“This was a Poet – it is That/ Distills amazing sense/ From ordinary Meanings –/ An Attar so immense.” In this course we will be closely examining the extraordinary poems and letters of the American poet Emily Dickinson, as well as the poems of poets who were her contemporaries, predecessors, and descendants. We will explore the myriad and overlapping ways in which she so uniquely expressed her thoughts on selfhood, nature, love, God, pain, death, women, and the household. We’ll also be thinking about formal matters (how does one read a lyric poem?; what’s with the dashes?), textuality (editorial issues including textual variants, manuscripts, and her groupings of poems), and Dickinson afterlives (poems, plays, and books she inspired).

Course Goals:
After engaging with this course actively and thoughtfully, you will be able to:
1. Identify the particular and specific writing style of Emily Dickinson, as well as the people, places, literature, and events that shaped the context in which her poetry and letters were written.
2. Interpret Emily Dickinson’s poetry, sensitive to both textual and contextual cues, and open to the notion that the poems resist singular interpretation.
3. Appreciate the aesthetic qualities of these poems and letters, despite or perhaps because of their difficulty.
4. Analyze and synthesize the critical responses of other scholars, evaluating the formal and theoretical arguments they make.
5. Articulate your evaluations of Dickinson’s poetry and responses to it, in speech and writing, cogently and with sensitivity to context.
6. Perform or create an interpretive response to one or more of her poems, making her world your own in a creative project.
7. Apply interpretive strategies developed in literary study to other academic and professional contexts.

Texts:
• The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition, edited by R.W. Franklin
• The Cambridge Introduction to Emily Dickinson, by Wendy Martin
• The Emily Dickinson Handbook, edited by Grabher, Hagenbüchle, and Miller
• Additional materials will be available online on our CROPS site

Requirements:
First Paper (close reading): 15% of grade
Second Paper (research): 25%
Creative Project: 20%
Four response papers: 20%
In-class writing, quizzes, and participation: 20%
**Weekly Schedule:**

Reading and assignments are to be completed by the day they appear on the syllabus, and are subject to change. Readings marked with an asterisk are those on which you can write for your critical essay response papers. All poem numbers refer to the poem’s number in the Franklin edition (not the page number).

**This was a Poet -**

**Week 1: Distills Amazing Sense (Form)**


*Wednesday, Aug 29:* Poems 320, 1263; Selections from Helen Vendler on CROPS

*Friday, August 31:* Poems 383, 446, 1096.

**This was a Poet -**

**Week 2: I dwell in Possibility - (Selfhood I)**

*Monday Sept 3:* No class for Labor Day.

*Wednesday, Sept 5:* Chapter 1 (“Life”) in *Cambridge Introduction to Emily Dickinson* (pp. 1-23); Poems 409, 466, 519, 605.

*Friday, Sept 7:* Poems 656, 700, 823, 1773; Letters on CROPS.

Paper 1 (close reading) assigned.

**This was a Poet -**

**Week 3: I am Afraid to Own a Body - (Selfhood II)**

*Monday, Sept 10:* Poems 357, 585, 605; Gudrun Grabher, “Dickinson’s Lyrical Self,” in *The Emily Dickinson Handbook* (pp. 224-239).*

*Wednesday, Sept 12:* Poems 645, 1050; Walt Whitman, Song 21 on CROPS.

*Friday, Sept 14:* Poems 740, 1088; Letters on CROPS.

**This was a Poet -**

**Week 4: Publication - Is the Auction (Creativity and Publishing I)**

*Monday, Sept 17:* Poem 788; “The Auction of the Mind: Publication History,” in *Cambridge Introduction* (pp. 110-117); Letters to Higginson on CROPS.

*Wednesday, Sept 19:* Poems 112, 270, 348; Martha Nell Smith, “Dickinson’s Manuscripts,” in *Handbook* (pp. 113-137);* Selection of Manuscripts on CROPS.

*Friday, Sept 21:* Poems 905, 1286, 1715; Chapter 1 of Martha Nell Smith, *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson* on CROPS.*

Response 1 due.

**This was a Poet -**

**Week 5: Better – Than Music! (Creativity and Publishing II)**

*Monday, Sept 24:* Poems 362-378 (fascicle 18); Sharon Cameron “Dickinson’s Fascicles,” in *Handbook* (pp. 138-162).*

*Wednesday, Sept 26:* Poems, same as above; Selections from Sharon Cameron *Choosing Not Choosing on CROPS*.

