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# *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*

EDITED BY

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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 Aesthetik 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.

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.

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>g</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>h</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.

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 had never been to protect man from the elements, since it was worn in countries whose climate made such protection unnecessary.



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 vaporous 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 Howell'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.

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.

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>q</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>r</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>s</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>q</sup> Lib. 1, Od. 22. [Horace, *Odes*, 1, 22; ode on Lalage to Aristius Fuscus.]

<sup>r</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 (1, 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*, 19); 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').

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.

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 Capernaïtic<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 writ 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 πᾶσι βολῆ) <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.

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.

Bacon represented mythology as a winged boy of Aeolus, the sun at his back, and with clouds for his footstool, fleeing away the time piping on a Grecian flute.<sup>bb</sup>

But Voltaire, High Priest in the Temple of Taste, can draw conclusions as compellingly as Caiaphas,<sup>cc</sup> and thinks more fruitfully than Herod.<sup>dd</sup> For if our theology is not worth as much as mythology, then it is simply impossible for us to match the poetry of the Heathens, let alone excel it<sup>54</sup> – which would be most appropriate to our duty and to our vanity. But if our poetry is worthless, our history will look leaner than Pharaoh's kine; but fairy-tales and court gazettes will take the place of our historians. And it is not worth the trouble of thinking of philosophy; all the more systematic calendars instead! – more than spider-webs in a ruined castle. Every idle fellow who can just about manage dog-Latin or Switzer-German, but whose name is stamped by the whole number M or half the number of the academic beast<sup>55</sup> is a blatant liar, and the benches and the clods sitting on them would have to cry 'outrage!' if the former only had ears, and the latter, ironically called listeners, only exercised their ears to listen with –

Where is Euthyphro's whip, timid jade?  
So that my cart does not get stuck . . .

<sup>bb</sup> 'I take mythological fables to be a kind of breath from the traditions of more ancient nations, which fell into the pipes of the Greeks.' *De Augm. Scient.* Lib. II, Cap. 13 [Bacon, *Works*, IV, 317].

<sup>cc</sup> 'Qu'un homme ait du jugement ou non, il profite également de vos ouvrages: il ne lui faut que de la MEMOIRE', is what a writer who utters prophecy has said to M. Voltaire's face. 'The rhapsodist should not forget this': Socrates in Plato's *Ion* [*Ion*, 539e].

<sup>dd</sup> Photius (in his *Amphilochii Quaest.* CXX, which Johann Christoph Wolf has added to his cornucopia of critical and philological whimsies)<sup>52</sup> looks for a prophecy in the words of Herod to the Wise Men of the East – 'that I may come and worship him also' – and compares them with Caiaphas's statement in John XI, 49–52. He observes: 'There are perhaps other remarks of this kind, spoken by one of evil intention and murderous heart, which are ultimately prophetic.' Photius conceives Herod as a Janus bifrons,<sup>53</sup> who represented the Gentiles by his race and the Jews by his office. Many malicious and empty utterances (on which both master and servant pride themselves) might appear in a wholly different light if we were to ask ourselves from time to time whether they are speaking of their own accord or whether they should be understood as prophetic.

<sup>50</sup> 'Plainly a thumb, not an index finger': pun from Cicero, *Epistles to Atticus*, XIII, 46, as a humorous indication (*index*) of the importance of the preceding quotation.

<sup>51</sup> Horace, *Ars poetica*, line 78: 'scholars argue, and the case is so far undecided'. Hamann now transfers his satire to Voltaire as a leader of the rationalistic Enlightenment.

<sup>52</sup> Johann Christoph Wolf (1683–1739) quotes the passage from Photius (820–91) in his *Curae philologicae et criticae*, IV (Hamburg, 1735).

<sup>53</sup> Janus bifrons: the Roman god of doorways, with two faces looking in opposite directions.

<sup>54</sup> A reference to the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*.

<sup>55</sup> Typically oblique reference to the academic degrees of Master (M) and Doctor (D, the Roman numeral for 500, and half of M or 1,000).

Mythology here, mythology there!<sup>ec</sup> Poetry is an imitation of Nature the beautiful – and the revelations of Nieuwentyt,<sup>56</sup> Newton and Buffon will surely be able to replace a tasteless mythology? Indeed they should, and they would too, if they could. So why does it not happen? – Because it is impossible, say your poets.

