



*«Können Sie denn dergleichen schreiben,
ohne in Wallung zu gerathen? Ich nicht».
A Commented Edition of an Unknown Letter
of Baumgarten to Meier*

ALESSANDRO NANNINI
ICUB, University of Bucharest

ABSTRACT: In this article, I make available the transcription of a letter of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten to Georg Friedrich Meier, which has hitherto remained completely unknown to commentators. After contextualizing the writing, I examine in particular the two most significant elements of the text: the King's order to Meier to deliver a class on Locke and Baumgarten's observations on the dispute with Gottsched. As for this aspect, I linger on the war declared to aesthetics, both as a term and as a concept, by Gottsched and his followers, so as to consider Baumgarten's position in a wider theoretical framework.

KEYWORDS: Baumgarten, Meier, Locke, Gottsched, Aesthetics.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: alessandronannini1@gmail.com

In the Bavarian State Library in Munich lies an autograph letter in German written by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten to an anonymous correspondent, dated 25th October 1754¹. Even the greeting formulas

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reveal the importance of the addressee, who is designed both as «professor» and as «supporter and friend» (*Gönner und Freund*) of the sender. From the analysis of the content, it is not difficult to infer that the anonymous addressee is no other than Georg Friedrich Meier, Baumgarten's beloved pupil and co-founder of aesthetics as a scientific discipline. This rather long letter, consisting in two sheets recto/verso densely penned in black ink, is not only unpublished, but has remained unknown to scholarship up to the present. Its importance is made even more relevant by the fact that, to date, it is the only extant letter of Baumgarten to Meier. In it, Baumgarten does not limit himself to dealing with personal issues, but enters into the philosophical debate of that time, providing a clear-cut stance on the 'aesthetic war' against Gottsched as well as on the reasons of his public silence in the face of the latter's attacks. In what follows, I supply first of all the criteria adopted in the present edition and the transcription of the text; in the second part of the article, I examine the most interesting passages of the letter.

1. *Editorial Criteria.*

In the transcription, I have strived to follow the manuscript as far as possible, even when the spelling is different from modern German. In doubtful cases, I have privileged semantic consistency. I have put my interpolations and page break marks into square brackets. The arrangement of the text follows the manuscript in the heading, in the closing formulas, as well as in the lack of new paragraphs. Only the line before the quoted passage in [1r] is not fully written; for this reason, I have separated it from the body of the text. Upper and lower cases of some letters are very often indistinguishable; in the transcription I have judged on a case by case basis. Punctuation is unaltered, apart from the correction of possible smears of the ink; in doubtful cases, I have fol-

¹ The manuscript has the following shelf mark: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Autogr. Baumgarten, Alexander Gottlieb. Annemarie Kaindl, whom I warmly thank, has communicated to me that the manuscript is recorded in a collection of autographs acquired by the Bavarian State Library in Munich between 1858 and 1908 (BSB, Cbm Cat. 99 k).

lowed current rules. As individual letters are written differently, depending on whether they are part of Latin or German words, I use italics for Latin sentences and Latinisms. Shorthand signs inserted by Baumgarten are retained and deciphered aside in square brackets. Quoted sources are indicated in footnotes. Inverted commas, used for explicit quotations only, follow current criteria. Deleted words are recorded as crossed out. Corrections within single words are accepted without further notice.

2. *Transcription of the found letter.*

[1r] HochEdelgebohmer Herr,
Hochzuehrender Herr Professor,
Werthester Gönner und Freund.

Ew. HochEdelgebl. liebes Schreiben u. gelehrte Geschenke sind mir um so lieber gewesen, da 2 Tage nach deren Empfang wieder mit Gewißheit berichtet werden wollte, wie Dieselben schon vor 14. Tagen gestorben. *Vivamus, mi amice, famae de mortibus nostris superstites*². Ihre langsame[n] Schritte zur Ewigkeit erinnerten mich einer Stelle, welche ich im Bion von Smÿrna vor einigen Tagen gelesen hatte, u. deren Anfang mich in änlichen Vorstellungen gerürt hatte:

«Ich aber gehe gemächl. herunter. Den Weg da herunter
Geh ich am Ufer im Sande. Da sing ich im leisen Gemurmeln:
Wie? Galatea! so hart! Doch denk ich das Süße der Hoffnung
Bis an mein spätestes Alter durchaus ð [= nicht] fahren zu laßen»³.

² It is probably a variation on the theme of a passage of a poem by Jean de Santeuil (1630-1697): «Ita est, amice, fuimus, & meae miser | Famae superstes vivo», see *Ad. Cl. Peleterium, regni administrum, in villa sua rusticantem, in Iohannis Baptistae Santolii Victorini operum poeticorum tomus secundus*, Thierry, Parisiis 1698, pp. 100-102, here 101. In this case, Baumgarten's sentence is even more poignant, given the exhortative form, which is perhaps suggestive of the incipit of Catullus 5.

³ The passage of the bucolic poet Bion of Smyrna (flourishing about 100 BC) is now known as 16 Gow and has been handed down to us as part of Stobaeus' *Anthologion*. It reads: «αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν βασεῦμαι ἐμὴν ὁδὸν ἐς τὸ κάταντες | τῆνο ποτὶ ψάμαθόν τε καὶ αἰὶνα ψιθυρίσδων, | λισσόμενος Γαλάτειαν ἀπηνέα: τὰς δὲ γλυκείας | ἐλπιδὰς ὑστατίῳ μέχρι γήραος οὐκ ἀπολειψῶ».

[1v] Gottlob! daß wir das Süße der Hoffnung kennen, welche noch über den Todt weit weiter fñrt, als das späteste Alter reichen könnte! Ja verdammt, u. zwar so, daß der oberste Richter unter den Menschen dabey nicht nur ruft, sondern auch überaus gnädig gerichtet, weil niemand gewesen, der ihm die vor mich streitende Warheit gesagt. Sorgen Ew. HochEdelgebl. aber auch genug vor Ihre Gesundheit? Ich habe nun vor 20 Jahren in Hall. erfahr[en], wie selbst wohlmeinende Ärtzte zuweilen erlauben Arbeit, die ihr doch gewiß schädlich ist. Vielleicht weil sie sich dergleichen Beschäftigungen leichter machen, als es das Gewißen p [= perge] deßen erlaubt, dem die Vergünstigung ertheilt wird. Ich hatte auch einmahl viel Besorgungen der Zukunft, und war dabei so matt, u. verwundet, daß ich ð [= nicht] gehn, stehn, oder, sitzen konnte. Da laß ich: Wenn ihr also auch dieses Kleinste nicht könnst, was sorgt ihr um das übrige⁴ mit dem Vorsatz: *quae mutare non possim, ne curiose quidem præsagiend*⁵. Das ist gewiß, daß kein Elend, meiner Krankheit gleich, allein kommt. *Anteit saeva Necessitas*⁶, *magna comitante caterva caterva*⁷, *pone sequentibus umbris*. [2r] Haben Ew. HochEdelgebl. denn würkl. d. Bluth-Stürzung gehabt? und sind Sie mit keinem verdächtigen Husten weiter beschwert? Ich zweifle ietzt an allen Berichten von Ihnen, die Sie mir nicht selbst geben, und nehme doch an Ihrem Wohl viel zu starkem Theil, als daß ich mich darin um Gewißheit nicht bekümmern sollte. Da ich die Ehre hatte Sie in Hall. zu besuchen, sprach mich mehr, als ein Hippokrates, als einen gesunden. Doch zerfraß täglich ein schleichendes Fieber die klopfende Brust. Ihr Gespräch mit dem Könige müße doch eine Gelegenheit seyn, Ihr zeitliches Glück auf einem noch vestern Grund zu setzen, als auf dem es bisher gestanden! Gott vergeb es den schönen Geistern, welche auch den philosophischen Grund eines Gebäudes umgerißen, auf welches so viel ~~Leute~~ Menschen hoffen, u. welches gewiß Bewunderung verdient. Viel Glücks zum neuen *collegio!* Der es Ihnen vorgeschrieben, bezahle es Ihnen vielfältig! Sie müßen mir in der That von Ihrem Befinden noch offenhertziger schreiben, als bisher. HE. Becker hat das aufgetragene bestellt, mich aber nicht zu sprechen verlangt. Doch habe ich ihn noch kennen zu lernen Hoffnung. [2v] Beynahe hätten mich Ew. HochEdelgebl. bei Lesung Dero Schrift gegen

