Texts

These courses are centred on a selection of texts. "Texts" should be understood in the broadest possible sense—anything that is created and can be interpreted as a panoply of symbols (e.g., music, art, architecture, film, literature, philosophy, and history). The broad goals are to familiarise students with strategies for close reading, to help students understand differences between genres, and for students to come to appreciate the value in working through serious texts.

Course Goals

1. Instruction and practice in the art of close reading
2. Recognition of genre, and of the rules of a particular genre
3. Understanding that there is value in the process used to approach various texts
4. Improved ability to express oneself through writing

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students ought to be able to:

1. Understand and reproduce some techniques used by scholars and creators
2. Be able to provide textual evidence in support of an interpretations
3. Recognise that a multiplicity of interpretations is fundamental to the richness of texts
4. Understand the relevance of the humanities to a number of different questions
5. Be able to distinguish between different genres: not every text is either philosophy or a novel

Educational Outcomes

In this course, students will have:

1. Read at least one text closely
2. Communicated their understanding of at least one text through written analysis
3. Acquired an appreciation of genre, and the ability to talk about at least one example of a particular genre
4. Gained a rudimentary understanding of context (historical development of the work, genre or culture)

Suggested Assignments

1. A paper, analysing one of the texts studied as part of an argument*
2. An oral presentation, taking a position on a particular interpretation
3. A creative project, in the style of one of the texts studied

* This assignment is common for every Texts course.

Sample Course Description

Epics and Epigrams
In this course, we will examine the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Homer's *Iliad,* and Virgil's *Aeneid,* with a view to raising several important questions: first, what shapes our lives; second, what is the nature of humanity; third, what is the relation of justice to revenge. We will then turn from the grandest literary form to the most reserved: we will read a selection of epigrams from *The Greek Anthology* and Martial's *Epigrams* on these same questions. All of these works were written over 2000 years ago. But it would be mistaken to say the study of these works is 2000 years old; rather, the study of them is only as old as you. The reason is this: each generation looks at the ancients through its own lens and draws different lessons. So the study of ancient texts is always, in a sense, at the first step.

Graphic Novels
This course focuses on graphic literature, particularly the modern graphic novel. We will examine the features of graphic literature, and understand how to read a comic strip, a comic book, and/or a graphic novel. We will consider (semi-)autobiographical texts, such as *Fun Home* and *Persepolis*, along with reworkings of the superhero graphic novel (*Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*; *Watchmen*). Finally, we will discuss alternative facets of graphic literature: it is both a vehicle for fantasy (*Sandman: Dream Country*), and a means of documenting social realities (e.g., work by Joe Sacco). Projects will include analytic essays and creative work.

Culture

These courses are centred on specific situated cultural knowledge and practices. The broad goals are to allow students to interpret culture using methods from the arts and humanities and evaluate theories of culture through application to specific themes and settings. Courses may investigate a particular cultural context (e.g., "Fin de Siecle Vienna"), a cultural theme across temporal or geographical locations (e.g., "Passing"), or a specific cultural phenomenon (e.g., "Digital Culture").

Course Goals
1) Introduction to methods and topics of cultural analysis.
2) Understanding the value of exploring specific familiar and unfamiliar cultures and the topic of culture in general.
3) Understanding culture as situated knowledge and practice.
4) Developing modes of analysis that address how issues of race, class, ethnicity, gender, and power more broadly play into cultural phenomena and practices.
5) Link to Texts and Scholarship by showing how situated cultural knowledge and practices shape texts and critical debates in humanities scholarship.

Learning Objectives
1) Students recognize that definitions of culture are contingent on context.
2) Students raise meaningful and generative questions about culture.
3) Students recognize culture as constituted through situated practices and develop interdisciplinary approaches to analyzing culture in its complexity, with particular attention to the function of social and political power.
4) Students understand general theories of culture and the relationship between those theories and the particular cultural context, theme, or phenomenon of the course.
5) Students develop a rich understanding of the topic of the course and effective cultural approaches to studying that topic.
6) Students are able to engage with different kinds of texts and media in approaching cultural contexts, themes, or phenomena.
7) By the end of the course, students should:

> a. Have closely examined a cultural context, theme, or phenomenon with attention to its geographical, temporal, and social context.
> b. Have engaged with different kinds of texts and media in relationship with this concept, phenomenon, or practice.
> c. Have produced a close reading of a cultural practice with critical depth through writing, presentation, or other forms of expression.
> d. Have developed critical perspectives on social and political power in interpretations of culture.

