



Wild Child and Other Stories

T.C. Boyle

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A superb new collection from "a writer who can take you anywhere" (*The New York Times*)

In the title story of this rich new collection, T.C. Boyle has created so vivid and original a retelling of the story of Victor, the feral boy who was captured running naked through the forests of Napoleonic France, that it becomes not just new but definitive: yes, this is how it must have been. The tale is by turns magical and moving, a powerful investigation of what it means to be human.

There is perhaps no one better than T.C. Boyle at engaging, shocking, and ultimately gratifying his readers while at the same time testing his characters' emotional and physical endurance. The fourteen stories gathered here display both Boyle's astonishing range and his imaginative muscle. Nature is the dominant player in many of these stories, whether in the form of the catastrophic mudslide that allows a cynic to reclaim his own humanity ("La Conchita") or the wind-driven fires that howl through a high California canyon ("Ash Monday"). Other tales range from the drama of a man who spins Homeric lies in order to stop going to work, to that of a young woman who must babysit for a \$250,000 cloned Afghan and the sad comedy of a child born to Mexican street vendors who is unable to feel pain.

Brilliant, incisive, and always entertaining, Boyle's short stories showcase the mischievous humor and socially conscious sensibility that have made him one of the most acclaimed writers of our time.

Wild Child and Other Stories Details

Date : Published (first published December 22nd 2009)

ISBN :

Author : T.C. Boyle

Format : Kindle Edition 323 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fiction, Contemporary

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From Reader Review Wild Child and Other Stories for online ebook

Beth says

This collection of stories deftly tackles the main literary conflicts in such a brilliant way (man v man, society, self, and nature). Boyle's style is always on the mark and oftentimes deadpan funny. Though I wasn't happy with how some of the individual stories ended, the final story, Wild Child, nearly took my breath away in how it surprisingly pulled the entire collection together. If I were still teaching HS English, I would want to assign this, though there are some sex scenes that might not make that possible. As a HS student, I felt like I was forced to read too much stuff that was just plain awful, and if I didn't already love reading, school would have killed it for me.

Michael DelMuro says

Wild Child is not TC Boyle's best collection of short fiction. Far too often, the stories seemed unsatisfying. I'm not talking about the quality--the writing is superb--rather the feeling of completeness that stories in some of his other collections possessed.

That said, Wild Child possesses some gems, specifically "Balto," a story about a child whose father asks her to lie for him in court. "La Conchita," which is about an organ delivery man forced to play hero during a horrific mudslide is excellent as well. And Boyle's storytelling prowess is strongest during the really long short story, or really short novella, "Wild Child."

Orsodimondo says

LA BESTIA MISTERIOSA

È storia nota quella che in questa edizione italiana viene spacciata come romanzo breve: si tratta della vera vicenda di Victor, il ragazzo selvaggio dell'Aveyron (regione di grandi formaggi, non altrettanto di vini - ma al vino le foreste dell'Aveyron forniscono il legno per le botti).

Durante la Rivoluzione Francese, il bambino cresce nei boschi dopo esservi stato abbandonato da sua madre all'età di cinque anni (ultimo di tredici figli - la donna gli taglia la gola, ma non ha forza e coraggio per completare l'opera, e lo abbandona sanguinante in mezzo ai cespugli).

Catturato da alcuni cacciatori qualche anno dopo, viene 'educato' per riportarlo a far parte del mondo civile.

Ma il tentativo fallisce: forse il ragazzo è ritardato, forse la civiltà non è (ancora?) così civile.

Come romanzo breve viene da chiedersi come mai così breve.

E viene da chiedersi come mai ripercorrere una storia già affrontata più volte dalla letteratura e, soprattutto, magnificamente, dal cinema nel 1970 con l'omonimo film di Truffaut: ci vuole coraggio a confrontarsi con quel film, la competizione è automatica, la battaglia è persa (in partenza, ma anche in arrivo).

Credo che l'edizione originale americana abbia più senso: in un volume con quattordici racconti, quello più lungo che presta il titolo all'intera raccolta, un racconto lungo in mezzo ad altri più brevi, sessanta pagine su trecento, anche se può destare perplessità, ha altro senso e ragione.

