Creative Writing in the Threshold

Narratives on Point of View and Perspective, Intertextuality, Place and Setting, and Metaphor

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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Research Degree (PhD) at Falmouth University

in collaboration with
University of the Arts London

April 2025

Creative Writing in the Threshold: Narratives on Point of View and Perspective, Intertextuality, Place and Setting, and Metaphor is a thesis that combines academic and creative writing to investigate narratives by tutors in Ibero-American academic institutions. Accompanying my research is a handmade artist's book that calls itself *The Diviner*, who intervenes in my chapters in the form of marginalia, expanding on my qualitative research with autoethnographic and metafictional references. Underpinned by an epistemology of *between-standing* – e.g., learning from the liminal space or "threshold" between creative writing, pedagogy and research –, my *go-finding* approach defines the sought encounters with the Other, between disciplines and modes, and with other languages via literary translation. Tutors' narratives in translation are curated to weave a tapestry of different perspectives on four key threshold aspects that apply narrative concepts to creative writing pedagogy: point of view and perspective, intertextuality, place and setting, and metaphor. Reframing the tutor of creative writing as a narrator, I explore what these aspects reveal about method but also the narrative choices that they imply: how tutors craft their narratives, how they manifest their cognizance, where they situate themselves on the psychic distance spectrum, and what tone they adopt (Chapter One); what criteria guide their selection of exemplary literary works (Chapter Two); how tutors and students are affected by place, and how tutors design their settings (Chapter Three); what the workshop as a metaphor means to them, and what other metaphors they associate with creative writing as an institutionalised discipline and as an artistic practice (Chapter Four). Foregrounding plurality, subjectivity, unfinishedness and aesthetic coherence, this thesis performs its findings as much as it narrates them, inviting readers to reimagine research in the field of creative writing studies.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to the Postgraduate Research community at Falmouth University. My special thanks to Professor Lee Miller for infusing the programme with inexhaustible wisdom, energy and enthusiasm, and for nurturing the culture of gentleness passed on by Professor David Prior.

I extend my thanks to Professor Prior and all those involved in the decision to award me a Doctoral Studentship, which has granted me opportunities beyond anything I could have foreseen.

Thank you to my Director of Studies, Dr David Devanny, and my supervisors Dr Jennifer Young and Dr Adrian Markle, for trusting me to shape my fieldwork and broader *artisanal* PhD experience. And crucially, for your patience and support during its intense final stages. David, thank you for being just as excited as I am – it has made all the difference.

To my peers, who have taught me so much about practice as research in all arts and disciplines, and whose valuable contributions made me look forward to our Spring, Summer and Autumn Symposia every year.

Katy Shannon, Heidi Ball and Kerry Taylor, you have been brilliant at dealing with all sorts of headaches caused by my unleash imagination: risk assessing "Cuba", customs, linguistic spot checks… – you name it. Thank you for the joyful atmosphere, too. I am also grateful to Sean Newton for looking out for me after hours on Woodlane campus and never losing patience whenever I set off the alarm.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to all the tutors who shared their time and knowledge so generously. I have learned so much from your interviews, and it has been a delight to go back and listen to them, and read them over and over again. Thank you for your wonderful voices – I hope I have done justice to them in translation.

Many of you have gone above and beyond in more ways than I can count. In the order I have met you: Carolina Zuppo Abed, Mara Pastor, Pilar Vega Rodríguez, Alejandra Flórez, Óscar Godoy Barbosa, Carlos Arámbulo, Márcia Ivana de Lima e Silva, Leonardo Valencia – I cannot wait to reciprocate your kindness.

Leonardo, your insight came at a key turning point: I followed the advice you give your students and did not try to "fix" what would become this thesis's most distinctive feature. I stayed with the trouble, instead. Carol, thank you for your reflections on curatorial research, and hours of meaningful conversation. It has been an honour to walk alongside you as our doctoral journeys crossed paths. I am so grateful to Manuel Portela for making this encounter possible.

I am forever indebted to all the people who have started a sentence with some version of "Oh, then you have to speak with…" and gone on to introduce me to their colleagues, publishers, friends and trusted contacts, near and far. There is a strong serendipitous component to *go-finding*, but so much depends on people weaving thoughtful connections – on site, online, transnationally and transculturally.

Thank you to all the artisans who are recrafting publishing as a practice of mutual support and resistance: Lissette Rolón and Beatriz Llenín (Editora Educación Emergente), Nicole Delgado (La Impresora), Daniel Galeas (Kikuyo Editorial), Leandro Jacob (Rescate), Eric Schierloh (Barba de Abejas), Yanely Esquijarosa (Cuadernos Papiro), E Tonatiuh Trejo (Esto es un libro), and Alejandra Flórez, Margarita Rosa Lozano and Jennifer Chavarro (Makerspace and Macedonio Editorial). You have mended some old wounds and welcomed me into a truly wholesome place. Tona, thank you for your wisdom and your beautiful lab *El libro no existe*. Aleja, Magui and Jenn: thank you for all the ma(kin)g, and the light you have cast onto this chapter of my life. *The Diviner* is for and because of you.

To my beloved family and friends, thank you for making me feel loved and safe no matter where I am. Mamma e papà, grazie per il tifo, sempre. Per tutti i "ma sì che ce la fai" e i "non avevo dubbi".

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Prologue

A ten-minute drive away from the campus of Uninorte in Barranquilla, Colombia, there is a long strip of land separating two major bodies of water. Someone local will drive you on their motorbike along a disused railway track until the path between the fishermen's barracks gets too narrow. Then, you will be on foot, treading on wet rocks and debris for an hour or so. As you walk, you will see the coffee-coloured, tranquil waters of the Magdalena River on your right; and the bright blue, agitated waves of the Caribbean Sea on your left. If you make it to the end of the dike, three or four fishermen will be sitting on the rocks, chatting and drinking beer. In front of you, the water will behave strangely, and its colour will not be blue or coffee. It will be somewhere between. Ash-coloured, perhaps, like the name of this place – Bocas de Ceniza, "mouths of ash" – suggests. This is a liminal place. A place of encounter between the river and the sea; and between the water and the land. A threshold.

Creative Writing in the Threshold is the title of this PhD project, which is situated on the edge of the field of creative writing studies, exploring the threshold between creative writing, its pedagogy and research. To do so, I propose to investigate four narrative aspects – point of view and perspective, intertextuality, place and setting, and metaphor – in the teaching practices of tutors of creative writing in Ibero-American academic institutions. The form that I have chosen to present this research is liminal, too, as it blends academic and creative writing, through a number of aesthetic, stylistic and narrative choices.

Let me show you around the threshold so you can familiarise yourself with the place. At the beginning, even if the titles are slightly different, the overall structure of this thesis should look familiar: this is your introduction, followed by a literature review, my methodology and four main chapters. At the end, you will encounter a creative-critical piece and a speculative manifesto in place of a conclusion. It is an open-ended journey from more academic to more creative writing.

Each chapter is introduced by a cover page featuring an argument (in smaller, Lusitana font) and an index, followed by the "Proliminium", an introduction that contextualises the chapter alongside relevant primary and secondary literature. Chapters are divided into two parts, each collecting several thematic "passages", in which tutors' narratives – in *italics* – are interwoven with my own. The titles of these passages – in ***bold italics*** – are written so that they read like a complete micronarrative on the cover page. At the end of the chapter, a part titled "In the Threshold" presents some final considerations.

Aside from the formatting specific to the argument, the tutors' narratives and the passages' titles, the overall thesis employs academic conventions, citing long quotes in smaller font, justified, and with wider margins. Referencing follows Falmouth University's own system, which is based on Harvard, author-date; however, tutors are introduced by their first names, followed by the short name of their university and city – e.g. Pilar (Complutense, Madrid) – with the academic reference following their quote, e.g. (Vega Rodríguez 2023). Another deviation from a standard convention is the use of 'single quotes' to highlight metaphors and words related to a certain metaphor's semantic field instead of small caps or italics (the latter already being used for tutors' narratives, emphasis and words not in English): e.g. if writing is cooking, ideas 'simmer'; if writing is gardening, they 'grow'.

This thesis is accompanied by a handmade book that calls itself *The Diviner*, a metafictional narrator intervening through marginalia and expanding my qualitative research with autoethnographic and metafictional references. It is composed of nine booklets: Portraits (P1 and P2), Landscapes (L1, L2 and L3), Lecture Diaries (LD), Workshop Diaries (WD), Reading Diaries (RD) and The Diviner Song Book (SB). References from The Diviner will cite the booklet's initials followed by the page. References from any of the *nó(s)* zines attached to *The Diviner* will cite the author followed by the number in the collection, e.g. *Cortázar #3*.

The Diviner has its own chapter, in the form of a short creative-critical piece titled "I Am the Diviner", typed in Asul, also used in the handmade book. As *The Diviner* is very keen on reminding you every now and then, its purpose is to exist alongside this manuscript, rather than be read in its entirety. As you are soon to find out, the book will speak for itself quite extensively.

Finally, before summarising what each chapter is going to cover, I would like to introduce myself and explain how this thesis has reached its shape.

I was born, raised and educated in Italy, in a Sicilian family migrated to Brianza, in the north. My dad was brought up in the mining communities of the north of France, so he is bilingual French; my parents spoke Sicilian at home.

Aged nine, I told my mum I wanted to be a poet. At twelve, I wrote a novella about Italian students going on a school trip to Stone Henge (although it was set in Cornwall, based on a confused notion of Arthurian geography). I saved it on a floppy disk which I gave to a friend whose mum taught Italian, though I do not remember what she said about it. Something kind, probably, otherwise I would not be here.

I kept writing and submitting poems and stories to literary prizes all throughout secondary school, winning a few of them and travelling to a lot of places to collect them. I liked the travelling part the most. Straight after school, I did the admission exam to study dramaturgy at Paolo Grassi, where I got laughed at for being too young.

So I attempted the admission exam for Scuola Holden, Italy's most established creative writing school. I was admitted, but with no scholarship, so instead I signed up to a very informal workshop in the cold, dark and damp basement of the Centro Culturale di Milano. At the time, I was also studying Spanish C2 at the Instituto Cervantes, and one of my workshop peers was an elegant Spanish lady sharing my favourite Argentinian author's surname. She pulled a very sceptical face when I asked her if she thought I could learn to write creatively in a second language.

The cultural centre was one street away from piazza Alessandro, where one year later, I would enrol in a BA in Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Milan, while working full time in a posh soap shop and taking an evening course in literary translation. After graduating, I studied Literary Translation at the University of East Anglia, where a mystical light surrounded our peers on the MA in Creative Writing. After my MA, I applied for Scuola Holden, again, with no luck.

With a project combining literary translation and writing, I searched for a PhD, instead, while still selling posh soaps and making extra cash busking on the streets – I am a musician, as it will emerge from many references to songwriting –, and translating books into Italian in exchange for the proverbial peanuts.

In 2015, I received a PhD offer from Victoria University in New Zealand, but with no scholarship, so I turned it down. Then I wrote my first novel, began to work in public libraries, and applied again a year later. By then, Brexit had happened. In 2016, I turned down a fully funded PhD in New Zealand, afraid I would not be allowed back into Norwich, UK – a place that was beginning to feel like home.

In 2018, my debut novel *Amarantha* was published by an Italian indie publisher, who instead of paying me an advance, charged me for author copies. He disappeared after signing my contract, and I was left to organising and financing my own tour with a live band playing the original music I had composed for the book. Six months later, my publisher came into the public spotlight for some serious sexual allegations, and I decided to withdraw my book, buying all copies from the first print run out of my own, already empty, pockets.

Meanwhile, just as I was settling in an exciting new job in public libraries, COVID sent me back to northern Italy to look after my parents. During the pandemic, Scuola Holden launched a one-year Ryanair-version of their prestigious course, one I could finally afford. Reader, it was not a good match. But I thought that the experience would make for an interesting case study, which I published on the *Journal*

of Creative Writing Studies. I was particularly intrigued by the literature that tutors tended to use (overwhelmingly Anglo-American, always in translation) and by the "workshop method", which I started to research independently.

A year later, a Norwich-based publisher offered to translate and publish *Amarantha*, despite it being virtually unavailable in Italy, and Norfolk libraries invited me as a writer in residence, facilitating workshops in isolated communities. In the evening, I trained as a tutor of creative writing at Escuela de Escritores online, in Spanish, teaching Creative Writing in English as a second language online for a number of different institutions… and still applying for PhDs.

I applied to my alma mater, the University of Milan, where a confused panel was not convinced creative writing could be taught in the first place, so why bother researching its pedagogy. I applied to universities in York (twice), Edinburgh (twice) and UEA in the UK; Northeastern, Indiana, Connecticut and Hawaii in the US, at Victoria in New Zealand (for the third time), and British Columbia in Canada, until an offer came from the place where, somehow, it all began, Cornwall – the real one, not the one I had imagined when I was twelve.

Over numerous drafts, my project proposal defined itself as an investigation of the literature of creative writing used in Spanish-language academic institutions.

But at Falmouth, something changed. Being enrolled in a multidisciplinary programme with peers from other arts made me rethink my methodology and my research interest altogether. Many of my peers were looking at their own practice, while I was mostly looking at literature. Reflecting on my own experience, the one you have just read about, I found that many more aspects of practice and pedagogy interested me: creative writing as a privileged, prestigious, and not very accessible field, especially in academia; the widely spread bad practices of publishing; the relationship between creative writing and literary translation; workshop experiences and how they vary across languages; and the impact of language and place on my own writing.

What did not change from my original proposal was the aim to investigate other tutors' practices rather than my own; so I narrowed down my topic to three narrative aspects – "perspective", "intertextuality" and "place" – and set off for a nine-month international field trip. I arranged research visits, interviews and training, while studying Portuguese so I could include Portugal and Brazil, too. Many universities enthusiastically accepted all types of collaborations, allowing me to train their staff (Sagrado, Central, Vera, Andina) and host writing workshops with their students (Coimbra, Complutense, Central).

On site, I was doing what a writer does, keeping my eyes and ears open, and recording pretty much everything. Talks, lectures, workshops, events, trips to local museums, conversations with friends and strangers, countless mishaps and accidents, plus all the literature I was discovering because it was being recommended to me, or because I found myself by chance in the city where a major book fair was happening (twice). I have called my approach to fieldwork *go-finding*, and you will read more about it in the Methodology chapter.

By the end of my fieldwork, I had interviewed 63 tutors in 12 academic institutions, all of them on site, with only two exceptions – one of which caused by the intense flooding affecting the south of Brazil days before my visit to PUCRS, Porto Alegre, was due.

With a total of just over 73 hours of interviews and 1600 pages of transcripts, plus 90,000 words of field notes, I had more than enough material to investigate the three aspects I had based my interview questions on. A fourth one, "metaphor", emerged along the way, alongside the idea of submitting my research with a physical artefact, inspired by my residency at the artisanal and community publisher Makerspace (Central, Bogotá) and countless conversations with artisanal publishers in book fairs.

In my first draft, I had 30,000 words more than I was allowed; so, I pulled out two substantial parts, one about secondary literature, and one about the relationship between programmes and their local publishing industries and wider cultural fields, which I hope to rewrite as articles, or include in a book-version of this research.

So, this, reader, is where we are at. And this is what is coming up next.

Surveying the Landscape

This is a contextual review of the field of creative writing studies, at the edge of which this research is situated. It outlines some of the key anglophone works of the "literature of creative writing", starting from early creative manuals to the emergence of a dedicated studies field, and its predominant concerns, particularly around "creative writing lore" and the "workshop".

Then I look at the wider international landscape with key works in English about second-language creative writing and non-anglophone contexts in Asia, Italy and the Southern Cone; and the most recent Ibero-American scholarship. Moving on to the political and social turn of creative writing studies, I talk about contemporary discourse around inclusive and anti-racist practices.

Looking into other fields that have educated and informed my approach, I write about some key works in pedagogy and cognitive linguistics to draw on Conceptual Metaphor Theory and reflect on how metaphors have been used to describe creative and pedagogical processes. I then introduce threshold concepts and propose the threshold as the metaphor upon which my methodology is based.

Threshold: A Methodology of Encounter

This chapter presents my methodology, which brings together methods and designs from academic and creative writing. Scholarly-based, qualitative research methods like interviews and autoethnography encounter creative methods, which are contextualised within arts-based research and, more specifically, "fiction as method".

After defining the epistemological framework of *between-standing* and my approach to qualitative and autoethnographic research as *go-finding*, I go through the set of stylistic and narrative choices that emerge from the threshold: the overall principle of "congruence of form and content" that allows me to apply aspects of creative writing (point of view and perspective, intertextuality, place and setting, and metaphor) to its pedagogy, drawing from existing works of fiction and fictional secondary sources, world-building through language, the use of multiple perspectives in translation, metafiction and librodiversity.

Chapter One: Point of View and Perspective

The first chapter investigates point of view and perspective in tutors' narratives. In the Proliminium, I contextualise these aspects within creative writing scholarship and relate them with lore, and I discuss the use of multiple perspectives in more depth. In the first part of the chapter, "Knowledges", I address the question of what knowledge (or narrative) tutors bring to class and where it comes from. In the second part, "Cognizance", I focus on how this knowledge is manifested based on different types of narrators found in literature: omniscient, partiscient (aliquiscient and equiscient), and ignorant, linking to Rancière's work *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. Then I explore one specific narratorial choice, John Gardner's notion of "psychic distance" to address the tone and the distance that tutors place between themselves and their narrative, and themselves and their students.

Chapter Two: Intertextuality

Introducing "reading as a writer" as a core method to teach creative writing, I focus on the criteria that guide the tutors' choices of their literary repertoires. These range from pedagogical purpose to personal taste, touching on key issues like the literary and creative writing canon, and multiple canons, local vs global literature, literature in translation, contemporaneity and hybridity. The first part of the second chapter,

"Palimpsests", focuses on criteria that are seemingly more traditional; while the second part, "Mosaics", has a distinct focus on diversity, closing on some reflections on two additional suggested criteria, "librodiversity" and "bibliodiversity".

Chapter Three: Place and Setting

Place is approached from a variety of different perspectives, coming from human geography and creative writing, and defined as a space that comes with meaning. Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire's principle of "reading the world to read the word" is used to introduce the first part of this chapter, "Reading the World", where I look at how place affects creative writing practice and pedagogy on different scales: from wider geographies to linguistic and cultural dimensions, including some reflections on the margins and the widely discussed issue of "cultural appropriation". In the second part, "Writing the World", I look at how place emerges from students' writing in their choice of "setting", and how "setting" is also the space created, intervened and rewritten by tutors in their online and on-site practices.

Chapter Four: Metaphor

In this chapter, I build on previous research on the metaphors of creative writing and deconstruct the "workshop" as a metaphor. Addressing the question of what makes a workshop a 'workshop', I point out how it is seen by tutors as a place for 'building', 'repairing', 'practising' and 'experimenting', each of these interpretations coming with their own entailments. Then I search for alternative metaphors, identifying five main themes: 'health', 'sports', 'journey', 'narrative' and 'textile'. For each of these, I raise questions about the role of the tutors and the target domain the metaphor is meant to indicate – whether it refers to the teaching and learning of creative writing within a specific (academic or informal) setting or to creative writing as a lifelong artistic practice.

I am The Diviner

In this short piece of creative-critical writing, *The Diviner* introduces itself and its purpose alongside this thesis. It is divided into six parts, each touching on the broad themes of voice and metafiction, materiality, intertextuality, community, language and metaphor.

27 Theses on the Threshold

In place of a conclusion, I reprise the format of Ricardo Piglia's *Theses on the Short Story* (in conversation with Horacio Quiroga's "Decalogue of the Perfect Storyteller", Andrés Neuman's various (do)decalogues, Italo Calvino's *Six Memos*, Umberto Eco's "36 Rules for Writers") to present a speculative manifesto about creative writing in the threshold (Eco 2006; Neuman 2007; Calvino 2009; Piglia 2011; Quiroga 2025). The manifesto, as an established creative writing form, is qualified by "speculative" and takes the place of a conclusion to reflect the aspect of unfinishedness and permanent search in creative writing and its pedagogy.

The Diviner (Artifact)

The Diviner is a handmade book inspired by Ulises Carrión's "The New Art of Making Books" and artisanal publishing practices in Latin America. On the portrait/knots side, it compiles stories of people I have encountered along the way (P1 and P2, "Portraits"); followed by "The Lecture Diaries" (LD) and "The Workshop Diaries" (WD). On the landscape/weave side, L1-L3 ("Landscapes") are dedicated to impressions of place; whereas the fourth libretto is "The Reading Diaries" (RD). As a *libro-obra* or artist's book, the artifact comes with additional components, including a handmade fabric case, a collection of zines inspired by *cordel* literature, nine tarot cards showing the index for each libretto, and an extra, removable booklet – "The Diviner Song Book", with a code to its own playlist.

*

I would like to conclude this prologue with an acknowledgement of the time and effort demanded by the sheer density of this thesis and by its hybrid nature and format.

Thank you for your consideration – I wish you a pleasant and meaningful stay.

Surveying the Landscape

In Almudena Sánchez's short story "Los puntos débiles" ("The Weak Spots"), Regina Katmandú is a *tallerista*, a tutor of creative writing at Absalóm, Absalóm, a fictional creative writing school in Madrid. She is described as a cult author who takes quite a visceral approach to teaching creative writing, to the point that one of the pieces of advice she gives Lorna, the protagonist and first-person narrator, is that she should try acupuncture to deal with her "weak spots".

In a recent training with tutors of creative writing at Sagrado University in San Juan, Puerto Rico, the short story provoked a lot of laughter and reflection, ultimately leading to the question: how does one teach creative writing?

This question is at the core of the field of creative writing studies. Drawing from concerns raised by composition and rhetoric scholars from the late 1970s onwards, this predominantly anglophone field has investigated how creative writing can be taught, documenting various teaching practices and extensively commenting on "lore", the inherited knowledge that teachers-writers receive and pass on, often unconsciously, and on the discipline's signature pedagogy, the "writers' workshop" or "workshop method" (or, from now on, just "workshop").

A very general definition of the workshop comes from D. G. Myers, as he defines it the "gathering to read aloud and exchange views on work by members of the group" (Myers 1996: 13). This process varies significantly, and it may or may not entail writing and reading during or ahead of the workshop, technique-oriented writing prompts or working on personal projects, authors participating in the discussion or being asked to be "silent", and written or oral feedback by the tutor/workshop leader and peers. Approaches to the workshop also vary and can be more or less expressive, publication-driven, process-oriented, collaborative, creative and interdisciplinary.

The history of the anglophone workshop has been widely documented and it is now emerging in non-anglophone scholarship too. Some literature about it will emerge from the overview that follows, reflecting on how the field of creative writing studies has emerged and how it relates to the "literature of creative writing".

The "Literature of Creative Writing" and Creative Writing Studies

The "literature of creative writing" is an umbrella term proposed by Grace Lark for different types of publications that inform the theory, practice and pedagogy of the artistic discipline: creative writing manuals and handbooks; academic literature concerned with teaching methods and approaches; and exemplary literature, i.e. creative works (novels, short stories, poem, etc.) used in class to illustrate literary techniques (Lark 2022: 57).

Manuals like *Becoming a Writer* by Dorothea Brande started to appear in the 1930s, alongside the first programmes of creative writing, but really flourished between the 1980s and 1990s, with the publication of canon works like *The Art of Fiction* by John Gardner (1984), *Writing Down the Bones* by Natalie Goldberg (1986) and *Writing Fiction* by Janet Burroway (1987). Manuals with a strong memoir component like *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron (1992), *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott (1994) or *On Writing* by Stephen King (2000) can be also considered a popular form of propaedeutic literature.

At around the same time, the first examples of pedagogical literature began to circulate in anglophone scholarship, such as *Learning by Teaching* (Murray 1982), the edited collection *Creative Writing in America* (Moxley 1989), and Wendy Bishop's *Released into Language* (Bishop 1990b), which captures earlier publications by the first "reformers", writer-academics who "started producing scholarship that reacted to the limitations of creative writing's restrictive focus on craft" (Westbrook and Ryan 2020: 40).

In the early 1990s, a separate strand of pedagogical literature tracing the history of the discipline emerged, such as D. G. Myers's article "The Rise of Creative Writing" (Myers 1993) and his volume *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880* (Myers 1996). In the same strand, more recent publications include Mark McGurl's *The Program Era* (McGurl 2011); and Eric Bennett's "The Pyramid Scheme" (Bennett 2014) and his book *Workshops of Empire: Stegner, Engle, and American Creative Writing during the Cold War* (Bennett 2015).

In the decade between 2005 and 2016, the field of Creative Writing Studies experienced real momentum, starting with the publication of three landmark works all in the same year: *Power and Identity in the Creative Writing Classroom* (Leahy 2005), *Creative Writing Pedagogies for the 21st Century* (Dawson 2005) and *(Re)Writing Craft: Composition, Creative Writing, and the Future of English Studies* (Mayers 2005).

These publications were followed by Kelly Ritter and Stephanie Vanderslice's collection, which presents a key question in its very title: *Can It Really Be Taught? Resisting Lore in Creative Writing Pedagogy* (Ritter and Vanderslice 2007).[1] The volume delves into one of the major issues in the field, "lore", meaning passed-down knowledge, described by Patrick Bizzaro as "writers [teaching] what they do when they write employing the 'workshop' approach to teaching – based on a longstanding notion that the teacher is a 'master' who teaches 'apprentices'. The workshop method survives not because rigorous inquiry offers testimony to its excellence […], but because only recently have some teachers of creative writing questioned its underlying assumptions" (Bizzaro 2004: 296).

[1] "A question which would sound ridiculous applied to any other forms of art – can music be taught? Can painting be taught? – but that it repeatedly turns up like bad weed, spoiling the colourful, lush, vibrant and full of fragrance field of literary studies" (Borgogna 1999, my translation).

In the same article, cited throughout *Can It Really Be Taught?*, Bizzaro explains how the "workshop-writing phenomenon no doubt works vertically, where sameness is passed from teacher to student who, in turn, becomes a teacher who passes certain literary biases to yet another generation of students" (Bizzaro 2004: 305).

This view is echoed in the introduction of Ritter and Vanderslice's volume, as they write that "a defining characteristic of lore is that it has become so deeply embedded in the culture that practices it that it is part of the basic assumptions of that culture, in this case, all but invisible to those who teach and write in the world it scaffolds". According to the editors, the collection is "designed to make you think about those assumptions that constitute the way you teach creative writing and the way you were taught", and "make you wonder, 'Where does this theory come from?' 'Is this practice effective?' 'How so?' 'What will happen if I try it differently next time?'" (Ritter and Vanderslice 2007: xviii).

Another key question, also expressed in a volume's title, is Dianne Donnelly's *Does the Writing Workshop Still Work?* (Donnelly 2010). This question has been discussed since the time of the "reformers". For example, in the preface to *Creative Writing in America*, Joseph Moxley critiques the workshop for "focusing primarily on revising and editing" and "failing to address prewriting strategies". "Without defining aesthetic criteria for evaluating manuscripts," Moxley writes, "most teachers direct the group's analysis by asking, 'Does the text work?'", taking for granted fundamental techniques of creative writing "or even, for that matter, the basics of grammar", leaving students "to the haphazard winds of group discussion" (Moxley 1989: xiv).

In the same volume, Eve Shelnutt suggests that "most teachers of creative writing find the workshop format effective because it is the only format they know" and that, yet, "there are other methods" (quoted in Moxley 1989: 16). For example, the one proposed by Wendy Bishop in *Released into Language*, a model that she defines "transactional", as an alternative to both text-centred and authored-centred workshops (Bishop 1990b).

Donnelly's collection cites many of the criticisms and proposals advanced by the "reformers", adding to the range of proposed methods master classes focusing on practical technical skills and familiarising with the publishing industry; incorporating more critical theory; encouraging students to engage in socio-cultural enterprises; or allowing them to experiment in class (Donnelly 2010). Ultimately, as Graeme Harper points out in the preface to this volume, the workshop does not need to be dismantled, but reconceptualised as "an exchange of human experiences", reframing creative writing as a thing "we do" rather than "we make" (Donnelly 2010: xix).

Donnelly looks into the workshop in more detail in her volume *Establishing Creative Writing Studies as an Academic Discipline* (Donnelly 2012), in which she recognises that "alternate practices and approaches exist", such as: "feminist pedagogies, which tend to decenter models of inspiration and traditional master-apprentice type workshop models" (2009: 130) or approaches based on composition and rhetoric models, or interdisciplinary approaches linking writing to performance, printmaking, digital technologies, film studies, more traditional literary studies and the publishing industry, applied at undergraduate and/or postgraduate level (2009: 137–139). Donnelly analyses four common practices recurring in the workshop model – reading, writing, responding and theory – concluding that they can be seen as the "definitive markers of professional difference from composition studies and literary studies" each and all contributing to a "more rigorous and intelligent workshop model" (2009: 165).

Further volumes widening the scope from the workshop to more general pedagogical approaches are *Key Issues in Creative Writing* (Donnelly and Harper 2012), *Creative Writing Pedagogies for the Twenty-First Century* (Peary and Hunley 2015) and *Creative Writing in the Digital Age: Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy* (Clark et al. 2015).

In Donnelly and Harper's collection, among the themes that emerge are: the future of creative writing as a discipline; the importance of understanding creative writing's history for its practice and development; the importance of "habitat" when it comes to practising the discipline but also teaching it; the notion of creative literacy and its "practical implication" being that "creative writing can and does lead students to a much wider range of careers and professional paths than is often acknowledged" (Donnelly and Harper 2012: 72); and investigations of creative writing *as*/and research.

The "pedagogies for the 21st century" proposed in Peary and Hunley's collection draw from a wide range of disciplines, fields and approaches, including: Greco-Roman rhetoric, composition studies, Freirean pedagogy, "community of practice", feminism, writing centre methodology, service learning, creative literacy, ecology, digital technologies and creative writing across the curriculum (Peary and Hunley 2015).

The last approach, an investigation of how digital technologies can be in conversation with creative writing and vice versa, is at the core of Clark, Hergenrader and Rein's volume *Creative Writing in the Digital Age*. Here, contributors propose many ways in which digital technology has been or can be integrated in creative writing classes using a wide range of media, software and online platforms: social media, software for movie making, platforms for interactive fiction, blogs and digital portfolios; while existing multimedia repertoires could include videogames and netprov literature (online collaborative literary improvisations) (Clark et al. 2015).

It is true that some of the activities proposed in *Creative Writing in the Digital Age* have a short shelf life due to how quickly digital platforms, tools and their functions evolve or sometimes even cease to exist; but the "what else" (as opposed to "what's next") principle underpinning the volume's pedagogy is an approach in line with the general direction of the creative writing studies field, looking for alternative pedagogies – whether more student-centred or more relevant with our times.

This line is pursued by two other important volumes in contemporary scholarship: *The Old, the New, the Tried and the Untried* (Kroll et al. 2016) and the tenth anniversary edition of *Can It Really Be Taught?*, titled *Can Creative Writing Really Be Taught*, edited by Stephanie Vanderslice and Rebecca Manery (Vanderslice and Manery 2017).

This volume – by means of Janelle Adsit's chapter "Polemics Against Polemics: Reconsidering Didacticism in Creative Writing" and "Disability Culture and Creative Writing Pedagogies: When Having Fun Together is Radical Practice" by Petra Kuppers – contains the seeds of what would become a major strand in the creative writing studies field, covering issues of diversity, inclusion, identity and social justice, which will be explored further on in the section "From Redefining Craft to the Political and Social Turn of Creative Writing Studies".

International Creative Writing Studies

Creative writing scholarship so far has emerged and been discussed in very limited geographical, cultural and linguistic contexts. The very introduction of *Key Issues in Creative Writing* promises something that the volume will not deliver: "Key Issues and *Global* Perspectives in Creative Writing" (Donnelly and Harper 2012: xiii, my emphasis) – unless by "global" is meant "relative to the United States, United Kingdom and Australia".

A strand that has been expanding its horizons to non-anglophone contexts is the one looking at creative writing SL (second language). Volumes like *Exploring Second Language Creative Writing: Beyond Babel* (Disney 2014), really begin to provide insight into how creative writing is taught in academic institutions outside of US, British and Australian territories, with case studies in universities in South Korea, Macao, Hong Kong and Brunei – albeit most often, but not always, in the context of English-language learning programmes.

Brazilian tutor and academic Bernardo Bueno suggests that "Creative Writing is a realm that speaks mostly English" (Bueno 2018: 145). It could be said that the same is true for creative writing studies, being the history of the field and the history of the discipline being so intrinsically rooted in the anglophone context. Yet, with new programmes being established in Asia, Europe and Latin America, new scholarship about creative writing in languages other than English is now emerging.

One of the volumes branching out to non-anglophone contexts is *The Place and the Writer*, edited by Marshall Moore and Sam Meekings, featuring case studies from Brazil, Finland, Iceland, South Africa, Hong Kong, Poland, Greece, Japan and China, as well as the UK and Australia (Moore and Meekings 2021). The major themes explored in this volume are teacher lore, literary canon and cultural context, language and identity, the creative writing classroom, and recommended best practice. Examples of considerations about how cultural context affects the experience of teaching (and learning) can be compared across Fan Dai and Li Ling's and Ross Gibson's chapters, both addressing the issue of authority (or perceived lack of thereof) in China vs Australia.

These considerations echo Kit Kelen's exploration of Confucian orthodoxy in Macao, and Eddie Tay's reframing of Paulo Freire's ideas on pedagogy in Hong Kong, in Dan Disney's *Exploring Second Language Creative Writing* (Disney 2014); and are in conversation with a more recent international collection, Darryl Whetter's *Teaching Creative Writing in Asia* (Whetter 2022). This volume features case studies of Creative Writing modules and programmes in China, Hong Kong, India, the Philippines, Singapore and Taiwan, and focuses intensely on language. Multilingualism recurs not just as a pedagogical strategy, but as a condition that is impossible to ignore "as we approach (or have already passed) the point at which the number of non-native speakers doubles the number of people who speak English as a mother tongue" (Whetter 2022: 4).

Several contributors also point out how important the choice of language for creative writing and self-expression is for their bi/multi/translingual students, and their perception of English based on how it is received by the society.[2]

As for Romance languages such as Italian, Spanish and Portuguese (mentioning the ones that are more relevant to this study), current anglophone scholarship has only just begun to scratch the surface of creative writing in these languages.

Two recent exceptions are my own investigation into how creative writing is taught in Italy (Traina 2022) and a study on the literary workshop in the Southern Cone (Palacios Bianchi and Maier Cruz 2023).

In "Challenging Conventional Approaches to Teaching Creative Writing in Italy", I provide an examination of the current landscape of creative writing education in Italy and explore the challenges hindering its integration into public universities. To this day, creative writing is mostly offered in private schools and institutions (such as Scuola Holden, Scuola Omero, Belleville, etc.) and has yet to be integrated into a postgraduate offer comparable to the MFA or the MA, let alone as a PhD programme.

My article delves into the dynamics between Italian academia and creative arts, emphasising the private nature of these courses and addressing concerns related to inclusivity and diversity, and pedagogical issues arising from the adoption of the anglophone model (i.e. the workshop) and the overwhelming use of English-language literature in translation as exemplary literature. Ultimately, I make an argument for the positive impact of introducing creative writing into Italian academia, suggesting that it would foster a more balanced creative-critical approach to both writing and the studying of Italian literature, benefitting writers and universities alike.

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[2] My review of *The Place and the Writer*, and a review essay featuring Whetter's and Disney's volumes alongside selected articles from the *Newsletter of OUHK Tin Ka Ping Centre of Chinese Culture* ("Newsletter" 2021) and the short story anthology *The Art and the Craft of Asian Stories*, edited by Robin Hemley and Xu Xi (Hemley and Xu 2021) have appeared in the *Journal of Creative Writing Studies* (Traina 2021, 2023).

Magdalena Palacios Bianchi and Gonzalo Maier Cruz, instead, focus on the representation of the literary workshop in the Southern Cone. This article sheds light on the phenomenon of the Latin American workshop held by a *tallerista*, i.e. "the tutor of a literary creation workshop, who is also a writer, and who makes this practice a stable part of his or her work and identity" (Palacios Bianchi and Maier Cruz 2023: 306). The authors present the idea of the Latin American workshop as a community of practice, and reflect on existing practices by *talleristas*, highlighting their self-reported ignorance and near-guessing approach to the pedagogy. They offer a version of the workshop as a "community that accompanies each other in the task of achieving genius […] mediated by an ignorant teacher" (Palacios Bianchi and Maier Cruz 2023: 303), and argue for a process of emancipation associated with "the awareness of the medium, method, or manner in which knowledge [is] learned" (Palacios Bianchi and Maier Cruz 2023: 305).

Both my Italian overview and Palacios Bianchi and Maier Cruz's study focus on practices that are external to academia, whereas a third example of scholarship about creative writing in Romance language, Bernardo Bueno's "Creative Writing in Brazil: Personal Notes on a Process" (2018), documents the pioneering work done by Brazilian universities to integrate creative writing in their Literary Theory courses first, and then as separate undergraduate and postgraduate concentrations.

Bueno highlights some of the differences in how academia is structured in Brazil compared to the US and the UK, and reflects on the challenges that the programme and its students have to face in its geographical and cultural context: an insular publishing industry, a political and economic crisis causing significant underfunding of the arts and education, and academic prejudice. He also shares a reflection around language which reveals a tension between the history and identity of the discipline as an English-speaking subject, and the desire for countries with immensely rich and established literary histories to welcome creative practices in their academic establishment.

An emerging strand of non-anglophone scholarship looks at how this introduction has panned out in Ibero-American countries and will be reviewed in the next section.

Ibero-American Scholarship

If creative writing as an academic discipline is still considered "young" in Ibero-American countries, creative writing studies, i.e. its scholarship, is in its infancy. In Spain, there have been two major publications dedicated to creative writing scholarship: the monographic issue of *ARBOR* "La escritura creativa como disciplina emergente – Creative Writing as an Emerging Discipline" (Arbona Abascal 2020), and the volume *Escritura creativa e imaginación literaria* (Mora and Peinado Elliot 2022).

Both collections are concerned with the fundamental question "can it really be taught" and the emerging themes surround the nature of creative writing, its pedagogy and evaluation, the cognitive and neurological dimension of writing and creativity, and the new models emerging from the "third environment" (or cyberspace).

It is worth pointing out that the editors and most of the contributors of this volume, and of the monographic issue of *ARBOR*, are affiliated to either Complutense University in Madrid or the University of Sevilla. These are the only two Spanish universities in which creative writing is taught at Master's degree level in an accredited programme, and that are conducting research in the field.

While new programmes are being established every year in other Spanish-speaking countries such as Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Argentina, academic research is slow at catching up with the pedagogical advances and research.

Slightly different is the situation with Portuguese-language research. In Portugal, creative writing research seems to have been conducted by one single scholar, João Mancelos, author of four key papers about the relationship between

creative writing and literary studies in Portugal (Mancelos 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010). In his 2010 article "O ensino da escrita Criativa em Portugal: preconceitos, verdades e desafios", Mancelos says that the majority of creative writing workshops are "too practical" and that they need a "solid and competent theoretical foundation"; and that investment in the training of creative writing tutors is also needed, along with funding for specific publications (rather than "works on literary theory disguised as creative writing") (Mancelos 2010, my translation).

In Brazil, papers about the teaching of creative writing began to appear later, starting from an article titled "A ainda tímida relação entre cursos de Letras e a escrita criativa" (Guedes 2014). This article discusses the initial efforts to introduce creative writing in Brazilian universities and explores why its relationship with academia remains so "timid". Different reasons include the fact that "Literature degrees are more interested in content than form", "people read less in Brazil [compared to the US and Europe] and the publishing industry is smaller", the "strict separation between different areas of knowledge", the fear that creation/creativity will lead to "losing control", and a "long-standing haunting of positivism still lingering" (Guedes 2014).

One of the experts interviewed in this article, Luiz Antonio Assis Brasil, is himself a scholar who contributed to the field with a widely quoted 2015 article on creative writing and academia (Assis Brasil 2015). Citing Wallace Stegner, Paul Dawson, the legend of Virgil's birth, Horace's *Ars Poetica*, 14th century Parisian architect Jean Mignot and 19th century painter Eugène Delacroix, Assis Brasil contends that art and science (intended as "knowledge" or "theory") are intertwined but "not confused" (Assis Brasil 2015: 108). Discussing established workshops in the US, France, Spain and Latin America, and the workshops that have made a name for themselves in Brazil, he concludes that this field will see great research interest in the future, as the integration of creative writing in academia is "currently irreversible" (Assis Brasil 2015: 109).

However, a later study by the very Assis Brasil and Marcelo Spalding Perex concludes that in Brazilian academia, there still persist "difficulties in understanding literary creation as a process likely to be researched, taught and learned" (Spalding Perez and Assis Brasil 2018, my translation). One aspect that the authors choose to highlight is the "interdisciplinary potential of the subject", as the research shows creative writing in conversation with other areas, such as education, communication studies, applied linguistics and literature (Spalding Perez and Assis Brasil 2018: 217).

Finally, three Brazilian scholars who are looking at creative writing pedagogy in Brazil are tutors who have participated in this study, Márcia Ivana de Lima e Silva, Carolina Zuppo Abed and Luís Roberto Amabile.

De Lima e Silva's contribution in the collective volume *Ensino da literatura, poéticas e teorias 1* explores the role of mentoring in creative writing, emphasising the relationship between artistic production and academic research. De Lima e Silva traces the historical development of programmes in universities, particularly in the Anglophone world and Brazil, and ultimately advocates for a collaborative approach that respects the individuality of each writer's creative journey while integrating critical and theoretical perspectives (de Lima e Silva 2021). Her more personal and detailed account of the history of the creative writing programme at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) has appeared in the volume *PPG Letras UFRGS: 50 anos de uma história* (de Lima e Silva 2022a).

A recent doctor at USP (São Paulo), Abed has published two articles documenting the current situation of creative writing in Brazil, expanding on the list of dedicated programmes and publications (Abed 2021a, 2021b), and two case studies comparing practices at University of São Paulo and University of Coimbra in Portugal (Abed 2023, 2024a). She has also recently successfully defended her doctoral thesis, which examines the teaching of writing in Brazilian universities, focusing on the creative process, the role of the teacher as a mediator, and the conceptualisation of

fiction in the contemporary era, all through a transdisciplinary approach that intersects literature with philosophy and psychopedagogy (Abed 2024b).

Amabile's research covers the history of the literary creation workshop at his academic institution, Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS) (Amabile 2014; Amabile et al. 2020); and offers an approach to the discipline as a space and a definition of creative writing as "an environment which stimulates reading, research and, above all, the production of texts using literary devices" and which brings together "writers, apprentices, teachers and researchers" (Amabile 2020, my translation).

From Redefining Craft to the Political Turn of Creative Writing Studies

Between 2017 and 2022, there is an effort in redefining craft from both a pedagogical and a political point of view, exemplified by the publication of three volumes marking the "political turn" of creative writing scholarship, a movement of scholars who advocate for inclusive and anti-racist practices: *Toward an Inclusive Creative Writing*, by Janelle Adsit, *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop*, by Felicia Rose Chavez, and *Craft in the Real World*, by Matthew Salesses (Adsit 2017a; Chavez 2021; Salesses 2021).

Before delving into each of them, it is worth mentioning three articles preceding these works (aside from the already mentioned contributions in *Can Creative Writing Really Be Taught?*): Junot Díaz's "MFA vs POC", Viet Thanh Nguyen's "Viet Thanh Nguyen Reveals How Writers' Workshops Can Be Hostile", and Janelle Adsit's "The Writer and Meta-Knowledge about Writing" (Díaz 2014; Adsit 2017b; Nguyen 2017).

In his article, Díaz recounts his own experience of being a creative writing student at Cornell, and he does that denouncing the "standard problem of MFA programs", summarised as "that shit was *too* white" (Díaz 2014). Díaz ultimately argues that in the workshops he attended "the default subject position of reading and

writing – of Literature with a capital L – was white, straight and male", and therefore "[reproduced] exactly the dominant culture's blind spots and assumptions around race and racism (and sexism and heteronormativity, etc.)" (Díaz 2014).

Sharing Díaz's experience of being silenced as a non-white workshop participant, Nguyen adds that in his experience of the workshop, the "art of writing" appeared to be presented as alienated from matters that concerned him, like politics, history, theory, philosophy and ideology, while simultaneously promoting its own ideology, defined by white, privileged aesthetics sold as universal, like "show, don't tell" (Nguyen 2017).

Talking about the concept of "representation", Adsit defines what Nguyen and Díaz have experienced as the "master narratives", that "dominate a social imaginary, as the ideological scripts that act upon us" (Adsit 2017b: 311). She expands,

> Conscious of these ideological scripts and how they operate, the writer is faced with a decision: Do I write in a way that relies upon and reinforces master narratives? Or do I write to counter them? Writers are shaped by the cultures of which they are part, but they in turn can influence the culture. (Adsit 2017a: 312)

This paragraph lays the groundwork for Adsit's 2017 volume, in which inclusion and diversity are at the core of her expanded framework. In the book, she identifies "threshold concepts" that can form the base for a "critical creative writing curriculum [which] provides students [with] the means of accessing and identifying the conventions of different writing practices, as it encourages text-making and text-circulation in all its forms" (Adsit 2017b: 83). Threshold concepts will be discussed more in detail in the section Metaphors of Space and Threshold Concepts, below.

Moving on to Felicia Rose Chavez's and Matthew Salesses's works, these echo Junot Díaz's and Viet Thanh Nguyen's lived experience of the creative writing

workshop as a silencing environment.[3] "This silencing," Chavez warns, "particularly of writers of color, is especially destructive in institutions that routinely disregard the lived experiences of people who are not white" (Chavez 2021: 2). Chavez argues that an inclusive approach – or anti-racist, as she defines it – would benefit everyone as "it advances humility and empathy over control and domination" (Chavez 2021: 7).

One of the many strategies that she proposes would be to revise the workshop goals so that participants' lived experiences and expertise is taken into account, as she suggests that, "Rather than serve as passive receptacles for white authorship, a democratic educational model demands that all participants contribute to knowledge production" (Chavez 2021: 26). She also recommends that workshop leaders defy "[their own] supremacy as art's official gatekeeper[s]" warning tutors that "student storytelling is not, was not ever, yours to conquer, control, and manipulate to your aesthetic. You are artistic ally, trusted confidant, ready resource, steady guide" (Chavez 2021: 28).

An entire chapter of Chavez's volume is dedicated to a topic that has come to the forefront of this strand of research, that is the questioning of the notion and function of "craft". Chavez posits:

> You can't teach creative writing? Perhaps because craft itself is just another make-believe construction. Workshop leaders are equipped with approximate definitions, adapted to their individual aesthetic preferences. (Chavez 2021: 34)

In line with her democratic and collective model of pedagogy, Chavez suggests that students create a shared vocabulary so that they can "compare definitions" and "engage in collective meaning making" (Chavez 2021: 35).

[3] Interestingly, Adsit too defines her volume as "an outgrowth of frustrations" (Adsit, 2017b: 7), which seems to be a recurring "origin story" for many works on creative writing pedagogy.

If both Adsit and Chavez dedicate a chapter to redefining craft, Matthew Salesses does so in an entire volume titled *Craft in the Real World* (Salesses 2021). Salesses builds on the premise that "the Workshop never meant the craft to be neutral" and that "craft is in fact nothing more or less than a set of expectations […] shaped by the workshop, by reading, by awards and gatekeepers, by biases about whose stories matter and how they should be told". Like Chavez, Salesses argues that these expectations "represent the values of the culturally dominant population: in America that means (straight, cis, able, upper-middle-class) white males" and that, "when craft is taught unreflexively, within a limited understanding of the canon, it reinforces narrow ideas about whose stories are important and what makes a story beautiful, moving, or good", reminding us of Adsit's warning against playing into "master narratives" (Salesses 2021: xv).

In the contemporary landscape of creative writing studies, Adsit, Chavez and Salesses lead a transformative shift in the field, challenging conventional norms and advocating for self-reflective, inclusive and anti-racist pedagogical practices. Their works have ushered in an era marked by diversity, critical consciousness, and a redefined understanding of the craft, and have been chosen as representative of a range of studies exploring the same themes and working in the same direction, such as Joy Castro's "Racial and Ethnic Justice in the Creative Writing Course" (Castro 2015), Namrata Poddar's "Is 'Show Don't Tell' a Universal Truth or a Colonial Relic?" (Poddar 2016), Tonya C. Hegamin's manifesto "Inclusion and Diversity: A Manifesto and Interview" (Hegamin 2016), David Mura's volume *A Stranger's Journey: Race, Identity, and Narrative Craft in Writing* (Mura 2018), Audrey T. Carroll's edited collection *Musing the Margins: Essays on Craft* (Carroll 2020) and Micah McCrary's *Teaching Cultural Dexterity in Creative Writing* (McCrary 2023).

Workshop Literature

At the edge of creative writing studies sits "workshop literature", i.e. literature about, of, featuring or narrativizing the creative writing workshop.

An example of this in anglophone scholarship is Alan Ziegler's *The Writing Workshop Notebook*, whose subtitle reads *Notes on Creating and Workshopping* (Ziegler 2007). Part creative writing manual, part memoir and part workshop diary, the volume gathers advice, prompts, reflections and memories in the form of "notes" (hence the "notebook" in the title).

Another example comes from the postgraduate course directed by Márcia Ivana de Lima e Silva at UFRGS, a volume which collects students' creative works alongside critical and reflective pieces, titled *Por dentro da criação* ("inside creation") (de Lima e Silva 2022b).

Interestingly, this type of publication is becoming more and more popular in Argentina, with published titles like: *Las clases de Hebe Uhart* ("Hebe Uhart's Classes") by Liliana Villanueva (2015); *De la trama al relato: teoría y práctica del taller de escritura* ("From plot to story: theory and practice of the writing workshop") edited by Irene Klein (2019); and *Nomadismo por mi país* ("Nomadism across my country") by Cecilia Pavón (2024).

De la trama al relato is a collection of academic essays about different forms of writing and experiences of the workshop, featuring some prompts, some students' samples, and a lot of theory. In format and content, it is aligned with the many creative writing studies publications which were presented in the literature review, following the strict conventions of academic writing.

Las clases de Hebe Uhart, instead, is a compilation of the notes taken by Liliana Villanueva as she attended Argentinian author Hebe Uhart's workshop. In the prologue, Villanueva mentions that she had been going to the workshop for almost two years, and realised she had enough notes to put together a volume about

everything she had learned – not just about writing techniques, but about perspective, restraint, and the role of emotion in writing.

Uhart's considerations on craft cover from language and mystery to turning childhood memories into prose, travel writing, humour, bad habits and general advice. Some chapters even include prompts in the form of lists – like a list of themes to address in a fictional dialogue, or a list of prompts for interior monologues. Villanueva closes the book with her own Horacio Quiroga-style *decálogo*, followed by two essays by Hebe Uhart herself.

Also published by blatt&ríos, *Nomadismo por mi país* is a workshop diary by Argentinian poet and *tallerista* Cecilia Pavón. The diary features fragments of the author's workshop participants alongside Pavón's reflections about the artistic and the teaching practice, everyday anecdotes, deeply personal desires and metaliterary excursions.

Both Villanueva's and Pavón's writing is hybrid, moving on from the traditional creative writing manual and, particularly in Pavón's case, placing the workshop right at the centre of the discussion – hence the need for a genre of its own, as "workshop literature".

If the genre "writers on writing" has a long-established tradition in both the field of literature and creative writing, the same cannot be said about this "writers on workshops" literature, which is only just emerging. Yet, as degrees in Creative Writing develop in non-anglophone countries, it becomes a space to watch – one with the potential to enrich the field of creative writing studies not only with a wide range of reflections on method, but also with personal, imaginative, sometimes funny and even moving "stories from the workshop".

In fact, this genre extends to fiction, too. In dialogue with its predecessor, the English-lit campus novel – by the likes of *Stoner* (John Williams), *Wonder Boys* (Michael Chabon), *Thinks…* (David Lodge), etc. – workshop fiction is also emerging in recent Ibero-American literature.

Hints at the workshop appear in Alejandro Cuevas's surreal and metafictional novel *Literatura barata* ("Cheap Literature"), but two even more notable examples are the short story "Los puntos débiles" by Spanish author Almudena Sánchez (Sánchez 2018), and the novel *El taller literario* ("The Literary Workshop") by Francisco Bitar (Bitar 2024).

In Bitar's novel, Gori Lizmayer, a published but forgotten writer going through a writer's block, decides to attend another writer's workshop under the false name of Ghito Londres. Featuring some of the original writing produced by Lizmayer/Londres, the novel builds a *mise en abyme* reminiscent of Sánchez's short story, similarly satirising the workshop and the role of the workshop leader, while offering plenty of food for thought to the reader-writer or reader-tutor looking for more pedagogical intertexts.

Metaphors of Space and Threshold Concepts

If so far the literature review has covered publications from early creative writing manuals to workshop literature – via contemporary anglophone and Ibero-American creative writing studies scholarship –, in order to contextualise the methodological framework presented in the next chapter, I would like to expand to other fields to mention some works that discuss metaphor and threshold concepts.

In their groundbreaking work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that metaphor is more than "a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish", and that, in fact, metaphors are pervasive of everyday language, helping us shape our understanding of abstract concepts and processes (Lakoff and Johnson 2011: 3).

One of the processes that are notoriously difficult to understand is the writing process. In the 1980s, Barbara Tomlinson conducted a study on how writers describe their creative processes using metaphors, finding that the most common metaphors

were "cooking, gardening, mining and hunting" (Tomlinson 1986). In a feminist study exploring women's perspectives, Pamela Annas mentions a range of different metaphors, from "putting together a jigsaw puzzle", to "birthing a child", or "finding an old chair in a garage pile and slowly and lovingly refinishing it" (Annas 1987: 3–18).

Metaphors have also been studied in the field of education. Carrie Paechter, for example, looks at spatial metaphors emerging from educational discourses and what they reveal. In her taxonomy, Paechter explores varieties of spatial metaphors while providing examples and reflections on each metaphor's implications, such as issues of inclusion/exclusion implied by the 'knowledge as field' metaphor (Paechter 2004: 452). When approaching threshold concepts, Paechter appears cautious, as in her view, they seem to imply that "knowledge that one acquires or understands remains static; one crosses the threshold to it, rather than developing or constructing it for oneself" (Paechter 2004: 455).

Her point is consistent with how the idea of threshold concepts was first developed in the early 2000s in the field of undergraduate education by Erik Meyer and Ray Land. The way they define the term is "like passing through a portal" or "conceptual gateway" that opens up "previously inaccessible way[s] of thinking about something" (Cousin 2006: 4). Meyer and Land identify the defining characteristics of threshold concepts: transformative and irreversible, troublesome, bounded, integrative/ expansive, and liminal, i.e. involving "messy journeys back, forth, and across conceptual terrains" (Cousin 2006: 5).

Exploring the liminality of threshold concepts further, in "Learning in the Liminal Space: A Semiotic Approach to Threshold Concepts", Ray Land, Julie Rattray and Peter Vivian focus on their troublesome and transformative nature, which denotes a process of learning "in which there is a reformulation of the learner's meaning frame and an accompanying shift in the learner's subjectivity" (Land et al. 2014: 201).

They emphasise the movement from one state to another by using other metaphors, like 'portal', 'gateway', 'doorway' and 'tunnel'. For example, the state of liminality is characterised by the tunnel's aspects: "dark and foreboding", "if long, the sense of direction and progress can become obscured and the light at the end may be dim or even non-existent" (Land et al. 2014: 205).

The liminality of threshold concepts implies uncertainty, recursiveness, and, in some cases, a shift in the learner's self-perception. For example, encountering theories of gender, evolution, or deconstruction can reveal the world through a revolutionary lens (Land et al. 2014: 208–9).

One of the first works looking at threshold concepts in the wider field of writing studies is the 2015 collection *Naming What We Know* by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle. In this study, threshold concepts are formulated as statements, such as: "Writing is a social and rhetorical activity," or "Writing involves making ethical choices" (Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2015).

More recently, Janelle Adsit has compiled a list of threshold concepts to guide the creative writing curriculum. Her list is composed of twelve concepts: attention, creativity, authorship, language, genre, craft, community, evaluation, representation, resistance, theory and revision. Reflecting on the impact that these concepts have on the students' learning paths, tutors can shape their curriculum to aim towards specific learning outcomes (Adsit 2017).

Both Adler-Kassner and Wardle's and Adsit's studies seem to imply a notion of threshold as a space to be "crossed" in order to acquire new knowledge, as suggested by Paechter, and even the liminal focus proposed by Land, Rattray and Vivian implies a "before" and "after" dimension, however rich and complex the threshold stage is presented to be.

In this study, however, the aspect of the threshold metaphor that is being investigated is its liminality and potential for encounter, to be explored in the following section.

*

From this landscape surveyal, the research gaps that this study proposes to cover are an exploration of uncharted Ibero-American perspectives on creative writing and its pedagogy, and a reframing of the threshold as the encounter between the artistic discipline, its pedagogy and research. Before moving on to the next section, here is a brief reflection on form.

Collecting different quotes about the workshop, Diane Donnelly mentions Maurice Guevara's description of the workshop's design often being "sin of all sins – unimaginative" (Donnelly 2009: 102). At least as far as form and style are concerned, the same could be said about many contemporary works of creative writing studies, with the exception, perhaps, of "workshop literature".

Most, if not all, of the scholarly works cited so far take the form of academic papers and publications, despite this being a field with the word "creative" in the name. As we have seen, many scholars advocate for more hybrid and interdisciplinary practices in the creative writing classroom, but the way these pedagogical propositions are being put forward ultimately draws from an academic range of formal features: fixed sections, arguments, references, markers of coherence and cohesion, and clear and accurate vocabulary reflecting critical thinking and logical progression, with the ultimate goal to persuade the reader about some *truth*.

One reason why that might be is that, for a long time, scholars in the field have had to defend the status of creative writing as a discipline and field deserving of academia (Donnelly 2009; Mayers 2016). Any approach to research other than the scholarly-based one might have been seen as jeopardising the collective effort in proving that not only creative writing can be taught, but also that its practice, theory and pedagogy can be researched "properly".

This tells us that the research gap in the field is not only related to content (threshold aspects, narrative-based pedagogy) or scope (Ibero-American perspectives), but also to form and methodology, particularly concerning how research is designed and represented.

The next chapter will illustrate alternative methods to present a study in creative writing pedagogy enriched with narrative techniques and aesthetic and stylistic choices reflecting the nature of the discipline.

Threshold: A Methodology of Encounter

In her fable "The Crossing", Jhumpa Lahiri allegorizes her experience of writing creatively in Italian as a second language using the metaphor of 'crossing a small lake'. She writes:

> For twenty years I studied Italian as if I were swimming along the edge of that lake. Always next to my dominant language, English. Always hugging that shore. [...] If you study a foreign language that way, you won't drown. The other language is always there to support you, to save you. But you can't float without the possibility of drowning, of sinking. To know a new language, to immerse yourself, you have to leave the shore. Without a life vest. Without depending on solid ground. (Lahiri 2017: 5, trans. Ann Goldstein)

One of the early proposed principles of Conceptual Metaphor Theory is that "metaphors have entailments through which they highlight and make coherent certain aspects of our experience" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 484); and the entailment that has most often been highlighted in the 'threshold' metaphor applied to threshold concepts is the idea of the 'crossing'.

Threshold Concept Theory is based on the premise that one goes from a 'place of not knowing' to a 'place of knowing' crossing the threshold. In creative writing, 'not knowing' and 'knowing' could take more nuanced and processual

acceptations, like 'unawareness' and 'awareness', with this type of movement still implied in the learning stage. This is the premise upon which works like *Naming What We Know* by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, and *Toward an Inclusive Creative Writing* by Janelle Adsit are based, and that is great.

But it is not what I am doing here.

The threshold I am interested in is the space between creative writing and pedagogy, and creative writing and research.

According to philosopher Andrea Gentile, a threshold is a space between two places, two territories, two fields; it is a space of transit, a passage; paradoxically, a dividing line and site of contact; it is an "inbetweenness", and a "third place" (Gentile 2020: 14). I am interested in the muddy waters of the lake, or the ash-coloured ones of Bocas de Ceniza. The site of contact, the place of encounter. And what you can find there.

