Pearls of Great Price:

Madness and Meaning

in

*Jubilate Agno*

by

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Let us attempt to reconstruct the scene.

Perhaps the precipitating event took place in St. James’s Park. St. James’s Park: a popular public place in mid-eighteenth-century London, a place of cautious social transaction among citizens of a city of strangers.

In the middle decades of the century, walking and riding in the park—especially

St. James’s Park—became a daily experience for large numbers of Londoners.1

Here Londoners expressed “their passion for the ‘promenade,’ the mixture of classes which was so strangely tolerated.”2

In both London and Paris, strangers meeting in the parks…might without embarrassment speak to each other. In the 1740’s it was in good taste for all classes of men to make the pantomime motion of tipping their hats to an unknown woman in order to indicate the wish to speak to her.3

Even the King might graciously wave, as he rode by in his carriage, to a distinguished commoner like the young Wolfgang Mozart. But what was most characteristic about such spontaneous encounters was that they were haphazard and fleeting.4 The eighteenth century experience a progressive separation of public and private modes of life in major European cities like Paris and London. The crystallization of the commodity structure of capitalism in this era entailed a certain ossification of public social transaction. After all, as Marx writes, people under capitalism become merely the representatives of the commodities they bring to the marketplace. In addition, displaced peasant, the future urban proletariat of the industrial era, were flowing into London in huge and ever-increasing numbers. Form roughly 1650 to 1750, the population of London more than doubled in size, to about 750,000. It came to be almost a definition of London that it was a place “where strangers were likely to meet.”5 A semiotics of public behavior was required to counteract the centrifugal forces driving the private from the public sphere. One manifestation of the widening gap between public and private realms in this era (and of the strange accommodations it inspired) appeared in the relations between political enemies like Wilkes and Johnson, who in their public polemics wore masks of vituperation, but whose private relations (once Boswell manipulated Johnson into dining with Wilkes) were cordial. Another manifestation was the code of etiquette prevailing in St. James’s Park.

One day (or perhaps on several days) Christopher Smart, among a crowd of highly reserved strangers, falls to his knees and begins to pray. Loudly. Perhaps he even importunes passersby to join him in praising the Lord. “For I blessed God in St. James’s Park till I routed all the company.” (*Jubilate Agno*, B1, 89)6 Embarrassment, confusion and indignation among the passersby. Perhaps the police are called: “For the officers of the peace are at variance with me, and the watchman smites me with his staff. (81,90) What Smart has committed is not a crime, but something as bad, or worse: a breach of etiquette. To breach etiquette is to sin against a careful propriety, a fraught balance, a social, not just a Cartesian dualism: Smart has intruded the private into the public realm. He is taken to the police station. Family and friends are summoned. Smart, perhaps in shock or hysterics, is led away to St. Luke’s Hospital. So begins his jeopardy, his hazard, his adventure. A premature, pre-Romantic quest-romance? Perhaps.

But perhaps it didn’t happen that way at all. At any rate there were signs of imminent crack-up before 1756 (the year in which Smart was confined for the first time). There had been similar scenes before, in public and private, on the streets and among family and friends. There had been alcoholic drinking, stress from overwork, respiratory ailments, delirium (“my mind lay open to the powers of night”). When did the crack begin to form?

It is impossible to say. What is certain is that the crack or fissure formed under a combination of exterior and interior forces. The manic pace of Grub Street literary life, the constant stress of attack and counter-attack (parrying, in print, such adversaries as Hill and Kenrick) formed the exterior coordinate; inside his body alcohol traces its effects on the liver and infused its poison through the veins. Insurrection in the internal organs, noise and strife at home and in the office. And along the frontier between these internal and external stresses, keeping pace with them: the silent fissure. Gilles Deleuze writes concerning the crack-up of another alcoholic, manic-depressive author (Fitzgerald):

Certainly, many things happened, both on the exterior and in the interior: the war, the stock market crash, a certain aging, depression, illness, loss of talent. But all these noisy accidents had their effects immediately; they would not have been sufficient by themselves if they hadn’t hollowed out and deepened something of an entirely different nature, something which, on the contrary, is only revealed by these accidents at a distance and when it is too late: the silent fissure (*la fêlure silencieuse*)…. There was [in Fitzgerald’s life) a silent, imperceptible fissure on the surface, a unique surface Event suspended as it were over itself, floating over itself, flying over its own area. The real difference is not between interior and exterior. The fissure is neither interior nor exterior; it exists at the frontier, imperceptible, incorporeal, ideal…everything that happens noisily happens on the border of the fissure and would be nothing without it. Inversely, it is only under the impact of what happens that the fissure follows its silent path… Until the moment when these two, noise and silence, are closely and continuously wed, in the crackle and explosion of the end that now signifies that the play of the fissure is incarnated in its entirety in the depths of the body….7

Fitzgerald’s crack-up led to *The Crack-up*; profound disruption of body and mind had a unique counterpart in Fitzgerald’s language: a small masterpiece resulted.

In the depths of his body, in the depths of his brain, Smart’s crack-up also finally incarnated itself. From this crack-up too a unique and powerfully original work of literature resulted. In Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in Their Day Browning wrote of Smart: “…the ground gave way beneath his feet.” If Browning was wrong in considering *The Song to David* a mad poem, he was right about the poem he never saw: *Jubilate Agno*. In *The Song to David*, for all its manic instability of tone, discontinuity, and occasionally a-syntactical trains of association, Smart has already regained the surface. But in *Jubilate Agno* we have a unique piece of writing, partly a clinical document, partly a diary, partly a poem, partly an experiment in language theory—a production incommensurable with anything previous to or contemporary with it. The first example (outside the poetic passages in the King James Bible) of free verse (anticipating with its long line the loose prosody of Blake and Whitman), *Jubilate Agno* skips past the Romantics to modernity I more important ways. An age that has renounced the dream of absolute closure cannot but relish the very raggedness and open-endedness of this production. The quarry is more interesting than the polished block of marble. An age in which a harrowingly large percentage of the best writers have been alcoholic, drugged, mad, suicidal or simply isolated and alienated recognizes in *Jubilate Agno* a direct literary ancestor.

The Smart who wrote *Jubilate Agno* did not know how mad, how alienated, how tragic he was. Or rather he warded off the exterior facts of isolation and the interior facts of depression as fiercely as possible, through the repetitive, incantatory labor of the form in which he wrote, and the manic, insomniac vigilance of his verbal associations. Sitting in his cell, destitute of family and birthright, a curiosity to the public, he nevertheless proclaimed himself a prophet, “the restorer of ADORATION among English men,” and dreamed up schemes of liturgical reform, communal religious ecstasy. The degree of Smart’s resistance to the truth of his alienation and isolation is also the measure of his historical position. God and society were the twin coordinates by which the eighteenth-century poet still tried to find his way. Smart’s quest for meaning is not subjective to the degree that a Wordsworth’s is. His quest takes place, not in the interiors of his subjectivity, but along or up to the shattered surface that places interior in contact with exterior. *Jubilate Agno* is the work of a man who has fallen below a collapsing border and is attempting to repair that border without knowing that it is disintegrating everywhere. In attempting to restore old structures he produces new ones. Attempting to write an authoritative language for the hegemonic Church of England, he instead writes a subversive, marginal language gleaned from fragments discarded by the Enlightenment: language- and number-mysticism, alchemy, Neo-Platonism, the medieval doctrine of sympathetic similars—thus undermining the dualities of eighteenth-century thought and collapsing them into a new, alien, in many ways thoroughly modern economy. Though the mind’s allegiances were consciously conservative, the hand that wrote them was revolutionary. *Jubilate Agno* represents a breach against eighteenth-century common sense and linguistic propriety as startling and scandalous as the breach against social etiquette represented by Smart’s wild effusions in St. James’s Park.

