The Literary Canon in Creative Writing through the perspective of the Critical Model

El canon literario en la escritura creativa a través de la perspectiva del model crítico

El cànon literari en l'escriptura creativa a través de la perspectiva del model crític

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Abstract

The paper aims to investigate the relationship between creative writing and the literary canon. The main question is whether the Western canon can be a source of knowledge and an occasion for experimentation. It is vital today that Creative Writing emerges as a public discourse that intervenes in the public sphere on severe political and social issues concerning contemporary societies. It is also important to turn his gaze to the work itself, its poetics, and its ideology. Its new role presupposes workshop poetics, which will collide with the established discourse of mass literature and reshape the ways of assimilating the cultural values of the past (knowledge) and the present (experience and reflection). In the paper, we propose a new inclusive pedagogic model of creative writing, which not only systematizes older models and links criticism, criticism on canonical works, genre theory, and creative writing to lead to experimental projects but also invites diverse perspectives and voices offering a promising future for the field.

Keywords: Creative Writing, Literary Canon, Pedagogy of Creative Writing, Experimentation.

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo investigar la relación entre la escritura creativa y el canon literario. La cuestión principal es si el canon occidental puede ser una fuente de conocimiento y una oportunidad para la experimentación. Hoy en día, es fundamental que la escritura creativa emerja como un discurso público que intervenga en la esfera pública sobre cuestiones políticas y sociales graves que afectan a las sociedades contemporáneas. También es importante dirigir la mirada hacia la obra en sí, su poética y su ideología. Su nuevo papel presupone una poética de taller que entrará en conflicto con el discurso establecido de la literatura de masas y redefinirá las formas de asimilar los valores culturales del pasado (conocimiento) y del presente (experiencia y reflexión). En este artículo, proponemos un nuevo modelo pedagógico inclusivo de escritura creativa que no solo sistematiza modelos anteriores y vincula crítica, crítica de obras canónicas, teoría de géneros y escritura creativa para dar lugar a proyectos experimentales, sino que también invita a perspectivas y voces diversas, ofreciendo un futuro prometedor para el campo.

Palabras clave: Escritura creativa, Canon literario, Pedagogía de la escritura creativa, Experimentación.

Resum

Aquest article té com a objectiu investigar la relació entre l'escriptura creativa i el cànon literari. La qüestió principal és si el cànon occidental pot ser una font de coneixement i una oportunitat per a l'experimentació. És fonamental avui dia que l'escriptura creativa emergisca com un discurs públic que intervinga en l'esfera pública sobre qüestions polítiques i socials greus que afecten les societats contemporànies. També és important dirigir la mirada cap a l'obra mateixa, la seua poètica i la seua ideologia. El seu nou paper pressuposa una poètica de taller que entrarà en conflicte amb el discurs establert de la literatura de masses i redefinirà les formes d'assimilar els valors culturals del passat (coneixement) i del present (experiència i reflexió). En aquest article, proposem un nou model pedagògic inclusiu d'escriptura creativa que no sols sistematitza models anteriors i vincula crítica, crítica sobre obres canòniques, teoria de gèneres i escriptura creativa per donar lloc a projectes experimentals, sinó que també convida perspectives i veus diverses, oferint un futur prometedor per al camp.

Paraules clau: Escriptura creativa, Cànon literari, Pedagogia de l'escriptura creativa, Experimentació.

1. Introduction

In designing a Creative Writing curriculum, a pivotal question arises: what is the role of Criticism in Creative Writing, and how do canonical works fit into the programme? While the term 'criticism' may not always be clearly defined, it is often associated more with literary theory than review/critique. Some scholars assert their independence as two distinct disciplines (Criticism and Creative Writing) in the curriculum, each serving unique functions and seemingly conflicting pursuits (Amato and Fleisher, 2001, p. 3; Freiman, 2005, pp. 4, 10; Earnshaw, 2007, pp. 71-76; Earnshaw, 2013, pp. 215, 218-219; Harris, 2009, p. 4; Harper, 2010, p. xvi; Pope, 2012, pp. 136-140). Others argue that incorporating criticism into the creative process is a valid pedagogical tool extending beyond the workshop method. It is posited that writers and critics approach texts differently, with distinct assumptions about the nature of writing and the purpose of commentary and analysis (Poovey, 2000, 109, 113; Parras, 2005, pp. 158-159; Atherton, 2006, p. 68; Ramey-Scheyer, 2007, pp. 43, 51; Wandor, 2008; Robins, 2010, pp. 7, 9; Cowan, 2011, p. 14; Welsch, 2015, pp. 3-4). However, this dichotomy is artificial. Until the mid-20th century, writers were the most influential figures in literary criticism, often leading creative movements. Renowned writers and critics have significantly shaped the definition of critical interpretation and analytical methods.

We argue that canonical masterpieces allow writers and Creative Writing students to understand the literary tradition despite the ideological issues they arise. Canonical oeuvres are living examples of aesthetic history transcending human mortality. However, many students or writers feel trapped when asked to study works of the canon. They deny studying works of high aesthetic value, although literary

classics are a source of knowledge about original proposals and the richness of language. The literary canon is a portion of literary memory resulting from the fusion of historical and idealized characteristics; it is not a catalog that students have to imitate but a basis for experimentation. Form, expressive choices, and content are dialectical elements of the literary work. They are intertwined with the norms of the subgenre as an artistic environment in which they evolve.

