

CREATIVE WRITING HANDBOOK

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Introduction

Creative Writing Course: What You Need to Teach.

There are many schools of creative writing in Italy and around the world, each of which is based on its own parameters and elaborations. In our case, the structure of this manual will be addressed, after a synthesis of the various components and techniques, to a type of writing that breaks the 'mold', that is, comes out of the swamp of the so-called mainstream, a term now in use to indicate a conventional and mass writing, which often does not bring anything new in the field of narrative techniques. In this regard, it should be remembered that we will use the term narration to indicate 'the object of writing', a term which, being in some way 'neutral', will not give rise to confusion between the definitions indicating novel, short story, short novel, long story, autobiographical novel, etc.

We have said that creative writing courses have multiplied, but let's take a look at the basic syllabus of a creative writing course. What is taught? What aspects do you focus on?

What do the trainees learn? We will review the basic technical topics, which cannot be glossed over in a course that aims to provide the main tools to undertake this type of experience: essentially, the general rules and technical tools.

What must be reiterated decisively is that each of these schools follows particular parameters, beyond the 'technical' indications which, however, are general and which, as already mentioned, must be known. The

A central and fundamental point is that we too will follow a certain logic of writing or, better said, a given theoretical approach, based fundamentally on a manipulation and re-elaboration of general structures and techniques. They are techniques, structures and imagery that are linked both to Italian groups and movements that remain fundamental in the Italian literary scene (first of all, the '63 Group); and to international authors and narratives, who are taking the text off the page, an operation that we believe is essential to get out of the shoals of the mainstream.

Only such a perspective, based on the history of literature, will be able to lead to results of a certain interest and importance. Before starting to talk about narrative techniques and the various components/structures present in a narrative, it will be necessary to take a very brief historical look at both the origins of creative writing and the current situation in Italy.

Creativity and writing.

According to the definition, creativity is an intellectual virtue that, in theory, everyone is more or less gifted with. It is the ability to create, an ability stimulated by certain peculiarities such as sensitivity, the production of ideas, originality, the ability to analyze, synthesize and structure.

In the writer, creativity is the basis of work. Writing involves the use of imagination and fantasy, elements that require the development of a creative mind, that is to say that one must possess a certain 'talent' to be able to write, without which, there are no courses whatsoever.

Creative writing is the transition from ideas - from creativity - to the production of texts also written for fields that are not exclusively literary (think of cinema). It is in this passage that the possession of writing techniques, of the metaphorical suitcase containing the needles, proves to be necessary of the trade.

How to Teach Creative Writing: The Foundation.

We can hypothesize a methodology on which to base a creative writing course. Given the aims, in fact, a course of this kind cannot ignore certain elements.

The first element is purely theoretical, and consists in teaching theories and techniques of writing that should be known to anyone who wants to learn (some) of the secrets of writing.

The second element is practical. It is necessary to move from theory to practice, from knowledge of the technique to its application. In courses, writing exercises are generally assigned, exercises that allow you to evaluate and guide the student in his or her learning and improvement process.

Also here, a workshop will be presented in which the theoretical and, above all, the practical moments will be divided. Around these two elements, writing courses can propose other, additional original elements that characterize and distinguish them from each other. You can privilege a certain type of approach to writing and teach in that sense. You can propose to work on different genres of texts, for example crime and noir, which require additional specific knowledge. Each narrative genre requires

knowledge of certain narrative techniques. We will move on the basis of your enthusiasm and your willingness to reach the fundamental parameters to be able to elaborate a creative text: a short, given the objective situation, an original narrative that you will have to commit to elaborating.

Many people wonder what creative writing is. Certainly born in America, it shows that the world needs to tell and tell itself, both to oneself and to an undefined audience. A creative writing course aimed solely at a psychological need is not the goal of this course: here, we will try to give technical and structural information on how a narrative is configured.

