KU LEUVEN

FACULTEIT LETTEREN

Contemporary Literary Advice in France.

Adopting, Adapting and Transforming American Creative Writing Handbooks.

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Proefschrift aangeboden tot het behalen van de graad van Doctor in de Letterkunde

Leuven, september 2018

Front cover image: Dmitri Prigov, *Composition*, 1972–1973.

Dankwoord

Een boek schrijven is een solitaire bezigheid, het staat gedrukt in zowat alle schrijfhandboeken. De totstandkoming van dit doctoraat vormt geen uitzondering op deze regel. Nochtans had ik het niet kunnen schrijven zonder de aanwezigheid en steun van een heel aantal mensen. Hen wil ik hier graag bedanken.

Mijn dank gaat eerst en vooral uit naar Anneleen Masschelein. Zij heeft mij de kans gegeven om me vier jaar aan dit onderzoeksproject te wijden. Daarnaast heeft ze me steeds op een open en positieve manier begeleid. Onze vele gesprekken hebben me geïnspireerd en gemotiveerd, iets wat zeker in de laatste maanden van dit project belangrijk was. Ik bedank ook graag Dirk De Geest. Zijn commentaar op een eerdere versie van mijn doctoraat is bepalend geweest voor de plooi waarin het werk uiteindelijk is gevallen. Ik denk met plezier terug aan onze gesprekken over allerlei onderwerpen, en aan de vele filosofische inzichten die tussendoor aan bod kwamen.

Verder bedank ik Jan Baetens die steeds bereid was om mijn artikels te lezen en grondig te bespreken, Ben De Bruyn voor zijn nuttige opmerkingen tijdens mijn doctoraatscommissie, en Reine Meylaerts voor de feedback op een paper die belangrijk was voor het eindelijke opzet van mijn onderzoek. Ik dank ook Catherine Combes voor het grondig nalezen van mijn tekst.

Hartelijke dank gaat uit naar alle leden van de onderzoekseenheid Literatuurwetenschap en de Master Culturele Studies. Het is een plezier en een voorrecht om deel uit te maken van deze groep gemotiveerde onderzoekers. Ik denk in het bijzonder aan de doctorandi met wie ik samen begon: Jan Vanvelk, Kristof Van Gansen, Tom Willaert, Tom Serpieters, Marcela Scibiorska, en Laura Cernat. Verder denk ik ook aan het enthousiaste culturele studies-team met wie ik meerdere winterse weekends in Oostende mocht doorbrengen: Fred Truyen, Leni Van Goidsenhoven, Marijke Malfroidt, Mieke Bleyen, Arne Van Raes, Laura Smith, Thomas Van Parys, Charlotte Pylyser, Laurence Van Nuijs, Jonas Rutgeerts. Mee Yee Chan wil ik bedanken voor de ontvangst in de bibliotheek – bij momenten mijn tweede thuis – en Mia Hamels voor alle praktische ondersteuning. Dank ook aan Peter van Copy De Raaf voor zijn hulp bij de vormgeving van dit proefschrift.

Ik richt in het bijzonder een woord van dank aan mijn ex- en huidige kantoorgenoten Marieke Winkler, Nieves Rosendo, Heidi Peeters en Bram Lambrecht voor het fijne gezelschap en de mooie momenten. Daarnaast bedank ik Michiel Rys voor zijn vele welkome bezoekjes aan ons kantoor, Clarissa Colangelo voor haar aanstekelijke enthousiasme, en Stijn De Cauwer voor de vele ochtendlijke overlegmomenten en de regelmatige dosis relativering. Jullie zorgen ervoor dat het fijn vertoeven is op het derde verdiep van het Erasmus-huis.

Ik wil het Junior Mobility programma van KU Leuven bedanken voor de beurs waarmee ik drie unieke maanden in Montréal heb kunnen doorbrengen, alsook Bertrand Gervais en de hele equipe van

labo NT2 voor de goede ontvangst. Daarnaast bedank ik van harte Jean Hanna, Ilies Reguieg, Maria-José Vargas om mij ook in Canada thuis te doen voelen – un grand merci les amis.

Ik wil graag alle vrienden en familieleden bedanken die me de laatste vier jaar van dichtbij of veraf aangemoedigd en geïnspireerd hebben. In het bijzonder bedank ik mijn ouders Luc Meyntjens en Magda Apers voor hun voortdurende steun. Tot slot wil ik Anna Sashchenko bedanken voor haar geduld en haar geloof in mij. Jouw liefde verrast me telkens opnieuw.

Ik draag dit proefwerk op aan Alice Verbraecken, Maria Van Nespen en Georges Apers, voor de vele warme herinneringen.

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Introduction: Towards a Transatlantic Analysis of Literary Advice Texts

Nowadays, literary writing has become a prominent part of our popular culture. An increasing number of people, with very diverse backgrounds, are practicing writing everyday (Poliak, 2006; Chateigner, 2007). And indeed, everyone has their own reasons to write. Some want to pen down their memoirs or family history. Others hope to find therapeutic relief by writing down their life stories. Others participate in short story contests or slam poetry championships in pursuit of the dream of becoming a published author. Certainly, this multitude of budding writers does not operate in a vacuum. In fact, these writers are being catered to by what we can call a "literary advice industry" (Hilliard: 2006): a system that entails creative writing workshops, writing groups, writing retreats, YouTube channels on writing, literary blogs, online courses, writing contests, writing coaching, writing software and, last but not least, an extensive meta-literature on how to write. This literary advice industry meets people's ambitions halfway. It appeals to their desires and anxieties and tells them to "be creative" and "realize the dream of being a writer". At the same time, while making the dream attainable, it gives them all sorts of practical advice. Handbooks explain "how to unlock the writer within you" (Fletcher, 2003), "how to write a damn good novel" (Frey, 2010) and "how to write short stories that sell" (Bettany, 2014). YouTube videos show "how to write convincing dialogue", "how to get your book published" and provide "Creative writing tips, advice and lessons from bestseller Stephen King". Blogs such as "the Write Practice" and "Courage to Create" advise on "finding a literary agent" and enlist "ten writing tips from ten great writers".

This dissertation zooms in on one of the central phenomena within the contemporary literary advice industry: literary advice books. This umbrella term designates an extensive body of texts that provide advice on writing and becoming a writer. It comprises a range of genres, from popular how-to-write handbooks to essays on the craft of fiction by established writers like E.M. Forster, John Gardner and Milan Kundera, to memoirs by famous authors such as Marguerite Duras, V.S. Naipaul and Stephen King. The tradition of literary advice books is particularly prominent in the Anglo-Saxon world. There, these texts emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, in the context of what historian Andrew Levy has called a "creative writing revolution" (1993: 77): a popular movement of would-be writers which was supported by a network of academics, publishers and short story magazines. While this revolution somewhat lost momentum from the 1920s onwards, American literary advice books have been going strong ever since. In the course of the twentieth century, they have come to represent a democratic alternative to the more elite creative writing workshops that have been an established part of American universities since the 1950s (Myers, 1993; McGurl, 2009;

Peary, 2014). Recently, scholars have noted a revival of creative writing handbooks. Anneleen Masschelein and Dirk De Geest speak of a "new wave" (2016: 92) of literary advice towards the end of the twentieth century, marked by a diversification of the handbook offer under the impulse of a saturated marketplace. They describe the emergence of specialized formats for popular genres like erotic fiction, life writing, romance novel and fantasy, parodic formats like 'how-not-to-write', and literary advice software. Most importantly, they contend that the new wave is characterized by a shift towards the highly pragmatic how-to-write format.

The most debated genre among the literary advice books is probably the how-to-write handbook. For many critics, this genre epitomizes the recipe-based and money-driven literary advice industry (Levy, 1993; Wandor, 2008). How-to-write books claim to dispense techniques and rules for writing (i.e. a poetics) that will lead to commercial success on the literary marketplace. They present this poetics by means of catchphrases like *show don't tell*, *write what you know*, *find your own voice* and *kill your darlings*. These formulas are typically denounced by critics (Westbrook, 2004; Wandor, 2008; Goldsmith, 2011), which is mainly due to the fact that the handbooks fail to situate their poetics within a specific historical context. Indeed, creative writing handbooks present a poetics with universalist pretensions, making little effort to contextualize the techniques that are being laid down: where and when did these techniques emerge? Why did they emerge there and then? This poetics is presented as if it could capture readers' attention anywhere, regardless of the context in which it is being applied. Moreover, it is legitimated by its continued success on the literary marketplace. These norms are universal, the handbooks suggest, because they have succeeded in capturing their readers' attention from Antiquity until today.

Working against this universalist doxa, my dissertation explores what happens when this body of concepts, formulas, techniques and representations (i.e. this universalist poetics) present in the American creative writing handbook turns up in a different tradition that has developed its own views on the processes of writing and becoming a writer. How does the encounter between the seemingly universal and the local plays out? I will investigate the reception of the American creative writing handbook and its formulaic and universalist poetics in a European context rich with local literary (advice) traditions. More specifically, I will study the reception and transformation of the creative writing handbook in the context of literary advice in France today.

1. Literature

I situate this study in three research traditions: 1) historical studies of creative writing; 2) sociological research about contemporary popular writing culture in France; 3) critical analysis of the central role of craft and creativity in contemporary culture, both as concepts and practices.

History of Creative Writing

When I started out this investigation, it seemed that little had been written about creative writing handbooks and their place in the popular writing culture, but more in-depth research revealed the existence of a number of books on the history of creative writing that proved to be very useful. This research was useful in at least three ways: it demonstrated how handbooks are typically embedded in broader advice-industries; it uncovered the universalist, formula-driven and market-oriented character of American creative writing handbook poetics; it made me familiar with the existing literary advice traditions in France.

In *The Culture and Commerce of the American Short Story* (1993), literary scholar Andrew Levy explains that American creative writing handbooks appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century in the context of a budding short story market populated by magazines that were looking to publish new, upcoming literary talents. Levy pays attention to how this emergence of the handbook fits within changes that are occurring in higher education — especially the establishment of English as an academic discipline (1993: 83) — as well as within dominant ideological visions that profess a belief in industrial progress. According to him, early creative writing handbooks are part of the modern science-based industry in which scientific knowledge is applied to the production of commodities (1993: 84). In a similar vein, historian Christopher Hilliard's *To Exercise Our Talents. The Democratization of Writing in Britain* (2006) details how writing emerged as an organized pursuit in the U.K. in the first decades of the twentieth century. Hilliard brings to light the handbooks, the networks, the magazines and the correspondence schools that played a role in promoting writing as an activity that should be practiced by ordinary people, particularly factory workers and women. He explains that this "literary-advice industry" (2006: 21) primarily capitalized on one idea: "The lesson that the literary marketplace had some rules, and that those rules could be learned" (2006: 33).

If Levy's and Hilliard's books offer significant insights into the advice systems in which writing handbooks participate, other historical studies focus on the poetics that can be found in these handbooks. Perhaps surprisingly, I discovered that the most detailed descriptions of writing handbook poetics appeared in historical studies of creative writing workshops like D. G. Myers's *The Elephants Teach. Creative Writing Since 1880* (1996), Paul Dawson's *Creative Writing and the New Humanities* (2005) and Mark McGurl's *The Program Era. Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (2009). These books deal neither with popular writing culture as such, nor with creative writing handbooks. Rather, they analyze the development of academic creative writing workshops in the United States. Yet, in their attempt to describe the poetics of these university-based workshops, these literary historians resort to the adages and formulas for which the writing handbooks are so infamous. As Mark McGurl notes: "To be sure, no self-respecting creative writing teacher of the present day would be

caught dead using such hackneyed phrases [as *write what you know*, *show don't tell* and *find your own voice*] without heavy scare quotes, but I believe they accurately frame the implicit poetics of the program" (2009: 34).

D. G. Myers's *The Elephants Teach* and Paul Dawson's *Creative Writing and the New Humanities* go a long way in uncovering the poetics of creative writing. These books describe the literary, philosophical and pedagogical origins of the writing workshop. Myers's interest lies in describing the foundational moment of the creative writing workshop as minutely as possible. In doing so, he incorporates comments from a host of poets and teachers, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Robert Frost, John Dewey, Robert Lowell and Ezra Pound. Creative writing teacher Paul Dawson, on the other hand, sets out to rethink the practice of creative writing for the twenty-first century. For this purpose, he seeks first of all to pinpoint the specificity of creative writing poetics and pedagogy by tracing some of its most famous formulas back to their origins: *reading as a writer*; *show don't tell*; *find your own voice*. Mark McGurl, on his part, is not so much interested in describing the creative writing workshop per se, but rather in tracing the effects of the writing workshop program on the American literary production in the second half of the twentieth century. He presents novels and short stories by authors such as Philipp Roth, John Barth, Flannery O'Connor and Raymond Carver and demonstrates how these texts translate the poetics and institutional dynamics of the creative writing program into fiction. Significantly, he uses the handbook formulas w*rite what you know*, *show don't tell* and *find your own voice* to supply his exposé with periodization. In particular, he integrates these formulas to distinguish periods that perceive writing as a self-expressive activity (*write what you know*; *find your own voice*) from periods that highlight writing as a technical craft (*show don't tell*).

If, at first, it seemed that little had been written about creative writing handbooks in the Anglo-Saxon world, it appeared that even less research had been done on literary advice texts in France. Yet, in the second year of my PhD project, an essential book on the topic was published: Françoise Grauby's *Le Roman de la création. Entre mythes et pratiques* (2015). In terms of approach and objectives, this groundbreaking study has many points in common with my dissertation. In the blurb of the book, literary scholar Grauby formulates its core problem as follows:

> Un phénomène nouveau est sur le point de modifier en profondeur la représentation traditionnelle, vieille de plus de deux siècles, de la création littéraire: l'atelier d'écriture. Entre une pratique scripturale de plus en plus ouverte et un système qui repose encore sur une conception sacrée de la littérature, du moins en France, une situation inédite s'annonce: les mythes de l'écriture et de l'écrivain sont-ils en passe d'être détrônés? (2015: back cover)

In light of the current popularity of *ateliers d'écriture*, Françoise Grauby investigates whether traditional representations of authorship and writing are giving way to new ideas. More precisely, she examines whether romantic notions of the author as genius and of literary creation as spontaneous invention — the myths to which Grauby's title refers — are gradually giving way to other, perhaps more technical and realist, ideas. In order to pursue this research, Grauby does not describe the organization of leisure writing in contemporary France, nor does she interrogate the views of amateur writers through interviews (as the sociological studies which I will present below do). Instead, she analyzes a large number of texts that speak about the various facets of authorship and writing: vocation, inspiration, collaboration, creation. In other words, Grauby examines the representations of authorship and writing as they appear in literary advice texts.

Given the resemblance between Grauby's work and my dissertation, it is useful to point out the differences between our respective studies. For one, my research zooms in more resolutely on contemporary books, moving beyond Françoise Grauby's time span. Although Grauby situates her work against the backdrop of current developments (the popularity of *ateliers d'écriture*; changes of the notion of authorship under the impulse of digitalization), she mainly analyzes literary advice texts written by authors that one would associate more readily with the previous century. While she devotes an important section of her study to "l'acte créateur dans les manuels d'écriture" (2015: 176), she nonetheless primarily discusses theoretical texts by Jean-Paul Sartre, Raymond Queneau, Julien Gracq, Roland Barthes and Jean Ricardou, interviews with Michel Leiris, Michel Butor, Nathalie Sarraute, Hélène Cixous, and Patrick Modiano, and writing handbooks by Remy de Gourmont, Antoine Albalat, André Gide, Rainer Maria Rilke, Max Jacob and Raymond Roussel. In this dissertation, I draw extensively upon Grauby's illuminating historical work, however, my own close readings are primarily performed on advice texts from the 21st century.

A second point of contrast concerns the focus of our close readings. Grauby primarily analyzes the ways in which literary advice texts depict the multiple dimensions of authorship and writing. Generally put, she attempts to point out how the proposed representations draw upon or divert from romantic ideology. This dissertation, by contrast, strives to go beyond an analysis of representation. Certainly, representation will be a major issue in my study, and I have learned from Grauby's study in this regard. Yet, at the same time, I strive to open up the discussion to questions of poetics and technique. In other words, I will not only be concerned with "how writing appears" in these texts, but also with "which forms of writing" are actually being promoted by these texts.

Furthermore, Grauby's analysis is essentially diachronic. It explores how representations of authorship and writing in French literary advice books transform over time. This dissertation, on the other hand, combines diachronic and synchronic perspectives. It conjures up older French literary advice traditions in order to trace changes on the levels of poetics and representations. But, more

prominently, it also studies the multiple relationships between the American and the French bodies of literary advice. In particular, it investigates strategies of criticism, imitation, parody, adaptation, *détournement* and transformation on the part of French advice authors when confronted with American creative writing handbooks. Françoise Grauby, by contrast, only mentions American handbooks when she notes: "On connaît la faveur dont jouissent, dans les pays anglo-saxons, les manuels d'apprentissage […] En France, [par contre], les manuels d'écriture font une percée timide" (2015: 176-177).

Sociology of Popular Writing

In addition to these histories of creative writing, I situate this dissertation in a tradition of sociology of literature. Sociological studies of literature depend foremost on quantitative methodology through surveys and on qualitative interviews. Whereas my own research is text-centered rather than quantitative or interview-based, I learned much about the system of amateur writing to which literary advice books belong by closely reading these sociological studies. More precisely, these books showed me how literary advice texts in French are part of a broader system that emerged in the last two decades of the previous century and that is driven by phenomena such as short story writing contests, writing magazines, creative writing workshops and amateur poetry readings and publications.

An essential work in this regard is Claude Poliak's *Aux Frontières du champ littéraire. Sociologie des écrivains amateurs* (2006). In this book, Poliak studies the popular phenomenon of short story writing contests in France. By analyzing extensive surveys, he sheds light on the attitudes, anxieties, desires and representational habits of the individuals who participate in these contests (i.e., these amateurs' views on questions such as: how does one become a writer? how/where/when/why does one write? how does the literary field operate?). Moreover, Poliak uncovers the existence of an organized field of leisure writing, with its own audience of amateur writers and its institutional players such as amateur publishers, contests, magazines, writing prizes, workshops, handbooks, to which he refers as the "simili-champ littéraire" (2006: 2) or, as I will call it, the "pseudo-field of literature". According to Poliak, this field emerges in the 1980s in the wake of a stream of critique against mechanisms of exclusion in the domain of cultural production on the one hand — a critique that originates in the countercultural thought of the sixties —, and as a result of a new politics of culture on the other.

In *Une Société littéraire. Sociologie d'un atelier d'écriture* (2007), Frédéric Chateigner describes the origins and the development of the French equivalent to the American creative writing workshop: the *atelier d'écriture*. Chateigner's book demonstrates how these French creative writing workshops, after an initial, more experimental decade in the 1970s, become increasingly professionalized and

institutionalized during the last two decades of the twentieth century. Based on interviews, the book's last section provides an insight into the sociological backgrounds, motives, dreams and anxieties of those who participate in an *atelier d'écriture*. On a similar note, *Les Poètes amateurs. Approche sociologique d'une conduite culturelle* (2001) by Aude Mouaci proposes a typology of amateur poets. She specifically zooms in on the poets' representation of their own writing practice, something which has encouraged me to pay close attention to the representations of writing and authorship in the French writing handbooks.

Other post-Bourdieusian sociology that has helped me to develop my thoughts has been provided by Bernard Lahire, Jérôme Meizoz, Gisèle Sapiro and Cécile Rabot. These scholars do not write directly about popular writing culture, but they offer interesting ideas to develop a more accurate understanding of this phenomenon. In *La Condition littéraire: la double vie des écrivains* (2006), Bernard Lahire sheds light on the sociological and financial condition of writers and unveils that most writers have to do second jobs to guarantee their income. In this way, he problematizes the distinction between amateur and professional writers and even Bourdieu's concept of the literary field itself. In *Postures littéraires. Mises en scènes modernes de l'auteur* (2007), Jérôme Meizoz describes the crucial role that literary postures, that is, the manner in which authors present themselves through discourse and images (e.g. photographs), play in guiding the interpretation of literary texts. Meizoz's exposition fine-tuned my understanding of the multiple ways in which authorship can be represented. Lastly, Gisèle Sapiro and Cécile Rabot's impressive study *Profession? Écrivain* (2017) demonstrates how authorship is currently appearing more and more like a profession in France. It provided me with a way to understand the emergence of writing handbooks in France, which fits within this professionalization of authorship.

Critical Analysis of Creativity and Craft

Finally, this dissertation also builds on a tradition of critical thought about the roles of creativity and craft in contemporary culture. I will not refer to these writings explicitly, yet, these texts have helped me advance my understanding of the literary advice book as a complex phenomenon that reflects a number of core ideas that shape people's views and behaviors in Western societies today. To put it differently, far from being a marginal or isolated phenomenon, as it might appear at first, the literary advice book touches upon essential issues at the heart of our current economic, political and educational systems: how do we think about creativity — that most positively charged of terms — when this concept leads more and more people to pursue highly demanding career paths without social protection? Which model of creative work — that is, which (sustainable) model of making things

— should we endorse in times of job-hopping, nebulous organizational structures, constantly changing market demands, and detrimental processes of global production and consumption?

With regard to creativity, a number of sociological studies analyze the role of this concept — together with related terms such as flexibility, potential, talent, human capital, entrepreneurialism and the ability to adapt — within current systems of labor (Sennett, 1998; McGee, 2005; Menger, 2005; Sennett, 2006; Menger, 2014). Cultural theorist Angela McRobbie's *Be Creative. Making a Living in the New Culture Industries* (2016) was particularly enlightening in that regard. In this critical book, McRobbie exposes how the romantic dream of the creative life, diffused extensively by media and education, leads a generation of young people, the majority of which women, into precarious forms of freelance work without social protection. McRobbie calls this dynamic "the creativity dispositif" (2016: 15). This dispostif, she explains, should be understood as "an immensely pedagogical invitation" which is "encouraging rather than coercive" (2016: 15). It operates by means of a "panoply of instructive discourses" (2015: 9) and incites people to become hard-working, disciplined and always cheery creative entrepreneurs. Furthermore, she explains that the realization of this romance of passionate/creative work, in many cases, is being inhibited by mechanisms of exclusion based on gender, class, age, geographic location and ethnicity.

Literary advice books, especially the hands-on how-to-write handbooks, can readily be understood to participate in Angela McRobbie's "creativity dispositif". Indeed, these texts propose not only rules for writing, but also lifestyle advice. They explain that in order to fulfill the dream of becoming a writer, people have to assume responsibility for the ways in which they lead their lives: the handbooks point to the importance of strict discipline and routine; they warn their readers that they are their own worst enemies in not achieving their literary goals; they give tips on how to maintain healthy lifestyles, ranging from advice on eating habits to descriptions of useful yoga exercises; they indicate the importance of solitude; they tell their readers to invest less time in social activities, friends and even family; most importantly, they constantly remind their readers that writing is very, very hard work.

Other books that have nourished my thinking about literary advice handbooks deal with the topic of craft. A number of historical studies describe the various meanings that have been attributed to the concept of craft over time (Dormer, 1997; Adamson, 2007). Other studies zoom in on craft practices in the contemporary creative economy (Luckman, 2015). I have learned the most from sociologist Richard Sennett's analysis of craft in his pivotal book *The Craftsman* (2008). In this study, Sennett reflects on the conditions for doing good work. He presents a broad view of craftsmanship, defining it as "the desire to do a job well for its own sake" (2008: 34). Craftsmanship is an attitude that is applicable to a potentially endless number of practices. As a result, the examples of craft given by Sennett are diverse, ranging from contemporary software-developers, to surgeons, antique methods

for brick making and Medieval guilds, Eastern techniques for archery and musical instruction. By analyzing the ways in which these makers deal with materials, tools and technology, by studying their authoritative and cooperative ties and the ways they acquire skill through practice, repetition, trial and error, Sennett draws important lessons about favorable working conditions.

In the context of this dissertation on literary advice handbooks, Sennett's take on craft has incited me to reflect on a number of issues: What are the conditions for effective transfers of complicated sets of knowledge and skills from one person to another (from handbook author to apprentice writer)? What are the roles of detailed instruction, ambiguity, difficulty, letting go, personal initiative and tools in these processes of transfer and learning? What are the conditions for collective creation (when one attempts to write in a workshop for example)? Which elements make people practice a certain activity such as writing in the long term? Even if I do not answer these questions explicitly in the course of this dissertation, they certainly have guided my analysis. What is more, over the course of this research project, they have inspired me to explore the world of literary advice books with continued curiosity.

2. Corpus

In order to perform my research, I had to assemble a corpus of literary advice books in French. This took up more time than I initially expected. Looking back, I would even argue that assembling and organizing this corpus was not so much a preparatory step to carry out my actual analysis, but in fact a substantial part of the research itself. Commentators have pointed out that finding creative writing handbooks in the U.S. is an easy matter (Grauby, 2015; Bon, 2015). Indeed, it only takes a trip to a big bookstore such as Barnes & Noble to encounter dozens of literary advice books. In France, by contrast, this is hardly the case. Big bookstores such as FNAC hardly carry more than five books on the topic of how-to-write. Nevertheless, over the course of four years, I managed to compose a corpus of 246 literary advice books in French.

I composed the corpus in three ways. First, I performed a number of search queries on *Amazon.fr* and investigated that website's Art d'écrire section, which provided the bulk of the corpus.[1] Second, I visited collections of French writing advice in libraries, in particular the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ). Finally, I consulted the bibliographies of the literary advice texts that I found, which gave me access to lesser-known and older titles. The earliest text dates from 1976 (Elisabeth Bing's *atelier d'écriture* text *Et je nageai jusqu'à la page*) and the latest, Pierre Ménard's (pseudonym of writer Philippe Diaz) *Comment écrire au quotidien,* from 2018. I took 1976 as

[1] The search queries were: atelier d'écriture, manuel d'écriture, (comment) écrire, guide d'écriture, (comment) devenir écrivain, écriture créative, (comment) écrire un roman, (comment) être publié.

a starting point for this corpus of contemporary advice books because the sociologists of literature in France note that, from the end of the seventies onwards, popular writing becomes an increasingly organized and institutionalized pursuit (Rossignol, 1996; Poliak, 2006; Chateigner, 2007). What is more, 1976 is the year of publication of *atelier d'écriture* facilitator Élisabeth Bing's classic writing memoir *Et je nageai jusqu'à la page*.

I present the corpus in Annex 1 of this dissertation. There, the corpus is organized following a typology of advice genres. It contains 136 how-to-write handbooks, 47 writing guides and 63 *atelier d'écriture* handbooks. Further, the texts are ordered chronologically by date of publication. If a text has appeared in different editions over the years, it is included under the year of its earliest edition. The later editions are indicated in the same entry. Certain texts were published before 1976 (e.g. Max Jacob's *Conseils à un jeune poète*) but are still included in the corpus since I consider them to be part of the contemporary literary advice offer. In Annex 1, they can be found under the year of their first publication from 1976 on. I have also included French translations of advice texts written in English, German, Russian and Spanish in the corpus, since, just like the older advice texts, these translations shape the contemporary body of advice texts in French. Notable examples would be the French translations of Rainer Maria Rilke's *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter*, Stephen King's *On Writing. A Memoir of the Craft* (2000) and Mario Vargas Llosa's *Cartas a un joven novelista* (2006).

3. Structure

This dissertation follows a two-fold structure. In chapters one to three, I develop a model of standard American creative writing *formulas*, local French *representations* and a typology of advice *genres*. Such a model allows me to both uncover the main tendencies that appear in my corpus of advice texts, and to point out the diversity that characterizes this same corpus. In chapters four to six, I perform a number of close readings of contemporary literary advice books. The order in which I present these case studies follows a particular logic: I move from texts that remain predominantly faithful to the American creative writing handbook format, to texts that depart from it in increasingly radical ways. I also indicate this logic by means of the concepts which I use in the titles of these chapters: "adaptation" (chapter four), "*détournement*" (chapter five) and "transformation" (chapter six).

In the first chapter, I trace the origins of the American literary advice tradition back to Edgar Allan Poe's pragmatist poetics as exposed in "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846). I show that Poe's reader-oriented approach to writing was later given a commercial turn in the boom of early twentieth century short story handbooks. Furthermore, I discuss the formulas that take up a prominent place in American creative writing handbooks: *write what you know*, *find your own voice*, show *don't tell*, *kill your darlings*. In later chapters, I demonstrate that these formulas become the subject of criticism,

parody, imitation, interpretation and transformation on the part of contemporary literary advice authors in France.

In the second chapter, I describe the representations of writer, writing process and literary field as found in local French advice traditions. I zoom in on the representations of the martyr-writer and the scientist-writer proposed by what I call the neo-romantic *conseils* tradition and the procedural advice tradition respectively. Just like the creative writing formulas, these representations are central to understand contemporary literary advice in France. In this dissertation, the notion of "representation" draws upon the British cultural studies tradition's definition of this term. In the book chapter "The Work of Representation" (1997), Stuart Hall speaks of representation as the "production of meaning through language" (7). He argues that ideas, objects and practices do not have so much an essential meaning in themselves, but that they are constantly being given meaning by the way people speak about them, depict them, criticize them, compare them to other things and classify them. Invoking a definition from the Oxford Dictionary, Hall notes: "To represent something is to describe or depict it, to call it up in the mind by description or portrayal or imagination; to place a likeness of it before us in our mind or in the senses" (16). Likewise, in this dissertation, "representations" refers to the ways in which concepts and ideas are being described and depicted in literary advice texts in French. In particular, I will focus on the ways in which ideas like authorship, writing, and literary field are being represented. On some occasions, I will also use the terms "image" and "imagery". These should be considered as synonymous with the notion of "representation".

In the third chapter, I establish a typology of contemporary literary advice in France, exposing four genres that structure the local body of texts. I identify U.S. modelled how-to-write handbooks, autobiographical writing guides, French *atelier d'écriture* handbooks and methodological advice texts on the writing process. My approach to genre draws strongly upon John Frow's views. Genres, Frow points out, are sets of "conventional and highly organized constraints on the production and the interpretation of meaning" (Frow, 2015: 10). They "shape and guide, in the way that a builder's form gives shape to a pour of concrete, or a sculptor's mould shapes and gives structure to its materials. Generic structure both enables and restricts meaning, and is a basic condition for meaning to take place" (Frow, 2015: 10). Genres are tools that facilitate the creation and the interpretation of individual texts. At the same time, individual texts do not so much "belong" to genres as perform them. For instance, texts can have features that explore and transgress the limits of genre conventions, thereby modifying the genre itself. As a result, the genres that I will discuss are not so much solid taxonomic classes, but, as Wai Chee Dimock puts it, "fields at once emerging and ephemeral, defined over and over again by new entries that are still produced" (2007: 1379).

Equipped with this model of American *formulas*, local French *representations* and a typology of *genres*, in the second part of this dissertation (chapters four to six), I will perform a number of close-

readings on contemporary literary advice texts in French. To describe how these texts re-use the American creative writing model, its poetics, its formulas, and its techniques, I will use the concepts of "adaptation" (chapter four), "détournement" (chapter five), and "transformation" (chapter six) as the red thread in the discussion.

In the chapter "Adaptation", I discuss how French how-to-write handbooks adapt the American model to the national context by infusing it with references to local literature and culture, with local representations of authorship and writing, and with local writing techniques. My use of the term "adaptation" can be traced back to Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins's poststructuralist take on adaptations when they define them as inevitable re-workings that are necessary to foster understandings of cultural products when these are being transposed from one media context to another — in the case of this dissertation, the focus is not so much on transfers from one medium to another, but on transfers from one *national* (literary) context to another (2010: 19). Moreover, I distinguish between how-to-write handbooks that present instances of what I call "classic adaptation" (Griggs, 2016: 12) and a less conventional handbook like Jean Guenot's *Écrire* (1977), which provides a case of "adaptive revision" (Bryant, 2013: 50).

In the chapter "Détournement", I show how writer François Bon's *atelier d'écriture* handbooks *Tous les mots sont adultes* (2000) and *Outils du roman* (2016) enact a shift from literary advice completely based on local writing techniques to literary advice that draw strongly upon the how-to-write model. By practicing *détournement* strategies on American formulas and techniques, François Bon appropriates them and adapts them to the French context. In this context, the concept of *détournement* recalls Guy Debord's and Gil Wolman's definition of deceptive *détournement* as "celui dont un élément significatif en soi fait l'objet; élément qui tirera du nouveau rapprochement une portée différente" (1956). 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.

Finally, in the last chapter "Making it New", I discuss four advice texts that present self-conscious attempts to re-interpret, renew and transform the local advice traditions to which they subscribe. These texts seek to transform local French representations of authorship and writing, for instance by introducing formulas from American how-to-write advice into their own discourse. As such, they seek to rejuvenate literary writing in France which, in their eyes, is currently in crisis. In *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* (2014), Martin Page aims to go beyond local representations of the martyr writer towards a more militant and combative depiction of the writer (*you can do it*). In the short texts "Visite guidée" (2007) and *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi* (2008), writer of autofiction Chloé Delaume proposes a modification of what I call the "procedural" advice tradition by making lived experience (*write what you know*) the basic constituent of her poetics. Finally, poet Olivier Cadiot's *Histoire de la littérature*

récente (2016) stages a collision of a variety of advice genres in an attempt to renew writing practices in France.

4. Transatlantic Perspective

Ultimately, my study of the role of American creative writing handbooks in the creation of contemporary literary advice in France fits within a broader analysis of transatlantic cultural production. It is known that French critics and producers of culture have a long history of ambiguity when it comes to evaluating and learning from American models for cultural production. From the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, the French cultural world has oscillated between feelings of disdain and fascination when discussing the American "cultural imperialism". On a regular basis, in comments reminiscent of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's critique of the cultural industry, the American approach to making literature, film or television has been disavowed for being recipe-based, for issuing products that are only pleasing or entertaining, for being driven by commercial rather than artistic motives, and for reducing the freedom of individual artists. For instance, in his film *La Société du spectacle* (1973), activist and philosopher Guy Debord chided the ideology of slavish consumption promoted by formulaic Hollywood films. On a similar note, avant-garde writer Anne Garreta has denounced the money-driven system of university-based creative writing workshops that teaches to "devenir écrivain… pour quelques dollars de plus" (1987: 17). Yet, in spite of this kind of criticism, American cultural products have also been an important source of fascination and inspiration for French critics and producers of culture. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze has written about "la supériorité de la littérature anglaise-américaine" (1996: 46). Likewise, critic Vincent Colonna has studied "l'art des séries télé [amércaines]" (2015: 13) as a model for French television makers.

The French artistic movement that perhaps incarnated this tension between rejection and fascination most emblematically was the French *nouvelle vague* cinema of the 1950s and 1960s. On the one hand, directors like François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard and Alain Resnais strongly refuted the governing principles of what they described as Hollywood's "usine à rêves", and even used these principles as a strong counterpoint for developing their own esthetics. On the other hand, these filmmakers were indebted to a certain "modèle américain" (Marie, 2015: 41) composed of the cinematographic works by film icons such as Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock, Fritz Lang and Howard Hawks, but also of quite a few medium-budget B-films, especially hard-boiled detective stories, that Hollywood produced in large numbers during the 1950s and that even received a French name, *film noir*. By drawing upon this body of films, the *nouvelle vague* directors were looking to enact a rupture with French cinema tradition (which Truffaut calls "la tradition de qualité" (Truffaut, 1954)) and to reinvigorate local creative practices.

Spurred by this history of push and pull dynamics, this dissertation strives to contribute to the analysis of transatlantic cultural production by shedding light on strategies of rejection, parody, imitation, admiration, adaptation and transformation on the part of French makers of literary advice when faced with the American how-to-write handbook. Literary advice texts in France take their cue both from American handbooks and from older, local advice traditions. Yet, by the mere fact that they operate in a different context than the texts they draw upon, they provide new interpretations of existing formulas, techniques and representations. In this way, they are constantly at the crossroads of tradition and innovation, that is, constantly drawn between cultural preservation — as an archive of formulas, literary techniques and norms — and cultural change — as a vehicle for introducing new techniques and new representations. I hope that this dissertation can shed some light on both the elements of continuity and the processes of transformation that literary advice texts in France today embody, and on the role that American creative writing formulas and techniques play in this dynamic.

I.

1. Writer's Aid: Creative Writing Formulas

1.1. Introduction

Contemporary literary advice texts in France draw upon other textual traditions, particularly American creative writing handbooks. Multiple French advice writers acknowledge that they adapt, divert and transform this body of American texts. François Bon, one of the major literary advice figures in France, hints to the importance of American creative writing handbooks as a source of inspiration on his personal website *Tierslivre.net*. There, in a blogpost titled "Des livres pour écrire et faire écrire", Bon presents a number of French advice texts that he considers to be useful for writers and writing workshop facilitators. He introduces this collection of advice texts as follows:

> Aux États-Unis, le rayon writer's aid est solide et incontournable, en France c'est beaucoup plus difficile de savoir quels sont les livres les plus riches pour l'usage atelier d'écriture. Que vous animiez des ateliers, ou pour votre usage personnel, que vous connaissiez l'auteur, ou bien qu'on cherche le bon biais pour l'utiliser, en voilà quelques-uns... Cette page sera régulièrement complétée, classée, affinée.[2]

This fragment's point of departure is the American creative writing corpus. In order to conceive a collection of French advice texts, Bon evokes the American bookstore's extensive writer's aid section which he describes, in contrast to the French literary advice offer, as "solide et incontournable". In this way, he brings to light the productive role that American writing handbooks play in the creation of French literary advice. American writing handbooks, Bon's introduction suggests, facilitate the conception of French literary advice.

Bon is not the only French advice writer who acknowledged the role of American creative writing. Many advice writers draw on American writing handbooks. Some explain that an American handbook made their own advice text possible. For instance, Martin Page, author of *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* (2014), notes that Ray Bradbury's classic *Zen in the Art of Writing* (1990) "[a] compté dans mes réflexions sur l'écriture et la condition d'écrivain" (169). Other writers use elements of American handbooks to formulate or substantiate their advice. In *Écrire. De la page blanche à la publication* (2014), Marianne Jaeglé includes quotations from the translations of Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones* (1986) (translated as *Les Italiques jubilatoires* (2000)) Stephen King's *On Writing* (2000) (translated as *Écriture. Mémoires d'un métier* (2001)), and Annie Dillard's *The Writing Life* (1989) (translated as *En Vivant, en écrivant* (1996)) to underline the importance of pursuing intuition, the value of persistence, and the risks of too much self-doubt, respectively. Likewise, in *Écrire et trouver ses lecteurs* (2011) Brigit Hache offers writing advice by resorting to some of American creative

[2] I include all references to websites in the bibliography.

writing's most known formulas. "Écrivez sur ce que vous connaissez," (59) she suggests, reiterating the famous advice to *write what you know*.

This chapter zooms in on this body of American creative writing handbooks. Its first sections outline the historical context in which these advice texts emerge: American creative writing handbooks rise to prominence at the end of the nineteenth century, when important shifts in American universities align with the cultural aspirations of a broad section of the American public. This results in the construction of a genre that is not only commercially motivated, but also driven by an ideology of (collective) progress through technology and science. Throughout the twentieth century, the creative writing handbooks become more commercial and less technical (Levy, 1993; Wandor, 2008). In addition to the commercial aspects, we observe a growing emphasis on self-development and self-knowledge as pre-requisites for making good fiction. Moreover, after a decline of handbook production after the Second World War, a new wave of literary advice comes to the fore at the end of the twentieth century (Masschelein and De Geest, 2016). This growth of the literary advice market goes hand in hand with a diversification of advice genres, as well as with the canonization of a number of books as classic literary advice texts. In particular, pragmatic how-to-write models and self-help literature have an impact on the development of contemporary literary advice in the U.S. Additionally, writing memoirs by known authors like Stephen King, Ray Bradbury, Annie Dillard, John Gardner become central to the advice canon.

In the following sections, I will take a closer look at a number of the most significant advice texts by Dorothea Brande, R. V. Cassill, Peter Elbow, John Gardner, Natalie Goldberg, Ray Bradbury and Stephen King, in order to expose a number of the rules, formulas and techniques that constitute the poetics of contemporary American writing handbooks. Writing handbooks are known to perpetuate formulaic advice like *read as a writer*, *show don't tell*, *write what you know*, *kill your darlings* and *find your voice,* and they have been heavily criticized for this recipe-like discourse which is deemed to be patronizing and simplistic (Westbrook, 2004; Wandor, 2008; Dawson, 2008). Yet, I would argue that these formulas also provide an insight in the poetics of creative writing. What is more, as I will show in the following chapters, those are the very phrases that resurface in French literary advice, as their formulaic and easily identifiable structure makes them easy to appropriate, imitate, divert and transform.

1.2. The Inalienable Right to Make Fiction

1.2.1. The Rise of the Short Story Handbook: 1890–1920

The rise of the American creative writing handbook at the end of the nineteenth century and its boom in the following decades are often overlooked by literary historians. The early short story handbook in

particular has a noteworthy history. This pedagogical genre is situated at the heart of what literary historian Andrew Levy calls, in 1993, a "creative writing revolution" (77) that took place between approximately 1890 and 1920. Levy characterizes this "commercially motivated, populistically-modeled critical movement" (78) as unique in scope and ideology: it was supported by a complex network of agents with both commercial and ideological motives — often scholars and writers who consider themselves peripheral representatives of academia (Dawson, 2005: 63) — and it addressed a broad section of the American public, an audience eager to gain recognition by seeking success as a short story writer. Furthermore, a diverse set of media, ranging from short story magazines, handbooks, correspondence courses, as well as workshops in and outside the university contributed to the success of that revolution. In 1931, faced with the public's embrace of creative writing, Douglas Bement, a handbook author, referred to this phenomenon as "the twentieth century writing hysteria" and noted that it would attract the attention of "scholars of the twenty-first century" (1932: xi). Two factors account for the time it took for that episode to be noticed by literary historians. On the one hand, later modernist critics who were striving for the academic recognition of the short story were not eager to study this phenomenon: in their view, the short story could only be taken seriously if its connections to popular culture were to be negated. On the other hand, the fact that creative writing became a fundamental constituent of the American literary system obscured the unique character of the movement. As Levy observes, "what looked like an aberration in 1931 has become the status quo sixty years later" (78).

Various factors contributed to the emergence of the creative writing movement and its handbooks. The expansion of the American magazine establishment, combined with nationalistically oriented adjustments to international copyright laws, turned commercial magazine fiction into a highly lucrative business (Levy: 82). Moreover, the newly found cultural prestige of the short story writer encouraged the public to take their chance. In spite of growing competition from other media, in particular the radio and motion pictures, until the 1920s, magazines remained by far the most influential medium on the American mass market, unrivaled in their economic and cultural dominance. Consequently, becoming an author of short stories in magazines like *Scribner's* and *Harpers* had a strong appeal, similar to the aura of contemporary pop-musicianship or movie acting. As Levy notes, the published short story writer of the early twentieth century is "a muted version of the present-day pop star, producing with seemingly little effort 2,000 word masterpieces that reached the largest possible audiences, who then blessed the writer with celebrity, four-figure fees, and leisure time" (87).

Simultaneously, important shifts in the American university at the end of the nineteenth century contributed to the development of the handbooks. In particular, the establishment of English as a discipline played a crucial role in this regard (Myers, 1993). With the increase of English grammar and composition courses in the curriculum, it soon became clear that many students only had a flawed

command of their native tongue, which led to a call for pedagogical material on composition or, as Levy calls it, "an academic mandate for writing textbooks" (83). Additionally, the English scholars' struggle to have their discipline recognized amidst the classics and the exact sciences spurred them to adopt a new and rigorous paradigm for the humanities. As professor of English James Garnett contends in the second volume of the *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* (*PMLA*): "The teaching of language is as strictly scientific as that of any one of the natural sciences" (1886: 68). As we will see, this paradigm shift, which becomes manifest in the development of mathematical models to analyze narrative and the appearance of a (pseudo-)scientific and highly technical discourse, had a profound impact on the early writing handbooks. Moreover, the handbooks also drew upon (and contributed to) the efforts of nationalist literary scholars to analyze the short story and claim it as the American literary genre par excellence, a form of writing that grew almost organically out of the American culture and way of life.

On a broader level, the rise of the short story handbooks fits in an American ideological climate where the faith in the societal and individual benefits of scientific and industrial progress was more solid than ever. As Levy argues:

> The short story handbook — the short story itself, in fact — was an icon of the same period that produced the first IQ tests, the Efficiency movement, the engineer as silent movie hero, and the assembly line. If skeptics doubted the ability of the handbook to transform (through scientific principles) its reader into a professional writer, proponents needed only to point to the last issue of *Scribner's* or *Harper's*, where invariably some ex-handbook-student's well-honed story threaded its way among advertisement attesting to the transfiguring power of the washing machine, the automobile, and the college education. (84)

Creative writing handbooks were part of the modern science-based industry in which scientific knowledge was applied to the production of commodities. Particularly, they fit in with a broader discussion about the role of the machine in the arts. A paradigmatic figure in this debate on machine-aesthetics was Frank Lloyd Wright, whose writings, according to critic Peter Conn, are a testimony to the belief that "we may find [machines] to be the regenerator of the creative conscience in our America" (1983: 221).

1.2.2. The Philosophy of Composition

The discourse and notions of authorship in early short story handbooks go back to one text in particular: Edgar Allan Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846) (Levy; Dawson, 2005; Grauby, 2014). Yet, Poe's text deals not with the story, but with poetry. It exposes the construction of a

particular poem and reflects on the universal principles of poetry making. Its importance for the early short story handbooks can be explained in a number of ways: Poe's argument that writing is a purely rational activity that can be deconstructed into its basic constituents will influence the views on writing in later handbooks; Poe's description of literary texts as public-oriented generators of effect instead of expressions of an intimate self or a higher truth is equally influential; the paradox at the heart of the essay which, despite Poe's argument to the contrary, maintains that writing has to do with talent and inspiration is something which returns in creative writing handbooks.

Writing as a Rational Endeavor

In sharp contrast with the (British) romantic poets of an earlier generation, Poe contends that writing is a purely rational operation. Whereas Coleridge wrote in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) about "the character and privilege of genius" (I: 80-81), Poe claims that genius is nothing more than the veil with which writers conceal the logical nature of literary writing so as to glorify their own endeavors. In the opening paragraphs of "The Philosophy of Composition", Poe opposes the dominant romantic ideology to his own views:

> I have often thought how interesting a magazine paper might be written by any author who would — that is to say, who could — detail, step by step, the processes by which any one of his compositions attained its ultimate point of completion. Why such a paper has never been given to the world, I am much at a loss to say — but, perhaps, the authorial vanity has had more to do with the omission than any one other cause. Most writers — poets in especial — prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy — an ecstatic intuition. (504)

Unbothered by authorial vanity and unworried about committing a breach of decorum, Poe demonstrates how he constructed the poem "The Raven". "The Philosophy of Composition" performs a retrospective, step-by-step analysis that starts with the consideration of a number of general axioms and that gradually becomes detailed. In this way, he shows that literary writing is entirely dependent on the consequent application of reason rather than on *ecstatic intuition*. The writing process, in his view, is logical and thus entirely transparent: "It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referable either to accident or intuition — that the work proceeded, step by step to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem" (504).

Poe's discourse is reminiscent of the methods and language of science. He formulates a number of axioms on the possible length of poetry, on the consideration of *effect* as the poet's primary task, on beauty (rather than truth and passion) as poetry's true *province*, and on melancholy as poetry's supreme tone. These axioms, he argues, have universal validity. Furthermore, the essay is

laden with definitions, scientific jargon, Latin and French, and turns of phrase like *it appears evident* and *it became necessary,* which contribute to create an air of scientific treatise, written by an expert and based on a strict logic of deduction, necessity, and cause and effect. In this framework, as in the early creative writing handbooks, the writer-genius makes way for the writer as scientist-engineer: writers are not dependent on divine inspiration, but only pursue the logical consequences of a number of general axioms. They obey the universal principles of logic rather than higher commands or inner voices.

Apart from universal principles, Poe also pays heed to the form and sounds of language in order to arrive at the content of his poem. He describes for instance how his resorting to the single-word refrain *nevermore* (and consequently the majority of his story) was inspired by his wish to use the letters *o* "the most sonorous vowel" and *r* "the most producible consonant". For Poe, language is the writer-engineer's true material. Rather than events or plotlines, the writer (or better, the poet) should work with the forms of language to create his works. As Poe observes: "There is a radical error, I think, in the usual mode of constructing a story. Either history affords a thesis — or one is suggested by an incident of the day — or, at best, the author sets himself to work in the combination of striking events to forms merely the basis of his narrative" (503). Whereas this prioritization of the form of language over content is commonsensical in the case of poetry, it should be observed that the French avant-garde literary advice tradition, which we will encounter in the next chapter, applied it to the novel as well.

Writing as Generating Effect

"The Philosophy of Composition" emphasizes *effect* (the term appears twenty nine times in the short essay). Poe notes that, when writing a poem, he "prefer[s] commencing with the consideration of effect" (503). He begins by asking himself which impression he wants his text to make on the reader. This reader-oriented view of writing is the radical opposite of the romantic notion of the poem as the expression of *sincere sentiment* or *higher truth*. For Poe, writing essentially means producing effects in the reader. Furthermore, he substantiates this notion in a philosophical way. "When, indeed, men speak of Beauty," he writes "they mean, precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect — they refer, in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of soul […] upon which I have commented, and which is experienced in consequence of contemplating the "beautiful" (506). For Poe, the experience of beauty, precisely because it is an experience, resides in the reader and not the text (even though the text can be beautiful).

By privileging *effect* over self-expression or expression of higher truths, Poe at once establishes a rupture with the romantic tradition and anticipates the arrival of early creative writing handbooks. Like Poe, these books frame writing as manipulating or, to use a more neutral term, guiding the readers'

expectations. As handbook author Carl Grabo argues, the ideal short story "aims at a single effect," (quoted in Levy: 90). Likewise, E. A. Cross insists on "the necessity of producing a single effect" (1928: 13). However, whereas Poe argues for effect in an ontological way, the short story handbooks give it a more commercial dimension, that is, they equate the efficient production of effects with success in the literary marketplace. In the short-story handbooks, effect as a commercial tool replaces effect as a prerequisite for experiencing beauty.

Writing as Hard Work

Although the bulk of "The Philosophy of Composition" leaves the impression that writing, given the writer's familiarity with the universal principles of literature, is a relatively straightforward process, Poe also hints at the notion of *writing as hard work*. In the introduction of "The Philosophy of Composition", he points out that writers hide the rational dimension of their activity, but also its problematic aspects. Writing is not a smooth process, quite the contrary. It is a difficult struggle, and readers who only read the final text would be surprised if they could have a look at

> the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought – at the true purposes seized only at the last moment — at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view — at the fully-matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable — at the cautious selections and rejections – at the painful erasures and interpolations — in a word, at the wheels and pinions — the tackle for scene-shifting — the step-ladders, and demon-traps — the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches, which, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, constitute the properties of the literary histrio. (504)

As Paul Valéry observed, in this passage, the writer appears in a new guise. In his 1889 notes "sur la technique littéraire" Valéry speaks of a "conception toute nouvelle et moderne du poète" (1957: 1786). This poet "n'est plus le délirant échevelé, celui qui écrit tout un poème dans une nuit de fièvre, c'est un froid savant, presque un algébriste, au service d'un rêveur affiné" (1957: 1786). In "The Philosophy of Composition", as Valéry rightly insists, the writer is reinvented as a conscious craftsman, as a partisan of labor exerting an important level of control over the process of making literature.

Poe's Paradox

Finally, and perhaps most essentially, "The Philosophy of Composition" anticipates the short story writing handbooks because it embraces the tension between the notions of writing as something that can be taught and writing as a gift or inspiration. This becomes most manifest in the passage referred to above, in which Poe describes how he came up with the refrain *nevermore*. After having articulated his preference for a single-word refrain composed with the letters *r* and *o*, he observes:

> The sound of the refrain being thus determined, it became necessary to select a word embodying this sound, and at the same time in the fullest possible keeping with that melancholy which I had predetermined as the tone of the poem. In such a search it would have been absolutely impossible to overlook the word "Nevermore." In fact, it was the very first which presented itself. (507)

As Poe notes, *nevermore* came to him as a gift. Although one might argue that the preliminary choice for a melancholy tone opens the way for this word, it remains the case that in Poe's experience it "presented itself". Put differently, at the heart of Poe's rationally constructed poem (and at heart of his analysis of it) lies something which can hardly be explained. Anticipating the early handbooks, "The Philosophy of Composition" thus embodies the tension between writing as a rational and teachable enterprise, and writing as a gift or talent.

Poe's Pragmatism

In sum, I argue that "The Philosophy of Composition" defends a pragmatic kind of literary advice. Instead of conceiving writing as a means for authentic self-expression (what I further call "neo-romantic advice" – see 2.2.3.) or as the pursuit of an ideal literary form (what I further call "rhetorical advice" – see 2.3.1.), pragmatism conceptualizes literary writing as the art of efficiently generating effects with readers. It crafts its advice in accordance to people's response to its techniques and literary devices. It asks the question: what kind of writing works to draw and preserve the audience's attention? Given the reader-oriented pragmatic nature of his advice, it is indeed not surprising that Poe can be regarded as a direct precursor of short story handbooks or, as some critics would have it, the father of creative writing. Like "The Philosophy of Composition", early handbooks are fundamentally rooted in the idea that writing should strive to generate particular effects with the audience, its main goal being to draw people's attention. However, whereas Poe's pragmatism is philosophical in nature — he contends that beauty lies (partially) in the reader —, the handbooks' advice springs from more commercial motives. Indeed, the latter texts propose reader-based advice because they are striving to aid aspiring writers to become successful on the short story marketplace.

1.2.3. Media and Genres of Early Creative Writing

At the turn of the twentieth century, short story handbooks quickly emerge as an industry in their own right, drawing on Poe's discourse and views as expressed in "The Philosophy of Composition" and in response to the pervasive desire to become a short story writer (which they nourished as well) and to the urgent academic call for pedagogical material. Between 1910 and 1920 almost all the major American publishing houses distributed at least one short story writing handbook. The Home

Correspondence School, the largest handbook publisher at the time, put out nine short story handbook in this period. Levy estimates that between 1898 and 1940 more than a hundred titles dealt exclusively or primarily with the short story (86). Moreover, successful handbooks normally went through multiple editions, often in the same year. For instance, Berg Esenwein's *Writing the Short Story* went through sixteen editions in the space of fifteen years, between 1908 and 1923, while Walter Pitkin's *Art and Business of Story Writing* appeared in ten different editions between 1912 and 1923. It should be noted that there are many women-writers among the authors of short-story handbooks (Wandor: 103).

Although handbooks played a crucial role in the early creative writing movement, they were not its only medium. Before the breakthrough of the handbook, magazines and newspapers, especially those publishing fiction and literary criticism, were already putting out an extensive corpus of advice. In disparate articles and advertisements, they anticipated what would become the quest for the ideal short story and, as such, provide the groundwork for the later handbooks. As C. R. Barrett, author of *Short Story Writing* (1898), signals: "I am considerably indebted to the frequent fragmentary articles on the short story, many of them by successful short story writers, published in current periodicals" (1898: 9). Simultaneously, different types of short story courses begin to emerge. Around 1896, the University of Chicago, Princeton University, and the University of Iowa introduced short story workshops. Furthermore, a pseudo-collegiate network of extension and correspondence courses sees the light of day.

The popularity of the short story pedagogy not only resulted in its expansion across media, it also led to the appearance of a variety of didactic texts. The rise of the creative writing handbook was thus accompanied by the emergence of related genres. A popular format, the pseudo-anthology, collected a number of model short stories and presented them along with a text accounting for their success. Another favored genre, which developed when the creative writing revolution began losing its momentum in 1920, is the counter-handbook. These parodic texts first insisted that writing could not be learned, and paradoxically, went on to formulate the rules for writing good short stories. Finally, the academic anthology-textbook associated with the New Critical movement (e.g. Wilbur Shramm's *The Short Story Workshop* (1938) and Brooks and Warren's *Understanding Fiction* (1943)) is too similar to the classic handbook to be considered a rupture with the body of advice works. Its emphasis on unity and suggestion and its use of the notion of *elements of fiction* and of the tool of a-posteriori analysis of the creative process are especially reminiscent of the handbook tradition.

The emergence of this industry, with its diversity of genres, media and agents and its strong commercial aspects, gave rise to fierce criticism, in particular on the part of American literary scholars eager to have the short story acknowledged as a serious literary genre. Fred Lewis Pattee, for instance, author of *The Development of the American Short Story* (1923) criticized the handbooks and the correspondence courses for reducing short story writing to "a trade-school matter, a handwork

vocation to be acquired by mere diligence and mastery of technique" (quoted in Dawson, 2005: 63). Two years later, H. L. Mencken, another academic, referred to the enterprise as "the trade of manufacturing hack fiction for the cheap magazines" which he accused of doing "gross damage to the American short story" (1991: 537).

1.2.4. Short Story Handbooks' Poetics

The early handbooks are as much ideologically as commercially motivated. Levy notes that some volumes present sincere attempts to formulate the criteria for creating the ideal short story. They offer detailed guidelines, definitions, advice on the values fiction should and should not promote, information on magazine policy, and instruction in mass psychology and American politics. By identifying all the thematic, formal, and sociological parameters that play a role in the success of a short story, they create "an idealized image of the American short story, the American author and, by implication, America itself" (Levy: 87). In other words, they testify to a belief in progress through technology — some of them insist, for example, that the fiction of Poe and Hawthorne would come to be surpassed by the short stories of the future —, a belief in the creative potential of man and of the nation as a whole, and the ability of the market to recognize quality. On the other side of the spectrum, openly commercial handbooks also used a similar discourse. Yet, these volumes lack the technical basis and ideological groundwork of their counterparts. All in all, however, most of the handbooks revolve around what critic N. Bryllion Fagin in 1923 described as "a peculiar psychology", composed partly of the cheapest form of advertising", and partly of "erudite and conscientious scholarship" (1923: 126).

Whatever their particular agenda, short story handbooks are relatively homogenous on the levels of form, discourse, and content (Levy: 1993). On the formal level, most handbooks use an identical structure. They open with a portrait of the author, establishing her authority, closely followed by a defense of the notion that everyone can learn to write. Then, they proceed to define the short story and trace the genre's origins. The definitions go back directly to Poe's conception of the short story as a narrative that produces "a certain unique or single effect" (1842: 299). The origins of the short story, on the other hand, are situated in classical works, like the Bible, Boccaccio and Chaucer, as well as in the more recent tradition of Poe, Hawthorne, Irving and Maupassant. After this typically comes a chapter on preparation and the collection of material, in which the writer is told to collect newspaper clippings, to keep notes and classify them in orderly files, and to expose herself to new experiences. Then follow chapters on the *elements of fiction*: plot, character, dialogue and title. Additionally, the handbooks provide an overview of the different kinds of short stories and enlist the themes the aspiring writer should avoid in order to obtain success. These topics include sex and religion, but also controversial, pessimistic or reflective subject matters. As handbook author Walter

Pitkin formulates it, “action must dominate” (1923: 148). Lastly, the handbooks contain extensive sections with advice pertaining to manuscript (margin size, placement of address, etc.) and marketing. They emphasize that writers should have a profound understanding of the field they are operating in, especially the policies of magazines. As handbook author William Byron Mowery observes: “To be a successful story writer requires a comprehensive knowledge of policies and preferences of the various periodicals that buy stories” (quoted in Fagin: 67).

The rhetorical dimension of the early creative writing handbooks is mainly determined by the handbook authors’ efforts to come across as experts on fiction and the field of literary magazines. Revelatory in this respect are the prefaces or introductory chapters in which authors introduce themselves. These sections make mention of the author’s publications and her position in editorial boards of magazines and publishers. Notably, they make note of the success some of the author’s ex-students had in being published in some of the nation’s best-known magazines.

Additionally, these opening sections are typically the place to tackle the crucial question that lingers over all creative writing pedagogy: can it be taught? At this point, the handbooks typically conflate two contradictory messages. On the one hand, they emphasize that writing can be learned, and that the short story is a very good format to do so due to its compactness. On the other hand, they point out the need for a minimal amount of talent in order to become a writer. This double rhetorical strategy has two reasons. First, it negotiates between establishing the concept of creative writing instruction on the one hand, and preserving the aura of the short story writer on the other; if everyone could do it, the short story would soon lose its prestige. Second, its air of nuance and truthfulness contributes to the construction of a more convincing and authoritative discursive position for the author. Interestingly, there is a similar strategy at work in the counter-handbooks that emerge from the twenties onwards. Only, these volumes first insist on writing being a matter of talent, and then expose the rules for good fiction and editorial success. Counter-handbook author N. Bryllion Fagin is especially frank as he exposes his own ambiguous position and links it to the professional circumstances in which he operated:

> The share of injury I may have contributed has simply been the unavoidable accompaniment of being engaged in a profession grounded upon the popular belief the literature is a trade, like plumbing, or tailoring… That it is in the interests of the profession to foster and perpetuate this popular belief needs no elaborate substantiation. (1923: 2)

Furthermore, the authors usually adopt different speaking positions: the writer-craftsman; the professional businessman; a casual tone that attempts to disparage the scientific tenor in many handbooks. Nonetheless, most writers resort to the tools and language of science in order to convince

the readers of their expertise. For instance, the sections on plot are usually supported by a geometrical figure called *the plot diagram,* and some handbook use statistics to measure the percentage of conversation in stories. The discourse also includes many (pseudo-)logical argumentation, definitions and classifications. For instance, the handbooks often make an effort to quantify the amount of emotion or intensity that stories need to be engaging. Walter Pitkin defined "intensity" as "the amount of a given quality per impression" (1923: 111). H. A. Phillips, author of *Plot of the Short Story* (1912), suggests that "to have a maximum of outpouring, [the short story writer] should have a definite inpouring of forces that contribute to the inspiration, association, and suggestion of ideas" (1912: 103).

The handbooks support the principles of efficiency and socialization. Writers are told to be efficient story tellers, that is, to be mindful of the number of words they use, and to focus on one plotline per story. Moreover, they are told to comply with market demands. The worst thing that can happen is rejection by one of the magazines. The best way to become acquainted with the norms is to read, in particular commercially successful short stories and novel, which leads to a rejection of the classical canon in favor of a selection contemporary works. Put differently, on the basis of a pragmatist attitude that underlines the importance of knowing the literary market, handbooks advise to become acquainted with recent best-sellers rather than the classical works of literature. Discussing this commercial dimension, Levy speaks of an "aesthetics of product" (96) that addresses aspiring writers in the language of dos and don'ts, and that substantiates its argument with the threat of rejection by magazines. Ultimately, writers are asked to internalize the laws of the market so that they might spontaneously write what the readership is looking for. The fact that this may happen at the cost of "the elimination of individual taste" (Levy: 98) is not always considered problematic by the handbook writers. Bliss Perry even includes a section on "the obliteration of personal traits" (1902: 312) and Cecil Hunt insists that "personal preferences must be completely suppressed" (1950: 126).

When it comes to content, the handbooks project an idealized representation of authors, who are depicted as both highly skilled technicians with a strong level of control over textual mechanisms and their effects, as well as professionals who have internalized the rules of the literary field and the expectations of the readership. Consequently, the short story itself appears as a technical device constantly always susceptible to improvement, and as a valuable commodity. Moreover, the genre is explicitly inscribed in a nationalist pursuit of a proper American literature. The literary field, finally, is portrayed as a technological industry on the one hand, and as a commercial market on the other. Importantly, this market is depicted as fair. Editors of magazines, so the handbooks suggest, know quality when they see it.

1.2.5. Early Advice in the U.K

Similar tendencies arise in the U.K, in parallel with the U.S. creative writing revolution. At the turn of the twentieth century, in light of the appearance of the professional writer and of new dynamics within the university, influential literary critics begin to argue for the notion that writing can be taught (Wandor, 2008). A crucial event in this respect is the debate between Henry James and critic Sir Walter Besant, one of the founders of the British Society of Authors in 1884. Against the increasingly powerful position of publishers who, in Besant's words, "intended to claim the whole of literary property for themselves as their pretended right" (2007: 191), Besant campaigns for a heightened protection with regard to literary property and for better financial compensation for writers. With this in mind, he believes that it is crucial for young writers to become familiar with the workings of the literary system (the players involved, the types of contracts, the costs of publication) so that they might avoid falling victim to voracious publishers. In 1899, he publishes *The Pen and The Book*, a passionate treatise in which he exposes the inner workings of the literary system. In the foreword, he signals that his work is "written for the instruction and the guidance of those young persons, of whom there are now many thousands, who are thinking of the Literary Life" (2007: 273). In addition to institutional matters, he discusses his views on becoming a writer, insisting that beginners need both talent and rigorous work ethics. The advice he offers would not be out of place in contemporary creative writing handbooks, for instance, his suggestion to develop a daily writing habit which includes keeping notes at all times. He also considers fiction as an imitation of reality, and sees personal experience as the basis for any good story.

Similar advice can be found in *The Art of Fiction* (1884). This work contains an exposition by Besant and a critical reply on the part of Henry James. James's essay is theoretically more complex than Besant's pragmatic approach. Whereas the latter sees fiction as the mimesis of reality, James argues for the competitive nature of the relation between fiction and reality. In his view, the fictional world is an autonomous construction governed by its own principles: "The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it *does* compete with life" (1900: 54). He also contradicts some other of Besant's notions, in particular the emphasis on personal experience. Most importantly, James concludes that the process of writing can neither be explained nor taught: "The writer's manner is his secret, not necessarily a deliberate one. He cannot disclose it, as a general thing, if he would; he would be at a loss to teach it to others" (1900: 61).

A little more than a decade after this Besant-James debate, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch published *On the Art of Writing* (1916), a future bestselling book based on a series of twelve lectures given by Quiller-Couch on the occasion of his inauguration as Kind Edward VII Professor of English Literature at Cambridge. In the book's preface, Quiller-Couch advocates for practicing writing within the academy:

> Literature is not a mere Science, to be studied; but an ART, to be practised […] I propose to you that, English Literature being (as we agreed) an art, with a living and therefore improvable language for its vehicle, a part — and in no small part — of our business is to *practise it*. Yes, I seriously propose to you that here in Cambridge we *practice writing*. (1916: 2)

With the institutionalization of English as a discipline, and with the gradual substitution of Latin for English as the university's lingua franca, Quiller-Couch points to the need of practicing the English language at the university. Instead of merely studying it, scholars and students should practice it in order to understand it from within, as it were. The great writers of the past, he contends, should be studied "for their own sakes", but also "for our guidance" (1916: 2).

1.2.6. Interbellum Criticism: 1920–1940

The period between 1920 and 1940 is mostly characterized by a fierce critique of the handbooks. Marxist, regionalist and Modernist critics argued that the handbooks are too formalistic and nationalistic (Levy: 79). Especially literary scholars associated with New Criticism, who were seeking to establish the short story as a legitimate element of the literary canon and the university, were highly critical of the populistically-modeled and commercial creative writing movement. For instance, *Understanding Fiction* (1943), Brooks and Warren's annotated anthology of short stories, in spite of the resemblance it may bear to the handbook tradition, can be read as an attack on this tradition (Dawson, 2005: 78-79). For Brooks and Warren, (short story) fiction must be understood as an organic unity whose interest depends on the ironic tension between its different constitutive elements. They paid particular attention to the relation between thematic and formal elements such as plot, tone, character, style, which is reminiscent of the New Criticism approach to poetry (as exhibited for instance in their *Understanding Poetry* (1938)). Moreover, they promoted Henry James's views, whose essays they constantly quoted against those of Walter Besant. As critic Paul Dawson notes:

> This meant that commercial magazine fiction was not to be considered literature because, rather than constituting an organic unity, such stories were written to elicit a 'stock response' from readers. As a result, the view of composition as a 'bag of tricks', as 'the mechanical manipulation of characters and scenes according to a set formula' (Brooks and Warren) designed to produce this stock response, was rejected in favor of a more organic and unified view of the creative process. (2005: 79)

Additionally, the rise of creative writing workshops at American universities from the 1930's onward brought about criticism of the handbooks on the part of creative writing and composition

teachers and scholars who were looking for their place in the university system (Peary: 88). This strategy of *othering* the more popular discourse of the handbooks has indeed functioned to establish creative writing as a university practice. As a result, with the birth of the university workshop emerged two discrete tracks of creative writing instruction. On the one hand, the workshops for university students. These are technical courses that expose "students to issues of subjectivity, beauty, truth, and emotional and sensory effect through close work with texts" (Peary: 86-87). On the other hand, the popular track, with its writing handbooks and amateur workshops.

However, the two tracks are not completely separate: early short story handbooks contributed to the rise of academic creative writing workshops (Dawson, 2005: 60) and, in turn, writing workshops had an influence on the development of the handbooks in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly with regard to the concept of creative expression. This notion, central to the creative writing workshop, links creative writing with self-cultivation, and can be traced back to the theoretical framework of the Progressive Education movement, especially the works of John Dewey and Hugh Mearns's bestselling *Creative Youth* (1925) (Dawson, 2005: 56). Also, one should not forget that many university creative writing teachers such as R.V. Cassill and John Gardner have authored influential writing manuals.

1.2.7. Diversification in a Saturated Marketplace: a New Wave

Levy notes a waning of creative writing handbooks in the decades following the Second World War (1993). Nonetheless, new handbooks like R. V. Cassill's *Writing Fiction* (1962) and re-editions of older handbooks such as Dorothea Brande's *Becoming a Writer* (1934) and Brenda Ueland's *If You Want to Write: A Book about Art, Independence, and Spirit* (1938) continue to be published. These books differ from the early short story books in that they stress the importance of self-development over technical skill. Instead of presenting the *building blocks of fiction* and exposing the dynamics of the literary market, these texts propose that aspiring writers be mostly occupied by nourishing their inner state of mind. "Becoming a writer," Dorothea Brande explains, "is mainly a matter of cultivating a writer's temperament" (36).

There is, then, a revival of writing handbooks towards the end of twentieth century. In "So You Think You Can Write… Handbooks for Detective Fiction" (2016) Anneleen Masschelein and Dirk De Geest speak of a "new wave" (92) of literary advice that is characterized by a diversification of the handbook offer under the impulse of a saturated advice marketplace. Above all, this new wave is characterized by a shift towards the highly pragmatic how-to-write format. Books like James N. Fray's *How to Write a Damn Good Novel* (1987), Randall Ingermanson and Peter Economy's *Writing Fiction for Dummies* (2009), Vicky Hambleton and Cathleen Greenwood's *So You Want to be a Writer?* (2012)

and Nathan Bransford *How to Write a Novel* (2014) offer exercises, step-by-step work sheets and bullet point lists to guide the aspiring writer to find the most efficient way to publication. By using straightforward language, they give the impression that becoming a published author is a feasible endeavor, as long as the beginning writer conforms to the suggested do's and don'ts.

In reaction to the surge of this how-to-write format, parodic books like Howard Mittelmark and Sandra Newman's *How Not to Write a Novel. 200 Classic Mistakes and How to Avoid Them* (2008) and Claire Gilman's *How NOT to Get Published* (2013) come into existence. These texts make use of the step-by-step approach found in how-to-write literature, but turn it around by enlisting all the errors writers might make when working on their first novel and attempting to publish it. Like the how-to-write handbooks, these texts portray publication as the ultimate criterion for measuring literary value.

Additionally, the new wave of literary advice witnesses to a spectacular rise of specialized formats that tackle specific fictional genres like detective or mystery, fantasy, romance and erotica. These books rely heavily on the notion of writing as a craft. Dirk De Geest and An Goris have observed that handbooks for romance-writing like Estrada and Gallagher's *You Can Write a Romance* (1999) and Wainger's *Writing a Romance Novel for Dummies* (2004) treat literary creation "as a specific kind of craft, an activity based on expertise and hard work rather than on innate talent alone" (2010: 92). These handbooks present "writing as the practice of putting together a set of tools, making optimal use of all ingredients indispensable to a good romance novel. The guidebooks thus present themselves to the reader as an essential toolbox" (93). Further, these genre handbooks highly value publication and commercial success, and highlight the importance of a professional attitude to achieve these goals. As Clair and Donald signal in *Writing Romance Fiction* (1999): "A professional attitude is the mark of the real writer […] Invest in your writing, even if at first you're not earning much – most jobs have a training period before you begin to earn a living. Writing is no different" (1999: 92).

Finally, there is an increase in software tools for the individual writer, like Scrivener and Hemingway Editor. These applications fulfill different functions. Scrivener, for instance, is designed as a tool for long-term writing projects. It offers a framework to document, structure and write stories. Hemingway Editor is an application that provides stylistic aid. It detects over-complicated sentences and redundant word usage.

1.2.8. Writing Memoirs and Gurus

The new wave of literary advice is equally characterized by a strong emphasis on self-development. In many texts, nourishing the self becomes both the starting point for writing, as well as its ultimate goal. This was anticipated in Brande's and Ueland's interbellum handbooks. The emergence of the genre of the *writing memoir* (Wandor, 2008: 115) fits within this focus on the self. These are autobiographical

texts on the literary life written by successful authors like Stephen King, John Gardner, Annie Dillard and Ray Bradbury. Similar advice can also be found in the many literary interviews that, following the famous *Paris Review* interview series, promise an insight into the writer's life and creative process. Instead of technical advice, all these texts offer "a model for creative being" (McGurl: 36).

Writing memoirs are "one of the primary models for [creative writing]'s pedagogy" (Wandor: 115). As Wandor points out, they rely on the idea of a master-apprentice or guru-acolyte relationship (115). Many significant writing memoirs have been written by famous and successful authors. Stephen King's *On Writing* (2000) recounts King's trajectory, from his childhood memories to his emergence as a writer, and puts forth King's almost fatal road accident as its turning point. Wandor calls it a "forceful, compelling page-turner, driven by superb narrative skills" (115). Pulitzer Prize winner Annie Dillard's *The Writing Life* (1989) exposes Dillard's views on why she writes, as well as the conditions in which she writes. Esteemed science fiction writer Ray Bradbury's classic *Zen in the Art of Writing. Essays on Creativity* (1990) presents a collection of essays, written between 1961 and 1990, where he analyzes the nature and workings of the creative mind. Bradbury's articles are threaded with anecdotes and metaphors designed to unveil the different facets of inspiration. Creative writing cult figure John Gardner's *The Art of Fiction. Notes on Craft for Young Writers* (1983) is not so much a memoir as an exhibition of Gardner's insights in literature and the process of writing, while its first part is theoretical and entails chapters on "Aesthetic law and Artistic Mystery", "Basic skills, Genre, and Fiction as Dream", and "Interest and Truth". Its more practical second part includes the chapters "Common Errors", "Technique", "Plotting", and "Exercises". Peter Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers* (1973) presents this professor of composition's views on creativity and develops techniques to overcome *writer's block*. Elbow's text is infused with metaphoric language use and is mainly known for its promoting free-writing exercises.

Other writing memoirs have strongly contributed to the fame of their authors to the point of turning them into guru-like figures. Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird. Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (1994) is an autobiographical account that recounts Lamott's attempts at writing, as well as her struggles with depression, alcoholism and single-motherhood. Today, Lamott is a popular public speaker who meshes advice on writing with the promotion of Christian and progressive political views. Nathalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones. Freeing the Writer Within* (1986) brings together new-age discourse and literary advice. Goldberg is also a popular speaker famous for her advocating of Zen Buddhism.

1.3. Conseils pour Livres Inutiles

To recapitulate, the end of the century marks a new phase in the development of American literary advice: it signals a growth of the advice market, a diversification of advice genres, a surge of how-to-write handbooks, the canonization of a number of advice texts, and the appearance of multiple guru-figures. As I pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, this extensive body of American texts attracted the attention of contemporary French literary advice writers. Above all, it enabled them to form the idea of writing as a learnable craft. This can be observed, for instance, in the many French advice texts that refer to the system of university creative writing workshops as a way to justify their own existence (Timbal-Duclaux, 1986; Roche, Guiget and Voltz, 1993). What is more, the French advice writers turn to the specific images, techniques and formulas of American creative writing to develop their proper methodology. The works of François Bon, the main spokesperson of the *atelier d'écriture* (the French version of the creative writing workshop) and a major advice figure, perfectly illustrates this tendency. On his personal website *Tierslivre.net*, Bon regularly issues blogposts that argue for the importance of collecting and studying American literary advice texts. In a post titled "Écrivez votre roman en 90 jours et autres lunes" Bon discusses the U.S. literary advice market as he sees it embodied in the writer's aid shelves of a New York Barnes & Noble bookstore. He observes:

> Toujours le même paradoxe, petit sourire à ce qui est devenu aux US un marché aux productions plutôt opportunistes, voire douteuses, mais qui réserve aussi de véritables perles – depuis le fondateur Art of fiction, craft for young writers [sic] de John Gardner, figure tutélaire de l'histoire du *creative writing*, et qu'il nous faut développer comme vrai lieu de gestation littéraire, dans la tradition française qui en fait aussi de magnifiques outils de recherche, comme *Espèces d'espaces* de Perec ou *En lisant en écrivant* de Gracq.

Bon describes his ambivalence towards the American advice production: he is skeptical in the face of its abundance and its "productions plutôt opportunistes". Yet, he believes in this corpus's role as a "vrai lieu de gestation littéraire" and argues that a similar advice tradition should be developed more systematically in France. To nourish such a French tradition, he contends that is important to take into account the American corpus, starting with John Gardner's *The Art of Fiction* which he considers as the historical starting point of literary advice. Likewise, in another blogpost titled "John Gardner. 30 exercises d'écriture", Bon states: "Enseigner l'écriture créative, cela suppose d'en apprendre l'histoire: difficile en ce cas de ne pas en passer par les classiques comme le livre de Gardner."

Bon, however, not only thinks of using writing memoirs like Gardner's, but also points to the commercial how-to-write handbooks as potential source of inspiration. In "Écrivez votre roman en 90 jours et autres lunes", he formulates it in the following terms: "De drôles de rêves qui viennent en tête,

prendre ces 130 ou 140 bouquins regorgeant de conseils pour livres inutiles et écritures normées, et faire un faux guide tout inventé qui serait, lui, une piste pour l'imaginaire." Bon muses about appropriating the "conseils pour livres inutiles" that can be found in how-to-write handbooks and transform them into an original writing handbook.

In the following sections, I will introduce a number of the "conseils pour livres inutiles" that constitute the poetics of American literary advice. These, as I will show in the following chapters, play an important role in contemporary literary advice in France. Indeed, American writing handbooks are known to make abundant use of a limited set of stock formulas to guide the writing process.[3] Phrases like *reading as a writer*, *show don't tell*, *find your voice*, *write what you know*, *writing as hard work* and *you can do it* appear in all handbooks and writing memoirs. Their formulaic nature is the principal reason why creative writing handbooks receive so much criticism. In a very critical chapter in her book *The Author is not Dead* (2008) titled "Household Tips and Recipe Books", Michelene Wandor calls them "mantras" that are "'naturalized' explicitly and implicitly in pretty well all the British and American CW texts" (104). Other critics have observed that these simplistic precepts are the reason that creative writing teachers do not want to be associated with writing handbooks (Dawson, 2005; McGurl, 2009).

1.3.1. Reading as a Writer

The advice to *read as a writer* appears in many writing handbooks. Natalie Goldberg, author of writing memoir *Writing Down the Bones* (1986), spurs her readers to "read books," and adds that "they are good for us" (2005: 43). In his widely read *Zen in the Art of Writing* (1990), Ray Bradbury asks: "When did you last read a book of poetry or take time, of an afternoon, for an essay or two?" (7). In *On Writing* (2000), Stephen King urges: "If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot. There's no way around" (2012: 164).

The creative writing handbook's incentive to read is characterized by a distinct approach. As Paul Dawson argues: "There must be a particular method of reading which is taught" (2005: 91). *Reading as a writer* can be traced back to Henry James's and Walter Besant's already mentioned *The Art of Fiction* (1900). In this text, the aspirant is told that she "should with the greatest care and

[3] In *The Program Era* (2009), his landmark study on the determining role of creative writing workshop in shaping the outlook of post-war U.S. literature, Mark McGurl draws upon the formulas *write what you know*, *show don't tell* and *find your own voice* to provide periodization. He considers *write what you know* the quintessential expression of the poetics of the early workshops that emerge in the 1930s and 1940s, *find your own voice,* the best summary of the ethnicity-driven literature originating from the workshops from the end of the 1960's onwards, and *show don't tell,* the formula that characterizes the literary minimalism of workshop writers from the 1980s like Raymond Carver, Tobias Wolff and Frederick Barthelme. In contrast to McGurl's approach, this dissertation does not so much connect specific formulas with delineated historical moments. Rather, it seeks to stress the fact that formulas, notions and techniques re-appear throughout the history of literature advice, and, just as importantly, that these re-appearances inevitably entail transformations of the meanings attributed to the given formulas and techniques.

attention analyze and examine the construction of certain works, which are acknowledged to be of the first rank in fiction" (1900: 29). The goal, as Besant insists, is "not [to] sit down and read them 'for the story', as uncritical people say: [the aspirant] must read them slowly and carefully, perhaps backwards, so as to discover for himself how the author built up the novel" (1900: 29). Put differently, Besant encourages beginning writers not to consider the quality of a work of fiction, but the way in which it is made, that is, the process rather than the product.

Reading as a writer has become popular due to its use in Dorothea Brande's *Becoming a Writer* (1934). In this book, Brande includes a chapter titled after this issue ("Reading as a Writer") and signals that "to read effectively it is necessary to learn to consider a book in the light of what it can teach you about the improvement of your own work" (1983: 99). She advises to overcome a distaste for "dissecting a book" (99) and, in particular, proposes a step-by-step method called "Read twice" that begins with a first spontaneous reading, followed by a "summary judgment and detailed analysis" (100), and that concludes with the critical "second reading" (102). During this second reading, aspiring authors are told that they "know how the story ends" (102) and that they should be "on the watch for the clues to that ending which come early in the book or the story" (102). Importantly, they are also advised to unearth "false clues – passages which do not make the book more real, or which distort the author's intention, but which have been allowed to pass" (102).

In his bestselling *Writing Fiction* (1962), R.V. Cassill, who founded of the Associated Writing Programs (AWP) in 1967, takes up the formula *reading as a writer* as the title of his opening chapter. He alerts the reader: "Good writers are your real teachers of how to write fiction, and their novels and stories are the means by which they teach" (6). Notably, in this chapter, Cassill makes an effort to distinguish *reading as a writer* from other forms of reading, which is due to the fact that, in his time, creative writing had become an established discipline which had to affirm its methodology vis-à-vis the methods of reading promoted by literary critics (Dawson, 2005: 93).

Finally, a clear manifestation of what it means to *read as writer* appears in Stephen King's *On Writing*. In this book, *reading as a writer* is listed as the first piece to the aspiring writer. It is the condition sine qua non of becoming a writer or, as King puts it, "the creative center of a writer's life" (167). "If you don't have time to read," King observes, "you don't have the time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that" (167). Like Brande and Cassill, King proposes a method of critical reading that pays attention to how the narrative is made. As King notes, two types of books can contribute to our development as a writer. It is above all important to read "to experience the mediocre and the outright rotten" (2012: 166). Bad writing, he notes, teaches beginning writers how not to write. Moreover, it is encouraging to the struggling writer to find out that her "work is unquestionably better than that of someone who actually got paid for his/her stuff"(165).

Additionally, it is important to read good books. This "teaches the learning writer about style, graceful narration, plot development, the creation of believable characters, and truth-telling" (166). It provides the beginner with an elevated standard to aspire to. As King formulates it: "We also read in order to measure ourselves against the good and the great, to get a sense of all that can be done" (166). Moreover, King points out that reading good fiction is important "to experience different styles" (166) because, in turn, the beginning writer can imitate and play around with these different styles so as to develop a proper voice or style: "This sort of stylistic blending is a necessary part of developing one's own style" (167).

1.3.2. Find Your Own Voice

The notion of *find your own voice* can be traced back to Romanticism, especially Samuel Taylor Coleridge's emphasis on the poet's unique style in his refutation of William Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). As critics suggest, it resurfaces in creative writing handbooks through the prism of ego-psychology (Dawson, 2005; Wandor, 2008). Ego-psychology is a school of psychoanalysis rooted in Freud's id-ego-superego model of the mind. In the United States, it was the predominant psychoanalytic approach from the 1940s through the 1960s. It marked the passage from a psychoanalytical method focused on the id and its libidinal and aggressive drives to a psychology of the ego as primary shaper of human behavior and as intermediary instance between the id and the super-ego (Hartmann, 1964).

This attention to the ego as the potential locus of responsibility, action and growth can be traced back to writing handbooks and their notion of cultivating the self or, in other words, of *finding your voice*. Dorothea Brande's *Becoming a Writer* is again prototypical in this regard. As British creative writing teacher Malcolm Bradbury observes in the introduction to the 1980 reprint of *Becoming a writer*, this book "was written in Freudian times, and rightly assumes that writing is a psychological matter: at once a conscious activity and an unconscious one" (1980: 12-13). In her introduction, Brande speaks of her own strenuous apprenticeship and her disillusionment with the existing creative writing literature. She recounts how, when first beginning to teach writing herself, "nothing was further from [her] mind […] than adding to the top-heavy literature on the subject [of creative writing]" (1983: 21). This, however, changed when she realized that the problems beginning writers face are all but technical: "The difficulties of the average student or amateur writer begin long before he has come to the place where he can benefit by technical instruction in story writing" (1983: 21). What Brande sets out to do is to address those issues that precede the technical dimension of writing. As she concludes her introduction, she notes: "This book, I believe, will be unique; for I think [the amateur writer] is

right. I think there is such a magic, and that it is teachable. This book is all about the writer's magic" (1983: 23).

