

# HL2020 Creative Writing: Hybrid Genres

Semester 1, AY 2020/21  
Location: HSS-TR+2 (TBC)  
broc.rossell@ntu.edu.sg

Day and Time: W 9:30-12:20  
Assistant Professor Broc Russell  
Office: HSS 03-71

Pre-requisite: HL1001

## Course Description

In this class we will read and write texts that don't fit neatly into conventional literary genres. Like Dr. Frankenstein, who cobbled together various parts to make a new kind of corpus, students will adapt and appropriate elements from multiple genres to write between poetry and prose, fiction and non-fiction, philosophy and literature, and other "generic" divisions.

To write through, between, and against literary genres we will read some criticism and theory as to what constitutes genre, how it's formed, and what its potential might be, as we turn most of our attention to readings that move against generic and conventional forms and strategies that comprise literary genres.

Those readings, as well as the hybrid writing we find on our own, will serve as models for what we create and share in class. Our goal is to develop a keen sense of what is important to us as practitioners of creative writing, rather than university students *per se*. Students are evaluated according to their ability to think creatively, making unlikely connections between discrete ideas, and to objectively assess creative texts for the value they offer to our creative practices: i.e., communicating clearly and thoughtfully about the strengths and weaknesses of a given text as they pertain to our own projects. Our focus is *not* on academic writing, therefore, but on the critical and creative thoughts that result from the development of a writerly acumen.

Students will write critical responses to assigned readings, generate and share new writing in a workshop format, and provide written feedback to other students for their writing. Our discussions of reading and writing will centre on the writerly aspects of hybridity and the strategies we develop to avoid generic literary forms. As a capstone assignment student will write a reflective essay about their own writing contexts, models and/or process, citing their own work in addition to secondary readings to describe the conversation in which their writing takes place.

We will be together for three hours each week, and establishing a friendly, rigorous atmosphere for our conversations is really important. We will spend most of the first couple weeks creating that kind of space. After the first few weeks the latter part of each class period will consist of a workshop.

To repeat: in our settled routine, we will begin each class with a discussion of the assigned reading, weighing its strategies and techniques to decide whether to try them in our own writing. Then we'll break into workshop[s] and use the analysis from the first part of class as a catalyst for discussing each other's work.

If you're not familiar with a workshop, it is a classroom format where students discuss each other's work in order to deepen and strengthen our craft. Imagine a round table where everyone talks and works as equals. It depends on students who are prepared, engaged, and respectful. We will assume everyone in the class is a serious writer, a serious artist, and treat each other and our work with the respect and effort it deserves. Even if your motivation for the course is simply to gain a deeper understanding of hybrid genre writing, you must abide by these principles in order to accomplish your goal.

To "workshop" a text means to read it carefully and thoughtfully: to *never* use critical or "crap" sandwiches, to *never* make qualitative statements (like "it's good," "it's bad" – "I like this part," "this part sucks"), and instead describe what the text makes you think about and how the text works to produce those effects. Technical terms and specific references to intention and effect are necessary elements of constructive criticism that allow us to answer basic questions about a text. Many helpful prompts are included at the end of this syllabus. Some basic questions about a text are:

- What kind of text is this? How is it dead or alive, most true to itself?
- Where are the moments it fails to be itself? Why does it fail there?
- What techniques does the writer use to create effects and *affects*?
- Are they effective and/or affective? Why and why not?

### Assessment

Presentation (5-10 minutes, one page handout submitted)	10%
Class participation (including attendance and peer reviews)	20%
Workshop leads (2x, short analyses of peer writing, 400 ea.)	20%
Portfolio (12 pages of finished work plus 12 pages of drafts &/ notes)	20%
Statement of Poetics (1200 words)	30%

### Descriptions of Assignments

#### Presentation

Students will give an informal presentation on the work[s] of an author who has some relation to their own work at the beginning of class. No PowerPoints are allowed, and students will take no more than 9 minutes. A single one-page handout is to be distributed in class. See assessment guidelines for more information on this requirement.

### **Participation**

Your participation mark will reflect your attendance, your ability to come to class prepared with annotated hard copies of the material, and the degree to which your contributions to class discussion and activities adhere to the principles of fair and constructive criticism.

