

JÖCHER'S ANTHROPOLOGY OF SCHOLARS

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Scholars are complex beings who defy easy description by either biographers or bibliographers. In most cases, defining a scholar is impossible without restricting oneself to the limits of a discipline, focusing all relevant questions on one subject. But there have been attempts at a more encompassing approach. In publishing his *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon* [General Dictionary of Scholars] 1750/51 in four volumes, Christian Gottlieb Jöcher most certainly aimed for completeness in content, but he did not try to give an exact definition of what a scholar is. What he called “scholars” in his dictionary was a rather heterogeneous group, dispersed in time and space, united perhaps more by common striving for knowledge than by production of knowledge.

One must be careful in choosing the perspective from which to view a work of stupendous compilation such as the *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon* (fig. 1).¹ Does it document industrious self-indulgence? Was it an offshoot of the lust for copying, time and again, which led the author to its four-volume climax after having published three editions of a “Compendious Dictionary of Scholars” [Compendiöses Gelehrten-Lexicon] with only half the amount of text?² Can we detect a longing for recognition which

¹ On Christian Gottlieb Jöcher and his *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon*, see Ulrich Johannes Schneider (ed.), *Jöchers 60.000—Ein Mann, eine Mission, ein Lexikon* (Leipzig 2008).

² The first edition of the *Compendiöse Gelehrten-Lexicon* appeared in 1715, followed by a second edition in 1726 and a third in 1733. Jöcher's name is mentioned on the title page from the second edition onwards: *Compendiöses Gelehrten-Lexicon, darinnen Die Gelehrten aller Stände, als Fürsten und Staats-Leute, die in der Literatur erfahren, Theologi, Prediger, Juristen, Politici, Medici, Philologi, Philosophi, Historici, Linguisten, Mathematici, Scholastici, Oratores, und Poëten, so wohl männ- als weiblichen Geschlechts, welche vom Anfang der Welt grösten theils in gantz Europa bis auf ietzige Zeit gelebet, und sich durch Schrifften oder sonst der gelehrten Welt bekannt gemacht, an der Zahl über 20000. nach ihrer Geburth, Absterben, vornehmsten Schrifften, Leben, und merckwürdigsten Geschichten, aus denen glaubwürdigsten Scribenten, die man jedesmahl fleißig angemerkct, kurz und deutlich nach Alphabetischer Ordnung beschrieben worden. Denen Liebhabern der Historie der Gelehrten, und andern curieusen Personen zu nützlichem Gebrauch zum Druck befördert. Nebst einer Vorrede Herrn D. Joh. Burchard Menckens, Königl. Poln. und Chur-Sächß. Hof-Raths und Historiographi, wie auch Histor. Prof. Publici, der Königl. Engl. Societät Socii, und des grossen Fürsten-Collegii Collegiati. Die Andere Auflage, in zwey Theile getheilet, sorgfältig übersehen,*



Fig. 1. From 1742 until his death in 1758 Jöcher served as director of the university library in Leipzig (founded 1543), which had around 25,000 titles at the time, registered in a catalogue completed under Jöcher in 1751. Yet in his biographical dictionary, Jöcher used only 20% of the university library's holdings; the other 80% came from his private library.

the polyhistor from Leipzig thought he deserved, despite his initial studies of medicine, despite his own teaching posts in philosophy and history, and despite his doctorate in theology?³ What do we make of the fact that his dictionary was the last of its kind in the eighteenth century?

und mit etlichen 1000. Articulis vermehret, durch M. Christian Gottlieb Jöcher, der Heil. Schrift Baccal. der Philos. Facultät zu Leipzig Assessorem, und des grossen Fürsten-Collegii Collegiatum. Bey Johann Friedrich Gleditschens seel. Sohn, Buchhändl. in Leipzig, im Jahr 1726. See the title *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon, Darinne die Gelehrten aller Stände sowohl männlich als weiblichen Geschlechts, welche vom Anfange der Welt bis auf jetzige Zeit gelebt, und sich der gelehrten Welt bekannt gemacht, Nach ihrer Geburt, Leben, merckwürdigen Geschichten, Absterben und Schriften aus den glaubwürdigsten Scribenten in alphabetischer Ordnung beschrieben werden. Erster Theil A—C herausgegeben von Christian Gottlieb Jöcher, der H. Schrift Doctore, und der Geschichte öffentlichen Lehrers auf der hohen Schule zu Leipzig. Leipzig, in Johann Friedrich Gleditschens Buchhandlung. MDCCL.*

