



# **Tokyo Stories in Contemporary Japanese Fiction**

EALC 1251 – Spring 2023

Tuesday and Thursday, 1:45–3:15PM  
Williams Hall, Room 304

Tokyo is one of the largest and most vibrant cities in the world. It's also one of the most storied, laying claim to centuries of history and countless colorful districts and neighborhoods. In this class we will explore Tokyo by delving into a collection of stories set in and around the great metropolis. We will work our way forward in time, beginning with the city's roots as the samurai capital of Edo. Along the way, we will investigate contemporary themes such as demographic crisis, social stratification, gender trouble, and the ruins of neoliberal capitalism.

Through the study of representative works of contemporary Japanese fiction, this course gives students the opportunity to learn about Japanese values from a diversity of perspectives as we investigate how social and cultural organizations are mapped onto physical space. Our study will incorporate visual media such as films, animation, music videos, fine art, architectural photography, and fashion. Various methods of critical cultural analysis will be modeled in class lectures and practiced during class discussions, and students will be asked to perform their own critical analysis in their written assignments.

By the end of the semester, students will have been exposed to a diverse range of representative authors and cultural concerns that will help them develop a nuanced understanding of Japanese literature, history, and society.

## **Instructor**

Dr. Kathryn Hemmann  
khemmann@gmail.com  
office hours by appointment

## **Course Texts**

*In the Miso Soup* by Ryu Murakami  
*Kitchen* by Banana Yoshimoto  
*After Dark* by Haruki Murakami  
*Tokyo Ueno Station* by Miri Yu  
*Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata  
*The Emissary* by Yoko Tawada  
*Himawari House* by Harmony Becker

## **Grading and Assignments**

Thirteen Weekly Quizzes: 40%  
Three Short Responses: 30%  
Short Class Presentation: 10%  
Class Participation: 20%

### *Weekly Quizzes*

A short weekly quiz will be conducted via Canvas. Quizzes are due every Thursday by 10:00am.

Each quiz will consist of five or six short answer questions. Most of these questions will be related to the plots and themes of the week's assigned course readings, but some may be more creative. If you miss a quiz, you will be allowed to re-take it only if you have a formally excused absence. A make-up quiz must be submitted within a week of its original due date.

### *Short Responses*

There will be three short written responses due via email by 5:00pm on the following days:

Thursday, February 16  
Thursday, March 23  
Tuesday, April 25

A short response can be either analytical or creative. Analytical responses should be roughly 800 to 1,000 words (four or five paragraphs), and they should discuss the course texts or engage with the class discussions. Creative responses (such as short stories or autobiographical essays) should be related to the themes of the class readings or discussions, and they should be roughly the same length as analytical papers, with some allowance for higher or lower wordcounts.

### *Short Class Presentation*

Each student will be expected to give an in-class presentation on an aspect of the city of Tokyo. The topic of the presentation must be a physical space, such as a neighborhood, a building, or some other tangible landmark. Examples of topics include Harajuku, the Meiji Shrine, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building, the Mori Art Museum, the Ueno Zoo, Tokyo Big Sight, Tokyo Disney, the Yamanote Line, or the Hachikō Memorial Statue.

Each student will be allowed to choose their own presentation topic based on their interests, and these presentations will be scheduled throughout the semester. A presentation should be no longer than six or seven minutes and should include a slideshow or some other form of visual aid.

### *Participation*

Students are expected to complete all required reading assignments and to be attentive during class lectures and discussions. Repeated lack of preparation will significantly lower your participation grade, as will a demonstrated lack of respect for the instructor or the other students. Class participation is graded according to the following rubric:

- A – Strong participation, contributes at least once or twice during each class.
- B – Fair participation, contributes once or twice a week.
- C – Minimal participation, does not contribute but attends class.
- D – Poor participation, does not contribute or attend class regularly.
- F – No participation, demonstrates disrespect and frequently does not attend class.

### **Course Policies**

#### *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 email attachments are fine, but please be aware that Course Absence Notice messages generated through Canvas will not count as a valid excuse.

Each unexcused absence after the second will result in half a letter grade being deducted from your final course grade. In addition, these absences will affect your participation grade. Obligations for other classes (such as exams, labs, and study sessions) do not count as valid absences, but I am willing to be flexible regarding interviews for jobs or professional schools.

#### *Technology*

Tablets and laptops are permitted in their capacity as e-readers, but **smartphones are absolutely not allowed**. If you use your smartphone or laptop in class, you will be asked to leave, and you

will be marked as absent. Any student expecting an urgent call or message should notify me before class begins and sit close to the door so as not to disturb the other students.

### *Plagiarism*

I have a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism. Plagiarism is surprisingly easy to catch, so please don't try it. You're primarily being graded on your good faith effort and engagement with the course material, and multiple deadline extensions are permitted. There should be no need for you to submit work that is not your own. Please be aware that submitting the same assignment for multiple classes is a violation of the Honor Code.

### *Disability Accommodation*

I'm happy to grant deadline extensions and accommodations to anyone who asks regardless of an official declaration of disability. Feel free to request whatever you need, and please know that it's not necessary to share private or personal information with me. Still, please be sure to send a request in writing via email so that I have a means of following up with you if necessary.

