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.

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

Additional poems (marked below with an asterisk [*]) will be posted to the course Moodle site.
ASSIGNMENTS

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) Two essays. 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.
B) Exercises. You will complete four short exercises in which you will mark up a poem to provide an account of its formal properties and provide a short commentary on what you notice.
C) 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.

Foundation option. This course offers a foundation option. If you choose the foundation option, you will write an additional longer 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. We will also meet throughout the term to discuss your project, and your writing in general.

GRADES
The final grade breaks down like this:

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

Students who take the foundation option will have an adjusted grade breakdown, which we will establish at the start of the course.

SCHEDULE
Introduction: Poetry and History

1/27 – Whitman: Appetite, Pleasure, Heroism 1
Leaves of Grass (1855 ed., LG 662-751), 1855 Preface (616-36)

2/3 – Whitman: Appetite, Pleasure, Heroism 2
Whitman’s comments on his poems (783-788)
2/10 – **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**

2/17 -- **Dickinson: Soul and Form 2**
As for last week, 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.

2/24 – **Longfellow: History/Poetry as Commodity**
Longfellow, *Evangeline*
Second exercise due in class.

3/2 – **Slavery and the Circulation of Poems**

First (5-7pp.) essay due Friday, 3/4 via email (mcgarrett@wesleyan.edu).
Midsemester Recess

3/23 – Dawn or Yawn America
William Blake, “America;”*  “Yankee Doodle” (AP 616-620); Hannah Griffitts, all selections (AP 558-63); Joel Barlow, “The Hasty-Pudding” (AP 799-808); Royall Tyler, “The Origin of Evil: An Elegy” (AP 809-12); Philip Freneau, all selections (AP 723-57)

3/30 – Wheatley: Imagination, Imitation, and Slavery
Alexander Pope, from An Essay on Man; Wheatley, selections (WCW); Jupiter Hammon, “An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley” (AP 477-80)

4/6 – Empire and the Poetry of the Plantation
Introduction (PE 1-85), The Sugar-Cane Preface and Books I and II

4/13 - Empire and the Poetry of the Plantation
The Sugar-Cane Books III and IV; George Berkeley, “Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America” (AP 346)
Third exercise due in class.

4/20 – Puritan Poetics
Edward Taylor, from Preparatory Meditations (First Series) (AP 164-178); Edward Taylor, from Preparatory Meditations (Second Series) (AP 178-191); Benjamin Harris, from the New England Primer (AP 221-23)
Relevant scriptural passages

4/27 – Milton
Paradise Lost Book I (“The Verse, “The Argument, and ll. 1-49); Book III (JM 355-57, 401-20), and IV (JM 420-45); Book IX (JM 523-52); Books XI and XII (JM 580-618)
Fourth exercise due in class.

Final essays due May 6 via email (mcgarrett@wesleyan.edu.).