

# Barthold Heinrich Brockes’ Physico-Theology of Smell

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Studies on the significance of olfaction for philosophical aesthetics are justifiably interested in innovative literary explorations of links between aesthetic values and olfactory perceptions. In this context, the early Enlightenment poetry by Barthold Heinrich Brockes has remained neglected: literary historians rarely pay attention to his approaches to smell, and the few pertinent studies appeared in German only. This article introduces the English-speaking public to the valuation of smell in the theological aesthetics of Brockes’ poems, and it concludes with a sketch of his contribution to the tradition of modern cultic smelling, in which the olfactory and the aesthetic are variously intertwined. He thematises smelling as an emotional climax of human relations to external nature which are validated by a sacred essence of the experiential world, the awareness of which can be conjured up through innerworldly poetic thought. This interpretive pattern of olfactory culture has remained relevant to the present day. | *Keywords: German Literature, Enlightenment, Nature Poetry, Natural Theology, Literature as Ritual, Literature and Olfaction*

Barthold Heinrich Brockes (1680–1747), one of the most eminent German poets of the early Enlightenment, does not yet separate between the poetic contemplation of natural beauty, the didactic conveyance of scientific knowledge, the theological proof of God, and the cultic praise of Creation. The poems of his nine-volume collection *Earthly Joy in God [Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott]* (1721-1748) thematise smell as part of nature, the useful design and beauty of which prove the existence, indeed the concealed presence of God, and they celebrate them as an inducement to worship the Creator. All of his poems contemplate the connexion of humanity with the sacred, but as smell plays on the boundaries of the bodily permeable self, it can serve as a medium for religious self-experience; and as the joy of smell affects body, feeling and thought, it marks an emotional climax of religious experience. For Brockes, mindful sniffing and the experience of beauty are comparable: both quicken the mind and point at the Creator. When smell and vision evoke sacred inner states, the aesthetic and the olfactory merge into one complex of sensory knowledge. As Brockes’ poetic osmology is largely unknown to the

English-speaking public, it warrants a detailed introduction with illustrative examples. The first part of the following overview foregrounds Brockes' approach to the observation and philosophical explanation of smell, whilst the second part is focussed on his theological interpretation of smell and its exercitatorial values.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Philosophical Borrowings and Independent Observations

The persona of Brockes' poem *Three Kinds of Violas* [*Dreyerley Violen*] describes a bunch of flowers he had asked his gardener to bring in. The flowers are now in a vase, and the beholder sits down so that he can honour their admirable qualities in detail:

And their fair effects  
[...]  
Are conceived by our brain:  
As through the spiced sweetness,  
Which mingles with a range of scents,  
The heart is pleased by feeling smell,  
The tongue 's enlivened, blood refreshed,  
And Man 's filled with delight. Me thinks  
(Although the words for smell do not come easy)  
That, when I close my eyes for joy,  
And savour the sweet scent with mindfulness,  
I find therein united smell and strength  
Of honey, milk of almonds, must, peach-stone, and rind of cinnamon,  
And that with lovely sweetness  
A trifle sour- and bitterness are merged  
To a degree that pleases heart and brain.  
From their versicoloured caves they filled  
My brain, the seat of souls, in pleasant ways  
With an almost incorporeal fare,  
And, yes, imbued with a dry juice  
The soul itself in sweet abundance.  
This animated me, whilst savouring  
Such pleasant and fair properties, to raise  
My eyes up towards heaven  
And give with utmost gratitude my thanks,  
To him who is from all eternity the fount of every virtue.<sup>2</sup>

[Und deren holde Influentzen  
[...]  
In unserm Hirn empfunden werden:  
Indem durch die gewürtzte Lieblichkeit,  
Die mit so mancherley Geruch sich mischet,  
Im spürenden Geruch das Hertz erfreut,  
Die Zung' erquickt, das Blut erfrischt,  
Der Mensch vergnüget, wird. Mich deucht,  
(Beschreibet man gleich den Geruch nicht leicht)  
Wann ich vor Lust die Augen schliesse,  
Und mit Aufmercksamkeit des süssen Dufts genieße,  
Es sey darin der Duft und Kraft vereint zu finden  
Von Honig, Mandel=Milch, Most, Pfirsch=Kern, Zimmet=Rinden,

<sup>1</sup> These parts are largely based on chapter 5 of Krause (2023).

<sup>2</sup> All translations of Brockes' poems are mine.

Und daß, mit holder Süßigkeit,  
 Ein wenig säurliches und bitt'res sich verbinden  
 In solchem Grad, der Hertz und Hirn erfreut.  
 Sie fülleten aus ihren bunten Hölen  
 Mir mein Gehirn, den Sitz der Selen,  
 Und nährten es, auf angenehme Weise,  
 Mit einer fast uncörperlichen Speise,  
 Ja träncketen zugleich mit einem trocknen Saft  
 Die Sele selbst in süßem Überfluß.  
     Dieß trieb mich im Genuß  
 So angenehm= und holder Eigenschaft,  
 Die Augen auf= und Himmelwärts zu schlagen,  
 Und höchst= erkenntlich Danck zu sagen  
 Dem, der von Ewigkeit die Brunnquell aller Kraft.  
 (Brockes, 1732, pp. 18–19)]