³ Christian Gottlieb Jöcher was born 20 July 1694 in Leipzig. His parents were Magareta (b. Etmüller) and Johann Christoph Jöcher. A younger brother Gottfried Leonhard became a lawyer. In 1707, Jöcher was enlisted at the Rutheneum in Gera, then at the Gymnasium in Zeitz. In 1712 he enrolled at Leipzig University, where he obtained the title of Master [Magister] with his 1714 *Dissertatio de affectibus musicae in hominem*. His subsequent career in Leipzig included the following: 1717 Assessor at the Faculty of Philosophy; 1730 Professor of Philosophy; 1732 Professor of History; 1735 Doctor of Theology. Jöcher acted as rector in semesters 1737/38, 1741/42 and 1747/48. Starting in 1742, he also directed the

JÖCHER'S CAREER

From Jöcher himself we can gather only a few answers to these questions. Details of his life remain obscure; precious few facts beyond his academic career have survived. Jöcher's career was limited to Leipzig and was in itself only of secondary importance to him; he was someone who cared deeply and unconditionally about printed books and books to be printed. Jöcher not only published dictionaries, he also prefaced books,⁴ initiated translations, and published funeral sermons.⁵ What he did not do was to specialize in any one area of knowledge. For a long time he served as editor of a scholarly journal, the *Deutsche Acta Eruditorum*.⁶ Jöcher was a general book-lover, privately collecting around 15,000 volumes that also served as the basis for his dictionaries.⁷ In 1742, he became responsible for the Leipzig University Library, a position which had little effect on his work as a writer, because the University Library held very few modern books and few in languages other than Latin.⁸

Leipzig University Library, where he supervised the conclusion of a handwritten catalogue of printed books in 1751. In 1715, Jöcher started working with Johann Burckhard Mencke on the *Compendiöses Gelehrten-Lexikon*, taking sole credit for the second and third editions in 1726 and 1733. From 1719 he also joined the editorial collective of *Deutsche Acta Eruditorum*. Jöcher died on 10 May 1758.

⁴ Jöcher provided prefaces to books by the following authors: Benoit Baudouin, Nicolaus Hieronymus Gundling, Lorenz Reinhard, Johann Andreas Schmidt, Cresacre More, Jean LeClerc, Dorothy Pakington, Lodovico Antonio Muratori, Augustin Calmet, Carl Gottlob Dietmann.

⁵ Christian Gottlieb Jöcher, *Trauer-Reden, welche bey verschiedenen Fällen öffentlich gehalten* (Leipzig 1733); id., *Den Schatten eines schönen Bildes...* (Leipzig 1718) [funeral sermon for Paul Abraham König, theologian, died on 24 August 1712]; id., *Schuldiges Liebes- und Ehren-Gedächtniß Frauen Margarethen Reginen geb. Baudißin, Herrn Carlotto Rechenbergs... Ehe-Liebsten, welche entschlief...* d. 30. November 1720 (Leipzig 1720).

⁶ Among other works, Jöcher authored: *Disputatio effectus musicae in hominem* [Michael Ernst Ettmueller praes.; Christian Gottlieb Jöcher resp.] (Leipzig 1714); *De cura philosophi circa historias* (Leipzig 1732); *Danck-Predigt... zum Andencken der vor 100 J. gescheh. Stiftung des Donnerstägigen Großen Prediger-Collegii zu Leipzig 1640* (Leipzig 1740); *Ioachimi Felleri Et Christ. Gottl. Ioecheri In Academia Lipsiensi Professorum Et Bibliothecariorum Orationes De Bibliotheca Academiae Lipsiensis Paulina* (Leipzig 1744). Jöcher also edited the *Zuverlässige Nachrichten von dem gegenwärtigen Zustande, Veränderung und Wachstum der Wissenschaften* (Leipzig 1740–1757).

⁷ *Catalogus bibliothecae D. Christiani Gottlieb Ioecheri Academiae Lipsiensis... Professoris... et Bibliothecarii etc. a die V. Februarii MDCCLIX Lipsiae in Collegii Paulini aedibus a pie defuncto inhabitatis auctionis lege publice dividendae* (Leipzig 1759).

