

**Theo 6332 Thought of Wendell Berry
North Park Theological Seminary
Spring Term, 2014**

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Course Description

Wendell Berry is one of our greatest cultural, political, and spiritual critics. His multi-faceted work has addressed the challenges of community, agriculture, politics, education, family, marriage, work, and worship in a culture given to acquisitiveness, waste, and ignorance. His critique of the church and Christians as frequent contributors to our problems must be heard. Throughout his work he manifests a love/hate relationship with the church and the Christian tradition that is finally hopeful and constructive. During our weeks together we will explore the major themes of Berry's work. These themes constantly intersect and inform one another. We will read Berry's essays, fiction, and poetry. We will engage in rich conversations about the corporate and personal challenges of his work.

Required Texts:

Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba, Counterpoint, 2003 (ACP)

Wendell Berry, *Citizenship Papers*, Counterpoint, 2003 (CP)

Wendell Berry, *That Distant Land: The Collected Stories*, Counterpoint, 2004. (TDL)

Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems*, Counterpoint, 2012 (NCP)

Additional Texts on Reserve

Wendell Berry, *The Way of Ignorance and Other Essays*, Shoemaker and Hoard, 2005 (TWI)

Wendell Berry, *A Place in Time*, Counterpoint, 2012 (APT)

Wendell Berry, *This Day: Collected and New Sabbath Poems*, Counterpoint, 2013 (TD)

Wendell Berry, *Recollected Essays: 1965-1980*, North Point Press, 1981 (RE)

bell hooks, *Belonging*, Routledge, 2009

Requirements

1. Read all assigned texts for each week and be prepared to engage in conversation regarding them. You will be asked to report on your reading at the end of the term. (20%)
2. Be prepared to lead two separate discussions of a topic and texts for a particular class during the semester. This will involve preparing a summary of the readings for the day and a list of questions for discussion to be sent to the instructor and your fellow students on the Monday before the Tuesday class. The student's initial presentation of findings and questions should be no more than 10 minutes to allow plenty of time for discussion. (20%)

3. Read one additional book of essays, novel, or collection of poetry during the semester and be prepared to report on it during class near the end of the semester. Demonstrate to the class how this book connects with the various topics of concern to Berry. (20%).

The additional books should be chosen from the following list:

Novels

- a. *Jayber Crow*
- b. *Hannah Coulter*
- c. *A Place on Earth*
- d. *The Memory of Old Jack*
- e. *Nathan Coulter*
- f. *Remembering*

Essays

- a. *The Unsettling of America*
- b. *The Hidden Wound*
- c. *What are People For?*
- d. *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community*
- e. *The Gift of Good Land*
- f. *Life is a Miracle*
- g. *Home Economics*

Poetry

A Timbered Choir

4. Write a final paper exploring one Berry theme as it connects with the concerns of ministry within the local church. This paper should be 10 pages, double-spaced, 12 point type, and include endnotes. (40%).

Weekly Assignments

This is a course that meets one day a week for three hours. Normally the course will begin with the instructor making a few comments to set the context of the discussion and then asking questions to begin the conversation. If previous classes are any indication, the proactive nature of Berry's work will provide a good deal of grist for the mills of conversation! As noted above, each student will lead two discussions during the term. Some of the essays, stories and poems are quite short. Others are much longer. I trust the readings will begin to interact with one another as you continue to read.

January 14 Introduction to Wendell Berry

Students should read the materials before class this week and every week!

Essays: ACP, "A Native Hill"; "The Unsettling of America"; CP, "The Agrarian Standard," "Still Standing"

Stories: TDL: "Watch With Me"

Poetry: NCP: "The Dream," "To Think of the Life of a Man," "Window Poems," "The Man Born to Farming," "The Satisfactions of the Mad Farmer"

First Hour: An Introduction to the Agrarian World of Wendell Berry

Second Hour: A discussion of "Watch With Me" and the connection of the agrarian world and the world of the church.

Third Hour: An introduction to Berry's poetry and discussion of the agrarian elements of the poems read for this class.

January 21 Individual in Community: The Membership

Essays: ACP "Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community," "People, Land, and Community"

Stories: "Pray Without Ceasing," "It Wasn't Me," "Fidelity"

Poetry: "The Handing Down," "The Contrariness of the Mad Farmer," "Meditation on the Spring Rain," "At A Country Funeral," "Elegy," "The Mad Farmer, Flying the Flag of the Rough Branch, Secedes from the Union"

First Hour: An introduction to and discussion of Berry's notion of a coherent community.