Twentieth-century theorists like Deleuze turn to the literary productions of mad writers (like Artaud) or to writers who experiment with nonsense (like Carroll) because in an age that has discredited many of the tenets of traditional rationalism, meaning is no longer considered to be immanent or primary in language or in things. Rather it is something to be produced. “Against Plato and the ensuing Western tradition which sees in meaning the origin, principle and matrix according to which reality is comprehended, Deleuze posits Carrollian *non-sense* as a privileged approach to an ‘other’ theory of meaning for which, in Deleuze’s terms, ‘meaning is never principle or origin, it is product. It is not something to be discovered, restored, or reused, it is something to be produced by new mechanisms.’”8 Psychotic texts lay bare these mechanisms in unique ways, because the psychotic, unlike most of us, does not taking meaning for granted, but wages a desperate struggle to produce it out of the depths of non-meaning in which he or she founders. The point is not to belabor the lack of meaning, but to show the impossibility (as long as there is language) of the total absence of meaning. “Meaning is an excess produced and over-produced by non-sense as a default of itself…”9 Meaning is common and commonsensical—it is what is routinely presupposed in our linguistic transactions. Consequently it is the most uncanny and most unknown of our possessions. Few of us know what it is like to start from the zero point, to build up a world of meaning painfully from the ruins. Whence the value of works like *Jubilate Agno*. Because in it the normal processes of meaning production, thinking and perception have broken down, we can see, in their nakedness, the processes by which they are (re)produced. Smart’s linguistic adventure is an attempt to make (sublime, poetic, religious, allegorical) sense of his life in a world emptied of meaning by Cartesian dualism and Newtonian science. It is a proto-romance quest, but also a post-romance quest, since, on the one hand, it is an adventure, like Alice’s, of language, in language and through language, and on the other, it represents a hazard of Smart’s body and Smart’s life, the record of a physico-psychic collapse—the rift or fissure Blake and Wordsworth attempt to heal in the fabric of things is incarnated in Smart’s body.

Taking his point of departure from the linguistic theories of the Stoics, Deleuze writes:

The privileged position of the Stoics comes from the fact that they were the

initiators of a paradoxical theory of meaning which imposed a new division

between beings and things on the one hand, and concepts on the other…

between bodies, with their depth, their physical qualities, their interrelation-

ships, their *actions* and *passions*, [and] the effects that take place on the

surface of beings. Effects are not states of things, but *incorporeal events*

(expressed by verbs: “to grow,” “to shrink,” “to cut,” etc.)…Carroll’s

entire work consists precisely in marking this difference between events

on the one hand, and corporeal beings, things, on the other.10

This duality is carried over into a division between bodies and language, or things and propositions. “From this comes the alternative which recurs throughout Carroll’s work: to eat or to speak.” Eating is “the operational model” for bodies; speaking, the movement of the surface, is “the operational model for incorporeal events.” The infant is born into a schizoid depth, a language-less “chaosmos”11 of aliment and excrement, of the eaten and the eating, of interpenetrating bodies and parts of bodies. The infant’s is a world of Senecan tragedy without linguistic articulation: prey and predator, terror, helplessness, cannibalism. To acquire language is to climb to the surface where mere bodily sounds (eructations, screams, and so forth) pass into the incorporeal, “ideal” realm of speech. Meaning is neither purely subjective nor purely objective. It is the frontier between “propositions and things.” This frontier neither wholly unites nor wholly separates these two elements (neither radical monism nor radical dualism): “It is rather the articulation of their difference.” But this quasi-dualism goes further. It divides things into physical qualities and logical attributes (incorporeal events). It divides propositions into nouns that *designate* things or states of things, and verbs that “*express* events or logical attributes.” The mirror-like symmetry of the distribution of such quasi-dualisms arises from the fact that meaning (which is the linguistic equivalent of the incorporeal event) does not exist outside of the proposition that expresses it, and yet within the proposition is the attribute of things.

Alice’s adventures represent an “oral regression,” a flirtation with schizoid depth. But by the time we pass through the looking glass, we are safe from the depths, safe to explore a lateral world of surfaces “We thought we knew so well that we never explored them.” The world, in other words, of ordinary language. Carroll introduces a series of logical paradoxes embodies in non-sense words or propositions which by their transparent oddity demonstrate (as ordinary speech does not) the oddity of the process by which ordinary meaning is made. Words like “Rilchiam” (Richard + William), “snark” (snake + shark) and “frumious” (furious + fuming *or* fuming + furious) organize in varying ways what Deleuze calls “series” (the series represented by bodies versus the series represented by incorporeal events, for example). “Snark” places side by side and conjoins two heterogeneous series (snake and shark) and circulates through “the two oral series,” alimentary and semantic. It effectuates a “conjunctive synthesis.” “Frumious” places side by side and disjoins the alternative but mutually exclusive series “furious + fuming” *or* “fuming + furious.” This last species of proposition (the disjunctive synthesis) has a privileged place in Deleuzian theory because it affirms two incompatible series simultaneously—it has the form of the classical syllogism, the *disjuncta*, in which two or more propositions are asserted, only one of which can be true. As such, it is the paradoxical figure of meaning itself, which articulates the difference between propositions and things, causing them both to converge and diverge around a “paradoxical element” or “aleatory point.” Such aleatory points, propositions and syntheses find their counterparts in certain key words in *Jubilate Agno*, which I will soon explore.

Alice wavers on the surface between two coordinates, eating and speaking, the incorporeal world of meaning and the bodily world of action and passion, and in so doing allows the series whose convergence and divergence are represented by meaning to operate under a kind of detached Apollonian scrutiny. With Artaud, on the other hand, we are in an entirely different world: the world of agonized schizophrenic depth. The surface “that protects sonorous language from being confused with the physical body” has disintegrated. The language/body distinction has become a purely bodily one between acting and suffering. Words have become dangerous things, confused with the alimentary/excremental nexus, hence solid, jagged, potentially poisonous. To protect himself against dangerously physicalized speech from the outside, Artaud must collapse the articulating structures of his own language (vowels) into thick, unpronounceable blocks of consonants whose meaning is secondary to their primary function, which is to protect the body from intrusions. Incantation, chant, or measured scream denote the reduction of language to a zero-point function, that of warding off total non-meaning, the evil spirit that the outside world has become. Defensively, Artaud dreams of a body without organs, a body without articulation, impervious to the incursions of a hostile physical world. In his desperation he aspires to the condition of incorporeality. Again there are important similarities between such patterns of thought and patterns found in *Jubilate Agno*.