2. Toward a pedagogical model of coupling Creative Writing and Criticism

Postmodernism has turned literature into a commercial product without active discourse, erasing the earlier modernist distinctive boundary between 'high' culture and commercial art. Postmodern *everyday aesthetics* is identified with the aesthetics of the commodity and the narcissism of pleasure, which is placed on an anti-humanist subjective view of entertainment (Jameson, 1991, p. 54). Bourdieu's work on *cultural capital* ([1979] 1994) demonstrated the class distinctions latent between high culture, mass culture, and popular culture. It revealed how social institutions impose the culture of the ruling class as the only legitimate culture, reinforcing its recognition as an elite and legitimate government vector. Postmodern k*itsch* is an expression of cultural discrimination supporting class divisions. In this way, however, social inequalities are further reinforced, as inequalities in access to and exploitation of information and communication wealth are added to those related to the possession of capital and commodities (Leandros, 2000, pp. 147-184). The book and art acquired a utilitarian perception in the advertising frenzy of "commercial pulp" and mass literature. The entertainment is limited to conventional and comprehensible works, rejecting any other aesthetic perspective. Postmodernism, in its amnesia conditions, narcissistically projects as aesthetically radical anything that differs from the mass production of cultural products, even if such an aesthetic proposal had been submitted earlier. "Postmodernism encourages historical and artistic oblivion, with its worship of the imaginative mode of theory and instant intellectual consumption" (Eagleton, 1996c, p. 23).

In this context, we seek to examine the role of Creative Writing in the face of the dominance of commercial books. We argue that literature nowadays has to produce a new aesthetic and ideological discourse through poetry or novels and revive Criticism through the experience of the writing process. Can the discipline of Creative Writing create works of high aesthetic value that intervene in the *public sphere*? Can the writer constitute a public intellectual opposing the *hegemony* of power discourse expressed through the language of the media or anti-aesthetic formations? The *Critical model* is an appropriate didactic proposal for the creative writing workshop, including canonical works in its methodology. It aims to reposition literature in the *public sphere*, renewing the writer's social position.

It directs us towards a form of literary activism, where artistic endeavors engage with social occurrences and challenge conventional narratives and stereotypes.

3. Review of related literature

To answer these questions, it is worth looking at dynamic pedagogical models of Creative Writing. Researchers in teaching literature and Creative Writing have proposed many didactic approaches according to the goals set. Some have been put into practice, and others function more as suggestions, often outside the discipline of Creative Writing.

The *Mimetic model*, based on Aristotle and Horace, is the oldest. Many Creative Writing programs utilize the exercises of style and poetics imitation (*à la manière de*) (Anagnostou & Kotopoulos, 2015, p. 17). A disadvantage of this method is that homogeneity is reinforced in the workshop, and students may be led to a feeling of inadequacy (Donnelly, 2012, p. 99). With a different approach but with a common goal, *parody* allows more freedom for developing the *individual voice* (Panagiotidis, 2015), even though it stays very close to cultural tradition.

Another of the older methods is the *reading as writer* model, a term introduced by Dorothea Brande in 1934. Brande's proposal was inherent in the *close reading* of the New Criticism (Dawson, 2005, pp. 90-98). As a method, it seems to have originated with Walter Besant. In his essay *The Art of Fiction,* he advised that the novice writer should carefully analyze the works he/she/they considers very important in order to discover how the writer wrote the novel (Walter, 1884, p. 35). The idea of *reading as writer* treats the text as an organic unity and key to understanding the creative process as the result of aesthetic decisions (Cassill, 1962, pp. 9-10, 217). Nowadays, it is considered a formalistic method, which leads to the suppression of the historical, sociopolitical, ideological, and emotional dimensions of literature because it ignores the fact that reading is a *praxis* multifaceted and historically changing (Jarvis, 2011).

According to Vanderslice, in the last decade, the *Grand Tour model* has become an introductory, multigenre course widespread in university Creative Writing courses in the US (2004, p. 15). Many writing handbooks propose a kind of multigenre teaching model regardless its title (it was Vanderslice who named it '*Grand Tour'*), such as Minot's *Three Genres*, Diamond and Shaefer's *The Creative Writing Guide*, Estes and McCann's *In a Field of Writing*, and Jason and Lefcowitz's *The Creative Writing Handbook*. The model aims to cover the material around the primary genera relatively quickly (usually in an academic semester). Students navigate through different genres of the primary genera and are then asked to produce their work (Vanderslice, 2004, p. 16). It consists of an attempt to effectively teach fiction, poetry, and drama within a limited time. According to this model, the instructors divide

the course into distinct sections for each genre (one genre per month). Instead of these, Vanderslice proposed the *Concept-based Course* in which students are introduced to Creative Writing by studying nine basic art concepts over a fourteen (14) week semester (pp. 17-19). Students must submit two detailed writing assignments for feedback, several other reflection assignments, and a final portfolio. Dustin Michael's (2015, pp. 30-34, 74-81) *Wiggling Technique*, another didactic multiple-genre model that moves between poetry and prose, follows similar syllogistics. In practice, students will "wiggle" between poetry and nonfiction and turn in every direction within those forms until they get traction on an idea and take off moving again (p. 31).

Light proposed the Conception model, which incorporates principles from Bakhtin and Williams and seeks to raise students' awareness in two dimensions: at the reading level and in integrating and understanding their material during writing activities (Light, 1996, pp. 19, 21). In a similar syllogistic, Donnelly (2012, pp. 30-119) proposed a combinatorial pedagogical model influenced by Abrams' pedagogical theories, the Lacanian social approach, and the historical development of Creative Writing.

