



Pastoralia

George Saunders

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With this new collection, George Saunders takes us even further into the shocking, uproarious and oddly familiar landscape of his imagination.

The stories in Pastoralia are set in a slightly skewed version of America, where elements of contemporary life have been merged, twisted, and amplified, casting their absurdity-and our humanity-in a startling new light. Whether he writes a gothic morality tale in which a male exotic dancer is haunted by his maiden aunt from beyond the grave, or about a self-help guru who tells his followers his mission is to discover who's been "crapping in your oatmeal," Saunders's stories are both indelibly strange and vividly real.

Pastoralia Details

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Author : George Saunders

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From Reader Review Pastoralia for online ebook

Markus says

White Trash ist - glaube ich - die übliche Bezeichnung für die typischen Charaktere, die George Saunders satirische Kurzgeschichten bevölkern. Mit beißender Ironie stellt er die nicht so glänzende Seite der amerikanischen Erfolgsgesellschaft bloß. Es sind tragische Schicksale, bedingt durch die absurde Logik eines Systems, in dem angeblich jeder die Freiheit hat, aus seinen Fähigkeiten etwas zu machen, eben auch jene, die sich ganz ohne Fähigkeiten in dieser Welt finden, die Kaputten, die Traumatisierten und die Gestörten.

Morse macht sich Sorgen, wegen seinem Sohn Robert und dem in Bälde anstehenden Klaviervorspiel. Morse hat ihm eine Tastatur aus Pappe zum Üben gebastelt, aber die hat Annie, die süße kleine Schwester gegessen. Noch dazu wissen sie nicht einmal, wann und wo das Vorspielen stattfinden soll. Das Klavier hat der Exekutor mitgenommen. Er macht sich auch Sorgen, dass er sich zu viele Sorgen macht. Eines weiss er nämlich: nur mit positivem Denken, mit Optimismus kann man es schaffen und das macht ihm Sorgen.

Eine andere Geschichte spielt in einem Steinzeit-Themepark. Die Angestellten hausen in urzeitlichen Bauten und braten Ziegen, sie müssen grunzen und sich kratzen, englisch sprechen ist verboten. Abends bewerten sie ihre Kollegen auf einem Formblatt und faxen es an die Verwaltung. Als der Touristenstrom nachlässt, werden die Leute genötigt, sich gegenseitig zu denunzieren, um einen Mitarbeiterabbau zu rechtfertigen. Auch hier wird positives Denken belohnt, schließlich ist jeder für seinen Erfolg selbst verantwortlich.

Die sechs Stories sind in ihrer brachialen Überzeichnung und Absurdität äußerst heftig. Wenn im Hof, wo die Kinder spielen, gerade eine kleinere Schiesserei stattfindet, während die Erwachsenen auf dem Sofa liegen und eine TV-Talkshow namens *"Wie mein Kind gewaltsam ums Leben kam"* schauen, ist das bezeichnend für diese Art von 'politisch unkorrektem' Humor, den man vorwiegend im englischen Sprachraum findet, dem Subtilität und Feingefühl völlig fehlen, der aber die Menschenverachtung einer Gesellschaft, in der das Tragen einer Waffe quasi als 'Menschenrecht' gilt, umso schonungsloser entlarvt.

Betroffen macht mich die Tatsache, dass die Realität oft gar nicht mehr so weit von der Satire entfernt ist. Bei allem Witz bleibt ein bitterer Nachgeschmack.

Sprache und Ton sind dem Milieu, in dem die Stories spielen, angepasst und sind für ihre spezielle Wirkung unverzichtbar. Ich habe den schweren Fehler gemacht, die Geschichten in der deutschen Übersetzung zu lesen. Das hat die Lesefreude deutlich getrübt. Die deutsche Fassung bringt das nicht authentisch herüber. Ich habe mir Ausschnitte des Originals online angesehen und ich würde sicher vier Sterne vergeben - da ich die deutsche Edition bewerte, sind es nur ★★★.

