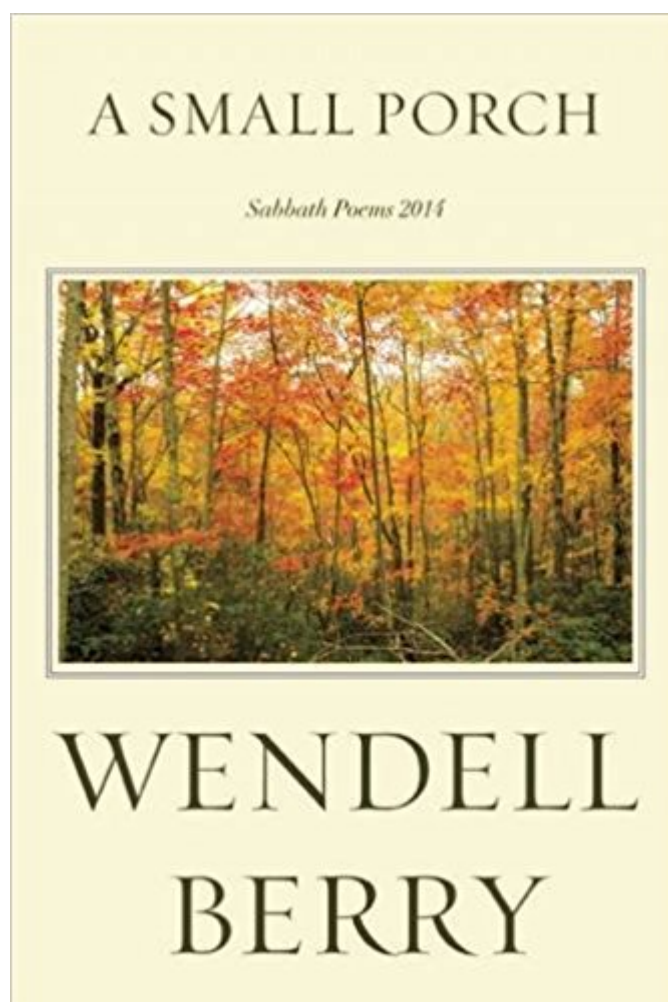


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A Small Porch: Sabbath Poems 2014



Synopsis

More than thirty-five years ago, when the weather allowed, Wendell Berry began spending his sabbaths outdoors, walking and wandering around familiar territory, seeking a deep intimacy only time could provide. These walks arranged themselves into poems and each year since he has completed a sequence dated by the year of its composition. Last year we collected the lot into a collection, *This Day, the Sabbath Poems 1979-2013*. This new sequence for the following year is one of the richest yet. This group provides a virtual syllabus for all of Mr. Berry's cultural and agricultural work in concentrated form. Many of these poems are drawn from the view from a small porch in the woods, a place of stillness and reflection, a vantage point of the one/life of the forest composed of uncountable lives in countless years each life coherent itself within the coherence, the great composure, of all. • A new collection of Wendell Berry poems is always an occasion of joyful celebration and this one is especially so.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Early on summer Sunday mornings, I often sit on my back porch with *This Day*, a book of Wendell Berry's Sabbath poems written between 1979 and 2013. While all the machines are silent, I read and savor two or three poems reading slowly and rereading. For instance, with birdsong, "the day ends/and is unending where/the summer tanager, warbler, and vireo/sing as they move among/illuminated leaves," and "heaven seizes its moment" (1998, VI). For years, Berry has been taking walks into his woods on Sunday mornings. From time to time, a poem emerges, polished on the front porch of his writing cabin at the edge of the trees. *A Small Porch* (counterpointpress.com)

gives us twenty-five new Sabbath poems from 2014 and 2015, plus an essay, "The Presence of Nature in the Natural World: A Long Conversation." The hardback just appeared in my mailbox, and I don't want to hurry through it---at my usual rate, this many poems could take a couple of months of slow reading; so we'll only explore the book a little, a spoonful or two to share the flavor with you. First the essay, "The Presence of Nature." In surveying more than 50 years of reading, Berry reports that he has been in conversation with Scripture, which imposes "on humans the obligation to take good care of a world both given to them...and to which they have been given," and with several poets whose work was formed by Scripture, especially Chaucer, Spencer, Langland, Milton, Pope, and who seem to have remembered" Alan of Lille's *Plaint of Nature* (c.1170). So there are several pages about Alan's *Plaint* followed by comments on the poets, giving some clues to how Berry reads his fields and woods. And now, a poem from the *Porch* (2014, V.

I enjoyed the poems more than the essay, but that is more due to my ineptness in reading Chaucer than any fault of Wendell Berry's. This is a serious book with Wendell calling out for us to work hard on saving the world as we know it. It is a wonderful book. I feel blessed to have read it. #9 "To care for what we know requires care for what we don't, the world's lives dark in the soil, dark in the dark..... And our competence to do no permanent wrong to the land is limited by the land's competence to suffer our ignorance, our errors, and---provided the scale is right---to recover, to be made whole." III "Nightmare of the age invades my days and darkens them, but sometimes my sleep is lighted by a better dream. On night, as if in justice perhaps or mercy, or by some kindness of this world, I dreamed of my father. Long ago he would play the piano, lively songs of World War II, rocking on the bench, sometimes singing, as he played. And then a lasting sorrow came, and no more piano music after that. In my dream my father was again playing the piano. He was beautiful. He was smiling. He was playing an elated improvisation on a tune neither of us had known in the old time. The notes shone singly as they gathered brightly together. "Daddy," I said, "you could play anywhere!" He smiled at his thought's music, and played on." In the essay, "The main characteristic of Nature's farming can therefore be summed up in a few words.

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