English 4552: US Poetry to 1912 (Emily Dickinson, Inc.)

Professor Elizabeth Hewitt
Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:10 – 12:30 in Denney 206
My office: Denney Hall 530
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 9 – 11 am
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This course will provide an opportunity to study Emily Dickinson’s poetic corpus. Our primary goal will be to become agile and sophisticated readers of individual lyrics, and in so doing we will learn about Dickinson’s adoption and manipulation of the poetic conventions she inherited from earlier classical and romantic traditions. We will engage in sustained formal, theoretical, and historical readings of Dickinson’s work. We will also consider Dickinson’s own unique compositional methods, which were to incorporate the texts, which have been generically conceived as lyrics, in larger sequences, fascicle books, and her voluminous correspondence. We will study Dickinson not merely as a sui generis poet of the 19th century, but alongside other poets writing in the United States during the mid-19th century.

Course Information and Requirements

Required Books
- The Poems of Emily Dickinson (ed. R.W. Franklin) Harvard UP | 0674018249
- The Emily Dickinson Handbook (ed. Gudrun Grabher, Roland Hagenbuchle, and Cristanne Miller (UMass Press | 155849488X)

Reading Notebook (20 points): In this “notebook” (which I would prefer to be digital, as it will allow for easier submission, but may also be handwritten), you will take reading notes on all our assigned poems and essays. Such notes will include basic paraphrases; analyses of particularly interesting or hard figures; commentary on meter, sound, form, language; possible readings of the whole poem or individual lines. Different poems will engage you to different degrees, but I want you to record some commentary on every assigned poem. Your notebooks will be due on the September 15, October 15, November 15, and December 5 (in Carmen dropbox).

Poetry Analysis (10 points each): During the quarter, you will write three papers that will offer a careful analysis of an individual lyric. Each paper should be 3-4 pages long and should involve a rigorous explication of the text attending to a wide range of poetic elements (vocabulary, figures, meter, and sound).

Final Paper (20 points): Because this course gives us an opportunity to study one particular author in such depth, it also gives you an opportunity for real literary research. This final and longer paper will allow you to focus on a particular set of poems (around a particular theme, a fascicle, a series of letters) and develop a literary argument about these texts. Your focus can be formal, historical, biographical, thematic, or linguistic. Your paper will also involve secondary research and will be due on Friday, December 13th (in Carmen Dropbox).

Final Examination (20 points): The final examination will be an occasion to demonstrate your knowledge of individual poems, features of her oeuvre more generally, mastery over the critical conversation surrounding Dickinson and antebellum U.S poetry. Our exam is scheduled for Tuesday, December 10 from 10 – 11:45 am. Graduating seniors will take the exam at the same time.

Participation and Carmen (10 points): The course will rely heavily on a seminar format in which all students participate and contribute. I will expect and encourage in-class contributions, but also will provide Discussion Forum on Carmen on which you should respond with readings, questions, and observations. Each week you are
required to post at least one comment on any of the assigned reading for the week on the designated discussion board. Additionally, I encourage you to respond to other people’s posts. This can be a way to get us started in our conversations about the individual poems. You must regularly check in the course Carmen site both to download supplementary materials on syllabus [marked as (C)] and to provide regular posts on discussion section.

**Attendance and Lateness Policy**
Attendance is mandatory and I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. If you miss more than 2 classes, I will lower your grade by half a grade. (Thus, if your final average is a B and you have missed 4 classes, then you will receive a C+ for a final grade). More than 5 missed classes will automatically result in a failing grade. Please arrive on time and do not leave early. You also must bring your books to class. Habitual infractions will reduce your grade by 1 full letter.

**Academic honesty**
The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed, which includes but are not limited to cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Plagiarism is the representation of another’s works or ideas as one's own, and includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person's work and/or ideas. I will report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the Committee on Academic Misconduct.

**Students with disabilities**
Any student who feels that he or she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss specific needs. You should also contact the Office for Disability Services at 292-3307/Room 150 Pomerene Hall, who will work with us to coordinate reasonable accommodations for documented disabilities.

**Electronic media policy**
Laptops and tablets are permitted, so long as they are being used for course-related activities (reading texts, taking notes). Please be courteous to your colleagues and me and do not browse. I also request that you turn off your phone ringers before class.

