Abstract of PhD Dissertation

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The Bookman: Johann Georg Hamann

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AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

In my thesis I analyse Johann Georg Hamann’s *The Crusades of the Philologist* from the perspective of its covers and peripheral textual elements.

As a young man Hamann was a prototype *bookman*: a passionate consumer, reader, collector and also a dealer of books – a perfect representative of the so-called extensive reading habits of the age.

At the age of 28 however he reread the Bible closely and alienated from his former lifestyle. The universe of books and the universal library were replaced for him by the Scriptures: the bookman was transformed into the *man of the Book*.

Realizing that his radical religious thinking is in sharp contrast with the intellectual atmosphere of the age of Enlightenment he chose a somewhat concealing way of writing. Compensating for this fact he used supplementary means of expression: masks, counterparts and also he transformed his main intellectual characteristics into certain components of his books – *he presented himself in book-format*. This last layer of the expression “bookman” is the main theme of my thesis.

More precisely as it takes place in *The Crusades of the Philologist* and in its central piece, *Aesthetica in nuce* in the form of covers, titles, subtitles, mottos, graphic and typographic motives, forewords and epilogues. Other writings of the book come into consideration only from this perspective. Philological completeness is not my aim, instead I try to catch a recognizable and proportionate intellectual portrait.

The structure of my thesis follows Hamann’s intensions, which means I have not changed the order of the peripheral textual elements. However I cannot promise a strict linear structure. The main reason is the complexity of inter-textual relations in the oeuvre which makes repetition and modification of motives inevitable. Another factor is that the above mentioned changes in Hamann’s personality weren’t unequivocal: the
man of the Book could not have a definitive win over the bookman. They fought for supremacy until the very end of Hamann’s life.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

In the first part of my thesis I analyze the cover of the book and the peripheral textual elements which refer to the whole volume.

The cover represents the continuity of pagan and Christian cultural history. The missing name of the author “stands for” a basically spoilt author-reader relation but also for inspired authorship.

The title shows Hamann’s quijotism which is based on his fight against rational supremacy in the fields of philosophy and theology. As a philologist he frees his activities from the strictly defined scientific approach towards texts, instead paraphrasing Paul’s Letter to the Jews he defines the ideal philologist as “the lover of the Word”.

The Vergil-motto on the front cover places both the book and Hamann’s character into the context of Salvation.

Pan’s figure stands for Hamann’s concept of nature: a non-verbal form of Revelation, a book. The visual, sensuous shape of things is the speech of the Creator through the creatures – that is why Hamann fiercely opposed the idealization of nature (or the human body in the long history of theology).

In chapter 6 and 7 I discuss the men who had the greatest influence on Hamann: Socrates and Luther with special emphasis on the dialogue-form of their writings. In Luther’s case this meant a quasi conversation with the aim of helping the reader to understand the sacred text and its unquestionable truth and also the application of principles to their daily routines.
For Socrates though there were no texts of sacred truth. His dialogues were based on suspicion against the work of mind and intellect, its dynamics stemmed from intentional misunderstandings and failures.

Hamann also took his method of reading difficult texts from Socrates. The first step is the differentiation between the known and unknown parts of the text, which makes the reader capable to move on and make non-cognitive deductions from the former to the later parts.

In the 18th century both the constant suspicion against the capacity of mind in secular texts and the acceptance of absolute authority of sacred texts hit a provocative note in intellectual life.

In the second part of my thesis I have a close look of the peripheral textual elements of the most important piece in the volume: *Aesthetica in nuce*. The most essential subject in these chapters is the phenomenon of aisthesis. In Hamann’s views this phenomenon makes possible the sensuous appearance of the Logos from nature as a whole to the style of his own writings.

This fact has a major influence on the nature of human understanding. Hamann says that man can comprehend nature only through his senses and passions, and these senses and passion can understand only images, and also they can communicate only with the help of images (metaphors). This is possible in poetic language because its kyriiological signs are the images of objects and also share the essential qualities of the represented objects.