This poem is in many ways representative for Brockes' poetic approach to smell: it is focused on blossom smell, takes time for detailed observation, stresses the simultaneous effects of scent on body, emotions and thought, and responds to this intense impact with gratitude towards the Creator, whose existence is proven by the purposive design of nature, which meets human needs and provides scope for the enjoyment of the senses. The observation of human and external nature is scientifically interested; Brockes recognises the contribution of smell to taste, to which contemporary neuroscience refers as 'retronasal olfaction' (Smith, 2021, p. 31), and the phrase 'dry juice' links up with Aristotle's (384–322 BC) theory of smell.<sup>5</sup>

According to Aristotle, "[o]dour is the natural substance consisting of the Sapid Dry diffused in the Moist, and whatever is of this kind would be an object of Smell". For him, neither steam (which only consists of water) nor smoke (in which air and earth are mingled) are objects of our sense of smell: "Hence the propriety of the figure by which it has been described by us as an immersion or washing of dryness in the Moist and Fluid." However, Brockes' qualification of smell as an almost incorporeal nourishment does not match Aristotle's theory: "It is plain, therefore, that odour, *qua odour*, does not contribute to nutrition; that, however, it is serviceable to health is equally plain" (Aristotle, 1908, unpag., 445a). Moreover, Brockes repeatedly stresses the refreshing or cooling effect of smell, which seems to contradict the Aristotelian view:

This is the reason of the further fact that man alone, so to speak, among animals perceives and takes pleasure in the odours of flowers and such things. For the heat and stimulation set up by these odours are commensurate with the excess of moisture and coldness in his cerebral region. (Aristotle, 1908, 444a–b)

To be sure, Aristotelian medical theories of the Middle Ages also know cooling

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle also noted a link between smell and flavour; he states that smells "have taken their names from the latter" (Aristotle, 2002, p. 35, 421a 30). However, his theory does not allow for a contribution of smell to taste; similarities between smell and taste result from partially identical qualities of distinct objects of perception. The sense of smell perceives *dryness* with the help of a moist *medium* contained in air and water, which "has no name" (Aristotle, 2002, p. 29, 419a 34); for further detail, see Johansen, 1996, pp. 1–19. Brockes' impression that the flowers vitalise the tongue is not compatible with Aristotle's model.

scents such as the smell of roses, but they need to explain such special cases as an exception from the rule (Robinson, 2020, p. 78); by contrast, Brockes presents the refreshment through scents as an evident norm beyond doubt.

Brockes' shorter poems usually aim to enhance our senses' attention to nuance, and they therefore don't normally discuss scientific concepts; in his 310-page didactic poem *Observations on the three Realms of Nature* [*Betrachtungen über die drey Reiche der Natur*], published posthumously in 1748 and still unfinished by the time of his death, he engages with such concepts in more detail. For example, he explains that catarrhs in the nose stem from glands and not, as older theories had it, from the brain (Brockes, 1748, p. 208); with this statement, he also distances himself from a medical explanatory model which presupposed, in line with Aristotle, that the brain is cool.<sup>4</sup> But in a didactic poem about *The five Senses* [*Die fünf Sinne*] of 1727, he still assumed that discharges from the nose would flush out moisture from the brain, and he insisted that cold and moisture hinder the sense of smell (Brockes, 1734, pp. 328–380, here pp. 345 and 346); at the same time, he did not deny the refreshing effect of smell fostered by warmth. Brockes' claim that the qualities of smells vary with the geometrical shape of perceived particles is based on a view held by Democrit and the atomists, from which Aristotle had distanced himself (Aristoteles, 2002, pp. 64–65; cf. Johansen, 1996, p. 15). In short: Brockes proceeds in an eclectic fashion, is prepared to correct himself and tolerates possible tensions between theoretical models and observations.

When Brockes' praise singles out the rosebuds, “from which a spiced myrrh-fume, / Wherein sweet- and bitterness are fairly mingled, / Rises upwards invisibly, refreshing brain and head” [Aus denen ein gewürtzter Myrrhen=Rauch, / Worin sich süß und bitter lieblich mischet, / Unsichtbar aufwärts steigt, und Hirn und Haupt erfrischt (Die Rose [The Rose] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 82–92, here p. 87))], he seems in line with Aristotelian-leaning humoralism, but as a supporter of Paracelsian models, he does not let himself be tied down to that approach. Brockes links up with Paracelsus' view that salt, sulphur and mercury are manifestations of the three fundamental principles which are inherent in all things, and he adopts Paracelsian interpretations of bodily functions as alchemistic processes; by contrast, humoralism posits four bodily fluids, and these correspond with the four elements of earth, air, water and fire which, according to Aristotle, make up everything in the terrestrial realm.<sup>5</sup> And in further contrast with humoralism, one of Brockes' spring poems qualifies the entire “army of plants” [Pflanzen-Heer] as refreshing: “Therefrom emerges instantly a fair and bitter scent / Refreshes our sense of smell, and fills the air” [Draus dampft sogleich ein lieblich bitterer Duft, /

<sup>4</sup> “For his brain is naturally cold [...] (whence it happens that the exhalation arising from food, being cooled by the coldness of this region, produces unhealthy rheums)” (Aristotle, 1908, 444a).

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed exploration of Brockes' eclectic approach with emphasis on his views on alchemy and affinities to Paracelsus, see Kemper, 1991, pp. 114–121; for an account of the main difference between Aristotle's theory of elements and Paracelsus' concept of fundamental essences, see Kemper, 1988, pp. 125–127.