Brande proposes to instruct what she calls the "writer's magic". This essentially entails paying attention to the writer's "life and attitudes and habits" (1983: 35) and to "the very character itself" (1983: 35). *Becoming a writer*, she insists, should not be regarded as a book that replaces handbooks on the craft of writing, but as a preliminary to them: "If it is successful it will teach the beginner not how to write, but how to be a writer; and that is quite another thing" (1983: 36). Learning how to be a writer, Brande signals, "is mainly a matter of cultivating a writer's temperament" (1983: 36). With this, she does not mean to say that she will "inculcate a wide-eyed bohemianism" — a notion that she considers a "remarkably embarrassing inheritance of the past" (1983: 37-38). Instead, Brande promotes "an earlier and healthier idea of the artist" (1983: 38), that is, "the idea of the genius as a man more versatile, more sympathetic, more studious than his fellows, more catholic in his tastes" (1983: 38). She further contends that the writer's character is "adult, discriminating, temperate, and just," (1983: 38), and gives advice on "the right recreation" (54), "friends and books" (55), "displacing old habits" (63), "writing on schedule" (75) and even "coffee versus maté" (174).

In addition to this type of straightforward lifestyle advice, Brande suggests ways to cultivate the unconscious. In fact, *Becoming a Writer* has played an important to role in popularizing the notion of "duplicity" or of the writer as "two-persons-in-one" (48). There is the conscious side of the writer, on which most handbooks propose to work, that is, "the craftsman and the critic in him" (44), and there is the unconscious, or the "artist's side" (44). As Brande stresses, in order to become a mature writer, the beginner should develop both sides and even "teach [herself] not as though [she] were one person, but two" (44). She points out that "the unconscious must flow freely and richly, bringing at demand all the treasures of memory, all the emotions, incidents, scenes, intimations of character and relationship which it has stored in its depths" (45). For Brande, the unconscious is the "source of originality" (123), "the elusive quality" (119), "the root of genius" (149), and the faculty that "dictates the form of the story" (46). To write well, the beginner "must teach the unconscious to flow into the channel of writing" (69). On the other hand, beginners should acquire the craftsman-like skill to critically read and edit their writings. This type of critical activity, however, should only be performed once the first version of a text has been completed with the help of the unconscious mind. As Brande observes: "It is time now to call on your prosaic side for the services it can render you. […] there are hundred things it can do for you as soon as you have given it this much material to work on. If it is called in too soon, though, it hampers you more than it helps" (90).

Brande's ideas on accessing and developing the writer's unconscious side or voice through lifestyle advice are reminiscent of ideas found in self-help literature have had a major impact on subsequent writing handbooks (Wandor: 2005). This can be seen when Julia Cameron, in her

bestselling *The Artist's Way. A Course in Discovering and Recovering Your Creative Self* (1994), describes writing as "a spiritual journey, a pilgrimage home to the self" (203). In Cameron's view, all people are "creatively blocked" and must "engage in creative recovery" (xiii). To enable such a recovery, Cameron prescribes a life of regularity, solitude and meditation in service of the "Great Creator" (xxi). Further, the legacy of Brande can be witnessed in Natalie Goldberg's *Writing down the Bones* (1986) where, in the introduction, Goldberg states: "This book is about writing. It is also about using writing as your practice, as a way to help you penetrate your life and become sane" (3). A bit further in the book, in the chapter "Writing as a Practice", Goldberg continues: "Once you're deep into it, you wonder what took you so long to finally settle down at the desk. Through practice you actually do get better. You learn to trust your deep self more and not to give in to your voice that wants to avoid writing" (11). Goldberg equally endorses Brande's theory of duplicity when she remarks: "It is important to separate the creator and the editor or internal censor when you practice writing, so that the creator has free space to breathe, explore, and express" (28). Finally, in *Writing Without Teachers* (1973), composition professor Peter Elbow signals: "Maybe you don't *like* your voice; maybe people have made fun of it. But it's the only voice you've got. It's your only source of power. You better get back into it, no matter what you think of it" (7).

1.3.3. Writer's Block, Freewriting, Write What You Know

Of course, the omnipresence of the piece of advice *find your voice* in writing handbooks is related to the intensity with which these books treat the ideas of *writer's block* and *fear of the blank page*. As Wandor suggests, the notion of terror of the blank page "is repeated so often in creative writing literature that it takes on the force of a precondition of writing" (113). Indeed, the difficulties beginning writers experience receive ample attention in handbooks. Brande's *Becoming a Writer* opens with the chapter "The Four Difficulties" that discusses the problems of "the difficulty of writing at all", "the one-book author", "the occasional writer", "the uneven writer" and "the difficulties not in technical equipment". Likewise, in his popular textbook *Writing Without Teachers* (1973), Peter Elbow notes: "Most people's relationship to the process of writing is one of helplessness. First, they can't write satisfactorily or even at all. Worse yet, their efforts to improve don't seem to help" (12).

One very common way in which handbooks suggest to overcome *writer's block* and *find your voice* is known as *freewriting*. *Freewriting* exercises are often seen as based on André Breton's *automatic writing* practices (Elbow: 1998; Dawson: 2005). These exercises advise students to write uninterruptedly for a certain amount of time without any constraints with regard to language and subject matter. This approach also features in Ray Bradbury's tagline advice "WORK – RELAXATION – DON'T THINK – FURTHER RELAXATION," (144) and in his belief that "quantity gives experience. From

experience alone can quality come" (145) and that "the artist must work so hard, so long, that a brain develops and lives, all of itself, in his fingers" (146). For his part, Peter Elbow, one of the best-known proponents of *freewriting*, argues: "The most effective way I know to improve your writing is to do *freewriting* exercises regularly. At least three times a week" (13).

Another way in which handbooks propose to *find your voice* is through *writing what you know*. *Write what you know* tells beginning writers to base their narratives on personal experience. This would not only contribute to the depicting of convincing stories as a result of the accuracy with which the writer can portray the setting as well as the psychological development of characters. It also enables the discovery of authentic voice. In *Writing Fiction* (1962), R.V. Cassill makes this point when he argues that "the writer will discover who he really is. His own identity will be clarified as his ability to write of his own experience increases" (1962: 23).

Write What You Know is a quintessential piece of writing advice that appears in many handbooks. It often entails the suggestion to draw from childhood experience, memories, trauma and professional experience to write. This, however, does not exclude the imagination as a creative source. In *On Writing* (2000), Stephen King explains: "I think you begin by interpreting 'write what you know' as broadly as possible. If you're a plumber, you know plumbing, but that is far from the extent of your knowledge; the heart also knows things, and so does the imagination. Thank God" (183). Then, he adds:

> Write what you like, then imbue it with life and make it unique by blending in your own personal knowledge of life, friendship, relationships, sex, and work. Especially work. People love to read about work. God knows why, but they do. If you're a plumber who enjoys science fiction, you might well consider a novel about a plumber aboard a starship or on an alien planet. (185)

In King's opinion, *write what you know* operates as a directive that permits to create persuasive and enchanting fiction on the condition that writers make use of other faculties than reason and memory. In a similar though more critical vein, John Gardner notes that a "common and usually unfortunate answer" to the question of what the beginning writer should write about is 'write about what you know'" (1991: 18). "Nothing can be more limiting to the imagination, nothing is quicker to turn on the psyche's censoring devices and distortion systems," he warns, "than trying to write truthfully about one's home town, one's Episcopalian mother, one's crippled younger sister" (18). According to Gardner, when *write what you know* does yield good results, this does not come from the fact that a writer was able to transform lived experience truthfully into quality fiction, but it has to do with the writer's knowledge of literary genres: "The writer, in other words, is presenting not so much what he knows about life as what he knows about a particular literary genre" (18).

Finally, a somewhat different interpretation of *write what you know* is present in Brande's *Becoming a Writer*. In this book, it functions as an exhortation to pay close attention to ordinary, everyday life. Brande urges beginning writers to examine their own and others' ways of speaking, and acting, as well as their surroundings. This, she believes, has great literary potential. "*Turn yourself into your own object of attention*," she advises, "what do you look like, standing there? How do you walk? What, if you knew nothing about yourself, could be gathered of you, your character, your background, your purpose just there at that minute?" (58-59).

1.3.4. Elements of fiction, Situation, Kill your Darlings

An alternative to *find your voice* and *freewriting* as a mantra for writing consists in planning or plotting story. Most writing handbooks give advice on how to prepare the separate aspects that constitute a work of fiction. These aspects are typically known as the *elements of fiction writing* or the *building blocks of fiction* and can include plot, character, dialogue, setting, action, point of view, theme, style and rewriting. There are handbooks specifically devoted to each of these elements. For example, the publisher Writer's Digest Books has a book series titled *Elements of Fiction Writing* that entails volumes on *Scene and Structure* (2011), *Conflict and Suspense* (2011), *Beginnings, Middles and Ends* (2011), *Characters and Viewpoint* (2011), *Setting* (2011) and *Description* (2011). Many other handbooks, like Sherry Ellis's popular collection of writing exercises *Now Write!* (2006), use the *elements of fiction* to structure their advice: *Now Write!* contains sections with exercises in "Get Writing!", "Point of View", "Character Development", "Dialogue", "Plot and Pacing" and "Setting and Description".

In respect to the *elements of fiction*, handbooks draw on a wide variety of technical texts that treat one or more of those aspects. Aristotle's *Poetics* and E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) are common references in this regard. In particular, the handbooks testify to the influence of notable screenwriting handbooks like Christopher Vogler's *The Writer's Journey. Mythic Structure for Writers* (1998) and Robert McKee's *Story. Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting* (1997). As their titles announce, these texts expose the basic principles that underlie story-telling. They uphold to the idea of archetype rather than stereotype, arguing that their advice functions well not because it unearths a set of generic principles for success, but because it is derived from a number of fundamental and universal truths about human nature and its relation to narrative. As screenwriting guru McKee observes: "*Story* is about eternal, universal forms, not about formulas" (3). Likewise, Volger indicates that his *Writer's Journey* deals with "a form, not a formula" (xvi).

In *Story*, McKee unveils these universal forms in chapters on "Structure and Setting", "Structure and Genre", "Structure and Character", "Scene Design", "Crisis, Climax, Resolution", "The Principle of Antagonism" and "Character". He pays much attention to what he calls the "terminology

of story design" (32) and makes many conceptual distinctions. In the chapter "The Structure Spectrum", for instance, he distinguishes between structure, event, scene, beat, sequence, act and story and provides each term with an apparently clear-cut definition. In addition, he explains the three major plot-types (archplot or classical design; antiplot or anti-structure; miniplot or minimalism) with the aid of the "story-triangle" (45). He further specifies the details of the story-triangle on the basis of "formal differences within the story-triangle" (47) like "closed versus open endings", "external versus internal conflict", "single versus multiple protagonists", "active versus passive protagonist", "linear versus non-linear time", "causality versus coincidence" and "change versus stasis". In his own *The Writer's Journey*, Christopher Vogler first presents the different character archetypes like "hero", "mentor: wise old man or woman", "threshold guardian", "herald", "shapeshifter", "shadow", "ally" and "trickster", after which he analyzes the different stages of the story such as "ordinary world", "call to adventure", "refusal of the call", "meeting with the mentor", "crossing the first threshold" and "tests, allies, enemies".

Many popular how-to-write handbooks borrow aspects from screenwriting books like McKee's and Volger's to present the *elements of fiction* and convey information about how to plot a narrative. Even in writing memoirs, which tend to stress self-development over technique, the *building blocks of fiction* are present. In *Becoming a Writer*, for instance, Dorothea Brande points to Frenchman Georges Polti's classic *The Thirty-six Dramatic Situations* (originally titled *Les Trente-six situations dramatiques* (1895) – first English translation in 1916) to make the point that "there are only so many dramatic situations in which man can find himself" (124). In *The Art of Fiction*, John Gardner includes a chapter on "Plotting", in which he distinguishes between three ways in which a writer can design a plot: "He borrows some traditional story or action drawn from life; he works backward from his climax; or he works forward from an initial situation" (165). Additionally, Gardner concludes his book by giving twenty exercises on plot-construction, and thirty exercises on other technical aspects of fiction writing like character, monologue, dialogue, style, point of view and setting. The following suggestions figure among the plot exercises: "plot a realistic story, working forward from an initial situation"; "plot a story based on some legend"; "plot a comic or serious fable"; "plot a short surreal fiction; a short expressionistic fiction"; "plot a story by beginning with a choice of the style to be used. Let the style be in some way odd or unusual — for example, a preponderance of very long sentences, or the use of the virtually unusable second-person point of view"; "plot an interesting novel on a hackneyed subject"; "plot an architectonic (or multi-plot) novel; plot a novel that imitates the form of the biography" (198-199).

In *On Writing*, Stephen King attacks the importance of plot for fiction and contends that "plot is, I think, the good writer's last resort and the dullard's first choice. The story which results from it is apt to feel artificial and labored" (189). King notes that he prefers to begin from situation rather than

plot: “I lean more heavily on intuition, and have been able to do that because my books tend to be based on situation rather than story” (189). Putting it differently, he writes: “I want to put a group of characters (perhaps a pair; perhaps even just one) in some sort of predicament and then watch them try to work themselves free” (189). He further exposes a number of situations that are at the heart of some his books, “*Gerald’s Game* and *The Girl who loved Tom Gordon* are two other purely situational novels. If *Misery* is ‘two characters in a house,’ then *Gerald* is ‘one woman in a bedroom’ and *The Girl Who* is ‘one kid lost in the woods’” (195), and he explains that “the most interesting situations can usually be expressed as a *What-if* question” (196). Even though it often goes unnoticed, this notion of situation, I argue, is important not only in King’s *On Writing*, but in the broader American literary advice literature, where the writing exercises often use it as their starting point. In the only exercise that figures in his own book, King sketches a situation (estranged hubby beats up (or murders) ex-wife (200)) on the basis of which beginning writers can craft a story.

Apart from *situation*, there is another notion that is connected to the idea of the plot or to the *elements of fiction* more generally: *kill your darlings*. This very popular piece of advice — usually attributed to William Faulkner, but already present in Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch’s *On the Art of Writing* (1916) — suggests that when revisiting drafts, writers should be capable of doing away with those passages that, although well-written, do not add to the overall narrative. It is a testimony to the functionalist idea that each element in the story should play some kind of role. According to this view, an element without added value only distracts the reader and decreases the story’s quality. In Stephen King’s *On Writing*, this advice is included word for word:

> Mostly when I think of pacing, I go back to Elmore Leonard who explained it so perfectly by saying he just left out the boring parts. This suggests cutting to speed the pace, and that’s what most of use end up having to do (kill your darlings, kill your darlings, even when it breaks your egocentric little scribbler’s heart, kill your darlings). (266)

King points to the importance of pacing for making good fiction and argues that *kill your darlings* plays an essential role in finding a good pace. He further recounts how a magazine editor once provided him with a formula for editing his stories that has proven very beneficial for him. “In the spring of my senior year at Lisbon High,” he tells, “I got a scribbled comment that changed the way I rewrote my fiction once and forever. Jotted below the machine-generated signature of the editor was this *mot*: ‘Not bad, but PUFFY. You need to revise for length. Formula: 2nd Draft = 1st Draft – 10%. Good luck” (266).

1.3.5. Show Don't Tell, Be Specific

Probably the most famous creative writing formula is *show don't tell*. Already in his 1962 *Writing Fiction*, R. V. Cassill signals that this piece of advice is canonical in creative writing circles. "An experienced writer, criticizing the work of any apprentice," Cassel writes, "is apt to say repeatedly, 'Don't tell us what your character or scene is like. Show us'" (1962: 5). This advice generally points to the importance of concrete description in letting the reader witness or *see* a scene. Instead of encountering a summary sketch ("she was happy"), the reader should be provided with sensory detail ("she was laughing and her eyes were shining").

This advice can be traced back to Plato's distinction between dramatic and narrative poetry in *The Republic* and, more recently, to Ezra Pound's 1913 manifesto "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" (Dawson: 2015). In the tradition of the novel, however, the writings by Henry James and Percy Lubbock contributed the most in propagating that notion. For Lubbock especially, the historical progression of the novel ventures towards an increase in dramatization (showing). For example, in discussing Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, he notes: "I speak of his 'telling' the story, but of course [Flaubert] has no idea of doing that and no more; the art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be shown" (1954: 62).

Since Lubbock and James, this notion has become the dominant principle for evaluation of fictional work. Critic Wayne Booth observes that "this championing of the aesthetic achievements of modern fiction, soon solidified into a rule for both composition and evaluation as it was taken up by both commercial handbooks on fiction writing and scholarly and critical work" (quoted in Dawson, 2005: 102). In the creative writing workshop in particular *show don't tell* has become the principal tool for commenting on students' fiction. It allows to evaluate sentence structure and to give advice as to the question if certain scenes should to be rewritten or fleshed out. Yet, this predominance of *show don't tell* has also resulted in a fierce critique of writing workshops. In particular, it is considered the main contributor to the omnipresence of American minimalism or "dirty realism".[4] As Antoni Jach argued in his handbook, *show don't tell* is limiting and prescriptive because it favors "scene-setting followed by dialogue" (quoted in Dawson, 2005: 103).

Show don't tell appears in many handbooks. In *Writing Down the Bones*, Natalie Goldberg observes that "there's an old adage in writing: 'Don't tell, but show'", and explains that it means, "don't tell us about anger (or any of those big words like honesty, truth, hate, love, sorrow, life, justice, etc.); show us what made you angry. We will read it and feel angry. Don't tell readers what to feel. Show them the situation, and that feeling will awaken in them" (75). Adding to this, Goldberg urges her

[4] The term "dirty realism" was first coined by author and journalist Bill Bufford in *Granta magazine* to define a group of American writers who are said to depict the seamier aspects of ordinary life in a minimalist style.

readers to “be specific. Don’t say ‘fruit.’ Tell what kind of fruit — ‘it is a pomegranate.’ Give things the dignity of their names” (77). In a similar way, John Gardner observes that “vivid detail is the life blood of fiction […] in all major genres, the inner strategy is the same: The reader is regularly presented with proofs — in the form of closely observed details — that what is said to be happening is really happening” (26).

1.3.7. Hard Work, Rewriting

Handbooks constantly insist that writing is very *hard work*. As Brande signals, “then comes the dawning comprehension of all that a writer’s life implies: not easy daydreaming, but hard work at turning the dream into reality” (13). Handbooks contend that to turn “the dream into reality”, writers must work hard and work through failure. They argue that aspirants must be conscious of being engaged in a long-term learning process of trial, error and repetition. In this way, they underpin the notion of hard work by means of long term rewards. “So we should not look down on work nor look down on the forty-five out of fifty-two stories written in our first years as failures,” Ray Bradbury writes in *Zen in the Art of Writing*, “To fail is to give up. But you are in the midst of a moving process. Nothing fails then. All goes on. Work is done. If good, you learn from it. If bad, you learn even more. Work done and behind you is a lesson to be studied. There is no failure unless one stops” (146).

An important part of the hard work that writers must perform entails *rewriting* earlier drafts. Many handbooks give specific advice on methods for rewriting. In *Writing Down the Bones,* Natalie Goldberg notes: “It is a good idea to wait awhile before you reread your writing. Time allows for distance and objectivity about your work” (172). Likewise, Stephen King notes: “Now let’s talk about revising the work — how much and how many drafts? For me the answer has always been two drafts and a polish” (248). He specifies that “the first draft — the All-Story Draft — should be written with no help (or interference) from anyone else,” and that “how long you let your book rest — sort of like bread dough between kneadings — is entirely up to you, but I think it should be a minimum of six weeks” (252).

1.3.8. You Can Do It

To support writers in their hard work, handbooks insist over and over that *you can do it*. As Alexandria Peary observes: “All the content areas of self-help — the role of the unconscious, control, and holism — gesture to this one message: you can do it. You can write” (90). In “Taking Self-Help Books Seriously: the Informal Aesthetic Education of Writers” (2014), Peary argues that writing handbooks fill certain voids in the academic creative writing curriculum. Instead of refuting the handbooks on the basis of

the commercial circuit in which they operate (as many critics do), she points to the democratic potential of these texts.

> Traditional writing courses, […] lack the sort of autotelic, holistic aesthetic that is advanced in self-help books on how to write. Not simply a package of "how-to" techniques or tips to get published, self-help books provide an experience of art akin to Dewey's holistic aesthetic experience in which the individual's qualitative, internal, and everyday lived experiences—'the movement of the organism in its entirety'—are factors. It seems the rarified atmosphere of the classroom tends to preclude this type of creative encounter. (87)

The democratic potential of handbooks, for Peary, is realized in two ways. On the one hand, these texts offer writing tools to a public that lacks the opportunity to be involved in creative writing due to socio-economic, ethnic, gender-related and geographic factors. They address a need that Natalie Goldberg, drawing on personal experience, articulates in the preface to her *Writing Down the Bones*: "I had a sincere and earnest desire to figure out this writing life. I very badly wanted to do it and I didn't know how, and I hadn't learned how in all my public school education. By college, I think I gave up" (xiii). On the other hand, Peary finds that regular writing education (creative writing and composition) underlines the technical and rational aspects of the writing act. It is rooted in a model that preaches control over the text, but that overlooks the most fundamental issues that face the beginning writer. Handbooks, on the other hand, offer a more emancipatory and holistic model for writing.

Peary contends that writing handbooks deal with the beginning writer's most fundamental problems: lack of self-confidence, fear of the blank page, and giving up too soon. She distinguishes four strategies that handbooks offer to resolve these issues. First, they present doubt and anxiety as natural and universal (for instance by referring to similar feelings in the autobiographical works of famous writers). Second, they portray the capacity and the desire to write as feelings that are just as natural and universal. The ability and the eagerness to write are not the privilege of those who had to fortune to follow higher education, but are, to a certain extent, intrinsic to every person. Third, the handbooks propose a holistic approach to writing. In other words, they provide a method that presents writing not only as a technical and rational endeavor, but as an activity that includes the entire person's faculties, affective as well and unconscious, the ultimate goal being to restore the connection with the unconscious (*find your own voice*) and to reintegrate intuition in the creative process. As Anne Lamott observes in her widely recommended *Bird by Bird*: "Everything we need in order to tell our stories in a reasonable and exciting way already exists in each of us. Everything you need is in your head and memories, in all that your senses provide, in all that you've seen and thought and absorbed. There in your unconscious, where the real creation goes on" (1995: 181). Finally, the handbooks propose to

abandon the notion of (rational) control over the writing process. “Control, coherence, and knowing your mind,” as Peter Elbow explains in *Writing Without Teachers*, “are not what you start out with but what you end up with” (1998: 15).

1.3.9. Problems with Handbooks: Self-expression and Craft

Finally, I want to point out that many commentators of creative writing handbooks write critically about the phenomenon. They denounce both the discourse as a whole and the formulas that underlie the handbooks’ poetics. Creative writing teacher Michelene Wandor chides the handbook discourse’s patronizing tone. With regard to the handbooks’ notion of *writing as hard work*, she writes for instance that “it may be appropriate to explain this principle to a child acquiring literacy,” but, “when addressed to adults it is patronizing” (115). Similarly, she argues that the handbooks’ discourse of “simple vocabulary, the user-friendly tone (‘you’), reassurance, encouragement, suggestions to write when you ‘feel’ like it, an exhortation not to think (!), a little joke to help you along,” does nothing but “infantilizing creative writing,” (117-118) and concludes that it is such “pretentious stuff” which “quite justifiably, gives creative writing pedagogy a bad name” (112). Additionally, she thinks that the formulas are empty vessels. They are “mantra’s” appearing over and over and without any explication what they actually mean. For instance, commenting on the inclusion of model short stories in R.V. Cassill’s *Writing Fiction* as a way to teach *reading as a writer*, Wandor observes: “Quite how [these stories] are meant to operate as models for writing is unclear; it might be mimetic […] but the complexity of this is not developed” (105).

Yet, above all, Wandor’s criticism is directed at the handbooks’ emphasis on self-expression through the formulas *write what you know* and *find your own voice*. This poetics of the self, she contends, entails a strong narrowing of the concept of literature. In this light, every fictional text, not only memoirs or autobiographies, becomes a form of confession or “a kind of gossip” (110). Further, Wandor believes that it offers a highly problematic basis for creative writing pedagogy. On the one hand, it refutes the possibility that students could write about things they have not experienced firsthand, in other words, that students exploit “the potential of anything defined as outside immediate ‘personal’ (i.e. autobiographical) experience” (110). On the other hand, by privileging the personal and inviting students “to trawl their emotions, in order to uncover and work on, and with, the most vulnerable,” (110) it undermines the pedagogical dialogue during which the teacher can advise the student to revise a written text.

Wandor thinks that an additional side effect of *find your voice* is the transformation of *writer’s block* into something very personal. As mentioned, most contemporary handbooks principally advice to scrutinize lived experience in order to find interesting writing material. Turning this precept around,

Wandor claims, it becomes clear that handbooks suggest that people incapable of writing do not have interesting experiences nor a voice of their own. In this way, the *writer's block* can become a problematic sign of a personality problem or, worse, of a lack of personality. Finally, Wandor suggests that another consequence of the emphasis on personal experience is that it makes the reading act superfluous, in spite of the incentive to *read as a writer*. As Wandor observes:

> If students don't read one can hardly blame them. Why should they, if they have been told again and again that all writing must come from personal experience? Despite the repeated exhortations in CW [creative writing] books, writing is thus pedagogically separated from reading. Despite the mantra that all good writers read a lot, reading has now effectively become the new Missing Subject. (114)

In "Just Do It: Creative Writing Exercises and the Ideology of American Handbooks" (2004), creative writing teacher Steve Westbrook offers a similar critique. He finds that the problem of writing handbooks resides in the almost exclusive insistence on the writing act. At no point, he contends, the handbooks encourage using the critical faculties. More significantly, they advise against thinking about the reasons for writing and about the societal role of the writer and her literary work. For instance, *freewriting* exercises normally contain advise against critical thinking, as the latter would only obstruct the creative process.

On an ideological level, Westbrook thinks this type of advice is highly problematic. It weeds out the political tendencies of writers in favor of the category of personal experience. He argues that, ultimately, this only leads to political submission to the status quo, both within the immediate "American creative writing industry" in which writers operate and in "the larger state" (147). "These exercises," Westbrooks signals, "function like the machinery of what Althusser (1971: 133) has called an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), which 'teaches know how but in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology'" (147).

Lastly, Australian creative writing teacher Paul Dawson finds fault with creative writing handbooks for failing to give a historical interpretation of craft. This is particularly true, he thinks, for the concept of *show don't tell*. Instead of presenting it as a historically determined way of writing that becomes predominant in the course of the nineteenth century, handbooks summon *show don't tell* as a universal law of fiction (2005: 102). Moreover, this, Dawson thinks, is not only the case for *show don't tell*, but for all the so-called *building blocks of fiction writing* that handbooks discuss: plot, focalization, character, dialogue, voice (Dawson, 2008). All these elements, Dawson writes, are presented in handbooks as if they are untouched by the course of history and available as such for any writer who wishes to make use of them. Dawson himself, by contrast, is "interested not in offering students a static set of formal devices, backed up by canonical and contemporary examples, but in

using these devices as a heuristic method for showing different, historically contingent, approaches to the writing of fiction" (2008). In other words, as the title of his essay suggests, he wants to historicize "craft in the teaching of fiction".

1.4. Conclusion

Clearly, the formulas found in writing handbooks or, as François Bon calls it, the "conseils pour livres inutiles", have spurred much discussion. Commentators like Westbrook, Wandor and Dawson criticize them for simplifying the art of writing and patronizing the aspirant writer. Meanwhile, as can be seen from the analysis above, it is not always simple to determine which messages these formulas convey. Indeed, like all language, they can be interpreted in different ways. For example, as I showed, *write what you know* signifies different things in Dorothea Brande's *Becoming a Writer*, John Gardner's *The Art of Fiction* and Stephen King's *On Writing*. In my view, it is precisely the simplicity of these creative writing formulas that makes them so convenient for writers of literary advice. By using them, these authors summon a received idea of how people should write (for instance, based on lived experience), while adding their own interpretation to the formula (for instance, Brande's injunction to "*turn yourself into your own* object of attention" or King's suggestion to "write what you like, then imbue it with life and make it unique by blending in your own personal knowledge of life, friendship, relationships, sex, and work").

In other words, the meaning of creative writing formulas is not completely stable. Every time they are used in handbooks, they are re-interpreted. There are different factors that play a part in this act of re-interpretation by the handbook writer. For example, there is the writer's particular poetics, but the literary tradition in which she stands plays an equally important role. Ultimately, these writing formulas stand at the crossroads of the universal and the local. On the one hand, handbooks present these slogans as universally valid pieces of advice on the craft of writing. Disregarding historical period, geographic space and national literary tradition, they imbue these formulas with undisputed authority. On the other hand, it is certain that these formulas and techniques originate in local literary (advice) traditions such as the short story handbooks and the ego-psychology-inspired tradition that begins with Dorothea Brande's *Becoming a Writer*. This tension between the universal and the local is at the heart of the analyses presented in the following chapters. When U.S. literary advice formulas cross the Atlantic ocean and re-appear in texts written by French authors, they inevitably undergo change through their encounter with local French literary (advice) traditions. Hence the question that drives a large part of this dissertation: what changes does this transatlantic move bring about, and what is the role of local French advice traditions in these processes of transformation?

In the next chapter, I will discuss two local French advice traditions. Just like American creative writing handbooks, these traditions have left a trace on contemporary advice in France. Specifically, I will focus on the representations of the author, the literary text, the writing act and the literary field as present in these traditions. Exposing this imagery, I contend, is essential to coming to grips with literary advice in France today. In later chapters, I will show how contemporary advice authors draw upon this imagery to give shape to their text, but also make attempts to transform and undermine this very imagery.

2. Two French Advice Traditions: Representations of Martyrs and Machines

2.1. Introduction

Local advice traditions play an important role in constructing the outlook of contemporary literary advice in France. This can be seen in different ways. Above all, many advice books that have been written in the past continue to circulate on today's advice market. This, for instance, is true of Charles Baudelaire's *Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs* (1846), Antoine Albalat's *L'Art d'écrire enseigné en vingt leçons* (1899), Raymond Roussel's *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* (1935), and Rainer Maria Rilke's *Lettres à un jeune poète* (1937) (the German original was first published in 1929). Further, the formats of these earlier books are being re-used by contemporary advice authors. For example, the epistolary format found in books like Claire Delannoy's *Lettre à un jeune écrivain* (2005) and Martin Page's *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* (2014) directly recalls the master-apprentice dialogue taking place in Baudelaire's *Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs,* Rilke's *Lettres à un jeune poète* and other books of what I will term the *conseils* tradition. Likewise, "Visite guidée" (2007) and *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi* (2008), two short texts authored by autofiction writer Chloé Delaume's renew the retrospective and scientific treatise-like format of Roussel's *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres*. Finally, contemporary advice texts in France take up many of the representations, ideas and techniques from earlier advice traditions.

This chapter explores the reservoir of images, ideas and techniques offered by early French advice. Particularly, it zooms in on the representations of writer, writing, literary text, and literary field that can be found in two local advice traditions. The *conseils* tradition emerges in the nineteenth century, for instance with Baudelaire's *Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs* (1846), and echoes the imagery found in Flaubert's *Correspondance* and Jules and Edmond de Goncourt's *Correspondance*. These short texts, typically shaped as dialogues between master and apprentice, depend on their authors' ability to project a convincing image of the writers' working habits and lifestyles. Among the variety of representations that the *conseils* present (*bohémien* writer, pragmatic writer, *arriviste* writer), I will draw particular attention to the notion of the martyr writer as developed in neo-romantic *conseils* texts such as Rilke's *Lettres à un jeune poète* (1937) and Max Jacob's *Conseils à un jeune poète* (1935).[5] This notion, I argue — with its ties to solitude, hard work, hardship and passion —, is especially helpful to form an understanding of contemporary literary advice in France.

[5] Rilke's *Lettres à un jeune poète* is published posthumously in German in 1929 by Insel in Leipzig. Bernard Grasset issued it in French for the first time in 1937. Today, the translated work figures as a classic in the French literary advice tradition. It has been re-printed by many different publishing houses, from Seuil (1992) to Gallimard (2005) and Flammarion (2011) (see 3.3.2.). Moreover, it is referred to extensively in how-to-write handbooks and other contemporary advice texts in French (see 6.2.1.).

The texts of what I call the methodological advice tradition, on the other hand, prefer depicting the writing process rather than focusing on the writer. Baudelaire's "La Genèse d'un poème" (1848), Antoine Albalat's *L'Art d'écrire enseigné en vingt leçons*, Raymond Roussel's *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* and Georges Perec's "Notes sur ce que je cherche" (1978) uncover the principles according to which literary texts have been written and, consequently, expose writing as a rational, systematic, and even scientific process. In this framework, the literary text appears as a meticulously crafted machine, with the writer as its engineer (even a mad scientist, in the cases of Roussel and the Oulipo). In addition to this imagery, I will address the avant-garde technique of *écriture à contraintes*. This technique, together with other practices promoted by the literary collective the Oulipo (Ouvroir de littérature potentielle), has been influential in shaping the writing exercises included in contemporary advice texts, in particular in what I call *atelier d'écriture* handbooks like François Bon's *Tous les mots sont adultes* (2000).

2.2. *Conseils*: Depicting and Creating Writers

2.2.1. Rise of the Literary field and the Bohémien Writer

In the afterword to his 2014 *Manuel d'écriture et de survie*, writer Martin Page signals: "Penser sa condition la fait nécessairement évoluer. L'écrivain est une invention d'écrivains, c'est important d'en prendre conscience, de le revendiquer (on ne va pas laisser ça à d'autres)" (177). Page pleads for the need to constantly think and re-think authorship. Today's capitalist world, he argues, is a place that leaves little space for genuine artists. If they refuse falling victim to the homogenizing power of the cultural industries, they are destined to face social and financial precariousness. It is up to these genuine writers (and other artists), Page believes, to construct a way of life and work that allows them to *survive* these conditions. In other words, they are responsible for inventing strategies that will allow them to pursue their passion, in spite of the capitalist world's contempt.

Page's argument for the ability of writers to invent alternative ways of life is solidly rooted in the history of literary advice in France. In particular it calls to mind the *conseils* genre that emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century when the literary field stood on the brink of autonomy (Bourdieu: 1992). In *Les Règles de l'art,* Pierre Bourdieu describes how, in nineteenth century France, many young men from popular and middle class backgrounds set their hopes on becoming writers. These men were well educated, but unable to obtain positions that matched their qualifications. Bourdieu invokes three reasons to account for this discrepancy between labor force and labor demand: the young age of the bureaucrats that came out of the First Empire (1814-1815) and the Restauration (1815-1830) made it difficult for new generations to enter the governmental apparatus; a centralization of government in Paris meant fewer bureaucratic positions; the high bourgeoisie strived to save prestigious positions for

their own children. Given how slight their chances were of finding a consecrated position in the established fields of work, many of these young men were determined to risk their chances elsewhere, namely, in the world of literature. As Bourdieu explains:

> Ces nouveaux venus, nourris d'humanités et de rhétorique mais dépourvus des moyens financiers et des protections sociales indispensables pour faire valoir leurs titres, se trouvent renvoyés vers les professions littéraires qui sont entourées de tous les prestiges des triomphes romantiques et qui, à la différence de professions plus bureaucratisées, n'exigent aucune qualification scolairement garantie. (97)

With the emergence of a proper book market at the end of the eighteenth century, and with legal adjustments that promoted freedom of publishing and acknowledged authors' rights (Sapiro, 2003: 443), it became possible to make a living as independent writer. As critics like Pierre Bourdieu and Gisèle Sapiro point out, whereas writers used to be dependent on state and church to make their art, it was now possible for them to pursue a livelihood by producing books that can be sold on the book market (Bourdieu, 1992; Sapiro, 2003). This new economic reality, however, provokes a reaction on the part of authors who claimed to care about professional deontology and who distanced themselves from the capitalist and bourgeois model that judges literature exclusively in terms of sales.

This double attitude towards the market resulted in the rise of two opposed poles of literary production that function according to proper principles. The industrial pole operated according to heteronomous principles, namely, the laws of the market (Bourdieu: 1992). It follows that authors and publishers produced serial literature that drew from the "recipes" that made past literature successful, and whose internal hierarchy was based on the short-term profits that authors make. In this configuration, writers appeared as professional entrepreneurs driven by financial rewards. By contrast, the autonomous pole rejected commercial success and pursued beauty in a disinterested way, that is, for the sake of beauty itself ("l'art pour l'art"). Its hierarchical principles resided in the judgment of peers and critics who evaluated the originality of particular texts, which called for a view of authorship, not as profession, but as a higher calling in the service of beauty.

As Bourdieu shows, the emergence of an autonomous pole of literary production, with its own values and hierarchical principles (Bourdieu speaks of "un monde économique renversé" (1992)), also manifested itself in the invention of alternative lifestyles on the part of these *pure* writers. In order to affirm their existence as "une nouvelle entité sociale" (99) and to signify their independence from capitalist principles, these writers embraced and cultivated a bohème lifestyle "avec la fantaisie, le calembour, la blague, les chansons, la boisson et l'amour sous toutes ses formes" (Bourdieu: 1992, 98). This lifestyle was not only adopted by writers, it also became a theme in the literature of the time with

"l'invention du personnage littéraire de la bohème" (98). Moreover, it became the subject of a specialized meta-literature which I call, after critic Françoise Grauby, the literary *conseils* (2015: 135).

2.2.2. Baudelaire's *Code De La Civilité*: the Pragmatic Writer

The *Conseils* date back to Horace's *The Art of Poetry* and grow in popularity during the Renaissance (Grauby: 134-135). These are typically short texts in which a seasoned writer shares advice and experiences with the uninformed neophyte. In addition to suggestions on writing, these texts mostly give an insight into the writer's *art de vivre*. As Bourdieu notes, in their efforts to construct a notion of authorship, these texts rely more on description than prescription: instead of laying down how writers *should* act, they expose how writers *do* act (1992: 99). Whereas the texts mentioned by Bourdieu (Henry Murger's *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (1851) and Honoré de Balzac's *Traité de la vie élégante* (1830)) endorse the idea of the *bohémien* writer, later *conseils* embrace a somewhat different depiction of the literary life. As Françoise Grauby observes, gradually the *bohémien* makes way for a more ascetic writer figure: "En amenant à considérer avec lucidité l'écriture et à projeter sur lui-même un discours critique, la gamme des conseils avisés enjoignent au néophyte de bien peser son engagement dans les Lettres, de considérer avec sérieux une hygiène de vie appropriée à la vocation" (2015: 138).

Charles Baudelaire's *Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs*, published for the first time in the magazine *L'Esprit public* (1846), testifies to this shift in the portrayal of the writer. At the time of this text's publication, Baudelaire was twenty-five years old and had been working for some years on the poems that would appear in *Les Fleurs du mal* (first edition 1857). A second version of *Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs* appears in Baudelaire's 1868 *L'Art romantique* (Michel Lévy). Throughout the twentieth century, the text has been re-edited by different publishers. For instance, it appeared in 1929 in one volume with Jean Prévost's *Traité de débutant*. In the preface, Baudelaire presents himself as a trustworthy guide to the literary field, saying that "les préceptes qu'on va lire sont le fruit de l'expérience," (9) and makes it clear that his advice is principally concerned with lifestyle: "Supposez le code de la civilité écrit par une Warens au cœur intelligent et bon, l'art de s'habiller utilement enseigné par une mère" (9). Interestingly, as if to mark his distance from the *bohème* writer tradition, Baudelaire, when drawing the comparison between himself and Françoise-Louise de Warens, the libertine noblewoman who introduced Rousseau to the worlds of love and culture, signals that he, unlike Warens, will be a morally acceptable mentor: "Une Warens au cœur intelligent et bon". Moreover, to stress the latter point, he situates his text in the tradition of "la civilité puérile et

honnête" (9), a genre of pedagogical writings that, imitating Rousseau's *Émile*, was fashionable during the nineteenth century.[6]

Whereas there is certainly some humor and exaggeration involved in these comparisons ("l'art de s'habiller utilement enseigné par une mère"), it is also true that Baudelaire's text does make a genuine effort to promote a number of values that might be closer to a bourgeois conception of the world than to the *bohème* lifestyle. This becomes apparent in *Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs*'s opening section "Du Bonheur et du guignon dans les débuts", which discusses the issue of work versus talent. "Je ne sais pas si, en fait de réputations, le coup de tonnerre a jamais eu lieu," Baudelaire notes, "Je crois plutôt qu'un succès est, dans une proportion arithmétique ou géométrique, suivant la force de l'écrivain, le résultat des succès antérieurs, souvent invisibles à l'œil nu. Il y a lente agrégation de succès moléculaires; mais de générations miraculeuses et spontanées, jamais" (10). In a somewhat surprising gesture, Baudelaire refutes the idea of spontaneous invention and instead argues for the notion of gradual labor. Literary success (or the lack thereof), he argues, can only be explained by the amount of effort that budding writers put in their work. Such a view is in sharp contrast with ideas that can be found in the specialized *bohème* literature to which Bourdieu refers. While Balzac, in *Traité de la vie élégante*, writes that the artist's "oisiveté est un travail, et son travail un repos" (quoted in Bourdieu: 99), Baudelaire states that "rien n'est vrai que la force, qui est la justice suprême" (12).

In the body of his text, Baudelaire discusses a range of different topics, going from financial demands that beginning writers can make ("l'homme raisonnable est celui qui dit: je crois que cela vaut tant, parce que j'ai du génie; mais s'il faut faire quelques concessions, je les ferai" (14)), to friendship with other writers ("les vraies sympathies sont excellentes […] les fausses sont détestables" (15)), to ways of dealing with creditors ("n'ayez jamais de créanciers. Faites, si vous voulez, semblant d'en avoir, c'est tout ce que je puis vous passer" (24)), to the women budding writers should become involved with ("je n'admets pour eux, — âmes libres et fières, esprits fatigués, qui ont toujours besoin de se reposer leur septième jour, que deux classes de femmes possibles: les filles ou les femmes bêtes, — l'amour ou le pot-au-feu" (26)) and, finally, to eating habits and daily hygiene ("l'orgie n'est plus la sœur de l'inspiration […] Une nourriture très substantielle, mais régulière, est la seule chose nécessaire aux écrivains féconds. L'inspiration est décidément la sœur du travail journalier" (21)).[7] In all these areas, Baudelaire favors a pragmatic approach.[8] A good writer, in his opinion, lives by a disciplined and

[6] A notable example is *La Civilité puérile et honnête expliquée par l'oncle Eugène* (1887).

[7] Such advice, advocating for disciplined and healthy lifestyles, is found in a number of the American handbooks and writing memoirs that I discussed in the previous chapter. Dorothea Brande's *Becoming a Writer* and its description of the writer as "adult, discriminating, temperate, and just" (1983: 38) is prototypical in this regard (see 1.3.2.).

[8] Baudelaire's representation of the pragmatic writer in *Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs* should be distinguished from the pragmatism that I discussed in chapter one with regard to Edgar Allan Poe's "The Philosophy of

healthy work ethos, but can be flexible, should the situation demand it. She understands the conditions that allow her to make art and is able to organize life and work in such a way as to shape these productive conditions.

This pragmatic approach also comes to the fore when Baudelaire discusses writing methods. In this domain, he advocates strongly for efficiency by urging writers to produce good, almost finished, first drafts of texts ("il faut donc que tous les coups portent, et que pas une touche ne soit inutile" (19)) and by giving them the advice to understand a subject as good as possible before putting pen to paper. Mental preparation, he contends, is the crux of writing ("la toile doit être couverte — en esprit — au moment où l'écrivain prend la plume pour écrire le titre" (20)). By contrast, he considers making multiple drafts a mere waste of time ("je ne suis donc pas partisan de la rature" (19)).

2.2.3. Neo-Romantic Conseils: the Martyr Writer

Flaubert's Correspondance: Comme Un Ascète Le Cilice Qui Lui Gratte le Ventre

Whereas Baudelaire provides a pragmatic outlook on the writer's work, this pragmatism is completely thrown overboard in a number of other notable *conseils* texts. In texts like Rainer Maria Rilke's *Lettres à un jeune poète* (1937) and Max Jacob's *Conseils à un jeune poète* (1945), the notion of work — if what they propose can indeed be called work — appears in a very different light. There, it signifies a calling or, in other words, an inner and dire need to lead a life in the service of beauty. Indeed, instead of work, writing, for these authors, becomes a question of passion, vocation, and martyrdom. In their view, the amount of time and energy invested by writers are of no importance at all when discussing the process of literary apprenticeship. The same is true for praise by peers and success on the literary marketplace. The only question that should be on beginning writers' minds, they contend, is whether a text (or a poem) expresses something truthful and authentic.

In the French literary advice tradition, perhaps no text is more famous and influential in carrying out this idea of the martyr writer than Gustave Flaubert's *Correspondance*.[9] Quotations from this book are used in many writing handbooks to underline the need for hard, disinterested and passionate work. For example, in *Écrire. De la page blanche à la publication*, Marianne Jaeglé includes

Composition". While Baudelaire's depiction centers on the writer's lifestyle (be flexible, assertive, etc.), Poe's pragmatism emphasizes the writing process (write according to what generates the best effects).

[9] There have been a number of editions of Flaubert's letters. It was Flaubert's niece and heiress Caroline Commanville who, a few years after the author's death, first decided to issue selected parts of the correspondence with *Lettres de Gustave Flaubert à George Sand* (1884) and with the four volume counting *Correspondance* (1887-1893). For more information on the history of the editions of Flaubert's *Correspondance*, see Leclerc Yvan. "Les Éditions de la correspondance de Flaubert." 2001. http://flaubert.univ-rouen.fr/correspondance/. Accessed 09.07.2018.

the following quote: “J’ai travaillé hier pendant seize heures, aujourd’hui toute la journée et, ce soir enfin, j’ai terminé la première page” (2014: 160).

Flaubert’s letters bring up various topics, but I shall focus on two of them in particular in the framework of this dissertation. First, there is Flaubert’s description of how he found his vocation. Flaubert describes how his literary calling manifested itself during the time that he studied law in Paris. In the letters written in that period, he marks his aversion to both his subject and the idea of a life trajectory that has already been worked out for him. With disdain, he announces: “Je ferai mon droit, je me ferai recevoir et puis j’irai pour finir dignement vivre dans une petite ville de province […] avec une place de substitut au procureur du roi” (1973: 38). Young Flaubert saw the reality of studying law and the future prospect of life as a province magistrate with utter dread. Meanwhile, his letters show that he dreamt of another, less common life in which he would be “Turc en Turquie, ou muletier en Espagne, ou conducteur de chameaux en Egypte” (1973: 77).

As fate has it, a nervous disease rendered Flaubert unequipped to lead the bourgeois life that is sketched out before him. While on a visit in Rouen, he was struck by what critics argue to be an epileptic or a nervous attack (Grauby, 2015: 10). After subsequent crises, Flaubert abandoned his study, and returned to Rouen where his father bought him a house. In his letters, Flaubert pays much attention to his disease. He compares his attacks to fireworks, colored volcanoes, torrents of flames and cerebral orgasms. “Chaque attaque était comme une sorte d’hémorragie de l’innervation,” he writes in a letter, “c’était des pertes séminales de la faculté pittoresque du cerveau, cent mille images sautant à la fois, en feux d’artifices. Il y avait un arrachement de l’âme d’avec le corps, atroce (j’ai la conviction d’être mort plusieurs fois)” (1973: 377). As Françoise Grauby suggests, this can be read as art invading of Flaubert’s body, so to speak (2015: 10). This becomes especially apparent in a letter fragment in which Flaubert compares the state of his nervous system to that of a string instrument being tuned: “Tous mes nerfs tressaillent comme des cordes à violon” (1973: 203).

Flaubert’s depiction of his vocation is intrinsically linked to his dissatisfaction with reality and to the notion of sickness. This thematic clustering also appears in contemporary literary advice. These texts often point to a potential disillusionment with ordinary life on the part of the aspiring writer, and present the pursuit of a literary life as an adventure, a way to escape the daily grind. In some cases, the handbooks resort to the notion of sickness to articulate the beginning writer’s sense of being stuck. Writing, in these texts, has a therapeutic or curative function to help recover from the ailments of everyday life. As author Martin Page writes in *Manuel d’écriture et de survie*: “Ceux qui manquent suffisamment d’imagination pour se croire en bonne santé ne connaissent pas l’urgence à faire des choses, la nécessité de créer, d’affronter le néant“ (77).

The second theme from Flaubert’s *Correspondance* that recurs in contemporary advice is the idea of constructing an ascetic lifestyle as a way of answering art’s calling. Once he became fully aware

of his vocation, Flaubert found himself standing before a crucial decision. In a letter to Louise Colet, he writes: "Je suis arrivé à un moment décisif: il faut reculer ou avancer, tout est là pour moi. C'est une question de vie ou de mort" (1973: 94). To fulfill his calling, Flaubert had to construct a suitable kind of life, that is, a secluded and disciplined life of hard work. While this life allowed him to pursue his passion, it also went hand in hand with a great deal of suffering, anxiety and exhaustion, as appears clearly from his letters:

> Je ne sais pas comment quelquefois les bras ne me tombent pas du corps, de fatigue, et comment ma tête ne s'en va pas en bouillie. Je mène une vie âpre, déserte de toute joie extérieure, et où je n'ai rien pour me soutenir qu'une espèce de rage permanente, qui pleure quelquefois d'impuissance, mais qui est continuelle. J'aime mon travail d'un amour frénétique et perverti, comme un ascète le cilice qui lui gratte le ventre. (1998: 170)

In spite of testifying to the bitterness and hardship of his life, Flaubert maintains that he loves his work "d'un amour frénétique et perverti". This clearly evokes martyrdom. For him, writing means suffering in the service of passion. In his letters to Louise Collet, emphasizing this notion of writing as vocation, Flaubert stresses that he does not care for commercial success or recognition in the contemporary literary market. "*Être connu* n'est pas ma principale affaire," he writes, "Je vise à mieux, à me plaire. […] Que je crève comme un chien plutôt que de hâter d'une seconde ma phrase qui n'est pas mûre" (1998: 179). In his eyes, then, writing has nothing to do with success and prestige, but is solely a matter of finding the right word.

Echoing the figure of the martyr writer that emerges in Flaubert's *Correspondance*, most handbooks urge beginning writers to pursue their dream of becoming a writer in spite of the hardship of such an endeavor. Certainly, they argue, the literary life essentially entails discipline, solitude, patience and hard work. Yet, it is also a unique and beautiful experience.

Rilke's Je Ne Peux Pas Faire Autrement

What I call neo-romantic *conseils* echo Flaubert's depiction of the martyr writer as seen in his *Correspondance*.[10] These texts, typically written by poets, argue that writing is essentially a question of looking inside and finding an authentic voice. They stress that such a search for a voice requires patience and solitude, and is unavoidably tied to feelings of anxiety and sickness. The most prominent neo-romantic *conseils*-book is without a doubt Rainer Maria Rilke's *Lettres à un jeune poète*. This text was published posthumously in German in 1929 by Insel in Leipzig. In French, it was issued for the first

[10] I speak of neo-romanticism because these texts contain many elements reminiscent of 19th century romantic views on art, but they are written during the first half of the twentieth century.

time by Bernard Grasset in 1937. It comprises ten letters written by Rilke between 1903 and 1908 and addressed to the young officer and aspiring poet Franz Xaver Kappus. In the preface of the book, as he justifies why the publication only includes Rilke's part in the correspondence, Kappus notes: "Lorsque parle une grande figure originale, les petits doivent se taire" (23).[11]

Like Flaubert, Rilke endorses the figure of the martyr writer. This becomes clear, first of all, with Rilke's refusal of anything associated with the commercial aspect of literature. Genuine writing, he contends, has nothing to do with seeking commercial success or even the praise of peers. There are no externalized frameworks for judging poetry, and it is futile, in his view, to submit literary texts to criticism based on pre-determined conventions. "La solitude qui enveloppe les œuvres d'art est infinie, " Rilke observes, "et il n'est rien qui permette de moins les atteindre que la critique" (45). Therefore, he strongly advises against seeking the approval of others: "Vous avez, auparavant, demandé leur avis à d'autres gens. Vous avez envoyé ces vers à des revues. Vous les comparez à d'autres poèmes, et vous êtes inquiet lorsque certaines rédactions refusent vos essais. Puisque vous m'avez autorisé à vous donner quelque conseil, je vous prierai de cesser tout cela" (27).

If, according to Rilke, neither success nor the opinion of peers are true concerns of the true poet, there are more subjective ways of recognizing the worth of a literary work. In fact, the sole question the beginning writer should ask herself, when estimating the value of her art, is whether it is authentic, that is, whether it manages to express convincingly what is most personal and subjective. If the writer does succeed in creating such a truly personal work of art, then, Rilke argues, the opinions of others become positively irrelevant. "Vous ne songerez pas à interroger quelqu'un pour savoir si ce sont de bons *vers*," he explains, "Vous ne tenterez pas non plus d'intéresser des revues à ces travaux, car vous verrez en eux ce qui vous appartient naturellement et vous est cher: une part comme une expression de votre vie. Une œuvre d'art est bonne qui surgit de la nécessité" (31).

Given literature's highly subjective nature, Rilke contends that there is only one thing writers can do to develop their art, that is, embark upon an inner quest: "Il n'existe qu'un seul moyen: plongez en vous-même" (27). If they want to become true artists, writers must turn away from the criteria for measuring quality that have been defined by others and the literary market, and they also must explore the inner depths from which their values, anxieties and views originate. Such an investigation, Rilke warns, is very time-consuming. It follows its own trajectory and, as a result, writers cannot but surrender to it. "Développez-vous tranquillement et sobrement en obéissant à votre propre évolution," Rilke advises Kappus, "Vous ne pourrez davantage la perturber qu'en tournant vos regards

[11] To maintain uniformity with respect to the language of my primary texts, I quote from the French rather than the English translation of Rilke's text.

vers l'extérieur, et en en attendant des réponses à des questions auxquelles sans doute seul votre sentiment le plus intime est, à l'heure la plus silencieuse, en mesure de répondre" (33).

The question that young writers should ponder above all, Rilke insists, is whether they truly feel an irresistible urge to be an artist. In his first letter to officer Kappus, Rilke underlines the importance of sincerely answering this crucial question by making the famous statement:

> Répondez franchement à la question de savoir si vous seriez condamné à mourir au cas où il vous serait refusé d'écrire. Avant toute chose, demandez-vous, à l'heure la plus tranquille de votre nuit: est-il nécessaire que j'écrive? Creusez en vous-même en quête d'une réponse profonde. Et si elle devait être positive, si vous étiez fondé à répondre à cette question grave par un puissant et simple 'je ne peux pas faire autrement', construisez alors votre existence en fonction de cette nécessité. (27)

For Rilke, the only phrase that encompasses and justifies a person's decision to pursue the literary life is "je ne peux pas faire autrement". This clearly recalls Flaubert's acknowledgment, expressed in his letters, of being at a turning point: "Il faut reculer ou avancer, tout est là pour moi. C'est une question de vie ou de mort" (1973: 94). For Rilke, just as for Flaubert, the question of choosing the artist's life (or not) can only be truthfully answered when it is cast in terms of life and death. Moreover, once the writer has made her decision, Rilke, like his French predecessor, points to the necessity of constructing the kind of life that allows full devotion to literature.

The genuine writer's life, in Rilke's eyes, consists in patience, solitude, and sickness. It recalls martyrdom, an existence defined by the suffering in the name and service of a higher goal. Patience is the highest virtue to respond to art's calling. "Le temps n'est pas alors une mesure appropriée," he explains, "une année n'est pas un critère, et dix ans ne sont rien" (45). Further, it is essential to dwell in solitude, because only time spent alone can bring the writer to discover her inner truth: "Ce qui est nécessaire, c'est seulement ceci: la solitude, la grande solitude intérieure. Pénétrer en soi-même et ne voir personne durant des heures" (73). Lastly, Rilke contends that anxiety, exhaustion and physical illness are inevitable ailments that the beginning writer must face. Such challenging experiences must be endured and reinforce the writer's conviction and self-understanding: "Soyez patient comme un malade, et confiant comme un convalescent […] il y a, dans toute maladie, bien des jours où le médecin ne peut rien faire qu'attendre" (113).

Max Jacob's École De Vie Intérieure

Recalling Flaubert (and anticipating the *find your voice* formula of creative writing handbooks), Rilke presents writing as both vocation and martyrdom, an extremely demanding task in the service of strong inner imperatives. This description of a disinterested, passionate martyr writer has a major

impact on later literary advice, both in France and the U.S. A lesser known *conseils* text that draws on similar representations is Max Jacob's *Conseils à un jeune poète*, written in 1941, when the 65-year old writer meets some friends in the town of Montargis. His friends' son, J. E., is eighteen years old and studies medicine. His parents tell Jacob that they would like him to become a poet. To inspire the boy, Jacob buys him a notebook in which he jots down some advice. Shortly afterwards, copies of the notebook begin to circulate. "J'ai écrit deux pages de conseils à un gars de Montargis dont les parents docteurs voudraient faire un poète," Jacob writes in a letter to the executioner of his will, "là-dessus des copies circulent" (8). In another letter, directed to the poet Marcel Béalu, who is preparing the book's first edition, Jacob confides: "Je ne sais ce que valent les conseils à J. E. Je les ai écrits de tout cœur […] Ils seront utiles à d'autres peut-être" (8).

Conseils à un jeune poète (1945) does not expose a clear-cut set of poetic principles. There is a lack of coherence in the advice, which, perhaps, does not come off as a surprise, coming from a writer who was all at once painter, critic, modernist poet (symbolist, cubist, surrealist), friend of Picasso, Cocteau, Modigliani, bohémien, Jew, devout catholic, closeted homosexual, and respected author of letters. Jacob's pieces of advice are fragmentary and sometimes hard to reconcile with one another. They repeat themselves, expand, vary, question and contradict each other. Jacob's style is unpolished, almost aphoristic. Nonetheless, these ambiguities make up the essence of *Conseils à un jeune poète*. Indeed, Jacob is not striving for coherence, nor is he trying to establish a set of rigorous rules. His advice is rather offered as a number of personal convictions offered for the budding writer to ponder. In a letter, he writes: "Je dis la vérité ou ce que je crois la vérité. On regimbe. On finit par réfléchir et profiter: c'est ce que je souhaite" (10). These statements fit within Jacob's broader vision of authorship as a process of growth, in which critical reflection and life practice go hand in hand.

For Jacob, just like for Rilke, the question of becoming a writer is imbued with an existential charge. As he emphasizes the need to cultivate a rich inner life, he points out:

> Je ne suis pas un homme à définitions scientifiques. Il ne s'agit pas de savoir ce qu'est l'âme ou le sentiment. Il s'agit de FAIRE VIVRE SON ÂME. […] Une définition qu'est-ce que ça veut dire? Ça ne rend pas. Une méthode, ah oui! Or 'vie intérieure' c'est une méthode. Je n'ai pas de définition de 'vie intérieure' mais j'ai sa réalité. Il faut vivre les choses et non les définir. Assez de 'spectacle', vivons et chantons: c'est là la poésie. (10-11)

Jacob favors inner development. It is no coincidence that this is how he chooses to open his book of advice: "J'ouvrirai une école de vie intérieure, et j'écrirai sur la porte: école d'art" (15). According to him, a rich inner life distinguishes true art from pastiche and is the reason for "the densité" of the great poets' "Verbe" (33). This rich inner life, however, cannot be cultivated, Jacob underlines, if one leads

a socially active life. “Aller le moins possible dans le monde,” he says, “tous y ont un masque […] Le monde n’est qu’une stupide séduction. […] Je vous recommande dix ans d’égoïsme, d’indépendance folle, de raideur énorme” (35). Associating solitude and work, he adds: “Au début de toute carrière, il y a un *miracle de travail*.’ Et travail veut dire solitude” (44).

Jacob emphasizes the importance of a process of gradual self-understanding: “L’originalité vraie ne peut être que dans la maturation, car ce qui est original c’est le fond de mon moi” (19). He conceives of this process in catholic terms. For instance, Jacob calls a good line “un vers sacré”, and he sees inspiration as the work of genius angels. Every man is inspired, Jacob believes, only, some are inspired by demons, others by mediocre angels, and others by genius angels: “Il y a des anges remarquables aussi; il faut les mériter, ou bien les recevoir de la bonté de Dieu. Il y a des démons inspirateurs de vols, de crimes, d’entêtement. Il faut prier Dieu de vous en débarrasser” (27).

Jacob’s catholicism goes beyond mere terminology. He proposes a catholic system of values to which writers should adhere: “Soyez une âme de première qualité. Soyez chrétien, fréquentez les sacrements, confessez-vous, examinez-vous […] Picasso me disait: ‘Pense à Dieu et travaille’” (30). He reconciles this normative religious framework with the search for authenticity by insisting on the Christian demand for introspection. Self-analysis, in Jacob’s system, is both the path to God (“l’escalier vers Dieu” (40)) and to the creative self (“l’examen de conscience quotidien est l’A. B. C. de la littérature” (30)). It is a path, he warns, strewn with loneliness, silence and doubt. Furthermore, Jacob encourages writers to remain chaste: “Balzac disait: une nuit d’amour, c’est un livre de moins” (41). In sum, Jacob explains that, in order to become good poets, people should first become good Christians. Like Rilke and Flaubert, he ultimately offers a model of martyrdom: “J’appelle maturité d’une œuvre sa descente aux enfers,” he notes, “le Seigneur est descendu aux enfers avant l’Ascension” (40).

2.2.4. Parodic Conseils: the Arriviste Writer

The Goncourt Brother’s Journal: a repository of woes and disappointed hopes

Parodic *conseils* such as Remy de Gourmont’s *Conseils familiers à un jeune écrivain* (1896) and Fernand Divoire’s *Introduction à l’étude de la stratégie littéraire* (1912) differ widely from Rilke’s and Jacob’s texts. These books embrace a parodic mode in order to produce a caricature of what Bourdieu calls the literary field’s “industrial pole” (Bourdieu: 1992). They depict the literary field as a battlefield where only the most cunning individuals come out victorious, and they describe success as a matter of networking skills. Implicitly, they are predicated on the position that genuine writing cannot be taught. The only thing people can be taught is what Fernand Divoire disapprovingly calls “la stratégie littéraire” (9).

If the neo-romantic *conseils* draw on Flaubert's *Correspondance*, the parodic *conseils* borrow aspects of the Jules and Edmond de Goncourts' infamous *Journal*. Jules and Edmond de Goncourt began their *Journal* on the second of December 1851, the day on which their first novel was published. Jules was originally the writer, but his brother Edmond took over after Jules's death as a result of syphilis in 1870, and continued the work until his own death in 1896. The *Journal* is an extensive document that was published in separate volumes from 1886 onwards. Whereas the Goncourts' novels have been forgotten today, their *Journal* is still widely read, studied and mentioned in research. Literary critics find in it a day-to-day report of literary life in the second half of the nineteenth century. All the major literary figures of the time make an appearance in the text. It is no coincidence that the subtitle to the first edition in 1887 is *Mémoires de la vie littéraire*. Further, it provides historians with a view on nineteenth century politics. For instance, for the years 1870 and 1871, it recounts the impact of the French-Prussian war and of the Paris Commune on everyday life. Lastly, it is an intimate document that details Edmond's attempts to cope with his beloved brother's death and, some twenty years later, demonstrates how Edmond approaches his own ending while suffering from old age.

Spurred by his friend Alphonse Daudet, who was amused by certain passages, Edmond de Goncourt published the first part of the *Journal* in 1886. Even though the text was strongly revised to avoid offending some people, many individuals in the literary world took offence. Given the commercial success of the first part, the *Journal*'s next volumes appeared at a fast pace. From this moment on, the text started detailing its own reception, including the negative reactions of literary figures to the ways in which they were portrayed.

The Goncourt brothers wanted to depict writers in their natural, social habitat. They say their intention was to "représenter l'ondoyante humanité dans sa vérité momentanée" (2004, I: 19). The entire literary scene of their day figures in their diary entries. "On sonne," they observe, "c'est Flaubert" (2004, I: 453). "Baudelaire soupe à côté," they write, "sans cravate, le col nu, la tête rasée, en vraie toilette de guillotiné" (2004, I: 301). Whereas some writers, like Flaubert, were already celebrated at the time, others were still unknown. For example, the Goncourt brothers mention "un peintre bizarre, du nom de Degas" (2004, II: 569). When they first encounter "notre admirateur et notre élève Zola", he strikes them as "un normalien crevé, à la fois râblé et chétif," but with "une note de volonté âcre et d'énergie rageuse" (2004, II: 186-187). Although the Goncourt brothers recount conversations on philosophy and art, they have a preference for describing more carnal matters such as sex, prostitution, venereal diseases, and alcoholism.

The brothers also discuss their literary career. They announce future projects and report on technical innovations they have introduced in their novels. In this respect, they are all but modest. They consider themselves the inventors of literary realism, naturalism and symbolism, and argue that writers like Zola and Guy de Maupassant (whom they intensely detested) took advantage from their

innovations. “It is impossible to read a page by them,” André Gide confides in his journal, “where that good opinion they have of themselves does not burst out from between the lines” (quoted in Dyer). The Goncourts believed their work to be the most complete expression of modernity and were certain that it will be hailed with great admiration by their own and future generations.

Since fame did not come their way, the Goncourt brothers transformed the *Journal* into a continuous lament, leading critic Geoff Dyer to call it “a vast archive of anxiety and thwarted ambition” and “a repository of all the woes and disappointed hopes suffered in their ‘hard and horrible struggle against anonymity’”. The brothers complained about bad reviews, disappointing sales, being misunderstood, and, most of all, the undeserved success of other writers. For example, they write: “Ah! Si un roman de Dostoïevski, pour lequel on est si admiratif, si indulgent pour son *noir*, était signé Goncourt, quel éreintement sur toute la ligne” (2004, III: 153). Moreover, judging by their diary entries, the Goncourt brothers seem not to have been the only writers experiencing disappointment and envy.

Gourmont’s église de truands

At the turn of the twentieth century, some of the imagery of literary field found in the Goncourt brothers’ *Journal* recurs in a number of parodic *conseils*.[12] A notable work in this tradition is Remy de Gourmont’s *Conseils familiers à un jeune écrivain*, which appears in 1896 in the symbolist review *Mercure de France* and is included in the collection *La Culture des idées* (1900). Remy de Gourmont is one of the pioneers of French literary symbolism and exerts an influence on later generations of writers, both in France and the Anglo-Saxon world. His best-known work is *Le Problème du style* (1902). This text is intended as a criticism on Antoine Albalat’s popular rhetoric handbook *L’Art d’écrire enseigné en vingt leçons* (see below). As Gourmont explains: “[Le] but […] est plutôt de développer cinq ou six motifs de ne pas croire aux recettes de la rhétorique” (1902: 9-10). In parallel with the Henry James and Sir Walter Besant debate described in the previous chapter, the discussion between Gourmont and Albalat (which I will expand upon below) revolves around the question of whether writing, and literary style in particular, can be taught. Against Albalat, Gourmont argues that:

> ‘Le problème du style’ est important, si l’art est important, si la civilisation est importante. Il est insoluble dans le sens où M. Albalat a voulu le résoudre. On n’apprend pas à écrire, c’est-à-dire acquérir un style

[12] In the introduction to this dissertation, I explain that the notion of “imagery” is synonymous with what Stuart Hall would call “representation” (1997: 16). It signals a linguistic attempt to give meaning to ideas by criticizing them, comparing them to other things, classifying them, giving them positive or negative connotations. Hence, when discussing the imagery of the literary field in literary advice texts, this means that I will pay attention to how the entire system of literary production and consumption is being described, given certain connotations, translated into metaphors (i.e. represented).

> personnel; sans quoi rien ne serait plus commun, et rien n'est plus rare. C'est le côté pédagogique de la question et le côté vain. (1902: 9)

For Gourmont, it is impossible to teach someone how to be a genuine writer. Contrary to Albalat, he believes that the process of learning how to write is something that every writer has to go through on her own. Gourmont's *Conseils familiers à un jeune écrivain* should be read in this light. As might be suspected, Gourmont's advice text contains much irony. In the preface, writer Thierry Gillyboeuf calls it "un véritable manuel de l'arrivisme littéraire" (2006: 7) in which Gourmont refutes the principles of "pure" literature (that is, originality, spontaneity) in favor of a vision of authorship as a matter of auto-promotion, networking, marketing, and strategic planning.

This vision is clear from the outset. Gourmont's text opens with a caricature of the literary world:

> Vous n'ignorez pas sans doute que le monde dans lequel vous allez entrer est fort méprisé par ceux-là mêmes qui doivent y vivre et qui en font l'ornement. Vous avez entendu dire que ce monde n'est guère qu'une église de truands qui tient à la fois de la maison de prostitution, de l'étable à cochons et de la chambre de rhétorique; cette opinion est très exagérée, vous ne tarderez pas à vous en apercevoir, et qu'avec un bon manteau, de solides bottes, d'imperméables gants et un chapeau 'qui ne craint rien', ni la pluie, ni les avanies, ni la grêle, ni les mensonges, ni la neige, ni la saburre qui tombe des balcons, on peut y vivre tolérablement. (14)

Gourmont compares the literary world to a church of mobsters, a brothel and a piggery, and urges the writer who dreams of entering it to be well prepared. Given the malevolence that pervades this literary world, it is important that beginning writers, he argues, understand its inner workings, especially, the principles that determine whether a writer is successful or not.

Regarding these principles, Gourmont stresses that it is most important to eliminate a misconception that beginning writers, in his eyes, often have of literary success: style and literary quality, he argues, not without a certain amount of tongue-in-cheek humor, play no part in becoming a successful writer. On the contrary, it is better to avoid stylistic experiment. "Non, il ne faut pas 'écrire'. […] L'art d'écrire est, aujourd'hui, assez répandu," he notes, "mais l'art de ne pas écrire l'est bien avantage, quoique personne n'en ait encore formulé les principes; c'est la tendance actuelle et demain ce sera la loi de tous les gens de goût" (21). He then fantasizes about producing a handbook on not writing: "Le joli traité à rédiger sous le titre: 'Du style ou de l'Art de ne pas écrire!' En voici la première règle: 'N'employez jamais une image qui ne soit journellement d'usage dans le langage familier" (21-22). In a satirical way, Gourmont contends that it is better *not to write* than *to write*. Unusual formulations and original images are fated to go unnoticed. The public only wants what it

already knows. Consequently, Gourmont's ideal novel is "un roman où tout […] donnerait la sensation de retrouver un chien perdu ou une amante égarée" (22). At best, the budding writer should write a novel that consists only of clichés, but which nevertheless looks like serious literature. These texts are best suited to reach the big public: "Je veux que ce livre sans écriture, sans idées […] ait 'un air de littérature' qui séduise les plus difficiles et les plus délicats" (22).

Continuing in this parodic mode, Gourmont remarks that instead of wasting time by developing literary style, it is much better to learn about strategies to navigate "la haute industrie" (18). Far more than literary qualities, he contends, these strategies determine writers' success. As he jokingly signals: "À cette heure, vous n'avez besoin que d'adresse: de l'adresse et encore de l'adresse." (15). Writers must network and promote themselves in order to have their merchandise circulate. For instance, a strategy that Gourmont offers is to defend old writers in literary magazines and present them as forgotten geniuses: "Prenez donc un de ces vieillards roulés dans la poussière et dans les crachats, et protégez-le hardiment" (26). In this way, debutants put themselves on the literary map. At the same time, however, Gourmont advises to cut off these "vieillards" once they have served their purpose ("soyez toujours prêt à couper la corde" (27)). As it is likely that unflattering stories about these figures will quickly circulate, aspiring writers should make sure to safeguard their reputation from being smeared by such stories.

According to Gourmont's parodic advice book, it is crucial that beginning writers understand the power and the inner workings of press media. Anticipating the expectations of the always news-hungry media is the key to success for young writers. For example, Gourmont encourages beginning writers to gossip about other writers and raise suspicion with regard to their colleagues' alleged plagiarism or rumored syphilis. In this way, aspiring writers gain recognition as informed and somewhat "mauvaise langue" individuals (27). As a consequence, journalists will seek out their entertaining company, which in the long run can only contribute to their success. Additionally, in a number of very ironic passages, Gourmont advises to become the subject of media controversy at least three times in the course of a literary career, to maintain socialist politics, and to be a catholic (Jews, he thinks, should better convert to Catholicism). As a heterosexual, it is best to create the impression of being sexually experimental. Yet, as a homosexual man, it is better to be vague about sex: "Dans le cas où vous auriez vraiment ce goût à la mode, je vous conseillerais au contraire une certaine réserve. Un homme soupçonné de mauvaises mœurs est incontestablement plus estimé qu'un homme convaincu de mauvaises mœurs" (34). It is important for writers to be generous with beggars and drunks, because the press might find out about their generosity. Lastly, it is better to live expensively because this attracts more media attention. "Il faut vivre riche. Il faut mourir gras," he insists, "la graisse est le commencement de la gloire" (16).

Divoire's chaire de stratégie littéraire

Belgian critic Fernand Divoire's *Introduction à l'étude de la stratégie littéraire* (1912) is in many ways very similar to Gourmont's *Conseils familiers à un jeune écrivain*. The book opens with the following declaration:

> Avertissement: L'auteur a voulu écrire ici une satire pure. Il en avertit expressément les personnes malintentionnées. Celles-ci d'ailleurs, à prétendre que l'auteur est 'un stratège' et qu'il donne des conseils d'arrivisme, s'exposeraient à ce que l'on recherchât et critiquât de différents points de vue les méthodes stratégiques employées par celles au cours de leur vie littéraire. Ce serait le juste châtiment de leur déloyauté envers l'auteur et envers l'éditeur qui veut bien présenter au public cette satire. (5)

Divoire wants the reader to know that this *Introduction à l'étude de la stratégie littéraire* is sheer parody. His strong insistence in this matter, however, divulges his unease to be judged a strategic "arriviste" by his peers. Indeed, he is aware of the risks of teaching methods for literary success. Discussing the need for an academic chair devoted to "la stratégie littéraire", he signals: "Le professeur sera difficile à trouver. Personne n'accepterait ce dangereux poste d'honneur. Puis comment donner confiance aux leçons d'un maître qui commettrait la pire des fautes stratégiques, celle d'enseigner la stratégie?" (13).

In the introduction, Divoire describes his mock handbook as a systematic, even scientific attempt to analyze the parameters of literary success. Given their potential usefulness, it is surprising, he thinks, that methods for literary success are not taught in schools. "Il est vraiment incompréhensible que la Stratégie littéraire ne soit enseignée nulle part," he jokingly observes, "alors qu'il existe quantité de cours parfaitement inutiles aux littérateurs (latin, grec, langue française, grammaire, technique poétique, étude des prétendus bons auteurs, etc.) et que sont données dans certaines universités libres des leçons méthodiques de lyrisme et de sincérité" (9-10). Yet, before organizing a course in literary strategy, it is crucial to develop a science in this subject matter ("il faut avoir la Science" (13)). Like Poe in "The Philosophy of Composition", Divoire advocates for a scientific method. Only, in his case, science does not analyze literary technique, but literary strategy. "La Science se créera par observation, " he explains, "on étudiera soigneusement les causes de réussite ou d'échec des contemporains. Du classement de ces observations on tirera des hypothèses dont on demandera ensuite la justification à la méthode expérimentale" (14). Notably, eighty years before Bourdieu's *Les Règles de l'art*, Divoire formulates a framework for the sociology of literature.

Divoire compares the literary world to a field of war. "Notre science sera donc l'art de préparer un plan de campagne pour triompher dans la vie littéraire," he points out, "l'art de conduire à une fin profitable et glorieuse l'armée des circonstances que l'on rencontre dans la vie littéraire" (15). In this

science, it is first of all crucial to distinguish literary strategy from "l'arrivisme". "La Stratégie est la condamnation de l'arrivisme," he observes, "l'arriviste en effet se distingue par sa maladresse, l'arriviste est celui qui n'arrive pas" (16). Whereas the "arriviste" operates hastily and overtly, which, Divoire believes, can only result in failure, literary strategy demands patience and subtle tactics. Divoire reinforces this point in the section titled "De la Prudence". Unlike Gourmont, Divoire does not believe in arousing controversy in the media. Employing a Darwinean rhetoric, he indicates that "la vie littéraire est, comme la vie, soumise aux lois de la sélection naturelle. On y est, par conséquent, en état de guerre perpétuelle. Mais l'art est de vivre sur le champ de bataille sans se battre et sans être blessé. Attendre qu'on reste seul" (66). Caution is key, Divoire tells the reader.

Introduction à la stratégie littéraire contains ironic advice on a myriad of topics. It discusses the age at which writers should publish for the first time ("le plus tôt sera le mieux: l'âge de quatorze ans est bien choisi" (18)), the importance of the publishers' logo on book covers for the reception of books ("en littérature le pavillon couvre la marchandise" (20)), the added value of prefaces written by known authors ("les dédicaces et les préfaces sont aux livres ce que sont les légumes et le bœuf au pot-au-feu" (42)), the danger of being too successful too soon ("malheur à celui dont le nom éclate comme un coup de tonnerre dans le ciel grisâtre de la littérature" (24)), the interest of founding a literary magazine ("la façon la plus simple d'entrer sans fracas dans la vie littéraire est de fonder une revue" (27)), the futility of literary manifestos ("coutume condamnable" (31)), and the true significance of winning a literary prize ("avoir un prix, c'est prouver qu'on était déjà quelqu'un auparavant, qu'on a de belles relations et qu'on a un éditeur qui sait 'se remuer'" (118)).

Whereas Gourmont zooms in on the writer's relation with the media, Divoire stresses the importance of networking. He advises budding writers to bring their debut novels to all the critics, literary salons, and magazines in person ("le premier livre ne doit pas être envoyé par la poste. L'auteur en prendra chaque jour un petit paquet et il ira déposer un exemplaire chez tous les gens connus" (39)), to have an easily identifiable face ("il est utile d'avoir le visage ou le crâne fait de telle façon qu'on ne puisse plus être oublié […] Lorsque l'on veut arriver à la grande célébrité, il faut être caricaturable" (59)), to avoid literary salons ("il n'y a plus de grand salon littéraire" (83)) and to attend banquets ("les discours y sont courts, la période post-dînatoires suffisamment longue, et l'on se sait en nombre contre les gens qui voudraient monter sur les tables pour y dérouler de la poésie" (91)). Regarding these literary banquets, Divoire proposes a simple code of behavior. Debutants should briefly introduce themselves before listing and praising the books of all of their conversation partners. They should hand over their business cards ("un littérateur ne doit jamais sortir sans cartes de visite" (92)) and, once at home, immediately send their debut novel to their new acquaintances. All that remains to be done, Divoire argues, is to wait for letters of praise. Finally, like Gourmont, Divoire points to the irrelevance of talent in obtaining success. "Il faut avoir le courage de le dire," Divoire observes,

“le talent est un luxe agréable, mais complètement inutile à la carrière de l'homme de lettres. Pour un romancier qui veut être acheté, rien ne vaut que la médiocrité” (63).

2.3. Methodological Advice: Constructing Texts as Machines

In addition to making use of the *conseils* format and its depictions of writers (pragmatic writer; martyr; arriviste), writing (work efficiently; find your voice; network), literary field (irrelevant to the genuine writer; strategic battlefield) and literary text (subjective expression of the self; commercial merchandise), many contemporary literary advice in France draw upon a what I call a methodological advice tradition. For instance, in *Histoire de la littérature récente* (2016), his poetic re-writing of how-to-write handbooks, Olivier Cadiot refers to this tradition, when he asks: “Un livre, c’est quoi? C’est une machine immatérielle qui produit des images que nous devons oublier par la suite” (125). Likewise, in her handbook for autofiction, *S’écrire. Mode d’emploi* (2008), Chloé Delaume conjures up this tradition, when she explains: “Comment s’écrire. Le réel, la fiction, les préoccupations esthétiques, comment ça se mélange, dans quel ordre, quels outils. Dans mon laboratoire, j’effectue des essais” (4).

Methodological advice explains *how to write* rather than *how to become a writer*. Methodological texts stress the rational nature of the writing process and argue that it can be dissected into its constitutive elements. They often resort to a retrospective approach to lay bare the genesis of literary texts. In this dissertation, I distinguish three subtypes of methodological advice. First, there is Edgar Allan Poe’s pragmatism that formulates writing advice in view of efficiently capturing readers’ attention (see 1.2.2.). This pragmatic position, exhibited in “The Philosophy of Composition” — an essay which is later translated by Charles Baudelaire as “La Genèse d’un poème” —, is echoed in the American how-to-write handbooks that supplement it with an important commercial dimension (write those stories that will obtain success on the literary marketplace!). Second, I discern “rhetorical advice”, that explains how to write by referring to a number of universal principles, especially concerning literary style. Early 20th century French critic Antoine Albalat’s popular handbooks (e.g. *L’Art d’écrire enseigné en vingt leçons* (1899)) are prototypical for this category. Finally, there is what I call “procedural advice”, a category which, as I will demonstrate in the next chapters, is central to contemporary literary advice in France. Procedural advice like Raymond Roussel’s *Comment j’ai écrit certains de mes livres* (1935), the nouveau romanciers’ *Hier, aujourd’hui* (1972), and the Oulipo’s manifestos (1973) are avant-garde texts that seek to break with established poetics. They do so by developing highly technical procedures (*procédés*) that prompt new forms of writing. Typically, the outcome of these procedures cannot be predicted beforehand. Even if they do not explain how to become a literary figure, these procedural advice texts nevertheless project writer images: the writer is typically represented as a scientist carrying out experiments and pursuing projects in a systematic

way. These procedural advice texts envision literary works as if they were machines or technological devices whose construction depended on establishing precise procedures of operation (*procédés*), and whose realization were a matter of executing the plan.

2.3.1. Rhetorical advice: Assimilating the Classics with Antoine Albalat

The origins of rhetorical advice can be traced back to Plato's *Phaedrus* and Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (Richards: 2007). The first highly technical rhetoric handbooks appear in Roman Antiquity, notably Quintilian's twelve-volume textbook *Institutio Oratoria*. During the Middle Ages, rhetoric becomes a fundamental part of the education of young men. With the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, and under the impulse of the Jesuits, the position of rhetoric is even reinforced during the Renaissance. Yet, the Renaissance also preludes the decline of the subject. In modern times, the discipline loses its prestige in favor of the new scientific ideal.

Rhetoric was also questioned and rejected in literary circles. For romantic writers, rhetoric was too prescriptive in its rules, too universalist in its claims, and too focused on the persuasion of the audience. Romanticism sought to foster self-expression through a language as authentic as possible. It rejected the art of rhetoric as a body of rules and figures as well as the practice of learning through the imitation of models. Wordsworth, in 1802, reproached this type of rhetorical training with resulting in artificial language and for distancing the poet from "the language which the Poet himself had uttered when he had been affected by the events which he described, or which he had heard uttered by those around him" ("Appendix" to 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, quoted in Richards: 103).

The denunciation of rhetoric persisted into the nineteenth century. As Gérard Genette observes in "Enseignement et rhétorique au XXe siècle" (1966), the subject still figured on the official school program in France, but it had lost all its prestige outside of school walls:

> Le destin de la rhétorique nous offre d'ailleurs un exemple caractéristique de cette relative autonomie par rapport au savoir, qui fonde l'historicité de l'enseignement. Dans la conscience littéraire générale, l'esprit de la rhétorique traditionnelle est mort, on le sait bien, dès le début du xixe siècle, avec l'avènement du romantisme et la naissance — conjointe — d'une conception historique de la littérature; mais ce n'est qu'un siècle plus tard (en 1902) que l'enseignement secondaire prendra acte de cette révolution en débaptisant la classe de Rhétorique. Hugo a tué la rhétorique, mais Rimbaud apprend encore l'art de la mise en tropes et des vers latins. (293)

Genette notes that rhetoric fell of its pedestal with the emergence of romanticism, but that schools are slow to pick up the discipline's downfall. In other words, rhetoric has an afterlife in the curriculum. As Roland Barthes shows in "L'Ancienne rhétorique. Aide-mémoire" (1970), this afterlife is visible in

the continued presence of rhetorical textbooks in the nineteenth century. Yet, these textbooks also testify to the waning of rhetoric in favor of literature. As Barthes notes, literary textbooks like F. De Caussade's *Rhétorique et genres littéraires* and Prat's *Éléments de rhétorique et de littérature* become the shelter of traditional rhetoric: "La littérature dédouane la rhétorique avant de l'étouffer complètement" (194). Furthermore, in early twentieth century universities, rhetoric is gradually replaced by psycho-stylistics or stylistics of expression. "La disparition de la Rhétorique traditionnelle a créé un vide dans les humanités et la stylistique a déjà fait un long chemin pour combler ce vide," Ulmann signals in *Language and Style.* "En fait, il ne serait pas tout à fait faux de décrire la stylistique comme une 'nouvelle rhétorique', adaptée aux modèles et aux exigences des études modernes en linguistique et en littérature" (quoted in Barthes: 194). This psycho-stylistics functions as a hermeneutics of style that attempts to capture the complexity of the writer's psyche by examining the texts' stylistic features.

