



**Interviewee: T. Coraghessan Boyle**  
**Title: Making art in a random universe**  
**Duration: 6 minutes, 10 seconds**

### **Introduction**

"In wildness is the preservation of the world."

Henry David Thoreau said that, and the assertion is the perfect backdrop for *Wild Child*, the 2010 collection of stories by T. Coraghessan Boyle.

In this episode of Bookpod, Boyle talks about some of the stories and the wild, random nature from which they grew.

### **Presentation**

I take it as a challenge to write from all sorts of perspectives, from every point of view I possibly can, without regard to sex or ethnicity or anything else. Still I keep coming back to do characters like the narrator of "The Lie" or the narrator of "La Conchita," people who have an aggressive attitude towards life and don't necessarily ever come to any point of redemption or maturity.

Like "Balto," for instance, where the father is a drunk and gets his daughter to drive the car home for him even though she's still a kid and under age. We get her point of view



and also his point of view, and I think the contrasting points of view, as I use in many stories and novels, allows the reader to make an assessment for him or herself as to what this is all about.

Now, at the end the story ends in an elliptical way. We don't know exactly what will happen in the next beat with regard to the father, but we can imagine that it will go badly for him. And then we can imagine that perhaps he'll have some sort of reformation. However, considering the fact that he's sneaking a drink even while he's in court, I doubt it. That is the beauty of an elliptical ending. It leaves it up to the reader to make these judgments.

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One of the reasons I'm comfortable with writing these punk characters who are immature characters is because that was me for a long time in my life. I was constantly butting my head up against the world and trying to assert myself. And, you know, what was I looking for? I was looking for art and love and, you know, fulfillment.

In art, we can examine bleakness or have horrific things



happen, and it is great and entertaining because it's art and it makes you feel something. You know, I wish I had better news for the world. When I did *A Friend of the Earth* in the year 2000 about global warming and the catastrophe awaiting us, it was pretty grim. You know, read the environmentalists. In my lifetime, we've gone from three billion to seven billion people on earth. The climate is collapsing. The animals are extinct. Soon there will be no food. We are already fighting wars for resources. I mean, where's the good news in that? The good news for me is in making art.

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Flannery O'Connor is the first writer who turned me on when I was just a kid and didn't know about writing so much. What I had most admired about her, and the first story of hers I ever read was "A Good Man Is Hard To Find," is how she was able to take you by surprise. That is, put you into a comic universe where it's a sort of conventional sitcom familial situation -- the grandmother, the harassed husband, they're going on a trip, the brat kids -- and turn it into this horrific, cosmic portrait, you know. It's the same thing that I think I'm doing in my stories, where it



should make you uneasy in some way just as you start to get comfortable.

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There is an utter randomness to our lives, which is the most terrifying thing about being alive, which is why the Jesus freaks in "Bullet Proof" assert that there's Jesus or the mullahs assert that there's Allah. Because if you believe it absolutely, then you're safe and then there's a reason.

But, in fact, from my view, there is no reason. And it is utterly random that we animals are here and doing what we're doing. And so it's very frightening to be naked to the universe. Anything can happen at any time.

You know, we talk about saving the environment. Well, we can't save the environment. The environment has nothing to do with us except that we are one part of it. I am an environmentalist and, you know, I hope that we can stop exterminating all the animals. But what is happening is we're destroying the environment that allowed us to come to power and to arise, and something else will come after us.



We only have three and a half billion years, of course, until the earth is destroyed when the sun becomes a yellow giant, and that's a short period of time.

One story of mine, one novel, *A Friend of the Earth* – one character is killed in this way. He's puttering around in his kitchen and a tiny fragment of a meteorite comes down through the roof and right through the back of his head and down into the floor. Now, this could happen. It has happened. You know, it could happen at any moment. Anything can happen.

And it's sort of horrifying to have to deal with that and I think this is what I'm trying to address in my work. I'm not going to figure anything out. I'm not giving any solutions, but I'm addressing it over and over.

And I do feel completely powerless at the hands of nature. Which, again, is why art is such a great thing to participate in or to make it because it's a controlled universe. It is something that we can make and do in spite of everything else, whether there is Allah or Jesus or Darwin or answers to anything, at least we can make art.



## **Valedictory**

For more about T. Coraghessan Boyle, visit his website at [www.tcboyle.com](http://www.tcboyle.com). And see the related links on his Bookpod author page.

Bookpod producer is Barbara Finkelstein. Music is by Kevin MacLeod.

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## **Related links**

Just Wright? Author T.C. Boyle's home

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fH\\_XNEFj\\_Rk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fH_XNEFj_Rk)

The Outsiders

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epnl0a2dbaE>

T.C. Boyle reads from "The Wild Child"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch#!v=L-nwoMJTung&feature=channel>