Erfrischt den Geruch, und füllt die Luft (Erbauliche Betrachtung eines zeitigen Frühlings [Edifying Reflections on an Early Spring] (Brookes, 1732, pp. 4–7, here p. 5)) –, and further examples could be provided.<sup>6</sup> His praise of the hyacinth is likewise:

Your lovely scent fills up my brain and chest  
 With balm-exuding pleasure-pregnant spirits,  
 Which, due to rather unexpected joy,  
 Nearly usurp the soul itself with sweet delight,  
 Which well-nigh sinks in a sea of charm,  
 When it, as if intoxicated by the pow'r of scent,  
 Drinks the subtle sweet and sour juice  
 From your fresh blossom's sapphirine chalice.  
 From which, as it is downwards turned,  
 The dry juice pours incessantly,  
 Without it ever being emptied,  
 For our enjoyment flows incessantly.  
 The very sweetest Tokay grapes  
 Cannot give such force and zest  
 To our dry palate and our weakened chest  
 With their nectar-juice, as your  
 Spiced vapour, mixed with balm,  
 Refreshes my befogged head  
 And feeds and gives to drink to my mind;  
 So that it turns itself delightedly to your Creator,  
 The or'gin of all joy, from whose love and power  
 Sprouts what is lovely; who makes all the beauty.  
 I wish, with hot desire and joyful gratitude,  
*That I will also spend my time as you do;*  
*That, in the fragrance of good deeds,*  
*My neighbour realises GOD in me, as I in you;*

[Dein lieblicher Geruch erfüllt mir Hirn und Brust  
 Mit Balsam= dünstenden Vergnügungs= schwangern Geistern,  
 Die, durch recht unverhoffte Lust,  
 Sich fast der Seele selbst mit süßser Lust bemeistern,  
 Als welche schier im Anmuhts=Meer versincket,  
 Wenn sie recht wie berauscht durch des Geruches Kraft,  
 Den säurlich=süssen zarten Saft  
 Aus deiner frischen Blüht Sapphirnen Kelchen trincket.  
 Woraus, indem sie unterwärts gekehrt,  
 Der trockne Saft sich stets ergiesset,  
 Und, sonder, daß sie ausgeleert,  
 Zu unsrer Lust beständig fließet.  
 Die allersüßesten Tockayer=Reben  
 Vermögen nicht, dergleichen Kraft und Lust  
 Dem durren Gaum' und unsrer matten Brust,  
 Durch ihren Nectar=Saft, zu geben,  
 Als dein gewürtzter Dunst, mit Balsam angemischt,  
 Mir mein benebelt Haupt erfrischt,  
 Und mein Gemühte lab't und träncket;

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Die Blumen [The Flowers] (Brookes, 1732, pp. 104–109, here p. 107); unlike the diamond, the flowers refresh “with their smell” [“durch ihren Ruch”]; Morning Prayer in Spring, to be used from 23 March until 22 June [Morgen=Gebet im Frühlinge, vom 23. Martii bis den 22. Junii zu gebrauchen] (Brookes, 1732, pp. 471–477, here p. 473); here, the “lung” [“die Lunge”] is refreshed [“erfrischt”].

So daß es sich entzückt zu deinem Schöpfer lenket,  
 Dem Ursprung aller Lust, aus Dessen Lieb' und Kraft,  
 Was herrlich ist, entspriesst; Der alles Schöne schafft.  
 Ich wünsch', aus heissem Trieb' und froher Danckbarkeit,  
 Daß ich auch so, wie du, verbringe meine Zeit;  
 Daß, im Geruch der guten Wercke,  
 Mein Nächster, GOTT in mir, wie ich in dir, bemercke;  
 Die Hyacinthe [The Hyacinth] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 338–340, here pp. 339–340)]

The comparison of hyacinth scent with sweet Tokay grapes seems to associate refreshment through smell with enlivening rather than cooling effects, the more so as its balsamic virtue consists in removing fog from the head, thus clearing the mind, but in another poem, the hyacinth's "ambergris scent" [Ambra=Duft] with its balsamic quality reminiscent of Tokay is explicitly qualified as "cool" [kühl] (Ein Bett voll Hyacinthen [A Flower-Bed full of Hyacinths] (Brockes, 1734, pp. 24–27, here p. 25)). Brockes also qualifies the scent of lilies of the valley which "refreshes" [erfrischt] "brain and nerves" [Gehirn und Nerven] as "fresh and really cool" [frisch und wirklich kühl] (Lilien=Convallien oder Mayen=Bluhmen [Lilies of the Valley, or Flowers of May] (Brockes, 1734, pp. 56–59, here p. 58)). When he claims that the smell of *syringa vulgaris* refreshes the "brain" [Hirn] (Die Cyrene [Silphium] (Brockes, 1734, pp. 67–70, here p. 68)), and that lemon scent refreshes "heart and brain" [Herz und Hirn] (Betrachtungen über die drey Reiche der Natur (Brockes, 1748, pp. 190–192, here p. 192)), it remains unclear whether cooling effects are implied.

In a poem about the marigold variety *Flos Africanus*, Brockes implicitly assumes that the strength of a smell depends on the *heat* of its substance:

In this herb, of which many  
 Cannot bear the fragrance,  
 Must burn strong fire in the bitterness,  
 As it smells pungent, if one rubs it;  
 So that its smell almost resembles bitter myrrh.

