

CES 313 / ENGL 311
Introduction to Asian Pacific American Literature (3: HUM; G)
Fall 2017
T/Th 12:00 – 1:15
CUE 407

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office hours:
W 2:15 – 4:15
and by appointment

Required texts

Carlos Bulosan. *America Is in the Heart*. 1946, 1973. University of Washington, 2014. \$18.95.
Susan Choi. *My Education*. Penguin, 2013. \$16.
Kristiana Kahakauwila. *This Is Paradise*. Hogarth, 2013. \$16.
Viet Thanh Nguyen. *The Refugees*. Grove, 2017. \$25.
Ruth Ozeki. *A Tale for the Time Being*. Penguin, 2013. \$17.
Charles Yu. *How to Live Safely in a Science Fictional Universe*. 2010. Vintage, 2011. \$15.95.
Mai Der Vang. *Afterland*. Graywolf, 2017. \$16.

We will also read and view some handouts and films. You are responsible for keeping up with these as they are assigned. *Since this is a literature course, you will be expected to have the books. If you cannot afford them, let me know. I will try to have at least one copy of each text placed on reserve at the library. But you must keep up with reading assignments.*

Your enrollment means that you have read and understood the syllabus and that you agree to abide by its policies and procedures.

Course description

This course provides a general survey of contemporary fiction and poetry by Asian American and Pacific Islander American writers. One of our texts is a collection of poems; two others are collections of short stories. We will read no drama, literary nonfiction, or memoir, though you may, for your final paper, write about a text in one of these genres.

Course objective and “learning outcomes”

Our purpose is to read, study, discuss, and write about U.S. literature by writers of Asian or Pacific descent. Ruth Wilson Gilmore defines racism as “the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death”—which is surely different from any definition we were taught by our schools and the media. We have been conditioned to define racism as a product of personal hatred, but Gilmore says that it comes from institutions, and it is exploitative (ie, it makes a profit for the institutions), and that it renders victims vulnerable to premature death. Keep this definition in mind as we read Bulosan, Nguyen, Vang, and our other writers.

Skeptics ask why we study “multicultural” texts, suggesting that the only criterion for selecting books should be literary excellence. Liberals argue that, by reading the variety of perspectives afforded by writers of color, we realize that “standards of excellence” are not universal but are peculiar to dominant cultures. Both positions are flawed. The conservative notion is flawed by the very fact that it is advanced by white people who just happen to think that the very best books and ideas come from white people—they have an investment in proving

themselves superior. The liberal notion is flawed in two ways: First, it threatens to replace one standard with another; and second, it risks abolishing all standards and implying that, even at the same time, all differences are important even as all differences are equal.

Ishmael Reed famously wrote that “writin’ is fightin’”—that every literary act is a political act. As the struggle for gender-neutral language should have proven, language is never neutral. Even the simplest language of race is troubled. In his history of the color black, Michel Pastoreau discovers that the word “black” as the absence of all “natural” colors was once synonymous with “white.” Why do we assign the language of color to humans who are not really yellow, black, red, white, or brown? But terms that avoid such color-based nomenclature, that derive from culture or from geographical regions, are problematic. For example, why did the 2010 U.S. Census form restore the word “Negro” to racial categories? Why are Pacific Islanders grouped with Asian Americans in some systems and with Native Americans in others? And what does “Hispanic” really mean? Language is inadequate to name all aspects of social relations, and so we must be sensitive in our usage. It is also always changing, always catching up. Writers of short stories, poems, novels, and plays must be especially sensitive to the politics of language. For all its inadequacies, language remains our best tool for framing our experiences, our memories, our feelings and ideas. Consider the ancient Chinese claim that a picture says ten thousand words: Does it say the same ten thousand words to everyone? Of course not. At its clearest, language remains our best tool for communication.

Literature is a record of the evolution of social relations. The best literature succeeds not only because it is most beautiful but also because it most faithfully and honestly tells the stories of those changing social relations.

By term’s end, you should have developed a better appreciation of the social as well as aesthetic role of literature.

