Rule number 1: No two tiles are ever made the same.

Help pa. Earn tomorrow’s lunch by searching for signs of aging on each tile. Always bet different. Remember that spidery wrinkles are worth five, the ones like pa’s veins, the stains in ma’s old tea cups that pa never throws away. Age spots blooming yellow and brown are both worth ten. Sometimes dust will settle, face powder tracing fine lines on the tile. Those are worth most. The little black specks, stubborn mascara fallouts blotting out a laboriously painted face. Better to point these out and win a little. Risk a slap. Earn pa six persons’ worth of grudges.

Someday you will learn that the gossipy clatter of ivory tiles is not worth listening to. Indulge instead in how sunken her cheeks are, whittled away by experience. Each caress embosses your finger, traces fainter each time, till one day your fingertips will cultivate a tenderness that knows her contours by heart. Learn her curves to recall faces in the dark with a feather touch, before pa wins tonight’s dinner and loses next week’s.
STORIES OF AUTHORSHIP ON SCREEN

by Sanna McGregor

A balding, portly man carries a double bass onto a train, walks past holding a newspaper or his wife’s arm, is teased by a child in the train, shows up in a newspaper advertisement, or tunes the clock in a pianist’s apartment. In over half the films he made, director, writer, and producer Alfred Hitchcock made a brief appearance on screen. It was a trademark of sorts, popular among fans who would eagerly look for his cameos. It is not the only continuous thread in his oeuvre: whether it was Bruno’s machinations in Strangers on a Train, the conspiracies of Vertigo, ominous avian behaviour in Birds, or Rear Window’s voyeuristic neighbourhood watch, the Master of Suspense was renowned for films that kept the audience on the edge of their seats. Hitchcock is one of the clearest examples of an auteur in British and American cinema, though there are many more.

‘Auteur’ is a word taken from French film criticism, developed by the critics of the Cahiers du Cinéma in the 1950s and 60s. It was a channel through which to validate the study of film as a medium in its own right, rather than a derivative of literature. Auteur theory focuses on the ‘sensibility’ of the director, deriving a meaning from their vision and seeing value in a unity of style and themes that a director may imbue their films with. To Andrew Sarris, a major influence in the theory’s development, it is based on technical competence, personal style, and interior meaning – with a particular emphasis on the latter element, which he thought derived from the artistic soul of the director and differentiated them from any other. Although structuralists within auteur theory, such as Peter Wollen, adopt a less subjective approach and lean heavily on underlying codes and structures in close relationship to semiotics. They look to clear themes, ordered through binaries, in order to analyse an auteur’s work.

There are innumerable different interpretations, issues, and approaches to auteur theory and its application in studying film. Some have discarded it entirely, labelling it deader than Barthes’ author. There are those who focus on the implied author within a text, an agent separate from both audience and creator or director; others look to the audience to shape the meaning, along the lines of reader response theory. Some people look solely to the director as the auteur of a film, while some remain unconvincing that in a crew of hundreds the artistic influence can be accredited solely to one contributor. What of the cinematographer who shapes each shot in their choice of lenses, framing, perspective? What of the lighting director who advises on every scene’s shadows? What of the screenwriter(s) who births the narrative, characters, concept?

There are many screenwriters’ whose works show as much a consistency of themes or style as a director like Hitchcock or Tarantino, or who have worked closely with their directors to shape the final product of their script. Writers like Charlie Kaufman and his oeuvre of angsty, surreal, philosophising films, or James Cameron’s series of science fiction productions, or Woody Allen’s dorky romances that incorporate place as a character of sorts. Admittedly, many recognised writers also direct or produce, giving them more space in the spotlight and influence over their work. But for most, Hollywood’s tendency to get a script delivered and then discard its writer reduces the agency of the author and their claim to auteurship.

Yet one of the biggest obstacles to seeing a screenwriter as an auteur is the ubiquity of equating a script to dialogue, when it is much more than that. The script sets the tone, space, characters, pace, and lays the foundation for every other element of the film. Can all this change with editing, lighting, cinematography and re-writes – yes. Does that mean the silver screen shows something other than the first drafted page – sometimes. But this is far from always the case, particularly when the screenwriter maintains control – as Kaufman, for one, often does – or when they claim the director role in order to prevent being bypassed.

