

Encyclopedic Form in the Modern French Novel

by

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Abstract

“Encyclopedic Form in the Modern French Novel” explores three modern encyclopedic texts and argues for the novelistic potential of their (re)arrangements of knowledge so as to change, distort, de- or re-contextualize it. Inspired by the French literary group Oulipo, founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais, I show that as in Ouplipan texts, encyclopedic writing takes formal constraint as generative of creative potential. The constraints of encyclopedic form--alphabetic organization, fragmentation, the singular focus on a definition or identification--opens up new ways of imagining relationships among concepts and ideas. In my dissertation I examine the narrative qualities of encyclopedic writing as well as encyclopedic novels. I discuss the choice of subjects of encyclopedias and the kinds of epistemologies such choices construct. Furthermore, I argue that encyclopedic practice reimagines narrative authority and ostensibly anonymous author’s relationships with readers.

Using the term “encyclopedism,” which scholars have theorized as a move away from the taxonomy of genre to encyclopedias as a knowledge or reading practice, I discuss three modern French texts. Raymond Queneau’s novel, *Les enfants du Limon*, is a novel entangled with an encyclopedia he himself wrote. I argue that this novel demonstrates the creative, inventive, pedagogical, and literary value of the encyclopedic form. Gustave Flaubert’s *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is structured encyclopedically: each chapter representing a different branch of knowledge. The narrative is connected to a short text called *Le dictionnaire des idées reçues*, a complex multilayered critique of bourgeois ideology. I argue that Flaubert’s encyclopedic writing is a strategy deployed to avoid clichés and maximize creative potential. Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig’s *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes*, more accurately an encyclopedia, emphasizes fragmentation and recontextualizes it as a way of reading Sappho’s corpus. The text tells the story of “Amantes” (“Lesbian peoples”) using a mix of styles and tones and produces a history/mythology of this fictional group. The text heavily references antiquity, as well as Sappho’s poetry, inscribing lesbian culture across time periods and locations. Ultimately, I argue that constraint and encyclopedic form should be taken more seriously as creative and literary strategies.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Ranger la culture pour mieux la déranger
-BNF slogan

I. The Encyclopedia

My epigraph cites the official slogan for the *Campagne de communication* of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF) in 2014. Its first claim is simply descriptive, to *ranger*: a library or archive must organize culture in a way that is both logical and accessible. Libraries and archives preserve history and culture, librarians collect and they communicate with various audiences, and the public needs to reference knowledge practically and efficiently. The further suggestion that putting culture into order disturbs or disrupts it (*déranger*) gives libraries and archives an apparently subversive role in our societies. At the same time, the slogan suggests that “ranger” is actually itself a form of “déranger.” In other words, it leaves the reader open to the possibility that these verbs are actually not opposites, and that arranging culture is in fact a way of changing, distorting, de- or re-contextualizing it. This slogan, written in bright neon lights on a concrete wall and reproduced on postcards, articulates a grounding argument of my dissertation: *ranger pour mieux déranger* is, I will argue, the aspiration of the Encyclopedist. This claim is inspired by the work of the movement *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle* and the surprising ways the group’s ideas intersect with the project of encyclopedism.

“Ranger la culture,” for a library, means organizing knowledge in particular conventional ways. Perhaps the most familiar form of organization when it comes to codifying knowledge is alphabetization. Alphabetical order is a useful, though arbitrary and even unnatural way of

organizing information. It is of course useful because its arbitrary order makes finding texts easier. At the same time, it is unnatural, in that there is no “natural” relationship among the order of the letters, or among the knowledge sources ordered by letters. Any organizational method imposes constraint in that it delimits the information itself and shapes the way we make relationships among different kinds of knowledge. And yet, not only does organization make knowledge accessible in all the ways we know (libraries, archives), organization operating as constraint may also open new ways of imagining relationships among concepts and ideas, and even among subjects themselves. The claim of this dissertation is that in the organization of knowledge, and particularly in encyclopedism, constraint is also creative and generative.

The literary movement Oulipo inspires my thinking about constraint and creativity in relation to encyclopedism. Founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and François le Lionnais, *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*, or Oulipo, is a literary working group of primarily French writers and mathematicians. The central principle of Oulipo is the development of, “plusieurs stratégies dont la principale est celle de la composition sous contraintes” (22) in order to produce literary potential¹. The principle of “composition under constraint” is a lens through which I examine the encyclopedia and the conventions that define the genre. In this dissertation I will discuss three very different modern French novels that tap into the creative potential of the encyclopedic form. Ultimately, I argue, encyclopedic style and format are used to produce radically original works, which allow us to learn more about the novel, its form, and its future. I interrogate, for example, the narrative qualities of encyclopedic writing, as well as the translation

¹ “The Oulipians have identified two principal tendencies in their research...The former approach studies existing works of literature (past and present) in order to uncover the principles of their structure and to see if these structures are still capable of engendering new works...The second approach...aims to invent new structures.” (Hale 52)

of an encyclopedia into a novel; the choice of subjects included in the compilation of knowledge and the kinds of epistemologies such choices construct; and the kinds of narrative authority defined by encyclopedic practice and subsequently the kinds of relationships they produce with readers.

Encyclopedic works or works that bear some resemblance to our modern idea of encyclopedias have existed since antiquity. In a broad sense, there is no shortage of reference works and compendiums of knowledge from antiquity to the present. Many reference Pliny's *Naturalis historia* as the first of these works in the Western world; other such works exist only in fragmentary form (Loveland 6). However these early examples of encyclopedic works do not resemble the encyclopedia as we conceive of the genre today, often as a totalizing, objective, reference work. The impulse to retrofit early works into a modern generic model obscures their distinctive characteristics, as Jeff Loveland explains:

Crucially, little indicates that contemporaries saw them as forming a genre, let alone one approximating that of the encyclopedia. Furthermore, while continuities can be found between encyclopedic works from before 1650 and those that came after, the differences are striking.

First, alphabetical order only became widespread as the primary order for encyclopedic works in the late seventeenth century. Second, encyclopedic works in Latin declined in the seventeenth century, while those in living languages proliferated, a tendency corresponding to a broadening readership. Third, the market for encyclopedias took off in the second half of the seventeenth century. (Loveland 6-7)

Encyclopedic works were not considered a “genre” until the 19th century, and even then the word “encyclopedia” was used interchangeably with “dictionary.” Loveland points out that in the 19th century, the most common encyclopedic genre was the “alphabetical dictionary or lexicon.” Within this group he argues that only a few resemble the modern encyclopedia: “the universal dictionary” and “the dictionary of the arts and sciences,” the latter being more detailed and often accompanied by illustrations. He explains that “as an ideal, the dictionary of things was regularly set off against the dictionary of language, but in practice the two types lay on a continuum, with numerous intermediate forms, notably the universal dictionary” (Loveland).

It is more appropriate to speak of pre-Enlightenment encyclopedism than pre-Enlightenment encyclopedias², according to Greg Woolf and Jason König:

What does it mean to talk of ‘encyclopaedism’ before the Enlightenment?...It...would be hard, in any case, to find anything quite like a modern ‘encyclopaedia’ before the eighteenth century. Instead we are concerned with the much broader phenomenon we refer to as encyclopaedism. We are interested, in other words, in the ways in which a series of different authors (primarily located within western, European culture) made use of a range of shared rhetorical and compilatory techniques to create knowledge-ordering works of different kinds, works that often claimed some kind of comprehensive and definitive status. (König and Woolf 1)

² This history is additionally fraught because of a misunderstanding of the term encyclopedia itself which appears only in the 15th century. 15th century writers previously believed that the greek word, enkyklopaideia, was used in the first century CE. However König and Woolf point out that this is infact a misreading-- Roman writers were in fact using the phrase “enkykliospaideia” which means “general education” (König and Woolf 1).

For Konig and Woolf pre-Enlightenment works deploy “a range of shared rhetorical and compilatory techniques” that result in “knowledge-ordering works.” Here we see the conceptualization not of a genre, but of a kind of knowledge organization (as in the BNF’s claim to “ranger”) as well as a type of reading practice. I follow Konig and Woolf in making a shift away from the taxonomy of encyclopedic works towards an understanding of encyclopedism as a knowledge practice.

II. Diderot and D’Alembert

Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* was originally planned as a translation of Ephraim Chambers’s 1728 English *Cyclopaedia*. The first volume of the French *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* was published in 1751. Subsequent volumes would be published until 1766 in a total of 17 volumes of text and 11 volumes of plates. The multi-author work contains entries written by well-known philosophers such as Voltaire and Montesquieu, but also many entries written by relatively unknown or anonymous authors, with some entries simply left unsigned.

In its original conception, beyond translating Chambers’ work, the *Encyclopédie* set out to explain the origin of and the relationship among different branches of human knowledge, and to make that knowledge available to as many people as possible. Nevertheless, from the onset the authors affect a humble, self-conscious tone in relation to their project’s ambitious claims. D’Alembert’s *Discours préliminaire* opens the *Encyclopédie*, and although it begins by explaining the importance of the relationship among the different branches of knowledge, it quickly develops into a discussion about the importance of shared humanity and its relationship to knowledge. And when D’Alembert explains the reason and methodology behind the

organization of the *Encyclopédie*, he emphasizes that the system of organization chosen by the encyclopedists is one among many possible systems:

A tree of knowledge could be formed with any of the following divisions: natural and revealed; useful and agreeable; speculative and practical; evident, certain, probable, and sensible; or so on ad infinitum. We chose a division which seemed satisfactory to us and at the same time the most practical one of the encyclopedic and genealogical order of our knowledge. (10)

The explicit turn to an explanation of the organizational principles of the work is unusual. It suggests the arbitrary nature of such an organization; that is, it is only one of many ways in which the encyclopedia might have been organized. As D'Alembert himself acknowledges: "We are too convinced that arbitrary judgments always prevail in such divisions to believe that our system is unique or the best one" (10). This ostensibly humble tone alternates with another decidedly unapologetic stance that is echoed throughout the political claims regarding human rights and the freedom of expression: "You will see that nothing was missing in the way of obstacles to prevent the return of reason and good taste; for only the freedom to act and to think is capable of producing great works, and freedom needs only enlightenment to protect itself from excess" (13).

Towards the end of the *Discours préliminaire* D'Alembert explains the practical considerations of the work, how the encyclopedists see themselves exercising a form of economy by compiling works, rather than proliferating needless repetition. As sprawling as the work seems to us today, at the time, all the distinct topics of the *Encyclopédie* would not have been gathered in one text. Finally, he describes the *Encyclopédie*'s imagined reader:

We therefore believed that it was important to have a dictionary that could be consulted on all artistic and scientific matters, and that would be as useful in guiding those who feel that they have the courage to work for the education of other people as in enlightening those individuals who only seek to educate themselves.

Until now, no one has conceived of a work on such a vast scale, or least no one has produced it... (35)

These pragmatic concerns are continuous with political ends for Diderot: the enlightenment of individuals. The freedom to think and to act to produce such a work should naturally be extended to the readers. This particular formation perhaps best demonstrates the democratic philosophy behind the *Encyclopédie*.

While it was originally conceived as a translation of Chambers's work, the *Discours préliminaire* of the first volume makes it clear that the project already goes well beyond that scope. D'Alembert appears to take pride in this achievement and he boasts in particular about the number of plates, or illustrations:

The engraving will be equal to the perfection of the diagrams, and we hope that the plates of our 'Encyclopedia' will surpass those of the English 'Dictionary' in beauty as much as they surpass them in number. Chambers has thirty plates; our earlier project promised one hundred twenty of them; and we shall provide at least six hundred... (41)

D'Alembert emphasizes the impressive aesthetic contribution the *Encyclopédie* makes, in addition to what it will contribute to knowledge, claiming a kind of excess that counters the praise of constraint elsewhere. For the encyclopedists, the illustrations are also about the work as a knowledge-production accessible to all, as D'Alembert goes on to describe:

From all of the foregoing it follows that in the work we announce, the arts and the sciences have been treated in a way that does not assume any previous knowledge. We have set forth what is essential to know about each subject, and the articles explain one another. Consequently the difficulties of nomenclature are nowhere troublesome. Hence we infer that at least one day this work will be able to take the place of a library in all fields of knowledge for the man of culture and in all fields of knowledge but his own for a professional scholar or scientist; that it will explain the true principles of things; that it will indicate their relationships; that it will contribute to the certitude and to the progress of human knowledge; that in multiplying the number of true scholars, distinguished artists, and enlightened amateurs it will spread new advantages throughout society. (41)

D'Alembert emphasizes accessibility and economy here: no prior knowledge is required, and only the essential is described. The *Encyclopédie* should be able to “take the place of a library,” and proliferate both knowledge and progress. This emphasis on the economic and efficient is striking considering the sheer length of the work. At the same time, as the work grows and changes, one sees that it is not the vision of one person, and that the vision, philosophy, and stakes of the work are complex and by no means uniform. The *Encyclopédie* possesses many authors of different standing in society and distinct political differences. It is a multi-authored text, constantly under construction; it is a kind of encyclopedic workshop.

In his translation of selected passages from Diderot and D'Alembert's work, Stephen J. Gendzier comments on the controversies that marked the work's composition as well as the diversity of opinion it includes: “From a philosophical point of view there were many divergences in [the authors'] attitudes. Among the Encyclopedists could be found sincere

Catholics and convinced Deists, as well as skeptics, materialists, and atheists” (Gendzier xii). In addition, he addresses one of the most commonly held misconceptions about the *Encyclopédie*: “There was no attempt to be objective in our modern sense of the word, for the Encyclopedists were committed intellectuals to whom knowledge was power” (Gendzier xvi). Here we encounter another preconceived notion about reference works: that they must be objective. This was not a feature of the *Encyclopédie* but rather a contemporary notion about reference works that we project onto it.

Gendzier emphasizes that beyond there not being any intention to offer “objective” knowledge, there was not a perceived value in “objectivity” for the Encyclopedists. To write an entry was often to take a political stand, and one that was not without consequences for its authors. These strategies often took very creative forms: “To show the inadequacy and falseness of metaphysical notions the Encyclopedists had to invent more subtle techniques. There are myriads of short, seemingly innocent articles that supply what appears to be a definition of a noun or a verb. ‘Adore, a.v.,’ an active verb, in reality was intended as praise for reason and virtue” (xvii)³. This first encyclopedia was polemic; its authors criticized powerful institutions and ideologies. For example, in the entry “Autorité Politique” instead of giving a history or description of the concept, begins with a political stance: “Autorité Politique: Aucun homme n’a

³ He continues: “Diderot explained to the reader, in his article ‘Encyclopedia,’ the most extensive technique for speaking one’s mind in an oblique fashion: the system of cross references. Such references were first of all intended to clarify complex subjects and to show all the relationships between things and between words...When it became difficult to contradict openly certain hallowed opinions, a modest cross reference could elsewhere state facts that suggested the inner convictions of the Encyclopedists. The cross references in the arts and sciences also had a philosophical intent: to describe their interrelations and to open up the horizons of research as well as to change the general public’s common way of thinking by leading them through a series of tacit deductions to the most daring of conclusions.” (xx)

reçu de la nature le droit de commander aux autres.” Elsewhere, the use of irony and humor were essential in both conveying meaning but also evading censorship and larger political consequences for its authors⁴. To approach an entry with the goal of objectivity, then, would have been entirely counterintuitive to the writers of the *Encyclopédie* who understood themselves to be participating in a high stakes political project. And indeed, politics enters even seemingly unrelated topics, as in the entry on “Jouissance” signed by Diderot. It is worth spending a moment parsing this complex and enigmatic entry:

JOUISSANCE, s. f. (Gram. & Morale.) jouir, c’est connoître, éprouver, sentir les avantages de posséder : on possède souvent sans jouir. A qui sont ces magnifiques palais? qui est-ce qui a planté ces jardins immenses? c’est le souverain : qui est-ce qui en jouit? c’est moi.

Mais laissons ces palais magnifiques que le souverain a construits pour d’autres que lui, ces jardins enchanteurs où il ne se promène jamais, & arrêtons-nous à la volupté qui perpétue la chaîne des êtres vivans, & à laquelle on a consacré le mot de jouissance.

The entry begins with ponderous questions, and introduces characters (the sovereign and *moi*) who seem to have no relationship to the word “jouissance.” There is a great deal to unpack in this entry, and much to be said about its waxing, literary style. Diderot presents us with philosophical questions apparently inspired by the concept of *jouissance*: *jouir* indicates possession, he tells us, and yet one can possess without *jouissance*. The entry implicitly invokes the sexual meaning of *jouissance* as possession, but then separates the two meanings: “on

⁴ The editors also occasionally used ironic cross-references as Kafker notes (66).

possède souvent sans jouir.” And then we have the character of the sovereign, present not in his authority or his law, but rather in his absence from his own gardens. Diderot makes this figure disappear as soon as we encounter him. He is the possessor of this beauty, and yet he does not enjoy it; by contrast, Diderot does and we do, since he invites us into the text, to enjoy without possessing. This enigmatic passage conflates possession and *jouissance* only to prise them apart. The complex double meanings of possession and *jouissance* in these few sentences demonstrate a clear literary style and playfulness. Nevertheless, there is an argument here as well: it is better to “jouir” than it is to “posséder.”

However, Diderot then self-consciously moves on, taking the reader with him: “arrêtons-nous” he says, in order to contemplate the “volupté” that characterizes the perpetuation of “la chaîne des êtres vivans.” Here opens a lengthy section on romantic love and childbearing. The literary tone changes to a distinctively argumentative one; he insists that the sexual act is not obscene, or shameful, but natural and beautiful. Diderot goes so far as to interrogate the reader as to whether the subject causes them to blush from embarrassment. Far from endorsing any shameful qualities in word or act, Diderot insists that we honor *jouissance* in naming and defining it. In this lengthy and somewhat meandering definition we can observe that the constraint of the entry format allows for a remarkable amount of creativity and playfulness. The encyclopedia does not simply describe, it engages with the reader, offering clever rhetorical argumentation, and representing many shifts in tone and style.

The scene established in the beginning of the entry is remarkable. There is a narrative, even novelistic quality to the discursive meandering through the sovereign’s gardens, and in the way Diderot guides the reader out of the garden and back to the “story” that is the entry. Encyclopedic knowledge takes on a novelistic form here in its overt use of literary conventions.

However, this is not the only way that the encyclopedic engages with the novel, as we will see with the modern novels and encyclopedias discussed in this dissertation.

III. Uses of the Encyclopedia

In the volume *L'Encyclopédie 250 ans après, la lutte continue*, Véronique Le Ru discusses Diderot and D'Alembert's translation of Ephraim Chambers' *Cyclopaedia*, emphasizing the expanse of the work, its length, as well as the time it took to write:

Le projet de *l'Encyclopédie* a quelque chose de monstrueux: des cinq volumes, dont un de cent vingt planches, prévus initialement en mars 1745, aux dix volumes, dont deux de six cents planches, prévus à la fin de la même année, et annoncés...en octobre 1750, jusqu'aux dix-sept volumes de texte et onze volumes de planches finalement livrés au public sur plus d'un quart de siècle, le projet de la traduction de la *Cyclopaedia* de Chambers s'est métamorphosé en une véritable aventure éditoriale. (11)

Le Ru effectively communicates the length and sheer weight of such a work, and in terms that suggest the excess of accumulation. Rather than a neatly ordered compendium, the encyclopedia is simultaneously “monstrueux” and an exciting “aventure”:

Diderot lui-même...n'hésite pas à comparer l'ouvrage à un monstre: “Ici nous sommes boursoufflés et d'un volume exorbitant...Ajoutez à toutes ces bizarreries celle d'un discours tantôt abstrait, obscur ou recherché, plus souvent négligé, traînant et lâche; et vous comparerez l'ouvrage entier au monstre de l'art poétique, ou même à quelque chose de plus hideux.” Mais *l'Encyclopédie* est un ouvrage monstrueux au sens défini par Canguilhem: elle ouvre sur un monde prodigue, fantastique et vertigineux où l'imaginaire a toute sa place aux côtés et parfois au milieu de la raison. (11)

Prodigious, fantastic, poetic: the *Encyclopédie* was in the process of being invented. Whereas the introduction stressed the economy of its form, we quickly see that the project was constantly shifting and changing, growing into something almost uncontrollable, with its own agency, and in which the fantastic and the imaginary were fully at play.

What is striking about Le Ru's observation, however, is that immediately following this comment, she invokes a form of rationality in a powerful instrumentalization of the text for her own argument: "C'est ce triomphe de l'Encyclopédie que nous voulons célébrer aujourd'hui, 250 ans plus tard, alors que l'année 2015 a été marquée par des attentats terribles à Paris contre la liberté d'expression (fusillade au siège de Charlie Hebdo à Paris le 7 janvier), contre la liberté tout court (attentats de 13 novembre...)" (9). In Le Ru's description what begins as the monstrous, vertiginous and fantastic encyclopedia is quickly subsumed into a neat 250 years of the legacy of Enlightenment reason. She continues to say that the "attentats qui signifient dans le sang que des formes criminelles de fanatisme et d'intolérance, malgré le combat des Lumières" (9). Le Ru has mobilized a weapon in the encyclopedia⁵. And finally to be completely explicit she adds that the work of the encyclopedia is to "écraser ce que Voltaire et les encyclopédistes appelaient 'l'infâme' et que nous appelons le terrorisme" (10). All of the complexity of the work is reduced to the triumph of a vague nationalistic notion of rationality.

This is perhaps the encyclopedic at its most threatening: a power to construct and reproduce a notion of the universal and to contribute to nationalist and/or imperialist ideologies. In this way the encyclopedia can be a kind of "monument"; in this case a complex multivolume

⁵ "Mais pourquoi l'*Encyclopédie*? ... Aujourd'hui, la confusion du politique et du religieux contre laquelle ont lutté les encyclopédistes semble connaître un nouvel essor dans l'émergence d'un 'état islamique' ou de 'républiques religieuses'" (Le Ru 10)

work with dozens of authors, reduced to a familiar propagandistic message. It is commonplace to hear the encyclopedia spoken about in these terms: rigid, universalizing, authoritative. Le Ru's rhetorical shift between the encyclopedia as a radical, original and monstrous work, and the easy reappropriation into the triumph of Enlightenment reason obscures the historicity of the text, as well as the fact that it existed at a time when the genre of the encyclopedia as we conceive of it *did not exist*.

While certainly encyclopedias, dictionaries, and other reference works may be instrumentalized in this way, that can hardly be said to be their only function. What has been taken for granted as an authoritative and totalizing form possesses many of the possibilities and qualities of subversive and satirical literature. As the writers I will examine demonstrate in diverse ways, the alphabetic order of the encyclopedia makes connections among ideas and concepts *arbitrary*. Encyclopedias do not come with instructions on how to read them. Furthermore, while we tend to think of the encyclopedia's content as factual and its tone descriptive, encyclopedic form is just as often poetic, deliberately political, or comedic. The use and format of entries, reference and cross-reference, as well as how these choices affect its representation of events in time, can make for truly strange and exciting texts, as is evident in Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*, as in the nineteenth and twentieth century texts I will examine.

Acknowledging the sprawling potential of its subject, how then do we recognize encyclopedic form? The vast majority of texts we call encyclopedias make use of alphabetic order. Entries take the form of a word, term, or phrase, followed by a description or definition. Entries are separated by blank lines, leaving space between them to indicate not only their separation from the entries that surround them, but also their relative autonomy and mobility.

Another feature is referencing, or cross-reference. As D'Alembert says, "the articles explain one another." Each entry is often in fact, many entries, echoing back to the etymology of encyclopedia as being about the relationship among different kinds of knowledge. Reference format creates a kind of mobility and movement in the encyclopedia that invites a reading practice that is creative, accessible, and intellectually complex.

IV. Oulipo: Form and Constraint

Raymond Queneau (1903-1976) was a prolific writer whose works traversed several literary periods and categorizations, but he is probably best known for his work in OuLiPo. The name and its peculiar capitalization derives from a shortened version of *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle* (the capitalization is often regularized in common usage, as I will do here). Queneau distinguishes the group from a literary "movement," emphasizing that it is a workshop (an *ouvroir* or *atelier*): "l'Oulipo...est un ouvroir au sens étymologique de 'lieu où plusieurs personnes travaillent ensemble, atelier.'" He explains that the group's goal is "la potentialité: entendez la mise en oeuvre des forces nécessaires pour que le système de la littérature devienne, ou redevienne, actif." The key to this potential is the use of constraints: "Pour atteindre son but l'Oulipo développe plusieurs stratégies dont la principale est celle de la composition sous contraintes." Perhaps most intriguing in this definition, is the suggestion that Oulipo should discover "des contraintes traditionnelles à réactiver." In other words, the group seeks to enliven certain 'traditional' literary constraints that have been generative of literary creativity. Such constraints may have simply fallen out of fashion, or there may be genres that have not been recognized for their unique use of constraint and form.

