Smart alludes to all these problems in Jubilate Agno, showing an unusual self-consciousness about the limits of his radical aims as a religious poet.

The second problem with Hawes’ reading of Smart’s rhetoric of mania is his unwillingness to recognize the individual voice of madness in Smart’s religious poetry, which, however typical or inspired by a collective sense of suffering, does place its ultimate faith on the possibility of individual redemption. Hawes is determined to limit himself to a discussion of Smart’s madness as a radical ‘strategy.’ As he makes it quite clear in a subsequent essay,

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Hawes does not subscribe to the ‘altered’ or ‘transformed subjectivity’ reading of Smart’s personal conversion but thinks that ‘it is, rather, an alternative intersubjectivity that motivated his sublime rhetoric.’ Hawes agrees with Chris Mounsey and Marcus Walsh in concluding that ‘Smart’s crisis was not merely personal’ – that he had ‘implicitly associated himself with tendencies within the Church some of which were, to more conservative men, at best suspicious, at worst positively dangerous.’ Mounsey discusses how Smart’s adherence to more conservative Anglican beliefs in the Seatonian Prize poems had gradually given way to an expression of Stukeley’s less orthodox and more controversial views, which might be interpreted as a sign of his deviancy from the official Anglican position. Smart’s subscription to Anglican beliefs will be discussed in the next section, but this thesis argues that the radical content of Smart’s religious poetry can only be differentiated in its ‘madness’ not because it is expressed in a rhetoric of mania or carries the effect of certain religious or political affiliations, but because it bears the imprint of a state of mind that had been radically othered by the discourse of reason.

Clement Hawes does point out that in the case of Smart all the tropes of Puritan manic rhetoric that he deploys are overshadowed by his protest against

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320 Clement Hawes, “The Utopian Public Sphere,” p. 208.
321 Clement Hawes, Mania and Literary Style, p. 139.
323 Chris Mounsey, Christopher Smart: Clown of God, pp. 176, 214.
the practice of administrative incarceration. According to Hawes it is not just a protest against Smart’s own stigmatization, confinement and isolation, however, but ‘a historical antagonism’ to ‘bourgeois disciplinary control’ that becomes meaningful by ‘entering into a dialogue with the language of plebeian martyrdom and revolt,’\textsuperscript{324} In the following lines, for example, Smart might be seen as praying for a reform of attitude to lunatics and the treatment they are meted out in the houses of confinement:

For I pray the Lord JESUS that cured the LUNATICK to be merciful to all my brethren and sisters in these houses.
For they work me with their harp-irons, which is a barbarous instrument, because I am more unguarded than others. (B123-124)\textsuperscript{325}

The harp-iron, as Karina Williamson’s note reveals, was described by Alexander Cruden in his account of his experiences twenty years earlier in the following words:

‘if the Prisoners in the Madhouse refuse to take what is ordered them, there is a terrible instrument put into their mouths to hold down their tongues, and to force the physic down their throats,’\textsuperscript{326}

Katz shows how two arguments are conflated in this one rhetorical operation:

\textsuperscript{324} Clement Hawes, \textit{Mania and Literary Style}, pp. 20-21.
first, the prophet stands out against the others in the strangeness of his knowledge about the world; and second, in his reference to the technology of the madhouse, he opposes the modern world generally and applied science in particular, which are both characterized as barbaric.\textsuperscript{327}

The greatest significance of these lines as far as this thesis is concerned, however, is that Smart claims a kinship with the lunaticks that he does not directly claim with the Poor, for his only hope is the saving grace of Christ. A few lines later, Smart goes on to bless the Magdalen House, an asylum for prostitutes in Goodman’s Fields, London, which was opened in 1758: ‘For I pray Almighty CHRIST to bless the MAGDALEN HOUSE and to forward a National purification (B 128).’ The themes of the healing of the lunatic and the purification of the prostitute thus become integrally connected in Smart’s prayer.

As Chris Mounsey discusses in his biography of Smart, the first public debate in the history of modern psychiatry between Dr. John Monroe and Dr. James Battie took place during the years of Smart’s confinement. Smart’s release on 31\textsuperscript{st} January, 1763, was primarily effected through the intervention of lunacy law reformer John Sherratt\textsuperscript{328} rather than due to the professional differences between the psychiatrists – which culminated in a parliamentary committee being set up in 1762 for investigating the charges of malpractice.