Nature works through the senses and the passions. But whoso maims these instruments, how can he feel? Are crippled sinews fit for movement?

Your lying, murderous philosophy has cleared Nature out of the way, and why do you demand that we should imitate her? – So that you can renew the pleasure by murdering the young students of Nature too.

Verily, you delicate critics of art, go on asking what is truth, and make for the door, because you cannot wait for an answer to this question. Your hands are always washed, whether you are about to eat bread, or whether you have just pronounced a death-sentence. Do you not also ask: what means did you employ to clear Nature out of the way? Bacon accuses you of flaying her with your abstractions. If Bacon is a witness to the truth, well then, stone him – and cast clods of earth or snowballs at his shade – If one single truth, like the sun, prevaieth, it is day. But if you behold instead of this One truth, as many as the sands of the seashore; and here close by, a little light<sup>ff</sup> which excels in brightness<sup>gg</sup> a whole host of suns; that is a night beloved of poets and thieves. The poet<sup>hh</sup> at the beginning of days is the same as the thief<sup>ii</sup> at the end of days.

All the colours of the most beautiful world grow pale if once you extinguish that light, the firstborn of Creation. If the belly is your god, then even the hairs on your head are under his guardianship. Every created thing becomes alternately your sacrifice and your idol. Cast down against its will, but hoping still, it groans beneath your yoke, or at your vanity; it

<sup>ec</sup> Fontenelle sur la Poésie en général. 'Quand on saura employer d'une manière nouvelle les images fabuleuses, il est sûr qu'elles feront un grand effet.'

<sup>ff</sup> '... et notho... lumine...' Catull. *Carm. Sec. ad Dian.* ['and with borrowed light', Catullus, *Hymn to Diana*, II. 15 f.]

<sup>gg</sup> '... And yet more bright  
Shines out the Julian star, as moon outglows  
Each lesser light'

[Horace, Odes, I, 12, lines 46–8;  
translation by John Marshall]

<sup>hh</sup> II Corinthians, IV, 6. <sup>ii</sup> Revelation, XVI, 15.

<sup>56</sup> Bernhard Nieuwentyt (1654–1720), Dutch scientist and physico-theologian; he, Newton and Buffon are named simply as representatives of modern science, the Enlightenment's faith in which Hamann did not share.



does its best to escape your tyranny, and longs even in the most passionate embrace for that freedom with which the beasts paid Adam homage, when GOD brought them unto man to see what he would call them; for whatsoever man would call them, that was the name thereof.

This analogy of man to the Creator endows all creatures with their imprint and their stamp, on which faithfulness and faith in all Nature depends. The more vividly this idea of the image of the invisible GOD<sup>jj</sup> dwells in our heart, the more able we are to perceive his loving-kindness in his creatures; and to taste, and see it and grasp it with our hands. Every impression of Nature in man is not only a memorial, but also a warrant of fundamental truth: who is the LORD. Every counter-effect of man in GOD's created world is charter and seal that we partake of the divine nature,<sup>kk</sup> and that we are his offspring.<sup>ll</sup>

Oh for a muse like a refiner's fire, and like a fuller's soap!<sup>mmm</sup> – She will dare to purify the natural use of the senses from the unnatural use of abstractions,<sup>nn</sup> which distorts our concepts of things, even as it suppresses the name of the Creator and blasphemes against Him. I speak with you, o ye Greeks, for you deem yourselves wiser than the chamberlains with the gnostic key; go on and try to read the *Iliad* if you have first, with your abstractions, sifted out the two vowels alpha and omega, and then give me your opinion of the poet's sense and sound!

Sing, -G-ddess, the wr-th -f Peleus's s-n -chilles<sup>57</sup>

Behold, the scribes of worldly wisdom, great and small, have overwhelmed the text of Nature, like the Great Flood. Were not all its beauties and riches

<sup>jj</sup> 'the image of the invisible God', Colossians, 1, 15.

<sup>kk</sup> 'partakers of the divine nature', II Peter, 1, 4; 'to be conformed to the image of his Son', Romans, VIII, 29.

<sup>ll</sup> Acts, XVII, 27, etc. <sup>mmm</sup> Malachi, III, 2.

