

Semester 2 (2015-16)
HL2008: Singapore Literature and Culture II
Friday, 1:30-4:30pm
LHS TR+37

SINGAPORE LITERATURE AND CULTURE II

The Past in the Present

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OVERVIEW

The true picture of the past whizzes by. Only as a picture, which flashes its final farewell in the moment of its recognizability, is the past to be held fast. –Walter Benjamin, Theses V of *Theses on the Philosophy of History*

In this course we will focus on how explore how contemporary writers and filmmakers represent, explore, and grapple with Singapore history. We will think about issues of history both as a socio-political issue and as a theoretical issue. If history is the story of winners, who is winning and who is losing? How does history inform our conception of the present? What is our responsibility to the past as readers of Singapore literature or as people who live in Singapore? How do Singapore writers and filmmakers use history to comment on the contemporary? What problems does the contemporary pose for representations of the past?

We will work with novels (literary and graphic), flash fiction, short film, poetry, and performance. As we examine texts that hold in tension the historical and the contemporary, we will consider how the specificities of Singapore—its language politics, its cultures, its religions—play into issues of genre, narrative, style, and figurative language. We will also read critical and theoretical essays to frame our broader discussions.

Although our class theme is concerned with the politics and aesthetics of the past, all of our readings are by 21st century writers and filmmakers, which is to say that they are alive and well—and hopefully, we will have a few visit our class. We will keep in mind that Singapore literature/culture is vibrant, growing, and right in front of us. To that end, you will be required to do some light (and hopefully, enjoyable) research work outside of the classroom (a museum visit, a theater visit, and a literary arts event visit) to give some further context for your literary/filmic analyses. If you do not feel that your schedule can accommodate these activities, please consider taking HL2008 another time.

Assignments include:

Blogs (15%) *topics and guiding questions to be given in class*
Presentations (5%)
Final paper (~1200 words) (15%)
Final Exam (50%)
Participation (5%)

REQUIRED TEXTS

Alfian Sa'at. *Malay Sketches*.

Kwa, Lydia. *Pulse*. (Please buy the Ethos Books edition).

Liew, Sonny. *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye*.

Wong, Cyril. *The Dictator's Eyebrow*.

We will also watch a collection of short films, *7 Letters*, in class. We will have additional readings by writers such as Benedict Anderson, Walter Benjamin, Elizabeth Freeman, Jack Halberstam, Philip Holden, Hong Lysa and Huang Jianli, Robert Shapard, Frank Swettenham, Lee Kuan Yew, and Wan-ling Wee. These will be made available by PDF.

NOTES ON PARTICIPATION

There are a variety of ways to demonstrate your participation on class. You can share your thoughts during class discussion. I also value students who make the classroom a dynamic space by encouraging their peers to engage with the material. In other words, good classroom citizens make strong participants. Some students may not be comfortable speaking in front of the class—this is fine. You can still be an active member of the class by meeting with me individually to discuss your work or the class readings.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change)

Week 1 (January 15)

Introductions

Timeline exercise

Singapore stories

Week 2 (January 22): History and Power I

Readings due: Excerpts from Wee, excerpts from Holden, Hong and Huang intro

Interview exercise must be complete.

Week 3 (January 29): The Politics of History in Popular Culture

National Museum visit must be complete. Look through the Singapore Memory Project.

Readings: Benjamin, Anderson, excerpts from Lee

Week 4 (February 5): National Commemoration in Singapore Contemporary Film

7 Letters to be shown in class.

Readings: Film term worksheet

Week 5 (February 12): Alternative Histories, Gender, Sexuality

Pulse, excerpts from Freeman and Halberstam

Week 6 (February 19): Alternative Histories, Gender, Sexuality

Pulse

Author visit

Week 7 (February 26): Revisualizing the Past, Rereading the Archive
The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye

Week 8 (March 11): Revisualizing the Past, Rereading the Archive
The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye

Week 9 (March 18): Decolonizing Anglophone Literary History
Malay Sketches, excerpts from Swettenham, Shapard

Week 10 (March 25): Decolonizing Anglophone Literary History
Malay Sketches

Week 11 (April 1): Performance, Collaboration, and Community
Field trip to TNS

Week 12 (April 8): Historical Allusion and the Present
The Dictator's Eyebrow
Final paper workshop

Week 13 (April 15)
Author visit
Exam review