⁸ Jöcher's private library contained some 15,000 books, according to the auction catalogue (see note 7). The University Library had about 25,000 books at the time, mainly older printed works, which was also the case for the Senate Library. In the final (fourth) volume of his *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon* Jöcher gives an inventory of publications that he used [Verzeichnis der Schriften, so in dieser Ausgabe häufig gebraucht worden]. Of the

The *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon* helped Jöcher to make a transition from the closed realms of the university into the public reading cabinets and book shops. He held a position similar to the eminent Leipzig scholars Johann Christoph Gottsched und Johann Burkhard Mencke; all three were clearly attracted by the new phenomenon of the public sphere. His books communicated news from every quarter of the scholarly world to a yet undefined new audience. Jöcher excelled in a secondary form of writing, respecting the need for short texts typical of dictionaries; his texts never really treated a subject at any great length.

JÖCHER'S LEXICOGRAPHICAL ART

Positively stated, Jöcher erased old distinctions and deconstructed traditional hierarchies when editing his *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon*. In it, Plato appears as one of many ancient thinkers, just as Francis Bacon appears as one of many modern ones. Jöcher did not really care for the distinction between older intellectuals and younger ones. He did not measure prudence by the criteria of chronology or geography. For Jöcher, intellectual activity was an event, something emergent, a miracle. Leaving aside most articles on theologians, many articles are devoid of any consideration of contemporaries or influential producers of theory. The *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon* opens a panorama of peculiar characters and unusual achievements:⁹ The boy who already knew Greek and Latin at the age of five first incited high hopes, then died young. The beauty from Baghdad who mastered many languages and married an Italian also died very early. Her grieving husband carried her embalmed body on his travels for years; here, Jöcher seems to deplore lost talent and forgotten knowledge almost equally.

Most agreeable to Jöcher are the not so professional thinkers. He does not even care whether the heroes and heroines in his dictionary could

318 titles, about 60 per cent are in Latin, 20 per cent in German, and 10 per cent in French, together with miscellaneous other languages, mostly Italian and English. A sample of 50 listed sources shows 15 then in the University Library (according to the catalogue of 1751), 25 others Jöcher owned privately. He may have found the rest elsewhere in Leipzig.

⁹ In the course of preparing the exhibition and the catalogue "Jöchers 60,000" (see note 1), all articles in the *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon* were checked by a group of students. Even though some articles turned out to be mere bibliographies (mostly in the realm of theology), most insisted on biographical details, which also becomes apparent when they are compared with source material that has been edited and shortened.

write or leave written traces. He enjoys reporting mythological or fantastic tales about great minds. Jöcher welcomes them all: Mani Giorida Sitti who could not write, and Anna d'Osoria who did not want to write, as well as Aemilius Ferreti, who burned his writings. Jöcher has an article on Adam in his dictionary and even discusses the question whether the first man wrote a book about animals. He includes Brutus who was a learned man and of whom we now know little more than that he murdered Caesar.¹⁰

Seen from the margins of scholarly activities, the nature of Jöcher's endeavour eventually becomes clear: he was looking for the effort and the passions surrounding knowledge. In the past and in the present, he searched for book miners and fans of scripture, for readers who could not stop and the curious who are never satisfied. Jöcher creates types, and he does so within the limits of a dictionary, often forced to admit that his sources are dubious. Yet he never leaves out information that could be used to typify somebody, even if it is clearly wrong or contradictory. He reports the gruesome death of Euripides, the Greek dramatist, in a way that defies our comprehension: The poet was ripped apart, he writes, either by hounds or by women. Today, we are unable to make sense of such mindless repetition of obviously corrupt sources, and one wishes for a critical scholar like Pierre Bayle, who in his *Historical and Critical Dictionary*—a work translated in Jöcher's time in Leipzig into German—reports the death of Euripides, but not without commenting upon the quality of the sources.¹¹

Nothing of the sort occurs in Jöcher's writing. The modern reader feels drawn into the text half by entertainment, half by endless astonishment. This afflicts the text with a good deal of misunderstanding. Of course it is entertaining to read that Senecio—a rarely mentioned and perhaps invented figure in ancient Latin texts—insisted on having everything big in size: "His servants, his silverware, his clothing, his meals—everything had to be big. His mistress was quite tall, too."¹² What does this mean?

¹⁰ *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon*, vol. 1, col. 1438: "Ein Redner und Philosophus, welcher den Jul. Cäsarem A.V.C. 710 ermordet. Er folgte der Secte der Stoicorum, und schrieb einen Auszug der römischen Historie. . . und andere Schrifften, so verlohren gegangen, doch sind noch unter seinem Nahmen 35 Episteln vorhanden, welche aber nicht vor genuin wollen gehalten werden."

