

## **HL2020 Creative Criticism Workshop**

**Division of English, Nanyang Technological University**

**Semester: Fall 2024**

**Day:**

**Location:**

**Seminar leader: J.C. Hallman**

**Email address: JCHallman@gmail.com**

**Office:**

**Office Hours:**

**Pre-requisite: HZ9101 Intro to CW/HL1001 Intro to Study of Literature**

What draws us to a work of art is invariably a function of fancy. This class explores how personality, context, preference, and whim—all things subjective—influence our perception of literature and become potentially interesting avenues of inquiry in their own right. Creative nonfiction collides with criticism as we explore writers executing their own odd form of critical response—highly personal, yet respectful of the intent of the artist. We will read writers' responses to the work of J.D. Salinger, Franz Kafka, Vladimir Nabokov, and others in preparation for producing our own essays about stories which have moved us or proved important at stages of our lives. The essays we write will in turn become the text for a course that allows us to bring creativity to our response to literature.

Students will be required to write one major essay for this class (based on four shorter assignments: see below). Students will choose a book or author that is particularly interesting or fascinating to them, and over the course of the semester each student will conduct an investigation, reading related material, looking for what the author has said about their work, etc. What you will produce will be the story of your relationship with that book or author. It will be as much about the book as about the act of reading, what the place of literature is in the world, and undoubtedly it will be about you on some level. I expect papers around 5,000 words.

Class will be broken into two distinct sections. In the first, we'll look at two books and a variety of essays that are in keeping with what I hope you'll be producing. These readings should give you a good idea of the variety and the creativity that can be brought to bear on the subject of reading. From the readings, you'll hopefully be able to devise a personal strategy for making narrative sense of all the research you've been doing. As we read examples of this kind of work, you'll complete several short assignments that will prepare you for your own essays.

In the second portion of class we'll read one another's essays. These works in progress will be distributed to all other students and to the instructor the week before the piece

is due to be discussed in a workshop context. Each student in the class will critique each presented piece and return this to the writer at the end of the discussion.

In addition to the creative work required in the course, each student will write a reflective commentary about their own writing context, models and/or process. According to the instructor's preference, this can be comprised of a reflective essay, a critical essay, an annotated bibliography, a manifesto, some form of reading journal, or a statement of aesthetics. These pieces will not be workshopped, and it should go without saying that, to some extent, these pieces can be creative in nature as well.

### Tentative Course Outline

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Week	Topic	Indicative Reading
1	Introduction	Woolf, Gilb
2	Seminar	"Creative Criticism": Spingarn, Barthes, Sontag, Kazin
3	Seminar	Selected Readings, <i>The Story About the Story I &amp; II</i>
4	Seminar	Selected Readings, <i>The Story About the Story I &amp; II</i>
5	Seminar	Selected Readings, <i>The Story About the Story I &amp; II</i>
6	Seminar	<i>U &amp; I</i> , Nicholson Baker
7	Seminar	<i>B &amp; Me</i> , J.C. Hallman
8	<b>Recess Week</b>	
9	Workshop	Student essays
10	Workshop	Student essays
11	Workshop	Student essays
12	Workshop	Student essays
13	Workshop	Student essays
14	Workshop	Student essays

\*NB. Topics and readings are subject to change depending on the depth of our interests and the speed of our progress.

### ***Learning Outcome***

Students will obtain an introduction to Creative Criticism and will embark on building their own portfolios.

