

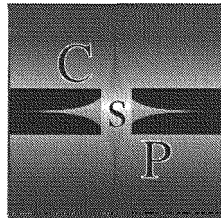
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Duquette, Natasha. "Anna Barbauld and Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck on the Sublimity of Scripture." In *Sublimer Aspects: Interfaces between Literature, Aesthetics, and Theology*, edited by Natasha Duquette, 62-79. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007.

Sublimer Aspects:  
Interfaces between Literature, Aesthetics,  
and Theology

Edited by

Natasha Duquette



CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHING

Sublimer Aspects: Interfaces between Literature, Aesthetics, and Theology, edited by Natasha Duquette

This book first published 2007 by

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

15 Angerton Gardens, Newcastle, NE5 2JA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN 1-84718-336-0; ISBN 13: 9781847183361

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### ANNA BARBAULD AND MARY ANNE SCHIMMELPENNINCK ON THE SUBLIMITY OF SCRIPTURE

NATASHA DUQUETTE

The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.

—Romans 1:20 (King James Version)

There is little need that I should tell you of God, for every thing speaks of him.

—Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781)

God has . . . in his mercy instituted nature one vast magazine of spiritual types, by which the invisible truths of Him are made visible, to whoever opens them with the true key.

—Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck “Introductory Address” to *Biblical Fragments* (1825)

Whereas in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (second edition, 1759), Edmund Burke quotes from the descriptions of God’s power in the Book of Job and the Psalms to define sublime poetics exclusively in terms of terrifying force, both Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck turn to scriptural texts that move through holy fear to redemptive love as the key to seeing God’s glory in the created world.<sup>1</sup> Through their commentary on the sublime, these two women writers created a space for themselves from which to address the largely masculine arena of biblical studies. In resistance to Burke’s dichotomy between the sublime terror of the Old Testament and beautiful love of the New Testament, Barbauld and Schimmelpenninck point to signs of God’s sublime love in the Psalms and

contemplate the beautiful terror of the Book of Revelation.<sup>2</sup>

Edmund Burke depicts the Old Testament exclusively in terms of terror and the New Testament exclusively in terms of love, in a polarizing manner typical of Enlightenment thought. Modern critic Marjorie Nicholson argues that eighteenth-century writers often constructed a strong and absolute distinction between “the awful . . . God who reigns in ‘darkness visible’” and the “Second Person of the Trinity, the kind, humane, tender aspect which God shows his followers in His Son.”<sup>3</sup> Burke provides an excellent example of this tendency. There is a firm line drawn in Burke’s *Enquiry* between the sublime, terrifying justice of the Father and the beautiful, loving mercy of the Son. In his section on “Power,” Burke defines the sublime in terms of terror *as opposed* to love, quoting from the Psalms to argue that

in Scripture, wherever God is represented as appearing or speaking, everything terrible in nature is called up to heighten the awe and solemnity of the divine presence. The psalms, and the prophetic books are crowded with instances of this kind. *The earth shook* (says the psalmist) *the heavens also dropped at the presence of the Lord.*<sup>4</sup>

Burke continues by arguing, “true religion has, and must have . . . a mixture of salutary fear.”<sup>5</sup> Here, Burke appears to acknowledge that Christianity, being in his view “true religion,”<sup>6</sup> must *mix* awed love with a healthy fear. However, he further dichotomizes the Old and New Testaments when he insists,

Before the Christian religion had, as it were, humanized the idea of the divinity, and brought it somewhat nearer to us, there was very little said of the love of God.<sup>7</sup>

This statement ignores the many references to God’s “lovingkindness” in the Psalms.<sup>8</sup> Burke quotes very selectively from Scripture in order to support his dualism between the sublimity of divine, abstract terror and the beauty of human, incarnate love. Barbauld and Schimmelpenninck, on the other hand, use biblical allusions and quotations to illustrate how the two testaments are in dialogue, informing each other to create a sublime scriptural poetic that constantly mixes the terror of reverence with the wonder of love.

Anna Laetitia Barbauld was uniquely positioned as an eighteenth-century woman writer who actively contributed, in print, to discussions of the Bible’s sublime, poetic merit. Literary historian Murray Roston chronicles the shift away from classical to biblical literary models during



the age of sensibility within which Barbauld wrote. Roston argues:

Between neo-classicism and romanticism a change had occurred which was closely in line with the biblical tradition. For in place of the wit, the stylization, the balance and the restraint of early eighteenth-century verse, the romantic poet, spurning the poetic diction of the preceding generation, was turning from the form to the spirit, from classicism to Hebraism.<sup>9</sup>

During his overview of this shift towards biblical models for poetry, Roston rightly highlights Bishop Robert Lowth's role in cultivating a cultural appreciation of Scripture as sublime poetry. However, Roston places too much weight on Lowth's *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (published in Latin in 1753 but not published in English until 1787) and ignores Barbauld's work altogether. Lowth did open the way for the biblical literary criticism of later, Romantic-era writers like Schimmelpenninck;<sup>10</sup> however, he did not do so alone. The more open, flexible, and inclusive definition of scriptural sublimity evidenced in Schimmelpenninck's work builds on approaches to Scripture as sublime poetry found in the prose of earlier eighteenth-century writers, such as Joseph Addison,<sup>11</sup> as well as Anna Laetitia Barbauld.