A long take of the railway track running between the Caribbean Sea and the Magdalena River closes the documentary El Inmortal (2016), which the Researcher saw at a screening at House Museum of Meira Delmar in Barranquilla. Intrigued by the name of the place (also the name of a café on campus at Uninorte), She digs into it and mentions it at lunch with a tutor. He calls a colleague, who's an oceanographer, and says, "Talk to him; he'll tell you all you need to know about the place and how to get there."

(L1: 28-29; 31-36)

Consider the etymologies of "understand" and its Italian equivalent "*capire*". If under- is taken in its obsolete sense of "between, in the midst of", it aligns with an older meaning of *capire*: "to fit (stand) in a place". The Latin root (*capiō*), which also gives rise to *caber* in Spanish and Portuguese, conveys notions of occupying space, containing, and figuratively "taking in" ("*capire*", Wiktionary 2023). Think: capacity, capacious, capable.

The epistemology of knowledge proposed in this thesis is, therefore, one of *between-standing*. From this perspective, thresholds are not 'crossed' to "unlock" new "areas of

knowledge" (Cousin 2006: 4); instead, they are seen as areas of encounter where one can linger and understand.

What will follow is a summary of the three different encounters proposed here: 1) *go-finding* and the Other; 2) research, creative writing and pedagogy (with a detailed breakdown of all the narrative techniques employed); and 3) the encounter between languages via literary translation.

Encounter 1: *Go-Finding* the Other

As I mentioned in the introduction, this is a study about other people's practices. In academic terms, it features qualitative research based on interviews *in situ* with tutors in Ibero-American postgraduate degrees in Creative Writing, and autoethnographic research based on the journal contained in *The Diviner*.

Before reviewing the methods and approaches, I would like to acknowledge the environmental implications of in-situ research in nine different countries across two continents. They are disastrous, and there is not much to add. As much as I wish it was not the case, this is neither a sustainable nor an innocent project, although mitigating measures have been taken to reduce or compensate my impact at all stages. I stand by the idea that conducting this research remotely, from one place and through a screen would have resulted in a completely different study.

Argentinian poet Cecilia Pavón says: "Literary workshops through my computer screen are a way to travel with no vehicle other than love." She declares herself "in favour of a world with less travelling, although perhaps it would be good to be given a life quota of international displacement. You'd have to think carefully about how to use each of those precious passes. [...] We'd love each other so much through poetry that, after meeting only virtually, we'd decide to use our only travel token to meet in Mexico City, Buenos Aires or Madrid." (Pavón, RD: 35)

Leonardo Boff writes, "The head thinks from where the feet tread." (P2: 46)

And Hebe Uhart would say "By travelling you become aware of differences." (Uhart #7)

Though, in my opinion, it's Pierre Mac Orlan who describes the Researcher's REAL motives best: "The fundamental reason that calls active adventurers to action is misery – with all its consequences – excellent ones, from a world-building point of view. (World-building is always very important.)" (RD: 30)

With these ethical and environmental considerations in mind, I turn to the methodological choices that underpin this study.

The use of interviews and qualitative research in education is widely documented, offering "a distinctive way of knowing and theorizing about educational and social practices and structures" which can "make distinctive contributions to educational knowledge and debate" (Freebody 2004: 10). The chosen format is that of semi-structured interview, establishing a core of issues to be covered, but allowing the interviewee to contribute with new directions. Following Baker's considerations on interviews as data-generative activities (Baker 1997: 131), the act of interviewing is understood as "an interactional event" or encounter; questions are contextualised as culturally grounded (i.e. not neutral); and interview responses are treated "as accounts rather than as straight reports", here reframed as "narratives" (see Encounter 2).

A summarised account of the ethics measures put in place to guide the qualitative stages of this research is available in the Appendix at page 397.

This body of qualitative research is complemented by a journal documenting my own experience travelling to different countries as a visiting researcher, *The Diviner*. Featuring narratives, descriptions, unrecorded conversations, and general field notes, the journal allows for an autoethnographic exploration, which is intended as a combination of ethnography (the writing of cultural

experiences) with life writing and personal narratives (Leavy 2018: 142); it adds an intertextual and metafictional dimension to this project (see Encounter 2); and it embodies the principle of *go-finding*.

In fact, part of my methodology consists of defining a wider approach to *between-standing* place, interviewing tutors and engaging with the institutions in a variety of ways beyond interviews: leading trainings, hosting workshops, participating in workshops and lectures, etc.

This approach is inspired by Donna Haraway's reading of Hannah Arendt's "visiting" ("To think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains one's imagination to go visiting") and Vinciane Despret's "virtue of politeness" (Haraway 2016b: 126). Haraway writes, "Visiting is not an easy practice; it demands the ability to find others actively interesting, [...] to ask questions that one's interlocutors truly find interesting, to cultivate the wild virtue of curiosity, to retune one's ability to sense and respond – and to do this politely!" (Haraway 2016b: 127). This resonates with the way I conduct my research, however, there is something inadequate about the verb "visiting" which requires further exploration.

I associate "visiting" with tourists looking for places to "see" (*vīsitō*, I see) rather than under/*between-stand*. In Ted Chiang's novella *Story of Your Life*, the narrator tells:

> We regularly asked the heptapods why they had come. Each time, they answered "to see," or "to observe." Indeed, sometimes they preferred to watch us silently rather than answer our questions. Perhaps they were

> scientists, perhaps they were tourists. [...] [T]he heptapods never asked questions about anything. Whether scientists or tourists, they were an awfully incurious bunch. (Chiang 2015: 137)

Equally unpleasant to this "incurious" attitude is the clinicality of "visiting", like a doctor's visit.

Instead, an idiomatic expression which is used in Italian to mean "to visit" is *andare a trovare*, which literally translates as "to go and find". In Italian, *andare a trovare* implies politeness, but also a certain degree of spontaneity, the practice of "calling upon someone". *Andare a trovare* embodies Despret's idea that "beings render each other *capable* in actual encounters" (cited in Haraway 2016b: 126, my emphasis). It is finding oneself in a place ready to encounter, to go and "find", as in "to discover or perceive (something) after thinking about it or experiencing it" ("find", OED 2024b).

Tourists, heptapods and doctors visit. Researchers *go-find* and then tell people about it.

In Aymara, they say: "Amta yarachin uywaña, which is the mutual nurturing of thoughts and feelings. I cultivate thoughts, and the thoughts are in my body, within the landscape, within the tools that are being used. [...] This shared FEEL-THINKING is what gives rise to the creativity for a work of art. (Elvira Espejo Ayca, quoted by Daniel, publisher at Kikuyo, in Quito. LD: 34)

go-finding is feel-thinking in movement

Encounter 2: Research, Creative Writing and Pedagogy

In the previous chapter, I made a point about the "unimaginative design" of research in creative writing studies. However, in other fields, narrative-based and other forms of arts-based research (ABR) have been used since their emergence between the 1970s and 1990s. Patricia Leavy has investigated these forms in two key works that I will be

referencing here, *Fiction as Research Practice* (2013) and *Method Meets Art* (2020).

According to Leavy, narrative-based research comprises a number of approaches and methods, including "narrative inquiry" and "fiction as method"; whereas arts-based research draws on and can be represented in the form of "literary writing, music, dance, performance, visual art, film and other mediums" (Leavy 2020: ix). Leavy proposes that "the capability of the arts to capture process mirrors the unfolding nature of social life, and thus there is a congruence between subject matter and method" (Leavy 2020: 22).

Leavy's focus on "social life" reflects the context in which arts-based research has emerged and in which it continues to thrive, i.e. social sciences. She proposes that "methods that draw on narrative writing exist on a science-art continuum" and that "some approaches to narrative inquiry are closer to traditional qualitative research practice, particularly interview research, whereas others are further along the artistic side and draw significantly on literary traditions" (Leavy 2020: 44). Some fiction-based research has privileged output in pure fiction form, displaying recurring features or techniques, such as: aspects of fiction (plot, character, scenes, etc.), the characterisation and fictionalisation of participants' stories, a focus on verisimilitude, aesthetics and literariness via description and detail, language, specificity, metaphors, similes, and symbolism (Leavy 2018).

Here, the output is a hybrid, in the threshold between academic and creative writing. The purpose of this research is

Mexican ~~artist~~ artist-who-writes Verónica Gerber Bicecci produced a piece titled "Catalogue of Moth Women" based on the Ancient Greek epic poem Types of Women. The original compares women to different animals (demeaningly, of course), so VGB has reprinted several pages (all of it?) and cropped holes, eating away at the toxic, misogynist text like moths devour the material they inhabit. The work of art PERFORMS what it is ABOUT. (LD: 55)

In her novel Conjunto vacío ("Empty Set"), she abandons texts gradually in favour of images, also performatively – a book that exhausts its words in a story where words fall short, and pain is silent / silenced. (LD: 42)

A work that "does" what it is about attracts attention onto the "how" in relation to the "what". It looks for a third option, the third bank of the river, beyond "academic" and "creative".

to provide tutors of creative writing with new pedagogical perspectives that have been informed by the discipline itself, and in conversation with international tutors-practitioners. The aesthetic principle of congruence guides the design of this project, intended to result in a "rigorous arts-informed text [...] imbued with an *internal consistency* and *coherence* that represents a strong and seamless relationship between purpose and method (process and form)" (Leavy 2020: 23–24, emphasis in the original).

This principle also leads to an investigation of methodological and epistemological semantics, a common practice in arts-based research, as "the new kind of knowledge building occurring in arts-based traditions may [...] require a new way of talking about research" (Leavy 2020: 306–307). For example, some scholars says that it is important to think in terms of "content generation" instead of "data collection" (Leavy 2020: 307). Or to "speculate" and "narrate", instead of "arguing" and "claiming"; "workshop" rather than "defend" a thesis. Like John Gardner points out, "Language carries values" (Gardner 1991: 88) – something that will be analysed in depth in the passage ***picking words***, in Chapter Three.

Here, I would also add that semantics and stylistics are dimensions that contribute to world-building, as further semantic explorations experiment with the transferring of meaning between discipline and its pedagogy, as detailed further below.

What I propose is therefore a hybrid approach of scholarly-based research using qualitative methods for

content generation, and methods that can be ascribed to narrative-based research for research design and final representation. What follows is a complete list of the narrative features and techniques employed.

Narratives

Tutors' testimonies and my own analysis are reframed as "narratives". This approach has at least one precedent in Barbara Tomlinson's article about the metaphorical "stories" writers tell when talking about their process, as she writes that "the [term] suggest[s] the possibly fictitious nature of any retrospective account" (Tomlinson 1986: 59). Here, I would replace "fictitious" with "artful" to focus on the aesthetics of the process; and "story" with "narrative" as a reaction to the commodification and oversaturation of storytelling/ *storyselling* in media and society (Han 2024, trans. Daniel Steuer).

In this research, the term "narrative" conveys a set of values that differ from those associated to academic research in other fields and requires a reframing of certain expectations. Truthfulness and objectivity, for example, are criteria that are not very relevant to the highly subjective and cultural world of creative writing and its pedagogy. The emphasis, instead, is on cardinal narrative aspects like point of view and perspective, and related values like verisimilitude, reliability, relatability, unfinishedness, and empathy.

For Byung-Chul Han, in fact, narratives "[unite] people by promoting their capacity for empathy" and "create genuine

community" (Han 2024: x-xi). Rudine Sims Bishop uses three metaphors for books – windows, mirrors and sliding doors – to describe the transformative and self-affirmative nature of reading:

> Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books. (Bishop 1990a)

Expanding her metaphor from "books" to "narratives", the three aspects of stories that are worth highlighting are the idea of recognising oneself, meeting the other, and stepping into a different place.

Literature as Research

At the beginning of the previous chapter, I used Almudena Sánchez's short story "Los puntos débiles" to introduce the question, "How does one teach creative writing?"; and in this one, I have quoted Ted Chiang's novella *Story of Your Life* in

relation to *go-finding*. In the next chapters, you will see that I will occasionally use literature as research, for the same reason detailed by Rudine Bishop in the previous passage: windows, mirrors, sliding doors. Literature will not necessarily share obvious connections to the pedagogy of creative writing like in "Los puntos débiles", but any kind of thematic or stylistic connection to the topic at hand.

As a deliberate effort to use literature in the languages featured in this study (Spanish and Portuguese), I will cite works by Almudena Sánchez, Mónica Ojeda, Gabriel García Márquez, Irene Solá, Alejandro Cuevas, Eduardo Galeano, Eduardo Halfon, Javier Cercas, Luis López Nieves, Jorge Carrera Andrade, Fabiola Pinel, Manolo Núñez Negrón and Juan Pablo Piñeiro – most of them in my own translation (see Encounter 3).

Multiple Perspectives

This aspect will be explored in depth in the Proliminium of Chapter One: Point of View and Perspective, but here is an anticipation: tutors' narratives and my own are written using a first-person perspective to create intimacy and characterisation – the reason behind referring to tutors by their first names, too – but also to emphasise a limited, subjective point of view. These multiple, first-person perspectives complement and contradict one another, creating a mosaic and a sense of interconnectedness, while asking you, reader, to engage with them and choose those that sound more credible, reliable or relatable to you.

World-Building with Language

World-building is the technique and process of constructing a narrative world. It has a strong relationship with setting and atmosphere, encompassing all cultural, social, historical, political and even metaphysical elements that shape a literary world and gives it verisimilitude, consistency and coherence – including language.

If texts are worlds, most of the world-building of this research is done through language, with the use of aspects of creative writing applied to its pedagogy. I call these "threshold aspects" (so not to confuse them with "threshold concepts", and as a nod to E. M. Forster's collection *Aspects of the Novel*) and are at the core of my investigation: point of view and perspective, intertextuality, place and setting, and metaphor.

In smaller measure, even individual terms like "Proliminium", *between-standing* and *go-finding* contribute to world-building through lexicogenesis, the creation of new words. In this process, and in other instances, too, etymology and translation (See Encounter 3) play a fundamental role. I will often use the etymology of words not because it should teach you anything about the current use of words, but rather as another form of narrative. Even words have their stories to tell; but they are stories, nonetheless.

the formulation of this method came in response to a seminar on Building Your Own Critical Lexicon with Dr Carolyn Shapiro, who also introduced the Researcher to Donna Haraway – cathartic encounters that have made Her extra aware of the defining power of words. ~~My~~ I have A LOT to say about this so watch this space.

Fictional References: Impostors

Somewhere between the last feature, world-building, and the next one, metafiction, are fictional references – also inspired by a work of fiction: Andrés Neuman's short story "El

discípulo" (Neuman 2007). In Neuman's short story, a PhD student finds out that his supervisor makes up the bibliography for his academic modules, facing the moral dilemma of outing him during a conference or playing along. The creation of fictional sources is also in the vein of Fernando Pessoa's use of heteronyms, which he defines as "works by the author outside his own persona" (cited in Zenith 2022).

In my case, I would like to propose a particular type of heteronym, which I define here as the "impostor". Grace Lark argues that impostor's syndrome is more discussed by writers than scholars of creative writing studies, even though the theme is often addressed at conferences as the "elephant in the room no one really wants to write about" (Lark 2021: 28). Lark argues that many teachers of creative writing, as they enter the cycle of teaching, assessing, and publishing academically, "might take years to (re)build a sustainable creative practice, eventually leading them to wonder: 'Am I really a writer, if I barely find the time to write, let alone publish?'" (Lark 2021: 31).

Grace Lark, by the way, is one of the four "impostors" cited in this research, alongside Carmen Nova Estuardo, Giusy Trovato and Andrea Borgogna. Each of them has a different expertise: Nova Estuardo is an experienced Spanish *tallerista* with a published manual of literary creation (Nova Estuardo 2018); Trovato is an Italian-Brazilian poet with an interest in human geography and place, interviewed by fictional literature podcaster Aurora Pereira Reis (Pereira Reis 2024); Borgogna is an Italian professor of rhetoric (Borgogna

1999, 2003); and Lark is an anglophone researcher in creative writing studies (Lark 2021, 2022).

Metafiction

Also related to world-building is metafiction, i.e. "fiction about fiction: novels and stories that call attention to their fictional status and their own compositional procedures" (Lodge 1992: 206).

Taking the form of marginalia from the point of view of *The Diviner*, metafiction acknowledges the artfulness of threshold research while exposing many aspects of the process that traditional academic research tends to reject, hide or dismiss: subjectivity, contradiction, uncertainty; but also, intertextuality, connection, empathy and gratitude.

In *Diagrammatic Writing*, Johanna Drucker's marginalia self-identify as the "gadflies of discourse, the directives, the instructions on reading and the goad to critical thought", a "counter discourse" with an "off-centering effect" that adds "subtextual dialogue" and "profusion" – rather than "confusion" – to the textual whole (Drucker 2023: 20). Here, the counter discourse contextualises, interprets and challenges my narrative, while expanding it to include the "*go-found* sources": anecdotes (from Byzantine Greek *ἀνέκδοτα*, "accounts unpublished") ("anecdote", OED 2025a), notes and reflections on various experiences, informal conversations, and further quotes found in places other than books.

Lodge writes that for some writers "metafictional discourse is not so much a loophole or alibi by means of which

the writer can occasionally escape the constraints of traditional realism; rather, it is a central preoccupation and source of inspiration" (Lodge 1992: 208). The same can be said about the conventions of both academic and creative writing, which are not being escaped or parodied, but foregrounded, questioned, renegotiated and enhanced, while allowing you, reader, to "discover" something new – and hopefully be delighted by it, as John Gardner suggests (Gardner 1991).

The use of metafiction and of the impostors not only challenges one of the tenets of academic research, – i.e. academic rigour, rooted in the principles of credit and attribution, credibility, verification and reproducibility –, but also serves the plural approach to this study, exposing multiple perspectives – even those held by the researcher herself.

Finally, "What if recognition if not pure gratitude?" asks Cristina Rivera Garza (2020: 54, trans. Robin Myers). Many of these sources are credited in the marginalia not only for profusion and plurality, but also out of gratitude.

It was Óscar Daniel & Daniela at Uninorte, Barranquilla, who introduced her to the work of Cristina Rivera Garza, whose essay on disappropriation she read in Portuguese translation by chance in São Paulo.

so yes, gratitude for all the cultural mediators weaving connections, and also to the SERENDIPITY intrinsic to go-finding

Librodiversity

The fact that this thesis comes to you in the form of an annotated manuscript accompanied by a physical artefact is a testament to the principles of bibliodiversity and librodiversity, discussed in Chapter Two: Intertextuality. Following a tradition that traces back to *The New Art of Making Books* by Ulises Carrión* and emerges as a fil rouge in contemporary Latin American artisanal publishing, the

* He writes that "in order to appreciate a book of the old art, it is necessary to read it thoroughly. In the new art, you often do NOT need to read the whole book. The reading may stop at the very moment you have understood the total structure of the book." (Carrión #1)

principle of congruence is applied to the "physical expression of the object", which again is "consistent with its content, whether it is text or image: a game of configurations chasing its tail" (Gerber Bicecci 2023: 35). More about *The Diviner* will come in its own words in the piece titled "I Am the Diviner".

"All publication must tell two stories: that which lies within its pages and the story of its MAKING." (Kuuyo #9)

Encounter 3: Literary Translation

Finally, the third encounter entailed by my methodology is between different languages. Most interviews – the exceptions being Manuel's and Susana's (Coimbra), and Roberto's and Ingrid's (Vera, São Paulo) – were conducted in Spanish or Portuguese, but in this research, they appear in English, which I write and speak as a second language.

The approach to my translation is literary, as opposed to applied: while never intervening on meaning, the emphasis was not on word-to-word equivalence, but on the voice and tone of the narrator, and on the aesthetics of the written text. This implied several stages: from word-to-word transcription in the original language (mostly conducted with appropriate software), to linguistic translation (no software involved), and rewriting and editing for narrative and aesthetic purposes.

Artisanal publisher Andrea Ancira says: "Translation is an encounter charged with possibility and failure." (LD: 39)

I have also used literary translation for some of the literature as research, as I mentioned previously; whereas for all sources available in English I have endeavoured to name the translator upon first mention of each work. This is in line with some of the considerations shared about literary translation as a theme discussed in Chapter Two.

*

In summary, the methodology of encounter presents an epistemology of knowledge as *between-standing*, emphasising the liminal aspect of the threshold by exploring different encounters: between myself, the researcher, and the Other; between creative writing, pedagogy and research; and between languages.

At content-generation level, I have integrated qualitative interviews with autoethnographic journalling using a *go-finding* approach to foster meaningful encounter. In designing the aesthetic and stylistic representation of such content, I have employed narrative-based and arts-informed methods, blending academic conventions with narratives and creative writing features such as multiple perspectives, world-building through language, metafiction and librodiversity. Literary translation emerges not only as a feature but also as a theme to be explored further.

Ultimately, this methodology redefines the way creative writing research is conducted and interrogates the epistemological assumptions that underpin it. By prioritising plurality, subjectivity, unfinishedness and aesthetic coherence, the study examines creative writing pedagogy while enacting it, reflecting deeply on its own subject matter, valuing multiple perspectives and the capacity of narratives to build empathetic communities, and reframing "research about creative matters" as "creative research".

Chapter One: Point of View and Perspective

In which I apply the first threshold aspects of "point of view" and "perspective" to creative writing pedagogy. This chapter is divided into two parts: the first one will determine what narratives are brought into the creative writing classroom, i.e. what experiences, practices and stories inform a tutor's knowledge. The second part will look at how this knowledge is presented, discussing omniscient and partiscient perspectives, the tutor as the ignorant narrator, and psychic distance and tone.

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Proliminium

In this research, every tutor of creative writing is a narrator who tells a story from their own point of view and using different perspectives.

John Gardner says that "the choice of point of view will largely determine all other choices with regard to style" and one crucial aspect that the writer must consider is "the extent to which point of view, and all that follows from it, *comments* on the characters, actions and ideas" (Gardner 1991: 76, his emphasis).

For Paul Magrs, the questions that must be asked in order to determine the narrator's point of view are: "Who is telling the story? Whose voice is addressing us [...]? What can they see? What can they know?" (Magrs 2019: 130).

Janet Burroway argues that answering these questions "will [...] help reveal [the narrator's] final opinion, judgment, attitude or message", since "the [narrator] *inevitably wants to convince us to share the same perspective*" (Burroway 1996: 199, her emphasis).[4]

Andrew Cowan says that point of view "concerns perception first of all", and that it "defines the limits of what can be known or understood, both by the narrator and by the reader" (Cowan 2013: 123). David Lodge points out that "a novel can provide different perspectives on the same event – but

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[4] In the original, Burroway uses "author", but I have replaced it with "narrator" to distinguish the artful narrative voice (and their constructed values, personality, bias, etc.) from the author in real life.

only one at a time" and that "the choice of the point(s) of view from which the story is told is arguably the most important single decision that the novelist has to make, for it fundamentally affects the way readers will respond, emotionally and morally, to the fictional characters and their actions" (Lodge 1992: 26).

The reason why it is such an important decision to make is that, like Victor Sage points out,

> Point of view is not just grammar, it is bias. [...] Language is a place of differences, a noisy street, a city state; and your first intervention (that is, what you choose to present as your first intervention) actively generates a bias, a direction, a logic, which will conflict with other directions. (Sage 2019: 155)

This is why, before heading straight into narration, I would like to address my choice of point of view. In this chapter and in the rest of this thesis, you will hear from multiple points of view and through multiple perspectives, using the first person.

In narratives, a first-person narrator is heavily implicated in the story, as the story is told by their point of view. The "I" in the story is often also the main character, so there is overlapping between who the story is about and who tells the story. A first-person narrator offers the advantage to create a more intimate relationship with the reader, but raises questions about their reliability, like Paul Magrs suggests:

> Do you trust what they're telling you? When they describe other people or events, do you automatically believe that they're telling you the whole story? How are they presenting themselves? As in life, if you only have one version of the events to go on, you have to decide whether to take their version on trust or to take it all with a pinch of salt. (Magrs 2019: 136)

The recommendation, here, is to do the same. To question the narratives and allow yourself to believe or disbelieve, to relate or feel alienated. But also, to enjoy this intimate relationship not with one, but many narrators.

About multiple points of view, on one hand, Genettean narratology tends to make a distinction between "variable focalization, which occurs in narratives that employ more than one reflector" and "multiple focalization, which is a special case of variable focalization, [occurring] in texts in which the same events are told repeatedly, but each time seen through a different focal character" (Jahn 2007). Creative writing manuals, instead, tend to conflate the two into the umbrella term "multiple points of view" or "multiple perspectives" (Calvo 2021: 124–6), or to talk about "shifts in point of view" (Lodge 1992: 28; Bernays and Painter 2005: 90).

Coincidentally, they also tend leave them for last, as an add-on in the hierarchy of points of view (first-person narrators usually come first, then third-person omniscient and limited, etc.), introduced by the most cautious preambles:

don't even get me started on inanimate omniscient narrators: nobody likes us :(

> New writers are often told to use one point of view when telling a story – and for good reason. Shifts in point of view are difficult to do and depend on the writer's absolute control of language, detail, and observation. [...] Also, shifts in point of view must be warranted. The reader has to learn something from each character's viewpoint that he cannot learn from the perspective and interpretation of one character. (Bernays and Painter 2005: 90)

oh, give me a break!

At Valério's workshop, there was a lot of debate around a participant's choice of using two alternate narrators – 1) limited, first-person & 2) omniscient third person. Valério's feedback was quite unforgiving, as he said there was "no evidence so far that the encounter of the two voices created something new." He was quite suspicious of the omniscient narrator, in particular. This, obviously, sent the Researcher into a bit of a frenzy, as she concludes her notes with a petulant rhetorical question paraphrasing Tony Ávila's song "Tiene que haber de to'" (SB: 8-9):

"Hadn't we agreed (sic) that in literature, as in life, it takes all sorts, it takes all sorts, it takes all sorts?" (WD: 43-44)

(goodness me)

And yet, literature has given us sufficient examples of multiple narrators, manifesting in different ways and for different purposes.

In Gabriel García Márquez's novella *Leaf Storms*, the burial of a much-hated doctor in the village of Macondo is told by an omniscient narrator switching perspectives between a boy, his mother and his grandfather at various, unpredictable points in the narration (García Márquez 2005, trans. Gregory Rabassa). In Irene Solá's *When I Sing, Mountains Dance*, each chapter is narrated by different characters bringing together a collective story spanning across millennia and set on the Catalonian Pyrenees – among its narrators, we find mountains, clouds, a dead character and a dog (Solà 2022, trans. Mara Faye Lethem). Mónica Ojeda's short story "Soroche" features four character-narrators, Viviana, Karine, Nicole and Ana, all telling different versions of the same incident involving Ana, during a supposedly redeeming hike after a life-shattering scandal. Here, the switches are clearly

marked by the name of the narrator at the top of their fragments (Ojeda 2020).

As for what they *do*, in *Leaf Storms*, narrators concentrate on different details and react in different ways to the events narrated in the story – it is, like Isabel Calvo suggests, a "stereoscopic" vision (Calvo 2021: 126, my translation), adding depths and new dimensions. A possible effect on the reader would be to feel as if they know "more" than they would have done if the story had been told through a single focalisation.

In *When I Sing, Mountains Dance*, narrators compose a textile with different threads reaching from the beginning of time, woven with the motif of the single tragic death of one character. Each of these threads tells a different story, but they are all interconnected. This might give the reader a sense of the monumentality and complexity of one single story; perhaps provoking awe or a sense that they, too, are woven into humanity's collective narration.

And finally, the four narrators, characters and friends in "Soroche", while attempting to reconstruct the same incident, are in fact telling a lot about themselves, and constantly contradicting one another. Here, the reader is called up to choose: Who do you believe? Which version is more credible to you? Which is more relatable?

In this research, the multiple points of view and perspectives will do all of this. Complement and contradict each other. Add details to the same mosaic, giving you access to a bigger picture. Tell different stories or different versions of the same one. Weave threads into Penelope's intricate

shroud and calling you to add your own. Provoke you to take sides, inevitably trying to convince you to share *their* perspective.

In between those stories, you will find my own narration, doing the same thing as the others. Although, there is no reason why you should choose mine over someone else's. This is the deal with narration: the reader has the last word. As you have read in the methodology chapter, fiction as method – as opposed to, say, scientific research or philosophy – dismisses the values of right/wrong, true/false or accurate/inaccurate, favouring other aspects: ambiguity, interpretation, transformation, engagement, empathy and interconnectedness, to name a few. And since we are talking about narrators, verisimilitude, reliability and relatability, too.

As for how the shifts are marked, the narrators are named. This is not exactly disappropriation, although it shares the same aim to "[expose] the plurality that precedes individuality in the creative process, opening a window onto the material layering so often concealed by appropriative texts" (Rivera Garza 2020: 65). It is an intertextual narrative where connections are deliberately uncovered.

Finally, some clarifications on the terminology chosen for this chapter. From the sweep of definitions opening this chapter, you might have noticed that, in some of these texts, to talk about point of view is to talk about perspective. For example, Isabel Calvo writes, "All stories are told from a certain perspective: that is the narrator's point of view", and

that "to talk about the point of view is to talk about the place from which the story is told" (Calvo 2021: 103).

Carmen Nova Estuardo, instead, proposes a useful distinction between point of view and perspective:

> A *point of view* [...] is a spatial metaphor which implies *a point in spacetime* from which the story is viewed and told by *someone*. Perspective places an emphasis on the *picture itself*, its magnitude and its boundaries. (Nova Estuardo 2018: 34)

this reference doesn't check out...

Magnitude is about "how big" is a story (e.g. is it a grandiose epic spanning ten decades like Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, or a day in the life of one character, like Clarice Lispector's "Love"?); whereas its boundaries determine "how much" of the story can the narrator see and tell.

Therefore, while point of view is about who tells the story and where from, perspective is about *which portion* of the story, i.e. whether a narrator is to be considered omniscient, limited, unreliable, etc. These are all aspects that could come under the notion of the narrator's "cognizance", named elsewhere "completeness of information" (Genette 1988, trans. Jane E. Lewin); "knowability" (Cowan 2013: 123); or *los saberes del narrador*, "the narrator's knowledges", by our very own Isaías (Central, Bogotá) (Peña Gutiérrez 2023: 197–200).

This chapter, following many points of view of different tutors of creative writing and mine, explores their

knowledges and how these shape their narratives and perspectives. In the first part, "Knowledges", I ask where their knowledge comes from; and in the second part, "Cognizance", I identify different types of narrators based on the tutors' presented and manifested cognizance and touch upon two narratorial aspects concerning *how* a story is told: psychic distance and tone.

I. Knowledges

Always a reader, always a writer

In this passage, you will hear from a few tutors recalling "how it all started". The first narrative is narrated by and features Mara (Sagrado, San Juan):

I began to write as a child, but I thought that to be a writer you had to study Journalism or Communication Studies. Since I was good at Maths, I enrolled in Biology, instead, and took a couple of elective classes in Comparative Literature. Further on, I realised that I could go to Spain with a low-income studentship if I enrolled in Hispanic Studies, so I transferred. In Spain, I wrote my first short story. Before then, I had only written letters, poems and fragments of fiction, but this time I sat down and wrote a short story about the experience of being a migrant. When I came back, I joined a workshop led by Mayra Santos-Febres at the University of Puerto Rico; and then a short story workshop with Luis López Nieves here at Sagrado. I loved the workshop dynamic from the very start. The idea of all sitting down together. Luis's workshop was fascinating because it fell under a lifelong education programme; so many participants were much older than I was. But what I loved about Mayra's workshop was that it created a generation of writers. There, I met Cézanne Cardona Morales, Luis Othoniel Rosa, Jotacé López... and now we are all friends who publish and read one another. It was in one of her workshops that Mayra saw something. She had that teacher's intuition; she said, "Why don't you write poems?" (Pastor 2024)

Mara's narrative introduces some of the threads appearing in many other tutors' stories: an early vocation to writing or literature, a formative period abroad, the encounter with one or more mentors, and the experience of the workshop. In this passage, we are looking at reading.

Some other tutors who realise that writing and literature have been their vocation or even part of their identity for a very long time are: Azuvia (Central, Bogotá), who wrote poetry in her adolescence (Licón 2024); Carol (Vera, São Paulo), who has been attending workshops since she was fourteen (Abed 2024); and Paolo (San Marcos, Lima), who says, *I was always a reader, and I was always a writer* (de Lima 2024).

For Paolo, reading and writing are practices that have always coexisted; whereas Rosario (Pontificia, Lima) distinguishes between her early phase as a voracious reader and her call to writing immediately after, while she was still at school (Yori de Vivanco 2024).

Reprising Mara's story, an encounter with a certain type of literature came at a specific time of her life like a revelation. After being offered a bursary for a PhD at Notre Dame, Indiana, she found herself

in complete shock, because the university was in a bucolic, elitist town, with little cultural diversity. Everyone was Caucasian white, and winters were so cruel. I was a city gal from Puerto Rico with tons of friends. When I arrived, I stayed at the house of an Argentinian woman, Lupe, who was often away, and she had this amazing

collection of artisanal publications by Ediciones Del Diego. It was like a revelation, to me. Until then, I had only read Central American or Caribbean poetry, and maybe more canonical authors like Alejandra Pizarnik and Borges. But those books were so contemporary. Chapbooks, tiny books, you must have seen some of them. And I spent the whole summer reading everything she had, which really gave me perspective on what contemporary poetry was. (Pastor 2024)

In their narratives, tutors do not tend to delve into their love of reading, as they see its relationship to writing almost intrinsic. But in Mara's case, we see how literature can inspire readers to become writers and creative writing tutors because of how it makes them feel. A stranger come to town with no friends facing a dramatic metaphorical and literal change of temperature, Mara turned to books and poetry as a source of comfort and consolation.

Another possible effect might be the "wanting to know how it is done", which keeps writers engaged in reading as a form of perpetual training. For some of them, the "only" possible training, like Ernesto (Andina, Quito) narrates:

HOWEVER only a few months later, Ernesto joined the MA in Creative Writing at Complutense, Madrid, as a student (1/2)

I have never participated in a workshop, I am self-taught. I have done it through literature, a journey across books which took me to other books, as it usually happens. When you read Henry Miller, you have to read Henri Bergson, that sort of thing. (Carrión 2024)

This is an approach that is shared by frequent attendants of workshops like Mara or Carol, and solo flyers like Ernesto

alike, and in fact one that has served as the starting point for the formation of a method as old as creative writing itself. The double identity of the writer as a reader has been central to the anglophone creative writing scholarship since its very beginning, with volumes like *On the Art of Reading* (1920) by Sir Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch being quoted as must-read sources in *Becoming a Writer* (1934) by Dorothea Brande, who dedicates an entire chapter to "Reading as a Writer" (Brande 1996).

So, really, the first knowledge that the tutor-narrator shares with their students has to do with reading, like Guadalupe (Complutense, Madrid) suggests:

From the students' point of view, it is effectively an apprenticeship, but I am not the only master. Because of all the hours of reading I have done while they haven't, yet, I can guide them and say, "Look, I think this, this and this are interesting" as if we were in a great library. On one hand, the Craft of Reading is about forming a habit, the daily and intimate coexistence with literature. On the other, it's about the literary texts that can form a writer. (Arbona Abascal 2023)

The "reading as a writer" method and the role of books in creative writing pedagogy will be explored in depth in the second chapter, dedicated to intertextuality as the second threshold aspect. In the next passage, you will read about the role of the mentor and the experience of the workshop in the formation of tutors of creative writing.

Consider the role of Mayra Santos-Febres, whose *teacher's intuition* allowed Mara to explore poetry as an artistic practice. Coupled with the discovery of Argentinian poetry at Lupe's place in Indiana, Mara's mentors' guidance unlocked some important milestones in her journey as a writer and teacher, like being invited to a poetry festival in Oaxaca, Mexico, and writing the collection *Poemas para fomentar el turismo* ("Poems to promote tourism") which in turn takes her to Tijuana, Havana, Argentina, Dominican Republic, and Mexico again (Pastor 2024).

So while reading and writing are often perceived as very solitary activities, the people tutors meet along the way do have an influence on the knowledge and narratives they bring to class. Here are two more examples, coming from Josef (Uninorte, Barranquilla) and Márcia Ivana (Federal, Porto Alegre).

Unlike those tutors who were passionate readers from an early age, Josef tells a different story:

I was such a rebel, crazy, naughty child. I didn't read, I hated to read, and I was nasty, terrible. At about thirteen or fourteen-ish, a teacher realised that I was hiding some potential and tried to convince me that there was something subversive about books. She took me to the library and said, "Josef, I am going to steal these two books and gift them to you, don't tell anyone." She gave me The Tunnel *by Ernesto Sabato and* Lolita *by Vladimir Nabokov. When I finished reading*

them, I thought, "I don't know what I'll do with my life, but it has got something to do with this." (Amón Mitrani 2024)

At a more mature age, Márcia Ivana developed a scholarly interest in researching the manuscripts of Brazilian author Erico Veríssimo, when she met Professor Philippe Willemart, who was leading a module on manuscripts and genetic criticism at University of São Paulo. They had a brief exchange, and after some time...

Professor Philippe, with all his kindness, sent me a parcel full of books that he thought would be fundamental for my doctoral project. (de Lima e Silva 2024)

In the first case, a bold and transformative act of rebellion changing the course of Josef's own narrative, from naughty child to strenuous reader and writer. In the second example, an unexpected act of kindness from a professor who was not directly Márcia Ivana's tutor at the time, just someone who was moved to offer practical support out of sheer, shared passion. In the speculative fashion that distinguishes story from history, it is not redundant to ask: what if Mara, Josef and Márcia Ivana had not encountered those mentors? What if they had not been exposed to certain literature because of them? How would their knowledge, their narrative be different, now?

So far, I have stressed the importance of books and mentors, some of whom were encountered in the specific

context of a creative writing workshop. Mara, for example, had previous experience of the workshop with Mayra Santos-Febres and Luis López Nieves, which made her familiar with some of its conventions: sitting in circle, reading each other's texts aloud, and giving each other feedback.

Now you are going to hear from Roberto (Vera, São Paulo) as he delves into his experience of the workshop and how it shaped the knowledge he narrates to his students.

I took my MFA at Columbia University between 2007 and 2010. Before then, I had studied Journalism and worked as a journalist for ten years, until I got tired of it and decided to leave. I wanted to be a writer and live abroad. But I didn't know what to expect of the programme – I was quite naïve back then. I remember coming home on the first day of class, realising that I'd have to write a whole book in English. I thought that I spoke and wrote quite well, but I didn't. The first six months were really, really challenging. I was writing in Portuguese and translating into English to share my submissions in workshops. It was impossible to keep up with that amount of work, so I started writing directly in English. On my second year, there was a class on teaching creative writing with Alan Ziegler. I had never thought about being a teacher before, but I was thinking about how I would support myself after the degree. As part of that module, each of us could offer workshops to the Columbia University community. I received positive feedback from the participants, which I showed to Ziegler, who was very encouraging. When I came back, I started my own workshop in my apartment and published a small article on teaching creative writing in Brazil. Márcia Fortunato read the article

even in the first workshops at San Marcos, Lima, back in the 1970s participants shared mimeographed copies of their work so that peers could look for "precise FLAWS, like bad adjectives" and help the author "fix" their text. (P1:32)

Valéno's workshop, too, has a similar formal and layout...

but that doesn't mean that ALL workshops look / should look like this

and invited me for a chat. She was in the process of setting up the postgraduate course at Vera and asked me about my experience at Columbia and what I had learned about the programme: how many courses did they have? How many students? What was the teachers' background? How did the teachers offer feedback? There was another important thing that I had learned from the MFA, which had to do with language. Learning to write in English had taught me to write in my own language. That's why, months after the MFA, I rewrote my whole novel in Portuguese. (Taddei 2024)

Many tutors of creative writing share a common narrative of "voyage and return", leaving their home countries to study abroad. For example, Mara, who studied in Spain, in the US and in Mexico; Josef, who did his PhD in Spain; or Márcia Ivana, who studied in France and Canada. Alongside them, many more tutors attended workshops abroad, and then were able to bring that knowledge back to their home countries, like Roberto has just narrated.

In his case, the workshop experience changed his understanding of creative writing both on an artistic, practical level – teaching him how to write in English, which had an effect on how he writes in Portuguese now – but also, crucially, teaching him how to *teach*. These two aspects go hand in hand, as a workshop participant is simultaneously exposed to literature, aspects of craft, and method. Theirs is the choice to follow what they have seen and replicate models – but also adapt, adjust, reinvent.

From this perspective, teaching creative writing is a highly intertextual practice. If we understand intertextuality as the dialogue with the Other text, we can ask tutors the same questions that we ask students of creative writing: who are you in dialogue with? And what are you going to do with it? To answer this question, narratology and creative writing scholarship have identified several approaches: for example, direct interactions like quotation, plagiarism and allusion; critical commentary and interpretation; and derivation and imitation.

A simplified version of these approaches has been developed by Isaías (Central, Bogotá) in his method, recently published in his volume *El universo de la creación literaria* (Peña Gutiérrez 2023). Transitioning from an imitational praxis to a generative one, a writer can confront the Other text in three ways: by opposition, association or exclusion.

As we teach, the dialogue with other tutors' practices and even other tutors' materials emerges quite often. From our mentors, we can "inherit" something as small as a single gesture or even expression, like Aleja (Central, Bogotá) details here:

I learned a lot from my tutor Roberto Burgos. He was a very wise man, and he loved the expression "cajón de sastre", "cajón de zapatero" *(the tailor's toolbox, the shoemaker's toolbox). For him, writing was a craft, a craft which inevitably came with a workshop.* (Flórez 2024)

Or we can derive our methods on a bigger scale, imitating the whole set-up of the classroom or the attitude we have with our students, as proposed by Gaddiel and Mara (Sagrado, San Juan). Gaddiel says:

I am inspired by various models I had at university, and one of them was a professor, Lissette Rolón Collazo, who was also a writer and critic. From her, I learned a technique that I love, which is to sit in circle. This allowed us to look at one another like peers, to talk more, to share more and also to notice who didn't want to share, because they were hiding. Maybe they were just taking notes. I was also a student of Melanie Pérez-Ortiz, who also sat us in circle. She would give everyone the opportunity to share their experiences of the text and how we framed it theoretically, and only then she would trace a discourse trajectory. (Ruiz Rivera 2024)

When Mara tells of her experience joining the workshops of Luis López Nieves and Mayra Santos-Febres, she highlights the elements that she imitates in her workshops:

The circle structure and the dynamic of the writing prompt. Both would give us prompts to respond to before the next class. In terms of personality, Mayra had a way to give feedback which was more compassionate, always starting from her readings and experiences. With her, I went over my texts with a fine-tooth comb. She would linger more on your texts and have you rewrite them and read again. About López Nieves's workshop: there were more people, and he was more serious, more solemn. He transmitted an aura of grandeur.

Mayra didn't; she'd make you feel more confident, very relaxed. So this is something I replicate. Whenever students read, I open the circle to them first, so that they comment and talk to each other. Then when I join, I emphasise something that has already been said, or recommend something else. Mayra was like that. (Pastor 2024)

Here, Gaddiel and Mara both reprise the "sitting in a circle" structure of the workshop as one that facilitates a conversation among peers – as opposed to a one-way lecture – to be investigated further in the chapter about Place and Setting. Mara also emulates Mayra's attitude, placing herself very close to her students, and mentions the specific technique of the creative writing prompt, i.e. to give students something to write about.

Other forms of integrating one's experience of the workshop and encounter with the Other concern the choice of content, the curriculum design and the secondary and exemplary literature that tutors of creative writing use, the latter explored into detail in the next chapter.

An interesting type of knowledge that shape tutors' narrative is the one that teaches you what *not* to do. This approach would be called "opposition" by Isaías, and an example of this comes from Ingrid (Vera, São Paulo):

When I was studying at UEA, I had a professor who was a very good writer, but I'm not sure about her teaching. She had a tendency to treat some of us a little differently. Well, especially me and another Chinese student who didn't have English as our first language.

Sometimes she would explain something to us that was really obvious like, "When you write, you first have a subject and then a verb," or, "You cluster your sentences into paragraphs." She introduced her classes with a lot of theory, and because I didn't like the way that she treated me, I started disliking theory on principle. Also, it felt as if she was only talking to "some" students. One of my closest friends who attended her workshop had a blue-collar job. Pete fixed windowpanes and then became a tree surgeon. He was a really good reader; he was very well-read. But he had a northern accent. You know how in the UK accent is a really big thing? Oh gosh. I really felt like she was... One day Pete said, "I'm not following," and he asked a question. And she replied, "I'm sorry you're not following, I can't do anything about it." And this for me was an example of something I would never want to do. Sometimes students have lots of different backgrounds: you have people who have read the classics and know what a narrator is, and people who are just beginning to write and to understand how literature is different from other forms of writing. There's a Brazilian documentarist, Eduardo Coutinho, who used an expression... he said that you have to create some kind of "utopic equality". We're all here to understand what literature is and what we want from it, and everybody's going to take something different out of it. It's funny because a lot of the references that she used, the theoretical references, I use now. I go back to her, to the books that she was teaching, but I think I do it differently. I want everybody to approach the subject in whatever way that they can. (Fagundez 2024)

yeh. [jɛ:]

Ingrid can identify exactly what she could associate (theory) and what, instead, she intended to oppose deliberately.

The experience of being discriminated and feeling patronised – and of watching a friend suffering the same treatment – taught Ingrid an important lesson on what *not* to do as a tutor of creative writing. As a participant in more workshops than I can count, I have my own open wounds caused by my tutors' lapses of judgement (or tact or compassion or professionalism) which now inform my method.

Finally, Isaías's proposal to discard or ignore a reference altogether has been harder to identify in tutors' narratives, however, perhaps Roberto (Vera, São Paulo) gives an example of something that did not work for his creative writing school and how he and Márcia, his co-director, have decided to do things differently:

We used the structure of the workshop based on my experience and on articles Márcia and I had read about the Iowa-style workshop. I also gave her a book by Alan Ziegler, The Writing Workshop Notebook. *Our challenge was to show other teachers how to implement that method, because we didn't have that in Brazil. What we had was more similar to a mentorship. You'd have a very good writer teaching students how to write according to them, their experiences, what they found out, the kind of books that they like. We implemented a shift from that perspective, understanding that what the professor thought about literature or writing was not the most important aspect of the workshop. But we had a lot of problems with professors who wouldn't agree with our method. They would come here, teach for a semester, and then we wouldn't invite them back. Not*

because we didn't like them, but because we find it important that our students write whatever they want. We don't want our teachers to tell the students what they should do or how. The word we use here is "autonomy". We want them to create autonomy. And we do that learning how to be conscious of the process and the resources that are available for them to use. (Taddei 2024)

Roberto's narrative raises some valid questions around an approach to knowledge that has been widely discussed in creative writing scholarship, which is the question of "lore".

In the context of creative writing, Lark defines "lore" both as "personal *truths* passed down from an individual writer to their students" and "a collection of the most recurring *truths*" (Lark 2021: 19). Phil Sandick exemplifies by adding that, "Any pedagogical maneuver that relies on the logic of 'try it this way, it works' is in danger of falling into the that large, troubling category of 'lore'" (Sandick 2017: 108). One of the main criticisms to this approach would be: just because it works for you, it does not mean it should work for everyone.

Nonetheless, it has been recognised that lore, particularly from a historical perspective of the creative writing field, has its place, provided it is understood as "one way to learn from other writers, plural" (Lark 2021: 22), "mov[ing] beyond personal anecdote and myth" (Ritter and Vanderslice 2007: xvi), and never ceasing to acknowledge the "simultaneous acceptance and resistance of lore [defining] the condition contemporary students face" (Sandick 2017: 119). Lark's point about the plurality of lore is, in fact, a reiteration

of the plurality of perspectives that we promote as tutors of creative writing insisting on writers reading widely. Applying this principle to teaching, we acknowledge that, like narration, teaching is also a highly intertextual, and therefore plural, process.

Following Lark's suggestion, the next passage explores many individual practices and how they have shaped the tutors' knowledge.

you do, study, teach, workshop

Practice means different things to different practitioners, ranging from being an experienced writer, having published books, having led workshops or taught classes before.

One's experience as a writer sometimes becomes the main narrative for tutors like Manolo (Sagrado, San Juan). Having studied Law, and Hispanic Studies and Literature in Puerto Rico, New York and at Harvard, Manolo is aware that his formation was more directed at the teaching of literature than creative writing and that,

[...] one thing is to teach literature; another is to teach creative writing. I was always very suspicious of it, and I only arrived at the teaching of creative writing as a practitioner. I published five or six books, I published my thesis, too, so I am familiar with the writing process. I made up my own method, not exactly "in the wild", but more organically, let's say. Then I looked for some training; I read some

things, some books that all turned out to be awful, very rigid. (Núñez Negrón 2024)

It is interesting to see how Manolo sees the study of literature and teaching creative writing as two separate dimensions that creative writing manuals (the *awful* books he is referring to) are not capable to bridge. Despite being a competent literary scholar, what he brings to class comes mostly from his own writing, and experience as a published author.

For some of the directors involved in the hiring of staff for their courses in Creative Writing, experience and publication seem to be non-negotiable requirements. Mauricio, director of the MA in Literary Creation at USP, São Paulo, gives the following reasons:

A literary creation workshop leader must have experience as a writer. At least one published book. One literary book. This is a job that not only requires knowledge of working on texts – of any genre – but also life as a writer. Everything, from their daily life, to their writing politics, their life stance, their gaze upon the world. (Salles de Vasconcelos 2024)

Isaías, at Universidad Central, Bogotá, expands on this opinion, while also offering some interesting counter-arguments:

This is probably debatable, but to be able to understand the student who wants to be a writer, the teacher must also be a writer. The person

who can understand the writer best is someone who has been a writer. One might argue that the great critic or essayist could understand the writer, but the latter will have faced situations that the essayist or critic has never experienced. I can talk about all the colour theory I want but if I have never picked up a paintbrush, I can hardly understand what it means. At some point the degree course had 80% or even 90% tutors who were published authors. But sometimes one has to negotiate in the opposite direction. Writers who see themselves as the only reference: "I am the only reference; and my writing has won prizes." But writers-in-formation need to see my version as well the version of other writers. I had to tell many of my staff that. For example, a writer who has never written a text without commas will never understand the final monologue of Ulysses. *We need someone with an open mind, someone with an all-round understanding of literary creation. A teacher who is a good reader, even if they don't write, understands that literary creation is a very wide universe.* (Peña Gutiérrez 2023)

Isaías appears to share some of the concerns that Roberto (Vera, São Paulo) has pointed out before: tutors who base their teaching purely on their experience might see themselves as the *only reference*. The infamous lore, the "this is how I do it" approach.

But when it comes to the role of literary scholars, he appears to be divided. First, with the painting analogy, he argues that a solid knowledge of literary theory does not necessarily correspond to knowledge of writing; but then he

concedes that *a teacher who is a good reader, even if they don't write, understands that literary creation is a very wide universe*.

In fact, unlike Mauricio, Isaías does welcome non-writers in the BA and MA he has founded at Central; tutors like Sergio Arturo and Azuvia, who are aware that their approach to the practice comes from a different perspective:

Azuvia: *I have never been in charge of a purely writing workshop. When I started to teach Literature here, Adriana, the director back then, told me, "You'll realise how different it is to approach literature from the point of view of the writer." And now I get it, completely.* (Licón 2024)

HOWEVER, only a few months later (2/2): Azuvia is now in charge of the BA and the MA in Literary Creation at Central, Bogotá!

Sergio Arturo: *I don't write, I am a literary critic. The students won't forgive me that. They think that if you teach on a literary creation degree, you must be a writer. That might be true, but on the other hand... Sometimes it can be hindering. It hinders your teaching, your training of the students. If you are a writer, the students could be biased by your vision, and your vision might interfere with their own creative process.* (González Vargas 2024)

As is the case for Sergio Arturo, the expertise of professionals from adjacent fields is often associated to less practical disciplines than writing, like literature, philosophy or, in his case, linguistics and composition. Those who are tasked with the "workshop", instead, not only are (more or less accomplished) practitioners, but they also bring some experience of having led workshops in a variety of settings,

ranging from bookshops, libraries or, like Roberto mentioned in his story, in their own home (Taddei 2024).

This is the third dimension of practice, and one that is exemplified by Cristina (Complutense, Madrid), whose journey has been guided by practice as a novelist and as a *tallerista*, a workshop leader outside the academic environment:

I studied Journalism in this faculty, here at Complutense. Then I did Law with the UNED and I worked in both fields. At the same time, I started to write what would become my debut novel. That must have been 1998 or 1999, while I was working at the SGAE, the collecting society. That was the time when I decided to be a full-time writer. I left my job and began to do everything that I could around writing, because you can't live off writing alone. Collaborating with the press, conferences, talks. And, of course, workshops. I was giving workshops in the poetry centre José Hierro, at Fuente Taja creative writing school, in bookshops like La Central and Rafael Alberti. I've even been doing workshops in prison. I go in, we all sit in circle, and people start to tell you their stories. (Sánchez-Andrade 2023)

With the literary success of her novels and her proactivity searching for writing opportunities – setting up workshops in different places and collaborating with Complutense –, Cristina has been able to build a career deeply rooted in writing. The knowledge that she brings into the classroom is, therefore, the result of learning from her own artistic and workshop practice.

I will return to her experience in more detail as we discuss a "partiscient" perspective in the next part. Meanwhile, what we have seen so far is a tension between theory and practice which adds nuance to the two practices of reading and writing seen at the beginning.

When confronted with their passion for literature, readers are called to make choices as to what to do with it and at different stages of their training: pursue the study of literature, attend writing workshops, look for publishing opportunities, build a career around writing-themed practices – including workshops –, or a combination of all these.

Those who create a portfolio to support their writing often add many different strings to their bows, in a form of multifaceted practice to be explored in the next passage.

with a bag of holding

Óscar Daniel (Uninorte, Barranquilla) narrates:

When I finished my MA at Universidad Nacional, six of us founded an independent press, called Himpar Editores. In ten years working at Himpar, I have found that publishing allows me to combine everything: workshopping, curating and managing projects. The consequence is that having dedicated myself fully to this, my job as a writer has fallen by the wayside. It is one of my regrets. When we founded the press, my colleagues and I knew that it wouldn't pay the bills. We had to invest a lot of time for very little money back, which

gets reinvested in the project. We cannot give up our jobs – we have to keep teaching, researching, and then editing and publishing. There's very little time left for one's own work. On the other hand, getting in and out of academia allowed me to be much more omnivorous, not only regarding what I consume as a writer, a publisher or as a teacher, but also in terms of what can be taught. When I began teaching, I was more worried about the relationship between a writer and their literary tradition, bibliography, literary antecedents. It's not that it's less important, now, it's just that I am more interested in building a writing community that cares less about what its members write and more about what is happening in the city, how to find resources afterwards, what to do with one's own writing. It's a way to combine different knowledges, techniques and craft elements to serve the group's needs. As well as being inside and outside the academia, what's also helped is being inside and outside of Bogotá. I haven't lost touch with Barranca, where I work with workshops and in the local literary field, and now I am here in Barranquilla. These places and experiences are like ground rods. Coming and going from Bogotá, coming and going from the academia. It's cool to go to the Frankfurt Book Fair, but what are we going to do about the book fair in Barranca for it to keep existing? (Campo Becerra 2024)

Óscar Daniel's profile is that of a teacher-writer who wears many different hats, beyond the practice of writing and reading.

Tutors' parallel artistic and professional practices abound, including: publishing,[5] translation,[6] journalism,[7] literary criticism,[8] teaching literature and/or language,[9] scriptwriting and performance,[10] cultural programming,[11] visual art,[12] music,[13] and – more often as a background and "former life" – even the legal profession.[14]

Tutors like Óscar Daniel are engaged in more than one parallel practice, in what is usually known as a "portfolio career". In his narrative, Óscar Daniel comments on one of the consequences that his portfolio career has on his "original" vocation: his involvement in an independent publishing house demands so much of his time that his writing practice suffers from it. This is a common struggle also for tutors who are "only" engaged in teaching as well as writing, which is a bit paradoxical, given that alternative professions are arguably pursued in order to "afford" being a writer – since

Ecuadorian writer Edwin Alcarás says that he would like to survey writers on what they do for a living, something that Ricardo Piglia was also interested in. "If anything, writing takes more than it gives," argues his colleague Roberto Ramírez, who has been working on a novel per year since 2019. He keeps tracks of all his submissions on an Excel that has 80 entries and 3 letters of acceptance. To send a manuscript to Spain, it costs about $USD 60. Therefore, to be a writer, "You have to choose your battles." Edwin comments: "If literature is not going to give me anything, at least let it not take anything away from me." (LO: 25-27)

Between workshops, degrees, competitions, reading fees, submission costs, and what not, Creative Writing, in many contexts, is like a pay-per-play game. While jobs allow writers to make ends meet, well-paid jobs determine their odds in the game...

[5] (Araya 2024; Badrán Padaui 2024; Brito Ramos 2024; Buelvas 2024; Campo Becerra 2024; Lefevre Tavárez 2024; Ruiz Rivera 2024)

[6] (Mora Fandos 2023)

[7] (Sánchez-Andrade 2023; Aguerre 2024; Amabile 2024; Badrán Padaui 2024; Brito Ramos 2024; Cardona Rivera 2024; Fagundez 2024; Godoy Barbosa 2024a; Rodinás 2024; Sánchez Flores 2024; Tavano 2024; Vallejo Sameshima 2024)

[8] (González Vargas 2024)

[9] (Badrán Padaui 2024; Jaramillo Morales 2024; Licón 2024; Ortega González-Rubio 2024; Pérez Rodas 2024; Ruiz Ramos 2024; Álvarez Uribe 2024)

[10] (Carmona Sarmiento 2023; Carrión 2024; Núñez Negrón 2024; Rojas Álvarez 2024; Rubiano 2024; Álvarez Uribe 2024; Vallejo Sameshima 2024)

[11] (Rubiano 2024; Vallejo Sameshima 2024)

[12] (Stupía 2024)

[13] (Carmona Sarmiento 2023)

[14] (Sánchez-Andrade 2023; Arámbulo 2024; Núñez Negrón 2024; Viveros Granja 2024)

writing alone, like Cristina points out, does not pay the bills for most people.

However, an aspect of Óscar Daniel's story that is worth discussing is how his experience has made him conscious of his method and how this has changed over time. Like many of his colleagues, he approached the teaching of creative writing with a focus on reading and *the relationship between a writer and their literary tradition, bibliography, literary antecedents*, but his narrative has gradually shifted. For him, it has become more urgent to situate a writer's practice within a community inside and outside the university, making sure that writers-in-formation are aware of what is out there and what possibilities/responsibilities to engage with it are available to them: from community workshops to local, underfunded book fairs.

Óscar Daniel guesses that this shift might have been provoked by his constant "commuting" between different settings: inside and outside the academia, publishing and teaching, effectively professing between Bogotá, Barranquilla and Barrancabermeja. Instead of one major movement informing his pedagogy – from writing to teaching – Óscar Daniel is always moving and picking up things up along the way, which he later shares with his students.

From this perspective, I relate his narrative to that of Ursula Le Guin in "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction". Le Guin's essay builds on Elizabeth Fisher's "Carrier Bag Theory of Human Evolution", which argues that "the first cultural device was probably a recipient [...], a container to hold

gathered products" (Le Guin 2024: 27). For Le Guin, "The natural, proper, fitting shape of the novel might be that of a sack, a bag" as "a book holds words", and "words hold things" and "they bear meanings" (Le Guin 2024: 32). A tutor's teaching narrative could effectively be seen as a "bag of holding"[15] of different knowledges made available and shared with students – and their movement one of permanent search. ✡

Argentinian author Gabriela Larralde describes the writing process of her novel Lopez saying that she wasn't following any Hero's Journey-like structure, and that, instead, she was "putting lots of things in a bag, hoping that at some point they would make sense." (LD: 18)

As we have seen so far, some of these knowledges come from reading; from mentors and having one's work read by Others in the experience of the workshop; from the discoveries of our own writing made available to someone else; and from the closely related or more tangential activities we do to survive but also to keep nourishing ourselves, to keep gathering, to fill that carrier bag.

