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## Creative Writing.

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## 20.1 | 2022

### 1. Creative Writing - 2. L'entre-deux : espaces, pratiques et représentations

#### 1. Creative Writing

#### II. Introduction

## “There is a time for building...”: Creative Writing in English Studies in French Universities

Sara GREAVES et Helen E. MUNDLER

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### TEXTE INTÉGRAL

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- 1 <https://journals.openedition.org/erea/11317>.

1 This dossier comes out of a recent attempt to launch, or consolidate, creative writing as a discipline within English Studies in French universities. It follows on from an earlier *E-rea* dossier, *Letters to Swift*, co-edited by Ruth Menzies and Jean Viviès in 2021<sup>1</sup>. The project began with the creation of a new panel at the annual conference of the SAES (*Société des Anglicistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur*) in 2020. The response to our call for papers was enthusiastic, and it quickly became clear that a number of colleagues were running or participating in creative programmes in their home universities, or were writers of prose, poetry or other, experimental forms, or, in many cases, came into both these categories – that is to say that there was significant overlap between critical and creative practice. So far we have held two panels, the first, comprising two sessions, at the virtual SAES congress hosted by the university of Tours in 2021, the second, with a third session added, at the in-person congress in Clermont-Ferrand in 2022. A third panel is planned for the SAES congress to be held in Rennes in 2023.

2 It is often said that creative writing has been slow to get off the ground in France, an assertion on which the title of Charles Holdefer's essay ironises, but the response to our call for papers, and the participation at each of the two congresses, showed that there is a wide range of practice of creative writing in English in terms of teaching, theorising and practice within English departments and in non-specialist English teaching (*L'Anglais pour Spécialistes d'Autres Disciplines* (LANSAD) and *Métiers de l'Enseignement, de l'Éducation et de la Formation* (MEEF)). While as yet there are no degree programmes in creative writing in English, there is a great deal of activity in French both in terms of non-degree programmes run by universities, such as the *Diplôme Universitaire Formation à l'animation d'ateliers d'écriture* (a professionally-oriented course in facilitating creative writing workshops) at the University of Aix-Marseille, and indeed in terms of research, with a number of Masters and Doctoral programmes in “creation littéraire” now available. Thus there seemed to be a need not so much to create a new discipline *ex nihilo*, but to begin to formalise something which has existed for some time.

3 Notwithstanding, the overwhelming response to our initiative was one of surprise and gratitude to see a discipline which had long been out in the cold in some way legitimised. The publication of the present review is a further step in this process. At the same time, a number of other events, with a certain number of sessions given over to creative writing theory and practice, have been taking place, hosted by research groups such as LOOP (*Laboratoire Ouvert sur l'œuvre Poétique*) at the Université d'Artois, Arras (10th March 2022, with another event to be held in March 2023) and EMMA (*Études Montpelliéraines du Monde Anglophone*) in Montpellier (29th March 2022). In October 2022 Tracy Bloor organised a Study Day at the Université de Franche-Comté for master's students training to be English teachers in secondary schools, and with the help of Laure-Hélène Anthony-Geroldt, Tracy Bloor, Florent Da Sylva and Noëlle Mathis a learned society (*association 1901*), La Société Etc. (*écrire, traduire, créer*), and a research blog: <https://creativel2.hypotheses.org/> have been set up. Moreover, a conference to be held at Aix-Marseille University is planned for the near- to medium-future.

- 2 « Encadrer des projets d'écriture collective en anglais : d'une évaluation pour la forme à une éval (...) »
- 3 Florent Da Sylva, PhD thesis, « Les ressorts narratologiques et stylistiques et leur redéploiement (...) »

