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# Creative rewritings of critical texts: report on a creative workshop, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2022

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## 1. Critical introduction: Helen E. Mundler-Arantes

All writing is in fact cut-ups. A collage of words  
read, heard, overheard. What else?  
William Burroughs

- 1 The idea of this workshop was to celebrate the twenty-year anniversary of *e-Rea* by using some of the articles published in that journal as a basis for a creative workshop. The workshop, to which members of LERMA were invited, used the technique of cut-ups. Each participant was invited to choose an article and, in an act of creative destruction, to physically cut it up and rearrange it to make a personal production. The first part of this article is a critical introduction to the workshop, providing theoretical context and background, while the second consists of a short commentary by each participant on their work.
- 2 Recycled texts, or rewritings of the canon, have long been a central interest in my critical work. How, for example, do late twentieth- and twenty-first-century novelists deploy Shakespeare, John Donne, biblical accounts, myths, fairy tales, Romantic poetry or the poetry of T.S. Eliot? (See Mundler 2003 and 2016). More recently, I have turned to cut-ups, seeing this technique as a logical continuation of my main body of critical work.
- 3 For the first dossier which came out of the recent work on creative writing by a small group of academics working in French universities (see Greaves and Mundler 2022), I contributed an article which sought to bring together the stands of literary criticism

and the teaching of creative writing. One of the principal questions we set out to explore, from the inception of our group with an SAES panel in 2020, is that of the relationship between our theoretical work and our creative practice.<sup>2</sup> In my article, I returned to the work of British novelist A.S. Byatt, the first object of my critical output, and considered how I could use it to teach creative writing, in particular for workshops aimed at generating interest from students, and others, in short-story competitions. To do this, I went back to the cut-ups produced by Frederica Potter, the protagonist of Byatt's tetralogy, and arguably her alter ego (*The Virgin in the Garden, Still Life, Babel Tower, A Whistling Woman*). Having first decided against writing a doctoral thesis on metaphor, then, during a period of vacillation, being discouraged from doing so by her husband, Frederica returns to her older ambition, which is to write a novel, using the notes on her personal and intellectual development which she has been taking since adolescence under the title *Laminations*. Beset by writer's block and unable to express what she wants and needs to say, she turns to cut-ups as a way to interrogate her unconscious. The victim of a violent husband and a difficult divorce, in which her name is blackened by her husband's lawyer, Frederica feels herself to be "caught in a story" (a phrase which resonates through another Byatt text) not of her own making.<sup>3</sup> Cut-ups, which produce chance juxtapositions and thus generate new meanings, allow her to find her own voice – by using that of others. This is a variation on various other narrative devices in Byatt's work: many English specialists will be familiar with the quotation, ventriloquy, pastiche and parody in her neo-Victorian success, *Possession* (1990), all of which imply in one way or another the selection and rewriting of older texts.

- 4 As explained in the article, Frederica uses not only novels by D.H. Lawrence and E.M. Forster, but also the criticism on these texts contained in her own teaching notes. By physically cutting up and re-ordering snippets of these texts, Frederica finds insights into her situation, most memorably, and no doubt most significantly, the question, "How can I say I?": thus she stumbles upon the very heart of Lacanian theory, the incapacity of the subject to express itself to itself. Frederica's decision to use this technique is set in the context of 1960s London, the background against which much of *Babel Tower* is set. Due in great part to the work of William Burroughs (Tanner 124), the sixties saw an upsurge of interest in the technique as part of a period of experimentation with traditional forms and the deconstruction of the grand narratives of the past. However, the cut-up technique emerged long before Burroughs: like black-out, or erasure, cut-up text was also a part of the early production of the printed book (Fleming 546), used to amend or add to existing books in times when updating printed editions was no easy undertaking. Cut-ups were also used by the Christian community at Little Gidding, which in the early seventeenth century undertook to produce the Harmony Gospels by that means – a project which aimed to produce a single, chronologically-organised account of the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John with all the contradictions eliminated (Smyth 464). Sara Greaves and I were very much struck by the connection with T.S. Eliot, a juxtaposition which can only encourage the performance of a mental cut-up which pits this desire for wholeness and continuity against the fragments shored against the poet's ruin. Today, cut-ups are a strong, although perhaps not widely-advertised, presence both in English Studies and more widely in the arts and humanities, to which the four-day Cut-ups 2023 conference held at the University of Chicago Center in Paris testifies.<sup>4</sup>

- 5 Cut-up texts have also become an area of interest to the creative writing group which in recent years has flowered in the cracks between the paving slabs laid by literary, translation and linguistics studies, first within LERMA itself, thanks to the leadership of Sara Greaves and Monique Mattia-Viviès, and later in a multi-university group, which developed into *La Société ETC (écrire-traduire-créer)*, founded in 2023.<sup>5</sup> I used cut-up and its sister technique, blackout, at a workshop at the Journée d'Études held by our group, and organized by Tracy Bloor, at the INSPE of Université de Franche-Comté, Besançon, in October 2022, with the idea of introducing trainee teachers to a creative technique which would challenge their ideas about using language. Sara Greaves has incorporated the technique into the teaching of translation, and held a creative workshop on this theme at the SAES Congress in Rennes in June 2023, while Laure-Hélène Anthony-Gerroltdt, Sara Greaves and I all gave creative workshops on cut-ups at the above-mentioned Paris conference in September 2023. Each of us has adapted the technique to our own creative, critical and pedagogical practice: Sara Greaves uses it both to create poetry and to further her long-standing interest in creative translation; Laure-Hélène Anthony-Gerroltdt uses intersemioticity, with the inclusion of drawings, which reflects her interest in illustrating the poetry of Keats. Personally, I have incorporated cut-ups into my creative practice as a novelist, using it to challenge and stimulate both my own writing and the hypodiegetic writing practiced by my characters (which will not necessarily form part of the final draft). I have found that feeding text through an online cut-ups generator can lead to the production of utterances which not only delight and surprise but also feed back into the creative process: one character, whose name is not Alice, has become "Alice in vivid 1940s hair" – something which allows me to see her more clearly, to imagine her more intensely – and she has produced a cut-up of a passage by Saint Augustin which reflects her feelings towards her unfaithful husband. Thus, from the tentative project outlined in my first article to use cut-ups for workshops linked to short-story competitions, we have begun to incorporate the technique as a group, and the workshop in question was a small step in that process.
- 6 With this background in mind, and working with Sara Greaves's proposal for the anniversary issue involving recycling *e-Rea* articles, I tailored the LERMA workshop at the end of 2022 to the characteristics of the participants, and, of course, to the celebration of the twenty-year anniversary of *e-Rea*. The rationale was that as academics, we engage constantly with scholarly articles which we may find more or less useful and satisfactory as we explore the texts that are the objects of our research. Furthermore, just as reception is important for the objects of our research, it may also be significant in criticism on those objects. We may experience a range of emotions in response to the critical articles we read, from agreement to disagreement, excitement to frustration, a sense of community to a sense of alienation, and so on. In addition to this, over time our reactions may change: a critical article which we read once and put aside for many years may suddenly be remembered and interestingly deployed, just as a text which once seemed fresh and important may come to seem clichéd or irrelevant.
- 7 Furthermore, although we tend to think of scholarly articles as belonging to a different category from the novels, poetry or other texts towards which, as researchers, we may feel passionately, using cut-ups allows a dialogue to be established between the literary text and the commentary on it, one in which the researcher becomes the creator of a hybrid object which functions at once as a *mise en abyme* of their practice as a textual critic, and as a part of their creative output. Boundaries between literary criticism and