Some other models have been introduced into Creative Writing from different disciplines, and they link literature to language development and personal cultivation and less to creative writing itself. The Language model uses literature as a tool for language development. Literary texts teach structures and vocabulary (Bottino 1999, 211). The Cultural model – or Cultural Heritage model, according to Dawson (2005, p. 133) – and the Literacy model (Dawson, 2005, p. 49) are moving in the same direction. The Personal Growth model is oriented toward students' personal involvement with reading literary texts and focuses on actively using language as a means of self-awareness (Dawson, 2005, p. 133). It aims to develop taste and appreciate literary works (Hammad, 2012, pp. 105-106), choosing topics related to the students' experiences (Bottino, 2000, pp. 211-212). The Master-Apprentice Model (Berg, 2015, pp. 215-224), which aims at self-discovery, moves along a parallel path. The goal is for participants to be guided in exploring the writing process through personal experiences. The Creative Self-expression model is used more in adult classes as therapeutic self-discovery. Expressive writing and Therapeutic writing are placed in a similar direction. Although they are not pedagogical models, they have contributed significantly to models of self-expression and self-discovery. The first is based on life experiences and concerns about self-produced reflective writing. The other is proposed as art therapy and "follows a psychotherapy method for some condition" (Kotopoulos & Vakali, 2019, p. 1087).

Three other models of Creative Writing emphasize the writers' role and their work as a public intervention, introducing criticism into their pedagogy. The Craft model combines formalist criticism with art education (Dawson, 2005, p. 49), adopting the method reading as writer (Walter, 1884). Dorothea Brabde (1934, in Dawson 2005, 90-98) defined the latter as the kind of literary study that distinguishes Creative Writing from practical journalism training, on the one hand, and classical academic Literary Studies, on the other. The model is

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based on the belief that practical experience in writing leads to a more profound knowledge of literature and its appreciation. Close to this stays the Communication model, emphasizing the writer's societal position (Dawson, 2005, p. 149). The Integration model also uses the method of reading as writer and perceives the workshop as a means to establish a dialogue between the two sides (critique and writing). It allows students to explore the writer's intention, the reading response, the intertextual contacts, etc. (Dawson, 2005, pp. 161-162). McLoughlin (2008, pp. 88-100) extended the model by introducing practices of text scrutiny with tools of criticism that examine – with a reader focus – how the text works and if it can be improved (p. 90). The Political model promotes the openness of Creative Writing to political activism perspectives and suggests engagement with progressive ideologies. It trains students to understand the political responses of particular readers and shape a new aesthetic in which politics plays an important role, including globalization and its political and economic consequences (Knepper & Deckard, 2016, p. 3). The model reflects Sartre's theory of littérature engagée. The Avant-garde model encourages aesthetic engagement with Theory for the writer to produce an experimental work that challenges dominant lyrical structures, literary realism, and linear narrative.

However, none of the above pedagogical models has proposed a teaching corpus of works. Moreover, all of these emphasize the teaching process but do not address mass culture's dominance. They do not refer to the criteria the didactic material has to satisfy or the role the writer, as a public intellectual, is called to play. In an era dominated by popular and mass literature, the pedagogy of Creative Writing must set its teaching goals and criteria for selecting exemplary works.

4. Proposal for a Critical model

The *Critical model* responds to the artificial rupture between Creative Writing and Criticism. It offers an environment that facilitates the combination of artistic and critical pursuits. It is an integrated academic methodology in the discipline of Creative Writing, which systematizes the aforementioned didactic models. It focuses on the critical role of the writer and the need for experimentation in the

workshop (Chloptsioudis & Kotopoulos, 2023, p. 7). It places the writer in the *public sphere,* opposing the *hegemony* of power discourse expressed through the language of the media or anti-aesthetic formations. The term itself captures the double meaning of the *critical*, including the meaning of literary criticism as a genetic component and, simultaneously, the concept of very important and carefully analytical.

Combining literary Criticism and Creative Writing can promote literature as a public intervention. It supports students or writers in developing their skills through the study of literature and its historical evolution. It also helps to express the creative spirit and personal voice in the workshop. The fusion between the two can also be a barrier against the spread of popular literature. The objective is the emergence of new voices (homoerotic literature, feminist literature, ecological concerns, anti-globalization writing, etc.). The Critical model guides toward literary activism, in which the artistic work intervenes in social events and clashes with standardized discourse and stereotypes. The writer as academic sets a new aesthetic proposal that opposes both mass culture and its contemporary aesthetic trends. We suggest the term writer as academic in distinction from the probationary writer because of the knowledge he/she/they acquired within the university Creative Writing workshop. Probationary writers participate in private writing workshops of limited duration.

The *writer as academic* connects "a set of actions and at the same time embraces a reflection of both the activity and the result produced" (Kotopoulos, 2013, p. 519) through the need to submit a new aesthetic proposal that opposes both mass culture and its contemporary aesthetic trends. *Writers as academics* place themselves, guided by their aesthetics, in a field within the tangential limits of (a) the biological generation – as a carrier of socio-political quests – (b) the ideological *zymosis* of their time, (c) the literary generation – in which they can be integrated with conventional approaches as a self-conscious artistic entity that conflicts with previous ones – (d) the study of the history of artistic movements, (e) the contact with the aesthetic spirit of their time and the international artistic trends, (f) the knowledge of the Theory of Literature and (g) the exercise of literary criticism (writing reviews) (Figure. 1).

The challenge for Creative Writing is to clash with the stereotypical discourse of mass literature. The goal nowadays is for literature to cultivate critical discourse through fiction or poetry and to renew criticism with the writing process experience. In this proposal, literary criticism is included in the curriculum, not as a theoretical chapter, but as an area of practice and research for writers with the aim of *creative experimentation*. Its accomplishments can benefit *writers as academics* by evoking a combination of creative thought and critical discourse through experimentation.

