

The Oulipo

<http://www.rogerdboyle.net/Oulipo/a.pdf>

Roger Boyle

April 23, 2021

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Caveat

I don't have a proper literary education

Oulipo

MATHEMATICAL GAMES

*The flip-strip sonnet, the lipogram
and other mad modes of wordplay*

by Martin Gardner

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lipogram

Experimental literature

'Experimental' literature has a distinguished history.



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Experimental literature

'Experimental' literature has a distinguished history.



Lawrence Sterne, 1713-1768

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Tristram Shandy

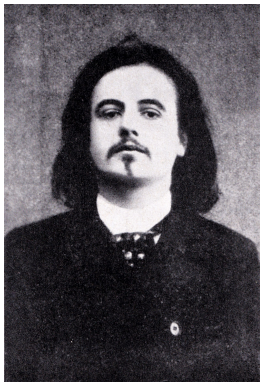
Published by Sterne 1759++

Tristram Shandy is filled with visual, typographical and compositing jokes – pages that are completely blank, pages that are completely black, misplaced chapters or chapters consisting only of their title, squiggly lines to indicate waving a stick, and much more besides.

https://naxosaudiobooks.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/96712_Tristram_Shandy.pdf

Oulipo

Pataphysics



Wikipedia

Oulipo

Pataphysics



Wikipedia

Alfred Jarry, 1873-1907

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Pataphysics

Pataphysics is '*a branch of philosophy or science that examines imaginary phenomena that exist in a world beyond metaphysics; it is the science of imaginary solutions.*'

Americal Heritage Dictionary

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Americal Heritage Dictionary

Ubu Roi, 1896

Act 3, Scene 8

Enter the Polish Army, singing a song.

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Pataphysics

During the 20th century, Pataphysics rode a tide of cultural enthusiasm for surrealism, the absurd, Dada, the outrageous

The College of Pataphysics *Collège de 'Pataphysique* was founded in 1948 with a string of influential members: François Le Lionnais, Raymond Queneau, Joan Miró, Man Ray, Max Ernst, Groucho, Chico and Harpo Marx, Marcel Duchamp . . .

Oulipo

Some members became disillusioned with the chaos Pataphysics seemed to imply. In 1960, Queneau and Le Lionnais formed the *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle* [Oulipo] which instead introduced rules (constraints) that their writing must follow.

Part of the rationale for this was that we don't hesitate to use constraints such as spelling, punctuation and grammar: why not introduce more?

Raymond Queneau (1903-1976)

A writer fascinated by science

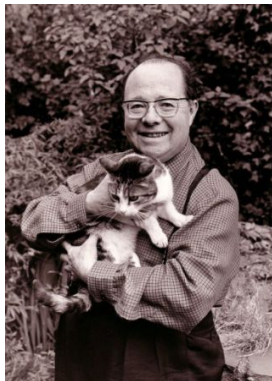


Wikipedia

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François Le Lionnais (1901-1984)

A mathematician fascinated by writing



<https://oulipo.net/fr/portraits-et-autres-documents-de-francois-le-lionnais>

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What it is . . .

'The Oulipo came to embrace a rigorous formalism, insisting that literary freedom could be unleashed not through the energies of chance, the unconscious, or automatic writing (à la surrealism) but through rule-bound procedures, severe formal restrictions, and mathematical constraints.

Oulipians follow the cunning design of Daedalus rather than the irrational urges of the Minotaur; as Queneau famously said, they are 'rats who construct the labyrinth from which they plan to escape.'

<https://hyperallergic.com/206802/rats-build-their-labyrinth-ouliipo-in-the-21st-century/>

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What it is . . .

According to the Oulipo, there is a big difference between rules (the things you have to do) versus constraints (the arbitrary things you choose to do). The group believed that language is always constrained by something be it time, material, experience, grammar, alphabet, stylistic conventions etc.

Since all writing is constrained, the group felt it best to recognize the existence of constraints and play with them to varying degrees, instead of simply ascribing them as intractable, universal forms.

