Robert Lowth's Hebraic Sublime and the “Ample Field of Poetry”

by

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Abstract

This dissertation is a study of Robert Lowth's theorizing of the Hebraic sublime and its posterity in the second half of the eighteenth century. I begin with an exploration of Lowth's description of the sublime across Lectures XIV-XVII, showing how, counter to his own claims about copying Longinus, the principle that underlies his sublime rhetoric—figurative dissimilarity—is the opposite of the principle that Longinus repeats several times in the *Peri Hypsous*. Whereas Longinus argues that figures and tropes should be used inconspicuously, Lowth argues from the Hebrew Scriptures that the conspicuity of the rhetorical construction is key to the excitation of the passions that follows the sublime encounter. Seeking to contextualize Lowth's theorizing within intersecting critical, social and literary discourses, I investigate Lowth's differing opinions of the concept of enthusiasm. Though he preached against it as a bishop in 1767, his earlier, positive images of enthusiasm in the *Lectures* reflect the influence of John Dennis's *Grounds of Criticism*. Having contextualized Lowth's theorizing, I turn to explore his influence on Christopher Smart and William Blake. Both poets, bearing a strong individual poetic vision, find in Lowth's *Lectures* a sublime rhetorical toolkit as well as a model of prophetic authority. Their relation to Lowth can be traced on a trajectory: while Smart shares Lowth's commitment to the church as an institution without his conservative theology, Blake uses biblical language and imagery but rejects both orthodoxy and the church as an organization. This trajectory ends with Percy Bysshe Shelley, who affirms the prophetic authority enabled by Lowth's Hebraic sublime, but without the rhetoric he described nor the Christianity that motivated his study.

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Dedicated to the memory of Cindy Susan Detombe

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Introduction

This dissertation is a study of Robert Lowth's theorizing of the Hebraic sublime and its posterity in the second half of the eighteenth century. Beginning with his exploration of the topic in the *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (1753, trans. 1787), I aim to contextualize his thinking within intersecting critical, social and literary discourses. My analysis is therefore concerned with the criticism of figures like Longinus and John Dennis, the social significance of religion and the anxiety associated with enthusiasm. I also consider at length the prophetic poetry of Christopher Smart and William Blake, both of whom modelled their prophetic writing on the example of the Hebrew Scriptures. Prior to any such analysis, however, a critical foundation must be laid. Beginning with the academic discourse of the eighteenth-century sublime, I turn to the reception of Lowth in recent scholarship. After drawing distinctions between Lowth and John Baillie, whose essay on the sublime was published during Lowth's tenure as Professor of Poetry, I lay out the trajectory of this project, considering the relation of Lowth's theorizing of the Hebraic sublime to the notion of poetic and prophetic authority in the late eighteenth century.

Contexts

In the histories of both the sublime and literary criticism in English, Lowth remains a relatively little-studied figure, existing mainly in footnotes and brief mentions in histories of the age.[1] James Engell suggests that

[1] While my interest is Lowth's contribution to literary criticism and his influence upon literary production, his greatest influence was doubtless in biblical studies, where he is still remembered for his articulation of a theory of poetic parallelism. This discussion comprises most of Lecture XIX and is of enduring interest.

> because of an affiliation with specific religious doctrines in the course of his life as a cleric . . . or because he delivers and first publishes his *Lectures* in Latin, or because his textual interest rests in a book now less at the heart of academic literary culture, Lowth receives scant attention in studies of criticism and culture, even by specialists—or in the many debates centering around theories of the sublime and of the symbol. Yet for these he holds vital interest. (126-127)

While the decline of literary critical interest in the Bible since Lowth inaugurated such study can be attributed to broad cultural shifts, his omission from the scholarly discourse on the sublime is due to the decisions of critics to read the development of the idea in the eighteenth century through a lens that disregards Lowth's contribution. The academic interest in the sublime as a major *topos* of eighteenth-century aesthetic and literary criticism was significantly influenced by Samuel Holt Monk's *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* (1935). Given the proliferation of writing on aesthetic topics in general and the sublime in particular during the century,[2] Monk faced "the necessity of imposing form of some sort" upon the subject (4), since "it would be unwise to embark on the confused seas of English theories of the sublime without having some ideas as to where we are going" (6). His argument, which gives a form to his study, is

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Hepworth provides a brief summary of Lowth's analysis (83-84), while Norton provides historical perspective on the influence of Lowth's description (2.67-73). Balfour, who helpfully suggests that "the centrality of that category in Lowth's work has been overstated in most recent accounts" (*Rhetoric* 61), provides a critical reading of Lowth's argument (59-62). For examples of the legacy of Lowth's theorizing of Hebraic parallelism in both biblical and literary studies, see Dobbs-Allsopp (51-60), Kugel's long analysis of the concept (1-68) and the first chapter of Alter (*The Art of Biblical Poetry*).

[2] De Bolla points out that "during the course of the eighteenth century some few thousand works were published in Britain on the general topic of aesthetics" (27). He also notes that "Andrew Ashfield has assembled a bibliography containing more than 6000 entries" (29, fn.).

that "it was Kant who took the isolated discoveries of earlier thinkers and welded their fragmentary æsthetic together so as to create a truly philosophical system" (4). He even suggests that "it may be said that eighteenth-century æsthetic has as its unconscious goal the *Critique of Judgment*, the book in which it was to be refined and re-interpreted (6). From this study R. S. Crane distinguished what have since been known as the "rhetorical" and "natural" sublimes (165-167), a distinction which has persisted in subsequent scholarship. Lowth, who in Monk's analysis is taken to be a peripheral and derivative figure concerned only with rhetoric, does not contribute to this steady march toward Kant. He is acknowledged and briefly considered as a minor attraction in contrast to Baillie's more productive thinking toward "that subjectivity fully developed in the *Critique of Judgment*" (74), though quickly passed over for a fuller exploration of Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*. This dismissal sets a precedent for numerous subsequent studies.

The sublime, as the concept was understood in the eighteenth century and by the Romantics, has been the subject of many scholarly books and articles—more than this brief introduction could adequately consider.[3] From this discourse I will dwell briefly on two notable contributions to show how they both do and do not relate to the present study. David Morris's book *The Religious Sublime* (1976) argues, in part, that by emphasizing the distinctly religious connotations associated with the sublime in eighteenth-century poetry and criticism, the distinction between the two notions of sublimity can be resolved. The sublime in nature, which for Morris's Christian poets "declares the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1),

[3] For a useful survey of the development of theories and scholarship on the sublime from Longinus to Lacan and Žižek, see Shaw's *The Sublime* (2006). It offers a broad consideration of the topic, even briefly mentioning Lowth.

has its correlates in the revealed glories of the Scriptures: "to an age which habitually spoke of nature as a 'book,' the landscape appeared vitally suffused with religious ideas and literary values" (7). Calling Lowth "one of the most original, important, and today least-known of eighteenth-century critics" (159), Morris asserts that the sublimity theorized by Lowth in the *Lectures* was "one stimulus for important changes in the nature of eighteenth-century verse" (160). He notes several influential aspects of Lowth's theorizing of the sublime. He points out that Lowth did not limit the source of the Hebraic sublime to its subject, "for a number of modern poets unintentionally demonstrated that excellence in the poet is as important as sublimity in the subject" (160). In addition to this excellence, Morris notes that, for Lowth, "the sublimity of the Hebrews depends particularly . . . upon strong passion in the poets and upon the 'naturalness' of their expression" (161). Noting how "natural expression" is an obvious correlate for strong passion, Morris summarizes Lowth's analysis by noting that

> the Bible is sublime because it contains the natural language of the heart—a language which must be poetic because it is figurative and which must be figurative because it is passionate. With his passions fired by thoughts of God, the biblical poet expressed his feelings without restraint or artifice, drawing his imagery from the "natural" surroundings and affairs of a primitive people. (162).

In Morris's brief summary of Lowth's role in the critical discourse, his relation to Romantic notions of, for example, poetry being "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and consisting of "the real language of men" becomes evident. Morris's summary lacks any mention of the details of Lowth's rhetorical analysis, though his inclusion in the study suggests that his contribution to the discourse on the sublime was neglected by Monk.

Thomas Weiskel's *Romantic Sublime* (1976), which recasts the sublime using the languages and concepts of both structuralism and psychoanalysis, remains an important text in Romantic studies of the sublime. Though his analysis retains the Kantian emphasis, his structuralist analysis of the sublime event has some correspondence to Lowth, who is not included in the study. When, according to Weiskel, the subject encounters excess, whether of mind or object, the habitual "determinate relation" (23) between the subject and the object is disrupted. As the mind works to recover "the balance of outer and inner by constituting a fresh relation between itself and the object" (24), the sense of indeterminacy that occurs at the interpretive breakdown is taken to "symbolize" the mind's relation to "the transcendant order" (24). In Lowth's theorizing, the excitement of the passions is caused by a disruption in the reader's engagement with the text. While this disruption is not necessarily caused by an excess of signification, but rather by an effective performance of passion in language, the reader's relation to the text and its signified can be taken as somehow symbolizing the reader's relation to the divine. Further, Lowth describes the Hebraic sublime as a hermeneutic process that happens in an instant. The process of attempting to understand the sublime figure or trope may correspond, in Weiskel, to the mind's effort to recover equilibrium. Beyond these apparent correspondences, however, Weiskel's ahistorical study offers little to my reading of Lowth.[4]

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[4] This is not to say that there is no connection that can be drawn between the two. In *Words of Eternity*, De Luca cites a passage from Blake's *Jerusalem* (12.21-23, E155) and describes it as "an exemplary instance of what Thomas Weiskel, codifying a scheme out of the speculation of Burke, Kant, and Wordsworth, has termed 'the sublime moment,' a threefold episode of consciousness, in which a state of radical disequilibrium intervenes between a prior state or ordinary awareness and a final state of transcendent exaltation" (16). Given the correspondences between Lowth and Blake that I point out in Chapter Four, it could be that Blake's seemingly eccentric notions of the sublime, which incorporate both the Bible and Burke, provide a bridge between Lowth's Hebraic sublime and Weiskel's Romantic notion.

Though Lowth is not included in Peter De Bolla's influential *Discourse on the Sublime* (1989), the *Lectures* are excerpted in Ashfield and De Bolla's 1996 anthology *The Sublime*. This collection signalled a turn in scholarship on the sublime, explicitly questioning Monk's Kantian teleology and the notion of the disinterested subject upon which it is based:

> This tradition, in its adoption of the Kantian formula, understands the aesthetic realm as 'disinterested', which is to say it adopts and adapts Kant's thesis that judgments made about aesthetic objects are universal and without motivation. As a result of this, pre-Kantian texts are read through the lens of the third critique thereby dissolving the differences between the English and German traditions. (2)

They further point out that "the aesthetic, at least since Kant, has been understood as without political or ethical motivation since its *affective* registers are, according to the Kantian model, disinterested" (2). Ashfield and De Bolla offer their collection as a counter to this tradition, positing various ideas of the aesthetic as politically, socially, and ethically engaged. Noting also Monk's devaluing of "rhetorically centred discussions of the sublime" (10), they argue that the "Longinian tradition repeatedly informs the *transformational* capacities of the discourse on the sublime," for "without this rhetorical conceptual base to the discourse on the sublime there would be no means of getting from aesthetics to politics, or from the ethical sublime to the politics of the imagination" (11). Their argument for a historicized consideration of the sublime has led to further studies and, consequently, an opportunity to reassess Lowth's contribution.

This critical turning against the Kantian model of the disinterested subject is echoed in Duffy and Howell's anthology *Cultures of the Sublime* (2011). Noting also the scholarly tradition stemming from Monk that assumes a Kantian model of disinterested subjectivity

(2-3), they argue that “the Kantian ‘analytic’ is problematic . . . precisely because of this refusal to acknowledge the role of cultural and historical factors in constructing the individual’s response to sublime effect” (3). They argue that

> the sublime should not be understood . . . as an abstract or isolated philosophical concept, but rather as embedded in the cultural practice of the late eighteenth-century and romantic period. It is as a ubiquitous trope rather than as a philosophical category that the sublime rose to its eminence in the cultural history of the romantic period. (1)

They offer, rather, a recovery of a historically informed model of sublimity:

> The thriving and diverse romantic-period cultures of the sublime that we recover here question the assumption that it is possible to formulate any objective definition of ‘the sublime’ as a phenomenon independent from given historically or culturally specific encounters with sublime effect. To put it more precisely, the cultures of the sublime that we recover here suggest that, during the romantic period at least, the encounter with sublime effect was entirely culturally determined, a moment (often consciously anticipated) of complex interaction between different, but increasingly familiar, discourses. (10)

It is in this vein that I offer my investigation of Lowth’s theorizing of the Hebraic sublime. I contend that his reading of sublimity in the Psalms, the Prophets and elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures is shaped by the historical conditions in which he is conducting his analysis, by his clerical vocation in the Church of England and by the socio-religious culture of his time. Similarly, the prophetic poetry of Smart and Blake—upon whom Lowth’s

Lectures had a direct and probable influence, respectively—is, like all prophetic utterance, engaged in the social and political conditions from which it emerges.

Several scholars have sought to bring recognition to Lowth's place in the history of criticism. Murray Roston's *Poet and Prophet* (1965), a study of the texts and critical movements that contributed to the Bible being a central text for the Romantics, locates Lowth as a central figure in the discourse. Roston argues that

> those preromantic poets writing during the period of transition from Pope to Wordsworth had been searching, for the most part unconsciously, for some august literary model under whose aegis they could break away from those authoritative 'rules' for poetry derived from the classics. And in the rediscovery of biblical poetry they found one gateway to the new literary world. For if the Bible had long formed part of their cultural heritage, its imaginative and spiritual impact upon English verse had been severely limited by the obscurity of its poetic techniques. (13)

In Roston's analysis, Lowth made two significant contributions to this development. While the *Lectures* provided a theory and allowed for the literary appropriation of the Scriptures, Lowth's translations (both within the *Lectures* and, importantly, his *Isaiah: A New Translation*) also demonstrated and modelled the critical principles that had been enthusiastically received. The scholarship of Stephen Prickett has likely done more than any other to restore Lowth to a position of prominence in the history of criticism. Invoking Lowth in numerous books and articles—most significantly in *Words and* The Word (1986)—Prickett claims that the *Lectures* did "more than any other single work to make the biblical tradition, rather than the neo-classical one, the central poetic tradition of the Romantics" (105). Further, he aligns Lowth's work to contextualize the literary reading of

the Hebrew Scriptures with similar efforts in classical scholarship (106-07). While Lowth revolutionized how the biblical texts were read and understood—and helped to inspire the development of the Higher Criticism in Germany[5]—his work occurred in parallel with similar efforts for the texts of other ancient traditions.

Two book-length studies of Lowth's life and work have been published. Brian Hepworth's *Robert Lowth* (1978) is useful for its broad survey of the contexts of Lowth the "orientalist" and precursor of Romantic poetry. Hepworth seeks "to suggest the importance of [Lowth's] political and professional ties and to indicate the sources of his early understanding of poetry in an investigation of his juvenile verse" (10). Further, he also attempts to

> account for [Lowth's] fight with William Warburton, Alexander Pope's literary executor; to analyze in detail his lectures on Hebrew verse; to explain the nature of his Medievalism in his *Life of William of Wykeham*; to relate his famous *Introduction to English Grammar* to his interests Medieval and Oriental, and to indicate the significance of Biblical translation in the late eighteenth century as seen in Lowth's *Isaiah, a New Translation*. (10)

[5] On Lowth's contribution to the scholarly effort to disclaim the divine origins of the Bible that Lowth himself affirmed, Clark notes that "Lowth's defense of the Bible as sublime poetry, then, tends to collapse the very distinction it tries to maintain between inspiration and enthusiasm, and facilitates, despite itself, a secularized view of the Bible as literature. In Germany, Lowth's approach to the Bible as a Hebrew cultural document was to become radicalized as the controversial 'higher criticism'" (76). Tieken-Boon Van Ostade notes a letter in which Lowth expresses some concern for Johann David Michaelis's translation of the *Lectures*: "His [text w]^{ch}. is intermixed with mine, makes about [a] third of the whole: there are a great many things in wch. I do not agree with him, & much wch. I cannot judge of as depending on a knowledge of Arabic; but upon the whole, I think, his performance very well deserves to be examined & considered: & at present I have it in my thoughts, to republish his part together with my new Edition; but intirely detached from my Volume, & leaving the Purchasers of mine quite at Liberty to take or leave his as they please" (36-37).

Hepworth's monograph remains the only such broad study of Lowth and contains a helpful summary of the development of the *Lectures.* However, his desire to present Lowth as a secular Enlightenment figure hinders his analysis. Ingrid Tieken-Boon Van Ostade's *Bishop's Grammar* (2011) is an in-depth study of Lowth's prescriptivist *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762), its contexts and its reception. Of particular value is her chapter on Lowth's "Life and Career," in which she gives detailed readings of his letters, memoirs, family records, will, and other personal documents.

Theorizing the Sublime in the 1740s

In order to further contextualize Lowth's theorizing among other notions of the sublime in the period before Burke published his *Philosophical Enquiry*, John Baillie's posthumously published "Essay on the Sublime" (1747) can be used for a helpful comparison. Baillie sets out to "treat of that kind of writing which of all others is the truly excellent and great manner, and which is peculiar to a genius noble, lofty, comprehensive" (87). His interest, however, is not so much in writing as with discerning and describing the nature of the imagination's response to the sublime object. "The sublime in writing," he states, "is no more than a description of the sublime in nature" (88). By making this distinction, Baillie sets his critical efforts in the vein of Addison's *Spectator* essays and, in some of his comments, anticipates Burke. Lowth's analysis of the Hebraic sublime, however, is not concerned with the representation of objects. Rather, his interest is writing or utterance that seemingly seeks to represent an abstract quality possessed by God, but fails to accomplish this: "those parts of Scripture, in which a delineation of the Divine Majesty is attempted" (1.349). The reader's involvement in this failure to represent,

according to Lowth, results in the excitation of the passions. Further, since sublime utterance is the product of the excited passions and results in subsequent excitation, the poetry that achieves sublimity is “little else than a continued imitation of the different passions” (1.376) or, as it were, a performance of the response to the apprehension of the divine. On the subject of the particular qualities and attributes associated with the sublime object, Baillie singles out vastness as the principal requirement. He writes that

> every person upon seeing a grand object is affected with something which as it were extends his very being, and expands it to a kind of immensity. Thus in viewing the heavens, how is the soul elevated; and stretching itself to larger scenes and more extended prospects, in a noble enthusiasm of grandeur quits the narrow earth, darts from planet to planet, and takes in worlds at a view! (88)

From the perception of the vastness of the night sky, the idea of the object in the imagination expands to conceive of the wholeness of the object and, with this expansion, brings a “solemn sedateness” to the subject, which “rather composes, than agitates the mind” (90). Thus, the perception of the sublime object “disposes the mind to this enlargement of itself, and gives her a lofty conception of her own powers” (88). Baillie also suggests that uniformity and novelty are requisite to the sublime, since “when an object is vast, and at the same time uniform, there is to the imagination no limits of its vastness, and the mind runs out into infinity, continually creating as it were from this pattern” (90). He further suggests that “custom” makes the exercise of enlargement and expansion familiar and, consequently, the imagination “no longer admires her own perfection” (90). Lowth’s concern being sacred poetry and his notion of the sublime being purely rhetorical, there can be no such expansion in response to the perception of vastness. While he does write of

the use of infinity or representations of vastness in the attempt to "carry away" the intellect, he is clear that it is not the object itself that triggers the sublime event, but rather the reader's hermeneutic effort and, finally, the failure of language to represent:

> when the intellect is carried beyond [the limits of representation,] there is nothing substantial upon which it can rest; it wanders through every part, and when it has compassed the boundaries of creation, it imperceptibly glides in to the void of infinity: whose vast and formless extent, when displayed to the mind of man in the forcible manner so happily attained by the Hebrew writers, impresses it with the sublimest and most awful sensations, and fills it with a mixture of admiration and terror. (1.357)

Though Baillie suggests that the response of the imagination to the sublime is to be "filled with one large, simple, and uniform idea," becoming, to the exclusion of all other sensation or even emotion, "one simple, grand sensation" (90),[6] he does describe a state that seems akin to the agitated passionate emotion theorized by Lowth of the hypothetical early poet. Lowth offers that the early enthusiasm was "a style and expression directly prompted by nature itself" and exhibited "the true and express image of a mind violently agitated" (1.79). This enthusiasm results in a poetic expression that abounds in "sudden exclamations, frequent interrogations, apostrophes even to inanimate objects," since "to those, who are violently agitated themselves, the universal nature of things seems under a necessity of being affected with similar emotions." Baillie describes a corresponding state,

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[6] Monk notes that the idea that "the sublime strikes, ravishes, transports, had been the starting point for many theories, and had resulted in the general admission of the pathetic into the sublime. Baillie will none of this. If the idea is vast it fills the mind to the exclusion of emotion and all else; it results in a pure serene" (76).

> when the blood moves brisk, the pulse beats high, and the soul has lofty conceptions of herself, she sublimes every thing about her, or to speak more truly, snatches herself away from the minute of things, and throws herself into grand prospects, and the magnificence of nature. (91)

This, to my reading, seems more active and agitated than the sedateness that Baillie otherwise describes as the consequence of sublime affect. Important in this comparison is the subject's relation to nature, and the direction of the exchange between the imagination and the perceived object. In Lowth, the enthusiastic subject is compelled to poetic utterance that is in itself sublime. For the hearers/readers of the poetic utterance, nature can be subsequently imbued with sublime potential and excite further enthusiasm, though the expression itself is the *sine qua non* of the passionate exchange, not the perception nor its contemplation in the imagination. For Baillie, the imagination of the subject can, in the particular mood he describes, project the sublimity it seeks so as to foster the expansion and subsequent sedateness. Importantly, this contrast shows how Lowth's theorizing allows for inspiration, expression and the further excitation of the passions. His is a theory of the prophetic sublime.

Prophetic Authority

While my focus is on the details of Lowth's theorizing of the Hebraic sublime and its influence upon the prophetic poetry of Smart and Blake, the larger trajectory of this dissertation is concerned with the notion of Romantic prophetic authority and its relation to the rhetoric of sublimity. If authority is a representation of power, the sublime becomes the rhetorical demonstration of that power. While, traditionally, prophetic authority is

given by God, the secularizing effects of Enlightenment skepticism displaced the divine source of this authority, which is increasingly relocated to the subject. The sense of power and forcefulness traditionally associated with sublime utterance, combined with the example of the biblical prophets, who spoke with authority against the corruption and sin of their day, provides a subversive poetic model for which the early Romantics, as Roston points out, were searching (13). The trajectory of this project suggests that, despite the decline of the church, or individual religious devotion, the rhetoric of the Hebraic sublime still served the purposes of these prophetic figures.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, prophetic authority is predicated upon the divine being who commissions and inspires the prophet. The Hebrew prophet is commissioned by God (Exo. 3, Isa. 6, Jer. 1), receives vision or some other divinely inspired message (Isa 1:1, Eze. 1), and declares this corrective message against the corrupt authorities of the time (Ex. 5, Jonah 3). Importantly, the prophet functions as a representative of divine power and, consequently, is able to command nature (Exo. 4, 1 Kings 17) and foretell future events.[7] While the prophet usually denounces sin and corruption, there are examples of the prophet using his authority otherwise (2 Kings 2:22-25). Lowth notes the ambiguous correspondence of poet and prophet in the Hebrew language: "It is sufficiently apparent, that the word *Nabi* was used by the Hebrews in an ambiguous sense, and that it equally denoted a Prophet, a Poet, or a Musician, under the influence of divine inspiration" (2.14). He elaborates further, noting that "the prophetic office had a most strict connexion with the poetic art. They had one common name, one common origin, one common author, the Holy

[7] See Lowth's third sermon at St. James for a summary of the different modes by which God inspired the biblical prophets (*Sermons* 253-268).

Spirit" (2.18). This ambiguity, combined with the inspiring enthusiasm, made for a compelling and efficacious poetic model.[8]

In Lowth's theorizing, poetic language is sublime, in part, because it attempts to rise to the glory of the concept it describes. By locating the effect in "the passions" and describing a rhetoric that seeks to affect the passions and by outlining a rhetoric that seeks to both represent and perform the power, Lowth theorizes a style that effectively delinks the inspiring agent from the sublimity of the text or utterance, locating the inspiration within the imagination or genius. From this reframing of poetic inspiration we can trace a trajectory—among prominent figures who are known (or suspected) to have been familiar

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[8] Two studies of poetic authority are worth nothing here, both of which offer more expansive perspectives on the cultural shifts to which Lowth contributed. John Guillory's study *Poetic Authority* traces the decline of the notion of inspiration from critical discourse. He notes that "although inspiration asserts the authority of the poetic text by invoking the participation of divinity in its production," the critique of this notion by Renaissance writers served to "demythologize the inspirational pretensions of the literary text, and the name they give for the origin of this text is 'imagination'" (viii-ix). He points out that "imagination" in this sense had not gained the positive connotations that the Romantics would afford the term, rather it suggests "a modest recalcitrance to the composure of reason" (ix). So from the demystifying of inspiration and its relegation to a work of mere imagination, to the Romantic re-enchantment of the imagination as something sacred, if not religious, we can trace cultural shifts concerning the reception of the Bible and its use as a poetic model. If the scholarly and skeptical study of the Bible led to its demystification, it could also be argued that its literary appropriation had the effect of sacralising the works of the visionary poet.

David G. Riede's study *Oracles and Hierophants* suggests a number of intersecting discourses that further contributed to the development of the Romantic notion of poetic authority. He cites, for example, Hannah Arendt's idea that authority, as word and concept, appeared "in the political context of the Roman notion of building upon prior foundations" (8). Against the notion of authority as augmentation, he also looks to Bloom's concept of the *agon* between poets (particularly that of the Romantics with Milton) (9). Authority, in these cases, is built upon a previous foundation or sought in the struggle with another. Riede further points out that the emergence of the Romantic notion of literary and critical authority occurred against the context of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century politics, the growth of public readership, the decline of the church, and the rise of the modern sense of "literature" (3). In addition to the political connotations of authority, Riede suggests the Romantic notion of poetic authority also has roots in the biblical notion of the prophet representing divine power. For the Romantics, however, the power previously assumed to rest in the divine has now been located within the self. Consequently, "the authority of poetry comes from its faithful representation of the depths of the poet's own soul, and poets, defined by their ability to distinguish the authentic and eternal truths of human experience from mere idiosyncrasy, are the most exalted of beings" (21). This authority, based on feelings, is "an authority based on a new conceptualization of the structure of the self" (22). The Romantic sense of poetic authority certainly also includes a reaction to neoclassical notions of literary taste, noted also by Roston.

with Lowth's work—of decreasing engagement with orthodox Christianity and the language thereof. While Lowth was theologically conservative and fully within the normative Anglicanism of his day, Smart identified with the Anglican tradition, though with heterodox tendencies. Blake, while using the language and store of images and symbols that orthodoxy supplied (he will still dine with Isaiah and Ezekiel), can in no practical way be reconciled with orthodoxy or the authority of the church. Smart and Blake, who both thought of themselves as prophets in the biblical model, not only utilized the principles of Lowth's Hebraic sublime but directly emulated the poetic style described in the *Lectures*. For them, the example of the Hebrew prophet and his poetry represent a spiritual authority that could effect both individual and cultural change. Shelley, who is said to have "read and admired" the *Lectures* (Leighton 16), represents the end of this trajectory and is considered briefly in the Conclusion of this project. Removed completely from both the language and the identification of orthodoxy, his idea of the poet is a prophet who, without religious commitment, "participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one" (513).

In order to understand the significance of Lowth's contribution to the broader discourse of the sublime in the eighteenth century, Chapter One examines the four lectures on the sublime (XIV-XVII) within the context of the *Lectures* as a whole. It takes as a point of analysis Lowth's own insistence upon the Longinian nature of his reading of the Hebraic sublime. I contend, however, that Lowth's silent divergence from Longinian principles, particularly from the idea that figures and tropes should be used inconspicuously, represents a unique and innovative development in the eighteenth-century discourse on the sublime. With particular attention given to the figures and tropes of the Hebrew poetry, Lowth shifts the focus of the sublime event from the represented object to the subject's

hermeneutic engagement with language. His theorizing of the Hebraic sublime also offers expansive possibilities for reading beyond the poetry to which he limits his analysis: the events represented in the narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures can exemplify the sublime. These different encounters with the sublime are demonstrated with an extended reading of the account of Balaam in the biblical book of Numbers. While Lowth gestures toward Balaam's first prophecy over the tribes of Israel as an example of the sublime mode (1.304), his subsequent prophecies, as well as the narrative that precedes his prophetic utterances, expand upon Lowth's principles. The account also suggests an inherent correlation between sublimity and perception.

Chapter Two historicizes Lowth's Hebraic sublime, both in a literary critical context and in a socio-political and religious context. Since, in the four lectures on the sublime, Lowth posited an enthusiasm consequent to an encounter with sublimity, he countered a discourse that, since the Restoration, had regarded religious enthusiasm with suspicion and hostility. Indeed, Lowth himself contributed to this discourse when, preaching before the House of Lords as a bishop in 1767, he condemned enthusiasm as a threat to both the State and the Church. Analysis of his earlier, positive enthusiasm makes evident his debt to the criticism of John Dennis, a silent but pervasive influence upon the *Lectures*. Lowth builds upon Dennis's notion of poetic enthusiasm but, by shifting the focus of his theorizing from the religious poetry of Dennis's analysis to the sacred poetry of the Hebrew Scriptures, is able to posit a "true and genuine enthusiasm" (1.367) that occurs in concert with the sublime realization but that does not bear the negative cultural connotations of religious enthusiasm. A comparison of Lowth's retelling of the account of Solon of Athens with its original in Plutarch demonstrates that, though Lowth sought to define moral and

ethical limits to his "true and genuine" enthusiasm, the nature of sublimity and enthusiasm to exceed boundaries is not easily contained, even in his own language.

Following the analysis of Lowth and his contexts, Chapter Three turns its focus upon Christopher Smart, who represents a degree of abstraction from Lowth's orthodox religious belief. Encountering, in early odes to "the Supreme Being," both the impossibility of representing the divine and the insufficiency of language for such representation, Smart develops a poetics in the *Jubilate Agno* that evades the difficulties of representation. While Lowth has been identified as an influence upon Smart since the first publication of the *Jubilate* in 1939, this influence has typically been seen in the parallel structure of the poem. I argue that, by utilizing Lowth's rhetoric of sublimity—particularly the notion of the inapt metaphor, which suggests representation while it fails to represent—Smart is able to negatively evoke a sense of divine presence as he proclaims his vision of a renewed Church at the centre of a revivified England. Smart is explicit about his authority to make such proclamations, calling himself "the Lord's News-Writer—the scribe evangelist" (B327), though the means by which this authority is expressed, a concept he calls "impression," is derived from Lowth.

