THE GEOGRAPHY OF AUTHORSHIP IN THE *ENCYCLOPÉDIE*: JAUCOURT'S LITERARY LANDSCAPES

Allison L. Rice

Any student of French literature appreciates the importance of the *Encyclopédie* published under the aegis of Diderot and d'Alembert between 1751 and 1772. Considered not only the first modern encyclopedia, but also "the supreme text of the Enlightenment,"[1] this 28-volume work has been the subject of countless studies. Whereas the authorship *of* the *Encyclopédie* has been examined from many angles, in publishing histories or biographies of the Encyclopedists, for example, authorship as a theme *in* the *Encyclopédie* has yet to receive the attention it deserves. In fact, this collaborative text is a fertile and largely unexploited source of information on the tensions surrounding the evolving concept of authorship in eighteenth-century France. Again and again, the Encyclopedists' articles bear witness to their continuing preoccupation with authorship as a professional practice, as a societal role, and as a legal, economic, and intellectual concept.

Where, one might wonder, among the *Encyclopédie*'s 17 volumes of text should its reader begin to search for insights on authorship? Although articles categorized under literature or *belles lettres* are an obvious choice, one of the most striking examples of this work's fascination with authorship can in fact be found under the rubric of geography. Comprising nearly 40% of the more than 17,000 articles that the chevalier Louis de Jaucourt wrote for the *Encyclopédie*, the chevalier's geography articles provide a map of the literary landscape shaped by his European contemporaries and predecessors.[2] In their insistence on the literary, Jaucourt's articles stand out among the geography articles in which the work abounds.

Geography plays a significant role in the *Encyclopédie*. Indeed, this discipline which serves as a pretext for Jaucourt's discussion of authorship, provides a springboard for other Encyclopedists to expand in still different directions. Over the course of the eighteenth century, geography grew both more rigorously scientific and considerably broader, unfurling branches with labels like "mathematical," "physical," and "political," and extending its canopy to cover disciplines as varied as anthropology, astronomy, geology, history, philosophy, and sociology, to name but a few. Yet however broad in scope, the geography of the eighteenth century was usually defined as a strictly descriptive science.[3]

In contrast, the geography articles Diderot wrote for the first several volumes of the *Encyclopédie* are decidedly polemical; Diderot often uses this discipline as a pretext to advance various causes on the *philosophes'* agenda, including the promotion of commerce, the campaign to crush intolerance, and the battle against superstition. The unsigned geography articles furnished by the abbé Mallet which predominate in volumes two through six, though less polemically inclined, nonetheless periodically urge his readers to adopt a more critical view of authority.[4] Modern readers may be surprised to encounter philosophical discussions in articles which purport to deal exclusively in geographical matters. It should be noted, however, that it was conventional practice in the *Encyclopédie* —as in other reference works of the era, such as Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, or Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophique* —to use articles in the service of causes extraneous to their explicit subject matter.

In addition to furnishing a nominal category that the three authors of the *Encyclopédie*'s geography articles can expand in various ways, geography also provides a metaphor for the work as a whole. In their "Preliminary Discourse" and "Prospectus," which are intended to orient the reader of the densely-packed first volume of text, d'Alembert and Diderot repeatedly use the metaphor of the *mappemonde*, or world map, to characterize the organizing principle behind the work they are editing. The map, their schematic system of human knowledge, serves to depict "countries" or categories of knowledge in relation to one another. The points of communication between these "countries" are indicated in turn by what the editors envision as a collection of detailed regional road maps: the articles of the *Encyclopédie*.[5]

In attempting to chart the progression of knowledge by mapping its points of origin, Jaucourt appears to have taken the metaphor of the *mappemonde* quite literally. The geographical place is clearly represented as the origin of a person. What is less obvious is that this person is virtually always an author. The person is then depicted as a source of knowledge in the form of a book. The chevalier's decision to introduce any biography at all defied the wishes of the editors, who had expressly excluded it. They had, after all, conceived their work as "l'histoire de l'esprit humain, et non de la vanité des hommes" (3: iv).

What makes Jaucourt's geography articles even more interesting, however, is the fact that they take the cartographical metaphor for the *Encyclopédie* a step further: in these articles, Jaucourt is in fact plotting

an intellectual trajectory for his readers. Geography is a pretext for authorial biography, which in turn gives rise to critical bibliography; and we will see that the chevalier's critical bibliography serves a variety of purposes. It is at once a pedagogical guide, an instrument of diffusion, a manual for library builders, and an inveterate bibliographer's stopgap measure for correcting his sources, or augmenting his colleagues' articles. In short, the bibliography scattered throughout Jaucourt's geography articles constitutes a relief map indicating for readers the summits and ravines not of physical places, but of the landscape of the Republic of Letters.