4The nascent discipline of creative writing within English Studies in France has been shaped by two factors: firstly, what the academic community was prepared to contribute, and secondly, the pre-existing characteristics and constraints of the context. With regard to both these factors, it quickly became clear that creative writers, even published writers, were reluctant to provide readings from their work in the context of an academic conference, and saw this as an unsatisfactory substitution of creative work for scientific activity. The existing discipline of *anglistique* showed a similar, not-expected reluctance to accommodate such substitution. This is a particularity of the French context, and things tend to be different elsewhere: not only in the UK and the USA, but in many countries of the world, it is completely accepted that a dossier of creative publications can be an alternative to a dossier of academic publications, and creative writers are considered academics in the same way as any other member of a humanities department, and benefit from the same career structure. In France, this way of doing things is not viable for a number of reasons. One of those is linked to evaluation, whether of students or academics – although in fact it is perfectly possible to track the progress of a piece of creative writing and to work in a rigorous way on its improvement, which can indeed lead to evaluation (see Florent Da Sylva & Sara Greaves<sup>2</sup> and Florent da Sylva<sup>3</sup>). A second is a mistrust of the process of teaching a creative process (Charles Holdefer points out that this is not seen as a problem in other artistic fields, such as fine arts). Thirdly, the fact that creative writing in English in French universities is largely exophonic brings with it a panoply of theoretical questions related to translation, linguistics and so on – questions which we believe to be important, and to constitute a developing field. Finally, as academics, we were both unwilling to abandon the analysis of processes in favour of creative practice. Essentially, while we wanted to innovate, we had to do so within certain constraints – but constraints can constitute a spur to innovation, rather than a brake on it.

- 4 This umbrella term is used in language courses in France to include history, politics, the history (...)

5What we are proposing is not to set up creative writing programmes in English which will constitute an alternative route to a degree or other qualification. Rather, the aim is to develop creative writing in English as part of the spectrum of English Studies, along with literature, translation, linguistics, *civilisation*<sup>4</sup>, didactics, visual arts, stylistics etc. Rather than advocate a split, which would force students and academics into a difficult choice between criticism and creation, we aim to foster a fusional approach. But at the same time, we want to provide a forum for creative writing itself. Just as it is usual for academics in art or music departments to hang their own paintings on a wall, or compose and play their own compositions, we wanted an opportunity to showcase some of the work of English studies scholars. If it can be argued that theoretical understanding is a key element of creative practice, the reverse can also be legitimately argued: creative practice can also be a key element in theoretical understanding, and as such it must be encouraged. It is for this reason that the last section of this publication is given over to prose and poetry written by our contributors. To a similar end, we held an open mic event at the SAES congress in Clermont-Ferrand, for participants in our own panel as well as in other panels to read their creative work.

6\*

7This review contains four sections, entitled as follows: (I) Creative Writing and Research; (II) Creative Writing and Didactics; (III) Creative Writing and Translation, (IV) Creative Pieces. The first three sections are analytical, and testify to the three areas of investigation we have worked on, and sought to encourage work on, in recent times, while the last two sections are given over to a selection of creative pieces by academics working in English Studies in France.

8The articles in the first section, then, come under the umbrella “Creative Writing and Research”. This part of the review stems from the initial idea for the Creative Writing SAES panel behind this project, which was to find ways of connecting research and creative practice in order to forge a discipline of creative writing adapted to English Studies departments in French universities. Reflection on personal creative practice is another area, and the aim was to encourage academics working in English Studies in France to bring their creative practice out of the shadows by showing how it relates to their research. Charles Holdefer uses this approach to produce an essay entitled “Mind the Gap: Creative Writing Comes to France” on what he sees as the introduction of creative writing to English Studies in France, and to meditate on his “bitextuality” as a literary researcher and writer of fiction. His essay unpicks the classic head-heart dichotomy for research and creative output, and, while pondering why France has a long tradition of training visual artists, but tends to distrust creative writing programmes, he acknowledges the differences between the French and American university systems which necessitate an adaptation of creative writing in English to the French context.

<sup>9</sup>Helen E. Mundler's article, "Criticism, practice, pedagogy: creative convergence through A.S. Byatt's *Babel Tower*", is also an attempt to bring together research, creative practice and a teaching project. She retraces a part of her research on the work of A.S. Byatt in which a character is afflicted by writer's block and turns to cut-up texts in the style of William Burroughs. She then relates this analysis to the techniques of erasure and black-out poetry, both of which may mobilise visual media, or constitute visual media in themselves, and suggests a technique for teaching creative writing through them.

