

Course Description

This course covers Japanese literature from the early classical times, through medieval, Tokugawa, Meiji, Imperial, World War, Post-War, and Modern / Postmodern times.

About the Author

Marvin Marcus is a professor in East Asian Studies at Washington University specializing in Japanese literature. Marcus's area of specialization is modern Japanese literature of the prewar (so-called *kindai*) period, and his research has focused on personal narrative and 'life writing'—memoir, reminiscence, essay, diary, and autobiography. He also researches aspects of the Tokyo literary community—the *bundan*—and the literary journalism that was its lifeblood. Marcus has extensively researched and written on authors such as Mori Ōgai, Natsume Sōseki, Shimazaki Tōson, Futabatei Shimei, and Uchida Roan. Literary translation has been an essential component of this work over the years. *Paragons of the Ordinary* (Hawaii, 1993) concerns Ōgai's biographical writings. *Reflections in a Glass Door* (Hawaii, 2009) centers on Sōseki's wide-ranging personal writings. Marcus's current book project, entitled *Writing in the Margins*, brings together a number of interrelated perspectives on *kindai* literature through the 'marginal' endeavors of major writers.

Course aims:

This course will provide a comprehensive survey of one of the world's greatest and most distinctive literary traditions. Our readings, which span some fourteen centuries, include diverse genres of prose narrative, poetry, and drama. This material will reflect the nation's rich and varied history—from the establishment of a Chinese-style imperial order beginning in the sixth century to the globalized pop-cultural products of our present day. Our survey will concentrate on representative writers and works belonging to Japan's major cultural epochs— the Kyoto-based era and its aristocratic elegance and courtly sensibility; the medieval period and its contesting warrior elites and Buddhist-inspired austerity and meditative solemnity; the isolationist Tokugawa era and its iconic literary and artistic legacy; and the turbulent modern era, marked by the rise and fall of the Japanese empire and the nation's rebirth and resurgence in the postwar period.

Our readings will call into question persistent cultural stereotypes— the elegant courtier; the samurai code of duty and honor; geisha, kabuki, and the world of entertainment and pleasure; and the many iconic images that reinforce our essentialist view of Japan and its purported uniqueness. We will both acknowledge the prominence of such cultural elements and examine the contexts and historical circumstances in which they arise. Overall, we will explore the intersection of 'traditionalism,' as it has been constructed and reinforced over the centuries, and the countervailing forces of individualism and selfhood that have emerged in the modern period. We will also pay attention to the manner in which Japan's classical literature has been revisited and retold in pre-modern Japan, and how modern writers have been inspired by earlier works while at the same time seeking to break free from outmoded styles and conventions.

Our chronological survey will culminate in the literature of Japan's postwar period and the emergence of a new nation purged of the imperial and military hegemony that ended in the cataclysm of fire-bombings and nuclear devastation. We will examine how modern and contemporary writers have forged new literary avenues that reflect Japan's ever-changing place in East Asia and the larger global context.

As for our approach to the texts in question, we will focus on the basics of literary study— plot, narrative voice, style and imagery, and the development of character. The aim here is to develop skill and confidence in close reading, literary analysis, and interpretation. In the process, we will explore the artistry and social awareness that our authors bring to bear on their work.

Our ultimate aim is quite simple: to enjoy what we read and to appreciate what makes it distinctive, compelling, and interesting. To the extent possible, we will want to consider aspects of this literature that appear 'uniquely Japanese,' and those which it shares with other literary traditions— both Asian and Western.

Readings:

Required Texts:

- Abe Kôbô. *Woman in the Dunes*
- Carter, Steven. *Traditional Japanese Poetry: An Anthology* (TJP)
- Goossen, Theodore (ed). *The Oxford Book of Japanese Short Stories* (JSS)
- Gordon, Andrew. *A Modern History of Japan* (2nd edition)
- Goring, Paul, et al. *Studying Literature: The Essential Companion*
- Kawabata Yasunari. *The Old Capital*
- Marcus, Marvin. *Japanese Literature: From Murasaki to Murakami* (forthcoming, AAS/KIAS series)
- McCullough, Helen. *Classical Japanese Prose: An Anthology* (CJP)
- McCullough, Helen (transl). *Genji and Heike*
- Miner, *Introduction to Japanese Court Poetry* (IJCP)
- Mishima Yukio. *Temple of the Golden Pavilion*
- Murakami Haruki. *The Elephant Vanishes and Other Stories*
- Natsume Sôseki. *Kokoro*
- Ôe Kenzaburô. *A Personal Matter*
- Tanizaki Jun'ichirô, *Seven Japanese Tales*
- Tyler, Royall. *Japanese Nô Dramas*
- Varley, Paul. *Japanese Culture* (4th edition)

Note: The Gordon and Varley texts will provide the historical and socio-cultural contexts. The Goring volume provides a comprehensive overview of literary study. Note the abbreviations for regularly-cited texts. Other readings will be provided in pdf form, as indicated below.

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Week 15 Postmodern Visions of Contemporary Japan (II): The Viewpoint of Women Writers

ASSIGNMENTS

Unit Essays : Write a paper of 1200 words on ONE of the following topics for each unit. Whichever you choose, support your argument with citations from the relevant texts.

Units I Early and Classical Japanese Literature

What are the chief characteristics of the classical literature presented thus far? Comment on the integration of poetry and prose narrative in this literature, and the qualities of courtly society revealed in our literary selections.

Choose *three* of the assigned readings that you consider representative of the literature presented thus far. Comment on how characters are presented, how they interact, and how the natural world is represented.

Unit II: Medieval Japanese Literature

Citing three episodes from *The Tale of the Heike*, discuss the underlying themes and the qualities of the warrior persona as expressed in these episodes. How does *Heike* compare with *The Tale of Genji*?

Choose any three of the Buddhist texts assigned for Week 6 and discuss the ways in which the key medieval themes of ephemerality, quiet reflection, and transcendence are expressed. What have you found the most appealing and the most challenging aspects of this literature?

Unit III: Early Modern Japanese Literature (Tokugawa period)

Compare and contrast the literature of medieval and Tokugawa Japan. How do the respective social and cultural contexts figure here? In what sense can poetry and lyrical sentiment be regarded as an over-arching concern?

Compare and contrast the three Tokugawa literary genres (prose fiction, drama, and poetry) covered in this unit. How is each one distinctive, and how do they collectively reflect Tokugawa society and its values and attitudes?

Unit IV: Modern Japanese Literature: Pre-War Period

Citing relevant textual examples, compare and contrast Mori Ōgai and Natsume Sōseki as the two great pioneers of Meiji literature. What has each contributed to the Meiji 'mission' of producing a modern Japanese literature that would displace the outmoded Tokugawa literary styles?

Discuss three short stories— one each by Akutagawa, Shiga, and Tanizaki— and compare them with respect to theme, narrative technique, and the use of historical and legendary materials. Identify your personal favorite and explain your rationale.

Unit V: Post-War and Contemporary Japanese Literature

Citing relevant textual examples, compare and contrast the work of either Kawabata and Mishima or Abe and Ōe (our authorial pairings for Weeks 12 and 13). Discuss their respective literary evocation of postwar Japanese society and their treatment of the 'national identity' question.

Discuss any three of Murakami's stories as examples of his 'postmodern' vision. What is Murakami's world, what does it say about contemporary Japan, and how does his work compare with the view presented in any of the readings by our grouping of woman writers.

