

2024 Spring Semester

Course Title: Creatures, Monsters, and Heroes of Japanese Pop Culture. The origin and importance of fantasy narratives in Japanese popular media.

Section 1

Instructor	Julieta de Icaza Lizaola M.A
Office/Building	
Office Hours	By appointment

【Course Outline / Description】

This course aims to provide a deep understanding of the relationship between old and new storytelling media in Japan and to explore how narrative and culture mutually build each another. With this purpose in mind, we will examine traditional monsters, creatures, and heroes from folklore and mythology, along with their representations in modern literature and film, particularly in manga, anime, and other popular media.

Throughout the course, we will discuss the religious, social, and political uses of the supernatural in popular media. Additionally, students are expected to learn how monsters, ghosts, heroes and other products of the popular imagination have symbolized and personified the problems, hopes, and fears of the Japanese people from pre-modern to post-modern times, facilitating their search for meaning and identity.

This course will be structured around thematic modules. In the first one, we will explore the theoretical principles of Myth, Legends, Folklore, and Folklorism. To illustrate these points, we will examine specific examples from both modern and pre-modern media, with a primary focus on Yokai, Mononoke, Yurei, and other creatures.

In the second module, we will delve into horror narratives and their affective importance in society. We will take a close look at monsters in pre-modern, modern, and post-modern Japan, using traditional scary tales, Godzilla, and J-Horror movies as examples.

In the third module, we will investigate how these monsters and fantasy narratives function to process collective trauma through the catharsis provided by the safe space of media.

In the final block, we will explore the concept of religiosity in storytelling and examine how even present-day heroes, rooted deeply in cultural traditions, trace back to the earliest foundations of Japanese culture.

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Section 2

【Course Objectives/Goals/Learning Outcomes】

In terms of the field of cultural studies, this course mainly focuses on storytelling media and its affective impact on culture and society. For this reason, instead of adopting a historical approach to the evolution of Japanese fantasy stories and characters, we will concentrate on philosophical concepts that will help students understand the crucial role that fantasy, and its symbolic elements, play in constructing a collective cultural identity.

In addition to delving into these theoretical concepts, this course also aims to provide students with an introduction to some of the main works, tropes, and characters of Japanese pop culture narratives.

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Understand the theoretical concepts of Folkloresque and Religiosity.
- Understand the mediatic specificities of manga and anime.
- Understand the role of media in Japanese society and how it differs from the role of media in their own country.
- Have a clear view of the Western influence in the new ways of expressing through storytelling.
- Have a clear understanding of the affective history of the XXth Century in Japan and how it is reflected in media.
- Understand some of the main tropes in traditional Japanese storytelling and their origins.

Section 3

【Class Schedule/Class Environment, Literature and Materials】

BLOCK 1: Legends, Folklore and Folkloresque (Creatures)

Class 1: **Course Introduction: Storytelling and cultural identity.**

- In this class, we will go through the course assignments, assessments, and rules, such as late submission policies, in-class participation, etc.
- We will start the course with a discussion of storytelling and its role in building cultural identities. We will talk about the origins of the Japanese storytelling tradition and identify some of the main values portrayed.
- **In-class viewing:** The Tale of Princess Kaguya (excerpt)

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Class 2: **Myths and Legends**

- In this class, we will explore the oral traditions of storytelling, and we will discuss how myths reveal the spirit of a culture, while legends reveal its identity.
- **Reading Assignments:**
 - Mircea Eliade, "Myth and Reality," Harper and Row, 1968.
 - Mircea Eliade, "The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion," Harcourt Brace, 1959.
- **In-class viewing:**
 - "National Anthem, Kimigayo" by Noburo Ofuji, 1931.

Class 3: **Yōkai in Edo Period Art and Popular Media**

- In this class, we will explore Yokai, understanding what they are and their origins. We will also examine their representation in popular culture during the Edo Period.
- **Reading Assignment:**
 - "The Book of Yokai" by Michael Dylan Foster, University of California Press, 2015.
- **Optional viewing:**
 - "A Letter to Momo" by Hiroyuki Okiura, 2011.

Class 4: **Folklore and Folkloresque**

- In this class, we will explore how folklore reinvents itself through popular media, and we will discuss the cultural implications of the process of "re-branding" folklore for newer generations.
- **Reading Assignment:**
 - "The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World" by Michael Dylan Thomas and Jeffrey A. Tolbert, University Press of Colorado, 2015.
- **Optional viewing:**
 - "Pom Poko" by Isao Takahata, 1994.

Class 5: **Mizuki Shigeru's "GeGeGe no Kitaro"**

- In this class, we will take an in-depth look at the master mangaka Mizuki Shigeru and how he reinterpreted yokai and scary stories for new generations.
- **Reading Assignment:**
 - "GeGeGe no Kitarō" by Mizuki Shigeru, Kodansha, 1959.

