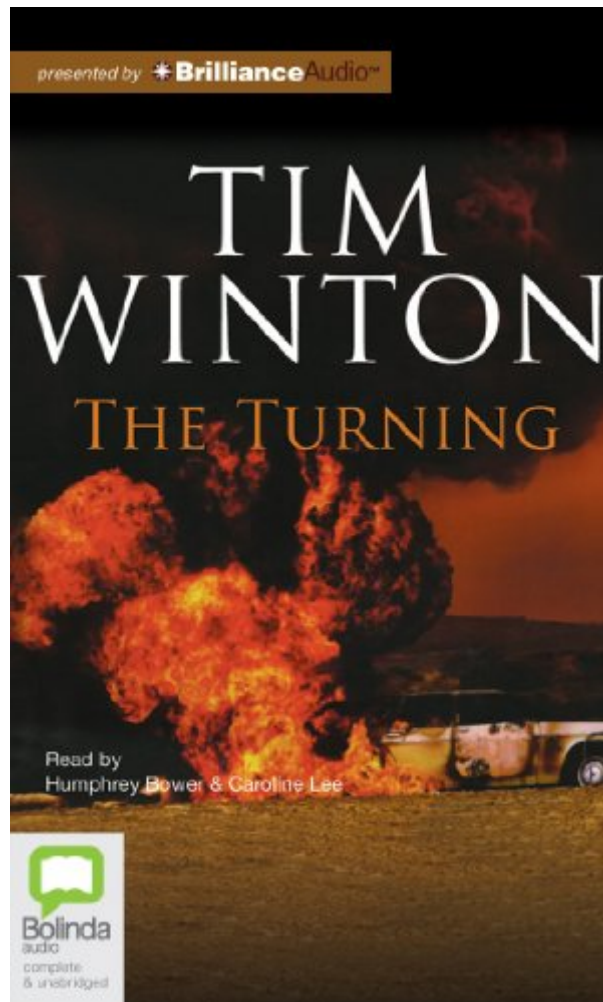


THE TURNING BY TIM WINTON



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From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Well-known in his native Australia and twice shortlisted for the Man Booker, Winton (*Dirt Music*, etc.) is overdue for wider recognition in the U.S. This collection of linked stories showcases his strengths: memorable characters colliding with the moments that define them—for better or worse—and clean, evocative prose that captures the often stultifying life in smalltown Western Australia. In the title story, Raelene, a young wife and mother living in a trailer park with her abusive husband, Max, becomes fascinated with her happy new neighbors; the seemingly perfect couple's influence sets Raelene on a muddled path toward self-examination, resulting in a transformation shocking for both its brutality and naïveté. "Sand" reveals Max's cruelty as a young boy—he tries to bury his younger brother alive—while "Family" shows the two brothers meeting again as adults, with the balance of power between them shifting dramatically. Another character, Vic, is central to the book: he appears as an awkward adolescent fixated on unattainable older girls, as a young man coping with the legacy of his father's alcoholism and abandonment, and as a middle-aged man unable to come to terms with his past. Winton reveals a wide but finely turned swath of simmering inner lives; the sweetness of these stories, as well as their sharp bite, feels earned and real. (Sept.)

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Painful, raw, eloquent—these tales comprise a powerful defense for a much maligned genre, the short story collection. It's no surprise that many of the stories here have been previously published in literary journals like *The Threepenny Review*. Winton's language is taut, his characterization masterful, and the local color pitch-perfect. But what truly sets these stories apart is their emotional impact: they are subtle yet stirring and sensuous. Winton has been short-listed for the Booker Prize twice and is acclaimed in his native Australia. This collection will likely earn him the attention he deserves in the United States.

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Here are turnings of all kinds - changes of heart, nasty surprises, slow awakenings, sudden detours - where people struggle against the terrible weight of the past and challenge the lives they've made for themselves. Beautifully crafted, and as tender as they are confronting, these elegiac stories examine the darkness and frailty of ordinary people and celebrate the moments when the light shines through.

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Most helpful customer reviews

21 of 22 people found the following review helpful.

Life's Turning Points

By Adam

Tim Winton's latest book 'The Turning' is a collection of short stories, narratives that are to some extent connected, in that the same places feature in the book and the same characters come in and out of the stories.