Chapter Four speculates on Blake's familiarity with Lowth's *Lectures* and his later translation of the biblical Book of Isaiah. Arguing that the categories of reading that Lowth posits in the *Lectures*, the Poetical and Theological, roughly correspond with Blake's notions of Intellectual Powers and the Corporeal Understanding, this chapter demonstrates how Lowth can bring insight to the reading of the sublime in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. The conversation of the prophets, the competing visions of eternity and the diabolic conversion of the Angel all reflect aspects of Lowth's Hebraic sublime. Further, Blake's

critique of Contraries suggests a reading of Isaiah 34 and 35 in Lowth's translation that emphasizes the active role of the imagination in prophecy and its realization. Blake, whose Isaiah figure argues that "the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God" (Pl. 12, E38), marks a further remove from Lowth and orthodoxy. While his poetics is more deeply rooted in the biblical tradition than Smart's, for Blake the spirit of the prophet is not allied with church or institution. His authority is given, like that of *Milton's* Bard, "according to the inspiration of the Poetic Genius / Who is the all-protecting Divine Humanity / To whom be Glory & Power & Dominion Evermore Amen" (14.1-3, E108). Lowth's *Lectures* provide Blake with the rhetoric, though the theological substrate has been discarded.

This trajectory ends with Shelley, who purchased Lowth's *Lectures* in Latin just months before his journey to Switzerland in 1816 (*Letters* 1.437.38). Shelley's poetics are not, like those of Smart and Blake, modelled on the Hebrew poetry and do not suggest a Lowthian influence. However, his "Defence of Poetry" is redolent with Hebraic notions of the power and effect of poetry as well as the glorification of the prophet as an efficacious poet. Though Shelley is completely separated from Lowth's Christianity and is concerned with the sublime as it perceived in nature, his notions of the prophetic vocation and social role of the poet clearly demonstrate the continuing, though diminished, influence of Lowth's ideas.

Chapter One

Reading the Hebraic Sublime

The turn in scholarship of the sublime in eighteenth-century Britain away from a Kantian notion of the disinterested subject and toward a notion of the sublime being "embedded in the cultural practice of the late eighteenth century and romantic period" (Duffy and Howell 1) invites a reconsideration of Robert Lowth's theorizing of the Hebraic sublime in his *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* and other works. This invitation was signaled by his inclusion in Ashfield and De Bolla's anthology *The Sublime*, which first raised the question of detaching the discourse of British aesthetics from "the scholarly tradition that has repeatedly told a story about the beginnings of aesthetics in eighteenth-century Britain in terms of the gradual shift towards the Kantian critique of judgment" (2). Lowth, whose theorizing in the *Lectures* was derided by Samuel Holt Monk in his foundational 1935 study *The Sublime*, has long been regarded as a derivative figure whose notions of the rhetorical sublime were quickly superseded by the publication of Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* in 1757. Indeed, Lowth is better remembered for his articulation of a theory of parallel verse structure of Hebrew poetry or for the publication of his *Short Introduction to English Grammar*, than for any contribution to the discourse on the sublime. From Monk's initial remarks on Lowth—stating that "he was not so original in his insistence on the sublimity of the Old Testament poets" (80) and that his theorizing is "as vague as if he had used the time-honored phrase, *le je-ne-sais-quoi*" (81)—scholarship has

gradually and increasingly recognized the importance of Lowth's contribution to the discourse.[1]

Monk's objection to Lowth, presumably based upon his "reading [of] the British tradition exclusively in terms of a preparation for the Kantian description of the subject" (Ashfield and De Bolla 3), as merely reverting to Longinus and otherwise lacking innovation, struck a keynote that subsequent scholarship has been slow to question or refute. J. W. H. Atkins follows Monk in making a simple identification of Lowth with Longinus, though he notes the importance of "brevity of statement" in the sublime Hebrew poetic style (191). Norman Maclean also acknowledges the similarity to Longinus but makes more of differentiating Lowth from Addison and Burke. Later scholars of Lowth, religion and the sublime changed their analytical focus to the poetics of the Hebraic sublime. Robert Morris, for example, notes how Lowth impressed his contemporaries by "moving his *Lectures* far beyond the jargon of standard eighteenth-century criticism. The sublimity of the Hebrews depends particularly, he [argues], upon strong passion in the poets and upon the 'naturalness' of their expression" (161). Similarly, Brian Hepworth points out that, unlike Burke, Lowth "is concerned with linguistic response in poetry" (97). He elaborates further, noting that "'low' and 'coarse' words induce a sense of immediate sublime shock, and the highest kind of parabolic flight of the mind." Subsequent scholars aimed to locate Lowth's analysis within the broader context of biblical sublimity. James Kugel—who suggests that "Lowth's identification of *sublimitas* as a characteristic of biblical

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[1] One can get a sense of Lowth's posterity by noting either his absence or marginal appearance in studies on the subject. In Philip Shaw's 2006 survey, for example, Lowth is included briefly as an addendum to Dennis (32). While Lowth does not warrant mention in De Bolla's *The Discourse of the Sublime* (1989), several passages from the *Lectures* are included in Ashfield and De Bolla's 1996 anthology. He is also absent from Robert Doran's recent study *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (2015).

poetry was not an insignificant event in English literary history" (279)—as well as David Norton elaborate on the earlier suggestion of the sublimity of "low and coarse" language and its relation to the sublime. Kugel differentiates poetic language from "ordinary parlance," noting how "Lowth specifically mentions unusual syntax, ellipses, and shifts in grammatical person and tense" and makes the point that Lowth was unique in showing that such "lawlessness comes from, and is in turn capable of producing, the excitement of the 'passions'" (279). Norton further points out how Lowth juxtaposes "the kind of language often used for the [King James Bible's] English—'vulgar, mean'—with key Augustan words for literary excellence" (2.67). Subsequent scholarship cast a more critical eye upon Lowth's claims about his own analysis.

James Engell, who wrote a celebratory essay on Lowth as the "unacknowledged legislator," was the first to question Lowth's own assertion—accepted by Monk—that he simply relied on Longinus for his own theorizing. Engell follows Norton's suggestion that Lowth's is an aesthetic approach and describes it as "more akin to Burke or even Kant than Longinus." He continues:

> Lowth has stronger affinities with a psychological than a rhetorical analysis. He is interested in the reaction of different faculties of the mind as well as in "the language of the passions." His concept of the sublime in Hebrew poetry dwells in the infinite and incomparable, it supersedes representational language, art, and imaginative power, all of which, however, return to it as if drawn by a magnet. It overpowers the imagination, it is associated with infinity, it works "by a kind . . . of negation." (134)

While Kugel and Norton suggest that Lowth finds a sublime force in “low and coarse” language, Engell argues that such language strikes the reader with such force because, in its coarseness, it better intimates both the infinite that cannot be represented in language and the urgency of prophetic inspiration. Ian Balfour makes a similar point, arguing that “the language of the sublime . . . usually defined by an incommensurability between a discourse and its object,” is, in Lowth, “posited as entirely consonant with its referent, even if in the mode of incommensurability” (*Rhetoric* 58). Theologian John Milbank, differentiating Lowth from contemporary theorists who located the sublime outside of the subject and who argued that language represented the sublime in nature, notes that, in Lowth, “the sublimity of nature is not so much something represented in language as something which irrupts *through* language as an expressive event: a figurative expression which is also in itself sublime” (217).

Scholarship has developed from the simple identification of Lowth and Longinus with increasing narrowness, focusing on elements of Hebrew poetics and the function of sublime style. No previous study, however, has investigated in detail the means by which the “low and coarse” language and unusual syntax—that which Lowth identifies as constitutive to the Hebraic sublime—are used to foster the sublime “irruption” through language and the consequent excitation of the passions. Nor has there been discussion of the principle that underlies the sublime mode of Hebrew poetry: figurative dissimilarity. Scholarship on this subject has also been limited to poetic passages of the Hebrew Scriptures, though Lowth’s theorizing can inform the reading of narrative as well. This chapter examines in detail the development of Lowth’s theorizing of the Hebraic sublime across Lectures XIV-XVII and argues that Lowth’s explicit identification with the ideas of

Longinus (if not exactly the *Peri Hypsous*) and silent divergence from them represents a unique and innovative development in the eighteenth-century discourse on the sublime. By shifting the focus of his analysis from the represented object—the signified or the content of rhetoric—to the functioning of language (or its inability to function) in the sublime event, Lowth unassumingly alters the trajectory of English poetry. The first section of this chapter reviews the argument of the *Lectures*, contextualizing the four lectures on the Hebraic sublime, while subsequent sections trace the development of Lowth's theorizing throughout these four lectures, with particular attention given to his exploration of the figures and tropes most conducive to sublimity in the Hebrew poetry. Following this analysis, the account of Balaam in the biblical book of Numbers is read as both exemplifying Lowth's Hebraic sublime and expanding upon his articulation of the notion. In this chapter, Lowth's sublime is considered in, as it were, its nominative form, leaving analysis of its place in British literary, religious and political culture for later investigation.

The Lectures

The argument of the *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* is that the Psalms and much of the prophetical writings—traditionally called poetical though not accessible to modern readers as poetry[2]—did conform to recognizable literary principles and could

[2] See chapter 7 of Roston for helpful context and discussion of eighteenth-century verse paraphrases of the Hebrew Scriptures. He notes that, though it was thought that the Psalms were a kind of poetry, "so long as it was believed that the poetry of the Bible depended upon an accentual metre which had been lost in the course of time, the biblical translator felt bound to replace the metre by one of his own—usually the heroic couplet" (126). Prior to Lowth's articulation of a theory of Hebrew parallelism, "the pre-romantic could not turn to Hebrew poetry for inspiration, but only to the diffuse Augustan translation—for at the time the Authorized Version was regarded as merely a prose translation, useless as a poetic model" (126).

sustain literary critical analysis.[3] Though the significance of this argument is lost to modern readers, Lowth's desire to separate his literary readings of the Hebrew Scriptures from their traditional sacred purposes had few precedents. Recognizing this, Lowth insists several times that "it is not my intention to expound to the student of theology the oracles of divine truth; but to recommend to the notice of the youth who is addicted to the politer sciences, and studious of the elegancies of composition, some of the first and choicest specimens of poetic taste" (1.50-51). His desire is to maintain a strictly literary inquiry and, toward such an end, proposes to "distribute the Hebrew poems, according to their different species, into different classes" (1.53-54), lest "while we wander too much at large in the ample field of Poetry, we should imprudently break in upon the sacred boundaries of Theology" (1.53). Roston notes the significance of Lowth's approach. Though the *Lectures* were well received as "general literary criticism which happened to use the Bible as its subject-matter," his innovative contributions to criticism "were evolved from the Bible itself, from his readiness to lay aside the literary assumptions of his age and to approach the Bible without preconceived notions" (21). He not only demonstrated a new way to read the Bible, but a new way to read.

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[3] The *Lectures* is divided into two major sections, the first being an exploration of the poetics of the Hebrew Scriptures (Lec. III-XVII) and the second an analysis of form and genre (Lec. XVIII-XXXIV). The first section begins by demonstrating that "the Hebrew poetry is metrical" (1.55), arguing for the "parabolic" (משל, *mashal*) as the characteristic poetical mode of the Hebrew Scriptures and defining its three principal styles (sententious, figurative, sublime). The sententious style is discussed in Lecture IV. Lectures V-XIII are devoted to the figurative style and its constituent elements (imagery, metaphor, allegory, simile and prosopopoeia). In lectures XIV-XVII Lowth explores the "sublime of the Hebrew poetry" and approaches it in each successive lecture with a narrowing focus. Lecture XIV discusses the "sublime in general" and concerns the relationship of poetic expression and language to the concept of the sublime. Lecture XV, on "the sublimity of expression," argues that certain figures are more conducive to sublimity than others. Lecture XVI, on "sublimity of sentiment," examines several tropes that are used in the representation of divine action. Lecture XVII, on "the sublime of passion," describes a mimetic process by which poetry affects the passions and provokes an intense emotional response.

Lowth, in a key passage early in the *Lectures*, argues that poetical language is the product of the "vehement affections of the mind" (1.79). This sort of primal utterance, which he identifies with "that singular frenzy of poets, which the Greeks, ascribing to divine inspiration, distinguished by the appellation of *enthusiasm*," is "a style and expression directly prompted by nature itself" and the "express image of a mind violently agitated" (1.79). The mind being so agitated, the subsequent spontaneous poetic composition emphasizes the authenticity, if artlessness, of the utterance:

> When, as it were, the secret avenues, the interior recesses of the soul are thrown open; when the inmost conceptions are displayed, rushing together in one turbid stream, without order or connexion. Hence sudden exclamations, frequent interrogations, apostrophes even to inanimate objects: for to those, who are violently agitated themselves, the universal nature of things seems under a necessity of being affected with similar emotions. (1.79)

The language Lowth uses in this description, of the interior being exposed or brought violently outward, suggests a poetic style that is technically imperfect, yet forcefully emotive and genuine. The style represents the suddenness and urgency of the mind's "vehement affections." Such poetry was religious in impulse and, though very expressive, limited in its breadth and use. Refinement of poetic expression, according to Lowth, allowed poetry to be put to more expansive uses. Once poetry was "in time improved by art, and applied to the purposes of utility and delight" (1.80), it could be used to

> depict the great, the beautiful, the becoming, the virtuous; to embellish and recommend the precepts of religion and virtue, to transmit to posterity excellent and sublime actions and sayings; to celebrate the works of the Deity, his

beneficence, his wisdom; to record the memorials of the past, and the predictions of the future. (1.82)

Poetry, in this early mode, developed into the method by which religious and cultural memory was preserved and transmitted. Consequently, the poetic tradition and style of any cultural group ought to preserve some distinction unique to that group's history. Lowth's analysis of the "parabolic mode" is thus an attempt to recover the poetic memory of the ancient Israelites and make it accessible to criticism. This sense of cultural recovery is emphasized by his claims that to read the Hebrew poets effectively, "we must see all things with their eyes, estimate all things by their opinions: we must endeavour as much as possible to read Hebrew as the Hebrews would have read it" (1.113). Lowth's "hermeneutical stance," which Balfour describes as an "'old' historicism" (*Rhetoric* 58), is taken up again in his 1778 *Isaiah: A New Translation*. Not only does he attempt to present an English text "by adhering closely to the letter of the text, and treading as nearly as may be in his footsteps" (1), but further to "imitate the air and manner of the author, to express the form and fashion of the composition, and to give the English reader some notion of the peculiar turn and cast of the original." Lowth's method, which assumed that the radical difference of time and place required an almost archaeological approach to the text, was later highly influential in the development of the Higher Criticism in Germany.

Lowth begins his analysis with the word *Mashal* (משל), which is commonly translated "parable," describing it as "the Hebrew word most expressive of the poetic style," and pointing out that is does not have "one simple and distinct meaning, but might commodiously enough be supposed to admit of three constituent parts or divisions: in other words, that it might imply the *sententious*, the *figurative*, and the *sublime*" (1.101).

The three constituent styles are not clearly demarcated in Lowth's analysis ("there are indeed many passages in the sacred writings highly figurative, and infinitely sublime; but all of them manifestly assume a sententious form," 1.99), and he is occasionally inconsistent in his use of the terms, though they are usually effective for his critical approach to the text.

The sententious style is, according to Lowth, "the primary characteristic of the Hebrew poetry, as being the most conspicuous and comprehensive of all" (1.98). His use of the word does not carry the pejorative connotation that it later acquired, but is descriptive: the Hebrew poetry is written in sentences rather than metrical or syllabic lines and conveys meaning. Lowth makes the point that the sententious style allows for the parallel constructions typical to Hebrew poetry. Since "the Hebrew poets frequently express a sentiment with the utmost brevity and simplicity, illustrated by no circumstances, adorned with no epithets (which in truth they seldom use); they afterwards call in the aid of ornament" (1.100). This ornament can come in the form of parallel statements, allowing for "the amplification of the same ideas, the accumulation of others, and the opposition or antithesis of such as are contrary to each other" (1.100). A further consequence of the sententious style is the relative ease with which the poetry can be translated into other languages without losing either the structural or sentimental significance. According to Lowth, "a poem translated literally from the Hebrew into the prose of any other language, whilst the same forms of the sentences remain, will still retain, even as far as relates to versification, much of its native dignity, and a faint appearance of versification" (1.71). That said, Lowth does, in the lectures and in his later preaching and translation work, call for new poetic renderings of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The figurative style is that which, though still sententious in form, makes use of rhetorical figures and tropes to communicate meaning or sentiment. Though Lowth's analysis of the style will use some terminology and concepts from "the Greek rhetoricians . . . who possessed a faculty of inventing names in the highest perfection" (1.105), he is confining himself to the Hebrew text itself without reference to other classical sources: "I shall neglect even their primary distinction between tropes and figures, and their subdivisions of the figures themselves, denominating some figures of expression, and some figures of sentiment" (1.105). He identifies five figurative elements upon which to expand: imagery, metaphor, allegory, simile and prosopopoeia. There is an important distinction to make here about the figurative style that will help to distinguish it from the later discussion of the sublime. The principle by which he groups these figurative elements is that of *resemblance*: "The word *Mashal*, in its most common acceptation, denotes resemblance, and is therefore directly expressive of the figurative style, as far as the nature of figures consists in the substitution of words, or rather of ideas, for those which they resemble" (1.104). The use of figures in the Hebrew prophets is communicative because there is an essential resemblance or likeness shared by an object and its figurative representation, or between tenor and vehicle. Expanding upon the idea of this resemblance, Lowth describes the relation of the various figures:

> That resemblance, if it be only intimated, and confined to a few words, is called a Metaphor; if the figure be continued, it is called an Allegory; if it be directly expressed by comparing the ideas together, and by the insertion of any words expressive of likeness, it is called Simile or Comparison. On the same principle of resemblance the Prosopopœia, or Personification, is also founded, when a character

> or person is assigned even to things inanimate or fictitious (which is a bolder species of metaphor) or when a probable but fictitious speech is attributed to a real personage. (1.106-108)

The use of the figure asserts to the reader that the tenor can be effectively substituted with the vehicle and doing so will expand the reader's understanding or insight about the tenor. Whether the substitution is made for aesthetic, expressive or sentimental reasons, the two elements of the figure ought to resemble each other sufficiently so that the hermeneutical burden placed upon the reader is light. For example, in the metaphor used in Psalm 23, that "the LORD is my shepherd," the resemblance between the two elements is near enough that the imaginative effort required to comprehend the substitution is not excessive. The effective figure is that which masks the absence of the tenor, in this case giving either comfort or reassurance with the suggestion of the vehicle. If the resemblance of the two elements is close, the imagination is able, having made the figurative association, to identify the vehicle with the tenor. In the above example, the absence of "the LORD" is mediated by the comparison to the shepherd. Since the comparison is legitimate, the shepherd, whether in its idea or in the actual presence of a particular shepherd, can compensate for the absence of "the LORD." Interestingly, the principle that Longinus articulates several times throughout the *Peri Hypsous*, that figures and tropes are most conducive to sublimity when they are inconspicuous, is the opposite of Lowth's analysis of the sublimity of Hebrew poetry. Though this contrast goes unacknowledged by Lowth, it suggests a fundamentally different relation between the poet/orator and the reader/audience. Whereas Longinus argues that the hearer's awareness of the rhetorical construction of the sublime utterance

will hinder the possible transport, Lowth's theorizing suggests that exposing the construction will witness to the reality of the signified divine.

The Hebraic Sublime

In Lecture XIV Lowth turns to consider the sublime as the third style in the parabolic mode of Hebraic poetry. While his basic definition of the sublime is explicitly Longinian,[4] it being "that force of composition, whatever it be, which strikes and overpowers the mind, which excites the passions, and which expresses ideas at once with perspicuity and elevation" (1.307), the course of his investigation and commitment to the Hebrew Scriptures leads him to silently diverge from Longinus. The lasting influence of Lowth's theorizing of the Hebraic sublime is rooted in this divergence, which sets him upon a unique theoretical trajectory. He begins his analysis by differentiating prose, being the language of Reason, from poetry as the language of the Passions. His description of the working of the latter upon the reader is redolent of the earlier description of the intensity and genuineness of early poetic expression: "The conceptions burst out in a turbid stream, expressive in a manner of the internal conflict; the more vehement break out in a hasty confusion; they catch (without thought or study) whatever is impetuous, vivid, or

[4] Indeed, Lowth mentions Longinus by name here: "in this use of the word I copy Longinus, the most accomplished author on this subject, whether we consider his precepts or example" (1.307). Longinus is invoked several other times by Lowth in the *Lectures* (1.347, 360, 365) and once in a footnote by Gregory (1.303). While Lowth's brief mentions indicate that he had read or was at least familiar with the *Peri Hypsous*—he could cite, for example, Longinus's "censure" of Homer's depiction of the gods (1.360)—he uses Longinus as little more than a sort of landmark by which he could perform his own theorizing; no detailed reference is made to Longinus in relation to the particular rhetorical features of the Hebraic sublime, though there are numerous correspondences. While this likely allowed him to exploit the popularity of the treatise, which had by this time been through two editions of Smith's translation, it also gave him, as a reference point, a purely rhetorical notion of the sublime that excluded other recent theories that posited sublimity in the interaction with an external object (*i.e.* Addison's essays in *The Spectator* (1712) or Baillie's "An Essay on the Sublime" (1747), which was published contemporaneously to Lowth's tenure as Professor of Poetry).

energetic" (1.308-309). The emotional force of such poetry is the product of two elements: the mimetic functioning of the imagination and the rhetorical performance of emotion. In Lecture 17 Lowth explains the logic of this mimetic relationship. "The language of poetry," he writes is "the effect of mental emotion" (1.366). Poetry, in the early sense discussed above, "is indebted for its origin, character, complexion, emphasis, and application, to the effects which are produced upon the mind and body, upon the imagination, the senses, the voice, and respiration by the agitation of passion" (1.366). Anticipating Wordsworth's declaration that "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," which "takes its origin in emotion recollected in tranquility" (251), Lowth argues that poetry is the effect of intense feeling conceived of in the poet's imagination. This imaginative effort is the beginning of the expressive relationship that leads from the poet's inspiring emotion to the reader's experience of passionate excitation. Poetry begins in the poet's mental or imaginative effort, which is given expression in language, then is replicated in the reader's experience. Not questioning nor prohibiting any divine source of inspiration, Lowth emphasizes the emotional effort of the poet's imagination.[5] When, he writes,

> a poet is able by the force of genius, or rather of imagination, to conceive any emotion of the mind so perfectly as to transfer to his own feelings the instinctive passion of another, and, agreeably to the nature of the subject, to express it in all its

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[5] Lowth's relationship to the Christian notion of divine inspiration is ambivalent in the *Lectures*. One consequence of his desire to separate Poetry from Theology (1.53) is that he must approach the biblical texts as works of the human imagination. He comments in Lecture XVI that "I shall endeavour to detract nothing from the dignity of that inspiration, which proceeds from higher causes, while I allow to the genius of each writer his own peculiar excellence and accomplishments. I am indeed of opinion, that the Divine Spirit by no means take such an entire possession of the mind of the Prophet, as to subdue or extinguish the character and genius of the man: the natural powers of the mind are in general elevated and refined, they are neither eradicated nor totally obscured" (1.347). While this view of inspiration-as-quickening is weighted more to the side of imagination than his later sermon on inspiration (256-259), neither is it a radical departure from typical Anglican teaching of the time.

> vigour, such a one, according to a common mode of speaking, may be said to possess the true poetic enthusiasm. (1.366)

In this passage, poetic inspiration is located in the imagination of the poet. Important at this point in the discourse is the expressive functioning of the inspiration. Conceiving of some strong emotion, the poet is able to contrive to feel that same emotion, which is then given poetic expression. The strongest emotions, those which correspond most clearly with the passions, require a poetics that is able to express *and* perform them. Once the poet has experienced the inspiring emotion, the resulting poem can "most completely effect its purpose" by producing a similar passionate experience in its reader (1.367). Since the "most perfect production of poetry" is, to Lowth, "the imitation or delineation of the passions," the mimetic relationship is furthered when the sublime rhetoric of the poem is able to perform or enact a similar emotion upon the reader. So, while "the language of poetry" to Lowth may be "the effect of mental emotion" (1.366), it is also the cause of such emotion.

Lowth's explanation of the experience of reading poetry also focuses on the evaluation of the imitated emotion. The act of reading is implicitly one of comparison, as "the understanding slowly perceives the accuracy of the description in all other subjects, and their agreement to their archetypes, as being obliged to compare them by the aid and through the uncertain medium, as it were, of the memory" (1.368). Pleasure is produced through the recognition of the original object or idea in its representation. When, however, the intensity of a passion finds expression in a sublime poetic utterance, Lowth argues that "the object is clear and distinct at once; the mind is immediately conscious of itself and its own emotions; it feels and suffers in itself a sensation, either the same or similar to that

which is described." The achievement of the sublime in poetry, in other words, produces in the reader at once—and without the opportunity or need for reflection—the feeling of the described passion as well as the imagination's consciousness of itself. Further, whereas the recognition of the imitated object produces pleasure in the reader at the recognition (1.370), the poetic expression of the passion will result in the excitation of that passion in the reader.

Sublime Figures

Hebrew poetry is sublime when it both imitates the passions and, in its language, forcefully performs the emotion it is expressing. Toward a fuller description of the sublime style, Lowth identifies several figures and tropes that, he argues, are particularly effective for communicating emotion with forcefulness. In his earlier discussion of the figurative style, Lowth posits that the use of figures and tropes was based upon a principle of resemblance (1.104). The sublime style differs from the figurative in two significant ways: the rhetorical features are based not on resemblance but upon dissimilarity and this dissimilarity is the source of their forcefulness.

In Lecture XV, "on the sublimity of expression," Lowth identifies two figures that contribute to the sublimity of the poetic utterance. The first is the apostrophe or "sudden and frequent change of persons" in the discourse (1.326) and the second is the "frequent change or variation of tenses" in poetic addresses (1.330). The former occurs at moments of intensity, when the speaker is compelled by sudden emotion to digress from their

current subject.[6] Lowth uses Deuteronomy 32:5-6 as an example. Moses, contrasting the sin of the people of Israel to the greatness of God, states that "Their evil disposition hath corrupted his children, which are indeed no longer his" (1.327). The next verse is not a description but an accusatory address to the people:

> Perverse and crooked generation!
>
> Will ye thus requite JEHOVAH,
>
> Foolish people and unwise?
>
> Is he not thy father and thy redeemer;
>
> Did he not make thee and form thee? (1.327)

This apostrophe is meant to signify Moses's sudden "indignation" at the wickedness of the people, after which, "adverting to a remoter period, he beautifully enlarges upon the indulgence, and more than paternal affection, continually manifested by Almighty God towards the Israelites" (1.327). The apostrophe signifies the sudden passion experienced by Moses in the utterance of the words, but also, in its abruptness and intensity, reaches toward sublimity for the reader. Lowth comments that "the abrupt transition in one short sentence to the Israelites, and back again, is wonderfully forcible and pointed, and excellently expressive of disgust and indignation" (1.328). The conspicuity of the figure is what makes it sublime, rather than representative of the figurative style. In this Lowth diverts from Longinus, though without acknowledgement of doing so.

Several times in the *Peri Hypsous*, during his discussions of particular figures and tropes, Longinus emphasizes the importance of inconspicuous use. In Sec. XVII, for

[6] Compare to Longinus's discussion of sudden transitions in Sec. XXVII, of change of persons in Sec. XXVI, and direct address in Sec. XXVII.

instance, he suggests that "a too frequent and elaborate Application of Figures carries with it a great Suspicion of Artifice, Deceit and Fraud" (50).[7] Since the hearer will regard such overuse as an attack "by the Quirks and Subtleties of a wily Rhetorician," Longinus advises that "wherefore a Figure is most dextrously applied, when it cannot be discerned that it is a Figure" (51). He writes similarly of tropes in Sec. XXXII. Of metaphor, he advises "do not so much as give leisure to a Hearer to cavil at their Number, because they immediately strike his Imagination, and inflame him with all the Warmth and Fire of the Speaker" (74). In Lowth's analysis of the Hebraic sublime, however, the figures that achieve sublimity in the Hebrew poetry and "inflame" the reader's imagination are those which expose themselves as figures and disrupt the act of reading. The figurative style, which works on a principle of resemblance, is effective when the hermeneutical burden placed upon the reader's imagination is not excessive. The sublime style, however, seeks to substantially increase the burden. In the above example from Deuteronomy, the suddenness of the change serves to destabilize the act of reading as the interpretive demand is increased. The apostrophe is indicated by the change of pronoun from verse 5 to 6, from "they" to "you." Not having any other indication in the text how Moses's address will change or has changed, the reader's relation to the text is altered. Moses in verse 6 is addressing the congregated nation of Israel, but the individual reader has, without any other indication, become the object of the suddenly intensified emotion. The reader must account for the increased intensity of expression as well as the change of pronoun in the address. Rather than a Longinian ecstasy—an experience of being carried in imagination along with the speaker (64)—the reader rather is suddenly made aware of the presence of the figure.

[7] Page references are to Smith's 1739 translation.

The other figure Lowth discusses in this lecture is the sudden inversion of grammatical tense, such that future events are described using the past tense and past events with the future.[8] Lowth argues that this trope contributes to the sublimity of the passage because such changes of tense serve to "render the subject of a narrative or description more striking, and even to embody and give it a visible existence" (1.330). Using Deuteronomy 32:5 again for an example, he states that Moses "speaks as if he were the actual witness of their depravity, and present at those impious rites" (1.333). By figuring himself as witness to the sin of the people, his condemnation becomes more forceful while the contrast with the goodness of God, with whom Moses has also had audience, becomes greater. Part of the rhetorical function of prophetic poetry is achieved through such inversion of tenses. By writing of future events in the past tense, and the past as future, the imagination of the reader is forced to locate itself differently to how perception and memory otherwise would. This realigning of the subject to history is perhaps what Lowth means when he writes of the seeming transmutation of rhetoric into something "embodied." These two rhetorical figures function through the disruption of reading, which, Lowth argues, expresses the forcefulness and energy with which Moses is speaking. By Lowth's argument, the reader's attention, when it encounters the change of subject or inversion of tense, is momentarily distracted and directed elsewhere, to consider the conspicuousness of the change.