Oulipo was shaped by the passion of its founders (Raymond Queneau and François le Lionnais) for mathematics, as both were trained mathematicians. They claim that mathematical constraints are intentional, but also arbitrary. Their practice applies such constraints to literature. Oulipian constraints are intelligible, and in that sense explainable, but not necessarily *explained* to the reader. (*Oulipo* 13). Queneau is careful to note that Oulipo is not a literary school or movement; instead the group places its emphasis on aesthetic value. This does not mean, however, that they “[font] fi.” In other words, their emphasis on the aesthetic is not superficial, nor is it unserious. To complicate the definition further, Queneau says the group is not serious “entre guillemets.” This direct, seemingly contradictory definition demonstrates the elusive and complex nature of the Oulipo “recherches,” which Queneau defines as:

1. Naïves: je prends le mot naïf dans son sens périmathématique. Nous essayons de prouver le mouvement en marchant.
 2. Artisanales - mais ceci n'est pas essentiel. Nous regrettons de ne pas disposer de machines: lamento continué au cours de nos réunions.
 3. Amusantes: tout au moins pour nous. Rappelons-nous que la topologie ou la théorie des nombres sont nées en partie de ce qu'on appelait autrefois “les mathématiques amusantes”, les “récréations mathématiques”. Rappelons-nous aussi que le calcul des probabilités n'a été à ses débuts qu'un recueil d' “amusettes.” Et la théorie des jeux jusqu'à von Neumann.
- (*Oulipo* 22-23)

Oulipo is first “naïf,” in the mathematical sense, which is to say informal. In other words, the group is interested not in a formalized or fixed movement, but rather in the way strategies and

principles are at work in day-to-day life. This is decidedly open-ended; Queneau sees it as a movement-in-progress, yet always also under constraints. The artisanal nature of the group's work is not desirable, but rather a simple condition. Oulipian writers would prefer to work more with machines. Lastly, the group is "amusant": fun and play are essential values to the Oulipians. Interestingly enough, rather than justify or explain *why* it should be fun, Queneau instead refers to the history of mathematics as possessing a recreational character.

Queneau's definition of the Oulipian project takes the form of separate tenets that are not related to each other; they are like encyclopedia entries. Each term is separated from the others typographically. Each entry consists of a term followed by a colon and a definition. Each entry is numbered. None has an obvious relation to the others. The list conveys information in an encyclopedic or dictionary-like form that scripts its reception as knowledge.

Part of the essential context of Oulipo is its divergence from surrealism and other artistic movements that derive many of their ideas about creativity from psychoanalysis. After working with French surrealists in the 20s, Queneau famously broke with André Breton in 1930. While the reasons for this split are complicated and inseparable from schisms related to leftist politics, it is also worth noting the ways in which Queneau sought to distinguish his work from that of the surrealists. The latter rely on a theory of creativity that is dependent on the unconscious. As Alison Jane Hale details, Queneau and other other members argue against "chance, luck, accident" in the creative process. She explains that for them, *all* works are subject to formal constraint independently of the author's knowledge. This is in direct opposition to the surrealist emphasis on psychoanalysis and specifically the role of the unconscious in literature (Hale 55). As opposed to many of the dominant theories of literary production of the moment, Oulipo is

distinct in its emphasis on formal constraint⁶. Hale is careful to point out that from the group's perspective, all literary works are in some way indebted to these constraints, even if authors are unaware of them. Indeed, Oulipo's commitment to constraint is in fact embodied in the encyclopedic form, as is its generative creative potential.

V. Queneau

The diversity of Queneau's literary output is, as Hale puts it, the author's trademark: Queneau's trademark is his very diversity--of style, of mood, of subject matter, of thought, of discipline. In his encyclopedic urge to apprehend an increasingly incomprehensible reality in its totality and to translate it into an artistic form accessible to a wide audience, Queneau constantly oversteps traditional barriers among intellectual disciplines, literary genres and styles, social classes, historical periods, and languages. (Hale 2)

Hale entitles her book *The Lyric Encyclopedia of Raymond Queneau*, and she is clearly interested in the thread of 'encyclopedism' that runs through Queneau's life and work. This is

⁶ James Kurt in his essay "The beginning of Oulipo? An attempt to rediscover a movement" elaborates on the use of constraint: "The use of constraint as a generative device functions opposite to this. The artist begins not with content, but with a formal choice, that is, the constraint. But, the constraint, as opposed to traditional forms such as the sonnet, is difficult to the extent that the artist's primary concern can only be the production of a work that satisfies the limitation. Content or plot, that is, meaning, and even language fall where they may. These are not chosen by the artist. Rather, they are generated by the constraint, or, better, blindly by the artist's attempts to work within it. There is, ideally, no conscious choice on the part of the artist on matters of meaning or language." (Kurt)

partially related to the sheer number of genres, styles, and subjects he explored. This reference to the encyclopedic, however, is not just about variety, but also accessibility. Hale draws attention to the connection between the encyclopedic and Queneau's oeuvre: "The same 'encyclopedic virus' that motivated his numerous researches and activities is also...the guiding thematic and structural principle of Queneau's literary universe" (Hale 10). In other words, the variety and diversity of Queneau's work is representative of the encyclopedic principle. This may be why many find him to be so difficult to categorize; his work is not structured by an attachment to one genre or style. Rather, the same principle is applied to different kinds of texts, as in his well-known *Exercices de style* where Queneau rewrites the same story 99 times. Each iteration has a unique style which effectively mutates as one reads the story. A similar variety characterizes the short story "Un conte à votre façon," or "A Story as You Like It" which mapped out in numbered options that ask the reader which story they would like to hear, and which directions the story should take. Each of these works calls on movement scripted by constraint. As I've emphasized this is an essential characteristic of the Oulipian project and, as I will show, it also characterizes Raymond Queneau's encyclopedic writing, which I take as a lens for my understanding of encyclopedism more broadly.

VI. Encyclopedism: A Literary Approach

While many consider it monumental, the encyclopedia in fact undermines the fixity of monumentalism in every way, as it is, by definition, impossible to complete. The encyclopedic has a particular relationship to time. In their own present moment, the moment of composition, encyclopedias often reflect the ideas, values, and systems of knowledge of their own time period. In turn, these works can become a curiosity of sorts, much like the metaphor of a time capsule, as

Paul Saint-Amour argues in his work *Tense Future*. More generally encyclopedias are records or accounts of the near or distant past. Perhaps most importantly however, as Raymond Queneau notes in “Présentation de *l’Encyclopédie*,” encyclopedias are not relics or “tombstones” (103) but must be in some way oriented towards the future. The encyclopedia does this formally in the entry and reference format, its lack of linear narrative, and the possibility of reading it in any order. Saint-Amour notes: “We hardly think of the encyclopedia as a conflicted, self-disrupting project that welcomes formal instability, contradictoriness, or play. Quite the opposite: it has the reputation of subjecting all topics to the descriptive rationalism that is both its premise and its house style...of typifying enlightenment arrogance in its claim to encompass the known.” (Saint-Amour 186-187). Theorizing “encyclopedism” as a kind of “counter-monument,” Saint-Amour outlines some of the ways in which conflict and contradiction are imbedded in the form:

Where the conventions of epic signal a self-enclosed world that already knows what it needs to know about itself, the techniques of modernist counter-epics index competing bodies, idioms, and systems of knowledge and their imperfect possession by communities that are themselves contested objects of knowledge and identification...Internal compartmentalization, conflicted discursive zones and organizational schemata, self-contradictory systems of internal cross-reference-- these are the means by which the genre delimits and impedes the project it nonetheless cannot refuse to undertake, a project that must be comprehensive while emphatically avoiding coherentism. And the name I wish to give this repertoire of necessary-impossible negotiations is encyclopedism.

(Saint-Amour 186)

The modern novels that interest Saint-Amour are “counter-epics” because they lay bare the impossibility of total cohesion and in-contestable knowledge. He uses the term “encyclopedism” to describe the conflicts and contradictions of works as *Ulysses*, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, and *Parade’s End*, among others. For him these are “anti-totalizing” and represent a unique, modern “heterogeneity” (320) as opposed to the traditional model of *bildung*. This is a very different view from that of Le Ru, discussed earlier, for whom the encyclopedic project is coherent, and even universalizing, in its Enlightenment values. I will follow Saint-Amour in defining encyclopedism as a heterogeneous method, expanding my own definition through readings of three modern French works. Each of my dissertation chapters is structured around a text and an encyclopedic quality or strategy. In Chapter 2, “Encyclopedic Potential,” I read Raymond Queneau’s *Les enfants du Limon* (1938); Chapter 3 “Encyclopedic Writing,” turns to Gustave Flaubert’s *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881) and Chapter 4 “Encyclopedic Mythmaking,” discusses Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig’s *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des Amantes* (1976).

VII. Chapter Summary

My second chapter, “Encyclopedic Potential: Raymond Queneau’s *Les enfants du Limon* and the Creative Possibilities of Encyclopedic Form,” takes as its subject Raymond Queneau’s 1938 *Les enfants du Limon* (Children of Clay), a novel that contains an encyclopedia, written by the author himself, in large excerpts throughout its narrative. Written roughly twenty years previous to the founding of Oulipo, the non-fictional encyclopedia covers what Queneau refers to as *fous littéraires* (often translated as “literary madmen”) a category of scholars whose work was published but never reproduced by students or a following of any kind. These works which range from unconventional cosmologies and grammars, to the texts of paranoid enemies of the state,

cannot be said to fit into the conventional history of ideas, and are considered by Queneau to be “mad.” The fictional work follows an encyclopedist and his copyist as well as the characters surrounding them who directly and indirectly engage the ideas of the encyclopedia. Queneau’s own text begins by calling the central term (“fous litteraires”) into doubt. Rather than a clear and expository statement we are instead led through a series of problems and questions. The encyclopedic project is introduced already as an unstable work, as well as one that begins with a series of tricks and dishonesty. The promise of freedom or the prospect of containment are proposed early on in the text and the encyclopedic project begins from an unstable premise.

I argue that one cannot read Queneau’s encyclopedia separately from the novel. Furthermore, rather than separating each out in order to value the encyclopedia as a kind of raw material for the novel, we must account for the specificity and substance of the text itself. As it discusses the work of these men in addition to the struggles of its protagonist, the text keeps judgment in suspension. In other words, the extent to which one can read these figures or their work as a failure or as a success remains indeterminate. This is to read the text on its own terms, rather than attempting to flatten it or attempt closure. The encyclopedia is a valuable part of this literary work: its form possesses a creative, inventive, pedagogical, and literary value.

In my third chapter I turn back to an exemplary 19th encyclopedia and read it through the lens of Queneau’s claims about encyclopedism. In “Encyclopedic Writing: *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and *Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues*,” I discuss Flaubert’s final 1881 work (published posthumously). The novel about two Parisian copyists begins with the dream of living in the quiet, idyllic countryside as opposed to the city. Bouvard and Pécuchet’s natural curiosity leads them to study numerous subjects, resulting in an encyclopedic narrative where each chapter is a particular field of knowledge. While the work remains incomplete, we know from notes and the

dossier of material produced by Flaubert before his death that the two finish their adventure by making an extensive copy (a reference to their previous career) of the writings and works they have consulted over the course of their studies. While not all of the planned works were completed, Flaubert did produce *Le dictionnaire des idées reçues* (*Dictionary of Received Ideas*). This work, separate from the text of the narrative itself, is literary, of its moment, and a complex multilayered critique of bourgeois ideology. Its encyclopedic organization allows for specific critique. Flaubert's novel represents the encyclopedic both through the narrative style of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, as well as the *Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues*. Raymond Queneau writes a preface to Flaubert's unfinished work, posing a distinction between works that take place in *plein temps* ("full time") *temps perdu* ("lost time") pairing each with *Odyssey* or *Illiad* respectively.

When he takes on the project of directing the literary volume of the *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade*, Queneau expands on his ideas about the encyclopedic, explaining that it possesses potential in its orientation towards the future; it is anticipatory. The encyclopedia is not timeless. I argue that the use of time in encyclopedias is plastic and indeterminate, allowing the reader to make connections that might not otherwise be apparent. Furthermore, I argue that Flaubert's text invents a kind of encyclopedic writing as a strategy to maximize creative potential.

My fourth chapter, "Encyclopedic Mythology: Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig's *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes*," examines this 1976 work, more accurately an encyclopedia than a dictionary, which tells the story of "Amantes" ("Lesbian peoples") using a mix of styles and tones and produces a history/mythology that moves across time periods, allowing the reader to make their own connections. The text heavily references antiquity, as well as Sappho's poetry, in order to construct a narrative encyclopedia about *Amante* culture. The work's preface is written by contemporary Oulipian Anne Garréta.

Wittig and Zeig describe their work as possessing a “Disposition Lacunaire.” Rather than attempting to hide gaps they aspire to make them visible and to recontextualize them. The mythical quality is overt in its references to antiquity, and especially to Sappho’s life and work. Wittig and Zeig emphasize fragmentation, and recontextualize it as a way of reading Sappho’s corpus, as well as a way of imagining *Amante* culture. I argue that though the entry on Sappho is blank, she is omnipresent in the dictionary.

Chapter 2 - Encyclopedic Potential: Raymond Queneau's *Les enfants du Limon* and the Creative Possibilities of Encyclopedic Form

In 1930 Raymond Queneau began to research what he would come to call *L'Encyclopédie des sciences inexactes*, a huge undertaking of research that was meant to catalog a series of 19th-century figures known as “fous littéraires.” Originally coined by 19th-century Romantic writer Charles Nodier, the term refers to authors whose writings do not fit within the accepted history of ideas, and are more complex and convoluted than merely “eccentric.” He introduces this fraught and complex term in his introduction to the work:

La chose est difficile, car le terme est mauvais; qu'il suppose légitime de porter sur un homme un jugement d'aliénation mentale uniquement d'après la forme et le contenu de ses écrits. Or, s'il est possible de faire avec quelques vraisemblance lorsque le contenu concerne la personne même de l'auteur, il devient délicat, et même absurde, de le tenter lorsque ces écrits portent sur une question scientifique précise. On serait alors obligé d'appeler folie une erreur un peu trop violente. On voit le danger d'une telle affirmation, il suffit de se souvenir que c'est une façon commode de se débarrasser des novateurs.

(39)

On the one hand, there is the separation of the author and the text: it would be misguided to diagnose these figures on the content of their work alone. The term of *folie*, or madness, then, is somewhat erroneous. In addition, Queneau reminds us that the accusation of madness is an all too familiar strategy of dismissing new ideas.

Nevertheless, Queneau goes on to categorize these ideas instead as “extravagant” and explains that it is not “erreur en soi,” error itself, that distinguishes the *fou littéraire*, but rather the social and professional milieu:

La première catégorie comprend tous ceux qui, traitant une question scientifique [quadrature du cercle (livre I)], système du monde (livre II), origine du langage (livre III)], soutiennent des thèses que l’on peut aisément qualifier d’extravagantes...Plus que l’erreur en soi, c’est inadéquation à son milieu culturel qui me paraît caractériser l’“excentrique scientifique”. Non seulement il n’est pas un précurseur, mais il n’a pas de disciples, ni même de maîtres. On ne discute pas ses idées: elles sont in-discutables. Son oeuvre est nulle et non avenue pour la science même non officielle, pour la philosophie, pour les religions. Elle n’a aucune portée culturelle. (40-41)

Instead of the writings themselves, it is the fact that the works possess no precursors, nor disciples, that make them remarkable. They do not participate in intellectual communities. Even more radically, Queneau asserts, their ideas are in fact not debatable: they have no cultural impact.

Gallimard and Denoël rejected *L’Encyclopédie* in 1934 (Velguth 11). Queneau would later incorporate this work into a novel, *Les enfants du Limon*, published in 1938. The novel follows a character named Chambernac who is in the process of compiling the very same encyclopedia Queneau attempted to publish. In this chapter I will discuss the novel and the questions it poses about the encyclopedic project and, by extension, the encyclopedic form. By narrating the compilation of the encyclopedia, the text comments on the process and experience of the encyclopedist. The reception of the work by characters in the story provides additional commentary and demonstrates the ways in which some come to relate to and identify with the

fous littéraires. I will take into account the way in which the encyclopedia has been interpreted as a “failure” by critics and publishers, but also the way the novel itself entertains the notion of personal and professional failure. Ultimately, I propose an alternative reading of the work that is not concerned with failure or redemption, but rather illustrates the unique form of the encyclopedia and its inventive qualities, as well as its distinctively Oulipian playfulness.

In *Les enfants du Limon* Chambernac explains his project, the *Encyclopédie des Sciences Inexactes*, to his new assistant, Purpulan: “En effet, lorsque nous aurons réuni trois ou quatre cent fiches, constaterons alors que les trois-quarts ne nous intéressent pas parce que concernant des auteurs indûment classés parmi les fous littéraires... Qu’est-ce qu’un fou littéraire? Nodier restreignait sa liste ‘aux fous bien avérés qui n’ont pas eu la gloire de faire secte’” (56). The work is an enormous undertaking in research; as Chambernac notes, there are hundreds of pages, many of which will not make the final cut. Chambernac is very discerning, and includes only the “fous bien avérés” defined according to several essential criteria:

celui-ci doit être resté un inconnu—par définition. Mais comment juger de la folie bien avérée d’un auteur—hein? Comment? Où se trouve la frontière entre la folie et l’excentricité. La simple excentricité? Après tout, la vraie folie, c’est celle qu’on enferme; et justement nos auteurs sont en liberté puisqu’ils publient leurs productions, puisqu’ils les font imprimer... (56)

While *fou littéraire* remains difficult to define, Chambernac asserts that these figures must be unknown, but also published, the latter quality indicating not only the availability of their texts but also the fact of them being “free.” The definition also rests on the distinction between eccentricity and madness, or rather that which exceeds eccentricity. The definition then presents a kind of contradiction between madness as defined by “celui qu’on enferme” and the fact of

being at liberty to publish their works. That is, the central term “fou littéraire” represents a tension regarding what would otherwise be confined, but is instead “en liberté” (56). The fact of being published also indicates not only the freedom of their authors, but also the freedom of their ideas to circulate. The explanation is equally about what the *fou litteraire* is not, just as much as what it is. The term maintains a certain ambiguity and elusiveness even as it takes the structured form of the encyclopedia.

In Allen Thiher’s book on the works of Queneau, he brings in the philosophical criticism represented by the encyclopedia, namely Chambernac’s inclusion of the “non-rational”:

Queneau is fascinated by the multiplicity of heterogeneous orders of representation that the mind can spin forth, even if, as Chambernac observes about this project, there is something equally as demented about the desire to catalog all these ravings. Yet, Hegel’s declaration that the real is the rational left him with an impoverished encyclopedia, for the total encyclopedia of the human mind would demand nothing less than a place for every product it has conceived— including vast tomes of delirium. (85)

As we will see later, it is suggested early on that Chambernac is not a “typical” *érudit*, as his excessive passion for his peculiar topic risks putting him in the ranks of his *fous littéraires* rather than the locating him within the stoicism of the solitary scholar. Thiher also draws attention to the exceptional nature of this encyclopedia, which is interested in “non-rational” material, which he refers to as “delirium.” The suggestion here is that to leave out what is not “rational” results in an insufficient or incomplete encyclopedia, incomplete because of the suggestion that this would be “the total encyclopedia of the human mind.” For Thiher, this hypothetical encyclopedia would not discriminate but instead function as a kind of information dump that would necessarily include what he refers to as “delirium.”

Furthermore, Thiher notes the mythic dimension of *Les enfants du Limon*, and how, as for Bouvard and Pécuchet, the encyclopedic task is represented as a Faustian one: “the encyclopedia urge is Faustian. With proper irony Queneau therefore gives Chambernac a Faustian helper, a poor devil named Purpulan. Chambernac’s encyclopedia thus unravels as quickly as he orders for it, for what classificatory system can contain within it the proliferating fictions of the mad?” (86) Here the encyclopedic project is already presented as not only impossible, but diabolic. Thiher also suggests that Chambernac’s project is a failed one from the onset, as the works of *fous litteraires* “proliferat[e]” in such a way that they cannot be contained. However, the purpose of this encyclopedia is not described implicitly or explicitly as a kind of containment. The observation instead reflects a number of assumptions about the encyclopedia he brings to his reading of the text: namely that it aspires to totality as well as containment. In Thiher’s reading the non-rational is both necessary to the completion of a totality (“the total encyclopedia”), but also excessive and uncontainable, making the work effectively impossible from the onset. This reading also implies a tragic characterization of both Chambernac and Purpulan, who are embarking unknowingly on this diabolic project which is doomed to fail.

The tone of the passage wherein Chambernac explains his project is didactic, as it is directed at the copyist Purpulan, introducing him to the subject matter for his training. However this didacticism is not structured or organized in the style of a lesson, but rather conversational and incomplete. Chambernac is clearly building to a narrative around the definition of the *fou littéraire*, while also pausing to ask rhetorical questions and meditating on the complexities of his topic. He argues that we must judge “la folie bien avérée” but then immediately troubles this category by presenting a contradiction between enclosure and freedom. Purpulan’s own relation to freedom is fraught. Originally he approaches Chambernac at his home in an attempt to

blackmail him into offering him a position as a teacher. Chambernac yields, only to then trick Purpulan who does not realize that the school year is not in session. This obliges the latter to stay with Chambernac as his personal assistant against his will. In this way Purpulan is a defeated character from the opening of the novel, his plan not only thwarted, but backfiring on him and forcing him into a position of servitude. Initially suggested to be a kind of supernatural figure, a mischievous trickster capable of ensnaring mortals in his schemes, it is Purpulan who is in fact trapped, outsmarted by Chambernac. The “pauvre diable” (referenced by Thiher) is now sentenced to the dull work of the copyist. The whimsical and mysterious Purpulan is domesticated, forced into the service of the encyclopedia.

The didactic tone in this passage also troubles the genre of the encyclopedia as a one of reference or of general information, as it begins by calling the central term into doubt. Rather than a clear and expository statement we are instead lead through a series of problems and questions. The encyclopedic project is introduced already as an unstable premise, as well as one that begins with a series of tricks and dishonesty. The promise of freedom or the prospect of containment are proposed early on in the text and the encyclopedic project begins from an unstable premise.

In order to explain his investment in the encyclopedia, Chambernac expands on the ambiguous nature of the *fous littéraires*' ideas using a quotation from the 19th-century psychiatrist François Leuret:

Ce Leuret, qui était médecin et psychiatre, écrit: “Il ne m’a pas été possible, quoique j’aie fait, de distinguer par sa nature seule”—par sa nature seule: c’est bien dans ce cas-là que nous nous trouvons—“une idée folle d’une idée raisonnable. J’ai cherché soit à Charenton, soit à Bicêtre, soit à la Salpêtrière l’idée qui me paraîtrait la plus folle: puis,

quand je la comparais à celles qui ont cours dans le monde, j'étais tout surpris, presque honteux, de n'y pas voir de différence." Alors? (56)

Chambernac quotes Leuret, who, speaking as someone who has worked at mental institutions such as Charenton and Bicêtre, expresses the difficulty of discerning exactly what the difference is between "une idée folle" and "une idée raisonnable." He specifies that it is "par sa nature seule" that this difficulty emerges, isolating the idea from other contexts or institutions.

Chambernac even repeats the phrase to indicate that this is the same predicament he and Purpulan find themselves in. The experience of uncertainty is described by the doctor as one not only of surprise, but of shame.

Here again, rather than providing a clear definition, Chambernac presents more uncertainty, this time through the voice of an "expert" on the topic of madness. The use of the term "ont cours" to describe ideas evokes not only acceptance, but also a kind of freedom and circulation. This recalls the relationship of the encyclopedia to ideas of freedom and enclosure, the *fous* who are not institutionalized. Reasonable ideas circulate and reproduce; mad ideas do not. The avowal of shame suggests a kind of failure on the part of Leuret to distinguish these two categories of ideas. The admission of failure will later be echoed in the experience of Chambernac as well as other characters. The necessity of recognizing and naming madness is described by Leuret as a task at which he fails. While the ideas "qui ont cours" should necessarily be reasonable based on their free circulation, Leuret is unable to use the qualities of freedom and enclosure to classify definitively. Leuret's quotation is an admission of slippage, of the escape of many of these ideas from experts and systems of classification. The mad idea is also a failed idea—it fails to circulate and propagate. A failed idea "should" be an unreasonable one, however the failure to distinguish between a reasonable and unreasonable idea is the failure

of the classifier/expert, contaminating their standpoint and leaving them open to unreasonable ideas. As we will see ,later in the text this slippage will come to apply to characters within the novel, as they find their own perspectives and lives affected by the encyclopedia. Some will move from skepticism to curiosity, others from disinterest to sympathy. The work will also move many of them to consider the fate of their own ideas and destinies, their relative success and failure in their projects.

Chambernac's definition of the category *fou littéraire* presents these contradictory themes, meant to trouble, as emphasized by the use rhetorical questions throughout the passage. This culminates in the final enigmatic "Alors?" an indication of uncertainty and aporia. The introduction hardly seems to suggest a pretense towards totality, completion, or the possibility of exhausting its subject. Rather the frame provided by Chambernac is an editorialized entry point into the text, one which takes care to not simplify or reduce his topic. While the compilation of the work may be organized, methodical, that should not be conflated with the idea of a "complete" work. Indeed, from the very beginning, Chambernac insists on the problematic nature of the encyclopedia, focused on the questions it provokes rather than any answer it could provide.

After Chambernac explains the project to Purpulan we are presented with the encyclopedic entries themselves. The entries are first introduced with the instruction to Purpulan that he will have to laboriously copy all of the information from a number of books. Chambernac then proceeds to expand his lessons on the subject of *fous littéraires*. Purpulan reacts with dread at the prospect of making copies of the aforementioned encyclopedic entries: "Je vous en supplie, monsieur, ne me faites pas faire des fiches. Je trouve ça trop triste" (55). Purpulan, who originally hoped to be teaching philosophy, is instead forced to make exact copies of other texts,

a task which he considers to be a tedious chore. This is followed by more pleas and groans when, much to Purpulan's chagrin, Chambernac begins to read a passage until his pupil can no longer bear it and asks him to stop.