[In diesem Kraut, von welchem viele  
 Nicht den Geruch vertragen können,  
 Muß in der Bitterkeit ein starckes Feuer brennen,  
 Weil es so streng, wenn man es reibet, reucht;  
 Daß am Geruch es fast den bittern Myrrhen gleicht.  
 Flos Africanus und Ritter-Sporn [French Marigold and Delphinium]  
 (Brockes, 1734, pp. 405–409, here p. 407)]<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> In *Die Nelcken* [The Carnations], Brockes proceeds in a similar manner (Brockes, 1732, p. 244–250, here pp. 248); here, the scent of carnations is compared to the aromatic fire of cloves, the German name of which is identical with that of the flower: "Are Ceylon's cloves not beaten by the scent / Which pleases head and heart? / As our palate with delight / Feels the sweet fire of the spice, / As is our nose stirred in the same way / Through the scent of the carnations, which alone / Are similar in smell to the most strong of spices." ["Sind nicht durch den Geruch, der Haupt und Herz vergnügt, / Ceylonens Nägelein besiegt? / Wie unser Gaum mit Lust / Von dem Gewürtz das süsse Feuer spühret; / So wird die Nas' auf gleiche Art gerühret / Durch den Geruch der Nelcken, die allein / Der starck'sten Würtz an Düften ähnlich seyn."] Brockes chiefly links the *spiciness* of smell with heat: "One smells, yes, almost sees it in the air / The rich fertility. A spicy scent, / Wherein life-fire glows, / Fills all one sees." ["Man riechet, ja man siehet fast in der Luft / Die fette Fruchtbarkeit. Ein angewürtzter Duft, / Worin ein Lebens=Feuer glüheth, / Erfüllet alles, was man siehet."] (Noch andere Frühlings=Gedancken [Further Thoughts on Spring] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 60–63, here p. 63)).

Brockes' innovative contribution to the science of smell consists in combining Aristotle's model of dry substance in a moist medium with empirical observations of self and world which provide evidence for the refreshing effect of smell on brain and spirit without invalidating the theoretical knowledge about the contribution of heat to the dispersion of strong fragrance. In his poem *Bean Fields* [*Bohnen-Felder*], he even notes that some mixtures of scents are bodily refreshing and emotionally inflaming:

Through these so sweetly mixed airs one feels the heated blood  
 Not only, so to speak, itself recov'ring, cooling, and refreshing,  
 A soul that's thusly driven by sweet air, by God, feels  
 Fire that is inwardly enlivening [...]

[Durch die so süß vermengten Dünste, fühlt man das hitzige Geblüte,  
 Nicht nur sich gleichsam recht erhohlen, nicht nur sich kühlen und  
 erfrischen,  
 Es fühlt ein, durch so süsse Luft, durch Gott getriebenes Gemüthe  
 Ein innerlich erquickend Feuer, ein fast entzückendes Empfinden [...]  
 (Brockes, 1740, pp. 133–136, here p. 133–134)]

In line with medical theories which were current in 18<sup>th</sup> century England (Tullett, 2019, p. 31), Brockes refers to the nerves' contribution to smell, which allows him to question the assumption of a direct link between the nose and the brain.<sup>8</sup> As trigeminal sensations can contribute to the sense of smell, Brockes' sense of refreshment may also refer to such impressions. Be that as it may, the physiological refreshment of blood, lungs, nerves or brain is indicated by feelings and sensations; the observation of nature is thus valorised as an independent source of knowledge. Unlike the empiricist German thinkers of the Enlightenment, who characterise the understanding of science in the epoch from around 1740 onwards (Alt, 1996, pp. 7–11), Brockes combines the observation of external and inner nature with a hermeneutic approach to the purposive order of Creation as a whole: "The creatures' silent language / Can be heard everywhere; / It can be tasted, felt and seen." [Der Creaturen stille Sprache / [...] / Sie läßt sich allenthalben hören; / Man kann sie schmecken, fühlen, sehn. (Erbauliche Betrachtung eines zeitigen Frühlings (Brockes, 1732, p. 7))].

## 2. Theological Perspectives and Poetic Exercitations

The versatile applicability of the myrrh motif, which indicates something fiery in the *Flos Africanus* poem and refreshing roses in another context, results from Brockes' method to use the same *tertium comparationis*, in this case bitter smell, to tease out a series of categorically different similarities of sensory experiences. When bitter smells of different plants are compared with the fragrance of myrrh, he thus does not claim that their bodily or spiritual impact is comparable, too. Brockes' comparative specifications of smells draw on a limited pool of motifs; besides taste impressions, he chiefly mentions ritually relevant plants or secretions such as myrrh or incense, precious animal products such as ambergris, civet and musk, or balm, which is a mixture of

<sup>8</sup> Zumbusch (2012, pp. 62 and 65) provides examples for medical hypotheses concerning the contribution of the physiology of nerves to infections from German discussions in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

resins and oils. His comparisons of plant scents with smells of inorganic or animal substances follow the same pattern as his depictions of scenes in which impressions of earth, water and sky mirror one another or are compared to cut precious stones: in a meaningfully organised Creation, all orders can mirror one another.<sup>9</sup> The baroque writer Catharina von Greiffenberg had also compared plant scents with musk, but unlike her, Brockes does not meditatively withdraw from external nature in order to examine the sacred nexus of cosmic ordering. When Brockes elaborates on the experience of specific smells in great detail, he tends to present them as a climax of the enjoyment of self and world, which inspires body, feeling and reason to praise God; sometimes, he also interprets fragrant objects allegorically, but this approach is no longer at the centre of the understanding of nature, as it was in the baroque.<sup>10</sup>

The poem *The Ruddy-White Hyacinth* [*Die rōthliche weisse Hyacinthe*] increases the complexity of such enjoyment, as it explores the synergy of vision and olfaction. Beauty is beheld by the sense of sight:

As I, on your white snow,  
 With zest, and grace within my soul  
 And heartfelt pleasure see,  
 How sweet from the filled cavity  
 Such a sweet redness radiates,  
 And paints your petals' whitish light  
 with rosy-coloured sheen;  
 When I behold the tender shine,  
 And note the gentle rosy-coloured glow,  
 Which even puts the most beautiful blood  
 Of the most lovely skin to shame,  
 Whilst white and red so sweetly join together:  
 My touched spirit 's being filled with pleasure.

