

**St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo**  
**Department of English**  
**ENGL 486: Forms of Belief in Contemporary American Poetry**  
**T/TH, 4:00-5:20, SJ2 2007, Winter 2019**

**Instructor: Chad Wriglesworth**  
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**Office Hours: T/TH, 11:30-12:30, or by appt.**

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**Course Overview and Objectives:**

This course assumes that poetry provides an indispensable expression of artistry and knowing that can attend to relationships between artistic form and belief in a postmodern age of uncertainty. The contemporary American poets selected for this course – Christian Wiman, Robert Hass, Jane Kenyon, Li-Young Lee, and Tracy K. Smith – will give us *plenty* to ponder when it comes to thinking about what it means to be human in a complex and evolving world. Our attention will be given to their poetry, but these writings will also pull us into conversations about ways of knowing through science, religion, history, ecology, sexuality, geography, music, and the visual arts. We will immerse ourselves in each poet's way of being and knowing for roughly two weeks at a time, situating and deepening that experience of perception with selections of expressivist criticism: essays, interviews, podcasts, readings, and public lectures by each poet. Course assignments will provide the freedom to pursue any path of inquiry that this material invites you to explore. By the end of this course, you may walk away finding that you actually *need* poetry in your life (assuming that you don't already have that realization).

**Required Texts:**

Robert Hass, *The Apple Trees at Olema: New and Selected Poems* (2011)  
Jane Kenyon, *The Collected Poems* (2007)  
Li-Young Lee, *Behind My Eyes* (2009)  
Tracy K. Smith, *Life on Mars* (2011)  
Christian Wiman, *Hammer is the Prayer: Selected Poems* (2016)  
Materials on Course Reserve (see below)

**Bibliography of Materials on Course Reserve:**

**Robert Hass**

- "Robert Hass," *24 Frames*. PBS Digital Studios (August 18, 2015). Online.
- Hass, Robert. "Introduction." *A Little Book on Form*. New York: Ecco, 2017, pp. 1-8.
- . "Listening and Making." *Twentieth Century Pleasures*. New York: Ecco, 1984, pp. 107-133.
- . "Lunch Poems: Robert Hass." University of California, Berkeley (April 24, 2008). Online.
- . "Prose Poem." *A Little Book on Form*. New York: Ecco, 2017, pp. 385-392.
- Michael Silverblatt and Robert Hass, "Robert Hass." *Bookworm* (February 21, 2008). Online.

### **Jane Kenyon**

- Kenyon, "Childhood When You Are In It." *A Hundred White Daffodils*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 1999, pp. 61-69.
- . "An Interview with David Bradt." *A Hundred White Daffodils*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 1999, pp. 172-184.
- . "The Moment of Peonies" and "Gabriel's Truth." *A Hundred White Daffodils*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 1999, pp. 46-47 and 70-72.
- Kenyon, Jane, Donald Hall and Bill Moyers. "A Life Together: Donald Hall and Jane Kenyon." *Moyers and Company* (December 17, 1993). Online.
- Kenyon, Jane and Henry Lyman. *Poems to a Listener* (Series 1984 and Series 1994). Online.

### **Li-Young Lee**

- Corrigan, Paul T. "A Conversation with Li-Young Lee." *Image* 86, pp. 55-66.
- Lee, Li-Young. "Descended from Dreamers: Poems by Li-Young Lee." PBS NewsHour Poetry Series (January 14, 2009). Online.
- . "Lunch Poems: Li-Young Lee." University of California, Berkeley (August 21, 2007). Online.
- . "Reading, 29 March 2000." Lannan Foundation. Online.
- Marshall, Tod. "Riding a Horse That's a Little Too Wild for You." *Breaking the Alabaster Jar: Conversations with Li-Young Lee*. Rochester, NY: BOA Press, 2006, pp. 125-142.

### **Tracy K. Smith**

- Schwartz, Claire. "Moving toward What I Don't Know": An Interview with Tracy K. Smith." *The Iowa Review* 46.2 (Fall 2016): 173-203.
- Smith, Tracy K. "Politics and Poetry," *The New York Times* (December 10, 2018).
- . "Survival in Two Worlds at Once: Federica Garcia Lorca and Duende." American Academy of Poets (2005). Online.
- . "Wipe that Smirk off Your Poem," *The New York Times* (March 16, 2015).
- Smith, Tracy K. and Krista Tippett, "love is a language / Few practices, but all, or near all speak." *On Being* (November 1, 2018). Online.
- Smith, Tracy K. and Paul Elie, "A Conversation with U.S. Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith." Georgetown University: Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs (October 16, 2017).