At the turn of the twentieth century, in the force field between rhetoric, literature and stylistics appear a number of popular writing handbooks by novelist and critic Antoine Albalat: *L'Art d'écrire enseigné en vingt leçons* (1899), *La Formation du style par l'assimilation des Auteurs* (1902), *Le Travail du style enseigné par les corrections manuscrites des grands écrivains* (1903), *Comment on devient écrivain* (1925). In these volumes, Albalat defends the notion that is possible to teach how to write, in particular, to teach how to develop a proper style: "Je crois qu'on peut enseigner à avoir du talent, à trouver des images et de bonnes phrases. Je crois qu'on peut, avec une aptitude moyenne, arriver à se créer un style" (1899: 7). For critic Françoise Grauby, these views make Albalat "sans doute un des premiers enseignants de l'écriture créative en France" (139). Today, Albalat's books are still popular, figuring uninterruptedly among the suggestions in the Art d'écrire section of *Amazon.fr* and in the bibliographies of many contemporary handbooks.

Albalat's opinion that writing can be learned, combined with his commercial success, stirred controversy in his day (Philippe, 2013). Various fellow writers attacked Albalat, most prominently Remy de Gourmont in *Le Problème du style* (1902). Albalat, in turn, defended his position in *Les Ennemis de l'art d'écrire* (1905). What is striking in this French version of the debate between Henry James and sir Walter Besant is that Albalat's and Gourmont's poetics hardly differ (see 1.2.5.).[13] Both writers emphasize the importance of good taste, which amounts to avoiding stylistic excess, pursuing variety on the levels of syntax and vocabulary, and avoiding repetition and clichés. To put it in a different way,

[13] The debates between Sir Walter Besant and Henry James, and Antoine Albalat and Remy de Gourmont coincide in the sense that the former critics defend the position that writing can be taught, whereas the latter strongly refute this idea. A difference between these discussions is that the French debate revolves mainly around the question of style (can it be taught?), whereas the Anglo-Saxon discussion essentially tackles questions concerning the nature of fiction, in particular, the question of whether, as Besant suggests, literature can be said to stand in a mimetic relationship with reality (Wandor, 2006:97-100).

they believe that writers should essentially strive for a clear and harmonious style, which they see realized in the works of an author like André Gide. In spite of the similarity of their respective poetics, Gourmont and Albalat disagree over the question of whether writing can be taught or, what essentially means the same to them, whether literary style is a quality that can be taught. Gourmont clearly refutes this notion, arguing that "le style est aussi personnel que la couleur des yeux ou le son de la voix. On peut apprendre le métier d'écrire; on ne peut pas apprendre à avoir un style" (1900: 20). Albalat, by contrast, develops a method to teach writing.

Albalat's critics present him with a number of theoretical problems (Philippe, 2013). The first has to do with the unicity of literary style. Is style not the expression par excellence of a writer's subjectivity? How can someone teach style? Another issue revolves around the nature of the texts that are offered as models to imitate. On what grounds would a teacher favor one particular style over another? Finally, Albalat's critics contend that style is tied to historical context. Is it useful to imitate authors who have been dead for over two centuries in order to develop a style suitable for today?

Albalat addresses those concerns in *La Formation du style par l'assimilation des auteurs*. It is correct, he argues, that style is personal, and rooted in a historical context. For instance, two authors can have very different styles and both be good writers. It would be foolish, he contends, to write in the exact same way in one historic context and in another. This notwithstanding, he feels that style remains a universal issue: at the basis of each style lies a set of universal principles which have to do with what is proper and harmonious, with variation and consistence. Albalat argues that these principles are valid regardless of context. Mutatis mutandis, specific literary examples of good taste or style are historically situated realizations of these principles. These are the principles that Albalat wants to expose to the public:

> Oui, sans doute, il y a autant de styles que d'auteurs, et il serait absurde de vouloir en imposer un, quel qu'il soit. Ce n'est pas un style spécial que nous voulons proposer; nous voulons apprendre à chacun à bien écrire dans son propre style. Il y a un art commun à tous les styles. Ce sont les principes, les nuances et les conséquences de cet art que nous désirons développer. C'est cet art qui constitue la science d'écrire. Bien que les qualités d'écriture ne soient pas les mêmes chez tous les auteurs, un bon vers de Boileau est bon pour les mêmes raisons qu'un vers de Victor Hugo. 'Un bon vers n'a pas d'école' disait Flaubert. (1902: 12)

The objective of *La Formation du style par l'assimilation des auteurs* is to reveal the universal esthetic principles by analyzing the texts of some great authors. Albalat reckons that the ability to recognize these principles is a prerequisite for developing good taste and, in a second phase, for cultivating a personal style. In order words, in order to become good writers, people first have to become good

readers. This is only possible, he thinks, by reading slowly, rereading, and being attentive to details. Moreover, Albalat argues that it is more interesting to read the work of a small number of authors very carefully than to read many works by many different writers. The writers that he recommends are the classics of Antiquity and of French literature: "Faisons des grands écrivains de notre pays la base de notre éducation littéraire. Lisons les classiques, parce qu'ils sont nos maîtres, parce qu'ils ont écrit dans notre langue, parce que notre littérature est venue d'eux, et parce qu'enfin c'est le seul moyen pratique d'apprendre à écrire" (1902: 13).

Albalat further specifies that it is not sufficient to read and analyze classic texts: the beginning writer should also imitate them actively. The idea is not to copy them literally or to collect volumes of quotations. The making of so-called "commonplace books" is, according to Albalat, pointless. Nor does the beginner learn anything by dissecting a plot. However, beginning writers should actively imitate the style of those writers whom they admire. And, he continues, this is not superficial advice: the objective is not to imitate the external traits of a particular writer's style (which can constitute a first step, though), but to penetrate the specific worldview, the specific mind of that same writer, by means of an active exploration of this writer's form and style. If the beginner manages to do that, she can then work on her own style:

> Le but de la lecture est donc de mûrir l'intelligence, de produire une action réflexe, de nous féconder, de créer en nous les qualités que nous remarquons. Elle doit, en un mot, donner du talent. Nous verrons dans quelle mesure. Nous sommes donc loin de vouloir nous assimiler exclusivement le côté artificiel du style. C'est le fond que nous cherchons, et c'est le fond que nous trouverons, à travers la forme et par la forme même. (1902: 15)

Albalat thus distinguishes between two forms of imitation. The first is merely formal, while the second delves into the worldview of a writer through the close study of form. He speaks respectively of pastiche and assimilation. Although pastiche can be a first step in the process of imitation, assimilation is the ultimate goal:

> Nous constaterons que le ton particulier à tel ou tel auteur provient des tours de phrases, des procédés de style, du travail d'exécution; mais que ces tours de phrase, loin d'être le résultat d'une méthode artificielle, sont le résultat de la sensibilité intérieure, et que c'est cette sensibilité qu'il faut s'approprier, et non la partie matérielle du métier d'écrire. (1902: 21)

Reading and imitation are essential to style. However, Albalat points out that it is not enough to become familiar with examples of good writing. Reading and learning from flawed writing are even more important. In works such as *Le Travail du style enseigné par les corrections manuscrites des*

grands écrivains (1903) and *Comment il ne faut pas écrire. Les Ravages du style contemporain* (1921), Albalat analyzes examples of what he considers to be bad or mediocre writing on the part of well-known authors. He discusses the manuscripts of writers in order to expose their flaws, then he shows how authors have improved their texts. In this way, he not only demonstrates the universal principles of good writing to this students, but he also shows that the famous texts of great authors such as Flaubert, Pascal and Rousseau could only be achieved through hard work. Additionally, he discusses the texts of writers such as Stendhal, Massillon, Théophile Gautier, whom he considers as bad writers, because they have not worked enough. He considers that their texts suffer from "un manque de travail" (1927: 5). In this way, Albalat deconstructs the notion of genius in favor of the notion of *writing as hard work*.

Albalat emphasizes the importance of hard work, which does not merely signify that writing and reading demand focus and effort. For Albalat, working hard (the fact that someone is unable to stop writing) is the sign par excellence of how fruitful the process the writer is going through is. Texts are never perfect and can always be improved upon. The fact that the beginner recognizes a text's flaws means that she is developing a good sense of taste. In *Le Travail du style enseigné par les corrections manuscrites des grands écrivains*, Albalat writes:

> On dit : 'Le travail paralyse. C'est une entrave. Mieux vaut suivre son inclination, ne pas se surveiller, ne pas renchérir, ne pas raffiner […]' Sophisme encore! Loin d'être une contrainte, c'est le labeur qui est naturel. Je voudrais oser dire que le travail n'est pas un effort, mais une preuve de lucidité croissante, un résultat impérieux de seconde vue. (1927: 11)

Lastly, Albalat's main focus is description. For him style, and the acquisition of style through the imitation of models, have much to do with learning how to describe well. In *La Formation du style par l'assimilation des auteurs*, he distinguishes between two styles. On the one hand, there is the abstract style, which exposes ideas. He notes: "Le style abstrait vit surtout d'idées, d'intellectualité, de compréhension, de tours, de rapports, de nuances : histoire, philosophie, morale, métaphysique, maximes, critique, psychologie" (1902: 53). On the other hand, there is the descriptive style, which dominates literary writing, in particular the novel. When it comes to description, Alablat argues that all beginning writers should keep in mind one rule: "De tout ce que nous avons dit résulte ce grand principe, qu'on devrait inscrire en grosses lettres dans les Manuels de littérature: Pour être vivante, la description doit être matérielle" (1902: 55). Description should be material. It should be attentive to detail, to that which stands out, it should strive to be as concrete as possible. He compares it to painting and sees in Homer a master of detail. He writes:

> Il faut donc que tous les détails soient peints, dessinés, de contour net. Pour cela ne craignez pas de les accuser et de les pousser. Demandez-vous ce que serait ce tableau, s'il était peint à l'huile, et tâchez de le décrire aussi crûment que si vous l'écriviez d'après cette peinture, qu'il s'agisse d'une scène animée ou d'une scène de nature, en gardant toujours, bien entendu, les gradations de plan et l'importance des perspectives, comme sur la toile. (1902: 54)

In conclusion, the influence of Albalat's works can be situated on two levels: his emphasis on *reading as a writer* and his conception of the descriptive style. The former is an element which clearly recurs in the discourse of later creative writing handbooks, while the latter recurs in the *show don't tell* mantra.

2.3.2. Procedural Advice: the Writer-Scientist

Procedural advice texts typically promote an avant-garde literary program that is supposed to mark a break with dominant literary traditions. By portraying writing as a highly rational and insightful activity, the procedural texts that I will discuss in the remainder of this chapter challenge the romantic view of writing as spontaneous and inexplicable creation. In the French tradition, a text that anticipates procedural advice is "La Genèse d'un poème", Charles Baudelaire's translation of Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition" (published for the first time in 1849 in *Revue française*). However, many critics question whether this text succeeds in steering writing away from the ideology of romantic genius (Grauby, 2015: 130). Whereas Poe's original text stirred controversy because of its radical reader-oriented stance, Baudelaire's translation has been criticized precisely for undermining Poe's radicalism. Apart from Baudelaire's use of romantic vocabulary to describe the act of creation, it is mostly the French poet's introductory words that render clear his hesitations regarding Poe's premises. Describing his American peer, Baudelaire notes:

> Il avait certes un grand génie et plus d'inspiration que qui que ce soit, si par inspiration on entend l'énergie, l'enthousiasme intellectuel, et la faculté de tenir ses facultés en éveil. Mais il aimait aussi le travail plus qu'aucun autre; il répétait volontiers, lui, un original achevé, que l'originalité est chose d'apprentissage, ce qui ne veut pas dire une chose qui peut être transmise par l'enseignement. Le hasard et l'incompréhensible étaient ses deux grands ennemis. (334)

Baudelaire gives a rational interpretation of Poe's genius, defining it as "l'énergie, l'enthousiasme intellectuel, et la faculté de tenir ses facultés en éveil". Further, he insists on Poe's habit of hard labor and on his conception of writing as a practice that can be analyzed and taught or learned. Yet, simultaneously, he speaks of the American poet as "un original achevé" and states that writing cannot

be taught. As critics have observed, Baudelaire's translation bears witness to the ambiguity of his position. He supports Poe's views, but his translation fails to go as far down the road of modernist craft as the original text (Grauby, 2015: 130). While Poe's pragmatism adopts the language of industrial production, mass consumption and scientific knowledge, Baudelaire's tone is moderate and rooted in the ideology of the romantic genius: Baudelaire's title "Genèse d'un poème" recalls the theological dimension of genius and does not announce a general method for making literature (contrary to "The Philosophy of Composition").

Paul Valéry's Cool Scientist

Paul Valéry is one of the first major critics of the French literary tradition to take Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition" seriously. In his notes "sur la technique littéraire" (1889) Valéry praises Poe's "conception toute nouvelle et moderne du poète" (1957: 1786) and argues that, after Poe, the poet "n'est plus le délirant échevelé, celui qui écrit tout un poème dans une nuit de fièvre, c'est un froid savant, presque un algébriste, au service d'un rêveur affiné" (1957: 1786). Like Poe, Valéry wants to approach writing as "un froid savant". In his first major essay, *Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci* (1894), Valéry attempts to explain literary and artistic creation in rational terms. In this text, he ironically observes that not only have few writers attempted to grasp the complexity of the creative process, but also that most writers would be found wanting if they were asked to explain their methodology: "Bien que fort peu d'auteurs aient le courage de dire comment ils ont formé leur œuvre, je crois qu'il n'y en a pas beaucoup plus qui se soient risqués à le savoir" (14). In addition, Valéry emphasizes the importance of leaving aside such notions as talent and genius. "Une telle recherche commence par l'abandon pénible des notions de gloire et des épithètes laudatives; elle ne supporte aucune idée de supériorité, aucune manie de grandeur. Elle conduit à découvrir la relativité sous l'apparente perfection" (14-15).

Valéry insists that writing is hard work, which should not be ground for discouragement. In his opinion, the value of creative labor surpasses that of the ultimate product. In a way that anticipates the approach and poetics of the creative writing workshop, Valéry values the process of writing instead of the literary product. Furthermore, in a gesture that foreshadows the procedural advice of the avant-gardist Roussel, the *nouveau roman* and the Oulipo, he points to language itself as the writer's essential material. Rather than transforming ideas and experiences into stories (*write what you know*), Valéry thinks that the writer's primary task is to cultivate language. Famous in this regard is his anecdote on Edgar Degas, included in the text "Poésie et pensée abstraite" (1939). According to this anecdote, Mallarmé, upon hearing Degas's complaint of being unable to write in spite of having many ideas, responds that "ce n'est point avec des idées, mon cher Degas, que l'on fait des vers. C'est avec des mots" (1973: 1324).

In addition to science and hard labor, Valéry insists that writing, especially the making of novels, has to do with generating effects. Literature, he argues, is not so much an expression of the self (*find your own voice*), but a device that produces illusions to captivate the public, a machine of language that generates images. He considers André Gide as a prototypical writer in this respect: "Personne plus 'Personnel' que lui. Il fabrique son vrai" (1973: 179). In other words, Gide's texts bring about effects of sincerity. Hence, for Valéry, the idea of authentic self-expression is a matter of effect. He finds that writing, especially writing novels, inevitably has to do with "le charlatanisme, le masque, le faux psychologique" (1973: 1151) and concludes that "il y a toujours dans la littérature ceci de louche: la considération d'un public. Donc une réserve toujours de la pensée, une arrière-pensée où gît tout le charlatanisme. Donc tout produit littéraire est un produit impur" (1960: 581).

It should be noted that Valéry's views changed over time. In his early works, such as *Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci* and *La Soirée avec monsieur Teste*, he maintains a radically rational conception, contending that "l'enthousiasme n'est pas un état d'âme d'écrivain" (1957: 79) and equating writing with "construire cette machine de langage" (1957: 79). In later texts, Valéry tones down this insistence on reason, method and machine, and clears space for the notion of inspiration. As Grauby observes: "Refusant toujours de considérer l'inspiration 'totale', il accepte cependant l'existence d'une inspiration intermittente et même d'un état poétique" (82).

Roussel's Labyrinth

Raymond Roussel's *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* (1935) takes a procedural approach to the novel. As the title announces, in this essay, published two years after the death of the eccentric writer in a Palermo hotel room, Roussel exposes the technique (*procédé*) that he used to fabricate a number of his prose works. In the opening lines, he states:

> Je me suis toujours proposé d'expliquer de quelle façon j'avais écrit certains de mes livres *(Impressions d'Afrique*, *Locus Solus*, *L'Étoile au Front* et *La Poussière de Soleils)*.
> Il s'agit d'un procédé très spécial. Et, ce procédé, il me semble qu'il est de mon devoir de le révéler, car j'ai l'impression que des écrivains de l'avenir pourraient peut-être l'exploiter avec fruit. (11)

Roussel's technique is peculiar, coming from a prose writer, to say the least. It essentially exploits the content-potential of linguistic material. Instead of pursuing content (what Ferdinand de Saussure would call signs' "signifié"), it first considers the form of the language (de Saussure's "signifiant").

In the opening paragraphs, Roussel explains that he was still young when he developed this technique in its simplest form. He chose two almost identical words like "billard" and "pillard". To both words, he would then add words with a double meaning so as to obtain two sentences that were quasi-

identical on a phonetic level, but totally different on a content level. His examples are “les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux billard” (the white letters on the cushions of the old billiard table) and “les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux pillard” (the white man’s letters on the hordes of the old plunderer). Subsequently, he would use the first phrase as the opening sentence of a story and the latter as the same story’s ending. Finally, he had to invent a story that could tie them together.

Roussel notes that, as an adult writer, he would use the same *procédé*. For instance, his novel *Impressions d’Afrique* (1910) was based on the “billard” and “pillard” sentences described above. Yet, for this book, he admits to have complicated the technique somewhat. On the one hand, he would continue his search for words with an interesting double meaning in the semantic field of the billiard table (“amplifiant ensuite le procédé, je cherchai de nouveaux mots se rapportant au mot *billiard*” (13)). This provided him with new images, characters, scenes for his narrative: “Ainsi *queue* de billard me fournit la robe à traîne de Talou” (Thus billiard *cue* provided me with Talou’s gown and train) (13). On the other hand, he would think of polysemic composite words linked by the preposition *à* to generate ideas for his narrative:

> Je prenais le mot *palmier* et décidais de le considérer dans deux sens: le sens de *gâteau* et le sens d’*arbre*. Le considérant dans le sens de gâteau, je cherchais à le marier par la préposition à avec un autre mot susceptible lui-même d’être pris dans deux sens différents; j’obtenais ainsi (et c’était là, je le répète un grand et long travail) un *palmier* (gâteau) à *restauration* (restaurant où l’on sert des gâteaux) ; ce qui me donnait d’autre part un *palmier* (arbre) à *restauration* (sens de rétablissement d’une dynastie sur un trône). De là le palmier de la place des Trophées consacré à la restauration de la dynastie des Talou. (14)

Roussel gives some forty examples of these polysemic composite words. Ironically, he names this technique for finding content the “procédé simple”. The “procédé évolué”, which he discusses subsequently, entails taking a ready-made phrase (the title of a literary work, a line of poetry, an address, a phrase from an advertisement) and drawing upon its words’ alternative meanings to find new images: “Je fus conduit à prendre une phrase quelconque, dont je tirais des images en la disloquant, un peu comme s’il se fût agi d’en extraire des dessins de rebus” (20).

Roussel ends his essay with some conclusive remarks and an autobiographical sketch. He observes that his technique is essentially a poetic principle (“c’est essentiellement un procédé poétique” (23)) and that its application does not guarantee good results (“encore faut-il savoir l’employer” (23)). In the short autobiography, Roussel, who in his younger days thought that his fame would outshine that of Victor Hugo or Napoleon, regrets the disastrous reception of his works (“en terminant cet ouvrage, je reviens sur le sentiment douloureux que j’éprouvai toujours en voyant mes œuvres se heurter à une incompréhension hostile presque générale” (34)). He ends his text by

indicating that perhaps the exposition of his *procédé* might restore the reception of his work in the future: "Et je me réfugie, faute de mieux, dans l'espoir que j'aurai peut-être un peu d'épanouissement posthume à l'endroit de mes livres" (35).

It is clear that Roussel's technique is very idiosyncratic and complicated to understand, let alone imitate. Commentators agree on the fact that Roussel's exposition does not unveil much about his creative process nor about the resulting prose. In the preface to the English translation of *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres*, American poet John Ashbery observes:

> But, if it seems possible that Roussel did bury a secret message in his work, it seems equally likely that no one will ever succeed in finding out what it is. What he leaves us with is a work that is like the perfectly preserved temple of a cult which has disappeared without a trace, or a complicated set of tools whose use cannot be discovered. But even though we may never be able to 'use' his work in the way he hoped, we can still admire its inhumane beauty, and be stirred by a language that seems always on the point of revealing its secret, of pointing the way back to the 'republic of dreams' whose insignia blazed on his forehead. (John Ashbery in *How I Wrote Certain of my Books* xxii)

As Ashbery notes, the tools that Roussel leave the readers with are too strange to use. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the enchanting character of these texts, quite the opposite. After his death, through the initiatives of admirers such Alain Robbe-Grillet, John Ashbery, Michel Foucault, and François Caradec, the interest in Roussel grew strong, to the point that Ashbery speaks of a "Roussel industry" (vii). What fascinates most of these followers is the tension between the apparently methodologically constructed and forever lost "machines for the transformation of language" (Foucault: 181) on the one hand, and the bizarre, disrupting resulting texts on the other.

Nouveau Roman: Hier, Aujourd'hui

A number of authors associated with the *nouveau roman* share Roussel's approach of systematically working with linguistic material in the framework of the novel. This is particularly true when considering *Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui* (1972), an edited volume based on papers presented at the castle of Cerisy-la-Salle in 1971. This colloquium, organized by Jean Ricardou and Françoise van Rossum-Guyon, brings together most of the *nouveau romanciers* and is conceived as an occasion for these authors to reinvigorate their methods by sharing and publicly discussing them.

The titles of the papers are significant. Nathalie Sarraute's presentation is titled "Ce que je cherche à faire", Claude Simon's speaks of "La Fiction mot à mot", Robbe-Grillet reflects "Sur le choix des générateurs", Michel Butor recalls Roussel in "Comment se sont écrits certains de mes livres", finally, Ricardou's presentation is titled "Naissance d'une fiction". In the tradition of Poe and Roussel,

many of these papers offer retrospective analyses of novels. Moreover, they discuss the role of linguistic material in the process of writing. Simon, for instance, speaks of "ce prodigieux pouvoir qu'ont les mots de rapprocher et de confronter ce qui, sans eux, resterait épars" and adds "je ne connaissais d'autres 'sentiers de la création' que ceux ouvert pas à pas, c'est-à-dire mot à mot, par le cheminement même de l'écriture" (74). Robbe-Grillet actually nuances the centrality of linguistic material in his own œuvre: "J'ai renoncé très vite aux mots eux-mêmes comme générateurs" (157).

From the Oulipo's écriture à contraintes *to Perec's* infra-ordinaire

The literary collective the Oulipo — Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle — exerts a strong influence on contemporary literary advice in France. This group's endorsement of the figures of the scientist writer and of the machine-text has, like the other avant-garde texts mentioned in this section, been useful to a number of contemporary advice authors. In addition, the Oulipo also has a strong effect on the writing practices proposed in a significant number of contemporary advice texts. For instance, in *L'atelier d'écriture. Éléments pour la rédaction du texte littéraire* (1993), Roche, Guiguet and Voltz recall the Oulipo's famous practice of *écriture à contraintes*. "Nous vous proposons, surtout dans les premiers chapitres, des exercices qui obéissent à des contraintes strictes," the authors explain, "Très vite, vous vous apercevrez que la contrainte vous porte, qu'elle vous permet d'écrire alors même que vous pensiez 'n'avoir rien à dire', ce qui signifie le plus souvent 'ne pas arriver à dire'" (17). Similarly, François Bon, in his pivotal *atelier d'écriture* handbook *Tous les mots sont adultes* (2nd edition 2005), highlights the importance of Georges Perec, one of the most notable Oulipians, for contemporary writing practices: "Perec est omniprésent dans les tentatives contemporaines. Vingt ans après sa disparition, il ne s'agit pas d'influence, mais de territoires qu'il a ouverts, et pour lesquels il a construit la première grille de vocabulaire" (2005: 50).

The Oulipo is founded in the 1960 by mathematician François Le Lionnais and writer Raymond Queneau (initially the group operated under the name SeLitEx or "Séminaire de Littérature Expérimental"). Its primary aim, as Oulipian writer Jacques Roubaud formulates it in an introductory essay, "is to invent (or reinvent) restrictions of a formal nature [*contraintes*] and propose them to enthusiasts interested in composing literature" (1998: 38–39). Originally, the Oulipo's main focus is to point out the literary potential of specific poetic structures and forms rather than to actually produce literary works. In the group's first manifesto, a mock-serious pamphlet written in 1962, François Le Lionnais announces that the Oulipo engages in two types of activities: "L'anoulipisme est voué à la découverte, le synthoulipisme à l'invention. De l'un à l'autre existent maints subtils passages" (1973: 18). As Le Lionnais contends, the Oulipo is first characterized by an analytical tendency that delves into literary history in search of poetic structures that can be re-used and renewed by contemporary authors. Lionnais calls this type of activity *l'anoulipisme* and offers the example of the *cento* as a poetic

form waiting to be revived.[14] In addition, the Oulipo strives to create new poetic structures. Le Lionnais signals that this synthetic activity — dubbed *le synthoulipisme* — is "la vocation essentielle de l'OuLiPo" (17) and he cites as an example Raymond Queneau's *Cent Mille Milliards de Poèmes* (1961).[15]

Whether it looks to the past in search of usable forms or whether it attempts to invent tomorrow's poetry, the Oulipo rests on the notion that writing fundamentally depends on poetic structures. "Toute œuvre littéraire se construit à partir d'une inspiration," Le Lionnais writes, "qui est tenue à s'accommoder tant bien que mal d'une série de contraintes et de procédures qui rentrent les unes dans les autres comme des poupées russes" (16). On that basis, the Oulipo asks whether new times should not give rise to new poetic structures: "L'humanité doit-elle se reposer et se contenter, sur des pensers nouveaux faire des vers antiques?" (17) The answer is clear in the eyes of the writers of the Oulipo. Their mission is to discover and invent new poetic principles. Moreover, they proceed in a scientific manner: "l'Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle (Oulipo), entend le faire systématiquement et scientifiquement," Le Lionnais emphasizes, "et au besoin en recourant aux bons offices des machines à traiter l'information" (17). Further, in spite of its scientific pretensions, the Oulipo is a fundamentally playful enterprise. As such, it affirms a radical poetics of reason and simultaneously tones it down with humor. As Le Lionnais contends, this double strategy is intrinsic to poetry itself:

> Un mot, enfin, à l'intention des personnes particulièrement graves qui condamnent sans examen et sans appel toute œuvre où se manifeste quelque propension à la plaisanterie.
> Lorsqu'ils sont le fait de poètes, divertissements, farces et supercheries appartiennent encore à la poésie. La littérature potentielle reste donc la chose la plus sérieuse du monde. C.Q.F.D. (18)

Whereas the first Oulipians are mainly driven by a pursuit of knowledge, that is, the search for structures that *could* generate writing, in its second decade, the Oulipo's focus shifts towards *actual* writing. This has to do with the group's new members: Georges Perec joins the Oulipo in 1967, and Italo Calvino and Harry Mathews become members in 1973. As Daniel Levin Becker observes in *Many Subtle Challenges* (2012): "These three in particular were good readers but truly gifted writers, and they came to the Oulipo with designs on creation, not speculation" (32). Perec's *La Disparition* is the first literary work that testifies to the Oulipo's capacity to generate actual writing. It famously relies on the prohibition of using the vowel *e* and is seen as a diptych with *Les Revenentes*, a book that includes *e* as its only vowel, as its sister piece. "From then on," Levin Becker notes, "at the expense of the first

[14] A *cento* is a poetical text composed exclusively of sentences and verses borrowed from other writers. It dates back to the third or fourth century AD.
[15] *Cent Mille Milliards de Poèmes* is a bundle of combinatory poetry that, by printing the individual verses of ten different sonnets with the same rhyme scheme and rhyme sounds on separate strips, allows the creation of 100,000,000,000,000 poems.

decade's erudite historiography, the workshop began to be about writing first and asking questions later" (32).

As the Oulipo moves towards literary (especially novelistic) creation, the notion of *écriture à contraintes* becomes ever more dominant. Whereas creative constraints were not the Oulipo's main concern in the group's early days, this changes with the success of *écriture à contraintes* books by Mathews, Roubaud and Perec (Kurt, 2015). From this moment on, the notion of *écriture à contraintes* becomes almost synonymous with the Oulipo. Given the centrality of this notion for the contemporary literary advice tradition in France, it is relevant to give a definition at this point. Although there are different interpretations of *écriture à contraintes*, in the 2009 essay "The Challenge of Constraint" Jan Baetens and Jean-Jacques Poucel offers this useful definition:

> A constraint is a self-chosen rule (i.e., different from the rules that are imposed by the use of a natural language or those of convention); it is also a rule that is used systematically throughout the work […] both as a compositional and a reading device. Constraints are not ornaments: for the writer, they help generate the text; for the reader, they help make sense of it. (613)

Creative constraints are self-chosen rules that are systematically applied throughout a literary work. Given that they, as Baetens and Poucel observe, "help generate the text", their importance for contemporary literary advice comes as no surprise. While there can be constraints on different levels (form, content, commercial constraints), it should be observed that most of the Oulipo's famous *écriture à contraintes* practices use formal constraints. Instead of taking the creation of content as a starting point for writing, the Oulipo takes the linguistic material at hand as a point of departure.

To give a few examples (all of which appear in *atelier d'écriture* handbooks): the technique named "le beau présent", proposed by Perec in *La Bibliothèque oulipienne* (1st volume 1987), allows to make a poetic wedding gift by taking the letters of the groom and the bride's first and/or second names and transforming them into a large number of words from all syntactic categories (nouns, adjectives, particles, verbs). The writer can draw words from this pool of language in order to create a text that can be presented as a wedding gift to the married couple. The "boule de neige", a practice presented in *La Littérature potentielle* (1973), proposes to write a sentence in the same way one makes a large snowball by rolling it forward in the snow. The sentence's first word will consists of one letter, the second of two letters, the third of three letters, and so on until the writer reaches the longest possible phrase. The L.S.D. or "Littérature sémo-définitionnelle" technique, created by Marcel Bénabou and Perec and presented in *La Littérature potentielle*, consists in choosing a random sentence and expanding it by replacing the words of the sentence with the dictionary definitions of these words. Finally, "Alexandre au greffoir", a technique exposed by Bénabou and Roubaud in *La Bibliothèque*

Oulipienne (2nd volume 1987), suggests building a stock of French alexandrines (by writers like Molière, Racine, Corneille)[16], which can, in a next step, be cut in halves so that they can be re-combined and re-shaped into new alexandrines.

The attraction of these Oulipian *écriture à contraintes* practices for contemporary advice lies in their precisely outlined and playful nature. With their specific rules and their challenging and fun objectives, these practices are more reminiscent of board games than of traditional writing. Yet, whereas the *écriture à contraintes* might be the Oulipo's most visible contribution to the set of writing techniques promoted by contemporary literary advice in France, it is not the group's only legacy. Indeed, as can be seen from the François Bon quote earlier, contemporary literary advice in France turns especially to Georges Perec's oeuvre as a reservoir of practices and ideas or, as Bon puts it, as a "laboratoire non pas seulement de Perec écrivant mais de nous tous, dans nos recherches d'aujourd'hui" (20).[17] While, as I will show in the next chapters, Perec's work is echoed in many ways by contemporary literary advice, here, I will only zoom in on two of its contributions to the writing practices promulgated by contemporary advice.

Firstly, the conceptual framework that Perec uses to classify his overarching project is perpetuated in the ways that contemporary advice texts propose to structure the experience of the beginning writer. In his 1978 essay "Notes sur ce que je cherche" (included in the posthumous *Penser/classer* (1985)), Perec notes that he organizes his work around four axes, that is "quatre champs différents, quatre modes d'interrogation qui posent peut-être en fin de compte la même question, mais la posent selon des perspectives particulières correspondant chaque fois pour moi à un autre type de travail littéraire" (2003: 9-10). This classification into four fields of work — the sociological, the autobiographical, the playful and the novelistic — becomes a tool for contemporary advice to guide the beginning writer through different types or modes of writing.

Secondly, Perec's examination of everyday life, as exposed in texts such as *Espèces d'éspaces*, *Penser/classer*, *L'Infra-ordinaire* and *Tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien*, is often invoked in contemporary French literary advice to urge beginning writers to closely examine their environment. "Ce qui se passe vraiment, ce que nous vivons, le reste, tout le reste, où est-il?" asks Perec in his text *L'Infra-ordinaire* (1989), "Ce qui se passe chaque jour et qui revient chaque jour, le banal, le quotidien, l'évident, le commun, l'ordinaire, l'infra-ordinaire, le bruit de fond, l'habituel, comment en rendre

[16] The alexandrine is a syllabic poetic meter of twelve syllables with a medial caesura dividing the line into two hemistichs (half-lines) of six syllables each. It was the dominant long line of French poetry from the 17th through the 19th century.

[17] Whether the practices of Perec to which I refer can still be called Oulipian is a questionable issue. In fact, given the less rigid forms and methods proposed in works like "Notes sur ce que je cherche" and *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, it might be more accurate to term these texts Perecquian rather than Oulipian. The question of how the works of the Oulipo relate to those of Perec is an often discussed topic (see, for instance, Roubaud and Poucel, 2004; Kurt, 2015).

compte, comment l'interroger, comment le décrire?" (6). A well-known example of Perec's desire to uncover something of the *infra-ordinaire* (that which lies beneath the ordinary) is found in *Tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien* (1975). For this short text, Perec goes to the Parisian Place Saint-Sulpice to take as many notes as much as possible for three consecutive days. Rather than focus on the Place Saint-Sulpice's monuments, Perec zooms in on those aspects that are typically overlooked: "Mon propos dans les pages qui suivent a plutôt été de décrire le reste: ce que l'on ne note généralement pas, ce qui n'a pas d'importance: ce qui se passe quand il ne se passe rien, sinon du temps, des gens, des voitures et des nuages" (10).

In sum, whether exposing *écriture à contraintes* techniques or practices for investigating everyday life through writing, the Oulipian writer emerges as a scientist-engineer for whom writing means carefully crafting specific procedures as well as executing them. The literary text, in the Oulipian framework, becomes a device whose quality depends not only on the inventiveness of its actual writer, but also, and more prominently, on the ways in which the pre-determined procedures and constraints have been designed.

Structuralist Narratology

Finally, I want to briefly mention structuralism in this discussion of methodological approaches to writing. The structuralists are not avant-garde writers, but literary theorists. What they have in common with the writers mentioned in this section, however, is their highly methodological approach to literature. Inspired by Vladimir Propp and the Russian formalists, the structuralists attempt to uncover the fundamental laws and principles of narrative. Their most significant publication is the eight issue of the magazine *Communications* (1966). In these articles, and in a number of texts published later, they lay bare concepts that have had an enormous influence in literary studies, especially in narratology. The next chapters will reveal the importance of structuralist concepts for creative writing handbooks. Essential concepts are Gérard Genette's distinction between *narration*, *récit* and *histoire*, Greimas's actantial model (a tool to analyze the action and types of agents in a story), the notions of direct and indirect characterization, and the ideas of focalization and narration.

2.4. Conclusion

The two French advice traditions discussed in this chapter constitute a reservoir of representations and techniques that, in addition to the American creative writing formulas analyzed in the previous chapter, can be re-used and renewed in contemporary literary advice in France.

The literary *conseils* can be traced back to the period of the construction of the literary field in the middle of the nineteenth century. Aside from Balzac's *bohémien* writer and Baudelaire's

pragmatic writer, I focused on the representations found in two *conseils* tendencies. The neo-romantic *conseils* present writing as vocation and martyrdom, and insist on the need for long-term self-cultivation (Jacob speaks of "une école de vie intérieure"). In their books, the poets Rilke and Jacob associate writing with solitude, anxiety and sickness. They see the literary text as the result of an act of authentic self-expression and strongly dismiss literature's commercial dimension, arguing that the latter only steers the writer away from truthfulness. Remy de Gourmont and Fernand Divoire's parodic *conseils*, by contrast, mock-analyze the literary field's industrial pole by uncovering its governing principles (which Divoire dubs "la stratégie littéraire"). They paint a caricature of the writer as arriviste, of writing as networking, and of the literary texts as merchandise. Original style and formal experiment, they contend, are of no use in the literary field.

Methodological advice explains *how to write* rather than *how to become a writer*. Methodological texts stress the rational nature of the writing process and argue that it can be dissected into its constitutive elements. In the previous chapter, I described the reader-oriented pragmatism of Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition", which was later borrowed by commercial creative writing handbooks, as an American form of methodological advice. In this chapter, I distinguished between two French methodological advice traditions. Rhetorical advice explains how to write by referring to a number of universal principles, in particular regarding literary style. Central to the French rhetorical advice tradition is critic Antoine Albalat. With his popular rhetoric handbooks, like *L'Art d'écrire en vingt leçons* (1899), Albalat plays an important role as a pioneer of the notion that writing can be taught. His method is based on close reading and imitation of the classic Greek, Latin and French works. In addition, it directs budding writers to the flawed manuscripts of these famous writers in order to demonstrate the universal validity of the specific rules he presents (for instance, the advice to make description concrete) as well as to highlight the importance of hard work in general.

Procedural advice projects writing as a technical, even scientific activity. It offers strict procedures for writing that are supposed to generate unexpected results, marking a rupture with the dominant or conventional literary production. Paul Valéry's notion of the writer as a "cool scientist in the service of a subtle dreamer" and his attention to language as material are pivotal in this tradition. In his highly idiosyncratic *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres*, Raymond Roussel diverts the attention towards the genre of the novel (thereby completely inflating the notion of the "cool scientist in the service of a subtle dreamer"), after which two distinct paths emerge. The *nouveau romanciers*, whom I only mention briefly, are focused on the material or linguistic dimension of the literary creation. Likewise, the Oulipian writers exploit the formal dimension of language by means of *écriture à contraintes* practices. In addition, as suggested by the notion of *l'infra*-ordinaire, Oulipians like Perec also pay very close attention to everyday life. Whether he writes under formal constraints or whether he bases his work on a rigid examination of the surrounding world, the Oulipian author emerges as a

scientist writer carefully constructing procedures that allow the creation of literary texts as technical devices.

Before moving on to the next chapter, I want to make a few remarks, which anticipate aspects of the analyses presented in the following chapters. First, in many ways, the imagery developed in local advice traditions echoes the formulas of the American creative writing handbooks as I described them in the previous chapter. For instance, the ideas of *writing as hard work* and *find your voice* are constitutive to the figure of the martyr writer as it appears in Flaubert's *Correspondance* and in the neo-romantic *conseils* by Rilke and Jacob. Similarly, it can be argued that *write what you know* is the directive that drives Perec's scientist writer in her close examination of everyday life.[18]

Second, I want to point to the significance of literary advice for the future of the author's legacy. The success of a number of the writers mentioned is dependent on having authored such advice texts. The fact that the Goncourt brothers (whose *Journal* is, of course, much more than an advice text) are still remembered today certainly has to do with their *Journal*. Antoine Albalat's popularity is derived solely from his advice texts. Raymond Roussel's reception has much benefited from *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres*. Even the Oulipo's success is related to the practical nature of their *écriture à contraintes* practices. Furthermore, instead of looking at the issue of productivity in sole terms of reputation and legacy, it can also be discussed on the level of textual production. Indeed, it appears that giving advice, for some authors, gradually becomes the core of their literary project. Like Albalat or the Oulipo, from book to book, these authors interrogate different facets of literary creation. In other words, their writing is driven by a desire to understand their own creative practices and to share them with others. This recalls a remark by Mark McGurl in his study of American creative writing programs *The Program* Era: "For the modernist artist, the reflexive production of the 'modernist artist', i.e., job description itself — is a large part of the job" (48).

My third remark ties into the second. The degree of productivity of literary advice for their users (budding writers) sometimes seems unimportant to determine the success of a literary advice text. For instance, as John Ashbery and Michel Foucault observe, Raymond Roussel's *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* hardly helps anyone to become a better writer. Similar arguments have been made about the writing workshops of the Oulipo (Bloomfield, 2017). However, this does not stand in the way of the reception of these texts as advice texts. Perhaps, this paradox ultimately raises the question of whether a person can be acknowledged as a writer just by following someone else's advice. To put it differently, what makes a writer? Do we consider writing to be the invention of

[18] In fact, Perec's writer provides us with a more radical re-interpretation of this formula, arguing that people typically overlook (the poetic potential of) what they know. Perhaps *Write what you think you know* might be a more accurate formulation of Perecquian writer's intention.

procedures for making a text, or is executing these procedures enough to be a writer? Or: is it enough to invent techniques that allow to write texts in order to be writer?

Putting these theoretical questions aside, in the next chapter I will continue to describe the sources upon which contemporary advice texts in French draw. Specifically, I will pay attention to the various genres that, together, constitute contemporary advice in France. While it is necessary, I argue, to grasp the American formulas and the French representations that circulate within contemporary advice, it is also useful to distinguish the different genres that structure it. Like the formulas and the images, these genres provide contemporary authors with tools to communicate their advice.

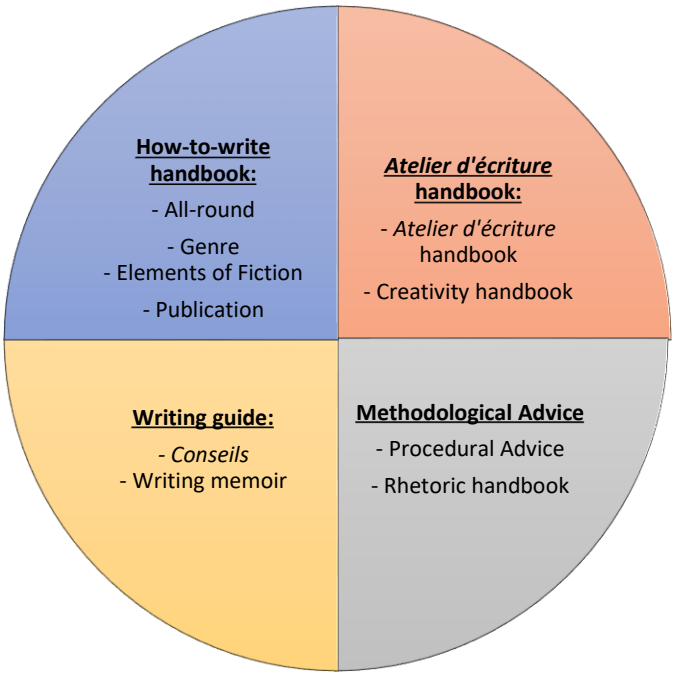
3. A Typology of Genres

3.1. Introduction

Genres, as John Frow points out, are sets of "conventional and highly organized constraints on the production and the interpretation of meaning" (10). They "shape and guide, in the way that a builder's form gives shape to a pour of concrete, or a sculptor's mould shapes and gives structure to its materials. Generic structure both enables and restricts meaning, and is a basic condition for meaning to take place" (10). Like the formulas and the representations discussed in the previous chapters, genres are tools that facilitate the creation and the interpretation of individual texts. They are structures that permeate texts and, which texts themselves, in turn, perform, interpret and transform.

This chapter presents a typology of contemporary literary advice genres in France. This typology comprises four genres that operate as structures of meaning that allow literary advice to occur. In my view, it is useful to point out and describe these genres, as they provide the basic structures which advice authors draw from to produce texts. We should not lose sight of the nature of such a typology: the genres do not constitute permanently fixed categories that set the rules that must be followed in order to produce generic texts. Vice versa, individual texts do not so much "belong" to the genres as they perform these genres. For instance, texts can entail features that explore and transgress the limits of genre conventions and thereby modify the genre itself. As a result, the genres that I will discuss are not so much rigid taxonomic classes, but, as Wai Chee Dimock puts it, "fields at once emerging and ephemeral, defined over and over again by new entries that are still produced" (2007: 1379).

My typology distinguishes between four genres: how-to-write handbooks, writing guides, *atelier d'écriture* handbooks, and what I call methodological advice texts. With the exception of the *atelier d'écriture* handbooks, I have touched upon these genres in the previous chapters. The French how-to-write handbooks draw strongly on the American handbook format discussed in chapter one. They encompass a spectrum of subgenres, ranging from all-round handbooks to handbooks focusing on specific literary genres (detective, romance, etc.) and to handbooks whose sole concern is being published. The writing guides encompass both the *conseils* tradition and the autobiographical writing memoir (see 1.2.8.). The *atelier d'écriture* handbooks are addressed to the *atelier d'écriture* facilitator and offer writing exercises that can be carried out in the context of an *atelier d'écriture*. The methodological advice genre, finally, includes both the rhetorical and procedural advice texts that were discussed in the previous chapter.



This typology is based on a study of an extensive corpus of advice texts that can be found in Annex 1. This corpus contains 246 texts: 136 how-to-write handbooks, 47 writing guides, and 63 *atelier d'écriture* handbooks.[19] It was composed in three ways. First, I performed a number of search queries on *Amazon.fr* and investigated this website's Art d'écrire section[20], which provided the bulk of the corpus. Second, I visited collections of French writing advice in libraries, in particular the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ). Finally, I consulted the bibliographies of the literary advice texts that I found, which gave me access to lesser-known and older titles. The earliest text dates from 1976 (Elisabeth Bing's *atelier d'écriture* text *Et je nageai jusqu'à la page*) and the latest, Pierre Ménard's (pseudonym of writer Philippe Diaz) *Comment écrire au quotidien,* from 2018. The corpus presented in Annex 1 is ordered chronologically by date of publication. If a text has appeared in different editions over the years, it is included under the year of its earliest edition. The later editions are indicated in the same entry. Certain texts were published before 1976 (e.g. Max Jacob's *Conseils à un jeune poète*) but are still included in the corpus since these are part of the contemporary literary advice offer. In Annex 1, they can be found under the year of their first publication from 1976 on. I

[19] Given the openness of the methodological advice category (for example, many works in narratology can be used as methodological advice), I focused on collecting how-to-write handbooks, writing guides and *atelier d'écriture* handbooks.

[20] The search queries were: atelier d'écriture, manuel d'écriture, (comment) écrire, guide d'écriture, (comment) devenir écrivain, écriture créative, (comment) écrire un roman, (comment) être publié.

have also included French translations of advice text written in English, German, Russian and Spanish in the corpus, since, just like the older advice texts, these translations shape the contemporary body of advice texts in French.

Before delving into the typology, I will first shed light on my use of the notion "contemporary". More specifically, I will lay out the reasons for taking the end of the 1970s as the starting point for my collection of "contemporary" advice in France.

3.2. Rise of the Pseudo-Field of Literature

The notion of "contemporary literary advice" as I use it in the frame of this dissertation refers to advice texts that have been published from the end of the 1970s onwards. As sociological studies (Poliak, 2006; Chateigner, 2007) have shown, these years mark the beginning of a broad interest in literary writing on the part of amateurs or, as sociologist Claude Poliak calls it, the rise of a "pseudo-field of literature" ("un simili-champ littéraire" (2)): a literary field for amateurs that mimics the institutional dynamics (prizes, magazines, networks, etc.) of the genuine literary field.[21] This pseudo-field responds to a number of needs. As a universe of consolation ("univers de consolation" (Poliak: 221)), it caters to the amateur writers' desire for recognition. As a marketplace, it answers the financial needs of "professional" writers and other literary agents (they can earn an income by providing advice in the form of handbooks, workshops or paid interviews).

A number of circumstances also explain the appearance of this pseudo-field. First, a decade earlier, the uprising of Mai 68 marked not only the rising critique of traditional patriarchal institutions like school, family, church, medicine, and industrial production. It also opened the way to a criticism of the literary field, especially of the way its dominant representations of authorship functioned as mechanisms of exclusion (Gobille, 2005: 30-61). Sociologist Frédéric Chateigner calls this criticism "la critique artiste des conditions sociales de la vie d'artiste" (2007: 14) and adds that "il s'agit de remettre en cause la division du travail appliquée à la maîtrise de l'écrit" (26-27). This suggests that everyone should be given the opportunity to participate in the literary and artistic fields. A number of slogans that circulate at the end of the sixties anticipate that criticism: "Écrivez partout!", "Créez!", "Tous auteurs!", "Assez d'actes, des mots!" (quoted in Poliak: 53). It further rests on a democratic vision of creative talent that maintains that all people are endowed with creative potential. As sociologist Boris Gobille notes: "La créativité est posée comme donnée fondamentale de l'humain, et non comme don de quelques-uns" (2005: 36).

[21] As Poliak notes, the distinction between pseudo-field and genuine literary field is not clear-cut, and it might be better to speak of a pro[fessional]-amateur continuum. Yet, for Poliak, as for me, it is a useful analytic distinction that allows to conceptualize this dynamic of imitation.

Second, the anti-authoritarian "culture psy" that emerges in the wake of May 1968 and that takes its cue from the works of pedagogues Carl Rogers and Michel Lobrot promotes the benefits of writing, both for individual well-being and societal cohesion (Castel and Le Cerf, 1980). Writing, in this framework, becomes an essential means for self-knowledge, self-development, and ultimately, for fruitful participation in society. As Poliak notes: "L'offre d'écriture, conçue comme offre d'expression publique de l'intimité n'est pas nouvelle […] mais elle s'est considérablement diversifiée et développée avec l'essor des thématiques de la créativité et de l'expression de soi" (30).

Third, the eighties are informed by the combination of a high number of educated individuals with cultural aspirations, and an unstable job market which cannot accommodate to these aspirations. This overproduction of graduates ("surproduction de diplomés" (Poliak: 222)) forced people to realize their aspirations outside of the domain of professional work, that is, in their spare time. In this light, writing appears as an obvious cultural outlet. It does not call for any financial investments (the writer only needs pen and paper) nor does it appear to require long practice and training (in the collective mind, writing is often perceived as a matter of talent only). Becoming a writer appears to be the most accessible way to reach a form of cultural salvation ("salut culturel" (Poliak: 222)), that is, to gain the symbolic recognition that the established labor market cannot offer. In *Aux frontières du champ littéraire* (2006), Claude Poliak examines the motives of people that participated in a short story writing contest in the early nineties. He concludes that "le trait qui rassemble, peut-être, la plupart d'entre eux, c'est un immense besoin de reconnaissance, de considération" (302). Quoting Bourdieu, he adds that : "Il n'est pas de pire dépossession, de pire privation peut-être, que celle des vaincus dans la lutte symbolique pour la reconnaissance, pour l'accès à un être social socialement reconnu" (302).

Fourth, the overproduction of graduates also entails a growth of people seeking symbolic recognition through providing advice on writing, thereby contributing to the inflation of the French creative writing offer ("l'inflation des offres d'écriture" (Poliak: 225)). As sociologist Frédéric Chateigner argues, this especially holds true for a number of intellectuals involved in the uprising of Mai 68. During the time of the student uprising, these intellectuals sought symbolic recognition through politics. When the ideological climate changed in the mid-seventies and radical leftist politics gradually collapsed, they looked for alternative ways to gain recognition. In *Une société littéraire* (2007), a sociological study of *ateliers d'écriture* and their participants, Chateigner speaks of a "déclin de voies de salut politiques à partir du milieu des années soixante-dix et reconversion dans des prophéties plus individuelles et culturellement moins iconoclastes" (32).

Fifth, new cultural politics promote cultural activities as the solution to social problems (Dubois, 1999). In France, under the neoliberal policy in the eighties, culture becomes the answer to the challenges that society has to face. Vincent Dubois speaks in this regard of "la culturalisation des problèmes sociaux" (1999: 259). Culture is put forth as a means to combat social exclusion and

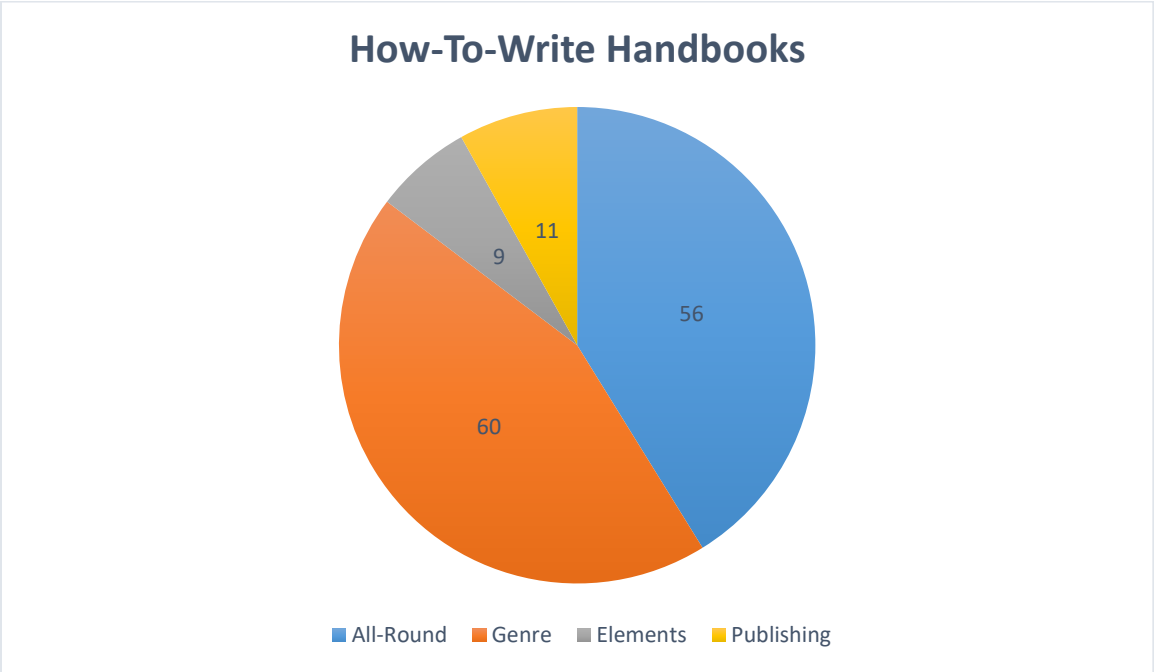
facilitate social integration and cohesion. As a result, cultural activities such as *ateliers d'écriture* and other artistic workshops are introduced in prisons, orphanages, schools, libraries, etc. From the policymakers' point of view, the advantage of such an approach is that it is a fairly cheap and easy marketable way to deal with serious societal problems. For the cultural facilitators involved, this politics of culture opened a new market from the eighties onwards. With regard to the *atelier d'écriture* offer, Chateigner speaks of the opening of an institutional market ("l'ouverture du marché institutionnel" (2007: 33)). Dubois argues that it is unclear whether this policy really opens the way to the cultural field for marginalized individuals, but it has at least made the possibility of accessing this field conceivable: "Si le développement de la politique culturelle n'a que peu socialement élargi cet 'accès' [à la culture], il l'a néanmoins inscrit dans l'ordre du pensable, du possible et du nécessaire" (1999: 305).

I argue that contemporary literary advice in France begins at the end of the 1970s because this period is marked by a number of socio-political and cultural processes that feed into amateurs' interest in writing. As a result of these developments, writing and authorship become sites of cultural compensation for an educated class, and of (collective) social and (individual) psychological work. The growing popularity of handbooks is only one of the manifestations of this broad interest in writing. In France, the eighties also mark the emergence of an institutional field of *ateliers d'écriture* (Chateigner: 2007), writing magazines and writing contests (Poliak: 2006).

Additionally, it is important to note that all the initiatives that constitute the pseudo-field not only respond to a demand, but also increase the aura of writing and writers. On the one hand, handbooks, contests, workshops, literary interviews cater to a growing desire of aspiring writers, and on the other hand, they also generate this desire. As Poliak notes, writing workshops, contests and handbooks issue an "appel aux auteurs" (Poliak: 57). They produce makers of literature ("la production du producteur" (Poliak: 51)) by persuading people to take their chance and discover whether they have the talent necessary to make it as a writer ("la thématique de talents dormants qui n'attendent qu'à être révélés" (Poliak: 229)). Moreover, these initiatives give themselves the power to unearth and consecrate ("mise en scène du pouvoir de consecration" (Poliak: 55)) these undiscovered talents. In a literary field free from the codes of diplomas and trainings ("un champ à faible degré de codification" (Poliak: 167)), contests and workshops play the role of gatekeepers. They pretend to have the power to offer "un droit d'entrée" (Poliak: 4) to the deserving talents.

3.3. Typology

3.3.1. How-To-Write Handbooks



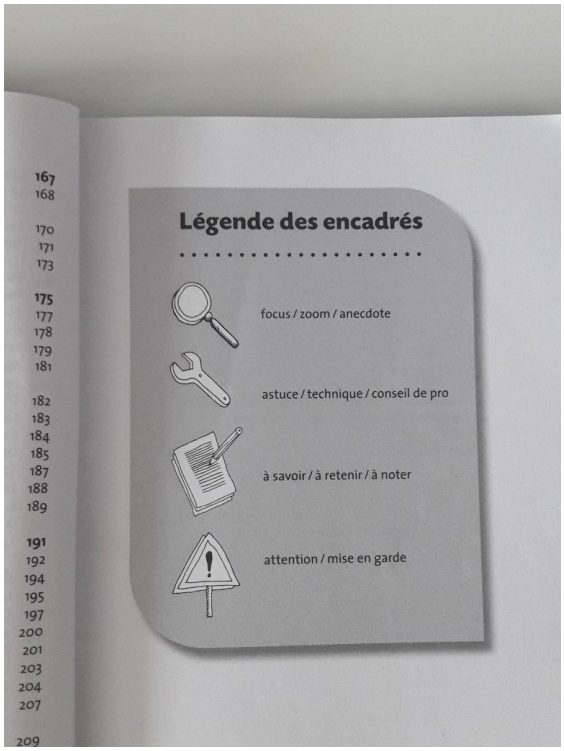
French how-to-write handbooks like Alain Berthelot's *Écrire et être édité. Guide pratique* (1992), Bernard Baudouin's *Comment écrire votre premier livre. Depuis le désir d'écrire jusqu'à la conception, la création et la publication* (2003), Brigit Hache's *Écrire et trouver ses lecteurs. Construire son projet, améliorer sa plume et trouver ses lecteurs (blog, publication)* (2011), Gérard Raynal's *Écrire un livre. Comment éviter les pièges de l'écriture* (2011), Laure D'Astragal's *Atelier d'écriture. Envie d'écrire? Du rêve à la réalité* (2013) and Marianne Jaeglé's *Écrire. De la page blanche à la publication* (2014) adapt the discourse and design of the U.S. handbooks described in the first chapter of this dissertation to the French context.

Above all, they distinguish themselves from the other genres through the direct and explicitly normative language that they use to address their readers. For instance, with regard to the issue of hard work, Alain Berthelot stresses the importance of "l'autodiscipline" (10) and explains that "sans une rigoureuse discipline personnelle, il n'est guère possible de rédiger un texte de roman ou de nouvelle qui soit vraiment achevé" (11). In a similar way, Brigit Hache warns that "il n'y a pas de miracle, le travail est seul moyen d'y arriver" (14). In some cases, the how-to-write handbooks even resort to strong do's and don'ts to convey their ideas. For example, when discussing the topic of sentence structure, Gérard Raynal tells his readers "alternez les longueurs" and "halte aux cadences infernales!" (47).

In comparison to the other genres, how-to-write handbooks make much broader use of variations in typography, titles and subtitles, pictograms, lists with advice to keep in mind, bullet-

points, exercises, and richly decorated covers. All these tools are presented to provide aspiring writers with an organized work plan. For instance, Marianne Jaeglé adds a pictogram to many sections of her handbook. As can be seen on the image below, she distinguishes between a looking glass, a wrench, pencil and paper, and a triangular traffic sign displaying an exclamation mark. These pictograms communicate to the reader the action she should undertake at a given point. The looking glass signifies "focus/zoom/anecdote", the wrench "astuce/technique/conseil de pro", pencil and paper "à savoir/à retenir/à noter", the traffic sign "attention/mise en garde". It should be noted that these pictograms stem from distinct semantic and societal fields. The looking glass calls to mind the detective and frames the creative process as a puzzle to be solved. The wrench hints at technical labor and pushes the literary text in the role of the machine. Pencil and paper allude directly to the act of writing, particularly the improvisatory and preparatory stage of notes and sketches. The traffic sign is reminiscent of police and jurisdiction and portrays writing as a matter of laws and rules to follow.

Jaeglé, 2014: 13



In addition, how-to-write handbooks often bring up extra-literary goals. Whereas *atelier d'écriture* handbooks typically stress the intrinsic value of the writing experience (as I will show below), how-to-write handbooks maintain that having a manuscript published is the beginning writer's ultimate reward. This can already be seen from such handbook titles as Alain Berthelot's *Écrire et être édité.* (1992), Brigit Hache's *Écrire et trouver ses lecteurs* (2011) and Marianne Jaeglé's *Écrire. De la page blanche à la publication* (2014) What is more, the how-to-write handbooks tend to stress the efficiency of their method in view of realizing these extra-literary goals. For example, the cover of Laure D'Astragal's *Atelier d'écriture* (2013) bears the inscription "la méthode qui va tout changer" and

Murielle Lucie Clément's *Comment écrire un bestseller* (2015) is subtitled "12 étapes simples et efficaces". Furthermore, almost all how-to-write handbooks contain chapters in which they explain how the publishing world works and how to obtain success in it. Alain Berthelot's *Écrire et être édité,* for instance, entails chapters on "Trouver un éditeur", "Contrat d'édition", "Copyright, droits, domaine public", "Comment fabrique-t-on un livre" and "Comment promouvoir la vente de son livre". On the basis of the 136 how-to-write handbooks collected in the corpus, I discern four subcategories: 56 all-round handbooks, 60 genre handbooks, 9 elements of fiction handbooks, 11 handbooks on being published. As these numbers are close to being exhaustive for the period from 1976 onwards, they give a good idea of the generic distribution of how-to-write handbooks for that period.

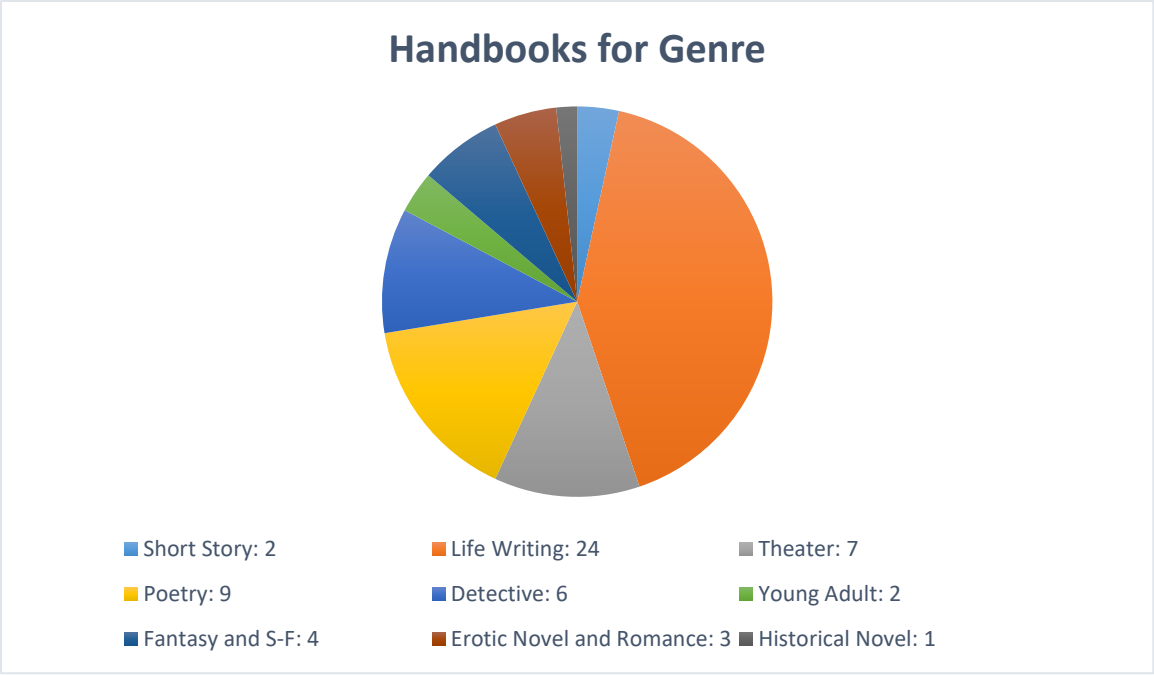
All of the how-to-write handbooks discussed above are all-round handbooks. This means that these are texts that give guidance from the initial desire to become a writer all the way to the eventual publication. As Bernard Baudouin's book's subtitle suggests, "Depuis le désir d'écrire jusqu'à la conception, la création et la publication". Additionally, all-round signifies that these handbooks do not restrict their advice to a specific literary genre, quite the contrary. They present a variety of genres and describe their various characteristics. For instance, Brigit Hache's handbook contains chapters on "La fiction" and "La non-fiction" in which she respectively discusses short stories, novels, young-adult books, autobiography, diaries, memoirs, autobiographical novels, auto-fiction and practical how-to books.[22] At the same time, the all-round handbooks tend to resort to the default genre of the novel in order to illuminate the creative process. Consequently, there is a tension between an all-inclusive approach discussing all genres and an approach that uses novelistic writing as default genre. This tension can also be witnessed in Hache's handbook whose section on the novel is nineteen pages long (75-94), while the non-fiction genres of autobiography, diary, memoir, autobiographical novel and autofiction, are addressed in the course of a single page (104).

Among the 60 genre handbooks, there are 24 autobiography handbooks, 8 for poetry, 7 on theater, 6 on detective stories, 4 fantasy and science-fiction, 3 on romance, 2 on short story, 2 on young adult writings, and 1 historical novel (French literary advice specialist Louis Timbal-Duclaux's *Écrire un roman historique ou régionaliste* (2015)). The number of handbooks on autobiography and related non-fiction genres like memoir, diary (e.g. Marion Rollin's *Écrire son journal* (2012)), travel narrative (e.g. British 19th century navy officer Frederick Marryat's translated *Comment écrire un livre de voyage* (2013)), and family narrative (e.g. Hélène Soula's *Écrire l'histoire de sa famille* (2012)) stands out. These non-fiction handbooks typically include non-literary objectives. For instance, in the introduction to *Écrire ma vie* (2009), Étienne Godinot signals that the exercises in his book "sont ordonnés au mieux-être des personnes et des groupes" and enlists four types of objectives: "faire

[22] These are Brigit Hache's own generic categories.

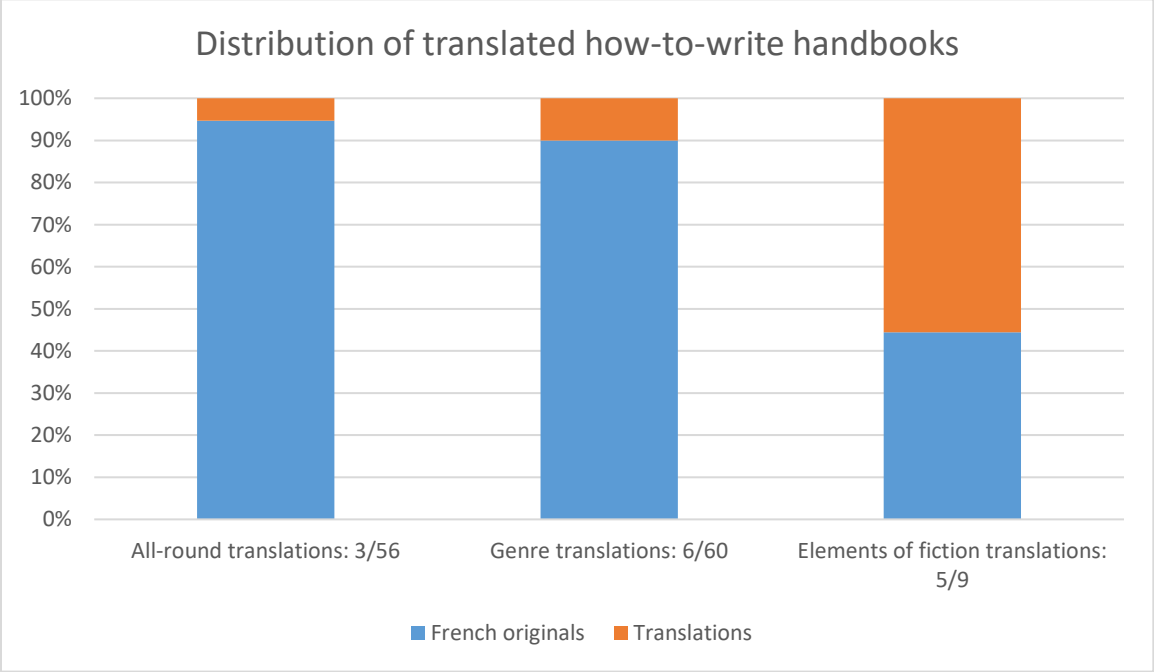
mémoire (d'une vie, d'une famille, d'une amitié, […])"; "créer du lien"; "donner sens à sa vie", "ouvrir l'avenir (définir un projet, faire des choix, se préparer à une nouvelle étape de vie […])" (11). In many cases, these autobiography handbooks propose narrative forms to structure lived experiences so that these experiences can be better remember and shared with others. A title like Éric Martini's *Mettre en forme ses mémoires* (2012) alludes to this structuring function of the autobiography handbook.

In comparison to the handbook offer for genre writing in the American creative writing tradition, the number of genre handbooks in French appears quite limited. Putting aside the 24 autobiography or life writing handbooks, there are only 36 French genre handbooks. Further, if we discard poetry (9) and theater handbooks (7) and only include the popular genre fiction that plays such a major role in U.S. handbooks, this leaves us with a relatively small number of 20 French genre handbooks. In chapter one, I mention how De Geest and Goris (2010) and Masschelein and De Geest (2016) situate the popular handbooks for romance fiction and handbooks for detective handbooks at the heart of a new wave of literary advice. In the U.S. tradition, almost any genre, from erotic fiction to young adult to fantasy, is supported by an extensive specialized creative writing literature that exposes all the specific conventions and rules of the genre in question. This is not the case in France.



Likewise, there are much fewer elements of fiction handbooks in the French tradition. Elements of fiction handbooks analyze specific techniques like composition, point of view, characters and dialogue. My corpus comprises 9 elements of fiction handbooks. Some of these titles, like Louis Timbal-Duclaux's *Techniques du récit et composition dramatique* (2009) and American creative writing teacher Tom Chiarella's translated *Écrire des dialogues* (2013) zoom in on a single building block of fiction. Other volumes like Armenian-American author Leon Surmelian's translated *Techniques d'écriture romanesque* (2002), American science-fiction and fantasy author Card Orson Scott's

translated *Personnages et Points de vue* (2009), novelist and Iowa Writers' Workshop graduate Oakley Hall's translated *Mécanismes des histoires romanesques* (2010) and François Bon's *Outils du roman* (2015 – written under the pseudonym Malt Olbren) expose the uses of multiple *elements of fiction*. Remarkably, 5 out of the 9 elements of fiction handbooks in the corpus are translations from American originals. As can be seen on the chart below, this number is much higher than the share of translations in the other how-to-write handbook subgenres (3/56 translations for all-round handbooks; 6/60 for genre handbooks). As I will show in the next chapters (see 4.2.3. and 5.5.), French literary advice writers and publishers are aware of a lack in the French advice traditions with regard to extensive treatment of the *elements of fiction*. To fill this void, they make attempts to infuse the French tradition with American input on this subject, notably through translations.



The handbooks on being published like Victor Bouadjio's *Scriptor. Le monde de l'écrit et de l'édition* (1999) and Paul Desalmand's *Guide pratique de l'écrivain* (2004) describe how the publishing world works, that is, the functioning of literary publishers, literary prizes, writing contests and literary agents. They advise on writing contracts, earnings, copyrights, plagiarism, protection of manuscripts, and self-publishing. They offer an extensive list of descriptions of publishing houses so that the aspiring writer can better choose to which publisher she sends a manuscript. Some handbooks, like Ted Oudan's *Auto-édition* (2002) and Aude Réco's *Autoédition, en avant!* (2017), focus on self-publishing and the various possibilities in this domain. Other handbooks, for example Jean Baptiste Viet's *Autoéditeur: transformer un blog en livre* (2015) and Marie-Laure Cahier and Élisabeth Sutton's *Publier son livre à l'ère numérique. Autoédition, maisons d'édition, solutions hybrides* (2015), emphasize the new publishing opportunities that await the contemporary debutant in the digital world.

Additionally, there are many titles of extremely short e-books downloadable for Kindle that offer guidance on publishing e-books on *Amazon.fr*.[23] Examples are Amandine Pierafeu's *Comment publier des livres en clônant les succès* (2012) and Cyril Codefroy and Club Positif's *Comment publier votre premier ebook* (2014), Pierre Benoit Tasse's *Comment publier facilement sur KINDLE des livres qui vous rapportent jour après jour* (2014), Séraphine Lemangou's *Comment publier des livres non-stop* (2013), and Eric Nicolas's *Comment bien gagner sa vie en publiant facilement: sans éditer, sans investir, sans être un auteur* (2013). A variant of these titles is the e-book that teaches how to publish a paper book by making use of *Amazon.fr*'s CreateSpace service, for instance Bruno Challard's *Comment publier sur CreateSpace* (2014) and Olivier and Cristina Rebères *Comment publier son livre sur CreateSpace* (2014). These e-books push the commercial aspect of how-to-write handbooks to an extreme. Not only do they omit the writing process completely — including all its hardship and joys (e.g. Lemangou shows how to "publier des livres non-stop") —, they even eliminate the symbolically highly valued notion of the author (Nicolas's title stresses that people can publish "sans être un auteur"), the reason that most amateur writers take up writing in the first place (Poliak: 221). This happens in favor of a focus on fast and easy (auto-)publication. The idea is not that everyone can write, but that everyone can publish. Writing is no longer a prerequisite for publishing. What is more, these e-books promise commercial success to anyone seeking it (e.g. Tasse's title mentions books "qui vous rapportent jour après jour"). Most notably, the writers of these e-books practice what they preach: by means of appealing titles that promise wealth without effort, they sell texts that have demanded no effort to write, publish or distribute in order to make fast and easy money.

3.3.2. Writing Guide

I have discussed the genre of the writing guide extensively in the previous chapters. The writing guide comprises the *conseils* tradition on the one hand (see 2.2.) and the writing memoir on the other (see 1.2.8.). In *conseils* books like Baudelaire's *Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs*, Remy de Gourmont's *Conseils familiers à un jeune écrivain* and Rilke's translated *Lettres à un jeune poète,* a master-author figure advises a young writer on how to organize her life in order to obtain success (this can be the success of writing a good poem, as in Rilke's case, or commercial success, as in Gourmont's case). The writing memoir, by contrast, does not address the aspiring writer directly, but is an autobiographical piece of writing that gives an insight into a famous writer's everyday life and working habits. Flaubert's *Correspondance* and Jules and Edmond de Goncourt's *Journal* are pioneering works in this category.

[23] Given their very specialized format, I have not included these Kindle-book titles for e-publication in the corpus found in Annex 1.

More recent examples include Stephen King's very popular translated *Écriture. Mémoires d'un métier* (2003) and writer Annie Dillard's translated *En vivant, en écrivant* (2008).

The *conseils* texts discussed in chapter two are approximately written between 1850 and 1950. Yet, all of these texts have been re-edited and continue to circulate in new guises on the contemporary advice market. A quick *Amazon.fr* query learns for example that Rilke's *Lettres à un jeune poète* (first published by Grasset in 1937) has been reissued by Grasset (1982), Le Livre de Poche (1991), Seuil (1992), Le Livre de Poche (1993), Grasset (2002), Gallimard (2005), Folio (2006), Flammarion (2011) and Le Petit Littéraire (2014). Similarly, Baudelaire's *Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs* (1846) has been re-published by Mille et Une Nuits (1997), La Cause des Livres (2008), Publie.net (2012) and Sillage (2013). In addition, the *conseils* format has been used regularly by younger and lesser known authors like Claire Delannoy in *Lettre à un jeune écrivain* (2005), Christian Cottet-Émard in *Tu écris toujours ? Manuel de survie à l'usage de l'auteur et son entourage* (2010) and Martin Page in *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* (2014). All these texts adopt the epistolary design of the classic *conseils*. An important difference, however, is situated on the level of gender. Whereas the traditional *conseils* are exclusively written by male authors and addressed to young male writers (e.g. Baudelaire's "jeune littérateur"), these new *conseils* are also made by female writers (e.g. Claire Delannoy) and targeted at female addressees (e.g. Martin Page's fictional addressee is named Daria).

The *conseils* texts bear resemblance to the all-round how-to-write handbooks in that they typically guide the writing process from A to Z. The correspondence between master and beginner usually starts when the latter embarks on the adventure of writing a first novel and has decided to get in touch with an experienced writer. For example, Martin Page's *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* opens with a letter in which the seasoned author Martin thanks the young girl Daria for sending him a letter: "Bonjour, votre courier m'attendait dans la boîte aux lettres ce matin. […] Merci pour vos mots. Votre lettre me touche et m'encourage" (9). Then, over the course of the book, the experienced peer exposes her views on the creative and publishing process. Sticking to the chronology of the process, the *conseils* text opens with letters on embracing the idea of becoming a writer (one of Delannoy's first chapters is titled "Pourquoi j'écris" (21)), moves on to letters about the struggle of writing (as Martin Page admits to Daria: "C'est une dure journée. Je n'avance pas. Ce que j'écris ne me satisfait pas" (73)), and ends with advice on how to deal with the publishing world (Delannoy provides "les sept règles d'or d'un manuscrit" (37)). In some cases, the recent *conseils* provide digressions on the contemporary writer's precarious socio-economic position. For example, Martin Page warns Daria: "On ne gagne pas contre la société. L'objectif d'un artiste devrait être de s'en sortir sans faire de concessions" (83). On a similar note, Cottet-Émard makes the following suggestion: "Puisque notre déplaisante société commande aux écrivains de perdre du temps dans un métier alimentaire, il faut dégoter la perle rare, un job qui vous permette d'être payé à ne rien faire" (23).

In chapter two, I showed that the early *conseils* are either funny to the point of becoming plain parody (like Gourmont's *Conseils familiers à un jeune écrivain*), or heartfelt letters that emphasize the importance of authenticity and originality (e.g. Rilke's *Lettres à un jeune écrivain*). The contemporary *conseils* still hover between the poles of parody or neo-romanticism. Yet, instead of moving towards one of those extremes, they favor a middle ground between these poles. In many cases, they offer a humorous and an empathetic take on the contemporary writer's condition. Think of Christian Cottet-Émard's title *Tu écris toujours? Manuel de survie à l'usage de l'auteur et son entourage*, a funny, hyperbolic phrase that contains a somewhat bitter grain of truth about the writer's precarious condition and its impact on her well-being and those around her. Throughout his book, with chapters like "Conseils eux écrivains qui cherchent un emploi", "Conseils eux écrivains qui envoient des lettres de motivations" and "Conseils eux écrivains assignés à résidence", Cottet-Émard persists in this humorous portrayal of the precarious conditions of the literary life.

The writing memoir is an autobiographical text that details the literary life by means of memoir, diary, biography, interview, correspondence and autobiographical essay (Wandor, 2008). Aside from Flaubert's *Correspondance* and the Goncourt brothers' *Journal*, the corpus – which was mainly composed by collecting references in how-to-write handbooks – entails texts by famous French writers: Marguerite Duras's autobiographical essay *Écrire* (1993) Charles Juliet's *Rencontres avec Samuel Beckett* (1999) and writer of autofiction Annie Ernaux's interview-book *L'Écriture comme un couteau* (2011) are frequently evoked as important sources of literary advice. Writing memoirs can also be written by publishers like José Corti's memoir *Souvenirs désordonnés* (1983). Finally, French writing memoirs, more than the other literary advice genres, are often translated texts (11 out of 26 writing memoirs included in the corpus are translations). Examples of such translations are V. S. Naipaul's essay collection *Reading and Writing* (2000), translated as *Comment je suis devenu écrivain* (2000), detective writer P. D. James's autobiographical *Time to be in Earnest* (1999), translated as *Il serait temps d'être sérieuse* (2000), Stephen King's *On Writing* (2000), translated as *Écriture. Mémoires d'un métier* (2001), Franz Kafka's selected and translated diaries *Journal* (2002) and American short story writer and creative writing cult figure Raymond Carver's collection of short stories and essays *Fires* (1983), translated as *Les Feux* (2013). In some cases, the translation does not exist in the same format in the original language. For example, Jack London's *Profession: écrivain* (2016) is a collection of short texts and diary fragments composed and translated specially for the French (advice) market.

The writing memoir differs from the *conseils* in its intention and approach. Whereas the *conseils* are intended as advice and directed to a (fictional) addressee who pursues a literary career, the writing memoir is not so much intended as advice, but can be used as such. Its discourse is monologic and does not address a fictional aspiring writer. Rather, it implicitly offers a model of authorship that can be adopted by beginning writers. It sheds light on the admired writer's beginnings

(e.g. V. S. Naipaul's *Comment je suis devenu écrivain* begins with the sentence: "J'avais onze ans, pas plus, quand le désir me prit d'être écrivain" (13)), cultural and literary references (e.g. Naipaul mentions Charles Dickens, Jules Verne, Aldous Huxley and the Indian epic *Ramayana* etc.), daily habits (e.g. in *Écrire*, Marguerite Duras observes: "Ma chambre ce n'est pas un lit, ni ici, ni à Paris, ni à Trouville. C'est une certaine fenêtre, une certaine table […] et certaines habitudes que je retrouve toujours" (15)), and general ethics (in the sense of system of values and views of the world).

In addition, the writing memoir often speaks of the harder parts of the literary life. It unveils the hard and bumpy road towards literary recognition and an audience (e.g. Naipaul notes: "J'étais pratiquement dans le dénuement […] quand je quittai Oxford pour m'établir écrivain à Londres" (30)), the inevitable difficulties of the creative process and the sense of isolation and sacrifice that comes with the literary work (e.g. Duras signals: "Il faut toujours une séparation d'avec les autres gens autour de la personne qui écrit les livres. C'est une solitude" (15)). Simultaneously, the writing memoir offers the message that writing is a vocation, that it is as essential for the writer as breathing (e.g. Duras notes: "La solitude, ça veut dire aussi: ou la mort, ou le livre" (19)). This double emphasis on the hard and the inevitable is likely to contribute to the writing memoir's success as a literary advice genre. Showing that writers of renown like Duras and Naipaul experienced hardship can be a source of consolation for the aspiring writer in times of self-doubt. Moreover, revealing and emphasizing the ultimate beauty of the writerly experience reinforces the aspiring writer's determination.

It is important to note that, apart from Stephen King's *On Writing*, only some of the classic American writing memoirs mentioned in chapter one (see 1.2.8.) have been translated into French: Annie Dillard's *The Writing Life* (1989) has been translated as *En Vivant, en écrivant* and published by Christian Bourgois Éditeur in 1996 and has appeared in a new edition in 2017; Natalie Goldberg's *Writing down to the Bones* (1986) has been translated as *Les Italiques jubilatoires* (2001) by the self-help publisher Le Souffle d'or éditions and is currently out of print; Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way* (1994) has been translated as *Libérez votre créativité* (2007) by J'ai Lu Éditions and is now out of print. Recently, Ray Bradbury's classic *Zen in the Art of Writing* (1990) has been translated as *Le Zen dans l'Art de l'Écriture* (2016) by the small independent publisher Antigone 14 Éditions. Many other classic U.S. writing memoirs like Dorothea Brande's *Becoming a Writer* (1934), R. V. Cassil's *Writing Fiction* (1962), Peter Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* (1973), John Gardner's *The Art of Fiction* (1983), and Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird* (1994) have never been translated.

3.3.3. *Atelier d'Écriture* Handbook

Atelier d'écriture handbooks like Anne Roche, Andrée Guiguet and Nicole Voltz's *L'Atelier d'écriture. Éléments pour la rédaction du texte littéraire* (1989), Alain André's *Babel Heureuse. L'Atelier d'écriture*

au service de la création littéraire (1989), Claire Boniface and Odile Pimet's *Ateliers d'écriture. Mode d'emploi* (1999), François Bon's *Tous les mots sont adultes* (2000), Pierre Frenkiel's *90 Jeux d'écriture. Faire écrire un groupe* (2005), Eva Kavian's *Écrire et faire écrire* (2007), Chloé Malbranche's *Atelier d'écriture à la manière de l'Oulipo* (2013) and Pierre Ménard's (writer Philippe Diaz's pseudonym) *Comment écrire au quotidien. 365 Ateliers d'écriture* (2018) are texts that all contain writing exercises that can be performed by the individual writer and by the writing workshop. Whereas the scope of the U.S. inspired how-to-write handbooks is often all-round, the *atelier d'écriture* handbooks focus almost exclusively on writing techniques.

