

*Alain André*

## Do our early readings matter for the way we write and teach?

*Keynote talk to Creative Writing:  
Pedagogy and Well-Being conference,  
Jyväskylä, 22.10.2014*

One of the key-points, in the initial training we are delivering to young creative writing teachers in Aleph-Écriture, lies in their attitudes towards reading and literature.

- What do they read and what not?
- How far do they feel comfortable in the literary field or do they feel terrified by the “monster” literature?
- Which tools do they use, when it comes to reading complex texts?
- In other words: what is their connection with literary knowledge?

I will have to come back to this connection, as a specialized aspect of a research field related to the more general concept of “connection with knowledge”.

Then I shall give a few examples of my work prompts in this area and finish with what I am discovering about

myself and writing about my own readings when I was between 6 and 11 year old. It is a work still in progress, probably a collection of both literary and theoretical fragments – maybe an essay?

## I. OUR CONNECTION WITH LITERARY KNOWLEDGE

### *Initial teachers' training*

I have been training young teachers since 1987 and now we have about fifty students every year. We had to build up a team of specialized teachers and a modular training system, with a ninety-hour long basic training and another ninety-hour long specialized curriculum that depends on each student's project as a creative writing teacher.

This initial training includes tools – a survival kit for teaching situations. It also includes a lot of experimenting and sharing about the collection of professional gestures composing the “posture” of a creative writing teacher: the way we live in it, its ethics and its horizons (it is more important, in the long run, than technique).

The teachers and writers who helped me to give its shape to Aleph in the first years were coming from the so-called New Education. We tried to achieve something valuable from a constructivist point of view. We were aiming at building, for each student, an “intimate knowledge. The term of “intimate knowledge” was later suggested by the American psychologist Albert Bandura, who stated that the psychological structure of our knowledge gathers men-

tal representations, affects and motivations. It means the so-called “posture” we are using when transmitting this knowledge is as important as the knowledge itself.

We first focus our teaching by determining a series of questions, such as problems linked to specific situations that may be told and analysed. The basic training is then dealing with the key-points that are worked through with the help of prompts and writing, work in small groups, role-plays, documentation research, mini-lessons and sharing.

The key-points are the following ones: (1) writing as a topic and as a process; (2) writing behaviours; (3) socialization and interactions; (4) giving feedback; (5) devices: holding a frame and group regulations; (6) professional gestures (such as welcoming, reformulating, wording a prompt, and so on); (7) inventing and experimenting prompts; (8) reflexivity and pedagogical detours; (9) posture (accompanying & teaching); (10) evaluation. We also use 5 additional tools: a training diary, privileged readers, along with writing about practice and case studies; role-games; and a commented and shared bibliography.

One of the main aspects in this training consists of helping the young teachers to locate and work through a few blind spots. One of them is the way they manage with their desires of teaching and writing, usually connected with both their writing difficulties and their connection with knowledge and transmission of knowledge.

As I was teaching in this basic training, around 1993, one of the students who was first, from a professional point of view, a psychoanalyst, proposed not autobiographical fragments, but a tale. From this moment on, I have sug-

gested the students to write a similar tale. A craftsman is moving to a new town and settling there. Two rivers flow through this town, as in Lyons for instance with the Rhône and the Saone. In Finland I would not know a similar example. A craftsman is looking at one of the rivers from his new shop. He discovers a ferryman is settling close to the river. A while later, he is looking at a traveller arriving near the ferryman and his boat. This traveller does not look like anybody. You jsbr 7 minutes to imagine the scene. I sometimes ask my student to imagine: the craftsman, the shop, the ferryman and the strange traveller.

It is not necessary to sort of undress the metaphor of this tale for such an audience as that of Scriptum's. When I tried to write a tale like that myself, my unknown traveller was a reader. ]

I am now teaching in a specialized session of this teacher training devoted to "literary texts". The session is 54 hours long, organized in nine days (3 three-day long modules). They are roughly devoted to:

- Reading, as a desire and as a work;
- Writing problems, with case-studies including oneself; and the way to help students come to reading from different perspectives and editing;
- And pedagogical invention (that is partly related to reading too, of course).

You can see how reading is important in this session. My idea is that our connection with reading is the main aspect of our connexion with knowledge in the field of literary writing.