Final Paper: Write a paper of 5000 words on ONE of the following topics. Whichever you choose, support your argument with citations from the relevant texts.

Japanese literature has often been viewed with respect to the interplay of 'tradition' and 'modernity.' Discuss the ways in which 'tradition' figures in the literature covered in this course, spanning the 8th century and the present day. In particular, remark on how 'tradition' has been re-evoked and re-deployed by modern writings. Comment as well on the pros and cons of reducing a complex national literature to a simple binary formula.

Japanese society and culture has been identified as a principally male domain, which has marginalized women and deprived them of agency and 'voice.' Write an essay that reflects upon this notion, from the vantage point of the literature covered in this course. How has gender figured in the sweep of Japanese literature to the present day? What are the literary high points of a female perspective and a feminine sensibility?

This course has introduced us to a number of literary genres. Write an essay that surveys the genre categories, and provide several examples of each. Comment on each of your choices. Point to literary concerns (theme, image, etc) that are shared by these genres, and indicate the ways in which they differ. Comment on the claim that the foundation of Japanese literature is its poetry and lyrical sentiment.

A literary tradition such as Japan's can be understood as comprising a set of 'great works'—literature considered 'canonical' or 'representative.' Write an essay that presents your list of Japan's great literary works (include at least seven works). Comment on your rationale for including each of these works. Comment as well on such an approach to literary study. Should we reject the tendency to 'canonize' our cultural products?

Overview: Japanese Literature and Its Place in the Literary Culture of East Asia and the World

This introductory unit will provide a backdrop to the study of Japanese literature. We will consider the fifteen-century sweep of literary production in Japan in its East-Asian context, and the crucial contribution of Chinese models and inspirations. We will call attention to the interplay of tradition and modernity, elites and commoners, major urban centers (Kyoto, Osaka, Edo/ Tokyo) and their relation to the rural periphery. Here special attention will be paid to the tension between a highly-refined code of aristocratic elegance and the samurai codes of honor, self-sacrifice, and meditative solemnity. The significance of the seclusionist Tokugawa era will be noted, as will the nation's emergence as a modern Asian empire in the transformative Meiji period. Our introduction will bring us to Japan in the contemporary era, which witnessed the improbable rise from the ashes of defeat in the Pacific War and recent challenges presented by a new East-Asian power nexus and an ever-shifting and globalized political, economic, and media network.

Questions

What are the hallmarks of 'Japanese civilization' and how might these be related to its remarkably varied literary products?

How best to understand the deeply-rooted traditionalism and classicism of Japan's literature, in light of its radical transformation in the modern period?

What is most distinctive about Japanese literature, and what does it share with other great literary traditions?

How might your own preconceptions about Japan and your individual tastes in literature affect your approach to our readings? Is there a particular attitude that one needs to cultivate in order to 'get at' this material?

How might the fact of a course centered entirely on translated literary works make a difference in our understanding and appreciation of this material? Consider the notion of 'lost in translation.'

Readings:

Marvin Marcus, *Japanese Literature: From Murasaki to Murakami* (Introduction) **[pdf]**

Helen McCullough, *Classical Japanese Prose* (CJP), pp 1-26

Rhodes Murphey, *East Asia: A New History*, pp 1-18 **[pdf]**

Paul Varley, *Japanese Culture*, pp 1-18

Recommended:

Paul Goring, *Studying Literature*

Donald Keene, *The Pleasures of Japanese Literature*

The Classical Voice in Japanese Literature

This unit will explore some five centuries of literary production in Japan. We will begin with an introduction to the Japanese language and to key Chinese imports— the ideographic (*kanji*) writing system, Confucianism, and Buddhism. We will turn to the emergence of the imperial court in the seventh century and the rise of a dominant poetic literature and culture, with Chinese roots, in the eighth century, based in the capital city of Nara. We will then turn to the Heian Era (ca 800-1200) and its 'golden age' of aristocratic culture and its orthodox aesthetic canon, based in the new imperial center of Kyoto. We will read broadly in both poetic and prose works, examining the lyrical foundation of Japan's classical literature. Special attention will be paid to Japan's unparalleled literary masterpiece, the *Tale of Genji* by Lady Murasaki. We will want to remain alert to variants and vestiges of this classical literature in subsequent eras, including modern and contemporary times.

Readings:

Varley, pp 48-76

Miner, *Introduction to Japanese Court Poetry* (IJCP), pp 1-35

Marcus, *Japanese Literature*, Chs 1, 2 **[pdf]**

Recommended:

Donald Keene, *Seeds in the Heart*

Thomas Rimer, *A Reader's Guide to Japanese Literature*

Haruo Shirane, *Traditional Japanese Literature*

Literary Roots: *Kojiki* and *Man'yōshū*

Our survey of Japanese literature will begin with two seminal works of the eighth century, which can be said to have created a foundation for the emergence of a distinctive literature that incorporated prose narrative and poetry.

Prose. The *Kojiki* (Account of Ancient Matters, 712)—Japan's earliest literary work—recounts the nation's mythological roots through the agency of deities known as *kami*. It served to establish the divine origins of the land and its imperial rule while incorporating its earliest poetic examples.

Poetry. The *Man'yōshū* (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves, ca 760), Japan's first— and arguably greatest— poetic anthology, contains over four thousand verses that span several centuries and a wide range of topics and poets. We will focus on selected works by great early poets such as Hitomaro, Okura, and Yakamochi, and the rise of what would become the standard poetic form, the *waka*— a poem in 31 syllables, written in a set 5-7-5-7-7 cadence.

Questions

Of what significance are the earthy, scatological escapades of the divine *kami* in *Kojiki*? Are there parallels elsewhere in world mythology?

What are the basic tenets of Shintō, and how are these 'encoded' in the *Kojiki* and *Man'yōshū*?

What is most easily graspable about this material? What appears to defy understanding?

How do these early texts construct a literary version of Japanese nationhood and identity? (Note: this question will concern us throughout the course.)

Readings

Selections from *Man'yōshū* (TJP, pp 17-71)

Bargen & Ury, *Readable Kojiki and Nihongi* ([pdf](#))

Miner, *Introduction to Japanese Court Poetry* (IJCP, pp 1-78)

Varley, pp 19-47

Recommended

A. E. Backhouse, *The Japanese Language: An Introduction*

Heian Poetry and Personal Narrative

Heian Japan was centered in the new imperial capital of Kyoto, which would remain the nation's political and cultural center until the late nineteenth century. Its courtiers— both men and women— fashioned a distinctive literature that reflected highly refined tastes and sensibilities. Poetry assumed special importance, and the Heian aristocracy was well versed in the Chinese classics as well as their native literary heritage.

Poetry. The courtiers employed poetry in their daily dealings (especially the romantic ones) and were typically judged on the basis of their calligraphic hand, poetic sensibility, and even their choice of paper.

The Heian period witnessed the emergence of formal styles and conventions of court poetry that derived from the standard 31-syllable *waka*. Others favored prose narratives that enabled them to relate their experiences, observations, and opinions. The lyrical voice, which privileges poetic sensibility, elegant emotional expression, and personal reflection, is a defining quality of Heian literature.

The *Kokinshū*, a collection of a thousand *waka*, was the first of many imperially-commissioned *waka* anthologies, and it established the standard for poetic production and the manner of poetic compilation according to set themes (the four seasons, love, laments, etc.).