Il caso di Victor sembra da manuale per poter osservare da vicino il rapporto tra la sfera della natura e quella

della cultura, dopo che Rousseau ha introdotto il mito del "buon selvaggio" e sostenuto che l'essere umano è più buono e felice se viene preservato dagli effetti corruttori della civiltà.

Ma perché Victor non progredisce, non risponde come fanno i sordomuti dell'istituto che lo ospita? Si tratta di un idiota cronico, di un minorato incapace di evoluzione, oppure di un essere sfortunato che la lunga solitudine e la mancanza di stimoli adeguati ha bloccato nel suo sviluppo normale?

L'uomo nasceva come una tabula rasa, non ancora formato e senza idee, educabile e perfettibile, e la società vi tracciava sopra il suo segno? Oppure, come supponeva Rousseau, la società era un elemento corruttore, e non il fondamento di tutto ciò che è buono e giusto?

Ma più di questo, più che lo scontro natura-cultura, a me pare soprattutto una storia di abbandono. Senza ritorno.

J says

ugh. i just don't like short story collections. i keep trying, but no. it's like me and radiohead. i will admit, however, that i started reading this under false assumptions (that this was a. a classic and b. semi-autobiographical of the author's childhood), but i pretty quickly amended my expectations. still, i just didn't like it. i can't even explain myself. i won't think less of anyone who does like this book, but i really disliked it.

Cdrueallen says

The stories in WILD CHILD confirmed my suspicion that T.C. Boyle is the most interesting fiction writer working in the U.S. today. I won't say North America, as Canada has Atwood and Munro, but Boyle is clearly in their all-star league. He wasn't always one of my favorites. His earlier stories were too white and male for me. But he steadily widened his point of view and improved his always impressive technical abilities until he was able to produce what I consider one of the finest novels of the past twenty years, DROP CITY. In both DROP CITY and WILD CHILD, Boyle demonstrates the ability to ground stories with the resonance of myth in the fabric of convincing reality. There are other American writers who excel at the creation of myth, notably Toni Morrison, but, lacking the grounding in reality that Boyle provides, her dream worlds fail to move me as there isn't enough at stake. My prejudice in favor of fiction that carries with it the convincing bite of a reality external to human minds and culture narrows down the field of writers whose latest can get me to pull out my credit card for a hardback purchase to a handful: Smiley, Lethem, Franzen, Boyle.

Smiley used to be the writer whose latest work I most looked forward to, and GREENLANDERS remains one of my favorite novels, but though she still writes with great skill and knows how to tell a good story, Smiley lost me when she retreated into the narrow world of the richest one percent, full of thoroughbred horses and architecturally significant houses in the hills. Another one of my prejudices: I can't stand fiction that fawns on the wealthy.

Lethem wrote wonderfully about the underclass in FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE and though his next, CHRONIC CITY, was a fascinating novel about a member of the cultural underclass, it seems that success

might soon have the same effect on Lethem that it did on Smiley. So far I've liked Lethem's subjects and prose enough to pardon his flirtation with post-modernism, which I don't like for the same reasons I don't like magic realism or too much mythologizing, but I much prefer Boyle's less affected style, and if Lethem's next is a post-modern novel about New York's cultural elite, he'll drop off my list of must-read writers.

I admire Franzen as much for his courage in writing about the ecological collapse of our planet, a topic that bores and annoys many readers, as I do for his wit, but with FREEDOM Franzen too is exhibiting symptoms of the Smiley syndrome, dulling of his satirical edge and increasing his tendency to have everything end up in a warm financially secure place.

