

Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson

Location

The Rosenbach of the Free Library of Philadelphia 2008-2010 Delancey Place Philadelphia, PA 19103

Time

Thursdays from 6-8pm (2/21, 3/21, 4/18, 5/9)

Instructor

Edward Whitley, Associate Professor of English, Lehigh University; whitley@lehigh.edu / 484-767-2735

Required Texts

Cristanne Miller, ed. *Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them* (Harvard, 2016)

Gary Schmidgall, ed. *Walt Whitman: Selected Poems 1855-1892* (St. Martin's, 1999)

Online Resources

The Walt Whitman Archive (whitmanarchive.org)

Emily Dickinson Archive (edickinson.org) & *Emily Dickinson Collection* (acdc.amherst.edu/collection/ed)

Additional readings online and as PDFs distributed by the instructor.

Instructor Biography

Edward Whitley teaches courses in American literature at Lehigh University. He has published essays in a variety of academic journals on Walt Whitman and other topics in American literary culture. He is also the author of *American Bards: Walt Whitman and Other Unlikely Candidates for National Poet* (North Carolina, 2010), and with Joanna Levin he is the co-editor of *Whitman among the Bohemians* (Iowa, 2014) and *Walt Whitman in Context* (Cambridge, 2018). He has contributed to the NEH-funded Walt Whitman Archive (whitmanarchive.org), and, with Robert Weidman, he co-directs The Vault at Pfaff's: An Archive of Art and Literature by the Bohemians of Antebellum New York (lehigh.edu/pfaffs).

Course Description

Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson are universally regarded by scholars and readers alike as the greatest poets of the nineteenth-century United States. Their lives spanned roughly the same period—Dickinson lived from 1830-86, Whitman from 1819-92—but they never met or read one another's poetry. They both pioneered new poetic forms that were better received by twentieth-century modernists than by their nineteenth-century contemporaries, with Dickinson writing short, complex poems best experienced in manuscripts penned in her own artistic script, and Whitman composing long, sprawling lines of poetry that were creatures of mass-market print. Dickinson was a poet of quiet contemplation, Whitman a poet of loud city streets. But they both shared a common interest in the big questions: life and death, life after death, religion and spirituality, spirituality without religion, the nature of the self and the nature of reality, sex and gender, race and class, power and powerlessness. They wrote about life in the United States before, during, and after the cataclysm of Civil War, and they wrote about the human condition in ways that have influenced poets, artists, activists, and mystics across the globe. In this course we will read the essential poems from the Whitman and Dickinson canons in modern editions of their work, while also exploring online archives that reproduce their poems as they originally appeared. (*Bring a laptop or tablet to every class to get the full benefit of these excellent online archives.*) We will contextualize these poems in their cultural and biographical contexts, while also experiencing them as aesthetic objects in their own right.

COURSE CALENDAR

February 21

- Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1855) from *Walt Whitman: Selected Poems 1855-1892* (pages 3-111)
- Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price, "Walt Whitman," read from "Family Origins" to "The First Edition of *Leaves of Grass*" (whitmanarchive.org/biography/walt_whitman/index.html)
- Ed Folsom, *Whitman Making Books/Books Making Whitman*, read from "Walt Whitman as a Maker of Books" to "The First Edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855)" (<https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/current/anc.00150.html>)

March 21

- Walt Whitman, selections from *Leaves of Grass* (1856), *Leaves of Grass* (1860), *Drum-Taps*, and *Sequel to Drum-Taps* from *Walt Whitman: Selected Poems 1855-1892* (pages 121-140, 214-252, 271-304)
- Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price, "Walt Whitman," read from "The 1856 *Leaves*" to "Whitman's Stroke and Move to Camden" (whitmanarchive.org/biography/walt_whitman/index.html)
- Ed Folsom, *Whitman Making Books/Books Making Whitman*, read from "The Second Edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1856)" to "The Fourth Edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1867)" (<https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/current/anc.00150.html>)

April 18

- Emily Dickinson, selected poems from *Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them* (see list at the bottom of this document)
- "Emily Dickinson's Biography," *Emily Dickinson Museum* (https://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/emily_biography)
- Aife Murray, "Architecture of the Unseen," in *A Companion to Emily Dickinson* (PDF)
- Martha Nell Smith, "Editorial History I: Beginnings to 1955," in *Emily Dickinson in Context* (PDF)

May 9

- Emily Dickinson, selected poems from *Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them* (see list at the bottom of this document)
- Martha Nell Smith, "Susan and Emily Dickinson: Their Lives, in Letters," in *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson* (PDF)
- Alexandra Socarides, "Editorial History II: 1955 to the Present," in *Emily Dickinson in Context* (PDF)

EMILY DICKINSON SELECTED POEMS

We will be reading Emily Dickinson's poems from an edition that reproduces and transcribes the original manuscript books (called "fascicles") that Dickinson stitched together by hand and left in her writing desk, only to be discovered after her death. Focus your reading on the specific poems listed below, but read them within the broader context of the other poems that appear in the same fascicle.

April 18

F1, "The Gentian weaves her fringes—"

F2, "One Sister have I in the house—"; "My Wheel is in the dark!"

F3, "I never lost as much but twice—"

F6, "These are the Days when Birds come back"; "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—" (see the version of this poem in F10 as well)

F9, "I'm 'wife'—I've finished that—"; "Some—keep the Sabbath—going to church—"; "Bound - a trouble -"; "Two swimmers wrestled on the spar -"

F10 "Come slowly - Eden!"; "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—"

F11, "I'm Nobody! Who are you?"; "Rearrange a 'Wife's' Affection!"; "Why do they shut me out of Heaven?"; "Wild nights—Wild nights!"

F13, "She sweeps with many-colored Brooms—"; "Of Bronze—and Blaze—"; "There's a certain Slant of light"; "There came a Day—at Summer's full—"; "'Hope' is the thing with feathers—"

F14, "A solemn thing—it was—I said—"

F15, "The first Day's Night had come -"; "We will grow accustomed to the Dark -"; "If I may have it, when it's dead"

F16, "Before I got my eye put out—"; "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain"

May 9

F17, "I dreaded that first Robin, so"; "I would not paint—a picture—"; "He touched me, so I live to know"; "I'm ceded—I've stopped being Theirs—"; "A Bird, came down the Walk—"; "The Soul has Bandaged moments—"; "I would not paint - a picture -"; "It was not Death, for I stood up"; "I felt my life with both my hands"

F18, "After great pain, a formal feeling comes—"; "This world is not conclusion"

F19, "I cried at Pity—not at Pain—"

F20 "Dare you see a soul at the 'White Heat'?"; "The Soul selects her own Society"; "Mine - by the Right of the White Election!"

F21, "They shut me up in Prose—"; "This was a Poet—"; "I died for Beauty—but was scarce"; "At last - to be identified -"

F22, "I dwell in Possibility—"; "He fumbles at your Soul"

F23, "Because I could not stop for Death—"

F24, "This is my letter to the World"

F26, "I heard a fly buzz—when I died—"; "The Brain—is wider than the Sky—"

F27, "There's been a Death, in the Opposite House"; "There is a Languor of the Life"

F32, "I took my Power in my Hand -"; "A Wife - at Daybreak - I shall be -"

F34, "My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun -"

F37, "Publication - is the Auction"