ENGL 6500: Seminar in American Literature and Culture to 1865
Early American Poetry in Context
Spring 2018 • M/W 3:30-4:50pm • AUDB 217

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Course Description
Early Americans wrote and recited poems on all sorts of occasions, such as love, travel, death, contemplation, indignation. They composed poems for a range of purposes, including social commentary, aesthetic refinement, civic engagement, devotional practice, and human connection. Poems adorned coffins, were read aloud in literary “salons,” circulated in both popular newspapers and intimate letters, and were collected into printed and homemade books. The public, collective aspect of poetry was particularly significant throughout our period of study, the seventeenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries. Poetry cultivated social and political connections and provided diverse authors a forum for civic engagement. The central American literary genre before the rise of the novel, poetry is crucial to understanding American culture, history, politics, and literary practice over centuries.

In this class we will read a wide range of early American poetry and will explore the relationship between the political, cultural, and aesthetic uses of poetry. We will practice how to read poetry, how to write poetry, and how to write about poetry. We will think through what poetic conventions and innovations teach us about history and society, and we will confront the complex identifications and affiliations of writers and audiences in early America. Through a variety of assignments, you will hone your skills in research, analysis, and creative thinking.

Required Texts
- All other required readings will be posted on Blackboard as PDF files or web links, or will be accessible through a UNT library online search.

Expectations for Students
Attendance and Participation: Attendance is mandatory. Graduate students should attend all classes and be prepared to engage in lively discussion. If you must miss more than one or two classes, write a two- to three-page paper in response to the readings for the missed class and email it to me within one week of the missed class. This will help make up for attendance and
participation points. Repeated absences will adversely affect your grade.

**Meeting Deadlines:** I expect a level of sophistication from graduate work that can only result from allowing ample time to complete assignments. Come to office hours well in advance of due dates for advice and research suggestions. Papers and drafts are due at the beginning of class on the day listed and must be printed and stapled. If you absolutely must be absent on the day an assignment is due, check with me in advance to work out a turn-in process.

**Citing Sources:** Literary scholars use both MLA and Chicago citation styles when publishing, based on the preference of the journal or press. You may use either format in this class. I suggest that you purchase or have access to the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 8th ed. and *The Chicago Manual of Style*. For quick reference, the Chicago Manual of Style Online has a free citation guide ([http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)); the OWL at Purdue website is helpful for MLA: [https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/).

**Academic Integrity:** If you use information or interpretations from the Internet or elsewhere in your papers or tests without a proper citation, you are committing plagiarism, or representing another’s words, ideas, or research as your own. Students who plagiarize will automatically fail the assignment (and possibly the course) and will be reported to the Academic Integrity Office. Please review UNT’s Student Standards of Academic Integrity at: [https://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/06.003_AcademicIntegrity_2009_0.pdf](https://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/06.003_AcademicIntegrity_2009_0.pdf)

While you do not have to cite “common knowledge” (e.g., the sun rises in the east), you must cite any ideas that do not originate with you that are not common knowledge. Literary analysis or “facts” about texts and authors found on websites ARE NOT common knowledge and MUST be cited. Follow this advice from the UNC-Chapel Hill writing center: “In order to decide if the material you want to use in your paper constitutes “common knowledge,” you may find it helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

- Did I know this information before I took this course?
- Did this information/idea come from my own brain?

If you answer “no” to either or both of these questions, then you need to cite your source(s) and indicate where you first discovered this information.

**Graded Work**

**Participation:** 15%
- Weekly Discussion Posts: 20%
- Presentation/Discussion Leading: 15%
- Poem Analysis Paper: 15%
- Final Paper/Project: 35% (Proposal/Draft: 5%)

**Participation (15%)**

Participation means completing the assigned reading and being prepared to talk about it, bringing your book or printed reading to class, listening carefully, contributing to class discussions, thoughtfully completing in-class assignments, and treating others with respect. My methods of evaluating participation include noting student comments and behavior, calling on students,
organizing small group discussions, directing open questions to the class. Come to class prepared and keep your comments focused on the day’s reading.

**Weekly Discussion Posts (20%)**
Beginning the week of 1/22, you will write weekly discussion board posts, one- to two-pages in length, in response to the readings for either Monday or Wednesday (you may choose which day). You will post your weekly response to Blackboard by 11:59pm the day before the class. Your goals are to raise issues for in-class discussion, to begin to articulate questions and insights for your final projects, and to engage in a weekly practice of writing and analysis that will prepare you for longer writing assignments. Please discuss specific ideas and passages from the readings in your response; vague or unsupported discussion posts will receive little credit. You are welcome to do a creative option for one or more discussion posts (e.g., a poetic response to one of our authors). You may skip one weekly post with no penalty.