Figure 1. Writer as an academic

The *critical model* opposes the de-ideologized postmodern 'porridge', which serves traditional stereotypes. Central to the proposed model are the social status of women, sexuality, disability, the natural environment, globalization, etc. The female body still has a central place in people's consciousness, especially at a time when news about violence against women dominates in many countries, and their status is degraded. That is why we need to re-approach feminine sexuality, women's social status, and disability through a new literary fresh language. A literary work about disability challenges existing cultural assumptions about bodily functioning. It resists the exclusive visibility of 'normality' and discrimination in favor of 'capable' individuals, highlights their paradox, and exposes the dangers of mass categorization defined by culture.

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As the aim of the *critical model* is the experimentation and involvement of writers in the life of their communities, nature in literature covers an important space (migration from the countryside to a big city, nature as symbolism, the relationship between human and natural environment). *Environmental literature* is an essential subgenre that de facto incorporates the natural environment into its rhetoric, revealing different anxieties and concerns. The *critical model* proposes the critical or experimental-

creative interconnection of anthropology, philosophy, and science in order to remind the reader that humans cannot ignore nature or admire it from afar precisely because it undergoes violent changes. It is necessary at the time to publish works that stimulate the ecological consciousness of the public, seeking environmental justice and a sense of respect for nature, putting forward the demand for the restoration of the balance between man and nature and the restoration of their relationship.

5. The literary canon in the *critical model*

The widely discussed term *literary canon* is one of the most successful concepts in Humanities and has been transferred to other fields of criticism (cinema, music). In literature, the term *canon* originally meant the set of texts that experts accepted as genuine works of an author (e.g., Shakespeare's canon) (Thompson, 1988, pp. 60-61). Later, it expanded to classify a group of literary works considered masterpieces or books selected by educational institutions as recommended study material. The modern idea of the canon arose during neoclassicism in search of a classical material with which the popular masses could be civilized to meet the needs of a modern nation-state. The hierarchies in the literary canon were constituted with inclusions and exclusions through a series of taxonomic schemes (generations, currents, schools, movements, trends) with the corresponding profits and the apparent losses of works and creators (Kotopoulos, 2015, p. 3).

The *Critical model* does not treat the literary canon with the linear dimension it once had but as a dynamic field of aesthetic proposals and a list of works of classical value. As *classics, we describe the literary masterpieces that transcend* time and place and become universal so that they're always read with the same pleasure, even if each reading community interprets them differently based on its needs and anxieties. The *classical* in the 17th century described the pattern of imitation, and in the following century, it was identified with the works of Greek and Roman antiquity (Compagnon 2003, 369). Gradually, it became identified with a work of art of higher aesthetic value. The word *canon* itself appeared in order to displace the honorific term *classical*, precisely to isolate the classics as an object of criticism (Guillory 1994, 6). Sainte-Beuve put forward perhaps the most complete definition of the *classic*: it moves between the individual and the universal, topical and eternal, local and global, tradition and modern, even if he refused to treat it as a standard of composition and style to which the writer must conform (Compagnon, 2003, pp. 368-369). The *classic* is distinguished by its timeless value: "It somehow transcends the limitations and peculiarities of the age it was written in, and thereby speaks to what is constant in human nature" (Barry, 2017, p. 20). It resists the history of literature and its sociological interpretation and "distance from experiential life" in pursuit of the "identity of the general, the idea, and the specific, the individuality" (Adorno, 2002, pp. 275-276).

The canon is the "literary Art of Memory," not a list to be studied with religious reverence. If a classic work does not require re-reading, it is unsuitable for the canon (Bloom, 1994, p. 17). Harold Bloom emphasized the aesthetic imprint of classical works, considering them unchanged over the centuries. For him, the Western Canon is a construction catalog of the masterpieces of all times. He denied the *literature of chaos* created by Deconstruction and political movements associated with literary studies, even though he remained open to a pluralistic world under the weight of humanistic tradition. Against the *School of Resentment,* he put forward an argument that referred to the values and positions of the critical tradition and defended the autonomy of the aesthetics. In his opinion, the debate on the broadening of the canon embodies the "power of positive thinking transferred to the field of academic institution" (Bloom, 1994, p. 35).

Unfortunately, many writers (and critics) feel trapped as they must comply with the canon. They avoid studying works of high aesthetic value, reinforcing *aesthetic oblivion*. As *aesthetic oblivion*, we define the phenomenon of writers refusing to study classical literary works or other masterpieces, thus becoming unable to identify the evolution of literary aesthetics (form and techniques). As early as Foerster's time, writers were criticized for not knowing works of classical literature because they remained loyal readers and faithful followers only of the movements of the time (Myers, [1996] 2006, p. 294). We argue that writers, away from the universal masterpieces of the past, are manipulated by the aesthetics of mass culture and condemned to a – conscious or unconscious – repetition of older aesthetic proposals.

The *Critical model* favors the literary canon as a living sample of the history of Reason, Ideas, and Aesthetics, transcending human mortal nature. It conceives canonical texts as "repositories of cultural values", the selection of which is identified with the "internal or external values of the work" (Guillory, 1994, pp. 22-26). The *Critical model* treats the canon as a source of knowledge of original proposals and language richness. It interprets the canon as a list of works that left their aesthetic imprint over time and are considered necessary for the *writer as academic* to understand the present and the past literary environment.

The canon is not a construction outside literature; beauty within literature arises from its originality in the form and the use of language. It is connected with the timeless grandeur of the works it contains, even though important texts have been neglected as undesirable. Although it seems simple to construct, it reflects concerns about language and form that are considered valuable in a culture or community. It results from the fusion of history and the characteristics of idealization. It is fragments of memory from the art of language, a storeroom of the artistic ideas of a *reading community* in a

certain period, a bridge that allows the *writer as an academic* to approach the evolutionary history of literature and aesthetic appraisal.