### **Christian Wiman**

- Wiman, Christian. "God's Truth is Life." *My Bright Abyss*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013, pp. 39-61.
- . "An Idea of Order." *Ambition and Survival*. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2007, pp. 94-107.
- . "Love Bade Me Welcome." *Ambition and Survival*. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2007, pp. 239-245.
- . "My Bright Abyss." *The American Scholar* (Winter 2009). Online.
- Wiman, Christian and Anthony Domestico. "Spirituality in a Time of Disruption: Anthony Domestico with Christian Wiman." *Commonweal* (April 29, 2018). Online.
- Wiman, Christian and Bill Moyers. "Poet Christian Wiman on Love, Faith, and Cancer." *Moyers and Company*. (February 23, 2012). Online.
- Wiman, Christian and Krista Tippett. "How Does One Remember God?" *On Being* (January 4, 2018). Online.

### **Marking Scheme and Due Dates:**

Close Readings (2 x 3 pp. each)	40% (20% each)	Due: See Schedule Below
Essay Proposal (2 pp.)	15%	Due: Tuesday, March 26 <sup>th</sup>
Final Essay (8-9 pp.)	35%	Due: Friday, April 12 <sup>th</sup>
Participation	10%	

There is no final exam in this course

### **General Instructions for Assignments:**

During the course of the term, you will complete **2 Close Readings** on work from two of the five poets we study this term. I have listed five due dates for close reading submissions and you will submit work on two dates based on the poets whose work you choose to write about. Your close readings will be attentive to form. You can focus on a particular poem, a key moment in a longer poem, or a stylistic pattern that you notice. Whatever the case, you will want to address *how* the poem is formed – visually, acoustically, and/or how it impacts the body physically/emotionally – as opposed to narrating what the poem is *about*. The close readings will also be integrative, in that you will draw from an idea or key moment in the secondary materials (e.g. essays, interviews, podcasts, public readings . . .). The **final essay** will be written on a question or observation that you develop over the course of the term. You might focus on work by a single poet, the way an idea or way of knowing is worked out comparatively across a couple poets, or something entirely different. If you are planning to write on a single poet's work, it must be a different poet than the two discussed in your close reading assignments. You will offer a description of your final essay in a 2 page **essay proposal**. This narrative proposal will describe your tentative thesis, your methodological approach to the material, and any key ideas for organization and/or specific moments of argument that are beginning to emerge. Your final essay must engage with at least **3 secondary sources**. Materials on Course Reserve (available electronically and physically located in the SJU library) will be helpful, but you are not limited to these sources.

When it comes to marking, I tend to avoid rubrics. The following description/scale provides an indication of my general standards when it comes to assessing written work:

“90-100” indicates that an assignment is worthy of truly exceptional recognition. The work shows originality and is presented with qualities of voice and argumentation that suggest the emergence of a future literary scholar. After encountering such work, I tend to remember it for months (perhaps years) to come. Work of this caliber is a rare species.

“80-89” indicates that an assignment reflects excellence in all areas. The work is not only thought provoking and structurally polished, but it is also completed with a high level of style and critical independence. The work presents obvious signs of fresh and independent thinking, a sense of skilled organization, and excellent control over mechanics and style.

“70-79” indicates that an assignment is average or above average. The work explores difficult questions in ways that are creative, critical, and thought provoking. The work is critically and organizationally sound, contributing to the interpretive concerns present in the course.

“65-69” indicates that an assignment meets the minimum requirements. The work is functional and all aspects of the assignment have been addressed, but the assignment may be hindered by a lack of critical argument, sophistication, or organizational clarity.

“55-64” indicates that an assignment is presented in a way that is highly generic, haphazard, or reckless. The work tends to be completed in haste and often suggests a lack of intellectual and organizational commitment. Major portions of the assignment need revision.

## SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

### Week One

T- 1/8 Introduction to the course: syllabus, readings, assignments  
Three Key Sources: Poetry Foundation, Lannan Foundation, and Academy of American Poets  
Christian Wiman, “Revenant” and “Preface” to *My Bright Abyss* (Handouts)

### Christian Wiman: Language and the Burn of Being

TH- 1/10 Wiman, *Hammer is the Prayer* (from *Every Riven Thing*, 79-97)  
---. “Love Bade Me Welcome” (Course Reserve)  
Wiman and Bill Moyers, “Poet Christian Wiman on Love, Faith, and Cancer” (Online, Course Reserve)

### Week Two

T- 1/15 Wiman, *Hammer is the Prayer* (from *Every Riven Thing*, 98-128)  
---. “My Bright Abyss” (Online, Course Reserve)  
---. “God’s Truth is Life” (Course Reserve)

TH- 1/17 Wiman, *Hammer is the Prayer* (from *Once in the West*, 147-169)  
---. “An Idea of Order” (Course Reserve)  
Wiman and Krista Tippett, “How Does One Remember God?” (Online, Course Reserve)