Requirements

Attendance: You are responsible for obtaining all missed materials and making up all assigned work. If you know in advance that you will be absent, you must submit *in advance* any work that will be due. After two unexcused absences (see me for absences resulting from university-sanctioned activities), each missed class will lead to a half-letter deduction from your course grade. I will distribute an attendance sheet after the third meeting. And then the attendance policy takes effect. As this is a literature class, attendance is especially important. Doctors’ appointments, study sessions or tests for other classes, and job interviews are *not* excusable absences. Do not come to me late in the semester with explanations for earlier absences. If you wait, those absences will not be excused.

Participation: Class discussions will depend on your reading the assigned texts and being ready to talk about them. Participation takes many forms: discussing issues raised in class or in our texts, keeping up with issues relevant to our texts. Some form of participation is required.

Presentation: You will lead the class in 1) discussion of an assigned reading and 2) discussion of your final paper. Text presentations involve your reading the text, discussing an aspect of it that you find significant (a theme, an issue, a historical figure, etc), and raising a question suggested by it. Paper presentations involve your explaining your paper’s argument and evidence as well as your process of writing and using sources.

Reading Journal: You will submit four Reading Journals, one for Bulosan and then one for each new pair of books we read. The first journal should be at least one typed page, roughly 275 to 300 words. The others should be two pages. Each journal is a personal response, but it should say more than “I liked the first chapter in Bulosan because it made me think.” Give a detail or example: Exactly *what* did Bulosan write that made you think, and *why* do you think about it as you do? The key is to focus on the why. In 300 words, you can provide enough detail to explain yourself. Your responses will be graded, and so be careful with grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Your grade will be based not on your opinions but on your ideas and observations. Each journal will count toward ten percent of your course grade, and all four journals will count for forty percent. **I will accept no late journals.**

Paper: You will write one paper. You may look at an outside work of literature by an Asian American or Pacific American writer. Select from a list of writers I will provide early in the semester, or you may go off list. Or you may compare two works we will read, or two works by any one writer we will read. Your paper should fill three to five pages (800 – 2500 words) and discuss an issue raised by the text. You will be required to consult at least one outside source, a work of literary criticism, and cite both the literary text and the critical study. Give your final paper a title and prepare it in MLA or Chicago style: twelve-point font, preferably Times New Roman, double-spaced with standard margins. If you do not know formats for formal manuscripts, consult me or the style manuals. Your grade on the paper will be based on your writing and persuasiveness. It will count as forty percent of your course grade.

Tests: There will be no exams in this class. I may ask you occasionally to respond to an easy question on that day’s reading. Your response will count toward your participation grade.

Grades (400-point scale)

Attendance and participation	10 percent	40 points
Presentations	10 percent (5 each)	40 points
Journals	40 percent (10 each)	160 points
Paper	40 percent	160 points

Course policies and community standards

I hope we will model a “good” community, driven by shared concerns even when we disagree. To do well in this class, please note the following guidelines:

Read the assigned material when it is due. *Bring the assigned reading to class.*

Attend the whole class. Repeated late arrivals and early departures count as absences.

Turn off all electronic devices, unless you are using them for note-taking.

Name-calling and other signs of disrespect will result in your removal from the class.

Feel free to disagree, respectfully. Consider others’ views. Reflect on your own social location, your privileges and power.

Learn a historically informed definition of racism, and challenge all racist discourse.

Reflect your grasp of history and social relations by respecting shy and quiet classmates, and by deferring to each others’ experiences.

Finally, understand the rage of people who are victims of systematic injustice. James Baldwin wrote that people of color are obligated to feel rage over this nation’s history of racism. If injustice does not fill you with rage, then perhaps you should ask yourself why.

Note on language: In our readings you may encounter words or phrases that will be, to some sensibilities, vulgar or racist. By themselves, no “mere” words are offensive. What makes a word vulgar or racist is its usage by a particular speaker in a particular context. Some whites complain that they are not allowed to say the “n” word without being labeled racist while black men use it among themselves all the time. Why does this complaint reflect a historical ignorance? When you see and hear such words, consider their context. Who speaks them? Why? And to whom?