Second Hour: **Student Led Discussion #1:** How do the stories we read illustrate Berry's understanding of community. What do they tell us about the nature of the church as a community?

Third Hour: **Student Led Discussion #2:** How do Berry's poems illustrate the inherent tensions and challenges of his notion of community?

February 4 The Two Economies

Essays: ACP: "Economy and Pleasure," "Two Economies," "The Whole Horse," "The Idea of a Local Economy," "A Big Bad Idea"; CP: "The Total Economy"

Stories: TDL: "The Discovery of Kentucky," APT: "Sold"

Poetry: NCP: "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front," "The Mad Farmer Manifesto: The First Amendment," "The Reassurer," "In Art Rowanberry's Barn," "Some Further Words"; TD: "VII (Massachusetts Avenue at Rock Creek Park, Sunday Morning), pg. 94.

Hours One and Two: Introduction to Berry's understanding of the industrial and agricultural economies. **Student Led Discussion #3** will focus on the essays and stories.

Hour Three: **Student Led Discussion #4:** What does this poetry add to Berry's critique of the industrial economy?

February 11 Women and Men and Marriage

Essays: ACP: "The Body and the Earth," "Men and Women in Search of Common Ground," "Feminism, the Body and the Machine"

Stories: TDL: "A Consent," "Nearly to the Fair," "The Solemn Boy," "A Jonquil for Mary Penn," "The Wild Birds"

Poetry: NCP: "Marriage," "The Country of Marriage," "Envoy," "A Marriage, An Elegy," "The Mad Farmer's Love Song," "An Anniversary," "Ripening," "The Way of Pain," "To Tanya at Christmas," "A Marriage Song," "Duality," "Burley Coulter's Song"

Hours One and Two: Introduction to Berry's understanding of marriage and

Student Led Discussion #5 focused on the essays and the stories.

Hour Three: **Student Led Discussion #6** on the poetry of marriage, manhood and womanhood.

February 18 Land and Health

Essays: ACP: "Solving for Pattern," "The Use of Energy," "The Pleasures of Eating";

CP: "A Long Job, To Late to Quit"

Stories: TDL "The Boundary"

Poetry: NCP: "The Wild," "The Broken Ground," "The Meadow," "The Peace of Wild Things," "Grace," "The Stones," "Enriching the Earth," "Air and Fire," "The Mad Farmer Revolution," "The Mad Farmer in the City"

Hours One and Two: Introduction to and exploration of Berry's understand of the health of the land. **Student Led Discussion #7** focusing on the essays.

Hour Three: **Student Led Discussion #8** of the contribution of the poetry. It should be noted that the Sabbath Poems found in *This Day* deal extensively with this topic.

February 25 Politics and Government

Essays: CP "A Citizen's Response," "Thoughts in the Presence of Fear," "The Failure of War"; TWI: "Secrecy vs. Rights"

Stories: TDL "Making it Home"

Poetry: NCP "Against the War in Vietnam," "Do Not Be Ashamed," "To a Siberian Woodsman," "We Who Prayed and Wept," "Let Us Pledge," "Questionnaire"

Hours One and Two: Introduction of Berry's Political Thought. **Student Led Discussion #9** focused on essays and stories.

Hour Three: **Student Led Discussion #10** on Berry's political poetry. This can and should include some poetry we read earlier! Especially important in this regard is the whole series of "Mad Farmer" poems. Do they have a common theme?

March 4 Food

Essays: CP: "Twelve Paragraphs on Biotechnology," "Stupidity in Concentration," "Tuscany"; TWI: "Renewing Husbandry," "Local Knowledge in an Age of Information"

Stories: TDL "Don't Send a Boy to Do a Man's Work," "The Inheritors"

Poetry: NCP "Prayers and Songs of the Mad Farmer," "For a Hog Killing," "Prayer After Eating," "Desolation," "A Speech to the Garden Club of America"

Hours One and Two: Introduction to Berry's discussion of food. **Student Led Discussion #11** focusing on the essays and stories.

Hour Three: **Student Led Discussion #12** on Berry's poems regarding food.