⁴ Luke 12:26.

⁵ The well-known refrain that we should not oppose what we cannot change (see for example Cicero, *Pro Balbo*, 61), is here interpreted, according to the Evangelic quotation, as a recommendation not to get worried nor to try to foresee what is not within our reach.

⁶ Baumgarten recalls here Horace, see *Odes* I 35, 17: «Te semper anteit saeva necessitas».

⁷ Virgil, *Aeneid* II 40; 370; V, 76.

HE. Gottsched überzeugt, d[a]ß ich eine Pflicht gegen mich selbst stillschweigend versäumte. Aber können Sie denn dergleichen schreiben, ohne in Wallung zu gerathen? Ich nicht. Sollten wir aber auch mit Nachtheil unsrer Gesundheit die Ehre zu vertheidigen verbunden seyn, die HE. Gottsched p [=perge] angreift? Diese Ehre habe ich nie meiner Gesundheit auch nicht den ordentlichen Verrichtungen meines Amtes vorziehn können, worin mich ihre Vertheidigung gestört haben würde. Beim letzten habe ich vielleicht geirrt, u. hätte der faule Philosoph vielleicht dieses Thun und ienes nicht laßen sollen. Im ersten aber dünk ich mir recht zu haben. In welcher höhern *Faculteet* ist denn bey Ihnen Krieg? Doch ich muß meiner Neu-Begierde sowohl, als Schwatzhaftigkeit Schranken setzen. Gott wird uns zu rechter Zeit aus allem Elend mit starker Hand reißen, und in der Seeligkeit völligen Genuß setzen, welche schon jetzt gegen manche Trübsaalen ein herrliches Gegengewicht ist. Ihm empfehle ich Dieselben mit mir und den Meinigen, welche sich Ihnen und der Werthesten Fr. Professorin zugl. ergebenst empfehlen. Ich bin [et]c.

Ew. HochEdelgebl.

M. Liebsten HE. Professoris, Gönners u. Freundes

Fr[ank]furth d. 25. Oct. 1754.

gehorsamster Diener
AGBaumgarten

3. *Commentary.*

3.1. *Biblical and poetic reminiscences.*

When Baumgarten leaves Halle towards Easter 1740 as a result of the royal appointment as Ordinary Professor in Frankfurt on the Oder⁸, the bonds with the city on the Saale certainly do not break. In Halle, there remain in particular his brother Siegmund Jakob, professor of theology at the Fridericana University, whom he revered as a father⁹, and the faithful pupil Georg Friedrich Meier, linked by deep affection to both

⁸ G.F. Meier, *Alexander Gottlieb Baumgartens Leben*, Hemmerde, Halle 1763, p. 19.

⁹ T. Abbt, *Alexander Gottlieb Baumgartens Leben und Charakter*, Hemmerde, Halle 1765, pp. 19-20.

the Baumgarten brothers since the beginning of his education¹⁰. Upon his departure, Baumgarten's lectures are predictably attributed to Meier¹¹, who becomes Extraordinary Professor in 1746¹² and Ordinary Professor in 1748¹³.

Both with his brother and with Meier epistolary exchanges must have been frequent: as recorded by his biographer Abbt, in the course of his long-drawn-out illness (1751-1762) Alexander many times writes his last farewell to Siegmund¹⁴. Similarly, he does not interrupt the contacts with his pupil, to whom he sends his *collegium aestheticum* probably in 1745¹⁵. On this manuscript, Meier will give his first class of aesthetics in the winter semester 1745/46¹⁶ and ground his *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften* (1748-1750)¹⁷. After Baumgarten's death, Meier does not only undertake to pen his first biography, including an index of his works¹⁸, but he also addresses Baumgarten's wife Justina Elisabeth Albinus a condolence letter, in which he writes among other things: «You have lost the most lovable husband, and I my second father, my master, the promoter of my fortune»¹⁹. Of such a tight relationship, no private evidence seemed to have survived. The found letter is thus all the more precious, enabling us to look closer into the partnership from which disciplinary aesthetics has emerged.

The interweaving of personal and poetic themes is already present in the first page of the letter with the quotation of the bucolic poet Bion of Smyrna, which is witness to the extensiveness of Baumgarten's clas-

¹⁰ S.G. Lange, *Leben Georg Friedrich Meiers*, Gebauer, Halle 1778, pp. 35-36.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 47.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 49.

¹⁴ Abbt, *Alexander Gottlieb Baumgartens Leben und Charakter*, p. 19.

¹⁵ See E. Bergmann, *Die Begründung der deutschen Ästhetik durch Alex. Gottlieb Baumgarten und Georg Friedrich Meier*, Röder & Schunke, Leipzig 1911, p. 23.

¹⁶ See S.G. Lange, *Sammlung gelehrter und freundschaftlicher Briefe*, 1. Theil, Hemmerde, Halle 1769, p. 173.

¹⁷ G.F. Meier, *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften*, vol. I, Hemmerde, Halle 1748, *Vorrede*, p. [a2].

¹⁸ Meier, *Alexander Gottlieb Baumgartens Leben*. The commented list of Baumgarten's writings is at pp. 39-54.

¹⁹ *Bey dem Absterben des HERRN Professor Baumgarten bezeugte der FRAU Profess. Baumgarten sein Beyleid Georg Friedrich Meier*, Hemmerde, Halle 1762, without page.

sical reading. The mentioned fragment echoes the Cyclops Polyphemus' unrequited love for the sea-nymph Galatea, who was on her part in love with the young shepherd Acis. Polyphemus, in the grip of jealousy, murders Acis, who is turned into a river-god²⁰. The hope in Galatea's love is therefore hardly possible for the poet too, who apparently takes the viewpoint of the Cyclops; yet, the sweetness of hope is to last until his «latest age»²¹.