<sup>10</sup>In a different register Isabelle Hervouet's article, « Expérience d'écriture créative, entre lecture critique du roman britannique contemporain et vieilles histoires de famille », prepares the ground for a creative piece by reflecting on how a genealogical archive can be exploited to best effect in fiction. Drawing on both her extensive reading and her experience of teaching literature – Ian McEwan's *Atonement* in particular – this contributor questions the nature of a creative text, and traces the stages by which the decision as to what kind of text to write may be taken.

<sup>11</sup>\*

<sup>12</sup>The second section is devoted to didactics and opens with an article by Tracy Bloor and Sara Greaves. Their article, "Creative writing teaching-learning practice in second language learning: a didactic study" adopts a clinical approach in order to analyse a course for English Studies undergraduates from the point of view of two theoretical notions from the field of educational science: jargon and thought-style, thereby shedding light on the pedagogical processes at work. The course, entitled *Transcultural Poetry: Criticism and Creation*, is founded on two postulates: that literary criticism and creative practice can fruitfully enhance each other; that creative writing is a potent enabler of language acquisition. The learning sequence presented here (in its online form) includes the following stages: viewing video productions of performance poetry (written orality), student/teacher interaction (poetry criticism), creative writing alone and in groups (creation and co-creation), and reading out loud followed by student feedback (poetry criticism again). This contribution illustrates how an external didactic analysis can help illuminate the mystic haze that tends to cling to creative writing, and creativity in general.

<sup>13</sup>The next contribution, "*There was a silly teacher in Mâcon ... Nonsense et écriture créative au service de la polyvalence en master MEEF 1<sup>er</sup> degré*", concerns trainee primary school teachers whose command of English needs to be sufficient for them to be able to teach it to A1 or A2 CEFR level. Acquiring the sounds of the language is often problematic, and Christine Collière-Whiteside observes that phonology is frequently absent from the students' learning sequences. Her approach, involving writing poems inspired by English nursery rhymes and Edward Lear's nonsense limericks, with the help of lists of rhyming or rhythmically similar words to dip into, seeks to remedy this by inviting students to rediscover the sensory experiences and sound play of childhood through poetry writing in English. The author observes the enthusiasm of the students for these activities, their personal and emotional investment, very often illustrating their poems with original artwork. When face-to-face with their young language learners, these teachers-to-be will undoubtedly find themselves in a far happier place than hitherto.

<sup>14</sup>\*

- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.outranspo.com/>.

<sup>15</sup>The third section consists of articles on creative translation. The pedagogic virtues of creative translation are the subject of Lily Robert-Foley's contribution, "Creative translation and *translucinación* in practice-based research and pedagogy", particularly in connection with the notion of *translucinación*, a conception of translation as a form of reading and writing that creates new forms, new conversations. Her article heralds a new departure in translation studies in which the timeworn binaries that structure the discipline, target- and source-based translation strategies, are at last superseded by pulling down the statue of the Original, seeking out the in-between spaces between and within languages, and – for instance – adopting the quirky, playful, stimulating translating constraints of the *Ouvroir de Translation Potencial* (Outranspo<sup>5</sup>). This author also critiques academic practices and makes a case for flipped teaching methods, advocating an enhanced fluidity between creativity, research and teaching – which her contribution aptly illustrates.

- <sup>6</sup> Cf. Transcreation for technical translators, as taught by Aurélie Ceccaldi, head of the Technical T ([...](#))

16The following contribution, “De la recherche-cr ation en traductologie   l’ criture cr ative : compte rendu d’un cheminement doctoral” by Virginie Buhl, who is both a university lecturer and a professional translator, showcases an experimental hands-on approach to translation and translation studies, and places the would-be binary opposites of literary creation/translation and source text/target text on a transcreative continuum. Virginie Buhl’s doctoral creation-research draws on narratology and stylistics to provide writing constraints in close collusion with her source text (*Room* by Emma Donoghue), to produce a range of creative translations: a heterodiegetic narrative or stream-of-consciousness style, a nursery rhyme version involving rich intertextuality and its self-translation as a French adaptation. While fun to do and inspiring to read, creative translations such as these can fruitfully be practised by trainee translators, whether literary or technical<sup>6</sup>.