¹¹ Cf. *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon*, vol. 2, col. 439, and Pierre Bayle, *Historisches und Critisches Wörterbuch, mit einer Vorrede und verschiedenen Anmerkungen versehen von Johann Christoph Gottsched, nach der neuesten Auflage ins Deutsche übersetzt* (reprint of Leipzig 1741-1744 edn., Hildesheim 1997), 4 vols., II: 426.

¹² *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon*, vol. 4, col. 503: "Senecio, ein alter Redner, mit dem Zunahmen Grandio, war von so wunderlicher Art, daß er alles groß haben wollte. Er redete

Jöcher keeps silent, providing no explanations, only communicating what he finds, forever manipulating his sources to make them sound enigmatic and shrill. His lexicographical art consisted in cancelling text or making it extremely brief, as can be clearly seen in his articles on Giordano Bruno and Julius Caesar Scaliger compared with the respective biographical entries in Johann Heinrich Zedler's *Universal-Lexicon* published slightly earlier.¹³ Although Jöcher's dictionary specializes in biographies, its 60,000 articles do not convey all available information; far from it.

AN IMAGINARY FAMILY

What Jöcher consistently omits are the stages in individual development that would give readers a better understanding of his subjects. What he retains, and by his policy of omission underscores, are peculiarities and idiosyncrasies, accidents, illnesses, conflicts and other extraordinary happenings. There is most likely a link between the passion Jöcher himself was famous for when delivering funeral sermons—late signs of a Protestant culture at the open grave then already in decay—and the fascination visible in his dictionary for ways of departing from the world. When preaching, Jöcher acted according to the motto “Our whole life is an art of dying”.¹⁴ In the dictionary, he provides examples showing how difficult it can be to enact that motto. The tragic ending of Johann Faust is described in detail (“bashed against the wall to make his brain stick to it”) and the deadly fall from a balcony of the Leipzig scholar Joachim Feller is noted dryly. There are dramatic descriptions of the death of the Roman writer Boethius after torture and of the Indian Calanus. In many other articles death is reported with a subtext of baroque horror. Rare indeed are phrases telling us that someone died “unnoticed” as in the case of Faber Stapulensis.¹⁵ What we read between the lines is this: It is difficult to lead a productive life, and almost impossible to work intellectually, since death is ever present, never really announced, mostly hard and sudden, and abruptly ends a life lacking order and consideration.

lauter prächtige Worte. Seine Knechte, sein Silber-Geschirr, seine Kleidung, seine Speisen musten alle groß seyn. Er hielt sich auch eine Maitresse von ungemeiner Länge.”

¹³ *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon*, vol. 1, col. 1434 (Bruno) and vol. 4, col. 191–193 (Scaliger); Johann Heinrich Zedler, *Großes vollständiges Universal-Lexicon* (Leipzig and Halle 1732–1754), 68 vols., IV: col. 1651–1653 (Brunus) and XXXIV: col. 511–513 (Scaliger).

¹⁴ Jöcher 1733 (note 5), 245.

¹⁵ Cf. *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon*, vol. 1, col. 1182 (Boethius) and col. 1555 (Calanus), vol. 2, col. 436f. (Faber Stapulensis), col. 531 (Faust) and col. 554 (Feller).

This interest in the typical, the accidental and the astonishing in Jöcher's dictionary is probably also the cause for its failure to cite proper references, either for the works quoted or for writings about the person in question. Life and death seem much more important than tradition and survival. The bibliographer who takes care to provide precise references loses out against the historian of scholarly anthropology. There is never any mention of the works and their actual merit. So the dictionary can best be understood as a giant cemetery. Whereas Karl Günter Ludovici, a professor and colleague of Jöcher, included biographies of living people when he took over the position of editor of Zedler's *Universal-Lexicon* in 1737, Jöcher continued in the vein of his three editions of the *Compendiöses Gelehrten-Lexicon*, sticking to the dead.¹⁶ Among the recently deceased we find the scientist Johann Bernoulli, who died in 1747, and the teacher Heinrich Bernhard Küster, who died in 1749.¹⁷

From the more or less contemporary figures in his dictionary, Jöcher builds his own imaginary family. This family also bore the name of an academy: an illustrious society of people who stopped short of achieving eternal life, regaining an existence of some sort through Jöcher. The academy is conjured up, its performance is directed without assigning fixed topics. What is fixed, on the other hand, is the individual life. Jöcher focused on biographical detail, while at the same time the historian of philosophy, Johann Jakob Brucker in Augsburg, worked hard to exclude just this kind of traditional knowledge from philosophy, which for him had its reality in propositions and theses.¹⁸ Jöcher's academy was composed of unrelated individuals, and even when a eulogy for someone is quoted, there is never any cross reference to the person being praised.

