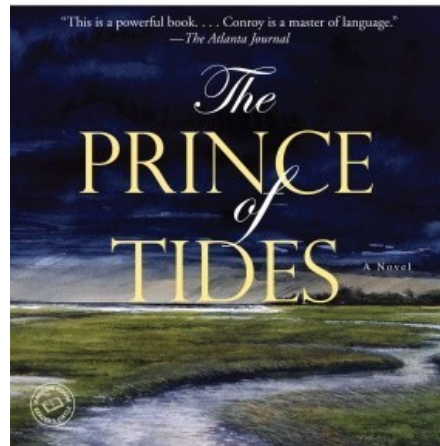


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PAT
CONROY



The Prince of Tides

Pat Conroy

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The Prince of Tides

Pat Conroy

The Prince of Tides Pat Conroy

PAT CONROY has created a huge, brash thunderstorm of a novel, stinging with honesty and resounding with drama. Spanning forty years, this is the story of turbulent Tom Wingo, his gifted and troubled twin sister Savannah, and their struggle to triumph over the dark and tragic legacy of the extraordinary family into which they were born.

Filled with the vanishing beauty of the South Carolina low country as well as the dusty glitter of New York City, **The Prince of Tides** is PAT CONROY at his very best.

The Prince of Tides Details

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From Reader Review The Prince of Tides for online ebook

Arah-Lynda says

My wound is geography. It is also my anchorage, my port of call.

So begins the story of the Wingo family of Melrose Island in Colleton County, South Carolina. As told by Tom Wingo.

To describe our growing up in the lowcountry of South Carolina, I would have to take you to the marsh on a spring day, flush the great blue heron from its silent occupation, scatter marsh hens as we sink to our knees in mud, open you an oyster with a pocketknife and feed it to you from the shell and say, "There. That taste. That's the taste of my childhood." I would say, "Breathe deeply," and you would breathe and remember that smell for the rest of your life, the bold, fecund aroma of tidal marsh, exquisite and sensual, the smell of the South in heat, a smell like new milk, semen, and spilled wine, all perfumed with seawater. My soul grazes like a lamb on the beauty of indrawn tides.

Tom has a twin sister Savannah and as the story opens Savannah, a successful poet, who lives in New York City has just attempted to end her life by slashing her wrists with a razor blade. This is not the first time. He also has an older brother Luke who he idolizes, but Luke is not there as this story opens and to understand why, why his sister is barely clinging with frightening, frailty to life, why his big brother is not present; well, then we have to go back. Back to when they were children, Back to when Lila and Henry, their parents, controlled the great tides of their life.

It is not a pretty picture. The Wingos of Melrose island were an intensely disturbing, dysfunctional family. Their three children survived a brutal upbringing, one that they were not allowed ever to discuss or even acknowledge; isolated from the neighbouring community of Colleton, with only each other to turn to for strength, support and comfort. Their bond seemed unbreakable.

Still there is beauty here:

It was growing dark on this long southern evening and suddenly, at the exact point her finger had indicated, the moon lifted a forehead of stunning gold above the horizon, lifted straight out of filigreed, light-intoxicated clouds that lay on the skyline in attendant veils. Behind us, the sun was setting in a simultaneous congruent withdrawal and the river turned to flame in a quiet duel of gold.....The new gold of moon astonishing and ascendant, the depleted gold of sunset extinguishing itself in the long westward slide, it was the old dance of days in the Carolina marshes, the breathtaking death of days before the eyes of children, until the sun vanished, its final signature a ribbon of bullion strung across the tops of water oaks. The moon then rose quickly, rose like a bird from the water, from the trees, from the islands, and climbed straight up - gold, then yellow, then pale yellow, pale silver, silver - bright, then something miraculous, immaculate, and beyond silver, a color native only to southern nights.

These days Tom Wingo is a family man himself with a beautiful wife and three beautiful daughters but he can feel it all slipping away. He used to be a teacher and a coach, work that he loved, but that was before Luke. Now he cannot seem to bring himself to give his wife the intimacy she craves, he wants to, but it is like he is frozen, unable to get himself in motion. He knows even before his wife confirms it, that he is losing her. Perhaps their time apart, while he is in New York City trying to help his sister will give them both an opportunity to reflect and come to terms with what they really want. It is in New York that Tom

meets Susan Lowenstein, Savannah's psychiatrist and at her urging turns back the hands of time as he relates the events of their childhood in a last ditch effort to help Lowenstein understand the trauma that may go a long way in explaining Savannah's suicide attempts and her current mental state.