*Jubilate Agno* is among things a manic-depressive production.12 It is full of contrasts between height and depth, exaltation and self-pity, self-aggrandizement and guilt, cheerfulness and bitterness. The first and most obvious contrast for us is biographical, or between circumstantial and “spiritual” biography—between the facts of Smart’s situation and the self-image he tries to build and maintain. On the one hand he identifies with all of Creation; on the other he is isolated and alone, without “human friends.” He is a prophet and restorer of adoration; he is a madman and a vagrant, manhandled by the police, locked in an asylum, bullied by hospital staff with “harping-irons,” and made a laughing-stock of the idle and the vicious: “For they pass by me in their tour, and the good Samaritan is not yet come.” (B1, 63) A semi-divine spirit, a human body; half-human, half-exotic animal, like the Gigantic Boy and the White Raven, and “a greater curiosity than both.” (B1, 25) Like the King’s Fisher, he is “of royal beauty, though plebeian size” (B1, 30) He is “ennobled” by his “ascent” (and his descent: progeny of Thomas à Becket, Agricola, St. George, a son of ABRAHAM, a PRINCE)—“the Lord hath raised me above my peers,” (B1, 86) e is also “a little fellow,” “a frog in the brambles,” a “worm in the rain.” (B1, 45, 95, 37) In addition to these signs of manic-depressive instability, there are clear signs of a repetition-compulsion arising from traumatic shock: Perhaps the shattering of Smart’s identity, or of the surface between himself and the world, occurred simultaneously with the humiliating blow of the watchman’s staff, at the moment when Smart’s private fantasies, spilling vociferously into the public realm, met with the sudden physical rebuke of the law of their separation. An obsessive theme throughout is that of the defensive capabilities of animals: the Baboon, who “defendeth himself with a staff against the assailant” (the watchman?); the Elk who stands his ground; the Porcupine, “which is a creature of defense and stands upon his arms continuously;” the Hare, whose mazes “parry the adversary.” (A, 74, A, 71, A, 44, A, 22). “Parry” and “adversary” appear frequently in the text (“adversary” to the point of saturation as the text “progresses”); I will have more to say about both words later. For now it should be noted that “parry” is, of course, a fending term, meaning to ward off a blow, and derives ultimately from Latin *parare*, to prepare. Clearly what is at work in the recurring theme of the defensive or hunted animal is an attempt at a retrospective mastering of (or preparation for) a shock through obsessive repetition: a desire to *re-parare* (the Latin word from which we derive “repair”).

Repairing the surface, as I have noted, is a major part of the labor of *Jubilate Agno* as a whole. Outer circumstances and inward doubt conspire to lead Smart into depression and disillusionment (in Swiftian terms, to turn spirit into mere wind). To reflect too closely on events in the immediate past is dangerous: the pattern of dissolution is too obvious, the specter of despair too vivid. Smart’s solution is to create an evocative incantation, endlessly repetitive, centered on an eternal present tense and intensive presence: animals and Biblical figures continuously praising, blessing and rejoicing in the Lord. These figures step out of the past into the glaring, shadowless, insomniac vigil of the “Let” verses, comfortingly crowding around the lonely poet, crowding out the darkness, in the present, *as* a present (the gift of their presence). The vividness of this hallucinatory present, peopled and animaled to teeming excess, distances Smart from his immediate surrounding and his immediate past. Reminiscence is now safely mediated by the immediacy of the “Let” verse-procession. The past tense becomes exclusively the locus of personal (not historical) remembrance, against the redemptive background of a timeless Creation. Irrational guilt (“For I bless the children of Asher for the evil I did them;” “I wronged (Hobbes) God forgive me” B1, 45, B1, 46) and anger (“For my brethren have dealt deceitfully as a book, and as the stream of brooks that pass away.” B1, 74) weave in and out of the vast present-tense texture of “Let” and are safely dissipated by it. Such reminiscences take place as a rule in the “For” verses. The “For” verse is among other things the locus of past and future—of remembrance, of prophecy, of project (liturgical reform, for example) and of progress (improvements in gardening, propagation of trees, peopling of desert, and so forth). The relation between “Let” and “For” verses somewhat resembles the relation between thing and proposition, or between designation and expression. Meaning, then, arises at the frontier between, or from the intersection of, the “Let” and “For” verses. In addition, meaning arises from the vertical axis (the relation between successive “For” and “Let” verses), tracing at times a weird diagonal trajectory through vertical and horizontal coordinates.

The repetitive, incantatory aspect of *Jubilate Agno* invites comparison with Artaud’s measured screams and breaths. Like Artaud, Smart collapses the distinction between words and things. But whereas for Artaud language has become body and has fallen into the body’s schizoid depths, for Smart language and body are fused along a manic-depressive axis. In Smart’s second-sighted vision things are figuralized, concepts literalized: depth leaps into height, height becomes depth, while the unstable surface between them wavers and blurs along the phenomenon on which it is situated: “For the VOICE is from the body and the spirit—and is a body and a spirit.” (B1, 239) Thus “the prayers of good men are visible to second-sighted persons.” (B1, 245)

while animals are endowed with speech: “Let Phillip rejoice with Boca, which is a fish that can speak.” (B1, 127) Creation is univocal: Let filled lips (Phillip) make joyful noise with Bucca (in Latin, “a declaimer” as well as the part of the cheek distended in the act of speech), which speaks. Or: Let speech speak with speech, which speaks. Univocity13 unites body and spirit on the level of pure meaning, language that speaks and celebrates itself like music.13

“Eternity” or universe becomes “creature,” a body without organs (except perhaps for ideal musical ones). The praying voice is a reconstructed, organ-less body into which Smart can climb; sheltered there, he can repair his shattered universe on the level of pure meaning.

But there is a darker (and deeper) side to this exalted vision. The creation of a univocal body without organs conditions a universe of language-become body, but on the other hand, the physicalization of language into a dangerous palpability necessitates the creation of the body without organs. Language is projected onto the world, but at the cost of the introjection of the world into language. Smart seeks a “privacy inaccessible to slander” (A, 45) in his univocal world of language; but the world which he must bring with him into the sanctuary of his language-world is founded on slander: χαταβoλη επι διαβoλη, “For Eternity is a creature built upon Eternity; a foundation on slander or Satan” B1, 170) Slander, like scandal, derives from a root meaning “trap:” the foundation always threatens to open up beneath Smart’s feet. At the opposite pole from pure meaning is pure non-sense.

Words become things…fish speak, but so do serpents (“For there are still serpents that can speak” B1, 18); and people are snake-like, deceitful, poisonous. Consider this line: “For Silly fellow! Silly fellow!” With a harrowing directness the phrase leaps from the page, all the more surcharged with meaning because it bypasses grammatical convention. “Silly fellow! Silly fellow!” is not so much a phrase as a thing, a weapon as palpable as the watchman’s staff or the barbarous harping-iron. The reference to the tourists who visit the asylum and “pass by” Smart, appearing just three lines after this one, suggests that the phrase “Silly fellow” Silly fellow!” is a taunting insult thrown at Smart by these people as they pass his cell. The world intrudes on Smart’s privacy with a vengeance, confronting the inward prophet’s self-image with the image he presents to the world, threatening to turn spirit into wind, the hallowed into the hollow. The beating in St. James’s Park is repeated here on the verbal level: one man’s psychosis confronts the social neurosis that surround and in part conditions it. Private visions of public worship clash with a public voyeurism feasting on private misery. We know that Smart was mad. But who in this tableau is sick?

Smart’s fixation on voice as a sublimated body without organs also contains a sexual component. After invoking the “Buteo who hath three testicles,” Smart goes on to add: “For I bless God in the strength of my loins and in the voice which he hath made sonorous.” (B1, 80) A sonorous voice compensates for diminutive stature, but it also sublimates the sexual desire Smart ostensibly renounces (“’tis good for a man not to know a woman.” B1, 104). Such an overdetermination of the power of voice has its dark converse in a powerful obsession implied throughout the text: fear of the loss of voice. This means both the physical loss of voice and the loss of (written) language and meaning. Another connection with the schizophrenic Artaud.

A sublimated sexuality centered on voice implies a sexualized voice (perhaps in danger of castration). The “wounded bark” mentioned at A, 59 is thus the wounded (Smarted) voice of the poet himself (“a dog without offense,” B1, 155) in danger of degenerating into mere animal noise (a bark), or indeed of becoming silent altogether. This danger of being silenced is twofold: it comes from within and without. The asylum staff, Smart’s “deceitful” friends, the sadistic voyeurs14 who tour the asylum, the fact of incarceration itself and the social structures the determine and impose it—these are the “noisy accidents” on the outside menacing Smart with silence. Within, depression, respiratory ailments (“weak lungs and a vitiated throat” B1, 225—the fissure incarnated in the body) menace him with the prospect of hoarseness—a thickening of the voice to the point of unintelligibility—muteness or even “stranggling:” “God bless my throat and keep me from things stranggled.” (B1, 179—the doubling of glottal consonants, a thickening, “strangling” effect, is curiously reminiscent of Artaud.) And always, the unstable surface, where meaning wavers of the depth of total non-sense, total madness.