After a series of entries we are provided with an extensive bibliography on *fous littéraires*. On the completion of the encyclopedia towards the end of the novel, Chambernac notes that "Naturellement je ne vous ai pas lu la bibliographie ni l'index...qui existent naturellement; non plus que la liste des auteurs dont je n'ai pu trouver les ouvrages qui m'auraient peut-être intéressé" (298). Here Chambernac's matter of fact tone evokes the tedium of the most banal aspects of writing the encyclopedia. This quote appears almost to taunt Purpulan with the suggestion of reading an exhaustive bibliography or index of this material. Even the earliest parts of the novel introduce the encyclopedia as a tedious and boring text. Allison Jane Hale comments on Queneau's integration of the scientific into fiction, citing *Les enfants du Limon* as both "the most extreme" and "the least successful" example: "These complex and bizarre entries that are merely juxtaposed somewhat awkwardly with the main story, rather than integrated into the work, are often more bothersome than intriguing to the reader" (49). However, "success" is understood here implicitly as the entries being well-integrated as well as "intriguing." The tedium of copying and reading the texts is directly referenced multiple times in the novel. The suggestion that the synthesis of the novel and the encyclopedic entries is "unsuccessful" ignores the possibility that boredom is indeed one of the desired or perhaps unavoidable effects. At the very least, if we take the work on its own terms, tedium should not affect its relative success in and of itself. Here again, there is an implicit judgment that an encyclopedia should be "intriguing" rather than "bothersome."

Nevertheless the encyclopedia and the characters' respective interests in it remain the focal point of the novel. Chambernac's obsession with the topic comes across as comic, particularly as characters are often presented as disinterested or even hostile to the project. In contrast to this, Chambernac's interest seems almost unreasonable or abnormal, a fact which ultimately leads him to sympathize personally with the *fous littéraires* themselves. Nathalie Piégay-Gros acknowledges how erudition in this novel appears to deviate from its typical associations: "Avec cette passion pour le langage des fous (littéraires ou non), l'érudition semble doublement déviée de son objectif conventionnel: d'une part les savants fous accumulent un savoir qui n'a rien de positif...d'autre part, Queneau—ou son double fictionnel, Chambernac—s'emploie à son tour à collecter ce savoir avec une passion un peu délirante" (77). Unlike the traditional *érudit*, Chambernac has a peculiar and unique passion regarding his task. Furthermore, the knowledge catalogued does not contribute to an already existent and recognized field of knowledge. Piégay-Gros draws attention to the knowledge which is not "positif," understood here not only as more "rational" knowledge, but also that which can be contextualized and understood in a field or community of scholars. This lack of "positive" knowledge is in contradistinction with the concept of accumulation, as without any outside context to situate these ideas, they are scattered rather than accumulated.

The construction of the encyclopedia involves the practical drudgery of working through dry material (much of which Chambernac reminds us will be ultimately excluded) and the time-consuming work of copying the original texts. Even as he introduces the topic of *fous littéraires* Chambernac comments: "n'oubliez jamais lorsque vous repérez un bouquin de noter la date de sa parution, son format, le nombre de pages, le nom de l'éditeur ou à son défaut celui de l'imprimeur, la ville où il a été publié..." (56). This information seems excessive for a novel, and

serves only to emphasize again Chambernac's obsession and his rigorous and painstaking research. When introducing texts he also provides detailed information such as "tome III, pages 148 et 149" (57). The list of instructions emphasizes the didactic tone, but also presents a parodic amount of citational information. The inclusion of this content so early in the novel makes the figure of the *fou littéraire* from the onset not only a troubling and complicated one, but also one that is inextricable from the painstaking and dull work of the encyclopedist. Piégay-Gros references the concept of the list and index: "la liste, sous sa form excessive et parfois délirante, rappelle que l'érudition est passion du détail et démon de l'exhaustivité. Elle fournit au roman une matière inépuisable, qui peut d'ailleurs entraver son développement : raconter s'épuise à énumérer et décliner n'est pas configurer" (73). This distinction between listing, enumerating and understanding appears multiple times throughout the novel. Here Piégay-Gros highlights the ways in which enumeration can have the opposite effect of development, and instead exhausts the novel and its material. However, her own description of érudition as passionate in its preoccupation with detail opens up a reading of the text which demonstrates that even listing has a kind of playful function in the text.

Nathalie Piégay-Gros expands on the concept of erudition and its representation in literature in her book *L'érudition Imaginaire*. She interprets this concept and its reception through a variety of literary traditions:

Avec une persistance remarquable en France tout particulièrement, la notion d'érudition est tombée en discrédit...Opposée à l'exercice libre de l'intelligence, elle est présentée comme une pratique asocial qui n'apporte rien à la connaissance générale et ne fournit aucune vérité abstraite. L'érudition est affaire de détails et on risqué de s'y enliser et de perdre toute vue d'ensemble. Trois motifs principaux cristallisent la critique don't elle est

l'objet: elle s'oppose à l'imagination; elle traduit un défaut d'expérience; elle s'oppose à la spéculation et à la théorie. (13)

Erudition comes to stand in for the opposite of intellectual freedom and expression, as well as a solitary practice, unable to contribute anything valuable to general or public knowledge. It is associated with pedanticism as well as a limited and myopic perspective. Throughout the different iterations of erudition the author discusses, she notes the ways in which the concept shifts relative to its time period and the literary movements of the moment. While for Hugo the undesirable form of erudition makes the library into a “necropole,” (15) for existentialists, erudition represents error in its association with knowledge that is separate and intentionally cut off from life and experience. Piégay-Gros compares Chambernac from *Les enfants du Limon* to other literary figures such as Roquentin: “On qualifiera de ‘syndrome de Roquentin’ cette attitude qui consiste à vouloir donner une forme d’immortalité et de gloire à un personnage oublié. Chambernac...en est évidemment atteint: il cherche à sauver de l’oubli les textes accumulés par d’obscurs savants; pour ce faire, Chambernac fréquente assidûment les bibliothèques” (28). She argues that Chambernac shares the desire to redeem these figures, even to provide them with a form of “glory” or “immortality.” Like Sartre’s Roquentin, one of the figures or models of the *érudit* is the solitary scholar, removed from society and lacking real-world experience: “son engloutissement dans la Bibliothèque achève de le couper du monde” (28). Chambernac partly represents, then, a critique of erudition in her view. However, though the monotony of the encyclopedic process is parodied somewhat in the novel, Chambernac is not shown to be interested in glorifying these figures.

Early on in the novel, a character requests that the Limon daughters mention his store to their grandfather: “Ce serait si gentil à vous Mesdemoiselles d’en toucher deux mots à M.

Limon” (44). The text then directly introduces an encyclopedia entry on their grandfather Jules Jules Limon, heavily indented on both pages:

LIMON (Jules-Jules), né à Lons-le-Saunier le 17 mai 1854. Ancien élève du Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers, succède très tôt à son père comme directeur d’une toute petite fabrique d’appareils de précision. En 1884, crée la Société de Construction Électrique et en 1902 L’Appareillage Électrique. Dès le 27 octobre 1898, intéresse au développement de la T.S.F. en France. Fondateur des principaux postes d’émission; constructeur ou concessionnaire des marques : Mardéconi, Sanfilips, Ducrotté, Sonoritas-Sonoritatum, le Branlyneur pour ondes courtes et la Machine-Infernale ; concessionnaire générale de la publicité par radio pour la France. En lutte avec l’agence Lavasse, a créé une agence d’information concurrente, l’Opéra Terrae. Administrateur général de la Banque Industrielle pour l’Industrie, de la Porcelaine électrotechnique de la S.A.Q.A.A.T.J.E. et de trente-six autres sociétés approximativement. A épousé le 5 mars 1883, Mlle Dorothée (von) Cramm (décédée le 2 décembre 1901). Dont il a eu deux enfants: Sophie née le 5 décembre 1883, et Astolphe, né le 1^{er} décembre 1901, un petit ravisé.

Mlle Sophie Limon a épousé le 25 juillet 1902, M. Edmond de Chambernac (né le 10 juillet 1878, tué à Verdun le 21 février 1916) dont elle a eu trois enfants: Daniel, né le 25 avril 1903, Agnès, née le 16 mai 1905 et Noémi, née le 13 décembre 1908.

Mme Veuve Chambernac s’est remariée le 26 juillet 1924 avec le baron Saloman Hachamoth, administrateur de sociétés et officier de la Légion d’honneur, ancien combattant. (45)

The insertion of encyclopedic entries into the narrative is efficient: we now have a background on the family tree of the Limon line in less than two pages and how the characters relate to each other early on in the novel. Limon was a successful industrialist with a number of offices, a career path he had inherited from his own father. We also learn the genealogy of the characters and how they relate by blood or marriage to the patriarch. This information is presented comically, however, with the inclusion of invented brands and companies. The summation of the character's life and accomplishments in this format gives both a sense of triviality. What seems parodic is partly that we have no profound sense of Limon as a character, of his actions, or his role in the family short of dates of birth and a brief family tree. What is most apparent about the entry is the form and style, particularly the list-like information and the convention of listing dates. In the entry, the life or death of someone is literally a parenthetical phrase. The passage is notable also because there is no other information about Limon besides his eventual suicide later in the novel, itself a ridiculously brief description. No other protagonists in the story receive encyclopedic entries. This is especially worth noting as Limon's absence from the plot makes the entry that much more significant. It highlights how at least a few of these characters relate to him and therefore each other, constructing him as a kind of absent link. In this way the entry substitutes for the character in the narrative. The only other substantial reference to Limon is in the title of work, which also highlights how he connects the characters in the novel. *Les enfants du Limon* is also what most clearly highlights the double meaning of "limon" evoking the biblical allusion of God creating man out of clay. The reference to clay is also not just natural, but elemental, in that it emphasizes a component of the earth's constitution. This connects it to the *fous litteraires*, particularly those writing about cosmologies and of the components of the earth and the galaxy. The mythic dimension of Limon here makes him all the more distant and

enigmatic. Here the format of the encyclopedic entry is comedic and inventive, but also functional. In a sense, the entry comes to stand in for narration, albeit in an abbreviated way, blurring the lines yet again between encyclopedic and narrative form.

Furthermore, the format of this entry does not resemble the entries of Chambernac's encyclopedia. The Limon entry is right-aligned to the extent that the left side of the page is entirely empty, drawing attention not only to the text, but to the blank space. While many of Chambernac's entries utilize indentation on the page, they do not follow a consistent format and many are provided in-text, with little or no introduction. The lack of consistency of formatting only serves to integrate the encyclopedia further into the novel itself, as there is no clear stylistic distinction that lets the reader know distinctly what is an entry and what is novelistic text. This is further complicated by the insertion of short poems throughout, as well as pronounced indentation of portions of the novelistic text without a discernible rationale. The latter serves to emphasize the way in which certain formatting choices evoke the expectation of different kinds and genres of information. This entry emphasizes the arbitrariness of the encyclopedic form, as well as its playfulness, which serves a narrative function within the text itself.

One scene early on in the novel features a visit from two of Limon's children, Agnès and Astolphe, to Chambernac. They instead encounter Purpulan, who proceeds to read an entry on *fou* and *quadratureur* Joseph Lacomme. Purpulan replaces Chambernac in this scene in which we also see the text of the entry, while like Purpulan before them, Agnès and Astolphe are not impressed. Astolphe suggests that perhaps Lacomme may have squared the circle after all: "La quadrature du cercle est un problème de géométrie, répondit Purpulan, et Lacomme croyait pouvoir le résoudre par des expériences 'Et bien, il se trompait : ce qui arrive à des tas de gens qu'on traite pas de fous' dit Astolphe 'Et puis, dit Agnès, j'ai l'impression qu'un vrai fou écrirait

des choses plus intéressantes” (82-83). Like Purpulan in the earlier scenes, they are bored, as well as skeptical. Astolphe then suggests that perhaps Lacomme had merely made a mistake, which would also mean he is not in fact a real “fou.” This is echoed by Agnès’ statement that a real “fou” would write more interesting things. The suggestion of “interestingness” recalls Chambernac’s introduction to the *fou littéraire* and his emphasis on the practical and disciplined work the encyclopedia involves. These two reactions are particular in the way that they recall the tedium or disinterest earlier. Furthermore, why should something “crazy” be more interesting? What would be interesting in the view of Agnès or Astolphe? The reverse logic is particularly worth noting— not that if the ideas were more interesting they would be “crazy,” but that he would be more authentically “crazy” if his ideas were interesting. In the passage it is Purpulan who takes the didactic tone, and Astolphe and Agnès who act as the audience. The previous dynamic is reversed, as Purpulan, formerly a student, is now placed in a pedagogical role. The shift of positionality in the novel serves to demonstrate the plurality of viewpoints, and the many responses and questions the encyclopedia provokes.

The shift demonstrates a movement in the novel: characters often take the opposing position regarding the significance of the *fous littéraires* without a clear or obvious transition. Though previously skeptical, here Purpulan the copyist takes on the pedagogical tone and role of the encyclopedist, reading passages to a relatively disinterested audience. The shift demonstrates the persistence of the encyclopedia, its force throughout the novel and its influence on the characters. At one moment, beyond defending the encyclopedia, Purpulan goes as far as to suggest that he himself has solved the quadrature of the circle, emulating one of the *fous*. While at first the novel may appear to be presenting separate compartmentalized narratives, the

encyclopedia begins to infiltrate many of these otherwise unrelated plotlines and characters, seeping into their lives and storylines.

The encyclopedia is given a more of a structure by Chapter 52: “[Chambernac] concevait maintenant son grand ouvrage non plus comme un chapelet de notices présentées dans un désordre alphabéto-cahotique, mais comme une œuvre ordonnée dont il savait même le titre. Il écrivait une *Encyclopédie des Sciences Inexactes*” (132). The structure is given an order, rather than a “disorder” described as “alphabéto-cahotique,” which involves skips and jumps that appear somewhat disconnected as opposed to a “chapelet.” The description is consistent with the seemingly haphazard formatting of the entries, and their place within and without the novelistic text, which increasingly become more substantial and ordered by topic as the novel goes on. Chambernac then explains how he divides the work into four parts: “le cercle” “le monde” “le verbe” and “le temps” (132). These categories are larger in scope than the average encyclopedia, and connote a kind of absolute or philosophical abstraction. Rather than “langue” or “grammaire,” Chambernac chooses “le verbe.” Rather than “histoire,” he chooses “le temps.” The lack of more conventional categories of these ideas gives the encyclopedia a more open-ended and almost poetic distinction. The categories are distinctly inventive. Rather than organizing the work around a title such as “history,” the term “time” demonstrates the imagination and novelty of the work. This moment in the creation of the encyclopedia demonstrates the arbitrariness of the organizing principle.

After the presentation of these chapters, increasingly larger portions of the encyclopedia are included in the narrative. It is this increased integration of the encyclopedic entries that Hale referred to as often “bothersome” to the reader. Chambernac then singles out a number of “special entries” (133-141) and even indents and places them into separate chapters, even the

shorter entries. Separating out the entries in this way creates more of an impression of reading the encyclopedia. By giving the entries their own chapters, the text of the novel merges more closely with that of the encyclopedia. The chapter headings no longer need to provide even a brief introduction from Chambernac. At this point, the encyclopedia appears to contaminate the novel, as we see increasingly more passages from it, and less of the other narratives. The contamination of the novel is not totalizing, however, as we do continue to follow storylines of the other characters. Ultimately, though, the process cannot be undone: the encyclopedia proliferates throughout the novel, unable to be contained or compartmentalized, and the novel cannot retain a separate identity or structure. It follows, then, that the problems of the encyclopedia are also the problems of the novel, as the two are inextricably linked. By the same logic, the encyclopedia cannot be compartmentalized either, it remains partial and interrupted. The entries while they are increasingly grouped together are inevitably interrupted by narrative. The two forms cannot be read without the other as a contrast or frame.

The distinction between understanding and classifying

When planning the encyclopedia Chambernac makes it clear that he cannot include everything: “Il faut choisir, disait-il à Purpulan. Dans un appendice énumératif, je collerai tous les refusés simplement pour montrer que je ne les ignorais pas” (137). In this way he prevents these omitted and forgotten figures from being additionally excluded. The drive to include even the exclusions of the encyclopedia matches the content of the novel and its inclusion of more and more entries. The more entries we see, the more sense we have of needing to read, to learn, to consume. The drive to include takes on an obsessive quality, while simultaneously we are made aware of the exclusions. At the same time, this inclusion is not accumulation, as the information

does not build or develop to a greater coherent whole or understanding of the *fou littéraire*. This recalls the “proliferation” of ideas mentioned by Thiher. At the same time, the encyclopedia is in no way totalizing or attempting to contain these ideas.

Recalling previous discussions of the status of the “folie bien avérée” (56) Chambernac explains his desire to understand “comment un homme peut arrive à penser ainsi” regarding the mentalities of the *fous* (169). After a discussion with Purpulan he concludes:

Évidemment, dit Chambernac, je ne me suis pas proposé dans ce livre de comprendre ni d’expliquer mettons : les délires de nos auteurs. Mon œuvre est purement énumérative, descriptive, sélective. D’ailleurs qui comprend la folie ? Personne. Surtout pas les psychiatres. Ils ne font que décrire eux aussi, énumérer, classer. Le docteur Frachoux m’a bien parlé une doctrine qui s’appelle la psychanalyse et qui explique les rêves. (170)

Chambernac emphasizes that his work does not claim to understand madness and that, furthermore, no one can claim to. This recalls the proposal of the project at the opening of the novel, its conversational tone, and its heavy use of rhetorical questions. However, this particular moment should not be interpreted as a criticism of psychology. The book does not contain any parodies of psychology or psychological texts or theories. Instead Chambernac is gesturing at the limitations of a particular kind of knowledge. It is not a fault of psychology as a science that it cannot “understand” madness, but rather all Chambernac or the psychologist can do is “describe,” “enumerate,” “classify.” The above discussion recalls François Leuret, and his admission of his surprise and shame at his inability to distinguish “une idée folle” from “une idée raisonnable.” This distinction between understanding and classifying is one of the most unique and intriguing aspects of Queneau’s novel. Like many other statements in the novel, this comment comes across as paradoxically both a defense and an apologia. It is difficult to interpret

these comments as the message becomes so diffuse across so many different characters. Chambernac's family seems largely skeptical, Purpulan is at times critical, and at moments passionate about the project. The tone of Chambernac and Purpulan's conversations suggests not only a degree of self-awareness and criticism, but also, as with earlier chapters, a sense of dread and displeasure. These criticisms are also interspersed with philosophical discussions and quotations, as well as open ended questions. The previous citation recalls the statement by Piégay-Gros that narration is in a way exhausted by enumeration, that listing is not the same as building or developing. While a lucid understanding may be the desired result of some encyclopedias, it is not for Chambernac. What is emphasized instead is a practice or method for presenting concepts and information.

Unable to find an interested publisher, Chambernac does, however, eventually abandon the project towards the end of the novel. The failure produces both indirect and direct identifications of Chambernac with his *fous littéraires*. The merging of the characters and these encyclopedic figures adds a unique dimension to the novel. This approaches one of the central questions of the text: why the "object" of Chambernac's encyclopedia is always in suspicion of being somehow illegitimate? In other words, the suggestion that the cataloguing of these ideas is unreasonable leaves the center of this collection of information somewhat opaque in Chambernac's own admission that it (madness) is not a topic that is understandable. He has chosen an object of study that resists interpretation, while also utilizing a method that renounces all claims to understanding. Furthermore, Chambernac is described by Purpulan as having an affinity with one of the *fous littéraires*. While reading out one of the entries which lists descriptions of the different sciences, Purpulan notes a similarity between this person and Chambernac: "Vous voyez, Monsieur Chambernac, dit Purpulan, c'était un esprit

encyclopédique comme vous” (172). Among at least one of the *fous* is an encyclopedic “esprit.” “Esprit” here cannot be simply understood as the act of writing an encyclopedia, but also to a desire and a temperament. This direct reference to Chambernac’s affinity demonstrates his own “contamination” by the encyclopedia. By identifying this drive we are also given insight into the formulation of an encyclopedic method which is characterized around personal desire and curiosity as well as being somewhat idiosyncratic.

Oddly enough, though there are many questions posed in the novel as to whether the subject of *fous littéraires* is worthwhile or legitimate, the format of the encyclopedia is never called into question. The content remains the focal point of all skepticism— the question is posed hierarchically: why are these figures worthy of study? What is significant about them that merits an encyclopedia? Furthermore, this raises the question of the encyclopedia within the novel itself, and why someone known for their novels and poetry would decide to write an encyclopedia. After all, the imaginings of the *fous littéraires* with their eccentricity and humor would seem to make the perfect subject of one of Queneau’s novels. However, the focus on whether the topic is interesting or valuable distracts from any skepticism about the genre of the encyclopedia, and its supposedly legitimating power. One possible answer to the question “what does an encyclopedia produce” may be its ability not only to produce knowledge, but also to potentially produce the desire for knowledge. Furthermore, rather than a work with pretenses towards objectivity or totality, Chambernac’s encyclopedia is remarkably and unabashedly creative and unique. Even the moments of monotony or tedium are themselves rather eccentric. Erudition, in this work, is decidedly more playful, humorous, and naive than many of the critiques outlined by Piégay-Gros. In many ways, the focus and skepticism of the object of study

obscurities the strangeness and lively quality of the encyclopedic method itself. One of these qualities is its ability to provoke changes in the novel's characters.

Towards the end of the novel, we are shown a brief glimpse into the thoughts of Agnès Limon, herself struggling with her role as the leader of a political organization, and a dilemma similar to that of Chambernac:

Agnès ne pouvait s'empêcher de penser avec une gêne croissante à tous ces pauvres ignorés, méconnus, moqués, oubliés. Dédaignés, aliénés, rejetés, délaissés, inécoutés, refusés, exclus, inconnus, disparus, qui crurent avoir quelque mission historique à remplir sur cette terre et ne réussirent qu'à fournir la matière d'une élucubration de l'oncle Chambernac.

Et pourtant les illustres, les connus, les admirés, les célèbrés, les perpétués, les glorifiés, les assimilés, les intégrés, les suivis, les ouï, les admis, les inclus, les connus, les apparus, -- les reconnus, crurent eux aussi dans leur mission. Elle aussi croyait dans sa mission. Et pourtant elle ne croyait plus dans sa mission. (285-286)

Agnès's reflection raises the issue of the value, legitimacy, inclusion, and, on the other hand, that which is devalued, illegitimate and excluded. She is, in fact, unable to avoid thinking about the *fous*, which she expresses with "gêne" evoking François Leuret's sense of shame in the earlier quote. The exhaustive list of adjectives "ignorés, méconnus, moqués, oubliés" and their corresponding opposites "les illustres, les connus, les admirés, les célèbrés," emphasizes this tension, almost to the point of parody. However, this passage is not comedic, but instead serves to humanize the struggle of the characters simultaneously with the plight of the *fous*. All of these figures, represented by the variety of adjectives presented, add up to only an "élucubration" of Chambernac. The repetition in the last two sentences captures this problem never resolved in the

novel between one's steadfast belief in one's mission and utter disappointment in defeat.

Furthermore this quote represents a form of enumeration. On the one hand, the exhaustive list of categories dilutes the meaning of the adjectives themselves, blending them together into an unrecognizable mix. This would be one effect of enumeration (and Piégay-Gros's argument). On closer inspection, however, the passage also highlights the diversity within the groups, multiples and produces new forms as well as new relationships among the terms.

Chambernac identifies and is identified with these figures. After a series of refusals from publishers, he gives up on the publication of his encyclopedia, noting "car il risquait ainsi en mettant en circulation un livre qui ne rencontrait qu'indifférence, d'entrer lui-même dans la catégorie des 'fous littéraires'" (332) echoing Agnès's sentiments above. He soon encounters another writer, named Queneau, to whom he offers his book: "Je vous en fais cadeau. Mais je vous préviens que ce n'est pas un cadeau de grande valeur" (334). After insisting that he take no credit for the work, effectively disowning it, he suggests that Queneau attribute it to one of his characters: "Non. Non. Attribuez mon ouvrage à un de vos personnages si ça a un sens pour vous... Refaites avec ces vieux papiers un livre neuf si vous en éprouvez la nécessité ; et si vous en êtes capable " (334). This ending can be read, much like other comments in the book, as a kind of admission of failure on the part of Chambernac. His insistence that it is not "de grande valeur" and his desire to dissociate himself from the project reinforce this idea. This passage cannot be read, however, as simply a disavowal of the work. Firstly because of the lack of resolution within the novel regarding the value of its subject, and secondly because it is the character of Chambernac who gives away the novel to the fictional Queneau. The structure of the work is reversed in this ending, as the fictional Queneau asks "Vous auriez une répugnance quelconque à ce que j'attribue votre oeuvre d'un roman que je suis en train d'écrire?" (334). In

this sense, the fictional Queneau is already writing the novel, and decides to include the encyclopedia, rather than the fact that Queneau has written this encyclopedia and subsequently “disguised” it in the form of a novel. The reversal emphasizes the hybridity of the work, by presenting an alternative reading where the novel precedes the encyclopedia. Alternatively, we could understand this as an interpretation of the work which is unconcerned with the origins of the text, in other words, whether they are encyclopedic or literary.

