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J. G. HAMANN  
 Aesthetica in nuce<sup>1</sup>:  
 A Rhapsody in Cabbalistic Prose (1762)

Judges v, 30

A prey of divers colours in needlework, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil.

Elihu in the Book of Job, xxxii, 19–22

Behold, my belly is as wine which hath no vent; it is ready to burst like new bottles.

I will speak, that I may be refreshed: I will open my lips and answer.

Let me not, I pray you, accept any man's person, neither let me give flattering titles unto man.

For I know not to give flattering titles; in so doing my maker would soon take me away.<sup>2</sup>

J. G. Hamann's own notes are printed at the foot of the page, indicated by superscript letters in the text. Editorial notes, printed beneath the author's notes, are indicated by superscript numbers; these include editorial notes to the lettered notes, which are numbered in one sequence with the notes to the text.

<sup>1</sup> 'Aesthetics in a Nutshell'; the title is probably modelled on that of Christoph Otto von Schönaich's (1725–1809) *Complete Aesthetics in a Nutshell* (*Die ganze Ästhetik in einer Nuß*, 1754), a satirical work against Klopstock.

<sup>2</sup> This, and the previous quotation from Judges, are given by Hamann in the original Hebrew.

*J. G. Hamann*

Horace

The uninitiate crowd I ban and spurn!  
 Come ye, but guard your tongues! A song that's new  
 I, priest of the Muses, sing for you  
 Fair maids and youths to learn!

Kings o'er their several flocks bear sway. O'er kings  
 Like sway hath Jove, famed to have overthrown  
 The Giants, by his nod alone  
 Guiding created things.<sup>3</sup>

Not a lyre! Nor a painter's brush! A winnowing-fan for my Muse, to clear the threshing-floor of holy literature! Praise to the Archangel on the remains of Cannan's tongue!<sup>4</sup> – on white asses<sup>a</sup> he is victorious in the contest, but the wise idiot of Greece<sup>5</sup> borrows Euthyphro's<sup>b</sup> proud stallions for the philological dispute.

Poetry is the mother-tongue of the human race; even as the garden is older than the ploughed field, painting than script; as song is more ancient than declamation; parables older than reasoning;<sup>c</sup> barter than trade. A deep sleep was the repose of our farthest ancestors; and their movement a frenzied dance. Seven days they would sit in the silence of deep thought or wonder; – and would open their mouths to utter winged sentences.

<sup>a</sup> Judges, v, 10.

<sup>b</sup> See Plato's *Cratylus*: 'Hermogenes Indeed, Socrates, you do seem to me to be uttering oracles, exactly like an inspired prophet.

*Socrates* Yes, Hermogenes, and I am convinced that the inspiration came to me from Euthyphro the Prospaltian [Hamann's text: the son of Pantios]. For I was with him and listening to him for a long time early this morning. So he must have been inspired, and he not only filled my ears but took possession of my soul with his superhuman wisdom. So I think this is our duty: we ought today to make use of this wisdom . . . but tomorrow, if the rest of you agree, we will conjure it away and purify ourselves, when we have found someone, whether priest or sophist, who is skilled in that kind of purifying . . . But ask me about any others [i.e. other names] you please, "that you may see what" Euthyphro's "horses are".' [Plato, *Cratylus*, translated by H. N. Fowler, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1926), 396d–397a and 407d; the quotation at the end is from Homer, *Iliad*, v, 221 f.].

<sup>c</sup> ' . . . as hieroglyphs are older than letters, so are parables older than arguments', says Bacon, my Euthyphro.

<sup>3</sup> Hamann quotes Horace in the original Latin (as he does with subsequent Latin authors). The translation is by John Marshall (1908).

<sup>4</sup> The 'Archangel' (Michael) is an allusion to Johann David Michaelis (1717–91), theologian and philologist, whose rationalistic approach to the poetic language of the Old Testament aroused Hamann's strong opposition.

<sup>5</sup> The 'wise idiot' is Socrates – and Hamann himself.