Essay. Shōnagon's famous essay collection presents a woman's view of the courtier world in a language rich in style and unflinching in its judgment of proper taste and decorum. It is a masterpiece of the personal essay genre, Sei Shōnagon's *Makura no sōshi* (Pillow Book, ca 1005).

Diary. The *Kagerō nikki* (Gossamer Journal, ca 970), is the unique literary diary of a courtier wife

Questions

Give thought to the highly abbreviated language of *waka* poetry and the manner in which it can suggest meanings and conjure feelings that transcend the modest confines of the genre.

How does the sequencing of multiple poems in the *Kokinshū* enhance the effect of the individual verse and provide a higher-order literary product?

What is most readily accessible about Japanese court poetry? What remains difficult and opaque?

Well over a thousand years old, the *Gossamer Journal* is strikingly 'contemporary' in its account of the diarist's moods, emotions, and observations. What are these moods and emotions, and how are they conveyed? How does poetry appear to serve the diarist?

Sei Shōnagon's very 'picky' observations on style and propriety may easily be regarded as superficial and shallow. Yet this is one of Japan's consensus classics. How to account for its 'greatness'? How does the work relate to our own obsessions regarding form, manners, and 'looks'?

Readings

Selections from *Kokinshū* (TJP, pp 73-124)

Selections from *Kagerō nikki* (CJP, pp 7-73, 102-155)

Selections from Shônagon's *Makura no sôshi* (CJP, pp 156-199)
Miner, IJCP, pp 79-100

Recommended:

A Tosa Journal (CJP, pp 70-71, 73-102)

A Tale of Flowering Fortunes (CJP, pp 200-250)

Heian Fiction

The Heian period is best known for its fiction— a genre of ‘tale-telling’ referred to as *monogatari*. The single work that epitomizes Heian courtly culture and has long stood at the very pinnacle of Japanese literature in the ‘classical’ mode is Lady Murasaki’s *Genji Monogatari* (Tale of Genji, ca 1010). *Genji* both recapitulates three centuries of earlier prose narrative and inspired subsequent literary and cultural production over the centuries. Set at the center of the imperial court of Kyoto, the novel details the romantic encounters of Prince Genji and introduces us to an other-worldly realm of beauty and pathos. Murasaki’s masterpiece recounts the splendors of court ritual and ceremony and details the private affairs of the aristocratic class. It is replete with lyrical sentiment and poetic exchanges, a shared sensitivity to beauty and the progression of the seasons, and— last but not least— the amorous affairs of its famous protagonist.

Our readings will focus on a series of representative chapters from *Genji*, together with excerpts from two earlier works: 1) *Taketori monogatari* (Tale of the Bamboo Cutter, ca 900), a supernatural tale of a moon maiden and her miraculous transformation into human form; and 2) *Ise monogatari* (Tales of Ise, ca 950), a series of brief ‘poem-tales’ that center on the romances of the great court poet, Narihira, featuring a selection of his *waka* poetry. It bears noting that Murasaki was deeply influenced by this important precursor.

Questions

How is Heian fiction both similar to and distinguishable from the poetry and personal narratives covered in Week 3?

How would you describe the courtly society as revealed in Murasaki’s novel? What is conspicuously absent from its representation of Japanese society in the early 11th century?

Give thought to gender relations as revealed in Heian fiction. In particular, is there a ‘feminine’ or ‘feminized’ quality to Murasaki’s novel? How might the fact of female authorship figure here?

Heian literature has long been associated with a keen sensitivity to beauty, an awareness of life’s transience, and a ‘splendor of longing’ for that which cannot be attained. Where do you perceive these qualities in our readings? Are there episodes and scenes that are confusing or appear to defy understanding? How to relate the ‘other-worldly’ realm of Heian society and culture to our own?

Readings

Selected chapters from *Genji* (McCullough, *Genji and Heike*, pp 3-242)

Selections from *Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* (CJP, pp 27-37)

Selections of *Tale of Ise* (CJP, pp 38-69)

Recommended:

Richard Bowring, *The Tale of Genji: A Student’s Guide*

Ivan Morris, *The World of the Shining Prince*

Medieval Japanese Literature : Texts and Trends

This unit will explore Japan's medieval era (ca 1200-1600), which witnessed the rise of the warrior class (*samurai, bushi*) and the establishment of a new political regime headed by a Shogun and an administrative system that rivaled and eventually eclipsed that of the Kyoto imperial aristocracy. Emulating the model of the courtier class, the samurai elite cultivated a taste for Zen Buddhism and the so-called 'meditative arts' of calligraphy, tea ceremony, and the like. The period was marked by a feudal division of the land into hundreds of domains (*han*), each headed by an overlord (*daimyō*) who exercised autonomy while remaining under the supervision of the Shogunal authorities. Eventually, central control would give way to local power bases and shifting alliances.

The four-century span of Japan's medieval literature reflects the enduring influence of Heian styles and genres, with the added influence of widely-held Buddhist beliefs and a related aesthetics centering on ephemerality, meditative solemnity, and a lyrical melancholy epitomized by the iconic image of autumn dusk. The artistic preference for unadorned, monochrome landscapes would be matched by a literary 'minimalism' that privileged the plain, the rusticated, and the faintly visible. In stark contrast are accounts of warrior heroics and graphic depictions of battle scenes and assorted human carnage. Finally, a new genre of dramatic performance— Noh theater— would underscore the enduring impact of a Japanese 'classical tradition' embodied within a unique performative mode. Our readings will sample the variety of this dramatic literature and its distinctive qualities.

General readings for the unit:

Varley, pp 77-139
Marcus, Ch. 3 [[pdf](#)]

Recommended:

Keene, *Seeds in the Heart*
Rimer, *A Reader's Guide to Japanese Literature*
Shirane, *Traditional Japanese Literature*

Japan's Warrior Epic: *The Tale of the Heike*

The consensus masterpiece of Japanese medieval literature, *The Tale of the Heike* rivals the *Tale of Genji* in its ability to epitomize an entire age and to bequeath a legacy of memorable characters and episodes that would endure to the present day. This early 13th century work is a sprawling historical fiction, recounting the protracted conflict between two rival warrior clans that eventuated in the defeat of the mighty Heike clan and the victory of the Minamoto. Its clan chieftain, Yoritomo, would become Japan's first Shogun at the end of the 12th century, in effect ushering in Japan's medieval era.

Notwithstanding the 'signature' battle scenes and warrior exploits, *Heike* is a deeply lyrical work, marked by an undercurrent of pathos for the decline and fall of a once-proud clan. Its episodic structure favored the development of a tradition of oral narrative and balladry, whereby blind performers would chant textual episodes to musical accompaniment on the lute-like *biwa*. In this manner, the *Heike* 'cast of characters'—Yoshitsune, Atsumori, Kiso, Mongaku, Kiyomori—would become fixed cultural properties. Our readings will comprise a representative sampling of *Heike* episodes, together with excerpts from a later warrior-based historical fiction, the *Taiheiki*, composed in the 14th century.

Questions

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What points of comparison and contrast can be made between *Genji* and *Heike*? Give thought to the development of characters, the role of theme and image, the function of poetry and literary cultivation, and the overall quality of story-telling.

How would you categorize the *Heike* episodes that you've read? Identify your favorites and the reason for your choices. Which were the least appealing? Why?

