Course Overview
God and money, love and beauty, slavery and freedom, war and death, nation and empire: the themes of early American poetry will carry us from London coffee-houses to Quaker meetinghouses, from Massachusetts drawing rooms to Jamaican slave-whipping rooms. Our texts will range from pristine salon couplets to mud-bespattered street ballads, from sweetest love poems to bitterest satire. Digging deeply into the English-language poetry written, read, and circulated after the first English settlement in North America, we will trace the sometimes secret connections between history and poetic form, and we will listen to what these links can tell us about poetry and politics, life and literature, in our own time. Our poets ignored false divisions between art and society, and so will we.

This is a course about the relationship between poetry and history, about the ways literary culture both reflects and participates in changes in social life. It is about why poetry matters: why it mattered to writers and readers between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, and why it matters to us. We will read for pleasure and for form: for what is specifically poetic about poetry, for what spurs us to read further and what tempts us to put our books down. And we will read for history. Imagine a historian whose only sources (or just about) were the poems on this syllabus. What kind of history would s/he write? What kind of history do these sources reveal that others might conceal? We are reading chronologically backwards. Why? Because we will be provoked to think not just about influence, but also about innovation. And because our reading of the poems will be energized not by the fact that we are moving forward in time, but rather by our efforts to see patterns and discontinuities in poetic tradition.

W.H. Auden wrote that poetry makes nothing happen. We’ll see just how much nothing can be.

Requirements and Policies
Read and reread. Then read again. Makes notes in the margins, underline and circle words and phrases: be an active reader. Do this with each text in advance of our session, and arrive with at least one point to contribute to our discussion. You should pay special attention to the form of the poems: you should arrive ready to describe the poem in terms of features such as meter, rhyme scheme, the length or variety of the line, etc. -- all of which we will discuss together in class.

Writing. A) Research option. This course offers a research option for students who would like to write a longer essay in fulfillment of the prerequisite for an English honors thesis. If you choose the research option, you will write a 20-25pp. essay on a topic you have discussed with me, and you will turn in components of the project -- outline, annotated bibliography, and final draft -- during the term.

B) Two essays. If you do not choose the research option, you will write two shorter essays, of 5-7pp. and 10-12pp., respectively, on either a topic I provide or one that you have discussed with me.

C) Exercises. Everyone -- research-option taker or otherwise -- will complete four short exercises in which you will mark up a poem to provide an account of its formal properties.
Archival presentations. Each member of the seminar will pair up with another to give a 10- to 20-minute presentation (with a write-up you will turn in) on a text that the two of you have located in one of the online archival databases accessible through the Wesleyan Library.

Participation. This course is a seminar: we succeed or fail collectively. You should arrive at each of our sessions ready to talk and ready to listen with engagement and generosity to your fellow students. If a text excites you, talk about it. If something confuses you, ask questions. If you agree with comments someone makes, try to elaborate your agreement with the class. If a text bores you, ask yourself why and then talk about your response. If you disagree with someone, explain why. In short, move your mouth -- in ways that contribute to our common enterprise in the seminar.

Attendance, deadlines. More than three absences will be grounds for failing the course. All due dates are firm: extensions will be granted only in cases of serious illness or personal crisis. Don’t even ask.

Grades
Your final grade breaks down like this:

- 60%: Two essays (5-7pp., 20%; 10-12pp., 40%) or research essay
- 20%: Participation
- 10%: Archival presentation, including write-up
- 10%: Written exercises

Students with Disabilities.
It is the policy of Wesleyan University to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services and making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible (during the second week of the semester) so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html.

