



Compilation as “heutige Bildung”: Philological and Philosophical Perspectives on Compilation in Friedrich Schlegel’s *Lessings Gedanken und Meinungen*

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Published online: 2 March 2020
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Abstract

This article considers the role of compilation in the work of Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), with particular emphasis on his anthology *Lessings Gedanken und Meinungen* (1803–1804). While compilation was often derided in an era increasingly dominated by the quest for originality, Schlegel gives it a new dignity and holds it as essential to his belief in textual “Potenzierung”. The article highlights the philological and philosophical implications of Schlegel’s concept of compilation, as well as its significance for what Schlegel terms “Kritik”.

Keywords Compilation · Lessing · Philology · Philosophy · Bildung

Compilation (from Latin *compilare*: to plunder), understood as the process whereby material from one or several texts is extensively copied and re-used in other texts, had a bad reputation among German scholars in the late eighteenth century. Unlike earlier in the century, when it still entertained a venerable position,¹ it was now viewed with suspicion and mockery. Some examples of this include Lichtenberg ridiculing young researchers who, instead of writing down their own “Empfindungen und Beobachtungen”, had taken to excerption and compilation, to the degree that they became “weiß, gelb, schwindsüchtig, und frigid und impotent” (Lichtenberg 1968, 441); similarly, Johann Gottfried Herder denigrates the “falscher Geschmack”

¹ For the importance of compilation in the early parts of the century, and in relation to the program of “eclecticism”, see Gierl (2001). Gierl quotes Bayle, who in his important dictionary (1697-) saw compilation as a principle of anti-dogmatic criticism: “Il faut apporter des preuves, les examiner, les confirmer, les éclaircir. C’est en un mot un Ouvrage de Compilation” (quoted in Gierl 2001, 65). According to Anthony Grafton, Bayle elevated compilation as critical method, “making compilation into a term of pride” (Grafton 1999, 198).

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shown by the “philologische Notenmacher”, whose texts appear as “ein großer Wald kahler fremder compilirter Stellen” (Herder 1967, 306); and in the controversy between Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Christian Adolf Klotz, sparked by the former’s *Briefe, antiquarischen Inhalts*, Klotz feels utterly scandalized at being viewed by Lessing as “ein Compiler, ein Ausschreiber” (Lessing 2007, 1013, also 400f).² Undoubtedly, this bad reputation had much to do with a transition from a stable culture of learning to one privileging individuality and originality where the celebration of the author replaced the belief in authority (von Arburg 2004, 113). A key aspect of this new “cult of originality” (Hirschi 2013, 151) was the Genieästhetik, whose art of “plundering” was distinctively different from that of the compiler. For instance, Rivarol, a late eighteenth century writer of aphorisms, viewed it thus: “Le génie égorge ceux qu’il pille” (Rivarol et al. 2016, 1383). While the compiler subjected himself with servility to the original author whose memory he however tended to discredit,³ the genius triumphantly killed off and made everyone forget his sources.

This article concentrates on the compiling methods behind Schlegel’s anthology *Lessings Gedanken und Meinungen aus dessen Schriften zusammengestellt und erläutert von Friedrich Schlegel* (1803–1804).⁴ The anthology, which has been rarely analyzed,⁵ is a compilation of material from several of Lessing’s most important theoretical works,⁶ which are paired with a small number of essays by Schlegel himself where he discusses various aspects of Lessing. My contention is that Schlegel in these essays presents both a *philology* of and a *philosophy* of compilation, and that both relate to his crucial concept of “progressive Universalpoesie”. Schlegel does not compile Lessing in order to present highlights or “schöne Stellen” from his work, nor to get a better grasp of the past in which Lessing lived. Rather

² For a detailed account of the controversy between Lessing and Klotz, see Wilfried Barner, in Lessing 2007.

³ See Johann Georg Hamann on compilation: “Die meisten Zusammenschmierer sind Harpyen, die, wenn sie alles, was ihnen ansteht, aufgeschluckt haben, das übrige verderben und beschmutzen.” (Hamann 1953, Bd. 5, 267).

⁴ It was republished, without changes, in 1810, now under the title *Lessings Geist aus seinen Schriften, oder dessen Gedanken und Meinungen zusammengestellt und erläutert von Friedrich Schlegel*. At the time, Lessing’s work had already been collected or anthologized several times: thus in *Schriften*, vols. 1–6, Berlin 1753–1755; *Vermischte Schriften*, vols. 1–14, Berlin 1771–1793; *Lessings sämtliche Schriften*, vols. 1–31, Berlin 1793–1825.

⁵ “Als Ganzes ist sie kaum jemals gewürdigt, mitunter ganz falsch charakterisiert worden. (...) viele Verfasser haben die Ausgabe offenbar überhaupt nicht in der Hand gehabt.” (Höhle 1977, 127). The interest in Schlegel’s anthology among his contemporaries was scarce and mostly it fell out in negative terms (see the comments in Eichner, in Schlegel 1975, XXXII). Dilthey, somewhat later, would dismiss the anthology as a “schlecht maskierte Buchhändlerspekulation” (id). Nonetheless, Eichner is right when he says that the essays contain some of Schlegel’s very best insights (Schlegel 1975, XXXIII). On Schlegel’s essays on Lessing in general, see Higonnet (1980), Peter (1982), Louth (2006). Apart from Höhle, the critics have skirted any discussion on the problem of compilation in his anthology.

⁶ Interestingly, the compilation does not contain any of the famous plays by Lessing, with the exception of *Nathan der Weise*. The reason for this is that Schlegel dismisses Lessing’s “poetische Sinn und Kunstgefühl”, and he considers his dramas—*Miss Sara Sampson*, *Minna von Barnhelm*, *Emilia Galotti*, as well as his epigrams and fables—inferior works. Only *Nathan der Weise*, a “philosophical work”, according to Schlegel, is included in his anthology. For more on this, see Höhle (1977, 123f).

he wants to single out and reflect on the “critical” character of Lessing, and to what extent Lessing’s thoughts were still upsetting the views and doxa of Schlegel’s own day. Arguing that Lessing’s works have “produzierende Kraft” (1975, 83), Schlegel thus in fact creates an etiology of his own Romanticism, finding in Lessing a prefiguration for his own writing. Schlegel’s anthology of Lessing is perhaps the best example of Schlegel’s well-known saying that “der Historiker ist ein rückwärts gekehrter Prophet” (1967, 176)

This article begins by examining the “philological” dimension of compilation. Of specific importance is Schlegel’s suggestion that his so-called “Studium” of Lessing implies compilation as a kind of “prolongation” of the original text: Lessing’s work forms a springboard for Schlegel’s own literary experiments. Philological compilation thus implies a “Potenzierung” of the original text. The second subchapter considers the “philosophical” dimension of compilation: Schlegel presents Lessing’s compiled work as a *fermenta cognitionis* (1975, 80) inviting the reader to think for himself, provoking his “Selbstdenken” (1975, 50). As we will see, this involves a concept of compilation based in dialogue. The last subchapter examines Schlegel’s anthology within the historical context, with particular emphasis on the idea of Bildung. Here I briefly turn to August von Kotzebue’s satire *Der hyperboreische Esel, oder die heutige Bildung* (1799). This will help us to see the distinctions that emerged around 1800 in relation to the idea of Bildung between a romantic compilation embraced by Schlegel, with its emphasis on reflection and critique, and the theatrical and performative compilation favoured by Kotzebue.