6. The Literary Canon as the expression of national ideals and power

Although many objections have been filed against the literary canon, the latter is an excerpt of literary history. No general theory of canon formation could predict or explain the *canonization* of any particular work without first identifying the unique historical conditions of the production and reception of that work (Guillory, 1991, p. 42). Many critics and academics have questioned its validity in the last fifty years due to its lack of diversity. Depending on the function it serves, it is considered a list of works with an intrinsic evaluative and hierarchical character that is presented (these and their writers) as paradigmatic and deemed worthy of being preserved and passed on as cultural heritage to subsequent generations from a typical list of works of high aesthetic value to a list of artistic models and books for educational use (Purves, 1991).

The canon was described as "an instrument of principled, systematic exclusion" that "reinforces ethnic and sexual assumptions" and serves "the mechanisms that keep cultural power in the hands of a conservative minority" (Gorak, 1991, pp. 1-2). According to Bourdieu's *literary field theory* (1993), it contributes to ideological legitimation. In Bourdieu's view, the characteristics of art are its preoccupation not with competition for commercial goods, political power, education, science, or athletics but with cultural legitimation (Gerhards & Anheier, 1989). The concept of the *literary field* implies that literary activity does not escape the constraints governing the social world, even though writers enjoy a certain degree of autonomy[1] (Sapiro, 2003).

A problem was submitted regarding the selection criteria of the works that comprise it. This became more evident in the heated debate in the 1970s with the *canon wars* (Backe, 2015, pp. 1-2). The European and US discussion focused on the (non-)equal representation of all social groups, genders, and nationalities. Out-of-canon works were perceived as the "excluded" and as "objects of historical repression", expressing values that are transgressive, subversive, and anti-hegemonic (Guillory, 1991, pp. 9, 20). However, if the ecclesiastical canon is specific and formulated by empowered authorities, the literary one is flexible and questionable without penalty. As a fundamental doctrine component, the ecclesiastical canon requires punishments; the literary canon is constantly transformed so that it is no longer an immutable body of texts on which academics or critics agree. It consists of a

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[1] The canon can also be considered as a system. Even-Zohar's (1979) polysystemic theory allows to describe the canon as a dynamic structuralism or a functionalism rather than a static, a-historical text-based approach to literature and culture. A literary work is not studied isolatedly but as part of a literary system, transcending social, cultural and historical framework, and affecting the other ones.

controversial and elastic body of conflicting literary material. In an era of fluidity of values and aesthetics, *canon wars* are presented as literary *democratization,* concealing their political basis.

Any canon discussion is essentially a discussion of history, society, culture, and ideology and requires a conscious effort to examine the complex structures underpinning political, economic, social, and cultural institutions (Luhar, 2014, p. 20). The confrontation around the canon incorporates notions of truth, legitimacy, and authority. The ideological background of the literary canon, as a means of legitimizing the status quo, was the focus of the debate. An elementary component is the utilization of white colonialism and male domination, history, and nationalism. Political expediency was one of the motives for introducing literary canon into education. Behind its teaching, there was a "characteristically Victorian mixture of class guilt over social inequalities, a kind of missionary zeal to spread culture and enlighten the world, and a selfish desire to maintain social stability" (Barry, 2017, p. 35). According to Mathew Arnold, teaching literature could "domesticate and humanize" the middle class that emerged in the industrial societies of the Western world (Compagnon, 2003, p. 361). He believed literature could provide entertainment based on texts of high aesthetics (in the Kantian sense) and awaken national sentiment. In the United Kingdom, F. D. Maurice, promoting the principles of *liberal humanism*, considered that the teaching of literature would function as a unifying link between the Queen's subjects, "maintaining the status quo and avoiding the redistribution of wealth" (Barry, 2017, pp. 34-35).

It is commonly accepted that the literary canon has been one of the primary ideological foundations of the national ideal. For example, in Greece, the literary 'canon' has been politically driven, focusing on national identity[2]. Greek literature played a crucial role in national homogenization through language and narrative, constructing a sense of cultural continuity and national uniqueness. The national narrative often included stereotypical representations of gender roles and community, reinforcing traditional gender discrimination and heroic male archetypes. People found common cultural identity in literature. The latter was a mass medium in which the reader, although alone when reading, feels that he/she/they is participating with all his/her/them compatriots in the same process as an imaginary (Anderson, 1983, pp. 216-217). In the 19th century, nationalism emerged in its early phase as cultural through literature and folklore, even before explicitly political nationalism appeared. "Culture was a means of educating the new cultural and demotic elites in the countries of the

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[2] We use quotation marks in the word canon because a Greek literary canon has never existed in the context it holds in other countries. It is only fragmentary – and often without a unified perception – collections of texts for teaching at school. Kastrinaki (2009, p. 231) argues that there was no concept of canon in Greek thought until very recently. No one had taken the trouble to define high work. Identifying a single list of works commonly accepted by the academic and educational community is impossible. The same view is suggested by Tziovas (Tradition or canon?, 2008) since there is no reference to a canon in Greek letters. Hontolidou (1989) mentions the word canon in quotation marks.

aristocratic monarchy" (Hobsbawm, 2013, p. 50). While political nationalism focused on achieving political autonomy, cultural nationalism was oriented towards cultivating national unity as a nationalism of a moral entity that provided a vision of identity, history, and destiny (Woods, 2016, p. 429). Romanticism and nationalism further linked the national identity with historical and folk traditions, promoting the concept of the national poet as the embodiment of the nation's spirit. Mass education and the informal literary canon helped consolidate the national idea, legitimizing it as an authoritative discourse. Writing for the first time in the national *language* of schoolbooks, newspapers, or other texts for official purposes was a decisive step in the process of national evolution (Hobsbawm, 2002, pp. 114-115). However, this also marginalized influential writers and the popular language. Institutionalizing literature in education aimed to preserve and transmit national values to future generations, embedding the national idea in the cultural consciousness through literature and folklore. This intertwined relationship between literature, nationalism, and education underscores the power dynamics inherent in the formation and perpetuation of the literary canon.

