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Hebrew Reminiscences: Global Religion, Politics and Aesthetics in the Rise of Hermeneutic Thinking

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Hebrew Reminiscences:
Global Religion, Politics and Aesthetics in the Rise of Hermeneutic Thinking

by

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Committee in charge:

Professor Winfried Kudszus, Chair
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Abstract

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Hebrew Reminiscences: Global Religion, Politics and Aesthetics in the Rise of Hermeneutic Thinking examines emerging approaches to the Old Testament in the late eighteenth century as constitutive to the period's egalitarian notions of textual interpretation and aesthetic sensibility. I argue that the universalization of the Hebrew Bible during this period was both instrumental and emblematic for the Enlightenment notion of a global community of interpreters. The dissertation evinces a parallel between the community of interpreters, established with the presumption that "hermeneutic thinking" is a universal human capacity, and the community of citizens in the modern nation state. Showing how interpretation was uprooted from its origins in specific religious cultures, the dissertation thus underscores the tensions pertaining to the symbolic communal form of the nation state in view of the separatist history of religious communities.

The first and second chapters deal respectively with Johann Gottfried Herder's historiography and aesthetics, which he develops in his writings on the Old Testament. These chapters demonstrate that the consideration of biblical texts as a global asset holds a reciprocal connection to the emerging notion of "humankind." The third chapter examines Moses Mendelssohn's lobbying for emancipatory politics, and proposes that the interreligious circulation of the Old Testament shows secular constructs to be porous to competing religious values. The fourth chapter describes how Schleiermacher's psychological hermeneutics built on the replacement of the Old Testament with the New Testament as the model object for interpretation, and traces how literary realism evokes Jewish ritual to repond to the theological backdrop for this paradigm shift in hermeneutics. Considering the incessant identification of the Old Testament with Jews in twentieth-century German poetics and thought, I conclude that the persistence of the Bible's standing as an unchanging, material object of worship has posed a continual challenge to models of modern interpretation that highlight restoration—a seminal aspect of Protestant biblical interpretation in Enlightenment theology—as the hegemonic perspective on reading.

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During the past five years, I spent roughly half of my time in Berkeley and the remaining half in Berlin. Both Berkeley and Berlin functioned as major academic "port cities" during this period; these cities' vibrant intellectual spheres and the stimulating act of moving between them thus enabled me to attune my work to many voices occupied with the Enlightenment's legacy. It is

my hope that this polyphony is reflected in the dissertation, and that it manages to orchestrate it in a harmonic manner that is yet loyal to its variety.

I was thus fortunate to enjoy not only Berkeley's vibrant scholarly atmosphere, but also Berlin's. The faculty at the Humboldt University has been welcoming and supportive, which enabled me to make Berlin my second academic home. I am especially grateful to Rolf-Peter Horstmann, Ethel Matala de Mazza, and Joseph Vogl for their engagement with my work. Colleagues who resided in Berlin during my stay there, particularly Andrew Patten, Tanvi Solanki, and Erica Weitzman, have been engaging interlocutors. Scholars from various universities—especially David Biale, Amir Eshel, Mark Gelber, Natasha Gordinsky, Na'ama Rokem, Yoav Rinon, and Sven-Erik Rose—discussed this work with me from its early stages, assuring me that it is worth being written. Daniel Weidner has been extremely generous in sharing his extensive knowledge of Herder and eighteenth-century biblical reception. Lastly, I am very grateful to Irit Dekel and Michael Weinman for asking me about this dissertation's relevance to the lives of Berliner Israelis. I am still figuring out the answer.

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Introduction

This dissertation demonstrates how writings on the Old Testament elicited the mutually-dependent paradigm shifts in theology and textual interpretation in the late German Enlightenment. Unfolding a non-monolithic account of Enlightenment philosophy, I argue that the Enlightenment debates on how to read the Old Testament were a platform for the negotiation of new subject positions in the emergence of the modern nation state. The view that all texts should be comprehended in the same way that the Bible is received encompasses an inherent problem eminent to this negotiation: religious polemics dictate that certain readers hold distinct presumptions that guide their approach to the Bible (there is no unified collective that reads the Bible in the same way). Yet the grounding of literary hermeneutics in Enlightenment experiments with human cognition renders comprehension universal. These diverging presumptions, and the discrepancy between them, were engrained in Enlightenment political philosophy, and in the notions of agency and autonomy it generated.[1] The history of Protestant and Jewish exchange on the learning, interpretation and circulation of Hebrew, I argue, has made the comprehension of the Old Testament a constitutive part of "hermeneutic thinking." This interpretive modality emerged with the universalization of premises on reading the Bible, which, in their turn, applied newly universalized religious presumptions—the most eminent of which is the assumption that textual meanings are not immediately apparent—to the reading of all texts.

The dissertation's first half demonstrates that key notions of literary interpretation, such as contextualization, reading through empathy and textual restoration, were shaped in eighteenth-century debates on how to read the Old Testament. Reading the Bible as a literary text, I argue, did not entail applying to the Scriptures preexisting categories of textual interpretation. Rather, biblical reading elicited the development of these new categories with the claim of newly applying aesthetic observation to the Bible. The debates on how to read the Hebrew Bible thus pertained to the irreconcilability of global reading practices, newly perceived as secular, with the grounding of these practices in certain, communal religious notions and practices. Exploring the repercussions of the Hebrew trope in modernity, the dissertation's fourth chapter, epilogue, and conclusion demonstrate that hermeneutic thinking is entangled with the reminiscences of the incomplete nature of religious abstraction in its function as a salient Enlightenment construct.

Following this trajectory in the writings of Johann Gottfried Herder and his interlocutors, I argue that salient norms of modern cultural production are ingrained in a reconceptualization of theological depictions of the origins of the humankind. New readings of the Old Testament as a universal asset that unfolds humanity's "childhood" did not merely apply literary and aesthetic theory to the Bible. Rather, these readings have often developed new textual approaches with the claim to be applying literary reading and tenets on aesthetics to the Old Testament. The fragmentary nature of the Old Testament has made it into a "supreme" artifact for experiments with reading as a universal capacity in proto-Kantian theories on the human cognitive apparatus.

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[1] William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 7-8.

Embedded in the so-called childhood of humankind, the Hebrew Bible was taken up as a universal source that can be recuperated through the communal means of perception. Seminal authors who applied theories of human reason to reading thus negotiated textual comprehension as a universal process with its application to a text identified with the harming influence of a religious minority: an influence which could be collectively *overcome* through textual comprehension.

Judaism has become the emblem of religious tolerance in the new nation state, with the reception of Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* in Germany, with Moses Mendelssohn's political lobbying, and with such poetic and cultural enterprises as those of his close friend Lessing. Yet, in order for the Enlightenment society to accept Jews as competent political agents—and, on a second step to characterize itself as tolerant with this "acceptation"—it had to re-conceptualize the tolerance of traditionalist reading cultures. Thus, declaring the tolerance of Jews as an accomplishment, one had to presume that this declaration indeed entailed a certain achievement, thereby perpetuating the view of Jews as inherently different from other political agents. I focus on a salient aspect of this problem: the standing of Jews as readers whose treatment of the Bible jeopardizes their entrance into the universal community of readers and interpreters. I thus scrutinize Mendelssohn's negotiation of the secularization of hermeneutics by examining his dual treatment of three notions: *Bildung* as a collective educational enterprise; affective attachment to holy texts; and political agency as elucidated in one's comprehension of state law.

Modern interpretation demands, but more so, confirms, readers' universal cognitive abilities. The rise of modern hermeneutics shaped the understanding of the Bible as a "human text"—a "human" asset rather than the artifact of divine revelation.[2] Literary hermeneutics redefined the supreme merits of the Bible as engrained in the cognitive process that is unfolded with biblical reading; the purpose of this new consideration of the Bible was to transcend confessional specificity. At the same time, the notion of religious tolerance opts to legitimatize the coexistence of different religious cultures. Tolerance thus "approves" traditionalist reading practices that conceive the Bible as a product of divine revelation. The dissertation thus demonstrates that religion holds both *epistemological* and *political* eminence in the Enlightenment secularist legacy and that these modalities are highly at odds with one another.

Significantly, the examination of the continual presence of Hebrew in German cultural memory emphasizes the Enlightenment's awareness of, and dialectic with, the Jewish presence in the emerging modern state. I claim that the notion of textual comprehension is constantly interrupted by reminders of distinct religious communities. The diversity of biblical interpretation thus subverts prominent religious assumptions that subtend universalizing theories of reading. The persistence of the Bible's standing as an unchanging, material object of worship, emblematic to

[2] See Joachim Wach, *Das Verstehen Grundzüge einer Geschichte der hermeneutischen Theorie im 19. Jahrhundert*, vol. II (J. C. B Mohr: Tübingen, 1929), 32-3.

German Jewry, has namely posed a continual challenge to models of modern interpretation that highlight restoration—the eminent principle of the Protestant approach to the Bible in Enlightenment theology—as a seminal perspective on reading.

Chapters

The dissertation's first chapter examines Herder's *On the First Document of Humankind* in conjunction with Georg Hamann's development of a new aesthetic theory through scriptural reading. According to Herder, Hebrew is not only exemplary of his *Volksgeist* theory (the emphasis on a nation's cultural particularity), but it also embodies the attempt to bridge the difference between fictional and historiographical texts. For Hamann, the emphasis on Hebrew seems to disconnect the reading of literature from historical enquires. The examination of Herder and Hamann's respective approaches to Hebrew demonstrates that the "choice" between interpretive approaches to the Bible veils the fact that influential and allegedly distinct religious models share the assumption of a Protestant, universalistic conception of the Old Testament as the ethos of the birth of humankind.

The second chapter considers Herder's *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* in order to examine his theory of reading the Bible in the background of the emergence of aesthetics. Influenced by Herder's writings on Hebrew, young Goethe's emulation of biblical poetry and his translation of the Song of Songs serve to establish a new model of the sublime in works of art. The chapter ultimately offers a reassessment of Goethe's approach to the Bible based on analysis of his relationship to Scriptures and with consideration of the period's volatile distinction between Hebrews and Jews. Both Herder and Goethe use an idealized concept of translation to treat Hebrew as a sublime trope that is equally available to *all* readers, Christian and Jews alike, due, precisely, to its initial unreachability.

The third chapter examines a major problem embodied in Hebrew in the late eighteenth-century: the equal availability of the "Hebrew sublime" to all readers is incongruous with the study and circulation of the language among Jews. The Jewish apprehension of the language—primarily through study and worship—stands in blatant contrast to the new, imaginary model of biblical apprehension in literary hermeneutics. Looking at Herder's writings on Hebrew poetry in conjunction with Moses Mendelssohn and Salomon Maimon's presentation of Hebrew in their respective, multilingual oeuvres, the chapter proposes a model with which to understand the construction of secularism vis-à-vis the presence of religious minorities in the modern state. The chapter puts Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem or On Religious Power and Judaism* in dialogue with Talal Asad's recent argument that Protestant values underlie the separation of church and state, a separation that is at odds with traditionalist readings of the Bible. I argue that Mendelssohn's abstraction of ritual, and his simultaneous condemnation of the materiality of script as hazardous to religious conduct, complicates Asad's contention that the Enlightenment reduces religious

practice to ritual-spiritual or material-transcendental binary oppositions. The chapter thus establishes the theoretical grounds for the secularist tensions at the core of universal reading techniques, while also situating the inquiry as an intervention in contemporary theories of secularism—as it seeks to retrieve the influence of interreligious exchange to reassess modern constellations of the self.

The fourth chapter offers an overview of hermeneutics in the nineteenth century, tracing the wide influence of the Halle School of Theology, which resulted in a clear preference for Greek over Hebrew (and the New Testament over the Old Testament), as reflected in Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. The chapter presents these transformations side by side with an analysis of Annette Droste-Hülshoff's canonic 1842 novella *The Jewish Beech*. With its multiple references to the Bible and inclusion of a Hebrew sentence (in the original alphabet) that remains untranslated until its end, the novella is a reaction to the transformation of the Hebrew Bible into an object that is no longer understood in its materiality. The chapter concludes with a review of later developments in hermeneutics, examining Dilthey's interpretation of Schleiermacher and proposing that Heine's approach to Hebrew can be read in the light of those developments.

The dissertation's epilogue considers the afterlives of "Hebrew understanding" in the twentieth century, arguing that the broad engagement with the language in Modernist poetry must be understood in light of the concurrent reappearance of hermeneutics as a leading paradigm of literary interpretation. Instances in which Hebrew words "interfere" with the reading of German texts thus lead not only to the momentary failure of hermeneutics, but also to a reflection on its history of emergence as an interpretive paradigm. I examine Else Lasker-Schüler's engagement with Hebrew (as part of her broader fascination with Romantic themes) in conjunction with Benjamin's essay "On Language as such and on the Language of Man," where he alludes to Hebrew while negotiating Kant and Goethe's interpretive models. This examination highlights the stakes of Benjamin's intervention with eighteenth-century theories of human comprehension on the background of the reappearance of Hebrew in Modernism. Considering the appearances of Hebrew words in Celan's poetry, I propose the examination of post-war poetry as a trajectory of "uttering the intelligible." I thus conclude the dissertation by asking what a Jewish traditionalist model for hermeneutics could possibly look like as an alternative to globalized religious presumptions that shape the modern hermeneutic episteme. The dissertation's conclusion maintains that the practice of "hermeneutics of suspicion" in the twentieth century, a perspective on reading linked to modernist and postmodernist epistemological skepticism, in effect relies on subject positions crystallized with the hermeneutic tradition and its grounding in Enlightenment values.

Alternative Enlightenments

Hebrew has received significant scholarly attention in the historiography of modern German literature and of Jewish studies, from Heinrich Heine's study of Hebrew to Celan's use of Hebrew words in his poems to Kafka and Benjamin's attempts at studying the language.[3] The (in)ability to comprehend Hebrew thus became intertwined with the volatile history of German-Jewish encounters and with the Modern canon of German literature. Whereas the majority of studies on Hebrew have focused on Jewish scholarship as a separate realm, this project relies on a different vantage point, following major Protestant and Jewish intellectuals that interacted within the public sphere of the modern state and whose debates centered on various idealized presentations of Hebrew. This investigation resists a simplistic distinction between Christian and Jewish thought and, more broadly, tells the narrative of an Enlightenment where the politics of tolerance emerged through a volatile negotiation of confessional differences and interreligious exchange.[4]

The description of seminal Enlightenment figures, above all Johann Gottfried Herder, in terms of their interaction with Jewish thinkers, and the examination of figures like Moses Mendelssohn and Salomon Maimon as they enter the realm of the modern state offers new insights into the period's religious constructs. Considering the interreligious function of theology in shaping modern interpretation, a cross-cultural perspective may prove most suitable for scrutinizing the period's wide occupation with the Old Testament.[5] Tolerance is thus not the product of a

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[3] See Amir Eshel, "Von Kafka zu Celan: Deutsch-Jüdische Schriftsteller und ihr Verhältnis zum Hebräischen und Jiddischen," in *Jüdische Sprachen in deutscher Umwelt: Hebräisch und Jiddisch von der Aufklärung bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Michael Brenner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 96–127; David Suchoff, "Kafka's Jewish Languages: The Hidden Openness of Tradition," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (2007): 64–132.

[4] Two recent works that are important to this project on that regard are David Sorkin's *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), whose mapping of the Enlightenment as a boon for religious polemics stresses the role of Judaism, and Leora Batnitzky's *How Judaism Became a Religion: an Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011) that scrutinizes the conceptual problems evoked by the definition of Judaism in Germany through the Protestant concept of what "religion" stands for. Building on recent works in anthropology and political science, this dissertation contributes to these tenets new critical conceptions of the Enlightenment religious tolerance and Jewish emancipation. My focus on a problem that is predominant in literary studies and my enquiry of how literary texts "responded" to the eighteenth-century interpretive turn is another unique contribution to research.

[5] Daniel Weidner's *Bibel und Literatur um 1800* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2011) describes biblical interpretation as a formative cultural phenomenon (the Hebrew language and literary hermeneutics are partially analyzed). Andrea Schatz's *Sprache in der Zerstreuung: die Säkularisierung des Hebräischen im 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009) which examines the secularization of Hebrew includes a section on Herder, stressing his cross-cultural influence. The focus of her book, however, remains the Jewish perception of Hebrew. Schatz's use of Talal Asad's tenets on secularism in the field of Jewish Studies is original, but remains uncritical in its application of Asad's model to the dual

monolithic Enlightenment discourse, nor is it a reconciliation of competing religious ideologies to establish a status quo that would maintain the relative peacefulness of the modern political sphere.[6] Rather, I show religious tolerance to *enact* competing religious ideologies, as exemplified in the dialectic between Protestantism and emancipated Judaism. Herder's universalistic philosophy of history, informed by his Pietism, and Mendelssohn's political theory that declares Judaism as exemplary for religious tolerance thus engrain different religious ideologies using the platform of the political treatise. Demonstrating the "performativity of tolerance," I open a new path for contemporary debates of secularism. While using tenets from current examinations of the influence of the Protestantism in establishing a universal notion of religion, I argue that German-Jewish exchange exemplifies how global religion emerges through an enactment of interreligious exchange porous to the ideologies and agenda of religious minorities.

To show how the notion of German-Jewish exchange has been rendered constitutive to universal readership, turning it into an asset of political secularism, I first establish that the Hebrew language has become in the late eighteenth century a signifier of higher understanding.[7] This is achieved through a reading of the different engagements with Hebrew as an *Ursprache*, as the instrument of creation, and as the mother tongue of humankind. Examination of the intersecting positions of Hamann, Herder and Mendelssohn in their writings on Hebrew demonstrates that their references to the language mobilized major presumptions of the emerging field of textual interpretation. Reading Hamann and Herder's respective writings and correspondence throughout the 1760s illuminates, namely, the development of a new, collective historical consciousness—a process to which the use of the Old Testament, and specifically, the Genesis stories was an important emblem. The association of Hebrew with higher understanding derives, the dissertation then demonstrates, from the tensions of negotiating—in a new secularist sphere—the materiality of the Bible as an object of worship and the learning of Hebrew as a part of one's particular ethnic identity.

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standing of Judaism as both a religious minority and a part of the Judeo-Christian tradition and its cultural hegemony.

[6] As would be the case for common accounts of the secularist sphere of modern society. Connolly, *Why I Am Not A Secularist*, 20.

[7] The history of German-Jewish exchange as a symbolic construct has been explored in Jeffrey Librett's *The Rhetoric of Cultural Dialogue: Jews and Germans from Moses Mendelssohn to Richard Wagner and Beyond* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000). Librett argues that the idea that Judaism can be integrated in German culture under the auspices of the modern state has functioned since the Enlightenment as a major symbol. He detects the appearances of this notion as a phantasm of the amalgamation of the Jewish letter with Protestant spirit—that has been aspired for in the German Enlightenment and rejected in other German traditions. I build on Librett's argument in that I situate German-Jewish exchange as a cultural construct, whose importance lies in its symbolic power (rather than in a concrete materialization). Relying on recent tenets of critiques of secularism, particularly in political science, anthropology and literary theory, my inquiry scrutinizes "interreligious dialogue" as a symbolic construct salient to the globalization of religious notions in the rise of political secularism.

My exploration of the Enlightenment's philosophical and literary dynamics thus builds on works in German studies that describe eighteenth-century cultural production as eliciting a new tendency in European literary works and criticism—a tendency that can broadly be described as the transition from a production of imitation to a new emphasis on representation grounded in semiotic. David Wellbery's work on Lessing and his interlocutors was especially influential in establishing this view.[8] Nevertheless, more recent works defined new ventures as eminent to this new aesthetic consciousness, such as the eighteenth-century shaping of new disciplines and forms of scholarship,[9] a new conception of the awareness of the senses in the German republic of letters,[10] and new views on eighteenth-century literary theory embodied in new conceptions of German body politics in the Enlightenment.[11] Critical accounts of "cultural capital" have shown Herder's influence to be eminent to the establishment of the notion of "world literature," a concept newly taken as reliant of the establishment of the vision that there is a system of "national literatures," which foster each nation's culture, reflected in its national language.

I rely on these analyses of Herder as an eminent figure in the Enlightenment shift of interpretation—inquiries in literary theory and more specifically, German studies—in order to avoid a certain tautology. The dissertation's first three chapters put in their center Herder's theological writings and his concurrent dialectics on aesthetic theory and interpretation with such figures as Hamann, Goethe and Mendelssohn. One can thus ask why an inquiry of modern hermeneutics should start with the theologian's 1760s writings, rather than with such figures traditionally linked to the movement, such as Schleiermacher, thereby suggesting that the focus on Herder is due exactly to his extensive engagement with the Old Testament and the Hebrew nation. The recent broad occupation with "world literature" as a discipline in its own right, and with transnational textual circulation centered the attention of literary studies on Herder as a forefather of interpretive theories, as did the above–mentioned titles. I wish to ground my focus on Herder in this research of his prominence to the history of textual interpretation.

Another enterprise that takes on a similar objective, albeit in a different disciplinary ambit, is Michael Forster's ongoing work on Herder and the German-tradition philosophy of language. In a series of publications and translations, Forster has proclaimed Herder's eminence in coining terms salient for the tradition of hermeneutics and for textual interpretation until Gadamer.[12]

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[8]David E. Wellbery, *Lessing's Laocoon: Semiotics and Aesthetics in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[9] Rüdiger Campe, *Affekt und Ausdruck: zur Umwandlung der literarischen Rede im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1990); Robert Scott Leventhal, *The Disciplines of Interpretation: Lessing, Herder, Schlegel and Hermeneutics in Germany, 1750-1800* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1994).

[10] Lothar van Laak, *Hermeneutik literarischer Sinnlichkeit: historisch-systematische Studien zur Literatur des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003).

[11] Ethel Matala de Mazza, *Der verfasste Körper: zum Projekt einer organischen Gemeinschaft in der politischen Romantik*. 1. Aufl. ed. (Freiburg: Rombach, 1999).

[12] *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); *German Philosophy of Language: from Schlegel to Hegel and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

Despite grounding his conception of hermeneutics in the philosophy of language, with a certain pragmatic assessment of Herder's "accomplishments" in the field, Forster in fact reiterates some claims of literary scholars that embraced Herder as an eminent figure in eighteenth-century cultural production. Forster namely stresses Herder's concept of translation as paradigmatic to the author's innovative conception of textual understanding. He thus depicts a philosophical-interpretive tradition that situates translation theory as constituting prominent views on textual comprehension more broadly—a tradition that links Herder's views on translation to Schleiermacher, and to Benjamin. The dissertation follows this line of argumentation, making translation theory, specifically in regard to its emergence vis-à-vis debates on how to read the Old Testament and Jewish-German encounters, not a component of the inquiry but a focal point throughout the work.

Referring to trends in contemporary historiography in general, and in the study of the history of "orientalism" in particular, historian Suzanne Marchand has drawn a cogent criticism of a methodological bias, much relevant to the current inquiry.[13] Marchand notes the influence of Eduard Said, and consequently, also of Michel Foucault, as shaping the writing of Enlightenment history through an incessant attempt to search the operation of power—attempt which dispels the need in an extensive exploration of different authors, texts and tendencies in European orientalism—an exploration that may reveal multifaceted ideologies and drives beyond the interest in ancient cultures.[14]

I approach Marchand's critique of genealogy, a methodology close in structure to the current inquiry, by looking to ground the examination to a broad array of historical sources and disciplinary categories. Like the inquiries to which Marchand refers, the dissertation seeks to connect the status of liberal state politics to Enlightenment constructs, claiming, more specifically, that it was the period's universalizing tendencies that yielded the exclusion of certain minorities from what is known today as liberal politics. I hope to address Marchand's critique by building on the theoretical intervention into Enlightenment historiography provided by Jonathan Sheehan's *The Enlightenment Bible*.[15] Namely, *The Enlightenment Bible* demonstrates a substantial connection between theological study since the early modern era and current scholarly approaches to secularism, reconciling, thereby, the object of study with its methodology. The Enlightenment Bible has been made into a universal asset, through the possibility of its multiple adjustments—as shown, predominantly, in the manifold of biblical

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2011). See also his introduction to the collection *Herder: Philosophical Writings*, ed. idem (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), 2002, xviii.

[13] Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Washington, DC: German Historical Inst., 2009).

[14] Ibid, xviii-xxi. Marchand highlights the attempt to justify and support religious needs as a continual major motive behind the German treatment of the orient—a motive that is both prior to and is more eminent than imperialist interest.

[15] *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

translations in the Enlightenment period. Here, the dissertation's argument converges with its methodology: the globalization of the Bible through the Enlightenment pluralizing Bible industry is a *Zeitgeist* that is to be detected through the reading of multiple sources. The project thus aligns with both recent secularism critiques that opt to locate general tendencies in the Enlightenment and with historiographies that stress the multiplicity and diversity of the examined sources.

David Sorkin's ongoing research on the "religious Enlightenment" also informs my examination of Jewish-Christian interreligious exchange on religious practices. Counter to depictions of the Enlightenment as antagonistic toward religious practices, Sorkin shows Enlightenment theology as conducive to religious polemics and exchange. His *The Religious Enlightenment* argues that it was not religious tolerance per se that is the Enlightenment's theological heritage.[16] Rather, according to Sorkin, what tied together different confessions was a set of vehement religious practices and notions—which, newly, everyman was taken to be able to pursue. A prominent example for this equality is the idea that the engagement with the Bible relies on affect in the process of reading, shared by both Christian Pietists and Jewish readers of the Bible.[17] Following Sorkin, I describe the Enlightenment in terms of the shift of religious notions from confessional separatism to national separatism, and detects the globalizing assumptions on religion embodied in the latter.

A third major source for my inquiry of Enlightenment critique dates much earlier than Sheehan and Sorkin's respective works. The dissertation owns a great deal to Reinhart Koselleck's analysis of the rupture between state politics and the European republic of letters, which has adapted a humanistic moral standpoint detached from the political authority. Claims about secularism and the public sphere are homological to Koselleck's classic study. While the state apparatus allows the practice of one's morality in private, this legitimization of "choice" in fact prevents private morality from dictating the law of the state, driving it away to the privatized realm. Id est, inserting a set of religious ideals in the place of "morality" shows Koselleck's model to explain why the Protestant model of tolerance remains intact by competing religious notions of political agency.

Literary Theory and Secularism Critique

As Pascale Casanova has argued in her *The World Republic of Letters*, the rise of national literatures is entangled with the concurrent emergence of national languages as a cultural

[16] *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).
[17] Ibid, 140; 190.

capital.[18] Casanova thus stresses Herder's theory of the nation's spirit as a main influence on the emerging system of world literatures. The dissertation furthers this examination as it investigates the importance of Herder for literary studies in view of eighteenth-century transformations in state infrastructure. Herder reads the Hebrew Bible as a universal ethos—a reading that is grounded in the emergence of the modern state as representing all citizens (and in the corresponding notion of the "religion of reason" that they are expected to share). As Benedict Anderson pointed out, the spread and circulation of Luther's translation of the Bible was integral to the emergence of the modern nation state, owing to the eminence it ascribed to cultural production in the vernacular.[19] The status of the Hebrew Bible was formed in the crucible of making the Scriptures a universal asset that is at the same time equipped for elucidating the particular national character of each nation and culture. The question of how to read Hebrew thus evoked the particularity of "the Hebrew nation" and juxtaposed it to the living presence of literacy among Jews.

Casanova's depiction of world literatures has become the topic of critique in works that reject broad-scale, normative depictions of world literature, such as Emily Apter's recent *Against World Literature*.[20] Apter develops various trajectories that present "Untranslatability" as irreducible to mere cultural differences or gaps; this notion is thus used to oppose a facile notion of intercultural transmission. Apter thus takes "secularism" (which she understands in relation to Said's identification of the term with colonial tendencies in modernity) as an eminent example for the fallacies of translatability. A main domain in which Apter locates the tradition of Untranslatability is thus traditionalist resistance to the abstraction of the biblical word through the act of translation. Grounding divergent scriptural readings in polemics on readership, she juxtaposes Harold Bloom's presentation of biblical translation (as a formative principle of what translation is about) to Muslim perspectives on reading:

> If the duty to translate is rooted in Bloom's writing in the cipher of the Hebrew Bible and its secular re-inscription in the aesthetics of romanticism, one could say that in more recent philosophy and theory, the duty to *not* translate is derived from Islamic tradition, and, more generally, from principled opposition to facile computations of cultural equivalence (253, body origins).

The fascination with the Hebrew Bible as a cipher of translatability, as I demonstrate in the first and second chapters, is an enduring legacy of Romantic aesthetics and its reception. Apter's position—especially her emphasis on how biblical translatability has constantly been questioned in the history of textual transmission—parallels my own intervention into the historiography of literary theory. The dissertation shows the Romantic idealization of the Old Testament as a

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[18] *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 34-5.
[19] *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 2006), 41
[20] *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London; New York: Verso, 2013), 41-5.

cipher of textual transference to be an always incomplete project, whose incoherence, I argue, is evident in both Enlightenment theology and its afterlives. In other words, the status of the Hebrew Bible as a cipher is not only due to its marking of the "divine gift" of transference; the Old Testament and the Hebrew language have also become a cipher of the tensions engrained in the "secular re-inscription" of biblical reading.

In her turn to Islam as a current of Untranslatability, Apter cites the work of anthropologist Talal Asad who has become seminal to such critiques of the Enlightenment's secularist legacy, with his inquiry of religious presumptions that guide modern state politics.[21] Asad presents the Enlightenment as the decisive moment in which certain Protestant ideals, namely in regard to the universality of biblical reading, have shaped the modern perception of the scriptures through the "training" of Romantic sensatory aesthetics:

> My concern is primarily with a conceptual question: What were the epistemological implications of the different ways that varieties of Christians and freethinkers engaged with the Scriptures through their senses? […] How did Scripture as a medium in which divinity could be experienced come to be viewed as information about or from the supernatural? Alternatively: In what ways did the *newly sharpened opposition between the merely "material" sign and the truly "spiritual" meaning become pivotal for the reconfiguration of "inspiration"?* (39-40, emphasis added)

This current strand in literary criticism and critical theory—with the above-mentioned works by Apter and Asad, but also by Michael Warner, Michael Allan and Saba Mahmood, among others— demonstrates how secularism critique may be taken into account when describing the history of reading and the historiography of literary theory and "world literature."[22] My own project engages in this enterprise, addressing what I see as two central claims these critics make: claims whose relationship to one another is central to my account of modern hermeneutics. Asad's depiction of the Romantic divine inspiration, as well as Apter's critique of translatability, hone an understanding of interpersonal connection between readers and authors (or between translators and authors). According to Asad, the notion of identification with the biblical "poets," newly presented in their humanness in Romantic aesthetics, has replaced the idea of divine revelation with an understanding of inspiration as engrained in a universal idea of affect.[23] Apter

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[21] See *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 21-66. For a succinct summary of Asad's claims on political secularism, see Connolly, "Europe: A Minor Tradition," in the volume *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and his Interlocutors*, Scott, David, and Charles Hirschkind (eds.) (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), 75-92.

[22] See especially Warner, "Uncritical Reading" in Jane Gallop (ed.) *Polemic Critical or Uncritical* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 13-38, Michael Allan, *Dissertation,* University of California in Berkeley, 2009 (unpublished), Mahmood, "*Azazeel* and the Politics of Historical Fiction in Egypt," *Comparative Literature* 2013, Vol. 65, 3: 265-284.

[23] Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 40-3.

makes a different argument, building on a similar depiction of the newly idealized nature of interpersonal communication. She described translatability as a construct of the notion that cultural capital is transferable.

But the above mentioned authors also stress an utterly different aspect of modern readership viewing the history of the distinction between "uncritical reading" and "critical reading" and the reception of the second term as the object of scholarly engagements with texts.[24] The ability to perform a critical interpretation of literary texts—and of cultural objects—is considered to demonstrate the maturity encompassed in the role of the modern political agent, ability that is embedded in a broader Western conception of individual autonomy and rationality.[25] Globalizing reading practices presumes and further constitutes both affect and reason as inherent to human nature. The making of the Bible into a human book—a shift that is captured with the emblem of the Hebrew origins of humankind—thus established both a mode of interpersonal identification and the idea of critical interpretation of literary texts. The new sensibility of the citizen of the modern state required, first and foremost, the notion of autonomous subjectivity, which is a prior condition to the attainment of spiritual convictions. The emergence of this subject position is embodied in the decline of the revelation narrative and its replacement with Romantic vision of interpersonal exchange. The direct connection between God and the believer was replaced with the deciphering of the biblical text as the godly or superb character of the Bible was attributed to the processing of a text, rather than to its atemporal pertinence to the believer as a direct gift from God. The making of the Bible into an aesthetic object—with the corresponding sublime nature of Romantic poetry that this turn has evoked—is thus inseparable from the birth of critical reading. Honing different reading skills and affective attachment to texts, both phenomena yet

[24] See especially Warner, "Uncritical Reading," Allan, *Dissertation* "Epilogue." Mahmood reconstructs the history of "critical reading" as contingent upon the liberal notion of religious Tolerance in her article "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: the Politics of Islamic Reformation," *Public Culture* 18, vol 2, 2006: 323-47.

[25] In their respective articles on the Danish cartoons controversy, Asad and Mahmood unfold a critique of presumptions regarding political secularism, arguing that the divergence from critical observation, or the so-called inability to accommodate it, is inseparable from a traditional religious episteme with the epistemological categories that it generates. The experience of a deep spiritual injury when observing the caricatures of Muhammad is engrained in the affiliation with Islam which constitutes a non-Western notion of "icon." This affiliation thus entails a mode of a visual reception of Muhammad's figure as inseparable from one's self. According to this argument, the "ability" to critically observe images that are related to one's spiritual affiliation presumes a universal epistemological apparatus that is based on the subject's autonomy. Presuming the subject as an autonomous entity that chooses one religious confession or another, this modern conviction is inherently foreign to Muslim observation of the world and of the human subject. *Is Critique Secular?: Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (Berkeley, Calif.: Townsend Center for the Humanities, University of California, 2009). See also Talal Asad, "Reflections on Blasphemy and Secular Culture," in Hent de Vries, (ed.) *Religion: Beyond a Concept* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 580-609.

demanded a similar detachment from historical authenticity as engrained in other legacies of scriptural reading.[26]

This theoretical trajectory can be furthered through its application to German-Jewish encounters in the German Enlightenment—an exemplary moment of the entrance of a public of readers, which can be broadly conceived as traditionalist, to the Enlightenment republic of letters. The crystallization of religious norms as hegemonic, I argue, does not exclude their status as porous and adaptable of various symbols, ideals and practices of religious minorities. I am thus interested not so much in asking whether the dialogue between Germans and Jews is or is not possible, but rather, in exploring the symbolic function of this dialogue in construing political agency as the product of interreligious exchange. A model for cross-cultural investigation, biblical Hebrew marks an invitation into a globalizing community of readers that simultaneously includes and excludes traditionalist believers, making their presence essential to Enlightenment political institutions while redefining the affective and ideological conditions of their belonging to communal readership.

The dissertation's third chapter, which centers on Mendelsohn's entrance to the German republic of letters, thus lays the groundwork for the theoretical framework of the entire project. The beginning of the chapter revisits salient works that established the grounds for modern politics, looking especially at tolerance and biblical interpretation as eminent to modern constellations of religion. I namely examine Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Locke's *Letter on Toleration*, and Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* as establishing which religious practices are fitted to the "politics of tolerance." This background leads to the chapter's historical focus: Germany's 1780s debates on Jewish assimilation, which, I contend, were emblematic to the efforts to constitute a new citizen in the German nation state: a subject whose religious conduct exists separately from its political agency. Germany's new interpretation methods raise the question of whether the Jewish subject could approach the Bible in a way that would foster, rather than jeopardize, this subject's rationality and striving for the general will of the state.

To elucidate what is at stake in the Herder and Mendelssohn's respective theories of the Hebrew language—and in the fact of their co-existence—, I situate their treatment of the language in the context of their respective aesthetic theories. I stress Mendelssohn's dialectic with the notion of

[26] This is not to say that the late-eighteenth century readings of the Old Testament turned away from historiographical readings of the Bible. As Hans Frei has cogently showed, Protestant biblical hermeneutics was widely influenced by Herder's ability to reconcile the view historical investigations of the biblical text with a continual view of its atemporal ascendancy. *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: a Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 183. As the dissertation's first chapter demonstrates, Herder's suggestion to examine the Hebrew Bible as a product of a specific culture dispels the view of the Scriptures as a God-given object. Ascribing divine attributions to the examination of the Bible, Herder manages to reconcile critical and philological observations of the Bible with its atemporal theological significance—newly aligning this theological pertinence with the abilities of all critical readers.

Bildung and his contribution to semiology to show his dual stance to scriptural reading, a stance which became formative for the separation of church and state. Mendelssohn promotes Judaism's status as a "rational religion"—which fosters its believers' political engagement. At the same time, he reinforces the importance of ritual law and biblical circulation as an uninterrupted praxis since the giving of biblical law. I argue that this position infers the allocation of the religious to the private as subsuming the religious credo of Jewish law under a new definition of the subject. Since the Jewish credo dictates the practice of law in public, Mendelssohn's is a conflicted position that pushes interpretation to mediate a religious credo as a command for the practice of law in the public realm—a command which exists, from the state's point of view, in the privatized sphere. I examine his theory of script in *Jerusalem* as explicating this mediation via a new notion of ritual as a set of practices subject to communal semiotics.

This leads me to examine the experience of the Jewish body as a site of conflict for Mendelssohn's understanding of interpretation in conjunction with state authority. Recent works in anthropology have acknowledged the distinction between the "religious" and the "secular" spheres as a religious construct in and of itself; they have also pondered on how this distinction in fact shapes different phenomena with the act of merely "allocating" them to those different spheres. I bring two examples to show on how these tenets may shed new light on Jewish assimilation. The first is Mendelssohn's mediation with the Prussian authorities concerning Jewish burial; the second is the problem of circumcision, which has been heavily discussed in Germany's recent juridical polemics. I am interested in circumcision since this problem embodies the two positions of Judaism (which, I argue, are still present in German cultural memory as an Enlightenment legacy). While ritual praxis can be shared by Muslims and Jews as religious minorities, showing them to have in common not only a specific ceremony but also its embodiment in a communal perception of the body underpins Judaism's dual status with regard to religious tolerance. The recent circumcision debates are telling in that they juxtapose concrete instances of ritual—concreteness echoed in the Muslim practice of a similar ritual— with the symbolic and historical status of Judaism as emblematic for the grounding of religious tolerance in a Judeo-Christian notion of public religion. Judaism is reminiscent of the religious notions whose abstraction as humanity's collective asset constituted this notion.

Throughout the dissertation, I follow postcolonial perspectives on the inability of the liberal state—with its history of adherence to certain religious presumptions, to accommodate traditionalist religious epistemes and norms of scriptural reading. The conclusion of the third chapter thus examines the valence of interreligious exchange in shaping the contours of political secularism. I contend that stances of such figures as Mendelssohn and Salomon Maimon, who drew heavily on Maimonides (himself responding to Aristotle) in order to advance general visions of human comprehension (albeit, visions radically different from one another), situate "secular" reading in incessant interreligious dialectics. These dialectics redistribute traditionalist subject positions in a new political sphere which is rendered responsive to the religious values represented by religious minorities. I do not opt to ask whether German-Jewish dialogue has

"indeed" taken place through mutual recognition of Jews and Christians. Rather, I look at how interreligious transference functions an ambit for both the efforts at creating a universalistic identification with religious notions and the traditionalist need to consider religious ritual uninterrupted. The examination thus serves to scrutinize the specific trajectory in which the notion of interreligious exchange has become formative for norms of cultural production, sensibility, and comprehension. The use of the Old Testament to define theories of reading—of aesthetics, semiology and, eventually, hermeneutics—shows interpretation as reliant on the notion of accomplishment at bridging interreligious difference. Showing the contingency of this trajectory, I argue for the need to observe the period's secularist legacy as an outcome of a non-monolithic Enlightenment debates. The idea of religious tolerance—a main construct at the core of political secularism—should thus be examined as a continual, active dynamic. The pietistic call for a universal Bible and the presentation of Judaism as exemplary for a public religion show how different religions continually enact their ideologies through the notion of tolerance and via the abstraction of religious tropes.

Detecting Secularism: Diverging Routes

With this theoretical aim, I wish to keep in mind Hans Blumenberg's critique of certain quests after the religious biases of modern political models. In the first part of his *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Blumenberg responds to Karl Löwith's examination of modern history through the notion of "Heilgeschehen."[27] Löwith claims to find a bias in modern historiography which lies in its claims to distinguish itself from theology. The stakes of this bias, as Löwith demonstrates throughout his book, lie in the "theodicy" that he locates in some historiographical perceptions of modernity. Modern historiography, he claims, encompasses an inherent conundrum: it relies on a Christian perception of time, but since Christianity does not have a critical-historical consciousness, descriptions of events that are salient to modern historiography—particularly those pertaining to the notion of human progress—wear, to Löwith, an eschatological cloak.

Responding to the sense of uncovering that lies in the core of Löwith's project, Blumenberg critics the methodology behind such attempts to expose the hypocrisy of secular politics. Blumenberg specifically underlines the assumption that notions of cultural inquiry are "mobile" or transferable from one period in human history to another. Against this idea, Blumenberg suggests that an investigation of secularism in modernity should entail a composite view of hermeneutics: an investigation not only of how religious notions are transplanted in various

[27] I refer to this notion in German in order to maintain its dual meaning: both a reference to the "holiness" of world history and the view of "healing" as inherent to Löwith's examination (resonated with the German verb "heilen"). Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: the Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1949), 11.

times and places but also how the observation of history itself entails religious terms and categories that it has absorbed.

Like Blumenberg, my goal is not to observe the so-called duplicity of political secularism (or suggest that the promise of tolerance at its core is false). In view of the eminent and persistent presumption that those are particularly the Jewish readers who hold distinct presumptions that guide their approach to the Bible, I rather aim to demonstrate that Hebrew became an eminent cultural trope that captures the problem of the globalization of hermeneutic categories and practices. The dissertation's conclusion thus proposes new insights into Jewish-German encounters as a phenomenon that formed the contours of modern literature, philosophy and politics. Examining the shift of Hebrew into a trope, I argue, demonstrates the stakes of the particular rout of the transformation of hermeneutics into a secular phenomenon: the circumventing of the specificities of religious beliefs and the identities of religious believers.

In his review of Charles Taylor's *Secular Age*, Martin Jay criticizes what he sees as Taylor's obliviousness to Blumenberg's criticism of the structure of secularism critique, i.e, of the attempt to reveal that secularism is religious in veiled ways.[28] Jay takes issue with Taylor's project of finding unifying religious notions in political secularism, claiming that this project performs a move similar in structure to the attempts to undercover religious tendencies in modern politics. To that view, Taylor tries to "discover" in the religious realm precisely those tenets whose merits are often identified with the secular, overlooking Blumenberg's critique of the structure of arguments on secularism with the assumptions they inflict on historical consciousness.

Such is the ability to religion to unify an egalitarian human community with regard to its common feeling of hope in view of the ability of religion to credit a sense of meaningfulness, without necessarily granting the ability to understand reality. Jay writes,

> [R]eligion can both embolden some believers to think that they share in divine wisdom and remind others that there are mysteries that they, as imperfect creatures, are unable to solve. It can therefore serve as stimulus to both arrogance and humility, both confidence and doubt, and the historical record abounds with examples of each. For a committed believer like Taylor, the scales are weighted in one direction, toward the possibility of meaningfulness, although he is reflective and self-critical enough to acknowledge they can easily tip in the other. For other less hopeful readers of that record, there is ample reason to worry that the post-secular age, if indeed it is upon us, has some very unpleasant and, alas, meaningless surprises in store, no matter how eagerly they are folded once again into the lessons of a divine pedagogue, whose previous teaching evaluations, alas, leave a great deal to be desired (84).

[28] "Faith-Based History," Book Review on A Secular Age, *History and Theory* 48 (February 2009): 76-84.

Jay compares Taylor's insistence on the need to preserve the mystery of reality—preserving the human inability to comprehend the logic behind history—to Walter Benjamin's reading of Kafka's fable as a comment on human hope. While the lesson we learn from Kafka, according to Benjamin, is that the world is full of hope, but it is not "for us," the lesson one can infer from Taylor is that "there may be meaning, but it is not for us."[29] A "liberating" conception of global religion lies, according to Jay's reading of Taylor, in its potential to keep meaning beyond the reach of human capacity—for all members of humankind. When finding its way to Benjamin's notion of history, this inability is transformed, nonetheless, into a breach that keeps human consciousness at distance from notions of religious meaningfulness designated for the collective of liberal politics. The liberal "us" knows that meaning exists "out there," but the discovery of this meaning is contingent upon the participation in discrete, specific, religions of revelation: in practices of faith are at odds with global religion. My attempt to reconstruct the conditions behind hermeneutic thinking aims at defining the "us" that may be left out of the option of soliciting meaning from the world due to its failure at encompassing the "we" that hermeneutic thinking places at its core.

[29] Ibid, 84.

Chapter 1: The Cognitive Turn and the Writing of Collective History

What is the Hermeneutic Episteme?

The notion of "Hermeneutics" has been enjoying resurgence in modern and postmodern literary theory, precisely due to the recurrent pronouncements of its demise.[30] Yet the idea that hermeneutics has been diminished as an interpretive paradigm presumes a cohesive notion of the term as it is used in variety of thinkers. A common depiction of the hermeneutic movement takes it to have a coherent lineage of thinkers, often presuming Schleiermacher's hermeneutics as the starting point for the emergence of this movement, while taking Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960) as the consolidation of hermeneutics as an interpretive paradigm in the twentieth century.[31]

My understanding of hermeneutics reiterates the view of Schleiermacher and Gadamer's interpretive theories as milestones in the hermeneutic tradition. Hermeneutics, according to this position, can be described as a cultural-sociological phenomenon which evinces new modalities of thinking, or a cultural episteme. In continental philosophy, the term "episteme" is often linked to the work of Michel Foucault on the conditions for the development of various fields of knowledge in conjunction with one another. Foucault's legacy is expressed in the detection of the conditions for changing discourses, and emerging cultural notions, assuming that, "if in any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice."[32] The notion that individuals obtain an equal capacity to interpret was an influential product of Enlightenment thought, both when regarding the notion of judgment and, when describing the observation of art. My goal throughout the thesis is to trace the emergence and shaping of the hermeneutic practice as reliant on transformations in theological and spiritual ideologies. I thus do not seek to establish that the emergence of hermeneutic thinking was contingent upon the transformation of Protestantism into Germany's state religion, but more so,

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[30] For salient texts that have claimed the existence of a "post-hermeneutic" turn, see David Wellbery, "Foreword" in: Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800-1900*, trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), vii-xxxiii; Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "A Farewell to Interpretation" in: *Materialities of Communication*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 389-402.

[31] See for example Heinrich Anz, *Hermeneutische Positionen: Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982); Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston [Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969).
Recent research has been tracing major conceptual sources of the hermeneutic movement in earlier authors who are commonly associated with German idealism. See Kristin Gjesdal, *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism*.

[32] *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1994 [1973]). 168.

to describe how contingent transformations in theological presumptions and practices were the backdrop for the modern hermeneutic episteme.

This introductory chapter describes the emergence of this modality, and grounds it in social and cultural transformations occurring through Enlightenment thought circa 1770. Particularly, I refer in this chapter to two phenomena that are marked in the period's new approach to interpretation: the emerging narrative of "human history"; and the pre-Kantian conception of textual interpretation as an experimentation with the human cognitive apparatus. The "hermeneutic episteme" refers to a phenomenon of approaching texts as comprising meanings that are unapparent; it refers to reading as an unveiling force that builds on human reasoning and affect. Hermeneutic thinking has come to be seen as engrained in the human existence in the world insofar that the human condition entails the understanding of other individuals. Interpretation has thus constituted the view of a global system of world cultures and societies, whose differences are manifested in national boundaries and linguistic alterations to be explored, understood, and overcome. The narrative of global history situates respective cultures in a coherent trajectory, conceptualized in both geographical and temporal terms. The chapter focuses on tracing the crystallization of the notion of global history, and global interpretive apparatus in the writings of Johann Gottfried Herder on Genesis.

In his notion of global history, Herder's reading of Genesis develops a uniquely dual status for the Hebrew people. The Hebrew nation is portrayed, on the one hand, as a particular cultural symbol that is to be interpreted in light of the nation's specificities: the national language (with its particular grammar, writing system, and pronunciation), the people's cultural norms, and the historical and cultural circumstances that led to the text's authorship. The Hebrew language emerges, nonetheless, as a particular that is being idealized: it is particular, like any other "specific" national artifact, at the same time as it is a cultural symbol that is unusually pregnant with meanings. Second, Herder's analysis of the Hebrew Bible evokes an appeal to the Hebrew Bible not as an object of study to which to apply his interpretation theory but as a historiography of the different components upon which his theory relies. The Genesis stories emerge as a collective, universal ethos of the origins of humankind. The Bible appears as an especially strong collective source thanks to the importance it assigns language, aesthetics, and the emergence of different nationalities and national languages. This philosophical reflective nature of the text reveals Hebrew not as a particular language and nation, but rather as unmarked altogether.

After establishing the dual function of the Hebrew Bible for Herder, this chapter will trace the similarities and differences between Herder's treatment of the Hebrew language and that of Georg Hamann examining the role of the Hebrew language in Hamann's perception of language. The comparison between these authors will focus on the conditions that led to Herder's development of the notion of *Volksgeist*, which is central both to his readings of the Hebrew Bible and to his larger philosophical, aesthetic, and anthropological enterprises. Herder's development of two related notions within his reading of the Hebrew Bible—the sense of empathy which one should reveal when reading a text, and the notion of the *Volksgeist*—both of

which are independent from Hamann's philosophy, shall be examined as Herder's contribution to the emergence of the hermeneutic episteme.

Herder and Hamann's respective treatments of Hebrew will be examined in light of theories on the emergence of Enlightenment society as a unified collective. I focus on both figures' engagement with readership in the context of their respective attempts to define *universal parameters for the process of understanding*. By examining the roles of Hebrew for Hamann and Herder, this chapter establishes a three-part argument: Hebrew was a major subject of debate during the rise of modern hermeneutics; the engagement with Hebrew was not only utilized to establish a new paradigm of reading, but also solicited tensions, problems and debates; these tensions are characteristic of modern hermeneutics and are telling in regard to its larger examination as a modern phenomenon. This use of the Hebrew Bible as the model for exeperiemienting with human udenrstanding shows an interesting shift in the stauts of scriptures: the Bible is not taken on due to its perfection, but due to the need to restore and rescue it.

Various recent works have turned to the Enlightenment: reexamining its reconstitution of religious faiths, revoking its appearance as a period that is antagonistic to or repressive of religious ideals.[33] Much of this current return to the Enlightenment's religious polemics may be traced to the growing interest not in the Enlightenment per se, but rather in its alleged legacy: the forming of the present-day, liberal state as a secular sphere.[34] That is, the commonly accepted major characteristic of the liberal state: the basis of the public sphere on the notion of religious tolerance. Talal Asad has become influential in evoking the view that modern society is not "secular" in the sense that its public sphere and state institutions are indifferent to religious convictions.[35] Asad's critique and its subsequent reception have shown that the constitution of political secularism may cohere with certian Christian, specifically Protestant, ideals. Asad presumes that the religious history of political constructs situates them in a certain religious

[33] For recent historiographies that propose the uncovering of political tendencies and processes behind the Enlightenment's treatment of religion, see David Jan Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Tomoko Masuzawa's *The Invention of World Religions: or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[34] Different accounts diverge significantly in constituting what would count as "secularism" in modern, liberal society. For an affirmation of secularism theory, see David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978); for an account that seeks to distinguish between religion's entrance into a defined sector in the modern state, and its so-called privatization, understood as its loss of power, see José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) and his contribution to the volume *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors*, ed. David Scott and Charles Hirschkind (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006). For an influential recent account on problems of the concurrent role secularism plays in the public and private spheres (specifically in regard to political theology), see Eric Santner, *The Royal Remains: The People's Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), xii.

[35] For the use of Asad's tenets in anthropology (particularly, in combination with field research), see Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) and her contribution to the collection *Is Critique Secular?: Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*, ed. Talal Asad et al. (Berkeley: Townsend Center for the Humanities, University of California, 2009).

episteme, often indentified with Western assumptions on the world (an epitome of which is the advocating of "religious tolerance").[36] He thusly establishes that taking part in democractic political life forces certain religious values upon the its pariticpants. Religious pluralism (which is closely related to the distinction of the public political sphere from the private sphere) in which religion can be practiced freely is an ideal whose grounding in a specific religious tradition carry political ramifications in regard to the treatment of religious traditions that are "intolerant in nature."[37]

Using historiographical accounts of the construction of the Enlightenment public sphere shows Herder and Hamann's engagement with Hebrew as a means for mobilizing their assumptions on reading more generally. Turning the Bible into an object with universal meanings goes beyond an affinity for specific religious and ethnic identities. Thus, the Hebrew Bible's stature as a document of the Genesis of humankind promotes a technique of universal appreciation and processing of the text. The Old Testament's story of origins, I argue, calls for the collective restoration of the text through Hamann and Herder's respective explorations of the human integral comprehension apparatus and cognitive capcities. Following Hamann and Herder's approaches to Hebrew, I will thus establish that both Hamann and Herder, despite (and in fact thanks to) the differences between them, fulfilled an important role in enabling the construction of readership as a collective term. These authors contributed to the infrastructure of the Bible's "secular" readership with their concurrent suggestions for different shapes of the collective ethos that stands at the core of the Enlightenment's universalization of theological reading.

Humanity's Historical Origins

As Frederick Beiser has argued, Herder's overall eminence as a historian is due to his promoting of natural history together with an emphasis on the particularity of historical events.[38] A peak moment of this combined perspective on human history is the long, late essay *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity* (1784–91). In the prologue to that text, Herder defines his goal as the attempt to establish a cohesive history of humankind, expressing awareness to the singular nature of each people on earth.[39] God's so-called fingerprint is found, according to this view, in the diversity of world nations.[40] With that in mind, Herder's approach to the Hebrew

[36] See his "Reflections on Blasphemy and Secular Culture," in Hent de Vries, ed, *Religion: Beyond a Concept* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 580-609.
[37] See Asad's *Formations of the Secular*, especially, pp. 205. For a succinct summary of Asad's claims on political secularism, see William E. Connolly, "Europe: A Minor Tradition," in Scott and Hirschkind's volume *Powers of the Secular Modern* (75-92).
[38] *The German Historicist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 101-147.
[39] *Johann Gottfried Herder. Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menscheit*, 12.
[40] Ibid, 36.

Bible as a unique cultural artifact in that it is both the epitome of cultural query, and the source of the moral justification for its conduct.

"[B]ei Gott ist Alles Ein ewiger, vollkommener Gedanke: und in diesem Verstande einen Gedanken, ein Wort der Bibel Göttlich nennen, ist die größte Hyperbel von Anthropomorphismus," writes Johann Gottfried Herder at the beginning of his *On the First Document of Humankind*. Reading the Bible as God's word in its literality would thus be "Unsinn, Vergötterung einer Menschlichen Seele gewesen – ein fanatischer Gedanke, dem alle Begriffe von Gott und von unserer Natur, die ganze Beschaffenheit der heiligen Schriften, und aller gesunde Menschenverstand widerspricht" (28). Alerting against such a way of reading the Bible through an anthropomorphism, Herder promotes instead interpretation that is tuned to the human initial inability to apprehend the divine: "...so lange wir keine Goettliche Grammatik, Logik, und Metaphysik haben; so lange wollen wir also auch Menschlich auslegen. Sprache, Zeiten, Sitten, Nation, Schrifsteller, Zussamenhang - alles, wie in einem Menschlichen Buche" (29).

The idea that the Bible is like all "human" books addressing humankind is an essential step to establishing the similarity between the Bible and literary texts essential for hermeneutic thinking. Herder's simultaneous engagement with biblical and literary texts, and his advocacy of their understanding in conjunction with one another, emerges in the *First Document* and in *The Oldest Document of Humankind* vis-à-vis his interpretation of Genesis, a text he reads as a universal ethos of beginning: the emergence of humankind. Through his analysis of Genesis develops his theory of the *Volksgeist*, a notion that he developed, among others, in his collection of *Volkslieder*. The idea that a nation's spirit is embedded in its language and national literature emerges with regard to this idea's applicability to the Bible as a significant historical source, the merits of which include its representation of the culture and time in which it was written.