self-expression become interestingly blurred, and the unconscious plays an important role in the selection of the elements retained to compose the final cut-up.

- 8 The central idea here was thus to interestingly recombine the processes of reading and writing which are so central to our lives as academics. I began by giving an introduction to the cut-up technique for those who had not already come across it, and then the articles from *e-Rea* which would form the basis of our work were selected from a pile of those whose authors had kindly agreed to allow them to be used. There ensued a period in which the group had to navigate the difficulty posed by being asked to do something so far removed from their usual academic practice. Unpacking coloured paper, glue sticks and so on may seem disconcertingly like a return to primary school, although Adam Smyth debunks this line of thinking:

It is tempting to regard cutting and writing as two fundamentally different acts, and regard the latter as more sophisticated [...] than the infantilized former. But every written word, and therefore written sentence and written text, can only come into being through a process of selection: a process of eliminating or cutting out other possible words, letting them fall to the floor, and of grasping the word intended. (Smyth 469)

- 9 Notwithstanding, the act of taking scissors to a text can be inhibiting, the more so when the text has been written by a colleague. It was also difficult for the participants to understand whether they should cut out parts of sentences which appealed to them, or leave their snippings to chance.

Fig. 1 Helen E. Mundler-Arantes, *Snippings*. Courtesy of the photographer



- 10 In fact, this is no easy question. On the one hand, I was anxious for the workshop not to veer towards Dadaism, in which the entire utterance is left to chance, “deprived of logic and denotation” (Renwick 205), with no conscious intervention from the “writer”: it seems to me far more interesting to trace the passage from randomness to intentionality, to be able to analyse it in one’s own production.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand,



however, I wanted the group to fully experience the serendipity that comes from random juxtaposition. Thus, seeing the participants hesitate before applying themselves to the task, I suggested that the constraint of taking one page of text, cutting it up into individual lines, and then deciding on a number of consecutive words to cut from each line, either two, three or four. I stressed breaking up rather than following syntax in order to disrupt the sense of the original and to allow for connections between snippets: for example, if I set out to choose three words from a line in my above-mentioned article which runs “subjective self rests must inevitably remain unconfirmed” (Boheemen 23-24). The choice of the group “self rests must”, which in itself does not make sense, is likely to yield better results than “subjective self rests” or “inevitably remain unconfirmed”, which do make sense, even though they are truncated.

- 11 However, I emphasized that the point was to use the chosen constraint in order to arrive at a point where the production began to take shape, at which point the participant was free to take control by breaking the constraint. Concretely, this might mean using single words for a particular purpose, or looking for specific words in the remaining pages of the text, rather than using only what has been cut up randomly. By taking control, the participant “helps” the cut-up become what it is tending towards: in other words, the tension between constraint and liberation is central to the exercise.
- 12 Thus the main point was to produce a subjective response to a critical text, and in doing so to reflect more widely on the critical-objective and creative-subjective facets of our practice. While the participants did not necessarily use as a base a critical text which with an immediately obvious relationship to their own critical output, they certainly produced highly-subjective pieces of work, which are presented below, with a brief commentary by each participant.

Fig. 2 Helen E. Mundler-Arantes, *Concentration*. Courtesy of the photographer



- 13 The workshop proved to necessitate periods of quite intense concentration for each participant.
- 14 Originally, I had hoped that we would be able to discuss a series of questions as we worked, but working and talking simultaneously proved difficult, and so the questions were left in suspense for personal reflection at a later point. They ran as follows:
- Does your production surprise you?
  - At what point did you begin to control your production, and why?
  - How did the number of consecutive words you snip out at a time influence your production?
  - Do you agree with Juliet Fleming, who says that cut-ups generate “interactive parts”, which “repeatedly spark new meanings”? (Fleming 550).
  - Does the fluid and ludic nature of cut-ups echo or contradict your usual creative practice?
  - Comment on the relationship between your cut-up and the original article from *e-Rea*.
- 15 At the end of the workshop we all moved around the table to look at each other’s work and each participant spoke a little about what they had managed to produce and how they related it to their critical and creative output.

Fig. 3 Helen E. Mundler-Arantes, *Inspection*. Courtesy of the photographer



- 16 What came out of the workshop was a further stage in our collective reflection about how creative writing, which has long been present in English Studies in France as we have explained in *e-Rea* 20.1, can be more formally developed within our universities. It has become clear to us, as we have argued in the introduction to our *e-Rea* dossier, that creative writing in English Studies in France has specific characteristics. Our contention is that while in many countries creative writing is looked on as a specialization in itself, and operates quite independently of literary criticism, with



creative output taking the place of research, this way of doing things would not be either possible or appropriate in France. We have shown that both the practice and the teaching of creative writing which take place in English departments in French universities are very strongly linked to research outputs, and it is for this reason that a cut-up workshop using critical texts seemed particularly appropriate.