Hamann’s views nowadays sound strange because they postulate continuity from the outside world (object) trough the human body which perceives it to the concepts of the mind and passions and also to human speech determined by the latter two. This vision is supported by a chain of theological thoughts:

- creation was done by the Logos (language), objects were originally words and nature is a kind of speech to the creature trough the creature itself;
- man was created as an imitation of the Lord, as a consequence also shares the spirit and language of God;
- metaphorical speech which is based on senses and passions – with the help of its kyriological signs – retains its original connection with the objects of nature;
- speech (language) – in case of pious attitude – can be supported by inspiration.

After all these I show that Hamann's writing/style intentionally works against the corruption of the language of his age. He returns to the metaphoric language of the Bible. His centos “have the hermeneutic purpose of making possible the interpretation through images and giving a sensuous character to Hamann's passionate language” (Max Baeumer). Hamann's own definition of his writing's genre – rhapsody in kabbalistic prose – refers mostly to the style. To the “spermologos” of Paul whose languages imitates the orderly disorder of nature which also dominates the language of the Bible.

And all these return again when Hamann defines the language and the task of the poet: to collect and arrange the scattered pieces of the first Poet (God). This means the imitation of the divine logic which says that the question how to speak is more important than the question what to say.

With the last two mottos (from Horace and the Book of Job) again Hamann turns to the rhetoric device of metaschematism and proclaims the validity of inspired speech in theological-philosophical debates. He makes clear his concept of the genius which is very different from the autonomous genius of the Enlightenment and Sturm und Drang authors. In Hamann's works the genius appears as “the analogy of man and his creator”. That's why the activities of the genius can not be subordinated to the principles and rules of taste. On the contrary masterpieces break the rules of common taste and set their own rules that root in their own substance (Mendelssohn-debate).
The mottos also reflect that Hamann thought the category to be valid for himself and his works – everything which he wrote on inspiration, poetic language and sacred literature in the broad sense can be read as self-reflection.

After all this we can answer the question: why exactly aesthetics forms the centre of Hamann's thinking? Hamann the bookman can most naturally cooperate with the man of the Book in this faculty of thinking. His own aesthetics is dominated by the ambition of driving back art (literature) to its original position of the medium – between the human and the divine spheres.

His crusades in the field of cultural criticism are fought not only by the usual theoretical apparatus but also by the art of language: his poetic, metaphorical prose uses biblical language to effect the senses and passions of his readers.

METHODOLOGY

In my dissertation I study Hamann and his oeuvre only through the above mentioned peripheral textual elements and their motives. Analysing them I discuss the tradition which forms Hamann's ideas (the 18th century interpretation of Socrates and Pan) and also certain areas of the tradition that he vehemently opposed (debates on mimesis, genius, language, science, theology or philosophy).

I show the origin of the writings in the context of philology, cultural and literary history.

Essential sources of my work were the catalogues of Hamann's library (Biga Bibliothecarum and N. Imendörffer's work) and also his extensive correspondence which helped a lot in navigating through his intertextual labyrinth.

His attraction to particularities and his aim to use religious principles in everyday life, together with the bookman's struggle with the man of the
Book make necessary to shed some light to biographical details (J. Nadler, H-J. Salmony, R. Unger).

The reception of Hamann's oeuvre is really extensive, in my work I mentioned only the most important comments (Herder, Goethe, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche) especially where the analyses of the peripheral textual elements results in a somewhat new interpretation.

In the interpretation of Hamann's texts and motives there were some unavoidable monographs (Éva Kocziszky, W. Koepp, E. Schumacher, M. Seils) and also some full-length analyses of *Aesthetica in nuce* (S. A. Jørgensen, M-T. Küsters, M. Lumpp).

At the beginning of my work I had the hypothesis that Hamann the bookman/man of the Book lined out an intellectual self-portrait editing his volume. As I advanced from chapter to chapter with my interpretations this hypothesis turned out to be true.

“Speak up, so I can see you”, said Socrates and Hamann follows this path. He gives a sensuous appearance to his intellectual self. In this case not in the form of the body or the face (like in physiognomy) but in the collected and arranged pieces of sacred literature: the peripheral textual elements.