Joshua Nomen-Mutatio says

Like other folks I know and respect on Goodreads, I loved the opening, titular story but found the rest of the book to be middling. Like, disappointingly, forgettably, middling. I know the stories were kinda weird and stuff but for the life of me I can barely even remember what they were about or even distinguish them from each other. I don't think I've ever felt so uneven about a short story collection. It's so strange that it makes me curious enough to give them a reread at some point, despite the less than flattering description I've just given. I feel like I must have read them incorrectly somehow, since the opening story was so engaging and fun, which is where the ~~four~~ three stars come from.

I love books and films that utilize facades and museum-like tableaux and the story "Pastoralia" does this with great effect. This quality plus the cover image of my copy of this book has established itself so firmly in my mind that when I see things like fake trees indoors or big landscape/nature murals (think of the paintings placed around City Hall on the TV show *Parks and Recreation*) that I think of them as being "Saunders-like" in the instant-association segment of my brain. I haven't yet *totally* over-analyzed what my attraction to certain uses of facades and replicas is all about yet (though there's been a more extended musing on this elsewhere) but I guess it might just have something to do with fond childhood memories of visiting museums and being enthralled by the displays of animals and humans, made to be lifelike but frozen into place behind glass. I still experience a powerful mix of sentimentality with a healthy dose of Ineffability when I revisit the Milwaukee Public Museum, a place I've wandered around many times over the years, each time worrying that I'll drain the magic of the childhood memories on *this* visit, but each time managing to still feel wrapped in an almost mystical euphoria and nostalgia.

Saunders tale is surreal and dark and playful and some of its main devices called this feeling up from the inner depths.

This is still the only Saunders I've read. I assumed his work would be so up my alley that I ordered three of his short story collections last year, had my weirdly uneven experience with this one and haven't exactly felt compelled to make the others a priority yet. I still have a sense that I'll like more of his work, but this experience was just such a strange disappointment in a way I can't really explain at all. At least I have a case to solve now, so I'll be back to Saundersville to snoop around for clues and answers later.

Sofia says

Winky: 3 estrelas. De todos os contos que compõem este livro foi o que gostei menos.

Carvalho do mar: 3,5 estrelas. A fazer-nos pensar até que ponto as nossas escolhas e a nossa passividade determinam o nosso percurso de vida.

O fim de Firpo neste mundo: 4,5 estrelas. O conto mais curto e também o mais triste...

A infelicidade do barbeiro: 4 estrelas. De como algumas pessoas passam a vida toda com a vida a passar-lhes ao lado

As cataratas: 3,5 estrelas. Repete um pouco a ideia dos dois últimos.

Em comum a todos os contos: mulheres(mães) dominadoras/castradoras. Personagens masculinos atormentados e dominados pela inércia. Os vencidos da vida, diria Eça.

Mykle says

I finished this last night when I couldn't sleep ... I adore George Saunders in small doses, he is so very funny and has such an ear for the pathos of our sad American industrial poverty.

But there's a kind of story that he writes over and over again ... not exactly the same story but the same kind of story. A story about a hilariously awful job, a hilariously difficult life and a sad, pathetic person stuck within. I don't even object to the repetition, but when I read it all back to back the relentless pessimism and bitterness overtook the comedy and I found myself just plain depressed.

Is that so bad? Is that my fault or his? Should I give more stars to a happier book? Are they Prozac stars? I don't know, stars are stupid. Short stories are not at their best compressed into collections. Any of these

stories is great on its own. (Though I preferred the shorter version of "Pastoralia" printed in the New Yorker to the extended-play version here.) So maybe you should get this book and schedule it out, maybe read one story a month over the next summer. But not all at once.

