



## Contemporary Japanese Fiction

**JAPA 340 Spring 2017**  
**Tuesday and Thursday 12:00 – 1:15**  
**Krug Hall 19**

When the Pacific War drew to a close in 1945, Japan was a defeated nation occupied by American forces, a remarkable position from which it rose to become an economic superpower boasting immense cultural capital. The story of postwar Japan is dramatic and exciting, and Japanese fiction is one of the best ways to experience this story from multiple perspectives. The wealthy and the impoverished, the powerful and the disenfranchised, the insiders and the outsiders, women and men, children and adults – there are as many stories about Japan as there are people to tell these stories, and contemporary Japanese literature is fascinating in its diversity. This class will introduce students to representative works and authors while providing a wealth of viewpoints on contemporary Japan.

The readings for this course will focus on fiction centered around the city of Tokyo, but class lectures will provide the historical and literary backgrounds of these works and sketch connections to regional literatures and other types of storytelling and literary expression, such as screenplays and poetry. Through close analysis, critical discussions, and creative assignments, we will explore the artistic movements, literary devices, and narrative styles that we observe in the stories we read. A major theme of this class will be the production of fiction in the contemporary literary market, and we will take a comparative approach in our examination of how literary magazines, literary prizes, translation, and international publishing groups have shaped and continue to influence our notions of fiction from Japan.

**Course Attributes:** Literature, Non-Western Culture, Undergraduate Upper Division

### Course Texts

Enchi Fumiko, *Masks*  
Mishima Yukio, *Patriotism*  
Ōe Kenzaburō, *A Personal Matter*  
Yoshimoto Banana, *Kitchen*  
Murakami Haruki, *Norwegian Wood*  
Kirino Natsuo, *Real World*  
Murakami Ryū, *In the Miso Soup*  
Nakamura Atsumiko, *Utsubora*

### Instructor Information

Dr. Kathryn Hemmann  
Aquia Building Room 326  
open office hour from 1:15 to 2:45  
on Tuesdays and Thursdays

### Grading

Class Participation: 20%  
Pop Quizzes: 25%  
Midterm Paper: 20%  
Final Project Proposal: 5%  
Final Project Presentation: 10%  
Final Project: 20%

#### *Class Participation*

Students are expected to complete all required reading assignments and to be engaged and attentive during class lectures and discussions. Repeated lack of preparation will significantly lower the participation grade, as will a demonstrated lack of respect for the instructor and the other students. A large number of unexcused absences will also affect a student's participation grade in addition to any accrued penalties to the overall course grade.

#### *Pop Quizzes*

There will be a number of pop quizzes given at the beginning of class over the course of the semester. These quizzes are designed to be extremely easy for students who have done the reading and impossible for students who have not. No background knowledge of Japanese history will be tested, and no familiarity with Japanese words will be assumed. It is highly recommended that students be familiar with the names of the major characters in each reading.

#### *Midterm Paper*

This assignment will be between four and six pages in length. A list of suggested topics will be distributed two weeks before **the due date, Thursday, March 9**. These papers will be graded according to a four-point rubric, which takes into consideration (1) clarity of thesis, (2) cogent structural organization, (3) appropriate reference to the source text(s), and (4) grammar and style.

*Final Project*

The final project may deal with any text covered in class, with one or more works of contemporary Japanese fiction not covered in class, or with any topic relating to fiction, books, and publishing in contemporary Japan. Students have two options concerning this project. The first option is a six-to-eight-page research paper that draws on a minimum of three academic peer-reviewed sources. The second option is a creative project, which may be undertaken either as an individual or as a group. Students may submit their final projects at any time before the deadline provided that a proposal has been approved beforehand. **Final projects are due on Thursday, May 11 at 1:15PM.**

*Final Project Proposal*

The goal of this proposal is to explain the questions and issues you want to address through your final project. If you are writing a research paper, your proposal should contain a thesis statement, a brief outline of the structure of your argument, and a list of sources. If you have opted for the creative option, your proposal should describe your artistic medium and the proposed length of your project (in terms of pages, blog posts, canvases, minutes of video, and so on). Please be aware that your final project cannot take the form of an in-class presentation or performance. Your proposal should be approximately one page, or three hundred words, in length. Only one proposal should be submitted for group projects.

Comparative approaches are welcome (examples might include a comparison of Japanese and American fiction or a study of cinematic adaptations of Japanese fiction), but please note that any project proposal not connected in some way with both literature and contemporary Japan will be immediately dismissed.

*Final Project Presentation*

Each student will briefly present his or her final project during the last two days of class. This presentation will be no more than five minutes in length. The time limit will be strictly enforced, and there will not be a period for questions or comments at the end of each presentation, so it is important to prepare well. Plan on using a PowerPoint slideshow or some other type of visual aid, but try not to rely too heavily on video. These presentations will be graded according to a four-point rubric: (1) clarity, or ability to convey content, (2) impact, or ability to demonstrate why the project is interesting and important, (3) concision, or ability to respect the time limit, and (4) creativity, or ability to construct apt and appropriate visual aids.

**Course Policies***Required Readings*

The eight books assigned for this course will be held on two-hour reserve at the library. The short stories will be available on the course site on Blackboard. Students are required to complete all assigned readings and to bring physical copies of the readings to class. Students are strongly encouraged to purchase copies of the four novels. Although these books are available at the campus bookstore, they are all currently in print and can be purchased at a discount from Amazon and other online retailers. Electronic copies are acceptable. Please note that all of the novels will take some time to read. It is recommended that students begin each novel at least a week in advance. If you would like me to have the library order a book, film, graphic novel, or

television series for your final project or personal reference, please notify me as soon as possible, as the process can take four to seven weeks.