[Da ich auf deinem weissen Schnee,  
 Mit Lust, und Anmuth meiner Seele,  
 Und innigem Vergnügen seh,  
 Wie süß aus der gefüllten Höhle,  
 Solch eine süsse Röthe strahlet,  
 Und deiner Blätter weißlich Licht,  
 Mit rosenfarbnem Glanze malet;  
 Wenn ich den zarten Schein betrachte,  
 Die sanfte rosenfarbne Gluht,  
 Die, auch das allerschönste Blut  
 Der schönsten Haut, beschämt, beachte,  
 Da weiß und roth so süß sich fügt:  
 Wird mein gerührter Geist vergnügt.  
 (Brockes, 1740, pp. 28-29, here p. 28)]

<sup>9</sup> In this way, Brockes flags up his debts to hermetic thought (Kemper, 1991, p. 119).

<sup>10</sup> "The bitter-sweetish scent / Which streams from crowns imperial / Is an image which instructs / That even the most high rank / Is often filled with bitterness." [Der bitter-süssliche Geruch, / So aus den Kaiser=Cronen quillt, / Ist ein mit Lehr' erfülltes Bild, / Daß auch der allerhöchste Stand / Mit Bitterkeit oft angefüllt. (Die Kaiser=Crone [Crown Imperial] (Brockes, 1732, p. 64)).



At the same time, the ruddy-white hyacinth vitalises the sense of smell and renders sensible a creative force in all beings that can only be beheld by the nose:

When now your fair adornment subsequently  
Is gently pressed against my nose:  
Thus is, through renew'd fancy, in me,  
The spirit vitalised in a new way.

Is the Creator's grace, who joined  
A twofold pleasure within you, not worth,  
that, as one sensed a twofold joy,  
One honours him with joyous praise to God?

Yes, I am, my dearest flower, through the splendour that adorns your,  
thusly led to our Creator, source of you and me.  
Your friendly, cool and sourly-sweet scent stirs me most notably,  
Which, from you little chalices exhales into the air  
Incessantly, as if from many mouths, as if arising from so many sources,  
Which to our souls does not appear through sight and through the light,  
as other bodies, but  
only through the smell, just through our nose.

[Wenn nun nachhero deine holde Zier  
Sich sanft an meine Nase drücket:  
So wird, durch neue Lust, in mir,  
Der Geist auf neue Weis erquicket:

Ist denn des Schöpfers Huld nicht werth,  
Der doppelt Lust in dir verbunden,  
Daß, wenn man doppelt Lust empfunden,  
Man, durch ein froh Gott Lob! Ihn ehrt?

Ja ich werde, liebste Blume, durch das Prangen, das dich zieret,  
So zu dein- als meiner Quell, unsern Schöpfer, hingeführet.  
Sonderlich rührt mich dein freundlich=kühl=und säurlich süsser Duft,  
Der, aus deinen kleinen Kelchen, unaufhörlich in die Luft,  
Als aus so vielen Münden haucht, als aus so viel Quellen steigt;  
Der sich unsern Seelen, zwar durch die Augen, und durchs Licht,  
So wie andre Körper, nicht  
Sondern ihr, nur im Geruch, durch die Nase bloß, sich zeigt.  
Die röthliche weisse Hyacinthe [The Ruddy White Hyacinth] (Brockes, 1740,  
pp. 28-29)]

Brockes' longer didactic poem about the senses performs the physico-theological proof of God with a view to the sense of smell; he concludes from the purposive order of nature the existence of a Creator who acts with intent, wisdom and benevolence (Kemper, 1991, p. 48):

68. That we smell in moderation  
Is a marvel. If we would  
Sense all vapours much more keenly,  
Which right now we hardly could;  
Many thousand matters must  
Cause displeasure and disgust,  
About whose fumes we now don't carp,  
As our sense is not too sharp.

69. How much ben'fit in our lives  
Does the sense of smell us bring?

If a blaze starts to arise,  
it's more useful than our seeing.  
Conflagrations would be felt,  
If they were not timely smelt and  
Fought, so that the fire would  
Not destroy our livelihood.

70. So much spicery, many flowers,  
Numberless variety,  
Which in India and Edom  
Grow and in barbarity,  
Would not serve a single creature,  
Vanish as a useless feature,  
If our noses were not fit  
To refresh themselves with it.

71. Tell me, uncouth mindset, does  
All this come by accident,  
Or from pow'r and loving kindness  
of an or'gin sapient?  
Tell me, should this not be prized  
So much as to be recognised?  
Who of creation loses sight,  
desecrates his Maker's might.