During the years she published "Thoughts on Devotional Taste" and *Hymns in Prose for Children*, Barbauld lived amidst the Dissenting Warrington Academy circles, where her Presbyterian father John Aikin taught. Anne Janowitz and Daniel White explore the importance of the Warrington experience to Barbauld's intellectual formation. Janowitz notes that the academy

numbered some of the most significant educationalists among the Dissenting branches of the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, and from it emerged important scientific, radical and reform thinkers and publications.<sup>12</sup>

Due to the recent revival of interest in eighteenth-century women writers, critics now count Barbauld's prose and poetry among these key publications.<sup>13</sup> Barbauld's "Thoughts" are largely a response to the intellectual debates she was witness to as a tutor's daughter who could not graduate from Warrington, a school officially for boys only, but who could nevertheless respond to its rational discourse in print.

Though critics have gained significant ground in re-establishing Barbauld as a central voice of late-eighteenth-century Protestant Dissent and as a forerunner of the Romantic poets,<sup>14</sup> none have noted her modification of the Burkean sublime through her reading of the Psalms,

nor the influence of that reading on later women aesthetic theorists and interpreters of Scripture, such as Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck. There is critical consensus around Barbauld's knowledge of Burkean aesthetics, but critics have seen her as primarily *upholding* Burke's dichotomy. For example, Barbauld's claim in "Thoughts on Devotional Taste" that ridicule is "an enemy to everything sublime" causes Elizabeth Kraft and William McCarthy to align her with Burke's division between sublime tragedy and beautiful comedy.<sup>15</sup> Barbauld's definition of grand views of heaven as "the Sublime" of Religion and affectionate connection to God as "the Pathetic of Religion"<sup>16</sup> has led Deirdre Coleman to assert that Barbauld is "following Burke, who offset the sublime and the beautiful in *A Philosophical Enquiry*."<sup>17</sup> Finally, in Daniel White's recent work on Barbauld's "Thoughts," wherein he carefully positions Barbauld as an Arminian Presbyterian rather than Socinian Unitarian,<sup>18</sup> he suggests that she reacts to the "sublimity inherited from Puritan devotion" by "coding devotional experience instead according to the aesthetic category of the beautiful."<sup>19</sup> White is right to note Barbauld's critique of those she refers to as "cold-hearted" philosophers who discuss "the sublimest ideas"<sup>20</sup> of God while destroying the "affectionate regard" for Him felt by "common . . . Christians."<sup>21</sup> Barbauld hints at the theological debates within the Warrington community when she asserts,

A plain man of a serious turn would be shocked to hear questions of this nature treated with the ease and negligence with which they are generally discussed by the practiced Theologian, or the young lively Academic ready primed from the schools of logic and metaphysics.<sup>22</sup>

However, by turning from such abstract, theological speculation, Barbauld certainly does not reject the "sublimest ideas" of God but instead lauds the intermingling of such ideas with affectionate praise in the poetry of the Psalms.

Barbauld's essay "Thoughts on Devotional Taste" benefits from interpretation within its original printed context. It was initially attached to a selection of Scripture for use in "private, or in public and social worship."<sup>23</sup> The full title of this collection was *Devotional Pieces, compiled from the Psalms and the Book of Job: to which are prefixed, Thoughts on the Devotional Taste, on Sects, and on Establishments*. Neither Coleman nor White considers the primary intended audience for Barbauld's "Thoughts": "common" devotional readers of the Psalms. Whereas philosophy, according to Barbauld, raises God "too high for our imaginations to take hold of,"<sup>24</sup> a devotional taste for the Psalms has its seat

in the imagination and the passions, and it has its source in that relish for the sublime, the vast, and the beautiful, by which we taste the charms of poetry.<sup>25</sup>

Barbauld later implies that poetry depends on a warm and sympathetic response, writing,

Love, Wonder, Pity, the enthusiasm of Poetry, shrink from the notice of even an indifferent eye, and never indulge themselves freely but in solitude, or when heightened by the powerful force of sympathy.<sup>26</sup>

Here Barbauld echoes the language of early eighteenth-century theorist John Dennis who defines sublime poetry as verse expressing enthusiastic passions, including wonder.<sup>27</sup> Barbauld sees the Psalms as balancing enthusiastic passion with rational contemplation of God's characteristics. She deploys the same phrase that she earlier applied to the content of theological debate, "sublimest ideas,"<sup>28</sup> when she states that the Psalms provide us with "the sublimest ideas"<sup>29</sup> of God, but in the Psalms these ideas are "intelligible to the common ear" and united with the "warmth and pathos" of "affection."<sup>30</sup> It is not that Barbauld turns from the sublime to the beautiful, but rather that she warns against any overly analytical treatment of the sublime that excludes common experience, emotions, and the feminine.<sup>31</sup> In the biblical Psalms she finds models for integrating these aspects into her own Barbauldian sublime.

In her introduction to her *Hymns in Prose for Children*, Barbauld returns to the theme of social worship emphasized in her praise of the Psalms. She writes, "Many of these hymns are composed in alternate parts, which will give them something of the spirit of social worship."<sup>32</sup> Barbauld used these hymns while teaching children at her Dissenting School for boys in Palgrave, Suffolk, co-managed by her husband, Rochemont Barbauld, a Presbyterian minister. The hymns were intended as an oral form, to be read out loud by Barbauld's students.<sup>33</sup> Hymn I recalls the tradition of responsorial psalms:

COME, let us praise God, for he is exceeding great; let us bless God, for he is very good.  
He made all things; the sun to rule the day, the moon to shine by night.  
He made the great whale, and the elephant; and the little worm that  
crawleth on the ground.  
The little birds sing praises to God, when they warble sweetly in the green  
shade.  
The brooks and rivers praise God, when they murmur melodiously  
amongst the smooth pebbles.