<sup>nn</sup> Bacon, *de interpretatione Naturae et regno Hominis*, Aphorism. CXXIV: 'But I say that those foolish and apish images of worlds which the fancies of men have created in philosophical systems must be utterly scattered to the winds, Be it known then how vast a difference there is between the Idols of the human mind and the Ideas of the divine. The former are nothing more than arbitrary abstractions; the latter are the creator's own stamp upon creation, impressed and defined in matter by true and exquisite lines. Truth therefore and utility are here the very same things: and the works of nature themselves are of greater value as pledges of truth than as contributing to the comforts of life' [Bacon, *Novum organum*, 1, Aphorism 124, in *Works*, IV, 110]. Elsewhere Bacon repeats this reminder that we should use the works of nature not only as amenities of living but also as pledges of truth.

<sup>57</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 1, I; Hamann omits the alphas and omegas in quoting the Greek, producing an effect similar to that of deleting the 'a's and 'o's from the English translation 'Sing, O Goddess, the wrath of Peleus's son Achilles'.

bound to turn into water? But you perform far greater miracles than ever delighted the gods,<sup>00</sup> with oak-trees<sup>PP</sup> and pillars of salt, with petrifications, alchemical transformations and fables, to convince the human race. You make Nature blind, that she might be your guide! Or rather, you have with your Epicureanism<sup>58</sup> put out the light of your own eyes, that you might be taken for prophets who spin your inspirations and expositions out of your own heads. Oh, you would have dominion over Nature, and you bind your own hands and feet with your Stoicism,<sup>59</sup> that you may warble all the more movingly in your Poetic Miscellanies at the diamond fetters of fate.

If the passions are limbs of dishonour, do they therefore cease to be weapons of virility? Have you a wiser understanding of the letter of reason than that allegorical chamberlain of the Alexandrian Church had of the letter of the Scriptures when he castrated himself in order to reach heaven?<sup>60</sup> The prince of this aeon takes his favourites from among the greatest offenders against themselves; his court fools are the worst enemies of Nature in her beauty; true, she has Corybants and Gauls as her pot-bellied priests, but *esprits forts* as her true worshippers.<sup>61</sup>

A philosopher such as Saul<sup>99</sup> sets up laws for celibates – passion alone gives hands, feet and wings to abstractions and hypotheses, and to pictures and signs gives spirit life, and tongue. Where will you find a swifter syllogism? Where is the rolling thunder of eloquence begotten? And where its companion, the single-syllabled lightning-flash?<sup>77</sup>

<sup>00</sup> 'for the gods also have a sense of humour'. Socrates in *Cratylus* [Plato, *Cratylus*, 406 c.]

<sup>PP</sup> Socrates to Phaedrus: 'They used to say, my friend, that the words of the oak in the holy place of Zeus at Dodona were the first prophetic utterances. The people of that time, not being so wise as you young folks, were content in their simplicity to hear an oak or a rock, provided only it spoke the truth; but to you, perhaps, it makes a difference who the speaker is and where he comes from, for you do not consider only whether his words are true or not.' [Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275 b–c; translated by H. N. Fowler, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1914)]

<sup>99</sup> I Samuel, xiv, 24.

<sup>77</sup> 'Brief as the lightning in the collied night,  
That (in a spleen) unfolds heav'n and earth  
And ere man has power to say: Behold!  
The jaws of darkness do devour it up.'  
Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

<sup>58</sup> A reference to such secular philosophers and freethinkers of the Enlightenment as Gassendi, La Mettrie, and Frederick the Great (who much admired the Epicurean philosophy of Lucretius).

<sup>59</sup> A reference to modern scientific determinism, as a counterpart to the determinism of the ancient Stoics.

<sup>60</sup> An allusion to Matthew, xix, 12 and to the Church Father Origen (c. 185–c. 254), who castrated himself for the sake of religion.

Why should I paraphrase *one* word for you with an infinity of them, you readers whose estate, honour and dignity make you so ignorant? For they can observe for themselves the phenomena of passion everywhere in human society; even as everything, however remote, can touch our hearts in a particular direction; even as each individual feeling extends over the range of all external objects;<sup>ss</sup> even as we can make the most general instances our own by applying them to ourselves personally, and expand any private circumstance into the public spectacle of heaven and earth. Each individual truth grows into the foundation of a design more miraculously than the fabled cow-hide grew into the extent of a state, and a plan greater than the hemisphere comes together in the focus of perception. In short, the perfection of the design, the strength of the execution – the conception and birth of new ideas and new expressions – the labour and the rest of the wise man, the consolation and the loathing he finds in them, lie hidden from our senses in the fruitful womb of the passions.