How would you define the 'warrior persona' as reflected in the *Heike* episodes? What do you make of the appearance of woman warriors in the text (for instance, Tomoe)?

How does *Heike* compare with the *Taiheiki* episodes?

Readings:

Selected chapters from *Heike* (McCullough, *Genji and Heike*, pp 245-458)

Taiheiki (The Great Peace) selection (CJP, pp 472-494)

The Buddhist Voice in Japan's Medieval Literature and Drama

Buddhism. Buddhist themes and sentiments are predominant in medieval Japanese literature and arts. The religion itself, with its rich textual tradition, multiple sects, and constellation of beliefs and practices, permeated the land during the medieval period. What is more, there was a syncretic merging of Buddhism and Shinto, the 'native' faith. In short, matters of faith and an associated worldview conditioned the work of writers and artists. In particular, notions of ephemerality, the illusory nature of 'reality,' the pitfalls of egocentrism and ceaseless desire—these found expression across the arts spectrum.

Essay. Our readings will sample the medieval literary spectrum. Several well-known essays—Kamo no Chōmei's *Hōjōki* (Account of My Hut, 1212) and Yoshida Kenkō's *Tsurezuregusa* (Essays in Idleness, 1330)—will reflect differing modes of expressing Buddhist-inspired values of simplicity, frugality, and meditative quietude.

Poetry. Selections from the work of great medieval poets such as Saigyō and Teika—centering on an important anthology, the *Shinkokinshū* (1205)—will reveal the manner in which the spare 31-syllable *waka* form can achieve a level of spiritual and aesthetic transcendence.

Folk Tales. A sampling of medieval folk tales (*setsuwa*) will point to a more accessible means of conveying Buddhist teachings to the masses.

Drama. Finally, we will read classical texts of the Noh theater—the work of the great playwright Zeami—which employ Buddhist figures and practices in creating an elevated and sublime performative art.

Questions

How are we to differentiate between Buddhism as a religion and Buddhistic themes and values? Must we be knowledgeable about the religion in order to appreciate its 'thematics'?

How best to draw lines of comparison and contrast among our 'multi-generic' readings, with their considerable range of literary expression?

Compare the reflective essays of Chōmei and Yoshida. How do they recall aspects of Heian courtly culture?

As for the Noh plays, how are we to 'read' drama, given the performative medium and the conventions of acting, musical accompaniment, and recitation? Note the manner in which the plays 'recycle' earlier material (especially from *Genji* and *Heike*).

What do you regard as the most accessible of these the medieval texts? What is least accessible?

Readings

CJP, pp 377-421 (Chōmei and Yoshida texts)

TJP, pp 145-242 (medieval poetry)

CJP, pp 271-287 (*setsuwa* tales)

Tyler, *Japanese Nō Dramas* (Note: Read the introduction and as many of the plays as possible. Be sure to include *Atsumori*, *Izutsu*, *Nonomiya*, *Sekidera Komachi*, and *Tadanori*.)

Early Modern Japanese Literature : World Within Walls, The Literature of Tokugawa Japan

This unit will center on what is arguably the most 'uniquely Japanese' epoch, the Tokugawa period (1600-1868). The medieval era, with its feudal divisions and weak central authority, came to an end in the 16th century, through a gradual process of national reunification brought on by three powerful warlords— Nobunaga, Hideyoshi, and Ieyasu. The 16th century also witnessed Japan's first encounter with Western civilization, in the form of Christian missionaries and emissaries from Western nations pursuing their colonial and commercial agendas.

Having defeated his rivals in 1600, Tokugawa Ieyasu established his clan as the new hegemonic power, with himself as its first Shogun. His capital was erected in Edo—modern-day Tokyo. Ieyasu set in motion a comprehensive program of social control and regulation, which involved a fixed class hierarchy (with the samurai at the top) and a strict policy of national seclusion (*sakoku*), whereby Westerners were expelled and the country was effectively cordoned off from the outside world. An important exception was the Dutch trading mission in remote Dejima, which served as Japan's sole window onto the Western world until the late-19th century.

The Tokugawa order would last for well over two centuries, and it witnessed an extraordinary social and cultural transformation. Despite the highly regulated social order, a vigorous domestic economy fostered the growth of cities— especially Edo and Osaka— and the rise of a new class of urban merchants and townsmen— the *chōnin*. It was this bourgeois elite that would underwrite a distinctive culture of entertainment, which centered upon the urban pleasure quarters (*yūkaku*). The best-known was the Yoshiwara, in Edo— which became the setting for all manner literary and pictorial representation. A secular, materialist spirit reigned, and money talked. The contrast with the samurai officialdom, tasked with upholding the traditional Confucian virtues of duty, obedience, and self-restraint, was extreme. Tokugawa literature amply portrays this truly fascinating world.

General readings for the unit:

Varley, pp 140-234

Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, pp 3-59

Marcus, Ch. 4 **[pdf]**

Recommended:

Keene, *World Within Walls*

Rimer, *A Reader's Guide to Japanese Literature*

Shirane, *Early Modern Japanese Literature*

Tokugawa Fiction and Drama

Fiction. Tokugawa culture is a celebration of style and fashion. Its new culture hero was the savvy connoisseur— the so-called *tsūjin*— who epitomized stylishness and savoir faire and occupied the center of overlapping cultural and social circles. Fiction writing, which had fallen on hard times since its heyday in the Heian period, had its own champion in the area of style. This was Ihara Saikaku, a writer who created a new language for a literature set in cities, which recounted, with a wonderful panache and flair, our obsession with money, sex, and the pursuit of pleasure. No Buddhist piety here, no Confucianist virtue. A brilliant social satirist, Saikaku lampooned the high and the mighty and took a dim view of human pretense and posturing. His lavish, witty style was much admired and would influence writers well into the 20th century.

Drama. The age was marked by two popular theatrical genres— *kabuki* and *bunraku*. *Kabuki* is an essentially improvisational and 'actor-centered' theater, and it generated a whole economy of entertainment over the centuries, to the present day. On the other hand, *bunraku* (known also as *jōruri*) is a highly sophisticated puppet theater, which entails the perfect coordination of puppeteers, musicians, and the reciter of the play's text. Since these texts were to be narrated verbatim, the playwright's role was crucial. The finest *bunraku* playwright, Chikamatsu Monzaemon, achieved a level of mastery rivaled only by his Noh predecessor, Zeami. Unlike Saikaku's satires, Chikamatsu's plays center on the tragic fate of ill-starred lovers. These so-called 'double suicide' (*shinjū*) plays depict, in a fashion that recalls Western opera, the age-old conflict between social duty and human passion in a deeply lyrical language that elevates the lowly circumstance of the unfortunate lovers.

Our readings will comprise selections from Saikaku's fiction (drawn from the 'love and lust' and 'money-grubbing' sub-genres), and two *bunraku* plays of Chikamatsu (*Love Suicides at Sonezaki*, *Love Suicides at Amijima*).

Questions

:
Comedy is very much tied to 'local' factors (most notably, language itself), which are easily lost in translation. Where is Saikaku's comedy to be found? What would you judge to have gotten lost in translation here?

What can we glean about Tokugawa society from Saikaku's work?

What comparisons can be drawn between Chikamatsu's plays and those of Zeami?

How does Tokugawa literary narrative compare with the Heian examples that we've read?