I will praise God with my voice; for I may praise him, though I am but a little child.<sup>34</sup>

These lines draw on the Bible's assertion of nature's ability to praise God. As Isaiah 55:12 states, "the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." Barbauld encourages her students, though they are but little boys, to follow nature's example in praising God, thus also making reference to Jesus's statement: "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14). The modern reader will discern here a clear influence on William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* (1789), though Barbauld voices the perspective of children without the attendant Blakean irony.

Throughout her *Hymns*, Barbauld makes multiple allusions to the Psalms, but her allusions to Psalm 139 in Hymns IV and V are most striking in their emphasis on God's sublime love.<sup>35</sup> Barbauld draws on Psalm 139 to question Burke's severe dichotomy between the terror of sublime darkness and the comfort of beautiful light by focusing on the sublime intensity of divine brightness. In his section entitled "Light," Burke states that "mere light" cannot be sublime, as it is too common.<sup>36</sup> While explaining the root sources of sublimity he claims, "Darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light"<sup>37</sup> and later that "an association that takes in all mankind may make darkness terrible; for in utter darkness, it is impossible to know in what degree of safety we stand."<sup>38</sup> In Hymn IV, Barbauld, contrary to Burke, draws on Psalm 139 to emphasize our safety even in darkness, as God watches over us. Psalm 139:12 states, "Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee." Though Barbauld does not quote this specific verse, she alludes to its imagery in her Hymn IV, when she states of God, "The eye beholdeth him not, for his brightness is more dazzling than we could bear. He seeth in all dark places, by night as well as by day."<sup>39</sup> Barbauld continues this imagery in Hymn V, where she reassures her students that God takes care of them by night, through the rhetorical question, "Who taketh care of all people when they are sunk in sleep; when they cannot defend themselves, nor see if danger approacheth?"<sup>40</sup> This question engages and unsettles Burke's depiction of night as a time of uncertainty and thus sublime terror. Barbauld asserts, "There is an eye that never sleepeth; there is an eye that seeth in dark night, as well as in the bright sunshine."<sup>41</sup> Though at night we cannot see in "what degree of safety we stand," God can, and thus from Barbauld's perspective night is a time for faith and child-like trust in God's sublime omniscience and omnipotence.

Barbauld continues to draw on the Psalms in her Hymn V to provide her students with images of God's parental desire to protect and bless them. She writes, "The eye that sleepeth not is God's; his hand is always stretched out over us."<sup>42</sup> Though Kraft and McCarthy argue that "Barbauld uses [this] phrase in a sense contrary to its biblical sense, of God's wrath,"<sup>43</sup> Barbauld could find precedent for this metonymic use of God's hand in Psalm 139. Psalm 139:4-6 states,

For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.

Here it is God's omniscient power and protecting hand that are wondrously sublime, too lofty for human comprehension. Barbauld incorporates femininity into her image of God's protective power through a maternal simile:

As the mother moveth about the house with her finger on her lips, and stilleth every little noise, that her infant be not disturbed; as she draweth the curtains around its bed, and shutteth out the light from its tender eyes; so God draweth the curtains of darkness around us; so he maketh all things to be hushed and still, that his family may sleep in peace.<sup>44</sup>

Barbauld maintains the male pronoun "he" for God but nevertheless suggests that God has a powerful maternal aspect that can hush the entire world into sublime repose.

In her comparison of God to a mother through a simile, Barbauld anticipates the modern feminist theological (re)turn to figurative, biblical images of God's maternity.<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Johnson finds a predominance of maternal imagery in the Psalms, focusing on their repeated metaphorical use of sheltering wings to portray God's love.<sup>46</sup> Barbauld hints at such imagery when she includes the line "The chickens are gathered under the wing of the hen, and are at rest"<sup>47</sup> before describing God's similar protective sheltering of his children at night. In constructing this parallel, Barbauld could be drawing on Psalm 36:7: "How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings."

Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck was three years old when Barbauld's twelve *Hymns in Prose for Children* were first published, and she counts the experience of reading them out loud with her mother amongst her "first recollections." Schimmelpenninck remembers her mother speaking

to her “of God; of His omnipotence; of His omnipresence.”<sup>48</sup> Donelle Ruwe notes that this was a time in history when

women were becoming increasingly important as educators, for the growing cult of domesticity recognized the importance of children to the family as well as the importance of mother-teachers, who were responsible for the early inculcation of moral sensibilities.<sup>49</sup>

