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SETTING UP A CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM AT BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT. ***Setting up a Creative Writing Program at Babeş-Bolyai University*****.** The present paper argues for the establishment of a Creative Writing program within Babeş-Bolyai University, by initially providing more courses at the BA level, with an MA in Creative Writing being the end goal. By examining the history of the field and its current status within higher education in America, the UK and beyond, I show that, wherever Creative Writing programs have appeared and gained sufficient traction, they have thrived, attracting significant numbers of students year after year. In those countries outside of Anglophone space where the implementation of Creative Writing is a much more recent endeavor, significant steps have already been taken to analyze and find solutions for the current issues that might slow down the spread of interest in this field. With this in mind, the paper concludes that it is time for Babeş-Bolyai University to embrace this growing trend.

Keywords: *Creative Writing, Babeş-Bolyai University, humanities, pedagogy, study program.*

REZUMAT. ***Înfiinţarea unui program de scriere creativă în cadrul Universităţii Babeş-Bolyai.*** Lucrarea de faţă pledează pentru înfiinţarea unui program de Scriere Creativă în cadrul Universităţii Babeş-Bolyai, prin oferirea iniţial de mai multe cursuri la nivel de licenţă, având ca scop final un Masterat în Scriere Creativă. Examinând istoria domeniului şi statutul său actual în învăţământul

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superior din America, Marea Britanie și nu numai, arăt că, oriunde au apărut programele de Scriere Creativă și au avut un pic de succes, acestea au prosperat, atrăgând un număr semnificativ de studenți an de an. În acele țări din afara spațiului anglofon în care implementarea Scrierii Creative este un demers mult mai recent, au fost deja făcuți pași semnificativi pentru a analiza și găsi soluții pentru problemele actuale care ar putea încetini răspândirea interesului în acest domeniu. Având în vedere acest lucru, lucrarea concluzionează că este timpul ca Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai să îmbrățișeze această tendință în creștere.

Cuvinte-cheie: *Scriere Creativă, Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, Științe Umaniste, pedagogie, program de studii.*

1. Introduction

At present we are living in an age where Humanities departments all across the globe find themselves in a constant battle to justify their place in academia and society overall amidst the onslaught of an ever-expanding STEM-based education. In some cases, that battle has already been lost, with numerous universities either allocating less and less funding to this sector, especially in the fields of literary studies and linguistics, or shutting it down entirely. And yet, all the while, as Elena Traina puts it, "we are living in a golden age of creative writing" (Traina, 2022: 1). Although presently limited almost exclusively to English-speaking countries, the field of Creative Writing (CW) has gone in less than a century from a few courses taught here and there in the US to thousands of programs offered at every university level across the globe. More importantly, there is every indication that the full range of possibilities offered by this field has only begun to be explored in the past couple of decades. Creative Writing is thus not new, and yet it is very much in its infancy, meaning that it is rife for new avenues of exploration that might be conducted from anywhere, including a university in Romania.

In this sense, what the present paper tries to do is to bring arguments why Babeș-Bolyai University (BBU) should develop a full Creative Writing program initially by offering courses at a BA level, with an MA program to be considered further down the line. At the moment, BBU does have some CW workshops that are not included in any educational plan (students receive no grades or credit for participation) and, perhaps more importantly, three actual courses, two of which are taught at the Faculty of Political Science (one of them by the author) and one at the Faculty of Letters (also taught by the author). However, there is no proper program to speak of, with the specific aim of teaching students the art of (creative) writing. To date, one cannot receive any kind of degree in this

field, or even to study it as a minor, and there are numerous reasons why things should be otherwise. Of course, the most obvious boon of teaching CW is the possibility of preparing students for a career in literary writing, which has been shown already to be possible time and again in hundreds of universities across the US, the UK, Australia and others. Yet, in addition to this, as I will endeavor to illustrate in the following pages, for the student such a program also offers the possibility to develop their capacity for self-expression, an ability that remains largely underdeveloped in most educational systems.

That CW in general is a field of study worth pursuing will not be addressed here, since this issue has already been amply discussed by numerous researchers. Instead, by providing clear data obtained from surveys conducted in the US and UK, I endeavor to explain why it is advantageous for BBU to establish its own program. At the same time, in order to form a more fully rounded out image of the status of the field, this paper also presents the challenges that CW programs face outside Anglophone space, not to deter anyone from expanding upon what CW options they have to offer, but to illustrate possible issues that they would have to overcome when doing so.