Compilation and Philology

In *Zur Philologie*, Friedrich Schlegel writes: “Die Kompilazion muß ihre Stelle finden in der Philologie wo sie hingehört, und ehrwürdig erscheint” (2015, 180). Compilation, then, is, or should be, a philological practice. This practice consists in “Sameln, Excerpt. historische Recherchen, ächte Hypothesen. Lesen aller Schriftsteller, enzyklopädisches Lesen” (2015, 33). Evidently, philology thus implies what Schlegel frequently calls a “Studium”, qualifying it as “ein unendlich potenziertes Lesen” (Schlegel 1980, 81). However, the various views on philology that Schlegel presents in his many writings are notoriously difficult, and they do not offer one single and unifying definition of this phenomenon. In the following, I will therefore concentrate on a metaphor he uses in his 1797 essay “Über Lessing”: the *labyrinth*. As I argue, this metaphor gives valuable hints regarding the connection between philology and compilation in Schlegel’s work.

Before his anthology of Lessing came out in 1803–1804, Schlegel had already published the essay “Über Lessing” in 1797. This text is remarkable for many reasons, but perhaps the most fascinating in our context is Schlegel’s reflection on his own way into Lessing, his “Studium” of this author. His reading of Lessing, he writes, had gone through various stages, from an initial naïve stage to a more learned one. Speaking of the first stage, he writes: “Mein Lesen war interessiert, und noch nicht *Studium*, d.h. uninteressierte, freie, durch kein bestimmtes Bedürfnis, durch keinen bestimmten Zweck beschränkte Betrachtung und Untersuchung,

wodurch allein der *Geist* eines Autors ergriffen und ein *Urteil* über ihn hervorgebracht werden kann.” Schlegel admits that the so-called “Durchbruch”, the “Sinn für Lessing” only came to him later, and since then are “sämtliche seiner Werke (...) ein wahres *Labyrinth* für mich, in welches ich äußerst leicht den Eingang, aus dem ich aber nur mit der äußersten Schwierigkeit den Ausweg finden kann” (Schlegel 1967, 111; italics mine).

Schlegel’s point about “Studium” as wandering in a labyrinth is interesting. To the one inside it, a labyrinth is a place of disorientation, a place where rather than finding one’s way, one loses it, and where ever new hints and suggestions present themselves. Instead of a clear continuity of direction, such a reading tends to break down into fragmentary views and an unending proliferation of possibilities. This chaotic experience has led, he notes in his 1797 essay, to not being able to commit to print the thoughts—“das Mittelbarste von dem, was ich über Lessing gesammelt und aufgeschrieben hatte”—that he had at first planned to publish. Instead of finding a way *out* of the labyrinth by taking his thoughts to print and to the public, his “Studium” consists rather in pluralizing and inventing *new ways into it*: “Denn das Interesse des Studiums überwog hier das Interesse der öffentlichen Mitteilung” (Schlegel 1967, 111).⁷

The metaphor of the labyrinth is quite relevant to *Lessings Gedanken und Meinungen*. In fact, his compilation has an undoubtedly labyrinthine character. Only a short glance at it shows that Schlegel has not at all sought to “simplify” Lessing. Rather, as Thomas Höhle notes, what emerges is a Lessing that is “zerschnitten, manipuliert, fragmentarisiert, am Ende regelrecht umgedreht und verfälscht” (Höhle 1977, 132). The radicalness of Schlegel’s approach leaps to meet the reader from the very first pages. His compilation is nothing less than a ragbag of quotations from Lessing’s oeuvre seemingly jumbled together without hardly any order or intention. Schlegel gives the reader almost no help whatsoever when it comes to navigating between the various compiled units. One finds few if any titles, no chapters, annotations or registers, and thus almost no information about from which of Lessing’s texts one or another passage—some rather short, some longer and taking up space of several pages—is collected. Rarely does the compilation indicate where one compiled passage transitions into the next. The long-standing tradition that any compilations would have to be ordered and framed,⁸ exemplified by John Locke’s “Méthode nouvelle de dresser des recueils” (1686), is thus a pattern Schlegel does not care to follow.

The sense of disorientation is particularly strong in the second volume, entitled *Fragmente dramaturgischen, literarischen und polemischen Inhalts*. Not only does it comprise a host of fragments from a variety of Lessing-texts, but it also includes arbitrary titles such as “Aus einer Vorrede” or “Über gewisse Versuche zu

⁷ Schlegel’s conception of the “disinterested” nature of “Studium” is influenced by Kant, but more importantly by Shaftesbury, to whom any action is only virtuous if it is disinterested. Shaftesbury hails the disinterested connoisseur as the only one who is able to judge a work rightly. See for instance his *Soliloquy: or Advice to an Author*.

⁸ See on this Parkes: “The Influence of the Concepts of Ordinatio and Compilatio on the Development of the Book”, in Parkes (1991, 35–70).

vergnügen" made by Schlegel himself, and which give hardly any clues as to the provenance of the compiled material. Schlegel, it seems, has willfully tried to nullify or even *confuse* the bibliographical foundation. He himself briefly touches on the idea of order (or lack of it) in the essay opening this volume: "Die Ordnung der nachfolgenden Fragmente ist im Ganzen chronologisch, und auch, *so viel als möglich war*, nach dem Zusammenhange der Materien eingerichtet; einige mehr isolierte Bruchstücke sind *willkürlich* eingeschaltet, wo es am schicklichsten schien" (Schlegel 1975, 85; italics mine). The conjunction of "Willkür" and "Schicklichkeit" appear here in a rather opaque fashion.

How does Schlegel defend his peculiar approach? Here, and in the following, we turn to the essay which opens the second volume, and which is arguably the most important in terms of compilation, namely "Vom kombinatorischen Geist". In this essay, Schlegel argues that what he wants to show with his anthology is not the integrity of Lessing's work, but Lessing as a thinker; attention is on the *spirit*, not the *letter*. However, this poses a dilemma for Schlegel, since the texts of Lessing compiled in his anthology, for instance *Laokoon* or *Briefe, Antiquarischen Inhalts*, are themselves full of quotations and references. How, then, to promote Lessing's own singular character in the face of the amount of compiled material which is incorporated in these Lessing-texts?

