

Nanyang Technological University
Division of English
HL 2041 Asian Historical Fiction
Semester 1 (Academic Year 2021–2022)
Course Blog: TBA

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Course Description

Historical fiction has always occupied a special place in literature for several reasons. Historical narratives record histories of peoples, cultures, and social and political crises. Historical fiction becomes especially important in history-making because it uses historical records to *reflect* on and *re-imagine* the past. More importantly, the re-imagination of the past is often bound up with the anxieties of today. Historical fiction then provides a platform for writers and readers to look to the past, the present, and the future simultaneously. This course focuses on modern Asian historical fiction and will cover the selective histories of Burma, India, Malaya, and Japan. Some of the larger themes that students will consider in this course include discussions of 1) genre: how do we define historical fiction; 2) types of narrative devices that are used in the representation; 3) the limitations of historical representation in literary narratives; 4) how to form a meaningful understanding of the past in historical fiction, and 5) the implications of interdisciplinary research in literary studies.

Learning Objective

This course aims to develop critical reading, writing and research skills through a study of Asian historical fiction. The reading materials in this course encourage students to consider how historical knowledge is formed and interpreted through literary narratives. More specifically, students will learn to form a critical understanding of the limits of representation in literary works. Students will also be exposed to interdisciplinary research in literary studies.

Content

1. Introduction to basic theoretical approaches to studying historical fiction.
2. Examination and discussion of historical and cultural contexts in Asian historical fiction.
3. Examination and discussion of the major authors and works in Asian historical fiction; introduction of interdisciplinary research in literary studies.

4. Students will be expected to participate in class discussions. Each student will also write a literary analysis of about 1800 words related to the materials assigned in class. In addition, students will also be required to give a presentation.

Important Notes:

- If you would like to make an appointment for consultation outside of office hours, pls. email me at least 3 working days ahead of time. Please allow at least a day or two for responses to emails.
- Office consultation: Please come prepared with questions so that we can address your concerns effectively and efficiently. Out of consideration for your classmates who may also need consultation time, I will limit consultations to about 20 mins for each student when assignment deadlines are nearing.
- Please observe punctuality in class, and if you have to leave early, pls. let me know ahead of time. As usual, pls. be respectful to your classmates and be sure to turn off all electronic devices during lectures and tutorials.
- **All materials** distributed in class and on the course blog are meant to be used for class lectures and discussions only. They are not to be re-distributed outside of class for any other purposes. If you wish to use the materials for your assignments, you must cite them accordingly.
- You are not allowed to record lectures in any form without permission from the instructors. If you have any special requests regarding this matter, you're welcome to discuss your concerns with me.
- If you are unable to attend class, it is your responsibility to check our course blog for updates or announcements that you may have missed.
- Late assignments: written assignments that are submitted late will receive a penalty of half a grade each day (including weekends and holidays); if I do not receive an assignment a week after it is due, you will receive a 0 for the essay.
- Absence in class: if you are absent on the day when an in-class writing assignment is due, you will not be able to make-up for this. Those who are absent for presentations will not have the opportunity to make-up their work in another group's presentation.
- Any attempt at plagiarism will be subjected to university disciplinary action. Please familiarize yourself with the university's academic integrity policies here: <http://www.ntu.edu.sg/ai/Pages/academic-integrity-policy.aspx>

Course Assessment

Presentation	20%
Participation	10%
Critical Responses	20%
Final Essay	50%

Required Texts:

Orwell, George. *Burmese Days*. New York: Penguin, 2010. ISBN: 0141185376

Tan, Twan Eng. *The Garden of Evening Mists*. New York: Weinstein Books, 2012. ISBN: 1602861803

Mistry, Rohinton. *A Fine Balance*. Vintage. ISBN: 978-1400030651

Murakami, Haruki. *After the Quake*. Vintage. ISBN: 978-0375713279

Viet Thanh Nguyen. *The Sympathizer*. Grove Press. ISBN: 978-0802124944

White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987. (Selections from this work will be posted on the course blog at the beginning of the term. You do not need to purchase this title.)

Tentative Course Outline

Week	Topic
Week 1 11 Aug.	Introduction
Week 2 18 Aug. Vietnam	Excerpts from Hayden White's "The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation" (posted on course blog); Viet Thanh Nguyen's <i>The Sympathizer</i>
Week 3 Vietnam 25 Aug.	Viet Thanh Nguyen's <i>The Sympathizer</i>
Week 4 Vietnam 1 Sept.	Viet Thanh Nguyen's <i>The Sympathizer</i>

Week 5 TBA 8 Sept.	Film: TBA
Week 6 Malaya 15 Sept.	Tan Twan Eng's <i>Garden of Evening Mists</i>
Week 7 Malaya 22 Sept.	Tan Twan Eng's <i>Garden of Evening Mists</i>
Week 8 29 Sept.	Recess
Week 8 Japan 6 Oct.	Haruki Murakami's <i>After the Quake</i>
Week 9 India 13 Oct.	Rohinton Mistry's <i>A Fine Balance</i>
Week 10 India 20 Oct.	Rohinton Mistry's <i>A Fine Balance</i>
Week 11 India 27 Oct.	Rohinton Mistry's <i>A Fine Balance</i>
Week 12 Burma 3 Nov	George Orwell's <i>Burmese Days</i>
Week 13 Burma 10 Nov.	George Orwell's <i>Burmese Days</i>