### **Workshop Lead**

A workshop lead is a very short work of literary analysis that consists of three paragraphs. It requires that you conceptualize the text as a whole, synthesize its essential identity, and characterize that essence in your own words. The first paragraph characterizes and describes the text; it is a hypothesis as to what it *is*. The first paragraph identifies what qualities, strategies, and decisions are *most important* to understanding this text.

The second paragraph includes quotes and/or paraphrases of the text that supports the characterization of it given in the first paragraph; the value of your second paragraph's contents is determined by the accuracy and relevance of the selection – whether you've chosen the best parts of the text as examples of what you're describing in the first paragraph.

The third and final paragraph explains how the quotes and/or paraphrases presented in the second paragraph support the assertions in the first. You explain exactly how those quotes are evidence of your hypothesis, your description, or your characterization of the text. It is the assignment's critical, literary interpretation and analysis. Please slavishly adhere to MLA format.

### **The Portfolio**

This is due on the last day. It is comprised of twelve pages of finished work written over the course of this semester (old work may not be included). It may include work previously submitted for workshop as well as new work; it's up to you to decide what is your strongest collection of work. You should include either previous drafts of each piece or some combination of early drafts and real notes taken during the revision process; no writing done after the fact is permitted. The portfolio should reflect your engagement with the assigned readings and the work of your classmates. And it should illuminate your poetics statement as much as that illuminates your portfolio

### **Poetics Statement**

With your portfolio, this is the capstone to the course: an articulation as cogent, clear, and forceful as you can make of what you value in poetics: not poetry, but poetics, which we will define as the best possible conversation that can happen about your writing, with the participants in that conversation including other writers (dead or alive) that inspire it, themes and concerns that inform it, and the values, both ethical and aesthetic, it represents.

Your statement of poetics demonstrates the many ways your writing is a reflection of those values. Think of it as a comprehensive introduction presented to a well-read audience.

There are many ways to write it well. This assignment can incorporate elements of a research paper, argument paper, literary analysis paper, or any combination thereof; your “sources” may include your own poems, your own workshop leads, our assigned readings, and any secondary or external texts you find or have found useful. One recommendation that many students have often taken over the years is to think of this assignment as a description of process, or a narrative of how your writing has changed over the course of the semester.

All sources outside of our assigned materials must be cited formally. It should present to the reader a clear and forceful introduction to your work, as presently constituted in your poetry portfolio. It is due on the last day of class. Again, please slavishly adhere to MLA format.

### Required Reading

A reader of compiled non-fiction is provided at the beginning of term. The printed hard copy is mandatory and required for a student to be considered present. This will be available at cost from Print Services, HSS Building, Level B1. Please note no PDFs will be provided. (Please also be aware that you must print student writing each week as well.)

**Reading Schedule\*** *We will average 20 to 40 pages per week, but some “easier” readings will run longer and some “harder” or “more dense” readings might be shorter.*

Week	Topic*	Tentative Readings*
1	Introduction to the Course	(Devitt, CanLit Guides, handouts of examples)
2	“An Essay on Style” From <i>Writing the Disaster</i>	Walter Pater Maurice Blanchot
3	Fiction genres	Wells Tower
4	Fiction / poetry Workshop	Aleksander Hemon Robert Majzels
5	Non-fiction / poetry Workshop	Sei Shonagon Sarah Manguso
6	Non-fiction / poetry Workshop	Sarah Manguso
7	Non-fiction / poetry Workshop	Mary Rueffle Samuel Beckett

		Alan Shapiro
8	<b>Recess Week</b>	
9	Poetry / non-fiction Workshop	Claudia Rankine
10	Poetry / non-fiction Workshop	Emmanuel Carrere
11	Poetry / non-fiction Workshop	Emmanuel Carrere
12	Non-fiction / fiction Workshop	John D'Agata
13	Non-fiction / fiction Workshop	William Blake
14	Final Class – TBD <b>Final Assessment Due</b>	

\* Please note that the outline is indicative; the table of contents in your course reader is definitive. Topics and readings covered from week to week **will vary** depending on the direction we take as a class. **It is the student's responsibility to stay current** with regard to reading assignments in the event of an absence.

### ***Learning Outcome***

Students will be introduced to the craft and theory of hybrid genre writing and will build creative portfolios with individually designed critical contexts.