[8] Compare to Longinus's discussion of hyperbaton in Sec. XXII and the vivid present tense in Sec. XXV.

Sublime Tropes

While the sublime figures serve to destabilize and dislocate the reader's relation to the text, the tropes that Lowth identifies as being conducive to sublimity are those that strive to represent something of the divine by failing to represent. His discussion of sublime tropes is intentionally narrowed to "those parts of Scripture, in which a delineation of the Divine Majesty is attempted" (1.349), though the use of such tropes need not be limited to this. It should be noted that the object of the sublime representation here is not the figure or being of God in itself, but the "majesty" thereof, which in this sense refers to divine power; the representation is of an abstract quality possessed by God. In Lowth's reckoning, the effectively sublime trope must seemingly represent the abstract concept but, in its failure to do so, perform or enact to the reader some sense of that power it suggests. Whereas, in the figurative mode, the trope stands in for the absent tenor and masks its absence, the sublime trope uses negative or apophatic means of representation. Lowth argues that

> when the intellect is carried beyond [the limits of representation,] there is nothing substantial upon which it can rest; it wanders through every part, and when it has compassed the boundaries of creation, it imperceptibly glides in to the void of infinity: whose vast and formless extent, when displayed to the mind of man in the forcible manner so happily attained by the Hebrew writers, impresses it with the sublimest and most awful sensations, and fills it with a mixture of admiration and terror. (1.357)

If language is insufficient for representation of the "Divine Majesty," the poet must employ other means of attaining such an end. The reader's imagination must be led through a

hermeneutic process of increasing abstraction—which, Lowth suggests, happens almost instantaneously—the end of which is less a point of comprehension and understanding than an experience of passion that cannot be accomplished directly. Three ways in which this may be accomplished are identified by Lowth: by describing the effects of divine power, by representations of infinity and by the use of intentionally inadequate terrestrial and corporeal metaphors.

One means of representing divine majesty is to focus upon its effects, rather than the actions that would otherwise make it visible. Lowth uses the *fiat lux* as an example: "And God said, Let there be light, and there was light" (1.350, Gen. 1:3).[9] In Lowth's reading, the source of the power of this statement is both in its focus upon the result ("there was light") and in its concision: "The more words you would accumulate upon this thought, the more you would detract from the sublimity of it" (1.350). Further, the simplicity of the phrase belies the interpretive process inherent in its interpretation:

> For the understanding quickly comprehends the Divine power from the effect, and perhaps most completely, when it is not attempted to be explained; the perception in that case is the more vivid, inasmuch as it seems to proceed from the proper action and energy of the mind itself. (1.350)

[9] Longinus makes reference to this verse in Sec. IX: "So likewise the Jewish Legislator, no ordinary Person, having conceiv'd a just Idea of the Power of God, has nobly express'd it, in the beginning of his Law. And God said—What?—Let there be Light, and there was Light. Let the Earth be, and the Earth was" (22-23). Smith appends a lengthy note to this passage. Commenting that "this divine passage has furnished a handle for many of those who are willing to be thought critics, to shew their pertness and stupidity at once," he goes on to summarize the opinions of Boileau and Huet on the passage. He concludes by suggesting that "that Interrogation between the narrative part and the words of the Almighty himself, carries with it an air of reverence and veneration. It seems designed to awaken the reader, and raise his awful attention to the voice of the great Creator" (128-129). Though Lowth does not mention the fact that Longinus comments on this verse, their respective analyses of the sublimity of the passage are similar. The commentary of Arieti and Crossett here is helpful (57-58).

Lowth posits that some of the power of the statement is the product of the interpretive effort itself: the divine power intimated in the passage is identified with the imaginative effort required to interpret it. God's creative power is likened to the creative potential of the imagination and the result is a sense of awe, admiration or even terror.

Another means of representing divine majesty is through appeals to infinity or "continued negation" (1.354). If the imagination would seek something with which to identify the divine, Lowth posits that sublimity can be attained through the discarding of anything concrete. "Here," he writes, "the human mind is absorbed, overwhelmed as it were in a boundless vortex, and studies in vain for an expedient to extricate itself" (1.353). By either extending the representation to infinity, or by negating any possibility of concrete representation, an interpretive process similar to that described above can be enacted. Lowth uses as an example Psalm 36:6-7:

> O JEHOVAH, thy mercy extendeth to the heavens;
>
> Thy truth unto the clouds:
>
> Thy justice is as the mountains of strength;
>
> Thy judgment as the vast abyss! (1.354)

This passage addresses aspects of the "Divine Majesty" but eschews concrete representation. The abstract qualities of the divine (mercy, truth, justice, judgment) are reified and extended towards endlessness. To interpret these statements is to engage in the interminable process of abstract representation: "the mind seems to exert its utmost faculties in vain to grasp an object, whose unparalleled magnitude mocks its feeble endeavours" (1.353). Lowth points out that, with this passage in particular, the ideas used as vehicles for each metaphor are "the grandest imagery that universal nature can suggest,

and yet this imagery, however great, proves totally inadequate to the purpose" (1.353). In this case the objects that were, in the eighteenth century, typically associated with the sublime of nature are considered insufficient for comparison with the "Divine Majesty."

The most innovative and influential aspect of Lowth's discussion of the Hebraic sublime is the use of conspicuously inapt metaphors to represent the divine. Acknowledging the insufficiency of language to represent the "Divine Majesty," he points out that the Hebrew poets still exploited that insufficiency for the purpose of representation. "In the delineation of the Divine nature," Lowth writes,

> the sacred poets do indeed, in conformity to the weakness of the human understanding, employ terrestrial [and corporeal] imagery; but it is in such a manner, that the attributes which are borrowed from human nature and human action, can never in a literal sense be applied to the Divinity. (1.360)

Metaphors and similes of this sort most fully demonstrate the essential qualities of the sublime tropes: conspicuity, dissimilarity and hermeneutical burden. The metaphor has become conspicuous in its failure: the tenor and vehicle do not share a resemblance and the two cannot be resolved. In Lowth's description of the reader's interaction with the trope, "the understanding is continually referred from the shadow to the reality; nor can it rest satisfied with the bare literal application, but is naturally directed to investigate that quality in the Divine nature" (1.360-61). The movement "from the shadow to the reality" is important, because it suggests a movement in the reader's imagination from the letter to

the spirit.[10] The trope is recognized for what it is, a rhetorical construct, but the reader is still moved toward the apprehension of the actual "Divine Majesty."

If, as mentioned above with reference to the figurative style, the trope typically functions by masking the absence of the tenor with an adequately similar vehicle, the sublime trope serves to expose the absence of the tenor and the artifice of the rhetorical construction. With this realization the imagination seeks to fill the rhetorical vacuum. Lowth explains that

> our understanding immediately rejects the literal sense or those which seem quite inconsistent with the Divine Being, and derived from an ignoble source: and, while it pursues the analogy, it constantly rises to a contemplation, which, though obscure, is yet grand and magnificent. (1.362)

Lowth uses as an example the image in Psalm 78:65 of God awaking "as out of sleep, / Like a strong man shouting because of wine" (1.363). The imagination, made aware of the trope and its inadequacy, rejects the image and instinctively seeks to replace it with a truer understanding of God's being moved to act. Consequently, a false notion of the divine is rejected—as something akin to rhetorical idolatry—and replaced with a more truthful apprehension. As mentioned above, the force of the realization is increased because "it seems to proceed from the proper action and energy of the mind itself" (1.350). Whereas Longinus warns against the hearer's "great Suspicion of Artifice, Deceit and Fraud" (50), Lowth's reading of the Hebrew poets emphasizes that the failure of the sublime trope reveals the reality that could not be contained in language.

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[10] This metaphor is suggested by Joshua Landy's reading of Jesus's use of parables in the Gospel of Mark (59-60).

There is an important implication that follows from the sublime rhetoric and the excitation of the passions that Lowth intimates but does not explore: the consequence of the sublime in the poetry is the reader's experience of something like an apprehension of the divine presence or a revelation of the divine in the imagination. It was mentioned above that poetic inspiration is a mimetic process through which the poet conceives of an emotion or passion and "by force of genius, or rather of imagination" is able to "transfer to his own feelings the instinctive passion of another" (1.368) and give it poetic expression. The reader encounters the passion represented in poetry and then experiences it. The most intense passions find suitable utterance in the most sublime poetry, consisting of the figures and tropes discussed above. Since the sublime figures and tropes are used to represent abstractions, such as the "Divine Majesty," they will also naturally be associated with the representation and consequent excitation of the passions, which are themselves closely associated with representations of the Divine. When Lowth's analysis does turn to the excitation of the passions in the poetry and their associations with the Divine Majesty, he approaches the subject with enthusiasm:

> Here indeed a spacious field presents itself to our view: for by far the greater part of the sacred poetry is little else than a continued imitation of the different passions. What in reality forms the substance and subject of most of these poems but the passion of admiration, excited by the consideration of the Divine power and majesty; the passion of joy, from the sense of the Divine favours, and the prosperous issue of events; the passion of resentment and indignation against the contemners of God; of grief, from the consciousness of sin; and terror, from the apprehension of the Divine judgment? (1.376-77)

If the “greater part of the sacred poetry” consists of the imitation of the passions, the potential rests in the imitations considered sublime to create in the reader an experience of the imitated passion. Therein lies the greater potential of Lowth’s theorizing of the sublime: sublime poetic utterance can create in the reader an experience of the passions like that which occurs in response to the apprehension of the divine presence. In Lowth’s catalogue of passions in the above quotation, the experience of each occurs in response to some contemplation or realization of a divine quality or, in biblical narrative, the presence of God itself. Admiration and joy meet the devout person who apprehends the divine, while the relative depravity of the sinful will rouse a divine indignation. The sinful person will, upon the divine realization, experience grief at their own sinful state or terror at the threat of judgment and condemnation. If poetry can excite these passions, and the apprehension of the “Divine Majesty” will also cause a similar excitation, it follows that the poem itself can become a metonym for the divine. The power of the biblical prophets relies on such an experience, as does the prophetic poetry of figures such as Christopher Smart and William Blake.

Reading the Sublime in Narrative

Lowth’s four lectures on the sublime of the Hebrew poetry abound with examples that demonstrate the forceful style he is analyzing. Indeed, he points out that such instances can be found “in the Book of Job, in the Psalms, in the Canticles, and in every part of the prophetic writings” and that “my principal difficulty” is not “the selection of excellent and proper instances,” but in the explication of their sublimity (1.377). The potential examples are legion, but the constraint of the lecture as a form does not allow for extended

analysis. Following up from one on his suggestions, the account of Balaam in Numbers 22-24 can be read both as an example of Lowth's Hebraic sublime as well as a demonstration in narrative of the passionate excitation that he theorizes. Lowth invokes Balaam as an example of form and style, but there is more that can be drawn from the passage. The ideas that he posits in these lectures can lead to an informed analysis of the functioning of the sublime in poetry and narrative.[11]

Following the defeat of the Amorites by the people of Israel (Numbers 21), the Moabite king Balak seeks to commission the prophet Balaam to curse his enemies, saying "curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed" (22:6). Balaam, having a reputation for speaking with prophetic power, is thought to be able to curse the encamped Israelites, though he defers to the divine for his authority.[12] He says, for example, "I will

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[11] The first example of the sublime style in Lecture XIV is Balaam's prophecy over the encamped people of Israel in Numbers 23:7-10. Lowth begins with it because it is the first instance of a character's "parable" or "discourse" (משל, *Mashal*) being "taken up" in the Hebrew Scriptures (1.304). This utterance, however, is the first of four such discourses spoken by Balaam, which are contained within a narrative that emphasizes issues such as inspiration, perception, and prophetic authority. Lowth's purpose in citing this passage is stylistic: he uses it to differentiate the sublime style from the sententious and figurative. He comments that it contains "exalted sentiments, that spirit of sublimity," and is animated with "energy and enthusiasm" (1.306), though this is stated without further analysis. Lowth returns to this passage in Lecture XX in his discussion of the poetical nature of the prophetic writings. He comments on this passage that "I do not know that the whole scope of the Hebrew poetry contains any thing more exquisite or perfect. This, which is at present under our consideration, abounds in gay and splendid imagery copied immediately from the tablet of Nature; and is chiefly conspicuous for the glowing elegance, the style, and the form and diversity of the figures" (2.81). He concludes the Latin lecture with a versified translation in alternating hexameter and tetrameter lines (*De Sacra* 240), while Gregory's English rendition is in iambic tetrameter (2.82-83). These renderings of the passage may show that the original Hebrew possesses poetic qualities but do nothing to support the claim for sublimity.

[12] Textual criticism has long demonstrated that the Balaam narrative is a compilation of separate texts, hence there are some continuity errors in these chapters. In addition to bearing traces of the J and E writers, the episode in 22:22-34—Balaam's encounter with the angel and the speaking donkey—is considered a later addition. Alter, however, notes the parallels between the two sections of the narrative (Balaam's journey and his prophecies), creating both "high comedy" and "a folktale pattern" (*Art of Biblical Narrative* 133-134).

bring word again, as the LORD shall speak unto me," and "if Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more" (22:8, 18). There is written into this account two notions of poetic-prophetic inspiration: Balak sees prophetic power in the imagination and speech of the prophet, while Balaam refers to the divine as the source of inspiration.

The four discourses of Balaam (23:7-10, 18-24; 24:3-9, 15-24) follow a similar pattern, each of which exemplify Lowth's theorizing of the Hebraic sublime. In each, it is said that Balaam "took up his parable"[13] before speaking his prophetic poem. As Lowth points out in Lecture IV, "a poem is called, in reference to the diction and sentiments, *Mashal*; which I take to be the word properly expressive of the poetical style" (1.76-78). In the first two discourses, the text says that "God [אלהים, *'Elohim*] met Balaam" and "the LORD [יהוה, YHWH] put a word in Balaam's mouth" (23:4-5).[14] The subsequent discourses are different, however, and suggest, rather than a direct word-giving inspiration, an encounter with the sublime and consequent excitation of Balaam's passions. For the third prophecy, rather than seeking God, he "set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes and the spirit of God came upon him" (24:1-2). In this instance, something about the sight of the tribes of Israel strikes Balaam as sublime; the coming of the spirit "upon him" could be read as the inspiration that results from his passions being excited. Balaam's fourth discourse is not preceded by an encounter with God. Rather, it is Balaam's curse upon Balak and the

[13] The fourth discourse is actually a series of curses against the various Philistine nations, each of which is prefaced with Balaam "taking up" his parable or *Mashal* (vv. 15, 20, 21, 23). Most contemporary English translations translate *Mashal* here as "discourse," "message" or "oracle."

[14] In verse 16, it is "the LORD," or יהוה that meets him and gives him the word.

Philistine nations. Several times he is said to "take up" his parable and utter prophecy, though there is no mention of any divine interaction. Rather, Balaam's curses are a response to Balak's anger. The parabolic form of the utterance indicates that Balaam's response is passionate and, with dramatic irony, the instance of Balaam's inherent imaginative prophetic power, which Balak sought to harness, is used against him.

The Balaam narrative suggests an inherent correlation between sublimity and perception. As Alter points out in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, the verb "to see" "becomes, with some synonyms, the main *Leitwort* in this tale about the nature of prophecy and vision" (132). In the first prophecy, he speaks of seeing the people of Israel, and seeing blesses. Inspiration occurs in the third prophecy after Balaam "lifted up his eyes and saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribe" (24:2). In the third and fourth discourses, he refers to himself as one "which heard the words of the God" and "which saw a vision of the Almighty," and falls "into a trance, but having his eyes open" (24:4, 16). He adds to this in the curse upon Balak, that "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh" (24:17). All of this sets up the conditions for the sublime utterance to occur: there is an interaction between God and Balaam, the giving of a word, the notion of prophetic authority being based on that interaction, the power of the poet-prophet to name and the idea that sublime speech is not limited to divine inspiration but is associated with the passions. In this narrative, sublimity corresponds with perception, as the subject is made aware of the presence of the divine and this encounter with God alters his perception.

The imagery of the three blessings models the sublimity Lowth describes in the *Lectures*. In each of these, the description of God's blessing upon Israel becomes a sublime

description of divine power and judgment. In the first blessing, sublimity is attained in the description of Israel's infinite expansion:

> For from the tops of the rocks I see him,
>
> And from the hills I behold him;
>
> Lo! the people, who shall dwell alone,
>
> Nor shall number themselves among the nations!
>
> Who shall count the dust of Jacob?
>
> Or number of the fourth of Israel?
>
> Let my soul die the death of the righteous,
>
> And let my end be as his. (Num. 23:9-10, 1.304-05)

From a place of elevation and upon the solidity of rock, suggesting the firm resolution with which Balaam speaks, he intimates limitlessness through negative suggestion. Further, by comparing expansion of Israel to the "dust of Jacob," he invokes the promise given by God to Abraham (Gen. 13:66, 22:17) and to Jacob (Gen. 28:14). The infinite expanse of Israel, itself suggestive of God's limitless power, is rooted in Israel's sacred history. The final two lines suggest that Balaam responds to the sight with admiration, for his spoken desire is now for a righteous end. The second blessing contains two images that demonstrate the sublime power of God. The first refers again to God acting within Israel's history: "God brought them out of Egypt: he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn" (23:22).[15] By

[15] The final word here—ראם [*re'em*]—has a curious translation history. While most contemporary English versions will render it "wild ox" (NASB, NSRV, ESV), it has been variously translated "unicorn" (AV) and "rhinoceros" (Vulgate: "*rinocerotis*"). Lowth himself translates the same word "wild goat" in Isaiah 34:7, a passage of particular interest to Blake. Though the force of the image is lost in translation, Job 39:9-12 suggests that the strength of the "wild ox" is such that it cannot be tamed by any human: "Will the wild ox consent to serve you, / Or will he spend the night in your manger?" (39:9, NASB). See also its mention in Burke on "Power" (66).

referring to what, in the narrative context would be the lived experience of Israel and, to later readers, sacred history, Balaam associates a defining moment of nationhood with the sublime and uncontainable strength of the "unicorn," the mere horn of which is sufficient to bring Israel from Egypt. In Lowth's theorizing, the sublimity of the image is in its indirect manner of suggesting God's strength, which is known through its effects and only through intimation. The image of God's judgment is complemented in 23:24 with an image of Israel, as a lion and lioness, devouring its prey and drinking "the blood of the slain." These images are repeated in the third blessing, though God is identified with the slaughter of Israel's enemies. The images of strength and violence are made more forceful through a contrast with the pastoral blessing upon Israel (24:5-7). This form of contrast, which has precedent in John Dennis's reading of Milton and later becomes the basis of Christopher Smart's poetics in the *Jubilate Agno*, is a development of the conspicuously inapt metaphor: the reader's consideration of the difference between the two states "constantly rises to a contemplation, which, though obscure, is yet grand and magnificent" (1.362).

The sublimity evident in Balaam's prophetic utterances in Numbers 23 and 24 can also be found in the account of his commission and journey in Chapter 22. This reading demonstrates that the principles of sublimity that Lowth locates in the poetry can also be used descriptively in narrative. Prior to his prophesying over the people of Israel, Balaam resists the beckoning Balak's messengers, because God tells him, "thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed." God then seemingly gives him permission to go with them, with the condition that "yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do." Balaam "rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab" though "God's anger was kindled because he went." There is a

seeming disparity between the permission granted to him and then the anger that immediately follows his acting upon that permission. The representation of God here reaches toward sublimity, as the strangeness and inscrutability of the representation defies reason and theology, comparable to the LORD's sudden appearance in Exodus 4:24-26 to kill Moses: "And it came to pass by the way in the inn, the LORD met him, and sought to kill him." As Balaam continues journeying toward the plains of Moab, an "angel of the LORD" stands before him, though he is unable to see it. His donkey, seeing the angel, tries to avoid it by laying down. Balaam, angered, "smote the ass with a staff." In response, "the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done to thee, that thou have smitten me these three times?" After speaking with the donkey, "the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand; and he bowed down his head and fell flat on his face." Convicted that his "way is perverse before [the angel]," Balaam repents: "I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me." Given sanction by the angel, again, to "speak only the word which I tell you," Balaam continues on his way.

The ironic inversion in this passage, in which "the ass . . . plays the role of Balaam—beholding divine visions with eyes unveiled—to Balaam's Balak" (Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative* 133), strikes an absurd note that, in its correspondence to the principles of sublimity described by Lowth, expands upon the poetic categories of his analysis. In this passage, the donkey demonstrates vision and a prophetic imagination that Balaam himself lacks. The word of God is uttered by an animal and the force of the experience alters Balaam's ability to perceive. Apprehending the already-present divine, his response is passionate. His reaction corresponds with the agitation of the passions in response to

sublimity: Balaam's reaction exhibits terror "from the apprehension of the Divine judgment" (1.377). The combination of inspired utterance, disruptive vision and a passionate response, taken together, suggests a representation in narrative of the effects that Lowth describes the reader of Hebrew poetry having to the sublime.

Conclusion

Given Lowth's sharp diversion from what seems a key principle of Longinus's discussion of the sublime—the importance of rhetorical inconspicuousness—one can justifiably question the grounds upon which Monk makes a simple identification between the two (one could also question, based on Lowth's few mentions of Longinus, how well he knew the *Peri Hypsous* himself). This exploration of Lowth's theorizing of the Hebraic sublime can conclude with another claim made by Monk. He states that

> the very aim of the lectures precluded the possibility of developing a thorough æsthetic system. They are criticism, and criticism can become an æsthetic only inferentially, for it is essentially an analysis by the reason of things created, and not an investigation through experience of the nature of artistic creation and æsthetic perception. (83)

This is true, to an extent. While Lowth's purpose in Lectures XIV-XVII is the description, with examples, of how a contemporary critical concept pertains to a poetic tradition foreign to such a reading and not the development of an aesthetic system, the breadth of his exploration allows for analysis beyond the realm of mere inference. Indeed, a broader consideration of Lowth's *Lectures*, sermons and translation work demonstrates both a thoroughness and consistency of thought that spans his career.

Lowth's lasting influence is usually recognized in the fields of biblical studies and English grammar, though the efforts of scholars, Stephen Prickett in particular, have increasingly made the case that Lowth is a neglected figure of some consequence in the history of literary criticism. Prickett, in fact, argues that the *Lectures* did more "than any other single work to make the biblical tradition, rather than the classical one, the central poetic tradition of the Romantics" (105), while Engell suggests hyperbolically that Lowth "changes profoundly all definitions of poetry and alters its practice permanently (119). By claiming to "copy Longinus" (1.307) while, in many points of his analysis, demonstrating otherwise, Lowth departs from the dogma of literary criticism with lasting effect. Beyond biblical criticism, his influence can be posited in terms of the development of a purely expressive mode, which sees poetic power in genius and authentic expression of the subject. As Abrams notes in his summary of the development of critical tradition, Lowth is "notable for conceiving the poem as a mirror which, instead of reflecting nature, reflects the very penetralia of the poet's secret mind" (77).

While this chapter examined Lowth's theorization of the Hebraic sublime in a historical vacuum, the next chapter will locate Lowth within both a religious-cultural and literary critical context. Lowth overstates his debt to Longinus while remaining entirely silent on the influence of John Dennis upon the *Lectures*, even though the poetic enthusiasm the latter posits in the *Grounds of Criticism* is foundational to the "true and genuine enthusiasm" that Lowth argues "animates" the "sublimer poetry of the Hebrews" (1.367). The analysis of these two chapters will set up subsequent exploration of how key ideas from Lectures XIV-XVII—in addition to the lectures on the prophetic writings (XVIII-XXI)—provide both a rhetoric and model of prophetic poetry for Christopher Smart and William

Blake. The prophetic vision of these two figures finds a useful tool in the sublime tropes described by Lowth, allowing them to articulate the “unspeakable words” of revelation (2 Cor. 12:4) mingled with imaginative genius.

Chapter Two

Lowth's Case for Enthusiasm

The idea of the sublime had, by the time of Lowth's professorship in the 1740s, attracted plenty of attention from thinkers and writers and was an accepted part of discourse on rhetoric and aesthetics. Contemporary to such theorizing, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, was the occurrence of forms of religious and political mass behavior labeled enthusiasm. Because of the historical concurrence of these two concepts, as well as a perceived similarity in the causes and effects of both, an association was made between them. For instance, the two concepts shared the sense of an irresistible and contagious force acting upon a person or a group, overwhelming both subjectivity and identity (Clark 66). Notions of religious charisma, rhetorical power and the exciting of the passions, each of which were associated with both sublimity and enthusiasm, were the cause of anxiety to the establishment at this time. Following the Civil War (1642-51), the Interregnum (1649-60) and the Restoration (1660), the influence of enthusiasm in religion and politics was regarded with suspicion and hostility by the establishment.[1]

[1] Neither the phenomenon of enthusiasm nor the anxiety with which it was perceived were limited to England. Both Heyd (1981 and 1995) and Pocock (1997) detail and provide analysis of various manifestations of enthusiasm in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as the philosophical, theological and medical critiques that were made at the time. While it is a gross simplification to argue that the condemnation of religious enthusiasm in England was principally because of the political turmoil of the seventeenth century, the association between enthusiasm, dissenting religion and revolution remained a compelling source of anxiety in the eighteenth century.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the near-uniformity of the condemnation it provoked, the term "enthusiasm" was loosely defined in this period. Classically evoking the idea of divine and poetic inspiration, it became associated in the seventeenth century with dissenting religious groups that claimed special favour and direct communication with God outside of the mediation and sanction of the church. Disregarding theological distinctions, the term "enthusiast" could be used to liken—and then stigmatize—any such group, "whether European millenarists, the radical sects and early Quakers in England in the Interregnum period, or the Cévennes Prophets after the Revocation" (Heyd, "Reaction" 259). The association of such groups with subversive and often theocratic politics, as well as what Irlam calls "the iconoclastic excesses during the English Civil War," led to the "widespread stigmatization" of religious enthusiasm (23). The characteristics of enthusiasm that carried this stigma were, according to Irlam, "the predominance of passion over reason, individual license . . . over traditional orthodoxy, and finally, a 'mystical' figural hermeneutics" (23). These three characteristics—the excitation of the passions, individual agency and a "highly wrought and figurative" rhetorical style—have obvious political manifestations as well. Consequently, any behaviour perceived to be subversive could be labelled "enthusiastic" and smeared with the religious stigma. Noting that "fear of enthusiasm is fear of mass cults, of crowd behaviour, of popular delusions or even of insurrections," Clark points out that enthusiasm "is not primarily an issue because one or two people claim to prophesy or to speak for God, it is because it relates to the power of mass psychological movements to sectarianism, to fear of the 'mob'" (63). Consequent to this fear was the constraining of rhetoric in public discourse, preaching, and literary writing. Plainness of speech was preferred to elegant or figural language, which was tainted

by the association with enthusiasm and the fear of sedition (Heyd, "Reaction" 266). To this end, the church emphasized practical preaching (Mee 33-34) while literary taste similarly preferred clarity, as Heyd suggests:

> The growing suspicion toward ornamental style, high-flown language and the tropes and figures of Renaissance rhetorical tradition, together with the stress on clear and distinct statements, may well be characterized as a "revolt against enthusiasm" within the literary tradition. ("Reaction" 265)

It was, however, from within the "literary tradition" that the changing perception of enthusiasm in the eighteenth century emanated. Early in the century there was a "remarked thaw in attitudes" towards the concept of enthusiasm, displacing it from religious discourse into poetic (Irlam 37). The literary criticism of John Dennis, whose *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704) argues for the positive role of the "enthusiastick passions" in the writing and reading of poetry, marks the beginning of this shift.[2] Part of the influence in the literary reevaluation of the concept in the eighteenth century is the literary turn in biblical criticism, to which Lowth's *Lectures* made a significant contribution. Such theorizing made newly available to literature and literary criticism concepts such as

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[2] Irlam regards this shift as the beginning of the "rehabilitation" of enthusiasm, a process that continues throughout the eighteenth century and finds a type of completion in the Romantics. Regarding the shift of enthusiasm into poetic discourse, Irlam argues that subsequent to the "concerted demonization of religious enthusiasm" by the church and state, "literary, poetic, and aesthetic discourses in qualified defense of enthusiasm try to rehabilitate it" (37-38). Mee disagrees with this claim and argues that there is no rehabilitation of the concept, rather a regulation and containment that rendered it acceptable: "Throughout the eighteenth century and beyond, enthusiasm remained as suspect as it had always been, if not properly regulated. If literature was a cultural space where enthusiasm gained relative toleration, it was only because literariness itself came to be seen as part of the process of regulation" (5). Part of Lowth's significance within this discourse, then, is the manner in which he straddles both sides of this dispute. His theorizing of a Biblical-poetic enthusiasm predates his later preaching on the subject: he can be read as contributing to the rehabilitation suggested by Irlam, while he also exemplifies Mee's claim that enthusiasm "remained haunted by the fear of the combustible matter within both the individual and the body politic" (5).

inspiration, prophecy and forms of figurative language—each of which had been previously stigmatized by their association with enthusiasm.

This chapter locates Lowth within the discourse of enthusiasm in the eighteenth century. His role here is significant, though little recognized. As a bishop, preaching before the House of Lords, he levels an attack against enthusiasm and argues for its containment by both church and state. As Professor of Poetry in the *Lectures*, however, he theorizes a positive enthusiasm that builds upon Dennis's criticism. Stated differently, Lowth contributes to the condemnation of enthusiasm and also argues for its positive use and value. In his theorizing, he posits a redeemed concept of a "true and genuine enthusiasm, that which alone is deserving of the name . . . with which the sublimer poetry of the Hebrews, and particularly the prophetic, is animated" (1.367). Lowth's innovative move is to build upon the poetic enthusiasm of Dennis's *Grounds* but to reframe it by shifting the focus of his theorizing from the *religious* poetry of Dennis's analysis to the *sacred* poetry of the Hebrew Scriptures. Doing so, Lowth can make use of the newly tolerated poetic enthusiasm while incorporating the spiritual and religious associations that form the basis of his theorizing of the sublime.

The first section of this chapter discusses Lowth's critique of enthusiasm, showing that his attacks against a political notion of enthusiasm correspond with the contemporary establishment's rejection of the concept, though he narrows its definition. The second section turns to the *Lectures*, analyzing Lowth's theorizing of a positive enthusiasm with a comparison to the critical writing of John Dennis. The comparison with Dennis helps to expand upon the intimations of theory Lowth makes in the *Lectures*. The final section explores Lowth's account of Solon of Athens, with a comparison to the same story in

Plutarch's *Lives*. His retelling of Solon's use of poetry to inspire the men of Athens, which precedes his theorizing of the Hebraic sublime and his "Martyrdom" sermon, suggests the limitations of his notion of a "genuine" enthusiasm by not differentiating poetic enthusiasm from political.