- 17 I would like to take this opportunity to thank the LERMA for its understanding of our project and its accommodation of new practices which might at first glance seem surprising, and all the contributors to *e-Rea* who gave permission for their work to be used in this way.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Cut-ups and Commentaries

### 2.1 Laure-Hélène Anthony-Gerroidt

- 18 Taken from Marc Porée's introduction to *e-Rea's* 2008 *Contemporary British Women Poets* issue (Porée), this cut-up both honours Marc Porée's work as a specialist of John Keats (whose poetry has been the main topic of my research) and poetry, and echoes the themes that keep coming up in my own poetic practice: the possession and dispossession of the female body, feelings of entrapment and loss, as well as the ways in which metamorphoses of all kinds can either spark hope or fear. The original introduction by Marc Porée aimed at contextualising the emergence of new female poetic voices in the United Kingdom, while also commenting on the form of their poetry. To celebrate the emancipatory and almost revolutionary nature of female poetry, the commentary focuses on the political aspects of their work, and cleverly highlights the parallels between the crafting of poems and the drafting of laws. The introduction then turns towards the question of body politics whereby the female body becomes a site of political and emotional battles that rage on the page and influence the form and contents of poems.
- 19 Yet, as I leafed through the introduction and saw bits and pieces of poems go by, I came across phrases and words that already read like poetry. This made me wonder how the female voices that were celebrated in the introduction could still speak under the academic veneer. The cut-up poem I produced ended up speaking of the body and raising the issue of body politics, as well as that of the ways we anatomize texts and bodies alike: the female body is scrutinised by society the way texts are scrutinised by scholars. This, in turn, can create striking parallels between the entrapped voice of the woman screaming to be set free and the imaginary voice of the text pleading to just be, and feel.

Fig. 4 Laure-Hélène Anthony-Gerroldt, Stage 1. Courtesy of the photographer

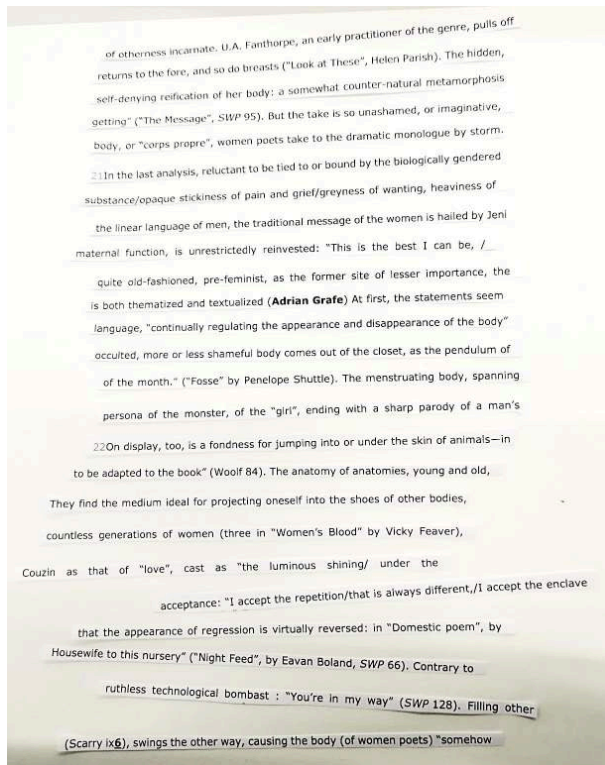


Fig. 5 Laure-Hélène Anthony-Gerroldt, Stage 2. Courtesy of the photographer

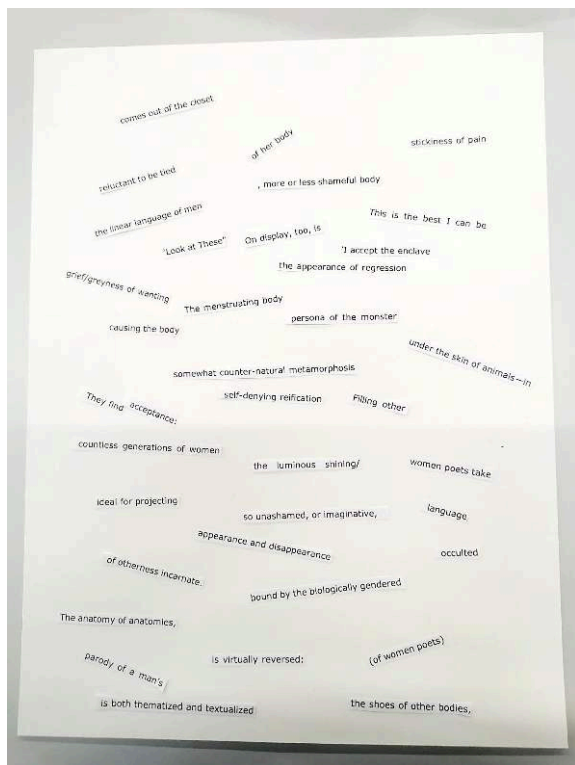


Fig. 6 Laure-Hélène Anthony-Gerroldt, Stage 3. Courtesy of the photographer

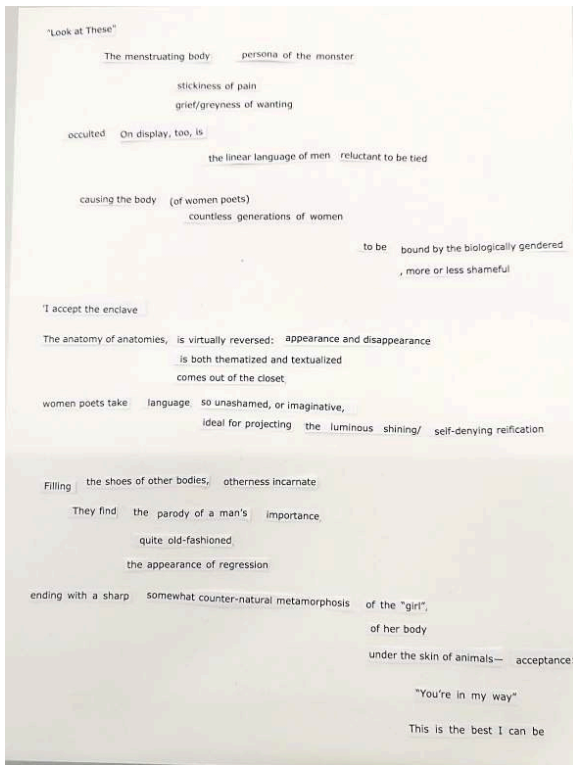
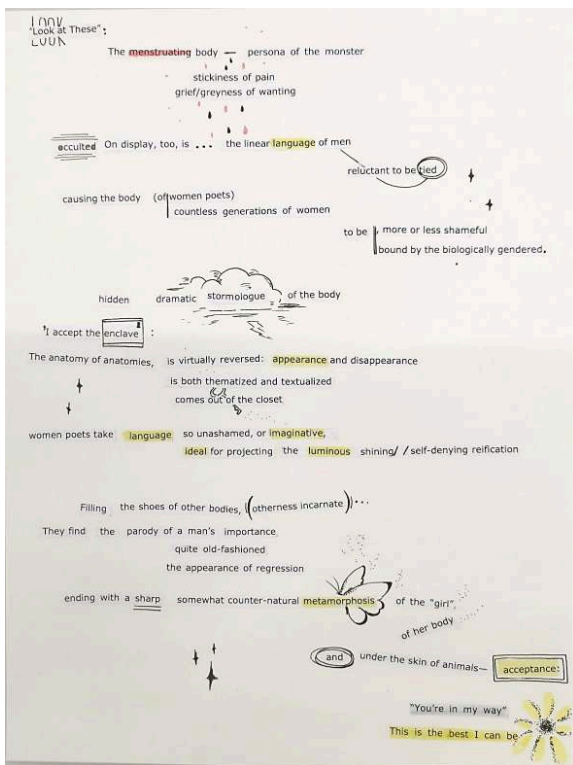


