Meets with CMLT-C 315

This is a practical course with emphasis on strategies of interpretation. Our primary concern will be the interplay between literal and figurative uses of language: when and how do poems mean what they say, and when and how do they mean something else? We shall be looking at the ways poems are shaped, the ways they begin and end, their reliance on cliché, their ambiguous status as both private and public statements, and their relations to their readers, to tradition, and to one another. We’ll probably use an anthology of poems in English, supplemented by brief readings in classical and biblical poetry, in European poetry (with opposite-face translations), and in such non-canonical forms as nursery rhymes, national anthems, hymns, charms and oracles, epigrams, and song lyrics. A few essays about poetry, often by well-known poets, will help direct our discussions. The course will conclude by surveying the career of a single poet, possibly Hardy or Bishop.

Written work: brief weekly exercises and two short critical essays.