TEXTS (available at Broad Street Books; some on reserve at Olin Library):
Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Back Bay Books) - DCP
John Gilmore, *The Poetics of Empire: A Study of James Grainger’s The Sugar-Cane* (Athlone; also available electronically through Olin Library) - PE
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Selected Poems* (Penguin) - LSP
David S. Shields, ed. *American Poetry: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Library of America) - AP
Phillis Wheatley, *Complete Writings* (Penguin) - WCW
Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings* (W.W. Norton) - LG

SCHEDULE (texts followed by an asterisk will be posted to the course Blackboard site)

**Week 1**
Thursday, 1/21 -- Introduction: Poetry and History
Week 2 -- Whitman: Appetite, Pleasure, Heroism
Tuesday, 1/26 - *Leaves of Grass* (1855 ed., *LG* 662-751), 1855 Preface (616-36)


Week 3 -- Dickinson: Soul and Form
Tuesday, 2/2 - Selections (*DCP*)

Thursday, 2/4 - (More) selections (*DCP*)

Week 4 -- Longfellow: History/Poetry as Commodity
Tuesday, 2/9 - *Evangeline*, Part First (*LSP*)

Thursday, 2/11 - *Evangeline*, Part Second (*LSP*)
  **First exercise due in class**

Week 5 -- Slavery and the Circulation of Poems

Thursday, 2/18 - Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point**; blackface minstrel songs*

Week 6 -- Dawn or Yawn of America
Tuesday, 2/23 - “Yankee Doodle” (*AP* 616-620); Hannah Griffitts, all selections (*AP* 558-63); Joel Barlow, “The Hasty-Pudding” (*AP* 799-808); David Humphreys, all selections (*AP* 758-62); Royall Tyler, “The Origin of Evil: An Elegy” (*AP* 809-12); Benjamin Banneker, “The Puzzle of the Hare and Hound” (*AP* 574-75); Anne Hecht, “Advice to Mrs. Mowat” (*AP* 720-22)

Thursday, 2/25 - Philip Freneau, all selections (*AP* 723-57); Margaret Lowther Page, “To Miss J.L.--” (*AP* 818-19)

**Friday, 2/27: First essay (5-7pp.) due via email at 5pm**

Week 7 -- Wheatley: Imagination, Imitation, and Slavery
Tuesday, 3/2 - Alexander Pope, from *An Essay on Man*; Wheatley, selections (*WCW*)

Thursday, 3/4 - Wheatley, selections (*WCW*); Jupiter Hammon, “An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley” (*AP* 477-80)
  **Second exercise due in class**

Weeks 8 and 9 -- Spring Break
Week 10 -- The Uses of Verse in the Eighteenth Century
Tuesday, 3/23 - Ebenezer Cook, “The Sot-Weed Factor” (AP 239-258)

Thursday, 3/25 - “Poor Julleyoun’s Warnings to Children and Servants” and “Advice to the Dead from the Living” (AP 470-76); Thomas Clemson, runaway-slave ad (AP 526-27)

Week 11 -- Empire and the Poetry of the Plantation
Tuesday, 3/30 - Class visit to Special Collections

Thursday, 4/1 - Introduction (PE 1-85), The Sugar-Cane Preface and Book I, with notes (PE 89-109)

Week 12 -- Empire and Poetry of the Plantation
Tuesday, 4/6 - The Sugar-Cane Books II and III, with notes (PE 112-44)

Thursday, 4/8 - The Sugar-Cane Book IV, with notes (PE 145-63); George Berkeley, “Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America” (AP 346)
  **Third exercise due in class.**

Week 13 -- Puritan Poetics
Tuesday, 4/13 - Edward Taylor, from Preparatory Meditations (AP 164-191)

Thursday, 4/15 - Benjamin Harris, from the New England Primer (AP 221-23)

Week 14 -- Milton
Tuesday, 4/20 - Paradise Lost Books I (“The Verse, “The Argument, and II. 1-49) and III (JM 355-57, 401-20)

Thursday, 4/22 - Paradise Lost Book IV (JM 420-45)

Week 15 -- Milton
Tuesday, 4/27 - Paradise Lost Book IX (JM 523-52)

Thursday, 4/29 - Paradise Lost Books XI and XII (JM 580-618)
  **Fourth exercise due in class.**

Week 16
Tuesday, 5/4 - Conclusion: History and Poetry

**Friday, 5/7 - Final and research essays due via email by 5pm.**