

## **2306: Introduction to Poetry**

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### **Course Description**

Most of us have read poems, but few can say what, exactly, poetry is or what it ought to do. Poets themselves struggle with these tasks. Should it provide a kind of news about the world (William Carlos Williams), “start arguments” (Salman Rushdie), make one feel “as if the top of [her] head were taken off” (Emily Dickinson)? Or should it, as Archibald MacLeish famously said, “not mean/ But be.” In this course we will look to poets writing today and in our recent past to determine what makes a poem. We will work from the assumption that poetry is a practice, a living art, one that relies on (as much as it continually subverts) particular techniques and devices. We will pay particular attention to these moments of subversion (of form, subject, language) as poetry is, to add to our list of definitions, a kind of response—both to the world and to existing poetic traditions. In order to begin assembling our own definitions of poetry, we will practice close readings of and engage in thoughtful discussions about modern and contemporary poems, developing a critical vocabulary of poetics and a better understanding of what poems do, how and why.

**Requirements:** One presentation, two critical papers, occasional reading responses (some in-class) and a final exam.

**Required texts:** *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry* (Volumes 1 and 2) edited by Jahan Ramazani, Richard Ellmann and Robert O’Clair, and supplemental readings.