*'Aesthetica in nuce: A Rhapsody in Cabbalistic Prose'*

The senses and passions speak and understand nothing but images. The entire store of human knowledge and happiness consists in images. The first outburst of Creation, and the first impression of its recording scribe; – the first manifestation and the first enjoyment of Nature are united in the words: Let there be Light! Here beginneth the feeling for the presence of things.<sup>d</sup>

Finally GOD crowned the revelation of His splendour to the senses with His masterpiece – with man. He created man in divine form – in the image of God created He him. This decision of our prime originator unravels the most complex knots of human nature and its destiny. Blind heathens have recognized the invisibility which man has in common with GOD. The veiled figure of the body, the countenance of the head, and the extremities of the arms are the visible schematic form in which we wander the earth; but in truth they are nothing but a finger pointing to the hidden man within us.

Each man is a counterpart of God in miniature.<sup>e</sup>

The first nourishment came from the realm of plants; wine – the milk of the ancients; the oldest poetry was called botanical<sup>f</sup> by its learned commentator<sup>6</sup> (to judge from the tales of Jotham and of Joash);<sup>g</sup> and man's first apparel was a rhapsody of fig-leaves.

But the LORD GOD made coats of skins and clothed them – our ancestors, whom the knowledge of good and evil had taught shame. If necessity is the mother of invention, and made the arts and conveniences, then we have good cause to wonder with Goguet first how the fashion of clothing ourselves could have arisen in Eastern lands, and second why it should

<sup>d</sup> Ephesians, v, 13: 'for whatsoever doth make manifest is light'.

<sup>e</sup> Manilius Astron. Lib. iv. [Marcus Manilius, *Astronomica*, iv, 895].

<sup>f</sup> 'for being as a plant which comes from the lust of the earth without a formal seed, poetry has sprung up and spread abroad more than any other kind of learning' (Bacon, *de Augm. Scient.* Lib. II Cap. 13). See Councillor Johann David Michaelis' observations on Robert Lowth, *de sacra poesi Praelectionibus Academicis Oxonii habitis*, p. 100 (18).

<sup>g</sup> Judges, ix; II Chronicles, xxv, 18.

<sup>6</sup> The allusion is again to Michaelis. The latter's work on Lowth, referred to in Hamann's footnote (f), is his annotated edition of Robert Lowth's (1710–87) lectures on Hebrew poetry, *Praelectiones de Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* (originally published in England in 1753). The quotation from Bacon in the same footnote is from *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, Book II, chapter 13. Translations of this and subsequent Latin quotations from Bacon's works are from the English versions in vols. IV and V of Francis Bacon, *Works*, edited by James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis and Douglas Denon Heath, 14 vols. (London, 1857–74); the present quotation is from IV, 318.

*J. G. Hamann*

have been in the skins of beasts.<sup>7</sup> Let me risk a conjecture which seems to me at least ingenious. I place the origin of this costume in the universal constancy of animal characters,<sup>8</sup> familiar to Adam from consorting with the ancient poet (known as Abaddon in the language of Canaan, but called Apollyon in the Hellenistic tongue).<sup>9</sup> This moved primal man to hand on to posterity beneath this borrowed skin an intuitive knowledge of past and future events . . .

Speak, that I may see Thee! This wish was answered by the Creation, which is an utterance to created things through created things, for day speaketh unto day, and night proclaimeth unto night. Its word traverses every clime to the ends of the earth, and its voice can be heard in every dialect. The fault may lie where it will (outside us or within us): all we have left in nature for our use is fragmentary verse and *dissecta membra poetae*.<sup>10</sup> To collect these together is the scholar's modest part; the philosopher's to interpret them; to imitate them,<sup>h</sup> or – bolder still – to adapt them, the poet's.

To speak is to translate – from the tongue of angels into the tongue of men, that is, to translate thoughts into words – things into names – images into signs; which can be poetic or cyriological,<sup>i</sup> historic or symbolic or hieroglyphic – and philosophical or characteristic.<sup>j</sup> This kind of

<sup>h</sup> You learn to compose verses with a divided name;  
 Thus you will become an imitator of the singer Lucilius.

Ausonius *Epist.* v. [Ausonius, *Epistolae*, xvi, 37–8]