The reading of this passage arouses similar ideas in Baumgarten, but with a significant difference. In fact, Baumgarten changes the meaning of the fragment according to a Christian interpretation, so that hoping against hope (Rm 4:18) entails a complete trust in God. In this way, the sweetness of hope is able to go well beyond the «latest age», thereby breaking down the doors of death. As is known, Baumgarten suffered from tuberculosis in 1754 and was meditating every day on Jesus' sayings for his own consolation²². The theological tinges of the letter are therefore consequential to this intense religious route in the training ground of illness. In this sense, Baumgarten remembers his health problems, which emerged as early as twenty years before in Halle and were underestimated by physicians²³, as well as the impairments provoked by his tuberculosis (in particular, from the end of September 1751 onwards)²⁴. If initially Baumgarten was anxious about his future, he admits, a verse of the Gospel according to Luke («Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?», Lk 12:26)

²⁰ See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XIII, 738-897.

²¹ See E.A. Schmidt, *Poetische Reflexion. Virgils Bukolik*, Fink, München 1972, pp. 80-81.

²² Meier, *Alexander Gottlieb Baumgartens Leben*, p. 22; Abbt, *Alexander Gottlieb Baumgartens Leben und Charakter*, p. 20; A.G. Baumgarten, *Gedanken über die Reden Jesu nach dem Inhalt der evangelischen Geschichten*, hrsg. von F.G. Scheltz und A.B. Thiele, vol. I, Brückner, Pforten 1796, *Vorrede*.

²³ Meier remembers that Baumgarten went to Berlin to recover in Autumn 1736, see Meier, *Alexander Gottlieb Baumgartens Leben*, pp. 16-17.

²⁴ As well as the sources quoted at note 22, see also the letters written by Baumgarten's pupils in M. Fontius, *Baumgarten und die «Literaturbriefe»*. *Ein Brief aus Frankfurt/Oder an Louis de Beausobre in Berlin*, «Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte», 80, 2006, pp. 553-594, § 4.

shows him the necessity of surrendering himself to God in the face of the Horatian «savage necessity» (*sæva necessitas*)²⁵.

Such reflections combine with a sincere interest for Meier's health, as is evident by the questions addressed to his pupil, whom Baumgarten had also recently visited in Halle. In fact, Meier's biography, written by his friend Samuel Gotthold Lange, records the asthenia and persistent cough which plagued him since his infancy. In addition, Meier also suffered from haemorrhages, which became paroxysms precisely in 1753, soon before the beginning of the winter semester²⁶. It is thus natural that Baumgarten, who knew the seriousness of the haemoptyses by personal experience, proves to be caring and attentive towards his pupil who showed similar symptoms, distrusting any news on this topic that did not come from Meier himself.

3.2. *The interview with the king.*

If the first part of the letter has a personal tone, redolent of poetic and biblical memories, the second part is more centred on the public life. The focus therefore shifts from Meier's physical and spiritual health to his worldly fortune²⁷. In this sense, Baumgarten hopes that the interview with the king can consolidate Meier's position. Which interview is at issue is not difficult to infer. As recorded by the chronicles of that time, King Frederick II is on a visit to Halle on the 16th and 17th June 1754²⁸, and converses with some professors of the Fridericiana Univer-

²⁵ Interesting evidence about Baumgarten's health in 1754 is provided by a passage of a letter written by Eberhard Heinrich Daniel Stosch to Beausobre of the 16th December: «L'état de Monsieur Baumgarten surprend tout le monde. La faculté l'a condamné plusieurs fois à mourir; mais sans effet; et quand la mort paraissait le tenir, il sait lui-même, en bon métaphysicien, trouver quelques échappades. Je doute pourtant qu'il puisse disputer encore longtemps le terrain; parce que il sait lui-même que ses forces diminuent tous les jours», see Fontius, *Baumgarten und die «Literaturbriefe»*, p. 575.

²⁶ Lange, *Leben Georg Friedrich Meiers*, p. 63.

²⁷ On Meier's financial condition, see *ibidem*, p. 49.

²⁸ H. Droysen, *Tageskalender Friedrichs des Großen vom 1. Juni 1740 bis 31. März 1763*, «Forschungen zur Brandenburgischen und Preußischen Geschichte», 29, 1916, pp. 95-157, here p. 136.

sity, among them Meier²⁹. The interview must have made a great impression on Meier, who provides a detailed description in his autobiographical sketches published by Lange, taking note with some measure of pride that «he was satisfied with me»: «When the king stopped by Halle in 1754, I had the grace to have an interview with him. [...] He ordered me to give a course on Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. I did not dare to show him that it is not easy to lecture on this book with beginners. I obeyed and experience taught me that it is not a textbook. I had barely four fixed students, and I have given this course only once»³⁰.

The talk, Meier's biographer Lange writes, is held in French; although he did not master well the pronunciation, thus having limited expressive possibilities, Meier did not appeal to the translator, managing to dialogue directly with the king³¹. This hindrance in expression must have contributed to the parody which the monarch delivered with all

²⁹ J.C. Hoffbauer, *Geschichte der Universität zu Halle bis zum Jahre 1805*, Schimmelpfennig, Halle 1805, pp. 294-295. From Baumgarten's letter it is clear that he would have liked to know the king, but the latter did not wish to meet him. Despite the denial, Baumgarten does not give up. His desire is understandable, since, on the occasion of Frederick's accession to the throne in 1740, Baumgarten had written a long poem in Latin in his honour (*Serenissimo ... principi Frederico regi Borussiae ... felicia regni felicitis auspicia*, Conradi, Francofurti ad Viadr. 1740), then translated into German by his brother Nathanael. More concerned with Baumgarten's condition was Prince Henry, Frederick the Great's brother, who inquires about Baumgarten's health when he passed through Frankfurt at the head of his troops in 1760, see Abbt, *Alexander Gottlieb Baumgartens Leben und Charakter*, p. 22. When the king visits Frankfurt on the Oder in 1763, after the end of the Seven Years' War, the *Oberbürgermeister* Johann Samuel Ungnad shares with him his worry that Baumgarten's death (1762) can harm the Viadrina University, as a proof of the great power of attraction which Baumgarten exerted on students despite his long illness, see C.R. Hausen, *Geschichte der Universität und Stadt Frankfurt an der Oder*, Apitz et al., Frankfurt an der Oder 1800, p. 24.

³⁰ Lange, *Leben Georg Friedrich Meiers*, pp. 38-39. Before imparting this order, the king had asked on which textbooks Meier was lecturing; Meier had answered that he was lecturing on his own works, see A.F. Büsching, *Beyträge zu der Lebensgeschichte denkwürdiger Personen, insonderheit gelehrter Männer*, 5. Theil, Curt, Halle 1788, p. 80.

³¹ Lange, *Leben Georg Friedrich Meiers*, p. 39.

probability on this interview in his *Lettre sur l'éducation* (1770)³². After defining monads and pre-established harmony as an «absurd and unintelligible system» in the same way as the previous conception of substantial forms, the sovereign takes it out on one of these philosophers, «le plus entêté des monades»³³. On the occasion of an exchange with the latter, Frederick II remembers, he asked this professor if he had ever read Locke. In the face of the brusque and laconic answers of the interlocutor, who indeed knew Locke, the king claimed that this English thinker is «very wise», in that he never abandons the thread of experience. At that, the academic, for whom every nation should have its own philosophy, could barely constrain his wrath³⁴. In opposition to pedantry and the fashion to be Wolffian³⁵, which the king viewed as spread throughout German universities, cross-Channel empiricism must have appeared to him as a valid alternative³⁶.