✡ "The awareness of the world and the awareness of the unfinished self necessarily inscribe the being aware of its incompletion into a permanent movement of search." (Freire #4)

that keeps getting bigger

In this passage, we are looking at the least common source of knowledge for creative writing tutors co-narrating this study, which corresponds to the field where this research is situated: creative writing studies, i.e. the scholarship, theory and pedagogy of creative writing.

This is not surprising in linguistic and cultural contexts in which creative writing scholarship for a long time has been

[15] This how bottomless bags like Mary Poppins's carpetbag or Hermione Granger's beaded purse in *Harry Potter* are known in the Dungeons and Dragons "lore".

limited to manuals and self-reports, as opposed to the rich discourse around theory, practice and pedagogy in the anglophone world, one which has produced volumes, articles, specialised journals, conferences and subject associations and organisations.

Still, two tutors who have picked up the discourse around creative writing pedagogy are Carol (Vera, São Paulo) and Luís Roberto (PUCRS, Porto Alegre) in Brazil, where creative writing scholarship was introduced by Luiz Antônio Assis Brasil, whose pioneering workshop evolved into a line of research at Pontificia Rio Grande do Sul. According to Luís Roberto, this is still seen as a niche endeavour:

In Brazil, I think there are only two people who are researching how creative writing is taught in academia: myself and Carolina Zuppo. Possibly three.[16] *I have written articles and essays in Portuguese. My focus is the teaching of creative writing in Brazil, because the context here is very different. I researched other contexts, too, the MA at the Sorbonne, the Escuela de Escritores, the Iowa model and* The Elephants Teach. *So many things made me think about this MFA.* (Amabile 2024)

[16] Luís Roberto might be referring to his colleague Bernardo Bueno, who could not be interviewed due to the catastrophic floods which affected Porto Alegre during the time of my visit. Bernardo has published an article on creative writing in Brazil in *New Writing* (Bueno 2018) and a contribution on the same topic in *The Place and the Writer*, edited by Marshall Moore and Sam Meekings (Bueno 2021).

Luís Roberto is not the only coordinator who has researched other MAs and MFAs in Creative Writing – Daniela and Giovanna have done that for Pontificia, Lima (Ramírez Ugolotti 2024), Anuchka for Sagrado, San Juan (Ruiz Ramos 2024), Roberto and Márcia for Vera, São Paulo (Taddei 2024; Vescovi Fortunato 2024) – but he has also written about it.

On the other hand, Carol has dedicated her PhD to researching creative writing in Brazil. In her narrative, which concludes this chapter, will resonate several of the melodies you have heard in this rich polyphony of points of view and experiences:

I have been involved in creative writing workshops since I was 14. I knew I wanted to be a writer. At 17, I went to enrol in a Literature degree at University of São Paulo. In my head, that's how it worked: if you wanted to be a visual artist, you'd study Art; if you wanted to be a musician, you'd study Music; for actors, it would be Performance Studies. So what about writers? When I got to the university to enrol, there were senior students chatting in the queue. One of them asked me, "So, do you write?" And I said, "Yes." And she said, "You're going to stop." And that's what more or less happened. In four years of undergraduate studies, I didn't write a single page. When I finished my degree in Literature, I taught Portuguese language, literature, text analysis and composition at school. And while I studied on the MFA at Vera, I was also doing a postgraduate course in Psychopedagogy. My dissertation was on the teaching of creative writing in primary education. After attending all the possible workshops in São Paulo and graduating from Vera, I wanted to keep studying. But I had also

already read all the creative writing manuals that were available at that time – they weren't many – and couldn't find more. Towards the end of 2015, I attended a round table with Márcia, Roberto and Mauricio. I approached Mauricio, who encouraged me to enrol in an MA where I could investigate the teaching of creative writing, which then evolved into a PhD. In my thesis, I am designing a transdisciplinary pedagogy of creative writing, drawing from psychopedagogy, education and the philosophy of education. My method is based on the principle that the artistic and the teaching practice cannot be disentangled by who we are as people. The literature we write is a reflection of who we are, and so are the lessons we give. As a human being interacting with a specific artistic form, I become the medium through which all my lived experiences converge. (Abed 2024)

Receiving her call while still being very young, Carol attended many workshops and decided to pursue the study of literature. She trained as a writer on the MFA where she now teaches, at Vera, while building a career as a teacher and studying Psychopedagogy at the same time. Her love and commitment to research brought her back to creative writing when she decided to pursue it as the main subject of her PhD, which has culminated in the formulation of her teaching method.

For Carol, literature is a reflection of who we are as people, and so is teaching. In this part, this has been narrated over and over again, as the knowledge, the narratives that tutors bring in the creative writing classroom do not emerge

in a vacuum, but out of a rich landscape of encounters, experiences, studies, books. A tutor's knowledge is the text emerging from these other texts. And a study on creative writing pedagogy proposes to expand this intertextuality further, reading how it all started for other tutors and how they do it, and relate, unrelate, believe, disbelieve, associate, expand, contradict, discard, adjust, adapt, rewrite from there.

In the next part, more narratives will allow us to focus on cognizance, providing an insight into how much the tutors think they know about the subject they teach, and its pedagogy.

II. Cognizance

In the second part of this chapter, we are considering cognizance, raising questions around the completeness and reliability of the tutors' narratives.

What if you knew everything?

We would call a narrator with complete information and access to the full picture an "omniscient" narrator. They tend to be external narrators who can "can access all information at all points in time; and can pop in and out of characters' heads as they wish or choose to tell their own version of the story" (Nova Estuardo 2018: 45).

In most of the tutors' narratives, omniscience appears to be very rare to find, as it is more common for them to be surer of what they do not know, rather than what they know, displaying various degrees of self-awareness, modesty and confidence. Nonetheless, the next story provides a notable exception from a tutor whose omniscient narration almost approaches levels of prophecy. José Carlos (Seville) is our narrator.

I did a double degree in Music and Literature, and between 1989–1992, I lived in the US to study on a Master's Degree in Orchestra Direction. When I came back to Seville, I noticed how the city was changing. For example, there was a lot of enthusiasm around the building of a shopping centre, the first in Seville. People would say, "It will have lots

(*) We also seem to have fallen into DISGRACE for our terrible habit to tell, tell, tell; for being too in-your-face; and even for coming across as patronising (to the characters or, worse, YOU, the reader)... BUT ALSO because cinematographic, action-packed, dialogue-heavy writing is often the preferred/expected alternative – one that has Nothing To Do with contemporary readers' craving for drama and conflict, and their 30-second attention span (!)

of shops, and a cinema, everything in one place." This whole thing made me laugh. I had lived in the US, where they had malls – immense shopping centres with cinemas and children's playgrounds. To me, that felt so ordinary, as I was so used to hanging out and socialising in the mall. And it annoyed me. It annoyed me that the American way of life was spreading here. People of Seville would move out of the city driven by the illusion of living in a house with a garden so that children could play outside. As the city was changing, so were relationships. It's not the same to hang out with your girlfriend in the city square, and hanging out on the phone. Now, imagine this. After coming back, like any good reader, I wanted to know what the best book in the bookshop was. I would find myself surrounded by oceans of books, wondering, "Which of these will be most relevant to me, my desires, my conflicts?" I wanted to have a magic car to travel thirty years in the future and find out what had been the best book of 1994, and buy it without making a big mistake. That desire coalesced with what I was seeing about an American way of life taking roots here. You know how literature reflects life and human relationships at certain times? When I started to read Anglo-American literature from the 1950s and 1960s, I realised that it perfectly portrayed our new conflicts, our new situations in the 1990s. When I read John Updike, who wrote in the 1950s and 1960s, I would see things that were only starting to happen here. Divorce had been recently legalised. When I got divorced, I had already read about it all. Or when I read Philip Roth, I told my friends: "Look, Philip Roth has written this book, The Dying Animal. *This is what is going to happen to us." And fifteen years later, it happened.* (Carmona Sarmiento 2023)

Many of the tutors from the previous stories came back from living or studying in the US or abroad having experienced the workshop. Instead, José Carlos was given a glimpse of what life in work-in-progress Seville 2.0 would be like, foreknowledge which would influence his literary choices as a reader and tutor of creative writing.

The question is: what consequence that prophetic knowledge has on the teaching, how much of it is shared with the students and for what purposes. While reading recommendations and selection criteria will be covered extensively in the second chapter on "Intertextuality", it is worth asking now whether José Carlos's perception of a certain genre of Anglo-American literature as very relevant to Seville in the 1990s justifies the inclusion of such literature in Spanish-language creative writing syllabi more than thirty years later.

Still, I am interested in looking at omniscience as a conscious approach, and speculate about its effects. I can imagine that it might be associated with authority, inspiring trust and reliability. An omniscient narrator is a reference ready to be consulted, who can and will advise on reading materials, techniques, challenges, the best way forward – for a text or even a writer.

To a certain extent, an omniscient narration deemed complete and reliable applies to all student-writers in the same way, because all of them are given the same advice and recommended the same literature. This, perhaps, has the advantage to create a solid reference, with measurable

markers for literary quality – which are, however, highly dependent on the individual tutor's single vision of literature.

For example, when I was a student at Scuola Holden, my tutor only read a certain genre of translated anglophone literature written by white, male authors from the US. He was a scriptwriter, so the only possible narrative structure he could envision was Aristotelian; and the only style of writing that he deemed acceptable was a highly visual one. All of our stories had to be written around desire and conflict; all of them had to show and not tell. All of them had to present some form of subtext and leave endings unresolved. At the end, writing short stories for that particular tutor was like filling a checklist of requirements: is there an inciting incident? Check. Does the character clearly want something? Check. Is there something in the way? Check. Is the style identical to Raymond Carver in translation? Check.

As a person with aphantasia, my writing is born out of language, not images. And as much as I learned to appreciate the only type of literature that my tutor made us read in class, I hardly believed that all literature should read like that. I loved Ursula Le Guin, Julio Cortázar, Cristina Peri Rossi. I loved the exciting speculative literature written by Karen Russell and Irene Solà, as it spoke to me more presently than Philip Roth or Raymond Carver ever did. But they did not fit in the omniscient narrative that would eventually split my cohort into two groups: those who found it credible and those who did not. Coincidentally, those two groups corresponded to those who had little literary references and based their

writing on visual storytelling and audiovisual references; and those of us who were passionate readers, each with our own tastes and models.

It can then be speculated that this type of narrative requires suspension of disbelief and that this raises questions around their reliability and supposed omniscience. At the very least, what does it mean to know *everything*, like the word suggests, anyway? As I understand it, it implies that it is possible to measure the unmeasurable; to declare literature and creative writing finite; and to present one's version as the most complete and reliable, and one that does not require anyone else's contribution.

"Only the teacher gets 5 as a grade." A First, an A, a 10, or a 30 e lode – whatever the equivalent of a top grade is in your context – is the grade reserved to the teacher, some students are led to believe. This implies that, for Aleja, "the student is never perfect, which instantly elevates the teacher's status to UNATTAINABLE". (Flórez #5)

Such approach, to me, does not allow for possibility, discovery and even unfinishedness, all characteristics of a different perspective, partiscience (from Latin *part-*, *pars*, "part, portion, share"), which will be seen in the next passage.

Before moving to examples of tutors' narratives offering a partiscient perspective, I would like to offer more examples of omniscience, a couple from fiction and the last one from José Carlos's narrative, again. This time, we are looking at how omniscience is applied to method.

First, here is short scene from Alejandro Cuevas's surreal and metafictional novel *Literatura barata*. After aliens abduct her boyfriend, unhappy Dolores decides to sign up to a literary workshop, and this is her experience:

> The tutor brought his own short stories to class and asked the workshop participants for feedback.

"I didn't understand a single thing," one student said.

"They're all over the place," said another.

The tutor was visibly angry. His face was all red and his nostrils flared. "You have no idea. You're all idiots."

He stormed out, slamming the door behind him. (Cuevas 2024: 32, my translation)

The tutor's reaction to critique exposes his paradoxical stance as both an omniscient authority figure and a fragile, self-centred writer. This type of aggressively displayed omniscience may be less common in academic settings, where structures are in place to deter such behaviour, but they certainly seem to proliferate in informal workshops – at least, as reflected in their portrayal in workshop literature.

In Almudena Sánchez's short story "Los puntos débiles", Regina Katmandú is a *tallerista*, a tutor of creative writing in a writing school in the centre of Madrid. She is described as a cult author who takes quite a visceral approach to teaching creative writing, to the point that one of the pieces of advice she gives Lorna, the protagonist and first-person narrator, is that she should try acupuncture to deal with her "weak spots".

After reading her submission to the rest of the group, Lorna would normally have to endure some feedback along the lines of: "'Lorna Garrido, listen carefully. Your weak spots are: 1) Bad taste. 2) Tragic sensitivity. 3) Repressed emotion. 4) Some degree of existential confusion'" (Sánchez 2018: 146, my translation).

According to Lorna, "Regina thought that any writer's fault was psychological, rather than technical" (Sánchez 2018: 146), and her way of giving feedback to her student did not allow for uncertainty or interpretation. In fact, her absolutist rhetoric betrays her self-perception of her cognizance as an omniscient one, manifested in quite a toxic way.

An omniscient tutor who behaves in a similar way is another fictional character, this time to be found in a film, *The Motive* by Manuel Martín Cuenca (2017), an adaptation of Javier Cercas's 1987 novella "El móvil". In the film, Álvaro, the protagonist, is attending a workshop because he wants to write "Literature". His attempts, however, are not appreciated by Juan, his tutor. His last submission is the last straw on the tutor's back, who explodes in a violent rant. He is sick of Álvaro's habit to name his characters with foreign names ("James, Murphy, Callaghan. Who the hell has a name like that in Seville?!") and the fact that his stories do not seem to go anywhere or tell anything. "What you've written is, like always, hollow, fake, pretentious, flowery," he says, and then proceeds to remind him that "reality is out there" (*The Motive / El autor* 2017).

This example portrays an omniscient tutor with an unwavering sense of what is right and wrong in his students' work – or, in creative writing terms, what works and what does not. His attitude is expressed aggressively, and his emotionally charged response echoes the example from Cuevas's novel discussed earlier. This reaction also introduces

Momento, momento, momento: is she just going to GLOSS OVER the fact that in the original novella, the protagonist does NOT attend ANY workshops, and all his misdemeanours are of his own making?

Not to mention that the novella is HIGHLY meta-fictional, whereas the film is structured EXACTLY how you would expect a Netflix film to be: it's Story by Robert McKee to-the-letter.

And what is the major source of conflict in the film? The workshop! And its absurd tallerista, Juan. His trite creative writing lore almost sound like parody... almost.

Note the difference between 30 years ago and now: back then, writers didn't need workshops to ruin their own lives with their writing and end up in prison. They were perfectly able to do that by themselves. (RD: 3-9)

recommended to her by José Carlos, who even stars in it as a secondary character!

☆ see my notes on the next page, I need more SPACE!

the concept of "psychic distance", which will be explored further in the final passage of this chapter.

Let us now consider how omniscience not only is revealed by how feedback is given to students, but also by how tutors come up with their own teaching method or approach. Here is José Carlos's narrative, again:

> *I studied Composition at the Music Conservatoire under a solid pedagogical approach, which Literary Creation did not have, at the time. Everyone sort of muddled through. I think that lots of people are still a bit lost when it comes to teaching Creative Writing. I, on the other hand, having studied Composition, had no doubt as to what method to use. I could use the same method, but applied to writing, instead of music.* (Carmona Sarmiento 2023)

José Carlos's method proposes to use imitation as a gateway to original writing in the same way composers traditionally learned by making copies of other musicians' work. It is an interdisciplinary method formed out a tutor's own training but also out of necessity, filling a methodological gap at a time when, according to José Carlos, there was no such thing as a creative writing pedagogy.

Yet, the first part of this chapter shows that the many different ways in which tutors *muddled through* account for different established methods of teaching creative writing: learning from practice, reading, prior experience of the workshop, imitating one's own mentors and models, and from research. José Carlos's approach is another form of

* This sort of attitude would fall under what Freire calls "inhibiting behaviours" as he writes:

"My respect as a teacher for the person of the student, for their curiosity, for their shyness - which I must NOT aggravate with inhibiting behaviours - demands of me the cultivation of humility and tolerance. How can I respect the curiosity of the student if, lacking humility and a real understanding of the role of ignorance in the search for knowledge, I am afraid to reveal my own ignorance?" (Freire #4)

That doesn't mean that all omniscient tutors show such poor behaviour and lack of respect. Still, keep this quote in mind, as I divine that it will come in handy soon. Spoiler: the role of ignorance

intertextual imitation/association/derivation, albeit one that has discarded all possible alternatives without really having taken them into account. One more challenge to the concept of omniscience in the first place, rephrasing the question from "Is this *everything* that can be done?" to "Is this all *you* can do?".

The next perspective, partiscience, is tightly related to the second question, reframing the perspective of the first-person tutor-narrator as a necessarily limited one – explored in the next passage.

something, or just as much

A successful novelist who now collaborates on the MA in Creative Writing at Complutense, Cristina mentions her prior experience as a workshop leader in the prestigious creative writing school Fuentetaja, the Centro de Poesía José Hierro, the Librería Central bookshop in Madrid, and even jail. Her rich and diverse experience has made her sure of one thing:

In literature, two plus two never equals four. You cannot give strict lessons or generalise about how things work, because there is always going to be some participant or some author whose work contradicts everything you have just said. And that's marvellous. So, yes, I do talk about "rules" but then I always say, "This is what I am telling you today. I am going to give you a little outline; you are going to take it home. You are going to listen to me. But then, when you begin to write, you put everything to one side. I don't want you to look at any of this.

Write from your intuition. Inevitably, something of what I have been giving you will have stuck." (Sánchez-Andrade 2023)

Following a broad taxonomy of perspectives, Cristina's narrative could be defined as "partiscient", and more specifically, "aliquiscient". Partiscience is an umbrella term proposed by Nova Estuardo to bring together two types of narrators: "equiscient" narrators, corresponding to the anglophone definition of "limited narrators" – external or internal narrators in first, second or third person whose point of view is limited to that of one or more characters – and "aliquiscient" narrators (from Latin *aliquis*, "something"), who simply know "something" (Nova Estuardo 2018: 52).

In the last example that you have read, Cristina positions herself as an aliquiscient narrator, someone who knows "something" and is aware of her fallibility, particularly as she recognises the *marvellous* inescapability of someone proving her wrong, eventually.

Drawing a parallelism with literature, Marta Morello-Frosh and Gracia Morales Ortiz point out that several narrators in Julio Cortázar's stories play the role of "observers" and their professions often parallel this disposition: this is the case of Bruno, the music critic and biographer of jazz musician Johnny Carter, protagonist of "The Pursuer" (Morales Ortiz 2015). Morello-Frosh thinks that it is quite meaningful for an internal narrator to be someone "who lives off the reality of humans and the reality of art" and who therefore "recognises the existence of an extraordinary,

sublime order" (quoted in Morales Ortiz 2015: 60, my translation). Morales Ortiz develops this idea further, concluding that "literature is left in the hands of intellectual observers, who are capable at times of sensing their own limitation, peering on the edge of that other reality that they do not reach and towards which they never make the leap" (Morales Ortiz 2015: 61).

A teacher-writer offering a deliberately partiscient narrative senses their own limitation, although I would suggest that they *have* made that leap, venturing in the other reality and coming back with stories to tell. As you have read in the first part of this chapter, what happened "out there", i.e. what each tutor has seen and experienced, varies.

Such variation applies to what they have *not* seen or experienced, too: the gap in the knowledge, the "part" of their partiscience which has not been covered or discovered. Here is how Pilar (Complutense, Madrid) deals with that:

I don't think the point is to know a lot of stuff or to know everything. It's to know how to deal with what you don't know. You can always invite a publisher, another writer... design the content of your module to invite other perspectives from those who know better and those who have that experience, so that they can share it. (Vega Rodriguez 2023)

From Pilar's narrative, we learn that where there is room for unfinishedness, there is room for external perspectives. These not only fill the gaps and complement, as Pilar seem to

suggest, but also contradict and multiply. This is how Leonardo (Andina, Quito) explains it:

The idea is to be as polyhedric as possible, to accumulate perspectives, even those that contradict our own. I have to remind both my staff and students that you can't expect a single truth about writing and how it's done. "You'll see how we, the tutors, constantly contradict one another. Someone will defend something that someone else will reject. Don't be scared by the fact that there's no single truth. Listen to many versions and follow the one that's more convenient to you." (Valencia 2024)

With his narrative, Leonardo is simultaneously in conversation with the multiple perspectives proposed here and with the approach that I proposed at the beginning: as far as multiple points of view are concerned, the reader has the last word as to whom to believe. Whether they are going to believe the narrator and relate to their narrative depends on a compatibility of values and on a shared culture that is impossible to predict for every single reader out there. Adding perspectives to one's narratives, then, increases the chances that "something" will resonate to "someone".

For one more consideration about partiscient and aliquiscient narrators, how they feel about their narrative also varies. If omniscient narrators might be expected to bestow a certain degree of solemnity to their knowledge, some aliquiscient narrators might be more inclined to not make a big deal of it, like Fabián (Uninorte, Barranquilla) suggests:

I bang on and on about the fact that what I say in class is all on YouTube. It's not like I know something special. What makes the workshop experience valuable is the possibility to interact with other people involved in the same process. I, myself, am involved in the same process. When I write, I do the same thing as they do: look for the words I need to say something. (Buelvas 2024)

With this perspective, Fabián is not only demystifying his narrative and his role as narrator, but he is also introducing a different aspect of partiscience, i.e. "equiscience", usually interpreted as a perspective limited to one character, who knows "only what they know, what they have been told, and what they feel or think" (Calvo 2021: 119). Equiscience applied to teaching situates the tutor on the same level as their students or peers, as it will be suggested in the next passage.

you are one among many

As mentioned above, equiscience describes a narrator's knowledge that matches that of one or more characters, corresponding to what anglophone scholarship calls "limited narrator". In tutors' narratives, equiscience manifests in two, not always incompatible, ways: as the tutor seeing themselves as a peer, or even as a student. The first scenario is introduced by Roberto as director of the MFA at Vera (São Paulo), who says,

We have been trying to tell our tutors and make our students perceive that the tutor should be just one more person in the group. They will have some experience in order to conduct the discussion, but the tutor's voice shouldn't be the one that will "legitimate" the arguments of the class. The tutor shouldn't be the person who at the end of the workshop says, "Well, this is right, this is wrong; this works, this doesn't work." (Taddei 2024)

The issue of legitimisation comes up with Luís Roberto (Federal, Porto Alegre), too, who chooses to see himself like a coordinator:

People call me "professor", but I reply, "I am not a professor." I am something different. I am a mediator, a motivator. Once it happened that a student wrote a story from the point of view of a baby inside her mother's belly. It was executed well, but some of the other students didn't get that it was a baby. I did, and when she said, "But the professor said–" I interrupted her. I said, "People, it's not that I know more than you, that's not the point. I have read more about it, but I don't know more. It's not a matter of knowledge; it's a matter of accumulated reading." (Amabile 2024)

A contrasting perspective comes from Gabriela (Vera, São Paulo), who suggests that,

It's a lie that all a tutor does is to coordinate. There's a direction, a gaze. Like one's own accent to it. It's not just about directing the participants' contributions. It's about organising a gaze upon the text

that has been submitted. And in one-to-one meetings, filtering or emphasising or provoking so that the student finds their own way. I really hope to do the very best. And sometimes my very best is silence. I don't have to be too zealous. I can just say, my best contribution is silence, and praise, and admiration. [...] Now, what costs me a little is to place myself at a certain distance, because I was myself a student until not long ago. In the workshop, I feel when I'm most at ease. But, look, I am learning to acknowledge that, as a tutor, I have a certain ownership. Sometimes I feel that we're on the same level, but I also recognise that my experience is very rich, and wider than that of those who are sitting in a workshop for their very first time. It's a process. (Aguerre 2024)

Oscillating between aliquiscience and equiscience, Gabriela's narrator organises multiple perspectives to form one collective *gaze*, while engaging personally with her students with her credible, if not reliable narrative, *filtering, emphasising and provoking so that the students find their own way*.

Her process of "owning" her narrative as an aliquiscient tutor – one who knows more than her students – is an interesting one. This need for self-validation likely arises from her transition into the tutor role in the very programme where she was recently a student. This is a process that for Gabriela's colleague Silvana (Vera, São Paulo) *almost didn't happen*:

I see myself as a peer. Sharing the little more than I know and learning with them at the same time. We learn from students. That's the beauty of it all. I think all tutors learn from their students; but not all of them

share what they learn. For me, teaching came later in life. I was a student myself, then I began to teach. This transition almost didn't happen, you know. I behave in the same way I used to behave as a student, following the rules of the workshop. At the hour of discussion, we're all writers. (Tavano 2024)

Based on some of the narratives that you have just read, the recognition that *we're all writers* might have this double effect: on one hand to dismiss the expectation of the tutor of someone who gets paid to "validate" anyone's writing, and on the other, to help the students see themselves as artists, or writers, too. In fact, Carol (Vera, São Paulo) says,

I think it's important for the tutor to situate themselves as an artist. The idea of a "master of the craft" is very cool, but not in the sense... I mean, a master is only someone who has spent more time on the craft. If the tutor situates themselves as an artist, the students might also see themselves as artists. They're not traditional students. They're artists; they're peers. (Abed 2024)

Artistry, in the creative writing classroom, is perceived very differently than in other arts. An organist attending the conservatoire would probably not think twice about calling themselves a "musician", just like trainee dancers or painters with their respective arts. Eduardo (Tres de Febrero, Buenos Aires), a visual artist and tutor of Historiography of Art, reflects on how leading a workshop with writers feels distinctly different from leading one with artists:

In art classes, the idea of artistry is very strong. An art class is a meeting of peers, because anyone who draws or makes art considers themselves an artist, however rustic their language is. As a tutor, I don't intervene in that process because it has already been established. Art workshops are tinted with instant artistry. It's not the same with writers. On one hand, the writer professes their craft with a tool that we all have, which is writing. So writing isn't an aesthetic discipline until it becomes so. It accompanies you for so long in life. You start defining yourself as a writer when you have constituted a writerly corpus sufficiently detached from your basic writing, sufficiently dense or integrated with certain qualities that allow you to consider yourself a writer. It's usually not enough for you to say that. If someone came to me and said, "I am a writer; I have 200 pages worth of unpublished writing," I wouldn't question that. (Stupía 2024)

But someone else would, or at least this might be the students' perception of their own artistry: that they are not allowed to call themselves "writers" unless someone else says so, or until someone else validates the transition of their writing from day-to-day (or, like Eduardo says, *basic*) to "aesthetic" – a role traditionally assigned to a publisher, a literary agent or, more recently, a tutor of creative writing.

But the writer is a writer because they play the instrument, not because their tutor believes that they play it exceptionally well, or because they have recently signed a contract as a session guitarist for Oasis.

In this passage, we have seen how equiscience can situate tutors as peers, discarding the role of the tutor as the

omniscient narrator with the last word. Tutors' self-perception as "still a student" influences their democratic and co-shared narrative, once again promoting the multiple-perspective approach. Another interesting consequence of the tutor situating themselves as a peer is to reinforce that the notion of artistry does not have to emerge from external validation, but from within the writer who has developed awareness of their practice as *someone who has spent more time on the craft* (Abed 2024).

and what if you didn't know

Going back to Silvana's narrative, the second way in which equiscience can manifests itself is when the tutor sees themselves as a student.

Susana (Coimbra) brings this awareness to the table:

I always wanted to write fiction, so that's how I present myself to them. Someone whose published works is minimal, just some works of poetry and fiction. I'm a teacher, more than anything else, not a well-known author teaching them what I've learned from my own writing. I wish that was the case! What I do is experiment with things that can enable their writing. I imagine what I would have liked to have been taught if I was doing a Master. I don't know if it's good or bad, but I see myself as a student a lot. (Araújo 2023)

Playing pretend is at the base of the human art of narration, and one of the conditions setting up the scene of fictional situations is the question: "What if?" What if *I* was a student

on the creative writing course? What if I was the participant in a workshop? As she opens a space for her students to experiment, Susana is also experimenting methodologically, engaging in a speculative style of teaching directed at an imagined desired outcome: perhaps for the workshop to be fun, to be useful or even memorable.

Investigating a similar approach, Daniela (Uninorte, Barranquilla) turns the dial of equiscience even lower, discussing one of the possible consequences of such an experimental method:

> *No way I am the master who teaches. I provoke, I'm not a master. I don't own a knowledge that I aim to transmit and that students can learn. I can provoke from some gestures, reading or writing activities, just so that they can write. But I am not even sure of that. What I tell them is that I don't pass knowledge on, I just open a space so that something can happen. Sometimes it doesn't. I am subject to failure in my class, just as students are in their writing. Like, "Did the workshop work?" "No, it was a disaster."* (Pabón Llinás 2024)

It is interesting that failure as a possible outcome for the workshop is compared to failure in one's writing; and it is also interesting that "failure" has a pedagogy has been discussed in creative writing before (Suphap 2023), and even used as a method by Daniela's own colleague and friend Óscar Daniel, who in 2023 gave a workshop called "The Failure of Writing" at a local bookshop (Campo Becerra 2024). Óscar Daniel's workshop contemplates failure as a starting point, with the

idea *not to write things that are ready, beautiful and perfectly working, but rather useless, that don't work, that need to be rewritten, edited, or put together with other texts – writing without fear, without fear of failure* (Campo Becerra 2024).

Voluntarily or involuntarily setting themselves up to fail, Susana and Daniela appear to be replicating the method applied by French philosopher and pedagogue Joseph Jacotot and studied by Jacques Rancière in his essay *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (Rancière 1991, trans. Kristin Ross). In 1818, Jacotot taught French to Flemish students, not being himself a Flemish speaker. The method he devised consisted of having the students read a bilingual edition of the novel *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, and letting them work out not only the meaning of each word, but also how to construct sentences in French to talk about the book. Fascinated by the unexpected success of his venture, Jacotot went on to teach painting and playing the piano, two subjects at which, according to Rancière, he was "notably incompetent" (Rancière 1991: 21).

Ignorance is, therefore, a very peculiar form of equiscience. "I know as little as you do," the ignorant tutor of creative writing would tell their students, "but we're going to figure this out together."

Such approach, according to Rancière, goes against the traditional role of the "Old Master", who *explains* in order to fill a perceived gap between intelligences, their own and that of their student. Rancière argues that to "explain something to someone is first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself" (1991: 6), whereas to emancipate is to encourage

"The unfinishedness or inconclusiveness of the being is characteristic of life. Where there is life, there is unfinishedness. As an unfinished being, I know that I am conditioned but [...] I also know that this allows me to go beyond my unfinishedness. This is the profound difference between the conditioned being and the determined being." (Freire #4)

In her lecture on "Hesitation", Anne Carson brings up the etymology of "ignorance" (> Latin ignoscere, "forgive") to speculate on hesitation as "an openness to the unknown, a space where perception deepens." (LD: 6)

Forgive yourself for being ignorant and hesitant, as you can always learn more and learn deeper.

At Toque Percussion Festival in Buenos Aires, Juan José Martínez gives his audience two tips inherited from his own tutor: 1) First, play. Then, learn. 2) Comprehension comes with repetition. Comprehension comes with repetition. Comprehension comes ... (LD: 22)

the student to use their own intelligence (1991: 15). *Age quod agis*, keep doing what you are doing, is one of the few instructions the tutors are allowed to give (1991: 16), along with an invitation to observe, compare and combine one's "making" and notice "how one has done it" (1991: 36).

Defining one's artistic practice for what it is – no more, no less – seems to be the first step for emancipation, immediately followed by the artistry of talking about it, proposed by Rancière as just another form of craftsmanship: "In the act of speaking, man doesn't transmit his knowledge, he makes poetry; he translates and invites others to do the same. He communicates as an *artisan*: as a person who handles words like tools" (1991: 65).

Ecuadorian poet María Auxiliadora Balladares says, "A happy person is a person who works and understands what they're doing." (LD: 42)

A study by Magdalena Palacios Bianchi and Gonzalo Maier Cruz that links Rancière's notion of the ignorant schoolmaster to the figure of the *tallerista* in the Southern Cone also concludes that the *tallerista* is not a master of knowledge but a participant in a collective, horizontal learning process that culminates in emancipation (Palacios Bianchi and Maier Cruz 2023). Emancipation is associated "with the awareness of the medium, method, or manner in which knowledge was learned" and "the assimilation of [one's] repertoire" (2023: 305).[17] The invitation, here, is for tutors to do the same: to talk about their practice and to find, in the

[17] The authors also mention that emancipation "will also translate into the ability to metaphorically kill the *tallerista*, to consider his [sic] teachings outdated, to become independent by jumping into the void [...] and to know how to operate from a distance [...]" (2023: 305).

process, emancipation through the words and the perspectives with which they resonate the most.

So far, narratives on perspective have revealed tutors' perceived or narrativized omniscience, partiscience, equiscience and even ignorance. The "tutor as narrator" is a metaphor that deserves to be explored further, with interesting crossovers on concepts like "reliability vs unreliability", "objectivity vs subjectivity", "relatability" and "verisimilitude". In the next passage, I have chosen to focus on the specific technique known as "psychic distance", offering a different perspective on perspective itself and point of view, as well as some considerations about "tone".

how distant does it feel.

This passage is introduced by a narrative by Gaddiel (Sagrado, San Juan):

One day, I arrived at class in incognito. I pretended that I wasn't the teacher. Someone was inside the classroom before me. A girl, who asked me: "Are you here for the non-fiction class?" And I said, "Yes, is it here?" And she said, "Yes." But then another girl outed me, "Aren't you the teacher?" And I said, "Ah, yes, of course, that's me!" I like being funny with students, both online and in person. Humour guides me. It frames me not as a strict teacher or an authoritative figure, but still like a model to follow. When I crack jokes, it attracts their attention. For example, yesterday, when we introduced ourselves, we all had to share if we had any pets. So one student mentioned that they have a

"chihuahua churriento". Churriento means that it has diarrhoea. So I said, "What a fantastic alliteration! I just have to write it!" And I wrote it on the board. And we were laughing. And we continued with our class. This histrionism of mine gives students a different perspective. First of all, I am always like this. So what I bring to class is genuine. And secondly, this creates a warm impression of me, rather than a cold one. (Ruiz Rivera 2024)

Gaddiel's "tutor as a student" stunt is a pretence for having a laugh and not necessarily a narrativization of his knowledge – but it introduces another aspect related to point of view and perspective: John Gardner's notion of "psychic distance". As defined by Gardner, psychic distance is the distance between the reader and the narration as perceived by the reader themselves: the greater the distance, the more formal the narration; the shorter the distance, the more intimacy between the reader and the characters or the events (Gardner 1991: 111).

If perspective is the portion of the story that is framed in the picture, psychic distance determines the distance at which the narrator places the picture before the reader's eyes. Narratively speaking, it is also closely related to "tone", defined by Salesses as an "orientation toward the world" (Salesses 2021: 51), and explored by Burroway as a "musical metaphor [...] used to describe color and speech" which conveys an attitude "determined by the situation" (Burroway 1996: 234). Burroway adds that, "We will trust, in literature as in life, a choice of words that seems appropriate in intensity

or value to the meaning conveyed" (Burroway 1996: 235). Therefore, if point of view concerns who is narrating, and perspective tells us where from, then psychic distance and tone begin to answer the question of "how", revealing an attitude, a degree of intimacy and intensity, alongside a (more or less) credible insight into the narrator's values.

In Gaddiel's case, the choice of a humorous tone contributes to shorten the distance between himself and his students. In fact, he sees it as a way to present them with *a different perspective*, hinting at a conscious decision to break the implied students' expectations around tutors usually not being that funny or histrionic. There are other cases, however, where humour not only can shorten the distance between a tutor and a student, but also between a tutor and their narrative. Gabriela (Vera, São Paulo) shares an example of this:

In our one-to-one meetings, every time the student and I find something that is very bad about their text, we laugh about it. We need to subtract the solemnity from what is good and what is bad. On one meeting, the students and I laughed so much because what they had written was so bad. "This is horrible, you can't make head nor tail of it! That was not my intention!" he said. And we just laughed it off. (Aguerre 2024)

Again, with the tutor's conscious decision to "set the tone" to humorous, Gabriela not only is breaking an expectation around the *solemnity* of the one-to-one feedback ritual, but

she is also shortening the distance between herself and her students quite dramatically. Allowing for all the due cultural differences, a tutor cannot simply laugh about a student's submission, unless a level of trust has been established. And sometimes, the beginning of such rapport starts with a simple gesture, as suggested by Jotacé (Sagrado, San Juan):

The first thing I tell my students is, "Call me Jotacé." I address them as "compañeros". *Everyone contributes with suggestions. I give mine. With a lot of respect. But some of them try and keep their distance. Some are older, so they maintain a certain idea of authority around the "teacher" like a distinguished person. But I am not that.* (López 2024)

For Jotacé, introducing himself as a peer is both a way to show an equiscient approach to his workshops, in which his voice is one of many, and a way to shorten the psychic distance, establish rapport, and create an informal environment. Like Gaddiel, he is also actively subverting the expectation of the *"teacher" like a distinguished person*. There are, however, downsides to such an approach, as Jorge (San Marcos, Lima), cautions:

Too friendly can hinder the workshop. For example, students can take advantage and send me lots of texts, asking for all my attention. One has to put boundaries. Some people want you to read their novels or they see a father figure in you. That also happens. They develop some attachment, because in a workshop, lots of personal things come up.

So they see you as a supportive figure, almost a confessor. I try to avoid that, but I am friendly. Amiable, respectful. I can make jokes. I encourage them to write whatever story they want to write. I don't try to influence them, not in the least. (Valenzuela Garcés 2024)

Jorge touches both on psychic distance and his cognizance as he acknowledges the possibility – that he tries to avoid – to influence them to the point of them writing in a way that will "please" him. This is an aspect of omniscience that has not emerged fully so far, but that it is worth considering: a tutor who sets very rigid parameters for what is "right" and what is "wrong" might involuntarily make the students emulate the tutor's aesthetics to please them, instead of finding out their own aesthetics.

Jorge also brings up fair points about boundaries which are related to how often what students share can be very personal, sometimes even leading to the disclosure of trauma. Daniela, at Pontificia, Lima, says that she and Giovanna, the course director, often joke that they will get a PhD in Psychology from their teaching practice because

creative writing goes through the heart and feelings. Writing, or any artistic discipline, goes through the emotional. So it is inevitable that we separate the person from the writing, and try to accompany the students psychologically. They get stuck, they despair, they feel frustrated, and there you are, with your writing prompts, to stimulate them, helping them get unstuck, listening and trying to understand them. Some people are very sensitive; some have big egos. Giovanna

and I are becoming very professional with the psychological side of this. (Ramírez Ugolotti 2024)

Salesses, drawing on Aristotle, raises the point that "emotion is intelligent", as "*what you feel* can teach you *what you think*" (Salesses 2021: 52, his emphasis); if that is true, the emotional intensity with which tutors are comfortable dealing seems to generate learning opportunities not only for their students, but also for themselves. Giovanna and Daniela acknowledge the struggles their students experience and choose to accompany them, aware that, after all, *writing, or any artistic discipline, goes through the emotional*. They choose a close psychic distance, a soulful tone, intimacy and intensity over alternative attitudes, including those that are to be expected of an academic environment or a certain professional figure.

Intimacy and intensity manifest themselves in a very different way with Juan Pablo (Andina, Quito), who encourages his students not to be neutral to one another, but to *tell the other what you think with absolutely no concession*, because:

When everything is too concessive, too relaxed, too light, I get bored and the students get bored, too. It's a type of aestheticized, contained violence that allows us to express our ideas freely in that act of confrontation. (Castro Rodas 2024)

Juan Pablo's fierce approach will be discussed further as part of a longer narrative in Chapter 4 ("Metaphor"); however, at

this stage it is worth noting how violence, too, also dramatically shortens the psychic distance in the same way laughter does, and with the same conditions: extreme trust and rapport must have been established beforehand so that the participants have the necessary confidence to endure and benefit from this process.

One example of a more distant approach comes from Jorge (Sagrado, San Juan), who sets a completely different tone to his conversations. Unlike the tutors we have heard from so far, Jorge as a narrator attempts to be *as neutral as possible, whereas the students are very emphatic. "I loved that sentence!" that sort of thing. They offer more verbal support. "I loved how you expressed your frustration with this character." There's something nice, something nice about it. I don't usually use such... strong words. Which is a bit of an issue in my marriage, too. I am not that emphatic about things.* (Lefevre Tavárez 2024)

(Flórez #5)

A psychologically distant narrator creating the impression of neutrality, Jorge realises that perhaps he has little control over this aspect of his narrative. Similarly to Gaddiel, who is histrionic by nature, Jorge's personality is what it is and does not lend itself to an *emphatic* or particularly empathetic tone. Still, being aware of this natural predisposition might allow him to intentionally renegotiate the psychic distance and tone to shape their classroom dynamics, while maintaining his professional attitude.

⊗ There are, then, tutors who use neutrality to act like a "villain", a "devil's advocate" or the BAD COP. During a student's assessed pitch of his final work at Central, one examiner began his harsh evaluation by introducing himself as "the bad cop of this story". He then proceeded to humiliate the student on the grounds that, since the other examiners' comments were positive, "he didn't need any more applause." The whole incident prompted Aleja to write a manifesto "In Praise of Tenderness", where she advocates for "tenderness" as a more appropriate approach. For her, "meanness has no place in the educational equation", while for other tutors it is a way to situate themselves on the psychic distance spectrum under the guise of impartiality.

⊗

The question is: What are tutors REALLY doing while they are "bad copping" and playing "devil's advocate" in an unnecessarily cruel way?

In fact, by modelling attitudes that convey different values – respect, care, empathy, relatability, authenticity, equality, reliability, resilience, freedom of expression, and even presumed neutrality – the tutor as narrator shows students how to navigate the complexities of creative writing not only as a technical challenge, but as a highly emotional one.

To conclude, shifting the attention from who is telling a story and where from to how this narrative gets told allows us to think about psychic distance as the thermometer measuring the level of formality and closeness between tutors and their students, and tutors and the discipline itself.

With all due consideration to the negotiation of boundaries that sustain trust without compromising the integrity of the learning space, psychic distance also allows us to think about tone as the tutor's orientation towards the world which sets the mood and the energy in the classroom; and to combine these two narrative aspects to ultimately balance informality and professionalism in the way that suits our (narrative) personalities best.

In the Threshold

This chapter lays the foundation for an understanding of this research as a polyphonic work bringing together multiple points of view and perspectives on creative writing theory, practice and pedagogy. This approach is grounded in an established literary tradition of narratives told through multiple perspectives and points of view, a deliberate choice that creates an intricate textile of personal, diverse, often contradicting stories about different aspects of writing and teaching creative writing.

The first narrative and threshold aspects explored in these narratives emerge from the metaphor of the tutor as a narrator. Like a narrator in fiction, tutors have their own

- point of view, determining whose narrative is being told and where from;
- perspective, determining what portion of the narrative is being shared with students;
- psychic distance and tone, determining the degree of intimacy or formality between tutors and students, and revealing an orientation towards the world.

Choices around these aspects, whether conscious or unconscious, define the tutor's role in the classroom and their knowledge, which can emerge from various sources: practice, the experience of the workshop, reading, other professions, and research.

As far as practice is concerned, tutors often rely on their own experience as (often published) writers. Being published can lend credibility but can also create obstacles. One tutor's personal style or method might dominate, potentially narrowing students' perspectives by presenting a single model or single story. Tutors who are aware of their bias can expand their teaching beyond their own practice by searching for alternative perspectives and encouraging students to do the same.

Many tutors' experiences are shaped by having participated in writing workshops or having facilitated them in different contexts outside an academic

environment. This experience has shown tutors like Cristina (Complutense, Madrid) how creative writing is a complex and highly subjective practice, which complicates the dynamics of feedback and learning. Other tutors have never experienced and still refuse to participate in workshops, forming their methods by managing their own learning, most commonly by reading or learning from their practice. In fact, it emerges that most tutors see themselves as readers before anything else, and a profound knowledge of literature is considered the foundation of their method.

Next, a common perspective sees creative writing as an artistic discipline that cannot support itself – in some case, taking more than it gives, and requiring multiple or well-paid jobs to allow tutor-writers to engage with it (or "pay to play"). Experiences in publishing, editing, translation and other professions or disciplines often enrich a tutor's perspective, allowing them to expand their students' understanding of creative writing as a fundamentally interdisciplinary practice. This is a "carrier bag" approach akin to Ursula Le Guin's "Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction" and proposing a notion of knowledge not exactly as the accumulated content gathered, stored and shared, but as the act of gathering itself.

As an exception among many cultural and academic contexts in which creative writing scholarship is only just emerging, a few tutors base their method on research, actively looking for more pedagogical perspectives to shape their own path.

This first exploration of what knowledge is brought into the creative writing classroom begins to reveal that knowledge manifests itself in the form of confidence with one's own practice and as an awareness of one's own pedagogical method.

The second part of this chapter was dedicated to cognizance and perspective. In narration, the choice of perspective corresponds to the narrator's completeness of information, or knowability, which addresses the question: how much do they (think they) know? Among several possibilities, I have looked into omniscience and

partiscience, bringing together narrators knowing "something" (aliquiscience) or "as much as other characters" (equiscience).

Omniscience appears to be rare among creative writing tutors, at least based on their narratives, but can be found in fiction, as we have seen in the examples from *Literatura barata*, "Los puntos débiles" and *The Motive* (2017). A tutor presenting themselves or coming across as omniscient might project a sense of complete authority, which can inspire trust and confidence; on the other hand, it can narrow down students' perspectives. Tutors who assume a prophetic role may inadvertently impose their own perspectives as absolute truths, precluding the possibility of discovery for their students and themselves.

Partiscience, instead, acknowledges that possibility and reframes unfinishedness as an opportunity for continuous growth. A partiscient tutor is more likely to be permanently searching, and to invite more perspectives into their practice. It can manifest as aliquiscience, which emphasises the unfinishedness of one's knowledge of the practice and its pedagogy, and/or equiscience, which emphasises one's positioning on the same level as students.

Interestingly, equiscience can also derive from the tutor's perception of their own ignorance, where they deliberately adopt the role of the fellow learner. Drawing on Jacques Rancière's concept of the "ignorant schoolmaster", this approach challenges traditional hierarchies, fostering a more democratic environment while also acknowledging the possibility of failure as a pedagogical outcome. Following Rancière's thoughts on the artistry of talking about one's creative practice, it reproposes one's self-awareness as a road to emancipation – a principle equally applicable to both art (any art) and teaching.

Closing this chapter, John Gardner's concept of psychic distance serves as a thermometer for the degree of formality and informality in the classroom. Some tutors' narratives reveal a close psychic distance through humour, friendliness and an openness to dealing with their students' emotions and feelings. This approach builds

rapport, subverts expectations (like the tutor as a figure of authority, or a perceived solemnity of literature), and generates a learning opportunity, as creative writing is an art based on emotions. Some tutors, however, caution against excessive closeness as it can blur boundaries, creating unhealthy attachment or unreasonable expectations.

As an example of greater psychic distance, instead, the pretence of neutrality can restore professionalism and authority for those tutors who are more comfortable with values of impartiality and objectiveness. When impartiality turns into an excuse to be ruthless, however, it risks masking power plays as pedagogy – where cruelty is not a path to clarity but a deflection of responsibility and a clear display of inhibiting behaviours. Psychic distance also applies to qualitative research.

Closely related to psychic distance, tone reveals the tutor's orientation towards the world and their attitude, which in turn conveys implied values like respect, care, relatability, authenticity, equality, reliability, resilience, freedom of expression and even presumed impartiality.

In conclusion, this first exploration of the metaphor of the tutor as a narrator has revealed plenty of applications for creative writing concepts to the teaching of creative writing itself, while opening some new interesting avenues: for example, how narratorial aspects like reliability and verisimilitude come into play in the narratives told within the classroom; or what is the role of students and their own narratives.

This chapter's (and this wider research's) approach – composing a mosaic of perspectives each revealing a different detail, narrative and experience – adds a further layer to the understanding of perspective as a threshold aspect, encouraging fellow tutors to reflect on their teaching practices and embrace a multiplicity of voices, experiences and methods. This approach mirrors the richness of perspectives and narratives found in literature, giving readers the opportunity to relate and *not* relate to the Other, and creating an open-ended, exploratory, fundamentally partiscient and plural understanding of creative writing pedagogy.

Chapter Two: Intertextuality

In which I, after establishing "reading as a writer" as a core, transcultural method, investigate "intertextuality" and the criteria that tutors follow to select their exemplary literature: purpose, canon and literariness, contemporaneity, hybridity, diversity, culture, and personal taste and knowledge. These are followed by some reflections on the role of literature in translation and two bonus criteria: bibliodiversity and librodiversity.

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Proliminium

The concept of intertextuality can be traced back to Julia Kristeva's reading of Mikhail Bakhtin's work on discourse, which she interprets as the proposition of the fundamental principle: "Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva 1986: 37). Gérard Genette elaborates on intertextuality further, creating a rich taxonomy for "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" (Genette 1997: 1, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky) and using the analogy of the *palimpsest*, writing: "On the same parchment, one text can become superimposed upon another, which it does not quite conceal but allows to show through" (Genette 1997: 398–9).

In the context of teaching creative writing, intertextuality is about how we reveal all the layers of our own palimpsests and how we put the mosaic together for our students as we invite them to engage in the practice of "reading as a writer".

As a form of self-taught apprenticeship which emerged in the first chapter as one of the core "knowledges" (Arbona Abascal 2023; Carrión 2024; Pastor 2024), this method is likely to predate any form of institutional teaching of creative writing, when writers' level of awareness of their aesthetics depended on their access to books and libraries.

When the first workshops were being established in US universities, "reading as a writer" or "reading like a writer"

began to appear on manuals like Dorothea Brande's *Becoming a Writer*, in which she writes, "Every book [is] a specimen, and not merely [...] a means of amusement" and therefore it should be read "in the light of what it can teach [the writer] about the improvement of [their] own work" (Brande 1996: 91).

"Reading as a writer" has now evolved into a method, systematised in publications such as Francine Prose's *Reading Like a Writer* (Prose 2007) and "Reading as a Writer in Australia and China" by Jeri Kroll and Fan Dai (Kroll and Dai 2014); and problematised, among others, by Katherine Haake in "Against Reading" and "Against Reading, 2" (Haake 2007, 2017); by Pamela Annas and Joyce Peseroff in "A Feminist Approach to Creative Writing Pedagogy" (Annas and Peseroff 2015); by Kara Mae Brown in "The Text is in the Context" (Brown 2017); in Hannah Kroonblawd's "The Craft of the Unknown" (Kroonblawd 2021); and in "When Reading Lists Tell Tales" by Grace Lark (Lark 2022).

Going through a similar list of existing literature on the topic, Lark argues that,

> A number of studies have discussed "reading as a writer" and its related method "close reading" to redefine the purpose of reading in a creative writing classroom (the *why*) and to identify the shortcomings of reading techniques too focused on form and less on content, and not mindful of context (the *how*). Fewer studies have focused on *what* is read in class, with no general consensus on what to call the texts that are brought in as examples of best practice, other than

> "exemplary texts" (if read in class) or "recommended/ required reading" (if included in the course as individual work). (Lark 2022: 56)

Lark then proceeds to propose the term "literature of creative writing" with the aim to "foreground the nature and role of exemplary texts and reading lists in the creative writing classroom" (Lark 2022: 57). In her work, this term seems to bring together various types of entries to a typical syllabus or reading list, including "exemplary literature" (i.e. creative work in all forms and genres used in class to illustrate literary techniques), and "supportive literature", ranging from creative writing manuals and writers' memoirs, to more scholarly literature concerned with literary studies, narratology and, more recently, creative writing studies.

source: not found!

Lark's "When Reading List Tell Tales" builds extensively on "Against Reading" by Haake, who offers a thought-provoking perspective on the self-reflective work that must be undertaken by the creative writing tutor, when she argues: "The question 'what books are you teaching?' must be replaced by 'why are you teaching *what* books and *how*?'" (Haake 2007: 23, my emphasis).

Finally, here I would like to acknowledge the scholarship which questions the notion of literature in the first place, and its derived conflation of "literariness" and "good quality". As Cristina Rivera Garza points out,

> Literature [...] isn't a synonym for good or high-quality writing. Literature is the name that has been assigned

> to a certain form of writing published on paper, usually in the form of books, and which was constituted as a hegemonic element in the formation of canons throughout the modern period. If a form of writing isn't literary, it only means that it's the product of another historical era, and of both social and technological practices that are different from modernity's characteristic ones. It doesn't mean that its quality is greater or lesser, just that it responds to other conditions and expectations. (Rivera Garza 2020: 132)

In the tutors' narratives that you are about to read, what is meant by "literature" will vary extensively, though these reflections by Rivera Garza will be useful to keep in mind when discussing "good literature" and certain historical preferences that seem to perpetuate the aesthetics of the "small elite [...] bickering in the town square" (Rivera Garza 2020: 132).

The selection criteria that have emerged are divided into two parts: the first one, titled "Palimpsests", offers some considerations on theme and concept-driven repertoires, good literature and literariness, and the literary canon; whereas the second part, "Mosaics", collects further criteria like contemporaneity, hybridity, diversity and culture. The second part also includes some closing reflections on two proposed criteria, "bibliodiversity" and "librodiversity".

I. Palimpsests

Each theme with its own fool

There is a Spanish expression, *cada loco con su tema*, ("each fool with their own theme"), which loosely translates as "each to their own". When going through the interviews and looking at the most common criteria for choosing one's texts, my wires crossed as I misremembered this piece of popular wisdom as its own antimetabole: each theme with its own fool. Based on what theme/topic/concept/technique you want to explore in class, you choose a relevant text by a specific author (or, in our expression, its "fool").

This is the criterion explored in this passage, introduced by Manuel's (Complutense, Madrid) narrative:

The first criterion that guides my selection is obviously the text's pedagogical nature. I mean, if I want to talk about perspective, I'd be showing "In a Grove" *by Ryūnosuke Akutagawa. Reading expertise is an important skill to have as a tutor; to be in a constant process of reading in order to find propaedeutic, proactive models that offer tools or show a specific writing technique. So the first principle would be: the text has to serve the prompt or concept I'll be illustrating.* (Broullón-Lozano 2023)

This is only the first of many criteria that Manuel evaluates when making their choices, and some of the others will come up in the following passages. Still, it is interesting that this is

the first that came to their mind: the choice of the text is guided by the purpose to explain, show, discuss a specific theme.

Other tutors explain this in their own words. Alejandra (Nacional, Bogotá), says: *We are looking for texts that draw our attention for the technical elements that we want to show* (Jaramillo Morales 2024). Miguel (Pontificia, Lima): *The text has to be in conversation with the concept* (Sánchez Flores 2024). And Óscar (Central, Bogotá): *The example has to mirror the topic we're talking about* (Godoy Barbosa 2024b).

So what examples are they using and what for?

A study which addresses this question in the field of creative non-fiction is "Reading as a Writer in Australia and China" (Kroll and Dai 2014). The study provides examples of why works are selected, such as: providing "subject matter that can extend students' knowledge of the world and encourage critical thinking as well as empathy" and showing successful examples of "how potent subjects, such as grief and war, can be dealt with by manipulating structure" (2014: 82); or showcasing the widest variety of forms, "encompassing confessions, letters and diaries, biography, autobiography, memoir, essays, testimony, art work, photography, websites, documentary and social networking" (2014: 86).

Similarly, some tutors share some examples of concepts they want to talk about and texts matching them. One example by Jorge (San Marcos, Lima):

In my module Mechanics of Textual Production, I talk about the metafictional and metatextual, the relationship between metaphor and narrative, or simile and prose. How do I narrativize certain rhetoric figures? How do I build a metaphorical or allegorical narrative? Then I show them Flannery O'Connor's "The Life You Save May Be Your Own". In her narrative world, she uses lots of similes. So many. What I'm interested in is how this system of similes builds an image of the world. In her case, she draws from the animal kingdom. Each simile has an "animal" component to it. Purely by looking at them, we can talk about her vision of the world in her story. (Valenzuela Garcés 2024)

In this example, the concept Jorge wants to show addresses his wider question: *How do I narrativize certain rhetoric figures?* Looking at the stylistic and narrative choice of embedding a system of animal similes in a story, student-writers are invited to speculate on the narrator's *vision of the world*, and perhaps to create their own world-building using a similar system in response. This is a journey in three recurring stages: reading a literary example, discussing one specific aspect of it (or more than one), and proposing a writing activity inspired by the text and technique. Or: text, concept, prompt.

A more common concept that tutors have in their repertoire is that of "point of view", offering different angles: person (first, second, third, etc.), position in relation to the narration (internal, external) or cognizance (omniscient, limited, etc.). Some authors and works chosen by Óscar (Central, Bogotá) to run through each type of narrator

include: *The Marquise of O* by Heinrich von Kleist, Martín Luis Guzman, Anton Chekhov, *One Thousand and One Nights*, *Ivanhoe* by Walter Scott, Victor Hugo, Mikhail Bulgakov, Mario Vargas Llosa, Andrés Caicedo, Edgar Allan Poe, F. Scott Fitzgerald, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Carlos Fuentes, Bram Stoker, Manuel Puig, Juan Rulfo, Paul Auster, Julio Cortázar, J. M. Coetzee (Godoy Barbosa 2024).

There's a little bit of everything, from every era, Óscar says, *and since I spent my life reading, this syllabus is not static; the examples keep changing* (Godoy Barbosa 2024).

But is it really *a little bit of everything* or is there more to it? Óscar's repertoire of "fools" for his narrator "theme" does span across decades, but many of the names and works he mentions are likely to sound familiar to those who inhabit the creative writing and the literary fields. Why do you think that is?

I would offer two hypotheses: one has to do with the tutor's perception of what counts as "good" literature – or literature in the first place, and the other has to do with the literary and the creative writing canon, each explored in the next two passages.

picking the wheat and the chaff

Continuing Manuel's narrative from where I left it, once they establish that they pick based on what they need, Manuel (Complutense, Madrid) makes a clarification:

However, it can't be any *text. In non-fiction, and particularly since we're in the Faculty of Media Studies, it would be tempting to just open the newspaper and say, "The first interview I find, that's what we're reading today." This could make sense if we're making a stylistic critique, for example, but I would say to myself: "Students are like sponges; whatever you give them, they will absorb. So, are you going to give them a hot dog or a* cocido madrileño?" *The* cocido madrileño *is likely to be more nutritious. I am always looking for the meal that could be more digestible, that can give the students their vitamins.* (Broullón-Lozano 2023)

Two narratives from Manuel's own colleagues, Guadalupe and Cristina (Complutense, Madrid), help us disentangle the gastronomic metaphor. Both of them, in fact, state that there is an overarching requirement that supersedes concept or pedagogical purpose:

Guadalupe: *It has to be good literature* (Arbona Abascal 2023).

Cristina: *The main requirement is that it is good literature* (Sánchez-Andrade 2023).

Like Manuel, Guadalupe and Cristina are implying that not everything goes, and that students deserve their hearty and delicious *cocido madrileño*, rather than any junk food that can fill their stomachs. But in literature, how can you tell gourmet from junk? What is "good" literature? The metafictional and

facetious narrator of Alejandro Cuevas's *Literatura barata* ("Cheap literature") writes:

> Good literature is undefinable – ineffable, even. It's written with words; but words are not enough to explain it; on the other hand, no one can deny that there are novels that objectively stand on their own two feet, and others that crumble in our hands. According to Stendhal's allegedly apocryphal quote, "Novels are like *pimientos de Padrón*: some of them sting, some of them don't." (Cuevas 2024: 190, my translation)

My dear reader and colleague, you will not find any similar definition here. You will not find lots of answers either. Most tutors preferred to dodge this question on the assumption that I would just *understand*, that I would *know* what they meant. I do and I do not. If I do, it is because I am familiar with the notion of canon, which we will talk about later; but what I do not know is what good literature means for *them*.

Maybe this is because if we all start from the assumption that you *know* what we mean, we feel exempted from having to articulate the answer – or any answer, however unsatisfactory, imprecise, highly subjective and subject to mutations that might be. Or maybe this is because some tutors adhere to general, universalist aesthetics that have already been established (by whom? In what context?) and which are easier to communicate to students because it has been done before (again, by whom? In what context?).