Auteur theory laid the groundwork for film theory to consider the medium as a whole and the artists behind it, but classically it narrows the view to one agent. Film, more than many other artforms, is a collaborative process that cannot but involve a large team of creatives before finding its audience. One of those collaborators, arguably one more important than others in conceptualising and driving the creative process, is the screenwriter and they are worthy of recognition. They are the storyteller behind the screen, and we shouldn’t write them off. WC
One can only write about love in two ways. Rather it comes from two places, two personas. Either the lover gives, or the beloved takes.

Sometimes one has a story to tell, a love to imagine. One has a lot to say, a lot to give. A fairy-tale love has as much to give as a star-crossed love. Tragedy offers an overflow of tears, and Rom-Com a contagious laughter. Both come from the place of the lover. Good gift or bad gift? The point is there is a gift.

Such a narrator is a giver—the lover.

But, more often than not, one takes. A paramour, for instance. Or a baby that suckles; a cripple with crutches. Even the lover takes. The one who gives is also the one who gives to take. The Rom-Com gives only because it has taken from Romance and Comedy. Call it Satire, Parody, Mockumentary; they are all fond of taking. Something original need not be new. Call it subversion, appropriation, re-appropriation. It is, nonetheless, taking. With or without permission.

Such a narrator is a taker—the beloved.

But the lover and beloved are seldom distinguished. So roles are blurred and we are always doing one and the other at the same time. And that is the beauty of love. That we can come from two places, play-act two personas. Difference is not a matter of concern. It might even be the key.

We can be the verso and recto, the alpha and the omega, the left and right. We swing like a pendulum and that is all right. Because in flinging ourselves from one side to the other, back and forth, we always have something to give and something to take. More precisely, we always have something new, either to take or give. Hence love never wanes. Give and take, there is always some love to write about, even when we are athirst and starved, dry and empty. So Love never fails the reader.

On page, love is manufactured and confined, no? Festering until fatal. Manifests as a problem, never a solution. Swann’s love for Odette is doubtful; as fragile as the foreplay of adjusting flowers on a bodice. Only there so long as he is unsure of her affection (she is not his type anyway). Hamlet’s affection for Ophelia, not enough to share his sanity or his insanity. Does the affair between Binodini and Mehrendra in Tagore’s Chokher Bali at any point in the narrative feel permanent?

And impermanence is the nature of love and lover. So, how do we pin down, like Hercules, this many-headed beast?
CONSULTATION CORNER: HOW YOU SHOULD FEEL AT THE END OF A CONSULTATION

by Dini Parayitam

45 after the hour means:
Thank you for coming in. Time’s up.

Are you lost? You might have come in with a particular question about thesis, and now you’re wondering if you need to rewrite the essay because you conflated ‘modernism’ and ‘modernity’. Is your breathing increasing? Are you telling yourself: never again will I step foot in a place that demolishes my hours of work. Or, maybe you came in with a bunch of ‘ideas’, and now, you are leaving with two or three different essays you could potentially write—but which is “right”? Which would be ‘easier’ to prove?

“Can I book another session with you?” the student asks, “Immediately. Like, are you free now? Are you free later in the day?”

To which, I say, “Relax. Go home first. Take a minute to absorb the session. Then, of course, come back with revisions.”

Talking to us about your writing is supposed to feel like a breath of fresh air. Air that you most certainly need when you are on the other side of an ice sheet, slowly trying to find a break through which to stick your head and inhale. Well, you may think we are here to break the ice for you. But we aren’t. We’re here to give you a hammer. A sickle. Maybe, strengthen the punching swing of your fist. So, you yourself can break the ice when you need, how you need.

BOOKS & BANTER

by Jennifer Gargiulo, featuring Lisa Zeidner (author and Chair of the English Department at Rutgers)

* WHAT IS YOUR IMAGE OF A WRITER?
  Solitude.