*The Life of Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck* testifies to this movement within education, as Schimmelpenninck credits her mother, along with Barbauld, with encouraging her love of nature and attitude of wonder towards its Creator. Biblical scholar Lissa Wray Beal notes that the instruction Mary Anne received from her mother also “instilled in her a reverence for the Scriptures,”<sup>50</sup> however, Beal does not mention the role of Barbauld’s *Hymns* in this process. Schimmelpenninck recalls her mother first teaching her “one of the Commandments, a clause of the Lord’s Prayer, or one of the texts from the Sermon on the Mount,” then reading from “Dr. Priestley’s Scripture Catechism,” and finally having Mary Anne “read to her one of Mrs. Barbauld’s Prose Hymns for Children” each Sunday.<sup>51</sup> Reading Barbauld’s words out loud must have been an empowering experience for Mary Anne. She recalls that still later on in her youth a

favorite book for me . . . was Mrs. Barbauld’s ‘Prose Hymns for Children.’ I cannot express the delight it often was for me to walk out alone and look at the beautiful hills, and wood, and water, or the flowers, and the happy birds, and insects, and to think that God had made them all in wisdom and in love.<sup>52</sup>

After reading Barbauld’s *Hymns* as a child and young adult, Mary Anne later stayed at Barbauld’s Hampstead home for a month in 1798.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, Barbauld’s “Thoughts on Devotional Taste” had a significant impact on the Dissenting culture within which Schimmelpenninck was raised. Mary Anne’s parents Lucy and Samuel Galton were Quakers who entertained the Unitarian Joseph Priestley in their home. In his youth, Priestley taught at the Warrington Academy, the institution that Barbauld’s father John Aikin helped establish.

In her later, theoretical widening of the sublime to include passions other than fear, Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck expands upon the work of Barbauld, as well as that of other dissenting women writers, such as Joanna Baillie.<sup>54</sup> Building on Barbauld’s subtle amendment of Burkean aesthetics in both her “Thoughts” and *Hymns*, Schimmelpenninck

explicitly highlights the limitations of Burke's dichotomy in her *Theory on the Classification of Beauty and Deformity* (1815). In this early publication, she groups Burke with "writers on beauty" who "have fallen into the mistake"<sup>55</sup> of creating overly restrictive aesthetic categories. Schimmelpenninck expands upon the work of Burke by depicting the awe of "the terrible sublime" as only an initial stage *en route* towards the dauntlessness of "the contemplative sublime," love of "the sentimental," and vivacity of "the sprightly."<sup>56</sup> The diversity of Schimmelpenninck's experiences of Dissenting Quaker, Unitarian, Methodist, Moravian, and Catholic communities may have led to her construction of a more multifold and inclusive definition of beauty. For Schimmelpenninck, beauty itself is an overarching concept within which the smaller "species" of the Burkean sublime is contained.<sup>57</sup> Schimmelpenninck sought to create a more diverse and complex aesthetic system, defining beauty not as a fixed category but as a dynamic process unfolding in stages: from terrifying force through unshaken serenity to affectionate grace and, finally, playful elasticity. Rather than polarizing terrible sublimity with loving beauty, Schimmelpenninck splits sublimity into two successive types, the terrible and the contemplative sublime.<sup>58</sup> One could read her biblical scholarship as tracing a movement from the terrible and contemplative sublimity of the Old Testament to the graceful sentiment and sprightly joy of the New Testament; however, the boundaries between her categories are more permeable than that, allowing for an intermingling of sublime terror and beautiful love in both the Old and New Testaments.

Barbauld's *Hymns* sharpened Schimmelpenninck's biblical knowledge and further encouraged her to see the brightness of God's glory shining through creation. In her "Introductory Address: On Early Biblical Instruction," which prefaces her book *Biblical Fragments* (1821), Schimmelpenninck suggests that readers approach the natural world allegorically, with the aid of Scripture, admonishing them to

look at the heavens . . . the everlasting hills, the boundless ocean; turn your eyes where you will,-- where is there an object in the vast treasury of nature which Scripture poetry has not elevated and consecrated as the type of spiritual things?<sup>59</sup>

Barbauld intended her *Hymns* to be read by the young boys who were her students, but Schimmelpenninck offers her text to a definitively female audience. She directs her *Biblical Fragments* to "mothers, and to young persons of her own sex," with the goal of inciting them to love creation, love God, and love human others through active service.<sup>60</sup> She thus hopes to pass on what her own mother had taught her through a line of female

instruction and discipleship. In addressing her intended audience, Schimmelpenninck's tone is both admonishing and enthusiastic.

One root of Schimmelpenninck's enthusiasm is her readerly passion for sublime poetry, already evident in her *Theory on the Classification of Beauty and Deformity*, and continuing as a central thread throughout her *Biblical Fragments*. Schimmelpenninck continues the tradition established by Addison, Lowth, and Barbauld of viewing Judeo-Christian poetry as equal to, or even greater than, ancient Roman and Greek poetry. She asks, "Is there no poetry in the sublime strains of Isaiah, of Job, or of Ezekiel?"<sup>61</sup> and later, "Are the majesty of Milton, the truth of Cowper's English scenery, inferior to the ferocity of Homer or Aeschylus?"<sup>62</sup> Schimmelpenninck also partially echoes Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who in 1796 wrote to his friend John Thelwall:

Is Milton not a *sublimier* poet than Homer or Virgil? Are not his personages more sublimely clothed? And do you not know, that there is not *one* page in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in which he has not borrowed his imagery from the *Scriptures*?--- I allow and rejoice that *Christ* spoke only to the understanding & the affections; but I affirm that after reading Isaiah, or St. Paul's epistle to the Hebrews, Homer and Virgil are disgustingly *tame* to me & Milton himself barely tolerable.<sup>63</sup>

Coleridge, however, maintains Burke's distinction between terrible Hebrew sublimity and gentle Christian beauty in the above excerpt, thereby oddly excluding Christ's address to the "affections" from his definition of sublime poetry. By contrast, Schimmelpenninck follows Barbauld's emphasis on the integration of Christian affection *into* reverential sublimity. Barbauld questions any absolute dichotomy between Hebrew and Christian Scripture through the juxtaposition of alternating Old and New Testament allusions in her *Hymns*, and Schimmelpenninck also modifies Burke's dichotomy by reading evidence of Christ's "sublime interior history" as already present in the Psalms.

