



Creative Writing Crosses the Atlantic: An Attempt at Creating a Minor French Literature

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INTRODUCTION

Literary advice is, it appears, an Anglo-Saxon affair par excellence.¹ For more than a century, countries such as the United States, the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have presented extensive and varied literary advice offers, both for academic and amateur audiences (see Myers 1996; Dawson 2005; Marquis and Guy 2007; Wandor 2008). At the same time, in recent years, literary advice has increasingly crossed the borders of the English-language world (see Soukop 2011; Harper 2012, 2014). Inspired by the Anglo-American workshop model and the academic creative writing system, multiple regions in the world are witnessing a surge of literary advice, ranging from workshops to handbooks and online channels. In the European context, France represents this tendency most prominently (Grauby 2015). In spite of the nation's own longstanding *conseils* (advice) tradition and its literary prestige, local advice-makers are

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eager to integrate established methods from the overseas territories into their offers. This process of cultural transfer has been sparsely documented (Meyntjens 2018). In this chapter, I will shed light on the reception of the American poetics of creative writing in contemporary France, while focusing on *Outils du roman: Avec Malt Olbren sur les pistes et exercices du creative writing à l'américaine* (2016, *Tools of the Novel: Exploring American Creative Writing with Malt Olbren*)² by the experimental prose-writer and creative writing pioneer François Bon. This text, I argue, represents a broader dynamic in which French authors resort to a repertoire of American writing techniques in an attempt to reinvigorate French literature.

To conceptualize this dynamic I will employ Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "minor literature" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986). This choice has less to do with the concept's political dimension (which, as I will suggest, applies to the case of François Bon as well), than with the idea that a minor literature always operates in a system.³ It encompasses forms of writing that, in contrast to the great literature, refuse to imitate the canonical writers as well as genres of the past which do not perpetuate what the educational system considers to be models of style and are therefore incapable of conforming to the norms of a literary market based on repetition and calculated diversification. In spite of its dissident condition, a minor literature can only germinate against the backdrop of a great literature: It depends on the stylistic, thematic, and generic conventions that constitute either the canonical or commercial great literature. Additionally, in their work, Deleuze and Guattari are less interested in the eventual creation of a specific minor literature, than in a general reflection on the conditions of such a phenomenon: "We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions of every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature" (ibid., p. 18). As I will show, this emphasis on conditions rather than on actual production recurs when we consider the role that American poetics of creative writing plays in the French literary system today.

Deleuze and Guattari suggest that the relation between minor and great literature should not necessarily be considered within the confines of a nation, as the case of Kafka demonstrates. In this chapter, the minor literature for which a literary advice author like François Bon creates the conditions must be considered on two levels. Firstly, in the context of mainstream literature in France, which can be understood as a body of bestselling texts and works of writers who are actively present

in French media today (such as Michel Houellebecq and the Belgian Amélie Nothomb), and who evoke criticism from experimental authors like François Bon. Secondly, it exists at the level of American cultural hegemony,⁴ that French literary advice authors are simultaneously striving to resist. This results in an appropriation and *détournement*⁵ of the American poetics of creative writing, that also entails a critical take on the relation between literature and the dominant narrative media of today, most importantly English-language films and television series

CREATIVE WRITING IN FRANCE: THE ATELIER D'ÉCRITURE

In order to grasp what *Outils du roman* aims to accomplish, it is useful to very briefly outline the literary advice culture against which François Bon can be situated. Although less well-known than its American counterpart, France has a genuine literary advice tradition of its own, which can be traced back to a heterogeneous collection of texts produced during the “autonomization” of the literary field in the late nineteenth century (Bourdieu 1993; Grauby 2015; Meyntjens 2018). The canon of French literary *conseils* consists of Edmond and Jules de Goncourt’s *Journal* (1886–1896), Gustave Flaubert’s collected *Correspondance* (1887–1893) and the rhetorical handbooks of creative writing “guru” Antoine Albalat (1899–1925), all of which have consistently remained in print.⁶ In the twentieth century, the French literary advice tradition has been profoundly marked by the rise of *ateliers d’écriture* (writing ateliers). The *atelier d’écriture* movement does not replicate the American creative writing program, but has its own ideological and literary roots in the initiatives of the “Ligue internationale pour l’éducation nouvelle,” in the writings of pedagogue and school-reformer Célestin Freinet, and in the anti-institutional thought which sparked the revolts of May 1968.⁷

