

The
World-Ending
Fire
The Essential
Wendell
Berry

Selected and introduced
by Paul Kingsnorth



The World-Ending Fire: The Essential Wendell Berry

Wendell Berry, Paul Kingsnorth (Editor)

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Wendell Berry is 'something of an anachronism'. He began his life as the old times and the last of the old-time people were dying out, and continues to this day in the old ways: a team of work horses and a pencil are his preferred working tools. The writings gathered in *The World-Ending Fire* are the unique product of a life spent farming the fields of rural Kentucky with mules and horses, and of the rich, intimate knowledge of the land cultivated by this work. These are essays written in defiance of the false call to progress, and in defence of the local landscapes that provide our cultural heritage, our history, our home.

In a time when our relationship to the natural world is ruled by the violence and greed of unbridled consumerism, Wendell Berry speaks out to defend the land we live on. With grace and conviction, he shows that we simply cannot afford to succumb to the mass-produced madness that drives our global economy. The natural world will not withstand it.

Yet he also shares with us a vision of consolation and of hope. We may be locked in an uneven struggle, but we can and must begin to treat our land, our neighbours, and ourselves with respect and care. We must, as Berry urges, abandon arrogance and stand in awe.

The World-Ending Fire: The Essential Wendell Berry Details

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From Reader Review The World-Ending Fire: The Essential Wendell Berry for online ebook

Graham says

Beautifully written essays with many original thoughts. Mr Berry communicates his love of the land and explains why it matters so well that even I, a life-long city dweller, could appreciate. Berry is never dull and always honest. There is an integrity in his way of living and way of writing that won my respect. Look at the date of each essay before you read it. In many of them Mr Berry is way ahead of his time. In some of them, the passage of time has shown his predictions to be unbalanced but even so, there is much more that Berry gets right ahead of the crowd.

Tree says

Berry is a modern Thoreauvian who inspires me to want to live a little more simply as the right thing to do.

Mary Nee says

Well-crafted essays with a passion for the environment.

Pastel says

I won an ARC of this thick book of essays in a Goodreads giveaway (and I'm writing this review suffering from bad jet lag, so there's no guarantee I'm going to make sense).

This is a book of well-crafted essays (the author is clearly educated, well read, and has in his life moved between the urban and rural American worlds), and if you are a young (probably white and male) hipster with a passion for the environment, many of the essays will appeal to you the way Walden Pond might appeal.

The essays cover decades and as such there is a time-machine feel to some of the ideas--while there are a lot of universal and/or long standing philosophies in here, some things feel reactionary to a certain moment in the zeitgeist.

As an another reviewer pointed out, this isn't easy (or fun) to read cover to cover, rather you should take your time with a singular essay and give yourself time to ponder it (picturing landscapes, moods formed by environment, whether you agree with Barry's views or not, etc).

I'm not giving it any stars because I'm not sure how many stars to give it. Total honesty, I spend some amount time on the internet being exasperated by the way people argue, and reading about Barry having these same sorts of experiences pre-internet (via letters to the editor in magazines, for example) is already to me totally unappealing. However, he crafts solid paragraphs of clean sentences, so if you want to know how

some Americans think and feel, read the synopsis or his biography on wikipedia, and then try this book on if you have the time.

Lucy says

Disappointing. Over the years I've heard or read the praises of Wendell Berry, so I was looking forward to finally reading some of his work. This book is a collection of essays ranging from 1968 to 2006, presented in no particular order that I could discern. He was a writer and a farmer; he called himself an agrarian. I suppose he was also a bit of an activist. He wanted to save the Earth - or rather, he wanted to see the Earth saved (other than a lot of words, I'm not sure what action he took). In the 60's and 70's, maybe even the 80's, some of his proposals might have seemed a bit radical - get closer to the land, grow your own food, eat local, get to know the people who raise the meat and vegetables that you eat. Common ideas today. I do agree with his ideas - to an extent. I'm not sure it's feasible for everyone to give up their desk or factory jobs, buy a few acres and a team or work horses, and successfully grow everything they eat. Who would provide the electricity that he still uses, or build the cars that he admits he can't get by without? Even he admits that he couldn't have gotten by without the income from his writing. Is every parent really equipped to home school their children? But in essay after essay, he goes on and on and on about how everyone needs to stop what they're doing and live their lives the way he does. His tone isn't that of a dialogue, it's a diatribe. He just made me angrier and angrier. I'm done with Wendell Berry.