It is the beginning of a long and uncanny season in the house of Wingo. There will be honor and decency and the testing of the qualities of our humanity, or the lack of them. There will be a single hour of horror that will change our lives forever. There will be carnage and murder and ruin. When it is over, we will all think that we have survived the worst day of our lives, endured the most grisly scenario the world could have prepared for us. We will be wrong.

Violence sends deep roots into the heart; it has no seasons; it is always ripe, evergreen.

There will also be Luke, our Prince of Tides. Luke's story however is one you would be well advised to read for yourselves.

But there is also a Bengal tiger and whales and a rare white porpoise and the South Carolina low country.

There is sadness and brutality yes, but also adventure and mirth and heart swelling love; all wrapped up in Conroy's luscious, lyrical, haunting prose.

Later when we spoke of our childhood, it seemed part elegy, part nightmare.

I am sure a great many of you have likely already seen the movie with Barbra Streisand and Nick Nolte, which was great. I loved it! You may be thinking why should I read the book when I already know the story? Why? Because there is so much more story here and because it is so beautifully written that it brings tears to my eyes and my chest feels oddly swollen, just remembering some of Conroy's passages. The movie cannot even begin to compare or compete.

All The Stars in The Sky!

Debbie Zapata says

This book was, like all of Conroy's titles, intensely gripping, humorous at times, coarse and gruesome at others, with more than a few touches of sheer poetry scattered everywhere.

Conroy excels at describing tortured family life; in this case the Wingos of South Carolina. Through narrator Tom's eyes, we learn about his parents, his older brother Luke, and his twin sister Savannah. Rarely does one family have so much happening: whether drama comes from inside the family circle or from without, it finds these children and their parents and puts them all through hell.

I've read enough Conroy to know that his childhood was nearly as tortured as Tom Wingo's. I admire the courage it must have taken to face his own demons in the way he had to in order to write any of his books. Perhaps it was a necessary step to understanding his own life and the past moments that made him who he was. That is the way things turned out for Tom Wingo, so why not for Pat Conroy also?

Kelly says

I can't remember the last time I felt this torn; I hated the characters for being so selfish with their affections, so cowardly in their confrontations, the cruelty shown when the moment was theirs for the taking. What I hated more was when the victim on the receiving end - and, to be fair, it always rotates - would rise up in anger, but then crumble to their knees in love and forgiveness.

And that's also why I loved them. In one moment they felt so betrayed, so dishonored by blood and by love. Then would wait five minutes, and forgive them because of who they were..family. The parents who brutalized but also showed beauty, the siblings that both threw each under the bus and saved them from it, and the hometown that treated them like nothing more than low-rent scrubs. And all those in-betweens: the hits, the tragedies, the shining moments, the crimes so unspeakable it leaves the reader wondering if there really is God...they stream in and out of life, the yellow & red threads in life's tapestry.

I've read other reviews on this book, and I think 75% of them got it wrong. While the location is in South Carolina, and the southern culture itself becomes a character in it, that town feeling, that family feeling - that can be anywhere.

And finally, even had I not been utterly entranced by Conroy's writing style, I never would have wished for one page less.

Julie says

Passion swells for this epic, **The Prince of Tides**, and so I swim in murky waters here, careful in my criticism not to become The Princess of Against the Tides.

Ah, hell. Who am I kidding? This princess often swims against the tide and her upper body is strong.

So, let me not mince words. Let's get right to it.

Pat Conroy has almost as many devotees as Jesus. I'm not sure about the source of the appeal, but he looks like a jolly gnome in the pictures I've seen of him, and I take him for a man who shook hands vigorously at book signings.

Okay, so he was affable (I'm not entirely sure; you'd need to ask Wife #1, Wife #2 or Wife #3 how she felt about him), and I enjoy affable types, but I'm not sure why more attention hasn't been placed on some of the damnable mistakes in his writing.

First off, Mr. Conroy is incredibly inconsistent. He'll write something lovely and memorable, like, "when we spoke of our childhood, it seemed part elegy, part nightmare."