### **CLASS POLICIES:**

- Please be present and on time. If you enter late, there's no need to apologise, but settle in with minimum disruption. If you are more than 20 minutes late to class or leave class more than 20 minutes early, this will count as an absence.
- Use of laptops and tablets during class time is not allowed; student work must be printed in hard copy. Please turn your phones off and put them out of sight in class.
- Eating is allowed during class time, messes are not; failure to clean up will cancel eating privileges.
- Participation is a two-way street. 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.). Please understand that if you have continuing logistical challenges to arriving in class on time it may affect your final marks.

**Please make sure you print and read all work that is to be workshopped, that you make notes on that work to help you participate in discussion, and that you bring these annotated materials with you to class.**

#### **ASSESSMENT NOTES:**

- For the purposes of participation assessment, any unexcused lateness beyond 20 minutes of class start time will be marked as an absence.
- Workshop leads cannot be submitted late. Failure to be present and on time when you are scheduled to lead a workshop, or when you are scheduled to be workshopped, will affect both your mark for the assignment and your final participation mark.
- Work is due at the beginning of class and is held to the same attendance policy people are. Late assignment submissions will be penalized by one half of the final letter grade 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 and in MLA format, except where your creative intentions demand otherwise (as in experimental poetics). It is the student's responsibility to be familiar with and adhere to MLA conventions.
- Prose assignments must be double-spaced and include a word count.
- Assignments should be stapled or secured in a closed manila folder. Please do not submit your work in plastic files.
- Please contact me immediately if you think you'll have difficulty completing any of the requirements or submitting your work on time. Please don't hesitate to contact me for an appointment to discuss anything that comes

up, and don't wait until you've already missed assignments or fallen behind. Extensions are 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.

## **BEYOND CLASS:**

### **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 of many kinds and in many ways. You might, for example, re-situate in a poem the fragments of a conversation you've overheard, or use the narrative structure of a song you know as the basis for a story. 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. Should you be tempted to become a literary thief, however, please: do not. This is the wrong class to attempt plagiarism. See the policy regarding plagiarism at the end of this syllabus.

### **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.

## **APPENDIX 1: Workshop Learning Agreement and Feedback Guide**

Workshops are an integral part of any creative writing class. At least twice during the semester you will present written work to your colleagues for discussion and critique. Use this workshop time to help you prepare for assessment. A schedule of allocated dates for these workshops will be drawn up within the first few classes. If you forget to bring in work to class, you will be responsible for distributing this work by email. Ensure you have your class's email addresses at the start of the semester.

### **Learning Agreement**

The purpose of creative writing workshops is not only to provide your work with an audience, though this is important. It is always useful to test the success of your writing on a community of readers in order to gain an idea of what works (what communicates or "carries") and what doesn't. You can then think about *why* some things succeed and others don't. This process of workshop-generated reflection is key to good revision and to informing the critical self-commentaries that form part of all assessed assignments.

But there is more to it than that. In submitting your work for discussion you are providing us – the group – with an opportunity to think about some of the key issues in creating stories, poems, novels, and scripts. These issues may be technical, ethical, perceptual, philosophical... And it isn't just you – the author – who benefits. In analyzing your work, we are all pressed in to thinking about the issues your work raises.

The workshop provides us all with an opportunity to learn, regardless of whose writing is under discussion. For this reason it is crucial that you participate in every session. Your participation will benefit you as much as the person whose work is being discussed.

Although undertaking studies in creative writing demonstrates willingness to engage in the workshop process, not everyone enjoys having their work discussed, let alone dissected; not everyone feels comfortable in the spotlight. It *can* be a trying experience. It can also seem quite at odds with the day-to-day reality of writing, which usually involves silence and solitude. Even those of us who do feel at ease may struggle to cope with certain kinds – and levels – of criticism. It is therefore important that your criticism be constructive.

In order for your criticism to be constructive, you should endeavor to identify and praise what does succeed before you go on to talk about what might not. And in discussing what works less well, you should try always to think about solutions, remedies, the ways in which a difficulty might be resolved. What is the problem exactly? How do you think it might be fixed? Bear in mind that the improvement of technique and structure – insofar as these can be separated from theme and from one's personal philosophy – is our primary focus.

Needless to say, whatever your feelings about the writer, it is the work you should be focused upon. The workshop is not a place to air personal grievances and the work itself should never become a pretext for other kinds of criticism. This guideline for conduct



should, naturally, apply to correspondence outside the classroom as well. Moreover, the confidentiality of someone else's written work must be respected; that which is meant for discussion in the workshop should not be shared elsewhere.