*Friday, Sept 28:* Above poems continued.

Paper 1 (close reading) due.

**Thematic Approaches**

**Week 6: Bobolink for a Chorister – And an Orchard, for a Dome – (Nature)**


*Wednesday, Oct 3:* Poems 654, 721, 800, 983, 1062, 1086, 1779.
**Friday, Oct 5:** Poems 402, 718; “Philosophical Reactions: Transcendentalism,” in *Cambridge Introduction* (32-34); Selections by Emerson and Thoreau on CROPS.

**Week 7: Might I But Moor – Tonight – In Thee! (Love)**

*Monday, Oct 8:* Poems 134, 218, 269, 452, 812, 951, 1094, 1760; Elizabeth Barrett Browning, selections from *Portuguese Sonnets* and *Aurora Lee* on CROPS; “Easy, quite, to love: friendship and love in Dickinson’s life and works,” in *Cambridge Introduction* (pp. 70-85).

*Wednesday, Oct 10:* Poems 64, 234, 292, 330, 346, 349, 477, 734, 774, 1742; Master Letters on CROPS.

*Friday, Oct 12:* Poems 189, 706, 1436; Letters with Susan on CROPS; Martha Nell Smith, “Susan and Emily Dickinson: their lives, in letters,” on CROPS.*

Response 2 due.

Paper 2 (research paper) assigned.

**Week 8: The Brain is Just the Weight of God – (Contemplating God)**


*Wednesday, Oct 17:* Poems 408, 411, 598, 546, 1266; Selection of Letters on CROPS.

*Friday, Oct 19:* Poems 615, 670, 1715; George Herbert poems on CROPS.

**Week 9: I Felt a Cleaving in My Mind - (Pain and War)**

*Monday, Oct 22:* Poems 39, 181, 312, 336, 515; Selection of Letters on CROPS.


Response 3 due.

**Week 10: I Felt a Funeral, in My Brain (Death)**


*Wednesday, Oct 31:* Poems 576, 871, 1037, 1314, 1470; Selection of Letters on CROPS.

*Friday, Nov 2:* In-class paper workshops, draft of paper 2 due.

**Theories and Methods**

**Week 11: All Men Say ’What’ To Me: (Dickinson the Woman I)**

*Monday, Nov 5:* Poems 185, 194. Selection of letters on CROPS; Suzanne Juhasz and Cristanne Miller, “Performances of Gender in Dickinson’s Poetry” on CROPS*

*Wednesday, Nov 7:* Poems 381, 392, 627.

*Friday, Nov 9:* Poems 445, 857, 1098.

Paper 2 due.

**Week 12: Life’s Little Duties Do – Precisely – (Dickinson the Woman II)**

*Monday, Nov 12:* No class for Veterans’ Day

*Wednesday, Nov 14:* Poems 185, 238, 318; “Sweeping with many-colored brooms: the influence of the domestic,” in *Cambridge Introduction* (pp. 51-7); Margaret Dickie, “Feminist Conceptions of Dickinson,” in *Handbook* (pp. 323-341).*

Creative project assigned.

**Week 13: A Word Dropped Careless on a Page (Textuality I)**  
*Monday, Nov 19:* Poem 225, 1268; “The Apocalypse” edited by Higginson on CROPS; Letters on CROPS “Editing the Poems and Letters,” in *Cambridge Introduction* (pp. 117-120); Selections from Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson’s Misery* on CROPS*

**Week 14: Grand Go the Years (Textuality II)**  
*Monday, Nov 26:* Selection of poems from the Variorum edition on CROPS; Jerome McGann, “Emily Dickinson’s Visible Language” on CROPS*.  
*Wednesday, Nov 30:* Poem 124; Selections from the Variorum edition on CROPS.  
*Friday, Nov 30:* Poems 278, 1788; “Emily Robert Weisbuch, “Prisming Dickinson, or Gathering Paradise by Letting Go,” in *Handbook* (pp. 197-223)*.  
Response 4 due.

**Dickinson’s Afterlives**  
**Week 15:**  
*Monday, Dec 3:* Jonnie Guerra, “Dickinson Adaptations in the Arts and Theater” in *Handbook* (pp. 385-407); Selections from *Belle of Amherst* on CROPS; Poems by John Berryman, Donald Hall on CROPS.  
*Wednesday, Dec 5:* Selections from Jane Langton, *Emily Dickinson is Dead* on CROPS; Poems by Andrea Carlisle, Billy Collins, Adrienne Rich on CROPS.  
*Friday, Dec 7:* Poems 314, 930, 1696; Poems by Jayne Relaford Brown, William Stafford, Linda Paston on CROPS.  
Creative project and responses due.