Before arguing why a field of study should be further developed within an institution such as BBU, it is important to understand what it consists of. Here, one of the more difficult initial challenges one has to contend with is found in comprehending its origins and tracing its initial evolution. Fortunately, this task has already been accomplished and outlined in D.G. Myers' compelling work *The Elephants Teach* (2006) and so what follows is an outline with information taken almost exclusively from this one text. Thus, there are three names that are central to the early development of CW: Barrett Wendell, Hughes Mearns and Norman Foerster. Their vision and openness to academic experimentation established the importance of self-expression and mentorship that are still central tenets of the field today. For this reason, a brief presentation of the history of CW can be provided based on their influence.

Barrett Wendell and the appearance of English Composition

The history of *Creative Writing* begins decades before there was anything to be called *Creative Writing*, in the second half of the 19th century, when a series of disgruntlements brought about significant changes to the world of academia in the US. On the one hand, there were teachers of English literature, who claimed that literature wasn't in fact being taught. Rather, "the study of English *literature* was subordinated to the study of the English *language*" (Myers, 2006:16). In other words, when studying literary texts (when this was done at all), teachers were expected to treat them not as objects worthy of a particular kind of

intellectual scrutiny but rather as receptacles from which one might be able to extract interesting linguistic phenomena. English departments were first and foremost philology departments, or departments of language and literature, in that order.

At the same time, another important disgruntlement came from those teaching and studying rhetoric. Although a very old, traditional field, by the end of the 19th century scholars had begun to seriously question its academic value. Scholars called for reform and the result was the creation of a new field – English Composition (Myers, 2006:36). This field, in truth, had very little to do with rhetoric itself and their aims, at least in the beginning, were polar opposites. If the latter emphasized correctness and proper oral rendering of prescribed texts, in the case of the former "correctness and assigned themes were accordingly dropped [and] what was encouraged was original work" (Myers, 2006: 38). Nowhere was this emphasis on originality more evidenced than in the Advanced Composition class offered at Harvard University by Barrett Wendell.

In contrast to the fixed set of rules that characterized the field of rhetoric, "Wendell's first concern was teaching students how to write [whereas] correctness was secondary and subordinate to expression" (Myers, 2006:50). In practice, what this meant was that students of his composition classes would be given daily themes to write, and the topics for these themes was whatever the student had found interesting the day before. What mattered, therefore, was not how well the student wrote their texts, but how well they managed to express themselves. Later on, when Creative Writing would emerge, this emphasis on student self-expression was to become a central element of the field, an element taken directly from Wendell's English Composition class.

Hughes Mearns and the birth of Creative Writing

At the beginning of the 20th century, a practical approach to literature was still not common within the university, as English departments had returned completely to a focus on philology, while Composition Studies had shifted its focus towards professional writing. The initial reaction of both established and would-be writers was to return to practicing and exploring their craft outside established academia, and this was especially true with respect to the emerging short story genre, whose rising popularity led to the creation of several workshops and many how-to booklets. For a short while, it looked like this would become the status quo, were it not for one former student of Wendell's who had been inspired by his course.

Hughes Mearns joined the Lincoln School, which was part of Columbia University, in 1920, where "until his resignation to accept a position at New York

University in 1925, Mearns conducted the 'deliberate experiment' of replacing English with Creative Writing" (Myers, 2006:103). In practice, what this meant was that Mearns would read poetry aloud every class, with the expectation that, eventually, every student would be inspired to write their own original piece, which in turn represented the work for which they would be graded. Like Wendell, Hughes Mearns centered his pedagogical approach on student self-expression. At the same time, he took it one step further than his predecessor, by channeling this act of self-expression through the creation of a literary text.

In order to understand how the field of Creative Writing went, seemingly overnight, from being nonexistent to being everywhere within US higher education, one has to be aware of three things that occurred around the same time. First, at the beginning of the 20th century "the technique of story writing […] was much in demand" (Myers, 2006:68). People were especially interested in learning how to write short stories, since the demand for reading such pieces of literature had skyrocketed and full-time short story writers could actually make a pretty decent living based solely on this practice. Yet since, apart from the occasional advanced English composition courses here and there, no higher education program was genuinely concerned with the teaching of literary writing, this was done "by correspondence, university extension, or self-instruction" (Myers, 2006:68), in other words by anyone other than academics.

The second significant occurrence was that Robert Frost took up a teaching position at Amherst College in 1917. His reasons were primarily financial. Unlike in the case of short stories, poetry writing was not in any way a lucrative business. In fact, for most artists, it seemed that "real work and starvation, or being fed materially and going hungry artistically" (Myers, 2006: 77) were the only options at hand. In this light, teaching at a college English department was seen as a suitable compromise, since, at the very least, the poet would still be engaged in literature while working. This is what Frost had in mind when taking this third option and his example was soon followed by others. The result was the establishment of a very specific type of university professor – the writer in residence.