You won't find many warm safe fuzzy places in the stories in WILD CHILD. There are bars and restaurants where men, reaching for the pleasures of the moment, slip, fall, and fail. There's a monumental mudslide where one of these failed, always potentially violent men grabs at a shovel and an illusory chance of redemption. There's the house in a middle class suburb where a lonely man falls in love with a rat and ends up dead in a sea of rodents. There's the gated mansion where a black unemployed college girl takes a job dog sitting a quarter million dollar puppy. There's the early 19th century French institution where the wild child of the title is introduced to Enlightenment civilization. There's a trailer park where a woman decides that a feral cat's worth sacrificing for a dubious male lover while across the country her married sister falls in love with an escaped tiger. There's a run-down recording studio in wintery New York where a second-string backup singer finds a moment of heaven. And my favorite, a terrorist camp in the jungles of Venezuela where the middle-aged mother of a Mexican baseball millionaire survives by doing what she always has, which is the daily work of recreating civilization. All of these settings are places for Boyle to explore the conflicts between men and women, rich and poor, man and animal, and to think about the nature of Nature, in stories that are never didactic and always amusing. Financial success hasn't caused Boyle to forget what the world looks like to most of its impoverished inhabitants, and age has only increased his ability to see the world through the eyes of women. In fact it's Boyle's ability to create female characters whose lives aren't subsumed by men that makes him stand out from his talented male (and most of his female) contemporaries.

Boyle can write as beautiful a sentence as any language-obsessed writer, like the one that begins his title story "Wild Child":

"During the first hard rain of autumn, when the leaves lay like currency at the feet of the trees and the branches shone black against a diminished sky, a party of hunters from the village of Lacaune, in the Languedoc region of France, returning cold and damp and without anything tangible to show for their efforts, spotted a human figure in the gloom ahead."

What's great about this sentence, and all of the sentences in this collection, is that they never call so much attention to themselves that they get in the way of the story. Rather they carry you forward into a life you couldn't have imagined on your own while depositing just a trace of extra loveliness on the way, like using the right amount of good scent instead of a whole cheap bottle of flowery verbiage.

In WILD CHILD, Boyle displays all the literary qualities I like: the courage to write about serious social problems; convincing characters of many classes, genders, and nationalities; a sly satirical but not too obvious wit; and smooth beautiful unobtrusive writing. I'm looking forward to many more years of reading his very fine work.

Denise says

Wild Child is T.C. Boyle's latest collection of short stories. The majority of these stories are about the chaos that nature injects in everyday, orderly life and how that chaos changes people. Mudslides, escaped tigers,

thousands of rats, and feral boys all rampage across these pages challenging people and changing them. There is a tinge of magical realism in some of the stories, plenty of tragedy, and even a sprinkling of hope.

What struck me most about these stories was how often I wanted more of the story. The characters themselves were often not very likable, but the situations and their actions were so interesting that I was left curious about the outcome. Did the two pothead singers make amazing music together and become famous? Did the liver make it to the recipient in time? Short stories are not normally my favorite genre, but when they are well written they show you a slice of a life, just a moment or two, that marks something significant and reveals the essence of that life. TC Boyle accomplishes that with this creative, wild collection.

I listened to the audio version of this book, read by the author himself. He does a fine job of the reading especially emphasizing the irony and dry humor in the stories. I passed many hours happily immersed in these stories and was reminded to pick up more by T.C. Boyle.

Alisa says

Few writers can achieve the consistency in voice and poignance that T.C. Boyle does. Though his rhythms and pacing can begin to repeat when reading an entire collection, I never tire of them. I will always go back for more.

This collection in particular is a meaty, juicy thing, filled with visceral, sometimes horrifying things ("Thirteen Hundred Rats", which I read to freak myself out; and "Wild Child", the novella about a feral boy in medieval France); people in complicated situations whose behavior complicates them tenfold ("The Lie", "Balto" & "Admiral"); and a handful of people who find themselves heroic or disappointed, sometimes both ("La Conchita" & "Question 62"). There are no duds here.

(And the author himself reads the audiobook. Nobody can read his own rhythmic language better.)

