

HIST 4994W

Trauma and History: German and Chinese Memoirs in the 20th Century

Spring 2015
Tu 2-4:30, OAK110

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“Trauma and History” is a writing-intensive seminar that focuses on reading memoirs from Germany and China from the twentieth century. These memoirs describe individuals’ experiences of the Holocaust in Germany and the Cultural Revolution in China. This seminar does not equate those events but takes them as two cases of traumatic events that affected millions of people.

This seminar revolves around three goals:

- 1) to learn how memoirists engage in remembering their experiences, ordering those experiences to make some kind of sense, dealing with the pains and pleasures thus recalled, and organizing or constructing their memories for public presentation;
- 2) to learn different ways of reading memoirs and to be able to analyze how we can learn from them—to understand in what senses they are reliable guides to the past and in what ways they have limitations—and to be able to understand our own reactions to memoirs;
- 3) to improve research and writing skills: much of the semester will be devoted to preparation of a final paper in which you analyze a body of memoirs that deal with a specific historical experience, making use of both primary sources (the memoirs) and secondary sources (other analyses by historians and scholars of self-writing).

The course requirements consist of class participation and written work.

Class participation is based on the assigned readings and discussion of your additional (paper) research. We will be dealing with difficult and emotionally-laden topics; all points of view are allowable but should always be expressed in a mutually respectful way. (And please turn off cell phones and use laptops only for notes.) Class participation—discussion of the readings, of your own work, and of other students’ work—counts for 40% of your final grade.

Written work is central to this course and is, in my view, an important way of teaching yourself to think clearly. Collectively, written work counts for 60% of your final grade.

- ♦ “My experiences reading memoirs” ~3 pages [not graded]
- ♦ “Paper proposal: topic, scope, and tentative thesis” ~2-3 pages (to be revised later) [5% of final grade]*
 - * Holocaust memoirs, Cultural Revolution memoirs, or other bodies of 20th century historical memories)
- ♦ “Annotated bibliography” (of secondary sources) ~4-5 pages [10%]
- ♦ “Summary of selected secondary sources w/ revised paper proposal” ~6-8 pages [5%]
- ♦ “Complete paper draft” ~15-20 pages; to be rewritten [10%]
- ♦ “Final paper” ~15-20 pages [30%]

According to university-wide policies for W courses, you cannot pass this course unless you receive a passing grade for its writing components.

Late work will be penalized 10 points for each day late. *Assignments should be emailed to me before class AND a hardcopy brought to class.*

In your written work, citations should follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*, in the Babbidge Reference Room (Z253.U69 2010). This applies to the last three writing assignments (“Summary,” “Draft,” and “Final paper”).

Further Notes:

1. You are welcome to work with the University Writing Center, which can schedule individual tutorials for you. See <http://writingcenter.uconn.edu/>.
2. Plagiarism is not tolerated. See http://irc.uconn.edu/PlagiarismModule/intro_m.htm. Students caught plagiarizing will receive an automatic F and may be reported to the university.
3. Provisions will be made for students with disabilities.
See http://www.csd.uconn.edu/accommodation_services.html.

READINGS

Six books are required for this course and can be obtained at the UConn Co-op:

- ◆Rae Yang, *Spider Eaters: A Memoir*
- ◆Peter Gay, *My German Question: Growing Up in Nazi Berlin*
- ◆Gao Yuan, *Born Red*
- ◆Elie Weisel, *Night*
- ◆Primo Levy, *Survival in Auschwitz*
- ◆Feng Jicai, *Ten Years of Madness*

CLASS SCHEDULE

Jan. 20: introduction to course

Jan. 27: discussion of Yang, 1-129

Library tour

*Writing assignment due: “My experiences reading memoirs”

Feb. 3: discussion of Yang, 130-287

Feb. 10: discussion of Gay, 1-110

Discussion of paper proposal ideas

Feb. 17: discussion of Gay, 111-206

*“Paper proposal” due

Feb. 24: reports on memoir studies

*“Annotated bibliography due”

Mar. 3: discussion of Gao, 1-172
*“Summary (with revised paper proposal)” due

Mar. 10: discussion of Gao, 173-362
discussion of paper research

{ Mar. 17: spring break }

Mar. 24: no class (work on “complete paper draft”)

Mar. 31: discussion of Weisel (complete)
draft progress reports

Apr. 7: discussion of Levy (complete)
*“Complete Paper Draft” due

Apr. 14: discussion of Feng, 1-141
final paper progress reports

April 21: discussion of Feng, 143-274
final paper progress reports

April 28: student reports
*“Final paper” is due