Or, "I was the son of a beautiful, word-struck mother and I longed for her touch many years after she had no obligation to touch me."

And then he'll carry on for eons with some overly wordy, barely readable prose. I would struggle, page after page, reading these "rants," which felt almost like the long-winded stories my children tell me, as I drive them home from school. You know, the stories that feel as though they have no punctuation, no beginning or ending, and require the storyteller to say them all in one breath?

Also, um. . . ahem, anyone else made uncomfortable by Tom's mother wanting to make out with him and both brothers wanting to hook up with their sister? Who is this guy, John Irving?

And, last but not least, the dialogue. For the love of God, come on, now! Even if you love this book, I ask you to return to it and read about 20 pages of the dialogue. Truly, do me this favor, before you deem me "harsh." Clearly, this was not Mr. Conroy's strength as a writer, and, luckily he is more prone to descriptive narrative than passages of dialogue, but whenever it occurred, it pulled me right out of the story. Quick example:

"Where ya going, Tom?"

"Nowhere, Savannah. I'm going nowhere, Savannah."

"But did ya want to, Tom? Did you want to go somewheres, Tom?"

"Nah, Savannah. But ya know what, Savannah? I'm hungry, Savannah."

I'm telling you, I've read better dialogue produced in short stories by high school freshmen.

So. . . what made this story all the rage? Was it the occasionally beautiful prose? The imagery? I experienced some of that. Was it the focus that was placed on the need for men to pursue mental/emotional support? I liked that, too. Men need mental health outlets as much as women do, and I hate that our society has long made it taboo for them to seek it. Was this book instrumental in shifting mindsets? I don't know.

I do know that the movie did nothing to help my reading experience. I thought (almost relentlessly) of Barbra Streisand's acrylic nails and Nick Nolte's hair in his famous mugshot, as I was reading it. And, worse than that, I pictured Nick Nolte's mouth, slack from overdosing, whispering to Streisand's lacquered nails. . . *Lowenstein. . . Lowenstein.*

Hard to get past that, though it's not the book's fault.

So, back to the book. Most Conroy diehards tell me that **Tides** isn't their favorite; it's typically **The Great Santini**, when I ask. I'd be happy to receive Conroy suggestions, and I'd be open minded toward another read.

This was just surprisingly disappointing to me.

Three stars, says the Princess Against the Tides. . . three stars for some great one-liners, a fantastic title, and the book's long-lasting, cultural impact.

Matthew Klobucher says

Pat Conroy's prose is tragically acquainted with all the misery and glory and pain and beauty of humanity. It is also deeply entrenched in the American south. I believe he immortalizes his own time and place the way Hemingway did for wartime Europe. This story, so startlingly brutal and direct in it's engagement of the

reader, lays out the impressive and failed life of Tom Wingo. The plain good virtue and astonishing cruelty of small-town South Carolina take shape in an uneasy and inevitable connection, vying ferociously with the complicated sadness of modernity. This book is treacherous and difficult, wounding at the very threshold of a happy or cathartic moment, and while it is not always pleasant to read, it is provocative and cathartic. It is an angry and sensitive book, dedicated to an ideal of America and made up of terrific stories. It is all tied together in the structure of a novel, and ends up being well worth the read.

Glenn Sumi says

Oy gevalt. I think this is a case of a book not aging well. Back in the 80s, this novel was an enormous bestseller and (if I recall) was pretty well received critically too. And, of course, it was made into a lavish movie starring Barbra Streisand and Nick Nolte.

But holy sun, stars and moon... this thing is wildly, extravagantly overwritten. Perhaps it needs to be appreciated in its context. Stories of abuse weren't as common back then as they were to be later, so it must have been considered bold and brave. And Conroy's descriptions of the South Carolina lowlands are still beautifully evocative, if excessive.

That said, I didn't believe any of the characters: football coach Tom, his suicidal twin sister Savannah, a Sylvia Plath-like poet, and especially not Savannah's New York Jewish psychiatrist, Susan Lowenstein. (Don't get me started on Lowenstein's concert violinist husband.)

Even after the big emotional climax, which (let's be honest, here) we've seen coming for at least 250 pages, there's lots to go. The pacing is way off in the final 50 pages. And despite the length of the thing, there are many, many unanswered questions.