Readings

Saikaku selections (from *Life of a Sensuous Man* and *Five Sensuous Women*), from Shirane, *Early Modern Japanese Literature* **[pdf]**

Bunraku plays of Chikamatsu, from Shirane, EMJL **[pdf]**

Tokugawa Poetry

Poetry was very much on the menu of Tokugawa literary arts, but its thousand-year history of orthodox styles and formal rules had left a legacy of stale conventionalism. The new Tokugawa milieu required fresh poetic expression to replace the outmoded courtly tradition. The key figure here is Matsuo Bashō, an authentic Japanese cultural icon. Bashō is largely responsible for reviving interest in poetry and expanding the community of poets. His vehicle was the seventeen-syllable *haiku* form, which essentially displaced the older 31-syllable *waka*. While paying homage to the great court poets and their exquisite sensitivity, Bashō introduced a new poetic vocabulary that went beyond refined image and courtly sentiment to embrace the gritty reality of ordinary lives.

Matsuo Bashō was known in his age as a poetic sage dedicated to the perfection of his art. He adopted the persona of itinerant poet-priest, whose travel accounts and poetic diaries have been admired for centuries. Over the years he attracted numerous disciples, and the so-called 'Bashō style' is still practiced by *haiku* devotees in Japan and throughout the world. Our readings will provide a generous sampling of Bashō's poetry, together with the text of his best-known travel diary, *Narrow Road of the Interior* (*Oku no hosomichi*, 1689). We will also read the work of two late-Tokugawa poets— Yosa Buson and Kobayashi Issa— who produced noteworthy 'variants' of Bashō's *haiku* model.

Questions

How are we to conceive of the 'art of *haiku*'? What are the criteria of excellence here, given the utter simplicity of the 17-syllable format?

How do our Tokugawa examples compare with the classical and medieval poetry that we have read? What appears to be new and innovative?

Compare the Bashō examples with those of Buson and Issa. Do you have any preferences here? You are encouraged to try your hand at *haiku* composition.

Give thought to the artistry of the travel-diary, which incorporates prose narrative and poetic 'commentary.' Which episodes in Bashō's *Narrow Road* did you particularly like? How does he pay respect to important historical and cultural landmarks?

Readings

Selection of Bashō verse (TJP, pp 347-375)

Selection of Buson verse (TJP, pp 390-400)

Selection of Issa verse (TJP, pp 416-422)

Bashō's poetic travel diaries (CJP, pp 510-551)

***Kindai*: Modern Literary Voices in Pre-War Japan**

Japan's emergence on the world stage, precipitated by the arrival in 1853 of the American 'Black Ships' under the command of Commodore Perry, was marked by the dismantling of the elaborate Shogunal system and the advent of a modern nation-state under the reign of Emperor Meiji. The Meiji era (1868-1912), the first and most crucial phase of what would be Japan's prewar (or *kindai*) period, witnessed an extraordinary project of nation-building, urbanization, and industrial/commercial expansion, which eventuated in Japan's rise as a Western-style empire. Tokyo, the nation's capital, was rebuilt on the foundations of Tokugawa-era Edo, and it became a symbol of the nation's impressive advances. Together with the modernization of its political institutions, schools, transportation and communication technologies, and media, Meiji leaders inculcated the citizenry with a sense of national pride and the uniqueness of Japan's native traditions and values. People were taught to be both dutiful and loyal subjects of the emperor and to strive for success and achievement as individuals. Despite the embrace of a Western-inspired credo of freedom and democracy, a legacy of inequality and hierarchy prevailed, especially in the gender domain. Boys were to embark on careers and strive for success; girls were to get married and have children.

The Meiji era, with its seemingly incongruous mix of modernity and tradition, 'group-think' and individualism, presented formidable challenges to Japanese writers and intellectuals. The Westernization mission obliged them to study and absorb the cultural, philosophical, and scientific disciplines of the West and to apply these in the Japanese context. This was easier said than done, especially in the case of literature and the arts. Whole libraries of books in foreign languages had to be translated, studied, and appreciated, as part of the project of fashioning a modern *Japanese* literature. The tumultuous course of prewar Japan, with its stark contrast of an expansive imperialist and militarist agenda and the concerns of ordinary citizens who led quiet lives, is reflected in the literature of this period. Much of this literature points to the perennial question of Japanese identity, with its contest of modernity and tradition, authoritarian control pitted against the desires and dreams of individuals.

Note that our coverage of modern and contemporary literature will center on fiction, which emerged as the dominant modern literary genre. We will not consider modern poetry or drama, notwithstanding the fact that these have been, and remain, important literary domains.

General readings for the unit

Varley, pp 235-303
Marcus, Ch. 5 [\[pdf\]](#)

Recommended:
Gordon, pp 60-223
Karatani, *The Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*
Rimer, *A Reader's Guide to Japanese Literature*
Rimer and Gessel, *Modern Japanese Literature* (Vol 1)

Meiji Literary Pioneers

The first generation of modern Japanese writers embodied the 'mission mentality' of the Meiji, which promoted learning as the *sine qua non* of nation-building and the molding of national character. Literature was to embody important political and ideological values, and writers were inclined to view literary pursuit as a higher calling. But despite the authoritarian regime and its political agenda, writers were not mere tools of the state; rather, they would call attention to societal problems and question the regime, even though they were subject to state censorship. We will focus on the work of two authors long regarded as 'founding fathers' of modern Japanese literature— Mori Ōgai (1862-1922) and Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916). Beginning in the late 19th century, these two embarked on the challenge of creating a modern literary voice to replace the now outmoded styles of the late Tokugawa. This would entail the creation of characters with psychological depth and narratives that reflected the modern urban circumstance and its complex social relations. Of particular concern was how to deal with gender— which is to say, a new order of male-female relations, especially in the romantic domain, and the emerging nuclear family unit.

Mori Ōgai was something of a renaissance man. He was instrumental in establishing the Japanese short story as a modern genre and produced pioneering work as a literary translator, poet, critic, and public intellectual. Deeply conversant with both Western and Asian philosophy, Ōgai employed literature as a vehicle for exploring the moral and ethical temper of his age. All of these feats he accomplished while serving as Japan's chief medical officer.

Natsume Sōseki emerged as Japan's leading novelist, publishing work regarded as capturing the spirit of the Meiji. Sōseki's novels— most notably *Kokoro* (1914)— mark the full maturation of modern Japanese fiction.

Higuchi Ichiyō. And although the Tokyo literary community, the so-called *bundan*, was a largely male establishment, it allowed the contribution of literary women. Of these, Higuchi Ichiyō (1872-1896) ranks as modern Japan's first great woman writer, although she died in her early twenties. Her example inspired subsequent generations of women who aspired to a literary career.

Our readings will present a survey of the work of these three preëminent figures.

Questions

Mori Ōgai was a pioneer of modern historical fiction. What can be gleaned from the historical tales included in our readings? How do his accounts of Tokugawa-era samurai relate to the circumstance of early 20th-century Japan?

In what sense can Sōseki's *Kokoro* be regarded as capturing the so-called 'spirit of Meiji Japan'? How is the character Sensei emblematic of the age?

What are Ichiyō's concerns in *Growing Up*? Contrast this much-admired story with the work of her two male counterparts. Is the author's gender evident here?

