EAST 305 Current Topics: Introduction to Modern Japanese Poetry

Fall 2020
Time: Tues. and Thurs. 4:05-5:25 pm ET

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Office Hours: tba

Course Description and Aims

This class is a survey of major poets and movements of modern Japanese poetry in English translation. It will include a diverse selection of modern Japanese poetry, including classically influenced forms such as tanka and haiku, modern free verse, and prose poetry. We will pay particular attention to poetry by women, minority poets, and other underrepresented groups. The skills introduced here include how to close read and interpret poetry on an aesthetic and emotional level, how to connect poetry to its cultural and historical context, and how to write a paper of literary analysis that uses evidence from the text to make an argument.

We’re going to be practicing the skill of close reading this semester. How do we close read poems? First, what is the poem about? Give a brief summary. Then, identify one or more key elements that make you think, evoke an emotional reaction, or make you ask a question. What do these elements mean or do in the text, and how do you interpret them? Why are they important? Close reading focuses especially on ambiguity, moments where the meaning is indeterminate and multiple interpretations become possible. As we go, you might want to make connections with other readings or screenings from the semester.

Required Books

There are two required books available for purchase at McGill’s bookstore. You may also source your books from elsewhere, such as Amazon. Electronic books, such as the Kindle edition, are fine. All other readings will be available on MyCourses.


Course Delivery Guide
The class will meet through live Zoom sessions at the scheduled class time.

There will be a combination of lectures (with PowerPoint slide show), discussions, and group activities. Live components will be recorded.

Professor will hold Zoom office hours each week.

Students will be able use the discussion boards to post responses and questions and to communicate with each other.

Course Requirements

Weekly posts: 25%
Creative writing assignments: 20%
Midterm Paper: 20%
Final Paper: 25%
Poetry Reading: 5%
Participation and Attendance: 5%

For more information about the above requirements, please see the below sections.

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Asynchronous Assignments and Evaluation

- For each class, so twice a week, there are 2 required posts on the Discussions forum on MyCourses. These are due at 5pm on Monday and 5pm on Wednesday.

  1) Choose a poem from the weekly material and write a one-paragraph response. Identify one or more key elements that stand out to you and offer some speculation about what they might mean. Also, craft one discussion question related to your poem.

  2) Reply to one of your classmates’ posts and explore their discussion question. Your response should be about a paragraph long. You may choose any classmate’s post to respond to. Feel free to double up if someone else has already responded. If you are inspired to participate further, you may reply to more than one post. Feel free to let the discussion flow.

Weekly posts will comprise 25% of your final grade.
• Creative Writing Assignment (4 times)

Due:  Wednesday Sept. 9 10pm ET  
      Wednesday Oct. 8 10pm ET  
      Wednesday Nov. 18 10pm ET  
      Wednesday Dec. 2 10pm ET

To be a good reader of poetry, it helps to have experience writing it. You will receive a prompt with instructions for each creative writing assignment.

This is not a creative writing class, so you’re not going to be graded on the aesthetic quality of your work. Instead, I will look for how deeply and accurately you engage with course concepts and materials.

Creative writing assignments will comprise 20% of your grade.

• There will be two critical essays. More information about each essay will be available later in the semester.

Midterm paper: Comparing 2 poems  
Due Friday Oct. 16 at 5pm ET

The midterm paper will comprise 20% of your grade.

Final Paper: Making an Argument  
Due Friday Dec. 11 at 5pm ET

The final paper will comprise 25% of your grade.

Synchronous Assignments and Evaluation

The class will meet synchronously on Zoom on Tuesday and Thursday from 4:05-4:50pm ET. Attendance at synchronous sessions is not mandatory, but it is highly recommended for those who are able to attend and comfortable doing so. I will keep a record of attendance. For those who cannot attend, a 1-paragraph written response to the recording is required in the 24 hours after class. These will be posted to Discussions in MyCourses.

Attendance and participation will count for 5% of your final grade. You will not be penalized for taking the asynchronous option.

During the class meeting time, the instructor will start with a live interactive lecture. We will then use the Breakout Rooms for small group discussion activities,
and the instructor will drop in on as many groups as possible. Finally, we will reconvene as a class for collective discussion and debriefing.

All class activities will be recorded for use by students who cannot attend. Recordings are for class use only and must not be disseminated beyond. For the Breakout Rooms, the recording will follow me, so that whichever group I am visiting with will be recorded.

I encourage you to turn your video on if you are able to and comfortable doing so, but you are also welcome to attend the Zoom meetings with your video turned off. You may participate in discussion and other activities either with your audio or with the Chat function.

**Poetry Reading**

On Thursday Dec. 3 at 4:05 pm ET, we tentatively plan to have a live, in-person poetry reading on campus at McGill. This event is conditional depending upon the state of affairs with the pandemic. We may meet remotely instead.

If we meet in person, masks and social distancing will be required. You will have the option to participate virtually if for any reason you are not comfortable coming in person or you are unable to attend.

At the poetry reading, you will be invited to read either a poem you have written, or a poem you have read that means something to you. It can be a poem from outside class. It does not have to be a Japanese poem. You are welcome to read in another language if you prefer, with a brief translation or explanation in English.

The Poetry Reading will comprise 5% of your grade.

**Academic Integrity**

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [McGill’s guide to academic honesty](https://www.mcgill.ca/student-life/academic-integrity) for more information).

**Weekly Schedule**

Thurs. Sept. 3

Syllabus
Introduction: How to Read a Poem
No preparation necessary.

“Traditional” forms in a modern world: Haiku and Tanka

Tues. Sept. 8


Thurs. Sept. 10


Home and hometown

Tues. Sept 15

Margaret Benton Fukusawa, Kitahara Hakushū: His Life and Poetry (East Asia Program Cornell University, 1993), 1-51.

Thurs. Sept 17


Tues. Sept. 22


Thurs. Sept. 24

**Cityscapes**

Tues. Sept. 29


Thurs. Oct. 1


Tues. Oct. 6


**Science and Technology**

Tues. Oct. 13


Thurs. Oct. 15


**Wartime**

Tues. Oct. 20

Thurs. Oct. 22

Ayukawa Nobuo, America and Other Poems: Selected Poetry by Nobuo Ayukawa (Kaya Press, 2007), excerpts, around 10 pages.

Tues. Oct. 27

Gender, Sexuality, and the Body

Thurs. Oct. 29

Tues. Nov. 3

Thurs. Nov. 5


The 1960s: Experimentation and Protest

Tues. Nov. 10


Thurs. Nov. 12

Tues. Nov. 17


Thurs. Nov. 19


**Poetry of Everyday Life**

Tues. Nov. 24
Tanikawa Shuntarō’s page on *Poetry International*,
https://www.poetryinternational.org/pi/poet/21377/Shuntaro-Tanikawa/en/tile
Please read all of the poems and click on a few of the links that intrigue you. It should be about 40-50 pages total of reading.

Thurs. Nov. 26

Tues. Dec. 1
film: Takahata Isao, *My Neighbor the Yamadas*, 1999, 1 hour 44 minutes
Available on Netflix in Canada, HBO Max in the US, and elsewhere.

Thurs. Dec. 3

Poetry Reading (remote or in-person)