Rob says

Imagine for a moment that you go into the up-scale liquor store around the block that is celebrated city-wide for its fabulous wine selection. You're a bit of a novice when it comes to wine and are a little embarrassed to be here because your wallet is that ballistic nylon stuff and not something truly exotic like alligator skin and with that in mind you decide not to ask the sommelier for any help. You browse around the store looking for a bottle of something called David Foster Wallace that was recommended to you by your friend with the alligator skin wallet. You manage to find the bottle of DFW and admire the fancy bottle with its fancy label and its curlicues and footnotes and excellent leading. The bottle seems really heavy and big and everyone has told you how excellent it is. So you decide to try it but when you actually get to the counter you discover that you've picked up a bottle of something called George Saunders by mistake. The George Saunders bottle isn't as big or as fancy as the DFW and in fact it looks a little bit like a down-market or off-label knock-off of the vintage DFW but at the same time you believe that there is maybe something authentic and distinct about it anyway. The sommelier gives you a funny look as he rings you up but you don't say anything because you don't want to look stupid in front of him and anyway you're probably just being self-conscious about the whole thing like the time you had a glass of Pynchon at your friend's house and you said that it was a good Vonnegut and everyone laughed and your friend explained that the Vonnegut has a much sharper finish and you'll notice how the Pynchon seems to hang around in your mouth so much longer but he could see how you might make that mistake. And you try to think about that night on your drive home because it's that same friend with the alligator skin wallet that is coming over for dinner tonight with his wife and you remember how he plays golf with your boss and this is an important event to get right. So that night before the main course you pour everyone's glass in the kitchen so that no one will see the bottle and the secret will be safe with you. And your wife brings out the entree and you bring out the wine and everyone digs in and finds it delicious. Your friend with the alligator skin wallet remarks on how delicious the wine is and did you have any trouble finding the David Foster Wallace at the store? And was the sommelier there helpful? And what year did he recommend because this is really really quite good? And you smile and try to decide whether or not to say anything because you know that you'll need to say something but how are you going to make up something plausible on the spot. But then your wife blurts out that it's really a George Saunders and don't you just love it? Because she slurped down her glass of George Saunders and it was her third of the night anyway because she and your friend's wife managed to down a whole bottle of David Sedaris as a warm-up but they both agreed it was too dry for them even though you and your friend think that it's the perfect middle-of-the-week wine. For a moment you're paralyzed with fear because this was your shot, your chance to show off and really shine and display your competence and you blew it because you were too chicken shit to tell the sommelier at the counter that you picked up the wrong bottle by mistake. But instead your friend raises an eyebrow and says that it's wonderful, just delightful, and he'd never tried it before and though maybe it's not as dry as the DFW, does it ever have a great finish and it's just perfect for a dinner party, isn't it?

fortuna.spinning says

This collection was totally up my alley. Saunders' writing kind of reminds me of Vonnegut, who I later realized was one of his inspirations. I was not a fan of Lincoln in the Bardo, but I'm so happy I gave his short stories a chance. Can't wait to read more of his work!

Hazal Çamur says

Adeta bir Kaybedenler Kulübü'nün absürt uyarlaması bu kitap. Saunders'tan Türkçe olarak okuduğum 4. kitap ve Saunders kitapları arasında favorilerime girmiş bulunuyor.

Bu kitapta kara mizah var, tahtlama var, sizi tam güldürürken tokat atan bir yapı da var.

Hayatın gidişatına, düzene ve tüketim toplumuna bir türlü ayak uyduramam?? "ezikler" in hikayelerinden derlenen bir kitap bu. Günümüz toplumsal düzeninin damgaladığı insanlar?n trajikomik maceraları. Geniş bir aralıkta yer alan bu insanlar?n her biri düzene ayak uyduramam?? kaybedenlerden başkası değil.

Şkna Ulusu ve Phil'in Dehşet Verici Kışa Saltanat? ile birlikte favori Saunders kitapları arasında girer. Yazar?n ödül aldığı Aralığın Onu ise maalesef bu 4 kitap arasında en sonuncu olmaya devam ediyor.

Dilerim daha nice George Saunders kitabını okuruz.

Madeleine says

Based on the opinions of people with excellent taste in books, I knew I was in for something good when I grabbed *Pastoralia* from the shelf the other day. I didn't know what to expect beyond that but it sure wasn't the sardonic giggles this collection gave me. Does everyone find their first foray into Saunders's mind this darkly endearing? 'Cause.... lemme tell you, you all led me somewhere I can't wait to revisit.

