

Poetic Faith: An Imagined Seminar

Christopher N. Phillips

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The purpose of this seminar is twofold: to guide me through an unwieldy, idiosyncratic bibliography in a compressed amount of time and to focus my reading and thinking on large topics I'm very interested in exploring during my sabbatical. Reading lists are subject to editing, and blogging will supplement note-taking as a way of processing and recording the learning I do over the coming weeks. By the end of the next three weeks, I will have plenty of food for thought while I continue my Frederick Burkhardt Fellowship at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, MA. I'm nearing the end(!) of my process in writing *The Hymnal Before the Notes* and starting the process for its followup, *Hymnic Reading*, and this seminar will feed my work on both of those projects.

Week 1: Books and Gifts

Central questions: How have books and their readers interacted in history, particularly at the intersections between media, devotional practices, and ideas about the book itself? And how might these ideas and practices interact with some of the most important scholarship from anthropology and philosophy about the meanings of gifts?

Readings

Piper, *Dreaming in Books*
Westphall, *Books and Religious Devotion*
Chartier, *The Order of Books*
Hyde, *The Gift*
Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift*
Godbout, *The World of the Gift*
Derrida, *The Gift of Death*

Week 2: Reading

Central questions: What are some of the salient contours of the “postcritical” turn in literary studies? How does this new movement offer new ways to engage classic reader-response criticism from the 1980s and 1990s?

Readings

Hollywood, “Reading as Self-Annihilation”
Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*
Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally*
Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetics of Reception*

Jackson, *Romantic Readers*
Culler, *On Deconstruction*
Wood, *Without Mastery*
Felski, *The Limits of Critique*

Week 3: Devotion and Poetry

Central questions: How does devotional reading play out in hymnody, in poetry, in Scripture? How does the devotional as a mode of reading change in a secular age? Is there something devotional about poetry itself? And how do acts of witness, even of resistance, participate in the devotional?

Readings

Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*
Hildebrandt, *Works of John Wesley, Vol. 7: Hymns*
Ricoeur, *Essays in Biblical Interpretation*
Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America*
Gray, *The Hermeneutics of Hymnody*
Agamben, *The End of the Poem*
Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry*
Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*