

ENG324: Whitman and Dickinson

Fall 2017

"...read these leaves in the open air every season of every year of your life, re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem and have the richest fluency not only in its words but in the silent lines of its lips and face and between the lashes of your eyes and in every motion and joint of your body..."

--Walt Whitman, from the 1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass*

Dare you see a Soul at the "White Heat"?
Then crouch within the door -

--Emily Dickinson

Professor

Dr. Bethany Hicok

Email and Cell

hicokbf@westminster.edu
724-612-1763 (text or call)

Office Location & Hours

TC305, T 2-3, W 1-2, and by
appointment

Course Description

It would be difficult to imagine two poets who have redefined the American literary landscape more thoroughly than Walt Whitman (1819-1892) and Emily Dickinson (1830-1886). It would also be difficult to imagine two poets who were more unlike. Dickinson wrote nearly 1800 poems (1789 is the latest count), but only 12 of these were published in her lifetime (anonymously and without her express permission). Dickinson came from a wealthy family; Whitman from the working class. Dickinson's father was a prominent lawyer and politician who served a term in Congress. She wrote dazzling, compressed lyrics that, borrowing from her own words, can "stun[] you by Degrees." But by the early 1860s, Dickinson rarely left her family home in Amherst, Massachusetts, and wrote most of her 1789 poems from her room in the manse, overlooking the town of Amherst. Yet this small circle that Dickinson drew around her world seems to have been just what she needed to allow her imagination to soar. Whitman, by contrast, wrote and lived expansively, using the long line and the "catalogues" of events and people that characterize his poetry. As he said of himself in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, "I am large. . . .I contain multitudes." He loved the "blab of the pave" of his beloved Manhattan and walked its streets to soak in the experiences of his time. He published multiple editions of his epic poem of America, *Leaves of Grass*, accumulating new poems and revising old ones as each new edition came out from 1855 until his so-called "death bed" edition in 1892. He attended the opera and theatre and dressed the wounds of soldiers on the battlefield during the Civil War. Whatever their differences, both poets were immersed in their time and place and both gave us a new way to think about poetry and nation. Whitman and Dickinson wrote at a time of profound change in America. Progressive forces in American education began to argue for the importance of educating women. Dickinson was well-educated, attending Amherst Academy with its emphasis on science from 1840-47, and Mount Holyoke Female Seminary from 1847-48. At a time of religious revivals and extreme pressure on citizens to profess their faith, Dickinson stopped going to church, and, in the spirit of the Romantic poets she loved, turned to nature as her companion and spiritual guide, finding God everywhere: "Some—keep the Sabbath—going to church--," she wrote, "I—keep it—staying at Home— / With a Bobolink—for a Chorister— / And an Orchard—for a Dome--."

The Revolutionary War that brought about American independence would still have been close at hand, alive in the stories of the previous generation, and it became an important touchstone for Whitman. The Civil War (1860-1865) was this nation's second major defining moment, etching the nation's divisions over slavery and ways of life that are still with us today. We see the fissures appearing once again in recent events in Charlottesville.

This course will explore the poetry of Whitman and Dickinson and their context in depth with attention to the publishing history of their work and how it has influenced how we have read them. Both poets taught us to question, re-examine, and "dismiss whatever insults your own soul." In reading them, we will come to understand why they were poets of their own time and remain poets for our own time.

Required Texts

Dickinson, Emily. *Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them*. Ed. Crisianne Miller. Harvard Belknap, 2016.

Course Outcomes: By the end of the course students should be able to

1. Read and interpret poetry with proficiency;
2. demonstrate the capacity to sustain controlled, critical arguments that analyze and synthesize texts
3. demonstrate an advanced understanding of the craft of writing, including concision, diction, grammar, and syntax
4. identify and use a range of sources suitable to the scholarly conversation on a particular topic, evaluate and integrate source material, and to document accurately
5. communicate clearly, elegantly, and effectively in speech and writing;
6. read poetry aloud with force and conviction;
7. convey an understanding in speaking and writing of how cultural forces work to shape the poet, as well as how the poet shapes the culture.

