

**Six Pretty Good Books**  
HUMS 082

Tina Lu  
& Shawkat Toorawa

Pauli Murray Seminar Room  
MW 1-2:15

In this course, we will read six exceptional books that have had long cultural lives. By reading and discussing texts to which readers have returned for centuries, we will also be paying attention to what it means to study the humanities at Yale.

Humanistic study has always been a tool for posing big questions, even as those questions have changed over time. These include: Why are some texts more important than others? Who decides how texts are preserved materially and in cultural memory? What is the relationship between a work and political institutions?

We will grapple with these and other questions through discussion of and engagement with the texts themselves. And we will consider the ways in which reading and writing about books can help readers understand their place in the world.

Assignments: 1 to 3 pages of writing a week; a final public project (e.g. youtube video, op-ed, personal essay).

The class will also involve two mandatory off-site field trips: to the Metropolitan Museum in New York and to the Freer|Sackler Galleries in Washington DC; several short local field trips; and dinners.

Tina Lu (East Asian Languages and Literatures) and Shawkat Toorawa (Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations) lead the class, which will also include lectures by professors from other departments.

*\*In Fall 2020, we will gather again over dinner to discuss a seventh book...*

The six books for Fall 2019 are:

1. Poetry of Du Fu – free PDF
2. The Shahnameh, tr. Dick Davis (Penguin Classics) – purchase
3. The Superiority of Dogs to People – free PDF
4. The Tempest (Norton Critical edition) – purchase
5. The Story of the Stone, tr. David Hawkes (Penguin Classics) – purchase
6. Frankenstein (Penguin Classics) – purchase

## INTRODUCTION

W 8/28 Introductions, preliminaries

## THE POETRY OF DU FU

F=M 8/30 Literary Context(s) of Du Fu's Poetry  
*Guest: Prof Luke Bender, East Asian Languages and Literatures*  
Discussion

W 9/4 Historical Context(s)  
*Guest: Prof Luke Bender*  
Discussion

M 9/9 Big questions

Class dinner: Taste of China, Chapel Street (Dinner)

W 9/11 Afterlives

## THE SHAHNAMEH

M 9/16 The Shahnameh and its Historical Context(s)  
*Guest: Prof. Samuel Hodgkin, Comparative Literature*

W 9/18 Literary Context(s)  
*Guest: Prof. Samuel Hodgkin*  
Discussion

Sat 9/21 Class trip: The Met, Dinner at Ravagh (NYC trip)

M 9/23 Big questions

W 9/25 Afterlives

## THE SUPERIORITY OF DOGS TO PEOPLE

M 9/30 Abbasid Baghdad and Writerly Culture (Rosh Hashanah)  
Discussion

W 10/2 Context(s)  
Discussion

M 10/7 Big questions

\*W 10/9 Afterlives (Yom Kippur)

### THE TEMPEST

- M 10/14 Literary Context(s)  
*Guest: Prof. Emily Greenwood, Classics*  
Discussion (October break)
- M 10/21 Historical Context(s)  
*Guest: Prof. Emily Greenwood, Discussion*
- W 10/23 Big questions
- M 10/28 Afterlives

### THE STORY OF STONE

- W 10/30 Literary Context(s)  
Discussion
- 11/2-3 Class trip to Freer|Sackler Gallery, DC (Washington DC trip)
- M 11/4 NO CLASS
- W 11/6 Big questions
- \*M 11/11 Afterlives

### FRANKENSTEIN

- W 11/13 Literary Context(s)  
*Guest: Prof Deborah Coen, History of Science & Medicine*  
Discussion
- M 11/18 Historical Context(s)  
*Guest: Prof Deborah Coen*  
Discussion
- W 11/20 Big questions (Thanksgiving break)
- M 12/2 Afterlives

### ENVOI

- W 12/4 Borges  
Tillie Walden (End-of-year event)