1. Reassessing Literature
Telus Centre 131 | 8:45-10:15

Dysfluency in Fiction: Modern Japanese Literature Meets Disability Studies
Shota Iwasaki, University of British Columbia

Dysfluency is medically regarded as a speech disability. However, in literary and cultural fields, it is also used as a narrative device. If dysfluency is considered a phenomenon relevant to literary and cultural issues, how does it function and what logic lies therein? This study examines the representation of stuttering in modern Japanese literature through the lens of disability studies. In particular, I focus on the short story “Kitsuon gakuin” (“The School of Suffering”) published in 1953 by the postwar writer Kojima Nobuo as one example.

Disability studies emerged mainly in Anglophone and its interaction with literary studies has recently developed. While there are already some literary work and its research in Japan on disability and illness such as atomic bomb disease and Hansen’s disease (also known as leprosy), it is hard to say that research in modern Japanese literature is actively involved in the interaction. This study discusses the benefits and limitations of theoretical approaches of disability studies to modern Japanese literature through examination of dysfluency in Japanese fiction.

Reinventing a Poetic Tradition: Internal Factions, International Entries, and Japan’s New Year Poetry Reading
Gideon Fujiwara, University of Lethbridge

In the New Year, Japan’s imperial court hosts a ceremony for members of the imperial family and general public to read waka poems they had composed on a preannounced theme. In the early years of the Meiji period (1868 - 1912), this Utakai hajime ceremony which had previously been conducted exclusively within the court began to accept poems from the general populace, thereby making this elite cultural practice accessible to the common people. Such changes reflect larger social developments and reform, as well as efforts to make the modern emperor and empress visible to the public and build a nation of subjects who also partake in continuing the tradition of waka composition passed on for over a millennium. This presentation chronicles the history of the reinvention of the Utakai hajime, focusing on the various circles of waka poets at the imperial court and among commoners, including traditionalist and populist factions, and how they contributed to or were excluded from the process of reinventing this poetic tradition at the court. I also highlight international participation in the ceremony by examining submissions and input from the United States and Canada.
In 1968, Kawabata Yasunari became the first Japanese writer to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature for expressing “the essence of the Japanese mind.” Kawabata’s Nobel Lecture “Japan, the Beautiful and Myself,” alongside with his 1937 novel Snow Country, presented an “aestheticized Japan” to the curious and essentialist western eye in a self-orientalising manner. This paper builds on Japanese literary critic Karatani Kōjin’s definition of “aestheticentrism (審美中心主義)” as “the inflexible purification of aesthetics as a domain,” and peeps into Kawabata’s world of aesthetics through analysing the imageries of white and red representing emptiness and destruction in Snow Country. In the first part, I examine aestheticentrism as a literary tradition developed from the Japanese classical “aestheticism (耽美主義)” while influenced by the 19th century European wave of “l’art pour l’art.” In the second part, I investigate the emergence of aestheticentrism as a response to the modern conditions and political tensions in 1930s Japan, and argue that aestheticentrism could not be easily divorced from politics as it claimed; moreover, the modernist exploration of inner experience, the forceful will to end the wasted efforts of life, could potentially be used to justify brutality done to human life.