The following major assignments and activities address these outcomes as indicated:

Discussion Forums (Outcome #1-7)

Discussion is crucial to testing ideas and creating knowledge. You learn more by engaging directly and actively with our readings, with us, and with your peers. In order to ensure a high degree of participation from everyone and encourage a collaborative environment, you have been placed in teams. Each team will lead discussion for that day's reading a total of seven times during the semester. On the day you are responsible for the readings, **please post to the forum for your group a response of 300 to 500 words on your assigned section on D2L at least 24 hours in advance of our class meeting**. You will find the forums by clicking on the Discussion tab and then clicking on the appropriate forum. To post, begin a new thread. Each post should include the following:

What do you notice about what you are reading? What images does the poet use to convey ideas? What is the overall impact of these images on the reader? How is rhythm and rhyme used? How does it contribute to the poem's effect on the reader and/or its meaning? What words does the poet use? Why? For Dickinson, see Dickinson's Lexicon, a comprehensive dictionary of words and variants found in Dickinson's poetry:
<http://edl.byu.edu/index.php>

What are the multiple meanings of these choices? How does the word choice affect the overall meaning of the poem? What is the effect of variant words on the poem and its meaning and how we read it? What values are being emphasized? What characteristics or values are condemned? What are some of the major themes? What are the major metaphors or similes used and how do they relate to the major themes? When there are critical works assigned, you should be able to summarize the main argument and respond to several talking points as they relate to the poet's work. As we explore specific concepts and ideas in class over the course of the semester, you should explore these as they arise.

In your post you may respond to one or several of the questions above. Your post should, however, include the following components:

1. At least two specific references to the reading under consideration.
2. At least one specific reference to a passage from a different poem in the same reading group or another work, which provides some comparative perspective.
3. A question or idea for further consideration.

In addition, you should respond to at least one post per week. Each of your seven posts is worth 20 points. You earn all 20 points by posting on time and by keeping to the 300 to 500-word parameters. Your weekly response is worth 2 points each, and there should be at least 10 of them.

Discussion Teams

Team 1: Portmann, Nestor, Whitmer, Yesko; **Team 2:** Acklin, Cinicola, Hall, Koegler; **Team 3:** McElwain, Travis, Oertly

Essays (Outcomes #1-5, 7)

The word “essay” connotes exploration—a venturing into interesting territory. You will have a number of essays of varying length throughout the term. Your essays should be double spaced, 12 pt. font, Times New Roman, 1” margins, and MLA manuscript format: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>
 Your writing should be clear, analytical, and specific. The essay prompts will be available on D2L.

Final Presentation (Outcomes #1-8)

Your final presentation will be a group effort that brings together all the elements of the course. A full description of this project will be available on D2L.

Grading:

Discussion Posts/Forum	20%
First Dickinson Essay	10%
First Whitman Essay	15%
Dickinson Fascicle Essay	15%
Whitman-in-Context Essay	20%
Final Project	20%

GRADING SCALE

100% - 94% = A	89% - 88% = B+	79% - 78% = C+	69% - 60% = D
93% - 90% = A-	87% - 84% = B	77% - 74% = C	59% - 0% = F
	83% - 80% = B-	73% - 70% = C-	

Classroom Policies:

Late Work: Papers, exams and presentations are due on the day they are due. Late work will be penalized 5% per day.

Academic Integrity: The lasting reward of academic integrity is a good character and the ability to learn on your own. Those seem worthy aspirations. Plagiarism or cheating of any kind will result in a failing grade for the assignment, as well as notification of the dean. More than one instance will result in a failing grade for the course and further administrative action. Please review the college’s Academic Integrity Policy starting on p. 66 of the undergraduate catalogue.

Attendance: You are required to come to class. Missing class more than three times will reduce your final grade by half a letter. I expect students to have done the day’s reading prior to class so that we can have a lively discussion even if you’re not leading discussion that day. Believe me, you’ll appreciate it when you have to lead a discussion and your classmates are prepared. Exceptions to this policy will only be made in extreme circumstances, and you must discuss it with me.

