



Source

Mark Doty

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This bold, wide-ranging collection -- his sixth book of poems -- demonstrates the unmistakable lyricism, fierce observation, and force of feeling that have made Mark Doty's poems special to readers on both sides of the Atlantic.

The poems in *Source* deepen Doty's exploration of the paradox of selfhood. They offer a complex, boldly colored self-portrait; their muscular lines argue fiercely with the fact of limit; they pulse with the drama of perception and the quest to forge meaning.

Source Details

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Author : Mark Doty

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Meredith says

I took a workshop with him awhile ago. While he isn't one of my favorites, meeting him in person made me like him more.

Edward Ferrari says

One or two poems in this book I'll come back to over the next 50 or so years (touch wood) but the rest are too convoluted for my taste, too contrived. Will be investigating earlier books as know this is fairly late career and others have said the earlier stuff is quite different.

Ethan says

I really enjoy his use of simile and metaphor: it is often beautiful and striking. I also like the slow, easy pace of his poetry. He's not in a hurry, and his poems have a thoughtfulness, a sort of rumination, that is refreshing. He ends his poems fairly well: an interesting image, or an illuminating thought. Overall, a really nice collection. I can't say I loved every poem or that it blew me away, but Doty is definitely one of my favorite poets. He really does some neat stuff.

Joy says

Poetry takes some concentration for me to understand. I liked some of the poems in this book. Some seemed too personal to be universal, if that makes sense. I liked the one about the fish, and the one about heaven on earth.

Ashley says

This book was my introduction to Doty and contains some of my favorites still. "Essay: The Love of Old Houses" describes waxing the old, used floorboards of the century-old house he shared with his late partner Wally. The house becomes a metaphor for the self itself (!), a process, a constant revision, a vessel for memory. ("whorls and curves/ that made them themselves, variant, // well-used. Like skin.")

The title poem is another lovely one, on meeting horses by the side of the road. The obvious influence is James Wright's "A Blessing" ("Suddenly I realize/ that if I stepped out of my body I would break/ into blossom"), but Doty's own beautifully crafted language is there. And his love for his own craft. Below, one of the best summaries of poetry I've seen:

"Experience is an intact fruit,

core and flesh and rind of it; once cut open,
entered, it can't be the same, can it?

Though that is the dream of the poem:
as if we could look out

through that moment's blushed skin."

Eric Mueller says

Mark Doty always delights. His writing is always clear and direct. Syntax is always respected. What I loved about this collection was the length of most of the poems. (Most) weren't so long that they'd be considered "long poems," but their added length offered such a great space to get lost in and revel in for a while.

Two of the shorter poems are some of my favorites of Doty's and poetry in general. "At the Gym," which I've read a million times, but for some reason, maybe because it's been a while since I've read it and I've gotten a little older, or something about being "in the book" as opposed to reading it online or in handouts, I was able to see so much more physical contact other than the desires it expresses.

"To the Engraver of my Skin" I've been looking for for years after seeing it online somewhere. The fact that it's in the same collection as "Paul's Tattoo," is probably not coincidental. Mark Doty is a poet I generally read and say, 'I could get this tattooed on me,' so seeing him write about tattoos and the artists makes too much sense.

All and all this is a solid read that'll open your heart up and help you feel the world.

Kent says

It seems that Wally is going to be an inescapable subject for Doty's books. However, what I appreciate in this book is how the past, as a personal consistency, exists inside someone. Mainly through the figure of Whitman, and then in the recurring birds that appear in the poem, reminding the speaker of his heritage in the American poet.

Richard O'Brien says

Sadly, I came across this collection only recently. Or maybe it was a good thing. These poems remind me of what poetry should be: a marriage of concise language and revelation that allows us to share in the poet's experience. Much has been said about Doty, he is the logical successor to this poet and that poet, but Doty carves his own path. With poems like Letters to Walt Whitman and Manhattan: Luminism (two of my favorites in this collection), Doty proves that his work is a cut above what much of American poetry is about these days.

A. says

I read this for my poetry group. Doty's language (the flow of his words, how they sound in your mouth when you read them and the breadth of his vocabulary) really stood out. So many beautiful lines. Many of the poems in this collection share similar themes. He's concerned with what is permanent and what erodes. I felt at times he got in the way of his own poems. Perhaps a bit too self reflective when an image or an idea could have stood on its own. I felt this was true of the otherwise beautiful title poem.

My favorite poems were Brian Age 7, Essay: The Love of Old Houses, American Sublime and To the Engraver of My Skin. In most of these Doty is working on several layers. There's the surface layer but just underneath of it he's playing with the idea of relationships or writing in a nuanced and very interesting way.

Of the longer poems and there are several, I enjoyed Letter to Walt Whitman the best. He seems to summon the marvelous American poet and commune with him in an entertaining way that seems as relevant as it is humorous.

Naomi Williams says

While I didn't find this quite as transporting as *Still Life with Oysters* (a very different book), I really loved this slim volume from 2001.

The title poem, "Source," which closes the collection, is kind of miraculous, the way it offers an *ars poetica* even as it relates a roadside encounter with three horses: "The poem wants the impossible; / the poem wants a name for the kind nothing / at the core of time, out of which the foals / come tumbling..."

But my favorite piece here, for the sheer pleasure of reading and re-reading, is "Brian Age 7," and I don't think I like it just because I am a mother of sons charmed by a poet's reflection on a boy's artwork. I love the question it asks of why some things/some art moves us more than other things/other art: "Why do some marks / seem to thrill with life, / possess a portion / of the nervous energy / in their maker's hand?" And his answer, at least about this drawing of a kid with an ice cream cone, is this: "Artless boy, / he's found a system of beauty: / he shows us pleasure / and what pleasure resists."

Mark Doty, by contrast, is always artful. But I think he's done the same thing here with beauty and pleasure.

Bill Tarlin says

The high points were very high but for me that amounts to only two or three of the poems included. The language is exquisitely controlled throughout but sometimes that mastery is applied to sequences that struggle to rise above the level of diary entries. Worth a look if you stumble across it on the shelf somewhere.

E says

Doty's language is so compressed, tight, precise - like aged, thick balsamic vinegar - a little goes a long way on the tongue. These poems are both an emotional and intellectual pleasure, esp. the lengthy "Letter to Walt Whitman," wondering Walt to the present ("I wonder if you'd like those boys/in underpants looming huge on billboards/over Seventh Avenue?"); "Brian Age 7"; "Essay: The Love of Old Houses," where writing, and love, and renovation are layered like the wax of the burnished wood; "To the Engraver of My Skin," where tattoos bespeak love and fidelity ("I understand the pact is mortal,/agree to bear this permanence"); "Summer Landscape"; and the horses and meditation of "Source" ("Experience is an intact fruit,/core and flesh and rind of it; once cut open,/entered, it can't be the same, can it?")

Lara says

Shimmering vision, reverent heart.

The title poem is like a sister to James Wright's "The Blessing," which is one of my most beloved.

Kari says

Some of my favorite contemporary poetry. I love the way Doty manipulates scale. He often begins with the smallest object, then expands to the whole universe, and finally, distills it all back down to a single moment. Sublime.

Jo says

Well, I love Mark Doty's writing, and this slim volume of poetry is full of transcendent moments he's found everywhere, from the sheen of a much-loved, much polished floor to the unexpectedly still body of a little rabbit found by the back door, to summer landscapes, Durer paintings and Walt Whitman. This is life, this is art, this dazzles.