The stories in order as I loved them:

"The Lie" (ch 7)
"Thirteen Hundred Rats" (ch 11)
"Ash Monday" (ch 10)
"Balto" (ch 1)
"La Conchita" (ch 2)
"Bulletproof" (ch 5)
"Admiral" (ch 9)
"Question 62" (ch 3)
"Wild Child" (ch 14)
"The Unlucky Mother of Aquiles Maldonado" (ch 8)
"Sin Dolor" (ch 4)
"Anacapa" (ch 12)
"Hands On" (ch 6)
"Three Quarters of the Way to Hell" (ch 13)

Dominick says

Another masterful collection of short stories by one of the form's best current practitioners. This collections

hits many of Boyle's thematic sweet spots, including the troubling relationship between humans and nature, explored in the very strong (and historically-based) title story, about a feral child and the frustrating and ultimately failed efforts to reclaim him into the human world. Most of the rest of the stories are comparably strong. One or two, perhaps, don't fully work, but most do. The result is a heady mix of cynicism, satire, and unsentimental human drama, punctuated by rare--and therefore all the more effective--moments in which characters seem to transcend the petty and mean concerns that usually govern life in Boyle stories. Powerful stuff, and highly recommended to fans of literary short fiction that manages to avoid the preciousness and self-consciousness of much literary fiction.

Rebecca Foster says

Each story in *Wild Child* is assured, in-your-face, and perfectly executed; Boyle is a master of the genre. The stories are so deep and insightful that I could imagine any one of them being extended into a full-length, absorbing novel. His themes seem peculiarly contemporary and American – very much of their place and time, but not as if that is a limitation. With the exception of two stories, this is California incarnate: immigrants, people of Asian and Latino descent, sushi, coastal and island scenery, the music and movie biz. Boyle alternates expertly between third- and first-person narration, and his tales are rich with foreboding and tragic potential. Many begin with a simple hint of menace: a hidden gun, a small lie that becomes overblown, a few pet rats that horrifyingly, nauseatingly multiply to 1300.

I am convinced Boyle could write an engrossing story on any subject, but especially interesting for me is his preoccupation with cutting-edge science, including conservation: there is an imagined new 'Scopes monkey' trial, debating the right of teachers to teach on evolution in schools ("Bulletproof"), the cloning of beloved pets ("Admiral"), organ transplantation ("La Conchita"), the possibility of a person never feeling pain ("Sin Dolor"), gratuitous cosmetic surgery ("Hands On"), and house cats threatening songbird populations ("Question 62" – similar in theme to Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom*). There are also foretastes of the subject matter of *When the Killing's Done*, such as the plague of rats and a boat trip out towards Anacapa island.

"Wild Child," the final novella of 60-some pages, is the only historical story, but unlike, say, the final story in Wells Towers's collection, *Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned*, it does not feel strained or out of place here. Boyle retells the story of Victor, the 'Wild Boy of Aveyron,' and specifically his training with Doctor Itard. Feral children are fascinating test subjects for questions of domestication versus wildness, instincts versus learned behavior, and so on. A few years ago I read an intriguing study of the feral child phenomenon (*Savage Girls and Wild Boys*, by Michael Newton), and it's no surprise to me that authors find the idea inspiring. As Boyle asks of Victor's experience:

What must it have been like to be abandoned, to have your throat cut, to be captured and imprisoned and without defense except to sink your teeth into the slowest and weakest of your tormentors? To throw off your clothes, indifferent to the cold? To cower and hide and hunger?

Wild children occupy a rare gray area between humans and animals and thus provide a kind of metaphor for Boyle's concerns: what the relationship is – and/or should be – between mankind and nature, and how human interaction can transcend mere beastly reactions.

(This review originally appeared at Bookkaholic.)

William Koon says

The late Cratis Williams who taught me contemporary literature announced in class that any man who used an initial instead of a first name was obviously impotent. He then began *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. My own prejudices stretch to include people who hyphenate their names, people with weird names, and writers who are also creative writing teachers at a college. With all of that out of the way, here's a collection by T.C. Boyle. Yes, every time you turn around there's a *New Yorker* with a new story in it by him, and LOOK! There's another new novel, and it's six hundred pages. But face it. The man can write. And he writes quality fiction. This collection shows that in spades. He lets his mind wander over the past and in some very different locales, always at home with his multi-faceted characters and his clever plots. What's more, each is a short story. Not some truncated or incomplete novel. Brave T.C. Bold T.C. Keep it up, --- please.