- 7 « Entrer dans la langue ou dans les langues : de la langue maternelle   la langue ‘mat-rang re’ », (...)

17In Sara Greaves’s short article, “Transports of Translation: Creativity and Healing”, a theoretical justification for creative translation classes is presented with reference to a psycholinguistic approach to the Mother tongue, as developed by Monique De Mattia-Vivi s in an article published in 2018 in *E-rea* and again, in English translation, in 2022: “Entering Language and Languages: from the Mother tongue to the (M)other tongue”<sup>7</sup>. A poem and self-translation produced during a Creative translation class are analysed in the light of concepts such as *lalangue*, decentering, listening in on language from the outside, identity fluidity and the “bilingual overlap”.

18\*

19The fourth section is given over to creative pieces and includes both prose fiction and poetry. “The Fish”, a short story by Helen E. Mundler, which was shortlisted for The Fish Publishing Prize (Ireland) in 2018, is about making maps. The main character, newly arrived in Chicago for the first time, both uses and creates maps to get her bearings in the new world, and those maps undergo a gradual shift from the geographical to the subjective, while the story itself is constructed according to a metaphor map, which the reader may or may not choose to discern. This story is also about writing strangeness, evoking the passage from the unfamiliar to the familiar, the process by which the strange homely and the uncanny fade away, and as such it anticipates C cile Girardin’s short story.

20No lle Mathis’s piece, “Je parle pas la langue 1”, moves between languages in search of a lost, never learnt Mother tongue. This piece adopts an unusual form, and one which is not easily classified. Part argument, part meditation, part prose poem, her piece concerns language, and in particular the various linguistic influences which have shaped their author as a person and as a writer. This is a very original and haunting piece about living with(in) languages, about living through language.

21Three short stories follow. Anne Marsella’s “Maid and Mistress” is written in an idiosyncratic but sophisticated voice and is a rich portrayal of a Moroccan woman, Yasmina, and a playful and nuanced tale of her relationships with the privileged men that she serves. C cile Girardin’s piece moves back to realism: “T l travail, famille, patrie” chronicles daily life for a single mother of three children during the first lockdown of 2020, pitting the petty restrictions against the almost incomprehensibly vast unfolding of the pandemic. Fabien Desset writes in the very different genre of Young Adult fiction, a much-read and important genre today, as Florent Da Sylva argues in his recent doctoral thesis (see above, footnote 2). “Creatures of the Forest” evokes a young boy looking back on a state of almost animistic harmony with nature which he knew as a young child, and, from which, against his will, he becomes divorced.

22In the next piece, entitled “Self-translation as re-creation: The incipit of a fantasy novel in French (original language) and English”, Emma Sch tz takes the interesting step of translating the opening chapter of her own novel into English. This piece of speculative fiction is set towards the end of the twenty-first century, and approaches the themes of dystopia and the post-human.

23The four final contributions are all poetry. The piece presented by Laure-H l ne Anthony-Gerroltdt is an extract from a long poem in which mythical figures are given authentic voices and speak in tones of intimacy. The author traces the inspiration for her poem in part to H. D.’s *Eurydice*, but as we enter the mind and sensations of her goddesses we think of Keats, one of the poets studied for her PhD, and get a strong sense of research and creative writing feeding into each other.

24The following contribution, by Adrian Grafe, is comprised of five very diverse poems, four of which were inspired by poetry-writing workshops attended or led by the author. This explains the wide

range of forms and themes, imposed by or developed from the workshop's prompts: graceful pentameters, a villanelle, a verse fable, supple quatrains and a dub lyric "intended as a sort of affectionate imitation (in no wise a parody) of Linton Kwesi Johnson, whose 'Inglan is a Bitch' I have taught". Writing in real time with students is an excellent way to reduce the barrier between teacher and learner, allowing each participant to engage with the learning situation – in this case poetry-writing – according to the stage they are at on their own path, as Lily Robert-Foley puts it in her contribution on creative translation. In this case, however, this flipped classroom set-up would have been facilitated by the fact that the poetry workshops seem to have been extra-curricular, and it was no doubt unnecessary to assess student's work institutionally.

