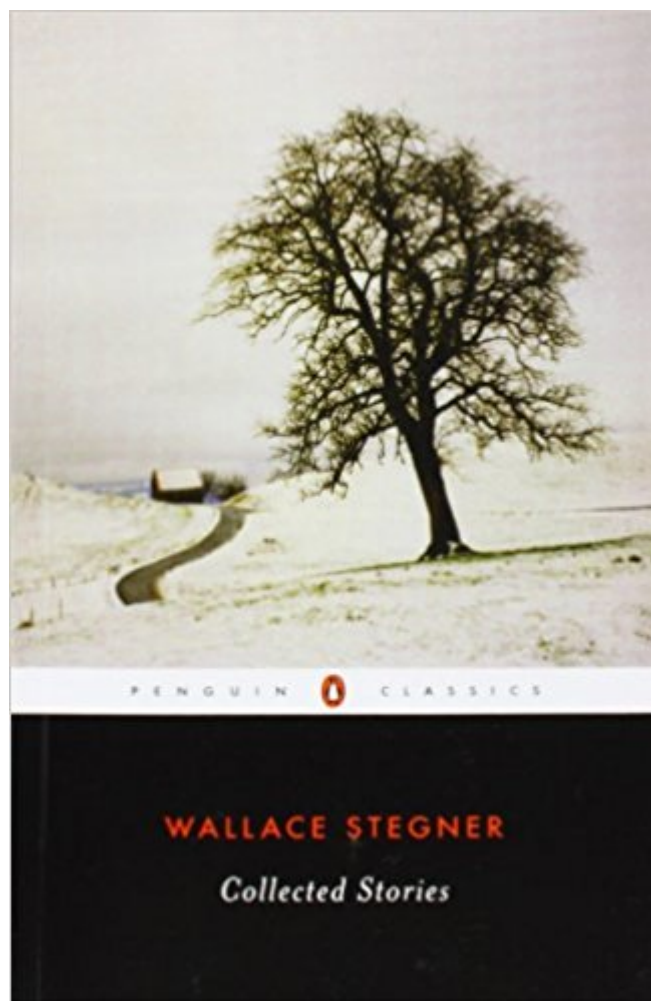


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Collected Stories (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

In a literary career spanning more than fifty years, Wallace Stegner created a remarkable record of the history and culture of twentieth-century America. Each of the thirty-one stories contained in this volume embody some of the best virtues and values to be found in contemporary fiction, demonstrating why the author is acclaimed as one of America's master storytellers. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

"Exemplary stories . . . The reader of Stegner's writing is immediately reminded of an essential America . . . a distinct place, a unique people, a common history, and a shared heritage remembered as only Stegner can." —Los Angeles Times

Wallace Stegner was born in 1909 in Lake Mills, Iowa. The son of Scandinavian immigrants, he traveled with his parents and brother all over the West—to North Dakota, Washington, Saskatchewan, Montana, and Wyoming—before settling in Salt Lake City in 1921. Many of the landscapes he encountered in his peripatetic youth figure largely in his work, as do characters

based on his stern father and athletic, outgoing brother. Stegner received most of his education in Utah, graduating from the University in 1930. He furthered his education at the University of Iowa, where he received a master's and a doctoral degree. He married Mary Stuart Page in 1934, and for the next decade the couple followed Wallace's teaching career-to the University of Wisconsin, Harvard, and eventually to Stanford University, where he founded the creative writing program, and where he was to remain until his retirement in 1971. A number of his creative writing students have become some of today's most well respected writers, including Wendell Berry, Thomas McGuane, Raymond Carver, Edward Abbey, Robert Stone, and Larry McMurty. Throughout his career and after, Stegner's literary output was tremendous. His first novel, *Remembering Laughter*, was published in 1937. By the time of his death in 1993 he had published some two dozen works of fiction, history, biography, and essays. Among his many literary prizes are the Pulitzer Prize for *Angle of Repose* (1971) and the National Book Award for *The Spectator Bird* (1976). His collection of essays, *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs* (1992), was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle award. Although his fiction deals with many universal themes, Stegner is primarily recognized as a writer of the American West. Much of his literature deals with debunking myths of the West as a romantic country of heroes on horseback, and his passion for the terrain and its inhabitants have earned him the title 'The Dean of Western Letters'. He was one of the few true Men of Letters in this generation. An historian, essayist, short story writer and novelist, as well as a leading environmental writer. Although always connected in people's minds with the West, he had a long association with New England. Many short stories and one of his most successful novels, *Crossing to Safety*, are set in Vermont, where he had a summer home for many years. Another novel, *The Spectator Bird*, takes place in Denmark. An early environmentalist, he actively championed the region's preservation and was instrumental-with his now-famous 'Wilderness Letter'-in the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act. Honest and straightforward, educated yet unpretentious, cantankerous yet compassionate, Wallace Stegner was an enormous presence in the American literary landscape, a man who wrote and lived with ferocity, energy, and integrity. Lynn Stegner is the author of three novels: *Undertow*, *Fata Morgana*, and *Pipers at the Gates of Dawn*.