Lars Guthrie says

In one of those weird confluences of coincidences, I was traveling west on the Pacific Coast Highway with my mother and father and sister towards Santa Barbara (home of T.C. Boyle). At La Conchita, traffic suddenly jammed up, and we just squeezed past a serious accident, a small pickup loaded with white sacks of something soft, now scattered across the highway, its cab flattened nearly below the load bed, an SUV turned toward oncoming cars, horn blaring, onlookers rushing to help, already talking to 911 on their cells. Scary.

My mother noted that accidents always happen here, cars crossing north into the little hamlet against a lethal flow of eighty-mile-per-hour traffic, but not only that—also the disastrous mudslide that bottled up the highway and killed ten in 2005, the source for T.C. Boyle's 'La Conchita,' which we had all read in 'The New Yorker.'

Later, on a Saturday night, while making a run for groceries, I ended up happily sitting in the parking lot listening to 'Selected Shorts' because Isiah Sheffer announced he would read the short story most requested by listeners, 'La Conchita.'

A few days later I was browsing in the library, looking for something quick. There displayed in the new fiction section was Boyle's latest collection of short stories, 'Wild Child,' which, of course, includes 'La Conchita.'

Sometimes things really do call to you—like a short story.

Boyle is a master of the form, and 'La Conchita' a shining example of that mastery. The thirteen other pieces in 'Wild Child,' while not all at the same level, are testimony to the care and craft Boyle puts into his work.

Just when I think Boyle has overused the sort of voice the narrator of 'La Conchita' has—a savvy but somehow clueless guy, blunt and staccato, quintessentially American prole—he surprises me by stretching a bit.

In 'Three Quarters of the Way to Hell,' he goes back to Manhattan in an alternate 60s, and a studio session where some washed-up crooners are enlisted to try and cash in on a cheesy novelty Christmas record—'Little Suzy Snowflake.' In a matter of several pages, Boyle turns his tale of woebegone has-beens resentfully punching the clock into a paean to the transforming power of song.

Boyle uses more pages in the long title story, his version of the actual events that made up the life of the wild

boy of Aveyron in post-revolutionary France. It's an archetypal narrative because it is universal and unique, bound by the facts and open to fantasy. I've seen Truffaut's 'L'Enfant Sauvage,' and read Mordecai Gerstein's children's novel, 'Victor,' as well as his picture book, 'The Wild Boy,' all powerful interpretations, but Boyle brings something new to the story in unusually restrained, unadorned, and elegant prose.

'La Conchita,' 'Three Quarters,' and 'Wild Child' are my favorites of the bunch, but Boyle also veers away from his vernacular shtick in 'Sin Dolor,' a kind of parallel warm-up for 'Wild Child' about a boy who feels no pain, and a doctor who cares about and for him.

Boyle, it should be said, is maybe only slightly lazy with the average-joe thing. It's pretty dang authentic, he always tells a good tale, and in some of the stories in 'Wild Child,' he's not bound to it. Every one of these fourteen is worth reading.

Sam Quixote says

A new TC Boyle short story book is a literary event and Boyle's latest short story collection is like his other collections - that is, it is nothing short of brilliant. He is the best short story writer alive at the moment and "Wild Child" cements his reputation for crafting well written stories that draw you into the characters' strange worlds and have you wanting more.

The best story here is a short novella called "Wild Child" about a young boy found hiding in the woods in 18th century France, apparently animal-like due to years of living in the wild. He is taken in and, like the real life case of Caspar Hauser, is taken to the city where he is taught and educated. Unlike Hauser though, the wild child is never tamed. Boyle's characterisation of the child is a perfect rendering of what you would imagine to be a feral child, part human, part animal. You feel the frustrated attempts by doctors to make him speak as well as the surroundings of 18th century Paris and Languedoc. If all the other stories in this book were bad (and they're not) the book would be worth reading for this novella alone.

"The Lie" is about a man who, unable to face work, crafts a lie that his baby has died and thus gains a few more days off. However he's unable to backtrack and then his wife finds out...