\textsuperscript{327} Edward Joseph Katz, “‘Action and Speaking Are One’,” \textit{Christopher Smart and the Enlightenment}, p. 56.

\textsuperscript{328} Chris Mounsey, ‘Politics… would have been impotent but for the provision of information on abuses in madhouses and the direct intervention of John Sherratt.’ \textit{Christopher Smart: Clown of God}, p. 240.
brought against both of them. Sherratt had learned of the abuses in private madhouses from his business partner Robert Turlington, and brought direct evidence before the parliamentary committee looking into ‘1st, The Manner of admitting Persons into houses, now kept for the reception of Lunatics: and 2dly, The Treatment of them, during their Confinement.’

Monroe, the conservative mad-doctor whose family held a monopoly of authority over Bethlem Hospital (Bedlam) since the time of his father, was well known for his belief in the incurability of madness and his endorsement of conventional methods of physical ‘management’ (like bleeding, purging, vomiting, bathing) over medicine or therapeutic advancement. Battie, under whose treatment Smart was placed, had a reputation for progressive methods of treatment and was admired for his view that some forms of madness were curable. The diagnosis of Smart’s madness, however, was changed from curable to incurable by Battie within a year after his admission to St. Luke’s Hospital, following which he was shifted to Mr. Potter’s private asylum where he remained under the supervision of Battie. Accusations were brought to the parliamentary committee against both Monroe and Battie for issuing affidavits which testified to the insanity of patients who were later adjudged sane. Both were found to be keepers of private madhouses and accused of mercenary motives rather than humane concerns in advocating confinement to their patients. In the course of the

329 See Mounsey, *Christopher Smart: Clown of God*, p. 242 for a discussion of how the two witnesses were set against each other over these two matters of investigation.
investigation, the committee made sure that abuses which had occurred till then would cease, and Smart’s release was engineered by Sherratt three days after the committee submitted its report.\textsuperscript{330}

Curiously, if Smart represents persecution and confinement as a \textit{topos} of martyrdom like his seventeenth century predecessors,\textsuperscript{331} he also suggests that it is desired by him as early as the first Seatonian Prize poem, \textit{On the Eternity of the Supreme Being} (1750):

\begin{quote}

Purge thou my heart, Omnipotent and Good  
Purge thou my heart with hyssop, lest like Cam  
I offer fruitless sacrifice, with gifts  
Offend, and not propitiate the Ador'd.  
Tho' gratitude were bless'd with all the pow'rs  
Her bursting heart cou'd long for, tho' the swift,  
The firey-wmg'd imagination soar'd  
Beyond ambition's wish—yet all were vain  
To speak Him as he is, who is INEFFABLE.  
Yet still let reason thro' the eye of faith  
View him with fearful love; let truth pronounce,  
And adoration on her bended knee  
With heav'n directed hands confess His reign…  

\textsuperscript{332}

\end{quote}

As Emanuel Swedenborg’s gloss on the Biblical significance of ‘hyssop’ tells us, ‘to be purged with hyssop and made clean’ denotes external purification

\textsuperscript{330} Mounsey, \textit{Christopher Smart: Clown of God}, p. 243.  
\textsuperscript{331} Clement Hawes, Mania and Literary Style, pp. 158-159.  
in Psalm 51:7: ‘Thou shalt purge me with hyssop, and I shall become clean; Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.’

That "hyssop" denotes external truth as a means of purification, is because all spiritual purification is effected by means of truths. For the earthly and worldly loves from which man is to be purified, are not recognized except by means of truths, and when these are insinuated by the Lord, there is also insinuated at the same time horror for these loves as for things unclean and damnable, the effect of which is that when anything of the kind flows into the thought, this feeling of horror returns, and consequently aversion for such things.

Hyssop was employed in cleansings and ‘signified purifications from falsities and evils, as in the cleansing of the leprosy, in Moses’:

The priest shall take for the leper that is to be cleansed two living clean birds, and cedar wood, and scarlet and hyssop, and shall dip them in the blood of the bird that was killed, and he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed (Lev. 14:4-7);

and similarly ‘in the cleansing of a house, if the leprosy be in it’ (Lev. 14:49-51), says Swedenborg. The substitution, in the seventeenth century, of leprosy with madness as a symptom of moral evil to be purged is noted by Foucault in *Madness and Civilization*, where he observes that the old lazars houses of Europe were turned into early sites of confinement. It is not

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335 Ibid.
336 Ibid.
impossible to read in Smart’s use of this image in his earliest poem on a religious subject an incipient trace of guilt about his own habits of intemperance.