The special status, and continual presence of the languages of origins is essential to Herder's overall project of describing the historical development of civilization. Thus, in Herder's famous *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772) he describes the "languages of origin" as a living testimony to the development of human language from instinctive reactions of the human drives (most importantly, the expression of pain). The languages of origin contain the sounds of nature in their primordial form:

"In allen Sprachen des Ursprungs tönen noch Reste dieser Naturtöne; nur freilich sind sie nicht die Hauptfäden der menschlichen Sprache. Sie sind nicht die eigentlichen Wurzeln, aber die Säfte, die die Wurzeln der Sprache beleben." A reminder to the driving force behind human language, the languages of origins thus break with the process of estrangement from the sounds of nature that characterizes life in civilized society.[41] Language thus encompasses, especially in

[41] *„Daß der Mensch sie ursprünglich mit den Tieren gemein habe*, bezeugen jetzt freilich mehr gewisse Reste als volle Ausbrüche; allein auch diese Reste sind unwidersprechlich. Unsre künstliche Sprache mag die Sprache der

poetry, a nation's specific attributes, the "body of a nation," as Herder establishes in the prologue to his translation of the collection of folk-songs (Volkslieder), demonstrated in language, tone, and content.[42]

Early on in his writing on the Hebrew people, Herder sets a paradigm of reading the Hebrew Bible as a literary text, namely by distinguishing the text's literary devices in the context in which they were created, paying attention to the text's style, tone, and imagery, the "Poetische Einkleidungen"[43] which construct its narrative. Examining the Bible just like "any" other text situates those textual features as parts of a larger conception of texts, a conception that relies of Herder's earlier work, and especially on the development of the notion that different nations adhere to diverging cultural contexts. With the later development of hermeneutics in the first half of the nineteenth century, this principle has appeared as a seminal principle of modern hermeneutics altogether. Herder's then-revolutionary claim that an interpreter should aim for a stage of emphatic reading, an identification with a given culture, is a milestone of this endeavor.[44]

Herder insists that the Bible cannot be taken to signify hidden, "higher" meanings, a claim that at times appears highly provocative.[45] While defending the status of the Bible as an object that is yet inspired by the divine, Herder defends the Bible from the perception that it needs to be recuperated. It is the literal that retains the connotations previously retained through allegorical readings, marking the process of literary reading as one that solicits a revelation of the divine. As Hans Frei has argued, Herder's reading of the Bible is a seminal contribution to the development of a new Protestant consideration of the Bible that advocates for "the realistic spirit in history" (183). According to Frei, Herder manages to reconcile the status of the Bible as a divine object with its position as a text that can be read and deciphered as a product of specific historical and cultural circumstances. On the one hand, Herder's approach rejects the naiveté of taking the Bible to transcend history. On the other hand, he presents a historiographical consideration of the

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Natur so verdränget, unsre bürgerliche Lebensart und gesellschaftliche Artigkeit mag die Flut und das Meer der Leidenschaften so gedämmet, ausgetrocknet und abgeleitet haben, als man will" (698-99).

[42] *Johann Gottfried Herder. Volkslieder, Übertragungen, Dichtungen*, 19-20.

[43] *First Document*, 17.

[44] On the originality of Herder's use of the term *Einfühlung*, enriching the German language and the idea of historical perception, see Friedrich Meinecke and Carl Hinrichs, *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1959), 357. On the importance of the term for Schleiermacher's hermeneutics see Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* , 305-6. Describing the origins of the "hermeneutic movement," a phenomenon most readily identified with the writings of Schleiermacher, Michael Forster has claimed that research has generally underestimated Johann Gottfried Herder's shaping of the term and overestimated Schleiermacher's contribution. Forster's alternative assessment posits Herder as the originator of the notion of empathic identification with an author. Herder's contribution entailed the sensation and psychological rapport with the author—attributes which are often taken as the major contribution of hermeneutics to modern theory of interpretation *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition*, 3. See also his introduction to the collection *Herder: Philosophical Writings*, xviii.

[45] A telling example for this adherence to the Bible as a human object is Herder's rejection of an allegorical reading of the Song of Songs, which will be discussed in length in the following chapter.

Bible that stresses the need to perceive the Bible in its context. The Hebrew Bible, with the frequent discordance of its parts with one another, and with its many "incompressible" vocabulary usages, is exemplary of Herder's approach. Both phenomena reflect the Hebrew Bible's long-lasting circulation, which marks it as especially susceptible to the influence of history. Certainly the characterization of the Hebrew Bible as demanding special attention for the traces of history is grounded in the Bible's long history of being read as such an object. An important historical source is Baruch Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*, which places the Hebrew Bible at the center of a much-detailed inquiry into the impacts of the contingent historical circumstances on the circulation of the Scriptures, as will be established in chapter three.

Yet at the same time Herder preserves the idea of reconstructing the past, which reaffirms theological views prominent in the period, and specifically, the work of Johann David Michaelis who made the influential claim that the Bible should be read with thorough recognition of the Hebrews' environment. While attuning to this historical perspective, Herder's position opts to sustain the divine status of the Bible by maintaining its supremacy. According to Herder, both historical descriptions and historical-like descriptions are grounded in the conditions of the text's writing, to which the spirit gives right.[46] Factuality and fact-likeness are thus granted the same ontological status through a new historically grounded reading—which benefits the sustenance of a reading that is based on the spirit (i.e., on the text's divine right). This process of reading *through understanding* thus sets the grounds for collective engagement with the Scriptures. It also presumes the reconciliation of the literal and the historical via the detection of the circumstances in which the text was written. This effort has prominently advanced the eighteenth-century transition of biblical reading as, according to Frei, "Hermeneutics [was] clearly on its way toward a notion of explicative interpretation in which a biblical narrative makes sense in accordance with its author's intention and (before long) the culture he exemplifies. And the meaning of the narrative is the subject matter to which the words refer" (91).

Herder offers a cogent way of grounding this principle of the Bible's "spirit" in a methodology that accords with philological and historiographical inquiries into the text. The advocating of reason through a scholarly approach to the Bible (as promoted most influentially by Spinoza) could thus co-exist with praise for the literal sense of the Scriptures. Readership through understanding ("Verstand") is the precondition for Herder's methodology, and it is something which all readers possess. For this to work, it was not enough to blur the distinction between factuality and fact-likeness by insisting that both should be interpreted in light of the cultural conventions during the times of the Hebrew Bible's writing. A significant component that adds to this is an idealized conception of language and of philology. Like Michaelis, Herder holds that identification with the Hebrews is essential to "historical" understanding of the Bible. It thus

[46] *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 187-190.

seems that the study of Hebrew must be a first stage of inquiry according to Herder's scheme. At the same time, Herder does not interfere with the philological enquiries into Hebrew, but conveys that the biblical text can be interpreted by any reader, regardless of scholarly training, through common-sense understanding of the circumstances in which the text was written. Hebrew consequently emerges as a language that—phenomenally—offers its so-called deciphering to all readers.

In the *First Document*, Herder performs the reading method he advocates: a reading that is attentive to the cultural and surrounding circumstances of the text's authorship, and especially to its imagery and literary devices (which are contingent upon the text's particular historical standing). Nonetheless, Herder continually reminds the reader that the text under examination is not just *any* text. Herder describes the Old Testament, and especially biblical poetry, as cultural artifacts which fit the hermeneutic paradigm "especially well." The Hebrew Bible is a text whose significance stems first and foremost from its uniquely human nature, which arises through the sophisticated and crafty working of the text's imagery and its stimulating effect on the readers.

The Hebrew Bible, like any other cultural object, should be interpreted as an artifact of the culture from which it originated. Yet at the same time, its powerful imagery is due to the uniqueness of the culture for which it was composed, making it not only an example for Herder's notion of reading through empathy to the target culture, but an epitome for this reading method. The Hebrew people's use of allegory and image shows them to be extremely sensual: the ancient Hebrew poet wishes to appeal to his people through stimulating literary devises since enhanced sensual exposure is what guides their comprehension. His attempt to assemble "everything" into a picture/image ("Bild") (98) is not a sign of a Hebrew lack of sophistication. Rather, it is a historically prominent example for the ability to develop philosophical investigations through the use of images:

> daß sie dieselben, bis auf die feinsten Philosophischen Bemerkungen, in ein sinnliches Bild einkleideten; das ist als ihre allgemeine Lehrart der Philosophie bekannt: das bezeugt ihre Sprache und Naturlehre und Religion und Geschichte. Wie sehr war nun diese *Sinnlichmachung*, diese Schöpfung des Baums der Erkenntnisse, nach ihrer Welt und Lebensart, und Sprache und Denkart angemessen (ibid, body origins).

The Hebrew Bible is thus "just like" any other text in that its form and literary devices are contingent upon the cultural specificities of the society where it emerged. The Bible's use of literary devices should provide a key for understanding the epistemology of the people to whom those devices were supposed to appeal. But at the same time, the Hebrew poetry is unique because it meant to appeal to people who are especially sensual by nature. The Hebrew people and their demand for an enhanced stimulation of the senses thus expand upon the definition of the "singularity" of a culture and its expression through literary devices that attune to the audience's sensitivities.

As much as Herder idealizes the Hebrew culture, his tone IS at the same time patronizing. After telling the story of Adam and Eve's discovery of their nakedness, he notes in this way the differences in cultural norm between the Hebrew people and his contemporaries. This reminds his readers of the cultural differences and his objective of adherence to the text's original tone:

> Ich schreibe im Tone eines Morgenländers; denn ich interpretiere ein Morgenländisches Stück aus den ältesten Zeiten. Bei uns diese gesellschaftliche Scham, Anstand, Bescheidenheit u. s. w. von Jugend auf gelernte, und durch alle Gesetze der Gesellschaft, die mehr als die Gesetze der Natur gelten, privilegierte Tugenden (103).

The suggestion that the reader imagine himself in the viewpoint of an (oriental) *Morgenländer* evokes the recognition of what it takes to do so, that is, acknowledgment of the gaps between their norms and one's own. To Herder, these gaps must be recognized in a non-judgmental manner: a process which enhances one's perception of one's own societal norms as arbitrary. Herder's regard of Adam and Eve's *Einkleidungen*, the cover they sought after eating from the tree of wisdom, evokes his early mentioning of poetic "Einkleidungen" (17) that should guide those dealing with any text, wishing to decipher it by detecting the influence on its literary devices of the culture in which it was conceived. The sudden need to wear body cover is the moment of the emergence of a distinction—a division—between a signifier and a signified, words and meaning, as linguistic use was torn from its mere representative mode (like the naming of animals) into a new, playful and deceptive mode (like the following instance of Adam and Eve lying to God). This is the moment when metaphors came into use, seeking a poetic "cover" for thoughts as well as world objects. The meta-poetic role of the suit sought by Adam and Eve is exemplary for the role of the Hebrew Bible. It is a text with a plot that has, significantly, a historiographical style and a historiographical stature (Herder blurs the distinction between the two with his prominent contention that a text is always documentation of the culture that produced it, a blurring that prolongs the belief that the Bible *is*, in effect, an historical account). The biblical plot evokes awareness of language's role in forming the world. As the text is considered simultaneously fictional and historical, this is a meta-poetic awareness that is materialized in the events of world history, and primarily in the creation stories of Genesis.

Another example of the Hebrew Bible's self-reflective nature is the appearance of language in Genesis in the acts of naming world objects and entities. Herder ascribes the naming of woman not to God, but to two personas: the first man and the biblical poet. The former recognizes the woman as part of his own flesh, a recognition which he commemorates by naming her after himself, man-woman ("Mann-Männin"). Herder sees this as an example of the parallelism featured in biblical poetry: the naming of woman is equivalent to the naming of animals.[47] Recognizing parallelism between biblical scenes and verses is a means by which biblical reading

[47] For the importance of parallelism to Herder's reading of the Hebrew Bible, see Daniel Weidner, *Bibel und Literatur um 1800* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2011), 56.

is being "pluralized": every reader is able to follow Herder's point and seek similar instances in the biblical text.

Herder establishes that both acts of naming constitute distinctions between kinds: man-animals, man-woman. These distinctions are constituted as perpetual through their eternal existence in language. Man distinguishes himself from his surroundings with his use of language—the distinctive capacity of humankind—in a creative manner and in the process of dynamic exploration of his surroundings. Genesis is thus a story about the origins of man's creative responsiveness to reality, which is, at the same time, the story of how the birth of man lies in the birth of language in its first uses.

This interpretation of Genesis assigns it poetic awareness, not only in the interpretation's depiction of Genesis as a historiography that pays special attention to the role of language in world creation, but also in the interpretation's holding that Genesis continually alludes to its own status as literature. The Hebrew poet is, on that level, an *Ich* who replicates through his writing of the text the creative act of naming. The naming of the woman is done *in the moment of* (or *through*) the act of narrating the origins of humankind. Herder compliments the Hebrew poet for being the one to commemorate the gender difference with language: the ancient poet embarks on the enduring distinction between these two signifiers through the creative act of poetry. To Herder, the creative act of naming is parallel to the act of innovative narration. Both show man in his ability to find a creative, linguistic shape to his conception of reality, a capacity that draws an equivalence between him and God. This similarity shows poetry as both the emblem of creative linguistic use and as the ability to ponder it: the act of naming is the topic of the story, which the poet both describes and performs. The poetic initiative of writing Genesis thus describes creation in the same motion of mirroring it. It is itself a speech-act that not only emulates creation, but also performs it.

What is more, the relationship between poetry and language is shown in the effectiveness of poetry as a tool for cultural transmission. The creative use of language—for example, through imagery and wordplay— whose emergence is detailed in the creation story simultaneously evoke the means by which this story is told and made appealing to new generations. Literary imagination thus stimulates its further transmission in a narrative that reflects on the merits of linguistic creativity. The merits of poetic innovation stimulates the continual receipt and spread of these tenets from father to son, and from one (ancient) culture to another (the modern one). The power of narrations thus promotes a major component of Herder's theory of language and of its creative use through poetry: the existence of national languages. Herder praises the excellence of the Genesis poet: "Wie National, wie Morgenländisch, wie Dichterisch!" (86). The ability to establish linguistic innovation, as much as it is universal, is the means of transmitting one national language among many and make it prosperous through the vital circulation of texts. Ingraining imagery in daily life enhances the power and presence of a language as cultural capital.

The portrayal of Hebrew as the language of creation whose extraordinary power is due to its unique, meta-poetic and sensual nature, was eminent to Herder's contribution to Protestant theology. In his reading of Genesis as the meta-poetic historiography of humankind, Herder shows the importance of the Genesis stories in documenting the emergence of national languages with national differences. A reflection upon the origins of national languages is detailed in the section "Die Poetische Geschichte von Verteilung der Völker und Sprachen" in the *First Document*. There, Herder reads the Story of Babylon as an explanation for the differences of national languages from one another. The story "makes sense" in that one language cannot simply be sustained on earth as unified and single for long. Dissimilarities between languages are due to the manifold differences among speakers. Variances in uttering a language can develop from physical differences that are contingent upon gender and on differing physiological constructions of the "Sprachwerkzeuge" (language apparatus)—the throat, the palate, the tongue, the teeth and the lips (158-9):[48]

> Nun werden gar verschiedne Familien, die sich von einander absondern, und etwa hier und da ihren Hauston in diese und jene Aussprache bringen: das Klima, Luft und Wasser, Speise und Trank sei sehr verschieden: die Sitte der Gesellschaft, und die mächtige Göttin, die Gewohnheit bringe diese und eine andre Art von Demut oder Höflichkeit in die Sprache; sie wird sich mit den Geberden und Denkart sehr ändern, eigne Dialekte machen – und das ist doch erst Aussprache. (159)

All languages emerge as different from one another, because they are all contingent upon these conditions that vary among geographical areas. To Herder, these variations between languages parallel the differences between ways of thinking ("Denkart") (160).

This description advances Herder's conception of national languages as inherently imperfect, in the sense that language always contains diversions from grammatical rules—a view which is evident in his corpus of works as a whole. The diversions from the rule are rooted in the historical use of the language through time. This is a testimony to the changes that have occurred in the language throughout various historical periods.[49] As language is a living and flexible entity, the enduring presence of which is contingent upon its use. Languages are immanent reminders of peoples' existence separately from one another, but yet within a system of nationalities (that is, in relation to one another). In the specific context of reading the Bible, the view that the traces of time are not a sign of a language's inferiority, but rather are markers of its

[48] In his *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity*, Herder further elaborates of the connection between a national language and a nation's climate, as well as ethnically-influenced physiognomic language apparatus (136-142).

[49] Herder famously develops a fuller account of his perception of the "impurity" of language as the marker of its historical transformation (and thereby, a testimony for its richness) in his *Ueber die Neuere Deutsche Literatur* (181-199).

richness, makes unique and cogent Herder's proposal to understand biblical language through a restoration that still maintains the view of the biblical text as supreme.

In *The Oldest Document of Humankind* (1774-6), the self-reflective nature that Herder ascribes to the Hebrew Bible takes the form of an elaborated theory of the Hebrew language: a theory that presents Hebrew as possessing a special semantic status. Examined in its historical context, Herder's later description of the Hebrew people's unique writing system appears as an apologia. The text responds to *The Divine Legation of Moses* (1738-1742), in which influential British theologian William Warburton develops a theory of the hieroglyphs. For both Warburton and Herder the Hebrew language elicits the emergence of a new writing culture; whereas Warburton sees Hebrew as a degrading stage in the development of languages, Herder contends that the poetic style of the Hebrew Bible is a speaking hieroglyphic—which he establishes in *The Oldest Document* through a reading of the divine language of creation (318-9). God's ability to create the world in seven days forms, according to Herder, a pattern that resembles script: the seven days of creation are equivalent to seven letters in which the world was "written."[50]

Contrary to Warburton's argument that the new invention of *Schrift* provoked the shift from complex ways of thinking to simple ones, a shift that is marked in the decline of Egypt and the rise of Israel, Herder describes the Hebrew epistemology as a highly influential evolvement of human culture and art. This sets the cultural study of the Hebrew people in a new direction. Herder praises Hebrew in view of its role as an *Ur*-Language. The description of Hebrew as the ideal language of creation appears at the very beginning of the text, where Herder establishes his theory of the Hieroglyphs of creation. An epitome for the supremacy of script is the creation of the world in seven days is an outstanding sign of language's importance in the creation process—at the same time that it characterizes the unique nature of the specific language of creation. Each of the days of creation signifies a part of the whole (the entire act of creation) that is essential (270).

With this description, Herder distinguishes his interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, and specifically his perception of Hebrew, from the exclusion and degradation of the Hebrew Bible by some of his contemporaries. His model purports to correct an historical injustice that has been done to the Hebrew people and to their heritage that is embodied in biblical poetry. This correction of an "historical injustice" is dominant not only against the background of the aforementioned Warburton, but also within an evolving tradition in Germany that had started to show its influence. Biblical philology, under the broad influence of Michaelis, the period's most prominent biblical scholar, clearly favored Greek (and respectively the New Testament) as an appreciated object of study, contending that the Old Testament has been highly corrupted through its enduring transmission. Examining Hebrew in comparison to other ancient languages

[50] See Daniel Weidner's "Ursprung und Wesen der ebräischen Poesie" in *Urpoesie und Morgenland. Johann Gottfried Herders "Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie"* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2008), 134; Weidner, *Bibel und Literatur um 1800*, 50-61.

(mainly Arabic) should enable the scholar to recuperate some of its original intentions. To Michaelis, the process of restoring the original text—as much as it is a testimony to the productivity of present scientific study—is also a signifier of the inferiority of the Hebrew people's cultural legacy.

The comparison with Michaelis helps define Herder's own textual approach, with its much different sociological-anthropological rationale. With the advancement of the Volks- and Zeitgeist project, Herder commences the change in status of culture and text. Whereas for Michaelis culture and text stand on one side of the inquiry, Herder's object of interpretation, the Hebrew text (together with its philological understanding), stands in a reciprocal relationship with the culture that produced it. Herder's subtle move vis-à-vis this perception is to advocate a historical reception of the text (an approach that implies, on a first level, linguistic comprehension of a text), while in effect propagating "reasoning" as an abstract notion that replaces the philological in its traditional form.

Michaelis' contribution to biblical scholarship is essential to Herder's project in that it aims at "bringing the Hebrews to life" through a process of examining the Old Testament and the Hebrew language as objects of study that are independent from the New Testament. Michaelis mostly refrains from presenting the Old Testament as a text that hints at or alludes to the New Testament. Nevertheless, a gap stands between the two in view of Herder's insistence of the observer's need to take on the examined culture's point of view, albeit without demanding of readers any scholarly knowledge of that examined culture. According to Herder, as noted by Jonathan M. Hess, "Michaelis […] lacks a sense of precisely those temporal and geographical differences that structure history and make its act of empathy possible…" (59). Even so, Herder assumes that all readers of the Bible are capable of noting these differences without any academic or scholarly apprenticeship.

In sum, Herder's insistence on Hebrew as a universal ethos of humankind embodies praise of the language as a meta-language by way of its corresponding status as the language of creation. His insistence is also emblematic of the shift that his interpretive approach has made in the hermeneutic paradigm. The status of Hebrew as part of a universal ethos *de facto* purports to it the status of a divinely shaped cultural object. It is an emblem of the new shift that molded the emergence of modern hermeneutics, since the idealization of Hebrew has both an instrumental role and a symbolic-conceptual role in promoting this paradigm. Hebrew's idealization has enabled reading "the literal" as a process that is open to all individuals. But it is at the same time a process that portrays itself as its own *raison d'être*: the Hebrew language now entailed that the interpretation process would be relevant to all individuals within the collective ethos that universally-marked meanings are taken to convey.

In this way, the reading process is understood as a revelation of the divine while establishing how this revelation pertains to a "neutral" or "universal" audience of readers who are taken as capable of "reading" the beginning of civilization. The Hebrew Bible is thus an exemplary text

for the enquiry of cultural relativism: it appears as a rich source of evidence for the productivity of Herder's reading method—a richness that resonates in the Bible's status as a holy text due to its omniscient textual stature—as literarily prolific. The literary skillfulness and meta-poetic awareness that Herder aims to find in the Hebrew Bible is cleaved, in other words, to its seemingly universal importance as the documentation of the origins of humankind. The ability of "everyman" to read and interpret the Genesis story in the manner suggested by Herder colors the cultural motivation to read the text—its role as the documentation of the origins of humankind—as a collective, universal effort. Herder's dual consideration of the Old Testament as an object of historical examination, and at the same time as a historiography per se, performs with its blurring of the object and means of examination a radical reconsideration of the historical. This effort was seminal to the Protestant establishment of the Bible as a narrative whose grounding in world history must be reached through a critical reflection on the text. The process of reasoning about the Bible's "human" nature is that which is being idealized as what may reveal the text's divine stature.

For Herder, the Hebrew language constitutes a universal ethos from within its position as the language of creation, and its corresponding presentation as a highly reflective account of language, aesthetics and style. The characteristics that humankind has in common—the ability to interpret, which, as will be discussed henceforth, already in Hamann receives its status as universal—emerged against the backdrop of a common historical vision for the origins of language. As noted by Weidner,

> Herders Morgenland ist nicht nur ein Ort der "anderen" Natur, die darauf wartet beschrieben zu werden, sondern eine "andere" Schrift; es wird nicht nur semiotisch konstruiert, sondern ist selbst ein semiotischer Gegenstand. Herders Schöpfungsgeschichte, der angenommene Ursprung von Sprache und Schrift in einem Urzeichen, das in der Struktur der Schöpfungsgeschichte eingeschrieben sein soll, fasst dabei in gewisser Hinsicht die verschiedenen zeitgenössischen Diskurse über Zeichen und Bilder, Sprache und Schrift zusammen und versucht, sie wiederum in die Bibel einzuschreiben.[51]

The eighteenth-century's broad interest in the means by which one could mediate or evaluate the aesthetics of fine art from that of poetry finds its way, according to this argument, to the debate about hieroglyphs. In light of this debate, Hebrew is taken by both Herder and Hamann before

[51] *Bibel und Literatur*, 51. On the great impact of theology and biblical study in shaping the term "Morgenländer" and German orientalism, see Andrea Polaschegg, *Der andere Orientalismus: Regeln deutsch-morgenländischer Imagination im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin/ New York: W. de Gruyter, 2005), 157-77. Polaschegg shows how, for Herder and others, positing the Morgenland as the place in which the Hebrew Bible was written enables the Bible's idealization as a text from an old age. She traces this transformation, which she specifically grounds in the new conception of the Bible as a supreme poetic text in the late eighteenth century: "Ohne dabei den Character einer Offenbarung zu verlieren, gewinnt der biblische Text im Laufe dieser Jahrzehnte die Signatur einer Poesie, aus der die orientalische (Vor-)Vergangenheit spricht" (166).

him to be the origin of signs—depicting the biblical account of the birth of civilization as an account of the birth of semantics. The Hebrew Bible wins meta-poetic stature in that its language was used during the creation of the world, in a primordial, idealized setting.

Hamann's Biblical Reading: Sharing Common Secrets

Herder's contention that the Bible should be read as a literary text promotes the view that every reader can understand the Bible, regardless of philological or theological training. This conviction presumes that the ancient, biblical text—despite its fragmented nature and linguistic obscurity, and notwithstanding the discrepancy between its cultural background and that of its modern readers—can and should be understood in the context in which it was composed.

Consequently, "understanding" corresponds with the Aristotelian model of investigating the world: man is capable of approving or disproving certain presumptions about reality through an active study of his surroundings, and in the case of Herder's model for reading the Bible, of history. Hamann's poetic manifesto grounds a universal vision of the human in the Genesis stories: it proposes a vision of poetry as the "mother tongue" of humankind ("Poesie ist die Muttersprache des menschlichen Geschlechts"[52]). A comparison of Herder's writing on the Hebrew Bible to that of his teacher, Johann Georg Hamann, thus sheds light on the theological influences behind Herder's reading of the Bible, and scrutinizes the background behind Herder's intervention into textual interpretation.

Taking poetry as belonging to a primordial mode of thinking, Hamann opens his famous essay, "Aesthetica in nuce" with the identification of biblical poetry as the language that created humankind and that was spoken during man's first encounters with his surroundings. The moment of man's creation was the pinnacle of the process of creating the world, as man stands at its end as the pattern, or the copy of divine characteristics: "Endlich krönte GOTT die sinnliche Offenbarung seiner Herrlichkeit durch das Meisterstück des Menschen. Er schuf den Menschen in Göttlicher Gestalt" (*sic*, ibid). God's supremacy is expressed first and foremost through the act of creating the world; paradoxically, the main expression of God's power is his creation of a being that is equal to him—one having his own power to create.

Hamann's text exemplifies reading as a process which continually poses and challenges assumptions regarding readers' identity and efforts. Hamann views the Bible not as a divine object free of errors, but as a "human" medium that transmits the godly word in which the errors, fragments and gaps that create moments of incomprehension also play a seminal role in illustrating the logic of the reading of the Bible. These inaccuracies unfold the symbolic role of Hebrew within this methodological framework. Explicating this theory in a letter to Herder,

[52] Hamann, Johann Georg, "Aesthetica in nuce," in his *Sämtliche Werke. Schriften über Philosophie/Philologie/Kritik 1758-1763*, ed. Josef Nadler (Vienna: Herder Verlag, 1950), 197.

Hamann concludes that the confrontation with gaps in the text is a step toward the accomplishment of human reason.[53] This perception of the Bible features a significant role in Hamann's theology. Hamann destines religious the role of rescuing reason, after the recognition of man's innate sin (the fall): "Was ist die Religion anders als die lautere gesunde Vernunft, die durch den Suendenfall erstickt und verwildert ist, und die der Geist Gottes, nachdem er d[as] Unkraut ausgerottet, den Boden zubereitet und zum Saam[en] des Himmels wieder geheiligt hat, in uns zu pflanz[en] und wiederherzustellen sucht."[54] In its livelihood, religion enables God to inseminate man with His spirit.

Hamann stressed the role of textual engagement in his theological paradigm through the function of script (Schrift). Whereas nature (as much as it is superb), cannot mediate God's language to man, script addresses humankind, speaking to it in its own language:

> Die Natur ist herrlich, wer kann sie übersehen, wer versteht ihre Sprache, sie ist stumm, sie ist leblos für den natürl. Menschen. Aber die Schrift Gottes Wort, die Bibel, ist herrlicher, ist volkommener, ist die Amme, die uns die erste Sprache giebt [...] und uns stark macht allmählich auf unsern eigen[en] Füßen zu geh[en] (*Londoner Schriften*, 152).

The nursing effect of script in fostering man's ability to "stand on his own two feet," helps shape man's understanding of God's revelation in the world.

Where, then, does the meaning of the script lie: in the mind of the author or the reader? To Hamann, the interpreter must have the courage to be a "Kabbalist"; that is, to say more than the text does, not to express oneself, but to say what the author left unsaid. Hamann adapts a certain principle from the Kabbalah: the creative and imaginative reading of the Bible. In his imagining of Kabbalistic reading techniques, interpretation is motivated by religious efforts which then yield the power of creative and inspirational connection to the biblical texts. These are aimed at an evocative interaction with the Scriptures that elicits individual imagination. This interaction always relies on the biblical text as its *raison d'être*; at the same time, the strength of the reliance on the Bible is an impetus that kindles the reader's imagination. Evoking this view of the Jewish practice of reading, Hamann forms a model of reading the Bible as "lebendige Schrift"—as a dynamic object that activates human imagination through the reading process.[55]

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[53] Cited and translated in Dickson, *Johann Georg Hamman's Relational Metacriticism*, 89.

[54] *Londoner Schriften*, 213-4.

[55] Eckhard Schumacher portrays Hamann's concept of *lebendige Schrift* as eliciting a process of stimulation in which the Bible is the center. The Bible stands as an intentional object with which to practice different forms of understanding. *Die Ironie der Unverständlichkeit: Johann Georg Hamann, Friedrich Schlegel, Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man* (1st. ed. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000). Dickson's classic study of Hamann situates his theory of hermeneutics within his larger philosophical enterprise. Hamann distinguishes his ideas from the two major ways of perceiving knowledge: of either privileging the mind (or the soul) as already containing the objects within it, or privileging the objects. Hamann wishes to reject the subdivision between the object of knowledge and the human capacities that perceive it. See *Johann Georg Hamann's Relational Metacriticism* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1995), 15.

Recognition that the Bible is human, i.e. imperfect, is highly important to Hamann. Its perception as imperfect is a precondition for the Bible to be a tool that functions as a mediator of godly communication. As formulated by Dickson, to Hamann, "The Bible, whatever the source of its inspiration, is written by human authors, and it is addressed to human beings to evoke a very 'human' and personal response. Perfection … would be *inappropriate* …God communicates with us on *our* terms, in *our* fashion, within *our* limitations."[56] By and large, Hamann's text sets the stage for a long tradition of hermeneutic approaches that are against viewing the inability to comprehend textual utterances—on the linguistic or philological level—as a sign either of the flawlessness of a text or of a certain incapability of its readers. Instead, Hamann suggests that one's perspective toward the text is contingent upon one's particular life circumstances that one recognizes through the reading of the "book of all books" (as seen in Hamann's own inspirational experience, described in his *Londoner Schriften*). Hamann thus evinces the individual engagement with the Bible as a praxis that reciprocally constitutes the reader and the Bible. This radical perception of the godly language is, in effect, what mediated and enabled Herder's insistence on reading the Bible as a "human" text.

In his third "Hellenistic Letter" Hamann conveys a strong objection to his contemporaries' presentation of the Hebrew language as a cultural object that should not be restored. This approach is equivalent, according to Hamann, to the portrayal of the language as a dying animal which suffers from mortal wounds.[57] Against Michaelis, Hamann presents biblical Hebrew as an atemporal marker of the relation between man and God.[58] Accordingly, Hamann argues, the reading of the Scriptures should not aim to make the text "more coherent." The text's fragmented nature and the ambiguity of biblical Hebrew are constant reminders of the readers' connection to God, a connection marked in their experiences of reading the Scriptures. The vagueness of certain biblical excerpts is an important example of the text's stimulation of the readers' experience of reading as a dynamic engagement with God. The Bible is human in its conveying of a human—individualistic and singular—personal life experience.[59]

The beginning of Hamann's text demonstrates the potential of the Hebrew language in reaching this goal. The text opens with two biblical quotations: the first from the Book of Judges ("the Song of Deborah"), and the other from the Book of Job. The inclusion of these excerpts should

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The process of reading the Bible is thus not a mode of critical examination, but of diffusion of the self into the "object" of reference.

[56] *Johann Georg Hamann's Relational Metacriticism*, 132, body origins.

[57] Dickson, *Johann Georg Hamann's Relational Metacriticism*, 86.

[58] John R. Betz reiterates Hans-Martin Lumpp's claim that "it is notable that Michaelis is depicted as sitting not upon the living Word of God, but (in reference to the title of one of Michaelis's own works, *Beurtheilung der Mittel, welche man anwendet, die ausgestorbene Hebräische Sprache zu verstehen*) upon the relics of an ancient language that, from a purely rationalist-historicist perspective, cannot help but seem dead" (*After Enlightenment: The Post-Secular Vision of J.G. Hamann* [Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009], 124; Lumpp, *Philologia Crucis: Zu Johann Georg Hamanns Auffassung von der Dichtkunst* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1970), 43).

[59] See Oswald Bayer und Bernd Weißenborn, Einführung, *Johann Georg Hamann. Londoner Schriften* (Muenchen: C. H. Beck, 1993), 4.

be understood against the background of a transformation in humanistic education, specifically the newly widespread exclusion of Hebrew from the academic curriculum. With the reading public largely incapable of understanding the language, the first two epigrams appear as a performance of textual unintelligibility. Moreover, the choice of these specific biblical excerpts underscores the text's intentional ambiguity. Taken from biblical poetry, a genre that is often archaic (or archaistic, i.e, trying to present itself as older than it really is), the citations are enigmatic to readers of Hebrew and to biblical scholars. Hamann's chosen quotations exemplify the features of biblical poetry as they use several words in a way that disagrees with their lexical meanings:

Buch der Richter. V, 30.

שלל צבעים רקמה

צבע רקמתים לצוארי שלל:

30 "spoil of dyed stuffs for Sisera,

spoil of dyed stuffs embroidered,

two pieces of dyed work embroidered for my neck as spoil?"[60]

Elihu im Buch Hiob XXXII, 19-22.

הנה בטני כיין לא־יפתח

כאבות חדשים יבקע:

אדברה וירוה לי

אפתח שפתי ואענה:

אל־נא אשא פני־איש

ואל־אדם לא אכנה:

כי לא ידעתי אכנה

כמעט ישאני עשני:

My heart is indeed like wine that has no vent;

[60] *The New Revised Standrad Version*.

like new wineskins, it is ready to burst.

20 I must speak, so that I may find relief;

I must open my lips and answer.

21 I will not show partiality to any person

or use flattery towards anyone.

22 For I do not know how to flatter—

or my Maker would soon put an end to me!

HORATIVS.

Odi profanum vulgus & arceo.

Fauete linguis! carmina non prius

Audita, Musarum sacerdos,

Virginibus puerisque canto.

Regum timendorum in proprios greges;

Reges in ipsos imperium est Iouis,

Clari giganteo triumpho,

Cuncta supercilio mouentis.[61]

The Song of Deborah and the Book of Job are notorious for their use of singular words (usages that occur in the Bible only once), which can be evidence of the biblical authors' attempt to present the text as older than it in fact is. The meaning of biblical poetry is "concealed" also from trained philologists and biblical scholars. Hamann thus begins his own text with a performance of obscurity through his use of Hebrew. Yet his turn in the following epigram to write in a language that is much more familiar to his public of readers, Latin, dispels the conviction that linguistic command would yield understanding of the text. The third, Latin epigram is a citation from the poet Horace: "Odi profanum vulgas et arceo" (I hate the mob and distance myself from it) (Carmina 3, 1, 1). With this use of linguistic familiarity, the text wishes to exclude exactly those who think they can understand. John Hamilton describes Hamann's transition between these fragments as constituting his "Poetica obscura": "Like pious custodians, Hamann's obscure

[61] Ibid, 195-96.

words protect the inner sanctum of meaning, barring more readers than they admit."[62] According to Hamann, reading a text requires renouncing the attempt to understand its concrete, literal meaning, which the text explicates, as Hamilton shows, through the transition from collective non-understanding with Hebrew to Latin as a trope of textual understanding.[63] The "non-understanding of Hebrew" emerges here as a cultural trope that the audience of readers is now assumed to be familiar with: Hebrew is the cipher of sharing "common secrets"—facing the biblical enigma. The subsequent process of transcending the written letter through personal engagement with the biblical text is a process that builds on the presumption that the "gaps" in the biblical text exist for all readers, and to the same extent. Like Herder's later proposal of biblical reading through reasoning, this method characterizes the process of reading Hebrew as a cognitive process that is relevant for the general audience. In other words and despite the evident differences between their notions of engagement with the Bible, for both Hamann and Herder, the Hebrew Bible turns into a platform for explicating reading techniques as ingrained in a general theory of reason.

Hebrew is thus no longer meant to be apprehended, in the scholarly, philological sense of the word. It is rather turned to function as a trope that embodies obscurity, an initial mode of incomprehension, which is to be overcome, for both thinkers, through the personal engagement with the biblical text—one that, in Herder's case only, strives to penetrate the position of the original authors, and understand the objective reality behind the writing of the text. In Hamann's paradigm, the obscurity of the letter does not elicit a linear effort (the more obscure the text is, the deeper the investigation into the biblical text one needs to conduct to grasp its meaning). Rather, obscurity is shrouded in the intensity of a trope: in the symbolic value that makes obscurity function as a trope in the first place. In this model of enhancement, Hebrew is not only a means for Hamann to explicate his theory of reading; Hebrew is central to his theory with its standing *as Poetica Obscura*: as an embodiment of the obscurity of biblical texts, an obscurity that continually challenges the universal reader's confidence in order that he grasp its content.

Moving from the Hebrew verses to Horace's Latin, Hamann demonstrates his claim that only a few among the "mob" will be able to understand Hamann's text and comprehend the theory of reading he explicates. Due to the performative standing of his text, the comprehension of the

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[62] "Poetica Obscura: Reexamining Hamann's Contribution to the Pindaric Tradition," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34, no. 1 (2000): 94.

[63] This could only work within a new framework for humanist apprenticeship: the newly established exclusion of Hebrew from the humanist academic curricula where it had been an essential subject for hundreds of years. The linguistic component of humanistic education (mastery of Greek, Latin and Hebrew) was shifting in favor of the command of only Greek and Latin (See Weidner, *Bibel und Literatur um 1800*, 122). Looking at humanistic education as constituting the "knowledge of the public sphere" with the projection of this assumption onto the text's imaginary readers is both an essential condition for Hamann's text and a cultural conviction which the text further constitutes. The detachment of "Hebrew learning" into a separate sphere that is associated with ethnic and religious particularity will be discussed in the third chapter of this dissertation.

theory (i.e., its "right reading") would entail following it.[64] The transformation of Hebrew into a trope does not assume that every reader could now comprehend the Hebrew letter (i.e., penetrate the obscurity of texts and decipher their secrets). It also does not imply—on the meta-level, or in the philosophical function of obscurity—that every reader would now appreciate the status of *secretiveness*, that is, understand Hamann's performative theory of reading.[65] The historical transition that is taking place in *Aesthetica in nuce* is that the function of Hebrew as a trope depicts the potential existence of a reader such as Hamann's theory promotes. Hebrew is transitioning into a secret language in its function as a trope, a function that assumes a universal reader who does not comprehend its meaning—for a public that is now, for the first time, assumed to share the same secrets. Hebrew emerges as a trope that encompasses the conviction that every reader can engage in interpretation, as the "holy language" is now taken to facilitate a similar (if yet, idealized or "sublime") starting-point for all readers. Ironically, the essay's radical theory of religious conduct through creative and inspirational imagination in fact constitutes a collective based on the shared vocabulary that this public is assumed to share: a vocabulary taken from religious practices (the reading of Hebrew, the secretiveness of the letter, faith in God) and which is now becoming, with the address of the public, the collective's common grounds.

Hamann's theory of translation adds another level of complexity to his attitude toward the Bible. Hamann grounds the Bible in the lengthy tradition of trying to retrieve its prior meanings, tracing the ideal text with the help of the text that has been transmitted to contemporary times. This plays a role in his greater observation, according to which every act of speech is in fact a translation; every act of enunciation starts a process of "translation," in that it requires that the original message behind the transmitted enunciation be deciphered. Whereas the Bible is a model for that deciphering, its ontological status is not superior to other cultural objects: texts, pictures and signs. Hamann perceives translation as a practice that is eminent to all acts of thinking, in that thoughts must be "translated" into other media in order to mediate them to others (Betz, 127). The Bible is equal in its status to other texts and other acts of enunciation. Its importance is embedded in the historical account it provides on the nature of translation, with its unfolding of

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[64] This resembles the philosophical enterprise of Søren Kierkegaard. In *Fear and Trembling* (in which the first epigram is a quote from Hamann), Kierkegaard presumes that only very few among the readers could reach the state of a "knight of faith." This later project may shed light on Hamann's theological concept of reading, which can be described as an early form of religious existentialism. Hamann's model of belief through tautological intentionality, like that of Kierkegaard, both assumes the encounter with God through a self-stimulation of the questioning of one's faith as a universal model for the structure of the self; at the same time, both authors portray this model as an ideal that only a few (perhaps no one) could attain.

[65] John R. Betz describes Hamann's attitude about the *Aufklärer* as reactionary polemics, which is manifested through his theory of language: "Hamann calls attention to what the Aufklärer virtually ignored, namely, the historical contingencies of tradition and the 'impurities' of language and metaphor pervading all putatively 'pure' thought." *After Enlightenment: the Post-Secular Vision of J.G. Hamann* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 16. While Hamann's theory of language indeed renounces major tenets from the theories of several of his contemporaries, his broad influence on Herder and the prominence of the latter in the Enlightenment discourse on language show Hamann's theory as located in the center rather than the at the margins of the Enlightenment's debates about language and semiotics.

the relation between God and man as primarily linguistic. This relation is expressed through the act of creation: the belief in God's creation of the world with his word depicts a world of objects in which every component of our reality consists of traces of God's word. Every object is the outcome of an act of divine enunciation, and therefore every perceptual effort entails translation.

With the prominence of creation in mind, Hamann understands man as a divine text written by God (the divine poet) and created in his image. This statement is another means by which Hamann blurs the distinctions between subject and object, a reader and a text. In the context of biblical mythology, creation functions as a means to blur (through speech) not only the distinction between reader and text, but also the hierarchy between man and God. Hamann points out the subsequent act of divine creation: man's naming of the animals, which demonstrates his own divine patterns—not only in that he is created in God's image, but also in that he encompasses the godly ability to create (Dickson, 113). Every human being emulates the Divine Poet in his further linguistic constitution or shaping—which in Hamann is given the status of creation—through his continual acts of enunciation.

Hamann and Herder's mutual influence, the similarities and differences between their approaches, and the historical influence of their common existence in the Enlightenment discourse on theology shed light on the emergence of hermeneutics (with the presuppositions that entails in regard to the constitution of a "public of readers"). Such a comparison would be especially poignant in regard to the role of Hebrew in their respective projects. In both cases, Hebrew functions as a means to support their interpretation theories with their shared goal, the constitution of a general public of readers that reads the Bible in the same way. At the same time, Hebrew exposes immanent tensions at the core of this effort.

Herder's famous statement "menschlich muss man die Bibel lesen" thus carries on Hamann's earlier insistence that the Bible is a human text—a text that represents the divine at the same time as it is written to humankind in its language.[66] Viewing it as a language that introduces the incomprehensibility of the written word that leads to its higher understanding (Hamann), or as a language that is to be understood in an idealized process of reflection that does not require knowledge of Hebrew, the case of turning Hebrew into a trope is a means of preserving both the "human" nature of the Bible and its divine standing. Hebrew is "human" in the sense that it can be approached in the same manner by all readers, regardless of their education or ethnic identity. Hebrew maintains the divine stature of the Bible, according to Hamann, in that it evokes a relational coexistence with God; according to Herder, this relational coexistence is evoked insofar as the process of reading the Bible through reasoning is guided by the Protestant principle—according to which the Bible holds the key to how it should be read, a divine guidance embodied in the text's human language. The pertinence of idealizing Hebrew to all

[66] "Briefe, das Studium der Theologie betreffend," in: *Johann Gottfried Herder. Theologische Schriften*, 145.

readers revokes the necessity to learn the language and determines that the Bible is "human" by applying Protestant assumptions about reading to humankind as a whole.

In *The First Document*, Herder develops a theory of reading by way of the opposition to reading the Bible as God's word. The elevated status of the Holy Scriptures is not derived from its status as explicating the divine message. This standing is entangled with the understanding of biblical texts as mediating a message rather than embodying it. In other words, like in *Aesthetica in nuce*, and in conjunction with Hamann's work, Herder develops a self-reflective performative reading process in regard to the Scriptures. Just as in his teacher's model, Herder's reader of the Bible exists in a continual self-constitution throughout the process of reading: his detection of the text involves making a set of presumptions. This is the reader's "human" act of reading, which both presumes that interpretation encompasses such active processes and shapes, as it takes place, the individual's own self-perception by way of the then-materialized definition of what the human, creative praxis consists of.

Another of Hamann's important influences on Herder is the role of the language of creation in the theory of Hebrew as a language that appropriates a unique approach to semantics. For both Hamann and Herder, the language of creation is reflected in man's materialization as a word uttered by God—in the Hebrew language—during the creation of the world. Similarly, both view man's ability to create, an ability that is signified in Genesis through the act of naming, as showing the divine ability to be one that man possesses; the ability to write poetry (like the Book of Genesis itself) is a supreme manifestation of this ability, according to both thinkers. Thus for both Hamann, who presumes an initial stage of incomprehension of Hebrew, and for Herder, who advocates reasoning and understanding of the Hebrew text, the language is idealized in a process that replaces literal knowledge of the language with its understanding through a transcendence of the letter. Whereas in Hamann this happens through a detachment from the literal sense, Herder's model propagates a more traditional adherence to the Lutheran and Calvinist preferences for the *Geist* of the text over its literalness. Despite this seminal difference, both the teacher and his student advance a similar move: with their grounding in universal assumptions about the activity of reason, their respective theories ingrain a new definition of readership of the Bible in a religious vocabulary that is now taken to be comprehensible to all readers.

The result would be a transformation in the status of interpretation, with the status of engagement with the biblical text at the epicenter of religious practice. Herder's move toward a theory of cultural semantics diverges from Hamann's hermeneutics as the result of a major factor: Herder's concept of Volksgeist and his promotion of this notion as a core component of his hermeneutics. Herder's theory should be grasped in the larger context of Schleiermacher's theory of hermeneutics, to which it was the most important contributor. In view of the afterlives of eighteenth-century biblical reading practices in literary theory, the biggest difference between Hamann and Herder is the latter's emphasis on the detection of the concrete, literal meaning of

the word, which should encompass—as he develops in his later works on reading—a psychological understanding of an author's thoughts.[67]

Like Hamann's, Herder's reading of the Hebrew Bible by way of an idealized view of Hebrew is a means for the constitution of a universal public of readers, a public that the text addresses and, in its very address, constitutes.[68] Readership is here parallel to the desire to develop a model of reading the Bible that is ingrained in world order. The role that Hebrew fulfills in Hamann's "biblical mythology" and in Herder's historiography of the world destines to the *Ursprache* a role in a constitution of Christian myth as a universal myth. Whereas the Lutheran desire for textual interpretation is manifested in different ways, its pertinence to the general abilities, motivations, and cultural background of the reader is significant in both cases. While both attempts are quite different from each other, Herder's championing of reasoning as a practice that every reader can (and should) engage with in effect relies on his teacher's idealized notion of philology that goes much beyond the field's adherence to the concreteness of language, manuscripts and formal education.

The consideration of literature in the "religious" or the "secular" Enlightenment sheds light on the coexistence of Hamann and Herder's different hermeneutic approaches in the eighteenth-century's emerging discourse of hermeneutics. Marking them as agonistic, with the perception of the Enlightenment as an advocate of reason, overlooks not only Hamann's profound reliance on reason (as he defines it), Herder's promotion of religious imagination, their mutual influence, or the various instances that would present eighteenth-century Germany as tying together diverse religious positions by advocating reason rather than detaching them from one another.[69] Such an approach would also disregard the possibility that the differences between the two (with their broader representations of different positions in the Enlightenment discourse) did not weaken the establishment of a general public in eighteenth-century Germany, but rather enhanced its foundation.

Noting the idealization of Hebrew presents both Hamann and Herder as participating in the establishment of the general public of readers with the religious presumptions that this public is expected to hold. This inquiry will presume that the coexistence of differences in the approaches to Hebrew as idealized provides a seminal condition for the establishment of such a public: the legitimization of diverse religious positions stands behind the view of biblical readership as a

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[67] Especially in his *On Thomas Abbt's Writings* (1768) and *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul* (1778).

[68] Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics* establishes a comprehensive insight into the tautological nature of textual addresses. According to Warner, a text is always circulated in the framework of addressing an "already existing" audience, whereas it is in effect the very act of circulating the text that constitutes its audience.

[69] A definite characterization of Hamann as antagonist to the Enlightenment discourse is that of Isaiah Berlin, which describes him as "the enlightenment enemy" in Berlin's *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*. For a position that seeks to connect Hamann's contribution as *not* an inherent part of Enlightenment knowledge, see Sheehan's "Enlightenment Details: Theology, Natural History, and the Letter H" in *Representations* 61 (Winter 1998): 29-56.

diverse, universal enterprise; the sublime nature of reasoning in Herder's case; and the emergence of Hebrew as an esoteric if yet common "secret" in Hamann's theory of language. The existence of both theories one next to the other in the Enlightenment's new definition of readership evinces the new perception of the Hebrew language as the property of all readers. The influence of Hamann on Herder's notion of textual understanding exemplifies the insertation of an existential—all human—theological ethos to the new, emerging field of secular textual understanding.

The Religious Enlightenment

It can roughly be claimed that until recent years, a major current in the study of the German Enlightenment contended that the period's focus on universal rights, its inquiries into the ideal political and juridical systems, and its various investigations into human reason were intertwined with "secularization." That is, with a certain decline in the status of sectorial religious affiliations. Works that seek to dispel this approach toward the Enlightenment, such as David Sorkin's *The Religious Enlightenment*, have recently established an alternative account, portraying the period as an elicitation of religious practices and a negotiation of various religious identities and practices, demonstrating that,

> Contrary to the secular master narrative, the Enlightenment was not only compatible with religious belief but conducive to it. The Enlightenment made possible new iterations of faith. With the Enlightenment's advent, religion lost neither its place nor its authority in European society and culture. If we trace modern culture to the Enlightenment, its foundations were decidedly religious.[70]

Sorkin describes the specific characteristics of the religious Enlightenment, focusing on the colliding interests of several religious groups:

> For Christians, the religious Enlightenment represented a renunciation of Reformation and Counter-Reformation militance, an express alternative to two centuries of dogmatism and fanaticism, intolerance and religious warfare. For Jews, it represented an effort to overcome the uncharacteristic cultural isolation of the post-Reformation period through reappropriation of neglected elements of their own heritage and engagement with the larger culture (4).

Sorkin's religious Enlightenment is an Enlightenment of tolerance: a claim in favor of moderation, which helped advocate for the nineteenth-century's "cultural Protestantism" (313).

The construction of the public sphere was an important social concept that enabled the perception of religious tolerance in the Enlightenment's distinct national regimes, which Sorkin

[70] Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment*, 3.

ascribes to the emergence of the notion of the Public Sphere. The religious Enlightenment's ability to coexist in several different countries, religious groups and social strata would entail the idea of a sphere as a construct of political liberalism that is detached from national or religious specificities (16). Sorkin suggests an alternative model to that dismissal of religion from accounts of the Enlightenment expanding upon the role of theology in shaping the Enlightenment public sphere; commenting on such figures as Warburton, Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten and Moses Mendelssohn, Sorkin's Religious Enlightenment turns out to be an account of the rise of moderation, especially in regard to the interpretation of biblical passages and extra-biblical religious regulations.

The construction of the Enlightenment public sphere was examined in two seminal works which have, to a large extent, shaped the perception of the Enlightenment at large. Jürgen Habermas' *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* and Reinhart Koselleck's *Kritik and Krise. Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt* can be read as radically different accounts of how the Enlightenment's public sphere has come into being; the differences between the two authors' perspectives constitute an entirely different story of how religious values and readership functioned in eighteenth-century philosophy and thought. According to Habermas, the eighteenth century featured the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere, the rise of which was based on the decline of traditional regimes, such as monarchy and feudalism. The bourgeois sphere emerges with modern nation-states, whose newly all-encompassing political sovereignty was conceived as separated from society, the embodiment of a cluster of private practices. With its solicitation of bourgeois society, the rise of capitalism further honed this distinction between political sovereignty and society. Mercantilism has encouraged the autonomy of its agents, thereby enhancing the independence of society from the state.

Habermas saw society as exposed, side by side and in conjunction with the decline in power of the old political regimes, to political liberalism (embodied in such works as Hobbes and Kant's philosophies), a process that emerged together with new ways of textual circulation, such as reading circles and public discussion. In the following century, Hegel's critique of Kant, which points out the tensions and potential inconsistencies of the bourgeois ideal, marks the collapse of bourgeois society with the melancholic rise of modernity and the frustration and depression it destines to the individual of an estranged, new society. This transition is shown as Hegel's critique culminates in Karl Marx's writing, according to Habermas' classic account, which radically dispels the ideological ideality of public opinion.[71]

Written in close proximity to Habermas' analysis, Koselleck's *Kritik und Krise* offers a nexus from which to recognize the limits of the Enlightenment notion of tolerance; this recognition is

[71] As James Van Horn Melton has argued, "a major limitation of Habermas's model of the public sphere is the lack of importance it assigns religion." His alternative perspective contends that "religious issues provoked intense controversy in the eighteenth century, and their role in expanding the public spheres of politics and print deserves more emphasis" (48).

shown especially in the moments in which Koselleck diverges from Habermas' fairly positive description of the intellectual independence of the new bourgeois society. According to Koselleck, "From the outset, Enlightenment and mystery appeared as 'historical twins'" (49). Koselleck consequently offers a detailed description of several figures in the Free Masons movement, which he takes to be one of two exemplary structures that emerged in the Enlightenment, together with the Republic of Letters. Koselleck argues that the Masons' prominence is telling: their presence shows that alongside the emergence of the nation-state, the new political order stimulated the activity of groups that seem subversive or antagonistic to the ideals of a liberal regime. The Free Masons fostered rituals, used esoteric symbols, and operated through a hierarchical and secretive circle. Yet, it is not only the cryptic nature of the movement, but more so that it operated according to an order that is quite different from that of the liberal state, which can shed light on a distinction that stands at the core of the modern state—rooting tensions that are inherent to it due to the separation of circles that may be subversive of the state from its political order.

According to Koselleck, both the Free Masons and the intellectuals writing during the early eighteenth century had the potential to circulate and propagate anti-state criticism. The relation between these two circles is one of homology or structural similarity, at the same time that several figures took part in both groups (like Gotthold Ephraim Lessing). The "crisis" that the book unfolds regards the homology between the two groups: the secretive nature that was ascribed to both. According to Koselleck, this secretiveness demonstrates that the Enlightenment emerged through a sharp distinction between criticism and the state. This distinction declares the existence of the liberal state as grounded in "respect" for or acceptance of the choice of faith and spiritual practice, which is then to be practiced in the private sphere. In fact, the strictness of this distinction enforces the inability of critique to influence state order. Critique can be practiced in private, but cannot jeopardize the hegemonic power of the public sphere, exactly because the liberal state presents its *raison d'être* as tolerance, which is what enables the practice of critique in the first place. With the collapse of "tolerance," critique faces a threat of persecution and annihilation. The "subversive" order, in other words, is legitimate as long as it maintains its subversive nature that cannot take up authority in the liberal state. This neutralization of the power of critique fostered a constant feeling of frustration—a crisis that is an internal part of the modern era. Readership, the reliance on a collective of intellectuals, appears in Koselleck's account as existing within an inner circle of social and cultural codes—a circle that is disconnected from state political authorities. Koselleck does foresee the possible, sporadic collapse of the separation between the political and its critique. The French revolution, he argues, is an expression of the culmination of such frustration; it represented an accomplished entrance of revolution into the political sphere.

Other historians, cultural critics, and anthropologists are less optimistic in view of the shuttering of the political in the public sphere as an Enlightenment construct, as it is presented in more recent literature on the Enlightenment's formation of the public sphere and the heritage of this

formation to modern-day society. Jeffrey Librett's *The Rhetoric of Cultural Dialogue* (2000) is a description of the impenetrability of the political state order, which enhances its power through its self-presentation as the main protector of tolerance. The liberal state, according to this account, is not only immune to the influence of intercultural and interreligious exchanges, but is in effect made stronger through the belief in the existence of such exchanges. To Librett, the triangle Judaism-Catholicism-Protestantism has been generating, especially since the eighteenth century, the appearance of cultural transmission of ideologies, which propagates the "rhetoric of cultural dialogue." In reality, the very definition of cultural dialogue is paradoxical, as pluralism can only exist within a certain public sphere—which has been largely dominated and overseen by the emergence of the Christian nation state.