Finally, in 1925 Hughes Mearns took a collection of his students' work and published it, alongside an explanation of his pedagogical approach, in *Creative Youth*, followed soon after in 1929 by *Creative Power* (Myers, 2006: 103). In the first book "the phrase 'creative writing' was used for the first time to refer to a course of study" (Myers, 2006: 103), thus Mearns can be credited with coining the term itself, at least with this meaning. The reaction within the academic world was both immediate and explosive, propelled both by the presence of writers in residence, who were more than eager to substitute the teaching of literature for the teaching of craft, and by the general need by Americans at the time to learn how

to write. Quite simply, people assumed his perspective as dogma and "little more than a decade after the first news of Mearns' experiment, Creative Writing had become one of the most popular subjects in the curriculum" (Myers, 2006: 104).

Norman Foerster and the professional writer

In just a few years, CW became an established part of undergraduate studies. And yet, in spite of its initial success, there was one important element missing in these initial years of Creative Writing, one which in more recent decades has begun to dominate the nature of the field, namely mentorship – teaching students to become professional writers. Central to the development of this aspect of the field was Norman Foerster, who took up the role of dean of the School of Letters at Iowa University in 1930 and immediately set about the task of "restoring the traditional alliance of scholarship and criticism", proclaiming a new dawn of criticism, for which "creative writing would be [its] ally" (Myers, 2006: 125). In his view, the teaching and literary scholarship conducted would be in contrast to the philological trend that predominated within English departments in the US at the beginning of the 20th century. In Foerster's view, at the Iowa School of Letters "criticism and Creative Writing went hand in hand [in that] creative writing was an effort at critical understanding conducted from within the conditions of literary practice" (Myers, 2006: 133). In other words, students would use criticism in order to decipher the elements that make up a piece of literature so that they in turn might acquire the capability of producing literary art. In time, Norman Feorster's vision would gain ever increasing traction, taking form initially in the now famous Iowa Writer's Workshop and then in the hundreds of Creative Writing MA, MFA and PhD programs across America and beyond, programs that focus primarily on teaching students how to become contemporary writers of literature.

Thus it was that, what began as an alternative to both the field of Rhetoric and Philology, evolved, with the help of three key figures and a series of circumstances both within and outside of academic circles, into a field of its own. At the undergraduate level, the aim of Creative Writing classes is to foster and develop a student's capacity for self-expression, as well as to gain a better understanding of literature by looking at it from within, rather than from the outside. At a graduate level, the program takes on a more mentor/apprentice type approach, seeking to critically analyze contemporary literature in order to prepare a new generation of career writers. In what follows, I will look at how successful these approaches have been.

2. Creative Writing in the US today

If one is to argue for the implementation of a Creative Writing program at Babeş-Bolyai University, perhaps a more important question than how CW came to be is how successful the current programs are today. Fortunately, at least as far as the United States is concerned, the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) conducted in 2014-2015 and published the following year an extensive survey analysis that seeks to provide satisfactory answers. Of course, some might question the use of a seven year old survey when discussing the status of CW in 2023. Here, I would argue that, to my knowledge, no great upheaval has occurred within the US educational system that might render the results less relevant today, beyond some minor changes to the specific numbers provided.

The AWP is a non-profit organization founded in 1967 by fifteen writers representing thirteen Creative Writing programs and, as stated on their website, the organization "fosters literary achievement, advances the art of writing as essential to a good education, and serves the makers, teachers, students, and readers of contemporary writing" (AWP Our history). In the making of their 2016 survey, the AWP received feedback from 515 administrators at both undergraduate and graduate programs of creative writing. While this number is already significantly high and sufficient to draw relevant conclusions about the state of the field in the US, it nevertheless only makes up a bit over half of the 912 Creative Writing programs that are associated with the AWP. The fact that, from 1967 to 2015, the number of programs across the country rose from merely 13 to just under a thousand is already a strong indication of how successful Creative Writing has been and the specific numbers that follow will only serve to strengthen that assertion.

In order to facilitate the interpretation of the results of the 2016 AWP survey, the document that was made public outlines the key findings of their study, and in what follows I will endeavor to present and analyze some of the more important ones. Thus, a first key finding of the survey is that, by and large, Creative Writing programs in the US do not exist independently. Rather, close to three quarters (74%) of the programs analyzed belong to English Departments (AWP survey, 2016:5). Even this number is brought down by some private institutions and would be closer to 90% if one looked only to public institutions. This makes sense. If one thinks about the intrinsic link between the critical analysis of literary texts conducted within English departments and the goals of CW as stated above, it is easy to see that having a Creative Writing Department existing separately within an institution might set up a certain degree of redundancy. What isn't clear from here is whether the coexistence of literary scholars and creative writing teachers within the same department is a balanced one, with each side understanding the value of the other, or whether one segment is seen as being

subordinate to the other. For an institution willing to set up a new CW program, this information might prove useful.