In both cases, understanding what tutors think good literature is or looks and sounds like is not an easy task. There are a few exceptions, though.

In the example that follows, we can work out Cristina's idea of "good literature" based on what aspects she tends to "correct" in her students' texts when these show lack of quality:

Well, let's see, these are things that are very intuitive... Each text has its different reading, and it's difficult to generalise, but, for example, a text that does not transmit any emotion, that has no tension, a text that does not have conflict – since that there are many types of conflicts that students aren't aware of, or that they don't understand –, there are even texts that don't have a character; they're writing a story and there's no character; or when the style is overloaded with adjectives, adverbs, gerunds... When we see that the action doesn't move forward, or that the character doesn't transform in some way, I am sure you know this, Elena, these are very basic things that appear in all creative writing manuals and that are there for a reason. (Sánchez-Andrade 2023)

While this applies to students' texts, perhaps we can assume that any work that has too many of these "red flags" would not count as "good" literature, for Cristina. So, inferring by opposition, good literature allegedly has *emotion*, *tension*, *conflict*, *story* and a *character* who *transforms in some way*, plus some expectations on its style (which should not be *overloaded with adjectives, adverbs, gerunds...*).

This follows my previous point on general aesthetics being promoted as universal, which is a topic discussed by Steven Westbrook and James Ryan in relation to how Raymond Carver's style has shaped what they call "conventional workshop lore" (Westbrook and Ryan 2020: 205); and by Matthew Salesses, who warns fellow readers, writers and tutors against "fram[ing] craft as prescription or even guidelines without first making it clear where those guidelines come from and whom they benefit" (Salesses 2021: 5).

The aspects identified in Cristina's story seem very analytical and easily detectable within each text, whereas other tutors present wider opinions on "good literature" that hint at the relationship between one text and its field. This is the case of Pablo (Seville), who chooses to talk specifically about novels when it comes to distinguishing the good from the bad:

The literature I choose tends to be in Spanish, and from the second half of the 20th century. I have some texts from this century, too, but I like 20th-century literature best. The 21st-century novel is horribly declining, at least in Spanish-language literature. Do you want to know why it's declining? It's called "capitalism". It's called "imposing market dynamics" and allowing editorial criteria to follow them. People aim for economic benefit and reaching the widest audience. This prevents publishers from taking risks, dissuading them from looking for complex or controversial novels, in favour of bestselling products. (Sánchez 2023)

For Pablo, good literature belongs in the 20th century, and everything that came later is doomed by the consequences of capitalism on the publishing industry, which pursues what sells instead of – I speculate – what makes readers think. But how could it be possible that all the novels published in Spanish (even only in Spain) in the last twenty-five years be at the mercy of the market dynamics that Pablo is describing? Is Pablo's romanticised view of literature shaped by the "essentialist", "ahistorical" view that makes "literary" synonymous with "quality" (Rivera Garza 2020: 132), and "20th-century" synonymous with "literary"? Is it, perhaps, that he is not looking in the right place, or not looking at all?

And yet, a different tutor in a different context, Mauricio (USP, São Paulo) appears to agree with Pablo's view, expanding on more of those 20th-century qualities that 21st-century literature seems to lack:

Today's authors are deprived of conceptuality and research. There's no sense of historicity. If I study a contemporary author who has just been published, the work is unlikely to have quality. I see this as a serious problem in this country. I don't encourage students to read awarded authors because they stick to topical issues and write in a people-pleasing style, ignoring all the linguistic conquests from other eras, those that opened up new possibilities for language that still have repercussions today. Great authors belong to decades ago. Today, I don't see research, I don't see a coherent production. Faculties of literature tend to follow market trends, identity and cultural theories, at the expense of the inventive work of language. That's why, if you

want to write literature today, you have to read what in your own literary tradition was considered powerful, what was more substantial, what had conceptual and linguistic depth, much more than today. (Salles de Vasconcelos 2024)

According to Mauricio, what markets appear to prefer is literature that is written in a *people-pleasing style* and that follows certain trends, particularly in the realm of identity and cultural theories. It is an interesting angle that speculates on what bestselling books seem to be doing now, adding to Pablo's view. And in that process, Mauricio narrates, faculties of literature, too, are guilty of following the herd, instead of encouraging student-writers to study the *researched, coherent productions* of the past, the *powerful and substantial traditions*.

His idea of "good literature" tells of linguistic conquests, *conceptual and linguistic depth*, which Mauricio feels are currently missing from what is being published today, inevitably spoiled by market trends and culture wars, *at the expense of the inventive work of language* (Salles de Vasconcelos 2024). He then goes on to make many examples and to add more reasons why certain authors and works are worth including:

both Pablo & Mauricio seem to be pointing at what Basque philosopher & tolkienist Jon Mentxakatorre call "an aesthetic crisis", to which one should respond "with the creation of more beauty" (Mentxakatorre, LD:4) ... instead of shaking your fists in the air and ranting and raving about the glorious olden days.

How can you forget about Rubem Fonseca, the short story writer, from the '60s to the '00s, or Sérgio Santana, who died more recently, or João Gilberto? They are moulds of contemporaneity. Who decides what is contemporary? Is it the magazines? Is it because it sells? Or maybe because a certain publisher exerts their influence on a media platform

to promote one of their authors? The literature of the '70s and '80s is great for how connected and interrelated all the authors were. Think about the connection between João Gilberto Nol and the US short fiction writer Donald Barthelme; or how Barthelme was read by Rubem Fonseca, who uses him as a character for one of his stories. Or the link between J.D. Salinger's story "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" and Clarice Lispector's "Journey to Petrópolis", and "The Guests" by Silvina Ocampo, who's Argentinian. I like showing these relationships across literatures, looking at the distinctive signs of that era. (Salles de Vasconcelos 2024)

Here is one more aspect that, according to Mauricio, the literature of the past was doing well: the interconnectedness of authors and literary works, even across borders and languages. He is also raising an interesting question about "contemporaneity", which will be addressed in its own passage.

In this passage, it emerges that quality is a concern that affects tutors when they choose their literature of creative writing. How quality is measured or identified is a more difficult question to address, with some suggestions on what "bad" literature looks like (lack of emotion, lack of conflict and tension, no character, no character's transformation, overdecorated style, etc.); a view that privileges 20th-century literature for its linguistic and conceptual conquests over a more shallow and subject-to-trends 21st-century literature; and a point about the interconnectedness of authors.

In the next passage, I am delving deeper into some literature of the past to discuss the role of "canon" in determining tutors' literature of creative writing.

the stick and the clay

Instead of introducing the topic with a tutor's narrative, this time I am sharing a short fable by Eduardo Galeano, trans. Mark Fried.

Window over Memory (II)

> On the shores of another sea, an old potter retires.
>
> His eyes cloud over, his hands tremble, the hour to say goodbye has arrived. Then the ceremony of initiation begins: the old potter offers the young potter his best piece. As tradition dictates among the Indians of northwest America, the outgoing artist gives his master work to the incoming one.
>
> And the young potter doesn't keep that perfect vase to contemplate or admire: he smashes it on the ground, breaks it into a thousand pieces, picks up the pieces, and incorporates them into his own clay.
>
> (Galeano and Borges 1995: 104)

Galeano's fable could be used as a wonderful analogy of how intertextuality works, although there are some aspects of it that I cannot help but challenge, like the idea of the "perfect" piece or the master/apprentice relationship.

Still, the latter is a well-established trope of creative writing pedagogy which applies both at personal and (inter)textual level.[18] Supposedly, the master is the tutor who knows more about the craft in the workshop, but also the author who teaches us by means of their literature. The fable, therefore, narrativizes Mauricio's vision for a pedagogy that encourages students to learn from the "great" or the "masters" and to look for tradition beyond one's own literature and language.

Beyond this cast-iron vision of the literature of the past vs the literature of the present – shared by both Pablo and Mauricio – some of the authors mentioned by Mauricio (and, previously, by Óscar, Central, Bogotá) are worth considering in relation to creative writing pedagogy, workshop canon and canon in general.

The word "canon" comes from the Greek *kanōn*, which stands for a measuring rod or a standard of measurement. In most creative disciplines, including literature, the concept of "canon" has evolved to mean a body of creative work which represents the highest achievements of human creativity according to principles of aesthetic/artistic excellence, originality, and historical and cultural relevance ("canon", OED 2024a).

In literary studies, this notion determines what is included and what is excluded from the study of specific literatures (English literature, Spanish literature, etc.); and

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[18] To be explored further in Chapter Four: Metaphor.

creative writing appears to have its own canon, exemplified by this reasoning shared by Miguel (Pontificia, Lima):

It's not just about the concept that I want to show. There's something to do with... the canon, right? Say there's a novel by John Green and one by Hemingway, both working the same concept or technique. Canon mandates that I choose Hemingway over John Green, doesn't it? There's some sort of legitimacy, or maybe snobbery, too, in the choice of reading. (Sánchez Flores 2024)

What Miguel seems to suggest is that the use of certain texts is justified by a recognised value that they have acquired, or by their authors' status of "masters". Before interrogating what these attributes – legitimate, recognised, valuable, masterful – mean, here are some examples of authors and texts that appear to fall into this genre.

Daniela (Pontificia, Lima) says that the first part of her module is dedicated to *fundamental texts* that her students simply *have* to know:

For example, "The Killers" by Hemingway, right? If you want to teach them about how to use silence, you need to read Hemingway. What better way to understand the "Iceberg Theory" than with this dialogue-based short story? I also make sure they read "The Man of the Crowd" by Poe, which is the first short story about the city. About the nocturnal city. And it's the first short story in which there's nothing going on. It's just a description of the city, which introduces a new literary tradition. They have to read these texts. There are students

coming from engineering, advertising, who are a bit clueless. I think it's important for them to know these fundamental texts. (Ramírez Ugolotti 2024)

In Daniela's narrative, we still see a concern with theme or concept (the "Iceberg Theory) guiding her towards a specific text ("The Killers" by Hemingway), but it remains unclear why the choice should fall on *that* text over others that might do the same thing. Perhaps the clue is in the example that immediately follows, as she says that "The Man of the Crowd" by Poe is, putatively, *the first short story about the city*. Perhaps, then, it is an attempt to show "how we got to where we are" simultaneously filling the gaps of her more *clueless* students with different backgrounds.

At Complutense, José Manuel, too, finds that his students' background is quite diverse and therefore requires some "levelling":

An artistic apprenticeship requires situating oneself within a certain tradition, also in order to break with the Romantic clichés. We begin with the 20th-century Russians, like Chekov, Tolstoy, sometimes Dostoevsky. Then we read North American authors, as there's an interesting connection. Russians, Hemingway, North American realism, then back to Europe. There's an evident sense of tradition, but also chronology. Aldecoa, the Spanish writer, borrows from Hemingway, who borrows from Chekov. This way, Aldecoa is borrowing from the Russians, too. We see why Aldecoa's dialogues are so bare, and then we see a short story by Carver, then Mary Levin, a

contemporary Irish writer, and Juan Miñana, who's a writer from Barcelona. We read "The Garden Party" by Katherine Mansfield, too. These are all well-known reference texts whose quality is undiscussed. Even if some of the students have come across them before, they always find out something new about them. (Mora Fandos 2023)

José Manuel's approach could be defined "historiographic", responding to a principle condensed by Idalís (Sagrado, San Juan) as: *We need to know the past so that we can understand the present* (García-Reyes 2024). In such approach, the overall organisation of the module would perhaps follow some chrono-logical order, as opposed to the theme-based organisation proposed by other colleagues. Also, authors across literary traditions and languages are put in relation to one another, similarly to Mauricio's approach.

When I interviewed Mauricio, at this particular question he stood up and proceeded to write each author and work on the blackboard, drawing arrows linking to the next one, or listing groups of them in the same section. The result was a rich tapestry of literature, or "good" literature, albeit one that was limited to a past, golden era.

Other tutors effectively discard a chronological (or "reminiscing") approach by breaking down time-space barriers adding contemporary authors to their own tapestries. I asked Josef (Uninorte, Barranquilla) how he negotiated "canon" and "margins", and he said:

It's a good question. The answer is: I don't negotiate them. If we're looking at dramatic tension, in my head Shakespeare shows up, but also Gabriela Castro, who's a youngster who's just graduated in our MA with a spectacular play. So we're going to read both, Shakespeare and Gabriela Castro. I don't negotiate. Here there's dramatic tension; here there's dramatic tension, too. Now, a certain section of the hipster, woke, however you want to call it, generation, who has all the right reasons to question the canon, has also forgotten about many great authors. And there's so much to learn. Pessoa said that every poem must acknowledge somehow that Homer existed. If you're studying literature, you need to read The Iliad. *Five books, you have to read five books. If you write in Spanish, you have to read* Don Quixote. *You have to read* Don Quixote *to understand why it is what it is. You have read Shakespeare to understand why he's Shakespeare. You read Carlos Fuentes to understand why Carlos Fuentes is Carlos Fuentes.* (Amón Mitrani 2024)

On one hand, Josef does not buy into a principle of legitimisation that would impose Shakespeare over Castro. Nor does he follow a chronological path that would take his students *from* Shakespeare *to* Castro. They simply exist at once and are always available.

On the other hand, Josef argues that some works and authors are too important to miss if one wants to study literature. This raises an interesting question: is studying literature the same as studying creative writing? How are these two disciplines related? How are they separated or merged within an MA specialised in creative writing, or an

MA, like the one directed by Josef, where they are together even in its title, MA in Literature and Creative Writings? The choice between singular and plural, here, is also quite telling. How is literature one, and creative writing a multitude?

Plurality is certainly one aspect that is considered by tutors who are reflecting on the canon. Here, Giovanna (Pontificia, Lima) and Luís Roberto (PUCRS, Porto Alegre) offer different approaches to organising their reading. Giovanna says:

We talk about Terry Eagleton and how the literary canon is unstable and ideological. Among the authors I choose there are Lucia Berlin, John Cheever, Clarice Lispector, Elena Garro, Borges, Carmen Martín Gaite, Pilar Quintana, Roberto Bolaño. Then Nabokov, Laurie Moore, Kōbō Abe, Samanta Schweblin, Julio Cortázar, Edgar Allan Poe, Pilar Dughi, María Fernanda Ampuero. In general, we start from Bloom's notion of a Western literary canon, which we then challenge to clarify that each society in each time had their own canon, all influenced by different factors. Then we have more general canons – no one is going to question Don Quixote *or* The Divine Comedy. *Those are like the Olympus. And yet many people haven't read any of those books. Then we approach a Peruvian canon, embodied by Mario Vargas Llosa, right? But the canon needs to be widened. There are so many Peruvian writers who are not high-profile. I imagine it happens in all literatures. There are high-profile writers who get asked for autographs, who are covered by the media, or win great prizes. But every now and then someone like Lucia Berlin shows up. Who knew her? Some publisher launches her. And now everyone knows who she*

is. This is what I would like them to understand. Not all writers are visible. (Pollarolo Giglio 2024)

The idea of different canons is put forward by Luís Roberto, in relation to one of the modules he teaches, Mass Literature:

We don't speak about one canon, anymore. We speak about many possible canons. We can trace a classical canon, but also a canon of literature written by women, for example, or mass literature canon, literature that is designed for commercial purposes. So, I start from a tradition of feuilleton, *which will evolve into mass literature, now featuring a lot of dialogue, a "hook", and plot twists. I show them how mass literature achieves the opposite of what the Russian formalists called "literary defamiliarisation". Defamiliarisation is usually caused by language. Mass literature can cause defamiliarisation in other ways: through its plot, or its world, through an absurd adventure or a magical world. But not through language. That's a more classical canon, which places an emphasis on the historical importance of a certain text, and which lies beyond the scope of mass literature.* (Amabile 2024)

A more classical canon, according to Luís Roberto, reminds us of Mauricio's vision for a type of "good" literature which is highly aware of its language.

However, these tutors' narratives also reveal that there are several literary canons whose centres, peripheries and borders constantly mutate. For example, there is a Western literary canon (often defined "universal literature") which

could include authors like Homer, Miguel de Cervantes, William Shakespeare, Anton Chekhov, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce or Vladimir Nabokov. Then there is a Latin American literary canon which often conflates with the Latin American Boom: among others, Gabriel García Márquez, Jorges Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa, and the women authors who were integrated *a posteriori*, like Clarice Lispector.

In the field of creative writing studies, the use of canon literature has often been criticised as an ineffective approach, as implied by Kara Mae Brown when she writes, "Workshops rely too heavily on reading canonical texts or more traditional anthologies that often favor historical works over those produced today" (Brown 2017: 301); or even as a damaging one, as argued by Wendy Bishop, who writes, "Using anthologized texts can lead undergraduates to value seemingly monolithic writing conventions, that lead them to overvalue the commercially printed text and, feeling intimidated or marginalized, avoid risky writing mimicking other voices and suppressing their own" (quoted in Annas and Peseroff 2015: 165–166).

This also applies to those works that find particular appreciation in the workshop, suggesting that creative writing has its own canon. Consider this testimony by Katherine Haake, who writes: "[A] steady diet of *eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British novels*, *American masters*, and *contemporary American minimalism*, then very high in regard,

was really not that useful to me from my own writerly perspective" (Haake 2007: 18, my emphasis).

This particular selection of literary forms and genres, indicative of Haake's tutor's choices, is shockingly representative of a limited genre within the "literature of creative writing", which Grace Lark defines "workshop canon". Lark writes:

> Based on existing scholarship, it is hard to identify what authors and works belong to this genre, as there seems to be an assumption that creative writing scholars know who the "usual suspects" are, but rarely name authors. Nonetheless, one does not have to look much further than creative writing handbooks to get an idea of what "workshop canon" looks like: for example, Raymond Carver's short story collection *Cathedral* is referenced in both Janet Burroway's *Writing Fiction* and Francine Prose's *Reading Like a Writer*, along with F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Ernest Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants", and Flannery O'Connor's collection *A Good Man is Hard to Find and Other Stories* – just to name some of the very obvious ones. (Lark 2022: 61)

An updated list of "usual suspects" including some popular authors of workshop canon literature used by Spanish and Portuguese-language tutors would feature: the already

mentioned Raymond Carver,[19] Ernest Hemingway,[20] and Flannery O'Connor,[21] plus Katherine Mansfield,[22] John Cheever,[23] JD Salinger,[24] and William Faulkner.[25]

There are several problems with using the "workshop canon" in creative writing workshops as the "go-to" literature for "reading as a writer".

The first one has to do with "lore", that is the "passed-down" knowledge tutors inherit from their predecessors. Paraphrasing Carl Vandermuelen, Hannah Kroonblawd concludes: "We teach the way we've been taught" (Kroonblawd 2021: 4). Patrick Bizzaro comes to the same conclusion, writing of a "workshop-writing phenomenon [that] no doubt works vertically, where sameness is passed from teacher to student who, in turn, becomes a teacher who passes certain literary biases to yet another generation of students" (quoted in Haake, Katharine 2007: 21).

For example, a tutor back in her workshop's days might have been taught "Hills Like White Elephants" by Ernest Hemingway as a perfect example to learn text and subtext, or to apply a certain minimalist aesthetic to her writing or, more generally, to understand "subtlety" in short stories. Now, she

Argentinian author & critic Ricardo Piglia extrapolated his famous "one story always tells two stories" thesis from Hemingway's "Iceberg Theory" (Piglia #2) and it spread like wildfire, so this hypothetical tutor is not necessarily anglophone, in case you were wondering.

[19] (Carmona Sarmiento 2023; Mora Fandos 2023; Amabile 2024; Amón Mitrani 2024; Castro Rodas 2024; Valenzuela Garcés 2024)

[20] (Amabile 2024; Badrán Padaui 2024; de Lima 2024; Fagundez 2024; Núñez Negrón 2024; Ramírez Ugolotti 2024; Valenzuela Garcés 2024)

[21] (Sánchez-Andrade 2023; Núñez Negrón 2024; Valenzuela Garcés 2024)

[22] (Mora Fandos 2023; Badrán Padaui 2024)

[23] (Carmona Sarmiento 2023; Sánchez 2023; Núñez Negrón 2024; Pollarolo Giglio 2024)

[24] (Salles de Vasconcelos 2024)

[25] (Abed 2024c; González Vargas 2024; Núñez Negrón 2024)

teaches the same to her students. One of her students will become a teacher one day, and the "Hills Like White Elephants" cycle begins again. Twenty, thirty, forty years might have passed, but the model has not been updated, expanded, challenged.

This has several implications. First, the possible formation of "student cohorts with similar 'house styles'", as pointed out by Kroll and Dai (Kroll and Dai 2014: 78). Another likely consequence is the misunderstanding of a series of very specific context- and time-bound expectations – subtlety and the "show don't tell" of American minimalism, for example –, which are presented as some sort of universal aesthetic (Westbrook and Ryan 2020: 204).

Thirdly, there are considerations to be made about what in economics terms is referred to as the "opportunity cost", i.e. the cost of the next best alternative that is sacrificed when making a choice or decision. In Haake's words: "If I 'taught' a story by Grace Paley, it meant I was not teaching one by Jane Bowles (or Joyce, or Ray Carver, or Philip K. Dick)" (Haake 2007: 20). Then, a tutor's pedagogy "may narrow to a particular kind of 'literariness', limiting their own students' ability to explore and experiment" (Kroonblawd 2021: 8).

This, in turn, may have the effect of silencing all writers whose practice does not fit within those very narrow literary margins, while also failing to represent writers with very different experiences and cultural backgrounds, as you can understand from Cristina's (Complutense, Madrid) description of her own experience as a workshop participant:

Well, the tutor we had, he wanted us to write like Faulkner or Juan Benet. And if you didn't write like them, he didn't like your texts. I mean, Faulkner and Juan Benet are all very well, but I don't write like that, sorry. He didn't have the open mind to respect our own styles, which I think is an essential aspect of teaching creative writing. (Sánchez-Andrade 2023)

Yet another point to take into consideration is one that I made in the previous chapter, when talking about José Carlos's overwhelming predilection for Anglo-American literature of the 1950s and 1960s, and how useful it is to the purpose of training writers in Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries today.

Finally, things get particularly thorny when literature is used in translation, as you will read in the passage that follows.

as tutor-traitors in tight shoes.

No one really knows where the expression *traduttore traditore* (translator-traitor) comes from, but in essays about literary translation, it is quoted *ad nauseam*. It is meant to imply that something always gets lost in translation; that translators strive but inherently fail to be *faithful*; and other abominable clichés that have been sufficiently and brilliantly addressed by scholars in the field of literary translation studies: from the 1960–1980 first wave of Eugene Nida, George Steiner, Itamar Even-Zohar, André Lefevere, to golden-age scholars like

Lawrence Venuti, Susan Bassnett, Clive Scott and Jean Boase-Beier (and these only in the anglophone field).

Recently, Eugenia Loffredo and Manuela Perteghella have discussed the link between literary translation and creative writing extensively, documenting a "creative" turn in literary translation studies in their edited volume *Translation and Creativity: Perspectives on Creative Writing and Translation Studies* and in their contribution to Dan Disney's *Exploring Second Language Creative Writing* (Loffredo and Perteghella 2007; Loffredo and Perteghella 2014).

Arguably, literary translators are more interested in creative writing than creative writers are in literary translation.[26] In fact, the latter are guilty of the only betrayal I see here, which is the consistent dismissal of the role of the translator of literature in translation used for creative writing purposes.

As you were able to see from the many examples cited by tutors, a significant portion of the literature of creative writing comes in translation. Because some tutors are offering universalist, diverse and transnational perspectives; because for others, Anglo-American literature is the *best* literature for creative writing; because creative writing as a

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[26] For example, the first attempts at creative writing workshops at La Sapienza University in Rome in the 1980s stemmed from the success of the literary translation workshops established by Frank McShane, head of the writing programme of Columbia University and William Weaver, literary translator (Traina 2022: 5). As a counterexample, Márcia Ivana (Federal, Porto Alegre) mentions some students in her creative writing programme who have chosen to submit literary translations as their final works (de Lima e Silva 2022: 195).

discipline and its scholarship speak English as its first language... whatever the reason, translated literature here is not a minority. In the creative writing workshop, *the use of translation is inevitable* (Sánchez-Andrade 2023; Valenzuela Garcés 2024).

Yet, not one tutor has said that they name the literary translator, with the exception of Guadalupe (Complutense, Madrid), who tries *to find the best possible translations*, whenever possible: *If we're reading* The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man *by James Joyce, I use the translation by Damaso Alonso, a poet from the 1927 Generation. It's a magnificent translation* (Arbona Abascal 2023).

Carlos (San Marcos, Lima), Pedro (Central, Bogotá) and Silvana (Vera, São Paulo) also try to look for the *best possible translations* (Arámbulo 2024; Badrán Padaui 2024; Tavano 2024), although, like good literature, good literary translation is hard to define. The quality of a translation, according to José Carlos (Seville), seems to depend on the original language:

I simply do not understand translations from French. Or Russian: I have read many translations of the same piece of work, and they differed substantially from one another. The best translated literature is Anglo-American. Because English is a much simpler language, and because so many people speak it. This doesn't happen with Japanese or Russian or other literatures. The truth is that I don't trust translations very much. (Carmona Sarmiento 2023)

neither does Spanish poet José Mateos, who advises students of creative writing to avoid them at all cost (José Mateos, LD: 5)

Ricardo (Pontificia, Lima), however, assures that literary translations of Asian languages have significantly improved, which makes it easier to incorporate non-Western texts in the workshop:

I wouldn't have used translations of Korean literature twenty years ago. They were bad, stiff, they didn't have anything to offer. But now translations are very good. It's as if you were reading a translation from English, French or German (Sumalavia 2024).

When confronted with the question of whether the students are engaged in any conversation about the fact that they are reading a translation, Miguel (Pontificia, Lima) honestly answers: *None at all* (Sánchez Flores 2024). The most common reason for this would be, in Leonardo's (Andina, Quito) words, that *there is no time. Our modules are all 30 hours and that doesn't give you a lot of time to go into the detail of translatability or translation* (Valencia 2024).

Anuchka (Sagrado, San Juan), however, is breaking this common pattern. Like other tutors – Daniela (Uninorte, Barranquilla), Cristina (Complutense, Madrid), Rosario (Pontificia, Lima), Jorge (San Marcos, Lima) –, she gives student-writers the option to read the original text, if they can (Sánchez-Andrade 2023; Pabón Llinás 2024; Valenzuela Garcés 2024; Yori de Vivanco 2024). But then she weaves translation into the discourse of her classes:

I allow students to choose whether they want to read a text in Spanish translation or in English. It's an interesting fact that in the standard admission tests for our university, many students score better in English than they do in Spanish. It's common for some students to prefer to read, or even write, in English. What I do is to contextualise the exercise of translation with different literary translation theories, mentioning some of the narrative elements that could be altered in translation because of the change of language: a point of view or an intrinsic element which makes more sense in English. (Ruiz Ramos 2024)

Other tutors say that they provide their own translations if they are not happy with the existing ones or if the text they want to propose has not been translated. Carol (Vera, São Paulo) mentions a specific case:

In Brazil, we don't have a habit of reading one text in its original language. It's difficult for Brazilians to speak other languages. Only in some instances, if the translation has some issues, or if the original has something really incredible, I show the original, provided I know the language well, like English or Spanish. I remember, for example, that the Brazilian translation of 1955 *by Alice Walker had something I didn't like, so whenever I use this text I show a fragment in English and I explain it.* (Abed 2024)

Juan José (Andina, Quito), too, shares his own translations to his students, while doing a little bit of critical reflection and a little creative exploration, too:

The workshop itself is not about translation. But we do mention it to talk about the changes that it produces, what happens in a text, putting emphasis on the creative side of the matter. And sometimes we do that with songs. I read out songs by Gloria Gaynor, Michael Jackson, with their lyrics translated into Spanish. And sometimes students don't recognise them. For that exercise, we have a conversation about how cultural codes change in the process of translation. (Rodinás 2024)

Finally, Manolo (Sagrado, San Juan) proposes a translation exercise to unlock creativity:

This is something I do in the first class of term. I use poetry in other languages, generally in English, since they're most familiar with it, and I ask them to translate it. This is something I do myself when I need to warm up. When I want to write but I lack the appetite, or I'm sluggish, or slow, or nothing comes out... Discipline is fundamental for me. To create a discipline. So, I translate, only for myself. Some poem I like, and it's as if the arm, the hand warms up. I propose that exercise because it helps to be considerate, to respect the traduttore, traditore. (Núñez Negrón 2024)

Once again, context matters. If Anuchka and Manolo are able to read texts in English and to even propose literary translation prompts, it is because the circumstances that Anuchka defines – bearing in mind that Puerto Rico is a US colony and English is one official language – are different from MAs whose cohorts are largely monolingual. Still, you

can provide glossed texts in any language (or different varieties of the same language) and use them as a starting point for translation or rewriting exercise, which might work in monolingual contexts, or, with even more interesting implications, where indigenous languages are largely inaccessible to speakers of a dominant language.

Embedding any type of literary translation exercise has plenty of creative outcomes, but let me remind you how we got here in the first place: because translators are currently invisible in the creative writing workshop. What I am suggesting is that perhaps by occasionally inviting the creative writer to wear the literary translator's tight shoes – which, according to the proverb and to my literary translation professor Jean Boase-Beier, make for new dances – you could initiate an ongoing appreciation and discussion of the creative work carried out by the hidden party who is *also* responsible for the literature of creative writing that you have chosen to share and that your student-writers are reading.

At the very least, a most basic, not very time-consuming practice would be to acknowledge the fact that you are reading a translation in the first place and simply remember to #NameTheTranslator.

This concludes the first part, in which the Palimpsests of our tutors have started to reveal their preferences. In the second part, you will read about a Mosaic of further criteria, all addressing, in one way or another, the question of diversity.

Scout around the dead and the alive

In Mauricio's narrative, he plants an interesting question about what makes a work of literature "contemporary", as he asks, *Who decides what is contemporary? Is it the magazines? Is it because it sells? Or maybe because a certain publisher exerts their influence on a media platform to promote one of their authors?*

I have to admit that, at the time, I found these questions quite odd, as my assumption was that a contemporary author is simply one who has not died, yet – contemporaneity was not a quality to be bestowed on a text, it was just a fact. But not all tutors share the same assumption, and the question of "contemporaneity" is more nuanced than it seems. Guillermo (Uninorte, Barranquilla), for example, ponders:

When thinking about writing, one cannot just draw from the past, but also from their contemporaries. It's an interesting question: what does it mean to be contemporary? It's quite paradoxical. In class, sometimes we read a text by Giorgio Agamben, whose title is: What is the Contemporary. *It's very contemporary, in the sense that is currently being read a lot. But in his text, Agamben argues that to be contemporary one has to keep a distance from their own time.* (Serrano López 2024)

Does an author have to be alive for their literature to be considered contemporary? How contemporary is contemporary?

For some tutors, proposing exemplary texts by authors who are still alive present different advantages. For Susana (Coimbra), it has to do with how differently students engage with an author whose work is currently being discussed outside the setting of the classroom or the university:

The students are very excited to talk about Annie Ernaux. Because her books have been published very recently and the students are engaging in what's coming out, which seems so... alive. It's good for them and it's easier for me, because it injects new life into the class. It turns the debate into something more lively. (Araújo 2023)

Gaddiel (Sagrado, San Juan) appears to share this perspective, as he writes,

I notice that students react with a particular interest when they approach poetry or literature in general by contemporary authors. Like, "Wait, this person is still alive." They realise that one day they can even meet some of these authors, or that some of them are even teaching them classes. (Ruiz Rivera 2024)

By introducing contemporary authors into the conversation, tutors like Susana and Gaddiel help bridge the gap between students and authors – some of whom they might one day meet at a literary festival or book signing. This is a way to

demystify the figure of the author, who is a person like everyone else. In fact, Gaddiel mentions that *some of them are even teaching them classes*, as he includes texts by some of his colleagues at Sagrado:

I don't know all the faculty, nor everybody's creative work, but what I know is very good. Recently, I have included one text by Anuchka which occurred to me because it's poetic prose even before I remembered that she teaches here. (Ruiz Rivera 2024)

Gaddiel is not the only tutor who feels comfortable analysing texts written by colleagues in his class. Gabriela (Vera, São Paulo) says,

We read Roberto's novel in class, which is something that he would never allow himself to do, because he's too biased and because his students would say, "Prof, I just can't." But when I did it, I allowed for a lot of freedom. We did not record that lesson. I told them, "What is discussed here stays here." And the students felt very comfortable, we even laughed because... Well, Roberto is very fond of point of view. In his workshop, he would always point out something about the narrator. So the students found it really fun to look for problems in the narrative voice and proposed very interesting analyses. It's an exercise in freedom. It says a lot about an environment which I think is really healthy. (Aguerre 2024)

Gaddiel and Gabriela are demystifying the role of the author and the tutor at the same time, encouraging students not only to "learn from the master" but also to read their work critically and as they would read anyone else's text.

Sometimes looking for contemporary literature means to be two steps ahead of what is currently being done in workshops and what is currently being published. And to keep searching for something else whenever that sort of literature starts to become, in Óscar Daniel's (Uninorte, Barranquilla) words, *commonplace*:

to create yet another parallelism with the artistic practice: Chilean journalist, publisher & author Diego Zúñiga says, "Journalism is concerned about the present, and literature about the future." (LD:29)

I have made an effort to always include contemporary literature in my classes, but that implies that I have to be very up-to-date. When Latin American women writers began to explore a dark, horror genre, like Samanta Schweblin and Mariana Enríquez, then Mónica Ojeda and María Fernanda Ampuero, or Liliana Colanzi, I thought it was important to see how these texts could be included. We could still have conversations on the same themes: narrative perspective, building different levels of reality, temporality... But it was important to include them. Now, probably not so much, as the publishing industry is already responding to this. I think it's awesome; but the students are already likely to come across Samanta Schweblin in a bookshop, whereas it would be more difficult for them to find someone like, I don't know, María Buelvas, who's a poet from Cartagena. Her poetry book, Y ahora qué hago yo con esta cuchara, *uses such an accessible, ordinary language. This is one criterion: what's happening in the field? What are people reading? What are the searches, the questions? How do I integrate this conversation? Now people are talking more*

Cecilia Pavón's poem "Taller Literario" ("Literary Workshop") has a line that reads: "Is poetry the art of what comes after?" And another that says, "I need to know whether poetry is the artform that comes after capitalism." (RD:34)

and not only in Spanish, but in translation, too... a participant in Valério's workshop chose to ask her peers (as her ONLY question allowed in a "silent" workshop) if they had "got" a hidden reference to Schweblin's Mouthful of Birds in her short story. (They didn't) (WD:40)

and more about Rivera Garza's work. I don't know how old her book about necrowriting is, but I think that necrowritings have become more commonplace to the creative writing workshop. This doesn't make the book less interesting or that people should stop using it – by no means. But I think it's less interesting to use that in workshops. Instead, we can go into recycling narratives drawing from Verónica Gerber Bicecci or Nona Fernández. Keeping up-to-date means all of this: think about what's going on and respond to the students' writing impulse, which has to do with a collective momentum, the questions that are out there. (Campo Becerra 2024)

so much so that guest artists Grace and Romany used necrowriting as prompt for both writing and socialising texts at their workshop "Sounding Territories", attended by both the Researcher & Óscar Daniel. (WD: 12–14)

Óscar Daniel's narrative introduces a big strand within the Latin American workshop canon which will be explored further down in the section about gender and the inclusion of women writers; but it also introduces the notion of contemporaneity as an exploration of what is new.

For tutors like him, it is an ongoing search for authors and texts that do something new or different. And when that something eventually becomes part of the creative writing canon, like the new wave of Latin American women horror or Cristina Rivera Garza's necrowritings, they move on, looking not so much for the next "big thing", but for the next big *questions*.

This implies a whole new level of proximity, a complete immersion in the collective discourse that requires listening beyond the clamour of today's answers to yesterday's questions to anticipate the questions that tomorrow will bring.

For Óscar Daniel, who also works as a publisher, this inclination for scouting might come naturally as an extension of his work. Other tutors, however, might object to such perpetual search on the grounds of barely having time to be on top of their personal reading lists without having to worry about society's ones, too.

Fair, BUT Ângela at the Paulo Freire Institute would remind them that "teaching demands dedication just as much as autonomy". (P2:45)

In this passage, we have seen how contemporary as a criterion means different things. From those literary works from the past that are responsible for shaping contemporary literature now, according to Mauricio's and, to some extent, Agamben's vision; to works by authors who are alive and as close to the student-writers as their very tutors; to works who will answer the questions of tomorrow. In the next passage, we will look at a different, but related criterion, which inspires tutors to choose literature based on their breaking the rules and opening new, unexplored paths.

promiscuities and the in-between

This passage is introduced by Adriana (Central, Bogotá), who has a different idea of contemporaneity from what has been seen so far. She narrates:

To approach more contemporary literature, I ask myself what works allow us to trace dialogues between genres in the new forms of literature. In some lessons, I have taken some examples from Derrida's "The Law of Genre" and included works of fiction which showed some of that hybridity: Empty Words *by Mario Levrero,*

Flights *by Olga Tokarczuk,* El atajo *by Mery Yolanda Sánchez, which is poetic prose. Then there's* House of Leaves *by Mark Z. Danielewski. Anything which doesn't fit into pure narrative, or which could be poetic prose, essay, theatre... So long as there's experimentation. When we designed the syllabus, we asked: how can we train writers who are in dialogue with contemporary literature, if contemporary literature isn't composed of single genres, anymore? An interrogation for an infinite dialogue, in Borges's terms, between books that are all connected. Shorter novels, too.* The Beauty of the Husband *by Anne Carson.* Conjunto vacío *by Verónica Gerber Bicecci.* Optic Nerve *by María Gainza.* Las extraterrestres *by Juliana Borrero, a novel which mutates into a performance, a rewriting of, if you like,* The Odyssey, *because it's divided into songs, it has a lot of things. Who else? Ah, well, of course, Carmen María Machado.* (Rodríguez 2024)

the hybrid nature of VGB's work in general often puts her in the awkward position of having to justify it to both the art world (where it is perceived as "too wordy") and the literary world/ publishing industry ("too full of images") (LD:37)

Adriana navigates a repertoire of texts which, despite some of them being two or three decades old (Levrero's *Empty Words* was first published in 1996, Danielewski's *House of Leaves* in 2000, Carson's *The Beauty of the Husband* in 2001), still read fresh and innovative, breaking with the boundaries of traditional forms (prose, poetry, essay, etc.) and genre (crime, romance, etc.). Hybridity is a criterion searched by other tutors, too, who see the benefit of teaching students to think beyond genre as an escape from the education they might have received prior to the workshop, as suggested by Richard (Sagrado, San Juan):

There are authors who combine different genres, perhaps a book that includes short stories and poems, whereas before we were more used to books that are either collections of short stories or poetry anthologies. Yet, even iconic works like Don Quixote *already include poetry, essay and literary criticism. But with the passing of time, we have seen a tendency to purify genres, something that the students will have encountered in their education. They cannot conceive the alternative, a hybridity of genres. That's why it's so important to show them some examples.* (Cardona Rivera 2024)

This is an approach that some tutors adopt in their own artistic practice, perhaps having had to conquer such space of experimentation with little guidance, which now they hope to provide their own students. Ernesto (Andina, Quito), says,

Once you understand the limits of genre, you can begin to blend them, to turn texts into something else. I don't believe in literary styles; I don't have a single style. All my novels are different because I believe in that possibility. And I like for my students to have that possibility, too. (Carrión 2024)

The narratives discussing hybridity so far appear to be situating it at the other end of the spectrum in relation to "pure" forms (e.g. "literary fiction", "poetry") and genres (e.g. "fantasy", "folk horror"). This will be discussed further in the Metaphor chapter, although it is worth anticipating here that "purity" in literature and creative writing is a fictional concept, a narrative like many others, inherited from "a

mythological and rarified idea of literature that never really was" (Westbrook and Ryan 2020: 205). It comes with distillations of processes, structures, conventions and expectations which populate creative writing manuals with the neat checklists (e.g. Is there conflict? Does the character change? Are you showing and not telling?) and mountain-shaped graphs.

Hybridity, on the other hand, rarely features in (monolingual) creative writing manuals; and why would it? The whole point of hybridity is to challenge and defy conventions, transcend genres and forms. Sometimes it is associated with experimental writing, and as such is characterised as "polysemous, indeterminate, polyphonic, multi-genre, documentary, meditative", "put[ting] the reader in an unstable position vis-à-vis the work's meaning" (Field 2007: 305). Field does suggest many ways to "proceed 'experimentally' in practice" while acknowledging that moving away from habitual strategies leads to "infinite approaches" (Field 2007: 308): questioning language and using "discourses or languages traditionally considered unsuitable or incompatible with 'creative writing'"; mixing genres; writing automatically, meditatively, procedurally; challenging forms of authorship and writing collaboratively; using different forms of translation; and moving away from the printed form to explore other or mixed media, and questioning the dynamics of the published page and book as a form (Field 2007: 308–11).

I purposefully began the previous paragraph mentioning monolingual creative writing scholarship because in multilingual and translingual contexts hybridity seems to be much more covered. In the blossoming field of second-language creative writing, processes like "code-switching, lexical mixing, hybridization, and reconfiguration through interlinguistic play" are embedded in – if not intrinsic to – the "hybrid discourses" of L2 creative writing (Disney 2014: 3).

Still, in both these examples – Thalia Field's "Writing as Experimental Practice" and Dan Disney's *Exploring Second Language Creative Writing* – the authors' focus is more on processes and prompts, than on intertextuality and a hybrid literature of creative writing, with the exception of Jane Spiro's chapter "Learner and Writer Voices", which goes through many examples of poetry experimenting "in search of a second language writing voice" (Spiro 2014: 23).

These tutors' narratives, instead, have provided plenty of literary examples of hybridisation transcending form and genre, like *Empty Words* by Mario Levrero, *Flights* by Olga Tokarczuk, *El atajo* by Mery Yolanda Sánchez, *House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski, *The Beauty of the Husband* by Anne Carson, *Conjunto vacío* by Verónica Gerber Bicecci, *Optic Nerve* by María Gainza and *Las extraterrestres* by Juliana Borrero (Rodríguez 2024); and even *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes (Cardona Rivera 2024).

But just like Field suggests, moving away from the printed page and looking for new media is also a way to

diversify and hybridise one's repertoire. In fact, tutors like Óscar Daniel (Central, Bogotá) and Manuel (Coimbra) take their search beyond the field of traditionally published literature, and into other spaces and media. Óscar Daniel narrates:

Lately, I've been using a digital documentary, Welcome to Pine Point, *which collects photos and flash animations about a village that doesn't exist anymore; and* a *digital novel called* Retratos vivos de mamá *by a Colombian writer, Carolina López, also hosted on a website. This project asks the question: who was my mum before she had me? So the author builds an archive from photos, texts by other people, her own texts. This was to investigate archives and to demystify the moment of writing. These works challenge the fundamental principle of "finding one's own voice", which perpetuates the idea of genius alongside other prejudices about writing. It creates a space for writing to be something else.* (Campo Becerra 2024)

What is that something else? In electronic, digital and hybrid literature, the first answer would be a shift in the reading experience. In defining electronic literature, Scott Rettberg writes, "This question is not only hermeneutic – it refers not simply to how readers might encounter the meaning, style, themes, and language of the work but also to how readers can operate the text-machine itself", and that "non-trivial effort is required from the reader [...] in order to *traverse* the text" (Rettberg 2019: 10). If reading literature on a variety of digital media is a different experience than reading on the printed

page, then writing for these media must take that into account. The shift in the reading experience and the effort implied by it are shared by both writers and readers.

Secondly, there is the diversity of forms and media inhabiting this vast field. Touching on them is Manuel (Coimbra), who dedicates an entire module to Digital Literature, building on the work of Scott Rettberg:

This book was very important in my structuring of the module. Rettberg offers an overview of the different genres that have developed over the years: there's hyperfiction, which depends so much on reader interaction; then there are "playable forms", collaborative writing, network collaborative writing... He then uses a term, "expanded writing", which includes locative, narrative, augmented reality, virtual reality, interactive installations, expanded cinema... all hybrid forms. One of the interesting things about the digital medium is that because it's so dependent on specific software or platforms, certain genres and forms only appear after the technology comes to exist. And certain features of the rhetoric of the work depend on certain features of the software. When writers get used to branching narratives, they do something which is not usual in the traditional narrative plot or narrative structure: they start to think about characters and events in terms of alternatives. If you follow one path, maybe the character will die, or something else will happen if you follow this other path. This can generate contradiction and inconsistency, but the pedagogical consequences of these hypertext or hyperfiction exercises is that students will think about plots and

characters and situations and places in a much more flexible way. (Portela 2023)

Based on Adriana's, Óscar Daniel's and Manuel's case, showing examples of literature that does not behave "typically" and engaging the students to experiment with "atypical" structures, genres, forms and styles might simultaneously accomplish two things: first of all, initiating a conversation about what is "typical" and why, i.e. what are craft expectations around plot (e.g. causality, agency, conflict, etc.), structure, form and style, and how are they culturally and socially contextualised; and secondly, how is it that authors "get away" with subverting these expectations, and what is it that makes their work enjoyable, literary and, just like any other work of literature, in conversation with other texts.

The integration of digital literature in the workshop has the bonus that, as a form or genre, it appears to have diversity embedded in it by default. Manuel (Coimbra) explains it quite clearly:

Digital writing comes with multiple perspectives. This is really interesting, as somehow diversity is built into the content in terms of theory. The two electronic collections that we use as major sources have been designed with that diversity focus, as they include texts that are dealing with racial, gender, social and economic issues. Plus, these texts are freely available. Each collection includes sixty texts, but I only choose four or five. Students can explore the collections as they

want. The texts are multilingual. They have texts in English, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian and other languages. (Portela 2023)

When Manuel suggests that digital writing has *diversity built into the content in terms of theory*, we go back to the plurality of forms that it welcomes, which are as many as the different platforms and virtual spaces which digital literature can inhabit: *hyperfiction, playable forms, collaborative writing, network collaborative writing, expanded writing (locative, narrative, augmented reality, virtual reality, interactive installations, expanded cinema...)*, etc. And there are still forms yet to emerge, once the platforms capable of hosting them have been imagined. To each of these forms and genres correspond different ways to experience reading, which multiply as writers engage with several platforms and media at the same time.

Alongside the diversity of forms and experiences, Manuel also highlights the diversity in the content of the publications in terms of the cultural and identity themes they explore, as well as the cultural diversity of their authors, with platforms such as the Electronic Literature Collection disseminating works in many languages. Compared to the publishing industry, access to digital distribution channels is more open, with less – economic, symbolic and social – capital needed (O'Sullivan 2021: 262), overall contributing to a more inclusive, diverse and democratic digital ecology.

The diversity in the existing literature feeds back into the diversity of practices and process, as multimodality is said to "allow students of different backgrounds, cultures,

linguistic levels, areas of interest, fandoms, genre preferences, and communication styles to compose texts in a wide variety of methods" (Skains 2019), in a virtuous cycle of amplifying, augmenting, redefining literature and creative writing.

Diversity has fully emerged as a theme in several of the narratives you have read in the second half of this chapter. In the next few passages, it will be explored even further, taking up the invitation that Manuel (Complutense, Madrid) shares in their narrative: *If we stop and think a little, there are high-quality texts from all over which help us restore the balance* (Broullón-Lozano 2023).

guided by a multitude of voices

Once again, I open a passage with a fragment from fiction to introduce the theme. This time, it is a translated excerpt from Eduardo Halfon's short story "Lejano", featuring the author's autofictional alter ego in the role of a Literature professor.

> At the end of the class, the fat girl approached me while I was putting my stuff away. I still don't like short stories, she said. I smiled and asked for her name. Ligia Martínez. No problem, Ligia, neither I nor Mr Poe will take offence. [...] Look, Ligia said, I also wanted to ask why there aren't more women in your syllabus. There's only one woman, Eduardo, this O'Connoly, or whatever her name is. Don't you think it's incorrect, I mean, politically incorrect? She asked, with a hint of malice. I

according to José Mateos (the poet who doesn't read translations, yes), for a long time, women couldn't contribute to society & literature because washing machines hadn't been invented, yet. (LD:5)

> didn't include a black author either, Ligia, or an oriental one, or a dwarf. And only one homosexual, to my knowledge. I told her that my lectures, thank God, were politically incorrect. In other words, Ligia, they are sincere. Like art. Great short story writers, full stop. She said, fine, I just wanted to know, and walked away with her friend. (Halfon 2018: 112–3)

In this short story by Eduardo Halfon, the professor extremises the position that great literature is great literature, whether it is written by women, or black or "oriental people", "dwarfs" or "homosexuals". As radical and offensive as Halfon's attitude (and wording) may be, both the idea behind it and the situation are surprisingly common among creative writing tutors. Both Jorge (San Marcos, Lima) and Aleja (Central, Bogotá) have been confronted by students about a similar issue. Jorge says,

I have strived to include more women ever since a student pointed out, "Professor, you've only included men in this syllabus." And I had never thought about it, obviously. So I said, "Ok, let's change some of the plan so we can include more women authors." You have your library in your head, and instances like these force you to change it, to widen it. This process is part of being a teacher. (Valenzuela Garcés 2024)

Aleja, too, is aware that a valid change in the general discourse has consequences on her pedagogical approach; however, that does not affect her own way of reading literature:

I support any movement that revindicates women's voices wholeheartedly. However, I have a vision of the arts that is supposedly not biased by gender. I think that I, Alejandra Flórez, don't read men or women, I read literature. If in this moment of my life I am trying to read more women authors, it's because I am making up for lost time, for all the lost voices that I wasn't able to read because my training was based on a masculine, patriarchal literary canon. So when we read authors from the Latin American Boom, I include Elena Garro, Silvina Ocampo, women who found it so hard to publish and who were silenced. It has happened that students noticed, "Oh, this module we're only going to read men," and so I said, "I hadn't realised that. Ok, if in the Latin American Boom module we only have men, in the next module we're going to invite a woman writer to tell us about her experience." (Flórez 2024)

Aleja's rationale distinguishes between reading a work of literature as a reader and reading it as a tutor of creative writing. Reading gender (or class, or race, or sexual orientation, etc.) in literature will ultimately be at reader's discretion, a deliberate choice or a natural consequence of how the reader themselves relates to issues of gender and cultural identity, which has to do with their experience, their empathy, their education and with how present these issues are perceived in their context. However, as these discourses begin to transcend borders and historically oppressed individuals and groups seek understanding and representation, ignoring the issue altogether within a

pedagogical context – like Professor Halfon does in the short story – simply is not an option.

The theme of "literature has no gender (/race/culture, etc.)" is explored by different tutors in different ways. For Josef (Uninorte, Barranquilla), it is a delicate balance between being inclusive and not falling into positive discrimination:

The time has come to listen to voices that historically have not been heard, particularly in Colombia. I ask my students, "Who read a woman author at school?" No one. "Who read a black author?" Also no one. So a black Colombian poet from the 19th century like Candelario Obeso is known by no one, despite being a much better poet than Mutis, Roca, Silva... But he was black, wasn't he? Now, you have to be very careful with this. If I want to talk about complex characterisation, I immediately think about Virginia Woolf and Jonathan Franzen. If Franzen does it better, I don't go and choose Woolf, because that would be like giving her a consolation prize. The pink quote. That's very gringo. If someone's black, or Jewish, they get the consolation prize. Is Emily Dickinson more or less useful than Fernando Pessoa? This is how I choose. Of course I am very conscious of my choices, but I am also wary of giving nobody a consolation prize, because this is discrimination, too. (Amón Mitrani 2024)

For Isaías (Central, Bogotá),

The difference between a man author and a woman author is the same difference that there could be between two authors – like Julio Cortázar and Henry James. Literature has no gender, in that sense. Perhaps it

will have idiosyncrasies, but women authors manage male psychology incredibly well, just as there are male authors who manage female psychology well, too. (Peña Gutiérrez 2024)

Similarly, Pedro (Central, Bogotá) claims that,

Women are good writers. I don't look for balance, I look for quality in women's writing just as I look for quality in men's. Jhumpa Lahiri, for example. She's a very good writer. Or Katherine Mansfield, or Dorothy Parker. Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own *is a major reference text in my course. What I'm interested in is that certain techniques are also used by women. I think women and men writers are the same. Now, there's a publishing boom of women authors, some are good, some aren't. They must be read and assessed, and incorporated to the discussion on technique and theme, right?* (Badrán Padaui 2024)

From my point of view as a woman writer, I am afraid that Pedro's stance might come across as patronising, rather than empowering. His suggestion – along the lines of "women are good at writing, too" – is backed up, with the exception of Jhumpa Lahiri, by the inclusion of women authors who have already "passed the test" of an overwhelmingly male canon, together with the O'Connoly-whatever-her-name-is of Halfon's text (who, we can safely assume, is very likely to be Flannery O'Connor).

but, lucky them, most of them don't have to "undergo the embarrassment of being called a GENIUS", as the Guerrilla Girls manifesto displayed at MASP, São Paulo helpfully points out. (L2:64)

In some of the narratives shared so far, and in the creative writing scholarship that has looked into these issues,

it emerges that the erasure of women can take different forms. From their systematic exclusion to tokenism or pink quotas, to the equalling of men and women writers on the basis of presumed fairness, neutrality, and "quality". But how is quality "fair" or "neutral"? Markers of literary value are cultural, and as such, biased by a long-established favouring of male voices in literary and creative writing canons.

Furthermore, affirming that women authors write like men authors is another way to silence those women who *choose* to actively explore their gender through language, structure and content; in other words, who choose to write *as* women ☆ – in the way they see most fit. As a philosopher and woman writer very concerned with women writing, Hélène Cixous advances an idea of an *écriture feminine* which starts from the premise that, "There is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman," (Cixous 1976: 876, trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen) and that, "It is by writing that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence" (Cixous 1976: 881).

Talking about silenced women, sisters Victoria and Silvina Ocampo, routinely omitted by lists of authors usually associated with the Latin American Boom, openly discussed the relationship between their gender and their writing (Astutti 2000). In the letter which opens her collection *Testimonios I*, Silvina Ocampo writes, "My only ambition is to write, one day, more or less well, more or less badly, but like a woman" (Ocampo 1981, my translation).

Some examples:
- not featuring any woman author on the blue plaques on the walls of Coimbra (L1: 5)
- inviting a woman PhD student to speak at a round table and then not allowing her to SIT or SPEAK at said table (LD: 11-15)
- calling Galicia's laureate poet & county hero Rosalía de Castro "(Gustavo Adolfo) Bécquer's friend" (LD: 5)
- two men posthumously "fixing" Peruvian poet María Emilia Cornejo's work into tidy, "round" poems, then implying her voice was their creation (P1: 32.)

And one example from the music field, too:
- ignoring the only woman musician as she shyly joins a jam session in which men are hyping each other up like major rockstars (LD: 22-23)

the latter prompted the Researcher to wonder: "Why does it still cost people so much to high-five women once in a fucking while?"

Never mind high-fiving, you humans need to resit Basic Equality 101 and learn key skills like, I don't know, "not-nobodying", or "respecting their CHOICES."

☆ Compare, though, with one of the "Advantages of Being a Woman Artist" 183 by the Guerrilla Girls: "Being reassured that whatever kind of art you make, it will be labelled FEMININE." (L2: 64)

In her *Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway writes of a "route that [...] passes through women and other present-tense, illegitimate cyborgs, not of Woman born, who refuse the ideological resources of victimization so as to have a real life" (Haraway 2016a: 59); her dream is not "of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia", writing from the point of view of someone who "would rather be a cyborg than a goddess" (Haraway 2016a: 68).

In her poem "Composición", Cristina Peri Rossi infuses language itself with womanhood, personifying *palabra* ("word") as *mujer* ("woman") and writing about them both as being one and the same (Peri Rossi 1971: 59).

More recently, some of the contemporary Latin American women authors participating in this heteroglossic movement have already been acknowledged here by Óscar Daniel, who also points out that the publishing industry, too, has taken an interest in this very specific, woman-led genre. Sebastián (Central, Bogotá) explains a little bit more about it:

There's a type of literature written from an ethical perspective, with a political purpose, that, however, does not read like propaganda. I have been drawn to a kind of Latin American literature that sees horror not as something external to reality but as something embedded in daily life, particularly within the family. It's a way of challenging hegemonic structures that also permeate literature. I believe men write in this mode too, but I have focused more on women who dismantle power structures through their aesthetic creations. There's no hesitation in revealing political – or rather ethical – positions. It's

Whereas Romany Dear changes the grammatical gender of the Spanish word for "future" (el futuro, m. → la futura, f.) and uses it as a motif in her and Grace's necrowritings: "I am ready for a she-future we are ready for a she-future [...] A she-future made of many times, spiral times, pasts of pasts, presents of pasts, she-futures of pasts, and she-futures of she-futures." (WD: 13-15)

a kind of literature with a pedagogical purpose: to make you uncomfortable. It's far from people-pleasing. It emerges on the periphery, through independent presses, which eventually become part of the hegemonic cultural field – something not inherently negative. These authors aim to complicate the human condition, offering women or non-binary characters a more active and nuanced role. There's an interest in the maravilloso *in rural settings, as with Mónica Ojeda, or in urban contexts, with María Fernanda Ampuero. These works emphasise tensions between rural and urban life in Latin American societies, providing a social commentary through fiction. Literature has always done this, but here it feels unique. These women are from the Global South, advancing critical challenges to hegemonic structures, always through the lens of language, which is particularly striking. There's a critical, ethical stance, yet the aesthetic dimension remains essential; depth is not sacrificed in favour of ideology or politics – it remains intact. The notion of objective writing or writing solely for entertainment falls apart. There's a commitment to writing, one way or another. Through language, they search for identity: from the feminine, from the periphery, from Latin America.* (Montañez Cifuentes 2024)

These authors, also identified by Óscar Daniel and by other tutors, appear to have created their own creative writing canon within a very specific genre, with short story collections such as *Las voladoras* (Mónica Ojeda), *Ustedes brillan en el oscuro* (Liliana Colanzi), *Pelea de gallos* (María Fernanda Ampuero), *Pájaros en la boca* (Samanta Schweblin).

Many of these authors' titles are published by the same Spanish publisher of short stories, Páginas de Espuma. Colanzi, Ojeda and Schweblin also appeared in the 2017 Bogotá39 list (*) of the most promising Latin American writers under the age of 39, an initiative of Hay Festival and the City of Bogotá. Here, the role of publishers and festivals as tastemakers cannot be dismissed when it comes to giving voice to the unheard until, in some cases, like both Sebastián and Óscar Daniel suggest, it becomes mainstream.

For Sebastián, contemporary Latin American women authors of the rural and urban *maravilloso* "read the world to write the word" (Freire 1983), or rather read *their* world, one that has been shaped by their experience as women and as Latin American authors. The latter aspect is one more criterion explored by tutors of creative writing in the next passage, negotiating tensions between the local, the regional, the universal.

close to home, or the universe

This passage is introduced by Guillermo (Uninorte, Barranquilla), who addresses the question of cultural preferences in his narrative:

I feel like we have to read our own stuff. A trainee writer needs to see how their peers have achieved something similar to what they want to achieve. They need to be able to say, "If she made it, why can't I?" Here in Colombia, the most patent example is Gabriel García Márquez.

some volumes are only published by PdE, which in some places becomes a bit of a problem due to their retail price and how it compares to local currency/purchasing power: it's not the same to buy Pelea de gallos for €15 in Spain and for $ARS 22.990 in Argentina* even in the days when the price happens to be equivalent on paper. (L3:77)
so when Óscar Daniel says that students are likely to come across these authors in a book-shop, or fair, BUT are they going to be able to afford their books?

* where bread today costs $ARS 2400/kilo. "Borges used to say that a book should cost as much as a kilo of bread at the baker's." (Kukuyo #9)
Not ten times as much.