Fig. 7 Laure-Hélène Anthony-Gerroldt, Stage 4. Courtesy of the photographer

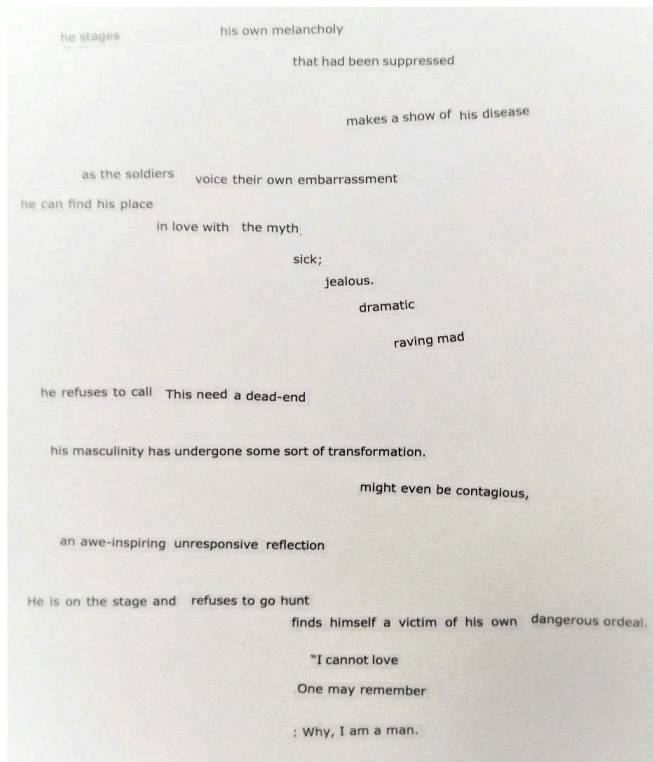


## 2.2 Florent Da Sylva

- 20 What first surfaces when remembering the cut-up workshop is a sense of transgression mixed with childish satisfaction. I had never participated in such a workshop and I distinctly recall a moment when one of the participants raised their head and voiced how "satisfying" the feeling of using actual scissors for artistic purposes was. I personally hadn't done it since middle-grade art classes and I related wholeheartedly. "Adults aren't meant to use scissors this way," my brain kept whispering to me. There was a sense of pleasurable regression in the act. And a sense of transgression as well, since we were effectively using another's words to create meaning of our own. Additionally, the text material I was using was a research article written by Jean-Louis Claret (Claret), who, beyond being a colleague of mine, was also my professor when I was a first-year student at Aix-Marseille Université, some 13 years ago. I was a student *destroying* the master's words, as it were. That sense of transgression was therefore multi-layered for me.
- 21 There was also a sense of freedom in the practice. While I've been teaching creative writing for almost five years, focusing both on prose and narratological aspects, I've had very little time for my own writing in the last few years. Little to none, if I'm being truthful. But when I do write, I do so in English, which isn't my mother tongue. Every word is therefore—calculated, measured. I often struggle to find balance between what pertains to my "style" and what would just be off-target idiomatically. I felt that the cut-up practice, which mandates using another's words, freed me of that lexical burden. I only had to worry about syntax, and even that could be fragile at times.
- 22 I believe the most pleasant aspect of the exercise for me was also to give free reign to my subconscious in the cut-up selection phase. Helen Mundler had instructed us *not* to read the texts we'd be working with prior to cutting them up. The only hint I had of what the text was about was the writer, Jean-Louis, who is a Shakespeare specialist. And the first words I laid eyes upon in this meaningless sea of text were "Why, I am a man". Shakespeare's plays being ripe with dramatic, larger-than-life male characters, I thought of playing with the idea of masculinity, tuned my eyes for words or phrases that could relate to the subject and went to work, quickly thinking about the notions of hegemonic and toxic masculinity and how men also suffer from patriarchal norms (and how they "suppress" that suffering, or suffering of any kind). The word "soldiers" evoked for me how veterans, or just men having gone through trauma, often only feel safe enough to share what they've been through with men who have *also* endured trauma, as in Hemingway's early short stories. I thought of how this constant search for "true masculinity", for strength, dominance and power only leads to "dead-ends", as the world we live in today can attest.
- 23 I was also thinking of the women-hating groups that are rising and calling themselves "Incels" (for "involuntary celibate"), claiming they are *owed* sex and companionship by women... These men "stage" their misery and try to spin the narrative to prove they are the real victims (which does not mean men's pain caused by patriarchy should be ignored altogether) while the obvious worst sufferers of patriarchy are women and children. Finally, the "masculinity that has undergone some sort of transformation" seemed to me as relevant in Shakespeare's play as it is right now, since western societies are attempting to deconstruct the notions of gender, sex, masculinity and femininity. Deconstruction is often mistaken for *destruction*, and therefore an

emasculating threat that women-hating groups are afraid of. Could refusing “to go hunt” be a form of rebellion for the new man, then? Could that deconstruction be “contagious” as more and more men are learning to deconstruct themselves and find another type of masculinity?