Indem nun alles, was sich auf die Gedanken anderer bezieht, auf Gegenstände, die jetzt völlig gleichgültig, auf Meinungen, die vergessen, auf Bücher, die so gut als nicht mehr vorhanden sind, weggestrichen werden mußte, blieben von einem großen Teil der Lessingschen Schriften nur Fragmente zurück, die es also ganz ohne unser Zutun geworden sind, oder vielmehr es gleich von Anfang an waren, und erst jetzt nachdem die störenden Zwischendinge weggenommen worden, in ihrer ursprünglichen Gestalt erscheinen können. (Schlegel 1975, 79)

Schlegel's aim is to show Lessing's "spirit", but this, he says, was only possible by effacing all the so-called "störenden Zwischendinge". Schlegel thus compiles Lessing, but he does not compile what Lessing had himself compiled. Clearly, his approach to compilation is quite ambiguous. As he puts it, what remains after the eradication of the superfluous "Zwischendinge" are *fragments*; but these fragments are allegedly not something he, Schlegel, has created by effacing the "Zwischendinge"; rather, they were fragments from the very beginning, because, as Schlegel insists, Lessing's thoughts themselves tend to be fragmentary.⁹ This means that Schlegel insists in the disorderliness and labyrinthine character of the original material. Moreover, it means that the difference between Lessing and Schlegel becomes somewhat blurred. For not only does Schlegel, by effacing the so-called "Zwischendinge", scissor the original texts into fragments that he then hails as the authentic expression of Lessing's spirit, but, in doing so, he can praise Lessing as a pioneer of the poetics of the fragment, the literary form which Schlegel, of course, himself

⁹ Especially so as regards theology and dramaturgy: "In dem dramaturgischen Fach, und in der Theologie, erscheint Lessing ganz absolut fragmentarisch" (Schlegel 1975, 79).

cultivated. Indeed, this underpins Schlegel's frequent claim that Lessing's work points beyond its own historical period, that it has "produzierende Kraft". Schlegel, in other words, seeks to capture these fragments as the prefiguration of his own cult of the fragment, and as the germ of early romanticism.

According to Schlegel, Lessing's fragmentary spirit points forwards; with a metaphor from Novalis, we could see these fragments as "seeds" that bear the potential of their future development.¹⁰ Of course, this typological model suggests that, even if Schlegel had earlier, in his 1797 essay "Über Lessing", noted the disinterested nature of his reading of Lessing, he nonetheless, with his anthology, has a clear purpose with the way he compiles him. His compilation might be fragmentary and labyrinthine, but the disorder is itself pointing to a deeper typological significance.

On these grounds, we might understand why Schlegel wants to distinguish his own compilatory practice from a more traditional one: what he calls "antiquarian compilation". About a popular book at the time, namely Jean-Jacques Barthélemy's *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce* (1788), Schlegel writes: "eine antiquar. Kompilazion, ohne histor. Geist, ohne alle φσ, (ohne Schönheitsgefühl,) ohne Styl, u ohne Sinn fürs Klassische" (Schlegel 2015, 180). As the word suggests, antiquarianism means the collection of various historical artefacts. Schlegel's view here reflects current historiographical notions at the time. In the seventeenth and at the beginning of the eighteenth century, antiquarianism still enjoyed a venerable status as a branch of historical study, but its position became somewhat more complex and tenuous as the century unfolded. In his influential article "Ancient History and the Antiquarian", Arnaldo Momigliano has traced this development, seeing what happened when thinkers like Montesquieu and Voltaire presented new ideas about the nature of history. Typical for the antiquary was a "fondness for classification and irrelevant detail. The antiquary was a connoisseur and an enthusiast; his world was static, his ideal was the collection" (Momigliano 1950, 311). In contrast, the French thinkers demonstrated "that history is a re-interpretation of the past which leads to conclusions about the present" (Momigliano 1950, 307). This view about the dynamic relationship between the past and the present is of course also something that we find in Schlegel. Not accidentally, in Schlegel's criticism of Barthélemy he notes that the latter's book lacks "historischer Geist". The "historical spirit" was exactly what Schlegel wanted to promote in his anthology. His compilation of Lessing is not "antiquarian", because its material is not "static", but dynamic.

How should we understand this "historical sense" as regards Schlegel's compilation of Lessing? An important factor is Schlegel's emphasis on Lessing's *Germanness*. In his earlier essay "Über Lessing", he had insisted that Lessing stood out and pointed beyond the era in which he lived, a period remarkable only for its "Nulität und Gemeinheit" and "das Übel des französischen Geschmacks" (1975, 61, 64). It is a specifically German critical spirit that Schlegel sees as emerging with the

¹⁰ "Die Kunst Bücher zu schreiben ist noch nicht erfunden. Sie is aber auf dem Punct erfunden zu werden. Fragmente dieser Art sind litterairische Sämereyen. Es mag freylich manches taube Körnchen darunter seyn – Indeß wenn nur einiges aufgeht" (Novalis 1978, 274).

fragments of Lessing. This call for a German spirit is crucial in the era of early Romantics. An *Athenäum*-fragment by August Wilhelm Schlegel is revealing:

Es ist ein erhabner Geschmack, immer die Dinge in der zweiten Potenz vorzuziehn. Z.B. Kopien von Nachahmungen, Beurteilungen von Rezensionen, Zusätze zu Ergänzungen, Kommentare zu Noten. Uns Deutschen ist es vorzüglich eigen, wo es aufs Verlängern ankommt; den Franzosen, wo Kürze und Leerheit dadurch begünstigt wird. Ihr wissenschaftlicher Unterricht pflegt wohl die Abkürzung eines Auszugs zu sein, und das höchste Produkt ihrer poetischen Kunst, ihre Tragödie, ist nur die Formel einer Form. (Schlegel 1967, 181)

A.W. Schlegel pits the French compilation and its obsession with form against the German “sublime”¹¹ notion of compilation where the point is not to abbreviate but to “prolong” the texts.¹² Unlike the French, German compilation is not “die Abkürzung eines Auszugs”, nor does it reduce a text into semantic “essences” and formulaic knowledge, but rather implies a proliferation and transformation of the textual material. Compilations, he argues, do not repeat, but alter and transform. What matters, is not the static integrity of the text, not the isolated and “eternal” form,¹³ but a text’s potential for self-transformation, such as it takes place through the kind of compilation Schlegel favours. Compilations, in fact, ensure that texts are “alive”, that they have “produzierende Kraft”. This means that a text should not be judged from its original state alone, but from the perspective offered by means of its compilation, which means its transformation. In fact, this is why Friedrich Schlegel, in one of his essays on Lessing, suggests that his own compilation gives the reader a better grasp of Lessing than the original texts themselves.¹⁴ His compilation offers a “second degree” perspective on Lessing that enriches and energizes the understanding of Lessing’s texts.

As we see, then, to compile is to prolong, thus to allow the semantic energy of the original to grow into the compilation and thus develop *outside* of the original

¹¹ This idea of compilation is “sublime” (“erhabner Geschmack”) because it rejects the fixation of a text within a given form. In this, Schlegel follows Kant: “Das Schöne der Natur betrifft die Form des Gegenstandes, die in der Begrenzung besteht; das Erhabene ist dagegen auch an einem formlosen Gegenstand zu finden, sofern *Unbegrenztheit* an ihm, oder durch dessen Veranlassung, vorgestellt und doch Totalität derselben hinzugedacht wird.” (Kant 1974, 165).

¹² In his criticism of the French cult of the formula, A.W. Schlegel echoes Herder’s criticism of the French in *Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1769*. As Herder puts it: “Sie haben nichts zu schreiben und machen also *Abrégés*, *Dictionnaires*, *Histoires*, *Vocabulaires*, *Esprits*, *Encyclopedieen* u.s.w (...) Die Originalwerke fallen weg” (Herder 2002, 91). For a discussion of Herder’s dismissal of the French encyclopedia, see Blumenberg (1986, 177ff).