### ***Assessment***

Course grades will be determined by the following:

Class participation	20%
One full-length essay, and four short assignments (5000 words)	70%
Critical Self-Commentary (1000 words)	10%

### ***Required Reading***

Selected readings

Selections from *The Story About the Story*, I and II, ed. J.C. Hallman

*U & I*, Nicholson Baker

*B & Me*, J.C. Hallman

### **SEMINAR NOTES:**

- Please be present, and please be on time. If you enter late, there's no need to apologise, but settle into the class with the minimum disruption. If you are more than 20 minutes late to class, this will count as an absence.
- Use of the internet during class time is not allowed.
- Eating is not allowed during class time.
- Please turn your phones off in class.
- The group needs your thoughts. Your comments, questions and contributions are invited, welcome, and absolutely necessary to productive creative discussion – however basic or as-yet-unformed those thoughts may be. However, make sure you listen as well as speak, and that you respect writing time as silent time, unless otherwise advised.
- Please let your seminar leader know as soon as possible if you have any disability

or other issue that requires special accommodation in class (examples: you need to sit in a special position so you can see or hear well; you need to leave your phone on in case of a family emergency; you need to leave class early to attend a medical appointment, etc.).

## **BEYOND THE SEMINARS:**

### **Writing time**

Your participation in this course needs to be supported by substantial time spent writing outside of class. This is necessary for basic completion of the assignments.

For those of you who wish to have creative writing (or any creative practice) as an active part of your lives in the future, success in this course will not be measured by grades, but by how effectively you set up the physical and intellectual habits of writing, reading and engaging with new ideas. Dedication to these habits will show results in your grades, but also in the richness of your writing, and in the quality of your broader life experience. Please make the most of this rare opportunity.

### **Writing sources**

Language is shared; texts always bear the traces of the texts that surround and precede them. You are encouraged to make conscious and creative use of source texts. Be aware of (and avoid) the problems of plagiarism, but also partake of the great storehouse of language around you. You can use a writing journal as a place to collect source material if you wish, or keep other notebooks.

### **Revision**

Even though publishing writers occasionally (very occasionally) write work that achieves all its aims on the first draft, this is not a skill that can be learned in a semester. More often published work has gone through many phases of revision – and learning to revise is central to the aims of this class. Keep early drafts of your work, and take risks as you make new versions. Not everything you try will work, but if you are only willing to change the odd word or punctuation mark, you will miss at least half of the adventure of writing.

## **ASSESSMENT NOTES:**

- For the purposes of participation assessment, any unexcused lateness beyond 20 minutes of class start time will be marked as an absence.
- Please contact your lecturer immediately if you think you will have difficulty completing any of the requirements or submitting your work on time. Extensions are only granted in exceptional circumstances (for example, for medical reasons or in cases of family emergency), and documentation is

required. However, support or resources may also be available to help you manage more minor difficulties, so please don't hesitate to contact me for an appointment to discuss anything that comes up.

- Late assignment submissions will be penalized by three percentage points per day. No work will be accepted more than seven days after the due date, unless an extension has been pre-arranged.
- Assignments should be printed in a plain, legible 12 font.
- Assignments should be 2x spaced.
- Please include a word count estimate at the end of each assignment.
- Assignments should be stapled, or secured in a closed manila folder. Please do not submit your work in clear-files.
- Assignments should be submitted to your seminar leader's assignment box at the English Division office.

### **APPENDIX 1: Two-Stage Workshop Method**

When we begin the workshop portion of class, we'll aim to discuss each student essay for approximately 45 minutes. By the time we turn to that portion of class, you'll have read two books and almost twenty essays of this kind of work—to some extent, you'll be experts, and your critiques of one another's work can draw up the class discussions we will have been having all semester.

What I want you to do: read each piece at least twice. The first time, read it just as you would any essay that you might come across. That is, without thinking necessarily of how to make it better. The second time, knowing where it's headed and what it's going to say, concentrate on what you would do to help it say what it wants to say better.

In Class:

Divide your response mentally into two categories.

First, shape a response to each piece just as if it was one of the essays we read in class. By that I mean concentrate simply on articulating or re-articulating what the author seems to have wanted to say. If our essays on "writing about reading" are lengthy versions of people articulating what happens to them when they read a particular book, then this response in class is a little similar. You describe what it was like to read each essay, and you talk about what the essay made you think.