Most of the early *ateliers d’écriture* emphasize the emancipation of the individual and the creation of an egalitarian society, rather than the technical aspects of writing. Over the course of the past decades, the movement has become institutionalized (Rossignol 1996; Chateigner 2007; Oriol-Boyer 2013). From 1980 onwards, teachers have organized themselves in organizations like “Les Ateliers d’écriture Élisabeth Bing,” “ALEPH écriture,” and the “GFEN” (Groupe français d’éducation nouvelle). These organizations each placed different emphases on

writing, from GFEN's focus on the political, to Bing's more therapeutic aims, and ALEPH's emphasis on the realization of literary ambitions. Moreover, public institutions such as high schools, prisons, and cultural associations have increasingly sought to host writing workshops. Today, the *atelier d'écriture* movement has entered the French university (Sapiro and Rabot 2017). With a small number of universities offering Master programs in *création littéraire* (literary creation), France—alongside the Hispanic world—has become one of the pioneers in the development of academic writing curricula on the European continent (see Harnache in this book).

The methodology of the French writing teachers is derived from the practice of *écriture à contraintes* (constrained writing). This technique has, from the 1960s onward, been cultivated by experimental writers, most famously the literary collective OuLiPo (*Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*, or Workspace of Potential Writing), and is based on the premise that literary inventiveness is best stimulated by introducing constraints (Baetens and Poucel 2009). These creative constraints are typically formal (e.g., the prohibition of using the vowel “e,” a technique exploited by Georges Perec in *La Disparition* (1969, *The Disparition*)), but they can also be applied to matters of content (e.g., the imposition of a certain type of focalization). The techniques have been conveniently transformed into pedagogical tools in the framework of writing workshops, wherein participants are typically given a stimulus text and numerous constraints formulated by the instructor, in order to spark their creativity. It is however often overlooked that the OuLiPo, and especially the oeuvre of Perec, also contributed another element to the methodological toolbox of the French writing teacher, i.e., the urge to acquire knowledge about contemporary society through literary writing. Inspired by what can be termed Perec's sociological-anthropological writings, such as *Les Choses* (1965, *The Things*), *Espèces d'espaces* (1974, *Kinds of Spaces*) and *Tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien* (1975, *Attempt to Exhaust a Parisian Place*), French workshops use literature as a method of gathering insight into the myriad dimensions of reality, from the tissue of urban spaces, to social habits of consumption.

Finally, French literary workshops, contrary to the Anglo-Saxon systems of academic writing, are situated in the margins of the official literary system. Most French writing teachers, François Bon being a well-known example, oppose the notion of creative writing as a trajectory which leads to finished literary products and careers in creative writing.

Their method primarily intends, by contrast, to increase self-confidence and creativity. Likewise, from an institutional perspective, there is a gap between the domain of creative writing workshops (and related literary advice instances, like short story writing competitions, writing magazines, and writing handbooks) and the literary field itself. According to sociologist Claude Poliak, these phenomena belong to a *simili-champ littéraire*, or a “field resembling the literary field”: only a very small number of amateur writers will eventually enter the literary system (Anna Gavalda is frequently cited as a counter-example), and only very few consecrated authors will be active in the world of writing workshops. Over the past decade, however, the divide between these seemingly opposed literary camps has gradually lessened, notably with the implementation of creative writing workshops at French universities. In the French field, no one has pre-figured the gradual disappearance of intra-disciplinary literary borders more than François Bon.

FRANÇOIS BON’S *OUTILS DU ROMAN*

The most prominent representative of the *atelier d’écriture* movement, François Bon is a writer of experimental and engaged prose who started his career in the 1980s, and became involved with writing workshops from the 1990s onward. This resulted in the publication of *Tous les mots sont adultes* (2005, *All Words Are Mature*), an ambitious and systematic approach to creative writing that recalls the ideology of personal emancipation and the practice of “constrained writing” mentioned above. Since 1997, Bon also has a website, *tierslivre.net*, to promote his pedagogical views and writing exercises, and since 2013 he teaches writing at the arts school École nationale supérieure d’arts de Paris-Cergy.