### *Content Warnings*

With the exception of the Ryū Mukakami novella *In the Miso Soup*, I have done my best to ensure that the course material does not feature graphic depictions of violence, gore, or sexual assault. Nevertheless, as the stories we will read are intended for adult audiences, certain elements may be upsetting to readers. I will do my best to accommodate student requests for specific content warnings. Please don't hesitate to ask!

### *Respect*

Each student is expected to be respectful of the instructor and their 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.

Cultural essentialism, or the reduction of a large and diverse group of people into a set of stereotypes, is offensive and counter to the purpose of this course. The uncritical reproduction of generalizations and stereotypes in class discussions and written assignments will be penalized.

### *Anime Viewing*

The four anime episodes assigned on the syllabus will not be screened outside class, nor are they available in the university library. Instead, students are asked to access the episodes through an online streaming service. Crunchyroll, Hulu, and Funimation are free with ads and offer the option to watch the shows with either English subtitles or an English-language dub track. Either language option is fine.

### **Week One: Visualizing and Theorizing Urban Space**

Thursday, January 12

Course Introduction, Course Themes, and Pronunciation Guide

In-class viewing of excerpts from *Your Name* (2016), directed by Makoto Shinkai

### **Week Two: Fantasies of Old Edo**

Tuesday, January 17

Shūhei Fujisawa, “Out of Luck,” from *The Bamboo Sword and Other Samurai Tales*, pp.169-184

Thursday, January 19

Aiko Kitahara, “Eight-Tenths a Man,” from *The Budding Tree: Six Stories of Love in Edo*, pp.37-58

### **Week Three: Modern Life in a Modern City**

Tuesday, January 24

Kafū Nagai, “The Peony Garden,” from *The Oxford Book of Japanese Short Stories*, pp.45-51

Thursday, January 26

Yasunari Kawabata, “The Piano Girl,” “Sumida Park,” “The Bug House,” and “The Aquarium,” from *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa*, pp.3-17, 24-39

### **Week Four: Postwar Tokyo**

Tuesday, January 31

Taiko Hirabayashi, “Blind Chinese Soldiers,” from *Japanese Women Writers: Twentieth Century Short Fiction*, pp.41-45

Thursday, February 2

Kōbō Abe, “The Bet,” from *Beyond the Curve*, pp.183-212

### **Week Five: Tokyo Gothic**

Tuesday, February 7

Takashi Atōda, “Dried Fish and an Electrical Leak,” from *The Square Persimmon and Other Stories*, pp.51-66

Thursday, February 9

Yōko Ogawa, “Dormitory,” from *The Diving Pool*, pp.107-164

**Week Six: The Neon City of the Future**

Tuesday, February 14

Mariko Ohara, "Girl," from *Monkey Brain Sushi*, pp.261-278

In-class viewing of excerpts from *Akira* (1988), directed by Katsuhiro Ōtomo

Thursday, February 16

Ryū Murakami, *In the Miso Soup*

Short Response #1 due via email by 5:00pm

**Week Seven: A Rose-Colored Dream**

Tuesday, February 21

Banana Yoshimoto, "Newlywed," from *Lizard*, pp.1-18

Thursday, February 23

Banana Yoshimoto, "Kitchen," from *Kitchen*, pp.3-105

**Week Eight: Tokyo After Dark**

Tuesday, February 28

Haruki Murakami, "The Second Bakery Attack," from *The Elephant Vanishes*, pp.35-49

Thursday, March 2

Haruki Murakami, *After Dark*

\* \* \* SPRING BREAK \* \* \*

March 4 – March 12

**Week Nine: Hooligans and Shenanigans in West Tokyo**

Tuesday, March 14

Ira Ishida, "Ikebukuro West Gate Park," from *Digital Geishas and Talking Frogs: The Best 21st Century Short Stories from Japan*, pp.47-90

Thursday, March 16

First two episodes of *Durarara!!* (2010), directed by Takahiro Ōmori

Short Response #2 due via email by 5:00pm

**Week Ten: Burnouts, Dropouts, and Art Students**

Tuesday, March 21

Novala Takemoto, "Story Two," from *Missin'*, pp.73-111

Thursday, March 23

First two episodes of *Princess Jellyfish* (2010), also directed by Takahiro Ōmori

### **Week Eleven: Underground Ecosystems**

Tuesday, March 28

Hiromi Kawakami, "Mogera Wogura," from *Speculative Japan: Outstanding Tales of Japanese Science Fiction and Fantasy*, pp.235-251

Thursday, March 30

Miri Yū, *Tokyo Ueno Station*

### **Week Twelve: Part-Time Tokyo**

Tuesday, April 4

Kikuko Tsumura, "The Surveillance Job," from *There's No Such Thing as an Easy Job*, pp.1-65

Thursday, April 6

Sayaka Murata, *Convenience Store Woman*

### **Week Thirteen: Tokyo After Tokyo**

Tuesday, April 11

Yūya Satō, "Same as Always," from *The Penguin Book of Japanese Short Stories*, pp.498-504  
In-class viewing of excerpts from *Tokyo Magnitude 8.0* (2009), directed by Masaki Tachibana

Thursday, April 13

Yōko Tawada, *The Emissary*

### **Week Fourteen: A Different Perspective**

Tuesday, April 18

Rana Dasgupta, "The Doll," from *Tokyo Cancelled*, pp.175-221

Thursday, April 20

Harmony Becker, *Himawari House*

### **Week Fifteen**

Tuesday, April 25

No class meeting today!

Short Response #3 due via email by 5:00pm