The notion of dialogue that stands at the center of Librett's book takes into account the hermeneutic tradition that has largely promoted the belief in "the symmetrical exchange of expressions of intention between dyadic partners, to the end of mutual and nonviolent understanding" (xvii). Yet as Librett claims, the intercultural dialogue has been controlled by initial inequality:

> The difference between the Jewish-German nonrelation (or dialogue) specifically and nonrelation in general is that the Jewish-German nonrelation is established and maintained by German Christianity (on the levels of both theology and its attendant institutional-discursive structures) as a legitimate *asymmetry*—indeed, a divinely sanctioned one… (xviii-xix)

The dialogue between Germans and Jews cannot be materialized equally, "for Christianity has always viewed itself as the ultimate meaning or speech of the silent or dumb utterance that is Judaism" (xix).

The conditions that enable "dialogue" to exist can be explored through a reading of a classic symbol of Enlightenment tolerance, as demonstrated by Lessing's play *Nathan the Wise*. The play follows the figure of Nathan, a Jew that demonstrates his virtues to the play's non-Jewish characteriscs. As the play evolves, Nathan reflects on the innate nature of Jewishness, and of any confessional difference.

Thus, upon the plea of the Klosterbruder that Nathan identifies himself as a Christian, since "there has never been a Christian better than him," Nathan states, "Denn was Mich Euch zum Christen macht, das macht Euch mir zum Juden!"[72] Lessing's narrative may guide, enrich and foster cultural dialogue among the three major religions, based on the realization that religious affiliation is performative in nature, while essential to one's identity.[73] The so-called interaction

[72] Gottfried Ephraim Lessing. *Werke*, Band II (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1971), 317.

[73] This is a later development in Lessing's thought that signifies an important shift from his 1777 "Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts." In the earlier text, Lessing advocates for reconciliation between the belief in outside revelation and the existence of inner reason. This solution through dialectics serves as a universal truism, as

between the different religions, the "dialogue" among them, assumes that they are "different equals." Their otherness, or difference from one another, is not merely a potential obstacle for dialogue that dialogue manages to overcome; rather, it is a condition for the dialogue to take place. But at the same time, the play does not neutralize the sphere in which religious interaction is taking place: the authority of the nation state is what enables the dialogue to happen. The state is taken to facilitate religious tolerance, thereby legitimizing religious plurality.

The Protestant spirit of reason, represented in the play by the state judge, is what enables the coexistence of monotheistic religions. Christianity became the voice of tolerance. The impossibility of subverting the modern state stems from the self-presentation of state order as enabling its "alternative" to exist in the first place. What would a Jewish or a Muslim state look like? Would they foster the same kind of religious tolerance? Librett's argument locates the standing of state order and of minorities as its religious agons and explores the specific attribution of religious tolerance (specifically, the German-Jewish "dialogue") as an ideology that enhances and sustains the legitimacy of state control.

Despite his reliance on the hermeneutic paradigm as a major constitution of cultural dialogue, Librett does offer an investigation of how these tensions played a role in the constitution of the hermeneutic tradition at its debut. The dialogical construct has been established upon the theological attitude toward the Bible, assumptions that necessarily entailed theological polemics and the consideration of competing religious ideologies. Viewing the history of the hermeneutic paradigm with the prominence of cultural dialogue that stands at its core can trace the specificities of the religious—to a large extent Protestant-dominated—conception of the public sphere that has constituted the dialogical model of cultural transference between others that are, paradoxically so, also equals.

Based on the long-lasting paradigm of biblical interpretation, modern hermeneutics relies in its heart upon religious ideology. Thus, as major figures prepared the conditions for the rise of hermeneutics as a cultural phenomenon, biblical interpretation served as a concrete field with which to establish reading as interpersonal deciphering. This method had to first establish a mode of similarity between different agents (different commentators)—a mode of capacity—in order to establish a compatibility between readership and authorship. This generated a prominent legacy of the emergence of literary hermeneutics: the belief in intercultural dialogue that is mirrored in the author-reader relationship.[74] The public nature of this appeal to dialogism is

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opposed to "Nathan the Wise," in which the author necessitates the concrete existence of the three religions as credos of faith.

[74] Peter Szondi has argued that the new feature with which literary hermeneutics had to deal was the transition from self-reflection (or the objects in one's soul) to the examination of objects that are reflected in the artistic artifact of another agent. The model of dialogue at hermeneutics' center is ingrained in a broad vision of reciprocity between agents, and thereby also in the possible exchange between readers and authors. An unmistakable expression of this exchange of places is the readers' demand to put themselves in an author's position during the process of understanding the text. *Einführung in die literarische Hermeneutik*, 1st ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975).

sustained through the belief in everyman's aptitude to read and interpret. This discourse on "ability" at times masks the fact that other conditions are required to launch a cultural dialogue.

Readers of the Bible who have used it to develop hermeneutics as an interpretive practice and as a cultural phenomenon had to develop a Bible that everyone could interpret in the same manner: a Bible that could be a model for interpretation. But the assumption of cognitive capability and the promotion of means by which the Bible can be perceived in the same manner "for everyone" (such as the emphasis on a text's style, literary devices, and the historical circumstances of its writing) does not suffice. Another effort would be establishing a common motivation or grounds for this effort (interpretation) as a universal task for individuals.[75] The reading of the Bible, as one sees in Herder, Hamann, Mendelssohn, and Schleiermacher, seeks to find in it a universal ethos that would pertain to all readers of the text, at the same time as it shows that reading the bible, and thus also gathering together this collective ethos, is a universal activity. The idealization of Hebrew shows this to be a twofold effort: on a pragmatic level, it enables all readers to take part in reading the Bible (the respective manners of reading that they wish to advocate); in an ideological manner, Hebrew becomes a common ethos, an *Ursprache*, that is also the language in which the *Ursprung* is told, and is made approachable. Embedded in the new common ethos of humankind's origins, reading of the Hebrew Bible sparks a universal motivation for individual readers' efforts.

The use of Hebrew during the emergence of reading as a general practice that is taken to be approachable to all participants in the Enlightenment's public sphere sheds light on the diverse means by which reading the Bible has become a general model, or a cultural praxis. As one sees in Hamann's topological use as the obscure, Hebrew is not used so that everybody can understand it; it is used so that everybody has a similar starting point for the "Genesis" of humankind. The Enlightenment public sphere is taken to have not only common truths, but also common secrets that would establish "understanding" on the counter-intuitive transcendence of the written word.[76]

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[75] Sheehan detects in the cultural transformations of the Bible's status, mainly in eighteenth-century Germany and England, the still-evident perception of the Bible as a text with universal pertinence to every individual in a society. Influenced mainly by seventeenth-century pietism, Germany has produced a wave of biblical translations, a phenomenon that reflected the spread of different usages of the Bible.

[76] While I share Sorkin's goal of depicting "the Religious Enlightenment," I yet believe that highlighting Hamann and Herder's seminal role in constituting the concept of readership during the eighteenth-century in Germany shows a side of the religious Enlightenment that is at odds with Sorkin's focus on the Enlightenment discourse as a discourse of "theological rationalism" (313). First, I argue that the appearance of Enlightenment moderation does not rely merely upon attempts to regenerate religious ideologies as applicable to all faiths. Rather, it relies on certain such religious ideologies as esotericism, and Pietism, as can be deduced from Hamann's theory of communication with God through individual imagination and its influence on Herder. Second, I conceive "moderation" as inseparable from attempts to universalize the Enlightenment's community of readers, attempts that I take to entail specific (namely Protestant) religious ideologies. In other words, I agree with Sorkin that the Enlightenment featured a significant tendency of previously exclusive religious faiths to present their tenets as comprehensible to all individuals, and that this move represented a new conception of rationalism. I contend that

As an *Ursprache*, Hebrew received an eminent, constitutive part in the establishment of a shared theological vocabulary and of theological presumptions about reading as derived from human "common sense" or "reason" (Vernunft). The constitution of Genesis as the place of humankind's origins, of Hebrew as the language of creation, and of Hebrew as should yield an understanding that is beyond the letter, are examples of such theological vocabulary that addresses a collectivity that is "aware" of these symbolic functions of Hebrew. The function of Hebrew as a language in which worship is taking place, a language that is studied by some populations (at times as part of traditional religious apprenticeship) is dispelled, or is being set aside. Practices of reading which are meant to bridge the literal and the realistic, aiming at a spiritual process of reading that maintains the divine status while appeasing the rational, are concerns that historically take place in a Protestant transformation of the biblical narrative. Grounding these practices in "reason", and at the same time in a common ethos of creation that tells the historical story of their importance, shows that the modern-day characterization of "reason" as what established the Enlightenment public sphere would be false when conceiving of reason as inseparable from the period's theological polemics and the new conceptual constructs and religious vocabulary they introduced. Detecting these two aspects in Herder's redefinition of Hebrew may help to situate the emergence of secularism in the Enlightenment as a phenomenon that enforces not the decline of religious practices, but rather their amendment as the property of a collective via a transformation in which "reason" and "theology" are entangled in one another.

This commonality of religious vocabulary should be understood within the broader context of the Enlightenment's heritage in constituting the conception of liberal society as secular. The common assumptions behind the idea of readership, which are embodied in the idealization of Hebrew, significantly derive from certain religious positions that necessitate the material dimension of the Bible as an object of worship, an object whose grounding in history is a matter that opens space for interpretation.

Readership in the Age of Tolerance

Recently, an increasing number of works have tried to unearth the religious presuppositions behind the grounding of the liberal state (specifically in the United States) as a secular sphere. Several studies, especially in postcolonial studies, anthropology and political science, have argued that the pluralism embodied by the neutralization of religious affinities was established under the auspices of the liberal state whose emergence as a Protestant enterprise has enabled and grounded the concept of religious pluralism. A main example of the liberal public sphere's "Protestant" principles is the perception that one should be able to choose one's religious

in this process, the rise of "reason" as a universal category happened in conjunction with persisting religious ideologies that stressed faith as an individualistic and sensual process (the replacement of the man of *Vernunft* with the man of the senses).The Religious Enlightenment does not seem to feature a "search for a middle way between extremes" (Sorkin, 11), but a globalization of such religious sentiments as separatism and pietism.

affiliation in the modern state: freedom of religion has become a main characteristic of how modern liberal society conceives of itself. Nonetheless, freedom of choice in religious matters may be more conceivable in certain faiths as opposed to others.

Perceiving of the liberal state as secular may thus be seen as an ironic characterization: it is due not to the ceasing of religious practices in the society in which we live, but rather to the opposite tendency to encourage and even appreciate the affluent diversity of faiths that can exist next to each other in the modern state. Secularism is conceived, according to this model, as a derivation of state authority in its shaping of the public sphere. At the same time, the exorcising of religion from the public sphere explicates a decline in its power as a leading principle of the state apparatus.

Prominent figures in the investigation of secularity today have suggested that the conception of religion as existing within the realm of the private, but as distinct from the public is another principle that is more accommodating of some religious faiths than others.[77] The work of anthropologist Talal Asad has become important in articulating the claim that religion and religious presumptions persist to exist in the modern liberal state. According to Asad, religious presumptions can be said to exist in the liberal state in several manners: as ingrained in so-called national spiritual practices; in the description of the so-called universal standing or relevance of religious symbols (especially the Bible); and in the principle of distinguishing between the public-political and private-personal, a principle that necessitates the expression of a religiously-based opinion.[78]

Discussing the role of the Bible in the liberal state has been a major topic in the work of anthropologist Saba Mahmood. Mahmood stresses that the Bible exists in the public sphere of the modern nation-state as a source of universal, humanistic meanings. It is in the private sphere that one is "allowed" to read holy texts as objects of worship. In her article, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation," Mahmood describes the tension between the views of biblical hermeneutics in the United States' public sphere, views whose promotion of "tolerance" is a prism through which traditional readings of the Bible have been excluded, criticized, or ignored. The reasoning in the modern nation-state that is beyond turning the Bible into a source of universal, humanistic meanings, Mahmood argues, stems from the presumption that, "religion is […] an object of individual free choice whose abstract truths

[77] For a summary of the common perception of secularism as an essential part of modern politics, see Charles Taylor, "Modes of Secularism," in *Secularism and Its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 31-53.

[78] Two crucial observations need to be made when applying current theories of secularism. The presentation of Enlightenment tenets in such theories refers many times not to Enlightenment thinkers per se, but to what is perceived as the Enlightenment heritage. Second, basing these theories on contemporary societies necessitates the consideration of different structures of religious influences on the nation-state than the ones negotiated during the Enlightenment. In the case of Asad, his theory of secularism aims at locating the emergence of secularism in the Enlightenment (albeit by way of a Foucauldian genealogy of that idea) and at their detection in contemporary notions of the term in western countries.

nonetheless have universal value — as long as they do not contradict the dictates of reason and science" (341). Traditional Muslim readings of the Quran which do not aim at creating a critical distance between the text and the world may thus be at odds with the hermeneutic project of "creating the conditions for the emergence of a normative religious subject who understands religion—its scriptures and its ritual forms—as a congeries of symbols to be flexibly interpreted in a manner consonant with the imperatives of secular liberal political rule" (344). Flexibility does not accord with religious views that are fostered by what is perceived in the nation-state as "religious minorities." The religious presumptions of these "minorities," their metaphysical perceptions—some of which are inseparable from alternative political orders that are ingrained in these religious views—remain in the margins of the liberal state. These alternative models of reading the Bible cannot penetrate and influence the public sphere: as a direct derivation of their grounding as the minority, these alternative religious views cannot criticize or replace the religious conduct advocated by the public sphere, because the religious order promoted by this sphere is one of "tolerance." If these alternatives were to enter the public sphere (as in Koselleck's description of the critique of the modern state) they would threaten the "tolerance" that this sphere advocates, thereby bringing their own annihilation as a minority.

The view of religion as a practice that one can choose, of the Bible as a text that can be interpreted in one way or another, and of holy texts as objects that are given interpretations, would not exist under the auspices of other religious systems that might not regard religion as a matter of choice. The Enlightenment, in other words, is no longer the locus of secularism insofar as the term entails the annihilation of religious affiliations. At the same time, the "secular" has been redefined as a conspicuous demonstration of religious power. With the transformation on both sides of the equation, the Enlightenment has continued to be examined as establishing today's religious perceptions and practices—namely the perception of the Bible as an object that is read in the public sphere through (now universalized) theological techniques and vocabulary that are assumed to be the property of all individuals in the nation-state who take part in its collective reading. The argument that can be extrapolated from Asad and Mahmood's theories of religion and the public sphere is that the transformation of the Bible into an object of universal humanistic meanings excludes certain religious practices from the order of the liberal state. Tracing the emergence of *literary* hermeneutics within the process of reading's secularization may thus expand Asad and Mahmood's respective theories of political secularism. This project may show what is at stake not only in the reading of the Bible through the Enlightenment's new universal ethos of religious humanistic values, but also how this manner of biblical reading affected literary reading altogether.

The various inqueries into the presumptions behind modern-day secularism may create a productive constellation when brought together with Koselleck's now-classic depiction of the crisis of critique in modernity. Asad and Mahmood's understandings of secularism expand on an important goal of Asad's previous work: the questioning of disciplinary and scientific assumptions, especially those that pertain to anthropology, as contingent upon western Christian

ideals. Asad has argued that taking religious ceremonies and tokens to represent societal structures is influenced by a transcendental perception of God, a perception that does not accord with certain non-Christian religious practices.[79] The three propose a nexus from which to apply the evaluation of one or several disciplines to the *concept of critique per se*: is the regard for an object of critique from a distance linked to the search for transcendentalism, to going beyond adherence to the material?[80] Koselleck's analysis of modernity as the period in which a hedge has been placed between critique and state control sheds light on religious affiliations as distinct from the state. Asad's work shows this distinction as grounded in the possibility of knowledge overall. Critique is thus shown to be religious not only by way of homology (i.e., religious structures which, according to Koselleck, have affinity for critique of the state via their focus on morality). The distinction of morals from politics is the moment in which critique that does not adhere to certain Christian presumptions about knowledge stops being discerned altogether in the public sphere.

Conclusion: Textual Restoration and the Origins of Humankind

As will be further established in the chapters that follow, the debates on the Hebrew Bible were a boon to the Enlightenment's debates on reading techniques, soliciting principles eminent to the emerging paradigm of modern hermeneutics—principles which explicated and negotiated the new sciences of aesthetics, theology and historiography. Questions regarding the goal of reading the Hebrew Bible, its restoration, preservation as an object of faith, transmission, and interpretation, allowed it to become a most important and suitable object of debate in the new laboratory of theories on human reason in the dawn of German idealism. As seen in Hamann and Herder's engagement with the fragmentary nature of biblical Hebrew, the Old Testament's long process of composition and transmission have made it a unique object for the practice of reason.

The Hebrew Bible's textual incoherence, use of singular words, and the politics of studying its language as an intercultural practice formed its "incomprehensibility." The long-day tradition of viewing the Hebrew Bible as an incomprehensible or problematic artifact has made it an attractive object of study for those interested in applying theories of reason to reading and interpretation. In this process, contensions about about reading in general—the encounter with

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[79] See for example, his "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Occasional Papers Series* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986); "The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology" in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); and his controversial critical analysis of Clifford Geertz's concept of religion in *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 42-53.

[80] In his article "Uncritical Reading," Michael Warner proposes that a model for reading literary texts that explicitly object to a secularist approach to literature may yield more intimacy with literary texts (and other kinds of texts). He advocates for this approach instead of taking a critical, distant textual approach, which he characterizes as the common academic, and secularist, approach to literature.

gaps in texts, the use of the reader's imagination, or the attempt to understand the text in its context—made the Hebrew Bible as an exemplary object for examining the dynamic nature of the human cognitive capcities. In the process, theological assumptions regarding the premises of biblical reading, as well as a certain theological vocabulary—like the ethos of Genesis—were taken as the universal asset of all readers, thereby constituting a universal public of biblical readers.

The engagement of thinkers like Hamann and Herder with theories of universal reason is generally a sign of the impossibility to distinguish the Enlightenment from the so-called counter-Enlightenment, due to the close proximity of thinkers and ideas on both sides. Hamann and Herder's specific engagement with Genesis as a mode of universal origins, and the imaginative and creative power they ask the readers to actuate when reading Hebrew, is a reminder that the enterprise of universalizing religion in the Enlightenment was not motivated only by Kantian enunciations of religion as a stabilizing social power, but also by theories that encouraged individualistic, creative engagement with the Bible.

The negotiation of Hebrew evoked tensions in the Enlightenment discourse on reason and reading; these tensions materialized not only in the debates between different thinkers, like Michaelis, Hamann and Herder, but also in the tensions that Hebrew embodies in the work of each of the thinkers writing about the language. To Herder, Hebrew can bridge ancient history and the present through its stimulation of reading through difficulty and time. The role of Genesis as a story of the origins of language adds another self-reflective and ideal feature to the language. Herder's notion of cultural relativism thus allocates two functions for the Hebrew Bible: it is a text with merits that lie in its ability to represent a specific culture at one point in history; yet, at the same time he holds that the Hebrew Bible is a key to understanding the origins of language, culture, and aesthetics. What seems to be a contradiction—embodied in the symbolic presence of Hebrew in eighteenth-century discourses on the Bible—should be understood in the context of Herder's theological enterprise: the transgression of the distinction between the fictional and non-fictional, the literary and the historical, via the perception that a textual artifact is always, first and foremost, a documentation of reality. Hebrew thus helps mobilize the presumption that history is embodied in the Bible—Herder's contribution to the reconciliation of philological approaches to the Bible with its continual status as a divine object.

Herder and Hamann's concurrent engagement with Hebrew is illuminating in that it sheds light on the multiple ideologies that formed readership as a definition of a religious collective, with the universal assumptions that this collective is assumed to hold when reading the Scriptures. The differences between their approaches (both of which are influential in their own ways) portray the establishment of biblical reading from diverse religious positions. Whereas their respective theories of reading contributed to the establishment of Hebrew as a trope of understanding which is beyond the letter, the ideologies that lie behind their theories diverge significantly from one another. The subjective interaction (or "understanding") with Hebrew in Hamann's model of religious existentialism does not entail the empathic understanding of the

culture that produced the text, since such a perception assumes the objective presence of history. Hamann's ethos of readership—in view of the presumption of "God as an Author"—thus solicits the presence of "collective secrets" at the core of collective reading, rather than offering a vision of linear understanding. His contribution to eighteenth-century discourse thus complicates the attempt to distinguish the Enlightenment public sphere (of reason) from the private sphere (where religion is practiced). Hamann's construction of a universal reader who should yield to a non-literal understanding of Hebrew implies a shared public ethos of incomprehension, rather than a vision of understanding. This vision takes part, together with the attempt to replace the man (or reader) "of Vernunft" with the man of the senses, in a construction of a public sphere of readers is based on a shared religious vocabulary that seems much different from the Kantian model of reason that was about to appear in the Enlightenment philosophy.

Chapter 2: The Aesthetic Bible and the Hermeneutic Affect

Introduction

Prevalent among the new roles of the Bible in the second half of the eighteenth century was its conception as an aesthetic artifact. Eminent personas in the Enlightenment republic of letters evoked the Bible in multiple ways, including the modern adaptation of biblical stories in poetry and drama and the praising of the Bible's aesthetic merits. The detailed paradigm of Schleiermacher's later hermeneutics, i.e, the elaborated comparison of biblical reading to the reading of all texts, relied on the extensive appraisal of the "Bible as literature" in circles of critics and poets, primarily the *Sturm und Drang*. Such readings became the epicenter of the eighteenth-century's broad occupation with the Bible, eliciting its pluralizing effect: every citizen of the new collective of Enlightenment readers was expected to acknowledge the supreme merits of the Bible.

Yet, in the mid-eighteenth century, as the above-mentioned authors engaged extensively with the scriptures , their work referred to a certain part of the Old Testament: the Hebrew Bible. As Sutcliff has demonstrated, Jewish scholasticism was perceived as a separate realm from European thought that made disturbing, constant appearances as Enlightenment thinkers were trying to reach a universal definition of reason. To Sutcliffe, traditional Jewish traditions of approaching the Bible elicited tensions in the Enlightenment attempt to institute religion as a means for establishing a universal ground for a society of equal citizens motivated by reason. Judaism is a disturbing emblem of otherness for the Enlightenment's all-encompassing effort of inclusiveness.[81] To make the Bible into a model for textual craftiness, one thus had to bridge not only its distinction as a divine text from literature to a secular realm, but to also shape it as an emerging universal object of human cognition, an object that is approachable to individuals in equal ways despite their different systems of faith. The aesthetic (Hebrew) Bible was read in the vernacular by the new collective of readers, which nonetheless had to take into consideration the role of a religious minority in transmitting a text that was becoming a universal cipher.

Herder and his contemporaries undertook this objective by presenting biblical poetry as a supreme artifact for different reasons than those reinforcing such evaluation in the past. Herder, Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, young Goethe and others reclaimed the Bible as an object whose merits are revealed through textual analysis that *every man* can perform: with attention to cultural context, style, imagery, and register. These authors presented poetry as a divine gift to humankind, holding at the same time the perception of the Bible as a text written for humans and

[81] "While the tensions between Judaism and Enlightenment were […] uniquely intense and historically significant, they are closely related to their more general problematics of the relationship of Enlightenment rationality to whatever it cannot readily encompass," Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and enlightenment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6.

by humans. Thus, the Bible's aesthetic merit became the token of its supreme—or divine—nature, which is yet ingrained in a larger, aesthetic conception of literature. The descriptions of the aesthetic merits of Hebrew poetry relied on the traditional view of the Bible as a historical account of the origins of humankind. The making of the Bible into an aesthetic object involved, in other words, its reintroduction as "human" or secular, while maintaining its reading as a procedure of spiritual discovery, defined as such under aesthetic and historiographical presumptions.

This new sense of the divine nature of the Bible materialized via dialectics and the development of former aesthetic presumptions—namely those that considered art as stimulating unique manifestations of human experience. It is a common view that the writings of Klopstock, Herder and Goethe advertised the reading of the Bible as literature by means of praising the aesthetic merits of the Old Testament and emulating biblical poetry in their own poetic writings.[82] What scholars often ignore is that the emerging conception of the Bible as literature occurred in a realm that was neither static nor neutral in regard to how it defined literary interpretation. I shall demonstrate that *these authors in fact developed new textual approaches with the claim of applying literary analysis to the Bible*; the fact that they were actually talking about the Hebrew Bible, a representative of the liminality of universalism and the particular, was a decisive influence on these new conceptions of literary interpretation.

My inquiry into how literary hermeneutics emerged vis-à-vis Enlightenment Hebraism centers in this chapter on the transformation of the Hebrew Bible into a collective asset of Enlightenment readers as both utilizing and advancing the interpretive turn from aesthetics to hermeneutics in the German literary scene. In the motion of addressing the public of readers in the modern state, the consideration of the Bible as literature constituted, in effect, such readers. This was a public whose ability to discern the merits of the Bible—its *universal* aesthetic and historiographical importance—was detached from ethnic, spiritual or religious identities.

Yet, with the Hebrew Bible's ongoing presence as a *particular*: as proof of Jewish interference and ill-transmission of the text, hermeneutics emerged as a recuperative effort. It is a cognitive procedure that rescues meanings from their loss, texts from the damaging influence of time, objects from cultural ignorance and decay. The role of biblical poetry was a unique expression of affect in literature, a central part of *Sturm und Drang*'s extensive occupation with the Bible as a general model for textual engagement. Thus, William Robert Smith has argued that in the eighteenth century, the new attitude toward the Bible resulted in a new conception of poetry as soliciting a clandestine understanding of authors' feelings:

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[82] See David L. Jeffrey, *People of the Book: Christian Identity and Literary Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996); John Jarick (ed.) *Sacred Conjectures: the Context and Legacy of Robert Lowth and Jean Astruc* (New York: T & T Clark, 2007); Stephen Prickett, *Words and the Word: Language, Poetics, and Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Daniel Weidner, *Bibel und Literatur um 1800* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2011), especially 23-62 and 97-122.

> [T]he true power of poetry is that it speaks from the heart to the heart. True criticism is not the classification of the poetic effects according to the principles of rhetoric, but the unfolding of the living forces which moved the poet's soul. To enjoy a poem is to share the emotion that inspired its author.[83]

This principle of reading, which pertains to biblical reading and specifically the Old Testament, is a forthright description of major characteristics of the eighteenth-century interpretive turn from rhetoric to hermeneutics. The period's heated debates on how to read Hebrew created a public discussion that negotiated, mobilized and brought to the fore aesthetic stances—dialectics that yielded a position of an emphatic and yet distant and critical relation to the author of a text for the purpose of *restoring* a text's original meanings.

A few steps were needed to make Hebrew emblematic of the hermeneutic turn. The first was a distinction between the ancient Hebrews and the Jews. The treatment of contemporary Jews with suspicion and occasional dismay conditioned the Hebrew sublime, as it set ancient Hebrew poetry as an ideal. This idealization required a second condition to occur: the "forgetfulness" of the material and ritual presence of Hebrew in favor of its new use as a trope of sublime aesthetics. I will demonstrate that the idealization of Hebrew reached its climax with a third shift: the re-giving of Hebrew to Jews as equal citizens, or competent readers. With the view of reading practices and education as common to a collective audience, the Hebrew sublime has become approachable to all readers to the same extent, ironically exactly due to the idealization that generated its initial unreachability.

The chapter begins with an analysis of imperative eighteenth-century "descriptions" of how one should read Hebrew: the debates solicited dialectics, I shall show, with the period's models of literary interpretation. The chapter will begin with an exposé of the Bible's role in the German republic of letters as an asset of poetic imagination and deep interest: for the individual, and by way of homology, for the nation. Connecting the Hebrew Bible to a key notion in early romanticism—childhood images, imagery and language acquisition—served authors like Goethe and Herder to ponder the emergence of a national languages and literatures: a common effort that also exposes, nonetheless, the differences between the authors' premises.

Robert Lowth's *Praelectiones Academicae de Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* (Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews) will then serve as a main example for the dialectics between biblical and literary reading in the mid-eighteenth century. Praised for his attentiveness to the Hebrew Bible's literary devices, Lowth strives for affinity with the Hebrews through comprehension of the Hebrew Bible's aesthetic merits. In Herder's *Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie* (On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry) (1782-83), these ideas appear to be adapted via an important change: Herder's influential insistence on historical, cultural and anthropological relativism. Whereas to Lowth the

[83] William Robertson Smith, "Poetry of the Old Testament" in *Lectures and Essays* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1912), 405.

link to the Hebrews traces a first stage of the development of aesthetic merit, Herder alerts against such a linear chronology of aesthetics, shaping instead cultural particularity as relational.

An overview of research on the shift from aesthetics to hermeneutics in the Enlightenment republic of letters will then serve to contextualize Herder's invention of the Hebrew sublime in his influential account on textual interpretation—and more broadly, hermeneutic thinking on cultural objects. I shall discern the role of the Hebrew sublime in his emerging perception of poetics, noting how Herder's choice to translate the Song of Songs echoes his intervention with the aesthetic theories of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten. I will then conclude that in this role, Hebrew emerged as an emblem of the existence of Pietism as a stabilizing force in the emergence of the modern state. The equally distant stance of each reader from the Old Testament encompasses an 'open secret.' The presence of Judaism as a state minority is both the raison d'être of hermeneutics (Jews corrupted the text that should now be restored) as well as the signifier of its accomplishment (Jews could read like Christians with the universal tool of human cognition). But this accomplishment is exactly what exposes the original presumption of hermeneutics, the need of restoration, as invalid. This dynamics parallels the period's larger political transition: through some of the century's most vibrant and expressive poetic works and works on poetics, Pietism became a unifying principle of the citizens of the modern state not in spite of, but exactly due to, its separatist zeal.

The Hebrew Bible and the Language of Childhood Memories

Theories on the Hebrew Bible have long intersected with, reflected on, and confronted depictions of the nation. These theories at times commented on the origins of the people that originated the Hebrew language—like Voltaire's characterization in his 1756 *l'Essai sur les Mœurs et l'esprit des Nations* that there was nothing "pretty/fine" in Hebrew poetry since there could be no artifact of beauty from "the crude nation of the Hebrews."[84] Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*, which will be discussed more broadly in the following chapter which discerns the Treatise's importance to Mendelssohn, provoked a critical view of the Israelite state. Spinoza significantly presented the Hebrew Bible as a text which was meant to function, first and foremost, as a legal constitution.[85] His analysis of the so-called textual fallacies of the text: its gaps, fragmentary passages and inner contradictions, as well as descriptions that do not accord with reason, such as those of miracles, portrayed the Hebrew state as a political power primarily occupied with securing its ascendancy. With means like censorship, textual circulation and redaction, this state was focusing on securing its power through its ongoing production of the Bible. Spinoza thus ties together political and textual corruption, paralleling, like Voltaire, the text and its producers

[84] "Nulle politesse, nulle science, nul art perfectionné dans aucun temps chez cette nation attroce." *Oeuvres Completes de M. de Voltaire* (Deux-Ponts: Sanson, 1792), 344.
[85] Benedictus de Spinoza, and Jonathan I. Israel, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. by Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 9.

based on a critical view of both. Such positions reiterate that of Leibniz, who does not allocate a special place to Hebrew in his historiographical account of the development of language for humankind from its beginning.[86]

But the late seventeenth-century Germany also featured a wave of agonistic responses to such critical accounts, a wave that relied on the aesthetic merits of the Hebrew Bible by drawing an affinity between German poetry and the ancient Hebrews. This affinity was grounded in the identification of the Hebrew Bible as the prehistoric source of poetry and of the Israelites as the nation that brought forth aesthetics, which was followed, in the eighteenth century, by an extensive interest in Luther's Bible, which, as Burdach has contended, widely inspired German poets in their establishing of a new alternative to classicism.[87] Late eighteenth-century Germany approached the Hebrew Bible as a new platform for the prevailing wave of Pietistic affect: the broad emulation of the style and themes of the Hebrew Bible served in the *Sturm und Drang* movement as a major expression of a new nationalistic tendency, an emerging affiliation of the German nation with the Hebrew state.[88] Moreover, the sweeping embrace of Hebrew thus stemmed from the will to avoid the use of other aesthetic models—ancient Greek poetry, which was already used in German classicism and Latin, which by then was a recognizable cipher of French nationalism: choosing Hebrew to separate the German state from preexisting aesthetic models and national movements signaled, as Ofri Ilany recently argued, the emergence of modern German nationalism.[89]

The Hebrew sublime emerged vis-à-vis debates on poetry in eighteenth-century Germany. Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* ("Truth and Poetry" is the English title) supplies tenets to this role of the scriptures in Germany's literary scene, mapping retrospectively the emergence of the

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[86] Andrea Schatz, *Sprache in der Zerstreuung: die Säkularisierung des Hebräischen im 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 216.

[87] Konrad Burdach, *Die nationale Aneignung der Bibel und die Anfänge der germanischen Philologie* (Halle: M. Niemeyer, 1924), 116–7. See also Joachim Dyck, *Athen und Jerusalem: Die Tradition der argumentativen Verknüpfung von Bibel und Poesie im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (München: Beck, 1977). On the stimulating effect that Luther's biblical translation had on print (and vice versa: the importance of print to the circulation of the translation), see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 41. Anderson famously showed the rapid circulation of texts in the vernacular to stimulate the emergence of nation states in the eighteenth century. My focus on hermeneutics offers a new nexus with which to understand the influence of the circulation of the Bible on nationalism: it is not merely the influence of the Bible as a national epos or its reciprocal affinity with "print-capitalism" (Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 37) that established the scriptures as the crucible of the emerging nation state; an eminent role of the Bible was the relational affinity it had to *all* texts, establishing nationalism not only upon the idea that texts belonged to the same community, but rather, that there is a community which can interpret—in a similar manner—cultural objects. This assumption relied on the acceptance of the Bible's cultural significance as a condition for its entrance to the collective sphere.

[88] In his account of the influence of patriotism on Germany's republic of letters at the time, Gerhard Kaiser notes poets' yearning for a common folklore (on top of having a common language and culture). *Pietismus und Patriotismus im Literarischen Deutschland. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Säkularisation* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1961), 32.

[89] Ofri Ilany, "Between Ziona and Teutona: Hebrew Poetry as a Model in *Sturm und Drang* Literature," *Historia* 28, 2012: 81-3 [Hebrew].

new poetics in view of his contemporaries' interest in the Bible. Told from a perspective that is already knowledgeable of later forms of German national literature, Goethe's account discerns how arguments on Hebrew mobilized tensions between different Enlightenment figures: for example Herder and the young Goethe's agonistic views on religion and human passions. In the seventh book of his autobiography, Goethe names the qualities that a good poet should possess as they were perceived during his time. The influence of Gottsched's *Versuch einer kritischen Dichtkunst* (An Essay in Critical Poetics) (1730) on the period's poets was great, he reveals; yet apart from the formal knowledge of poetry (like that of rhythm) explicated in Gottsched's influential aesthetic manual, poets were also expected to obtain certain erudition and good literary taste.[90] The erudition demanded from the poets encompassed "human history"—of which the Bible was an important part. More than any other book, the Bible was pregnant with material, supplying German poetry a quality that it had been missing: pregnancy of meaning, a quality that evoked its use for the reflection on "human things" (275). What is more, the belief that the Bible was a divine gift constituted it as a cultural object that is of importance to humanity as a whole, which constituted humankind, in effect, as a unified entity:

Man hatte nämlich bisher auf Treu und Glauben angenommen, daß dieses Buch der Bücher in einem Geiste verfaßt, ja daß es *von dem göttlichen Geiste eingehaucht und gleichsam diktiert s*ei. Doch waren schon längst von Gläubigen und Ungläubigen die Ungleichheiten der verschiedenen Teile desselben bald gerügt, bald verteidigt worden. Engländer, Franzosen, Deutsche hatten die Bibel mit mehr oder weniger Heftigkeit, Scharfsinn, Frechheit, Mutwillen angegriffen, und ebenso war sie wieder von ernsthaften, wohldenkenden Menschen einer jeden Nation in Schutz genommen worden. Ich für meine Person hatte sie lieb und wert: denn fast ihr allein war ich meine sittliche Bildung schuldig, und die Begebenheiten, die Lehren, die Symbole, die Gleichnisse, alles hatte sich tief bei mir eingedrückt und war auf eine oder die andere Weise wirksam gewesen. (275-6, emphasis added).

Goethe's description is telling in regard to the status of the Bible as a text with universal relevance in a newly globalized community of readers, due not merely to its praising, but rather to the attacks on it from all sides, "by Englishmen, Frenchmen and Germans," criticism solicited in view of the striking differences between its parts (e.g., its fragmented nature). Consequently, the Bible had to be defended—and in the act of its defense, cherished—by "men of each nation." A welcoming environment for debate, contestation, and apologia solicited the Bible's repetitious appearances in the eighteenth century's public sphere. For the above-mentioned Enlightenment figures, theology was not about the sweeping reception of the Bible's higher ascendancy; rather, vis-à-vis the period's new concept of pluralism, competing religious approaches were turning the scriptures —*the* object of public contestation—into an organizing principle of the nation state.

[90] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Aus Meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit* (Deutscher Klassiker Verlag: Frankfurt a.M, 1986). 287.

The debates on the Bible in every nation created the sense that it was of universal importance.[91] These debates stood as a homology to the importance of the Bible for each individual *nation* (each in itself a microcosm of biblical readers), situating the nation in the global system, or community, of world nations.

Illuminating in Goethe's description is the role he ascribes to the Hebrew Bible when defining, pondering on, and developing his persona as a writer (and with it, the reflection on the period's definition of poetic persona). The ending of the paragraph introduces the question of readership and textual circulation as a driving force of modern nationalism.[92] The republic(s) of letters used identification with the Bible as part of growing national reading cultures; the romantic reception of the text made the Bible an influential source for mobilizing individual identification of the reader to his or her role in the nation state. Goethe himself "loved" the Bible, he testifies about his early life, due to the text's rich contents in which every man could find what he was looking for. The view of Hebrew as the language of childhood imagination, which sparks in its turn poetic vocation, was well-spread in Goethe's time; a prominent example is the wide reliance on biblical forms and motifs for enhanced moments of poetic expression in the work of Klopstock: arguably Germany's most celebrated poet at the time. Literary critic Johann Jakob Bodmer stresses in Klopstock's biography, written in 1749 while Klopstock was still at the beginning of his career, the role that Hebrew played in his early life:

> Er war noch in der Kindheit, als er sich die Formen, der hebräischen Sprache und die figurliche Art die Sachen vorzustellen, die er darinnen fand, schon so bekannt gemacht hatte, daß er sie, sich selbst unbewußt, in dem gemeinen Umgange gebrauchte, so oft er etwas mit Ernst und Nachdruck sagen wollte.[93]

Poetic vocation (with "Ernst und Nachdruck") as relying upon—and driven by—biblical forms and motifs was in the background of young Goethe's encounter with Hebrew. Goethe describes in the fourth book of his autobiography his attempts at studying the language as a youngster. This account, itself a part of the performative unfolding of Goethe's poetic persona, touches Goethe's poetic formation, literary imagination, and apprenticeship as a reader and writer. Having had some knowledge of Yiddish, which he picked up by strolling in Frankfurt's Jewish

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[91] A pertinent influence on the perception that belief in the Bible is a precondition for equal citizenship is Locke's *A Letter Concerning Tolerance*. Locke's treatise greatly promotes tolerance and the separation of church and state, yet under the condition of monotheistic faith to which each and every citizen of this state must adhere.

[92] A recent work that highlights Goethe's profound awareness of textual circulation (as a nation-building set of practices, among other roles) is Andrew Piper's *Dreaming in Books*, which demonstrates how this awareness shaped Goethe's publication of his own writings: "Goethe's publishing practices were ecstatically self-referential. As they promoted the increasing difficulties of isolating a work's boundaries—its excerptual qualities—Goethe's prepublications also promoted the amplification of the authorial persona that regulated and orchestrated this print performance," *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 30.

[93] The biography was published by Cramer in 1780. Friedrich Cramer, *Klopstock: Er, und über ihn* 1724–1747 (Hamburg: Schniebes, 1780), 41–2.

quarter,[94] Goethe turned to ancient Hebrew to get a better hold of the Hebrew script so as to transcend the corruption of the language in its modern usage. He justified this choice to his father with the widely spread conviction that a command of Hebrew leads to better comprehension of the Old Testament—which would enable better understanding of the New Testament (125).

The attempt was a failed one. After several lessons with Doktor Albrecht, the rector of his Gymnasium and a churchman, Goethe quit studying the language. He was overwhelmed by the necessarily mediated encounter with the script through the mediaeval addition of punctuation ("Heer von kleinen Buchstäbchen und Zeichen," 126). Aware of other media peculiarities of the language, such as writing from right to left, Goethe was appalled by the transmission of the language, since the original signs (Urzeichen) are followed in Hebrew by an overwhelming presence of auxiliary signs:

> Auch ward gelehrt, daß die jüdische Nation, solange sie geblüht, wirklich sich mit jenen ersten Zeichen begnügt und keine andere Art zu schreiben und zu lesen gekannt habe. Ich wäre nun gar zu gern auf diesem altertümlichen, wie mir schien bequemeren Wege gegangen; allein mein Alter erklärte etwas streng: man müsse nach der Grammatik verfahren, wie sie einmal beliebt und verfaßt worden. Das Lesen ohne diese Punkte und Striche sei eine sehr schwere Aufgabe, und könne nur von Gelehrten und den Geübtesten geleistet werden. Ich mußte mich also bequemen, auch diese kleinen Merkzeichen kennen zu lernen; aber die Sache ward mir immer verworrner. Nun sollten einige der ersten größern Urzeichen an ihrer Stelle gar nichts gelten, damit ihre kleinen Nachgebornen doch ja nicht umsonst dastehen möchten. Dann sollten sie einmal wieder einen leisen Hauch, dann einen mehr oder weniger harten Kehllaut andeuten, bald gar nur als Stütze und Widerlage dienen. Zuletzt aber, wenn man sich alles wohl gemerkt zu haben glaubte, wurden einige der großen sowohl als der kleinen Personnagen in den Ruhestand versetzt, so daß das Auge immer sehr viel und die Lippe sehr wenig zu tun hatte (126-7).

What was so disappointing, according to Goethe, is the constant rejection embodied in Hebrew: the collective aspiration of his age for an intimate connection with the language demanded, to him, the command of its grammar. But the closer one gets to the language, the more evident is the mediate nature embodied in punctuation, the later intervention with the biblical script. Ironically, it is those who are already well trained and erudite who could read the language in its original form by "forgetting" punctuation. To the young reader striving to explore idyllic biblical stories and images through script, the media encounter reaches its peak with a bodily rejection:

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[94] On Goethe's study of Yiddish and Hebrew in view of his broad interest in foreign languages and cultures, albeit via arbitrary pickiness, see Theodore Huebener, "How Goethe Learned Languages," *The Modern Language Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 1949: 268-273. Goethe's enchantment by and fluency in French but difficulty with studying English portrays his language study as random, situating his interest in Yiddish and Hebrew in his broader, eclectic study of foreign cultures and distaste for formal grammar. See F. H. Reinsch, "Goethe's Interpretation of Language Mastery," *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 3, May, 1938: 115-125.

the volatile marking of breathing—fluctuating between soft breathing and guttural sounds—which results at the end of the paragraph in a complete discordance of the hand-mouth relation.

Friedrich Kittler has defined the imaginary origin of romantic reading technique as the moment of being read to (with the act of the mother reading to her son that filled a moral and civil duty in educating him). He thus portrayed the romantic conception of script as evoking the presence of the voice behind the word. Reading is phonetic in an inherent and deep level in the son's formation as a reader of the "mother tongue."[95] With these tenets in mind, Hebrew seems to embody a media conundrum: whereas its complicated grammar system exposes it as foreign to German, its script is comprised of primordial *Urzeichen*. Not a part of the original script, but yet necessary for its articulation, the liminal presence of punctuation disrupts entirely the option of uttering—or imagining—the voice behind the script through an *immediate* reading experience.

The relationship with Herder, which emerges in Goethe's biography as fluctuating between admiration and derision, is charged here with multiple references to Herder's statement that opens his On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, according to which one needs to learn Hebrew to understand the Old Testament, to ultimately better understand Christianity (a statement that undoubtedly meant to establish broad interest in the essay).[96] The occupation with Hebrew poetry thus entails a restorative move: since Hebrew was spoken during the childhood of humankind, studying it, writes Herder, highlights the importance of that global childhood period. In Herder's dialogue, the interlocutors confess that the study of Hebrew in one's childhood leaves a bad taste in the learner's mouth due to its tedious grammar. *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* thus marks the language of humanity's childhood as the one that bears relevance to each and every individual from his youth or educational years (The text presumes the presence of Hebrew as integral to a humanistic education, together with Greek and Latin). Goethe and Herder differ from one another in the image they ascribe to childhood, but they agree on the shaping of different childhood experiences, and in the analogical portrayals that stem from these respective experiences.

The essay also elicits an alternative "childhood" in regard to the nature of ancient Hebrew: this alternative can be detected through close examination of the language's features, speaking it as joyfully as children. The collective childhood embodied in the language thus suggestively evokes the reminiscences of childhood memories that replace the studious formation of the humanistic reader. *Truth and Poetry* presents Herder's call for a childhood imagination of Hebrew as didactic in spite of its ostensible liberating content—the allusion to the religious motivation from which it emerged: Goethe's distaste for institutionalized religion resonates with his excuse to his

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[95] *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900* (München: Fink, 1995), 86-8. This description is complemented with Wellbery's account of the lyric as emerging from the "voice" that originates in the maternal reading to the child. *The Specular Moment: Goethe's Early Lyric and the Beginnings of Romanticism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 197-8.

[96] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Schriften Zum Alten Testament*, ed. Rudolf Smend (Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, Frankfurt a. M., 1993), 669.

father to allow him to study Hebrew for a better understanding of Christianity, as well as with the failure of this study. For Goethe, the self-stimulating nature of the childhood recollection of Hebrew is constantly at odds with the obstacle of mediation embodied in Hebrew.[97] Thus, on a last account, in Goethe's post-romantic reflection on *Sturm und Drang* poetry, the childishness of the period's Hebrew reminiscence is that of the German nationalism in its youth expressing a failure at using original material for its emerging national literature:

> Den Stoff, der auf diese Weise mehr oder weniger die Form bestimmte, suchten die Deutschen überall auf. Sie hatten wenig oder keine Nationalgegenstände behandelt. […] Die idyllische Tendenz verbreitete sich unendlich. Das Charakterlose der Geßnerschen, bei großer Anmut und kindlicher Herzlichkeit, machte jeden glauben, daß er etwas Ähnliches vermöge. Ebenso bloß aus dem Allgemeinmenschlichen gegriffen waren jene Gedichte, die ein Fremdnationelles darstellen sollten, z.B. die 'Jüdischen Schäfergedichte', überhaupt die patriarchalischen und was sich sonst auf das Alte Testament bezog (272).

The German poets consented to the lack of originality of forms and themes with the "childish joy" in which they embraced their lack of character: the "fathers" of national German poetry failed to obtain their own role as patriarchs, ironically, since they turned time and again to patriarchs of another nation, which they wished to situate as the patriarchs of humankind. With the symbolic role he attaches to Hebrew punctuation as a disturbing reminder of the concrete presence of a foreign nation, Goethe shows as false the utopic presentation of Germans as ancient Hebrews. He rejects the positioning of one nation at the center of a universal creation story as a means to grant power to the emerging German national project. This critical account exposes Herder's philosophy of relativism in its recurrent attempt to found through biblical aesthetics an ahistorical, immanent principle with which to justify its raison d'être: the establishment of the observing subject upon a religious model of divine creation and revelation.

[97] Important to the current inquiry—which traces the Hebrew sublime as ingrained in early romanticism and its relation to the development of literary hermeneutics—is the Romantic emphasis on childhood as the individual's asset for creativity and imagination. See Linda M. Austin, "Children of Childhood: Nostalgia and the Romantic Legacy," *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (2003): 75-98; Meike Sophia Baader, *Die romantische Idee des Kindes und der Kindheit* (Luchterhand, 1996); Eugene L. Stelzig, *The Romantic Subject in Autobiography: Rousseau and Goethe* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000). The last part of this chapter will go back to *Sturm und Drang* poetry, examining Goethe's lyric speaker in his early poetry as a derivation of his occupation with the Bible, in the context of his retrospective autobiographical account and his own aesthetic enterprise of the translation of the Song of Songs.

Biblical Aesthetics and the Birth of Hermeneutic Thinking

Herder's own attitude toward childhood and nation-building receives a prominent expression in his *Über die neuere deutsche Literatur* (Fragments on Recent German Literature) (1767–68), where he parallels the early stages of language development to those of a national language:

> Eine Sprache in ihrer Kindheit bricht wie ein Kind, einsilbichte, rauhe und hohe Töne hervor. Eine Nation in ihrem ersten wilden Ursprunge starret, wie ein Kind, alle Gegenstände an; Schrecken, Furcht und alsdenn Bewunderung sind die Empfindungen, derer beide allein fähig sind, und die Sprache dieser Empfindungen sind Töne, – und Geberden. Zu den Tönen sind ihre Werkzeuge noch *ungebraucht*: folglich sind jene hoch und mächtig an Akzenten; Töne und Geberden sind Zeichen von Leidenschaften und Empfindungen, folglich sind sie heftig und stark […] sie verstehen also die Sprache des Affekts mehr, als wir, die wir dies Zeitalter nur aus spätern Berichten und Schlüssen kennen; denn so wenig wir aus unsrer ersten Kindheit Nachricht durch Erinnerung haben, so wenig sind Nachrichten aus dieser Zeit der Sprache möglich, da man noch nicht *sprach*, sondern tönete . . .[98]

The account of language acquisition in the "childhood" of a nation resonates with Herder's famous opening to his *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (Treatise on the Origins of Language), where he provocatively distinguishes himself from both Hamann and Kant by evading taking a position on their dispute. There, Herder's ascription of language to animalistic drives (the most primitive of which is pain), is at odds both with Hamann's idea of language as God's gift and with Kant's view of it as the accomplishment of human reason. Herder's project of recovering the childhood of language—perceived as a reflection of the emergence of a nation—turns in his *Fragments on Recent German Literature* from the detection of the nature of literature in Germany during his time to an exploration of the emergence of the ancient languages of the *Morgenländer* (languages of the Orient); the inquiry turns to the childhood of humankind as a whole. These languages—of which Hebrew receives the fullest account—embody a wild beauty that is no longer reachable.

These lost traces of ancient languages are explored in the description of Hebrew synonyms (that were not synonyms when the language was spoken by the ancient Hebrews, but rather, signifiers of distinct objects) (195-6). The delicate sensibility in the Hebrew characterization of world objects has been lost, which is an eminent problem of biblical translation. The Hebrew sublime emerged when scholars started referring to the Bible as a literary asset and a supreme aesthetic artifact. But this non-controversial characterization of mid-eighteenth-century biblical reading should be amended in two ways. First, it was not "the Bible" that was the center of these discussions, which emerged parallel to *Sturm und Drang*'s aesthetic and its new nationalistic

[98] Herder, Johann Gottfried. Johann Gottfried Herder. Fruehe Scriften 1764-1772, ed. by Ulrich Gaier (Frankfurt a. M. : Deutsche Klassiker, 1985), 181-82.

resonances. The question of how to comprehend the scriptures via the new universalistic categories of human cognition behind these experiments bears strong relevance for German-Jewish relations.

A most prominent, primary instance of these efforts is found in a text widely circulated in Germany, On the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews by English theologian Robert Lowth. As Jonathan Sheehan demonstrates, Lowth's apologia on Hebrew poetry is a seminal instance for Enlightenment figures who began to use the Bible for new, multiple needs (e.g., for the coining of new aesthetic ideals and reading practices). Sheehan emphasizes that the originality of Lowth's text stemmed to a large extent from the appearance of his translations of the Old Testament as a unique textual approach: Lowth proved that translations do not have to repeat the rhyme and rhythm of the original text.[99] Exercised here on the Holy Scriptures , this intrepid aesthetics would echo in Herder and Schleiermacher's respective, later theories of translation; for all three, cultural inquiry and textual restoration are established through "free" translation, rather than through the text's original content and form, a focus on the spirit (Geist) of the text.

Under this premise, Lowth's reading of the Old Testament opts to hone the relationship between the contemporary reader and the author of the Hebrew text, which has been severely corrupted:

> We must endeavor as much as possible to read Hebrew as the Hebrews would have read it […] he who would perceive and feel the peculiar and interior elegances of the Hebrew poetry, must imagine himself exactly situated as the persons for whom it was written, or even as the writers themselves…[100]

The ability to "transfer" emotions from one soul to another, to criticize or analyze the thoughts of another—a revolutionarily new conception of texts with modern hermeneutics—involved a new sense of sharing with an author's self. Via his scrupulous reading of it, Lowth suggests an admiring account of the Old Testament with regard to its aesthetic merits. This presentation relies on several premises, the first of which is the distinction of the ancient Hebrews, who are not held responsible for the corruption of the text, from Jews who *are* responsible for it. The model of identification (namely, emotional identification) with the author enables the reader to unite with the ancient Hebrews, transcending the corruption of the medium through which their work has been transmitted. The idealization of Hebrew poetry elicited the acute motivation to bridge the gap that separated the reader from the text.

To Lowth, it is not only that poetry should be analyzed through an emphatic address of the authors' emotions, but it should also be written in view of this anticipated effort: Hebrew poetry, with its appeal to the human passions, is the historically important emblem of this aesthetic effort. It thus serves as complementary to the momentary project of the Greeks: the appeal to

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[99] *The Enlightenment Bible*, 148-81

[100] Lowth, Robert, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*. A new ed., trans. by G. Gregory (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1829), 48.

high merits through the address of the senses, in order to regulate and sustain a participatory civil order. Lowth's project is to show that Hebrew poetry has a special virtue: while the role of poetry in general is to "improve the bias of our nature," the merit of Hebrew poetry is its "natural splendour" (*sic*, 16-7). Thanks to its sublime beauty, the power of Hebrew poetry is to maintain noble feelings, which in their turn are testimony to human accomplishments: "the human mind can conceive nothing more elevated, more beautiful, or more elegant; in which the almost ineffable sublimity of the subject is fully equalled by the energy of the language and the dignity of the style" (22). The language thus emerges as an ideal language that captures the noblest feelings of humankind.

Lowth's third lecture takes up illustrating Hebrew's aesthetic merit with an inquiry into the metrical and rhythmical sophistication of its poetry (without the need to actually reiterate them). To Lowth, these aspects prove the merits of Greek and Latin which ancient Hebrew is lacking. To illustrate these merits, Lowth claims that whereas the sentiments that follow one another in subsequent passages of Hebrew poetry do not seem to yield coherence, successive passages do form a coherent system preserved through the use of alphabetic order with the last letter of each stanza (32). His second proof of the language's merit presents an apologetic turn: the unclear nature of Hebrew poetry is a sign of the poetic intentions of its authors. Similarly to other authors who are confined to verse, the Hebrew poets often use words in ways that transgress and are even opposite of their normal usage (33). The outcome is not only the unique versification of Hebrew poetry, but also its lexical diversity. Like other languages that "are made for" the writing of poetry, Hebrew demonstrates the attempt to elevate the vulgar, common use of language through the use of foreign words and irregular or uncommon usage.

While those aspects of Hebrew poetry support its new claim to be a special "poetic language," Lowth also admits, however, that out of the three ancient languages that demonstrate poetic excellence, Greek, Latin and Hebrew, the corruption of the latter has been the worst. Major evidence of the corruption of the Hebrew language, Lowth argues, is our lacking knowledge of how Hebrew poetry should be pronounced. The ongoing Jewish circulation of the language has damaged the Hebrew language: the Jews have corrupted its sweetness. This claim filled a prevalent role in eighteenth-century writings on Hebrew and on the subsequent distinction between the Israelites as an ideal nation and the Jews as a group that is at odds with the existence of these aesthetic ideals. Herder's preoccupation with accent, dialectic features, and sound sensitivity was a major aspect of this debate. In Herder, the need to "forget" the semantic and literal sense of Hebrew reaches its climactic raison d'être with the making of aesthetics into a universal ideal.

On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry and on Poetry in General

Herder's *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* reiterates Lowth's search for the text's original meanings through identification with the authors, as well as his praising of the supreme aesthetic value of Hebrew poetry. With Johann David Michaelis' presentation of Hebrew as impure, on the one hand, and Lowth's praising of the historical achievements of the language, on the other hand, Herder is forced to adapt a different approach to Hebrew: one that not only perceives it as wholesome, but that also discerns the language's merits in the specific context of the culture in which it emerged—and not in view of a concrete historical lineage of Hebrew poetry as a contribution to poetry in the present. Herder acknowledges the need to distinguish himself from Lowth's "schoenes und allgepriesenes Buch" in the very first line of his essay (663). The seminal differences between the two authors mark the path that led from the commentary on the Hebrew Bible to the shape of literary interpretation under the influence of Herder's particular interventions in the field of aesthetics. Herder's essay presents the discussion on the merits of Hebrew poetry in the form of a dialogue between Alciphron, a young and skeptical scholar passionate about the inquiry into ancient peoples, and Eutyphron, an older scholar who is convinced of the supreme merits of Hebrew poetry, which he is trying to demonstrate to his companion.