The inclusive and internal nature of the encyclopedia reinforces the distinction between the two groups— the valued and the devalued, the remembered and the forgotten. The novel vacillates between these two perspectives often without any clear transition— as is the case with the example of Purpulan’s disinterest, which later turns into fascination and even outright indignant pride in the project. Agnès, too, herself originally disinterested, comes to identify with these figures, ultimately reflecting on them as a lens through which she views herself and her political project. Nor does this dynamic between the two perspectives result in any narrative resolution. The encyclopedia, then, can be said to produce not only knowledge, but desire as well as identification throughout the novel. It contaminates the novel, overtaking not only the text itself, but also the characters and the way in which they view themselves.

Piégay-Gros, writing about the relationship between erudition in literature and skepticism, provides a more generous reading than other critics on *Les enfants du Limon*:

L’Encyclopédie des sciences inexactes est tout autant éloge de la folie qu’une leçon de relativité sur ce que peut la connaissance. On ne peut donc limiter l’entreprise de Queneau à une volonté de donner gloire à des savants oubliés...ce qui est recherché, c’est aussi un certain usage du savoir...Par tous ces aspects, *Les enfants du Limon* peut être lu comme un grand roman des années 30, porteur d’une réflexion sur les limites d’une

culture qui s'est fondée sur la conservation et l'accumulation d'un savoir ordonné et rationalisé. (106)

She notes the larger context of *Les Enfants du Limon* as commenting on the limits of knowledge and discourse. This also recalls Thiher's statement about the encyclopedia which must include the "non-rational." What this argument does not address, however, is the *fous* themselves, the chapters and the objects of fascination they represent. Here the content is evacuated of its specificity and its meaning, coming to stand in for a critique of knowledge production. While the question of the rational and the non-rational is certainly pertinent to the work, it can hardly be said to encompass the entire work, much less its singularly whimsical quality. The latter, as we have already seen, is present equally in the playfulness of the encyclopedic method demonstrated in the novel, as well as its vacillating tone.

Piégay-Gros reiterates her point regarding the skepticism of the novel, and its refusal of the "explicative" and "interpretive":

En suivant scrupuleusement l'archive et en la citant amplement, quitte à faire de son texte un centon de citations, Queneau renonce au discours explicatif et interprétatif. Le savoir sur la folie est frappé de scepticisme. Car les archives permettent d'avoir une prise sur le réel, mais ne pensent pas la folie. A l'analyse est donc préférée l'expérience que la folie engage, le tour si particulier, si étrange, qu'elle donne au langage. L'érudition délivre donc des personnages, dérivés de textes que dédoublent les destins. (126)

Here, she deviates from other critics in her clarification that the archive serves to offer "une prise sur le réel" without carrying with it the stamp or determination of madness. It is instead "l'expérience que la folie engage." Ultimately, however, she rests on the redemptive theme of the "characters" that Queneau's archive has produced. She then begins to describe the ways in

which the *fous littéraires* become characters in the novel: “*Aux confins de ténèbres*, puis *Les enfants du Limon* assurent la gloire (fictionnelle) d’hommes qui deviennent d’authentiques personnages...les lacunes de la documentation sont rapportées par Queneau de façon méticuleuse, sans doute par scrupule érudit, mais aussi parce qu’elles stimulent notre désir de connaître le personnage” (124-125). For Piégay-Gros, the archive represents a “livre des personnages qui peu à peu prennent corps dans la fiction” (123). The work is redeemed through its literary potential.

Allen Thiher sees this connection among the fictional characters in the novel, all of whom he argues become “engulfed” by their own stories in what he refers to as Mephistophelian irony: “This irony functions to designate Queneau’s own cosmology, portraying in the novel the children of mire, as but another version of the many mad cosmologies that cranks have succeeded in having published (with the added irony that Queneau did not succeed in having his *Fous littéraires* published)” (87). Ultimately, Thiher reaches a similar conclusion to Piégay-Gros : Queneau “redeem[s]” his original encyclopedia in the novel “or at least integrating them into a work that embodies the fictions of real madness within a real fiction that is a successful novel” (88). This is echoed by Jane Allison Hale for whom Chambernac’s work is also a recuperation:

Queneau took fragments of old writings of discarded authors and used them as raw material for his own imaginative invention. Queneau saved his work on the literary madmen from being relegated to the status biographical footnote by reworking and synthesizing an originally marginal intellectual pursuit into a literary form...Queneau refused to admit the irrelevance of even this self-proclaimedly marginal domain of

knowledge...and recuperated it into the totality of his life and work by translating it into literature. (12)

Hale, too, treats the encyclopedia as discarded material, and reiterates the viewpoint that the work is redeemed (or in this case “recuperated”) in its literary form. Only when it is “translated” into a literary form is it seen as possessing value. In her view, this also prevents the work from remaining “marginal.”

However, in order for the novel to “redeem” the encyclopedia, we would have to read both as already distinct, rather than being mutually constitutive or part of a hybrid work as discussed previously. To read the novel in this way is not only to separate out the two forms (which I would argue the text does not allow for) but also to take at face-value the suggested failure of the encyclopedia, in other words that both Chambernac and Queneau fail to publish their work makes failure a *fact*. This reading of failure is then followed by a redemptive reading, a reversal of the former, one which seems to want to account for and appreciate Chambernac and Queneau’s work, to recover and recuperate it from one side of Agnes’s list to the other.

Reading the novel as a philosophical commentary on knowledge production is effectively the same critical move, as it recycles the text into an overarching philosophical argument, making it in some way larger than itself. The problem with these readings, however, is their inattention to the composition of the text, its particularity, as well as the mechanisms throughout which are in fact its most meaningful qualities. Readings that attempt to redeem the text serve only to affirm the supposed failure of the work, rather than recognizing that failure is one of a number of fraught concepts that the novel entertains throughout. Furthermore, to redeem the text is also to flatten it, to dismiss its particularity and open-endedness, its distinctive Oulipian playfulness. By keeping the concept of play central to our reading of the text, the idea of failure

or the necessity to redeem are no longer at stake. Our point of departure is one where the text has value in and of itself. We can read the work on its own terms.

The desire to “recuperate” the encyclopedia also inherently privileges the novelistic form. It presumes that the encyclopedia has no value itself, but rather becomes valuable when it is incorporated into the fictional text. Nor does it take seriously the encyclopedic form as creative or in fact literary. In a sense, this treats the encyclopedia as a kind of source or raw material, to be repurposed into novelistic form, in effect finding its “rightful” place.

In her introduction to an edited volume on the *Encyclopédie* referenced in the introduction, Veronique Le Rus confronts the assumption that reason is the primary subject of the encyclopedic form. She refers to it as “monstrueux” in terms of its practical undertaking, but also in a sense which she attributes to Georges Canguilhem:

Mais l’Encyclopédie est un ouvrage monstrueux au sens défini par Canguilhem: elle ouvre sur un monde prodigue, fantastique et vertigineux où l’imaginaire a toute sa place aux côtés et parfois au milieu de la raison. En ce sens, on peut lire les trois colonnes-- Mémoire, Raison, Imagination -- du Système figuré des connaissances comme les trois brins d’une même tresse. Même si, à première vue, la primauté est donnée à la colonne de la raison, d’autres points de vue viennent perturber cette priorité. (11-12)

While on first reading, we may privilege reason, the encyclopedia in its earliest forms was equally concerned with imagination. The characterization of the encyclopedia as monstrous, both in its form and in its content allows us to appreciate its imaginary potential. In Queneau’s essay “Présentation de l’Encyclopédie” on the experience of editing *Histoire des Littératures* of the *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade*, we can observe his own reasoning and philosophy on the encyclopedia and its organization:

Il est vrai qu'on ne pourrait ne pas exiger une encyclopédie qu'elle prévoise l'avenir, en ne lui demandant que de donner le bilan de la science actuelle... Mais puisque ce que ce bilan ne peut s'ordonner suivant une classification bien faite, n'est-il pas préférable de renoncer à une classification boîteuse de ce qui est pour essayer, au contraire, avec plus de souplesse, et aussi plus de risque, de préparer des ouvertures sur l'avenir?

While the encyclopedia cannot predict the future, in some sense it should anticipate it, with an emphasis on flexibility, and an awareness of the risk involved. Expanding on this flexibility, Queneau notes that the encyclopedia should also be a point of departure: "C'est à cette solution que nous souhaiterions pouvoir être arrivés. Loin d'être seulement un bilan, cette encyclopédie doit être aussi une initiation, une préparation, un point de départ. Elle ne doit pas être la pierre tombale..." (103) Queneau uses the metaphor of a "bilan" in the sense of "balance sheet":

C'est ainsi que peut se justifier le mot "bilan," car, dans un bilan, il n'y a pas seulement un actif, il y a aussi un passif. Et il y a effectivement, ici, un "passif": celui de notre ignorance. Nulle part, dans cette entreprise, ne seront celées les ampleurs de nos incertitudes et les immensités de notre non-savoir. Le lecteur apprendra à ignorer, à douter. C'est aussi une entreprise critique... C'est aussi la possibilité de l'invention. (104)

If the encyclopedia is a balance sheet, we must understand that it is not only one of assets, but also one of liabilities. In other words, we must take into account what is absent, our non-knowledge as part and parcel of the work itself (or its total equity). This relationship, in his view, prompts the reader to doubt, as well as critique. The encyclopedia possesses a pedagogical function, as well as an inventive one. On the one hand, he does view the encyclopedia as being future-oriented, so in some sense progressive. At the same time, he is all too aware of the

limitations of such a project. The encyclopedia is still somewhat aspirational, but not, however, towards a complete or totalizing knowledge.

Ultimately, insofar as one understands the encyclopedia as a kind of raw material to be compiled and integrated into a novelistic totality, the text cannot escape this narrow reading. As long as the encyclopedic form is ignored or neglected, viewed as inherently inferior to a particular conception of the literary, it is forever obscured by assumptions regarding its supposed investment in totality, completion, and rational truth. Even as Hale argues that Queneau and Flaubert move towards a more “literary model” (22) of the encyclopedic text, she repeatedly refers to that knowledge as a form of raw material. The encyclopedia is denied any kind of creative value of its own, but is instead understood as a substance that can be inserted into the literary machine. The consequence of these narrow interpretations of the literary is a fundamental misunderstanding of form, as well as an investment in totality that ultimately undermines literary potential. As Queneau reminds us in his own writing, the encyclopedia serves not only a pedagogical function, but also a critical and inventive one. *L'Encyclopédie des Sciences Inexactes* and *Les enfants du Limon* are demonstrative of the creative value of the encyclopedia as well as a potentially more flexible and critical concept of literary form.

Chapter 3 - Encyclopedic Writing: *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and *Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues*

Queneau's preface

Queneau's *Les enfants du Limon* [*Children of Clay*] owes much to Flaubert's final, unfinished work *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, a novel about two Parisian copyists who move to the countryside and devote themselves to the pursuit of knowledge. This results in an extensive *copie*, like Chambernac's instructions to his assistant, cited in the preceding chapter: a set of documents including reference works produced by the pair, as well as various compilations of secondary sources. One such reference work is a *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*. As the novel is incomplete and was published posthumously, it is unclear whether Flaubert ultimately wanted to include the dictionary within the novel itself, or rather add it as an appendix. What understanding we can gain about the conclusion of the novel is found in the notes, drafts, and outlines left by the author, which collectively form a sort of dossier. The *Dictionnaire* is a playful and comic work that orders alphabetically *idées reçues*: it constitutes a collection of thoughts, opinions, and truisms meant to represent the accepted knowledge of the "vox populi, vox dei," the ironic epigraph that introduces it. The *Dictionnaire* thus seems more than tangential or ancillary to the novel. On the contrary, it is, as I shall argue, central, and the encyclopedic form that it reflects is crucial to Flaubert's final experiment with the form of the modern novel.

Queneau actually began a preface to *Bouvard et Pécuchet* in 1947. This text, which remained unfinished at his death in 1970, helps us understand the narrative quality of the

encyclopedic form. Published posthumously in 1976 by Gallimard, the preface compares Flaubert's 1881 novel with *Madame Bovary*⁷ (1857):

Quant à l'héroïne, moins intelligente certes que Bouvard et l'ami Pécuchet, elle se lance dans diverses entreprises, l'adultère, la dévotion et la grammaire italienne, avec le même insouciant de la méthode et la même désinvolture primaire qu'en première analyse on attribue aux deux bonshommes (46)

Here the connection between the two novels is the passionate act of pursuit and the variety and multiplicity of “enterprises” in which the characters engage. Queneau portrays Emma and the two protagonists as acting in relatively the same way, even though the subject and plots of the works are radically different. The unlikely pairing of Emma⁸ with Bouvard and Pécuchet throws into relief the themes, as well as the stakes, of the works that otherwise might not be apparent. First of all, Queneau compares Emma's own embrace of “adultery, religion, italian grammar” to Bouvard and Pécuchet's embrace of every subject they encounter. Indeed, the latter two protagonists seem equally enthused by every subject that comes their way: from agriculture to mathematics, from philosophy to pedagogy. The second point in common that Queneau notes is the insouciance and the carelessness of method with which Emma, like Bouvard and Pécuchet, throws herself into these “undertakings,” adopting one, then the other, without any rational connection between them. Such a lack of “method” and such a seemingly endless variety of experiences are features of the encyclopedic.

⁷ In his 1950 essay Queneau also notes “La ressemblance entre les noms de Bouvard et de Bovary est curieusement accentué par le fait que Flaubert avait obtenu celui de Bovary en dénaturant celui de Bouvaret” (63-64).

⁸ For more reading on *Madame Bovary* see Jean-Paul Sartre. “Entretien” *Gustave Flaubert*. Paris Ed. Inculte, 2009 or Jean-Paul Sartre. “Notes sur Madame Bovary” *Gustave Flaubert*. Paris Ed. Inculte 2009. Also Nathaniel Wing, “Emma's Stories: Narrative, Repetition and Desire in Madame Bovary.” *The Limits of Narrative : Essays on Baudelaire, Flaubert, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé*. Cambridge University Press, 1986 for desire and narrative in the novel.

Queneau then goes on to make a broad comparison between *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and Homer's *Odyssey*:

Bouvard et Pécuchet est une *Odysée*, madame Bordin et Mélie sont les Calypsos de cette errance à travers la Méditerranée du savoir et la copie finale est l'Ithaque où, après avoir massacré tous les prétendants, ils font avec un enthousiasme plein de sagesse l'élevage des huîtres perlières de la bêtise humaine. Tout comme *Candide*⁹, ils cultivent leur jardin et, dit Flaubert dans une lettre à Edmond de Goncourt: "La fin de *Candide*: cultivons notre jardin est la plus grande leçon de morale qui existe" (47)

Mapping *Bouvard and Pécuchet* onto these models, Queneau's evocation of the classical voyage transforms the interpretation of the text radically. Flaubert's text becomes a type of modern epic. *Bouvard and Pécuchet* is no longer just an ironic story of two farcical protagonists and their folly in a seemingly erudite pursuit of knowledge. Rather, Queneau's comparison demonstrates the haphazard quality of all pursuits-- the risks, the errors, and the dangers. Their comical wanderings ("errance") through the vast oceans of encyclopedic knowledge is like the epic hero's wanderings and adventures. Furthermore, if the novel *Bouvard and Pécuchet* is an *Odyssey*, the final *copie* is figured by Ithaca, the result and reward of this journey: on this Ithaca, the two "heroes" collect the pearls of human stupidity-- that compilation which is the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*.

Queneau then extends this comparison to literature as a whole, in a sweeping and rather poetic paragraph concluding (at least in this incomplete version) his preface:

La littérature (profane —c'est-à-dire la vraie) commence avec Homère (déjà grand sceptique) et toute grande oeuvre est soit une *Iliade* soit une *Odysée*, les odysées étant beaucoup plus nombreuses que les iliades: *le Satiricon*, *La Divine Comédie*, *Pantagruel*,

⁹ For a discussion of Voltaire's influence on Flaubert see: Zagona, Helen G. *Flaubert's "Roman Philosophique" and the Voltairian Heritage*. University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland, 1985.

Don Quichotte, et naturellement *Ulysse* (où l'on reconnaît d'ailleurs l'influence directe de *Bouvard et Pécuchet*) sont des odyssées, c'est-à-dire des récits de temps pleins. Les iliades sont au contraire des recherches du temps perdu: devant Troie, sur une île déserte ou chez les Guermentes. (48)

Here again, Queneau emphasizes the structural elements of pursuit and temporality, rather than the content of the work; the latter are divided into either “temps plein” (full time) or “recherches du temps perdu” (search[es] for lost time). *Bouvard and Pécuchet* takes place in the former: it exists in a kind of continuous time, and this immediacy distinguishes the novel from those which recount a lost past. Because of the temporality of the work, much of its meaning remains suspended. *Bouvard and Pécuchet* is not an attempt to recover something lost, but rather takes place in its moment. Queneau’s configuration of the *copie* as an Ithaca then cements it as a kind of triumph, a reward for the journey and the result of the massacre of the suitors. This reward, this culmination of the journey that has been the novel is the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*.

Queneau’s comments on encyclopedic time in the essay quoted in the previous chapter help elaborate his analysis of literature and time: “Loin d’être seulement un bilan, cette encyclopédie doit être aussi une initiation, une préparation, un point de départ. Elle ne doit pas être la pierre tombale...” The metaphor of the tombstone carries over into the preface’s distinction between the two forms of time. The encyclopedia is not only in the past, it is in *temps plein*, as is *Bouvard and Pécuchet*. It is both an account of a past and a point of departure for the future: a setting sail on the “odyssey” to which he compares Flaubert’s novel. The novel’s temporality, like that of the encyclopedic project, does not imply closure. It is not a “tombstone,” but rather a playful and creative openness

While Queneau interprets the final *copie* as an Ithaca, this can only be in retrospect. *Bouvard and Pécuchet*'s journey, so to speak, does not have a clear endpoint in mind. The idea

of copying does not return again until the very end, and not in the novel but instead in the story outline left in the dossier. This connects to Queneau's characterization of the novel as being part of the heritage of the *Odyssey*: taking place in "temps plein." It is the suspension of any sort of endpoint or resolution that places it into this category.¹⁰ As the reference to the *Guermantes* suggests, Proust's work gestures towards a loss or an absence, and is constructed around this, in the same way that the *Iliad* is an account of loss, the fall of Troy. *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, in contrast, is in real time, "full time," experienced by the reader in the moment. This, as we shall see, is closer to encyclopedic time, a wandering or "errance" in the narrative present, where Ithaca not a stopping point but a point of departure for the cultivation of "huitres perlières de la bêtise humaine," the *Dictionnaire*.

In 1950 Queneau evoked the same unpublished preface in an essay on *Bouvard et Pécuchet* that appeared in *Batons, chiffres, et lettres*. In a particularly self-reflexive essay, he refers to this work as "pages naïves" (53), explaining that he had not read the literature on *Bouvard and Pécuchet*. Citing both the novel and criticism at length, he expands on some of the ideas in the previous draft. He quotes Flaubert's correspondence regarding his writing plans: "[s]e mettre cet été à un autre livre du même tonneau [as *Salammbô*], après quoi, je reviendrai au roman pur et simple." Queneau explains that this letter "montre d'ailleurs que *Bouvard et Pécuchet* n'est pas un roman 'pur et simple'" (61). Indeed, its experimental character is due, I shall argue, to its encyclopedic character.

¹⁰Queneau's own novel, *Les enfants du Limon*, has a unique relationship with time in its use of fiction and non-fiction. As I discussed in chapter 1, the conclusion contains a scene in which the fictional Queneau receives the encyclopedia from Chambernac, effectively reversing the order of the novel and the encyclopedia. Queneau's insertion of himself into his work, *Les enfants du Limon*, adds a layer of immediacy to the text. In this way, Queneau's novel *also* takes place in *plein-temps*.

Queneau also expands on ideas from the first draft. His concluding portion includes the following sentence, lacking in the later Gallimard edition: “Mais, riche ou vide, le temps des épopées n’est pas susceptible de s’organiser selon la chronologie précise des romans ‘purs et simples’” (69). Here Queneau introduces epic time, and explains its incompatibility with novels “pure and simple,” specifically their linear chronology. Even the timeline of *Bouvard and Pécuchet* rejects verisimilitude. Queneau goes on to explain the uncharacteristic youth of the two *bonshommes*:

Dans le chapitre III de son livre cité, Descharmes montre que, du point du vue de la vraisemblance, Bouvard et Pécuchet devraient avoir dans les quatre-vingt-cinq ans lorsqu’ils se mettent à copier, alors que, si l’on s’en rapporte aux repères fournis par Flaubert, ils n’ont que soixante-dix: leur rencontre se situe en juillet ou bien août 1838 (ils ont quarante-sept ans) et dans le chapitre X, il est fait allusion à la “question du libre-échange,” donc 1861 mais dans les deux cas l’invraisemblance est égale; en effet leur jeunesse d’esprit, leur vitalité, leur santé parfaite, montrent que Bouvard et Pécuchet ne sont pas plus des vieillards “purs et simples” que le roman qui porte leur nom (69-70)

Here again with the usage of the term “pur et simple” Queneau draws attention to the unconventional passage of time in the work, this time reflected in the ages and behavior of Bouvard and Pécuchet. The “epic time” that Queneau associates with *Bouvard et Pécuchet* approaches the temporality of the encyclopedia, in which time does not progress, but constitutes an expanded, ever renewed present.

While the satire of the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* lies in its criticism of shared or accepted knowledge¹¹, and the imitative, uncreative *copie* in which it is realized, Flaubert’s novel

¹¹ For *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and critiques of epistemology, see: Stephanie Dord-Crouslé, *Bouvard et Pécuchet de Flaubert : une encyclopédie critique en farce.*” Belin, 2000 and Paul-Laurent

is not simply a critique of the idea of encyclopedic copying. On the contrary, as I shall argue, the *Dictionnaire* shows its creative possibilities. What Flaubert demonstrates in the novel is an increasing emphasis on the encyclopedic that culminates in his attempt at what I refer to as “encyclopedic writing.” The act of copying, while satirized in the work, begins to change, to be transformed into a creative act.

Flaubert’s novel

The entries on literature in the *Dictionnaire* are an example of the satirical¹² layers of the text: “Littérature: Occupation des oisifs” (537). For more insight into Flaubert’s concept of the novel, one notes the entry on “roman”:

Roman Les romans pervertissent les masses.
 Sont moins immoraux en feuilleton qu'en volume
 Seuls, les romans “historiques” peuvent être tolérés, parce qu’ils
 enseignent l’histoire. Ex: Les trois mousquetaires etc.
 Il y a des romans écrits avec la pointe d'un scalpel. Ex. Madame Bovary,
 D'autres qui roulent sur la pointe d'une aiguille (550)

The brief entry crucially ties together Flaubert’s own literary career, and the obscenity trial of *Madame Bovary*, as well as the moralization of the novel in general and literary polemics of the

Assoun, *Analyses & réflexions sur Gustave Flaubert: Bouvard et Pécuchet*; Ellipses, 1999. “Espoirs et déchéance de deux antihéros en quête de savoir,” Marianne Revel-Mouroz; Thierry Poyet, *Bouvard et Pécuchet : le savoir et la Sagesse*. Éditions Kimé, 2012; Anne Herschberg-Pierrot and Jacques Neefs, *Bouvard et Pécuchet : archives et interprétation*. Éditions nouvelles Cécile Defaut, 2014.

¹² See Stephanie Dord-Crouslé, *Bouvard et Pécuchet de Flaubert : une encyclopédie critique En farce*. Belin, 2000 or Paul-Laurent Assoun. *Analyses & réflexions sur Gustave Flaubert: Bouvard et Pécuchet*. Ellipses, 1999. “Clichés et parodie dans le chapitre I” Alain-Gabriel Monot for more on Flaubert and satire.

19th century. The suggestion that novels “pervertissent” the masses is a direct reference to Flaubert’s censorship trial, which was concerned with social norms, notably the harmful effects, on women and girls especially, of the novel’s “crude realism” and its depiction of the adulterous woman.¹³ He gets to the heart of the pedagogical notion of the novel by referring to the “tolerable” novel: those that teach history. The idea of a functional role for the novel is antithetical to Flaubert’s literary philosophy as the irony brings out. Furthermore, the function of historical novels cannot merely be instrumental; rather it is their creative potential that interests the author of *Salammbô*.

While there is a great amount of attention placed on Flaubert’s contribution to the form of the modern novel, the form of an encyclopedia or dictionary (as in his final work) is relatively unexamined in a literary context. On the other hand, the modern novel is distinct as a form from the encyclopedia or dictionary in the way that it presents and represents reality. The encyclopedia is a distancing form; its style and format do not represent how we communicate; it is a work that one consults in fragments, rather than reading linearly. There is no teleological narrative, no correspondence between the evolution of the narrative and its meaning. In most cases the sequence of entries follows the arbitrary order of the alphabet. Cross-references complicate the order of reading, allowing reversals and multiple movements across the text that are impossible in an ordinary novel. Its descriptions are stylistically distinct from other forms, specifically in its manner of providing information, reference, or advice in the form of “entries.”

¹³ See Dominick La Capra, *Madame Bovary on Trial*. Cornell University Press, 1982 or Michèle Hannoosh “Reading the Trial of the *Fleurs du mal*” *The Modern Language Review* Vol. 106, No. 2 (April 2011): “The literary values brought out in Flaubert’s trial were classical ones: the work judged as a whole, the reader interpreting correctly or not the message which the work contained” (387)

Simply put, the encyclopedia is a radical departure from the traditional novel both in form and in reading practice.

