AY2025-2026 HL2007 Contemporary Literature and Culture Seminar
Course Outline and Schedule

Introduction:

This module offers students various texts from which to understand the contemporary world from the late-twentieth century to the recent present. Through the lens of critical theoretical ideas and debates, we will read works that explore the intersectional as well as individual preoccupations that consistently insist on how the human body is situated both in physical and abstract space, all the while interpellated by forces such as politics, race, gender, class and science/technology. With readings that cover genres of fiction, literary essays and poetry, as well as non-print materials such as films, visual images (paintings and photographs), and music (MTV, digital) students will gain an in-depth and critical appreciation of the contextual and overlapping tensions within our contemporary societies.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will

- Identify the key features of major literary-critical forms relevant to the period, namely postmodernism, postcolonialism, feminism and intersectionality
- Discuss meaningfully how the later-half of the 20th century's literary and cultural forms respond to, echo, challenge, and/or undermine historical, social, and political metanarratives
- Evaluate literary-critical sources, genres, and readings to deepen understanding of relevant theories
- Raise critically-informed questions (in class discussions, presentations, an essay abstract, and research abstracts)

Assessment:

10% - Participation (classroom discussions, activities, group work, seminar postings)

40% - Final Essay (argumentative essay of 2000-2500 words, including citations on a subject agreed with tutor; **1 primary and 1 secondary text**)

50% - Final Exam (testing a broad range of literary-critical skills, across a range of materials drawn from the primary readings in the course; **2 primary and 2 secondary texts excluding those used for final essay**)

Seminar Schedule

Week	Topics	Texts
1 14/8	Introduction to Contemporary Literature and Culture (Part 1)	Handouts: Overview of Course, Contemporary literary and cultural theories (postmodernism, postcolonialism, feminism).
2 21/8	**Body/Bodies:** **The Immobilised Body** - Unreliable narrator - Questioning History	**Pr text (novella)**: Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Chronicles of a Death Foretold* (1981) **Sec text (film)**: Jim Jarmusch (dir.), *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013)
3 28/8	**Body/Bodies:** **The Immobilised Body** - Unreliable narrator - Questioning History	**Pr text (novella)**: Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Chronicles of a Death Foretold* (1981) **Sec text (film)**: Jim Jarmusch (dir.), *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013)
4 4/9	**Body/Bodies: Transforming the Body (Part 1)** - Science and Technology	**Pr text (novella)**: Ursula Le Guin, "Nine Lives" (1969) **Sec text (Performance Art)**: Stelarc
5 11/9	**Body/Bodies: Transforming the Body (Part 2)** - Who Controls Your Body and Home?	**Pr text (novella)**: Arkady Martine, *Rose/House* (2023) **Sec text (film)**: Bong Joon-ho, *Parasite* (2019)
6 18/9	**The Interpellated Body: Gazes / Gazing (Part 1)**	**Pr text (novel)**: Elif Shafak, *The Gaze* (2000) **Sec text (Art)**: Jenny Saville
7 25/9	**The Interpellated Body: Gazes / Gazing (Part 2)**	**Pr text (novel)**: Elif Shafak, *The Gaze* (2000) **Sec text (Photography)**: Cindy Sherman
8	**Recess (29/9 – 3/10)**	
9 9/10	**The Racial Body: Histories / Memories** Research Essay Abstract Due	**Pr text (novel?)**: Teju Cole, *Tremor* (2023) **Sec text (Website)**: Denver Art Museum, "Speaking With Light: Contemporary Indigenous Photography" (2023)
10 16/10	**The Racial Body: Histories / Memories**	**Pr text (novel?)**: Teju Cole, *Tremor* (2023) **Sec text (MTV)**: Jorja Smith, "Blue Lights (2018) Beyonce, "Formation" and "Lemonade" (2016)
11 23/10	**Places and Spaces: The (Post)modern City of Singapore** Final Essay Due	**Pr text (poetry)**: Theophilius Kwek (2014-2018), 'Witness,' 'Strangers Drowning,' 'The Week It Happens,' 'Coast,' 'Pearl Bank' **Sec. text (short film)**: Roystan Tan, *36 Ways to Say Good Morning* (2018)
12	**Places and Spaces: Who Lives Here?**	**Pr text (Essay)**: Jamaica Kincaid, 'A Small Place' (1988)

30/10		**Sec. Text (digital music & video)**: weish, ['A Taxi Uncle Symphony'](#) (2021)
13 6/11	**Intersecting Identities:** **Race/Gender/Space/Class**	**Pr text (Essay)**: Jamaica Kincaid, 'A Small Place' (1988) **Sec text (film)**: Bong Joon-ho, *Parasite* (2019)
14 13/11	**Concluding Lesson**	Review of literary and cultural theories Review of texts and critical readings

We meet Thursdays 9.30am-12.20pm. Venue: TBC.
Tutor: Dr. Ng Soo Nee (soonee.ng@ntu.edu.sg)

Core Texts:
Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*
Ursula Le Guin: 'Nine Lives'
Arkady Martine, *Rose/House*
Elif Shafak, *The Gaze*
Teju Cole, *Tremor*
Online texts for poetry and essays

Course Policies:

Attendance and Participation:
The success of any seminar depends on the active participation of all its members. You should endeavour to complete the weekly required readings and any assigned work, and be ready to participate in class discussions. Failure to do so will reduce your participation grade significantly. Barring illness or emergencies, you must attend every seminar. If you need to miss a class, you should supply a medical certificate or account your absence via email (the latter not more than twice in the semester year).
You must arrive on time, as late entrants disrupt everyone's concentration, who made an especial effort to turn up punctually for class.

Late Work and Extensions: If your essay is late, it will be marked down by one third of a letter grade for each day that it is overdue (i.e. a paper that would have received an A will receive a A-). No work will be accepted more than three days late without prior permission. Extensions will be granted only for exceptional circumstances, including documented illness or genuine emergency.

Generative AI: Generative AI (such as ChatGPT) is not designed for research and is inclined to make things up. If you intend to use generative AI for your work in *any* capacity, you must get written permission from me first. You must follow the university's prevailing policies about how to acknowledge the use of generative AI in your work. Although it can be a useful tool, **you must not use it to replace your own thinking or learning**.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty: Don't do it! If I find that you have misrepresented someone else's work or wording as your own you will fail the assignment and possibly the course. If you are unsure of how or when to cite a source, please ask me or refer to the university's academic integrity resources online.