A second key finding worth noting is that the average age of a CW program was less than 20 years, at least as of 2015 (AWP survey, 2016:8). From here one can surmise that the 515 programs that were analyzed do not include some of the oldest ones, such as the Iowa Writers' Workshop, which was established in 1936. At first glance, one might be tempted to raise an eyebrow, but, in fact, what appears to be a limitation of the survey's ability to paint a complete picture of CW in America is in fact an advantage for the purposes of this paper. Simply put, the very fact that over half a thousand programs have been set up in the US during the past two decades (probably even more by now) is a testimony of just how quickly the success and popularity of the field is spreading today.

The steady growth of CW programs across the US is also found in specific numbers. According to the enrollment trends identified (AWP survey, 2016:9), between 2012 and 2015, 54% of the BA programs analyzed saw an increase in the number of enrolled students, while another 27% of programs registered no significant change. During the same period 30% of MFA programs analyzed saw slight or significant increases in enrollment and another 41% saw no change. Finally, 41% of PhD programs had more students enroll than in previous years, while another 41% felt no changes. As can be seen then, the majority of the programs analyzed saw either an increase or no significant change in enrollment trends between the years 2012 and 2015. Certainly, if one were to carry the math through to the end, it becomes clear that a small number of programs saw decreases in their number of students, however by and large the survey illustrates a steady increase in interest across the US.

Finally, when choosing to establish a CW program, one inevitable decision is just what genres would prove most popular. Therefore, it is worth looking at what the current trends are and, fortunately, the AWP survey comes through here as well. Thus, practically every university program analyzed (99%) offers courses that focus on fiction writing and almost all of these programs (96%) offer courses on poetry (AWP survey, 2016:21), regardless as to whether we are speaking of an undergraduate or graduate program. This is perhaps unsurprising, since poetry has traditionally been regarded as the best tool for developing self-expression, while learning how to write fiction feeds best into the premise that CW programs can prepare students for a life as someone who makes a living exclusively out of writing. Another interesting note here is that 82% of the programs analyzed offer courses that focus on creative nonfiction writing, which is indicative of the tentative capacity for CW to branch out into other disciplines, such as history or sociology. One should not assume from the above, however,

that fiction, creative nonfiction and poetry are the only genres taught; there are also a considerable, albeit significantly lower, percentage of programs that offer courses in screenwriting, playwriting, digital narratives and others (AWP survey, 2016:21). It would also be wrong to assume that each course within a program only focuses on a specific genre. On the contrary, for example all introduction courses at the BfA level are multi-genre courses, while at the BA level 67% of introduction courses have similar structures (AWP survey, 2016:28).

What can be concluded from the AWP survey is that the field of CW is not only flourishing in the US today, but its growth has yet to reach its apex, what with at least 515 BA, BFA, MFA and PhD programs appearing between 1995 and 2015 alone. Moreover, the results clearly show that, with very few exceptions, each program has seen a steady increase in student enrollment and overall higher demand from one year to the next. While the data from the survey is close to a decade old, it is doubtful that the situation has changed significantly. People in the US want to study CW, both at an undergraduate and graduate level, thus ensuring, among other things, a constant influx of students enrolling in various English departments. Creative Writing works in the US. Might it not work well in other countries? As it turns out, yes it can.

3. Creative Writing in the UK

While it began in the US, Creative Writing did not remain limited to this country, but eventually expanded to other English speaking countries such as the UK and Australia. For the purposes of this article, it is sufficient to focus on the first. It is an unfortunate fact however that, in order to start any discussion on Creative Writing in the UK, one must first accept that, while the evolution in the field from the US has benefitted from research such as that done by D.G. Myers, "a comparable history remains to be written of the emergence and rise of Creative Writing in the UK" (Cowan, 2016: 46). This does not mean that no information exists. As Andrew Cowan explains, while more research is needed in this respect, it is clear that its beginning is marked by "the inauguration of the MA in Creative Writing at UEA [University of East Anglia]" (Cowan, 2016: 46). Similarly, to the situation in the US, the UEA program began as an experiment that sought to breathe new life into the field of English Literature, which at the time was already beginning to struggle in the face of other increasingly popular areas of interest (a struggle that in many countries, Romania included, continues today, as the utility of Philology specializations is constantly being called into question by the wider population). The MA program at UEA was set up by Angus Wilson and Malcolm Bradbury, two authors who became teachers, similar to writers in residence as one finds in the US. Unlike in the US, where "Creative