'The philologist's public, his world of readers, seems to resemble that lecture-hall which Plato filled by himself.'<sup>tt</sup> Antimachus continued confidently, as it is written:

like the leech which does not drop off the skin until it is sated.<sup>63</sup>

Just as if our learning were a mere remembering, our attention is constantly being drawn to the monuments of the ancients, to shape our minds through memory. But why stop at the fountain of the Greeks, all riddled with holes as it is, and abandon the most living sources of antiquity? Perhaps we do not really know ourselves what it is in the Greeks and Romans that we admire even to idolatry.<sup>64</sup> This is where that accursed lying<sup>uu</sup> in our symbolic textbooks comes from, for to this day they are daintily bound in

<sup>ss</sup> 'C'est l'effet ordinaire de notre ignorance de nous peindre tout semblable à nous et de repandre nos portraits dans toute la nature', says Fontenelle in his *Histoire du Théâtre Franc*. 'Une grande passion est une espèce d'Ame, immortelle à sa manière et presque indépendante des Organes', Fontenelle in *Eloge de M. du Verney*.

<sup>tt</sup> 'for Plato alone is worth all of them to me'. Cicero, *Brutus*.<sup>62</sup> <sup>uu</sup> Psalms, LIX, 12.

<sup>61</sup> The 'prince of this aeon' is Frederick the Great; the 'court fools', 'Gauls', and *esprits forts* are the French freethinkers (La Mettrie, Voltaire, etc.) with whom Frederick associated.

<sup>62</sup> Antimachus, in the anecdote alluded to, was reading a long poem, and all of his audience except Plato left the lecture room. He then made the remark quoted by Hamann (Cicero, *Brutus*, LI, 191).

<sup>63</sup> Horace, *Ars poetica*, line 476 (the final line of the poem).

<sup>64</sup> An allusion to Winckelmann, and an example of Hamann's hostility towards neo-classicism.

sheep's parchment, but within, verily, within they are whited sepulchres and full of hypocritical wickedness.<sup>vv</sup>

We treat the ancients like a man who gazes on his visible face in a looking-glass, but who, having looked upon it, straightway goes and forgets how he was formed. A painter sits for his self-portrait in a wholly different spirit. Narcissus (the bulbous plant of *beaux esprits*) loves his picture more than his life.<sup>ww</sup>

Salvation comes from the Jews.<sup>66</sup> I had not yet seen their philosophical writings, but I was certain of finding sounder concepts in them – to your shame, Christians! Yet you feel the sting of that worthy name by which ye are called<sup>xx</sup> as little as you feel the honour GOD did himself in taking the vile name of Son of Man.

Nature and Scripture then are the materials of the beautiful spirit which creates and imitates – Bacon compares matter with Penelope. Her importunate suitors are the scribes and philosophers.<sup>67</sup> The tale of the beggar who appeared at the court of Ithaca you know, for has not Homer translated it into Greek, and Pope into English verse?

But how are we to raise the defunct language of Nature from the dead? By making pilgrimages to the fortunate lands of Arabia,<sup>68</sup> and by going on crusades to the East, and by restoring their magic art. To steal it, we must employ old women's cunning, for that is the best sort. Cast your eyes down, ye idle bellies, and read what Bacon has to say about the magic art.<sup>yy</sup> Silken feet in dancing shoes will not bear you on such a weary journey, so be ready to accept guidance from this hyperbole.<sup>zz</sup>

<sup>vv</sup> See Part II of the *Letters concerning Recent Literature* (*Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend*) passim, a little here, a little there, but mainly p. 131.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>ww</sup> Ovid, *Metamorph.*, Lib. III. [Hamann, in this footnote, goes on to quote Ovid's version of the myth of Narcissus at length, from *Metamorphoses*, III, 415–510.]

<sup>xx</sup> James, II, 7.

<sup>yy</sup> 'But indeed the chief business of magic was to note the correspondences between the architectures and fabrics of things natural and things civil. Neither are these only similitudes (as men of narrow observation may perhaps conceive them to be), but plainly the same footsteps of nature treading or printing upon different subjects and matters.' So Bacon in the third book of *De augmentis scientiarum*, in which he claims to explain the magic art also by means of a 'science of the universal consents of things', and in the light of this, the appearance of the Wise Men at Bethlehem. [Bacon, *Works*, IV, 339 and 366.]

