



School of the Arts

Mark Doty

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With *School of the Arts*, Mark Doty's darkly graceful seventh collection, the poet reinvents his own voice at midlife, finding his way through a troubled passage. At once witty and disconsolate -- formally inventive, acutely attentive, insistently alive -- this is a book of fierce vulnerability that explores the ways in which we are educated by the implacable powers of time and desire in a world that constantly renews itself.

School of the Arts Details

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Author : Mark Doty

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From Reader Review School of the Arts for online ebook

Christina M Rau says

The poems inspired by other art, writing, artists, and writers (complete with notes in the back) summarize a variety of creative processes and inspiration in different kinds of poems, most of which stun in the good way. Throughout are some seemingly out-of-place poems about dogs. Overall, a lovely collection. Favorite pieces: "Heaven For Helen," "The Hours," "Notebook to Lucian...", "Late Flight," and "Fire To Fire."

Zach says

First, let me acknowledge my inherent bias. I find Mark Doty's work to be superb, I've met him and he's a very nice guy, and the content of his poetry usually appeals to me inherently.

That said, this was an overall good collection of poems - though certainly not his best.

I found 'Notebook / Lucian Freud / On the Veil' to be an excellent poem that invited a dark intimacy. It was chilling, but touching. It also contains one of the stanzas that really stood out to me in this book.

"Do these paintings of dying / warn or celebrate, // does their maker caution or consume?" This line, of course, draws a thin border between good and evil, sanity and lunacy, etc. How do we judge the macabre artist?

'Heaven for Paul' is another great piece. I heard this read by the poet in 2008 and it resonated in reading it again. It's thrilling, relatable, and subtly questioning.

Frankly, 'Letter to God' was simply bizarre. I have no better way to describe it.

The sexual tones of this collection are more blunt, bold, and powerful than other Doty works, and in some of the pieces, such as 'The Bootblack,' 'Double Embrace,' and 'To Caravaggio,' the sexuality complements the scene. In 'Hood,' 'The Acknowledgment,' 'The Harness,' and 'The Blessing,' I felt that the overt sexual nature distracted from the deeper point the poet is trying to make - though the sexual scenes themselves may have been, in fact, the point - which wouldn't make them the deepest of his pieces.

I significantly enjoyed 'Now You're an Animal,' which is superb. This piece is so incredibly carnal. I also should note some of the lines in 'Pink Poppy,' in which one of Doty's "theories of beauty" is "longing solidified," which I found to be a stunning phrase on its own.

This collection is a great relative to most modern poetry - but it gets lesser marks when compared to Doty's entire body of work, which I find, overall, to be much more impressive than this collection.

Rick says

I'm a fan of Mr. Doty and have seen him read and thoughtfully and respectfully respond to questions from his audience with insight and warmth. Yet this, his most recent collection but one, was mildly disappointing. Not sure if it was one too many poems about his dogs or that there is too much on the surface of feeling, observational poems that impress but don't move. I liked "Heaven for Stanley," "Notebook/To Lucian Freud/On the Veil," "In the Same Space," "Late Flight," "Meditation: 'The Night of Time,'" and the title poem. Doty is always graceful, his lines elastic and well-observed, lyrical and conversational. I wanted them to disturb my attention more, to compel me to re-read them as soon as I finished them. I will need to revisit them and see if they strike me differently on second or third encounter but initially they were enjoyable, at times engaging, but not compelling.

Susan says

Is it possible for poems to be too polished? I suppose not, and yet that's the taste left in my mouth from this collection. There is nothing parochial about Doty's modernist "School of the Arts": his world-weary skepticism is responsible, rich, and self-conscious, if not always provocative. This aloof posture, however, feels like "yesterday's poetry for tomorrow" and lacks the frisson of vulnerability that I associate with the best contemporary poetry I have lately read. So, sorry, Mark Doty: these poems were just too pretty for me!

Elizabeth? says

Mark Doty wrote a memoir *Dog Years: A Memoir* some years ago that I found so moving. His use of language is impressive. His connection to his animals admirable.

This collection of poems has several that pay homage to past dogs and friends that have died.

Letter to God is a favorite. This is really a clever explanation for how dogs greet one another.

There are some beautiful lines contained within the poems. Some poems are a bit more abstract, but when Doty sticks to the concrete and corporeal the poems are satisfying.

Sue says

This was an up and down reading experience that ultimately came out on the high side. There is simply more here that catches me than not. Some of the poems are full of loss of people, places, of his beloved dogs. But they are also full of appreciation, of love, of wonder and wonderment, of guessing about what this world and life are about.

From "Heaven For Paul":

*At this point it seemed plain: if God intervenes
in history, it's either to torment us
or to make us laugh, or both, which is how*

we faced the imminence of our deaths...

This after a near disaster in an airplane is followed by a tornado warning on landing.

I will return to this book, after I read others that sit waiting on my shelf.