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Class 6: **Ghibli and it's re-invention of Folklore**

- In this class we will take an in-depth view at the two main directors of Studio Ghibli, Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata and how they both have re-interpreted folklore for the new generations.
- **Viewing Assignment: (choose one)**
 - "The tale of Princess Kaguya" by Isao Takahata, Studio Ghibli, 2013.
 - "Pom Poko" by Isao Takahata, Studio Ghibli, 1994.
 - "Spirited Away" by Hayao Miyazaki, Studio Ghibli, 2011.
 - "Princess Mononoke" by Hayao Miyazaki, Studio Ghibli, 1997.

Class 7: **Ghosts, vengeful spirits, and haunted houses.**

- In this class, we will take a look at some of the more common tropes in Japanese traditional scary stories.
- **Reading Assignment:**
 - "The Book of Yokai" by Michael Dylan Foster, University of California Press, 2015.
- **Viewing Assignment: (Choose one)**
 - "Mononoke" by Kenji Nakamura, Toei Animation, 2007.
 - "Hausu (House)" by Nobuhiko Obayashi, 1977.

Class 8: **Women in folklore.**

- In this class, we will take a look at how women have been represented in folklore, as well as some of the most common tropes and characters.
- **Viewing Assignment: (Choose one)**
 - "Snake Woman's Course" by Nakagawa Nobuo, 1968.
 - "The Blizzard" in *Dreams* by Akira Kurosawa, 1990.

BLOCK 2: Horror stories and their social function (Monsters)

Class 9: **Fear in Japan**

- In this class, we will discuss the idea of fear and why different societies portray different fears in various ways. We will also explore the origins of the main themes in Japanese Horror.
- **Reading Assignment:**
 - "Ugly Feelings" by Sianne Ngai, Harvard University Press, 2009.

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Class 10: **Fear of Nature.**

- In this class, we will explore the different types of horror portrayed in Japan, taking a deeper look at the concept of "Natural Horror."
- **Viewing/Reading Assignment:**
 - "Mushishi" by Yuki Urushibara, Kodansha, 1999.

Class 11: **Lafcadio Hearn: Introducing Japanese horror to the West**

- In this class we will learn about the work of Lafcadio Hearn and the importance of his studies inside and outside of Japan.
- **Reading Assignment:**
 - “Of Ghosts and Goblins,” by Lafcadio Hearn from Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan.
- **Viewing Assignment:**
 - “Kwaidan” by Masaki Kobayashi, 1964.

Class 12: **Edogawa Rampo: Japan’s Edgar Allan Poe**

- In this class we will learn about the life and work of Edogawa Rampo, and his influence in Japanese Horror.
- **Reading Assignment:**
 - “The Human Chair” and “The Caterpillar” From Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination, by Edogawa Rampo.

Class 13: **J-Horror1**

- In this class, we will examine depictions of Japanese Horror in manga. We will identify the different elements that contribute to building horror and discuss their origins. Additionally, we will explore the influence of horror manga on other media from different countries.
- **Reading Assignment:**
 - "Uzumaki" by Junji Ito, Shogakukan, 1998.

Class 14: **J-Horror 2**

- In this class, we will examine depictions of Japanese Horror in movies. We will identify the various elements that contribute to building horror and discuss their origins.

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Additionally, we will explore the influence of horror manga on films from other countries.

- **Viewing Assignment:** (Choose one)
 - "Ringu" by Nakata Hideo, 1998.
 - "Ju-On" by Takashi Shimizu, 2000.
- **Reading Assignment:**
 - "Ghosts of the Present, Specters of the Past: Kaidan and the Haunted Family in the Cinema of Nakata Hideo and Shimizu Takashi" by Jay McRoy.

Class 15: **The monster 1: the social function of fictional monstrosity**

- In this class, we will investigate the concept of what constitutes a monster and our understanding of the monstrous. We will discuss modern-time monsters, examining how they have changed and evolved from traditional monsters and the traumas they represent. Additionally, we will explore the importance of the monster as a metaphor and discuss monsters in modern narratives. The class will also touch upon the idea of collective trauma and how it is processed through fiction.
- **Reading Assignment:**
 - "Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors" by David D. Gilmore, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.

Class 16: **Godzilla, King of Monsters**

- In this class, we will take an in-depth look at the King of Monsters, Godzilla. We will delve into its history, symbolism, and significance.
- **Reading Assignment:**
 - "Godzilla on My Mind. Fifty years of the King of Monsters", by William Tsutsui, St. Martin Publishing group, 2017.
- **Viewing Assignment:** (choose one)
 - "Gojira (Godzilla)" by Honda Ishirō, 1954.
 - "Shin-Gojira" by Hideaki Anno, 2016.