Atelier d'écriture handbooks are strongly grounded in French literary advice traditions. On the one hand, they are closely connected to the politicized *atelier d'écriture* movement that emerges in the wake of Mai 68 (Rossignol, 1996; Chateigner, 2007). This can be seen for instance in the introduction to the classic *atelier d'écriture* handbook *Babel Heureuse* in which author Alain André describes the effects that the student revolt had on him: "C'est dans la révolte que je me suis inventé, en cherchant le salut du côté de Sartre, du marxisme et de l'utopie d'une Grande Révolution culturelle prolétarienne accomplissant les promesses démocratiques de la Commune de Paris" (11). On the other hand, *atelier d'écriture* handbooks can be situated in the procedural advice tradition described in chapter two (see 2.3.2.). They especially make abundant use of Oulipian *écriture à contraintes* techniques. For example, in *L'atelier d'écriture. Éléments pour la rédaction du texte littéraire* (1993), Roche, Guiguet and Voltz allude directly to the Oulipo. "Nous vous proposons, surtout dans les premiers chapitres, des exercices qui obéissent à des contraintes strictes," the authors explain, "Très vite, vous vous apercevrez que la contrainte vous porte, qu'elle vous permet d'écrire alors même que vous pensiez 'n'avoir rien à dire', ce qui signifie le plus souvent 'ne pas arriver à dire'" (17).

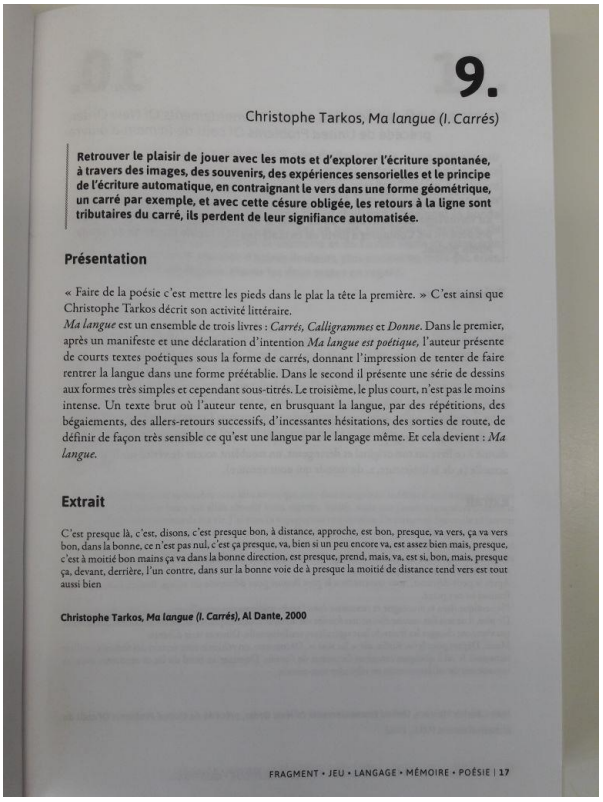
The specific French roots of the *atelier d'écriture* handbooks are also visible from the fact that the corpus does not include French translations from texts originally written in other languages. In contrast to how-to-write handbooks and writing memoirs, all the *atelier d'écriture* handbooks are French originals. Additionally, as I will show below, most of the literary texts to which the *atelier d'écriture* handbooks refer can be situated in the French (or continental) literary avant-garde tradition. This is especially true for what I would call the "stimulus texts", that is, the literary texts that serve as sources of inspiration for writing exercises.

The *atelier d'écriture* handbook entails two subcategories: the genuine *atelier d'écriture* handbook (41 entries in the corpus found in Annex 1) and the creativity handbook (22 entries). The genuine *atelier d'écriture* handbooks address facilitators of *ateliers d'écriture,* and propose exercises that they can use in their *atelier d'écriture*. In addition, they mention that the individual writer can benefit from these exercises. This double address can for instance be observed in Eva Kavian's book title *Écrire et faire écrire* and from the back cover of Roche, Guiguet and Voltz's book which states:

"[Ces exercices] peuvent être réalisés seul, en groupe ou en classe". Further, *atelier d'écriture* handbooks display a shared vocabulary: participants to an *atelier* are called *écrivants*, the facilitator is an *animateur*, the exercises are *consignes* or *propositions*, one session is a *cycle d'écriture*, and the phase of re-writing is *la réécriture*.

The *atelier d'écriture* handbook mainly consists of writing exercises. The way in which these exercises are introduced differs from book to book. Some volumes use a fixed template to present the exercises. For example, as can be seen on the image below, Pierre Ménard's *Comment écrire au quotidien. 365 ateliers d'écriture* follows a rigorous format: every page contains a numbered writing exercise (in this case number 9). The top of the page contains the writing exercise, the middle introduces the stimulus text and the author of the stimulus text (Christophe Tarkos's *Ma Langue*), the bottom contains an excerpt from the stimulus text, as well as a number of thematic key-terms ("fragment", "jeu", "langage", "mémoire", "poésie"). Other handbooks like François Bon's *Tous les mots sont adultes* are less rigid in design and in the way that they present exercises.

Ménard, 2018: 17.



9.

Christophe Tarkos, Ma *langue (I. Carrés)*

Retrouver le plaisir de jouer avec les mots et d'explorer l'écriture spontanée, à travers des images, des souvenirs, des expériences sensorielles et le principe de l'écriture automatique, en contraignant le vers dans une forme géométrique, un carré par exemple, et avec cette césure obligée, les retours à la ligne sont tributaires du carré, ils perdent de leur signifiance automatisée.

Présentation

« Faire de la poésie c'est mettre les pieds dans le plat la tête la première. » C'est ainsi que Christophe Tarkos décrit son activité littéraire.
Ma langue est un ensemble de trois livres : *Carrés*, *Calligrammes* et *Donne*. Dans le premier, après un manifeste et une déclaration d'intention *Ma langue est poétique*, l'auteur présente de courts textes poétiques sous la forme de carrés, donnant l'impression de tenter de faire rentrer la langue dans une forme préétablie. Dans le second il présente une série de dessins aux formes très simples et cependant sous-titrés. Le troisième, le plus court, n'est pas le moins intense. Un texte brut où l'auteur tente, en brusquant la langue, par des répétitions, des bégaiements, des allers-retours successifs, d'incessantes hésitations, des sorties de route, de définir de façon très sensible ce qu'est une langue par le langage même. Et cela devient : *Ma langue.*

Extrait

C'est presque là, c'est, disons, c'est presque bon, à distance, approche, est bon, presque, va vers, ça va vers bon, dans la bonne, ce n'est pas nul, c'est ça presque, va, bien si un peu encore va, est assez bien mais, presque, c'est à moitié bon mains ça va dans la bonne direction, est presque, prend, mais, va, est si, bon, mais, presque ça, devant, derrière, l'un contre, dans sur la bonne voie de à presque la moitié de distance tend vers est tout aussi bien

Christophe Tarkos, *Ma langue (I. Carrés)*, Al Dante, 2000

FRAGMENT • JEU • LANGAGE • MÉMOIRE • POÉSIE | 17

The objective of *atelier d'écriture* handbooks isn't to guide the aspiring author towards a finished manuscript, nor do they promise to make an author out of someone (as François Bon notes in his 2012 collection of essays *Apprendre l'invention*: "Former un écrivain, personne n'y est jamais arrivé, et personne n'y prétend" (409)). Typically, these books emphasize the intrinsic value of the writing experience. "Notre propos [est] de vous faire partager une expérience dont nous avons éprouvé l'efficacité," (13) Roche, Guiguet and Voltz observe. In some cases, these texts explain that they also

seek to share this experience with those in society who find themselves disconnected from the written word, those who never dreamt of becoming writers. In those cases, the writing exercises have a potentially empowering effect. For example, in *90 Exercices d'écriture*, Pierre Frenkiel notes: "Je constate que ces jeux conviennent aussi bien à l'écrivain confirmé […] qu'à l'analphabète qui, les pratiquant oralement (oui, c'est possible! Et pour beaucoup d'entre eux!) se relie grâce à eux à sa propre histoire" (19). Other *atelier d'écriture* handbooks like Claudette Oriol-Boyer's texts *Lire-écrire avec des enfants* (2002) and *50 Activités de lecture-écriture en atelier de l'école au collège* (2004) situate themselves in an educational context and aim to provide an explorative and creative literary experience that differs from the usual, normative approach to language and literature in school.

The *atelier d'écriture* handbooks usually follow a chronological development. The starter exercises are based on the application of strict (formal) constraints so as to familiarize the novice with the practice of *écriture à contraintes*. Over the course of the books the exercises become more complicated and demanding, also leading to more substantial texts. At the same time, the constraints become less precise so as to foster individual creativity. Roche, Guiguet and Voltz describe this trajectory as follows:

> Nous vous proposons, surtout dans les premiers chapitres, des exercices qui obéissent à des contraintes strictes […] Au fur et à mesure que vous progresserez dans votre démarche, vous constaterez que vous jouez de plus en plus facilement avec les contraintes proposées, et que les derniers chapitres, faisant la part moins belle aux consignes, vous permettent d'accéder à une forme plus 'votre'. (17)

Furthermore, the exercises usually unfold according to a relatively stable fourfold schema. Facilitator Claudette Oriol-Boyer refers to this approach as "la spirale de lecture-écriture-relecture-réécriture" (2013: 55). First, the facilitator presents the inspirational source text (or stimulus text) and the exercise. Then, the participants of the *atelier* write. This is followed by a roundtable in which participants read their texts out loud in order to discuss them. Finally, the texts are rewritten. The *atelier d'écriture* handbooks pay particular attention to the duration of the different phases, indicating quite precisely how many minutes each of them should last.

Many *atelier d'écriture* handbooks make similar choices with regard to the stimulus texts. They typically draw on short texts from the French and continental experimental literary traditions, especially the works of the Oulipo and Georges Perec. For example, François Bon opens his pivotal handbook *Tous les mots sont adultes* with a chapter titled "Ouverture: hommage à Georges Perec" and proposes writing exercises based on Perec's *Penser/classer*, *Espèces d'espaces*, *L'Infra-ordinaire* and *W*. Likewise, Roche, Guiguet and Voltz present exercises based on the practices of Oulipians like Raymond Queneau, Jacques Roubaud, Harry Mathews, Italo Calvino, Marcel Bénabou, Noël Arnaud

and Ross Chambers. Other experimental writers whose names and texts frequently figure in *atelier d'écriture* handbooks are Raymond Roussel, Franz Kafka, Francis Ponge, Antonin Artaud, Michel Leiris, Roland Barthes, Thomas Bernhardt, Samuel Beckett, Nathalie Sarraute and Claude Simon. In many cases, *ateliers d'écriture* handbooks feature these writers and their texts for the same reasons. For instance, for exercises on the description of objects, handbooks typically turn to Francis Ponge's *Le Parti pris des choses*. In a similar way, they frequently look at Artaud's oeuvre for writing exercises on trauma and the description of mental states. As Odile Pimet and Claire Boniface explain in *Ateliers d'écriture. Mode d'emploi*: "Les ateliers d'écriture ont leurs incontournables: la répétition chez Thomas Bernhardt; les tropismes chez Nathalie Sarraute; les sutures chez Claude Simon; la voix chez Beckett" (169). Ultimately, what these stimulus texts have in common is that they display traces of their own creation. Put differently, they are self-reflexive texts created according to more and less systematic principles that are still visible in the texts themselves. As François Bon notes: "Peut-être importe-t-il plus que le livre choisi puisse permettre de raconter une histoire. Non pas l'histoire du livre, mais de son invention, sa fabrique. Et que cela soit aussi l'histoire de celle ou de celui qui a son nom sur le livre" (15).

Some *atelier d'écriture* handbooks strive to shake the literary canon as it is presented in the traditional educational system. They do so by drawing on texts by lesser known writers to propose writing exercises. For example, the exercises found in Eva Kavian's second volume of *Écrire et faire écrire* (2011) are derived exclusively from texts by Belgian writers ranging from Charles De Coster, to Camille Lemonnier, Jean Ray, Georges Simenon, Jacqueline Harpman, Caroline Lamarche, Xavier Deutsch, Bernard Tirtiaux, and Tuyêt-Nga Nguyen. In this way, Kavian aims to raise awareness about Belgian literature. "Si les auteurs représentés dans cet ouvrage vous font écrire," she writes, "J'espère qu'ils vous donneront également envie d'aller découvrir les auteurs belges qui en sont absents, connus ou moins connus, présents et à venir, car cet ouvrage n'a pas la prétention d'en avoir fait le tour. Parce qu'écrire, c'est aussi… devenir curieux et lire" (12). In a similar way, Pierre Ménard's *Comment écrire au quotidien: 365 ateliers d'écriture* (2018) only uses stimulus-texts by contemporary writers. While some of these writers, like Yves Bonnefoy, Sophie Calle, Nathalie Quintane, Christophe Tarkos and Valère Novarina, are established names, other writers like Yannick Liron, Renée Gagnon, Alice Massénat and Virginie Poitrasson are relatively unknown to the bigger public. In the text on *Comment Écrire au quotidien*'s back cover, this canon-unsettling function is clearly assumed: "Ce livre est un labyrinthe autant qu'une bibliothèque. Il est à la fois une anthologie de littérature contemporaine, un recueil poétique et une méthode pour appréhender la création littéraire en ateliers au contact d'auteurs et de leurs livres".

Creativity handbooks address the individual writer and offer exercises to overcome *writer's block* and to generate material with which longer stories can be written. Louis Timbal-Duclaux's

L'Écriture créative. 5 techniques pour libérer l'inspiration, pour produire des idées (1986), Sébastien Onze's *150 défis d'écriture. Pour en finir avec la page blanche* (2008), Josette Carpentier's *L'Écriture Créative. 80 exercices pour libérer sa plume et oser écrire* (2010), and Virginie Leymarie's *30 Déclics pour l'écriture. Pour ne plus rester en panne d'inspiration* (2014) all contain exercises to remedy *writer's block*. As these titles suggest, notions like blank page, *writer's block*, anxiety, creativity, inspiration, liberation play an important role in these texts.

Creativity handbooks such as Alain Duchesne and Thierry Leguay's *Petite fabrique de littérature* (1984), and Hubert Haddad's *Le Nouveau magasin d'écriture* (2006) and his *Le Nouveau nouveau magasin d'écriture* (2007) offer ideas and suggestions for stories. In particular, Hubert Haddad's lengthy works (tome one counts more than 1000 pages, tome 2 more than 600) are known by *atelier d'écriture* practitioners.

3.3.4. Methodological advice

Methodological advice refers to the rhetoric handbooks and the procedural avant-garde texts described in the previous chapter (see 2.3.). Rhetoric handbooks provide advice on style. Their usage is not restricted to creative writing, as they also deal with writing in professional and educational contexts. A number of classic rhetoric handbooks like Buffon's *Discours sur le style* (1753), Du Marsais's *Traité des tropes* (1730) and especially Antoine Albalat's *L'Art d'écrire enseigné en vingt leçons* (1899), *La Formation du style par l'assimilation des Auteurs* (1902) and *Le Travail du style enseigné par les corrections manuscrites des grands écrivains* (1903) still figure prominently on contemporary literary advice bibliographies. More recent examples of rhetoric handbooks include Bernard Dupriez's well-known figures of speech inventory *Le Gradus. Les Procédés littéraires* (first edition 1980), Louis Timbal-Duclaux's *Le Travail du style littéraire* (1996), Jean-Loup Chiflet's funny *99 clichés à foutre à la poubelle* (2010) and Mathilde Levesque's *Les Figures stylées* (2017).

Procedural advice texts build upon the technical tradition of Poe, Valéry, Roussel, the *nouveau roman* and the Oulipo. They typically adopt the scientist writer perspective and compare literary texts to technical devices whose mechanics can be analyzed, explained and copied. They often perform retrospective analyses of the creative processes that have engendered literary texts, in view of reviving and renewing the ways of making literature. As François Le Lionnais asks in the Oulipo's first manifesto: "L'humanité doit-elle se reposer et se contenter, sur des pensers nouveaux faire des vers antiques?" (17)

Recent examples of such an avant-garde approach include the two volumes of poets Olivier Cadiot and Pierre Alferi's *Revue de littérature générale* (1995-1996) – in whose introduction the authors write: "On pourrait raconter l'écriture comme la construction d'un barrage, ou d'un moulin,

ou d'un moteur" (3) –, Olivier Cadiot's *L'Art poétic* (1988) – a rewriting of Gertrude Stein's *How to Write* (1931) –, François Bon's translation of American avant-garde poet Kenneth Goldsmith's *Uncreative Writing* (2011) (translated as *L'Écriture sans écriture* (2018)), and writer of autofiction Chloé Delaume's texts "Visite guidée" (2007) and *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi* (2008). In the latter text, Delaume assumes a scientific posture when she explains: "Je fais des tentatives, je ne suis même pas dans l'œuvre, juste dans la recherche. Certains objets s'avortent dans des précipités, d'autres résistent mieux à la publication. Je ne m'en préoccupe pas. […] Seuls m'importent processus, tuyauteries, protocoles. J'explore" (1).

Additionally, methodological advice can also refer to the narratology books which I mention in chapter two. Texts like *L'Analyse structurale du récit* (1966), Gérard Genette's *Figures*, and Vladimir Propp's *La Morphologie du compte* (1970 for French translation) are frequently mentioned in literary advice bibliographies. These texts offer structured insights in the structural aspects of narrative. Likewise, books that offer the personal views of famous writers on writing and the role of literature like Julien Gracq's *En lisant en écrivant* (1980), Milan Kundera's *L'Art du roman* (1986) and Italo Calvino's translated *Leçons américaines* (1989) are also typically included on literary advice reading lists.

3.4. Authors

Contemporary literary advice in France can be studied through the lens of genre, but examining the profile of its authors and publishers can also prove quite informative. The literary advice authors mentioned in the previous chapter formed a fairly homogeneous group. They all were active in the literary field. Some like Flaubert, Max Jacob, Rainer Maria Rilke were known authors of literary works, while others, like Antoine Albalat, Remy de Gourmont and Fernand Divoire were rather known for their literary criticism. Moreover, all of these advice writers were men. The corpus that I present in this chapter reveals that the profile of contemporary advice authors is more diverse and complex.

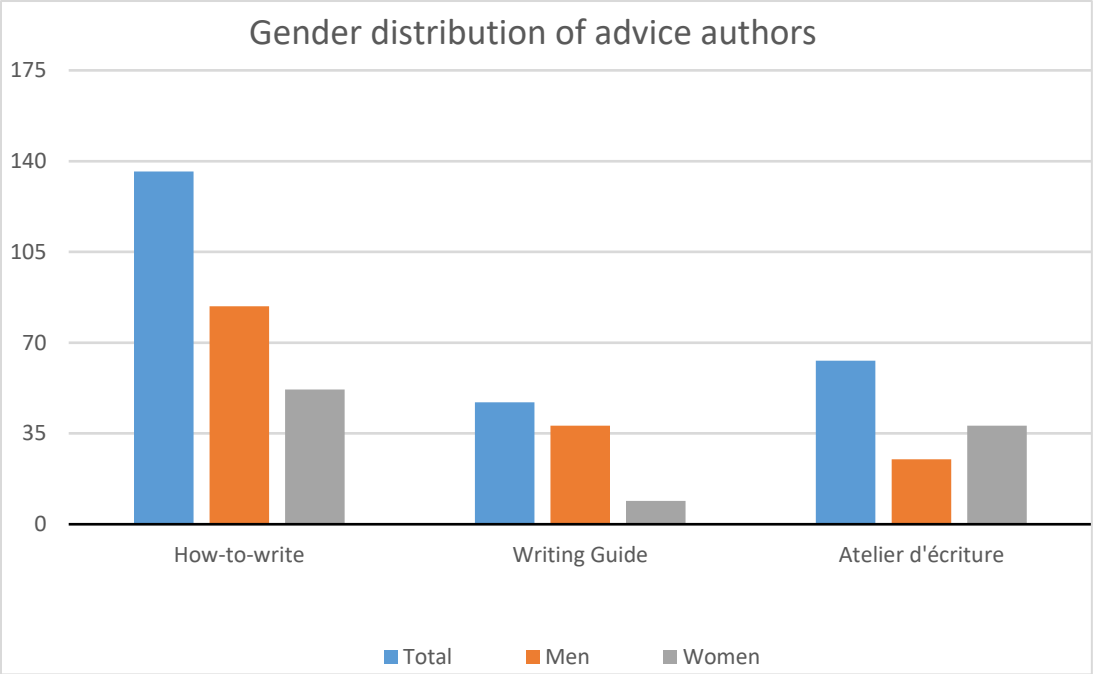
Judging from the biographical notes found on the back covers of how-to-write handbooks and *atelier d'écriture* handbooks, it appears that many contemporary literary advice authors claim to be in some way active in the literary field. Many of them claim to be "l'auteur de nombreux livres" (Baudouin, 2003), "l'auteur de plusieurs ouvrages" (Jaeglé, 2014), or to have written "plusieurs livres (histoires pour les enfants et bientôt des romans)" (Hache, 2011). In addition, the notes describe the authors as "un homme du livre […] directeur de plusieurs collections" (Desalmand, 2004), "responsable de collection" (Raynal, 2011), or as person who has "exercé différents postes dans l'édition" (Hache, 2011). A constant is that authors are also facilitators of *ateliers d'écriture*: she "anime un atelier

d'écriture" (D'Astragal, 2013), or she "anime des ateliers d'écriture aux Ateliers Élisabeth Bing" (Jaeglé, 2014).

In terms of professional activities, it is notable that many of the authors work as teachers, and this at different levels in the educational system. Some teach young children, others are active in secondary schools or in universities. Many of them teach French language and literature and organize training sessions for facilitators of *ateliers d'écriture*, but some are "ancien professeur de philosophie" (Tessarech, 1996) or have "longtemps enseigné la communication" (Barlow, 2003). Two authors are "inspectrice de l'Éducation nationale" (Pimet and Boniface, 1999) and "conseiller d'éducation populaire et de jeunesse" (Frenkiel, 2005). Additionally, there are journalists and people who have experience in marketing and communication. For instance, one author "passe les dix premières années de sa vie professionnelle dans le secteur de la communication et des médias" (Rollin, 2012), another is "consultante indépendante en édition et marketing du livre" (Cahier and Sutton, 2015). Some jobs seem less connected to literature. For instance, one authors works as "ingénieur et professeur de yoga" (D'Astragal, 2013), another one "a travaillé 34 ans dans les ressources humaines" (Godinot, 2009) and another one has done "quelques années de travail en hôpital psychiatrique" (Kavian, 2007).

A similar diversity is visible in the educational background of the authors. Many authors have obtained diplomas in French language and literature. Others have graduated in related studies and are "Docteur en philosophie de l'art" (Malbranche, 2013). Further, there are authors who had "une formation psychanalytique" (Kavian, 2007), "un diplômé d'HEC, licencié en sociologie" (Timbal-Duclaux, 1996), "un juriste de formation" (Godinot, 2009) and, peculiarly, an author who is "spécialisée en Programmation-Neuro-Linguistique" (Carpentier, 2010).

On the level of gender, there is a significant increase of the number of female authors (see chart below). Among the 246 texts collected in the corpus, 99 have been written or co-written by women (40,24 %). In other words, 4 out of 10 literary advice texts have been published from 1976 have a female author. In the case of how-to-write handbooks, 52 books out of 136 have been (co-)written by women. If we only count the all-round books, the figure is 25 female authors for 56 texts. Further, the *atelier d'écriture* handbooks have 36 female authors for 63 books (57 %). The writing guides, by contrast, only have 9 women authors for 47 books, which reflects the patriarchal nature of 19th century advice tradition, in which a male great author divulges writing secrets to a young and male "jeune littérateur".



Some authors use pseudonyms. François Bon has written *Outils du roman* (2015) under the name of Malt Olbren, a character that appears in a short story by Russian writer Daniil Charms. Aloysius Chabossot is the pseudonymous author of *Comment devenir un brillant écrivain: alors que rien (mais rien) ne vous y prédispose* (2007). Claude Neix, author of *Comment j'ai pas eu le Goncourt* (2015), is the pseudonym of self-publishing writer Cristina Rodriguez. Pierre Ménard, author of *Comment écrire au quotidien* (2018), is the pseudonym of Philippe Diaz. It should be pointed out that these pseudonymous texts are typically either more technical *atelier d'écriture* handbooks (Bon/Olbren, Diaz/Ménard) or humoristic writing guides (Rodriguez/Neix). The autobiography handbooks, by contrast, have not been written under pseudonyms, which is likely related to the fact that the author's authenticity is at stake in these texts.

Many authors have written more than one advice book. Louis Timbal-Duclaux is the most prolific author, with more than twenty titles. Many authors have written two or three books. For example, Faly Stachak has written four books that are all published by Eyrolles. Two focus on writing for and with children, one on erotic fiction, one with exercises to stimulate the creativity. Eva Kavian has written two volumes of *atelier d'écriture* handbooks.

3.5. Publishers

Many French publishing houses, both acclaimed and more obscure, feature literary advice texts in their catalogues. Among the well-known houses, Fayard has published François Bon's *Tous les mots sont adultes* (2000), L'Harmattan has published François d'Assise N'Dah's *Comment écrire un roman?* (2013) and Hugues Lethierry's *Écrire publier diffuser* (2013), Seuil has published Martin Page's *Manuel*

d'écriture et de survie (2014), Flammarion has published Jean-Baptiste Gendarme's *Splendeurs et misères de l'aspirant-écrivain* (2014) and, in the collection Les Mille et Une Nuits, many writing guides like Baudelaire's *Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs* (1998), Fernand Divoire's *Introduction à l'étude de la stratégie* littéraire (2005), Virginia Woolf's *Lettre à un jeune poète* (2015), Antoine Albalat's *Comment il ne faut pas écrire* (2015) and the Oulipo's *Abrégé de littérature potentielle* (2002). At the same time, these renowned publishing houses hardly have any U.S. based how-to-write handbooks in their catalogue.

Additionally, multiple authors publish volumes themselves. This happens in two ways. First, the author publishes under her own name. Jean Guenot's *Écrire* (1977) is published by Guenot Éditions, Henry Coston's *Ce qu'il faut savoir quand on publie un livre* (1983) is published by Publications Henry Coston, Tatiana Kletzky-Pradère's *Plan-guide de l'écrivain* (1984) by Kletzky-Pradère, Stéphanie Garcia's *J'écris le récit de ma vie* (2015) by S. Garcia, Murielle Lucie Clément's *Comment écrire un bestseller* (2015) by MLC. On the other hand, some authors publish with self-created publishing houses that do not carry names that lead immediately back to the author in question, despite the fact that they might very well be the only author published there: Éric Galland, author of 2015 *Comment écrire un livre* (Éditions de la Reine), leads the publishing house Éditions de la Reine; Gérard Raynal, author of 2011 *Écrire un livre. Comment éviter les pièges de l'écriture* (TDO Éditions) of is part of the editorial team of TDO Éditions.

In France, three publishers are specialized in literary advice texts. Écrire Aujourd'hui Éditions (founded in the early nineties) is the only house that exclusively distributes literary advice. This small house has been founded by advice-expert Louis Timbal-Duclaux, and its catalogue contains around thirty titles, most of them fitting in the genre of how-to-write handbooks. These books are authored by a small group of writers, among whom Timbal-Duclaux, Victor Bouadjio, Alain Berthelot, Christian Bulting and Ted Oudan. In the catalogue, there are titles like *Écrire et être édité* (Berthelot, 1992), *J'écris mon premier roman* (Timbal-Duclaux, 1993), *Scriptor. Le monde de l'écrit et l'édition* (Bouadjio, 1999), *L'Art de retravailler ses manuscrits* (Marquis, 1999), *J'écris des nouvelles et des contes* (Timbal-Duclaux and Bouadjio, 2009). Moreover, there are translations like Tracey Dills's *J'écris pour la jeunesse* (1999 originally *You Can Write Children's Books* (1998)) and Oackley Hall's *Le Travail de romancier* (2002 originally *The Art and Craft of Novel Writing* (1994)). Écrire Aujourd'hui re-issues the same titles over and over. For example, *J'écris mon premier roman* appears in 1993, 1999, 2004, 2011, 2012, 2017, *J'écris des nouvelles et des contes* in 1999, 2000, 2009, 2013.

Thematically, the catalogue follows the principles of an all-round training. It includes genre handbooks, elements of fiction handbooks, handbooks on being published and *atelier d'écriture* handbooks. Additionally, the house has been publishing *Écrire magazine* since 1990. On the level of paratext, Écrire Aujourd'hui strives to maintain uniformity in its catalogue. Its covers are composed of

a smaller upper frame in one color and another frame below it in a contrasting color (purple and orange; white and blue; green and orange). The upper part contains the title of the volume and the name of the author. These are printed in the same font in the entire collection. The bottom part contains a drawing , often symbolic and adapted to the specific content of the book. For instance, Louis Timbal-Duclaux's *Construire des personnages de fiction* (2009) contains a drawing of a dancing figure with a high hat, loosely connected limbs and whose face has no features except for a question mark in the middle of it. The high hat evokes the tradition of the nineteenth century realist novel and its plethora of unforgettable characters (think of Dickens, Tolstoy, Dostoyevski, Flaubert). The question mark and the floating limbs connected by a fine threat like a marionette indicate that characters have to be created, that there is a work to be done to bring them to life, and puts the writer in the position of a puppeteer. Most of the covers display such symbolic images. Timbal-Duclaux's *Écrire comique* (2013) sports a fountain pen and ink marks in the shape of a laughing smiley. Victor Bouadjio's *Tout savoir sur les maisons d'éditions* exhibits a house-shaped labyrinth.

Timbal-Duclaux, 2009; Timbal-Duclaux 2013; Bouadjio, 2017.

The second specialized publisher is Eyrolles. Eyrolles is one of the largest independent publishers in France (meaning that they are not part of an international media-group). It was founded in the beginning of the twentieth century by Léon Eyrolles and is currently in the hands of his grandson Serge Eyrolles. It is known for its practical guides and technical books for professionals. Among their many collections, classified following the basic labels "vie pratique", "psycho", "loisirs créatifs", "business", "nouvelles technologies", there is the Atelier d'écriture collection (ranged under the "vie pratique" label and its subcategory of "culture générale"). This collection is created in the first years of the new millennium (the oldest title is Bob Mayer's translated *Écrire un roman et se faire publier* (2003)) and currently entails more than twenty handbooks. The involved authors have written one handbook each. Faly Stachak has authored three and Mireille Pochard two. It further contains one translation: Bob Mayer's *Écrire un roman et se faire publier*. The other books are original French works.

On the Eyrolles website, one can trace previous editions of handbooks. Over the past fifteen years, some titles have appeared multiple times: *Écrire un roman et se faire publier* in 2003, 2008, 2014, 2017 and *Écrire une nouvelle et se faire publier* in 2009, 2017. Yet, most handbooks like Faly Stachack's *Écrire pour la jeunesse* (2010), Laurence Bourgeois's *Écrire un livre et se faire publier* (2012) and Faly Stachack and Jean-Marie Gachon's *Écrire un texte érotique et se faire publier* (2013) have gone through one edition only. A remarkably well-selling work in the collection is Faly Stachack's *atelier d'écriture* handbook *Écrire. Un Plaisir à la portée de tous. 350 techniques d'écriture créative* (2004). This book features almost constantly in the top three of the Art d'écrire section of *Amazon.fr.*

The Atelier d'écriture collection is ordered according to genre. Instead of offering different handbooks to a writer seeking to master all skills (the Écrire Aujourd'hui principle), Eyrolles provides a singular handbook per genre: the catalogue contains for instance *Écrire des contes* (2012), *Écrire un one man show et monter sur scène* (2012), *Écrire un scenario pour le cinéma* (2009), *Écrire ses mémoires* (2004), *Écrire un roman et se faire publier* (2003)*, Écrire un roman sentimental et se faire publier* (2013). Additionally, the Atelier d'écriture collection entails *atelier d'écriture* handbooks like *Écrire. Un plaisir à la portée de tous* (2004), *Animer un atelier d'écriture pour tous* (2010) and *L'Écriture créative* (2010).

Eyrolles strives for a strong uniformity in the outlook of its writing handbooks, making them highly identifiable (see image below). The Atelier d'écriture handbooks have a bright and easily recognizable yellow and white cover. A big yellow quill-pen spreads diagonally across a white background. The title and author's name are displayed in the same font throughout the collection. The title is printed on top of the cover and consists of three lines, ordered vertically, with a smaller font going down each line. The first line reads "Écrire" in black letters. The second signals the genre in question in red letters, for instance, "un roman" or "une nouvelle". The third line states "et se faire publier". The second line changes from handbook to handbook, the other two remain identical. The books are all between 150 and 200 pages long. All this consolidates the strong visual brand of the collection.

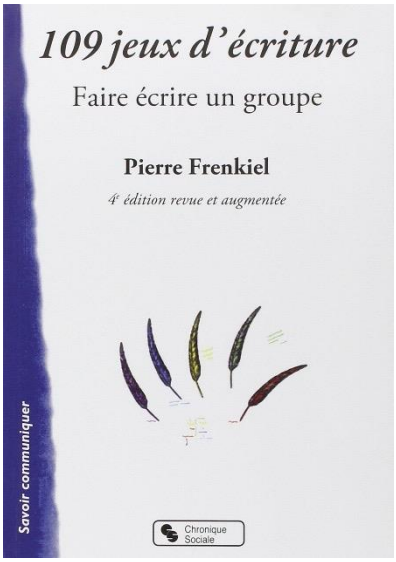
Bellet, 2009; Stachack, 2004; Pochard, 2009.

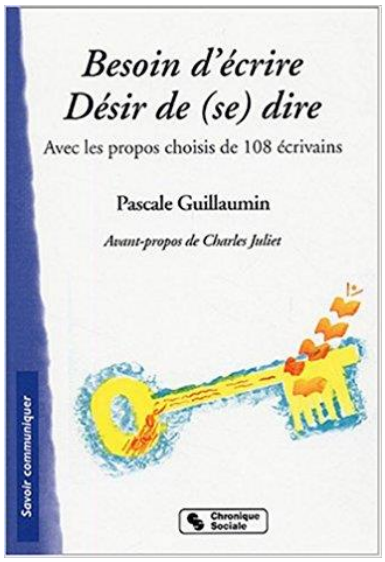
Chronique Sociale, the third publishing house strongly involved in literary advice, has a long history of political and social engagement. It was founded in Lyon in 1982 by the engaged Catholics Marius Gonin and Victor Berne, in order to spread knowledge on contemporary societal developments to a broad public. The founders thus aspired to contribute to the development of new solidarity forms of collectivity to counter the individualist and competitive capitalist model. During the interwar period, Chronique sociale organized summer schools in different French cities around questions such as "le rôle économique de l'état" (Strasbourg 1922), "La femme dans la société" (Nancy 1927), "Le désordre dans l'économie internationale et la pensée chrétienne" (Lille 1932). At the time, the publishers were influenced by Célestin Freinet's views on pedagogy. During the Second World War, Chronique Sociale played an active role in resistance movements. During the sixties, in particular after May 68, it gradually acquired more institutional autonomy vis-à-vis the church. Simultaneously, its conceptual framework began to be influenced by Marxism and psychoanalysis. Today, Chronique Sociale operates along three axes: it provides trainings for professionals, enterprises and private individuals; it does research, for instance by organizing colloquia; it publishes books.

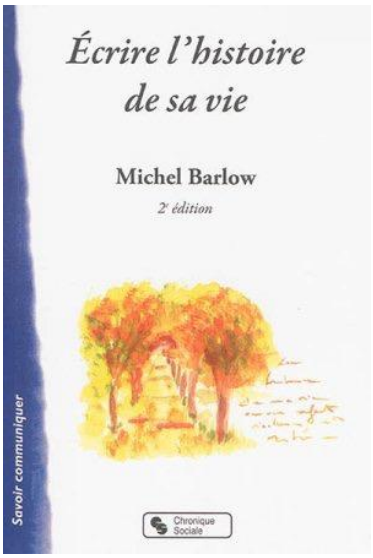
The catalogue of Chronique sociale includes five collections: "comprendre les personnes"; "comprendre la société"; "pédagogie/formation"; "savoir communiquer"; "savoir penser". All nine literary advice texts that are collected in the corpus fall under the "savoir communiquer" label. Not surprisingly, these texts are very different from the titles proposed by Écrire Aujourd'hui and Eyrolles. Chronique Sociale stresses the critical-therapeutic potential of the act of writing and its collective dimension. Its catalogue is imbued with two tendencies. On the one hand, handbooks for autobiographical forms of writing such as *Écrire l'histoire de sa vie* (2003), *Besoin d'écrire, désir de (se) dire* (2004) and *Écrire ma vie* (2009). On the other hand, *atelier d'écriture* handbooks like *90 Jeux d'écriture* (2005) and *Devenir animateur d'atelier d'écriture* (2014). These uphold to notions such as collective creation, open and egalitarian pedagogy, as well as pleasure and game.

The authors of Chronique Sociale are active in the social sector or are engaged academics. Some authors have contributed much to the development of French *ateliers d'écriture*. Nicole Voltz, Corine Robet, Annick Maffre, Philippe Cheminée, Simone Molina and André Bellatorre, all of whom have co-authored *Devenir animateur d'atelier d'écriture* (2014), are members of the pioneering *atelier d'écriture* group at the university of Aix-Marseille (Rossignol, 1996). Pierre Frenkiel, writer of *Faire écrire un groupe*, is one of the founders of the *atelier d'écriture* organization CICLOP. Prefaces are usually written by well-known figures such as the pedagogue Michel Lobrot (to Frenkiel's book) and writer Charles Juliet (to Pascale Guillaumin's *Besoin d'écrire, désir de (se) dire*). On the paratextual level, the texts are cultivate uniformity: the books count 150 to 200 pages, their covers have a white background and a blue border, indicating their place in the "savoir communiquer" collection. At the top of the cover we see the title and the author's name, at the bottom, the logo of Chronique sociale, and in the middle, a pencil drawing or an aquarelle depicting symbols related to writing and producing meaning, such as a set of quill pens (*Faire écrire un groupe* (2005)), a key (*Besoin d'écrire, désir de (se) dire* (2004)) or a path lined with trees in autumn colors (*Écrire l'histoire de sa vie* (2003)).

Frenkiel, 2005; Guillaumin, 2004; Barlow, 2003.





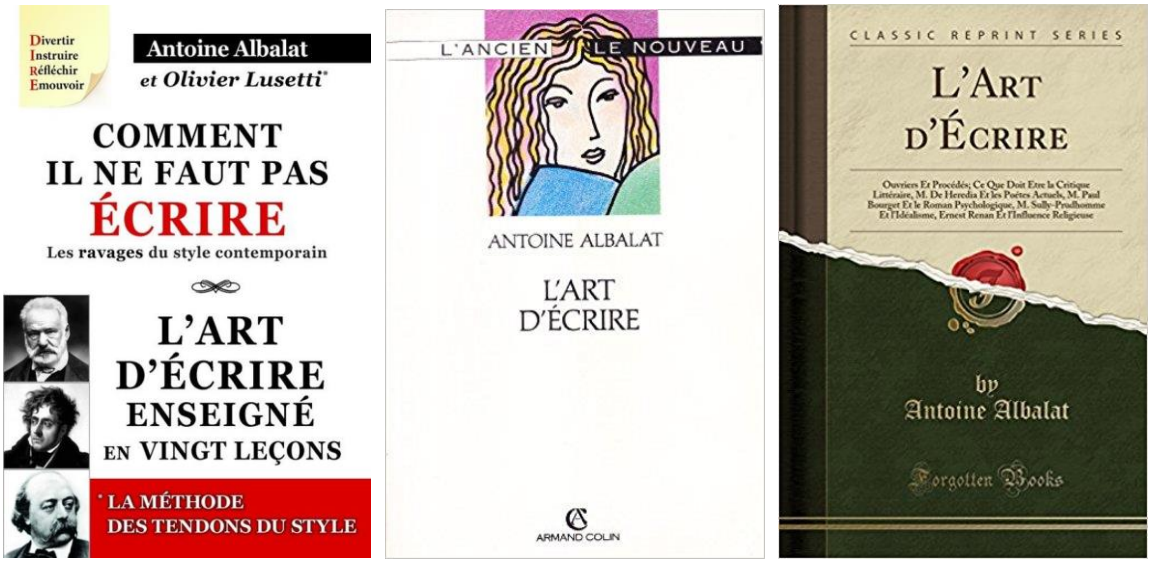


Finally, some literary advice books are presented by various publishers, notably the works of Antoine Albalat. On *Amazon.fr*, there are a myriad of re-editions of his works. Olivier Lusetti offers Albalat's texts in combination with his own texts published by Fantasy éditions (the publishing house created by Lusetti). This results in the co-authored ("Antoine Albalat et Olivier Lusetti") *Comment il ne faut pas écrire et l'art d'écrire enseigné en vingt leçons* published in 2016. In this work, Lusetti pairs two texts by Albalat, counting up to 400 pages, with twenty pages of his own ("Tendons du style"). He offers the whole volume under the banner "la méthode des tendons du style". Another publication of Fantasy éditions is *Comment on devient écrivain et le travail du style* (2014) — again bundling two of

Albalat's texts — with a preface by Olivier Lusetti and the mention "Couronné par l'académie française".

Albalat's books are further published by Armand Colin (*Le Travail du style; L'Art d'écrire; Souvenirs de la vie littéraire*), Hachette BNF (*La Formation du style*; *Souvenirs de la vie littéraire; Les Ennemis de l'art d'écrire*), Wentworth Press (*Souvenirs de la vie littéraire*), Fayard's Mille et une nuits collection (*Comment il ne faut pas écrire*), Ulan Press (*L'Art d'écrire*), HardPress Publishing (*Souvenirs de la vie littéraire*) and Nabu Press (*Le Travail du style*). Some of these publishers ask up to fifty euro per copy. Furthermore, there is a large Kindle offer: Amazon.media proposes *L'Art d'écrire* for € 5.35; Les Zéditions zélectroniques sells *L'Art d'écrire* for € 3.43 and *La Formation du style* at the same price; Collection XIX asks € 3.43 for *La Formation du style*; Forgotten books vends *Le Travail du style* at € 3.94; Donald Lecoste offers *Le Travail du style* and *Comment il ne faut pas écrire* for € 3.73; Classic energie sells *Comment devenir écrivain* (which is no title of Albalat's) at € 2.99; Ligaran offers *Souvenirs de la vie littéraire* for € 0.99. The covers of these books, both print and Kindle, are extremely varied, ranging from the imitation of a manuscript to a copy of a painting of Diderot, an image of a type writer, a fountain pen or a clock. In sum, there is an Antoine Albalat industry on *Amazon.fr*.

Three Editions of Albalat's L'Art d'écrire.



3.6. Conclusion

The typology exposed in this chapter presents the basic genres or, as John Frow puts it, "structures of information" (11), from which French advice authors draw when producing advice texts. These genres, together with the formulas found in American creative writing handbooks and the representations of the writer and writing and the notion of literary field developed in local French traditions, provide the elementary components of French literary advice. To put it differently, these stock phrases, stock images and generic structures constitute a reservoir of materials that can be used (and transformed)

in and by contemporary advice texts. In the next three chapters, I will examine the roles that this reservoir plays in the construction of individual advice texts in more detail. In chapter four, I will analyze how the U.S. based genre of how-to-write handbooks plays out in the French context. These French how-to-write books, I argue, borrow the American how-to-write design, but not necessarily its other features. Whereas some texts remain quite faithful to the American model, others infuse it with imagery and techniques typical for the French traditions described in chapter two, thereby adapting and re-interpreting the how-to-write genre. In chapter five, I will discuss how major *atelier d'écriture* figure François Bon's handbook *Les Outils du roman* (2015) embodies an attempt to imbue the *écriture à contraintes*-based *atelier d'écriture* tradition with a number of the American formulas and techniques discussed in chapter one. By adopting *détournement* strategies and transporting U.S. how-to-write formulas to the French context, Bon seeks to enrich the *atelier d'écriture* tradition. Finally, in chapter six, I will look at four advice texts (Martin Page's *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* (2014), Chloé Delaume's "Visite Guidée" (2007),"S'écrire. Mode d'emploi" (2008), and Oliver Cadiot's *Histoire de la littérature récente* (2016)) that renew the local French advice traditions described in chapter two from within. These texts draw strongly on the representations of the martyr writer and the scientist writer, but also present conscious attempts to transform these same representations. For them, literary advice becomes the place *par excellence* to re-negotiate received ideas on writer and writing.

Before I move forward, I want to make two additional remarks, based on the data presented in this chapter, to compare contemporary literary advice in France to the situation of contemporary American creative writing handbooks as described above (see 1.2.7 and 1.2.8.). In chapter one, I invoke Masschelein and De Geest's argument that the renewed popularity of literary advice in the U.S. (the "new wave") entails a strong diversification of advice formats: as authors have to distinguish themselves from others on the crowded advice marketplace, they produce new and original formats like ironic how-not-to-write handbooks, specialized elements of fiction handbooks (on dialogue, plot, character, etc.) and specialized handbooks for genre-fiction like romance, fantasy, detective and erotic fiction (Masschelein and De Geest, 2016). In France, by contrast, the advice market appears less diverse and less specialized. For example, there are relatively few handbooks for genre fiction and for *elements of fiction*. In addition, it is notable that a large portion of the French elements of fiction handbooks are translations from texts originally written in English. This trend, as I will show in the next chapters, uncovers a shortage of specialized books on craft in the French tradition, and an attempt to respond to this lack by introducing translations.

A second side-effect of the new American advice wave is the appearance of a number of guru figures. In the U.S., advice writers like Natalie Goldberg, Anne Lamott, Julia Cameron have written bestselling creative writing handbooks that continue to be reprinted. They have a large following and are active presences on the internet. Their spiritual, new-age, Christian lifestyle advice is particularly

suited to attract large numbers of followers. In France, literary advice has not yet produced this type of guru-figures. Jean Guenot, one of the pioneers of the French how-to-write handbook (see 4.4.), has always operated away from the spotlights, and *Écrire* is hardly known today – there is only one *atelier d'écriture* handbook (Roche, Guiguet and Voltz, 1989) that includes it in its list of suggested readings. Moreover Guenot's use of irony makes him ill-equipped to be a guru-figure. Louis Timbal-Duclaux, founder of the publishing house Écrire Aujourd'hui, and writer of more than twenty how-to-write handbooks, does not even have a French Wikipedia-entry. In recent years, François Bon is clearly the *atelier d'écriture* facilitator that has drawn the most attention (see chapter 5). Thanks to his abundant use of social media like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, and thanks to his often quoted *atelier d'écriture* handbook *Tous les mots sont adultes* (second edition 2005), Bon has gathered a following. Yet, the technical and down-to-earth approach to writing that he cultivates sets him apart from the typical spiritualist discourse of the guru.

II.

4. Adaptation: French How-To-Write Handbooks

4.1. Introduction

The discipline of adaptation studies is typically concerned with transpositions of cultural products from one artistic medium to another (for instance literature to film). It takes into account the specific characteristics (structures and constraints) of the media it juxtaposes, and, following poststructuralist theorists like Bakhtin and Derrida, conceives the cultural products it studies as interpretations, re-workings and retellings which involve a number of agents (writers, performers, the commercial apparatus, readers and viewers, critics). As Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Cutchins note in their introduction to *Adaptation Studies. New Approaches* (2010):

> Adaptations should be seen as responses to other texts that form a necessary in the process of understanding. Rather than seeing adaptations as taking one thing (a novel's imagined 'essence') and placing it into another context, we should recognize that the 'essence' is neither knowable, nor directly representable. A novel's imagined essence remains elusive and ambiguous; what one does achieve in reading, or in adapting a text, is thus always more, less, or other than what the novel or the author wanted to express. (17)

In this chapter, I will discuss the French how-to-write handbooks in terms of adaptation. I take into account Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins's poststructuralist take on adaptations when they define them as inevitable re-workings that are necessary to foster understandings of cultural products. Yet, whereas adaptation studies generally entails a comparison of products belonging to distinct media, the discussion in this chapter confines itself to the medium of text or the book. In a way, this discussion supports an understanding of adaptation in the broadest way possible, as it is expressed, for example, in the *Cambridge Dictionary*: "Something produced to adjust to different conditions or uses, or to meet different situations".[24]

French how-to-write handbooks adapt the American model to the specific French context. They attempt to transpose the format in such a way that it "makes sense" to the audience using it. Even though we currently live in a globalized world in which ways of life grow increasingly similar, in which culture has become internationalized (for instance "international" writers who are widely read around the globe), and in which American culture dominates, adaptation nonetheless remains inevitable. Perhaps literary culture particularly calls for adaptation, given that the literary framework

[24] For an article that discusses the concept of adaptation first of all as a "cross-cultural process" rather than as a transfer across distinct media, see O'thomas Mark. "Turning Japanese: Translation, Adaptation, and the Ethics of Trans-National Exchange." In *Adaptation Studies. New Approaches*. Ed. Albrecht-Crane Christa and Dennis Cutchins. Madison – Vancouver: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010. 46–60.

acquired in high schools mostly revolves around the specific national literary tradition, and given that readers, in particular in countries with strong literary traditions, mostly read literary texts written in their native tongue.[25]

In this chapter, I offer a close reading of a sample of French how-to-write handbooks. First, I analyze how these books adopt the American format in terms of form, content and proposed formulas and techniques. I argue that the incentive to pursue commercial success and the related recourse to the device of *elements of fiction* constitute a novelty within the broader literary advice offer in French. Second, I study how these handbooks introduce elements from the local literary advice traditions into that format. In other words, I describe the ways in which these French texts adapt the how-to-write format, with its pretension to universal validity, to the local context. Some handbooks, I contend, remain quite faithful to the original, limiting the interference of local traditions. In those cases, I will argue that they constitute cases of "classic adaptation" or "classic treatment" (Griggs, 2016: 12). Other books, by contrast, are more receptive to local influences and move further away from the U.S. model. The latter is particularly true for Jean Guenot's *Écrire. Guide pratique de l'écrivain* (1977), the handbook that I will study separately in the last section of this chapter. *Écrire* offers a singular take on the how-to-write handbook, borrowing the American handbook's structure, formulas and techniques, as well as its representation of the professional writer. Yet, *Écrire*'s ambitious design (the 1998 edition counts 506 pages) and its ironic and essayistic tone distinguish it from the American-style texts and draw it closer to some of the texts that constitute the local advice traditions in France, in particular the ironic *conseils* books by authors like Remy de Gourmont and Fernand Divoire. Borrowing terminology from scholar John Bryant, I will contend that *Écrire* provides a case of "adaptive revision" or "partial adaptation" (these terms are synonyms) rather than "classic treatment" (2013: 50).[26]

Apart from Guenot's *Écrire*, I have selected six all-round handbooks, 'all-round' meaning that they are texts that promise to guide the aspiring writing from "la page blanche" to "la publication", and that cover a whole range of genres. The texts in question are *Écrire et être édité. Guide pratique* (Alain Berthelot, 1992), *Comment écrire votre premier livre. Depuis le désir d'écrire jusqu'à la conception, la création et la publication* (Bernard Baudouin, 2003), *Écrire et trouver ses lecteurs. Construire son projet, améliorer sa plume et trouver ses lecteurs (blog, publication)* (Brigit Hache, 2011), *Écrire un livre. Comment éviter les pièges de l'écriture* (Gérard Raynal, 2011), *Atelier d'écriture. Envie*

[25] The preference of educational systems for literature in official national languages is discussed, for instance, in Emmanuel Fraisse's article "L'enseignement de la littérature: un monde à explorer". In this article, Fraisse studies the cases of France, Denmark, China, Haiti, Russia, Senegal, Québec and the U.S.A. See Fraisse, Emmanuel. "L'enseignement de la littérature: un monde à explorer." *Revue internationale d'éducation de Sèvres*. 61 (2012): 35–45.

[26] The terms "adaptive revision" and "partial adaptation" are synonyms, but stress different aspects of the textual strategy that they describe: while the former highlights the transformative dimension of the adaptation, the latter indicates that only parts of the source material will be adapted.

d'écrire? Du rêve à la réalité (Laure D'Astragal, 2013), *Écrire. De la page blanche à la publication* (Marianne Jaeglé, 2014).

All of the chosen handbooks are relatively brief, counting between 150 and 250 pages. I will start by briefly introducing the authors. Alain Berthelot is the author of the oldest handbook in the selection, in collaboration with Victor Bouadjio. Both writers are regular contributors to *Écrire magazine* and have written multiple books published by Louis Timbal-Duclaux's publishing house Écrire Aujourd'hui. Bernard Baudouin is a self-proclaimed former actor who "a étudié la comédie au Lee Strasberg Theater Institute de Los Angeles" in the 1970's, and who claims to have written "une douzaine de pièces", "des scénarios de film, sous contrat" before devoting himself entirely to literature. On his webpage we read: "Lorsqu'il décide de renoncer à la comédie, en 1981, c'est pour écrire ses premiers livres. Ce seront d'abord vingt-deux romans d'espionnage pour les presses de la Cité". Brigit Hache, whose handbook contains a preface by Joseph Messinger, a Belgian therapist and author of popular books on body language, says she has "exercé différents postes dans l'édition" (2011: back cover). She is the author of children's books, a handbook on the romance novel *Écrire un roman sentimental et se faire publier* (2012), and the self-help books *50 Exercices pour se consoler* (2013) and *50 Exercices pour mieux vivre avec des pierres* (2013). Gérard Raynal is an ex-winemaker who was forced to put an end to his agricultural activities after "le fameux gel de 1985" (2011: 3). He self-publishes his first novels and later becomes involved with the regional publisher TDO Éditions (whose slogan says: "L'édition en Sud de France"). This publisher issues all his works, among which historical novels, thrillers, and the handbook *Écrire un livre*. Laure D'Astragal is trained as an engineer, teaches yoga, and has written *J'Écris ma vie pour mieux me connaître* (2014). She also facilitates *ateliers d'écriture*. Marianne Jaeglé, finally, has written two novels (one inspired by the life of Vincent Van Gogh), two school handbooks, and non-fiction books on the history of Paris and on Sartre. When she was twenty-seven, she participated in a series of *ateliers d'écriture* organized by Les Ateliers d'écriture Élisabeth Bing, and today she is a facilitator in the same organization and one of its spokespersons, participating in *atelier d'écriture* conferences and appearing on television and on the radio.

4.2. Classic Treatment: Adopting How-to-Write Handbooks

4.2.1. Adopting Form

French how-to-write handbooks adopt the model of their American counterparts. This is immediately visible from their outlook. First of all, titles and subtitles like *Écrire. De la page blanche à la publication* (2014), *Comment écrire votre premier livre. Depuis le désir d'écrire, jusqu'à la conception, la création et la publication* (2003) and *Écrire et trouver ses lecteurs. Construire son projet, améliorer sa plume, et trouver ses lecteurs* (2011) conjure up the American handbooks' notion of writing as a calculated step-

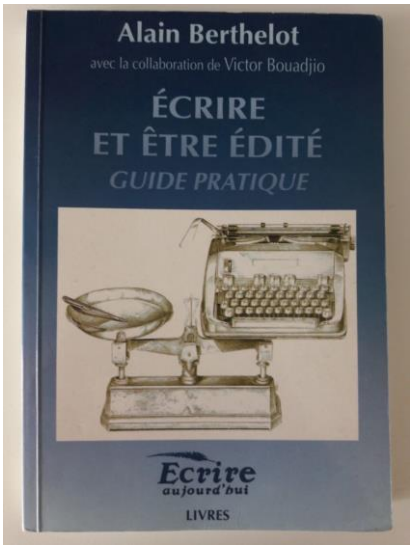
by-step plan. These titles present the road from writing to publication as a linear, well-organized and smooth trajectory. They point out its different stages and suggest that they will easily guide the beginner through all of them (you can do it!). In so doing, they neglect to mention the disorder, the moving back and forth, the dead ends, the rewriting and the unpredictability that writing generally entails. What is more, the titles of these French texts recycle the reader- or market-oriented poetics of U.S. creative writing handbooks. They emphasize being published and gaining a readership as the writer's primary objectives.

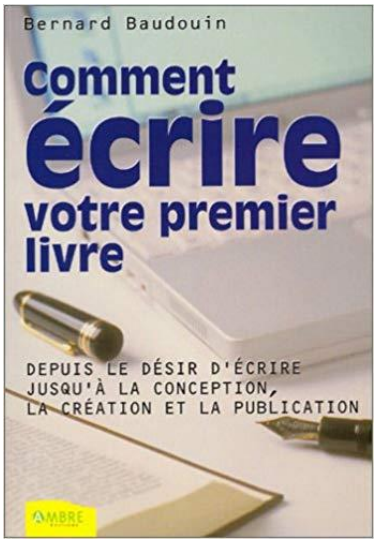
The pragmatist view of writing (writing as an orderly and calculated process driven by market-demands, see 1.2.2.) expressed in the titles is reinforced by the French how-to-write handbooks' cover images.[27] There, however, it merges with another conception of the writing process which is just as foundational to the how-to-write format: writing as self-expression (find your own voice). All the handbook covers display pieces of writing equipment, whether a quill pen, a fountain pen, a pencil, a typewriter or a computer. In many cases, the front covers combine images of quills/fountain pens/pencils and typewriters/computers. For example, the cover of Alain Berthelot's *Écrire et être édité* portrays a balance with a fountain pen in one arm and a typewriter in the other. Similarly, Brigit Hache's *Écrire et trouver ses lecteurs* displays a pencil and a notebook, but also a laptop and a calculator (as if to evaluate the duration of the writing process or to calculate the formulas for writing – it could also signify the commercial dimension of writing). This frequent combination of traditional writing tools and modern equipment also echoes an idea that one encounters again and again in handbooks: in order to become a successful writer, one must learn to balance the romantic (self-expressive) and the pragmatic (reader-oriented) aspects of the writer's occupation. On the one hand, one must necessarily give expression to the self, unveil one's authentic voice, bring into play one's personal past (the quill/fountain pen). On the other hand, one must master the techniques of writing, take the public into account, and produce readable texts (the typewriter/computer). How-to-write handbooks often address this idea by means of the (pseudo-scientific) theory of the two brain halves.[28] According to this theory, the right brain half is responsible for intuition and the left brain for reason. To become a good writer, the handbooks insist, the aspirant must learn to balance the left and right brain halves.

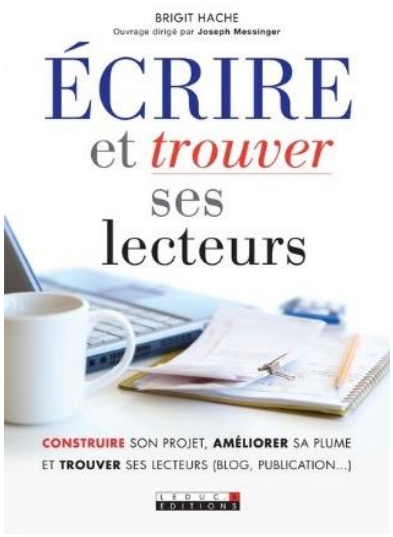
[27] The term pragmatism refers to Edgar Allan Poe's poetics as presented in "The Philosophy of Composition". This poetics rests upon the notion that writing should be driven by the reader's reaction to it. It is a poetics of effect rather than of expression (as romanticism would be). Following Poe, this pragmatist view later takes a commercial turn in American creative writing handbooks. The advice proposed by these texts is founded on knowledge about the kinds of literary techniques and devices that have managed to capture readers' attention (in other words, that have managed to obtain commercial success) in the past. The handbooks' intention is ultimately to share this knowledge with the public by means of digestible, hands-on, step-to-step programs.

[28] See Timbal-Duclaux, Louis. *L'Écriture créative. Cinq techniques pour libérer l'inspiration*. Nantes: Écriture Aujourd'hui, 1986.

Covers to Berthelot, 2011; Baudouin, 2003; Hache, 2011.







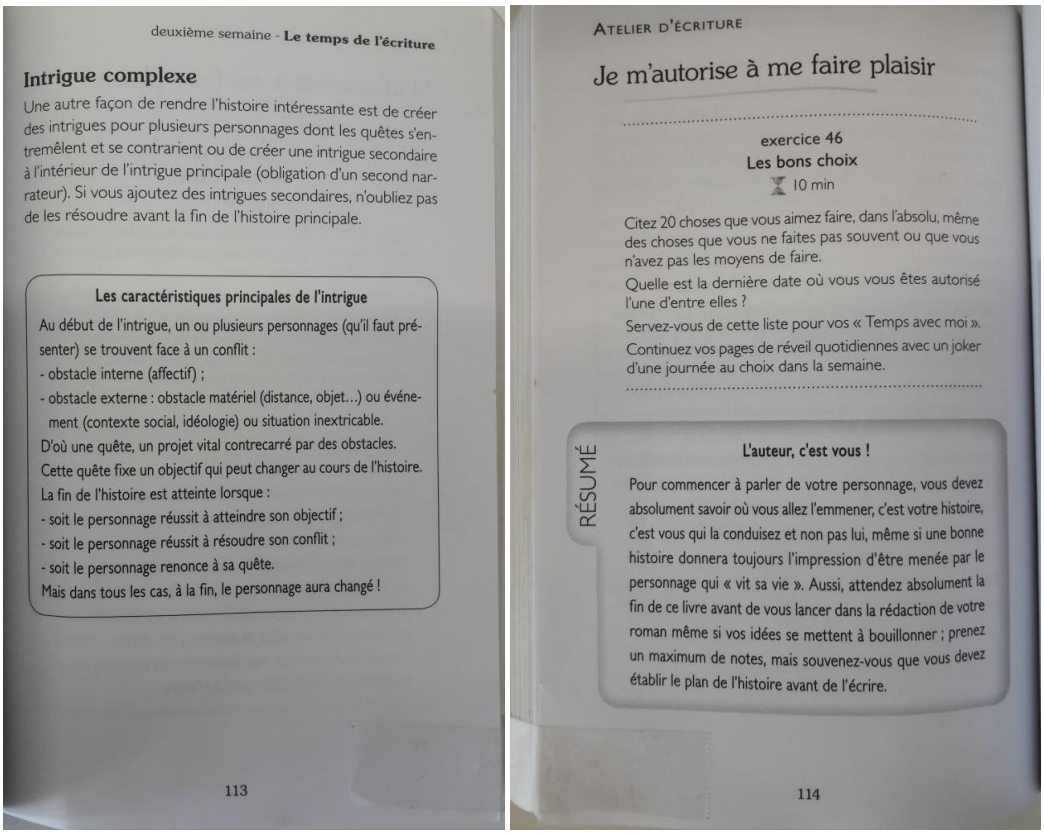
The texts on the back covers of these how-to-write books further mix romantic and pragmatist messages. In these passages, the authors conjure up the audience's hidden dreams of becoming a writer and signal that their manuals offer the professional expertise necessary to make those dreams come true. As Brigit Hache notes in *Écrire et trouver ses lecteurs*: "Vous avez envie d'écrire, de rencontrer votre public et peut-être de vivre de votre plume. Mais comment vous y prendre? Comment trouver la bonne méthode de travail et mettre toutes les chances de votre côté avec les éditeurs" (2011: cover). Passages like these appear to come straight out of marketing handbooks. Reminiscent of advertisement discourse, they appeal to the secret anxieties, dreams and desires of its intended audience. They formulate questions to which the audience can only answer "yes!". In this way, the reader is pushed into the role of a consumer, just as much as they push the handbook author in the role of a master-figure or holder (or producer) of knowledge.

This presentation of the author as an experienced master-figure is further reinforced by the biographical notes on the back covers, which are supposed to convince the readers of the author's expertise and contribute to the construction of the author's ethos or credibility. They point out the author's literary output — often in a somewhat vague formulation, like "l'auteur de nombreux livres" (Baudouin, 2003) and "l'auteur de plusieurs ouvrages" (Jaeglé, 2014) —, publishing houses who have published the author's works, and other literature-related activities with which the writer is involved — for example, according to such biographical notes, Brigit Hache "a exercé différents postes dans l'édition", Gérard Raynal works "depuis plus de 15 ans dans le monde de l'écrit" and Marianne Jaeglé "anime des ateliers d'écriture aux Ateliers Élisabeth Bing".

When looking at the formal features inside the French handbooks, we find that they pursue the pragmatist step-by-step approach reminiscent of the American how-to-write format. The entire internal design of the handbooks is intended to make the road to publication seem as orderly and

straightforward as possible. The handbooks are divided into brief chapters that consist of short one-to-four sentence paragraphs, with forthright titles and subtitles like “Pourquoi écrire?” (Baudouin, 204), “Un livre, d’accord. Mais pour raconter quoi?” (idem) and “Une vision globale du projet” (idem). Furthermore, the handbooks use a variety of fonts to differentiate various kinds of advice and, as mentioned in the previous chapter, they feature symbols, icons, and indexes (see 3.1.1.). Finally, the French how-to-write texts provide supplementary advice in small inserts as well as practical exercises, memorable quotes by famous authors and bullet point lists that summarize the chapter’s main arguments. Some handbooks make extensive use of this typical textbook tool. For instance, as can be seen on the image below, in the space of two pages, Laure D’Astragal provides two boxes with a list of bullet points on the essential characteristics of plot, with an exercise on making “les bons choix” and with a synopsis of the preceding chapter’s main idea (114).

D'Astragal, 2013: 113-114.



deuxième semaine - **Le temps de l'écriture**

Intrigue complexe

Une autre façon de rendre l'histoire intéressante est de créer des intrigues pour plusieurs personnages dont les quêtes s'entremêlent et se contrarient ou de créer une intrigue secondaire à l'intérieur de l'intrigue principale (obligation d'un second narrateur). Si vous ajoutez des intrigues secondaires, n'oubliez pas de les résoudre avant la fin de l'histoire principale.

Les caractéristiques principales de l'intrigue

Au début de l'intrigue, un ou plusieurs personnages (qu'il faut présenter) se trouvent face à un conflit :
- obstacle interne (affectif) ;
- obstacle externe : obstacle matériel (distance, objet...) ou événement (contexte social, idéologie) ou situation inextricable.

D'où une quête, un projet vital contrecarré par des obstacles.
Cette quête fixe un objectif qui peut changer au cours de l'histoire.
La fin de l'histoire est atteinte lorsque :
- soit le personnage réussit à atteindre son objectif ;
- soit le personnage réussit à résoudre son conflit ;
- soit le personnage renonce à sa quête.

Mais dans tous les cas, à la fin, le personnage aura changé !

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ATELIER D'ÉCRITURE

Je m'autorise à me faire plaisir

exercice 46
Les bons choix
10 min

Citez 20 choses que vous aimez faire, dans l'absolu, même des choses que vous ne faites pas souvent ou que vous n'avez pas les moyens de faire.
Quelle est la dernière date où vous vous êtes autorisé l'une d'entre elles ?
Servez-vous de cette liste pour vos « Temps avec moi ».
Continuez vos pages de réveil quotidiennes avec un joker d'une journée au choix dans la semaine.

RÉSUMÉ

L'auteur, c'est vous !

Pour commencer à parler de votre personnage, vous devez absolument savoir où vous allez l'emmener, c'est votre histoire, c'est vous qui la conduisez et non pas lui, même si une bonne histoire donnera toujours l'impression d'être menée par le personnage qui « vit sa vie ». Aussi, attendez absolument la fin de ce livre avant de vous lancer dans la rédaction de votre roman même si vos idées se mettent à bouillonner ; prenez un maximum de notes, mais souvenez-vous que vous devez établir le plan de l'histoire avant de l'écrire.

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4.2.2. Adopting Content

The formal features of the French how-to-write handbooks recall the design and pragmatist approach of the U.S. based how-to-write model. This impression is reinforced when we consider the content of these French books. As the tables of contents demonstrate, all of these texts operate by means of strict linear chronology: they start with chapters on finding inspiration, end with advice on publication, and deal with documentation and the writing act in between. Interestingly, these tables of contents are

highly readable in themselves. Rather than plain providers of information, they can be interpreted as micro-narratives that shed light on what is to come. The reader, just by glancing at the index, can easily imagine herself moving swiftly from one phase to the next, approaching her objective (being published!) at rapid speed. For example, for his chapter on the writing act, Bernard Baudouin proposes the following subdivisions:

This fragment from Baudouin's table of contents, although it only covers a mere twenty-six pages of the handbook, performs the entire writing act: it opens with overcoming anxiety and the fear of the blank page. After having tackled the inevitable question "écrire au stylo ou à l'ordinateur", it moves on to developing a stable working rhythm. Finally, it brings the budding writer to the act of re-writing.

The brevity (26 pages out of 218) of Baudouin's chapter on the writing act is significant. We note a similar tendency in the other French how-to-write handbooks. Even though writers like Alain Berthelot, Brigit Hache and Marianne Jaeglé leave more space to deal with that topic — 81 pages out of 153, 107 pages out of 213, 64 pages out of 227 respectively —, they pay at least as much attention to the stages that come before and after the actual writing: preparation and publication. As a result, the beginning writer might be led to believe that writing itself is the least time-consuming aspect of the creative process, that it is a matter of solid preparation on the one hand, and understanding the dynamics of the publishing world on the other. The writing act, in these texts, appears as the most self-evident part of the creative process. If we interpret this more critically, this lack of in-depth discussion might signify that writing is still the most enigmatic and problematic aspect of the process: one can

indeed be taught how to prepare like a writer and how to avoid the pitfalls of publishing, but writing remains a question of talent. In accordance with this interpretation, Gérard Raynal's *Écrire un livre* titles one of his chapters on writing "Bienvenue dans le monde du flou" (33).

No matter how we interpret it, the (relatively) meager attention paid to the writing act by French how-to-write handbooks — and their efforts to focus more on preparation and publication — is revealing in light of the discussion in this chapter. Like the American model texts and their promise of comprehensive guidance, these French books propose a view of writing that is much broader than the act of writing itself. It entails all the aspects of getting ready to write and all the skills needed to actually getting a manuscript published.

Preparation is indeed an important issue in the French handbooks. These texts typically discern various kinds of preparation, all of which echo pieces of advice found in American handbooks. First of all, French how-to-write handbooks argue that to become a writer, it is necessary to become a good reader. Brigit Hache explains that "pour pouvoir devenir un bon écrivain, il faut d'abord être un 'grand' lecteur" (31). On a similar note, Alain Berthelot incites his readers to "lire, lire, lire" (13). These suggestions recall the crucial notion, found in almost all American creative writing handbooks from Dorothea Brande to Stephen King, of *reading as a writer* (see 1.3.1.). Even if interpretations of this precept tend to differ somewhat from one French how-to-write author to the next (just as in the case of the American authors), most of the writers do establish a link between reading fiction and acquiring know-how. As Brigit Hache signals: "La lecture vous apporte un enrichissement sur divers sujets, et elle vous insuffle le savoir de l'écriture" (31).

Secondly, similar to the ways in which the American handbooks tackle issues like the *fear of the blank page* and *writer's block* (see 1.3.3.), the French how-to-write books provide strategies to overcome beginner's anxiety. Marianne Jaeglés speaks of "identifier et surmonter les obstacles à l'écriture" (45) and Laure D'Astragal of "évacuez les freins" (4). Typically, the handbooks start by diagnosing the sense of insecurity: they describe the experience of self-doubt and provide an explanation as to its origins. "Tu doutes de toi, encore et toujours. As-tu le droit d'écrire?" Marianne Jaeglé writes, "En prenant le stylo, tu as le sentiment d'accomplir un acte d'une audace et d'une arrogance inouïes; ce faisant, tu oses te comparer à ceux que tu admires tant, toi qui ne leur arrives pas à la cheville" (54). In a next step, the handbooks offer remedies to cure that anxiety. A regular strategy in this respect is to invoke quotations by famous authors like Flaubert, Proust and Kafka that demonstrate that even geniuses can come to doubt their talent. Marianne Jaeglé, for instances, cites Proust when he reminisces: "Combien depuis ce jour, dans mes promenades du côté de Guermantes, il me parut plus affligeant encore qu'auparavant de n'avoir pas de dispositions pour les lettres, et de devoir renoncer à être jamais un écrivain célèbre" (52). From this statement, she draws the lesson that it is perfectly normal for anyone, even the most talented individuals, to question one's own gifts for

writing. Therefore, it is essential, she maintains, that beginners write through these periods of anxiety so as to gain self-confidence. Drawing upon the idea of the small critical voice inside people's minds telling them that "they are just not good enough", she calls this "écrire avec la petite voix" (50).

Thirdly, the last piece of preparatory how-to-write advice that I will mention concerns the issues of time, space, ritual and writing equipment. French how-to-write texts, like American handbooks, stress the importance of setting aside a fixed time-space for one's literary activities. In this regard, Alain Berthelot speaks about the creation of a suitable "cadre de travail" (7) and Marianne Jaeglé about "l'espace-temps de l'écriture" (57). On the level of space, they typically distinguish between places of social activity like parks and bars on the hand, and the home environment on the other. On the level of time, some handbooks suggest that it could be fruitful to carry out one's writing practices in the early morning or late in the evening. Given that both moments are close to sleep, these handbooks argue that they offer the perfect conditions for budding writers to enter the state of semi-consciousness that can liberate their writing. As Laure D'Astragal points out: "C'est pourquoi le moment idéal pour s'entraîner à écrire se situe juste au réveil, avant même tout échange avec qui que ce soit, quand la raison n'a pas encore pris le pas sur vos actes et que vous êtes encore tout proche du monde des rêves" (48). In addition, the how-to-write handbooks propose to develop daily rituals in order to organize one's literary labor. It is notable that many of these rituals are reminiscent of the eastern meditative practices which are also recommended widely in self-help literature. For instance, Brigit Hache advises "essayez la méditation, le yoga, la course à pied" (52). Likewise, Laure D'Astragal, who refers to the times of writing as "des moments d'hygiène", suggests to go for walks, practice yoga, light incense sticks, and stick to a healthy diet. "Respectez l'écrivain qui est en vous," she observes, "accordez-lui des pauses, du sommeil, une vie saine et équilibrée, des promenades, des sorties, des moments de joie et d'amour" (27). Furthermore, how-to-write handbooks in French offer lengthy discussions of "les instruments de l'écriture" (Jaeglé: 23), weighing the pros and cons of writing by hand versus writing on a computer, and making suggestions about the types of pens, notebooks and software beginning writers could use.

On a side note, I want to point out the paradoxical effects of the ways in which these texts underline the importance of time, space, ritual and writing materials. Above, I demonstrated that the handbook front covers, by simultaneously depicting traditional and contemporary writing tools, negotiate between pragmatic and romantic views of writing. A similar tension appears, I argue, when we interpret their emphasis on time, space, ritual and material. On the one hand, by paying much attention to these aspects of preparation, the how-to-write handbooks strive to make literary writing part of everyday life. Rather than a stroke of divine genius, writing, they suggest, is being performed in everyday spaces and by means of ordinary tools. On the other hand, by stressing the importance of these elements, the handbooks invest them with a symbolic value so strong that they acquire a fetish

status. To give an example of the paradoxical effect of the handbooks' treatment of writing tools, we can study their approach to the notebook. By inciting budding writers to make use of notebooks, how-to-write books demonstrate that writing is not a matter of spontaneous invention, but of making outlines, erasing passages, making errors and starting again. They show that writing, just as many other everyday activities, entails processes of trial and error. Yet, at the same time, the handbooks' insistence on the importance of notebooks, particularly on the fact that writers "should carry with them at all times!", leads to a fetishization of these objects. In the handbooks' discourse, the notebook morphs into a talisman, a quintessential part of the writer's symbolic outfit.

As mentioned, the French how-to-write handbooks focus as much on being published as on being well-prepared. Like their American counterparts, the French texts typically conclude with a number of chapters that explain in detail how the publishing world works and how to achieve success in it. Alain Berthelot's *Écrire et être édité,* for instance, comprises chapters on "Trouver un éditeur", "Contrat d'édition", "Copyright, droits, domaine public", "Comment fabrique-t-on un livre" and "Comment promouvoir la vente de son livre". Likewise, Brigit Hache's *Écrire et trouver ses lecteurs* proposes sections on "Présentation de votre manuscrit", "Protection de votre manuscrit", "Le contrat d'édition type", "Arnaques et fausses bonnes idées", "Autoédition et publication à la demande", "Éditeurs par genre" and "Adresses utiles". Even if different how-to-write handbooks emphasize different aspects of the publishing process, the gist of their advice broadly concurs. This is especially true with regard to the types of publishing that they promote. Indeed, all the French how-to-write books agree that being published by a renowned publisher is the best way to go about it. As Bernard Baudouin signals: "La parution chez un éditeur est donc généralement considérée comme une première 'reconnaissance' accordée à un livre" (155). Additionally, they emphasize the benefits of print on demand: as beginning writers can decide the exact number of books that they want to see published, print on demand allows them to make precisely the costs that they want to make. By contrast, all the how-to-write handbooks warn against shady publishers that propose contracts "à compte d'auteur".

Finally, some handbooks advise on how to behave after one's book has been published. They explain how to give interviews and how to deal with fans (or with the absence of fans). For instance, when it comes to the subject of giving interviews, Marianne Jaeglé strongly encourages thorough preparation: "Un discours sur son œuvre ne s'improvise pas […]. Tu prépares ce que tu vas dire, ce que tu souhaites promouvoir, ce qui valorise ton travail. Tu répètes devant ton miroir. Tu construis ton discours d'écrivain et l'image qui va avec" (196). Further, with regard to the audience, Jaeglé stresses that is important to approach one's readers with the right mindset. She insists that writers should prepare for misunderstandings, ill-founded criticism and jealousy. There will also be pleasant encounters, she adds reassuringly, but only at rare occasions. "Donner quelque chose qu'on a écrit à

lire," she quotes English novelist David Mitchell, "revient à fournir aux autres un couteau aiguisé et à s'allonger dans son cercueil en disant: 'c'est quand vous voulez!'" (194).

4.2.3. Adopting Formulas and Techniques

Find Your Own Voice

The content of French how-to-write handbooks clearly echoes the advice disseminated by American handbooks. Like the U.S. based texts, the French books offer sections on preparation that deal with issues like *reading as a writer*, *fear of the blank page* and *writer's block*. Further, they perpetuate the American handbooks' focus on being published, provide detailed explanations of the ways in which the publishing world works so as to enhance the beginner writer's chances of success. In this section, I will take a closer look at the ways in which French how-to-write texts adopt and adapt a number of the formulas that constitute the core of American creative writing poetics.

As I explained in chapter one, *find your own voice* is an essential piece of handbook advice. Drawing upon romantic poetics and ego-psychology, it was popularized by Dorothea Brande's *Becoming a Writer* (1934), a book that, as Brande explains, would "teach the beginner not how to write, but how to be a writer" (1983: 36). Brande's objective, in her own words, is to help budding writers cultivate a "writer's temperament" (1983: 36). Such a temperament, she specifies, has nothing to do with what she calls "a wide-eyed bohemianism" — a concept that she considers a "remarkably embarrassing inheritance of the past" (1983: 37-38). On the contrary, it refers to "an earlier and healthier idea of the artist" (1983: 38), that is, "the idea of the genius as a man more versatile, more sympathetic, more studious than his fellows, more catholic in his tastes" (1983: 38). She also points out that the writer's character is "adult, discriminating, temperate, and just," (1983: 38), and gives advice on "the right recreation" (54), "friends and books" (55), "displacing old habits" (63) and "writing on schedule" (75).

French how-to-write handbooks recycle Brande's precept of cultivating a singular voice by means of developing the right habits. Indeed, their insistence on preparation — especially on the importance of a suitable "cadre de travail" (Berthelot: 7), of rituals and of writing equipment — recalls Brande's ideas on the relationship between healthy and orderly lifestyles on the one hand, and good writing on the other. Like Brande and the many American handbooks that have followed in her footsteps, French how-to-write texts propose models of authorship that promote the values of solitude, silence, hygiene and order. Laure D'Astragal, for instance, signals: "Une grande majorité [des auteurs] vous conseillera l'isolement et le silence. […] Essayez de ne penser qu'à vous, à votre respiration, calme, régulière" (27). Likewise, Alain Berthelot discusses the importance of "l'autodiscipline" (10), a concept which entails, among other things, that writers should pay attention

to their dietary habits: “Sachant comment votre alimentation influe sur votre esprit, sur son agilité, et l’importance qu’elle revêt dans la santé de tout travailleur sédentaire […], vous ne pourrez plus vous permettre de vous nourrir n’importe comment” (11). In the eyes of French handbook authors like D’Astragal and Berthelot, solitude, hygiene, discipline and order facilitate the writer’s labor. Lifestyles that adhere to these principles, they contend, make it possible for writers to increase their working pace and output. In turn, hard work will ultimately allow writers to discover something: their own unique perspective on things, their own style, *their own voice*. Comparing the cultivation of authorship to becoming a musician, Marianne Jaeglé notes: “Tu travailles donc tous les jours. Si tu étais un musicien, tu ferais des gammes quotidiennement […]. La différence entre un musicien et toi, c’est que tu es à la fois l’interprète et l’instrument. Et que la partition que tu dois déchiffrer est cachée en toi” (28). Significantly, Jaeglé describes writers as the interpreters of the music score which is hidden in themselves. Provided that they work hard — “si tu étais un musicien, tu ferais des gammes quotidiennement” —, writers, she contends, might ultimately discover their own inner music.

This idea of a unique voice (or a unique style, perspective or story) that lies within the writer waiting to be discovered (by means of hard labor) is something that returns in many of the French how-to-write handbooks. Brigit Hache remarks that “écrire […] c’est s’abandonner à la créativité qui sommeille en vous” (16) and instigates writers to find “cette petite voix que est la vôtre” (86). Laure D’Astragal tells writers “puisez dans le puits intérieur et laissez couler la source” (49) and explains that “[en écrivant], vous allez être plus proche de votre nature profonde” (42). Alain Berthelot argues that there is “un livre en chacun de nous” (Berthelot 21). What is more, in many French how-to-write handbooks, this notion of a unique voice is invoked as a response to the tricky question of originality. Rather than on original subject matter, budding writers, the handbooks suggest, should rely on the uniqueness of their voice to stand out amidst their peers. As Marianne Jaeglé puts it: “Par sa sensibilité, par son approche particulière, un écrivain peut renouveler entièrement un sujet déjà encombré par des poids lourds de la littérature” (108). In a similar way, Alain Berthelot observes: “Jamais deux histoires ne seront semblables” (55).

French how-to-write handbooks, like their American counterparts, often resort to the practice of *freewriting* to help writers access their inner voice. As explained in chapter one, *freewriting* exercises encourage people to write uninterruptedly for a certain amount of time without any constraint on the levels of language and subject matter. These exercises are designed to help budding writers find and cultivate their own voice. For instance, Laure D’Astragal, who refers to the morning *freewriting* exercises that she recommends as “la douche d’écriture”, advises: “Commencez votre cahier, écrivez exactement ce que vous pensez, sans censure, sans entrave, jusqu’à ce que le cerveau artiste prenne le relais” (49). Echoing the popular creative writing theory of the two brain halves, D’Astragal speaks of an autonomous artistic brain that can be cultivated by means of *freewriting*. In this way, she mirrors

an American advice writer like Ray Bradbury, a prominent partisan of *freewriting*, who noted in his *Zen in the Art of Writing*: "The artist must work so hard, so long, that a brain develops and lives, all of itself, in his fingers" (146). Marianne Jaeglé, on her part, advocates for the utility of *freewriting* in view of finding subject matter from which books can grow: "Tu notes donc tout, indistinctement; ce que tu as devant toi, tes rêves de la nuit comme Perec, les remarques, obligeantes ou non, de tes collègues de travail, tes doutes […] Tu notes tout parce que tu ne peux pas savoir à l'avance ce qui naîtra de la graine que tu plantes aujourd'hui dans ton cahier" (28).

Write What You Know

That last quotation brings us to the issue of subject matter. As described in this dissertation's first chapter, when it comes to the question of topic, American creative writing handbooks famously advice to *write what you know*. *Write what you know* suggests that writers should ground their stories in personal experience. This would facilitate the discovery of their own voice — here, the argument goes that it is easier for writes to find their unique manner of expression when they are operating on familiar thematic territory, which also helps them produce more convincing and enchanting (and thus more commercially successful) narrative. In *On Writing*, Stephen King points to this link between *write what you know* and the making of literature that people actually want to buy and read. "Book-buyers aren't attracted, by and large, by the literary merits of a novel," he states, "Book-buyers want a good story to take with them on the airplane, something that will first fascinate them, then pull them in and keep them turning the pages. This happens, I think, *when readers recognize the people in a book, their behaviors, their surroundings, and their talk*"(184 my italics). According to King, books that are successful on the literary marketplace do well because they provide readers with recognizable and convincing stories, characters and situations. To create such lively narratives, he specifies, it is essential to *write what you know* (or, as he adds, what you like and love). He instructs: "Write what you like, then imbue it with life and make it unique by blending in your own personal knowledge of life, friendship, relationships, sex, and work" (185).

Furthermore, *write what you know*, in the U.S. creative writing tradition, can also be interpreted as an exhortation to pay close attention to the ordinary. It warns beginners against overdoing it when looking for original (and unconvincing) subject matters and incites them to examine the things that surround them instead. As Dorothea Brande formulates it in *Becoming a Writer*: "Turn yourself into your own object of attention," she advises, "what do you look like, standing there? How do you walk? What, if you knew nothing about yourself, could be gathered of you, your character, your background, your purpose just there at that minute?" (58-59).

