SYLLABUS

Japanese Women Writers

This course offers a survey and critical reading of poetry, short fiction and novels by women from Japan’s modern period (1868—present). We will discuss the historical background and contribution of these writers to the development of modern Japanese literature. Themes that we will pay particular attention to in our texts is the representation of women, their changing roles in Japanese society, and their relationships with themselves and others. However, we will also examine the particular demands that form and style place on our reading: why are some texts more emotionally accessible than others? What sort of subject position is expressed in different narratives? We will consider these questions, and more. You will read all literature in English translation. Knowledge of Japan or the Japanese language is advantageous, but not required.

REQUIRED TEXTS


Many of the texts we discuss will be available through electronic reserve (ER). Please download and print these yourselves; you should be able to find them by title on the Library’s course reserves. I will occasionally provide photocopies.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

You are required to have done your reading for each class meeting, in full. This ensures that, as a class, we can have a lively and informed discussion on the works assigned. I will generally take up some of class time with lecture, but 277 is primarily a discussion-based class. You are responsible for participating actively. I measure the participation grade by your level of preparedness and your thoughtful contributions to the discussion. The discussion questions you will prepare for each new text are graded separately, but of course have a bearing on your participation grade. Throughout the semester, each of you
will carry out an extended research project that will result in a ten-page paper. We’ll get there in steps: you will submit a topic, an annotated bibliography, a first draft, and then (finally) the final draft. For the benefit of your classmates, you will also deliver a presentation on the topic of your research. We’ll meet individually to discuss your ideas. Besides this project, there will also be two in-class exams: a midterm and a final.

Participation: Your class participation grade is based largely on your actual verbal participation in the classroom (i.e. what you say out loud, which should be both pertinent to the discussion and stated at the appropriate time). Speak up, and respect others’ rights to do so as well! It not only affects your grade, but makes the class much more productive and enjoyable. I am confident that we, as a group, can create an environment where everyone will feel comfortable contributing. Here are a few pointers on how to participate successfully in class discussion. The student who consistently makes the effort to contribute according to these guidelines will receive a grade in the A to B range.

- If you are usually comfortable with speaking in class, then choose the moments you wish to speak carefully; more is not necessarily better. On the flipside, if you tend to be a bit quiet, don’t necessarily wait until the opportunity to speak is handed to you. Be proactive. Are you shy? Prepare some comments ahead of class and read them out loud instead. Come talk to me if you’d like some help.
- Sometimes, I will give you reading questions ahead of time. Sometimes I’ll leave you to your own devices. In either case, as you read, TAKE NOTES. Don’t just breeze through the text. You’ll be surprised at how many ideas you’ll have when you look back over what you wrote down. Use these notes to prepare some comments for class.
- When you speak, state your point concisely and stay on the point under discussion. If tangential perspectives emerge, as they invariably will, write them down so you can return to the issue later. Of course, if the discussion seems ready to move in a different direction, then please proceed. I will do my best to keep us on track, put part of that responsibility is yours, too.
- Support your points on the basis of the readings. That means citing exact page numbers, reading aloud short passages, identifying key terms/issues, and/or accurately summarizing in addition to stating your idea/asking your question.

Discussion questions: By 9 a.m. of each day of class, e-mail me one discussion question/comment (exceptions are exam days, of course). For the first time we discuss the text, consider the issues that struck you while you were reading/watching. What about the text interests me? Puzzles me? Challenges me? I encourage you to ask questions that will promote class discussions on larger issues concerning cultural, historical and literary contexts. Questions on specific elements in the work, such as Japanese terminology, historical facts, and so on, should be saved for class (though please feel free to ask them!). If we discuss the texts for more than one day, subsequent questions should be geared to deepening your understanding of the text. Did this text remind you of other texts? In what way? Would you like to discuss more extensively an idea introduced during the previous class? I may sometimes hand out questions for you to ponder for the next class, but you should still come up with your own. These discussion questions will often be used to spark class discussion and may even give me good ideas for exam
questions, so take them seriously! This means the questions should be well-stated and refer explicitly to our readings. Identify the location of the section to which you wish to draw attention, for example. Have you noticed a concept/term/theme that recurs in the text? Give us page numbers. To receive an “A” grade in this department means more than just sending something in for every class. An “A” grade will be awarded to students who consistently send in questions/comments that reveal a deep engagement with the readings by offering concrete textual examples and a critical assessment of those examples.

**Research paper:** This is a literary analysis paper of ten pages in length, for which you will do additional research on one of the authors included in the syllabus. By additional research, I mean reading at least one more long work (e.g. a novel) or two short works (e.g. short prose fiction) by that author, as well as finding and reading at least two scholarly sources on that author (e.g. an article in a journal or part of a chapter in a book). Be advised that many of these authors are underpublished in English translation. Start looking right away, for while I have tried to increase our stock of translations and secondary scholarship in the library, you will almost certainly have to order items through interlibrary loan. We’ll get to the final product in several stages, some of which are graded (bolded items; see schedule below). Once you know whom and what you want to write on (as stated above, this alone will take some research), come up with a **topic** (in a single, well-thought-out paragraph). Then, you’ll need to compile an **annotated bibliography** in which you list all your sources, summaries of those sources, and how you’re using them for your project (MLA format, please). You should have AT LEAST four sources, including your primary texts, but probably more. You’ll submit a complete draft of your paper. I’ll hand this back to you, with detailed comments, after Thanksgiving Break. The **final draft**, which will most probably be significantly different from the first draft, is due the Friday of finals week. If you have questions at **any** stage in the process, just ask! That’s what I’m here for. I’ll be happy to meet with you individually.