(*) To Argentinian publisher & bookseller Germán Gacio, this list and similar (like Granta's Best of...) are only good if you want to know what NOT to read. (LD:30)

This is a man who was raised in Sucre (Sucre), a place that you would never expect to give birth to a super famous person. And his stories are impregnated with that cultural richness. Then there's the internal difference. I'm odd, because I'm cachaco, *which means from the interior, from Bogotá. People from here are* costeños. *There's a big rivarly between* cachacos *and* costeños. *Bogotá is a hostile city, a very cold, unsafe city. And you notice the difference in literature, too. Gabriel García Márquez, Marvel Moreno, Manuel Zapata Olivella, Germán Espinosa are* costeños. *They display that Caribbean sensitivity associated to warmth, exuberance, explicit sexuality, to a predominance of mystery and happiness; the* cachaco *style leans more towards the moorland, the cold, self-reflection with a little bit of torment, some self-reflection with stomach issues, with bad digestion. Our most traditional literature is also associated with indigenous themes, with rural themes, and with race.* (Serrano López 2024)

Guillermo opens his narrative by claiming that *it is important to read one's own stuff*, Colombian literature of both the *cachacos* and of the *costeños*, very generally concerned with mountains and cold, beaches and warmth, the countryside, spleen and stomach issues, sex, music and race. He is not on his own in his quest to value the local, as both Jorge and Jotacé (Sagrado, San Juan) offer reflections about what local literature can offer students of creative writing:

Jorge: *My classes are based on reflections about literature by Caribbean authors. My idea is that we read Caribbean authors thinking about what it means to write from this place, so that the*

course is not entirely decontextualised. To avoid reading literature coming from industrial societies and imitate a model which does not apply to us, here in our own little mess. I focus on the English, Portuguese, French and Spanish-speaking Caribbean. I'm interested in a wider idea of Caribbean: in the first term, we read Roberto Fernández Retamar (Cuba), René Marqués (Puerto Rico). In the module called What is Literature, we read Maryse Condé (Guadeloupe), Jamaica Kincaid (Antigua and Barbuda), and Derek Walcott (Saint Lucia) – his Nobel prize speech and the introduction to his play Dream on Monkey Mountain. *We have more non-Spanish-speaking authors than Hispanic ones, now.* (Lefevre Tavárez 2024)

Jotacé: *The book market in Puerto Rico is unknown to many students. Why is that? There isn't a publishing industry as such and there's very little exposure of local authors outside the literary field, and that's a huge problem. So I tell my students: "Whether you like it or not, at some point, you will form part of a literary tradition, and it's important for you to get to know it. You're not writing in a vacuum; you're not inventing Puerto Rican literature; let alone literature itself. You're participating in a dialogue that has been going on for a long time." In the case of Puerto Rico, at least ever since the 19th century.* (López 2024)

To reiterate the two main reasons why tutors show their student-writers local literature, so far we have: the question of relatability, applied to writers (*if she did, why can't I?*) as well as themes and places (according to Jorge, there is a distinct

difference between writing from an *industrialised society* and writing from one's *own little mess*); and the question of intertextuality. In Jotacé's narrative, in fact, the effort is in uncovering the layers of contemporary Puerto Rican literature's palimpsests for student-writers to situate their practice.

From these narratives, and from some of the previous ones, like Óscar Daniel's and Sebastián's, for example, defining what counts as one's *own stuff* is not so obvious in a region like Latin America. Some tutors think in terms of the whole continent: if we look at the Latin American new wave of horror, authors come from countries as diverse as Ecuador, Argentina and Bolivia (while, I insist, being published by a Spanish publisher); and authors of the Latin American Boom (and their predecessors) spread across the continent, too: José Lezama Lima and Alejo Carpentier are Cuban; Gabriel García Márquez is Colombian; Juan Rulfo, Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes are Mexican; Mario Vargas Llosa is from Peru; and Julio Cortázar, Adolfo Bioy Casares and Jorge Luis Borges are Argentinian, just to name a few.

look at all these proud and grateful owners of washing machines(!)

As Mario Vargas Llosa, the "last author of the Latin American Boom" is announced dead, Cristina Peri Rossi checks in the mirror whether she's been a ghost all along without realising.

Jorge, on the other hand, thinks in terms of the wider, not necessarily Hispanic, Caribbean; and Jotacé specifically about Puerto Rico.

At Andina (Quito), Ariruma also makes a fundamental point, which unfortunately has not come up very often in conversation with tutors:

I have always argued that MA and PhD programmes should include studies on the indigenous literature of this continent. Ever since the 16th century historians have been documenting a lot of our literature, despite its oral nature and the idea that orality does not allow for continuity. But it's precisely because of orality that Andean literature still exists, keeping the spirit and the purpose of the text. We have prophecies, for example. In countries like Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, all over the Andes, there are surviving prophecies. One of them speaks about the return of Túpac Amaru I, who was murdered and quartered, and whose limbs have been looking for one another across the centuries. When they finally reunite, our people will be dignified, and our lives will change for the better. It's important to include our cultural manifestations, but it's not always easy. There are lot of issues, some of them having to do with ego, because egos always get in the way. (Kowii Maldonado 2024)

As I said, the case of Ariruma is entirely isolated, him being the only indigenous tutor involved in a programme of creative writing that I have been able to interview; and indigenous and oral literature do not seem to be on the radar of creative writing tutors.

If, like Juan José (Andina, Quito) says, some Latin American countries are the periphery of the periphery (Rodinás 2024), indigenous and oral literatures sit even further away – on the margins of the periphery's periphery. Yet, Ariruma's effort is not dissimilar to Jotacé's or Jorge's. As different as these approaches might sound, the underlying principle is to offer students a contextualised reading of

literature that speaks to them as writers from that part of the world, however they interpret this.

When I asked, "Do you favour Latin American authors over a supposedly universal notion of literature?", Daniela (Uninorte, Barranquilla) replied:

I ask myself that question all the time. All the time, all the time. For example, something really weird happens with Anne Carson. She is a Canadian author who I admire with a passion. But I always doubt myself because she is a very canonical author. She's an iconoclast, a scholar of Greek texts. And sometimes I clash with the very idea of "why Anne Carson". What can the students from here find in Anne Carson? But then I go back to the idea that there are forms of writing which reinvent language altogether. The games she plays with words, with her writing. They make me disregard the fact that she is an anglophone, iconoclast writer. They make me notice some rebellion even, in her writing, which interests me deeply. (Pabón Llinás 2024)

So while the ultimate decision is to include Anne Carson in her Poetry module for Spanish-language Colombian *costeños* writers, Daniella does not cease to ask herself "Why?". This reveals a sensitivity to the question in the first place, as a concern which appears more and more present in tutors of creative writing. Where are the authors of the texts you choose writing from? Why does it matter?

I believe it matters because it influences the vision of writing and literature that students form in their head; the relations that they are able to draw between their own writing

* It had been a very rainy day, a people had been queuing for two hours outside the Museo del Prado to see Anne Carson receive the honorary title of "Ninth Muse of the Prado". Presenting it to her, the museum director read a heartfelt, quite funny "invocation to the Muse", which was met by Carson's caustic comment about Spanish people's talent for being "transcendental and CORNY". She left the stage after her lecture "on Hesitation" without saying goodbye and asked someone else to inform the audience she wouldn't be signing books or staying. (LD:G)

Ever since that day, the Researcher too struggles with the question, because she can't bring herself to ignore/forgive Carson's bad manners – and poor sense of humour.

and someone else's; the possibility to subscribe to a tradition, whether this is shaped by culture, language, form or genre, or other commonalities or rupture points between their writing and the repertoire that they develop on their own and that you help to construct. It is not about determining which approach – localist, regionalist, "universalist", etc. – is better on principle, here; it is about asking the question in the first place, and seeing how other tutors have addressed it.

Other tutors, in fact, take a different, albeit not necessarily opposite, approach. Hear what Isaías (Central, Bogotá) has to say about it:

In my selection over the years, I have kept Colombian authors to the minimum. The reason for this is that students are already familiar with their own literature. They have it close at hand. The other literature, instead... The African author or any other, they wouldn't be so available to them. (Peña Gutiérrez 2024)

I imagine that if Daniela (Uninorte, Barranquilla) were to ask Isaías: "Why Anne Carson?", his answer would probably be, "Because she is not from here." The virtue of the tutor as a reader is that they are not only able to unveil the palimpsests of local literature, but also to draw connections with literature(s) far away. Isaías's approach, therefore, appears to be more guided by diversity than by an effort in localisation, a shared preoccupation for many of the tutors whose narratives you are about to read. Luís Roberto (PUCRS, Porto Alegre) explains why this concern:

Diversity is essential to show how, if we don't pay attention, we end up reading always the same authors and writing always in the same manner because we follow in those authors' steps. It's in the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity: diversity favours creativity. If you read diverse authors, women and men from different countries, this helps your practice. Plus, in our MA and in the PhD, it's impossible to evade this conversation. If you do, the students themselves interrupt the lesson, they make noise. PUC is so responsive about it. It was the community itself that demanded change. The students were tired: "We don't want only male professors anymore; we don't want to read the same old classic authors; we want something else." This is still very much present. It's the heat of the moment. (Amabile 2024)

Universities and tutors have different ways to respond to students' feedback and to engage with the general discourse about diversity, inclusion and what, in some contexts, is called decolonisation. Like Isaías, someone like Aleja (Central, Bogotá), would recognise that it is her own responsibility to make sure that students are exposed to literature that is as diverse as possible:

It is evident that here in the West we don't know anything about the East, and this is serious, very serious. I have always brought it up on staff meetings: we know nothing about Eastern literature. I try and look for super unknown poets when we look at haikus; or in the last term, we read Paulina Chiziane, the first ever Mozambican woman to

publish a novel. And it was interesting to read her, such a marvellous, amazing discovery. (Flórez 2024)

Roberto (Vera, São Paulo), too, makes a personal effort, while he also tries to get his staff involved:

In this module we discuss ten authors. Six are women and four are men. Three Brazilians, one Canadian, one South African, one English, and one from the US. I teach another module whose syllabus I try to change every year, balancing race, gender, sexual orientation and nationality. There must always be someone from Asia, Europe, Africa, South America, North America, and black authors, gay, lesbian and trans. It's not always easy to balance that, but that's definitely a concern, one that we try and discuss with all the professors. (Taddei 2024)

On the other hand, some tutors seem to interpret some of these efforts as political issues that should be kept outside the workshop. Whether the effort is directed at localising, or at decolonising, diversifying and including, Eduardo (Tres de Febrero, Buenos Aires) is not convinced that policies and ideology-driven practices are compatible with his vision for a *promiscuous* art:

I try not to put an emphasis on ideologies, because students already do that on their own. They are going to inscribe whatever I teach them into some field of political awareness or activism; or they are going to reject it by opposition. If UNTREF told me: "Look, please focus on

Latin American authors and mark a point of divergence, or rupture with anyone else who writes from a different place of speech or meaning-making," I wouldn't do it. You can take this stance when you're discussing politics. But when you build your language, your discourse is going to be mixed. Not necessarily hybrid; perhaps "promiscuous" is the word I prefer. Promiscuity is an Argentinian trait. Not only for mixing high and low culture, but also horizontally, mixing transversely. Even though art is made with certain solemnity, our metabolism is promiscuous. Thank goodness for that – that materials are not inscribed in such rigid codes. (Stupía 2024)

As I understand it, Eduardo's approach is neither to localise or diversify because both approaches would impose ideological or cultural restrictions. Perhaps, like Josef, he would not want to fall into positive discrimination; or, like Daniela, he would not want to sacrifice literature that serves his higher priority – in his case, promiscuity – to favour authors that *have* to be included for political reasons. The risk, perhaps, would be that without asking the question or making the effort, the choices based on presumed literary value and purpose might default, like Luís Roberto suggests, to *the same authors writing in the same way* (Amabile 2024).

To add some final considerations to this intricate aspect of the literature of creative writing, the choice between literature from home and literature of the outsider is also one that has different implications starting from where this choice is being made in the first place.

Where I come from and where I received part of my training in creative writing, in Italy, the tendency was to rely heavily on foreign literature in translation – mostly workshop canon (Carver, Cheever, O'Connor, Salinger, etc.) – or "masters" from the "universal" literary canon (Chekov, Kafka, Nabokov, Hemingway, etc.). Italian tutors of creative writing are xenophiles, just like Italian readers have been historically, at least ever since the Fascist era (Rundle 2019). The very few examples of Italian literature are limited to our usual suspects: an overwhelming presence of Italo Calvino, alongside the occasional 20th-century peer – Beppe Fenoglio, Tommaso Landolfi, Cesare Pavese, or Dino Buzzati – with some overlap with the secondary school literary curriculum, and three token women: Elsa Morante, Grazia Deledda and Natalia Ginzburg. Based on the average creative writing syllabus at Scuola Holden, you would assume that no literature worthy of study has been published in Italy in the 21st century (Traina 2022) – much like Pablo argued is the case for Spain and Mauricio for Brazil.

In such context, reading contemporary Italian authors would be seen as a most innovative choice, whereas a *certain type of* literature in translation is the default, mainstream option. In other contexts, translation sits at the margin, with the centre being taken by literature sharing its language with its readers, or national literature, or regional literature or continental literature, depending on whom you ask.

In this passage, we go back full circle and restore the Spanish saying to its more accurate translation, each fool to their own theme, to explore how literary repertoires are fundamentally shaped by... us, full stop. In fact, one of the most influencing principle is what Pedro (Central, Bogotá) calls *the professor's judgement* (Badrán Padaui 2024), encompassing one's values, taste, background and knowledge.

For some tutors, it is a question of what they know best, or texts that are very present in their minds, or at hand on one's own bookshelf:

Fabián (Uninorte, Barranquilla): *First of all, it's about personal experience. Texts that I have read and that have drawn my attention. That I remember. It's my own taste.* (Buelvas 2024)

Guadalupe (Complutense, Madrid): *In my repertoire there's a predominance of Anglo-American and Latin American authors. These are the geographies I manage best. It's what I know.* (Arbona Abascal 2023)

Ricardo (Pontificia, Lima): *Since I also teach Korean and Asian literature, I always try and include a Japanese or a Korean short story that students wouldn't read in another workshop. It surprises them; they like looking at other types of writing. Murakami is the most Western-like of Japanese authors, so I tend to choose something different. A zen story, for example. For a Peruvian reader, they appear*

to lack conflict or plot, but I like them to expose them to something like this. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. (Sumalavia 2024)

Jorge (Sagrado, San Juan): *The process has been a bit random. I look at my bookshelves at home. I choose. Sometimes I see things beyond the classics that are worth reading... So I assign Trotsky, I assign Raymond Williams.* (Lefevre Tavárez 2024)

For others, personal taste becomes an arbiter for literary taste:

Sergio Arturo (Central, Bogotá): *In this process of selecting texts, I have found out two things. One, that I am very attached to my personal taste, so long as it serves the purpose of the class. It's not a whim. It has to be useful. And two, I have discovered that students don't read classics. They don't know the authors of the Boom. Reading Cervantes is crazy for them. So I try and use a bit of everything, apart from science-fiction, which I don't like. Nowadays, I try and investigate it a little bit more, because students like it, so I give it a go, see what happens.* (González Vargas 2024)

Aware of his prejudice against science-fiction, Sergio Arturo has realised that to be able to work with students who are interested in that genre, he needs to read more of it, whether he likes it or not. An awareness of your preferences and biases allows you to respond to the needs of the students better, but you need to be able to identify your own limits in the first place:

Carol (Vera, São Paulo): *Contemporary authors, those whom you could meet at a book fair, are more difficult for me to include, purely because I don't know them well. My repertoire is a little older, not necessarily classic, but until the beginning of the millennium. Until 2010, like.* (Abed 2024)

Pablo (Seville): *The selection of texts depends on my taste and what I consider to be literary values. I think that the 20th century novel is much better than the 21st century one. So I decide that the students need to learn techniques and tools from the 20th century.* (Sánchez 2023)

Biased by my own overconsumption of 20th century "classics" (which I still love) and works from the creative writing canon (a little less so), I have already shared my perplexity at Pablo's refusal to believe that anyone has written a novel worth teaching in Spanish after the turn of the millennium. One should hope, at least, that this position is presented to his students for what it is: a passionate but personal perspective, which is not inherently condemnable. Are we not at our most foolish when we are in love?

Passion and personality characterise many of these tutors' personal libraries, because, just like Jorge (San Marcos, Lima) and Gabriela (Vera, São Paulo) say:

Jorge (San Marcos, Lima): *You teach the short stories that you love better. For example, there's a short story I love... I don't know why. I learned so much about perspective and point of view from it. It's by*

García Márquez, and it's called "Tuesday Siesta". That short story I teach... for the joy of teaching it. (Valenzuela Garcés 2024)

Gabriela (Vera, São Paulo): *Everyone who teaches here, Elena, is so in love with literature. And when you like something, you want to talk about it. "Oh, I loved this, I need to share it." When I was a student here, many of my tutors were very in love. You build up references, you take notes, you read along and borrow books.* (Aguerre 2024)

The joy of teaching a short story that we love; the love of literature in general. This sentiment was probably the most pervasive in my research – much more than the love of teaching or even the love of writing. Many writers come to the practice because they love books, stories, poems, or simply the experience of reading.

However, many tutors, some of them with a little bit of drama, deplore the fact that their students do not read, or do not read widely enough, or do not read the books that the tutors would like them to read. Well, reader, love is learned. And by this I do not just mean that we can teach our students to fall (back) in love with reading, but that we need to do that ourselves, and that requires the same effort that we ask of our students. Whether it means to look for the science-fiction short story or the 21st-century novel that will blow your mind; or to give a fair chance to the Other you so much dislike – whatever that means to you: the gringo, the local, the foreign, the oldie, the youngster, the underdog, the prize-winner and the weirdo – so they, too, can be loved. To pay special attention

★ Some of them do confess that they don't LIKE reading, to which the only possible response according to one tutor is: "Why do you want to be a writer, then? Go and sell empanadas instead." (WD:20)

PARTICULARLY when everything else conspires against finding time and space to read. María Wilcoxe's words embroidered by artist Ana Paula Méndez recall her childhood troubles:

"There are many things in the WORLD which make it difficult to READ. THINGS LIKE:
- boarding a bus
- setting the table
- tidying up your room
- visiting an aunt who watches a lot of TV

So you ALWAYS have to FIGURE OUT ways to READ in this WORLD." (L3:82)

(*) the rude Canadian iconoclast poet, too.

to the voices that have systematically been silenced, and to wonder why. And to acknowledge that literature exists orally, digitally, interactively, collaboratively, even clandestinely, travelling routes that are harder to map, so far away from the library catalogue, the literary anthology, the book festival, the review column.

Some closing considerations about this in the passage that follows.

in all shapes and sizes.

In this chapter, you were able to read about many criteria that tutors consider, often many of them at the same time, when selecting the literature they bring into the creative writing classroom. They can design materials based on themes, concepts or techniques, and choose the literature that best allows them to do that; they incorporate, discuss, rediscuss, challenge and update the literary canon(s); they look for what is contemporary and what pushes the boundaries of form; they include, diversify and amplify; they consider and question geographical, linguistic and cultural borders; and look at their own bookshelves for the literature that they love the most.

For the sake of a neat list of key words, we could say that their selection criteria so far take into account: purpose, canon and literariness, contemporaneity, variety, diversity, gender and culture, and personal taste and knowledge.

To these, I would add a couple of minor criteria that I have left out but that are considered by some tutors, like: the length of the excerpts proposed (Amabile 2024; Jaramillo Morales 2024; Pérez Rodas 2024); accessibility, i.e. copyright-free works or works available at the library (López 2024; Ruiz Ramos 2024); accessibility of language (Serrano López 2024); and works from other media (like films and visual art) and platforms (Portela 2023; Campo Becerra 2024; Flórez 2024; Valenzuela Garcés 2024).

Finally, I would like to add my own, two concepts that I have go-found on the other side, bibliodiversity (*bibliodiversidad*) and librodiversity (*librodiversidad*). The first term dates back to the late 1990s and it refers to "cultural diversity applied to the world of books", focusing on text and content "from the plurality of perspectives and actions in the field of publishing" (Schierloh 2022: 49–50). The second term, coined by Argentinian writer, translator, publisher and bookseller Cristian De Nápoli, refers to the materiality of the publications – "formats, materials, binding techniques, distributing and circulating options" – and, as Eric Schierloh argues, not only it is just as valuable as bibliodiversity but it also "constitutes an editorial politic, a strategy for visibility, and a tool that allows an artisanal publisher to diversify their business model" (Schierloh 2022: 50–51, my translation). In the context of the creative writing classroom, both concepts are useful as a reminder that literature comes, metaphorically and literally, in all shapes and sizes.

"Artisanal publishing offers an interesting and important contribution to notions of bibliodiversity and librodiversity, while it paves the way and sparks desire to conceive publishing like one more form of resistance." (Kikuyo #9)

many of them acknowledging the communal legacy of Ulises Carrión, who, according to Kikuyo's publishers, "gave us a new field in which we could play". (RD:23, Kikuyo #9)

Do-It-Yourself? No thanks.
* Mexican artisanal publisher Faustino Trejo would rather talk of Do-It-Together.

On the day when I am writing this passage, I have met with a cataloguer at the British Library and fellow Italian, Dr Annalisa Ricciardi. We were talking about the *cartonera* collection and the DIY philosophy that underpins alternative publishing cultures on both sides of the Atlantic, prompted by the collection of artist's books that the British Library currently has on display. One book shaped like a necktie, another like a tree trunk. One whose pages are crafted from the mud of different riverbeds. Books of fabric whose writing is stitched, not printed.

The Researcher's first encounter with cartonera was very tactile, as she handled plenty of cartonera and artisanal publications while she resolved to rearrange & catalogue her friend Eva's library in Puerto Rico (RD: 11). It was Nicole of La Impresora press who gave her a proper intro to the movement and how it emerged in Argentina on the back of the 2001 crisis (P1: 12)

Ten or fifteen years ago, assembling such a rich, diverse and unique collection would not have been possible, as artist's books were considered "for museums, not libraries".

Whereas now, the British Library is developing a new policy for purchasing artist's books and less conventional collections like zines and *cartonera* – this seems to suggest that there has been a shift in how they consider these artefacts as both works of art *and* literature.[27]

Curatorial text at FLACSO: "Artist's books are at that intersection between art & literature, content and formats, media & techniques. [...] They are that interstice in which we decode beyond words because literary or visual narratives overflow from the format." (WD: 37)

And as works of literature, they have something to teach about writing, reprising what Manuel (Coimbra) suggests, that the platform – or in our case, the medium – offers new pedagogical opportunities to think and rethink craft, but also consider the book as a physical, political, personal object and subject.

One of the first lessons that writers learn making their own books is how treacherous the designing, printing & assembling process can be. In the words of the Makers, "Printing should be one of the circles in Dante's hell, as something will always, inevitably, go wrong." (L2: 41)

see next page

[27] Librarians in the US, too, are demonstrating a keen interest in Latin American independent and artisanal publishing, as evidenced by the very recent publication of *Comunidad Letrada – Lettered Community*, edited by Marc Delcan, David Woken, and Lisa Gardinier (Delcan et al. 2025).

Lessons that the Researcher learned from making her book-object La selva inexistente can be found at WD: 36.

The appeal is for diversity to apply to both content and medium, so that marginal forms of literature (oral, digital, artisanal) are not confined to their own specialised disciplines (or not even mentioned at all), but integrated in the creative writing workshop – alongside your Penguin Vintage and Debolsillo paperbacks, available where you normally buy your books.

At the Quito Book Fair, the Researcher made friends with Daniel, who co-runs artisanal press Ikkuyo, based between Quito & Santiago de Chile. Ikkuyo has recently released a volume titled Atawallpa and the Book.

This small volume, printed on bright yellow paper, collects different versions of the same famous incident of Cajamarca: on 16th November 1532, Inca emperor Atahualpa was presented a prayer book (some say the Bible) and, not knowing what it was, he threw it on the floor. Allegedly, the gesture provoked Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro, who made a sign to his men, inciting them to attack and take Atahualpa as a prisoner.

In the introduction to the chapbook, Ikkuyo's editors write: "Writing takes on the full representation of Authority." And that this episode is NOT "the story of the Inca failure in the face of the book but, rather, the story of the failure of the book itself."

In the context of the erasure of indigenous people and their cultures & languages, what does it mean to make books, then?

"The most political thing you can do with a book is not to read it, but to throw it and break a window, instead." 204 (LD:39)

The book as a medium carries a historical and political value. Books are not innocent.

In the Threshold

In this chapter, the tutor's repertoire of exemplary texts has been investigated as a way to apply intertextuality to the teaching practice. By engaging students in "reading as a writer", tutors highlight craft techniques and conventions while at the same time exposing connections between texts across time, cultures and literary traditions. In fact, tutors are guided by a shared understanding that reading expertise is a foundation for writing and for teaching; whereas the criteria determining their deliberate or instinctive choices vary and are used in different combinations, addressing different questions.

The first question is that of purpose: what purpose does a text serve? Many tutors compile their repertoire thematically, choosing the texts that they need to teach techniques as basic and widespread like narrators' perspectives and points of view, or as specific as the use of animal symbology in short fiction.

The second criterion appears to be more complicated, as it concerns quality and literariness. Tutors establish "good literature" as a common trait of their examples, though what constitutes "good literature" remains elusive or unarticulated. Some tutors associate it with canonical works that are complex, linguistically innovative and unaffected by market trends, with a common preference for literature from the second half of the 20th century.

This has led into a discussion of the literary canon, and how it informs many tutors' choices. Sometimes, tutors feel that their cohort's diverse backgrounds and consequent gaps in their knowledge of literature need to be addressed, and make significant efforts to either historicise or contextualise or both. Still, in creative writing, canon appears to take many forms, drawing from different cultures: literary canons shaped by national or regional literature in the same language, a wider Western literary canon, or a narrower creative writing canon.

The latter frequently leans on works like Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" or Carver's *Cathedral*, yet it has been argued that solely relying on such texts risks narrowing creative horizons and silencing underrepresented voices. Integrating discussions about literary and workshop canons could provide a richer understanding of literary value and tradition without imposing supposedly universal aesthetics.

Another peculiar issue emerges in the use of workshop canon or literary canon when these texts are used in translation. I have raised some questions around the visibility of the literary translator to tutors, most of whom have admitted that these issues transcend the scope of their teaching. Other tutors, instead, recognise the creative potential of literary translation and, where contextually appropriate, engage their students in trying it for themselves, a pedagogical approach which could lead to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the role of the translator. As a minimum shift to make the literary translator's work visible, I have suggested to at least acknowledge their creative contribution by the small gesture of naming them.

Going back to literary and workshop canon, this is often explored in association with or in opposition to contemporary literature, which is interpreted in different ways. Some tutors associate it with the literature of the recent past that has affected the literature of the present the most; other tutors look at recent works by authors who are still alive – even their colleagues as examples very close to their students – to generate enthusiasm and relatability, and demystify the figure of the author. Some of them even go so far as to attempt to anticipate future trends and concerns, proposing a view on literature as the art of what comes after, and teaching creative writing as an act of divination.

A different interpretation of contemporaneity puts it in relation to hybridity, innovation and experimentation (or *promiscuity*). Expectations around forms, conventions and even traditional media are being subverted by authors who mix, disrupt and propose new redefinitions of literature. For example, digital literature is

a vast field which offers many opportunities to reintroduce discussions around "typical" forms and genre expectations, and how these are reinterpreted, subverted or discarded altogether. As a form, it also has hybridity and diversity built into itself.

As far as diversity is concerned, it is here presented as a value to enhance creativity and offer students a much wider range of possibilities, a responsibility that some tutors embrace enthusiastically while others reject, on the basis of avoiding positive discrimination, political correctness and engaging in gender and cultural identity wars.

In fact, tutors seem to be divided between those who do not read gender and cultural identity into literature and those who are mindful of it. Still, here it is useful to make a differentiation between one's personal reading habits and the habits brought into the classroom, where a certain perpetuation of narrow standards still gets challenged by students who do not see themselves represented. Such challenges have inspired tutors to make deliberate efforts to explore literature by women, revealing a peculiar interpretation of contemporaneity characterised by a diverse movement of Latin American women authors writing short fiction.

The criterion of "reading one's own authors" exposes the complexity of the Latin American region as tutors interpret it at various scales: from the whole continent to subregions like the Caribbean, the Colombian Caribbean vs the Colombian hinterland, and the centre and periphery – where the traditional centre of European-like literature is being challenged by non-European perspectives. Among these, indigenous and oral literature sits on the very margins and deserve more investigation.

The implications of where to draw one's own literary repertoire from are complex, as exemplified by Daniela's testimony as she questions her choice to include Anne Carson – a white, anglophone, iconoclast author – while negotiating the reasons of her inclusion. Such investigation seems to be a good starting point to acknowledge how literary repertoire influences the vision of writing and literature

that students form in their head; and their ability to subscribe to one or more traditions, or to deliberately disrupt cultural, linguistic, formal or genre conventions.

I have also speculated about the importance of considering where the question is being formulated, and understanding one's context – leading to the proposition that while creative writing seems to be understood as a culture of its own, it is not exempted from relating to other cultures.

Finally, some tutors recognise that personal knowledge, taste and one's own passions are major criteria in choosing their exemplary literature; and some of them try and be aware of their bias so they can actively expand their examples beyond their preferences to cater for their students' needs. Here I proposed that the mission to learn to fall (back) in love with literature is not one only to be undertaken by students, but by tutors too, who are called to identify the limits of their own repertoire and try to expand them.

To summarise, in this chapter, the criteria discussed at length by tutors are: purpose, canon and literariness, contemporaneity, variety, diversity, gender, culture and personal knowledge and taste; other criteria that have emerged include the texts' lengths and availability; accessibility of language, and texts from other media and platforms.

To these, I have proposed the principles of bibliodiversity and librodiversity to guide literary repertoires that widen, rather than narrow, define and redefine, challenge and question, speculate, and amplify the possibilities of what literature is and can be. Librodiversity, in particular, interrogates the book as an object which carries a symbolic and political value, as well as a commodity which holds a different value in different places and, as the *cartonera* movement shows, at different times in history. In creative writing pedagogy, embracing (libro)diversity in the texts we teach means modelling for students a literary practice that is expansive, critical, and aware of its cultural and material contexts.

Chapter Three: Place and Setting

In which I define place as a space that comes with meaning made by the people who inhabit, engage with and transit through it. Place is looked through the "Reading the World" lens, which collects narratives on place, language and culture; and the "Writing the World" lens, which applies creative writing concepts like setting, atmosphere and world-building to a tutor and student-writer's writing of their immediate surroundings, in person and online.

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Proliminium

In an interview with literature podcaster Aurora Pereira Reis, Italian-Brazilian author Giusy Trovato defines "place" as a "space that comes with meaning". This meaning, she argues, is simultaneously "written" and "read" by those who inhabit, engage with and transit through a place (Pereira Reis 2024, my translation).

Written or read, meaning is "capable of provoking sensations, evoking memories and originating interaction between people" (Orellana Vintimilla and Carrión Astudillo 2022, my translation) and is therefore "inseparable from the experience of those who inhabit it, of their thoughts and feelings" (García Ballesteros 1992: 112, my translation). According to Milton Santos,

> The World, seen as a whole in its current conditions, is our stranger. Place, our neighbour, gives the World back to us [...]. In the Place, we are condemned to know the World – not only for what it already is, but also for what it is not yet. (Santos 1996: 149, my translation)

For Yi-Fu Tuan, "To know a place in the full sense of knowing requires participation by the discerning eye and mind," as

> Passive experience and inchoate feelings must be given shape and made visible; and that is the function of art, education, and politics. [...] Literature and painting induce an awareness of place by holding up mirrors to

> our own experience; what had been felt can now be seen, what was formless and vacillating is now framed and still. (Tuan 1975: 161)

Here, Tuan hints at the role of the arts in communicating a "sense of place", one that has been described by Linda Lappin as the "creative force inherent in the land itself", which the Romans called *genius loci*:

> Writers, poets, and artists, whose job it is to interpret and recreate reality have long been intrigued by the concepts of the *genius loci* and the power of place [seeking] ways to capture the qualities or mood of a location [...]. At the same time, many literary and artistic movements have tried to illustrate how the outer environments of human beings mirror their inner ones. Writers and artists know that whether we are looking outward or inward at our surroundings, they have a lot to reveal to us about ourselves, our present, past and future. (Lappin 2020: xii)

Graham Mort and Cristina Rivera Garza appear to explore a similar relationship between the artist and "landscape" as well as "place".

Mort begins his essay "Landscapes and Language" with a reflection on what Lappin calls "place-consciousness": "Places are where we depart from, move through, arrive in." Then, he moves on to landscapes, citing a dictionary definition which implies "artifice, the laying out or deliberate

construction of aesthetic space", emphasising the "shaping force of human activity" as landscapes are "conceived, discovered, designed, perceived, communicated", sharing their origins, according to Mort, with literature. Like literature, "landscapes have been shaped by, and shape, human imagination" (Mort 2019: 171–172).

Spanish poet Olvido Valdés writes, "The animal's snout makes the pasture." (LD: 3)

Mort goes back and forth from place to landscape, drawing reflections that seem to apply indistinguishably to one or the other, like: "Everywhere in a landscape we are faced with human presence or absence," or, "The physical reality of the place is underlain by a mass of cultural paradoxes that complicate each moment of being there" (Mort 2019: 175).

Rivera Garza juxtaposes these two concepts more overtly:

> Above all, a place is a relationship. It isn't a geography, but rather an approach to that geography; not a city, but rather the way in which the body moves around the city; not a book, but rather the irreplaceable reading of the book; not a birth announcement, but rather the birth itself. The sky. We describe our relationship with a place as landscape. [...] [In] being human (and nonhuman), the relationship that constitutes every place is also – perhaps on principle, but perhaps also in the end – an imaginary relationship. A place is pure writing. (Rivera Garza 2020: 25, trans. Robin Mayers)

The concept of a "writing of place" is tinted with the affective and relational quality that Tuan explores in his *Topophilia* ("the

love of place") (Tuan 1990), while reiterating Trovato's complementary proposition that if places can be written, they can also be read (Pereira Reis 2024).

Scholars like James Duncan and Nancy Duncan argue that landscapes, like texts, offer a plurality of meaning and are interpreted as well as experienced (Duncan and Duncan 1988: 117). Rejecting "the view that texts are referential", they also note that landscapes are "usually anonymously authored", and "although they can be symbolic, [...] they are highly intertextual creations of the reader, as much as they are products of the society that originally constructed them" (Duncan and Duncan 1988: 120). In another study, Michael R. Curry writes, "to see a landscape as a text is to see it as something that is never experienced directly, but that instead is always the object of interpretation" (Curry 1991: 218).

In this chapter, you will see how writers and tutors of creative writing are concerned with the reading and the writing of *place*, a word which I favour because it allows me to shift the point of view from extradiegetic – a *landscape* narrated from the outside, like its geographic and artistic connotations seem to suggest – to intradiegetic, one that is narrated by its own inhabitants.

The chapter is divided into two parts: "Reading the World", which collates narratives on place, language and culture; and "Writing the World", which looks at "setting" in two ways: how place is featured as setting in students' writing; and how tutors see and intervene on the setting of their teaching, online and offline.

I. Reading the World

Here, we

In "The Importance of the Act of Reading", Paulo Freire introduces his principle of "reading the world" as something that "precedes reading the word" on the basis that "the understanding attained by critical reading of a text implies perceiving the relationship between text and context" (Freire 1983: 5, trans. Loretta Slover). His invitation to tutors of literacy and literature is to draw from "the word universe of the people who are learning, expressing their actual language, their anxieties, fears, demands, dreams" so that words are "laden with the meaning of people's existential experience, and not of the teacher's experience" (Freire 1983: 10). Following Trovato's suggestion that any meaning attributed to place is a negotiation – "between the individual, the community and the society; the inhabitant, the visitor and the migrant, etc." – (Pereira Reis 2024), the tutors' narratives that will follow negotiate a reading of their own and their students' world, language and culture.

Nothing is written in a vacuum, and what fills the vacuum surrounding us can be as big as a continent or as small as a table with some chairs around it. I will present some of the tutors' reflections more or less in this order, from big to small. The first one comes from Sergio (Uninorte, Barranquilla).

In this MA so few of us are from here. Myself, for example. I lived 20 years in Medellín and 20 years here in Barranquilla. Where am I from, then? That's such a difficult question. One of our main concerns when we were designing the programme was its location. Josef was interested in marginal literatures, and this ties in with the idea of the coast as periphery, as opposed to the centre, which is the capital, Bogotá. Bogotá is where knowledge and literature are produced. Everywhere else, not so much. We were interested in the question: how do we write creatively from the Caribbean? The whole region, not just Barranquilla. We wanted to write from *the Caribbean, rather than* about *it, rather than turn ourselves into Caribbean Studies. There's a difference between literature made from the Caribbean and a vision a little more... well, what you would* expect *from the Caribbean. The colourfulness. You can't deny that Caribbean means magical realism and García Márquez, because that would be like covering the sun with your hand. Yet we have a responsibility not to perpetuate the idea that the Caribbean is only this. And we need to pass that wider perspective on to our students, and sometimes they already have it. They come to us with the most unexpected projects.* (Álvarez Uribe 2024)

According to Isaías, founder of the Literary Creation programme at Central, too little credit is given to José Eustasio Rivera and his telluric novel The Vortex, without which there would be no 100 Years of Solitude. (P1: 21, 23)

2024 marked the 100th anniversary of The Vortex, which was celebrated in Colombian libraries, bookshops, schools, and at the Bogotá and the Quito Book Fairs. During her stay at Central, Bogotá, the Researcher created a book-object titled La selva inexistente, a poetry collection responding to lines quoted ad verbatim from The Vortex. (WD: 26-36)

→ to write from a place means to be rewritten by its narratives

What does it mean to write *from* a place? This is the first question emerging from Sergio's narrative, which begins to suggest some of the answers. To write from a place means to have to deal with the expectations that writers and readers have *about* the place. In his case, the colourful, vivid, musical, sensual, magical Colombian Caribbean – the collective imagery that authors like García Márquez have helped shape and that has trickled into countless subsequent cultural

products, including those that were not set on the coast but somewhere else in Colombia, like Disney's *Encanto* (2021).

Josef (Uninorte, Barranquilla) problematises the Caribbean package as an easy sell that serves the interests of a few and places writers in a very uncomfortable position:

> *They sell you this idea of the* costeño *with the* sombrero vueltiao, *the carnival, the cheerfulness, the rumba, the goodness of our hearts. Then your students like Nirvana and Metallica, wear black clothes and couldn't care less about the carnival. So they feel like they're betraying the Caribbean identity, because this is what they have been sold. But look, here people drink more whisky than aguardiente. They listen to rock'n'roll. Records from Europe would arrive here first and then get to Bogotá. The Caribbean history is one of cultural hybridity. But that's not what gets sold. García Márquez does well in Europe and in the US, because people like to identify with something different. So here we self-exoticize, falling into the alleged Caribbean narrative. A place like Macondo, after all, is so easy to subjugate.* (Amón Mitrani 2024)

Josef questions what counts as culture in a region exoticized to the extreme of brainwashing, a discourse that affects literature not just as a cultural manifestation but as the field that gave birth to its most dazzling star. Compare this with the words that were written about Andrés Caicedo, the twenty-five-year-old Colombian writer who, in 1977, committed suicide on the day when he received the printed copies of his debut novel *¡Que viva la música!* (in English,

recommended to her by Josef (Uninorte, Barranquilla) and Magui, a student at Central, Bogotá

Liveforever, trans. Frank Wynne). In an interview about his Caicedo "autobiography", author Alberto Fuguet says:

★ The Researcher's notes on Andrés Caicedo's ¡Que viva la música! are at RD: 26-27.

> Caicedo is the missing link in the Latin American Boom. Macondo's number-one enemy. I don't know to what extent he committed suicide or whether he was murdered by García Márquez and the dominant culture of his time. He wasn't as much as the rocker that Colombians wished he was. More of an intellectual. A most tormented nerd. [...] He needed to write in order to survive. He killed himself because he saw too much. (Careaga C. 2008, my translation)

Forty-seven years have passed since Caicedo's death, and perhaps the efforts that tutors like Josef and Sergio are investing into showing their students other alternatives are beginning to show in the newer generations. Sergio and Josef's colleague Mercedes (Uninorte, Barranquilla) elucidates on this shift and highlights some of the themes emerging in the space left by the outgoing culture:

Recently, in a talk with three alumni at the Hay Festival in Cartagena, what emerged was that contemporary writers do not seem to fear García Márquez like they used to. It does not concern them as much as it used to with previous generations of writers. Before, you'd be for or against. Either you're a follower or a defector of magical realism. Maybe now there's enough generational distance not to feel the weight of influence. The Caribbean region is interested in other themes, now, like decolonisation, migration, multiculturality and isolation. I

mean, you could find these in Latin American literature in general, but they're especially relevant in the Caribbean region, or even in the Greater Caribbean. We have so much in common with other places, but we don't communicate with one another. That's the isolation for you. And the fact that some of the regions are islands, and that there are still colonies out there. (Ortega González-Rubio 2024)

The affiliation between the Colombian Caribbean and the Greater Caribbean has emerged before and is confirmed by Sergio, who says that *in a region with so many contrasts like Latin America, talking about the Greater Caribbean feels more manageable* (Álvarez Uribe 2024). Aside from the scale, perhaps what both Sergio and Mercedes seem to suggest here is that one thing is to write from a shared language or nationality, another is to write from a shared experience: first, it was all about the microcosm of Macondo, but now writers relate to the cross-national themes of decolonisation, migration, isolation and multiculturality.

Indeed, like Mercedes says, there are still colonies out there. Unsurprisingly, *la cuestión de la colonia* was central to the answers provided by tutors in Puerto Rico, which are explored in the next passage and story.

wage our struggle

In 1983, a short story by Luis López Nieves was published on Puerto Rican weekly newspaper *Claridad*'s literary supplement *En Rojo*. Its translated title was "Seva: History of

(*) the founder of the first MA in Literary Creation at Sagrado, San Juan (now, MA in Creative Writing) and former tutor of Mara's. His digital home, Ciudad Seva, is the go-to portal for Spanish-language short fiction and poems, and often the first Google result when texts are searched by their titled followed by "full text". Tutors often admit to showing Ciudad Seva to their students in places where libraries don't hold adequate resources and books are too expensive to buy.

the First North American Invasion of the Island of Puerto Rico in May 1898", and it was a historical fictional account claiming that the U.S. invasion of Puerto Rico in 1898 began with the destruction of a town called Seva. The literary hoax caused a stir, as the piece moved and shocked Puerto Ricans in equal measure with a rewriting of the nation's history.

recommended to the Researcher by Marlota (Sagrado, San Juan)

Thirty-five years later, and according to Jotacé (Sagrado, San Juan), the *question of the colony* is

always present, Elena. Always present. But now in an unconscious way. If the light goes out, that's because of the colony. No matter what you write. No matter what story you tell. Even if you say that you're not a political writer, politics affect you day in and day out. And what you write is not written in a vacuum. There's a political, economic and social context. You can foreground it or make it less evident, but it's still there. You might write a story in which you're driving, and your car drives through a pothole and you get a flat tire. That's political. Or the fact that prices are over the roof. That's political. Or someone looking for a job. That's economy and politics. Now, whether students are conscious of this, that's something else. But it's always present. What I haven't seen, at least so far, is something that used to be very strong... this resentment, this anti-US sentiment. Previous generations were more visceral about it. It's still there, but it's different. How do I deal with this? Well, I start by telling my students that I will not add any complications to their lives, because living in Puerto Rico is already complicated. They all laugh, because they know exactly what I mean. (López 2024)

Interrogating *la cuestión de la colonia*, what emerges are structural issues that percolate the practice, featuring in students' writing (to which the second part of this chapter is dedicated) but more importantly in their lives and their tutors'. Officially, Puerto Rico is an "unincorporated territory" of the US, but in the interviews with tutors, the word that is being used is "colony". Manolo (Sagrado, San Juan) adds nuance to this term:

It's like living in the space between, it's an "inbetweenness". Puerto Ricans are in between because our society is colonised. But it's not just any other colony. The colonial structure was well designed by the US. Colony means exploitation, ok, that is important. But it also means that a permanent exchange has been established between Puerto Ricans and the US. I come and go every time I have the chance, and so do many people from all social classes. This has had a tremendous influence on the contemporary Puerto Rican identity. I don't think that we feel threatened culturally, though. That battle was won, I think. Identities are fluid, though, and it's impossible for us now not to be influenced by the US presence in all aspects of our lives, from our economy to our culture. (Núñez Negrón 2024)

Whether the politically charged denomination of "colony" is accepted or rejected, Puerto Rico's political status seems to be investigated at length by tutors who are helping me understand how and why place matters.

To even begin to comprehend Jotacé's statement, *If the light goes out, it's because of the colony*, you would need to take

into account the $70 billion public debt accumulated by the state and the austerity measures taken to curb it, the privatisation of essential services (including Puerto Rico's electricity supplier), the heavy dependence on imports and federal aids which are nonetheless insufficient and unequal, and the lack of funding on infrastructure, which is consistently menaced by adverse climate events – such as Hurricane Maria in 2017, from which the country is still in a process of painful and slow recovery (Alarcón et al. 2017; Alarcón and Segura 2016; Casanova-Burgess 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d).

These are the conditions Puerto Ricans are left to contend with – or, in their words, *bregar*, from *la brega*, "the struggle" (Casanova-Burgess 2021). Some examples of their practical consequences come from Gaddiel (Sagrado, San Juan):

The weather is very unstable in Puerto Rico. On a given rainy day, I'd think about how late I am going to be; and if I cannot cycle, then I'll have to factor in the traffic, too. Traffic is one of the major problems we have. The other is power. Power has been privatised, and it's all very corrupt. In summer it's when we have the most power outages. We all want the air-conditioning on and ice in our glasses, too, so the light goes out again and again. We have students all over the island; so sometimes I'm fine, but someone in Mayagüez cannot connect because the light has gone out there. We record our classes, but the student misses out. It's like watching a YouTube video; it's just not the same as being there. (Ruiz Rivera 2024)

☆ It happens that people can't cope with the struggle. Five days in her research visit to Sagrado, the researcher learned of a young man taking his life jumping out of the window in Eva's block of flats, where she was staying. A couple of weeks later, Eva was invited to read her poetry at a celebration of art & literature in Puerto Rico in Washington DC. The poem she read was about the young man's death by the colony.

Living in a country where power outages are weekly occurrences cannot not have an impact, particularly if the teaching is done online.

Another aspect inherently tied to the island's status of unincorporated territory which shows up online, and which has an impact on the degree, is explained by Jorge (Sagrado, San Juan):

The people from the diaspora who have joined our Master share valuable experiences and references. They integrate in their literature authors who have emigrated for political reasons, people who have been living in the US for a long time and who affiliate themselves with indigenous and Latino communities. In general, most Caribbean writers tend to bind literature and society much more than writers from more industrialised societies. Even those who write self-help books or speculative fiction, one way or another, end up tying their work to social issues. (Lefevre Tavárez 2024)

The MA in Sagrado, for being online, allows for an exchange between Puerto Rican students and students of the diaspora, one which is enriched not only by the personal experiences of both, but also by the literary references they bring with them.

Jorge's reflections on how a writer's setting shapes the social conscience in their literature are well worth considering. In my interviews, I noticed that tutors from the more *industrialised societies* hinted at by Jorge (in my case, universities in Madrid, Seville and Coimbra) did not to understand the question of place, or were not to be able to

identify a direct relationship between place and artistic and teaching practice straightaway. In general terms, at least.

But once the question was explored in more detail, it emerged that it is often the outsiders, the foreign students joining the Master's programmes in Madrid and Seville, for example, who function as litmus test by gathering their own impressions of the place, adding contrast and "holding up mirrors to our own experience" (Tuan 1975: 161).

One of the places in which this encounter occurs is language, the topic explored in the next passage, introduced by Pilar (Complutense, Madrid).

birds, language apprentices

One of the circumstances that affect teaching is to have Latin American students in class, coming from a good number of different countries. First of all, there's the issue of language. As a tutor, you have to ask yourself: what can you touch and what can't you touch? That is, where does linguistic accuracy stop and when do different varieties of Spanish come into play? This is something that we have considered quite a lot. In terms of background, the foreign students vary, there's a little bit of everything. There are students who do this Master's because it's a gateway, and then there are foreign students already living in Spain who sign up to extend their visa. That doesn't mean that they do not do it properly. Some are very, very committed. In terms of cultural and social diversity, it's important to be careful about what you say and how you say it. Some things that might sound insignificant here, have a lot of meaning there, and vice versa. Twice,

no food, no fuel, no power, no medicines, and, crucially, if you're a writer, no books (or paper). (L3:102–112)

as so many people simply put it: "Cuba is ... complicated." (L3:103)

for example, we've had people from Cuba. And it's so tough there. Or Venezuela. We've had political refugees. Then the peculiarities of each country... It's a fascinating world. One year we had someone from Peru who was a gem of a student. One of the tutors invited the cohort to think about their first contact with reading and we found out that this young man had learned to read at 17. We're worlds apart. But this contributes positively, rather than negatively. All these different worlds in contact with one another can only be good for creativity. People who are very, very, very different from one another. That shows up in their final projects. You read their projects and think, madre mía, *how distant are our worlds.* (Vega Rodriguez 2023)

In Pilar's narrative, we can read many of the key themes that other Spanish tutors have addressed as they think about how the place is lived by the students who come from outside: the linguistic and cultural differences, and the challenges they entail, the various socioeconomic backgrounds, and the motives behind enrolling in a Master's degree in Spain, some of them having very little to do with writing. In her vision, the Master and Madrid are both a place of encounter, and a gateway towards something else.

In this part, you will find more perspectives on language, starting from the questions that Pilar poses at the very beginning of her story: *What can you touch and what can't you touch? Where does linguistic accuracy stop and when do different varieties of Spanish come into play?* These questions will be addressed by tutors facing students writing in a different

language variety abroad or navigating their own linguistic identities and literary bias at home.

Pilar's colleague Guadalupe (Complutense, Madrid) narrates her experience reconciling linguistic and cultural differences in her groups:

> *We might not agree on everything we read or interpret. But there's a shared heritage and a place of mutual understanding and congeniality: the Spanish language and Spanish-language literature. Some students ask me to correct their language as if they were writing Peninsular Spanish; what I do is underline what to me doesn't sound Peninsular. Last year I supervised a Master's dissertation by a Colombian student who wanted to highlight the differences between a Colombian and a Spanish character. The linguistic contrast was evident, so I said, "Very well, but you'll have to write a glossary, because otherwise your examiners won't understand," and that's because her character used very colloquial expressions. The same happened with a Mexican student who wrote a formidable account of crossing the border from Mexico to San Diego. The language was very relevant to that area, so I advised that she should do a glossary, too.* (Arbona Abascal 2023)

at a round table with authors Leonardo Valencia (Quito) and Carlos Pardo (Madrid), both agreed that what matters most isn't where they write from geographically, but linguistically
✗ Ecuadorian writer
✓ Spanish-language writer

While it is true that student-writers are taught very early on that they are writing for an audience, here I would like to raise some questions about our intervention in our students' linguistic choices: is linguistic intervention a form of colonisation? If so, to what extent? What are the implications of advising a student who writes in a different variety of

Spanish that they should include a glossary? Where does clarity begin and end? Where does cultural domination begin and end? Why would another student feel compelled to write in Peninsular Spanish? What does this say about readers of Spanish-language literature and their bias?

The question of audience is examined by José Carlos (Seville), too:

With the Latin American students, in our first class I ask the question: "Where are you going to sell your books? What literature do you want to make?" That's because many of them, you'll have guessed, come here with the idea to gatecrash in Spain, don't they? I mean, they come here for the Master's, but then they find a Spanish girlfriend or boyfriend and hope to stay here, in Europe. Hell, some of them come from places like Venezuela, which is a shattered nation. Or from Argentina, which is also shattered by its economy and violence. They're hoping to escape. So, say they find a supercheap Master's, 800 euro, that's what the fee is worth, and they can come and hope to stay. If they want to stay, I respect that, of course I do. But if they want to stay, they need to try and write in Spanish from Spain. If you're going to go back to your country and you want to be a Chilean writer, that's great, you can write in Chilean Spanish. I am going to read you like that, I'll just keep the local expressions in mind and that's it. (Carmona Sarmiento 2023)

Looking at how these issues have been investigated before, notably in the Asian context where "anyone [...] writing in English, which may or may not be their first language, is likely

complicated by one or more languages and cultures" (Xu 2021: 45), here are some reflections posed by Xu Xi:

> Should we assist our students' future publishing prospects by teaching them to write a standard English and globally acceptable stories [...] that will find readership more readily in England or the US, perhaps with a white protagonist from American suburbia? Or do we complicate their writerly paths by insisting they delve deeply into their linguistic and cultural psyches to write as creatively as possible about the Asia they really know, suffused with what in linguistics is known as "code-switching" between languages, but which could also be applied to nationalities, cultures, and identities? (Xu 2021: 45)

From Guadalupe's and José Carlos's narratives, I understand that Spanish readers' expectations around literature written in Spanish is that they will not allow for much linguistic variation; that effort implies frustration; and that language, after all, must not attract too much attention onto itself.

This leads me to wonder whether the same expectations apply to exemplary and, more in general, published literature, though. Would a Peninsular Spanish-speaking reader demand a glossary to understand Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar, Roberto Bolaño? Twenty years ago, the answer would have been yes, at least according to an anecdote shared by Guatemalan author Eduardo Halfon, who writes,

> A certain well-known Latin American writer, whose name I won't reveal, once told me that when he saw his newly published novel in Spain, he discovered that the prestigious publishing house – whose name I also won't reveal – had completely Hispanicised it without consulting him. That is, they had replaced all his local words and expressions (the novel is about a kidnapping) with more Spanish-sounding ones. Fortunately, this writer had a renowned literary agent – whose name I also won't reveal – who immediately forced the publisher to first withdraw all copies from bookshops and then reprint the novel exactly as the writer had submitted it in his manuscript. The publisher, of course, had no choice but to comply. I never found out if they ever apologised. (Halfon 2021: 61, my translation)

Edwin Alcaás (Ecuador) is quite appreciative of the Latin American publishers who have ceased to use that "awful neutral Spanish which is only spoken in dubbed Disney films". (LD:26)

In Latin America, Halfon argues, this behaviour is perceived as "paternalistic, monarchic" and typical of "someone who – consciously or unconsciously – keeps treating Latin Americans like subjects" (Halfon 2021: 62). But what about now? What about contemporary Latin American authors like Mariana Enríquez, María Fernanda Ampuero, Liliana Colanzi or Samanta Schweblin? Does their publisher at Páginas de Espuma beg them to keep their Argentinian, Ecuadorian or Bolivian idioms to a minimum? Are they strongly advised to include glossaries or to use footnotes to explain, clarify, justify?

Following on Xu Xi's point that "the fact that the OED now includes an array of World Englishes words points to the

evolution of English into a more global language" and that this constitutes a "shift in what constitutes 'correct' or 'proper' English" (Xu 2021: 53), it is worth pointing out that the Real Academia Española also includes words that are used in non-Peninsular variations: for example, Puerto Rican word *(a)ñangotarse* (lit. "to squat down") (ASALE and RAE 2024).

I am choosing to see the good will in these tutors' approaches as I am sure it comes from a place of care, of wanting to help their students crack a difficult publishing industry, rather than attempt to suppress their cultures or dismiss their stylistic choices. However, such approaches appear to be steps in the opposite direction of bibliodiversity and decolonisation, so here is a question: is the creative writing degree supposed to replicate the bad practices of the publishing industry for utilitarian purposes; or could tutors of creative writing set the example and lead, whether people in publishing – and readers as a consequence – decide to follow or not?

I would also examine the role that fear plays in this process. Kroonblawd writes, "If an instructor is guided by fear rather than exploration and experimentation, their pedagogy may narrow to a particular kind of 'literariness,' limiting their own students' ability to explore and experiment" (Kroonblawd 2021: 8). Felicia Rose Chavez stresses that, "Fear wants to exercise control, strangling the life energy from our words until they are flawless. But real writing, the pursuit of authentic voice through process, not product, is a release of control" (Chavez 2021: 63).

(*) a word so Puerto Rican that a woman was once told to "squat" at the airport passport checks to prove that she was really Puerto Rican like she said she was. (L1: 16)

* by the way, this is the same Academia that invited writer Cristina Rivera Salazar to give a talk and then withdrew the invitation when they learned that the talk would be about Spanglish. A proposition that the RAE considered an "adefesio" ("abomination"). (LD: 37)

In the creative writing workshop, it is worth devoting one's effort to banishing fear, rather than provoking it, as students already contend with enough of their own.

In fact, on the other side of the Atlantic, some preconceived ideas about literary style come from the students themselves, who reject a more common, colloquial and/or localised register for a supposedly neutral or higher one.

This phenomenon has been observed by a number of tutors: Fabián (Uninorte, Barranquilla), who says that *there's work to be done around finding a more spontaneous way to write*; and Óscar Daniel (Uninorte, Barranquilla), who aims to *take the "literary" away from language*; explained by Roberto (Vera, São Paulo) as *the kind of language that was established at the beginning of the century, with well-constructed sentences and everything right* (Buelvas 2024; Campo Becerra 2024; Taddei 2024).

One tutor, Anuchka (Sagrado, San Juan), shares her own experience of struggling to accept her linguistic identity in writing with her students:

I tell my students about the time when I was writing my novel and in the first chapter, I wrote something like "getting on the bus", and I used the word "bus" *instead of* "guagua", *which is what I would have normally said. And this marvellous woman who was reading it pointed it out to me. "Why* 'bus' *and not* 'guagua'?" *And my immediate answer was, "Because it sounds better," but then I thought, "Hang on a minute... Why am I doing this?" If you read Bolaño, you read Mexico; if you read any other author, you read their country in*

the words they have chosen. It's a preconceived notion of what counts as editorial, publishable literature, and Puerto Rican writing being excluded from that. (Ruiz Ramos 2024)

You read their country in the words they choose, says Anuchka, and this idea is echoed by Daniela (Uninorte, Barranquilla) who cites Lezama Lima's lectures when she says that *landscape speaks with the language we speak* (Pabón 2024); and by Juan José (Andina, Quito), who quotes Jorge Carrera Andrade's poem "Lugar de origen" ("place of origin"):

In this poem, Andrade uses the word "capulí"*, which he immediately translates as "the Andean cherry". Being from Ecuador, if I say "cherry", that has no implications; but if I say* "capulí"*, it does. Social, cultural implications. Connections with our landscape. That's what makes it relevant, meaningful.* (Rodinás 2024)

In the 1945 poem mentioned by Juan José, Carrera Andrade also writes of "birds apprentices of languages" fed by all the local plants and trees – the *chirimoya*, the avocado tree, the eucalyptus, the *capulí* –, which he defines as the "docile allies of the man of the land / whence I come, free, with my lesson of winds / and my load of birds of universal tongues" (Carrera Andrade 2021, my translation). The contrast that he creates between the "birds of universal tongues" and those who are apprenticing, fed by the wonderfully specific flora, offers a poetic parallelism with students who, to use an expression

Helge Uhart says, "Every place shapes a language, and what's interesting is perceiving a way of thinking within the language. You learn a lot by talking to local people. You need to see how systems of thought and feeling work and how they change across different regions. A serrano doesn't think like a porteño." (Villanueva/Uhart #7)

local to me, "speak like they eat",[28] but write like have never had a plate of *pasta al sugo* before, having only been fed elaborate, but stale specialties from a century ago – or mainstream fast food.

The linguistic encounter between these two types of birds has already been commented on by Guadalupe and Pilar, but their colleague José Manuel (Complutense, Madrid) adds one more perspective which allows us to transition into the next section about some of the implications of the words that we use.

picking words

Sometimes, there are some issues in understanding one another because Latin American students might use different terms to analyse the texts that we read... A linguistic difference but very specific to understanding literature. Do we all use the same words to mean the same things? Sometimes this makes the class go slower. Are we all understanding or are there zones of no-encounter? It's very interesting to understand what they are, to have that awareness. (Mora Fandos 2023)

The zones of no-encounter that José Manuel is talking about perhaps are only uncharted territories of the mind waiting to

[28] "*Parla come mangi*" is a common exhortation to speak plainly, with no difficult or excessively formal words. It makes more sense in Italy, where simplicity is seen as a value and marker of quality. Hence the example with the tomato-sauce pasta, a staple of home cooking.

be unlocked by new words, by foreign concepts, by language that – like the Formalists would have wanted – must never be taken for granted.

