
Special Topics in Korean Literature: Post-Modernity and Its Discontents

01:574:221

Spring 2017

Tue SC-102 4:30-5:50

Thur SC-202 4:30-5:50

Instructor: Jenny Wang Medina

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Office Hours: Thurs 2-3, Scott 237 and by appointment

At 98%, South Korea has one of the highest literacy rates in the world. Go into any bookstore in Korea, however, and you can see that bestseller lists are dominated by translations of foreign authors mostly in non-fiction genres. If this is the case, what place does literature hold in the extremely literate and overwhelmingly wired South Korean society? This course examines the legacy of Korea's important literary history of activism and social commentary through readings in contemporary Korean literature from the 1990s to the present day. We will discuss the changing role of literary fiction in contemporary Korean society in relation to the rise of new media, visual media, and non-traditional texts such as internet novels, cartoons, and graphic novels in order to understand how fictional narratives impact social currents and action in everyday life. Students will be encouraged to engage with a variety of traditional and non-traditional forms of literature as we explore how reading and text influence the political, social, and economic lives of a globalized Korean populace.

South Korea's rapid transition from an impoverished post-colonial divided nation to the 11th largest economy in the world has been called the "Miracle on the Han River," but the country now has one of the highest suicide rates in the world. Taking the widespread dissatisfaction with contemporary life in South Korea as a starting point, this course explores the themes and literary forms Korean writers use to respond to rapid social change, globalization, technology, and post-developmental disaffection. We will examine what the incorporation of genres such as speculative fiction, historical fiction, myth, and folklore in contemporary literary fiction reveal about Korean authors' perceptions of contemporary society and the country's place in the world, while considering the role of literature in the overwhelming presence of contemporary Korean media. While the main focus of the course is literary fiction, we will also look at visual media and popular culture as mutual influences in the Korean cultural sphere. This course teaches students to develop their critical thinking and

close analysis of a variety of visual and verbal texts as we think through what it means to live in a “K-pop world.”

Course Requirements

Weekly assignment: 30%

Choose one of the following options for the weekly assignment:

1. Discussion questions/points: write a 2-3 paragraph analysis about the assigned readings. Each question should consist of 1-2 paragraphs and use specific examples from the texts to pose broader questions about the week’s theme, or that compare/contrast with other texts we have read.
2. Find and post outside material related to the week's reading and write 1-2 paragraphs explaining their significance to the week’s theme.. These can include short film clips, music, photos, newspaper clippings, or other visual media that help to expand our discussion of the period or theme of the week.

Attendance and Participation: 10%

1. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class and more than two unexcused absences will impact your final grade. Each subsequent absence will reduce your grade for the course by 2%. Being on time to class also counts as part of your attendance.

Presentation: 5%

Each student will choose a session to lead class discussion.

Midterm Essay (5-6 double-spaced pages, 12 pt. font, DUE IN CLASS 2/28): 25%

Take-home Final Exam (9-11 double-spaced pages, 12 pt. font, DUE MAY 12): 30%

Recommended texts for background reading in Korean history

Michael Robinson, *Korea’s Twentieth Century Odyssey: A Short History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007)

Charles Armstrong, *The Koreas* (New York: Routledge, 2007)

Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997)

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who are seeking consideration for services or accommodations should immediately contact the Office of Disability Services.

<https://ods.rutgers.edu/contact-ods/inquiry-form>

Statement on Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

All students are expected to abide by the Rutgers University principles of academic integrity as outlined here: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers/>. Instances of plagiarism, cheating, or other types of academic dishonesty will result in severe penalties, including failing grades on either a particular assignment or for the entire course based on my

discretion. All assignments should be produced specifically for this class and reflect your original thoughts and writing. If you are uncertain about how to reference sources that you have used for an assignment, feel free to ask me.

Final Note

This syllabus is subject to modifications over the course of the semester. Each student is responsible for keeping up to date with all announcements made in class.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Wk 1 Introduction: Literature and Society in South Korea

1/17 Introduction

1/19 Lee Seung-u, "The Storyteller's Tale"

Chung, Eun-Gwi, "Why Say Goodbye: Reterritorializing Working-class Literature in Contemporary Korea"

From the Masses to the Individual: Minjung Literature and the Inward Turn (1980s-1990s)

Wk 2 Literary Realism and Engagement

1/24 Shin Kyung-sook, *The Girl Who Wrote Loneliness* (first half)

Michael Robinson, *Korea's 20th Century Odyssey*, 137-140; 167-168; 176-178

1/26 *The Girl Who Wrote Loneliness*, cont'd.

Wk 3 Realism cont'd.

1/31 Yi Munyol, *Our Twisted Hero*

2/2 Sunyoung Park, "The Colonial Origin of Korean Realism and Its Contemporary Manifestation," *positions: east asia cultures critique*, Volume 14, Number 1, Spring 2006

Wk 4 Legacies of Division and National Literature

2/7 Kim Min-suk, "Scarlet Fingernails"

Yun Hun-gil, "The Rainy Spell"

Paik Nak Chung, "The Idea of Korean National Literature, Then and Now," in *positions* vol. 1, no. 3 (1993)

2/9 Ch'oe Yun, *There a Petal Silently Falls*

The "Crisis of Literature" and Depoliticization in the 1990s

Wk 5 Women Writers in Translation

2/14 Oh Chung-hee, "Chinatown" and "Evening Game"

2/16 Kim Chi-wŏn, "Almaden"; Kim Ae-ran, "Christmas Special," Gong Ji-young, TBD

Wk 6 “Crisis” of Masculinity?

- 2/21 Youngha Kim, *I Have the Right to Destroy Myself*
2/23 Seungsook Moon, “The Production and Subversion of Hegemonic Masculinity: Reconfiguring Gender Hierarchy in Contemporary South Korea”

Wk 7

2/28 MIDTERM ESSAY DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS

- In class film: *Green Fish*
3/2 Song Sok-ze, short stories

Wk 8 Bodies, the Grotesque, and the Fantastic

- 3/7 Cheon Woon-yeong, “Needle”
Pyeon Hye-yeong, “Corpses”
Oh Jung-hee, “Toyshop Woman”
3/9 Park Min-gyu, “Raccoon World,” “Is that so? I’m a Giraffe”
Kim Jung-hyuk, “Library of Sounds,” “Inuk the Inventor”

NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK 3/13-3/17

Wk 9 Experimental Fiction

- 3/21 *Vaseline Buddha*
“On Experimental Fiction,” excerpt
3/23 *Vaseline Buddha*, cont’d.

Wk 10 Transnationalism and Globalized Koreans

- 3/28 Bae Suah, *A Greater Music*
3/30 Bae, cont’d.

Wk 11 Imagining the Diaspora

- 4/4 Philip Onho Lee, *Olympic Boulevard*
4/6 *Olympic Boulevard*, cont’d.

Wk12 Family Dramas and Comedy

- 4/11 Cheon Myeong-kwan, *Modern Family*
4/13 *Modern Family*, cont’d.
Bonnie Tilland, “Family Dramas and Mother-Daughter Generational Bonds”

Wk13 Multiculturalism and Globalization in 21st century Korea

- 4/18 Hwang Sok-yong, *Princess Bari*
4/20 *Princess Bari*, cont’d.

Wk14 The Return of the Repressed: History and Engagement in the 2010s

- 4/25 Excerpt: *Wanduki*

Film (**watch before class**): *Punch!*
4/27 Conclusion: Last Day of Class

TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAM DUE 5/12 BY MIDNIGHT