There is something *off* about the worlds Saunders creates. Not off-the-charts unbelievably weird (view spoiler) but there's this vertiginous element to them that makes being jarred from such a mercilessly absorbing reading experience by, say, the unwelcome intrusion of your job (*whyyyyyyyy do you people keep assuming I'm here to proofread your ineptitude when I'm so clearly lost in something that is infinitely more rewarding than your refusals to grasp the nuances of proper comma usage and pica distances WHYYYY?*) a little disorienting upon reentry. I encountered a thing that doesn't happen often enough while reading this short-story collection: *I forgot I was reading* because I was so engrossed in the tales Saunders was weaving. Picturing the story that was taking shape right in front of me was equal parts riveting and really quite disturbing. Kind of like the clown car on fire that you'll snap photos of as you pass the gruesome scene but fuck no you're not stopping to help because it's a car full of clowns and everyone knows that clowns are evil but then the sadness of the whole thing hits you when you post the picture (along with an appropriately glib comment) on Twitter later but you're still snickering about the image for days.

And then there is something distinctly, deliciously Vonnegut-flavored here, too, but Saunders even makes that all his own. While Vonnegut's humor seemed like that of a cranky but avuncular relative whose lessons seem harsh at the time but are driven by an overriding love and a desire to emphasize the necessity of self-improvement, who softens the blow of reality with a satirical wit, Saunders seems more interested in pointing out the flaws so they can be turned into a long-running joke that derives its comedy from the dichotomy between a thing's inherent potential for dark humor and the deadpan subtlety in observing it from such an angle. It's realizing the hopelessness of a situation and having a good laugh at its expense because, otherwise, the void wins and everything is rendered too meaningless to face just one more insignificant day.

Pastoralia, ultimately, is a collection of stories that proves if you're taking life too seriously, you're doing it

all wrong. Tragedy is just comedy that tests your resolve to arrive at the punchline.

MJ Nicholls says

'Pastoralia' (the opening story) shows what Saunders can do. How his prose can be funny and surreal and warm and satirical and touching. Unfortunately, having done this, the other stories in this collection seem like shticky filler. 'Winky' was another strong piece, but I found myself snoozing through 'Sea Oak' which does a surrealist dance in a ra-ra skirt, and getting annoyed by his rhythms in 'The Barber's Unhappiness.' His repetition, his rambling passages of superfluous detail, how he goes on so long you have forgotten the characters' names, but that doesn't matter, as they are barely rendered anyway, and so on . . . cruel and wrong of me? Most likely. My take on Saunders over two years later here.

Kay?p R?ht?m says

Herkes bir kaybeden bu kitapta. Birbirinden tuhaf ve toplum nezdinde ezik bu karakterlerin hepsi absürt hikâyeler sahip. Fakat onlara gülemiyorsunuz. Çünkü tam gülece?iniz zaman beyninizden vurulmu?a dönüyorsunuz.

Daha da ac?s?, bu düzene ayak uyduramam?? tuhaflar, eziklerde, hepimizin kendinde bulaca?? yönler var. En az bir öyküde kendinizden bir ?eyler bulacaksınız. Duygu ve dü?üncelerinizin derinlerine dalarak bir kö?eye terk etti?iniz kimi an?larla ya da kendinizle ilgili ?üphelerinizle yüzle?eceksiniz. Empati kuracaksınız. Bu s?rada kitab? elinizden b?rakamayacaksınız.

Karakterlerin büyük k?sm? ya annesi dahil, kimse taraf?ndan seilmeyen/kabul görmeyen ki?iler ya da annesi veya ba?ka bir akrabas?yla ya?ayan ve onlardan bir türlü kurtulamayan bireyler. Asl?nda tam burada birey demem çok ironik, çünkü bireyselle?me a?amas?n? tamamlayamam?? ki?iler onlar. Annelerinin ya da birlikte ya?ad?klar? akrabalar?n?n boyunduru?unda, ba?kalar?n?n seçti?i hayat?, ba?kalar?n?n seçti?i rollerde oynayan ki?iler. Evet, hepsi de çok gerçekçiler.

Bu tür karakterlerle ilerleyen kitap, haliyle içinde sessiz bir ç?l?k da bar?nd?r?yor. Dilin ucuna kadar gelen ve ipleri kopartacak tüm o sözler, d??ar? ç?kamadan buhar olup uçuyor. Oysa biz okur olarak hepsini oldukça h?zli? bir ak??ta, birinci a??zdan okuyoruz. Ayn? öfke damarlar?m?zda kabar?yor. Yüzle?me an? geldi?indeyse, yine karakterde oldu?u gibi, f?s diye sönuveriyor.