From "equiscience" to "psychic distance", from "palimpsests" to "librodiversity", the terms and the concepts that we use reveal the traces of the schools of thought that have shaped our studies, and where they come from – ideologically, culturally, historically, geographically.

In this research, the most remarkable divide was around what to call the very artistic practice and discipline known as "creative writing" (es.: *escritura creativa*; pt.: *escrita criativa*) or "literary creation" (es.: *creación literaria*; pt.: *criação literária*).

Explaining the choices that she and Giovanna faced when establishing the programme, Daniela (Pontificia, Lima) says:

When we were setting up the programme, people didn't understand. They thought that literature and writing are one and the same. But if you go to the US, they have the department of Literature, the department of Creative Writing and the department of Journalism. And Creative Writing is much closer to Journalism. When they launched the first undergraduate degree in writing in Argentina, in the Universidad de las Artes, I think, they didn't want to call it Creative Writing. Because they're anti-American. So they called it "Arts of Writing". (Ramírez Ugolotti 2024)

Both programmes in Lima, Pontificia's and San Marcos's, ended up adopting the "Creative Writing" title. The resistance that Daniela has identified in Argentina, however, has been observed somewhere else. In Brazil, for example, like Luís Roberto (PUCRS, Porto Alegre) narrates:

The Pontificia chose "Creative Writing" a long time ago, whereas the newer programme at USP in São Paulo was created within the "Literary Creation" research line. And when someone chooses "Literary Creation" instead of "Creative Writing", the first thing that they are signalling is that they do not subscribe to the American model. Programmes in Literary Creation tend to have more literary theory; whereas Creative Writing programmes adopt the model that traces back to Harvard in 1884, then Iowa, then everything that came after that. It's that systematic model of discussing texts. Also, what I would like to stress about creative writing is that "creative" is not an adjective to the noun "writing". "Creative writing" is its own noun. (Amabile 2024)

The point that Luís Roberto makes about the "creative" in "creative writing" is one that has also been discussed from a different angle by Manuel (Coimbra):

We had an issue with the phrase "creative writing" because if you read the rationale for the programme, one of the elements that I try to stress is that we have to think about writing as a continuum, and we have to think about creativity as a universal aspect of our lives and experiences – rather than a "genre" of writing. So the only reason why

we kept the phrase was that it was good for publicity. It was a term that could be recognised. And the same goes for the "workshop". (Portela 2023)

It appears that many tutors thought along the same lines, deciding – more or less reluctantly – to adopt "creative writing" as a recognisable, marketable term. Márcia Ivana (Federal, Porto Alegre) says,

The concept had already been recognised by Pontificia, so at Federal we decided to stick with the same. We wanted to join a tradition and be easily understood. (de Lima e Silva 2024)

At Seville, from a "literary creation" workshop stemmed a Master's in Creative Writing, a choice that did not make José Carlos very happy:

I have been giving the course in Literary Creation for twenty-seven years. But for the Master's, they have decided to make it look American by calling it Creative Writing... I don't know, I think that as a name it's a bit ridiculous, like a toy thing. Instead, "literary creation" is much more dignified. Perhaps "creative writing" allows for more genres, while I only teach literary short stories – not science fiction or crime or any other genre. That's why I think that the word "literary" is very important. (Carmona Sarmiento 2023)

José Carlos's dislike for "creative writing" is not only attributable to the fact that the concept is used in translation.

In fact, anglophone tutors and writers have expressed similar concerns before, as worded by Donald Murray in 1982:

> Of course we have to define creative writing. Like most writers I detest the term. Its connotation seems to imply precious writing, useless writing, flowery writing, writing that is a luxury rather than a necessity, something that is produced under the influence of drugs or leisure, a hobby. (quoted in Bishop 1990b: 1)

Based on José Carlos's narrative, "literary" is anything but useless, flowery or amateurish; in fact, it is so serious and dignified that it does not even allow for genre to be considered literary and vice versa – compare with the great confusion we encountered in the Intertextuality chapter when tutors claimed to choose texts based on their literariness without really defining "literary" in the first place.

At Vera, São Paulo, Roberto and Márcia opted for a third preference:

We were struggling with "creative writing" because we didn't like either of the existing translations in Portuguese: "escrita criativa" *and* "criação literária". *We didn't like the "creative" attached to "writing", nor the "literary". So we decided to call our programme a Writers' Training. As for "workshop", in Brazil, we had had* oficinas literárias *since the 1960s; that's because some Brazilian writers went to the Iowa programme and came back with the term* "oficina", *workshop. This is something that we couldn't escape. We just had to use it.* (Taddei 2024)

Finally, there are those who are pluralising "Creative Writing" in "Escrituras creativas", like Uninorte (Barranquilla) and Nacional (Lima), perhaps once again rejecting the single model or the notion of *a* "creative" writing.

Like Roberto (Central/Nacional, Bogotá) explains, the Master's at Nacional has four concentrations – scriptwriting, playwriting, poetry and fiction, hence the plurality of writings. However, he is also keen to point out that choosing "creative writing" over "literary creation" or vice versa is

just nomenclature. Like Isaías says, teachers, writers like to use their own nomenclature. Creative writers have become more and more methodical, more precise. Once upon a time, at the beginning of the creative writing scene here in Colombia, writers would use one concept or another indistinctly. They would talk about idea, plot or story in the same way. It was all the same. Nowadays, people who work in this field are much more precise. If you want to talk about what you're working on, it is helpful to distinguish each different category. Though I can't say the difference between literary creation and creative writing matters too much to me. (Rubiano 2024)

But the words we choose do matter, reader. We have seen how in this part, with students questioning their local words abroad and at home, balancing clarity and authenticity, universality and specificity, literariness and unliterariness. We have also seen how words are imbued with place, evoking landscapes and metaphors.

Then, we have reflected on language as a way to subscribe to a certain tradition or reject it; to adopt a model or to amplify a practice with new words, new ideas and concepts. Perhaps some indigenous ones, as we are about to explore in the next passage.

Before moving to that, I just wanted to reprise an idea that I introduced in the Methodology chapter in relation to how fiction as method invites rethinking some of the words we choose in research – reframing "data" as "content", for example; or "evidence" as "narrative", as it happens in this project. Linking this passage to Chapter Four: Metaphor, in which the metaphor of the 'workshop' is deconstructed, is an invitation to think about words as narrative choices, and what they convey.

Verónica Gerber Bicecci's mentor and colleague Ana Gallardo "traverses" her students' works of art instead of "analysing" them. Or, like VGB says, "she extends herself like a bridge to the other side". (LD:36)

Students at Central, Bogotá, "socialise" (socializar) as well as "workshop" (tallerear) their texts. (WD:29, L2:40)

For example, in her narrative, Gabriela (Vera, São Paulo) stops to think about the expressions that she uses, like "to be workshopped" (*ser oficinada* in Portuguese, *tallerizada* in Spanish)[29], applicable to people and texts; and the Spanish and Portuguese verb "*entregar(-se)*" ("submit" but also "surrender", and "give oneself up", "devote oneself"), also applicable to people and texts:

In Portuguese we say that you "submit" your text to the workshop. "Entrega". "Entregar-se" *is also to "donate oneself". You also say it in relationships. You give yourself; you surrender. This is one of the*

[29] Gabriela teaches at Vera, in Brazil, but she is from Uruguay. In her interview, conducted in Spanish, she made examples from both languages, Spanish and Portuguese.

metaphors that touches me the most. You're surrendering to the process. What would be the opposite, otherwise? Resistance. Impermeability. "The text is ready; I don't care what you think." The same goes for the peer who gives feedback. If they criticise for the sake of it, it's because they're resisting. You have to surrender and learn how to listen. (Aguerre 2024)

The words we choose matter because they carry our methods and approaches. More about this in Chapter Four.

in the margins

In his narrative, Leonardo (Andina, Quito) shares the two main difficulties in integrating indigenous languages in a Master's degree in Creative Writing mostly taught by monolingual tutors: not only Ecuador is a plurinational and plurilingual state, but there is also the question of *indigenous culture being predominantly oral and not lending itself to fiction form* (Valencia 2024).

As an effort to reach out to some bilingual writers living in rural areas, Leonardo's colleague Ariruma has held a workshop of Oral and Creative Writing with wider concerns, such as the reactivation of memory, the awareness of one's heritage, and the building of a practice which aligns with the cultural spirit of Ayllu and explores the forms and elements of indigenous literature and culture. Ariruma narrates:

the indigenous artists, musicians and cultural programmers who attended the round table "Culture outside the Capital" would probably object to this wording: are indigenous oral cultures not "lending themselves" to fiction; or is it the case that fiction (and CW) is stuck in its ways and not very permeable to other forms?

"The idea of culture still flies too high, and hasn't landed, yet. This makes people think that they are not deserving/ worthy of it."

(LD: 32-33)

We are interested in retrieving our cultural heritage, such as the Ayllu, which is a type of society characterised by its solidarity. It's different from the mixed-race society, which is more individualistic. Then we have integrated Andean practices like the achij taita *and the* achij mama, *which mean "godfathers" and "godmothers". "*Achij*" means "full of light", and godparents take on that role to enlighten their community. Our participants are* achij taita *and* achij mama *of their thoughts. The first prompt is about power animals,* tótems, *which protect and give energy to each person. The participants who still have grandparents go and ask them about their power animals, about pumas or serpents. Otherwise, they ask neighbours and members of their community. Then they write about them. This allows people who have never written poetry or stories before to start from the stories within their communities. The figure of the godparent is interesting; it links with memory and the aim of injecting more self-confidence and identity in our people. It's a collective task, not an individual one. It's based on the Ayllu.* (Kowii Maldonado 2024)

The notion of workshop participants as godparents of heritage, language and stories not only is moving and thought-provoking, but it also affords a glimpse of the wealth of concepts, metaphors and narratives that will remain outside the borders of academia unless more effort is devoted to allowing in the custodians of this knowledge.

While Western philosophies have injected individualism in our hero-based stories, and anglophone concepts like creative writing itself and craft concepts like conflict, "show, don't tell", point of view, etc. have colonised

"workshops" all over the world, little can be said about real efforts to integrate not only local culture and literature, but Other cultures and literatures in general.

What could happen if we truly engaged with Other cultures to let *them* (de)colonise our workshops? As well as Ariruma's example, I am thinking about Sreedhevi Iyer, who draws a connection between Hong Kong's pluralistic society and a craft choice, the first-person plural point of view ("we") (Iyer 2022). Iyer argues that "the use of point of view in the Western canon primarily supposes, and derives from, philosophies of existentialism and the notion of individual rights prevailing over collective rights" (189), whereas "the use of FPP is an effective craft tool in CW in the Hong Kong context (and indeed perhaps in many Asian contexts) as it functions to include rather than exclude and reprioritises the centre of the narrative experiences" (196).

I wonder whether similar connections could be drawn between craft choices and, in Ariruma's case, the Ayllu structure of society, or other Andean and indigenous concepts emerging in other fields. For example, 1) the Aymara notion of *ch'ixi*, the "idea of something that is and is not at the same time" (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012, my translation); 2) or the concept of *tequio*, a "form of free, obligatory and collective labor that benefits the community at large" (Rivera Garza 2020).[30]

that is not to say that practices to include wider indigenous cultural manifestations are not present at all in academic contexts:
- at Uninorte (Barranquilla) the Researcher took part in the all-day workshop Bajo la Bonga, facilitated by the co-lab Juí Shikatguaxa, which aims to foster exchange between the academia and the territory (WD: 22-27)
- a few weeks before the Researcher's visit to Central (Bogotá), a PhD student had defended the first thesis entirely composed orally in the country
- and while She was visiting Andina, She joined in the summer solstice celebrations of Inti Raymi, coordinated by Ariruma and other colleagues across several departments (L3: 97-99)

or 3) the Aymara concept of yanapt uywaña, the "mutual nurture of the arts" (Espejo Ayca #8)

[30] As it is happening in the field of literary translation: a study by Paul M. Worley and Ellen Jones applies *tequio* to "translations of Indigenous texts into English, as a response to the [...] complexities of translating from an oppressed language into a colonial lingua franca responsible for a large proportion of global language loss" (Worley and Jones 2023: 241).

From my perspective, however, I have to consider the implications of exporting this knowledge similarly to how the workshop model has been exported outside the US and Europe. Put a concept like *achij taita/mama* on the table and to me it looks like a tray of Genoese focaccia when I am on one of my low-carb diets, or a pile of unguarded Aztec gold to... well, let's not go there. Do I take it? Do I *steal* it? Do I *borrow* it?

What can I give in return? Is credit enough? Is the fact that I am not profiting from it enough? (Or *am* I profiting from it?) Is amplification, rather than representation enough? What would my responsibilities as a white translator of other cultures be (Mishan 2022)? Is it enough to make my best possible effort to understand, to research, to cite, and to resist the temptation to adapt to my tastes and needs?

I asked Ariruma how he would feel if I, a white, European tutor of creative writing in English as a second language, were to adopt the notion of workshop participants as "godparents":

I think it could work. If the experience is positive, then no problem. So long as it's mentioned that, "This is how they do it in the Andes." I always say that whenever someone learns a word in Quechua, we win. We've got everything to gain. And it's also important to mention that in the Andes the way to do this is by sharing, which is part of a healing process. I mean, I think that the West has a lot of history that we can learn from, too, a lot of experience. We need to study, read, get to know and decide what can be useful to us. If it's useful, so long as we cite the source, we apply it. In the Andes, we talk about the tinkuy,

which means "permanent friction", but also renovation. A process like the encounter of globalisation with Andean culture would cause for new technologies to influence us. If we don't activate ourselves and generate something, we are won. For example, the way we make music is a very healing form of culture. We all benefit from it. Once, the West has learned from us, too. They documented a lot of uses of our medicinal plants; they studied them, and applied what they had learned. But they never shared it. So if there's a more balanced, more honest exchange, we can share. I see no problem with that. (Kowii Maldonado 2024)

When it comes to the sharing of cultural aspects, Western societies have a long history of bad habits – ranging from minor offences, like putting onion or cream in a *pasta alla carbonara*, to causing major diplomatic disputes by refusing to return stolen bronzes, marbles and Aztec emperors' headdresses. To the material theft, you have to add the intangible one known as "cultural appropriation", occurring when "a member of the dominant culture – an insider – [takes] from a culture that has historically been and is still treated as subordinate and [profits] from it at that culture's expense" (Mishan 2022). This will be discussed in the next passage, but before that, I just wanted to answer some of the questions I raised.

Dear reader, by nature and culture, I know that I can be both greedy and generous. I will steal the focaccia and I will share it – I have little doubt about that. And I will try and do all of the above – understand, research, cite, resist –, knowing

(*) She's LYING. She's, in fact, changing her mind about it every 5 minutes. Only a year ago, after learning the Cagui-language expression Jui Shikazguaxa ("to communicate from/within home"), she swore she'd never borrow it, because, "There's a difference between stealing words across European languages and doing the same with indigenous ones. Key words: Europe, steal, indigenous." (WD:22)

It was, in fact, talking to Ariruma that made her reconsider, although She's still very much in two minds about the whole thing.

that it will not be enough. That real amplification and diversity occur when the godparents (rather than "owners") of those cultures join the conversation, not when I interpret, translate and curate their narratives on behalf of them.

To open a space where everyone can benefit from the exchange, tutors can do a few things. Maybe we can lobby for more scholarships, and for a thorough scrutiny of the criteria that are used to give them out. Maybe we can make a case for some not-for-profit community work and outreach initiatives to be integrated as part of the curriculum, like the creative writing workshop students on the BA at Sagrado (San Juan) run in La Goyco community centre (García-Reyes 2024), or the many community workshops organised by Aleja and her Makerspace at Central, Bogotá (Flórez 2024).

Mozaic, at the Paulo Freire Institute, warns educators about meritocracy as a model based on a mercantilist view of society (winners and losers, success and failure, etc.) that often excludes instead of including. (P2:45)

Maybe we can challenge practices and behaviours that do not benefit either students or society as a whole, whether in the publishing and cultural field or even within inside the university. Raise the questions: where am I, how are things done here, and can I do them differently? And bring them to the attention of the generation we are training so that what they get from our workshops is not a machete to keep between their teeth while they deal with the jungle out there, but empathy, compassion, a sense of one's privilege, responsibilities and an understanding of literacy, culture and creativity as rights that belong to everyone, and not just the few.

Finally, maybe we can generate an environment where ethical questions are raised in our creative practice, too, as we

are about to read in the final passage of this muddy fragment about culture, where we question our very own speaking place.

where we stand.

In response to the discourses inflaming the publishing industry in the last ten years and widely represented in the media, creative writing tutors, too, have felt compelled to ask: who has got the right to write about whom? Who has got the right to write from whose point of view?[31]

This discourse is particularly present in Brazil, where feminist philosopher Djamila Ribeiro published her game-changing manifesto *Lugar de fala* ("place of speech" or "speaking point") in 2019 – translated into English by Padma Viswanathan as *Where We Stand* (2024). To introduce this theme, Gabriela (Vera, São Paulo) will share her reflections, followed by her colleagues Silvana and Roberto.

In this year's workshop, one of the participants is a lawyer who's writing from the point of view of a homeless person, narrating his personal drama. Can a white man who's a lawyer put himself in a

[31] To choose one example among many, think of the emblematic debacle caused by author Lionel Shriver's keynote speech "Fiction and Identity Politics" given at the Brisbane Writers Festival in 2016, and author Yassmin Abdel-Magied's response shortly after, summarised by Stephanie Convery in her Guardian article "We Need to Talk about Cultural Appropriation: Why Lionel Shriver's Speech Touched a Nerve" (Convery 2016) and thoroughly analysed by Sreedhevi Iyer in her "Cosmopolitan Creative Writing Pedagogies" (Iyer 2022).

homeless man's place? But the first question is: why does he do that? Second question: with what effect? Third question: to which agenda does it subscribe? Is this a project full of humanity or full of prejudice? Is it a stereotypical or accurate vision of reality? I can ask some of these questions to my student, without prejudice. When you perceive stereotypical or biased perspectives, you point it out, because a reader would point it out, too. It's all about how and why you're doing this. However, this also has the effect of putting people off even trying. Sometimes we don't know what to do, Elena; sometimes we need to deal with the problem on the fly. When someone writes something offensive, sometimes they insist on the old argument that art is free. To get out of that argument, I use several books. Like Talking Back *by bell hooks; or Toni Morrison's* The Origin of Others. *Morrison raises the question: why are you objectifying the other? Why dehumanise? I've learned this from Toni Morrison: literature is bound to a humanitarian project. If it isn't, then what's the point? I'm not saying it should be optimist, or good, or rose-tinted or full of unicorns. That's not what I mean. I mean that it's a project bound to meaning-making for humanity. I can still write a text that's full of prejudice, but it has to create an impact on the reader. It's when it's neither here nor there, when it's meant to make you laugh but it's not funny, that the text fails. So I use other authors to help students understand that. Someone who has inspired Djamila Ribeiro, too, is Grada Quilomba. She's written a marvellous book called* Plantation Memories. *She really makes you think about how, in Brazil, we need to revise history, revise language and think about what humanises and what dehumanises. The dehumanising is not needed anymore. It's 2024. We don't need that anymore.* (Aguerre 2024)

For Gabriela, if a student embarks on a project from a different point of view, it is important to question why they are doing it, how, and to what effect. If there are signs of a biased perspective potentially promoting damaging stereotypes, it is also essential to point that out, in a way that is not judgemental or harmful for the student-writer. A student-writer with genuinely racist, classist, homophobic, transphobic, or misogynistic views is unlikely to change them based on writing feedback. But a student-writer who is merely a little tone-deaf or naïve might appreciate a warning and constructive recommendations.

As for the question of wearing other people's shoes, more perspectives come from Silvana and Roberto, also at Vera, São Paulo.

Silvana: *There a was a bit of a fashion to talk about* lugar de fala *which has somehow waned a little nowadays. If I'm not indigenous, I can't write like an indigenous person; if I'm not Black, I don't have a Black person's speaking point. But we have to admit that writers write literature to put themselves in other people's places. Yet, in my workshops, men tend to write from the point of view of men, and women from the point of view of women. I tend to do that, too; I tend to censor myself. I can place a different character in a scene, but they are likely to be secondary, seen through the gaze of the main character, more similar to mine. I don't feel adequate to write from the point of view of someone who lives in a* favela, *for example. But I can have a character like that mediated by another character's gaze.* (Tavano 2024)

Silvana's "cautious" approach has been articulated by Robin Hemley and Xu Xi, as they write that,

> An important aspect of writing about the "other" in a culture or environment that is not our own is to find a way to "own" it. If you're interested enough in any kind of "other" to write about it, then it's incumbent upon you to do your homework. Beyond doing our homework, a good technique to use to enter into the other's experience is to show it from the POV that clearly does not understand or only half understands the other's experience. (Hemley and Xu 2021)

in her notes, the Researcher conjures the metaphor of the paxp'aku as written by Juan Pablo Piñeiro:

"As a paxp'aku, you know perfectly well that words help us create an identity. Creating illusions, you can transform yourself into whomever you want. [...] However, don't forget that the way in which we see the other is also an invention of words." (RD: 39)

Other scholars engaged in these kind of ethical considerations have also recommended wider approaches like cosmopolitanism, which "functions to neutralise offence, and deweaponise identity policing, in so far that it advocates not an idealistic, universal harmony with no conflict, but merely in adjusting and adapting the familiar with the unfamiliar" (Iyer 2022: 203); and seeking permission where ownership of materials "is a significant issue" – for example, in Australia, "where Aboriginal Dreaming stories have traditional custodians" (Kroll and Dai 2014: 86).

What does not appear to be useful, instead, is to advise students to steer away altogether from other perspectives for the sake of authenticity or fair representation, and instead invite them to engage in the complexity of what Manolo (Sagrado, San Juan) calls the "ethics of representation":

When giving Herself permission to borrow this concept, she conveniently concludes: "Maybe, when we look at visions that are not our own and write about them, we do what writers do – inventing the other, writing worlds, telling the uncle's tales." (RD: 42)

This debate appears in our workshop routinely but in small doses. When we talk about perspective, I show them clips from films by Almodóvar and ask: "This shot, this gaze, where does it come from? Is it a heteronormative gaze? Is it something else?" Part of being an author means to learn how to speak like someone else. Now the question is: to usurp or not to usurp? I must have mentioned something about subalternity in this course, but I tend not to place restrictions. If someone's white and they want to write from the point of view of a slave, I think it's fair. When talking about creation, you have to be free. As for appropriation... one thing is to steal a country's worth of stuff and take it to museums in the first world; quite another is creation. Am I not allowed, as a man, to write about domestic violence against women? I don't know. Maybe I'm not. I don't have an answer. But putting this type of restrictions in a process that is supposed to be free seems dangerous. Though I do raise some questions: when does the illiterate write? Someone writes on their behalf. Someone who's a white, Western person with an authorised voice. I think it's important that students are aware of these schools of thought, but that also they don't censor themselves. (Núñez Negrón 2024)

There is a lot that we can learn from the tutors who are engaging in this debate. First of all, they are acknowledging that this is a discourse that affects literature just as much as it affects society, and the recommendation is for writers not to ignore what happens around them and the opinions and needs expressed by fellow writers and members of society that have systematically been oppressed. After all, a "pedagogy of

the oppressed" (Freire 1996, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos) cannot ignore that the oppressed exist in the first place.

Secondly, restriction and censorship do not help. What helps is to place student-writers in the best position to make their own choices by exposing them to the complexity of the issues and, again, to the widest range of perspectives. It helps to call out discriminatory narratives and language, and to question the role of one's writing in the bigger picture. And perhaps to shift the emphasis from "authenticity" to respect, empathy and, with due caution, credibility.

Finally, as tutors, I think it is okay not to know exactly where we stand. Taking or not taking a risk does not make us a better or lesser writer, and vice versa. But a project in which a writer accepts the risk to fail in the areas of "authenticity" or even "credibility" can still be a project that contributes to creating meaning, learning from Kwame Appiah's suggestion that, "We should learn about people in other places, take an interest in their civilisations, their arguments, their errors, their achievements, not because that will bring us to agreement but because it will help us get used to one another" (quoted in Iyer 2022: 203-204).

Here is where I reiterate the importance to integrate Other cultures, practices and concepts that allow us to challenge creative writing as a monocultural discipline that "speaks mostly English" (Bueno 2018) or in *translation from* English, creating a "space of hybridity" and allowing in the "multiple voices that may have been previously silenced by dominant ideologies"; and to amplify these voices and their

cultures with "research, negotiation, knowledge, empathy, and permission where any 'traditional' material is used" (Burridge 2022).

Besides, keeping our eyes and ears open will make us tutors who are better placed to advise student-writers to deal with the challenge of acknowledging one's speaking point and accept it for what it is: another sign that we do not write or teach in a vacuum, and that what we write or teach can have consequences on the real world. We cannot predict what they are. We cannot predict how a text will be received even if we think that we have written it with the best of intentions and making the most effort. But at least we can check our intentions and measure our efforts, and ask ourselves to what wider project our writing and teaching contribute.

This concludes this very dense part "reading the world" of tutors and students of creative writing. In the next part, we will look at how place is reflected in students' writing as setting, and how tutors are affected by and intervene on their own setting.

II. Writing the World

Opening this part is an excerpt from Almudena Sánchez's short story "Los puntos débiles".

> The creative writing school was in the centre of Madrid. The entrance was through a backyard decorated with artificial flowers and a sign reading: THE GARDEN OF FORKING PATHS. There were birds, too, each with a piece of bread in its beak. When I arrived in my new shoes, they'd get startled and start squawking [...]. They'd drop the bread, and it looked as if it were snowing. The name of the school was Absalom, Absalom! (Sánchez 2018)

This is the description of the creative writing school where Regina Katmandú's workshop takes place: here, hints at the great masters of literature ("The Garden of Forking Paths", *Absalom, Absalom!*) are coupled with the sinister presence of irritable birds. The over-the-top symbolism that the author uses throughout the short story sets the scene and creates expectations about Lorna's first encounter with creative writing, showing that setting, in fiction, is hardly ever coincidental, and full of narrative opportunities, instead.

For Bernays and Painter, "Very few good short stories or novels float in time and space; they are firmly anchored in a particular year, or years, and in a singular place – whether it's a rooming house, region or country. Place matters" (Bernays and Painter 2005: 279).

According to Burroway, the harmonious or conflictual relationship between characters and settings also plays a fundamental narrative role (Burroway 1996: 173); and so does atmosphere, without which "characters would be unable to breathe" (Burroway 1996: 172). As pointed out by Matthew Salesses, setting is about what is *noticed*, which depends on who does the noticing:

> Cold weather affects someone not used to cold weather far more than it affects someone who is used to it. A strange man in an otherwise empty parking lot is a different setting for a female protagonist than for a male protagonist. A speed trap is a different setting for a Black protagonist than for a white protagonist. A staircase is a different setting for a protagonist in a wheelchair than for a protagonist who can easily ascend it. (Salesses 2021: 88)

Salesses is writing this as a reaction to setting being commonly praised "for being 'a character' of its own" but he insists on the fact that "setting is not character". He argues that "the settings most typically said to be characters are settings that are underrepresented in the dominant fiction tradition", and "perhaps one of the reasons a white author might have trouble writing a protagonist of color is that the author is noticing the wrong things[:] the author is thinking of setting as a character of its own rather than reliant on character" (Salesses 2021: 87–88).

This seems to be a development from Burroway's notion of harmony/conflict between character and place – one which could see one setting in a work of fiction taking over with its own personality or role: setting as the enemy, as the ally, as a character with its own narrative arc. While I understand Salesses's point, I do not think that this is just poor feedback given to writers of colour when the peer/reader has not got anything more useful to say; I rather understand it as a narrative choice that can be made or disregarded, as well as many others. In some narratives, setting can be written and read as an enemy, or an ally, or take on any other aspects of a figurative dimension branching out to metaphor or symbolism, too.

Writing tools and techniques that tend to be associated with setting are world-building, description, "show don't tell", characterisation (i.e. exploring how a character relates to/feels about/interacts with the place), conflict, and the already mentioned figurative dimension to setting (personification, metaphor, symbolism, etc.).

In this part, I will look at setting from two different perspectives. First, exploring how students choose (or do not choose) familiar settings and what their writing says about the place from where they are writing. Secondly, I will share the tutors' reflections on the setting where they teach creative writing, commenting on the strengths and drawbacks of in-person and online modes; and taking responsibility for the space they occupy, and the atmosphere that charges it.

This passage begins with a brief excerpt from a recent novel by Peruvian author Fabiola Pinel, *Danza entre cenizas* ("dance in ashes"):

presented by the author at the Havana Book Fair (L3: 112) and read by the Researcher at RD: 30.

> Thinking about Jorge, [Clara] got to the conference late and somewhat dazed. She got lost in the halls of San Marcos, even though it wasn't the first time she visited. [...] The lecture hall was full. [...] The blackboard was covered by a huge red banner with yellow letters. The walls of the hall were also covered in red and black writing, drawings of the hammer and sickle, acronyms for the PCP, the MRTA, and calls for a people's war. [...] Clara found it difficult to concentrate on the speakers, because she was still thinking about her sweetheart and what had happened between them that afternoon. [...] Her daydreaming was suddenly interrupted by a blackout and someone shouting: "The police have entered San Marcos! Don't use the main entrance! Disperse, *compañeros*, disperse!" (Pinel 2022)

But people haven't forgotten, as everyone has stories to tell about that time. Tutor Darío's wife, Laura, still remembers waiting in anguish for him to come home from the university all in one piece. Publisher Sofía had an interview with a professor interrupted by a smoke bomb in the faculty's canteen; and her husband was threatened by one of his own students, who showed up to his lecture with a gym bag full of rifles. (P1: 28–33)

It has been less than forty years since similar scenes were observed at San Marcos University in Lima. Now, students at San Marcos study on the programme in Creative Writing remotely, but their affiliation to this public university does show in their narratives, which seem to differ substantially from their more privileged peers at Lima's other programme at Catholic university Pontificia. Carlos (San Marcos, Lima) narrates:

There's quite a lot of realism in San Marcos because the students' social background is middle, middle to low, low. There's not a lot of upper middle class. By contrast, if you go to the Pontificia Católica there are deer wandering in the garden. Our students are very concerned about the here and now. They wouldn't be interested in autofiction or historical novels like the students at Pontificia. They're interested in how they really live, in everyday problems – it's the literature of the Combi, *of the hitman, of the transgender person beaten up in the street. Then there's a smaller group of writers venturing into science fiction or fantasy. In all of that, there's a lot of violence. Some students write about the Venezuelan migration; and that's because they live in places where they meet Venezuelan migrants. The average student at the Católica living in San Isidro, Miraflores or Chacarilla wouldn't meet a Venezuelan person unless they were washing their car. Pardon the honesty.* (Arámbulo 2024)

the Researcher's stay in Lima coincided with the debut of theatre play Combi-Nation, a satire of Peruvian society from the point of view of passengers of a Combi, a type of private minibus repurposed to drive students and working-class people across the Metropolitan area.

As it emerges from Carlos's story, a student-writer's social class is reflected in what students decide to write about and how their worlds shine through their writing. Delving into some of the themes or topics in his students' writing, a colleague of Carlos's, Jorge (San Marcos, Lima), shares some examples of what constitutes writing interested in society and social justice, and adds a different perspective:

In the last thirty years we have had an internal war, right? ★ *The Shining Path movement and the MRTA and guerrilla groups on one side, the Peruvian State on the other. These events marked the fiction written in the '90s and 2000s, which was full of political violence.*

★ 70,000 deaths caused by the guerrilla groups and the State. The conflict is now commemorated at the Place of Memory, Tolerance and Inclusion (LUM), whose debated creation was called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This was mostly formed of academics and its president was the Vice-Chancellor of Pontificia, Lima. The Head of the Museum planning, instead, was Peruvian author and Nobel Prize laureate for Literature Mario Vargas Llosa. (L2:51-53)

Now you have narratives about corruption, domestic violence, yes, but I would say that fiction that is committed to politics or society has lost its strength. What students are mostly interested in is the narrative self. Some students can write about absolutely insignificant, trivial, trivial things. Flings in the Humanities courtyard. Or family quibbles. I try to prevent that by showing them other types of fiction, like Borges, or Ursula Le Guin or Ballard or Bradbury. Literature can be a creative experience, an exploration of other worlds, too. (Valenzuela Garcés 2024)

Compared to the past, according to Jorge, even at San Marcos student-writers are showing more interest in their own selves than in the real world or, like he points out, other possible worlds. This seems to be exactly what is happening at Pontificia, and not only based on Carlos's narrative. Carlos's assumptions about the student-writers at Pontificia might sound biased, but a conversation with Daniela and Ricardo (Pontificia, Lima) confirms that his guesses are not that far off.

Daniela: *Our students tend to always want to write from "the self", so what I try and do is to push them out of their comfort zones. Look outside. So many things happen in Peru. In the US, for example, you'd have a murder and a month later, a fabulous novel about said murder would show up. Here, things happen every day. The last seven years in politics... Listen to me, not even* House of Cards. *For the last seven years, we haven't had a single president reach the end of their term of*

office, and all of them have ended up in jail. This would make terrific fiction, but no one has written about it. (Ramírez Ugolotti 2024)

Ricardo: *The place has a huge impact: Peru is a classist, racist country, and your social background will determine your aesthetics, just like in any other part of the world. And here it's evident. We have students who can afford a Master's degree in a private university, dishing out a lot of money for it. So when you read their texts, their themes, it doesn't look like they're writing a novel to condemn the social injustices in their country. If you go to San Marcos, which is a public university, with students who in general come from lower economic, social background with fewer means, you're going to see other aesthetic concerns. This also applies to staff. You're going to read very realist texts about society. It's like a task that they give themselves. They're interested in it. I'm interested in it, too, because I'm a bit of a hybrid. I did my Master's degree in Literature at San Marcos, so I know both worlds. Here, at most, you'd find a problematisation of society in history, rather than now. But most of our students write about other things. Very personal stuff, career frustrations, sentimental frustrations, memory, their past. One way or another, there are social questions, too, but they are more relevant to their social class.* (Sumalavia 2024)

Not only tutors recognise that the private/public nature of their institutions determines the social class of their students and what they are writing about, but also that this can be challenged or at the very least brought into discussion so that student-writers are aware of the alternatives. Daniela, for

example, tries to encourage them to look at the wider spectrum of experiences of the world *outside their navels*.

However, it is worth considering whether there might be other reasons, unrelated to social class, why student-writers do not write about the reality that surrounds them. The next story, featuring Anuchka (Sagrado, San Juan), documents what seems to be missing and why:

The theme of identity is the one that predominates contemporary literature in Puerto Rico. There are some elements of it in our students' writing, but not as notably as in published literature. Our students are concerned about other topics, rather than the Puerto Rican political and identity dilemma. This is the main difference between what is being written right now and what has been written for the last few decades. You can read texts that show no sign of a Puerto Rican identity: not the setting, neither the language nor the characterisation. I think this is fine; not everything has to be read from a Puerto Rican perspective. But it is quite remarkable that no one is doing that in a class of fifteen students. Only one of them recently decided to set her novel in Puerto Rico. It's a high-school love story. Everyone else wrote about superheroes, mythical worlds, places with no names, prototypical places. An island, but an island that has nothing to do with Puerto Rico. The city, New York, Europe, Spain. I think this has a lot to do with the type of literature you can access, and Puerto Rican literature is not that accessible. It's published in smaller print runs, and it often doesn't get to school libraries or bookshops outside the metropolitan area. Then there's the price. So it's much more likely that you grow up reading Isabel Allende than Rosario

talking about his first forays in fiction, Edwin Alcaráz says that his cities were many versions of Quito - without ever being called Quito (LD:26)

Ferré, like it was for me. Because you can get Allende's books on Amazon, but not Ferré's. (Ruiz Ramos 2024)

Reservations about writing one's own place have been observed somewhere else. Barrie Sherwood writes:

> Many fiction students living in or even from Singapore are loathe to set their short stories in Singapore. "Why?" I ask. "You live here. If you're an authority on one thing – just one thing – isn't it this place?" I impose no rules [...] but I do make it clear that of the 40 international writers in the reader in my fiction class, most of them set their stories in places they were capable of observing as minutely as anyone else. So Tayib Salih's story is set in the Sudan. Alice Munro's in some grim Canadian province in the wintertime. Haruki Murakami's in Tokyo. Amanda Lee Koe's in Singapore. [...] In contrast, when foreign settings appear in non-fiction, the narrator is almost invariably a tourist; it's this *lack* of authority, honestly related, that makes the setting so convincing. (Sherwood 2022: 165)

Maybe student-writers do not perceive a need to write from an authoritative (or non-authoritative) place but simply, like Anuchka suggests, they have not been exposed to literary references that legitimise their local settings as places that belong in literature – similarly to what has been observed with linguistic varieties.

In fact, the literary references prior to the degree in Creative Writing seem to have an impact on what student-

writers tend to write about and how place is represented. Also at Sagrado (San Juan), Idalís mentions that the students *are drawing a lot from Netflix, and during the pandemic many of them discovered manga and Japanese culture, which has nothing to do with our reality* (García-Reyes 2024). Jotacé also mentions it as significant: *the influence of comics and manga, and of fantasy novels in English* (López 2024); and Manolo adds that *the influence of audiovisual, and that's American, all the TV series and cinema* (Núñez Negrón 2024).

Yet, when place is represented, one theme seems to dominate over everything else, as mentioned in Jotacé's story previously: *The issue of crime. Murders, you know? During one term I had to say, ok, enough with the murders, this is not a course on serial killers. They tend to appear a lot, as a basic feature. I don't know why. I know that Puerto Rico is a violent country; I don't know if it's because of that that students are so interested in crime. I have to read about a lot of death, you know?* (López 2024). Manolo says that *in some of the students' texts you can read a certain fascination for violence, and for Narco culture* (Núñez Negrón 2024). The theme will be explored in more detail in the next passage.

according to the researcher, though, it's also home to some of the most generous and kindest people she's ever met (L1: 23) — this must be one of those cliché instances of her "noticing the wrong things"

violence and the city

The theme of violence transcends borders. In Ecuador, for Juan Pablo (Andina, Quito), *it is a theme that pervades all other themes, as well as a general disillusion. Our country doesn't have a tradition as a Narco-State, but this seems to be the direction to where we're headed. Hence the disillusion. So there's violence in the students'*

see next page

on the wall of the Museum of Immigration in Buenos Aires, five lines from a poem by Néstor Perlongher read: "under bushes in vacant lots on bridges in ditches there's corpses." (L3: 80)

Ecuador as a pseudo Narco-State: one taxi driver told the Researcher that tourists and taxi drivers are assaulted all the time. Robbers not only take your belongings, but also take YOU to the nearest cash machine and force you to withdraw the max amount of money allowed. Then they make you wait until midnight and do it again. Until they have ALL your money. (L2:94)

Another taxi driver shared his own story of violence: P2:64-66.

stories (Castro Rodas 2024). Or in Colombia, where *violence is a recurring theme; even if it's not addressed, it's addressed by absence, with students deliberately choosing not to write about violence*, according to Sergio Arturo (Central, Bogotá) (González Vargas 2024).

Also at Central, Bogotá, Paul seems to suggest that violence is associated with some places more than others:

Bogotá is such an unsafe city because it's big. Eight, nine million people. Very unsafe, so you don't live the same social life you would experience in any corner of the Caribbean. There, you can stop and talk to anyone about anything. So in the students' writing, you would read about the lack of sense of safety, about fear, murders, thefts. And it's not that Barranquilla is that much safer, but if you end up in a popular neighbourhood there, people would be hanging out on their terraces, everyone's always outdoor, so you have a safer feeling. Here, in a popular neighbourhood, you'd feel afraid. (Brito Ramos 2024)

even taxi drivers would straight refuse to drive you to some of these places, like Barrio Egipto Alto (L2:37). (taxi drivers always know best)

Before moving to more examples of violence, let us zoom in that indoor/outdoor contrast highlighted by Paul, which will take us on a detour confirming the city as the most predominant setting in workshop writing:

poet María Mercedes Carranza describes Bogotá as a "ciudad a medio hacer" ("half-baked city"), where "nobody looks at nobody in the eyes" (L2:38)

I have the impression that someone from Bogotá more often writes about indoor spaces than outdoor spaces, because you tend to hang around indoors. It's always raining, so we're all locked up. Even outside... the clouds are hanging so low, and even the hills, the mountains give that sense of confinement. It's something that is

passed on to writing. Novels from the interior are less sociable, less neighbourly than those from the coast. That's one of the reasons why One Hundred Years of Solitude *is a collective novel, where the whole village is important, and there are so many characters in its fabric.* (Brito Ramos 2024)

Urban settings in general tend to appear most often, forging a bond between creative writing programmes and the city where the teaching takes place. This has been narrated by Óscar, Aleja and Roberto (Central, Bogotá), Giovanna (Pontificia, Lima), Silvana (Vera, São Paulo), and Mercedes (Uninorte, Barranquilla) (Campo Becerra 2024; Flórez 2024; Godoy Barbosa 2024b; Ortega González-Rubio 2024; Pollarolo Giglio 2024; Rubiano 2024; Tavano 2024). And Carol (Vera, São Paulo), too, who once again points out that, *Those who live in the more rural areas of Brazil wouldn't have access to a programme*, which would explain why rural settings in contemporary literature are much harder to find (Abed 2024).[32]

one of the excerpts submitted for Valéro's fiction workshop was from a novel which follows the protagonist on a one-day odyssey in São Paulo, with evident parallelisms with James Joyce's Dublin in Ulysses and JD Salinger's New York in The Catcher in the Rye (WD: 41)

Óscar Daniel gives a sense of what elements of the city percolate in his students' works: *traffic, long distances and job insecurity* (Campo Becerra 2024); while Aleja (Central, Bogotá) shares more aspects revealed by a very specific (and place-based) task:

[32] And why a novel like *Crooked Plow* by Itamar Vieira Junior (2019, translated by Johnny Lorenz and published in English in 2023), set in the rural hinterlands of Bahia, Brazil, would attract so much attention in a literary landscape dominated by cities.

There's a book by Mario Vargas Llosa titled The Notebooks of Don Rigoberto. *Don Rigoberto is a cultured man and art lover who writes letters he's never going to send. Most of them are letters of complaint written in a most exquisite register. So I encourage students to write a letter about what they hate the most about life in the city. Transmilenio, the public transport company, is the most common feature. And Claro, the service provider. The hate for Claro is almost homicidal. Then the former president, Álvaro Uribe, murderers, parasites, that sort of thing. The insufferable noise in the city; how distant everything is. The health system, since it can take months for a doctor's appointment. The lack of public toilets or the fact that you have to pay for drinking water – even here at the university, we don't have fountains. A lot of it is about the infrastructure. Then there are the letters to the sexual harassers, the catcallers, those who feel women up on public transport, which happens all the time.* (Flórez 2024)

Going back to theme of violence and picking up from Aleja's narrative, domestic violence and harassment are also recurring themes, as narrated by Gabriela (Vera, São Paulo), Jorge (San Marcos, Lima) and Adriana (Central, Bogotá).

Following this review of how place is narrated by students in their writing, the recurring themes and settings are beautifully summed up by Lylyan, who says,

The kids are agitated for their country, they are animated by questions about the city, about the social issues of this world: feminist issues, human rights, diversity, social movements. These questions are pulsing within them (Rojas Álvarez 2024).

Perhaps more interesting but more difficult to discuss is how come these themes were more readily available in conversations on the American continent than they were in Madrid, Seville and Coimbra, where tutors really struggled to comment on the representation of place in their students' writing – unless this was seen from the outsider's point of view. A couple of perspectives and some closing thoughts about this will be shared in the next passage.

fresh eyes, heart-shaped

For Guadalupe (Complutense, Madrid),

Those who come to Madrid do cast a different gaze onto this place. Sometimes it's of admiration, sometimes it's full of incomprehension. Sometimes there's a sort of detachment. (Arbona Abascal 2023)

At Coimbra, Susana mentions how the very local tradition of *praxe*, the (infamous) initiation rituals for which Coimbra university is known, is seen by the outsiders very differently than it is by the locals:

The Brazilian students who are here for a short period will look at them with touristy eyes and a kind of romantic way. Whereas perhaps older people, and there are a few on the MA in writing, may be either attuned to them because they live in Coimbra, or be critical of them, like I am. I'm not a fan of those... of many facets of those rituals. (Araújo 2023)

* "Have you seen all the kids from Hogwarts?" said the British guy to his pal while black-caped students (some of them brandishing giant wooden spoons) swarmed the cathedral square.
Funny how the magical imagery that allegedly inspired JK Rowling in her Porto years (whose uni also has praxe) ended up overlapping with the "original", in a weird but not entirely unexpected "War of the World(s)-building" (P2:41)

by the way, "praxe" is known as "trote" in Brazil, where they are rarer and rarer, as some students have died because of them (P2:41)

And about the place as setting, she says,

Students love going into the romantic things about the Mondego River. I remember a Portuguese woman whose background was science... she wrote about Mondego as the spirit of the place and Coimbra as a city. So even people who live here, they draw on what I call the "romance of the city". (Araújo 2023)

Among staff at the European institutions that I have visited, Guadalupe and Susana are the only tutors to have noticed an interest in place from their students, who romanticise the city (and the university) as outsiders and insiders.

Just like Anuchka said before, it is not like I expected everyone to have perceived a strong sense of place in their students' setting; but if no one else has, then I do wonder why that is.

This could be a coincidence, or a sign indicating that where violence, threats to cultural identity or severe (infra)structural issues are not affecting students personally, place begins to lose its protagonist/antagonist role, fading in the background of the global(ised) village or the "apolitical and borderless cosmopolis" (Xu 2022: 48), with its specificity reduced to place names and iconic settings. It becomes less noticeable, more circumstantial, and only acquires meaning through its relationship with characters, rather than stand out on its own.

As a daughter of migrants, a migrant myself and a writer working across different countries and languages, I cannot help but interrogate the role of place in my writing, but I cannot assume that just because I am interested in it so viscerally, my students should be, too. As a tutor, however, I return to the question of "reading the world" and situate my teaching practice with the same care I dedicate to investigating settings and places in my writing. For this reason, the next passages turn to the physical setting where the workshop takes place; and how tutors intervene this space to create a certain atmosphere.

in circle and in the ether, looking

The first narrative in this passage discussing a physical setting is by Manuel (Complutense, Madrid):

I am so against the classroom we've been assigned. Radically against. Room 205. It's more comfortable than what we had before, but it's so inadequate for our purposes and needs. It's got seats like a bus or a church, if you like. Yes, the church layout. With one person more elevated than everyone else, on their altar. The space itself predisposes you to a certain style of teaching. It forces you to expect some determined behaviours. If one day you want to change the dynamic, have students peer-review each other's texts, or do something a little more creative, that classroom is useless. You have to take them somewhere else. Luckily, upstairs, there's a meeting room with an oval table, which makes more sense. I'm not saying I would get rid of

"There is an indisputable pedagogical quality in the materiality of space." (Freire #4)

lectures: some days, you just need your students to sit in front of the whiteboard while you show them the different types of narrators – and room 205 is good for that. But why are we forced to always *have class in there? I think that our faculty, or the Master's at the very least, should claim a room of its own, to go back to Virginia Woolf. A more adequate space for our classes.* (Broullón-Lozano 2023)

Like Manuel suggests, the idea that a room's layout creates certain expectations is core to how universities and schools have been traditionally designed to mirror churches: a tutor/preacher at the front; and a class/congregation sitting in front of them, quietly and in receptive mode. This design has survived centuries and education reforms, but it now appears to fit one mode of teaching – lecturing – while falling short on all other fronts, being inadequate for group work, peer-review, discussion and more practical and creative activities (some of them, like artisanal publishing, could even require big surfaces and being able to get messy).

On the other hand, Manuel (Coimbra) has been luckier with the spaces that his cohort has been assigned:

The room that we use for the first semester is a seminar room. We all sit around the same table, and it creates a very friendly and open environment. In the second semester, we have rooms with technical equipment for the multi-platform journalism or the digital writing workshops. Still, they are all very friendly. (Portela 2023)

The idea of sitting around the same table and/or in circle is a recurring feature of the workshop, and is appreciated by Cristina (Complutense, Madrid), Pablo (Seville), Márcia Ivana (Federal, Porto Alegre), David Jacobo and Aleja (Central, Bogotá), and Mara, Gaddiel and Idalís (Sagrado, San Juan) (Sánchez 2023; Sánchez-Andrade 2023; de Lima e Silva 2024; Flórez 2024; García-Reyes 2024; Pastor 2024; Ruiz Rivera 2024; Viveros Granja 2024).

It perpetuates a tradition inherited by other tutors (Pastor 2024; Ruiz Rivera 2024) or observed in other contexts (García-Reyes 2024), confirming the predominance of the peer-review rounds as the workshop's signature feedback dynamic.

Nonetheless, a surprisingly common shift from in-person teaching to online – for some institutions, established during the pandemic, while for others, embedded into the programme's design from the very start – means that this dynamic has had to be adapted, and there is a real divide on how tutors feel about it. Here is one perspective on the difference between teaching in person and online by Miguel (Pontificia, Lima):

The dynamic changes completely. Everyone's engagement, the energy we share, the students' attention… It could be that I am simply not trained to teach online, as a question of method. There must be tutors out there who run excellent online classes. To me, it becomes a simple transmission of information. The environment doesn't lend itself to dialogue or group work. Some modules specifically might be more apt:

mentorship, for example, works well. You work on a shared document and talk to your student one to one. (Sánchez Flores 2024)

Here, Miguel raises a great point about training for the online medium specifically. During the pandemic, academic institutions faced the transition to online teaching, but not everyone had the time and resources to train tutors to confidently run their workshops and give their lectures online. As an emergency measure, the assumption was that everything that was done in class could be done from home, in front of computer screens and through chat. But remote teaching predates the pandemic, and the virtual medium is a different medium with its own features, and a lot of creative opportunities emerge when one becomes aware of what it can offer.

To draw a parallelism with practice, I think of the difference between the Instagram poetry of rupi kaur and of Shelley Jackson. rupi kaur's poetry replicates what is done on paper with screenshots of her illustrated poems to fit the format of the Instagram post (kaur 2024). Shelley Jackson's poetry project *SNOW* fully takes advantage of Instagram's photographic medium and builds a narrative with words chiselled on a variety of snow-covered surfaces (Jackson 2024).

In my module Teaching in Virtual Environments on the Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching Creative Writing at Escuela de Escritores, I invite tutors to design online activities using a variety of strategies and platforms. Thinking about gamification, we look at games and competitions that can be

done online: for example, Quizlet and Kahoot to question theoretical concepts; 750 words and 4thewords to motivate students to put words down on paper; and Twine to introduce students to explorative hyperfiction.

For collaborative writing, the options are countless: from something as simple as a shared live document in which writers can write simultaneously, to more disciplined and visually pleasing platforms like Padlet to respond creatively to prompts and to each other's writing. With some creativity and some technical knowledge, even an Excel spreadsheet can become a playground, and a space to generate creative content and exchange feedback.

Finally, as suggested by Manuel (Coimbra) and Óscar Daniel (Uninorte, Barranquilla), the digital literature that already exists (*Retratos vivos de mamá* by Carolina López Jimenez, *Welcome to Pine Point* by The Goggles, *Snow* by Shelley Jackson...) also shows some possibilities to play with the medium. So, yes, writing and reading each other's writing aloud – i.e. workshopping – can certainly be done online, but that is not the only thing that can be done in a virtual workshop.

Following on some of the drawbacks of remote teaching, Daniela and Rosario at Pontificia, Lima, face some more specific challenges as they offer a hybrid option:

Daniela (Pontificia, Lima): *In the in-person workshop, there's a real energy that you can perceive. It can become magic, even. When you teach online, it's more difficult to recreate that. If we're hybrid, the*

* evoking the Sounding Territories workshop, in which participants sat on the floor of bookshop Dos Mangos, sharing their lines and engaging in a spontaneous necro-reading of their works, until silence fell, followed by stunned, delighted applause (WD: 14)

online students can't really make the most of that. They participate, but it's complicated. (Ramírez Ugolotti 2024)

Rosario: *In the virtual one, you have to raise your hand, turn your mic on, everybody else keeps quiet. There's not as much dialogue. People don't interrupt each other that much; people don't laugh that much either. In person, the workshop dynamic is more manageable. What's even more difficult than online, is when you go hybrid: some students in class and others connecting on Zoom. Your attention as a tutor is divided, you need to check what someone has just commented in the chat, and you interrupt the discussion to read it. And the message is maybe, "Sorry, I have to leave early, thank you, goodbye," and they just leave. That's very distracting. Still, you have to accept that some people want to come to the university in person. There are two Colombian students and a French one who have moved here to attend the course. It's only fair that they get to come to class. Otherwise, they could have just done it from their own country. So I've asked our secretary to arrange a classroom and those who want to come to class are able to do so.* (Yori de Vivanco 2024)

To manage the challenge and still be able to offer the hybrid alternative if students require it, Óscar Daniel shares the contingency plan they have at Uninorte, Barranquilla:

We ask one student in class to be responsible for engaging with those who are joining remotely and make sure they interact. The student can borrow a laptop from the university if they don't want to use their own. This is something that we negotiate with students beforehand; if

they're willing to do it, we go ahead in hybrid mode, otherwise we all participate remotely. (Campo Becerra 2024)

Moving to the aspects that tutors appreciate, Ernesto (Andina, Quito) introduces one of the most valuable advantages of online teaching: *What Zoom is really good for, though, is to cross borders. You can have participants who don't live in your country. That's wonderful.* (Carrión 2024)

Remote programmes of Creative Writing have the potential to be borderless and accept anyone from anywhere within and beyond their country. This happens in the Pontificia programme, as described by Rosario above, and at San Marcos, both in Lima; in Ecuador, as just described by Ernesto; and also in Puerto Rico, where students join from all over the island, from the US and from the Dominican Republic, too (Lefevre Tavárez 2024; López 2024; Núñez Negrón 2024).

For Carlos (San Marcos, Lima), inclusion is too much of a decisive factor, alongside other advantages of *not* being in person:

I would feel sorry changing the teaching mode to in-person only, because we would lose all those people who wouldn't be able to access a Master's in Creative Writing. I don't see the virtual mode as problematic. In fact, in person, you'd witness more histrionics. In traditional workshops, authors would show contempt when their texts were being discussed; they pulled faces and made gestures. I had to mediate that, tell them, "Please don't pull a face, it's all being said with

the best of intentions." Besides, many times, in class, students would interrupt one another. Virtually, they behave in a more civil way. They let one another speak without interrupting. As a professor, it's become much easier for me, too. (Arámbulo 2024)

Some of the aspects that Rosario has identified as the disadvantages of the online mode – *You have to raise your hand, turn your mic on, everybody else keeps quiet. There's not as much dialogue. People don't interrupt each other that much; people don't laugh that much either...* – are those that Carlos appreciates the most, really giving a sense of how subjective our responses to teaching environments can be. The manageability of teaching online and in person depends on the tutor's own expectations of what the workshop or class should look like; as always, it would be useful to identify this expectation, understand what alternatives are out there, experiment with different options, and decide what works best for you and for your groups.

Ultimately, I recommend seeing the workshop as a setting that can be intervened just as you would narratively, when you create the most suitable experience for your characters, building a world that makes their actions and characteristics stand out. We will see some examples of this in the next and final passage.

for the right atmosphere

Writers love to write about the space where the magic happens, or does not happen.[33] Márcia Ivana (Federal, Porto Alegre) illustrates this with a literary anecdote featuring Italo Calvino:

When Calvino was living in New York, he had an intense correspondence with his Italian publisher. In one of those letters, he mentioned how he kept changing rooms in his apartment, which wasn't very big anyway. He would say: "Yesterday I changed rooms twice before I could write." And he did not explain why that was. You know, because of this, this and that. He didn't. But if he mentioned having to change rooms, it must have meant something. Something to do with his creative process, and why it didn't work out. (de Lima e Silva 2024)

Tutors of creative writing, too, are sensitive to their immediate surroundings. In *The Place and the Writer,* for instance, James Shea shares various techniques to disrupt conventional teaching practices: foregoing PowerPoints, integrating music, arranging seating in a circle, or using tactile props to enhance sensory awareness (Shea 2021). Lania Knight, on the other hand, suggests that sometimes "campus is not the place to stimulate discussion", and therefore often

[33] One of the many publications that do that is *A Space to Write*, a 2015 volume featuring 26 Cornish writers interviewed and photographed in their own writing settings (Tanner and KEAP 2015).

takes her students to a pub – a setting that British students associate with sociability and familiarity, which "releases them from the expectation of being a 'student' on campus" (Knight 2021: 179).

These authors, and the tutors whose narratives you are about to read, are thinking about setting and atmosphere hoping to generate a specific effect in their student-writers. Here are some of their experiences:

If you choose, like Daniela did, to run a reading of Antígona González under the bonga tree (WD: 25), you might want to think about what that tree symbolises, with its massive trunk and upward-shooting, very thick thorns.

For Camilo Pérez, director of the Juri Shikazeguaxa Co-lab, the bonga tree means resistance, memory and a bridge between this and the Other world (WD: 22).

Daniela (Uninorte, Barranquilla): *The dynamic changes so much depending on the space. So sometimes, I don't know, we feel like going on a detour or we leave the class. We see what we can find, how we can activate other senses that are engaged in the process of writing.* (Pabón Llinás 2024)

Manuel (Complutense, Madrid): *Sometimes I take students somewhere else, either here in the building or sitting on the grass outside. When we talk about the non-fiction of* El jardín de las delicias *by Francisco Ayala, I take them to see the painting by the same name at Museo del Prado. I don't want to sound like the teacher from* The Dead Poets' Society, *as if I was always coming up with something weird. But each space serves a different purpose.* (Broullón-Lozano 2023)

Other tutors have an idea of what they would like, but they are constrained by the spaces available to them:

Juan Pablo (Andina, Quito): *In general, a writing workshop would have to be physically different from a regular classroom. It should be more playful. With nice, comfortable furniture. With carpet and bohemian lighting. Less academic. An environment à la Henry Miller. More similar to workshops held by writers in their homes. A bohemian space, where students can drink coffee or even wine. And those who want to smoke can just move a little further away.* (Castro Rodas 2024)

Pablo (Seville): *The faculty where we have our classes is Communications. It's a modern and technological building, but it's a bit isolated. What's the problem with that? It's a silly problem, but I think it matters. I think that many of our conversations would benefit from a chat in a bar afterwards. And there aren't many near the university campus; virtually no bars. It sounds like a minor thing, but it's important to amplify the experience and extend it beyond the classroom.* (Sánchez 2023)

In these two narratives, both tutors suggest that a certain level of comfort and ease would allow for more meaningful conversations. Perhaps more intimate, less impaired by the rigid expectations of institutionalised spaces – comparable to Knight's trips to the pub with her British students (Knight 2021). Or simply more enjoyable and comfortable. Comfort is affected by basic needs, as Manolo (Sagrado, San Juan) suggests:

I think that the environment is fundamental. Noise levels and how comfortable the chair is. These are factors outside the process of writing that have a real impact on the writer. Like hunger, and grief, and sleep. (Núñez Negrón 2024)

But some of these factors are in the hands of the tutor, who can use their creativity to *create ambience or even proper rituals*, as suggested by Gaddiel (Sagrado, San Juan) (Ruiz Rivera 2024). Read how Aleja (Central, Bogotá) has mastered this art:

I teach my Friday lectures in the ugly ultramodern building, with huge windows and dull carpet. Cold, grey, with blinding lights and a horrific projector. On Wednesdays, when we socialise texts, I invite students here, into the Makerspace. I light some incense; I offer them biscuits. It's as if they were two different modules. As for my dissertation group, I tend to take them out. "Today we're going to the park because we need to clear our mind." In the park, something is bound to happen, for sure. If you were stuck in your novel, you'll get unstuck. For me, it's very important that the student feels comfortable. A student who's hungry, or thirsty, is not going to write well. Now, it's true that sometimes one has to write from an uncomfortable place. That can generate contrast, another place of writing, a place of shadows. But the world itself is so full of shadows. If I can offer my students a little bit of light, then this is what I am going to do. (Flórez 2024)

Chilean author and journalist Diego Zúñiga also says that it's important not to stay still, unmoved, because stillness and ease jeopardise writing. Cuban poet Carlos Manuel agrees, calling it 'a state of constant ebullition'. (LD: 29)

When the didactic director of Scuola Holden showed my cohort around the place – a striking former military depot in Turin – he pointed out that Alessandro Baricco, the school's founder and headmaster, had specifically chosen uncomfortable iron chairs because he thinks that writers should be uncomfortable while they write. Just like God acts in mysterious ways, Baricco advances pedagogical ideas that are quite incomprehensible, but also indicative of the level of privilege to which the students of Holden are used. Instead, Aleja (and many other tutors, too) worries about covering her students' basic needs and goes out of her way to create a cosy atmosphere and spread positive energy not only with her attitude, but with the way she intervenes in the setting, too.