**Presentation/Discussion Leading (15%)**
You will present on the readings and lead class discussion for one class period; we will sign up for dates during the second week of class. While I expect you to discuss and synthesize the various readings, choose one poem for your primary presentation material. Follow these specific guidelines for your poem analysis presentation:

1. First, read your selected poem (or an important section of the poem, if it is very long) aloud for the class. This is an important element of the assignment. Practice beforehand and look up how to pronounce any unfamiliar words. Share something about your experience of encountering this poem and learning to read it aloud.
2. Then, answer (with evidence and explanation) the following questions about your poem:
   - What is the author’s background? Where/when did they live, what was their occupation, what else is notable about their life?
   - What is the poem’s meter? Scan several lines for the class.
   - What is the poem’s form and tone? Is it a humorous satire? A serious elegy? A formal ode?
   - What are the poem’s subject, argument, major themes, etc.? What major issues does the poem address? Where exactly do you see those issues in specific lines from the poem?
   - Identify at least three formal, sonic, or figurative devices in your poem.
   - List at least two other poems we’ve read with which we might group this poem because of a similar form, style, tone, subject matter, etc. Briefly explain your choices.
3. Guide a discussion of the poem with specific questions. You might begin by inviting the class to agree or disagree with your reading of the poem. Draw the poem into relation with any other poems we’ve read for that day.
4. Guide a discussion of any secondary readings. Summarize the main arguments/information from the readings, and pose questions for the class.

**Poem Analysis Paper (15%)**
This paper will be based on your presentation and due in class one week after the presentation date. For example, if you present on Monday, February 5, your paper will be due at the beginning of class on Monday, February 12. This is an approximately five-page poem analysis,
incorporating both close reading of the poem and contextual information/secondary interpretations garnered from your presentation research. You must quote specific lines from the poem in your analysis and cite all of your sources in either MLA or Chicago format. Your paper must include some analysis of form, sonic devices, and figurative language (see the poetic analysis handout and Stephen Adams, Poetic Designs for examples).

**Final Project Proposal (5%)**
Write a brief (two- to three-page) proposal describing the central question(s) your paper will attempt to answer, the current scholarly conversation about this topic, and the texts you plan to address. For a creative project, detail the types of poems you plan to create, their inspiration, and, briefly, their relationship to the material we’ve covered in class. For either option, attach a list of at least 10 secondary sources relevant to your paper/project topic.

**Final Project (35%)**
Choose from the following two options. A draft will be due on one of the last two days of class.
1. Write a series of at least five original poems inspired by the work we’ve read in class, with annotations and an explanatory essay of at least eight pages detailing your formal, sonic, figurative, and other choices. Your explanatory essay must cite specific course readings as it situates your poems among or against particular poets and poetic traditions; it should exhibit a clear understanding of the poetic conventions we’ve discussed in class and should reflect your knowledge of the social, historical, geographical, and cultural contexts of early American literary production. You are highly encouraged to draw some of your inspiration from primary source material in such databases as Early American Imprints, Early Americas Digital Archive, and/or Godey’s Lady’s Book (we will have a library tutorial on 2/28).
2. Seminar Paper: Write a fifteen- to twenty-page scholarly essay on the course readings and topic of your choice. You are highly encouraged to incorporate primary source material from such databases as Early American Imprints, Early Americas Digital Archive, and/or Godey’s Lady’s Book (we will have a library tutorial on 2/28). You are welcome to use your presentation materials in your paper.

**Assistance for Students with Special Needs**
The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at [http://www.unt.edu/oda](http://www.unt.edu/oda). You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.
Reading and Assignment Schedule

- This schedule is subject to change at any time. I will post changes to Blackboard and will notify you of changes by UNT email and/or in class. You are responsible for regularly checking Blackboard and your UNT email.
- Web texts and book chapters will be posted to Blackboard under “content”; journal articles (if not posted to Blackboard) can be found online through the UNT library website.