Öykülerin her birinin (hatta Saunders'?n di?er öykü kitaplar? da dahil) birinci tekilden olmas? da bunda büyük etmen. Özellikle karakterlerin kendi zihinlerindeki dü?üncelerin ak?? h?z?na göre Saunders'?n yaz?m h?z? da de?i?iyor. ?nsan nas?l ki çok k?sa sürede birçok dü?ünce aras?nda s?çrar, daldan dala konarsa, Saunders da yaz?m h?z?n? buna göre ayarlay?p s?k s?k h?zland?rarak karakterlerin iç seslerinde gaza bas?yor. Ço?unlukla da karakterlerin iç dünyalar?nda oldu?umuz için de ko?turmacas? bol bir kitap okuyoruz. Tempo hiç dü?müyor.

Unutmadan ekleyelim: Karakterlerin hepsinde bir çocukluk travmas? da mevcut. Ama hangimizin yok ki? Derinlerde bir yerde, k?pra??p duran, rahat vermeyen ama Saunders'?n anlat?m?yla tam bir kara mizah ö?esine dönü?en travmalar bunlar. Onlar hayk?rmas?n da kim hayk?rs?n? Hayk?rsalar bir... Ah!

George Saunders bu kitab?nda da kara mizaha olan hakimiyetini ortaya koymu?. Hem kara mizah, hem de trajikomiklik kelimelerinin hakk?n? veren ve bunlar? tarz edinmi? bir yazar olarak tam kar??m?zda. Eminim

ki ondan daha nice kitap okuyaca??z. Delidolu ekibinin yazar?n ba?ka kitaplar?n? da dilimize kazand?raca??n? dü?ünüyorum.

E?er hâlâ yazarla tan??mad?ysan?z araya fazla açmay?n. Sonra pi?man olursunuz; benden söylemesi.

- *Hazal ÇAMUR*

?ncelemenin tamam? için: <http://kayiprihtim.com/inceleme/pasto...>

Teresa Proença says

Na vida raramente há cabrito no "Tabuleiro Grande" e quase sempre papas de aveia no "Tabuleiro Pequeno". E mesmo assim... "na vida real há pessoas a chegar ao pé de nós e a cagar nas nossas papas de aveia a toda a hora."

Entre as Lengalengas da Auto-Ajuda, os Comprimidos para a Tristeza, as Lamúrias, e outras panaceias, o melhor é optar por RIR... lendo, por exemplo, George Saunders...

Julie says

Almost two decades before George Saunders published the everybody's-talking-about-it book, *Lincoln in the Bardo*, he published *Pastoralia*.

Pastoralia is a collection of six short stories, and they are some of the weirdest, bleakest, and most well-written ones I've ever encountered.

As I worked through (struggled through) each one of them, I kept asking myself, "Are these dystopian?" I tend to think of "dystopian" as futuristic, or containing more futuristic elements, of government-imposed rations, restrictions, etc, and these stories are not like that. However, when I looked up the actual definition of the adjective "dystopian," this is what I found: "relating to or denoting an imagined place or state in which everything is unpleasant or bad, typically a totalitarian or environmentally degraded one."

Okay. So, yes, they're dystopian.

The first one, *Pastoralia*, the lead story of the collection, is the longest and the weirdest. I think his editor made a mistake placing this in the first position. I found the story beyond quirky and unrelatable, and I would have been done with the entire collection after this weird tale, had I not told my sister I would read this book.

The second, third and fourth stories were so dark and depressing, I wished I'd had a cup of Kool-Aid and a cyanide capsule to go along with the book. Reading about the people in these stories is like having a nightmare in which a former reality-tv host is the president of the most powerful country in the world, and waking up to discover it's true.

In the fifth and sixth stories, I finally got to sit back a little and think, "Damn, Mr. Saunders, when you're not depressing the hell out of me, you can be funny and a little bit romantic, too. It made me hopeful to read *Lincoln in the Bardo*.