Lowth's Critique of Enthusiasm

In 1767 Lowth, as Bishop of Oxford, delivered his "Martyrdom" sermon "before the Lords Spiritual and Temporal," at Westminster Abbey. Preached on January 30th, "being the day appointed to be observed as the day of the martyrdom of King Charles I" (109n.), Lowth was tasked with contributing to a discourse that had, since the Restoration, served to affirm the legitimacy of the state and the importance of the church in the ongoing integrity of the government. According to Lacey, the annual fast day to commemorate Charles I "was an important opportunity to remind the people of their duty and to expound the official line" (220). Further, the task of the "official" sermon was to "teach the blessings of settled government" and act "as a reminder of the effect of resistance" (222). In this sermon—delivered less than a year after the repeal of the Stamp Act and at a time of increasing strife with the American colonies—Lowth attacks the concept of enthusiasm and the threat it poses to the establishment and calls for the joint working of church and state in preventing future outbreak of enthusiastic dissent. Whereas some Restoration and contemporary clergymen, such as Robert South,[3] showed concern with enthusiastic

[3] South's attacks were predicated on the language and rhetoric of enthusiastic preaching, which led the faithful away from sound doctrine and, ultimately, threatened the integrity of the state. "There is," he declared, "a certain bewitchery, or fascination in Words, which makes them operate with a force beyond what we can naturally give account of" ("The Fatal Imposture and Force of Words" 337). South feared that such discourse, associated with dissenting groups in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Irlam 23. See also

discourse and rhetoric and others, like John Wesley, with the spiritual effects of false doctrine,[4] the basis of Lowth's critique is political, rather than theological. Affirming the authority of the state as divinely ordered and the church's role in maintaining that authority, he argues from English history that enthusiasm is a threat to the state itself.

Lowth's objections to enthusiasm in the "Martyrdom" sermon, though unlike other contemporary Anglican critiques, do correspond with contemporary anxieties surrounding the concept. Michael Heyd's analysis of the complex factors involved in the response to enthusiasm groups these objections into several broad categories, including the questioning of authorities and the disruption of established orders. Since religious enthusiasm, being "the most common and traditional connotation of enthusiasm," suggested "direct divine inspiration, prophetic power, or special revelations," any manifesting of it was necessarily "set against the values and verities passed down by sacred texts (Scripture), traditions, and institutions (the Church)" ("Reaction" 277). The threat that enthusiasm presented was a subverting of established authorities and a will to overturn the status quo. The fear of disruption, further, spread beyond the authority of the church and threatened "the moral, social and political order as well" (279). In his "Martyrdom" sermon, Lowth describes true religion as that which operates under, and promotes obedience to, political authority. In such a context, any utterance or teaching that

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Heyd, "Reaction" 265-66), led listeners to abandon both reason and sound doctrine for the false assurances of private revelation. Such discourse is "that pestilent and vile Thing, which, wheresoever it has had its full Course, has thrown both Church and State into Confusion" ("A Sermon on Rom. VIII. 14" 326).

[4] Wesley, preaching in the second half of the eighteenth century, also spoke against enthusiasm. Himself accused of being an enthusiast, Wesley's concern was for the eternal spiritual state of the subject. His sermon, "The Nature of Enthusiasm," argues that enthusiasm and true Christianity are antithetical: "poor self-deceivers! Christian ye are not. But you are enthusiasts in a high degree" (525). His critique is based upon the threat to the individual, rather than the state.

might promote dissent or subversion of authority thus encourages enthusiasm and merits condemnation. This enthusiasm, however, does not manifest in rhetoric or style, but rather in dissenting action. Lowth's concern, unlike South's anxiety about language and Wesley's about the false assurance of salvation, is the behaviour of the masses and their obedience to authority:

> As true and rational principles of religion are the firmest foundation of civil government, and the strictest bond of peace and union among men; so on the other hand, false and irrational persuasions, which assume the name of religion, and often pass for it, have the most pernicious influence and a peculiar tendency to introduce disorder and confusion, and to rend asunder the strongest and most sacred bands of society. (112)

It is important to note here that enthusiasm is not given a particular or concrete manifestation. Lowth claims that since "law is reason," anything that opposes or claims to supersede reason, or violates the law, risks being tainted with the association. Though no particulars are given, the consequence of allowing enthusiasm to emerge is, given the setting of his sermon, plain to all: "The dreadful effects of such principles cannot be more fully exemplified from any history, than from that of the troubles, which gave occasion to the melancholy solemnity of this day" (112). The best preventative to the threat is strong authority, in which the state protects the church and the church supports the state:

> It behoves [the civic authorities] to protect religion, as their best auxiliary, against insult and contumely, against every disguised as well as open assault; and to preserve inviolate those wise as well as holy institutions, which best mould the

> public mind to their designs for the common good, and make it pliable to the rigid rule of authority. (112)

He then addresses the means of preventing and containing enthusiasm. Since such "false religion" has "a peculiar tendency to introduce disorder and confusion, and to rend asunder the strongest and most sacred bands of society" (112), the careful regulating of the attitude and mood of the people, in order to prevent such behavior, becomes both a religious and a civil imperative. Lowth further accounts for the process by which enthusiasm emerged in the previous century. Beginning with differences of opinion and objections to both tradition and the established order, discontent can develop over seemingly trite issues. He mentions, for instance, differing modes of worship and dress, "vehemence of debate [that] gave importance to things in themselves comparatively insignificant" and the overbearing suppression of opposition that fomented a resistance and "furnished it with an apology" (113). The loosening of the "barriers of civil restraint" allowed for "warm imaginations, heated with contention, stimulated by oppression, and now elevated with a prospect of deliverance from it" (113) to be drawn into sedition and rebellion. The association in Lowth's argument between this rebellion and enthusiasm is made clear by his next statement: "High notions of the righteousness of their cause, a divine favour, and divine communications, were indulged" (113). The result of this was that "the designs of faction were now the cause of God: to cast down authorities, to overturn establishments, to tread laws both human and divine under foot, was doing His work" (113). While the containing of enthusiasm is part of the divine mandate given to the state (the enthusiasts "expose themselves to the extreme, but just, severity of the law," 115-16), it must remain vigilant, lest it become complicit: "Tumults, seditions, insurrections, rebellions . . . anarchy and

confusion: and government, by suffering them to pass with impunity, would betray itself, and become accessory to its own destruction" (116). This analysis is his diagnosis of the troubles of the seventeenth century—and implicitly a warning about the American colonies—against which he prescribes a characteristically Anglican remedy: "it becomes us to be sensible of our own happiness, and to acknowledge with grateful hearts the great goodness of God in his merciful dispensation towards us" (122). The sermon concludes with an appeal to consider "with a just affection, esteem, and reverence, our excellent constitution, both civil and religious," and to be content with it, as it is "an object of envy and admiration to the nations round us." By promoting such contentment within the body politic, the church and state can, in the present and the future, avoid the tumult of the past.

It is important to note that the concept of enthusiasm that Lowth is critiquing here, while corresponding with popular notions, is atypical. He is, as it were, paying due diligence to the requirements of his position, his message being "the official view given on state-sponsored occasions" (Lacey 15). However, he does not go into any detail about the nature of enthusiasm, nor dwell upon its typically religious connotations. Though he does make mention of "warm imaginations"—a phrase commonly associated with the condition of the enthusiast[5]—he does not investigate further into its causes. Since, as Lacey suggests, the Martyrdom sermons can be read as a type of commentary or reflection upon contemporary events (15), Lowth's limiting of the concept to the enacting of dissent suggests the state of the discourse at the time. While "enthusiasm" is used to refer to the troubles of the seventeenth century, it can also be read as a cipher for contemporary

[5] Hume, for example, used the phrase to refer to the religious manifestation of enthusiasm (74) and Locke with the concept more generally (699).

political tensions with the American colonies.[6] His attack on political dissent and unrest leaves open the possibility of a genuine enthusiastic experience, the result of an encounter with the divine, while also demonstrating Mee's claim that the concept "remained haunted by the fear of the combustible matter within both the individual and the body politic" (5).

Genuine Enthusiasm and the Influence of John Dennis

Lowth's political critique of enthusiasm in the "Martyrdom" sermon was based upon the concept's historic associations with disorder, chaos, and the falsifying of true religion. He had, however, theorized a positive poetic and religious enthusiasm more than two decades earlier during his professorship. This "true and genuine" enthusiasm is not what Clark calls "the fanatic's notion of a direct impulse from God." Rather, it is "a poetic enthusiasm that responds to and is fired by the *idea* of God in the psyche" (67-68). Lowth theorizes it as both the consequence of the encounter with sublimity in the sacred poetry, as well as the cause of further sublime and passionate expression. His debt to the criticism of John Dennis is unacknowledged in the lecture, though evident throughout.

In Lecture XVII, on "the sublime of passion," Lowth invokes the contemporary ambivalence to the concept of enthusiasm in his discussion of the excitation of the passions in response to the sublimity of the sacred Hebrew poetry. "This species of enthusiasm," he writes, "I should distinguish by the term natural, were it not that I should seem to connect

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[6] See the reference to Lowth in Bell, listed among prominent clergymen who called for a substantial episcopal presence in the American colonies. Bell notes that "between 1767 and the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, spokesmen for the [Society for the Propagation of the Gospel] championed the cause" (182). Lowth, included among these spokesmen, delivered the annual anniversary sermon to the S.P.G. in 1771 (184).

things which are really different, and repugnant to each other" (1.367). Without a fuller description of the "things" that ought not to be connected, he states that

> the true and genuine enthusiasm, that which alone is deserving of the name, that I mean with which the sublimer poetry of the Hebrews, and particularly the prophetic, is animated, is certainly widely different in its nature, and boasts a much higher origin. (1.367)

This short description suggests that, counter to the popular meaning of the word, which is recorded in Johnson's 1755 dictionary—"a vain belief of private revelation; a vain confidence of divine favour or communication" (708)—Lowth considers true enthusiasm, the product of an encounter of the Hebraic sublime, to be the genuine response to an experience of the sacred. He makes clear that this experience is not a possession by a god[7] but rather the product of excited passions. The genuineness or falseness of the enthusiasm is indicated by the subject's actions and attitude toward goodness and truth. Lowth states that "this method of exciting the passions" is

> useful, when properly and lawfully exercised; that is, when these passions are directed to their proper end, and rendered subservient to the dictates of nature and truth; when an aversion to evil, and a love of goodness is excited; and if the poet deviate on any occasion from this great end and aim, he is guilty of a most scandalous abuse and perversion of his art. (1.369)

[7] See Plato's *Ion* for a classical description of enthusiasm as possession. Lowth speculates on how to resolve the classical idea with a notion of genius that accords with Christian convictions by suggesting that, in the moment of poetic conception and expression, the poet "in a common mode of speaking, may be said to possess the true poetic enthusiasm, or, as the ancients would have expressed it, 'to be inspired; full of the God:' not however implying, that their ardour of mind was imparted by the Gods, but that this extatic impulse became the God of the moment" (1.366-67).

There are several points to be drawn out of this passage, which, while short, is significant. Lowth seeks to strike a delicate balance between passion and restraint here. The excitation of the passions evokes the historical connotations of enthusiasm—the superseding of reason, the loss of subjectivity, etc.—but this is somehow counteracted and directed by the restraints of morality and a Christian *telos*. Lowth's genuine enthusiasm, contrary to the seventeenth-century concept of religious enthusiasm, is not a possession of the subject; the identity of the subject is retained and the imagination is an active agent in composition. He posits the persistent integrity of the subject elsewhere, saying that he is "indeed of the opinion that the Divine Spirit by no means takes such an entire possession of the mind of the Prophet, as to subdue or extinguish the character and genius of the man" (1.347). Rather, "the natural powers of the mind are in general elevated and refined, they are neither eradicated nor totally obscured." The notions of elevation and refinement are, in the above passage, given an ethical connotation. The passions are "rendered subservient to the dictates of nature and truth," which results in the moral nature of the experience, the love of good and hatred of evil.[8]

Lowth does not give a full explanation of his thinking on enthusiasm, but rather invokes the concept at several points during his exploration of the Hebraic sublime. Elaboration can be made, however, by considering the influence of John Dennis upon

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[8] It's worth noting that the political enthusiasm that Lowth attacks in the "Martyrdom" sermon consists of dissenting actions and not the excitation of the passions. Indeed, there is a conspicuous lack of any mention of passion in the sermon. The only occurrence of the word is in describing the difference between dissent and revolution. He describes "the assertors of the national rights and liberties" of the seventeenth century as acting "with the best intentions, and with a true zeal for the service of their country" (119). However, "the spirit of reformation in its full career knew not how to stop at the just point of possession of all its legal demands; but, borne onwards with an additional impulse of passion acquired in its course, soon transgressed all bounds of moderation, justice, and duty."

Lowth, which is evident throughout the *Lectures.*[9] In Dennis's literary criticism, chiefly in his *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (1701) and *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704), he articulates a positive notion of enthusiasm resulting from powerful encounters with—chiefly religious—poetry. In the *Grounds*, for example, he describes poetry as "an Art, by which a Poet excites Passion . . . in order to satisfie and improve, to delight and reform the Mind, and so to make Mankind happier and better" (8). The notion of poetry functioning primarily by affecting the passions—a radical innovation in English criticism[10]—leads to a reformed notion of poetic enthusiasm, "a carefully-regulated form of frenzy, analogous to the delirium of religious enthusiasm but capable of acceptable insight into the cosmic order" (Clark 65). Though Lowth does not name Dennis in his discussion of the sublime, the *Lectures* show the latter's influence.

Dennis displaces the concept of enthusiasm from religious discourse but, in reframing it as a poetic concept, affirms its religious value. Poetry, he argues, can aid in the reformation of fallen humanity.[11] According to the *Grounds*, "the great design of Arts is to restore the decays that happen'd to Humane Nature by the Fall, by restoring Order" (6).

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[9] Though Dennis has the reputation of being largely forgotten in the course of the eighteenth century, his theorizing of enthusiasm and the sublime is explored and helpfully analyzed by Monk, Morris and Irlam. Doran's recent *Theory of the Sublime* devotes an entire chapter to the figure, placing him on equal footing in the history of the subject with both Boileau and Burke.

[10] Noted in Monk, Morris and Doran. In Monk's description, Dennis's "interest is always in the emotional; he can explain poetry and genius on no other grounds than the passions" (45-46). Since neoclassical criticism preferred adherence to formal and compositional rules to the expression and excitation of the passions, Dennis found in the sublimes of Longinus and Boileau a means of articulating a theory of poetry that emphasized the expressive powers of genius and its effects upon the passions. He was, as Morris points out, "the first English critic to make sublimity the keystone of his poetics" (55). Doran describes Dennis's innovation as "converting Longinus's noetically oriented view of the sublime into a pathetically oriented one" (125).

[11] Stein notes Dennis's conflicted use of the metaphor of the fall: "On the one hand he argues that poetry has the properties needed to restore fallen man. On the other, he presents the idea of poetry itself as fallen and needing its own redemption. He has used 'the fall' in two very different ways here in relation to poetry. Poetry is both fallen and redemptive" (20).

The order and regulation reflected in the production of poetry—by following "the Rules" of the art—reflects the prelapsarian order of the universe. The fall affected the entirety of creation, introducing chaos to the external world as well as internal subjectivity: "As soon as he fell from his Primitive State, by transgressing Order, Weakness and Misery was the immediate Consequence of that Universal Disorder that immediately followed in his Conceptions, in his Passions and Actions" (6). If the Arts in general and poetry in particular are able to "restore the decays that happen'd to Humane nature by the Fall," how is this actually effected? According to Dennis, this moral and spiritual reformation occurs through the excitation of the passions (10). Doing so, poetry can give pleasure and instruction to the subject, moving the subject "either to Action, or to Contemplation." The synergistic influence of order and the excitation that poetry produces, can further produce the positive moral effects that Dennis envisions. Lowth's poetic moralism—the notion that the passions be "directed to their proper end" while exciting "an aversion to evil, and a love of goodness"—shows the influence of such a notion, though with further restraint.

There is an unresolved tension in the *Grounds* between the need for poetry to be ordered by "the Rules" and Dennis's emphasis upon the passions in the encounter with poetry.[12] He asserts that poetry, "an Art so Divine in its Institution," is "sunk and profaned, and miserably debased." Since this type of the fall occurred, in part, through an ignorance of "the Rules," it follows for Dennis that "the laying down of those Rules alone . . . can re-establish it" (5-6). However, since poetry is "an Art, by which a Poet excites Passion . . . in order to satisfie and improve, to delight and reform the Mind, and so to make Mankind

[12] Versions of this tension, and various ways of resolving it, are discussed in Morris (73), Irlam (66), Delehanty (238) and Stein (6).

happier and better" (8), a tension remains between the need for Art to be regulated and the need for an individual and subjective passionate response. The problem, as Irlam suggests, is that "Dennis pledges to *formalize* what seems to lie precisely beyond the purview of formalization, namely the manipulation of the passions for a program of reform" (66). Dennis's means of addressing this tension will aid in resolving the similar difficulty, noted above, in Lowth's insistence upon the moral purpose of his "genuine" enthusiasm. For Dennis and Lowth, the encounter of the subject with religious and sacred poetry, respectively, seems to imply a particular and necessary engagement with a force of ultimate good, whether a notion of "true" religion or an apprehension of the divine.

Dennis places particular emphasis upon the passionate potential of "religious Idea's" in poetry, being those "which either shew the attributes of the Divinity, or relate to his Worship" (20). He argues that, since the passions "are to be moved in a great Degree, and are to be moved by their Idea's, it follows . . . they must be moved by great Idea's" (20). The greatest ideas cause the greater movement of the passions and increase the soul's capacity to conceive of the ideas. Further, "the more the Soul is capable of receiving Idea's whose objects are truly great and wonderful, the greater will the Enthusiasm be that is caus'd by those Idea's" (21). He goes on to argue that the greatest ideas and enthusiasm are those related to the conception of God:

> Since therefore the Enthusiasm in the greater Poetry, is to hold Proportion with the Idea's; and those Idea's are certainly the greatest, which are worthiest to move the greatest and the wisest Men . . . it follows, That the greatest and strongest Enthusiasm that can be imploy'd in Poetry, is only justly and reasonably to be derived from Religious Idea's. (22)

Dennis's radical move is to take the stigmatized notion of religious enthusiasm—the idea that the subject could receive direct communication from God and supersede conventional authorities—and root it in a passionate response to poetry. Doing so, Dennis removes from the notion its purely subjective element and, at the same time, redeems the experience of an emotional response to literature. Consequently, "emotional excitation is . . . not an end in itself, but leads directly to a spiritual 'reformation'" (Doran 131). On the relation of poetry to religion and the passions, Dennis suggests that

> great Passion, only is the adequate Language of the greater Poetry; so the greater Poetry, is only the adequate Language of Religion; and that therefore the greatest Passion, is the Language of that sort of Poetry; because that sort of Poetry is the worthiest Language of Religion. (23)[13]

Since poetry is the best means of expressing the greatest passions, and religion is the source of the greatest passions, both Dennis and Lowth argue for the inextricable link between the earliest forms of both religion and poetry. Dennis suggests that "the Ancient Poets excell'd the moderns in the greatness of Poetry for no other reason, but because their Subjects were Religious in their constitution" (97). He also points out that "in the first Ages of writing among the Græcians, there was nothing writ but Verse, because they wrote of nothing but Religion," and concludes that "Poetry is the Natural Language of Religion, and that Religion at first produc'd it , as a Cause produces its Effect" (97). Lowth similarly makes the point that poetry, in its earliest forms, was both naturally enthusiastic and inherently religious. He makes reference to "that singular frenzy of poets, which the Greeks, ascribing to divine inspiration, distinguished by the appellation of *enthusiasm*" to describe

[13] Compare with this passage Lowth's assertion that "Reason speaks literally, the Passions poetically" (1.309).

an ecstatic and passionate style of poetic utterance. The ancient poet made utterance in "a style and expression directly prompted by nature itself, and exhibiting the true and express image of a mind violently agitated" (1.79). This is, to Lowth, the "origin and first use of poetical language." The enthusiastic poetic utterance is sudden and sublime.

The figure of the ancient enthusiastic poet, both religious and artless, is one to which Lowth returns several times throughout the lectures. Whereas Dennis focuses on the critical importance of such a figure and uses it to construct theory, Lowth is more concerned with the poet's natural modes of expression. His description of the poet in this state presents clear correspondences with the violent connotations frequently associated with the contemporary discourse on enthusiasm. Sublime poetic utterance occurs

> when, as it were, the secret avenues, the interior recesses of the soul are thrown open; when the inmost conceptions are displayed, rushing together in one turbid stream, without order or connexion. Hence sudden exclamations, frequent interrogations, apostrophes even to inanimate objects: for, to those who are violently agitated themselves, the universal nature of things seems under a necessity of being affected with similar emotions. (1.79)

The image of the soul's recesses being "thrown open" from the inside while the "inmost conceptions" rush outward suggests a force both irresistible and excessive. This is a pure form of poetic expression that precedes art. Indeed, in displaying "the inmost conceptions," the ancient poet expresses the passions naturally and unmediated by poetic art—what Dennis call "the Rules." Without any sense of craft obscuring the poet's passionate expression, his spontaneous utterance achieves sublimity and is naturally forceful. This is the image implied by Lowth when, later, he speaks of the sudden clarity and relatively

crude style of the Hebraic sublime. These are the moments when "the veil being as it were drawn suddenly removed, all the affections and emotions of the soul, its sudden impulses, its hasty sallies and irregularities, are conspicuously displayed" (1.312). Developments in expression, writing and the poetic art, however, require a new and abstracted use of language.

Both Dennis and Lowth highlight the limitation of language to effectively convey both the intensity of passionate, as well as religious discourse. Lowth describes the "language of the passions" in violent terms:

> The language of the passions is totally different [to the language of reason]: the conceptions burst out in a turbid stream, expressive in a manner of the internal conflict; the more vehement break out in hasty confusion; they catch (without search or study) whatever is impetuous, vivid, or energetic. In a word, reason speaks literally, the passions poetically. (1.308-09)

Poetic language, to Lowth, lacks precision but manages still to convey the passions through its intensity. For Dennis, the limitation of language is not redeemed by unadorned and forceful expression, but rather by recourse to figurative language. He argues that, for the ancient poets, "the wonders of Religion naturally threw them upon great Passions, and great passions naturally threw them upon Harmony, and Figurative Language, as they most of Necessity do" (98). Lowth makes a similar statement about the difficulty for the Hebrew poets in writing about God:

> Since, however, the sacred poets were under the necessity of speaking of God in a manner adapted to human conceptions, and of attributing to him the actions, the

> passions, the faculties of man; how can they be supposed ever to have depicted the Divine Majesty in terms at all becoming the greatness of the subject? (1.359)

In both cases, the excitation of the passions demands expression, but the intensity of the enthusiastic frenzy, as well as the surpassing grandeur of the inspiring subject, extends beyond the capacity of language to effectively convey. The resulting poetic language, whether figurative and harmonious language in Dennis or raw and unpolished language in Lowth, seeks not only to signify semantic content, but to both signal and enact upon the reader something of the enthusiastic passions experienced by the poet.

The key difference between the theorizing of Dennis and that of Lowth on the subject of the relation between poetry and the passions is the poetic style that each finds more effectual and the relation of that style to their respective notions of the sublime. Dennis's concern is for the religious, those "Idea's which shew the attributes of God, or relate to his Worship" (22), while Lowth's focus is upon the sacred, that which is purportedly spoken or inspired by the divine. This difference leads each to engage differently with a poetic text, a difference which is borne out in their respective approaches to the translation of Psalm 18.[14] While Dennis seeks to impose order upon his versified version of the AV, guiding the reader's passions in the grandeur of the poem, Lowth's verse translation seeks to preserve the sublime potential of the original text by refusing the imposition of neoclassical order. The following comparison is of their respective renditions

[14] Morris notes that Psalm 18 was a common choice for poets seeking to demonstrate the sublimity of the Scriptures (19).

of vv. 8-9, which describe the descent of God in response to the Psalmist's cry for help.[15] Dennis renders these verses such:

> From out his Nostrils a Tempestuous Cloud
>
> Of pitchy smoak in Spicy Volumes flew,
>
> And from his Mouth there ran a Raging Flood
>
> Of Torrent Fire Devouring as it ran.
>
> And then He Bow'd the very Heaven of Heavens,
>
> And arm'd with fearful Majesty came down.
>
> Under his Feet He plac'd Substantial Night
>
> Which aw'd the Nations with its dreadful Gloom (109)

While Lowth, in Gregory's translation, renders the Hebrew as:

> Before his face a smoke ascended,
>
> And a flame consumed before his presence,
>
> Burning fires were kindled by it.
>
> He bowed the heavens and came down,
>
> And clouds of darkness were beneath his feet. (1.198)[16]

Both versions of the Psalm seek to achieve sublimity toward the excitation of the passions, but through different means. Dennis follows a Miltonic model of sublime prosody, rendering the text in blank verse, while Lowth utilizes short and direct statements modelled on the Hebrew. Dennis adds sensuous details, appealing to sight and smell, as

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[15] AV: "There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet."

[16] "Ascendit fumus in eius nares; / Et e faucibus eius ignis edax; / Exeunt ab eo ardentes prunae. / Inclinat coelos, et descendit; / Sub pedibus eius caligo densa" (*De Sacra* 99).

well as describing the sentiment felt by an added audience. In Stein's helpful reading of Dennis's Psalm 18, she notes that Dennis "cannot leave it up to the reader to be moved and have his passions raised, he must act out the raising of the passions that he seeks by writing it directly into the story" (12). Accordingly, the "Nations"—a "figure of the good reader" (13)—are "aw'd" by the "fearful Majesty" of God's descent. In contrast to this, Lowth's translation seeks sublimity in paratactic impressions that, together, suggest the terror of divine power later associated with Burke, forcing the reader's imagination to assemble an image of God's appearance.[17] He even comments upon his translation that it, "though literally translated, and destitute of the harmony of verse, will I think sufficiently demonstrate the force, the grandeur and sublimity of these images" (1.198-199).

While Lowth trusts that the poetic language itself, forceful and unadorned, will strike the passions as though the divine appearance were being enacted within the imagination of the reader, Stein points out that, to Dennis, "passion alone is not enough to create sublime poetry. For true redemption poetry must also follow the rules . . . but Dennis does not find the basis for poetic rules in the same text where he finds the basis for religious passion" (13). In his versifying of Psalm 18, he turns the text into "a clear, ordered narrative, removing any ambiguity from the text." He also "adds many small clarifying conjunctions to his Psalm 18, adding a sense of continuity and causality to the verses" (16). That which Lowth argues is the greatest virtue of the Hebrew poetry is, to Dennis, a deficiency that requires correction. While Lowth argues persistently for the native sublimity of the Hebrew poetry and the natural complement of sublime sentiment and

[17] McLoughlin and Boulton point out the likely influence of Lowth upon Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* in the section on "Power" (II.V): "It is noteworthy that all the likely debts to Lowth occur in this section which Burke added in 2nd edn." (237n.).

expression, Stein notes that "for Dennis, the biblical text is sublime in idea, but needs a supplement to also be sublime in form" (19-20). The subsequent enthusiasm that each theorizes will, naturally, differ. While Dennis seeks an "awe filled reaction" (Stein 12) such as that demonstrated by "the Nations" in his Psalm 18, Lowth theorizes an inspired and productive excitation, able to arouse the passions of others and lead them to a productive enthusiasm.

Lowth's Reading of Plutarch

Lowth attacks enthusiasm as a political force, but celebrates it as a poetic achievement. While his "Martyrdom" sermon and the lectures on the Hebraic sublime seemingly correspond only in their use of the word "enthusiasm," his account of Solon of Athens in Lecture I speculates on the relation of poetry and passion to politics years before he articulates his other notions of enthusiasm. Lowth points to Plutarch's account of Solon as an exemplar of the power of the ancient ode but, in doing so, gives a radical retelling of the Athenian battle for Salamis. The differences between Plutarch's account and Lowth's are instructive. While Plutarch tells of Solon's success at persuading his fellow Athenians, through the use of poetry, to alter local law and to renew the campaign to conquer Salamis, Lowth's account focuses on the poet's ability to excite the passions of his audience and, consequently, effect action from the crowd. This comparison is productive because it collapses the clear distinctions he otherwise maintains in his descriptions of poetic and political enthusiasm, suggesting the limitations of his theorizing. His account of Solon models the poetic power of enthusiasm and also demonstrates the combustible political potential he warns of in the "Martyrdom" sermon.

Lecture I contains a description of enthusiasm that anticipates Lowth's later theorizing of the sublime but from outside the Hebraic context of his subsequent lectures. Discussing the various "species" of poetry, he points to the elegy as an example of those "which with us generally appear in an easy and familiar style, but formerly assumed sometimes a graver and more important character" (1.26). Rather than the "light and amorous Elegy of the moderns," Lowth prefers the "ancient, serious, sacred, and didactic Elegy, the preceptress of morals, the lawgiver of nations, the oracle of virtue" (1.26-27). He uses Solon of Athens as an example of both the power and the utility of the ancient elegy and, in the process, describes the phenomenon that he would later attack. Drawing from Plutarch's "Life of Solon," Lowth claims that

> when any thing difficult or perplexing occurred in the administration of public affairs, we are informed that [Solon] had recourse to Poetry. Were the laws to be maintained or enforced upon any particular emergency; was the indolence or licentiousness of the citizens to be reproved; were their minds to be stimulated to the love of liberty, he immediately attacked them with some poetical production, bold, animated, and severe, in the highest tone of censorial gravity, and yet in no respect deficient in elegance. (27)

Poetry, in this description, connotes both the power of action as well as the highest civic virtues. Solon uses it as an attack upon that which would threaten the integrity and the effective governance of the city. The language that Lowth uses to describe the qualities of the "poetical production,"—that it was serious, energetic and elegant—anticipates the sublimity that he would speak about much later during the sublime lectures. That this

ancient poetry was also put to use in the governance of the people parallels the utility and power of the poetry of ancient Israel.[18]

In Plutarch's telling, the Athenians "were tired out with a war which they were waging against the Megarians for the island of Salamis," and thus "made a law that no one in future, on pain of death, should move, in writing or orally, that the city should stake up its contention for Salamis" (VIII.1). Such a situation was a disgrace to the city and Solon, seeing "that many of the young men wanted steps taken to bring on the war," devised poetic means to motivate the city. Feigning madness, he "secretly composed some elegiac verses" and committed them to memory "so that he could say them by rote" (VIII.2). Venturing into the agora wearing a felt cap, "he got upon the herald's stone and recited the poem." After he had "sung" it, "his friends began to praise him, and Peisistratus in particular urged and incited the citizens to obey his words. They therefore repealed the law and renewed the war, putting Solon in command of it" (VIII.3). The text contains two differing accounts of the battle, but in both Solon is victorious and gains both power and authority in the city.