25 Marie Liénar-Yetérian's contribution, a bilingual prose poem, illustrates the cross-pollinising reciprocity of creative writing and research in a number of ways. Its very bilingualism of course, is the frontier English Studies lecturers in France are constantly crossing and re-crossing; certain landscapes from the American South recur as motifs on this meditative journey through past and present; and the creative potential of mistranslation, of time lag or asynchronicity, as in the title which offers "chemins de traverses" (minor roads or untrodden footpaths) as a translation of "borderlands", or the re-planted cyclamen whose leaves grow faster than its flowers...

▪ 8 Greaves & De Mattia-Viviès, *op. cit.*

26 Finally, Sara Greaves offers four poems under the heading "Mother tongue". Written mainly in English, with one bilingual poem, they spring from an evolving relationship with language (in exile), and can be seen as hidden milestones along the path to *Language Learning and the Mother Tongue: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*<sup>8</sup>. The research developed there reflects on the powerful hold the Mother tongue exercises over us and recommends taking that influence into account in second language learning. These poems engage with the time lag noted in Marie Liénar-Yetérian's poem and likewise capture some of the melancholy inherent in living outside one's language.

27 These four sections, with their diverse content, testify to a positive and varied response to our call for contributions. We hope to develop together a contribution to creative writing theory and practice appropriate to English Studies in France.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> <https://journals.openedition.org/erea/11317>.

<sup>2</sup> « Encadrer des projets d'écriture collective en anglais : d'une évaluation pour la forme à une évaluation formative ». *L'évaluation : évaluer pour enseigner, enseigner pour évaluer*, Bernard De Giorgi & Tereza De Almeida, editors. Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Florent Da Sylva, PhD thesis, « Les ressorts narratologiques et stylistiques et leur redéploiement vers l'écriture créative à l'université : les cas de Veronica Roth, Sabaa Tahir et Tomi Adeyemi », supervisor: Sara Greaves, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> This umbrella term is used in language courses in France to include history, politics, the history of ideas etc.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.outranspo.com/>.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Transcreation for technical translators, as taught by Aurélie Ceccaldi, head of the Technical Translation track of Aix-Marseille University's Master's Degree in Translation and Interpreting.

<sup>7</sup> « Entrer dans la langue ou dans les langues : de la langue maternelle à la langue 'mat-rangère' », *E-rea* 18.1, 2018. <https://journals.openedition.org/erea/6502> and: *Language Learning and the Mother Tongue: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, S. Greaves & M. De Mattia-Viviès, editors. Cambridge University Press, 2022.

[8](#) Greaves & De Mattia-Viviès, *op. cit.*

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## POUR CITER CET ARTICLE

### Référence électronique

Sara GREAVES et Helen E. MUNDLER, « "There is a time for building...": Creative Writing in English Studies in French Universities », *E-rea* [En ligne], 20.1 | 2022, mis en ligne le 15 décembre 2022, consulté le 31 janvier 2023. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/erea/15804> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/erea.15804>

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Sara Greaves is professor of translation studies, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century poetry and creative writing at Aix-Marseille University and a member of the LERMA research centre. She is head of the ECMA Master's degree (Cultural Studies on the English-Speaking World). In 2007/8 she took a D.U. qualification at Aix-Marseille University in facilitating creative writing workshops, and began developing the creative pedagogy that comprises a large part of her lecturing practice today: creative translation, plurilingual creative writing workshops, self-translation, transcultural poetry: criticism and creation, among others. She has published *Côté guerre côté jardin : excursions dans la poésie de James Fenton*, Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2016 and co-edited, with Monique De Mattia-Viviès, *Language Learning and the Mother Tongue: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, Cambridge University Press, 2022. She has published four poems in *Cadences : a journal of literature and the arts in Cyprus*, vol. 10 (2014).