To inform potential students about the offer of these unusual lectures, Meier compiled a program in 1754, where he stresses his own approach to the course, without mentioning the proximate cause of it, which «is however sufficiently known»³⁷. It is likely that precisely this writing is one of the «learned gifts» for which Baumgarten thanks Meier at the beginning of the letter³⁸. It comes as no surprise that Baumgarten wishes good luck to his former student for this new *collegium* which announces itself as all but simple.

In the program, Meier strives to find arguments to motivate potential students to follow a course of which he himself was not con-

³² For this hypothesis, see A. Trendelenburg, *Friedrich der Große und sein Staatsminister Freiherr von Zedlitz*, Bethge, Berlin 1859, p. 9.

³³ Friedrich II von Preußen, *Lettre sur l'éducation*, Voss, Berlin 1770, pp. 12-13.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

³⁶ E. Zeller, *Friedrich der Große als Philosoph*, Weidmann, Berlin 1886, pp. 15-16.

³⁷ G.F. Meier, *Zuschrift an seine Zubörer, worin er Ihnen seinen Entschluß bekannt macht, ein Collegium über Lockes Versuch vom menschlichen Verstande zu halten*, Hemmerde, Halle 1754, p. 3.

³⁸ Another gift is with all evidence Meier's pamphlet against Gottsched, see below. Both of them are recorded in Baumgarten's library catalogue, see *Catalogus librorum a viro excellentissimo amplissimo Alexandro Gottlieb Baumgarten*, Winter, Francofurti ad Viadrum 1762, p. 210, n. 37; p. 213, n. 87.

vinced³⁹. For those who take university as a place to apprehend skills which can be immediately spent in the job market, Meier argues, the course on Locke will be of little use⁴⁰; on the contrary, those who study in order to observe truth with their own eyes will not constrain themselves within the narrow boundaries of their study plan, but will attempt to learn all that which enables them to overcome the prejudices and errors of the human genre. The course on Locke is directed to this kind of students⁴¹.

After a brief summary of the main themes of Locke's work, Meier praises its great merits, in particular that of including in the same book a series of questions which are usually tackled in different disciplines (logic, metaphysics, and other sciences)⁴². Insofar as it is not conceived as a methodical system, Locke's essay allows greater freedom to readers' understanding⁴³. Such a character, however, cannot be fully endorsed by Meier, who is not willing to renounce the possible utility of the system. Indeed, truths can be thought in their complete correctness only if they are thought together with their grounds and consequences, that is, only if they are thought in a systematic way⁴⁴.

Precisely in 1754 another important pupil of Baumgarten, Louis de Beausobre, publishes an essay entitled *Le pyrrhonisme du sage* (the second edition comes out in 1755 with the title *Le pyrrhonisme raisonnable*), in which the issue of systems emerges. Embracing what has been defined as a «tamed skepticism»⁴⁵, Beausobre writes that «if human ignorance has multiplied miracles and saints, the error has filled the world with systems»⁴⁶. To be sure, Meier too concedes that there are «a lot of false systems»; or better, «the most part of the systems invented by humans are full of mistakes»; yet, truth does not turn into a mistake only be-

³⁹ Büsching, *Beyträge zu der Lebensgeschichte*, 5. Theil, p. 80.

⁴⁰ Meier, *Zuschrift an seine Zubörer*, pp. 4-5.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 5-6.

⁴² *Ibidem*, pp. 6-9.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, pp. 8-9.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 9-10.

⁴⁵ J. Laursen, *Tame Sceptics at the Prussian Academy*, «Libertinage et philosophie», 12, 2010, pp. 221-230. On Beausobre, see also Fontius, *Baumgarten und die «Literaturbriefe»*, § 3.

⁴⁶ L. de Beausobre, *Le pyrrhonisme du sage*, C.-J.-B. Hérissant, Berlin 1754, § 126. See also Id., *Le pyrrhonisme raisonnable*, Bourdeaux, Berlin 1755, § 69.

cause it is exposed in the form of a system⁴⁷. In this sense, if according to Beausobre systems are similar to buildings because they are periodically destroyed in order to raise other buildings on the ashes of the previous ones⁴⁸, Meier uses the same comparison to highlight the connection of the single truths in a whole⁴⁹. On Meier's view, erudition itself can indeed be considered as a sort of building, of which philosophy represents the centre or the foundations⁵⁰.

It is perhaps to buttress such a thesis that Baumgarten also employs the metaphor of the building in his letter, criticizing the attempts of the «beautiful spirits» to undermine even its philosophical ground (*philosophischer Grund*)⁵¹. Not least because of the importance of philosophy in

⁴⁷ Meier, *Zuschrift an seine Zuhörer*, p. 9.

⁴⁸ Beausobre, *Le pyrrhonisme du sage*, § 127.

⁴⁹ Meier, *Zuschrift an seine Zuhörer*, p. 9. As recently shown by Schwaiger, the problem of the 'system' was already significant for Wolff's philosophy at least since the confrontation with Michael Gottlieb Hansch at the end of the Twenties. Precisely this confrontation could have made a contribution to Wolff's more detailed reflection on the notion of 'system', which gave rise to the first explicit essay on the subject, see C. Schwaiger, *Der Streit zwischen Michael Gottlieb Hansch und Christian Wolff um die Aneignung des Leibniz'schen Erbes*, in «Für unser Glück oder das Glück anderer», Vorträge des X. Internationalen Leibniz-Kongresses (Hannover, 18.-23. Juli 2016), hrsg. von W. Li, Band 2, Olms, Hildesheim-Zürich-New York 2016, pp. 87-97. On the 'system' in Wolff, see also J.-F. Goubet, *Fondement, principes et utilité de la connaissance. Sur la notion wolffienne de système*, «Archives de Philosophie», 65, 2002, pp. 81-103; V.L. Waibel, *Die Systemkonzeptionen bei Wolff und Lambert*, in *Christian Wolff und die europäische Aufklärung*, hrsg. von J. Stolzenberg und O.-P. Rudolph, 2. Teil, Olms, Hildesheim-Zürich-New York 2007, pp. 51-70; and M. Albrecht's *Einleitung* to the modern edition of Wolff's *De differentia intellectus systematici et non systematici*, «Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert», 23, 2012, pp. 229-245.

⁵⁰ G.F. Meier, *Abbildung eines wahren Weltweisen*, Hemmerde, Halle 1745, § 24: «Man kan, ohne die Wahrheit zu beleidigen, und den Weltweisen eine Schmeicheley vorzusagen, behaupten, daß die Weltweißheit der Grundriß der Gelehrsamkeit sey. Alle Wissenschaften nehmen ihren Ursprung und ihre Gründe aus der Weltweisheit her». In the *Philosophia generalis*, Baumgarten had used the metaphor of the land to indicate the domain of erudition, see A.G. Baumgarten, *Philosophia generalis*, ed. J.C. Foerster, Hemmerde, Halae Magdeburgicae 1770, §§ 150 ff.