I simply love the passion, wisdom and balance of Wallace Stegner. I wish he were my uncle and I could sit forever at his knee. This is as close as I can get and that's ok with me.

I wish I had known about Wallace Stegner ages before. What a fabulous collection of stories! A must read for Americans.

When people ask who my favorite author is, Wallace Stegner is invariably one of the four or five names I toss out. And often I get the same response... "I've never read any Stegner" or even "I don't know the name". Stegner seems to be one of American literatures best kept secrets. These stories are an excellent introduction to Stegner, his style, and his ability to write vividly about life. A number of the stories in this collection were eventually incorporated as chapters in three of his novels: "The Big Rock Candy Mountain", "Recapitulation", and "Wolf Willow".

As he was driving his newly acquired Caprice in Tulsa one fine summer day, R. Royce was thinking about a lecture series of information briefings he had attended in the latter part of 1994, during a Combined Arms Seminar. Since discussion was encouraged, in order to provide constructive criticism and instantaneous feedback on the various topics being presented, he decided to contribute something positive after listening to a particularly moving and uplifting speech about the daily activities in an Army Mechanized Infantry Brigade which had once been located somewhere in central Louisiana. The post boasted a slower, more relaxed pace of life. It was a place where older soldiers eased into retirement gradually, quietly and gracefully, without much fan-fare. Processing was sort of like putting old race-horses out to pasture in a field of morning glories and daisies. At the end of the speech, Royce had made the comment, "Spoken like a true Samurai warrior." In the summer of 2006, Royce had found a late model Buick for a neighbor and swapped it for her buffed shiny silver 1995 Caprice Classic. He needed a reliable commuter car for transportation back and forth to work in and around Dallas at the time. He was living on the edge of the city, in the suburbs near the Speedway. Largely obsolete now, compared with the latest models coming out of Detroit, this particular vehicle had the unique distinction of being shaped like a big lemon, and was rapidly becoming a very popular car to customize, in certain inner-city circles. The body, paint, and leather interior was already in showroom condition. The sticker on the frame indicated the presence of an economical 4.6 liter motor, but someone had removed it altogether and dropped in a new 5.9 liter V-8 instead, which transformed the vehicle into an excellent highway car. Most importantly, it was a clean car with a clear title. All Royce had to do was tune up the motor, change the oil, install an aluminum radiator from California and a heater coil, replace the hi-fi stereo and speakers, add a lift-kit, and put a sharp set of 16-inch alloy wheels and new high-performance tires all the way around. Once completed, the modified vehicle was an eye-catching sight to behold, a one-of-a-kind original. As Royce steered the Caprice into the "Seven-Eleven" parking lot he noticed a pale green four-door Monte Carlo parked off to the side of the building, but didn't think too much about it at the

time. He stopped his car and walked cheerfully into the convenience store for refreshments. He located the soda fountain and snack aisles. While waiting patiently in line, he heard a deep resonant voice behind him mutter into his ear, "I want your car." What an odd, uncouth thing to say to somebody you don't even know in a busy, crowded convenience store, Royce thought. Sometimes acting normal and doing nothing is the best course of action to deescalate a potential incident. You never know when someone might come unglued, become unhinged, or fly completely off the handle. So, Royce ignored him. The tactic did not work. The short man of bulky stature--perfect for any eight-man football running back position, he thought, repeated himself, only louder and with a more insistent tone of voice this time. The youth had a dark complexion and a round smiley-face which gave him the appearance of a "Pillsbury dough boy." Was he merely pretending he was a tough-guy, and wise to the ways of the world, instead of being a junior college drop-out or some delinquent reject from technical training school? "Not for sale," Royce stated matter-of-factly, plainly and calmly, turning slightly to get a better angle on his antagonist, looking directly into his steady gaze and dull eyes. There is safety in numbers, Royce considered. Too many people around for trouble, he rationalized. He stepped up smartly to the cashier, paid for his soda and chips, and walked calmly outside, creating greater distance between himself and the other. Moving quickly to his vehicle then, Royce got in, started the motor, and put the transmission in reverse to leave the scene immediately. That was when he noticed there were actually four young men in the green Monte Carlo, including the one who tried to strike up a conversation a moment ago, who had just returned and taken a back seat. Punks, he thought. A Sunday driver and his joy-riding friends. Nothing to be taken seriously. Across the busy boulevard at the next intersection was a branch office of Royce's bank. He had planned to withdrawal cash for his trip back to Texas there, having visited family and friends in Oklahoma for a few days. Now he had to go back to work. As he exited the empty teller-machine lobby and strolled to his car, he couldn't help but notice, of all things, the green Monte Carlo with the four occupants moving slowly forward, leering, almost prowling. They pulled up and stopped their car beside his vehicle. Their windows were all rolled down. They must have followed him over to the bank, it appeared. Royce climbed into his Chevrolet and rolled down his window, too. He smiled as if he were meeting old friends at "Walmart" by chance. "What do you have under the hood?" one of them asked, the taller, slender, buck-tooth passenger in the front seat, with a gold-plated incisor. His inquiry did not appear to be made in a menacing or threatening manner, but you never know how someone might react, if you say something rude, insulting, or terribly offensive. So, Royce wanted to be careful how he responded. "A big V-8 engine," Royce replied pleasantly, not too smugly, hoping they wouldn't want to street-race for money. "And there