The chevalier's interest in authors and literary criticism is often expressed in the frankest of terms. Take, for example, the initial lines of his sketch of the French village "Ry": RY, (*Géog. mod.*) village de basse Normandie, entre Argentan et Falaise. Je ne parle de ce village que parce que c'est le lieu de la naissance de l'historien Mezerai (14: 449). Here, any physical description of the locale has been superseded by a discussion of authorship. This article exists solely to memorialize and critique Mezerai's contribution to French letters: his well-known history of France.

Going on to survey Jaucourt's relief map, we find that it is composed primarily of smaller units such as towns and provinces. Countries and continents offer too great a surface area to be represented in detail, and receive a more conventional treatment. We call the chevalier's articles on countries and continents "conventional" because they often contain elements that we would rightly expect to find in eighteenth-century geography as codified by contemporary geographers. These elements include information on the position and history of a locale, as well as various details of its topography, climate, architecture, population, government, institutions and/or commerce.

In contrast, Jaucourt's use of critical bibliography is unconventional, inasmuch as he uses his articles on towns and provinces both to map the Republic of Letters, and to plot a course through it for readers. If we now examine the functions of this mapping, we see that it serves a number of ends, which are often alluded to in self-conscious discourse. Jaucourt's critical bibliography functions first as a pedagogical guide intended to train the minds of his readers. He provides the "curious" with references for further reading.[6] He guides readers to a work, furnishing not only titles but also precise publishing information. He then guides readers through the work with critical assessments, in effect

inviting them to read and to compare their own judgement to the one he cites. In his article on the city of Rouen, for instance, Jaucourt both recommends and criticizes the work of Pierre-François Guyot Desfontaines. He observes that the author's translation of Virgil is one of the best in the French language, while remarking at the same time that Desfontaines's work as a journalist and literary critic has been deemed overly acerbic and even inaccurate (14: 394). In "Plaisance," his article on the Italian city Piacenza, Jaucourt devotes nearly 100 lines of text to the 17th-century author Pallavicino. After describing his controversial and prohibited works, Jaucourt indicates that it was the author's libelous writings which led to his beheading in 1644. He laments, "c'est un malheur qu'un homme qui avait beaucoup d'esprit en ait fait un si mauvais usage," judging Pallavicino's works "indignes de sa naissance et de sa profession" (12: 688). It is evident from these comments that while Jaucourt refers to these works because of the scandal they created, he is discouraging his reader from consulting them.

Second, Jaucourt's bibliography functions as an instrument of diffusion. In the article "Provence," he refers at length to 17th-century author and patron de Peiresc. He deplores the fact that "cet homme si célèbre par toute l'Europe . . . était inconnu à plusieurs Français de mérite, et presque ses contemporains," and seizes the opportunity to help generate the renown he believes de Peiresc to deserve (13: 510). In "Westmorland" and "Worsted," respectively, Jaucourt offers his own abridged translations of writings by John Mill and Henry Wharton because, he notes carefully, these works have never been made available in French (17: 600, 642). In "Shropshire," he explains that his article will be devoted to great authors produced by that English province because, "il importe aux gens de lettres de les connaître" (15: 143). Jaucourt is clearly intent on providing an avenue to inaccessible or hard-to-reach corners of the Republic of Letters.

Third, Jaucourt's bibliography serves as a guide to those building a personal library. Here, the chevalier's work reflects the growth of a sector of the expanding reading public concerned with collecting books. For instance, a full half of the article "Pologne" is devoted to commending texts on Polish geography and history to "les curieux qui forment des bibliothèques considérables" (12: 925). In "Voorhout," a worshipful account of the life and work of native son Herman Boërhaave, Jaucourt stresses the importance of the professional library.

The Encyclopedist notes about his mentor Boërhaave, that at the start of his career, he devoted all available funds to forming a personal library, knowing it would facilitate his professional development. With other library builders in mind, Jaucourt then dedicates hundreds of lines to the bibliographical description of Boërhaave's own works (17: 469-71). Significantly, the production of printed material in France tripled between 1701 and 1770; in response, numerous manuals were written to help guide consumers through the increasingly labyrinthine mass of books on the market.[7] Jaucourt's critical bibliography participates in this effort to plot a course for collectors.