On the other hand, the encyclopedia very often, and certainly in the case of the *Dictionnaire*, deals with the “everyday.” Therefore it is not entirely separate from experience, as it reflects the ideas, values, and objects of everyday life (Astronomy, Decorum, Photography); in other words, anything that might come up in an everyday conversation during the work’s moment. *Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues* specifically satirizes the knowledge of its day, and in this way is a fitting culmination to *Bouvard et Pécuchet*.

Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues

The form of the *Dictionnaire* is significant and provides a complex and dynamic critique of accepted bourgeois norms. Towards the end of the story’s outline, we see its narrative origin. After a series of failures, Bouvard and Pécuchet decide to return to the beginning, to copying: “Ainsi tout leur a craqué dans les mains. Ils n'ont aucun intérêt dans la vie. Bonne idée nourrie en secret par chacun d’eux. Ils se la dissimulent—De temps à autre, ils sourient, quand elle leur vient—puis se la communiquent simultanément: copier” (414). In this way the novel does not take them to a new location or development, but rather comes full circle. As Queneau’s reading confirms, rather than ending at a final *physical* destination, the journey of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* arrives at the text of the *Dictionnaire*.

Beyond the notes, the only complete portion of the “copy” that we possess is the *Dictionnaire*, an alphabetical reference-work that represents and reproduces the “common sense” ideas and opinions of Flaubert’s time. The work is preceded by two quotations: the old adage “Vox populi, vox Dei” and Chamfort’s maxim, “Il y a à parier que toute idée publique, toute

convention reçue, est une sottise, car elle a convenu au plus grand nombre” (485). In this way the satirical tone is present from the very beginning of the work. Culler explains how the dictionary represents a critique of bourgeois ideology.¹⁴ Nevertheless, he asserts that this reading would not oppose “other, preferable opinions” (60): “[T]he entries of the *Dictionnaire* neither represent a coherent view of the world, nor are they rendered stupid by being set against another coherent ideology” (60). Flaubert is thus presenting the reader with “a self-enclosed system of social discourse” (160). The dictionary “implies...that stupidity is a mode of language, or rather that social language is itself stupid: it is not the instrument or vehicle of a spontaneous response to the world: it is not something lived but something given, a set of codified responses. We do not understand the world...[we] talk about it in phrases which interact with one another in a self-enclosed system” (165).

Culler reads the dictionary as a kind of Barthesian move, reading Flaubert as a “mythologist” (160). Flaubert is not “claim[ing] that [received ideas] are necessarily false but only that their historical and conventional character has been obscured by a society which attempts to transform its particular culture into a universal nature” (160). The dictionary is a reference for “social meaning” (160). Because of its self-enclosed quality, the encyclopedia is an advantageous form for demonstrating the paradoxes, contradictions, and hypocrisy of human society. The satire is even more pronounced with the use of reference and cross-reference. This is apparent, for example, in tautological entries such as “Brunes: Plus chaudes que les blondes (voyez *blondes*)” where the latter entry is “Blondes: Plus chaudes que les brunes (voyez *brunes*)”

¹⁴ “When the bourgeois reader found palpable stupidities alongside his own thoughts and beliefs he would be disconcerted and uncertain how to respond...True stupidity, we might suppose, was the bourgeois ideology” (159)

(493-494). As Culler notes, there is not a counter-message or argument for the *Dictionnaire*, because it presents instead a self-enclosed system of meaning. The ultimate irony is that, as maxims, the epigraphs themselves which expose the stupidity of received ideas, are taken from the canon of received ideas. Even the voice of authority is a “cliché.” It is important to note the complex satirical quality of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, these different layers of meaning and the deeply ironic tone. In other words, it is not merely a critique of bourgeois norms, but also, and perhaps more importantly, a critique of that which would claim authority or legitimacy. Within the first few pages of the work, the clichés of quotidien life, but also of powerful figures, institutions, and ideologies¹⁵, are equally visible. Indeed, what is so remarkable about this text is how it is able to catch readers in their own hypocrisy, from an almost countless number of vantage points.

The encyclopedic form of the work is key to this critique. Flaubert has no shortage of novels which use and mock clichés of the bourgeois, and well before he wrote *Bouvard and Pécuchet*. Why does he then turn to the encyclopedia? The use of reference for enclosure, the effect of distancing, as previously mentioned, in its relationship to reality, are decidedly not “realist.” Furthermore, the descriptions or entries vary significantly from novelistic literary description, as they take a more direct approach as well as use an objective or scientific style of writing. At the same time, the entries do not eschew literary style and form. The *Dictionnaire* is both clearly ironic and demonstrably literary. This is evident from the use of poetic style and a playful, albeit at times mordant, tone. Furthermore, the direct and indirect references to influential texts and authors place the dictionary squarely in the literary realm.

¹⁵ For more on Flaubert and 19th century politics, see Dolf Oehler “L’Échec de 1848” *Gustave Flaubert*. Paris Ed. Inculce, 2009.

Rather than representing these *idées reçues* as the views and opinions of novelistic characters, they are presented in descriptive entries, emphasizing Culler's point that it is partly "social discourse" itself that is speaking. This inability to locate oneself, or who or what is speaking, takes Flaubert's free indirect discourse to a new level of intensity, making the satirical quality almost pernicious at times. The encyclopedia uses, by nature, the voice of public opinion, the famous "on" of *Madame Bovary*.

Flaubert is also criticizing the pedagogical role of the encyclopedia— knowledge is not inherently valuable; received ideas are not inconsequential, they are ideological. Juxtaposing the encyclopedia as pedagogical with the concept of the pedagogical (or moralizing) novel, Flaubert is also directly addressing the notion of censorship applied to his own work: the idea that *Madame Bovary* could be a tool of corruption is effectively put on trial alongside the knowledge of its day. The existence of the *Dictionnaire* itself puts into question the reading practices that condemned Flaubert's own works. This returns to the earlier point about the epigraph presenting the voice of authority as *itself* a cliché.

Flaubert writes the form into the *Dictionnaire* itself: "Dictionnaire: En rire—n'est fait que pour les ignorants" (506); "Encyclopédie (l'): Tonner contre. En rire de pitié, comme étant un ouvrage rococo" (512). Both the dictionary and encyclopedia are described as laughable. Specifically, the dictionary is defined as only made for the ignorant, while the encyclopedia is described as outdated, extravagant ("rococo"). In this way, the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* undermines its own form, refusing to offer itself as an answer to the received ideas that it exposes, and equally shunning the appeals to authority that might set the record straight, so to speak.

In his essay “Comment on devient Encyclopédiste,” Queneau, now director of the Encyclopédie de la Pléiade recounts his experience reading an encyclopedia at the age of 14:

Vers l'âge de quinze ans j'ai lu en entier de la première ligne à dernière ligne, le tome I du dictionnaire Larousse en sept volumes, de A à Bello (Andres), écrivain sud-américain qui n'est pas oublié dans “notre” tome II de l'Histoire des Littératures. A vrai dire, si ce fait avait été connu—je le révèle ici seulement maintenant—il aurait été plutôt fait pour me disqualifier comme directeur efficace. Une telle activité fait plutôt penser aux lectures de l'autodidacte dans la Nausée... en prenant les auteurs dans leur ordre alphabétique.
(Bords 120-121)

While the tone of the passage is rather tongue-in-cheek, the suggestion that this naive experience of reading part of a dictionary cover to cover in alphabetical order should somehow disqualify Queneau, adds another layer to his complex relationship with encyclopedic works. To read the encyclopedia in a “naive” fashion (in this case described as reading it linearly) is suggested as mutually exclusive with being a good encyclopedist. Like Piégay-Gros in the previous chapter, Queneau refers to Roquentin, the erudite scholar who shuts himself away from the world in the library. To read the encyclopedia from A to B is to misunderstand the encyclopedia, to treat it like a novel. As with Roquentin, no amount of erudition can make up for this error. Flaubert's dictionary contains an amusing parallel to this anecdote, in the entry for “Omega”: “Oméga: Deuxième lettre de l'alphabet grec, puis qu'on dit l'alpha et l'oméga” (544).

This anecdote makes a serious point about what is creative about the dictionary and encyclopedic forms. Because he read this first volume from cover to cover, Queneau was introduced to Andrés Bello, whom he then includes in the Pléiade. In other words, what should disqualify him as a good director in fact makes him a good director, acquainting him with an author whom he would otherwise overlook, by virtue of the chance occurrence that he stopped reading at the end of Volume I. In distinctive OuLiPian fashion, Queneau presents arbitrary order

as not only a writing tool, but also a tool for the study and appreciation of literature, and the formation of canons. This creative aspect of the banal form of the dictionary is already present, I would argue, in Flaubert's work.

The encyclopedic form is present not only in the *Dictionnaire*; it is also a structuring principle of *Bouvard and Pécuchet*'s narrative, as Flaubert's notes suggest. Each of the chapters is given a subject heading: "I Agriculture," "II Sciences," "III Archéologie." Encyclopedism is also performed narratively and with the creative use of novelistic functions. Ideas are presented in dialogues, offering differing perspectives of multiple authors or schools. Transitions from one topic to another are haphazard, following the line of thought of someone who is skimming sections of an encyclopedia. Experts are consulted both in the form of works referenced and as characters who appear in the narrative. The encyclopedists, Bouvard and Pécuchet are portrayed comically from the very beginning. While detailed, the descriptions of them are primarily clichés, surface-level without psychological depth. From the opening of the novel, Bouvard and Pécuchet are presented as a perfectly complementary pair:

L'un venait de la Bastille, l'autre du Jardin des Plantes. Le plus grand, vêtu de toile, marchait le chapeau en arrière, le gilet déboutonné et sa cravate à la main. Le plus petit dont le corps disparaissait dans une redingote marron, baissait la tête sous une casquette à visière pointue.

Quand ils furent arrivés au milieu du boulevard, ils s'assirent à la même minute, sur le même banc. (51)

As the two men begin speaking, they discover that they share many of the same opinions and qualities, while at the same time differing in small ways: "[Bouvard] exécrait les jésuites.

Pécuchet, sans les absoudre, montre quelque déférence pour la religion (54). The comic portrayal of the two complementary figures has the effect of presenting them almost as one character. This is further emphasized by the narrator stating "Chacun en écoutant l'autre retrouvait des parties de

lui-même oubliées” (54). This experience is described as a “épanouissement” (54) (“blossoming”), further portraying the two meeting as a form of fulfillment. The complementarity is comic, and its unrealistic and contrived style gives the reader a sense of being “set up.” Culler refers to it as “bathetic” and describes the introduction of the characters¹⁶ as “deliberately ridiculous and ‘novelistic.’”¹⁷ In this way, the novel is distinct in its treatment of character psychology: Flaubert overtly flouts the conventional model of psychological description. This, too, is a satire of novelistic clichés, and sets the tone for a work that will instrumentalize the use of encyclopedic copying as a kind of literary generative principle.

Copying and Failure

Bouvard et Pécuchet though narratively ordered, is also encyclopedic, as each chapter shows the protagonists researching a particular subject and performing experiments in that domain. After Bouvard receives an inheritance from his uncle, Bouvard and Pécuchet decide to move to the countryside. Combining their finances they purchase land in Calvados, leaving their jobs as copyists in Paris: “Plus d'écritures! Plus de chefs! Plus même de terme à payer!—car ils posséderaient un domicile à eux! Et ils mangeraient les poules de leur basse-cour, les légumes de leur jardin, et dîneraient en gardant leur sabots! —“Nous ferons tout ce qui nous plaira! Nous laisserons pousser notre barbe!” (66). The novel does not begin with a clear project, so much as a fantasy of leaving the city and living an idyllic life in the countryside. The desire to leave the city

¹⁶ See Paul-Laurent Assoun, *Analyses & Réflexions Sur Gustave Flaubert : Bouvard et Pécuchet*. Ellipses, 1999 or “La quête du savoir comme représentation du vide des personnages” by Evelyne Cosset for more on Flaubert and the representation of characters.

¹⁷ The complementary nature of Bouvard and Pécuchet’s personalities also suggests a possibility of identification with the two characters, not just for the reader, but also for Flaubert.

and their jobs also serves to highlight the work of “copying” as a repetitive and pointless task. As opposed to copying, Bouvard and Pécuchet’s new life will supposedly be free, independent, self-sufficient.

The two friends then begin their agricultural endeavor: “Tout ce qu'ils avaient vu les enchantait. Leur décision fut prise. Dès le soir, ils tirèrent de leur bibliothèque les quatre volumes de la *Maison Rustique*, se firent expédier le cours de Gasparin, et s’abonnèrent à un journal d'agriculture” (82). The emphasis on the garden recalls Flaubert’s reference to the famous line from *Candide* mentioned earlier. In the case of the Bouvard et Pécuchet, however, tending to the garden is the beginning rather than the conclusion.

Armed with all of these books and journals, they read up extensively on agriculture, only to find their plants dying:

Cependant, puisque les arbres les plus rares prospèrent dans les jardins de la capitale, ils devaient réussir à Chavignolles? Et Pécuchet se procura le lilas des Indes, la rose de Chine et l'Eucalyptus, alors dans la primeur de sa réputation. Toutes les expériences ratèrent. Il était chaque fois fort étonné

Bouvard, comme lui, rencontrait des obstacles. Ils se consultaient mutuellement, ouvraient un livre, passaient à un autre, puis ne savaient que résoudre devant la divergence des opinions (87-88)

Despite their encyclopedic reading, the two are unable to discover the cause of this failure, and find themselves again and again surprised. Moreover, the literature that they consult presents them with differing opinions about gardening which they are unable to reconcile: “Ainsi, pour la marne, Puvis la recommande; le manuel Roret la combat. Quand au plâtre, malgré l’exemple de Franklin, Rieffel et M. Rigaud n’en paraissent pas enthousiasmé” (88). Far from being authoritative, then, such encyclopedic knowledge leads them to confusion and, worse, failure. Indeed, Bouvard and Pécuchet are disappointed by each model that they encounter.

Encyclopedic Writing

In his correspondence with Louise Colet in 1853, Flaubert writes about the limitations of language when it comes to creativity and literature¹⁸:

La plastique du style n'est pas si large que l'idée entière, je le sais bien. Mais à qui la faute? À la langue. Nous avons trop de choses & pas assez de formes. De là vient la torture des consciencieux. Il faut prtant tout accepter & tout imprimer, & prendre surtout son point d'appui dans le présent. C'est pr cela que je crois Les Fossiles de Bouilhet une chose très forte. Il marche dans les voies de la poésie de l'avenir. La littérature prendra de plus en plus les allures de la science ; elle sera surtout exposante, ce qui ne veut pas dire didactique. Il faut faire des tableaux, montrer la nature telle qu'elle est, mais des tableaux complets, peindre le dessous & le dessus. (Flaubert à Louise Colet, Croisset, 06 avril 1853)

Flaubert sees the limits of language as posing a problem for literature. He states this succinctly as “trop de choses” and “pas assez de formes.” The solution, as he sees it, is “tout accepter” and “tout imprimer,” reading the future of literature as possessing something of the scientific in the sense of being “exposant.” Rather than being didactic, this means for literature to be more like painting: to show nature as it is, in its entirety. We could apply the same statement to Bouvard and Pécuchet: whose fault is the lack of creativity? It is simply the material available to them, or as Flaubert says “la langue.” The problem does not necessarily come from the artist's lack of creativity, but rather emerges from the limits of language itself. In this way Flaubert's concerns about creativity are not dissimilar from those that Oulipo will express nearly a century later.

¹⁸ For more biographical information about Flaubert and the process of writing *Bouvard et Pécuchet* see René Descharmes, *Autour de Bouvard et Pécuchet, études documentaires et critiques*. F. Sant' Andrea, L. Marcerou & cie, 1921.

While they have escaped the monotony of copying, the freedom that Bouvard and Pécuchet have attained causes them different problems—an undecidability when faced with contradictions. The ways in which they attempt to remedy this problem are somewhat spectacular:

délire de l'engrais. Dans la fosse aux composts furent entassés des branchages, des boyaux, des plumes, tout ce qu'il pouvait découvrir. Il employa la liqueur belge, le lizier suisse, la lessive Da-Olmi, des harengs saurs, du varech, des chiffons, fit venir du guano, tâcha d'en fabriquer—et poussant jusqu'au bout ses principes, ne tolérait pas qu'on perdît l'urine; il supprima les lieux d'aisances. On apportait dans sa cour des cadavres d'animaux, dont il fumait ses terres. Leurs charognes dépecées parsemaient la campagne. Bouvard souriait au milieu de cette infection. Une pompe installée dans un tombereau crachait du purin sur les récoltes. A ceux qui avaient l'air dégoûté, il disait: "mais c'est de l'or! De l'or."—et il regrettait de n'avoir pas encore plus de fumiers. Heureux les pays où l'on trouve des grottes naturelles pleines d'excrément d'oiseaux. (89)

In this particularly vivid passage, the attempts to revive the crops are hyperbolically described, culminating in the dead carcasses of the animals used to "treat" the soil. Stylistically, the enumeration of this material possesses a creative flair, as Bouvard's methods create an almost "mad scientist" caricature. The list of materials goes quickly from something banal like "branchage" to organic material like "boyaux." From organic material, Bouvard moves to waste of all kinds, then collecting all of the urine from the farm and getting rid of toilets. From animal and human waste, he moves on to actual entire carcasses. The passage moves comically from the organic and productive, to the abject. The concluding statement, contrary to peoples' disgust, that the compost is "gold," conjures the image of an alchemist.

The passage is an example of what I refer to as "encyclopedic writing." Bouvard's actions are described as a kind of "délire." Flaubert demonstrates a linguistic exhaustiveness,

mirroring the attempts, joys, and frustrations of the characters. Not just one or two ingredients are named, but an almost endless “entassement” catalogue, creating a linguistic delirium to match Bouvard’s feelings and actions. At the same time, if we follow the passage closely, we can see the attempt to be “exposant”: the passage reflects this attempt to “tout accepter & tout imprimer,” a linguistic and stylistic exhaustivity that may compensate for the pair’s essential inadequacy. The “encyclopedic” thus fulfills Flaubert’s goal of making language approach the variety of things and the expansiveness of ideas.

Bouvard may be almost joyous, but there is a darker side too. By exhausting the description, escalating from each sentence to the next, the reader senses Bouvard’s desperation. This is also the desperation of the artist who attempts to create something original out of what is old, dead, and discarded. The latter are the forms, models, and language at the artist’s (literal) disposal. From one perspective, they are abject and lifeless, yet what Flaubert begins to show is how, in their abundance, these “scraps” become a kind of compost, creating ideal conditions for new growth. The desperation at times turns to comedy. The compost passage demonstrates the creative process that Flaubert is attempting to enact. If language and literary history are only inherited clichés, profoundly limited in their fecundity, that waste must be made productive. Here, in the organic metaphor, we see Flaubert’s aspiration: to gather waste (that which by its own name is considered to have no use) almost obsessively in order to produce the ideal conditions for new vibrant growth.

In contradiction, the linguistic abundance and fertility do not translate into *actual* fertility. Regardless of Bouvard and Pécuchet’s inability to grow plants, we see, even in this early passage, the slippage between literal failure (to grow crops), and metaphorical success (a beautiful, compelling, humorous, grotesque literary passage). With the utter failure of their

crops, trees, and their preserves, they conclude that their body of knowledge must be lacking something: “Quand ils purent recouvrer la parole, ils se demandèrent quelle était la cause de tant d'infortunes, de la dernière surtout? —et ils n'y comprenaient rien, sinon qu'ils avaient manqué périr. Pécuchet termina par ces mots: —“c'est que, peut-être, nous ne savons pas la chimie!” (115). This failure to cultivate the land is what leads them to their next enterprise— the study of chemistry. As this shows, the trajectory of their “journey” is dynamic, moving from one subject to the next as one does in a dictionary or encyclopedia, led to another entry when one fails to provide the definition or information being sought.

It is important to remember that the two do not set out to write an encyclopedia (*copie*). They find themselves unable to grasp certain principles about chemistry: “Elles les conduisit aux acides—et la loi des équivalents les embarrassa encore une fois. Ils tâchèrent de l'élucider avec la théorie des atomes, ce qui acheva de les perdre” (117). In their confusion, they seek the aid of local Doctor Vaucorbeil, which instead leads their studies elsewhere: “La boîte chirurgicale posait au milieu du bureau. Des sondes emplissaient une cuvette dans un coin —et il y avait contre le mur, la représentation d'un écorché. Pécuchet en fit compliment au Docteur. --‘Ce doit être une belle étude que l'Anatomie?’” (118). Here we see that the shift comes from an inability to understand chemistry, but also the sighting of the surgical tools that begins to interest the two in anatomy. The project does not begin as one that seeks totality, but rather is a play of encyclopedic associations and cross-references.

Barthes and “l'effet de réel”

In his essay “L'effet de réel,” Roland Barthes discusses Flaubert and his particular style of realism using an example from the short story “Un coeur simple”:

Lorsque Flaubert, décrivant la salle où se tient Mme Aubain, la patronne de Félicité, nous dit qu' "un vieux piano supportait, sous un baromètre, un tas pyramidal de boîtes et de cartons,"...[C]es auteurs (parmi bien d'autres) produisent des notations que l'analyse structurale, occupée à dégager et à systématiser les grandes articulations du récit, d'ordinaire et jusqu'à présent, laisse pour compte, soit que l'on rejette de l'inventaire (en n'en parlant pas) tous les détails "superflus" (par rapport à la structure), soit que l'on traite ces mêmes détails...comme des "remplissages" (catalyses), affecté d'une valeur fonctionnelle indirecte, dans la mesure où, en s'additionnant, ils constituent quelque indice de caractère ou d'atmosphère, et peuvent être ainsi finalement récupérés par la structure. (167)

Those details which seem "superflus" are a kind of filling or padding ("remplissage") which in fact possess a function, albeit "indirecte" by accumulating enough to constitute a "caractère" or atmosphere of the realist. In other words, such apparently superfluous details are necessary as part of the structure of a realist work. The barometer has no purpose other than to signal the idea or genre of realism itself. Curiously, Barthes refers to this as an illusion:

La vérité de cette illusion est celle-ci: supprimé de l'énonciation réaliste à titre de dénotation, le "réel," y revient à titre de signifié de connotation; car dans le moment même où ces détails sont réputés dénoter directement le réel, il ne font rien d'autre, sans le dire, que le signifier; le baromètre de Flaubert, la petite porte de Michelet ne disent finalement rien d'autre que ceci: *nous sommes le réel*: c'est la catégorie du "réel"...qui est signifié au profit du seul référent devient le signifiant même du réalisme: il se produit un *effet de réel*, fondement de ce vraisemblable inavoué qui forme l'esthétique de toutes les oeuvres courantes de la modernité (174)

These details ultimately serve to signify the genre of realism. This is where he introduces the term "effet de réel"; Barthes is suggesting that this is not a realist *style* so much as a way of writing that produces a realist *effect*. To be clear, Barthes does not believe that such details make

the work more authentic, but rather recognizes that realism is itself an *effect*, not an approximation of reality. As we shall see, this effect is not just true of Flaubert's novels, but also his historical fiction.

History and Historical Novels

In June of 1859 Flaubert remarks in a letter written to Ernest Feydeau: “Tout cela ne sera pas perdu. À mesure que je me plonge plus avant dans l'antique, le besoin de faire du moderne me reprend” in reference to the experience of working on *Salammbô* in Tunisia. This remark reflects, in a preliminary fashion, Flaubert's approach to history and to the historical novel¹⁹. The issues that Bouvard and Pécuchet encounter in the study of history ultimately reflect Flaubert's relationship to the historical novel, and shed further light on his literary philosophy and technique.

The portion of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* that discusses history and the historical novel shed light on Flaubert's thinking about the genre of the novel. For Flaubert, the stakes of representing history are those of creating an authentic literature. In both cases, the authoritative genre of the encyclopedia or dictionary provides an important parallel. Where authority is located in the telling of history, however, proves just as challenging as locating the authoritative, or even authorial, voice in the *Dictionnaire*.

The two arrive at the topic of history after a particularly frustrating interaction regarding the authenticity of a particular artifact. Bouvard and Pécuchet conclude that they cannot

¹⁹ For more on Flaubert and the historical novel see: Anne Green. *Flaubert and the Historical Novel: Salammbô Reassessed*. Cambridge Cambridgeshire; New York, 1982 or Kathryn Oliver Mills. *Formal Revolution in the Work of Baudelaire and Flaubert*. University of Delaware Press, 2012.

understand the situation without a proper knowledge of the (encyclopedic) history of France.²⁰ However, their study of history leads them into difficult and ambiguous territory. The two discover the problems and inconsistencies of writing history, and as they seek to complete a picture of the history of France, they only find themselves more frustrated. Flaubert uses free indirect discourse to reflect upon the way history is shaped by individual perspectives, but also by the judgement of history itself:

La Révolution est pour les uns, un événement satanique. D'autres la proclament une exception sublime. Les vaincus de chaque côté, naturellement sont des martyrs.

Thierry démontre, à propos des Barbares, combien il est sot de rechercher si tel prince fut bon ou fut mauvais. Pourquoi ne pas suivre cette méthode dans l'examen des époques plus récentes? Mais l'Histoire doit venger la morale; on est reconnaissant à Tacite d'avoir déchiré Tibère [...]