Resources

In addition to the classroom texts, you will find the following on-line resources enormously helpful for the study of these two poets. A great place to begin your study of Emily Dickinson is the Emily Dickinson Museum site at: <https://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/>

Here you will find information about where Dickinson lived, her life and times, and her poetry, as well as links to many other sites, including, most importantly, the Dickinson Digital Archive from the manuscript collections housed at the Houghton Library at Harvard and elsewhere: <https://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/node/147#electronicresources>

Like Dickinson, Whitman also has great on-line resources to support the study of his work. The place to begin is the Whitman Archive at <http://whitmanarchive.org/>

Course Schedule

Dates	Discussion/Due Dates	Reading
T Aug 29	Introduction	
R Aug 31	"I am a poet of the body, And I am a poet of the soul."	Read Folsom and Price, "Walt Whitman," through the First Edition of <i>Leaves of Grass</i> : http://whitmanarchive.org/biography/walt_whitman/index.html Whitman's 1855 <i>Leaves of Grass</i> , "Song of Myself," 662-669, lines 1-194.
T Sept 5	Team 1	Whitman's 1855 <i>Leaves of Grass</i> , 669-677, lines 195-421. Michael Moon, "The Twenty-Ninth Bather," Norton, 855-863.
R Sept 7	Team 2	Whitman's 1855 <i>Leaves of Grass</i> , 677-695, lines 422-933. Reynolds, Chap 10, 306-338.
T Sept 12	Team 3	Whitman's 1855 <i>Leaves of Grass</i> , 695-710, lines 934-1336
R Sept 14	Team 1	Whitman's 1855 <i>Leaves of Grass</i> , "A Song of Occupations," 710-718; "The Sleepers," 723-731; "I Sing the Body Electric," 731-736; "Song of the Answerer," 740-42; "There Was a Child Went Forth," 745-47
T Sept 19	Whitman Essay Due	Dickinson Biography: https://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/emily_biography Be sure to read the sections on Dickinson's youth and writing years, as well as the related content. You'll see that when you click on each link, you will also find related content on the right hand side. Please explore all of this content for an excellent background on ED up to 1865. Cristanne Miller, ed. Introduction, <i>Emily Dickinson's Poems</i> , 1-29. Dickinson selections from fascicles: Fascicle 1, "The Gentian weaves her fringes—," 33; F2, "One Sister have I in the house—," 46; F3, "I never lost as much but twice—," 57; F6, "These are the Days when Birds come back," 81-82; "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—," 83 and also F. 10, 122.
R Sept 21	Team 2	F9, "I'm 'wife'—I've finished that—," 112-13; "Some—keep the Sabbath—going to church—," 115; F11, "I'm Nobody! Who are you?," 128; "Rearrange a 'Wife's' Affection!," 132; "Why do they shut me out of Heaven?" 133; "Wild nights—Wild nights!" 133; F12, "Of all the Sound' despatched abroad—," 146; F13, "She sweeps with many-colored Brooms—," 152; "Of Bronze—and Blaze—," 152-53; "There's a certain Slant of light," 153; "There came a Day—at Summer's full—," 155-56; "'Hope' is the thing with feathers—," 150.
T Sept 26	Team 3	F14, "A solemn thing—it was—I said—," 161; F16, "Before I got my eye put out—," 177; "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," 179; F17, "I dreaded that first Robin, so," 183; "I would not paint—a picture—," 184; "He touched me, so I live to know, 184-85; "I'm ceded—I've stopped being Theirs—," 186; "A Bird, came down the Walk—,"