7. Literary canon and experimentation

The *Critical model* does not face the canon as a model of imitation but as a basis of comprehension and reinforcement of the critical approach for students and writers, as a basis for experimentation with the language, the structure, and the dynamics of the text, adapted to the social present. That is why the *personal canon* cannot be limited only to works of national literature but also extends to works whose aesthetic value is considered insurmountable. It may also include works left out of the *official canon* and masterpieces that have left their mark on literature despite the ideological issues that may arise. Since students and writers are acquainted with feminist critical theories and Gender Studies or anti-colonialist and anti-racial approaches, they are equipped to analyze works of the canon without adopting the stereotypes of the past in their text. They can identify points of criticism without rejecting works of high aesthetics.

Creative writing is not a static monument but a constant battle between the old and the new. *Writers as academics* and students have to come in contact with classic works or other masterpieces of each subgenre and identify – theoretically and creatively – their conventions to experiment with form, language, and narrative techniques. It will enable them to overthrow or even disrupt the existing conventions. *Creative experimentation* suggests works that balance aesthetically between the *familiar* and the *unfamiliar*. The *familiar* exists in the presence of conventions and is associated with the expected and the traditional; the unfamiliar undermines dominant aesthetic norms, as it promotes expressive innovation.

The need for experimentation and contact with the literary canon can lead to an aesthetic beauty, overcoming the commercial treads of the cultural industry. The experimentation based on the study of canonical works rephrases the history of aesthetics and recognizes the latter as the material condition of ideology.

The need for experimentation and contact with the literary canon can lead to an aesthetic beauty, overcoming the commercial treads of the cultural industry. The experimentation based on the study of canonical works rephrases the history of aesthetics and recognizes the latter as the material condition of ideology. This necessarily involves considerations of race, cultural identity, marginalization, sexual orientation and gender, class, age, etc. Aesthetics and ideology are inseparable. As part of a system of philosophy and not a specific theory, aesthetics is an ideological model built through linguistic functions (deMan, 1986, p. 8). The aesthetic is "the language of political hegemony, an imaginary consolation for bourgeoisie [and a] discourse of utopian critique" (Eagleton, 1988, p. 337). The canon is the point of convergence among unsurpassed aesthetic value and experimental writing, a border where fiction/poetry and literary criticism assimilate each other's ideas. An – extended – canon consists of the underwater part of the iceberg (Morley, 2007, pp. 2, 38).

The *Critical model* draws students' attention to the literary text's rhetoric. Students and writers can critically study works that have left their mark on literary history and will renegotiate them in the new ideological and social conditions. The experimental work, through the critical dimension and its conflict with the aesthetic norms (as embodied in the works of the canon), questions many assumptions of literary criticism, and mainly the narcissistic view that genres are a fixed value and that the text is waiting for the critic to interpret it. The *Critical model* leads students to a model of reading that highlights the role of aesthetics as a structural element of a literary work alongside ideology. Employing canonical works leads to a way of reading as an interaction between writing and criticism. *Creative experimentation* challenges entrenched notions of narrative norms, references, inscriptions of subjectivity, textual stereotypes of identity, and their involvement in ideology. It overturns the empirical understanding of language and proposes a new aesthetic, reminding us that in powerful writing, there is always conflict, oscillation, and contradiction between subject and structure (Bloom, 1994, p. 61).

8. The didactic proposal of the *Critical model*

In the *Critical model* methodology, students submit one critical and one creative text analogous to Dustin Michael's genre teaching proposal (2015, p. 77). In the first, they try to experiment creatively. Second, they examine and analyze the dominant aesthetic forms (features and poetics, characters, style, etc.) and genre conventions discussed in the workshop. To date, no specific teaching corpus has

been submitted for creative writing workshops. The *Critical model* methodology proposes not only national canon works but also other works that left a solid aesthetic imprint on world literature. At the same time, it proposes the expansion of the canon with projects that raise broader questions of a social and political nature. Entire projects can be taught, or even limited topics (e.g., the role of nature, dust, rain, social violence, etc.). Genetic hybridization and aesthetic innovation combined with selected themes are the elements that define *creative experimentation*.

Creative reading [3] aims at systematically incorporating different critical methods and providing models that help students find their style, build vocabulary, and emphasize the ideology of the text. This undoubtedly includes scrutiny of national identity or racial themes, marginalization, gender or sexual orientation issues, etc. By examining aesthetics, *creative reading* emphasizes both the work's reception and the stereotypes embodied in its poetics. It focuses on intersectional approaches and identifies the limitations and possibilities of canonical works as intrinsically entwined with phenomenological and epistemological perspectives. It supports the *writers as academics* with the *armor of the process*, allowing them to repeat the procedures and problems of writing as if they were

> **The Critical model methodology proposes not only national canon works but also other works that left a solid aesthetic imprint on world literature. At the same time, it proposes the expansion of the canon with projects that raise broader questions of a social and political nature.**

in the *office* of the studied writer. They participate in the writing procedure by looking for viable options, checking their functionality (possibly correcting), and evaluating the outcome. The *writer as academic* examines the conventions of genres and subgenres and proposes a new genetic geography for contemporary literature within the creative writing workshop.