<sup>zz</sup> I Corinthians, XII, 31: 'and yet I show unto you a more excellent way'.

<sup>65</sup> The reference is to an (anonymous) attack by Nicolai, in the *Letters* referred to, on a volume of poems which had impressed Hamann favourably. Hamann throws back at the anonymous critic some of the abuse the latter had directed at the poems. For further details, see Hans-Martin Lumpp, *Philologia crucis. Zu Johann Georg Hamanns Auffassung von der Dichtkunst* (Tübingen, 1970), pp. 87–9.

<sup>66</sup> See John, IV, 22.

O Thou who tearest the heavens and camest down from them, before whose arrival the mountains melt as hot water boils on a bright fire, that Thy name shall be proclaimed among its enemies, who nevertheless call themselves by it; and that anointed heathens may learn to tremble before the wonders that Thou doest, which are beyond their understanding. Let new false lights rise in the Orient! Let the pert cleverness of their magi be roused by new stars into bearing their treasures in person to our country. Myrrh, frankincense and their gold, which mean more to us than their magic art! Let kings be gulled by it, and their philosophical muse rage at children and children's lore;<sup>69</sup> but let not Rachel weep in vain! –

Why should we swallow death from the pots,<sup>70</sup> to make the garnish palatable for the children of the prophets? And how shall we appease the vexed spirit<sup>71</sup> of the Scripture: 'Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?'<sup>72</sup> Neither the dogmatic thoroughness of the orthodox Pharisees nor the poetic extravagance of the free-thinking Sadducees will renew the mission of the spirit which inspired GOD's holy men (in season or out of season) to speak and write. That dearly loved disciple of GOD's only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, has declared it to us:<sup>73</sup> that the spirit of prophecy liveth in the testimony of the name of the ONE GOD, who alone maketh us blessed and through whom alone we may inherit the promise of this and the next life; the name which no one knows except he who receives it, the name which is above all names, that all things which dwell in Heaven and upon the earth and beneath the earth should bow their knee in the name of JESUS; and that all tongues should confess that JESUS CHRIST is the LORD to the glory of GOD the creator, to whom be praise in all eternity, Amen!

Thus the testimony of JESUS is the spirit of prophecy,<sup>aaa</sup> and the first sign by which He reveals the majesty of His humble figure transforms

<sup>aaa</sup> Revelation, XIX, 10.

<sup>67</sup> See Bacon, *Works*, IV, 319–20: Pan (Nature) is the son of Penelope (formless matter) and her suitors (the Platonic Ideas or Forms), according to one myth discussed by Bacon, who himself suggests that Nature is rather the son of matter and Mercury (the Logos or Word of God). Hamann's following sentence presents Odysseus, the true master, as a typological forerunner of Christ, appearing in lowly form (as a beggar).

<sup>68</sup> Allusion to a Danish scientific expedition (1761–7) to 'Arabia felix' (Southern Arabia) under Carstens Niebuhr (1733–1815), which was mounted at the suggestion of Michaelis, who remains the chief target of Hamann's satire.

<sup>69</sup> Another allusion to Frederick the Great and his circle of *philosophes*.

<sup>70</sup> See II Kings, IV, 38–42.      <sup>71</sup> See Isaiah, LXIII, 10.      <sup>72</sup> Psalms, L, 13.

<sup>73</sup> See John, I, 18 and XIII, 23–5.

the holy books of the covenant into fine old wine, which deceives the steward's judgement<sup>74</sup> and strengthens the weak stomach of the critics. 'If you read the prophetic books without understanding Christ', says the Punic<sup>bbb</sup> Father of the Church, 'what insipidity and foolishness you will find! If you understand Christ in them, then what you read will not only be to your taste, but will also intoxicate you.'<sup>80</sup> – 'But to put a curb on the proud and wicked spirits here, Adam must surely have been dead before he would suffer this thing and drink the strong wine. Therefore have a care that you drink no wine while you are still a suckling child; every doctrine has its measure, time and age.'<sup>ccc</sup>