### Week Three

T- 1/22 Wiman, *Hammer is the Prayer* (from *Once in the West*, 173-199)  
Wiman and Anthony Domestico, “Spirituality in a Time of Disruption: Anthony Domestico with Christian Wiman” (Online, Course Reserve)  
**Due: Close Reading Option (Wiman)**

**Robert Hass:  
Ecologies of Emotion and Matter**

- TH- 1/24 Hass, *The Apple Trees at Olema* (selected poems TBD from *Field Guide* and *Praise*, 43-130)  
---. "Introduction," *A Little Book on Form* (Course Reserve)  
"Robert Hass," *24 Frames* (Online, Course Reserve)

**Week Four**

- T- 1/29 Hass, *The Apple Trees at Olema* (selected poems TBD from *Human Wishes*, 131-202)  
---. "Prose Poem" (Course Reserve)

- TH- 1/31 Hass, *The Apple Trees at Olema* (from *Time and Materials*, 265-285)  
---. "Lunch Poems: Robert Hass" (Online, Course Reserve)  
---. Some Passages from *A Little Book on Form* (Handout)

**Week Five**

- T- 2/5 Hass, *The Apple Trees at Olema* (from *Time and Materials*, 286-328)  
---. "Listening and Making" (Course Reserve)

- TH- 2/7 Hass, *The Apple Trees at Olema* (from *Time and Materials*, 329-348)  
Robert Hass and Michael Silverblatt, *Bookworm* podcast about *Time and Materials* (Online, Course Reserve)  
**Due: Close Reading Option (Hass)**

**Jane Kenyon:  
Attending to the Ordinary**

**Week Six**

- T- 2/12 Kenyon, *The Collected Poems* (from *The Boat of Quiet Hours*, 61-99)  
---. "Childhood When You Are In It" (Course Reserve)  
---. Jane Kenyon and Henry Lyman, *Poems to a Listener*, Series 1984 (Online, Course Reserve)

- TH- 2/14 Kenyon, *The Collected Poems* (from *The Boat of Quiet Hours*, 101-139)  
---. "A Life Together: Donald Hall and Jane Kenyon" (Online, Course Reserve)

**Reading Break (2/18 – 2/22)**

## Week Seven

- T- 2/26 Kenyon, *The Collected Poems* (from *Let Evening Come*, 143-214)  
---. Jane Kenyon and Henry Lyman, *Poems to a Listener*, Series 1994  
[recorded in 1990] (Online, Course Reserve)
- TH- 2/28 Kenyon, *The Collected Poems* (from *Constance*, 217-267)  
---. Selected essays written for *The Concord Monitor*: “The Moment of  
Peonies” and “Gabriel’s Truth” (Course Reserve)

## Week Eight

- T- 3/5 Kenyon, *The Collected Poems* (Last Poems, 271-305)  
---. “An Interview with David Bradt” (Course Reserve)  
Donald Hall, “Weeds and Peonies” (Handout)  
Galway Kinnell, “How Could She Not” (Handout)  
**Due: Close Reading Option(Kenyon)**

### Li-Young Lee: Encounters with the Visible and Invisible

- TH- 3/7 Lee, “The Gift,” “Persimmons,” “From Blossoms,” “Falling: The Code,” “Early  
in the Morning,” “This Room and Everything in It” (from *Rose and The  
City in Which I Love You*, at Poetry Foundation website), and “The  
Waiting” (Handout)  
Lee, Lannan Foundation Reading, 29 March 2000 (Online, Course Reserve)

## Week Nine

- T- 3/12 Lee, *Behind My Eyes* (Part I, 15-42)  
PBS News Hour, “Descended from Dreamers: Poems by Li-Young Lee”  
(Online, Course Reserve)
- TH- 3/14 Lee, *Behind My Eyes* (Part II, 45-61)  
Marshall, “Riding a Horse that’s a Little Too Wild for You” (Course Reserve)

## Week Ten

- T- 3/19 Lee, *Behind My Eyes* (Part II cont. and III, 62-91)  
Corrigan, “A Conversation with Li-Young Lee” (Course Reserve)
- TH- 3/21 Lee, *Behind My Eyes* (Part III cont., 92-106)  
**Due: Close Reading Option (Lee)**

## Week Eleven

### Tracy K. Smith: Poetics for an Uncertain Universe

- T- 3/26 Smith, *Life on Mars* (Part I, 1-24)  
---. "Survival in Two Worlds at Once: Federica Garcia Lorca and Duende"  
(Online, Course Reserve)  
---. "Wipe that Smirk off Your Poem" (Online, Course Reserve)  
**Due: Essay Proposal**

- TH- 3/28 Smith, *Life on Mars* (Part II, 27-34)  
Claire Schwartz, "Moving toward What I Don't Know': An Interview with  
Tracy K. Smith" (Online, Course Reserve)