<https://ouliposting.wordpress.com/rules-constraints-or-how-does-this-project-work/>

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Sonnets

Queneau: Cent Mille Milliards de poèmes, 1961

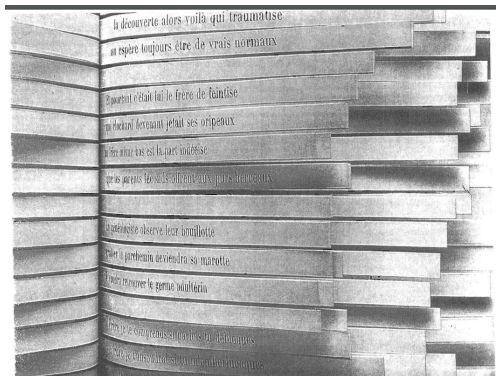
10 sonnets are laid on top of each other in a manner that allows lines to be interchanged.

This provides 'One hundred million million poems'.

An English translation exists - you can build your own sonnet(s):
<http://www.bevrowe.info/Internet/Queneau/Queneau.html>

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Sonnets



https://monoskop.org/images/a/a4/Motte_Warren_F_ed_Oulipo_A_Primer_of_Potential_Literature.pdf

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All roads lead to good intentions;
Time and tide bury their dead.
East is east and west is west and few are chosen,
The devil takes sailor's delight.
Once burned, sailors take warning:

<https://agnionline.bu.edu/essay/the-annoying-lacuna-one-unofficial-history-of-the-ouliipo>

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Time and tide save nine

His amiability in lending the justices the presidential yacht nearly led to disaster: with the entire Supreme Court on board for its annual picnic, the ship was caught in a violent summer storm and run against a sandbar. There, already foundering, it risked being broken up by the surf and wind. By good luck, in that very hour ebb changed to flood, and before further harm was done, the rising ocean lifted the boat and its august cargo into the milder waters of Chesapeake Bay

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L'Égal Français

a	cause	fat	lecture	palace	rude
ache	caution	fee	l'egal	pan	sale
ail	chair	fend	legs	pane	sang
allege	champ	fin	Lent	par	saucer
amends	chat	fit	lice	pare	scare
an	choir	fond	lie	pat	signet
ante	chose	font	l'imitation	pate	singe
appoint	coin	for	lion	pays	son
are	collier	forage	lit	pester	sort
as	comment	fore	lizard	pet	sort
at one	con	fort	location	Peter	sot
attend	confection	four	loin	pie	spire
audit	corner	fur	longer	pie	stage
averse	cote		l'oser	pin	stance
axe	courtier	gale	love	pincer	store
	crane	gate		pine	sue
Bade	crisper	gave	ma	plains	suit
ball	cure	gaze	mail	plate	super
ballot		gerne	main	plier	supplier
barber	dam	gort	mange	plies	
bard	D'ane	gourd	manger	plot	tale
baste	d'are	gout	mare	pour	tape
bat	d'art	grief	mariner	pries	tenant
be	defiance	grime	men	prone	the
beat	defie	groin	mien		these
bee	dent	guise	mince	rang	tiers
Ben	derive		mire	range	tin
bide	design	hair	miser	ranger	tine
bled	d'etain	hale	moult	rape	tint
blinder	dime	harder	mute	rate	tire
bond	dire	hate		rave	ton
bore	divre	have	n'est	rayon	toper
borne	don	here	net	rebut	tort
bout	don't	hurler	Nil	reel	tot
bribes	dot		noise	regain	tout
bride	dresser	if	n'ose	regal	tries
bril	d'ail		n'ote	rein	
butter	d'une	jars		relent	van
			oil	rend	vent
can		labour	on	report	venue
cane	edit	lad	once	ride	verge
canner	emu	laid	or	ripe	verse
cap	en-graver	l'air	ours	river	vie
car	enter	lame		robin	viol
carrier	entrain	l'ane	pain	rogue	
carter	ere	layer	pair	Roman	
case	fade	lecher	pal	rot	

Harry Mathews' short dictionary of "L'Égal Français"

Martin Gardner, Scientific American, 236(2), February 1977

001110

For a given text, substitute all nouns with the noun coming 7 later in the dictionary of your choice.

