HH 4018 History and Fictional Representation

Dr. Sandra Khor Manickam

Seminar Tuesdays 10:30-12:30 (LT12)

Tutorials Tuesdays 1330-1430 (LHS-TR+24)

Important Information

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Office hours: Email me to make an appointment

Pre-requisite: HH1001 What is History?

Introduction

This module seeks to introduce fourth-year students to issues in the conceptualization and writing of history through comparisons between historical and fictional works. The fictional works could comprise literature, film, television, graphic novels and games. The module is designed to be reading and viewing-intensive, with the intention of developing comprehension skills, writing, and critical thinking while having the opportunity to explore the boundaries between history and fiction and asking such question as "Is history fiction?" and "Can fiction be history?".

By the conclusion of this course, students will be familiar with:

1. Concepts related to the production of history and fiction such as colonialism, authorship, narrative and subalternality
2. Overlaps and divergences between historical writing and thinking, on the one hand, and fictional works and representations, on the other hand
3. Students will be able to identify issues with using history and fiction in order to understand the past and the present
4. Students will have honed their critical reading, viewing and writing skills

Content

Students will be asked to think critically about the nature of history, its aims and its differences from (or similarities to) other forms of writing. The course will require students to analyze works classified as “history” and “fiction” and to question that divide. Several issues in historical writing will be discussed. These include Orientalism in historical writing and the influence of colonialism in historical narratives; the subjectivity of the author; the representational differences between primarily literate and primarily oral cultures; the nature of narrative and the implications of causality; the influence of race, sex and subalternality on the resulting history; the impact of medium on history through analyzing film, television series, graphic novels and games as vehicles of history; and lastly, reading historical works that have been seriously contended.

Student Assessment

This module is 100% continuous assessment. Students will be assessed by:
a. Class discussions (10%). Students will discuss the readings with the lecturer and other students in class and take part in classroom activities.

b. Leading discussions (10%). Students will present the readings/films/television episodes to the class and lead discussions by posing questions related to the readings to the class.

c. Midterm exam (30%). The midterm exam is designed to test students’ understanding of key concepts in the class and their research skills. Before moving on to the later part of the semester, students have to understand the importance of the Orientalism, the linguistic turn, narrative, and subalternality, to the writing of history. A thorough understanding of these concepts is necessarily for further engagement with the issues surrounding history and fiction.

The midterm comprises 2 components: (1) In-class exam of key concepts already discussed in class (10%). (2) Presentation of students’ midterm papers which are due the following week. If students do not show up for their presentation, the highest grade they can achieve for their midterm paper is a C. Choose 1 of 2 topics to write and present on (20%).

  a. Write about an occurrence or event in a historical time frame by following a fictional main character through that event. 1000 words. (Note: the character does not have to be human.)

  b. Write a ‘fake’ history using footnotes of academic books and articles. The choice of topic is yours. 1000 words. (Note: the history in question does not have to be earth-bound.)

d. Debate on topic and draft of paper (20%). This assessment stresses the importance of adequate preparation, research and drafting to the refinement of ideas on paper. The topic for the debate and the final research paper is as follows: “Should people be allowed to write untrue or fictional histories?”

  a. In-class debate (10%)

  b. Draft of paper (10%). Students will have to show the research completed and a draft of the research paper at least 3 weeks before the paper is due. This will then open up the work to discussion and further improvement before the final draft is due.

e. Research paper (30%). The research paper is the accumulation of the semester’s learning. Students are expected to hand in a well-researched and well-written paper that deeply engages with the issues in the class. 3000 words.

class organization

The course will be in the format of 4-hour seminars where various subjects related to history, fiction and representation will be explored. Each of the weekly sessions comprises lectures, student presentations and other interactive classroom activities including intensive document-reading, discussions, and debates to develop researching and writing skills.