⁵¹ Baumgarten's concern with attacks to philosophy, in particular Leibnizian philosophy, is not new. Already in the preface (1749) to the third edition of his *Metaphysica*, Baumgarten made some reflections about this aspect, while showing his own confidence: «Let others doubt that first principle of knowing, which is consid-

the wider framework of erudition, the philosopher should thus think in a systematic way. Those who do not think in a systematic way, Meier continues in his program, are wanderers in the reign of truth, who bump into frequent mistakes⁵². As already anticipated, though, this does not mean that the system is devoid of any contraindications. For if duly embedded in the adequate concatenation, even a senseless idea could have the appearance of truth⁵³. Sometimes, it is therefore useful to stray from the pathway of the system in order to judge with more freedom

ered as characteristic of the Leibnizian philosophy; let others doubt the first contingent principles of becoming that the same philosophy establishes, i.e. monads or simple beings. I used to deny both principles. I indeed doubted them both. But once I thought them over, I acknowledged both as true». His polemical target was with all probability the essay by Johann Heinrich Gottlob Justi, *Untersuchung der Lehre von den Monaden und einfachen Dingen*, winner of the Berlin Academy prize in the contest of 1747. See in general R. Palaia, *Berlino 1747: Il dibattito in occasione del concorso dell'Accademia delle scienze*, «Nouvelles de la République des Lettres», 1, 1993, pp. 91-119. This and other passages from Baumgarten's preface are extensively quoted by Mendelssohn in the 21th of the *Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend*, Nicolai, Berlin 1759, pp. 135-140. At the end of the long quotation, Mendelssohn recalls the King's order to Meier to give lectures on Locke rather than on Wolff as a good recommendation in order to train the genius of the youth. In a letter to Beausobre of the 20th April 1759 (see Fontius, *Baumgarten und die «Literaturbriefe»*, § 6), Baumgarten asks for more information about the author of these *Briefe*. In this context, Baumgarten comments on the condition of bewilderment in the philosophy of the Fifties. While Beausobre spoke of an outright anarchy (Beausobre, *Le pyrrhonisme raisonnable*, § 69), Baumgarten is convinced that there is an aristocracy in philosophy, which has been however weakened by the death of some illustrious men. Baumgarten concludes that the apparent state of anarchy will end only when the «Rathaus» is purified, which seems to be the main responsible for the philosophical crisis. On the identification of the *Rathaus* as the Berlin Academy led by Maupertuis, from which several attacks against monads came, as well as on Baumgarten's unwavering support for the rationalistic tradition in the face of his pupil Beausobre's turn towards pyrrhonism, see *ibidem*, § 7. Against possible theological charges directed to philosophy, see A.G. Baumgarten (*praeses*), M.E. Gebauer (*respondens*), *Dissertatio periodica an philosophia sit sapientia mundi*, Winter, Francofurti ad Viadrum 1751.

⁵² Meier, *Zuschrift an seine Zuhörer*, p. 10.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, pp. 10-11.

the correctness of the system itself⁵⁴. And Locke's essay carries precisely the antibodies necessary not to be dazzled by a system full of lies⁵⁵.

Despite the arguments adduced, Meier's appeal does not achieve the desired effect. As he himself admits, only four students attended his lectures⁵⁶. At least three of them, though, will become famous in the following years: the future theologian Johann August Nösselt⁵⁷; the future chancellor of the Fridericiana University Carl Christoph von Hoffmann⁵⁸; and Karl Abraham von Zedlitz, then minister of Frederick II, whom the sovereign himself had tried to win to the Lockean cause still on the occasion of his visit in Halle in 1754⁵⁹.

The course on Locke is announced on the «Wöchentliche Hallische Anzeigen» on the 30th September 1754 for the winter semester 1754/55⁶⁰ and its beginning is scheduled for the 26th October⁶¹, precisely the day after the writing of Baumgarten's letter. Also because of the scarce attendance, the *collegium* left dissatisfied not only Meier, but also the king. Claiming the merit to have introduced Locke's philosophy in Halle, Frederick II will confide to Gottsched in an interview on the 15th October 1757 that Professor Meier had not lived up to the entrusted task⁶². To the sovereign's question whether lectures on Locke were giv-

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*. Meier's *modus operandi* in his lectures will consist in the comment on the central thesis of each section of Locke's essay according to his own sensibility. The course employs the Latin edition of the essay edited in 1741 by Gotthelf Heinrich Thiele, see *ibidem*, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁶ Lange, *Leben Georg Friedrich Meiers*, p. 39.

⁵⁷ A.H. Niemeyer, *Leben, Charakter und Verdienste Johann August Nösselts, Erste Abteilung: Biographie und Charakteristik*, Waisenhaus, Halle and Berlin 1809, p. 234, note.

⁵⁸ See H.-J. Kertscher, *Meiers Platz im geistig-kulturellen Leben der Stadt Halle*, in *Georg Friedrich Meier (1718-1777). Philosophie als «wahre Weltweisheit»*, hrsg. von F. Grunert und G. Stiening, De Gruyter, Berlin-Boston 2015, pp. 25-42, here p. 31. Kertscher believes that the fourth listener was Karl Gustav Struensee.

⁵⁹ See Trendelenburg, *Friedrich der Große und sein Staatsminister*, p. 9.

⁶⁰ «Wöchentliche Hallische Anzeigen», nr. 39, 30 September 1754, col. 662.

⁶¹ Meier, *Zuschrift an seine Zuhörer*, p. 14.

⁶² See *Schreiben des Professors Gottsched in Leipzig an Professor Flottwell in Königsberg* (22nd October 1757), «Der neuen Preußischen Provinzial-Blätter dritte Folge», IV, 1859, pp. 295-301, here p. 297. For the date of the first visit of the king in Leipzig in October 1757 – the second one is from the 26th to the 30th October with a fur-

en in Leipzig, Gottsched, for once in agreement with Meier, will reply what the latter did not dare, that is, that it is not a work for beginners⁶³.

3.3. *The controversy with Gottsched over aesthetics.*

The last part of Baumgarten's letter deals precisely with Gottsched. As is known, in 1754 the 'aesthetic war' between Gottsched and Meier was raging⁶⁴. If in November 1743 Meier still pledged his allegiance to Gottsched in a letter addressed to the latter, appreciating the positive judgement that the Leipzig philosopher seemed to have of him⁶⁵, not even two years later does Meier express his readiness to wage war on Gottsched⁶⁶. Crucial for this palinode is certainly his alliance with the Swiss critics Bodmer and Breitinger, mediated by the friendship with Lange, leading Meier to correspond intensively in particular with Bodmer in the second half of the Forties⁶⁷. In the face of Gottsched's attacks against Milton, Bodmer advises Meier to 'anatomize' Gottsched's

ther interview with Gottsched on the 26th – see Droysen, *Tageskalender Friedrichs des Großen*, p. 145.

⁶³ *Schreiben des Professors Gottsched*, pp. 297-298.

⁶⁴ A reconstruction of the dispute until the end of the Forties is offered almost in real time by Johann Carl Conrad Oelrichs, «Berlinische Bibliothek», Bd. 2, St. 1, 1748, pp. 113-117; Bd. 2, St. 4, 1748, pp. 434-438; Bd. 3, St. 2, 1749, pp. 263-264. In addition, see Bergmann, *Die Begründung der deutschen Ästhetik*, chs. 6 ff.; see also G.F. Meier, *Frühe Schriften zur ästhetischen Erziehung der Deutschen in 3 Teilen*, Teil 2: *Der «kleine Dichterkrieg» zwischen Halle und Leipzig*, hrsg. von H.-J. Kertscher und G. Schenk, Hallescher Verlag, Halle 2000.

⁶⁵ The letter is published in Bergmann, *Die Begründung der deutschen Ästhetik*, pp. 230-231.