*Connection with knowledge*

I am not using the concept “relationship with knowledge” because this concept of “connection with knowledge” has got a long history in French education sciences<sup>2</sup>. The term appeared in the sixties in the fields of psychoanalysis, critical sociology and adult training. Jacques Lacan used it first, then Pierre Bourdieu and many other sociologists. The French term “rapport au savoir” stems from the Marxist tradition, where we for instance talk about the economical “rapports de production”. I am trying to do the same when I am using the word “connection” instead of “relationship”. It is a means to omit our affectivity from our notion, or to highlight the questionable dignity of the concept.

The term was also used in education sciences later on. Several groups of researchers began to work from a clinical point of view that includes the question of our subjective desire to know or not to know. According to them, the connection with knowledge is slowly built up in a social context, including first the subject’s family, as well as his education and experiences in other institutions delivering knowledge.

Other researchers then began to study what they called our “connection with writing”. Christine Barré-De Miniac is the main one and I co-directed a research with her for the INRP (the French Pedagogical Research National Institute). This connection with writing may be defined as the combination of our social history with writing and of our effective writing attitudes and procedures<sup>3</sup>.

*Connection with reading*

Our connection with reading is significant to our connection with knowledge as writers and teachers. The personal project of teaching literature and creative writing has a background in a versatile experience of reading.

How are we passing on our literary traditions and innovations? Do we feel we have the social and professional legitimacies to do it or not? Michel Foucault, I apologize for all these French references, wrote (in: *Archéologie du savoir / Archeology of knowledge*, Gallimard, 1969): “Un savoir, c’est ce dont on peut parler dans une pratique discursive qui se trouve par là spécifiée (...) Un savoir, c’est aussi l’espace dans lequel le sujet peut prendre position pour parler des objets auxquels il a affaire dans son discours.” (“A knowledge is what we may tell about it in a discursive practice that is therefore specified by this knowledge (...) A knowledge includes the place where the talking subject is able to adopt a definite position about the matters he is dealing with in his own speech.”<sup>4</sup>)

Therefore, knowledge is here closely linked to our speech, about literature and texts for instance, and to its possible powers. It is used in the context of social interactions. Knowledge exists but only through actions it allows. It is transmitted through a speech. It is a reflexive reality, implying the awareness of knowing.

For this reason I have tried, in this session called “Literary texts”, to question and build up our young teachers’ self-confidence as readers and literature transmitters.

## 2. BUILDING UP YOUNG TEACHERS' SELF-CONFIDENCE

I suggest that my students write and talk about their mental representations and questions in the field, then I ask them to write from my prompts. I'd like to give one or two examples of these prompts about reading.

### *A small history of my readings (prompt 1)*

Of course, I am not starting with the technical aspects of reading and giving feedback, but with the intimate connection young teachers have got with reading. I'm still not interested in the way they read, but in the way they have been read by the books they met. This is the way a young French writer, Grégoire Bouillier, is telling the way he was interpreted by Homer's *Odyssey*: "Never before had I lived such an experience with a book. I was offering my face to the sun. Every verse had been written for me and was flowing into me, through my eyes and my ears. I was the act of reading itself. The *Odyssey* was decoding me. Everything was clear. Amazing coincidences emerged. My life was Ulysses' life. Borders were abolished. For instance, I had known four loves in my short life, exactly as Ulysses did in the book. Everything was proved. Calypso, Circé, Nausicaa, Pénélope: I knew their faces. I had even kept their pictures and phone numbers..."<sup>5</sup>

If we are teaching literature and creative writing, maybe it is because of encounters such as this with books.

Then I read one or two extracts of another book, by the

poet Raymond Federman. I do not know how to translate “coups de pompes” in English: in French it means both “a sudden access of tiredness” and a “strong kick in the ass”. Anyway, one of the texts is “A short history of my readings”. I have tried to translate the following extracts:

“When I was eleven, I was reading Jules Verne in the night under my blankets, with the help of a small electric lamp. I wanted to become Michel Strogoff. I was thinking that one day I would have wonderful adventures and write novels such as those of Jules Verne’s.