In her "Essay Upon the Psalms, and their Spiritual Application" (1825), attached, like Barbauld's "Thoughts," to a printing of Scripture intended for use in worship, Schimmelpenninck argues that the paradoxical mystery of the Psalms' "sublime poetry" demands Christological interpretation. Schimmelpenninck's interest in how the intermingling of sublime terror and affectionate love in the Psalms resists an exclusively historical reading moves her even further beyond Burke's binary. The full title of her collection is *Psalms According to the Authorized Version; with prefatory titles, and tabular index of scriptural references, from the Port Royal authors*, which reveals her indebtedness to



the Cistercian Port Royalist nuns of France. Schimmelpenninck's translation of the "prefatory title" to Psalm 139 as "a sublime anthem of praise and prayer"<sup>64</sup> reveals the influence of the Cistercians and of Barbauld who, as we have seen, alludes to the sublimity of Psalm 139. Schimmelpenninck pushes her reading of the Psalm as expressive of sublime Christian love further than does Barbauld, however, when in a fascinating hermeneutical move, she takes Christ as her model of figurative interpretation. Schimmelpenninck reminds her readers that Christ has stated that "*Moses, the Psalms*, and all the prophets speak concerning him"<sup>65</sup> and that therefore we are not to limit the Old Testament to historical literalism. She continues:

as these books, in very few instances, make what may be termed a direct and literal mention of Christ; we are reduced to the alternative, either of ourselves adopting the figurative and spiritual mode of interpretation, of which Christ set us the example; or of abrogating all those passages in the NT, which declare the whole of the Old to be prophetic of him.<sup>66</sup>

By equating figurative, poetic interpretation with "spiritual" interpretation, Schimmelpenninck implies that the exclusively literal, historical approaches of rational Dissent—exemplified by scholars like Joseph Priestley—fall short of a full understanding of Scripture.<sup>67</sup> Ultimately, for Schimmelpenninck, the reader may start with a literal, apparently fixed, meaning; however, in the Psalms

. . . lamentations under God's wrath, and bursts of triumph in his favour, are continually *intermingled* in the very same passage; in order that we may, as it were, be forced off the literal into the spiritual sense of the passage.<sup>68</sup>

For Schimmelpenninck, the apparent contradictions in the Psalms block a literal, completely empirical reading and thus lift readers off historical, factual interpretation into a sublimer, Christological truth.

Though Barbauld does not explicitly look for the "sublime interior history" of Christ in the Psalms, her biblical allusions to figurative images of divine, sheltering wings do emphasize a point of overlap between the text of the Psalms and the words of Christ. These allusions refer both to the Psalms and to the spoken words of Christ in the Gospel of Luke. When in Luke 13:34 Christ looks to Jerusalem and laments, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings," his speech repeats the imagery of God's maternal wings found in the Psalms. Barbauld's focus on the figurative images of God's

sublime, protective power in the Psalms leads up to her emphasis on the sublime, redemptive power of Christ as illustrated in the Book of Revelation.

When Barbauld turns to imagery of Christ's second coming, towards the end of her *Hymns in Prose for Children*, she constructs a Christian aesthetic of redemptive power. Barbauld foreshadows this emphasis on the Book of Revelation as early as Hymn III, where she conceptualizes divinity in terms of a sublime brightness, writing, "God is the sovereign of the king; his crown is of rays of light, and his throne is amongst the stars. He is King of kings, and Lord of lords."<sup>69</sup> Kraft and McCarthy rightly observe that this imagery borrows from Revelation 17:14;<sup>70</sup> however, the image of a shining crown composed of light is Barbauld's own. Barbauld waits until Hymn XI, the second last hymn in her series, to describe Christ's return. In a passage that Calvinist bluestocking Elizabeth Carter called "amazingly sublime,"<sup>71</sup> Barbauld again deploys rhetorical questions:

Who is he that cometh to burst open the prison doors of the tomb; to bid the dead awake, and to gather his redeemed from the four winds of heaven?

He descendeth on a fiery cloud; the sound of a trumpet goeth before him; thousands of angels are on his right hand.

It is Jesus, the Son of God; the saviour of men; the friend of the good.

He cometh in the glory of his Father; he hath received power from on high.<sup>72</sup>

These lines make no reference to dread or darkness, and they even refer to friendship, a quality that Burke placed firmly on the side of the beautiful, as opposed to the sublime, so why would Carter call them "amazingly sublime?" It is most likely due to the vastness implied by the "four winds of heaven" and the "thousands of angels," the fieriness of the clouds, a quality Barbauld added to the scriptural account, and the sheer redemptive power of this image of Christ's return.