Second, talk about how the essay could have been done better. At this point, all of you will have read more on this particular subject, writing about reading, than most people ever do. So you will all have a learned opinion on how essays like this should work. You know that, at least in the instructor's opinion, the four sections (history, synopsis, criticism, reading) are all valuable tools to make a good essay. But the balance between these things may vary. That may be one way to structure your response in this "stage." Does the essay drag in spots? Is it too short? Too long? Were you engaged with it? Did you have enough synopsis? Did you need a synopsis at all? Did you like the narrative voice? Did it prove its point, whatever it was? Criticism should *always* be constructive. Don't point out a flaw without doing the work of figuring out a possible solution for it.

Class will work like this...we'll talk about each "stage" for about twenty-five minutes. I'll start by pointing to someone randomly in class, and they'll give their response and we'll move down the row from there. Hopefully, we won't have to go far before others will want to volunteer their opinions. Important point: this kind of class discussion is not you talking to the instructor. It's you talking to the entire class. Another important point: it's very important to register either agreement or disagreement with what's already been said. This, in fact, may be more valuable than saying it the first time. It gives the author either a sense of consensus (in the case of agreement), or of variety (in the case of disagreement). Both are valuable. The instinct, I know, is to avoid saying something that's already been said, on the one hand, and, on the other, not wanting to look foolish by disagreeing with what seems like a majority. Ultimately, however, those minority opinions can be very valuable, and I'll be there to defend even responses that seem very different from the bulk of the class.

I'll expect you, as well, to line edit each other's work. Check for everything from spelling to punctuation to awkward sentences, or to moments when the piece lost you for whatever reason. Also, briefly hand-write or type up your responses for each of the two "stages" of class...a brief paragraph is all you may need for each. I'll collect all these responses, examine them (they're part of your participation grade), and give them back to the author during conference.

The author does not speak at all while their piece is workshopped. You'll have a conference with me some time later, and can speak then. But as well, I encourage you to approach each other for clarifications about opinions.

## **APPENDIX 2: HSS English Division: Definition and Penalties for Plagiarism**

### **Definition**

Plagiarism (from the Latin word for 'kidnapper') is the deliberate or accidental presentation of someone else's ideas or words as your own. This includes:

- The unacknowledged use of words, images, diagrams, graphs, or ideas derived from any source such as books, journals, magazines, the visual media, and the internet. Note: cutting and pasting words from the internet into your own essay, even if you reword them, is still plagiarism.
- Copying the work of a fellow student, having another student write one's assignments, or allowing another student to borrow one's work.
- Buying and/or copying essays, assignments, projects etc from the internet or any other source and handing them in as your own.

Please bear in mind that your lecturers know the subject and have read widely. They therefore can spot unreferenced quotations, and can tell the difference between university level writing and that of published scholars.

### **Penalties**

- If a first year student is caught plagiarizing, and it is the student's first offense, the student will have the opportunity to rewrite the paper with one grade reduction.
- After the first year of studies, it is expected that a student thoroughly understands the implications of plagiarism. Thus, after the first year, or if a student is caught plagiarizing a second time, the student will receive an F for the assignment.

### **Why plagiarism is academically dishonest**

- The unacknowledged borrowing of another's work is theft.
- Independent and creative thinking, as well as intellectual responsibility, are fundamental to a humanities education, and cannot be developed if one simply borrows the work of another.

### **How to avoid academic dishonesty**

#### ***Plagiarism***

- If you use an author's exact words, you must put them in quotation marks. If you paraphrase another's ideas, you again must indicate the source to your reader.
- Facts and statistics that are not "common knowledge" must be referenced.
- Be sure to use the method of citation recommended by your professor.
- If in doubt, it is always best to reference your material.
- Remember that your lecturer wants to see your ideas and interpretations. Avoid excessively quoting secondary sources and show your reader your thinking.

#### ***Collusion and complicity***

- Ask your lecturer if you are allowed to work on assignments in groups.
- Get the approval of your professor if you want to hand in material that you have already submitted for another course.
- Do not allow students to copy your work (including work from previous semesters).
- Follow the examination rules set out by the university.