¹³ In the *Athenäum* 116, Friedrich Schlegel writes that “und doch gibt est keine Form, die dazu gemacht wäre, den Geist des Autors vollständig auszudrücken.” (1967, 182). See also Benjamin: “die Romantiker faßten nicht, wie die Aufklärung, die Form als eine Schönheitsregel der Kunst, ihre Befolgung als eine notwendige Vorbedingung für die erfreuliche oder erhebende Wirkung des Werkes auf. Die Form galt ihnen weder selbst als Regel noch auch als abhängig von Regeln” (1973, 71).

¹⁴ “Vielleicht ist es (it is plausible that the “es” refers to *his*, Schlegel’s, anthology) das Beste, was Lessing uns hinterlassen hat, wenigstens dasjenige, woraus man den Umfang, den Hang und die Eigentümlichkeit seines Geistes am vollständigsten verstehen kann.” (1975, 80f).

text itself. This view is eminently philological, because it recalls Schlegel's metaphor about his reading of Lessing as walking in a "labyrinth". Just like a labyrinth, which, to the one walking in it, seems without any end or exit, German—and, one should add, romantic—compilation never comes to a definite halt: it transforms and *prolongs* the original. Instead of curtailing the text's semantic energy, it nurtures and develops it. It creates a proliferation of possibilities. The Schlegel brothers share the view of Novalis who claimed that the philologist is an "Ergänzer" with a "Sinn für das Leben und Individualität einer Buchstabenmasse", thus with preference for the organic self-development of texts (Novalis 1978, 387f).¹⁵ No text is finished or static, but dynamic and open to transformation.

In Schlegel's anthology, we see an example of this "prolonging" in his compilation of Lessing's fragmentary dialogue *Ernst und Falk. Gespräche für Freimäurer* (1778). Schlegel here follows in the wake of Herder, who had, in his 26. *Humanitätsbrief*, compiled the second dialogue of Lessing's *Ernst und Falk*, but simultaneously, under the title "Gespräch über ein unsichtbar-sichtbare Gesellschaft", also added his own continuation of this dialogue.¹⁶ Schlegel's compilation takes Herder's compilation *cum* addition a step further: Not only does he exclude much of the original material, reducing the original 5 dialogues into 2, but he also adds his own "third" dialogue: "Bruchstück eines dritten Gesprächs über Freimaurerei", but giving few signals that this is indeed a text written by himself. In other words, Schlegel blurs the distinction between the original author (i.e. Lessing) and the compiler (Schlegel), and in this way, he "prolongs" the original text—which had already itself been prolonged by Herder. We thus see an example of the very philological culture of German literary "Potenzierung" envisaged in the fragment by A.W. Schlegel quoted above. Schlegel does not so much create a new and original text, but simply prolongs the already existing one. Put differently, Schlegel critically engages with Lessing's original—and Herder's compilation—in his own "second degree" compilation, and in such a way that he installs himself into it, and gives himself the power to change it and its direction. Not perhaps completely by accident, he has abbreviated the name of the two interlocutors Ernst und Falk into their capitals E and F, and there is some indications that F in this text is indeed identical with Friedrich Schlegel himself.¹⁷ In sum, Lessing's original thus functions as a springboard, a "seed" for Schlegel's own creativity. As its compiler, he becomes what Novalis called the "Ergänzer" of the original text.

¹⁵ According to Novalis, this philological "sense" implies an attention to paratexts: "Noten, Titel, Motos, Vorreden, Kritiken, Exegesen, Commentare, Citaten sind philologisch. Rein philologisch ist es, wenn es schlechterdings nur von Büchern handelt, sich auf solche bezieht – und sich durchaus nicht auf die Originalnatur directe wendet" (Novalis 1978, 387f).

¹⁶ In a note, Herder points out that "Der erste Teil dieses Gesprächs ist aus Lessings 'Ernst und Falk. Gespräche für Freimäurer', Wolfenbüttel 1781, genommen, denen der zweite Teil des Gesprächs eine andere Wendung gibt". In Herder, the interlocutors are not called Ernst und Falk, but "er" and "Ich" (Herder 1991, 141).

¹⁷ Suggested, for instance, by the fact that this F promises to read out his own text "Über die Form der Philosophie", which was of course written by Schlegel.

We thus see that a philology of compilation leads to textual proliferation: the original is transformed and vitalized. This process illustrates what Schlegel calls *critique*, a key term in the essay “Vom kombinatorischen Geist”, and crucial to his emphasis on the German spirit of Lessing. About the state of critique in Germany, Schlegel writes: “Kritik und Literatur ist hier zugleich entstanden; ja die erste fast früher; allverbreitete und genau prüfende Gelehrsamkeit und Kenntnis auch der unbedeutendsten ausländischen Literatur hatten wir früher als eine einheimische” (1975, 81f). Evidently, Schlegel here takes into account the meagerness of a properly German literature, compared, for instance, to the abundance of French or British. However, this is not necessary a disadvantage, as Schlegel sees it. For as he claims, in a specifically German context, critique should not be posterior to literature itself, but on the contrary its antecedent and stimulus. Critique must be proactive and productive, rather than merely responding to already existing literature:

Mit der Veränderung dieses Verhältnisses aber ist auch schon die Möglichkeit und die Idee einer Kritik von ganz anderer Art gegeben. Einer Kritik, die nicht so wohl der Kommentar eines schon vorhandenen, vollendeten, verblühten, sondern vielmehr das Organon einer noch zu vollendenden, zu bildenden, ja anzufangenden Literatur wäre. Ein Organon der Literatur, also eine Kritik, die nicht bloß erklärend und erhaltend, sondern die selbst produzierend wäre, wenigstens indirekt durch Lenkung, Anordnung, Erregung (Schlegel 1975, 82)

This passage underscores what Schlegel had famously stated in *Athenäum*-fragment 116 about literature as a “progressive universal poetry” the essence of which is in its “becoming” (“Werden”) (1967, 182f). As “Organon”, critique is not reduced to mere commentary, but also implies the production and organization of texts.¹⁸ The task of the critic is to stimulate the *becoming* of literature. In this way, the critic is someone who establishes, controls and manipulates both literature itself and the discourse about literature, ensuring its continuing process and unfolding. This also matters for compilation: The compiler is someone who is able to transform and develop original texts, as well as the understanding of them.

Thus, we see the gist of Schlegel’s philology of compilation: in his view, texts are not finished but perpetually expanding, like a labyrinth that constantly reveals new possibilities.

Compilation and Philosophy

Schlegel writes in the introduction to his Lessing anthology: “Es versteht sich von selbst daß hier nicht die Kompilationen der Meinungen und Systeme gemeint sein können” (1975, 69). What he wants to show is Lessing’s “Gang (des) Denkens”, “die Folge der Gedanken”, and most importantly, how the idiosyncratic nature of Lessing’s “spirit” is based on “eine eigentümliche Verknüpfungsart des

¹⁸ For the concept of organon and organicism in Schlegel, see the rich material in Benne (2015, 460–515).