Following the structure of Barbauld's *Hymns* and, even more closely, that of the Bible, Schimmelpenninck waits until the very last chapter of her *Biblical Fragments* to address imagery of Christ's return. In this chapter, an exegesis of Revelation 13:18 titled "The Number of the Beast," she does not shy away from apocalyptic imagery conveying "the wrath of God,"<sup>73</sup> but she ultimately focuses on the redemptive power of Christ. Schimmelpenninck quotes the description of the second coming in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, and then states, "This is what we wait for, even his Son from heaven."<sup>74</sup> Later in this closing chapter, she petitions,

May it please God so to open our eyes, that we may see no beauty but in Christ; and may He so open our hearts as to see salvation in none other! May every weary and heavy laden soul come to Him, fully assured that in Him he shall find full rest!<sup>75</sup>

When Schimmelpenninck refers to the “beauty” of Christ, it at first appears that she adheres to Burke’s dichotomy between sublime Old Testament and beautiful New Testament, but the reader needs to remember that her definition of beauty includes four stages: the terrible sublime, the contemplative sublime, the sentimental, and the sprightly, with their corresponding moral aspects. In referring to the beauty of Christ, Schimmelpenninck does not limit him to the physical qualities of the Burkean beautiful, by any means, but rather implies that Christ contains within himself the diversity of every aesthetic and moral quality imaginable.

Furthermore, through her repeated emphasis on Christ as source of “rest”<sup>76</sup> and “repose,”<sup>77</sup> Schimmelpenninck associates him with her category of the contemplative sublime. In her *Theory*, she explains how the contemplative sublime “expresses boundless and irresistible power, without violence, but irresistibly certain; it defies the utmost human strength to elude, but it leaves the mind at rest.”<sup>78</sup> Schimmelpenninck’s use of the terms “rest” and “repose” in *Biblical Fragments*, paired with her focus on the contemplative sublime’s “certain” power, closely parallel her contemporary Ann Radcliffe’s idea of “sublime repose.” For Radcliffe, affective bonds are facilitated through shared glimpses of a divinity “benevolent, sublime–powerful, yet silent in its power–progressive and certain in its end, steadfast and full of a sublime repose.”<sup>79</sup> Radcliffe’s gothic novels focus largely on Burkean terror but, like Schimmelpenninck, Radcliffe presents hope for a progressive movement through terror into the “sublime complacency” of union with God.<sup>80</sup> In Schimmelpenninck’s *Biblical Fragments* she likewise momentarily acknowledges the Book of Revelation’s images of judgment and wrath, aspects of Burkean terror, but ultimately focuses on Christ’s ability to bring sublime “peace”<sup>81</sup> to believers, concluding, “I will trust and not be afraid.”<sup>82</sup> Ultimately, for Schimmelpenninck, the dauntlessness of “child-like confidence in Christ” is the sublimest aspect of faith.<sup>83</sup>

Both Barbauld and Schimmelpenninck expressed such confidence in Christ by living out their faith in dauntless social action. They shared an appreciation of the co-existence of harmonious differences in Scripture, nature and humanity. This capacity to not only tolerate but also actively celebrate difference informed their social commitments. Barbauld’s nascent abolitionist thought in her *Hymns in Prose for Children* most

likely influenced Schimmelpenninck's own fight against slavery.<sup>84</sup> In her Hymn VIII, Barbauld writes, "They pray to him in different languages, but he understandeth them all" before imagining an enslaved African woman praying for her freedom and for the healing of her sick child.<sup>85</sup> Reading these lines out loud as a child must have had an affect on Schimmelpenninck, who went on to form a women's abolitionist society in London.<sup>86</sup> A champion for ecumenical harmony and cultural heterogeneity throughout her life, Schimmelpenninck envisioned heaven itself in terms of a multiplicity of differences. She looked forward to heaven being

like a vast garden, filled with the choicest plants, each beautiful, though differing in kind and variety of fruit, but the very difference adding to the beauty of the whole.<sup>87</sup>

Barbauld and Schimmelpenninck saw the text of the created world, with its diverse plants and creatures in delicate ecological balance, and the landscape of Scripture, with its intermingled reverential terror and wondrous love, in terms of a striking variety of contrasts sustained by God in a harmonious whole. In "Thoughts on Devotional Taste," Barbauld admires the Psalms' mixing of sublime reverence with warm affection. In her *Hymns in Prose for Children* she blends allusions to the Psalms and the Book of Revelation to build towards her wondrous image of Christ's return. Schimmelpenninck responded to Barbauld's imagery, which she first encountered as a child, by reading the Psalms as poetic embodiments of Christian affection and sublimity. However, throughout her sustained scriptural exegesis, published under the modest title *Biblical Fragments*, Schimmelpenninck focuses more closely on Christ than does Barbauld, proposing that the Psalms provide access to the interiority of Christ and using the Book of Revelation to argue that sublime peace is found in Christ alone.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In doing so, their work resonates with the growing interest today in Christian aesthetics, evidenced through Gesa Theissen's 2004 publication *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader*. In addressing Romantic-era aesthetics, Theissen includes excerpts from Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817). However, she omits Burke's *Enquiry*, upon which Kant and Coleridge build, as well as the texts of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century women writers who responded to Burke's use of Scripture, including Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck.