If you still have questions, please ask your professors, or consult the website:  
<http://www.plagiarism.org>.

Sources for this document:

The Little, Brown Essential Handbook. Ed. Jane E. Aaron. New York: Pearson Longman, 2006.

### **ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR CREATIVE WRITERS:**

The conventions for acknowledgement in creative writing are somewhat different to those for acknowledgement in academic writing, but NO form of intellectual dishonesty is acceptable. It is acceptable to appropriate material from source texts, AS LONG AS your use of these texts is acknowledged, is within reason, and demonstrates substantial independent and creative thinking of your own.

There are a number of ways to acknowledge the use of source texts in creative writing, and these vary according to your stylistic imperatives, the level of dependence on the source text and the level of familiarity your audience is likely to have with the source text. For the purposes of this course, you need not always use quotation marks for quoted material if this interferes with your stylistic imperatives (they may be intrusive in a poem, for example). You MUST, however, acknowledge any source texts you use through reference integrated into the work itself, through footnotes or through endnotes. Do not “borrow” work from friends, books, the internet, song lyrics or any other source without acknowledgement, as this counts as plagiarism.

### **APPENDIX 3: Reflective Commentary Guide**

All creative work relies to some extent on instinct. As a writer you need a feel for the rhythms and textures of the language, for the shape of a phrase, the weight of a word. You need to be responsive to the promptings of your imagination. You need to be sensitive to the subtleties of human behaviour.

Instinct, however, will only take you so far. You also require a sound understanding of the conventions of writing. You need a solid grasp of the techniques for creating stories. You need to be capable of careful redrafting and editing, and you need to be attuned to other writing and how you might learn from it: every good writer is first of all a good reader.

In other words, the process of writing is both instinctual and highly self-aware. For this reason all our creative writing courses carry some element of reflective commentary.



The purpose of the commentary is to provide you with an opportunity to consider your own creative processes. Here you might account for the ways in which your reading has influenced or guided your writing, in terms of both theme and technique. You might comment on the technical difficulties you have encountered and the strategies you have employed to overcome them. You might attempt to place your creative work in the context of your wider critical studies.

Among the questions you might seek to answer in your self-commentary are these: How are you a writer of a particular cultural/historical context? What problems did you run into, and what steps did you take to overcome them? What techniques have you learned from other writers? What were your thoughts at each stage of composition, and what gains did you make in the process of redrafting? What insights did you gain *as a writer* from your reading? And what do you think you have learnt in producing this work, both as a writer and as a reader of other writings?

To help guide your reflections it might be useful to keep a writer's journal over the course of the semester. Here you can chart the journey you make from conception to completion. You can divide the process of composition into stages and make notes on each stage. You can analyse the issues that arise, and set down your anxieties, and explore some potential solutions. You can register your responses to class exercises and workshops. You can keep a detailed log of your reading.

Such a journal would not be submitted for assessment. However, you could draw upon it when writing your self-commentary. You could quote from it directly.

When you submit work for assessment I do not expect you to demonstrate your progress by including earlier drafts of your poems or stories. You may however quote from these earlier drafts in your self-commentary, giving a considered account of how your writing has developed.

What I am looking for is self-awareness, an ability to comment in a writerly way on your writerly processes and perhaps make a literary-theoretical critique of the end product.

You should be reflecting intelligently on your experience of writing and showing a genuine understanding of the issues raised in class. I will be looking for you to demonstrate an ability to examine your own work in the light of these issues and to refer to any set reading as appropriate. You may also draw on your knowledge of critical theories and theories of creative writing, using the appropriate critical vocabulary. I will also be looking for evidence of an ability to place your own work within larger critical and cultural contexts. You should be able to demonstrate a critical awareness of some key issues of literary production - such as, for instance, questions of authorial control and intentionality – and be able to employ theoretical perspectives when analysing your own processes. You should, in other words, have a sophisticated take on what it is you're up to.