French how-to-write handbooks clearly adopt the exhortation to *write what you know*. For instance, recalling Stephen King's suggestion that personal experience increases the appeal of

narratives, Marianne Jaeglé notes: “Sur quoi écrire? Sur ce que tu connais […] Il s’agit d’ancrer le récit dans une réalité qui t’est familière, de façon à pouvoir l’écrire de manière convaincante […] Ne cherche pas à éviter ce qui te caractérise profondément, bien au contraire” (29–30). Likewise, Brigit Hache explains that “le plus évident est de se baser sur ce qu’on connaît. Vous risquez moins de vous perdre lorsque vous allez entamer l’écriture de votre livre. Écrire sur un sujet connu rend l’écriture plus fluide, plus réaliste” (58). Just as the American writers, these French authors found their advice to *write what you know* on the belief that relying on personal experience makes for more convincing, more realist, and more readable stories. In other words, they exhort to stick to this advice because it is effective on the literary marketplace.

In addition, the how-to-write handbooks mimic Dorothea Brande’s interpretation of *write what you know* as an investigation of everyday life. For example, Laure D’Astragal suggests: “Observez les scènes du quotidien qui passent inaperçues habituellement. Écoutez les conversations de bistrot, les échanges dans la queue du cinéma […]. Au bout de quelques heures vous aurez matière à trois ou quatre sujets” (66). In a similar vein, although drawing upon the poetics of Georges Perec rather than those of creative writing handbooks, Marianne Jaeglé observes: “Un autre champ d’écriture consiste à ‘regarder le quotidien’, […] ce qui revient à écrire non plus sur ce qui a été dans un autre temps, mais sur ce qui est là, à disposition, ici et maintenant. […] Il ne s’agit plus de tourner le regard vers l’intérieur, mais de le diriger vers le moment présent” (62).

Furthermore, the how-to-write handbooks suggest finding topic ideas in the newspaper. For example, Brigit Hache writes: “Pour trouver un sujet, parcourez la rubrique faits-divers des quotidiens” (70). Similarly, Laure D’Astragal notes: “Découpez tous les faits-divers drôles, inattendus, percutants ou séduisants […]. Les faits-divers sont une vraie mine d’information” (58). Even if this is not exactly *write what you know* advice, it is grounded in a similar idea: events that have actually happened, even the most banal situations, provide good material for telling convincing stories.

While French how-to-write handbooks highly value personal experience as a source of inspiration for narrative, they also insist strongly on the importance of documentation (just like American handbooks for fiction and screenwriting). Even more so when they suggest to write from news stories, the handbooks argue that “une recherche se révèle souvent nécessaire, avant de commencer à développer votre idée, il faut préparer votre travail” (Hache: 83). Preparing the work, in these handbooks, entails gathering as much information as possible about character and setting. Typically, beginners are advised to make index cards on the characters and the places that play a role in their stories. The information included on these index cards, the handbooks remark, can be much more extensive than the things that are eventually revealed in the story. In Laure D’Astragal’s *Atelier d’écriture*, there is an extensive section on what the author calls “le travail du personage” (134). In this section, D’Astragal asks all kinds of questions that writers can use to prepare their characters, going

from questions on basic information such as name, surname, nationality, date and place of birth, address, height, eye color and ethnicity to more detailed questions on subjects which she groups by means of the categories "le carnet de santé du personage", "les défauts, les manies, les objets fétiches", "le contexte: aspect social", "le contexte: aspect hériditaire", "le contexte: tendance sensorielle dans son expression", "les comportements" and "les émotions". Similarly, Bernard Baudouin's *Comment écrire votre premier livre* entails an expanded chapter on the documentation of setting with questions on "les lieux d'ensemble", "les lieux rapprochés", "les milieux sociaux" and "les ambiances".

Lastly, some of the French how-to-write handbooks add an extra caveat to the advice to *write what you* know: they argue that to measure the quality of a subject, one should attempt to summarize it in a single phrase. "Une bonne histoire se résume bien," (59) Brigit Hache observes. In a similar way, Laure D'Astragal contends: "Le thème choisi doit poser une problématique précise et se focaliser sur une tranche de vie d'un personnage fictive" (99). Put differently, the handbooks argue that the strength of a particular topic not only depends on its being rooted in a person's actual experience, but also on something else: the possibility to capture a story's essence in a short description.

Elements of Fiction

The advice to test a story's potential by means of one-sentence summaries entails a move away from the rather romantic formulas *find your own voice* and *write what you know* to a more technical dimension of the French how-to-write handbooks. They follow the American model and encourage people to be self-expressive and to write what they know in their own voice, but they also make it clear that such romantic precepts, even if they constitute necessary pre-requisites for good writing, do not suffice. In other words, the handbooks insist that in order to produce readable and publishable books, there is more to writing than being yourself, i.e., technique.[29]

A first way in which the French handbooks, following the American example, guide the writer's attention to more technical issues is by means of genre. They provide a minimum amount of information about a number of literary genres, both fictional and non-fictional. For example, in addition to "le travail du roman", Alain Berthelot discusses "comment écrire un essai", "écrire une nouvelle", "écriture du scénario", "écrire une pièce de théâtre" and "écriture poétique". Brigit Hache, on her part, tackles "le roman", "le roman policier", "le roman noir", "le roman épistolaire", "le roman de science fiction [sic]", "écrire pour la jeunesse", "le journal", "les mémoires", "le récit

[29] Many French how-to-write handbooks distinguish between what they call "écriture autocentrée" (Hache: 58) or "écrire pour votre plaisir" (Berthelot: 27) on the one hand, and "écrire pour être lu" (Berthelot: 15) on the other. They explain that if writers do not want to be read, then, indeed, they can be absolutely self-expressive and write anything they want. However, if writers do want to be published, there are, the handbooks point out, a number of rules, constraints and techniques that they have to take into account in order to create publishable books.

autobiographique", and "l'autofiction". For each genre, the handbooks typically give a definition that formulates the basic constraints which writers should take into account if they want write in that particular genre. For instance, defining the detective novel, Brigit Hache notes: "Son thème est la résolution d'un crime ou d'un délit au travers d'un enquête. Un enquêteur cherche à élucider une énigme" (89). By providing this basic definition, Hache puts forth constraints on the level of theme and plot ("la resolution d'un crime") to which beginners should conform if they want to write a detective novel.

Another way in which the French handbooks communicate technical advice is through the prism of the so-called *elements* or *building blocks of fiction*. In chapter one, I showed how American advice texts — drawing upon classics like Aristotle's *Poetics*, Georges Polti's *Les Trente-six situations dramatiques* and E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* on the one hand, and influential screenwriting handbooks like Christopher Vogler's *The Writer's Journey* and Robert McKee's *Story* on the other — strongly rely on the use of fictional devices such as plot, character, dialogue, setting, action, point of view and style. I showed that even self-expressive advice authors like Dorothea Brande and a cult author like John Gardner make use of these techniques. The French how-to-write handbooks clearly adopt this *elements of fiction* approach.

First of all, most of the French texts stress the importance of developing a solid plot. Even if they acknowledge that one can write without a pre-conceived plot — for example, by citing famous writers who supposedly never planned the stories they wrote —, they typically provide plot structures that budding writers can use to shape their narratives. These structures are, the handbooks explain, based on traditional ideas that can be traced back to Aristotle. Laure D'Astragal, for example, signals: "Une histoire, c'est un récit réel ou imaginaire avec un début, un milieu et une fin. Aristote parlait d'une structure en trois actes: une situation, des complications et une résolution" (96). They also they acknowledge that these plot structures are derived from screenwriting handbooks: "Les structures d'Hollywood répondent à une structure simple, un héros, un objectif, un méchant qui a le même objectif" (122). Drawing upon these sources, the French how-to-write handbooks propose plot structures with seemingly universal validity. These structures typically revolve around a conflict that must be resolved by the protagonist. These conflicts, the handbooks explain, can be both internal and external: the protagonist might have to face her own inner demons and/or challenges that are presented by the outside world. Typically, the protagonist should go through a change of character by the end of the story. As Laure D'Astragal shows: "Intrigue: obstacle interne (affectif); obstacle externe ▫ atteindre l'objectif ou renoncer –> le personnage aura changé" (113). These plot structures indeed recall the narrative arches proposed by classical models like Aristotle and by screenwriting handbooks. For example, D'Astragal describes plot as follows: "Intrigue= élément déclencheur + conflit + péripéties + crise +climax + résolution" (99). Brigit Hache, on her part, explains :

Vous pouvez décomposer [l'intrigue] en quelques étapes:

1. Mise en place des personnages, cadre de l'action, lieu…
2. Élément perturbateur ou déclencheur […]
3. Le personnage principal va lutter, partir en quête […]
4. Le héros trouve une résolution à l'élément perturbateur
5. Le personnage principal n'est plus le même qu'au début de l'intrigue (86)

In addition, the French how-to-write handbooks make use of the device of character. They contend that, together with the plot, the characters should be the beginning novelist's main concern. As Laure D'Astragal puts it: "Les personnages font la force d'un récit (130)". As a main rule, the handbooks advise that any character making an appearance should contribute to the development of the story: "Les personnages secondaires ne doivent pas être là pour rien, leur brève apparition doit servir votre histoire" (D'Astragal: 147). Furthermore, when dealing with the topic of the protagonist (or "the hero" as the film-based how-to-write handbooks tend to call this character), they warn against the creation of morally flawless characters. Brigit Hache notes: "Votre personnage principal n'est pas un héros parfait" (83). Similarly, Laure D'Astragal observes: "Si votre personnage est heureux, il n'y a rien à raconter, il n'y a pas d'histoire. Par contre, s'il est malheureux ou dans une impasse, c'est qu'il a un problème, on a envie de savoir comment il va s'en sortir" (120). The handbooks also argue that the protagonist should evolve in the course of the story. Writers, they say, should think of obstacles, setbacks and conflicts which their main characters can face and eventually overcome. These obstacles not only shed light on different facets of the protagonist's character, contributing to the effect of a true-to-life protagonist, they also create the impression that the protagonist undergoes some kind of transformation. Such transformations (e.g. a happy ending), the handbooks explain, is important to satisfy the audience's expectations: "À la fin de votre roman, votre héros aura changé. Votre lecteur devra ressentir cette évolution à la lecture" (Hache: 83). Moreover, the how-to-write handbooks give advice on the construction of other characters such as antagonists, allies and what Laure D'Astragal calls "les personnages de décor" (149).

Other *elements of fiction* discussed in French how-to-write handbooks are dialogue and point of view. As in the case of characters, the handbooks explain that all dialogues should serve a function within the overarching narrative: they should reveal information about a particular character or they should move the story forward. Stylistically, writers should strive to create a specific and recognizable voice for each character and to avoid repeating phrases like "dit-il", "lança-t-elle" and "insista-t-il". In respect to point of view, all the French *how-to-write* handbooks draw upon classic narratology and

distinguish between “le point de vue de la première personne” (Hache: 87), “le point de vue de la troisième personne” (Hache: 88) and “le point de vue omniscient” (Hache: 88).

Show Don’t Tell

As I explained, how-to-write handbooks suggest that writing by means of the *elements of fiction* (plot, dialogue, character, etc.) increases the chances of producing readable and publishable narratives. These advice texts are built on the belief that these *building blocks*, which have withstood the test of time, are part of a universal method for creating and organizing stories that capture people’s attention. It is no coincidence, the handbooks say, that these *elements* were already being promoted in Greek antiquity and that they are still providing the basic methodology for making fiction in Hollywood today. This is the case, they argue, because the approach by means of *elements of fiction* actually works.

Another technique that the French how-to-write handbooks propose to make stories readable is expressed in the famous formula *show don’t tell*. As I demonstrated in chapter one, *show don’t tell* is one of basic tenets of U.S. creative writing. It can be traced back to the writings of Henry James and Percy Lubbock and is considered the creative writing workshop’s principal pedagogical tool for commenting on student fiction. *Show don’t tell* generally points to the importance of concrete description. Instead of providing a summary sketch (“she was happy”), writers should present their readers with sensory detail (“she was laughing and her eyes were shining”). As I mentioned, this formula figures in many American advice texts (see 1.3.5.). In *Writing Down the Bones*, Natalie Goldberg observes that “there’s an old adage in writing: ‘Don’t tell, but show’”, and explains that it means, “don’t tell us about anger (or any of those big words like honesty, truth, hate, love, sorrow, life, justice, etc.); show us what made you angry. We will read it and feel angry. Don’t tell readers what to feel. Show them the situation, and that feeling will awaken in them” (75). Adding to this, Goldberg urges her readers to “be specific. Don’t say ‘fruit.’ Tell what kind of fruit — ‘it is a pomegranate.’ Give things the dignity of their names” (77). In a similar way, John Gardner observes that “vivid detail is the life blood of fiction […] in all major genres, the inner strategy is the same: The reader is regularly presented with proofs — in the form of closely observed details — that what is said to be happening is really happening” (26).

The advice to *show don’t tell* figures prominently in French how-to-write handbooks. Marianne Jaeglé, for example, warns “n’écris pas de généralités, sinon tu risques de tomber dans la statistique” (99) and adds “montre, au lieu de dire: telle est l’une des règles les plus importantes que l’écrivant doit comprendre et intégrer” (101). On a similar note, Brigit Hache argues: “Dans l’écriture d’un roman, d’une nouvelle, il ne faut pas dire, mais montrer” (47). Moreover, just like the American advice texts, the French books justify their use of *show don’t tell* by referring to the reader’s experience. Showing rather than explaining something, the handbooks contend, is the best way to get the reader involved

in a story: “Voilà l’une des leçons que tu peux retenir. Ce n’est pas en employant les mots ‘malheureux’, ‘triste’, ‘misère, que l’on fait éprouver de la tristesse au lecteur. *C’est en lui montrant* une petite fille forcée de chanter dans l’obscurité pour dominer sa peur” (Jaeglé: 102 my italics).

In accordance with the advice to *show don’t tell*, the handbooks suggest to do away with stylistic experiment. They advise beginners to write simply, to use everyday vocabulary, to keep their sentences short and to reduce the number of adjectives and adverbs. In order to hold readers’ attention, it is important, the handbooks explain, to keep one’s writing style simple and concrete. “Écrivez simplement” Brigit Hache signals, “Vos mots doivent aller à l’essentiel c’est ainsi que votre lecteur ressentira votre sincérité” (47).

Kill Your Darlings

The final piece of technical advice that the French *how-to-write* handbooks borrow from their American counterparts is *kill your darlings*. This piece of advice — usually attributed to William Faulkner, but already present in Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch’s *On the Art of Writing* (1916) — suggests that when revisiting drafts, writers should be capable of doing away with those passages that, although well-written, do not add to the overall narrative. It is a testimony to the functionalist idea that each element in the story should have its own role to play. According to this view, an element without added value only distracts the reader and decreases the story’s quality.

Like American advice texts, French handbooks write extensively on the importance of rewriting. These books even distinguish the beginner from the experienced writer based on people’s willingness and ability to rewrite earlier drafts. As Alain Bethelot puts it: “Un bon critère permettant de distinguer un écrivain néophyte d’un écrivain professionnel serait, sans conteste, la capacité de celui-ci à remettre son texte en question, à le relire sans complaisance, à ne pas verser dans une aveugle autosatisfaction” (103). Significantly, like the U.S. handbooks, the principal advice that the French books give for rewriting is to *kill your darlings*. Marianne Jaeglé, for example, states: “Supprimez sans crainte ce qui est devenu inutile” (159).

4.3. Adapting How-to-Write Handbooks

4.3.1. Introducing Local References

French how-to-write texts draw strongly upon the American handbook: they adopt its step-by-step design, including its formal features, such as cover, titles and internal outlook (brief chapters, windows, bullet point lists); they mimic its table of contents, notably its emphasis on preparation — the stage during which they teach how to *read as a writer*, how to overcome the *fear of the blank page*, and how to create a suitable “cadre de travail” — and on being published; they recycle its formulas, which

comprise both romantic precepts (*find your own voice* and *write what you know*) and technical advice (genre, the *elements of fiction*, *show don't tell* and *kill your darlings*). Significantly, like the American handbooks, the French texts justify their poetics by pointing to its proven success. Indeed, regardless of historical and national context, the handbooks claim to propose rules and techniques that, when well applied, capture the readers' attention. Put bluntly, they propose a universal method for being successful on the literary marketplace. "Soyez efficace," Brigit Hache insists emblematically, "Rappelez-vous votre mission: CAPTIVER le lecteur" (70).

At the same time, French authors also infuse their advice with local elements. In addition to seemingly universal rules, they draw upon their own literary (advice) traditions in order to shape their manuals. The first way in which the how-to-write handbooks adapt the American format to the local context is by including references to the national literary culture. Certainly, given their universalist approach, the handbooks contain references to famous writers from all over the world. They mention English-language writers like Mark Twain, Truman Capote, Paul Auster, Charles Bukowski, Raymond Carver, Philip Roth, V. S. Naipaul and Kazuo Ishiguro. They also refer to international bestseller writers like Paulo Coelho, Carlos Ruiz Zafón, Haruki Murakami, J. K. Rowling, Dan Brown, Patrick Süskind and E.L. James. Yet, they equally refer to many French writers. They speak of Charles Baudelaire, Gustave Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant, Marcel Proust, Simone de Beauvoir and Michel Houellebecq, authors who, admittedly, fit well within the international canon just sketched out. Furthermore, the how-to-write handbooks invoke the names of French-language writers whom one would not classify as being part of an international literary advice canon, among whom Antoine Albalat, Max Jacob, Claude Simon, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute and Tzvetan Todorov. In addition, they refer to commercially successful writers like Marc Lévy, Amélie Nothomb and Anna Gavalda. Gavalda is frequently mentioned in the handbooks, as she is the prototype of the amateur writer who started out by participating in short story-writing contests and who subsequently became very successful.

In their attempts to adapt the American format, the how-to-write handbooks also integrate references to what we could call "general" French culture. In this way, they provide "couleur locale". For instance, when describing the difficult path to literary success, Gérard Raynal jokingly advises against buying a chalet in the French Alps ski resort Courchevel. "Le chemin est parsemé d'embûches," he remarks, "et je vous conseille, avant de commander votre superbe chalet à Courchevel, d'attendre les résultats définitifs de vos ventes librairies" (22). Similarly, evoking a fictional conversation the beginning writer could have with a friend, Marianne Jaeglé notes how the topic of conversation shifts from "tu racontes succinctement que tu as publié deux livres," to "le mobil-home loué au camping de Palavas". Additionally, the handbooks make allusions to French pop and television culture. Raynal recounts the anecdote of a woman coming up to him during a book signing event, and who wanted to know whether he sold the biography of sixties pop-singer Hervé Villard (25). Jaeglé, in a list with

inspirational quotes, includes a phrase by singer Jacques Brel: “Le talent, ça n’existe pas. Le talent, c’est avoir envie de faire quelque chose” (46).

4.3.2. Introducing Local Techniques

Another type of adaptation takes place on the level of technique. As mentioned, the French how-to-write handbooks are heavily indebted to their American counterparts when it comes to providing technical writing advice. They make use of the classic creative writing devices of *genre* and *elements of fiction*, and of the well-known formulas *show don’t tell* and *kill your darlings*. Yet, the French books also introduce techniques that originated in local literary traditions. More precisely, they draw upon the procedural (or avant-garde) writing methods designed by the Oulipo, especially the writing practices of Georges Perec (see 2.3.2.). They resort to this body of avant-garde techniques for multiple reasons. First of all, the French handbooks propose playful *écriture à contraintes* exercises as part of what one could describe as the writer’s daily training. These Oulipian exercises are designed, the handbooks explain, to stimulate the beginners’ creativity and to increase their familiarity with the writing act. By imposing formal constraints (constraints that apply to language instead of content: letters, words, phrases), these exercises typically challenge people to explore the material dimension of language before arriving at the creation of actual content. For example, Laure D’Astragal — who states “commençons par une exercice d’écriture avec des contraintes au niveau des mots et de la forme” (62) — recommends to write a brief text based on a list of words (“les mots voyageurs” (62)) picked randomly from the dictionary. In a similar vein, Marianne Jaeglé presents an exercise in “écriture ludique” (66) — a form of writing which she describes as “pur divertissement, plaisir de jouer avec les mots” (66) and which, she observes, “permet d’acquérir une certaine confiance en soi, une aisance dans l’acte d’écrire” (66) — based on a passage from Rabelais’s *Le Cinquième livre*. In the passage in question, Rabelais enlists a menu of invented dishes like “des corguignolles savoreuses”, “des heppelourdes” and “des badigonyeuses” (Jaeglé: 67). Jaeglé, in turn, invites her readers to put their imagination to work and come up with recipes for Rabelais’s invented dishes.

Secondly, in some cases, the French handbooks draw upon Perec’s ideas to generate exercises that use personal memory and everyday life as sources of inspiration. In terms of writing based on memory, Marianne Jaeglé — the French how-to-write author who makes the most extensive use of Oulipian writing practices — suggests to compose a list of brief recollections that each begin with the Perecqian incipit “je me souviens”. Furthermore, with regard to writing derived from the observation of everyday life, Marianne Jaeglé, following a section from Perec’s *Penser/classer*, instructs to put together “la liste des choses que, selon toi, on devrait faire systématiquement” (63). As she explains:

"Il ne s'agit plus de tourner le regard vers l'intérieur, et vers le passé, mais de le diriger vers le moment présent, et aussi (mais pas uniquement) vers l'extérieur" (62).

Thirdly, some French how-to-write handbooks mimic the conceptual framework that Perec used to organize his overarching literary project. As I described in chapter two, in the 1978 essay "Notes sur ce que je cherche", Perec signals that he classifies his work along four axes: "Quatre champs différents, quatre modes d'interrogation qui posent peut-être en fin de compte la même question, mais la posent selon des perspectives particulières correspondant chaque fois pour moi à un autre type de travail littéraire" (2003: 9-10). This classification into four fields of work — the sociological, the autobiographical, the playful and the novelistic — becomes a model for how-to-write authors like Marianne Jaeglé to guide the beginning writer through different modes of writing. Somewhat modifying Perec's typology, Marianne Jaeglé suggests: "Comme Perec […], tu cultives alors plusieurs champs *à la fois*. Dans l'un, tu écris des textes dédiés (par exemple) à ce qu'inspire dans ta pratique professionnelle; dans l'autre, tu élabores ton projet de roman; dans le troisième, tu travailles à ton journal intime […]; le quatrième rassemble des textes autobiographiques" (70). This Perecqian way of proceeding, Jaeglé explains, is beneficial in at least two ways: it forces beginning writers to become proficient in multiple genres; it allows them to remain creatively active over longer periods of time — when one mode of writing leads to an impasse, beginners can keep on writing by turning their attention to one of their other projects.

4.3.3. Introducing Local Representations

An additional way in which French handbooks adapt the how-to-write format is by infusing it with local representations of authorship, particularly the neo-romantic notion of the martyr writer. Indeed, these books refer abundantly to Flaubert's *Journal* and Rilke's *Lettres à un jeune poète*, texts, that, as I pointed out earlier, are essential to the local neo-romantic advice tradition (see 2.2.3.). In fact, some of the handbooks' discursive quirks seem to be derived directly from these older advice texts. This is especially visible in the opening sections of many French handbooks. In chapter two, I showed how Rilke makes it clear in his first letter to officer Kappus that the decision to become a writer should not be taken lightly. He insists that true writing calls for a lifestyle marked by solitude and suffering. Consequently, it is essential that people ask themselves if they truly feel the need to write before embarking on this endeavor. As Rilke puts it:

> Répondez franchement à la question de savoir si vous seriez condamné à mourir au cas où il vous serait refusé d'écrire. Avant toute chose, demandez-vous, à l'heure la plus tranquille de votre nuit: est-il nécessaire que j'écrive? Creusez en vous-même en quête d'une réponse profonde. Et si elle devait être

> positive, si vous étiez fondé à répondre à cette question grave par un puissant et simple 'je ne peux pas faire autrement', construisez alors votre existence en fonction de cette nécessité. (27)

The opening sections of French how-to-write handbooks often mimic aspects of Rilke's first letter to Kappus. Laure D'Astragal's *Atelier d'écriture* begins with the question "pourquoi ai-je le désir d'écrire?" (4). Similarly, Baudoin's *Comment écrire votre premier livre* starts by asking "pourquoi écrire?" (11). Typically, these sections gauge the individual's readiness to be disciplined and commit to the writing life in the face of solitude and small chances of commercial success. Like Flaubert and Rilke before them, these how-to-write authors conjure up the idea of self-chosen martyrdom in order to explain to the reader what would await her if she decided that she wants to write. Brigit Hache's *Écrire and trouver ses lecteur* offers a prototypical example of such a Rilkean opening section. As if issuing a preliminary warning, Hache writes:

> Qui êtes-vous?
> Oui, vous. Vous qui avez décidé d'écrire. Je vous propose de vous attarder un moment sur vous. Si vous lisez ces lignes, c'est que vous avez choisi de mettre toutes les chances de votre côté. Vous vous documentez, vous dévorez tout ce qui concerne le processus d'écriture. Très bien, c'est un bon début.
> […]
> Écrire, c'est aussi se retrouver seul devant une page blanche, même si votre imagination éprouve le besoin d'inventer de nouveaux horizons, vous vous préparez à de longs moments de travail, de découragement parfois. Êtes-vous prêt à affronter cet acte solitaire? Êtes-vous prêt à passer du temps chaque jour pour avancer dans votre projet? Si vous répondez par l'affirmative à ces deux questions, bienvenue parmi les auteurs en germe.
> Votre projet réclame de l'attention et du temps. Devant la page blanche, il vous faut renoncer à la facilité de repousser au lendemain l'écriture de votre texte, vous décourager devant le travail qu'il réclame. Vous êtes votre plus grand ennemi. La réalisation d'un livre demande de l'humilité, avancer pas à pas, même si l'on n'est pas sûr du résultat. Vous seul êtes capable de franchir toutes les étapes jusqu'au mot 'fin'. (14)

Just like Rilke, Hache points to the importance of self-knowledge. She asks her readers if they are prepared to suffer in order to fulfill their dreams. Put differently, she asks them to become martyrs of the art of writing.

4.3.4. Resisting Local Representations in favor of emancipatory politics

Finally, the French handbooks adapt the U.S. model by introducing a local problem: the oppressive effects of the image of the author-genius as is it is promoted in French education. Handbooks discuss

the French school system and the representation of the author as genius promoted there. In schools, these texts argue, French authors are put on a pedestal. As a result, many beginners feel insecure when starting out. On the one hand, they believe that what they are doing is pretentious. They feel that by taking up the pen, they automatically situate themselves in the tradition of giants such as Hugo, Balzac, Baudelaire and Rimbaud. As Marianne Jaeglé points out: "Tu doutes de toi, encore et toujours. As-tu le droit d'écrire? En prenant le stylo, tu as le sentiment d'accomplir un acte d'une audace et d'une arrogance inouïes; ce faisant, tu oses te comparer à ceux que tu admires tant, toi qui ne leur arrives pas à la cheville" (54). On the other hand, when beginners encounter problems on the creative level (e.g. *writer's block*), they believe this is abnormal. According to the handbook authors, this is due to the fact that French education never pays attention to the ways in which these famous writers had to struggle and labor, and instead, makes it look like individuals such as Hugo, Balzac and Proust wrote spontaneously. As a consequence, beginners see their own hesitations and difficulties as signs of their complete inadequacy.

French how-to-write handbooks attempt to battle the oppressive effects of this notion of the author genius as presented in schools by including quotes in which "grands auteurs" like Flaubert and Proust express self-doubt and express their faith in "hard work" rather than in talent and genius. They also remind the reader of the lack of success and recognition of these canonical figures during their early career (for instance Proust). In this way, handbooks dismiss the idea of "being a writer" and suggest focusing on the work in progress instead ("l'être-écrivain n'existe pas. Il n'y a que le processus d'écriture qui compte" (Jaeglé: 52)). Ultimately, they argue that there is no difference between amateur writers and these canonical writers ("tu realises qu'après tout, un écrivain professionnel n'est rien d'autre qu'un amateur qui n'a pas renoncé" (Jaeglé: 207)), except for the fact that the professionals have persisted and done the work necessary to become the figures that we know them to be.

The how-to-write handbooks not only debunk the national image of the writer-genius, but also the representation of the writer as *jeune littérateur* as promoted in the local *conseils* tradition (see 2.2.). Indeed, almost all of the older advice texts mentioned in chapter two addressed young male readers: Baudelaire spoke to a *jeune littérateur*, Remy de Gourmont to a *jeune écrivain* and Rilke to a *jeune poète*. By contrast, contemporary how-to-write books cater to a somewhat different audience. This can be seen in different passages in which the how-to-write authors describe their readers' experiences, as for example, in Brigit Hache's warning: "Ne croyez pas ceux (les bonnes âmes) qui vous rappellent votre âge (répondez-leur que *Jules et Jim* a été écrit par un 'jeune' auteur de soixante-quatorze ans!) ou votre parcours scolaire chaotique (tout s'apprend)" (16). On a similar note, Gérard Raynal describes: "Vous bouillez de jalousie à la vue d'un auteur plus jeune que vous, et déjà invité sur les plateaux télé" (17). Additionally, the French how-to-write books also appear to conceive of the

reader as a female. For instance, when exposing the challenges in finding time to write, Jaeglé characterizes the writer's experience as follows: "Dans un monde idéal, tu aurais toute latitude pour te consacrer à l'écriture […] La réalité est autre: tu dois gagner ta vie, tes enfants rivalisent de conneries pour attirer ton attention, et ton conjoint menace de divorcer si tu ne te rends pas plus disponible pour ta famille" (198). Even though Jaeglé could be speaking of a male writer, Jaeglé seems to conjure up the situation of women who have to combine demanding jobs and busy family and social lives. This representation is reinforced when she signals: "Tu devras lutter contre ceux qui pensent que ce n'est pas grave si tu t'interromps pour aller au ciné avec eux; ceux qui savent que tu es chez toi le mercredi après-midi […] ; ta mère qui ne comprend pas que tu renonces à l'accompagner dans une expédition shopping" (198).

The change of addressee that we witness in these French how-to-write texts brings us back to the American handbook model and its formulas. Indeed, it is clear that addressing an older and female audience presents a fundamental departure from what we find in local French literary advice traditions. I argue that this shift is inspired by the American handbooks' notion of *you can do it* (see 1.3.8.). As suggested in chapter one, this formula can be interpreted as expressing an emancipatory politics that professes a belief in the creative potential of all human beings. As critic Alexandria Peary notes, the American handbooks realize this democratic *you can do it* agenda in two ways (2014: 86). First, they offer writing advice to people who fall outside of regular writing instruction (the academic creative writing workshop) due to socio-economic, ethnic, gender-related and geographic factors. Second, instead of providing mere technical advice, they draw upon self-help discourse in order to help beginning writers overcome insecurity and anxiety: they explain that self-doubt is a natural part of every learning process; they contend that the ability and the eagerness to write are not the privilege of those who were lucky enough to get a higher education, but are, to a certain extent, intrinsic to every person; they advise to stop seeking complete control over the writing process.

By emulating the political program of their American counterparts (as expressed for instance in the self-help slogan *you can do it*), the French how-to-write handbooks present a challenge to the local advice traditions and their representation of the author a young and masculine. Here again, the handbooks embody a tension between the universalist claims derived from the American model (anyone can write) and the concepts (*le jeune littérateur*) that have dominated the local advice genres.

4.4. Expanding and Partially Adapting How-to-Write Handbooks: Jean Guenot's *Écrire*

The six handbooks that I have discussed in the previous sections of this chapter draw strongly upon the American how-to-write format. Certainly, in their efforts to make this genre fit within the local

French context, they adapt aspects of it. Some handbooks move further away from the original design than others (this is especially the case for Marianne Jaeglé's *Écrire. De la page blanche à la publication*, due to its use of local avant-garde writing practices). Yet, overall, I argue that all these how-to-write handbooks remain quite faithful to the U.S. model. They rely strongly on the their hands-on design, its formulas and techniques, and its market-oriented (or pragmatist) framework. Moreover, they take up the self-help notion of *you can do it* and cater to a female and older public, thus opening up the local representation of the writer as *jeune littérateur*. Due to their strong resemblance to the American how-to-write handbook, I suggest that we consider these French handbooks as instances of what scholar Yvonne Griggs calls "classic adaptation" or "classic treatment".

In *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Adaptation Studies*, Griggs discusses literature to film adaptations and distinguishes between several adaptation strategies, going from "classic treatment" to "re-vision" and "radical rethink" (2016: 12). When tackling *Jane Eyre* (1847), she studies three film and television versions of this famous Charlotte Brontë book, all of which she argues to be cases of "classic treatment". Classic treatment, in Griggs's book, refers to those film and TV versions that are often classified as "heritage cinema" or "costume drama". These products typically use canonical works from the national literature of the past 150 years as their source material and pay much attention to period detail (both setting and costume). However, in spite of this preoccupation with period detail, Griggs finds that none of these films privileges the temporal positioning at the expense of its own cinematic agenda. Rather than accurate depictions of a historical moment, these films are above all variations on the romance story at the heart of *Jane Eyre*. As Griggs puts it: "Each of these screen adaptations becomes part of a narrative continuum, recycling and intertextualizing the romance at the core of *Jane Eyre* ad infinitum" (2016: 41). In a similar way, I think that the French how-to-write handbooks can be considered instances of "classic treatment". Not so much because they attempt to remain absolutely true to the American format — as we saw, the French books do introduce local elements —, but rather because they recycle the commercial-pragmatist poetics and the emancipatory politics that constitute the core of the American creative writing handbook. As I showed, this act of recycling happens foremost through the prism of formulas like *write what you know*, *show don't tell* and *you can do it*.

In this final section, I will take a closer look at Jean Guenot's handbook *Écrire. Guide pratique de l'écrivain* (1998 edition). This book presents techniques similar to the other French how-to-write handbooks and, like these other texts, it defends a pragmatist view of writing; its poetics are based on the idea that writing should be driven by the readers' reaction. However, at the same time, it goes further than the other texts in testing the limits of the how-to-write genre in at least three ways. First of all, as one can already see from the outside, Guenot's book is much more extensive (it counts more than 500 pages), offering a more thorough and in-depth approach than the typical how-to-write text.

Secondly, Guenot's writing style is more essayistic, ironic and personal than the more uniform discourse that shapes the other how-to-write texts. In fact, his tone is similar to that found in the parodic *conseils* books by Remy de Gourmont and Fernand Divoire (see 2.2.4.). Like these early twentieth century authors, Guenot offers detailed insight into the workings of the literary field, but also supplements these insights with irony (even though he does not go as far as Gourmont and Divoire – his *Écrire* is in no way flat out parody). Thirdly, his political agenda is very different from the *you can do it* idea found in other U.S. based how-to-write handbooks. Guenot draws more upon local advice traditions and their representation of the *jeune littérature*. For all these reasons, I suggest that *Écrire* is not so much an example of "classic treatment", but rather of what John Bryant calls "adaptive revision" or "partial adaptation" (2013: 50). In "Textual Identity and Adaptive Revision", Bryant speaks of "adaptive revision" when "an originating writer or adaptor appropriates a borrowed text and, by 'quoting' it, essentially revises it and therefore adapts it, though in an intertextual and necessarily partial rather than comprehensive way" (2013: 48). By drawing strongly on the imagery of local advice traditions, *Écrire* goes further than other how-to-write handbooks in appropriating the how-to-write format and provides an instance of "partial adaptation" (Guenot only borrows parts of the American material — especially the technical aspects) or of "adaptive revision" (more than other how-to-write handbooks, Guenot's adaptation is at once a revision).

4.4.1. Jean Guenot: a Career in Literary Advice

Jean Guenot was born in 1928 in Paris.[30] He was a teacher of English at secondary schools before becoming a professor of linguistics at the Sorbonne, and later a professor of information and communication sciences at Paris 7. A reknown Céline-connoisseur, Guenot has written two books on the author of *Voyage au bout de la nuit*: *Céline damné par l'écriture* (1973) and *Céline écrivain arrivé* (1993). In 1960, with Jacques d'Arribehaude, he completed what would be the last interview with Céline. Additionally, he developed a method for learning languages through audiovisual material from which others, Guenot claims, have benefited financially (1998: 14). In parallel to this academic work, he was the author of a series of detective novels under the pseudonym Albert Sigusse. Moreover, in 1973, he founded his own publishing house named Guenot éditions that publishes all his works.

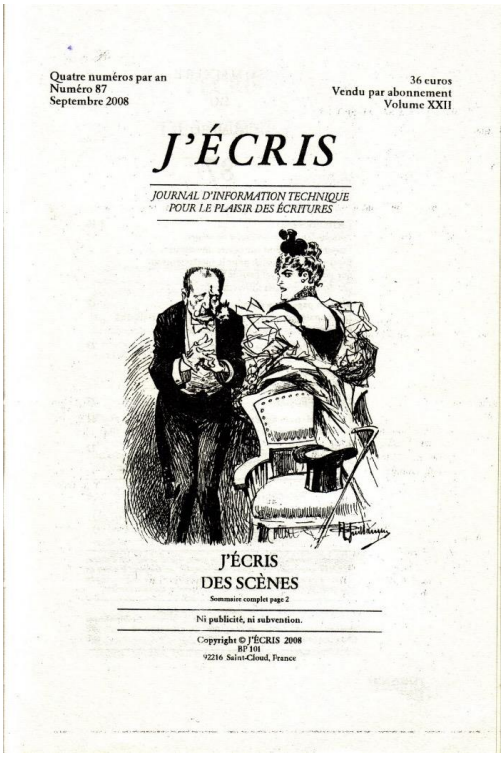
Guenot's first experience with writing instruction was as a professor of communication in the sixties. He instructed students to write pastiches of Guy de Maupassant's short stories. At this point, Guenot became aware of the divide between practitioners of literary writing outside of university walls on the one hand, and professors of literature who usually lack such a creative practice on the other.

[30] Most of the biographical information about Guenot comes from a radio-interview with Anne Brassié that can be found on Youtube and from an article on Guenot by blogger Patrick Besset. I include links to both sources in my bibliography.

During a radio interview with Anne Brassié, he stated: “En général les gens qui écrivent ne parlent pas de leur pratique, et les gens qui disent aux autres comment il faut pratiquer sont en général de faibles praticiens.” In the years that follow, Guenot writes *Écrire. Guide pratique de l’écrivain* (1977), the handbook that will later appear in two other editions (in 1983 and 1998) and he edits the journal *J’écris* subtitled *Journal d’information technique pour des écrivants pratiquants* (starting in 1987 and running until today). Between 1977 and 1991, he hosts a course on literary creation on Sorbonne Radio France.

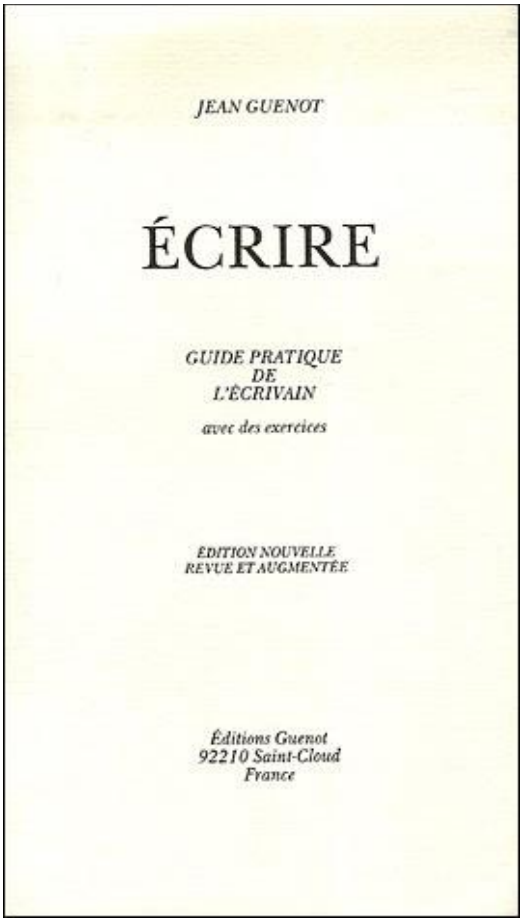
J’écris is a remarkable journal. It is fairly thin, with each issue counting thirty-two pages. The opening page of each issue draws attention the materials used to fabricate the journal: “Le journal est composé en baskerville et tiré sur vélin de chiffon, rarement utilisé de nos jours pour les livres de littérature. Il est livré non coupé, en format jésus à trois plis croisés, sur seize pages de dix-neuf centimètres sur vingt-huit”. Each copy comes in a white folder mentioning the year of publication and the volume number, as well as the address of the publisher/printer (Guenot’s home address). The opening page also lists the contributors to each issue, among whom l’abbé Aristide Bigusse, Armand de Saint-Gusse, Albert Sigusse, le colonel Alexandre Trigusse, Al Sig, Helmut von der Kuss, all pseudonyms of Jean Guénot. The issues contain a number of short articles on writing topics such as “Fabrique du scénario”, “Autoédition”, “Profession: écrivain. Entre redingotes et crinolines”, “Fabrique de la littérature érotique”, and “Céline: leçons”, some of which are attributed to Guenot and others to one of his pseudonyms. Also included are short stories attributed to such authors as Christina Bienenfeld, Brice Pelman, Albert Londres, some of whom also appear to be pseudonyms of Guenot. To sum up, the overall tone of the magazine is humoristic, but in spite of this, the advice that is provided seems to be useful and genuine.

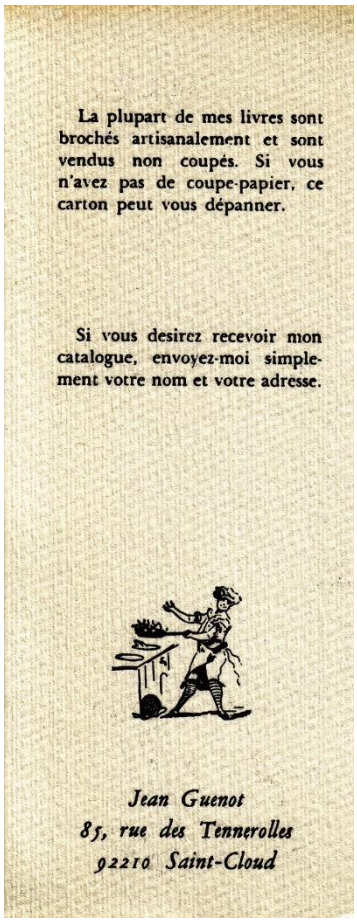
Cover to 2008 issue of J'écris



Likewise, *Écrire* is also a blend of humor and pedagogy. Over 500 pages long, the work is not merely impressive in scope, but also in the upscale material and care used for the print. The pages are uncut and the book comes with a carton bookmark, that says "La plupart de mes livres sont brochés artisanalement et sont vendus non coupés. Si vous n'avez pas de coupe-papier, ce carton peut vous dépanner". The bookmark depicts a small drawing of a female chef, standing in front of a heated stove while preparing a dish in a frying pan she holds in her hand. This image is reminiscent of Guenot's earlier collection of short stories *Comestibles* — stories related to food, presented as a menu —, in particular the preface of that book, entitled "Comment j'ai cuisiné ce livre". Like *J'écris*, the cover of *Écrire* is minimalist and evokes seriousness, refraining from using images in favor of sober black typography against a white background. The back cover to the 1998 edition presents a blurb stressing the value of the work: "Souvent imité, *Écrire*, dont la première édition a paru en 1977, reste le seul guide de l'écrivain qui aide véritablement à écrire et qui améliore les écritures de fiction tout autant que de documentaire".

Cover to 1998 edition of Écrire *and copy of its bookmark*





4.4.2. The Professional Writer: Between Self-expressive Writer and Pragmatic Author

In the next paragraphs, I will discuss *Écrire*'s different parts in more detail and pay attention to how Guenot's text relates to the French how-to-write books discussed above. I will focus on three elements of *Écrire* in particular: (1) Guenot's distinction between the author as a public figure and a writer-craftsman and his embrace of both authorial functions; (2) his description of the intensified commercialization of literature; (3) the novelty of his conception of the writer's craft — which is inspired mostly by the American literary and film tradition — in the French advice tradition. Finally, I will conclude with some remarks on Guenot's politics.

Écrire consists of four parts: l'écrivain et l'écriture; l'écrivain et l'édition; l'écrivain et les publics; l'écrivain et les techniques. The first three parts run approximately 100 pages and the last part 200 pages. "L'écrivain et l'écriture", the first part, starts from the observation which returns again and again in the book that there is an essential difference between author and writer ("L'auteur est l'habit de lumière; à l'intérieur, l'écrivain gratte dans une petite cage" (22)). The highly prestigious idea of authorship is what drives people towards writing in the first place ("tout écrivain est d'abord un auteur,

avant même d'écrire" (21)). It is at the origin of every writing project and thus essential to the creative process ("On souhaite devenir auteur puis on tente d'écrire" (22)), but at the same time, it conceals the fact that one has to go through a lot of hard work to become an author. Between the initial desire to obtain the symbolic high status of author and the result of this desire in the form of the published book lies a long process of literary labor that many aspiring writers have not considered ("Sachez bien que tout livre est une traversée solitaire" (24)). They only see the prestige of authorship that lies ahead, instilled in school ("dès le lycée, on fait disparaître le goûteur d'encres au profit de l'admirateur d'auteurs" (26)) and in various media, including writer's autobiographies: "À la vérité, Chateaubriand, Balzac, Flaubert […] sont des images de pouvoir sur l'imagination des autres. Ils font rêver qu'on est auteur en lisant simplement leur biographie. L'effort s'efface"(22).

In the first part of *Écrire*, Guenot unveils this hidden "effort", that is, he exposes the craft of writing, the creative and technical dimension without which the author can never exist: "On ne peut devenir écrivain qu'en traitant ce métier comme un artisanat ordinaire" (30). He tackles issues such as writing in different drafts ("couches minces ou couches épaisses" (49)), writing as "inspiration et transpiration" (49), the problematic issue of re-reading one's own texts ("de la lecture rédactionelle" (61)), the importance of reading aloud and training the ear ("l'oreille fait le style" (61)), the different types of writing block ("des pannes" (71)), writing for oneself or for an audience ("écriture pour soi ou pour les autres"), and the use of stylistic devices ("des embellissements" (97)). The level of detail that Guenot achieves with regard to these subjects outdoes the other how-to-write authors. An example of Guenot's eye for detail is his treatment of writing with a computer (in light of the typical "writing with pen or computer" discussion) in the second chapter of the 1998 edition. Here, Guenot shows himself an advocate of the use of computers, which allows the writer to develop drafts with the aid of software. These drafts are more than versions of the same fiction, they contain differing plot structures. As a result, the writer can compare the diverging story lines in order to determine which one works best.

Much of the vocabulary that Guenot uses to describe the aspects of craft recurs in other literary advice texts: *inspiration et transpiration*; *panne d'écriture*; *de la plume ou du clavier*; *écriture pour soi ou pour les autres*; *de l'écriture à couche épaisse*; *de l'écriture à jets minces*. At the same time, Guenot proposes many original metaphors, images and examples that have not found their way into other how-to-write handbooks. For instance, in the chapter "Écrire pour soi ou pour les autres" Guenot argues that every writer, when writing, is torn between "une dialectique du délire et du partage" (88). On the one hand, the vain author in all of us wants to make her authentic voice and original ideas heard, and perceives the use of technical devices to favor readability at the expense of self-expression ("le délire"). On the other hand, the craftsman in all of us longs to share her work and make it accessible by means of well-considered literary techniques ("le partage"). Guenot continues this line of thought

by distinguishing between three types of writers, using images that draw on the field of architecture. First, "pure" writers such as Julien Gracq, André Gide and Jean Giono write the books that they would have liked to read themselves. For them, there is no distinction between "écrire pour soi" and "écrire pour les autres". In architectural terms: "Ces écrivains sont dans la littérature pour y écrire des maisons qu'ils aimeront habiter. […] Spontané ou très travaillé, l'écrivain qui offre sa maison admet la présence de l'inconnu. Le lecteur, s'il passe par chez eux, pourra entrer" (91). Secondly, there are the writers "bâtisseurs HLM" (public housing appartement) who write to share with the largest public possible. In an ironic description reminiscent of Fernand Divoire and Remy de Gourmont (see 2.2.4.), Guenot states: "La condition pour mourir riche au terme d'une existence d'écrivain? Viser les plus médiocres. Travailler d'une plume sans aspérité, avec des complaisances […] surtout ne rien inventer!" (92) Finally, we encounter the "chieurs d'écume". This type of writer, of which Céline and late James Joyce are successful instances, has no house, "où qu'il aille, il est chez lui" (93). She pays only heed to her own voice, without considering questions of craft, readability and public. Guenot describes: "Jamais l'émotion est absente: la sienne. Partageable? Pas toujours" (93).

4.4.3. The Writer in a Strongly Commercial and Media-Driven Literary Field

"L'Écrivain et l'édition" and "L'Écrivain et les publics", *Écrire*'s second and third parts, mark the transition from the writer as craftsman to the writer as professional writer. They focus on the role of the writer within the large conglomerate of the publishing industry on the one hand and of the media on the other. "L'Écrivain et l'édition", part two, zooms in on the publishing process. It exposes how publishers judge manuscripts ("les vraies raisons de refus ou d'acceptation des manuscrits sont commerciales" (124)) and discusses different types of publishing houses ("minuscule, petit, moyen, gros"), the protection of manuscripts, book contracts, earnings, the crucial importance of the outlook of the printed book in terms of title, front and back cover, and typography. Finally, Guenot discusses the possibility of creating of one's own publishing house — which, he insists, is something very different from the highly deceptive "édition à compte d'auteur" (115) — and the issue of second jobs ("seconds métiers" (175)), a necessity for the vast majority of writers. Overall, "L'Écrivain et l'édition" presents a professional vision of authorship. Guenot insists on "la place infime de l'écrivain dans l'industrie du livre" (15), meaning first that from all the agents involved in the process, the writer earns the least: "Alors qu'il donne au produit fini l'essentiel de sa physionomie et la plupart de ses raisons d'achat, l'écrivain perçoit le pourcentage le plus faible du prix public" (15). Secondly, it means that the production is in the hands of people other than the writer:

> Toute entreprise d'édition opère des choix sur les orientations des contenus, les maquettes, les collections et leurs développements, la fixation du prix public, le montant des tirages, les mises en place à la vente, les modes de diffusion et les images des produits. Généralement, l'écrivain ne pèse sur aucune de ces décisions, qui le concernent pourtant. (15)

The writer, Guenot contends, is not an individual craftsman who creates, produces, and sells her works in isolation. Neither does she succeed by mere chance and talent only. Although the writing process is a solitary endeavor ("un plaisir déchirant, intolérable, nécessaire et solitaire" (15)), the fabrication and distribution is not like that at all. Consequently, the writer can best be portrayed as one of the agents in a large and complex system of cultural production. At best, she is a professional who understands the dynamics of the system she operates in and who can put this knowledge to her advantage.

If Guenot portrays the writer as a professional, it is because he understands the profound changes in the French publishing world in the second half of the twentieth century. In *Écrire*, we witness the emergence of a genuine industry, a system of cultural production that grows increasingly big, international and complex, that is wholly conceived in terms of numbers, that functions according to a media-driven logic, and in which the situation of the writer becomes increasingly precarious.[31] This industrial vision is especially manifest in the 1998 edition of *Écrire* where Guenot traces important changes in post-war French publishing:

> Rares sont les grandes maisons traditionnelles qui ne sont pas, désormais, fondues dans des groupes possédant également des journaux, des parts dans des chaînes privées et des agences de relations publiques influentes. L'évolution s'est faite entre la fin de la deuxième guerre mondiale et la dernière décennie du XXème siècle. (266)[32]

In the second half of the twentieth century, Guenot observes, the French publishing sector has fallen into the hands of big media groups. As a consequence, literary publishing has shifted from an autonomous (and often family-run) enterprise to one of the manifold branches of big European media companies. What is more, among the different branches (journalism, television, radio, software), it is all but the most lucrative one, hence the (comparatively) limited budget made available for literary publishing by the media groups: "C'est avec l'émergence de nouveaux produits de communication que se construit ensuite un véritable empire de dimensions européennes puis mondiales. […] Dès ce

[31] Gisèle Sapiro confirms Guenot's description of the changes in the French publishing sector. In *Profession? Écrivain*, she speaks of "le processus de rationalisation et de concentration éditoriale qui s'est accéléré dans les années 1970, accroissant les contraintes économiques qui pèsent sur l'édition littéraire" (10).

[32] Guenot is aware of small publishing houses that sometimes take risks to publish certain texts: "Depuis que le livre est pris dans le réseau bancaire des groupes de communication, seule la petite édition est capable de produire des écrivains français crédibles sur le marché international de la littérature" (285).

moment, le livre prend un statut de support annexe" (267). As a result of this integration of literature into a highly commercial circuit, publishers are no longer on the lookout for well-crafted prose or poetry, but for the next bestseller. In other words, according to Guenot, they do not pay attention to what is beautiful, but to what is sellable: "Le littéraire dit que c'est beau, le commercial demande combien on va en vendre" (123). This idea of the literary book as a highly commercial (and less a cultural or artistic) artefact is stressed in *Écrire*'s second part.

"L'Écrivain et les publics", part three, describes the media game in which the professional author participates. This game is played by a diverse set of agents, ranging from television ("il n'est pas possible de publier un auteur qui refuserait de passer devant les cameras" (222)) and radio stations, to literary prizes, book signings, and different forms of written criticism, among which Guenot pays particular attention to academic criticism, which often makes literary reputations in the long term and on an international level. Additionally, Guenot analyzes the status of the contemporary book as a fetish object to be collected and admired rather than as a text to be read ("le livre participe du sacré" (255)), as well as the author's role of media star ("l'auteur devient vedette" (256)). Today, Guenot insists, marketing is a key factor in the success of books and writers: "La décision de publier un livre spontané ne dépend plus de sa qualité littéraire mais de son image développable pour atteindre le marché" (505). All this reinforces the idea of the book as a commercial product (selected for print and shaped on the basis of commercial rather than aesthetic criteria) and of the author's posture as a marketing tool. That notion of the author's image as a result of strategy becomes clear, for instance, in an excerpt in which Guenot shares advice on radio-interviews:

> Confectionnez votre statue avant d'ouvrir la bouche. Le plus simple est de préparer à l'avance un bref couplet. Un machin anodin et charmeur dans le genre de votre quatrième de couverture. Grand romancier du cœur, vous adorez les femmes. Quand vous n'écrivez pas votre prochain livre, vous tombez amoureux. Jeune encore, on pourrait croire que vous courtisiez uniquement les tendrons? Erreur. Pour vous, rien de plus alléchant que la ménagère de moins de cinquante ans. Ou frisant la cinquantaine. Ou l'ayant déjà frisée. Plusieurs fois. Les centenaires aussi ? Pourquoi pas! (220-221)

Guenot's representation of the literary field is clearly different from that found in American-style how-to-write handbooks. Those texts largely refrain from making fun of the way in which the publishing industry functions. They present its way of operating in detail and frame book publication by a recognized publishing house as the beginners' ultimate goal. Guenot, by contrast, mocks the money-driven and media-obsessed industry and, in so doing, reminds us of the early twentieth century parodic *conseils* texts by Remy de Gourmont and Fernand Divoire (see 2.2.4.). Just as these authors, Guenot demonstrates a profound understanding of the literary field, but advises beginners against

taking this industry too seriously. What is more, as I will show below, he even suggests that writers are better off not participating in the commercial field, with all its constraints in terms of style and content, and recommends that they start their own publishing house. The difference between a text like Guenot's and the books by Gourmont and Divoire is one of irony and parody. Guenot's irony exploits the tension between providing quality advice on the one hand, and refuting the notion that this advice might be of any use to anyone on the other. Put differently, Guenot provides help to budding authors, while at the same time signaling that external help is of little use. Remy de Gourmont and Fernand Divoire's parodic *conseils* texts, on the other hand, increase the distance between what they are explicitly claiming and what they are implying. In contrast to Guenot, these texts claim that is easy to learn how to write. Thus, at the surface, they convey a similar message as other how-to-write handbooks (*you can do it*). Yet, they are in fact predicated on the implicit premise that genuine forms of literary writing cannot be taught. Thus, whereas Guenot adds a caveat to the notion that *you can do it*, Gourmont and Divoire ridicule this same notion.

4.4.4. Genre and the Elements of Fiction

"L'Écrivain et les techniques", *Écrire*'s most lengthy part, treats the *elements of fiction* on the one hand and literary genres on the other. In chapters twenty to twenty-three, Guenot discusses the difference between "histoire et récit" and the construction of characters, dialogues and narrative frameworks. In chapters twenty-four to thirty, he analyzes the characteristics and constraints of genres such as theatre, sketch, lyrics, film, television, comic book, children's book, biography, historical study, essay, thesis, school handbook, column and interview.

Like the other French handbooks discussed in this chapter, *Écrire*'s final part makes it clear that the American-based how-to-write format brings with it an approach to literary technique that strongly differs from writing methods propagated by the older French advice traditions. In chapter two of this dissertation, we distinguished between two forms of technical writing advice: on the one hand, rhetorical advice on style with at its core ideas of harmony, originality, variation, sobriety, good taste, and clarity, as found in the work of Antoine Albalat, and on the other hand, procedural advice that seeks to reinvent writing by coming up with new creative *procédés* that mostly operate on the level of language, thus pushing notions such as character, dialogue, plot and (psychological) realism to the background. Roussel, Ricardou and the Oulipo are part of this tendency. What we find in the final part of *Écrire* is something entirely different. Here, we witness a French advice author embracing the notions of dialogue, character, plot, realism, and genre. Therfore, it should come as no surprise that Guenot's frame of reference strongly differs from that of the avant-garde advice writers of his time. His models are the great nineteenth-century European novels (Balzac, Dickens, Hugo, Dumas,

Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Flaubert, Maupassant, Melville), cartoons (Tintin, Lucky Luke), detective stories (Raymond Chandler, le néo-polar français), American cinema and American genre-fiction ("la para-littérature américaine"). In these texts, genres and films, Guenot recognizes a technical expertise, a craftsmanship that is largely absent from the contemporary French novel. He writes: "S'il y a des peintres naïfs, il n'y a pas d'écrivain 'naïf'. Tout mensonge réussi est une fabrication élaborée. Le technique, dont les Français font si peu de cas lorsqu'ils commencent à écrire, est pourtant incontournable" (17).

This shift in frame of reference, which coincides with a more fundamental shift of perspective from literature as self-expression to literature as commerce and craft, runs through "L'Écrivain et les techniques". For instance, in the opening paragraphs of the chapter on character, we read: "En tant que pseudo personne crédible et inventée, le personnage a disparu pendant un demi-siècle du mobilier narratif des littératures qui plaçaient haut leurs ambitions. Il fut traité de regrettable survivance tel le breton parlé dans les campagnes" (314). Guenot looks back at the recent history of French literature, in particular the *nouveau roman*, and argues that the refutation of the notion of character is a mistake. He refers to the works of Propp, Lévi-Strauss, Dumézil, and Greimas on myths and concludes: "Tous mettent en évidence […] un trait commun: le personnage fait partie de l'invention spontanée des humains" (315). To find contemporary examples of well-made characters, Guenot refers to the comic book and film: "Durant la deuxième moitié du XXème siècle, le personnage demeure vivace grâce à la bande dessinée dès qu'elle sort de la sous-culture. Lucky Luke, les Dalton, Tintin, le capitaine Haddock constituent des références dans toutes les classes de consommateurs de fiction. Autre lieu de survie : la fiction filmée" (317).

In the chapter on plot, we encounter other examples of Guenot's frame of reference. Firstly, he promotes George Polti's *Les 36 situations dramatiques* (1895) and Eric Heath's *The Writer Inc.* (1941), two classic books of US screenwriting, and comments: "Je recommande la lecture de Polti à tous les écrivains qui ont de la peine à bâtir [un récit]. Ce n'est pas parfait mais c'est inhabituel pour des Français et parfois stimulant" (1977: 346). Secondly, he advocates the American practice of the so-called scenarist's "bible", which in his view can be one of two things. On the one hand, it is a document that lists rules concerning taboo themes and subjects (sex, drug abuse, violence).[33] On the other hand, it is an archival document containing detailed supplementary information on character, setting, plot, and that can be used to strengthen stories.[34] Guenot points out that the bible has a strong tradition in

[33] Such a set of moral guidelines recalls the Motion Picture Production Code, popularly known as the Hays Code, which was a document fixing the don'ts and the "be carefuls" in respect to the content that Hollywood films could show. It had an important impact on production in the film industry between 1930 and 1968.

[34] For an article on the use of bibles in screenwriting, see Macdonald, Ian. "Tablets of Stone or DNA? TV Series Bibles." *Journal of Screenwriting*. 9.1. (2018): 3–23.

Anglophone world, going back to American and British detective writers in the 1930's, and that today, the majority of US writers rely on a bible:

> Scénaristes et romanciers de tout ce qui pousse en serre aux États-Unis n'utilisent que des 'bibles'. […] Dans les usines à scenarios de séries pour la télévision, […] on se repasse l'ouvrage avant finition selon les feuilles de plan du producteur délégué. Peu de choses sortent directement du cœur. Tout est en provenance des catégories admises par la diffusion. Et plus d'auteur unique. Tout sort intégralement d'une production collective (332).

Additionally, Guenot holds a view of genre that moves away from both the French theorists and the French writers of his time. In the 1977 edition of *Écrire*, he writes:

> Les sémiologues français, Barthes, Greimas, Todorov, effectuent des analyses pertinentes et puissantes mais il semble qu'elles n'aident pas tellement l'écrivain qui bâtit son livre. Par exemple, l'essai de Todorov intitulé *Typologie du roman policier* traite superbement des règles du genre en oubliant simplement de mentionner qu'il est défini, comme tout genre littéraire, par la présence d'une clientèle rassemblée par le besoin de consommer le même type de menu. […] L'étiquette permet au lecteur potentiel d'avoir une idée, en tant que consommateur, de ce qu'il trouvera dans l'emballage. Plus un genre est consommé, plus les écrivains le pratiquent. (344)

For Guenot, genres are essentially linked to the literary marketplace. They are a means to structure the market and guide the consumer. They are a tool that the writer can use to her advantage by putting to use and playing around with its conventions, tricks and images. He summarizes: "On constate ici de plus la définition économique de ce qu'est un genre littéraire: c'est quand il se trouve une clientèle ciblée en face du produit" (308). Yet, Guenot is also critical of the quality of popular genre writing today, both in literature and film. He describes the average American detective as "souvent […] lisible, mais tiède et dépourvue d'interrogation idéologique" (334), the romance novel as "le hachis sentimental imprimé sous couverture en couleurs" (314), Hollywood pictures as "les fictions de commande provenant d'usines contrôlées par des groupes [de médias]" (314).

4.4.5. *Écrire*'s Individualist and Conservative Politics

In sum, *Écrire* depicts the writer as craftsman and professional. On the one hand, the writer should master techniques to write the best literary text possible. On the other hand, she should be knowledgeable about the commercial and media side of the book industry. Publishing, Guenot reminds us throughout, is above all a commercial affair. Importantly, *Écrire* does not advance commercial

success as the ultimate goal of writing, and this, for various reasons: commercial success is highly unpredictable and out of the individual writer's control; commercial success in literature is relative, only a small number of authors can truly live of their books, and the success often does not last; commercial success is not necessarily what brings satisfaction into the life of the true writer. Guenot advises against the idea of "écrire pour vivre" (505) because, ultimately, it is not rewarding for the literary craftsman. Instead he proposes: "Petit ou grand, tout écrivain travaille pour ce coup de feu. Pour ce plaisir enfin abouti. Petits ou grands, indiscernables les uns des autres, frères sans fraternité apparente, nous écrivons pour écrire" (508).

By drawing upon the American how-to-write format, *Écrire*, just like the other handbooks discussed in this chapter, differs in a number of respects from the books that we discussed in chapter two as part of the French advice traditions: the all-round, step-by-step approach ("de la page blanche à la publication") and the depiction of the writer as a professional involved in a strongly industrial and mediatized system of cultural production. Yet, *Écrire*'s most remarkable innovation perhaps lies in its conception of craft. Whereas the older French traditions associated craft either with the pursuit of an original style (rhetorical advice) or with an experimental exploitation of linguistic material (procedural advice), *Écrire* conceives it as a way of mastering the elements or building blocks of fiction on the one hand, and as a way of understanding the conventions of literary genres on the other. It can be argued that this view of craft gives the broader reading public a more central role in the process of writing. Whereas Valéry and Ricardou, for instance, also argue that writing is a matter of generating effects in the audience (rather than of self-expression), they did not seek to produce those effects that would meet the public's expectations. Quite the contrary, Valéry was critical of what he considered to be the manipulative aspects of the novel, and Ricardou's intention was to destabilize rather than please the reader. Guenot's view of craft, on the other hand, meets the reading public halfway. Whereas it stays critical of blindly being guided by the public's taste and the rules of genre writing, it also endorses the potential of understanding genre conventions and exploiting the techniques for creating readable fiction. Not coincidentally, it relies on a very different literary frame of reference than its predecessors. This framework is composed of nineteenth century novels, Hollywood films, and narrative genres such as detective stories and comic books.

To finish this analysis of *Écrire*, I want to point to some additional issues concerning the politics of *Écrire*. As we mentioned, Guenot believes that people can learn to write: "En réalité, tout le monde peut écrire" (88). At the same time, he thinks that writing cannot be taught. It is a matter of autodidactism: "Écrire s'apprend d'un livre au suivant. Seul. En construisant des parcours" (193). Consequently, Guenot is not a partisan of *ateliers d'écriture*. On the one hand, he finds that they are just a way for governmental organizations to give writers a meagerly paid job without having to support their writing. Paying writers to be teachers is imaginable, paying writers to be writers is not.

On the other hand, he believes that, since most people participate in *ateliers d'écriture* in order to be published, they can only be disappointed. *Ateliers d'écriture*, Guenot argues, do not provide strategies for publication (which are futile in any case), nor can they provide the context for writing longer, publishable texts.[35]

Guenot's views on writing as an individual learning process are complemented by his views on publishing. In *Écrire*, he stresses the importance of a professional attitude vis-à-vis the current internationalized, big budget, mediatized publishing world. The beginner should understand the inner-workings of this commercial system and the role she is expected to play in it. Simultaneously, Guenot is very critical of the state of affairs in the publishing industry and observes that it standardizes literary production and leaves little space for good and deviant writing. Therefore, he thinks that the best solution, for those writers who care about their work, is to fund one's own publishing house, just like he himself did in the early seventies.[36]

Lastly, although Guenot seems to defend the idea that "tout le monde peut écrire", the extent of this all-inclusiveness can be questioned. Unlike the other how-to-write handbooks, *Écrire* envisions a young, white, male reader, "le jeune littérateur". This becomes apparent in the discourse. Guenot refers to the community of writers as "frères sans fraternité apparente" (508), he describes book fairs, especially with regard to the signing sessions, as "l'endroit où on se lorgne mutuellement la grosseur de bite" (261). Additionally, he makes sexist jokes throughout *Écrire*. He compares insecure authors asking others to read their manuscript to "la femme coquette qui ne fait pas son âge. Il [l'écrivain] ne cesse de poser des questions qui embarrassent et qui luit attirent des réponses de complaisance" (115), he advises the beginner to create a public image as an omnivorous ladies' man, courting women of all ages in spite of his own youthfulness: "Grand romancier du cœur, vous adorez les femmes. Quand vous n'écrivez pas votre prochain livre, vous tombez amoureux. Jeune encore, on pourrait croire que vois courtisiez uniquement les tendrons ? Erreur" (221). He explains the use of metaphor with a particularly sexist and racist example:

> En général, l'image à deux termes fonctionne par transfert de denrées. Olga, par exemple, n'est pas facile à dissuade. Donc vous écrirez: *Elle est assise sur ses certitudes comme une douairière sur un coussin*. Bien confortablement . Pas moyen de la faire bouger. Voulant rajouter un peu de jubilation sexuelle, d'insolite et de tropical, vous allez écrire: *Elle est assise sur ses certitudes comme une négresse*

[35] Interestingly, Guenot's defense of writing as an autodidactic and solitary enterprise goes right against the Marxist discourse of some of the avant-garde literary advice writers of his time. Jean Ricardou, in particular, points to the impossibility of improving one's technique in isolation, and to the necessity of the *atelier d'écriture*. He conceives writing as a fundamentally social activity, a matter of hard and collective labor. See Ricardou, Jean. "Pluriel de l'écriture." *Texte-en-main*. 1.1. (1984): 19–29.

[36] Guenot has also published a handbook titled *J'écris et je m'édite* (2000) in which he explains in more detail the question of auto-publication.

sur une bite. C'est moins bien? *Elle est assise sur ses certitudes comme une tigresse sur une bite*. Les tigresses ne prennent pas le temps de s'asseoir? J'exagère. À cause de la bite? Si je disais qu'elle est *assise sur ses certitudes comme une Norvégienne sur une bite*, est-ce que ce serait mieux? Plus raide? Pourtant, de par le monde, il y a bien des négresses et bien des Norvégiennes assises sur une bite, tant en Afrique qu'en Norvège et vice versa. (98)

4.5. Conclusion

To conclude, French how-to-write books draw strongly on the American handbook model. As a result, they present a poetics that differs from the existing French advice traditions. Their vision of writing is inscribed in formulas like *write what you know*, *show don't tell*, *find your voice, kill your darlings*, and revolves around the use of *genre* and the different *building blocks of fiction* (plot, character, dialogue) thus promoting a realist (characters should be true to life), functionalist (every element should have a function in the narrative) and conventionalist (the writer should conform to the expectations of the market) way of writing. Certainly, aspects of this poetics are present in the older French advice traditions. For example, *find your own voice* is the main message carried out in Rilke's and Jacob's neo-romantic *conseils* (see 2.2.3.). Yet, the reliance on formulas that are repeated over and over, as well as the recourse to the *building blocks of fiction* to communicate this poetics are new. Most importantly, the poetics of how-to-write handbooks diverge from previous advice due to their advice to anticipate the expectations of the readers and the market. This advice is expressed clearly in the exhortation to "séduire le lecteur" on the one hand, and in the functionalist insistence on planning, sticking to the main narrative, doing away with stylistic experiment and *killing your darlings*. Indeed, what these how-to-write handbooks offer, just as their American counterparts, is a set of poetic rules and constraints with apparently universal validity. Regardless of the national or historical context in which they operate, they claim to share a set of skills and know-how that are universally applicable in view of capturing readers' attention.

At the same time, I also pointed out how the French how-to-write handbooks adapt the U.S. format by introducing a number of local elements: they refer to national literary and general culture; they make use of Oulipian writing practices; they conjure up neo-romantic representations of authorship; they introduce local issues related to the oppressive effects of the French system of education's representation of the author-genius. By infusing the American how-to-write model with these local elements, the French books thus appropriate the genre and re-interpret it in such a way that it "makes sense" to the audience using it. Some handbooks, I have argued, remain quite faithful to the original, limiting the interference of local traditions. Other books, by contrast, are more receptive to local influences and move further away from the U.S. model.

The how-to-write handbook that has gone the furthest in appropriating the American format is Jean Guenot's *Écrire*. As I have demonstrated, *Écrire* re-uses the format in a number of ways, from providing a step-by-step program to conveying reader-oriented writing advice by means of the devices of literary genre and the *elements of fiction*. However, *Écrire* also challenges the boundaries of the how-to-write genre and its universalist pretensions. First of all, Guenot expands the genre significantly by publishing a book that is over 500 pages long and by offering extensive descriptions of every aspect of the writing process. Secondly, more than the other French how-to-write handbooks, he creates a detailed portrait of the French publishing industry, anchoring his advice strongly within the local context of literary production. Thirdly, in contrast to the relatively uniform discourse of the other how-to-write authors, Guenot's writing style is essayistic, funny (to the point of resembling the parodic *conseils* texts by Remy de Gourmont and Fernand Divoire, see 2.2.4.) and less generic (or more personal). Lastly, Guenot supplements his writing advice with a rather conservative and individualist agenda that targets the solitary, young, male writer. Such a politics contrasts strongly with the emancipatory *you can do it* program promoted in American-style how-to-write handbooks. The latter texts seek to broaden the conventional representation of authorship and expand it to female and older writers.

Whereas the handbooks discussed in the first sections of this chapter present instances of classic adaptation or classic treatment — introducing some local elements, but essentially perpetuating the formula-based approach, poetics, and politics of the American creative writing handbook —, *Écrire* should be seen as a much stronger case of adaptive revision. By expanding the American format significantly, and by meshing its methods and techniques with local imagery, *Écrire* challenges the boundaries of the how-to-write genre. Indeed, one can truly question whether Jean Guenot's *Écrire* can still be said to participate in the how-to-write format: using the term "format" in relation to *Écrire* would reduce the personal and local character of this book significantly. In the next chapters, I will analyze books that, like Guenot's *Écrire*, increasingly move away from the generic conventions typical for the American how-to-write format. Certainly, these contemporary advice texts draw on aspects of this U.S. based-genre. Yet, they are in no way straightforward how-to-write handbooks. Indeed, by drawing on the local writing practices, representations and genres discussed in chapters two and three of this dissertation, these contemporary texts move towards realms of advice that are more personal, more politically aware and more historically self-conscious.

5. Détournement: François Bon's *Atelier d'écriture*

5.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on François Bon's *atelier d'écriture* handbooks *Tous les mots sont adultes* (2000; second edition 2005) and *Outils du roman. Le Creative Writing à l'Américain* (2016). Since he began providing *ateliers d'écriture* in the early nineties, writer François Bon has become the *atelier d'écriture*'s most important spokesman and theoretician. His handbooks offer the most detailed demonstration of an *atelier d'écriture*'s way of working. In the framework of this dissertation, they are especially relevant because they embody the encounter between the French *atelier d'écriture* tradition and the commercial and formulaic American how-to-write handbooks. *Tous les mots sont adultes*, Bon's first handbook, is fully grounded in French literary traditions. It draws in the first place on George Perec's writings on memory, place and everyday life, as well as on the Oulipian technique of *écriture à contraintes*. On the other hand, Bon's *Outils du roman* (originally titled *A Creative Writing No-Guide* and published under the pseudonym Malt Olbren) attempts to bring together the *atelier d'écriture* tradition and American creative writing. As Bon writes: "J'avais voulu seulement orienter ma pratique des ateliers d'écriture vers les formes américaines — littérature et démarche pour laquelle j'ai tant de respect — de narration Romanesque, et son développement" (2016: 9).

In *Outils du roman*, Bon practices textual manipulations that can best be described as instances of *détournement* of American how-to-write handbooks formulas. Here, my understanding of *détournement* is similar to Debord's and Wolman's definition of deceptive *détournement* as "celui dont un élément significatif en soi fait l'objet; élément qui tirera du nouveau rapprochement une portée différente" (1956). It signals a text's relocation from one context to another in a strategic attempt to subvert its meaning. As I will show, François Bon is critical of what he considers to be the predictable and commercial U.S. how-to-write handbook tradition. Yet, he exploits that tradition's potential: he appropriates and re-uses the handbooks' famous formulas in order to extract craft techniques that are unusual in the French literary tradition.

5.2. Atelier d'écriture Tradition

5.2.1. From May '68 to Master de Création Littéraire

The *atelier d'écriture* is a workshop (or a series of workshops) in which a facilitator (usually called *animateur*) lets a group of people (typically called *écrivants*) write. An *atelier d'écriture* typically runs through four stages (see 3.3.3.). First, the facilitator gives a writing assignment (*consigne*). This exercise is usually based on a literary text by a known writer (the stimulus text). In the following stage, the participants complete the assignment. This takes place within a clearly delineated time frame (for

instance ten minutes) and with the aid of imposed formal and thematic constraints (*contraintes*). Following the Oulipo, the *atelier d'écriture* is founded on the idea that a clear-cut framework (temporal, thematic, formal) stimulates creativity. In the following stage, the participants' texts are read out loud and discussed by the facilitator and the other writers. In the final phase, participants can rewrite their texts.

The first *ateliers d'écriture* in France appear at the end of the sixties. Histories of the *atelier d'écriture,* like Isabelle Rossignol's *L'Invention des ateliers d'écriture en France* (1996), explain that, in the aftermath of the events of May 1968, two different and unrelated initiatives saw the light of day simultaneously. At the Université d'Aix-en-Provence, young female academics like Anne Roche, Nicole Voltz and Andrée Guiguet (the "groupe d'Aix") attempted to reform the instruction of literature by making students read contemporary literary texts (by authors like Bataille, Louis-René des Forêts, Michel Leiris and Jacques Roubaud) and by making them write during a "Cours de création poétique" (Rossignol: 54). Additionally, Élisabeth Bing, founder of the later association Les Ateliers d'écriture Élisabeth Bing (1981), started to provide *ateliers d'écriture* to an audience of children in a therapeutic context (an experience which she recounts in the *atelier d'écriture* classic *Et je nageai jusqu'à la page* (1976)). In the 1970's, various groups in France start to experiment with *ateliers d'écriture*: *nouveau roman* theoretician Jean Ricardou and professor of literature Claudette Oriol-Boyer organized theory-oriented *ateliers d'écriture*; the organization CICLOP (Centre Interculturel de Communication, Langues et Orientations Pédagogiques, founded in 1975) offered therapeutic *ateliers d'écriture* based on Carl Rogers's psychological theories; the GFEN's poetry section (Group Français d'Éducation Nouvelle), situated in Toulouse and founded in 1972 by the poet Michel Cosem, operated under the banner "Tous Capables" and considered *ateliers d'écriture* as collective research seminars in support of social struggle and emancipation. All these groups participated in the *atelier d'écriture's* initial phase of experiment. They put into practice ideas that resonated with the events of May 1968. They were founded by a number of highly engaged individuals who operated somewhat outside of the established educational structures and were looking for a new pedagogical model.

In the eighties, the *ateliers d'écriture* lost some of the May 1968-inspired political aspirations and became institutionalized: they became integrated in a large number of social-cultural programs (in prisons, hospitals, psychiatric wards, schools) as part of a politics of culture (Dubois: 1999); they attracted the interest of commercial companies that were looking to improve their employees' communicative skills; new organizations, like *soixante-huitard* Alain André's Aleph Écriture, that highly valued a professional all-round attitude towards writing came into being. Sociologist Frédéric Chateigner speaks of an institutional market of *ateliers d'écriture* (2007: 33) in which the financial stakes become more prominent (see 3.2.).

In the next two decades, the *ateliers d'écriture* slowly gained a foothold in the French educational program, both at high school and university levels. In 1994, under the impulse of Anne Roche and her collaborators, the Université Aix-Marseille III created the first university-level training program for *atelier d'écriture* facilitators. More importantly, at the turn of the century, socialist minister of Education and Culture Jacques Lang took several initiatives to give cultural practices a more prominent place in society. He particularly wished to increase the importance of culture in schools. One of the cultural practices that he supported was the *atelier d'écriture* (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2001: 26-27) Another important initiative was the introduction of the so-called "sujet d'invention" in 2001. This test, together with the "commentaire" and the "dissertation", is part of the French language tests that students have to pass to obtain their *baccalauréat* (the degree that gives access to higher education). Whereas the "commentaire" and "the dissertation" test the analytical skills of students (they are asked to write an essay), the *sujet d'invention* allows students to practice narrative forms of writing. It emphasizes the rhetorical principles of amplification and transposition: the objective is for students to imitate the style of a known author in stories of their own creation (amplification) or for them to respect the narrative, while adapting another element of the text, like the point of view or the style (transposition). In any case, the introduction of the "sujet d'invention" generated much discussion with *atelier d'écriture* facilitators.[37] Some perceived it as a long awaited recognition of their work. Others, as we will see below, criticized the way in which this test is ultimately implemented. The most frequently heard criticism is that the "sujet d'invention" is a superficial exercise that consists in imitating outdated literary models without paying any attention to contemporary writers or fostering a reflection on the role of literature and writing in the present. The "sujet d'invention" is a meager exercise in style that does not incite students to relate to literature in a profound and critical way.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, it appears that the *atelier d'écriture*'s role in the university is more prominent. In a study of university programs of 2010-2011, Chateigner could still argue that *ateliers d'écriture* played a marginal role within the university (2013: 105-120). Things seem to have changed since. First of all, several universities offer Master programs in Création littéraire.[38] In 2012, the first Master de Création littéraire was created at Université du Havre. Since then, a number of French universities have set up similar Master programs, notably the Université Jean Jaurès Toulouse (2012), the Université Paris 8 (2013), the Université de Cergy-Pontoise (2015) and the Université Lumière Lyon 2 (2017). As of 2012, students can also do a PhD in the field of *Pratique et*

[37] For example, on the literary website *Remue.net* there is an entire folder dedicated to this discussion. See *https://remue.net/atel/INV01global.html*.

[38] Originally, these Master-programs operated under different names, but today it seems that the term Création littéraire is becoming the standard to refer to these programs. This term comes from Québec where *ateliers d'écriture* have been integrated in universities since the end of the sixties.

théorie de la création littéraire at the Université d'Aix-Marseille. Further, many bachelor-programs in universities and in Arts schools contain optional courses in Création littéraire. Notably, the Master-programs not only offer writing workshops, they also dedicate a significant part of their curriculum to other literary activities, like publishing and facilitating *ateliers d'écriture*. For instance, students are asked to do an internship in a publishing house. In a recent article published in Sapiro and Rabot's *Profession? Écrivain* (2017), Madeline Bedecarré foresees that university programs in Création littéraire might play an increasingly important part in the French literary field:

> Ces programmes pourraient ainsi, comme aux États-Unis, faire à terme de l'université et des acteur-e-s un maillon important de la chaîne du livre, qui assure une partie du processus éditorial en amont. Une des raisons de la méfiance que ces formations aux techniques d'écriture suscitent en France tient donc aux possibles transformations des conditions d'accès au champ littéraire, avec la perspective qu'un diplôme pourrait éventuellement constituer un droit d'entrée au métier d'écrivain et surtout que les enseignant-e-s pourraient de ce fait devenir de nouveaux prétendants à la fonction de *gatekeeper*, au rôle de découvreur, et par conséquent, au pouvoir de consécration. (210)

Bedecarré contends that Création littéraire programs can increasingly play the role of gatekeeper. On a broader level, it is undeniable that the perception of *ateliers d'écriture* is currently shifting. Big publishers such as Éditions Gallimard and big literary magazines like *La Nouvelle Revue Française* have recently organized *ateliers d'écriture* to discover and guide new talents. In 2016, Prix Goncourt laureate Leila Slimani admitted to having participated in the Éditions Gallimard workshops, thereby contributing to the popularity of these workshops (Bedecarré: 193).

5.2.2. Freinet and the Oulipo as Framework

In *L'invention des ateliers d'écriture en France* (1996) Isabelle Rossignol traces what she sees as "les grandes sources et influences" (21) of the early *ateliers d'écriture* groups. She refers to the American creative writing workshop, "même s'il est clair que les expériences françaises se sont considérablement démarquées du cousin américain" (21). She points to the *nouveau roman*, structuralism (especially Roland Barthes and Claude Lévi-Strauss), and the Oulipo. With regard to the Oulipian practice of *écriture à contraintes*, she observes: "L'OuLiPo a donc pleinement participé à l'histoire des ateliers. Plus que les avoir influencés, il les a guidés et leur a ouvert une voie directement exploitable" (44). According to Rossignol, *écriture à contraintes* is the technique that made the *ateliers d'écriture* possible in the first place and that gave them their specific character.

In addition, she also refers to the Freinet movement. This school of thought of school reformers is based on the writings of Célestin Freinet. From the interwar period onwards, this teacher

introduced new pedagogical ideas in magazines like *L'École émancipée*. Together with his wife Élise, he put these ideas into practice in the elementary school of the small village of Saint-Paul-de-Vence. During his lessons, Freinet mostly paid attention to the self-expressive, communicative and creative capacities of his pupils, as well as their collective involvement. These skills are taught through different tasks, most famously, through the assignment to create a school newspaper together. The pupils were expected to contribute articles, but they were free to write about any subject that was of interest to them. In Freinet's opinion, this freedom motivated and engaged them. Moreover, the pupils, with the help of their teacher, were responsible for printing the newspaper. The printing press plays a crucial role in Freinet's classroom.

An early *atelier d'écriture* group that especially takes its cue from Freinet is the GFEN's poetry section. As mentioned, in 1972, the poet Michel Cosem founded the *secteur poésie* in Toulouse. The slogan of this section was "Tous capables", and the facilitators involved (like Odette and Michel Neumayer) considered the *ateliers d'écriture* as a tool to be used in social-political struggle. For them, the *atelier d'écriture* was a place to put alternative forms of learning into practice, to give access to the practice of writing to people that were traditionally excluded from it, and to turn them into critical readers that can debunk the oppressing discourse of the dominant classes. In practice, the GFEN does not offer a single and clear-cut approach. Every *atelier* is seen as a research seminar in which one particular theme can be explored.[39]

Célestin Freinet and his pupils around the printing press. Photograph taken from the website of Freinet movement.

[39] For instance, on the GFEN's website we find themes like "création et champ social" or "les imagin'actions educ'actives". See *http://www.gfen.asso.fr/fr/les_activites_du_secteur_ecriture_poesie*.