I interviewed Conroy once, and he was the nicest, sweetest, most charming guy imaginable. RIP, sir. You entertained a lot of people with your stories. I hope your other books are a little bit subtler in their effects.

Carol says

I really did not intend to read **The Prince of Tides** anytime soon until a couple *avid* reading friends told me I should not pass it by.....and they were so right!

If you've seen the movie, you already know this is an unforgettable and disturbing story set in both the South Carolina low country and New York City about an extremely dysfunctional family with abusive father Henry and complacent mother Lila whose children are traumatized by their treatment during childhood.....but while Henry's brutality would leave a lasting impression on all their lives, it is **nothing** compared to the *scary as hell* seven-foot giant who would forever terrorize Luke, Tom and his twin sister Savannah. (*I can still see him starring in their window*)

Despite all the dark hidden secrets that eventually come to light, this emotional story reveals some good times and laughable moments too.....like grandmother Tolitha's episode inside the casket.....and Henry's fried "Alpo" dog dinner, (*my favorite*) and combined with Tom's sarcastic wise-crack humor and close, loving relationship with his siblings, the jesting does help to lighten the severity of horrors endured and tragedy of loss.

While the book is centered around Savannah's insanity and treatment by Dr. Susan Lowenstein, their very disturbing childhoods are narrated by Tom who hopes to bring his sister back from her world of demons and silence.

Except for bits of animal cruelty here and there (*that I abhor*) this is an incredible story and extraordinary novel. I remember the movie being quite good, but the book in comparison has much more detail and is *IMHO* exceptional.

Eileen says

I'm waiting for the day that Pat Conroy will disappoint me. I'm waiting for the day that he fails to astound me, to take my breath away with each poetically seductive word that he has chosen, to stir emotions deep within me that I only feel and understand when I am reading his literature.

I am pertinaciously confident that that day will never come.

Lori says

I almost didn't read this one because I have seen the movie numerous times and really didn't care to read about the romance of a small town coach and a big city psychiatrist.

This book is SO MUCH BETTER THAN THE MOVIE!!!!

Tragic and humorous. Shocking and touching. Brutal and tender. Honest and delusional. Love, fear, unadulterated hatred and inconceivable forgiveness are all combined in an eloquently written novel.

Jason says

This is the book that is the reason I read anything at all for pleasure. I decided I was going to read it before the movie came out and COMPLETELY fell in love with Conroy's style, renewed my love-affair with the low country of South Carolina, and discovered the joy of diving into a book wholeheartedly. Mr. Conroy is the reason I read today. The stories of what this family went through are heartbreaking at one (or more) moment(s) and hysterical at others. I didn't think the movie was half-bad, but the book is phenomenal.

Anna Ligtenberg says

After years of reading predominantly great reviews of this book, I finally read it, only to wonder why everyone was raving. Perhaps Pat Conroy explained it himself, when he wrote "Savannah's living proof that

writing poetry and reading books causes brain damage." I found myself skipping entire pages of pointless description and only skimming the entire "children's book" written by Savannah.

Most of the momentous events of the story require the reader to accept the most unbelievable things (Bengal tiger...) as facts of life for the Wingos, but the children's book crosses a line; this book within the book is only horrific in that it's a book no publisher would have published because it's a book that no parent would ever have let their child read.

Throughout the real book, beginning with Tom's reference to his daughters' "lovely, perfectly shaped behinds" to the children's book and all the way to the end, there's a tinge of incest and inappropriate sex to everything that leaves me needing a shower. I'm giving the book 2 stars because I think the story, buried under way too many words, is an interesting one - it's just too hard to find most of the time.

- AnnaLovesBooks

Perry says

A Riptide

In Southern English, "naked" means you ain't got no clothes on, while "nekkid" means you ain't got no clothes on and you're up to something.

Lewis Grizzard

Clip of the 3 kids in film version of novel

"Man wonders but God decides
When to kill the Prince of Tides."

A verse from the eponymous poem by Savannah Wingo, the suicidal sister and renowned poet in Pat Conroy's *The Prince of Tides*, a novel dealing on its surface with the general mentality of the Southern United States, particularly of the region's male gender.