* YOUR FAVOURITE AUTHOR?
  Nabokov

* LAST GREAT BOOK THAT YOU WOULD RECOMMEND?
  Magnificent by Lydia Millet

  ** BEST WRITING TIP YOU EVER RECEIVED?**
  Writing is rewriting. Don’t send things out until they are really done.

* FIRST BOOK YOU REMEMBER ENJOYING AS A CHILD?
  A mysterious book about how God invented animals. I haven’t been able to find it since.

  ** WHAT IS ON YOUR NIGHT TABLE?**
  Unwanted Advances by Laura Kipnis.

* HAVE YOU BEEN TO THE WRITERS’ CENTRE?
  Yes, I gave a reading and workshop there.

  ** WOULD YOU RECOMMEND GOING THERE?**
  Yes, it’s a great idea to mix creative writing with expository writing.

* BEST THING ABOUT YALE-NUS?
  The seriousness of the students and passion about their interests.

  ** AND FINALLY, YOUR LIFE IN ONE SENTENCE?**
  Walk the dog, clean the kitchen... and oh yes, I’m a writer.
The constancy of the Yale NUS Writers’ Centre and its efforts since my matriculation (installed the same year) has contributed much to my thinking about the crowning role of writing in a liberal arts education - and how a deep appreciation for the writing process maps itself most meaningfully onto the experience of mindful and interdisciplinary scholars, students, citizens of the world. It is how the writing process demands that to jump into exploration, to reflect upon how analysis can be deepened with different pieces of evidence, to make insightful transitions from idea to idea, and only then to attempt to glean larger implications from those links to understand the world around us, that cultivates an active propensity to think critically both in and outside academia. The writing process mimics the intellectual exploration of a student in their liberal arts journey, through deep analysis, shifts in perspective, and larger imprints of meaning.

An essay for the academy positions itself to elucidate a deeper understanding of an issue at hand, and its writing traces that process of understanding and reasoning. While training as a writing tutor, it quickly became apparent that the centre aims least to help to affirm interpretations of course material. At the heart of the Writers’ Centre is the commitment to help students further their ability to engage writing as thinking. Each 45-minute consultation offered at the centre is not the end of that learning – we often engage in tunnel vision – refining only one part of a complex and lengthy writing process. The patience on both the parts of the student and the centre to engage in such piecemeal refinement throughout four years, in this light, is analogous to how the writing process solicits for itself unceasing attention.

I have returned again and again to the centre for essays in creative fiction, anthropology, philosophy, sociology, and now as a major in the physical sciences, research laboratory reports. Each consultation adds to my ability to refine the articulation of reasoning, and make transitions after delving into satisfying analysis. As I wrote essay after essay over the past two years, learning how to write was teaching me to explore, to analyse, and to make links between materials so generously offered by the curriculum. Akin to the drafting, editing, and re-editing of an essay, the drawn-out space of writing steadies us for mistakes, reflection, and refinement in what we strive towards.

Now tutoring at the centre, I find myself asking almost all of my clients to explain their transitions from paragraph to paragraph, from section to section. This process is most useful to probe if the essay pulls together ideas not just to lend credence to its local thesis, but has the potential to reach out into larger conversations happening in the field, for its patterns of thinking to be re-contextualised and used to think about other issues. In the same way, the diversity and rigour of different disciplines found in a liberal arts curriculum nudges us to make larger links as we accumulate learning.

Navigating the liberal arts experience is grounded in the writing process. It is grounded in synthesising ideas by analysing what we know, and in making connections. Writing for the common curriculum challenges the transition students of different backgrounds make to university, but at the same time exposes how the writing process underlies so much of learning and thinking. In my experience of it at Yale NUS College, the Writers’ Centre has been nothing short of a cornerstone in learning how to write as a process of thinking, how to think using the process of writing, and how to share those processes with fellow writers.