How do our readings reflect the emergence of a modern literary persona— believable characters with an emotional life and self-awareness that we can understand and appreciate?

Give thought to the manner in which our readings raise the key question of national identity. How do other media (poetry, art, film, and so forth) serve this purpose?

Readings:

Ôgai:

'Sansho the Steward' (JSS, pp 1-27)

Selection of historical tales (*Okitsu Yagoemon, Jiisan baasan, Takasebune, Abe ichizoku*) **[pdf]**

Sôseki,

Kokoro

Ichiyô

'Separate Ways' (JSS, pp 36-44)

Growing Up **[pdf]**

Recommended:

Danly, *In the Shade of Spring Leaves*

Keene, *Dawn to the West* (Vol I, relevant chapters)

Modern Short Story

It was only toward the end of the Meiji period that a fully-fledged modern literature emerged in Japan. Benefiting from the pioneering work of their predecessors, a second generation of writers expanded the nation's literary horizons and reached out to a broader audience that enjoyed a daily diet of literary fare offered by the nation's periodicals. Longer novels were certainly in evidence, but the short story (and personal essay) became especially popular. This may relate to the legacy of brief, episodic narratives in the earlier literature. Be that as it may, major authors turned to shorter works, and many of these have found their way into the modern literary canon.

We will focus on three writers— Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892-1927), Nagai Kafū (1879-1959), and Shiga Naoya (1883-1971)— whose work both reflects the Meiji pioneers while forging new avenues of expression.

Akutagawa, considered by many as Japan's finest short-story writer, employed historical and legendary sources in crafting an incisive literary commentary upon the human condition that underscored, with delicious irony, our flaws and frailties.

Kafū, a native of Tokyo who took a dim view of the Meiji modernization project and its dehumanizing cityscapes, crafted a literature of nostalgia for the older Tokyo neighborhoods and a more congenial lifestyle. His work in this vein served as an implicit critique of the prevailing political agenda.

Shiga, who like Akutagawa favored the short story form, is credited with have created a uniquely 'pure' literary style, whereby the author's innermost self was said to have found direct expression via his writing. His stories have been subsumed under the much-debated 'I-novel' (*shishōsetsu*) category, which has been claimed to be a uniquely Japanese genre.

Our readings will reflect the mix of social realism, self-presentation, nostalgia, and retold history and legend that our authors have presented us.

Question

Give thought to the 'art of the short story.' What is it, and what can be accomplished in this medium that the longer novel cannot rival? What might be sacrificed in the process?

How does Akutagawa's historical fiction compare with that of Ōgai? How does irony figure in Akutagawa's work, and in what ways do his stories call into question the reliability of the narrative itself?

How does Kafū's *The River Sumida* compare with Ichiyō's *Growing Up*? How do their descriptions of Tokyo scenes and locales, and the personas of their respective characters, differ?

Consider the pros and cons of reading Shiga's work as a 'pure' manifestation of the author's spirit. What sort of autobiographical narrative has he produced?

Overall, how might we synthesize the work of these three authors? What concerns do they share? How do they differ?

Readings:

Akutagawa:

'In a Grove' (JSS, pp 95-102)

Selection of historical tales ('Nose,' 'Rashomon,' 'Lice', 'Hell Screen') **[pdf]**

Kafû:

The River Sumida **[pdf]**

Shiga:

'Night Fires' (JSS, pp 52-61)

Selection of stories ('At Kinosaki,' 'Shopboy's God,' Han's Crime, etc.) **[pdf]**

Recommended:

Birnbaum, *Monkey Brain Sushi*

Fowler, *The Rhetoric of Confession*

Gessel, *The Shôwa Anthology*

Keene, *Dawn to the West* (relevant chapters)

Seidensticker, *Kafû the Scribbler*

Visions of Desire: The Literary Artistry of Tanizaki Junichirō

Among the host of *kindai* authors, one who deserves special attention is Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886-1965). Tanizaki's long and distinguished career (he wrote virtually without pause from 1910 until his death) stands as a brilliant exploration of human desire and our unquenchable passions and private obsessions— in a sense an 'anti-Buddhist credo.' Tanizaki shared with Kafū a skeptical view of Japan's wholesale embrace of Western civilization, and he set out to produce a counter-narrative that called attention to native themes and values. And like Akutagawa, he wrote a good deal of historical fiction. His signature 'mother quests' explicitly recall the *Tale of Genji*, and his recurrent motif of shadows and hidden worlds reflects taps a deep current of Japan's classical literature. A writer who rejected the moralistic credo of the pre-war authorities, Tanizaki was in disfavor among those who considered him irreverent and perverse. He rejected the 'puristic' view of Japanese literature and proudly upheld the banner of creative fiction and narrative artifice. This was the subject of a celebrated literary debate with Akutagawa, which culminated in the latter's suicide in 1927.

Tanizaki's novels include acknowledged masterworks of modern Japanese literature— for instance, *Naomi* (1924) and *The Makioka Sisters* (1949). Our readings comprise short and mid-length fiction that span the author's famous maiden work, 'The Tattooer' (1910) and postwar tales such as the deeply evocative *Bridge of Dreams* (1954). We will also read Tanizaki's famous literary essay, *In Praise of Shadows*, which argues for a traditionalist 'bulwark' against the depredations of modern civilization.

Questions

Compare the historical fiction of Tanizaki and Akutagawa; in particular, give thought to how their stories call into question the reliability of the narrator and the very notion of truth and the limits of human understanding.

How does Tanizaki construct the motif of shadows and private worlds? In particular, consider his *Portrait of Shunkin* and *Bridge of Dreams*.

What do you make of Tanizaki's submissive males in subservient relation to dominant, and domineering, females? How does he undercut the seeming masochism of his male protagonists?

Give thought to the look and feel of Tanizaki's pre-war versus post-war work. Are they clearly distinguishable?

Readings

Tanizaki, *Seven Japanese Tales*
'Aguri' (JSS, pp 62-73)
In Praise of Shadows' **[pdf]**

Recommended:
Keene, *Dawn to the West* (Tanizaki chapter)
Ken Ito, *Visions of Desire*

Gendai: Literary Voices of Post-War and Contemporary Japan

Our final unit takes in the remarkable course of Japanese literature that spans the immediate post-war years and the second decade of the 21st century. The nation's total and comprehensive defeat in the Pacific War brought on privation and dislocation that beggars the imagination. Repatriated soldiers would gradually bear witness to the horrors of war and the agony of defeat. The atomic bombings would yield their own record of testimony on the part of survivors who would struggle with the depiction of unimaginable horrors. The American occupation (1945-52), initially feared as a likely retribution on the part of the victors, instead served to rectify the catastrophic militarist agenda and its myths of invincibility and imperial divinity. A postwar constitution (1947) aimed at 'normalizing' the nation under an American model of equality and freedom. In particular, it eliminated class hierarchy and the patriarchal extended family and instituted, for the first time in Japan's history, gender equality. As in the case of Germany, Japan's economy was strengthened. The nation not only recovered from its horrendous defeat but, in the course of several decades, became resurgent and, eventually, dominant. Inevitably, a new generation of writers would give expression to these dramatic transformations, and the ongoing quest for a national identity would assume new shapes and forms. As of the 1950s, visual media— in particular, film— would provide more broadly accessible 'versions' of literary works and point to new challenges to the primacy of the print media and literary narrative.