But, of course, the last sentence of the collection left me sucker-punched in the gut. Who is this guy?

I'm hesitant to recommend this, unless you're a reader who likes to smack your shoulders up against the edge, or if good writing supercedes all else for you.

Four stars for excellent writing, originality and memorable, though disturbing perspectives on humanity. . . that I hope, despite our current despair, are not true.

Peter Boyle says

"His childhood dreams had been so bright, he had hoped for so much, it couldn't be true that he was a nobody."

These stories, wacky as they may be, don't paint a very flattering portrait of modern life. A father takes a job as a grunting caveman at a run-down theme park in order to pay his son's exorbitant medical bills. A male stripper earns a meagre wage to support his ungrateful family, who spend their day watching reality TV like *How My Child Died Violently* and *The Worst That Could Happen*, a show of computer-generated tragedies. A desperate coward attends a New Age seminar, where is told to repeat the mantra "Now Is the Time for Me to Win!" and to remove his mentally ill sister from his home in order to achieve his goals.

The American Dream hasn't really happened for these characters. They're all a bunch of sad-sacks and nobodies who fantasise about the life they might have had. Any flicker of hope exists only inside their own heads and they're either delusional or too afraid to do anything about it. Saunders has a knack of pointing out the absurdities of modern existence. He sets up these surreal scenarios which initially sound unlikely, but the more you think about them, the more you realise they are not that far removed from life today. Though I personally preferred his *Tenth of December* collection, *Pastoralia* is a book of twisted, grimly funny satire from a visionary writer.

Konserve Ruhlar says

...

Okurken fena ?ekilde etkilendi?im bir kitab? öylece b?rak?p yeni bir kitapla yelken açam?yorum okuma denizinde. Pastoralıya da bu kitaplardan biri. Hem George Saunders öykücülü?üne giri? yapt??m kitap hem de absürt hikayeleri bu dozda okudu?um ilk kitap. Etgar Keret'i çok severim. Türkçede bu tarz hikayelerde iyi olarak gördü?üm ?sahag Uygur Eskiciyan 'ın kitaplar?yla tan??t??mdan beri Türk Edebiyat?'nda hikaye anlat?m?nda çe?itlilik ve yenili?in uzun zamand?r bekledi?im bir okuma deneyimi oldu?unu anlad?m. Ömür ?klım Demir'in hikayelerini de belki bu kategoriye koyabilirim. Gerçekler üzerine kurulu edebiyat?n yeri ayr?. Ama biraz fantastik öğeler öyküleri dinamik yapmakla kalm?yor okuyucuyu da farklı dünyalarda gezintiye ç?karak, pasif olarak gerçekleştirilen okuma eylemini e?lenceli ve maceral? k?l?yor. Her okur bu tarz? sevmiyor.

devam?:<https://konserveruhlar.wordpress.com/...>

João Carlos says

"Pastoralia" reúne seis contos de **George Saunders** (n. 1958): **Pastoralia, Winky, Carvalho do Mar, O Fim de Firpo Neste Mundo, A Infelicidade do Barbeiro e As Cataratas**; todos publicados originalmente na revista norte-americana *New Yorker*.

Os seis contos de **George Saunders** são histórias de homens e mulheres que têm comportamentos estranhos, exibindo uma excentricidade e uma singularidade incomum, por vezes, bizarra e esquisita, para os padrões de conduta "normais" e que acabam por agir e reagir mostrando os medos e os receios que os apoquentam, as vergonhas que os fragilizam e as necessidades decorrentes de um dia-a-dia quase sempre frenético e neurótico. Todos eles, cada um à sua maneira, tentam ser felizes, mas acabam por tornar-se, quase sempre invariavelmente perdedores, ficando na expectativa de poderem ser castigados pelos "crimes" e pelas imperfeições dos seus desempenhos.

A escrita de **George Saunders** é extremamente criativa e original; as histórias são irónicas, sombrias e melancólicas e reflectem as contradições implacáveis entre o amor, a família e o trabalho, numa América dominada pelo pessimismo e pela distopia.