Ils n'avaient plus sur les hommes et les faits de cette époque, une seule idée d'aplomb.

Pour la juger impartialement, il faudrait avoir lu toutes les histoires, tous les mémoires, tous les journaux et toutes les pièces manuscrites, car le moindre omission une erreur peut dépendre qui en amènera d'autres à l'infini. Ils y renoncèrent.

Mais le goût de l'Histoire leur était venu, le besoin de la vérité pour elle même.

Peut-être, est-elle plus facile à découvrir dans les époques anciennes? Les auteurs, étant loin de choses, doivent en parler sans passion. (187-188)

Without “une seule idée d’aplomb” the two appear to be at an impasse. Just as their books on agriculture provide contradictory advice, their history books say that the Revolution, for example, is “satanique” to some and “sublime” to others. The proliferation of “toutes les

²⁰ “If they did not know what to go by with regard to ceramics and Celticism, it was because they were ignorant of history, particularly the history of France” (135).

histoires,” “tous les mémoires,” “tous les journaux,” and “toutes les pièces manuscrites” that would be necessary to write an authentic narrative creates a kind of parodic encyclopedia that leads, ironically, to silence. Paired with the compost passage, this one displays a similarly exhaustive, frustrating tone, emphasized with the repetition of “tout” and “tous.” The text reflects the same desperation and obsession, but also joy: “le goût de l’Histoire.” Like the creative process, as in the composting process, these incomplete and problematic pieces must be mixed together to yield an authentic representation of history.

Rather than attempting to reconcile these contradictions, however, Bouvard and Pécuchet find themselves at an impasse. Flaubert recognizes these contradictions for what they are: winners, losers, martyrs. This is an inheritance of stale and overused tropes. And yet how can one write about history without winners and losers, without martyrs, without judgment? Here we see the same problem of literary inheritance. Rather than attempt to bypass or deconstruct these tropes, the encyclopedic style, in exhausting them, is able to transform them into something like Barthes’ “reality effect.” In this sense, the chapter on “history” is one of Flaubert’s commentaries on the novel, specifically the historical novel. The concern about objectivity is quickly eclipsed by larger and more complex problems. The issue is not that writers have opposing views, or even that some of these views are mutually exclusive, but rather that the tropes and language available for writing history suffer from the same lack of creativity as literary fiction. Bouvard and Pécuchet are searching for models, and have the same realization as Flaubert: these models are stale, unoriginal, and most importantly: inherited.

Here, too, we see that the problem of truth for the pair is also the problem of creativity. As with their other endeavors, there is a limited number of models. As in the literary world, the historian inherits a tradition. To say something “true” in the way Bouvard and Pécuchet

articulate it is in fact to say something *original*. For Flaubert, the study of History is incomplete without the historical novel. This portion of the book gets at the heart of his own work and literary philosophy. The experience of reading history inspires Bouvard and Pécuchet to want to understand the *lives* of the historical figures: “La succession de tant d'hommes leur donnait envie de les connaître plus profondément, s'y mêler.” (189). Here “tant” echoes the tone of “tout” and “tous” elsewhere, and leads them to desire more detailed knowledge.

With so many historical events and figures, the two begin to employ mnemonic devices to keep track of French history. They take their house as a kind of map that they will use to organize their knowledge:

Pour plus de clarté, ils prirent comme base mnémotechnique leur propre maison, leur domicile, attachant à chacune de ses parties un fait distinct;—et la cour, le jardin, les environs, tout le pays, n'avait plus d'autre sens que de faciliter la mémoire. Les bornages dans la campagne limitaient certaines époques, les pommiers étaient des arbres généalogiques, les buissons des batailles, le monde devenait symbole. Ils cherchaient sur les murs, des quantités de choses absentes, finissaient par les voir, mais ne savaient plus les dates qu'elles représentaient (190)

In this passage we can see how in their strategy to memorize and accumulate information encyclopedically, Bouvard and Pécuchet end up losing track of the information they had sought. The two encounter other problems— they cannot entirely rely on dates, due in part to radically different systems of time (141). The attempt to map all of these dates and facts results in their inability to understand them. Their effort to organize history onto their current surroundings leads them to lose what is significant about both. Battles, epochs, dates are evacuated of meaning. Indeed, as Flaubert writes, “le monde devenait symbole.” This is further emphasized by the statement that Bouvard and Pécuchet “finissaient par les voir, mais ne savaient plus les dates qu'elles représentaient” (190).

Writers who claim to be more objective are in fact deceptive: “Les autres, qui prétendent narrer seulement, ne valent pas mieux. Car on ne peut tout dire. Il faut un choix. Mais dans le choix des documents, un certain esprit dominera;—et comme il varie, suivant les conditions de l'écrivain, jamais l'histoire ne sera fixée” (192). The encyclopedic aspiration to completeness is impossible, “on peut tout dire,” but at the same time, so is the attempt to impose limits: history will vary according to the source and to write it would seem to require the expansiveness of the encyclopedia or dictionary. The result of this realization is a turn to the abstract philosophy of history: “Et de l'insouciance des dates, ils passèrent au dédain des faits. Ce qu'il y a d'important, c'est la philosophie de l'histoire!” (190). Confronted with the complexities and problems of writing history, the two then reach a compromise between these opposing methods: “Cependant on pourrait prendre un sujet, épuiser les sources, en faire bien l'analyse—puis le condenser dans une narration, qui serait comme un raccourci des choses, reflétant la vérité tout entière. Une telle oeuvre semblait exécutable à Pécuchet” (192). This encyclopedic method, exhausting the sources on a subject and then condensing it into a narrative-, is applied to a history of the Duc d'Angoulême.

However their study is then interrupted by a series of dramatic events in their household. A broken antique and the suggestion of an alcoholic maid lead the two to the realization that their studies have distracted them from the workings of the everyday world:

“Nous ne savons pas” dit Bouvard, “ce qui se passe dans notre ménage, et nous prétendons découvrir quels étaient les cheveux et les amours du duc d'Angoulême!”

Pécuchet ajouta:—“combien de questions autrement considérables, et encore plus difficiles!”

D'où ils conclurent que les faits extérieurs ne sont pas tout. Il faut les compléter par la psychologie.

Sans l'imagination, l'Histoire est défectueuse.

—“Faisons venir quelques romans historiques!” (200)

This final statement demonstrates not only a transition from one subject to another, but the ways in which each subject builds upon the other. The pursuit of knowledge in *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is not one of random association. Here the transition to historical novels is the result of the conclusion that history without a form of imagination or creativity is “incomplete.”²¹ It is particularly of note here that the emphasis is on historical novels, and not novels in general. Flaubert himself wrote a number of these works²² and with the use of free indirect discourse he expresses his own ideas regarding the role and value of the historical novel. The experience of reading these novels is described as “la surprise d'un monde nouveau”:

Les hommes du passé qui n'étaient pour eux que des fantômes ou des noms devinrent des êtres vivants, rois, princes, sorciers, valets, gardes-chasse, moines, bohémiens, marchands et soldats, qui délibèrent, combattent, voyagent, trafiquent, mangent et voient, chantent et prient, dans la salle d'armes des châteaux, sur le banc noir des auberges, par les rues tortueuses des villes, sous l'auvent des échoppes, dans le cloître des monastères. Des paysages artistement composés, entourent les scènes comme un décor de théâtre. On suit des yeux un cavalier qui galope le long des grèves. On aspire au milieu des genêts la fraîcheur du vent, la lune éclaire des lacs où glisse un bateau, le soleil fait reluire les cuirasses, la pluie tombe sur les huttes de feuillages. Sans connaître les modèles, ils trouvaient ces peintures ressemblantes, et l'illusion était complète. L'hiver s'y passa. (201)

²¹ See Anne Green *Flaubert and the Historical Novel* “Recognizing that it is impossible truly to recreate the past, he knows that a historical perspective is firmly rooted in the present...His sensitivity to the relativity of historical truth and his awareness of its contribution to a fuller understanding of the present are the main factors which distinguish Flaubert’s historical fiction. His approach owes less to the debate about the role of history in fiction than it does to shifts in the much more serious contemporary debate about the theory of historiography” (16)

²² *Salammbô* (1862); *La Tentation de saint Antoine* (1874); *Trois contes* (1877)

We begin with the empty ghosts of the past, which are then filled and animated by the encyclopedic proliferation of forms: “êtres vivants, rois, princes, sorciers, valets, gardes-chasse, moines, bohémiens, marchands et soldats.” These nouns are then followed by a proliferation of verbs “délibèrent” “voyagent” “mangent” which are themselves followed by a series of locations, “les rues tortueuses” “le cloître des monastères.” This is the same exhaustive encyclopedic writing we see in the compost passage. Even the allusions to art, “paysages artistement composés,” “scènes,” “decor de theatre” multiply. Flaubert then piles on romantic clichés: “On suit des yeux un cavalier qui galope le long des grèves,” “la fraîcheur du vent,” “la lune éclaire des lacs où glisse un bateau.” The painting metaphor is complete with the remark that, without knowing the models, they still find the depictions “ressemblantes.” This is, of course, the height of illusion, and perhaps delusion. The term “peinture” evokes Flaubert’s comment in his letter to Louise Colet about the goal of the artist. As Barthes reading suggests, these exhaustive details are *signifiers* of life, that create the *illusion* of realism²³, that animate the figures of the past. The term “décor” is used transparently. Flaubert is not arguing for a more objective or accurate novel, but rather one that is able to stage history, making use of the problems and clichés of the genre.

The use of sensory language in the passage heightens the tone to a satire of these works. The statement that “sans connaître les modèles” they consider the novels true to life, suggests that Bouvard and Pécuchet are naive readers. While certainly much of the description of the novels employs clichés, it vacillates between a love and appreciation of literature on the one

²³ For more on Flaubert and Realism see Paul-Laurent Assoun, *Analyses & réflexions sur Gustave Flaubert : Bouvard et Pécuchet*. Ellipses, 1999 or Solange Fricaud “Le réalisme en crise”

hand, and the fear of it becoming merely “illusion,” on the other. We see a similar structure with their reading of Balzac:

L'oeuvre de Balzac les émerveilla, tout à la fois comme une Babylone, et comme des grains de poussière sous le microscope. Dans les choses les plus banales, des aspects nouveaux surgirent. Ils n'avaient pas soupçonné la vie moderne aussi profonde.

“Quel observateur!” s'écriait Bouvard.

“Moi je le trouve chimérique” finit par dire Pécuchet. “Il croit aux sciences occultes, à la monarchie, à la noblesse, est ébloui par les coquins, vous remue les millions comme des centimes, et ses bourgeois ne sont pas des bourgeois, mais des colosses. Pourquoi gonfler ce qui est plat, et décrire tant de sottises...Nous en aurons sur tous les métiers et sur toutes les provinces, puis sur toutes les villes et les étages de chaque maison et chaque individu, ce qui ne sera plus de la littérature, mais de la statistique ou de l'ethnographie.” (205)

There is a genuine enthusiasm in this passage about the encyclopedic detail and the expanse of Balzacian realism which reflects genuine admiration of these works of literature. Nevertheless, the passage also presents the concerns about the limitations of this encyclopedic creativity with the suggestion that with so much detail “ce qui ne sera plus de la littérature, mais de la statistique ou de l'ethnographie.” This reflects the problem that Flaubert discussed in his letter to Colet: how to ensure that an encyclopedic style, “tout accepter et tout imprimer,” does not become a sterile science but rather one that “shows nature both inside and out.” In sum, “dans les choses les plus banales, des aspects nouveaux surgirent.” Balzac, too, is able to take the banal and make it generative. The bourgeois are turned into larger than life figures, epic, timeless, in their own way. Rather than avoiding clichéd types and characters, Balzac, like Flaubert, embraces them in order to transform them, to subvert our notions of the banal. This is further emphasized with the remark “Ils n'avaient pas soupçonné la vie moderne aussi profonde.” This is the aspiration of the writer. Rather than accurately represent reality, Flaubert’s creative aspiration is to construct art

from that which is most despised and discarded, and transform not only the forms he uses, but the reader's perception of reality itself, and how it is represented. Here Balzac is also described as a writer obsessed with minute details encyclopedically, as the succession of "tout" suggests. While there is a cautionary note here about becoming "ethnography," the significance of the effect of Balzac's work is emphasized. Encyclopedic writing is transformative: in its exhaustive generative form it can "gonfler ce qui est plat." The exhaustive use of tired historical tropes is used in order to transform the text and in fact move *beyond* these templates to produce something meaningful and authentic, not by approximating reality, but by making use of, and drawing attention to, the historical "effect."

Bouvard and Pécuchet as Artists

As discussed above, the failures of Bouvard and Pécuchet's experiments are not only comic and repetitive, but also often described with an excessive and grotesque flourish—as with the passage on the garden and manure. LeClerc notes the continual frustration and confusion of the protagonists: "Chercheurs de causes inconnues, Bouvard et Pécuchet comprennent rarement la cause de leurs échecs." Culler elaborates on the subject of failure in the work: "When we move beyond the general theme of failure to master the world through human knowledge and ask the obvious thematic question, "Why does their attempt fail?," we find that the text manifests a firm disinterest in the question of blame.²⁴ It does not secrete norms or offer alternatives which might help us locate responsibility." He then goes on to ask whether or not the reader is "being

²⁴ Culler argues that the works subtitle *Du défaut de méthode dans les sciences* is "highly ironic" because "method is perhaps the only thing Bouvard and Pécuchet do not lack...all theories rendered equivalent by their failure" (168).

mocked” and if their experience does not in some way reflect the failure of “our interpretive procedures” (138). If the book is in fact not interested in the causes of failure, what is meaningful about failure’s thematic centrality to the work?

While a comic and almost cartoonish tone pervades much of the novel, Bouvard and Pécuchet’s seeming simplicity of character is deceptive. Indeed, they are in many ways archetypal bourgeois caricatures. On the other hand, they renounce the security of their professions and way of life in order to pursue their desires and their freedom, an effort which, despite its failure, yields a dizzying prolific encyclopedia of linguistic and literary creativity and a playfully extensive *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*. If we focus only on their objectives-- to grow crops, to write a biography, to understand the nature of the universe-- we lose their insights, their creativity, their persistence. In many ways, and notably through employing the encyclopedic form, Flaubert is satirizing the creative process, but in doing so he is also drawing attention to its complexity, depth, humour, and suffering. *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is a novel about creativity and authenticity within the confines of our own culture and literary heritage. And within the OuLiPian constraints of this setting, the reader is drawn to the “potential” the writer must painstakingly produce.

Culler argues that Flaubert does not attempt to make Bouvard and Pécuchet “figures of any complexity...They alternate between enthusiasm and discouragement, both of which are subjective responses which make little contact with the world but which are also devoid of the psychological complexity of Emma’s or Frédéric’s mythmaking” (129). In this interpretation, there is a fundamental disconnect between Bouvard and Pécuchet and the world around them, both in their inability to affect it and in the relative level of simplicity of their own reactions to it. Curiously, like Queneau, Culler compares the two to Emma Bovary, demonstrating the thematic

importance of imitation or copying. Like Emma, Bouvard and Pécuchet imitate the texts that they read. For Culler, Emma displays a complex psychological “mythmaking,” whereas Bouvard and Pécuchet are viewed as lacking “complexity” in their imitation. I would argue that, while they may not possess the same psychological depth as Emma, they are not devoid of complexity. The problems of Bouvard and Pécuchet are those of the artist, of the writer. Their compendium of all “knowledge,” their “dictionary of received ideas,” are the problem with which Flaubert struggled throughout his career: how to say something authentic in a language of cliché? The answer, in his final work, was an encyclopedia and a dictionary.

Conclusion

In 2017 a *Dictionnaire Flaubert* under the direction of Gisèle Seginger was published. The work provides some fascinating entries on *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, *Idées reçues*, and of course the *Dictionnaire*: “Ainsi, le *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, dont certains articles ont été conçus dès les années 1850, traverse les autres textes Flaubertiens qu’il nourrit et reflète en même temps englobe dans le second volume du roman encyclopédique, cet étrange réservoir d’idées reçues joue le rôle de métatexte pour tous les lecteurs de Flaubert” (468 N. Sugaya). The entry, written by Norioki Sugaya, provides some insight into the larger significance of the text. The author emphasizes that many of the articles of the work were written as early as 1850, therefore certainly concerns and issues that plagued Flaubert’s entire career. Sugaya then goes on to suggest the work as a kind of “meta-text” for the Flaubert reader. The use of the term “nourrir” also suggests the generative quality of the work in addition to its reflexive and philosophical qualities.

Flaubert's novel represents the encyclopedic through the narrative style of both *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, and the *Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues*. Encyclopedic writing seems to provide a kind of response to the problems of form and creativity that preoccupy Flaubert. *Bouvard et Pécuchet* certainly satirizes bourgeois society and norms, and it also provides a commentary on the construction of knowledge. Ultimately, however, Flaubert sees the encyclopedic form as generative, allowing him to conceive of creativity within the limitations of language and cliché. Searching feverishly through different models of knowledge, Bouvard and Pécuchet are not ultimately "failures" because they are copyists; rather their existential condition is that of the writer. Banal and clichéd figures in their own ways, they are representative of the creative potential of copying, and are thus representations, comical, to be sure-- of the artist.

The *Dictionnaire* is indeed a satire of the limitations of a certain discourse, but it is ultimately and nevertheless a creative literary production²⁵. The most literal representation of this is of course the *Dictionnaire* itself, a creative literary work based entirely on clichés. Who is this figure who cries before skeptics that his heap of rotting and decaying matter "c'est de l'or! De l'or!" ? It is the artist, armed with the only resources at their disposal: a heritage they did not ask for, a cemetery of decaying forms and models. Rather than a simple joke at the expense of two copyists, Flaubert demonstrates in the form of these banal figures, the artistic process itself.

²⁵ For more reading on Flaubert and literary theory see Claudine Gothot-Mersch, et al. *Flaubert et La Théorie Littéraire : En Hommage à Claudine Gothot-Mersch*. Bruxelles: Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis, 2005.

Chapter 4 – Encyclopedic Mythology: Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig’s *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes*

You may forget but
let me tell you
this: someone in
some future time
will think of us
-Sappho
trans. Mary Barnard

I. Introduction

In 1976, Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig published *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes* (*Lesbian Peoples: Material for a Dictionary*). The title itself is puzzling and provocative. A published work that is presented as being a draft, specifically the draft or materials of a dictionary, the subject of which is *amantes*, a term for “lovers” that is often translated into English as “lesbians” or “lesbian peoples.” Not nearly as popular as her novels, *Brouillon* nevertheless occupies a special space for those interested in the fiction and feminist philosophy where Wittig takes up the idea of the *amante* as a category not identified as woman or *femme*.²⁶ The title “*un dictionnaire des amantes*” in French suggests that the dictionary is “about” lovers and “for lovers” and “by lovers,” representing an intimacy between reader and writer that is demonstrative of the intimacy of the *amantes* themselves, inviting readers into a creative, eroticized relationship to the text. It is a fictional dictionary that disrupts the genre, as Ostrovsky

²⁶ Monique Wittig (1935-2003) and Sande Zeig (1950-) published the first edition of *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes* in 1976, and it was reprinted in 2011 with a Preface by Anne Garréta. Other critics interested in this work include Erica Ostrovsky 1991, Catherine Ecarnot 2002, Namaskar Shaktini 2005, Dominique Bourque 2006.

points out: although the entries are definitions, arranged in alphabetical order and cross-referenced, *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes* is explicitly a work of fiction that puts into question the authority of more conventional dictionaries by suggesting the constructed nature of all reference works.²⁷ Instead of providing definitions, Wittig and Zeig's dictionary collects provisional materials that produce a desire to keep reading, to keep imagining more.

The fictional, experimental, imaginative and anticipatory qualities of this draft dictionary align it with the encyclopedic projects I explored in Chapters 1 and 2. A mix of styles and tones is one of the more playful features of the work, and embodies the creative potential of the encyclopedia described in relation to Queneau. The work possesses several functions, one of which is to tell the history and mythology of the *amantes*. This narrative, however, has a complex relationship to time and to history. The mix of style and grammatical tense is also one of time periods: distant past, cultural present, and, as I will argue, an imagined future.

Finally, *Brouillon* highlights another aspect of the encyclopedic form: that of the fragmentary work. Writing about one of her novels, Wittig comments: "Like all my books but more perhaps than any other, *Les guerillères* is completely composed of heterogeneous elements, fragments of all sorts, taken from everywhere, that had to be held together to form a book."²⁸ The *Brouillon* was published after *Les guerillères* and further experiments with the fragmentation of

²⁷ Ostrovsky observes *des amantes* in the title can mean both "by" and "for" lovers, and goes on to explain the significance of the dictionary form: "What instantly distinguishes her 'dictionnaire' from others is that it only superficially bears any resemblance to them...[I]n actuality, however, *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes* is a work of fiction. This immediately establishes several important notions: the overthrow of a long established tradition in which a dictionary is not fiction; the recreation of a well-known genre; and the strong suggestion that existing dictionnaires are not...fixed, but subject to challenge, redefinition, and metamorphosis" (111).

²⁸ Cited in Namascar Shaktini, *On Monique Wittig: Theoretical, Political, and Literary Essays*. University of Illinois Press, 2005.

the novel form; its heterogeneity is the pinnacle of Wittig's self-professed compositional style, in encyclopedic form. Fragments take on several additional meanings here, suggesting the fragmentary history of the *Amantes* as well as the fragmented nature of encyclopedic entries (taken out of a 'whole' by the arbitrary alphabetical order).

The experience of reading the dictionary is wholly unfamiliar: both because we enter to some degree as outsiders, and also because the encyclopedic form clashes with its tone and style. Ostrovsky suggests it is a "lusory" work of fiction in which the entries "actually resemble poetry."²⁹ While the dictionary plays around with many generic forms (including poetry), I will demonstrate that Wittig and Zeig take up the longer history of "the encyclopedic form" as part of the ongoing transformation of the French novel. The authors challenge narrative conventions and generic expectations using a singularly original subject, but also a remarkable diversity of entries from sampling poetry other famous *amantes*, to descriptions of the cultural mores of the lesser known. Wittig and Zeig write alternate stories and mythologies into their dictionary, in order to assemble in bits and pieces the missing history of *amantes*.

All of this is inseparable from the "invitation" they extend to their readers. This is first established by the title: both in the use of the term "brouillon" but also as Ostrovsky notes in the ambiguous participation of "pour amantes." This double meaning is subtle, and yet it radically interpellates the reader. You are given a choice to be inside or outside of this group, while the title actually refuses such a distinction grammatically. Therefore, like much of what we see in the

²⁹ Ostrovsky aptly chooses the term "lusory": "...it is a highly imaginative, and even frequently lusory, work of fiction, which in most instances consists of entries that are 'ciselés comme des poèmes en prose' and that actually resemble poetry" (112).

dictionary, this title is deceptively open ended. It teases the reader with a choice when it's unclear to what extent the reader actually has one.

The reader is given privileged information regarding the history and culture of the Amantes. This information often takes the form of a guide to the practices and beliefs of Amantes. It can be read as a kind of subtle initiation. But can one be initiated without one's knowledge? This brings us back to the ambiguity of "pour": both by and *for* Amantes. The degree to which the reader feels interpellated while reading the text is subject to change, but always at stake. The teasing or coy tone of the dictionary is seductive, but vacillates between a deceptive deference towards the reader, and a kind of indifference to them. These aspects are all related but produce multiple meanings as well as possibilities. On the one hand, the deference or hospitality of the text ingratiates itself to the reader; the language and tone is not heavy or directly persuasive, but rather poetic and thoughtful. However the text at times (and sometimes even simultaneously) presents a sort of indifference towards the reader. This latter point has the effect of both a passive insistence on the existence and value of Amante society (regardless of a skeptical reader). The indifference can also be itself a seductive technique in the form of coyness. The text at times takes interest in the reader and at times it does not. The complex layering of tone achieves a remarkable diversity of effects.

The invitation is not just about identity, it is also an invitation to experience and think differently about the novel. While you can read the entries in any order, there are certain determinations in the form that hold it together. Otherwise separate, and ordered alphabetically, what holds it together as a work is its novelistic qualities. The narrative structure is subtle and unconventional, but it sustains the idea of a "novelistic encyclopedia." As readers of the

Dictionnaire, how do we turn this idea into a reading practice? What kind of novel is this, if the process of reading is simultaneously overdetermined yet refusing predetermination?

Some of these questions are anticipated by Anne Garréta, who wrote a Preface to the 2011 reprinting of *Brouillon*. As a writer and contemporary OuLiPian, she is interested in the use of form and constraint, and specifically writing techniques that subvert literary conventions.³⁰ Garréta begins her preface by stating that it is *not* a preface: “Ceci n’est pas une préface. Un livre comme celui-ci n’en a nul besoin: il contient son propre mode d’emploi” (Garréta 7). The enigmatic statement recalls OuLiPian George Perec’s well known 1978 novel *La Vie mode d’emploi*. The suggestion that this, and perhaps no encyclopedia, requires instructions is suggestive of the creativity and freedom they embody. They are more accessible, and allow the reader to make more choices. They also establish a different relationship between author(s) and reader. The term “mode d’emploi” but also more generally “instructions” or “instruction manual” possess a particular importance for OuLiPians. Certainly the contrast of “la vie” and “mode d’emploi” is intended as ironic: the suggestion that the entirety of all life in its complexity and abstraction could have a user’s manual is intended to be comic. Underneath this layer however is a distinctly OuLiPian frame of mind regarding the importance of constraint. Traditionally, an instruction manual is distinct from its object; it comes *with* the object itself, but

³⁰ Garréta’s best known works include *Sphinx* (1986), a love story with no indication of the gender of either partner, as well as *La Décomposition* (1999), a novel about a serial killer who uses Proustian references to commit their crimes. We can note here the classic OuLiPian use of constraint: the “gender-less” love story evokes Perec’s *La Disparition*, a novel without the letter ‘e.’ By avoiding gendered language, Garréta uses a method very similar to Perec’s, albeit with more explicit political stakes. *La Décomposition* even in its title is a reference to the writing process, and its use of literary influence is upfront and self-aware.

is not a *part* of it. Garréta's quote about the *Brouillon* in one phrase undoes that conventional understanding about instructions.