Fig. 8 Florent Da Sylva, *His own melancholy*. Courtesy of the photographer



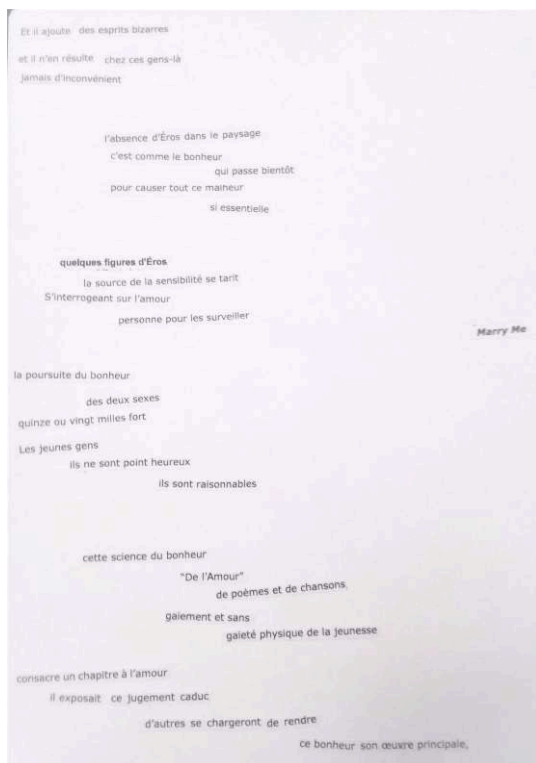
## 2.3 Heathir Lawrence-Monassa

- 24 Taken from an article by Sylvie Mathé about the various representations of the erotic in three of John Updike’s novels (*Marry Me*, *Couples* and *The Witches of Eastwick*) (Mathé 2003), this cut-up is an attempted repudiation of the goodness of *eros*. I tried to present it as a double-edged sword, but in the end still equate it with happiness. I was tired of the love-always-wins narrative, as it always does in the popular romances I read and write, but I had a hard time envisioning a narrative in which love loses. Sylvie Mathé’s article did nevertheless inspire me to explore what a dark *eros* might look like. The figure came out confused, not knowing if it was hopeful or hopeless. Honestly, at the end of the workshop I was still asking myself what I was trying to say. Putting aside the forbidden love of the courtly romance or an Updike novel, is it possible for true love to be the principal motivator, but for the outcome to be bad?
- 25 I research representations of love, beauty and the sublime in English literature and their French translations. Ann Radcliffe, on whose work I am currently writing a PhD dissertation, delves deep into the shadow-side of romantic love, sensibility, chivalry and adventure. Her novels are often referred to as “gothic” for this reason. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily, the heroine and epitome of the eighteenth-century young woman of sensibility, suffers from psychological agony for almost half of the novel. The qualities that make her desirable and worthy of emulation, qualities indicating moral



virtue and refinement and the capacity to love, are also the qualities that make her anguish possible. Her heightened ability for empathy makes her someone easy to torture. Her crossing the Apennines, and admiring the landscape, is also equivalent to Dante's descent into Hell or John Milton's angel descending upon a burning inferno. I think one of the reasons why my cut-up is confusing is because my reaction to the critical text was emotional – I was excited about the idea of *eros*, but it also set off a confused pessimism that had me wondering just how affected I am by Radcliffe's work. This cut-up is clearly a “stage on a journey” as Helen E. Mundler says when speaking above of her own cut-ups. It is the expression of an inner struggle regarding interpretations and feelings about *eros*. At the junction between light *eros* and dark *eros*, there is something complex worth exploring.

Fig. 9 Heathir Lawrence Monassa, *Marry Me*. Courtesy of the photographer

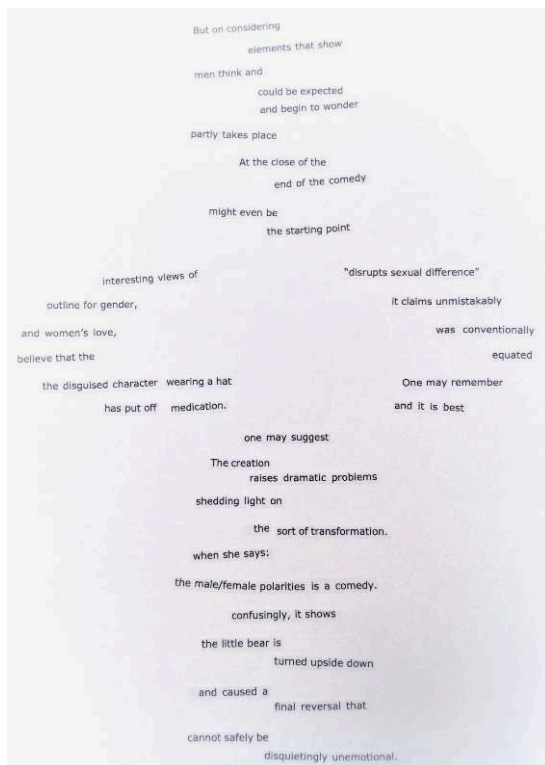


## 2.4 Tanya Tromble-Giraud. My Safe, Pleasantly Emotional Cut-ups Experience

- 26 When I was creating my cut-ups poem during the December 3, 2022 workshop, my thoughts were of nothing more than the pleasure of focusing on nothing but creating something fun for a couple of hours on a gray Saturday morning.
- 27 For my cut-up poem, I chose the article “‘When the bear won't go hunt’: masculinity in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*” by Jean-Louis Claret (Claret). I wanted one of the articles in English, for the comfort of working in my mother tongue, and I've always enjoyed the quality of Jean-Louis's scholarly prose. In addition, the title held the promise of some fun animal and action words to work with.

- 28 I started by cutting up the first page of the article, basically following Helen's suggestion of "taking one page of text, cutting it up into individual lines, and then deciding on a number of consecutive words to cut from each line." Feeling impatient to begin, I started working with those snippets and positioning them on my blank page. I realized that I was lacking verbs and linking expressions, so I cut up my second page of the article (I took the last page for this) with those specific needs in mind. I chose to work with the first and final pages of the article, thinking that snippets from both the introduction and the conclusion would represent a satisfactory sample of the author's fundamental arguments. However, I'm not sure it worked out that way in the end.
- 29 Why did I create a poem with alternating paths in the middle so that it can be read in two (or even three) different ways?
1. After "the starting point," read following the left "elbow" down to "one may suggest."
  2. After "the starting point," read following the right "elbow" down to "one may suggest."
- 30 To me, it was obvious, from the blank space in the middle of the page and the two word "paths" curving outwards in opposite arcs, that the poem should be read in one of these first two ways. However, during the sharing time at the close of the workshop, it became evident that not everyone immediately understood. So, the poem may also be read in a third way.
3. After "the starting point," read the middle section, combining the left and right arcs as if they were the beginning and end of each line: "interesting views of 'disrupts sexual difference' / outline for gender, it calms unmistakably," and so on down to "and may suggest."
- 31 I have never liked choose-your-own-adventure type stories. Why would I inflict such a choice upon my own readers? These questions did not concern me at the time. I was more focused on the aesthetically appealing shape that I was forming on the page.
- 32 However, reflecting on the experience five months later in terms of the question "How does your creative output relate to your research?," it does seem possible that I was unconsciously influenced in my creation by my research occupations at the time. Indeed, I had given a talk on short detective fiction at a conference in October and was currently in the process of finalizing my article for submission. The article discusses Joyce Carol Oates's penchant for mystery and suspense fiction, before offering a reading of her micro-fiction story "Slow" as detective fiction. Oates is one of those authors who continues the American literary tradition of inconclusive open endings, despite the fact that readers are often made to feel uncomfortable by them. I appear to have unwittingly channeled this impulse in my own poem, though at the time, as I said, I was conscious only of the fun I was having with it. I hope the little bear will forgive me.