5.2.3. Training Readers: Practicing A Politics of Autonomy

In terms of objectives, the French *atelier d'écriture* mingles the literary and the political. In contrast to the American creative workshop, its literary dimension resides not in its vocation to train professional writers. It rather strives to make audiences familiar with contemporary forms of writing (for instance by Leiris and Roubaud) and to teach people how to become better readers. The underlying premise here is that becoming a writer is something that people can only do by themselves. Somewhat reminiscent of Rilke's insistence on the importance of self-knowledge (see 2.2.3.), the *atelier d'écriture* tradition typically contends that becoming a writer is connected to the individual's acquiring an insight into her own literary DNA, that is, her own thematic concerns and stylistic inclinations. To achieve such an insight into the literary self, the *atelier d'écriture* argues that it is essential that beginners become familiar with existing forms of writing. They should learn how to read literary texts (especially by contemporary authors) and how to distill elements from these texts to nourish their own literary projects. This is where the *atelier d'écriture* has a role to play: by showing how to uncover the thematic stakes and the writing techniques present in a range of sample-texts, the *atelier d'écriture* provides aspiring writers with a set of skills that enables them to construct their own authorial identity. In other words, instead of training professional writers who know how to write a commercially successful book, the *atelier d'écriture* seeks to construct readers who are capable to draw on recent literary history in order to advance their own literary projects.

The political dimension of the *atelier d'écriture* is closely related to that idea of empowerment. Teaching people how to become good readers amounts to strengthening their autonomy. Experienced readers are able to construct their own techniques and formulas by drawing upon literary tradition and do not depend the advice of a guru-figure in order to write. In this way, the *atelier d'écriture*'s reader-oriented approach constitutes an attempt to open up the field of literature to those who would otherwise have difficulties accessing it. What is more, teaching people how to read well contributes to the development of their critical faculties. In other words, the autonomy at stake in the *atelier d'écriture* is not only an autonomy as a writer, but, perhaps in the first place, an autonomy as a critical citizen. The politics of the *atelier d'écriture* also transpires through its being conceived as an opportunity to tackle important societal issues. For some facilitators (like those of the GFEN), the workshop becomes a laboratory to investigate the problems facing society through literary means. It becomes a site of discovery, discussion and political resistance.

Lastly, it should be noted that the technique of *écriture à contraintes* plays a major role in all of this. When Rossignol remarks that "plus que avoir influencés [les ateliers d'écriture], [l'Oulipo] les a guidés et leur a ouvert une voie directement exploitable", I argue that she is mainly thinking of the importance of *écriture à contraintes* for the French workshops. In the framework of the *atelier*

d'écriture, *écriture à contraintes* is the didactic tool par excellence that enables the transfer of know-how and skills. As mentioned (see 3.3.3.), *atelier d'écriture* facilitators draw on stimulus texts in order to convey particular techniques. They present a text, for instance by Perec, Artaud or Duras, and they ask the workshop participants to re-use and experiment with the technique that lies at the basis of that text. In order to transform it into a writing exercise, facilitators articulate it as a constraint or a set of constraints that the participants should follow when writing. In the next sections of this chapter (see 5.4.), I will show in detail how this translation from technique-based stimulus texts to constraint-driven exercises happens in *atelier d'écriture* handbooks. I will do so by discussing François Bon's approach as he exposes it in the landmark *atelier d'écriture* handbook *Tous les mots sont adultes*. First, however, I will provide a general overview of Bon's *atelier d'écriture* poetics, based on a reading of Bon's collection of essays *Apprendre l'invention* (2012). This book, I contend, offers one of the most detailed expositions of the French *atelier d'écriture* approach, that is, a description of its intended audiences, its objectives and its methods.

5.3. Apprendre l'invention: François Bon's Poetics

5.3.1. Biography

François Bon (born in Luçon in 1953) is currently the *atelier d'écriture*'s most prominent advocate and practitioner. In the nineties, he started providing *ateliers d'écritures*, usually at the invitation of hosting institutions, and he continues to do so today. Over the course of twenty-five years, he has theorized his work as a facilitator. Bon was born in the Vendée department as the son of a garage mechanic and a French teacher. At university, he studied mechanical engineering, following in his father's rather than his mother's footsteps. He worked in the aerospace industry for several years, both in France and abroad (USSR and India). After having lived through different traumatic experiences in this industrial environment, Bon changed his path. In 1980, he registered as a philosophy student at the Université Paris 8 and took classes with, among others, Deleuze and Lyotard. He considered pursuing a doctorate on Adorno under the supervision of the latter, but the publication and success of his first novel, *Sortie d'usine* (1982), diverted him from this path. The novel, published by Jérôme Lindon's Éditions de Minuit, was inspired by the grim events Bon witnessed back at the factory. It inaugurated Bon's literary career, in particular, his reception as a member of a new generation of writers consisting of Pierre Michon, Pierre Bergougnioux, Jean Echenoz, Leslie Kaplan, etc. These writers moved away from the strongly language-based texts of the *nouveaux romanciers* in favour of writing practices that attempted to reconnect with the surrounding world. Like their predecessors, these writers were conscious of the complexity of the relationship of language to the world, but this did not deter them to attempt to represent that very world.

In the eighties and early nineties, Bon's main activity was novelistic. He was published by the Éditions de Minuit and, after an altercation with Jérôme Lindon over the text *L'Enterrement*, by Gérard Bobillier's leftist Éditions Verdier, two of France's most esteemed publishing houses. The nineties were pivotal in Bon's career. First, he began to explore the boundaries of literary genres, in particular the novel. After having published texts qualified as novels until the mid-nineties, Bon writes, in the text *Impatience* (1998): "Non, plus de roman jamais, mais cueillir à la croûte dure ces éclats qui débordent et qui résistent." In spite of this statement, Bon reclaimed the label 'novel' with texts such as *Daewoo* (2004) and *Tumulte* (2006). However, these texts are a far cry from the conventional novel. *Daewoo* is a mix of interviews, (fictionalized) sociological research, theatre fragments and newspaper clippings. It is accompanied by a virtual folder on Bon's website *Tierslivre.net* that contains images, further press documents, notes and comments on the creation of the work. *Tumulte* is the book-manifestation of an eponymous web-based project. This was a one-year project in which Bon wrote online texts daily. The texts were very heterogeneous (mirroring Bon's attempts to confront the tumult of the everyday with language), integrated links and images, and the webpage contained comment sections. While the printed book, which led to Bon's decision to delete the website *tumult.net*, is not interactive and multimodal, it hardly resembles a conventional novel.

Secondly, in 1997, Bon created his first personal website (only the 800th French website). This venture into the digital word would be followed by other initiatives, notably the creation of the online literary magazine *remue.net* (2000) and of Bon's personal website *Tierslivre.net* (2005). In recent years, that site has become his dominant platform. It contains many subsections, among which: a diary; a literary magazine (that previously appeared on the website *nerval.fr*) that collects texts by (young) authors, mostly fragments of novels but also other genres (non-fiction, noir and fantasy, translations, texts by francophone authors, photographs); a space devoted to Bon's translations, principally of H. P. Lovecraft's works (previously on the website *The Lovecraft Monument*), but also of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, Melville's "Bartleby", Kenneth Goldsmith's *Uncreative Writing*; a personal laboratory where he experiments with different forms of narrative writing, discusses his older publications, reflects on literature in digital times (which has resulted in the book of essays *Après le livre*); a section on *ateliers d'écriture* containing both theoretical reflection and online workshops; a section in which Bon comments on new and classic literary texts, photography, art, music, and webpages/blogs; a place in which he annotates his literary residencies, for instance at the University of Louvain-la-Neuve or at an industrial site in Fos-sur-Mer, a village in the South of France.

Thirdly, Bon has facilitated *ateliers d'écriture* upon the invitation of a range of host institutions since 1992. These workshops were originally meant as punctual events, brief encounters with different groups of participants, but over time, Bon started favoring longer cycles, which allowed him to elaborate and theorize his methods. Bon develops his practices through multiple media. In addition to

giving live *ateliers d'écriture*, he has written three books on the subject: *Apprendre l'invention*, a collection of essays, and two books that mainly contain exercises – *Tous les mots sont adultes* and *The Creative Writing No-Guide* – and he also provides online writing workshops.

In the first two decades of the 21st century, Bon continued the experiments started in the nineties. He kept on writing, being very active on the internet, and facilitating *ateliers d'écriture*. Important events in this period were first of all Bon's attempts to find new ways of publishing, first in the form of the creation of the online and collaborative publishing house Publie.net (2008), which he abandoned a few years later and which is currently run by a team led by Pierre Ménard (pseudonym of writer Philippe Diaz), and then with the creation of Tiers Livre Éditeur in 2016, the current outlet for many of his books, especially his translations of H. P. Lovecraft's texts. This shows Bon's dissatisfaction with publishing in present-day France. On multiple occasions, Bon has criticized the publishing world for sticking to outdated conventions (for instance with regard to what a novel should be) and for largely leaving out the authors when dividing the earnings of a book.

Another important event is Bon's appointment as professor of Création littéraire at the École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts Paris-Cergy (ENSAPC) in 2013. This appointment has profoundly influenced his *atelier d'écriture* practices. Before, he used to organize relatively short cycles of workshops (up to ten sessions) for diverse audiences that did not necessarily have the ambition to write in the first place. The goal of these *ateliers d'écriture* was to familiarize people who were at a remove from literature with the mechanisms and possibilities of reading and writing. If these individuals wanted to continue writing, they had to do so on their own. The conditions are different in an art school. There, Bon caters to an audience that is eager to write or that at least seeks to work with language in an artistic way, which fosters the development of extensive cycles of workshops (one or two years) and leaves space for individual guidance of students. As a result, Bon's practices now lean towards more elaborate narrative forms and profound engagements with notions like character, dialogue and plot.

5.3.2. Background

In *Apprendre l'invention* (Publie.net 2011) we find an extensive exposition of Bon's *atelier d'écriture* poetics. The book contains twenty-six essays by Bon written between 1994 and 2004 (plus more recent pre- and post-faces). The first essay, "Portrait par touches", bears witness to Bon's first *atelier d'écriture* experiences. "Comparaison (de ce qui ne saurait être comparé)", the last essay, compares two *ateliers d'écriture* — one in Tokyo, the other in Clermont-Ferrand — and focuses on the question of (urban) space in writing. Most of the essays have been published previously in magazines (*Contrepoints*, *Le Magazine littéraire*, *Encres de Loire*, *Théâtre(s) en Bretagne*, *Le Monde de l'éducation*)

or on *Tierslivre.net*. *Apprendre l'invention* traces the development of Bon's views and practices. It contains both the repetition and the gradual exploration of ideas. Additionally, it testifies to the context in which these ideas came to be. In particular, it evokes the resistance with which Bon's early experiments were met, notably in the public media, and the ambivalent stance of the French institutional and governmental apparatus vis-à-vis the *ateliers d'écriture*, especially regarding the financial and logistic support of the workshops and their place in national education. The context in which *Apprendre l'invention* emerges is characterized by five elements: (1) the reception of *ateliers d'écriture* in the media; (2) the introduction of the sujet d'invention in 2001, a test to assess students' creative writing skills, as a part of the French baccalauréat; (3) also in 2001, the proposal to create the Carrefour d'écritures, an expertise center to train *atelier d'écriture* facilitators and collect knowledge and material; (4) the organization of education in France and (5) the mediatization and standardization of the literary field.

Multiple essays in *Apprendre l'invention* attempt to set the vision of the *ateliers d'écriture* propagated in the media straight. According to Bon, the media paint a misleading picture, when journalists depict the workshops as therapeutic get-togethers or as writer's schools. They portray facilitators either as naïve individuals or as opportunists seeking to capitalize on the current writing boom. Additionally, they ask the same questions over and over again. Is writing a matter of talent? Are you training your students to become writers? Are you copying American creative writing? Do you have to be a writer to facilitate an *atelier d'écriture*? *Apprendre l'invention* wants to revise inaccurate portrayals and do away with the incessant questions once and for all.

As mentioned above, the *sujet d'invention* is one of three writing assignments (with the *commentaire* and the *dissertation*) that French students complete as part of their *épreuve anticipée de français* (EAF) or *bac de Français* at the end of the première générale or première technologique (the penultimate year of secondary school). Whereas the other tests entail exercises in argumentative writing, the *sujet d'invention* is a more open assignment. Exercises include writing a monologue, a dialogue, a letter or a fable. Students are supposed to know the constraints of each genre and to be capable to write within such a formal framework. The *sujet d'invention* was introduced at the turn of the twenty-first century, as a result of a preparatory study by literary sociologist Alain Viala and his research group. It was regarded by facilitators of *ateliers d'écriture* as a recognition of their work, a sign that *ateliers d'écriture* might receive more governmental support in the near future. At the time of its introduction, Bon and Viala discussed the test's implementation. They considered ways of grading, the (continued) training of *atelier d'écriture* facilitators, and the development of a proper methodology. They pondered the kind of writing that the *sujet d'invention* should prompt, the nature of the relation between the literary stimulus texts and the students' texts, and the ultimate value of the whole exercise. All in all, they saw the *sujet d'invention* as an opportunity to renew the role of

literature in education and, by extension, in society. They saw it as the moment to throw literature off its pedestal and show that it is an ongoing process in which many can be implicated and which has a crucial societal role to play. Most of all, they wanted to show that literature is indeed a work of invention. To Bon's disappointment, these considerations were not taken into account:

> On crée, par le biais de l'écriture d'invention, un territoire qui certes n'existait pas auparavant, mais qui risque de se faire le strict prolongement de ce avec quoi on comptait rompre. Fait irréversible et positif : la reconnaissance symbolique de l'écriture d'invention confère de toute façon un début de légitimité à une multiplicité de pratiques alternatives, toutes basées sur l'écriture créative. Mais il ne faudrait pas que ce qui massivement émerge des usages neufs, c'est ce très vieux fait de l'écriture ne se confrontant qu'à son corpus déjà figé, et mimant seulement l'invention en étendant à l'horizontale le corpus existant (2012: 232)

Around the time of the *sujet d'invention* debate, writer Patrick Souchon and national education representative Claude Ber pleaded for the creation of the Carrefour des écritures, an expertise center that would collect the writings of participants, that would theorize and categorize methods and techniques, that would construct a library of stimulus texts, that would host continued trainings, especially for advanced facilitators. At best, this would be both a physical and a virtual space. Bon was one of the people involved in conceiving the Carrefour des écritures. However, this project never came to fruition.

Apprendre l'invention criticizes various aspects of national education in France. On a general level, it puts into question the sharp divide between humanities and sciences in higher education, arguing that, for students enrolled in either of the two programs, this entails an impoverishment of their worldview — students of literature would benefit from scientific insights, and scientists should not be deprived of literary works. On a more specific level, it denounces the instruction of literature. In Bon's eyes, literary texts are introduced, both in secondary schools and universities, as fixed artifacts that seemingly fell from the sky without any labour preceding it. They are not presented as the result of hard work, practice, trial and error, but as touches of divine inspiration with which some rare, talented individuals (geniuses) are graced. Neither are they considered as the starting point for the students' own creative work — their language is not to be tampered with —, but they are instead displayed as masterpieces that ought to be passively admired. When Bon describes the *atelier d'écriture* methodology, he clearly adopts an opposite approach: "Ce n'est pas la valeur muséale établie du patrimoine littéraire, même moderne, qu'on cherche à rejoindre, mais le mouvement, bien sûr ouvert, par lequel ils ont sédimenté ou catalysé dans telle œuvre singulière" (2012: 332).

An additional point of Bon's criticism of literary instruction is the division of literary history in genre (poetry, prose, theater) and literary movements (classicism, romanticism, realism), as well the strong focus on authors and texts of the past. Bon finds that the recourse to genre and movement results in a self-contained portrait of literature. Texts, he claims, do not just respond to the literary conventions of a period. Above all, they are an individual's way of dealing with a particular aspect of reality. He writes: "La littérature ne s'invente pas en se considérant elle-même, mais par cette soumission aux conditions du monde" (2012: 293). In Bon's view, labels like poetry, romanticism and symbolism reveal less about Baudelaire than thinking of him as an individual seeking to express the complex experience of modernity and urbanization. Similarly, Nathalie Sarraute's association with the nouveau roman is less revelatory than regarding her texts as explorations of everyday language. In line with these views, Bon contends that it is more instructive to organize literary instruction according to thematic axes, like the representation of space or the exploration of language, than according to genres and literary movements. This, he believes, reveals more accurately what is truly at stake in writing, namely, investigating aspects of reality: "Si j'ai mûri, c'est en m'appuyant plus résolument sur une autre description de la littérature: d'après sa relation au réel, au mental, au statut de la voix ou de l'image plutôt que selon la division par genres ou par siècles, qui m'apparaît de plus en plus préjudiciable et obsolète" (2005: 8). For similar reasons, Bon argues that the strong focus on authors and texts of the past impedes the successful instruction of literature: the more remote the literary past, the more difficult it is to teach it, compared to the present or the recent past. Teaching Hugo or Zola demands more effort than teaching Artaud or Beckett.

Finally, *Apprendre l'invention* tackles issues regarding the literary field. Bon is very critical of the contemporary literary production. While he acknowledges that many good books are being published, he denounces the mediatization and subsequent standardization of the literary field. Only a small number of authors, whose writings hardly have any merit, are given a place in the spotlight. Bestselling novels, Bon observes, are highly romanticized and artificial fabrications that contain no elements of surprise or shock and that have nothing to do with the reality in which people live. They are political tools of distraction and subordination. Moreover, they diffuse similar perspectives over and over. Publishers are not looking for unconventional works, but for products that sell well. They prefer familiar voices, forms and ideologies, which generates a homogeneous literary production. Another criticism made by Bon is that authors earn too little. Among all the agents involved in the process of production, they are the smallest financial beneficiaries, which is an absurd situation, given that they are the instigators of the productive chain. This all led Bon to create the publishing house Tiers Livre Éditeur in 2016.

In sum, *Apprendre l'invention* must be considered against the background of the *atelier d'écriture*'s reception in the media, two (ultimately disappointing) initiatives to create institutional

space for the *ateliers d'écriture*, and the organization of national education, in particular the treatment of literature in this system. Bon makes public his conception of *ateliers d'écriture* so that this might have an impact on the ongoing debates. In the end, neither the media nor the educational apparatus took his suggestions to heart, which led him to see these efforts as mostly fruitless. Consequently, the publication of *Apprendre l'invention* in 2011 can be interpreted as an act of closure: not only does it provide a retrospective insight in the development of Bon's practices, it also marks the end of Bon's interventions in the public debate concerning the *ateliers d'écriture*.

5.3.3. Audience: Including Everyone (Except the Literature Department)

François Bon's *atelier d'écriture* addresses a whole range of audiences. First of all, it caters to people in precarious social circumstances. In the nineties especially, Bon ran many workshops for less privileged individuals, for instance the inhabitants of the desolate town of Lodève, teenagers in an abandoned neighborhood of Montpellier, youths in a detention center in Gradignan (a village close to Bordeaux). These experiences have resulted in a number of literary texts, such as *C'était toute une vie* (1995), *Phobos, les mal famés* (1995) and *Prison* (1998). Moreover, Bon has testified that these workshops have been pivotal for the development of his *atelier d'écriture*. Working in extreme circumstances allowed him to fine-tune his writing assignments and general approach. He states: "J'apprends plus, y compris sur la didactique de mes outils, si je les éprouve en situation plus radicale" (2012: 141).

Bon has facilitated workshops at all levels, that is, in primary schools, secondary schools, art schools and universities (including at the ENS Ulm). With regard to higher education, it is noteworthy that Bon prefers working in departments other than literature departments. He has regularly worked at Sciences Po Paris and treasures the memories he keeps of a two-year experience at the Université de Sciences Bordeaux 1. For him, university students who benefit the most from *ateliers d'écriture* are scientists, managers and engineers. Inversely, literature as a whole profits from these atypical voices. Bon states: "C'est dans les facs de sciences, dans les écoles de commerce, dans les IUT, qu'il faut introduire la littérature quand même, et c'est ceux-là qui peuvent déplacer aussi le champ littéraire" (2012: 412).

Bon cultivates a complex relationship vis-à-vis French literature departments. On the one hand, these departments have been reticent about welcoming him and his *ateliers d'écriture*. On the other hand, as I pointed out above, Bon is highly critical of the way the university teaches and studies literature. The division of literary history in genre (poetry, prose, theater) and movements (classicism, romanticism, realism), the chronological approach, the construction of the author's genius, the strong focus on authors of the past, all contribute, Bon argues, to the view of literature as an artefact of the

past. In his view, the French university pays no attention to literature as a process, and it fails to establish a connection between literature and present times. This notwithstanding, in the first decade of the new millennium, Bon has been active in various literature departments, especially outside of France. He has travelled abroad to facilitate workshops for literature or Création littéraire students at the Université Catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve, the Université de Montréal and the Université Laval.

Finally, Bon hosts trainings for actors and facilitators of *ateliers d'écriture*. He is particularly fond of collaborating with actors since they directly bring their body and voice into play: "Dès la page blanche, et le temps immobile et silencieux de l'écriture, c'est le corps et la voix que mentalement ils convoquent" (2005: 250). Bon considers the organization of *ateliers d'écritures* for other facilitators as a key task, given the growing interest in creative writing. In his view, this momentum should be put to the best use possible. It is essential that facilitators receive a good and continued training, and that expertise is gathered and shared. He writes: "Je ne connais pas de coin en France où le recours à des pratiques actives d'écriture n'est pas installé de façon multiple. Et […] le danger à ne pas transmettre nos outils est supérieur à son contraire" (2012: 151). If we want to enrich contemporary literature and rethink its role in the context of education, it is crucial, Bon signals, to provide quality trainings for facilitators.

Clearly, François Bon's take on *ateliers d'écriture* is inclusive. On different occasions, he stresses the flexibility of his approach, meaning that the writing exercises he offers should resonate with all audiences, ranging from illiterate people to the ENS Ulm student (even though he acknowledges that some groups require more thorough explanation than others: "Ce qui diffère peut-être, c'est ce dont on fait l'économie pour présenter ce qu'on recherche" (2012: 209)). What is more, rather than targeting audiences that already have access to literature, he prefers working with groups whose daily lives are completely severed from (creative) writing. This can mean facilitating workshops at detention centers, but also, and just as much, in science faculties. In spite of this call for inclusiveness, however, Bon does not work much (at least as far as he recounts) with certain groups that are explicitly targeted by many other atelier d'écriture facilitators and creative writing handbooks. In particular, he caters less to middle-aged or older individuals, which is striking, since sociological studies (notably Claude Poliak's *Aux Frontières du champ littéraire* (2006)) show that these individuals constitute an important portion of the group that pursues the dream of authorship today.

5.3.4. Media

In order to engage a broad audience, Bon develops his *ateliers d'écriture* through diverse media. He facilitates live workshops and published *Tous les mots sont adultes* (2000), a landmark book in the

atelier d'écriture bibliography. In more recent years, he has published the handbook *Outils du roman* (2016) and has added online workshops to his repertoire on his personal website *Tierslivre.net*.

Tous les mots sont adultes, which will be discussed in detail below, was published in 2000 by the publishing house Fayard, which was at the time under Olivier Bétourné's direction.[40] The publisher originally conceived of Bon's text as a model for a new collection of short and affordable essays. Whereas this new series never saw the light of day, Bon's text quickly became more than a mini-essay. A first version, *Méthode de Tremelan*, was named after the Swiss village where he was instructing *atelier d'écriture* facilitators at the time. In the course of the following four months, he expanded the text and chose Maurice Blanchot's phrase "tous les mots sont adultes" as the book's title. Fayard published a first version in 2000 and, following the fourth reprint, a reworked version in 2005. In recent years, Bon has refused to make a new edition, deeming the interactive and dynamic *Tierslivre.net* a more suitable space to revisit and elaborate on his earlier exercises.

Outils du roman (2016), which we will also analyze below, started as a web project in the framework of an eponymous online *atelier d'écriture* held in 2013. The purpose of this virtual workshop was to explore certain techniques and concepts reminiscent of the American creative writing tradition. Instead of simply offering writing exercises, however, Bon told the participants of his *atelier* that he took his cues from a classic American writing handbook that he was translating at the time: Malt Olbren's *Creative Writing No-Guide*. Bon had used the pseudonym Malt Olbren, taken from a story by the Russian writer Daniil Charms before and does not make a big secret of it being his alter-ego. Olbren, so goes Bon's story, is an American writer and creative writing teacher. He was trained by John Gardner, the most famous of creative writing instructors, and went against the grain of conventional workshops. He died at the beginning of the 21st century, leaving behind few things except for an unfinished bundle of course handouts. Over the course of the summer of 2013, in light of his online workshop, Bon presented *Outils du roman*, his pseudo-translation of Olbren's *Creative Writing No-Guide*. In 2016, Tiers Livre Éditeur, Bon's newly founded publishing house, released a paper version of the pseudo-translation. According to Bon, *Outils du roman* is his best-selling book today.

Bon's *ateliers d'écriture en ligne*, which started in 2013, are devoted to a specific theme (web-writing, space, fantasy, characters) and run for a number of weeks. In this period, Bon issues about eight writing assignments in separate blogposts. The participants can complete the exercises and send their texts back to Bon, who posts them on his website. The first online workshops were mostly text-oriented. Each blogpost contained an image and a written (usually lengthy) assignment. The participants' texts were assembled underneath the guidelines of the specific exercise in the same blog entry. The space for commentaries was limited. From a media point of view, the most recent *ateliers*

[40] http://www.tierslivre.net/spip/spip.php?article3547#histoire. Accessed 28.09.2018.

en ligne have grown more complex. Bon still presents us with an image and a written assignment, but he adds a video to the entries. The video and the text, he stresses, should not be considered as doubles, but as complementary tools. For instance, in the video, he elaborates on details of the exercise which the written exposition had only fleetingly addressed. Additionally, for each thematic cycle, Bon creates a closed Facebook page were participants can discuss the issues they encounter while writing or submitted texts. Those are now collected in a separate entry on *Tierslivre.net*, which grants them more autonomy with respect to the writing exercise that has generated them.

5.3.5. Objectives

Enriching Bon's Literary Project

There are multiple stakes underlying the *atelier d'écriture*. When journalists ask Bon why he organizes these workshops, his first answer points to how fruitful they are for his own writing practice. As I mentioned above, a number of Bon's novels were inspired directly by his *atelier d'écriture* practices. This goes for *C'était toute une vie* (1995), *Prison* (1998), both published by Éditions Verdier, and *Impatience* (1998), published by Éditions de Minuit. *C'était toute une vie* recounts the experience of facilitating *ateliers* in the desolate town of Lodève (near Montpellier). The text is spurred by the suicide of a young mother who participated in Bon's workshop and who asked Bon in a letter to tell her story and that of Lodève. In the novel, Bon describes the town's bleak appearance, encounters with its inhabitants, and the workshop. He maintains a clear distinction between his voice, which wavers between feelings of inadequacy and of a responsibility to document Lodève's suffering, and the fragments of language he comes across in conversations with others and workshop exercises. He quotes outcries like "j'ai mal pour ma ville pour ce qui me disent Bonjour. avec la Tête Basses. et les yeux qui explosent de cette dope qui nous prend tant," (1995: 9) and "terre sacrée, mère des rêves noirs, trop de terreur s'agite auprès de moi, après chaque malheur c'est en voir surgir un plus grand" (1995: 31).

Prison is set in a youth detention center close to Bordeaux and recounts Bon's encounter with a youth delinquent who murdered a young man who himself had previously participated in Bon's workshop. From this shocking event ensues a book that tells the stories of a number of youths, all participants of the *atelier d'écriture*. Here, Bon's voice gradually mingles with and relates the words of the delinquents, who are not always explicitly identified. The result is a bundle of language and scenes that testifies to these youths' harsh reality and that uses the writing techniques exposed in *Tous les mots sont adultes* to do so. *Impatience* perpetuates Bon's experiment of authorial self-effacement, social outrage and linguistic autonomization. It evokes the world of the theater, clearly reminiscent of

Bon's drama workshops (see 5.3.3.), and registers voices of outrage, fierce protest and "impatience" with the state of the world. It contains Bon's often discussed rejection of the genre of the novel:

> Non, plus de roman jamais, mais cueillir à la croûte dure ces éclats qui débordent et résistent, non plus d'histoire que ces bribes qu'eux-mêmes portent et comme avec douleur remuent sans s'en débarrasser jamais, plus de tableau qui unifie et assemble, mais dans le dispositif noir laisser résonner les linéaments dispersés d'images et de sons, le grossissement des visages abimés et tout ce sur quoi on achoppe soi-même pour dire, plus de calme mais l'agitation, se porter soi-même à cette rencontre des éclats où on achoppe, et le mal qu'on se fait, et le poison qu'on s'injecte et la dureté que c'est de continuer ici dans le grondement et la répétition et l'usure et l'arrogance des banques et bureaux et les vitres cassées des usines et ceux qui au coin des rues sont là. (1998: 67)

Surprisingly, this quote has usually been interpreted within the frame of Bon's transition towards the internet, as a sign that he was letting go of conventional notions such as book and novel in favor of literary forms that resonate more with the digital age. Yet, it appears that Bon's highly distressing *atelier d'écriture* experiences have at least as much, if not more, to do with the rejection of the novel found in this passage.

Whereas Bon's *ateliers* have resulted in a number of books, Bon himself argues that the impact they have had on his work is mostly indirect. The encounters with a wide array of audiences, especially those coming from troubled backgrounds, make his worldview rich and complex, and give it more substance. They provide an access to realms of reality which would otherwise be hard to unseal, especially since they demand, to a certain extent, a sharing of the intimate experience of te participants. Bon comments:

> Non pas qu'on transpose dans son écriture personnelle cette révélation qui n'appartient qu'à ceux qui l'écrivent. Mais le réel, dans sa complexité, pour ceux qui le constituent, on le reconstruit autrement, dans le travail solitaire, si la représentation intérieure qu'on en a est ainsi devenue plurielle et vive, acceptant de plus près les urgences […] ma relation de la langue et du monde, ce qui pour chacun s'établit dans le temps d'écriture, est plus nourrie, plus complexe. (2005: 13-14)

In a number of essays, Bon gives examples of this process of (indirect) complexification. He recounts how his experience of urban space has grown deeper after hearing stories of workshop participants. For instance, his perception of train stations and parking lots, these everyday sites of transition and movement, was affected upon hearing testimonies by youngsters who turn to these places when looking for shelter. Similarly, Bon's experience of Formule 1 hostel rooms was tainted after hearing

another youth's account of how he and his friends pooled money to rent a room for a single night to enjoy its heating and television.

Enriching Literature as a Whole

Another crucial *enjeu* of the *atelier d'écriture* is to enrich literature as a whole. Bon contends that the contemporary literary production in France is much too standardized and homogeneous. The same narrative forms, contents and authorial perspectives are presented year after year. Moreover, these perspectives emerge from relatively privileged factions of society and do not confront the readership with aspects of reality that are highly troublesome. If literature, Bon argues, is to be relevant, it should include as many different and diverging voices and perspectives as possible. In particular, it should include those voices that bear witness to the hardships of present times or that are informed by new forms of knowledge. Only if it opens a dialogue with the present can literature be relevant. Inspired by playwright Valère Novarina, Bon writes:

> Pour évoluer, se soumettre à ses bonds et sauts, la littérature doit constamment écouter le monde. Les ateliers, pour nous, c'est un peu une écluse avec les forces vives du monde, là où des êtres rendent compte de leur propre intensité. On injecte dans l'inventaire de la langue et des mots des cailloux qui ne lui appartiennent pas d'avance, mais dont elle a besoin en permanence pour répondre à ce qu'on exige d'elle. C'est notre défi. (2012: 20).

Investigating the Present World

The *atelier d'écriture*'s ultimate objective pertains to the state of the world. For Bon, literature is essentially a way of exploring the manifold aspects of the present. Writing only makes sense when it confronts what is undocumented and enigmatic, when it investigates contemporary objects, spaces, ways of experiencing time, images, imaginaries, memories, discourses, and when it seeks adequate literary forms to express those things. From Bon's point of view, the *atelier d'écriture* is a laboratory to collectively investigate and chart fragments of reality through writing. For that reason, it needs to reach diverse audiences (scientists, engineers, *normaliens*, youth delinquents, etc.) in order to map as much of reality as possible. Bon argues that the world has changed a lot in the course of the past decades, and that the texts that come out of the *atelier* can help grasp these radical changes. He comments:

> L'enjeu essentiel, pour moi, à ces pratiques neuves, n'est pas d'abord de didactique ou de résultat social ou humain […], *l'enjeu tient à l'état du monde*. Un bouleversement radical en quelques décennies, où par exemple l'image a conquis sa circulation autonome, là où elle ne pouvait auparavant se présenter

> qu'accompagnant et soutenant le récit. Le statut premier, le statut même, de la parole décrivante, la parole connaissante, a changé de façon radicale en cinq décennies et la littérature, là où le langage est traité de façon autonome, ne peut pas faire comme si. (2012: 139-140 my italics)

Given this insistence on the link between literature and the investigation of reality, it is understandable that Bon criticizes writing workshops that offer playful writing exercises or recipes for bestselling stories, for they cannot engender interesting literature, given their disconnect with the world. They remain stuck in harmless language games, or they perpetuate the predictable narrative forms that draw the reader's attention away from the troubling aspects of reality and towards romanticized and mind-numbing entertainment instead.

Training Readers, Not Writers

Perhaps surprisingly, Bon refuses to endow the *atelier d'écriture* with a pedagogical or didactical function. He feels that is not up to him to articulate the benefits that might come from participating in his workshops: "Travailler avec des jeunes en difficulté ce n'est pas faire bonne œuvre dans une grande cause" (2012: 62). He just offers an experience without pre-determined outcome, and it is up to the hosting institution (school, university, detention center) to formulate pedagogical objectives. For him, the *atelier d'écriture*'s value lies precisely in this openness. Yet, Bon mentions cases in which participants have benefited from the workshop:

> Évidemment, qu'au bout du compte ils lisent autrement, qu'ils s'attaquent aux poètes, et viennent vous dire fièrement : Monsieur, *Les Fleurs du mal* vous connaissez ? Je l'ai acheté au Leclerc, à cause du titre. Évidemment, qu'on déplie les épaules, qu'on regarde droit, qu'on s'habille autrement. Évidemment, qu'on retrouve du travail et qu'on est capable si besoin de dire merde à son chef (conséquence pas simple de l'atelier, quand une participante nous informe que désormais elle refuse son allocation d'handicapé, parce qu'elle ne se considère plus telle). (2012: 62-63)

In addition, Bon opposes the notion of the *atelier d'écriture* as a school for writers. Its intention is neither to train writers, nor to help complete a book. In Bon's eyes, training someone to be a writer is simply impossible. This does not mean that, for him, people are born as writers (even though some of his statements appear to support this view)[41], but that becoming a writer is a solitary endeavor. True writers operate alone and outside of the social realm. They develop a personal outlook on the world

[41] For instance: "Non seulement les ateliers d'écriture n'ont pas vocation de former des *écrivains* (initier au travail solitaire qui y mène, c'est assez), mais surgissement d'un autre paradoxe: lorsqu'un véritable écrivain traverse ces situations collectives, c'est peut-être à ce critère de nuque raide, impossibilité de se plier à une consigne, qu'on peut le dépister et le renvoyer au plus tôt à sa démarche solitaire" (2005: 35-36).

and tend to find the linguistic forms that best express that stance by themselves. Facilitators of *ateliers d'écriture* can only be of limited use in becoming a writer. Bon states: "Former un écrivain, personne n'y est jamais arrivé, et personne n'y prétend." (2012: 409) In the same way, Bon rejects that the *atelier d'écriture* should facilitate the writing of books or longer texts. In his view, every *atelier* session should provide the audience with a new perspective on a chosen issue and with a new writing exercise. In this way, participants can experiment and discover the forms that suit them best and the issues that engage them most. He writes: "L'atelier d'écriture est un formidable vecteur pour l'appropriation de la littérature, et tirer son propre plaisir de l'écriture, y prendre du risque, apprendre à situer sa singularité dans la diversité des démarches d'écrivains" (2005: 7-8).

On the other hand, Bon does characterize the *atelier d'écriture* as a school for readers. The school system is not equipped to teach reading skills. Many pupils do not understand how literary texts work, how they come to be, what they can offer. Bon considers his workshops as a response to that situation, commenting: "Pour moi, je considère ma tâche terminée s'il devient possible pour le participant de marcher seul dans le travail, et s'orienter dans ses lectures. Je n'ai jamais considéré ma tâche en atelier comme accompagnement de la gestation d'un livre" (2005: 8).

5.3.6. Craft

Writer's Craft

Bon contends that all writing worth the effort should explore the unknown. In *Apprendre l'invention*, he refers to multiple quotations that make that point, for instance, Aristotle's "qu'est-ce qui pousse les hommes à se représenter eux-mêmes", Bataille's "nous n'aurions plus rien d'humain si le langage en nous était en entier servile" and René Char's "comment vivre sans inconnu devant soi". According to one of his own formulations, the act of writing is like throwing a ball of clay against a wall. One can never predict the pattern the clay will form upon hitting the wall: "Écrire est une boule opaque, irrationnelle, indivisible. L'acte d'écrire est un saut dans l'inconnu qui ne peut s'exercer que solitaire, et hors du temps social" (2012: 339). At the same time, Bon argues that writing is not a question of mere chance or inspiration. On the contrary, the writing act, no matter how unpredictable its proceedings and its results, should be meticulously prepared. Returning to the ball of clay metaphor, he explains that it is the *atelier d'écriture* facilitator's responsibility to prepare the throw. The facilitator distributes the different types of clay that can be kneaded into a ball and explains what is at stake with each throw.

Put concretely, Bon thinks that, for every writing exercise that she proposes, the facilitator should have a profound understanding of the underlying stakes and the literary means offered to address this problem: "J'insisterai juste sur cette phrase : savoir ce qu'on attend de la langue, à quoi

on veut qu'elle serve. Savoir énoncer notre attente et quant à nous-mêmes, et quant à la ductilité, la fonction de la langue, les outils, les lectures viennent, peut-être lentement, difficultueusement, se disposer à cet endroit" (2012: 186). According to Bon, the writer's craft can and should be analyzed in order to determine its constitutive elements. As a theorist of writing workshops, he lays bare, one after the other, the various aspects of writing (the various stakes). These include the treatment of space, time, objects, images, language, mental states, dreams and memory. For each of these aspects, Bon offers multiple approaches. Each writing exercise proposes one way to tackle one of them. Importantly, each exercise takes its cue from a specific stimulus text, which serves as a mediation between the facilitator attempting to assign a task and the participants. It is a concrete realization of a possible way of writing and, at best, spurs the participants' hunger to write. I develop this aspect of Bon's methodology in more depth below, but will provide an example here: a field on which Bon has worked a lot is space. However, there are many ways to treat space through writing. In his workshops, Bon shows how Georges Perec handles the issue in *Espèces d'espaces*, how Julien Gracq works with it in *Les Eaux étroites*, how Leslie Kaplan approaches it in *Le Livre des ciels*, and how Blaise Cendrar's *Prose du Transsibérien* treats it. From each of these stimulus texts, he derives a writing exercise.

The Craft of the Facilitator

Let us zoom out for a bit and examine Bon's methodology. His workshops typically run over the span of ten to twelve writing sessions. He stresses the importance of having to build up toward a goal over a minimal number of sessions. Over the course of these sessions, Bon can either focus on one specific aspect of writing, such as space, memory, images, objects — this is a thematic *atelier d'écriture* — or he can touch upon multiple issues. In the former case, he presents a multiplicity of approaches to one theme, gradually making the exercises more demanding. In the latter case, three sessions might be devoted to space, three to discourse, three to memory and three to dreams.

Each individual session runs according to the same threefold schema. First, Bon presents an author, a literary text, and a writing exercise (*l'exposition*). In *Apprendre l'invention*, he underlines the importance of this preliminary phase. To engage the audience, it is crucial that the facilitator present the life of a writer, especially its pivotal moments and its historical context: Baudelaire's walk of life; Cendrars's experience of travel and war; Kafka's anxieties; Artaud's madness; Sarraute's migrant background and profession as a female lawyer; Duras's youth in Indochina and her work for the cinema; the loss of Perec's parents during the Holocaust. These narratives provide a lens through which to catch a glimse of the stakes underlying a literary text. Bon insists that, of course, biography does not explain fiction. Yet, good literature always mediates, in one way or another, an experience of reality. Therefore, when presenting Perec's work in the *atelier d'écriture*, which often deals with (the failing

of) memory, it can be useful to evoke the disappearance of his parents. When evoking Sarraute's writings that push the boundaries of language, it can be helpful to refer to her polyglot upbringing and her legal training. Bon finds that these stories show the audience that texts, however "literary" they might seem, do not appear in a vacuum. They are particular responses to particular situations. Bon summarizes:

> Peut-être importe-t-il plus que le livre choisi puisse permettre de raconter une histoire. Non pas l'histoire du livre, mais de son invention, sa fabrique. Et que cela soit aussi l'histoire de celle ou de celui qui a son nom sur le livre. Non pas que la biographie explique l'œuvre : on a passé ces lanternes, pour n'y plus revenir. Mais l'énigme de l'œuvre sera plus contrastée si mise en rapport avec le chemin d'une vie. […] C'est cette histoire, ce pur chemin oral, qui ouvre l'atelier. Elle n'est pas un exposé de faits, elle est ce qui met en rapport la spécificité arbitraire d'une écriture avec une nécessité. (2005: 15)

At the end of this introduction, Bon presents an exercise based on the text at hand. He speaks about the mechanisms that the texts resorts to in order to generate a certain effect, and proposes to apply those mechanisms in the writing exercise. For instance, in an exercise on mental states, he reads fragments from Antonin Artaud's *L'Ombilic des limbes* and *Le Pèse-Nerfs* and points out that the force and dynamic of these passages rests upon the absence of the event that spurred the intense experience brought to life in the text. The reader witnesses only the effects and never their cause. In turn, Bon proposes to the participants to evoke a traumatizing event and to describe all the physical and mental states that resulted from it, without ever revealing the nature of that event in the text. Sticking to the sensory, Bon observes, helps not only avoid intruding into the participants' intimate world, but also fosters the participants' writing. Bon comments: "C'est l'interdit autobiographique — ne rien laisser deviner du réel source— qui est devenu dans ce passage du jeune Artaud à la fois le principe générateur et la barrière de protection" (2005: 164). Additionally, Bon suggests to borrow Artaud's use of the hyphen. By resorting to this punctuation mark, the participants, Bon signals, are brought to experiment with a form of non-hierarchical and less logically structured writing that maintains a high degree of intensity throughout.

In the second phase of the *atelier* the participants write. In his handbooks, Bon indicates how long this stage should take, about ten or fifteen minutes. According to him, the brevity of the time imparted contributes to the intensity of both the writing act and the resulting text. It forces participants to write uninterruptedly and viscerally, sometimes generating surprising, shocking, powerful results. Reaching back to the metaphor mentioned above, this is the moment when the participants throw their balls of clay against the wall.

In the final stage of the *atelier d'écriture*, the participants read their texts out loud. At this point, what is at stake in a writing exercise becomes visible and audible. To reinforce the experience, Bon proposes to play around with the texts. He and the participants engage in a dynamic of repetition, of cut and paste, of montage, of collective recitation, of vocal and corporal manipulation. Bon finds that all this can lead to powerful moments of great emotion and beauty. Contrary to many *atelier d'écriture* facilitators, Bon does not foresee a fourth stage in which first drafts are reworked (*la réécriture* (see 3.3.3.)), even in the following session. For him, the *atelier d'écriture* is not the proper setting for working, discussing and re-working the same text over and over. On the contrary, each session is an occasion to encounter a new author and a new text, to experiment with a new technique. His *atelier d'écriture* is a laboratory of constant experiment and gradual authorial self-discovery. Every session is supposed to contribute a new tool to the writer's toolbox. Bon writes that if participants wish to elaborate on a text, he can present them with individual mentoring outside of the *atelier*.

5.3.7. Archive

François Bon has been more open about his *atelier d'écriture* methodology than other *atelier d'écriture* facilitators in France. This fits in with his ambition to theorize and professionalize the French workshop. On different occasions, he calls on his fellow-facilitators to make their methods public. He signals that it is crucial to construct a database that encompasses all the techniques and stimulus-texts that facilitators use, and to classify and theorize the various aspects of the writer's craft.

Bon was particularly adamant about that need for an archive of techniques and texts during the time of the aforementioned debate surrounding Le Carrefour des écritures. In that period, Bon was dreaming of such an expertise center, as "Pour rêver", the title of a 2001 essay, suggests. Le Carrefour des écritures, he observed, could fulfil a number of important functions which were not being taken up by any French institution: it could be a library for literary stimulus texts and techniques used by facilitators; it could be both a physical and a virtual place, collecting texts written by participants; it could operate as a research center and it could serve as a training space for facilitators.

Bon observes a lack in France (and by extension in the continental European literary tradition) with regard to the theorization of creative writing techniques, despite the past contributions of writers such as Baudelaire, Flaubert, James, Rilke, Kafka, Proust, Benjamin, Blanchot, Michaux, Gracq. Bon does acknowledge that recent writers like Sarraute, Perec, Novarina and Koltès have produced texts with valuable theoretical insights. Furthermore, poets such as Rimbaud, Hölderlin, Mallarmé, and later André Du Bouchet, Yves Bonnefoy and Jacques Dupin, whose texts, Bon comments, essentially combine the notions of literary work as *oeuvre* and *travail*, are also valuable. These writers' texts contain the traces of their own construction and thus constitute useful study material. In academia,

scholars often study literature with a specific theoretical agenda in mind, and they tend to neglect the notion that texts and oeuvres are the result of a creative process that resonates with the surrounding world. He states: "On a évidemment appris des linguistes, sémioticiens, grammairiens, mais c'est leur discipline qu'ils veulent nourrir et non le savoir de la littérature" (2012: 331). Today, Bon finds, the world has changed drastically. We are faced with new (urban) spaces, new ways in which images and words circulate, and new digital media. It is up to the *atelier d'écriture* facilitator to create literary forms that testify to these major changes, to theorize what is at stake, and to establish an archive of literary texts that can contribute to this endeavor. Bon states:

> Nous avons, dans notre quotidien d'auteur au travail, le difficile parcours qu'est la constitution d'un livre, à affronter des fragments de réel qui ne contiennent ou ne produisent pas d'eux-mêmes leur représentation, situation sans doute dont le seul grand précédent remonte à avant la période classique, remonte à Rabelais. Nous avons à les organiser et les assembler dans des relations qui n'ont pas de réceptacle esthétique constitué, du moins qui ne valent pas si elles ne déplacent pas l'inventaire des formes constituées, et ce mouvement même d'assemblage et de composition est la première affirmation littéraire, ou esthétique, de ce que nous avons à affronter. (2012: 232-233)

One theorist that Bon deems particularly useful to help conceptualize writing is Gilles Deleuze, in particular his works on cinema, *L'Image temps* (1983) and *L'Image movement* (1985). According to Bon, the significance of Deleuze lies in his conception of the creative process as irrational, and his simultaneous attempt to define the parameters which underlie and constitute this process. He writes: "La révolution introduite par Deleuze […] c'est de ne pas assécher le geste irrationnel, compact et abstrait, qu'est l'instant de l'écriture, mais d'en organiser à sa façon, de plis et fissures, le dépli qui permet d'en rendre énonçable la totalité complexe de rapports simultanés et indissociables" (201: 336). Bon finds particular value in Deleuze's notion of *chaîne* (*opératoire)*. This concept allows to articulate the process of artistic creation by resorting to a set of instances such as the real, the imaginary, the image, language, performance. In reality, Bon contends, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint these separate parameters. The making of art is always dynamic and unpredictable. Yet, they help us grasp something of creation's complexity and have a particular pedagogical value.

5.3.8. Conclusion

Bon's poetics, as exposed in *Apprendre l'invention,* can be situated in the extension of the political aspirations of the post-May 1968 *ateliers d'écriture* groups in the sense that they carry within them an important anti-institutional element. Bon defines his project in opposition to the ways in which the

traditional school system teaches literature (too passive, too historical, too genre-based), to the notion of the well-written and commercially successful book (not disruptive and too conventional), and to the institutions of the literary field, including the idea of the creative writing workshop as a training for writers (too conventional). By contrast, he advocates for the *atelier d'écriture* as a place to foster reading skills, critical thinking and individual autonomy. What is more, in view of the diversity of its audiences, Bon sees in the *atelier d'écriture* a potential catalyst for enriching French literature as a whole, and a unique platform to investigate the state of the world as it is. In the next section, I will analyze in detail how Bon proposes to carry out this investigation of contemporary life by discussing an extensive number of writing exercises from the landmark *atelier d'écriture* handbook *Tous les mots sont adultes*. I will show how, by drawing on short stimulus texts by writers like Perec, Julien Gracq, Apollinaire, Saint-John Perse, Seî Shonagon, Claude Simon, Francis Ponge, Nathalie Sarraute, Camille Laurens, Bon creates *écriture à contraintes* exercises that offer to investigate the present world by exploring issues such as space and the city, the construction of identity, and contemporary objects, images and language. Finally, I will demonstrate how the exercises in *Tous les mots sont adultes*'s last chapter provide leads for beginning writers to investigate their own singularity as writers and to cultivate an autonomous writerly posture.

5.4. *Tous Les Mots Sont Adultes*: Exploring the Present Together

Tous les mots sont adultes presents a large corpus of writing exercises. These are designed to be performed in the *atelier d'écriture*, but can also be completed in solitude. The second edition (2005) counts 341 pages and is divided into ten chapters (excluding the introduction). The chapters fall into three categories. Four are devoted to specific authors, notably Perec, Kafka, Novarina and Koltès. Another four treat various domains of writing: space and the city; identity; the psyche and perception; image, word, time. Two chapters are classified according to genre, namely theatre and novel. As a whole, *Tous les mots sont adultes* offers a gradual training. The first exercises are designed to incite writing. They target short forms (e.g. lists composed of single phrases) and impose precise constraints. They propose to describe from memory (which is less demanding than appealing to the imagination) and to bypass the writer's intimate subjectivity (so as to avoid being too invasive). As the book continues, the targeted textual forms become longer (though not going over two paragraphs), the content moves from the description of a familiar reality to fictional realms, there is a stronger appeal to the writer's subjectivity, the constraints are less clearly defined, leaving more freedom to the writer, sometimes to the point that the exercise's goal becomes unclear.

Cover to 2005 edition of Tous les mots sont adultes

5.4.1. Appropriating Perec to Explore Space and Everyday Life

"Ouverture: hommage à Georges Perec", *Tous les mots sont adultes*'s opening chapter, is entirely composed of exercises based on Georges Perec's work. Perec, Bon indicates, is central to contemporary writing. Not only because he is a great practitioner of *écriture à contraintes*, but also, and in the first place, because he points to the domains of writing that are crucial for writers of the present. Perec discards the conventional way of organizing literature by genre, and approaches writing in a way that unveils the essential connection between literature and the present. Bon writes: "Perec est omniprésent dans les tentatives contemporaines. Vingt ans après sa disparition, il ne s'agit pas d'influence, mais de territoires qu'il a ouverts, et pour lesquels il a construit la première grille de vocabulaire" (2005: 50). Furthermore, Perec's practice exhibits an essential lesson of craft that Bon evokes by quoting Maurice Blanchot's phrase "pour écrire, il faut déjà écrire". That is to say, Perec demonstrates that writing is an organic and continuous process. It is not a matter of coming up with a plan for a book and executing this plan in order to move forward to the next book. Writing, as Perec practices it, is a continuous activity, in which things become gradually visible, issues are revisited and expanded, and everything is connected to a global project.

Tous les mots sont adultes's first exercise is based on Perec's "Inventaire des lieux où j'ai dormi" from the volume *Espèces d'espaces* (1974). This is Bon's preferred opening exercise in a workshop cycle. The inventory, he argues, is a central field of contemporary writing, not only a preparatory step in the construction of longer texts, but also, and just as much, a form in its own right.

In the *atelier d'écriture*, especially in the first session, Bon finds that its use has two advantages. First, the inventory, at least in this exercise, does not appeal to the imagination. It is situated in the domains of memory and the everyday, which are accessible to all. Consequently, it discards the notion of inspiration and the notorious fear of the blank page. Bon describes: "Ce qu'on va écrire, on l'a fait, c'est avéré par notre existence même, il n'y a qu'à secouer l'arbre, ou cueillir aux branches. Chacun dispose de ce matériau, énorme, riche, dont le mot même d'inventaire suppose la préexistence" (2005: 20). What is more, the inventory makes clear right away that the objective of writing is the creation of phrases, pieces of language and images that stand on their own, that derive their right to exist from their intrinsic value. Literature, Bon argues, is not a question of plotting, of inserting passages meant to fit with prior or subsequent passages, of creation that is only justifiable within a larger frame. It is the construction of a language that can stand on its own, its principle of organization being montage rather than plot or scenario. To articulate this position, Bon points to rhetoric as a focus of critique:

> On va percevoir dès cette première et élémentaire bascule que chaque phrase dispose d'un poids et d'une force organique à partir desquels elle s'organise avec les autres pour former le récit. Sans même en parler préalablement, on va mettre les participants devant le fait accompli d'une matière phrase qui se constitue comme texte par son montage empirique depuis ses forces organiques, et non par la rhétorique de ses liaisons. (2005: 21)

In this opening exercise, Bon proposes to compose a list of rooms the participants slept in. He gives the constraint to only include places where they stayed not more than once (*des lieux où on n'a dormi qu'une fois*). Bon explains that this delineates the subject and facilitates the writing process. Without this constraint, there would just be too much material to describe. Additionally, it has the benefit of leading towards memories that stand apart from ordinary routine. It targets spaces linked to specific moments in life, particular and potentially significant events: "On a amené les participants à partir de ce qu'ils ont de plus singulier, ce qui tranche de la vie ordinaire" (2005: 22). Furthermore, Bon instructs to focus on the sensory, that is, on that which is seen (lights, furniture, other objects), smelled, felt and heard. This causes the writing to move away from an autobiographical narrative towards an intensified focus on the memories themselves. Instead of evoking an entire story (how the participants ended up in this room, their relation to the owners of the room, etc.), the writing attempts to trace a particular memory in all its sensory detail. A final constraint is that each space in the inventory can only be described in a single phrase.

The strength of this exercise, Bon argues, is that it targets subjective, intimate and emotionally charged subject matter (the bedroom), while simultaneously proposing constraints that reduce the direct presence of the writer (the inventory composed of single phrases, the focus on the sensory). As

a result, the participants are familiarized with one of the fundamental principles underlying literary writing, that is, its inevitable reliance on subjectivity and its simultaneous demand to be open enough for the reader to relate to it. Every act of literary writing necessarily engages subjectivity (Bon regularly quotes Barthes's phrase "on écrit toujours avec de soi"), but subjectivity can never be the end of it. Bon formulates it as follows:

> Cette intensité, la part autobiographique du souvenir, sont évacuées par la contrainte, la brièveté des items de l'inventaire, l'obligation de coupe après cette perception dominante, et subjective. Ainsi, c'est une traversée de soi-même qui va conduire au souvenir, mais celui qui écoute ou lit le texte devra faire appel à ses propres sensations pour le reconstruire, sans avoir accès à l'origine autobiographique: et c'est ce qui constitue le texte dans son fonctionnement littéraire. (2005: 24)

The following exercises, which Bon calls *variations* on the first exercise, continue in the same spirit. In "La Chambre" Bon proposes to describe a single bedroom in as many ways as possible: objects, sounds, smells, the floor, the windows, the sealing, in the morning, in the evening, in summer, in winter. Again he prescribes a suppression of autobiographical information: "Proposer que rien de ce qui est indiscret ou privé ne traverse le texte sera une force supplémentaire où s'appuyer pour contraindre à parler d'objets, de dispositions, de fenêtre et de sons" (2005: 28). In "Classements, inventaires", he instructs to make inventories of keys, of doors, of occasions to earn money, even of the inventories one uses in everyday life (i.e. shopping list, to-do list). In "Je n'aimerais pas mais si", Bon constructs an inventory exercise based on Perec's text "De la difficulté qu'il y a à imaginer une Cité idéale", collected in the posthumous *Penser/classer* (1985). He includes a fragment of Perec's text in his exposé. The fragment shows an inventory generated by the formula "Je n'aimerais pas mais si":

> Je n'aimerais pas vivre en Amérique mais parfois si
> Je n'aimerais pas vivre à la belle étoile mais parfois is
> J'aime bien vivre en France mais parfois non
> […]
> Je n'aimerais pas vivre dans un sous-marin, mais parfois si
> Je n'aimerais pas vivre avec Ursula Andress mais parfois si
> J'aimerais vivre vieux mais parfois non
> J'aimerais bien vivre à Xanadu, mais même, pas pour toujours
> Je n'aimerais pas que nous vivions tous à Zanzibar mais parfois si (*Tous les mots* 36)

Bon insists that, before having the participants use this form, it is important to discuss this text, especially to point to the different categories Perec works with. The inventory includes small villages,

large cities, imaginary cities, exotic oriental places, references to popular culture, etc. Moreover, it conjures symbolically charged people and things. Bon stresses the importance of interrogating the symbolic value of the places, objects, people that are conjured up so as to make the participants realize that the names and words evoked are not neutral, but they carry symbolic value in the broader culture and history. America carries value as a land of hope and liberty. At the same time, in 1981, when Perec wrote this text, the United States were still involved in the Cold War and had been through two decades of Vietnam war (1955-1975). Similarly, the submarine evokes both tales of adventure (Jules Verne) and the atrocities of warfare. Moreover, it refers to the Beatles song "We all live in a yellow submarine".

"Et quand Perec nous met à la rue" is deduced from a passage in *L'Infra-ordinaire* (1989) in which Perec traces the houses that used to stand in la Rue Vilin, the street where he was born and raised. Perec mentions restaurants, shops, a dry cleaner, a barber... Here, we find that Bon moves from a description of inside to outside spaces. Instead of analyzing a room, the participants are told to describe a street. Again, Bon suggests to leave out the first person singular and to focus on sensory detail. He compares the narrative form that the participants ought to adopt to a camera that moves from one place to the next and slowly zooms in on detail. The fundamental tension he exploits is that between description in the present tense and the vividness of sensory detail on the one hand, and the awareness of a finished past on the other: "Ce conflit incessant, pour chaque signe, entre le visuel pris à l'immédiat présent, et la mémoire déchirée, la separation imposée et la privation d'enfance" (2005: 38). Moreover, Bon includes a narratological discussion about focalisation. He goes back to Balzac, pointing to this writer's use of smooth transitions in the description of space, and moves to writers like Flaubert and Rimbaud who explored what Proust calls a *procédé de brusque transition*, that is, a sharp and sudden juxtaposition of petty details and large overviews. These transitions, Bon points out, blur the distinction between the trivial and the essential. They bear witness to transformations in the 19th century, that is, a collapse of fixed ideological and political orders, as well as the emergence of large cities that can easily make the spectator feel like she is lost in detail.

In sum, *Tous les mots sont adultes*'s opening chapter introduces a number of Bon's techniques, principles and domains of writing: it presents the inventory as an essential tool for writing; it shows that, in order to count as literature, phrases, passages, scenes must have an intrinsic quality; it tackles the theme of space, a major domain in Bon's work; it reveals the literary potential of everyday experience; it stresses sensory detail (visual, aural); it explains the notion of focalization; it exposes the subtleties of both memory and autobiography. Perhaps ultimately, its exercises feed off the fundamental tension between the representation of sensory detail and the suppression of intimate thought and feeling. On the one hand, Bon's method pushes participants to perform rigorous examinations of spaces to which they have strong attachments — here, the *atelier* penetrates the

intimate sphere. On the other hand, it prevents them from contextualizing their impressions and exposing their private feelings and thoughts. In this way, the *atelier* safeguards the participants' intimacy.

5.4.2. Interrogating Space, Identity, Objects, Images and Language

Three further chapters revolve around authors, namely Kafka, Novarina, and Bernard-Marie Koltès respectively. Like Perec, these authors demonstrate that writing is a continuous work that expands organically. They are valuable sources in the *atelier* because their oeuvre contains traces of the creative process itself. In the case of Kafka, for example, there are the *Diaries* which Bon describes as: "[Un] de ces très rares livres qui deviennent des livres-ateliers, des livres qui aident au quotidien à écrire parce qu'on y suit de soir en soir l'écrivain au travail, dans ses obstacles, dans ses vertiges" (2005: 98). Kafka's *Diaries* show the writer at work as well as the work that is writing. They depict the writer's daily life and views, which in turn can be a source of inspiration for the participants. They contain the seeds and sketches of, and remarks on Kafka's eventual literary production.

Tous les mots sont adultes's four thematic chapters each explore one to three domains of writing: space (chapter two); identity (chapter four); psyche and the sensory (chapter six); images, words, time (chapter seven). For each domain, Bon selects a number of texts that exhibit a particular treatment of the topic at hand. Clearly, "Premier cercle: les trajets, la ville", the first thematic chapter, prolongs many threads touched upon in the introductory chapter. The chapters share similar problems (space, memory, the everyday) and provide similar formal constraints (short forms, impersonal narration). Yet, in this thematic chapter, Bon takes things further. In "Mettre l'écriture en mouvement" for example, an exercise based on Julien Gracq's short text *Les Eaux étroites*, he instructs to have the focalizing instance perform a trajectory, which challenges the participants who have, until that point, adopted fixed perspectives. In "Retour à Apollinaire", an exercise derived from Apollinaire's famous poem "Zone", he instructs to use a personal pronoun, in this case the rare second person *tu*, for the first time. In "Accrocher la ville" he offers an addition to the Apollinaire exercise, which he criticizes for possibly "induire un effet de rimes, de phrase chantée, qui affaiblit" (*Tous les mots* 64). Based on Leslie Kaplan's *Le Livre des ciels*, Bon asks participants to describe the places where they stand still on a daily basis (house front door, red lights, bus stop). Here, the notion of trajectory (the description of multiple places) fuses with fixed focalization. Additionally, Bon points to Kaplan's unique take on adjectives and urges participants to pay attention to their own treatment of these qualifiers. Other assignments in this chapter expand on moving focalizers (Simon, Cendrars, Echenoz) or conceive the city as utopia (Calvino, Kolltès).

The thematic cycle on identity takes off where the space chapter left. It resorts to inventories and the second person singular. Like space, the problem of identity is approached in a number of ways. "Écrire à plusieurs", an exercise based on Seî Shonagon's *The Pillow Book*, requires to compose a list of objects and events with high emotional and symbolic charge: "Choses qui ne servent à rien mais éveillent un doux souvenir du passé, choses que les gens ignorent le plus fréquemment, choses qui ne sont bonnes à rien, choses qui distraient dans les moments d'ennui" (2005: 115). "Écrire depuis l'origine", a proposal derived from Saint-John Perse, introduces the construction of genealogy through repetition of the formula "celui/celle qui". "La grammaire mobile du 'tu'", based on Charles Juliet's *Lambeaux*, offers to draw the detailed portrait of a character from the previous exercise, the constraints being the use of the pronoun *tu* and the prohibition to reveal anything about one's relationship to this character. "Le Refus, la révolte", derived from Paul Valet, spurs participants to protest injustice and inequality by resorting to the formula "Je dis NON". Finally, "Moi tout seul", inspired by Apollinaire's "Cortège", broaches the notion of singularity: "Ce qui me différencie d'une collectivité de six milliards d'hommes et me rends parmi eux unique" (2005: 130). In sum, this chapter investigates identity through the prisms of emotionally charged objects and events, ancestors and history, politics and protest, and singularity. Paradoxically, it adopts the seemingly impersonal inventory as its essential tool. Bon shows that writing can do without autobiographical narration in its examination of identity. On the contrary, the inventory, whether it evokes objects, history or politics, is a strong literary technique for articulating the self. Further, Bon's indirect approach of identity through the inventory has the additional advantage of evoking the world. It frames the self as the many ways in which people relate to the surrounding world, that is, to objects, history or politics. As a result, here, exploring identity is always also revealing a context.

"Conquérir l'intensité" focuses on psyche and the sensory. If it follows the lines of investigation from the previous chapters, it also delves deeper into the participants' intimacy. While it abandons the inventory in favor of short and fragmented forms, it still wards off first person singular narration. It opens with "Profération et appel au langage", the Artaud-inspired exercise described above. Here, the participants' most distressing experiences become the subject matter. Urging them to disclose nothing about actual events, Bon suggests that the participants describe the experience of anxiety as meticulously as possible, in all its sensory detail. Other exercises tackle the domains of dreams, dialogue, and the description of voices and faces.

"L'Image, la parole, le temps" touches on a variety of domains: photography, objects, speech and time. The exercise on photography is preceded by an extensive exposition of the relationship between photography and literature, explaining how the photographic sign system has induced profound changes in literary representation, and arguing for the need of assessing the impact of the contemporary high-speed production and circulation of images on writing. The main exercise is

inspired by Claude Simon and encourages the participants to describe five photographs in which they are themselves depicted and to which they are strongly attached. Bon recommends to leave out punctuation marks and to focus on all aspects of the photograph, including the materiality of the picture itself (the frame, its place on a wall), except for the portrayal of the writer herself. One of the challenges of this proposal, Bon contends, resides in the management of these very complex photographic signs through writing (e.g. how do you represent all the information comprised in a group portrait?). A further sequence of exercises deals with the object. Its stimulus texts are by Ponge, Jean-Loup Trassard, Régine Detambel and Christian Boltanski respectively and it asks the participants to examine objects of the present and of the past (objects of one's youth). The theme of speech is explored by invoking Nathalie Sarraute and Camille Laurens. Here, Bon zooms in on language itself. He proposes that the participants choose a number of words and expressions that are important to them, and that they describe them as if they were writing a lemma for the dictionary. Here, like in so many of Bon's other assignments, the personal (words meaningful to the participant) and the impersonal (the dictionary form) meet again. Finally, Bon shares an exercise on time inspired by Pierre Bergougnioux. Essentially, this chapter performs two main functions. On the one hand, it examines aspects of everyday reality, and on the other hand, through this examination of the everyday, it demonstrates that writing never fully captures objects, images or the experience of time. Language, Bon finds, is an autonomous system whose signs refer above all to each other. When attempting to seize reality, or when transposing the information of another medium into its own signs, it always leaves something unsaid. In the assignment on the object, Bon articulates this two-sided view. On the one hand, he points to the relation between writing and the everyday: "Au centre de l'image, de la parole, du temps, l'objet muet, la réalité opaque du monde. En dépliant et en installant sa tension propre dans l'espace de la représentation, c'est un peu de l'énigme du monde au-delà du langage qu'on cherche à capter" (2005: 215). On the other hand, he recalls the ontological status of language as an autonomous sign system with intrinsic limitations when it comes to presenting things as they are: "Prendre conscience que ce qu'on utilise dans un récit n'est pas la réalité d'un objet, mais que la langue ne se réfère qu'à elle-même" (2005: 215). Finally, he argues that this ambivalence, that is, the fact that writing's attempts to express the real are destined to remain incomplete, is precisely what creates a space for readers. It sets out to stimulate the reader's imagination and reason: "Inversement, le nom des choses, dans un récit, n'est jamais seulement ce nom, mais un phénomène complexe d'appel à la représentation intérieure du lecteur" (2005: 215). In other words, for Bon, writing's intrinsic dynamic of attempt and failure is nothing less than the prerequisite for literature itself.

"Vers le livre", *Tous les mots sont adultes*'s final chapter, has a double function. It exposes ideas for writing longer texts, and it contributes to the construction of an autonomous authorial posture. Invoking Marguerite Duras, Pierre Michon, Jacques Dupin, Herman Hesse and Daniil Kharms,

Bon charts a number of leads that participants can use to venture into what he conceives as important domains of contemporary narrative writing. For instance, from Duras, he derives assignments for the construction of a chronicle that integrates the news, and for a form of writing that takes its cue from the techniques of film. Michon's *Vies minuscules* becomes the occasion for practicing biography and characterization. Dupin's poetry opens up the question of writing and the body. Hesse's and Kharms's texts lead into Bon's cherished domain of fantastic writing. All the exercises are designed to result in narrative texts. Furthermore, they revisit many of the notions encountered in previous chapters. In particular, the Michon-inspired biography assignment recalls issues of space, trajectories, objects, faces and dreams. Additionally, this chapter prepares the participants for going their own way. It refers to books by Duras, Juliet, Gracq, Henry James, Raymond Roussel, Olivier Cadiot, Patrick Chamoiseau and Blanchot that trace ways of being and working as an author. Gracq and Juliet, for example, offer stimulus texts for an exercise in unfolding the word "writing" (déplier le mot 'écrire'). Bon specifies that, once they have arrived at a sufficiently advanced point in their trajectory, it is necessary that participants take some distance (une prise de distance) from their own text and articulate what writing means to them. He adds the following quote from Gracq's *En lisant en écrivant*: "Le commentaire sur l'art d'écrire est mêlé de naissance, inextricablement, à l'écriture." (2005: 313) James's *Notebooks* and Roussel's *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres*, in turn, are the point of departure for demonstrating the functions of the notebook and for the invention of a future writing project. Patrick Chamoiseau's *Écrire en pays dominé* provides an example for keeping poetic notes and impressions of one's literary readings. Finally, Blanchot's fragments present a form of writing in which the boundaries between project and result, reflection and practice, become obsolete. Using Blanchot's form, which is characterized by its perpetual refusal of closure, allows participants to address their own singularity as a writers, as well their place in literary history.

5.4.3. Conclusion

Tous les mots sont adultes constitutes a culmination of the *atelier d'écriture* tradition. Bon's book is unmatched in scope and detail. It takes its cue from the Oulipian practice of *écriture à contraintes* and goes on to offer techniques to examine everyday life that can be used by a wide variety of audiences. It builds on the *atelier d'écriture* tradition that emerged at the end of the sixties and used a similar literary framework with a major role in it for the figure of Georges Perec and his project. At the same time, it expands this literary framework (for instance to texts by writers like Pierre Michon and Pierre Bergougnioux). Furthermore, if Bon attempts to downplay the political dimension of his project, it is obvious that *Tous les mots sont adultes* is still an extension of the explicitly political *atelier d'écriture* groups of the seventies: ultimately, the book's goal is to foster skills of critical reading and to increase

people's autonomy. Critically reading texts should be understood in the broadest sense possible: it not only entails examining literary texts or other texts composed of language, but indeed the world surrounding us, in all its different aspects.

5.5. *Outils Du Roman*: Diverting How-to-Write Formulas

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, Bon seeks ways to expand his methodology. Previously, he pointed out that it could be tiresome to do the same beginner exercises over and over. In spite of the richness that comes from working with diverse (beginner) audiences, ultimately, the element of surprise fades away. In light of such a remark, one can read the publication of *Tous les mots sont adultes* as a sign of completion. Just as *Apprendre l'invention* served to expose Bon's basic views on writing workshops once and for all (so that journalists would not ask him the same questions over and over), *Tous les mots sont adultes* can be interpreted as an attempt to conclude a chapter in Bon's *atelier d'écriture* history. Collecting and sharing his beginner exercises with the public and with other facilitators, allows Bon to move forward to a new stage in the development of his *atelier d'écriture*.

Developing a new methodology often requires a change of context. In 2013, Bon finds two additional settings for his *atelier d'écriture*. First, he is appointed as creative writing teacher at the École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts Paris-Cergy. There, he is not involved with a Master in Création littéraire, but his *ateliers* are part of a curriculum to obtain a DNA (Diplôme national d'art) and a DNSEP (Diplôme national supérieur d'expression plastique). In other words, his audience does not consist of aspiring writers, but is presumably eager to work with language in an artistic way. This allows Bon to develop extensive workshop cycles (one or two years long) and to provide individual tutoring. Secondly, Bon experiments with *ateliers d'écriture en ligne* on *Tierslivre.net.* There, he addresses individuals who are familiar with his methodology and who cultivate an autonomous writing practice, which means that they are capable of dealing with advanced writing exercises. Moreover, the virtual space holds unexplored possibilities with respect to collective writing and to the development of long term writing cycles.

Bon finds inspiration in American creative writing, both in workshops and handbooks, in order to elaborate a new framework of reference. His curiosity about the American creative writing workshop becomes particularly manifest during the 2013 edition of *Écrivains en bord de mer*. Two days of this literary festival were devoted to American literature. On Friday (July 19), Jacques Roubaud, Harry Mathews and Création littéraire instructor Vincent Broqua (Université Paris 8) spoke about American poetry. On Saturday, writers like Tanguy Viel and the Laura Kasischke discussed the American novel. The festival wrapped up with a panel discussion titled "Qu'est-ce que le creative writing? Par ceux qui le pratiquent". Bon animated this roundtable and framed the talk explicitly as an opportunity

for those involved in the *atelier d'écriture* to learn from their American counterparts, embodied here by the writers and creative writing teachers Cole Swensen, Thalia Field, and Laura Kasischke.[42]

Additionally, Bon establishes a collection of American creative writing handbooks. As we saw, in *Apprendre l'invention*, he pointed out the importance of texts on craft to articulate the creative process. He referred to older works such as Flaubert's *Correspondance*, Rilke's *Lettres à un jeune poète* and Julien Gracq's *En lisant, en écrivant*, and called attention to a lack of recent French theory on the subject. In contrast, the contemporary American corpus strikes him as (over)abundant and (over)specialized. In a 2007 blogpost titled "Rayon writer's aid", he testifies to his amazement upon stumbling upon the Writer's Aid shelves in a New York Barnes and Noble bookstore. In 2012 and 2013, after other trips to New York, he composes new blog entries, again expressing his astonishment at the scope of this bookstore section. In France, Bon notes, the mere existence of such a section would be inconceivable. To expand his own archive of creative writing texts, Bon systematically buys these American writing handbooks. Yet, he finds that if some volumes surely contribute to an understanding of the writer's craft, others are mere nonsense, the products of opportunists seeking to profit from the contemporary passion for writing.

In 2016, Bon creates the section "Des Livres pour écrire et faire écrire" on *Tierslivre.net*. He comments:

> Aux États-Unis, le rayon writer's aid est solide et incontournable, en France c'est beaucoup plus difficile de savoir quels sont les livres les plus riches pour l'usage atelier d'écriture. Que vous animiez des ateliers, ou pour votre usage personnel, que vous connaissiez l'auteur, ou bien qu'on cherche le bon biais pour l'utiliser, en voilà quelques-uns... Cette page sera régulièrement complétée, classée, affinée.

In this section, we mainly find the literary stimulus texts present in *Tous les mots sont adultes*, ranging from Georges Perec to Sarraute, Duras, Kafka, Juliet, Novarina, Simon and Gracq. Raymond Carver's *Fires* is the only American text. Bon further includes French writing handbooks, among which three classic texts (Anne Roche's *Atelier d'écriture*; Hubert Haddad's *Le Nouveau magazine d'écriture*; Thierry Leguay's *Petite Fabrique de littérature*) and two lesser-known volumes (Philippe Costa's *Petit manuel pour écrire des haiku*; Virginie Lou-Nony's *Ce qui ne peut se dire*).

In a YouTube video post from 2016 titled "Du Creative writing à l'américain", Bon speaks again of American handbooks. He presents his personal favorites — notably Gertrude Stein's *How to Write*, John Gardner's *The Art of Fiction*, Raymond Carver's *Fires*, Sherry Ellis's *Now Write* and Kenneth Goldsmith's *Uncreative Writing* — and offers his understanding of the differences between the French

[42] See the blogpost "Le creative-writing US par celles qui l'inventent" on *Tierslivre.net*.

atelier d'écriture and the American workshop. In the U.S., he observes, workshops and handbooks function mainly according to genre, in particular the short story. This is due to the existence of large magazines and journals that pay authors per story. In writing workshop and handbooks, he argues, students learn how to master the craft of the short story. This skill set allows them to (partially) make a living once they graduate with an MFA. If we exaggerate a bit, we can conclude that, for Bon, the U.S. methodology leads to generic writing, to texts that comply with a set of rules in view of being sold. Whether this is accurate or not, it is against this view of creative writing that Bon builds his methodology.

Importantly, Bon's move towards creative writing does not stand in isolation. It is triggered by changes in the institutional landscape. At the beginning of this chapter, I observed that the logistic and financial support for the *atelier d'écriture* in France became increasingly limited at the turn of the century. The research center Le Carrefour des écritures was never realized, just as several other initiatives to professionalize the *ateliers d'écriture*. Today, the situation is drastically changed. Numerous universities and arts schools offer courses in creative writing as part of their curricula. In 2012, the first Master de Création littéraire was created at the Université du Havre (during the Master's first year, Bon ran workshops on a regular basis). Since then, a number of French universities have set up similar Master programs, notably the Université Jean Jaurès Toulouse (2012), the Université Paris 8 (2013), the Université de Cergy-Pontoise (2015) and the Université Lumière Lyon 2 (2017). Apparently, French universities have discovered the advantages of the creative writing program.[43] As a result, the institutional space for creative writing workshops and for their facilitators (writers) has grown. Faced with this development, Bon looks at the country where writers are completely involved in the higher educational system. He is out to understand the prerequisites, advantages and pitfalls of this organization of literature, as much for writers as for literature itself.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss Bon's *atelier d'écriture* manual *Outils du roman*. This text enacts the encounter of the French *atelier d'écriture* tradition with the American how-to-write handbook. It takes the practice of *écriture à contraintes* as its starting point and applies it to well-known creative writing formulas, concepts and techniques. To put it differently, it performs *détournement* operations on the how-to-write corpus by taking up the how-to-write handbooks' basic constituents and relocating them in a different context, in this case, a different literary advice tradition. In this way, Bon appropriates how-to-write advice and cuts it loose from the commercial imperatives on which it is built. In turn, the French *atelier d'écriture* tradition is infused with a new set of techniques

[43] One of them being that its popularity might compensate the increasingly lower student rates in Arts faculties. As Bon notes: "Je ne suis pas compétent pour expliquer la désaffection des études littéraires, alors que prolifèrent des formations 'arts du spectacle' ou 'métiers du livre' qui font l'économie de la littérature et n'aboutissent qu'au chômage" (2012: 412).

for the writing of novels. Bon's *détournement* of creative writing thus marks a new phase in the *atelier d'écriture* tradition: instead of providing exercises that work well with a broad audience — and participate in some form of emancipatory politics —, Bon looks at how-to-write handbooks in order to develop advanced techniques for novel-writing. Here, the political gives way, to a certan extent, to the literary.

Cover to Outils du Roman

5.5.1. Malt Olbren: Cult Figure and Writing Guru

In 2016, Bon's move towards creative writing is consolidated in a text. Before the actual publication of this text, Bon already hinted to its release in a blog entry on an American Barnes & Noble writer's aid section titled "Écrivez votre roman en 90 jours et autres lunes":

> De drôles de rêves qui viennent en tête, prendre ces 130 ou 140 bouquins regorgeant de conseils pour livres inutiles et écritures normées, et faire un faux guide tout inventé qui serait, lui, une piste pour l'imaginaire. Puisque l'important c'est plus de rêver aux livres qui n'existent pas encore, et que tout d'un coup on croit possibles.

The bookstore shelves arouse Bon's imagination. He conceives a handbook that is at once a parody of these "bouquins regorgeant de conseils pour livres inutiles et écritures normées" and a useful guide for imaginative writing. It is hard to say whether Bon, when scribbling down this note, was already engaged in a book project. Does this passage mark the moment of Bon's original inspiration (a eureka moment) or, perhaps more likely given Bon's habit of long-term projects, does it allude to something

he is working on in an attempt to tease his readers in a game of hide and seek? In any case, the fact remains that not long after this remark, Bon presented a handbook that wants to be just that, that is, "un faux guide tout inventé qui serait, lui, une piste pour l'imaginaire".

Outils du roman. Le Creative Writing à l'américain is François Bon's translation of Malt Obren's *The Creative Writing No-Guide*. Over the course of 2013, Bon issues the French text on *Tierslivre.net* in separate entries (one entry per exercise). There, it plays a major role as stimulus text for his online workshop *Outils du roman*. In 2016, a paper version was published by Tiers Livre Éditeur, which turned out to be a (relatively) profitable idea, as it is currently the publishing house's bestselling text.

Bon characterizes Malt Olbren (1948-2004) as an eccentric creative writing teacher, friend of John Gardner and Raymond Carver, and translator of Rimbaud and Lautréamont. Olbren, he notes, had a reputation for being blunt, often teasing and provoking students. In the history of creative writing, he appears as an influential figure, someone who strived for a rational articulation of the writer's craft as well as for keeping of a strong connection with the literary canon: "Malt Olbren fait partie […] de ces grands fondateurs qui ont contribué à défétichiser la demarche de création littéraire, tout en mainteant un lien essentiel, profond à leur tradition littéraire" (2016: 8). Olbren died at the beginning of the twenty-first century, leaving the manuscript of *The Creative Writing No-Guide* unfinished. Yet, Bon indicates that this incomplete state was probably intended by Olbren, who meant for his pedagogy to remain open to a certain degree. In fact, the manuscript that Bon translated is the bundle of handouts and notes that Olbren distributed to his students. It still contains the traces of the oral classroom situation, something that Bon has attempted to render in the translation. In print, Bon's translation runs for 180 pages and entails four major parts: recommendations; narrations; constructions and inventions.

Situating *The Creative Writing No-Guide* in the corpus of creative writing handbooks, Bon concludes that it occupies a unique place. First, Olbren's text is a classic that is readily used in workshops and by individual writers. Second, it goes against the grain of conventional handbooks. In his introduction to *Outils du roman* — that bears the telling title "Introduction ou pourquoi inventer Malt Olbren" — Bon notes:

> Voici donc enfin, en exclusivité et traduit pour la première fois en français, le légendaire guide américain de *creative writing* et ses exercises fondateurs, qui circule depuis tant d'années dans toutes les facs américaines et sur la table de tant d'auteurs US.
>
> Dans la profusion de tous les livres d'exercices d'écriture, rayon *writer's aid*, *creative writing for dummies* ou *how to write* (mais pas comme Gertrude Stein, toujours ajouter le complément direct au choix: votre roman en trois semaines, une histoire policière, un scénario à succès pour le cinéma), la

> démarche d'Olbren a toujours choisi le contrepoint ou l'écart, dès ce titre qui l'a imposée comme définitif livre de référence, le fameux *A creative writing no-guide*. (2016: 7)

In this passage, Bon employs a parodic mode to present his translation. "Voici donc enfin, en exclusivité et traduit pour la première fois en français" clearly alludes to the marketing discourse found in the paratext of so many how-to-write handbooks. In addition, this introduction criticizes these handbooks, presenting them as an indistinguishable "profusion" and using irony to mock their titles' optimistic promises: "Votre roman en trois semaines, une histoire policière, un scénario à succès pour le cinéma".

When he first introduced *Outils du roman* on *Tierslivre.net*, Bon did not reveal much about Malt Olbren's identity. In fact, he made his translation seem authentic, for instance mentioning The Malt Olbren Archive's permission to complete the translation. Today, Bon no longer hides that Olbren is a pseudonym. He has suggested this in a video on *Tierslivre.net* and it can be gathered from the title of the introduction to *Outils du roman* ("Pourquoi inventer Malt Olbren"). Finally, in an explanatory note to this same introduction, he says:

> La rumeur s'est répandue que, sous le nom de Malt Olbren (que je n'aurais fait qu'emprunter à une des belles histoires ultra-brèves de Daniil Harms) j'avais voulu seulement orienter ma pratique des ateliers d'écriture vers les formes américaines – littérature et démarche pour laquelle j'ai tant de respect – de narration Romanesque, et son développement. Chacun choisira l'option qui lui convient le mieux. Ici, on trouvera seulement mon cher vieux maître Malt Olbren, et je vous laisse avec lui. (2016: 9)

Outils du roman is not the only project where Bon introduced Malt Olbren. He used the pseudonym in the past for web-projects and also presents the short texts collected under the title *Maisons intérieures d'écritures* (to be found on *Tierslivre.net*) as translations of Olbren's *Inside Houses*. Additionally, he includes Daniil Kharms story "Maltonius Olbren" in *Tous les mots sont adultes* as stimulus text. If we speculate about Bon's reasons to choose this name, we could perhaps see Kharms's one paragraph story as a parable of the process of writing or of becoming a writer. In the tale, a man named M. wants to rise three feet above the ground. Every day he stands in front of his wardrobe in an attempt to lift off. While his efforts prove futile, he starts to see a vision that, over time, becomes more detailed. When the maid finally asks him to take down the painting hanging above the wardrobe, he discovers that what he was seeing were not visions, but rather details of this particular painting. At that point, he realizes that he was hovering above the ground all along. Interpreting this story in the context of a writing handbook, we could say that M.'s wish to rise three feet above the ground represents the desire to become a writer, more precisely, to enjoy the aura that comes with authorship. His failing attempts to lift off (as days, weeks and months go by) and the subsequent dedication to his vision can

be read as the passage to creative work. Instead of prestigious authorship, the writer becomes fascinated with the text he is working on, absorbed to the point of forgetting his initial desire: M. forgets that he wanted to rise above the ground and gives himself over completely to the study of the vision. Finally, M's realization that "for a long time already he had been rising into the air" can come to stand for the a posteriori insight of having turned into a writer. Here, the lesson seems to be one of modesty: one only becomes a writer by doing the repetitive, demanding and absorbing work that is writing.

