



A turn-up for the book

ARTS

JACQUI BAHR

NOT wanting to feel like "a ghost at a wedding," celebrated Western Australian author Tim Winton stayed well away when his book *The Turning* was tailored into a play.

"I didn't want to be like a Mum taking a kid to school with their lunch box, saying, here's your hanky," he said. "I stayed at arm's length, which is the way I prefer it."

Winton thinks he's had a pretty good run with other adaptations, with *Cloudstreet* becoming one of Australia's most universally acclaimed pieces of theatre.

"I suppose in a way the guys making *The Turning* are conscious of the big precedent but I'm sure they'll do a good job," he said.

The play would be "a triumph for the small man" as one of WA's biggest independently mounted plays, he said.

Despite this freedom to "re-imagine" Winton's work, playwright Bill McCluskey said having the author see the play for the first time at the upcoming world premiere would be a nail-biting event.

"I'd be an idiot if I wasn't (nervous)," he said.

McCluskey's adaptation artfully strings together Winton's eloquent and often emotionally brutal short stories of the troubled Lang family from the 1970s to present.

Winton told theVoice one of the central

themes were the crippling social pressures in small communities during adolescence, which are revisited by the central character when he "goes a bit wobbly in middle age."

McCluskey said he hoped to capture the tone and ideas present in Winton's writing.

"The main theme is the forming of a soul," he said. "It's also about the potential life offers people to change and some people take that opportunity when others don't."

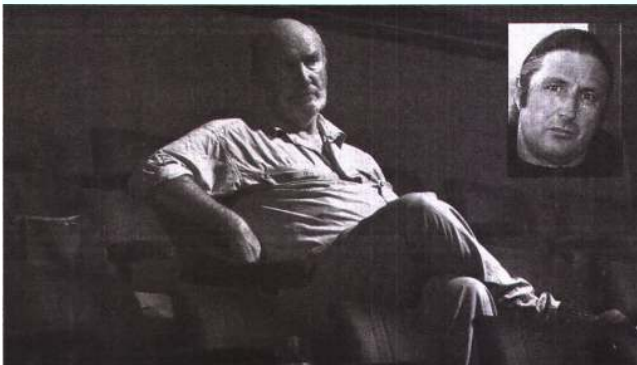
Inner voice

The play will blend live performance and film, with the crew collecting vision for a uniquely Western Australian backdrop from locations such as Albany, Kalgoorlie and White Point.

"A lot of the vision augments the inner voice of Winton, which is very hard to express," McCluskey said.

The play's director Steve Jodrell, who taught Winton film and television at Curtin University in the 1970s, assembled a cast of eight West Aussies and Sydney-sider Nick Simpson-Deeks, who stars in the challenging role of Vic from the ages of 13 to 43.

A highlight of Perth International Arts Festival and the first production for Western Edge Theatre Projects, *The Turning* is showing until March 8 at the Playhouse Theatre.



The *Turning*'s playwright Bill McCluskey hopes to stay true to the book by Tim Winton (inset).