Important: The first 10-15 minutes of each seminar will usually be devoted to going over important administrative matters, answering student questions and clarifying anything that is unclear. These could also include discussing the requirements of class assessment components, instructions for handing in assignments and formatting. It is highly encouraged that students are present during this crucial time of the lecture/tutorial so as not to miss any information that you might find relevant. Often times, the impromptu nature of the questions during this time means that the issues are not included in any other material or repeated elsewhere. As always, it is the students’ responsibility to
ensure that they are abreast of all information given during lecture and tutorial slots. *If you miss this information, you should ask a fellow student instead of asking the lecturer to repeat herself unnecessarily.*

**Class attendance**

**Important:** While attendance in seminars is not graded, it goes without saying that if you are not in class, you cannot participate and you are not privy to all the learning that takes place during the semester. *If you expect to miss more than 20% of the seminars, you must come see the lecturer to explain your absence and how you will make up for the lost time.* Failure to adequately keep the lecturer abreast of your absence will most likely result in a reduced grade for the assessments as you do not have the requisite information to successfully complete those assignments.

**Readings**

All readings that are stated as “required” should be completed before coming to class for that week. Often, the required reading only covers several pages from a chapter. In order to fully understand the context of the writing, you will find it helpful to read parts of the rest of the chapter.

There are no specific core texts though the books below will aid in your thinking through the issues of the class. The assigned readings are either in NTULearn under “Content” or in the HSS library reserve section:


Two novels are placed on reserve and must be read by Seminar #9:


In addition to books and articles, video material will also be reserved for you to view them:

1. Episodes from *Star Trek Voyager*, Season 1, #8: Emanations and #14: Jetrel

**Email communication**

It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that they check, and are able to receive, email. Please refer to the first lecture for my policy regarding the expected reply-time for emails. As a general rule, emails from students will be replied no earlier than 1 full working day after the email is received.

**Class Schedule**

15.01.16  **Seminar #1: Introduction: History, Fiction, Representation**

General introduction to the course. Scheduling of “Presentation of readings”, allocation of sides for debate.
Reading: "Philosophy of History" entry in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy website: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/history/

22.01.16 Seminar #2: History and Orientalism


Presentation of readings (1)

(By this week: Dogs at the Perimeter until p. 57)

29.01.16 Seminar #3: History and the Linguistic Turn


Presentation of readings (2)

05.02.16 Seminar #4: History as Narrative


Presentation of readings (3)

(By this week: Dogs at the Perimeter until p. 139)

12.02.16 Seminar #5: History and the Subaltern

Readings: (1) bell hooks, “this is the oppressor’s language/ yet I need it to talk to you”: Language, a place of struggle”, in Between languages and cultures: translation and cross-cultural texts by eds. Anuradha Dingwaney and Carol Maier (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 295-301; (2) Gayathri Spivak, “Can the subaltern speak?”, in Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf) 90-104; (3) F. R. Ankersmit, Historical Representation (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), Chapter 2: In praise of subjectivity, 75-106.

Presentation of readings (4)
19.02.16  Seminar #6: Midterm and presentation of research paper (Hand in papers a week later. No presentation, highest grade for research papers is a C) (By this week: *Dogs at the Perimeter* until p. 171)

26.02.16  Seminar #7: Historical Controversies (Fictional Readings?)


Students are expected to have gone through websites that are “revisionist” regarding the comfort women issue but also other topics such as the Jewish Holocaust during WWII. This information should be shared with others through NTULearn’s Discussion board beforehand. Note: Please be careful of downloading or clicking on viruses when searching for manga related to Comfort Women.

Due: Midterm research papers through NTULearn.

11.03.16  Seminar #8: The Future is the Present is the Past: History and Science Fiction


Debate: “Should people be allowed to write untrue or fictional histories?” (By this week: *Dogs at the Perimeter* until p. 215)

18.03.16  Seminar #9: History and the Novel


Students are expected to have started on these short novels from the beginning of class, and to finish them by this seminar. Additional research about the methods and problems of writing a novel with historical material should also be undertaken as you read, culminating in each person suggesting at least 1 reading for this week ahead of time. This information should be shared with others through NTULearn beforehand.

Presentation of readings (6)
Due: Draft of research paper through NTUlearn.

25.03.16  
Seminar #10: History and Film  
Readings: TBD  
Presentation of readings and film (7)

01.04.16  
Seminar #11: History and Documentary  
Readings: (1) *Timeless Temiar*; TBD  
Presentation of readings and documentary (8)

08.04.16  
Last seminar #12: Wrap-up

15.04.16  
Due: Final research paper through NTUlearn.