**Assignment Overview:**  
- **First paper (close reading):** You will write a 3-4 page paper closely analyzing one poem by Emily Dickinson.  
- **Second paper (research paper):** You will produce a 6-8 page paper addressing a historical, editorial, formal, or theoretical issue in a poem or selection of poems.  
- **Creative Project:** At the end of the semester, you will do a creative project about your response to Dickinson’s work, and write a two-page reflection on the process of this project. Projects may include: memorized recitations, visual art, musical compositions and performance, dramatizations, short stories, original poems in the style of or about Dickinson, baking, sewing, or gardening projects.  
- **Response Papers:** Throughout the course of the semester, you will write four 1.5-2 page response papers, two on poems and two on critical essays. You may turn in the responses in any order, just so there are two on poems and two on essays by the last due date. You may write about any poem that is not on the syllabus and not a poem you are writing about in a paper, and your response should include both a formal, close reading of the poem and a personal response, suggesting perhaps why you chose this poem to write about. For your essay responses, you may write about any essay listed above with an asterisk next to it. Responses to essays should begin with a short summary, and then be followed by your own response, that is, you might suggest what questions the author raises and agree or disagree with various points the author makes.
Quizzes and in-class writing: Class may begin with a reading quiz that includes a short freewrite to kickstart discussion of material. You will be unable to make up quizzes you missed throughout the semester. There will be other in-class writing activities that might also be collected in class for points.

Extra Credit: You may receive up to quiz bonus points if you attend a live theater event, a literary event, or an academic lecture and write a one-page response. Playhouse Merced on Main Street offers many plays each semester, and there are also numerous excellent campus events you might attend. You may attend and write about up to three performances and/or lectures.

COURSE POLICIES:
Special Needs: I welcome all students into this class. If you have any special needs, please speak to me and to Student Services as soon as possible so that we can outline the best ways to promote your success in this course.

Writing Help: Students who would like help with their writing are encouraged to visit the Student Advising and Learning Center (SALC) in Kolligian 172. Please check their website (learning.ucmerced.edu) for details on tutoring and other academic assistance.

Plagiarism Policy: As a simple guideline, if you submit your own work, you will avoid all serious types of plagiarism. Nevertheless, a responsible student should also consider the less obvious variants of plagiarism, especially when writing research papers that require citations. Consider these examples:

- Paraphrasing or summarizing a written source, including text from the Internet, without footnoting or otherwise referencing the source.
  
  When does another person’s idea supplant your own? Who “owns” an idea?

- Copying a written source, including text from the Internet, without using quotation marks or block indentation.
  
  How can a student paraphrase or summarize without using at least some language from the original source?

For serious instances of plagiarism, such as submitting an essay obtained from an online “paper mill,” students in this course will automatically fail the assignment, receive a final grade of F, and be recommended for dismissal from the university. There is no excuse for serious plagiarism.

I will also regard unattributed citations – verbatim copying of another’s person’s work without some indication of the source – as a serious form of plagiarism. In other words, don’t insert any text in a paper that is not your own without also noting the source. If you’re uncertain about how to use sources, ask me, or consult this website: http://www.library.ucla.edu/bruinsuccess/. It’s your responsibility to comply with principles of academic honesty; it’s my responsibility to see that every student receives a fair and accurate grade. Let’s work together in meeting these goals.

Technology: Laptops and tablets are not allowed in lecture. Cell phones must be turned off, and iPods and other recording devices are forbidden during class. The same applies to
discussion sections. Taping, filming, and photography in class (by camera, cell phone, or any other means) is prohibited.

When emailing any instructor, you are expected to write as you would in any professional correspondence, with courtesy, respect, and clarity. Please refer to the “How to email your professor” handout, posted on CROPS.

**Participation:** Arrive to class on time and do not leave early unless you have emailed the instructor in advance with regards to an urgent prior commitment. Try to use the restroom before coming to class. Please do not read other materials during class, or bring food into the classroom.

If you miss more than four classes without a valid medical excuse for all three absences, you will forfeit your entire participation grade for the course. If you miss class, you are responsible for speaking with a classmate about the class discussion to get caught up on the material. Missing class will also seriously affect your ability to do well on quizzes and papers. Two significantly late arrivals (or early departures) equal one absence, and texting during class also equals one absence.