<sup>i</sup> For an explanation, consult Wachter's *Naturae et Scripturae Concordia. Commentatio de literis ac numeris primaevis aliisque rebus memorabilibus cum ortu literarum coniunctis*. Lips. et Hafn. 1752, in the first section.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>j</sup> The following passage in Petronius is to be understood as being of this kind of sign. I am obliged to quote it in its context, even if it has to be read as a satire on the philologist himself and his contemporaries:<sup>12</sup> 'Your flatulent and formless flow of words is a modern immigrant from Asia to Athens. Its breath fell upon the mind of ambitious youth like the influence of a baleful planet, and when the old tradition was once broken, eloquence halted and grew dumb. In a word, who after this came to equal the splendour of Thucydides? (He is called the Pindar of historians.) [Hamann's parenthesis] Or of Hyperides? (who bared Phryne's bosom to convince the judges of his good cause) [Hamann's parenthesis] Even poetry did not glow with the colour of health, but the whole of art, nourished on one universal diet, lacked the vigour to reach the grey hairs of old age. The decadence in painting was the same, as soon as Egyptian charlatans had found a short cut to this high calling.' [Petronius, *Satyricon*, 2; translated by Michael Heseltine, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1913).] Compare this with the profound prophecy which Socrates put into the mouth of the Egyptian King Thamus about the inventions of Thoth, such that Phaedrus was moved to cry: 'Socrates, you easily make up stories of Egypt or any country you please.' [Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275b.]

<sup>7</sup> The reference is to Antoine Yves Goguet (1716–58), *De l'origine des loix, des arts et des sciences et leur progrès chez les anciens peuples* (1758), I, 114 f. Goguet maintained that the original purpose of clothing cannot have been to protect man from the elements, since it was worn in countries whose climate made such protection unnecessary.

*'Aesthetica in nuce: A Rhapsody in Cabbalistic Prose'*

translation (I mean, speech) resembles more than ought else the wrong side of a tapestry:

And shows the stuff, but not the workman's skill;<sup>13</sup>

or it can be compared with an eclipse of the sun, which can be looked at in a vessel of water.<sup>k</sup>

Moses' torch illumines even the intellectual world, which also has its heaven and its earth. Hence Bacon compares the sciences with the waters above and below the vault of our vaporious globe.<sup>17</sup> The former are a glassy sea,<sup>18</sup> like unto crystal with fire; the latter, by contrast, are clouds from the ocean, no bigger than a man's hand.<sup>19</sup>

But the creation of the setting bears the same relation to the creation of man as epic to dramatic poetry. The one takes place by means of the word, the other by means of action. Heart, be like unto a tranquil sea! Hear this counsel: let us make men in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion! – Behold the deed: and the LORD GOD formed man of the dust of the ground – Compare word and deed: worship the mighty speaker with the Psalmist;<sup>l</sup> adore the supposed gardener<sup>m</sup> with

<sup>k</sup> The one metaphor comes from the Earl of Roscommon's *Essay on Translated Verse* and Howel's *Letters*.<sup>14</sup> Both, if I am not mistaken, borrowed the comparison from Saavedra.<sup>15</sup> The other is borrowed from one of the most excellent weekly journals, *The Adventurer*.<sup>16</sup> But there they are used *ad illustrationem* (to adorn the garment), here they are used *ad involucrum* (as a covering for the naked body), as Euthyphro's muse would distinguish.

<sup>l</sup> Psalms, xxxiii, 9.      <sup>m</sup> John, xx, 15–17.

<sup>8</sup> A satirical reference to Lessing, whose essay *On the Use of Animals in Fables* (1759) argues that the writers of fables employed animals rather than men because of the 'universally known constancy of animal characters'; see G. E. Lessing, *Werke*, edited by Herbert G. Göpfert, 8 vols. (Munich, 1970–9), v, 398. Hamann, of course, finds Lessing's rationalistic explanation unacceptable.

<sup>9</sup> Abaddon . . . Apollyon: see Revelation, ix, II.

<sup>10</sup> 'the limbs of the dismembered poet' (Horace, *Satires*, I, 4, line 62).

<sup>11</sup> The philologist Johann Georg Wachter (1673–1757), in the work referred to, distinguished three phases in the development of writing (cyriological, symbolic or hieroglyphic, and characteristic) from pictorial representation to abstract signs. Hamann adds the terms 'poetic', 'historic' and 'philosophical' to indicate parallel phases in the development of human thought.

<sup>12</sup> Hamann's satirical reference and quotation are aimed at the rationalistic philology of Michaelis (and its prolix expression).

<sup>13</sup> See the Earl of Roscommon, *Poems* (London, 1717), p. 9 (on a prose translation of Horace).

<sup>14</sup> James Howell (c. 1594–1666), *Familiar Letters* (1645–55).

<sup>15</sup> That is, Cervantes (Miguel Cervantes de Saavedra).

<sup>16</sup> *The Adventurer*, no. 49, 24 April 1753.