These merits should grant the language a supreme status as a cultural asset. The so-called faults of Hebrew become in Herder's text the evidence for its literary qualities: Eutyphron alerts his interlocutor at the beginning of the essay that the so-called major deficiencies of Hebrew in fact illustrate its supreme aesthetic nature. He thus responds to several major problems that Alciphron finds in the language: it has few adjectives and prepositions; its tense system is irregular and unclear, disorienting readers; it lacks adjectives; the meanings of roots are enigmatic and seem far away from their common-sense meanings—the language formulations that derive, very often, from different roots thus lead to artificial collocations, far-fetched images and connections between terms that are far from one another. Alciphron then continues to criticize the language's use of parallelism (the setting of sentences or clauses in conjunction with one another that presents them as equivalent)—which he finds dull with its lack of attention to syllables. With respect to this laconic repetition, the language's tone appears monotonic and its sound unpleasant and tautological. Alciphron saves to the very end of his attack a most infamous attribute of the Hebrew language: the fact that vowels were added to the language at a late stage of its existence. As a consequence, the knowledge of how to pronounce Hebrew remains unknown and the language thus appears to lie like a "dead hieroglyph" (675). At the same time this dialogue privileges Hebrew over the Greek tradition, despite both the form of the text that resembles the Socratic dialogues and the setting in nature with a homo-social interaction between the interlocutors.

Eutyphron's apologia reiterates Herder's argument in his the *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts* (Oldest Document of Humankind): the apology on Hebrew begins with praise for the dominant presence of verbs. The relatively small number of adjectives, nouns and

prepositions in effect highlights the presence of verbs in the language: this is thus an application of Herder's method of cultural relativism in structural analysis, turning the gaze from a comparison between languages to the contrast between speech parts in a given language. In Hebrew, nouns derive from verbs, making the language especially animated. The poetic nature of Hebrew, to Herder, rests on the inherent vividness of verbs, which, as opposed to the more static nature of nouns, ingrain in the language a feeling of livelihood and constant action of plot.

Herder's characterization of Hebrew through the anthropological detection of its origins presents Hebrew as a functional communicative medium. In striking opposition to Lowth's statement that already during the time of its writing, the poets who composed the text were considered divine ("the ambassadors of heaven," 28), Herder's idea of poetic inspiration leaves more space to their characterization as humans who simply needed to address their surroundings. What is divine about the Bible is not the fact that its poetry is the word of God in its materialization through perfect transmission, but rather, exactly that the divine message took the form of a human, inherently flawed medium.[101] The divine aspect is the ability to transform a godly message into an utterly human form.

Hence, it is not the objective beauty of the Hebrew language which proves its divine origins; it is the human medium which exposes its merits. Herder describes the language's media particularity in the context of eighteenth-century debates on aesthetics:

> E. Also die Sprache, die viel ausdrückende, malende Verba hat, ist eine Poetische Sprache: je mehr sie auch die Nomina zu Verbis machen kann, desto poetischer ist sie. Ein Nomen stellt immer nur die Sache tot dar: das Verbum setzt sie in Handlung, diese erregt Empfindung, denn sie ist selbst gleichsam mit Geist beseelet. Erinnern Sie sich, was Leßing über Homer gezeigt hat, daß bei ihm alles Gang, Bewegung, Handlung sei, und daß darin eben sein Leben, seine Wirkung, ja das Wesen aller Poesie bestehe. Nun ist bei den Ebräern beinahe alles Verbis: d. i. alles lebt und handelt (675).

Here enters the picture another contemporary thinker from whom Herder now assiduously tries to distinguish himself. The inference of nouns from stems, a known cipher of Hebrew, is taken by Herder as establishing a language that is built upon verbs (in Hebrew grammar, the primary

[101] A more elaborated criticism of Lowth in that regard appears in Herder's essay "Versuch einer Geschichte der lyrischen Dichtkunst," in which he takes up an attack on Lowth's ideal description of Hebrew using his own declaration of the flawed nature of poetry in its primitive stages and confronting it with Lowth's sporadic description of Hebrew as an atemporal sublime: "poetischen Seite meistens zu viel Licht nahmen, und den Ursprung stets vom Himmel holten. Noch neulich hat der feinste Kenner der ebräischen Poesie, Lowth sich so weit vergessen, daß er die Worte schrieb: 'Der Anfang der übrigen Künste ist unvollkommen, grob, und bei niedrigen unwürdigen Versuchen: die Dichtkunst aber erblicken wir schon bei ihrem Ursprunge in Glanz; denn nicht von menschlichem Witz ist sie erfunden, sondern vom Himmel gesenket; nicht durch kleine Zunahmen gewachsen, sondern gleich bei ihrer Geburt vollständig reif an Stärke und Schönheit erschienen; nicht hat sie der Lüge ihren Schmuck geliehen; sondern sie war die Unterhändlerin zwischen Gott und den Menschen.'" *Johann Gottfried Herder: Werke*. Hrsg. von Wolfgang Proß. Bd. 1: *Herder und der Sturm und Drang 1764 – 1774* (Darmstadt: Hanser, 94).

function of stems is the construction of verbs). Hebrew thus appears to be a language which is in constant motion. To acknowledge what is at stake in this characterization of Hebrew poetry, one needs to observe Herder's broad engagement with and contribution to aesthetic theory.

The elegance and natural vibrancy Herder attributes to Hebrew in its function as a communicative medium situates the language as an important trope in view of eighteenth-century discussions about language and art. Herder's dialogue namely reiterates the discussion about the dynamic and static features that are to be found in art and poetry—a discussion that was famously embodied in the correspondence between Winckelmann and Lessing.[102] Lessing's *Laocoön* rejects Winckelmann's assertion that pain was not represented through sculpture since it would not suit the noble, unbreakable Greek spirit. In contrast to this view, Lessing develops a theory that discerns the features of different media from one another: the expression of human emotions depends on the respective properties of the art, and generally, on the differences between fine arts and poetry. Whereas poetry unfolds a narrative in time, sculpture does that in space.

To Herder, poetry may escape its spatial limits—this is in fact what it strives for. To make this point, Herder unfolds a critical account of Lessing's *Laocoön* in his *Kritische Wälder* (Critical Forests). Lessing presented poetry and fine art as incomparable since the first depends on time, whereas the latter relies upon space. Herder's reasoning, which leads to his original contribution to aesthetic theory, takes a few steps. First, Herder approaches the question of how art necessarily exists as a means for imitation. The world is temporary, and hence when he talks about how Laocoön's sculpture cannot capture pain since it would be marked on his expression forever and be ugly, he finds a fault in art.[103] If art cannot represent, the whole discussion is meaningless. Instead, Herder suggests looking at the way our minds operate when observing works of art.

But what about other arts, like music, that seem closer to poetry in some regards? Herder establishes that there are energetic arts in which the work unfolds a narrative and works in which everything appears at once. The energetic arts music, poetry and dance are distinguished from sculpture or painting. And yet, with this distinction in mind, what is so special about poetry, which makes Herder posit it as a separate category, in effect moving to a three-fold characterization of art? What differentiates it from the other energetic arts, and primarily from music, the art that Herder had brought as a counterexample to Lessing's binary distinction between poetry and fine art? Poetry is more than sounds, Herder claims: in it, the sounds transform to words. This entails arbitrary meaning—poetry is not just about the senses, whereas in music, sound is the most central aspect of a work. This is what gives the poet more possibilities than the artist. In the framework of this manifold of options, poetry obtains meaning

[102] Weidner, *Die Bibel um 18. Jahrhundert*, 44-50.
[103] Introduction, in: *Johann Gottfried Herder: Selected Writing on Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. by Gregory Moore, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2006, 9.

not through time or space, but through what Herder calls "force," a character that can be explicated through the synchronicity of sound, temporality and movement in poetry.

Lessing has shown—states Herder—that the essence of poetry is its "motion" which induces the feeling of vividness. Since verbs are the most essential part of the Hebrew language, as Alciphron is happy to admit, the language is especially suitable for the creation of poetry—as his interlocutor manages to convince him. At the same time, Eutyphron determines that Hebrew is not suitable for the abstract thinker, the philosopher. The first step in praising the cultural eminence of Hebrew thus relies not on the denial that indeed, the language is poor—at least, in terms of its vocabulary—in comparison to other languages, but rather on the acknowledgement of its inherent characteristics. A correct examination of the language entails a comparison of its inner properties, e.g., the relatively large number of verbs and the derivation of nouns from verbs. This new way of assessment through intra- rather than through inter-logic turns perspective from the lack of Hebrew (its fallacy) to a macro-perspective when estimating the "numerous" verbs it contains. This assessment leads to the tracking down of Hebrew's "symbolic value": its dynamic or poetic essence.

That said, Eutyphron's first move of defense echoes Herder's eminent anthropological perspective on aesthetics, which he elaborates on in many essays, translations and intellectual correspondences. This principle, as Herder describes most copiously in *Critical Forests*, determines that the beauty of one culture's artifact cannot be compared to that of another culture. Cultural artifacts should be examined only in the context of the specific time and culture that produced them. *Critical Forests* explores this relativism as it offers an elaborate account that situates the relativist principle in a scientifically-based description of the physiological development of humankind. There, Herder establishes that cultural artifacts—poetry being the emblematic expression of this principle—were aimed at addressing the sensual needs and drives of the people by whom they were produced. Thus, whereas the ancient peoples were sensitive to tones (Tönen), humankind has lost this ability and can only respond to sounds (Laute). Herder therefore insists on the power of a synchronic cultural inquiry rather than a diachronic one. *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* idealizes Hebrew in an account that reiterates the positioning of the language as the source of human cultural efforts and specifically poetics—and at the same time, Herder's different task, which is illustrated in his *Oldest Document of Humankind*, is to take an opposite approach: claiming that aesthetic beauty cannot be compared between cultures, since every culture has its own aesthetic ideals. The text reconciles these two agonistic arguments by describing Hebrew as one of many cultures that fulfills a unique role in the history of humankind, in that the uniqueness of its sounds are reminiscent of the primordial role of poetry, and the nature of its poetry, with its special vividness, is emblematic of poetry in general.

Herder's *Volksgeist* theory and the relativism it encompasses thus yielded an important divergence from Lowth: empathy for the ancient authors was not the direct outcome of self-identification with their legacy. Herder's idea of the contribution of Hebrew poetry to humanity dictates, rather, that one should feel empathy for the culture even as it is entirely separate from

one's present stance, and yet, at the same time one should acknowledge that in its the relativity, Hebrew (as any other culture) fills a unique role and has a specific place of "beauty" in the world's system of aesthetic artifacts, language, and sensitivity. With its primordial nature, Hebrew is the emblem of this emphatic process. And yet, Herder's perspective does allocate a certain place for a comparative and diachronic account of beauty insofar as the representation of the *Volksgeist* is a variable proof of aesthetic merit. The Old Testament, Homer, Ossian, Klopstock, and at times also Shakespeare, are Herder's examples of supreme texts, for they respond well to the needs of the time. *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* exemplifies the possibility of Hebrew to respond especially well to an extreme sensual stage of humanity—a stage which has been lost.

Hebrew thus appeares to embody the prevalent tension that is inherent in Herder's thought: the conflict between universalistic ideals and truisms and a relativist understanding of different cultures and historical periods. We should aim to understand the context in which Hebrew emerged; this would yield an understanding of the ancient perception of poetry, its primordial origins. The Enlightenment's standardization of taste in accordance with national collectivity, as established through Lessing's eminent theory of media difference, is shown to enrich and be enriched by the new political ontology of literary hermeneutics. That is, universalistic theories of how cultural artifacts should be interpreted—which discern the cognitive effects of poetry, its ability to produce affect, address a certain social context and ponder the restrictions of its medium—accelerated certain political transformations to which those theories were responding. The new standardization of a cultural and temporal conception of languages and literatures is reflected in the new globalization of the Bible stands in a reciprocal relationship with the emergence of a new political sphere. The seminal role—and conflicted position—of the Hebrew Bible in the globalization of the scriptures shows that the new theories of medium and of language, the new relativist consideration of cultures, were charged with the attempt to define one universal asset.

Herder's inquiry into the sublime nature of Hebrew poetry presents the distinction between Hebrews and Jews as a volatile one. The supreme characteristics of ancient Hebrew stand out with the acknowledgment that the language has been corrupted, degraded and regressed. A certain suspicion toward the Jews is embodied by their language not having been enriched through time, as opposed to languages spoken by other *Morgenländer*, such as Arabic. To Alciphron's note that the language is not a dead one, since the Rabbis have been speaking it, Eutyphron responds that they have not made it an aesthetic language. Whereas his defense of Hebrew touches on its so-called faults, proving that they in fact reveal the language's strengths, his apologia does not extend to the ritual usage of Hebrew that marks its continual transmission. More than that, it is exactly Eutyphron's line of argument which in effect necessitates the critique of the Jews. Eutyphron presents the language as a dead language that is alive in its nature. The greatness of Hebrew, in Herder's apologia, rests on the readers' ability to bridge the gaps of time—an effort stimulated by their enchantment with the language's natural vividness.

The harming influence of time, the fact that the language's lacks natural development and the insufficient knowledge of Hebrew in the presence—the consequences of the language's bad preservation—prove, in fact, its supreme ability to be continually circulated.

A certain quality of Hebrew makes it transcend the damages of time: its genuine reflection of the language of nature, with which the sounds of the language hold direct, mimetic connections. To Eutyphron, this immediate connection with nature is a merit of all *Morgenländer* languages. Thus, Alciphron insists, the biblical stories show the Hebrews as a distinct nation that encumbers the acknowledgement of its contribution to humanity as a universal asset:

> Der Glaube an die Vorsehung, den Sie mir aus den Schriften und die Geschichte des Ebraeischen Volks neulich entwickelten, und als eine Blüte fürs Menschengeschlechts anpriesen, hat an mir keinen Gegner; ich wünschte vielmehr, dass ihn die Schriften dieses Volks wirklich auf eine reine und fürs menschliche Geschlecht teilnehmende Art entwickelt hätten; sollte aber das letzte geschehen sein? War bei ihnen dieser Glaube nicht an so enger, ausschließender Nationalglaube, dass man ihn eher menschenfeindlich als menschenfreundlich nennen möchte?[104]

Eutyphron's response restates the aesthetic value of the Hebrew language as a contribution to humankind. Despite the emergence of this language and culture having occurred in a specific cultural and historical setting, Hebrew's contribution to humanity prevails with its resonances of humanity's primordial roots. The language's intimate connection with nature, which Herder pointed out in *Treatise on the Origins of Language* as the merit of the *Morgenländer* languages,[105] has survived and is still echoing in the biblical language, despite the all-and-all harmful presence of the Jews.

On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry cogently reiterates several times complaints against the rabbinic transformation of the language. For example, upon Alcophron's comment that the rabbis have been speaking the language, his older companion refutes the view of Judaism as preserving the beauty of Hebrew, insisting that the rabbis only contributed to the corruption of the language:

> E.: 'Nicht eben Perlen, auch leider nicht nach dem Genius ihrer uralten Bildung. Das arme Volk was in die Welt zerstreut: Die meisten bildeten also ihren Ausdruck nach dem Genius der Sprachen, unter denen sie lebten, und es ward ein trauriges Gemisch, an das wir hier nicht denken mögen. Wir reden vom Ebräischen, da es die lebendige Sprache Kanaans war, und auch hier nur von ihren schönsten reinesten Zeiten …' (678).

The Hebrew that Herder wants to return to is therefore a dead language. The effort of putting oneself in the shoes of the Bible's authors—an effort that became the model of the hermeneutic

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[104] *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, 876.

[105] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Frühe Schriften 1764–1771*, ed. Ulrich Gaier (Frankfurt a. M., Deutscher Klassiker, 1985), 701.

tradition in its entirety—is always a restorative one. For the hermeneutic enterprise that emerges from Herder's philosophical anthropology to be achievable, a rupture has to be made noticeable between ancient Hebrew and its traditional, continual circulation in the Jewish tradition. The legacy of identifying with the Hebrew poets shaped modern interpretation by way of the recurring correspondences between how we read literature and how the Bible should be read in its universalized status as a cultural asset. At the same time that hermeneutics prompted the emergence of new aesthetic ideals, these new aesthetic ideals were in turn reforming biblical hermeneutics and societal positions toward the Bible. The beginning of the hermeneutic tradition—insofar as it relied on the aesthetic features of the Bible—is in the distancing of the reader from the Jews in order to reconnect with the Hebrews.

The intensive occupation with Hebrew in the *Sturm und Drang* circle took place under the auspices of the movement's engagement with the relation that it drew between spiritual stimulation and the experience of art. In fact, the influence of Pietism was ingrained not only in the contents that national literature wished to utter, but also in the new genres that this literature formed. The Jewish "shepherd songs" that Goethe mentions as the trademark of Hebrew poetry were also taken by other authors as a major influence on genre and style. Salient in that regard was the genre of the ode, which as noted by Gerhard Kaiser, was a major manifestation of patriotism during the period and manifested most prominently in Klopstock's poetry.[106] The theme of prophetic speech and its use in pronouncing German nationalism is a major example of biblical adaptation: a motif that becomes a genre, a speech-act that is presented as exceedingly individualistic and which strives toward collective affect.

The consideration of Hebrew poetry as dictating a certain aesthetic model, which Klopstock took upon to emulate in his poetry, resounds in many of his odes; these often present a poetic speaker who unfolds a prophetic monologue reminding one of the Hebrew prophets as well as of other literary works that correspond with the Bible and its themes. One such work is Klopstock's 1757 play *Adam's Death* which revisits the Eden story and details new incidents in the life of the world's first inhabitants—explicating the Hebrew Bible by means of "filling in the gaps" in the text with the psychological motives and dilemmas of the patriarchs. With adaptation and emulation of the Hebrew Bible, textual forms—such as a self-aggrandizing speaker's monologue that echoes prophetic speech—are detached from the scriptures insofar as they are no longer perceived as objects of worship in the concrete sense of the word. At the same time, several of Klopstock's works aim at rewriting biblical stories and motifs in new forms that carry them away from their original meanings.

In this effort a two-Bible model is celebrated, noting both the Bible as a superior object and as a variable source. This move shapes the power of the Bible as a cultural object that is familiar to

[106] As Kaiser has argued, Klopstock utilized forms that placed at their center the individuality of the poetic speaker. These forms are then combined with the use of ancient poetic genres, like the epos. Such combination resonates and addresses the period's patriotism with which the poet corresponded. *Klopstock. Religion und Dichtung* (Gütrsloh: Gerd Mohn, 1963).

the *general reader* and continually constitutes its status as such. Yet ironically, the radical transformation of the Bible repudiates its status as a non-changeable source. Revisions, alterations and dialectics with the Bible make it an object that is changeable. What is more, the ability of the readers to recognize biblical motifs—such as the passionate belligerence of the Psalms—and biblical "forms"—such as long prophetic monologues—make the Bible's adaptability its unique virtue. The Bible's Pietistic alterations mark it as an object whose so-called singular merit stems, ironically, from its versatility and malleability. The process of "universalizing" the Bible presumes not only its inherent merits, but also the ability of every reader in the Enlightenment's emerging reading culture to recognize biblical forms and motifs despite their alteration. Thus, in the same motion that the Pietists undertook the mission of "speaking" the Bible in their individual voices, they also assumed a collective that could comprehend the text as a universalized cultural asset as was the ability to recognize the presence of the Bible in a literary text.

Nationalism and Pietism have gone hand in hand for as long as poets were establishing the new aesthetic realm in which sensitivity to another person's emotions became part of a collective practice. New ways of comprehending the Bible idealized the ancients while dictating their "correct" emulation. They also shaped the ideal view of the modern state through its address as a public of biblical readers. The presentation of the Old Testament as a basis for better command of the New Testament was taken to be the asset of such a society in that it created a conceptual barrier in regard to the new understanding of script and the role of poetry.

Hermeneutics of the German Senses

The new aesthetic approaches "to the Bible" emerged in a circle of authors that encompassed various movements and pursuits. Figures like Klopstock, Lessing and Herder engaged with poetry both in the form of critical essays on art and its interpretation, and as poetic texts which they composed. The rise of a new consideration of the text through aesthetics theory is often claimed to have elicited an eminent transition toward hermeneutic thinking. David Wellbery's *Lessing's Laocoön* has established exactly that, claiming that eighteenth-century discourses on art elicited a new semiotic awareness that was essential to the hermeneutic observation of art and of the world. Wellbery argues that the focus on successiveness in the unfolding of representations—the gradualness of which creates the beauty of the work of art—results in a new perception of the aesthetic effect as ontological, rather than psychological.[107] Wellbery's observations rely on the vibrant debates surrounding Lessing's essay—the most prominent interlocutors of them having been Meier, Herder, and Mendelssohn—as establishing the ontological shift toward semiotics. That is, toward a new perception of objects as signs that bear

[107] *Lessing's Laocoön: Semiotics and Aesthetics in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 44-55.

societally contingent meanings. Hermeneutics, Wellbery thus argues, relied on this shift in its later and fuller positioning of art at the core of a model that conceived interpretation as a new mode of deciphering the world.

In his more recent *Hermeneutik literarischer Sinnlichkeit*, Lothar van Laak offers a different focus of his inquiry into how eighteenth-century approaches to aesthetics, and specifically the *Strum und Drang* movement, prepared the ground for hermeneutics[108]; his is a definition of a hermeneutics of the senses that is based on a new appreciation of the sensual as eminent for the constitution of hermeneutics. The movement evoked an emphasis on the sensual aspects of texts, namely those that are provoked in their oral transmission. To van Laak, the focus on the affect that texts evoke has created novel criteria for their analysis.[109] The irony, or the counter-intuitive aspect of this argument, lies in the eighteenth century's esteem for rhythm and musicality, *Bildlichkeit* (which he explicates as the graphicness of literature), and its rhetorical structure in the transmission of texts.[110] This tendency toward *lebendige Schrift* (lively or dynamic script) ultimately did not express itself through a self-aggrandizing tendency to focus on the readers' personal emotions, but rather manifested a fresh critical, distant approach from which to view texts. A literary text was conceived as an artifact to be transmitted orally, which stimulated the perception of the text *as* plot.[111] Herder's importance lies in his advancement of a performative and historically-grounded concept of *Bildlichkeit*, reclaiming poetics as communicative and tracing poetic utterances as transitory and relevant to a certain point in time. In its unique unfolding through the reading process, poetry achieves the status of a cultural artifact that is both the embodiment of ontological essence and the reminder of traces of cultural specificity.

This "hermeneutics of sensibility" reaches its climax in Herder's anthropological perception of aesthetics. This has received attention in literature on the Enlightenment that studies Herder as an initiator of disciplinary classification. According to Robert Leventhal, who detects the emergence of modern hermeneutics in a disciplinary shift (expressed predominantly by the period's move toward semiotics): "Herder's writing […] ruptures literary-aesthetic discourse by subverting precisely the notions essential to the 'aesthetic' paradigm; subjectivity, the totality of the text, the primacy of spirit (Geist), the systematicity of argumentation."[112] Rejecting the

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[108] What Van Laak means by modern hermeneutics remains partly unclear; generally speaking, the study portrays the transition of the late eighteenth century as the move toward semiotic approaches to texts which rely on the perception of the text as embodying the unfolding of a plot. *Hermeneutik literarischer Sinnlichkeit: Historisch-systematische Studien zur Literatur des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Max Niemeyer Verlag: Tübingen, 2003), 15-8.
[109] Ibid, 5-26.
[110] Ibid, 3.
[111] Van Laak relies on Karlheinz Stierle's essay and phrasing "Text als Handlung" (ibid, 2). Van Laak counts three concepts as prevalent in establishing this new *Bildhermeneutik* (the hermeneutics of the image): *Zeitkritik*, the new conception of aesthetics, and the emerging concepts of anthropology. His historiography of the emergence of the hermeneutics of sensuality thus reaches a climax with Herder's position which embraces its "holistic conception of knowledge and sensation" (233).
[112] *The Disciplines of Interpretation: Lessing, Herder, Schlegel and Hermeneutics in Germany 1750-1800* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1994), 259.

classification of Herder's interpretive approach as romantic hermeneutics (assuming that such a description takes romantic hermeneutics to be a continuation of aesthetic discourse rather than its rupture), Leventhal emphasizes Herder's insistence on radical historicism of the text. His view that Lessing, Herder, and the early Romantics share with Heidegger a suspicion against "a theory of interpretation grounded in a transparent, self-identical subject, or any substrate that might provide an ahistorical ground for understanding," leads him to argue that hermeneutics emerged between 1770 and 1800 as a self-referential interpretive turn that relies not on a privileged status of comprehension but on the awareness that comprehension and incomprehension are mutually dependent: "As a form of text itself, hermeneutics is subject to the same historical exegesis that it itself allows us to perform on texts that are not readily translatable into our own idiom."[113]

A different approach to the rise of hermeneutics is explicated in Rüdiger Campe's *Affekt und Ausdruck*, which depicts an eighteenth-century shift from a "rhetorical to a hermeneutic culture" via an extensive grounding of the period's interpretive shift in transformations in physiology, psychology, and medicine.[114] Campe depicts the poetic and interpretive transformation toward modern interpretation as gradual, rather than depending on contingent interventions of major works on poetics and critique. The late eighteenth century thus signaled the last stages of the shift in the presentation of the author of literary text as a poet (rather than a theoretician). By then literature was observed to be in search of the affect it evoked in its reader—based on the consideration of literary texts as transmitting supreme truths, often times given their philosophical originality.

A crucial moment in the birth of new approaches to poetry and the arts reached the German-speaking territories—which seminal writings on the history of literary interpretation seem to agree on—in the publication of Lessing's *Laocoön*. The 1766 essay, which seeks to establish fine art and poetry as incomparable, reacts to Winckelmann's classist approach to art, which considers its connection to reality as mimetic and direct. To Wellbery, *Laocoön* is the climax of the period's interest in semiology, the primary step of which being the classification of different kinds of signs according to a hierarchal account of their ontological status. Wellbery distinguishes between this interest in representation-semiotics and expression-hermeneutics—the latter of which he identifies with Herder and early romanticism.[115]

What is common to both Lessing and Herder, however, is the strong emphasis they both put on affect when describing the encounter with works of art. In his *Critical Forests*, Herder's most comprehensive contribution to the field of aesthetics, he engages with the Winckelmann-Lessing debate, drawing on it from the tenets of his own interpretive endeavor. Herder's discussion of Lessing's essay recognizes and consequently advances its cultural importance. Aesthetic experience, according to the assumption Herder explores in this essay, activates the various

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[113] Ibid, 7.
[114] Rüdiger Campe, *Affekt und Ausdruck Zur Umwandlung der literarischen Rede im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990), 74.
[115] *Lessing's Laocoön*, 2.

faculties of humankind intensively; his analysis of Greek and other traditions of ancient art investigates how human faculties can be examined through the analysis of aesthetic experience both synchronically (art activates various physical and psychological mechanisms that are inherent to the human aesthetic experience) and diachronically (observing art in different periods detects not only the action of these mechanisms, but also their historical evolution). The premise of the essay thus reaffirms Ernst Cassirer's claim that Herder's interest in aesthetics stemmed from his view of this wide-spread field as key to the founding of a new, anthropological philosophy.[116]

Herder's account sheds light on his invention of the Hebrew sublime. The role of Hebrew aesthetics in mobilizing the new hermeneutic readings of poetry entails first and foremost advancement of anthropological consideration of cultures and texts. As established in the first chapter of this dissertation, the Hebrew culture is perceived in Herder's Protestant surrounding as the childhood of literary creation and the birth of script. Therefore, as argued previously, the reference to Hebrew is a means to explicate a new interpretive endeavor (examining cultural artifacts in their context) while at the same time scrutinizing its conceptual origins (interpreting the first human culture in its context). But the focus on the affect created by the Hebrew sublime mobilizes two other major assumptions of hermeneutics grounded in the period's aesthetic shift: that the analysis of texts should discern the gradual process in which they unfold representations and the presumption that all readers are capable of situating a text in its historical context to perform such analysis. Alluding to Hebrew—the biblical language rendered ideal for the writing of poetry—evokes a new model for the *reading* of poetry of all kinds. The religious charges that accompanied biblical reading during that time invaded the discourse on how affect should be made comprehensible, and how everyone should be capable of undertaking this endeavor.

The transition from rhetoric to the focus on the ability of art to unfold representations depended on new ways of perceiving signs and texts. But to trace the political transformations in which this transition was embedded, the attention should be directed toward the description of the readers who these shifts were interpolating. In his review of the emergence of literary criticism in eighteenth-century Germany, Klaus Berghahn applies Kant's notion of critique (as it is developed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*) to the period's new conception of readership.[117] In that regard he cites Koselleck's account that was elaborated upon in the first chapter of the dissertation, which argues for the neutralizing effect of readership in view of the attachment of intellectual pursuit to a private, non-political realm.[118] Critique is the ability of the masses to approach a text through a scrupulous observation, tracing the circumstances of the text's writing to solicit from it meanings that are not immediately apparent. Whether they describe it as a

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[116] *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 353.

[117] "From Classist to Classical Literary Criticism, 1730-1806, " in *A History of German Literary Criticism, 1730-1980*, ed. Peter Uwe Hohendahl (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 15-7.

[118] Koselleck, Reinhart. *Kritik und Krise; ein Beitrag zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt*.

teleological continuation of rhetoric or as its outbreak, theories on the Enlightenment refer to what can be described as the aesthetic shift in the consideration of texts as the contextual ground from which hermeneutics was to emerge. Several eminent theories of the Enlightenment make a certain counterintuitive assumption: that the enhanced presence of literary affect in eighteenth-century Germany signaled a new stage in the status of the sign, a stage that entailed not the dispelling of rhetoric by means of establishing an immediate emotional connection with texts, but the transformation of rhetoric into a new critique that can be pursued by all. This is due to the all-encompassing presence of affect in the new model of the Self. Affect did not yield the elimination of distance from texts, but—quite the opposite—stimulated a new distance from the text by way of the novel observation of literary devices as constituting emotion. The new textual analysis thus sublimated, but also relied upon, rhetorical practices. As the last section of this chapter shall demonstrate with its focus on the work of anthropologist Talal Asad, observing texts as evoking emotions not through a revelatory experience, but as one given to critical analysis, bears political implications with regard to the religious presumptions it embodies.

The Hebrew language, Herder establishes in *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, is unique in its unfolding of a representation, which evokes a supreme aesthetic feeling for its readers. With this praising of Hebrew, the idealized presentation of Hebrew eliminates the status of the Bible as a ritual object—exactly *due to* the sublime and spiritual nature attached to the Bible's aesthetic merits, which are taken to address the cognitive capacities of all readers. A wave of biblical translations that emerged in the late eighteenth century was a vibrant demonstration of how the Bible can be adapted for individual and group identity, strengthening through its aesthetic standing its status as a universal asset of every citizen of the modern state.[119] It is crucial to note that Herder's undertaking is contingent on his address of an audience of no readers of Hebrew—the concrete language, with its unique alphabet, vocabulary and grammar. His project assumes neither the philological training of its readers, nor their religious training, as is evident in his statement in the prologue to *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*: "Mit Gelehrsamkeit und fremden Buchstaben habe ich meinen Text nicht überschwemmen mögen; für den Ungelehrten sind sie nicht, und der Gelehrte, der die Ursprache und die alten Übersetzungen zur Hand nimmt, kann sie sich leicht supplieren. . ." (667). Herder's evident philological erudition leads to a transformation of Hebrew into a new trope: one that derives its importance from its significance for all readers. Since Hebrew is a language in which verbs are most prominent and have an effect on all speech parts, it is therefore a language that is uniquely suitable for the unfolding of a plot. Hebrew poetry, a unique *national poetry*, nevertheless embodies the aesthetic ideal of poetry in

[119] See Sheehan, Jonathan. *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), x. My discussion aims at elaborating on this process not only through the more extensive discussion of the eighteenth-century interpretive turn in aesthetics and hermeneutics, but also through the notion that it was not the Bible as a whole that was translated in keeping with the period's new aesthetic ideals, but rather the Old Testament. The universalization of the *Hebrew* Bible with regard to its aesthetic merits, an act that is demonstrated powerfully in its translations, is different from the claiming of the scriptures as a whole through the unique meanings ascribed to Hebrew as the language of a religious state minority, as I establish in this chapter.

general: it pushes the reader to an acknowledgment of the ontological status of the poetic artifact, an artifact that encompasses a unique power: the outcome of its musicality (sensual property) and semantic flexibility (cognitive merit).

The Song of Songs and the Aesthetics of Sensuality

In the 1770s the *Sturm und Drang* revolution in Germany's aesthetic discourse was already evident in view of its commentary on the senses' role in creating the modern citizen. Pietism's religious ideology was seminal in shaping the new self-aggrandizing, if yet "normalized," imaginary citizen of the emerging nation state. As Thomas Tillmann has argued, the Song of Songs is eminent in the Pietistic attempt to experience faith through sensation, a persisting tradition that is much present in Goethe's translation of the text.[120] The various translations of the Song show the specific ways, albeit different from one another, in which seminal authors pictured the role of the Hebrew sublime in the Protestant state (with the state's new collective of readers): the ways in which Pietism relied on representations of physicality, strikingly employing them to stress the ability of human cognition to follow the unfolding of an aesthetic work.

John Baildam describes Herder's translation of the Song of Songs as a prevalent and inherent part of both his theological reflections and his consideration of poetry in general: "In an age which considered Hebrew poetry barbaric […] Herder was unique with his plea that poetry in general was divine revelation, and that the Hebrew poetry of the Bible was the epitome of all poetry, the pinnacle of which was the Song of Songs."[121] His approach to the Song, Baildam establishes, should be understood in the context of his broader view of the Bible,

> [H]e saw the Bible as reflecting directly all the experiences of mind and body with which God had endowed mankind. Of these experiences the most important was love, the prime bond between mankind and God, and between human beings. For Herder the sole theme of the Song of Songs was human love between a man and a woman…"[122]

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[120] *Hermeneutik und Bibelexegese beim jungen Goethe* (Walter de Gruyter: Berlin, 2006), 196-7.

[121] *Paradisal Love: Johann Gottfried Herder and the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 54.

[122] Ibid, 37. See also Rudolf Haym, *Herder* II (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1954), 105-6 on the importance of bodily love in the Song for Herder. Haym highlights Herder's decision to rescue the Song from Michaelis' characterization of its expression of bodily love as inferior. Instead of insisting on its allegoric nature as a means for establishing the importance of the text, Herder's subtle translation stresses the text's power of sensuality ("Nachdruck der Empfindung") through a transmission into German (ibid, 107). Baildam and Haym's respective descriptions explicate the new form of divination through poetic transmission and through the comprehension of poetry: divination happens through the exploration of human faculties (for both a translator and a reader) manifested in the most supreme way in a superior (or sublime) aesthetic artifact. The Song is the embodiment of such an artifact through its enhanced evocation of human sensuality—this evocation that was the reason for observing it as an inferior part of the scripture is exactly what turns its status upside down.

But when viewed in the context of Herder's engagement with aesthetics, this view of biblical poetry, and specifically Herder's choice to translate the Song, refers to artistic creation as it was defined by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten—whose writings Herder studied assiduously throughout the 1760s—as a superlative and stimulator of human faculties.[123] To Baumgarten, the soul has the natural character of integrating perceptions into a whole. "Felix aestheticus" is one who manages to "think beautifully," in the process of which the integration of perceptions into a perfect whole results in self-governance and openness to the world. Thus to Baumgarten a valuable—or beautiful—representation is one that, with the perfected order that it encompasses, can "provide human beings with that centering of subjectivity that had previously been the function of the transcendent being."[124] Understating Herder's presentation of the Song as a supreme manifestation of poetry should be understood in the context of his combined, diachronic-synchronic conception of aesthetics, and in the shift from aesthetics to hermeneutics that Herder significantly advanced. To Herder's presentation, in its conception of how one could conceive aesthetics as a means to advance the exploration of human cognition by investigating its various functions,

> aesthetics exercises our capacity to grasp reality in all its concrete individuality and complexity. It celebrates the confusion of sensory knowledge, its particularity, vibrancy, and plenitude, precisely those qualities which are necessarily lost in translation from the specific to the general but embodied in exemplary fashion by works of art. Poetry, for example, which for Baumgarten was the paradigmatic form of artistic expression, does not pretend to discover universal laws or principles but lucidly represents individual things, persons, or situations, and the greater the vividness, richness, and inner diversity, the greater the value of the poem.[125]

With this new aesthetic effort in mind, the choice of the Song as the object of many translations (which were in dialogue with one another) should be explicated not merely through the sensuousness of this text, but also through the ways in which it unfolds human sensations: the Song's imagery evokes all human senses, often creating gradual scenes in which the different senses are mentioned and aroused one after another. The dialogue form of the text is another stimulating aspect which evokes a major feature of the aesthetic merit of Hebrew poetry, according to Herder: its vibrant nature presents the plot or the narrative as its inherent characteristic.

What is more, it is not only the dynamic nature of the plot in the Song, but also the very focus on the elimination of its allegorical interpretation that is Herder's major contribution. Wilhelm

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[123] Herder, Johann Gottfried, *Selected Writings on Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. by Gregory Moore, Introduction (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 4.
[124] Jochen Schulte-Sasse, "Aesthetic Orientation in a Decentered World" in: *A New History of German Literature*, ed. David Wellbery et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 353.
[125] Introduction to *Johann Gottfried Herder: Selected Writings on Aesthetics*, trans. Gregory Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 3.

Dilthey declared that objectifying allegory as a main means of interpretation was a major component of the hermeneutic movement. In Dilthey's overview of the emergence of modern hermeneutics as a restorative effort, the classification of interpretation as a reflective ability of the individual—and not as open to free associations—first required the revoking of allegory, an eminent religious reading practice.[126] The broad engagement of Herder and his contemporaries with the Song (often with the insistence on its "human" topic, the presence of sensual love) is emblematic of the hermeneutic effort as a whole. More specifically, it is an emblem that grounds the hermeneutic effort in a cogent auxiliary for human imagination for the comprehension of a text: an undertaking of a text's own imaginary nature that explicates its beauty, sensuality and imagination—which are its inherent property and with which the reader can identify by placing him or herself in the protagonists' positions. Allegorical, mystical and other ways of reading the text through one's initiative and imagination are replaced with the "secular charm" of the sublime that is embodied in the unfolding of the text.

Such sublime nature can be found in the Song in the centralization of the object in the eyes of the observer. This is a unique and common characteristic of the Song as expressed in several of its lines (in Herder's 1778 translation):

Er küsse mich

Mit seines Mundes Küssen:

Denn deine Leib' ist lieblicher, denn Wein.

Wie deiner süssen Salben Duft,

So ist zerfliessender Balsam

Dein Name…

Two eminent influences on Germany's aesthetic discourse should be looked for in Goethe and Herder's respective translations of the Song, translations that are only a part (if yet a representative part) of Germany's sweeping by the Song: Baumgarten's *Felix aestheticus* and Lessing's theory of media relativism. The ability to explore both concepts within the Song's fertile, synesthetic images explains Herder's fascination with the text.

The opening of the Song entails both, as it expresses its synesthetic quality, evoking taste, touch and smell simultaneously in a manifestation that blurs the distinction among them. The kisses of the mouth are compared to wine by means of their common feature—their sweetness; yet as the paragraph continues, the imagery of the sweet flowing fluids becomes the center of the scene.

[126] An argument he develops in his 1860 essay "Das hermeneutische System Schleiermachers in der Auseinandersetzung mit der älteren protestantischen Hermeneutik."

The first line uses the wine metaphor to allude to—and at the same time conceal—the bodily fluid that is exchanged during the kissing; but as the picture unfolds, a common feature of the Song emerges: the flexible replacement of metaphors and the object they signify,[127] showing that the point of the Song is not to describe erotica, but rather to provoke its experience through allusive and evocative poetic description.

The role of the Song of Songs, the prevailing example for the tracing of a Greek-like genre in the Hebrew Bible, was also a most prominent instance of collective, national fascination with the Old Testament. In a twenty-year period, numerous intellectual public figures translated the Song, as did young Goethe, who in this endeavor followed Hamann, Herder, Jacoby, Mendelssohn, Lessing, and other prominent late-eighteenth century authors. The Song's themes and style could be amended to fit more traditional ideals of beauty: it was poetry that dealt with erotic and scrupulous descriptions of bodies; the Song also allocated much space to nature and to fondling that takes place in nature. The broad interest in the poem can thus be attributed to its ability to bridge two models of beauty, the Greek and the Hebrew, while moving from the former to the latter.[128] The Song's identification as the new aesthetic sublime was emblematic of the wide insertion and appropriation of themes, genres and forms from the Old Testament in the period's emerging sentimental style of the *Sturm und Drang* movement.

Goethe's decision to join his mentor in translating the Song is part of his continual polemics with his mentor. Involving the holy text of the Bible created a conflict with view of his mentor's more traditional aspirations regarding the scriptures . Goethe is famous for preferring Homer's writings over the "pagan" stories of the scriptures Goethe's influence by Spinoza and his subsequent statements on the adherence to the religion of nature also constituted an opposition to the practice of monotheistic faith. But at the same time, Goethe's turn to the Song was part of an inherently different facet of his ongoing work: a certain admiration for the Old Testament as a text that, if taught didactically, could enrich human self-reflection and national unity.[129] Goethe's appreciation of what he saw as the beneficial aspects of the Hebrew Bible pertains to the text's standing as a national epos and to stories about the Israelite leaders—which is why his praise of the Song's supreme aesthetic merits makes a unique appearance in his references to the text. The Song of Songs, Goethe contended, was a supreme manifestation of beauty, which was the reason for his undertaking of the herculean task of translating the text—not in view of its transmission to the public as his ultimate goal, but with the equal intention of a new personalized creation of

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[127] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 3.

[128] The Song also embodies other aesthetic models, such as the medieval vision of the *locus amorous*, the place of loving and fondling in an idealized, isolated setting in nature. The Ancient Greek and medieval visions are not competing aesthetic models; both can be viewed as contained in the Song at the same time.

[129] Ze'ev Levi relates these two aspects in Goethe's writings on the Hebrew Bible to his intellectual dependence on Herder. *Judaism in the Worldview of J.G Hamann, J.G Herder and W. v. Goethe* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1994) [Hebrew]. While Levi's book significantly enriched my understanding and knowledge of Herder and Goethe's approaches to Judaism, I disagree with his conclusion that Herder's great admiration of ancient Hebrew poetry led to his view of the legitimacy of modern Judaism (124).

his own in the German language, the pertinence of which to the Song is an experiment in intentionality that enhances the originality and scope of his own poetic achievement.

Like his older companion, Goethe was not aiming for a literal comprehension of the Old Testament. In fact, Goethe evoked his lacking knowledge of Hebrew, advancing, with this disclosure, the idea of a new, liminal understanding of the biblical language. His only partial comprehension of the text makes Goethe frequently turn to Luther's translation and to the Vulgate, adhering to the position of a transmitter who transmits what has already been transmitted: "wie gar mancher gute Übersetzer" […] "aus Übertragungen weiter übertragen."[130] Goethe was utterly impressed by Luther's translation of the Bible, admiring his ability to capture the Bible beautifully to the "mother tongue."[131] To Kittler, this exemplifies how Goethe's interest in translation as a medium took over, dispelling the belief in the standing of signifiers for a unique and singular content. Turning to the Song, with its stimulating sensual and synesthetic effect, serves Goethe to illustrate what translation is about. Goethe's project of transmitting the Song is thus both a transmission from Hebrew to German and of the old translations to a new translation: whereas this first effort performs translation as the transmission of an object between two languages, the second embodies transmission as the extension of the *act* of translation; this dual endeavor performs translation while referencing its continual presence in the reading of the Bible. The transmission from Hebrew into German is amalgamated with the "translation" from German into German which is in itself an echo of Luther's previous project of the *Verdeutschung* of Hebrew in his influential translation of the Bible to the vernacular.

Goethe's enterprise recalls that, when regarding orality as the property of Hebrew poetry that defines its beauty,

> Herder is historically such as a decisive and influential critic not because of the accuracy of his observations and judgments, but because he formulated a new imaginary of language and literature. […] Herder imagines the collectivity of oral culture as a single individual that, in the inwardness of its audition, hears its own voice, the originary song of its language.[132]

The Song of Songs sparked both Herder and Goethe's interest its evocative nature and through the emphasis on a universal means of expressing the passions.[133] The so-called single voice of the Hebrew culture became a soul mate of the new German one; the ability to reflect and evoke the human passions was solicited from the Song as a way to transcend temporal and cultural

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[130] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and A. Schoell, *Briefe und Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1766 bis 1786* (Weimar: Ullan, 1857), 155.
[131] *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900*, 90-1. To Kittler, the ability to transmit the Bible through coherent style and form has constituted Goethe's search after literary form that is a perfect signifier.
[132] Wellbery, *The Specular Moment: Goethe's Early Lyric and the Beginnings of Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 190-1.
[133] Campe defines this transition as the "homogeneity of expression" in the European republic of letters, *Affekt und Ausdruck*, 163.

distance, entering the shoes of the Hebrews. The Song was read as an invitation for translation as a playful and passionate act of adapting the Hebrew passions. This "imagined orality" can be seen—in view of the above discussion of how the Hebrew sublime both reflected and advanced Herder's contributions to aesthetics—as a decisive transition from aesthetics to hermeneutics via the development of a new conception in Germany's literary scene: that of lyric poetry that emulates the unique musicality of the Hebrew Bible. "Reading Hebrew" became a cultural praxis, the idealized nature of which dictated perceiving translation anew.

The Hebrew Sublime and the Lyric I

In his seminal study of Goethe's lyric poetry, Wellbery has claimed that young Goethe's poetry created a new literary and idyllic model for lyric poetry, a transformation which happens within what he named "the lyric phantasm."[134] He thus argues that the eminent role of divination in hermeneutics theory is a main catalyst of that effect of Goethe's early lyric:

> [*T*]*he authentic utterances of the lyric call forth a hermeneutic identification* such as we find developed in Romantic hermeneutic theory from Herder to Schleiermacher, the inventor and canonizer, respectively, of the concept of divination in its hermeneutic sense. Thus, the lyric appropriation of the idyll evidenced in the juxtaposed texts engenders an entirely new form of cultural communication. Textual processing unfolds no longer as the playing of a social game, but rather as the reactualization by the reader of a subjective mode of being articulated in the text (body origins).

Wellbery claims that the lyric I, as a most prominent conceptual invention of Goethe's poetic enterprise, was conceived under specific circumstances that addressed theological transformations in interpretive approaches. Hermeneutic theory has changed the position of the readers of lyric poetry providing them with new models of textual identification with the lyric I. This shift illustrates the radical changes that the paradigm of literary hermeneutics manifested in Enlightenment reading culture. Goethe's case illustrates, Wellbery contends, how this new reading method with its religious origins was establishing what lyric poetry was supposed to be about. Thus, in Wellbery's subsequent analysis of Goethe's poems, the emergence of hermeneutics and of the "sublime" as leading notions in the understanding of literature in the late eighteenth century is taken to have shaped poetic figures like the "ich," "du" and the community of readers, as well as the consideration of the role of poetry in articulating to the community of readers religious views (399-401). Herder's definition of the *Volk* as the basis for mythical production thus became a germane presumption of shaping the figurative role of poetry; the invention of the lyric, according to Wellbery, embodies both Herder's imaginary and idealized notions of orality and mythical production as practices associated with collectivity and origins. The role of the wide fascination with the Hebrew language, and with themes and motifs from the

[134] Wellbery, *The Specular Moment: Goethe's Early Lyric and the Beginnings of Romanticism*, 13.

Hebrew Bible, cannot be overlooked while tracing the paths by which hermeneutics has enhanced the new, all-encompassing position of the lyric I as a universal subject position. This position explicates how *Sturm und Drang* authors wished to adhere to a new aesthetic paradigm embodied in the Hebrew Bible as a model of emulation, a model whose compelling power was due, for the first time in history, to the unreasoned sense of adhering to it in the first place.

The prominent influence of Pietism translated into aesthetic and cultural phenomena; this religious movement had a major impact on the seminal values and objectives of the *Sturm und Drang* movement: namely, the movement's emphasis on texts as a means for evoking intense feeling within readers, the importance it allocates to sensuality (Sinnlichkeit) and sensitivity (Empfindlichkeit) in its aesthetic model, and its establishment of the lyric "I." The transition of Hebrew into a trope was an emblem of the above values. In its transition into a sublime trope, the biblical language both facilitated the adherence to those values—transitioning into a sublime that is available to all readers to the same extent, exactly due to its initial unavailability—and embodied them—in its references to a primordial stage of humankind as a collective entity.

The perception of the Hebrew Bible as the mythical origin of humanity was the prevalent part of the shift toward literary hermeneutics, as major *Sturm und Drang* figures referred to Hebrew as a new cultural ascendancy. The turn to Hebrew in aesthetic writings, Ilany has argued, corresponded to the attempt to find an aesthetic model that would represent the ideals behind the poetry of the *Sturm und Drang*. The identification of the German classicists, such as Winckelmann and the young Schiller, with the ancient Greek tradition, and the affiliation of classicist French authors with Latin poetry, elicited the affinity with Hebrew in order to signify the reminiscences of an ancient tradition alternative to the aesthetic models of these contemporaries. Ilany concludes that the eighteenth-century turn to Hebrew signifies a new political trend in Germany: the repetition by Herder of the word "Nation" in several different collocations demonstrates the Lutheran tradition of using biblical motifs to express state ideologies, occurring, this time, within the new conceptual framework of the modern state.[135]

The ability to criticize one's poetic endeavor, which presumes pondering in one's soul the impressions created in that of another, is the outcome neither of a self-aggrandizing poetic speaker, nor of the emphasis on the readers' emotions. Rather, this major precondition for hermeneutic thinking builds on the consideration of aesthetics at the means for measurement, prediction and analysis, a means that deploys, and reaffirms, the universality of human aptitudes, thereby establishing an affinity between individuals—between authors and readers. The aesthetic position of the movement thus highlighted certain generic constructions and motifs as "religious," by means of their emergence from the newly-universalized interpretive and semantic legacy of Lutheranism.

[135] Ilany, "Between Ziona and Teutona: Hebrew Poetry as a Model in *Sturm und Drang* Literature," 104. My translation from the Hebrew.

As the beginning of this chapter has shown, Goethe's view of Hebrew poetry emerged with an all-encompassing enthusiasm—only to be dispelled with his later account of the immaturity of German national poetry that strived for plain imitation of biblical poetry. Goethe's dismay at the punctuation of the Old Testament continually reminds one of the Jewish interference with the Hebrew Bible as a primordial aesthetic asset. Goethe thus rejected, on a last account, Herder's attempt to conceive the national reader as a divine creation and of humankind as unified through one "childhood story." It is exactly the struggle to establish a unique national nature and a corresponding poetic model that defines the nation, to Goethe, as "individual"—an individuality that yet emerges, albeit in an indirect manner and by means of the medial intervention of aesthetic works, from one's correspondence with the first man, from the nation's correspondence with the patriotism of the first nation, and from the poetic emulation of primordial orality.

Secularism and Pietism

In his 2003 *Formations of the Secular,* anthropologist Talal Asad reflects on the eighteenth-century's emerging discussion of the Hebrew Bible as an aesthetic artifact. His analysis shows the period's sweeping admiration for Hebrew poetry as a prominent step in advancing Lutheran reading techniques as universal, making them into pillars of modern interpretation:

> Not only was it conceded that prophets and apostles were not superhuman, they were even credited with an awareness of their personal inadequacy as channels of revelation. In the romantic conception of the poet, the tension between authentic inspiration and human weakness allowed for moments of subjective illusion—and thus accounted for evidence of exaggeration and insufficiency […] *What mattered was not the authenticity of facts about the past but the power of the spiritual idea they sought to convey as gifted humans*.[136]

In the romantic invention of authorship and readership, human vulnerability was being idealized: insofar as godly attributes like the ability to create and interpret are manifested in the process of reading and writing literature, theology is not rejected but is transformed into an abstract concept. Gifted humans, according to Asad, did not long have to experience divine revelation. Instead, the Hebrew sublime stimulated the view of inspiration as a force whose Christian origins were now presented as a neutral aesthetic merit. The Hebrew sublime did not only play a prominent role in establishing the universal stature of the Bible; the dependence of the aesthetic merits of Hebrew on the negotiating of the Jewish faith also shows the Hebrew sublime to be the emblem of the act of universalism in the shaping of the Bible—ironically through the mutual dependence of Pietism and patriotism. In other words, when the Bible loses its ritual standing in favor of its transition into an abstract, everyman can take up the ardent faith and enthusiastic

[136] *Formations of the secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 45, emphasis added.

nationalism as the morals that it now embodies, for example, with its resonances in the prophetic monologue of the poetic speaker.

The fascination with biblical poetry, as I have shown, advertised intimacy with God and religious experience through the period's aesthetic project, echoing religious zeal in its energizing power if not in concrete form of religious practice. Yet in Germany's heated religious debates, Pietistic contribution mobilized, in effect, religious zeal, making it into a possibility of social and national integration. In his *The Religious Enlightenment*, David Sorkin presents Pietism not as the locus of separatism between Christian hegemony and religious minorities, but rather as enabling different religious groups to find spiritual common grounds. Thus theologian Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten's work that centered on Pietistic principles such as the benevolence of God and the obligation of contributing to society in effect enabled Jews and other non-Christians to found a common religious ideology that justified and mobilized new constellations of national coexistence:

> Baumgarten was representative of the first fully articulated version of the religious Enlightenment that enjoyed state sponsorship in the German lands. While it has an enormous impact on German Lutheranism, it also exerted significant influence among other confessions. The Protestant theological Enlightenment played a decisive role as Jews and Catholics in the German states created their own versions of religious Enlightenments.[137]

One can explain the emergence of Pietism as Germany's hegemonic religion with the spread of this religious faith among Germany's intellectual elite. In that regard, Kant's background and education as a Pietist could be seen as evident in his advocating of the "religion of reason" in such texts as *Religion within the Borders of Reason*. In this case, the Pietistic ideology will be taken to serve not so much the content of Kant's explicit ideology in regard to religious models, but the motivation that stands behind it. The Pietistic influence was also evident in the vast occupation of vibrant literary engagement with this religious conception—with its self-aggrandizing I, its advocating of reading as an individual capacity and at the same time as the grounds for the unity of the nation. Sorkin's original explanation offers a new perspective on the role of Pietism in constructing Germany's religious ideology. Through its amalgamation with nationalism, Pietism grants the members of different religious Enlightenments both the recollection of religious separatism and the ability to participate in a unified society.

An alternative description that yet employs similar tenets would relate to Pietistic religious ideology as actively wishing to spread among individuals who do not belong to the same faith. The Hebrew language has become, in this process, a trope signifying the unity of the nation under the umbrella of an aesthetic experience that is not contingent upon, and is in fact detached

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[137] David Jan Sorkin, *The religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 163.

from, textual comprehension in the traditional sense of the word. Turning the language into a sublime artifact engrained the incongruity of Hebrew poetry— a marker of Jewish faith and of concrete ritual practice of a religious minority—with its new model of a universalistic experience of reading texts; the Hebrew sublime is a constant reminder that the cognitive process that aesthetics elicits suppresses religious and ethnic differences, engraining this suppression in the secularist infrastructure of the modern state. This is a loss that is at the same time a continual and disturbing recollection of that which is left behind.

Conclusion: Odysseus' Scar Revisited

Erich Auerbach's Magnum opus *Mimesis* has long been conceived as the model for the field of comparative literature and the humanistic potential behind the discipline newly defined as "World Literature." Auerbach's flight from Nazi Germany to Istanbul evoked the myth around the book, a myth which describes Auerbach's examination of realism in the Western canon in such a way as to demonstrate his interpretive brilliance under unjust sanctions. As he did not have his library with him, Auerbach could not use secondary sources or dictionaries: his analysis of world literature greatly relied on his memory.[138] The German Jew produced a work that has been perceived as reaffirming the victory of human spirit. The reception of *Mimesis* engrains Enlightenment ideals of equality and universal affinity in an idealized vision of literary analysis that centers on style, discerning and describing texts' linguistic craftiness and literary devices—an analysis that relies on an extensive, if yet remote understanding of a literary text in its cultural context. The Jewish critic in exile is a model interpreter insofar as he expertly performs universalistic hermeneutic thinking on literature.

Arguably the most well-read chapter in *Mimesis*, Auerbach's comparison of the *Odyssey* to the story of Isaac's sacrifice is a praise of the Hebrew Bible's aesthetic merits, pointing out its contribution to western civilization. With his Jewishness in the background of his analysis, Auerbach's preference for the Hebrew Bible's modest aesthetic economy blurs the distinction between Hebrews and Jews: like the Jewish refugee in his brilliant interpretive endeavor in exile, the beauty of the Old Testament narrative (a plot that unfolds through the seemingly deficient Hebrew language and narrative) is discovered in its psychological depth through a comparison with the affluence of detail that one finds in Homer's description of Odysseus' scar. Ironically, it is because of his hazardous and disadvantaged position that Auerbach successfully produces a Protestant, Pietistic and Romantic image of hermeneutic readership.

