

S'PORE WRITERS FEST 2013

Flights of fancy



Nobel Laureate Gao Xingjian will be launching his new documentary film here. PHOTO: SWF

Nobel Laureate Gao Xingjian a highlight at this year's edition

MAYO MARTIN
 mayo@mediacorp.com.sg

SINGAPORE – Are Singaporeans illiterate robots?

Taking off from the not-so-recent issue about the falling number of Singaporean students studying literature, that's the cheeky subject of the Singapore Writers Festival 2013's closing debate.

Robots don't figure much in this year's edition, which runs from Nov 1 to 10, but audiences will get their fill of other genres like fantasy, crime and speculative fiction as the festival carries the theme of Utopia/Dystopia.

"We have a rich offering of programmes this year, including a focus on crime writing and themes of violence and war, which all shine a light on the darker side of humanity," said festival director Paul Tan.

This year's line-up comprises more than 190 Singapore and international writers, including Tracy and Laura Hickman, the husband-and-wife creators of the groundbreaking fantasy world *Dragonlance*; The Reluctant Fundamentalist author Mohsin Hamid; philosopher A C Grayling, crime

writer Peter James, poet Carol Ann Duffy, and Nobel Laureate writer-artist Gao Xingjian, who is set to premiere his documentary film *Requiem For Beauty* at the festival. This year's Literary Pioneer showcase shines the spotlight on Thamizhavel Sarangapani, founder of the Tamil *Murasu* newspaper. And a bumper crop of 65 books by Singapore authors will be launched.

The utopia-dystopia theme sneaks into a handful of festival events, including its first Singapore lecture — writers Gwee Li Sui and Adrian Tan look at the relevance of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Aldous Huxley's *A Brave New World* in today's context. The fringe programmes, curated by The Arts House, will include *Once Upon A Time*, which looks at the darker side of fairytales and folklore. They are also putting the spotlight on Nordic writing with authors like Roy Jacobsen from Norway.

This year's edition will also include a couple of "tours". There's a two-hour literary walk from the Singapore Management University to Raffles Place which incorporates works by authors like Edwin Thumboo, Ho Minfong, Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad. Another walk, featuring readings and performances, will be held around the artworks of the Singapore Biennale, which will be up during the festival run.