There are several suggestions of something like an enthusiasm affecting both Solon and the Athenians. There is an association intimated between madness and poetry. The madness that Solon feigns allows him to transgress "the boundaries of [the recitation's] appropriate context and audience," according to Elizabeth Irwin (146).[19] That the madness

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[18] See, for example, his comments on Moses's uses of poetry in Deuteronomy in Lecture XV (1.324-330).

[19] Recent scholarship on Solon's Salamis poem does not make explicit connections between madness and enthusiasm but does touch on several ideas relevant here. The analysis of scholars such as Irwin (2005) and Noussia-Fantuzzi (2010) focuses upon the cap he wore (πιλίδιον) and the status it bestowed upon him. In this guise he spoke as a "Salaminian herald" (Noussia-Fantuzzi 206), which gave him a freedom to speak and allowed him to disregard the Athenian prohibition against such speech. "Thanks to his 'mask' Solon would not have been expressing a personal opinion, but it also enabled him to assume the public role of one proclaiming

was pretended does not, in this instance, diminish the suggestion of enthusiasm. Rather, the transgressive nature of the act still suggests a figure acting beyond reason. An association remains, then, between poetic creation, the appearance of madness, the transgressive act, and the persuading of the audience. While there may be hints in Plutarch of the qualities that are, in the eighteenth century, associated with enthusiasm, Lowth's retelling of the story changes the emphasis significantly:

> It is a well-known fact, that Athens was altogether indebted for the recovery of Salamis to the verses of Solon; even contrary to their own inclination and intention. After they had, from repeated overthrows, fallen into the deepest despair, insomuch that it was made a capital offence, even to propose the renewal of the war, or the reclaiming of the island, such was the influence of that single poem, which begins—"Let us march to Salamis," that as if pronounced by a prophet, instinct with divine enthusiasm, the people, propelled by a kind of celestial inspiration, flew immediately to arms, became clamorous for war, and fought the field of battle with such incredible ardour, that by the violence of their onset, after a great slaughter of the enemy, they atchieved a most decisive victory. (1.28)

The differences between Plutarch and Lowth are striking. In the former, the recital of the poem motivates the people of Athens to repeal the law and take up the war again. In Lowth, the poem, which is itself given credit for the recovery of Salamis, enflames the passions of the people. They "flew immediately to arms" and "became clamorous for war," even though

a truth." Regarding the madness itself, it is associated with the performance of poetry. To Noussia-Fantuzzi, Solon's "pretending oddness . . . would not have been at all incongruous with the archaic orators' modalities of performance" (207), while Irwin suggests that "part of the madness implied by the performance would have to do with the unusual performance setting" (145). In this argument, Solon's recital not only transgresses the prohibition of speech about Salamis, but also the customs of the *agora*. The perceived madness seems to play a role in disarming the expectations of the audience and causing a greater spectacle.

it was "contrary to their own inclination and intention." Further, in Lowth's version the battle seems to happen immediately, while the passions remained excited. Plutarch's two different accounts of the battle each suggest a long period of planning and careful execution.[20]

This earliest of Lowth's descriptions of enthusiasm, in which poetic utterance leads to political dissent, best represents the complicated nature of the concept without neatly corresponding to either of his subsequent notions. Further, it does not fit classical ideas of enthusiasm. While it seems more like the religious enthusiasm of the seventeenth century, Lowth's use of it as a positive example of the power and gravity of the ancient elegy is markedly different to the condemnations of figures like Robert South. Further, there is no mention in the story of an inspiring divine figure, either to possess the poet or grant him any sense of favour or aid in the recitation. In Plutarch, Solon's composition of the poem is a reasoned and self-possessed act, the madness associated with it being feigned. While Lowth does not speculate on Solon's state during the composition of the poem and does not rule out a spontaneous passionate utterance, he is more interested in the forcefulness of the delivery and its effects. Such a delivery suggests several traits that Lowth will later associate with Hebraic sublimity: spoken with prophetic force and "divine enthusiasm" that effects "a kind of celestial inspiration" and immediate action. The question of the genuineness or falseness of the enthusiasm, however, is left unresolved. The conditions that Lowth establishes in Lecture XVII for the "true and genuine" enthusiasm pertain to propriety and lawfulness, subservience to "the dictates of nature and truth," as well as a

[20] Noussia-Fantuzzi, commenting upon the text of the Salamis poem, states that "The war for Salamis was long" and, counter to Lowth's version, was "finally ended . . . with an arbitration made by Sparta" (209).

love of good and hatred of evil (1.369). The speaking of Solon's poem is a violation of Athenian law, as is the resulting rush to battle. While in Plutarch the transgression of the law is given context by Solon's disguise and madness, Lowth's Solon does not have such recourse. His prophetic role could justify the violation of the law—there are numerous examples of Hebrew prophets righteously transgressing human law—if the breaking of the law occurred for the sake of the "dictates" of nature and truth.

The mob that forms and rushes "contrary to their own inclination and intention" into battle is more difficult to resolve with the conditions for Lowth's "genuine" enthusiasm and is more easily located in his attack on political dissent. In Plutarch, the praise of Solon's friends and the influence of Peisistratus lead to the revocation of the law and the planning of a new campaign to conquer the island. This response is emphatically not enthusiastic. Rather, this is functioning discourse in the *agora*. The actions of Lowth's mob more closely resemble the phenomenon of religious enthusiasm feared in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the force of "contagious rhetorical power" (Clark 66) leading to the loss of individual subjectivity in the passionate swelling of the crowd. Indeed, the image of the mob flying "immediately to arms" and becoming "clamorous for war" in violation of the law is precisely the disruption of order and authority condemned by Lowth in the "Martyrdom" sermon. By the standards with which Lowth differentiates the "genuine and true" enthusiasm from the false, Solon has likely violated the "great end and aim" of the poetic excitation of the passions and is thus "guilty of a most scandalous abuse and perversion of his art" (1.369). Though Lecture I was, reportedly, hastily written before Lowth had settled upon the theme of the sacred Hebrew poetry (Prickett 105), the

dissonance between his early enthusiastic description of Solon and his later, more considered reflections upon the Hebraic sublime remains.

Conclusion

The comparison here between Lowth's account of Solon and his later articulation of the "true and genuine" enthusiasm related to the Hebraic sublime has clear limitations. Lowth shows no interest in questioning the morality of Solon's actions, nor his influence upon the men of Athens. This account does suggest, however, that Lowth's theorizing of sublimity and its consequent enthusiasm depend upon a precarious balance between the passionate subjective response to the sacred poetry and the moral restraint imposed upon the enthusiastic subject. If Dennis errs in imposing poetic regulation and "cannot leave it up to the reader to be moved and have his passions raised" (Stein 12), Lowth's belief in the necessary morality of his Hebraic sublime seems naïve. Morris points out that the *Lectures* "implied a view of sublimity which [Lowth] himself might have rejected because of its revolutionary possibilities" (163). Though Lowth acknowledges and dismisses the negative enthusiasm of popular conception (1.367), he nowhere fully accounts for how his inspired and enthusiastic poet will avoid the "most scandalous abuse and perversion of his art" (1.369).

Lowth's three descriptions of enthusiasm suggest a tendency toward conservatism and a progressively narrowed definition of what an allowable enthusiasm might look like. However, the enthusiasm of Solon, which perhaps shows the influence of Dennis before Lowth's sustained reflection upon the Hebrew poetry, demonstrates simultaneously the authority of the poet-prophet to passionately move others to action *and* the sort of mob

violence that Lowth would later denounce before the House of Lords. The second description of enthusiasm, which comes after Lowth's analysis of the sublime rhetoric of the Hebrew poets and prophets, provides a theoretical basis to support the earlier image. His praise of Solon—who "when any thing difficult or perplexing occurred in the administration of public affairs . . . had recourse to poetry" (1.27)—as if "pronounced by a prophet, instinct with divine enthusiasm" (1.28) uses language that, with his later analysis, becomes distinctly Hebraic, though such a distinction is not made this early.

The appeal of the prophet figure to poets of the late eighteenth century is rooted in this collection of images and definitions. Possessing vision and motivation alien to the public, the prophet is able to effect corrective action and obtain some good for the public. Lowth's theorizing of the Hebraic sublime provides a rhetoric and a sanctioned model of enthusiasm for such a poet, while his later denunciation represents the opinion of the establishment, against which the prophet would preach. Taking these collectively, the appeal of the prophetic role to a figure such as Smart becomes evident. Seeing himself as a poet who wrestled with the appropriate language to express devotion to God, he also thought himself persecuted for his devotion. Lowth's example allows him to prophetically "preach the very GOSPEL of CHRIST without comment" (B9) while perceiving himself "the Reviver of ADORATION amongst ENGLISH-MEN" (B332).

Chapter Three

Christopher Smart and the Hebraic Sublimity of *Jubilate Agno*

Critical discussion on the sublime in Christopher Smart's poetry is necessarily difficult, given the peculiarity of his verse written between 1759 and 1763 while he was confined for madness. Just as these fragments, collected and first published in 1939 by William Force Stead as *Rejoice in the Lamb: A Song from Bedlam* and subsequently as *Jubilate Agno*,[1] defy typical categories of poetry and criticism, so too does the sublime he utilizes defy typical conventions. While some of his earlier poetry—such as his "Ode for Musick on St. Cecilia's Day" in 1746 and the Seatonian poems written to "the Supreme Being" from 1750-55—is written in a recognizably "sublime mode" (Williamson, *Poetry Foundation*), Smart's greater poetic achievements eschew these conventions. As Morris suggests, "because *Jubilate Agno* and *A Song to David* are so different from standard exercises in the religious sublime, one is tempted to conclude that, after his Seatonian days, Smart lost all interest in the sublime" (176). However, as he points out, "'sublime' is one of the epithets which Smart applies to David in the *Song*, and it seems likely that he intentionally altered and refined (rather than rejected completely) standard ideas concerning the religious sublime" (176). It is apparent that Smart is doing *something* sublime, though the definition of that sublimity is elusive.

[1] Also edited by W. H. Bond in 1950 and 1954 and Karina Williamson in 1980. Williamson's edition comprises the first volume of *The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart*, from which I quote in this chapter.

The influence of Lowth's *Lectures* upon Smart's poetic development in general, and on the *Jubilate* in particular, is now a well-worn subject in Smart scholarship. Smart wrote two enthusiastic reviews of Lowth's *Prælectiones* in 1756, calling it "one of the best performances that has been published in a century" (*Universal Visiter*, 25). While some have speculated that Smart attended Lowth's lectures,[2] it is known that they later did share some degree of familiarity (Bond 20). In the first edition of the *Jubilate*, Stead accepted Lowth's influence as a given: "Even though," he wrote discussing the verse form of the text, "[Smart] could not read [the Hebrew poets] in their original language, he had certainly read" the *Prælectiones* (297). For Stead, Lowth provided a poetics and hinted toward form: "Smart, especially in the earlier portions of his *Jubilate Agno*, follows [the] general description of Hebrew verse" (297). Smart's Hebraic form included his eschewing of "the metrical systems of the classical or English poets," as well as some recognizable instances of parallelism.[3] Subsequent editions by Bond and Williamson have expounded further upon this influence. Both Jeanne Murray Walker and Roberta Eve Tovey have given more rigorous readings of the Hebraic influence on the *Jubilate*, demonstrating how "like the Hebrew poet, Smart develops a distinct poetic idiom" and "that this idiom has much in common with the Hebrew poetic" (Tovey 319). Tom Keymer, speculating on the authority that the scriptural example gave Smart, declared that "to show how closely Smart himself echoes in *Jubilate Agno* the kinds of sublimity described by Lowth . . . would be a task as

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[2] See, for instance, Davie. Discussing the importance of the notion of Impression to Smart and its Longinian connotations, Davie remarks that "this metaphor is not to be found in 'Longinus' (whose treatise Smart studied when attending Bishop Lowth's lectures on Hebrew poetry)" (128). I have not encountered any evidence to suggest that this claim is any more than speculation.

[3] Stead's recognition of some parallel constructions is notable, since he had not noticed that possible parallelism between the Let and For statements on separate pages of the MS.

unoriginal as lengthy" (112). More recent considerations of the sublime in the *Jubilate* have sought a correspondence in Burke, but found his *Philosophical Enquiry* lacking as a point of comparison. Rosalind Powell, for example, uses Burke's exploration of the sublime in nature as a means of exploring Smart's "sublime aesthetics" in the visual world and in music. While Burke can serve as an effective contrast, she admits at the outset that while "Burke's sublime element of unknowable terror is a key theme in the [earlier] Seatonian poems . . . it is surmounted in Smart's later verse" ("Sublime Aesthetics" 114). The absence of a typically Burkean sense of terror is also noted by Clement Hawes, who prefers the notion of ecstasy to sublimity in the *Jubilate*:

> It might be argued that "ecstasy" is just a rival term for the achievement of sublimity. But we seldom fear Smart for long, as he represents a poetics more buoyant than overbearing or fear inducing. For such a refined exaltation, *sans* terror, the term "ecstasy" seems more fitting than "sublimity." ("Poised Poesis" 100)

That scholars continue to explore and attempt to define the nature of Smart's sublime in the *Jubilate* and elsewhere suggests that it remains elusive.

Geoffrey Hartman, in an essay that has served as a point of reference for all subsequent analyses of Smart's use of language in the *Jubilate*, points out the insurmountable difficulty of representing that which cannot be represented with the admittedly insufficient tools offered by language. This is what he calls the "twofold problem of representation":

> The traditional one of ineffability, related to the belief that God is "dark with excessive bright," or not attainable through mortal speech; and the somewhat rarer view, that the fault lies with language, which has lost yet may regain its

representational power. To the crisis which stresses the inattainability of the signified, Smart adds the impressively important splendor of the signifier. (438)

Smart's changing response to the problem of representation, both in the Seatonian poems and the *Jubilate*, is an apt way to compare the different modes in which he wrote these poems. The earlier poems are predicated upon the impossibility of "speaking" God "as He is" ("On the Eternity" 140), yet still search the natural world to demonstrate the sublime excessiveness of God in comparison.[4] The *Jubilate*, on the other hand, avoids the problem of representation by relying on a poetics of impression and juxtaposition to attain a sublimity that puts into practice the principles articulated in Lowth's *Lectures*.

Starting from the "twofold problem" articulated by Hartman, this chapter will explore Smart's engagement with the problems of representation in the Seatonian poems and the recognizably Hebraic sublime he utilizes in the *Jubilate*. The difference between the two modes is the result of a notion Smart invokes once in the poem and elaborates further in the preface to his *Works of Horace, Translated into Verse* (1767)—that of Impression.[5] Declaring of himself in the *Jubilate* that "my talent is to give an impression upon words by punching, that when the reader casts his eye upon 'em, he takes up the image from the mould which I have given" (B404), Smart describes his own poetic authority as that of a Hebrew prophet. Crucially, Impression is not a means of overcoming the problem of representation, rather it is a means by which Smart can *evade* these difficulties. The Hebraic sublimity that Lowth posits in his *Lectures* provides Smart with the rhetorical tools

[4] The Seatonian poems are all collected in *PW*4.

[5] The verse *Horace* is included in *PW*5.

needed to negatively evoke a sense of divine presence in the imagination and, at the same time, excite a passionate response in his reader.

The Limits of Seatonian Sublimity

Between the years 1750 and 1755, Smart submitted five poems to compete for the Seatonian Prize, winning each year that he entered. The prize, open to any Master of Arts at Cambridge, was instituted in 1750 at the bequest of the Rev. Thomas Seaton and awarded to the best poem written on the subject of the Supreme Being. Smart's poems, written in Miltonic blank-verse, explore the Eternity (1750), Immensity (1751), Omniscience (1752), Power (1753) and Goodness (1755) of the Supreme Being. These are poetic essays exploring divine traits and qualities reflected in the natural order. One recurring theme running throughout the poems is the poet's struggle with his own expressive insufficiency, compounded by the limitations of language to adequately express his subject. For instance, in "On the Eternity," the poet calls himself "the youthful, uninspired Bard" (13) and begins with an assertion of the incomprehensibility of the divine:

O what can words
The weak interpreters of mortal thoughts,
Or what can thoughts . . .
If to the Heav'n of Heavens they'd win their way
Advent'rous, like the birds of night they're lost,
And delug'd in the flood of dazzling day.— (6-8, 10-12)

The poet's difficulty is twofold: while language can scarce represent thought, thought itself is inadequate to conceive of the divine. Rather, the poet's efforts to imaginatively approach

the “Heav’n of Heavens” will be overcome by the sublimity of the subject. The poet’s solution to this difficulty is to petition God for inspiration: “Uplift th’ unpinion’d Muse, and deign t’ assist, / GREAT POET OF THE UNIVERSE, his song” (20-21). In this image, the muse, lacking feathers, must be lifted by God, himself a poet. In the subsequent lines (22-29), the poet expresses the eternity of God by asserting that before creation, “Thou art.” In doing so, however, he reaches the limits of what language can accomplish with simple assertion. Referring to the *fiat lux* as an act of inspiration (24), he states:

> Before “the Morning-Stars together sang”
> And hail’d Thee Architect of countless worlds—
> Thou art—all-glorious, all-beneficent,
> All Wisdom and Omnipotence thou art. (26-29)

These lines show the limits of the poet’s capacity to directly describe divine eternity. Finishing line 27 with an em dash, the sense of the preceding lines is held in suspension, emphasizing the first words of line 28, while the second em dash makes these initial words also begin the sense of the rest of the line. The quotation in line 26 from Job 38 is matched by an allusion to John 8, in which Jesus states that “before Abraham was, I am.” This density of allusion and signification, however, is poorly matched by the poet’s ascribing of “all” to the divine qualities. While the poet is expressing a theological point, it falls poetically flat. While the doubled sense of “Thou art” could be read to poetically suggest something of the eternity of God—a sense of being both outside of time and simultaneously throughout it—the rest of the passage fails to rise above poetic convention.

The rest of the poem searches the natural world for reflections or images of God’s eternity, seeking for a fit comparison in the transience of natural objects. Smart evokes

several tropes typical of the sublime in nature in order to suggest the greater sense of God's eternity. Using examples such as "ye foaming waves, / That all along the Atlantic roar" (74-75) and "ye mountains, on whose cloud-crown'd tops the cedars / Are lessen'd into shrubs" (78-79), Smart wants to suggest the greater terror of the Final Judgment: "He comes! He comes! The awful trump I hear; / The flaming sword's intolerable blaze / I see" (110-112). The reader, however, does not experience the terror nor the excitement. Since the objects of natural sublimity are accessible to the poet as mere tropes, the sense of power that they *ought* to evoke is not expressed. Consequently, the reader neither hears the "awful trump" nor sees the "flaming sword." The poem concludes by returning to the anxiety of expression with which it began:

> Tho' gratitude were bless'd with all the pow'rs
> Her bursting heart cou'd long for, tho' the swift,
> The fiery-wing'd imagination soar'd
> Beyond ambition's wish—yet all were vain
> To speak Him as he is, who is INEFFABLE. (136-140)

Despite all efforts to poetically approach God, the poet acknowledges the impossibility of doing so. The "unpinion'd Muse" of the poem's beginning is here "fiery-wing'd imagination," burning with a type of Pentecostal fire, though it still cannot "speak Him." Consolation is sought in the following lines, which seek to understand God through reason and the senses:

> 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. (141-144)

These lines serve as a useful contrast with Smart's later poetic method in the *Jubilate*. For instance, at the outset of the latter poem Smart declares: "Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together." Implied in this invitation is that "man and beast" can, in fact, approach God as equals for the purposes of admiration and praise. In these lines from "On the Eternity," however, there is no direct approach to the divine. Reason can "view Him" mediated through faith, while Truth pronounces without object and Adoration confesses only "His reign" without being able to "speak Him as he is." The act of devotion in this poetic mode is fractured, mediated and cannot apprehend the divine directly. Morris has suggested that in the Seatonian poems Smart was "dancing in chains" (127) and the blank-verse essay, with its heavy Miltonic overtones, seems itself to be a hindrance to Smart's attempts to "speak Him."

The anxieties of expression that Smart describes in the "Eternity" ode are echoed elsewhere in the Seatonian poems. The second, "On the Immensity of the Supreme Being," posits that the obscurity of God from the world is the consequence of humanity's fallen perception:

> Yet know that nor in Presence or Pow'r
> Shines He less perfect here; 'tis Man's dim eye
> That makes th' obscurity. He is the same,
> Alike in all his Universe the same. (24-27)

The limits that the "Eternity" poem placed upon thought and language, the "Immensity" poem argues is an issue with perception itself. God, the poet argues, is present if one could but recognize it. The poem then searches the heights and depths of the sublime of nature for a comparison to God's immensity, also seeking for the means to conceive of His

presence. The poet asserts throughout that art cannot compare in its conceptions to the intricacy of nature's design. Neither painters ("In vain thy pencil Claudio, or Poussin, / Or thine, immortal Guido, wou'd essay / Such skill to imitate," 79-81) nor architects ("Go bid Vitruvius or Palladio build / The bee his mansion, or the ant her cave," 121-122) can compare in representation. God's own artistry in nature surpasses every effort of humanity to conceive of similar achievement.

The conclusion of the poem does allow that, overcome with some sense of God's presence, a poetic ecstasy can give expression to God's immensity. Asserting that "Vain were th' attempt, and impious to trace / Thro' all his words th' Artificer Divine—" (127-128), God's presence can still be ascertained within the subject:

> Yet man at home, within himself, might find
>
> The Deity immense, and in that frame
>
> So fearfully, so wonderfully made,
>
> See and adore his providence and pow'r— (136-139)

In order to apprehend the divine, the poet resorts to paradox, here suggesting that God's immensity is somehow contained within. This mystical trope distances the reader, who is excluded from the poet's apprehension of the divine in the following lines, as well as his ecstatic response:

> I see, and I adore—O God most bounteous!
>
> O infinite of Goodness and of Glory!
>
> The knee, that thou hast shap'd, shall bend to Thee.
>
> The tongue, which thou hast tun'd, shall chant thy praise,
>
> And, thine own image, the immortal soul,

Shall consecrate herself to Thee for ever. (140-145)

The em dash at the end of line 139 cuts off the logic of the verse essay. The poet has sought "within himself" for the "Deity immense." Rather than seeking God through the consideration of the intricacy of nature, he contemplates himself as "fearfully, so wonderfully made" and is able to "see and adore his providence and pow'r." Notably, the poet is not seeing any concrete thing, but rather comes to a new understanding of the divine, which stimulates his passionate response. This sublime realization results in a transport that leaves the reader behind. The poet is no longer engaging the problem of representation, but is swept into a transport that, as Morris notes, "is clearly the effect that Smart wishes his poem to have on his reader" (127). The poem represents a sublime experience, but fails to do so in a manner that is sublime. This failure is not only the problem of representation as described by Hartman, but part of the limitation of this poetic mode.

While Smart makes the problem of representation one of his express themes in these poems and seems, in places, to have foundered against it, his struggle is not the same as the Hebrew poets, as Lowth described it. For instance, he articulates the problem of representation when discussing the use of terrestrial metaphor in the Hebrew poetry: "Since, however, the sacred poets were under the necessity of speaking God in a manner adapted to human conceptions," he asks, "how can they be supposed ever to have depicted the Divine Majesty in terms at all becoming the greatness of the subject" (1.359-360)? The response to the problem that he presents from the Hebrew Scriptures contrasts with Smart's in the Seatonian poems. While Smart despairs at the impossibility, making use of poetic convention and resorting to the tropes of mystical poetry, the Hebrew poets make

the impossibility the central feature of their poetics: "In the delineation of the Divine nature, the sacred poets do indeed, in conformity to the weakness of the human understanding, employ terrestrial imagery" (1.360). They employ such imagery, however, such that "the attributes which are borrowed from human nature and human action, can never in a literal sense be applied to the Divinity." So doing, "the understanding is continually referred from the shadow to the reality; nor can it rest satisfied with the bare literal application, but is naturally directed to investigate that quality in the Divine nature, which appears to be analogous to the image" (1.360-361). The response of the Hebrew poets to the problem of representation is to foreground the limits of language and, so doing, suggest to the reader the comparative greatness of God.

Becoming the "Lord's News-Writer"

One way to succinctly name the difference between the Seatonian poems and the *Jubilate* is "poetic authority." The "youthful, uninspired Bard" of the "Eternity" poem is, in the latter, a prophet claiming divine authority for his utterances. He calls himself, for example, "the Lord's News-Writer—the scribe evangelist" (B327), as well as "the Reviver of ADORATION amongst ENGLISH-MEN" (B332). Further, he claims to "preach the very GOSPEL of CHRIST without comment" (B9). His purpose is in one sense evangelistic, declaring the message of redemption and reconciliation to his countrymen, but also prophetic and apocalyptic (*PW*1: xxiv-xxv).[6] With this sense of authority comes a new

[6] For Smart's patriotic purpose in the *Jubilate*, see Kuhn. Friedman addresses the modeling of praise in the text, while Jacobs, in part, considers poetic authority in the *Jubilate* in response to Johnson's critique of religious poetry.

poetics. While the poet of the "Immensity" poem retreats inward to apprehend the divine, the prophetic voice of the poet in *Jubilate Agno* declares God to all creatures, human and animal. Whence this new-found authority? Further, how has the poet resolved the problem of representation? Even though in the Seatonian poems Smart says he cannot "speak Him as he is" because language and thought are incapable of the attempt, in the *Jubilate* he does not overcome this problem, rather employs a form of the Hebraic sublime—which he calls Impression—to evade the limitations of language and thought. Smart describes his poetic method in the *Jubilate* in the following way: "For my talent is to give an impression upon words by punching, that when the reader casts his eye upon 'em, he takes up the image from the mould which I have given" (B404). Though in his later thinking, Impression becomes a type of inspiration possessed by the poet, in this image the poet punches down to make an impression upon the words themselves, which subsequently punch outward to impress upon the reader. While there is the suggestion of something sublime in this dual action, Smart, by using the word "impression" to denote this method of composition, is drawing upon a term that, though central to empiricist epistemology, had also been used in literary criticism to describe the encounter with sublimity.[7]

[7] For an example of the role of impression in empiricist thinking on perception, see Locke. Impression is the effect of external stimulus of the senses, which results in the formation of an idea. For instance, he defines sensation as "such an Impression or Motion, made in some part of the Body, as produces some Perception in the Understanding" (117). Smart invokes Locke in the *Jubilate*, stating that "an IDEA is the mental vision of an object" (B395). The next line, however, attacks him: "For Lock supposes that an human creature, at a given time may be an atheist i.e. without God, by the folly of his doctrine concerning innate ideas." While the notion of an impression being made upon the senses corresponds with Smart's image of the reader of his poetry taking "up the image from the mould which I have made," he had less use for Locke's empiricism more generally. Gedalof cites Berkeley's *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710) as a direct influence upon Smart. He suggests that, "like his mentor Berkeley, Smart is concerned with immediate impressions, with the impact of things in the senses of the reader, the Creator, and the poet who is the singer of the praises of creation. Smart does not, therefore, record a reasoned account of things but rather a subjective reaction to all that happens within and around him" (263).

While, for the empiricists, impression is the result of external phenomena affecting the senses, the literary criticism of Dennis reframes it as the effect of the sublime upon the imagination, resulting in the excitation of the passions and enthusiasm. In the *Grounds of Criticism*, he is clear that neither the mere perception of an object, nor the experience of an external phenomenon, is able to cause this sort of impression. Rather, it occurs in meditation upon the idea of a perceived object or phenomenon. As an example, he uses the ideas of both the sun and thunder:

> The Sun mention'd in ordinary Conversation, gives the Idea of a round flat shining Body, of about Two Foot Diameter. But the Sun, occurring to us in Meditation, gives the Idea of a vast and glorious Body, and the top of all visible Creation, and the brightest material Image of the Divinity . . . So Thunder mention'd in common Conversation, gives an Idea of a black Cloud, and a great Noise, which makes no great Impression upon us. But the Idea of it occurring in Meditation, sets before us the most forcible, most resistless, and consequently the most dreadful Phænomenon in Nature. (17-18)

This description makes a distinction between the limited experience of an object or phenomenon upon the senses—seeing the sun or hearing thunder—and the impression that the contemplation of the idea of the thing can make. The idea that occurs in meditation can strike the imagination with sublime force, exciting the passions and causing "Enthusiasm" (18). The association implicit here between impression and the sublime is made explicit later in the *Grounds*, where Dennis discusses the religious nature of the Longinian sublime. In this discussion, he details the marks that define the sublime and their effects upon the reader. One of these marks is "when it makes an impression upon us,

which it is impossible to resist" (83). Shortly after this, Dennis argues that the effects of sublimity correlate to the effects of religion, claiming that "there is nothing so agreeable to the Soul or that makes so universal an Impression as the wonders of Religion" (84). Having repurposed the notion of Impression from the perception of external phenomena, he further frames sublime impression within religious discourse, the sublime being related to the realization of divine power. Anticipating Lowth's theorizing of the Hebraic sublime, Dennis suggests that poetry possesses a particular capacity to impress sublimely upon the imagination, even suggesting that the force and power of the Scriptures would be better preserved if "all those parts of them that were written in Verse" were "translated in Verse; and by persons who are the most qualify'd to do it with Force and Harmony" (122).