Contained within the *Brouillon*, the entry for "Dictionnaire" is the only one that comments on the work itself. It offers a glimpse at how Wittig and Zeig conceive of their work, their impetus and what strategies they employ:

Dictionnaire

La disposition du dictionnaire permet de faire disparaître les éléments qui ont distordu notre histoire pendant les périodes sombres à partir de l'âge de fer jusqu'à l'âge de gloire. C'est ce qu'on pourrait appeler une disposition lacunaire. Elle permet également d'utiliser les lacunes à la façon d'une litote dans une phrase où il s'agit de dire le moins pour dire le plus. L'assemblage des mots, ce qui a dicté leur choix, les fictions des fables sont constitutifs de ces lacunes et sont de ce fait opératoires quant au réel. Le dictionnaire en général tente d'évacuer procédé de métaphore, mise en scène des inconscients. Mais ce n'est encore qu'un brouillon. (72)

Immediately the language and tone of the entry stand out. For an encyclopedic entry, it is oddly formal and ornate. The authors draw attention to how the dictionary's "disposition" has allowed or "permitted" the disappearance of what has distorted "our" history. What is in many ways radical about the dictionary, is described in elegant, even polite, language. Particularly striking is the use of the phrase "disposition lacunaire" and the revelation of the "litote" to describe the functioning of the encyclopedia. The addition of a "disposition lacunaire" and of "litote" shed new light onto the form of the encyclopedia. Here Wittig and Zeig describe the fragmentary nature of the form, highlighting the use of space and gaps. The entry also opens up a space for the future: "ce n'est encore qu'un brouillon." This is evident of course in the term "brouillon" but also "encore." The work is preliminary, unfinished, but also anticipatory.

While the "Dictionnaire" entry appears in many ways to frame the entire work, it is an entry like any other, which the reader may or may not come across. What the entry puts into

relief is a description of the encyclopedic as something which is first, full of gaps (*lacunaire*), both gaps in knowledge as well as literal gaps in the sense of format. The latter emphasizes as well the distance and dissimilarity between one entry and what follows it alphabetically. Second, the encyclopedia is understated in form, in that the meaning is not transparent, straightforward, or totalizing. In addition, the entries are emphatic in meaning like the *litote*. And third, the encyclopedia is not only fragmentary but exercises a kind of restraint or moderation. In this sense, gaps can be understood as the gaps of knowledge regarding the history of *Amantes*. However the encyclopedia can also be understood as the ironic *litote*, that is, the distance between the form and meaning. Lastly, the encyclopedia is of course organized by the structure of entries separated by a formatted space. Thus to encyclopedic reading we can add encyclopedic myth-making, a narrative told in fragments and gaps. The latter is used in the way of a *litote*: to say more with less.

In the following sections I will discuss how the definition of *amantes* generates a discontinuous narrative in the *Dictionnaire*, allowing us to discover a story and recover a missing history that make it possible to imagine an “impossible” lesbian subject. This utopian subject is exemplified in the simultaneous absence and omnipresence of Sappho. Because of the fragmentary nature of Sappho’s poetry, these gaps invite a space for recreation and participation. It is an invitation to the reader, not unlike the *Brouillon*.

II. Defining *Amantes*

Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes, like much of Wittig’s work, is heavily influenced by Greek myth. Its tone can be described as poetic, mythological and anthropological. Some of the less enigmatic entries refer to important locations in antiquity: “**Cerné**: Cerné, grande île située à

l'est de l'Afrique et autrefois appelée Madagascar" (54).³¹ Other entries bypass even the descriptive style in favor of mystical aphorisms: "**Vérité:** Si on répète une affirmation à deux reprises, à la troisième elle devient vérité" (213). And others take on the character of a practical guide or dictionary for an outsider: "**Igname:** Les ignames dont cuites de préférence dans les champs sur des pierres plates ou encore dans les mileux des clairières pour les repas des sabbats quand les amantes se rassemblent pour les longs chants d'union" (117). The latter explains a simple culinary practice popular among the Amantes. Others still take the form of quoted poetry without commentary: "**Vent:** 'Forte créature d'avant le Déluge/elle n'a pas chair, elle n'a pas os/elle n'a pas veines, elle n'a pas sang...aussi étendue/que la terre dans sa surface/elle n'est pas née/et elle n'est pas vue' (Charlotte Guest, *Mabinogion*, Albion, âge de la vapeur)" (213). The excerpt of this poem in Charlotte Guest's *Mabinogion*, leads the reader into definition through a process of poetic interpretation, thus redefining the very idea of definition itself.³² Furthermore through the simple gesture of reference, it contextualizes certain authors in the Amante tradition.

While the title uses the term "dictionnaire," Wittig and Zeig's work often invokes the genre and style of the myth or epic. In describing the *Brouillon*, Shaktini calls it "an epic from a feminist point of view" (Shaktini 1). The power and scope of the epic form is used to imbue the Amantes with a history and mythos that "lesbian peoples" are otherwise denied, either by being erased or pushed to the periphery. In this sense, the dictionary puts these figures front and center, giving them an always-already figured place in that mythos. Rather than a critique or correction

³¹ Though relatively descriptive in style, the entry remains poetic particularly in its use of "autrefois" with its connotations of a distant or even fictional past. This will become more relevant with my discussion of the work's relationship to time.

³² Other examples of definition through quotations or poetry are the entries for "Différence," "Enthousiame," "Fondre," "Jules," "Latone et Niobé," "Sabbat," "Science," and "Vie." The entries on Sappho's lovers often include quotations from her poetry that mention them.

of the form, this is an instrumentalization of it; the Amantes are not inserted *into* antiquity, they are at its core: antiquity also belongs to them.

Regarding the place of the epic in her work, Wittig herself explains that in her novel *Les guérillères* she was interested in writing a modern epic that aspires toward a utopian subject³³:

J'ai voulu décrire certains aspects du bâti du livre pour montrer que je l'ai écrit comme une épopée moderne. On peut être surpris que cet article paraisse dans un numéro de revue consacré à l'utopie. Mais étant donné que le livre ne se passe nulle part et que l'action décrite n'a jamais eut lieu, la question se pose. Je la laisse posée pour les spécialistes de l'utopie. (135)

This utopian aspiration is important in *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire* as well, where Wittig also entertains the epic task of compiling a dictionary that will never be complete. Her commentary shows a degree of skepticism, at once denouncing the work's categorization as a utopia, while simultaneously referring to the original meaning of the term: a non-existent place. On the one hand, the work is not utopian in the colloquial sense, that is to say idealistic: only existing in the realm of ideas or imagination. Wittig's skepticism is primarily directed at this formulation, as it would relegate the work to an impossible, albeit desirable, idea. Indeed, idealism carries with it a connotation of longing (at least in the English language). Wittig then considers the concept of utopia in its original sense, rather than its more contemporary usage, entertaining the idea that perhaps the *Brouillon* has something in common with the genre, if it is referencing the original

³³ For more on Wittig and the Utopian see Kristine J. Anderson. "Encyclopedic Dictionary as Utopian Genre: Two Feminist Ventures." *Utopian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1/2, 1991, pp. 124–130 and "Lesbianizing English: Wittig and Zeig Translate Utopia." *L'Esprit Créateur*, vol. 34, no. 4, The University of Kentucky, 1/12/1994, pp. 90–102 and Cecile Lindsay, "Body/Language: French Feminist Utopias." *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, edited by Jeffrey W. Hunter, vol. 253, Gale, 2008.

meaning of “no place.” She emphasizes that the action “never took place,” implying perhaps a connection between the *Dictionnaire* and that particular conception of the utopian.

This unlocateability is also a quality of the encyclopedia. Encyclopedias are similarly ‘apart’ in time and place. They serve as a kind of record, or as in Saint-Amour’s formulation, a time-capsule of their moment (Saint-Amour “Encyclopedic Modernism” 182). As discussed in the previous chapter, they are also perceived as curiosities if or when they are considered out of date, peculiarly specific, or possessing strange, mysterious, or even occult content. And precisely because the encyclopedia has such a unique relationship to time, it is impossible to place it solely in its moment of writing or publication.

In the ambiguity regarding its chronology, even down to the shifting names of people and places, the dictionary is unlocatable: this is perhaps most apparent in the way the dictionary defines geographical spaces. They are defined by both their past and present names. In this way, the dictionary does not fit neatly into Queneau’s schema of *temps plein/temps perdu*, in part because it is not a novel, and in part because its temporality is fluid and fluctuating. In addition, this recalls Queneau’s anecdote of reading an encyclopedia from beginning to end, mocking himself as a naive reader. Nevertheless, what these aspects have in common is that even reading an encyclopedia “the wrong way” does not take away from its most important and defining traits as a genre.

Translators of the *Brouillon* are tasked with the difficulty of *amantes*, a term which is loaded with meaning and inseparable from the context of Wittig’s fictional and non-fictional works. As Diane Griffin Crowder notes, in her fiction, Wittig avoids the words “homme” and “femme” almost entirely, but here “lesbian peoples” seems to reject the word “femme”

entirely.³⁴ Anne Garréta, in her preface, comments on the use of the word *femme*, and why Wittig rejects it: “Non, notre dictionnaire y insiste...ce terme est un néologisme calamiteux” (8).

Wittig’s work is constantly imagining new terms and categories to describe the subjectivity of those who are not defined in relation to patriarchal values. This plays out in both fictional and non-fictional works, and in a number of genres. Here we can see a parallel with Garréta, who in writing a love story without using grammatical gender similarly pushes the reader to imagine gender differently; in her novel *Sphinx* (2015), Garréta demonstrates what is transformative and subversive about the *absence* of gender. Here again we see the use of the “disposition lacunaire,” which does not seek to fill in the blanks, but rather put them to use and help restructure our understanding of concepts. The reader is then confronted with the absence, to grapple with it, and make sense of it. This requires work on the part of the reader, who must then reroute their understanding of romantic love, narrative, and character around the notion of fixed gender. A new understanding of these concepts inevitably transforms our conception of the novel *tout court*.

The necessity of unresolved contradictions is embodied in the form of the encyclopedia, its use of entries, and of reference. The *Brouillon* gives us three terms for the subjects represented: “Amante,” “Amazone,” and “Mère.” Amante is defined in this way by Wittig and Zeig: “Amantes: Les amantes sont celles qui, éprouvant un violent désir les unes pour les autres, vivent/aiment dans des peuples suivant les vers de Sappho, ‘en beauté je chanterai mes amantes.’ Les peuples d’amantes rassemblent toute la culture, le passé, les inventions, les chants et les modes de vie” (24). Here we see the critical term “amante” defined with reference to one of the

³⁴ See “Universalizing Materialist Lesbianism” in *On Monique Wittig: Theoretical, Political, and Literary Essays*. University of Illinois Press, 2005.

fragments of Sappho, as the exemplary *amante* singing about the beauty of her *amantes*. Rather than the example sentence that one might see in a “standard” dictionary, the contextual definition offered by Wittig and Zeig is poetic. This is one of the many ways that Wittig and Zeig use reference and examples radically in this work, evading definition in order to play with possible identities and identifications opened up by the figure of the *amante*.

Indeed, the most radical definition of *amante* in the *Brouillon* would seem to be the entry under the name of Sappho, which is left altogether blank. What are we to make of a definition that calls attention to the absence of its example? How can Sappho be defined as exemplary *amante* if her work survives only in scattered fragments? Taking the form of a lost fragment, Sappho exists only as a figment of the imagination, as Joan DeJean writes in *Fictions of Sappho, 1546-1937*:

Sappho is a figment of the modern imagination. During her recovery by early modern scholars, she was completely a French fantasy. And throughout the entire span of her modern existence, she has remained largely a projection of the French imagination...This book is a particular kind of history. In a sense, it is a literary history à la Flaubert: a history of received ideas. The following pages record a tradition of images and perceptions. This is a chronicle largely of fictions and seldom of facts (1)

The comparison to Flaubert’s *Dictionnaire des Idees Recues* is especially relevant to reading the entry for Sappho in *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes*, as DeJean understands Sappho as a blank space for the projection of literary history.

Fictions of Sappho is a treatment of *one* story of Sappho told by philologists: as she analyzes the criticism of Sappho over a period of centuries, DeJean observes how these studies demonstrate more than anything the critics’ own preconceived notions and desires rather than more information about Sappho’s work: “A major lesson to be learned from the tradition of

Sapphic speculation is that received ideas about gender have always dominated what has passed for Sappho commentary...Her consistent refusal to be confined within stable definitions of gender and sexual identity invites, as it were, her readers to project their prejudices onto what has been denied them” (22). The blank page under Sappho’s name in *Brouillon* does not attempt to hide the fragmentary nature of the history of *amantes*; by displaying the absence of Sappho’s works as well as the silence about her sexuality, it opens up a space for ambiguity. Thus DeJean goes on to elaborate the seemingly intentional playfulness of Sappho’s work: “I would add one final factor, what I had in mind when I referred to Sappho’s Borgesian stance: the undeniable role Sappho herself plays in the creation of sexual confusion, most notably in her two most celebrated odes...both of which make their threatening sexuality evident only belatedly, and in a manner so devious that it appears teasing. It is as if Sappho had been fully conscious of the controversial nature of her subject matter-- and had sought actively to enhance it” (20). This observation recalls the tone of the dictionary: devious and teasing, aware of its controversial nature.

It is complicated to “define” the sexuality of the *amantes* as their entire culture is shaped by an open-ended sexuality, love of female bodies, love circulating within a community. The word “*Amantes*” suggests both subject and object of free-flowing desire, lovers simultaneously loving and being loved, sexuality including but not limited to reproduction, although this capacious sexuality gradually results in a schism between *Amazones* and *Mères*. Originally, all were *Amazones*: “Au commencement, s’il y a jamais eu un commencement, toutes les amantes s’appelaient des amazones. Et vivant ensemble, s’aimant, se célébrant, jouant, dans ce temps où le travail était encore un jeu” (24). The entry on *Mère* explains how “*Amazone*” then became

a separate term.³⁵ In order to explain this shift in definition, Wittig and Zeig must tell a story, quite different from the philologists; this is their “fiction of Sappho,” turning *amantes* into the individual and collective character of the Amantes.

III. The novel within the encyclopedia

While *Brouillon* is not a novel in its form, it possesses a narrative which, though nonlinear, does tell a story. This story is told in fragments, traversing different time periods. Garréta’s Preface describes it as an archipelago, as a library, and as ruins: “Archipel encore, la bibliothèque qu’il contient, faite des livres et des fragments sauvés par les amantes de la destruction et du chaos des âges sombres. Composant les ruines du passé, les traces du présent, il esquisse le corps politique et érotique nouveau qu’il anticipe [...]” (Garréta 16). Garréta’s analysis reinforces the different temporalities of the encyclopedia: fragments saved from the past, traces of the present, and the sketching out of a new future. The terms form their own kind of archipelagic chain: fragment, island, ruin, each *referring* to a whole and yet a whole in and of itself. This is key to understanding the work, which is not an attempt at a totalizing or universal narrative. Instead *Brouillon* reimagines narrative in a fragmentary form.

In Queneau’s theorization of the novel, there are books that are *temps-pleins* and *temps-perdu*: in other words, those which take place in continuous time, and those which are in search of lost time. Unlike *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, though, *Brouillon* appears to be *temps-perdu*, as it

³⁵ “Quant au mot femme qui était supposé recouvrir tout le concept de leur race, et désignait à la fois celles qui enfanteront, il était extrêmement étrange pour les amazones, tout comme son contexte....Quand le mot était employé dans le contexte de leur fonction de mères, les mères se disaient des femmes tout court. Mais dès qu’elles l’appliquaient à celles qu’elles appelaient les filles ternelles et qui ne prétendaient pas se limiter à une fonction unique, dans ce cas elles disaient femmes-guerrières, femmes-chasseresses, femmes-errantes, femmes-amantes” (152).

recounts the different eras of the Amantes, their customs and history. At the same time, as the entries shift in tense, we see many in the present tense that refer to a continuous time, as in the example of “Belle” which is a term of endearment “depuis toujours” (43) or “**Couleur:** Toutes les amantes émettent une couleur qui est leur propre” (63). In writing of past ages of the Amantes, Wittig and Zeig are writing a work in *temps-perdu*, but when they are describing certain aspects of Amante culture, we seem to be in the present *temps-plein*. By putting the text into Queneau's schema, we notice the various ways in which the *Dictionnaire* inhabits time, and the temporal complexity of the work. The dictionary is not a novel, but it is a narrative encyclopedia, or rather, a novelistic encyclopedia. It makes use of novelistic traits and functions, characters, and the passage of time (just not linear time).

As an example of encyclopedic form, the *Dictionnaire* is remarkable and unique. It points to the narrative qualities of the encyclopedia and uses them to construct a mythology that gives the Amantes a past, present, and future. While not told in a linear fashion, the encyclopedia tells a story in fragments. Like the other works discussed in this dissertation, this text is not simply descriptive and is demonstrative of the fact that an encyclopedia cannot *solely* describe. This narrative is also a historical one. The account, however, is composed of fragments that can only be pieced together by the reader, who, reading encyclopedically and making connections is able to conjure an image of this civilization. Each reading is distinct, non-linear and therefore emphasizes some elements over others, changing and shaping the interpretation by the different ways and moments that pieces appear to come together.

The story that emerges is about the Amantes: their history, their culture, their way of life, the way they show affection, their values, conflicts, poetry. A prosperous and successful civilization, they are described equally as being industrious and impressive hunters, as they are

romantic figures, decorated in flowers and perfumed in floral scents. However the definition of the Amantes themselves requires further exploration. Some entries reveal important historical figures, most notably famous Amantes, from antiquity all the way to the 20th century. There are also five distinct historical periods of the Amantes: Âge de bronze, Âge de fer, Âge de vapeur, Âge de gloire, Âge de béton, and the Âge de l'acier rapide. In addition there are enigmatic "Période[s] de chaos" often between certain eras, and although these materials evoke a rough periodication, these periods are never described in relation to historical time. Much of the content in the dictionary comes from the "Porteuses des fables," who preserve the history of the Amantes in an oral tradition, and there are mythological characters such as "Les Irréales," seen only in dreams, who guide them spiritually, often sending them to other regions to meet with other Amantes.

The collection of various (pseudo)historical and mythical sources about the Amantes produces a cumulative effect of narrativizing their story without fully historicizing them, creating "a mythical time" of storytelling that connects past to present, without distinctions between Amantes then and now. Parts of the dictionary involve a radical retelling of myth. For example, in the entry on Medusa, her story is told with some surprising new details:

Célébrée comme celle-qui-est-féroce, à son jour de fête. Reine de Gorgones, amazones qui vivaient en Libye, à l'âge de bronze. Les porteuses des fables disent que Méduse avait une chevelure abondante et bouclée et qu'elle mélangeait avec ses cheveux des serpents noirs. Les serpents bougeaient autour de sa tête quand Méduse galopait et quelques-unes s'enroulaient autour de son cou...Les porteuses de fables disent que les Gorgones et les Libyennes ont été amenées sous Méduse et sous Athéna, reine des Libyennes, à combattre au cours de la plus terrible bataille connue de mémoire d'amazone...C'est alors que [Méduse] a été tuée par Athéna...Athéna a gardé sur sa poitrine la tête de la terrible Gorgone qu'elle aimait en secret, dit-on (149-150)

Rather than being portrayed as monstrous, here Medusa is an Amazon warrior queen. She is presented as a human being who weaves live snakes into her long curly hair. The entry presents a magnificent image of the snakes moving and even wrapping around her neck as she charges into battle. Furthermore her kingdom is at war with the Libyans, led by Athena. This is a reimagination of the figure of Medusa as a formidable warrior queen, who is nevertheless, human. In this version of the myth, Medusa was killed not by Perseus but by Athena. Even more provocative is the suggestion that these two enemies in battle may have been lovers, or at least that Athena loved Medusa. Here is a reference to the violent eros we will see throughout the *dictionnaire*.

The composite image of the Amantes that emerges from the dictionary also suggests a radical reimagination of the body. For example, the entry on “cadavre” reimagines the origin of the surrealist term “cadavre exquis” in order to describe relationships between Amantes: “L’expression ‘cadavres exquis’ est née dans les donastères quand des amantes se sont mises à manger leurs amies mortes.” Here a term originating in surrealism, a movement whose champions were almost all men, is redefined to suggest an earlier Sapphic practice referred to as “the exquisite corpse” among the Amantes. The entry on the orgasm likewise proves to be a retelling of stories told by men, through a surprising, though anonymous, reference to Baudelaire: “Les amantes on une grande prédilection pour le clitoris, ces organes du plaisir dont, quand ils sont à l’oeuvre, il a été dit “là tout n’est qu’ordre et beauté, luxe calme et volupté” (tiré de la Bibliothèque, ensemble des livres et fragments du passé sauvés par les amantes pendant la dernière période de chaos).” The quotation suggests how the lesbian figures of Baudelaire’s poetry have entered into the cultural imaginary, but redefined by Wittig and Zeig so they can tell their own story about the clitoris, without naming Baudelaire.

Emerging as central characters in the (fragmented) narrative of the dictionary, the Amantes embody love among women but they also inhabit a world defined by conflict. Indeed, “conflict” has an entry in the dictionary, marked by the great schism between Amantes known as the Amazones and the Mères:

Conflit: “Il y a des traces de conflits obscurs dans les fables des porteuses de fables”... Il est fait ici allusion (une seule) au grand différence entre les mères et les amazones. Il a marqué notre passé de façon tellement indélébile qu’on peut s’attendre à voir la même histoire se répéter, les mères développer un rêve d’engendrement absolu et totalitaire, faisant des enfants durant les siècles des siècles, les amazones cherchant désespérément une brèche dans cette réalité là.”

The entry self-reflexively introduces “conflict” as a literary device: much as the traditional novel depends on conflict as the narrative device to drive its plot, the dictionary introduces differences among the Amantes that will come to define their conflict and their history. This conflict has marked the past in such a way that the authors suggest history may repeat itself: that the mères will bring the emphasis on reproduction to a totalitarian level, further pushing the Amazones to the margins.

The conflict among Amazones begins with those who begin to establish themselves by creating camps and eventually cities, and those who prefer to remain “errantes.” Wittig and Zeig explain that this was not originally a conflict, but became the basis for it:

Peu à peu les établies ont changé de comportement. Elles ont de moins en moins quittés leur cités...Elles se sont repliées sur elles-mêmes. Puis elles se sont prises d’émerveillement pour un de leurs processus physiologiques, l’engendrement. Elles ont cessé de s’appeler des amazones, terme par lequel elles désignaient désormais les autres, les étrangères, les barbares. Elles se sont appelées des mères. Elles ont élaborés toute une culture “nouvelle” où rien de ce qui l’enfante n’a échappé à l’analogie, puis à la symbolisation de leur propre engendrement. Elles se sont absorbés dans les mythes sur l’obscur, la béance, la germination, la terre-mère...Les mères se sont mises à fabriquer

des représentations d'elles-mêmes en boue séchée, en pierre...De là est né tout le cortège de déesses enceintes que notre histoire a connues. Les mères ont été fascinées par ces représentations et elles les ont multipliées.

The Amantes who had established themselves in cities begin to change and center their culture around reproduction and simultaneously disidentify with the term Amazone in favor of "Mère." For the Mères, there begins to be a singular emphasis on reproduction. This manifests in the subsequent representations of pregnant goddesses, which according to Wittig and Zeig, only multiplied further.

Furthermore, even though the Amazones do also reproduce, they do not identify with the Mères and are subsequently banned from the cities. Particularly significant in this passage is "se sont repliées sur elles-mêmes": the Mères become isolated, withdrawn, in such a way that they even begin to challenge the way of life of the Amazones. They begin to see the Amazones as foreigners, and slowly transform myths of goddesses into only representations of goddesses who bear children. At this time, the term "Amazone" begins to take on a different meaning:

C'est également à cette époque que dans les cités le terme le plus méprisant pour désigner quelqu'une a été amazone. Amazone a fini par signifier, contre toute évidence, celle qui n'enfante-pas. Les grandes mères, comme elles s'appelaient elles-mêmes, les considéraient comme des éternelles enfants, des immatures, celles qui ne voulaient pas assumer leur destin...Les dissensions qui ont surgi entre les mères et les amazones ont marqué la fin de l'harmonie et de l'âge d'or. (112-113)

Now only defined in the negative as "those that do not give birth," "Amazone" begins to connote one who does not reproduce (even though this is untrue) and furthermore takes on a negative connotation of childish or immature for not fulfilling their "destiny" (112). This schism then brings an end to the "âge d'or."