Writing at Master's level had evolved into a form of literary apprenticeship", the program at UEA was built starting from Bradbury and Wilson's "shared sense of the developing schism between creative and critical practice" (Cowan, 2016: 47). In this sense, the perspective behind the MA program at UEA seems to mirror, at least initially, the idea set forth decades earlier by Norman Foerster when establishing the PhD program in the US, namely that literary criticism and authorship should work together rather than apart. The ultimate goal is that of maintaining some control over the direction in which contemporary literary canon evolves and ensuring "that professors of contemporary literature have something resembling contemporary literature to study" (Bradbury, in Cowan, 2016: 47) at a time when the publishing of serious literature in the UK and abroad was rapidly becoming less and less profitable to publishers, an unfortunate situation that still persists to date. This is not to suggest that CW in the UK is limited to the MA level. As Marina Warner points out in the Forward to *The Creative Writing Workbook*, it wasn't long after its emergence within UEA that "interest proved so vigorous – in times of government discouragement of the Humanities – that these graduate add-ons were soon offered at undergraduate level as well, and this provision quickly segued to fully fledged BAs" (Bell & Magrs, 2019: x). Thus, what began at the graduate level soon spread towards the undergraduate one due to vast interest on the part of students. As is made clear in what follows, the field of CW did not remain confined to the UEA curriculum, instead emerging and continuing to grow through various higher education institutions across the UK.

As stated above, there doesn't seem to be a clear depiction of the emergence and evolution of CW in the UK along the lines of what D.G. Myers provides us for the US. There is however some data regarding recent developments, thanks to Paul Munden's 2012 *Beyond the Benchmark*, a report on the status of the field in the UK and written in collaboration with the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE). The NAWE is "a registered charity, supporting writers, writing facilitators and the sector as a whole, providing programs, information and advice on professional development for writers and other literature professionals across the UK" (NAWE About). The report in question was conducted in collaboration with teachers from 27 UK universities. This is a far cry from the 515 programs surveyed by the AWP in the US, but, then again, CW is significantly less present in the UK, to say nothing of the simple fact that there are fewer higher education institutions here than in the US overall. Therefore, Munden's report still offers a valuable glimpse into the status of CW in the UK.

There are two main points to take from here. The first has to do with marked differences between how CW is practiced in the UK and how it is carried out in the US. In the latter case, programs generally cling on to what can now be considered traditional approaches, meaning that they are part of or subservient

to English departments within a university, their course structures are almost exclusively workshop-based and the aim is first and foremost to offer an opportunity for self-expression at an undergraduate level and aid in becoming career writers at a graduate one. In the UK, on the other hand,

> there are high-profile programs that sit independently *alongside* English, History etc. within the School of Humanities; others have similar independence within Performing Arts (one particular BA running independently since 1990). In both cases, BA degrees are offered in a very wide range of combinations with other studies such as Film, Drama, Media, Digital Games, Languages and Philosophy (Munden, 2012: 11).

Later on, the author further stresses this difference by highlighting the fact that CW in the UK "has become more autonomous as a discipline, while maintaining important connections with other subjects", while "the range of forms and genres taught has expanded greatly, with notable inclusion of digital media" (Munden, 2012: 34). So, not only is the breath of such a program much wider than originally considered, but the full list of interdisciplinary possibilities has yet to be determined. What this means is that a possible program at BBU could be built starting from the Faculty of Letters, but there is no reason that it couldn't find a home in other parts, as also illustrated by the fact that a CW course has been functioning (quite well, I dare say) within the Faculty of Political Science for a few years now.

With respect to Theory too, one can see a breaking away from the American perspective. As mentioned in the report (Munden, 2012: 24), US teachers tend to outright reject it, a fact which probably makes sense, since the program was founded, at least in part, specifically as a response to the rise of Theory. The UK (and it seems Australia) however takes on a more open-minded approach to the issue, recognizing the utility of providing students with clear structural examples rather than merely giving them the opportunity to discover things on the fly. This is specifically reflected in how classes are organized.

With this in mind, the second interesting point that the report makes has to do with how classes are organized and how successful they are. Thus, CW courses involve typically 2-3 hour meetings. These in turn may consist of an hour or more of lecturing on theory, or assigning in-class writing tasks, followed by a focus on workshop materials. Thus, the first half of the meeting involves various types of approaches that are more typical to what one could expect even here from a practical course or seminar, while the second half is focused on peer-to-peer discussions on texts produced by the students themselves. It follows then that adapting the first half within a program at BBU is fairly easy, at least potentially. Where things become more difficult is with any type of workshop methodology. As also stated in the report, CW courses typically involve small groups of around

15 students, with most universities in the UK tending towards even smaller units. In my CW course there are usually over 30 students enrolled and this is typical for our institution, since forming any smaller classroom units would prove difficult to justify financially. Therefore, a CW program at BBU would probably (at least initially) not include any workshop-type course structures, since these require an amount of teacher feedback and opportunities for peer review that are simply not feasible in such a large class. Again, serving as a modest example of how CW is currently taught at BBU, first year Journalism students are offered weekly 90 minute classes focusing on theory and bi-weekly 90 minute seminars where they practice writing. Students also have to write a draft for a short story and then submit a final version for which they receive a grade. As is undoubtedly clear, in my pedagogical approach I draw inspiration from UK methodologies and I consider that a full Creative Writing program at BBU could be modeled on pre-existing British models.