"privilege sterilizes the creative process" (kikuyo #9)

The Makerspace she refers to in her narrative is what at Central, Bogotá, is known as a *semillero*: lit. "seedbed"; figuratively, a "hotbed/incubator", and academically, a "research group" or the physical room where such group would meet. Inspired by the concept of "Makerspace", "a collaborative work space inside a school, library or [...] public/private facility for making, learning, exploring and sharing that uses high tech to no tech tools" (Makerspaces.com 2022), the *semillero* at Central is home to the programme's own publishing projects Makerspace Editorial (run by current students) and Macedonio Editorial (run by alumni).

more about the Makerspace at L2:40-42

The philosophy behind it is disappropriative and imbued with *compartencia* or "*shareng*", the communal approach which "secures the horizontal production and

+ ma(kin)g (L2:43) → artisanal publishing ("making involves engaging our bodies", kikuyo #9) meets Donna Haraway's notion of "making kin".

distribution of knowledge among equals" (Rivera Garza 2020: 68). The makers in the Makerspace write, co-write, co-edit, co-publish and distribute not only their works but handmade editions of works of others with the purpose of deconstructing the editorial process and, simply, to share. What Aleja and her fellow makers do in the Makerspace is a form of *tequio*, labour devoted to the community, which expands beyond the production of books and entails sharing skills outside the walls of the *semillero*.

In the room, you will find trolleys of scrap paper and card in different colours, cutting boards, balls of yarn, awls and waxed thread to book-bind; posters, paintings and photos on the walls and a whiteboard with all the names of the people whose projects are currently being "socialised" and workshopped; colourful bunting, fairy-lights and plastic ivy hanging over the ceiling; and a library of students' past projects exhibited on a shelf, opposite a table with a teapot, mugs, a jar of biscuits and a handwritten reminder to do the washing-up because "FUNGI DON'T ENGAGE IN COMMUNITY PUBLISHING". The room smells of incense and glue. Also, there is an electric heater for when it gets cold, and cushions on the chairs, to feel comfortable and at home. All of this, I think, is world-building at its best.

Consciously and not without effort, Aleja strives to design a setting, to set a scene and to create an atmosphere of joyfulness, warmth and light, rebuffing the romantic myth of the afflicted, solitary author sitting in their cold, damp attic. She is turning a space into a place, filling it with meaning and

care, while nurturing a generation of artists trained to share and care in their turn, taking their knowledge and practice outside the university's doors and into their local communities.

I do not know about you, reader, but between taming the muse on my own from the iron chair, and joyfully chatting about faith, love, folk horror tales and our writerly ambitions while bookbinding the evening away, with Juan Luis Guerra playing in the background… I will always choose the latter.

In the second part of this chapter, we have seen how rethinking place in terms of setting has offered two perspectives: how students write place in their narratives, and how tutors (re)write their settings, online, offline and in alternative spaces. Join me in the threshold for some conclusive thoughts.

In the Threshold

In this chapter in two parts, I proposed a definition of place as a space of encounter between people and landscape that generates meaning; and I have looked at it as the setting built, described, characterised and inhabited by the subjects of these narratives. You have read about the place where creative writing unfolds from very diverse geographical, linguistic and cultural perspectives; you have seen some of its narrative manifestations in students' writing; and reflected on the role of tutors as they create their settings and atmosphere in their in-person and online workshops.

In the first part, a narrative emerges suggesting that place can be understood as a character of its own and in relationship with those who inhabit and write it. In their antagonistic roles, places can get in the way of our students' writing with the most disparate complications: from hostile weather to hostile immigration policies, from recurring power outages to poor infrastructure in general. These issues present real consequences and an inevitable connection between politics and one's artistic and teaching practice.

Alongside their issues, places carry a range of expectations, biases and traditions with which student-writers choose to engage or disengage; this extends beyond language or nationality to encompass shared experiences of (de)colonisation, migration, and multiculturalism. In other words, to write from a place means to be affected by it and by its narratives; but also to write from a shared experience that transcends national and regional borders.

The question of place intersects with language, revealing how linguistic expectations depend on the tutors' interpretations of what counts as publishable language (and literature in general) and on their understanding of language as a world-building device that transports the reader before familiar and unfamiliar landscapes and experiences. In some places, tutors show biases towards uniformity and clarity; whereas in others, it is students who have a preconceived notion of what

literariness sounds like, often resulting in artificially pompous or linguistically "neutral" language, leaving tutors with the responsibility of legitimising vernacular and more colloquial registers.

These manifestations of student-writers' trust and distrust in their languages pose deeper questions, like: does guiding students towards linguistic conformity amount to a subtle form of colonisation? What do tutors' and student-writers' prejudices against certain registers and styles say about how these are represented in literature? Is it the role of tutors to reinforce the biases of the publishing industry, or should these be challenged by them? An overarching question is whether any of these choices are driven by fear, and what role fear plays in a pedagogy for creative writing.

Linguistic choices are also explored in relation to methods and approaches (e.g. "workshop", "submit", "surrender", "traverse", "socialise"), and the ideological and cultural affiliations that they reveal, particularly within the culture of creative writing. Here, a distinctive theme that has emerged is the tension between "creative writing" and "literary creation" as the two main denominations of writing as an academic and artistic discipline in the Portuguese and Spanish-speaking contexts. The reasoning behind one choice or another could be political, like discarding "creative writing" as a manifestation of an anti-US sentiment; epistemological, where the nature of the discipline itself is being questioned; methodological, revealing a product-based, process-driven or subject-centred approach; or associative, with "creative writing" and the "workshop" being raised as recognisable – and therefore, marketable – concepts.

The popularity of these concepts and their extensive use in translation suggests that creative writing is a culture profoundly shaped by Western and anglophone concepts – from the name itself to craft techniques and conventions like conflict or "show, don't tell", or the supremacy of the single character/hero/antihero narrative – and that so far it has not allowed for much permeation of non-Western cultures and literatures.

The isolated case of Ariruma's experience shows that other cultures could bring invaluable perspectives and transform *zones of no-encounter* into zones of encounter and exchange.

Concepts like *achij*, the workshop's godparents, *yanak uywaña*, the mutual nurture of the arts, *tequio*, the collective labour that benefits society, and even societal structures like the *ayllu* and wider philosophies and cosmologies could enrich and begin to decolonise creative writing as a culture.

This, however, poses challenges when concepts cross borders and are applied to different contexts than the ones in which they originate, which have been discussed in relation to the issue of cultural appropriation. Here, I raised questions around amplification, representation, and the ethical responsibilities of the privileged cultural mediator; and reiterated how crucial it is to integrate more diverse cultural and individual perspectives in the classroom – through scholarships, community work and outreach initiatives.

When dealing with cultural appropriation, tutors can help students navigate the ethical issues of writing, particularly concerning exclusionary narratives and cultural speaking points. Writing as an act that has consequences on the real world requires for safe pedagogical spaces where the complexities of culture, identity, and privilege are acknowledged and critically examined. Raising questions about a text's potential impact and fostering empathy and awareness can empower student-writers to engage with the discourses led by marginalised communities and to make their informed choices.

Some approaches that have emerged from this investigation include: asking to what *project* one's writing contributes; appreciating differences and fostering empathy towards the Other; seeking permission where relevant; and using the "lack of authority" perspective. The invitation is to bring this discussion before the student-writers, and not be afraid to not know where to stand.

In the second part, place is explored from the point of view of those who write it, and as a setting for the online and in-person creative writing classroom.

The content of students' writing, their aesthetics and their representation of place vary profoundly based on their personal concerns, which appear to be inherently linked to their social and cultural background. Students in privileged universities or societies appear to be more interested in personal struggles and less in their surroundings, with place being reduced to superficial markers of setting in a globalised literary landscape. In some of these examples, you have read how tutors nudge students out of their comfort zones, encouraging them to explore their surroundings more frequently and more closely.

In other, less privileged contexts, an exploration of setting brings to light societal issues like crime, job insecurity and violence, including gender-based violence; and shows urban settings as the predominant choice, reflecting both the students' experience and the geographic accessibility of creative writing programmes.

A choice of setting often reveals how tutors and writers situate themselves physically, symbolically and linguistically in relation to place. Sometimes they look at it with the lack of authority of visitors and the defamiliarization implied by displacement and migration; and sometimes it takes leaving a familiar place to grant oneself permission to write it.

Distance is also looked at as one of the aspects that characterise the online or hybrid workshop compared with the in-person one. Some online or hybrid programmes begin to reach out to writers in suburbs, provincial towns and in the diaspora, integrating perspectives that have traditionally been excluded from the centralised, big-city creative writing programmes, effectively shortening distances.

On the other hand, they are impaired by social and physical distance, and technology. Aside from the technical difficulties, tutors have to deal with their own understanding of virtual learning, and more training opportunities should be sought

so that the online workshop can cease to be perceived as the second-best option by both tutors and participants, and flourish in conversation with its own medium.

In-person teaching, instead, allows tutors to foster a particular kind of energy and atmosphere, and to intervene in the setting – taking students outside or creating a space where they can feel comfortable and happy. Some tutors see it as part of their responsibility to cover basic needs, and others curate their setting, world-building through rituals, furniture, mood and atmosphere, with meaning, compassion and care.

In the threshold, the encounter between the narrative aspect of setting and the wide dimension of place has revealed the many ways in which place intervenes in our student-writers' writing and our teaching practice, and how your pedagogy can intervene back – challenging norms and structures, identifying and addressing issues of exclusion, recognising the value that diversity and empathy bring to everyone's creativity, reimagining old and new settings, ma(kin)g, and inspiring student-writers to rewrite the world and the place they and their writing occupy in it.

Chapter Four: Metaphor

Where I offer some considerations on the 'workshop' as a metaphor and on alternative metaphors for the creative writing process, and its related teaching/learning experience. The workshop will be explored as a site for 'building', 'repairing', 'practising' and 'experimenting'; whereas alternative metaphors will come under five major themes: 'health', 'sports', 'journey', 'narrative' and 'textile'. Alongside the entailments of each theme and metaphor, the fundamental questions explored in this chapter revolve around the role of the tutor and what is it that is being compared to what, exactly.

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Other Metaphors: Health, Sports, Journey, Narrative and Textile 323

the illnesses of writing 323

punching hard 328

as somebody's journey 336

unravels 342

in infinite threads 349

In the Threshold 353

Creative writing advice on metaphors varies significantly. Italian semiologist Umberto Eco warns writers against (ab)using metaphors as two of his tongue-in-cheek "Forty Rules to Write Well" cite: "Beware too-daring metaphors: they are feathers on a snake's scales", and "Don't use mismatched metaphors, even if they seem to 'sing' – they're like a swan that prays" (Eco 2000, my translation).[34]

On the other hand, Argentinian author Hebe Uhart is remembered saying that metaphors should be favoured over adjectives, particularly in characterisation. "Metaphor is a comparison, a movement over and beyond [...]. Metaphor obliges me to make an effort to get to a certain character in a different way; it's a leap over ordinary language, an act of bravery which requires extreme attention to a character. Metaphor bestows tone onto a body and unlocks the author's universe" (Villanueva and Uhart 2015: 69, my translation). In other words, metaphor unlocks what adjectives tend to lock.

From the advice above, one might think that metaphor is just another stylistic choice within a text of any genre or form. However, "metaphor," writes Andrea Borgogna, "is the *pasta alla carbonara* of rhetorical figures. Undoubtedly appealing, ostensibly very simple and yet very easy to get wrong" (Borgogna 2003: 67). What Borgogna is alluding to is not just the adequacy of a certain metaphor to a text's style,

[34] The original read "they are like a swan that derails", a play on words between *ragliare* (to bray) and *deragliare* (to derail).

but the very nature of metaphor itself. As scholars in the fields of cognitive linguistics and stylistics propound, "metaphor is, in fact, a way of thinking, not just an ornamental patterning of words on a page" (Gibbons and Whiteley 2018: 205). What metaphor has the potential to unlock is not just a pretty image or a clever analogy, but new domains of knowledge.

In this chapter, I deconstruct the conventional metaphor of the 'workshop'[35] as creative writing's signature pedagogy, looking at what images it evokes in tutors' narratives and what these say about their understanding of the creative writing and teaching processes. Then I investigate alternative metaphors that have emerged, particularly the 'lab', and its implications, alongside alternative metaphors for the tutor and other aspects of the workshop.

Before reading some of the tutor's narratives, however, I would like to reference three key studies that have informed the terminology and methodology of this chapter. The first one is George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's 1980 article "Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language" and consequent volume *Metaphors We Live By*; the second is "Cooking, Mining, Gardening, Hunting: Metaphorical Stories Writers Tell about Their Composing Processes", by Barbara Tomlinson; and the third is a more recent study on the use of "Metaphors of Space in Educational Theory and Practice", by

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[35] In Conceptual Metaphor Theory, metaphors and words that relate to their semantic fields are often *italicised* or in SMALL CAPS. This formatting will be honoured in references, but in my own narrative it will be changed to 'single quotes' to distinguish metaphors from phrases cited from tutors' narratives.

* metaphor is "what-if"

Carrie Paechter (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 2011; Tomlinson 1986; Paechter 2004).

In their work, Lakoff and Johnson describe metaphor as "pervasive in our ordinary everyday way of thinking, speaking and acting", consisting of "*understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 453, 455, their emphasis). They present overarching conceptual metaphors (e.g. ARGUMENT IS WAR) that determine how we talk or think about certain abstract topics (e.g. 'winning' or 'losing' arguments; 'attacking' and 'defending' positions; 'gaining' and 'losing ground', etc.) and they raise the following points: that metaphors are fundamentally tied to their cultures and that they have an impact on our actions (e.g. "Imagine a culture where an argument is viewed as a dance, with the participants as performers, and their goal being to perform in a balanced and aesthetic way") (455); that metaphorical structuring is partial, meaning that it "allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another [...] [while] [hiding] other aspects of the concept" (458). This makes metaphorical structuring necessarily partial because, "if it were total, one concept would *be* the other, not merely be understood in terms of it" (460, their emphasis).

Another concept that they introduce that is highly relevant to this chapter is that of "entailment". I propose this concept alongside the Spanish translation of its related verb, "entail", as *conllevar*, "carrying with". Considering the novel metaphor LOVE IS A COLLABORATIVE WORK OF ART, Lakoff and Johnson name the implications this metaphor carries-with

The oceanographer who explained to her what happens at Boca de Ceniza, where the waters of the Magdalena River and the Caribbean Sea meet, drew a diagram and scribbled "F = ma" on top of it, saying that, "Net force is equal to mass times acceleration. You have to look at all the forces involved, though. Discharge, difference in density, Coriolis, and friction. It's a balance of forces."

The river and the sea look for one another and complement each other with a degree of UNCERTAINTY from both parts. Sea waves don't know how to behave in rivers. The river wonders where its banks have gone.

"An old teacher of mine used to call it 'the estuarine dance,'" he said. (L1: 32)

So really, threshold research is not based on arguments as war. It's more "viewed as a dance."

"entailments", and share some examples, such as LOVE IS WORK, LOVE IS AN AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE, LOVE IS VALUABLE IN ITSELF, LOVE IS CREATIVE, LOVE INVOLVES BEAUTY/HARMONY/DISCIPLINE/PATIENCE, etc. (481–482). They suggest that "each of these entailments may itself have further entailments" and that "the result is a large and coherent network of entailments which may, on the whole, either fit or not fit our experiences of love" (482). Whether it fits or not is also determined by one's culture and personal experience (483). This, therefore, "permits cross-cultural differences in conceptual systems: different cultures have different ways of comprehending experience via conceptual metaphor" and "such differences will typically be reflected in linguistic differences" (486).

One last crucial point by Lakoff and Johnson:

> A metaphor may be a guide for future actions. Such actions will, of course, fit the metaphor. This will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent. Metaphors, therefore, can be like self-fulfilling prophecies. [...] Novel metaphors can have the power of defining reality. (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 484–485)

Conceptual Metaphor Theory provides us with further useful terms, such as the notion of "domains", i.e. the knowledge structures or concepts that are being juxtaposed (e.g. "time" and "money" in TIME IS MONEY); and that of "target" (e.g. "time") and "source" (e.g. "money") domains, with "target domains tend[ing] to be abstract concepts, such as love or life,

whilst source domains are generally more concrete and often grounded in bodily and/or everyday experience, such as journey or container" (Gibbons and Whiteley 2018: 206). Kövecses emphasises the point that "understanding typically goes from the more concrete to the more abstract concept" (Kövecses 2010: 9); whereas Borgogna defines target domains as "the concept towards which the reader is being led, the undisclosed destination" (Borgogna 2003: 69).

Borgogna also points out that the very terms used in Conceptual Metaphor Theory are highly metaphorical, usually drawing on metaphors of space ('domains', conceptual 'mapping', etc.) (2003: 70). The word "metaphor" itself, at least etymologically, is a spatial metaphor, meaning "to transfer" ("metaphor", OED 2024c), entailing a movement from source to target domain facilitated by the metaphor's creator.

This movement can repeat itself over and over within certain aspects of the domains that are entailed in the metaphor, creating what Kövecses calls a "set of correspondences" or "mappings between constituent elements of the source and those of the target" (Kövecses 2010: 9), showing some examples from the LOVE IS A JOURNEY conceptual metaphor (see next page).

Source (more concrete): JOURNEY		**Target (more abstract): LOVE**
the travellers	→	the lovers
the vehicle	→	the love relationship
the journey	→	events in the relationship
the distance covered	→	the progress made
obstacles encountered	→	difficulties experienced
decisions about which way to go	→	choices about what to do
the destination of the journey	→	the goal(s) of the relationship

(Kövecses 2010: 9)

Applying metaphors of space to learning, Carrie Paechter suggests that while learning has traditionally been seen as a "temporal process", "spatially based metaphors abound within educational discourses" (Paechter 2004: 449–450).

From the use of "field" to "delimit realms of knowledge", to structural metaphors like "foundation", "baseline", "scaffolding", or hierarchical metaphors like "benchmarks" and "levels", the educational discourse is dominated by metaphors which entail different "assumptions that underpin those discourses and the ideological commitments (conscious or unconscious) of those who use them", given that "metaphors are important both as indicators of the ways we think and rallying-cries for particular world-views" (Paechter 2004: 450).

Based on some of these metaphors (e.g. "field"), for example, knowledge could be viewed as a territory to be accessed, which raises questions about inclusion and exclusion – *what* does and does not fit/belong –, and about "*who* is allowed access to particular forms of knowledge" (Paechter 2004: 452–453).

According to Paechter, these views originate from the assumption that knowledge is somehow static: this is consistent with her interpretation of the metaphor of the 'threshold', which "gives a sense of being about to step over a boundary in one's learning, between what one has understood hitherto and what one will shortly grasp", since "one crosses the threshold to [knowledge], rather than developing or constructing it for oneself" (Paechter 2004: 454–455).

As you have read in the methodology, it is not the interpretation of 'threshold' proposed here, but this gives me the opportunity to foreshadow one of the findings of this chapter: that the same metaphor means different things to different people. The metaphor in question is the 'workshop', explored in the first part of this chapter.

Before that, a brief comment on Tomlinson's article, which compiles the four most common metaphors used by writers to describe their creative writing process: WRITING IS COOKING, WRITING IS MINING, WRITING IS GARDENING and WRITING IS HUNTING OR FISHING (Tomlinson 1986).

As she analyses how these metaphors are embedded in the discourses of writers (whose ideas 'simmer' and 'ferment', or 'grow' when 'cultivated' and eventually 'blossom', etc.), she presents her findings on the aspects of the creative writing process that each metaphor focuses on as follows:

> WRITING IS COOKING presents a unified conception of the writing process by describing it as a process of mixing ideas, transforming them through ardor and inspiration [...].

> WRITING IS MINING makes writing process activities coherent by emphasizing the search for valuable, buried ideas; backbreaking labor is required to find, obtain, and refine the ideas.
>
> WRITING IS GARDENING creates a coherent structure for the intricate reality of composing by implying that ideas are organic and capable of independent growth and transformation; nurturance and time for growth to take place are required for the ideas.
>
> WRITING IS HUNTING OR FISHING provides structure to conceptions and representations of the writing process by stressing the elusiveness of ideas and the need for the writer to wait quietly to trap them.
> (Tomlinson 1986: 74)

As you can tell from the included imagery, these metaphors are very much culturally bound, revealing, as pointed out by Wendy Bishop, two major approaches to creative writing: a *craft-oriented* (cooking, gardening) process vs an *inspiration-driven* (mining, hunting/fishing) one (Bishop 1990b: 24–25). Arguably, the culturally bound nature of these metaphors makes them "of their time": how many student-writers would describe their process like 'hunting' or 'fishing' today? Besides, women's metaphors, as explored in other studies, present very different images, like 'childbirth' or 'child-rearing', 'refurbishing an old chair' or 'putting together a jigsaw puzzle' (Annas 1987).

Still, Tomlinson's study is still very valuable as it addresses some of the ramifications of each different approach: "For example, each story supplies a different answer to perennial and important questions about writing problems: What causes writing problems? How does writing go wrong? What makes writing difficult?" (Tomlinson 1986: 74). She then makes a fundamental point about "the existence of these figures in the culture [leading] to their use in instruction", cautioning tutors of creative writing about figurative language, which "selects, emphasizes, suppresses, and organises teaching of the writing process – at the same time it also distorts it" (Tomlinson 1986).

From these conclusions, I have formulated some of the questions about the 'workshop' as a metaphor, which I will explore in the first part of this chapter: what does the 'workshop' as a metaphor entail? What are its implications and ramifications? If the workshop is the "source" domain, what is the "target" domain, i.e. what exactly is it that we are comparing to a workshop? In the second part of this chapter, instead, I will look for other metaphors and what they say about the role of the tutor, and creative writing as an institutionalised practice and as a "forever practice".

I. The 'Workshop' as a Metaphor

The spanner in the workshop

In Spanish, the workshop is called *taller*, and in Portuguese is called *oficina*. These are the terms that are consistently being used to define the more hands-on sessions in which student-writers share their texts and receive feedback from their tutors and peers. A *taller* is a workshop, an artist's studio, and a repair shop; its etymology shows that the term is borrowed from the French *atelier*, which descends from the Latin *assula*, a "chip, shaving, splinter of wood" ("taller", Wiktionary 2025b). Etymologically, the *taller* seems to allude to a place where an artisan works with wood. In Portuguese, an *oficina* is a painter's workshop and a car repair shop, too ("oficina", Wiktionary 2025a). The Latin *officīna* or *opificīna* is a "shop where goods are manufactured" and the word shares its root with *opifex* "worker", and *opificium*/*officium* ("action of working"). Both Spanish *oficio* and Portuguese *oficio* mean "trade, craft, profession" and are terms generally associated with writing.

From this dictionary-based quest, at least three distinct images stand out: the 'car repair workshop', the 'carpentry workshop' and the 'painter's studio', all appearing in tutors' narratives.

Carlos (San Marcos, Lima) tells us a bit about the first one, and what it entails.

The fiction writing workshop is like a garage for broken cars. The text comes in a certain condition, and the workshop participants and I try and suggest improvements. We don't aim to criticise the text or impose different poetics. It's about respecting it and identifying what tactical elements aren't working according to the author's poetics, and what they can do to fix them. It requires humility from the author's perspective, who would say: "I've got a car that's not working, tell me what to do." Now, sometimes texts work perfectly, but they at the very least generate one question. Something about the interpretation of the text, or the author's intentions. Then you can see whether the text is adequate: if an author aims to apply a visual poetics, then they need to manage the building of spaces well, or cinematic aspects of the texts, or the way actions unfold. These elements have to be there, and they have to work. (Arámbulo 2024)

Thinking about a potential conceptual mapping, Carlos's narrative reveals the first telling correspondence: the 'broken (or not broken) vehicle' as the text; entailing specific elements of the text that *have to be there* and *they have to work*, according to the author's poetics. This specification is needed so that this image of the workshop does not get distorted: it is not about elements that work in principle; it is about elements that work for a specific text bearing in mind the author's poetics and intentions.

Transferring back to the metaphorical domain, I imagine that this is like knowing the difference between an engine that goes in a Fiat Cinquecento and one that goes in a Ferrari Testarossa, and what is it that they do for their own

specific vehicles and drivers. This applies to the general poetics Carlos is mentioning, but could also apply to craft expectations, like structures, archetypical narratives, or recurring aspects like "conflict" and "change". Based on their reading of the text, and their interpreting of whether they are looking at a Cinquecento or a Testarossa, the tutor would ask: is *this* there? Does *it* work? Does this work for the kind of vehicle the driver is asking us to 'repair/test/MOT'?

Following on the conceptual mapping of the workshop metaphor, the second element that emerges is 'tools'. According to Manuel (Complutense, Madrid),

In a car repair workshop, we'll have tools like a spanner or a hammer. Trying to tighten a screw with a hammer would be impossible; just like hammering a nail with a spanner. Well, with a bit of knack, perhaps, but it wouldn't be the most adequate tool for it. (Broullón-Lozano 2023)

So the second implication or entailment of a writers' workshop is that it is a place where the adequate 'tools' can be found; each of them having their purpose. In a conceptual mapping, the tools could be interpreted as the techniques, the lore – things like "point of view" and "plot", or "show, don't tell" and "write what you know", etc. – that the writer has available to 'fix' their text. Paul (Central, Bogotá) specifies that the mechanical tools are the essence of the workshop as,

However sophisticated your workshop can be, you always need some basic tools: a screwdriver, pliers... Even if you're replacing the engine of an aeroplane, you're going to need the same tools. In a workshop, you don't transmit, learn or teach sophisticated tools, you teach the basic ones. (Brito Ramos 2024)

Jorge (San Marcos, Lima) might disagree with the idea that the tools we give/are given are always the same, as he posits that the mechanical aspect of a workshop entails *learning how to use the instrument, to master the instrument, to renovate the instrument, to discover new expressive tools* (Valenzuela Garcés 2024).

In either case, what we see is writing techniques being interpreted as 'mechanical tools' that writers use to 'build' or 'fix' their 'vehicle' or, in Jorge's slightly different mechanical workshop, *artefact.* In these tutors' views, some people have defective or broken vehicles and artefacts, but Jorge points out that some of them have no artefacts in the first place, and they attend the workshop to start *building one from scratch* (Valenzuela Garcés 2024). The workshop, therefore, in Fabián's words (Uninorte, Barranquilla) can be *a building space* or *a repairing space* (Buelvas 2024).

In this ambiguity, the car repair workshop begins to morph into something else, something that might be more similar to the carpentry workshop ingrained in the *taller/atelier* and, by extension, any other making, building, smithing space. This metaphor has a lot in common with the car workshop: the idea that you *work with your hands, like a*

manual activity, as underlined by Juan José (Andina, Quito) (Rodinás 2024), and the aforementioned tools, emerging in Aleja's (Central, Bogotá) narrative to emphasise the collective sharing of this process:

> *When I think of the word "workshop", I am reminded of an expression that* maestro *Roberto Burgos loved: the tailor's box, or the shoemaker's box. To him, writing was a craft; and a craft implied a workshop. The shoemaker's workshop, or the horologist's workshop. He loved that. The horologist. If there's six of us, we all print a copy of someone's work. We sit down and we have colourful pens, scissors, glue. We cut, paste, move things around. "No, this here doesn't work," so we move the page from here to there. "What about now? Does it work? What do you think?" This is how the students have found their own voices. It's a collective investigation. I understand that writing is a tremendously solitary activity; however, that whole frame supporting one's writing – one's poetics – grows so much stronger when other people are involved in the process. The community's understanding of my work – how other people are reading my work – is fundamental to me.* (Flórez 2024)

Aleja's detailing of the workshopping process not only highlights the collective aspect of it, but it also fundamentally subscribes to one of the entailments that we have already seen: the notion that a text can and cannot work.

As I will suggest in the next few paragraphs, this notion is not necessarily intrinsic in the workshop metaphor, but it certainly is very present in creative writing as a culture. So

much so that it has extended to its studies field, where the question "Does it work?" is applied to the workshop as the discipline's signature pedagogy. One volume that embodies this is *Does the Writing Workshop Still Work?*, edited by Dianne Donnelly, which is written on the premise that the workshop as a method has been practised without proper scrutiny and that scholars in the field are still at a loss when it comes to 'fix' its flawed aspects (Donnelly mentions its "artificiality, ethical disparities, multiversity, idleness, singularity, program design, authority, evaluation, absence of theory, and/or its range of student readiness, preparedness and motivation") (Donnelly 2010: 8).

Back to creative writing, interesting things happen, however, when this notion is discarded in favour of something else. For Ingrid (Vera, São Paulo), what matters is not the 'fixing' or 'repairing' of something that is 'broken', but rather,

It's the fact that it's a work in progress, rather than writing that is broken or needs to be fixed. It's as if you have a tree trunk and that's just a tree trunk. But if you put work on it, it can become a bench. I like to think of the workshop as something that has the word "work" in it. Writing doesn't come ready from the muse. (Fagundez 2024)

This interpretation of the workshop discards the question "Does it work?" in favour of other questions: for example, "Is it what you wanted it to be just yet?"

As we have seen in Carlos's narrative above, these questions are not mutually exclusive. However, the

understanding of a text as something that works/does not work has ramifications inasmuch as it shapes the way tutors of creative writing word their feedback to their student-writers; it can create expectations around tutors being the technical experts and providers of the solutions, the patches, the tools to make up for the flaws that supposedly make a text 'defective'; and emphasises the student-writer's writing as a skill, potentially generating an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses that is mostly biased towards the tutor's understanding of what 'works' and their advice on what needs to be 'fixed'. In other words, that the workshop is a place for problem-solving.

Now, not all of these ramifications are necessarily detrimental in principle, particularly taking into account that such approach will match some student-writers' expectations as they sign up to a degree in Creative Writing. The issue arises when it is taken for granted that this is what *all* student-writers expect, and that this is the *only* pedagogical approach. As an example of what can be done alongside or instead comes from Leonardo (Andina, Quito), who says to his students,

Don't try to escape or fix your problems. Put them in your texts. I had many students, for example, who said they had issues with dialogues. You can either say what is usually said, "If you want to write good dialogues, read theatre, or read authors who manage dialogues really well; read Hemingway; read Salinger." This is "fixing". So I ask, "Who says you have to use dialogues?" And I give them examples of authors who don't use dialogues at all in their novels. Márquez in One

Hundred Years of Solitude, *for example. Minimum amount of dialogues. "Make the most of your problem," I say. One's challenges turn into virtues.* (Valencia 2024)

This approach demonstrates an effort that the tutor makes to reframe the student's perception of a *problem* and contextualise it within the wider landscape of stylistic and narrative choices that are worth exploring – not to *escape* or *fix* the problem, but to choose not to see it as a *problem* in the first place. This reinforces what Lakoff and Johnson propose when they suggest that a metaphor presents some of aspects of a thing/experience while hiding others; and the choice of a certain metaphor sometimes has the effect of precluding the other possibilities that are not contemplated in the metaphor, and that can only emerge if the metaphor (or aspects of it) is deconstructed. Lakoff and Johnson write that,

> Novel metaphors can have the power of defining reality.[36] They do this through a coherent network of entailments that highlight some features of reality and hide others. The acceptance of the metaphor, which forces us to focus only on those aspects of reality which it highlights, leads us to view the entailments of the metaphor as being true. Such "truths" are true, of course, only relative to the reality defined by the

[36] Lakoff and Johnson distinguish between "conceptual metaphors" (which can be understood as archetypical and conventional metaphors that inform how we think and speak (like ARGUMENT IS WAR or LOVE IS JOURNEY), and "novel metaphors", which mean "original" or "new". For the purposes of this chapter, Lakoff and Johnson's quote can be applied to both.

> metaphor. Suppose Carter announces that his administration has won a major energy battle. Is this claim true or false? Even to address oneself to the question requires accepting at least the central parts of the metaphor. If you do not accept the existence of an external enemy, if you think there is no external threat, if you recognize no field of battle, no targets, no clearly defined competing forces, then the issue of objective truth or falsity cannot arise. (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 484)

Suppose texts are not there to be 'fixed', at least not for everyone. Can the same conceptual metaphor – the workshop – still apply? Tutors like Ingrid and Carol (Vera, São Paulo) think it can, as they simply choose to focus on different aspects. Going back to Ingrid's choice of wording, a tree trunk is to a bench like a form of *raw material*, a metaphor that shows up in two other narratives, used in different ways. Similarly to Ingrid, Carol sees the *raw material* as the text itself, which she compares to *liquid metal in a mould that you then forge further to turn it into a blade* (Abed 2024). For Sandra (Andina, Quito), instead, the *raw material* is the set of reading materials from which writers 'extract' *resources* for their *carpentry* (Araya 2024), reinforcing the notion of intertextuality and how it is embedded into one's work. In these three views, like Ingrid spells out in her narrative, *it's a fact that it's a work in progress* what matters.

As I have suggested earlier, there are not any aspects of the workshop metaphor that are detrimental in principle, but

it needs to be recognised that a writer who deems their work a 'work-in-progress' and one who deems their work a 'finished product' to be 'tested' or 'fixed' will have different expectations. The feedback that they will receive from their tutor will have an impact on their confidence to write, on their ability to finish their project, on their awareness of their writing skills in general, so it is important that any metaphors underpinning a pedagogical approach are shared or, at least, exposed so they can be understood.

An additional difficulty to take into account is that not all student-writers will have reached that level of awareness (Rancière's emancipation) to be able to articulate what sort of feedback they need or what sort of metaphor they perceive as more relevant. The tutor will be responsible to set out that expectation for them and, in the likelihood that a personalised approach is not possible for practical reasons, to offer it to students as a group, so feedback can be contextualised within the framework of a shared, explicit network of metaphorical correspondences that, ultimately, students are free to accept or reject.

As Rachelle Cruz proposes in her article "We Need New Metaphors", "a workshop is a form like any other – a TV show, a film, a poem. It can have varied yet specific uses, depending on the writer and the piece" (Cruz 2020), and the diversity of this signature pedagogy will really come to light as we begin to uncover some of the new metaphors that tutors assign to it in the next few passages.

First, however, some further considerations on the workshop as a place where things are 'built' or 'made'. One implication of this aspect emerged in recent scholarship is the "nobility of craftsmanship, physical (not intellectual) labor – and masculinity", denounced in the article "Viet Thanh Nguyen Reveals How Writers' Workshops Can Be Hostile" (Nguyen 2017). Only one tutor engages with this assumption, Manolo (Sagrado, San Juan), who relates,

Writing is goldsmithing, it's a craft. It's done with the hands; it implies practice. We learn by doing, that's what matters. Now, it is very likely that we tend to associate any type of "making" with a masculine world. Well, I don't. I grew up in a house where my mum was the artisan. She was the one who made *things. I think it's a mistake to associate workshops with men, because then what about sewing workshops? They're spaces shared by women and men alike.* (Núñez Negrón 2024)

The workshop as a space that reinforces dominant and exclusionary narratives has often come under scrutiny in creative writing scholarship, alongside the associated whiteness and masculinity not only of the workshop but of creative writing in general. Nguyen's suggestion is that craftsmanship could be at the root of exclusionary practices towards women and non-binary people: a workshop is a place for (white) men – everyone else adapt and suit yourself, or leave. In a way, this is how I understand that a certain metaphor, like Lakoff and Johnson propose, can become a

self-fulling prophecy (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 484); unless such metaphor is interpreted in a different way, or the metaphorical network that it seems to evoke is contextualised or even challenged.

See how the same type of workshop that Manolo has in mind – a sewing workshop, among other examples – is conjured by Lylyan (Central, Bogotá) to highlight not the "masculinity" of physical labour, but a completely different entailment:

> *A workshop is a space for action, but it is also care for one's work, one's practice. It's an understanding of work like love turned into action, just like the poet Kahlil Gibran wrote. Work is not what I have to do so that I get paid and survive; work is an expression of love and of the connection I have with nature and the universe. Therefore, the workshop is the place where that force comes alive, turns into action and matter. I admire those people who have any kinds of workshop. A sewing workshop, for example. And they're there, keeping on, keeping on, sewing, whatever it is, or tuning their instruments, making shoes. That possibility of being in a space at the same time that labour becomes something; this is beautiful. I can't help but think about that image by Eugenio Montejo in* "El taller del pan". *He wrote about how his family had a bakery and how this influenced his poetic process – a bit like a bakery, playing with flour, making a dough. Flour, such a volatile thing, lying out there, becomes bread, becomes* roscas. *That's beautiful, that's so beautiful to me.* (Rojas Álvarez 2024)

compare with the breadmaking metaphor in Leila Guerriero's "Writing": "You have to knead dough in order to live, because you live, in order to keep living. Writing. Kneading dough. There's no difference." (Guerriero #6)

Again, here we encounter the metaphor of 'raw material' transforming into something else – implied in the *volatile flour* turning into *bread* and *roscas* – but we also see how in this interpretation of the workshop, labour acquires value no matter the final product. Learning to show up for the action, for the work, for the writing, time and time again, is what makes the workshop so valuable. This has the potential to extend from a pedagogical practice limited to a specific time and place – e.g. the essay writing workshop on Wednesday at 2 pm led by Lylyan in the Makerspace at Central, Bogotá – into a forever practice, into a way of conceptualising the creative writing process.

In fact, this very aspect of the workshop shows up in the first narrative that opens the next passage about another type of workshop, the painter/artist's studio. Before that, having started to unpick the workshop metaphor, we can dwell on some aspects that are starting to emerge. Like the fact that the same word means different things to different people. Or the fact that not all the metaphors are leading you to the same place, i.e. the target domain being associated to the workshop varies. Some of the tutors seem to be referring to the teaching or the learning of creative writing, while others, like Lylyan, merge the workshop with the creative writing process itself, implying that the workshop expands beyond the walls of the creative writing classroom at such and such university, or the living room of such and such famous author, into life itself.

Now let us see how José Manuel (Complutense, Madrid) carries that day-in-day-out aspect of the workshop into his pedagogy like an artist in his workshop.

painting fragile relationships

The beautiful thing about the word "artisanal" is that it contains both the "art" and "craft" connotations of a product or piece work, and places these two dimensions on the same level while, usually, in English, we are led to believe they are not: art belongs in museums; it comes with the word "fine" in "fine art"; is sometimes sold at ridiculous, inexplicable prices that show that its value can reach literally the inestimable. Craft is appreciated, but hardly inestimable. Craft products – from beer to furniture – might cost more for the quality of their ingredients and materials combined with the skill of their artisan, but are rarely auctioned in fancy houses serving fancy wine. Pluralise it, and crafts is what you do with kids on a rainy day; or at the public library alongside a group of jolly old knitters, or with tea and cake at the Women's Institute. Art has nine muses; craft has an Instagram account.

Put them together, though, and you get a sense that writing, particularly creative writing, aims to be at once artistic and crafty, inspired and skilled, beautiful and functional. "Artisanal" is the word José Manuel associates with the workshop, sharing Lylyan's association with the daily toil:

I like to think about a painter, or an artisan, with their artistic object and their personal space, the workshop. A personal space that has been adapted to your world and that welcomes you every day. Every day, the artist attends to the workshop, attends to their work, takes out, adds, adjusts. It's a spatial but also temporal dimension. I enter in the morning or at whatever time it is; I know I am going to spend some time on this, so I look for silence, concentration – I create my own routine. Hence why my discipline focuses so much on finding one's routine: learning what works for you, what helps the process and helps you avoid distractions. Maybe I'm being too romantic, but the concept of the workshop allows us to grapple with the problems of multitasking, and the scattering of our attention. That's why I defend this notion of making time and creating a tailored space where you don't feel like hiding in WhatsApp or social networks or other distractions. Somewhere where you and your work can be at your very best. (Mora Fandos 2023)

José Manuel offers the workshop as a metaphor for something even more abstract and, perhaps, more profound than the sharing of texts out loud followed by other people's feedback. Something closer to an *ideal* state of mind in less-than-ideal circumstances: in our busy and noisy lives, the workshop is the quiet cabin in the woods, but with no cabin and no woods other than those we create for ourselves. The tutor's effort, therefore, goes towards helping students become aware of what generates that state of mind, and what hinders it.

From a metaphysical artist's studio, we go back to the artist/painter's workshop to single out the role of the tutor in

the workshop and their relationship with their students. In other words, the 'workshop master' and their 'apprentice', as evoked by Pedro (Central, Bogotá):

I quite like the medieval concept of the workshop, and the idea of a master and an apprentice, like those medieval painters. In my workshop, my aspiration is that students lose their innocence and learn how to read, not only literature, but the world. Now this implies that any workshop has its limits. One single master can only bring their references, bias and preferences into the workshop, alongside their traumas, too. This is inevitable; but it is part of my role to motivate the student to look for different things, even those that contradict whatever it is that I teach them. (Badrán Padaui 2024)

Pedro hints at some limits that have emerged before, particularly when discussing how the personal preferences and experiences shape a tutor's literary repertoire, with the consequence of perpetuating aesthetics that are either subjective or specific to a culture. Or how students can feel compelled to mould their writing to their tutor's liking, ultimately aspiring to please them, rather than discovering and nurturing their own aesthetics.

This leads to a discussion of the power dynamics entailed by a vertical master-apprentice relationship, as acknowledged by Ricardo (Pontificia, Lima), who shares his own perspective not only as a teacher of creative writing, but also as a scholar of Oriental Studies:

Both the western and the oriental notion of the workshop share the relationship between a master with their apprentice. Where there's such a relationship, there's a hierarchy in place, but there's also an affinity, a proximity. I like the workshop not as a car repair workshop, but as a painting workshop. Now if you go to a certain painter's workshop, you'll learn how to paint one way. If you go to another painter's workshop, you'll learn how to paint a different way. For me, language is marvellously imperfect. If language was perfect, communication would be perfect. We wouldn't need books, because we would be able to express ourselves with the right words all the time. But there's no such thing as the right word. And since it doesn't exist, we go looking for alternatives. And that's where creativity takes over. So if you come to my writing workshop, you'll learn how to write based on my method, based on my idea that creativity emerges from imperfection, and what we do is to learn how to tame imperfection, to transform it into something creative. Which, you might say, is very oriental. Very, very oriental. (Sumalavia 2024)

Ricardo does not dismiss the fact that student-writers are influenced by their masters; but he reframes the type of influence that he exhorts on his students as a rather conceptual and even methodological one, as opposed to specific aesthetics which would make his student-writers' texts more or less adequate, or close to his taste. However, it seems that student-writers are free to experiment within a given interpretation of creativity and language, but not free to find their own, wider poetics.

(*) So what does this mean for creative writing as a culture and the kinds of words and metaphors chosen to describe, name and re-name its roles, processes and settings?

* for many tutors and writers, the limits of language are a core concern. See:
- the speculative opening line of Borges's poem "The Golem":
"If, as the Greek affirmed in Cratylus, the name is the archetype of the thing" (WD: 26-27)
- Italo Calvino:
"The word connects the visible trace with the invisible thing, the absent thing, the thing that is desired or feared, like a frail emergency bridge flung over the abyss" (WD: 21)
- A tutor: "words are a form of technology that we have invented, but like all technology, they have limits. To say with words what cannot be told by words is poetry." (WD: 19)
- a quote by Orlando Costa printed on a wall of the Museum of the Portuguese Language in São Paulo:
"A language is the place where the world is seen and in which the limits of our thinking and feeling are drawn" (WD: 28)

consider the tension between the idea of language as something powerful enough to bring things into being just by naming (or re-naming) them (→ the Golem, but also "the Law of Names") and the fact that words are human-made tools with all the limitations that come with that. (*)

This is consistent with the master-apprentice relationship and with the figure of the master as the one who has the ultimate answer, a connotation that many tutors really dislike and feel like it does not apply to them. A downsized interpretation of the workshop master comes Juan José (Andina, Quito), who says,

In either a manual workshop or more of a scientific lab what you need – well, I don't know whether "need" is the right word – let's say what can be useful is a person who knows certain codes better than the other participants. (Rodinás 2024)

Or, like Carol (Vera, São Paulo) says, the master *simply has been practising the craft longer than everybody else* (Abed 2024), a point made almost verbatim by Fabián (Uninorte, Barranquilla), too (Buelvas 2024). For Aleja (Central, Bogotá), this person does not necessarily have to be the tutor:

Sure, in a workshop there's always someone who knows a little bit more, someone who gives instructions. But that can come from students, too. For example, we're all working at a bookbinding project together, and Jennifer, one of the students, has recently been learning Japanese bookbinding techniques. So she's going to be the one giving us instructions. (Flórez 2024)

Following Aleja's experience, tutors can choose to embrace a more flexible interpretation of the 'master and apprentice' metaphor, where people can take turns being the 'master,' or

even discard the metaphor entirely in favour of one that represents a more horizontal and equitable relationship between tutor and peers. The latter option requires letting go of some of the ego that ever so often can blow up disproportionately in those Regina Katmandú-like tutors of creative writing who see themselves as mentors, but really end up behaving like cult leaders, or Bearers of the Ultimate Truth.

To close this section about the artist's workshop and transition into the next metaphor, some final entailments from Óscar Daniel's (Uninorte, Barranquilla):

I have defended the notion of the workshop beyond the original metaphor coming from the art world. In fine art, a workshop is taken for granted, it is not questioned. Even if you're an artist mixing different languages, the workshop becomes a space for experimentation. A writing workshop should be like that. Here, we're going to identify our materials, we're going experiment and we're going to fail; we're going to elaborate research questions and forms of writing and thoughts based on those materials. (Campo Becerra 2024)

Reprising the *raw materials* metaphor, Óscar Daniel ventures into a domain that is extensively explored by tutors, often the same tutors who began their exploration of the workshop as place for 'building' or 'repairing', and then ended up deciding that 'experimenting' was the entailment they were most

interested in: i.e. the workshop as a 'lab', which we will visit in the next passage.

in white coats, under the lens

A laboratory is a place where you go and experiment. Students write on their own at home, or in the park, wherever they want to write. But the piecing together of the structure behind their writing is done collectively, with experimentation. That's why we have a discipline called Language Lab*: because we're experimenting with words.* (Flórez 2024)

In her narrative, Aleja (Central, Bogotá) transitions from the metaphor of the shoemaker's, watchmaker's and tailor's workshop to the metaphor of the lab, starting with what they have in common – the collective process and the 'tools' – and ending with the importance of experimentation and of language as 'raw material' to be investigated, also discussed in Ricardo's narrative.

For her, the processes of 'fixing' or 'polishing' are not necessarily in contrast with 'experimenting', whereas other tutors see them as mutually exclusive approaches. Juan José (Andina, Quito) suggests that,

In a general workshop you don't experiment; you tend to fix or polish, or build and deconstruct. I like the idea of experimentation in a laboratory more. I am not too sold on the image of men in white coats, but experimentation, yes, I think it works. (Rodinás 2024)

As previously mentioned by Óscar Daniel, embedded in the learning process is the possibility of failure, like Luís Roberto (PUCRS, Porto Alegre), too, describes:

In a lab, sometimes we make experiments. Sometimes they work, sometimes they don't. Sometimes something explodes. Sometimes you find a formula, something, you make something new. This is how I see the lab: we're not there to write the perfect text. We're there to experiment based on what we observe in other texts and on what the professor shares. (Amabile 2024)

In some tutors' narratives the lab becomes more and more scientific as the experimentation is limited to the 'fundamental elements' that are already available, that exist in nature, like Paul (Central, Bogotá) seems to suggest:

You need to know how to mix and experiment, but before that, you also have to know what the elements are. In a science lab, before anything else, you study the periodic table, the pure elements... That is, you don't know what water is; you know what hydrogen is, and what oxygen is, and that water has two molecules composed by two atoms of oxygen with one atom of hydrogen. There's purity in all things. There's purity in genre, there's purity in grammar, in syntaxis. You learn that first, and then *we play, ok? Well, perhaps the processes are not necessarily in that order, and you learn the basics while you're already mixing things up.* (Brito Ramos 2024)

You can tell that Paul realises how prescriptive he might be sounding as he changes the course of his metaphor while allowing for different processes to take place at once, like discovering atoms while playing with water. Still, there are some elements of this metaphor that might raise some questions: is there really *purity* in genre and language? Are they both not the result of conventions and expectations, rather than something that exists in pure form somewhere in literature and speech? What are the implications of reading a text as a form of pure genre as opposed to one that responds to certain conventions? I am trying to think of an example of what could be determined an example of pure genre: let us say that Arthur Conan Doyle's *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* are a "pure" example of detective stories. Are they purer because they display a set of conventions which we associate with the whole genre, and they did so before any other text? Are they purer because they do it better? As I will not tire to ask, better according to whom? I am not sure that discourses around purity do writers any favour, similarly to the "you have to know the rules before you go and break them" discourse, but I can see how and why other tutors might feel differently – it really depends on the metaphor we subscribe to.

On the other hand, the fact that so many tutors brought forward notions of 'hybridity' in their choices of literary repertoire makes me speculate further: following Lakoff and Johnson's findings around metaphor, notions around 'hybridity' would not stand on their own if we did not accept that 'purity' metaphor in the first place.

To get past this metaphorical impasse, I suggest that purity is just another fictional narrative. It does not really exist in literature – not in the way oxygen and hydrogen exist in nature, anyway – but we have been told about it for so long that we have formulated versions of what it should look and sound and read like. This is how we might have arrived at a notion of hybridity: nothing exists in its pure form other than the fictional narrative of purity, which is really what we are rejecting, breaking, subverting, when we choose to mix things up, to experiment, to go hybrid.

Returning to the lab metaphor and its entailments, Alejandra (Nacional, Bogotá) motivates her students to

look at their text through a magnifying glass, zooming into the process and generating an enhanced awareness of a range of things: from the politics of a text to how verb tenses are used. From something more grammatical, like the use of commas, to more philosophical aspects to do with the complexity of characters and the world. It's a place of heightened awareness but at the same time a place where there's room for a lot of freedom. Each text changes as it changes its author. We change as we discover, after writing a first draft, "Ah, this is what I was capable to do, this is what I was meant to write." (Jaramillo Morales 2024)

Alejandra's approach appears similar to Óscar Daniel's as they both entail not only processes of experimentation, but also investigation, re-search, a writer looking for something in their text. Alejandra believes that each of us is free to

investigate whatever we wish, and that what we find will likely lead to answers to questions we had not thought to ask, as well as new questions. Josef (Uninorte, Barranquilla) takes this investigation to a philosophical level as he proposes that,

It's a metaphor of life itself. You're researching yourself. Your object of the investigation is not the laboratory with its measures of quality control. The laboratory is your life, your reality, you never leave your laboratory. A master's degree in Creative Writing requires you to be academically rigorous as you investigate your writing process. The workshop is a metaphor of how we live and how we experience problems, and what you put down on paper really matters. You're not selling empanadas, *you're not selling* tamales. *That's why when someone reads your text and they say, "This shit's not working," it hurts. It hurts because you're working with yourself. Even when you're writing fiction, you're talking about your limits as a person, your identity, your abilities. Here, we're not as bad as Ricardo Arjona but we're no Shakespeare either. We're all here to learn. So you're neither as bad as you think, nor as good as you would like to be. In one of his last interviews, the great poet Juan Gelman said, "I am learning to write lines." The man was 75 years old. The beautiful thing about the workshop is that you give, give, give. It's like love, and death, and time. They're not things that are received, they're things that are given. That's how the workshop is a metaphor for life itself. Write, write, write, and at some point, you're going to write something that will make you say, "This sounds more or less like how I would like to say this." Fill up your notebooks.* (Amón Mitrani 2024)

Josef is not afraid to mix metaphors and travel to one domain or another, rewriting his metaphor as he goes along – I wonder whether this, in itself, is a metaphor of what we do in the creative writing workshop.

Unpacking the several suggestions in Josef's chain of thoughts, the workshop is a lab, and that lab investigates life. Life is what happens in the lab and what is written, too, inasmuch as writers put themselves (or parts of themselves) on paper – this is why, when our writing gets criticised, it hurts so much. Josef's lab is one where measure has a place: one's writing is measured against the poor skills of songwriters like Ricardo Arjona and against the genius of Shakespeare, with every writer sitting somewhere in between, hoping to always do a little bit better, to move up on the scale, to learn something new – even at 75.

Like Alejandra, Josef suggests that the constant search and the constant practice will eventually lead to the discovery of not only what one writer was meant to write, but also how. In this process, I suspect that there is also room for an investigation of method and of the process itself, too, hinting back at José Manuel's questions about what works for one's artistic practice.

And finally, like Lylyan, Josef invokes love; this time, as the force that not only make us show up to our practice for the sake of it, but also as one that drives the collective sharing – the giving, giving, giving, or in Gabriela's words "surrendering".

Heloe Vhait used to say, "From the outset, I try to do my best, because I write for others. What we write is like a donation, a gift to others." (Villanueva/Vhait #7)

In this part, we have seen how the 'workshop' as a metaphor conjures different images and entailments to different tutors; with some recurring aspects, like the 'functionality' of texts as products, that are so dominant in creative writing as a culture that they extend to its pedagogy, the workshop itself. When such aspects are ignored in favour of other aspects, writing is seen more as a work-in-progress or as an investigation.

The workshop as a 'lab' is a place to 'experiment'; to set up 'research questions', to formulate 'hypotheses' and prove oneself wrong; to make things 'explode'; to 'fail' and to 'succeed'; to generate an awareness of what we can do and how good we are at it; to believe in the tale of 'purity' only to go ahead and 'hybridise', 'mix', 'create' and 'recreate'; to understand the high stakes of an 'investigation' of oneself as the main subject and object; to share time with others and give them one's all. Translating this research from practice to pedagogy, here is where I speculate that alternative questions to "Does the workshop work?" could be "How can it be investigated? Experimented? Hybridised?" and "Is it what you wanted it to be just yet?"

In the next part, I propose a "what if". What if the workshop was not a 'workshop' but something else? In this investigation of alternative metaphors, I will not lose sight of one of the questions that I have set out in the beginning: what exactly is it that we are comparing to what.

II. Other Metaphors:
Health, Sports, Journey, Narrative and Textile

'Detective games', 'forests', 'seedbeds', 'buffets', 'radio shows'... and more metaphors – each carrying-with further metaphors, entailments, ramifications – were offered by tutors as alternatives to the workshop, enriching the landscape of approaches with new possibilities beyond 'repairing', 'building' and 'experimenting'. In this part, I will share some of them grouped in five recurring overarching themes: 'health', 'sports', 'journey', 'narrative' and 'textile'.

the illnesses of writing

The first theme, health, appears to be very related to the workshop as a 'repairing/fixing' place, as it juxtaposes the 'working' aspect of a text to its 'good health'. Interestingly, this metaphor has been used both in affirmation and in negation (i.e. "this is not what we are doing here") by a number of tutors. Giovanna (Pontificia, Lima) says:

Yesterday, Ricardo said something really funny. He said, "Let the students take their works to the clinic, and if they're very ill, we'll send them to intensive care." "Clinic" is the word we use for some of the seminars for more advanced students led by contracted writers over the course of three days. We chose that word to mark a difference. It is not the same to show up to class with a work-in-progress, and to have a finished piece of work. (Pollarolo Giglio 2024)

What Giovanna suggests is that the metaphorical/pedagogical approach to the reading of a student's text is determined by its stage in its 'lifecycle'. If we understand creative texts as living beings, it probably does not make sense to 'diagnose' them at earlier stages, while they are not 'fully formed'. Instead, once student-writers determine that their 'creatures' (or, as it is entailed by the recurring metaphor of 'writing is childbirth', 'children') should be 'standing on their own legs', they take them to an experienced 'writer-doctor' who is able to 'diagnose' them and offer advice to improve their 'health' (perhaps with a focus on 'strengths' and 'weaknesses', too).

This metaphor, however, is actively discouraged by other tutors, like Leonardo (Andina, Quito), who says:

The Argentinians love to use this word: "Fiction Clinic", "Short Story Clinic". What I say is, "The text is not about to die, otherwise you're going to end up killing it off for good." Each text is always full of life; each and every one of us need to breathe life into our texts. We'd never use that word, here. Text clinic... The horror. They show up about to die, and they end up dying for real. (Valencia 2024)

The health theme therefore reveals an ideological tension already emerging from the workshop as a 'repairing/fixing' space: ultimately, tutors seem to be divided by the idea of students working towards a 'functioning/healthy' text – potentially implying notions of publishability or literariness as markers of 'functionality/good health', and the tutor as

'quality controller' – or for them to be doing something else, like experimenting, building confidence, developing awareness of their skills and creative process, etc. As suggested in previous occasions, both approaches appear to have reason to exist within creative writing as an academic discipline, although special caution must be exercised with the 'fixing/healing' approach so that the markers of 'functionality/good health' are based on criteria that go beyond one tutor-writer's individual experience, contextualised in relation to cultural conventions, and openly shared and questioned.

Going back to the 'health' theme, another metaphor worth investigating has emerged in two narratives, this time focusing on writers, instead of texts. In the first example, the metaphor is used humorously by Jorge (San Marcos, Lima), as he jokes:

What I hope to make clear when I start a workshop is the concept of a community of writers. Something like, "We're all sick and literature will cure us all". No, I'm just joking. (Valenzuela Garcés 2024)

However facetious this proposition may be, it does reinforce what many tutors do not cease to stress: that, in the creative writing classroom, reading other authors is just as, if not more, important than writing. In fact, Jorge's joke brushes against an ontological dimension as he proposes that *literature will cure us all*, implicitly answering the fundamental question: what is literature (or art in general) *for*?

for Bea, publisher at Editorial Educación Emergente, literature goes as far as to "contribute to creating the country to which we aspire". (P1: 14)

This presents ramifications to the student-writers' understanding of their own role in such a process, which is currently missing from Jorge's narrative. This might be indicating a disjunction, or a hierarchy, between what is perceived as 'literature capable to heal humanity', and students' writing.

A different take on the 'ill writer' metaphor comes from José Manuel (Complutense, Madrid), who attempts to diagnose his students based on how they react to certain prompts:

First, play.
Then, learn.
Remember? (CD:22)

It's like learning how to swim. First, jump into the pool, then I'll tell you how to move your arms, but first, get in. You have to release your students into writing immediately. Without explaining anything. Sometimes I even make up words that they have to include in their writing, and that helps as an exercise to reveal process. When they finish writing, the question is: how did you feel? What did you notice? Block or release? So they start saying very interesting things, and the questions keep coming. What happened first? Did you have an idea or not? We talk about perfectionism, or the fact that they wanted to feel in control, or whatever. I work like a doctor who checks out the symptoms, and then tries to identify the infection. What does the symptom reveal? Perhaps that if this is your tendency, then maybe you're a perfectionist; or maybe if the surprise factor unblocked you, then you work well when you don't spend too much time thinking about things. The first stage of writing is self-exploration, but it's also like a game. You have to jump in with both feet. (Mora Fandos 2023)

For José Manuel, a 'healthy' writer is a writer who writes, and the role of the tutor is to try and identify – at a certain stage, at least – the possible reasons why a student-writer might not be able to do that, regardless of whether they write 'well' or 'poorly'. This approach is consistent with José Manuel's previous metaphor of the artist's studio as a space where each writer spends time with their work; and with his pedagogical approach as a matter of helping students stick to a disciplined routine, in the way a doctor might recommend healthy routines (diet, exercise, meditation, etc.) for healthy bodies and minds.