What better figure of the chaotic depths where language and even sound are lost than the sea? Indeed the sea is everywhere in the text. Every time a fish or other sea-creature is invoked, so is the threat of a figurative drowning (even a physical drowning in phlegm), and the possibility of a redemption (or a re-baptism: “God, God hath sent me to sea for pearls” B1, 30). Smart’s obsession with the sea is an obsession with its depths and the silence in those depths; this in turn is an obsession with the threat of language loss. Conversely, speculation on the possible vocal qualities of fish expresses the hope of sustaining language even in oceanic depth and of breaking the twofold silence that weighs on, and in, the poet. If “the praise of God can give to mute fish the notes of a nightingale” (B1, 127), then this same praise can give to a silenced poet a voice loud enough to be heard by the Church and people of England.

Fear of muteness, then, helps overdetermine a compensatory world of rejoicing Biblical figures, speaking animals, and HARPS of stupendous magnitude. Repetition and incantation, manic flights of verbal association, the body without organs, and a univocal Creation form the poet’s defensive armory against a host of internal and external dangers. Thus the “meaning” of *Jubilate Agno* must be understood partly in terms of the work it performs in a disturbed and defensive psychic economy.

But such an approach does not exhaustively explain the process of meaning-production in the poem. It would be an ironic mistake to attempt to explain *Jubilate Agno* exhaustively in those very terms of careful accounting, profit and loss, that Smart himself with such reckless determination exceeds. *Jubilate Agno*’s policy is not mercantalism, or balance of trade. “For GOD nevertheless is an extravagant BEING and generous unto loss. (B2, 380) Balance and justice do not govern an economy of excess and lack (where lack itself generates excess by the default of itself). God’s policy of extravagance also governs the meaning-distributive operations of Smart’s puns, disjunctive syntheses and other aleatory points: “For Tully says to be generous you must first be just, but the voice of Christ is distribute at all events.” (B2, 386) Let us now look at some of these peculiar words and try to describe the laws of their generation, distribution and divergence.

Smart, we recall, contends with a bafflingly antagonistic pair of series: the world of bodies eating and interpenetrating in the depths, on the one hand, and on the other, the world of language, “spirit” and ideality: eating and speaking; eating *or* speaking. These two series are conjoined and ramified in the text by the aleatory words “pray/prey,” which are themselves a designation of some unknown “X” word of which they in turn represent a ramification. Thus every “Pray” potentially resonates with “prey,” and vice-versa—according to the problematic we have outlined, where the world of bodies in the depths is sublimated into an ideality, but also undermines that ideality. This resonance can be poignant. Thinking of his children at one point,

Smart writes: “For I pray God to give them the food which I cannot earn for them any otherwise than by prayer.” (B1, 76) Here a note of dismal everyday reality comes close to shattering the sanctuary of detached, ideal meaning (the body without organs of the praying voice) in which Smart enjoys his manic exaltation. Eating or speaking suddenly ceases to be an abstract and becomes an actual alternative. The hunger of his children almost re-orients him to a world of struggling organisms in which the man of prayer is a kind of predator (a parasite) by default (by his refusal to be practical, to produce useful physical things). Desperately he “hunts” the Lord (“preys” to him) with a note of accusation in his voice, and seeks the miraculous transformative (or transubstantiating) equation that might cross the impasse between real and ideal, generating meaning from the air. At other points the conjunction of “prey” and “pray” has a more affirmative quality, linking incompatibles consciously and without overt comment: “Let Bedan rejoice with Ossifrage—the bird of prey and the man of prayer.” (B1, 54) The “bedesman” or prayer and the “bone-breaker”—there may seem little connection here, until one notices that a bedesman or beadsman is someone who prays for a price, and thus a kind of sublimated predator like the Ossifrage. And a more disturbing association links the beadsman’s professional praying with Smart’s attempts to pray food onto his children’s table. “Pray/prey” can also bond with one or more of a cluster of morphemically or phonemically similar words (expressed or unexpressed) in any combination and in any situation: *par*, equal; “parry,” ward off a blow; περι, around; “pair” and “pare” or even the “purr” of Smart’s cat Jeoffry. The relations among these words again reflect Smart’s overall psychic economy, exemplifying the relations of pairing, opposition and distance Smart outlines at B2, 600-3.

“Bless” is another aleatory word. Derived from an old Teutonic hypothetical root-meaning of either “blood” or “blood-sacrifice,” and passing into its modern meaning by way of serving to translate *benedicere* (which in turn translated a Hebrew word meaning “bend the knee in worship”), the word recapitulates the sublimating process by which Smart tries to transpose brute bodily givens into ideal meanings, and the fundamental persistence of those givens on that ideal level. In addition there are two simulacra, “bless” from French *blesser*, to wound, and a Spenserian “bless” meaning to brandish (a weapon—thought to derive from the meaning, “to flourish as in making the sign of the cross,” thus exemplifying de-sublimation, the militaristic re-corporealizing of a spiritual meaning). These series pull the praising, blissful “bless” further back into the brute physical. (Note that “to wound” is “to Smart,” transitive and intransitive.) Thus throughout the text physical aggression from a potential counter-series to spiritual benediction.

The universe thus contains a paradox in its very structure: the foundation or base of things is built on the Devil, or the scandalous appearance of radical dualism and contradiction (between words and things) and incompatibility (eat or speak, eat or be eaten). At the summit of Creation, however, is God, radical monism (or its appearance), pure harmony, pure compatibility. But God’s compatibility and the Devil’s incompatibility are not compatible (double rift, again). If God is pure meaning, the Devil is pure none-sense (and in this they resemble each other). The Devil is also the Adversary, that is, conflict as such, the eternal event of conflict between body and spirit and body and body. In some sinister way *he* seems the more inclusive entity of the two, the more “meaningful,” in that his principle of conflict encompasses not only the relations between the creatures in *his* realm (bodies versus bodies), but also between his realm and the harmonious realm of God (since he sets body against spirit). The Devil is both outside Creation (He is the principle of “Resistance,” which “is not of GOD, but he—hath built his works upon it” B1, 162—i.e., the foundation on slander or Devil), and inscribed in its every detail. He is the figure of the opaque and impenetrable face of resistant things turned toward (*ad-versus*) the face of language. Even his duality is treacherous because partly illusory. For he is both less and more than two.

In Smart’s strange psycho-theological mathematics, God is one and Three, while the Devil is two, “the most imperfect of all numbers.” (C, 21) “For the Devil is two, being without God.” (C, 23) The Devil’s doubleness, in other words, is the sum of a subtraction: 1 (Devil) – (or without) (the One) God = 2. He is consequently both excess and lack, excessive with respect to monism (One), lacking with respect to his own duality (since his doubleness is the sum of a subtraction: 1 – 1 = 2). The Devil is closer to an asymptotic sequence with a limit of 2 than to any whole number: 1 ½, 2 ½, 1 ½… Smart’s whole numbers can only fracture into minute differences and repetitions when divided into such a series. The Devil is *the* aleatory point, the non-sensical generator of the pure meaning God enjoys.