Bon’s practice can be described, with another term borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari, as “rhizomatic.” It encompasses a multitude of thematic, generic, stylistic, and media-based threads, which are gradually fleshed out. In recent years, Bon has been branching out to the American literary canon, and to American creative writing methods. He made translations of classic works by Edgar Allan Poe, H. P. Lovecraft, and Ernest Hemingway, as well as of *Uncreative Writing* (2011) by controversial, Internet-inspired poet Kenneth Goldsmith (see Tsitsovits in this book). Moreover, in order to reflect more systematically on writing pedagogy in France, he started collecting and annotating an extensive corpus of American creative writing handbooks. In 2013, during the festival *Écrivains en*

bord de mer, Bon facilitated a panel on creative writing with the American writing instructors Cole Swensen, Thalia Field, and Laura Kasischke, and in 2016 he published, initially under the pseudonym Malt Olbren, the handbook *Outils du roman: Avec Malt Olbren sur les pistes et exercices du creative writing à l'américaine*.

This remarkable book first appeared as serial form in an online creative writing workshop offered on *tierslivre.net*. Bon introduced the text as a translation of a manuscript, entitled *Creative Writing No-Guide*, by a fictitious creative writing cult figure, Malt Olbren. This infamous and unorthodox teacher who passed away in 2004 was, according to Bon, a student of John Gardner and a fellow traveler of Raymond Carver. The manuscript, which Bon supposedly translated, was the basis of Olbren's workshops, but it unfortunately contained numerous imprecisions, contradictions, and gaps. The book, a slim volume of about 200 pages, comprises some twenty chapters and is divided into four parts: "Recommendations," "Narrations," "Constructions," and "Inventions."

The opening section "Recommendations" is both in form and content inspired by Comte de Lautréamont's *Poésies* (1870), whose anarchistic approach to writing is conveyed in author Harry Mathews's characterization: "Nothing is fixed or static. Stasis equals death" (Bon 2016, p. 19).⁸ The section contains an extensive list of "anti-advice on writing" (*ibid.*, p. 13). These absurd, nonsensical maxims are mostly intended to ridicule the simplistic formulas propagated by American writing handbooks. For example, in a *détournement* of the advice "kill your darlings," Bon writes: "Cut away the useless elements, they say: remove the useful and maintain the rest, say to yourself that music is rarely found in potatoes" (*ibid.*, p. 13). Similarly, he ironically criticizes the emphasis on action found in most handbooks, stating that "(a)ction is a narrative's engine: well, let them run if they want, and find out what a novel becomes when it stays in bed" (*ibid.*, p. 15).

In the other sections of the book, Bon sets out to enrich the French ateliers d'écriture, and by extension French literature as a whole, with techniques and practices from American creative writing. As Bon indicates in the preface: "I wanted to orient my practice of writing workshops towards the American forms of narrative writing – a literature and an approach for which I have the utmost respect" (*ibid.*, p. 9). In practice, this means that the chapters in section two to four all contain writing exercises inspired by the techniques found in English-language handbooks, for instance, an assignment to re-write based on the notion

“kill your darlings,” or exercises in dialogue, character, or genre-writing. All these concepts are, according to Bon, currently neglected in French literary advice culture. Moreover, Bon constantly refers to poems, short stories, and novels by American and British authors like Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Malcolm Lowry, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, John Dos Passos, John Steinbeck, and William Carlos Williams. These references not only reinforce the translated manuscript’s air of authenticity, they also situate the proposed techniques within a specific literary-historical framework.

MINOR LITERATURE IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

At this point, one may wonder how Bon positions himself vis-à-vis Anglo-American clichés like “show don’t tell,” “write what you know,” and “find your own voice,” as a model for the international development of literary advice and creative writing curricula. Indeed, at this point, my claim that François Bon instigates a minor literature by introducing this hegemonic poetics into the French field, might seem paradoxical. Is it rather not the case that *Outils du roman* yields to existing power dynamics in the transnational field of culture, by slavishly following a great, rather than a minor, literature? In order to capture the process of transference in *Outils du roman*, however, Bon’s strategies of irony, transformation and appropriation of the dominant poetics of creative writing must be taken into account.