**Non-juring Anglicanism and Radical Orthodoxy**

Chris Mounsey suggests that between 1753 and 1755, during which time Smart’s whereabouts cannot be traced, Smart underwent a religious conversion from the beliefs of High Anglican orthodoxy as represented by Thomas Seaton to ‘a non-juring Anglican morality of salvation through good works’ that was upheld by William Stukeley.337 Mounsey thinks that Smart’s views on earthquakes in On the Power of the Supreme Being ‘show a marked shift from Seaton’s doctrine of quietude to a desire for self-improvement and good works whereby salvation may be assured.’338 Seaton’s anti-Catholic hymn on the earthquake blamed the frequency of these disasters in Italy on its unreformed religion, but Smart – writing after the earthquakes of London in 1750 – warns English people that they must change their ways:

O spare us still,  
Nor send us more dire conviction: we confess  
That thou art He, th’Almighty: we believe.339

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337 Chris Mounsey, Christopher Smart: Clown of God, pp. 172-179.  
338 Chris Mounsey, Christopher Smart: Clown of God, p. 172.  
339 See Chris Mounsey, Christopher Smart: Clown of God, pp. 173-175, for a detailed analysis of the poem.
Stukeley believed that the new scientific ideas were appropriate means of exploring the secondary causes of natural disasters rather than primary theological causes. ‘For Stukeley, the primary cause of the three earthquakes around London was God’s pointing to the den of iniquity that was England’s capital.’ He urged the Christian philosopher to investigate not only the material causes, but to regard the moral use of them: Do we look only at the second causes with our unbelievers; and sport away the divine presence. As if it was an ordinary occurrence every day…In vain will the philosophers seek for a solution of this problem, in natural causes only.340

Smart’s shift from Seaton’s position towards Stukeley’s may be seen more clearly and completely with respect to their views on animals341 which will be discussed in the next Chapter.

The non-juring Anglicanism which Stukeley represented had been associated with Toryism and Jacobite political leanings since the non-jurors formed their own faction within the Anglican Church over the issue of opposing William of Orange’s claim to the British throne. Smart’s conversion, after his release from the asylum, from his early Toryism to a Wilkesite radical politics of expanding the electorate is therefore not as surprising as it has appeared to some. Thomas Lathbury writes in the Introduction to his book History of the Nonjurors: Their Controversies and Writings, with Remarks on Some of the Rubrics in the Book of Common Prayer, published in London by Pickering in 1845:

341 Chris Mounsey, Christopher Smart: Clown of God, p. 179.
The history of the schism in the Church of England, occasioned by the Revolution of 1688, constitutes one of the most interesting chapters in our Ecclesiastical Annals. The views and proceedings of the Nonjurors, from their origin as a party to their extinction, must be contemplated with much interest by members of the Church of England. Few persons are aware how much of the cause of religion, as well as of Sacred Literature, was indebted, during the last century, to the exertions of the Nonjurors, who, when they were excluded from the National Church by their scruples respecting the oaths, devoted themselves to useful and laborious study. Whatever we may think of their views, we cannot deny, that they suffered much for conscience' sake, and that they generally suffered with meekness and in silence, not parading their wrongs, whether real or imaginary, before the public, as was the case with the Nonconformists subsequent to the year 1662.  

The non-jurors initially used the standard Book of Common Prayer, but, as they were no longer subject to the same restrictions of Parliament as was the Church of England, some, aided by then-recent scholarship, devised new liturgies. The non-jurors were willing to suffer both poverty and persecution for their cause and their liturgy often dwelt on the rites of sacrifice. n 1734 a group of Separatist non-jurors ‘departed altogether from the Liturgy of the Church of England, and adopted a new Book of Common Prayer.’ After 1733, says Lathbury, their services were conducted in accordance with a book of devotions published by the Separatist leader Deacon in 1734, which was titled "The Holy Liturgy: or, the Form of Offering the Sacrifice, and of Administering the Sacrifice of the Eucharist." The new Communion Office was ‘founded on that

of King Edward's *First* Book, A. D. 1549, in which the particular practices,
comprehended under the general term *Usages*, were retained.’