Karen Hagerman says

So happy to have read these essays from a fellow nature and farm loving Luddite. A bit ponderous in parts but so worth it. Wendell Berry is my new hero.

Paul Swanson says

Wendell Berry's essays are somewhat depressing always condemning our industries and calling for small communities and family economies to save us from ourselves.

Matthew Trevithick says

4.5 Stars - some truly beautiful writing in here.

David says

have long admired him and expected to like this more than I did. Certainly has its moments, and he's nothing if not impressively consistent, but I'm not sure essay collection spanning decades is the optimal format for consumption of his worldview. I should probably have bought it and sampled one every month or so.

Read straight thru, a suburban non-farmer like myself can end up feeling hectored by a somewhat humorless person obsessed with how food is produced, the downside of modernity [computers etc.], how much one is suspected of looking down on the south, and so on.

Robert Culliton says

A must read. Most independent thinker I've read in years.

If you're looking to get a sample, I really enjoyed the individual pieces "Faustian Economics" and "The Rise".

Contrary to how it sounds, The Rise is a fun story about a river raft trip during a flood and is not some dark allusion to upheaval in the wake of global economic collapse :)

Tim Mort says

Thought provoking view on agriculture, its relationship with society, and its future.

Gill says

'The World-Ending Fire' by Wendell Berry (selected and introduced by Paul Kingsnorth)

3.5 stars/ 7 out of 10

I have read some previous articles by Wendell Berry, and also have come across several references to him, so I was interested in reading this book.

There are more than thirty articles in 'The World-Ending Fire', written by Berry over a period of more than five decades. In my opinion this is more of a book to dip into, than to read from cover to cover. The articles are a mixed bunch, the majority of them linking to Berry, and to his life in Kentucky as a farmer, a writer, and a thinker.

The most interesting article for me was 'Writer and Region', especially the section about Huckleberry Finn. Several of the other articles were also very interesting eg 'Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer', where I also enjoyed reading the responses to the points that Berry had made in this article.

Kingsnorth writes in the introduction about Berry's 'questing thoughtfulness'. I think this phrase is a good summing-up of both the man himself, and the approach articulated in the articles in this volume.

Thank you to Penguin Books (UK) and to NetGalley for an ARC.

Maureen says

I really appreciated most of this. The essays on home agriculture, canoeing, Mark Twain, and more all touched me deeply. Quantity vs. Form, a piece about quality of life at the end of a human lifetime, doesn't leave me easily either. I would say to skip the essay on computers, though.

Richard Subber says

If you're willing to admit that the domain of the intellect is a world you're willing to live in from time to time, then you're waiting to discover the prose of Wendell Berry.

“No expert knows everything about every place, not even everything about any place.” (p. 98)

Berry is a novelist, a farmer, and a poet. He cares deeply about preserving our natural environment. He has been described as “a cultural critic.” He quietly conjures the world-ending fire.

You may say “Anybody can be a cultural critic, and everybody is a cultural critic.” Perhaps. Berry is several cuts above your typical wannabe cultural critic. He has insight, he is committed to intensely defending all the stuff that qualifies as “the right thing,” and he makes reading the King’s English a great joy (perhaps not less because he writes with a pen and a paper tablet, disdaining the computer).

The World-Ending Fire is full of literate ruminations on such topics as “Horse-Drawn Tools and the Doctrine of Labor Saving,” “Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer,” “Nature as Measure,” and “Feminism, the Body, and the Machine.”

Wendell Berry says: “...but a man with a machine and inadequate culture...is a pestilence. He shakes more than he can hold.” (p. 101)

Wendell Berry encourages us to be shakers and holders.

p.s. I'll mention that the verities and the points of view that Berry has reduced to writing remind me of the scribbling of H. L. Mencken. Berry does not have Mencken's savage wit, and Mencken probably never had to wipe cow manure off his boots. However, these men encourage their readers to think hard about stuff that matters.

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Mattyk says

This was first read f a Wendell Barry book. Fantastic! I really need to read more by this guy. He brings a different view to the debate. He's got plenty here to upset the conservative and progressive viewpoint. He just seems to take Wendell's view. I especially liked the essay Why I will never own a computer. I wonder if he still does not have one. And his responses to readers of his essay was also very nicely done. I still have a few more to read but this was a wonderful book and some essays are very quick reads.