Einzelnen" (1975, 50), a combination and configuration of heterogeneous elements. Again, we see the notion of literature in terms of its "becoming". Lessing's works, he says, must be approached not for their "opinions" or "systems", but as "Tendenz" and "fermenta cognitionis". Moreover, Lessing's thoughts immediately address and engage the readers, like Plato's dialogues: they are "dazu eingerichtet, das Selbstdenken zu erregen" (1975, 50). Thus, Lessing's thoughts necessitate an aesthetics of effect where the reader—and critic—is given the task of assisting in their unfolding and fulfillment. This means that Schlegel's compilation can be called "symphilosophical" (cf. 1967, 161): it presents itself as a dialogue between writer and reader-critic. The critic is the one given the task of responding to and "prolonging" the initial text.

How is this dialogue *philosophical*? In the essay that ends his anthology, entitled "Über die Form der Philosophie", Schlegel sets out to define philosophy. With reference to Plato, he sees the essence of philosophy in dialogue:

Ihr Wesen aber besteht in dem schwebenden Wechsel, in dem ewigen Suchen und nie ganz finden können. (...) und in jedem guten philosophischen Gespräch muß wenigstens einer sein, der wißbegierig die Geheimnisse der höchsten Forschung zu enthüllen strebt, und einer, der im Besitz derselben, sie gern mitteilend immer mehr verrät, aber wenn man glaubt, er werde es, was er weder kann noch darf, nun ganz tun und ganz aussprechen, dann plötzlich abbricht, und durch eine unbestimmte Aussicht ins Unendliche unser Sehnsucht von neuem erregt. – (1975, 100).

In order to be philosophical, a dialogue, as Schlegel sees it, must be fragmentary. The breaking off of speech (achieving the sublime effect of *aposiopesis*) means that the thoughts provoked by this dialogue go beyond any given "form" that would incarcerate and fixate them within a specific frame. Schlegel's essay, entitled "Über die Form der Philosophie", is thus in reality an embracement of the formless, the infinite.

A consequence of this view is that philosophy is not identical with books or bookish learning: "Nicht in den Schriften also und Buchstaben und Systemen ist die Philosophie beschlossen; so eng läßt sich der unendliche Geist nicht fesseln und binden. Sie will sich verbreiten und mitteilen, lebendig wirken und Gegenwirkung empfangen" (1975, 101). Philosophy transcends the limitations of the book: it is *lebendige Wirkung*. Or rather, philosophy means that the world of books is itself energized and vitalized: instead of being a fixed body of inherited "opinions" and "beliefs", it becomes a field of lively discussion. This vitalism Schlegel calls, with reference to Lessing, *polemics*. Polemics implies debate, and these debates continually change the outlook of the literary world. One of the important aspects of polemics is the destruction of insignificant and mediocre writings. This can be achieved by compilations:

Es ist nicht nur noch keine vollendete und klassische Literatur vorhanden, sondern es wird auch die Stelle derselben durch ein Unding, ein Chaos von sein-sollender Literatur eingenommen, deren Unbildung niemand wird leugnen wollen. Diese nun zu vertilgen, um wenigstens Raum zu schaffen

für das Bessere, ist die erste Bedingung, die Aufgabe zu erreichen. (1975, 82)

We recognize here his earlier argument about the need to cleanse Lessing’s writings of “die störenden Zwischendinge”. Polemics is a kind of compilation *ex negativo*, namely a practice founded on the vacuum-cleaning and annihilation of all that which, according to Schlegel, is an “Unding”, and which prevents the establishment and growth of the future-oriented German philological and philosophical culture.¹⁹ Compilations, precisely because they omit much of the texts that they quote from, with the aim of only retaining the valuable, can therefore, paradoxically, be seen as productive: They reduce the initial text into its key “fragmentary” elements, and by so doing, generate the seeds for a new beginning. In a way, they release these “fragments” from their place in a given book, thereby enabling them to engage with the reader directly. As he puts it, philosophy “will sich verbreiten und mitteilen”. Compilation is a means to achieve this spread.

If one side of the philosophy of compilation is polemics, the other is “Witz”. About the fragments of Lessing, Schlegel writes:

Was sind nun eigentlich diese Fragmente (of Lessing)? Was ist es was ihnen den hohen Wert gibt, und welcher Geisteskraft gehören sie vorzüglich an? In wiefern können sie, obwohl Fragmente, dennoch als ein Ganzes betrachtet werden? Nicht ängstlich auf jedes einzelne gesehen, ob es unter diese Benennung gehören könne oder nicht, sondern auf die Masse und den Geist des Ganzen, darf man wohl dreist sagen: die darin vorherrschende Geisteskraft ist der Witz; ihr Wert besteht darin, daß sie das Selbstdenken nicht nur energisch erregen, sondern auch auf eine sehr universelle Weise; und ihre, ungeachtet der Verschiedenheit der Materie, dennoch sichtbare Einheit liegt in der scheinbar formlosen Form, in den Eigentümlichkeiten des Styls und Vortrages (1975, 81).

Schlegel here builds on a well-known conception developed by John Locke²⁰ and later taken up by Kant, who defined wit as a frivolous analogy and combination of wholly heterogeneous elements. In Kant’s words: “Es ist angenehm, beliebt, und aufmunternd, Ähnlichkeiten unter ungleichartigen Dingen aufzufinden und so, was der Witz tut, für den Verstand Stoff zu geben, um seine Begriffe allgemein zu machen” (Kant 1964, 539). In the same context, Kant speaks about “Sagazität”, the capacity for discovering new ideas. Of course, with this in mind, we also see the relevance of compilation. Compilation, as Schlegel envisages it, consists in putting heterogeneous “fragments” into productive and novel configurations. In other words, the compiler connects and lets various fragments come into touch with each other. In a fragment in *Lyceum*, he writes: “Witz ist unbedingt geselliger Geist, oder

¹⁹ Schlegel here seems to promote a rather widespread skepticism towards the culture of print in this era, typified by Herder’s criticism of the art of printing. For romantic responses, see for instance Novalis’ *Dialogen* (1978, 426) or the scene with Sophie and the “Schreiber” in Klingsohr’s fairytale in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1978, I,342).

²⁰ See *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book 2, chapt. XI.

fragmentarische Genialität” (1967, 148), and this shows what compilations can do: they offer a surprising *rendez-vous* between various fragmentary material. In another fragment, he notes: “Ein Dialog ist eine Kette, oder ein Kranz von Fragmenten” (1967, 176). Compilations, then, are dialogic: a wreath of fragments. We thus see: While polemics sets out to cleanse literature of its redundant and irrelevant parts, wit ensures a spiritual integration of the variously compiled fragments.