The *Usages* were four, namely, *mixing water with the wine*, Prayer for the Dead, the Prayer for the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Elements, and the Oblatory Prayer. They were not however placed in precisely the same order in which they stood in King Edward's First Book. By this new form, therefore, the Holy Communion was celebrated by Collier's party, after the year 1718, and by all the regular body, subsequent to the union in 1733, until they became extinct.

Two distinct tenets of the non-jurors as advocated in the new texts appear to be a) a doctrine of suffering martyrdom or persecution in silence and b) the belief that on the Last Day of Judgement they will be reinstated to their deserved positions on the right-hand side of God.

The Prayer is restored as follows: "We commend unto thy mercy, O Lord, all thy servants, who are departed with the sign of faith, and now do rest in the sleep of peace: Grant unto them, we beseech thee, thy mercy and everlasting peace: and that at the day of the general resurrection, we and all they, who are of the mystical body of thy Son, may all together be set on his right hand.”

In Smart’s *Jubilate Agno*, however, the sacrificial rites of the Eucharist are subordinated to its sacramental significance. John Orens, in his article “Liberating Orthodoxy: The Adventure of Anglo-Catholicism”, discusses how the words to be uttered during the Eucharist were changed from the first Book of Common Prayer (1549) to the Elizabethan Prayer Book (1559):

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343 All quotations above are from Thomas Lathbury, “Chapter XI: Offices of the Nonjurors,” History of the Nonjurors, quoted in “Description of the Liturgies of the Nonjurors” at http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Lathbury.htm#a
In the first Book of Common Prayer, published in 1549 when the Protestant ascendancy was not yet complete, those words implied that Christ was truly present in the sacrament. As he gave the people the consecrated bread, the priest was to say: “The body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life.” In 1552 those words were replaced by the beautiful but sacramentally denuded exhortation: “Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving.” The Elizabethan Prayer Book of 1559 resolved the disagreement between these two radically different theologies by joining one sentence to the other, leaving the priest breathless as he recited, “The body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee and feed on him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving.”

Since the time of Richard Hooker, proto-Catholics had emphasized the significance of prayers over theological discourse and the belief in the sacrament as a divine mystery of ‘shared participation in Christ’ rather than a matter of opinions. Hooker himself had felt very strongly about the belief in the efficacy of prayer:

“Let me die,” he exclaimed, “if ever it be proved that simply an error doth exclude from hope of life. If it be an error to think that God may be merciful to save men when they err, my greatest comfort is my error.”

Orens identifies five defining characteristics of the Anglo-Catholic tendency in the seventeenth century which continued into the eighteenth:

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1. A reluctance to define the truth too narrowly. This is not because the truth is unimportant, but because it is too large for us to grasp. However much we know, there is always more that we do not.

2. An emphasis on worship rather than academic theology. To put it another way, it is the understanding that worship is the soil from which doctrine springs and provides the context in which it must be interpreted.

3. Sacramental mysticism. By this I mean the conviction that what we receive from worship and what is conveyed to us in the sacraments is not a metaphysical theory or moral lesson. Rather, it is nothing less than our mutual participation in God himself.

4. Reverence for the Church and for its unity. The Puritans of Hooker’s day, like many Protestants, saw the Church as a gathered society of believers. For Hooker, on the other hand, the Church was not an assembly of the like-minded or the right-minded, but a sacred organism, and thus it was neither ours to make nor ours to break. A few decades later, Jeremy Taylor explained this in words that have lost none of their power. “It is not the differing opinions that is the cause of our present ruptures,” he wrote, “but want of charity; it is not the variety of understandings, but the disunion of wills and affections; it is not the several principles, but the several ends, that cause our miseries…we, by this time, are come to that pass, we think we love not God except we hate our brother, and we have not the virtue of religion, unless we persecute all religions but our own.”

5. A communitarian ethos. From Hooker on, Catholic-minded Anglicans have been aware that just as we are embedded in the community of faith, so we are embedded in the community of the world, the community of our fellow human beings who, like us, bear the image of God.  

