

Read descriptions of two courses Christian Wiman has taught at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music and lists of some of the required texts:

### **Accidental Theologies**

Much of the best and most durable theology is done accidentally, or incidentally. It occurs in letters, essays, and notebooks, and in poems and stories. It is often, if not unintentional, at least not foremost in the writer's consciousness. It is often inextricable from biographical details and formal dynamics. It is often the very thing that gets overlooked in critical appraisals of the work. This course is designed to discuss the theology of these apparently non-theological works. It is also designed to test our faith against the various pressures exerted by these works.

Required Texts:

Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*

Gillian Rose, *Love's Work*

Fanny Howe, *Indivisible*

Flannery O'Connor, *Habit of Being; A Prayer Journal*

Per Petterson, *Out Stealing Horses*

Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings*

Sara Grant, *Toward an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Non-Dualist Christian*

### **Poetry and Faith**

This course is designed to look at issues of faith through the lens of poetry. With some notable exceptions, we will concentrate on modern poetry—that is, poetry written between 1850 and 2013. Inevitably we will also look at poetry from the lens of faith, but a working assumption of the course is that a poem is, for a reader (it's more complicated for a writer), art first and faith second. You may want to challenge this assumption. The entire course may end up being a challenge to this assumption.

Required Texts:

*Poetry* magazine, February 2012

George Herbert, *Herbert: Poems* (Everyman's Library Pocket Books)

Anne Carson, *Glass, Irony and God*

Yehuda Amichai, *Selected Poems* (tr. Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell)

Prose Readings

Adam Zagajewski, "A Defense of Ardor"—closer to creative nonfiction than criticism, which is a fine direction in which to go!

Edward Hirsch, from *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry* (pgs. 66-80)—excellent example of defining a type of poetry (praise) as well as using the personal to inflect and enliven the critical. This whole book provides models of various approaches and tones you may want to emulate.

Ilya Kaminsky, “Of Strangeness that Wakes Us” (Poetry)—fragmentary, completely idiosyncratic, brings in all kinds of different readings, but it does cohere.

Danielle Chapman, “Sweet Bombs” (Poetry)—pretty straightforward but still: an excellent, critical look at a single poet. For the purposes of this class, you would need to focus more on the religious dimensions of the poet’s work.

Matt Fitzgerald, “Gloriously Undone” (Poetry)—general examination/comparison of poetry and preaching; this would need to become much more specific to work for your assignment.

Peter Campion, “Mad Tom” (Poetry)—identifies a type of poetry and traces it through several periods of literary history; also focuses on the spiritual significance of this type.

Christina Pugh, “On Non-Conformists and Strange Gravity” (Poetry)—very personal lens for what is mostly a critical piece.

Nate Klug, “The Upside of Terror” (Poetry)—two book reviews; you could do this, so long as the emphasis was in some way on religious themes, language, etc.

Kay Ryan, “Specks” (Poetry)—a personal anthology; not at all easy to do, but you could go this route: find seven poems not on syllabus and link them together with critical and personal prose as Ryan has done.

Marina Tsvetaeva, from “Art in the Light of Conscience” (“Art without Artifice,” pgs. 161-164)—similar to Peter Campion’s piece.

W. S. Di Piero, “Force” (from *City Dog*)—another powerful example of the personal and the critical being melded together to illuminate both.

Rowan Williams, “Lazarus: In Memory of T. S. Eliot”—a brilliant look at one poet through a specific theological lens.

Reading #1 (Poetry and Prayer)

Carol Ann Duffy: “Prayer”

Kay Ryan: “Blandeur”

Anna Kamienska: “A Prayer That Will Be Answered”

Ilya Kaminsky: “Author’s Prayer”

Peter Campion: “Just Now”

W. S. Di Piero: “Moving Things”

Gwendolyn Brooks: “God works in a mysterious way”

Rainer Rilke: "Lament" (tr. Stephen Mitchell)

Emily Dickinson: #495 ("The day undressed—Herself") and #525 ("My period had come for Prayer") and #377 ("At least—to pray—is left—is left")

Reading #2 (Poetry and Prayer)

Osip Mandelstam, "Sorrowdrawl," "Maybe Madness"

Sylvia Plath: "Years"

Paul Celan: "Psalm" and "Deathfugue" (tr. John Felstiner)

John Berryman: "Eleven Addresses to the Lord"