Academic integrity: “Academic integrity is the cornerstone of higher education. As such, all members of the university community share responsibility for maintaining and promoting the principles of integrity in all activities, including academic integrity and honest scholarship. Academic integrity will be strongly enforced in this course. Students who violate WSU’s Academic Integrity Policy (identified in Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 504-26-010(3) and -404) will fail the course, will not have the option to withdraw from the course pending an appeal, and will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration as defined in the Standards of Conduct for Students, WAC 504-26-010(3). You need to read and understand all of the definitions of cheating: <http://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=504-26-10>. If you have any questions about what is and is not allowed in this course, you should ask course instructors before proceeding. If you wish to appeal a faculty member’s decision relating to academic integrity, please use the form available at <conduct.wsu.edu>.”

Students With Disabilities: “Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please either visit or call the Access Center to schedule an appointment with an Access Adviser. All accommodations MUST be approved through the Access Center or Disability Services. For more information contact a Disability Specialist on your home campus.” 509-335-3417, Washington Building 217; <http://accesscenter.wsu.edu/>, Access.Center@wsu.edu.

Safety and Emergency Notification: “Classroom and campus safety are of paramount importance at Washington State University, and are the shared responsibility of the entire campus population. WSU urges students to follow the “Alert, Assess, Act” protocol for all types of emergencies and the “Run, Hide, Fight” response for an active shooter incident. Remain ALERT (through direct observation or emergency notification), ASSESS your specific situation, and ACT in the most appropriate way to ensure your own safety (and the safety of others if you are able). Please sign up for emergency alerts on your account at MyWSU. For more information on this subject, campus safety, and related topics, please view the FBI’s Run, Hide, Fight video and visit the WSU safety portal.”

Schedule

Note that all assignments are negotiable and subject to change. Also note that several of our books provide helpful glossaries or footnotes/endnotes. Look for these and read them. And look for epigraphs and dedications at the beginnings of books.

8/22: Introduction, syllabus.

8/24: Vang 3 and Bulosan vii-xxiv.

8/29: Bulosan xxv-xxxii and 1-93. Begin text presentations.

8/31: Bulosan 94-189.

9/5: Bulosan 190-261.

9/7: Bulosan 262-327. FIRST JOURNAL DUE (BULOSAN).

9/12: Kahakauwila, "This Is Paradise" and "Wanle."

9/14: Kahakauwila, "The Road to Hāna" and "Thirty-Nine Rules for Making a Hawaiian Funeral into a Drinking Game."

9/19: Kahakauwila, "Portrait of a Good Father" and "The Old Paniolo Way."

9/21: Choi 1-60.

9/26: Choi 61-191.

9/28: Choi 192-252.

10/3: Choi, 253-end. SECOND JOURNAL DUE (KAHAKAUWILA AND CHOI).

10/5: Yu 1-60.

10/10: Yu 61-149.

10/12: Yu 150-187.

10/17: Yu 188-end.

10/19: Nguyen, "Black-Eyed Women."

10/24: Nguyen, "The Other Man," "The War Years," and "The Transplant."

10/26: Nguyen, "I'd Love You to Want Me."

10/31: Nguyen "The Americans," "Someone Else Besides You," and "Fatherland."

11/2: Read Streamas, "Narrative Politics in Historical Fictions for Children":

<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1348&context=cleweb>

THIRD JOURNAL DUE (YU AND NGUYEN).

11/7: Vang 7-61.

11/9: Ozeki 1-108.

11/14: Ozeki 109-203.

11/16: Ozeki 204-258.

11/28: Ozeki 259-356.

11/30: Ozeki 357-end.

12/5: Vang 63-end.

12/7: Handout. FOURTH JOURNAL DUE (OZEKI AND VANG).

12/13: FINAL PAPER DUE in my office, 118 Wilson-Short, by 3:00 PM. *Do not slip your paper under my door.* Keep a copy for your own records.