<sup>17</sup> The reference is to Bacon's distinction between two types of knowledge: divine revelation, and the empirical data of the senses (Bacon, *Works*, I, 520).

<sup>18</sup> See Revelation, iv, 6.      <sup>19</sup> See I Kings, xviii, 44.

*J. G. Hamann*

her who bore the news to the disciples; honour the free potter<sup>n</sup> with the Apostle to the Hellenistic scribes and philosophers of the Talmud!<sup>20</sup>

The hieroglyphic Adam is the history of the entire race in the symbolic wheel: the character of Eve is the original of Nature's beauty and of systematic economy, which is not flaunted as a sacred method, but is formed beneath the earth and lies hidden in the bowels, in the very reins of things.

Virtuosos of the present aeon, cast by the LORD GOD into a deep trance of sleep! Ye noble few! Take advantage of this sleep, and make from this Endymion's rib<sup>21</sup> the newest version of the human soul, which the bard of midnight songs<sup>22</sup> beheld in his morning dream<sup>o</sup> – but not from close at hand. The next aeon will awake like a giant from a drunken sleep to embrace your muse and rejoice and bear witness: Yea, that is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh!

If some modern literary Levite<sup>24</sup> were to take passing note of this rhapsody, I know in advance that he will bless himself like Saint Peter<sup>p</sup> at the vision of the great sheet knit at the four corners, upon which he fastened his eyes and saw four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air . . . 'Oh no, thou one possessed, thou Samaritan' – (that is how he will scold the philologist in his heart) – 'for readers of orthodox tastes, low expressions and unclean vessels<sup>25</sup> are not proper' – *Impossibilissimum est, communia proprie dicere*<sup>26</sup> – Behold, that is why an author whose taste is but eight days old, but who is circumcised,<sup>27</sup> will foul his swaddling clothes with white gentian<sup>28</sup> – to the honour of

<sup>n</sup> Romans, ix, 21.

<sup>o</sup> See Dr Young's *Letter to the Author of Grandison on Original Composition*.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>p</sup> Acts, x, II.

<sup>20</sup> The reference is to St Paul, as Apostle to the Gentiles and a scholar learned in the Scriptures.

<sup>21</sup> A combined reference to the creation of woman from Adam's rib (Genesis, II, 21–3) and to Endymion, the beautiful youth whom the moon-goddess Selene visited while he slept.

<sup>22</sup> A reference to Edward Young's (1683–1765) poem *Night Thoughts* (1742–4).

<sup>23</sup> A reference to Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition, in a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison* (1759).

<sup>24</sup> A reference to the Jewish philosopher and critic Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), friend of Lessing and contributor, with Lessing and Nicolai, to the *Letters concerning Recent Literature* (1759–65); the 'passing Levite' alludes to Luke, x, 32 (the parable of the Good Samaritan).

<sup>25</sup> See Mark, vii, 4 and 8.

<sup>26</sup> Horace, *Ars poetica*, 127 (*Difficile est proprie communia dicere*): 'It is difficult to deal adequately with familiar subjects'; or, in Hamann's context, 'It is utterly impossible to call vulgar things by their proper name.'

<sup>27</sup> See Genesis, xvii, 12.

<sup>28</sup> According to Adelung's dictionary 'white gentian' was a vulgar expression in German for the white excrement of dogs.

*'Aesthetica in nuce: A Rhapsody in Cabbalistic Prose'*

human excrement! The old Phrygian's fabled ugliness<sup>29</sup> was never so dazzling as the aesthetic beauty of Aesop the younger.<sup>30</sup> Today, Horace's typical ode to Aristus<sup>9</sup> is fulfilled, that the poet who sings the praises of sweet-smiling Lalage, whose kiss is still sweeter than her laughter, has made dandies out of Sabine, Apuline and Mauretanian monsters.<sup>31</sup> True, one can be a man without finding it necessary to become an author. But whoever expects his good friends to think of the writer apart from the man, is more inclined to poetic than to philosophical abstractions.<sup>32</sup> Therefore do not venture into the metaphysics of the fine arts without being initiated into the orgies<sup>f</sup> and Eleusinian mysteries. But the senses belong to Ceres, and to Bacchus the passions, the ancient foster-parents of Nature the beautiful:

Come to us, Bacchus, with the sweet grape cluster hanging  
 From thy horns, and, Ceres, wreath thy temples with the corn ears!<sup>8</sup>

If this rhapsody might even be honoured by the judgement of a Master in Israel,<sup>34</sup> then let us go to meet him in holy prosopopoeia,<sup>t</sup> which is as welcome in the realm of the dead as it is in the realm of the living<sup>35</sup> (. . . si NUX modo ponor in illis):<sup>36</sup>

Most Worthy and Learned Rabbi!