Lowth's use of the word Impression in the *Lectures* is, like Dennis's use, associated with the experience of the sublime. He locates it, naturally, within the subject's encounter with poetry. Poetry, compared to prosaic utterance, is capable of creating a greater impression upon the mind of the hearer, hence its use in ancient sacred rites (1.50). Since poetry was, to the ancients, "excellently adapted to the exciting of every internal emotion, and making a more forcible impression upon the mind than abstract reasoning could possibly effect" (1.80), it had clear pedagogical and political uses (1.84). With regard to the sublime in poetry, Lowth associates the impression made by poetry specifically with the attempt to convey sense beyond perspicuous expression, hence its association with the sublime. In his discussion of simile, for instance, he suggests that some similes result in clarity and some in obscurity, but that "each species of comparison has in view a different end" (1.259):

> The aim of the poet in one case is perspicuity, to enable the mind clearly to perceive the subject, and to comprehend the whole of it at one view; in the other the object is sublimity, or to impress the reader with the idea that the magnitude of the subject is scarcely to be conceived. (1.259)

In this description, Impression becomes a form of experiencing or intimating that which overcomes knowing and speaking. He picks this up later, in Lecture XVI on the "sublimity of sentiment," while discussing representations of the infinite in the Hebrew poets. The boundlessness of the divine is "perhaps the most difficult of all ideas to impress upon the mind: for when simply and abstractedly mentioned, without the assistance and illustration of any circumstances whatever, it almost wholly evades the power of human understanding" (1.356). Recalling Smart's encounter with the problem of representation in the Seatonian poems, one reason for his inability to "speak Him as he is, who is INEFFABLE," can be explained as the difference, in Lowthian terms, between poetry being used to enable perception and to cause impression. While the Seatonian poet sought for a perspicuous expression of the divine in natural terms and failed to find it, the poet of the *Jubilate* realizes that his "talent is to give an impression upon words by punching." By giving an impression upon the words, which will, in turn, impress upon the imaginations of his readers, Smart can with divine authority "preach the very GOSPEL of CHRIST without comment."

Some recent scholarship has analyzed the image of the poet punching. Gedalof (263) and Powell ("Making an Impression" 48) make reference to the printing press as a means of explaining the analogy of punching.[8] The image, however, suggests an action more organic

[8] Gedalof also points out that Smart's father-in-law was the prominent printer John Newbery (263).

and human—the action of the poet in the act of composition—rather than the mechanical reproduction of the printer.[9] Importantly, Smart states that he impresses *upon* words already present, giving them depth and making of them an image that is taken up in the imagination of the reader. Seemingly, a word has its denotative meaning, but the image impressed upon it adds layers of potential connotation outside of the already implied connotative potential. The poet that can "give an impression upon words" would have the ability to increase the possibility of signification that a word or line of poetry possesses, allowing the poem, figuratively, to say more than is being said. Famously, the *Jubilate* abounds with wordplay and puns that exploit these possibilities, creating layers of "interrelated meanings" (Stern 31) that seemingly expand in meaning while being read.[10] Powell, suggesting that Impression is, to Smart, "a peculiar quality of good writing" ("Making an Impression" 47), argues that the concept is a theological one that bridges language and sensory experience, which can be "accessed through a special kind of language" (59). Keymer's reading of Impression in the *Jubilate* emphasizes Smart's need to give expression to his experience of suffering, like Job or David in the Psalms:

> Various passages combine to describe, then, a poetic voice that owes its power to three things—strange diction, the praise of God, a suffering condition. It is in the meeting of these three qualities that we may find the key to *Jubilate Agno*'s "impression"; and here Smart's turn to the Hebrew model is central. (106)

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[9] See Gigante's argument for the centrality of the organic to both the form and content of the *Jubilate*.

[10] Hawes, who suggests that such expansions in meaning can induce a "reader's sublime" (*Mania* 169), provides an apt demonstration of such an expansion in his reading of the word "BULL" in B674 ("Poised Poesis" 97-98).

Here Keymer makes an important connection between Impression and the poetry of the Hebrew Scriptures. Smart's later elaboration on the concept makes the Hebraic influence upon him clearer.

Impression and the Hebraic Sublime

Smart returns to the notion of Impression in 1767 in the preface to his *Works of Horace, Translated into Verse*. Describing a "rare" quality possessed by the poet, Smart describes "another poetical excellence, which tho' possessed in a degree by every great genius, is exceeding in our Lyric to surpass; I mean the beauty, force and vehemence of Impression" (6). By associating the qualities of "beauty, force and vehemence" with the concept of Impression, Smart is invoking Longinian concepts—an association Dennis made in 1704. Though he does not use the word "sublime" here, Impression still suggests a powerful and impacting encounter with language. The concept is further associated with poetical excellence and genius, and is likened to a sort of prophetic inspiration:

> Impression then is a talent or gift of Almighty God, by which a Genius is impowered to throw an emphasis upon a word or sentence in such wise, that it cannot escape any reader of sheer good sense, and true critical sagacity. This power will sometimes keep it up thro' the medium of a prose translation; especially in scripture, for in justice to truth and everlasting preeminence, we must confess this virtue to be far more powerful and abundant in the sacred writings. (6-7)

Though Impression is something possessed "in a degree by every great genius," it is not a latent quality, rather an "impowering" from without. Smart suggests that Impression manifests in discrete instances of language, throwing "emphasis upon a word or sentence,"

though he is unclear about how this emphasis is detected by "any reader of sheer good sense, and true critical sagacity." An informed exploration of these ideas can be made with reference to Lowth's Hebraic sublime.

Davie suggests that Smart's introduction to Longinus was through attending Lowth's lectures (128). Though this suggestion is speculation, it is notable that, in defining his own theory of sublimity, Smart uses Longinian concepts and, shortly after, quotes a verse from Psalms used several times by Lowth to demonstrate the Hebraic sublime. Some correspondences between Longinus and Smart are evident. Impression is a quality that demonstrates a "poetical excellence" seemingly similar to the quality by which, according to Longinus, "the greatest Writers, both in Verse and Prose, have . . . obtain'd the Prize of Glory, and fill'd all Time with their Renown" (Sec. I). Further, Smart's claim that the "emphasis" of Impression "cannot escape any reader of sheer good sense, and true critical sagacity" may correspond with the irresistible nature of the experience that Longinus describes as being a "Force we cannot possibly withstand; which immediately sinks deep, and makes such Impressions on the Mind as cannot be easily worn out or effaced" (Sec. VII).[11] If these parallels can be posited, that Impression functions upon the reader in a way that corresponds with what Longinus describes about sublimity upon its audience, it follows that something akin to the "Transport" produced by sublimity (Sec. I) ought to occur when the reader encounters impressive writing. Smart does not offer such speculation, though the prophetic nature of his vision demands that the poetry must affect

[11] There is a notable correspondence here between Dennis's use of the word impression in his discussion of Longinus in 1704 (83) and Smith's use of the word in his 1739 translation of Longinus.

the reader. A means of accomplishing this is suggested by the correspondences between Smart's Impression and Lowth's Hebraic sublime.

Smart includes in his catalogue of examples of impressive poetry several instances from the Hebrew Scriptures.[12] From the outset, he privileges sacred poetry in his discussion, stating that "there is a littleness in the noblest poets among the Heathens when compared to the prodigious grandeur and genuine majesty of a David or Isaiah" (9). He supports this claim by quoting Psalm 29:3 in Hebrew:[13]

קול יהוה על-המים

אל-הכדוד הרעים

יהוה על-מים רבים

He follows this immediately with the corresponding text from his *Translation of the Psalms of David* (1765):

The *Word* of infinite command,

August, adorable and grand,

The water-flood controuls;

And in terrific glory breaks

Upon the billows, and he speaks

The thunder, as it rolls. (10. Also ll. 13-18 in the *Psalms of David*)[14]

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[12] See Liu for discussion and analysis of Smart's structuring of this catalogue.

[13] "The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; / The God of glory thunders / The LORD is over many waters" (NASB). An error in the second line, whether Smart's or the printer's, is preserved here. The word printed here as כדוד is, in the Masoretic text, כבוד.

[14] Smart's *Translation of the Psalms of David* is included in *PW*3. Powell discusses this verse and the relation of Smart's translation to that of the *Book of Common Prayer* in *Christopher Smart's English Lyrics*: "In full knowledge of the sublime impression of the Psalms, Smart makes the verses his own—and thus makes his

It has been noted elsewhere that Smart's version of the Psalms is not a literal translation of the Hebrew.[15] Rather, it is a metrical reworking of the Psalter from the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, intended for liturgical use. However, it can be used for a productive comparison with a Lowthian reading of the passage.

The Hebrew text, in three brief lines, sublimely performs the presencing of Jehovah in the sound of thunder, which Dennis uses as an example of sublime terror occurring in meditation (18). The lines are declarative statements about Jehovah's relation to the waters, but there is no transition or logical connection that links them. In the first line, Jehovah is absent, but a disembodied voice echoes in his absence. In the second line, the sound over the water is identified as thunder, but the thundering is of the God of Glory. The third line declares his presence over the water, rather than just his voice. The suddenness and power of the thunderclap are associated not only with the disembodied voice of the divine but are meant to suggest his actual presence to the reader, who receives these impressions with the suddenness and striking force of thunder. Smart's version is more descriptive and necessarily different in its emphasis. Lines 13-15 do not name the divine, rather label it and attribute to it epithets of greatness. Considered together, the sense of the verse is, rather than the sublime power of the unspeakable Jehovah, the intricate control of the *Logos* over nature. The high diction of the lines suggests the augustness ascribed to the controlling Word, while the emphasis in line 15 on the control that it exercises over nature does find poetic support in the meter. This sense of control, however, hinders any sense of

own Anglican tradition—by answering the challenges of concise and powerful Hebrew parallelism with the variety of English lyric" (55).

[15] See Davie (112). Powell also points out that Smart's version of the Psalms are rewritten to be explicitly Christian (*English Lyrics* 49).

poetic power or prophetic urgency. These two texts, while purporting to have similar content, are expressive of different poetic modes. The Hebrew text, exemplifying the traits of Hebraic sublimity, conveys a sense of power in its sparseness and brevity. Smart's version, while technically accomplished, does not convey any such sense of power. If the original, in either its conception or execution, is an example of Impression, Smart's version is not.

Smart's choice of this verse as a demonstration of Impression is evidence of his indebtedness to Lowth's sublime, as Lowth uses this same verse in Lecture XVII as an example of sublimity and the passion of admiration:

> The voice of Jehovah is upon the waters:
>
> The God of Glory thunders:
>
> Jehovah is upon the many waters. (1.377-78)[16]

The brevity of these lines recalls other passages highlighted by Lowth, where, for example, he focuses on the "abrupt form" and "boldness" of Job's language (1.314). He points out that "the meaning of [Job's statements] is extremely clear, so clear indeed, that if any person should attempt to make it more copious and explanatory, he would render it less expressive of the mind and feelings of the speaker" (1.315). He similarly treats of the "expressive brevity and simplicity" of the *fiat lux*, commenting that "the more words you

[16] "Vox Jehovæ super aquas; / Deus gloriæ intonate; / Jehova super ingentes" (*De Sacra* 158). In the Latin edition of the lectures, the Hebrew is also printed. Lowth returns to this psalm again in Lecture XXVII, giving a metrical translation of the entire psalm in Latin. If Smart's verse translation loses the concise and energetic sense of the original, Lowth's Latin verse also loses the directness and strength that, in the original, gave the text its sublime force. Similarly, Gregory's English translation, consisting of rhyming couplets in catalectic trochaic tetrameter (2.252-53), conveys little of that which Lowth identifies as sublime. Roston points out that "in the lectures themselves it was difficult for Lowth to provide models of the kind of translation he demanded, since the lectures were delivered in Latin and, in any case, as a classicist, he was expected to provide tasteful translations into Latin hexameters. In this he was tempted and fell, offering translations which, by being in a quantitative metre lost their value as faithful versions" (133-34).

would accumulate upon this thought, the more you would detract from the sublimity of it" (1.350). In both of these examples, Lowth stresses not only the sense of energy conveyed by the language but also the clarity of its meaning. Since the sublime style is meant to demonstrate or represent "the true and express image of a mind violently agitated" (1.79), the urgency of the poetic impulse precludes contrived or artful expression.

Lowth's theorizing of the Hebraic sublime can be used to speculate on the effect of Impression upon Smart's reader. Smart's claim that emphasis is "thrown upon word or sentence" can be understood with reference to Lowth's description of the constitution of the sublime: "The sublime consists either in language or sentiment, or more frequently in an union of both, since they reciprocally assist each other, and since there is a necessary and indissoluble connexion between them" (1.307). With this insight, it seems that when Impression "throw[s] an emphasis," it increases the burden of sentiment upon discrete instances of "word and sentence." These words and sentences bear increased possibilities of signification and meaning-making. This also corresponds with the image of Impression in *JA* B404, in which the poet gives "an impression upon words by punching, that when the reader casts his eye upon 'em, he takes up the image from the mould which I have made." From discrete letters and words comes an impression upon the imagination, suggesting the occurrence of the sublime in Smart results in the expansive proliferation of signification. The sublime of the Hebrew poetry results in the excitation of the passions, which is likened, in the poetry, to the revelation of the divine in the imagination. Poetically, this is accomplished through a variety of poetic figures and tropes that function by either disrupting the act of reading and destabilizing the reader's relation to the text, or by attempting to represent some aspect of the divine through a failure of representation. By

suggesting the presence of the divine in the failure to represent him and making the artifice of the metaphor plain, the Hebrew poets excite the passion of the reader. Similarly, Smart's method in the *Jubilate* is, according to Hawes, not to persuade his reader logically, but to exploit the artifice of language to "convey ecstasy":

> Smart does not convey ecstasy by his repetitive "message" alone, for no less crucial are his leaps of creative exuberance. Language itself is pushed to the foreground: words, phonemes, and letters are isolated and fearlessly remixed in the eternal *now* of Smart's imagination. ("Poised Poesis" 90)

What Hawes calls "ecstasy" in the *Jubilate*—being "based upon praise,"— is the Lowthian excitation of the passions produced by an experience of sublimity.

Sublime Juxtaposition and Prophetic Authority in Fragment C

In the excerpt from Psalm 29 that Smart uses as an example of impressive poetry, the sublimity of the original Hebrew is a product of the series of declarative statements presented appositely and without explicit logical transition. Sublimity occurs in the reading as the reader encounters the sense of each line and intuitively fills in what is lacking between them. The aforementioned presencing of the divine in thunder is implied but not described in the text. In Lowth's theorizing of the Hebraic sublime, sublimity results from the use of poetic statements that "impress the reader with the idea that the magnitude of the subject is scarcely to be conceived" (1.259). In other words, by forcing the reader to read for what is not stated, to infer what Smart calls the "uncommunicated letters" (C44), the poet can achieve what Smart could not in the Seatonian poems' inability to "speak" God:

resolve the problem of representation by evading the limitations of language. Such is the underlying theme of Fragment C of the *Jubilate*.

Between lines 1 and 51, Smart explores the expressive and representational possibilities in letters and numbers. The Let lines in this fragment pair biblical names, lifted from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, with various plants "from standard 18th-c. herbals and horticultural books or Pliny" (91 fn.).[17] The For lines begin with Smart's third inscribing of values to the alphabet, giving each letter divine significance: "For H is a spirit and therefore he is God. / For I is a person and therefore he is God. / For K is king and therefore he is God" (C1-3). It concludes by declaring that "Christ being A and Ω is all the intermediate letters without doubt" (C18). Continuing by stating that "there is a mystery in numbers" (C19), Smart proceeds to comment on the moral value of the various numbers, concluding with zero: "For Cipher is a note of augmentation very good" (C34). This provokes a poetic meditation on both nothingness and infinity, playing on the creation of the infinity symbol from two conjoined zeroes, first noted by Stead:

> For innumerable ciphers will amount to something.
>
> For the mind of man cannot bear a tedious accumulation of nothings without effect.
>
> For infinite upon infinite they make a chain.
>
> For the last link is from man very nothing ascending to the first Christ the Lord of All. (C34-38)

In these lines, Smart intimates a resolution to the problem of representation that hindered him from "speaking" God in the Seatonian poems. "Nothings" is the unrepresentable,

[17] See Christensen for an astute reading of the structure of Fragment C, as well as useful speculation on the liturgical significance of the relation of Let and For statements.

though it can be signified. The conjoining of signs, though they each represent nothingness, will "amount to something." This is the result of the subject's inability to "bear a tedious accumulation of nothings without effect." The apprehending of "infinite upon infinite" still leads, as a chain, toward God. The reader's inherent will to interpret, even when presented with an "accumulation of nothings" corresponds with Lowth's thinking on the use of infinity in representations of divine power:

> When the intellect is carried beyond these limits, there is nothing substantial upon which it can rest; it wanders through every part, and when it has compassed the boundaries of creation, it imperceptibly glides into the void of infinity: whose vast and formless extent, when displayed to the mind of man in the forcible manner so happily attained by the Hebrew writers, impresses it with the sublimest and most awful sensations, and fills it with a mixture of admiration and terror. (1.357)

Both Smart and Lowth realize that the reader desires understanding and, faced with the uncomprehendingly vast, will still seek to interpret. The mention of "admiration and terror" suggests the excitation of the passions and the apprehension of the divine. Rather than an aimless wandering, Smart's image of the chain suggests a more definite path toward such apprehension. Whereas Lowth ends the "intellect's" wandering at the display of "the void of infinity" and an impression of divine immensity, Smart's Christian poetics leads to Christ. The signifying of nothingness, which impresses rather than trying to represent something perceived, shows how Smart's new poetics evades the representation problem that hindered his Seatonian poems.

The subsequent lines of Fragment C elaborate on the expressive potential of his new poetics. C39 speaks of the vowel as the spirit of the Hebrew consonant, being unwritten

prior to the development of the Masoretic text, while further lines state that there are yet "more letters in all languages not communicated" (C40), some of which can signify entire sentences. St. Paul is invoked as an example of one who "heard certain words which it was not possible for him to understand" (C43), before Smart suggests (erroneously) the existence of an additional Hebrew letter. These lines, taken together, both address the possibilities of poetic expression and also perform it. From the letters—each of which he identifies with God—to the moral value of numbers, to the possibility of nothingness expanding to represent infinity, to the existence of further letters yet uncommunicated by God, Smart asserts throughout the excessive potential for prophetic-poetic expression. Importantly, he is making these claims poetically and not, as in the Seatonian poems, essayistically. As he makes these pronouncements about the expansive capabilities of expression and signification beyond the normal capacity of speech and language, he does so in statements that—through allusion, pun and wordplay—abound in the suggestion of additional meanings and connotations. "H is a spirit" because H, as an aspirated consonant, exhales and mnemonically evokes the breath or wind that signifies the spiritual presence of God in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. "M is musick," in part, because the Hebrew equivalent מ (*mem*) is "the direct figure of God's harp" (B524). Christ, being "all the intermediate letters," then suffuses all writing and speech.

The relation of the Let to the For lines in this section of the poem is important and, significantly, the basis of the sublime potential in the entire text. Throughout the C fragment, Smart invokes names from the biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah, both of which are concerned with the return of the people of Jerusalem from exile in Babylon, with the reconstruction of Jerusalem and with the reinstitution of temple worship. Further, the

book of Ezra is also concerned with the purifying of Israel, both spiritually and ethnically. Following the reconstruction of the temple, Ezra is informed that some of the men had married foreign wives during the exile (9:1), a transgression of Mosaic law. Following confession and correction, the book concludes with a list of names of the men who had taken foreign wives.[18] The juxtaposition between, in the Let statements, the abjection of those returning to Jerusalem—compounded by the shame of conviction and repentance—and, in the For statements, the glorious state of the new millennial England, is an example of the sublime juxtaposition throughout the *Jubilate*. By placing these statements opposite each other, the reader's attention moves from abjection upward to the renewal of England. Juxtaposition of this sort attains sublimity by directing the attention or imagination of the reader and, by forcing the reader to reckon the difference and account for the implied connection between the two, leads the imagination "upward" toward a contemplation or realization of divinity. In Lowth, the description of the inapt metaphor functions in this way. By representing the Divine with a deliberately inadequate image, "the understanding is continually referred from the shadow to the reality" (1.360) and led toward

[18] The misogyny of C66-67 ("For I prophecy that they will be less mischief concerning women. / For I prophecy that they will be cooped up and kept under due controul."), which likely stems from Smart's fractured relationship with his wife, also finds precedent in the names mentioned in the accompanying Let versicles: "Let Uel rejoice . . . Let Kelaiah rejoice." Both of these figures are among the names of Israelite men who had "taken strange wives" listed in Ezra 10. The Roman Catholicism of Anna Maria Smart, whose permanent estrangement from Smart began around this time, may suggest a further connotation to the condemnation of the Israelites who failed to separate themselves from other nations. Shortly after these lines, Smart does ask that "God be gracious to my wife," and "God be merciful to my wife" (C108, 128), though, as Williamson also notes, the accompanying For lines express a sexual tension, and an anxiety about (or desire for) cuckoldry (*Poetry Foundation*). Hawes explores this sexual tension and its relation to prophecy in greater depth in "Smart's Bawdy Politic."

apprehension of the divine.[19] Smart also gestures toward a similar principle in several statements about the relations of words and the possibilities of signification (B598-600).

The subject of Smart's address changes with the invocation of Orpheus as a type of the impressive poet-prophet. Having dwelt upon the impressive and expressive potential in language, he assumes the prophet's mantle in order to become "the Reviver of ADORATION amongst ENGLISH-MEN" (B332). At line 52 he invokes Orpheus, whom he associates with David in the Seatonian ode "On the Goodness of the Supreme Being" (1-2).[20] The subsequent lines affirm Orpheus's musical gifting since he "was a believer in the true God and assisted in the spirit" (C54). His playing on the harp, which occurred "in the spirit by breathing upon the strings," is said to "affect every thing that is sustaind by the spirit", for it is "the business of a man gifted in the word to prophecy good" (C55-57). The For lines, from C58-118, constitute a prophetic vision of a spiritually and socially renewed England. The declarative act of making these statements shows Smart asserting that he is "a man gifted in the word" (C57) and, like the Orphic-David, "assisted in the spirit" (C54), and so fulfilling his role "to prophecy good." The object of his prophecy is England and in the first four statements envisions the visitation of God that will mark the apocalyptic change:

For it will be better for England and all the world in a season, as I prophecy this day.

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[19] Dennis also implies a similar directing of the imagination in the *Grounds*. In his discussion of the sublimity of Milton (and his superiority to the ancients), he argues that the dialogue between God and Adam in Book VIII "derives its greatness and its sublimity, from the becoming Thoughts which it has of the Deity" (30). The sublimity, he suggests, is achieved in part through the inequality of the two figures in dialogue. After quoting Adam's address to God (VIII.357-368), Dennis "desire[s] the Reader to observe, how the Spirit of the Poem sinks, when *Adam* comes from God, to himself; and how it rises again, when he returns to his Creator" (31). The fluctuating "Spirit of the Poem" corresponds to the movement of the reader's imagination: from the heights of divinity to the lowliness of humanity.

[20] David is also mentioned in the preface to the *Works of Horace* as an example of an impressive poet, one of "prodigious grandeur and genuine majesty" (9).

For I prophecy that they will obey the motions of the spirit descended upon them as at this day.

For they have seen the glory of God already come down upon the trees.

For I prophecy that it will descend upon their heads also. (C58-61)

Though the object of his prophesying is the people of England, his benevolent vision is, like that of the Servant figure of Isaiah, not limited only to a single nation.[21] Rather, he extends it to "all the world." The fulfillment of this prophecy is contingent on the apprehension of the divine presence, which has already manifest "upon the trees." Bond and Williamson both note that, these lines being written on or around Easter in 1761, the spiritualized colours (B662-69) already bear witness to the presence of the spirit. The sublime purpose of the text, then, is to bring the reader to realize that this descent has already occurred and to participate in the prophesied blessing. While Revelation 21 envisions a restored heavenly Jerusalem with God in its centre, Smart's vision focuses on the centrality of the church in the renewed England. He prophesies that "the praise of God will be in every man's mouth in the Publick streets" and that "there will be Publick worship in the cross ways and fields" (C62-63). When it comes that "there will be full churches and empty play-houses" (C68), there will also be "more mercy for criminals" and that the authorities "will not dare to imprison a brother or sister for debt" (C65, 72). When "the clergy in particular will set a better example" (C71), the public will "observe the Rubrick with regard to days of Fasting and Abstinence" (C70) and that the blessing will extend to the world, since "the

[21] Isaiah 49:6: "And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth."

Liturgy will obtain in all languages" (C100). The *Jubilate Agno*, as a presumptive liturgical text for this envisioned renewal, invites the reader to participate in its realization.

Conclusion

Smart's prophetic self-image and his Hebraically flavoured poetics bear the influence of his engagement with Lowth's *Lectures*. While many scholars have commented on the form of the *Jubilate Agno* and drawn simple comparisons to Lowth's theory of Hebraic parallelism, the significance of Smart's encounter with Lowth's ideas is demonstrated at a more fundamental level: the purpose, the language and the function of the poem can be traced back to Lowth. Impression, in Smart's definition in the *JA*, depends upon the reader's participation in the poetic encounter. While the poet might "give an impression by punching," it is the reader who "takes up the image from the mould which I have given" (B404). While for Dennis Impression is the result of the contemplation of a sublime idea in the imagination, for Lowth, Impression describes the manner in which sublime utterance can convey meaning beyond perspicuous expression. The sublime poet can, through the use of failing tropes, still excite the passions by casting an Impression upon the imagination. Smart, juxtaposing all manners of objects and ideas in the pursuit of sublime potential, invites the reader to—in Lowth's words—let "the understanding" be "continually referred from the shadow to the reality" and be "directed to investigate" the analogous qualities of Smart's juxtapositions (1.360-361). The fulfillment of prophecy requires action on the part of the audience; Smart invites his reader to participate in his vision for England, as the recitation of a new liturgy,

It is significant, considering both the prophetic model that Lowth provides and the rational empiricism against which he reacts, that Smart centres his prophetic vision upon the church. Unlike Blake, who opposed institutional authorities, Smart still affirms the centrality of the church for spiritual and social matters. However, his personal sense of persecuted devotion, finding a means of expression in the Hebraic sublime, asserts a prophetic authority that calls for the dramatic reformation and renewal of English society. The singular eccentricity of the *JA* should not be mistaken for a poetic solipsism; the evidence of the text indicates the Smart remained interested and informed about the goings-on of the world outside the asylum. His presumed madness, however, and displays of excessive devotion deviate from the nominal Anglican theology and practice of Lowth. Further from Lowth, and also followed by rumours of madness, William Blake represents the next degree of abstraction from Lowth. While Blake still draws from the lode of imagery, symbolism and language provided by the Hebraic tradition, his views cannot be resolved with the authority of an institutional church. Hawes suggests that Smart seeks a sublime ecstasy in verse, while for the Blakean prophet the "voice of honest indignation" is the voice of God.

Chapter Four

Lowthian Contraries and Blake's Hebraic Sublime

Following the four lectures on the sublime of the Hebrew poetry, which were the culmination of a study of poetic mode in the Hebrew Scriptures, Lowth turns to an exploration of different poetic genres. The first of these is prophetic poetry, to which he dedicates four lectures (XVIII-XXI). The move from the sublime as a *topos* to the prophetic as a genre is natural, since "we learn from the testimony of the Prophets themselves, that the act of prophesying was often, if not always, accompanied with a very violent agitation of the mind" (2.17), such agitation being the precondition for sublime utterance. Lowth's concern in these lectures is to argue that the "writings of the prophets [are] in general poetical and metrical" (2.2) and to identify what in the prophetic writings can be considered poetry. Though the notion of the prophetic books consisting of poetry is now a commonplace, the argument put forth by Lowth in these lectures revolutionized how the Prophets were read. Ian Balfour suggests that "there is little doubt that one of Lowth's greatest achievements was the 'proof' that the prophets were poets" (*Rhetoric* 77), while David Norton, in his *History of the Bible as Literature*, notes that

> one of the most striking aspects of the *Lectures* is that they drastically widen the sense of poetry in the OT. Until now the poetic parts had been reckoned to be Psalms, the Song of Songs, the bulk of Job, the various interposed poems from Moses' song (Exodus 15) on, including a few passages from the Prophets such as Habakkuk 3, and, sometimes, Proverbs. The Prophets in general, if they were

considered in literary terms, had been thought of as orators . . . Lowth extended poetry to include the Prophets. (2.65)

Among the genres upon which he lectures, Lowth considers the Prophetic to be in "the first rank" (2.4). He notes that the word נביא [*nabi*] "was used by the Hebrews in an ambiguous sense, and that it equally denoted a Prophet, a Poet, or a Musician, under the influence of divine inspiration" (2.14). In this ambiguity is the inherent sublimity of prophetic poetry. Surveying each of the prophetic books in Lecture XXI, Lowth notes—and sometimes compares—the sublimity of each. Isaiah, whom he calls "the first of the prophets, both in order and dignity," is said to "afford the most perfect model of the prophetic poetry" (2.84-85). Continuing, Lowth states that "he is at once elegant and sublime, forcible and ornamented; he unites energy with copiousness, and dignity with variety" (2.85). Jeremiah is "deficient neither in elegance nor sublimity" (2.87), while Ezekiel's "sublimity . . . is not even excelled by Isaiah: but [it] is of a totally different kind" (2.89). Central to his interest in the prophetic writings is the poetic function of sublimity.

Lowth's ranking of the prophets according to their style and use of language introduces a tension between the literary analysis of the text and its theological use. Since the prophetic writings are all said to be divinely inspired, his literary critical comparisons emphasize the role of the author in the composition of the text. Lowth suggests that "Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, as far as relates to style, may be said to hold the same rank among the Hebrews, as Homer, Simonides, and Æschylus among the Greeks" (2.95), but also agrees that "the same celestial Spirit indeed actuated Isaiah and Daniel in the court, and Amos in the sheep-folds" (2.98), although the text attributed to Daniel is "mere historical commentary" (2.100). The tension that his literary approach to the Hebrew Scriptures

creates is acknowledged early on. In Lecture II, Lowth notes the need for caution, "lest while we wander too much at large in the ample field of Poetry, we should imprudently break in upon the sacred boundaries of Theology" (1.53). By positing a Poetical and aesthetic approach to the text separate from the Theological, he made an early contribution to the eighteenth-century reimagining of the Bible as "a literary, as well as a sacred, object" (Ackroyd 173), a notion that would be met with sympathy by William Blake.