“When I was sixteen, I tried Marquis de Sade. I wanted to know what a real sexual enjoyment was exactly. I was fed up with self pleasure. I was thinking that one day everybody would say that I was writing porno books, just as Sade did, and I would be thrown to jail.

“When I was nineteen, I read my first novel in English – Dangling man, by Saul Bellow. I did not want to become this poor guy in the novel, who appeared to be totally unable to make up his mind about anything. I wanted to speed along and shoot bang bang! I was thinking I would one day write a novel with guys who speed along and shoot, not such a depressing novel.”<sup>6</sup>

And so on. Students then are invited to write such fragments, about a dozen of them. They may use the same structure as what the poet has used: an age, the memory of a book and a commentary – not a literary one: a commentary about the effect of the book, in terms of desire and identification. Of course, something else may happen, e.g. a film, or a painting.

Such a simple prompt initiates the writing of autobiographies as readers. It helps me to work with young teachers

about what I sometimes call the Indian track or the “hidden side” of the creative writing workshop, a sort of equivalent of the Northern track for a mountain peak – a silenced or hidden approach for those who believe in the old idea of “spontaneous writing” (a skill that just exists and cannot be learnt). It is also a way to establish a strong distinction between reading as an intimate and projective activity and reading as an intellectual effort and training. I encourage the first one because the other, reading as a technical work, is the only one used in schools, I mean the French ones, especially at the worst possible age, between 14 and 18, when teenagers are trying to find out who they are and to have sexual experiences instead of intellectual ones.

*A reading that changed my life (prompt 2)*

Before the next step (close readings, poetics, feedbacks etc.), I therefore prefer to deepen the approach to the aspect of identification. One of my favourite prompts here deals with a book that changed your life.

The prompt is based on what happened to me on the 7th of October, 1995. I had planned to go and see the film *Moonfleet*, by Fritz Lang, in a Latin district of Paris cinema. A critic from the movie magazine *Les Cahiers du cinéma* (Antoine de Baeque) was there, along with the Italian writer Antonio Tabucchi. They had just published a book titled *Le cinéma des écrivains / Writers’ movies* (Éditions de l’Étoile-Cahiers du cinéma). It was a collection of texts from several writers. Each text discussed a film that had been significant in the writer’s life. The idea was to forget

about criticism and “initiate a conversation about shared emotions”. The writer then had to write not a review, but an intimate experience he lived with the film he had chosen, sort of a letter or a personal story about a bedside film, if you like. A film does exist, explained Antoine de Baeque, only if somebody writes about it.

Tabucchi was one of these writers. He told us he had written about *La Dolce Vita*, by Federico Fellini. He had watched it in 1961, as he was eighteen year old and living in Florence. At the time, he assumed Italy was a sort of post-fascist paradise. After seeing the film, he realized how suffocating and narrow the real Italian situation in the sixties was. Nobody is saved in this film, neither the stupid bourgeoisie nor workers or intellectuals. He realized he needed a huge amount of fresh air and decided to spend a whole year in Paris. And there, as he was wandering along the river Seine, surrounded by second-hand books on both sides, looking at the stand of a bookseller, he found *Bureau de tabac / The Tobacconist's shop*, an extraordinary poem written by Fernando Pessoa. Then this book changed his life again, as he decided to learn Spanish and Portuguese and write a thesis about Pessoa, who never stopped accompanying him into his writer's life.

The prompt itself has three steps. First, can you locate a book that changed your life, or at least exerted a real influence on it? It does not matter whether you have read it recently or in your childhood or during your university years. It does not matter if it is a proletarian or popular book, because I am not suggesting a decorative exercise. As another Antonio – Lobo Antunes – wrote: “Important books are the ones we read as we were kids and, later, books

that are not much from a very literary point of view, such as Antoine Blondin's or John Updike's for myself. I owe a lot to them, even though hardly anybody talks about them anymore”.

It does not matter either if you remember something else instead of a book. It's a secret I am asking to share. Forget your present literary norm. It is a message from the inner world that I am asking for, from your inner world.

When the choice is made, approach the book from a narrative point of view. Do not name it. Try to memorise when and where you bought the book, in a bar of Helsinki or a Greek beach or a Mexican village. What were the atmosphere and the precise moment like when you bought the book or opened it for the first time. Were you standing or lying then? Work out the circumstances, even if you have to make them up for some parts, because you will anyway.