God himself, as opposed to Satan, is at the heart of Creation and yet nowhere capturable within it. He is absent through the fullness of his meaning, as the Devil is everywhere through the self-default of his essential absence (he is the essence of negation). But Smart cannot accept this law of the absent Father. He wants God to be everywhere and various as his Creation, inscribed on every leaf, but on each in a unique way. But of course this risks splitting the One into two or into the Many. Smart’s compromise is the collective singular of a teeming Creation, seen (and heard) as the “meaning” emanating from God’s HARP of stupendous magnitude and melody.” But this HARP-ing (note the resonance with the devilish “harping-irons”) is not perpetual—it is subject to laws of temporality, and thus limited in space. It plays now at this time, now “at that time.” (B1, 248) God’s many-stringed harp represents the sub-theme of his epic plurality within the collective singular of his univocal Creation.

Christ is the third term, the mediator. If God rules the heights and the Devil the depths, Christ is the master of surfaces: “he walketh upon the sea.” (B1, 12) Insofar as he is both Word and body, God and man, man and animal (Lamb), his blood marks the border between the “old law” of bodies eating bodies in the depths (“an eye for an eye”) and the new law of sublimated violence (the Eucharist) on the level of spiritual meaning. But like the surface, he can also transmit the contaminating violence and treachery of the physical depths into the incorporeal realm, reintroducing he old law of judgment and revenge as bad conscience and *ressentiment* (and thus generating the need for a *new* new law).

God, Devil and Christ form the Trinity. Each mediates, designates to some degree, the other. If they are in some sense the Meaning expressed by all languages, the attribute of all things, they also operate only *in* language and represent the dimensions of its structure. If they are Meaning, they are also the terms under which meaning is produced, and the production of that meaning. Pure meaning, generated by the circular movement of its own non-sense.

Where does Smart fit in? *That*, in an important sense, is the whole burden of his strange quest. The event or fissure that resulted in Smart’s incarceration both effected and *was* a loss *and* change of identity. Reduced to an aleatory point, identity = X, Smart is shopping the “chaosmos” for a (restored) self. Every animal or Biblical figure, every word of syllable (or even letter: “I is identity,” B1, 521—note the similarity-by-antithesis to Rimbaud’s “I is another”) is a potential identity, but also a potential threat—law of introjection and projection, body = language, and is measured by its opposition, closeness to or distance from representing the ideal pairing (or identity) that Smart seeks. Identity = X circulates through every possible series in search of a center that constantly eludes him, leaving him instead with a series of partial identities, each of which converges with and diverges from the other. When Smart praises Otis, the supple-necked and circumspect bird that “sees the horizon compleat at once (B1, 20) he is imagining for himself the impossible, ideal synoptic center of the circle of all possible identities. (He is also, true to the logic of repetition-compulsion, retrospectively arming himself with that foresight he lacked in his spontaneous falling-to prayer in public, with catastrophic consequences.) Thus Smart wrestles with his own anomalous situation on the great Manic-Depressive axis of all Creation: as both an animal among animals and an image of the Creator. (We should keep in mind that madness in the eighteenth century was widely viewed as a reversion to the animal state. Thus for Smart being an animal among animals would have an ethical as well as a biological meaning: the ethical failure to sustain one’s reason—a fall from Man as well as from God.)

But it is time to examine how Smart’s quest or hazard of identities and meanings takes place in a (relatively) sustained sequence of text. It is unnecessary and indeed impossible to analyze large segments of the text. Its logic is a-temporal and a-syntactic. It is pure association, pure meanings. But so lightning-quick and condensed is Smart’s meaning-generation machine that it subdivides into the smallest units almost *ad infinitum*. Its only limit is the identity that recedes from and approaches to itself via difference. Nevertheless, it should be possible to reconstruct a virtual narrative—perhaps several.

Let Elizur rejoice with the Partridge, who is a

prisoner of state and proud of his keepers.

For I am not without authority in my jeopardy which

I derive inevitably from the glory of the name of the Lord.

(B1, 1)

These two lines present two series, or a-syntactical sub-narratives, which share two basic points of convergence: bodies in captivity. The first point of divergence is obvious: the Partridge is merely an animal and Smart is a man. The second is more subtle: the Partridge’s predicament is unambiguously designated as physical captivity (he is a prisoner); Smart’s predicament is blurred and complicated by the introduction of the word “jeopardy,” which leaves his actual physical captivity only indirectly designated, if at all. The failure of precise signification in the word “jeopardy” in this context is also the means by which an excess of meaning—an ambiguity—is generated or expressed. The two series now begin to diverge further into a pseudo-opposition: The Partridge is unambiguously a physical captive, yet he is in no immediate danger (after all, he is kept, not hunted); Smart’s physical predicament is unspecified, but he is in jeopardy. We should again note that even the level on which Smart’s state converges with that of the Partridge (the physical level of a “body in captivity”) is not *designated*. The “I” and the “jeopardy” are both empty and excessive with respect to the “Partridge” in “captivity.” The Partridge and its captivity are projections of Smart onto the world of (animal) bodies. But conversely Smart and his predicament are a nebulous subjectivity into which the quasi-objectivity and physical specificity of the imprisoned bird are introjected. Indeed, since the “Let” verse appears first (takes the initiative), the Smart in the “For” stanza is in a position of reaction with respect to the introjected or invading identity of the Partridge, which threatens to engulf Smart (“identify” him). The two entities, the Partridge of “Let” and the “I” of “For,” mutually reflect a pattern of similarity and difference that continuously defines and re-defines a sought-for subject: the integrated subject, Smart’s identity. The “I” in a sense rushes out to meet the Partridge, but the Partridge in turn has already rushed in to confront and define the “I” as a possible caged animal among animals—and the “I” must react with the recoiling differentiation introduced by the ambiguous word “jeopardy.” The “I” in “jeopardy” (the “je” in jeopardy) is both less (because less concrete) and more (because more “spiritual” and thus subject to “spiritual” dangers—irrevocable madness) than the Partridge. He is both emptier and more “free,” or semantically mobile.

But the Partridge, as a kind of trial-size version of a possible Smart, also has “spiritual” attributes: “he” is “proud of his keepers.” He is also linked by the preposition “with” with Elizur, and thus partakes of the activity of “rejoicing.” As such he represents a positive model of stoicism rejoicing in adversity, which can be safely appropriated by the Smart of the “For” verse. Paralleling this relatively syntactical or linear relationship between stoical Partridge and jeopardized Smart, an aleatory “word” forms out of the conflation of the “jo” of “rejoice” with the voiced “ge” of “Partridge.” The re*jo*icing of Partrid*ge* (“jeo”) of the “Let” verse is assimilated to the “jeo” of “jeopardy” in the “For” verse—it is “literally” (letter-for-letter) internalized.

“Jeopardy” is derived from Old French *iu parti* or Medieval Latin *jocus partitus*, originally a chess term meaning “divided play” or “an even game,” hence uncertainty, hazard, risk: a situation ramifying unpredictably into two or more alternative outcomes. Smart’s jeopardy seems to take, on the religious, moral level, the form of an alternative between heaven and hell, and on the psychological level, an alternative between elation (“rejoicing”) and depression, recuperation or loss. From the point of view of the production of meaning, the question is where the chain of association will lead, whether meaning and identity will be produced or not, and if so, under what terms. “Jeopardy,” than, is a serious game: an experiment in verbal association, a spiritual and psychological trial. It refers to Smart’s incarceration, the positive or negative interpretation of that incarceration (punishment, ordeal, even martyrdom), and the serious game by which all possible alternative meanings are sounded—along with the possibility that no meaning will be produced at all (madness, loss of language).