## Week Twelve

- T- 2/2 Smith, *Life on Mars* (Part III, 35-53)  
Smith and Krista Tippett, "love is a language / Few practice, but all, or near  
all speak" (Online, Course Reserve)

- TH- 4/4 Smith, *Life on Mars* (Part IV, 56-75)  
---. "Politics and Poetry," *The New York Times* (Online, Course Reserve)  
Smith, Tracy K. and Paul Elie, "A Conversation with U.S. Poet Laureate Tracy  
K. Smith" (Online, Course Reserve)  
**Due: Close Reading Option (Smith)**

### **Due: Final Essay**

**By 4PM, Friday, April 12<sup>th</sup>. Submit as hard copy to my drop box  
(second floor of SJ1)**

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## ADDITIONAL DETAILS AND PROCEDURES

### LATE ASSIGNMENTS AND PARTICIPATION

- Late Assignments:  
All assignments are to be handed in (hardcopy) at the start of class on the due date.  
**Late assignments will be penalized 2% per day late, including weekends.**  
Late assignments must be submitted to me electronically (so I know when they were  
completed) and then submitted in hard copy to my drop box (2nd floor of SJ1).
- Participation:  
It should go without saying that I expect that you will attend class on a regular basis.  
I also expect that you will have read the material for each day in thoughtful and

critical ways. In addition, I also expect that you will have something to say about the readings each day – meaning that you should attempt to discuss on a regular basis. In terms of participation marking, you should expect the following: If you do not attend class on a regular basis, your participation mark will be assessed at 0-50; if you attend class but do not contribute to course discussion on a regular basis, expect a mark between 60-75; if you attend class regularly and participate in meaningful ways, you should expect a participation mark ranging from 75-100.

### **EMAIL COMMUNICATION AND OFFICE HOURS**

Students using email to contact me should include their first and last names, as well as the course in which they are enrolled in the email subject line. Feel free to contact me about the course through email, but please keep the following in mind:

- I am unable to provide in-depth email responses about assignments, readings, and proofreading. If you wish to discuss these matters, please visit me during my office hours.
- I am unable to provide in-depth email responses about materials and lectures that you may have missed due to an absence. Again, if you want to talk about these matters, please stop by during my office hours.
- I am unable to answer last-minute emails about assignments, formatting, or editing. For questions about MLA formatting, you may want to consult Purdue University's Online Writing Lab. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

### **CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT AND ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

I am committed to establishing a face-to-face classroom environment that is conversational and relational. For this reason, please be respectful to others and their ideas, and please, do not text or be distracted with your phone during class.

### **UW POLICY REGARDING ILLNESS AND MISSED TESTS**

The University of Waterloo Examination Regulations ([www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/exams/ExamRegs.pdf](http://www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/exams/ExamRegs.pdf)) states that:

- A medical certificate presented in support of an official petition for relief from normal academic requirements must provide all of the information requested on the "University of Waterloo Verification of Illness" form or it will not be accepted. This form can be obtained from Health Services or at [www.healthservices.uwaterloo.ca/Health\\_Services/verification.html](http://www.healthservices.uwaterloo.ca/Health_Services/verification.html).
- If a student has a test/examination deferred due to acceptable medical evidence, they normally will write the test/examination at a mutually convenient time, to be determined by the course instructor.
- The University acknowledges that, due to the pluralistic nature of the University community, some students may on religious grounds require alternative times to write tests and examinations.
- Elective arrangements (such as travel plans) are not considered acceptable grounds for granting an alternative examination time.



## THE WRITING CENTRE

The Writing Centre works across all faculties to help students clarify their ideas, develop their voices, and communicate in the style appropriate to their disciplines. Writing Centre staff offer one-on-one support in planning assignments, using and documenting research, organizing papers and reports, designing presentations and e-portfolios, and revising for clarity and coherence.

You can make multiple appointments throughout the term, or drop in at the Library for quick questions or feedback. To book a 50-minute appointment and to see drop-in hours, visit [www.uwaterloo.ca/writing-centre](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/writing-centre). Group appointments for team-based projects, presentations, and papers are also available. Communication specialists guide you to see your work as readers would. They can teach you revising skills and strategies, but will not change or correct your work for you. Please bring hard copies of your assignment instructions and any notes or drafts to your appointment.

## OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

**Academic Integrity:** To maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo and its Affiliated and Federated Institutions of Waterloo (AFIW) are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. See the [UWaterloo Academic Integrity](#) webpage [for more information](#).

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under the [St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Discipline](#). For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to [University of Waterloo Policy 71 - Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

**Grievance:** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. [Read the St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances](#).

**Appeals:** A decision made or penalty imposed under the St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or the St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to the [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Appeals](#).

**Note for Students with Disabilities:** The [AccessAbility Services](#) office, located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (1401), collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.