Then try to tell the story. If you change it, it will be greatly significant and maybe a good impulse for writing something. Do not name the book yet. Try to tell the main passage if you can, or the image, or the verse or the sentence. Try to share a word about the repercussion the reading of this book had in your life.

Then, maybe you can add some sort of a commentary. What book was it? What do you think about it now? Has it still an influence on you or not? Name it at last, or choose not to do it.

Of course I have many similar prompts. I may ask the young teachers to create their “erutarettil”, an old surrealist – and probably more widely used – practice that consists of imagining one's own imaginary family-tree as a writer.

“Erutaretil” is the French word “literature” read backwards. It refers to a page written by André Breton in the magazine *Littérature* (n° 11 -12, 1923), where poets, artists etc. he considered as the sources for the Surrealist movement are mentioned.

Or I may ask for an inventory of literary debts, just like the Roman Emperor and philosopher Marcus Aurelius was already doing in his *Meditations*. Patrick Chamoiseau, for instance, did it more recently, in a book titled *Writing in a dominated country*<sup>7</sup>. In that book he is building an inventory of what literature planned for himself, in order to help him find his own voice and way in spite of the French colonial, ideological and literary dominations.

### *A few derived questions*

I do not, however, want to discuss these prompts too deeply. I would just like to point out that the following ones, when the main aim is to train young teachers, are devoted to a few recurrent questions, such as:

- Which sort of reading do we need?
- Is it important to have a good university background in classical literature or in contemporary literature or in linguistics or in poetics or...?
- Is it a danger to a writer to read too much?
- Are there some books that we absolutely must have read?
- How can I manage with literary influences, in my writing and in my students' writings?

- Which are the most important literary tools for feedback?
- How may I help my students, as a creative writing teacher, to find their own specific music or voice?

Sharing about them is the beginning of finding some tools and gaining more self-confidence. It may of course also lead to changes. Some students go to university, for a literature specialized curriculum or something else. Some revise their aims or audience. Some make up their minds: they want to write, not to teach.

### 3. ABOUT OUR PERSONAL CONNECTIONS WITH READING

#### *Fish keep their eyes open*

I have been teaching the training session “Literary texts” and reading publications in this field for about 20 years. I have never got bored, as I have got bored with a lot of other sessions (three to five times are enough).

When teaching, I was often writing about my own history as a writer and/or as a reader and a teacher: my own readings, the books that changed my own life, my own literary debts (generally creating a literary family-tree of one kind, from Homer and Montaigne to Marcel Proust, Claude Simon and to yours truly, a tree I have to change every five years). I have been collecting those teaching diaries for a long time. I was even adding post-its at the very pages where I had written something about my own writ-

ings and readings. But I had not done much with them yet. Something else happened. During the summer of 2013, I bought and read a small novella written by Erri De Luca. It was titled *Fish sleep with open eyes*. No, it should have been *Fish keep their eyes open*, not “sleep with open eyes”. I suppose readers are sleeping and dreaming with open eyes...

It is a story about the end of a childhood: the young hero is about ten. It is obviously an autobiographical story, including a love story, an initiation tale and the writer’s self-portrait as a sixty-year old man. Growing up is a matriochka affair here, apart from the fact that the matriochka is a small Italian peasant. In this novella, reading is a part of growing up, but I must confess the slow awakening to the excitements and flutterings of flesh and gender roles, was more important for me when I discovered the story.

I was with my daughter who was five or six years old at the time, in sort of a playing hall designed for children, where the owners had been wise enough to plan a bar and internet connections for the parents. This was the first time I read the book and I have read it three times after that but, this afternoon of 2013, I used the 8 or 9 blank pages at the very end of the book, to write about the similar period in my own life.

### *Going back to one’s own roots*

I knew that a few periods are decisive when reading and one’s relationship with it develops with age.

I might have returned to the times when I was prepar-

ing entrance examination for the prestigious French “École Normale Supérieure”, as Pierre Bourdieu had done, with more success, some years before (he wrote a great small book about it<sup>8</sup>). In those years, I learnt most of the tools I am using when I am working on any literary text. I might have returned again to the way we were taught to read and write commentaries and commentaries of commentaries in our secondary French schools. But Erri De Luca, in his own wonderful novella, has written about the end of childhood.