In the quotation above, Schlegel called philosophical dialogue a “schwebender Wechsel”. This metaphor is to Schlegel’s philosophy of compilation what the “Labyrinth” was to his philology of compilation. Indeed, in any compilation, there is a “schwebender Wechsel” between the original text and the compiled text, the primary and the secondary one. Yet this “Wechsel” is not only going on between different texts, but also between different selves. Schlegel, we remember, had said about Lessing’s thoughts that they provoked the reader’s “Selbstdenken”. Here we should stress the notion of “Selbst”: the “*Selbstdenken*” that Lessing’s texts unleash, entails thinking about the status of the self. Schlegel had already argued in “Über Lessing” that Lessing had a specific gift of seeing himself from the outside, and precisely therefore was able to understand himself all the better: “Denn niemand kennt sich, insofern er nur er selbst und nicht auch zugleich ein anderer ist” (1967, 116). Lessing, then, was able to divide himself; he was, to use the words of Novalis, an “Individuum” but also a “Dividuum”.²¹ Schlegel comes back to this when, in one of his later essays on Lessing, he discusses the method behind the latter’s philosophical texts. These texts are characterized by his dialogue with others: “Freimütige und sorgfältige Prüfung der Meinungen anderer, Widerlegung manches gemeingeltenden Vorurteils, Verteidigung und Wiederanregung dieser oder jener alten, oft schon vergeßnen Paradoxie, das war die Form, in welcher er seine eigne Meinungen in diesem Fach (i.e. philosophy), meistens nur indirekt vorzutragen pflegte” (1975, 52). When Schlegel says that Lessing spoke “indirectly” in his philosophical texts, he means that he spoke through the mouths of others—he *became* another. By quoting others, Lessing gained a higher level of understanding. Only by going through and studying the opinions of others—and only by dialoguing with them and quoting them—was Lessing able to discover and present his *own* opinions (“Meinungen”).

Schlegel here accentuates a specific trait of compilations: they are “indirect” utterances where the compiler (re-)writes what others have written. By compiling, he gains a distance to itself, and opens himself to a “schwebender Wechsel”, a dialogue with himself as another. Such a division of the self indicates the romantic interest in the processes of *reflection* understood as endless self-mirroring that Schlegel describes in the *Athenäum*-fragment 116. The “progressive Universalpoesie”, he famously writes, flies “auf den Flügeln der poetischen Reflexion”, and can “diese Reflexion immer wieder potenzieren und wie in einer endlosen Reihe von Spiegeln vervielfachen. Sie ist der höchsten und der allseitigsten Bildung fähig; nicht bloß von innen heraus, sondern auch von außen hinein” (1967, 182f). Schlegel’s insistence on the self-mirroring of reflection and its “Potenzierung” is also attributable to his idea of compilation. Moreover, such “Potenzierung” implies “Bildung”, a highly

²¹ “Das ächte Dividuum ist auch das ächte Individuum” (Novalis 1978, 692).

central term in Schlegel’s texts on compilation. In the last subchapter, we will look more at compilation as *Bildung*.

Compilation as “heutige Bildung”

As we have seen, from a philological viewpoint, compilation means to “prolong” texts in order to organize what Schlegel calls the “becoming” of literature. Philosophically, compilation implies dialogue and the division of the self for the benefit of “Selbstdenken” and reflection. On several occasions, Schlegel insists that the philosopher must also be a philologist.²² As we have seen, his compilation of Lessing seeks to unite both perspectives, and in this sense follows Lessing himself, who, as Schlegel insists, had both philological and philosophical inclinations.

We will now proceed somewhat to consider how both these dimensions relate to what Schlegel calls *Bildung*. This term occurs frequently in his texts on Lessing. For instance, Schlegel says that with his anthology he hopes to create a “System des Wissens und Bildens” (1975, 82), and he notes that German “Kritik” is to be “das Organon einer noch zu vollendenden, zu bildenden, ja anzufangenden Literatur”. The fact that Schlegel highlights concepts such as “Bildung” and “bilden” in relation to compilation, is not surprising, given that “Bildung” indicates evolving historical processes and organic development. Through his compilation, Schlegel obviously hopes to “educate” his contemporaries and himself. As already noted, he even suggested that the reader would gain a truer grasp of Lessing by reading his compilation, than by reading Lessing’s original works.

Given the importance of *Bildung* to Schlegel’s anthology, it is revealing that this term had been used by August von Kotzebue in relation to compilation only a few years earlier, but given a completely different sense. Kotzebue’s Lustspiel *Der hyperboreische Esel, oder die heutige Bildung* (1799), is a satire of Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel where Kotzebue takes issue with the aesthetics of the early romantics. The title alludes to a fragment by August Wilhelm Schlegel (which again points to Pindar’s 10. Pythian ode) lamenting the “Originalitätssucht” among modern writers.²³ In his play, Kotzebue takes Schlegel at his words, presenting the romantics as themselves the best exponents of this “Originalitätssucht”, and guilty of having introduced a new and false idea of *Bildung*, a “heutige Bildung”. Kotzebue had some years earlier been criticized in a recension by August Wilhelm

²² “Die einzige Art, die Philosophie auf die Philologie oder, welches noch weit nötiger ist, die Philologie auf die Philosophie anzuwenden, ist, wenn man zugleich Philolog und Philosoph ist.” (1967, 242).

²³ “Schwerlich hat irgend eine andere Literatur so viele Ausgeburten der Originalitätssucht aufzuweisen als unsre. Es zeigt sich auch hierin daß wir Hyperboreer sind. Bei den Hyperboreern wurden nämlich dem Apollo Esel geopfert, an deren wunderlichen Sprüngen er sich ergötzte” (1967, 196). I thank Henrik Mentz Indergaard for the reference to Pindar.

Schlegel, and *Der hyperboreische Esel, oder die heutige Bildung* is his revenge. As the most prominent example of anti-romantic literature from around 1800, it offered a quite blunt but also wide-ranging attack on the romantics.²⁴

The play is about Karl von Berg, who has just left university and returns home to his family. The family reunion is however far from happy. Not only is Karl haughty and cold, but all his utterances are quotations, some rather bombastic and pompous, from the *Athenäum*-fragments and *Lucinde*, which in the sphere of homeliness alienate the other characters and give Karl the reputation of being a “Narr”. The trick of Kotzebue, then, is to have compiled utterances by the Schlegel brothers and to insert them into a dramatic setting where they have no chance of being understood. The romantic statements are thus de-contextualized and theatricalized. Kotzebue’s views are clear: the ideas of the romantics offer a bad kind of education because they are nothing short of ridiculous when confronted with “real life”, i.e. the milieu where his plays are set. At the very end of the play, the “Fürst”, who here represents Kotzebue’s own opinions, sums up his low opinion of Karl: “Das ist also unsere heutige Bildung? Impertinente Anmaaßung, hochtrabender Unsinn, und gänzliche Nutzlosigkeit” (von Kotzebue 1992, 42).

Kotzebue’s persiflage clearly diverges from Schlegel’s idea of compilation, but also implies a different aesthetic outlook. This difference is neatly summed up by Pierre Mattern who distinguishes romantic “Reflexion” from Kotzebue’s “Theaterästhetik” and embracement of “Performanz”. This goes back to differences in the approach to “Schrift”. One of the quotations by Schlegel uttered by Karl is the following: “Moderantismus ist Geist der kastrierten Liberalität” (von Kotzebue 1992, 34). As Mattern makes clear, in Schlegel castration is a reference to “Schrift” as dead letters: “Die Kastration ist bei Schlegel Effekt der Schrift; bei Kotzebue wird sie jedoch ganz in der Logik der Performanz behandelt”, namely as “ein Kraftwort” (Mattern 2011, 130) with which Karl wants to impress the other characters in the play. Kotzebue refuses to take seriously the romantic insight into the nature of writing, and instead turns the quotation into a bravura-statement, a “Kraftwort” uttered on stage. Indeed, Kotzebue seems himself aware of this transformation. In the preface to the play, he mockingly addresses the Schlegel brothers, presenting himself as their most ardent believer: “Alle die goldenen Sprüchlein dieser Weisen (Karl) sind sorgfältig unterstrichen worden, theils, damit man nicht glauben möge, ich wolle mich mit fremden Federn schmücken, theils weil – wie gleichfalls Einer ihrer goldenen Sprüche behauptet—in der wahren Prosa Alles unterstrichen seyn muß.” (von Kotzebue 1992, 7, 14). This *Athenäum*-fragment clearly highlights the romantic interest in writing and reflection. Kotzebue, on the other hand, wrests the quotations out of the space of reflection and onto the theatrical stage.