⁶⁶ Lange, *Sammlung gelehrter und freundschaftlicher Briefe*, 1. Theil, p. 176. The divorce with Gottsched is already tangible in the *Gedanken über die Frage: Ob ein Kunstrichter seine Urtheile jederzeit erklären und beweisen müsse*, «Critischer Versuch zur Aufnahme der Deutschen Sprache», 13. Stück, 1744, pp. 3-21.

⁶⁷ Despite the praises, the alliance does never entail common theoretical bases, not even in the first phase, see for example Bodmer's letter to Hagedorn dated 11th July 1745, in F. von Hagedorn, *Poetische Werke*, hrsg. von J.J. Eschenburg, vol. 5: *Briefwechsel*, Campe, Hamburg 1800, pp. 196-202, in particular pp. 201-202. The partnership dissolves at the end of the Forties, see Bergmann, *Die Begründung der deutschen Ästhetik*, pp. 200-202.

poetics⁶⁸, in order to detect the mistakes present in it, according to a project already conceived by Jakob Immanuel Pyra, cofounder with Lange of the so-called ‘first poetic circle in Halle’⁶⁹. Between 1746 and 1748, Meier publishes the *Beurtheilung der Gottschedischen Dichtkunst* in six issues, in which he reviews a series of gaps in Gottsched’s *Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst* on the basis of Baumgartenian categories. In response to the betrayal, the *Gottschedianer* Theodor Johann Quistorp harshly attacks Baumgarten’s *Meditationes* in November 1745, misunderstanding the latter’s definition of poetry and using the misunderstanding for accusing poetry of subduing reason to passions⁷⁰. To the provocation against his master, Meier replies with an articulated defence in February 1746, criticizing the rudeness of the attack and refusing to acknowledge the principle of imitation as the essence of poetry⁷¹. If we add to these elements the controversy over the Christian *épopée*, in particular after the publication of the first three cantos of the *Messiah* by Klopstock (1748)⁷², and the controversy over occasional poems⁷³, the growing tension between Leipzig and Halle is all but unexpected.

⁶⁸ See Bodmer’s letter to Lange, without date, in Lange, *Sammlung gelehrter und freundschaftlicher Briefe*, 1. Theil, p. 129.

⁶⁹ Bergmann, *Die Begründung der deutschen Ästhetik*, pp. 91 and 129. As is known, Pyra, who prematurely died in 1744, was the author of two vehement pamphlets on the corruption of taste provoked by Gottsched and his followers, see his *Erweis, daß die G*ttisch*dianische Sekte den Geschmack verderbe*, s.e., Hamburg und Leipzig 1743; and his *Fortsetzung des Erweises, daß die G*ttisch*dianische Sekte den Geschmack verderbe*, Schütze, Berlin 1744.

⁷⁰ T.J. Quistorp, *Erweis, daß die Poesie schon für sich selbst ihre Liebhaber leichtlich unglücklich machen könne*, «Neuer Büchersaal der schönen Wissenschaften und freyen Künste», 1. Band, 5. Stück, November 1745, pp. 433-452.

⁷¹ G.F. Meier, *Vertheidigung der Baumgartischen Erklärung eines Gedichtes*, Hemmerde, Halle 1746.

⁷² The necessity of a strong bond between poetry and religion is theorized by Meier in the *Untersuchung einiger Ursachen des verdorbenen Geschmacks der Deutschen*, Hemmerde, Halle 1745, § 8. On the link between religion and the new aesthetic science, much has been written in the last years. Here, I can mention only E. Müller, *Ästhetische Religiosität und Kunstreligion in den Philosophien von der Aufklärung bis zum Ausgang des deutschen Idealismus*, Akad.-Verl., Berlin 2004, pp. 33-67; and B. Auerochs, *Die Entstehung der Kunstreligion*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2006, pp. 119-260.

It is precisely Meier's critique to occasional poems that pushes Gottsched to take up arms again in the preface to the fourth edition of his poetics (1751)⁷⁴. By now, it is evident that Meier has become his enemy of choice, although he never names him directly. Meier defends himself in a paragraph of his *Verteidigung seines Beweises des ewigen Lebens der Seele* (1752), complaining about the libellous tone taken by the confrontation⁷⁵. This skirmish paves the way for the violent exchange of blames in 1754, which marks one of the pivotal moments in the dispute. The occasion is provided by Gottsched's publication of the *Auszug* (1754) of Batteux's *Beaux-Arts réduits à un même principe*, of which there was no real need given the German editions by Johann Adolph Schlegel (1751) and Philipp Ernst Bertram (1751). Despite a number of justifications⁷⁶, the aim of Gottsched's operation was evidently polemical, taking advantage of Batteux's name to «contain the stream of erroneous doctrines willing to find the nature of poetry not in imitation, but simply in the savage expression of unbridled imagination, which they call “aesthetics”»⁷⁷.

That this noun cast suspicion in the ranks of Gottsched's followers was already clear in a satire by Quistorp of 1750. In it, the author pretends to have a dream of an interview with the late poet Canitz about the most recent tendencies of German literature, where aesthetics is ridiculed as «our newly-invented picture of the soul»⁷⁸. In the following

⁷³ Wulf Segebrecht reconstructs the whole quarrel in his *Das Gelegenheitsgedicht. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und Poetik der deutschen Lyrik*, Mezler, Stuttgart 1977, pp. 255 ff.

⁷⁴ J.C. Gottsched, *Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst*, Breitkopf, Leipzig 1751⁴, *Vorrede zu dieser vierten Ausgabe*, where Gottsched returns to the beginning of the dispute concerning occasional poems.

⁷⁵ G.F. Meier, *Verteidigung seines Beweises des ewigen Lebens der Seele und seiner Gedanken von der Religion*, Hemmerde, Halle 1752, § 33.

⁷⁶ Review to the *Auszug aus den Herrn Batteux schönen Künsten*, «Das Neueste aus der anmuthigen Gelehrsamkeit», Wonnemonath 1754, pp. 464-467.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 464. Aesthetic poets, Gottsched writes in the *Auszug*, would like to «turn the imitation of the beautiful nature into obscure alchemical ramblings, worthy of Jakob Böhme and the Herrnhuters», see J.C. Gottsched, *Auszug aus den Herrn Batteux schönen Künsten, aus dem einzigen Grundsätze der Nachahmung hergeleitet*, Breitkopf, Leipzig 1754, p. 42.

⁷⁸ T.J. Quistorp, *Gespräch im Traume, mit dem Hrn. v. Canitz, über die neumodische hieroglyphische Schreibart*, «Neuer Büchersaal der schönen Wissenschaften und freyen Künsten», 9. Band, 4. Stück, 1750, pp. 309-316, here p. 311.

years, Gottsched's acolytes seem to develop an outright obsession for the word 'aesthetics', repeated as a mantra to exorcize not only the principles of the new science, but also Klopstock's poetry, with which it was considered as inextricably linked⁷⁹, thus making an unwilling contribution to the capillary spread of the term⁸⁰. The values of phantasy and intuitiveness promoted by aesthetics thereby become in the eyes of critics irrefutable evidence of the endorsement of confusion in thought and turgidity in style, of which the neologism seems to seize the spirit⁸¹. In this way, 'aesthetics' turns into a sort of insult (*Schimpfwort*)⁸², while the adjective 'aesthetic' counts as a synonym of 'senseless'⁸³. Such a systematic misunderstanding, common until the end of the Fifties⁸⁴, does not leave Meier untouched. In his *Vorstellung der Ursachen, warum es unmöglich scheint, mit Herrn Professor Gottsched eine nützliche und vernünftige Streitigkeit zu führen*, published in October 1754⁸⁵, Meier undertakes an apology of aesthetics, which is first of all an attempt to defend its original

⁷⁹ Bergmann, *Die Begründung der deutschen Ästhetik*, p. 200.