I wanted to do that my own way. It did not develop into a love story, I am afraid, even though sexual initiation has a role in it. Instead, I moved towards what I confusedly already knew, especially about the links between sexual desires and desires to know in general and the desire to read in particular... As many of you probably know, a psychoanalytical cure is not so much different: you discover what you already knew but did not really wish to know...

I decided to do three things: first write everything I could remember about the period when I was living in a small village where my parents were the only schoolmasters and, unhappily enough, my own schoolmasters. This was the case between the ages of 6 and 11, because at 11 I was imprisoned in one of the worst French state boarding schools and this sort of old-fashioned Bastille meant the very end of childhood.

The village stands by a river. It flows from the French Central Massif to Angoulême, Cognac and the old royal military harbour of Rochefort-sur-mer, still dreaming about the times when La Fayette left the place to help the American army against England. This was between 1955 and 1960. I was born at the very end of the first half of the

bloody twentieth century: just a year after the last French concentration camp designed for Tzigans had been closed.

The second idea was to write about a selection of pictures I have from this period, thanks to the family album combined with a chronological logbook where my father has written down the most significant events of our family life.

The third idea was to write about all the books I had read at that time. I had kept some and my mother had kept nearly all others. She is 88 years old and she has memory problems but, when it comes to the times when my sister and I were children, she instantly remembers every detail, even the precise month when I was reading such or such a book...

The book I would write would be based on this material: my memories, photographs and the books that I have read. Its provisory title is: *An intimate legend*.

### *Results*

I discovered reading helped me to achieve four vital aims:

- Survive and live, as a boy and the son of schoolmasters. It meant life in the woods, to put it briefly: neither the life at home or in the school, which were the two places where my terrible father was ruling hard;
- Learn, in my parents' classes;
- Talk, imagine possible speeches, especially in order to survive the wide family which lived outside of

the village, that included thirteen schoolmasters and teachers, all of them politically left or extreme left-wing, which meant a place where you just could not utter a single word without an elaborated strategy;

- Imagine some outer places where life might be more pleasant.

Well, but what did I read? Here is a list of the works that have influenced me strongest:

- *Tom Thumb*. This tale was written in 1630 and later adapted for children. How to survive when you are one inch tall, which exploits will you have to perform, will you be recognized and loved or will death be faster? In the tale, Tom is eventually loved but he dies.
- *The war of the fire* (La Guerre du feu), by Rosny Aîné, a Belgian writer who writes in French, a precursor or fore-runner of sci-fi literature in France and the unchallenged master of pre-historical novel. The decimated tribe of the Oulhamr are running away in the marshlands. They have lost the fire cages. Two rival groups are sent to go and fetch the precious resource. The chief of the winning group will have the beautiful Gammla to himself. This is an initiation novel, of course, asking important questions: how to survive? Which sort of man to become?
- *Au vent de fortune* (translates roughly: On the wings of fortune?). This is a story for young readers written by totally unknown Michèle Massane. It is an adventure novel, beginning on a French corsair ship.

The hero is one of the ship-boys, Corsic (which means small corsair in the Bask language). They discover an English boat, “The Indefatigable”. After a fight, the English boat explodes and the French one is sent to the bottom. Corsic succeeds in reaching another island. With the help of the English commander of the “Indefatigable”, abandoned there because he got the Black Plague, and Anhoa, an Abenaki Indian girl who was tied up and thrown to a sure death on a small wooden canoe, he succeeds in reaching New France, now the East of Canada. The story ties two strong traditions in the adventure novel: the maritime one and the Indian one. It asks good questions: how to survive, how to become a man, and also how to behave with other cultures, which begins with the girls’ culture? This was my favourite book as a child. I think one should build a monument for unknown writers.

- *The Arkansas trappers*. This is an adaptation again, from a novel written by Gustave Aimard, a French writer in the style of Eugène Sue or Paul Feval and others. He wrote a lot of western novels, along with maritime and popular ones. His own life was nearly as dangerous as his heroes’ lives. The story takes place in Mexico and shows a real taste for unending plotting, mysteries and changes of fortune. It’s a drama, with Comanches this time.
- *The Mysterious Island*, by Jules Verne, the most-widely translated French writer. I liked the story, the balloon in the air, then the island they name after Lincoln. Without understanding it at the time, Verne

was rewriting Robinson Crusoe, until the discovery of Captain Nemo and the exploding volcano. It was long, a bit too didactic for the child I was, but it gave me the idea I might become a journalist like Gideon Spilett was.