In accordance with the transformative logic of the movement of identity and difference, the “pride” of the Partridge becomes Smart’s “authority.” The “keepers” of the Partridge become “the glory of the name of the Lord.” In the “For” series Smart attempts to turn the tables on *his* keepers (the hospital staff) by skipping conceptually past them to his God (who is his true keeper, as well as theirs, and the ultimate providential agent responsible for Smart’s ordeal). This semantic twist does not actually reverse the keeper-to-prisoner relationship of the “Let” verse (such that Smart would become keeper and his keepers inmates): Smart does not exactly have authority—but he is *not without it*. This litotes (or denial of a contrary) expresses Smart’s divided state. The authority he has derives from and refers only to the level of allegorical or providential meaning. Apart from that he is a powerless body in captivity. The meaning of his “authority” is not “embodies;” it hovers over the physical Smart, writing in his cell, like an elusive phantasm looking for an entrance into the dense interplay of that writing. (Note that writing is both more concretely physical than speech in that it consists of visible marks made with pen and ink, and more “spiritual” in that it can outlast the ephemeral vibratory phenomenon of speech.) Authority here means among other things authorship, the ability to write one’s way out of a bad situation, or to create a written shelter or body without organs (as well as a testament and testimony). It is also increaser-ship (“author” derives from an attribute of Jupiter, the increasing of fertility and prosperity) and expresses Smart’s compulsion to add meaning to his situation, to accumulate it continuously to excess in the face of the danger of its total arrest, lack, or disintegration.

The next “Let” verse invokes another possible Smartian analogue, “Pyrausta, who dwelleth in a medium of fire, which Goth hath adapted for him.” The corresponding “For” line reads: “For I bless God whose name is Jealous—and there is a zeal to deliver us from everlasting burnings.” Via a detour through the “Let” fire (for Smart’s jeopardy is a kind of spiritual trial by fire), the “jeo” of jeopardy becomes the *Jea*lous or zealous God of the corresponding “For” verse (B1, 2) A horizontal, vertical, and quasi-diagonal relationship. The semantic kinship between “fire” and “jealous” (ardent), “zeal” (like “jealous” derived from Greek “zeen,” to boil), and of course “burning” establishes the horizontal connection. The morphemic and phonic resemblance between “jeo” of jeopardy and “jea” of Jealous, annealed “diagonally” in the “fire” of the “Let” verse (B1, 2), establishes the vertical connection between the two “For” verses. The polarity of Heaven and Hell(fire) is skewed along the animal coordinate of the entomologico-mythical entity “Pyrausta” (fire-breathing insect) , whose figuralized physical (bio-mystical) fire is paired with the spiritual but “real” fire of “everlasting burnings.” God adapts the fire for Pyrausta: that is, he both softens or figuralizes it so that it does not kill the body, and “adopts” it as a trial by fire for the soul of Christopher Smart. Thus Smart diverges from the possible analogue-identity “Pyrausta” in that, unlike the animal, he faces the possibility of everlasting burning beyond biological death. But if imprisonment and jeopardy are a foretaste of possible Damnation, they may also signify a possible redemptive “baptism by fire” similar to the “baptism by water” (“God hath sent me to sea for pearls”). The “jeo” of jeopardy is also (as previously noted) the “I” of Smart (“je”, from Latin “ego”). The peregrination of “jeo” into the Jea-lous God reveals a further ramification into “Je-hovah.” God is with Smart in his *je*opardy and in the fire, as with Daniel in the fiery furnace. Through an intricate maze of language the aleatory point “jeo” traces the difficult progress of Smart’s progress of Smart’s body and soul, and defines and re-defines his risky relationship with his God. (God becomes, as well, the pivotal term—a locus of salvific puns—that sublimates physical or diabolical fire into salvation: zeal is spiritualized, redeeming fire, and God is its ultimate embodiment.)

We might reconstruct a providential narrative with a happy ending from the verbal trajectories of this passage: Smart’s jeopardy is both physical incarceration and spiritual trial. It is a figurative/literal Hell on earth which, though it does not necessarily threaten corporeal life, constitutes a threat to the “body” of the spirit (the temporary trial may become the everlasting punishment). But God, who in the lonely Smart’s very jeopardy is intimately and companionably linked with him (in the “je” of Smart and the “Je” of Jehovah), desires ardently to deliver him from the fire of damnation, which is ultimately the only real danger. Hence Smart’s earthly fate is providentially significant: Christian forbearance and suffering in prison (and all earthly life is a kind of prison) will lead to redemption on the spiritual level. Trial and punishment are thus telescoped and transposed into a saving economy (redemption of meaning and of the soul). Smart *will* go to Heaven, since has already suffered Purgatory and Hell on earth. Form the point of view of the master-narrative of providence, physical and spiritual suffering is resolved: Smart’s ordeal is a redemption through a baptism in fire.

But such closure exists only in the ideal, “best-case” scenario. From a point of view both demonic and mundane (earth and Hell, surface and depth are confused in Smart’s unstable, manic-depressive thought), language and body constantly to converge on the animal body, in mute, meaningless depth (bird, insect, madness-as-animality) in a demonic counterpoint to their convergence on the spiritual level. Telescoping of earth- and hellfire, trial and punishment, can become a disastrous convergence in madness or damnation as well as a “saving” economy. Thus when “jeo” continues down to “Jael” in line 4 (developing the bodily series “jail” or “jayl”) this represents a dissolution of the body/language that has occurred on the physical level, *and* a defensive separation of body and spirit in the depths. The mutual mirror-play of Smart’s possible selves seems never-ending. The chains of associating series both exceed resolution and fall short of it—they find stability only in constant motion.

The “Jael” (jail) of line 4 pairs with the defensive maneuvers of acting-suffering bodies in the depths (“the plover who whistles for his live, and foils the marksmen and their guns”). The corresponding “For” line (“For I bless the PRINCE of PEACE and pray that all guns may be nail’d up…”) diverges in turn from the physical actuality of the “Let” line into ideal eventuality. But “bless” (with its aggressive connotations of brandished weapons, blood and wounding) and pray (“Prey”) act as two disjunctive syntheses, linking the physical “Let” and the “ideal” “For” in their very incompatibility and reintroducing into the ideality of Smart’s prophetic vision the violent world of aggressive/defensive bodies in the depths.

Smart and the world, then, are not unambiguously saved. But meanings are, from the point of view of economy. Diffuse and disconnected syntactically, this passage is almost impenetrably condensed and rigorous semantically (in terms of pure meaning). Thus even the “pardy” of jeopardy is not discarded, but undergoes a proliferation and ramification parallel to the adventures of “jeo.” Deriving in part from Par-tridge, “pardy” splits into “pard”—or (caged) animal (*Jeo*ffry)—on the one hand, and into “pardon” and “pardi” (*per deum*) on the other (“pardi” meaning “pardon” is common in Chaucer’s English). It thus recapitulates, in a fugue-like counterplay, one virtual narrative of the passage as a whole. It even contains “par” (“equal”), thus expressing Smart’s wish to unite the physical/spiritual duality (“pair”) and his need to balance unity and duality, ascent and descent on a surface in equilibrium. But the drive from conflict to resolution or rest is itself an addition to the conflict. (Artaud: “[E]vil is the permanent law, what is good is already an effort and a cruelty added to the other cruelty.”15) Pairing and making *par* also means parrying and preying. Fire must be fought with fire, which in turn must be fought with fire, up, down, and across the axis of meaning—physical, spiritual, bodily, ideal.

I have traced a proliferation of meanings in this passage, but perhaps it is appropriate to ask: What is *the* meaning? Where and how is it produced? The first approach might be approached by backing up, and beginning with the how and where.