⁸⁰ H. Reiss, *Die Einbürgerung der Ästhetik in der deutschen Sprache des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts oder Baumgarten und seine Wirkung*, «Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft», 37, 1993, pp. 109-138, here p. 129. See also K. Weimar, *Geschichte der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft bis zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Fink, Paderborn 2003, p. 80.

⁸¹ Gottsched himself publicly accredits this misunderstanding in his *Fortsetzung und Beschluß des neulichen Schreibens von der französischen und wälschen Musik*, &c., «Das Neueste aus der anmuthigen Gelehrsamkeit», Weinmonath 1753, pp. 738-756, here pp. 745-746 note. While aesthetic words are full of obscure and confused concepts, Gottsched argues, certain critics dare to praise them as the true force of current poetry, rhetoric and critique. A collection of occurrences of this arbitrary use is in Bergmann, *Die Begründung der deutschen Ästhetik*, ch. 12.

⁸² G.S. Nicolai, *Vorrede*, in *Briefe über den itzigen Zustand der schönen Wissenschaften in Deutschland*, hrsg. von F. Nicolai, s.e., Berlin 1755, without page.

⁸³ J.M. Gesner, *Primaе lineae isagoges in eruditionem universalem*, ed. J.N. Niclas, *Tomus primus*, Fritsch, Lipsiae 1774, p. 243. The first edition dates back to 1756; in the mentioned posthumous edition, Gesner's pupil Niclas provides Gesner's oral glosses drawn from the latter's lectures. The mentioned passage is taken from the gloss to § 238.

⁸⁴ M. Huber, *Fortsetzung der Geschichte der deutschen Dichtkunst*, «Hannoversches Magazin», 27. Stück, 1. April 1768, coll. 417-432, here col. 422.

⁸⁵ Bergmann, *Die Begründung der deutschen Ästhetik*, p. 216.

meaning⁸⁶. For this reason, after pointing out that the adversaries have attacked «their own concept of aesthetics, false and completely arbitrary»⁸⁷, he turns to reject their allegations. Whatever detractors may say, aesthetics does not intend to identify the essence of poetry in the merely sensible, bombastic or obscure expression of thoughts⁸⁸, and is not in opposition to sound reason⁸⁹, but has its ground in the principle of improvement of sensible knowledge, which leads to beauty⁹⁰.

This is the writing against Gottsched to which Baumgarten makes allusion in the found letter, the date of which, it should be remembered, is the 25th October 1754⁹¹. Baumgarten refrained from public comments in the course of this controversy. The author of the *Aesthetica* is however a silent presence in the dispute, which does not fail to be evoked. Already in Quistorp's answer to Meier in 1746, the former wonders why Baumgarten does not defend himself on his own⁹². In the *Trostschreiben an den Herrn Prof. Meier über seine Kriegserklärung an dem Herrn Prof. Gottsched* (1756), the reply of Gottsched's party to Meier's *Vorstellung*⁹³, Baumgarten's silence appears unjustified, obliging his pupil to re-

⁸⁶ G.F. Meier, *Vorstellung der Ursachen, warum es unmöglich scheint, mit Herrn Professor Gottsched eine nützliche und vernünftige Streitigkeit zu führen*, Hemmerde, Halle 1754, § 4. Meier's claim is also against some «friends of aesthetics» who abuse of the term.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, § 4.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, §§ 7-9. According to Meier, the essence of poetry does not even lie in the expression of thoughts in general, but rather in a certain degree of beauty of thoughts, *ibidem*, § 10.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, § 11.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, § 21. It is impossible to examine here all the arguments adduced by Meier.

⁹¹ Meier does not make reference only to Gottsched, but also to «several other writers», § 1, whence the *perge* used by Baumgarten beside the name of Gottsched in the letter. Such authors are in particular Triller, Reichel, Schönaich and Quistorp: what Bergmann calls the four-leaf clover, see Bergmann, *Die Begründung der deutschen Ästhetik*, p. 200. On the theoretical proximities and differences between Gottsched and Baumgarten, see D. Mirbach, *Gottsched und die Entstehung der Ästhetik*, in *Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766)*, hrsg. von E. Achermann, Akad.-Verlag, Berlin 2014, pp. 113-130.

⁹² «Pommersche Nachrichten von gelehrten Sachen», 28. Stück, 8. April 1746, pp. 225-229, here p. 228.

⁹³ It mostly consists in a series of glosses to each of the 29 paragraphs of Meier's original writing. Its probable author is Christoph Otto von Schönaich.

peat the master's words⁹⁴. On his part, Meier had announced at the beginning of the feud over the definition of poetry that Baumgarten had neither time nor will to defend himself, thus giving permission to Meier to support his cause⁹⁵. Baumgarten, however, does not seem an uninterested spectator in the quarrel with Gottsched. A precious, albeit indirect, witness of his thought can be drawn from the letter written on the 22nd September 1747 by the Frankfurt on the Oder jurist Johann Ludwig Uhl to Gottsched. In it, the former exhorted the latter to interrupt the epistolary contacts with Baumgarten, who, according to Uhl, did not miss the opportunity to speak ill of Gottsched and to support the Swiss⁹⁶. Baumgarten himself has not remained completely silent on the subject. In the preface (dated 12th September 1749) to the third edition of his *Metaphysica* (1750³), he returns to the misunderstanding on his definition of poetry, dismissing it as a spectre unfairly declared to be his thought. At the end of the brief reply, Baumgarten comments on the delay of his answer: «I, to be sure, have remained silent. Now, I would not have written a word concerning this wretched little quarrel had it not seemed to others who do not know me that I, putting forth the pretext of more serious annoyances, am perhaps concealing a dearth of arms with which I would defend myself»⁹⁷. Once any possible ambiguity in his behaviour has been dispelled, Baumgarten seems to categorically exclude his intention to plunge into nit-picking disputes whatsoever in the future: «I am using this as my occasion to publically implore immortal God never to give me so much spare time that I could while it away, squander it, and waste it through quarrels about something so

⁹⁴ *Tröstschreiben an den Herrn Prof. Meier über seine Kriegserklärung an dem Herrn Prof. Gottsched*, 1756, p. 11: «Ich habe überdem gehöret, daß du bey der *Aesthetik* nur *verba Magistri* widerhohlet: warum vertheidiget sich denn der nicht?».

⁹⁵ Meier, *Verteidigung der Baumgartischen Erklärung*, § 1.

⁹⁶ The relevant passage is recorded in T.W. Danzel, *Gottsched und seine Zeit. Auszüge aus seinem Briefwechsel*, Dyck, Leipzig 1848, p. 215. The only extant proof (to date) of this exchange is a reference letter for a student written by Baumgarten to Gottsched (27th November 1744), see A.G. Baumgarten, *Die Vorreden zur Metaphysik*, hrsg. von U. Niggli, Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 1999, pp. LXXIX-LXXX.

