

AS1602: Death in Traditional Japanese Literature (Summer 2016)

Syllabus

Course Description:

This course surveys the literary treatment of death and killing in the Japanese tradition from the 7th to the 18th centuries. It is both a chronological introduction to the literary tradition and an investigation of Japanese conceptions of death, which are often popularly characterized and perhaps misunderstood. It also highlights the relationship between these literary themes and cultural influence from the mainland. The course takes its examples from English translations of the early mythological books, song / poetry collections, and popular didactic literature of the 8th century, from the poetry, fiction and diaries of the court period (800 - 1200), from warrior literature (to 1600), from dramatic forms and popular literature from the period of printing (1600 to 1900), and from historical literature from the early twentieth century. Where possible video and other media will be brought in to support the readings. Major goals of the course are: (1) to explore the way in which a number of approaches to death have arisen and been integrated within the tradition, and (2) to help students learn to read closely and consciously materials from within a tradition, and to understand something of the nature of a literary tradition.

Grading Policy:

The final grades are accumulated as follows:

- (1) Class participation component = 30%
Consisting of 10% for attendance, 20% for active and relevant participation in class discussion.
- (2) Final examination = 70%

Readings:

The readings for the course, in English translation, will be distributed in class.

No textbook covers the content of the course. Nevertheless students who would like some background information on Japanese traditional literature might be interested in looking at:

Kato Shuichi, 1979. *A History of Japanese Literature*, volume 1, (Kodansha) or
Donald Keene, 1993. *Seeds in the Heart* (Henry Holt).

These are NOT required for the course.

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Class Schedule:

The following schedule is subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class well in advance. Listed are the textual sources of primary materials read in translation. Supporting video materials will be shown or recommended.

Each class consists of a discussion of one set of readings, followed by an introductory lecture to that night's readings. The subject given is the previous night's readings.

Note that the times for each class are given on the ATW 2016 timetable.

SECTION 1 Introduction

Class 1: Organisational Aspects, Introduction to Japan: Geography, History, Literature, General discussion of pre-Buddhist attitudes to death.

SECTION 2 The Cosmology of Death: Myths, legends and politics of the early court (to 9th century)

Class 2: Shinto worldview (according to Ōno Sōkyo)
Class 3: Death in mythical narrative *Kojiki pt. 1*
Class 4: Death in the construction of legends *Kojiki pt. 2*
Class 5: Ritual death poetry *Manyōshū*

SECTION 3 Death in the Heian Court (to the 12th century)

Class 6: Death to explain life *Nihon Ryōiki*
Class 7: Waka poetics and death *Kokin Wakashū*
Class 8: Bitterness and death *Genji Monogatari*
Class 9: Death as promotion *Eiga Monogatari*

SECTION 4 Death as the warrior's fate (to 16th century)

Class 10: Warriors and death 1 *Konjaku Monogatari*
Class 11: Warriors and death 2 *Taiheiki*

SECTION 5 Death as aesthetic and literary, dramatic device (to 19th century)

Class 12: The regretful dead. *Mugen Noh plays*
Class 13: Death in the puppet theatre. *Puppet plays*
Class 14: Dying for your lord. *Mori Ogai.*
Exam preparation.

Class 15: Final exam.