"La Conchita" is about an organ courier in California who sees a mudslide happen on the motorway and gets caught up in rescuing trapped people from their cars, imagining an alternate life where one woman's husband dies and he takes his place.

"Bulletproof" is about the battle between secular education and religious views with stickers on biology textbooks that read "Darwin's theory of evolution is just a theory" dividing parents and teachers alike. The narrator, a single man, is torn between loyalty to his secular friend and a Christian woman.

"The Unlucky Mother of Aquiles Maldonado" is about a Venezuelan baseball star whose mother is taken hostage.

"Admiral" is about a rich couple who clone their dead dog and try to recreate conditions as they were years ago.

Those are the stories that stood out for me but none were terrible and all drew me into the story despite being only a dozen pages long. The characters and settings are so vivid that you become instantly interested in the stories. It's the mark of a great writer and a master storyteller who can do that so well. I would heartily

recommend this book to any fans of fiction or fans of TC Boyle, who is sure to go down in literary history as the American Chekhov. A must read, fantastic book.

Sridhar says

Until I read T C Boyle, I don't think I had encountered another fiction writer who takes a sensitive consciousness of nature, ecology, and environment, and blends it intricately with an understanding of people and of humanity. His stories are well written, well told, too (as I heard him read 'The Lie', a story in this book). As a fiction writer, Boyle deftly uses stories to explore human dimensions of environmental issues and activism, by going into the lives of activists as well as the people they are apparently in opposition with. He does this very well, for instance, in his short story 'The Siskiyou, July 1989' (in the anthology I'm With the Bears: Short Stories from a Damaged Planet), where a couple and their child dig a trench across a road that carries logging trucks and set themselves in it with quick-dry concrete. In his novels like *When the Killing's Done* and *A Friend of the Earth*, he sets human dominion over nature as backdrop to explore the extents to which people will go over things they want or cherish. Environmental activism, he reveals, is not just about fighting against some ongoing or imminent environmental threat, but also about striving for particular values, memories, and ideas of people as a part of nature. And what do we ultimately have on both sides that we need to understand better? People.

Lacey N. says

Yes, it's absolutely true: T.C. Boyle is a master of the short story. In "Balto," a young girl is asked to lie in court for her alcoholic father, even as she matures into her own, powerful self; in "Sin Dolor," a young boy living in squalor marvels a community--including its detached doctor--by his absence of feeling physical pain; in "Anacapa," the only story not previously anthologized, the narrator discovers what he most needs even as he fades away. The title story, "Wild Child," is more a novella that chronicles the story of The Savage of Aveyron with gentle precision. I read an ARC of this book but will probably purchase in hardcover when its available in January.

A.M. says

This is my first taste of TC Boyle's writing and I have to admit to being impressed by his style, his unusual imagery and turns of phrase that capture the imagination.

It's difficult to sum up an anthology containing so many short stories (14, to be precise, each fairly lengthy), but many of these contain vivid, very human and ultimately flawed characters -- there is a sense of disillusion, loneliness, and of the compromises we make with ourselves in order to find some sort of love or companionship.

But despite the technical greatness of the writing and the interesting characters, many of the stories left me feeling unsatisfied; the endings often felt incomplete, anticlimatic. It furthermore did not help that all the stories run along similar themes, making reading this book in one sitting (as I did) a little repetitive -- perhaps it is best to dip in and out of this one.

Nonetheless many of the stories provide food for thought. Some that stood out for me were:

- "Question 62", about two women faced with the animal rights vs. hunting rights issue. It's one of my favourites because it has a very powerful female perspective, and I found the chemistry between the characters very realistic and evocative.
- "Balto", which follows a young girl asked to lie in court about her father's drunk driving, with an excellent teen point of view.
- "Admiral", about a rich eccentric couple who clone their dead dog and try to recreate the same environment the original dog grew up in.
- "Sin Dolor" follows a child impervious to pain and is a disturbing but striking read.
- Last (but not least) "The Unlucky Mother", where a baseball player's mother is kidnapped. There was something charming about Boyle's evocation of Latin America.

Certainly an interesting anthology, and one I'd recommend dipping in and out of rather than reading in one sitting.