Finally, in addition to functioning as a pedagogical tool, an instrument of diffusion, and a guide to library building, Jaucourt's bibliography also functions as a means to correct or reconcile sources, or supplement colleagues' articles which he deems incomplete. In "Saintonge," an article in which he lists and critiques works by the poet Gombault, Jaucourt notes that by including information on one of the author's plays, he is filling in what his source Moreri fails to mention (14: 524). In "Sommerset-shire" the chevalier devotes two columns to John Locke, supplementing Diderot's article "Philosophie de Locke" with anecdote and bibliographical detail. Whereas Diderot criticizes a number of Locke's ideas, Jaucourt praises them, stating, "dans son livre . . . l'on ne trouve que des vérités" (15: 336).

I would now like to suggest three factors which Jaucourt himself perceived as motivating his choice of critical bibliography as a means of mapping the allegorical Republic of Letters. First, the chevalier's personal interest in bibliography was longstanding, and leaves its mark from the start of his career. The only work published under his own name, his *Vie de Leibnitz* (1734), contains an annotated bibliography that extends an astonishing 30 pages. Perhaps more importantly, during the same era, Jaucourt was listed as one of the seven editors of the periodical *Bibliothèque raisonnée des ouvrages des savants de l'Europe*, a journal devoted to bibliography (Haechler 70-72).

Second, not unlike his colleagues, Jaucourt clearly saw literature and its source, the author, as the core of the encyclopedic enterprise, and of the *philosophes*' project in general. In the article "Esprit philosophique," rather than linking this faculty to the analytical sciences as does d'Alembert (1: xxxi), the chevalier highlights its fundamental role in the production and criticism of literature (12: 515). In the article "Littérature," he defends the study of Greek and Roman classics as

essential to the survival not only of *belles lettres*, but of sciences (9: 595). His bibliography repeatedly emphasizes the importance of the author and his works to both the preservation and the advancement of human knowledge.

Third, in addition to his abiding personal interest in bibliography and his conviction of the import of its objects, Jaucourt's choice of critical bibliography was motivated by his desire to help police the frontiers of the Republic of Letters. Imbued with a stronger classical sense than his fellow Encyclopedists, he vigorously defended the primacy of the Ancients. And though he did not share his colleagues' preference for the Moderns, Jaucourt did share their dismay before the rapid expansion of the book trade, and the simultaneous proliferation of mediocre works. The commodification of literature during the eighteenth century engendered a fear for the corpus that is well documented in the *Encyclopédie*.[8] In an effort to counterbalance the new economic definition of authorship, the work's authors, Jaucourt included, overwhelmingly favored their craft's reputation as an inspired intellectual activity. Jaucourt's critical bibliography sets professional standards for authors which betray his concerns about the state of literature and the Republic of Letters.

Finally, we might consider some of the wider implications of Jaucourt's practice of critical bibliography in his geography articles. In mapping the literary landscape and plotting the reader's course through it, the chevalier is focusing on an issue which pervades the *Encyclopédie*'s every volume. The author is heralded in this text not only as a participant in--but also an interpreter and perpetuator of--human knowledge and progress. As such, this figure is ascribed a pivotal role in a new intellectual history which the *Encyclopédie* seeks to reshape as well as to recount. Jaucourt's geography of authorship, while striking, should be viewed in the larger context of a work filled with normative and prescriptive responses to questions of style, taste, and literary genius, as well as questions of professional mandate and autonomy. His geography is but one instance of a concern with authorship that was widespread at a complex historical moment when greater access to the marketplace of ideas coincided with limited freedom to express, control and benefit from those ideas.

Boston University

NOTES

[1] Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage, 1985) 191.

[2] Figures based on Jean Haechler, *L'Encyclopédie de Diderot et de...Jaucourt: Essai biographique sur le chevalier Louis de Jaucourt* (Paris: Champion, 1995) 361, 498-99.

[3] Sergio Moravia, "Philosophie et géographie à la fin du XVIII[e] siècle," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 57 (Genève: Droz, 1967) 951, 989-90.

[4] George Perla has convincingly argued that Mallet first took responsibility for editing the geography portion of the *Encyclopédie* in volume two, continuing until his death in 1755. Cf. "The Authorship of Unsigned Articles in the *Encyclopédie*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 4 (1971): 447-54.

[5] Diderot and d'Alembert, eds., *L'Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 17 vols. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann, 1966) 1: xv.

[6] Cf. articles like "Frise," "Heidelberg," "Pont-à-Mousson," "Quedlinbourg," "Ravenne," "Salisbury." Not always content simply to suggest sources to his readers, Jaucourt occasionally uses the imperative to urge them to consult a work.

[7] Claude Jolly, ed., *Histoire des bibliothèques françaises*, 4 vols. (Paris: Promodis, 1988) 2: 235-67.

[8] Cf., for example, "Style," "Verve" (Jaucourt), "Critique" (Marmontel), "Génie" (Saint-Lambert), "Imagination," "Enthousiasme" (Voltaire).