'The postilion of the Holy Roman Empire, who bears the motto *Relata refero* on the shield of his escutcheon,<sup>37</sup> has made me desirous of the

<sup>9</sup> Lib. I, Od. 22. [Horace, *Odes*, I, 22; ode on Lalage to Aristius Fuscus.]

<sup>f</sup> 'Orgia nec Pentheum nec Orpheum tolerant.' Bacon, *de Augm. Scient.* Lib. II, Cap. 13.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>s</sup> Tibullus Libr. II, Eleg. I. [Tibullus, *Elegies*, II, I.]

<sup>t</sup> 'L' art de personifier ouvre un champ bien moins borné et plus fertile que l'ancienne Mythologie.' Fontenelle sur la poésie en général. Tom. VIII.

<sup>29</sup> A reference to the proverbial ugliness of Aesop.

<sup>30</sup> A reference to Lessing, whose *Fables* were published in 1759.

<sup>31</sup> The geographical names are taken from Horace's ode (I, 22) to Aristius; the target of satire is again Lessing, who wrote frivolous Anacreontic poetry in his early years.

<sup>32</sup> A reference to Lessing's contention, in the *Letters concerning Recent Literature*, that the private life of an author is irrelevant to his writing (see Lessing, *Werke*, ed. Göpfert, v, 43).

<sup>33</sup> 'Orgies cannot endure either Pentheus or Orpheus' (that is, both were torn to pieces by frenzied Maenads); see Bacon, *Works*, IV, 335.

<sup>34</sup> Another reference to Michaelis; also to John, III, 10.

<sup>35</sup> Personification (prosopopoeia) was employed in ancient rhetoric not only as an everyday figure of speech, but also as a means of introducing deceased personages as spokesmen in dialogues. (Hamann himself is about to address an ironic dialogue to the 'Rabbi' Michaelis.)

<sup>36</sup> 'if as a NUT I count as one of them' (Ovid, *Nux*, 10); an allusion to the title of Hamann's essay.

<sup>37</sup> A reference to the weekly newspaper *Ordentliche Wöchentliche Kayserliche Reichs-Postzeitung*, published in the Imperial city of Frankfurt; its motto was *Relata refero* ('I report reports').

*J. G. Hamann*

second half of the homilies *da sacra poesi*.<sup>38</sup> I yearn for them, and have waited in vain until this day, even as the mother of the Hazorite captain looked out of a window for her son's chariot and cried through the lattice<sup>39</sup> – so do not think ill of me if I speak to you like the ghost in *Hamlet*, with signs and beckonings, until I have a proper occasion to declare myself in *sermones fideles*.<sup>40</sup> Will you believe without proof that *Orbis pictus*,<sup>41</sup> the book by that renowned fanatic, school-master, and philologist Amos Comenius,<sup>v</sup> and the *Exercitia* of Muzelius<sup>42</sup> are both far too learned for children still pract-is-ing their spell-ing, and verily, verily, we must become even as little children if we are to receive the spirit of truth which passeth the world's understanding, for it seeth it not, and (even if it were to see it)