Finally, as to how successful CW courses usually are in the UK, the report indicates very positive results. In terms of student numbers, "the number of students enrolled on individual BA programs ranges from 40 to 350, more typically around 100" (Mundern, 2012: 11). These numbers are often swelled even further however, since CW programs usually attract a significant number of ERASMUS students. It is clear from such numbers that student interest in CW is high, thus providing a decent measure of prestige (to say nothing of funds) to any institution that offers such programs. The news only gets better. When comparing the number of students who enroll in a program to the ones who complete it, the report tells us that "drop-out of 5% (below the overall national average) is considered unusual, with ill-health or finance issues contributing" (Munden, 2012: 18). Moreover, while some 1st year students drop out, the number of those who transfer later on is significantly higher, meaning that, in the end, the number of students who complete the program are by and large the same as those who begin it, or even more. This fact alone should entice Babeș-Bolyai University.

All in all, when looking at CW in the UK, every indication is that it is doing well. Enrollment rates are high and dropout is low. The programs that exist have managed to connect to a wide range of disciplines, ensuring that the field stays relevant no matter what changes might occur in both academia and the job market. And, lastly, while Munden's Benchmark report is now over a decade old, I have found nothing to indicate that the positive trends presented here have changed in any significant way.

4. Creative Writing outside Anglophone space

Although the purpose of the present paper is not to analyze Creative Writing studies around the world, some notes on the situation in other countries

would be useful in determining what challenges might arise when establishing a program at BBU. With this in mind, and working on what data has been made available, in what follows I will present the situation in two very different countries – Italy and Qatar – as well as touching a bit more upon the situation in Romania.

Italy

Elena Traina (2022) offers a comprehensive overview of the status of CW in Italy. Overall, the situation is not as optimistic as one might hope, as "humanities departments have made few sporadic attempts at introducing creative writing workshops and no official degrees exist at postgraduate level" (Traina, 2022: 2). This does not mean that no programs exist, but that they are currently limited to private institutions such as Scuola Holden, where Elena Traina works. Throughout her analysis, Traina comes up with possible reasons for the reluctance to embrace creative writing more and these would be interesting to list here, since they could potentially serve as caveats in the process of implementing a program at BBU.

Thus, the first issue that Traina points out is that, "just as you cannot learn how to write in Italian universities, you cannot learn how to paint, dance, act or play the viola" (Traina, 2022: 3). Instead, these examples of fine arts are only available for study at various institutions that function separately from universities. As a result, the general perception within Italian academic circles is that practice-based education should be the purview of such institutions. Universities on the other hand are expected to focus more on theoretical approaches to knowledge, therefore the introduction of a CW program would naturally be viewed with skepticism. Considering the fact that Romania also has separate craft-based institutions such as the National Arts University or the "Gheorghe Dima" National Music Academy, one might wonder whether a similar separation between practical and theoretical approaches to knowledge would also represent an obstacle to overcome when trying to establish a CW program.

The separation mentioned above is not the only problem that Traina points out and that is potentially recognizable for Romanians. In an interview with Linda Lappin of University La Sapienza, the author identifies three major obstacles, namely class size, a lack of trained teaching staff and finally, the existence of what are socially perceived as "useless degrees" (Traina, 2022: 14). The first obstacle then is that classes are often too large, sometimes with over 100 students, to make it feasible for professors to adequately assess the work of each and every participant. In Romania such large classes certainly exist, however most likely CW would be taught here in practical and optional courses, which are comprised of a much more manageable class size of 25 students.

As to the second obstacle, Linda Lappin asks the pertinent question "if indeed creative writing were to become an accredited discipline, who would teach such courses and how would they be chosen and what formative itinerary would be required of them?" (Traina, 2022: 15). This is certainly a problem that any institution would have to tackle when setting up a program in a country where a tradition in CW has yet to materialize. However, as Traina mentions, a proper selection of staff could be found by examining the criteria adopted in universities in countries such as the UK or Ireland, provided of course that an adequate interest in teaching CW exists.