Class 17: **The monster 2**

- In this class, we will discuss post-modern-time monsters, examining how they have changed and evolved from traditional and modern monsters and the traumas they represent. Additionally, we will

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explore the concepts of humanism and post-humanism, focusing on how the post-modern trope of the altered body reshapes our understanding of the monster.

- **Viewing/Reading Assignment:**

-“Full Metal Alchemist” by Hiromu Arakawa, Square Enix, 2001.

Class 18: **Western influence in the monster**

- In this class, we will examine examples of monsters in Japanese media influenced by Western horror creatures. Additionally, we will explore how traditional Japanese horror elements either persist or undergo changes in an era of globalization.
- **Viewing /Reading Assignment: (choose one)**

-“Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba” by Koyoharu Gotouge, Weekly Shounen Jump, 2016.

-“Vampire Hunter D” by Hideuki Kikuchi (adapted by Toyoo Ashida), Toho, 1985.

Class 19: **Monster creation workshop**

BLOCK 3: Collective trauma and catharsis (Metaphors)

Class 20: **A-bomb manga**

- In this class, we will discuss the genre of A-bomb manga and its role in the collective process of dealing with the emotional aftermath of the Atomic Bomb. We will also explore the concepts of catharsis and "ugly feelings," as well as the importance of media in processing both individual and collective emotions.
- **Reading Assignment: (choose one)**
 - “In this corner of the world” by Kono Fumiyo, Weekly Manga Action, 2007.
 - “Barefoot Gen” by Keiji Nakazawa, Weekly Shounen Jump, 1973.

Class 21: **Ghosts from Okinawa**

- In this class, we will examine another tragedy Japan went through during World War II and how it has been reflected in literature and manga. Additionally, we will discuss the reasons why narratives about Okinawa have not been as prevalent as those about the Atomic Bomb.

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- **Reading Assignment (choose one):**

- “Cocoon” by Kyou Machiko, Kodai, 2020.

- “Mabuigumi” by Shun Medoruma, Asahi Shinbun Shuppan, 1999.

Class 22: **Bodily monster: the aesthetics of ultra-violence**

- In this class we will investigate the idea of the body as monstrous. We will think about the questions: What kinds of bodies can be monstrous and why? What does these types of fear reflect about society.

- **Viewing (choose one)**

- “Visitor Q” by Takasii Mike, 2001

- “Wicked City” by Yoshiaki Kawajiri, 1987.

Class 23: **Body Horror**

- In this class, we will discuss the genre of Body Horror, exploring its historical context and its impact on other forms of media.

- **Reading Assignment:**

- “Monstrous Bodies. The Rise of the Uncanny in Modern Japan” by Miri Nakamura, Harvard University Press, 2015.

- **Viewing Assignment: (choose one)**

- “Tetsuo: The Iron Man” by Shinya Tsukamoto, 1989.

Class 24: **Cyberpunk cities**

- In this class, we will explore how cities represent post-modern anxieties in neoliberal societies. Additionally, we will discuss the impact of the Japanese cyberpunk aesthetic in media from other parts of the world.

- **Viewing Assignment: (choose one)**

- “Ghost in the Shell” by Mamoru Oshii, 1995.

- “Akira” by Katsushiro Otomo, 1988.

BLOCK 4: Religiosity and it’s ties with the origins of storytelling (Heroes)

Class 25: **Religiosity and Story Telling**

- In this class, we will explore the concept of religiosity, its differences from religion, and how it influences storytelling and the construction of cultural identity through shared narratives.

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- **Reading assignment:**

“The Power of Myth” by Joseph Campbells, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011.

Class 26: **Mythological Heroes**

- In this class, we will explore the concept of a mythological hero and how it has translated into modern-day media. Additionally, we will learn how religiosity influences the creation of heroes and the values they represent.

- **Reading assignment:**

“The Heroe with a Thousand Faces” by Joseph Cambell, Fontana, 1993.

Class 27: **Shonen Heroes**

- In this class, we will examine specific examples of manga heroes inspired by mythological heroes. We will learn how some of the functions of the original heroes persist in contemporary times.

- **Reading/Viewing Assignment (Choose one)**

-“Dragon Ball” by Akira Toriyama, Weekly Shounen Jump, 1984.

-“Naruto” Masashi Kishimoto, Weekly Shounen Jump, 1999.

-“One Piece” by Eichiro Oda, Weekly Shounen Jump, 1997.

- **Viewing assignment: (Choose one)**

- -“Alakazam the Great” by Daisaku Shirakawa, 1960.

