
GHOSTS AND GOBLINS IN MODERN JAPANESE
LITERATURE 2 credits (Spring)

日本近代怪奇幻想小説通史 2単位(春学期)

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Ghosts and Goblins in Modern Japanese Literature

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Course Description/Objectives/Teaching Method/Intended Learning Outcome:

Modern Japanese literature is filled with ghosts and goblins--if only you know where to look. This course surveys some of the strangest, scariest, and wildest fiction in modern Japan. It is designed as an introductory survey to the material, meaning that no prior knowledge of Japanese literature or Japanese history is required. We will begin at the "beginning" of modern Japanese literature in the late nineteenth century and work our way up through more contemporary works, and the stories we will encounter range from ghost stories to fairy tales to the literary equivalent of the splatter film.

Along the way, we will ask ourselves a set of interlinking questions. How did the broad genre of what is today known in Japanese as *gensō bungaku*, roughly corresponding to supernatural, horror, and fantasy genres, emerge and develop as a set of assumptions about the nature of modern life in Japan? How do these assumptions challenge our way of interacting with the world, with other people, and ultimately with our own sense of self? What kind of new understandings of various boundaries--between the real and the unreal, the present and the past, the foreign and the native, the living and the dead--might these stories suggest? And how are these texts part of a larger global network of weird fiction--what, in other words, does it mean to call a Japanese text "Gothic"?

Course Plan:

- 1 Course Introduction
- 2 Kōda Rohan and the Origins of *gensō bungaku* (Kōda Rohan, "Encounter with a Skull")
- 3 Izumi Kyōka's Supernatural Fiction (Izumi Kyōka, "One Day in Spring," first half)
- 4 Izumi Kyōka and the Possibilities of Radical Disorientation (Izumi Kyōka, "One Day in Spring," second half)
- 5 Real/Unreal in Natsume Sōseki and Mori Ōgai (Natsume Sōseki, selections from "Ten Nights of Dream"; Mori Ōgai, "Ghost Stories")
- 6 Folk Horror (Lafcadio Hearn, "Jikininki" and "Yuki-Onna"; Yanagita Kunio, selections from *The Legends of Tōno*)
- 7 Gothic Grotesque Nonsense (Murayama Kaita, "The Diabolical Tongue")
- 8 Specters of Empire (Satō Haruo, "The Tale of the Bridal Fan")
- 9 Orikuchi Shinobu's "Antiquity" (Orikuchi Shinobu, *The Book of the Dead*, first half)
- 10 Ghosts, History, and the Uses of the Past (Orikuchi Shinobu, *The Book of the Dead*, second half)
- 11 The Dark Fairy Tale and Postwar Feminist Horror (Kanai Mieko, "Rabbits")
- 12 Folktales Retold (Matsuda Aoko, selections from *Where the Wild Ladies Are*)
- 13 Weird Futures (Torishima Dempow, "Sisyphian (Or, Perfect Attendants)")

Other Students will write a 2,000-word final essay at the end of the course. Essay prompts will ask students to synthesize the reading they have done throughout the semester; no outside reading or research will be required to complete the assignment.

Method of Evaluation:

Grades will be calculated as follows:

- 40% Regular attendance and active participation in class discussion
- 30% Short written responses and/or in-class quizzes
- 30% Final 2,000-word essay

Textbooks:

1) Orikuchi Shinobu. *The Book of the Dead*. Translated by Jeffrey Angles. University of Minnesota Press, 2016.

2) Matsuda Aoko. *Where the Wild Ladies Are*. Translated by Polly Barton. Soft Skull Press, 2020.

3) Torishima Dempow. *Sisyphian*. Translated by Daniel Huddleston. Haikasoru, 2018.

(All other reading assignments will be distributed by the instructor in class.)

Reference Books:

Students are welcome to consult with the instructor for suggestions if they are interested in reading more about modern Japanese literature.

Lecturer's Comments to Students:

This class will be taught in English, and all distributed readings will be in English translation.

Potential students should note that they will be required to complete the weekly reading outside of class. This class requires a significant amount of reading outside of class for each session.

Every class session will start with a short (1-question) quiz on the content of that day's assigned reading to ensure that students have done the reading. (There is a chance that this might be substituted with an equivalent assignment in the event that the quiz is difficult to implement due to the 2021 course format.)

Likewise, active participation in class discussion is an important aspect of the class. Students who complete the weekly readings and participate in class discussion will likely succeed in the class; those who do not have a high chance of failing the class. Please note that there is no final exam administered for this class.

Questions/Comments:

Students can contact me via email (to be distributed on the first day of class); students are also welcome to schedule office hours to discuss assignments and other course-related matters.