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[138] Making *Mimesis* the model of world literature in contemporary discussions relies to a large extent on Edward Said's admiring presentation of Auerbach as a "liminal intellectual." Said chose Auerbach to illustrate his notion of a "critic in exile," with the ideological agenda embodied in this position. See his "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginal" in the series "Representations of the Intellectual," *The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994).

The sweeping appreciation for *Mimesis* is striking due to the correspondence of the book's image with the secular, cultural presumptions of world literature and hermeneutics, which were transferred to the political circumstances of Nazi Germany. The Jew who proves command of the secularist, humanist and global perspective on literature, with his striking capacity to put himself in the shoes of many authors and restore their original thoughts, is compensated for his expulsion from the modern state and the revocation of his equal citizenship. His precarious position is in fact what proves the extent to which he commands skill in addressing the Bible as literature. Auerbach's intimate relationship with the Hebrew Bible is thus emblematic of his own—national, ethnic, and religious—accordance of his identity with his idealized position as a critic in crisis, a position that reaches a climax with his rescuing of the Hebrew Bible from its own precarious cultural standing. Hebrew aesthetics is not only a major outcome of hermeneutic thinking on literature; more importantly, it is a locus from which the hermeneutic thinker successfully operates, ostensibly reaffirming his or her belonging to a community of world readers and further honing the network of emphatic connections to past and present textual artifacts that are assumed to have been partially or fully lost. The next chapters of this dissertation will explore alternative models for interpretation, inquiring "what could have happened" to the field of world literature had traditionalist understandings of the Bible and their corresponding perspectives on textual analysis been taken into account as the realm of general readership took shape.

Chapter 3: Interreligious Dialogue and the Enactment of Secular Law

Introduction

In his *Formations of the Secular*, Asad has argued that modernity represents a seminal change in the perception of scriptures. The Bible has stopped to be perceived as an object whose materiality engages the human senses directly as part of the practice of ritual. Instead, the Bible becomes a signifier of higher meanings through the opposition between abstract forms of spirituality, perceived as superior, and the material sign belonging to the newly inferior realm of ritual:

> How did Scripture as the medium in which divinity could be experienced come to be viewed as information about or from the supernatural? Alternatively: In what ways did the newly sharpened opposition between the merely 'material' sign and the truly "spiritual" meaning become pivotal for the reconfiguration of 'inspiration'?"[139]

In this chapter, I shall juxtapose Asad's claim to a problem that I find in Enlightenment thought. Judaism, can be treated since the Enlightenment, as an array of spiritual phenomena that jeopardize the separation between the secular and the religious. Practices such as circumcision, burial and veiling the body shows that modern Judaism obtains a conflicted status as it both embodies the hegemonic Enlightenment notion of public religion and at the same time holds an affinity to traditionalist textual and bodily experiences.[140] This dual status of Judaism can be attributed to the attempt to preserve the Jewish tradition as uninterrupted, while at the same time carrying it to the modern realm of the nation state: an attempt most readily identified with Moses Mendelssohn's position and political lobbying in the Enlightenment. Evincing Judaism's presence in the Enlightenment, I wish to propose a new conception of the function of secularism in liberal politics and show how secular constructs adapt the religious principles of groups, even

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[139] *Formations of the Secular*, 40.

[140] A major question on that regard is whether Judaism was a part and parcel of the construction of the hegemonic notion of religion that as embodied in the Enlightenment legacy. To begin and talk about a certain Enlightenment legacy that emerges from the period's salient polemics on theology, I accept the tenets of major secularism critics that the period's distinguished between "spiritual religion," and civil acceptance of global religion, and allocated the former to the citizen's private sphere (tenets that I elaborated on in the dissertation's first two chapters). With his association with salient thinkers who promoted this distinction (such as Lessing and Kant), Mendelssohn's activity advanced this legacy. My goal in his chapter is not to refute the above-mentioned descriptions of Enlightenment legacy, but to show the complex way in which this legacy built on the Jewish insistence on remaining a religion of revelation. Thus, the chapter stresses the constant awareness of—and dialectics with—the Jewish presence in the emerging modern state and demonstrates how the notion of interreligious exchange became formative for norms of cultural production, sensibility, and comprehension. I establish that modern interpretation is ingrained in tensions pertaining to the globalizing of religious notions and practices in the emergence of the nation state, with my premise that globalization is informed with a constant awareness of ritual.

as they simultaneously tether them to an abstract notion of religion much at odds with such groups' world conception.[141]

In June 1780, Moses Mendelssohn writes Herder with a query about reading. In the letter, Mendelssohn encourages Herder to think how the latter's approach to textual interpretation may function as a model for interpersonal relationships:

> Sie, mein Herr, haben gezeigt, daβ Sie das Hebräische sehr gut verstehen. Vielleicht haben Sie auch einige Kenntniβ des Rabbinischen. Wenigstens scheinen Sie es nicht ganz zu verachten. Sie besitzen auch die Gabe, sich, so oft Sie wollen, in die Lage und Denkungsart Ihres Nebenmenschen zu versetzen, um ihn zu richten. Sie sind also befugter Richter und Beurtheiler dieser meiner gedruckten Bogen...[142]

Opening the letter with the hope that he will be able to raise his children as decent human beings who will not cause themselves public shame, Mendelssohn goes on to compliment Herder on his skillful reading of biblical Hebrew. The ability to identify with the authors of texts—a capacity which Herder, according to Mendelssohn, proved to be a master—may be conceived of as a way to constitute new relationships among human beings. The strength of this compliment to Herder

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[141] I thus do not wish to criticize secularism critics as poor historians of the Enlightenment: their goal is obviously not to provide an accurate historiography of the period. At the same time, I do propose that thick intellectual history of the Enlightenment should amend our understanding of the function of tolerance as an Enlightenment legacy. While Asad's goal is not proposing an accurate historiography of the Enlightenment, it does seem to be the goal of some applications of his tenets in Jewish Studies. Applications of Asad's tenets in Jewish Studies appears lacking insofar that they apply a postcolonial perspective to the understanding of German-Jewish relations. While I hold that postcolonial approaches are productive to the understanding of secularism's function in the modern state, I argue that the understanding of Jewish secularism necessitates the view of interreligious relations as transcending a model of epistemological coercion. I contend that the interaction between Germans and Jews in the late Enlightenment, particularly in view of the Jewish treatment of holy texts, shows secular constructs to be porous to religious minorities, and, accordingly, to a continual dissemination of these minorities' religious values.

[142] Dated June 1780. H. Düntzer and F. G. v Herder, *Aus Herders Nachlas* (Frankfurt/Main: Meidinger, 1856), ii. 216. Barnard discusses this letter in his depiction of Herder's relationship to Jews as highly overall positive in his *Herder on Nationality, Humanity and History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 19-21. Barnard thus claims that "When Herder wrote about the Jews, he thought of them chiefly as a collectivity, indeed as a nation *par excellence*," but at the same time, recognizing the Jews as a model nation did not stop him "from sharing the sentiments of men such as Voltaire and Montesquieu in France, or Mendelssohn and Lessing in Germany, in support of Jewish emancipation" (19). Herder advocates Jewish emancipation without assimilation, which allows him to preserve both the view of the Jewish uniqueness as a people since antiquity, and of national character, more generally, as not easily replaceable (ibid). This account should be problematized through a distinction between nationality and ethnicity, acknowledging the shift in Herder's writing on modern Jews to focus on the latter. Herder's attitude toward Jews has been described in other works as proto-anti-Semitic, such as in Liliane Weisberg's "Juden oder Hebräer? Religiöse und politische Bekehrung bei Herder," in *Johann Gottfried Herder. Geschichte und Kultur*, Martin Bollacher. ed. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1994), 191-211. Like Barnard, Weisberg notes the role of the Jews as a model nation for Herder (noting that for Herder, Judaism sets an example for the organic development of a national language, 193). She nonetheless confronts this model with Herder's negative modeling of the Jews as the representatives of early Judaism, due to his perception of trade as a destructive practice.

lies in Mendelssohn's Jewishness. Mendelssohn's precarious status in the Protestant state—which stood in stark contrast with the public interest in his philosophical works—resonates with his reflection on the relationships of "Nebenmenschen." Mendelssohn demonstrates the stakes of his suggestion insofar as he belongs to a religious minority. Due to his position as a Jew, Mendelssohn's comment about Herder's command of Hebrew validates the latter's ability to understand the culture of a religious minority. This is a comment on Herder's hermeneutic success, or rather, the success of Herder's hermeneutics, which, as I have discussed in the previous chapters took the comprehension of the Hebrew Bible as its emblematic object.

Yet Mendelssohn's statement refers to Hebrew in a second, utterly different way; hinting at his own societal status, Mendelssohn evokes the Jews' traditional readership of the Hebrew language. He thus ties "empathic reading" to religious tolerance—an ideal that is acutely relevant to Mendelssohn's own precarious status in the Prussian state, a status that comes to the fore in his correspondence with a Protestant theologian. The symbolic quality of the compliment infers the tolerance of Jewish ritual: the ability of Jews to engage with the Bible on their own terms.

The irony here lies in the fact that Herder's reading methods correlate interpersonal empathy with the reading of biblical Hebrew by employing practices of textual *restoration*. Herder's hermeneutics relied on Pietistic motivations, in order to call for Hebrew texts to be "rescued." In order to legitimize Jewish ritual, which considers itself to be uninterrupted since revelation, Mendelssohn built on a notion of an inherent gap between the Bible's Hebrew authors and their contemporary readers—a gap that assumes Jews have corrupted or lost the original text. Mendelssohn ironically calls for the defense of a traditional reading culture, the uniqueness of which lies in that culture's perception of itself as preserving the revelatory divine gift by "relying" on a principle that contradicts the very religious and ethnic traditionalist practices he opts to defend. This chapter explores how the irony of Mendelssohn's reliance on (and promoting of) hermeneutic thinking was set to save the status of Judaism as a religion of revelation. I will ask how this ironic position has formed the Enlightenment's legacy of political secularism.

The chapter thus focuses on the entrance of Jews into the modern state's political sphere as Judaism retained, arguably for the first time, the definition of being a "religion."[143] Inquiring the valence of Jewish assimilation for Enlightenment political thought, I will first discuss the cultural valence of the notion of *Bildung*, looking at the tensions between Jewish literacy and the conceptualization of traditional educational practices in Protestant terms. In the chapter's first half, I discern Mendelssohn's contribution to hermeneutic thinking, based primarily on his early aesthetic writings.

Mendelssohn's presentation of perfection and judgment in his aesthetic theory is an important platform used to promote egalitarian notions of human agency. Mendelssohn's endorsement of

[143] Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion*.

an understanding of art is directly connected to his adherence to Kantian terms, which become central to his political activity. I thus ask how the period's notion of readership—with the new interpretive modality that it establishes—is perceived as being inherent to political participation as represented in Mendelssohn's societal stance.

In the chapter's second half, I thus read Mendelssohn's influential political manifesto *Jerusalem* as promoting the secularization of interpretation as the grounds for Enlightenment political thought while negotiating the status of Judaism as an unchanging religion of revelation. *Jerusalem*'s meditations on the Hebrew language establish Judaism as a religious minority by mediating the notion of uninterrupted religious practice with the idea that religion has only newly been privatized. This position of the Hebrew, I argue, embodies the unresolved tensions behind the Enlightenment legacy of repressing ritual, as can be shown through Mendelssohn's perception of Hebrew's "lebendige Schrift": as a language that blurs the distinction between "material sign" and "spiritual meaning," which Asad rightly describes as a salient Enlightenment legacy.

I thus conclude the chapter by proposing that Mendelssohn presents Jewish ritual and Jewish history as enacting the new definition of public religion that emerged in Germany with the founding of Protestantism as Germany's state religion. It is particularly Mendelssohn's insistence—both in *Jerusalem* and in his public religious debates—that Judaism is a *superior* religion because of its tolerant, non-doctrinal nature, which evinces Judaism's enactment of public religion. I wish to pay attention to the political valence of this influential declaration of Judaism's so-called inherent tolerance. My main argument is that this statement may challenge postcolonial perspectives on secularism critique, which have been influential in evincing religious tolerance as enforcing a hegemonic religious ideology on traditionalist believers, in particular, Protestant values of religious pluralism which traditionalist believers are forced to accept in their entrance into the state's political arena. Judaism's calling to be recognized as a superior religion—and, even more strikingly, to recognize Jewish worship as the symbol of tolerance, offers a major complication of this view. Taking this position, the last section of this chapter discerns the operative role of the Jewish enactment of tolerance in establishing the Enlightenment notion of religious minorities' political participation.

Universal Aesthetics and Emancipatory Comprehension

In the year 1753, a Jew from Dessau entered the city of Berlin and its vibrant intellectual sphere, where he would leave his mark in the debates about aesthetics and the Bible. The young Moses Mendelssohn was unique in his knowledge of both German and Hebrew; he was about to author many influential books, texts, biblical commentaries, and translations in both languages. This linguistic competence was equivalent to his attempts at mastering both cultures: throughout his

life, Mendelssohn maintained his engagement with the Orthodox Jewish community while gradually becoming a well-recognized thinker in the period's general republic of letters.

With regard to that second, intellectual enterprise, Mendelssohn's first steps into Enlightenment society occurred largely through his work on aesthetics. In a set of publications, including both independent articles on and reviews of other thinkers' works (which will be the topic of the next section), Mendelssohn commented on the period's emerging aesthetic theories by setting up a systematized portrayal of the observer of works of art within a Kantian theory of comprehension. Promoting the Enlightenment notion of reason as embodied in human agency, Mendelssohn's stance on aesthetics is inseparable from his support of egalitarian politics and Jewish emancipation. The mere utterance of his stance on aesthetics was already an expression of social, intercultural integration.

The term "Bildung" was essential for the enterprise of making aesthetic perception and literacy a platform for political assimilation. Claiming that Jewish emancipation reached its peak during the first half of the nineteenth century, George Mosse writes that

> [I]f the Enlightenment made Jewish emancipation possible, gave it a faith and an aim, it also supported an ideal of self-education which was decisive for the history of German Jewry. Jews were emancipated at a time in German history when what we might call "high culture" was becoming an integral part of both German citizenship and the Enlightenment. The word Bildung combines the meaning carried by the English word "education" with notions of character formation and moral education.[144]

Mosse describes Herder and Goethe's models for the cultivation of the individual self as constitutive of this modern ideal of education. In Herder's case, this ideal dictates that one should amend his or her personality to be harmonious and autonomous. It is an internal process, a fact that changed drastically one's perception of oneself: Jews had begun to enter a sphere that accepted them with their religious and ethnic background, a background that dictated their educational background (the specific fashion by which they became literate, learning how to read and write). Reading Hebrew, in terms of the act's goals and premises as a cultural practice, explicates the Jewish community's composite position vis-à-vis the Enlightenment ideal of education.

With the appearance of Lessing's *The Education of the Human Race*, the question of religious diversity became essential to the political implications of modern hermeneutics. The tenets of the new science of interpretation promoted a new perception of literacy as egalitarian and a new perspective on reading and education, as expressed in the notion of *Bildung*. Negotiated in the dialectics between Mendelssohn and other Enlightenment figures, this interpretive modality occurred together with a major political transformation embodied in Jewish assimilation. In view of political secularism's role in shaping hermeneutic thinking, I will now expand on the

[144] *German Jews beyond Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 2-3.

relevance for hermeneutic thinking of recent inquiries into the secular subject's formations, particularly in regard to practices of critical analysis and affective attachment to texts.

Affiliation with the Jewish community is the starting point that evokes both an interest in Hebrew and the will to study the language. Hebrew may display the Jewish community's literacy, emphasizing the community's endurance. The relationship of the Jewish community to Hebrew can thus be described in accordance with Herder's notion of cultural relativism: Jews can be seen as members of an independent cultural community that holds the Hebrew Bible as a common asset; the study of this cultural source is defended and even praised. Yet, as this section will demonstrate, the search for acceptance through adherence to a universal subject position problematizes the initial goal of the idea of assimilation insofar as Jews' communal affiliation relates to a definition of religion as unchanging and self-contained.

Mendelssohn's occupation with aesthetics was integral to his traditional education and ongoing engagement with Jewish sources. This engagement received prominent expression in his often poetic translations of the Hebrew Bible. In a letter to his friend Avigdor Levi from May 25, 1779, Mendelssohn explains what drove him to translate the Pentateuch. Namely, he clarifies the choice to use Hebrew letters in the German.

> Ich übersetze die Schrift in die deutsche Sprache […] für den Bedarf der Söhne, die mir Gott gewährte. Mein ältester Sohn starb—eine Heimsuchung Gottes—und es blieb mir nur mein Sohn Joseph (möge Gott sein Herz mit Seiner Torah stärken). Ich legte ihm die deutsche Übersetzung in den Mund, auf daß er durch sie den einfachen Sinn der Schrift verstehe, bis der Knabe aufwüchse und von selbst verstehen würde.[145]

Mendelssohn's enterprise nonetheless involves not only a continuation of the tradition of reading the scriptures, but also the tradition's transformation by way of the use of a German translation: a radical intervention that Mendelssohn explicates as "the need of the sons." His son Joseph represents the growing phenomenon of Jewish youth who have difficulty reading Hebrew, but who at the same time strive to read the holy Hebrew writings. Mendelssohn envisions a gradual process of training in Hebrew literacy by which the beauty of the text that is exposed in German would motivate the sons and lead them through the difficult task of gradually familiarizing themselves with the Hebrew script. As in German "Schrift" references the Bible, the question of literacy and reading ingrain immediate theological ramification in hermeneutic practices of reading and writing. This translation creates a hybrid between the literacy in Hebrew and in German, enhancing the former, by hinting at—and hence marking—the community's command of the latter.

Under the influence of new influences of the German language, *Bildung* practices, and media, Mendelssohn yet defines literacy as ingrained in Judaism's traditional values. The circulation

[145] In Werner Weinberg, Einleitung, Moses Mendelssohn, *Hebräische Schriften* II (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1990), XIV.

and reading of the Pentateuch are inseparable from the father-son relationship. Mendelssohn's translation thus carries on the incessant existence of Judaism as a reading culture: Judaism is a tradition rooted in familial relationships that perpetuate the role of sons as readers.

Readership as a legacy that encompasses a unique awareness of the script's materiality was an integral part of Moses Mendelssohn's own identity: the son of a scribe (a writer of Torah scrolls), "Mendelssohn" symbolically retained his father's profession. He was trained at a young age in orthography; Mendelssohn's literacy contributed to his reputation among Enlightenment figures, among whom he was known for his refined hand writing. Mendelssohn's enterprise nonetheless involves not only a continuation of the tradition of reading the scriptures , but also the tradition's transformation by way of the use of a German translation: a radical intervention that Mendelssohn explicates as "the need of the sons." His son Joseph represents the growing phenomenon of Jewish youth who have difficulty reading Hebrew, but who at the same time strive to read the holy Hebrew writings. Mendelssohn envisions a gradual process of training in Hebrew literacy by which the beauty of the text that is exposed in German will motivate the sons and lead them through the difficult task of gradually familiarizing themselves with the Hebrew script.

The need to write "German in Hebrew letter" corresponds with the anomaly of Jewish existence in Germany. Mendelssohn's translation of the Pentateuch opens with a Hebrew poem that details the conflicted literacy of Jews: "The day we left the holy city/ our vision was lost and we have not found wisdom/ and we have stopped speaking the holy language/ we have learned mumbling like the language of the peoples of the lands/ but we have not sought after their soft speaking/ we have rested illiterate, meshing up the languages of the nations."[146] This discription may remind one of Herder's description of the Rabbis' continual corruption of Hebrew (which I brought in the previous chapter): "Das arme Volk was in die Welt zerstreut: Die meisten bildeten also ihren Ausdruck nach dem Genius der Sprachen, unter denen sie lebten, und es ward ein trauriges Gemisch, an das wir hier nicht denken mögen." The use of the verb *bll* [balal] in the poem to refer to the "mix of tongues" is telling in its evocation of the story of Babylon (in the Hebrew Bible, "Babel"), an etiological story that ties the name of the foreign region to God's punishment of confusing the nation's languages. The enterprise of thus making the sons "grow" into the ultimate reading of the Hebrew Bible through command of the Hebrew language resonates with the wide Protestant interest in the Genesis stories.

This introduction to his translation repeats several of the statements Mendelssohn made about the Hebrew language in his essay "Ohr Le-Netivah." Both in this 1783 essay and his explanation for the translation, Mendelssohn refers to Hebrew as a language that derives its uniqueness from its role in the creation of the world. Hebrew is the language in which God first spoke to human beings (the Genesis patriarchs); it is the language in which God gave the religious laws on Mount

[146] Moses Mendelssohn, *Hebräische Schriften* II (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1990), 12 (my translation).

Sinai. Hebrew is also the language in which the Tablets of Law were composed, and in which God spoke to his prophets and to Moses. These are the reasons why Hebrew is a language with unique merits which make it superior to all other languages, and which justify its being called "the holy language." Mendelssohn also refers to the debates among Jewish commentators regarding the notion of Hebrew as the language in which the world was created (through God's use of the language), and in which man and woman were formed.

Mendelssohn's writings thus resonate with Hebrew's idealization in the Protestant theology of his contemporaries (which has been discussed in the previous chapters); at the same time, his writings reference the specific context of Jewish theological history. Mendelssohn's is a religious attachment, which informs his undertaking of the Protestant discussions of Hebrew as an *Ursprache*. Like the view that the Hebrew language is the Jewish community's historical asset, the theological grounds for the study of Hebrew compound Jewish tradition with a certain Protestant framework of thinking about history, culture, and literacy. Cultural relativism demands that several communities accept what "humankind" encompasses, thereby positing Hebrew as one national language and literature among others. Evoking traditional Jewish sources, which assumes religious practice is singular in its truthfulness, is thus at odds with the gesture the community uses to justify its continual existence in a separate textual culture: namely, using the ideas of cultural pluralism and diversity to legitimize literacy in Hebrew and the circulation of traditional Jewish sources.

In his autobiography, Salomon Maimon ponders this modern construction of Judaism as it elucidates what was at stake for someone pursuing Jewish education and literacy practices while using Enlightenment ideals. Several times, Maimon expresses his contempt toward traditional Jewish manners of studying the Bible and the Hebrew language. Thus he writes about the traditional Jewish school as a grim place—the exact opposite of an Enlightenment educational institution. While reading Hebrew is taught regularly, the methods of teaching the language do not allow for scholarly progress as expressed in the philological command of the language.

> Hingegen geht es mit der Erlernung der hebräischen Sprache ganz seltsam zu. Grammatik wird in der Schule nicht traktiert, sondern diese muß *ex usu*, durch Übersetzung der Heiligen Schrift erlernt werden, so ungefähr wie der gemeine Mann durch den Umgang, auf eine sehr unvollständige Art die Grammatik seiner Muttersprache lernt. Auch gibt es kein Wörterbuch der hebräischen Sprache. Man fängt also bei Kindern gleich mit Explizierung der Bibel an; und da diese in so viele Abschnitte geteilt ist, als Wochen im Jahre sind (damit man die Bücher Mosis, worin alle Sonnabend in der Synagoge gelesen wird, in einem Jahre durchlesen könne), so werden alle Woche einige Verse vom Anfange des dieser Woche gehörigen Abschnitts expliziert, und dieses mit allen möglichengrammatikalischen Fehlern. Es ist auch nicht gut anders möglich; denn da das Hebräische durch die Muttersprache expliziert werden soll, die jüdisch-polnische Muttersprache aber selbst voller Mängel und grammatischer Unrichtigkeiten ist, so muß auch natürlich die dadurch erlernte hebräische Sprache von gleichem Schlage sein. Der

> Schüler bekommt auf diese Art ebensowenig Kenntnis von der Sprache als von dem Inhalt der Bibel.[147]

Maimon's concerns address the study of Hebrew through translation. He depicts two parallels between Hebrew and the students' mother tongues. He first evokes the mother tongue to describe the methods used to teach Hebrew: the study through translation of a traditional text is similar to total immersion in the language—a "study" that does not include the programmatic study of grammar. The non-scholarly (even anti-scholarly) methods of studying Hebrew are corrupted through the Jewish dialect of Polish that the students speak. Hebrew is explained in the mother tongue, which is itself an impure dialect. The vernacular, an ad hoc language whose hybridity marks the Jewish presence among the nations, thus enforces inaccuracies in the Hebrew language. Maimon's critique takes on what seems as an Enlightenment perspective on *Bildung*, and on the application of this notion in philological study as a way to promote literacy.

According to Maimon's account, Hebrew is regularly taught, yet the students stumble upon an endless number of errors that prevent any progress in their study of the language. This lack of progress on linguistic or scholarly terms reflects a concrete stagnancy in that the errors both reflect and derive from the Jews' segregation in an uneducated and primitive community. In this description, a major textual feature of the Jewish Holy Scriptures illuminates the text's continual circulation. The Hebrew Bible is separated into small sections (*Parashot*) and each is read during one week. This communal reading of the Bible in the synagogue thus dictates a circular temporality that is reflected in the study of the Bible ("so werden alle Woche einige Verse vom Anfange des dieser Woche gehörigen Abschnitts expliziert"). Hebrew reading practices in the traditionalist culture thus coordinate communal life in accordance with a specific time zone that contradicts the linearity of modern scholarly norms. What creates the complexity of the above description is Maimon's description of Judaism, in his Hebrew philosophical writings, as the *only* religion of reason.[148] The difficulty lies in adopting the traditional practices in which this religion's truisms are disseminated, and then, transmitting them in manners that accord with the Enlightenment notion of reasoning. As demonstrated by the example of the Hebrew Bible's "textual temporality" being entrenched in traditional study of Hebrew, the Jewish community must adopt to new epistemological categories in order to carry its cultural and educational asset (centered on the study of the Holy Scriptures) into a new, secularized realm.

Yet for Maimon, as it is for other Jewish Enlightenment figures, Jewish reading practices govern a space in which Judaism persists as an uninterrupted ritual. As Abraham Socher has shown, the juxtaposition of Jewish and non-Jewish ideals for education by no means reveals a dichotomy according to Maimon.[149] Thus, the Jewish ideal of intellectual perfection (*shelemut*), of which

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[147] *Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte* (Berlin: Union Verlag, 1988), 36.

[148] See, for example, his *Giv'at Hammore* (New Edition) (Jerusalem: Israeli Academy of Sciences, 1965), 25. [Hebrew].

[149] Abraham P. Socher, *The Radical Enlightenment of Solomon Maimon: Judaism, Heresy, and Philosophy* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press), 2006.

Maimonides was a prominent supporter, has a long history of correspondence with non-Jewish ideals, and primarily with Aristotle's philosophy—a history that receives recurrent expressions in Maimon's works.[150] With this intercultural conversion of religious ideals, Maimon performs in his writings a rebellion against Jewish tradition that takes place in the secularization of Jewish sources (of biblical and rabbinic texts) by their insertion into literary and philosophical texts. Interreligious exchange is how Maimon tries to resolve the conflict that arises from simultaneously preserving Jewish ideals (with their self-contained and atemporal presence) and amending Judaism to fit a modern model of education (one which treats Judaism as one possible reading culture among others).

This dual function of "Jewish *Bildung*" is embedded in and influenced by new notions of political agency. The manifesto *Jerusalem* demonstrates how Mendelssohn's stance in fact complicates and challenges contemporary theories of secularism, which refer to the Enlightenment's notions of reason on the one hand and patriotism and nationalism on the other as the building blocks for religious tolerance. In the following section, I shall focus on Mendelssohn's presentation of Hebrew in the context of the period's debates about the language, of the Bible's transformation into an aesthetic artifact, and of the shift in eminent religious practice (namely of reading and interpretation). Reading cultures are dependent on the ways particular cultures transmit and refer to the Bible. Although such treatments are contingent upon a specific moment in history—since readings of the Bible often rely on the voice of tradition—reading cultures sustain a certain characteristic heritage. Even if this heritage is not atemporal, its traditional religious component makes it conceive of itself as such.

Mendelssohn's Kantian Aesthetics and Universal Hermeneutics

Mendelssohn's approach to art is constitutive of the Enlightenment attempt to make hermeneutic skills homological to political participation. His views on aesthetics can be described in relation to Baumgarten's revolution in the field of aesthetics. Baumgarten's claim that the science of aesthetics should focus on the reception of outside impressions by the human senses is evident in Mendelssohn's inquiries into human cognition through works of art—inquiries which are often seen to carry a psychological content. Thus in his "Betrachtungen über die Quellen und die Verbindungen der schönen Künste und Wissenschaften" (1757), Mendelssohn discusses the observation of art as an exemplary case in the study of the human senses: "Bey welchen Erscheinungen sind aber wohl alle Triebfedern der menschlichen Seele mehr in Bewegung, als bey den Wirkungen der schönen Künste?"[151]

[150] Ibid, 7, 11, 162-3.

[151] Mendelssohn, *Betrachtungen über die Quellen*, in: *Moses Mendelssohn. Ausgewählte Werke*, Studienausgabe, Band I, Schriften zur Metaphysik und Aesthetik 1755-1771 (Darmstadt: WBG,), 173.

Wellbery has influentially opposed the tendency of considering Mendelssohn and Baumgarten's focus on the human reception of outside expressions as merely psychological. In his reading of Mendelssohn's aesthetic writings, Wellbery shows Mendelssohn to be a link in the chain of thinkers who amend art's ontological status, depicting him as a central figure who elicits the transition toward an "aesthetic of representation." Mendelssohn aims to detect the changing perception of "reality" that emerges from aesthetic observation. This change occurs, according to Wellbery's reading, through exposure to the work of art as a depiction of an object in nature. In short, Wellbery claims that the focus on successiveness in the unfolding of a representation—the gradual development of which creates the beauty of the work of art—results in an ontological (rather than a psychological) change. Thus the work of art's ability to challenge preconceptions and cognitive patterns of ontology depends on the work's specific ways of imitating nature. According to Wellbery, who bases his claim on Mendelssohn's response to Edmund Burke's aesthetic theory, the former's critical judgment of poetry appreciates poetry when "it exhibits an iconic relationship between signifier and signified, that is, when it *attains to the status of a natural sign.*"[152]

Mendelssohn's model of aesthetics thus highlights human agency: as beauty is intended for human eyes and perception, human perceptive abilities are key to the creation of beauty.[153] According to Mendelssohn, nature (unlike art) is *not* intended to create beauty. This distinction between nature and art grants independence to art while sustaining nature's ontological superiority. In his "Über die Empfindungen" (1755), Mendelssohn describes attraction to beauty as an attribute that is ingrained in the senses: "In meiner Seele liegt eine Neigung zur Vollkommenheit, die ich mit allen denkenden Wesen, die ich gewissermaßen mit Gott gemein habe."[154] As he states in his later, complementary text "Rhapsodie oder Zusätze zu den Briefen über die Empfindungen" (1761), one's admiration for geniality is connected to the human virtues, whereas the lack of passion (*Unlust*) that occurs during the process of reflection is connected to human weakness. Mendelssohn's praise for the merits of art thus depicts human agency as something that is manifested through art. At the same time, Mendelssohn's praise creates a parallel between art and nature—between human artifacts and objects of divine creation. The human ability to create beauty relies on a clear presentation of the original impression's attributes, as well as on a distinct portrayal of each of the details of this impression. The clarity of the representation arouses within the human soul a strong sense of vividness and pleasure: "[J]e ausgebreitet klarer die Vorstellung des schönen Gegenstandes, desto feuriger das Vergnügen, das daraus entspringt."[155]

A successful representation is thus one which captures the unity of all its components while still stressing their distinction from one another. Such a representation allows both for de facto

[152] Wellbery, *The Specular Moment*, 97.
[153] He establishes this in the essay "Ueber die Hauptgrundsätze der schönen Künste und Wissenschaften."
[154] Mendelssohn, "Über die Empfindungen," 57.
[155] Ibid., 49.

comprehension of the representation's components and for perception of the representation within a short span of time. Mendelssohn's description of the pleasure that is caused by the beauty of art seems to carry a religious charge, as the feeling of pleasure allows for exposure to what he defines as *Vollkommenheit*, or perfection. The senses' exposure to the delightful representation results in an encounter with *the* perfection. Unfolding perfection is another distinctive feature of the "being" (*Wesen*) of the work of art that stresses the work's merits: "Das Wesen der schönen Künste und Wissenschaften besteht in einer *künstlichen sinnlich-volkommenen Vorstellung*, oder in einer *durch die Kunst vorgestellten sinnlichen Vollkommenheit*."[156]

This account of perfection's sensual nature carries repercussions for the role of globalized religious terms in defining the human perceptional apparatus. Namely, one could argue that Mendelssohn presents the encounter with perfection through art as a moment of potential religious revelation at the same time that the moment challenges hierarchical religious systems.

Mendelssohn thus replaces church authority with human agency. The critical observer of art performs personal freedom. Humanity comes into being through human agency's expression in the critique of art. The role of the critic as an independent individual is interesting in that it connects a term within discourses of aesthetics to the term's appearance on a new political level. "Judgment" attains supremacy in Enlightenment aesthetic theory, where the term is used in Johann Jakob Breitinger and Johann Jakob Bodmer's *Critische Dichtkunst* as a prominent aspect of art criticism. In eighteenth-century aesthetic discourses, the tendency to highlight the individual's capacity for judgment as an essential part of defining "critique" gains a political charge in Mendelssohn's writings on aesthetics. The notion that the *Volkommenheit* of the human senses corresponds with the wholeness of beauty constitutes the figure of an individual as an independent and complete entity: this image serves to decipher the political agent in Mendelssohn's period. Mendelssohn's struggle to attribute equal rights to his own religious minority in the name of universal human faculties positions judgment at the intersection of religion, aesthetics, and politics. Aesthetics and liberalism share a pertinent quality: both involve a process of judgment in which the individual's natural qualities are manifested.

An anecdote involving Mendelssohn's critique of Herder, in view of the latter's reading of Hebrew poetry to establish a new aesthetic perception, elucidates the stakes of the religious backdrop behind the period's changing notions of aesthetics. Mendelssohn took interest in Herder early on in the latter man's career, writing a review of *Fragments on Recent German Literature*. Herder's multiple references to the Old Testament and biblical translation in the essay drew Mendelssohn's attention. Although he compliments the fragments' author on his impressive familiarity with the ancients, Mendelssohn concludes his review with criticism for Herder's use of aesthetics that was formed in connection with Greek art and poetry to read the

[156] Mendelssohn, "Hauptgrundsätze der schönen Künste," 193. Emphasis added.

Hebrews and the Romans.[157] Opposing Herder's notion of poetry as a wild expression of primordial drives, Mendelssohn sees Herder's portrayal of finding this model in Hebrew poetry as a dangerous move. Thus, according to Mendelssohn's critique,

> in matters of taste one ought to be guided not by principles but by sentiment, feeling. In other words, Mendelssohn reproached Herder for relying overmuch on his hypothesis of the "ages" in the life of a language. In his view, Herder had been misled by abstracting his theory entirely from the Greek language. […] Above all, he rejected Herder's interpretation of poetry as "wild simplicity." Poetry, he insisted, was no longer nature but the imitation of nature.[158]

The return to the Hebrew Bible through the praising of the return to humanity's origins abstracts the classist model, while imposing it to Hebrew poetry. Although he shares in the project of constituting global religion through aesthetic exposure, Mendelssohn is concerned with the implications of Hebrew's symbolic use, and particularly, with idealization the language as primordial by means of promoting aesthetics of sentiment in place of aesthetics that places cognition in its center. Mendelssohn's own allusion to the Hebrew Bible in *Jerusalem* engages in a similar attempt to abstract the Old Testament as humanity's idealized origin while bridging global religion with traditionalist Jewish values. Mendelssohn's promoting of order in his aesthetics, and his ensuing endorsement of interpretation as egalitarian, strongly inform his political vision.

Secular Sensibility and the Attachment to the Scriptures

Major Enlightenment texts relied on a long tradition of referring to the Bible to establish, legitimize, or elucidate new political models. In this section, I will explore a few major instances in Enlightenment political theory that were formative for the specific conditions behind biblical reading in the Enlightenment. Using the Bible to advocate for the idea of tolerance made a *certain* reading of the Bible a common asset among political agents since the Early Modern. Presumptions about reading the Bible thus created a definite distinction between the practice of religion in the private realm and the presumptions about religion and the Bible as a constitutive part of assumptions regarding political norms, norms which shaped the affective attachment to holy texts.

The state's ability to govern religious practices in modern politics was conceptualized anew with Locke's 1689 *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. This text's contribution to the modern nation-state lies in Locke's advancement of the fact that different citizens of the modern state may

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[157] See Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (London and Portland: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1998), 168.
[158] Ibid.

adhere to different confessions while yet constituting a coherent, unifying political body. The coexistence of different faiths in the modern state is not an obstacle for the state's unity; it is instead a characteristic that enhances the state's political power, which is, according to Locke, situated in religious diversity. The political power of the state thus lies in a new conception of the political subject as presumed and perpetuated by the nation-state's structure: the citizen is a subject whose agency as a rational individual concerned with the state's well-being is allegedly separate from religious truisms, concerns, and practices. Perceived as central to modern state politics, religious tolerance emerges in Locke's treatise as a condition of political power. Because of its influential reception, the treatise made religious diversity prerequisite for politics (rather than a tense situation to which modern politics is capable of offering a solution).

Locke's treatise advocates, nonetheless, for *certain* religious principles with its specific vision of religious tolerance. With the treatise's emphasis on religious tolerance as being constitutive of modern politics, Locke's model presumes a subject that adheres to a certain confession while being able to accommodate others. Locke states explicitly that certain individuals could not participate in this political constellation, listing as such atheists and believers of non-monotheistic religions. The necessity for religious tolerance stands at the core of the modern state, thus situating some individuals in a liminal standpoint: on the one hand, their faiths are recognized by the mere act of excluding them from the political sphere because of the specific spiritual conditions to which they adhere. Yet on the other hand, since this political sphere is defined exactly by virtue of tolerating various religious faiths, these subjects are not granted the title of a religion that one can adhere to while tolerating others—the very definition of the subject that takes part in this political sphere.

A major work that resonates with Locke's treatise is Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Kant argues that a constructive religion is one that demands that its believers conduct a mental process of reflection and abstraction. Christianity is exemplary of this quality due to the situation of Christ's birth at the religion's center. Christ's role in western history marks the belief that human sins may be transcended, thereby requiring abstraction. Looking at Enlightenment debates in view of their legacy, Kant's treatise is telling in regard to Judaism's role in soliciting the Bible's new status during the period. The precarious characteristics of the so-called literalist reading of the scriptures are not exclusive to Islam. These characteristics also seem pertinent to the description of traditional Jewish practices of reading the Holy Scriptures. The practice of religious law in public is inherent to Jewish and Muslim religious credos, which creates a major difference between them and the principle of a secular juridical authority that governs societal norms and laws regardless of one's faith. As the next section shows, practices of reading and interpreting the scriptures fulfill a major role in preserving the dual nature of Judaism as a ritual religion that is at the same time affiliated with the "religion of reason" in Enlightenment legacy.

Kant's theory of public religion—of the kind of religion that should be endorsed under the auspices of the modern state—entailed the distinction of a certain "privatized subject": the subject that adheres to religious praxis from the standpoint of being a certain "political subject."

Sharing common spiritual grounds (i.e., a monotheistic belief) allows collective participation in political life by members of different confessions that accept (or grant) the right of others to adhere to faiths different from their own. This common spiritual standpoint thus establishes the political sphere as distinct from the private realm of religious practice. This standpoint also formulates religious law as being subordinate to state law, the regulating power that subtends all citizens, regardless of the specificities of their monotheistic faiths. By blurring the specificities of religious convictions, modern body politics allocates the logics of religious law to the private sphere, which maintains religion's regulation by state sovereignty. This new conception of monotheism has been taken to be at odds with certain religious convictions: namely in Judaism and Islam, both of which view religious law an inherent part of the public sphere. In other words, the notion that religious affiliation lies in faith as an inner part of the human relies on a Protestant definition of what religion entails, thereby confining other "religions" to definitions that are at odds with basic religious practices. Religions that do not adhere to such principles are excluded from this basic constellation of body politics that prioritizes "monotheistic religions" as granting their believers a superior rational and moral standing. The act of identifying a religion as monotheistic and rational, and thus in accordance with modern political principles, in effect constituted "monotheistic religions" in a certain form, linking their existence to the regulating force of the modern state.

Recent works in anthropology and political science have looked into the outcomes of this distinction as amending such phenomena as bodily experience, pain, ritual, and reading practices. If the distinction between the religious and the secular spheres is itself a religious construct, then the question arises of how the phenomena "allocated" to these different spheres have been modified by way of this act of differentiation. In his article "Is there a Secular Body?" Charles Hirschkind asks whether the adherence to Enlightenment political ideals may be conceived of as shaping a modern bodily perception that is based on a new attachment to state institutions.[159] Hirschkind seeks to expand two theories of secularism by asking how they could contribute to the understanding of bodily experience in a secular society. The first theory is unfolded in William Connolly's *Why I am not a Secularist* (1999), which argues that Kant's view of religion has set a certain subject position as a presupposition for a citizen's participation in the Enlightenment's secular, political sphere. William Connolly's inquiry into the emergence of secularism from Christian polemics describes Kant as having established a new idea of supreme morality that transcended Christian sectarianism. This new moral modality purposefully objects to any ecclesiastic theology that appears to be "governed by texts and practices sunk in the medium of history and sensibility."[160] The second theory is Asad's genealogical examination of secularism as a set of epistemological constructs.

Hirschkind addresses Connolly's treatment of Kantian philosophy as a reading of Enlightenment political theory that may have major implications regarding sensory existence. These

[159] "Is there a Secular Body?," *Cultural Anthropology* 26, no. 4 (2011): 633-647.
[160] Connolly, *Why I am Not a Secularist*, 30.

implications, Hirschkind argues, may be far reaching when referring to the secular body as embedded in a new sphere of political agency that emerges from Kant's promotion of "rational religion." According to Hirschkind, Kant's political project, which is emblematic for the Enlightenment project, is contingent on setting a hierarchy between cruder and superior sensibilities.

> Kant's treatment of the question of sensibility is guided and limited by his primary aim of securing the purity of the moral will, its protection from what are seen to be the contaminating effects of sensible desire. This is achieved through his positing of a two-world metaphysic [*sic*] that ensures the autonomy of the moral will by assigning it to the domain of the supersensible while circumscribing the role of the passions and habits to the sphere of sensible life. Honed sensibilities and practices of self-cultivation do have a positive function in disciplining the cruder drives within the self, but they never directly contribute to moral reasoning.[161]

This account can be borrowed to describe the role of the Bible in eighteenth-century theology and aesthetics as described in the previous chapters. As discussed earlier, Herder's idea of aesthetics refers to affect as a means of participation in society; his account of Hebrew poetry detaches the Bible from its position as an object of the divine revelation of its own abstraction, which dispels the historical value of the Bible's position as such an object. The role of sensibility in the shaping of Herder's Bible is more complicated. If one relies partially on Baumgarten's argument, then idealization of the Hebrew Bible dictates that sensual experience should not be dismissed, since sensual experience can teach about higher faculties. As Herder's enthusiastic engagement with the Song of Songs shows, sensuality enables the Bible to be portrayed as "especially human" in nature. Sensual experience thus elicits the process of studying the encounter of one's cognitive apparatus with the biblical text, which in turn addresses humankind in human language. This sensual experience is thus meant to replace a different one: the sensual relationship of the believer to the text; the text is perceived to be God's word as it is revealed by the culmination of the believer's bodily attachment to the text. The appearance of the Bible as a means of honing readers' aesthetic processes had concrete stakes with regard to the Jews' assimilation into the general population. The stakes of abstracting the Bible into an "all-human" artifact paved the way for significant transformations in believers' relationships to the text in view of Judaism's dual standing in Enlightenment discourses on the Bible: Judaism's role as both a representative of religious ritual and its symbolic function as a representative of the origins of reason.

Recent research has proposed options for reconsidering Judaism's role in the modern state in light of the tenets established predominantly for Muslim state minorities. Leora Batnitzky's *How Did Judaism Become a Religion* (2011), David Biale's *Not in the Heavens* (2011), and Andrea Schatz's *Sprache in der Zerstreuung* (2008) offer different answers to the challenge set by those

[161] Hirschkind, "Is There a Secular Body?," 637.

commenting on secularist theories that highlight the great potential of those theories' not-yet explored application to Jewish Studies. The following analysis diverges from those inquires both in its object of study and in the position it destines to Judaism as a religious minority. This dissertation centers on the Protestant perspective on Hebrew, a focus that at times points at Christian projections about Jews. Nonetheless, it is not a comprehensive overview of such projections (or of German proto-anti-Semitism). This focus does not aim to offer a comprehensive presentation of Jewish voices on interpretation, or even of Jewish reactions to Hebraism. The following exploration seeks to represent Jewish opinions insofar as they wore the form of political and public engagement with the Enlightenment public. This juxtaposes tenets of the modern state's new regulating power with transitions occurring in the practice of religion during that period.

Batnitzky offers an introduction to Modern Jewish thought beginning in the moment when Judaism first met the Protestant definition of being a "religion." This account takes its point of departure with the argument that:

> The invention of Jewish religion cannot be separated from the emergence of the modern nation-state. The notion that Judaism is a religion suggests that Judaism is something different in kind from the supreme political authority of the sovereign state, and may in fact complement the sovereign state. The modern concept of religion also indicates that religion is one particular dimension of life among other particular and separate dimensions…[162]

Batnitzky unfolds what she sees as the emergence of "Judaism as a religion" in the context of German Jewry, particularly in the scholarship and public presence of Mendelssohn, with his efforts at insisting on Jews' ability to participate fully in the political sphere. In light of Mendelssohn's efforts, Jewish identity is perceived to be separable from Jewish citizens' political affiliations. Jewish religious identity thus adhered to a new conception of spirituality that detached the religious identity from the public sphere, grounding it in "private" existence—a transition that was shaped by Kant—particularly in his *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen en Vernunft*.

In view of the potential it had for advocating political rights to Jews, Batnitzky notes the strict opposition between Mendelssohn's adherence to this conception of religion and his insistence on the importance of ceremonial law. Noting the tensions between Mendelssohn's two positions, she writes that, "Mendelssohn seems to reject the German Protestant definition of religion offered by Schleiermacher, who argues, 'Religion's essence is neither thinking or acting, but intuition and feeling.' For Mendelssohn, the revealed legislation of Judaism [...] is orientated toward *both thinking and acting*."[163] This account of Judaism's emergence as a religion depicts a

[162] Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion*, 6.
[163] Ibid., 27. Emphasis added.

multifaceted idea of secularism: not only were religious tenets newly allocated to the private sphere, but the credo that defines where religious law should take place was also newly allocated. In other words, the Jewish assimilation that is deemed successful in Batnitzky's account of Mendelssohn's religious revolution did not result from Mendelssohn rejecting the public status of Jewish law, but rather from his ability to reconcile this status—in and of itself a religious credo—with the privatized realm of religion.

The initial discrepancy between Judaism and Christianity in their conceptions of secularism may lie in the lack of a stark distinction between the secular and the religious sphere in Jewish theology. In *Not in the Heavens*, David Biale offers to understand Jewish secularism not as a transformation in traditionalist values, but as ingrained in Judaism's values with the claim that,

> [It] is a tradition that has its own unique characteristics grounded in part in its premodern sources. While the Christian origins of the word "secular" are connected to the dichotomous way Christian theologians saw the "city of God" and the "city of man," Judaism never made such a sharp distinction: the profane world is not irredeemably polluted. While traditional Jewish sources repeatedly hold that this world is not the same as the next (or the one above)...[164]

Describing Judaism as being grounded in the "here and now" of ritual practices, Biale indeed demonstrates that Jewish tradition can and should be a model for theoretical thinking into the influence of Jewish thought on modernity—and, on the origins of political secularism. Like Batnitzky, Biale points out that some of Jewish tradition's pivotal principles pertaining to the practice of religion affiliate Judaism with ritual. He thus offers an account of Mendelssohn's thought, portraying him as a formative figure for Judaism's modern appearance. Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*, according to Biale, focuses on establishing religious faith as inseparable from political institutions. This makes it hard to account for *Jerusalem*'s second half, which presents the ancient Jewish state as a supreme political system (thereby portraying a conversion of religion and politics). Situating Mendelssohn as a forefather of Jewish secularism requires a detachment between this depiction of the ancient Jewish state and the present. The collapse of the ancient Jewish state brought with it the disappearance of not only the practice of Judaism as a political identity, but also the ability to practice any kind of just and functional theocracy.

Another recent account that relates to Mendelssohn's effect on modern Judaism is Schatz's examination of the process by which the Hebrew language turned from a "holy language" into a secular language—a marker of a certain ethnic and national identity. Mendelssohn's role in shaping a new idea of Jewish ritual plays a major part in this examination. Schatz relies on Asad's portrayal of secularism as a model for dispelling complexities from the Middle Ages until modernity, as she contends that

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[164] Biale, *Not in the Heavens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 4.

> Asad beschreibt die Oppositionen, die das Verhältnis zwischen dem Religiösen und Säkularen definieren […] als Reduktion mittelalterlicher Komplexitäten: "The complex medieval Christian universe, with its interlinked times (eternity and its moving image, and the irruptions of the former into the latter: Creation, Fall, Christ's life and death, Judgment Day) and hierarchy of spaces (the heavens, the earth, purgatory, hell), is broken down by the modern doctrine of secularism into a duality: a world of self-authenticating things in which we *really* live as social beings and a religious world that exists only in our imagination."[165]

The subsequent quote (which she also brings from Asad) explicates the methodology Schatz pursues in the book. Asad's contribution to her view of Jewish presence in the Protestant state relies on the perception that emerged during the Enlightenment, according to which religion is one of many "spaces" or categories that are predefined in order to be controlled:

> …[T]he nation-state requires clearly demarcated spaces that it can classify and regulate: religion, education, health, leisure, work, income, justice, and war. The space that religion may properly occupy in society has to be continually redefined by the law because the reproduction of secular life within and beyond the nation-state continually affects the discursive clarity of that space."[166]

Following Asad, Schatz turns to the changes in Germany's political infrastructure to explain Hebrew's transition to being the national language of the Jews in diaspora. She locates the secularization of the Hebrew language between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries and assigns Mendelssohn a prominent role in bringing about this change by implementing in the newly constructed Jewish public sphere the principle of a societal allocation of different realms and religious privatization. Schatz thus uses Asad to account for the changes occurring in the status of Jewish tradition, as entered the arena of the nation state as a "religion." But while this account explains the establishment of new spaces for assimilated Jews (first and foremost, their practice of Judaism as a part of the new "religious space" allocated by the state) it does not relate to how such Jews constitute these new spaces as maintaining a long-lasting religious logics: as keeping the private sphere as having a continual power in explaining the logics behind communal life and religious ritual. In *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn generates this uninterrupted status of Judaism, this is my thesis, by alluding to the status of Jews as the so-called keepers of the book. The dependence of Christian global religion on Judaism's primordial status renders the postcolonial perspective insufficient in explaining the dynamics behind Jewish assimilation. This is because the adherence to powerful Christian tropes (which have long relied on an idealized picture of Judaism) creates ways in which to conceive Judaism as an uninterrupted religion of revelation on its own right within its newly practice in a privatized social space.

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[165] Schatz, *Sprache in der Zerstreuung*, 26, body origins.
[166] Asad, "Responses," 201.

According to Schatz, the Hebrew language established for the first time a national common ground for the Jews in the diaspora. The feeling of belonging to a national group of people has thus established the group identity of diaspora Jews under a certain paradox: they were a group whose commonality was the feeling of detachment. Schatz's view of Jewish identity's consolidation as both diasporic and nationalistic enables examination of the writings of the Jewish *Maskilim*[167] in light of the German nation-state's emergence. Schatz recognizes Michaelis' criticism of the Jewish transmission of Hebrew texts and his criticism of Herder's writings on Hebrew poetry as sources with which the *Maskilim* (primarily Mendelssohn) corresponded while establishing, among others by means of apologia, Hebrew's new character.[168] Nevertheless, Schatz's exclusive emphasis on "Jewish secularization" leads her to ignore Hebrew's role as it was broadly demonstrated in the first and second chapters of this dissertation: the idealization of Hebrew as an *Ursprache* by prevalent figures of Enlightenment thought was emblematic of the nation-state's emergence upon the globalization of religious practices and tropes. Thus Mendelssohn does not merely correspond with the space given to Hebrew by the period's growing interest in the question of the language's origins.[169] Rather, his stance that elicited the Jewish engagement with Hebrew as an emulation of new nationalistic principles was a materialization (or the bringing into power) of an important, reflective trope of Enlightenment thought. Through the exchanges among Hamann, Herder, Klopstock, Michaelis, Goethe, and others, Hebrew was made into a trope—the process of which guaranteed that the language would generate an equal distance between each of its readers and the text of the scriptures. With its idealization, Hebrew thus both participated in the generalization of interpretive skills and functioned as a trope of what this process embodied—with its role as a signifier of the origins of humankind and a highly meta-linguistic and meta-poetic national poetry. Mendelssohn's interference with the discourse on the origins of Hebrew and its humanistic value draws its power from the interference's performative nature: the activation of general reading by the Jew who "really knows" the language at the same time puts into practice (amongst his people) the principles of general humanism—the ability for ethnic groups to have their own languages—ironically, through the literal transformation of Hebrew into a national language.

It is important to note that for Asad and Schatz (in her adaptation of his theories), the view of religion in modernity is one of dualism. Schatz's acceptance of Asad's model reiterates the characterization of the post-Enlightenment religious sphere as dualistic in nature. This characterization maintains a strong critical perspective on the dualistic nature of the distinction between the religious and the non-religious in modernity. Jewish secularism is perceived to be a mode of adapting to outside society by adjusting to hegemonic religious principles and logic, and thus locating religious rituals and practices in one sphere among many. Schatz thus accepts Asad's notion of adjusting one's religious consciousness to the political sphere of the nation-

[167] This category denotes students of traditional Jewish sources.
[168] Schatz, *Sprache in der Zerstreuung*, 244-5.
[169] Ibid., 223-4.

state—as does Batnitzky in her own narrative of Judaism's emergence as a religion through Mendelssohn's political enterprise. Nevertheless, that narrative of the minority's adjustment and epistemological transformation is shaped by the auspices of a postcolonial discourse that is largely set to explain the East's penetration by the West. As it appears in the transcultural circulation of the Old Testament, the story of modern Judaism's religious transformation was not a one-way adjustment of the minority to the hegemony. Rather, this transformation featured a reception of religious notions and practices whose initial idealization had already occurred vis-à-vis the religious minority's cultural presence. Reading Mendelssohn's political treatise thus demonstrates that a more complex, non-binary structure stands at the core of the Enlightenment's political arrangement of the separation of church and state, or between ritual and political practices.

Jerusalem: Ritual and Attachment

In terms of the Enlightenment's secularist legacy, one major aspect of Germany's political revolution should be traced in the separation of church and state, coined under the influence of German-Jewish encounters, and especially with Mendelssohn's intervention in the Enlightenment's public sphere. Mendelssohn's involvement in the period's political debates emerged as a correspondence with the period's polemics on the standing of Jews in German society. The question of whether Judaism can account for active participation in civil culture was an important part of the Enlightenment's writing on politics and religion. A key text in that regard was Christian Wilhelm von Dohm's *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* (1781). Dohm's essay provided a unique turn in the political ideology of the state; the text signaled a novel conception of religious believers' identities as political agents in a state. This restructuring of religious and political identities took place within the realm of advocating a new perception of the Jews—through Christian eyes.

Dohm revolutionarily suggested that Jews can take part in the emerging society of equal citizens. Moreover, he did not blame the belated realization of this vision on the Jews; in a striking opposition to common accusations about the Jews' inherently corrupted character, Dohm claimed that rulers did not fulfill their role in integrating the Jews into society. In 1783, Dohm's claims took on a new appearance: they received the voice of a Jewish thinker. In his widely-circulated political manifesto, Mendelssohn reiterates the reasoning behind Dohm's argument in order to develop a more established perspective: adhering to the common good of the state and interrogating the proper behavior of the ruler who would be in accord with that common good. Mendelssohn thus develops the view that Jews should be respected as equal citizens; the responsibility for their integration as such is an inherent part of the ruler's duty. But at the same time, Mendelssohn redefines occupations perceived to be traditionally Jewish (primarily mercantilism and vending) as legitimate and productive in human society. As Paul Rose notes,

> The German philosophical revolution equipped this notion of a Jewish national character with a theoretical framework which held that the Jews were not only ethnically 'apart' from other peoples, but somehow morally 'against humanity' because they suffered from a defect of truly human moral feelings, notably love and freedom. The Jews were a people that needed still to be 'redeemed into full humanity' by emancipation or assimilation."[170]

Rose takes Dohm's treatise as a key moment in changing this presentation of Jews: the "Verbesserung" adopts notions in Enlightenment thought, reiterating rationalist and humanitarian tendencies, which the text then combined with Prussian constitutionalism.[171]

Mendelssohn's political intervention builds on this background with a major difference from Dohm: instead of arguing that Jews must be "improved" to take part in politics, it presumes that they are already qualified for political participation. The shift between the focus on claiming that Jews deserve political rights to arguing that Jews already hold the keys for their assimilation creates a certain contradiction in *Jerusalem*: the text argues that different confessions hold equal claims of the truth while at the same time portraying Judaism as a religion that holds a unique, symbolic connection to an ideal political regime.

