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 meeting-houses, 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
Reading. 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 15-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

Disabilities resources
Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible. If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860-685-2332 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.
TEXTS (available at Broad Street Books)
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 Moodle site)

Monday, 9/2 – Introduction: Poetry and History

Wednesday, 9/4 – Whitman: Appetite, Pleasure, Heroism 1
*Leaves of Grass* (1855 ed., LG 662-751), 1855 Preface (616-36)

Monday, 9/9 – Whitman: Appetite, Pleasure, Heroism 2
Whitman’s comments on his poems (783-788)

Wednesday, 9/11 – Dickinson: Soul and Form 1
Read around and arrive with your favorites for discussion. Please also read the following:

Paul Fussell, from *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*
Monday, 9/16 -- **Dickinson: Soul and Form 2**

As for 9/11, read around and arrive with your favorites for discussion. We will continue where we left off, but you should also read the following:


**First exercise due in class**

Wednesday, 9/18 – **Longfellow: History/Poetry as Commodity 1**

*Evangeline*, Part First (*LSP*)

Monday, 9/23 – **Longfellow: History/Poetry as Commodity 2**

*Evangeline*, Part Second (*LSP*)

**Second exercise due in class**

Wednesday, 9/25 – **Slavery and the Circulation of Poems 1**


Monday, 9/30 – **Slavery and the Circulation of Poems 2**

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point”; blackface minstrel songs *

Wednesday, 10/2 – **Dawn or Yawn of America 1**

“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)

Monday, 10/7 – **Dawn or Yawn of America 2**

Philip Freneau, all selections (*AP* 723-57); Margaret Lowther Page, “To Miss J.L.--“ (*AP* 818-19)
Wednesday, 10/9 – **Wheatley: Imagination, Imitation, and Slavery 1**  
Alexander Pope, from *An Essay on Man*; Wheatley, selections (*WCW*)

Monday, 10/14 – **Wheatley: Imagination, Imitation, and Slavery 2**  
Wheatley, selections (*WCW*); Jupiter Hammon, “An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley” (*AP* 477-80)

Wednesday, 10/16 – **Some Uses of Verse in the Eighteenth Century 1**  
Ebenezer Cook, “The Sot-Weed Factor” (*AP* 239-258)

**Friday, 10/18: First essay (5-7pp.) due in box outside my office by noon.**

Monday, 10/21 – Fall break. No class.

Wednesday, 10/23 – **Some Uses of Verse in the Eighteenth Century 2**  
“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)

Monday, 10/28 – **Empire and the Poetry of the Plantation 1**  
Introduction (*PE* 1-85), *The Sugar-Cane* Preface and Book I, with notes (*PE* 89-109, 165-182, 213-244)

Wednesday, 10/30 – **Empire and the Poetry of the Plantation 2**  
*The Sugar-Cane* Book II, with notes (*PE* 111-126, 182-188, 244-264)

Monday, 11/4 – **Empire and the Poetry of the Plantation 3**  
*The Sugar-Cane* Book III, with notes (*PE* 127-144, 188-192, 264-286)  
Third exercise due in class.

Wednesday, 11/6 – **Empire and the Poetry of the Plantation 4**  
*The Sugar-Cane* Book IV, with notes (*PE* 145-63, 193-198, 286-311)  
George Berkeley, “Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America” (*AP* 346)

Monday, 11/11 – **Puritan Poetics 1**  
Edward Taylor, from *Preparatory Meditations (First Series)* (*AP* 164-178)  
Relevant scriptural passages

Wednesday, 11/13 – **Puritan Poetics 2**  
Edward Taylor, from *Preparatory Meditations (Second Series)* (*AP* 178-191)  
Benjamin Harris, from the *New England Primer* (*AP* 221-23)  
Relevant scriptural passages*
Monday, 11/18 – Milton 1
Paradise Lost Books I (“The Verse, “The Argument, and ll. 1-49) and III (JM 355-57, 401-20)

Wednesday, 11/20 – Milton 2
Paradise Lost Book IV (JM 420-45)

Monday, 11/25 – Milton 3
Paradise Lost Book IX (JM 523-52)

Wednesday, 11/27 – Thanksgiving break. No class.

Monday, 12/2 – Milton 4
Paradise Lost Books XI and XII (JM 580-618)
Fourth exercise due in class.

Wednesday, 12/4 – Conclusion: History and Poetry

Friday, 12/13 - Final and research essays due via email to mcgarrett@wesleyan.edu by 5pm.