<sup>u</sup> John, III, II. The following passage from Bacon, *de Augm. Lib. IX* may help to guard against the crude and ignorant idea of pronouncing the present imitation of cabbalistic style to be good or bad: 'in the free way of interpreting Scripture, there occur two excesses. The one presupposes such perfection in Scripture, that all philosophy likewise should be derived from its sources; as if all other philosophy were something profane and heathen. This distemper has principally grown up in the school of Paracelsus and some others; but the beginnings thereof came from the Rabbis and Cabalists. But these men do not gain their object; and instead of giving honour to the Scriptures as they suppose, they rather embase and pollute them . . . and as to seek divinity in philosophy is to seek the living among the dead, so to seek philosophy in divinity is to seek the dead among the living. The other method of interpretation which I set down as an excess, appears at the first glance sober and modest, yet in reality it both dishonours the Scriptures themselves, and is very injurious to the Church. This is, (in a word), when the divinely inspired Scriptures are explained in the same way as human writings. But we ought to remember that there are two things which are known to God the author of the Scriptures, but unknown to man; namely, the secrets of the heart, and the successions of time. And therefore as the dictates of Scripture are written to the hearts of men, and comprehend the vicissitudes of all ages; with an eternal and certain foreknowledge of all heresies, contradictions and differing and changing estates of the Church, as well in general as of the individual elect, they are not to be interpreted only according to the latitude and obvious sense of the place; or with respect to the occasion whereon the words were uttered; or in precise context with the words before or after; or in contemplation of the principal scope of the passage; but we must consider them to have in themselves, not only totally or collectively, but distributively also in clauses and words, infinite springs and streams of doctrines, to water every part of the Church and the souls of the faithful. For it has been well observed that the answers of our Saviour to many of the questions which were propounded to Him do not appear to the point, but as it were impertinent thereto. The reason whereof is twofold; the one, that knowing the thoughts of his questioners not as we men do by their words, but immediately and of himself, he answered their thoughts and not their words; the other, that He did not speak only to the persons then present, but to us also now living, and to men of every age and nation to whom the Gospel was to be preached. And this also holds good in other passages of Scripture.' [Bacon, *Works*, IV, 116–18].

<sup>v</sup> See Kortholt's collection of letters by Leibniz, vol. III, Ep. 29.

<sup>38</sup> Hamann refers to the newspaper announcement of the publication of the second part of Michaelis' edition of Lowth's work on Hebrew poetry (see note 6 above), which appeared in 1761.

<sup>39</sup> See Judges, v, 28.

<sup>40</sup> *sermones fideles*: true expressions (as distinct from the 'cabbalistic' style of the present work).

<sup>41</sup> *Orbis pictus sensualium* (1657) by the Czech scholar and educationalist Johann Amos Comenius (1592–1671), an illustrated textbook designed to teach children by concrete, visual methods.

<sup>42</sup> Friedrich Muzelius (1684–1753), philologist and author of school textbooks.



*'Aesthetica in nuce: A Rhapsody in Cabbalistic Prose'*

knoweth it not – Ascribe the fault to the foolishness of my way of writing, which accords so ill with the original mathematical sin of your oldest writing, and still less with the witty rebirth of your most recent works, if I borrow an example from the spelling-book which doubtless may be older than the Bible. Do the elements of the ABC lose their natural meaning, if in their infinite combinations into arbitrary signs they remind us of ideas which dwell, if not in heaven, then in our brains? But if we raise up the whole deserving righteousness of a scribe upon the dead body of the letter, what sayeth the spirit to that? Shall he be but a groom of the chamber to the dead letter, or perhaps a mere esquire to the deadening letter? God forbid! According to your copious insight into physical things,<sup>43</sup> you know better than I can remind you that the wind bloweth where it listeth – regardless of whether one hears it blowing; so one looks to the fickle weather-cock to find out where it comes from, or rather, whither it is going.'

O outrageous crime! Shall the precious work be destroyed?  
 Rather let the venerable power of the laws be infringed.  
 Bacchus and sweet Ceres, come to our aid! . . .<sup>w44</sup>

<sup>w</sup> See the poetic edict of the Emperor Octavius Augustus, according to which Virgil's last will *de abolenda Aeneide* [i.e. that the *Aeneid* should be destroyed] is said to have been nullified. One can concede whole-heartedly what Dr George Benson<sup>45</sup> has to say about the unity of sense, though he has scarcely developed his ideas, rather pulled them together with little thought, selection or smoothness. If he had tried to convey some earthly propositions about the unity of reading, his thoroughness would strike us more strongly. One cannot leaf through the four volumes of this paraphrastic explanation without a sly smile, nor miss the frequent passages where Dr Benson, the beam of popery in his own eye, inveighs against the mote in the Roman Church's, passages where he imitates our own official theologians when they applaud any blind and over-hasty bright idea honouring the creature more than the creator. First I would want to ask Dr Benson whether unity cannot exist without multiplicity? A lover of Homer is exposed to the same danger of losing his unity of sense by French paraphrasts like de la Motte or thoughtful dogmatists like Samuel Clarke. The literal or grammatical sense, the corporeal or dialectical sense, the Capernaitic<sup>46</sup> or historical sense are all profoundly mystical, and they are determined by minor circumstances of such a fleeting, arbitrary, spiritual nature that without ascending to heaven we cannot find the key to their understanding. We must not shrink from any journey across the seas or to the regions of such shadows as have believed, spoken, suffered for a day, for two, for a hundred or a thousand years – oh mysteries! –. The general history of the world can tell us hardly as much about them as can be written on the narrowest tombstone, or as can be retained by Echo, that nymph of the laconic memory. The thinker who wants to intimate to us the schemes which thoughtful writers in a critical place devise in order to convert their unbelieving brethren must have the keys to heaven and hell. Because Moses placed life in the blood,<sup>47</sup> all the baptized rabbis are afraid of the spirit and life of the prophets, which make a sacrifice of the literal understanding, the child of their heart (ἐν παραβολῇ)<sup>48</sup> and turn the streams of Eastern wisdom to blood. A dainty stomach will have no use for these stifled thoughts. – *Abstracta initiis occultis; Concreta maturitati conveniunt*, according to Bengel's *Sonnenweiser*.<sup>49</sup> (*plane pollex, non index*.<sup>50</sup>)