Destaco dois contos : **Pastoralia**, um narrador do sexo masculino não identificado e uma mulher, Janet, estão preocupados porque podem perder o emprego num parque temático pré-histórico decrépito; uma dupla que não tem permissão para falar em inglês e que tem que agir como os homens e as mulheres das cavernas...;

"Uma coisa é mais do que certa, ficar a matutar nos problemas não os resolve. Embora, por outro lado, pensar de forma positiva sobre os problemas também não os resolva. Mas pelo menos somos positivos, e isso dá-nos, ou pelo menos devia dar-nos, alguma força, estão a ver? E é bom sentir força. A força é uma coisa necessária nestas alturas." (Pág. 50);

e **Carvalho do Mar**, O narrador é um stripper masculino no Joysticks.

Vive na urbanização Carvalho do Mar - mas não há carvalhos nem há mar, só uma centena de apartamentos sociais.

A tia Bernie é uma paz de alma. Não gosta de confusão.

A tia Bernie morre... e ressuscita... regressa ao apartamento, amarga e profana...

"Se calhar há mortos zangados em toda a parte, escondidos dentro de casas, tapados com cobertores, a dar ordens aos seus parentes assustados e envergonhados. (...)

Se ela agiu mal ao regressar, por favor perdoe-a ela nunca teve nada de jeito na vida, e além do mais estava a tentar ajudar-nos. (...) Mas por favor não a deixe regressar outra vez." (P. 147)"

Jon says

This is the second collection of Saunder's short stories I've read and Pastoralia is cut from the same cloth as the first. Think of the cartoon strip, The Far Side, in story form and you'll get the idea of what his writing is like. His stories are weird and funny, with a pronounced absurdist edge to them. Saunders often populates his stories with a menagerie of misfits who are life's punching bags. While their struggles are played for laughs, there is, at times, an underlying pathos to his character's determined efforts to remain optimistic in the face of a cosmos equally determined to give them metaphorical wedgies. In the end, however, life usually grinds them down and even death doesn't bring relief:

"We bury her at St. Leo's, on the hill up near BastCo. Her part of the graveyard's pretty plain. No angels, no little rock houses, no flowers, just a bunch of flat stones like parking bumpers and here and there a Styrofoam cup. Father Brian says a prayer and then one of us is supposed to talk. But what's there to say? She never had a life. Never married, no kids, work, work, work.

Sometimes she comes to me in dreams. She never looks good. Sometimes she's wearing a dirty smock. Once

she had on handcuffs. Once she was naked and dirty and this mean cat was clawing it's way up her front. But every time it's the same thing.

"Some people get everything and I got nothing," she says. "Why? Why did that happen?"

Every time I say I don't know.

And I don't"

Saunders is a savage satirist and takes careful aim at American society. One of his frequent motifs is the seedy amusement park as a microcosm for America. The title story is yet another foray into that theme. Pastoralia is a historical amusement park where living people play act in dioramas of the past. As a threatened restructuring looms, the story becomes a Dilbert-like skewering of corporate culture:

"And in terms of mass firings, relax, none are forthcoming, truly, and furthermore, if they were, what you'd want to ask yourself is: Am I Thinking Positive/Saying Positive? Am I giving it all I've got? Am I doing even the slightest thing wrong? But not to worry. Those of you who have no need to be worried should not in the least be worried. As for those who should be worried, it's a little late to start worrying now, you should have started months ago, when it could've done you some good, because at this point, what's decided is decided, or would have been decided, if those false rumors we are denying, the rumors about the firings which would be starting this week if they were slated to begin, were true, which we have just told you, they aren't"

I liked the book, but it's not for everyone. The stories are often freakish and bizarre, filled with satire sharp enough to draw blood and a bleak view of American society. Saunders does have a unique voice and an original style, but I have to admit I did find his 1st book, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*, to be somewhat repetitive, largely due to four of the stories being set in amusement parks. There's a little more variation in setting and themes in this collection and even a couple of stories that could be considered to have "happy endings" or what passes for a happy ending in Saunder's world view.