We can understand the split between the Amazones and the Mères in terms of different conceptions of time. The use of the word “destin” emphasizes that the Mères have their own idea of time, one that views reproduction as a necessary telos. “Destin” contradicts the errant ways of the Amazones, if only for its shared root with “destination,” a concept not valued or even mentioned in the description of their culture. The Amazones are all “errantes” while by settling down the Mères develop a different notion of time. This shouldn’t be understood too literally, but rather to underscore the importance of “error” in the world of the Amantes. This lifestyle does not prevent them from bearing children, and it is not as though the Mères “need” to settle or form cities in order to do so. Nevertheless, the act of wandering is described as central to the culture and history of the Amantes, and philosophically significant in their rejection of the concept of destiny.

For Wittig and Zeig, the story of the Amazones and Mères also demonstrates a different way to tell history, as a form of wandering (error) through myth. Their encyclopedic mythology invites the reader to wander, through multiple stories that demonstrate the ongoing conversion of myth into history and history into myth. Throughout the dictionary, this process of mythmaking involves the figures and stories inherited from antiquity and other distant eras but also a process of reimagination and recontextualization, and an appreciation for the lacuna, the discovery of what is missing. Thus encyclopedic reading here is a form of wandering and discovering with no clear or fixed goal.

IV. Notre Histoire

Like Flaubert’s novel, Wittig and Zeig’s work theorizes and defines history in multiple and contradictory ways. The entry on history in the *Brouillon* is the longest by a considerable

amount: roughly five pages of text. It elaborates on the different ages of Amantes as well as their conflicts. Here I will cite an excerpt at length.:

Histoire

Les peuples de celles qui ont commencé notre histoire—si cette histoire a eu jamais un commencement—ont été composés de petites tribus, cueillant les fruits de arbres, chassant, élevant ensemble leurs enfants, se déplaçant sur toute la terre qui était alors un jardin. En ce temps-là, elles se sont appelées des amazones et elles ont créé l'harmonie. C'était facile car leur monde était clément et bon à vivre...Un jour une amazone a eu l'idée de construire une place où habiter toutes et où revenir la nuit. C'était une assez bonne idée en soi, tout semblable à celle de se vêtir, de s'abriter contre le froid. Le premier établissement a été imité par d'autres tribus. Il a été à l'origine des cités, mais aussi de la discorde entre les amazones sur la terre. Les unes ont continué à rester errantes, elles aimaient bouger, elles n'avaient pas envie de s'installer, elles préféraient parcourir des places diverses, elles disaient qu'une amazone établie cesse d'être libre. Les autres ont construit des cités de plus en plus grandes...Au début tout s'est bien passé. Les errantes s'arrêtaient quelquefois dans les grandes et dans les petites cités, pour saluer les amazones qui vivaient là. Elles donnaient des nouvelles. Elles servaient de lien autant qu'elles le pouvaient. (110-111)

Beyond the sheer length of the History entry, its direction and scope take a rather unexpected turn. Instead of a definition of the term “history” *in relation* to Amantes or Amazones, or how they conceived of history, we are instead given the history of a people.

In this sense, history in this work does not possess another meaning other than that of the Amantes. Wittig and Zeig's work is not one of negation, but of reimagination. While the civilization has conflicts, distinct ages with more or less cultural flourishing, there is not a reference to “our” world in the sense of a reality their world is set up against. Indeed, one of the most striking features of this work in addition to Wittig's other fiction, is its radical insistence of its own world, its own imaginary. It is not a “conflict” with the straight mind but rather its own

monument which disrupts it. The *Brouillon* tells a story which contains many of the concepts of her theoretical works, though it takes the form of a mythology. Wittig and Zeig describe the split between the Amazones and the Mères as a kind of “fall” further emphasized by the following statement: “C’est aussi à l’âge d’argent que les langues se sont diversifiées” (114). The result of the split is also a diversification of languages. This split then itself produces more fragmentation. In this sense, fragments produce more fragmentation. In the *Brouillon*, rather than a complete, exhaustive, and linear account, history functions through fragments and fragmentation.

The structural fragmentation of the narrative is paralleled by the schism among the Amantes. Because the text makes use of novelistic conventions, we can see that while not explicitly so, implicitly the Amantes, but also the Amazones are the protagonists. We are not being told this story by the Mères, for example. How are we interpellated by the text? Certainly based on the story of the schism, we are meant to sympathize with the Amazones, who are described as ostracized and misunderstood. At the same time, the reader’s identification is especially complicated, as they are both within and outside of the narrative. Ultimately however what the text demonstrates in its fragmentation is its ability to form a cohesive work and story while remaining in its encyclopedic form.

While telling the (fragmented) story of the Amantes, the “histoire” entry also opens up an intentionally ambiguous language of identity and possession: “*notre* histoire” (my emphasis) can be at once *our* story in the literal sense of the authors Wittig and Zeig, but also can be their identification with Amante culture. “*Our* story” also brings the reader into the world of the Amantes as a subject belonging to this group. The story, like *Bouvard et Pécuchet* begins in a garden, a reference certainly to Genesis, but also the root of garden, that is, the idea of an enclosed, cultivated space. The garden is by definition secluded. This appears to be in

contradiction with the notion of “error”: the original amantes were all “errantes,” a habit which changed onto when building shelter, other factions began cities and therefore the conflict among them. What seems to be at stake here is a redefinition of amantes, deviating from woman in order to open up a historical space for reimagining the lesbian subject as “not woman.”

In her essay “When Lesbians Were Not Women,” Teresa de Lauretis describes the influence of Wittig’s work, as well as what that statement made possible for her in the 1980s: “But at that time the statement ‘lesbians are not women’ had the power to open the mind and make visible and thinkable a conceptual space that until then had been rendered unthinkable by, precisely, the hegemony of the straight mind—as the space called ‘the blind spot’ is rendered invisible in a car’s rear-view mirror by the frame or chassis of the car itself” (51-52). Just as integral to this statement are the many ways in which de Lauretis and others view Wittig as being largely misunderstood by an English-speaking audience:

Wittig’s “lesbian” was not just an individual with a personal “sexual preference” or a social subject with a simply “political” priority but the term or conceptual figure for the subject of a cognitive practice and a form of consciousness that are not primordial, universal or coextensive with human thought...but historically determined and yet subjectively assumed-- an eccentric subject constituted in a process of struggle and interpretation. (55)

De Lauretis disagrees with those who read Wittig as embracing a kind of liberal individual lesbian subject, as well as those that believe her to be theorizing a “universal” feminine subject.³⁶

³⁶ Judith Butler is often taken as exemplary of this misunderstanding, as DeLauretis writes: “Like the other critics, Butler failed to understand the figural, theoretical character of Wittig’s ‘lesbian’ and its epistemological valence. The subject of a cognitive practice based in the lived experience of one’s body, one’s desire, one’s conceptual and psychical disidentification from the straight mind” (57).

Rather, for De Lauretis, Wittig's subject is "in a process of struggle" precisely because patriarchal discourse and relationships were still relegating such a subject to the "blind spot" she describes in that moment.

If we expand on this theory, Wittig and Zeig's project is not utopian in the idealist sense, but rather rooted in a desire to inscribe the subjectivity of "lesbian peoples" into history, not by searching for that subjectivity in the archive, but rather by appropriating the universal in order to imagine a history where Amantes were *never* "femmes," where the former precedes the latter, where "femme" is "the product of social relations" (8). In this way de Lauretis explains that critiques from both sides, materialist and idealist, fail to understand that Wittig is theorizing a subject in process: "Wittig's 'lesbian society' did not refer to some collectivity of gay women but was the term for a conceptual and experiential space carved out of the social field, a space of contradictions in the here and now that need be affirmed and not resolved" (de Lauretis 55).

The substitution of this term for another is not meant as a rejection tout-court of "femme" for its own sake, but rather an exercise in forming and imagining new discourses of thought about sexuality. What De Lauretis describes exists as an idea in the utopian space, or "no place," of the *Dictionnaire*. To get there, De Lauretis sketches out what she views as Wittig's "journey" as a writer as a path through distinct genres:

Indeed, the thematic topos of the voyage in Wittig's fiction corresponds to her formal journey as a writer. Both are voyages without fixed destination, without end, more like a self-displacement that in turn displaces the textual figurations of classical and Christian mythologies, the Homeric heroes and Christ, in Western literary genres and reinscribes them otherwise: *The Divine Comedy* (*Virgil, non*) and *Don Quixote* (*Voyage sans fin*), the epic (*Les guérillères*), the lyric (*Le corps lesbien*), the Bildungsroman (*L'opoponax*), the encyclopedic dictionary (*Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes*), and later the satire

(*Paris-la-politique*), the political manifesto and the critical essay (*The Straight Mind*).
(De Lauretis 58)

This theorization of the progression of her writing as a journey is described as being without a “fixed destination,” a theme that DeLauretis also views as paralleled in her work. She suggests that Wittig “displaces the textual figuration of classical and Christian mythologies,” so that genre is not arbitrary but in fact a deliberate reinscription of these mythologies. By taking us through these different genres, Wittig recasts these genres as subversive, and instrumentalizes them to build a literary corpus around the imagination of a lesbian subject, or what De Lauretis calls “an eccentric subject constituted in a process of struggle and interpretation.”

One important figure for this ongoing process of struggle and interpretation is Sappho, who emerges as a powerful subtext in Wittig’s generic transformation of “the lyric” in *Le corps lesbien*. Published in 1973, this prose poem is a radical reinterpretation of Sapphic eros that is simultaneously “lyrical” and “anti-lyrical” in performing a violent fragmentation of the lesbian body. Published three years later in 1976, the *Dictionnaire* has many more explicit references Sappho, as it continues the process of reconstituting the lesbian subject in another genre: initiating the reader into the fragmented Sapphic corpus through scattered entries of the encyclopedic dictionary, it points to the proliferation of both past and future readings of Sappho.

V. The Future of Sapphism

While the tense of entries in the Wittig and Zeig’s dictionary is past and present, the title *Brouillon pour un dictionnaires des amantes* aims squarely towards the future. It is not only future-oriented in the sense that it continues writing the story of the culture of the Amantes, it is also an *invitation to do so*. Indeed, the use of the word “brouillon” is the first indication of the futurity of the work. In this way Wittig and Zeig’s myth building in the dictionary is in no way a

“tombstone” (though it often speaks of the past) but a living work which asks to be continued (though never completed). Commenting on writing the work, Zeig calls it “Le dictionnaire d’un âge nouveau” even as she describes it as telling the story of “des amantes qui vivaient et aimaient dans un âge de gloire” (Garréta 16).

The encyclopedia shares the function of etiology or explanation with the myth, but is not always narrative, as in the case of Wittig and Zeig. *Brouillon* is encyclopedic myth-making in that it adds to the encyclopedic function the dimension of narrative. It makes use of the gaps in the encyclopedia to represent the gaps in history and myth. These gaps are not hidden, whether they are the literal gaps of the formatted entry, or the incomplete story of the Amantes. Rather than “explaining” in the sense of covering over the gaps of historical events or natural phenomena, however, encyclopedic myth-making makes lacunae *productive*. The work is not interested in gaps for their own sake, but rather focused on making visible and contextualizing these gaps. In this sense, the importance of the fragment is not as that which is lost, but that which is decontextualized. The blank entry should not be understood as merely another mystification or erasure of Sappho, but rather as an acknowledgement and recontextualization of that referenced absence. To tell the story of the Amantes is to also tell the story of these gaps, without reinforcing the erasure of Sapphic culture that many of these gaps represent.

Thus, while Sappho’s entry is blank, she is not *absent*: she can’t be defined or confined to one location, precisely because she is present everywhere in the *Dictionnaire*. She is cited frequently in relation to her lovers, and “speaks” in verses quoted by Wittig and Zeig; or rather, she is made to speak through her poetry in French translation. The mediation of Sappho through various layers of translation is significant, as the interpretation of her poetry has been a tool used to erase or censor her sexuality in criticism. But it also opens up an opportunity for

reinterpreting, retranslating, and recontextualizing fragments of Sappho in the *Dictionnaire*, where Wittig and Zeig tell a story steeped in passion for women that overwrites the erasure of Sappho's sexuality. Through quotations from Sappho, the *Dictionnaire* creates a way of imagining Amante culture as a performance of Sapphic eros.

The entry for Anactoria, for example, makes desire between women explicit by quoting verses from Sappho: "Amante d'Atthis et de Sappho. 'Anactoria que nous aimons toutes les deux, Atthis,/demeure maintenant dans la lointaine Sardes/mais elle dit qu'elle pense...Elle brille à présent les Lydiennes...alors elle nous appelle et nous crie de venir'" (26-27). Translated into lyrical French, the Sapphic fragment creates desire for the absent Anactoria and also a sense of her presence, as the poem imagines Anactoria crying out from afar to return to Sappho's circle on the island of Lesbos. In another entry, Atthis (born on Lesbos) is named as the most passionate love of Sappho, and the very embodiment of lesbian desire: "Née à Lesbos, la plus chère amante de Sappho. Plus tard amante d'Andromède. 'Je t'aime Atthis, depuis si longtemps...J'avais envie de toi/Et toi tu incendies mon coeur dévoré de désir'" (35). The quotation from Sappho here highlights the intensity of her passion, burning with desire and devoured by it.

The idea of Sapphic eros as an experience of simultaneous pleasure and pain, presence and absence, exists within a longer tradition explored by Anne Carson in *Eros the Bittersweet*. According to Carson, it was Sappho who first called eros "bittersweet" (or in Greek, "sweetbitter"), a paradoxical epithet that expresses the contradictory effects of desire (3). The rhetorical effects of this paradox are performed in fragment 31 of Sappho, who dramatically describes the body falling apart under the influence of eros and seems to end on the verge of

death: both mind and body are shattered by the violence of her desire.³⁷ This violent fragmentation is amplified in *Le corps lesbien*: Wittig's prose poem can be understood as a rhetorical expansion of fragment 31, anatomizing in painful detail how the body is simultaneously constructed and deconstructed to create the lesbian body. In addressing the subject/object of desire, this text seeks to materialize the body--organs, veins, bile, and all--through a process of disintegration that pushes the body to an impossible limit. This is not just a material limit, but a rhetorical limit: at what point does the fragmenting of the body in lyric become even *undesirable* or repulsive to the reader? Hovering between lyric and anti-lyric impulses in *Le corps lesbien*, Wittig imagines a lesbian subject that is *always already* fragmented, and her prose poem only fragments it more and more.

However, in collaborating on *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes*, Wittig and Zeig open up a different way to read the scattered Sapphic corpus. Rather than turning to lyric as a genre that revolves around address to "you," they choose the genre of the reference work as a different way to engage the reader. The *Dictionnaire* posits itself as useful, explanatory, and yet as I have discussed in previous sections, the reader is at times unknowingly initiated into the text and therefore the world of the Amantes. Compared to *Le corps lesbien*, the dictionary's indirect appeal to readers is more subtle. The prospective reader may be led in merely by curiosity, only to find themselves entrenched in the world of Amantes, unknowingly participating in Sapphic fiction. One entry itself may not overwhelm the reader, or may even just confuse the reader. And

³⁷ In *Eros the Bittersweet*, Carson translates Sappho's fragment 31 as follows: "He seems to me equal to gods that man/who opposite you/sits and listens close/to your sweet speaking // and lovely laughing—oh it/puts the heart in my chest on wings/for when I look at you, even a moment, then no speaking/is left in me // no: tongue breaks and thin/fire is racing under skin/and in eyes no sight and drumming/fills ears // and cold sweat holds me and shaking/grips me all, greener than grass/I am and dead—or almost/I seem to me" (12-13).

yet, as one continues to read, indeed in any order, the reader enters the world of the Amantes and begins to learn their ways.

There are many references to Sappho passing on her wisdom to other Amantes: “Héro: Amante de Sappho, née dans une île à l’ouest de Lesbos, ‘la jeune Héro aux pieds ailés.’ ‘J’ai tout appris à Héro de Guaros/légère à la course.’ ‘Je ne crois pas qu’il y aura/pour voir la lumière du soleil/une seule amante/en aucun autre temps/aussi savante quelle,’” (Sappho Poèmes, Grèce âge de fer).” Héro is taught by Sappho, and carries on her wisdom. Here romantic love is not emphasized so much as intellect and wisdom. She is a kind of disciple, which places Sappho in a position of great creative and philosophical power: she lives on through her teachings in addition to her romantic and sexual relationships. In other words, her lovers are also her readers.

The survival of Sappho through her lovers/readers is signalled in an entry on the word “Belle,” which explains the origin of the term of endearment as beginning with Sappho: “Terme d’affection, sous la forme ‘ma belle’ ou ‘mes’ belles, que les amantes emploient entre elles depuis toujours ‘Pour vous, mes belles, ma pensée ne changera jamais.’” (43). The entry is anonymized: the example is not of Anactoria or Atthis but “vous” in a general address to you, both singular and plural. Furthermore the quotation from Sappho is in the future tense, “For you, my beauties, my thoughts *will* never change.” The temporality of the entry is complicated by its statement that this term of affection has been used “depuis toujours.” In the present moment of reading, it would seem that Sappho will always love her readers and they will always love her.

Indeed, what is Sappho but her lovers? When we read fragments of Sappho quoted in the *Dictionnaire*, she is both the “I” and the “you,” simultaneous subject and object of her own love poetry. Omnipresent but elusive, she is the origin and embodiment of love among Amantes that survives through history. Reading through the *Dictionnaire* thus becomes an eternal quest for

Sapphic love that has defined, and will define, communities of Amantes in the past and the future. Consider, for example, a rather striking entry about the Holy Grail, where we learn that Sappho survives as a legend in medieval Amante culture:

Graal: Le cycle du Graal rassemble une série de contes dont chacun se réfère à une table ronde autour de laquelle se regroupaient les chevalières du Graal au nombre de treize...Le but des chevalières a été la recherche ou quête d'une coupe pleine de sang. On a perdu le sens de cette coupe. D'après certaines la coupe a recueilli le sang d'Oreithyia, une amazone tres aimée..Selon d'autres, le graal a un jour recueilli le sang du corps de Sappho que les chevalières, ses amantes, cherchent sans relâche" (101)

The reference to the grail participates in the "alternate history" performed by the *Brouillon*, using references to distinct historical periods and myths to imagine a new story. Retold from the perspective of "chevalières," without any reference to monarchy, the holy grail is rumored "according to some" to hold the blood of either Oreithyia or of Sappho. If it is the blood of Sappho, then drinking the blood becomes a sacred act of communion, a way to partake of her body and re-embody Sappho, making her immortal by incorporating the past into the future.

However, it is important that the entry about the Grail remains in the style of myth or folklore: "d'après certaines" and "selons d'autres." Even in their own figuration of the world of Amantes, Wittig and Zeig leave gaps and questions about a quest that may still be unfulfilled or unfinished; if the quest were completed, we would run the risk of mystifying or essentializing Sapphic love or the *Brouillon* itself. Their entry on the Grail should therefore not be taken literally as a recasting of Sappho as Christ, and the *Brouillon* as a kind of Sapphic bible. There remains a rhetorical and poetic function of these associations, as well as the characteristic playfulness of Wittig and Zeig's writing. Irony and humor pervades the entire *Dictionnaire*, which is just as much about the universalization at play in the stories of antiquity and of Christ as

it is about Sappho and the project of the *Brouillon*. There are many different ways to read the entries on Sappho's lovers that are scattered throughout the *Dictionnaire*. The entries I have selected to read in the preceding paragraphs should not be misread as sacralization of Sappho and Sapphic love, but rather as an engagement with a "Sapphic" heritage that is neither overdetermined nor predetermined by the dictionary, but left open, remaining radically undetermined and without completion.

In the conclusion of *Fictions of Sappho*, Dejean reflects on the question of the futurity of Sappho's work and its reception:

How can anyone come to terms with a figure whose official history has been for the most part charted by men, who, terrified of the consequences of her fecundity, condemn her to sterility? How can a writer dare assume the succession of someone whom literary history has confined to splendid, frozen isolation...In all that has been written about the original Sapphic society, there is no prototype for the future of Sapphism. (311)

The word prototype here is important, as it gestures towards the past: there is not an original or authentic Sapphic "prototype" that we can recuperate. De Jean emphasizes that even taking into consideration all of the work on "Sapphic society" by philologists (the subject of her own book) that it remains unclear, nevertheless what the future of that readership and critical response will resemble. Here, as in the work of Wittig and Zeig, the futurity of the work is both urgent, yet uncharted and uncertain. Furthermore, to imagine this future requires a great deal of imagination and creativity. De Jean, in her own way, is participating in a project not dissimilar to the goals of the *Brouillon*. She is disrupting the conventional legacy of Sapphic fictions, not only to criticize them, but to open the possibility for a new Sapphic future: in this case, the tradition of criticism and interpretation.

The creative potential and the playfulness made possible by the encyclopedic form inscribe Sappho and lesbian subjectivity into a semi-fictional tradition that asserts itself radically

into the universal. Furthermore, the use and elasticity of time in the work challenges normative concepts of history and taken-for-granted notions of what constitutes myth and value. The result is a work that lays bare the lacunae of history and of myth, making use of the gaps both as a gesture to the past, and simultaneously an invitation to the reader of the future to participate in the work.

Coda

In the epigraph to this chapter, Barnard's translation of Sappho draws attention to the act of forgetting: "You may forget but/let me tell you/this: someone in/some future time/will think of us." This "forgetting" is projected into the future, and the poem takes us further still with "some future time." Simultaneously, all of this speculated future is already at risk of being forgotten. As Sappho addresses us in the present, she reminds us to not forget the future, and specifically, how we ourselves will be remembered. In other words, the risk is not of being forgotten, but that the reader will forget that they will be remembered. This fragmented time in Barnard's translation appears paradoxical. How can one forget something that has not happened?

This poem, while vague, is also deeply intimate. Who is the "us" in this poem? Is this Sappho to a lover? Is this Sappho to the reader? The former paints a portrait of Sappho and her lovers immortalized in her poetry, where the latter seems to bridge the gap between Sappho and the reader, claiming a kind of intimacy that is endearing, yet mysterious. It hints at Sappho's own legacy, albeit in a very understated way, and this relative humility is part of its charm: in this translation it is not even "remember" but "think of," a significantly lighter expression. Furthermore, the certainty of the author's statement is slightly undermined by "some future time": a very uncertain and unknowable time.

The tension between an immortal legacy and readerly intimacy, sly confidence and an unknowable future, is profoundly representative of Sapphic style, but also the poet's complex and fraught legacy: her immortal place in antiquity on the one hand, and her iconic (and sometimes campy) status as a figure for queer communities. The risk of being forgotten, and the need for a recuperative gesture are both at stake in imagining a queer subject. Indeed, Wittig and Zeig keep both of these motifs at play throughout the *Brouillon*. The form of the encyclopedia allows these contradictions to coexist and come together. The encyclopedia openly 'flirts' with both, as well as many other styles and tones.

And yet this freedom, this creativity, is largely the product of form, of *arrangement*. Here we see "Ranger la culture pour mieux la déranger," the slogan cited at the opening of my introduction, at work. Where Sappho is monumental, the encyclopedia makes her accessible, intimate. Where the reader feels intimate with Sappho, she remains distant and epic. An encyclopedia is in many ways an ideal form for what are considered "marginal" topics. The encyclopedia has no center, it has presence across many time periods and places. Sappho's presence is in her lyric, her lovers: she is located in antiquity and yet pervasive throughout all history in Amante culture. Because of the heterogeneity of the encyclopedic format, the imaginary of Amante culture takes up a lot of space in a relatively short text, that nevertheless provides details for mythmaking and world-building. Furthermore the discontinuous form of the dictionary creates a different temporality of reading, a different way of reading history.

Encyclopedic reading engages the curiosity and the desire of the reader and invites them to wander. One might equate the experience to wandering through a bookstore, organized by subject and also alphabetically, with no particular text in mind. With this view, the reader's attention may be drawn in any sort of direction, and turn around to another shelf only to see a

connection between two works that they had not previously considered. And yet, the reader is alone; there are no other patrons or staff. They are left with the arrangement in place, and to their own agency, with no instructions. Viewed in this way, it is a remarkably unique and creative reading practice. Each of the writers in this dissertation were able to capture that encyclopedic potential and produce singular works, that interpolate and invite the reader to participate in unconventional ways.

Indeed, it is not incidental that each of these works is closely tied to the concept of failure or loss, as the encyclopedia is a response to that question or problem. These works make fragments and empty space monumental, and they eschew the commonly held prejudices of their era. This is not to say that encyclopedias can *only* do this, but rather that they are uniquely positioned to be critical, satirical, and subversive. Even those who may set out to write or read an encyclopedia in a hegemonic fashion, may find that the form itself resists them. Queneau's novel and his encyclopedia are deeply concerned with the question not only of success and failure, but also of the margins, those whose ideas are not considered valuable or worth preserving. Bouvard and Pécuchet set out on a journey to start a new life, to make plants grow, to study great works. At every turn they find not only digressions, which change and shape their path, but also legitimate and serious questions about human nature and pedagogy, the writing of history and of realist literature. Flaubert's dictionary is a brilliant satire hiding in plain sight. Just as the encyclopedia urges us to read differently, it can also push us to think differently, about what information is considered valued or valuable, about the hierarchy of ideas, about authorship and authority, about definition and description. If we take the encyclopedic seriously as a method, we are better equipped to read and write literature not just because the constraints of the form can be

productive of meaning and imagination, but also because of the unpredictability of where they will lead us.

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