Nowhere in Blake's extant writings is Lowth mentioned, though one expects that the poet must have been aware of the bishop and his work. Beyond the common interest in biblical poetry, prophecy and the sublime, they share a connection to the prominent bookseller Joseph Johnson. Johnson, who published Gregory's translation of the *Lectures* in 1787 as well as an edition of Lowth's *Isaiah: A New Translation* in 1791, employed Blake as an engraver throughout the 1790s. Blake's awareness or ignorance of Lowth remains speculation, however, for no direct evidence for their acquaintance is known.[1] Regardless, a

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[1] Having no clear evidence that Blake drew any influence from Lowth, the scholarship has to carefully approach the suggestion of a connection. Vincent De Luca, for example, suggests that there is a "strong likelihood" that Blake "was familiar with contributions to the developing theory of the sublime" made by Lowth, among others (*Words of Eternity* 15). Leslie Tannenbaum includes Lowth in a hermeneutical discourse that, he suggests, is evident in Blake's use of the Bible (13). Morton Paley suggests that Lowth is part of a group of writers who "shared certain assumptions about sublimity" in the eighteenth century, and includes Blake in this list (*Energy* 19), but also admits that "Blake's imitation of the Bible as mediated by eighteenth-century theory cannot be fully distinguished from his direct use of the Authorized Version as a model" (*Continuing City* 49). Stephen Prickett breaks with this tendency and asserts that "it is clear from [Blake's] references to the 'poetic genius' as ''The Spirit of Prophecy' that he was well aware of Lowth's work by 1788" (116). He pursues this idea further yet: "So far as I know, no commentator has yet called attention to the fact that Blake's famous aphorism 'The Old and New Testaments are the Great Code of Art' ("The Laocoon", E274) is also a reference to Lowth." He cites the "Preliminary Dissertation" to Lowth's *Isaiah*, in a discussion of the difficulties of the transmission and translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Comparing the state of the Hebrew text to Aristotle's Poetics, he states that "notwithstanding these disadvantages, this treatise, so much injured by time and so mutilated, still continues to be the great code of criticism" (xlii). Ackroyd's biography mentions Lowth to contextualize Blake's poetic development, but stops short of suggesting a direct influence: "It would be too facile to say that [Blake] composed the Songs of Innocence under the direct influence of the Wesleyan hymns, or that he fashioned the poetry of the prophetic books after a reading of Lowth's Isaiah; but the rediscovery and reinterpretation of the Bible in his period does at least set the context for his own understanding both of his poetic inspiration and of his prophetic mission" (174).

productive comparison between the two can be made. Acknowledging the tenuousness of any claim of a connection between the two figures, this chapter will argue that the dichotomy Lowth posits between the Poetical and Theological modes of reading the Hebrew Scriptures provides a lens through which Blake's own thinking on the sublime can be understood, roughly corresponding to his categories of the Intellectual Powers and Corporeal Understanding. Lowth's Poetical approach to the text allows for his analysis of the sublimity of the prophets, which anticipates Blake's own thinking on the subject. Conversely, Blake's prophetic commitment to the sublime overcoming of contraries in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-93) provides a critique of Lowth's effort to balance the Poetical and Theological in his translation of Isaiah. Turning to Isaiah 34 and 35, which are cited in the *Marriage* as pertaining to the appearance of "the Eternal Hell," Blake's ideas suggest a reading that emphasizes the active role of the imagination in the prophesied restoration of the land. While Lowth seems, at times, ambivalent about the theological implications of prophetic sublimity, Blake argues for a sublime perception that transcends contraries and seeks the "enjoyments of Genius" (Pl. 6, E35).

Reading Contraries in the *Lectures*

Throughout the *Lectures*, Lowth posits and consciously navigates a tension between different uses of the Bible. He articulates this difference in Lecture II, as he outlines his plan for the series of lectures:

> We must with the diligence (as considering the difficulty of the subject) and at the same time with caution engage; lest while we wander too much at large in the ample

> field of Poetry, we should imprudently break in upon the sacred boundaries of Theology. (1.53)

He proposes two modes of reading the same text, the Poetical and the Theological, and in this passage implies the differences between them. The "sacred boundaries" of theology suggests the stasis of one who is bound, and bound to a particular sense of orthodoxy. Poetry, however, is an "ample field" in which one can freely wander, guided by impulse. By proposing to remain outside the boundaries of theology, Lowth retrieves the aesthetic power of the poetry from what he calls "our vulgar translation" of the Scriptures (*Sermons* 85) but, at the same time, he frames his analysis within other boundaries that exclude it from the authority that theology has to name sacred truths. He identifies and maintains other tensions throughout the *Lectures*. One example is the difference between the authentic expression of the primitive poet, whose utterance is later "improved" into forms of knowledge, memory and religion (1.80). Another is the tension that Lowth identifies in the act of inspiration between the imagination of the subject and the inspiring external spirit that threatens subjectivity. He states that his analysis will

> detract nothing from the dignity of that inspiration, which proceeds from higher causes, while I allow to the genius of each writer his own peculiar excellence and accomplishments. I am indeed of opinion, that the Divine Spirit by no means takes such an entire possession of the mind of the Prophet, as to subdue or extinguish the character and genius of the man. (1.347)

Though this notion of biblical inspiration is not radical, his idea of the relation of the Prophet's individual genius to the Divine Spirit is noteworthy. In classical notions of inspiration, the subject is possessed by the spirit and made to speak for it. Even Hebraic

notions of prophetic speaking suggest that the spirit possesses the subject entirely.[2] It is important for Lowth's purposes, however, that the Prophet retain his subjectivity; the Poetical mode of reading that he promotes requires that the Prophet do so.

There are also examples of Lowth himself being constrained by the tension between the Poetical and Theological modes of approaching the biblical text. In his discussion of the enthusiasm that results from the experience of the Hebraic sublime, he intimates the tension between the Poetical and Theological approaches to the text by stating that "the intent of poetry is to profit while it entertains us; and the agitation of the passions, by the force of imitation, is in the highest degree both useful and pleasant" (1.369).[3] Having called this "the true and genuine enthusiasm" (1.367), he is, it seems, forced to elaborate and, in doing so, asserts the constraints of religious orthodoxy:

> This method of exciting the passions is in the first place useful, when *properly* and *lawfully* exercised; that is, when these passions are directed to their *proper* end, and *rendered subservient* to the dictates of nature and truth; when an aversion to evil and a love of goodness is excited; and if the poet *deviate* on any occasion from this great end and aim, he is *guilty* of a most scandalous abuse and perversion of his art. (1.369, emphasis added)

If this passage is read as Lowth navigating a tension between the demands of Poetry and Theology, it becomes an assertion of constraint by the bounds of institutional religion. The notion of the sublime in eighteenth-century discourse suggested an energy that exceeds

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[2] See, for example Balaam's awareness that he "could not do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the LORD my God" (Num. 22:18), or Saul's encounter with the group of prophets in 1 Samuel 10: "and the Spirit of God came upon him mightily, so that he prophesied among them."

[3] See Chapter Two for analysis of Lowth's argument for a redeemed and "genuine" enthusiasm.

boundaries, hence its association with revolution and the enthusiastic critique of the established church. Against this creative poetic energy, Lowth imposes propriety, law, subservience, and aspersions of deviance and guilt.

The notion of contraries from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* casts Lowth's navigating of these tensions into a different light. What Lowth presents as an exercise in responsible scholarship—retrieving a poetry that can "profit while it entertains us" (1.369) without violating orthodoxy—Blake would critique as evidence of passivity and weakness (Pl. 5, E34). Indeed, as literary critic and clergyman, Lowth himself navigates this tension, which is exacerbated by the time he publishes *Isaiah: A New Translation* in 1778. His translation, which sought to "imitate the air and manner of the author, to express the form and fashion of the composition, and to give the English reader some notion of the peculiar turn and cast of the original" (i), was produced while he was Bishop of Oxford, and published after he had been installed in London. Any sense of devotion to the sublimity of the text would necessarily conflict with his clerical role.

The *Marriage* presents a critique of the constrained sort of reading that Lowth falls into. The contraries that form the basis of the text—between "Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate" (Pl. 3, E34)—correspond with Lowth's dichotomy between the Poetical and Theological modes of reading. Blake states that "from these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason[.] Evil is the active springing from Energy." Applying this idea to the tension in the Lowthian dichotomy suggests that, in Blakean terms, the Poetical ideas and analysis of the Hebraic sublime correspond with Energy, while the Theological approach, which observes the constraints of religion, doctrine and authority, corresponds with the dictates of Reason.

From the position of orthodoxy, then, the Theological reading of Scripture is Good, while the Poetical, which could subvert or contradict the authorized reading, is Evil. The next section, spoken by "the voice of the Devil," elaborates on the errors perpetuated by a reading of the Scriptures from Reason, or the Theological:

> All Bibles or sacred codes. have been the causes of the following Errors.
>
> 1. That Man has two existing principles Viz: a Body & a Soul.
> 2. That Energy. calld Evil. is alone from the Body. & that Reason. calld Good. is alone from the Soul.
> 3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.

The consequence of the Theological reading of Scripture is, to Blake, the codifying of error and the perpetual re-inscribing of that error. The speaking Devil, however, asserts the opposite:

> But the following Contraries to these are True
>
> 1 Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that calld Body is a portion of his Soul discerned by the five Senses. the chief inlets of Soul in this age
>
> 2. Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.
>
> 3 Energy is Eternal Delight (Pl. 4, E34)

Since "without Contraries is no progression" and they are "necessary to Human existence," the text directs the reader, who perceives the contraries, to a sublime vision that transcends the dichotomy and points toward a liberated perception of the infinite. Lowth's separating of his Poetical analysis from the Theological tradition, then, is a movement toward "progression," in that it retrieves the sublime potential of the text, though the

prophetic call to raise “other men into a perception of the infinite” (Pl. 13, E39) remains incomplete.

The fifth Memorable Fancy provides an instructive illustration of a figure who transcends the perception of contraries and attains a sublimely different vision. In the Fancy, a Devil asserts that the appropriate worship of God consists in “honouring his gifts in other men according to his genius” (Pl. 22, E43). An Angel asserts the religious law, claiming that Jesus Christ has “given his sanction to the law of ten commandments,” and that correct worship is in accordance with it. The Devil argues that Jesus himself violated the commandments, despite his being “the greatest man” in the eyes of the angel. He further asserts that “no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments: Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse: not from rules” (Pls. 23-24, E43). The Angel, having no response, “stretched out his arms embracing the flame of fire & he was consumed and arose as Elijah.” The speaker further claims that “this Angel, who is now become a Devil, is my particular friend: we often read the Bible together in its infernal or diabolical sense which the world shall have if they behave well” (Pl. 24, E44). The Devil’s claim is, to the Angel, a violation of the ordered religious ethic of worship. In the angelic sense, the Ten Commandments are a moral code that restrains the devout from evil. The Devil, however, asserts the genius of Jesus Christ, who “acted from impulse” and violated the law yet was virtuous. Significantly, the Angel is not persuaded by the logic of the Devil’s statement, yet his consumption in fire, representing sublime realization, suggests the attainment of vision beyond the logical paradox of unlawful virtue. His revelation as Elijah is significant, for he is now a prophetic figure who can call others to similar vision.

The Devil's affirmation that the worship of God is "honouring his gifts in other men according to his genius" could give direction to Lowth's navigation of the tension between the Poetical and Theological. Indeed, the appreciation of genius is a theme that recurs throughout the *Marriage*. The speaking devil in the first Memorable Fancy delights in "the enjoyments of Genius; which to Angels look like torment and insanity" (Pl. 6, E35). The "ancient Poets" are said to animate "all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses," and to study "the genius of each city & country. Placing it under its mental deity" (Pl. 11, E38). Ezekiel refers to the God of the Hebrew Scriptures as a vision of the "Poetic Genius" (Pl. 12, E39). The association of genius with poetry, God and the integrity of the individual suggests that the resolution to Lowth's tension should be in a privileging of the genius inherent in the text, rather than an *a priori* separation of poetry from theology. Perhaps most telling for the present analysis of Lowth—who describes the sublime utterance of the primal poet as being "improved by art, and applied to the purposes of utility and delight" (1.80)—is the infernal proverb: "Improvement makes strait roads, but crooked roads without Improvement, are roads of Genius" (Pl. 10, E38). "Strait roads" are those which border the "sacred boundaries" of Theology and, implicitly, constrain the "ample fields" of Poetry. In contrast, the "roads of Genius" are those which run according to the impulse and desire of Genius, disdaining institutional order and the dictates of Reason. When Lowth, as will be seen, encounters conflicting demands between the Poetical and Theological approaches to the text, his commitment should be to "honour" what he repeatedly calls the "true genius and character" of the Hebrew poetry (1.325, 330, 343, 345), or the "character and Genius" of the Prophet, who contends with the Divine Spirit in the moment of inspiration (1.347).

However, being governed by the impulse to "straiten" the text into Poetry and Theology, he restrains the prophetic voice into passivity.

Blake and the Sublime of the Hebrew Bible

The Angel of the fifth Memorable Fancy is consumed in the fire of sublimity after, having failed to comprehend the paradox of unlawful virtue, he was able to perceive beyond the contraries through which he read the Gospels. [4] The Angel, "who is now become a Devil" reads the Bible with the narrating Devil "in its infernal or diabolical sense" (Pl. 24, E44). Unable to account for the Devil's paradox, the Angel yet transcended the limits of Reason through a sublime imaginative realization. This serves as an image of Blake's notion of the sublime in poetry: an expansion of perception that occurs despite the failure of the rational faculties to comprehend. Vincent De Luca remarks at the outset of *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime*, "it is not consistently easy to know what Blake means when he speaks of the sublime" (15). It is a term that had gathered a plethora of meanings and connotations, in relation to which Blake can sometimes be located. Since he left no systematic theory of the sublime, scholars are left to collect discrete statements—written in letters and marginalia—and synthesize these with the practice of his poetry in order to arrive at an understanding of the concept.[5] Lowth's theorizing anticipates Blake's

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[4] Compare to the circumstance of the sons of Urizen, for whom, contained within the iron religion of Urizen's net: "Perswasion was in vain; / For the ears of the inhabitants, / Were wither'd, & deafen'd, & cold; / And their eyes could not discern, / Their brethren of other cities" (*BU* 28.14-18, E83). Their escape occurs after the prophetic call of Fuzon, who is represented by fire.

[5] In "Blake and the Two Sublimes," De Luca suggests, but does not explore in depth, the relation of the Hebraic sublime described by Lowth to the concept as it is demonstrated in Blake's poetry.

own thinking on the subject and provides a lens through which the sublimity of the *Marriage* can be understood.

De Luca points out that, though there is no systematic statement on the sublime from Blake, one "should not there assume that he lacks a cogent and complex idea on the subject" (15). Rather, his thinking on the subject "arises out of a historical context of competing concepts—which, in an ongoing dialogic process, it assimilates, contests, modifies or completes" (15). One can, by examining some of his various statements, start to move toward a preliminary understanding of Blake's thinking on the subject. For example. in a letter to Thomas Butts in 1803, Blake states that "Allegory addressd to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding is My Definition of the Most Sublime Poetry" (E730). If by Corporeal Understanding Blake is referring to the sensuous and rational faculties of the subject, the Intellectual Powers refers to the visionary and imaginative capacity. The "Most Sublime Poetry" is that which defeats the ability of the Corporeal Understanding to comprehend, while still giving vision to the imagination. According to De Luca, "this is to be done by presenting to the mind artifacts that sift it, separating out the dull from the bright, the stony from the buoyant, so that what is imaginative and visionary within us can outwardly manifest itself" (22). Similarly, Morris states that "sublimity for Blake is itself a form of religious experience—jarring men not only out of rational disbelief . . . but out of rational *belief* as well" (185). The "Errors" of religion referred to in the *Marriage* are not belief in an illogical or incorrect proposition, but the idea of belief itself inasmuch as belief is the product of reason or proposition. This makes Blake's concept of sublimity difficult to clearly articulate, given its "extreme and

profoundly personal formulation" (Morris 182), but this is by design. As Blake wrote to Trusler in 1799,

> you ought to know that What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to an Idiot is not worth my care. The wisest of the Ancients considerd what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act. (E702)

Insinuating his own prophetic purpose, Blake seeks to instruct his reader, though not by communicating propositional content. His method is to "go beyond argument to lead the reader to vision" (Tannenbaum 36). By challenging—and finally denying—his reader's rational capabilities, Blake forces the intellectual labour upon the reader, the failure of which allows for the sublime attainment of "vision."

Blake's notion of the separation of the Intellectual Powers from the Corporeal Understanding has correlates in the concepts of biblical sublimity described by Lowth. Much has been written about Blake's relation to and use of the Bible, which is both the "Great Code of Art" as well as the model of sublimity he invokes in the preface to *Milton*. Leslie Tannenbaum argues in *Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies* that Blake's "use of the principles of prophetic form, as they were understood by his contemporaries [including Lowth], is markedly present in his early prophecies" (43). Importantly, the example of the Hebrew Scriptures models a poetics that is "not based upon external rules, but on a principle of inner coherence that served the poet-prophet's need to protest against the moral, religious, and political abuses of his time" (35). Blake's rejection of "external rules" as a basis for his poetics is at once a rejection of the neoclassical notion of a "rational theory of poetry" (Wellek 13), but also a suspicion of ideological systems. The negative

counterpoint to the inner coherence and generic fluidity that the Bible models is Urizen's "Book of brass," containing the laws of his iron religion (*BU* 4.44, E72), as well as the priestly system by which "poetic tales" are used to enslave "the vulgar" (*MHH* 11, E38). As Tannenbaum shows, the "inspired and harmoniously ordered rhetoric [of biblical prophecy] would go beyond argument to lead the reader to vision, removing the 'heavy load of morality' from the reader who perceives the order and coherence of the rhetoric" (36). The importance of the rhetorical coherence is emphasized by the formal principles of biblical prophecy, which, according to Tannenbaum, contribute to both a textual indeterminacy and the reader's disrupted engagement with the text. These principles, such as abrupt transitions in the text (43-44), disruption in the chronological sequence of events (44), the use of multiple perspectives of an event (46), and a fluid approach to genre (49-50) contribute to this sense of indeterminacy and fluidity. The reader's approach to the text, consequently, cannot be in expectation of logical proposition or any appeal to the Corporeal Understanding. Biblical prophecy, as Blake read it, sought to militate against the ordering of morality, seeking rather vision or revelation.

The formal principles that Tannenbaum identifies as representative of Hebrew prophecy correspond closely with those that Lowth associates with the Hebraic sublime. Drawing distinction between the figurative and sublime poetic modes, Lowth claims that the figurative is based upon a principle of resemblance, utilizing figures and tropes that substitute "words, or rather of ideas, for those which they resemble" (1.104). The sublime style, in contrast, is based upon dissimilarity. In this mode, the figures and tropes employed by the poet function by resisting the reader's effort to understand in a literal or sympathetic manner. In resisting the hermeneutic labour—and finally defeating it—the

sublime figures and tropes succeed in expressing the forcefulness of the poem and exciting the passions of the reader. In this sense, Lowth's Hebraic sublime also seeks not to communicate syllogism nor propositional content, but rather to lead the reader to a passionate apprehension of divine qualities. The sublime figures and tropes that Lowth identifies anticipate the principles that Tannenbaum suggests allow for rhetorical order and coherence. The abrupt change of persons (1.326) and variation of tenses (1.330) serve to dislocate the reader's relation to the content of the poetic text. Similarly—and importantly—the conspicuity of tropes that, for example, fail to adequately represent "the majesty" of the divine, also function by increasing the hermeneutic burden placed upon the reader and then by denying the expected representation. Through the use of misdirection (1.350), expansions into the infinite (1.354) and intentionally inapt metaphors (1.360), the Hebrew poets achieve sublimity and forcefulness not through evocative representation of grandeur, but by leading the reader through a hermeneutic process that culminates in a passionate experience. Lowth's theorizing of the Hebraic sublime provides a lens through which to read and understand how Blake approaches and uses the sublime in the *Marriage*.

The second Memorable Fancy provides a helpful concatenation of Blake's thinking on the sublime and the poetics of Biblical prophecy upon which he modelled his own. The speaker, sharing an audience with Isaiah and Ezekiel, asks them "how they so roundly dared to assert. that God spake to them; and whether they did not think at the time, that they would be misunderstood, & so be the cause of imposition" (Pl. 12, E38). Isaiah's response, that "I saw no God. nor heard any, in a finite organical perception," illustrates the divide between the Intellectual Powers and the Corporeal Understanding that forms the basis of Blake's description of the "Most Sublime Poetry." Rather than argue for a material

or empirical proof of the divine, "my senses perceived the infinite in every thing." According to Isaiah, "I was then perswaded. & remain confirmed; that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences but wrote" (Pl. 12, E38). The writings of Isaiah, preserved in the eponymous biblical book, are the sublime poetry upon which Blake modelled his own prophetic works.[6]

The voice of "honest indignation," which Isaiah calls "the voice of God" speaks sublimely because it, in Lowthian terms, is the voice of passionate expression. The utterance of the excited passions is sublime and will, in Blakean terms, result in utterance or poetry that speaks to the Intellectual Powers while defeating the Corporeal Understanding. Further, this gives context to the prophetic actions performed by the prophets, what Tannenbaum calls "significative action" (74): Isaiah's prophesying naked and barefoot and Ezekiel's eating of dung are examples cited by Blake. Their actions cannot be reckoned by the Corporeal Understanding, rather they seek to raise "other men into a perception of the infinite" (Pl. 13, E39). The sublime shock experienced by the perceiver of these actions defeats attempts to rationalize, rather forces the subject into a different order of understanding. This is a means of cleansing "the doors of perception" so that "every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite" (Pl. 14, E39).

Blake's separation of the Intellectual Powers from the Corporeal Understanding has a precedent in Lowth's notion of the incongruous relationship of the sublime metaphor and its referent. In a broad sense Lowth posits that the sublime utterance in poetry is both received and comprehended differently to perspicuous utterance. Speaking, for instance, of

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[6] See Wittreich (192-195) for discussion of the book of Isaiah as a model for the form and structure of the *Marriage*.

the use of simile that can illustrate or obscure meaning in a poem, he points out that "each species of comparison has in view a different end:"

> The aim of the poet in one case is perspicuity, to enable the mind clearly to perceive the subject, and to comprehend the whole of it at one view; in the other the object is sublimity, or to impress the reader with the idea that the magnitude of the subject is scarcely to be conceived. (1.259)

In this passage, the clear perception of the mind and comprehension of the whole refers to the rational faculties of the mind, what Blake calls the Corporeal Understanding. The other species of comparison, which, in its sublimity, risks "obscuring" meaning is that which defeats the Corporeal Understanding and is rather perceived or apprehended by the Intellectual Powers. Speaking elsewhere of the difference in poetic composition between the language of Reason and that of the Passions, Lowth asserts that "Reason speaks literally, the Passions poetically" (1.309). The Passions, from which sublime utterance springs, speak not to be understood nor comprehended, rather to be encountered and experienced.

In his discussion of sublime figure and tropes, Lowth also theorizes the denial of the rational faculties in more minute detail. Discussed in previous chapters, the inapt metaphor functions specifically through its conspicuous failure to signify. By defeating the mind's desire to comprehend the relationship of tenor to vehicle, the metaphor leads the imagination to pursue a more sublime apprehension. Discussing the comparison in Psalm 78:65 of God's acting to a man awaking from a drunken sleep, Lowth explains that

> our understanding immediately rejects the literal sense of those [comparisons] which seem quite inconsistent with the Divine Being, and derived from an ignoble

> source: and, while it pursues an analogy, it constantly rises to a contemplation, which, though obscure, is yet grand and magnificent. (1.362)

The sublimity of the comparison comes from its seeming inappropriateness. The "understanding" knows that the metaphor cannot literally be applied to God and rejects it, though the desire of the "understanding" to connect signifier with signified leads it to contemplate the apophatic remains of the metaphor. Using Blake's phrases, the Corporeal Understanding, again, is defeated by the metaphor, though the Intellectual Powers are able to apprehend a greater meaning.

In the commentary to his translation of Isaiah, Lowth expands upon the notion of the inapt metaphor. Whereas in the *Lectures* he speaks of figurative representations "derived from grosser objects" (1.363), he later accounts for imagery that is shocking and offensive. In Lowth's translation, Isaiah 1:24 reads:

> Wherefore saith the Lord JEHOVAH God of Hosts, the mighty One of Israel:
> Aha! I will be eased on mine adversaries:
> I will be avenged on mine enemies. (3)

There is some wordplay in this verse, as the Hebrew words for "ease" (נחם, *nacham*) and "avenge" (נקם, *naqam*) are almost homophonic. Lowth's translation is very similar to that of the Authorized Version, though in his commentary he reads against the tradition of Christian tradition and exegesis. In many prominent commentaries of the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries, "ease" carries the connotation of a burden being removed from the

subject.[7] Matthew Henry, for example, suggests in his *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (1708-1710) that the wicked

> are a burden to the God of heaven, which is implied in his easing himself of them. The Mighty One of Israel, that can bear any thing, nay, that upholds all things, complains of his being wearied with men's iniquities . . . God will find out a time and a way to ease himself of this burden, by avenging himself on those that thus bear hard upon his patience. (1079)

Lowth, on the other hand, reads scatological connotation into the verse and uses this meaning to argue for the sublimity of the statement. His commentary on this verse reads very much like his explanation from the lecture quoted above, though he adds the category of "offensive" to it:

> When the idea is gross and offensive, as in this passage of Isaiah, where the impatience of anger, and the pleasure of revenge, is attributed to God; we are immediately shocked at the application; the impropriety strikes us at once; and the mind, casting about for something in the divine nature analogous to the image, lays hold on some great, obscure, vague idea, which she endeavours in vain to comprehend, and is lost in immensity and astonishment. (143)

According to Lowth's reading, the offensive nature of this image—in which God, constipated with enemies, will, with vengeance, unburden himself—is meant to shock the understanding of the reader and deny it an easy equivocation between tenor and vehicle. Otherwise, "we are apt to acquiesce in the notion; we overlook the metaphor, and take it as

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[7] See, for example, the commentaries of Matthew Poole (1685), Matthew Henry (1708-1710), John Gill (1748), Joseph Benson (1811-1818), Albert Barnes (1830s) and Charles Ellicott (1897). In none of these works is the scatological connotation of "eased" considered.

a proper attribute" (143). Since the image cannot be taken literally, the Corporeal Understanding is denied and, having "[rouzed] the faculties to act" (E702), leaves the Intellectual Powers to apprehend something other.

That Lowth advances this reading in *Isaiah: A New Translation* is significant. In the *Lectures*, he made the distinction between the Poetical and Theological uses of the text and signaled that his readings were not to be considered a contribution to theology. The publication of the entire book of Isaiah for public consumption is a different matter, however. While he does conclude his "Preliminary Dissertation" by differentiating translations meant for the "private use of the reader" from "those that are made for the public service of the church" (li-lii), he insists upon the literalness of his effort. He states, for instance, that his purpose is

> not only to give an exact and faithful representation of the words and of the sense of the Prophet, by adhering closely to the letter of the text, and treading as nearly as may be in his footsteps; but, moreover, to imitate the air and manner of the author, to express the form and fashion of the composition, and to give the English reader some notion of the peculiar turn and cast of the original. (i)

The proximity of his translation to the Hebrew original, further, recommends its use as a sacred text: "The sublime and spiritual uses to be made of this particularly evangelical Prophet, must, as I have observed, be all founded on a faithful representation of the literal sense which his words contain" (lii). The consistency of Lowth's thinking on the sublimity of the Hebrew poetry is notable. The ideas advanced in the 1740s are repeated in the 1778 publication, separated by decades of Lowth's episcopal ministry. The separation of the

Poetical and Theological uses of the text are perhaps less distinct than he suggested in his second lecture.

Lowth's arguing for the sublimity of the scatological reading also anticipates Blake's use of Isaiah and Ezekiel as figures in the Memorable Fancy. Lowth reads the verse in such a way as to make it sublime and Blake, in his depiction of the two prophets, does similarly. The narrator asks of Isaiah "what made him go naked and barefoot for three years," and of Ezekiel "why he eat dung, & lay so long on his right & left side" (Pl. 13, E39), though both instances are arguably misreadings—or rewritings—of the text. Lowth's commentary on Isaiah 20 argues that "it is not probable that the Prophet walked uncovered and barefoot for three years: his appearing in that manner was a sign, that within three years the Egyptians and Cushites should have the same condition, being conquered and made captives by the king of Assyria" (244). Similarly, Ezekiel 4:12-15 plainly show that the command to the prophet was to use dung for fuel and not to consume it. The response of the prophets, that they were driven by "the desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite" appeals to the sublime possibility of their offensive acts.[8] Though, in the biblical accounts of Isaiah's nakedness and Ezekiel's use of dung for fuel, the divine command explains the meaning of the symbolic act, Blake's figures do not deign to explicate themselves; rather they consider "what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act" (E702).

[8] It is worth noting that Ezekiel makes use of the same Hebrew word as Isaiah (נחם) to describe God's judgment as an easing. In his commentary on Isaiah, Lowth notes that "Ezekiel introduces God expressing himself in the same manner," and renders Ezekiel 5:13 as "And mine anger shall be fully accomplished; / And I will make my fury rest upon them; / And I will give myself ease" (142).

Comparing Models of the Sublime

The fourth Memorable Fancy proves a notable demonstration of the principles of Lowth's Hebraic sublime as well as Blake's own notion of sublimity. In this passage a reproving Angel offers to show the narrating Devil his "eternal lot" as a warning against "the hot burning dungeon thou art preparing for thyself to all eternity [and] to which thou art going in such career" (Pl. 17, E41). The words of the Angel suggest those less of a prophet than a hectoring priest, trusting that a vision of infernal suffering will terrorize the subject into a life of faithful devotion. The Devil, in return, shows the Angel his lot. Rather than identify the allegorical meaning of the various components of each vision,[9] they can each be read to represent different models of the sublime, competing, as it were, for the imagination of the figures. While the Angel's vision utilizes the tropes of the Burkean sublime—vastness, concealing darkness and natural terrors—the Devil's projection rather demonstrates a Lowthian notion of sublimity through shock and passionate response.

The Angel's vision is a composite of imagery and sublime tropes that read almost as a list of Burkean clichés: the vision incorporates obscuring darkness, infinity, vastness, and storms. Though Burke referred to spiders as "odious" (86), the spiders contained in the vision are "vast" and stalk their prey as greater predators. The "nether deep" rolls like a black sea, producing "a terrible noise" (Pl. 18, E41), while Leviathan advances "with all the fury of a spiritual existence" (Pl. 19, E41). Using Burke the way that Urizen would the Bible—to terrify and regulate—the Angel seemingly knows that "to make anything terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary" (59), that "greatness of dimension, is a powerful cause of the sublime" (71), that "another source of the sublime, is *infinity*" (73),

[9] For such a reading, see the commentary of Keynes, Bloom (18-20) and Rowland (92-93).

that “darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light” (79-80) and that the appearance of Leviathan in Job, in its power and freedom, “is worked up into no small sublimity” (66). The contents of this vision, however, fail to impress the Devil.