[68. Daß wir riechen, doch mit Massen,  
Ist ein Wunder. Sollte man  
Alle Dünste schärffer fassen,  
Die man itzt nicht spüren kann;  
Würden so viel tausend Sachen  
Uns Verdruß und Eckel machen,  
Deren Dampf uns itzt nicht rührt,  
Weil man gar zu scharf nicht spürt.

69. Welchen Nutzen in dem Leben  
Bringet der Geruch uns nicht?  
Will sich eine Brunst erheben;  
nutzt er mehr, als das Gesicht.  
Manche Gluht wär' ausgebrochen,  
Hätte man sie nicht gerochen,  
Und bey Zeit dem feur gewehrt,  
Das sonst Hab' und Gut verzehrt.

70. So viel Specerey und Bluhmen,  
Die unzählbar mancherley,  
Was in Indien, Idumen  
Wächst und in der Barbarey,  
Könnte kein Geschöpf gebrauchen,  
Und müst', ohne Nutz, verrauchen,  
Wär die Nase nicht geschickt,  
Daß sie sich dadurch erquickt.

71. Sprich, verwildertes Gemüthe,  
Kommt dieß wohl von ungefehr  
Oder aus der Macht und Güte  
Eines weisen Wesens her?  
Sprich! verdienen solche Wercke  
Nicht so viel, daß man sie mercke?

Wers Geschöpfe nicht betracht,  
Schändet seines Schöpfers Macht.  
Die fünf Sinne [The Five Senses] (Brockes, 1748, pp. 325–380, here p. 350–  
351)]

The world is, as stanza 70 shows, created to be perceived; the enlivenment of the senses through fragrance fulfils an intrinsic purpose of Creation, and our senses are, as stanza 68 explains, attuned to a proper degree of enjoyment in this world.

In his posthumously published didactic poem, Brockes feels compelled to see “in nature’s work of reproduction / Not only ways of nature, but something divine” [in dem Werke der Natur der Vermehrung die wahre Bildung der Gestalten / nicht bloß für Wege der Natur, für etwas Göttliches zu halten], and he thus locates God’s presence in nature. Under the guise of St Augustine’s dictum that belief begins where knowledge ends – “Where reason falls down, that is where faith is being built up” (St Augustine, 1993, p. 108) –, Brockes relates the perceptible world to something that is hidden everywhere: “Whatever in nature’s realm I hear, smell, taste and see, / All that is and shows itself, does indicate, / That something everywhere’s concealed which surpasses reason by far” [Was ich im Reiche der Natur auch höre, rieche, schmeck’ und sehe, / So weist mir alles, was vorhanden, so zeigt mir alles, was sich zeigt, / Daß etwas überall verborgen, so die Vernunft weit übersteigt (Brockes, 1748, p. 231)]. The claim that the divine is “hidden everywhere” [überall verborgen] is not identical with St Augustine’s doctrine that everything which exists points at an absent Creator (Krause, 2023, pp. 25–27). Brockes’ love for God is a love for the universe: “GOD is no old man, no spirit such as other spirits, / He is an eternal ubiquitous All, / An immeasurable whole” [GOTT ist kein alter Mann, kein Geist, wie andre Geister, / Er ist ein ewiges allgegenwärtigs All, / Ein unermesslichs Gantz [...] (Das, durch die Betrachtung der Grösse GOTTes, verherrlichte Nichts der Menschen. In einem Gespräche Auf das Neue Jahr, 1722 [The Nothingness of the Human Species, Glorified by the Contemplation of God’s Greatness, in a Conversation about the New Year 1722] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 431–467, here p. 445))]. Brockes speaks to God as “you who, for our salvation, conceal yourself in yourself” [Der Du Dich in Dir selbst, zu unserm Heyl, verhüllest]; the senses thus cannot perceive God himself, but the concealment of his presence, so that he is almost visible in the starry sky (Der Wolcken= und Luft=Himmel [The Sky of Clouds and Air] (Brockes, 1734, pp. 5–14, here p. 14)). The human ability to think God’s greatness is also of divine origin; with this capacity, he “almost” seems “to descend in our mind” [fast Sich Selbst in unsern Geist zu sencken (Brockes, 1732, p. 461)]. From this perspective, the awareness of God in the experience of smell also marks a religious climax, as the concealed real presence of God is almost palpable in body, feeling and soul.<sup>11</sup> The concealed share of man in God’s emanation sacralises the self, as Brockes’ word choice testifies:

<sup>11</sup> Brockes emphatically distances himself from attempts to turn nature into a Goddess; see *Misbrauch des Worts Natur* [Misuse of the Word Nature] (Brockes, 1740, pp. 310–313). This attitude is also manifest in Brockes’ translation of a poem by Shaftesbury; Brockes modifies Shaftesbury’s reference to an all-loving nature, to which the latter ascribes a divine quality, and speaks of divine nature as a source of knowledge about God’s essence. See Kimber (1969, p. 807).

When my chest, as all's in blossom,  
 Draws balm-full spring scent  
 Of the air, warmed up by Zephir's breeze,  
 T'wards itself whilst breathing;  
 [...]
 My soul is filled by a sweet shiver.

[...]

A pleasant fear, a lovely holy fright,  
 Aquivers my heated blood,  
 And calls upon me to see, hear, feel, taste  
 Awestruck the great Giver's goodness.

[Wenn meine Brust, da alles blühet,  
 Den Balsam= vollen Frühlings=Duft  
 Der, durch des Zephirs Hauch erwärmten, Luft  
 Im Atem=Holen an sich ziehet;

[...]