The first part of *Jerusalem* is a political manifesto that supports the separation of church and state with the claim that religion exists in the realm of one's private conscience. The text thus responds to Hobbes' notion that the state controls its citizens by restricting their natural drives. Mendelssohn narrows down the areas in which the state is able to influence the individual: whereas citizens can renounce the natural rights that relate to their physical existence, they cannot give up any rights that relate to the spiritual. Mendelssohn outlines this in two steps: first, by arguing that the system of human chores or commitments ("Pflichte") has two principles: commitments to man and commitments to God; and second, by discussing the distinction between church and state. This first step expands on Hobbes' theory of the state by establishing the political as a realm distinct from the religious. Mendelssohn then goes on to characterize this distinction in his second step, in which he distinguishes between the state as the body governing the relation between men and the Church as the body addressing the relationship of man to God (relating to man as an image of the creator). This distinction does not only allocate the religious to one sphere; it in fact constitutes what the "religious" stands for: religious convictions are natural rights that are separate from one's physical existence. Religious conviction is a matter of choice that is grounded in citizens' intellect as opposed to their physical drives. Mendelssohn's two-fold move thus develops Hobbes' narrative of the modern state to support the existence of religious minorities within the state: since beliefs are a matter of opinion, religion and the interpretation of the scriptures are not the ruler's domain, as in Hobbes' *Leviathan.*

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[170] Rose, *German Question/ Jewish Question* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) xvi-xvii.
[171] Ibid., 70.

Yet this rule of separation has one prominent exception: when God is the ruler, he dictates religious commands and laws to His citizens. This ideal situation existed only once in history, at the beginning of the world and with the governing of the Jewish state. Linking the model Israelite state with modern Jews is striking as developed by Mendelssohn, a thinker who is at the same time Herder's interlocutor and a Jewish believer. In traditional Judaism, the Jewish people did not differ from their ancestors. The idealization of the Hebrew nation during Mendelssohn's period serves his appeal for the protection of the rights of contemporary Jews (himself included) through an apologia on Judaism that seeks to prove Judaism's power as an ideal political model for the purposes of the modern state. The second part of *Jerusalem* appeals to a description of the ancient Jewish nation as just such an ideal. With the pertinence of Mendelssohn's political manifesto to modern times, his depiction of the Jewish state serves both to illustrate contemporary Jews' ability to observe state laws and to constitute Judaism as a tradition that is constitutive of modern state politics.[172] In effect, it is the relationship between the two (i.e., the link between the ideal and present Judaism) which makes *Jerusalem* a seminal contribution to Enlightenment public discourse. One of Mendelssohn's most prominent conceptual innovations in the realm of religion is his new conception of ritual, which he develops in *Jerusalem* in conjunction with his depiction of the state's role in facilitating religious tolerance on the one hand, and his theory of script on the other. These two notions facilitate the view of Judaism as an uninterrupted religion of revelation while yet ingraining it in an ideal depiction of the Jewish state.

The depictions of the Jewish state and of ritual in *Jerusalem* emerge through Mendelssohn's discussion of an author whose work was incredibly influential: Spinoza and the conception of the Hebrew Bible in his *Theological-Political Treatise*.[173] Through his correspondence with Spinoza, Mendelssohn echoes the positioning of biblical interpretation as a political right. Mendelssohn had come to terms with Spinoza's portrayal of the ancient Hebrew nation as a political regime that left its marks on the Hebrew text. According to both Spinoza and Mendelssohn, the ability to read and understand the Old Testament carries a historical and symbolic legacy that has repercussions for political agency in the modern state.

The *Treatise* influenced Mendelssohn's theory of reading in two major ways in connection with the two roles of Spinoza's text. First, the *Treatise* is a stepping-stone because of its advocacy of state tolerance and religious pluralism. Second, and very much in conjunction with these principles, the *Treatise* is a manifestation of an awareness of the power of censorship and political constraints. In that regard, the *Treatise* both advocates for and exemplifies transgressive readings of a text through its analysis of the Hebrew Bible. Mendelssohn who followed Spinoza

[172] This second aspect is particularly significant for the dissertation's trajectory.

[173] On Spinoza's influence on Mendelssohn, see, for instance, Willi Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine* (Madison: Wisconsin-Madison University Press), 2003.

in his early aesthetic writings;[174] He thus had to come to terms with Spinoza's critique of the Judaism, and, with the way in which this critique has become a milestone in the history of religious pluralism.

Spinoza argues against two main streams in the Jewish tradition of reading the scriptures. The first is Maimonides' approach, which, according to Spinoza, prefers the superiority of reason to the literal meanings of the scriptures, as well as to difficulties and problems that exist in the Hebrew text. Maimonides suggests allegory as a way of allowing rational readings of the text while preserving its holy status. A key example of allegory offered by Spinoza is Maimonides' reading of the biblical scenes on miracles. As the rational mind is not accustomed to acknowledging the concrete presence of miracles in ancient Israel, the relevant excerpts in the Bible should be understood allegorically. The second stream of tradition which Spinoza opposes is another line of religious reading practices that prefers religious presumption over the voice of reason. Spinoza presents Jehuda al-Fakhar, a thirteenth-century opponent of Maimonides' rationalistic approach to the scriptures, as an exemplar of this line of reasoning. To Spinoza, al-Fakhar represents a dogmatic approach which contends that nothing in the Bible should be taken metaphorically, but by doing so contradicts and neglects the Bible's literary devices and allegorical expressions. This neglect creates further textual complications, as the Bible seems to contradict itself when it is taken in all cases literally and dogmatically.[175] Spinoza thus calls for an understanding of the Bible in its historical context: he aspires to remain "faithful" to the biblical text and examine it from within its own presumptions, as much as possible without imposing external meanings and agendas on the original text. His investigation of the text is therefore a quest for "reason" through performance of the investigation, as the philological approach to the scriptures sets reason in motion.

Spinoza classifies two main sets of problems that emerge as a result of the scriptures' circulation. First, the reader is confronted with difficulties resulting from the misunderstanding of the Hebrew text's language in regard to its historical context. The reader of scriptures who wishes to remain loyal to the text must acquire a perfect knowledge of the Hebrew language; however this is an impossible task, as there remains "no dictionary, no grammar, no book of rhetoric" from the ancient scholars of Hebrew.[176] Spinoza specifically highlights a feature of Hebrew that would occupy lengthy debates in eighteenth-century philology: Hebrew lacks special letters for vowels, and the ancient writers of the scriptures did not use punctuation to clarify sentence structure.[177] Spinoza thus determines that the eighth-century "pointers" (*Masoretes*) in fact interpreted the biblical text, adhering to certain meanings that their punctuation forces on the text—meanings

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[174] On the importance of Spinoza on Mendelssohn's aesthetics, see Arnold Eisen, "Divine Legislation as 'Ceremonial Script': Mendelssohn on the Commandments," *AJS Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Autumn, 1990): 239-67, and the detailed account brought in Willi Goetschel's *Spinoza's Modernity Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine*.

[175] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*. Translated by Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 187.

[176] Ibid., 106.

[177] Ibid., 106-8.

that were not there to begin with. This deceleration arouses awareness of the potential use, or misuse, of an individual reading of a text. When a particular encounter with a text gains authority, personal judgment and agendas may affect how that text is read for generations to come.

Additionally, Spinoza shows awareness for what one may today call the socio-linguistic background of the Israelite society that produced the textual artifact. He notes that idioms, literary devices (e.g., allegories and metaphors), and grammatical constructions bear coherence and comprehension in the context of their particular historical appearance.[178] He thus highlights the necessity for a historical inquiry into the lives of the ancient Israelites to define the framework for their language use. Noting this second cluster of textual problems, Spinoza further explores the processes of circulation that have harmed the text. Those problems are not the result of a lack of linguistic incompetence, but of textual interferences and the loss or damage of material. In this context, Spinoza notes the editorial work that the Bible has gone through and proposes readings of the Torah that demonstrate moments of incoherence in the text. His scriptural reading is thus at odds with the belief that the Torah was written by Moses and delivered directly to its disciples.

The *Treatise*'s political theory emerges from these hermeneutic positions. It relies on the depiction of ancient Israel as a state that is ruled through the power of revelation: a central theme in the text which grants the text's own authoritative status. According to Spinoza, the rules of the Torah are in fact political regulations that were meant to enforce a regime on citizens. Consequently in this view, the accordance between a state's power and the content of the scriptures occurred only once during the course of history: during the regime of the Hebrew nation. According to this view, the content of the five Books of Moses is a covenant of national laws. Spinoza asserts that this set of rules does not entail a universal and atemporal validity or moral value; its use is applied to the Hebrew state as a means for protecting the specific and contingent country.[179] Spinoza argues that these rules differ from the true divine laws, since the laws of nature and of reason hold universal validity. Biblical revelation is not for "everyone," whereas the value of human well-being and the idea that reason should apply to all human-beings encompass "everyone." The idea of revelation does not hold for rules of reason.[180] Rules of reason apply to all human beings, and they are neither exclusive nor subordinated to the claims of revelation that apply to certain sectors and religious groups. For Spinoza, the Jewish state is the only time during which the contingent biblical rules perfectly adhered to the rules of the state and power. At all other times, these rules had to be manipulated to meet the state's interests. Mendelssohn reiterates this notion of accordance between the regime of the Jewish state and the inception of political law. But instead of adopting the assumption that biblical laws

[178] Ibid., 106-7.
[179] Ibid., 57.
[180] Ibid., 157.

are contingent, his is a reading that turns this momentary accordance into a divine legacy: a turn that holds a normative status for the tolerance of divergent interpretations of the scriptures.

Spinoza contends that the enforcement of biblical rules in the modern state is a manifestation of rulers' power by way of the application of certain of the state's citizens' interpretations of the scriptures. Those interpretations, Spinoza provocatively claims, are not loyal to the text's literal meanings or to the voice of reason that is to decipher those meanings in their concrete historical framework. In his criticism of institutionalized religion, Spinoza therefore stresses the monarch's ability to control the state's citizens through texts, both because of the texts' intentional content and the belief in this content. Biblical interpretation may endorse superstition, false beliefs, and religious practices and traditions that are subordinated to the will of a state's rules and institutions, and which are opposed to reason. In view of this dangerous subordination, Spinoza stresses the importance of the freedom of reason—expressed in the free ability to philosophize and de facto to read. Spinoza's theory of reading the scriptures is grounded in the view that biblical interpretation cannot be separated from theories of reading. Public opinion regarding a juridical text, a religious source, or a social covenant may diverge when employing certain views on each of those texts. Thus when taking into account Spinoza's notion of religious tolerance and freedom of speech in the state, one must occupy oneself with theories of reading and with the power of individual judgment to change a textual object. The Old Testament is exemplary in showing how hermeneutics may reveal political interest and temporal changes.

Replying to Spinoza's accusations, Mendelssohn depicts Judaism as a religion that does not coerce one to believe, but which includes only the command of doing: "Unter allen Vorschriften und Verordnungen des Mosaischen Gesetzes lautet kein einziges: Du sollst glauben! oder nicht glauben; sondern alle heißen: du sollst tun oder nicht tun!"[181] The practice of Judaism embodies the recognition that faith (*Glaube*) cannot be ordered. The aspect that Spinoza ascribed to the authoritarian nature of the Jewish state and the religious commands that authoritarian nature induced thus appear to be the foundation for Mendelssohn's argument that Judaism is the symbol of the true public religion. The commands of the Jewish nation lead through the complete immersion of ritual in one's daily life into true religion, allowing the citizen to choose it freely.

The goal of improving human character shifts upon encountering a misunderstanding and misuse of script. As succinctly put by Elizabeth Weber, Mendelssohn argued that: "[T]he very medium of recording the law is also what undermines it and causes it to fall into oblivion: the script, writing. Or, conversely, if the law was instituted to prevent idolatry, its very medium constitutes the beginning of idolatry."[182]

Bearing in mind these dangers that the Hebrew script entails, flexibility that relates to speech may look like a disadvantage—but it actually appears to be script's greatest advantage. Speech

[181] Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, oder, Über die religiöse Macht und Judentum* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2001), 96.
[182] "Fending off Idolatry: Ceremonial Law in Mendelssohn's Jerusalem," *MLN,* Vol. 122, No. 3, (Apr., 2007): 528.

has a direct temporal connection to human thought. According to Mendelssohn, the constant changes in content that speech entails and forces thus serve truth. In comparison, the superiority offered by signs through their ability to constrain human thought opened the hazardous door of *worshiping symbols themselves*. This is equivalent to an adherence to script that neglects its true importance; that is, the embodiment of the commands in their daily practice. A chief aspect that Mendelssohn presented in his writing about aesthetics is language's ability to imitate nature. This is thus conceived of in *Jerusalem* to be the most problematic aspect of script. *Jerusalem* stresses the iconic nature of language, as illustrated by the example of the Hebrew letters. The confusion of images and language appears extremely dangerous, marking the building bricks of human language as destructive exactly because of their iconic nature. Humankind may confuse the textual artifact with the "real" thing, as Mendelssohn writes that:

> Allein, wie es in Genusse für sich und andere aufbewahren.—Allein, wie es in menschlichen Dingen allzeit gehet. Was die Weisheit hier bauet, suchet die Torheit dort schon wieder einzureißen, und mehrenteils bedient sie sich derselben Mittel und Werkzeuge. Mißverstand von der einen, und Mißbrauch von der andern Seite verwandelten das, was Verbesserung des menschlichen Zustandes sein sollte, in Verderben und Verschlimmerung. Was Einfalt und Unwissenheit war, ward nunmehr Verführung und Irrtum.[183]

Mendelssohn is thus occupied not only with the misunderstanding of script, but also with the historical role that Hebrew script fills in the confusion between the signifier and the signified. In this context, he shows his awareness of script's historically problematic status in Judaism: precarious is particularly the fact that Hebrew script is derived from "living" representations of nature. Hebrew letters are hieroglyphs, thus idolizing natural objects. The Hebrew words are images that may cause confusion between reality and its representation, and the status of Hebrew as the primordial language makes this confusion its legacy.[184]

Mendelssohn's illustration of ceremonial law tries to appease criticism suggesting any coercion of institutionalized religion. He nevertheless declares, through the proposed solution of ceremonial law, that the exposure to words and to language is a hazardous one. "Law" is a means of fighting what may happen when men encounter written words. Mendelssohn's prominence in Enlightenment discourse challenges Asad's claim that the Enlightenment produced a binary construction of the Word, with the materiality of the scriptures and ritual on the one hand and with religious abstraction, pluralism, and the use of religious symbols as ciphers of humanistic entities and universal assets on the other. Mendelssohn adheres to religious symbols in his quest for societal acceptance of Judaism, but throughout his public polemics, he maintains that the entrance of the Jews into civil society and its laws is a move which preserves Jewish ritual as an inherent part of the Jewish abstract token of monotheism. In other words, the practice of Jewish

[183] Ibid., 106.
[184] Ibid., 104-5.

ritual is not to be done as a compromise with the new separation of private and public; rather, it is an innate part of the idea of tolerance and the separation of church and state which it dictates.

In sum, three aspects of Mendelssohn's political treatise should be taken into account as establishing his seminal intervention into Enlightenment political theory. These aspects demonstrate the performative power of interreligious exchange as constitutive of political secularism. First, the presence of *Jerusalem* in the Enlightenment discourse on religious tolerance should alert the reader to the fact that political secularism was not established merely through the negotiation of inner-Christian dynamics. I read Mendelssohn's reiteration of such tropes as the Hebrew language and the ancient Hebrew nation in the context of the Enlightenment discourse on biblical reading, a discourse which was salient to the constitution of religious notions and practices as global. I contend that Mendelssohn's presentation of Judaism as both an abstraction and a religious tradition extends this globalization of religious practices; yet this depiction allocates a space to the continuation of material Jewish ritual.

Second, the text complicates the notion that the Enlightenment dictated a binary opposition between ritual and abstract spirituality. Mendelssohn's active engagement with the idealization of Hebrew establishes a non-binary relation between the two. The city Jerusalem is the locus of monotheistic worship as established through unchanging and atemporal Jewish practices. It is nonetheless the presence of uninterrupted ritual that turns Jerusalem into an abstraction (i.e., into a spiritual notion prevalent in all nations and confessions). Jewish life in its concreteness and Judaism as a trope are thus not opposed to one another, but are rather theorized by Mendelssohn in his engagement with the abstraction of the Hebrew trope as co-dependent. This negotiation of the Hebrew trope and the Jewish state take place in Mendelssohn's text through the symbolization of ritual. Nevertheless, the concreteness of Jewish worship remains the precondition that Mendelssohn sets for this globalization. It would be hard not to see *Jerusalem* as representative of the Enlightenment's legacy—first and foremost in regard to the separation of church and state. Thus theories of the Enlightenment's secularist legacy should understand that the Enlightenment's redistribution of spiritual ideals is not a stark opposition of the abstract to the material (and of the public notion of religion to the private sphere), yet those theories should acknowledge a non-dichotomist dynamic between traditionalism and religious abstraction.

Third, Mendelssohn's theory of the Hebrew alphabet poses another challenge to theories of secularism as it dismantles another binary opposition: that made between the Bible in its materiality and the Bible as an abstraction that pertains to all members of humankind. For Mendelssohn, it is not the case that ritual and the biblical word are opposed to the abstract, since ritual and biblical law are not affiliated with one another to begin with. In his description of Jewish ritual, and of the ancient Hebrew nation, Mendelssohn is responding to Spinoza's declaration of the Hebrew state as authoritative and the Hebrew Bible as a set of laws that reflect state control of its citizens. Replying to Spinoza's critique of Judaism, Mendelssohn depicts ritual as a voluntary praxis and puts the emphasis on the oral aspects of textual circulation in the Jewish community, thereby dispelling the affinity between written law and religious practice. It

is then difficult to claim that the material Bible is a medium that is key to supreme inspiration, since the material law is a trajectory that leads, according to Mendelssohn, to continual ritual tradition, rather than to a supernatural meaning or "inspiration" that is embodied in the sign that is the biblical word.

Secular Bodies and Ritual Continuity

Mendelssohn's dual position as a practicing Jewish theologian and a public Enlightenment figure drove his participation in various public disputes. One major dispute was the question of Jewish burial. In eighteenth-century Germany, a wave of anxiety arose in light of the possibility that the "dead" could in fact be buried alive. Under order of the Prussian authorities, the act of burial was then regulated to insure that three days passed between the diagnosis of death and burial of the deceased. The state's debut as the highest ascendancy in regulating burial—wherein state command neutralizes the influences of different confessions—appears to align with Hirschkind's description of the "secular body" as a body, the contours of which are subject to state control. Surely the command of the Prussian authorities was at odds with the perception of Jewish law as atemporal and uninterrupted: Jewish law dictates that burial must take place within a day of death; not following this rule amounts to a deep disrespect for the dead.[185] In a decree from April 30, 1772, Jews from Mecklenburg-Schwerin were commanded to wait three days before a burial in order to confirm the deceased's death.

Mendelssohn's intervention into the case was sought after. A practicing theologian, Mendelssohn offered adherence to an ancient Jewish law as a way of reconciling the conflict with the Prussian authorities' demand. Mendelssohn's suggestion consisted of two parts: the reliance on an old Talmudic order asking the community to wait for three days before burying the dead, and a suggestion to build in the Jewish cemeteries a cave where the body would lie for three days in a ritual emulating the biblical stories of cave burials in the ancient Land of Israel. In the context of the attachment to a new, "secular" body, Mendelssohn's two suggestions show how the pressure of the authorities and the transformative moment of making the Jewish body subject to state authority in defining its demise elicits what is in fact a reactionary attachment to traditional laws and narratives. Whereas the body could be seen as existing in a dual-sphere structure, Mendelssohn tries to sustain the Jewish community's affective attachment as uninterrupted through the act of amending religious law to appease not modern state rules, but rather primordial religious laws and narratives that are more ancient yet than those to which the community adhered before the authorities' intervention. The new practice of religion in the

[185] For an account of the burial polemics as pertinent to the Haskalahh debates on reforms and the adherence to the laws of the gentiles see Moshe Pelli, "Intimations of Religious Reform in the German Hebrew Haskalah Literature," *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Jan., 1970): 3-13.

private sphere (with the self-perception it generates) is governed by religious ideals, the pertinence of which is taken to be atemporal.

In order to investigate the operative power of "human rights" in modern state politics, Asad examines Hannah Arendt's arguments about the dependence of human rights on civil rights in his article "What Do Human Rights Do? An Anthropological Enquiry."[186] Looking at Arendt's study of the "dispensability" of the lives of Second World War refugees, Asad scrutinizes the complications that derive from the attempt to universalize "the Human" while maintaining the national and cultural specificities of "the civil." Following Arendt's depiction of "human rights" as a construct of political activity, Asad develops in his analysis a version of the human's fictionality that applies Arendt's tenets to biopolitics: the "human" in that regard is not only the false consciousness motivating civil activity, but also a fictional concept that defines the preconditions for the organization of this political activity that is then set to justify itself with the so-called grounds for its existence.

The "human" thus appears to be a fictional category that predefines the state's control of individuals, whom the state posits in social and political interaction with one another. In other words, it is not just a tautological justification for political activity, as it is in Arendt's study. Rather, the "human" is a fictional presence that sets the conditions for the existence of the state's political system, dictating the logic behind that system's infrastructure. With his grounding of human rights in a shared bodily experience of pain, Asad points out a way of decoding the logic at the core of biopolitics and state control, which has a direct connection to their roots; this would indeed be a utopian solution that breaks from within what can be called (according to Lacan) the imaginary realm that predefines life in the framework of civil existence. Rather, the universal experience of the body through its pains and decay has the potential for connecting human subjects as it draws a *lineage* between two appearances of the body: the shared false consciousness that posits the sustainability of human life as the bedrock of social institutions, and the unreachable and undefinable experience of the world population that produces the conditions for biopolitics.

In his *Formations of the Secular*, Asad furthers his investigation into the emergence of human rights as a means of constituting the individual's secular status through presumptions that were conceptualized in Medieval Christianity.[187] Asad's reading of Hobbes' definition of "natural punishments" as a derivation of "natural rights" prolongs the specific, religious vision beyond the history of human rights: namely, the notion that the individual is sovereign in his own actions.[188] Asad explores how the possibility of a universalized concept of the human that relies on bodily awareness would correspond with (and subvert) this religious notion of individual fate.

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[186] *Theory & Event* 4, no. 4 2000. Online at http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v004/4.4asad.html.
[187] Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 130.
[188] Ibid., 131.

Once again turning to Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* for the issue of bodily punishment elucidates the complexity of the way in which the Enlightenment's redistribution of religious notions had taken place by the time of Mendelssohn's later treatment of the question of the state's control of its citizens as a body. In the context of this dissertation, I wish to draw attention to the Hebrew letter's function as a trope that shifts textual comprehension into a new realm. *Jerusalem* reiterates Hobbes' idea that the state may have the right to bind its citizens to law. In that regard, Mendelssohn conceives of man as an earthly being whose bodily existence is beholden first to the state's judgment. Yet Mendelssohn grounds this existence in a larger conception of the Jewish state as the primordial ascendancy for political laws. Mendelssohn thus portrays God's role as the ultimate sovereign as *a grounds* for the attachment to political laws—an attachment that is based on the idea that Judaism is an uninterrupted religious tradition with universal pertinence. The idea that bodily punishments are part of the regime's right in its self-constitution is nonetheless limited and remains a pre-historical moment.

Asad opts to establish a way of thinking about human rights as a naturalist right that does not embody free will. In the context of Asad's entire book, this enterprise seeks to rescue thinking about "the human"—and specifically, about the body and pain—in a manner that establishes an alternative basis for civil rights by way of the body: a basis that strives for the universality of human rights while highlighting the complexities of old models of such universality with regard to the coercion of framing one's bodily experience of the world in Christian terms. Mendelssohn's intervention into the burial conflict marks the polemic between his two roles as an active proponent of religious standardization and reconciliation in Enlightenment politics and as a member of a traditionalist culture and its perception of law. I argue that this dual position is not merely a compromise, but is rather an enactment of traditional laws and religious positions. It is an active attempt to maintain a religious episteme and bodily perception as uninterrupted.

Jews' ability to perform ritual is inherent to this model; as such, Judaism is a cipher of tolerance, a continual presence that defines what Protestantism as a state religion is about. "Ritual time," the uninterrupted presence of worship (a traditionalist presumption that creates ritual, such as circumcision) persists in the same way that it has been performed since the origins of the world were immersed in liberalism as liberalism wishes to see itself. Hence contemporary attacks on this ritual contradict the precarious harmony reached between the hegemony and the traditionalists. An attack on ritual is at odds with ritual's view of itself as persistent—which was embodied by Mendelssohn's presentation of Jerusalem as an essential part of monotheistic religion. Accordingly, liberal society is supposed to prohibit rituals that are "no longer" acceptable under modern circumstances and values. Yet "ritual time" is unchanging. Mendelssohn's entrance into the Enlightenment public sphere entailed the sustainablility of a private domain that upholds *its own definition* of the public sphere and of temporality. This has been translated into a privatized subject that yet continuously retains the control of religious law as the highest author and as the defining ascendancy of the body's contours.

Asad's *Formations of the Secular* offers not only a critique of neo-liberalism and its tendency of seeing the Enlightenment as a legacy of religious tolerance, but also of critiques of the Enlightenment that discerned the prejudices behind the perception of neutrality in the modern state's politics, but which did not go so far as to see this neutrality as a constitutive phenomenon to which all citizens are bound to adhere to a certain degree (to Protestantism as an authority on morals). A foremost interlocutor in that regard is sociologist José Casanova, whose seminal critique of the concept of secularism, the 1994 *Public Religions in the Modern World*, led to a paradigm shift in the study of religion and secularism in the modern world. Casanova offered an intervention into the competing claims about religion by European and American sociologists. Whereas the former claim that secularism is a decisive fact in view of modern society's declining religious practices, the latter show that the continuing practice of religion is a continually prominent feature of modern society, which invalidates the idea that secularism is a determining aspect of modern western civilization.

Casanova has cogently shown this with the view that the cultural exchange between religious and secular practices refutes the claim that the two are antagonistic to or exclude each other's existence. While empirically claiming this, there is truth in claims regarding the ongoing "de-privatization" of religion—that is, "religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them."[189] Casanova points out what religious practices and institutes have been emulating, more so in the German world. To make this point, he defines three kinds of propositions about secularization: the "differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms, secularization as a decline of religious beliefs and practices, and secularization as the marginalization of religion to a privatized sphere."[190] Proposing inherently different interpretations of "secularization" entails that, if one of them is proven incorrect, the world can still be considered secularized.

Casanova does not explore the results of this "competition," nor does he portray the differentiation of public religions from secular state ideology as a discrepancy. This lack leads to a critique of Casanova in Asad's *Formation of the Secular*, which refers to Casanova's thesis that the deprivatization of religion makes the secularism thesis normative. Asad has criticized Casanova for the tautology in holding that "in order for a society to be modern, it has to be secular, and for it to be secular, it has to relegate religion to nonpolitical spaces because that arrangement is essential to modern society."[191] Responding to this critique, Casanova argues that Asad's interpretation diverges from his own theory—a theory that relies to a large extent on a historical description of the decline of religious practices.[192] As he notes in his response to Asad, Casanova did not presume a certain "arrangement" of public religion to be a direct derivation of

[189] Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 5.
[190] Ibid., 211.
[191] *Formations of the Secular*, 182.
[192] "Secularism Revisited: A Reply to Talal Asad," in: *Powers of the Secular Modern*, 19.

what modernity is about. For Casanova, the question of secularism—either in the form of religious praxis or as embodied by the state apparatus—is given to empirical research, which would confirm or refute its presence. Casanova claims that one can examine and assess *how* religions are practiced in order to see whether or not they accord with the principles of the liberal state.

What Casanova fails to see, Asad has argued, is a deeper level of "normalization" that is reflected in his position: what does it mean for a public religion to adhere to the principles of modern politics? And can religious minorities shape the structure of a democratic liberal society? Asad analyses key principles of liberal politics, such as religious choice and autonomy, to demonstrate that the normative power of the secularism theory takes place on a deeper level that is not avoided, but rather is perpetuated by Casanova's thesis. This is due to the so-called contingency of whether or not public religions follow secularism, an aspect that Casanova suggests can be empirically examined separately from the practice of religion as defined by the practice of religious ideology. Casanova insists that religions that do not accept civil society and individual liberties do not need to be conceived of as "a rebellion against modernity and the universal values of Enlightenment," claiming rather that, "[t]hey are simply religions that follow are constituted by different norms,"[193] Significantly, Casanova insists that the value which he considers to be the one enabling a religion to become a public religion, "the recognition of freedom of conscience as an inviolable individual right," does not have to be based on liberal or secular notions.[194]

This leads Casanova to examine the valence of Asad's criticism in view of the perception that religious believers who are part of liberal society continue to follow their religion's laws authentically. The dialectical nature of the Jewish attachment to the Hebrew language raises the question of whether the public sphere's origination from the Enlightenment secularist legacy entails competing religious epistemologies, the debate among which defines the terms for modern religious practice. Crucial preconditions of modern hermeneutics, such as a history common to humankind in its entirety, emerged from the transformation of the Old Testament into a global asset. The emphasis on this part of the scriptures as the part that has been lost and damaged took place through the lengthy negotiation of Jews' status in the modern state. Against this background, Mendelssohn's reiteration of some idealized depictions of the Hebrew Bible elucidates Enlightenment values as being ingrained in an interreligious exchange between Protestantism and the minorities that it wishes to incorporate into a new political order. Establishing ritual as a part of the idealized vision of the Old Testament, Mendelssohn embeds in globalized religious notions and practices the traditionalist attachment to the Bible in its materiality. Religious tolerance thus emerges as an ambit for both universalistic religious

[193] Ibid., 13.
[194] Ibid., 14.

abstraction *and* traditionalist adherence to ritual that perpetuates its self-perception as uninterrupted.

Enacting Tolerance

For the purpose of the current examination, it is important to note the new realm that was enabled by Casanova's understanding of secularism. This realm emerged from the refutation of the thesis that religion has been marginalized in modernity—while Casanova insists that the distinction between secular spheres and religious norms is a valid one. The study of secularism is not about whether religion has lost its power (a presumption that would prove force); studying secularism enforces looking at how religion's pragmatic function, for which the state's political sphere is an important exemplar, maintains complex homological relations to the practice of religion—practices that exist in the private sphere, according to the modern state's pragmatism since the Enlightenment. In that regard, an original aspect of Casanova's thesis is the differentiation between Enlightenment ideals and their homology for practices common to religious institutions. For example, numerous Christian congregations tend to elect their leaders in a procedure that demonstrates democratic principles and further ingrains those principles in the community. Casanova concludes that it is in fact religion which appears to accord with Enlightenment values. This assertion complicates—and critiques—the common view that the Enlightenment has constituted a tradition that juxtaposes modern politics with religious practices. Extrapolated from this view is the fact that some religious values accord with the Enlightenment revolution in political thought, whereas others do not.

Asad opts to take this argument further by proposing that it is not only secular institutions that may be accommodating practices that are common among certain religions and which are preferable to Enlightenment political values. He claims to advance this examination by extrapolating from it the claim that secularism embodies the prioritization of certain religious values and norms over others. This leads to the claim that Casanova does not follow through on detecting the repercussions of his own thesis in modernity: it is a fact that traditional religions existing in modern society have "accepted" or adjusted to a cluster of norms. According to Asad, the distinction between law and morality is a precondition for participation in the public sphere as it has been constructed since the Enlightenment. This separation stands as a requirement for the possibility of speaking and being heard in the modern public sphere: "The limits to free speech aren't merely those imposed by law and convention—that is, by an external power. They are also intrinsic to the time and space it takes to build and demonstrate a particular argument, to become particular speaking and listening subjects."[195] The entrance into the public sphere—where, I would add, the citizen is a hermeneutic agent—amends the political subject's religious position. In religious communities that require believers to manifest religious law as a part of the

[195] Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 184.

public sphere (i.e., communities in which morality and law are one and the same), entrance into the public sphere is particularly crucial for enforcing a new religious identity on the political subject. Asad goes on to discern how notions of "force" are essential to modern society's preservation of its political public sphere, as force is inherent in the "dislocation" of certain subjects' moral, religious, and spiritual world in order to control the ever-changing repercussions of the entrance of religious (and implicitly traditionalist) subjects into the public sphere.

I have argued that the presence of Jews in the Enlightenment public sphere furthers the implications of this debate in secularism studies while enforcing a reexamination of Enlightenment political thought and thereby scrutinizing its heritage. As I have discussed thus far, the role of Judaism in the Enlightenment has been emblematic of the idea that some religious principles accord with Enlightenment values. More so than that, I have shown that the presentation of Judaism in the 1780s was directed exactly at showing that Judaism defines a religious conduct that complies with Enlightenment political theories. In other words, the agreement between Enlightenment values and religious practices can be conceived of not only as a byproduct of the period's politics. The dual situation of Judaism as a "privatized religion" is a defining moment in the separation of church and state in the modern nation-state.

As my reading of *Jerusalem* has suggested, the separation of church and state is entangled with the establishment of a new field of traditionalist religious conduct. The correspondences concerning Hebrew brought about new possibilities for the comprehension of the scriptures. When united with new interpretive methodologies, the act of reading the Hebrew Bible has become a seminal cipher of Enlightenment ideals in the Bible's status as emblematic of interpersonal transmission and communication between author and writer. This status of the Bible replaces, at the same time that it was dependent on, the scriptures' model as divine revelation. Capturing the emerging notion of political secularism, the power of the Old Testament was derived from its conception as the epicenter of interreligious exchange. This is not to say that a dialogue between Germans and Jews indeed exists—to reiterate Gershom Scholem's famous concern that the very depiction of that "dialogue" as a concrete historical phenomenon presumes two free and equal interlocutors. Rather, I wish to draw attention to the power of interreligious exchange as a notion that constituted political secularism as a liberating, albeit volatile, status quo. The fact that Christian and Jewish theologians (who were also political leaders on both sides) conversed with one another about the question of how to read Hebrew turned the Hebrew language into a code, the abstraction of which relied on the symbolic power of this status quo.

Discussing the privatization of religious practice, Casanova writes that "religion has often served and continues to serve as a bulwark against 'the dialectics of enlightenment' and as a protector of human rights and humanist values against the secular spheres and their absolute claims to internal functional autonomy."[196] This critique is aimed at a view of the Enlightenment critique

[196] Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 39.

of religion as one that is consistent in its opposition of humanistic values and religion. Since the appearance of *Public Religions*, numerous works on the historiography of the Enlightenment have challenged the view of the Enlightenment as a monolithic tradition, thereby reassessing the Enlightenment's legacy. The view of several of these scholars that theological notions proliferated in Enlightenment debates rejects the oppositional structure of religion and reason, depicting the period's salient notions as inseparable from theological debates. One outcome of this legacy is that humanistic values like the idea of political secularism were shown to be reliant upon the contingent historical dynamics they constantly reference. Thus when present religious notions and practices opt to amend Enlightenment values, they do not constitute attacks from the outside; instead they are reminiscent of the religious tensions and contingencies by which they have been informing those values. The return of religious traditions is not "a sign of the failure of the Enlightenment to redeem its own promises,"[197] but a correspondence with the composite dynamics under the auspices of which certain Enlightenment notions about the privatization of religion have gained power—a correspondence that highlights the conflicted religious history of this political construct.

The notion of interreligious transference is an important approach by which Enlightenment values are stabilized as encompassing the tensions that stand at their core. Reading the Hebrew Bible continually evokes interreligious correspondence as the basis for the concept of interpersonal transmission, which in turn emerges as a collective presumption of readers following the appearance of modern hermeneutics. Turning away from the question of whether or not the secularism thesis can be defended, the question that is carried into the study of secularism today is the relationship between the cultural influence of religion (primarily in view of its structural shaping of modern political institutions) and concrete conflicts among different religious confessions.

My examination thus elucidates a new object of analysis for the study of the Enlightenment secularist legacy: the presence of interreligious exchange as an epistemological category which is intertwined with the notion of secularization. I offered an examination of how the entrance into the political sphere has elicited major changes in Jewish self-perception, manifested by changing conceptions of the body, of ritual, and the relationship to the scriptures. In a second move, I have argued that, in enforcing a practice of "public law" in the private, these changes have dictated a new interpretive approach in which the community's relation to the scriptures became holistically intertwined with the new role of interpretation as constituting and defending the reconceptualization of religious dogmas.

As the previous two chapters have demonstrated, eminent constructs of hermeneutic reading (primarily the perception of textual restoration, contextualization, and "reading through empathy") have emerged through a negotiation of the Old Testament in its new conception as a universal asset. It is the operative power of turning the Hebrew Bible into a collective object that

[197] Ibid., 233.

has constituted textual interpretation as a capacity that is reliant on the universal categories of human comprehension. Hence the reception of religious tropes and practices as detached from particular confessions depended on overcoming the intricacies of "Hebrew understanding," using the interreligious gap between Germans and Jews as constitutive of the idea that cultural artifacts in general can be comprehended by contemporary readers. The prominent idea that Christianity is the "child" of Judaism is thus an inherent legacy of the dialogic infrastructure inherent in the hermeneutic tradition, a structure that both assumes this link between these religions and offers the overcoming of that link as a model. The idea that Christian epistemology could grasp ancient Hebrew texts, thereby reviving its own origins, constitutes the religious backdrop behind the hermeneutic episteme. It enforces both notions (e.g., the assumption that the Hebrew Bible may be restored) and practices (e.g., the Protestant egalitarianism and autonomy ascribed to readers of the scriptures).

The symbolic function of German-Jewish dialogue thus contradicts religious tolerance in its concreteness, insofar that the idea of "bridging" temporal and interreligious gaps presumes that the Old Testament has been damaged and lost. This contradiction competes with the new, modern affective conceptualization of the scriptures. In the context of this examination, *Jerusalem* demonstrates the Jews' unique role in the formative action of secularization in the eighteenth century as a model for the "enactment of religious tolerance." Practicing Judaism in a newly privatized sphere, Mendelssohn responds to the Protestant address of a new attachment to the scriptures. I wish to draw attention to the fact that notions inherent to political secularism have existed since their birth in a continual dialectic with the Jewish presence in the German state: particularly, in terms of the performative power of interreligious dialogue.

Mendelssohn allocates a space where, through an act of interpretation, Jewish law could exist under the auspices of the state's new definition of the privatized religious realm. Here, Schatz is correct to point out the changes in the traditional epistemological framework that is manifested in Mendelssohn's writings, such as the novel perception of time that interferes with a certain traditional, circular approach to the scriptures and the Hebrew language.[198] Yet *Jerusalem* functions in multiple ways to maintain the attachment between Jews and the Hebrew Bible. Importantly, the text reiterates the idealization of Hebrew and of the Jewish state, and is thus a response to the Protestant use of the Old Testament to constitute a dialogic model between Germans and Jews. The text is not only an adaption of the religious minority to Enlightenment religion, but is also an emulation of the tropes that Protestantism uses to constitute the definition of public religion. Mendelssohn turns the traditional attachment to Hebrew into a trope which corresponds with the process of universalizing the Old Testament. His presentation of Judaism as *the* religion of tolerance ingrains the traditional relation to the scriptures in the new attachment to the Old Testament within the context of a universal community of readers. With this political lobbying, Judaism becomes a universal abstract. Mendelssohn's efforts show how this process

[198] Schatz, *Sprache in der Zerstreuung*, 24-6.

occurred through an attempt to conceive of Judaism, from within its universalized status, as an uninterrupted ritual. Mendelssohn's enactment of religious tolerance restates Judaism as a religion of revelation. Against the background of the Old Testament's idealization and its globalization as the cultural asset of humankind under the auspices of Pietism and Protestantism defining state ideology, Mendelssohn advocates the truism of Judaism as a religion with logics and values that dictate a universal ideology.

Conclusion

The instrumental role of tradition in constituting the Enlightenment public sphere has created tensions, discrepancies, and contradictions embedded in secularist conceptions of religion. As several works have shown in recent years, the Enlightenment was conducive to religious practice; Enlightenment religious notions and practices confirmed Enlightenment values. Thereby, one striking Enlightenment notion is that participation in a global community of "humankind" was brought to the fore through the commonalties of religious practice as it crossed the boundaries of religious confessions. As Enlightenment values have been disseminated through religious notions, they have construed religion anew. With the emphasis on the globalizing aspects of religious convictions, the practice of religion has been understood to newly entrench a pluralizing effect. This has led to an innovative conception of a religious community—for example, radically amending hierarchical structures which had formerly been essential to religious practice. If religion is the means by which truisms can be transmitted to all members of the community, then religious practices (the epitome for which is the reading and interpreting of the Bible) should be open to all individuals. Judaism as a traditionalist culture is a reminder that religious practices were often at odds throughout the course of history with the view of religious notions as vehicles for egalitarianism. In traditional Jewish settings, for example, the Bible is studied and commented on in a male-dominated sphere. What is more, Judaism has maintained several levels of engagement with the Bible that are stratified and monitored with regard to the age, marital status, and familial heritage of community members.[199] Traditional structural restrictions within the Jewish community are evocative of a larger problem: they are reminiscent of the process through which the notion of religious community has come to parallel the universal community of humankind, exposing the problems that are embodied by this emblem. The presence of Judaism is important in celebrating the long-lasting triumph of monotheistic religion; the specificities of its daily practice—unchanging in their own right—insert into this presence an eminent challenge to Enlightenment values.

The conception of humanity as a religious collective is thus challenged not only by the internal structure of the religious community, but also by the standing of different strata of the religious

[199] For example, the study of the Kabbalah is only allowed for married men over forty, under the presumption that with the status the members of the community reach a state of maturity which enables them to engage with Jewish esotericism.

community as they are fixed in societal and ethnic structures. Within my focus on reading practices, the Hebrew Bible's standing as both the promise and danger of traditionalism is crucial. The dialectic between Protestant theologians and public Jewish figures encompasses the composite nature of accepting traditionalism while changing its public structure. The question of how to read Hebrew, I have argued, has become a charged trope that embodies this complexity in offering the promise of interreligious exchange and political egalitarianism, side by side with the reminiscences of monotheism as an unchanging separatist domain.

In 2012 Germany, a controversy emerged surrounding the circumcision of a four-year old Muslim child. The procedure resulted in a severe infection, and the child was brought to a hospital for treatment—at which time the hospital officials filed a complaint against the abuse of the child. This led later to a state lawsuit in the highest court. What then became the issue of debate is whether or not the ceremony should be forbidden in Germany, a demand that is based on two principles of religious practice in the country: one's rights on one's own body, which are claimed to be at odds with the damage to the child's body, and religious freedom, which is allegedly violated as the ceremony is performed on the child's body without consideration of his will. Notwithstanding, the execution of this ceremony is an essential part of honing the child's belonging to the community.[200] The case sparked unprecedented public attention and media coverage; in the context of religious practice in Germany, the lawsuit was at the center of attention due to the fact that the circumcision ceremony that provoked this controversy when performed in a Muslim context is nonetheless recognized predominantly within another religious minority: with Jews.[201]

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[200] Yoram Bilu has described circumcision and the Bar-Mitzvah as preparing the ground for the child's entrance to the Jewish community. The Hebrew name for circumcision, *Milah* ("word") marks the linearity of the connection between these two ceremonies, Bilu argues, in connection with the centrality of literacy in Jewish culture. Starting with this ceremony that "engraves" the "word" in the child's body, his maturity will culminate in his educational achievement: his public reading in the Torah: "From a social science perspective, the rabbis' comments on the first years of life can be read as fragments of a traditional Jewish ethnopsychology that contemplates the crossing of the developmental space between physical, bodily, and unarticulated experiences and symbolic, abstract, and discursive ones. […] [T]his crossing is depicted as requiring much effort and investment. The inscription on the male body of the physical mark of circumcision is the very first step in this direction, designed to prepare the Jewish male for 'entering the Torah'—the universe of religious injunctions and spiritual calling conveyed by the holy language of the holy text." "From *Milah* (Circumcision) to *Milah* (Word): Male Identity and Rituals of Childhood in the Jewish Ultraorthodox Community," *Ethos*, vol. 31, 2003: 174.

[201] Opponents of circumcision often compares it with the mutilation of female genitalia. For a review of this comparison see Kirsten Bell, "Genital cutting and Western discourses on sexuality," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (2005): 125-148. Both practices are presented as medically unnecessary procedures executed without considering the will of the agent, on whose body the ceremony is performed.

A recent report by AJC, a Berlin-based Jewish organization, warns of the resonances of day-old anti-Semitic tendencies in the recent critique of circumcision in Germany.[202] Under the title "Facts and Myths," the report predominantly alerts the audience that this debate is of an anti-Semitic nature because of the claims against circumcision—claims that have long-lasting historical resonances and a rather notorious history. When asked whether the procedure holds any proven advantages or risks for the infant's health, urologists addressed by the court have testified that there is no medical evidence that circumcision as it is conducted in Western Europe creates risk or benefits for the child. They thus advised the court that the debate would have to be carried out in a different realm than the medical one.

It seems that the analysis of this recent public dispute could greatly benefit from Asad's views on the constitution of the terms "religion" and "religious freedom," as they appear equipped to demonstrate the gaps between the liberal assumptions of the state authorities and traditionalist thinking. Both principles advocated by the state presume the status of the child as an independent, autonomous individual who, upon maturity, will be able to undertake religious commitments, such as the changing (or damaging) of his body. In their status as the choices of others, these choices must not be forced on the individual: if they are initiated by other individuals and forced upon the child without his free will, then the ritual in fact transfers from the field of religious choice to coercion, receiving a most alarming expression by harming the wholeness of the child's body.

As Asad's tenets points out, traditionalist thinking does not take the child as an autonomous being, but rather, as belonging through his birth to a community of believers. Jewish law would in fact be especially forceful in perpetuating such a belief, due to its conception of religious and ethnic affiliations as identical. Traditionalist thinking views communal belonging not as contingent upon the individual's choice of entering a religious community, or of initiating belonging in a confession through ritual. Rather, it assumes belonging in a religious group as a given part of one's existence in the world. The circumcision ritual does not confirm one's belonging to the community, but is a natural, organic part of the child's birth into the community. The child's body is the locus upon which religious law is to be performed, not requiring (and even excluding the identification of) this locus to be the property of an autonomous subject: males become autonomous in Judaism only upon their thirteenth birthdays, after the Bar-Mitzvah ceremony during which they first read the Torah in public. The characterization of both Jews and Muslims through their inclusion of the body in communal ritual may show the "thinking" of these religious minorities to be at odds with the state, thereby

[202] AJC – Berlin, "Fakten und Mythen in der Beschneidungsdebatte," AJC Berlin, the Lawrence and Lee Ramer Institute for German Jewish Relations, Berlin, November 15, 2012, 9-10. With its emphasis on the anti-Semitic echoes as anti-Jewish, the AJC report establishes an apologia for circumcision that seeks to both cleanse the ritual from non-Jewish symbolic meanings, allegedly de-mythicizing the ritual, at the same time that establishing a strong separatism from the Muslim praxis, separatism which does not enable "seeing the ritual as a mere practice," which in its de-mythicized form could have been seen as a mere practice of both religions.

constituting an opposition to state rule. Indeed, in the circumcision debate, Jews and Muslims share the position of a ritual and traditionalist thinking about the body, a position that may be seen to subvert state law.

Yet the discomfort in the recent case of the circumcision debates stems from the fact that secular liberal society cannot accommodate ritual, even after making religious tolerance a political norm. More specifically, it is the role of Jews as a traditionalist society whose incorporation into the Protestant state is a constitutive proof of the very existence of the state as secular. As the circumcision case shows, problems arising from the Jews' traditionalist adherence to religious law create a paradox: Jews must be included in Germany's secularist politics, since the identification of the country as secular already presumes the symbolic notion of Judaism as an exemplary public religion. The case of the appearance of the Old Testament in writings significant for modern hermeneutics is a landmark in this symbolic role of Jews. The transformation of the Old Testament into a globalized asset presumes the obstacle of difference between Jews and Germans; it is with reference to this obstacle that the globalization of religious tropes perceives itself as successful. The core of this difference—the traditional adherence to the scriptures, whose emblematic reflection was the concreteness of literacy in Hebrew—lies in Mendelssohn's actions as he turned Hebrew literacy and the concrete Bible into tropes that capture both traditional adherence to the scriptures and their idealization.

Chapter 4: Literary Deliberations and the Return of Written Law

Introduction

Throughout the nineteenth century, hermeneutic thinking developed as a phenomenon synonymous with modernity. Cultural transformations, such as the modernization of the notions of empathy and scientific reading, elicited new strands of interpretation theory, as hermeneutics was coming to be defined in terms that crossed confessional affiliations.[203] At the same time, the second half of the nineteenth century also signaled the emergence of such literary genres as the Romantic poetry and the realist novel. These new literary phenomena were emerging in anticipation of the reception of literary texts via new categories of textual comprehension in their pertinence to the modern subject. My goal in this chapter is to examine the modernization of hermeneutic thinking through early nineteenth century's theological transformations and the emergence of literary realism in conjunction with one another.

Dealing by and large with the shift from Herder to later phases of Enlightenment thought, this chapter begins with a description of Schleiermacher's influential attempt to systematize hermeneutics. Building on earlier forms of hermeneutics, Schleiermacher presumes that a general theory of understanding does not yet exist, as opposed to distinct, specialized "hermeneutics" (in the plural).[204] It is his goal to fill this gap, which he does, first, with the codification of philological or linguistic hermeneutics, and second, with the definition of a second level for reading—the psychological hermeneutics. The first half of this chapter seeks the understanding Schleiermacher's work on the background of developments in German idealism sheds light on the religious backdrop that subtends his hermeneutic system. Looking particularly at Hegel's *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate* (1798-9), I describe the period's attitude toward Judaism as reflective of developments in hermeneutics. Schleiermacher's paradigm focuses on the contextualization of utterances rather than on their literal understanding. The period's accounts of Christianity showed it to enable a new, abstract understanding of Scriptures — thereby making the New Testament a new epitomic object for hermeneutics with its status as a historical documentation of the beginning of abstract thinking.

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[203] The development of hermeneutics throughout the late nineteenth century held a close connection to the development of new scientific disciplines related to the mental sciences, a correlation promoted especially in Dilthey's work. See Julius Goebel, "William Dilthey and the Science of Literary History," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Apr., 1926): 145-156. Goebel shows how Dilthey's early work on aesthetics leads to his attempt in his second book to claim for the definition of the "Geistwissenschaften" through their comparison to other "sciences" (an enterprise that both relies on and promotes developments in the sciences). Specifically, Dilthey's description of poetry develops the notion of the human mind as engaging with an array of psychic experiences which serves that later enterprise.

[204] Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Manfred Frank, *Hermeneutik und Kritik*. 1. Aufl. ed (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 75.

"Contextualization" was eminent to Schleiermacher's philological hermeneutics (a statement should be analyzed through an overall grasp of language considering the period and culture that produced the text). This term that was largely developed by Herder, as I have explored in chapters one and two, thus played an important role in Schleiermacher's psychological hermeneutics, which seeks to understand utterances in a parallel way to linguistic contextualization: through the situating of a thought or an aim in the author's life. Schleiermacher's overall relationship to Scriptures —his view that the Scriptures ' merits lie in unfolding the history of the reception of God's word by the Church—undergirds the almost complete exclusion of the Hebrew Bible from his hermeneutic writings. Schleiermacher's Lectures on Hermeneutics thus unfold an account parallel to Kant's Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone and Hegel's The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate: for Schleiermacher, the New Testament is an exemplary object for the practice of hermeneutic reading in describing humanity's abstract thinking on religious law and in demanding, accordingly, the utilization of abstract thinking when reading the Scriptures . This turn in hermeneutics relies on the period's theological-historical account of the emergence of Christianity from the spirit of Hebraism. The New Testament embodies civilization's new beginning, which facilitated, according to Schleiermacher, the ultimate creation of a new body of texts. Christ's message to civilization thus shows the need to apprehend a body of text through hermeneutic reading (which discerns texts' unique and original nature). The choice of the New Testament, I contend, was thus a catalyst for new contributions to interpretation. The text offers a cogent way to demonstrate the effectiveness of psychological inquiry. Hegel and Schleiermacher's respective historical-theological accounts tell the story of how the human subject reaches its climactic position as a free agent and thinker. With the standing of the transition from Hebraism to Christianity as the eminent moment of this transformation of the subject into a free and able thinker, the reading subject is depicted in conjunction with the objects that this subject should engage with: civilization's post-Hebraic cultural artifacts.

Whereas the previous chapters focused on the emergence of the hermeneutic episteme, this chapter scrutinizes, in its second half, the tensions engrained in the consolidation of hermeneutics as a secular domain. I propose an analysis of literary texts that reveals their constant anticipation and negotiation of the hermeneutic episteme with the claims it makes regarding "interpretive skills," and with its history of emergence as an interpretive paradigm. In this context I demonstrate how literary practices—and specifically, literary devices such as intertextuality with the Bible and multilingualism—reference the globalization of theological principles that subtends reading. In particular, allusions to Hebrew and to the Old Testament in moments of interpretive challenge recall the emergence of textual interpretation upon an abstract conception of the Enlightenment Bible. Thus, references to Hebrew underpin the interplay of secular notions behind cultural premises regarding textual analysis.

As I shall demonstrate in my reading of early realist prose, literary texts may evoke reading as engrained in *particular* confessional and communal affiliations. Droste-Hülshoff canonic 1842

novella *Die Judenbuche* illustrates exactly that. The novella's salience in German literary history derives from its presentation of a new literary genre: the *Krimi* (crime fiction). It can be claimed that in advancing that genre, the novella reaffirms the presumptions of literary hermeneutics: the readers should seek to decipher what the author "had in mind" in order to solve the mystery encompassed in the text. The appearance of Hebrew script in the midst of the novella signifies the failure of such an attempt. The language of the Jews, which is not translated, and is thus not made approachable to the general reader till the very end of the text, uncovers the language of the "Judens-buch" as a hindrance to textual comprehension.

The chapter's final section presents another literary response to modern transformations in literary understanding. Heinrich Heine's multiple references to Judaism and theology lends a case study that has become a seminal influence on the shaping of Hebrew as a trope in German cultural memory. The examination centers on Heine's unfinished historical novel *Der Rabbi von Bacharach* which he began writing on 1824. I analyze the text's portrayal of Jewish ritual and scriptural reading in order to situate Heine's engagement with the Bible in the context of a meta-poetic perception of communal reading that can be extrapolated from his poetics. The novel's use of the Hebrew Bible as a reference text may be taken as a comment on the teleological nature of modern hermeneutics with regard to its claim for empathy that is based on the effacement of confessional difference.

On Jews and Other Bad Readers

In his theological Magnum opus, *Der christliche Glaube* (1832), Schleiermacher establishes that the proof for the validity of Scriptures is to be found in the New Testament. The responsibility of the Jews for that textual corruption was again brought to the fore in making the New Testament the model text for textual interpretation—this time, not because the Hebrew Bible's fragmented nature makes it an ideal object for interpretation, but exactly since its evidently lacking nature puts into question the possibility of the interpretive effort. Schleiermacher thus choses a new focus—the New Testament—in order to elucidate his contribution to textual interpretation—the adding of a psychological level to the linguistic one.

The preference of the New Testament due to its documentation of Christian spirit should be understood in a broader theological and philosophical context; a major influence in that regard is Hegel's work which portrays the image of man through a historical inquiry of early monotheism. In his early essay "On the Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," Hegel connects Jewish religious practices, to modes of thinking (viewed as continuous since antiquity) and to the function of Jews as political agents. Hegel's presents a notion of Christian morality, which is achieved through a transition away from the Jewish relation to scriptural law—a notion that influenced

later authors eminent to hermeneutic thinking.[205] Hegel's early essay was not published till the beginning of the twentieth century and I do not wish to claim that it had a direct influence on Schleiermacher. My point is, rather, that the essay represents a certain Zeitgeist that became eminent to German idealism—i.e, a transition in thinking about the relationship between the attachment to the Scriptures , and the political valence of subjects—which reflects developments in hermeneutics.