- *The Pardaillan*, by Michel Zévaco. These novels are a series of cloak and dagger ones again, in the tradition of Paul Féval, Jean Rostand, Eugène Sue, Ponson du Terrail and Alexandre Dumas. It refers to the 15th century, but all the books in this series were published at the beginning of the 20th century. Zévaco was a Corsican. As Gustave Aymard had hardships in his youth and an adventurous life. His hero, Pardaillan, is constantly serving the poor ones. In fact, these novels are deeply political.
- *Osceola the Seminole*. Under the title *Le roi des Séminoles*, the French adaptation for young readers of this novel by Mayne Reid, was one of the most important books in my life. It is the first book I ever chose and bought. Forget Abenakis and Comanches, with this novel we are in Florida with Seminoles. The hero is a young half-bred Indian called Powel, who will become the Seminole warrior Osceola, a historical character. The book contains plenty of racial stereotypes, pure youngsters, a war for survival, dangers everywhere, noble friendship and love as a reward.
- *The Last of the Mohicans*, by James Fenimore Cooper. When I decided to read the original version of this very famous novel, which I had read only as an adaptation for young readers previously, I remem-

bered the name of Uncas and that he was Delaware, to be exact. The Delawares are one of the Mohican tribes. This story begins in the very middle of the woods. Forest here plays the part of a character, maybe even the main one.

These eight books have made the most significant effect on me. Three US ones, an English one, four French ones. The distribution is not intentional. A pre-historical novel, a sci-fi novel, a medieval tale, a cloak-and-dagger novel and 4 others related to the American West. I must confess my absolute favourite are *On the Wind of Fortune*, which is well-written and combines maritime and Indian aspects, not forgetting war, conflicts and a love affair; and *The War of the Fire*, because of its heroic and epic style.

### *Comments*

So... I have been fed with popular literature. It means I have been supplied mainly with narratives, I was nearly shocked as I realized my list did not include poetry, music or paintings.

I was also fed, however, with educative literature. Most of these books are initiation novels, not only translated, but adapted for a younger audience. They were written mainly for a male audience, gender stereotypes are everywhere. My parents were struggling rather hard to avoid not the gender stereotypes but the pure domination of US by-products. Zévaco for instance, as a French anarchist and free-thinker, or Jules Verne, as a French writer, counterbalanced the

Americans Cooper and Reid. I think all men in my family, my father, uncles and I, were reading Zévaco.

I have been fed with literature discussing mainly the American West, as a straight result of the superiority of the US tanks. (I sincerely thank them for that.) At my grandparents' family house, I could connect myself with my father and my two uncles' education, or with their sediments. They had built miniature models of American, British and German military ships or aircraft, they had read American comic strips, I was following in their footsteps. That is one aspect of being born just after WW2. The blood stained fun fair hardly finished, I quested beauty through a cloak, a mask, a sword, an aircraft, or a forest and its glades.

When it comes to the American influence, I must say Indians were everywhere and I hated the stupid cowboys. What I needed was... escape, and woods were the place for it, in my real life as well as in books. At the very end of *The Last of the Mohicans*, the good British soldiers win and the naughty Frenchmen lose, but I just did not mind at the time. My only hero was Uncas. I think I was connected to Indians exactly as, at school, I had been connected with the Gauls and the hairy Gaul instead of with the Romans and their capital.

When I read the English original version of *Osceola the Seminole*, a few months ago, I was totally surprised as I realised how much this literature, which I did not consider as high literature because it had nothing to do with James Joyce, Claude Simon or Georges Perec, was deeply alive in myself. Maybe nothing is as straightforward or all-encompassing as the process where a child receives his identity, through his readings, with such or such a character of

the stories he has totally absorbed. I was not making any difference between the stories I wanted to read the stories I wanted to live. Sometimes I think my real life is just a dream compared with the harsh reality of these stories. I was identifying myself with heroes, as I went on with writers who were literary heroes. Maybe my life is just the story of the successive compromises I had to make between my real and imaginary lives.