Dates	Discussion/Due Dates	Reading
		189-90; "The Soul has Bandaged moments—." 190; F18, "After great pain, a formal feeling comes—," 198.
R Sept 28	Team 1	Read all of Fascicle 20, 212-20.
T Oct 3	Fascicle 20 Continued Team 2	Criticism.
R Oct 5	Team 3	F21, "They shut me up in Prose—," 223; "This was a Poet—," 224; "I died for Beauty—but was scarce," 225; F22, "I dwell in Possibility—," 233; "He fumbles at your Soul," 237-38; F23, "Because I could not stop for Death—," 239; F24, "This is my letter to the World," 254; F25, "The difference between Despair," 263; F26, "I heard a fly buzz—when I died—," 270; "The Brain—is wider than the Sky—," 273; F27, "There's been a Dean, in the Opposite House," 279; "There is a Languor of the Life," 282.
T Oct 10	Dickinson Essay Due. Team 1	Whitman, The second edition: <i>Children of Adam</i> , pp. 78-96; Reynolds Chap. 7 of Reynolds, "Sex is the Root of it All: Eroticism and Gender," pp. 194-234. "
R Oct 12	Whitman, Second Edition Team 2	Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," pp. 135-140; "Song of the Open Road," pp. 126-135; "Song of the Broad-Axe," pp. 155-164.
T Oct 17	Whitman, Second Edition Team 3	<i>Sea-Drift</i> , pp. 206-220, including especially "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" and "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life." Chapter 6 of Reynolds, "American Performances: Theater, Oratory, Music."
R Oct 19	Whitman, Second Edition Team 1	<i>Calamus</i> , pp. 96-116; Chap. 12 of Reynolds "Brotherly Love, National War: Into the 1860s," pp. 383-412.
T Oct 24	MIDTERM BREAK. NO CLASSES	
R Oct 26	The Wound-Dresser Team 2	<i>Drum Taps</i> , pp. 234-275; Chap. 13 of Reynolds, "My Book and the War are One: The Washington Years," pp. 413-447; "Walt Whitman," to the end: http://whitmanarchive.org/biography/walt_whitman/index.html See also Dickinson's, "My Triumph lasted till the Drums," 503, and Whitman, Dickinson and the War: http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/walt-whitman-emily-dickinson-and-the-war-that-changed-poetry-forever-31815/
T Oct 31	Whitman and Lincoln Team 3	<i>Memories of President Lincoln</i> , pp. 276-284, particularly the famous Lincoln elegy, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/gettysburg/good_cause/transcript.htm "The Poetics of Union in Whitman and Lincoln," Norton, 872-889.
R Nov 2	Whitman-in-Context Essay Due.	Favorite Poems. Have at least a section of something from Whitman memorized to recite—10 lines minimum.
T Nov 7	Team 1	F29, "God is a distant—stately Lover—," 302-303; "I think I was enchanted," 308; "The Battle fought between the Soul," 309; "I started Early—took my Dog—," 311-12; F31, The Soul's Superior instants," 319; "I saw no way—The Heavens were stitched—," 320;

Dates	Discussion/Due Dates	Reading
		F32, "I asked no other thing—," 333; "A Wife—at Daybreak—I shall be—," 338.
R Nov 9	Team 2	F34, "Pain—has an Element of Blank—," 352; "My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—," 354-55; "Essential Oils—are wrung—," 358; F35, "The Props assist the House—," 365; F36, "Sweet Mountains—Ye tell Me no lie—," 374; "It's easy to invent a Life—," 375; "Through the Straight Pass of Suffering," 376-77; F37, "Four Trees—upon a Solitary Acre—," 382; "Renunciation—is a piercing Virtue—," 384; "Publication—is the Auction," 386.
T Nov 14	Team 3	F38, "She rose to His Requirement—dropt," 393-94; Unbound: "A Coffin-is a small Domain," 424; "Split the Lark—and you'll find the Music—," 427; "I stepped from Plank to Plank," 434; "Bee! I'm expecting you!" 453;
R Nov 16	Team 1	Dickinson Biography, the Final Years: https://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/later_years "The missing All, prevented Me," 457; "Crisis is a Hair," 478; "Under the Light, yet under," 478-79; "There is a finished feeling," 488; "A narrow Fellow in the Grass," 489-90; "We play at Paste—," 531.
T Nov 21	Team 2	"Further in Summer than the Birds," 534; "Tell all the truth but tell it slant—," 563-64; "A Word dropped careless on a Page—," 565; "I thought that nature was enough," 565; "What mystery pervades a well," 602; "Fame is the one that does not stay—," 621.
R Nov 23	THANKSGIVING. NO CLASSES.	
T Nov 28	Team 3	Final selections.
R Nov 30	Dickinson Fascicle Essay Due.	Favorite Poem Day. Recite from memory at least one Dickinson poem.
T Dec 5	Final Project Preparation.	
R Dec 7	Final Project Preparation.	
Exam Day: M Dec 11 3-5:30	Presentations	