<sup>2</sup> In *The Religious Sublime: Christian Poetry and Critical Tradition in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century England*, David Morris notes that eighteenth-century poets and critics generally saw Scripture “concerned with the last things” as a source of sublimity. Morris, 117. Burke does not cite from the Book of Revelation, however. Biblical scholars Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland note that Coleridge, on the other hand, was fascinated by the Book of Revelation and “recognized the biblical prophecies and visions as effusions of kindred, poetic spirits, a view shared by William Blake.” Kovacs and Rowland, 22.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholson, *Newton Demands the Muse*, 112.

<sup>4</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, 69. Burke here misquotes Psalm 68:8.

<sup>5</sup> Burke, 70.

<sup>6</sup> Burke claimed to be attached to “Christianity at large.” Quoted in O’Brien, introduction to *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 29.

<sup>7</sup> Burke, 70.

<sup>8</sup> See Psalms 17:7, 25:6, 26:3, 36:7, 36:10, 40:10, 40:11, 42:8, 48:9, 51:1, 63:3, 69:16, 88:11, 89:33, 89:49, 92:2, 103:4, 107:43, 119:88, 119:149, 119:159, 138:2, and 143:8 (KJV), for example. All subsequent biblical references in this chapter shall be to the King James Version of the Bible.

<sup>9</sup> Roston, 40.

<sup>10</sup> Lowth’s *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* admire the Psalms for the force and energy of their figurative poetic language. Lowth, 133.

<sup>11</sup> Addison treated the Psalms as sublime poetry in his literary journal *The Spectator*. See, for example, *Spectator* No. 489, September 20, 1712.

<sup>12</sup> Janowitz, 65.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel White, “Anna Barbauld and the Dissenting Public Sphere,” 527.

<sup>14</sup> Critics argue that her *Hymns in Prose for Children* influenced the poetry of William Blake (Summerfield, 216-219), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (Kraft and McCarthy, 236), and Elizabeth Barrett Browning (McCarthy, 85).

<sup>15</sup> Kraft and McCarthy, editors, footnote to “Thoughts on Devotional Taste,” 219.

<sup>16</sup> Barbauld, “Thoughts on Devotional Taste,” 217.

<sup>17</sup> Coleman, “Firebrands, letters and flowers: Mrs. Barbauld and the Priestleys,” 89.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel White presents Barbauld’s “theological position” as predominantly Arminian. White, ““With Mrs. Barbauld it is Different”: Dissenting Heritage and Devotional Taste,” 482. Mark Knight and Emma Mason portray Barbauld’s position as Arian but also note her move away from strict Calvinism to a “gentler” faith that saw God as primarily loving. Knight and Mason, 38. Despite their differences in placing Barbauld as an Arminian or Arian Christian, critics agree in acknowledging her rejection of what she herself termed “gloomy” Calvinism. See also Kraft and McCarthy, Introduction to *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry and Prose*, 14.

<sup>19</sup> White, 483.

<sup>20</sup> Barbauld, 215.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 214.

- <sup>23</sup> Barbauld, 232.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., 215.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., 211.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., 219.
- <sup>27</sup> See John Dennis's *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (1701).
- <sup>28</sup> Barbauld, 215.
- <sup>29</sup> Barbauld, 232.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Barbauld believes that an irreverent treatment of God's sublimest aspects by "cold-hearted philosophy" distances us from the divine and destroys any sincere response we might have to sublimity. Barbauld, 212. Mary Wollstonecraft, who diverged from Barbauld's conservative views on women, did agree with Barbauld on this one point, arguing that the sublime was closed to "men who have cold, enquiring minds." Wollstonecraft, 5:275.
- <sup>32</sup> Barbauld, "Preface" to *Hymns in Prose for Children*, v.
- <sup>33</sup> The hymns were intended for "alternate recitation." Kraft and McCarthy, 235.
- <sup>34</sup> Barbauld, *Hymns in Prose for Children*, 1-3.
- <sup>35</sup> Kraft and McCarthy note Barbauld's multiple allusions to the Psalms, but do not mention Psalm 139. Harvey Darton argues that throughout her hymns she borrows heavily from the Psalms. Darton, *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life* 153.
- <sup>36</sup> Burke, 79-80.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., 80.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 143.
- <sup>39</sup> Barbauld, 23-24.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., 29-30.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., 30.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., 31.
- <sup>43</sup> Kraft and McCarthy, 244.
- <sup>44</sup> Barbauld, 32-33.
- <sup>45</sup> Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendell, 303; Rosemary Radford Ruether, 69.
- <sup>46</sup> Psalms 17, 36, 57, 61, and 91 contain such imagery. Johnson, 83.
- <sup>47</sup> Barbauld, 26.
- <sup>48</sup> Schimmelpenninck, *Life of Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck*, 3.
- <sup>49</sup> Donelle Ruwe, introduction to *Enculturing the Child, 1690-1914*, viii.
- <sup>50</sup> Lissa Wray Beal, "Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck: A 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Woman as Psalm Reader," 81-82.
- <sup>51</sup> Schimmelpenninck, 3-4.
- <sup>52</sup> Schimmelpenninck, *Life of Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck*, 22.
- <sup>53</sup> Christiana Hankin, *Life of Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck*, 298.
- <sup>54</sup> For analysis of Joanna Baillie's influence on Schimmelpenninck's *Theory on the Classification of Beauty and Deformity*, see my article "'Dauntless Faith': Contemplative Sublimity and Social Action in Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck's Aesthetics."
- <sup>55</sup> Schimmelpenninck, *Theory*, 6.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>57</sup> Jacqueline Labbe's *Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender and Romanticism* provides an extensive reading of Schimmelpenninck's definition of beauty in her *Theory on the Classification of Beauty and Deformity*. Labbe, 50-51.