The familiarity of these fellow writers at the centre, if we let them, then shares a close bond with our craft of writing, which grows in tandem with our ways of thinking as we progress. It is in writing and learning to write that we build local-to-global scaffolds of thinking, from essays to ideas, from disciplines to methods and patterns, and then to academic and global conversations at large - and we can always count on having the resources to refine that process at a Writers’ Centre.
ERASING COLLIER NOGUES
by Hunter Cuming Shaw

INTRODUCTION:

As part of our Reading Series, the Writers’ Centre had the pleasure of hosting the Hong Kong-based poet Collier Nogues, whose work stems from the place where history and poetry intersect, where memory and forgetting meet. Her poems revisit military documents and use the method of erasure to bring out voices that are embedded in them. Hunter Cuming Shaw, a student poet, interviewed her last semester as part of his project in his poetry workshops class. Here he pays tribute to her by erasing the transcript of their correspondence. The result in itself is a kind of poem.

You are a poet. how? When did you wanted — were you born the poet?

(How might transform myself? Be born myself?) my question is vague, my thoughts on poetry are vague. It seems marvelous to be a poet...

I wrote a few lonely poems in high school. I understood no one would be interested. it seemed natural I study English in college.

But I found something more relevant to my interest in people, power, as a Women’s Studies major to poetry was how poetry could name injustices and insights, could make a home for queerness, difference, anger love. I was scared, though. must know what they were doing.

I submitted a story, my classmates and workshop leader say "Hmmm...great imagery, ...is there a plot?" one classmate told me that my sounded like a poem. Huh, I thought.

one way to become a poet is to do other until somebody tells you you’re actually writing poems.

I took poetry workshops a good poet a good teacher, getting acceptedShe encouraged me to apply for MFA programs, It wasn’t until a book contract that I could use the I began to feel a poet. "I’m a writer" or "I write poems."

...do you think your way of experiencing and articulating the world is different than ‘regular people’s? you must be more conscious of the lyrical world, more aware of language

others? I write in lyrical confessional verse, I speak also in this tongue with my romantic partners — and it can be too much — it can be confusing, the words seem insincere because they are impasioned and highfalutin — a caricature of itself!

How do you navigate ‘poetic voice’ with the voice of every life?

poets, like other artists, may notice nuances because we are looking fiction writers really do mine conversations for material, taking notes while they’re supposed to be listening.

your question is whether language can get in the way to someone you’re close to. that doesn’t seem a problem, because I am not lyrical in speech. I’m more articulate writing than talking. If you find it easy in a lyrical, flowing language, awesome! I have to go looking for ‘poetic voice’ — for the oddly right-strangeness that means ‘poem’. often I only ‘poem’ when juxtaposing pieces of language written at different times. the idea of a poem flowing lyrically or confessionally is alien, it’s less

the language of a line that makes than the tension between that line and before and after.

Fini
TIPS FOR PULLING AN ALL-NIGHTER

by peer tutor Isa Ho

1. DON’T DO IT.

BUT IF YOU REALLY HAVE NO OTHER CHOICE, HERE’S WHAT TO DO.

2. DO THE NECESSARY READING BEFORE YOU START WRITING.

When the hours are counting down, it can seem tempting to skip past any relevant research and dive straight into writing your essay. If, however, you know the quality of your essay will be heavily contingent on how well you’ve read the material, it’s worth taking a chunk of your time to read and take notes. It’s much easier to write sleep-deprived than interpret a complex theoretical text and plan your essay sleep-deprived, especially if you’ve already pulled all the necessary quotes.

3. DON’T CAFFEINATE UNTIL IT’S ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY.

This one’s for the people who aren’t already reliant on caffeine. I’m very much a night owl, yet I drink caffeine very rarely. As a result, too much coffee is likely to give me the jitters. For those of us who, on an overload of caffeine, start vibrating and seeing in four dimensions, I would only advise that Starbucks cup as a last-ditch attempt when you really feel like you’re flagging. It can give you a much necessary boost to finish off that essay, application, or report.

