

Professor Mai Wang
Email: mai.wang@utdallas.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday, Thursday by appointment only
Tuesdays 10 am-12:45 pm
JO 4.112

Lit 6304: Asian American Memoirs

This course explores memoirs by Asian American authors from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that address themes of class, migration, ethnic identity, militarism, and gender disparities. Beginning with a critical examination of the genre, we will seek to answer questions such as: what are the differences between autobiography and fiction? Are there particular tropes or common subjects that define Asian American memoirs? How do Asian American authors negotiate the tension between resistance and assimilation in the context of a racialized society? Finally, what are the major theoretical debates in the field of life writing, and how are they connected to Asian American texts?

This graduate seminar will feature a series of writing workshops and challenge students to produce a work of original scholarship or creative nonfiction. In the final weeks of class, we will share drafts of the final papers or personal essays and give feedback on each other's work.

Required Texts:

America is in the Heart by Carlos Bulosan
Days and Nights in Calcutta by Bharati Mukherjee and Clark Blaise
The Best We Could Do by Thi Bui
Homeland Elegies by Ayad Akhtar
Good Talk by Mira Jacob
Speak, Okinawa by Elizabeth Miki Brina
Minor Feelings by Cathy Park Hong
Crying in H Mart by Michelle Zauner
On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous by Ocean Vuong

Articles posted on Elearning:

Lejeune, Philippe. "The Autobiographical Pact." *On Autobiography*. Ed. Paul John Eakin; trans. Katherine Leary. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989. 3–30.
De Man, Paul. "Autobiography as De-facement." *MLN* 94.5 (1979): 919–30.
doi: 10.2307/2906560

Assignments:

Oral presentation
Final research paper or personal essay (15-20 pp)
Work-in-progress presentation (20 minutes) during final workshop

Grade breakdown:

Oral presentation and class participation (50%)
Class sessions will center on intensive discussion of the assigned readings. Active

participation and attendance are mandatory, and each student will be required to give an oral presentation once over the course of the semester by preparing a summary and critique of that week's reading. Email me an outline of your presentation at least 48 hours before you are due to present.

Final research paper or personal essay and workshop presentation (50%)

Students may choose to write a research paper OR personal essay for their final assignment. Please email all assignments to mai.wang@utdallas.edu as a Microsoft Word document.

Option A—Research Paper: The final research paper will be 15-20 pages, and it can cover a topic of your choice drawn from our class discussions. You can use revised material from your oral presentation in your final paper, but you can also pick a new topic. The final research paper must engage with **at least two** (but preferably more) scholarly sources, ideally peer-reviewed articles or published monographs on your subject. You will be evaluated on the originality of your argument and your ability to marshal textual evidence to support your main claims.

Option B—Personal Essay: You may also choose to write a 15-20 page personal essay about any aspect of your life that you deem to be of interest to a general readership. Subjects may include (but are not limited to) racial/ethnic identity, your family's history in the United States, your experience encountering or living in other cultures, or any other theme relevant to our class discussions. If you choose to write a creative essay, you must cite **at least one** of the class readings and demonstrate how the author's experience relates to the story you are telling. You will be evaluated on the clarity of your writing and the cohesiveness of your narrative.

All students: Near the end of the semester, each of you will present your work-in-progress for the final research paper or personal essay, discussing your findings and methodology (if writing a research paper) or overall artistic intentions (if writing a personal essay), as well as any questions or difficulties you have yet to resolve. A short Q&A will follow. You should be prepared to answer questions from your classmates regarding your work.

Learning Goals

- Students will emerge from the course with the ability to develop a sustained, original argument that incorporates advanced literary criticism and theory AND/OR produce a polished piece of creative nonfiction.
- Students will learn how to make connections between texts from disparate time periods and cultural backgrounds.
- Students will deliver an oral presentation and be able to present their written findings to a broader audience.

Attendance and deadlines

Please note that essays are due by midnight of the specified day via email to mai.wang@utdallas.edu. Extensions will only be granted for personal illnesses or family emergencies with proper documentation. Late submissions will be deducted a half letter grade per day (so an A becomes an A-, an A- becomes a B+, etc.).

Attendance is required, and a bad attendance record will affect your grade. You are

permitted one unexcused absence, but you are responsible for all the material covered on that day. Multiple unexcused absences will substantially lower your final grade.

Plagiarism

Any written work you hand in should be done on your own. Please make sure to cite all your sources and relevant page numbers using MLA style.

Schedule of Readings:

Week 1: Tuesday January 17

Introduction: syllabus review + Lejeune article

Week 2: Tuesday January 24

Lejeune article

Paul De Man article

America is in the Heart by Carlos Bulosan

Week 3: Tuesday January 31

America is in the Heart by Carlos Bulosan

Week 4: Tuesday February 7

Days and Nights in Calcutta by Bharati Mukherjee and Clark Blaise

Week 5: Tuesday February 14

Days and Nights in Calcutta by Bharati Mukherjee and Clark Blaise

Week 6: Tuesday February 21

The Best We Could Do by Thi Bui

Week 7: Tuesday February 28

Homeland Elegies by Ayad Ahktar

Week 8: Tuesday March 7

Homeland Elegies by Ayad Ahktar

NO CLASS Spring Break: March 13-19

Week 9: Tuesday March 21

Good Talk by Mira Jacob

Week 10: Tuesday March 28

Speak, Okinawa by Elizabeth Miki Brina

Week 11: Tuesday April 4

Minor Feelings by Cathy Park Hong

Week 12: Tuesday April 11
Crying in H Mart by Michelle Zauner

Week 13: Tuesday April 18
On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous by Ocean Vuong

Week 14: Tuesday April 25
Final Paper Workshop (bring 5 double-spaced pages of your final paper or personal essay to class)

Week 15: Tuesday May 2
Final Paper Workshop (bring 5 double-spaced pages of your final paper or personal essay to class)

Final Papers Due: Friday, May 5th by midnight via email as a Microsoft Word document to mai.wang@utdallas.edu