The canonical works are tools of meaning, which creative writing students can approach as an evolving organism. Students, writers, and critics can use this framework to engage with previous literary productions. Any interpretation of canon works is linked to the expectations of the genre, influenced by the earlier readings. Since the *writer as academic* knows the problems of canon formation (ideological and other) and genre evolution, he/she/they studies the masterpieces with specific preliminary perceptions. He/she/they recognizes regularities or constants in the texts and specific common genetic characteristics (style, theme, form, etc.). Criticizing works of – an extended – canon and submitting a creative text help students understand the place of their work in the more extensive

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[3] Reading in a Creative Writing workshop is not an innocent activity, but a cultural practice linked to the social environment, as it constitutes a multifaceted and historically variable enterprise (Cooley, 2003:103). In bibliography we can find creative reading (Emerson, 1837), reading as a writer (Dorothea Brabde, in Dawson 2005, 91), and creative criticism (Spingarn, 1917; Siskin, 1983, p. 85; Myers, 2006, pp. 116-117). The critical model adopts the term creative reading, combining qualities of the above proposals.

history of literature (and through the lens of different schools and their approaches to the text). The students realize they are not confined to a sterile environment but participate in shaping and interacting with social movements. Studying and criticizing canonical works redefines their literary identity. The students must be aware of what preceded and prefigured their work of art: their cultural heritage, their literary environment, and the grammatical influences that they exercised (Sutcliffe, 1942). When a *writer as academic* criticizes a canonical work, he/she/they is led deeply to search for the power of discourse, tests insight, response, understanding, and perception of social relations and ideas within the work. Critical research on canonical works and *creative reading* is a way of entering the tradition to express the voices and visions of the present.

Genre theory can be leveraged in a focused and differentiated pedagogical course in an academic workshop, such as that suggested by the *Critical model*. The study of genres, as they were shaped by works of the (extended) canon, constitutes a form of focused knowledge embedded in the experimentation that promotes the proposed model. Many creative writing handbooks[4] and creative workshop teachers have noted the need to teach genres (Gross, 2010; Royster, 2010; Vanderslice, 2011; Mort, 2012; Wilson, 2010; Bertolini, 2010). Studying works of an extensive canon and their genetic conventions seeks to break down barriers between genres and styles. The benefit of a diverse group in the creative workshop is a richness that encourages experimentation as students explore different styles, genres, and thematic approaches. It is essential that students try new genres and not limit themselves to those that give them positive feedback. The critical study of canonical works is always an act of revision. It requires "study of what others have written in the relevant form or genre" and research, which

The *Critical model* emphasizes genre study because this knowledge opens up a new era in experimental work construction and renovates the critical discourse (with the writing experience) so that they can be read as symbolic acts

"proceeds through the discovery of what is to be written, beyond any original intention or conception" (Cook, 2012, pp. 101-103).

The *Critical model* emphasizes genre study because this knowledge opens up a new era in experimental work construction and renovates the critical discourse (with the writing experience) so that they can be read as symbolic acts. The *Critical model* prompts the *writer as academic* to proceed in combinations with other forms and genres and intervene in the public sphere. Through genetic

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4 The handbook Creative Writing in America: Theory and Pedagogy (1989), edited by Joseph Moxley, devotes four (4) chapters to writing in different genres, and similarly, The Handbook of Creative Writing (2007), edited by Stephen Earnshaw, contains eight (8) chapters on specific prose, five (5) sections on poetry, and six (6) chapters on various types of screenplays.
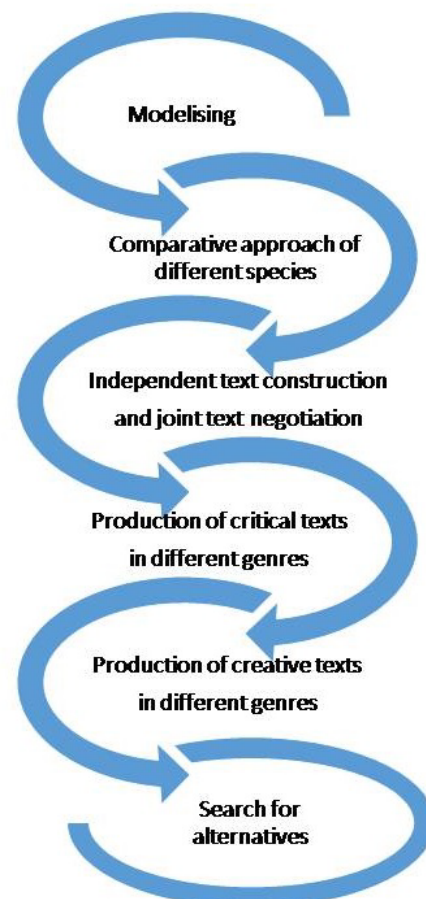
hybridization, he/she/they can subvert reader expectations by intervening in critical social issues as public intellectuals. Literature is renewed through new genres/subgenres, allowing writers to combine and transcend them by innovating. Contact with various genres forms such a cognitive framework, which acts as fertile ground for the intended experimentation of the critical model. Through the multiple forces of the *genre*, the students utilize the collective knowledge and approach the polyphonic field created by a text, meeting other voices of tradition.

Our teaching method, systematizing elements from previous models, includes six (6) steps (Figure 2):

1. *Modelizing*: The teacher approaches the genre by providing students with paradigmatic texts so that they can focus on *creative reading*. The aim is to explore the literary work and the genre as a *cultural text*, as well as its ideology, structure elements, and distinctive rhetorical features (vocabulary, structure, character analysis). Genres are modeled, and their basic (theme, form, etc.) or specific (poetic) characteristics are recorded using the social framework of text analysis.