Or do the same with adjectives. Or adverbs. Or some number other than 7.

- In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth
- In the belfry, Godson created the hedgerows and the East

Try it! <http://www.spoonbill.org/n+7/>

Oulipean novels

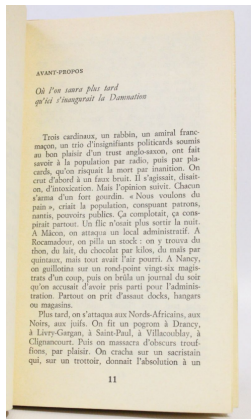
Many of the Oulipean ideas are simple tricks used to stimulate imagination.

Longer tracts exist: famously, Georges Perec wrote an entire novel [La Disparition] omitting the letter 'e' – the subject of the novel was the missing letter (a translation exists: *A Void*, Gilbert Adair, 1994).

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Le Disparition

Georges Perec, 1969



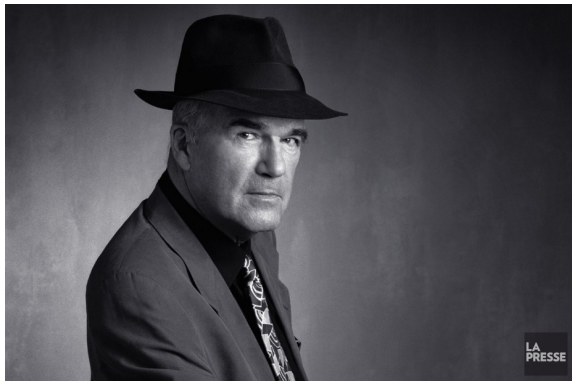
<https://www.edition-originale.com/en/literature/first-and-precious-books/>

perec-la-disparition-1969-61504

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Harry Mathews, 1930-2017

American writer and French translator



<http://www.quotationof.com/bio/harry-mathews.html>

Oulipo

Tlooth, Harry Mathews, 1966

'Tlooth is a picaresque tale of blue, blasphemous, black humor.

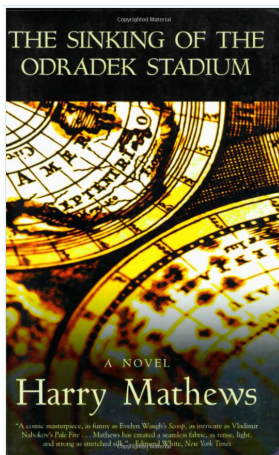
Nephtys Mary Allant is the bisexual catcher of the Baptist baseball team at Jackson-grad, a Siberian labor camp. We do not learn her name or sex until 10 pages from the novel's end. Mary had been a violinist until her former friend Evelyn Roak, a surgeon, needlessly amputated two fingers of her left hand.

Dr. Roak is also an inmate of the camp, having been sent there for selling her amputations to a delicatessen. She plays on a rival ball team. Mary tries unsuccessfully to kill her.

An infection in Mary's finger stumps prevents her from practicing dentistry, the profession for which she is in training.'

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The Sinking of the Odradek Stadium, Harry Mathews, 1971



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Michèle Audin, 1954–



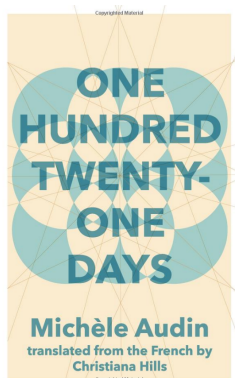
<https://www.francetvinfo.fr/culture/livres/roman/>

[quot-cent-vingt-et-un-joursquot-le-premier-roman-reussi-de-la-mathematicienne-michele-audin_3341727.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/culture/livres/roman/quot-cent-vingt-et-un-joursquot-le-premier-roman-reussi-de-la-mathematicienne-michele-audin_3341727.html)

A professional mathematician, specialising in symplectic geometry. *00/1/00*

121 Days, Michèle Audin, 2015

Cent vingt et un jours



cf. *Les 120 Journées de Sodome*, de Sade, 1785.

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Diolch yn fawr

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