



## Tinkers: 10th Anniversary Edition

A novel by Paul Harding

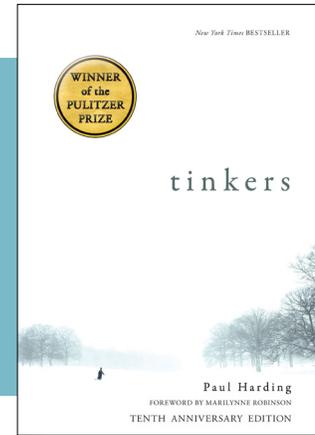
with a foreword by Marilynne Robinson

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**Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction**

**American Library Association Notable Book**

**American Booksellers Association Indie Next List for Reading Groups & Indies Choice Honor Award**

***New York Times* Bestseller**

“A powerful celebration of life in which a New England father and son, through suffering and joy, transcend their imprisoning lives and offer new ways of perceiving the world and mortality.” —**Pulitzer Prize citation**

“*Tinkers* is truly remarkable. It achieves and sustains a unique fusion of language and perception. Its fine touch plays over the textured richnesses of very modest lives, evoking again and again a frisson of deep recognition, a sense of primal encounter with the brilliant, elusive world of the senses. It confers on the reader the best privilege fiction can afford, the illusion of ghostly proximity to other human souls.” —**Marilynne Robinson**, author of *Gilead* and *What Are We Doing Here?*

“*Tinkers* is not just a novel—though it is a brilliant novel. It’s an instruction manual on how to look at nearly everything. Harding takes the back off to show you the miraculous ticking of the natural world, the world of clocks, generations of family, an epileptic brain, the human soul. In astounding language sometimes seemingly struck by lightning, sometimes as tight and complicated as clockwork, Harding shows how enormous fiction can be, and how economical. Read this book and marvel.” —**Elizabeth McCracken**, author of *Thunderstruck* and *Bowlaway*

“The life and death questions Paul Harding raises in *Tinkers*, as well as the richness of his writing, keep a reader coming back to it. . . . Like Faulkner, he never shies away from describing what seems impossible to put into words.” —**Dallas Morning News**

### INTRODUCTION

An old man lies dying. As time collapses into memory, he travels deep into his past, where he is reunited with his father and relives the wonder and pain of his impoverished New England youth. At once heartbreaking and life affirming, *Tinkers* is an elegiac meditation on love, loss, and the fierce beauty of nature.

### A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

*Tinkers* arose from my fascination with my grandparents’ stories about their lives growing up in Maine. The stories became like family myths or legends. But my grandparents would not elaborate on the more difficult parts of their upbringings. So I took the bare bones of some of their stories and made them the premises for a work of fiction. *Tinkers* is not biographical, then, but an imaginary elaboration built up from a few stark, factual details. In it, I have attempted to imagine my way into what might be called a familial consciousness, a kind of single mind or sensibility that encompasses three generations of fathers and sons.

Since its publication, I’ve had the opportunity to read from and discuss *Tinkers* with readers all around the country. I’m delighted and thankful that so many people recognize something of themselves and of their own families in it, that the book can lay claim to something we have in common, no matter what our particular circumstances. It’s such a great good fortune to be able to have this ongoing conversation with all of you, not simply about the book but about art and fiction and what they mean to us all as people. It’s like a long, sustaining talk among friends.



## CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. *Tinkers* is told over the course of eight days, as George lies dying—approximately the same amount of time it takes a hand-wound clock to run down. What do clocks symbolize in *Tinkers*, and why do you think their care and repair is so important to George?
2. After witnessing one of his father's epileptic fits for the first time, George runs away, and his father, Howard, makes a fateful decision. Was it an accumulation of circumstance that led to his decision, or do you think he made it in haste? Do you think George's actions influenced his father? Or do you think Howard's own father's history was more influential?
3. George is very tolerant and forgiving of his mother's bitterness toward his father's illness. What do you think accounts for this? What other roles does illness play in the story? How does it draw the characters together or pull them apart?
4. How do the secrets the family keeps from each other affect the way they interact? How do those secrets color their worldview?
5. During one of George's final revelations, he muses upon his father's life and thinks, ". . . but he was not like a clock or at least was only like a clock to me. But to himself? Who knows? And so it is not he who was like a clock but me." In what ways do different characters' perceptions of themselves reflect their perceptions of their loved ones?
6. The spirituality in this novel is subtle but profound. What do you think the author is trying to say about forgiveness, grace, love, and free will?
7. The author, a former drummer, has said that his experience in a band helped him "keep the time" in this novel. Do you sense that rhythm within the story, and is it the kind of novel you'd expect from a rock musician?
8. The narrative is nonlinear, circling back upon the present day as George explores his own memories and as the histories of his father and grandfather are slowly revealed. By telling the story this way and by merely suggesting certain events and leaving other subjects open-ended, do you feel the author succeeds in inviting readers to open their own imaginations and fully participate in and experience the book?
9. How does the use of contrast work in the novel? For example, what happens when the rational, logical, and orderly passages about the workings of the universe (from the imaginary book *The Reasonable Horologist*) are set alongside the individual characters' often disorderly, chaotic experiences of their personal lives? Do you think George is attracted to the rational version of the universe because his own experience has been so difficult for him to make sense of?
10. The role that kindness plays in the novel is very evocative. How do the passages about the hermit who returned Howard's kindness with his most precious belonging affect your understanding of both characters? What other acts of kindness are performed in the book?
11. In what ways do you see this novel fitting into other classic and contemporary stories of the American experience?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Harding is the author of two novels about multiple generations of a New England family: *Enon* and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Tinkers*. He teaches at Stony Brook Southampton.

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