“The” meaning is produced in this passage by the simultaneous coordination and ramification of heterogeneous series. A primary aleatory point effectuates (somewhat like a railroad switch) this simultaneous coordination and ramification: I have designated this point as the sub-significant morpheme “jeo.” This humble germ of potential semantic energy has, insofar as it functions as a primary circulator of meaning, no signification: It does not refer to any being or thing or any quality of being or thing. Etymologically, it refers back to what was once a whole word: *jocus*, a game. In this sense it expresses a meaning: the serious game of associative dueling (and “un-dualing”) played out in the passage. In this sense also, the function of “jeo” in the “game” expresses and *is* its meaning: It is the wild “joker” in the deck. As circulating blank word “X” it adopts and adapts, lending a wide but not indeterminate range of semantic values throughout the passage. Its lack of logical signification is the condition of its mobility and of the excess of meaning it distributes, across several trajectories, through the heterogeneous series. Originating almost from the smallest possible, meaningless point—a consonant and a vowel, “jo” or “ge”—it expands outward into a “chaosmos” of pure Meaning. This universal Meaning synthesizes and affirms myriad different, similar, compatible and incompatible meanings. Thanks to its distributive power Jea-lous is simultaneously the “I” of Smart and/or Jehovah and/or jail and/or jeopardy and/or fire and/or the Partridge, Pyrausta, Jeoffry, Jesus…almost to infinity. God and Hell, personal and impersonal, self and other, individual and collective: It is neutral with respect to all such distinctions. Neither monism nor dualism.

How, then, is the meaning produced? Excessively, by the self-defaulting non-sense of “jeo.” And where? Neither in one series nor in the other but along the surface that coordinates and ramifies them.

But though “jeo” proliferates into Meaning, surely the meaning of this passage is not “jeo.” What is the meaning of this passage? I have suggested that it is (the wish-fulfilment fantasy or projection of) salvation. But I did not mean precisely that. Not religious salvation. The meaning of the passage is salvation of the soul, but the passage is also obsessed with the salvation of meaning. Salvation is a master term in the “narrative,” but as such it is only a term, and can be understood to refer to another proposition that designates *its* meaning: I will say, *repairing the surface*. In the most concrete terms: Smart’s restoration of Smart’s sanity, or identity (that is to say, its re-production). I am less interested in the fate of Smart’s soul than in the fate of his mind and body (and the healing of the fissure along their common border). If Smart will forgive me, I will even appropriate “soul” and rename it “the subject.” The “other narrative” is of a wound (fissure), a trial-by-error of difference and (compulsive) repetition, a dialectic of sickness and health, a problematic of destruction and transformation.

Smart’s problem is to repair the surface. This entails two seemingly contradictory drives: outward in identification and projection, inward in recoil, differentiation—recoil from the introjection that is simultaneous with projection, protective differentiation from the dangerous identification. The Partridge is a miniature Smart, but Smart must not be the Partridge. (According to the law of introjection by which language becomes body, verbal animal can eat other verbal animals—Smart’s identity can become prey.) What is involved here is a border dispute between Smart and the world. Until the dispute is settled, Smart has no identity. Until Smart finds an identity, there can be no fixed border, and in a real sense, no world. Only the manic-depressive alternation between identification and antithesis. Smart must build a wall in order to be re-connected with the world. He must enact the function of the surface in the very attempt to repair it, by coordinating and ramifying heterogeneous series. He must learn to do this simultaneously, instead of in rapid alternation. Simultaneous recognition of similarity and difference (judgment and discrimination) are the conditions of functioning in the world, especially the social world. The paradox is that Smart must recover in order to recover.

What is the function of a surface? Not exactly to place two things in contact, not exactly to separate them, but to create surface orientation on each with respect to the other: the interior of one, the exterior of the other. A fence dividing two fields represents the end of one field and the beginning of the other, or vice-versa, depending on which side of the fence you are on. The surface conditions and creates a duality or separation—two opposed orientations—between two things. But it is only by being thus brought together—that is, placed into relation with each other—that the two things can be mutually opposed. Conversely, it is only by the maintenance of separation that a surface brings two things into contact. Obviously contact between bodies is inevitable. But without the protective mediation of a membranous surface like the skin, death ensures quickly for each body (loss of identity, infection).

What has happened to Smart is precisely a shattering or fissuring of surface—a wound. Result: confusion of exterior and interior, infection of body with language (and vice-versa), disruption (loss or transformation) of identity. A cut into a surface not only sounds a depth: it creates a new surface in (what were previously) the depths. It pushes the surface back into the body with it. Hence the confusion in Smart between surface and depth, Earth and Hell, himself and animals. The event of a wound places the interior of the body suddenly, involuntarily, drastically into direct contact with the exterior. It turns interior suddenly into surface, and the (new) surface, surprised, rushes out, in alarm, confusion (perhaps manic exhilaration): a gush of blood. Smart’s projections and identifications, his wildly immediate connections with remotest things, are also a form of bleeding. They also rush out with a vehemence that resembles aggression, liberation, volition (as insomnia resembles volition: involuntary vigilance, a falling awake); they may even appear as a kind of liberation to Smart himself. But in reality the movement of identification is precisely the effect of the wound (the wound itself): the introjection of the cut precedes the projection of blood, by only by a small fraction of a second. The wound has suddenly and violently situated the point of contact between interior and exterior on a new, more vulnerable (further-woundable) surface: a new identity (a new surface), a lost identity (a new absence). Hence the wound calls forth an equally violent protective reaction, a vehement recoil. Antibodies rush to the site of the wound to fight off infection; the flesh immediately begins to knit itself together anew over the fissure, it has not been completely destroyed. At best, thousands of cells die. The battle rages. The event has pushed the surface back behind its own lines, the fissure is incarnated in the depths of the body.

Identification alternating with alienation, projection with recoil: these are “healthy” bodily reactions to trauma, but they also repeat the trauma, resemble and are identical with it. Reaction struggles to become action, determined counter-attack takes place simultaneously with helpless symptomizing (the antibodies versus the gushing blood).

A change of identity, a loss of identity: a crisis, an interim. The wound both changes and destroys the identity of the body (its surface): that is, it moves surface to where it was not before, and from where it was. So that where it was not, it now *is*, and where it was, it now *is not*. What is and what is not, what is and what was, both share in the actual and the now. Through the creation of new surface and the loss of old, surface as such persists. Meaning, sick meaning, but meaning nonetheless, continues on the disrupted surface. And what is absent persists, impossibly like the ghost-sensation in the leg that does not exist, because it has been amputated. Every change is a death and a rebirth—or, a disruption and a recuperation. The time of waiting is not so much the interim between the end of the old thing and the beginning of the new as it is the waiting-out of the time of their simultaneity, their mutual confusion, their conflict.

Identification is both the healing of the wound and the wound itself. It is the attempt to reconstruct a new identity, the bleeding of the old, and the compulsive repetition of the shock of the precipitating wound (like the scratching of an itch, the rubbing of a tongue-sore against the teeth, the imagined return of the watchman’s staff). The precipitating event for Smart, the moment of the fissure (I am hypothesizing) occurred at the moment when his private fantasies, projecting into the public realm, met with the rebuke of the law of their separation (the blow dealt by the watchman’s staff, incarceration, shock, madness). In attempting to heal this wound, Smart inevitably and simultaneously re-enacts it: the stretching out of the hand, so to speak, the sudden recoil on receiving the cut. Then he reaches out his hand again, actively yet involuntarily—and this reaching out is again both an essay in healing and a repetition of the action of the wound. Repetition is inscribed in each different attempt. Smart identifies with the Partridge, then defines himself away from it. He identifies with Pyrausta, then differentiates himself from it. Each reaction from one identity is a movement toward another. Each difference is a repetition, each repetition a difference.