Adrienne Rich: "The Fact of a Doorframe"

R. S. Thomas: "Emerging" and "In Church"

Langston Hughes: "Litany"

Maurice Manning: "A Blasphemy"

Reading #3 (The Death of Faith)

Wallace Stevens: "Sunday Morning"

Philip Larkin: "Church Going," "Faith Healing," and "Aubade"

Reading #4 (The Death of Faith)

Louise Gluck: "Celestial Music"

Thom Gunn: "In Santa Maria del Popolo"

A.R. Ammons: "Gravelly Run" and "Easter Morning"

Clive James: "Natural Selection"

Thomas Hardy: "The Darkling Thrush"

Marie Ponsot: "Pathetic Fallacies Are Bad Science But"

Anne Stevenson: "The Spirit Is Too Blunt an Instrument"

Laura Kasischke: "My Beautiful Soul" and "O elegant giant"

Emily Dickinson: #1581 ("Those—dying then")

Reading #5 (Placeless Heavens)

Patrick Kavanagh, "Innocence"

Anne Carson, "The Life of Towns"

Seamus Heaney, "Clearances"

William Blake: "Eternity"

Ben Johnson: "It is not growing like a tree," "To Heaven"

Edwin Muir: "The Horses," "The Brothers"

James Wright: "A Blessing"

W. S. Graham: "To Alexander Graham"

Charles Causley: "Eden Rock"

Jorge Luis Borges: "Adam Cast Forth" tr. by Alastair Reid

August Kleinzahler: "The Hereafter" and "Land's End"

Kay Ryan: "A Certain Kind of Eden"

Philip Larkin: "The Explosion"

Janet Lewis: "Country Burial"

May Swenson: "Question"

Langston Hughes: "Luck"

Emily Dickinson: #1072 ("A loss of something ever felt I") and #1240 ("So much of Heaven has gone from Earth")

Reading #6 (Poetry and Pain)

C. Day Lewis: "Walking Away"

Wisława Szymborska: "Summary"

Job 3: 20-26 (KJV)

A.E. Housman: from "More Poems" (VI only—"I to my perils")

Anna Kamienska: "The Return of Job" ("Job didn't die..."), tr. Grazyna Drabik and David Curzon

Osip Mandelstam: "Black Candle"

Zbigniew Herbert: "Mr. Cogito Meditates on Suffering"

Eleanor Wilner: "High Noon at Los Alamos" and "Magnificat"

David Ferry: "The Guest Ellen at the Supper for Street People" and "The Proselyte"

Laura Kasischke: "Look"

Lucille Clifton: "Sorrows"

Don Paterson: "The Lie"

Robert Hayden: "These Winter Sundays"

Anna Akhmatova: "Requiem" (Kunitz/Hayward translation)

Anthony Hecht: "More Light, More Light"

Czeslaw Milosz: "Theodicy"

Richard Wilbur: "At Moorditch"

Emily Dickinson: #515 ("There is a pain—so utter") and #538 ("Must be a Woe")

#### Reading #7 (Poetry and Christ)

Osip Mandelstam: "Cathedral, Empty"

Robinson Jeffers: "Shine, Perishing Republic"

Gjertrud Schnackenberg: "Supernatural Love"

Geoffrey Hill, "Pavana Dolorosa" and "Lachrimae Amantis" (both from "Lachrimae")

Mary Karr: "Disgraceland," "Descending Theology: Christ Human," "Descending Theology: The Resurrection"

Gerard Manley Hopkins: "When Kingfishers Catch Fire, Dragonflies Draw Flame"

Janet Lewis: "Lullaby"

Richard Wilbur: "A Christmas Hymn"

Nate Klug: "Advent"

Rene Char: "The Absent One"

Frank Marshall Davis: "Christ Is a Dixie Nigger"

T. S. Eliot: "Journey of the Magi"

Stevie Smith: "The Airy Christ"

Lawrence Ferlinghetti: "Sometime During Eternity"

#### Reading #8 (Poetry and Christ)

Galway Kinnell: "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World"

Spencer Reece: "The Road to Emmaus"

Gwendolyn Brooks: "The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith"

Reading #9 (New Forms of Faith)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge: "The Aeolian Harp"

Paul Celan: ["With wine and being lost, with"], tr. Heather McHugh

Paul Celan: "Praise of Distance," tr. John Felstiner

Anna Kamienska: "A Prayer That Will Be Answered," tr. Clare Cavanagh

W. B. Yeats: "Crazy Jane Talks With the Bishop" and "Long-Legged Fly"

Craig Arnold: "Meditation on a Grapefruit"

Wallace Stevens: "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon"

James Wright: "The Blessing"

Lorine Niedecker: "Paeon to Place"

Adrienne Rich: "Toward the Solstice"

Agha Shahid Ali: "Tonight"

Nate Klug: "Dare"

George Oppen: "Psalm" and "The Poem" ("A poetry of the meaning of words...")

