

SOUR GRAPES
--A Critical Review of Past and Present Literary Offerings

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Week of January 2nd, 2011
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Book Review of:
Tinkers
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Tinkers
(2009)
Written by Paul Harding.
Review by Paul Lambrecht.

Grade: B+

I didn't really like the organizational structure. A dying man who can see into the hearts of two generations of his forbears. George Washington Crosby is a clock mechanic. His father, Howard, was a traveling salesman of novelty and domestic items. And Howard's father, George's grandfather, was an uninspiring minister. Hardy seems to be enraptured in this text with the mind-boggling ingenuity of machines, hence the title, and alternatively with the stark beauty of nature. These two ideas are wed together thematically, to my mind, in an almost alchemical view of the natural universe. As if everything we see is just a smartly crafted machine.

In fact, Howard, the salesman (and epileptic) sometimes thinks he is about to catch a glimpse beyond the fabric of his perceptions, through a hole which has been punched into the sky by some minor miracle. Howard likens his seizures in fact to bolts of lightning which hit him, and which have originated from this "beyond" universe. Howard is the best developed character in this story and what mechanics of plot there are in this story, they seem mostly to do with his character.

The dying son George is kind of a frame, as is his hallucinatory near-death state which allows for flashy intervals of perceptive and obscure description.

Howard has one really great scene in the wilderness prior to becoming an epileptic. Other than that, I thought the scenes and plotting were somewhat lackluster.

The minister grandfather is kind of weak. Some of the intercutting episodes of flashy prose went above my head. The dying character, George, is not all that clearly fleshed out, in terms of his personality. Perhaps that is by design.

All of the three generations seem somewhat put upon and lacking confidence. Perhaps because they are all on fleeting mental terms with reality: the almost autistic George with his precisely ticking clock parts and possible dementia at the end where these reminiscences come from; the “feeble-minded” and unrealistic, almost childlike, but good-hearted Howard; and the curious example of the senile untalented minister.

There is some real emotion in this book and it certainly has a shimmering surface but it all seems kind of vague, somehow.