**Introductions: August 22**

**Week 1: The Exceptional Dickinson**
August 27 and 29

**ED poems**
- F99 (“Low at my problem bending”)  
- F112 (“Success is counted sweetest”)  
- F123 (“Besides the Autumn poets sing”)  
- F174 (“Pictures are to daily faces”)  
- F207 (“I taste a liquor never brewed”)  
- F260 (“I’m nobody!”)  
- F620 (“Much madness is divinest sense”)  
- F788 (“Publication is the auction”)  
- F1096 (“A narrow fellow in the grass”)  
- F1263 (“Tell all the truth”)

**Other reading**
Jane Donahue Eberwein, “Dickinson’s Local, Global, and Cosmic Perspectives” (EDH, 27-43); Gary Lee Stonum, “Dickinson’s Literary Background” (EDH, 44-60); Dickinson Letters 3, 13, 22, 73, 77
Also read the Preface (by Thomas Wentworth Higginson) to the 1890 edition of Dickinson’s poems (found under Contents/Links in Carmen). Please also take a look at the Table of Contents and individual poems.

Week 2: Ars Poetica 1
September 3 and 5

ED poems
F42 (“There is a word”) F533 (“I reckon when I count at all”)
F333 (“Many a phrase has the English F590 (“No romance sold unto”)
language”) F665 (“The martyred poets did not tell”)
F348 (“I would not paint a picture”) F696 (“The tint I cannot take is best”)
F380 (“All the letters I can write”) F1268 (“A Word dropped careless on a
F381 (“I cannot dance upon my toes”) Page”)
F458 (“She dealt her pretty words like
blades”)

Other reading
William Cullen Bryant, “To an American Painter” (C); ED Letters 260, 261, 265, 268, 271, and 290;
Higginson, “Letter to a Young Contributor” (C)

Week 3: Ars Poetica 2
September 10 and 12

ED poems
F445 (“They shut me up in prose”) F930 (“The poets light but lamps”)
F446 (“This was a poet”) F996 (“I heard as if I had no ear”)
F448 (“I died for Beauty – but was scarce” F1118 (“Reportless subjects to the quick”)
F466 (“I dwell in possibility”) F1163 (“A spider sewed at night”)
F549 (“The one who could repeat the F1243 (“Shall I take thee, the Poet said”)
summer day”) F1353 (“To pile like Thunder to it’s close”)
F772 (“Essential oils are wrung”) F1715 (“A word made flesh is seldom”)
F905 (“Split the lark and you’ll find the music”)

Other reading
Joseph Raab, “The Metapoetic Element in Dickinson” (EDH, 273-95); Cristanne Miller, “Dickinson’s Experiments in Language” (EDH, 240-57); Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “The Spirit of Poetry” (C)

Week 4: American Romanticism and the Natural World
September 17 and 19

ED poems
F122 (“These are the Days when birds F200 (“The rose did caper on her cheek”)
come back”) F204 (“I’ll tell you how the sun rose”)
F137 (“A lady red amid the hill”) F213 (“The skies cant keep their secret”)
F140 (“Bring me the sunset in a cup”) F224 (“An awful tempest mashed the air”)
F147 (“A science – so the savans say”) F233 (“A slash of blue”)
F171 (“A fuzzy fellow without feet”) F291 (“It sifts from leaden sieves”)
F351 ("She sights a bird")
F359 ("A bird came down the walk")
F383 ("I like to see it lap the miles")
F721 ("Nature is what We see")
F1433 ("What mystery pervades a well")

Other Reading:
David Porter, "Searching for Dickinson’s Themes" (EDH, 183-96); Emerson, “The Snow-Storm” (C); Longfellow, “Snow-Flakes” (C); Bryant, “To the Fringed Gentian” (C); Rose Terry Cooke, “A Story” (WP, 260); John Greenleaf Whittier, “The Barefoot Boy” (C); Walt Whitman, “A Noiseless Patient Spider” (C)

Week 5: American Romanticism and the Divine Self
September 24 and 26

ED poems
F144 ("I never hear the word ‘Escape’")
F255 ("A drop that wrestles in the sea")
F256 ("The robin’s my criterion for tune")
F347 ("I dreaded that first robin so")
F360 ("The soul has bandaged moments")
F373 ("This world is not conclusion")
F407 ("One need not be a chamber")
F519 ("This is my letter to the world")
F409 ("The soul selects her own society")
F467 ("A solemn thing within the soul")
F546 ("I prayed, at first, a little girl")
F598 ("The brain is wider than the sky")
F630 ("The soul’s superior instants")
F709 ("Me from myself to banish")
F724 ("Each life converges")
F740 ("On a columnar self")
F895 ("Further in summer than the birds")
F1050 ("I am afraid to own a body")
F1103 ("Perception of an object costs")