### *Class Attendance*

Each student is allowed **two unexcused absences**, no questions asked and no excuses necessary. If you would like to excuse an absence, you must submit at least one form of written proof of legitimacy (photocopies and printouts are fine). If your documents are not submitted within three days of your absence, they become forfeit. **Each unexcused absence after the second will result in half a letter grade being deducted from your final course grade**, in addition to a reduction of your participation grade. Please be aware that obligations for other classes (such as exams) do not count as a valid excuse, even if they are scheduled during our class time. If such a conflict arises, please notify the professor to reschedule the commitment. Showing up to class more than fifteen minutes late or without a copy of the reading will count as an absence.

### *Technology*

Tablets are permitted in their capacity as e-readers, but **laptop computers are absolutely not allowed** without a formal letter from the Office of Disability Services. If I catch you using your smartphone, you will be marked absent for that class period. Any student expecting an urgent call or text message should notify me before class begins.

### *Email Policy*

I will usually respond to email within twenty-four hours, but in certain cases it may take longer. If you have an urgent question or concern and do not receive a timely response from me, feel free to email me again. If you have a question that can be answered by consulting the syllabus or the internet, please consider doing so before contacting me.

### *Disability Accommodation*

The Office of Disability Services (ODS) has strict guidelines concerning the submission of accommodation requests. If your registered disability enables you to receive a specific accommodation on a class assignment or evaluation, please submit the appropriate paperwork to me in advance of the deadline, which is generally a week before the assignment due date or scheduled evaluation date. If you feel that I am not being properly sensitive to your disability, please let me know, and please don't hesitate to suggest a meeting with your officer at the ODS.

### *Plagiarism*

I have a zero tolerance policy for plagiarism. If you submit work that isn't your own for any assignment for any reason, you will fail the class, and I will report you to the Honor Committee, which may result in your expulsion. Plagiarism is surprisingly easy to catch, so please don't try it.

### *Respect*

Each student is expected to be respectful of the instructor and his or her peers. No speech or behavior demonstrating or encouraging discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, age, body shape, or disability will be tolerated. The uncritical reproduction of stereotypes relating to culture and nationality in written assignments and class discussions will be harshly penalized.

**Important Dates**

Thursday, March 9  
Midterm Paper Due

Thursday, April 20  
Final Project Proposal Due

Tuesday, May 2 and Thursday, May 4  
Final Project Presentations

Thursday, May 11  
Final Project Due

**Week One: Fictions about Japan, Fictions about Fiction**

January 24  
Course Introduction

January 26  
Dazai Osamu, "Merry Christmas"  
Kawabata Yasunari, "First Snow on Fuji"

**Week Two: Understanding History, Understanding Literature**

January 31  
Hayashi Kyōko, "Masks of Whatchamacallit"

February 2  
Mizuki Shigeru, *Onwards Towards Our Noble Deaths* (pp. 4-57)

**Week Three: The Appropriation of Tradition**

February 7  
Enchi Fumiko, *Masks*

February 9  
Enchi Fumiko, *Masks*

**Week Four: Sensuality and Decadence**

February 14  
Mishima Yukio, *Patriotism*

February 16  
Kōno Taeko, "Toddler Hunting"

**Week Five: The Absurdity of Postwar Japan**

February 21  
Abe Kōbō, "The Bet"

February 23  
Kurahashi Yumiko, "We Are Lovers"  
Takahashi Takako, "Foxfire"

**Week Six: How to Win a Nobel Prize, Part One**

February 28  
Ōe Kenzaburō, *A Personal Matter*

March 2  
Ōe Kenzaburō, *A Personal Matter*

**Week Seven: Sugar Will Rot Your Brain**

March 7  
Yoshimoto Banana, *Kitchen*

March 9  
Yoshimoto Banana, *Kitchen*

**SHORT PAPER DUE ON THURSDAY, MARCH 9**

**Spring Break**

March 13 – March 19

**Week Eight: How To Win A Nobel Prize, Part Two**

March 21  
Murakami Haruki, *Norwegian Wood*

March 23  
Murakami Haruki, *Norwegian Wood*

**Week Nine: A New Century, A New World**

March 28

Okuda Hideo, "What A Fool Believes"

March 30

Ogawa Yōko, "Pregnancy Diary"

**Week Ten: Fear and Loathing in Tokyo**

April 4

Murakami Ryū, *In the Miso Soup*

April 6

Murakami Ryū, *In the Miso Soup*

**Week Eleven: Mystery, Suspense, and Schoolgirls**

April 11

Kirino Natsuo, *Real World*

April 13

Kirino Natsuo, *Real World*

**Week Twelve: The World Without Us**

April 18

Taguchi Randy, "The Blue Summit"

April 20

Kawakami Hiromi, "The God of Bears"

Kawakami Hiromi, "Summer Break"

**FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE ON THURSDAY, APRIL 18**

**Week Thirteen: "Fiction" Is Make-Believe**

April 25

Nakamura Atsumiko, *Utsubora*

April 27

Nakamura Atsumiko, *Utsubora*

**Week Fourteen: The Reader as Writer**

Tuesday, May 2  
Student Presentations

Thursday, May 4  
Student Presentations

**Final projects are due on Thursday, May 11 at 1:15PM.**

The illustration on the first page of this syllabus, which depicts the character Terauchi from Kirino Natsuo's novel *Real World*, was created by Arielle Jovellanos (<http://jovaline.tumblr.com>).