Hegel's oeuvre evinces an ambivalent approach to Judaism: this religion appears as a fundamental, prominent stage of civilization, at the same time that this religion is condemned as an insufficient expression of man's natural abilities.[206] A seminal point in the essay "On the Spirit of Christianity and its Fate"—the juxtaposition of Jews and Christians in view of their respective approaches to Scriptures —underpins the backdrop for the transformations in hermeneutics during the period. Jews, namely, have been perpetuating with their unchanging worship practices a stale form of cognitive function; their adherence to the materiality of Scriptures is inflicted in a primitive attachment to scriptural law. This treatment of the Bible as a set of rules reveals the inability of Jews to experience higher steps of religious existence, and primarily, the abstraction of religious law that enables one toe perceive a higher ontological mode of reality. Reading is thus where ethnic, religious and cultural identities may carry out (or, rather, withhold) one's mental functions in this early instance of Hegel's contribution to German idealism.[207]

In this early manifestation of Hegel's philosophy, the Jews represent a stagnant mode of thinking about the world. With their conception of God as a revengeful being, the Jews adapted God as a sublime, infinite object. They juxtapose the godly being to man, conceived as finite. It also by means of calling man an absolute subject which God could be conceived as an object, an option that is foreign to Jewish theology. While Kant, in his *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, depicts Jesus as a Kantian who overcomes Jewish materiality with his enterprise of establishing morality as universal, Hegel presents Abraham as Kantian to establish a criticism of

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[205] Hegel's early writings were published in 1907—with the enthusiastic support of Dilthey, who has published a study of Hegel's *On the Spirit of Christianity and its Faith*. Dilthey takes this text to reveal a Hegel that has not yet confined himself to his philosophical system: an author whose genius is expressed in his historical investigation into civilization. Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 4, (Leipzig und Berlin: Teubner, 1921), 68.

[206] In his study of Hegel's relationship to Jews and Judaism throughout his work, Yirmiyahu Yovel concludes that the philosopher's relationship to Jews is an unresolved matter, constantly shifting between despise and appreciation of their contribution to humanity. Yovel argues that it is not possible to determine Hegel's opinion on this matter as resolved. *Dark Riddle: Hegel, Nietzsche and the Jews* (Tel Aviv: Shocken, 1996), 123 (Hebrew). In his account of the negotiation of Judaism as a catalyst of Enlightenment thought, Adam Suttcliffe argues that "Hegel's struggle to distil a rational kernel from the distorting irrationalities of religion repeatedly drew him back to Judaism, the unique historical significance and endurance of which powerfully resisted accommodation within his own dialectical systems of thought." *Judaism and Enlightenment*, 255.

[207] The essay's eminence in the history of German idealism derives from its unfolding of terms seminal to Hegel's philosophical system such as thesis and antithesis and the notion of servitude. Yovel argues that the early essay exemplifies not only the master-slave dialectic, but that is also already explicates the ability to transgress this power relation through work and the shaping of nature. *Dark Riddle: Hegel, Nietzsche and the Jews*, 59.

Kant's stale vision of ethics—presented as the realm of the law that should be detached from drives.[208]

"Hebrew morality" features obedience to the law out of fear of God, who is conceived as a sole eternal object, and thus, as the only subject. Jewish existence in the law does not encompass the ability to become an equivalent, eternal subject through an inner process of transformation:

Das Prinzip der ganzen Gesetzgebung war der von den Voreltern ererbte Geist – das unendliche Objekt Inbegriff aller Wahrheit und aller Beziehungen, also eignetlicher das einzige Subjekt – da es nur erst Objekt gennant werden kann, insofern der Mensch mit seinem geschenkten Leben vorausgesetzt wird und das lebendige, das absolute Subjekt heißt...[209]

Hegel thus blames the ill-equipped nature of Judaism on the Jewish adherence to law in its materiality. To support this point, Hegel quotes Deuteronomy which lists three cases of exemptions from war: a man who built a house, but has not yet dedicated it; one who planted a vineyard and has not yet eaten from its fruits; or a man who has a fiancé whom he has not yet married. Hegel summaries the principle reflected in this army treatise: Jews take it as immoral to coerce one to risk the possibility of enjoying earthly goods for the "real" ("denn sie, denen ihr Leben itzt bevorstand, haetten toericht gehandelt, fuer die Wirklichkeit die ganze Moeglichkeit, die Bedingung des Leben zu wagen"). Hegel argues that sacrifice can be done only "heterogeneously": existence (or earthly presence) and property (manifested in the exemption from battle) exist in the same realm of reality. They could be given up only for things that are beyond this realm, such as honor, freedom or beauty.[210] The fact that the Jews do not consider the renunciation of the possibility to enjoy earthly pleasure a venture to enter a non-earthly realm shows them as incapable to experience the "eternal" marked in the above mentioned concepts.

On this point, Hegel calls for a surprising authority to support his argument: Moses Mendelssohn's account of Judaism in *Jerusalem* which declares that this religion does not dictate higher truths to its believers, in Hegel's words: "ewigen Wahrheiten."[211] As chapter three has shown, Mendelsohn's apologia opted to depict Jewish worship and ritual as conducive for political participation as they free the human mind for political engagement. The daily practice of ritual separate religious practice from the realm higher truths, which, Mendelssohn insists in his lobbying for tolerance, are a matter of free decision. Judaism thus clears the way for political deliberation; even more importantly, it is a model public religion since its principles entail free

[208] David Nirenberg has recently described this transition between Kant's decision "to portray Jesus as a Kantian, a rebel against Jewish materiality" (394) to Hegel's presentation of Abraham as "the founder of Kantian idealism" (400-1) in his description of the lineage of "Anti-Judaism," an ongoing discourse of authors who corresponded with each other's depictions of Jews as inhuman, human, and partially human. *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013).
[209] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus G. Mohn, 1970), 14.
[210] Ibid, 17.
[211] Ibid.

choice in matters of higher truth. Hegel's adaptation of Mendelssohn's bluntly ties the Hebrew adherence to law as a deficiency in executing the human potential of conceiving eternal concepts. Mendelsohn's account confirms, according to Hegel, the existence of the Jewish God as a command (*Befehl*) and it thus ratifies the existence of Jewish spirituality in the framework of a limited notion of reality.[212] Hegel's reading of Mendelssohn thus serves him to draw his critique of Kant. Whereas for Kant, Judaism lacks the ability to free oneself from adherence to the law in favor of a regime based on reason, Hegel describes what he sees as Kant's opinion that emotions should be separate from the practice of law as a belated Jewishness. The strict adherence to reason is fostered through a fear of an outside ascendancy and it thus disables the agent's more supreme affective attachment to the law—in which the adherence to law facilitates the agent's aspiration to take part in an eternal world order.

For Hegel, the epitome of the Jewish practice of faith as subjected to laws, commands and restrictions is the Hebrew endorsement of talion law. The Jews' adherence to the "an eye for an eye" principle perpetuates their practice of morality out of fear of God. This stage in civilization created the "positivistic man" identified with the Jews: a political agent who centers his societal conduct on following public rules and commands.[213] For Hegel, it is the Christian practice of faith, and particularly Jesus' self-sacrifice, which marks a new stage in civilization: the transcendence of the primordial and earthly existence as the grounds for morality in the annulment of parity as the grounds of law:

> Aug um Aug, Zahn um Zahn, sagen die Gesetzte; die Wiedervergeltung und die Gleichheit derselben ist das heilige Prinzip aller Gerechtigkeit, das Prinzip auf dem jede Staatverfassung ruhen muß. Aber Jesus fordert im allgemeinen Aufgebung des Rechts, Erhebung über die ganze Sphäre der Gerechtigkeit oder Ungerechtigkeit durch Liebe, in welcher, mit dem Rechte, auch dies Gefühl der Ungleichheit und das Soll dieses Gefühls, das Gleichheit fordert, d. i. der Haß gegen Feinde verschwindet.[214]

The adherence to biblical law, with no ability to abstract it is a sweeping fault of the Jewish as a collective: a determination that in the case of Hegel draws a line between the Hebrew law and modern day Jews, thereby, ironically reiterating Mendelssohn's striving to present Judaism as an uninterrupted religion of revelation. The primordial nature of Judaism as a continued tradition is shown in the modern status of Hebrew:

> Man kann den Zustand der jüdischen Bildung nicht einen Zustand der Kindheit, und ihre Sprache eine unentwickelte kindliche Sprache nennen; es sind noch einige tiefe kindliche Laute in ihr aufbehalten oder vielmehr wieder hergestellt worden, aber die übrige schwere, gezwungene Art sich auszudrücken ist vielmehr *eine Folge der höchsten Mißbildung des Volks, mit welcher ein reineres Wesen zu kämpfen hat, und von welcher*

[212] P. 18.
[213] P. 36-8.
[214] P. 32.

> *es leidet, wenn es sich in ihren Formen darstellen soll, welche es nicht entbehren kann, da es selbst zu diesem Volke gehört.*[215]

Hegel's description of Judaism attacks the fascination with the Hebrew Bible, as it was manifested in Germany in earlier decades. Hegel's rhetorical move reveals just that. The presentation of Hebrew as a "childish language,"—a claim which he opts to refute—is juxtaposed to the incessant treatment of the language through the Hebrew nation's enduring "*Mißbildung"* which has *also* caused the language's convoluted nature. It is thus only at the end of this excerpt that the reader acknowledges that the childish nature of Hebrew counts, much in opposition to Herder's presentation of the language, as inherently flawed.

Differing from Herder on the question of relationship between Hebrews and the moderns fuels Hegel's philosophical intervention. According to Herder, the primordial spirit of Hebrew enables the moderns to explore their origins. This depiction of the nature of Hebrew poetry as novel, precisely due to its wild nature, transforms in Hegel into the portrayal of a continual neglect that is inherent to Jews from the birth of their nation on. But also for Hegel, the Christian spirit is inseparable from Hebrew history. Hebrew serves him to exemplify the essay's major claim regarding civilization: human spirit ascends only in the process of leaving behind the inherent conditions for its in existence. A purer essence (ein reineres Wesen) must struggle with Hebrew ways of expression: a difficult task since this essence must represent itself, concurrently, through the Hebrew forms that it cannot leave behind. The statement that this essence "belongs to its nation" thus evokes the spirit of Jesus who departs from the Jews, in order to advance humankind into a higher state of existence.

It is important to discern the parallel that this account creates between two aspects of Judaism: the position of Jews as practicing believers becomes attached to their traditionalist, communal adherence to Jewish *Bildung* and "way of reading." Ways of practicing the Jewish confession become attached, in this account, to inherent "Jewish characteristics" whose ethnic endurance is realized in the act of reading. This latter category of Jewish characteristics is explained through cultural specificity as a transitory category, but with the description of a "Jewish epistemology" that is conceived as a universal, ever-lasting category. "Jewish staleness" in following the Scriptures —which, for Schleiermacher, translates into a broad way of conceiving texts—was thus a token that fostered the move toward nineteenth-century hermeneutics. This move built on the fascination of German idealism and Romanticism with emotions, and with the function of emotions as the grounds for political engagement, as hermeneutic reading was increasingly alluding to interpersonal communication as its model.

Schleiermacher's Hermeneutic Turn

[215] P. 58, emphasis added.

In his comprehensive enterprise of describing transformations in hermeneutics through a biographical examination of Schleiermacher's life, Dilthey describes the need to go beyond Kant's philosophy, with its refusal to make claims on God's existence, as an essential condition for nineteenth-century achievements in philosophy and interpretation.[216] Schleiermacher's theological-historical description thus converges with his metaphysics, offering multiple answers to how a subject's psychological drives and needs are appeased through religious, Christian experience.

Schleiermacher's depiction of Judaism in his *Über die Religion* resonates Hegel's critique of the Jewish spirit as dictating a stagnant existence. Schleiermacher writes, "Denn der Judaismus ist schon lange eine todte Religion, und diejenigen, welche jetzt noch seine Farbe tragen, sitzen eigentlich klagend bei der unverweslichen Mumie, und weinen über sein Hinscheiden und seine traurige Verlaßenschaft."[217] Yet, such accounts seem to be softened the context of Schleiermacher's statements on religious tolerance, where he declares citizenship as a universal modality that should accommodate members of different confessions. Such is his assertion, "Die Vernunft fordert, daß alle Bürger sein sollen, aber sie weiß nicht davon, daß alle Christen sein müssen und es muß auf vielerei Art möglich sein, Bürger und Nichtchrist zu sein.[218] The adherence to Judaism does not inherently entail exclusion from political engagement. Schleiermacher's depiction of the universal subject considers Jews as able political agents, i.e, as individuals who are able to make judgments concerning appropriate conduct as described in Kant's model of the categorical imperative. Schleiermacher thus contends that Jews must renounce certain religious notions, and lists adjustments of Jewish religious practices as conditions for the entrance of Jews to the political sphere as equal participants. Such is the Jewish notion of the messianic end of the days, which, according to Schleiermacher, must be transformed to accommodate a conduct that prioritize the well-being of the state.[219] Jews may engage in general processes of thinking—and their corresponding political practices—, but this universality thus presumes their acceptance of Christian premises that are the basis for politics.

This political position is reflected in Schleiermacher's interpretation theory which seeks to establish a general paradigm of textual comprehension while yet relying on a Christian narrative to explicate the essence of textual interpretation—and the conceptual origins of interpretation's universal aims. Held between 1805 and 1833, Schleiermacher's lectures on hermeneutics foster Lutheranism, with its emphasis on individual interpretation, as a way of being which embodies human reason—as well as facilitates its performance. Schleiermacher develops a distinction between the correct linguistic understanding of the text, and its psychological grasp defined as

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[216] Leben Schleiermachers, erster Band in*: Wilhelm Diltehy: Gesammelte Schriften* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprech, 1966), 107-8.

[217] *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*, Studienausgabe. Studienausgabe (Zürich: TVZ, Theologischer Verlag, 2012), 237.

[218] In *Briefe bei Gelegenheit der politisch theologischen Aufgabe und des Sendschreibens jüdischer Hausväter* (Berlin: Evang. Verl.-Anst., 1984), 12.

[219] Ibid..

the penetration of the author's intentions at the time of the writing. He attaches the sense of divination that accompanies the accurate interpretation of a text mainly to the psychological level: the understanding of the work in the context of the author's thought. Schleiermacher's theological oeuvre promotes the interpretation of the New Testament as the text that unfolds the historical revelation of Christian spirit to the Church. Dilthey pointed out the duality of Schleiermacher's development of textual interpretation through a new choice of the latter part of Scriptures : "Die Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments hat einen doppelten Ausgangspunkt; nicht nur der allgemeinen Hermeneutik, sondern auch der theologischen Wissenschaft ist sie untergeordent."[220] Theological shifts and interpretive tenets develop reciprocally with the making of the New Testament a supreme universal asset and object of human comprehension exercised through reading (while claiming that theoretical insights into reading emerge through the interpretation of the New Testament due to this object's universal merits).

With the view that is seminal to Schleiermacher's project—that every body of texts demands scrupulous attention—the New Testament is an exemplary model for textual interpretation due to its emergence as a new beginning for civilization. As put by James Duke,

> Schleiermacher was convinced that Christianity brought forth a distinctive language and content. Christianity was, and remains, a language-producing power. With Jesus Christ there came a new message or "idea" to be experienced and proclaimed. In communicating this message the authors of the New Testament thought and wrote in terms of the linguistic, religious, and intellectual milieux in which they lived. Their own understandings and expressions of their faith were conditioned by their heritage and environment. Yet at the same time they reshaped or transformed, and at times even created, patterns of thought and ways of speaking in accord with their new faith.[221]

If for Herder the Hebrew Bible was the epitome for hermeneutic reading due to the acute need of its restoration then for Schleiermacher, it was the New Testament, due to its break with the stale mode of religious existence that precedes it. This examination centers not on a text or message that has been lost but on the restoration of an overall way of thinking: the psychological conditions that called for the writing of the New Testament (90).

The New Testament is the epitome of hermeneutic reading since it is representative of the most crucial introduction of a new message and a "language-producing power." Thus, the text is not only an object that is exemplary for the manifestation of hermeneutic reading; it is also prevalent to the shaping of the subject who is exposed to the text in its status as transformative to civilization. Like in Hegel's account, the transition from Judaism to Christianity is embodied in the attempt to leave behind the conditions that are essential to the development of this new mode

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[220] Leben Schleiermachers, zweiter Band in: *Wilhelm Dilthey: Gesammelte Schriften* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 726.

[221] Introduction, Schleiermacher, Friedrich, and Heinz Kimmerle, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press for the American Academy of Religion, 1977), 7-8.

of thinking. Here too, this effort is reflected in the evolvement of a new language. The transition from Hebrew to Aramaic and to Greek is thus exemplary for grammatical hermeneutics (which transgresses any common case study of linguistic development), "Denn wenn in einem Volke eine geistige Entwicklung vorgeht, so entsteht auch eine neue Sprachentwicklung. Wie nun jedes neue geistige Prinzip sprachbildend wird, so auch der christliche Geist" (ibid). But that "linguistic development" does not necessarily merit the coining of a new hermeneutics. What is different here is that the Christian spirit had to be expressed in a new language while negotiating the linguistic influence of Hebrew: "Der neue christliche Geist aber tritt im N. T. hervor in einer Sprachmischung, in der das Hebraeische der Stamm ist, worin das Neue zunaechst gedacht worden ist, das Griechische aber aufgepfropft" (ibid).

This guiding principle of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics—which also marks the innovation of his hermeneutics—the psychological hermeneutics (which he also names "technical hermeneutic") carries Herder's anthropological relativism to a new model of interpersonal relations. Herder insisted on the need to understand a culture in its context via alert to its poetic conventions, historical setting, and cultural norms. Schleiermacher thus replaces "culture" with an individual author that is then examined through the relation to another individual: the reader. Schleiermacher's extensive parallel of hermeneutics to dialogue and to speech subsumes the reader and writer in a dialectic interaction in which they are both personalized. Schleiermacher's reframing of hermeneutics in terms of communication scrutinizes speech not only as an interpersonal dynamics, but also as a way for a subject to utter ideas:

> Das Denken wird durch innere Rede fertig, und insofern ist die Rede nur der gewordene Gedanke selbst. Aber wo der Denkende nötig findet, den Gedanken sich selsbt zu fixieren, da ensteht auch Kunst der Rede, Umwandlung des ursprünglichen, und wird hernach auch Auslegung nötig (176).

Interpretation is needed in places where a thinker has changed his or her mind. In that case, importantly, the utterance should be interpreted in the context of an author's life, just like a linguistic utterance should be interpreted in the context of this language's overall usage, as dictated by its grammatical rules (88). The move from Herder's description of reading through empathy to Schleiermacher's grounding of hermeneutics in speech transforms, importantly, the exposure of the "original" as the ends of interpretation.

The New Testament is exemplary for the practice of the psychological part of hermeneutics in that it demands not only the broad consideration for the conditions that accompany the emergence of a new linguistic modality, but also in that it enables a tracing of how individual authors sought to express this new modality. The works of such writers as Luke or John demonstrate individual engagement with the Christian spirit, and supplies differential attempt to express the Christian principles in a new language that is "in the being," and that must overcome the Hebrew background that is the condition for its existence. But, additionally, the New Testament's division to books exemplifies how this new mode of thinking retains multiple

ventures—all of which reflect an author's personality, life circumstances and character.[222] Through their comparison to one another, the self-expression of the different authors of the New Testament sheds light on other authors' body of thought, and of the overall infrastructure that evoked the Christian spirit in its new linguistic and textual modality.[223]

By analogy to the comprehension of a linguistic utterance, which is always grasped by virtue of the underlying linguistic system, Schleiermacher proposes that a text should be understood as an utterance in the context of the author's biography, as he demonstrates with the aim of the New Testament's authors to convey a new message to humanity. The focus thus shifts from language per se, to language as an analogy for psychological understanding: a transition that is elicited through the preference of the New Testament as it expresses a new message to humanity that relies on former forms of thinking in order to develop a new religious ideal. Schleiermacher's emphasis thus swerves to the "psychological aspect" of interpretation, and language is reduced to the status of a metaphor. According to Richard Palmer, "hermeneutics becomes psychological, the art of determining or reconstructing a mental process, a process which is no longer seen as essentially linguistic at all."[224] The preference of the New Testament is engrained in its view as a historical testimony for a new mode of thinking: a higher form of human existence. The new mode of religious existence corresponds with the ultimate interpretive act, which aims at the tracing of the conditions for the emergence of a new mode of thinking. Thus, the interpretive act of the New Testament parallels its historical content: the reading of the New Testament puts into play one's cognitive and behavioral merits, which have been granted to humanity with the Church's acceptance of Christ's doctrine.

The transformation of empathy—a germane example for human merit—into a common-place "skill" emerged together with new literary genres.[225] Schleiermacher comments on hermeneutics explicates this shift in his promotion of hermeneutics as an interpersonal experience and conversational exchange.[226] Jeffrey Librett has offered a detailed account of the literary echoes

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[222] See for example, *Hermeneutik und Kritik*, 196-7.

[223] Dilthey, Leben Schleiermachers, zweiter Band in: *Wilhelm Diltehy: Gesammelte Schriften*, 770-1.

[224] Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston [Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 94. This is not to say that Schleiermacher presents grammatical hermeneutics as inferior to psychological hermeneutics; he presents the combination of the two as essential to the interpretive act. The point is, rather, that a linguistic apprehension of a text does not seek its literal understanding, but its understanding within the language as a functional system, a procedure that is then paralleled to the psychological understanding of the author.

[225] In her study of sentimental literature in eighteenth-century Britain and France, Lynn Festa has argued that sentimental tropes, "govern the movement of affect not just between different kinds of individuals but between different kinds of individualisms. In eighteenth-century texts, feeling as much as reason designates who has value and who does not" (*Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 4.

[226] According to Gadamer, empathy is inherent to the development of hermeneutics through Pietism and its endorsement of affect as a major stage of reading: "In thus taking cognizance of the affective modulation of all discourse (and especially preaching) lies the root of the 'psychological' interpretation founded by Schleiermacher

of the rupture between hermeneutics' empathic structure, and the concrete ramifications of making hermeneutics a shared cultural asset: the enforcement of practices and ideals that are reliant on a certain confession and that are presented as the grounds for human communication overall. Librett takes dialogical structure of hermeneutics as evoking the idea of equal exchange: "The proponents of hermeneutic dialogue […] assume that, through the symmetry of reciprocal exchange, power is harmonized with truth…"[227] Librett concludes that a more genuine intercultural exchange "requires not so much the emphatic defense, but rather, the radical transformative critique—the affirmation of the relentless self-interruption of dialogical rhetoric and of the notion of 'understanding' with which it is allied" (xviii). The hermeneutic conception of understanding as dialectic is in fact a normative portrayal of the power relations between the so-called interlocutors. The assumption that truth can be transmitted thus dispels hierarchies or power relations between the authors and their readers.

Disciplines of Interpretation

The nineteenth-century hermeneutic shift was contingent upon a radical transformation in theology: the rise of theology as a field of knowledge that has begun to be studied in non-Christian surrounding. Becoming a field of knowledge, theology was leaving the domain of metaphysical truth. This shift has brought about various new ways to study theological practices—such as critical examination of Scriptures —in a new setting whose relationship to religion was indirect. Theological interpretive practices were becoming formative for the perception of reality through a scientific outlook newly established.[228]

Schleiermacher's literary hermeneutics involves the combination of two, seemingly contradicting, contemporary tendencies: the period's engagement with various attempts to establish a system of education that relies on the universal human capacity to exercise reason (demonstrated, to name prominent examples, in the enterprises of Kant, Fichte and others), and the literary and philosophical endeavors of romanticism. Schleiermacher's interpretation theory grants every man's engagement with texts, maintaining one's individual and subjective engagement with texts. This method elicits the manifestation of reason that promotes the

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and ultimately of all theories of empathy." "Rhetoric and Hermeneutics" In: *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in our Time*, Walter Jost and Michael J. Hyde (eds.) (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 52.

[227] *The Rhetoric of Cultural Dialogue*, xvii.

[228] Thomas Howard presents the spread of Protestant ideals as formative for Germany's modern academic institutes and disciplines, whose rise he follows from the late eighteenth century and till the mid twentieth century. It is particularly the negotiation of knowledge as a form of "universal gift" that stands, according to Howard, in the core of Protestant influence on modern university education. Howard thus suggests to closely examine theology as engrained in Enlightenment historiography: "…because of its venerable pedigree in European culture, theological reflection and its locus in the social field provide an excellent barometer for mapping cultural change and continuity in the modern era, in so far as theological reflection seeks to come to grips with, understand, and/or resist modern realities." *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9.

religious presumptions that stand at its core: the Lutheran model of a direct, individual engagement with the text, and the romantic aspiration to do so through a subjective and passionate expression of the individual. Schleiermacher's reconciliation of both ideologies with the view of literary hermeneutics as the practice of reason is shown in his distinction between one's associations when encountering a text, and his or her detection of the author's intentions. Declaring the latter the goal of hermeneutics, Schleiermacher revoked the cultural importance of allegory, a main candidate for the romantic efforts, in his casting allegories as belonging to the second degree level of interpretation, together with associations. The Lutheran and romantic efforts continue to inform the hermeneutic object as equivalent to the Bible: the effort to decipher an author's intentions is charged with its parallel to the attempt to conceive God's original message. Hermeneutics has become an interpretive method that regained a new status as a neutral scholarly technique and a cultural praxis that can be taught.

Schleiermacher's standardization of textual interpretation as a human skill meets a certain irony, exactly due to its conception as a method effective for the apprehension of all texts. The theory's cultural significance evokes, de facto, its use in contexts that diverge from its original religious conceptualization—contexts whose appearance became more and more frequent with the rise of modernism and its expressions in literary works that subvert the truth claims of religious beliefs and practices.

Take for example Georg Büchner's novella *Lenz* that recounts the life-story of a late-eighteenth century poet and his disillusionment from a belief in his ecstatic, religious vocation (1835). The poet Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz, mentioned in the novella's title, was a companion of Goethe, and a known contributor to the Sturm und Drang Movement, who has suffered from a severe mental illness. The novella opens with a description of the poet's initial isolation in nature: a locus that is supposed to be fruitful for his poetic vocation. Yet, the distance from human company makes him embrace a messianic religious persona: a process that culminates with his disappointment and disillusionment. The novella's plot can thus serve to detect the transitions between several periods in German culture through its presentation of the shifting views of theology, which culminates in an antagonism toward religious practices. In particular, Lenz's disillusion may signal the move from the Sturm und Drang's eschatological aggrandizement of the lyric I to the position of the modernist speaker, which often embraces social estrangement and existential rupture. The detailed exposure of this speaker's inner experience—a presentation that provokes the reader's empathy, his or her hermeneutic affect—thus culminates in a moment where religious practices are claimed hazardous and destructive.

Lenz's attempt to enter an eschatological mode of being—one which is intended to enable the forming the artistic object—falls apart together with the collapse of the poet's system of faith. The peak moment of that failure occurs when Lenz posits himself in the place of Jesus, trying to cure a dying child in a New Testament-like episode. With the death of the child, Lenz's eschatological pretentions appear to have betrayed him, causing him to succumb to severe

depression. Following Lenz's disillusion from his messianic phantasy, the novella ends with a note regarding Lenz's stagnant afterlife *after* his intense emotional fluctuations:

> Am folgenden Morgen bei trübem regnerischem Wetter traf er in Straßburg ein. Er schien ganz vernünftig, sprach mit den Leuten; er tat Alles wie es die Andern taten, es war aber eine entsetzliche Leere in ihm, er fühlte keine Angst mehr, kein Verlangen; sein Dasein war ihm eine notwendige Last. – So lebte er hin.[229]

The ending refers to what lies beyond the novella—Lenz's life that is subsequent to the novella's fabula. The protagonist does not die at the end of the novella; he lives on—a movement, the continuity of which is marked with the preposition "hin." This is, however, death in life, as his movement in the world and his interaction with others reflect his inner void. This thematic point is enhanced by the novella's form—the autobiographic narrative ends with a semi-death of its main protagonist.

Viewing Lenz's life story as constitutive model for modernity, among others, due to its main protagonist's psychological exposure, signals the critique of religion as an attribute of realist prose. Whereas the idyll style of lyric is replaced with an anti-idyll description of human existence as a burden, the actualization of the narrative through the merging of the protagonist and the reader relies on hermeneutic conventions. While the religious promise and its eschatological pretention fail, the divinatory promise of reading persists through the climactic exposure of the protagonist's consciousness. Lenz's failure to put himself in the role of Jesus—the main protagonist in *his* reference text which is the New Testament—yields a constitutive autobiography of the modern individual, a protagonist with whom the novella's readers *can* identify as they put themselves in his shoes, in the mode of post-religious despair and in the position of an anti-religious Christ, whom God has forsaken, and with whose misery the readers identify in the climactic moment of divinatory readership.

Hermeneutics can thus be claimed to charge the post-religious being in the world with the revelatory affect that accompanies textual interpretation and which can albeit be describing a narrative inherently contradictory to faith. The play on hermeneutic form, affect and psychological conventions when announcing the failure of religious values is the characteristic of a germane nineteenth-century author who builds on the numb state of atheism or agnosticism that features the ending of *Lenz*: philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. The failure of eschatology leads to despair with the dispelling of the promise of faith. Nietzsche's philosophy features a prophetic style which reflects its appeal to human desires. This philosophy thus opens up the option of a "lively" post-religious existence. In that enterprise, Nietzsche focuses not on atheism, but rather, on the metaphysical insinuations of the existence of God as a concept, an existence that, by the mid nineteenth century, has fueled many human enterprises, including the notion of interpretive accomplishment. Reading Droste Hülshoff´s 1842 novella *Die Judenbuche*, I shall demonstrate

[229] *Lenz* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1998), 31.

how the period's literary works anticipate the tensions intertwined with the religious and moral backdrop of hermeneutic practices, and provoke a conflicted reception of their own reading through hermeneutic tools.

Hermeneutic Hindrance and Interpretive Fallacies

Friedrich Schleiermacher's "modern hermeneutics" shaped the tools not only for textual analysis, but also the perception of reality. Textual understanding has thus become an asset of an all-universal community of readers-persons: a transformation that largely built on Schleiermacher's description of readership as embodied in interpersonal communication. The modernization of hermeneutics became closely linked with the emergence of "pluralizing" interpretative approaches to literature. The period's advanced a transition from rhetoric to hermeneutics and established new positions of readers toward texts, which centered on the possibility of dialogic exchange of affective expressions.[230]

This section examines the anticipation and response of literary works to the modernization of hermeneutics. I contend that realist prose, in particular, evinces such a response by contesting the standing of the Bible as an epitome for textual comprehension. At the core of my argument is Droste Hülshoff´s crime novella *Die Judenbuche* (The Jewish Beech, or The Jew's Beech). The importance of the text has been attributed to its representation of a crime investigation, a genre that has since become constitutive to modern German literature and culture.[231] Detecting who committed the crime that stands in the center of the novella—the murder of the Jew Aaron—the reader of the novella participates in the prevalent reading process advocated by modern hermeneutics: deciphering the hidden meanings of the novella while engaging with the unsolvable mystery of the text, which keeps the identity of the murderer unclear.

Drawing on a manifold of contemporary approaches to secularism and its critique, I shall demonstrate that *The Jewish Beech* represents an intervention against the adoption of the Bible as a symbolic and universalistic source, specifically in the paradigm of literary hermeneutics. The novella depicts the moral disintegration of a society that stopped adhering to biblical law in its material, literal form: the text does this with its multiple references to the Bible as moral

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[230] Rüdiger Campe describes the first half of the eighteenth century as a transition period between rhetorical and hermeneutic cultures, and argues that Schleiermacher's general hermeneutics maintains the traces of the critique. of rhetorical tropes. *Affekt und Ausdruck: zur Umwandlung der literarischen Rede im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1990), 3-4.

[231] On the structure of the novella and its formation of a unique "crime narrative" through judgment, see Huge, Walter, "*Die Judenbuche* als Kriminalgeschichte. Das Problem von Erkenntnis und Urteil in Kriminalschema," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 99 (1980): 49-70. On the emerging popularity of crime literature in the years 1850-1880 and the correspondence of the genre with the period's Zeitgeist, see Jörg Schönert, "Literatur und Kriminalität. Probleme, Forschungsstand und die Konzeption des Kolloquiums," in *Literatur und Kriminalität: Die gesellschaftliche Erfahrung von Verbrechen und Strafverfolgung als Gegenstand des Erzählens. Deutschland, England und Frankreich, 1850-1880*, hrsg. von Jörg Schönert (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1983), 1-13.

ascendancy that lost its power. Second, the interpretive conundrum of the text with its fragmented narrative thread is crucially linked to the Bible, alluding to the cultural prominence of the Scriptures in establishing literary hermeneutics. The novella's comments on its own interpretation thus allude to the standing of biblical readings as an interpretive model. The Bible appears as an artifact whose moral and historical importance has been gradually deteriorated due to its symbolic use—among others, for the purpose of interpreting works of literature. An alert to the forgetting of the Bible's materiality emerges in the alarming moment of the reader's exposure to the Hebrew language, which appears in the midst of the novella in a Hebrew sentence that remains untranslated till the very last line of the text. Forewarning that the investigation cannot be completed, since interpretation or reading cannot take its course toward textual comprehension, the sentence signals a momentary collapse of literary hermeneutics via the reflection that it elicits on its history of emergence as an interpretive paradigm.

Thus, with its reflective stance on the history of secularized interpretation, the novella sheds light on the dependence of hermeneutics on the political infrastructure of Protestant Germany, a fact whose troubling consequences the novella signals through its depiction of Jews. Jews are an alarming presence in the story's infrastructure: with their command of Hebrew, they are agents that engrain in present-day society the ritual status of the Bible as a primitive, if yet enduring, cultural legacy. The reading of the Bible through the newly universalized Protestant interpretation theory has assumed "understanding" as a universal category of approaching the Bible (and subsequently any texts). Those functions of the Bible not properly aimed at its "deciphering": such as its use as an authoritative juridical reference book, or its use in worship, have consequently greatly declined. I shall thus propose to read the novella as an intervention with the political implications of modern hermeneutics, scrutinizing the text's alert against the stakes of the transformation of hermeneutics into a secular phenomenon: the suppression of the specificities of religious beliefs and the identities of religious believers.

Literary Hermeneutics: The Outset of the Symbolic Bible

Describing the origins of the "hermeneutic movement," Michael Forster has claimed that research has generally underestimated Herder's shaping of the term and overestimated Schleiermacher's contribution.[232] With consideration of the lineage of hermeneutic thinking, the affective identification with the authors—which was largely conceived in the late eighteenth century—became a broad cultural phenomenon through Protestant reading techniques prevalent

[232] Forster's alternative assessment posits Herder as the originator of most seminal notions of the hermeneutic tradition such as the ideal of putting oneself in an author's shoes. Herder's contribution already entailed, according to Forster, the psychological rapport with the author—attributes which are often taken as the major contribution of hermeneutics to modern theory of interpretation. *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3. See also his introduction to the collection *Herder: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Michael Forster (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), 2002, xviii.

during the early nineteenth century:[233] as the second half of the nineteenth century was approaching, hermeneutic thinking relied on a coherent tradition of thinkers, who shared consistent presumptions regarding the human aptitude for interpretation, the ideal of a holistic apprehension of texts, the notion of empathy to the authors, and the belief each text contains the keys for its interpretation. These presumptions have informed the view of the so-called historical sense which one should practice in the reading and translation of texts.[234] Political, social and cultural changes in the status of the Bible were underscored by the emergence of the Protestant hermeneutics as the conceptual pillar of the new movement of textual interpretation.

In its stance as a cultural phenomenon, Schleiermacher's contribution accelerated the shift from a philological approaches, with their demands of prior knowledge, to interpretation in its abstract form: an attempt to decipher not the literal (*buchstäblich*) meaning of a text, but rather its spirit.[235] With the writings of Herder and Schleiermacher, language as a system of referents became subject to idealization and abstraction. As noted by Leventhal: "The object of interpretation was […] not so much the book or discourse itself, but the ideas behind the discourse, or material that subtends the signs, the mental content behind the semiotic realization."[236] The Bible as a material object—with its ritual purposes and usages—thus had to be swapped for a new, symbolic role as a model for the reading of all texts.

Narratological Interventions

The onset of the nineteenth century signaled a culmination in the remodeling of the Bible as a collective cultural asset. The rise of modern hermeneutics was a prominent aspect of a late-Enlightenment reception of the Bible that was aware of how "the Reformation made the Protestant Bible the engine of political, religious, and imaginative life, an engine defended and cherished well into the nineteenth century."[237] By the time that Schleiermacher concluded his theory of reading as a paradigmatic the "Enlightenment Bible" has already become a universalistic cipher that is recognized as such. The Scriptures wore the form of a cultural

[233] See Wilhelm Dilthey, „Das hermeneutische System Schleiermachers in der Auseinandersetzung mit der älteren protestantischen Hermeneutik," in *Gesammelte Schriften, Zweiter Band: Leben Schleiermachers*, hrsg. von M. Redeker (Göttingen, 1966 [1860]).
[234] A notion which Schleiermacher explicates, for example, in his prologue and introduction to his translation of Plato. See *Platons Werke* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1984 [1817]), 3-38.
[235] On the role of Protestantism, and specifically Luther's translation of the Bible, in stimulating print culture with its new nationalistic resonances, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 41.
[236] Robert Scott Leventhal, *The Disciplines of Interpretation: Lessing, Herder, Schlegel and Hermeneutics in Germany, 1750-1800* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1994), 145.
[237] Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, 1.

commodity in the modern state, where one could amend it in accordance with one's "personalized" religious needs, ethnic background, national agenda, and cultural tastes.[238]

Appearing in 1842, the novella *The Jewish Beech* was thus written as the shift of Scriptures into a malleable artifact was gathering pace, and issuing forth institutional, disciplinary and aesthetic cultural tokens. The text's numerous allusions to the Bible, its citation of biblical scenes, verses, names and motifs signal just that. The multiple references to the Bible go cheek by jowl with the work's other predominant attribute: the convoluted and intriguing narrative form, intended to prolong the murder investigation at its center. With form and narration thus at the core of its innovations, the novella can be read as a commentary on the practices of interpretation. This is where its thematic preoccupations turn to reflect on its intertexual dialogue with the scripture. Examining the novella's multifaceted references to the Bible can shed light on the crime investigation formula as a critical commentary on interpretation theory, and the assumptions of the social and moral roles and implications of texts promoted by that form.

The novella's opening sets interpretation as an acutely social matter. This alert is received already in the motto that precedes the novella like its epigram: „Wo ist die Hand so zart, daß ohne Irren/ Sie sondern mag beschränkten Hirnes Wirren,/ So fest, daß ohne Zittern sie den Stein/ Mag schleudern auf ein arm verkümmert Sein? […] Laß ruhn den Stein – er trifft dein eignes Haupt!"[239] The motto utters the conviction, according to which no mere human can undertake judging a sinner. Interpretation without direct instruction and supervision, as one is soon to find out when learning about the village where the story is set, is hazardous in its determination of moral order. This blending of the epistemological and the moral—both encompassed in the concept of judgment—implies that for the task of violent punishment of a so-called sinner one needs to be free of confusion as well as moral flaws.

The village is introduced as the ultimate locus of crime and recklessness. It is like a "Fleck" (stain) on the map due to its provinciality, a metaphor that connects its isolation with the moral disorder it embodies, as it alludes to the "stains" on a murder's conscience.[240] In their geographic removal from state authority, the village's inhabitants become accustomed to ad hoc juridical norms, abandoning the letter of the law for a volatile juridical system that seems "practical" for their needs. Such is the background of the early life of Friedrich Mergel, the novella's protagonist and main suspect of the murder investigation that stands at its core. Losing his father at an early age, Mergel learns from his uncle Simon, his surrogate father, and his other companions the immediate benefits of petty crime. Mergel's moral deterioration reaches its peak,

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[238] According to Hans Frei, in his description of the modernization of Protestant biblical reading, "hermeneutics [was] clearly on its way toward a notion of explicative interpretation in which a biblical narrative makes sense in accordance with its author's intention and (before long) the culture he exemplifies." *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: a Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*, 91.

[239] *Annette von Droste-Hülshoff: Sämtliche Werke in zwei Bänden*. Band 1, hrsg. von Bodo Plactha and Winfried Woesler (München: Suhrkamp / Insel, 1973), 483.

[240] Ibid.

when it is hinted that he was involved in a murder of a fellow villager, Brandis, an incident that precedes the killing of Aaron.

The moral chaos in the village manifests itself in ferocious power struggles over control of the woods. The acceptance of "misdemeanors" as a life routine reaches its apex with two murders: those of the villager Brandis (killed by his business rivals) and of the Jew Aaron, whose dead body is found underneath the beech tree that gives the novella its name. The identity of the murderer remains unknown, with a certain moment of reconciliation afforded only at the novella's end, as Mergel, who escaped the village after the murder, returns to it in old age and hangs himself on a tree, an act the villagers interpret as a sign of the unbearable guilt of a murderer.

But the novella also supplies blunt hints about how to construe Aaron's murder differently. The villagers receive a letter that sheds new light on their investigation, as it informs them that a Jewish convent dweller in a different region confessed to killing a fellow Jew named Aaron. As he killed himself soon after his admission, the emergence of a new suspect never matures into a real finding in the investigation. The letter includes a suggestive assertion about the nature of interpretation, as the extraneous judge accompanies his message with the French expression "the truth sometimes rather lacks verisimilitude."[241] This sentence has evoked in scholarship the view that Friedrich should not be regarded as the murderer, precisely because he seems to be the most obvious suspect.[242]

As the novella unfolds, hints regarding the identity of Aaron's murderer pose larger exegetical enigmas. Interpreting the murder case is emblematic of the process of reading the novella (i.e, the crime story) as a whole. But several of the characteristics of the text reveal this effort as impossible, or rather, as an endeavor whose accomplishment could not be certain. The novella's narratological features include a focalization that becomes fragmented and obscure whenever a climactic moment, e.g. a murder, is forthcoming. "(Mis)reading" the murder investigation, and consequently, letting the murder go unpunished, would highlight the moral fallacies of the village. The fragmented storyline allows the readers to walk in the shoes of incompetent detectors, as their knowledge of the events exceeds only at times that of the lead investigators among the protagonists. The ironic complication that derives from that difficulty is that the readers share the villagers' interpretive incompetency, as they characterize, or "judge," the villagers as incompetent investigators (the murderer of Aaron is never caught).

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[241] »Le vrai n'est pas toujours vraisemblable« (519).

[242] Mecklenburn adheres to this position, as he argues that the reception of the novella was largely erroneous, in that most of its readers assumed Mergel as the obvious murderer of Aaron. *Der Fall Judenbuche: Revision eines Fehlurteils* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag , 2008). Mergel's suicide is the novella's foremost dramatic moment, not only because it potentially solves the enigma of Aaron's murder, but also due to its cryptic nature: reading the end of the novella as a moment of resolution presents the Jewish community as capable of avenging the death of its member.

This paralysis of judgment thus appears as the intrinsic state of the villagers. The investigators ignore the clear involvement of Friedrich in the murder of Brandis, allowing him to elude investigation of what went on in the woods. The ineptitude of the officials sees the two main suspects in Aaron's murder killing themselves before they are investigated appropriately; Friedrich manages to escape immediately after Aaron's murder, and is not found though his bed is still warm when the villagers seek him at his home. To that one can add the villagers' "bad memory" and imperceptivity, which are evident when Friedrich returns to the village and manages to "pass" as his former companion Johannes, a man completely different from him in character. This establishes the villagers as passive "readers" who cannot, or would not, see the details the way they are, characteristic of a culture of readers opting for an interpretation of the spirit over the detection of concrete details.

The exception to the moral and cognitive paralysis holding sway over the village is embodied in the novella by the phantasmagoric presence of Jews. In the aftermath of Aaron's murder, the village's Jews gather and buy the beech tree underneath which his body was found. After this, the rabbis engrave the tree with a Hebrew script. The cryptic message is not translated until the very last lines of the novella; the text's last scene, which finds Mergel hanging from the tree, reveals it to say "When you approach this place, I shall do to you what you have done to me."[243]

Left untranslated till the novella's very last line, the writing signifies certain "higher meanings" embodied in the biblical word, a function that highlights the inability of the implied reader to understand the storyline and, consequently, decipher the murder mystery. Insofar as the fallacy is a direct consequence of this implied reader's inability to grasp the biblical language, the novella confronts her or him with the allegedly hazardous outcome of *losing* concrete connection with the moral law: the eye for an eye principle. The interpretive collapse claims religious positions—and namely, the striving for an abstraction of the word of the Bible—as bearing alarming influence on textual comprehension. It thus brings in the Bible, in its concrete religious position as a book of laws, to the process of interpreting a secular text. The interpretative collapse of the secular text intersects with the alarming reminder of the incomprehension of Scriptures .

By comparison, the Jews' command of Hebrew parallels their—exceptional in the village's setting—strict adherence to biblical law. Reminding one such accounts as Hegel's view on Judaism in the above-mentioned essay, this rigor stands out in view of the novella's Christian figures who tinker with the law for gain. The story is in many respects a *Bildungsroman,* following Friedrich who learns to avoid rules and evident restrictions, through the instruction of his mother and, primarily, his uncle. The latter's disdain for law prominently emerges when he teaches Friedrich—who is about to go to confession, undoubtedly in order to cleanse his conscience from guilt for Brandis' death—a moral lesson. Simon makes sure to inculcate him

[243] P. 518 (my translation).

not only in his own interpretation of a key biblical commandment, but also, consequently, a more general lesson in forgetting script:

> »Friedrich, wohin?« flüsterte der Alte. – »Ohm, seid Ihr's? Ich will beichten gehen.« – »Das dacht' ich mir; geh in Gottes Namen, aber beichte wie ein guter Christ.« – »Das will ich,« sagte Friedrich. – »Denk an die zehn Gebote: du sollst kein Zeugnis ablegen gegen deinen Nächsten.« – »Kein falsches!« – »Nein, gar keines; du bist schlecht unterrichtet; wer einen andern in der Beichte anklagt, der empfängt das Sakrament unwürdig.«[244]

Simon's order demonstrates the moral deterioration that oral transition of law leads to—the corruption of script through the subjective and egoistical alteration of its content. Oral practice and instruction of law allow one to amend the law according to one's momentary intentions and needs, setting the ground for moral disorder. Yet the appearance of Hebrew script in the midst of the reading of the book signifies not the idealization of the Jewish community in comparison to the Christian figures, but rather its threatening presence, symbolic of the ability to sustain a viable system of retribution. Thus the representation of Hebrew in the novella highlights its existence as a living language—one that is suitable for the forming of new utterances with which the Jews in the novella respond to changing circumstances, and most prevalently, to violence against their community.

Similar to contemporary texts, the novella distinguishes between two parts of the Bible—the Old Testament of the Jews, and the New Testament of Christians. In subscribing to the partition, the novella, the large majority of its readers have argued, presents the Jewish juridical system as a primitive system of cruel retribution. Following Aaron's murder, two different verses, from the New Testament and the Old Testament, are featured, reflecting respective affiliations:

> Der Gutsherr stand am Fenster und sah besorgt ins Dunkle […] »Gretchen, sieh noch einmal nach, gieß es lieber ganz aus! – Kommt, wir wollen das Evangelium Johannis beten.« Alles kniete nieder und die Hausfrau begann: »Im Anfang war das Wort und das Wort war bei Gott und Gott war das Wort.« Ein furchtbarer Donnerschlag. Alle fuhren zusammen; dann furchtbares Geschrei und Getümmel die Treppe heran. – »Um Gottes willen! Brennt es?« rief Frau von S. und sank mit dem Gesichte auf den Stuhl. Die Türe ward aufgerissen und herein stürzte die Frau des Juden Aaron, bleich wie der Tod, das Haar wild um den Kopf, von Regen triefend. Sie warf sich vor dem Gutsherrn auf die Knie. »Gerechtigkeit!« rief sie, »Gerechtigkeit! Mein Mann ist erschlagen!« und sank ohnmächtig zusammen.[245]

With the report on the finding of Aaron after his murder, the novella depicts a transition from the New Testament—brought here with the depiction of God as elevated and merciful, as it is described in the Gospel of John, to the description of God in the Old Testament, where he

[244] P. 508.
[245] P. 514.

appears, according to the novella, as a vengeful and wrathful deity. The allusion to the Christian credo is, importantly, a statement about the sublime nature of God's word—a supreme and privileged status encompassed in the Scripture. This approach is contrasted to the frantic demand posed by a Jewish woman, Aaron's wife, who presents in her plea for Old Testament justice the Jewish attitude to the Bible with the bloodthirsty, and yet, effective, adherence to talion law—the "eye for an eye" principle: "ihre übergroße Spannung hatte nachgelassen und sie schien jetzt halb verwirrt oder vielmehr stumpfsinnig. – »Aug' um Auge, Zahn um Zahn!« dies waren die einzigen Worte, die sie zuweilen hervorstieß."[246] The Jewish adherence to the "eye for an eye" principle is reflected in their portrayal as a people preoccupied with materiality. Jews in the novella are merchants, and most of them make a living out of the despised practice of money lending. As such, they seem to have inside knowledge of "exchange value" in its primitive materialization.

The novella thus posits the Jewish juridical norm of retribution as morally inferior, yet better suited to the violent environment of the village. In a world that corrupts script, where law is subject to individual impulses, the Jews are able to sustain their communal justice system with their adherence to written law, if still in its primeval form. The tree motif that repeats through the novella conveys the differences between these two juridical systems. The Jews—who are corporally hurt, the same way that trees are damaged throughout the text—avenge their assault through the casting of the beech tree.

Konrad Schaum has argued that the self-sacrifice of the alleged sinner in the novella embodies Dante's principle of the *Contrapasso*.[247] This notion embodies the conviction that sinners shall be punished "by a process either resembling or contrasting with the sin itself,"[248] a principle which is complicated in the novella through the recurrent motif of wood that is entangled with this idea of moral punishment. In the seventh canto of the Inferno, the narrator meets suicides who were turned into trees, and who can utter their thoughts only through the breaking of their branches. The suicides are punished, as dictated by the *Contrapasso* principle, in accordance to their sin of violence against the self: they separated the soul and the body that God had put together, and therefore lose their body, turning into static objects. Violence toward the suicides, via the breaking of brunches, further injures their deformed body, granting their souls with certain relief by allowing them to put their pain in words. Dante Alighieri's son Payetro de Dante was the first critic to interpret this picture as a parody of a well-known religious image: that of Judas Iscariot, whose unbearable guilt leads him to suicide through hanging himself from a tree. The description of the suicides' souls, according to which they are "hanged" on the tree forever, appears as the basis for such interpretation.

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[246] Ibid.

[247] *Ironie und Ethik in Annette von Droste-Hülshoffs Judenbuche* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2004), 188.

[248] Mark Musa, "commentary notes," *The Divine Comedy. Volume 1: Inferno* (Penguin Classics: NYC, 1984), 37-8.

The resonance of this scene from Dante in the novella is telling: in both, the tree embodies the retribution for violence, while at the same time also inciting it: the breaking of twigs in Dante, or the stealing of wood, which leads to further murders in *The Jewish Beech*. Both texts signify the ultimate union of man and tree through the suicide trope. Several readers of the novella describe Friedrich as Simon's metaphorical son, and suggest that Friedrich resembles Simon's biblical son, Judas.[249] Thus, the novella shares with the Bible the representation of the union of man and tree as self-requital. Most important to the current discussion is that both texts embed within wood imagery the idea of *Contrapasso*: the principle that sinners' fate is determined by their inner feelings and consciousness, as reflection of the sins they have committed. The allusion to Dante establishes the expectation that moral corruption is to be met in the form of narrative, an anticipation that the novella, with the continual sense of narrative fragmentation and lack of reconciliation, does not fulfill. Whereas in the *Inferno*, suicide is punished through the *Contrapasso* principle, the modern Christian surrounding described in the novella does not bring about the resolution of evil-doing, but rather its endurance: the sinful act of self-violence is what ends the novella. In a society of subjects who ignore written law, and, similarly, the concrete evidence of crime, script becomes the embodiment of the forgotten "Jewish" law ("an eye for an eye") and the cryptic recollection of religious punishment that the community fails to enforce.

The Jewish presence—embodied in the Hebrew script that is engraved on the beech—is a reminder of the corporality that follows from an adherence to the Bible's word in its basic and literal sense: the Hebrew script emblematizes this corporal connection to law. Thus, its appearance in the novella echoes—very critically—the symbolic function of the Bible in the constitution of literary hermeneutics. Following the interpretive fallacies of the villagers would suggest that the novella's allusions to interpretation tell the story of how literary reading adopted fallacious perception of the Bible. Commenting on the Bible's moral status that is forgotten, and on textual interpretation as inconclusive, the novella interferences with religious presumptions conceived of as universal in the nineteenth century—destabilizing their underlying reading practices.

Im(morality) and the Hermeneutic Rupture

The novella's narrative encompasses several parameters that may make it seem "obscure" or indecipherable. The text is narrated throughout by an intra-diegetic narrator, who appears as present in the various events, but whose unreliability sparks doubts and curiosity regarding the reported events. That impression derives from the impersonalization of the narrator, who is not identified by name, nor presented as one of the characters. Yet the act of narration does not seem to accord with a major characteristic of such a narrator: in the case of *The Jewish Beech*, the

[249] See Gray who cites Rölleke, and Fricke in that regard. "Red Herrings and Blue Smocks: Ecological Destruction, Commercialism, and Anti-Semitism in Annette von Droste-Hülshoff's 'Die Judenbuche'," *German Studies Review*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2003): 515-42, 533.

storyteller does not seem to be omniscient. Events in the story "should have appeared," tells the narrator, using such expressions as "heißt es," "man meinte," "es soll dass," etc.; thus the narration bases itself on rumors, or half-truths, instead of on concrete evidence. The use of the subjunctive form "Sei" enhances this impression. The narrator's omnipresence is also questioned by the impression that his or her knowledge of the occurrences, their willingness to share it, or both—are lacking.

The novella thus suggests that the riddle may be solved, offering multiple "hints" regarding the investigation, while at the same time provoking the opposite impression—the feeling that the mystery may never be resolved. That impression arises from the comparison between the two murder cases. When murder is about to take place, narration becomes fragmented and inconclusive; in both cases it is, nonetheless, implied that Mergel is connected to the crime. The resolution of the first murder case comes, accordingly, not through description of the occurrence of the murder: descriptions of reality too often appear flawed. The murder case is solved by the inhabitants of the village, so it seems, again as a cause of one's inability to decipher reality. Rather, the case is explained through the exposé of a fact: the understanding of Friedrich that his uncle Simon is involved in the crime. Also in the case of Aaron's murder, one cannot count on the dispelling of the mystery.

Readings of *The Jewish Beech* have delved into its reflective albeit inconclusive statements on whether the interpretative enigma lying at its core can be resolved by its readers. William Donhaue categorizes two schools of readers of the novella in that respect, noting that "[o]ne school holds that "undecidability" is itself the point; another is bent on teaching us the novella so that we recognize Friedrich as the perpetrator hanging in the beech tree at the story's conclusion."[250] Reading the novella as a meta-literary statement on mechanics of reading highlights its indeterminacy; however, instead of enforcing the choice between a reading that sees the reader as capable of deciphering the "mystery" and an opposite one that alerts against the reader's "epistemological hubris" (Donhaue's phrasing),[251] reading the novella as a meta-critic of interpretation points out that at its core one finds the unfeasibility of arbitrating between any given binarity. In other words, the novella's "undecidability" is embodied precisely in the inability to determine whether its narrative thread is undecidable. or not: whether the readers are going to find out that their interpretation was right or wrong, or, rather, never find out whether their reading is approved or rejected. According to that view, the text does not put in its center the alert against epistemological hubris, but rather, the inability to know whether individual judgment will ever be shown to go astray due to such erroneous pretension.

The novella can thus be read as an inquiry into the role of interpretation as an epicenter of human society. This is a move from the epistemological to the social function of texts and their

[250] "'Ist er kein Jude, so verdiente er einer zu sein': Droste-Hülshoff's *Die Judenbuche* and Religious Anti-Semitism," *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No. 1 (1999): 44-73, 44.
[251] Ibid, 66.

interpretation: when interpretation plays a role in concrete life circumstances and juridical cases it may become a destructive force. The text alludes to metaphysical uncertainty (the inability to know whether human judgment is ever going to be determined as true or false) as leading to the collapse of juridical judgment as stabilizing social force: a world that allows interpretation to determine the conditions for communal life lacks objective moral standards and subsequent societal laws.

This metaphysical allusion is the unique manner in which the novella dispels the expectation raised both by its realistic character, and the tropes of crime literature, namely that the investigation will be solved. The moment biblical law is revealed in its corporality, with the Jewish ritual, is also where the investigation/interpretation of the readers comes to a halt, and can proceed no further. The appearance of the Hebrew script shakes the most prevalent principle of literary hermeneutics: the assumption that we should read all texts in the same way we read the Bible. The Hebrew letter reminds one of the fact that there is no one "we," a collectivity that reads the Bible in the same way, and that hence, literary interpretation has been established upon a universalistic approach to reading, which privileges individual interpretation and regards it as a collective capacity. With its converging comments on the forgotten moral roles of Bible and on textual interpretation the novella makes a meta-poetic statement on how reading became a collective practice, which has been "secularized" only to the extent that its Protestant presumptions have been taken as universal. The importance of the crime literature genre in German modernism is thus entangled with modes where (in)comprehension is foregrounded, and reading is exposed as a practice that is realized differently in different cultures, ethnic groups, and religious communities and whose presentation as neutral has contingent religious history of. Considering the multiple appearances of Hebrew in the hermeneutic tradition—its transformation from a concrete language into an ideal trope—may add further insights into these meta-poetic inferences of *The Jewish Beech*.