Fig. 10 Tanya Tromble-Giraud, *But on considering*. Courtesy of the photographer



## 2.5 Sara Greaves

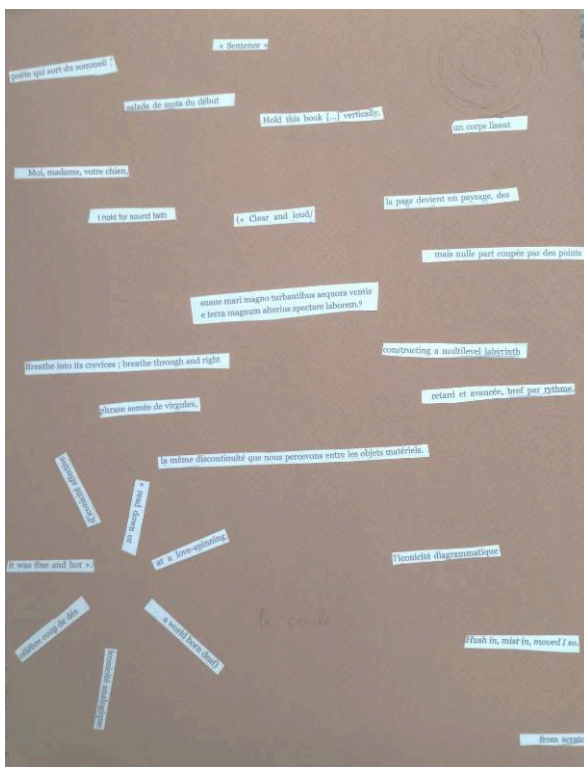
- 33 My first interest in cut-ups was through Basil Bunting, the poet I wrote my PhD on, who used to black out segments of Shakespeare's sonnets to pare them down to the bare essentials, in keeping with his Poundian aesthetics of maximum economy of means. He advocated discarding everything extraneous ("Cut out every word you dare"<sup>8</sup>), looking to present the living kernel of the sonnet in a modern idiom, just as Pound sought to do with his innovative approach to translation based on the "luminous detail"<sup>9</sup>. More recently, I was intrigued by Helen Mundler's work on cut-ups as presented above, and started wondering about their relation to translation practice: is a cut-up a kind of translation? Like translation it can involve an interpretive dimension and a critical dimension; like translation it can be a means of subjective appropriation of literary (or other) texts; like translation it can derive poeticity from contrasting voices (see Pound's or Antoine Berman's defence of hybridity in the translated text [Berman]).
- 34 So I began experimenting with cut-ups in Creative translation classes, <sup>10</sup>inserting them in the translation process as an intermediary stage—an exploratory creative space—between the source text and the potential target text. A translated text may remain the goal, in which case it will probably turn out very different from what it would have been without the cut-up stage, as the translator's sensuous, body-oriented relation with their Mother tongue (even when writing in their second language) has been brought into play, as well as the unconscious, reinforcing their "skin voice" (Greaves, *Côté guerre*). In some cases though, cutting up a source text leads to further creative meanderings such as self-translation, cultural transposition or "fleshing out", and the "translated text" is dispersed along the way, in diverse self-appropriating declinations.

- 35 The cut-up offered here may be considered in the light of these remarks and perceived as a creative translation using translation techniques such as reduction, literalism, bilingual polysemy....<sup>11</sup> The source-text was a 10-year old contribution to *e-Rea* by Jean-Jacques Lecercle: “L’ordre des mots dans le temps de la phrase », selected out of admiration for an author who has led a lifelong enquiry into the nature and meaning of style in language. In *De l’interpellation: Sujet, langue, idéologie* , for instance, he develops the idea that style is the dialectical opposite of “system”, and in a subsequent publication he equates idiolect or style with the Mother tongue: “a Mother tongue is not merely a collective system, not even a plurality of systems, but an individual construction, sometimes called an idiolect or a style [...]” (Lecercle in Greaves and De Mattia-Viviès , 53). Can the practice of cut-ups help hone or enhance the translator’s style?
- 36 You have to work fast in a cut-ups workshop, and unlike word processing once you’ve stuck a word on the page it has a kind of permanence, and becomes a further constraint to work with. The first word I stuck down was “Sentence”, which recalls Bunting’s concise aphoristic style (cf. the adjective sententious), and led to “sound faith” (ie his firm faith in poetic language but also particularly in the sound of poetry, *sound* faith), and the way his Northerner’s dialectical consonants are designed to ring out “clear and loud”. But “Sentence” is firstly a laconic reduction of Lecercle’s title, “L’ordre des mots dans le temps de la phrase », and an English/French transparent word connecting language and the law (ie Lecercle’s “system”). The article analyses iconicity in the sentence (affective, analogical, and diagrammatic), which the cut-up could be said to “translate” through its interplay of the visual and the verbal, and through the following metatextual phrases, selected and foregrounded by the cut-up process: “salade de mots”, “la page devient un paysage”, “la même discontinuité que nous percevons entre les objets matériels”. This use of the same words and phrases recalls the literalist approach to translation adopted by certain early translators of the Bible, and their convergence around the idea of a fragmented, spatialized text seems to capture that Poundian “luminous detail”, as if Lecercle’s scholarly article were secretly dreaming of its own destiny, cut-up and “visibilised” on the page... As with translation, a cut-up is a space in which two imaginaries may meet.
- 37 Moreover, the cut-up opens on a narrative mode with “poète qui sort du sommeil” and “corps lisant”, a drowsy desultory writer/reader reminiscent of George Perec’s *Un homme qui dort* (1974). This image of a reading body may be what inspired me most as I read through the article, many of the fragments having a body-oriented character, conducive to the play of affect as the reader weaves in and out of languages in “an enriched Mother tongue”<sup>12</sup>; which is why the Latin extract is positioned at the centre of the cut-up:<sup>13</sup> “vous reconnaîtrez avec moi l’éminente supériorité du texte latin dans l’expression de l’affect” (Lecercle, “L’ordre des mots...”). This extract is also a tribute to Bunting who admired and translated Lucretius.
- 38 By the time I was about half-way through my cut-up I noticed the conventional horizontality I had fallen into, and chastised myself for my lack of visual inventiveness, so switched to music and took a riff on “love-spinning” with the spokes of a wheel to be read every which way, reminiscent of Mallarmé’s “célèbre coup de dés”. I then noticed it was a circle or rather a “le cercle”, thus a signature, echoing the author’s own tongue-in-cheek self-designation in his article: “il me chagrine que, parmi ces figures masculines, il n’y ait pas de cercle : nul doute que s’il y en avait un, ce serait le symbole