8) Common assignment: an essay in which students analyze specific cultural practices by making use of theories of culture, power, and/or discourse.

Sample Course Descriptions

Culture: The Digital Age
What does it mean to live in the "digital age"? This course will examine how digital technologies participate in the creation of new forms of daily life in contemporary society. Drawing on cultural studies methodology and theories of technology and everyday life, we will explore three central questions: What makes digital media new? What does it mean to communicate digitally? How do utopian ideas of digital life (e.g., the network, open source, the universal library) govern the way we think about and use these technologies? This course offers an introduction to cultural theory, practice with theoretical approaches to technology and media, and the opportunity to critically engage our own cultural context.

Culture: Peasant Cultures
How can historians recover the mental worlds of those who neither read nor wrote? Is it possible to give voice to those who are truly oppressed? What outlets for expression or resistance do the oppressed have available to them? This course addresses these questions from a historical perspective through the examination of peasants in two very different times and places: medieval England and modern India. We begin the course with a discussion of the methodological challenges of recovering peasant cultures and the techniques historians have developed in order to meet them. We continue with attempts to reconstruct the beliefs and practices of medieval English peasants using fragmentary, mediated evidence. The course concludes with an investigation of the culture of modern, Indian peasants and their encounters with the globalizing, homogenizing forces of modern capitalism.

<u>**Scholarship**</u>

These courses are centred on a specific debate or field of inquiry. The broad goals are to allow students to understand scholarship in the humanities and enable them to form arguments that engage with this scholarship. Courses may investigate how people have engaged in conversation about a particular topic, how people have developed different stories or conclusions from the same or similar evidence, and how different lenses or approaches might be applied to understand a single topic.

Course Goals
1) Introduction to arguments in the humanities.
2) Introduction to research practices in the humanities.
3) Understanding fields in the humanities as ongoing conversations among scholars.
4) Understanding what's at stake in debates in the humanities, and how they might be shaped by culture, politics, etc.
5) Link to Texts and Culture by showing how academic discussions have shaped inquiry into important questions in the humanities.

Learning Objectives
1) Help students move from using scholarship to try to find the "right" answer to a question to using scholarship to investigate and open up interesting questions.
2) Introduce students to ways in which scholars in the humanities have tried to answer questions that are important to them.
3) Help students understand how to frame research questions that are open-ended enough to be interesting but focused enough to be investigated in a finite amount of time.
4) Give students ways of situating their own research in the context of larger conversations in the humanities.
5) By the end of the course, students should:
    a. Have read academic writing in at least one discipline in the humanities carefully.
    b. Have the ability to identify, assess, and synthesize relevant research in a field in the humanities.
    c. Understand how to critique an argument.
    d. Understand how to begin a research project in some field in the humanities.
6) Common assignment: a literature review in which students synthesize and assess academic arguments on a particular topic.

Sample Course Descriptions

The Scientific Revolution
Steven Shapin's *The Scientific Revolution*, one of the best-known introductions to the topic, begins by stating that "there was no such thing as the Scientific Revolution, and this is a book about it." Shapin's seemingly self-contradictory claim highlights a central tension in scholarship on early modern science. On the one hand, historians of science often reject the view that there was an abrupt shift in the practice of science, or even that anything like a unified science existed to be revolutionized in the first place. On the

other hand, the modern sciences seem distinctive enough as to require a history, and the period from roughly 1500-1700 is still frequently seen as crucial to that history. In this course, we investigate recent scholarship on the Scientific Revolution. We ask questions such as how early modern culture and politics influenced the development of science; what, if anything, made early modern science distinct from earlier ways of investigating nature; what the category of science meant, and how it developed; and, most broadly, whether there was a Scientific Revolution at all, and if so what it entailed.

What Is a Canon?
The idea of a canon, or a list of fundamental and orthodox works of art and literature, has long been a feature of literate societies. In this course we will examine the justifications for a notion of a canon offered by philosophers, literary and cultural critics, and authors. We will discuss the differences between high and low culture, as well as the concepts affiliated with the latter (e.g. melodrama). We will also view how the canon, as the repository of a defined and discrete body of knowledge, has been called into question since the 1960s. This questioning has been carried out both by scholars of "minority," non-Western, or hybrid literature; and by those who would critique the process of canon formation, such as Pierre Bourdieu (*Distinction*).

In the process of the seminar, students will be asked to consider the ways in which Quest as an institution both fosters and interrogates the notion of canon.