Nimmt meine Seel' ein süsser Schauder ein.

[...]

Ein' angenehme Furcht, ein holdes heiligs Schrecken,  
 Erreg't mein wallendes Geblüte,  
 Und heisset mich, des grossen Gebers Güte,  
 Mit Ehr=Furcht voller Lust, sehn, hören, fühlen, schmecken.  
 Sing-Gedicht [Song-Poem] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 58–59)]

Elsewhere, he asks a human mind to note in “holy wonderment” [heiliger Verwund’rung] the sensually perceptible qualities of leaves, including their scents (Betrachtung der Blätter [Contemplation of the Leaves] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 75–79, here p. 76). A bowl filled with fruit allows humans “with soul and mind through all our senses’ doors / The Godhead’s shine, that’s everywhere concealed, / To feel as present” [Mit Seel’ und Geist durch aller Sinnen Thüren / Der überall verhüllten Gottheit Schein / Als gegenwärtig zu verspühren (Eine Schüssel mit Früchten [A Bowl with Fruit] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 288–295, here p. 294)]. The force with which God acts is “his love, / Which in the scent my heart has felt” [Seine Liebe, / Die im Geruch mein Herz empfunden (Die Rose [The Rose] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 82–92, here p. 91))]. “One tastes in scents the balm of his love.” [Man schmecket im Geruch den Balsam Seiner Liebe (Die Welt [The World] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 503–509, here p. 506))]. When the lily’s good scent causes “sleep, melancholia, pain and dizziness” [Schlaf, Schwermuth, Schmerz und Schwindel zeuget (Die Lilie [The Lily] (Brockes, 1734, pp. 108–113, here p. 112))] in the long run, it still teaches us helpfully that all joy requires its proper measure, and if bad smells annoy human beings at all, they harbour excessive expectations, as they judge Creation as a whole only in the light of human self-love. To be sure, the “scent of the best spiceries / Cannot delight the nose as much / As stink does cause us nausea” [Duft der besten Specereyen / Kann nicht so sehr die Nas’ erfreuen, / Als ein Gestanck uns Eckel bringt (Ursprung des menschlichen Unvergnügens, samt einem bewährten Mittel wider dasselbe, in einem Sing=Gedichte, darin alle Absätze einerlei Reim=Endung haben [The Origin of Human Displeasure,

Including a Proven Antidote, in a Song-Poem, in which all Paragraphs end on the same Rhyme] (Brockes, 1732, p. 523–525, here p. 523)), but the reflection on all the good we receive from God can alleviate this inadequacy. Even a poor man who sees the sunshine from a grave in the “mist of half-rotten air” [Dunst der halb=verfaulten Luft (Der Ursprung des menschlichen Unvergnügens, bey dem Anfange des 1720sten Jahres [The Origin of Human Displeasure, At the Occasion of the Beginning 1720th Year] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 406–414, here p. 413))] would yearn for God as the origin of this beauty, and repulsion pertaining to the ageing body can be superseded by our certainty of bodily resurrection (Das, durch die Betrachtung der Grösse Gottes, verherrlichte Nichts der Menschen. In einem Gespräche Auf das Neue Jahr, 1722 [The Nothingness of the Human Species, Glorified by the Contemplation of God’s Greatness, in a Conversation about the New Year 1722] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 431–467, here p. 445)). Therefore, Brockes’ literary attention training plays a prophylactic role, too; those who are aware of the world’s design transcend blinkered self-love and protect themselves against displaced expectations.

The awareness of this design also includes knowledge of the sense of smell of other species. In his encyclopaedic didactic poem, Brockes praises the extraordinary ability of the dog to scent game, even though it cannot always perceive the hare’s trace in its entirety; he notes that foxes use stench to deter badgers from their den, recognises the elephant’s trunk as an organ that is sensitive to smell, and realises the cat’s keen sense of smell (Brockes, 1748, pp. 254, 255, 263, 270 and 290). He also speaks about scents of animals, whilst he is usually focussed on plant scents. The impression that the faeces of martens have a “not unpleasant lovely smell” [nicht unangenehmen lieblichen Geruch] is as fit for poetry as the observation that an auroch’s tuft of hair smells like musk, or that burning a goat’s horn helps against the plague and other epidemics (Brockes, 1748, p. 276; cf. pp. 295 and 300). Brockes’ nose still appreciates the scent of the civet cat’s glandular secretion, which went out of fashion over the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century;<sup>12</sup> he praises the “scent” [Duft] of its “ejection” [Auswurf[s]], which

With such sweet loveliness and fair fumes in the air,  
Which it surrounds, wells up incessantly,  
So that through smell wells up sensitive joy in our brain  
And delectates us dearly. Who of us humans understands,  
In which way all the particles, which please our smell, pile up,  
Emerge and last so long? As a thing, which lies near to them and,  
Is, so to speak, embalmed by them, gives pleasure that’s as strong as they,  
Without depriving them of anything.

[Mit solcher süßen Lieblichkeit und holden Dünsten in die Luft,  
Die sie umgiebt, beständig quillet,  
Daß ein empfindliches Vergnügen durch den Geruch das Hirn erquillet  
Und uns recht inniglich vergnügt. Wer von uns Menschen kann begreifen,  
Auf welche Weise sich die Theilchen, die den Geruch vergnügen, häufen,  
Entstehen, und so lange dauren? Da Dinge, die bey ihnen liegen,  
Von ihnen gleichsam eingebiesamt, so stark uns, wie sie selbst, vergnügen,

<sup>12</sup> In the 1760s, civet had fallen out of favour, especially in France; see Muchembled (2020, pp. 138–139).