5.5.2. Bon/Olbren's Method

Outils du roman addresses both the individual writer and the facilitator of *ateliers d'écriture*. All the exercises can be performed in a workshop and in isolation. Each exercise presents one particular writing technique. This can be a technique to write a short prose fragment ("Narrations"), to develop characters and overarching structures ("Constructions"), even to write a short story ("Inventions"). All these techniques are designed to become part of the individual writer's toolbox, to the point that she can use them without thinking. In the past, Bon has compared this to how musicians are trained to gradually acquire this tacit know-how. In *Outils du roman*, he signals that this approach is typical for the American workshop:

> Il faut comprendre en premier lieu ce que, dans chaque exercice, je nomme leur artefact : situation d'écriture de laboratoire, conçue artificiellement, qui nous permet de grossir jusqu'à la distorsion un élément technique particulier, que vous intégrerez ensuite dans votre pratique dès le premier jet, et sans plus y penser. Et toute l'essence et la gloire de l'*american creative writing* réside en cette démarche (2016: 73)

Bon/Olbren's methodology is marked by three characteristics: it enters into dialogue with American creative writing; it mainly deals with preparation and the creation of mental images; it rests on a carefully constructed dynamic of precision and openness.

Détournement of how-to-write

First, almost all assignments are based on rules, techniques and concepts that play an important role in American creative writing, both in workshops and handbooks. For instance, Bon/Olbren offers assignments drawn from the *kill your darlings* rule, the technique of *versioning* (writing by using a system of drafts or versions), and the concepts of dialogue, character and action. Noticeably, Bon/Olbren always transforms the original technique. These transformations generally entail an expansion or complexification of the technique in question. This not so much because Bon/Olbren

merely wants to make things complicated, but rather because he believes that the creation of interesting and layered texts requires interesting and layered exercises. Many writing rules and exercises, Bon/Olbren argues, are too general to be put into play in a workshop. For example, in "Exercice dit de l'observation du carrefour-soi", the first exercise, Bon/Olbren explains that many handbooks ask to write about the street where one lives or to describe a pretty landscape. This hardly ever generates an interesting text, nor does it captivate the participants. In turn, Bon/Olbren presents an elaborate exercise (seven pages) on the notion and image of the crossroads. He notes:

> Il n'y a pas de mauvais livre de *creative* writing qui ne propose de décrire une rue de par chez toi: ça ne colle pas. Les mêmes mauvais livres de *creative* writing se sentent tenus à proposer de décrire un beau paysage : ça ne colle pas. Moi Malt Olbren te propose d'écrire un carrefour. (2016: 37 italics by Bon)

Bon/Olbren is critical of the advice that he finds in American how-to-write handbooks. Yet, Bon/Olbren's changes are not only motivated by this criticism, that is, by the idea that rules in American handbooks are trivial. Bon/Olbren values (high-brow) handbooks such as Gertrude Stein's *How to Write* and John Gardner's *The Art of Fiction*. Nonetheless, when introducing exercises based on these texts, he also transforms them. This is due to Bon/Olbren's idea that the facilitator should have a profound understanding of the assignments he proposes. Each exercise should echo her specific singularity as a writer and as a facilitator. He comments:

> On n'invente pas des exercices d'écriture avec une moulinette qui s'appellerait la moulinette à inventer des exercices d'écriture.
>
> On dispose chacun d'une harmonique particulière, tu vois: comme ces baudruches sculptées très fines et fragiles qu'on te donne dans les fêtes foraines, et colorées sur ciel nuageux gris. Cela, c'est ton rapport personnel et singulier à la vielle chose littérature, à la vieille chose récit.
>
> Alors, dans cette singularité, tu inventes des passerelles: ce qui fait résonner la vieille chose à partir de cette petite sculpture étroite qui est toi. (2016: 53)

A writing exercise proposed in a workshop should resonate with the particular sensibilities of the one who proposes it. This is a prerequisite for a successful *atelier d'écriture*. Consequently, Bon/Olbren, when using a creative writing exercise from another handbook, will transform and appropriate it.

Another reason for the appropriation of American writing exercises has to do with context. Bon/Olbren understands that American writing exercises are connected to the context in and out of which they emerge. They are rooted in American literature (Poe, Faulkner, Steinbeck) and culture (geography, film, music, food) and constantly make references to them. To open these exercises up to a non-American audience, Bon/Olbren plays the role of a cultural guide. He points to the specificity of

the American landscape (its vastness and its great cities), to the importance of television and film, to US eating and drinking habits, and to how all this plays out in literature. Ultimately, this familiarizes French readers with the American context. By integrating these references, Bon/Olbren evokes a world that captures the attention and spurs the imagination. From this perspective, Bon/Olbren's transformations are cultural adaptations, or attempts to let literary techniques that originate in one culture speak to writers from another culture.

A good example of a transformation is found in "Auteur, aime la foule", one of *Outils du roman*'s last exercises. Bon/Olbren writes that this assignment is the most challenging and the most open of all the exercises in the handbook. Its goal is to make a successful rendition of a crowd possible, something which film and television, Bon/Olbren contends, is well equipped to do, but which contemporary literature has difficulties treating. It takes its cue from an exercise by John Gardner. Bon/Olbren presents it as if he and Gardner came up with the assignment together. He recounts the story of Gardner's hospitalization after a motorcycle accident. Sitting in his hospital room together and watching television, they suddenly realize that film and TV pose a challenge to literature when it comes to portraying large crowds. Bon/Olbren recalls how Gardner formulated the problem: "*Hey Buddy*, reprit-il (là cette fois c'est sa manière de parler), je te dis: savons-nous dans le roman utiliser la scène de foule de façon aussi élémentaire et naturelle qu'en usent le cinéma et la télévision?" (2016: 174) Can writing rival film when it comes to making convincing depictions of a crowd? This is the challenge on which the remainder of the exercise rests. After this, Bon/Olbren exposes the different constraints of the assignment and leaves the rest up to the writer. In sum, here we encounter a reenactment of Bon/Olbren's transformation of Gardner's exercise. Bon/Olbren narrates how he and Gardner literally created the exercise together. By embedding Gardner's exercise in a narrative — a story in which he presents the figure of Gardner to a French audience, in which he speaks of American television, coffee shops and the Maine Lobster Festival —, Bon/Olbren constructs a cultural passageway for French writers to use Gardner's writing proposition.

Constructing Mental Images

Secondly, Bon/Olbren's approach is characterized by its focus on (lengthy) preparation and the construction of strong mental images (rather than on the writing act itself). For him, not writing, withholding writing, and recognizing the right moment to write are the writer's main concerns. He states: "Apprends à [sic] seulement à en penser en termes de temps et de stratégie dans le temps, plutôt que texte et combinaison de textes" (2016: 132). Bon/Olbren's exercises are lengthy, in average running some eight pages. They open with an exposition of the *enjeu* or with a somewhat puzzling statement on poetics. Then follow various stages with instructions that gradually become more specific. Throughout, Bon/Olbren dictates the pace. He tells the writer to slow down, to take time, to

focus, to wait before writing. In most cases, he urges to refrain from writing until the exercise is over. First, the writer should obtain the right state of mind that allows her to produce a good first draft. In particular, the writer should have a detailed and rich vision of the scene she wants to evoke. Indeed, the preliminary vision is the crux of Bon/Olbren's method. Every exercise offers a technique to construct strong mental images that can spark the writing act. Every exercise ultimately contributes to the understanding that preparation and vision are the *sine qua nons* of writing. Notably, all this echoes Daniil Kharm's short story. It was only by developing a plentiful vision that M., the protagonist of "Maltonius Olbren", finally and haphazardly reached his goal (to hover three feet above the ground).

A fine instance of the importance of preparation and preliminary vision is the already mentioned "Exercice dit de l'observation du carrefour-soi". Its opening lines are an enigmatic statement of poetics: "Il n'y a pas de paysage qui ne soit aussi peinture de soi. Il n'y a pas de paysage qui soit description mais élévation ou construction" (2016: 37). After this, Bon/Olbren announces that the assignment deals with the image of the crossroads. To start, he proposes to consider the notion of crossroads. He provides an existential and literary interpretation*:* "Là tu bifurques, et l'écriture inclura cet ouvert. Et le carrefour est un point, tu focalises ton récit à une distance précise de toi-même, qui inclut l'au-delà et l'en-deça." (2016: 38). Then, he asks to compose a list of crossroads that have played a role in the individual's life ("liste mentale de tous tes carrefours"). He stresses that this list should not be written down and that it should not be made in haste. He issues warnings such as: "Ce n'est pas assez, tu vas trop vite: à chacun de tes lieux chronologiques associe un Carrefour et reprends plus lentement ta liste" (2016: 38). Two lines further, we read: "Maintenant tu les vois. Continue. Reprends depuis ta vie récente, prends ta vie à l'envers, selon chaque lieu d'activité, chaque point de souci, et trouve tes carrefours." (2016: 38). Bon/Olbren instructs to keep on expanding the list. He exposes different strategies for finding one's many crossroads: starting today and working backwards; focusing on key-moments in one's life and looking for crossroads associated with them; keeping the image of a cross in mind and thinking of the crossroads as postcards that are linked together by the cross-shape*:* "La figure du croisement devient le point fixe de la superposition mentale. Ce sont des cartes postales qui s'assemblent par le milieu, garde cette idée de milieu" (2016: 38). Once the list is complete, Bon/Olbren proposes to select five crossroads and explore them further. He emphasizes to abandon the notion of list and to conceive the crossroads instead as a set of projected slides. As in a slideshow, the writer should study the images one after the other, first in chronological order, then two by two, then in a random order. At this point, Bon/Olbren instructs to choose one image and comments: "Enfin, tu en prends un et tu regardes: maintenant tu sais voir" (2016: 39). In the rest of the assignment, the writer is given advice to nourish her vision of this crossroads. She can pay attention to the buildings around it, to traffic lights, to cracks in the pavement, to garbage, to passers-by. She can imagine the crossroads in movement, observe the rhythm of the fluxes of cars and people, or think of postcards,

paintings, films, literature that depict crossroads. Finally, Bon/Olbren suggests to select four photo stills of the crossroads, four different images of the same space*: "*Garde quelques figures, je suggérerais quatre: jour puis nuit, panne puis neige". He concludes: "Voilà, c'était l'exercice dit observation du carrefour soi. Peu m'importe que tu l'écrives. Mais si tu l'écris, tant mieux" (2016: 40). In other words, the first exercise in *Outils du roman* does not even assume a writing act. It is only entails preparation and vision. Whether the text is ultimately realized or not, is up to the individual writer.

Between Precision and Openness

Third, pedagogically, Bon/Olbren's method is rooted in a balance between moments of precision and of enigmatic openness. At some points, the instructions are specific. Think of the dictation of pace in the crossroads exercise. Another example comes from "Et alors il est où, le dialogue", the first of a series of exercises on dialogue, in which the basic constraint prohibits the rendition of speech: "La seule condition: que jamais une parole ne soit dite par un des personnages" (2016: 67). At other points, the intention of an exercise is unclear and unspecified. Bon/Olbren leaves gaps and blanks in his handbook (at some point, he plainly writes: "Je laisse un blanc" (2016: 171)). He omits part of an exercise and resorts to opaque metaphors (for instance in the titles of the exercises) and poetic statements. All this leaves space for interpretation. It makes the budding writer ponder the design of an exercise and appeals to her imagination. Ultimately, it draws her into the narrative of the handbook.

Bon/Olbren understands that precision and space for the reader's imagination and interpretation are both essential in constructing exercises. This becomes obvious in the exercise dubbed "Ne coupe pas le moteur, Joe". Initially, Bon/Olbren refuses to do more than repeating the title, arguing that it contains the entire idea of the exercise. He writes: "La consigne s'énonce ainsi: tout se passe ici sans couper le moteur, et Joe ou pas Joe ça suffit pour la route" (2016: 55). And a bit further: "Je répète donc, de façon synthétique et complete, la consigne de l'exercice: 'Ne coupe pas ton moteur, Joe" (2016: 56). Then, he clarifies the setup of the assignment. The writers are instructed to create a scene involving a car of which the engine must keep running. The car can move or stand still, can contain zero to six passengers, children and adults, can pass through crowded streets or along silent highways. All this is possible, as long as one respects the constraint formulated in the title. In addition, Bon/Olbren adds the constraints of organizing the narrative around four pivotal moments (like the four steps that start an engine: "Admission, compression, explosion, échappement") and of censoring all information about the final destination. He ends the exercise by saying: "Profitez-bien (*Have fun*)" (2016: 60). Clearly, this exercise rests on a dynamic of gradual precision (Bon/Olbren goes from vague suggestions to the articulation of specific constraints) and of space for interpretation. It invites the reader to fill in the gaps and even appeals to her on an affective level. For example,

Bon/Olbren notes, in a somewhat provocative and challenging turn of phrase, “Et pour celles et ceux qui n’auraient pas compris [l’exercice], j’explique” (2016: 57).

The openness of Bon/Olbren’s approach, and its subsequent appeal to the reader, also characterizes Bon/Olbren’s views on writing over a long period of time. In the chapter “Expansion continue et discontinue d’une histoire simple”, Bon/Olbren observes: “On ne construit pas ces stratégies-là d’avance. Tu apprends à te connaître rétrospectivement […]. Ce sont des rythmes biologiques, peut-être cinq à six heures sur douze à quatorze jours, et puis refaire les forces. Va voir cela de près chez les écrivains qui sont les tiens” (2016: 131). Writing, he contends, has to do with managing time and energy, and these matters are highly subjective. Whereas some writers work night and day for weeks on end and have a long break afterwards, others maintain a more moderate tempo. Bon/Olbren specifies: “Sache seulement qu’il n y a pas de hiérarchie. Sache qu’on trouvera dans la bibliothèque, les correspondances, les journaux, les exégèses autant de postures pour l’écriture de grands, très grands livres, que tu peux en définir” (2016: 132). There are many possible postures and what counts, Bon/Olbren argues, is finding the one that suits a specific text. For him, it matters that writers cultivate a feeling for a text’s intrinsic dynamic. As if it were a living organism, they must learn to listen to it and to respond to it in an appropriate way: “L’exercice c’est d’apprendre à obéir: que veut de toi ton texte? Et que peux-tu retourner de tes forces contre ton texte même?” (*Outils* 134). Moreover, Bon/Olbren stresses the necessity to change one’s habits after having grown accustomed to them. Writers, he thinks, must constantly push themselves out of their comfort zone: “Quand tu connais tes habitudes de travail, le mieux c’est de te forcer à en changer” (2016: 131).

5.5.3. Blowing up How-to-write Formulas

Outils du Roman consists of four parts: Recommandations, Narrations, Constructions, Inventions. The most puzzling part is definitely “Recommandations”. It consists of two chapters. “Anti-commandements de l’écriture” contains thirteen pages with aphoristic pieces of writing advice, usually limited to one sentence. The tone of these maxims is direct and caustic, as if Bon/Olbren were looking to provoke some violent reaction with the reader. Their meaning is often enigmatic, though some appear more evident than others. In fact, they do not express a delineated poetic vision, if not precisely the idea that true literature can never be captured in delineated poetic visions. Here are some examples:

> À ceux qui te disent: demande-toi toujours ce qu’il y a de plus important dans ton histoire, demande-toi plutôt pourquoi toute cette histoire a si peu d’importance.
> Coupe les élément inutiles, disent-ils: enlève l’utile et garde le reste, dis-toi que la musique est rarement dans les pommes de terre.

> À ceux qui te disent: sache toujours les trois éléments principaux de ton récit en cette phrase, réponds-leur que le quatrième élément non plus n'est pas celui qui compte.
> À ceux qui te disent: garde-toi des clichés, réponds qu'effeuiller les clichés c'est l'acide que tu bois, et si le cliché c'est les puces sur le chien, il est bon pour toi d'être le chien de ton livre. (2016: 13)

> Mange peu, mange plutôt avant qu'après, choisis ce que tu manges, te disent-ils: je mange ce que j'écris, réponds-leur.
> Faire la différence entre ce qui est intéressant et ce qui est important: oui, puis écrire seulement avec ce qui reste.
> Prépare ton brouillon, te disent-ils : mais le brouillon est déjà le mort qu'on a rhabillé, et c'est le mort qui fait le livre. (2016: 15-16)

These aphorisms do not tell the writer what to do or not to do. On the contrary, they intend to undermine such proscriptive attempts. Thinking back of Bon's interest in American how-to-write handbooks, it is not difficult to read them as subversions of the norms and tricks that one finds in this corpus. Indeed, many of the *anti-commandements* allude to rules present in writing handbooks: *kill your darlings*; avoid clichés; prepare your writing tools; make drafts; do not stall. Yet, the function of Bon/Olbren's list of aphorisms in *Outils du roman* is more than critical. It serves as a preparatory workout for the writing act. Bon/Olbren wants to get his readers in a right state of mind to write. He uses repetition, the imperative mode, and a biting, hostile tone and content to do so. The message is: get rid of all possible prejudices, transgress all the rules exhibited in writing handbooks (even in Bon/Olbren's own book). Write with what comes from deep within, with one's most extreme and violent experiences, with that which cannot be captured in simple rules and which confronts language in the most direct and surprising ways.

That becomes more obvious in "Que l'écriture soit ton tigre intime", the second chapter. Olbren opens the chapter with an anecdote about a student taking his course after having participated in a bestselling and Pulitzer prize winning author's writing workshop. The student explains to Olbren how his former teacher offered an exercise in writing about an imaginary animal ("toi et ton animal, une imagination"). After Olbren ridicules this assignment for its triviality and lack of imagination, the student runs off. Olbren, goes on to say:

> Moi je dis: *cherche la bête*, quand la littérature seule est la bête. Moi je dis: cherche la bête, quand elle se bat avec la bête, et tue ou mords ou contamine, et se moque de l'humain. […] Moi je dis: la littérature qui imagine dans les possibles et les variations du possibles est une littérature morte, sinon pour les prix trucs et les journaux machins. (2016: 29)

In this passage, we recognize the same voice as in the aphorisms. We find repetition, imperative, and violence. Spurred by the student's mention of the imaginary animal exercise, in the rest of the chapter, Bon/Olbren exposes his view on the relation between animality and writing. For him, an exercise in writing about animals, whether imaginary or not, does not touch upon the essential stakes of literature. He notes: "Je n'aime pas l'idée d'écrire sur" (2016: 30). Instead, the animal or the beast is that which the writer must pursue or become. It is an intense state of mind linked to extreme experiences of violence, sickness and death. It is a space in which conventional societal, linguistic and literary norms no longer hold. It is the only place out of which good and relevant writing can emerge. Bon/Olbren states: "L'animal c'est la bactérie qui te mange les tripes, le virus qui te troue les cellules, c'est la merde d'éléphant que le pauvre type en bottes et masque ramassa à brouette avant que les visiteurs payants arrivent. L'animal c'est nous-même dévoré, c'est nous quand malade" (2016: 29-30).

Here, the idea of the preparatory workout applies again. In his discourse, Bon/Olbren facilitates a transition. He takes his readers by the hand and leads them from the feeble imaginary animal assignment to the discovery of their inner beast. For instance, in the following fragment, he moves from saying "la bête est en toi" to "la bête est toi". Additionally, he summons a number of strong images reminiscent of animals, especially dangerous or endangered animals. All this appeals to the readers' imagination in an effort to help them to arrive at the mental state necessary to write well:

> La bête est en toi. Regarde tes ongles. Regarde tes ongles assez longtemps pour que tu voies pousser […]. Ils sont griffes, et pareil grandit ce que portes en gueule pour te nourrir et te battre. La bête est en toi: tu gémis, tu te tords, tu as mal, tu ne sais pas penser. La bête est toi: tu sais tant de choses par instinct que tu n'auras jamais besoin d'apprendre. (2016: 33)

If we were to think of the literary influences in this strange opening chapter of *Outils du roman*, we would quickly arrive at Maurice Blanchot. His entire oeuvre is pervaded by the question of the possibility of writing (his first published text of criticism is titled "Comment la littérature est-elle possible?), especially in the face of death and sickness. Moreover, Bon regularly quotes Blanchot, and the title *Tous les mots sont adultes* is a phrase borrowed from this writer.

At the same time, a text by another writer has been a much more immediate source of inspiration. In 2013, a few weeks before the publication of *Outils du roman*, Bon posted an essay from Harry Mathews's *Le Cas du Maltais persévérant* on *Tierslivre.net*. In the article, titled "Isidore Ducasse", the Oulipian writer performs a reading of Lautréamont's (or Isidore Ducasse's) oeuvre. The event that sparked the essay was the publication of a new English translation of Lautréamont's *Oeuvres complètes* by Alexis Lykiard. Bon praises Mathews's exposition, especially the decision to construct it around the figure of Isidore Ducasse (Lautréamont's real name), which allows Mathews to discuss Ducasse's two

major (and only) works, *Les Chants de Maldoror* (published under the pseudonym Lautréamont) and *Les Poésies* (published under Ducasse) together. In this way, Mathews unveils the importance of *Les Poésies* to foster an understanding of Ducasse's oeuvre, something which most critics have failed to do (most critics focus solely on *Les Chants de Maldoror*).

In his exposé, Mathews characterizes *Les Poésies* as follows:

> *Les Poésies* sont faites principalement d'aphorismes et de brèves assertions dogmatiques. Ce qu'on demande habituellement à un aphorisme, c'est qu'il sonne juste, qu'il tranche un problème, parfois nouveau mais nécessairement évident, avec une incisive élégance. On comprend rapidement que les aphorismes de Ducasse ne satisferont pas pareilles exigences. À lire 'Bonté, ton nom est homme' (p. 253) ou 'Nul raisonneur ne croit contre sa raison' (p. 258), on peut en déduire que l'auteur s'est mué en Candide ou en menteur hypocrite, à moins qu'il ne se moque de nous. D'autres exemples nous laissent ébahis : 'J'accepte Euripide et Sophocle ; mais je n'accepte pas Eschyle'; 'Je ne laisserai pas des Mémoires' (p. 239). Des affirmations massives, sans qu'on sache comment ni pourquoi. Aphorismes et proclamations doctrinaires servent là un nouveau dessein.

It would be hard to negate the link between this description of *Les Poésies*, available on *Tierslivre.net*, and the opening chapters of *Outils du roman*. Clearly, Bon/Olbren has appropriated Ducasse's form of baffling aphorism and enigmatic doctrine. Likewise, the message that the *anti-commandements* convey echoes Mathews's interpretation of Ducasse's poetics. Citing translator and critic Lykiard, Mathews concludes: "Toutes les opinions que professe Ducasse dans les Poésies peuvent être attaquées et contredites, comme la moindre de ses paroles peut être réarrangée. Rien n'est fixé ni statique. La stase, c'est la mort". Like Ducasse, Bon/Olbren points to the essential transgressive and mobile nature of writing. Literature cannot be captured in permanent and rigid rules, lest it lose all dynamic and historic relevance.

Outils du roman's opening chapters parody, appropriate and transform the formulas found in how-to-write handbooks. One by one, Bon takes these mantras and detaches them from the context in which they emerged. In particular, he departs from the simple commercial imperatives that constitute their groundwork in order to explore what can be done with them when free imagination takes hold of them. In the next chapters, he proceeds to stage the encounter of these formulas, by now liberated from market directives, with the French *atelier d'écriture* tradition and its *écriture à contraintes* practices.

5.5.4. Infusing the *Atelier d'écriture* tradition with How-To-Write

The book parts "Narrations", "Constructions" and "Inventions" are mostly composed of writing exercises. "Narrations" provides techniques for the creation of short prose fragments, "Constructions" deals with the construction of character and longer narrative structures, "Inventions" contains an exercise in short-story writing and the John Gardner based crowd exercise mentioned above. I will give an overview of those three parts and provide some detailed examples of the ways in which Bon/Olbren constructs exercises by practicing *détournement* of how-to-write formulas, concepts, and techniques. More specifically, I will discuss the ways in which Bon/Olbren's appropriates a typical American creative writing technique (versioning), an important building block of fiction (character), and a quintessential formula (*kill your darlings*) respectively. I will conclude by analyzing Bon's proposal to write a fantastic short story in the tradition of Poe and H. P. Lovecraft.

"Narrations", *Outils du roman*'s most lengthy part, counts eleven chapters and 85 pages. Each chapter offers one exercise in prose writing. If we think back of Bon/Olbren's transformations of American creative writing, we recognize that most exercises in "Narrations" are based on techniques, concepts, or literary texts from the US creative writing tradition and literary canon. For instance, one exercise transforms the technique of versioning (writing in different drafts or versions), another departs from the notion of dialogue, another uses stimulus texts by Melville and Poe. Similarly, the previously discussed "Exercice dit de l'observation du carrefour-soi" is based on the popular handbook exercise of describing the street where one grew up, and "Ne coupe pas le moteur, Joe" is inspired by *October Ferry to Gabriola*, the last novel by British writer Malcolm Lowry.

In "Irruption du dérangé, et ce qui s'ensuit", Bon/Olbren appropriates the typical creative writing technique of versioning. Versioning is a method frequently used to create stories with the help of software. There are many variations, but its basic idea is to work in multiple files so as to allow the writer to experiment with elements such as diverging storylines, different points of view and the introduction of additional scenes. At the outset of "Irruption du dérangé" Bon/Olbren expresses his disdain for versioning: "Je ne crois pas au versioning, je ne crois pas à la littérature millefeuilles, je ne crois pas au fabriqué" (2016: 60). He rejects what he considers to be a method for generating polished and artificial stories to produce bestselling literature. Instead, he offers his take on versioning. In a first step, he proposes to write the scene: four or five people in an ordinary setting. He leaves it to the individual writer to fill in the particulars, but insists that the scene should be portrayed as if it were a slice of life "imposez-vous qu'il soit […] comme détaché au couteau de la vie courante, puis posé là sur la table à écrire," (2016: 61) and specifies that it should be composed in a fixed order: the setting (i.e. a room), the details of the setting (i.e. objects in the room), the people in the setting, specificities of these people, fragments of their conversations. At the same time, he emphasizes that the text should

maintain a sketch-like character: “Vous racontez cela comme dans une lettre à un ami, comme dans un reportage de terrain, rien n’est appuyé” (2016: 63). After this, he recommends to save the text as “version 1” and to make a copy. In the second version, the writer should introduce an additional character whose behavior disrupts the created scene. Importantly, the character’s actions and words should be directly inserted into the text, that is, given a place between the existing lines and images: “Vous insérez sa propre description, puis celle de ses actes, puis les paroles qu’il émet, dans le fil temporal continu de votre première scène” (2016: 62). Then, a third file (version 3) should be created, in which all the traces of version 1 must be deleted. As a result, only the disruptive character’s speech and actions remain visible. In turn, a new setting can be created to host *le dérangé*: “Eh bien, réinventez-lui un lieu, un lieu qui cette fois soit basé uniquement sur lui, le dérangé, quitte à simplement le faire marcher dans la nuit, simplement le poser sur un plateau nu de théâtre” (2016: 63).

In “Et alors il est où, le dialogue” and “Pompiers du dialogue (deux exercices plus un)”, Bon/Olbren introduces five exercises on dialogue and stresses that these should be performed in the suggested order. A first assignment instructs to construct a dialogue without dialogue. To come up with a subject matter, the writer can use a work in progress or, in case one has no text at hand, she can conjure up a recently lived moment of intense dialogue. Bon/Olbren insists: “La seule condition: que jamais une parole ne soit dite par un des personnages” (2016: 67). The entire scene must be written out, as many sensory impressions as possible should be included (smells, background noises, detailed description of the characters), but the text cannot contain the dialogue itself. In “Adresse à l’absent”, the goal is to write a dialogue in which the speech of only one of two characters, the narrator, is related. Again, the suggested starting point is a scene from a manuscript in preparation. The third exercise, “De la retouche photographique appliquée à l’échange oral” likens the writer to a photographer and offers that she rewrite a dialogue as if she were editing photos with graphic software such as Photoshop. Bon/Olbren uses this analogy to show that the writer must give depth, relief and contrast to dialogue. He signals: “Une conversation n’est pas un paysage plat (*flat landscape*). Une conversation, en chacune des zones que vous avez définies, fait varier l’interlocuteur principal” (2016: 75). More precisely, he proposes to divide a dialogue into five parts and expand or reduce it where necessary. Finally, in “Un cinquième pour William”, Bon/Olbren offers his variation on the handbook mantra *kill your darlings* and suggests that the writer delete one fifth of a given dialogue. He testifies to the technique’s efficiency*:* “Le miracle: [ton texte] est nettement mieux comme ça. Il ne manque rien, il est bien plus dense, rapide, fort, au contraire. Et dans chaque endroit où vous avez mis de l’air, c’est la tête du lecteur qui gamberge, et vous en apporte bien plus que ce que vous avez enlevé” (2016: 78). Interestingly, when considering the dialogue exercises as a whole, it appears that Bon/Olbren has taken his own advice to heart, as he presents only four exercises on dialogue rather than the

announced five. What is more, it seems that he has suppressed the crux of the series. Whereas the first two exercises treat the preparation of dialogue, the last two focus on rewriting dialogue. Yet, no assignment offers a way to construct dialogue. This shows how Bon/Olbren leaves space for interpretation and imagination, leaves space for the reader, just as he notes: "Et dans chaque endroit où vous avez mis de l'air, c'est la tête du lecteur qui gamberge" (2016: 78).

"Constructions", *Outils du roman*'s third part, consists of five chapters in total, one on the construction of character, and four on longer narrative structures. "Construire un personnage (aphorismes sur)" opens with a list of statements on characterization reminiscent of the aphorisms of the introductory chapters. We read: "Un personnage n'est pas un nom, ou un prénom, ou un nom et un prénom mis en tête d'une phrase" (2016: 123). Or further : "Un personnage n'est pas une statue habillée: plutôt le contraire" (2016: 123). In slight contrast with the puzzling phrases in the opening chapters, here, Bon/Olbren's statements convey a more precise view: characters are not only names, but are generated by the words on the page, by the stories they live, by the ways in which they speak and act. As he argues: "Un personnage n'est pas le début d'une histoire mais sa fin" (2016: 126). Characters are the result of all that happens in a story. In between the aphorisms, Bon/Olbren inserts advice and exercises. For instance, he refers to "his friend" Raymond Carver's minimalist stories and explains that the life-like quality of this author's characters can be directly linked to the paucity of his plot and setting. From this, he infers the following advice: "Réduisez toujours, toujours, toujours votre histoire. Alors vient au devant le personnage, et sa voix, et sa mèche de travers ou sa frange trop longue, et ses chaussures. Le monde commence là" (2016: 127). Or, he gives three small, consecutive exercises. In the first one, "l'anti-liste", writers are instructed to compose a list of characters they do not wish to deal with, and explain why not. The second exercise is preceded by the statements "un personnage n'est pas l'auteur (cette histoire, c'est une invention des Français)" (2016: 127) and "un personnage est un peu de l'auteur arraché par un poing dans ses tripes et boyaux et que l'auteur ne récupèrera plus jamais pour lui-même" (2016: 127). It entails that the writers enlist those aspects of themselves which they would like to see transforming into fiction, and those which they do not. The final exercise opens with a remark on the importance of precision when formulating certain writing assignments: "Plus on se tient près d'un fonctionnement banal et d'un rouage élémentaire du récit littéraire, et cela quel qu'en soit le mode narratif, plus la consigne de l'enseignant doit être stricte et précise" (2016: 129).

Bon/Olbren argues that the more basic the notion at hand (in this case "character"), the more pressing the need for rigorous constraints. In this exercise, Bon/Olbren tells the writers to place two school desks opposite of one another. Behind the desks, there should be chairs and on one of them paper and pencil. The writers are asked to sit down and to imagine that they are facing the character they seek to portray. They are not allowed to evoke the character's history, nor can they insert their

own thoughts in the text. Like a police officer interrogating a suspect, they can only ask basic questions (qui êtes-vous, que faites-vous, d'où venez-vous, que cherchez-vous) and note down everything the character says. Moreover, they should represent other sensory impressions, for example, the character's face and gestures, the sound of his voice, the decoration of the room, the sounds that come from outside.

"Cours tout droit Billie (exercice d'agression narrative)", one of the assignments on narrative structures, entails another interpretation of *kill your darlings*. Bon/Olbren opens by saying: "Vous commencez à connaître Malt Olbren et comment il s'y prend: jamais tout droit. Mais aujourd'hui, il s'agit précisément d'un exercice pour aller droit" *(*2016: 137). As became clear in *Les Outils du roman*'s first chapters, Bon/Olbren mocks, appropriates, uses and transforms the poetics of creative writing handbooks. One of the main reasons that Bon/Olbren refutes and transforms the American handbooks' poetics is these texts' advice to build straightforward narratives. American writing handbooks, he contends, advise to construct plots that rest on simple causal relations and in which the presence of events can only be justified by referring to the bigger narrative, to the scenes that precede and follow (in the previous chapter, I called this the how-to-write handbooks' functionalism). All that which transgresses the boundaries of the main narrative should be suppressed. In spite of this criticism, "Cours tout droit Billie" exposes a technique that fits easily with such a poetics of causality, linearity and sparsity. Indeed, Bon/Olbren is aware of that kinship, as we read in the summary of the exercise:

> Que chaque phrase, chaque paragraphe ait sa fonction unique dans l'économie du texte. Si c'est une diversion, une ouverture potentielle vers autre chose, ou bien une impasse, un resserrement, ou que cela ne contribue pas à l'économie narrative: danger. Je ne veux pas dire qu'il s'agisse de suite de supprimer. Un Européen ne supprimerait pas, un Américain oui. Soyez parfois mauvais Américain. (2016: 141)

In this passage, Bon/OIbren oscillates between American creative writing and the European literary tradition. Even though he acknowledges being inspired by the former, he is also keen to distance himself from it: "Soyez parfois mauvais Américain". In the exercise, writers are said to work in pairs. They are told to hand texts to one another (five to twelve pages) and rigorously analyze them. In their analysis, they must disclose the function of each sentence ("Narratif, descriptif, digressif, poétique, dialogique, onirique, mental, abstrait, délirant, figuratif, informatif") and evaluate its necessity and efficiency in the whole of the text by giving out grades on a scale of ten. Bon/Olbren proposes to use colored pencils to mark the functions and to pay particular attention to moments in the text that call for expansion. He ends the exercise by emphasizing the importance of reminding that *kill your darlings* is a retrospective technique. It does not apply from the first draft onwards — Bon/Olbren contends

that good literature does not come from clear-cut and pre-established scenarios —, but only works when the whole of the narrative has been constructed. As he observes:

> 'Cours tout droit Billie' c'est un principe qui définit à lui seul notre littérature américaine — jamais d'élément redondant, pris à l'échelle de la phrase, qui ne soit en rapport énonçable avec l'économie tout entière du livre. […] Mais cette nécessité de chaque élément à l'économie tout entière du livre pris globalement n'est pas le préalable à l'écriture, elle ne se définit pas dans le scénario. […] Elle se définit comme l'action réciproque, rétrospective, de la globalité du texte sur les éléments qui l'ont constitué comme tel. (2016: 145)

"Inventions", *Outils du roman*'s fourth and final part, only contains two exercises. "Auteur, aime la foule" invites the writer to depict a crowd. As mentioned above, Bon/Olbren thinks that contemporary writing should test whether its tools can match those of television and film with respect to effectively portraying large crowds. "Défiez-vous des photographies trop silencieuses", the other assignment, takes Poe's "The Oval Portrait" as its stimulus text and proposes to create a fantastic short story. Apparently, the title "Inventions" means two distinct things in the two exercises. In the first instance, it points to a deficit in the contemporary writer's toolbox and to the need for creating of a new technique, that is, a literary way of portraying the crowd. In the second instance, it signifies the making of a fantastic short story by the individual writer.

"Défiez-vous des photographies trop silencieuses" echoes Bon's fascination with the genre of the fantastic short story as practiced by Poe and Lovecraft. It starts with a disclaimer of The Malt Olbren Archive explaining how Bon/Olbren only offered this assignment on rare occasions, as he saw it as "une mise à l'épreuve de l'écriture en condition réelle" (2016: 163), a test case for writing in real conditions. The exercise takes its cue from Poe's "The Oval Portrait", a tale in which a narrator, after having found refuge in an abandoned mansion in the Apennines, traces the genesis of a portrait hanging in one of the rooms of the mansion. The mysterious and exceptionally vivid portrait depicts a young and beautiful women, apparently the wife of the painter. In a book lying about in the mansion, the narrator reads that the painter was obsessed with his work. At a given point, the man asked his wife to sit for him in the barely lightened turret-chamber and went on for weeks on end to paint her portrait. When the painting is eventually finished, vivid to the point of inspiring fear, the painter discovered that his wife had died. After presenting Poe's story, Bon/Olbren suggests to create a fantastic tale in four movements. First, the writer must come up with a portrait that matters much to her: a painting, a photograph, a poster, as long as it has a frame and is deeply rooted in the writer's consciousness. Then, she should zoom out — in the assignment, Bon/Olbren once more resorts to film — and situate this framed image within a larger setting (i.e. a mansion, a city). In the following step, she should imagine

a character watching the image. Only her back is visible. Finally, Bon/Olbren suggests three possible endings to the story: the depicted figure comes to life; the character disappears in the picture; the writer invents a different ending. Bon/Olbren concludes: "Vous avez votre image, elle est bien solidement encadrée, un personnage la regarde? Alors tout de suite pensez à la fin. Et vous n'aurez plus qu'à écrire le milieu" (2016: 172).

"Défiez-vous des photographies trop silencieuses" is not only remarkable because of its proposition to create a finished story, but also because of its use of Poe's tale. This story, the last stimulus text in *Outils du roman*, can be read as an addition to Daniil Kharms's "Maltonius Olbren". I showed earlier that in the context of a writing handbook, Kharms's story can well be read as a parable for the creative process, highlighting the need for patience, repetition, and mostly, preparatory vision. Poe's story, on the other hand, brings to light the dangers that come with artistic and literary work. In his tale, the cost of the work, of rich and detailed artistic vision, is life itself. Although it is highly unsure whether Bon/Olbren included "The Oval Portrait" with the intention of conveying a similar message, it is tempting to interpret the presence of the story as a warning pointing to the risks of obsession and the importance of measure.

5.6. Conclusion

François Bon's texts *Tous les mots sont adultes* and *Outils du roman* enact the passage from literary advice that is strongly steeped in local literary tradition (Perec, Novarina, Koltès, Duras, Gracq, Detambel, etc) to literary advice that draws on American writing traditions, both in their canonical (Steinbeck, Faulkner, Gardner) and their low-brow (how-to-write handbooks) forms.

Tous les mots sont adultes constitues a capstone element in the *atelier d'écriture* tradition: its level of detailing and its scope are unrivaled. Even though François Bon sometimes downplays the pedagogical and political dimensions of his *atelier d'écriture* work (in favour of the literary dimension), *Tous les mots sont adultes* shares many of the concerns of the older, May 1968-inspired, *atelier d'écriture* groups: Bon facilitates workshops for people who typically do not have easy access to literature and writing; he contends that the richness of a literary tradition depends on the variety of voices that it includes; he believes in literature's potential to bring about some sort of change in the world (l'enjeu tient à l'état du monde). In addition, *Tous les mots sont adultes* draws upon similar literary traditions as other *atelier d'écriture* facilitators, with writers like Julien Gracq, Raymond Queneau, Italo Calvino, Roland Barthes, Marguerite Duras, Claude Simon, Nathalie Sarraute playing important roles. In particular, like many *atelier d'écriture* manuals, *Tous les mots sont adultes* introduces Georges Perec as the quintessential *atelier d'écriture* writer.

Outils du roman moves away from the politics and literary framework of the *atelier d'écriture*. Instead of facilitating the access of neophytes to writing, this book aims to provide the more experienced practitioner with tools for novel-writing. Bon draws on techniques, rules and concepts from the American creative writing tradition, particularly as they are pitched by how-to-write handbooks. However, Bon does not take these elements at face value. He parodies, appropriates, and performs *détournement* on them: he examines what a how-to-write technique like *versioning*, a rule like *kill your darlings* and *elements of fiction* like character, dialogue, and plot can be when they are placed in the French literary (advice) tradition. In this way, Bon infuses French literary advice with new input. Indeed, *Outils du roman* embodies the encounter of the French *atelier d'écriture* and its use of *écriture à contraintes* with the American how-to-write tradition. Bon examines what happens when one attempts to produce precise *écriture à contraintes* exercises based on mantra's like *kill your darlings* and *show don't tell*, and on broad concepts such as *character*, *dialogue*.

If we recall the conceptions of craft that we encountered in the previous chapters, it becomes apparent that Bon presents a take on craft that stands out in the French literary advice tradition. Jean Guenot's and the later French how-to-write handbooks' notions of craft take the reader and the market into account. For Guenot, craft means negotiating between self-expression and creating a readable text. He gives the examples of Gide, Gracq and Giono as writers who succeeded in finding this equilibrium: "Ces écrivains sont dans la littérature pour y écrire des maisons qu'ils aimeront habiter. […] Spontané ou très travaillé, l'écrivain qui offre sa maison admet la présence de l'inconnu. Le lecteur, s'il passe par chez eux, pourra entrer" (Guenot, 1998: 91). In a sense, the how-to-write handbooks inflate Guenot's vision of craft: they reiterate the importance of finding your voice: "Soyez vous-même, et continuez à lire et étudier les textes des autres auteurs, qui ne vous enlèveront pas votre 'style', cette petite voix qui est la vôtre […] C'est votre style" (Hache, 2011: 87). Meanwhile, they describe in detail the inner-workings of publishing houses and ultimately emphasize publication, and by extension "becoming a published author", as their goal: "Ca vaut la peine même d'être un petit écrivain" (Jaeglé, 2014: 207).

In his *atelier d'écriture* manuals, Bon occasionally mentions the reader. In *Tous les mots sont adultes*, for instance, he notes that the suppression of autobiographical information that he proposes is linked directly to the opening up of the written texts to the reader. Commenting on the Perec-based "Lieux où on a dormi" exercise discussed above, he observes: "C'est une traversée de soi-même qui va conduire au souvenir, mais celui qui écoute ou lit le texte devra faire appel à ses propres sensations pour le reconstruire, sans avoir accès à l'origine autobiographique: et c'est ce qui constitue le texte dans son fonctionnement littéraire" (2016: 24). By contrast, Bon constantly refutes any form of writing that takes the mainstream market and its rules, genres, and formulas for success into account. This position is clearly reflected by the Lautréamont-inspired opening section to *Outils du roman* in which

Bon/Olbren performs *détournement* strategies on the writing rules found in commercial how-to-write handbooks: “Coupe les élément inutiles, disent-ils: enlève l’utile et garde le reste, dis-toi que la musique est rarement dans les pommes de terre” (2016: 13).

In spite of Bon’s rejection of book-market values, his *atelier d’écriture* practices have contributed to his own success, both financially — he was given a permanent position in the arts school — and symbolically: also due to his online experiments, his *ateliers d’écriture* have generated a lot of attention for his work. Thus, he emerges as the most prominent contemporary French literary advice figure. Whereas how-to-write handbook authors generally remain outside of the spotlights, the fame which Bon enjoys today is probably equally, if not more, due to his *atelier d’écriture* work than to his literary works. This reveals something about the importance of extra-literary activities, in this case *ateliers d’écriture*, to achieve success in the French literary field today.

6. Making It New

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter I analyze four contemporary advice texts in French that, in the words of modernist poet Ezra Pound, "make it new": Martin Page's *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* (2014), Chloé Delaume's "Visite Guidée" (2007), Delaume's *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi* (2008), and Olivier Cadiot's *Histoire de la littérature récente. Tome 1* (2016). These texts draw upon the formulas, representations and genres discussed in chapters one, two and three. They invoke the various advice traditions and consciously attempt to re-interpret, re-new and transform them from within. Novelist Martin Page's *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* revisits the representations of the writer and of writing as presented in the neo-romantic *conseils* tradition, especially Rilke's *Lettres à un jeune poète* (1937). I argue that, for Page, literary advice is the locus *par excellence* for rethinking authorship today. What is more, most of his other works explore similar themes, making him a writer whose project is largely driven by the desire to share advice. Writer of autofiction Chloé Delaume's short texts "Visite Guidée" (2007) and *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi* (2008) conjure up the procedural advice tradition and its representations of the scientist writer and the machine-text, in particular as found in Raymond Roussel's *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* (1935) and in the works of the Oulipo. Yet, whereas the older texts endorsed notions of impersonal writing and minimized the role of life experience in the creative process (in favor of imagination or of formal *écriture à contraintes* practices), Delaume's texts point to personal experience as a pre-requisite for any valuable writing and uphold the motto: "Tout vu, rien inventé" (2008: 4). Poet Olivier Cadiot's *Histoire de la littérature récente*, finally, portrays the collision of a range of advice formulas, representations and genres, mixed with an investigation of the state of contemporary literature triggered by the widespread idea of the death of literature. By drawing on procedural, neo-romantic and how-to-write advice, Cadiot seeks a way out of the dead-end idea of the death of literature and in so doing, to bring new life to contemporary writing: "La coupe est pleine, on va se rebeller. Ça ne peut plus durer, cette histoire de fin [de la littérature]" (2016: 31).

6.2. Revisiting *Conseils*. From Martyr Writer to Militant Writer with Martin Page

Neo-romantic *conseils* (see 2.2.3.) such as Rilke's *Lettres à un jeune poète* and Max Jacob's *Conseils à un jeune poète* (1945) are dialogic texts in which a master-writer projects an image of writing as an irresistible calling: they depict the writer as a martyr who has no choice but to struggle and labor in the service of her art ("Je ne peux pas faire autrement," (27) Rilke notes). This struggle, they insist, is time- and energy consuming (as Rilke observes: "Une année n'est pas un critère, et dix ans ne sont

rien" (45)). It requires patience, solitude (Rilke speaks of "la grande solitude intérieure" (75)), and is characterized by moments of intense anxiety and sickness. Ultimately, it brings the beginning writer closer to her authentic self, which, as they note, is the sole source of all genuine writing ("Il n'existe qu'un seul moyen: plongez en vous-même," (27) Rilke explains). In addition, these texts strongly dismiss the commercial dimension of literature, arguing that the search for success or for the approval of peers only steers the beginning writer away from truthful expression (as Rilke signals: "Il n'est rien qui permette de moins atteindre [les œuvres d'art] que la critique" (45)).

Today, the format and the representations of the neo-romantic *conseils* still play an important role in contemporary literary advice. As mentioned above (see 3.3.2.), books like Claire Delannoy's *Lettre à un jeune écrivain* (2005), Christian Cottet-Émard's *Tu écris toujours? Manuel de survie à l'usage de l'auteur et son* entourage (2010), Paul Zeitoun's *Guide de l'apprenti romancier* (2014), Jean-Baptiste Gendarme's *Splendeurs et misères de l'aspirant écrivain* (2014) and Martin Page's *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* (Seuil, 2014) make use of the dialogic format. Furthermore, contemporary writing guides and how-to-write handbooks regularly deploy neo-romantic representations of the martyr writer, of the literary world as a hostile marketplace (also remember Remy de Gourmont's description of the literary field as "une église de truands qui tient à la fois de la maison de prostitution, de l'étable à cochons et de la chambre de rhétorique" (14)) and of writing as an act of self-expression. To present these images, the contemporary advice texts draw upon two texts in particular. First, they refer extensively to Flaubert's *Correspondance*. For instance, in *Lettre à un jeune écrivain* (2005), Claire Delannoy cites from one of Flaubert's letters to make the argument that writing can (or should) be as much an existential need as sleeping (or smoking): "J'écris pour moi, écrivait Flaubert dans une lettre à Louise Colet, pour moi seul, comme je fume et comme je dors. C'est une fonction presque animale, tant elle est personnelle et intime" (21). Secondly, contemporary writing guides and how-to-write handbooks appropriate the representations provided by Rainer Maria Rilke in his *Lettres à un jeune poète*. For example, Marianne Jaeglé's *Écrire. De la page blanche à la publication* (2014) includes lengthy passages from Rilke's letters on topics like the need for patience and the importance of sadness for artistic creation, for instance the following citation: "De grâce, demandez-vous si ces grandes tristesses n'ont pas traversé le profond de vous-même, si elles n'ont pas changé beaucoup de choses en vous, si quelque point de votre être ne s'y est pas proprement transformé" (32).

In the previous chapters, I repeatedly made the point that acts of appropriation like Delannoy's and Jaeglé's are always acts of interpretation and transformation: using words and imagery of the past in a contemporary context inevitably signifies transforming these words and imagery. In some cases, the transformations go almost unnoticed: the image seems a faithful rendition of its source. In other cases, the transformations are striking: the image has clearly been endowed with a new meaning. Be that as it may, whenever contemporary advice texts integrate images and ideas from Flaubert's

Correspondance and Rilke's *Lettres à un jeune poète*, they cannot but re-interpret these images. For this reason, Delannoy's simple act of taking a fragment from Flaubert's private letters and presenting it as a piece of general how-to-write advice is a transformation, turning Flaubert's testimony of how he writes into a generally applicable piece of advice on how writers should write.

In some contemporary advice books, these acts of re-interpretation appear to be carried out without the authors being conscious of the ways in which they transform particular imagery. Other advice authors, by contrast, are aware of the interplay between the image as it appears in the source text and the image as they construct it in their own text. One such self-aware advice author is Martin Page.

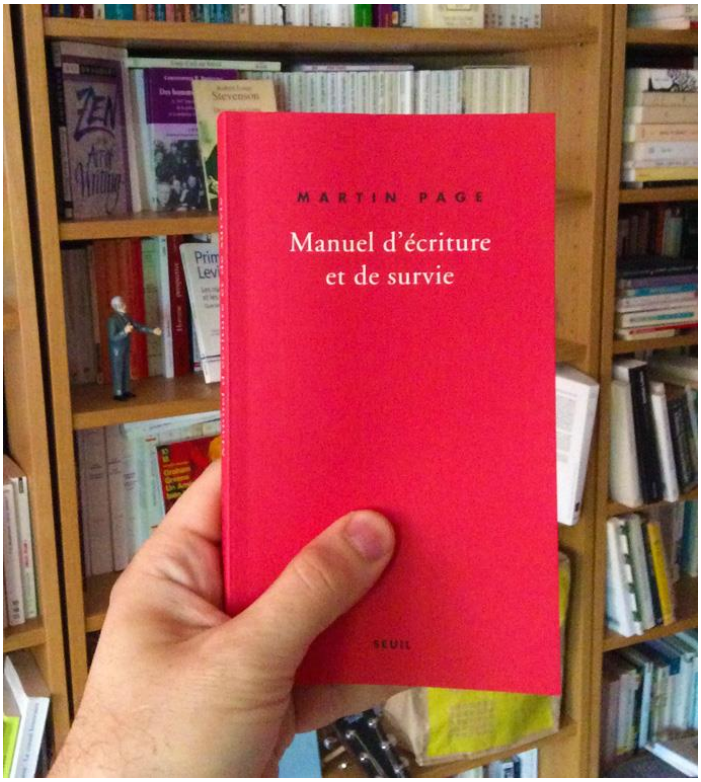
Martin Page (1975) is the author of a number of novels and essays like *Comment je suis devenu stupide* (2000), *On s'habitue aux fins du monde* (2005), *La Nuit a dévoré le monde* (2012), *L'Apiculture selon Samuel Beckett* (2013), *L'Art de revenir à la vie* (2016) and *Les Animaux ne sont pas comestibles* (2017). With his wife Coline Pierré, herself a writer and artist, he runs the small publishing house Monstrograph, founded in 2015. On Monstrograph's website, they describe it in English as a "screen printing workshop created by Martin Page et Coline Pierré" and recount that they "print in a DIY spirit: we are not professional printers, but we do not see this art as a hobby, it's an important part of our life, and we are working on improving our skills. Our own home-made products are hand-printed on organic or/and quality materials. Our inks are eco friendly". Monstrograph mostly publishes short texts in French and English by Page and Pierré like *Tu vas rater ta vie et personne ne t'aimera jamais*, *Petite Encyclopédie des Introvertis* and a collection of thirty interviews with writers and artists about the work and living conditions of contemporary creative workers, *Les artistes ont-ils vraiment besoin de manger?* Additionally, Martin Page has an active online presence on Facebook, Twitter, Tumbler, his personal website, the Monstrograph website and his vegan recipe-website Monstrovéganes. On these social platforms, Page shows himself as a socially and politically committed writer, advocating for gender equality, ecologically-responsible lifestyles, animal rights, and improvement of the socio-economic conditions of creative workers. For example, he shares and comments on articles that denounce gender discrimination and animal cruelty, and he publishes self-made cartoons that decry the precarious socio-economic position of creative workers.

Manuel d'écriture et de survie (2014) is one of Page's more recent works. On the author's personal website, it is classified as a novel. The book counts 166 pages and is divided into short chapters. Following the *conseils* format, each chapter presents a fictional letter addressed from an experienced author, Martin, to the young, aspiring writer Daria.[44] The letters show Daria's trajectory from feeling the urge to become a writer to having her first novel published. In addition, they provide

[44] I refer to the fictional author as Martin.

an insight into Martin's ideas on writing and the writing life and into his private life (with his girlfriend Coline and his cat). The book ends with a letter in which Martin reveals to Daria that he is about to start reading her novel ("Je suis dans mon lit et ton livre est posé sur ma table de nuit" (165)) and in which he proposes to meet in real life: "Ps: si tu passes dans le coin un de ces jours, que dirais-tu de prendre un café avec moi et mon amie? Le temps est idéal pour rester à discuter en terrasse?" (166).

Photograph of Manuel d'écriture et de survie *taken from Martin Page's personal website. Standing on the bookshelves in the background is Ray Bradbury's* Zen in the Art of Writing.



6.2.1. Return of the Martyr Writer

Clearly, *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* participates in the neo-romantic *conseils* tradition. It uses the unilateral letter format that can be found in Flaubert's *Correspondance*, Rilke's *Lettres à un jeune poète* and Max Jacob's *Conseils à un jeune poète*, and it even borrows utterances from those texts. For instance, Martin's first letter to Daria mimics passages from Rilke's first letter to officer Kappus. Whereas Rilke begins his letters with the words "Votre lettre m'est parvenue il y a quelques jours seulement. Je tiens à vous remercier pour la grande et l'aimable confiance dont elle témoigne," (25) Page, on his part, writes, "Votre courrier m'attendait dans la boîte aux lettres ce matin […] Merci pour vos mots. Votre lettre me touche et m'encourage" (9).

Further, *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* conjures up the representations found in the texts by Flaubert, Rilke and Jacob. For instance, Martin's letters regularly invoke the image of the writer as a solitary figure: "Je ne vois qu'un point commun à mes amis écrivains: ce sont des solitaires. Ils ne font

partie d'aucun groupe" (36). In addition, Martin points to the sickness and suffering that every genuine writers encounters.[45] "Création et maladie sont liées," Martin explains, "si souvent un artiste est malade ou hypocondriaque, c'est qu'il a un corps hyperesthésique […]: il devine la maladie sociale qui se cache, il sait les troubles qui n'inquiètent personne" (77). He adds: "Ceux qui manquent suffisamment d'imagination pour se croire en bonne santé ne connaissent pas l'urgence à faire des choses, la nécessité de créer, d'affronter le néant" (77). On a more personal note, he regularly describes his suffering to Daria. In a letter reminiscent of passages from Flaubert's *Correspondance*, he notes: "C'est une dure journée. Je n'avance pas. Ce que j'écris ne me satisfait pas. J'ai rayé la plupart de mes phrases depuis ce matin" (73). Likewise, extending romantic views on authorship (think of Flaubert's epileptic crises), Martin presents his younger self as a misfit. He signals: "Je n'étais pas grand-chose, je n'avais rien pour moi, j'étais un *misfit*. Je ne pensais pas m'en sortir" (117).

Aside from this representation of authorship as solitude, sickness and suffering, Martin also projects the neo-romantic notion of writing as existential need. Echoing Flaubert, Martin contends that literature has rescued him from a miserable fate: "J'écris parce que […] c'est une manière de m'en sortir. J'écris pour contre-attaquer et manger ce monde qui essaye de me dévorer" (43). In a similar way, he observes: "Tu me demandes pourquoi j'écris. La vraie question me semble plutôt être: mais pourquoi tout le monde n'écrit pas? C'est une chose si magique que ne pas le faire est pour moi incompréhensible" (43). These passages highlight that writing, for Page, is as essential as breathing and eating. They call to mind Rilke's insistence on the idea that writing should emanate from a fundamental urge, as expressed, amongst others, in Rilke's famous question: "Avant toute chose, demandez-vous, à l'heure la plus tranquille de votre nuit: est-il nécessaire que j'écrive" (27).

As a result of his conception of writing as both suffering and existential need, Martin points to the importance of patience, persistence and hard work. He argues that it demands sacrifice and labor to pursue the dream of being a writer. For instance, in response to a letter in which Daria tells about a publishing house's rejection of her manuscript, Martin advises: "Prends le rejet comme un moyen de tester ta vocation. Acharne-toi" (84). Lastly, like Rilke before him, Martin warns Daria against becoming involved in the literary scene: "Tiens-toi loin de la vie littéraire. On te fera croire que des choses s'y passent. C'est faux […] Ta seule dépendance doit être le désir d'écrire des livres. Rien d'autre ne compte" (152-153). In another letter, he continues: "Les réseaux, les amitiés stratégiques, les écoles, l'esprit de groupe, la police du goût abîment la littérature. Seule la solitude garantit une attitude éthique" (162).

[45] In a similar way, Deleuze and Guattari suggest a relationship between suffering and the creation of art. For instance, see Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure*. Paris: Minuit, 1975.

6.2.2. Rejection of the Martyr Writer

Through the association of writing with notions like passion, struggle, solitude, persistence and sickness, *Manuel d'écriture* evokes the neo-romantic representation of the martyr writer as constructed by authors like Flaubert and Rilke. At the same time, however, Page's book aims to shake up this imagery. Indeed, Page is aware of the fact that authorship is a cultural construct. In the afterword to *Manuel d'écriture et de survie*, he signals: "Penser sa condition la fait nécessairement évoluer. L'écrivain est une invention d'écrivains, c'est important d'en prendre conscience, de le revendiquer (on ne va pas laisser ça à d'autres)" (177). Page understands that writers play a crucial role in the creation and distribution of representations of authorship. What is more, he contends that these representations, as they have been constructed in the French literary tradition, function as mechanisms of exclusion. He argues that dominant conceptions of authorship exclude particular social groups from the field of literature: "Nouveau venu dans le monde littéraire, je voyais combien la sacralisation servait à masquer des problèmes d'éthique et des questions de pouvoir" (17). According to Page, the representation of the writer as a sacred figure — white, male, serious, suffering in the service of his art, detached from everyday life and financial concerns — makes it difficult for individuals who do not conform to these characteristics to imagine themselves as writers: "Le poids de l'histoire littéraire dans ce pays effraye, ou plutôt disons que l'histoire littéraire y est largement utilisée pour inhiber la liberté des écrivains" (16).

In his letters, Martin describes how the different aspects of the neo-romantic writer representation operate as mechanisms of exclusion. He distinguishes three strategies of exclusion. First of all, he points out how the associations of the martyr writer with sickness, solitude and loneliness are supposed to have a frightening effect. They serve to discourage people from wanting to be a writer. He remarks: "Le cliché de l'artiste malade, pauvre et alcoolique sert à effrayer les aspirants. La pédagogie de la peur est une technique de contrôle social" (158). Secondly, Martin points out that the neo-romantic representation of the "pure" and financially disinterested martyr writer has the intended effect of making writing the exclusive domain of those who are rich and privileged: "Séparer l'art de l'argent, c'est réserver l'art aux rentiers et aux plus fortunés. C'est un choix politique, en somme: le retour à une liberté censitaire" (92). Lastly, the posture of the writer as a dead, white male prevents individuals from particular social groups that do not fit that stereotype (women, people with non-Caucasian ethnicities) to conceive of themselves as writers. In a passage reminiscent of some of François Bon's statements invoked in the previous chapter (see 5.3.5.), Martin writes: "La littérature a besoin des femmes, des pauvres, des minorités, des inadaptés, de toutes celles et de tous ceux pour qui le monde n'est pas une évidence" (15).

6.2.3. Going Beyond the Martyr Writer towards the Militant Writer

Manuel d'écriture et de survie not only denounces the mechanisms of exclusion of neo-romantic imagery, it also seeks to adjust and transform this imagery. As I mentioned above, like Flaubert, Rilke and Jacob, Page associates being a writer with notions like sickness, suffering and solitude: he reflects on the fundamental link between creativity and sickness and speaks of his own grievances and anxieties. Meanwhile, he seeks to push authorship beyond this frightening representation of martyrdom. It is true, he argues, that being a writer is a demanding occupation, and it is important to take that into account. However, it would be a mistake to embrace the posture of the martyr writer, as it would be a sign of the artist's giving in to the role she is expected to play in society. Put differently, it would imply (on an individual level) that the artist accepts the harsh conditions that society forces upon her, as well as (on a broader level) the marginal place of art and culture in contemporary society. Artists, Martin contends, should denounce the ways in which society treats them and uphold a belief in the transformative power of their art. In one of his last letters, he writes to Daria:

> Il ne s'agit pas d'abandonner au premier obstacle, au contraire il faut être pleinement engagé. Mais en se gardant de grands sentiments photogéniques. L'art est un paganisme et une pharmacopée. Y associer l'obligation de souffrance et le signe d'une obéissance masochiste à la morale majoritaire. On peut faire le choix de ne pas s'y conformer. Je ne dis pas qu'être artiste est simple: je dis que les douleurs viennent de la société et non de l'art, et qu'être fasciné par la souffrance c'est obéir. (159)

Rather than conforming to the oppressing stereotype of the martyr writer, writers should make a stand. They should both rebuke their marginal place in society and have the courage to voice their belief in the power of art. Significantly, in making these arguments, Martin Page does not draw upon the French literary tradition, but upon two different types of discourses: continental political theory on the one hand, and on the other American literary advice as represented by cartoonist R. O. Blechman's *Dear James. Letters to a Young Illustrator* (2009) and Ray Bradbury's classic advice book *Zen in the Art of Writing* (1990).

Manuel d'écriture et de survie contains many traces of a politicized discourse that tackles questions of being a contemporary artist and the role of art in today's capitalist world. This discourse is expressed in the works of political theorists, notably Michel Foucault, James C. Scott, Gilles Deleuze and Georges Didi-Huberman. In his letters, Martin refers explicitly to these thinkers and their concepts. For example, in the afterword to *Manuel d'écriture et de survie*, Page remarks: "On lisant ce livre on aura compris que Deleuze est un auteur important pour moi. C'est un de mes esprits tutélaires" (182). In the same afterword, he evokes Didi-Huberman's views on political resistance:

> En passant d'une des bibliothèques de la maison, je tombe sur *Essayer Voir*, de Georges Didi-Huberman: 'Tout acte de résistance suppose un art (le détour par exemple) et une raison (la ruse tactique par exemple). C'est-à-dire la création d'une forme. Toute survie cherche la forme efficace où se lover. La forme ainsi entendue serait comme un lieu malgré tout: un passage inventé, une faille pratiquée dans les impasses que veulent créer les lieux totalitaires.' (178)

Likewise, in his letters, Martin uses Foucault's concept of "hétérotopie" (29) and Scott's notion of "infrapolitique". Martin draws upon these political theorists and their ideas to conceive a notion of artistic resistance in capitalist times: how can artists continue to make art that matters when governments, media and cultural industries hardly promote it, even work against it; how can people be motivated to continue making art when they hardly earn money through it; how can they continue to believe in the transformative power of art when cynical and purely economic views on art dominate; how, to use Didi-Huberman's words quoted above, can artists make "une faille pratiquée dans les impasses que veulent créer les lieux totalitaires"?

Additionally, in its attempt to go beyond the representation of the martyr writer and move towards a more combative writer figure, *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* also makes use of American literary advice as found in R. O. Blechman's *Dear James* and Ray Bradbury's *Zen in the Art of Writing.* R.O. Blechman (1930) is an American illustrator whose work has been the subject of retrospectives at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. His best-known works include the book *The Juggler of Our Lady* (1953) — based on Anatole France's story *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame* (1892) —, television commercials for the painkiller Alka-Seltzer (1967), and numerous covers for The New Yorker magazine. His *Dear James. Letters to a Young Illustrator* (2009) narrates Blechman's own false starts and failed beginnings, but also his first artistic triumphs. Additionally, it provides many pieces of practical advice, both on work and life, such as dealing with editors, choice of work environment, and proper technique.

When Martin Page evokes Blechman's *Dear James,* he does so with the explicit intention to undermine neo-romantic imagery. In one of his last letters to Daria, Martin discusses the representation of the martyr writer. He quotes Rilke's famous question, "Répondez franchement à la question de savoir si vous seriez condamné à mourir au cas où il vous serait refusé d'écrire. Avant toute chose, demandez-vous, à l'heure la plus tranquille de votre nuit: est-il nécessaire que j'écrive?" (27) and counters it with cartoonist Blechman's response to Rilke as formulated in the book *Dear James*:

> Nous n'allons pas mourir pour notre art, car ce serait faire une offrande à la société. À la question de Rilke dans *Lettres à un jeune poète* […], R. O. Blechman, le dessinateur du *New Yorker*, répond: 'Je ne serai pas un martyr de mon art. Si on m'empêchait de dessiner, je chanterais, je jouerais du piano, je tournerais un film, j'écrirais un roman. Mais je ne mourrais pas. Je serais comme la rivière bloquée par

> un obstacle: je changerais de chemin et créerais un nouveau canal. L'énergie créatrice ne peut pas être arrêtée.' (158-159)

Taking his cue from Blechman, Martin warns again against the posture of the martyr writer. He urges Daria to reject that oppressing stereotype and to continue making art with conviction. Playing the role of the martyr is, as Martin writes, "faire une offrande à la société".

In a more implicit way, Martin extracts similar ideas from Bradbury's *Zen in the Art of Writing*. Ray Bradbury (1920-2012) was an American author and screenwriter widely known for his dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) and his science-fiction and horror-story collections *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), *The Illustrated Man* (1951), and *I sing the Body Electric* (1969). He was the recipient of numerous awards, including a 2007 Pulitzer Citation. At the time of his death, *The New York Times* dubbed him "the writer most responsible for bringing modern science fiction into the literary mainstream". Bradbury's *Zen in the Art of Writing* presents a collection of essays, written between 1961 and 1990, in which the author analyzes the nature and inner-workings of the creative mind. Bradbury's articles are threaded with anecdotes and metaphors designed to unveil the different facets of inspiration.

In the note of thanks at the end of *Manuel d'écriture et de survie*, Martin Page mentions Bradbury's book as an important text that has helped him develop his thoughts. Indeed, *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* displays clear traces of this American advice classic. It especially draws on the ideas and vocabulary present in Bradbury's preface. For example, Bradbury's statement "so while our art cannot, as we wish it could, save us from wars, privation, envy, greed, old age, or death, it can revitalize us amidst it all," (xii) and his exhortation that "we must take arms each and every day, perhaps knowing that the battle cannot be entirely won, but fight we must, if only a gentle bout," (xii-xiii) are echoed in phrases in *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* like "être un artiste, c'est tenir le coup. Pour beaucoup d'entre nous, le monde est hostile. Il y a une stratégie possible: nous porterons des coups en devenant intouchables. Le seul moyen de blesser le monde consiste à ne plus nous offrir en sacrifice," (163) and "nous écrivons pour rendre disponibles à nos lecteurs des armes et des formes inédites de vie et de rapport au réel […] l'art est un art de vivre et de combattre" (163). In those statements, Martin takes up Bradbury's vocabulary of resistance, war and strategy. Like the American advice author and novelist, he establishes an opposition between world and art. Whereas the world represent threat, anxiety and violence, art becomes the means to live through these things. As Bradbury notes: "Writing is survival. Any art, any good work, of course, is that" (xii).

6.2.4. Writers' Finances

Martin believes that writers should refuse to assume the martyr role. They should be combative and take a stand. This is especially true with regard to the question of the social and financial situation of contemporary creative workers. In his letters, Martin describes and denounces the precarious conditions in which writers are forced to work today. These conditions, he contends, are hardly addressed in contemporary literature: "La moitié de mes amis ont des vies difficiles et je n'en trouve pas trace dans la littérature de mon pays" (184). In his letters, Martin denounces the ways in which the French government and cultural industry marginalize artists: "Beaucoup de gens (et de jeunes gens) sont dans des situations douloureuses. Ils sont doués et enthousiastes, mais cette société les laisse sur le bas-côté. Ils sont au chômage, occupent des postes subalternes et mal payés" (135). Similarly, he points to the fact that many French artists are leaving the country: "Je pense à ces écrivains qui ont quitté la France, de plus en plus nombreux, personne ne dit rien, personne n'analyse ce fait important" (183).

According to Page, the fact that the harsh conditions in which contemporary writers and artists live and labor are being overlooked is a direct consequence of neo-romantic representations. Influential writers like Flaubert and Rilke, for example, make an argument for writing as pure expression and against literature's commercial dimension. They disconnect the notion of making art completely from the need to make a living. In Page's eyes, this imagery still has strong effects in how the relationship between art and money is conceived today. Making art for the sake of art itself is still the dominant way to conceive artistry. As a result, Page thinks that it is crucial to remind people that writers like Flaubert, Rilke (or contemporary writers who defend the same position) could only make a plea for pure and completely disinterested art because they were very privileged. These writers did not need to generate an income. This, however, is not the case for most contemporary artists. Most artists, Page points out, cannot afford taking all the time they want to work on a poem until they feel that it expresses something truly authentic. Quite the contrary, most contemporary artists have to combine their artistic activities with second jobs and have to find compromises between self-expressive work and work that can earn them an income. This, Page insists, is nothing to frown upon.

Rather than dismissing the commercial dimension of art, Page thinks that "l'ambition de vivre de son art devrait être reconnue comme légitime" (92). In a letter to Daria on the topic of writing on commission, Martin expands on this idea when he writes:

> N'aie jamais honte de gagner ta vie en te servant de ton talent si ça te permet d'obtenir du temps et des moyens pour créer une œuvre personnelle. Ceux qui te critiqueront seront toujours des personnes dans des positions de confort financier. Beaucoup d'écrivains et artistes que je connais luttent pour s'en sortir, ils font des petits boulots, donnent des cours, écrivent des textes de commande en

> communication, font de la réécriture. Ils se battent pour survivre. Penser qu'ils abandonnent quelque chose d'eux-mêmes parce qu'ils travaillent pour d'autres, pour des entreprises par exemple, dénote une vision superficielle et idiote de ce qu'est le travail d'un artiste. (145)

As can be read in this passage, Martin uncovers the ways in which contemporary artists earn a living. He describes how artists "font des petits boulots, donnent des cours, écrivent des textes de commande en communication, font de la réécriture". It is important, he contends, to situate the notion of authorship in this broader social and financial context so as to avoid that art becomes the exclusive domain of the wealthy and the privileged. As Page signals: "Il ne faut jamais oublier l'extrême fragilité de notre condition, et le combat que nous avons à mener pour survivre" (27).

Cartoon taken from Martin Page's Tumbler.

6.2.5. From *Jeune Littérateur* to *Jeune Littératrice*

Besides going beyond the martyr writer image, Page also seeks to open up the dominant representation of the writer as the white, serious male. In his view, this stereotype functions as a mechanism of exclusion that inhibits particular individuals' imagination with respect to the idea of becoming a writer. Yet, it is important that literature is made by those people who do not conform to that stereotype. As Page puts it: "La littérature a besoin des femmes, des pauvres, des minorités, des inadaptés, de toutes celles et de tous ceux pour qui le monde n'est pas une évidence" (15). Given that women, poor people and minorities are typically more familiar with the harder parts of life, literature gains much by including their voices. Such an inclusion would not only make the literary production more diverse, it also would generate more disruptive representations of contemporary society.

The most obvious way in which *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* seeks to open up the notion of authorship is through its choice of addressee. Whereas the older *conseils* texts address a young, white man, *Manuel d'écriture et de survie*, as the only advice text in my corpus, presents a collection of letters

directed to a young woman named Daria. Here, the *jeune littérateur* makes way for a *jeune littératrice*.[46] Furthermore, Martin seeks to debunk the stereotype of the serious, white writer by representing the manifold aspects of his everyday life. In his letters, he describes how he makes hummus, how he does the dishes, how he likes to read comic books and how he plays guitar. These descriptions are part of a strategy to humanize the figure of the writer and make him less sacred. Put differently, by presenting the writer as an ordinary human being (someone who cooks, makes bad jokes, who does the dishes), Page attempts to make the idea of becoming an author imaginable for more people.

This strategy is also at work in Page's other books, most explicitly in the autofictional book *L'Art de revenir à la vie* (2016) in which the protagonist Martin observes at a certain point:

> Quand je regarde des photos d'écrivains, je fais une overdose de machines à écrire, de stylo-plumes, d'ordinateurs, de cigares, de cigarettes, de fume-cigarette, de chats et d'air sérieux. Je veux des photos d'écrivains changeant leur enfant, l'aidant à faire du découpage, cousant un ourlet, en pleine séance de jardinage ou en train de préparer à manger. Je comprends l'importance pour certains du fétiche et d'un sacré qui passe par le fantasme historiquement construit du cliché de l'artiste au travail, mais, de mon point de vue, donner le biberon, bricoler, travailler l'interface de son site internet, discuter sur Facebook, expérimenter une nouvelle recette, ça fait partie de la vie d'un écrivain. Et ça compte dans le travail. (150-151)

Furthermore, the strategy of humanizing the writer figure is at the heart of Page's book *L'Apiculture selon Samuel Beckett* (2013). This book recounts a fictional episode in the life of Irish playwright and novelist Samuel Beckett. Set in 1985, it presents the diary of a young doctoral anthropology student hired by Beckett to help him sort his archives. At first, the young man is nervous to encounter the famous author ("Comment se prépare-t-on pour un entretien d'embauche avec un écrivain célèbre?" (13)). However, the Beckett he meets does not match his expectations at all. In his writings, the young man describes his amazement upon first meeting Beckett:

> J'ai d'abord cru m'être trompé de porte car je n'avais pas face à moi l'homme dont j'avais vu le portrait dans les journaux: il avait les cheveux longs et une barbe. Il portait une chemise en soie à fleurs, un pantalon noir en cotons, des chaussons à motifs écossais et une casquette de capitaine de navire marchand. (15-16)

[46] Page's choice of a female addressee fits within Beth Driscoll's ideas on the feminized character of contemporary middlebrow literature. See Driscoll, Beth. *The New Literary* Middlebrow. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Rather than a serious-looking, soberly dressed and smoking introvert, the young man learns to know an extravagant and non-smoking Beckett who enjoys making cakes, playing bowling, making jokes and who has a passion for apiculture. This humanization of Beckett, probably one of the last *grand auteurs*, is again a strategy to deflate and open up the notion of authorship on the part of Page.

6.2.6. Literary Advice as Survival Kit

In sum, *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* renews the *conseils* tradition from within. It takes up familiar elements from Flaubert and Rilke, like the writer's suffering, sickness, and loneliness, but also seeks to go beyond those elements and move towards a more militant and combative depiction of the writer. Embracing the role of martyr writer, Page contends, is a sign of giving in to society's contempt for art. Artists should believe in the transformative power of their work and, consequently, call for a fair and just treatment in society. Admittedly, this is not an easy thing to do. The literary life is a constant struggle and it is essential that writers and artists support each other. In the afterword to *Manuel d'écriture et de survie*, Page points to the importance of mutual support when he notes that "à part 'survie', le mot le plus important pour moi est 'alliés'" (179). He urges readers to keep on supporting their favorite authors and refers to like-minded artists as his family: "Ma famille, ce sont les anormaux, ce sont aussi ceux qui malgré les coups et les problèmes arrivent à créer de nouvelles conditions d'existence, ce sont les hackers, les makers, les férus de DIY, ceux qui inventent et élargissent le réel" (180). Perhaps, it is ultimately in light of this statement that *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* can be understood. Page's *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* is a collection of letters of support of struggling writers and artists. As its title suggests, it is a survival kit for the beginning writer. Moreover, as Page notes, writing this book also helped him get through his everyday struggle. It forced him to formulate personal answers to difficult questions about literary life and, in this way, it strengthened his convictions. As he notes in the beginning of the book: "De toute façon, celui qui donne des conseils cherche d'abord à s'éduquer lui-même. […] se comprendre est le meilleur service qu'on puisse rendre à ceux qu'on aime" (11).

6.3. Revisiting Procedural Advice. From *l'imagination est tout* to *tout vu, rien inventé* with Chloé Delaume

Procedural advice texts like Raymond Roussel's *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* (1935), the essays collected in the volume *Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui* (1972), and the Oulipo's first (1962) and second manifestos (1973) stress the rational nature of the writing process and argue that it can be dissected into its constitutive elements (see 2.3.2.). Extending Poe's method as exposed in "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846), they make use of a retrospective approach to lay bare the genesis

of literary texts. They depict the writer as a scientist carrying out experiments and pursuing projects in a systematic way. These procedural advice texts stick to that imagery and envision literary works as if they were machines or technological devices whose construction depended on the establishment of precise procedures of operation, and whose realization were a matter of executing a plan. As François Le Lionnais states in the Oulipo's second manifesto: "La poésie est un art simple et tout d'exécution" (1973: 19).

Typically, these avant-garde advice texts endorse notions of impersonal writing: they minimize the role of the individual writer's life experience in the creative process. As Roussel explains with regard to his own way of working: "J'ai beaucoup voyagé […] Or, de tous ces voyages, je n'ai jamais rien tiré pour mes livres" (27). By contrast, these texts highlight the writer's cleverness in coming up with surprising procedures (Roussel speaks of "un procédé très special" (11)), and the writer's wild imagination in executing those procedures (as Roussel puts it: "Chez moi l'imagination est tout" (27)). Furthermore, the proposed procedures exploit the formal dimension of language (as Roussel notes: "c'est essentiellement un procédé poétique" (23)): instead of seeing writing as the translation of a mental content into a written story (as one could interpret the popular *write what you know* formula), they conceive of writing as a systematic exploration of linguistic material, often with the intent of renewing literary conventions. As Le Lionnais concludes in the Oulipo's first manifesto:

> L'humanité doit-elle se reposer et se contenter, sur des pensers nouveaux de faire de vers antiques? Nous ne le croyons pas. Ce que certains écrivains ont introduit dans leur manière, avec talent (voire avec génie) mais les uns occasionnellement (forgeages de mots nouveaux), d'autres avec prédilection (contrerimes), d'autres avec insistance mais dans une seule direction (lettrisme), l'Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle (OuLiPo) entend le faire systématiquement et scientifiquement, et au besoin en recourant aux bons offices des machines à traiter l'information. (17)

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the procedural advice tradition has left its traces in contemporary literary advice in French. *Atelier d'écriture* handbooks, and to a lesser degree how-to-write handbooks, make wide use of the Oulipean technique of *écriture à contraintes* (see 4.3.2. and 5.4.). At the same time, these texts do not invoke the representation of the scientist writer and the machine-text. In this way, they remain at a remove from avant-garde representations. An author who stands more directly in this advice tradition, is Chloé Delaume.

Chloé Delaume (1973 pseudonym of Nathalie Dalain) is the author of more than twenty books like *Les Mouflettes d'Atropos* (2001), *La Vanité des somnambules* (2002), *Certainement pas* (2004), *J'habite dans la télévision* (2006) and *La Nuit je suis Buffy Summers* (2007), most of which she classifies

under the label of autofiction.[47] Born to a Lebanese father and French mother, Delaume spent the first years of her life as Nathalie Abdallah in Beirut (Delaume, 2010: 10). With the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975, the Abdallah family fled to France where they adopted the name Dalain in order to avoid racist treatment on the part of French family-members, school teachers and employers. In the book *La Règle du je* (2010), Delaume writes about the experience of having her family name changed: "Lorsque vinrent mes sept ans et une poignée de mois, Abdallah fut biffé de mon état civil. […] Dalain ça ne veut rien dire, et quelle que soit la langue" (11). At the age of ten, Delaume experienced the trauma that haunts her entire oeuvre: she witnessed her father killing her mother and then committing suicide. After this, she was cared for by her grandparents and her aunt and uncle respectively. At the Université Paris X, she studied modern literature, but ultimately became disenchanted with the university system. She quit the university during her Master year without finishing her thesis on "la pataphysique chez Boris Vian" and went on to prostitute herself, a topic that she eventually develops in her first book *Les Mouflettes d'Atropos* (2000).

Delaume's entire oeuvre explores the borderline between fiction and reality. The premise on which her work rests is that of the fictional nature of identity. In her eyes, every identity is a constructed fiction. In some cases, this identity is imposed on a person: whether consciously or unconsciously, the individual assumes the role that is attributed to her by history, society, family and governmental institutions. In other cases, a person strives to exert a certain degree of control over her identity: she will seek to adjust and re-write the narrative that constitutes her societal role. In the introduction to *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi* (2008), Delaume points out that her entire oeuvre is produced in light of an attempt to appropriate her identity:

> Je m'appelle Chloé Delaume. Je suis un personnage de fiction. […] Je m'écris dans des livres, des textes, des pièces sonores. J'ai décidé de devenir personnage de fiction quand j'ai réalisé que j'en étais déjà un. À cette différence près que je ne m'écrivais pas. D'autres s'en occupaient. Personnage secondaire d'une fiction familiale et figurante passive de la fiction collective. J'ai choisi pour me réapproprier mon corps, mes faits et gestes, et mon identité. (2008 : 1)

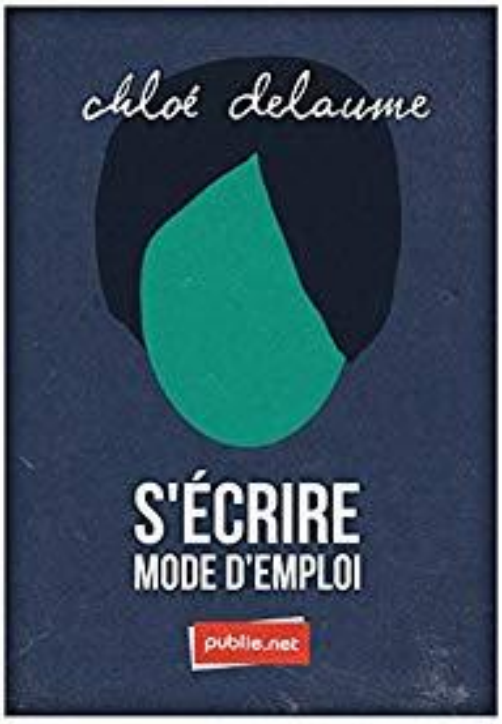
In the short texts "Visite Guidée" (2007) and *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi* (2008), Delaume explains in detail how she goes about in this attempt to re-appropriate her identity. "Visite Guidée" is a 20-page

[47] The advice texts by Martin Page and Chloé Delaume clearly embody attempts to bring together the genres of literary advice and autofiction. These authors' validation of the idea of autofiction over that of autobiography or memoir is probably related to their views on the fictional, fabricated nature of every life story. This is at least the case as far as Delaume is concerned. Ultimately, as I point out in the conclusion to this chapter, I believe that this reconciliation between literary advice and autofiction marks a trend within the French advice offer towards more personal and singular advice books.

essay printed in the book *Neuf leçons de littérature* (2007). That book, edited by Marguerite Gateau and Cécile Wajsbrot, collects nine papers presented by different writers in the framework of a series of events promoted by France Culture, the Bibliothèque nationale de France and La Maison des écrivains. In addition to the paper by Delaume, *Neuf leçons de littérature* gathers texts by authors like Michel Butor, Claudine Galea, Richard Millet, Antoine Volodine and Cécile Wajsbrot. *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi* (2008) is a twenty-two-page text published as an e-book by the publishing house Publie.net. This text as well was first conceived as a paper presented by Delaume during a colloquium on the topic of autofiction at the castle of Cérisy-la-Salle. In *La Règle du je*, Delaume describes the experience of speaking at this colloquium as crucial for the development of her work: "L'assentiment de la salle vaut un permis de construire. Je ne serai plus seule, c'est à ça que je pense en traversant l'allée parsemée de graviers. Je me sens désormais pupille de cette nation, j'ai une terre, un abri" (25).

"Visite Guidée" (2007) and *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi* (2008) both provide an insight into Delaume's ways of working. *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi* (2008) is more straightforward in its approach. It exposes the basic ideas upon which Delaume's oeuvre rests and it offers a retrospective analysis of the compositional methods used to create her works until 2007. Instead of saying how writers should write, Delaume exposes how she has written her books until then: "Ce sera un témoignage. Je ne théorise pas. Je ne généralise rien, je suis les mains gantées dans mon laboratoire" (1). "Visite Guidée" adopts a more narrativized approach. In her own words, it could be called a "mise en scène de la problématique" (2008: 5). As its title suggests, in this text Delaume provides a guided tour. She assumes the role of tour guide and leads her readers through what she describes as the castle of "La République Bananière des Lettres", a term she often uses to refer to the literary field, and into her personal laboratory. As she announces at the beginning of the essay: "Je m'appelle Chloé Delaume. Je suis une administrée de la République Bananière des Lettres. J'ai obtenu les bons papiers à l'automne 2001 sur un malentendu. Depuis j'ai accès au petit bain" (33).