<sup>43</sup> A reference to Michaelis' emphasis on geographical and climatic factors in his rationalistic exegesis of the Scriptures.

*J. G. Hamann*

The opinions of the philosophers are variant readings of Nature, and the precepts of the theologians variants of the Scriptures. The author is the best interpreter of his own words. He may speak through created things and through events – or through blood and fire and vapour of smoke,<sup>x</sup> for these constitute the sacramental language.

The Book of Creation contains examples of general concepts which GOD wished to reveal to His creatures through His Creation. The Books of the Covenant contain examples of secret articles which GOD wished to reveal to man through man. The unity of the great Author is mirrored even in the dialect of his works – in all of them a tone of immeasurable height and depth! A proof of the most splendid majesty and of total self-divesting! A miracle of such infinite stillness that makes GOD resemble Nothingness, so that in all conscience one would have to deny His existence, or else be a beast.<sup>y</sup> But at the same time a miracle of such infinite power, which fulfils all in all, that we cannot escape the intensity of His affection!

If it is a question of the good taste of the devotions, which are constituted by the philosophical spirit and poetic truth, and if it is a matter of the statecraft<sup>z</sup> of the versification, can we present a more credible witness than the immortal Voltaire, who virtually declares religion to be the cornerstone of epic poetry and whose greatest lament is that his religion<sup>aa</sup> is the reverse of mythology?

<sup>x</sup> Acts, II, 19.      <sup>y</sup> Psalms, LXXIII, 21, 22.

<sup>z</sup> 'La seule politique dans un Poème doit être de faire de bons vers', says M. Voltaire in his credo on the epic [Voltaire's *Idee de la Henriade*].

<sup>aa</sup> Whatever M. Voltaire understands by religion, *Grammatici certant et adhuc sub Judice lis est*,<sup>51</sup> the philologist has as little to worry about here as his readers. We may look for it in the liberties of the Gallican Church, or in the flowers of sulphur of refined Naturalism, but neither explanation will do any harm to the unity of the sense.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted by Hamann in Latin from *Anthologia Latina*, 672, lines 4, 20, and 8. The quotation expresses Hamann's unease at the violence done to Scripture by such interpreters as Michaelis.

<sup>45</sup> George Benson (1699–1762), liberal theologian and author of various paraphrases, with commentaries, of books of the New Testament. (Michaelis had translated some of Benson's work.) Benson rejected the notion of the multiple sense of Scriptural passages, arguing for the unity of sense (that is, every passage has only a single meaning). Antoine Houdart de la Motte (1672–1731) and Samuel Clarke (1675–1729) applied the same thesis to Homer; for further details, see Sven-Aage Jørgensen's notes to his edition of Hamann's *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* and *Aesthetica in nuce* (Stuttgart, 1968), pp. 102–4.

<sup>46</sup> Capernaïtic: pertaining to the doctrine of transubstantiation.

<sup>47</sup> See Leviticus, xvii, II.      <sup>48</sup> 'as an example'.

<sup>49</sup> 'The abstract is appropriate to dark beginnings, the concrete to maturity': inaccurate quotation from Johann Albrecht Bengel's (1687–1752) *Gnomon* [= German *Sonnenweiser*] *Novi Testamenti* (1742). Hamann wishes to suggest by this quotation that the true prophetic sense of the Scriptures, denied by the literalist Benson, will come to light in the fullness of time.