Most of the characters in the stories have been in some sort of trouble of one kind or another and have been damaged. They are all at some turning point in their lives, where they are facing up to what has happened to them in the past and trying to work out who they are, before they set off into the future.

"There are turnings of all kinds - changes of heart, nasty surprises, slow awakenings, sudden detours - where people struggle against the terrible weight of the past and challenge the lives they've made for themselves."

Winton's depiction of the world of small-town Western Australian life is expressed with precise realism. He uses sensory detail to convey the atmosphere of the setting. Winton's use of the senses lets the reader share the intimacy of living in a small-town. However, Winton also illustrates the drawbacks of small-town life.

Winton's prose is simple and yet powerful. The characters are all interesting and he makes the reader think. You will read this book and want to read Winton's other books as well. Highly recommended.

12 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

do yourself a favour

By sandra papas

for those of you who are yet to discover Tim Winton he is a legend here in Australia and you are in for a treat! Most of his novels are set in Western Australia - our country's largest, yet least populated state which is dreadfully hot in summer but full of magnificent surf beaches, stunning scenery and some of the best wineries in the world. I spent much of my childhood in Perth and Winton writes so well I spend weeks having flashbacks - I can smell the sand during our summer holidays.

The book is a series of short stories that turn out to be linked in some (often very subtle) ways. I can't recommend it enough - or any of his books for that matter - see *Dirt Music*.

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Antics in Angelus

By Stephen A. Haines

There's a special appeal to the "linked" short story collection. Although the same names and places appear,

each is new with the next story. The desperate men, the battered wives, the confused and bewildered children. They interact in their own ways, coming together and breaking apart over the years. In the hands of a master storyteller like Winton, each tale is a spark of reality. Every individual comes almost startlingly alive in but a few pages. As the sequence unfolds through the view of the protagonist, you gain fresh insights on circumstances. Absolute values have no place here, a lesson most of us would do well to remember.

The tales are set in a coastal town in Western Australia. Angelus is a fishing community - often under stress from unemployment, it is a contained locale. Children grow up as neighbours, move through school together, and interact in almost wildly varying ways as they mature. There are mysteries - why was a boy left broken and battered on a beach? Who was the girl found dead in a school loo and how did she die? Who escaped the almost desolate town and how bound do they remain to it in later years? These are common situations and questions in a small town, and the economic pressures add intensity to the expected conditions we all endured in adolescence. It is a credit to Winton's outstanding prose skills that beauty emerges within this forlorn community. A coastal location always provides a sense of expanded view lacking in inland towns. Yet here, as almost everywhere in Australia, the desert looms as an ever-present menace, poorly understood and a block to escape even mountains fail to match.

Vic Lang, the character around whom these stories weave, emerges first as a young child at a beach party. His life is complex. While in school, a girl with a facial birthmark fascinates him, but that's not the girl he marries. His attachments are intense and sometimes offbeat. He takes up with "Boner" McPharlin [the term comes from his job in an abattoir], the Huckleberry Finn of his time and place. Totally without ambition, Boner's presence gives Vic a basis for comparison with his own life. It's a shaky foundation to launch into adulthood. Vic symbolises the small-town outlook with his sense of being under constant scrutiny. In "The Long, Clear View", Vic reflects on his life and how the town imposed so much of itself on his later life.

North American readers often balk at the "culture shock" of Australian conditions and language. Winton's deft touch softens the shock to what might be deemed a "culture tickle". His character portrayals and the manner in which he deals with the passage of time among what become familiar people, guide the reader effortlessly through some unfamiliar terms and conditions. What does "shoot through" mean? It has nothing to do with weapons. It means "escape" or "desertion" depending on the protagonist's viewpoint. A "jacaranda" turns out to be a tree, ugly when not blooming, but a stunning array of colour in the proper season. If a blossom falls on while walking underneath, it is said to be a sign of good luck. Does that happen in Angelus?

Winton's realistic view of people and events is at odds with much of today's literature. His voice, while grim and sometimes even bleak, doesn't overwhelm the reader with despair. His people aren't crushed by events, they remain battlers even in the most seemingly desperate circumstances. You must, however, traverse the entire sequence to understand how they accomplish that feat. While each story stands entirely on its own, like a brick-built building, they must all be taken together to perceive the entire stunning edifice. [stephen a. haines - Ottawa, Canada]

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