Throughout the book, Bon does not leave the Anglo-American maxims intact, rather, he perversely reconstructs them into nonsensical aphorisms, that undermine the whole enterprise of a formula-driven creative writing. In the guise of Olbren, Bon presents a series of subtle transformations of established creative writing concepts, formulas, and techniques. An exercise in rewriting, for instance, is entitled “One fifth for William (Faulkner),” following the notion “kill your darlings” which is often accredited to Faulkner, and in a writing prompt for a minimalist style à la Raymond Carver, the rule is undermined in the emphatic urging to “(a)lways, always, always, always pare your story down. Only then does its character, its voice emerge” (ibid., p. 127). In the assignment “3, 2, 1, action,” Olbren/Bon adds that “(o)ur American particularity, and we are indeed proud of it, consists in the action. As we use it, the verb “doing” carries with it a historical density” (ibid., p. 78), drawing attention to the specificity of the supposedly universal rule of show don’t tell’.

One of the most telling instances of appropriation, however, can be found in the assignment “Author, cherish the crowd” from *Tools of the Novel’s* last section “Inventions,” which offers only two exercises that, in terms of aspiration, constitute the climax of the handbook. The first exercise is based on Edgar Allan Poe’s story “The Oval Portrait” (1842) and provides a blueprint for a short story in the style of Gothic fiction. Here, contrary to most of Bon’s propositions, which typically result in brief and sketchy fragments of prose, one encounters a layout for the creation of a completed story. The second assignment, “Author, cherish the crowd,” by contrast approaches writing from a different angle, not with the aim of “inventing” a short story, but rather inventing ways to write about crowds.

The premise underlying this assignment is that literature, in contrast to recent media like cinema and television, has little expertise in depicting large gatherings. Olbren/Bon alludes to a number of classic texts that form an exception to this rule, mostly texts from the French tradition such as Stendhal’s *La Chartreuse de Parme* (1839), Gustave Flaubert’s *L’Éducation sentimentale* (1869), and Emile Zola’s *Germinal* (1885), and concludes that contemporary literature, in times of a growing world population, crowded urban environments, and popular mass-events such as manifestations and festivals, would benefit from engaging with the question of the crowd. Bon presents this exercise by narrating the scene as his American alter ego Malt Olbren. He evokes a visit to John Gardner, who has been hospitalized as the result of a motorcycle accident. Olbren/Bon recounts how his efforts to chat with Gardner fail, because the latter is too much distracted by the images on his hospital room’s television, in the following conversation:

Did you notice, my dear Malt, (he didn’t say “my dear”, but who cares) the ease with which film and television arrange scenes with groups or large crowds?

Yes, I responded, without a doubt passionately.

Hey buddy, he went on (this is really how he speaks), I’m telling you: do we novelists know how to use group scenes as effectively and naturally as cinema and television

Let’s see, I answered, probably even more passionately this time.

No, *motherfucker* (excuse me for repeating my friend Gardner’s exact words), let’s write! (ibid., pp. 173-174)

After this dialogue, which transforms the creation of a writing exercise into a narrative, Olbren/Bon unveils the different steps or constraints of the exercise. He proposes to write about a crowd familiar to the author (“One, choosing your crowd”), to contemplate the multiple perspectives from which gatherings can be described (“Two, choosing and isolating your parameters”), to focalize whilst in movement (“Three, I urge you to navigate the crowd”), and finally, to write as if creating the voice-over for a film (“The voice-over, Malt, let them write the voice over!”) (ibid., p. 178).

By presenting the assignment in this way, Olbren/Bon stages the process of transfer which eventually leads to a French minor literature. In this *mise-en-scène*, Gardner is no longer an icon, an idolized and abstract representative of the American tradition of creative writing. He is portrayed as a character with visible flaws and qualities, a fictional being whose acts and ideas allow varied responses. The reader can simultaneously accept Gardner’s suggestions and learn from them, while also rejecting or adapting them according to personal tastes and views. Or, to put it differently, in the exercise, a space emerges for maneuvering to transform not only Gardner’s insights, but also, by extension, the creative writing tradition which he represents. The way in which this transformation in *Outils du roman* takes place is equally telling. Drawing on the French *atelier d’écriture* tradition, Bon re-writes Gardner’s suggestion for a literature of the crowd as a genuine constrained-writing exercise. He formulates creative constraints on the levels of theme, focalization, and style. Moreover, the goal of the exercise, in contrast to the goal of the assignment inspired by “The Oval Portrait,” is in line with the *atelier d’écriture* movement: the objective is not to write a publishable short story, but rather to acquiring critical insight into the role and dynamics of contemporary crowds. When Olbren/Bon incites students to write about “the political version ([of crowds], these great gatherings on public squares which make walls crumble and dictators step down” (ibid., p. 180), he appeals to the *potential* of literature to represent such assemblies. Whether, in fact, François Bon based his idea for literary descriptions of the masses on one of Gardner’s literary advice texts is not important. The character of the American writing teacher functions as a mediator, representative of something bigger. Gardner not just embodies the tradition of the American creative writing workshop, but there is more to this assignment. The fact Gardner became inspired while watching television

suggests a new direction for literature, inspired by visual images and the media.