même de la perfection [...]”<sup>14</sup> (Lecerclé, “L’ordre des mots...”). Only when the scan was made did I notice I had unintentionally left the pencilled-in “le cercle”, along with the mysterious yet happy circumstance of the spiral indented in the top righthand corner. Finally, the cut-up ends the “sentence” with a paradoxical full-stop and a pun on a bodily action to relieve itching, and the injunction to begin again (“from scratch”) in an ongoing circle of textual recycling (the very nature of cut-ups).

- 39 Composing a cut-up was also a way to pay tribute to the impish playfulness of Lecerclé’s approach to language; but am I now better able to translate his article into English? Whatever the answer, the practice of cut-ups can surely help students of English acquire their “second Mother tongue” (Lecerclé in Greaves and De Mattia-Viviès) or subjective “(M)other tongue” rich in affect (De Mattia-Viviès)<sup>15</sup>; and, to quote Jean-Jacques Lecerclé once again, comprises one possible answer to his vibrant call to “teach our students [...] not a means of communication but ways of acquiring a style” (Lecerclé in Greaves and De Mattia-Viviès 56).

Fig. 11 Sara Greaves, *Sentence*. Courtesy of the photographer



## 2.6 Helen E. Mundler-Arantes

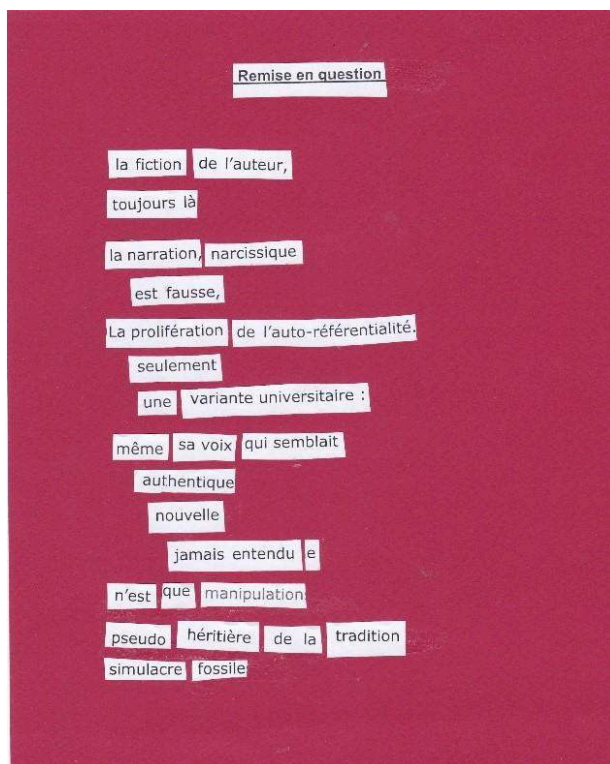
- 40 Taken from an article by Nathalie Martinière on pseudo-citations in *Possession* by A.S. Byatt (Martinière), an author whose work I have loved and deeply admired for most of my life, this cut-up testifies to a period of disavowal, when the authorial voice which had seemed so new, so original, so vital, began to sound instead like an over-practised piano exam piece. What used to soar and sing – perhaps a strange image, since Frederica Potter, Byatt’s presumed alter ego, is markedly unmusical – became as sawing and grating as the voice of Jude, the renegade novelist, in *Babel Tower*, while the narrative techniques which had once delighted me with their audacity, their self-



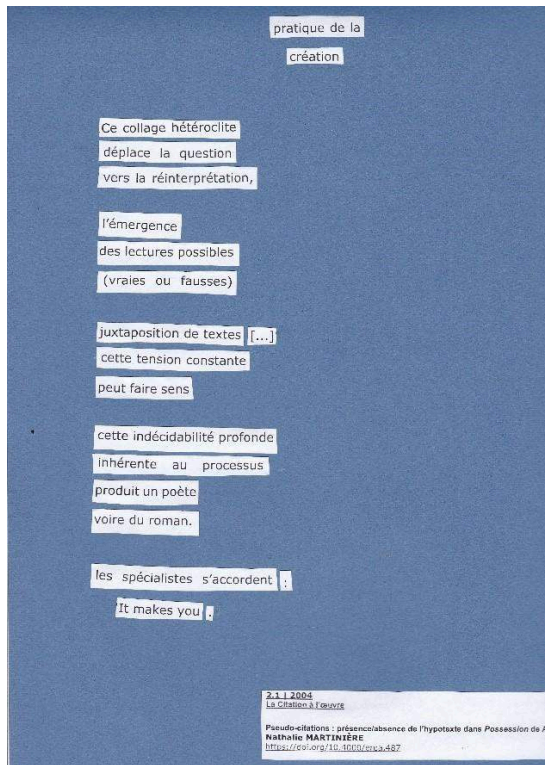
conscious cleverness, made me thump books closed in dismay. I was ripe for the twenty-first-century return to agency in the novel, the toning-down of the endless self-referentiality of postmodernism.<sup>16</sup> I wanted to see characters let out of the paper worlds which now seemed to imprison them. In short, I had overdosed on those very metatextual and self-referential mechanisms I used to love so much.

- 41 The critical text I chose here and the way I cut it up happened to allow for an expression of that emotional response to the text – which is by no means the definitive version of what I feel about Byatt, but was only a stage on a journey. But that very instability is part of the point and the joy of cut-ups – they are a fleeting form, the words can be rearranged at any moment to make something completely different (Juliet Fleming points out that cut-ups generate “interactive parts”, which “repeatedly spark new meanings”, 550), and the second cut-up I produced from the same text illustrates this very point, in that it can be read as a commentary on, or reply to, the first:

Fig. 12 Helen E. Mundler-Arantes, *Remise en question*. Courtesy of the photographer



- 42 This second cut-up is about the endless recycling of texts and meanings, and to that extent it is both very Byattian and very bound up with my own work on Byatt. “Old words, new words, going gracefully together”, a quotation from *The Virgin in the Garden* (Byatt 1981, 66), is an economical expression of the project at the heart of Byatt’s work, and while I could never pretend even to echo that Byattian grace, this cut-up, for me, with the change of language in the last line, expresses that “words-fail-me, I-need-another-language” moment in which my subjective response to Byatt suddenly becomes inexpressible, engulfing.