- “The Prince and the Eight Headed Dragon” by Yugo Serikawa, 1963.

Class 28: **Deities re-imagined.**

- In this class, we will explore examples of religious characters and elements reimagined in popular media. We will discuss their social function and conclude the course with final reflections.

- **Reading Assignment: (choose one)**

-“Saint Young Men” by Hikaru Nakamura, Morning 2, 2007.

-“Budha” by Ozamu Tezuka, 1972.

- **Viewing assignment**

“Evangelion” by Hideaki Ano, 1995.

Class 29: **Final Presentations**

Class 30: **Final Presentations**

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【Textbooks/Reading Materials】

All readings will be available for students to download from a Google Drive class folder, where specific excerpts from each book that are required for reading will be marked.

- Mircea Eliade, "Myth and Reality," Harper and Row, 1968.
- Mircea Eliade, "The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion," Harcourt Brace, 1959.
- "The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World" by Michael Dylan Thomas and Jeffrey A. Tolbert, University Press of Colorado, 2015.
- "GeGeGe no Kitarō " by Mizuki Shigeru, Kodansha, 1959.
- "The Book of Yokai" by Michael Dylan Foster, University of California Press, 2015.
- "Ugly Feelings" by Sianne Ngai, Harvard University Press, 2009.
- "Mushishi" by Yuki Urushibara, Kodansha, 1999.
- "Of Ghosts and Goblins," by Lafcadio Hearn from Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan
- "The Human Chair" and "The Caterpillar" From Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination, by Edogawa Rampo.
- "Uzumaki" by Junji Ito, Shogakukan, 1998.
- "Ghosts of the Present, Specters of the Past: Kaidan and the Haunted Family in the Cinema of Nakata Hideo and Shimizu Takashi" by Jay McRoy.
- "Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors" by David D. Gilmore, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.
- "Godzilla on My Mind. Fifty years of the King of Monsters", by William Tsutsui, St. Martin Publishing group, 2017.
- "Full Metal Alchemist" by Hiromu Arakawa, Square Enix, 2001.
- "In this corner of the world" by Kono Fumiyo, Weekly Manga Action, 2007.
- "Barefoot Gen" by Keiji Nakazawa, Weekly Shounen Jump, 1973.
- "Cocoon" by Kyou Machiko, Kodai, 2020.
- "Mabuigumi" by Shun Medoruma, Asahi Shinbun Shuppan, 1999.
- "Monstrous Bodies. The Rise of the Uncanny in Modern Japan" by Miri Nakamura, Harvard University Press, 2015.
- "The Power of Myth" by Joseph Campbells, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011.
- "The Heroe with a Thousand Faces" by Joseph Cambell, Fontana, 1993.
- "Dragon Ball" by Akira Toriyama, Weekly Shounen Jump, 1984.
- "Naruto" Masashi Kishimoto, Weekly Shounen Jump, 1999.
- "One Piece" by Eichiro Oda, Weekly Shounen Jump, 1997.
- "Saint Young Men" by Hikaru Nakamura, Morning 2, 2007.
- "Budha" by Ozamu Tezuka, Kodansha 1972.

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Section 4

【Learning Assessments/Grading Rubric】

Class participation 20%

Vlog entries (4) 15 %

Final paper 30%

Presentation 20%

Creative exercise (in teams) 15%

The assessments in this class are designed for the following purposes:

Firstly, to encourage active participation in class seminars and evaluate students' abilities to engage in discussions. A class participation grade will be awarded based on their involvement and contributions. Failure to complete the required readings or engaging in distractions (such as texting, sleeping, watching videos, etc.) will result in a lower participation grade.

Additionally, to foster conversations about class topics, students are required to create four vlogs (2-5 minutes each) expanding on any topic from the lectures or readings. These vlogs are expected to be insightful reflections rather than mere summaries of the chosen themes.

Secondly, to enhance their academic skills and apply the concepts from the class to develop their own original ideas through research. Students will be required to write an academic paper and deliver a final presentation on the same topic.

Lastly, to reinforce the concepts learned in the class, students will have a hands-on experience creating their own monster or creature. This assignment will not be graded based on artistic merit but rather on how well students justify their creative decisions to align with the content of the course.

Section 5

【Additional Information】

Classroom policies:

- Students may arrive up to 10 minutes late.
- Students will be marked as late if they arrive 11 minutes or more after the scheduled start.
- Students will be marked as absent if they arrive 30 minutes late.

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- Late submissions will be accepted up until 24 hours later, with a penalty of 10% of the grade. (Exceptions can be granted.)
- During class discussions, all opinions are accepted and encouraged, as long as they are expressed with respect and empathy.