Thus, Bon appears not only to have drawn inspiration from American creative writing workshops, but also from the Hollywood films which have shaped contemporary imagery of the public more than any other medium. In other words, in his design for a French minor literature, Bon moves beyond appropriating and transforming American creative writing techniques and concepts, and in so doing, he positions himself vis-à-vis the most dominant narrative medium today: American cinema and television, and by extension the industry of production as well.

MINOR LITERATURE IN THE FRENCH CONTEXT

This chapter employs the concept of minor literature on two levels: international and local. *Outils du roman* should not only be understood against the backdrop of Anglo-Saxon culture, but also against that of dominant, canonical, and commercially successful forms of writing in France. The selections from the book's preface, discussed above, illustrate how Bon seeks to enrich the French *atelier d'écriture* with approaches from American creative writing standards, in order to remedy a flaw that Bon registers in the *atelier d'écriture* itself, namely a lack of expertise when it comes to creating longer prose, but also with a more fundamental stake: the revival of French literature as such.

Undoubtedly, a primary motivation behind Bon's commitment as a writing teacher is his critical vision of the French established literature. This criticism comes in two shapes. Firstly, Bon's critique targets the French educational system and the literary texts being supported within and by this system (Bon 2005, p. 16). In his view, the classical literature that is taught in French high schools and universities suffers from a lack of expressive force, an inadequacy which is not necessarily situated in the texts, but rather in the temporal distance between the themes and forms found in students' daily lives and the works of authors like Jean Racine, Denis Diderot, Victor Hugo, and François-René de Chateaubriand. Bon argues that the more sensible approach would be to initiate young people into the world of letters with texts relevant to their own thematic sensibilities. The minor literature which Bon defends, and for which he seeks to shape the conditions through a handbook like *Outils du roman*, could bring solace on this level, not so much because Bon makes a plea for a youth-centered literature, but because he argues that meaningful forms

of writing can only come about in dialogue with the present: “To evolve, to submit to its jumps and its leaps, literature should constantly listen to the world” (Bon 2012, p. 20).

Furthermore, Bon is extremely skeptical of established literature with commercial success. The contemporary French literature market, he believes, runs on the constant repetition of standardized recipes and calculated diversification: “This era prefers what’s pale” (Bon 2005, p. 141), with the media promoting mediocre literary works which generate revenues and entertain the audience. By contrast, literature of real value, innovative forms of writing which shed light on the present world, have no place in this system regulated by star-authors and sales numbers. Bon’s position is very clear in his continuous critique on the *rentrée littéraire*, the highly mediatized opening of the French book year which takes place annually from the end of August until the beginning of November. He describes this event as a “normalizing and ever-growing cacophony on its way to fast suicide” comparing it to a “tap with lukewarm water.” In the autumn of 2017, he published a video series with reading advice under the title of “Anti-rentrée littéraire,” which can equally be understood as an attempt to construct a minor literature. Bon does not stand alone in this analysis of the French world of letters, it is part of the wider debate about the perceived crisis of the death of French literature, which in turn speaks to a larger ongoing discourse on the demise of French culture as such, found in popular media, in contributions of conservative authors such as Richard Millet and Éric Zemmour, and in specialized academic circuits. (Todorov 2007; Compagnon 2007).

While the accounts diverge depending on the commentators’ political preferences, and while some voices attempt to create some perspective (Viart and Demanze 2011; Gervais, 2016), the sense of crisis is very much alive in the French field of literature, and somewhat paradoxically, it has resulted in a heightened productivity. Different interventions (debates, pamphlets, essays, books) have generated an ongoing discussion about the past, present, and future of French literature. A more pragmatic, though less visible, line in this debate is precisely represented by the literary advice tendency represented by *Outils*. François Bon is not the sole author who, instead of presenting us with a method for writing publishable books, turns to the writing manual as a tool to overcome the cultural crisis. Advice texts by Olivier Cadiot, Martin Page, and Chloé Delaume, all attempt to establish “lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) leading to different views. Like Bon, these authors