⁹⁷ A.G. Baumgarten, *Metaphysics: A critical translation with Kant's elucidations, selected notes, and related materials*, ed. by C.D. Fugate and J. Hymers, Bloomsbury, London 2013, p. 75.

empty, when such things are stirred up against me»⁹⁸. It is certain that Baumgarten considered the dispute over aesthetics as empty as the one over his definition of poetry. The public silence held in this occasion is therefore predictable, especially since he knows that he can count on possible help: «If bolder and wrongful attacks must at times be repelled, there will be no shortage of defenders, just as until now there has not been a shortage of those who are to be commended with a public act of gratitude – those who, without having such a defence either asked or demanded of them, nevertheless consented, as befits gentlemen, to write on my behalf, or rather on behalf of the truth that I have written»⁹⁹. In consequence of this approach, Baumgarten's thoughts on the scathing attacks against aesthetics are probably expressed only in private exchanges. To date, his considerations in the found letter are Baumgarten's only direct witness of his attitude towards this theme.

Upon reading Meier's book, Baumgarten writes, he has the impression to have neglected a duty towards himself. It was precisely the duty to defend his own honour which had pushed Meier to react to Gottsched's digs, as he himself admits in the first paragraph of the *Vorstellung*¹⁰⁰. It is well understandable that a defamatory campaign whose aim was to make «of aesthetics the object [of] cold mockeries»¹⁰¹ can have annoyed Baumgarten too, who had coined the word and employed it to indicate a philosophical discipline in its own right. Yet, Baumgarten asks, how can Meier manage not to fly into a rage in replying to such accusations? Honour should indeed be defended, though not at the expense of one's health. Already in the preface of 1749, Baumgarten had begged God «never to allow the idea of true honour to sink so low in my view that I, armed, would never find it opportune to immediately attack whatever sort of things are spoken or written against me, waging a war that will never have a victory parade»¹⁰². Hence, Baumgarten returns to the issue of honour raised by Meier in order to uphold the opposite conclusion as to the attitude to adopt. On the one

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 75-76.

¹⁰⁰ Meier, *Vorstellung der Ursachen*, § 1. Meier had devoted a whole booklet to the issue of honour, see G.F. Meier, *Gedancken von der Ehre*, Hemmerde, Halle 1746.

¹⁰¹ Meier, *Vorstellung der Ursachen*, § 4.

¹⁰² Baumgarten, *Metaphysics*, p. 75.

hand, the «lazy philosopher» should not have permitted this abuse; on the other hand, though, and despite the blind violence of the attacks, he thinks his decision is right. In sum, silence is once again an aware and intentional choice, but in no case conniving. From this point of view, Baumgarten's argumentation seems to entail the (not too) veiled recommendation to Meier, who was ill in that period, not to invest time and energy into the vain engagement to rebut criticism. Also in this case, Baumgarten turns to God, who will rescue him from misery in due time, offering a counterweight to suffered tribulations.

In spite of the timely review in a series of learned journals of that age¹⁰³, Meier's writing will not prevent further assaults to the newly-born discipline. An example is the one made by the theologian Johann Benedict Carpzov (1755), who has no qualms about criticizing aesthetics in the funeral oration for a colleague. Carpzov too has a pronounced idiosyncrasy for the Grecism introduced by Baumgarten to indicate an art «unknown to the Atticans and the Romans»; in this case, though, the objections are grounded on arguments rather than on derision and misconception. Carpzov's thesis is simple: even if not all of aesthetics is despicable, the good things present in it derive from rhetoric, poetics, grammar or philosophy; the rest is a jumble of senseless sophistry. Consequently, aesthetics is a sort of chimera with a human head and the body of a beast¹⁰⁴. Not by chance, Carpzov's writing receives the support of Gottsched's journal «Das Neueste aus der anmuthigen Gelehrsamkeit», providing the opportunity for a new onslaught on aesthetics¹⁰⁵. In this case, however, it is no longer Meier who takes the pen to defend the cause, but his pupil (as well as a colleague of Baumgarten's in Frankfurt on the Oder) Gottlob Samuel Nicolai. To the doubts raised on the alleged inutility of this discipline, Nicolai replies in the preface to the *Briefe über den itzigen Zustand der schönen Wissenschaften in Deutschland* (1755) with a heartfelt defense of Baumgarten's and Meier's

¹⁰³ See Bergmann, *Die Begründung der deutschen Ästhetik*, p. 218.

¹⁰⁴ J.B. Carpzov, *Sempiternae memoriae spectabilis consultis et excellentis viri Carol Gerard Guilielmi Lodtmanni*, Schnorr, Helmstadü 1755, pp. VIII-XI.

¹⁰⁵ Review to *Sempiternae Memoriae Spectab. Consult. & Exc. Viri Caroli Ger. Guil. Lodtmanni*, «Das Neueste aus der anmuthigen Gelehrsamkeit», Heumond 1755, pp. 544-551.

invention¹⁰⁶, claiming the irreducibility of aesthetics to other disciplines, such as metaphysics, from which it draws only the general principles¹⁰⁷.

On his part, Meier does not respond any longer to such provocations, not even when they concern him more proximately. He does not reply to the mentioned *Trostschreiben* directly addressed to him; he does not reply to Christoph Otto von Schönaiach's malevolent epigrams¹⁰⁸ nor to Johann Gottfried Reichel's two pamphlets against his terminological clarifications¹⁰⁹, where the author continues to mock Meier's fatherly care for a 'foundling' – aesthetics – born from another's head¹¹⁰. The reasons of this lack of reaction can be multiple. Bergmann makes reference to the fact that Meier was liable to be blackmailed because of his letter of 1743 in Gottsched's hands which could have been published, as threatened by Reichel in an underhand way¹¹¹, if Meier had crossed the line¹¹². Now it is clear that Meier's restraint could also be partly due to the implicit recommendation addressed to him by Baumgarten in their private correspondence. In this sense, the found letter makes it possible to insert a missing piece in the articulated puzzle of the controversy between Gottsched and nascent aesthetics.

¹⁰⁶ Nicolai defines aesthetics as the «science of the feeling intellect» (*Wissenschaft des empfindenden Verstandes*), thus stressing both the importance of the *Empfindung* in the judgements on beauty and its possible agreement with the intellect, see Nicolai, *Vorrede*, without page.

¹⁰⁷ If aesthetics is useless because the lower faculties are already discussed in metaphysics, then logic must be considered useless as well. Actually, both logic and aesthetics are highly useful, in that both of them promote the improvement of human faculties (respectively the higher and the lower), see *ibidem*.

¹⁰⁸ [C.O. von Schönaiach], *Sammlung von Sinngedichten*, 1755, pp. 9; 46-47; 52.

¹⁰⁹ [J.G. Reichel], *Erläuterungen über die ganze Aesthetik in einer Nuß*, Frey-Singen, 1755, pp. 110-111; [Id.], *Der ganzen Aesthetik in einer Nuß; oder des Neologischen Wörterbuchs Erster Anhang*, 1755, pp. 19 ff.

¹¹⁰ [Id.], *Erster Anhang*, p. 31.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

¹¹² Bergmann, *Die Begründung der deutschen Ästhetik*, pp. 223-224.