The enormous amount of work in putting together the dictionary effectively isolates the members of the academy from one another, not linking them with each other. We still have a few copies of Jöcher's dictionary written into by their owners, documenting the very hard work of getting the entries right.¹⁹ What Jöcher provides in terms of connections

¹⁶ Cf. Ulrich Johannes Schneider, 'Zedlers *Universal-Lexicon* und die Gelehrtenkultur des 18. Jahrhunderts', in Detlef Döring and Hanspeter Marti (eds.), *Die Universität Leipzig und ihr gelehrtes Umfeld 1680–1780* (Basel 2004), 195–213.

¹⁷ Cf. *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon*, vol. 2, col. 1025–1027 (Bernoulli) and vol. 2, col. 2178 (Küster).

¹⁸ Cf. Ulrich Johannes Schneider, 'Das Eklektizismus-Problem der Philosophiegeschichte', in Theo Stammen and Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann (eds.), *Johann Jakob Brucker (1696–1770). Philosoph und Historiker der europäischen Aufklärung* (Berlin 1998), 135–158.

¹⁹ Leipzig University Library has two handwritten documents that bear witness to the continuation of work done on dictionaries by Jöcher. There is a copy of the third edition

between his entries can be regarded as a dialogue, yet it is not one that the reader can detect easily. Rather, the dictionary appears to assemble a series of excerpts taken from books—most likely to be found in Jöcher's private library—and display them without bothering to connect the dots. If tradition is a carpet, it is single threads that prevail here. Put differently: Jöcher highlights the individual scholar and underlines individual achievements.

JÖCHER'S COMPETITORS

Jöcher's *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon* figures at the end of a story which started in the sixteenth century in the context of Protestant culture, when Nicolaus Reusner and later Paul Freher, made intellectual life accessible through biographies.²⁰ Contemporaries of the Reformation and the Early Enlightenment were made acquainted with spiritual heroes of their own time as well as from the past. Dictionaries of scholars were a considerable part of overall book production early on, offering such ideological identification. Other, more broadly designed biographical dictionaries like Louis Moréri's *Dictionnaire historique* (which appeared in one volume in 1674 and was reedited many times until a final ten-volume set appeared in 1759),²¹ extended coverage of all distinguished Europeans. Moréri joined scholars and noblemen as well as ancient and modern figures, and political and ecclesiastical dignitaries (also mixing, in later editions, Catholics and Protestants). Moréri's dictionary was strictly historically oriented, while Jöcher's guidelines seem to have been more anthropological at the core, providing more often than not scenes of disputes between intellectuals. With Jöcher, thinkers and poets are presented in a way that shows the scars of earthly combat in their biographical accounts; they are portrayed as fighting off all kinds of dangers arising from the world they live in, from their very families, from illnesses, etc. Again and again an undisturbed life of the spirit and a calm environment for intellectual work must be established against numerous odds.

of the *Compendiöses Gelehrten-Lexicon* (1733) (UBL: Litg.29–1), annotated by Karl Friedrich Aichinger (1717–1782, city preacher and school inspector in Sulzbach), and extensive comments and additions to the *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon* by Heinrich Wilhelm Rotermund (1761–1848, cathedral preacher in Bremen) (UBL: Litg. 120–ba).

²⁰ Niklaus Reusner, *Icones sive imagines virorum literis illustrium* (Argentorati 1587); Paul Freher, *Theatrum virorum eruditione clarorum* (Noribergae 1688).

²¹ Louis Moréri, *Le grand dictionnaire historique ou le mélange curieux de l'histoire sacrée et profane* (Lyon 1681).