Finally, during Traina's interview, Linda Lappin points out that universities in Italy often find themselves faced with the "challenge to justify the public system funding degree programs which produce graduates for whom there is no need in the job market" (Traina, 2022: 16). An example of such a degree is philosophy. This perception of limited utility becomes even more acute when it comes to graduate programs, which students often take with specific future career options in mind. Though beyond the scope of the present paper, it would be interesting to see whether similar perceptions exist in the Romanian public eye. If so, it would certainly be a problem that needs addressing, although what the solution might be is unclear.

One last observation that Traina makes is worth mentioning with respect to CW programs that exist in private institutions, namely that the "lack of research [in Creative Writing] in Italy has somehow contributed to tutors generally imitating what has proven popular (rather than successful) without ever considering its efficacy" (Traina, 2022: 8). In other words, lacking a national tradition in the practice of this field in Italy, scholars have proceeded to apply Anglophone approaches, not just in terms of adopting the workshop pedagogical model, but even going so far as to assign students almost exclusively Anglo-American texts to read, despite the fact that the courses are taught in Italian. This can be understandable, at least until more experience in the field is gained and popularity among the general population grows, however it may also be true that this one-to-one emulation of Anglophone approaches plays a part in the presently limited number of Creative Writing programs in Italy.

Qatar

In order to obtain a more nuanced view of Creative Writing around the world, it is perhaps opportune to look at a case study outside of European space. Fortunately, for this Meekings et al. (2023) comes in to provide an important glimpse into the status of this field in Qatar. As a former British colony and at present a sovereign Arab state, over the last few decades Qatar "has rapidly transitioned from a tribal society to a globalized state; workers of all levels and from a vast number of nationalities have flocked to the country" (Meekings

et al, 2023: 2) resulting in a society that is particularly diverse. Among the results of such a unique social make-up is the establishment of several educational institutions that offer CW classes in English and that have close ties to US schools (Meekings et al, 2023: 4). Unfortunately, these institutions have struggled to attract students and Meetings et al, through a series of interviews, have provided four possible reasons why this is the case.

The first issue identified is that, "despite a basic definition being included in [their] interview script, many of the subjects expressed a degree of uncertainty about whether or not what they had done in the past, or were doing in the present, constituted creative writing" (Meekings et al, 2023: 7). To an extent, this is due to the fact that the very definition of creative writing has changed more than once over the years. Mostly, however, the confusion comes down to the lines between creative writing and literary studies that continue to be blurry. While the latter is an established component of higher education, students (and to an extent researchers) struggle to understand what differentiates it from the former. In Romania, where CW is arguably even less known than in present day Qatar, it isn't difficult to imagine that such a confusion might be at least equally prevalent. Still, when setting up a program here, sheer curiosity would bring students in initially, and so it is paramount that a proper understanding of the field should be one of the first task to accomplish.

The second obstacle identified is education. During their interviews, many of the students counted concern over keeping up with their education and social obligations as a principal reason why they choose not to engage in creative writing. Even if they had already practiced it, students often feel that "they do not have the time and/or energy to engage in creative writing while at university" (Meekings et al, 2023: 9). At the same time, many students involved in the study mentioned that, since classes over the years continually assign various writing assignments, they instinctually associate any kind of writing, including creative, to school work and with all the pressures that come with it. Thus, the enjoyment of this activity is compromised from the very start and this in turn fosters a potential reluctance on behalf of students to pick CW as an area of academic interest.

The third obstacle that Meekings et al mention is family influence. Specifically, they focus on the habit of parents choosing or at least heavily influencing the choice of what major their children should opt for, and on "their family's beliefs and assumptions about the financial woes that accompany a career in creative writing" (Meekings et al, 2023: 12). Strong writing skills are, of course, seen as a great benefit for future employability, even in STEM fields, which appear to be the main areas of interest towards which parents tend to guide students. However, this only pertains to forms of professional writing, whereas creative writing is preponderantly seen as a hobby rather than something worth studying or pursuing as a career.

Finally, Meekings et al mention Culture as being an obstacle in students' desire to enroll in CW courses. While Qatar is certainly not without its cultural events, many students expressed concerns that it is not enough and that "a stronger local writing culture in Qatar would likely encourage them to write more" (Meekings et al, 2023: 14). Along similar lines, students also complained that what creative writing events do exists outside of academia are often poorly advertised, meaning that many of them do not garner as much public interest as they otherwise could. Elena Traina, when discussing the relationship between CW programs and the world outside of academic circles in Italy, raises similar concerns and it is therefore feasible to entertain the possibility that a similar issue exists here as well.