<sup>bbb</sup> See pp. 66 and 67 of the *Answer to the Question as to the Influence of Opinions on Language and of Language on Opinions* which received the prize awarded by the Royal Academy of Sciences in 1759.<sup>75</sup> Also to be consulted in this connection: *Ars Punica sive Flos Linguarum: The Art of Punning, or the Flower of Languages in seventy-nine Rules for the farther Improvement of Conversation and Help of Memory*. By the Labour and Industry of TUM PUN-SIBI.<sup>76</sup>

'Bons-mots promoted by an equivocation are deemed the very wittiest, though not always concerned with jesting, but often even with what is important . . . for the power to divert the force of a word into a sense quite different from that in which other folk understand it seems to indicate a man of talent' (Cicero, *De Orat.*, lib. 2) [Cicero, *De Oratore*, II, 250 and 254].

See the second edition [of *Ars Punica*], 1719, octavo, The author of this learned work (of which I have, unfortunately, only a defective copy) is Swift, the glory of the priesthood ('The glory of the Priesthood and the shame!', *Essay on Criticism*).<sup>77</sup> It begins with definitions: logical, physical, and moral. In the logical sense, 'Punning is essentially something of which it is said that it applies to something else or is in any manner applied to something else.' According to the natural science of the extravagant and whimsical Cardanus, 'Punning is an Art of Harmonious Jingling upon Words, which passing in at the Ears and falling upon the Diaphragma, excites a titillatory Motion in those Parts, and this being convey'd by the Animal Spirits into the Muscles of the Face raises the Cockles of the Heart.' But according to Casuistry, it is 'a Virtue, that most effectually promotes the End of good Fellowship'. An example of this artful virtue can be found among others of the same ilk in the answer quoted above to the Punic comparison between Mahomet the Prophet and Augustine the Church Father, which resembles a hybrid lover of poetry, with an imagination half inspirational, half scholastic, who is not nearly learned enough to appreciate the use of figurative language properly, let alone be able to scrutinize religious experience.<sup>78</sup> The good Bishop spoke Hebrew without knowing it, just as M. Jourdain spoke prose without knowing it, and just as even today this raising and answering of learned questions without knowing it, can reveal the barbarism of the age and the treachery of the heart, at the cost of this profound truth: that we are all sinners, and devoid of the glory that is ascribed to us, the lying prophet of Arabia as much as the good African shepherd, as well as that clever wit (whom I should have named first of all) who thought up that far-fetched comparison between the two believers in providence by putting together such ridiculous parallel passages according to the Punic theory of reason of our modern cabbalists, for whom every fig-leaf yields a sufficient reason, and every insinuation a fulfilment.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>ccc</sup> Our Luther's words (reading Augustine, it is said, spoiled his taste somewhat), taken from his famous Preface to the Epistle to the Romans,<sup>81</sup> which I never weary of reading, just as I never tire of his Preface to the Psalms. I have introduced this passage by means of an accommodation, as they say, because in it Luther speaks of the abyss of Divine Providence, and, after his admirable custom, rests upon his dictum: 'that one cannot without suffering the cross and the pains of death trade Providence against God without harm and secret rage'.

<sup>74</sup> See John, II. 8–10.

After GOD had grown weary of speaking to us through Nature and Scripture, through created things and prophets, through reasonings and figures, through poets and seers, and had grown short of breath, He spoke to us at last in the evening of days through His Son – yesterday and today! – until the promise of His coming, no longer as a servant, shall be fulfilled –

Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ,  
Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father,  
Thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb.<sup>ddd 82</sup>

We would pass a judgement for slander if we were to call our clever sophists fools and idiots when they describe the Law-Giver of the Jews as an ass's head and when they compare the proverbs of their great singers to dove's dung.<sup>84</sup> But the day of the LORD, a Sabbath darker than the midnight in which indomitable armadas are but as a stubble-field – the gentlest zephyr, herald of the last Thunderstorm – as poetical as the LORD of Hosts could think and express it – will drown the blasts of even the sturdiest trumpeter – Abraham's joy shall reach its pinnacle – his cup shall run over, then with his own hand GOD shall wipe away Abraham's last tear, more precious than all the pearls wantonly wasted by the last Queen of Egypt;<sup>85</sup> the last tear shed over the last ashes of Sodom and the

<sup>ddd</sup> The devout reader will be able to complete the hymnic cadence of this section for himself. My memory abandons me out of sheer wilfulness; 'Ever hastening to the end . . . and what he cannot hope to accomplish . . . he omits'.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>75</sup> The prize essay referred to is by Michaelis, and the reference is to remarks by him on Augustine's Punic (Carthaginian) origin and native language. Hamann goes on to pun on the word 'Punic' in his footnote, and makes fun, at considerable length, of Michaelis' learned deliberations.