4. TAKE A NAP—BUT ONLY IF YOU’RE A PRACTICED NAPPER.

If napping were a sport, I could go professional. If you’re used to squeezing in a scant 20 minutes between classes, or you’re confident you can get up and continue working with your alarm, go ahead and take a quick snooze when the words start blurring in front of your eyes. If you know you’re the type to sleep through three alarms, your deadline, and miss half a class: nap at your own risk.

5. WORK WITH A FRIEND—but only if they’re as desperate as you are.

Misery loves company. If you have a friend also rushing the same assignment, it may be a good idea to work together so that you can motivate each other through the night. A word of warning, however: if your friend doesn’t have an imminent deadline, or if you know they’re an even more notorious procrastinator than you are, they may act as more of a distraction than encouragement.

6. WATCH THE SUNRISE.

If you can, take a few minutes out of your all-night writing frenzy to watch a new dawn peek over the horizon. You’re witnessing something that you (hopefully) won’t see too often in your college career. It can feel oddly satisfying. Give yourself a little pat on the back—you’re nearly there.

FROM THE NIGHTSTAND

of Carissa Foo

I’M VERY INTO YOU, Kathy Acker and McKenzie Wark. A set of email correspondence between two writers. The book opens with an email from Wark, stamped 8 August 1995, to which Acker replies the day before—7 August. This isn’t science fiction. It was a courtship across 7,500 miles of airspace and 15 hours of time difference. It also only lasted for two weeks. How do supremely intelligent people communicate? With heaps of _____, …, —. And coded subject headings that only Acker and Wark are privy to: from the likes of portisheadspace to greetings from hooterville. Then, there are timeless questions, clichés even, phrased and recalibrated for their beautiful minds: “Can the spots change their leopard?” Wark says to Acker. Still in the realm of virtual love, the lovers’ academics are plagued by their craft, which ironically has been transferred to the reader: “Do we need to analyze our encounter with each other?”

NOW THAT IT’S OVER, O Thiam Chi. First Singapore, then Phuket. Christmas. Four characters. All are thinking and reminiscing—regretting. A little boy, a stranger to them, holds the narrative together. No HDBs. Only a lot of beach and sea and wind. No NS stories, no family drama. Only love and loss. On the first page is a decomposing body, a tiny life within. Death begins the story.

JE, TU, NOUS, Luce Irigaray. A series of essays on women in the modern world. Embedded within are interviews, some lists of action plans, fact sheets, etc. that somewhat depart from Irigaray’s philosophic rhetoric. In this book is a call for action. What do women in our modern world have to do? Put up more pictures of mothers and daughters, no more fathers and sons. Reimagine the Pietà.

Tips for Pulling an All-Nighter

by peer tutor Isa Ho

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Come sign up for a consultation at yalenus.mywconline.com today!

1. The writer who thought the Greeks were most civilised.
2. Foucauldian imprisonment (Inspiration for the previous name of The Octant).
3. Anarchic existence.
4. What are “Correspondences”, “Exotic Perfume” and “Spleen”?  
6. “This island’s mine, by _____ my mother”.  
8. A THING we can help with at the Writers’ Centre.  
9. What do Darwin and Hitchcock have in common?  
11. How many net ATP molecules are made after glycolysis?  
13. “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the ____ herself.”  
14. Philosophical origin of Kelly Clarkson’s song “Stronger (What Doesn’t Kill You)”.  
15. What does Guy Hibbert describe as the eye in the sky?  
17. Writer of “Diary of a Madman”?  
18. All students are smart people. Some students are ______. Some good writers are not at the Writer’s Centre. What is missing to support the truth of “Some smart people are good writers”?  
19. Derivative of ____ is 1/x.  
20. Whose “tale, sir, would cure deafness”?  
21. Amazing _____.

Across  
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Down  
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3. Anarchic existence.  
5. Korean pianist one listens to (to finish essays).  
10. Rama’s brother who ruled in Ram’s absence.  
12. What did Rosalind Franklin discover?  
19. Derivative of ____ is 1/x.  
20. Whose “tale, sir, would cure deafness”?  
21. Amazing _____.

Our thanks for photography by:  
Sanna McGregor, and Dini Parayitam..