The failure of the Angel to cause terror in the Devil (or elicit any passionate response) is due to the Urizenic manner in which he deploys the various sublime tropes. The scene of the vision is, to the Angel, a literal and material space in which the body is subjected to the terrors within. The Angel indicates as much by referring to the vision as the dungeon “to which” the Devil is going and by specifically locating the Devil’s eventual lot “between the black & white spiders.” He appeals to the material senses—the Corporeal Understanding—with the expectation that the anticipation of suffering would persuade the Devil. This is an implicit appeal to Burke’s assertion that the passions “which are conversant about the preservation of the individual turn chiefly on *pain* and *danger*, and they are the most powerful of all the passions” (38). The issue is not that the different components of the vision are not individually potentially sublime but rather the manner in which they are used. For example, Leviathan is a powerful symbol of sublime strength and power in the Book of Job (with which Blake was familiar), though its appearance in the Memorable Fancy excites no reaction from the Devil.[10] The Angel’s “metaphysics,” which the Devil later derides as “only Analytics” (Pl. 20, E42), can only appeal to the Corporeal Understanding.

The vision that the Devil imposes upon the Angel is of a different nature and achieves a sublimity quite different to the Burkean vision. The sublimity of the Devil’s vision is signaled by the Angel’s being compelled to follow the Devil: “I by force suddenly

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[10] See Alter’s reading of the sublimity of Leviathan’s appearance in Job (*Art of Biblical Poetry* 132-138).

caught him in my arms" (Pl. 19, E42). Their journey takes them through the night to a point of elevation above the earth, into the sun and then into "the void." Entering a church, they open the Bible and descend into the pit it contains. Entering one of seven houses, they encounter a grotesque scene. Chained monkeys and baboons engage in mutual consumption and copulation:

> I saw that they sometimes grew numerous, and then the weak were caught by the strong and with a grinning aspect, first coupled with & then devourd, by plucking off first one limb and then another till the body was left a helpless trunk. this after grinning & kissing it with seeming fondness they devourd too; and here & there I saw one savourily picking the flesh off of his own tail. (Pl. 20, E42)

The scene is offensively sublime but, unlike the Angel's vision, its sublimity is not contingent upon the content of its imagery. Rather, the effect upon the figures is key. Lowth's theorizing of the sublimity of the inapt or offensive metaphor explicitly rejects the literal meaning of the metaphor; the appearance of the image does not convey its meaning. In this passage, the non-literal nature of the vision is signalled by the Devil's description of the Angel's lot: "Here said I! is your lot, in this space, if space it may be calld" (Pl. 19, E42). The space before their eyes is not a literal, actual space, but a vision of the infinite that is filtered through the Angel's "Analytics." The grotesquery of the apes is offensive to the figures, for "the stench terribly annoyd us both." The use of word "terribly"—a cognate of "terror"—suggests sublimity and the consequent excitement of the passions. The Angel, however, is restrained by the Corporeal Understanding. Unwilling to seek beyond the literal and material, he responds to the Devil with aspersions of shame: "thy phantasy has

imposed upon me & thou oughtest to be ashamed" (Pl. 20, E42). In Lowthian terms, he can only read in the Theological mode and condemns the vision.

Reading Isaiah in "its Infernal or Diabolical Sense"

While Lowth's dividing of the Poetical from the Theological in his approach to the Hebrew poets provides useful categories through which to read Blake in the *Marriage*, Blake also offers a lens through which Lowth's attempt to balance the tension between the two modes of reading can be transcended. For instance, Lowth's 1778 translation of Isaiah contains numerous emendations and revisions to the manuscript tradition that both diminish and increase its sublimity.[11] These changes are consequent to Lowth's attempt to effectively balance the demands of Theology and Poetry in the text. Part of Lowth's purpose in the translation is to recover the poetic nature of "the writings of the most sublime and elegant of the Prophets of the Old Testament" (Dedication). Doing so, Lowth can better represent to the English reader its prophetic urgency, demonstrating what he claimed in Lecture XVIII, that "the act of prophesying was often, if not always, accompanied with a very violent agitation of the mind" (2.17). In other words, he sought to present more effectively to his reader the sublimity and power of the text. This aim, however did lead to the sort of conflict he sought to avoid in the *Lectures*: that the sublimity of the poetry would subvert or challenge orthodoxy. Two examples, from chapters 34 and 35, are illustrative of this point.

[11] The chapter in Hepworth on Lowth's *Isaiah* explains some of the circumstances of Lowth's work on the text and provides some perfunctory analysis relating the translation to the earlier Lectures, also discussing the relation of Lowth's translation to the Authorized Version.

Isaiah 34 prophesies the destruction of Edom, symbolizing the judgment of God against the enemies of Israel. The coming destruction is represented by the descending of "the sword of JEHOVAH" upon the kingdom. The extent of the destruction is predicted in verse 5 with the suggestion of the ban (חרם, *cherem*):

> For my sword is made bare in the heavens:
>
> Behold, on Edom it will descend;
>
> And on the people justly by me devoted to destruction.

Lowth's translation of Isaiah seldom departs from the language of the Authorized Version; its principal difference being the versification of the lines. In these verses, however, Lowth diverges from the traditional reading to both "remedy" the translation and make the imagery of slaughter more vivid and forceful. Verse 5 in the AV reads: "For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea [Edom], and upon the people of my curse, to judgment." The issue is the "bathing" of the AV and the "baring" of Lowth. His commentary suggests that, despite the language of the original, the image of the divine here is improper:[12]

> There seems to be some impropriety in this, according to the present reading, 'my sword is made drunken, or is bathed, in the heavens;' which forestalls, and expresses not in its proper place, what belongs to the next verse: for the sword of JEHOVAH was not to be bathed or glutted with blood in the heavens, but in Botsra and the land of Edom: In the heavens it was only prepared for slaughter. (298)

[12] For the sake of comparison, the more literal NASB reads: "For My sword is satiated in heaven, / Behold it shall descend for judgment upon Edom / And upon the people whom I have devoted to destruction."

After a short discussion of scholarly opinion on the issue, he concludes the commentary on this verse by asserting that "whatever reading, different I presume from the present, he might find in his copy, I follow the sense which [Arbp. Thomas Secker][13] has given of it" (298). Faced with what he considers to be an error in the manuscript tradition, resulting in "some impropriety," Lowth here diverges from the text itself, choosing rather to follow the authority of the church.

This emendation is significant because of the accusation of "impropriety." To use such a term is to suggest something other than a mere aberration in the manuscript tradition—the error of a copyist, for example. Rather, the accusation bears moral connotations and recalls his warning in Lecture XVII against any "scandalous abuse and perversion" of the poet's art (1.369). The baring of the sword, the reading he prefers, suggests preparation for the destruction described in verse 6. The sword being "bathed," however, gives the image of the slaughter being enacted *first* in the heavens. Recalling the infernal proverb, the manuscript is a crooked road that Lowth chooses to "straiten" and improve. The "bathing" of the sword of Jehovah in the heavens demonstrates impropriety because it violates the theological consistency that he seeks. Since the goal of theology is to systematize and make logical the nature and actions of God, the suggestion in this verse, that God enacts judgment in heaven before the destruction of Edom, cannot be reckoned theologically. In the face of such poetic inscrutability, Lowth privileges the Theological reading that, in Blakean terms, argues that "Energy" is evil (Pl. 4, E34).

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[13] Archbishop of Canterbury 1758-1768. Secker was a noted expert of ancient languages, including Hebrew, and was Bishop of Oxford from 1737 to 1750, during which time Lowth delivered his Lectures.

Lowth's rendering of "bathed" as "bared" diminishes the power and sublimity of the image by making it scrutable. This is a missed opportunity, given the vividness with which he renders the imagery of slaughter in the next verse. At verse 6, the AV reads that "the sword of the LORD is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness." Lowth, however suggests that God surfeits in gore and destruction:

> The sword of JEHOVAH is glutted with blood;
> It is pampered with fat:
> With the blood of lambs, and of goats;
> With the fat of the reins of rams:
> For JEHOVAH celebrateth a sacrifice in Botsrah,
> And a great slaughter in the land of Edom. (63)

The sublimity of these verses comes from a principle articulated by Lowth in Lecture XVI. Both images seek to represent divine anger through the conspicuously inapt metaphor, done "in such a manner, that the attributes which are borrowed from human nature and human action, can never in a literal sense be applied to the Divinity" (1.360). In these verses, the divine anger is so great as to be reckless and uncontrollable: God first "bathes" his sword in destruction in heaven, before glutting it in blood in Edom. This anger exceeds the rationalizing capacity of theology, akin to other instances of God's inscrutable anger in the Hebrew Scriptures.[14] Lowth's urge to "remedy" the text suggests, in Blakean terms, the restraining and ordering of the prophetic genius into sacred code. The sublimity of the verse is contained and the contrary relationship between Poetry and Theology is

[14] See, for instance, God's sudden appearance to kill Moses in Exodus 4 or the killing of Uzzah for steadying the Ark of God in 2 Samuel 6.

maintained. In other instances, however, Lowth diverges from tradition and orthodoxy and, in doing so, anticipates a Blakean sense of sublime vision.

In Isaiah 35, which prophesies the renewing of the land, Lowth again emends the text, though in this instance he chooses a sublime image without precedent in other translations. Lowth's commentary on this chapter, both in Lecture XX and in *Isaiah: A New Translation*, is principally concerned with the messianic connotations that find fulfillment in Jesus Christ. A passing remark on verse 7, however, suggests expansive and sublime poetic possibility, the likes of which anticipate Blake in the *Marriage*. Beginning with the declaration that "the desert, and the waste, shall be glad; / And the wilderness shall rejoice, and flourish" (35:1), the prophecy likens the new growth of a desert to the physical restoration of the individual subject. Seeing beauty in the new flowers of the "well-watered plain of Jordan" (35:2), as well as the strengthening of "the feeble hands" of the weak, the text turns in verse 5 to the organs of perception: "Then shall be unclosed the eyes of the blind; / And the ears of the deaf shall be opened." This is again likened in verse 6 to the return of moisture to the desert. In verse 7, the revivifying of the desert and the restored power of perception are joined in an image of nature enchanted: "And the glowing sand shall become a pool, / And the thirsty soil bubbling springs." While this does not differ markedly from the AV, which says that "the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water,"[15] the implications of the "glowing sand" are significant. Lowth's commentary to this verse clarifies that "glowing sand" refers to "the glowing sandy

[15] Few other English translations mention either the "glowing sands" of Lowth or, more explicitly, a mirage. For example, both the English Revised Version (1881) and the American Standard Version (1901) render the phrase "glowing sands." Young's Literal Translation (1862) seems to be the earliest mention of "mirage," which is also used in the translation of John Nelson Darby (1890). Similarly, the Contemporary Jewish Bible (1998) renders it: "the sandy mirage will become a pool."

plain, which in the hot countries at a distance has the appearance of water" (300). Rather than the "parched ground" simply becoming a pool, those whose perception has been restored perceive the mirage or figment of oasis in the act of becoming a pool. Implicitly, the glowing of the sands suggests the presence of God in the scene, perhaps recalling the burning bush, immanently involved in the restoration of the land. By hinting at the divine presence in the liminal appearance of the mirage to the unclosed eyes, the drab concreteness of the AV's "parched ground" is overcome with an image more sublime. Diverging from the tradition of translation, Lowth privileges the Poetic reading and increases the power of the prophecy.

These two chapters of Isaiah are singled out by Blake in the *Marriage* as pertaining to "a new heaven" beginning and the revival of "the Eternal Hell" (Pl. 3, E34). "Now," he writes, "is the dominion of Edom, & the return of Adam into Paradise; see Isaiah XXXIV & XXXV Chap:" The next lines on the plate introduce the notion of the contraries: "Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence." Lowth's reading of these two chapters of Isaiah does consider them contraries, though he regards them as comprising a single text:

> These two chapters make one distinct prophecy; an entire, regular, and beautiful poem, consisting of two parts: the first containing a denunciation of Divine vengeance against the enemies of the people or church of God; the second describing the flourishing state of the church of God, consequent upon the execution of those judgments. (296)

The two chapters, which together make up a single poem, demonstrate two aspects of God's involvement in the world and treatment of humanity. Thus, the imagery of desolation

and waste in chapter 34 is subsequently balanced or answered by the restoration and flourishing of chapter 35, with its messianic connotations. Given the prophetic purpose of the *Marriage*—to raise "other men to a perception of the infinite" and cleanse "the doors of perception," through an encounter with the sublime—Blake offers a lens through which these chapters can be read that counters the contraries of judgment and blessing. Rather, the imagery of the land, which can be identified with the "new heaven" and the revived "Eternal Hell," represent states of mind, something through which, as Damon points out, "the Individual passes" (180). These states of mind relate to the capacity of the subject to, in Lowth's terms, "wander . . . in the ample fields of poetry," or remain contained within the "sacred boundaries of Theology."

The role, in Blake's work, of the imagination in perception changes the emphasis of these chapters dramatically. The prophesied destruction and restoration, which in Lowth's reading are chronological historical events, are rather states of mind that reflect the subject's "metaphysics" and relation to the "Poetic Genius." The parched ground is an imaginative wasteland, described in the language of judgment and Theology. This scene, however, for its Theological associations, is, to the angels, the "new heaven" named on the plate. The lush scene of rejuvenation, in which the imagination actively participates, is associated with the Poetical. This, to the angels is the revival of the "Eternal Hell." One of Blake's annotations to Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man* suggests that hell is "being shut up in the possession of corporeal desires which shortly weary the man for *all life is holy*" (E590). Further, in an annotation to Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*, hell is associated with "the Negation of the Poetic Genius" (E603). Lowth's emendation of 35:7 highlights the

importance of the imagination in the fulfillment of the prophetic message. Blake takes this message, with its emphasis on the imagination, and internalizes it.

Throughout the *Marriage* Blake emphasizes differences in perception and the capacity of the imagination to inform the content of perception. For instance, the infernal proverb states that "a fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees" (Pl. 7, E35). Similarly, the "enjoyments of Genius" look to the Angels "like torment and insanity" (Pl. 6, E35). In the fourth Memorable Fancy, the Angel's vision of chaos, darkness and spiders was, to the Devil, a pastoral scene "on a pleasant bank beside a river by moon light" (Pl. 19, E42), each figure perceiving the scene through their "metaphysics." This process, by which the perceived phenomena are filtered and understood through the imagination, occurs elsewhere in Blake. As he wrote to Trusler, "as a man is So he Sees. As the Eye is formed such are its Powers You certainly Mistake when you say that Visions of Fancy are not to be Found in This World" (E702). The function of the sublime, then, is to reform the Eye and enable it to see beyond what, in this prophecy, is the dichotomy between judgment and restoration. This centering of subjectivity, particularly in relation to the sublime, has correspondences in Lowth. Describing the different passions excited by the sublime in Lecture XVII, he uses language that emphasizes the subjectivity of the perception of the divine in the sublime event:

> What in reality forms the substance and subject of most of these poems but the passion of admiration, excited by the *consideration* of the Divine power and majesty; the passion of joy, from the *sense* of the Divine favour . . . of grief, from the *consciousness* of sin; and terror, from the *apprehension* of divine judgment? (1.376-77, emphasis added)

In Lowth's description there is no concrete and objective language that defines the excited passion categorically. The passionate response, rather, evokes a sense of divine presence in the imagination, consequent to the encounter with the sublime. Thus, to the devout the appearance of God results in admiration and joy, while to the sinful the same apprehension results in grief and terror. The prophecies of Isaiah 34 and 35 operate similarly, offering different perspectives of the same event—God's appearance in the land—reflecting the "metaphysics" of the subject, rather than describing objectively God's actions in the world.

Conclusion

The evidence of Lowth's *Lectures*, preaching and his prominence within the Church of England—he was preferred for the position of Archbishop of Canterbury in 1783, but declined the position due to his health—suggest that his theology and piety remained within the conservative norms of the established church. The reading categories he proposes in Lecture II, the Poetical and the Theological, are not meant to be in opposition to each other. Rather, the Poetical reading is his means of analyzing the text set apart from theological tradition. The contraries that Blake introduces in the *Marriage*, however, insist on a different reading of Lowth while, at the same time, Lowth provides insight for reading the sublime in Blake. Lowth's analysis of the Hebraic sublime is made possible because he separates his Poetical reading from the Theological. For Blake, this distinction emphasizes the importance of the imagination in the reading of Scripture. The modes of perception that Blake involves in the sublime, the Intellectual Powers and the Corporeal Understanding, correspond roughly with Lowth's categories, if the Poetical suggests the elevation of the imagination and the excitation of the passions, while the Theological suggests the

application of Reason to vision, creating the "sacred boundaries" that Lowth seeks to respect.

The comparison of Lowth with Blake allows for productive readings of both. Blake's separation of the Intellectual Powers from the Corporeal Understanding has precedent in Lowth's notion of the incongruous relationship of the sublime metaphor to its referent. When, in the Hebrew Scriptures, a trope fails to signify its referent, Lowth argues that "the understanding" will, while it "pursues the analogy," constantly rise "to a contemplation, which, though obscure, is yet grand and magnificent" (1.362). In other words, the imagination will continue where the faculties of reason are halted. For the Hebrew prophet, this allows for efficacious utterance, moving others to act with a passionate sense of the divine. In Blake, the prophet seeks to "[raise] other men into a perception of the infinite" through similar means (Pl. 13, E39). The diabolic conversion of the Angel, who attains a sublime vision consequent to the defeat of reason, is an example of this. Lowth's example of the offensively sublime, which shocks the reader's sensibilities into a grander contemplation, is a further example of this. Blake's commitment to the imagination and the "Poetic Genius" offers a critique of the tension in Lowth's translation of Isaiah between the Poetical and Theological readings of the text. Where Lowth will at times side with the Theological insistence on a deity that is accessible to reason, Blake commends the fertility of the Poetical.

If Blake's response to the (likely) influence of Lowth is a further degree abstracted from Smart's—Blake's poetry and sense of prophetic vocation still utilize the conventions, language and imagery of the Hebraic tradition, though without Smart's devotion to the church—the figurative distance between Blake and Shelley loses the interest in the Hebraic

altogether. This is not to say that Shelley takes nothing from Lowth, but the latter's influence henceforth remains in the realm of theory, while the sublime rhetoric no longer serves the prophetic purpose it once did.

Conclusion

Though the Professors of Poetry who preceded Lowth's election to the position did attain some renown from their tenure and subsequently published lectures, Lowth would not have imagined the influence that his study of the Hebrew poetry, particularly his theorizing of the Hebraic sublime, would have upon subsequent poetry and criticism. His scholarship demonstrated the poetic nature of the Hebrew Scriptures and made this poetry accessible in a manner previously unknown. By demonstrating the poetical nature of the prophetic writings and arguing that the sublime afforded the prophetic writings the poetic force and power that constitute prophetic authority, he set into motion changes to English poetry and criticism that anticipated the drastic shift associated with Romanticism.

Lowth cites Longinus as a reference point for his own description of the concept and the rhetorical elements of the Hebraic sublime, even identifying his own theory with the *Peri Hypsous*. Though he does not make it explicit, he diverges from a crucial principle of the grand style upon which Longinus insists: the inconspicuousness of figures and tropes. Whereas Longinus suggests that the audience's awareness of the use of figures and tropes will hinder the transport sought by the orator, Lowth argues that the very basis of the Hebraic sublime is the use of figures and tropes that, in their conspicuity and failure to represent, disrupt the reader's experience with the text. This disruption makes evident to the reader the rhetorical construction of the text and, seeking an appropriate referent for the figure or trope, the reader's imagination "constantly rises to a contemplation, which, though obscure, is yet grand and magnificent" (1.362). Though Lowth's analysis is focused on the poetry of the Hebrew Scriptures, the principles he describes can also inform the

reading of narrative, wherein a character's encounter with the sublime is described, such as in the account of Balaam (Num. 22-24) or that of Elijah upon Mt. Horeb (1 Kings 19). Such narrative passages serve to expand upon and nuance Lowth's theorizing, suggesting, for example, an inherent relation between the experience of sublimity and the capacities of perception.

Lowth's *Lectures*, of course, emerged from a historical context, and when he posits the idea of a "true and genuine enthusiasm" in Lecture XVII, he is participating in long-running social discourse that tended to regard enthusiasm with suspicion. Given the religious subtext of the conflicts of the seventeenth century, the state and established church considered enthusiasm a threat to their legitimacy and would restrain any hint of subversion as a manifestation of enthusiasm. Lowth contributed to this discourse in 1767, delivering a sermon to the House of Lords to commemorate the "martyrdom" of Charles I. The enthusiasm invoked in the *Lectures*, however, is not the individual's receiving of a divine message outside the mediation of the church, nor does it suggest the subversive violence of the mob. Rather, he modifies an idea presented by John Dennis in the *Grounds of Criticism* of a poetic enthusiasm: the excitation of the passions toward moral improvement caused by powerful encounters with the sublime in poetry. Dennis, who argued that art could help to "restore the decays that happen'd to Humane Nature by the Fall, by restoring order" (6), demonstrates in his translation of Psalm 18 that passion and sentiment must be carefully nurtured toward this restoration, while Lowth's "true and genuine" enthusiasm, because of its association with the inspiration of the biblical poets, assumed that the subject would inherently be contained by morality and propriety. This assumption seems, at best, naïve, given Lowth's own retelling of the story of Solon from Plutarch. The poet,

with both enthusiasm and a prophet's zeal, inspires the men of Athens to rush to battle, contrary to both law and "their own inclination and intention" (1.28). Despite Lowth's desire to account for inspiration in his lectures on the sublime, he cannot entirely avoid the residue of the social discourse. His conservative theology and allegiance to the established church remain at odds with some of the conclusions and implications of his criticism.

The *Lectures* contributes a number of influential ideas to both biblical studies and literary criticism, the most well-known being his theory of parallelism in the Hebrew poetry. Further, he, more than any other before him, makes the principles of Hebrew poetry accessible to scholars and poets, who could look to the Hebrew Scriptures for a poetic model counter to the ideas of neoclassical criticism. Also, and importantly, he demonstrates convincingly that the prophetic writings are properly considered poetry, rather than oratory. Doing so, he contributes to the contemporary interest in primitivist poetry. The figure of the Hebrew prophet, which proves to be of great interest to the Romantics, is that of an inspired poet, making sublime utterance and challenging the norms of a corrupt society. A marginalized figure, the prophet proves particularly compelling to Smart and Blake. Both poets, possessing strong individual poetic visions, find in Lowth's *Lectures* a sublime rhetorical toolkit as well as a model of prophetic authority.

Smart, who is known to have read and enthusiastically praised the publication of Lowth's *Lectures*, struggled in his Seatonian odes "to the Supreme Being" with the unrepresentable transcendence of the Divine, as well as the insufficiency of language for any such representation. In the *Jubilate Agno*, however, Smart develops a poetic form that both resolves the problem of representation encountered in the Seatonian poems and allows Smart to prophetically declare his apocalyptic vision of England renewed. The

authority with which Smart declares himself the "Lord's News-Writer" (B327) is made possible by his notion of poetic Impression, an analogue of Lowth's Hebraic sublime. Smart theorizes a type of grandness and inspiration possessed by both great poets and biblical prophets, the ability to impress upon words and readers a more substantial significance, which expands the possibilities of meaning-making in the act of reading. Smart's rhetorical idea, which is comparable to what Lowth writes about the sublime, is combined with a Hebraic structure to constitute a prophetic text of power and vision. Central to Smart's vision is the importance and centrality of the church in the millennial England. Though he considers himself persecuted for his piety, Smart remains within the Church of England. His theology, such as it is, betrays heterodox tendencies, but Smart's sense of prophetic calling remains in relation to Lowth's own normative Anglicanism.

Further from the faith of Lowth's establishment vocation is Blake, who attacks the church and opposes its role and authority in society. Despite his separation from the church, Blake's prophetic vision is still given expression through the language, imagery and poetic forms of the Hebrew Scriptures. Though it has not been proven that Blake was aware of Lowth's *Lectures* or *Isaiah: A New Translation*, both the circumstances of Blake's work with Joseph Johnson and his interest in biblical poetry make it likely that he did know of Lowth. Their ideas share similarities that allow for a productive comparison. Lowth posits two modes of reading the Hebrew poetry in the *Lectures*, the Poetical and the Theological. These categories can be mapped upon Blake's concepts of the Intellectual Powers and Corporeal Understanding—the faculties of perception that he involves in the sublime encounter with poetry—and also related to the notion of Contraries in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. While Lowth's theorizing of the Hebraic sublime gives insight

into the role and function of the sublime in the prophetic purpose of *The Marriage*, Blake's ideas reveal a struggle in Lowth's translation of Isaiah to balance the Poetical and Theological demands of the text and the church. While Lowth, at times, does prevaricate and "correct" the text in some ways while making it more sublime in others, Blake's prophetic vision urges allegiance to the Poetic Genius, associating its negation with the concept of hell.

The trajectory that this project has followed—beginning with Lowth's rhetorical analysis of the Hebraic sublime and then, with increasing distance from his conservative Anglicanism, focusing on Smart and Blake—reaches its logical endpoint with Percy Bysshe Shelley. His letters show that he purchased the Latin *Lectures* in late 1815 (1.437-38) and, while his poetry demonstrates neither the Hebraic poetics of Smart and Blake nor the rhetorical sublime of Lowth, the "Defence of Poetry" shows that the *Lectures* did have a lasting impact upon Shelley's notion of the authority and vocation of the poet.

To assess Shelley's response to Lowth, distinction has to be made between scholarship on Shelley's relationship to the sublime and to the Bible. Scholarship on both topics offers divergent opinions. On the sublime, Leighton claims that Shelley had "read and admired" the *Lectures* (16) and goes further to suggest that his descriptions of the sublimity of the Alps demonstrate the influence of Lowth's sublime rhetoric (37-38). This is somewhat surprising, given Leighton's principal focus on Kantian notions of the sublime in nature. Duffy counters this reading of the sublime in Shelley by arguing, along the lines of Ashfield and De Bolla's critique of the scholarly discourse that followed Monk, that Shelley's interest in the sublime should be more effectively historicized and considered in relation to contemporary revolutionary politics. Rather than Leighton's reading of Shelley's

interest in the sublime marking a shift of sensibility from empiricism to idealism, Duffy argues that "Shelley was concerned to revise the standard, pious or theistic configuration of that discourse along secular and politically progressive lines" (7). Needless to say, Lowth plays no part in this analysis.

Shelley's interest in the Bible is well-documented (Balfour, "Shelley" 412-413) but Lowth's contribution to this interest is contested. Bryan Shelley notes that the poet had read the *Lectures*, but claims that he finally had little interest in a literary approach to the Bible:

> Another approach to the Bible that Shelley refused to adopt, at least to any significant degree, was the analysis based on literary and rhetorical features. The exponent of this method was Bishop Robert Lowth . . . Although the young poet would occasionally refer to the scriptural writings in a belletristic sense, he never became overly preoccupied with the view of the Bible as literature. (30-31)

Further, Bryan Shelley argues that the poet's conception of the Hebrew prophets as poets was not Lowthian in its origin. Rather, this idea came to Shelley from the Italian renaissance. Citing Mussato and Petrarch, Bryan Shelley states that "it is [their] affirmation of the Old Testament writers as poets that Shelley continues in the nineteenth century" (132). Balfour argues that Lowth had a greater influence, however. He states that the fact that Shelley would take an interest in the *Lectures* "probably indicates a concern for the technical (but not merely technical) workings of the biblical poets" ("Shelley" 415). Balfour even points out that the *Lectures*, "so famous for the 'discovery' of parallelism, in fact devote far more attention to the sublimity and high passion of biblical poetry" and claims that this did impact Shelley:

> It is the heightened, extreme rhetoric of the biblical poets that makes its mark: forceful, arresting imagery, with stakes often cast in terms of all or nothing, as in Shelley's favoured Book of Job. Numerous verses from Shelley's odes especially—think of the 'Ode to the West Wind' with its impassioned entreaties, prayers even, and the anguished questions—derive from and inscribe themselves in this biblical lineage. (415)

While Balfour points to biblical "images and phrases, cadences and figures" ("Shelley" 416) that are evident in Shelley's poetry, nowhere can he be said to have modelled his poetics on biblical poetry, as Smart and Blake did. Rather, the evidence of Shelley's response to Lowth is best demonstrated in the image of the poet-as-prophet that he describes in the "Defence of Poetry." Balfour points out, however, that the Shelleyan poet-prophet does not, like the biblical figure, foretell the future. Rather,

> the poet/prophet is said to know the *spirit* of the future, even if elsewhere in the passage the same figure is conceived of as vaulting above all history and temporality into the ethereal empyrean of 'the eternal, the infinite and the one'. This accords rather well with the mythopoetic reworking of the Bible ushered in by Lowth's lectures and various allied attempts on the parts of critics to pry loose the mythical, poetic, highly figurative texture of the Scriptures from the narrow referentiality of what formerly counted as sacred historiography. ("Shelley" 421)

While Bryan Shelley cites the Italian tradition to explain the poet's interest in biblical poetry, Balfour locates Shelley within his own age—an English literary context that had been deeply influenced in the previous century by the Lowth's literary appropriation of the Bible.

There are hints in the "Defence" that seem genuinely Lowthian, however, and demonstrate the continuing of his influence. In particular, Shelley's broad definition of poetry as "the expression of the imagination" (511). Such a conception of poetry, which regards the poem as "a mirror which, instead of reflecting nature, reflects the very penetralia of the poet's secret mind" (Abrams 77), suggests Lowth's description of the poet's sublime inspiration. At such an instant,

> a poet is able by the force of genius, or rather of imagination, to conceive any emotion of the mind so perfectly as to transfer to his own feelings the instinctive passion of another, and, agreeably to the nature of the subject, to express it in all its vigour, such a one, according to a common mode of speaking, may be said to possess the true poetic enthusiasm. (1.366)

Lowth's expressive poet-prophet anticipates that of Shelley. Further, Shelley's notion of the natural poetry of the primitive suggests Lowth's own theorizing of natural poetic sublimity. "In the infancy of society," Shelley writes,

> every author is necessarily a poet, because language itself is poetry; and to be a poet is to apprehend the true and the beautiful, in a word the good which exists in the relation, subsisting, first between existence and perception, and secondly between perception and expression. (512)

This idea of the poet is the precedent that Shelley seeks to recover in his argument that poets, as prophets, are the "unacknowledged legislators of the world" (535). Lowth, who imagines a similar early poetic figure, considers the expression of such a figure to be inherently sublime; his lectures on the subject are, in part, an attempt to recover the naturally expressive force of the primitive poet.

With these brief examples, I mean to suggest that, despite Shelley's seeming ambivalence to Lowth's work, the poet's ideas still bear the latter's influence. The authority that Shelley ascribed to poets—to be the "institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers" (512), and further, to be "legislators or prophets" (513)—cannot be separated from the sublimity that, Lowth argued, animated and gave such authority to the Hebrew prophets.

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