<sup>58</sup> In his early work *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1763), written shortly after Burke's *Enquiry*, Immanuel Kant also suggests that what he calls the "terrifying sublime" is only one *type* of sublimity. The other two types, for Kant, are the "splendid" sublime of magnificence, and the "noble" sublime of "quiet wonder." Political philosopher Susan Meld Shell has recently published a fascinating analysis of Kant's *Observations*, wherein she astutely observes that in the *Observations* beauty and sublimity "are both mutually supporting" and makes her most trenchant claim within her consideration of Kantian ethics. She notes, "As we move from the aesthetic to the moral, however, this reciprocal relation between beauty and sublimity (or natural and spiritual life) becomes peculiarly 'entangled,' for virtue alone is truly noble, that is, both sublime and moral in the highest sense . . . And yet, ethical qualities that are beautiful (such as sympathy and complaisance) 'harmonize' with virtue by promoting the same end, and may thus be regarded as noble, as it were, by 'adoption' (*adoptirt*)." Shell, 457. Shell's argument explores the potential for an in-between space that is neither exclusively sublime nor exclusively beautiful, and she finds this most prominent in Kant's consideration of noble virtue.

<sup>59</sup> Schimmelpenninck, "Introductory Address: On Early Biblical Instruction," xxi.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, xxx.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>63</sup> Coleridge, "Letter to John Thelwall, December 17<sup>th</sup>, Saturday Night, 1796," in *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 1:164.

<sup>64</sup> *Psalms According to the Authorized Version*, 324.

<sup>65</sup> Schimmelpenninck, "Essay Upon the Psalms," 352.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

<sup>67</sup> Wray Beal goes as far as to argue that Preistley's influence unsettled Schimmelpenninck's faith and that Schimmelpenninck subsequently rejected or eschewed a historical critical hermeneutic. However, rather than rejecting historical interpretation, she appears to maintain aspects of it but to nevertheless subordinate them to the "spiritual truth" of the Psalms. Later in her "Essay Upon the Psalms," Schimmelpenninck proposes that historical meaning is to spiritual truth as the body is to the soul, making the spiritual meaning "visible" through a more tangible manifestation, more discernable to the human senses. Schimmelpenninck, "Essay Upon the Psalms," 354.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 359, my italics.

<sup>69</sup> Barbauld, 18.

<sup>70</sup> Kraft and McCarthy, 241.

<sup>71</sup> Carter, *A Series of Letters*, 2:346.

<sup>72</sup> 87-88.

<sup>73</sup> Schimmelpenninck, *Biblical Fragments*, 258.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 265, 269, 270, 271, and 281.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 271-72.

<sup>78</sup> Schimmelpenninck, *Theory on the Classification of Beauty and Deformity*, 25.

<sup>79</sup> Radcliffe's journal entry for October 9, 1811, quoted in Talfourd, "Memoir" lxxxii. See Chapter Three, "The Poetic Progression from Solipsism to 'Sublime Repose' in *Romance of the Forest*," in my doctoral dissertation *Dauntless Spirits: Sublimity and Social Consciousness in the Poetry of Radcliffe, Williams, and Baillie* (2005, Queen's University) for a sustained examination of this idea. In her recently published article "Ann Radcliffe and Natural Theology," Anne Chandler reads Radcliffe's idea of "sublime repose" as reflecting the influence of Thomas Burnet's theology, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophy, and Anna Laetitia Barbauld's aesthetics, mentioning "Thoughts on Devotional Taste" specifically. The connections to Burnet and Barbauld are plausible, though we do not have textual evidence for them. The continued reading of Radcliffe's writing through a Deist Rousseauian lens, however, does not acknowledge Radcliffe's more orthodox views of Trinitarian Christianity as expressed in her journals, where she refers to Christ as "our SAVIOUR." Radcliffe, quoted in Talfourd, xxxiii.

<sup>80</sup> Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, 140. In this novel Radcliffe's poet-heroine Adeline finds an escape from pained solipsism into "sublime complacency" through prayer and community. Feminist critic Anne Mellor insists that Radcliffe's heroines reach a "consciousness of the power and glory of divine creation without fear and trembling." Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, 94. However, I argue that Radcliffe's idea of sublimity, like Schimmelpenninck's, involves progressive stages, which include an initial experience of Burkean obscurity and terror.

<sup>81</sup> Schimmelpenninck, *Biblical Fragments*, 271.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>84</sup> Barbauld's later poem "Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade" (1791) makes her abolitionist sympathies much more clear. We do not have evidence that Schimmelpenninck read this poem, but she may have discussed it with Barbauld while staying with her in 1798. For further analysis of Barbauld's "Epistle to William Wilberforce" see Moira Ferguson's *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (60-61).

<sup>85</sup> Barbauld, *Hymns in Prose for Children*, 59-61.

<sup>86</sup> As noted in my article "'Dauntless Faith,'" Schimmelpenninck helped found "The Female Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves" in London in 1825. Duquette, 529-30. Schimmelpenninck also published an anti-slavery text titled *Is the System of Slavery Sanctioned?*. Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870*, 58.

<sup>87</sup> Schimmelpenninck, *Life of Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck*, 545.