Reminiscences of the Hebrew Obscure

The frequent appearances of the Hebrew language in the dialectics between such thinkers as Hamann, Herder, Mendelssohn and Schleiermacher was construed, by the mid nineteenth century, as a transformation of the biblical language, with its vocabulary and writing system, into a seminal cultural trope. The idealization of Hebrew can be described as a means of the new collective "understanding" of the Bible—emerging as a new collective asset of all citizens of the modern state regardless of the particular religious identities of these citizens. Turning Hebrew into a trope is a means of forgetting the inability to understand a text whose circulation is contingent upon a group identity—a notable possibility in regard to the Hebrew Bible. Since the birth of hermeneutics, the Hebrew language has been charged with symbolic meanings, losing to a large extent its concrete linguistic importance.

In his reflections on the modern state, Asad provides important insights into the cultural legacy of Protestantism in establishing itself as a main influence on religious institutions. A new reading of Scriptures was instrumental in promoting empathy, the ability to penetrate an author's mental and emotional state. Asad's refers to Herder's praising of the Old Testament aesthetics posit the hermeneutic turn as a crucial moment. The idealization of Hebrew poetry in its view as interpersonal means of communication grounded the reading of the Bible as a global artifact:

> Not only was it conceded that prophets and apostles were not superhuman, they were even credited with an awareness of their personal inadequacy as channels of revelation. In the romantic conception of the poet, the tension between authentic inspiration and human weakness allowed for moments of subjective illusion—and thus accounted for evidence of exaggeration and insufficiency […] What mattered was not the authenticity of facts about the past but the power of the spiritual idea they sought to convey as gifted humans.[252]

According to Asad, the Romantic view of biblical Hebrew poetry shaped the reconsideration of the Scriptures as an artifact stripped of its divine status and historical role in revelation. The Hebrew language was thus central to the modern hermeneutic turn in its debut: its merit, it was for the first time argued, lies in that it does not have to be understood in its materiality or accepted as an artifact of divine revelation to elicit the understanding of Scriptures as the artifact of human weakness and drives: affective exchange between authors–prophets and readers–listeners sets the new merits of biblical reading.

As I described in chapter one performative methods of biblical interpretation such as that of Georg Hamann have largely contributed to the notion of the Bible as a superior; perfomative reading praises the Bible as a catalyst of affective exchange. The role of affect in Hamann's theory of reading recurs in his own documentation of his own first revelatory encounter with the Bible—during his stay in London—expressing his recognition of "Gott ein Schriftsteller!"[253] Hamann views the Bible not as a divine object that is free from errors, but as a "human" transmission of the divine word, where errors, fragments and gaps create moments of incomprehension.[254] The reading of the Bible thus necessitates a revelatory mode, where the reader comes to term with the limits of the human fallacy of understanding the script. Hamann evokes the reader's emotional standing using the allegory of Job's misery as he faces his inability to comprehend the divine intentions. Job's dismay at his limited comprehension of the

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[252] *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, 45.

[253] *Londoner Schriften* (Muenchen: Beck, 1993), 59.

[254] Schumacher presents Hamann's aesthetic theory as eliciting a process of stimulation whose center is the Bible and specifically the Old Testament, making thereby a significant appearance in what he depicts as the history of incomprehensibility in interpretation theory. Important to my current reading of literary work of realism is Schumacher's presentation of Hamann as commencing a linage of textual obscurity that reaches its climax in modernist literature. *Die Ironie der Unverständlichkeit: Johann Georg Hamann, Friedrich Schlegel, Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man*, 102-34.

divine references the "humanness" of the readers who face the Scriptures ' obscurity and seemingly fragmentary nature.[255] Hamann's often perplexing use of biblical allegories demonstrates yet another function of texts which builds on readers' affects: Hamann's frequent use of humor and anecdote drives his own readers to newly conceptualize their stance as humans.[256]

In the theological exchanges and debates on how to read the Bible, the Hebrew language often elicited the development of hermeneutic thinking as an interpersonal skill: be it through a notion of understanding the Hebrew language as a linear and productive effort (in Herder) or through the view of Hebrew as a catalyst of a revelatory reading process (in Hamann). At the same time that Hebrew promotes these notions of textual comprehension—and grounds them in an all-human notion of affect—, the frequency of the appearances of Hebrew in the Enlightenment exposes the tensions at the core of the effort to constitute the Bible as an epitome for textual comprehension. The language's broad appearance negotiates the fact that different readers, namely, Jewish readers, have a different attachment to the biblical language, an access that goes beyond their allotted role as human-citizens in the interpretive community of the modern state.

The Return of the Repressed Bible

The obscurity of Hebrew was not only an outcome but also a precondition for the emergence of modern hermeneutics as a collective practice in Germany's republic of letters. The recollection of the status of the Bible as a ritual object, whose "word" marks the beginning of moral thought, and as such, cannot be amended, represents in the novella the alternative to subjective interpretation—which the text identifies as the token of the hermeneutic movement. Reading practices as they are reflected in the Jewish presence in the novella, and primarily in the appearance of Hebrew script, signal a move from the *Buche* to the *Buch*: Jews' concrete connection to the law, shown through the emblem of the Hebrew utterance, is a threatening presence in a world of abstract hermeneutic order.

The Jewish Beech alerts to the threatening return of the "repressed Bible," which it depicts as the outcome of a Christian world that has forgotten the concrete relation with the Scriptures and written law. One can take, I have suggested, the ambiguous manner in which the novella is told to illustrate the metaphysical confusion of such a world. The co-existence of affirmation and rejection of epistemological judgment results in moral disorder and in the loss of the punitive conventions. Thus, the novella's multiple thematic allusions to the Bible merge with its form to

[255] "Aesthetica in Nuce," in *Schriften 1758-1763*, 197.
[256] On this function of humor in Hamann's texts see Julia Goesser Assiaiante, *Body Language: Corporeality, Subjectivity and Language in Johann Georg Hamann* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 83.

establish a meta-poetic stance toward interpretation, a stance which references to biblical reading as the cultural epicenter of a reading culture.

The novella's "recollection" of Hebrew script represents a momentary instance of this commentary on interpretation, alluding to the history of the constitution of modern hermeneutics upon the idealization of the language of the Bible: an idealization that was the precondition for the use of biblical reading as an interpretive model for all members of society—regardless of their ethnic and religious affiliation. The fact that the Jewish protagonists who engrave the Hebrew script on the beech tree master the ability to use the Bible to address present affairs is an alarming moment to the general audience of readers that the text imagines and addresses. When the language of the Bible is used as a living language, one is invited to recall its extremely powerful and primordial roles in moral society. Disrupting interpretation, this moment reveals reading, in general, as a hazardous practice, exposing with the recollection of the Bible's materiality the history of constituting literary hermeneutics upon a symbolic Protestant vision of the Bible. The disturbing sense that one is left with at the end of the novella—the lack of resolution of the murder investigation—derives its threatening character from the anomaly of the Jewish figures. The Jews lack the ability to read texts in order to amend them in accordance with their own needs. As such, they actually hold, according to the novella's world view, the last resort for biblical law in a phantasmagoric, deteriorating society of interpreters.

Heinrich Heine's Practical Faith

The attempt to scrutinize of belonging to a certain religious culture—while pushing the boundaries of the notion of group "belonging"—is a frequent theme in the work of Heinrich Heine, an author whose contested approach to his Jewish heritage has become a token for his "modernity." Heine presentation of confessional affiliation as volatile if yet unavoidable construes, I contend, the meta-poetic notion of reading generated in his work. Communal belonging situates the readers in a certain textual culture: it yields the readers' affective attachment to texts; their expectations from texts; and their literacy in a certain language. Heine's description of the reading of the Hebrew Bible as the crucible for the shaping of readers' subjectivity thus intervenes with the notion of reading as a global, all-human skill.

In a recent study, Na'ama Rokem has argued that Heinrich Heine's works had a stimulating effect on Hebrew literature in their ability to represent a rupture immanent to modern Jewish identity. Heine's poetic enterprise negotiates the universalism of the world republic of letters through the conflict of literary genres in his work (ultimately culminating, according to Rokem, in his decision to write prose).[257] Heine's work stirred up Jewish and Zionist literary and cultural

[257] "Through the dilemmas of writing prose, as opposed to poetry, Heine addressed the seemingly unrelated quandary of his place as a Jew in the German literary public sphere in an age defined on the one hand by emancipation and on the other by […] the ever-growing limitation of the freedom and

production since the early the twentieth century. The engagement with Heine's writings was expressed in the debates on the translation of his texts into Modern Hebrew: translations that have then provoked polemics regarding the possibility of integrating Heine in the emerging canon of Zionist literature.[258] In the case of the Heine, the poet's persona functions as a cultural trope on its own right: his figure embraces the liminality of religious and national identities in modernity. Born to a family of assimilated Jews, Heine's exposure to Jewish holidays and cursory knowledge of Hebrew serve in many of his poetic works as a marker of his composite, irreconcilable identity. As a student at the University of Köln, Heine studies enthusiastically the principles of Romantic poetry. His interest in Romantic poetry has also guided his engagement with the "Verein Für Kultur und Wissenschaft der Juden" which Heine joined in 1822, serving as the organization's secretary before he was baptized to Lutheranism in 1825. Thus, the negotiation of modernity through meta-poetic questions is inseparable, in Heine's work, from the engagement with theology and the historical chronology of Jews as a political and ethnic minority, often portrayed in his writings as pathetic.[259]

Heine's fragment *The Rabbi of Bacharach* that was taken in secondary literature as an important manifestation of his views of Judaism and was often perceived as autobiographical in nature is exemplary to the volatile role of biblical nostalgia in Heine's work.[260] The novella tells the story of Rabbi Abraham and his wife Sara who flee their home due to an anti-Semitic conspiracy. Well respected in his city, Abraham leads a quiet life till the moment when, in the evening of Passover, two visitors bring a child's corpse to his house in order to provoke the impression of a ritual murder. Fleeing their persecutors along the Rhine,[261] the text unfolds another uncanny

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independence of the individual by the state. Heine was negotiating at the same time the opening of the German literary public sphere to his voice as a Jewish author and its closing to his voice as a social critic." *Prosaic Conditions: Heinrich Heine and the Spaces of Zionist Literature* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 20-21.

[258] Ibid, 55-76.

[259] Paul Peters makes the point that highly negative depictions of Jews in Heine's works are intertwined with the motif of shame in his oeuvre. Portrayals of Jews that appear almost anti-Semitic in nature thus correspond with the Romantic devise of self-parody of the poet. *Heinrich Heine "Dichterjude": die Geschichte einer Schmähung* (Frankfurt am Main: A. Hain, 1990), 15.

[260] Several of the commentators on the text took it to represent not so much Heine's knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish custom, but more so, his lack thereof. See Ludwig Rosenthal, *Heinrich Heine als Jude* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1973), 93; Jeffery L. Sammons, "Heine's Rabbi von Bacharach: The Unresolved Tensions," *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Jan., 1964): 32.

[261] This hazardous confusion construes the status of Heine's own text as a "historical novel." In his reading of the text, Gerschon Shaked has noted the presence of the Rhine, an important locus in German literature, as the path along which Abraham and Sara escape their home. Shaked notes the choice of juxtaposing the Rhine with biblical legends that involve water as discerning the liminal status of Jews in the German tradition. "»Der Rabbi von Bacharach« von Heine – Hier und heute," in Naomi Kaplansky, Elisheva Moatti, and Itta Shedletzky (eds.) *Heine in Jerusalem* (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 2006), 61. In comparison, Eliot Schreiber has described the novel as a "trenchant critique" of the Grimm ideology, as the text subverts the emphasis on folklorist purity with its multiple allusions to

correspondence of their life with a Genesis narrative. Sara recalls how Abraham married her in their youth, shortly before departing to Spain on a business trip, in a zealous attempt to emulate Jacob's life to Rebecca, whose love was realized after seven years of anticipation to reunite. Additional biblical narratives are evoked with the reading of the Passover's Haggadah as Abraham and Sara flee their hometown along the Rheine, encountering on their way other nomadic Jewish figures. The fragment then ends with Sara and Abraham's assimilation in a new Jewish community in a scene of reading the Torah in a synagogue.

I propose to examine the appearances of Jewish ritual in the text, in order to scrutinize the connection that the text draws between practices of biblical reading and reading in general. The novella centers on the portrayal of Jewish readership as inseparable from the community's connection to the Bible. The grounding of one's life in the Hebrew Bible appears as a fateful, cross-generational link. The task of interpreting the novella thus emerges as a volatile enterprise that is contradictory in nature to the text's portrayal of reading as inseparable from a material, deterministic attachment to the Hebrew Bible.

The plot of *The Rabbi of Bacharach* is inseparable from the major literary device in the text: its use of intertextuality. The repetitive references to biblical narratives—the protagonists often perform moments from the Abraham stories—strengthen the impression of textual coherence, an effect grounded in the text's positioning of parallel scenes.[262] The text draws multiple connections to the Genesis stories are multiple, which appear interacted as the plot unfolds. The numerous references to the Bible evoke expectations with regards to the novel's plot: expectations that are often dispelled.[263] Like the biblical Abraham, the protagonist is married to a beloved wife who has not borne children. Similar is also the focus of the story of the act of leaving one's home to go to a foreign land that is much identified with the patriarch's figure. Yet, the references to the Bible evoke surprising narratological turns. Like the biblical Abraham, the protagonist accepts strangers to his house with gracious hospitality at the debut of a seminal narrative on his life. But whereas in Genesis the guests bring Abraham the tidings on the birth of his son, these ones evoke a disastrous turn—through the body of a child they secretly hide in the house. The death of a child thus dissolves in the novel the expectation of a child's birth that construes the biblical Abraham's status as a patriarch.

In a moment of Mise-en-abîme, the protagonist demonstrates his awareness to the correspondence of his life with that of the biblical Abraham, as he hints that the visitors to their house may bring them a similar blessing of the birth of a son: "wie die drey Engel zu Abraham

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Jewish religious sources. "Tainted Sources: The Subversion of the Grimms' Ideology of the Folktale in Heinrich Heine's 'Der Rabbi von Bacharach'" *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (Winter, 2005), 23.

[262] Margaret A. Rose, "Ueber die strukturelle Einheit von Heines Fragement »Der Rabbi von Bacharach,« *Heine Jahrbuch*, Ebrhard Gelley (ed.) (Duesseldorf: Hoffmann und Campe, 1976), 44.

[263] Lion Feuchtwanger has written that the novel encompasses „im wesentlichen aus einer Reihe von Schilderungen, die lose, ohne eine zielsichere Handlung zu bilden, aneinander gereiht sind." *Heinrich Heines "Rabbi von Bacherach": eine kritische Studie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985), 108.

kommen, um ihm zu verkünden, daß ihm ein Sohn geboren werde von seiner Gattin Sara, welche unterdessen, weiblich pfiffig hinter der Zeltthüre steht um die Unterredung zu belauschen."[264] The story then continues to describe the happening in the room—Sara's eavesdropping to the strangers' word. The allusion to the biblical text leaves the difference between the modern and the biblical stories indistinct and finds the biblical Sara in the figure of modern Sara: "Dieser leise Wink goß dreifaches Roth über die Wangen der schönen Frau, sie schlug die Augen nieder, und sah dann wieder freundlich empor nach ihrem Manne, der singend fortfuhr im Vorlesen der wunderbaren Geschichte…"[265] The reaction of the biblical Sara to the tidings of Isaac's birth converges with that of the modern Sara. It is telling that the acknowledgment that the paragraph deals with the modern Sara only occurs with the notification that she follows her husband as he is reading "the wonderful story." This makes present the text's emphasis on the circulation of the Holy Scriptures , whose continuity in modernity is what made the presence of the biblical stories entangled with the life modern day Jews in the first place. An emphasis is given to the literary devices of Scriptures that elicit their continual reading, creating a parallel between the biblical stories' literary merits and these of the novel that employs the Bible to tell a "wonderful story" on its own right.

The text offers a lively documentation of Jewish ritual as the reading of the Bible evokes the text's vivid expression of human emotions. Such is the moment where Sara notices a dramatic transformation of her husband's behavior when reading the Hagaddah. Abraham's face freezes in terror, a moment after which he continues the reading with enhanced zeal and unusual jolliness:

> Derweilen nun die schöne Sara andächtig zuhörte, und ihren Mann beständig ansah, bemerkte sie wie plötzlich sein Antlitz in grausiger Verzerrung erstarrte, das Blut aus seinen Wangen und Lippen verschwand, und seine Augen wie Eiszapfen hervorglotzten; - aber fast im selben Augenblicke sah sie, wie seine Züge wieder die vorige Ruhe und Heiterkeit annahmen, wie seine Lippen und Wangen sich wieder röteten, seine Augen munter umherkreisten, ja, wie sogar eine ihm sonst ganz fremde tolle Laune sein ganzes Wesen ergriff. Die schöne Sara erschrak wie sie noch nie in ihrem Leben erschrocken war, und ein inneres Grauen stieg kältend in ihr auf, weniger wegen der Zeichen von starrem Entsetzen, die sie einen Moment lang im Gesichte ihres Mannes erblickt hatte, als wegen seiner jetzigen Fröhlichkeit, die allmählig in jauchzende Ausgelassenheit überging.[266]

This depiction of reading as a continuous ritual demonstrates that fear is not an occasional companion of Jewish customs; it is rather their immanent trait. Abraham's behavior while reading the Haggadah appears terrifying not so much because of its irregular nature, but rather, due to the normality of this situation's abnormality, as Abraham regains his jolliness "almost in

[264] Heinrich Heine Werke, zweiter Band (Frankfurt a. M: Insel Verlag, 1968), 619.
[265] ibid.
[266] 619-20.

that very moment." Abraham is accustomed in shifting rapidly between religious zeal, terror, and calmness (Ruhe). The volatility of Jewish existence—the precariousness of Jewish life—is thus epitomized in ritual activity, which bears both repetitiveness and circularity, as well as emotional peaks and turns (often provoked with the motif of killing that recurs in almost all of the text's citations of Jewish sources that are read in ritual). We can thus believe Nosey Stern, who invites Abraham and Sara to visit the synagogue upon their arrival at the new Jewish community—confessing that he has heard that "wonderful story" about the Sacrifice of Isaac over thirty time—as he shares with them the feeling that he has inherited untimely fear through his mother's blood.

The description of Abraham swift transformation while reading the Hagaddah refers to the moment where he discovered the threat of being accused with ritual murder. His fear thus inflicts his "real" ritual practice. But here the text shows that the binary oppositions "true" and "false" prove unproductive. While the accusation in a child's murder was false, this Passover libel was so common that it has become inseparable from the cultural associations attached to this Jewish holiday. Moreover, as the narrative goes ahead to describe the reading of the ten plagues, God's punishment to the Egyptians that is a climactic part of the Haggadah narrative, the readers may recall the culmination of this part with the tenth plague: the death of the firstborns, which echoes the accusation of Jews at rejoicing at the death of gentile children. Ritual and the historical reception of ritual thus converge, due to their common grounds as repetitious, societal practices grounded in "fictional history."

Jewish ritual appears to establish a community of readers who are inseparably connected to the Hebrew Bible as a supreme ascendancy that predetermines their life. A historical novel, the text reads, in a first glance, as an apologia on the life of Jews; yet, as the text unfolds, its composite relationship to the Hebrew Bible puts at its center the query of the Bible's deterministic influence on life, as explored through the Bible's narratological qualities. Jews hold an uncanny, fateful link to the Holy Scriptures which is perpetuated through their ritual reading and circulation of scriptures . *The Rabbi von Bacharach* thus presents the biblical text as a determining factor in monitoring and determining "real life": not only in that Jews cannot escape their communal attachment to the Scriptures , but also in that their treatment by non-Jews perpetuates the biblical stories on their persecution as a religious minority. In that sense, Jewish life circumstances are *indeed* predetermined by religious texts. With the employment of intertextuality with the Scriptures , the novel utilizes the Bible's narratological framework to claim for the Bible's deterministic influence on the historical status of religious communities. The Bible "proves" its status among religious communities as a text with a true claim to amend reality.

A major way in which the so-called literary text employs literary devices to evoke the Bible's ritual status is the novel's depictions of emotions. Ritual emerges as an evocative practice that stimulates human feelings—an effect that is achieved, first and foremost, through the communal reading of biblical texts. The detailed description of how emotions are shaped by the reading of religious texts holds an interesting parallel to the reading of the novel—the medium that arose

feelings with the readers through the detailed descriptions of the fictional readers' feelings. Questions on the ability of texts to stimulate their readers thus stress religious texts' claim to exceed fictional or literary status. Affect is thus detached from its role in the period's interpretive paradigm, where it was attached to the notion of universal empathy to others, as the novel evokes the Bible's affective valence. This power is achieved through the Scriptures ' claims about reality, which are engrained in the circulation of holy texts among distinct, traditionalist societies and under specific historical circumstances. With use of its own ability to effect readers' emotions, the novel shows the Bible to transgress its role as a model for establishing universal empathy, showing textual affect as contingent upon confessional and ethnic differences rather than their bridging. Reading the biblical narratives thus emerge not as a way of identifying oneself with the authors, but through a self-positioning as a chain in a tradition of readers that are themselves potential figures in the narrative they share. What is more, the affective impact of Heine's own text—with the various strata of identification it arises—stresses confessional difference as the germane factor that determines a reader's identification with a narrative.

Heine's occupation with Judaism is reminiscent of the concreteness of religious reading: with the ontological claims that it makes on the world, and with the text's evoking of reading as engrained in societal practices perpetuated through sacrament, i.e, through a separatist communal belonging. Reading perpetuates the fate of those who take part in the communal reading culture, as texts' affective power constitutes readers as members of the community. Sara's collapse at the end of the fragment demonstrates the rootedness of Jewish fate in sacramental reading:

> Die Ohnmacht der schönen Sara hatte aber eine ganz besondere Ursache. Es ist nämlich Gebrauch in der Synagoge, daß jemand, welsche einer großen Gefahr entronnen, nach der Verlesung der Gesetzabschnitte, oeffentlich hervortritt und der goettlichen Vorsicht fuer seine Rettung dankt. Als nun Rabbi Abraham zu solcher Danksagung unten in der Synagoge sich erhob, und die schöne Sara die Stimme ihres Mannes erkannte, merkte sie wie der Ton derselben allmaehlich in das truebe Gemurmel des Totengebetes ueberging, sie hoerte die Namen ihrer Lieben und Verwandten, und zwar begleitet von jenem segnenden Beiwort, das man den Verstorbenen erteilt: und die letzte Hoffung schwand aus der Seele der schönen Sara, und ihre Seele ward zerissen von der Gewißheit, daß ihre Lieben und Verwandte wirklich ermordet worden...[267]

Having to be saved from her own overflowing emotional reaction, Sara witnesses the ritual power of Jewish praying. The affective economy of Jewish ritual is overwhelming as it appear to prolong the Jews' victimized position, even as they thank God for their momentous "saving." Echoing the ever-lasting status of the Bible as an emotional stimulant, the novella evokes a "reading of a reading" whose meta-perspective does not dispel its own provoking of the reader's emotions. Thus, the sudden ending of the novel parallels Sara's detachment from the Synagogue's communal sphere and emotive surroundings through het somatic collapse in the

[267] 643-44.

moment of her fainting: "Von dem Schmerze dieses Bewußtseins wäre sie schier selber gestorben, hätte sich nicht eine wohltätige Ohnmacht ueber ihre Sinne ergossen."[268]

Conclusion

As hermeneutics became paradigmatic, the sense that literary texts encompass meanings that transcend their denotative features became a wide-spread conviction. The social impact of this transformation was not exclusive to the work of critics and the behavior of readers; it was also integral to how literary texts conceived their own anticipation and reception, and how they responded to them. Textuality has transitioned into a platform on which the practice of universal comprehension is performed, tested and measured. In Schleiermacher's hermeneutic project, the turn of religion into a matter of affect and interpersonal empathy require making religious into an internal matter, dispelling, thereby, the importance of other religious traditions, practices, and rituals.

In comparison to Hamann's emphasis on readers' efforts in understanding—and in fact, *in forming*—the written word, Herder's theory of interpretation stresses the accurate understanding of the linguistic stratum of the interpreted text. According to Herder, the correct understanding of language is an essential condition for the consequent levels of apprehending a text, such as the analysis of its aesthetic effect. Building on both approaches, Schleiermacher's hermeneutics exists not *despite* anti-analytic tendencies, but rather, as a paradigm that derives its power from the attempt to include both the rational (texts hold one meaning that could and should be grasped) and the so-called irrational (the readers undergo a self-stimulating process in effect creating this meaning).

The association between empathy and hermeneutics tells the story of how the religious backdrop for hermeneutics became inseparable from the movement's social and political ramifications—understood, as modernity reaches its later stages, as inherent to "civil conduct."[269] Schleiermacher's hermeneutics presents empathy as inseparable from communication and makes the Romantic perception of hermeneutic skills into an integral human quality. Feeling empathy, understanding one's interlocutor, analyzing one's thoughts in the context of one's life became synonymous with textual interpretation. Reading thus implied the acceptance of a new social treatise—with the specific theological ideology that lies at its core.

In his study of the Goethe's lyric poetry, David Wellbery has claimed that the poetry of young Goethe creates a new literary and idyllic model for lyric poetry, a transformation which happens within what he named "the Lyric phantasm." Wellbery argues that the important role of divination in hermeneutics theory is a main catalyst of the form of the lyric of Goethe's early

[268] 644.

[269] Josef Bleicher's *The Hermeneutic Imagination: Outline of a Positive Critique of Scientism and Sociology* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1982) depicts the hermeneutic movement's societal and scholarly impact, particularly in fostering a scientific approach to interpersonal relations.

lyric. This new form is thus an example for how the eminence of hermeneutics as a cultural phenomenon was reflected—and perpetuated—in works of literature:

> [*T*]*he authentic utterances of the lyric call forth a hermeneutic identification* such as we find developed in Romantic hermeneutic theory from Herder to Schleiermacher, the inventor and canonizer, respectively, of the concept of divination in its hermeneutic sense. Thus, the lyric appropriation of the idyll evidenced in the juxtaposed texts engenders an entirely new form of cultural communication. Textual processing unfolds no longer as the playing of a social game, but rather as the reactualization by the reader of a subjective mode of being articulated in the text.[270]

Wellbery's assertion is important to my examination in that it brings in to the discussion the many aspects the influence of hermeneutics had on the evolution of reader-identity from the late eighteenth century onwards. Hermeneutics does not only dictate the means of interpreting the text (i.e, the attempt to solicit meanings from it). It rather shapes the various positions a reader may have to a text and to his or her role as reader. Wellbery ascribes a major influence, on that respect, to divination. The term denotes the belief in inspiration as what enables the comprehension of the text's linguistic features (as in Herder) or, more specifically, that which enables the deciphering of the author's thoughts during his or her writing of the text (Schleiermacher's use of 'divination' in his account of the psychological aspect of interpretation). As literary texts came to anticipate their hermeneutic reception—which, in late Romanticism and the debut of realism, meant their understanding through a dialogic model of comprehension—they negotiated and challenged the theological backdrop of hermeneutics. References to the Bible evoke the presumptions behind literary interpretation—and primarily, hermeneutics' turn of the Bible into a global asset. Appropriating ritual, self-fashioning confessional difference, and unfolding biblical usages rival to the Scriptures ' abstraction, literary texts may be shown to challenge their conception through hermeneutic thinking and the religious globalization at its core. The continual references to biblical Hebrew and the Hebrew Bible as belonging to a Jewish religious minority thus resonate an alternative metaphysics which takes the text as its enabling center rather than adopting an outside, critical outlook on textual subject positions, narratives, and meanings.

A main step in the standardization of hermeneutics was Dilthey's scientific turn in defining the goals of textual interpretation. Dilthey turns to Schleiermacher in order to trace the beginning of modern hermeneutics in its paradigmatic form. It is namely the concept of uncovering the consciousness of the original authors which is transformed in Dilthey into a scientific realization that is to be grounded in textual evidence. The connection between one's cognitive capacities and psychology thus transforms the religious notion of the soul into a notion that maintains the singularity of human interpretation while engraining completely in this paradigm the

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[270] Wellbery, *The Specular Moment: Goethe's Early Lyric and the Beginnings of Romanticism*, 13 (body origins).

universalizing presumptions of Protestant interpretation.[271] As the twentieth century was approaching, hermeneutic teaching became contingent upon a historiography of interpretation. Dilthey, and Gadamer after him, opted to ground their contributions to interpretation in their accounts of precedent thinkers of hermeneutics; they thus negotiated the importance of such notions as divination to the hermeneutic episteme and presented spiritual particularity as ever more detached from interpretation. These enterprises deepened the rupture between hermeneutics' dialogical structure and the monologue of its religious ideology: the eradication of confessional difference as dictating alternative models for textual interpretation.

[271] An important example for Schleiermacher's theological assumptions, according to Dilthey, is his portrayal of Schleiermacher's approach to allegory. Allegory, Dilthey contends, was the enemy of modern hermeneutics and as such, it had to be eliminated from reading. Religious enthusiasts that aimed to find in the Bible hints of their individualistic spiritual experiences or echoes of their personal lives are expelled in order to propagate the notion that speech (Rede) has one meaning only (Sinn). *Leben Schleiermachers*, zweiter Band in: *Wilhelm Diltehy: Gesammelte Schriften*, 738. Eliminating allegory—which is a germane example for inner-Christian dynamics of ideological conflict—was essential to Schleiermacher's promoting of interpretation's rational grounds—and objective ends. This example is telling in that its ramifications in literary theory are evident till today shown in the exclusion of readers' associations from the scholarly and educational practices of interpreting literature while accepting connotations that texts "evoke" (with the view of connotations as universal).

Epilogue: Beyond Hermeneutic Thinking

Hermeneutic thinking has undergone an array of transformations in the twentieth century under the influence of such theoretical endeavors as those of the Frankfurt School, French structuralism, and Roland Barthes' formulation of the "death of an author," and of diverse strands in deconstructive reading, and the tenets of media theory as they constitute the senses in conjunction with the interpretive act.[272] The multiple commentaries on and references to the Hebrew Bible have thus served since the late Enlightenment as the laboratory in which "global humanity" has been consolidated. The Hebrew Bible marked the perception of humankind as a collective that shares historical origins, the right for national belonging, and the psychological and cognitive apparatus that enables the recognition of both.

Seminal authors in Protestant hermeneutics promoted the conception of the Scriptures ' sublime merits in the process that results from the process of reading the Scriptures . Reading holy texts thus emerged as an experience that is both part of the notion of the individual experience of biblical reading and is also a universal, "all-human" experience of reason and affect. This new view of the Bible held a reciprocally stimulating relationship to the emergence of new approaches to literary reading and to a general theory of aesthetic observation. The constitution of the Bible as a universal asset promoted the emergence of semiology, as the Bible can be used for semiotic explanations of reading that adhere to the notion of a universal human apparatus. The making of the Bible into a global asset was never a fait accompli, since the power of the Hebrew Bible's abstraction resided in its status as a marker of confessional difference. The phenomenon of "Hebrew reminiscences" has thus continually recalled the irreconcilability of confessional difference as entrenched in the modern reader's position. The negotiation of both functions of Hebrew reminiscences recurs, I would like to suggest in closing, in prominent theoretical and poetic commentaries on modern poetics and the philosophy of language. I argue that the universalistic presumptions of hermeneutic thinking are questioned and negotiated in modernist poetics and language philosophy; instances of the negotiation of hermeneutic presumption solicit the search for linguistic modes that are beyond the contours of hermeneutic thinking.

Walter Benjamin's 1916 essay "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" relates to Hamann and Herder's respective readings of Genesis and cites Hamann's description of the "original language" in order to establish the view of language as irreducible to its denotative quality. Written in cryptic style, Benjamin's essay concerns the attachment of words to world objects as a phenomenon that establishes man as an omnipotent being. The biblical narrative detailing the creation of the world through language is thus claimed to reflect the correlation

[272] Friedrich Kittler's *Aufschreibesysteme* provoked a critique of hermeneutic thinking's claim to universality and called attention to the diverse ways in which educational practices shape hermeneutic sensibilities. Various modes of listening, seeing, and speaking are honed through one's domestic surroundings, as well as in institutional education. The shifts occurring in these activities between 1800 and 1900 stressed the contingent fostering of hermeneutic sensibilities and their influence on reading.

between language's denotative quality and the human ability to name world objects. The essay develops notions central to Benjamin's later philosophy of language, in that it promotes an idea of language as encompassing two components: a certain ability to mediate world representations, which is accompanied by a self-referential gesture that points out the arbitrary and necessarily indirect connection between signifier and signified.[273]

The essay begins with the personification of all world objects—without distinguishing among them—that seek to mediate through language an essence that Benjamin defines as their inner core. Benjamin's theological intervention lies in his view of "the name" as transmitting the essence of objects and thereby exposing the divine quality of man:

> Sie besagt Das Mittel der Mitteilung ist das Wort, ihr Gegenstand die Sache, ihr Adressat ein Mensch. Dagegen kennt die andere kein Mittel, keinen Gegenstand und keinen Adressaten der Mitteilung. Sie besagt: *im Namen teilt das geistige Wesen des Menschen sich Gott mit*.[274]

Benjamin questions the idea that the realm of statements about God is an inappropriate object for critical thinking—that is, he questions the Kantian reasoning that places critical inquiry in the realm of human abilities. This theological transition lays the groundwork for Benjamin's systematized philosophy of language, which resists the reduction of language to an instrumental medium.

With his ability to name objects, man evokes the godly image that was given to him during his creation. He appears as "the master of nature" who transmits through words the quality of world objects in his surroundings:

> Der Inbegriff dieser Intensiven Totalität der Sprache als des geistigen Wesens des Menschen ist er Mensch ist der Nennende daran erkennen wir, daß aus ihm die reine Sprache spricht. Alle Natur, sofern sie sich mitteilt, teilt sich in der Sprache mit, also letzten Endes im Menschen. Darum ist er der Herr der Natur und kann die Dinge benennen. Nur durch das sprachliche Wesen der Dinge gelangt er aus sich selbst zu deren Erkenntnis—im Namen.[275]

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[273] See Winfried Menninghaus, *Schwellenkunde: Walter Benjamins Passage des Mythos* (Frankfurt am Main: Surhkamp, 1986), 7. Menninghaus claims that Benjamin juxtaposes the language philosophy of his Romantic precursors with an important element: a self-reflective structuralism that is centered in his distinction between the semiotic and the mystic characteristics of language which are equivalent to the "referential" and "poetic" functions of language (8). Benjamin recognizes this *Mittelbarkeit* (mediation) as a characteristic of human language (17). See also his *Walter Benjamins Theorie der Sprachmagie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1995).

[274] See Walter Benjamin, *Medienästhetische Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), 70. Sigrid Weigel has argued that the biblical act of naming functions in Benjamin's work as an "Urszene" that dictates his conception of the theological origins of language ("Auf der Schwelle von Schöpfung und Weltgericht," In *Profanes Leben. Walter Benjamins Dialektik der Säkularisierung*, Daniel Weidner ed., (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), 84)

[275] *Medienästhetische Schriften*, 70-71.

The myth of the *Ursprache* perpetuates the theological notion that man was made in God's image, which in turn ingrains this theological conviction in linguistic structures. Thus, with their unfolding of the creation stories, and specifically of man's emulation of God by naming the objects around him, the Scriptures contain a metaphysical awareness that is then inherent in many human languages:

> Gottes Schöpfung vollendet sich, indem die Dinge ihren Namen vom Menschen erhalten, aus dem im Namen die Sprache allein spricht. [...] In der Bezeichnung des Menschen als des Sprechenden (das ist aber z. B. nach der Bibel offenbar der Namen-Gebende: "wie der Mensch allerlei lebendige Tiere nennen würde, so sollten sie heißen") schließen viele Sprachen diese metaphysische Erkenntnis ein.[276]

With this reflection on the theological presumptions behind language use, Benjamin suggests that the myth *of* language becomes entrenched *in* language, for example in the belief in the speaking subject's ability to capture the essence of surrounding objects through the act of naming them. Making this move, Benjamin relies on Hamann's description of Hebrew to define his own philosophy of language. He thus reiterates Hamann's description that man's most prominent feature is his ability to name the objects around him. Many languages, Benjamin adds to this description, manifest a biblically-dependent metaphysical awareness through their positioning of man as *the* speaker.

Benjamin references Hamann's perception of Hebrew to explicate a major feature of language: the myth of the *Ursprache's* ability to capture the essence of human sensual output. The original language has had an immediate, visceral connection to world objects that captures this quality in its purity: "Hamann sagt: 'Alles, was der Mensch am Anfange hörte, mit Augen sah ... und seine Hände betasteten, war ... lebendiges Wort; denn Gott war das Wort. Mit diesem Worte im Mund und im Herzen war der Ursprung der Sprache so natürlich, so nahe und leicht, wie ein Kinderspiel.'"[277] Benjamin's essay ends with another reference to Hamann's biblical reading, as he determines that, "Alle höhere Sprache ist Übersetzung der niederen, bis in der letzten Klarheit sich das Wort Gottes entfaltet, das die Einheit dieser Sprachbewegung ist."[278] The idea of a language of origins which is fixed in the Bible evokes the notion of the aesthetic Bible. According to this notion, the Scriptures unfold truisms about the function of human language, while the Holy Scriptures provide historical evidence for the birth of language.

Biblical myth is thus prolonged in everyday linguistic structures (of many national languages). Biblical myth consequently has a performative role in signifying objects with names, an act facilitated by the *belief* that man perpetuates God's denotative ability, marking the role of

[276] Ibid, 71.
[277] Ibid, 76.
[278] Ibid.

Hebrew reminiscences in the early attempt to critique the modern elimination of the spiritual essence of language:

> Denn Gott hat die Dinge geschaffen, das schaffende Wort in ihnen ist der Keim des erkennenden Namens, wie Gott auch am Ende jedes Ding benannte, nachdem es geschaffen war. Aber offenbar ist diese Benennung nur der Ausdruck der Identität des schaffenden Wortes und des erkennenden Namens in Gott, nicht die vorhergenommene Lösung jener Aufgabe, die Gott ausdrücklich dem Menschen selbst zuschreibt: nämlich die Dinge zu benennen.[279]

Language of Creation and the Prophetic Poet

In April 1934, eleven years after his immigration to Israel, Gershom Scholem describes in a letter to Benjamin the disturbing confusion of time and place of German immigrants in Israel: "Zur Zeit befindet sich hier, soweit ich verstehe, hart an der Grenze des Irrsinns, Else Lasker-Schüler, die in jedes Land der Welt wohl besser paβt als in den wirklichen Orient."[280] Scholem captures the liminality of Lasker-Schüler's presence in Palestine, which received in her works the status of a fantasy land. Lasker-Schüler's relationship to the Hebrew language has drawn attention because of her refusal to translate her poetry into Hebrew, since her poems, as described by the prominent Hebrew poet Uri Zvi Greenberg, are already written in "Hebrew in German letter."[281]

Long before her actual stay in Israel, Lasker-Schüler had been fascinated by the "Holy Land": the land that had been the object of many of her phantasmic literary texts and paintings. Her 1937 novella *Das Hebräerland* depicts a turning point in her relationship to the land during the early years of her writing. While her visit to Israel at that time evoked her dismay at the troublesome political circumstances and hard living conditions, the novella unfolds an idealized, almost surrealist picture of the country. The text presents a journey to Palestine, where the poet who visits the land holds conversations with both Jews and Arabs. The account of a poet's visit to Israel presents the "Land of the Hebrews" as inhabited by celestial beings and landscapes. The Hebrew Bible calls for a transgression of fantasy and reality exactly in the moment in which the poet's attraction to the land is allegedly realized, when the narrator claims to visit it and see it with her own eyes.

The novella opens with an evocative statement: "Ganz Palästina ist eine Offenbarung!"; if the land is a revelation, then the poet who sets foot in the land is a prophetic figure who both encounters its spiritual mysteries and recounts them to her readers. In effect, the acts of naming

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[279] Ibid, 76-77.
[280] Letter from 11 April 1934. In *Walter Benjamin-Gershom Scholem Briefwechsel, 1933-1940* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1980), 133.
[281] Quoted in Ben-Chorin, "Elsa Lasker-Schüler und Israel," *Literatur und Kritik* 105: 291.

sites and landscapes reveals the narrator's gaze as equivalent to that of a creator: she notes a childhood scene in which she and her brother named a place in nature "Jerusalem," transforming the unmarked setting into the holy location. The journey in Israel enables the poetic recollection to function as a speech-act: it is the poetic account which creates reality. The process of writing about Israel is taking place, the narrator notes, "in the middle of the Bible." Travelling in Palestine, the poet evokes various childhood memories—mental pictures shaped in her mind while she, as a child, was reading about the Land in the Bible.

The text thus fosters what can be called an anti-hermeneutic approach in the same gesture that it recalls the ideological and cultural background of hermeneutic thinking: the idealizing perception of the Hebrew Bible (and the Romantic notions of poetic prophecy and nationalism entailed by this perception).The text attempts to create a similar associative effect for its readers—an effect close to the one the poet experienced as a child reading the Scriptures , the imagination of which submerges her in the biblical setting as an active agent:

> Man sollte sich bescheiden im Heiligen Lande, fürlieb nehmen mit den Dingen, die einen als Kind erfreuten. Wir befinden uns in Jerusalem, mitten in der Bibel [...] Wir reisten in das Bibelland, im lebendige Testament. Nicht etwa nur in seinem mächtigen Buche zu blättern, wie die Mehrzahl der Menschen es zu tun pflegt, schenkt der Dichter ihnen seine Verse...[282]

The poetic enterprise evinces the Bible's stimulating effect on one's memory; the narrator wishes to reproduce the same effect of evocative images through her own text. The Hebrew Bible is hence a reference text (the novella builds on it and enhances its power as a cultural object) at the same time that it is a model for the potential, suggestive function of the new text: a function that lessens the Bible's singular stature. The poet's journey in the Bible-land is a reproduction in German that builds on the sacredness of the Bible. This idealization of the Hebrew Bible reiterates the act of making the Bible into a global human asset through the act of forging it into a sublime artifact; but in contrast to Herder and Schleiermacher's legacies in hermeneutics, the text fosters the experience of one's personal encounter with the Bible as visceral and propagates the revelatory sense of the subjective encounter with texts.

Palestine thus emerges in the novella as a liminal locus, a space that derives its status from its role during world creation: "In Palästina gibt es keine Dämmerung. Also vom Ursprung der Welt her keinen Einbruch bleischwer in den lichten Tag. Ein göttlicher Beweis für die Erzheiligkeit Palästinas schon auf dem Plan der Schöpfung."[283] With its supernatural climate and geography, the Land of the Hebrews is a setting which, upon exploration, provides an inquiry into the world's metaphysics and the nature of God, knowledge that the poet negotiates in her

[282] *Das Hebräerland*, 17.
[283] Ibid, 31.

conversations with the inhabitants whose unique presence is explained through their attachment to Jewish sources:

> Ich frage die lieben Talmudschueler, ob sie mir wohl sagen könnten, wie alt Gott sei? Diese Frage, meinten sie einstimmig, möchte wohl selbst ihr großer Raw nicht zu beantworten wissen, aber ich möchte den Rabbiner Kook persönlich fragen oder—seine kleine zweijährige Enkelin Zipora, da Adoneu nicht nur der Älteste der Ältesten, auch der Jüngste der Jüngsten sei—nach Seinem eigenen Kundtun: "Ich Bin, Der Ich Sein Werde." Unaufhörlich umschwebt der Schmelz zukünftiger Ewigkeit den Herrn.[284]

Ancient Hebrew, on the other hand, does not distinguish among future, past or present, but rather between two modes of actions: a complete action and an incomplete action. The revival of the language in modern times necessitated the construction of three tenses (past, present, and future); in Modern Hebrew, the form אהיה is a future-tense conjugation of the verb "to be." Translating the verse as "I am who I will be" thus captures the form at the beginning of the verse in the ancient understanding of Hebrew while "reading" its second appearance as a Modern Hebrew utterance.[285]

Secondary literature on Lasker-Schüler's relationship to Judaism has traced references in the poet's work to the Kabbalah, the Talmud, and other traditional Jewish texts.[286] The poet's broad engagement with Hebrew as a unique language both alludes to and makes use of the long tradition of granting Hebrew the status of a self-reflective, supreme language, a dominant tradition in late-eighteenth century Germany. The appeal to this tradition may shed light on the poet's use of Hebrew to shutter in her descriptions of the boundaries between reality and imagination; her repetitious naming of Israel as a *Morgenland*; her interest in and emulation of the travel book genre; and, first and foremost, her adherence to the Hebrew language as a trope of world creation that comes into being again in the poet's work.

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[284] Ibid, 17.

[285] The use of Hebrew words in the novella subverts the perception of translation as mediating concepts between two languages. Several descriptions of the setting of Palestine in the novella are provided in Hebrew, such as *Melech* (12), *Chaluzim* (13), and *Emek* (13). These words appear at times to refer to unique or singular aspects of the reality of life in Israel. Hebrew, the narrator states, is the "ehrwürdige und ewigblühende Sprachgewächs des Gelobten Landes" (39)—a characterization that enhances the impression that she uses Hebrew in order to convey "the real essence" of the Land in her poetic account.

[286] Sabine Graf has argued that the novella exemplifies a main idea formulated by Abraham Abulafia, a medieval Kabbalah scholar who held that the Hebrew script is an eternal marker of God's creation of the world. Graf claims that the novella presents Israel as a place where landscapes materialize at the utterance of words by renouncing the perception of Hebrew as a language that captures the unique speech-act power of creation. The land is the embodiment of the Hebrew "Schrift," as its landscapes recall how world objects were first materialized to the sound of the divine words. This direct connection between a signifier and signified emerges due to the qualities which, according the Kabbalah, are unique to the Hebrew language. Hebrew is the language of creation, which the poet emulates through her own power as a creator of the landscapes through which she passes and which she names to her readers during her journey. See *Poetik des Transfers: "Das Hebräerland" von Else Lasker-Schüler*, 1. Aufl. ed. (Köln: Böhlau, 2009), 4-7.

The perception that Hebrew has maintained, throughout the course of history, its status as a "lebendige Schrift," a system of signification that is embedded in a dynamic approach to language, made Hebrew eminent in the Enlightenment discourse on semantics. Several characteristics of Hebrew, such as the close proximity of nouns to verbs and adverbs (due to the importance of stems in the language), were taken to form a language where motion is an inherent part of nouns. Having been described as poetry that is "nicht von hier und nicht von heute,"[287] Lasker-Schüler's work provokes disorientation through its conflicting markers of time and place, motifs from different periods, and archaistic-looking interests that date back to antiquity but that gain, at the same time, a surrealist reappearance. Like Benjamin's depiction of material objects transmitting their own spiritual essence, the Bible's reappearance reiterates the Protestant idealization of the "Hebrew origins," while yet displacing the universalization of the Old Testament in a contemporary context.

The poet's relationship to the Romantics should be understood in the broader context of the Expressionists' interest in the Romantics, and in the interacted positions toward poetics that the affinity with the Romantics has enabled the Expressionists to form.[288] Lasker-Schüler's poetry thus elicits with its biblical and mythical fascination a sense of disorientation through generic incongruence. This poetry's connection to the Romantics—namely with its treatment of the Hebrew Bible—sheds light on the means by which poetry forms an effect of confusion: historical genealogy thus reveals the means by which the feeling of a-historicity is formed. In Lasker-Schüler's case, the return to the Land of the Hebrews enables not the realization of a dream, but rather the further dreaming of a realization. This creates a unique platform through which she is able to further detect the borders of a now-materialized fantasy land. The meta-semantic role of Hebrew in the eighteenth-century debates on aesthetics establishes the poet's engagement with Hebrew as a mode of creating poetry that is meta-poetic in its core—it is a poetic creation that resonates with world creation, assigning the poet a prophetic role and highlighting the globalization of the Bible in literary cultural memory as a trajectory of dismantling and disturbing. This enterprise evokes scriptural reading through a direct spiritual experience of the holy text. The poetry evokes an interpretive approach that is antagonistic in nature to hermeneutic reading: it evinces the Bible as a model for personal revelation and encourages the reader to adhere to this biblical experience in his or her encounter with the literary text.

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[287] Dieter Bänsch, *Else Lasker-Schüler. Zur Kritik eines etablierten Bildes* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1971), 50.

[288] Lasker-Schüler's use of classically romantic motifs—namely, her evocation of orientalism, art as a religious vocation, and the search for Heimat—is not detached from the period in which she wrote. Brigitte Hintze, *Else Lasker-Schüler in ihrem Verhältnis zur Romantik: ein Vergleich der Thematik und des Sprachstils* (Bonn: Rheinische Friedrich Wilhelms-Universität, 1972), 238-43.

Poetica Obscura

In her contribution to the volume *Is Critique Secular?*, Saba Mahmood calls for a reexamination of the Danish cartoon controversy, drawing attention "to normative conceptions enfolded within this assessment about what constitutes religion and proper religious subjectivity in the modern world."[289] Therefore the attribution of divine agency to material objects is a fundamental emblem of the discrepancy between western and non-western religious experiences.[290] Viewing a certain religious episteme as an ambit separate from the secularist presumptions about public culture shows icons, pictures, and images to be rooted in an experience that is separate from the laws of secularist interpretation of modern society. The epistemological approach to signs cannot be distinguished from one's spiritual experience. A key aspect of this epistemological approach derives from an attachment to signs that diverges from the principle of religious choice as being separate from the subject's self-perception as an autonomous being. The interpretation of signs as a praxis demanding a "critical" or "distant" stance lies not only in a different religious attachment to signs than the one ingrained in one's spiritual identification, but in an entire array of cognitive and affective relationships to signs that are derived from such an attachment.

If major western institutions of interpretation rely on taking for granted such principles as subject autonomy and "religious choice,"—neutralizing the religious backdrop behind these principles—can one at all imagine alternative modalities of interpretation? In order to answer this question, I wish to suggest a move equivalent to Mahmood's enterprise: an attempt to imagine alternative institutions of self-cultivation, critique, and criticism. Taking into consideration traditional Jewish reading practices may be one way of imagining interpretation practices that diverge from the modern hermeneutic episteme. Such practices as Kabbalistic and Talmudic studies convey a kind of attachment to texts that might diverge from the hegemonic conception of hermeneutic practices.

The turn to the Hebrew Bible in the work of such authors as Lasker-Schüler, Franz Kafka, and Paul Celan evinces the fascination with Romantic motifs which informs the literary imagination of German literature. These authors' Jewishness may thus be said to resonate with the continual process of inclusion and exclusion that has become eminent to hermeneutic thinking. Hermeneutics often emerges in the modern period (and the postmodern era) in performances of its failure, which are marked by the incomprehensibility of texts.[291] The historical events of the twentieth century, primarily the First and Second World Wars, are the driving forces of this tendency. This is shown, perhaps most typically, in readings of the poet Paul Celan, a famous example of an author who is taken to reflect through his obscure poetics the

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[289] See Saba Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?" in *Is Critique Secular?: Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*, 66.
[290] Ibid, 72.
[291] Eckhard Schumacher cogently claims that the reception of modernist literature propagates an "aesthetics of ambiguity." See *Die Ironie der Unverständlichkeit: Johann Georg Hamann, Friedrich Schlegel, Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man*, 67. Albeit contemporary in its concerns, this characterization relies on the ancient aesthetic perception that views clarity and obscurity (*Dunkelheit*) as forces that shape beauty in its diverse forms (Ibid, 40).

"incomprehensibility" of the century's events. In such poems as "Die Schleuse" (1960), obscurity is entangled with references to religious statements and affiliations:

"Die Schleuse"

Über aller dieser deiner

Trauer: kein

zweiter Himmel.

.....

An einen Mund,

dem es ein Tausendwort war,

verlor—

verlor ich ein Wort,

das mir verblieben war:

Schwester.

An

die Vielgötterei

verlor ich ein Wort, das mich suchte:

Kaddisch.

Durch die Schleuse mußt ich,

das Wort in die Salzflut zurück-

und hinaus- und hinüberzuretten:

Jiskor.[292]

With its Hebrew utterances, which are the names of Jewish mourning ceremonies, the poem stresses Jewish rituals through a repetitious pattern that also ends the poem. What seems to be

[292] Paul Celan, "Die Schleuse" (2000).

the poem's expression of affinity for Jewish tradition is intertwined with the theme of grief, which the poem's language puts at its center through the implication of the loss of a sister. The intricate discussion of linguistic incapacity—the loss of words, which are themselves a living agent that "seeks" the poetic speaker—can be read as a reflective account of language, as often is the case with Celan's poetry.

At first glance, the Hebrew utterance looks like a marker of incomprehensibility that blocks certain meanings from an implied public of German readers. The words seem to strengthen the feeling of identification between those who understand their ritual meaning. Yet the Hebrew word also enables another level of understanding which rests on an important feature of Hebrew: the semantic resonance of roots in verbs, names, and concepts. In particular, the word *Jiskor*, which is the prayer used to mourn the extinction of a group that was part of the community in mourning, contains the verb *zhr*—to remember. The word thus entails another level of meaning in the language, one that relates the ceremony to a continual cognitive process. Celan's use of Hebrew enables different levels of comprehension (and incomprehension) to different readers, and highlights the reliance of interpretation on ethnic and religious identity and biographical background, an awareness that wears a meta-poetic form.

This endeavor seems in fact to stand in contrast to major twentieth century philosophical projects that are concerned with the failure of hermeneutics—namely those of Heidegger and Derrida. Celan seems to perform the eternal play of language that is described in such texts as Heidegger's *Was heißt Denken?* (1951-2) and Derrida's *De la grammatologie* (1967). The frequent appearance of alliteration in Celan's poems appears to demonstrate Heidegger's idea of letting language delve into its inner features (without forcing on it the signification of former and outside ideas). Celan's use of neologisms, it can be argued, serves an equivalent agenda developed in Derrida's deconstruction theory: the announcement of the failure of hermeneutics through a demonstration of the inner playful features of language. Language cannot hold or signify stable meanings due to the volatile function of signs—an inability that shows the hermeneutic attempt to be inherently flawed.

But a closer look at Celan's poetry challenges this impression. Celan's frequent use of Hebrew words demonstrates the various levels of comprehension and incomprehension his poetry evokes. Celan's use of alliteration, neologism, and multilingualism thus demonstrates the diverse reception that his poetry may have among different readers—as shown by his frequent references to religious affinities, and to Judaism as an ethnic identity. His poetry indeed refutes the view that interpretation yields the successful performance of reason. Nonetheless, it does so by challenging the belief that comprehension (or incomprehension) is to be understood in the context of a universal community of readers. Celan's allusions to Judaism evoke models of different religious interpretations of texts—models that do not assume a universal understanding of the text or a linear accomplishment of reason by way of textual interpretation, such as mourning rituals. This poetry can thus be read as antagonistic to criticisms of hermeneutics that establish themselves on a universal and total understanding of a certain linguistic collapse that

affects "everyone," and to the same extent.[293] Celan's use of Hebrew words, a reminder of distinct intellectual interpretative traditions, is an epitome of the sense of unapproachability that arises from his poems. Ambiguity is reached, in this case, not through this poetry's self-aware affinity to a "modernist canon," but more so through its self-fashioning anomaly, which it reaches by shifting between traditionalism and present aesthetic values. These poems preserve views on reading that recall the reader's position as an exception to human society, at the same time that they ground the singularity of a reader's position as the position of one interpreter among many. Celan's poetry offers the option of replacing the hermeneutic assumption of global inclusion with a universalistic experience of exclusion—of estrangement from the notion of meaning and textual incomprehension.

The emergence of hermeneutic thinking can be thought of in terms of substitution: hermeneutics functioned, in a sense, as replacing confessional religions with the various societal functions they had in soliciting acts of interpretation, reading, and understanding. In the late German Enlightenment, hermeneutics emerged as a global religious force. The gathering of interpreters under the umbrella of the new cultural institutions of the state, a universal group assembled under the auspices of aesthetic enquires, thus promoted the erasure of distinct "religious cultures" with the diverging textual cultures they dictated. The modernization of readership thus continually insisted on the autonomy and individuality of readers. Ironically, such qualities of the reader are shown especially when engaging in "hermeneutics of suspicion"—a practice taken to expose the conditions behind taken-for-granted world views and assumptions. Critique that puts itself in the distance, in a judgmental stance vis-à-vis the authors that it regards. Such critique is perhaps hermeneutics' most eminent propagator in modernity; critique already presumes major assumptions about modern hermeneutics, which reiterate the religious history of its form of thinking.

[293] Celan's work is understood by some critics to present poetry as a way of alluding to transcendental meaning, as shown in his multiple references to negative theology and his use of Kabbalistic motifs. For example, see Shira Wolosky, *Language Mysticism: The Negative Way of Language in Eliot, Beckett, and Celan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) for an analysis that ties the ambiguity of Celan's poem to his correspondence with negative theology—a history of correspondence that situates his poetry in the context of Jewish traditionalist thinking on the one hand, and in the historiography of self-fashioning mysticism through modernist style on the other hand. Celan's references to reading constantly remind the reader of the *exclusiveness* that shapes different models of linguistic apprehension and which contrasts with a universalistic model of reason.

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