We can compare Jöcher's lexicographical work with other universal dictionaries of his time, such as the *Conversations-Lexicon*, published by Jöcher's publisher Gleditsch, which had already gone through eight editions by the middle of the eighteenth century,²² or the *Universal-Lexicon* by competing publisher Johann Heinrich Zedler, who finished the alphabet with the 64th volume in 1751. There is also Ephraim Chamber's *Cyclopaedia*, the second edition of which in 1750 displayed considerably more care in dealing with historical knowledge than Jöcher.²³ This is even more true of the French *Encyclopédie* published by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert from 1751, the same year that Jöcher published the final volumes of his *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon*, announcing in the preface that he did not plan to produce any more dictionaries or editions thereof.²⁴

What the readership of the eighteenth century was offered fills big libraries today. For contemporaries, there were quite a few repetitions in reading about the life and work of authors. Most likely, Jöcher's originality consisted in his choice and the space he accorded to each entry, as well as biographical accentuation of the articles. Later dictionaries of similar design, like the *Gelehrte Teutschland* by Georg Christoph Hamberger,²⁵ were more concerned with the reliability of the biographical information, much like the emerging type known as "Konversationslexika", which strove to be professional news brokers: What readers were interested in was achievement of some sort; everything else counted as literature.

This analysis allows us to conclude that Jöcher's dictionary stays within the literary genre. His many stories about strange ways of dying relate directly to the crime stories of Pitaval,²⁶ even if the end of the life of a scholar did not always imply a crime. As mentioned earlier, Jöcher's obsession with death is also evident in his funeral sermons [Trauerreden], where death becomes an abstract force. Jöcher may have been looking for an explanation for the great mystery of how intellectual activity ends

²² *Reales Staats-Zeitungs- und Conversations-Lexicon* (Leipzig 1744).

²³ *Cyclopaedia: or, an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (London 1750), 2 vols.

²⁴ See preface, unpaginated: "Ich wiederhole übrigens mein ehemals gethanes doppeltes Versprechen: einmal daß dieses Werck bey meinem Leben nicht wieder solle gedruckt werden ... nebst diesem aber, daß ich die zu gegenwärtigem Lexico nöthigen Ergänzungen, Verbesserungen und Zusätze in besonderen Supplementen gewiß liefern ... werde." [Moreover, I repeat the dual promise that I have already made: that this work will not be published again in my lifetime, and that I will certainly make necessary improvements and additions, in special supplements, to the present Lexico.] This did not take place.

²⁵ Georg Christoph Hamberger, *Das gelehrte Teutschland, oder Lexicon der jeztlebenden teutschen Schriftsteller* (Lemgo 1767ff.).

²⁶ Francois Gayot de Pitaval, *Causes celebres et interessantes, avec les jugemens qui les ont décidées* (Paris 1734–1743), 20 vols.

at all. In his sermons he uses rather simplistic rhetoric, overblown metaphors, exaggerated phrases and clumsy dramatization: “The grave and the coffin cover the bodies of the deceased, yet their fame penetrates the earth. While their flesh disintegrates to ashes, and mould grows on their bones, the memory of their good life will never go away.”²⁷ This means that the great family of human lives as presented in the dictionary is collectively doomed to die, prone to a senseless death, confronted with the sudden disappearance of all forces.

THE DICTIONARY AS A FAMILY VAULT

This may have comforted Jöcher, who was an ever-changing scholar, always at work, with no family, seeking instead a collectivity of like-minded and similarly doomed men and women. But this is speculation. Today we certainly lack the sense of closeness and proximity provided by a biographical sketch in edited books that was felt by the eighteenth-century scholarly community. We also most likely lack the imagination to directly compare thinkers of our own time with intellectual giants from ancient times or the Middle Ages. Most of all, we have no sense of the eighteenth-century feeling of how fragile the relation of body and mind was and how this will forever limit our knowledge.

If we imagine a world where there is no death and every scholar is still alive, it would resemble an academy of the undead, giving a voice to all knowledge at all times in an instant, or rather many voices at the same time: Bablyon. In this vision, we would be open to the future, thanks to a continuous past, but we would have difficulties in making ourselves heard simply because of the infinity of voices already speaking. Jöcher’s work can be understood as denying such a vision. When he reconstructs intellectual life from the perspective of ever-occurring death, he intends to silence this cacophony of simultaneous discourses. His *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon* relocates every discourse to a person and finds for every person an individual history, including, if possible, an interesting way of dying. Historical knowledge edited in this fashion both fills and reflects the limitations of a book. The dictionary becomes a family vault in which mainly the voice of the editor resonates, strangely animated by the many deaths it reports.

²⁷ Jöcher 1733 (note 5), 43: “Gruft und Sarg bedecken die Glieder derer Erblassten: Aber der Ruhm ihrer Tugenden dringt durch Grab und Erde; und wenn die Fäulnis längst ihr Fleisch in Asche verwandelt, oder der Moder ihre Gebeine befleckt, so grünt das Andenken ihres wohlgeführten Wandels noch unverweslich.”