Conroy's protagonist Tom Wingo gives a first person account of the heart-stinging story of the Wingo family of the South Carolina coast, primarily to his sister's NYC therapist in an attempt to save sis's life after a second suicide attempt. The novel provides fertile ground for delving deeply into conflicts among family members, the steadfastness of the grandfather's religious beliefs, marital infidelity (wounds and healing), the bonds between siblings and the lifelong scars left by a parent's physical and mental abuse and by a barbarous rape.

The story is also a serenade to our need for amore', and the irony that humans, so capable of loving friends, family and mates, can also show more savagery than any other species to our own species and to our environment.

Through the contrast between New York City and a fishing village on the Carolina coast, Conroy examines these issues in a superb self-reflective way, showing that we can find love anywhere, when we least expect it and with someone we initially see as so different; and, love will follow us wherever we go, so long as we let it.

Splendorous and distinctly Southern.

Chrissie says

There is just too much wrong with this book for me to give it more than two stars. Of course, this merely reflects my personal view.

What went wrong for me?

Too many topics are covered with inadequate depth. The central theme is physical abuse in a family. How does this affect family members for the rest of their lives? This central theme is expanded to touch upon patriotism, the Vietnam War, nuclear weapons, environmentalism, rape, sexism, feminism, psychiatry, religion, drugs, finally ending with the strength of family ties and love of home, that is to say **where** you grow up. I question the view that in a family all can be forgiven. I am uncomfortable with the view that “home” can be just **one** place. I do understand that Pat Conroy, the author, felt a deep love and tie to the South Carolinian lowlands. He describes them movingly. This I did appreciate.

The Wingo family is ripped apart by physical abuse. There are three siblings – Luke and two twins, Tom and Savannah. Savannah ends up in psychiatric care. It is not just her though that is scarred! I was intrigued by the characters’ different ways of dealing with their abuses.

I found the writing overblown - too ripe, too syrupy, too cloying, too sentimental. Events are too cinematic, too melodramatic. The end too (view spoiler).

Some events are just ridiculous. A (view spoiler) as a pet! Give me a break. I like books fixed in reality. It is ridiculous and then predictable when Tom first threatens to dump the psychiatrist's (view spoiler) Don't all patients (view spoiler) A book of this length has to have a love affair. So sentimental that Luke agrees (view spoiler).

I said the writing was overblown. The audiobook narration by Frank Muler further exaggerates the writing. Many listeners love that. I don't. Yet I must agree that he captures well the cool, detached voice so typical for a psychiatrist and also Tom's snide wisecracks. He captures the tone of the author's words. In the introduction to the audiobook the author says himself he thinks the narrator did a marvelous job, and he wrote the book so that does mean something.

The book simply isn't my cup of tea.

Halfway through:

I am a yo yo..... The Prince of Tides has captured my interest now. I am about halfway through. No question, the writing is over the top, but two things are great. First of all I really want to understand this family. I need to understand the familial relationships and why they are who they are. The protagonists' adult and childhood selves fascinate me. I am beginning to understand who Tom and who Savannah really are. Tom's self-assurance and joking is only skin deep. And their Mom, she demands to be understood too. All of them in fact. What I like is that these are complicated individuals.

Secondly, Conroy deliciously depicts the feel of the Carolina lowlands, the islands, the shrimpers, the sea and the social stratum there in the 50s. Here the melodrama and the overly descriptive writing work wonderfully. I felt I was there on the shrimp boats. I am seeing both sides of their youth, the good and the bad.

I think I am just a baby - the section about the monstrous "Callanwolde" scared me to death! It put me off. It led me to believe that I was reading merely a horror story. Now I find that I am being given a book about human relationships. A book that focuses on character portrayal. I also like the sharp contrast between the New York and Carolina worlds, and what this says about the different milieus. I am a country person. I love the sea, but I have also lived in NYC. I immediately recognize the city's magic pull.

Think if I had stopped?! No, this is good.

In chapter 6 (5 hours completed of a total 22hours and 41 minutes):

Phew, this is a struggle. The telling is disjointed, jumping between NYC, Alabama and coastal small-town South Carolina. Europe too. The language fluctuates between beautiful and overly dramatic. At points too wordy, too melodramatic.

I may have seen the movie years and years ago and suppressed the whole experience.

The author introduces the audiobook by praising Frank Muler's narration. I prefer employing my own imagination.

The violence - is it movingly told or too extreme? That no one has classified this as horror surprises me.

Last night I decided to dump it. This morning I have decided to continue.