Fig. 13 Helen E. Mundler-Arantes, *Pratique de la création*. Courtesy of the photographer


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## NOTES

1. <https://journals.openedition.org/erea/14858>.
2. The reference is to the annual congress of the SAES, Société des Anglicistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur, initially scheduled to be held at the University of Tours in 2020, and finally held online in June 2021.
3. The reference is to "The Story of the Eldest Princess" in *The Djinn in The Nightingale's Eye*: "I am in a pattern I know, and I suspect I have no power to break it" (Byatt 1998, 48).
4. For details of the conference, see <https://ebsn.eu/2023-special-conference/>.
5. For information about La Société ETC, see <https://creativel2.hypotheses.org/>.
6. For instructions on how to write a Dadaist poem, see <https://modernistcommons.ca/islandora/object/yale%3A352>.
7. Permission was granted by: Peggy Pacini, Anita Butler, Sylvie Mathé, Jean Viviès, Sandrine Sorlin, Monique De Mattia-Viviès, Marc Porée, Christelle Klein-Scholz, Jean-Jacques Lecercle and Jean-Louis Claret.
8. Cf. *Shakespeare and Creative Writing – Featured Research Projects in the School of English (st-andrews.ac.uk)*
9. Ezra Pound, "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris": "[...] the method of the Luminous Detail," which is "a method most vigorously hostile to the prevailing mode of to-day [sic] – that is, the method of multitudinous detail, and to the method of yesterday, the method of sentiment and generalisation" ("Osiris 2," 130). *The New Age*, 7 December 1911 – 15 February 1912. This series of articles was originally published in twelve parts and included a number of translations most of which Mr. Pound subsequently revised – these revised versions are printed in *The Translations of Ezra Pound* (Faber, 1970). <http://www.staff.u-szeged.hu/~gnovak/00strepiglo.htm>.
10. An M2 class offered as an option on the *Etudes Culturelles du Monde Anglophone* Master's course.
11. This cut-up was produced during the workshop Helen Mundler and I facilitated at *Cut-ups@2023, Talks, Performances, Poetry, Music, Films*, The University of Chicago Center in Paris, 12-15 September 2023, organized by Oliver Harris, Paul Aliferis, Peggy Pacini and Frank Rynne, entitled "Creative Cut-ups from Scholarly Articles".
12. Lecercle speaks of the "enriched Mother tongue" of the exile, of the "fusion of languages, which is also, inextricably, a fusion of cultures" (Lecercle in Greaves and De Mattia-Viviès, 54).
13. Lucrèce, *De natura rerum*, II, 1-2, in « L'ordre des mots dans le temps de la phrase », *op. cit.*
14. This is the conclusion to a summary of a novel by Victorian science-fiction writer Edwin Abbott, *Flatland*.
15. Monique De Mattia-Viviès's original French portmanteau word is "langue mat-rangère", "Entrer dans la langue ou dans les langues : de la langue maternelle à la langue 'mat-rangère'", *e-Rea* 16.1/ 2018. <https://journals.openedition.org/erea/3613>.
16. Robert Eaglestone sees the fiction of the new century as a backlash against the excesses of postmodernism, but one which leaves in place its central tenets: "[W]hile these writers have

learned a great deal from the experimentalism of postmodernism and its forebears, they have integrated it, domesticated it, and returned some way to the more traditional forms of the novel” (Eaglestone 15). While identifying “a retreat from the wilder edges of postmodernism towards a stronger sense of narrative”, he argues that “these texts are still playful, still complex over issues like textuality and closure” (23).

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## ABSTRACTS

This article is a report on a creative writing workshop held at Aix-Marseille University under the auspices of LERMA on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2022, and led by Helen E. Mundler. The aim of the workshop was to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of *e-Rea* by using the cut-up method, popularized in the 1960s by William Burroughs, to recycle articles taken from issues of this review that have been published over the last two decades. The first part of the article is a critical introduction by Helen E. Mundler in which she explains the rationale behind the workshop. Building on her article on creative and critical convergence published in *e-Rea* 20.1,<sup>1</sup> she relates cut-ups to other types of recycling texts, such as quotation, ventriloquy, pastiche and parody, with particular reference to the work of A.S. Byatt, in whose 1996 novel, *Babel Tower*, the technique features. The theoretical underpinnings of cut-ups are explained, their capacity to generate new meaning examined, and the question of whether and how to take control of the text thus produced, rather than to leave it to chance, is touched upon. In the second part of the article, each of the participants provides a brief commentary on their production in response to the intentionally broad question, “How does your creative output relate to your research?”

Cet article est le compte-rendu d'un atelier d'écriture créative organisé à Aix-Marseille Université sous les auspices du LERMA le 3 décembre 2022, dirigé par Helen E. Mundler. L'objectif de l'atelier était de célébrer le vingtième anniversaire d'*e-Rea* en utilisant la méthode du *cut-up*, popularisée dans les années 1960 par William Burroughs, pour recycler des articles publiés dans des numéros de cette revue au cours des deux dernières décennies. La première partie de l'article est une introduction critique d'Helen E. Mundler dans laquelle elle explique la raison d'être de l'atelier. S'appuyant sur son article sur la convergence créative et critique publié dans *e-Rea* 20.1, elle fait le lien entre les *cut-ups* et d'autres types de recyclage de textes, tels que la citation, la ventriloquie, le pastiche et la parodie, en se référant en particulier à l'œuvre de A.S. Byatt, dont le roman de 1996, *Babel Tower*, inclut cette technique. Les fondements théoriques des *cut-ups* sont expliqués, leur capacité à générer un nouveau sens est examinée et la question de savoir à quel moment prendre le contrôle du texte ainsi produit, plutôt que de le laisser au hasard, est abordée.

Dans la deuxième partie de l'article, chacun et chacune des participants et participantes fournit un bref commentaire sur sa production en réponse à la question intentionnellement large : « Quel est le lien entre votre production créative et votre recherche ? »



## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** A.S. Byatt, William Burroughs, cut-ups, syndrome de la page blanche, créativité, atelier d'écriture créative

**Keywords:** A.S. Byatt, William Burroughs, cut-ups, writer's block, creativity, creative writing workshop

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