Our survey of some seventy years of postwar literature will focus on a group of representative authors. It will not include treatment of the large body of war literature, although this certainly merits attention. (See recommended readings.) Our authors range from several who had established themselves in the prewar period to younger ones for whom the war and its aftermath were little more than historical curiosities. Our coverage will bring us to the present day, and to developments in the area of media technology and cultural globalization that have altered the look and feel of contemporary Japanese literature and will surely continue to do so.

Readings

Varley, pp 304-351

Marcus, Ch. 6, Postscript [\[pdf\]](#)

Recommended:

Gordon, pp 224-334

Ibuse Masuji, *Black Rain* (novel of the atomic aftermath)

McDonald, *From Book to Screen*

Ôe Kenzaburô (ed), *The Crazy Iris and Other Stories of the Atomic Aftermath*

Ôoka Shôhei, *Fires on the Plain* (war novel)

Rimer and Gessel, *Modern Japanese Literature* (Vol 2)

Rimer, *A Reader's Guide to Japanese Literature*

Kawabata and Mishima : The *Yin-Yang* Literary Worlds

We will study two of Japan's most celebrated postwar writers—Kawabata Yasunari (1899-1972) and Mishima Yukio (1925-1970)—whose work stands in a *yin-yang* manner of complementary opposition. Kawabata and Mishima can be said to represent a high water mark of modern Japanese literature; and despite their sharply contrasting styles and temperaments, they share a concern for beauty, sadness, and the state of Japan's postwar identity.

Kawabata. Having established himself in the 1920s, Kawabata went on to craft a distinctive fictional style that evokes Japan's classical aesthetics and a nostalgic longing for the past. Novels such as *Snow Country* and *Sound of the Mountain* (1948, 1954) became icons of a postwar traditionalism that helped earn their author the Nobel Prize in literature in 1968. Kawabata became a living embodiment of a 'traditional Japan' marked by exquisite sensitivity, empathy, and understatement.

Mishima. In dramatic contrast, Mishima Yukio espoused a *bushidō*-inspired literature that recalls the medieval samurai aesthetic and stood as a critique of the vacuous, materialist landscape of postwar Japan. Mishima's brilliant (and markedly narcissistic) literary career paralleled his emergence as a reactionary figure who promoted a restoration of the emperor and a return to the 'purity' of imperial rule. Having utterly failed in this quixotic mission, Mishima took his own life, in a grandiose and spectacular ritual suicide, on November 25, 1970—the very day that he completed the final chapter of his final literary work.

Our readings will center on two representative novels—Kawabata's *The Old Capital* (1962) and Mishima's *Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (1956)—together with a selection of shorter work.

Questions

What comparisons can be drawn between Kawabata's fiction, with its subtlety, nuance, and wistful sensitivity, and the bold, histrionic style of Mishima, with its strong egos and philosophical density?

How does Kawabata's maiden work, 'The Izu Dancer,' compare with his 1962 novel? How does the author present his female characters and their relationship with the male protagonists?

Give thought to Kawabata's Nobel essay and its traditionalist credo. How does this relate to his fiction? What does it say about the author's view of Japan in the late 1960s?

How does Mishima construct his vision of beauty in *Temple of the Golden Pavilion*? What sense do you make of the fate of its protagonist, Mizoguchi?

Mishima is well known for his treatment of 'eros and *thanatos*'—beauty and death—and the long-tabooed theme of homosexuality. How are these reflected in our readings?

Readings:

Kawabata:

The Old Capital

'The Izu Dancer' (JSS, pp 129-148)

Nobel essay [\[pdf\]](#)

Mishima:

Temple of the Golden Pavilion

'Onnagata' (JSS, pp 293-312)

'Patriotism' **[pdf]**

Abe and Ōe : Existential and Moral Imperatives

We turn to another important authorial pairing— Abe Kōbō (1924-1993) and Ōe Kenzaburō (1935-)— and work that explores different approaches to Japan's postwar situation and the quality of the modern condition.

Abe Kōbō created a politically-engaged body of writing that reflects his Marxist proclivities and avant-garde literary tastes. Raised in colonial Manchuria, Abe embraced an 'outsider's' perspective on Japan and the crisis of its postwar identity. His novels and stories explore the existential dilemma of a rootless, spiritually-crippled nation and provide an absurdist 'take' on alienated, disaffected, and lonely lives and the fate of modern civilization. Abe Kōbō's existential concerns are epitomized in his celebrated 1962 novel, *Woman in the Dunes*, whose protagonist is trapped in a surreal sand-dune world and must construct meaning out of absurdity.

Ōe Kenzaburō. Raised in the Japanese hinterland, Ōe Kenzaburō was imbued with his own 'marginal' view of Japanese modernity. His distinguished literary career, which has centered upon a deep concern for the moral and ethical fabric of modern society, features work that critiques the excesses of freedom and self-indulgence and promotes an imperative of moral conscience and personal responsibility. Ōe's unflagging commitment to a literary 'high ground' and to the advocacy of worthy causes (such as the anti-nuclear movement) led to his receiving the 1994 Nobel Prize in literature. Ōe Kenzaburō's moral concerns are exemplified in his 1964 novel, *A Personal Matter*, whose immature, escapist protagonist comes to self-understanding and a willing acceptance of adult responsibility. This loosely autobiographical novel features a brain-damaged infant who is modeled on Ōe's own son, Hikari.

Our readings will center on these two novels, in addition to selected short stories by each author and the text of Ōe's Nobel essay. In addition, you are encouraged to read several historically-based tales by two prominent postwar writers— Inoue Yasushi (1907-1992) and Endo Shūsaku (1923-1996). These will afford divergent perspectives on the dilemma of modernity, the crisis of faith, and the nature of our ties with society and self.

Questions

What sense do you make of the title of Abe's novel? How does the 'woman in the dunes' transform the protagonist, Niki Jumpei? How does he manage to convert an absurd existence into a form of utopia? What themes does Abe weave into his tale?

How does *Woman in the Dunes* compare to Abe's short stories? Is there anything 'uniquely Japanese' about these tales, or do they belong to a more universal literary commentary on the modern condition?

In *A Personal Matter*, Ōe's protagonist, Bird, ends up learning important life lessons. Is his a plausible 'coming of age'? How does he compare with Abe's Niki Jumpei?

How does Ōe's 'Prize Stock' reflect upon Japan's wartime experience and foreshadow its postwar situation?

Compare Ōe's Nobel essay, 'Japan the Dubious and Myself,' with Kawabata's. How does Ōe 're-write' Kawabata's 1968 essay and, in so doing, critique late 20th- century Japan and its literature?

Readings

Abe:

Woman in the Dunes

Selection of short stories **[pdf]**

Ôe:

A Personal Matter

'Prize Stock' (JSS, pp 351-390)

'Japan the Dubious and Myself (Nobel essay) **[pdf]**

Recommended:

Endo Shûsaku, 'Unzen' (JSS, pp 252-263)

Inoue Yasushi, 'Passage to Fudaraku' (JSS, pp 206-223)

Postmodern Visions of Contemporary Japan (I): Murakami's Altered Realities

Japan's best-known writer, who ranks among the leading names in world literature today— is Murakami Haruki (1949-). For many, Murakami's work is virtually synonymous with 'Japanese literature' and in effect serves as a guide to the lifestyles of modern-day Japanese. His thoroughly 'Americanized' tastes (in food and music, especially) and embrace of pop culture and consumer fads mark his work as a sort of literary hybrid. A prolific writer famously reluctant to discuss his work and its 'significance,' Murakami is typically identified as 'postmodern'— a problematic label, to be sure. His writing typically blurs the distinction between 'reality' and 'fantasy,' and his characters— especially the first-person '*boku*' protagonist who relates many of Murakami's tales— revel in the ordinary and the mundane, while finding themselves merging with 'parallel worlds' and embarking on improbable adventures.