Through this small research, I am discovering to what extent I have been the son of French republican schoolmasters. For my parents, nothing was above knowledge, even religion or politics. They were militant teachers, standing first for the old standards, that were not that funny, then moving on to become post-68 libertarian pedagogues. But they were readers first, and they transmitted it to me, no doubt. What was legitimate in this family was knowledge and teaching. Creation, on the contrary, was not pertinent at all. Literature was produced in another world, a far and invisible one, somewhere around the very centre of the world, I mean in Paris.

I realize that I almost never wrote for children nor imagined to write a single adventure novel. There is one poor exception to the rule: a school manual called *J'écris un roman d'aventures* I write an adventure novel (Paris, Hatier, 1991).

I think all these experiences as a child and a reader have been severely repressed, back in my unconscious, by my French literature teacher ego. Even when I was writing the manual *J'écris un roman d'aventures*, in 1991, I did not realise how important this literature was for my intimate self.

I think the more I remember my early reading history

the more I am the writer I am. It confirms that writing and sharing about the genesis of one's connection with reading might be one of the ways for us to become more conscious of our not so spontaneously built literary norms. And to keep some distance with them of course.

*Does it affect the way I teach?*

It influenced my general attitudes as a teacher.

I am still enjoying collective adventures. I like leading groups. I like it better when it looks like a quest for survival, with obstacles and problems to be solved. That is why I have always been fond of small associations. I once was an Indian and an extreme-left militant and now I am involved in two rather small tribes (Aleph-Écriture and EACWP).

I still enjoy disappearing, towards the deep forests, in order to breathe deeper, and walk and settle down in a lonely shelter, then read and write. Probably it is always the same childish dream: loving one's mother and going on with the same conversation we had before I was even born, up to now, through the books...

*Alain André <alain.andre@aleph-ecriture.fr> is the vice-president of EACWP, in charge of pedagogical affairs. He organized the first EACWP International Pedagogical Conference in Paris (2012).*

*A former French literature teacher, he founded in 1985 the French writing school Aleph-Écriture <www.aleph-ecriture.fr>. He teaches creative writing, accompanies groups of young writers*

*involved in personal projects and is in charge of young creative writing teachers' training. He is one of the main contributors for the Internet collaborative creative writing French magazine L'Inventoire <[www.inventoire.com](http://www.inventoire.com)>.*

*As a writer, he has published novels (La Passion, dit Max / "Passion", said Max, Thierry Magnier, 2007, or Rien que du bleu ou Presque / Only blue or almost, Denoël, 2000), short stories, creative writing manuals, scientific papers in French language didactics and essays about creative writing and its teaching: Babel heureuse. L'atelier d'écriture au service de la création littéraire / Happy Babel. Writing workshops and literary creation, Syros, 1989 & Aleph-I-Kiosque, 2011, Devenir écrivain (un peu, beaucoup, passionnément) / Becoming a writer – a little, a lot or passionately?, Leduc.s, 2007 et Aleph/I-Kiosque, and Écrire l'expérience. Vers la reconnaissance des pratiques professionnelles / Writing about experience. Towards the recognition of professional practices, in collaboration with Mireille Cifali, Presses Universitaires de France, 2007 and 2012.*

## NOTES

1 Bandura, A., Auto-efficacité. Le sentiment d'efficacité personnelle / Self-efficiency. The feeling of personal efficiency, De Boeck, Brussels, 2002.

2 A good introduction to the history of this concept may be found in a French book: Savoir, apprendre, transmettre. Une approche psychanalytique du rapport au savoir, Françoise Hatchuel, Paris, La Découverte, 2005, 2007.

3 Barré-De Miniac, Christine, *Le rapport à l'écriture - Aspects théoriques et didactiques*, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, Lille, 2000.

4 *Archéologie du savoir / Archeology of knowledge*, Gallimard, 1969.

5 *Rapport sur moi*, Allia, 2002

6 *Coups de pompes*, Le mot et le reste, 2007.

7 *Écrire en pays dominé*, Paris, Gallimard, 1997.

8 *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse*, Raisons d'agir, 2004