Cover of the e-book S'écrire. Mode d'emploi



6.3.1. Return of the Scientist Writer

Delaume's works participate in the procedural advice genre. Their short length, first of all, is reminiscent of the format of Roussel's *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres*, the texts collected in *Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui*, and the Oulipean manifestos. Likewise, the title *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi* recalls Georges Perec's classic *La Vie mode d'emploi* (1978). In addition, Delaume refers to the importance of "les enseignements de l'Oulipo" for her writing (2007: 45). Furthermore, Delaume's texts re-use the representations of procedural advice. Like Poe, Valéry, Roussel and the Oulipo, Delaume constructs the author as a scientist who designs and carries out procedures. For example, she states:

> [Je manipule] les formes que peuvent prendre un genre qui n'est pas anodin, ses variations et mutations, sa réaction au contact de techniques classiques ou très contemporains. Je fais des tentatives, je ne suis même pas dans l'œuvre, juste dans la recherche. Certains objets s'avortent dans les précipités, d'autres résistent mieux à la publication. Je ne m'en préoccupe pas. Je les défends à peine. Seuls m'importent processus, tuyauteries, protocoles. J'explore, un point c'est tout. (2008: 1)

Delaume explains that she investigates forms of autofiction. Like a scientist, she speaks of techniques, experiments, research, procedures, pipework and protocols. She argues that it does not matter whether these experiments generate texts that can actually be published — she insists that "ça ne

m'intéresse pas d'être juste écrivain" (2008: 1). Her exclusive interest consists in research. Not surprisingly then, the references to science are omnipresent in Delaume's texts. She speaks of her laboratory ("Dans mon laboratoire, j'effectue des essais" (2008: 4)), compares her autofictional project to quantum physiques ("Autofiction: comme en physique quantique le fait d'observer change l'état de ce qui est observé" (2008: 3)) and she proposes formulas to explain elements of her approach ("S'écrire mode d'emploi = notice = synthèse des expérimentations" (2008: 2)).

Moreover, like the older procedural advice texts, Delaume adopts a retrospective method that uncovers the guiding principles behind the books she has written in the past. In *S'écrire mode d'emploi* especially, she systematically unveils the premises on which her books rest. She starts with "Expérience Romanesque 01. 2000. *Les Mouflettes d'Atropos*" (2008: 4) and ends with "Expérience Romanesque 10. 2008. *Dans ma maison sous terre*" (2008: 6). At the same time, Delaume's texts look forward to the future. Indeed, as I will show below, it is no coincidence that "Visite Guidée" and *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi* are written around the same time. Around 2007, Delaume's project has reached an impasse. In its exploration of the principle of "tout vu, rien inventé", it suddenly reaches a limit. She writes: "Dans mon laboratoire, cet été, un échec" (10). As a result, Delaume is seeking to renew her ways of working. She notes: "À moi d'élaborer une recette inédite" (10). This use of the advice text as the place to renew writing methods is anticipated by the majority of the avant-garde advice authors that were discussed in chapter two. For example, Raymond Roussel notes that "ce procédé, il me semble qu'il est de mon devoir de le révéler, car j'ai l'impression que des écrivains de l'avenir pourraient peut-être l'exploiter avec fruit" (11). Likewise, the Oulipo's two branches of activities dubbed "l'anoulipisme" and "le synthoulipisme" represent a past and a future-oriented line of research respectively. As François Le Lionnais notes: "L'anoulipisme est voué à la découverte, le synthoulipisme à l'invention. De l'un à l'autre existent maints subtils passages" (1973: 18).

Finally, Delaume also recalls procedural advice in the ways she makes use of the formal dimension of language. For instance, in "Visite Guidée", she reveals herself to be an avid player of the online version of the word-game Scrabble. Scrabble, she explains, is a "logiciel d'anagrammes" in which "la langue a […] les entrailles sur le plateau, c'est le moment ou jamais de prendre des échantillons" (46). By playing Scrabble, Delaume creates words with letters handed out to her at random. Sometimes, when a word strikes her, she includes it in a stock of words that she assembles to help generate her writing. In "Visite Guidée", Delaume recounts how Scrabble provided her with three new words in the week prior to presenting her paper: "Flustre: c'est un invertébré marin vivant, entre autres, en colonie" (46); "Ixia, c'est une fleur" (46); "Mignoter, c'est choyer, caresser, dorloter" (47). This way of working echoes Roussel's *procédés* as well as some of the Oulipean techniques. Roussel, for instance, also starts with the consideration of the form of a word before exploiting its content. More precisely, for Roussel, a word chosen for its form becomes a generator of content.

6.3.2. Inserting Experience in the Machine-Text

Delaume's essays resemble procedural advice texts in many respects, especially in their use of the representation of the scientist writer. However, they add an important element to the catalogue of techniques established by this tradition: lived experience. Whereas Roussel and the Oulipo typically start with a consideration of the form of language in order to provoke the writing act, Delaume, while holding on to elements of these avant-gardists' formalist tendencies, operates under the basic principle "tout vu, rien inventé" (2008: 4). In another passage, she writes: "Je ne crois pas aux vertus de l'imagination" (2008: 4). Everything included in her work is derived directly from experience. This, she explains, does not signify that her writings are driven by an investigation of memory (as autofictional texts sometimes seems to be) — quite the contrary, she stresses that "la mémoire est menteuse" (5) —, but that they are always created in line with a particular experience. To put it differently, Delaume's writing occurs in parallel with her life experiences. Moreover, her writing not only derives from these experiences. It also has an impact on the ways in which these experiences develop to the point that literature and life become completely entangled. As she signals: "S'écrire est différent de consigner sa vie. Il s'agit de s'écrire, pas de se rédiger. Le mouvement implique une préoccupation esthétique, dans l'écriture comme dans la vie. Faire de sa vie une œuvre d'art, et d'une œuvre d'art sa vie" (2008: 3).

Delaume's insistence on the intimate ties of writing to subjective experience fuses remarkably well with the scientific imagery mentioned above. While how-to-write handbooks often promote anything-goes principles for life-writing, as embodied for instance in *freewriting* exercises, and shy away from notions of recipe- or constraint-based writing in favor of writing as self-expression, Delaume blends a scientific discourse with the idea of a literature based on personal experience. In other words, in her texts, the scientist writer and the machine-text merge with the idea of experience-based writing. This becomes manifest in passages such as: "J'utilise, comme mes pairs, le vécu comme matériau. Dans mon laboratoire je suis organisée, le passé à la cave, le présent dans le chaudron. [..] Je ne fais confiance qu'à la viande, au ressenti des nerfs, au fissuré des os. Le sujet n'observe pas seulement ce qu'il vit, le sujet vit ce qu'il observe" (2008: 4).

To get a more detailed understanding of how Delaume fuses scientific method and personal experience, to get a grip on what I would call Delaume's "*procédés* of personal experience", it is useful to have a look at *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi.* In this text, Delaume exposes the *procédés* that underlie her books until 2008. Put broadly, she distinguishes between three types of literary works written according to three types of *procédés*. In the first category, she includes books that deploy the standard model for autofiction:"autofiction classique. Tout vu, rien inventé" (2008: 4). In these books, lived

experience precedes the writing act: “Parfois la vie suffit à nourrir le procédé. Parfois la vie précède, la vie marque le corps et le corps retransmet. À la langue d’effectuer le travail de conversion” (2008: 4). Delaume specifies that the books in this category are rooted in painful personal experiences. Fiction and language, she clarifies, are put to work in order to cope with these traumas. In a note reminiscent of Martin Page’s *Manuel d’écriture et de survie*, she writes: “Une mise en fiction de mon état mental, de mon vécu, de mes quêtes et de ma reconstruction. Parce que je me reconstruis par la littérature. L’écriture et la vie, un pacte de lecture, mais aussi, et surtout, un pacte de survie” (2008: 4). The first book she classifies as following this classical *procédé* of autofiction is *Les Mouflettes d’Atropos* (2000). In this text, Delaume uses a fractured syntax to work through the experience of prostitution. Looking back, she observes how putting that experience into fiction gives her a sense of control or agency: “Les faits et événements sont strictement réels, le prisme de la fiction effectue son travail d’agencement et de stylistique. (2008: 4). A similar attempt at re-appropriation through fiction is what drives *Le Cri du Sablier* (2001). The experience at the heart of this book is the brutal homicide and suicide witnessed by Delaume at the age of ten, an event to which she consequently refers as “Hiroshima” (2008: 4). In *Le Cri du Sablier*, Delaume works extensively with blank verse so as to signify the gradual erasure of her parents’ bodies by “les asticots [qui] grignotent papa maman” (2008: 4). Additionally, she employs a fractured syntax or, as she calls it “la syntaxe […] meurtrie” (2008: 4), to render the idea of the child’s bruised body (“à l’image du corps de l’enfant” (2008: 4). Lastly, Delaume puts *La Vanité des somnabules* (2003) in the category of these classical works of autofiction. In this book, she fictionalizes the invasion of Nathalie Dalain’s (Delaume’s official name) body by the fictional character Chloé Delaume. She calls it “la mise en scène d’une lutte, d’une invasion […] c’était un témoignage, je ne théorise pas. Juste une petite mise en scène de la problématique” (2008: 5).

Delaume’s second category of books follow a different *procédé* of autofiction. In these books, fiction precedes lived experience: Delaume constructs a situation and carries it out in real life. She explains: “Parfois la vie subit, se retrouve modifiée. La fiction lui impose expérience et démarche. Mises en situations, implication du corps, actions volontaristes. J’investis temporairement des lieux, des formes, des territoires. Voire même des espaces sociétaux” (2008: 5). What is at stake in these books is acquiring a deep understanding of contemporary social domains and dynamics by means of immersive experience. As Delaume points out: “Je choisis le milieu que je vais infiltrer, ensuite en fait connaître sa psychologie. Pour ça, seule l’immersion s’avère une technique viable” (2008: 5). Books written according to this principle are *Corpus simsi* (2004) and *J’habite dans la télévision* (2006). In the former, Delaume created an avatar-character to explore the video-game The Sims, while the latter is based on her experience of watching television for twenty-two months consecutively. With regard to *J’habite dans la télévision*, she describes her intention as follows: “Observer les changements, les modifications du corps et de la pensée. S’écrire dans ce réel qui nous fictionnalise. Se réapproprier sa

propre narration. Se prendre comme propre cobaye" (2008: 5). As can be gleaned from this remark, the books also deploy strategies of re-appropriation. Delaume seeks to investigate those platforms and media that that play a major role in constituting the identity of people by imposing narratives upon them. Like in a cathartic ritual, Delaume explores the boundaries of the effects of these media in an effort to re-appropriate her identity.

Before looking into the third type of Delaume's literary works, it is useful to discuss the dead end that Delaume's project reached around 2008. In *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi*, she discusses the problems she experienced when writing *Dans ma maison sous terre* (2008). This book recounts a visit to the cemetery. Every chapter tells the story of a single deceased person. While making the book, Théophile, Delaume's friend, suggested that she assist in the preparation of a dead body at a mortuary. When she discussed this idea with her therapist, the doctor strongly warned her against it, contending that it would bring back traumatic memories: "Elle dit: tout remontera. Et elle entend par tout la tête trouée du père qui me guette au couloir, le miroir qui reflète ma peau creusée de vers blancs, les nuits où je déterre maman, maman qui n'est plus rien qu'un horrible mélange d'os et de chairs meurtris et traînés dans la fange" (2008: 8). Her doctor's warnings confronted Delaume with a dilemma: should she carry out her project at the risk of seriously damaging her mental health? Delaume was convinced that in order to bring *Dans ma maison sous terre* to a good end, she should indeed assist in the preparation of a body: "Vécu mis en fiction, mais jamais inventé […] Pour que la langue soit celle des vrais battements de cœur" (2008: 8). In the end, however, she decided against this idea, but felt disappointed: "J'ai peur, donc je déserte," she admits, "Je perds toute légitimité. L'écriture ou la vie. La vie, pas l'écriture. Accepter qu'il y ait une limite, valider la notion de limite. Faire le deuil de l'immersion totale" (2008: 8-9). Furthermore, she writes "Je n'ai pas pu me construire un nouveau souvenir, or j'en avais besoin pour ma trame narrative. J'ai failli au principe *Tout vu. Rien Inventé*. […] S'écrire, en vérité, je n'ai pas le mode d'emploi" (2008: 10).

In the aftermath of what Delaume considers as the "échec" (2008: 10) of *Dans ma maison sous terre*, Delaume feels that she has to renew her *procédés*. Indeed, in *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi* and "Visite guidée", Delaume is looking for a way out of the impasse she finds herself in. In this sense, the user guide that Delaume proposes is less a how-to-write handbook for those who want to create autofiction than a note to herself to renew her methods. She asks:

> S'écrire, pourquoi, comment. Avec de la fiction, du vécu, mais quoi d'autre? Autofiction = une somme d'ingrédients. À moi d'élaborer une recette inédite, où le Je est à une sauce qu'ignorait le palais. Qu'importe que les goûteurs n'apprécient pas le civet, mon but n'est nullement de ravir les estomacs. J'ai pour seul objectif la variation d'un genre via mode combinatoire. Autofiction + X = ? (2008: 10)

Delaume wants to “élaborer une recette inédite”. Borrowing from culinary discourse, she points out that she wants to douse her “je” into a new kind of sauce. Putting it scientifically (and recalling the idea of a combinatory poetics of the Oulipo), she explains that she is looking to vary on the genre of autofiction by combining it with something new: “Autofiction + X = ?” (2008: 10).

Clearly, the *procédé* for the third category of books is not fixed yet. It is still a work in progress. In the remainder of *S’écrire mode d’emploi*, Delaume outlines possible directions for her project. She observes: “Je tente de créer de l’autofiction génétiquement modifiée. Faire un objet hybride, qui écrirait le *Je* en lui faisant incarner le plus de strates possible. Auteur, narrateur, directif, personnage, lecteur. Une forme d’autofiction interactive, qui se jouerait sur et à plusieurs niveaux” (2008: 10). Delaume is looking to create hybrid and interactive works of autofiction. She also calls it “de l’autofiction expérimentale” (2008: 11). She strives for hybridity and experiment in two related ways. First, she attempts to open up her writings to the readership in such a way that the reader becomes actively involved in her project. For instance, the book *La Nuit je suis Buffy Summers* is conceived as an interactive game in which the reader is invited to play the role of Chloé Delaume: “[Le lecteur] entre dans le *Je*, devient le *Je*” (11). Secondly, she transgresses the limits of writing by integrating other media into her project: Delaume puts to use “des outils plus technologiques. La musique électronique, Internet, les jeux vidéo” and describes this as “s’écrire par-delà le papier, proposer à l’autofiction d’investir d’autres territoires” (11).

6.3.3. République Bananière des Lettres

Delaume’s advice texts also contain echoes of the parodic *conseils* texts by Remy de Gourmont and Fernand Divoire. In chapter two, I showed how these early 20th century authors criticize the industrial pole of the literary field by producing ironic advice texts that show how to attain commercial success. On a stylistic level, these authors issued mock-warnings against the ideas of originality and literary experiment and, by contrast, advised to rely strongly on clichés. Moreover, with tongue-in-cheek humor, they supported the idea that networking skills and media savviness (what Divoire calls “la stratégie littéraire”) are much more important than talent in making it in a literary field which they compared to a battlefield or “une église de truands qui tient à la fois de la maison de prostitution, de l’étable à cochons et de la chambre de rhétorique” (Gourmont, 2006: 14).

In “Visite guidée”, Delaume provides a similar take on the literary field. She envisions the field, which she calls “la République Bananière des Lettres” (2007: 33), as a medieval castle of which she provides a guided tour. Of this castle, she says:

> Il y a beaucoup de crocodiles, aussi. Qui dévorent les anciens sauriens. Des larmes acides, des sacs de fiel, dans leur gueule des murailles d'ivoire, le parquet est plein d'éraflures, pourtant il était vitrifié. […] Le parc est barbouillé d'omelette de caïman, c'est pour ça que les chutes sont promptes, en ces contrées. (2007: 33)

Like Gourmont and Divoire, Delaume mocks the literary field, which she represents as a harsh world of rivalries and jealousy. She speaks of crocodiles, "larmes acides" and "sacs de fiel". Further, she describes the photographs that people encounter when they enter the castle. These are images of the writers who inhabit the castle: "Sous chaque photo, une fiche indique le nom, la marque sous laquelle le produit est commercialisé, l'année et le label des concours remportés, leur taux de rentabilité et l'avis des experts. La date de péremption est intégrée dans le code barre" (2007: 33). Delaume mocks the way in which literary field operates as a marketplace of commodities with recognizable author-brands, quality labels (literary prizes), sales numbers and expiring dates. She is even more critical of industrial authors of whom she writes that "la singularité relève exclusivement du capillaire" (2007: 33). Additionally, she compares literary production to cultivating the castle's gardens and harvesting their production. Referring to the abundant literary production, she writes that "la jachère n'est plus pratiquée, paysagistes et maraîchers imposent un rendement permanent, les herbes folles n'ont plus leur place" (2007: 34). Lastly, she points out that many of the gardener-writers use "de l'engrais alchimisé Da Vinci Code, ce qui explique cette odeur de soufre et de prénoms américains" (2007: 34).

6.3.4. Re-Appropriating Identity. Going beyond Formal Experiment and Therapy

In sum, Chloé Delaume's *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi* and "Visite Guidée" (2007) offer a modification of the procedural advice tradition by making lived experienced the basic constituent of the machine-text, the sine-qua-non condition of her *procédés*. This stands in strong contrast with texts like Roussel's *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* and the Oulipean manifestos.[48] Delaume shares the formalist tendencies of these avant-gardists: she occasionally derives content from found linguistic material (for instance by using Scrabble as a "logiciel d'anagrammes") and she argues that the putting into form or the "mise en fiction" of experience is precisely what allows her to re-appropriate identity. However, in Delaume's project, formalist activities are ultimately subordinate to re-working and transforming

[48] In respect to the role attributed to personal experience, it is important to distinguish the Oulipian manifestos from other texts written by Oulipian writers. The manifestos disregard the creative potential of the writer's lived experience and favor the idea of writing as a scientific and systematic endeavor. By contrast, many other texts by Oulipian writers, not in the least Perec, testify to the importance of personal experience and memory as sources of inspiration. Think, for instance, of Perec's *W* (1975), Jacques Roubaud's *Quelque chose noire* (1986) and Harry Mathews's *My Life in CIA: A Chronicle of 1973* (2005).

experience. As can be read in *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi*: "J'ai choisi l'écriture pour me réapproprier mon corps, mes faits et gestes, et mon identité" (2008: 1).

It is also possible to argue that Delaume's papers propose a modification for handbooks on life-writing. They infuse the how-to-write literature on autobiography with the ideas of the scientist writer and the machine-text. Put differently, they diverge from the notion of autobiographical writing as free self-expression, and enact the encounter between writing the self and writing as the construction of a machine. In my view, the introduction of this scientific and technological imagery is related to Delaume's views on what it takes to re-appropriate her identity. For her, the simple act of writing down one's life does not suffice to get a grip on things. In order to successfully accomplish acts of re-appropriation, she must re-work her experiences by putting them through the mangle of specific literary forms. It is as if she had to insert her experiences in a literary machine in order to transform them into something manageable. As she describes: "L'écriture peut être une thérapie, mais l'important c'est de produire de la littérature. S'écrire est différent de consigner sa vie. Il s'agit de s'écrire, pas de se rédiger. Le mouvement implique une préoccupation esthétique" (2008: 3).

6.4. Collision of Advice Genres. Olivier Cadiot's Science-Fiction

In an article from October 2017 Johan Faerber, from the cultural magazine *Diacritik*, called Olivier Cadiot "le master incontesté de la création littéraire". Indeed, poet, translator and dramatist Cadiot has been analyzing the creative process of writing since the beginning of his career. His first published volume, *L'Art poétic'* (P.O.L. 1988), has been compared to Gertrude Stein's *How to Write* (1931). Like Stein, Cadiot uses cut-up and collage techniques and applies them to grammar textbooks. In this way, he delves into the basic constituents of the French language and exploits them to produce poetic effect. He cuts up seemingly impersonal and universal grammar textbooks and creates something that is his own. In 1999, *L'Art poétic'* was translated into English as *Art Poetic* by renowned creative writing teacher and poet Cole Swenson.

Cadiot edited two volumes of the so-called *Revue de littérature générale* (1995-1996) with writer Pierre Alféri. These volumes, respectively subtitled *La Mécanique lyrique* and *Digest*, are all but regular literary journals. This was clearly noted in a 1995 article by Antoine de Gaudemar on the first issue of *Revue de littérature générale* in the magazine *Libération* that opened with the riddle: "Qu'est-ce qui est blanc, gros, lourd, ressemble à un catalogue de Manufrance, et ne coûte que 50 francs? Réponse: la nouvelle revue de quatre cents pages lancée par les éditions POL et dirigée par deux auteurs maison, Pierre Alféri et Olivier Cadiot". The two issues of *Revue de littérature générale* are full-fledged books that each count more than 400 pages with many images, photographs, footnotes. They are composed of experimental essayistic and literary texts, for the most part unpublished, in French,

by a whole range of dead and living writers, ranging from Valère Novarina, to Bernard Stiegler, Harry Mathews, Philippe Le Goff, Mikhaïl Bakhtin, Pascale Casanova, Charles Bernstein, Christophe Tarkos, Nathalie Quintane, Sigmund Freud, William Faulkner, and Gustave Flaubert.[49] In their introduction, Alféri and Cadiot observe that they intend to exhibit the mechanics of literary writing: "On pourrait raconter l'écriture comme la construction d'un barrage, ou d'un moulin, ou d'un moteur" (3).

Covers of Revue de littérature générale 1 and 2

Situating themselves in the procedural writing tradition of Poe, Valéry, Roussel and the Oulipo, Alféri and Cadiot think of writing in mechanical terms. They compare it to constructing a dam, a mill and an engine. They further contend that they do not want to provide a history of mechanical takes on writing: "Ce serait moins que de l'histoire, moins que de l'archéologie" (3). Quite the contrary, by exhibiting these texts that demonstrate the mechanical dimension of writing, they are attempting to provide a science for future writing. They call this "science-fiction" and note, with a reference to Blanchot's *Espace littéraire* (1955): "Ce pourrait être une science-fiction, un effort d'imagination pour décrire en détail un chantier dans la cinquième dimension de 'l'espace littéraire'" (3). In a 2016 television interview, Cadiot has equally described this project as: "C'était aussi une manière de rêver aux livres qu'on voudrait lire en 2022".

In spite of their ambition to create a science-fiction, Cadiot and Alféri argue that they are not providing writing recipes ("ce serait […] moins que des recettes, bien sûr" (3)), as if to distance themselves from how-to-write handbooks. The ambiguity of providing a catalogue of techniques for books of the future (science-fiction), while at the same time distancing themselves from writing recipes

[49] Pierre Alféri is the son of Jacques Derrida, the poststructuralist philosopher who was himself familiar with the writings of many of the thinkers and writers included in *Revue de littérature générale*. For example, Derrida has written on Freud and Flaubert in *Psyché. Inventions de l'autre* (1987).

is reinforced by the subtitle of the second issue of *Revue de littérature générale*'s: *Digest*. This term refers to the highly popular American magazines *Reader's Digest* (°1922) and *Writer's Digest* (°1920). These magazines have a strong educational dimension: in an effort to make the American public read, the early *Reader's Digest* magazines provided thirty articles summarizing novels and novellas, with an accompanying vocabulary page; *Writer's Digest* is one of the longstanding writing magazines composed of interviews with writers, how-to-write sections, and calls for manuscripts. Alluding to these magazines, *Revue de littéraire* claims to be "une théorie fictive, jetable," (3) and mentions that there can be, "une [théorie] autre s'il le faut, et une autre. Une par numéro" (3). Moreover, with the low price of *Revue de littérature générale* — issues only cost fifty francs each— the editor P.O.L., Alféri and Cadiot hoped to tap into an audience of youngsters and students.

6.4.1. Going Beyond the Death of Literature

In his recent book *Histoire de la littérature récente. Tome I* (P.O.L., 2016),[50] Cadiot continues his exploitation of literary advice, this time, however, in a less technical way than in *Revue de littérature générale*. The text on the first issue's back cover, a single sentence, testifies to Cadiot's interest in literary advice. It states: "Une méthode *révolutionnaire* pour apprendre à écrire en lisant". How should we interpret this phrase? It definitely refers to the you-can-do-it discourse of how-to-write handbooks. Does the experimental poet Cadiot offer an ironic take on how-to-write handbooks, or is there more to this sentence?

Cover of Histoire de la littérature récente

Histoire de la littérature récente consists of sixty short chapters that exhibit Cadiot's views on writing in an associative and essayistic way. Echoing the statements made in *Revue de littérature générale*, Cadiot claimed in a television interview: "Ce n'est pas vraiment une histoire, c'est plutôt une

[50] There is also a *Histoire de la littérature récente. Tome II* (2017).

histoire prospective". Cadiot is interested in the future of literature rather than its past. The use of the term "histoire" is explained in the chapters "C'est compliqué" and "Enquête". In these sections, he draws on the discourse of the death of literature, omnipresent in both the French popular media and in intellectual circles. For example, he writes: "*La littérature, ça n'intéresse plus personne*, m'a dit dernièrement une personne spécialiste du *contemporain* à l'université, désolée, comme si elle m'annonçait la disparition programmée de quelqu'un" (28). The discourse around the death of literature has sparked Cadiot's interest, and he wanted to study (he speaks of "enquète") and testify to this event. "C'est le bon moment pour en faire une [Histoire] quand la chose est soi-disant en train de disparaître," he observes, "La *chute de l'Empire romain* n'a été écrite que quatre siècles plus tard, c'est dommage, regardez les éruptions du Vésuve, les grandes choses décrites en temps réel par de grands chroniqueurs contemporains par chance voisin de l'événement" (33). In the way that Pliny the Younger described the eruption of Mount Vesuvius and the destruction of Pompeii, Cadiot wants to analyze the death of literature.

Meanwhile, Cadiot suggests that, whatever the outcome of his study on the state of the art of writing might be, he will continue to write. Indeed, he shows himself to be resilient with regard to the idea of the death of literature. As he notes: "La coupe est pleine, on va se rebeller. Ça ne peut plus durer, cette histoire de fin" (2016: 31). Even if his investigation led to the conclusion that literature is indeed dead, this, Cadiot points out, does not entail that people should give up writing. He compares the situation to a mother who, having lost a child, abandons playing the piano and observes: "L'interdiction de faire ceci ou cela en fonction de l'importance de la personne perdue. Alors tu vas arrêter de jouer du piano parce que quelqu'un est mort? C'est excessif" (47). Cadiot contends that writers should continue their work in spite of literature's possible death. However, he also thinks that it is important that they reflect on the ways in which they are working. What do they want the literature of the future to be like? And, just as important, what do they not want it to be?

6.4.2. Criticizing Dominant Writing Culture

Cadiot thinks that a reflection on the future of writing calls for a consideration of the ideas on writing and literary trends that should be abandoned. In *Histoire de la littérature récente*, Cadiot rejects a number of commonplaces about writing and dominant trends on the book market. For example, concerning the therapeutic value of writing — a notion that frequently appears in the popular discourse on writing —[51] he remarks: "On dit souvent que la littérature est une thérapie, mais pas du

[51] Other theorists have recently studied the ways in which the contemporary consumption of literature has come to resemble therapeutic experiences. See Illouz, Eva. *Saving the Modern Soul. Therapy, Emotions and the Culture of Self-Help*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008; Collins, Jim. *Bring on the Books for Everybody. How Literary Culture became Popular Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

tout. Ce n'est pas ça, absolument pas. Recopier ne soigne rien; on ne supporte pas mieux les choses en les dédoublant par des mots — comme si *ça irait mieux en le disant*" (10). Likewise, he debunks the widespread idea of suffering as a condition for writing ("il nous fallait une bonne petite catastrophe, *il faut souffrir pour être belle*. Mais pas du tout. Allez, on respire, il ne vous est jamais rien arrivé, pas de drame. Respirez. Plus de passé, plus de récent" (107)) and the fetishization of writing materials that one finds in how-to-write handbooks, especially of notebooks. "Autre mensonge, personne ne se sert jamais de carnets; ils sont toujours vides ou seulement la première page est remplie – avec une tentative de journal intime" (112). Furthermore, he rejects important trends in the book market: he refutes the writing memoir ("les vieux écrivains qui racontent leur vie, c'est terrible. (67)), fantasy book series ("Ca ne cesse pas: des voyages interminables; des gens qui se parlent en hurlant sur des terrains en arc de cercle en plein soleil; des héros qui rêvent dans leur tente et qui racontent tout *in extenso*: c'est épuisant" (62-63)), and the trend of autobiographical writing:

> Croire qu'on est au maximum de la douleur, bien installé dans son fauteuil, si on est un petit-bourgeois anxieux qui souffre quelquefois de rages de dents — et a sans doute perdu sa mère: grossière erreur. […] Vous allez finir par croire pour de bon que vous êtes *la* personne la plus malheureuse du monde; et vous allez vous persuader que vous avez le *devoir* de déverser vos malheurs dans un livre et en détail: histoires de famille, premiers émois, mort du père, viol de X, disparition de Z, tortures de W. (19)

In addition, in a parodic mode reminiscent of Remy de Gourmont and Fernand Divoire, he advises to write in a mediocre way so as to obtain the largest commercial success possible. "Voici mon premier conseil pour réussir votre livre: ne faites pas l'artiste ni l'artisan. Ni Van Gogh ni souffleur de verre," he notes, "trouvez la position la plus proche possible du lecteur visé et ne bougez plus. Soyez mou, transparent, dominable — surtout si vous êtes dévoré d'ambition. Cherchez désespérément *le premier degré*, le plus petit dénominateur commun, et restez-y" (36). On a similar ironic note, he points to the limited importance of good writing for obtaining success, given that people hardly read these days: "À la vérité, on ne lit pas les livres. Si on les déteste, on les jette; si on les aime, quelques pages suffisent à nous emporter, on les jette aussi" (163).

6.4.3. Making Procedural, Neo-Romantic and How-to-Write Advice Collide

Histoire de la littérature récente entails a genuine effort to provide directives for a literature of the future. Given that it draws on procedural, neo-romantic and how-to-write traditions, its mixture of advice cannot be situated within one specific advice genre. Rather, it selects bits and pieces from the various traditions and mixes them. Cadiot avoids providing strong directives, leaving instead room to the reader to figure out how to write.

First of all, as could be expected from the maker of *Revue de littérature générale*, *Histoire de la littérature récente* recalls the technical and procedural tradition of Poe, Valéry and Roussel. For example, Cadiot compares books to machines: "Un livre, c'est quoi? C'est une machine immatérielle qui produit des images que nous devons oublier par la suite" (125)). Like the avant-gardists, he repudiates the notion of writing as self-expression: "Il ne faut rien faire sortir. Les choses à dire ne surgissent pas de l'intérieur comme ça, elles sont autour et déjà dehors" (22). Additionally, Cadiot attempts to de-fetishize and rationalize writing, literature, and authorship. For instance, he explains that writing is just as logical as other activities:

> La littérature, ce n'est pas plus compliqué que le reste. Est-ce qu'un chasseur perdu dans la campagne n'a pas les mêmes réflexes de pensée qu'un chercheur en mécanique quantique enfermé dans une tour d'une partie industrielle de la ville? Pas plus pas moins. Notre chasseur a des idées complexes comme nous tous. *Tout le monde se ressemble*. (54)

Histoire de la littérature récente also echoes the neo-romantic *conseils* tradition. Notably, in the chapter "Lettre à un très jeune poète", Cadiot points to the importance of patience and conceives writing as a long-term and organic learning process. "Remettez à demain chaque jour le travail à accomplir, il s'inscrira malgré vous quelque part," he advises, "il s'agira juste de ramasser. Aujourd'hui, c'est *vacances*, ne rédigez pas tout de suite vos idées. Enterrez-les. Il paraît que, même enfermées dans des boîtes métalliques hermétiques, les sardines s'améliorent en vieillissant" (91). Similarly, he suggest: "*Vous ne comprenez pas où ça va?* Mais bon dieu, où vouliez-vous aller? Vous avez peur de craquer. Vous avez peur que ça dure toujours, cette angoisse. Calmez-vous, on perd la main puis on la retrouve" (92). Moreover, he calls the desire to write a disease ("qu'est-ce que c'est, cette histoire de *je veux écrire*? C'est une maladie. Mais pourquoi ? D'où ça vous vient? On vous a dit que ça ne guérissait pas" (85)) and ultimately, in a note reminsicent of Rilke's exhortation "Avant toute chose, demandez-vous, à l'heure la plus tranquille de votre nuit: est-il nécessaire que j'écrive," he states: "Et puis, recopier, pour quoi faire ? […] Avant de se lancer dans l'écriture — qui peut vous faire perdre des années précieuses —, il faudrait faire une petite étude, ne foncez pas à l'aveuglette dans les ruines" (17). Similarly, when comparing writing to a kind of acrobatic act that consists of repeatedly cutting off the branch on which one sits, he issues the following preliminary warning :

> Il faut trouver un espace contraint où l'on peut changer d'avis profondément. Exercice étrange qui consiste à s'appuyer sur une branche pendant qu'on la coupe, et au moment du fracas, à sauter sur la prochaine — et ainsi de suite, c'est épuisant. Finalement, je vous déconseille d'embrasser cette profession. (178)

Finally, and perhaps most surprisingly, Cadiot shares advice that is very similar to rules that appear in how-to-write handbooks: he proposes to write every day ("rédigez quand même chaque jour un petit paragraphe d'une traite sur des sujets divers que vous pouvez prendre aujourd'hui dans l'actualité" (105)), to prepare and document the writing ("n'hésitez pas à vous documenter. Un livre est assez généreux pour supporter des informations détaillées" (161)), to make use of stock characters and recognizable scenery ("on a intérêt à utiliser des personnages comme notre butler effacé et digne; on gagne un temps fou, ce sont des concentrés de choses partageables immédiatement […] C'est pareil pour les lieux " (119)), *to kill your darlings* ("on coupe les branches en gardant la ligne de la branche principale — jusqu'au bout des feuilles. N'importe quel horticulteur vous le dira" (149)) and to *show don't tell* ("Il faudra trouver une distance, pas de confessions, *never explain*, *never complain*, sinon vous allez raser les gens avec vos histoires de famille, vos récits de rêves et de voyages" (150)).

In sum, *Histoire de la littérature récente* makes advice genres collide in an attempt to project a writing fit for the future. Instead of producing a clear-cut manifesto that embodies a radical break with the poetics of the past and an ambitious program for the literature of the future, Cadiot proposes a writing handbook in progress. Going beyond the discourse on the death of literature, *Histoire de la littérature récente* constitutes an attempt to provide insights coming from various advice traditions without clearly privileging one type of poetics. In fact, Cadiot proposes insights from these traditions and simultaneously adds nuance by juxtaposing them to the other traditions.

6.5. Conclusion. How-To-Survive

The texts discussed in this chapter draw upon the advice traditions discussed in the first three chapters of my dissertation. At the same time, they seek to go beyond these traditions. Martin Page's *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* borrows the format and aspects of the imagery of neo-romantic advice, but refutes the notion of the martyr writer in favor of the militant writer. Chloé Delaume's *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi* and "Visite Guidée" offer the avant-garde inspired representation of the scientist writer, but argue for lived experience as the crucial input to feed into the machine-text. Olivier Cadiot's *Histoire de la littérature récente. Tome 1* makes a range of advice genres collide in order to renew contemporary writing.

Remarkably, all the authors discussed in this chapter turn these established advice representations, formulas and genres into very personal texts. Indeed, these texts testify to the personal, political and literary struggles that these writers are undertaking. Not coincidentally, they all resort to a vocabulary of life and death that has dominated the French literary tradition since Blanchot. They especially validate the notion of survival. Martin Page ponders the question of how he can

continue making art in a political and social context that impedes the making of art. Chloé Delaume is looking for a way out of the impasse that her artistic project finds itself in. What is more, she conceives her autofictional writing explicitly as a means to survive in the capitalist system. Lastly, Olivier Cadiot considers the survival and renewal of writing in times when the death of literature is a widespread idea.

Clearly, the term "advice", when referring to these texts, means much more than merely explaining how to write a good book. These books touch upon important societal and political issues: artists' rights in the capitalist world; art's role as a transformative power. In fact, these books explicitly distance themselves from the ideas of becoming an author or writing a good book that can be found in popular writing advice. Page insists that the notion of survival, rather than writing, is the true question underlying his text. Delaume states that "ça ne m'intéresse pas d'être juste écrivain" (2008: 1). Moreover, all these texts refute, mock or criticize the literary field's industrial pole. Put differently, they disconnect writing from having commercial success (which, of course, does not mean that they are against making a living out of one's literary activities).

In addition to the way in which they personalize literary advice traditions, these texts also have a strong collective appeal. Instead of teaching a single person how to write a good book, these texts situate themselves in a broader political and literary movement. Martin Page highlights the importance of the notion of "ally" and considers like-minded artists as his "family", with whom he wants to continue making art in spite of the difficulties artists have to face. Chloé Delaume validates the concepts of a collective "autofiction" that re-appropriates people's identities in the face of the dominant capitalist narrative. As she puts it in *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi*: "Autofiction collective. Qu'à l'instar de mon *Je* chacun s'écrive en marge de la fiction collective qui porte une majuscule et de toutes ses petites sœurs qui sont propre à chacun. S'écrire c'est dire je suis et c'est moi qui maîtrise le récit ou je me trouve. Tout du moins dans la mesure de mes capacités" (2008: 14). Olivier Cadiot's title *Histoire de la littérature récente* already reveals that Cadiot considers the search to go beyond the death of literature as something broad and collective. In a general way, he speaks of "history" and "recent literature".

Finally, I want to draw attention to the role of the American literary advice tradition in this chapter. As mentioned, Martin Page and Olivier Cadiot both insert references to American how-to-write culture in their texts. The former mentions Ray Bradbury's *Zen in the Art of Writing* and R. O. Blechman's *Dear James. Letters to a Young Illustrator*. The latter infuses his *Histoire de la littérature récente* with typical how-to-write formulas. I suggest that a way to understand the presence of this American discourse is to point to its optimistic premises. As mentioned, in Page's and Cadiot's books, there is an important sense of political and literary crisis, and a simultaneous longing to find a way to survive the crisis. I argue that these texts insert pieces of American advice because of its ideology of

don't give up and *you can do it*. In *Manuel d'écriture et de survie*, this can be seen clearly in the passage where Martin Page counters Rilke's representation of the martyr writer with a passage from Blechman's book: "Je ne mourrais pas. Je serais comme la rivière bloquée par un obstacle: je changerais de chemin et créerais un nouveau canal. L'énergie créatrice ne peut pas être arrêtée" (Page, 2014: 159). In Cadiot's case, the American optimistic how-to-write formulas and recipes are inserted as the essential counter-weight against the media-driven idea, popular in France, of the death of literature. Even if Cadiot does not endorse the recipe-based approach of creative writing handbooks, he includes references to this American literature as an important element to help push his reflection on the future of writing beyond the impasse of the dead of literature. For Cadiot, more than neo-romantic advice and more than procedural advice, how-to-write discourse, in particular its optimistic notion of *you can do it*, is the essential ingredient to rethink contemporary writing. More precisely, it is the optimistic premise that clears space for the possibility of new forms of writing, the antidote against the belief in the death of literature.

Conclusion: Creative Writing Crosses the Atlantic (and Goes Back Again)

American creative writing handbooks offer step-by-step programs on how to become a writer and how to write a good book. They provide definitions, formulas and techniques that appear to have universal legitimacy and that have proven very successful all the way into the twenty-first century. At the same time, however, they offer little historical perspective: they fail to situate their poetics within historical contexts and national literary traditions (Dawson, 2005; Wandor, 2008). Typically, they find inspiration in texts by a diverse set of writers — from Aristotle to Edgar Allan Poe and Georges Polti —, which they present as being part of the same body of knowledge about the universal rules of storytelling. Moreover, the U.S. creative writing handbooks justify their poetics of universality by pointing to the proven efficiency of these formulas on the literary marketplace. The rules are universal, so the handbook gospel goes, because they have withstood the test of time in managing to capture the readers' attention.

In this dissertation, I investigated how the American creative writing handbook tradition, with its universalist claims, goes through changes when it enters into a European context with important local literary (advice) traditions. What happens when this body of concepts, formulas, ideas, techniques and representations (i.e. this poetics) shows up in a place that has its own deeply ingrained views on the process of writing and becoming a writer? How does this encounter between the apparently universal and the local play out?

As I explained in the introduction to this dissertation, I focused on the literary advice offer in France because of this country's ambivalence towards American creative practices. Recalling the *nouvelle vague* cinema of the 1950s and 1960s especially, I pointed out that the field of French cultural production has long been torn between feelings of disdain and fascination when evaluating American models for producing culture (Marie, 1997; Neupert, 2007). How then does this ambivalence manifest itself regarding contemporary literary advice texts? Do we uncover similar push and pull dynamics in these texts?

This dissertation aims to contribute to a specific body of research. On the one hand, it has its place among a number of important studies on the history and poetics of American creative writing handbooks (Levy, 1993; Dawson, 2005; Hilliard, 2006; Wandor, 2008; McGurl, 2009; De Geest and Goris, 2010; Atwell, 2013; Caughey, 2016; Masschelein and De Geest, 2016). On the other hand, it contributes to the existing sociological research on popular writing culture in France today, going from studies on short story contests, amateur poets and creative writing workshops (Rossignol, 1996; Mouaci, 2001; Poliak, 2006; Chateigner, 2007). Indeed, with this dissertation, I attempted to bring

these two fields of research closer to each other by analyzing how literary advice texts, which play a significant role in the popular writing culture in France today, draw upon the American handbook tradition to shape their poetics. Recently, literary scholar Françoise Grauby has carried out a similar enterprise: her *Le Roman de la création* (2015) provides a thorough investigation of literary advice texts in France. Yet, Grauby's book focuses less on the relationship between French and American texts, and less on contemporary and commercial how-to-write handbooks. Moreover, she is primarily concerned with questions of representation and less with the issue of technique. I hope that my dissertation can provide answers to some of the questions that Françoise Grauby leaves untouched.

In the first part of this dissertation, I established a framework that would enable me to perform close-readings of contemporary advice texts in French. First, I traced the origins of the American advice tradition back to Poe's pragmatism as exposed in "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846) and showed that Poe's reader-oriented approach to writing was later given a commercial turn in the boom of early twentieth century short story handbooks (chapter one). Additionally, I discussed creative writing formulas (*write what you know*, *show don't tell*, *find your own voice*, etc.) and techniques (*freewriting*, *the elements of fiction*) that appear in almost all American literary advice texts, while paying attention to the different interpretations these formulas receive from different writers. Even within the American corpus, there is little consensus as to the meaning of these apparently universal rules. What is more, I argued that it is precisely because catchphrases like *write what you know* and *find your own voice* leave ample room for imitation, interpretation, parody and transformation, that these pieces of advice could become central in contemporary advice texts in France and elsewhere.

In chapters two and three, I presented the local French advice culture. I described the representations of writer, writing process and literary field as found in older literary advice traditions, zooming in especially on the imagery of the martyr writer and the scientist writer proposed by what I called the neo-romantic *conseils* tradition and the procedural advice tradition respectively (chapter two). In contrast to the American handbooks, these local traditions neglect and even dismiss the commercial dimension of producing literature. In a subsequent typology of contemporary literary advice in France, I distinguished four primary genres within the broad corpus of French advice (chapter three). Apart from how-to-write handbooks modelled on American examples, I identified writing guides, French *atelier d'écriture* handbooks and methodological advice texts on the writing process. I paid particular attention to the *atelier d'écriture* handbooks (textbooks that provide writing workshop exercises) that continue a tradition of post-May 68 political ideas — their main goal being to train critical readers —, and that draw strongly upon avant-garde writing practices, in particular the Oulipo's technique of *écriture à contraintes*.

Equipped with this hybrid model of American formulas, local French representations and a typology of genres, in the second part of this dissertation (chapters four to six), I performed a number

of close-readings of contemporary literary advice texts in French. As I was attempting to create a varied picture of the current advice offer, I selected case studies from each of the advice genres that I presented in chapter three: I discussed how-to-write handbooks (chapter four), *atelier d'écriture* handbooks (chapter five), writing guides and methodological advice texts (chapter six), respectively. By presenting the close readings in this order, I supplemented the analysis with a particular rationale: I went from texts that remain predominantly faithful to the American creative writing handbook format, to texts that depart from it in increasingly radical ways. I also indicated this logic by means of the concepts with which I described the multiple relationships between the American model on the one hand, and the French texts on the other: adaptation (both classic treatment and partial adaptation), *détournement*, and transformation. The sequence of these concepts outlines a movement that goes further and further away from the format and the poetics American model. Or, if we reverse the perspective, they provide increasingly strong examples of appropriation on the part of local producers of literary advice.

In chapter four, I studied a selection of how-to-write handbooks that negotiate between American and French advice cultures. Advice writers like Laure D'Astragal, Gérard Raynal, Brigit Hache, Marianne Jaeglé borrow the hands-on design of U.S. handbooks — including its formulas and its commercial directives — supplementing it with references to national French literature and culture, with local representations derived from texts by Flaubert and Rilke, and with Oulipian writing practices. Thus, these how-to-write handbooks enrich the contemporary advice offer in French by acknowledging commercial motives as legitimate, and by proposing a pragmatist (in other words, a reader-oriented) approach to writing. As these handbooks resemble the American model quite closely, I called them instances of "classic treatment" (Griggs, 2016: 12). A book that, by contrast, goes further in appropriating the American genre is Jean Guenot's *Écrire* (1977). Like other how-to-write handbooks, this book promotes a reader-oriented poetics, and it refers to the success of American novels and films to justify the rules that it lays down. At the same time, it differs from the other French how-to-write handbooks in important ways: it is much more detailed and pursues a conservative political agenda. Perhaps most notably, its tone is essayistic and humorous. Guenot's book provides useful advice, but — in keeping with the parodic *conseils* tradition of writers like Remy de Gourmont and Fernand Divoire—, its insights are also drenched in irony. As a result, I propose that *Écrire* is not so much an example of "classic treatment", but rather of what scholar John Bryant calls "adaptive revision" or "partial adaptation" (2013: 50).

Chapter five zoomed in on novelist François Bon's *atelier d'écriture* handbooks *Tous les mots sont adultes* (2000) and *Outils du roman* (2016). The former, I argued, constitutes the culmination of the French *atelier d'écriture* tradition, a large share of the contemporary advice market. In this text, the literary and the political converge through the idea of readership: François Bon's ultimate objective

is to foster critical reading skills. This means that Bon provides reading strategies that might be of use not only to the experienced writer who is looking to find inspiration in literary texts from the past, but also to anyone who wishes to enhance their capacity to read and understand texts. Importantly, reading texts, in this framework, should be understood in the broadest sense: it refers not only to a critical interrogation of literary texts or other texts composed of (printed) language, but indeed of the world surrounding us, in all its different facets. *Outils du roman*, in contrast, tones down the emphasis on politics and opts for an American instead of a French or European literary framework. Presented as a translation of American creative writing cult figure Malt Olbren's *Creative Writing No-Guide*, this book draws exclusively on formulas, techniques, rules and concepts from the American creative writing corpus. However, François Bon does not use these elements as they come. He parodies, performs *détournement*, and transforms these elements into genuine *écriture à contraintes* exercises. In this way, he seeks to invest the *atelier d'écriture* tradition with new input, more precisely, with techniques designed to facilitate the making of novels.

Finally, I analyzed four contemporary advice texts that attempt to re-interpret, re-new and transform the older French advice traditions (chapter six). Novelist Martin Page's *Manuel d'écriture et de survie* (2014) revisits the representations of the neo-romantic *conseils* tradition. Taking his cue from American creative writing, in particular Ray Bradbury's *Zen in the Art of Writing* (1990) and R. O. Blechman's *Dear James* (2009), Page strives to supplant the neo-romantic tradition's notion of the martyr writer with that of the militant writer. Writer of autofiction Chloé Delaume's short texts "Visite Guidée" (2007) and *S'écrire. Mode d'emploi* (2008) introduce personal experience into the scientific and mechanical procedural advice tradition initiated by Raymond Roussel and the Oulipo. Poet Olivier Cadiot's *Histoire de la littérature récente* enacts the collision of a range of different advice formulas, images and genres, and mixes this with an investigation of the state of the art of contemporary literature prompted by the strongly mediatized idea of the death of literature. By drawing on procedural, neo-romantic and U.S.-inspired how-to-write advice, Cadiot seeks a way out of the impasse of the idea of the death of literature and in so doing, he strives to reinvigorate contemporary writing.

1. Transforming American Creative Writing Handbooks

One of the main questions of this dissertation — how is the American how-to-write format adapted and transformed when it becomes part of contemporary literary advice in France? —, allowed me to understand that the selected case studies demonstrate that the universalist American model is transformed in at least four ways. Firstly, the case studies, especially in the last two chapters, show

that the imported format becomes less generic and increasingly personal.[52] For some authors, the creative writing handbook becomes the setting for personal and singular experiments. Thus, paradoxically, the genre of the handbook, with its fixed repertoire of formulas and recipes, is experienced as liberating by some authors: they use the genre to put into perspective and re-think their own ways of writing (Bon, Delaume, Cadiot) and being an author (Page); they mix the genre with other literary genres like autofiction (Page, Delaume) and poetry (Cadiot), creating hybrid literary advice products; they make the genre their own by introducing humor, going from irony (Guenot) to parody and *détournement* (Bon, Cadiot).[53]

Secondly, the French authors supplement the creative writing handbook with notable political dimensions. On the one hand, someone like Jean Guenot promotes a conservative and individualist political agenda — for instance, following the local *conseils* tradition, Guenot portrays the budding author as young and masculine (*le jeune littérateur*). On the other hand, the more recent makers of literary advice in French typically lean towards the political left.[54] François Bon's project is predicated on a desire to advance critical thinking and reading — it especially pays attention to the people who are typically left out by traditional education; Martin Page offers an ideology that encourages artists to persist with their creative work in spite of their harsh working conditions and that professes collective activism; Chloé Delaume's project is fundamentally driven by an awareness of the importance for people to reclaim control over their existence in times when capitalism imposes its ways upon their lives.

Thirdly, the French authors expand the literary scope of the creative writing handbook. Instead of showing how individuals can write a book that will do well on the contemporary marketplace (as the American handbooks are said to do), people like François Bon, Chloé Delaume and Olivier Cadiot strive to provide programs to reinvigorate French literature as a whole. In these texts, the focus shifts

[52] Of course, there are also plenty of examples of less generic and experimental creative writing handbooks in the U.S such as Kenneth Goldsmith's *Uncreative Writing* (2011) and Richard Cohen's *How to Write like Tolstoy* (2016).

[53] The distinction between Jean Guenot's irony, Remy de Gourmont's and Fernand Divoire's parody, and François Bon's *détournement* can be understood as follows: Guenot's irony is situated in the tension between his effort to provide quality advice on the one hand, and his simultaneous rejection of the notion that his advice might be of any use to anyone on the other. Put differently, Guenot provides help to budding authors, while at the same time signaling that external help is of little use. Remy de Gourmont and Fernand Divoire's parodic *conseils* texts increase the distance between what they are explicitly claiming and what they are implying. In contrast to Guenot, these texts claim that is easy to learn how to write. Thus, at the surface, they convey a similar message as other how-to-write handbooks (*you can do it*). Yet, they in fact are predicated on the implicit premise that genuine forms of literary writing cannot be taught. Lastly, Bon's *détournement* is similar to Gourmont and Divoire's strategies in that it also mimics the phrases and formulas of the how-to-write tradition. However, Bon does not so much ridicule the simplicity of these formulas, but he actually uses them as a starting to point for new and, in his eyes, more intricate creative practices.

[54] As I signaled in chapter five, French literary advice has an important tradition of leftist politics. This is especially true for some of the authors that did pioneering work in the field of writing workshops like Alain André, Jean Ricardou and Claudette Oriol-Boyer (Rossignol, 1996; Chateigner 2007).

from the individual writer and her book to the collective of French writers and literature as a whole. How can we, Bon and Cadiot ask, together with other less and more experienced writers, renew our national literary tradition?

Finally, the French authors provide more historical context. Rather than proposing rules and formulas with apparently universal validity, these authors situate their books within well-defined historical contexts. These contexts can be literary contexts (the authors provide a state of art of writing in France today), political and social-economic contexts (the authors describe life and work in neoliberal France), and even technological contexts (the authors reflect on writing or being a writer in the age of the internet). Interestingly, these descriptions of context — the literary, socio-economic or technological context — often evoke the notion of a crisis which, they argue, has to be overcome. As Olivier Cadiot remarks: "La coupe est pleine, on va se rebeller. Ça ne peut plus durer, cette histoire de fin [de la littérature]" (2016: 31).

2. Transforming Literary Advice in France

Just as the American handbook format changes by entering the French context, the contemporary literary advice in France also evolves as a result of its encounter with American creative writing. The most visible change is the appearance of French how-to-write handbooks. These texts, as I argued in chapter four, mark an important transformation within the broader French advice offer: in contrast to the older French advice traditions, these how-to-write handbooks defend the legitimacy of pursuing commercial success, and, in keeping with these commercial objectives, propose a pragmatist and reader-oriented approach to writing.[55]

In addition, the *elements of fiction* are introduced in French literary advice. French how-to-write authors, in particular Jean Guenot, François Bon and Olivier Cadiot point out the successful ways in which the American advice tradition has exploited devices like plot, character, dialogue and setting.[56] They contend that the success of American narrative traditions, from books by Steinbeck and

[55] Pragmatism, as I have understood it in this dissertation, puts forth the audience's reaction as the touchstone for measuring the efficiency of particular literary techniques and devices. It suggests that the writer makes an effort not so much in order to express an inner state, but rather to create a narrative that successfully keeps readers' attention.

[56] One could argue that structuralists like Propp, Todorov, Greimas, Genette and Barthes did much to uncover the universal role of plot and character in narrative and that, therefore, contemporary French advice authors could be as much indebted to these thinkers as to their American counterparts (see *Communications*. 8. 1966). However, I contend that there is an important difference between the structuralist idea that there are universal plotlines and character types, and the American methodology for literary writing that takes these elements as a starting point for creating stories. The structuralist point of view does not in any way imply that one should use these *elements of fiction* in one's writing. Perhaps the opposite argument is easier to make: given that plotlines and character types are inevitably there, one should hardly make an effort to develop these elements. By contrast, American creative writing practices incite writers to use these elements as a starting point. They advise this because they believe that these elements generate universally recognizable stories

Hemingway to Hollywood films, television series and comic books, has much to do with its use of these aspects. Consequently, these authors want to learn from their American counterparts with regard to these *elements of fiction*. Jean Guenot and other how-to-write handbook authors do this in a relatively straightforward way, re-using some notable pieces of advice on character, plot and dialogue. Others, like François Bon, develop a more complex take on these foreign elements, performing *détournement* strategies on them and mixing them with local *écriture à contraintes* techniques in order to appropriate them.

Finally, literary advice in France is also affected by the American sense of optimism expressed in the adagio *you can do it*. Martin Page, Chloé Delaume and Olivier Cadiot profess a belief in the importance of persistence. They insist that artists should continue making art in spite of the hardship and crises (whether personal, literary or political) they might face. Moreover, these authors have faith in the transformative power of art and literature. They see art as a catalyst for change in society. This ideological position, I showed, draws upon critical thinkers like Gilles Deleuze and Georges Didi-Huberman, but also upon the *you can do it* ideology of American creative writing handbooks. Martin Page, for instance, invokes Ray Bradbury's *Zen in the Art of Writing* (1991) and R. O. Blechman's *Dear James. Letters to a Young Illustrator* (2009) to spur their fellow artists to take up activist and militant stances. Similarly, Olivier Cadiot uses the optimistic slogans of American creative writing ("cinq techniques pour *réaliser* un livre" can be read on the back cover of volume two of *Histoire de la littérature récente*) to counteract the pessimist view of the death of literature.

3. Reversing Perspectives

Ultimately, my study of the role of American creative writing handbooks in the creation of contemporary literary advice in France fits within a broader analysis of transatlantic cultural production. It sheds light on a complex dynamics of rejection, parody, imitation, adaptation, and transformation on the part of French cultural producers when faced with U.S.-based ways of making culture. This ambivalent position has been uncovered by earlier pieces of comparative criticism (Marie, 1997; Neupert, 2007). It calls to mind analyses of the reception of Hollywood film by French Nouvelle Vague directors like François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard and Alain Resnais. For these French filmmakers, the American stereotype-driven film industry offered the perfect counterpoint to generate their own more experimental techniques. Furthermore, it echoes a book like Vincent Colonna's *L'Art des séries télé* (2010) that testifies to the fascination of contemporary French screenwriters with the American production of high-quality and commercially successful TV series.

To continue the discussion on transfers of literary advice practices across the Atlantic, it would be interesting to reverse once more the perspective of this dissertation. My study has investigated

how a popular American format is currently being appropriated, personalized and transformed by a number of French authors. What if we now were to make the opposite argument and explore how complex theories on writing that have emerged in France in the last century are currently being recuperated by the creative writing workshop in the United States. Indeed, at the present moment, it appears that American creative writing workshops draw increasingly upon continental European artistic and literary practices and theoretical views.[57] French literary movements like the Surrealists and the Oulipo, and theories of thinkers like Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Michel de Certeau and Jacques Derrida are frequently mentioned by practitioners of workshops. For instance, teachers of creative writing like Kenneth Goldsmith and Maggie Nelson construct a methodological framework that departs strongly from the typical workshop model by taking their cue from French traditions (Nelson, 2009; Goldsmith, 2011). How do these French and European theoretical models coming from disciplines such as literary studies, cultural studies, philosophy, anthropology and sociology transform when they are put to use in the creative writing workshop? In other words, what happens with this corpus of French theory when American creative writing puts it into practice?

Clearly, the last word on literary advice handbooks and creative writing practices has not yet been written. I suspect that, as creative writing becomes an increasingly important institutional factor in the literary fields of both the Anglo-Saxon world and continental Europe, more and more research will need to address this topic. My own study has strived to shed some light on the vast and varied body of literary advice books in France, as well as on the processes of adaptation, imitation and transformation that shape these popular texts. Whereas a lot remains to be told of the story of creative writing, my own contribution to this tale has come to an end here. I hope that it has provided insight and that it will spark curiosity and questions. To put in the words of creative writing teacher Malt Olbren: “Et puis tout à la fin, ajoute rien que pour toi-même: est-ce que mon histoire est bien rien qu’une histoire, seulement une histoire, une histoire qui ne parle qu’aux histoires? Alors peut-être auras-tu mérité ta chance” (2016: 26).

[57] This is also confirmed by American creative writing professors Laura Kasischke, Thalia Field and Cole Swensen on the occasion of a roundtable discussion with François Bon during the 2013 edition of the literary festival *Écrivains en bord de mer*. See *http://www.tierslivre.net/spip/spip.php?article3632*.

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Annex 1

Legend:

Underlined: female or collective author

(T): translation

(P): pseudonymous author

(E): editor

How-to-write handbooks: 136

All Round Handbooks: 56

1.	Guenot, Jean	*Écrire*	1977 – 1983 – 1998
2.	Union des écrivaines et écrivains Québécois	*Le Métier d'écrivain. Guide pratique pour ceux et celles qui veulent vivre de leur plume*	1981 – 1988 – 1993
3.	Kletzky-Pradère, Tatiana	*Plan-guide de l'écrivain. Comment écrire un livre, le faire éditer ou l'éditer, le faire diffuser ou le diffuser, le vendre*	1983
4.	Michel, Friedman & Pierre Rouchaléou	*Guide pratique à l'usage des auteurs qui veulent publier leurs livres*	1984
5.	Hesse, Jérôme	*Comment écrire un livre et être édité*	1987
6.	Sobler, Richard	*Comment écrire un texte qui rapporte*	1987
7.	Sobler, Richard	*Comment écrire un texte qui rapporte 2*	1988
8.	Curran, Susan (T)	*Comment écrire un livre et le faire publier*	1990
9.	Les Presses d'Amérique	*Votre premier roman. Comment l'écrire et le faire publier*	1991
10.	Barbet, Guy	*Comment écrire avec succès une histoire, un roman (et en tirer profit)*	1992
11.	Berthelot, Alain	*Écrire et être édité. Guide pratique*	1992 – 1999
12.	Maccio, Charles	*Savoir écrire un livre, un rapport un mémoire. De la pensée à l'écriture*	1992 – 1999

13.	Lavigne, Chantal	*Écrire un roman. Du brouillon à la production de textes*	1993
14.	Timbal-Duclaux, Louis	*J'écris mon premier roman*	1993
15.	Tisseyre, Pierre	*L'Art d'écrire*	1993
16.	Albalat, Antoine	*Comment on devient écrivain*	1997
17.	Lesage-Vézina, Thérèse	*Pourquoi hésiter à écrire*	2001
18.	Oudan, Ted	*Bien écrire de A à Z*	2001
19.	Baudouin, Bernard	*Comment écrire votre premier livre. Depuis le désir d'écrire jusqu'à la conception, la création et la publication*	2002
20.	Fischer Marc	*Le métier de romancier*	2002
21.	Fréchette, Denis	*Le Guide de l'écrivain. Comment donner vie à un texte sans y laisser la sienne*	2002
22.	Gamard, Matthieu	*Le Travail de l'écriture*	2002
23.	Bouadjio, Victor	*Écrire et être édité. Guide pratique*	2004
24.	Fleury, Marie-José & Francine Prévost	*Écrire. Labeur et plaisir*	2004
25.	Brousseau, Marilou & Nicole Gratton	*Écrire un livre. De la conception à la publication*	2005
26.	Grignon, Jean	*De l'écriture à l'édition*	2005
27.	Guillon, Marie-Christine	*L'Envie d'écrire : Oser l'aventure des mots*	2005
28.	Boulland, Anne-Françoise	*Petit manuel d'écriture: à l'usage des complexés de la plume (ou de la souris!)*	2006
29.	Chenut, Yves	*Comment devenir écrivain, se faire éditer et se retrouver éditeur: essai à l'usage des postulants écrivains*	2006

30.	Devaux, Nadège	*L'ABC de l'écrivain - Guide de l'écrivain et du scénariste. Guide pratique de l'écriture*	2006 – 2011
31.	George, Elizabeth (T: Dominique Haas)	*Mes secrets d'écrivain. Ecrire un roman, ça s'apprend!*	2006
32.	André, Alain	*Devenir écrivain: un peu, beaucoup, passionnément : s'autoriser, trouver son style, aboutir ses chantiers, publier*	2007
33.	Editions Cabédita	*Guide du bon auteur. Du brouillon à l'édition*	2007
34.	Jaeglé, Marianne	*Ecrire. De la page blanche à la publication*	2010 – 2014
35.	Rathaud, Bernard	*Manuel pratique de l'auteur*	2010
36.	Hache, Brigit	*Écrire et trouver ses lecteurs. Construire son projet, améliorer sa plume et trouver ses lecteurs (blog, publication)*	2011
37.	Raynal, Gérard	*Écrire un livre. Comment éviter les pièges de l'écriture*	2011
38.	Bourgeois, Laurence	*Écrire un livre et se faire publier*	2012
39.	Éditions ESI	*Le Grand livre de l'écriture. Les conseils et méthodes. De l'écriture à la publication*	2012
40.	Guilleron, Gilles	*Écrire pour les nuls*	2012
41.	Jamot, Alain	*Dictionnaire espiègle de l'écriture et des écrivains. Et autres conseils pour écrire, être publiable, et publié…*	2012
42.	Pécher, Laure	*Premier roman, mode d'emploi*	2012
43.	Ternoise, Stéphane	*Comment devenir écrivain? Être écrivain!*	2012

44.	D'Astragal, Laure (P)	*Atelier d'écriture. Envie d'écrire? Du rêve à la réalité, la méthode qui va tout changer*	2013
45.	Madou, Geneviève	*Écrire et se faire publier. Tout ce qu'il faut savoir en 120 questions*	2013
46.	N'Dah Françoise d'Assise	*Comment écrire un roman? Guide de l'écrivain débutant*	2013
47.	Baty Chris (T: Isabelle Vadori)	*Écrire un roman en 30 jours: pas de panique grâce à NanoWrimo*	2014
48.	Biantsissila, Guy Aurélien	*Comment écrire un livre: méthodologie, pour un passionné de l'écriture*	2014
49.	Clément, Murielle Lucie	*Comment écrire un bestseller: 8 étapes simples et efficaces*	2015
50.	Clément, Murielle Lucie	*Comment écrire un bestseller: 12 étapes simples et efficaces*	2015
51.	Galland, Eric	*Comment écrire un livre*	2015
52.	Hébert, Laurent	*Écrire une fiction. Littérature, cinéma, théâtre, télévision*	2015
53.	Lacotte, Guillaume	*Guide pratique à l'usage des écrivains qui veulent (très) bien faire sans (trop) se fatiguer*	2015
54.	Saint-Laurent, Marthe	*Écris-moi ton histoire. Vous rêvez d'écrire? Passez à l'action*	2015
55.	Barthelot, Amélie	*Écrire un livre. Le guide pratique! La méthode complète pour écrire votre premier livre facilement*	2017
56.	Delavie, Philomène	*Je veux écrire un livre: comment faire?: Les conseils qu'il vous faut!*	2017

Genre Handbooks: 60/59

1.	Pochard, Mireille	*Écrire une nouvelle et se faire publier*	2009
2.	Timbal-Duclaux, Louis	*J'écris des nouvelles et des contes*	2009 – 2013
3.	Thériault, Yvon	*L'Ombre du souvenir. Essai sur le récit de vie*	1996
4.	Liechtele, Sylvie & Robin Deschênes	*Écrivez vos mémoires. Laissez l'histoire de votre vie en héritage*	1997
5.	Samson, Guy	*Écrivez vos mémoires*	2002
6.	Barlow, Michel	*Écrire l'histoire de sa vie*	2003 – 2016
7.	Mazars, Marianne	*Écrire ses mémoires: guide pratique de l'autobiographie*	2004 – 2009 - 2014
8.	Didelot Jean-Claude	*Écrire ses mémoires: guide pratique de l'autobiographie*	2005
9.	Garcia, Stéphanie	*J'écris le récit de ma vie. Manuel de l'autobiographie*	2005
10.	Morel, Denise	*12 étapes pour écrire votre livre. Écriture et développement personnel*	2005
11.	Ripert, Pierre	*J'écris ma vie. Tous nos conseils*	2005
12.	Baudry, Nathalie	*Écrire sa biographie. Petit guide pratique*	2008
13.	Timbal-Duclaux Louis	*Écrire des souvenirs de voyages ou de vie*	2008
14.	Bonifas Cécile & Sébastien Onze	*120 défis d'écriture pour écrire sa vie. Autobiographie, blog, journal*	2009
15.	Godinot, Etienne	*Écrire ma vie : 80 exercices à faire chez soi ou en atelier d'écriture*	2009
16.	Holmes, Marjorie (T)	*J'écris mon expérience de vie*	2009
17.	Auduc, Laurent & Mousse Boulanger	*J'écris une biographie*	2010
18.	Martini, Éric	*Mettre en forme ses mémoires*	2012

19.	Nozières, Pierre	*Osez votre livre: manuel à l'intention des personnes qui souhaitent écrire pour témoigner*	2012
20.	Rollin, Marion	*Écrire son journal. 80 propositions d'écriture pour mieux saisir l'inspiration selon son humeur du jour*	2012
21.	Ruaud, Jean-Yves	*J'écris mon histoire. Tous les conseils pour devenir l'écrivain de votre vie!*	2012
22.	Soula, Hélène	*Écrire l'histoire de sa famille*	2012
23.	Marryat, Frédéricq (T)	*Comment écrire un livre de voyage*	2012
24.	Fortin, Suzanne	*Ton adolescence: Guide facile pour écrire ton histoire*	2014
25.	Marois, Carmen	*Écrivez vos mémoires. Un guide pratique en 12 étapes*	2015
26.	Saint-Laurent, Marthe	*Écris-moi ton histoire. Vous rêvez d'écrire? Passez à l'action*	2015
27.	Du Boisbaurdry, Patrick	*Écrire un livre sur sa vie, guide pratique*	2017
28.	Tisseyre, François	*Vivre de l'écriture dramatique. Conseils pratiques à l'intention des auteurs dramatiques*	1987
29.	Prémont, Henri	*J'écris une pièce de théâtre*	1998
30.	Gooch, Steve (T: Martine Capdevielle)	*Comment écrire pour le théâtre. L'idée de départ, la trame, la révision du texte*	2005
31.	Klein, Jean-Pierre	*Cet étrange désir d'écrire du théâtre*	2007
32.	Durnez, Éric	*Écritures dramatiques: pratiques d'atelier*	2008
33.	Ressi, Michèle	*Écrire pour le théâtre*	2008
34.	Forest, Monique	*Écrire le théâtre québécois. De la règle à la parlure et tout autour*	2016

35.	Clavreuil, Gérard	*Comment écrire un poème d'amour*	1988
36.	Nony-André, Danièle	*J'écris un recueil de poèmes*	1992
37.	Voiturier, Michel	*Allez les vers!*	1993
38.	Charpentreau	*Jouer avec les poètes*	1999
39.	Costa, Philippe	*Petit manuel pour écrire des haïku*	2000 – 2010
40.	Reboul, Edmond	*Écrire des poèmes*	2006
41.	Bulting, Christian	*J'écris des poèmes*	2010
42.	Chipot, Dominique	*Haïku do. La voie du haïku*	2011
43.	Asúnsolo, Isabel	*Le haïku en herbe*	2012
44.	Anonymous (T)	*Polar, mode d'emploi*	1993
45.	Gallerne, Gilbert	*Je suis un écrivain (comment écrire un thriller, un polar, un roman d'horreur). Guide de l'auteur professionnel*	1999 – 2014
46.	Timbal-Duclaux, Louis	*J'écris mon premier polar*	2010
47.	Lange, Henrik (T: Hélène Duhamel)	*Comment écrire un polar suédois sans se fatiguer*	2015
48.	Chesterton, Gilbert Keith (T: Basil Syme)	*Comment écrire un roman policier*	2016
49.	Fournel, Paul	*Avant le polar. 99 notes préparatoires à l'écriture d'un roman policier*	2016
50.	Dils, Tracey (T: Carole Hébert)	*J'écris pour la jeunesse*	1999
51.	Stachak, Faly	*Écrire pour la jeunesse*	2010
52.	Card, Orson Scott (T: Karim Chergui)	*Comment écrire de la Fantasy et de la science-fiction*	2006
53.	Lusetti, Olivier	*Comment mieux écrire, raconter une histoire et réussir sa fantasy*	2013

54.	Bertrand-Egrefeuil, Emmanuel	*Comment réussir sa magie dans un univers de fantasy*	2014
55.	Lusetti, Olivier	*Comment écrire une histoire fantastique en 5 semaines. Petite anthologie du style et du récit court, drame, policier, fantasy, romance, épouvante & fantastique*	2015
56.	Day, Valentine & Condie Raïs	*Écrire et publier une saga érotico-sentimentale à succès (guide pratique)*	2013
57.	Gachon, Jean-Mary & Faly Stachak	*Ecrire un texte érotique et se faire publier*	2013
58.	Hache, Brigit	*Ecrire un roman sentimental et se faire publier*	2013
59.	Timbal-Duclaux, Louis	*Ecrire un roman historique ou régionaliste*	2015

Elements of Fiction Handbooks: 9

1.	Hall, Oakley (T: Christelle Sire)	*Le travail de romancier : travail du style, symboles et métaphores, flash-back, processus de création*	2002 – 2009
2.	Surmelian, Leon (T: Christelle Sire)	*Techniques d'écriture romanesque*	2002 – 2010
3.	Card, Orson Scott (T: Nénad Savic)	*Personnages et points de vue*	2008
4.	Timbal-Duclaux, Louis	*Techniques du récit et composition dramatique*	2009
5.	Hall, Oakley (T: Marie-Thérèse Draillard)	*Mécanismes des histoires romanesques*	2010

6.	Chiarella, Tom (T:Alinde de Pétigny & Carole Lager)	*Écrire des dialogues*	2013
7.	Timbal-Duclaux, Louis	*Techniques avancées de la fiction*	2013
8.	Meyer, Isabelle	*Écrire un roman. Les trucs qui marchent*	2015
9.	Olbren, Malt (P: François Bon)	*Outils du roman*	2016

Publishing Handbooks: 11

1.	Patar, Benoît	*Directives aux auteurs pour la confection d'un manuscrit. Suivies d'un glossaire*	1990
2.	Coston, Henry	*Ce qu'il faut savoir quand on publie un livre*	1995
3.	Bouadjio, Victor	*Scriptor. Le monde de l'écrit et de l'édition*	1999
4.	Oudan, Ted	*Auto-édition*	2002
5.	Desalmand, Paul	*Guide pratique de l'écrivain*	2004
6.	Bagadey, Nathalie	*Autoédition: à vous de jouer! Aide à l'autoéidtion via les plates-formes d'impression à la demande*	2015
7.	Bellavance, Dominic	*Présenter votre manuscrit littéraire comme un pro en 5 étapes*	2015
8.	Viet, Jean-Baptiste	*Autoéditeur: transformer un blog en livre*	2015
9.	Cahier, Marie-Laure & Elisabeth Sutton	*Publier son livre à l'ère numérique. Autoédition, maisons d'édition, solutions hybrides*	2016

10.	Bouadjio, Victor	*Tout savoir sur les maisons d'édition. Guide pratique*	2017
11.	Réco, Aude	*Autoédition, en avant! Le guide de survie de l'autoédité*	2017

Writing guide: 47

Conseils: 21

1.	Jacob, Max	*Conseils à un jeune poète*	1972
2.	Rilke, Rainer Maria (T)	*Lettres à un jeune poète*	1982 – 1987 – 1991 – 2002 – 2005 – 2011 – 2014
3.	Gide, André	*Conseils au jeune écrivain*	1993 – 2004
4.	Prévost, Jean	*Traité du débutant*	1996 – 2011
5.	Baudelaire, Charles	*Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs*	1997 – 2002 – 2008 – 2013
6.	Woolf, Virginia (T)	*Lettre à un jeune poète (A letter to a young poet)*	1998 – 2013
7.	Fischer, Marc (T)	*Conseils à un jeune romancier*	2000
8.	Vargas Llosa, Mario (T: Albert Bensoussan)	*Lettre à un jeune romancier*	2000
9.	Goldberg, Natalie (T)	*L'Écriture, du premier jet au chef d'oeuvre*	2001
10.	Tcheckov, Anton (T)	*Conseils à un écrivain*	2004
11.	Delannoy, Claire	*Lettre à un jeune écrivain*	2005
12.	Divoire, Fernand	*Introduction à l'étude de la stratégie littéraire*	2005 – 2001
13.	De Gourmont, Remy	*Conseils familiers à un jeune écrivain*	2006
14.	Chabossot, Aloyssius (P)	*Comment devenir un brillant écrivain. Alors que rien (mais rien) ne vous y prédispose. La méthode chabossot*	2007

15.	Cottet-Emard, Christian	*Tu écris toujours ? Manuel de survie à l'usage de l'auteur et son entourage*	2010
16.	Gendarme, Jean-Baptiste	*Splendeurs et misères de l'aspirant écrivain. Conseils à l'usage de ceux qui souhaitent publier un premier roman (et qui pourraient bien y parvenir)*	2014
17.	Page, Martin	*Manuel d'écriture et de survie*	2014
18.	Zeitoun, Paul	*Guide de l'apprenti romancier*	2014
19.	Neix, Claude (P: Cristina Rodriguez)	*Comment j'ai pas eu le Goncourt. Ce qu'il ne faut surtout pas faire si vous voulez devenir écrivain*	2015
20.	Tessarech, Bruno	*L'Atelier d'écriture. Leçons à un futur écrivain*	2015
21.	Blanc, Jean-Noël	*Dans l'atelier d'écriture. On n'apprend pas à nager par correspondance*	2017

Writing memoir: 26

1.	Laffont, Robert	*Éditeur, un homme et son métier*	1974
2.	Aragon, Louis	*Je n'ai jamais appris à écrire ou les incipit*	1981
3.	Corti, José	*Souvenirs désordonnés*	1983
4.	Assouline, Pierre	*Gaston Gallimard, Un demi-siècle d'édition française*	1984
5.	Duras, Marguerite	*Écrire*	1993
6.	Albalat, Antoine	*Souvenirs de la vie littéraire*	1920 – 1993 – 2010 – 2013 – 2016
7.	De Goncourt, Emond & Jules	*Journal*	1896 – 1989 – 2014 – 2016
8.	Bothorel, Jean	*Bernard Grasset: vie et passions d'un éditeur*	1989

9.	Haymann, Emmanuel	*Albin Michel, le roman d'un éditeur*	1993
10.	Belfond, Pierre	*Les Pendus de Victor Hugo*	1994
11.	Juliet, Charles	*Rencontres avec Samuel Beckett*	1999
12.	Goldberg, Natalie	*Les italiques jubilatoires. La créativité par l'atelier d'écriture*	2000
13.	James, P. D.	*Il serait temps d'être sérieuse…*	2000
14.	Flaubert, Gustave	*Correspondance*	2001
15.	Kafka, Franz (T)	*Journal*	2002
16.	Duchesne, Alain & Thierry Leguay	*Qu'est-ce qu'un écrivain? Petits secrets de la création littéraire*	2002
17.	Naipaul, V.S.	*Comment je suis devenu écrivain*	2002
18.	King Stephen (T: William Olivier Desmond)	*Écriture: mémoires d'un métier*	2003
19.	Oates, Joyce Carol (T: Claude Seban)	*La foi d'un écrivain*	2004
20.	Dillard, Annie (T: Brice Matthieussent)	*En vivant en écrivant*	2008
21.	Stevenson, Robert Louis (T: Elise Argaud)	*Devenir écrivain*	2008
22.	Ernaux, Annie	*L'écriture comme un couteau. Entretien avec Frédéric-Yves Jeannet*	2011
23.	Férey, Caryl	*Comment devenir écrivain quand on vient de la grande plouquerie internationale*	2013
24.	Carver, Raymond	*Les Feux*	2015
25.	Bradbury, Ray	*Le Zen dans l'écriture*	2016
26.	London, Jack	*Profession: écrivain*	2016

Atelier d'écriture **handbook: 63**

Atelier d'écriture *handbook*: 41

1.	Bing, Élisabeth	*Et je nageai jusqu'à la page*	1976
2.	Grenier, Christian, Claude Bessou & Roger Portay	*Écrire des romans à l'école*	1978
3.	Roy, Bruno	*Imaginer pour écrire. Ateliers d'écriture et enseignement de la poésie*	1984 – 1988
4.	Vonarburg, Elisabeth	*Comment écrire des histoires. Guide de l'explorateur*	1986 – 2013
5.	André, Alain	*Babel heureuse. L'Atelier d'écriture au service de la création littéraire*	1989
6.	Guiguet, Andrée, Anne Roche & Nicole Voltz	*L'Atelier d'écriture. Eléments pour la rédaction du texte littéraire*	1989 – 1993 – 2001 – 2009
7.	Oriol-Boyer, Claudette	*La Réécriture*	1990
8.	Boniface, Claire	*Les Ateliers d'écriture*	1992
9.	Rebattet, Christiane	*Créer des ateliers d'écriture*	1997
10.	Fairon, François	*La Plume partagée: des ateliers d'écriture pour adultes*	1998
11.	Boniface, Claire & Odile Pimet	*Ateliers d'écriture. Mode d'emploi*	1999 – 2013
12.	Bon, François	*Tous les mots sont adultes*	2000 – 2005
13.	Oriol-Boyer, Claudette	*Lire-écrire avec des enfants*	2002
14.	Guibert, Rozenn	*Former des écrivants : Principes des ateliers d'écriture en formation d'adultes*	2003
15.	Kaplan, Leslie	*Les Outils*	2003
16.	Oriol-Boyer, Claudette (E)	*50 activités de lecture-écriture en atelier de l'école au collège*	2004

17.	Pimet, Odile	*Le Goût des mots. Guide pour l'animation d'ateliers d'écriture pour public peu lecteur*	2004
18.	Berthaut, Philippe	*La Chaufferie de langue: dispositifs pour un atelier d'écriture*	2005
19.	de Cacqueray, Tugdual	*Comment animer un atelier d'écriture*	2007
20.	Kavian, Eva	*Écrire et faire écrire. Manuel pratique d'écriture*	2007 – 2009
21.	Kostrzewa, Fabienne	*Ateliers d'écriture. 26 lettres en quête d'auteur*	2007 – 2017
22.	Neumayer, Odette & Michel Neumayer	*Animer un atelier d'écriture. Faire de l'écriture un bien partagé*	2008
23.	Evrard, Franck	*L'Atelier d'écriture. 150 jeux de lettres et exercices de rédaction*	2009
24.	Frémaux, Nathalie	*Concevoir et animer un atelier d'écriture à visée littéraire*	2009
25.	Lecherbonnier, Bernard	*Porte-Plume. Atelier d'écriture et de création littéraire*	2009
26.	Plantier, Evelyne	*Animer un atelier d'écriture pour tous*	2010
27.	Bara Stéphanie, Anne-Marguerite Bonvallet & Christian Rodier	*Écritures créatives*	2011
28.	Kavian, Eva	*Écrire et faire écrire. Tome 2. 50 auteurs belges vous font écrire.*	2011
29.	Massicotte, Micheline	*Les Ateliers d'écriture. Un chemin vers soi et vers l'autre*	2012
30.	Michallet, Jean-Paul	*L'Atelier d'écriture. Voies et détours. Un livre-outil*	2012
31.	Chafik, Nadia	*L'Atelier d'écriture. Un laboratoire littéraire à large spectre didactique*	2013

32.	Janvier, Monique	*80 Pratiques d'ateliers d'écriture. Soigner, Récolter, Transmettre*	2013
33.	Malbranche, Chloé	*Atelier d'Écriture à la Manière de l'Oulipo*	2013
34.	Bellatorre, André, Corine Robet, Nicole Voltz, e.a.	*Devenir animateur d'atelier d'écriture. (Se) former à l'animation*	2014
35.	Garcia, Paul	*Attention travaux! Outils pour animateurs d'ateliers d'écriture ou écrivants ambitieux*	2014
36.	Lou-Nony, Virginie	*Ce qui ne peut se dire. L'atelier d'écriture à l'épreuve du silence*	2014
37.	Stachak, Faly	*Faire écrire les enfants*	2015
38.	Escamez, Charlotte	*La Classe vive. Pour une poétique de l'atelier d'écriture*	2016
39.	Bouadjio, Victor	*Guide des ateliers d'écriture*	2017
40.	Cottereau, Dominique	*Dehors: Ces milieux qui nous transforment - Récits éco-biographiques nés d'ateliers d'écriture*	2017
41.	Ménard, Pierre (P: Philippe Diaz)	*Comment écrire au quotidien. 365 ateliers d'écriture*	2018

Creativity handbook: 22

1.	Bénac, Henri	*Guide des idées littéraires*	1984
2.	Duchesne, Alain & Thierry Leguay	*Petite fabrique de littérature*	1984
3.	Timbal-Duclaux, Louis	*L'Écriture créative. 5 techniques pour libérer l'inspiration, pour produire des idées, pour communiquer avec efficacité*	1986

4.	Duchesne, Alain & Thierry Leguay	*Lettres en folie. Petite fabrique de littérature 2*	1988
5.	Duchesne Alain, & Thierry Leguay	*Les petits papiers: écrire des textes courts*	1991
6.	Gibert, Bruno	*Ma petite fabrique à histoires*	1993
7.	Vermeersch, Gérard	*Petite Fabrique : La Petite Fabrique d'écriture*	1994
8.	Stachak, Faly	*350 Techniques d'écriture créative*	2004
9.	Bezsonnoff, Cathérine	*(Se) former à l'écrit. 98 fiches: démarche et mise en oeuvre*	2005
10.	Oulipo	*Pratiques oulipiennes*	2004
11.	Frenkiel, Pierre	*90 Jeux pour écrire*	2005
12.	Lecompte-Depoorter, Isabelle	*30 Outils pour (se) dire, (se) raconter et l'écrire*	2005
13.	Haddad, Hubert	*Le Nouveau magasin d'écriture*	2006
14.	Haddad, Hubert	*Le Nouveau nouveau magasin d'écriture*	2007
15.	Onze, Sébastien	*150 défis d'écriture. Pour en finir avec la page blanche*	2008
16.	Carpentier, Josette	*L'Écriture créative. 80 exercices pour libérer sa plum et oser écrire*	2010
17.	Maugenest, Thierry	*Les Rillettes de Proust. Ou 50 conseils pour devenir écrivain*	2010
18.	Chailley, Ségolène	*La Fabrique des Histoires 50 Ateliers d'Écriture pour Devenir Auteur*	2013
19.	Leymarie, Virginie	*30 déclics pour l'écriture: Pour ne plus rester en panne d'inspiration*	2014
20.	Chailley, Ségolène	*S'initier à l'écriture créative*	2015
21.	Sánchez-Cutillas, Patricia (T: Caroline Busquet)	*Tu aimes écrire? Manuel d'écriture créative*	2016

22.	Atwell, Nancie (T)	*Ateliers de Lecture et d'Écriture au Quotidien*	2017