Puritan ideology, following Luther, was opposed to both the ritual of the magical Mass and the medieval doctrine of salvation based on worksrigheteousness. The maxim followed by The Book of Common Prayer was ‘the Latin tag, Lex orandi, lex credendi, the rule of praying is the law of

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believing. Indeed, as Lori Branch points out in her book *Rituals of Spontaneity*, Puritan Reformers developed an ‘ideology of spontaneity’ based on the practice of free prayer as a mode of inward communion between the Spirit and the individual soul. Branch also notes a contradiction in the eighteenth century ideology of spontaneity which encouraged creative expression while devaluing religious feelings, and reads Smart’s case as a demonstration of this contradiction.

Notoriously sent to an asylum for his practice of spontaneous prayer, Smart’s own experience demonstrates the inner contradictions of the culture formed by the ideology of spontaneity. When Smart recovered from his strange illness and came back as a writer to the London scene,

Newbery and Anna Maria were relieved that their friend Samuel Johnson could quit covering for him in The Universal Visiter, and Newbery quickly made plans for Smart to finish his long promised collection of verse fables. But Smart refused. He refused to honour his other journalistic commitments as well, writing nothing that was not directly “for THEE and THEE alone.” By every account, Smart began to take seriously St. Paul’s exhortation in the Epistle to the Philippians to “Pray without ceasing” and cultivated attention to the desire to pray, which, as Hester Thrale Piozzi told it, “he held it as a duty not to control or repress.”

Piozzi added further that once

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the Idea struck him that every Time he thought of praying, resistance against yt divine Impulse (as he conceived it) was a Crime; he knelt down in the Streets & the Assembly rooms, & wherever he was when the Thought crossd his Mind – and this indecorous Conduct obliged his Friends to place him in a Confinement.350

The most memorable observation of the contradiction between the dominant social value of religion and Smart’s eccentric habits of prayer was made by Dr. Johnson:

Madness frequently discovers itself merely by unnecessary deviation from the usual modes of the world. My poor friend Smart shewed the disturbance of his mind, by falling upon his knees, and saying his prayers in the street, or in any other unusual place. Now, although, rationally speaking, it is greater madness not to pray at all, than to pray as Smart did, I am afraid there are so many who do not pray, that their understanding is not called into question…I did not think he ought to be shut up. His infirmities were not noxious to society. He insisted on people praying with him; and I’d as lief pray with Kit Smart as with anyone else. Another charge was, that he did not love clean linen, and I have no passion for it.351

Thomas Keymer observes that in Smart’s own writings of the 1760s ‘the category of madness is insistently relativized, and made to seem little more than the invention of a society strategically concerned to discredit all utterance or conduct that threatens its interests and norms.’

350 Hester Thrale Piozzi quoted in Lori Branch, Rituals, p. 158
351 Samuel Johnson quoted in Lori Branch, Rituals, pp. 158-159.
Modifying the third commandment, he forbids such arbitrary strategies in *A Song to David*: “Thou shalt not call thy brother fool.” In Jubilale Agno he aligns himself with Christ, for whom he is “willing to be called a fool” (B 51), in suffering the same hostile interpretation of his challenge to conventional decorums: “For I am under the same accusation with my Saviour – for they said, he is besides himself” (B 151). Looking forward to a time in which the habits of prayer for which he was confined (“For I blessed God in St. Jammes’s Park till I routed all the company” B 89) will themselves be normative, and in which the deviant will be those who neglect to pray, he strongly implies a notion of madness as time-bound and socially constructed: “For I prophecy that the praise of God will be in every man’s mouth in the Publick streets” (C 62).

**The association of conservatism with religion-as-madness**

Mario Caricchio, in his essay “Radicalism and the English Revolution,” suggests that from the point of view of the 1980s historians who agreed with Christopher Hill’s general thesis that ‘an undoubted religious radicalism did exist during the revolution’, this radicalism was increasingly ‘reduced to a catalyst of conservative forces.’[1]

It survived on the plane of expression: studies on radicalism progressively took the shape of studies about radical religion and the radical word. As an epigraph to this process, we could choose Nigel Smith’s assertion that “by the summer of 1660 the revolution was lost, but literature had triumphed”.[2] Winstanley, Walwyn, Coppe, not so much at ease in the political world of the British multiple kingdoms context, entered into the English literary canon. Even if “revolution” had become tremendously old-fashioned among English-speaking historians – as one reviewer has recently written – it cannot be denied that the poetry and the prose of the period “by any fair comparison with what came before and what came after” were “either revolutionary or at least radical”.[3]

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<http://www.cromohs.unifi.it/seminari/caricchio_radicalism.html>
English literature thus began to be seen in the late twentieth century as the archival repository of the history of Puritan radicalism, and it was no longer read as progressivist but as a turn towards conservatism.