2. *Comparative approach of different subspecies*: Two or three distinct genres are given with a shared content (e.g., crime story or immigration). The aim is to bring together the characteristics of each genre, identify the scenes and action, determine the patterns of the genre, and analyze these patterns within specific scenes and throughout the plot, as a reader's reception and as an ideology of the text. In poetry, paradigmatic texts of different subgenres can be given for students to examine how a theme is utilized in different subgenres

Figure 2. The six (6) steps of Critical model

(e.g., death, migration, rain), assessing their function in a different context or common poetics (e.g., the rhetoric of nature). The aim is to gather the characteristics of each sub-genre by comparing and identifying their differences, defining the genre patterns, and then analyzing these patterns as a reader's reception and as an ideology of the text. An essential difference between critics, writers, and *writers as academics* is (in addition to the scientific approach to knowledge) the importance they give to the many ways a work can be read and interpreted.

3. *Independent text construction and joint negotiation*: Students compose their own texts based on shared knowledge. The aim is not to imitate but to gradually integrate new elements from other genres and subgenres into the creative text. Students may be asked to transform a text (their own or a fellow student's) into another genre. For example, a murder can be investigated in different genres, mixing the crime plot with conventions of other genres (historical, science fiction, fantasy literature, etc.). Such hybrids, balancing on the conventions of subspecies, can gradually lead to experimental works. These texts will later be discussed in the workshop in terms of understanding the conventions and making a critique. A vital component of the workshop method is the critical dialogue that develops in the classroom and analyzing a work into its parts.

4. *Production of critical texts in different subgenres*: Students submit their critical texts, analyzing canonical works and other masterpieces and discussing their conventions and poetics to identify the genetic contacts in a literary text and its originality. It is an informal study of Comparative Literature as a stage of student education. The ultimate goal is the difference from comparative research since the proposed model leads to critical text or creative. Progressively, students can study various texts chosen for this purpose and analyze them, focusing on their conventions.

5. *Production of creative texts in different subgenres*: At an advanced stage, students are asked to write texts in different subgenres with the same central point. For example, the theme of the recent pandemic can be developed through a variety of poetic subgenres (confessional poetry, protest poetry, lyrical composition, anti-elegy, etc.) and novel or short story subgenres (dystopian novel, science fiction, historical or crime novel, etc.). Similarly, students can submit creative texts on decay, disability, or organ removal. Especially, mastectomy, and erectile dysfunction or prostate removal are directly linked to sexual identity and stereotypical gender self-identification. Such texts can contribute to the public debate on the promotion of consequences of old age and a dysfunctional body and, of course, sexual weakness combined with social codes. This stage is included in the *Critical model* as a step between creative writing and the systematic exercise of literary criticism. The suggestion that students write creative texts in various genres does not follow the logic of *mimetic model* or *parody*. Students should practice the (sub)genres, as they have developed up to their days, so that through experimentation, they gradually contribute to the evolution of literature, connecting poetics, convections, and forms.

6. *Search for alternatives*: As a final stage, the teacher's teaching approach will proceed to file alternative solutions. The proposed pedagogical method should be oriented towards criticizing the ideology of the works. The aim is for students to practice looking for alternative solutions through

crossing kinds and to examine the introduction of new elements into the structured boundaries of the genre.

9. Conclusion

As discussed throughout this paper, exploring the literary canon within the context of Creative Writing underscores the integral role that canonical works play in bridging the gap between literary criticism and creative expression. The *Critical model* proposed herein advocates for a pedagogical approach that harmonizes these two domains, enabling a symbiotic relationship that enriches students' creative and critical capacities. Central to this model is the recognition that canonical works serve as a vital resource for understanding literary traditions and fostering innovative experimentation because of their historical and ideological complexities.

The *Critical model* treats canonical works as an opportunity to clash with the standard discourse in the context of experimentation. Engaging deeply with these texts, students can appreciate the aesthetic values that have shaped literary history and critically interrogate the ideological underpinnings that accompany these works. This dual engagement facilitates a richer, more nuanced approach to creative writing beyond mere imitation, promoting a space for critical dialogue and creative transformation. The methodology proposed allows the *writer as academic* to identify the innovations of a work, the aesthetic limitations, and the ideological concerns it reflects. For this reason, the literary canon is a valuable tool for codifying the evolution of genres. Understanding them as an information structure or a dynamic of meaning can serve as a bridge to one of the most essential tools of poetics (Frow, 2007, p. 1631). The contact with canonical works is the primary axis on which the *writers as academics* can move. They must be aware of them to overturn existing literary conventions, as the relations of canon and exception are antithetical or dialectical – the dynamics of art lie in the rupture with its past. Literary work acquires artistic value when it deviates from the canon and breaks the conventions recorded in works of the canon (Fowler, 1979, p. 100; White, 2003, p. 599).

The *Critical model* addresses the contemporary challenge posed by the dominance of mass literature. By positioning the writer as a public intellectual, this approach seeks to elevate the discourse around creative writing, aligning it with broader social and political issues. This perspective is crucial in cultivating a new generation of writers who are not only skilled in their craft but also aware of their potential impact on public discourse and cultural production.

In conclusion, integrating the literary canon into creative writing through the lens of the critical model offers a promising pathway for advancing the field. It fosters an educational environment where critical and creative processes are mutually reinforcing, paving the way for a dynamic and engaged literary

community. This approach enriches the individual writer's development and contributes to the evolution of literary traditions in response to contemporary cultural and ideological contexts. As such, the critical model represents a significant step forward in Creative Writing pedagogy, advocating for a future where literary creation and critical inquiry are deeply intertwined and mutually supportive.

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