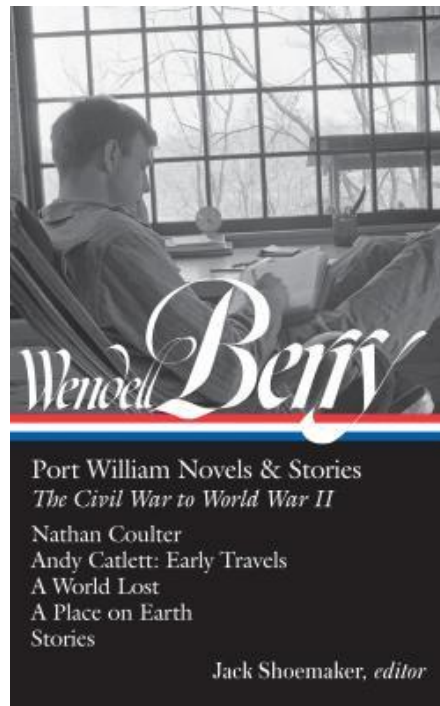




Port William Novels & Stories (The Civil War to World War II): Nathan Coulter / Andy Catlett: Early Travels / A World Lost / A Place on Earth / Stories

Wendell Berry , Jack Shoemaker (Editor)

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For more than fifty years, in eight novels and forty-two short stories, Wendell Berry (b. 1934) has created an indelible portrait of rural America through the lens of Port William, Kentucky, one of the most fully imagined places in American literature. The river town and its environs are home to generations of Coulters, Catletts, Feltners, and other families collectively known as the Membership, women and men whose stories evoke the earthbound pleasures and spiritual richness of what Berry has called the three-dimensional life, a time before industrial agriculture, pervasive technology, and unrestrained consumerism began to unravel the deep bonds of community that once sustained small-town America.

Taken together, these novels and stories form a masterwork of American prose: straightforward, spare, and lyrical. Now, in an edition prepared in consultation with the author, *Library of America* presents the complete Port William novels and stories for the first time in the order of their narrative chronology, revealing as never before the intricate dovetails and beguiling elegance of Berry's larger construction. As one of his narrators puts it: "their stories are all added finally into one story . . . bound together in a many-stranded braid beyond the power of any awl to pick apart."

This first volume, which spans from the Civil War to World War II, gathers the novels *Nathan Coulter* (1960, revised 1985), *A Place on Earth* (1967, revised 1983), *A World Lost* (1996), and *Andy Catlett: Early Travels* (2006), along with twenty-three short stories, among them such favorites as "Watch With Me," "Thicker than Liquor," and "A Desirable Woman." It also features a newly researched chronology of Berry's life and career, a map of Port William and a Membership family tree, and helpful notes.

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From Reader Review Port William Novels & Stories (The Civil War to World War II): Nathan Coulter / Andy Catlett: Early Travels / A World Lost / A Place on Earth / Stories for online ebook

James Murphy says

I can say I mostly loved it Who can say why we like the things we read? We understand what kind of book will resonate with us, and that interest is the spark. We also think we can recognize the qualities of literary fiction that we prefer and that make something we're enthusiastic about rise above other books. For a time I've been nostalgic about my family's humble roots in rural Alabama. And for a time I've been reading and loving Wendell Berry's poetry, much of which is about the Kentucky landscape where he was born and where he still lives. Learning of Berry's stories and earlier novels collected in this handsome Library of America edition, I knew that reading them would connect with my own past. I told myself I was revisiting the pastoral, which is how I seemed to remember it. But, of course, neither Berry's world nor mine were quite that idyllic. Berry does, however, get it right. What he writes in his declarative, magically-spun sentences is authentically country.

I read only the 1st 8 stories and the novel Nathan Coulter, leaving 15 more stories and 3 novels for later. In the Port William saga that's Berry's fictional oeuvre, what I read runs from 1864 to 1941. These are stories of farmers working the land, living in the small community of Port William and the surrounding countryside hard by the Ohio River. This is small town America and family-owned farms before mechanization became common. Mules still pull plows, cows are milked by hand, and Nathan Coulter's family loads hay onto a wagon with pitchforks. Some of the stories are humorous. I felt like I've known the characters--I've certainly known people as plain yet as colorful and sagacious as these. The novel is told from the pov of Nathan between the ages of 5 and 14. A Bildungsroman, I suppose, a story of how he learns from those around him, particularly the men of his family.

In the final 2 chapters are Berry's larger themes. The worldview that the young Nathan learns might be considered existential. His father and grandfather already know what Nathan comes to realize, that a man spending his life working the land can, in the end, only do his damndest. That's all a man can do. The stewardship of the land is passed from generation to generation, son replacing the father over and over, each working the dirt for a lifetime until one day it's shoveled in your face.

I'm gonna make myself wait before reading more, but I'm looking forward to learning what happens in Port William and to these good people in what remains of the book.

Reading again in April I'll read the next 11 stories and the short novel Andy Catlett: Early Travels.

I did that, reading the next 11 stories and the novel--novella, really, or long story--Andy Catlett. I still find it very good and realize that one reason is certainly that I'm immersed in industrial nostalgia because it's a rural world I remember visiting from time to time as a kid, just as Andy does. The novel recalls a few days between Christmas and the New Year of 1944 when he's 9 years old and his gone to his grandparents' homes to visit, his early travels. The voice in the novel is looking back from 40 years on, presumably 1984 when Andy is 49.

It's a kind of still point. It's paradisaal as the older Andy Catlett remembers it. This remembered paradise combine with the remembered people to form an example from which all men, no matter the sophistication of their learning, may benefit. This is much the same perspective of the 1st novel in the volume, Nathan Coulter. It's going to be interesting to see if, in the later novels--there are 2 more, and longer--Berry allows

the serpent into his garden. Though World War II is angrily boiling offstage and several characters we've been introduced to are involved, the world Andy sees is without conflict. What he remembers is a world of honesty and deep attachment. As Andy is on his way back home Berry has him reflect, "And now, as often before, I am reminded how grateful I am to have been there, in that time, with these I have remembered. I was there with them; they remain here with me. For in that little while Port William sank into me, becoming one with the matter and light, and the darkness of my mind, never again to be far from my thoughts, no matter where I went or what I did."

Berry is writing small town Kentucky as he remembers it and which he probably misses. He clearly admires the people he writes about and their lives on the land at that time. Berry has Andy express that admiration by reminding us that those who lived by the work of their hands, close to their animals and land and plants and the weather were living in the true world. Our new world, he says, is mostly theater. The world which came after this is a muddle of scenery and props which stretch belief. Nature seems distant.

Gayle says

I bought this book because of the Wendell Berry novels I'd read in the past, and was pleasantly surprised (although why I was surprised I have no idea) at the humour in his short stories and thoroughly enjoyed them. Berry's way of weaving stories together and retelling the same stories from different points of view is fascinating; I highly recommend this book.

Terje Fokstuen says

A generous collection of Port William short stories and novels dealing with period up to the end of the world war two in 1945. Berry's themes are the land, the people who live on it and work it, and their kinship. It's a splendid world, and this particular connection gives you a deeper glimpse into the world of Port William by letting you follow the town and its inhabitants over the years. Highly recommended.

Linda says

Pure gold! Berry is a national treasure. His characters are absolutely wonderful and his writing is exquisite and a joy to read.