<sup>76</sup> Hamann, as his subsequent comments make clear, shares the belief of his contemporaries that the work was by Jonathan Swift. It is now ascribed to Thomas Sheridan (see Jørgensen *Sokratische Denkmüdig Keiten*, p. 132).

<sup>77</sup> Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, line 694 (on Erasmus).

<sup>78</sup> All of this is oblique criticism of Michaelis and his attempts to rationalize Biblical references to miracles etc. as merely figurative expressions.

<sup>79</sup> Satirical references to the philosophical doctrines of the Enlightenment such as the Leibnizian principle of sufficient reason.

<sup>80</sup> The quotation is from St Augustine's commentary (IX, 3) on St John: see J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, xxxv, 1379 f.

<sup>81</sup> See Martin Luther, *Vorreden zur Heiligen Schrift* (Munich, 1934), pp. 78–93. Luther warns, in the passage referred to, against philosophical speculation on the mysteries of predestination and divine grace.

<sup>82</sup> The quotation is from Luther's translation of the *Te Deum*.

<sup>83</sup> Fragmentary quotation from Horace, *Ars poetica*, lines 148 ff. <sup>84</sup> See II Kings, vi, 25.

<sup>85</sup> The reference is to Cleopatra, who dissolved a pearl to drink Antony's health.

fate of the last martyr<sup>ccc</sup> GOD will wipe from the eye of Abraham, from the father of the faithful.

That day of the LORD, which gives the Christian courage to preach the LORD's death, will publish and make known the most stupid village idiots among all the angels for whom the fires of hell are waiting. The devils believe and tremble! But your senses, crazed by the cunning of reason, tremble not. You laugh when Adam the sinner chokes on the apple, and Anacreon the wise man on the grape-pip. Do ye not laugh when the geese fill the Capitol with alarm, and the ravens feed the lover of his country, whose spirit was Israel's artillery and cavalry? You congratulate yourselves secretly on your blindness when GOD on the cross is numbered among the criminals, and when some outrage in Geneva or Rome, in the opera or the mosque,<sup>86</sup> reaches its apotheosis or purgation.

Paint two snakes! Consecrated ground, my lads:

Not the place for a piss! I take my leave . . . <sup>87</sup>

(Persius)

The birth of a genius will be celebrated, as usual, to the accompanying martyrdom of innocents – I take the liberty of comparing rhyme and metre to innocent children, for our most recent poetry seems to put them in mortal danger.

If rhyme belongs to the same genus as paronomasia and word-play,<sup>fff</sup> then its origins must be almost as old as the nature of language and our sense-impressions. The poet who finds the yoke of rhyme too heavy to bear is not therefore justified in denigrating its talents.<sup>ggg</sup> The failed rhyme might otherwise have given this frivolous pen as much occasion for a satire as Plato may have had to immortalize Aristophanes's hiccups in *The Symposium*, or Scarron his own hiccups in a sonnet.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>ccc</sup> II Peter, II, 8.

<sup>fff</sup> See note 76 of the editor, Lowth's *Praelect.*, xv; Algarotti, vol. III.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>ggg</sup> Gently rhyme creepeth into the heart, if 'tis not under compulsion; Harmony's staff and adornment, speech in our mem'ry it fixes. *Elegien und Briefe*, Strasburg, 1760.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>86</sup> That is, in the Catholic mass (Rome) or the austere Calvinist church (Geneva).

<sup>87</sup> Persius, Satires, I, 113; snakes, sacred to the house, were used as a sign to warn against desecration. Here, the satirist responds ironically to protests by influential persons against his attacks.

<sup>88</sup> Michaelis, in his edition of Lowth, discusses wordplay at length, and considers it of little aesthetic merit; the second reference is to Francesco Algarotti's (1712–64) *Oeuvres*, III, 76 (*Essai sur la rime*).

<sup>89</sup> The collection of poems quoted is by Ludwig Heinrich von Nicolay (1737–1820).

<sup>90</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 185c–e; Paul Scarron (1610–60), French poet.