Listening/participation, expressiveness, creativity are dictated by the emotions that everyone in the group is able to convey through creative imagination: therefore, if the number of participants is greater than 10 people, they will be divided into groups of at least 3 elements. In the beginning, what will emerge will be a group writing, in which everyone will bring their own idea or experience; Later, after establishing a harmony within the various groups, you can start producing your own texts.

From style to plot.

A creative writing course, both in a theoretical and practical sense, must therefore take into account various elements:

- Style. That is, 'how to write', the language used, the narrative techniques present in the narration.
- Weft. It's the narrative you want to tell, the way it's structured. A good example, but certainly not the only one, is to rely on the technique of the show, don't tell, that is, not to explain what happens, but to show it through the events of the narrative: exactly as is done in cinema, where images replace words. In this case, the author will have to use his creative creativity and be able to perform this small miracle.
- Characters. This point is about the creation and development of primary and secondary characters, following their arc of transformation, i.e. how they change from the beginning to the end of the story; or the archetype structure of the 'hero's journey', as it was theorized by Chris Vogler (1949) many years ago (but still relevant),¹

¹ Chris Vogler, *The Hero's Journey. The Structure of the Myth for the Use of Fiction and Cinema Writers or Other Theories*, Audino, 2010

No specific rules will be imposed, and each new author will have to develop the techniques closest to him, while maintaining the point of wanting to write something that detaches, possibly, from the conventions of the mainstream.

- The conflict. A story is generally based on a conflict, which is what generates narrative tension, meaning here by 'conflict' any contradiction that emerges in the narrative.

As Alberto Asor Rosa has repeatedly reiterated in *Scrittori e Massa* (Einaudi, 2015), the author must to bring out the 'conflict', an element that, in his opinion (and also ours), has completely disappeared in mainstream writing, redundant yes of genres such as noir and the like, but disappeared in other narratives.

We are not referring here to 'conflicts' that are only political or social, but also existential. The years and events we are experiencing, even bloody and tragic ones (wars, diseases, hunger, poverty, unbridled enrichment of the few in the face of the poverty of the many) should represent, for an author, an inexhaustible source of inspiration. Creative writing: a debated term.

Not all industry insiders agree on the definition of creative writing. Sometimes it has even been claimed that it is nothing more than an excuse to advertise writing schools. Others say that it is enough to indicate the term writing alone: creative would be an unnecessary clarification.

However, the current definition has its own dignity: creative writing is defined as that which is not professional in the strict sense, and which is born from thought, ingenuity, imagination and that wonderful world that is imagination.

Moreover, we cannot deny that the term itself has a great appeal, and is evocative of a world that has seen the creation of great works. If we talk about writing, the term really lends itself to many variations, but when we combine it with the adjective 'creative' everything changes. We don't think we need to discuss this too much, everything will depend on the value that will be given to this type and its practical applications.

In recent years, creative writing courses have multiplied, various schools have included it among the subjects taught. It means that the demand is high, and for this reason it must be met in the best way. Just as we should not forget the proposal of online creative writing courses.

Areas of application.

The works we are talking about when referring to creative writing are certainly not documents, bibliographic research, reports of various kinds. Creative writing concerns short stories, novels, poetry, biographical and autobiographical narratives (as mentioned, narratives): a fictionalized news text can thus fall within the scope of creative writing.

We don't talk about creative writing when referring to manuals, historical, social or scientific research.

Although at this point I would like to say that any topic, if written with the creative contribution of the author, should and could fall under this definition.

Last but not least, it should be remembered here the extreme importance that is given to this writing practice in nursing homes and centers for the elderly. There is a vast literature on this subject, but we will not deal with it, since the notion of creative writing dealt with here refers specifically to techniques for developing narratives based on specific and personal experiences or the result of the imagination, but always from the point of view of invention or, precisely, creativity, and not for therapeutic, let's say therapeutic, purposes. in which it is also used.