Vanessa says

Before I wrote this, I took a cursory look at a few of the reviews and realized to my dismay that in this case I am the Grinch who took the roast beast. And yet I stand by my rating because this book was for me an exercise in maudlin pablum. The protagonist experiences all matter of tragedy in his youth, both quotidian and bizarre (an abusive wretch of a father, a venal socially climbing mother, a horrific yet nonsensical assault) and then grows up to have a mentally ill sister and a cheating wife. There's also some mystery about his brother's fate but I won't spoiler it for you (hint: it's nonsensical too.) The aforementioned sister has suffered a breakdown which takes him from South Carolina to NYC where he meets her therapist. There, he tells the story of their life to nice therapist lady with lines like, "I haven't gotten to the worst part yet. I haven't told you about the time they picked up and MOVED my hometown, Doctor. Ahem, sniff sniff." Yes that scene is in the book. At some point he hooks up with the therapist. She has a snooty violinist husband. That is the highlight reel. Now you don't have to read this book. De nada.

(I'm not completely heartless. The story about the pet tiger choked me up a little. Wait-a pet tiger in South

Carolina? In the 1940's? See I told you this book was freaking ridiculous. By the way, I read this around the same time the movie came out and told a friend who had seen it I hated the book but the part with the tiger was sad. She said, "Tiger??")

I have heard that The Great Santini was a better Conroy book and I did like the movie version of it. Then again, people seem to like this book too. So for now, I'll go back to stuffing the Who's Xmas tree up the chimney.

Robin says

I'm wearing my softest, fuzziest slippers while writing this review - treading as lightly as I possibly can - realising that I'm on holy ground here, discussing a much beloved book among many of my very dear and respected Goodreads friends. *PLEASE, DON'T HATE ME!*

This book was at a disadvantage from the beginning, because the spectres of Babs and Nick haunted me continuously from the horrendous movie adaptation. However, I was fully expecting to love and revel in this big, romantic, Southern family epic.

I didn't.

There, I said it. I didn't love it, I didn't enjoy it. I am bewildered how I received this book so off the mark from legions of other readers. If you love this book, please just laugh and disregard my review and keep on loving it.

My first problem is that I found it incredibly sentimental, with prose as purple as can be. An example:

He was tall and thin and had a complexion like goat cheese left on the table too long. The funeral parlour smelled like dead flowers and unanswered prayers.

And another:

I tasted the wine and it was so robust and appealing that I could feel my mouth singing with pleasure when I brought the glass from my lips. The aftertaste held like a chord on my tongue; my mouth felt like a field of flowers. The mousse made me happy to be alive.

I also found a very weird, incestuous tone cropped up dozens of times throughout the book. This is a book in which sisters kiss their brothers on the lips, where a brother carries his sister "like a bride", where a mother tells a son if she was younger she'd "have a go" at him, where a father chases "lewdly" after his daughter after she shows him her budding breasts. And so on, and so forth, and I could come up with many more examples. Once I started noticing the weirdness, I just couldn't stop. It gave me "the no feeling".

I found the dialogue to be horrid - characters constantly used each other's names in almost every line of dialogue. "Are you enjoying this Tom?" "Lowenstein, I really am not." "Oh, Tom, Tom, but why not?" "I wish I knew, Lowenstein." "TOM!" "Lowenstein!!!!" Once I noticed it, it was impossible not to notice it, and cringe. I felt like I was watching a terrible 1980's movie most of the time, with a showy, cinematic predictability.

And, believability went out the window with the TIGER. For goodness' sakes!!! A very poor shrimping boat family has a Bengal tiger in their barn?

Finally, the love story between Tom and Lowenstein did nothing for me. She wasn't particularly likeable (and so unprofessional, I might add!). So much build up leading to their relationship and then the sex scene was chaste enough to fit in a Stephenie Meyer book. BOO. And the way it ended was over the top, cheesy.

Now that I've complained mercilessly (and I apologise for that), I will say one thing Pat Conroy does consistently well, and which I appreciated, is convey his love for the American South: its beauty, its vibrancy, its imperfections and uniqueness. The South, in particular Colleton, South Carolina, is the main character and anchor to the rest of the players in the story. The sense of place and its tidal pull on the Wingo family is indelible and irresistible. That is where the gold lies.