Reading #10 (New Forms of Faith)

C. Day Lewis: "Walking Away"

Osip Mandelstam: "Faith," "And I Was Alive"

Robert Frost: "Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same," "The Most of It,"  
"Directive" and "Beech" ("Where my imaginary line...")

W. S. Merwin: "For the Anniversary of My Death"

A. E. Stallings: "On Visiting a Borrowed Country House in Arcadia"

Charles Wright: "Bedtime Story"

Averill Curdy: "Sparrow Trapped in the Airport" and "The God of Inattention"

Brooklyn Copeland: "Prayer's End"

Robert Hass: "Meditation at Lagunitas"

Adam Zagajewski: "Mysticism for Beginners"

Jane Hirshfield: "Once, I," "Sentencings," "Judgment: An Assay"

Seamus Heaney: "Old Pewter" (from "Shelf Life")

Emily Dickinson: #1263 ("Tell all the truth but tell it slant"), #1347 ("Wonder—is not precisely knowing"), #466 ("I dwell in possibility") and #373 ("This World is not conclusion")

Reading #11 (New Forms of Faith)

Fanny Howe: "O'Clock" (all of it) and "Buddhists Like School and I Don't" (essay)

Heather McHugh: "Acts of God," "Fast," "Coming," "Earthmoving Malediction"

Richard Wilbur: "Thyme Flowering Among Rocks" and "Advice to a Prophet"

Norman MacCaig: "Summer Farm," "Fiat," "Goat," "Half-Built Boat in a Hayfield" and "Lighthouse"

Reading #12 (Poetry and Praise)

Patrick Kavanagh: "Canal Bank Walk"

Denise Levertov: "O Taste and See"

Louis MacNeice: "The Sunlight on the Garden"

Gwendolyn Brooks: "the rites for Cousin Vit"

Jeanne Murray Walker: "Little Blessing for my Floater"

Richard Wilbur: "Hamlen Brook," "On Having Misidentified a Wild Flower," "Praise in Summer," and "Love Calls Us to the Things of this World"

Reginald Dwayne Betts: "For you: anthophilous, lover of flowers"

Maria Hummel: "Station"

Rainer Rilke: Sonnets to Orpheus

James Dickey: "At Darien Bridge"

Christopher Smart: from "Jubilate Agno" ("For I will consider my cat . . .")

Stanley Kunitz: "Touch Me"

George Oppen: "Psalm"

Emily Warn: "Psalm"

Sarah Lindsay: "Small Moth"

Emily Dickinson: #1225 ("The mountains stood in haze"), #442 ("I see thee better—in the Dark") and #378 ("Better—than Music")

Reading #13 (Poetry and Praise)

Edward Thomas: "Out in the Dark"

Ivor Gurney: "Song" ("Only the wanderer...")

Marianne Moore: "What Are Years?"

Walt Whitman: "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" and "A Clear Midnight"

W. H. Auden: "In Praise of Limestone"

Derek Walcott: "The Season of Phantasmal Peace"

A.R. Ammons: "The City Limits"

Scott Cairns: "Draw Near"

Adam Zagajewski: "Praise the Mutilated World"

Anna Swir: "The Second Madrigal" (tr. Czeslaw Milosz and Leonard Nathan)

Frederick Godard Tuckerman: "Sonnet XXVIII" ("Not the round natural world...")

William Meredith: "Accidents of Birth"

Muriel Rukeyser: "Song" ("The world is full of loss . . .")

Marie Ponsot: "For My Brother: 'Other Systems Must Exist'"

Eleanor Ross Taylor: "Te Deum"

Lisa Russ Spaar: "Temple on My Knees"

Les Murray: "Nursing Home" and "Phone Canvass"