March 18 Christianity and the Church

Essays: ACP "The Gift of Good Land," Christianity and the Survival of Creation"; TWI: "The Burden of the Gospels"

Stories: TDL "Pray Without Ceasing"; APT "A Desirable Woman"

Poetry: NCP "Canticle," "The Birth (Near Port William)," "At a Country Funeral," "To the Holy Spirit," "The Way of Pain," "Voices Late at Night," "While Attending the Annual Convocation of Cause Theorists and Bigbangists at the Local Provincial Research University, the Mad Farmer Intercedes from the Back Row"

Hours One through Three

For this class we will interweave the discussions of all three sections. I will ask one student to be responsible for the essays and raising questions for discussion. **This will be student led discussion #13.** The two stories we are reading are among Berry's most powerful. The second story, "A Desirable Woman," speaks to marriage, sexuality, fidelity and community. But is also a wonderful description of the challenges of ministry. **The stories will be introduced by student led discussion #14.**

March 25 Ignorance, Humanity, and Learning

Essays: CP "Is Life a Miracle"; TWI: "The Way of Ignorance," RE "Discipline and Hope"

Stories: APT "Andy Catlett, Early Education"

Poetry: NCP "The Handing Down," "Song in a Year of Catastrophe," "History," "Where," "Horses," "Words"

Hours One and Two: The instructor will lead a discussion on Berry's understanding of learning and ignorance.

Hour Three: Two students will take one half hour each to share the books they read, and how these texts contribute to our understanding of Berry's work.

April 1 Good Work

Essays: CP "Going to Work," "The Prejudice Against Country People" TWI: "Compromise, Hell!" "Charlie Fisher." Also, review the previously read essay "The Body and the Earth."

Stories: TDL "Where Did They Go?" "That Distant Land," "A Friend of Mine"

Poetry: NCP "The Clearing," "Work Song," "Horses," "Elegy," "Rising," "The River Bridged and Forgot"

Hours One and Two: The instructor will lead a discussion of Berry's notions of what constitutes "good work."

Hour Three: Two students will take one half hour each to share the books they read and how these texts contribute to our understanding of Berry's work.

April 8 Industry of Health and Death

Essays: ACP "Health and Membership"; TWI: "Quantity vs. Form" Review the previously read "The Body and the Earth."

Stories: TDL "Fidelity," APT "Misery," "An Empty Jacket." "The Requirement"
Poetry: NCP "Three Elegiac Poems," "At a Country Funeral," "Testament," "Requiem,"
"Elegy," "Epitaph," "Seventy Years"

Hours One and Two: The instructor will lead the class in a discussion of Berry's views of the health care industry.

Hour Three: Two students will take one half hour each to share the books they read and how these texts contribute to our understanding of Berry's work.

April 15 Environment and Agriculture

Essays: ACP "Conservation and Local Economy"; CP "In Distrust of Movements," "Watersheds and Commonwealth," "Conservationists and Agrarian"; TWI: "The Purpose of a Coherent Community"

Stories: APT: "A Place in Time"

Poetry: "The Slip," "The Gift of Gravity," "In a Country Once Forested," "Give it Time"

Hours One and Two: the instructor will lead a discussion of the conflicts and common ground between agrarians and conservationists, between advocates for farmers and advocates for landscapes.

Hour Three: Two students will take one half hour each to share the books they read and how these texts contribute to our understanding of Berry's work.

April 22 Racism

Essays: ACP "Racism and the Economy"; RE "Nick and Aunt Georgie"; bell hooks, *Belonging*, "Returning to the Wound"

Poetry: NCP "My Great-Grandfather's Slaves," "The Mad Farmer in the City," "Anglo-Saxon Protestant Heterosexual Men"

This class will be taken up with a discussion of Berry's view of race. The instructor and the student who read *The Hidden Wound* will lead this discussion. African American writer bell hooks has said that *The Hidden Wound* is the best book ever written on race by a white man.

April 29 How should we live?

In addition to our reading and discussion the instructor will invite some folks who have been working to realize Berry's values wherever they live.

Essays: ACP "Think Little," CP "Let the Farm Judge"; TWI: "Rugged Individualism," "We Have Begun"

Stories: TDL "Thicker than Liquor," "The Lost Bet"; APT "At Home"

Poetry: NCP: "The Guest," "The Design of the House: Ideal and Hard Time," "The Morning News," "Air and Fire," "A Standing Ground," "Awake at Night," "From the Crest," "Rising," "How to Be a Poet"

May 5 Final Lessons for the Church

As we conclude our class we will look back on the semester and consider the larger lessons for the church.

1. What does Berry's notion of community or "membership" say to the church?
2. What does Berry's understanding of nurture and care say to the church?
3. What does Berry's interpretation of politics say to the church?
4. How does Berry's notion of men, women, and marriage help the church?
5. How should Berry's understanding of the industrial economy reflect on the church's mission?
6. How does Berry's reading of the Christian story and the Bible help the church?