Other Reading:
Gudrun Grabher, “Dickinson’s Lyrical Self” (EDH 224-39); ED letters 173, 219, 269, 316, 330 and 330a, and 368

Week Six: Managing Death and the Impossible Elegy
October 1 and 3

ED poems
F62 (“There’s something quieter than sleep”)
F78 (“As by the dead we love to sit”)
F124 (“Safe in their alabaster chambers”)
F180 (“In ebon box when years have flown”)
F187 (“Through the straight pass of suffering”)
F238 (“How many times these low feet staggered”)
F259 (“A clock stopped”)
F315 (“To die takes just a little while”)
F337 (“Of nearness to her sundered things”)
F357 (“I felt my life with both my hands”)
F394 (“I cried at pity”)
F431 (“If I may have it when it’s dead”)
F479 (“Because I could not stop for death”)
F528 (“‘Tis not that Dying hurts us so”)
F543 (“Unit, like death, for whom?”)
F614 (“Twas warm at first like us”)
F648 (“I’ve seen a Dying Eye”)
F648 (“I’ve seen a Dying Eye”)
F938 (“Those who have been in the grave the longest”)
F951 (“Unable are the loved to die”)
F1100 (“The last night that she lived”)

Other reading:
Bryant, “Thanatopsis” (C); Lydia Sigourney, “Death of an Infant” and “Poetry” (C); Charlotte Brontë, “On the Death of Anne Brontë” (C); ED letters 216, 238, 338, 408, 730, and 868
Weeks Seven and Eight: The Illocality of Pain and Consciousness
October 8, 14, and 17
** class is cancelled on October 10th

Reading for October 8:
F109 ("For each extatic instant")
F178 ("To learn the transport ‘thro the pain")
F181 ("A wounded Deer")
F294 ("A weight with needles on the pounds")
F312 ("I can wade grief")
F339 ("I like a look of agony")
F372 ("After great pain")
F428/J419 ("We grow accustomed to the dark")
F515/J599 ("There is a pain so utter")
F550 ("I measure every grief I meet")
F588 ("The heart asks pleasure first")
F690 ("Forever is composed of nows")
F743 ("Behind me dips eternity")
F824 ("A nearness to tremendousness")

Reading for October 14 and 17
ED poems:
F81 ("She bore it till the simple veins")
F242 ("It is easy to work when the soul is at play")
F336 ("Before I got my eye put out")
F340 ("I felt a funeral in my brain")
F341 ("‘Tis so appalling it exhilarates")
F355 ("It was not death")
F423 ("The first day’s night had come")
F425 ("‘Twas like a maelstrom with a notch")
F563 ("The brain within its groove")
F570 ("I tried to think a lonelier thing")
F647 ("To fill a gap")
F649 ("No rack can torture me")
F664 ("Rehearsal to ourselves")
F714 ("No man can compass a despair")
F760 ("Pain has an element of blank")
F867 ("I felt a cleaving in my mind")

Other reading: Frederick Goddard Tuckerman, “Sonnet 17" (C); Sigourney, “To the First Slave Ship” (C); Lucretia Davidson, “The Fear of Madness" (C); Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, “The Slave Auction” (C)

Week Nine: Making (and not making) Meaning
October 22 and 24
ED poems:
F93 ("Water is taught by thirst")
F101 ("I had some thing that I called mine")
F121 ("Her breast is fit for pearls")
F143 ("Exultation is the going")
F170 ("‘Tis so much joy")
F179 ("If the foolish call them ‘flowers’")
F191 (‘Morning’ means ‘milking’)
F195 ("Victory comes late")
F243 ("That after horror")
F282 ("We play at paste")
F284 ("The zeros taught us phosphorous")
F314 ("Hope’ is the thing with feathers")
F319 ("Of bronze and blaze")
F320 ("There’s a certain slant of light")
F363 ("I found the words to every thought")
F450 ("The outer from the inner")
F484 ("From blank to blank")
F508 ("A pit with heaven over it")
F576 ("The different between despair")
F753 ("Grief is a mouse")
F782 ("Renunciation is a piercing virtue")
F785 ("It dropped so low in my regard")
F797 ("The definition of beauty is")
F1010 ("Crumbling is not an instant’s act")
F1044 ("Revolution is the pod")
F1064 (“As the starved maelstrom laps the navies”) F1123 (“Between the form of life and life”)