Guille says

Grandísima lectura. Un magnífico puñado de buenos cuentos que me han gustado incluso más que ese otro gran puñado que se recogían en "Diez de diciembre", en los que Saunders mostraba una mayor tendencia a la respuesta explícita a las distopías que en ellos planteaba. Aquí los finales son más abiertos o menos categóricos, con un resultado, para mí, mucho más amargo y efectivo.

De Saunders, me fascina su estilo naiff tan cargado de mala leche, como plasma con una sencillez extraordinaria, con una engañosa inocencia, el lugar al que nos dirigimos (o peor aun, el lugar donde ya estamos) en cuanto a relaciones laborales, sociales o familiares, consiguiendo que te conmuevas ante los patéticos hechos y los grotescos personajes que pueblan sus mundos y que, al mismo tiempo, te indignes ante lo que son, lo que suponen y la verdad que encierran.

En la buena literatura, la línea recta no tiene por qué ser el camino más corto ni el más interesante de recorrer. En los cuentos de Saunders, la narración es exagerada, los paisajes distorsionados, los personajes se mueven en ese estado de infantilismo que parece imponerse más cada día en una parte cada vez más importante de la sociedad, en el que predomina esa crueldad básica de los niños que exigen la satisfacción inmediata y fácil de sus deseos más primarios; esos sin-clase que ya han bajado los brazos ante lo que les han

convencido que es irremediable, que se dejan ir y conducir y son tratados por jefes, vecinos, clientes, y, lo que es más grave, por ellos mismos, como lo que son, elementos sociales, laborales o políticos totalmente prescindibles e intercambiables. Las derrotas íntimas, las miserias y mezquindades cotidianas, los comportamientos cobardes, los autoengaños, las fantasías consoladoras, estrategias en las que todos caemos con mayor o menor insistencia, son narradas en fantásticos diálogos interiores, mostrándonos unos cuantos motivos de nuestra congénita falta de felicidad, imposible de alcanzar e incluso de perseguir.

Paquita Maria Sanchez says

I think that if the arrangement of this collection had been reversed I would be singing a different tune right now, but as it stands I am a bit torn regarding rating this thing. Man, these stories are well-written. Saunders is darkly witty, and clearly his heart is in the right place. His main point of contention with the modern world is the reckless hammer of Capitalism, an easy target to be sure, but that is arguably all the more reason to call it into question. The injuries that it inflicts are almost universally felt.

In *Pastoralia*, Saunders has created a series of near-future worlds sprinkled with Dystopian and Horror elements, in which the voyeuristic tendencies and indiscriminately exploitative undercurrents of modern society are heightened in such a way that they become grossly comical. The name of the game is satire, and he pulls out all the stops while driving home just how pathetically isolating, spirit-breaking, and hedon-making the process of staying above water in today's Western World has become for its majority. Saunders has the panache of a Gilliam, Burgess, or Huxley, most effectively executed in the phenomenal title story which composes the first half of the book. However, his sardonic message eventually gets to feeling a bit redundant, and the stories seem to grow weaker and weaker as you move forward. For one, he is not really in the habit of crafting likeable characters. This is not generally a deal-breaker for me (if you know me on gr, that should be clear enough), but it begins to feel short-sighted after a while. Then again, I suppose that if you continuously grind a person down, there eventually won't be much left other than his or her most vile, base desires and tendencies. Enter George Saunders...

I dunno; maybe the novella *Pastoralia* just outshines the rest of the stories by far too many watts. Still, the collection is a fast and surprisingly breezy read for its dark content. I would strongly recommend Saunders to anyone with a stomach of steel and the heart of a cynic. Or anyway, that's me, and I thought this was pretty damn good indeed.

*Just imagine a fourth star, but its bulb is perpetually burning out in that way that makes it erratically flicker on and off. Deal?

Heidi Mckye says

Any person who does not deeply love George Saunders is not allowed to be my friend. Even a little bit.

Sinem A. says

çok iyi karamizah örne?i öykülerden olu?an kitapta yeralan öyküler günümüz insan?n?n trajikomik halini

inanılmaz bir dille anlatıyor. kurgu, yaratılan atmosfer mekan ve kişiler harika bir zeka ürünü. belki biraz amerikan ama modern insanın hezimetine güzel eğlenceli bir ağıt.