These paradoxes are part both of the logic of meaning and the logic of sickness and recovery. How can a sick person attain health if, being sick, he must re-enact his sickness in the act of seeking health? How can he avoid merely repeating his symptoms? How does he break out of the circle? How is health attained by unhealthy means? How can madness become sane again?

In Smart’s case, perhaps, health (a new surface, a new identity) is attained virtually; that is, its pin-point is defined by the pattern of overshooting and undershooting around it—just as one can deduce the center of the metronome without seeing anything but the tip of the pendulum, from the perimeter of the arc described by its oscillations. Slowly the manic oscillations of repetition and difference mutually adjust and converge on a point of rest.

But health is approached more affirmatively, as well. “For in my nature I quested for beauty, but God, God hath sent me to sea for pearls.” (B1, 30) Here Smart affirms the birth of the new identity, and mourns only tangentially the death of the old. The two halves of his life and divided symmetrically by a double God (“but God, God”—a wistful hesitation or a catch in the throat before proceeding to an affirmation): one God marks the end of the old and is placed after an adversative “but;” the other announces the birth of the new as something privileged, a prophetic calling. Both “Gods” approach to an identity, but asymptotically—they converge on the infinitesimally small point in time where the traumatic event was effectuated in Smart, where the blow was struck, the fissure or wound appeared. In the tiny space between the two Gods is the surface and the meaning that affirms a disjunction: death and rebirth, suffering and exaltation. A pause between the two Gods emits a note of accusation: hast thou forsaken me? instantly resolved. It was not the watchman who made the wound. The wound was the seal Got set on Smart’s forehead, the live coal he put to his lips to consecrate his vocation with fire.

Smart views his wound, not as a loss, but as an interesting addition. If he has been sent into an oceanic madness, it is also a place of rebirth (a place of plenitude and wealth, as well: pearls are of costly because precious). And even the variety that Smart loves, the infinite difference and digression and plenitude of Creation, is not sacrificed in the translation form the world of metamorphosis, transience and sensuality (“nature,” “beauty,” the world of pagan poetry, beloved Horace) to the world of One God, but is preserved under the double-focused regime of a God who is epic plural and collective singular at once: the monistic pearl of great price of the New Testament parable is pluralized into “pearls.” And “pearls” gestures from the One God to the almost pagan Shakespeare, poet of metamorphosis and infinite variety. (Shakespeare is directly quoted at B1, 189):

Full fadom five thy father lies,

Of his bones are coral made:

Those are pearls that were his eyes:

Nothing of him that doth fade,

But doth suffer a sea-change

Into something rich and strange. (*The Tempest*, I, ii)

Death and madness as transformation; transfigured eyes dazzled and dazzling with visions, pearly-white. Smart’s ordeal, his madness, his wound, is really a gift: a sea-change into something rich and strange.

At such moments, Smart is no longer bleeding—precisely when he confronts the death and the wound and identifies himself with it. In doing so he identifies himself. He becomes worthy of what has happened to him by acceding to and exceeding it, by counter-attacking or “counter-effectuating.” His suffering becomes all suffering, the Eternal Event of suffering, as exemplified by Christ on the Cross. Even his imputed madness identifies him with the Savior. “For they said [even of Christ], he is besides himself.” (B1, 151, quoting Mark 3:21) Now he can “bless and bear the rest.” His wound (Christopher’s Smart) is Christ’s, whose yoke is easy and whose burden light.

This is perhaps still madness. But in seeking so passionately for great health in extreme distress, the madness Smart dreams is not so much a lack as an (unhealthy?) excess of health. His madness resembles a super-sanity, what might be called health in some unknown, intensified world of pure event.

As with Smart’s “health,” so with his language. The language of *Jubilate Agno* exhibits a pathological richness, strangeness and intensity that indicts the poverty of ordinary, “healthy” language. At the same time, it exemplifies, in a kind of involuntary parody, the operations of ordinary language as in a sped-up sequence of film. Meaning in *Jubilate Agno* is produced as it is in ordinary language: via unconscious, overdetermined, aleatory points generating exclusions, inclusions, contradictions and identities by circulating through, coordinating and ramifying heterogeneous series. Smart overdetermines meaning, and thus foregrounds the non-sense that generates it (by self-default). Ordinary language, on the other hand, overdetermines signification and exhibits a poverty of meaning. The problem for all of us (who are interested in originality, intensity, and non-hegemonic language) is how to attain to such an intensity of language without falling into the depths—without allowing the fissure to be incarnated in the body. In a society that has a stake in limiting meaning, channeling the flow of signification and governing the production of discourse, “illegal” intensities of language constitute a risky violation not only of the rules of grammar, but of the law of the Father (the structures of power); not only of semantic economy, but of political economy.

The Smart of the biographers died in 1770. The Browning who admired *The Song of David* thought Smart a mad Romantic *avant la lettre*. But the Smart of *Jubilate Agno* was living in many ways closer to the twentieth century in his affirmations of shattered language and value. The fissure that incarnated itself in Smart’s body, the fissure he struggled to repair, was proclaimed by Nietzsche in the late nineteenth century as a general cultural phenomenon, and hailed by him as representing also a unique opportunity for new affirmations, new values, a revolution of desire: the Great Health. In attempting to repair eighteenth-century borders (in language-space), Smart created meanings and values close to those of Nietzsche: affirmation of difference, valorizing of an economy of expenditure without return, risk, intensity, celebration of the eternal return of the Eternal Event. His intensities of language came at a point near absolute disruption, total death of meaning and language. Total madness, of course, would have silenced him, as it did Nietzsche. But in the course of the struggle with disruption and madness, in the resistance to descent, in the risky space between fissure and abyss, near the point of absolute sickness, Smart, like Nietzsche, like Artaud, like a host of modern writers who have risked body and mind for an encounter with the rich and strange, leaves us with an intimation of the Great Health, and the burden of answering to ourselves for the paradox of a writing that is both pathological and more powerful than what passes as health.

*Notes*

1. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York, 1974), 85.

2. Ibid., 86.

3. Ibid., 84.

4. Ibid., 85.

5. Ibid., 45.

6. References throughout are to W. H. Bond’s edition of *Jubilate Agno* (London, 1954).

7. Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens* (Paris, 1969, 180-81. Translations are mine.

8. Josue Harari, ed., *Textual Strategies* (Ithaca, 1979).

9. Deleuze, op. cit., 88-9.

10. Deleuze,“The Schizophrenic and Language,” in *Textual Strategies*, 281.

11. Deleuze borrows the portmanteau word “Chaosmos” from Joyce (*Finnegans Wake*) in *What is Philosophy?* (1991).

12. In his book *Some Reflections on Genius* (London, 1960) Sir Russell Brain, the noted neurologist, has diagnosed Smart’s illness as cyclothymia, a variety of manic-depression, and quotes Smart himself: “For I have a greater compass of mirth and of melancholy than another.”

13. Univocity is a Deleuzian term denoting the unity of all ontological levels from the point of view of pure meaning. From this standpoint there is one and the same Meaning for the real, the imagined, the possible, and the impossible (possible gardens with real snarks in them).

14. Not all those who toured asylums were sadists or voyeurs. Boswell records himself and Johnson as making such a tour in the *Life of Johnson*. But it is fair to say that the tour as such was *structurally* sadistic and voyeuristic. Madness in the eighteenth century, as Foucault points out in *Madness and Civilization* (trans. Richard Howard, New York, 1973, 66ff.), was a shameful scandal to be hidden from view. As such it had a certain taboo appeal—a kind of ethical pornography.

15. Artaud, “Letters on Cruelty, #3,” in *Theater and its Double*, trans. M. C. Richards (New York, 1958), 103.