



Wendell Berry's Virtues of Renewal: Teaching the Forms that Sustain Life and Community with Dr. Jeffrey Bilbro

Lecture 7: Fidelity

Outline:

In this lesson, Dr. Jeffrey Bilbro draws on Wendell Berry's works to explore themes of fidelity and creative renewal.

Fidelity to People and Place

- **Margaret's Fidelity**
 - In Berry's fiction, characters like Margaret demonstrate fidelity by remaining committed to their community and family, even amidst loss.
 - Margaret cares for her daughter after the death of her father-in-law and later supports her husband, Mat, when their son goes missing in WWII.
- **Isolation and Art**
 - Industrial culture often glorifies isolation as a means of personal growth and creativity, with the Romantic ideal of the isolated artist.
 - Berry challenges this view, suggesting that true creativity and renewal come from committed relationships and community ties.

Creativity Through Fidelity and Revision

- **Renewal Through Familiarity**
 - Berry values creativity that emerges from revisiting and renewing familiar places and relationships, rather than breaking away to create something entirely new.



- His novels, particularly *A Place on Earth*, portray this idea of creative renewal through fidelity.
- **Re-visioning the Narrative**
 - Berry's writing process, particularly his revisions of earlier works, exemplifies fidelity. He revisits his stories and characters, deepening their meaning through each revision.
 - In *A Place on Earth*, his revisions reduce context and narrative explanation, placing more responsibility on readers to interpret and engage with the story.

Limits as a Source of Creativity

- **Embracing Constraints**
 - Berry argues that formal limits, whether in marriage, poetry, or place, inspire creativity and renewal.
 - True creativity comes from working within these constraints, as opposed to the "creative destruction" found in industrial culture.
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