Mon. Jan. 22: Shields, Interview (online); Lewis, “Waiting to be Found” (online); Anne Bradstreet, all poems (Shields 36-62); Benjamin Harris, “In Adam’s Fall” (Shields, 221); Stephen Adams, Chapter 1: “Meter and Rhythm”

Wed., Jan. 24: Bradstreet, continued; Adams, Chapter 4: “Figures of Speech”; Poetic Analysis Handout (online); Edward Taylor, “Huswifery” (Shields 198); Michael Wigglesworth, “The Day of Doom” Stanzas 1-43 (Shields 74-87) and “Meat Out of the Eater” (Shields 124)

Mon., Jan. 29: Urian Oakes, “Elegie” (Shields 132); Mather Byles, all poems (Shields 447-453); Benjamin Franklin, “Silence Dogood No.7” (online); Joseph Green, “The Poet’s Lamentation for the Loss of His Cat,” (Shields 430); Max Cavitch, Introduction and Chapter One of American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman (Minnesota, 2007)

Wed., Jan. 31: John Osborn, “Whaling Song” (Shields 481); Edward Johnson, “New England’s Annoyances” (Shields 17); Richard Lewis, “A Journey from Patapsco to Annapolis” (Shields 386)

Mon., Feb. 5: James Revel, “The Poor Unhappy Transported Felon’s Sorrowful Account” (Shields 156); James Grainger, “The Sugar Cane” (Shields 492); Britt Rusert, “Plantation Ecologies: The Experimental Plantation in and against James Grainger’s The Sugar-Cane,” Early American Studies 13.2 (2015): 341-373.

Wed., Feb. 7: Susanna Wright, all poems (Shields 371-379); Joseph Green, all remaining poems (Shields 430-442)

Mon., Feb. 12: Discussion leader: Kristen Pierce; Annis Boudinot Stockton, all poems (Shields 581-589)


Mon., Feb 19: Discussion Leader: Andrew Koch; Philip Freneau, “American Liberty” (Shields 723), “Female Frailty” (Shields 733), “The Indian Student” (Shields 743), “Lines Occasioned by a Visit to An Old Indian Burying ground” (Shields 746); Hannah Griffitts, “The Female Patriot,”
“Upon reading a Book entituled Common Sense,” “On reading a few Paragraphs in the Crisis” (Shields 558-563)


Wed., Feb. 28: **Library Tutorial**


Wed., March 7: **Dr. Ivy Schweitzer lecture (3:30-4:30pm) and film screening (7-9pm)**

Mon., March 12: NO CLASS (Spring Break)

Wed., March 14: NO CLASS (Spring Break)

Mon., March 19: Lydia Sigourney, “Death of an Infant,” “To a Shred of Linen” (online); William Cullen Bryant, “Thanatopsis” (online); Mary Louise Kete, “The Reception of Nineteenth-Century American Poetry” (online)

Wed., March 21: Tee-con-ees-kee (Cherokee), “On First Hearing the Report” and “Though far from thee Georgia in exile I roam” (online); Lydia Sigourney, “Indian Names,” “The Cherokee Mother,” “The Mohegan Church” (online)

Mon., March 26: Robert Dale Parker, Preface (ix-xv) and Introduction (1-84) to *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky*; Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, “To the Pine Tree” (89-90); Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Introduction to *The Song of Hiawatha* (online)

Wed., March 28: Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, poems (94-123)


Mon., April 9: Final Project Proposal Due


Mon., April 16: Emily Dickinson, selected poems


Wed., April 25: Walt Whitman, selections

Mon., April 30: Final Project Workshop (Drafts Due)

Wed., May 2: Final Project Workshop (Drafts Due)

Final Project Due: Wednesday, May 9, by 3:30pm

Further Reference and Suggested Secondary Readings:

- Caroline Wigginton, In the Neighborhood: Women’s Publication in Early America (Massachusetts, 2016)
- Arnold Krupat, That the People Might Live: Loss and Renewal in Native American Elegy (Cornell, 2012)
• Eliza Richards, ed. *Emily Dickinson In Context* (Cambridge, 2013)
• Vincent Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography of a Genius in Bondage* (Georgia, 2011)
• Eliza Richards, *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe’s Circle* (Cambridge, 2004)
• *Early American Imprints.* Access this database of more than 36,000 printed books, pamphlets, and broadsides from the 17th and 18th centuries via the UWF library website. The database catalogues poems by genre.
• *The Walt Whitman Archive* ([http://www.whitmanarchive.org](http://www.whitmanarchive.org)). This website includes all six editions of Whitman’s famous *Leaves of Grass* (first published in 1855).
• *The Emily Dickinson Archive* ([http://www.edickinson.org](http://www.edickinson.org)). Includes high-resolution images of Dickinson’s manuscripts.
• Important journals, available via MLA, Project Muse, and JSTOR: *Early American Literature, American Literature, American Literary History, The William and Mary Quarterly*.
• *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* ([http://keywords.nyupress.org](http://keywords.nyupress.org)). A great resource for familiarizing yourself with the critical vocabulary of American cultural studies. Includes web essays on important critical terms in the field of American cultural and literary studies.