Sara Greaves est professeure en traductologie, poésie britannique des 20<sup>ème</sup> et 21<sup>ème</sup> siècles et écriture créative à Aix-Marseille Université, membre du LERMA (Laboratoire d'Études et de Recherches sur le Monde Anglophone) et responsable du Master ECMA (Études Culturelles du Monde Anglophone). En 2007/8 elle a passé le D.U. Formation à l'animation d'ateliers d'écriture à Aix-Marseille Université et a commencé à développer la pédagogie créative qui constitue une part importante de son enseignement aujourd'hui : traduction créative, ateliers d'écriture plurilingue, autotraduction, poésie transculturelle, entre autres. Elle a publié *Côté guerre côté jardin : excursions dans la poésie de James Fenton* (Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2016) et, avec Monique De Mattia-Viviès, co-édité *Language Learning and the Mother Tongue: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, trans. by Sara Greaves (Cambridge University Press, 2022). Elle a publié quatre poèmes dans *Cadences : a journal of literature and the arts in Cyprus*, vol. 10 (2014).

### Articles du même auteur

- [Mother Tongue: language variations](#) [Texte intégral]

Paru dans *E-rea*, [20.1 | 2022](#)

- [Transports of Translation: Creativity and Healing](#) [Texte intégral]

Paru dans *E-rea*, [20.1 | 2022](#)

- [Creative writing teaching-learning practice in second language learning: a didactic study](#) [Texte intégral]

Paru dans *E-rea*, [20.1 | 2022](#)

- [Daniela Hașisan \(coord.\), Atelier de traduction N°24.](#) [Texte intégral]

Editura Universităţii « Ștefan cel Mare » din Suceava, 2015. ISSN : 2344-5610. 15 €

Paru dans *E-rea*, [15.2 | 2018](#)

- [Un atelier d'écriture pour les exilés : une question de statut](#) [Texte intégral]

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- [Étudiants d'anglais langue seconde et auto-traduction](#) [Texte intégral]

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Helen E. Mundler is Associate Professor in English Studies (*maître de conférences HDR, 11<sup>e</sup> section*) at l'UPEC (Université Paris-Est Créteil). She obtained a first class degree from Durham in 1992, an M Phil from Strathclyde in 1994, a PhD in Strasbourg in 1998, and an *Habilitation* (higher doctorate) in Nanterre in 2014.

She works on a range of contemporary fiction and has published monographs on A.S. Byatt and Liz Jensen as well as a book about climate-change fiction.

Recently she has become interested in the promotion of creative writing in English in French universities.

As a writer herself, she has published three novels, *Homesickness* (Stockport, Dewi Lewis, 2003), *L'Anglaise* (Newbury, Holland House, 2018) and *Three Days by the Sea* (Holland House, 2022).

She has also published and broadcast a few short stories, and was shortlisted for the Fish Publishing Short Story Prize (Ireland) in 2018.

Helen E. Mundler est MCF HDR en études anglophones à l'UPEC (Université Paris-Est Créteil). Diplômée avec mention Très bien de l'Université de Durham en 1992, elle a obtenu un Master à l'Université de Strathclyde en 1994 et un doctorat à l'Université de Strasbourg en 1998, ainsi qu'une HDR à l'Université de Nanterre en 2014.

Elle travaille sur la fiction contemporaine et a publié des monographies sur A.S. Byatt et Liz Jensen, ainsi qu'un ouvrage sur la littérature du changement climatique.

Récemment elle s'est tournée vers la promotion de l'écriture créative en anglais à l'Université française.

Écrivaine elle-même, elle a publié trois romans, *Homesickness* (Stockport, Dewi Lewis, 2003), *L'Anglaise* (Newbury, Holland House, 2018) et *Three Days by the Sea* (Holland House, 2022). Elle a également publié et diffusé à la radio plusieurs nouvelles, dont une a été sélectionnée pour le

Publishing Short Story Prize (Irlande, 2018).

### ***Articles du même auteur***

- [Criticism, practice, pedagogy: creative convergence through A.S. Byatt's \*Babel Tower\*](#) [Texte intégral]

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- [The Fish](#) [Texte intégral]

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