oppose what they consider the excessive commercialization and media-tization of French literature, by drawing upon techniques and concepts from American creative writing texts. In *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* (2014, Manual of writing and survival), Martin Page turns to Ray Bradbury's *Zen in the Art of Writing* (1990) as a source of inspiration for a reflection on new forms of authorship. In *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi* (2008, Writing oneself. A User's Manual), Chloé Delaume approaches the French genre of autofiction from a how-to-write perspective, albeit in an idiosyncratic manner. In his experimental book *Histoire de la littérature récente* (2016, History of Recent Literature), finally, Olivier Cadiot parodies and transforms the typical commercial discourse of many literary advice texts.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has analyzed contemporary French literary advice culture from a comparative, transnational perspective, focusing on the ways in which French writing handbooks integrate elements from the American tradition of creative writing in an attempt at creating a so-called minor French literature. In particular, I demonstrated how François Bon's pseudonymously authored handbook *Outils du roman* submits American creative writing techniques to processes of *détournement*, appropriation, and transformation. The notion of minor literature applies to this strategy on two levels. On the one hand, it renews the well-worn clichés of an internationally dominant creative writing poetics by showing how the even more dominant cultural forms of American cinema and television, applied to creative writing, can offer new prompts to stimulate a genuinely innovative literature that is able to adequately represent the contemporary. On the other hand, minor literature refers to forms of writing which Bon attempts to develop, using American creative writing standards, in order to take his distance from the commercial and canonical works that dominate the French literary field.

More broadly, this chapter argues for the importance of examining works on literary advice when studying processes of literary transfer and change, which occurs via many pathways. Here too, translations play a role, as does the emergence of new media (as illustrated through the Gardner example from *Outils du roman*). Considering the growing global influence of creative writing, it is important to analyze the specificity of the transfers in the domain of literary advice, in order to account for

changes in local literary production. In the case of the French field, it remains to be seen whether the creative writing-inspired efforts of François Bon and his fellow advice authors will eventually materialize into a genuine minor literature. “Let’s see,” Malt Obren says in *Outils du roman*. “No, *motherfucker*,” John Gardner answers with less hesitation, “let’s write!” (Bon 2016, p. 174).

NOTES

1. In the present text, the terms “Anglo-Saxon” and “American” are used in a generalizing way. Rather than oversight of the author, this usage reflects the way in which French literary advice authors refer to American creative writing as a monolith.
2. All translations from the work of François Bon will be by the author.
3. Previous research has connected François Bon’s oeuvre to the concept of “minor literature” (Chadderot 2017). The link between Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and François Bon is a logical one: There are numerous theoretical and poetic similarities, and Bon regularly refers to Deleuze, especially the latter’s *Cinéma 1* (1983) and *Cinéma 2* (1985).
4. The issue of American cultural dominance is a standard trope in both popular and critical discourse in France (Guerlain 1997; Kuisel 2012).
5. As I use it, the concept of *détournement* recalls the situationist definition of deceptive *détournement* as the reappropriation “of an intrinsically significant element, which derives a different scope from the new context” (Debord and Wolman 2006 p. 16). It signals a text’s relocation from one context to another in a strategic attempt to subvert its meaning. It especially signifies a strategic attempt to appropriate the images and language of commerce and industry, and use it against the capitalist system itself.
6. In terms of poetics and popular impact, Antoine Albalat’s *L’Art d’écrire enseigné en vingt leçons* (1899, *The Art of Writing in Twenty Lessons*), *La Formation du style par l’assimilation des Auteurs* (1902, *Developing One’s Style by Assimilating Other Writers’ Style*), and *Comment on devient écrivain* (1925, *How One Becomes a Writer*) could convincingly be likened to William Strunk and E. B. White’s *The Elements of Style* (1918). Like this American classic, Albalat’s books have contributed to the popular notion that everyone can learn how to write, mostly by focusing on issues of style such as clarity, coherence, and variation. His work is still widely available today.
7. Célestin Freinet is a noted French educational reformer and founder of the Freinet Modern School Movement. He developed his ideas and teaching methods during the interbellum, parallel with thinkers like John

Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Maria Montessori who were involved in the *Ligue internationale pour l'éducation nouvelle* (Rossignol 1996).

8. Harry Mathews was an author and translator, a close friend to Georges Perec, and the first American member of the OuLiPo.

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