are several notable safety and security features built right into the vehicle," he continued. "Standard issue." He let this information gradually sink in. There was no overt reaction by the other party. As long as they stayed in their vehicle the situation was cool. Nobody could accuse Royce of being modest and humble. Or shying away from trouble for that matter. He actually considered himself more of a Cowboy, than a top-rated Nascar racing driver, which really meant that he could be counted on to drive fast if the need had arisen to get from point A to point B in an awful hurry, but he would rather roam around on the range. Becoming much bolder and braver now, he suppressed the urge to grimace, groan, and growl. He stifled his trade-mark snarl, sneer, and howl. He thought of himself more as being among the rugged, trail-riding, cattle-driving cowboys who galloped horses across the silver screen and into the history books. So, no he didn't want a drag race. "See you around," said Bucktooth, postponing the inevitable. "Not if I see you first," replied Royce. They had obviously reached an impasse, a water-shed moment in their daily lives. They might have re-evaluated the situation or made a rapid risk-assessment, but nobody said another word when Royce grinned and calmly drove away at a leisurely pace through lively city streets, and onto the Broken Arrow expressway leading up to the turnpike gateway. He didn't expect them to follow. And they didn't. Cruising in a westerly direction on the Interstate toward OKC, Royce pushed the speakerphone button on his beeping phone. "Good evening, Mr. Royce. Did you meet the backup unit?" he was asked. "Greetings and salutations, Mr. Wright! Yes, I certainly did, but it was more of a confrontation. I wasn't made to feel overly enthusiastic by the enigmatic encounter with Destiny's children." "They have been trained in undercover work, and they know the city." "Bunko Squad definitely knows how to ruffle a fellow's feathers. But, at least they don't act like game rangers or look like rent-a-cops." "Can you keep me informed when the deal goes through?" "Sure, Chief. I always try to keep you in the loop. But, when you're up against organized crime and a crooked Ponzi scheme in a high-stakes poker game, you can't always predict end results. When I read the Collected Stories of Wallace Stegner, published in 1990 and written between 1938 and 1990, I gasped almost in disbelief and concluded, "Truer words have never been written." I reflected on the group of them. Imaginative stories generally require a "suspension of belief," or so I'd heard, in order to get anything really meaningful out of them. But Wallace Stegner's tales ring true any way you shake them. They smack you like a fist-punch in the face. You feel as if you'd just been blind-sided while talking on your portable telephone. You weren't watching where you were going and you blundered, walking directly into a corner-post column made of impervious six-by-six treated pine lumber. Knock on wood. Of the thirty-one stories in the book, I would estimate that over a dozen fall into the categories of most interesting, quite extraordinary, and unparalleled fiction-writing

which is capable of captivating a wide range of audiences from coast to coast. The three that impressed me the most were "The Maiden in the Tower," because I like visiting my old haunts; "Women on the Wall," because I can relate to corresponding with loved ones over great distances; and "Blue-winged Teal," because I'm a sentimental and an incurable romantic. Of course, there's "Berry Patch," which is all you need to know about true love, in my opinion. The author included a longer story, "Genesis," which turned out to be a common-theme story-line for many an epic Western novel or Hollywood film about courageous cowboys. Many of his stories are about growing up in the wilderness and have frontier settings. They are all about survival. The stories I could least relate to, being from a mostly rural county, a proverbial hay-seed of infinite possibility, depicted a sensible, moralistic photographer and his liberal-minded, idealistic, social-worker wife trying to convert their sprawling city into some form of perfect utopia and revitalized cosmopolitan metropolis, if not actually improving the living conditions there. My immediate reaction was, "Why are you wasting your time bringing losers home with you, trying to educate them? They're animals." On the other hand, eradicating them would be completely wrong, I suppose. At the other end of the spectrum, the stories which involve living among high-society misfits and malcontents did not make much of a suitable impression on me or do anything to significantly improve my edification, either. These kinds of stories are not meant to inflate your ego or soothe your psyche. I merely believe that they are stories meant to be about living among wolves in sheep's clothing.

I have only begun this book, however I just completed two of Wallace Stegner's books and have been thoroughly entertained. Stegner gives a good history of what it was like to grow up in the 20's and 30's. He does not disappoint. I'll probably read all of his books.

Wallace Stegner was one of the most revered writers in modern American literature. His *Collected Stories* is a panoply of wit and wisdom that everyone should read.

Mr. Stegner paints an emotional and perceptive portrait of humanity, opening the reader's eyes and revealing a truth often hidden just beneath the surface of our lives. A clear icon in American literature.

Wallace Stegner is one of my favorites. I thoroughly enjoyed this book of his carefully crafted short stories.

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