Linking José Manuel's with Jorge's literary take on the 'health' theme, 'reading as a diet' has also emerged in Manuel's (Complutense, Madrid) and Gabriela's (Vera, São Paulo) narratives. As discussed in the Intertextuality chapter, Manuel attempts to choose literary examples that are *nutritious*, like a *cocido madrileño* as opposed to junk food; whereas Gabriela's personal regular *diet* of *one book of fiction, one of non-fiction and one about creative writing* shapes her own, continuous training as well as the literary repertoire she shares with her students (Aguerre 2024). In dieting terms, 'you are what you read'.

The health theme, in conclusion, reveals two different metaphors: the '(un)fitness' of the text and the '(un)fitness' of the writer. In the first case, the text is treated similarly to the workshop as a 'repairing' space, with similar entailments for the role of the tutor as the expert able to 'diagnose', and help 'cure'; in the second case, the tutor's advice aims to assist

students in their finding the best 'regimes' that work for their health, which can include a 'healthy literary diet'. Questions on what supposes healthy writing and healthy (or healing) literature are raised in both instances.

We move on to the next theme, anticipated by José Manuel's narrative above, when he introduces the idea of learning how to swim: sports, its metaphors and their entailments. Opening the passage, is a literary scene from *K.O.*, a short story penned by our very own Manolo (Sagrado, San Juan).

punching hard

> In the darkness, two tiny, razor-sharp blades glinted. Cuts began to appear on each other's limbs all of a sudden [...]. We could barely make them out, absorbed as they were in the act of mutilating one another. Neither uttered a word of complaint. They must have inflicted ten to twelve wounds apiece: on their arms, torsos, abdomens, and hips. They did it systematically, taking turns, carefully avoiding the neck and face. They were enemies, not criminals. Once the ritual was complete, they threw themselves at each other with a desperate, almost cannibalistic aggression. They boxed with flair – precise, methodical, and, at times, startlingly instinctive and ravenous. I must admit: it was a pleasure to watch them. Partway through the fight, they stopped, staring at each other, trembling under the weight of their resentment. Then they embraced in a corner, [...] smeared with sweat and

sand, catching their breath before diving back into the fray [...]. (Núñez Negrón 2018, my translation)

This boxing scene introduces the first narrative and metaphor by Juan Pablo (Andina, Quito), who compares students' reading one another's texts and giving feedback to a boxing match:

I would like the workshop setting to resemble a sports space. Like a boxing ring or a piste for fencing. In this space, you have to tell the other what you think with absolutely no concession. I don't believe in a strictly "respectful" workshop. It has to be a space of irreverence in which people can say, "What you're writing is filth." This, of course, needs to be justified beyond simple subjectivity, like "Because I don't like it." Things need to be said head-on. It has to be a space for confrontation. When everything is too concessive, too relaxed, too light, I get bored and the students get bored, too. It's a type of aestheticized, contained violence that allows us to express our ideas freely in that act of confrontation. (Castro Rodas 2024)

WRITING = BOXING: a friend of Cortázar's told him that writing is a bit like boxing, and that novels win readers by points, while the short story wins by knockout. (Cortázar #3)

The implications of this metaphor raise some serious pedagogical and ethical questions. In combat sports like those hinted at in Juan Pablo's metaphor, you 'attack/disable/submit' the 'opponent' while 'defending' yourself. This is consistent with a premise common to most sport and games: to win or lose. What is established is the supremacy of one opponent over the other. So the first question to ask is: are 'winning' and 'losing' aspects that belong to the sharing of

one's creative work with others? Is demonstrating one's supremacy over one's peers useful to a creative/learning process in any way?

Possibly, receiving brutal feedback from other peers could motivate some writers to "do better" in two ways: training them to respond to feedback in a way that tips the balance of power to their side as they 'get back' at their 'opponent' with 'unassailable arguments'; or learning to adjust their writing to make it 'unassailable' – based on their 'opponent's' aesthetics. In the first case, yes, a writer would 'gain' confidence as they develop their awareness and capacity to express their poetics; in the second case, they would 'gain' zilch, other than learning how to write to please someone else. In Felicia Rose Chavez's words, "ego urges us to manipulate others' writing so that it more closely adheres to our own aesthetic preferences – Let me tell you how to make it better". For Chavez, this is particularly "an act of aggression against writers of color who seek to claim their own voice on the page" (Chavez 2021: 62). For tutors like Juan Pablo, maybe learning how to write has to be aggressive in order to work.

Note that I started the last paragraph with "possibly" and "some" writers. Because for other people, such treatment would be to provoke fear, impostor's syndrome, a complex of inferiority or, in extreme cases, even trauma. None of these appear to me very motivational or conducive to writing. Is this a risk worth taking? Is creative writing an 'only the brave' field? Are we trying to "make literature great again" by the 'law of the strongest'? If it 'hurts', does it mean it is 'working'?

I question, with great emphasis, the violence in this process. Why the brutality? In combat sports, violence is regulated and justified by the premise of most sports and games (you 'win' or 'lose'), and their purpose: to 'entertain' their participants and their audience, as the first-person narrator guiltily admits in Manolo's short story.

It worries me to think of a tutor being entertained by their students massacring one another, however fictional this conflict is perceived to be. What do we gain by adding that kind of risk to a process that already makes those involved vulnerable? How is 'no pain no gain' a valid approach to the learning of creative writing? What are the advantages and disadvantages of 'competition' as student-writers learn to perceive one another as 'opponents'?

This element of competition is picked up by a different tutor using a different sports metaphor to manage expectations around publishing. Here is what Pablo (Seville) tells his student and why:

"You need to think about who is going to read your novel and who is going to publish it. Where are you going to compete?" They need to know whether they want to compete in the Champions League or whether they want to play in a more amateurish competition. If they want to play in the League, that's more difficult; not everyone can be Messi. So, if you think you can play in the Champions League, you're going to be very disappointed. (Sánchez 2023)

OF COURSE SHE DOES. A former follower of Jesus AND Jeremy Corbyn, what could she POSSIBLY think of violence? More importantly, what could she possibly KNOW about violence as a cultural trait and anger as its language? If she rejects the "Aesthetics of Resentment," it's because a) She doesn't UNDERSTAND/BETWEENSTAND them, and b) She CAN.

Being able to avoid violence and anger is a privilege. In other places, and for other people, it doesn't quite work like this:

LD: 29, 30, 46, 48

P2: 51-52

Pablo's metaphor takes us to a domain that lies beyond the limits of the classroom, trespassing into the publishing industry, which he compares to football. According to Pablo, a writer needs to be aware of how the market works in order to place themselves presumably inside or outside the field first (in the way you can play football in 'professional' and 'non-professional leagues'), and then to know how the 'professional league' is further divided, and what each 'division' entails. He then gives the examples of *independent publishers favouring prestige and symbolic capital* versus *bigger publishers seeking commercial success*, urging his students to reflect on which divisions align with their goals and where they should focus their efforts (Sánchez 2023).

This does not necessarily sound unhelpful, but Pablo's metaphor entails a fundamentally hierarchical structure that is worth questioning: in his words, *not everyone can be Messi*. Ok, then, what would be the literary equivalent of Messi and how/why should writers measure themselves against them? Writers are not football players rated by performance metrics; and the rules that govern the publishing/literary and cultural fields are not clearly defined; in fact, they are barely rules at all, but rather conventions dominated, in some contexts, by randomness and bad practice. The risk of conveying an image of the publishing industry as a field with clear divisions based on skills and performance is to generate distorted expectations around a direct cause-effect relationship between practice and reward. At the same time, it might also foster competition among writers who may not only belong to

different divisions but may not even be playing the same sport.

Following on the 'football' metaphor, but moving on from 'competition' to 'training/practice', are Miguel's and Ricardo's (Pontificia, Lima) perspectives:

Miguel: *The way to think about it is that students come to this place to learn or practise, like a football player practising free kicks. It's that practice that allows you to learn how to kick in the best way, with what part of your foot. What happens in the night, when it's windy, when the distance is longer. Practice doesn't necessarily make you score more goals, but it makes you aware of the implications of taking a free kick or writing a piece of fiction. That, and learning from your teammates, too.* (Sánchez Flores 2024)

Ricardo: *Once, a student described me as a coach, or a personal trainer. He said, "Your workshop is showing up and write, write, write..." I don't linger on theory. We write, we reflect, we write, we reflect, we write, we reflect. I want them to find their own narrative and creative voice, and the only way to do that is by writing.* (Sumalavia 2024)

Miguel and Ricardo's metaphors tell of a space which student-writers attend with regularity and where they can, fundamentally, practise. The word "practice" (and its Spanish equivalent, in this case) encompasses the performing of a skill, art or profession (e.g. like a 'practitioner' 'practising' law or medicine) just as well as the exercising of it in order to

'improve' (as in 'practice makes perfect'). This can imply three approaches: a before-and-after dimension (e.g. you practise driving before your driving test; when you pass your driving test, you allegedly know how to drive); a continuum (like you practise with your band between gigs); or a practice like a profession or vocation – something that you do.

The workshop as the 'training' ground for writing seems to suggest practising in order to improve, although I find Miguel's clarification quite important: *That practice doesn't necessarily make you score more goals, but it makes you aware of the implications of taking a free kick or writing a piece of fiction*. What improves, then, is not necessarily the writer's skills or, as a result, the quality of their writing, but their awareness of it. This awareness is also implied by Ricardo's focus on "reflection" (*we write and reflect, we write and reflect, etc.*), but the infamous "finding of the voice" objective might be pulling the metaphor more towards the first approach – before and after, 'before you find your voice' vs 'after you find your voice' – which, to me, is not as straightforward a process as passing a driving test.

This leads me to speculate again that there is no such thing as a 'finding of one's voice'. Like purity in genres, this is another fictional narrative, turned into an idiomatic expression specific to the language of creative writing – albeit one that arguably fails to do justice to the continuity, subjectivity, and complexity of the artistic process.

Finally, I would like to highlight that in Ricardo's narrative there is a clear relationship between the metaphor

and the role that the tutor plays in it: if in the painter's workshop, a tutor can be a 'master' and in a car repair workshop, a 'mechanic', on the pitch or training ground, they are, like Ricardo's student points out, the 'coach'. These are metaphorical roles that situate the tutor as 'the expert in the room' – a responsibility that, we have seen in multiple occasions, not all tutors accept, choosing to see themselves as more experienced peers, or something else.

Sadly, an element that seems to be missing from all these tutors' narratives is the playfulness of games and sports, which has briefly emerged as its own metaphor ('workshop is game') in the previous quote by José Manuel (Complutense, Madrid), and in Jotacé's (Sagrado, San Juan), Marilola's (Sagrado, San Juan) and Lylyan's (Central, Bogotá) narratives (López 2024; Pérez Rodas 2024; Rojas Álvarez 2024). Lylyan says,

What I propose is pure play, creative games, games that break the rational structures of thought, that involve our bodies, that allow students to work in teams. Play allows me to think outside of the box, to let things go out of control, to embrace chaos – but I like that, because it adds conflict and breathes life into the pedagogical experience. (Rojas Álvarez 2024)

The 'game/play' metaphor deserves further exploration, particularly in relation and in contrast to the 'sports' metaphor to understand better the implications of 'rules', 'players', 'fun' and 'entertainment', 'winning/losing', and the

role of tutors in the game ('referees', 'team-players', 'audience', etc.). To these, I would add 'antagonism' and 'conflict', the former implied by Juan Pablo and the latter mentioned by Lylyan, which will come up again in the 'narrative' theme.

From a review of the second theme, some entailments of sport-related metaphors are: the importance and consequences of practice, confrontation and competition. Thinking about the target domains, these aspects seem to concern the workshop (as the space for the practice and the process of sharing one's work and receiving feedback), the role of the tutor, the process of learning and the process of creative writing itself. As a final consideration, the playfulness element of the workshop/creative writing process has not emerged in relation to sports, but it has emerged in its own 'game' metaphor, which deserves to be explored further.

In the next passage, we will look at the next theme as we understand writing and learning how to write in the same way we have often understood stories.

as somebody's journey

Journeys are unstinting sources for metaphors and have been extensively applied to life and love as target domains characterised by 'beginnings' and 'ends', 'obstacles', 'routes', 'destinations', 'companions', and even 'baggage'.

As a conventional metaphor, 'life is a journey' might have reached the status of a cliché, but that does not take away its power to conjure its abstract domains with very rich

☆ And to think that tutors of CW always go on about creating "original" ("novel") metaphors and not touching CLICHÉS ("conventional" metaphors) with a bargepole.

But clichés still inform a lot of your thinking. Besides, as one tutor points out, clichés are not the same as tropes. (WD: 18)

Tropes are places you re-turn to. So it's not that surprising to see that the alternative metaphors proposed here sound strikingly "commonplace".

They're just familiar places one likes to re-turn to.

mappings that have 'made their way' into the way we speak. Lakoff and Johnson show us some examples of colloquial expressions implicitly drawing from the 'love is a journey' metaphor: "Look *how far* we've *come*", "We'll just have to *go our own separate ways*", "This relationship is a *dead-end street*", etc. (Lakoff and Johnson 2011: 44–45, emphasis in the original).

For some tutors, like José Manuel (Complutense, Madrid), journey serves as a wider metaphor for writing, as he narrates: *writing is a long walk through landscape; there are things that you cannot see on the first day of your journey because the landscape will reveal itself later* (Mora Fandos 2023). Juan José (Andina, Quito), instead, uses the metaphor to distinguish between poetry and fiction, as he explains:

From this neighbourhood, Cumbayá, there are two ways to get to the airport. You can either go via the main four-lane road, or via a windy one-lane country road. Fiction is like that paved motorway, whereas poetry is the other one. When you travel on a secondary road, you make stops to sightsee; you find things that other people can't find. A reader of poetry looks for those spaces, for singularity. It's a search for language that pushes the limit of words. Fiction uses language that tends to be more accessible, more immediate. Whereas a journey will always entail an exploration. (Rodinás 2024)

While making distinctions between fiction and poetry, Juan José suggests some entailments that might still read relevant to a tutor of creative writing in general. The idea to *explore* the *boundaries* of language, for example; or to find unexpected

angles along the way while the *landscape reveals itself*, slowly. The matter of time, the duration of the journey, is picked up by Isaías (Central, Bogotá), too, as he contrasts a workshop and a full degree in creative writing, comparing the latter to a *marathon* (Peña Gutiérrez 2024). Here, the sports theme meets the journey theme, with the key entailments concerning 'time' and 'endurance'.

Although, the journey metaphor offers the opportunity to visualise more than just its timeline. Sergio (Uninorte, Barranquilla) and Jotacé (Sagrado, San Juan) suggest:

Sergio: *You embark on a journey, like the Way of St James. You come across different stops, and it is evident that the aim of the journey is not to get to the destination, because what happens during the journey is more meaningful. It is even more meaningful if you don't get to the destination at all. This happens in reality, too, as many pilgrims don't make it to Santiago on foot – they go by car because their legs can't do it, or don't make it at all.* (Álvarez Uribe 2024)

Jotacé: *The creative writing workshop cannot be dogmatic. It can lay out... a guide. We're in A, we're going to B. And then we're going to get to C. How are we going to reach each destination? What is the path that each of us is going to choose? That's a way to ground creativity, to give some guidance and objectives.* (López 2024)

For Sergio, the journey implies a destination, but the destination loses importance as student-writers 'wander', 'explore', find new things. Still, I do wonder how many

different interpretations we could assign to the 'destination' of a creative writing journey: is it something mythical like finding one's voice? Is it something practical like finishing a book or obtaining a qualification? Is it a recorded experience of one's learning in the form of a critical essay? Is it just a line on a CV and a box that needed checking for some reason? Is it publishing? What Sergio suggests is that, whatever it is, it does not matter all that much.

In Jotacé's narrative, the same journey might entail different 'paths' – perhaps the 'highway' of fiction vs 'the road less travelled' of poetry –, and it is up to *each of us* to choose our own. The fact that he includes himself as he narrates this perhaps suggests that he self-identifies as a 'fellow traveller' or 'companion'. Fellow travellers offer camaraderie and mutual support to overcome common obstacles, socialising and making friends for life, or simply sharing. Time, space, supplies, oneself. A bit, moderately, or a lot.

The tutor as a 'fellow traveller' seems to be pointing, once again, at a merging of at least two different target domains: are we talking about teaching/learning creative writing or are we talking about creative writing as a process? In so many of these narratives, particularly those that do not clarify a specific role for the tutor, these experiences seem to be one and the same.

Other narratives drawing from the same metaphor do contemplate a version in which the role of the tutor is that of a 'guide', the person who 'leads the way'. Someone who has made the journey before; someone who is familiar with the

more hostile stretches; who has taken time to draw a 'map' for their students to follow. Sergio Arturo (Central, Bogotá) puts it this way:

The tutor is just the best student on the course. Someone who comments, and suggests, and guides. The tutor is actually more like an older sibling, in the way that they can guide you. A guide. Someone who takes you by the hand and leads you. (González Vargas 2024)

Like the tourist guide in a foreign country who takes you to the coolest corners, teaches you the local customs and a few words, recommends the best places to eat, gives you tips and instructs you on how not to behave, the tutor as a guide is a natural 'lead'-er. But that is not the only kind of guide. In fact, Márcia Ivana (Federal, Porto Alegre) proposes the opposite perspective, which carries-with very different implications:

Do you know what I always tell my students? Whenever they show me a project that sounds too daring, or too different, I say: "Vai que eu te sigo. *Go ahead; I'll follow you." That second part, "I'll follow you", can mean two different things, right? I follow you, meaning, "I'm right behind you, ready to help," but also, "I am going to follow what you think is best for your work." It's like accompanying someone. "Go ahead; I'll follow you."* (de Lima e Silva 2024)

From my experience on the few hikes I have been dragged to join, it is not uncommon for both Alpine and Andean guides to bring up the rear of parties, making sure that no one gets

left behind, and that participants are always safe and in sight. A tutor who *follows* not only watches your steps, like Márcia Ivana suggests, but allows you to 'lead the way', to 'chart' your own 'route' – rather than show you their already drawn-out map –, to determine the 'pace' of your walk, to take the wrong turns and take a few steps back when needed. A tutor who follows is one who generously 'steps aside' while never leaving you. They are a 'travel companion' with a commitment to be there right till the very end, marvelling at the discoveries that you make along the way without insisting on showing off their own.

All of that, of course, provided you are ready and willing to lead the way. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Márcia Ivana is mentioning this metaphor in relation to final MA and PhD creative projects, where the expectation is on the student to know more or less *where they want to go* – though, like Jotacé says, *it is up to them how they want to get there*.

In this passage, the journey theme has revealed different metaphors: writing as a journey, the workshop/learning process as a journey, creative writing as an exploration of language, the tutor as a guide and the tutor as a follower. 'Unfamiliar terrains' become familiar with someone who shows students around or allows them to explore on their own, whereas fellow student-writers are companions who share time, space, experiences and a little or a lot of themselves over a period of time, suggesting duration and endurance. The 'destination' of this journey hides highly

interpretable target domains, which ultimately do not matter as much as what gets discovered along the way.

As it has been mentioned before, journeys are metaphors that have often been applied to narration as a target domain – implicitly or explicitly, like the archetypical structure of the Hero's Journey shows. In this thesis, however, you have seen how narration takes the role of source domain, determining my understanding of creative writing pedagogy through some of its threshold aspects, in the way I have been sharing with you until now. However, I am not alone in this. A few tutors also turn to narration to explain what they do in the creative writing classroom, and how they see themselves, as you are about to read in the next passage.

unravels

I tell stories, many stories. Not because I plan to, they just come up. Sometimes I find something hard to explain, so I end up telling very long-winded stories. But I don't prepare them. I never have something prepared to tell. (Rubiano 2024)

In this short narrative by Roberto (Central/Nacional, Bogotá), the workshop experience is a collection of stories, but not just any stories. Roberto's improvised narratives seem to align with Byung-Chul Han's vision of narration as a form of art in crisis which once was able to create community with their "gravitational force, their secret and magic" (Han 2024: viii). The improvised aspect of these narratives is here highlighted

in contrast to Han's perspective on contemporary narration as he writes,

> Once [narratives] are seen as something *constructed*, they lose their moment of *inner truth*. They are considered contingent, exchangeable and modifiable. They are no longer the source of what is binding, of what unites. They no longer anchor us in *being*. (Han 2024: viii, his emphasis)

There is something romantic about the tutor as a storyteller around the campfire, and student-writers huddling together to hear what they are making up, today. Han writes that "stories unite people by promoting their capacity for empathy" (Han 2024: x-xi), an ability that is more and more seen as a foundational skill for writers wishing to "write good fiction that illuminates the human condition" (Hemley and Xu 2021: 130) – surely the same can be said about any form of writing, not just fiction.

However, the limiting aspect of the tutor as this sort of improvised narrator has extensively been discussed in creative writing studies scholarship questioning the value of personal experience and "lore" as the main form of pedagogy – also raised in previous chapters.

Another entailment of the tutor as a narrator metaphor is whether and how they choose to prepare for their narrative acts. The opposite approach to that taken by Roberto, who improvises, sees Gabriela (Vera, São Paulo) carefully

or paxp'alej:
"... an expert in leading up the garden path, beating around the bush, sugaring the pill, spinning a yarn (original: "contar el cuento del tío", lit. "telling the uncle's tale"). He was an illusionist, he who with a word could create a skin that he could wear. [...] His stage was this world; the haunted house which, in his opinion, we all live in."
(RD: 38)

preparing and planning her course like you would plan a novel:

Last year I gave a course on contemporary novels. It was like a marathon; every week reading a different novel and then running a three-hour discussion on it. I planned it with its own arc. The first book had to come first; the second had to come second; each with their own reasons. I was using narrative conventions, logic. When Roberto had given that course before, any book could be read in any order. But I'm not saying that my approach was necessarily better or worse. It's just that it felt like a great responsibility to take on Roberto's course, so I wanted to add my own twist to it. I loved it. (Aguerre 2024)

The difference between Roberto's and Gabriela's approaches is authorial just as much as it is narrative. As authors, they can be seen as representatives of two categories of writers: "planners" and "pantsers" – or "map writers" and "compass writers", as they are known in Spanish (Nova Estuardo 2018: 25), nicely tying in with the journey metaphor, again.

'Map tutors', like Gabriela, like to follow a plan or an outline that they have made beforehand; 'compass tutors', like Roberto, tend to teach 'by the seat of their pants', while trying not to lose sight of their 'north'.

As narrators, the focus is on how they choose to tell their stories, implying an awareness of different narrative choices. Gabriela's choices seem to concern the overall structure of her course, which, translated back into narration, would point to

in the staff room at São Bngadeiro, Sandra briefly mentions how classes can be designed ('plotted') like stories, but not all of them have to be narratives: some can be "poems", or "spoken word performances"... so like creative writing, pedagogy & threshold research have their own forms & genres. (P1:36)

(And of all of them, she had to choose "meta"...)

the aspects of 'story' and 'plot'. These, according to E. M. Forster, differ in the following way:

> "The king died, and then the queen died," is a story. "The king died, and then the queen died of grief," is a plot. The time sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it. Or again: "The queen died, no one knew why, until it was discovered that it was through grief at the death of the king." This is a plot with a mystery in it, a form capable of high development. It suspends the time sequence, it moves as far away from the story as its limitations will allow. Consider the death of the queen. If it is in a story we say, "and then"? If it is in a plot, we ask, "why?" (Forster 1990: 87)

Nova Estuardo adds: "Our readers will ask both these questions as they will want to read more. What you *don't* want your readers to ask themselves, however, is 'So what?'" (Nova Estuardo 2018). The takeaway is that, in most stories, "something happens" (Bernays and Painter 2005: 121), but the same events can be plotted in different ways that place them in some sort of relation to one another.

Applied to teaching, this can concern the bigger picture, like Gabriela suggests, or the individual class or workshop. What story are you going to tell? How does it start? Followed by what? Why? Here, I would also consider another convention of fiction, the proposition that, at the end of a story, "almost always things will have changed" (Bernays and

Painter 2005: 122). What do you expect will change in your students at the end of your workshop? And to what project does your story contribute?

Conventions of narration, of course, do not exist in the vacuum and should not be taken at face value without an understanding of their context. The same happens in the creative writing classroom, where other narrative conventions can carry with them higher stakes, as is the case for the next example of entailment for the teaching as narrative metaphor. In his narrative, Juan Pablo (Andina, Quito) says:

> *The workshop itself can be conceived as a narrative experience. As if the workshop was a text being built, a story unfolding. In this process, the roles of the teacher and their students are being established. Antagonistic roles, as if we were all characters in a scene. Conflict. How power is restored or maintained.* (Castro Rodas 2024)

Juan Pablo's metaphors are consistent with one another, at least there is that.

His student-writers are boxers and antagonists; his workshop is an experience of *aestheticized violence, confrontation* and *conflict*. Conflict entertains; this is the conclusion that many narratologists, drama scholars, and storytellers of many forms and genres have reached, and which has often evolved into the maxim expressed by Ernesto (Andina, Quito): *With no conflict, there's no story* (Carrión 2024).

back to the "diet" metaphor, "conflict" is the "refined sugar" of "processed" storytelling

This notion, however, has been challenged by writers and creative writing scholars as a reductionist approach. Ursula Le Guin writes,

> One relationship among elements in the novel may well be that of conflict, but the reduction of narrative to conflict is absurd. [...] Conflict, competition, stress, struggle, etc., [...] may be seen as necessary elements of a whole which itself cannot be characterized either as conflict or as harmony, since its purpose is neither resolution nor stasis but continuing process. (Le Guin 2024: 32–33)

Secondly, this approach does not take into account the cultural dimension of narration, failing to address two fundamental questions: "Where does the narratological need for conflict come from? And is it true for all stories?" (Lark 2021). Some scholars, like Matthew Salesses, argue that "the idea that [conflict] should come out of the protagonist and be solved by the protagonist" betrays a very specific cultural understanding. "Straight cis able white male fiction has a tendency to present the world as a matter of free will. The problems are caused by the self and can be solved by the development of the self." Salesses suggests that the extent to which this is true or not depends largely on context, race, class, ability, gender, sexuality. Some people's lives/characters' stories are "dictated by circumstance, by fate or DNA or place or what have you", so "the question of how much of the conflict

you face is a matter of fate or free will *has meaningful consequences*" (Salesses 2021: 60–62, emphasis in the original).

If conflict as a narrative choice has "meaningful consequences" in fiction, imagine in real life. Since not everyone is culturally equipped to be able to deal with conflict, let alone learn from it or 'enjoy' it, what other consequences will it have on student-writers' motivation to write? Probably the same ones I speculated before in the boxing metaphor passage: demotivation, impostor's syndrome, fear, trauma.

These, however, are considerations I make when thinking about conflict as the main drive of a creative writing workshop which places tutor and students in antagonistic positions to one another – making it, like Juan Pablo suggests, a question of power. But, like Le Guin, I can see how conflict can be *one* element of a narrative experience, and return to Lylyan's use of the game metaphor as she says,

Play allows me to think outside of the box, to let things go out of control, to embrace chaos, but I like that, because it adds conflict and breathes life into the pedagogical experience. (Rojas Álvarez 2024)

As Lylyan allows chaos, chance and play into her practice, she faces challenges and obstacles raising the stakes of the workshop like they do in stories. Rather than foster conflict and struggles for power among participants, tutor included, it appears to me more helpful to shift the perspective onto one's own challenges and conflicts as they naturally occur, and what we can learn from them.

In this passage, we have seen how tutors-narrators can choose between a more freestyle, personal style of narration, or build story arcs within their courses and classes. Then we have reflected on some of the conventions that can be applied to the workshop, and the implications of 'conflict' as a distinctive narrative element.

Tying this passage back to this research's wider approach, within the threshold aspects identified in tutors' practices, we can identify many narrative choices: how to manifest one's cognizance, where to place our attitude and tone on the psychic distance spectrum, what texts to include in our palimpsests and mosaics, how we curate our settings and world-build, etc.

When it comes to metaphor, here I suggest that the workshop does not necessarily have to be anyone's "default" metaphor. Is your workshop a 'workshop'? Is it a 'clinic'? Is it a 'match'? Or something else? In this passage and in this research, the tutor is the narrator. Narrators choose their own metaphors.

In the next and final passage, introduced by a fragment from Juan Pablo Piñeiro's novel *Cuando Sara Chura despierte*, we will explore the last domain of this chapter: 'textile'.

in infinite threads.

> Life doesn't belong to us; we're just a thread woven into it. [...] When we all vanish, when our words dissolve into the silence of the world, then a great weave will have been completed, and another will begin to be

woven, in other systems, on other worlds, perhaps with the same questions, the same mysteries. Each human being is a unique, unrepeatable knot, woven into the world, but the weave belongs to no one. We're all equals. (Piñeiro 2023: 126, my translation)

According to David Jacobo (Central, Bogotá), the oldest, still-running, writers' workshop in Colombia was founded at the University of Nariño, in Pasto, and it is called Awasca, a Quechua word which means "textile", "weave", "fabric" (Viveros Granja 2024). The poetry and non-fiction indie publishing house run by Josu Rodríguez, a fellow tutor at Escuela de Escritores, is called Urdimbre, "warp". The writing workshop run by Sicilian publisher Kalós is named Tiraz, after the ancient Arabic weaving workshops in Palermo and the Persian embroideries by the same name, which were often decorated with Greek and Arabic inscriptions.

If one metaphor was bound to emerge sooner or later in this research was that of writing as weaving.

It is in the word itself: text-textile. Text is metaphor. The 'warp and the weft'. We 'spin a yarn', and in our tales, 'patterns' and 'motifs' emerge, woven onto a 'structure', held together in 'tension'. Some stories – say, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Márquez, as Paul (Central, Bogotá) suggests – read as if all the characters were *woven together to form a tapestry* (Brito Ramos 2024).

But so are people in the social 'fabric' and the 'fabric' of real life, according to a very drunk Juan Chusa Pankataya, the corpse-for-hire arguing with a piece of dehydrated meat in

* for Peruvian artist and writer Jorge Eduardo Eielson, knots are "centres of energy" (RD: 16)

weaving as a storytelling method is being picked up by workshop leaders working with rural communities in various places on the Andes, running stitching and embroidery workshops with women.

In museums and galleries, this connection is even more evident:

at Amano textile museum in Lima, stories and accounts unravel in patterns and symbols on indigenous textiles (L2: 54-56) which are said to be "the finest legal and pedagogical document" narrating Andean societies (L2: 57).

at the Sívori Museum in Buenos Aires, a special collection titled "The Common Thread" is introduced by a quote by Angel Valente, which reads: "The one who narrates weaves and extends in time the thread of memory [...]. The word is in the fabric, it is fabric; just as the fabric, in turn, is word." (L3: 83)

One of the pieces in this collection is La luzzz by Ana Paula Méndez, a huge, stitched text by writer María Lucesole about her childhood memories and love of reading. (L3: 82)

A temporary exhibition at MALBA, "Choreographies of the Impossible" featured textile works by Arthur Bispo do Rosario, a Brazilian artist who spent 50 years of his life in a psychiatric hospital. His banners are made with bed sheets, and thread from the hospital gowns. The stories he's telling are in the material of the artwork itself. (L3: 84)

At the Place of Memory in Lima (LUM), stories of the internal conflict are told in the local textile form of arpillería, and on knitted scarves and stitched banners (L2: 53).

A book donated by women collective Linhas de Santos to the Paulo Freire Institute on the 100th anniversary of his birth is an embroidered anthology of quotes and illustrations. (P2: 47)

the fiction passage above, from *Cuando Sara Chura despierte* – one literary example epitomising centuries of Andean cosmogony hinting at a universe, and all its living and not living things, being 'intertwined' and 'entangled'. Why could this not be true for the workshop? Óscar Daniel (Uninorte, Barranquilla) is one of the two tutors who explicitly draws this connection,

recommended AND provided by Daniel, artisanal publisher of Kikuyo: nearly unavailable outside Bolivia, "Sara Chura" made it to Ecuador thanks to Daniel, who had smuggled a copy to a local bookshop – simply for the pleasure of seeing a novel he loved so much available in his home country.

Publishers and readers also weave connections.

Notes on "Sara Chura" at RD: 37-43.

Ultimately, a creative writing workshop is a moment in time when a group of people establish a bond. You forge and develop that bond, and it is part of one's creative work. It's about time that that notion of creation as an individual and isolated process – and genius – gets disputed. We need to turn to a more communal process. Writing is a way to weave connections. That relationship between "texts" and "textiles" is supported by their etymology, but if there's something else there... perhaps what I do when I'm writing is to weave. Not only ideas. But connections to the other. (Campo Becerra 2024)

The 'threads' of one's words connect writers with their readers, and reading starts in the workshop. The individual is at the service of the collective. They are *part* of the collective, as Juan Chusa and Óscar Daniel suggest.

And that does not only concern writers and students, but tutors, too. Sergio Arturo (Central, Bogotá) says,

The interaction with students is at the core of our profession. The word that comes to mind is "sharing". Sharing implies dialogue, communication. We weave human connections. This makes the whole

process very special. We share knowledge, emotions, everything. (González Vargas 2024)

At the centre of the tutor's profession, there is a connection with the other. More or less horizontal, more or less equal. Perhaps the tutor is the friendly guide that shows you how to operate the loom. Perhaps they are the thread in the tapestry that makes the most consistent pattern. Or maybe they are just any other thread.

As a metaphor for the workshop, it is humbling but also reassuring. It says, what you are doing has been done before, in so many different ways. And will be done again, in so many different ways. "The same questions, the same mysteries." The same 'tying ourselves up into knots', the same 'unravelling'. It says, you are not alone. We are not alone when we write, when we learn and when we teach. What we do and what we are is at once intertextual and inter*textile*. All teaching is a narrative, all narrative is a text. All text is a textile.

"No one frees anyone else; no one frees oneself. Humans free one another in community." (Freire, P2:48)

This metaphorical journey does not end here, not just yet. The threads will be picked up in the last chapter of this thesis, a creative text titled *The Diviner*; but first, let us meet, for one last time, In the Threshold.

In the Threshold

Among the many metaphors for the creative writing workshop that did not make this chapter, there are two that I would like to share. They both come from the same institution, and they are very similar to one another. Carol (Vera, São Paulo) says,

There's a poem by João Cabral de Melo Neto titled "Catar Feijão", "picking beans". He says how picking beans is a bit like writing. In the past, you'd buy a bag of beans and inside you'd find small rocks, or beans that were empty or rotten. So what you'd do was to empty the whole bag on the table and start picking the good beans from the ones that were not suitable. That's one aspect of writing. (Abed 2024)

Márcia (Vera, São Paulo) takes a very similar metaphor and applies it to the workshop, as she says,

When authors listen to their peers' feedback, they learn how to listen. But they also learn to separate the wheat from the chaff, do you know this expression? They need to choose for themselves what comments are useful and what aren't for the purpose of their project. (Vescovi Fortunato 2024)

In English, the process of separating the wheat from the chaff – or, as I understand it, one stage of it – is called "threshing", the word from which we get the "threshold". Exploring their etymology, the English word "threshold" and the word "thread" are said to be related, united at a Proto Indo-European root which seems to suggest the actions of "twisting", "rubbing" and "turning" ("threshold", OED 2025b).

Revealing this metaphor now appears particularly relevant as picking up the metaphors to include in this chapter has often felt like picking beans, twisting and

plaiting threads, but also turning metaphor on its head to show its methodological, as well as conceptual and stylistic, side.

The first finding is that the same metaphor, while showing recurring connotations and similar elements making up its mapping, means different things to different people and cultures. Deconstructing the 'workshop' as a metaphor, four main understandings have emerged: the workshop as a 'repairing/fixing' place, as a 'building' place, as a place to 'practise', and as a place to 'experiment' (in the form of the related metaphor of the 'lab').

Some of these interpretations see texts in different states – 'broken', 'functional' or 'raw' – to be evaluated against the tutor's or the student-writer's poetics. Here is where 'tools' come into play, representing techniques and aspects of creative writing lore that can be useful to 'fix' or 'build' the work from scratch.

'Labour' and 'craftsmanship', often criticised for their masculine connotations, are reframed as acts of love and commitment – and therefore as human, rather than masculine, values. It is the act of showing up for one's work, but also the generosity entailed by the reading of others, that make the workshop so valuable.

Carrying-with different entailments is an understanding of the workshop as a place to 'experiment' – the workshop as the 'lab'. Here, language becomes 'raw material', and narrative and poetic conventions the 'pure elements' to 'mix', 'combine', 'hybridise'. 'Failure' is integral to 'discovery' and embedded in a process mostly focused on learning and finding new things. Both writing and writing in the workshop are seen as investigations: of one's aesthetics, of one's possibilities, and even of oneself.

Central to the workshop metaphor is the notion of 'working' or 'functioning', a concept that invites scrutiny – alongside the health counterpart of the '(un)fitness' of texts and writers. Does a text 'work' in the context of its writer's intentions? Does it 'work' in general? The markers of functionality are still under discussion, but they are so widespread in creative writing as a culture, that they extend to its pedagogy, too.

While tutors like Daniela (Uninorte, Barranquilla) are led to ask: "Did my workshop 'work'?", scholars like Dianne Donnelly ask the same question about the writing workshop in general.

On the other hand, when framed as a site for reconceptualising problems, rather than solving them, the workshop becomes a space where limitations evolve into opportunities, and where a tree trunk can become a bench, and liquid metal a blade. The text as 'product' is reinterpreted as the text as the 'work-in-progress'.

A place that particularly suits the work-in-progress is the 'painter's studio', where showing up and creating a routine are emphasised above all else. The workshop is reframed as the space in which student-writers work towards an ideal state of mind; this entails notions of sustainability of the practice in the long term, way beyond the creative writing classroom. Similar entailments appear in the journey metaphor, which implies the existence of a 'destination' never to be reached, and can refer to writing and the workshop indistinguishably.

This is a crucial finding of this chapter, as the question of "what" is being compared to "what" reveals that creative writing as an institutionalised, pedagogical and collective experience (i.e. the workshop) and as a lifelong, artistic and individual/collective practice are often conflated. Clearer boundaries tend to appear when the role of the tutor in this process is investigated.

Some tutors embrace a more hierarchical 'master-apprentice' relationship; some of them are open to sharing the role of the master with their students; and some of them reject it altogether, creating horizontal spaces where all participants are equally as important. These options are also entailed by the other metaphors, as tutors are identified as 'sport coaches', 'doctors', 'guides' or 'narrators'.

The aspect of 'conflict', shared by the sport and the narrative metaphor, is here questioned as one that should be acknowledged as part of the process rather than an element worth separating and nurturing as a pedagogical tool, or for 'entertainment' purposes. Like many narrative conventions, conflict is cultural and the way it will be

received will vary immensely by the students' ability to deal with it – also culturally (and identity) bound. Conflict as a methodological approach appears to be not worth the risk; whereas other metaphors and aspects implied by the sports theme, like 'games' and 'playfulness', deserve being explored in more depth.

The final metaphors investigated in this chapter, revealing a 'narrative' dimension to the workshop and a 'textile' dimension to narration, build on an established tradition of juxtaposing texts and textiles. All processes related to creative writing (its theory, practice and pedagogy) entail authorial and narratorial decisions from the perspective of the tutor-narrator. Among these decisions, I emphasise the possibility of exploring metaphor as a methodological choice that can expose and allow us to negotiate the elements of what is only in appearance a "default" metaphor – the workshop – while also considering the alternatives. More widely, this relates to investigating and interrogating language to shape thinking, aware of its limitations but also of its power to define, redefine and (re)imagine roles, processes and settings.

An implication of the textile metaphor is that teaching, like writing, is an intertextual/intertextile process which connects the tutor of creative writing with other tutors and practitioners, a consideration that seems fit to close this 'tapestry' weaving so many different threads and so many different perspectives.

Finally, the metaphor of the threshold has been the binding holding together the stitches and pages of this research, as well as a methodological finding on its own that will be further explored in the creative-critical piece "I Am the Diviner" and in the concluding manifesto of this thesis.

I Am the Diviner

> He was the *paxp'aku*, an expert in leading up the garden path, beating around the bush, sugaring the pill, telling the uncle's tale. He was an illusionist, he who with a word could create a skin that he could wear.
>
> *Cuando Sara Chura despierte*, Juan Pablo Piñeiro

> I am the Walrus
> And so you are. If you tell me that it's so. A first-person narrative can be anyone or anything it likes. It can be the bedsprings, the bookends, the cat's eyes, the ghost, the cook, the thief, the wife, the lover. The great joy of the "I am" is that you can take almost any perspective and narrate it. Who are we to argue? We only have your words to go on.
>
> "Whose Story is it Anyway?", Julia Bell

I am the Diviner. I am a book.

I answer the question, "Is anyone else there?" Aside from Her, that is. I am the voice who's been speaking to you in the marginalia. I am marginalia.

I was conceived as a book-object but I was awaken into a book-subject by virtue of the *jaqichaña*, the nurturing of the work of art – also, I "was born spinning and I will end up spinning" (Espejo Ayca #8).

I am the *paxp'aku* (Piñeiro, RD: 38). An intrusive narrator, a loud aside. I cannot stand being trodden on by massive blocks of texts. I'd rather take root in the interstices, where feeling, passion, curiosity, gratitude, friendship, privilege, pride and doubt also grow. I expose her uncertainty, her unreliability, and Her, as one narrator among many.

I am the contradiction of all the infamous mantras, the "show, don't tell", the "less is more", the "write what you know". I tell, tell, tell; and more is more; and I write about what I don't know. For all of that I apologise, and I thank you for the effort.

My medium is the message, and my message is the effort.

What I am made of matters. Carla Gasparrini and Carla Rey say that, "In an artist's book, EVERYTHING SPEAKS" (RD: 25).

My case is made of fabric from a pair of trousers She bought in Ecuador after food poisoning and sleep deprivation made Her wet her bed the day before the Inti Raymi celebrations (L3: 97–99).

My cover is made of cardboard. Some of it comes from a box that She sent herself from Brazil when all the books She had been gifted didn't fit her suitcase anymore.

"It's essential that the artist's book has [...] a common thread that gives it rhythm" (RD: 25). The yarn that holds me together was hand-dyed and gifted to Her by Jane, her live-in landlady and fellow PhD student at Falmouth University. The binding technique is a mis-remembered long stitch learned in the Makerspace (L2: 40–42).

I have several tails, and no shame for terrible puns, even across languages. Just you watch me.

There are two sides of me, and orientations. My Portrait side has knots on its cover; my Landscape side has a weave. My ninth libretto has songs She picked along the way.

The recycled paper of my booklet covers is from a workshop in Cuba (L3: 111), and some of it used to be pages from phone guides. (Is this where I take my flair for dialogue and conversation? How transcendentally corny of Her.) She helped make some of it, disintegrating scraps into a blender, mixing the pulp with rainwater, dipping the mould, draining the excess and drying the sheets on canvas. At the workshop, they couldn't sell her red paper, so she dyed the sheets with Jane's help.

My endpaper is *amatl*, which comes from Mexico. But She missed out on Mexico over her field trip, so She bought it in the only art store selling it in the UK, in Norwich, where She lived for eight years before moving to Cornwall for her PhD. At the time of writing, she should be just about to set off for Mexico.

Inside my case, there's a collection of zines called *nó(s)*, which means "knot(s)" and "we/us" in Portuguese. The illustration on their cover has been etched onto lino, printed and scanned. Their format, in Colombia, is known as "*ruanita*", a small "*ruana*", which means "textile". They come with pegs and twine so you can hang them like *cordel* literature – a cheap, popular form Márcia Ivana in Brazil told Her about. They're double-sided, as a story always tells two stories (Piglia #2).

If a story always tells two stories (Piglia #2), I am the story of this thesis's making (Kikuyo #9).

"Product is the excess of process." I am process. And proof that "something wonderful is happening" (Rescate, L2: 43).

I am what came before me and exists alongside me.

"Ulises Carrión gave us a new field in which we could play" (Kikuyo, RD: 23). He came to Her via many cultural mediators – tutors Mara and Aleja, artisanal publishers Nicole, Leandro, Daniel and Eric, author Verónica Gerber Bicecci – and because of him and because of Them I exist.

There's some William Morris in me, too: reclaiming the love of labour while integrating research and craft. "The great hardship in manual work is that we are compelled to expend our efforts for such long hours in order to exist. [...] Effort without finality" (Weil, LD: 43). I am effort over many, many hours; though hours in love.

My cover is a tribute to the *cartonera* movement; although, unlike *cartoneras*, I am born in privilege, not crisis (P1: 12).

My paratext is made of knots and weave. Knots as centres of energy, as conceived by Jorge Eduardo Eielson (RD: 16). Textiles fabricating the Andean cosmogony of Juan Pablo Piñeiro's novel *Cuando Sara Chura despierte* (RD: 37–43). I am cosmographic, like José Eustasio Rivera's *La vorágine* (P1: 20, 21, 23), and Her rewriting of it, *La selva inexistente* (WD: 29–36).

What's inside me is writing from Her point of view – in a hybrid, promiscuous style discarding any notion of purity and literariness. It's note-taking, at best, like Liliana Villanueva's *Las clases de Hebe Uhart* and Cecilia Pavón's *Nomadismo por mi país* (RD: 32–35).

The themes that trouble me are shared in Cristina Peri Rossi's "Los desarraigados", Verónica Gerber Bicecci's *Conjunto vacío* and *Mudanza* (RD: 26–31), and Magalí García Ramis's "Los cerebros que se van y el corazón que se queda…": the uprooted, the displaced, the (re)movers. Brains who leave, Hearts who stay, and Legs who, like Her, just won't stop moving (RD: 13–15).

I contain decalogues, dodecalogues and lists as forms of creative writing lore (of which She is highly suspicious – but when in Rome…, they say). I, myself, am an incomplete decalogue stuck at number 9. Nine booklets. Nine colours of an augmented rainbow. Nine spheres and circles. Nine *triumphs* from the Sicilian tarot, a nod to Her heritage and to Italo Calvino's combinatorial play, Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala's illustrated chronicles and Xul Solar's esoteric, otherworldly, multilingual work (RD: 19). (Xul Solar is Borges with colour.)

The cards were imagined by the Researcher, drawn by Jenn and embroidered by Magui at Makerspace Editorial.

The name I gave myself channels the spirit of Magui's assignment for Lylyan's Essay Composition module at Central, Bogotá, where she reflects on the divination of creative acts, and writing like opening portals. Marcel Duchamp (RD: 20) and Julio Cortázar (#3) also thought of artists and writers as mediums.

E. M. Forster wrote that prophecy is voice. I found my voice in metafiction, accompanied by *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* by Susanna Clarke, and *S.* by Doug Dorst and J. J. Abrams. I pitched my tone in the key of *A Handbook for the Perfect Adventurer*, by Pierre Mac Orlan, which She read in Spanish translation in Lima (RD: 30). Small Format Books like this and Leonardo's *Kazbek* represent everything She can't do (RD: 29).

I am multilingual and lost in variety and variation.

I am us
nós / knots / *nudos*
desnudos
naked
nudi
nodi
snodi
hubs
and crossroads (P2: 42).

"An encounter charged with possibility and failure" (Ancira, LD: 39), I am translation from one second language to another. A "frail emergency bridge flung over the abyss" (Calvino, WD: 21) down which She's pushed her fear of getting things wrong – holding onto narrative, which does not demand that She be right, nor, God forbid, *faithful*, but credible, at most. Predictably moved by all the words She has borrowed and will never return.

I am the difference between
andarsela a cercare / asking for it
"go-looking-for"
and
andare a trovare / paying a visit
"go-finding".

I am a woven community.

Portraits (P1 and P2) are about encounters with taxi-drivers, old flames, writers, tutors, their daughters, their friends, people She had only known through a screen and whom She could finally hug and walk-with and learn-from. I am the gifted books and gifted time; I am the home-made and treat dinners and lunches, and the kilometres driven to meet Her half-way. I am countless kindnesses.

My impressions of landscapes (L1, L2 and L3) read from the inside and the outside, and as second-hand accounts by painters and architects and singers and writers. I am curatorial texts on museum walls, and graffiti inside the National Library's toilet cubicles. My writing is communal.

I collect quotes about books and what we're made of – bodies, mostly – and what happens when bodies think and make collectively, collaboratively, writing the arts and one another, on site and online, locally and transnationally (RD: 24). I look up to a *comunidad letrada* where "no one frees anyone else, no one frees oneself; humans free each other in community" (Freire, P2: 48).

I am Metaphor.

A gift, or donation (Villanueva/Uhart #7). A nutritious meal, a game, a pilgrimage. A "seed where an enormous tree lies dormant" (Cortázar #3). Dough (Guerriero #6) and the tender cut (Flórez #5). An archive (P2: 41). A tapestry, a mosaic, a kaleidoscope, a palimpsest of palimpsests. A polyphonic texture. An estuarine dance (L1: 31–32). A what-if and the unpublished feasible (P2: 47).

I am knots in a rope bridge; and multiple threads between Her and Them, and Her and You. I am a self-fulfilling prophecy of what's to come: a little more of Them, a little more of Her, a little more of You.

27 Theses on the Threshold

(A speculative manifesto in place of a conclusion.)

> Where, in unison, the Diviner and I narrate 27 theses on the 'threshold'. Positioned as a recognised form of creative writing lore alongside lists, memos and decalogues (Eco 2006; Neuman 2007; Calvino 2009; Piglia 2011; Quiroga 2025), this speculative manifesto replaces the conventional conclusion, embodying the unfinished nature of creative writing and its teaching.

I

Tutor-narrators wear different skins and see the Other as an invention of words. What they narrate is an invention; it is the uncle's tale. Multiple perspectives about creative writing and its teaching show different versions of the same narrative or different narratives. As a tutor-writer, you can choose the one that sounds more engaging, thought-provoking, relatable, and credible to you. Narratives allow you to recognise yourself, meet the Other and step into a different place.

II

Threshold aspects like point of view and perspective, intertextuality, place and setting, and metaphor reveal something about tutors' methods. Their repertoire is as vast as what has been written about craft. What about voice? What about structure? Rhythm? They can all be applied to teaching creative writing and tutors as narrators. You can change genre and form, too, and think about teaching as poetry. What then?

III

Tutors weave their knowledges into their narratives. Knowledges come from reading, meeting mentors, writing and publishing, research and any parallel or complementary profession that allows you to pay per play. Cognizance is the

spectrum where different narrators are situated based on what they know. Omniscient tutor-narrators can inspire trust, although they can also narrow down students' perspectives imposing their preferences or cultural aesthetics as universal. Partiscient and aliquiscient narrators leave more room for discovery, embracing unfinishedness as the "bag of holding" that keeps you moving in a journey to emancipation and awareness. The tone of tutors' narratives sets their psychic distance – the degree of intimacy or presumed impartiality – and reveals implied values like respect, care, relatability, authenticity, equality, reliability, resilience, freedom of expression and subjectivity/objectivity. It can also betray tutors' inhibiting behaviours. Psychic distance applies to qualitative research, too.

IV

The tutor as a reader follows and combines different criteria to choose the exemplary repertoire that they share with their student-writers. They consider the purpose, the quality and the literariness of texts; although good literature appears to be hard to define. Articulating one's own definition might be one more step towards tutors' and writers' emancipation. Tutors also consider different canons, shaped by national, regional and cultural traditions. Some efforts are made into integrating contemporary works (although contemporaneity means different things to different people) and fostering hybridity and diversity. Personal taste and values, like how tutors feel about gender and cultural identity, and whether they read it or not in literature, also affect the choices that they make. Everyone is invited to identify the limits of one's repertoire, expand them, and fall (back) in love with literature.

V

A lot of the literature is used in translation, but the creative work of literary translators often passes unacknowledged. To raise their visibility, you can invite students to wear the translator's shoes or simply remember to name the translator.

VI

Literature is the art of what comes after, divining the questions that tomorrow will bring. It contributes to writing, rewriting, and healing the world; and exists in many different forms. Diversity not only can be reflected in content and culture, but also in medium. The book as a medium deserves to be investigated in its many incarnations, from symbol of authority and cultural hegemony to luxury item. The industry built around it perpetuates non-inclusive practices that instil fear and shape some tutors' approaches: privilege sterilises creativity. Artisanal publishers, instead, are paving the way to librodiversity and bibliodiversity, widening literature – ma*kin*g, resisting. Diversity is creativity.

VII

Place is a space of encounter that can be read and written. To write from a place means to be affected by it, and by its narratives and expectations. Sometimes place is not one place, but a shared experience.

VIII

Language is also a space of encounter. Tutors and students have their own linguistic expectations, which are permeated with their (literary and non-literary) references, and their ideas about what constitutes publishable, literary or deserving language. When helping students negotiate their language, tutors are advised not to let fear guide their approach.

IX

Place shapes language; language reveals method, affiliation, culture and cultures.

X

Creative writing is a culture that comes with its own lore, literary canon and world-building through language ("creative writing" vs "literary creation") and metaphors ("workshop"), which reveal its Western and anglophone affiliation. So far, it has not shown much permeability to Other cultures and languages; among these, indigenous perspectives are at the very margin and deserve representation and amplification. Acknowledging the privilege of institutionalised creative writing, tutors could consider options to open its access, not only through scholarships but also through *tequio* and community work.

XI

The tension between the intrinsic role of the writer as one who wears different skins and the complexity of cultural appropriation can be acknowledged and addressed by motivating students to ask themselves to what project their writing contributes, and by being honest about where you stand, even if you are not sure.

XII

Place affects settings and narratives. What writers and tutors notice and write about their setting depends on their physical, linguistic and symbolic perspective. Sometimes it takes leaving a place to see it more clearly. Students from more privileged backgrounds tend to write about personal concerns and less about their surroundings. Unprivileged settings provoke the writers they antagonise. Urban environments dominate in-person creative writing classrooms, but more provincial settings begin to emerge in online programmes, alongside other perspectives.

XIII

Online and hybrid programmes offer wider outreach, accessibility and diversity, but are jeopardised by social and physical distance, which affects energy and atmosphere.

A better understanding of virtual learning and more meaningful and creative engagement with the medium might help tutors shape third environments, and methods that are not just the second-best option to the traditional workshop.

XIV

The materiality of settings, even digital ones, has intrinsic pedagogical qualities. Settings can be curated for atmosphere and world-building purposes.

XV

The deconstructed metaphor of the workshop reveals that tutors associate it with 'repairing/fixing', 'building', 'practice' and 'experimentation'. There is a divide between those who see texts in different states of 'functionality' or 'health/fitness', and those who do not, with the alternative image of the 'work-in-progress'. In both instances, 'tools' apply. Sometimes language is 'raw material', and sometimes conventions are 'mixed', 'combined' and 'hybridised', particularly as the 'workshop' morphs into a 'lab'. In the lab, the focus is on 'research' and 'discovery' – an 'investigation' of one's aesthetics but also of oneself.

XVI

The workshop is a metaphor for the institutionalised, pedagogical and collective experience of creative writing: in other words, the 'workshop' is a metaphor for the "writers' workshop". But it is also a metaphor for a lifelong, artistic, individual or collective practice – with an emphasis on its discipline, sustainability and awareness. When the role of the tutor is mentioned, boundaries between creative writing as an institutionalised discipline and as a lifelong artistic practice appear more defined.

XVII

The workshop as a metaphor sometimes entails the 'master' and the 'apprentice'. Sometimes the role of the 'master' can be shared. Sometimes, there is no 'master'.

XVIII

The tutor as the expert in the room appears in other metaphors, as a 'sport coach', a 'doctor', a 'guide' or a 'narrator'. Metaphors beyond the workshop share similar entailments around the functionality of texts ('fitness' in health) and practice and awareness ('training' in sports).

XIX

'Conflict' also emerges as an aspect shared by sports and narratives. The value that people assign to it is cultural and subjective, and avoiding violence and anger are a privilege. However, meanness and violence as pedagogical approaches are unwise, as they add unnecessary risks to processes that are already vulnerable. 'Playfulness' and 'games' as their own domains are much more worth exploring. First, play; then, learn.

XX

Narratives are textiles; and all centres of energy – writers, readers, tutors, publishers, translators – are simultaneously woven and weaving.

XXI

Metaphor as method allows for an awareness of both creative writing as a process, and its pedagogy. Sometimes you will re-turn to tropes as familiar places; sometimes you will need new metaphors to test the "unpublished feasible" that overwrites the self-fulling prophecies of creative writing. In writing like in teaching, you need to learn to pick your beans and separate the wheat from the chaff. An excellent place where you can do this is the threshold.

XXII

Threshold research uses *between-standing* as an epistemological approach, and a methodology based on encounter. It is less of an argument and more like a dance. In research, *go-finding* the Other allows for meaningful connection and discovery. The physical displacement exposes differences and invites new thinking.

XXIII

Texts can be "read" and "interpreted", and theses can be "defended" – but both can also be "workshopped", "traversed" and "socialised". World-building with language allows us to question the words that we choose and their collocations. Writers and researchers negotiate with the divine power to bring things into existence by naming and renaming them, and with the limits of their own words.

XXIV

Translators, with the limits of their own – and someone else's.

XXV

Metafiction exposes process, people, texts and contexts.

XXVI

An artisanal book that tells the story of its own making attracts attention onto the "how" in relation to the "what". Writing is done with the hands and with our bodies. Handmade books and annotated manuscripts show that a little bit more evidently. They demand more effort from the writer and the reader. They embody ma(kin)g.

XXVII

Craft is research. Literature is research. Translation is research.

Creative, literary, artisanal research is research re-imagined.

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Appendix: Notes on Ethics and the Digital Appendix

Notes on Ethics

A research ethics application for this PhD project was reviewed by Falmouth University's Research Integrity & Ethics Committee on 23 March 2023 and approved on 6 April 2023. The proposal included a General Risk Assessment and a Travel Risk Assessment, and was classed as "medium risk" due to the involvement of participants. The approved methods included:

- Approaching institutions and introducing myself in a preliminary online meeting with the MA director, who would formally introduce me to their staff via email.
- Inviting named participants by email and arranging individual in-situ interviews.
- Sharing an [Information Sheet] outlining the study and asking participants to sign [Consent Form 1] permitting me to name them and their institution, while clearly stating their right to withdraw at any time.
- Conducting interviews in Spanish, Portuguese or English guided by a loose [Interview Script] covering three major themes while allowing participants to steer the conversation freely.
- Transcribing interviews using software and line-editing them in the original language. Participants were given the option to review the edited transcripts and to request changes or withdraw, using [Consent Form 2].
- Translating selected fragments into English and editing them for narrative and aesthetic purposes in literary translation. To ensure integrity, I proposed linguistic spot checks, which were arranged between my Director of Studies and the Postgraduate Research Office.

- For anecdotes and stories featured in *The Diviner*, I held a separate meeting with Professor Lee Miller in February 2025 to address safeguarding in cases where consent had not been obtained. Names of private individuals were anonymised, except for those from the Makerspace in Central, Bogotá, and the Paulo Freire Institute, where consent had been given. Names of writers speaking at public lectures were retained.

Digital Appendix

The General and Travel Risk Assessment forms, all templates, all signed forms and all transcripts are available in the "Digital Appendix" stored in the OneDrive folder Creative Writing in the Threshold - PhD Thesis - Elena Traina.

The Digital Appendix also includes a document with a typed transcription of the handwritten marginalia (Transcript of Marginalia).

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Typeset in Alegreya by Juan Pablo del Peral.

Arguments are in Lusitana, by Ana Paula Megda, inspired by the type found in the 1572 edition of Luís de Camões's *The Lusiads*.

The Diviner is typeset in Asul, by Mariela Monsalve, a baroque humanist typeface inspired by early 20th century Argentinian books and magazines.

Lusitana and Asul are available on the platform Badass Libre Fonts by Womxn: https://www.design-research.be/by-womxn/.

The printed thesis exists in one original, handwritten copy, and three photocopies.

The Researcher would have preferred to annotate each copy by hand, but a long-term repetitive strain injury – caused by excessive typing – unfortunately made this impossible.



Amuninni.

Interjection. Sicilian. From *jamuninni*, first-person plural imperative of *jirisinni* (“to go away”), formed from *jiri* (“to go”, here “let’s go”) + *si* (“oneself”, here ni “ourselves”) + *nni* (“from here/there”). Alternative forms: *amunì*.

Amuninni.

Let’s go, ourselves, away from here.

Printed in Falmouth in the days following the Researcher’s 35th birthday.

The fact that she’s Aries doesn’t seem to surprise anyone.

She secretly wishes she’d been born under a water sign, instead.

Assembled and bound on 23rd April 2025,

the Day of Books and Roses.