Romania

As stated previously, the presence of CW in Romania is limited today to a few optional and practical courses scattered here and there, with no fully formed program to speak of. This was not always the case. Between 2004 and 2010 the West University of Timisoara (WUT) ran an MA in Creative Writing within the English department of the Faculty of Letters, History and Theology. Through email correspondence with Claudia Doroholschi, who acted as co-coordinator, I discovered that the program had been intended both for aspiring authors and for students who looked to become literary scholars, editors or teachers. The courses offered, the list of which is still available online, reflect the dual nature proposed and feature an interesting mixture of literary studies classes and practical writing workshops. Initially, feedback for and results of the program were extremely positive, with some students not only mentioning how much they enjoyed it, but also going on to apply what they learned in their own future creative endeavors. Unfortunately, interest in the MA seemed to have waned in time. During the last three years of activity enrollment was particularly low and, with three other MAs operating within the English department at the same time, the difficult decision to shut down the Creative Writing program was made. Since then no other attempt seems to have been made.

5. Conclusions

Now more than a century old, the field of Creative Writing is still expanding and shows no sign of slowing down. Having begun in the US as a reaction to both philological approaches to literature and later as a countermeasure to the rise of Theory, it remains predominantly a trait of institutions within English-speaking countries. In the US it found fertile ground to appear and develop because of the "democratization of creative power" (Dawson, 2005: 32), which materialized in a rejection of the notion that writing cannot be taught, together with a strong

desire to try new pedagogical approaches. In the UK it appeared at the University of East Anglia "as an experiment in education – in a new university committed to educational innovation" (Holeywell, in Cowen, 2016: 46). At least as of 2012 and 2016, the data and responses from the AWP survey and from Munden's report show that CW as a field is doing quite well, especially in the US, where enrollment numbers are consistently high and the number of programs that are up and running seems to be increasing. This alone should pique the interest of any university institution that might look to expand the breath of its educational options by including CW.

If the interest does arise at BBU, the first CW program should probably exist within the Faculty of Letters. Most US and UK programs function within or in close relations to the institutions' Philology departments, meaning that there are hundreds of examples to draw inspiration from. In addition, it makes sense, since, as Veronica Austen points out,

> not only does effective essay writing require creativity, but [...] one must recognize that the writing of literature is a critical activity requiring writers to assess the works of others in order to gain inspiration for and insight into their own literary writing (Austen 2005: 3).

In other words, the creative and the critical are in fact intertwined, all the more reason why the field of CW should be welcomed.

Whichever way such a program might end up resembling, having one at the Faculty of Letters would foster an environment in which the critic and the writer are once again brought closer together, to in effect restore this relationship to its more original codependence, before the rise of Theory split them apart by proclaiming the death of the author. This brings up one more question to be addressed - what department should run a Creative Writing program? Here, the most obvious answer is the Department of English Language and Literature. While this author agrees with the conclusion in Meekings et al (2023) that courses should be adapted to the particularities of the country where they operate, at least when initially setting up a program one cannot discount the fact that institutions with a tradition in the field are predominantly Anglophone and having strong connections with them (something that is arguably more readily available for members of the English department) could go a long way towards developing a program and training teachers. At the same time, having English as the language of instruction opens up the possibility of attracting international students and guest lecturers, further adding to the potential academic and financial success of such a program.

This, of course, would not be an easy feat. As the situations in Italy, Qatar and even Romania show, implementing a creative writing program outside of

the Anglophone world has proven to be a challenge. According to Traina, in Italy creative arts are generally taught in academies that function separately from universities and the notion that the degrees obtained at either institution hold equal value is relatively new. At the same time, class size, the lack of trained CW teachers and the notion of useless degrees are all factors that continue to hinder the development of the field. Concern for the practical and financial utility of a CW degree is also great in Qatar, alongside other issues such as a proper understanding of what constitutes creative writing in the first place. Finally, in Romania one genuine attempt has been made at setting up an MA program within West University of Timișoara, however poor enrollment eventually lead to its discontinuation.

Future discussions

None of the challenges mentioned above should deter BBU from starting its own program. In their study Meekings et al conclude that "it is vital to localize how we study, teach and talk about creative writing, rather than assume or import global or Western-centric models" (Meekings et al, 2023: 17). I agree, since such an adaptation would ensure that the make-up of the classes offered would be in keeping with the sensibilities of the students who might show interest in them. This does suggest, however, that there is, at present, research lacking that might help determine exactly what these sensibilities are. For example, an analysis along similar lines to the one conducted both by Elena Traina in Italy and Meekings et al in Qatar might be useful in ascertaining whether similar social and educational constraints might exist that could prevent students from choosing Creative Writing as a field of study.

In this author's opinion however, BBU need not wait for the results of such research to be available before taking some preliminary steps. The lesson learned from the defunct program at WUT might be that setting up an MA from the very start runs the risk of failure in the long term. Instead, what BBU should try is to encourage an increase in the number of courses available at the BA level, which would result in a popularization of the field prior to taking the step towards setting up a full MA program.

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