In terms of compilation, this implies a transformation from a sphere of literacy to one of orality, from “Schrift” to so-called “goldene Sprüchlein” or “goldene

²⁴ On the historical and aesthetical context, see Mattern (2011, 112–139), and the commentary by Rainer Schmitz in von Kotzebue (1992, pp. 247–333). The popularity of Kotzebue’s satire created a febrile activity in pro- and anti-romantic milieus at the time, with notable contributions by, most prominently, August Wilhelm Schlegel (*Ehrenpforte und Triumphbogen*, a satire on Kotzebue). Friedrich Schlegel, the centre of the controversy, seems however to have been silent about the whole affair.

Sprüche". Moreover, Kotzebue's compilation puts performance above hermeneutics. For with the term "die goldenen Sprüchlein", Kotzebue highlights an approach to literature where the emphasis is not on understanding, but on mere enjoyment of isolated bravura-statements. This is exactly opposite to the logic of the romantic fragment, which is by definition not a self-sufficient "golden" unit, but indicates something of which it is only a part: a totality. In his essays on Lessing, Schlegel frequently polemicizes against the cult of "die schönen Stellen" and "einzelnen Stellen" (1975, 56), and he claims that the time has come to relinquish the old tradition of looking at artworks merely in the hope of singling out its "beautiful places" or isolated 'gems'. "Daß man im Kunstwerke nicht bloß die schönen Stellen empfinden, sondern den Eindruck des Ganzen fassen müsse; dieser Satz wird nun bald trivial sein, und unter die Glaubensartikel hören" (1967, 410). For Schlegel, an interpretation of the *whole* text, a hermeneutics, must come in place of a mere hedonism of self-sufficient units. We thus see the basic difference between Schlegel and Kotzebue: The latter had emphasized the performative aspect of Schlegel's fragments, but in this way had betrayed the very hermeneutic imperative of the fragment.²⁵ Schlegel's compilation of Lessing, on the other hand, intended, as we have seen, to emphasize context and movement, development towards something: the fragments are germs of a "bildende" process.

Kotzebue had subtitled his play "heutige Bildung", suggesting that romanticism offered a false kind of education. For Schlegel, however, romantic Bildung was essential to the emergence of modern German literature, where, as we saw, "Kritik" should be "das Organon einer noch zu vollendenden, zu bildenden, ja anzufangenen Literatur". This emphasis on critique in relation to Bildung is certainly relevant, and exposes a quintessential dimension of early romanticism, namely anti-classicism and *freedom*. There is freedom to the way literature develops, a freedom shared by the critics and writers in that they are both free to disregard inherited rules. As the *Athenäum*-fragment 116 puts it: "(Die progressive Universalpoesie) allein ist unendlich, wie sie allein frei ist, und das als ihr erstes Gesetz anerkennt, daß die Willkür des Dichters kein Gesetz über sich leide" (1967, 183). Freedom is also something that matters in terms of compilation. In the final part of this article, we will see an example of this from Schlegel's anthology of Lessing.

We get a sense of the freedom of the compiler if we look more closely at Schlegel's term "die nodöse Stelle". In *Zur Philologie* he writes: "Die Compilazion ist den Franzosen gar nicht fremd. Auch Casaubonus geht auf nodöse Stellen (nicht krit sondern Hist nodös) ist Compil. u φσ in gewissem Sinne. Die Italiener sind bloß Antiquare" (2015, 203). Furthermore: "Die Franzosen liebten immer recherches über nodöse Stellen" as "wissenschaftliche επιδειξις u Vorübungen" (2015, 200). What Schlegel calls a "nodöse Stelle" is a knot (Lat: *nodus*, knot),²⁶ and knots are

²⁵ The distinction between "schöne Stelle" and fragment has been noted by Joachim Jacob. "Das Fragment führt die Erinnerung an ein Ganzes stets mit sich. Es bleibt 'Bruchstück'. Während die Stelle, gerade weil das Ganze gegeben ist, gelassen bei sich bleiben kann" (Braungart and Jacob 2012, 50).

²⁶ I have not been able to identify "nodöse Stellen" in Isaac Casaubon, but in *Zur Philologie* Schlegel mentions his near contemporary Claudius Salmassius who in a commentary on a passage from Macrobius' *Saturnalia* speculates about the so-called "Herculean knot".

essential to compilations, he argues. How so? An example can be found in his compilation of Lessing's *Laokoon. Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*. About this famous text, Schlegel writes that despite its "antiquarianism" and some false premises, it still points in the direction of a modern aesthetics. Alongside texts by Winckelmann, Lessing's *Laokoon* offers a "Fortschritt" and the awakening of a modern "poetische Anschauung" (1975, 78).

At the heart of Lessing's text is his discussion about the differences between poetry on the one hand and sculpture and painting on the other. In particular, Lessing focuses on the representations of the Trojan priest Laocoön, whose death is described in the second book of the *Aeneid*, as well as represented by the famous sculpture of him and his sons that had been discovered in 1506. Lessing quotes extensively from the Latin text, and in particular concentrates on the following verses:

Ille simul manibus tendit divellere nodos
 perfusus sanie vittas atroque veneno,
 clamores simul horrendos ad sidera tollit. (II, 220–220, quoted in Lessing 2007, 52)²⁷

The last line is famously used by Lessing to illustrate the medium specificity of poetry as opposed to sculpture. For compared to the sculpture where Laocoön holds his mouth almost shut, Virgil presents him as screaming wildly, something which necessitates an open mouth. Yet in poetry, this does not lead to ugliness (as would an open mouth in a sculpture or painting), but instead presents itself in the verse *clamores horrendos ad sidera tollit*, which Lessing sees as "ein erhabner Zug für das Gehör" (Lessing 2007, 35). But what about the lines before? The crucial first line highlights Laocoön trying to loosen the knots by which the snakes choke him and his sons. Lessing remarks that "Der Einfall, den Vater mit seinen beiden Söhnen durch die mörderischen Schlangen in einen Knoten zu schürzen, ist ohnstreitig ein sehr glücklicher Einfall, der von einer ungemein malerischen Phantasie zeuget" (Lessing 2007, 54). And then, a page later, he returns to the same image, now emphasizing the hands of the victims:

In den Windungen selbst, mit welchen der Dichter die Schlangen um den Lakoon führet, vermeidet er sehr sorgfältig die Arme, um den Händen alle ihre Wirksamkeit zu lassen.