Ohn etwas ihnen zu benehmen. [...]  
(Brockes, 1748 p. 292)

These smell motifs are only insofar in a sacred context as Brockes regards the poetic reflection on the Divine as a cultic activity; the process of smelling itself is sanctified when it points to the concealed presence of God. In addition, Brockes appropriates biblical motifs and transfers their sacred authority to impressions in which the figurative meaning of biblical speech takes on a perceptible form:

The flowers are offering musk-sated juices;  
The herbage is stewing enlivening forces,  
Solely to honour the great universe.  
O aspire, you humans, to notice it well;  
And strive, through good deeds and devotion,  
To be a sweet savour before the Creator!

[Es opfern die Blüthen bebiesamte Säfte;  
Es dünsten die Kräuter erquickende Kräfte,  
Dem grossen All zur Ehr' allein.  
Ach trachtet, ihr Menschen, es wol zu bemercken!  
Bemüht euch, in Andacht und guten Wercken,  
Dem Schöpfer ein süsser Geruch zu seyn!  
Der Garte [The Garden] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 165–177, here p. 177)]

The biblical wording “sweet savour”, in German translated as “Geruch” [smell], refers to a sacrifice agreeable to God (in the Old Testament, see 1 Moses 8: 21; 2 Moses 29: 25; 3 Moses 1: 9 and 13; 3 Moses 17: 6; 3 Moses 23: 18; 4 Moses 15: 3, 7 and 24; 4 Moses 18: 17; 4 Moses 28: 6, 8 and 13; 4 Moses 29: 13 and 36; see also 1 Samuel 26: 19; cf. 3 Moses 26: 31), and as the fragrance of flowers and herbs is presented as such a sacrifice, the allusion to the bible seems plausible enough. However, when the bible qualifies pious human acts with smell motifs, good savour pertains to the knowledge of Christ which rises from the believers to God (2 Corinthians 2: 14–16), and to good deeds themselves (Philippians 4: 18). As Brockes leaves Christ unmentioned and amalgamates the figurative smell motifs of St Paul with the real aroma of a sweet sacrifice, the redeemer is marginalised in favour of a direct link to God. The attempt to harmonise readings in the Holy Scriptures and the Book of Nature results in a creative appropriation of biblical motifs, by which the poetic service of worship emancipates itself from ecclesial piety. The mystics of the Baroque had deified a consciousness which turned away from the bodily senses, and some humanists of the Baroque presented smells of nature as part of symbolically meaningful perceptions with sacred meaning. In Brockes’ poetry, the praise of scent also puts humanity’s permeable bodily self in a sacred context. Literary-historical studies on smell culture justifiably characterise the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the beginning of an “olfactory silence” or “muting” which remains a dominant trend for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Rindisbacher, 1992, p. 284; Friedman, 2016, p. 127, see also Davies, 1975): “the eighteenth century begins to clean up its act, and odours are increasingly complained about, condemned, and more and more eliminated” (Rindisbacher, 1992, p. 34), and “in many threads of the developing novel, we can see scent deployed in

increasingly muted ways over time” (Friedman, 2016, p. 119). However, such narratives of deodorisation need to be complemented by inquiries into impactful innovations of 18<sup>th</sup>-century olfactory culture.

### 3. Ritualised Depictions of Smelling in German Literature after Brockes

Brockes’ inquiry into the nature of sensory knowledge did not make a lasting contribution to theological aesthetics; however, it marks the beginning of a long-lived modern tradition in German literature to endow depictions of smelling with ritual significance. Brockes interprets olfactory experiences of nature as manifestations of a sacred essence, and he claims that poetic thought can conjure up the awareness of such manifestations. This pattern of using olfactory motifs from nature as a medium for poetic rituals has survived to the present day; the movements of Sensibility and Storm-and-Stress continued to evoke smells to heighten a joyous perception of nature framed by a religious ethics of love which increasingly relied on sacralised feeling as a source of innerworldly knowledge. From Romanticism through Symbolism to Expressionism, smells and their synergies with sound often mark thresholds to sacred spheres of inspiration, in which autonomous poetic forms reveal the *natura naturans*, the ensoulment of the world as a whole, or the metaphysical essence of authentic selfhood. And since the movement of New Objectivity after the First World War, neo-pagan explorers and poetic seers of nature have sniffed out and sought to conjure up the sacred value of natural forms which exceed and delimit the scope of human control. Links between olfaction and the aesthetic vary significantly over the course of this tradition. Pre-Romantic movements only allow the olfactory to amplify the aesthetic experience of visible and audible beauty and sublimity (cf. Eibl, 1996, pp. 9–10); by contrast, Romantic synaesthesiae of sound and smell mark a fusion of the aesthetic and the olfactory, and post-Expressionist proponents of ritualised smelling endow the qualities of scent with a sensory claim to validity in its own right. Brockes’ poetry marks the beginning of a tradition which has variously redressed relations between olfaction and the aesthetic, and which thus deserves the attention of research into the history of olfactory aesthetics, even though pertinent poetic contributions only intersect incidentally with the concerns or approaches of philosophical aesthetics. In this context, the literary historian can widen the scope for understanding such contributions; their contextualisation in the osmological discourse of modernity is still a desideratum.

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