It should be remembered that in these centers there are various other applications and exercises aimed at keeping the cognitive abilities of the guests vital, and that this specific practice is very frequent. There is no age-limit for setting one's creativity in motion, as Dewey already affirmed, as we will see later: whoever says this, affirms the false.

The design of a work.

This is the phase that precedes the actual narrative structure, the moment of investigation, in which the importance of having clear ideas about the work you are thinking of is emphasized. The literary genre, the general topic or plot, the timing to be followed must be established. You can also set an approximate length of the text you design. This last fact is of some importance. In a lot of fiction, very long texts are elaborated (Infinite Jest, by David Foster Wallace, is a typical example).

However, this type of operation requires a mastery of one's own handwriting processing skills, which are not common, so you have to be very careful with this data.

Narrative competence: writing as communication and transmission of knowledge.

Writing requires forms of self-discipline and methodology, such as forcing oneself to work (as Hemingway or Moravia did) certain hours or minutes a day: the important thing would be to try to make an effort to do so every day, psychological and material conditions permitting. You shouldn't be too strict with yourself, especially at the beginning, the elaboration of a text, whether long or short, generates anxiety. If you have to make radical corrections, do them when you have accumulated at least a certain number of written pages: even from a psychological point of view, it is essential to have the feeling that you have written something concrete. Writing is also a form of communication, not loneliness: you write to tell someone something. At first, you do it thinking that that someone will be a friend or relative. As you move forward, and you convince yourself that you are working well, that 'someone' ceases to have a face, and becomes an indistinct multitude.

You write for others, therefore, this is the spring that drives the writer. Starting from this point is Fundamental, because writing for others means first of all making yourself understood. In this regard, clear distinctions must be made: in the reading of any text, the reader's fundamental will to understand must actively intervene, without which no text has value; And it means, for the author, asking questions: about the stories you want to tell, about how to tell them, and above all about why you want to do it.

Other times it's just the pleasure or pleasure of telling something. Writing a book implies in a certain way the will to seduce the world.

It should never be forgotten that the first rule is to grab your reader, but he must be willing to be captured, and make sure that he does not detach himself from your writing.

But here other elements come into play: the type of audience, the type of narrative operation to be carried out, the historical-literary references of the masters of the past, that is, the objective to which one intends to refer. There is no one type of writing, and therefore literature, that is good for everyone, but specific fields (genres, language choices, use of digital systems, graphic processing, etc.) within which to move. The objective that we intend to indicate here will be a type of writing related to a very specific historical period of Italian literature, to well-identified masters and, more generally, to a form of novel that comes out of the very strong image of the handset telephone in an era of mobile telephony, as Claudio

Magris has well pointed out in a passage that we will see later. There are international authors who are moving in this direction. We will try to learn from them. Narrative competence (of narratives) is essentially the ability to understand, memorize, reorganize and create complex linguistic structures that qualify as 'stories' or 'tales'.

More specifically, the verb *narro* indicates, in a simplified form, the action performed by the one who is *gnarus* (hence *narus*), the one who knows, who is familiar with a thing, who has knowledge of it, and is therefore learned and experienced: writing thus becomes making others informed about something.

The word narration derives from the Latin *narratio*, dependent on the verb *narro* (to tell), and by extension 'to divulge'. More generically used also in the sense of saying, speaking, remembering, making mention of.

The narrator therefore communicates contents around which he has precise knowledge: the act of narrating does not arise from the pure and simple organization of a logical-temporal sequence within a structure of more or less interconnected partial elements. Narration is the result of an act of knowing, which translates into the public publication of the knowledge learned, and in the offer of expertise aimed at organizing that knowledge according to its further usability, according to purposes, purposes and skills that are partly of the narrator, partly of the reader: and here we reiterate, again, that the reader must also be familiar with a certain idea of writing.

Maybe your proposal may not be accepted or shared, but it doesn't matter: these are problems that authors who have made the history of literature have dramatically experienced, but from which they have not let themselves be blocked.

BACK TO SCHOOL