Note: Late papers will not be accepted and will receive an F. The only exception I will make is if you have a **family emergency** or a bona fide **medical excuse**.

**Oral presentation:** You will all give a formal, ten-minute presentation about your research topic. We’ll do these on December 1, after you’ve handed in your paper draft. What fun is it to learn about something if you can’t share that knowledge with others? There is no set format, but you should give everyone a handout that includes (1) the title of your project and a brief summary, (2) the main points you wish to cover, (3) any factual information you feel your audience needs to know in order to understand your subject, and (4) a bibliography of the sources you consulted, including the primary texts. You should meet with me to discuss presentation logistics (i.e. how to present your ideas) **BEFORE** Thanksgiving break.

**Exams:** Both the midterm and the final will include some short answer questions and one or two essays. I’ll have blue books for these in-class tests. The purpose of these exams is to test all the material we have covered. The final will not be cumulative.
A note on attendance: Needless to say, regular attendance is key to your success in this course. If you’re not here, you can’t participate; chronic absenteeism will not be tolerated. If you have a problem, please talk to me about it in advance if possible. We can usually work something out. If you have any more than two unexcused absences, your grade will be negatively affected.

**GRADING**

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**SCHEDULE** (subject to change):

**Week 1**
August 30 T  Introduction/Lecture on history of women’s writing in Japan
September 1 R  Modernity in Japan and its effect on women
  • Sharon Nolte, “The Meiji State’s Policy Toward Women, 1890-1910” (ER)

**Week 2**
September 6 T  What is (Japanese) women’s writing?
  • Joan Ericson, “The Origins of the Concept of ‘Women’s Literature’” in The Woman’s Hand
  • Presentation: bibliographical materials in Japanese women’s literature (by Kristin Strohmeyer, reference librarian)
September 8 R  The Modern Murasaki
  • Kishida Toshiko, “Daughters in Boxes” (photocopy)

**Week 3**
September 13 T  • Higuchi Ichiyô, “Troubled Waters” and “Child’s Play” (ER)
September 15 R

New women’s voices
- Selections from Yosano Akiko, Tangled Hair (ER)
- Laurel Rasplaca Rodd, “Yosano Akiko and the Taishô debate over the ‘New Woman’” (ER)

Week 4

September 20 T

September 22 R
- Hayashi Fumiko, “Vagabond’s Song” (in To Live and to Write)

Week 5

September 27 T
- Uno Chiyo, Confessions of Love

September 29 R
- Confessions of Love cont’d

Week 6

October 4 T
- Nakamoto Takako, “The Female Bell-Cricket”
- Okamoto Kanoko, “A Floral Pageant”
  (both selections in To Live and to Write)

October 6 R
- Hayashi Kyôko, “The Empty Can” (ER)
- John Treat, “Hayashi Kyôko and the Gender of Ground Zero” in The Woman’s Hand

Week 7

October 11 T
- Review session

October 13 R
- Midterm

Week 8

October 18 T
- Fall recess; no class

October 20 R
- Reinterpreting The Tale of Genji
  - Enchi Fumiko, Masks

Week 9

October 25 T
- Masks cont’d
October 27 R

Shocking sexualit(ies)
- Takahashi Takako, “Doll Love” (ER)
- Tomioka Taeko, “Straw Dogs” (ER)

Week 10

November 1 T
- Kôno Taeko, “Toddler-hunting” (ER)
- **Annotated bibliography due**

November 3 R
- Ôba Minako, “The Smile of a Mountain Witch” (ER)
- Kurahashi Yumiko, “The Woman with the Flying Head” (ER)

Week 11

November 8 T
- Pregnancy and Motherhood
  - Tsushima Yûko, *Child of Fortune*, Chapters 1-4

November 10 R
- *Child of Fortune*, Chapters 5-8

Week 12

November 15 T
- Writing from the margins
  - Yang-gi Lee, “Yu-hee” (ER)

November 17 R
- Yamamoto Michiko, “Betty-san” (ER)

Week 13

November 22 T
- Women in popular culture
  - Yoshimoto Banana, *Kitchen*
  - **Formal paper DRAFT due**

November 24 R
- *Kitchen* cont’d
- Sharon Kinsella, “Cuties in Japan” (ER)
- **Oral presentations**

Week 14

November 29 T
- **Final exam**

December 1 R
- Takahashi Rumiko, *Ranma 1/2*
- Review
- Course evaluations

December 6 T

December 8 R

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December 16 R

- Final draft of research paper due

Happy Holidays!