In short, Murakami Haruki is a story-teller par excellence. He explores the labyrinth of memory, the subjectivity of experience, and the 'accidentality' of our daily lives. Above all, he relishes the delicious twists and turns that befall his characters and define their strange, yet strangely familiar, worlds. Murakami is known for massive, intricately-plotted works of fiction— most recently, *Kafka on the Shore* and *IQ84* (2005, 2011). Many consider *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (1997) to be his finest novel, and it is highly recommended. Our readings will consist of a series of short stories that encapsulate the 'Murakami style' and will serve as an introduction to his literary world.

Questions

Does the 'postmodern' label help or hinder one's understanding and appreciation of Murakami's work? How so?

What do you find most compelling and interesting about Murakami's tales? Do they recall any of our prior readings?

How would you describe the first-person protagonist of Murakami's stories? What are his concerns? His traits? How does he relate with the women in his world?

Do you perceive a distinctive 'Japanese' feel to Murakami's literary creations? Or should his work be read as reflecting our globalized contemporary circumstance?

Readings

Murakami, *The Elephant Vanishes and Other Stories*

Recommended:

Rubin, *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*

Shimada Masahiko, 'Desert Dolphin' (JSS, pp 417-431)

Postmodern Visions of Contemporary Japan (II): The Viewpoint of Women Writers

We conclude our course with a survey of work by modern and contemporary Japanese woman writers. In stark contrast with the marginal status of women writers in early periods, the contemporary Japanese literary scene is arguably dominated by women writers, and they represent a wide range of genres, themes, and concerns. In short, the gender question and related assumptions about a compartmentalized 'women's literature' need to be revisited and rethought.

Among the cohort of prewar women writers, the following are especially prominent: Okamoto Kanoko (1889-1951); Miyamoto Yuriko (1899-1951); Hayashi Fumiko (1903-1951); Kôda Aya (1904-1990); Enchi Fumiko (1905-1986); Kôno Taeko (1926-); and Kurahashi Yumiko (1935-2005). Major writers born in the postwar period, all of whom remain active, include the following: Tsushima Yûko (1947-); Kirino Natsuo (1951-); Yamada Eimi (1959-); Yoshimoto Banana (1964-); Yu Miri (1968-); and Kanehara Hitomi (1983-).

Our readings, which draw upon both groupings of writers, will constitute a cross-section of twentieth-century writing by women. This final set of readings will in turn serve as a course capstone, which will invite us to consider the broad scope of Japanese literature from the contemporary perspective.

Questions:

Draw lines of comparison among these readings. How do the 'old guard' writers compare with their younger cohort?

How do these stories compare with our other modern and contemporary readings? Is there anything at all reminiscent of the concerns of our Heian-period authors?

How do you discern the 'gender signature' in these stories? Can an argument be made for regarding this as a distinctive category of 'woman's literature,' or rather as literature that happens to be written by women? (Note that a similar question should be raised regarding 'Japanese literature' versus 'literature that happens to be written in Japanese.')

What can be gleaned from these stories regarding the recent and current state of Japanese society? In particular, note that Yu Miri is a writer of Korean descent. Her work points to the heterogeneity of Japanese society and the emergence of minority voices that challenge the homogeneity myth.

Readings

Okamoto Kanoko, 'Portrait of an Old Geisha' (JSS, pp 79-94)

Hayashi Fumiko, 'The Accordion and the Fish Town' (JSS, pp 154-171)

Enchi F

umiko, 'The Flower-Eating Crone' (JSS, pp 172-181)

Kôno Taeko, 'Toddler-Hunting' (JSS, pp 313-333)

Tsushima Yûko, 'A Very Strange, Enchanted Boy' (JSS, pp 391-399)

Yoshimoto Banana, 'Dreaming of Kimchee' (JSS, 432-443)

Kanehara Hitomi, selection from *Snakes and Earrings* [pdf]

Recommended:

Copeland and Ramirez-Christensen (eds). *The Father-Daughter Plot*

Schalow and Walker (eds). *The Woman's Hand*

TIMELINE

Early historical era	ca. 550-710
Nara period	710-784
Heian period	794-1185
<i>Medieval Japan</i>	ca. 1200-1600
Kamakura Shogunate	1185-1336
Northern and Southern Courts	1336-1392
'Warring States' period	1477-1573
Muromachi Shogunate	1392-1573
Age of Unification	1568-1600
Tokugawa (Edo) period	1600-1868
Genroku epoch	ca. 1675-1725
<i>Modern Japan:</i>	1868— present
Prewar (<i>kindai</i>) Japan	1868-1945
Postwar (<i>gendai</i>) Japan	1945—
Meiji period	1868-1912
Taishō period	1912-1926
Shōwa period	1926-1989
Heisei period	1989—

RECOMMENDED READINGS

A: Classical and Premodern Japanese Literature

- Bargen, Doris. *A Woman's Weapon: Spirit Possession in the Tale of Genji* (Hawaii, 1997)
- Bowring, Richard. *Murasaki Shikibu: Her Diary and Poetic Memoirs* (Princeton, 1982)
- _____. *Murasaki Shikibu: The Tale of Genji, A Student Guide* (Cambridge, 2004, 2nd edition)
- Brazell, Karen (transl). *The Confessions of Lady Nijô* (Stanford, 1973)
- _____ (ed). *Traditional Japanese Theater: An Anthology of Plays* (Columbia, 1998)
- Carter, Steven. *Traditional Japanese Poetry: An Anthology* (Stanford, 1991)
- Cranston, Edwin (transl). *The Izumi Shikibu Diary: A Romance of the Heian Court* (Harvard, 1969)
- Eubanks, Charlotte. *Miracles of Book and Body: Buddhist Textual Culture and Medieval Japan* (California, 2011)
- Field, Norma. *The Splendor of Longing in the Tale of Genji* (Princeton, 1987)
- Goff, Janet. *Noh Drama and the Tale of Genji: The Art of Allusion in Fifteen Classical Plays* (Princeton, 1991)
- Hare, Thomas. *Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo* (Stanford, 1986)
- Keene Donald (transl). *Essays in Idleness* (Columbia, 1967)
- _____. *The Pleasures of Japanese Literature* (Columbia, 1988)
- _____. *Seeds in the Heart: Japanese Literature From Earliest Times to the Late Sixteenth Century* (Holt, 1993)
- _____. *World Within Walls: Japanese Literature of the Pre-Modern Era 1600-1867* (Holt, 1976)
- La Fleur, William. *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan* (California, 1983)
- Li, Michelle Osterfeld. *Ambiguous Bodies: Reading the Grotesque in Japanese Setsuwa Tales* (Stanford, 2009)
- Marcus, Marvin. *Japanese Literature: From Murasaki to Murakami* (AAS/KIAS, forthcoming)
- McCullough, Helen (transl). *Classical Japanese Prose: An Anthology* (Stanford, 1990)

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