Ille simul manibus tendit divellere nodos

Hierin mußten ihm die Künstler notwendig folgen. Nichts giebt mehr Ausdruck und Leben, als die Bewegung der Hände. (Lessing 2007, 55).

Lessing emphasizes the aesthetic effect of the moving hands, an effect he says was felt by both artist and poet.²⁸

Now, what strikes the reader of Schlegel's compilation of *Laokoon* is that he completely avoids quoting any of the Latin text. Of course, this makes his compilation

²⁷ "(...) his hands/frantic to wrench apart the knotted trunks,/his priestly bands splattered in filth, black venom/and all the while his horrible screaming fills the skies." (transl. Robert Fagles, in Virgil 2007, 82).

²⁸ Among the many interpreters of the Laocoon sculpture, including Herder and Goethe, Lessing seems to be the only one to focus on the aesthetics of the hands.

somewhat difficult to follow, as it only presents Lessing’s commentary, not Virgil’s original. This is also the case in the quotation above. In Schlegel’s compilation, the quoted line “Ille simul manibus tendit divellere nodos” has disappeared (Schlegel 1810, 206). This means: Schlegel has taken out the “nodus”, the knot.²⁹ In a certain way, by removing the quotation, Schlegel has thus achieved precisely what Laocoön himself strived and failed to do: He has untied the knots (divellere nodos), thereby, in a certain sense, removed the “knots” that existed in Lessing’s own text in the way he compiled Virgil. What does this say about his compilation? To compile, to quote others, can be seen as a creation of “knots” of different voices and texts, tying these voices together. Compilations are, one might say, “textiles” and patchwork, made up of such knots.³⁰ However, in Schlegel’s compilation, what matters is precisely the need to loosen these knots, or to free Lessing from the “knots” of his own text.³¹ This is in line with Schlegel’s insistence on the fragmentary nature of Lessing. Instead of the idea that a text consists of threads coming together in the centrality of a knot, Schlegel wants to promote the loose ends. This is why Lessing, to him, is not a patchwork, but a “labyrinth” (a labyrinth is not a knot, but a maze). Moreover, we understand why Schlegel at one point describes Lessing as “excentric”. He claims that Lessing’s mind resembled “jene krummen Linien, die mit sichtbarer Stetigkeit und Gesetzmäßigkeit forteilend immer nur im Bruchstück erscheinen können, weil ihr eines Zentrum in der Unendlichkeit liegt” (1967, 415).

By removing the “nodus”, Schlegel compiles Lessing in an anti-classicist way that might seem an indication of “heutige Bildung” (although not quite in the sense of Kotzebue) given its eradication of the antiquarian burden. His compilation, consisting solely of German, turns into a modern version of what the medieval monks used to note in manuscripts where they were confronted with Greek language, which was incomprehensible to them: *Graeca sunt, non leguntur!* Undoubtedly, the effacement of the Latin text points to the freedom Schlegel gives himself, and his capacity for overcoming the restrictions of the past. The compiler is no Laocoön being captured and tormented by the snaky knots of the inherited compiled material. Rather, Schlegel envisages a compilation that is free to overcome antiquarianism and servility to the primary sources.³² Of course, the logic behind this is what Schlegel calls

²⁹ Lessing also quotes extensively from a poem written by the cardinal Jacobus Sadoletus (1477–1547). The poem, an imitation of Virgil, contains the following verses: “At serpens lapsu crebro redeunte subintrat/Lubricus, intortoque ligat genua infima nodo” (Lessing 2007, 65). (transl. “die Schlange aber gleitet in vielfältigen Windungen immer wieder hin und her und fesselt ihn unten mit festgezogenen Knoten die Knie” (2007, 768). This quotation is also absent from Schlegel’s compilation.

³⁰ Johann Georg Hamann argues, in his rhapsodic patchwork *Aesthetica in nuce*, that texts might sometimes appear as the other side of tapestry, where one sees all the knots: “Diese Art der Übersetzung (verstehe Reden) kommt mehr, als irgend eine andere, mit der verkehrten Seite von Tapeten überein./And shews the stuff, but not the workman’s skill” (Hamann 1953, Bd. 2, 199).

³¹ Lessing frequently uses the metaphor of the knot. The famous distinction he makes between poetry as acts taking place in time, and painting as bodies in space, is introduced by the sentence “Der Knoten muß dieser sein: (...)” (Lessing 2007, 115).

³² In this way, his sense of compilation is perhaps not quite unlike what we find in Jean Paul’s well-known short narrative *Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Maria Wutz in Auenthal* (1790), where the schoolmaster has a library boasting Schiller’s *Die Räuber*, Kant’s *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Goethe’s *Werther’s Freuden* (sic) etc. It turns out Wutz has written the texts himself, but simply copied and compiled the titles, i.e. paratexts. This might suggest the freedom of the compiler.

“Kritik”, the necessary reduction of text, and his claim that Lessing’s texts are full of “störende Zwischendinge” that need to be effaced. Importantly, though, Schlegel contends that this operation does not take away all meaning from his compilation, for: “In den antiquarischen Versuchen blieb selbst nach Wegnehmen der heterogenen Einmischungen gewissermaßen doch einiger Zusammenhang, *eine Art von Faden, der die einzelnen Gedanken, wenn gleich nur lose, aneinander hielt*” (1975, 79; italics mine). Schlegel thus still thinks he has secured “eine Art von Faden”. However, his central ambition is to unravel any tendency to patchwork in the compiled text. This might be the reason why, in *Zur Philologie*, after having referred to the French predilection for “nodöse Stellen”, he remarks: “Die Compilazion ist wohl allgemein u an keine Nazion gebunden” (2015, 203). Here the significance lies with the word “gebunden”: Compilations are not “gebunden”! Schlegel distances his own romantic compilation from an allegedly French compiling practice, while at the same time refusing to see compilation as antiquarian patchwork.

This article began with the question of what happened to compilation in an age of originality and genius. Traditionally, of course, compilers has had a subordinate role to that of the author, whose texts they simply processed and amassed.³³ However, as a compiler of Lessing, Schlegel never appears inferior to the original author—or those authors that Lessing himself compiles. Rather, Schlegel believes that as a compiler he is able to steer discourse and manipulate its historical direction. With his typological idea of Lessing as a “germ” of Romanticism, he uses his compilation to celebrate the triumph of his own poetics as the “truth” that only existed as a “tendency” in Lessing himself. As we saw, Schlegel insisted that the German critic was not in merely in a position of “coming after”. Rather, it was the other way round; what he saw as “Kritik” was “das Organon einer noch zu vollendenden, zu bildenden, ja anzufangenden Literatur”. His compilation is this “Organon” by means of which Lessing’s texts are presented as on-going processes that are still “zu bilden”. In this way, his compilation fabricates and stylizes Lessing’s texts as the *fermenta cognitionis* of the Romanticism he himself implemented and brought to fruition.

Acknowledgements Open Access funding provided by University of Bergen.

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³³ In verity, this did not mean, though, that the compilers were not also able to change the original texts. As Ann Blair has noted “Compilers were never simple copyists but transformed the material as they disseminated it.” (2010, 176). For the medieval concept of compilation, see for instance Compagnon 1979, 192.

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