



## Winter Birds

*By Jim Grimsley*

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Winner of the American Academy of Arts and Letters' Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction. On a snowy Thanksgiving day in North Carolina, a dreamy eight-year-old is pushed headlong into the adult world by a violent quarrel between his parents. Jim Grimsley's brilliant first novel unfolds in a strikingly unconventional way--as the boy tells himself his own story. A shattering story of heartbreak, violence, and the endurance of the spirit. "Tell everyone."--Dorothy Allison, author of BASTARD OUT OF CAROLINA.

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## Winter Birds By Jim Grimsley Bibliography

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

This intermittently affecting but disappointing first novel from Grimsley, winner of Newsday's Oppenheimer Award as Best New American Playwright of 1988, limns family dynamics in a household crushed under domestic violence. Danny Crell, an eight-year-old hemophiliac, his four siblings and their mother are long-term prisoners of their father and husband Bobjay's alcoholic rages. The narrative centers on this highly dysfunctional clan's Thanksgiving celebration, which goes terribly awry-the food winds up on the kitchen floor, Danny and his mother hide beneath their house-and ends in the grisly death of a dog. Grimsley describes the hopelessness of the family's life in lyrical and moving language. Bobjay is the main problem here: depicted as a cartoonish character with only the barest motivation for his anger (he lost part of his arm in a combine accident a few years back), he is Grimsley's excuse to focus relentlessly on the inner sensations of victimization. But he isn't fleshed out enough as a character to make his abusiveness seem credible or worth our attention. Since the other characters are also insufficiently developed, the narrative never coheres into a compelling story.

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From Library Journal

This grimly violent first novel would seem unbelievable were it not largely autobiographical. It recounts the tumultuous history of the Crells, a poor and transient Southern family, as seen through the eyes of Danny Crell, a dreamy eight-year-old hemophiliac and the author's alter ego. The action is dominated by a brutally violent Thanksgiving Day quarrel between Bobjay, Danny's alcoholic father, and Ellen, his long-suffering mother. The shocking immediacy of the material compels readers to continue even when its harshness might otherwise turn them away. This artfully told trip through hell is at once a survivor's tale and a tribute to a mother's endurance as she struggles to keep her family together against impossible odds. Recommended for all public libraries.

*Lawrence Rungren, Bedford Free P.L., Mass.*

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From Scientific American

The surface simplicity of this first novel-the story of a young boy who survives a violent Thanksgiving quarrel between his parents-masks an amazing voyage of self-discovery. Danny Crell comes from what must be the apotheosis of the dysfunctional family: his father, who has lost an arm in an industrial accident, is a mean and frequent drunk, and his mother appears to be a doormat for her husband's abuse. Danny and his baby brother are hemophiliacs, and metaphors of blood and bleeding permeate the book. Grimsley tells the story in the second person, with the narrator, who seems to be the grown-up Danny, offering sentences like this: "You brush bits of powdered grass from your fingers." At first, this device seems stilted and artificial, but as the novel gains momentum, one is swept into the story, and it almost feels as if the narrator is addressing the reader directly-and, occasionally, accusingly. Grimsley has created a harrowing southern gothic world, reminiscent of Faulkner or Caldwell. A remarkable first novel.

## **Users Review**

**From reader reviews:**

**William Vogt:**

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