### **Feedback guide**

The writing workshop is an opportunity for you to share your creative writing in progress with the group, but also an opportunity for you to aid in the development of others' work. There are a few guidelines for giving and receiving feedback which will make the sessions as productive and useful as possible, so please bear them in mind. Refer to this list if you get stuck when giving feedback.

#### **Giving Feedback:**

- Give an overall response at the end that is positive and supportive and balances criticism with praise. Think 'critical sandwich' – a positive comment, followed by a more critical, questioning comment, followed by another positive comment.
- Everyone is expected to contribute in class, bear in mind the above when making comments in class.
- Avoid psycho-analyzing the writer, assuming their work is biographical, or giving comments that are personal in any way.
- It is useful to write comments or mark/underline your copy, then give this copy to the person presenting

#### **Things to consider when giving feedback:**

##### **Initial impressions:**

- What's your 'gut feeling' about the piece, what first impressions do you have?
- When you have read it, what remains, are there certain images or ideas that linger in your consciousness?
- What are the most significant aspects of the piece?
- What were the strongest images or ideas?
- Did it feel fresh, original or distinctive?
- Was it hard to put down?
- What are its strong points? Its weaker areas?
- Does it feel complete?
- Are you left with a sense of satisfying mystery, or confusion?
- What do you think the piece is about?
- Did the piece provoke thought?
- Does the piece feel complete, rounded, or like a fragment?

After the initial impressions, you need to focus on more technical areas:

- Does the piece locate the reader?
- Do you know whose point of view the piece is written from? Is this the right choice for the story?
- What is the narrative voice like – distinctive and clear, or confusing or vague?
- Is the setting well-evoked? Is it appropriate for the story?
- Does it begin well, or could it lose its first paragraph?
- Does it end well, or could it lose its last paragraph? Is the ending resonant, leaving you thinking about the story? Is it satisfying? Does it ‘tie’ everything up too well, or does it leave frustrating questions?
- Does the writer ask the reader to connect emotionally and physically?
- Does the writer make good use of silence and absence, as well as description?
- Are the characters convincing? Do they have complexity, motivation and feel like real people, or are they stereotyped and one-dimensional?
- Are character actions plausible and interesting?
- Are there too many characters?
- Is the dialogue effective? – do voices feel distinctive from one another, as though they belong to characters? Does the dialogue ‘do’ anything in terms of moving the plot along? It’s worth checking the dialogue to see that it does at least 2 things, e.g. forward the plot, illustrate motivation.
- Use of metaphor and simile – are these clichéd, or do they feel fresh and appropriate, or are they too oblique?
- Is there a good use of the senses, or do certain senses dominate?
- Is the piece overwritten – too much density of description?
- Are there moments of particularity and specificity, or moments of generalization? Are these appropriate?
- Does the piece have a sense of rhythm?
- Is it well-paced?
- Does the piece use the same ‘mode’ too much (dialogue, description, action) or switch between them appropriately to inject energy?
- What is the form of the piece, how does this work with its content?
- Think about overall structure – is it coherent? How does the piece handle forward and backward movement in time?
- Does the piece give away too much or too little – how does it ask the reader to participate?

### **Receiving Feedback**

- Remember you are in the privileged position of having a cross-section of your potential readership spending lots of time looking at your work in detail.
- During feedback in class you must remain silent for the initial feedback. This avoids leading the reader towards a particular interpretation of your work and means you will get an outside view of your writing.

- Be open to feedback and see it as a positive way to improve and develop your work. It is a gift.
- Don't take more critical comments personally, instead think constructively about how you can use that information to improve your work.

## **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, with potential measures to be taken by the department and / or college.

### **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. If you don't, you stole them.
- Facts and statistics that are not "common knowledge" must be referenced.
- Be sure to use MLA citations.
- If in doubt, reference your material.
- Remember that I want to see your ideas and interpretations. Avoid excessively quoting secondary sources and show your reader your thinking.

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

- Ask me if you are allowed to work on assignments in groups.
- Get approval 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.
- Failure to do any of the above will result in a zero for the assignment.

If you still have questions, please ask me or consult the website:

<http://www.plagiarism.org>.

Source 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.