**Other reading**
Robert Weisbuch, “Prisming Dickinson” (C); ED letters 187, 233, 248 (the Master Letters)

**Week 10: Erotic Longing**
**October 29 and 31**

**ED poems**
- F264 (“Forever at his side to walk”)
- F266 (“What would I give to see his face?”)
- F269 (“Wild nights”)
- F292 (“I got so I could take his name”)
- F277 (“Going to her/him/them! Happy letter!”)
- F304 (“The maddest/nearest dream recedes”)
- F323 (“Read – Sweet”)
- F325 (“There came a day at summer’s full”)
- F346 (“I showed her heights”/“He showed me heights”)
- F418 (“Your riches taught me poverty”)
- F426 (“I gave myself to him”)
- F442 (“I see thee better in the dark”)
- F451 (“The Malay took the pearl”)

**Other reading**
Julia Ward Howe, “My Last Dance” (C); ED letters 56, 305, 306, 559, 561, 562, 563

**Week 11: Faith and Desire**
**November 5 and 7**

**ED poems**
- F202 (“Faith” is a fine invention”)
- F236 (Some keep the Sabbath going to Church”)
- F268 (“Why do they shut me out of Heaven?”)
- F349 (“He touched me, so I live to know”)
- F373 (“This World is not conclusion”)
- F386 (“Taking up the fair Ideal”)
- F403 (“I reason, Earth is short—“)
- F413 (“Heaven is so far of the Mind”)
- F476 (“We pray—to Heaven— “)
- F477 (“He fumbles at your soul”)

- F544 (“Heaven’ has different Signs—to me—“)
- F546 (“I prayed, at first, a little Girl”)
- F560 (“One Crucifixion is recorded—only”)  
- F588 (“To just know how He suffered—would be dear”)  
- F978 (“Faith—is the Pierless Bridge”) 
- F1347 (“Wonder—is not precisely knowing”)  
- F1537 (“And with what Body do they come”?) 
- F1581 (“These—dying then”)
Other reading
ED Letters 185, 251, 389

Week 12: Dickinson’s Feminism
November 12 and 14

ED poems
F173 ("Except to heaven she is nought")
F175 ("I cautious scanned my little life")
F185 ("A wife at daybreak I shall be")
F194 ("Title divine is mine!")
F225 ("I’m ‘wife’")
F238 ("How many times these low feet staggered")
F267 ("Rearrange a ‘Wife’s’ affection")
F307 ("A solemn thing it was")
F318 ("She sweeps with many colored brooms")

F330 ("He put the belt around my life")
F353 ("I’m ceded")
F392 ("We talked as girls do")
F415 ("More life went out when he went")
F456 ("A prison gets to be a friend")
F522 ("I tie my hat – I crease my shawl")
F857 ("She rose to his requirement")
F1056 ("Could I but ride indefinite")
F1098 ("The leaves like women interchange")
F1352 ("How soft this Prison is")

Other reading
Margaret Dickie, “Feminist Conceptions of Dickinson” (EDH 342-55); Harper, “A Double Standard” (C); Sigourney, “To a Shred of Linen” (C); Frances S. Osgood, “Song” (C); Alice Cary, “The Bridal Veil” (C)

Week 13: Fascicles and Manuscripts
November 19 and 21

Fascicle 8
F181 ("A wounded deer")
F715 ("The sun kept stooping")
F183 ("I met a King")
F178 ("To learn the transport")
F179 ("If the foolish, call them ‘flowers’")
F180 ("In ebon box")
F174 ("Portraits are to daily faces")
F169 ("Wait till the majesty of Death")
F170 ("‘Tis so much joy!")

F172 ("At last, to be identified")
F165 ("I have never seen ‘Volcanoes’")
F166 ("Dust is the only Secret")
F167 ("I’m the little ‘Heart’s Ease!’")
F168 ("Ah, Necromancy Sweet!")
F173 ("Except to Heaven, she is nought")
F174 ("Pictures are to daily faces")
F175 ("I cautious, scanned my little life")
F176 ("If I could bribe them by a Rose")
F177 ("As if some little Artic flower")

Fascicle 16
F336 ("Before I got my eye put out")
F337/ ("Of nearness to her sundred things")
F338/ ("Tie the strings to my life")
F339 ("I like a look of agony")
F340 ("I felt a funeral in my brain")
F341 ("‘Tis so appalling")

F342 ("How noteless men and pleiads")
F343 ("When we stand on top of things")
F344 ("Twas just this time last year I died")
F345 ("Afraid! Of whom am I afraid")
F346 ("He showed me heights")
Other reading:
Sharon Cameron, “Dickinsons Fascicles” (EDH 138-160)

Weeks 14 and 15: November 26, class cancelled for individual meetings and writing time

December 3: Conclusions (This World is Not)