This curious overlapping of radicalism and conservatism in the eighteenth century is often missed out because the second half of the century has passed into history as the beginning of the Age of Revolutions. As a result, the Counter-enlightenment writers of eighteenth and nineteenth century who called into question Enlightenment ideals of secularism and progress are indiscriminately regarded as ideologues of conservatism even though their criticism had a radical content that needs to be differentiated from the established doctrine of the church. Introducing the concept of ‘Radical Orthodoxy’ in their book *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, the editors John Milbank, Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock observe that the great Christian critics of the Enlightenment—Christopher Smart, Hamann, Jacobi, Kierkegaard, Péguy, Chesterton and others—in different ways saw that what secularity had most ruined and actually denied were the very things it apparently celebrated: embodied life, self-expression, sexuality, aesthetic experience, human political community. Their contention, taken up in this volume, was that only transcendence, which ‘suspends’ these things in the sense of interrupting them, ‘suspends’ them also in the other sense of upholding their relative worth over—against the void. Such radicalism indeed refuses the secular, but at the same time
it does ‘re-envision’ a Christianity which never sufficiently valued the mediating participatory sphere which alone can lead us to God. 354

Unlike radical activism, Smart’s religious poetry carries the imprint of a passive and receptive mental process that he wishes to express as the ecstatic experience of madness. It is also, perhaps, a crucial difference between devotional and religious poetry. According to Professor Raymond Chapman, the poetry of Anglican Devotion is essentially devotional, and different from religious poetry because, 'It is created from an active state of mind and spirit, deeply feeling the presence of God, seeking to come closer to Him through words.' 355 But Smart’s religious poetry articulates his joy at being a passive recipient of the plethora of images that constitute God’s creation. As Smart wrote in one of his last hymns:

I speak for all – for them that fly,
And for the race that swim;
For all that dwell in moist and dry,
Beasts, reptiles, flow’rs and gems to vie
When gratitude begins her hymn. 356

In this poem Smart is not simply thanking God for the world's plenty; the world itself is thanking the divine for its very existence.

Finally, as Elias Mandel notes in “Christopher Smart: Scholar of the Lord,” Smart’s religious poetry is ‘metaphysical’ in a different sense than seventeenth century devotional poetry in that it deals with ‘the nature of existence and knowledge’ as a central thematic of the Enlightenment philosophy of Nature.

When, for example, Lowth speaks of an imitation of the human mind, he is not referring to the imitation of human actions which is the principle of the Aristotelian mimesis but of the psychological revelation in poetry of praise of God. Such poetry is metaphysical in the sense that it is concerned with the nature of existence and of human knowledge.357

It is also a way of dealing with a deep existential anxiety about religious thought:

Ernst Cassirer points to the significance of religious thought in the age of the Enlightenment. "It is doubtful", he writes, "if ... we can consider the Enlightenment as an age basically irreligious and inimical to religion. For such a view runs the risk of overlooking precisely the highest positive achievements of the period," He adds:

All apparent opposition to religion which we meet in this age should not blind us to the fact that all intellectual problems are fused with religious problems, and that the former find their constant and deepest inspiration in the latter, "45

It is in a situation such as this that attention turns, as in the criticism of the period, from interpretation of the rules of a system to the foundations of the system:

The more insufficient one finds previous religious answers to basic questions of knowledge and morality, the more intensive and passionate become these questions themselves. The controversy from now on is no longer concerned with particular religious dogmas and their interpretation, but with the nature of religious certainty; it no longer deals with what is merely believed, but with the nature, tendency, and function of belief as such. Thus … the fundamental objective is not the dissolution of religion, but its ‘transcendental’ justification and foundation. 46

When Questions become intensive and passionate they become the material of poetry. The nature of religious certainty is thus in this period a question for poetry, and the poetic answer is not a rejection of the implications of precise thought but an impassioned involvement in the problems of such thought.358

This concern about the metaphysical dimensions of human knowledge, or what Francis Bacon had called First Philosophy in *The Advancement of Learning* and Descartes had semiotically alluded to in the title of his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, was relegated to the background in the Enlightenment discourse of scientific reason, and provides the substratum of Smart’s poetry of madness.

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