3.5 to 4

saizine says

Another gem from Mark Doty, this time quietly balancing the melancholy and terror of time passing with the gentleness of beauty--there's also plenty of tender, poignant writing about aging dogs. My personal favourites in this collection were "Ultrasound", "Notebook/To Lucien Freud/On the Wall" (*skin perpetually lit from within/as if by its own failure-- and Flesh fails and failure/is visited upon it*), "Oncoming Train" (which has long been a favourite, ever since I had just heard of Doty and was flicking through the paperback in the shop and happened upon it), "Late Flight" (*Lustrous, continuous, unspoken night./The self isn't made of language,/the self is made of night*), "Fire to Fire", and "Meditation: 'The Night of Time'" (*My dear boy/walking further/into the realm/of the speechless and baroque evening: wild clarity*).

Mattl says

I thought this was one of Doty's strongest books. I can understand the comments about all the dog poems, some of which detracted from the volume, but I think this is a strong offering from Doty in that he really lets some of his more complex ideas breathe in some longer poems, and he doesn't confine himself to his typical describe-the-hell-out-of-everything mentality. I think his use of description was more exacting in this book, as was his use of narrative.

Sarah says

Breathtaking, hums in my skull. Time, beauty, death.

Daryoung says

I especially enjoyed the "heaven for" series, in which Doty describes what a specific person might define heaven as, moving through a few people, and even dogs, he knows well. Doty has a way of looking intensely at an object, describing it thoroughly and freshly and in such a way that you don't realize until the poem is almost over that he is also talking about human experience.

(Had to skip over the one very long sex poem in the middle.)

MY favorite poem of his remains "A Display of Mackerel," which isn't in this collection.

Julie Ehlers says

Incorporated into a radiant vitality without ceasing...

You want more than that?

*Of course you do: you want the steady
mosquito-drone to go on and on, ceaselessly,*

*you want to be the one who gets to do the perceiving
forever, of course you do.*

Earlier this year I read Mark Doty's *Sweet Machine*, a collection of poems about rising from the ashes, moving beyond devastation and grief and learning to live again. *School of the Arts*, published about 10 years later, seems to take death rather than life as its focus, but there's a sense that the lessons of the past have been reckoned with. Here, death is not something to fear, but something to contemplate and understand, and the result is luminous. Heaven is depicted as it might be for several of Doty's loved ones: heaven for his friend Helen; heaven for his neighbor; heaven for his partner Paul; heaven for each of his dogs. Doty takes the role of the resister, the reader's role. In "Heaven for Paul," a dangerous plane landing seems to bring out Paul's radiance, his readiness; Doty faces the possible crash with less equanimity: "*I couldn't think beyond my own dissolution. / What was the world without me to see it?*"

Still, as Doty watches his beloved dogs get older and more frail, as he observes the changes on his beloved Cape Cod, as he endures *another* death-defying plane trip, he eventually comes around. In "Time and the Town," he reveals, "*When I say I hate time, Paul says / how else could we find depth / of character, or grow souls? / Of course he's right...*" Indeed, making peace with time is the main theme of this book and its greatest triumph:

*Dangerous, to hate the thing that brings you all of this:
that flower wouldn't blaze if time didn't burn...*

Brief, but no one wishes it never.

Doty's dogs, Beau and Arden, make frequent appearances in this collection, so it's fitting that one of them provides the last word on the subject. "Heaven for Arden" recounts the dog's uncertainty on walks, and his happiness when Doty would finally turn around and start them both heading for home:

...Sooner or later, the turn would come;

*we'd gone far enough for one day. Joy!
As if he'd been afraid all along*

this would be the one walk that would turn out to be infinite.

*Then he could take comfort
in the certainty of an ending,*

*and treat the rest of the way as a series of possibilities;
then he could run,*

and find pleasure in the woods beside the path.

Tony Laplume says

Title poem is the clear highlight, followed by the several ruminating on an old dog.

Ruth says

Not everything about Doty's poetic style is to my liking, but there is a palpable atmosphere--he really weaves his images masterfully. An excerpt from his 'theories of beauty' (section of a larger poem): 1. "Hook that pulls us out of time." 2. "or a lure to catch us in it." What great phrases! I would have been happier not to have read the very specific sexual poetry he included in this collection; otherwise, there were some magical moments.

Joy Arbor says

I don't know what happened, but I had to force myself to finish this one. And as I remember, I started it a number of times, though I am an avid Doty fan. Here, his obsession with time and what is passing and what is lost is fully out in the open, even stated ("When I say I hate time"), which has helped me think about all the rest of his work (since I, of course, have read all of it). I have a vague sense that as I moved through the collection, it went from having that exactness of description coupled with meditation that I love from Doty -- to something more vague in some experimental pieces -- then to meditations on his dogs. Now, I love that he writes about his dogs, especially as they were dying. His work has been really colored by loss throughout, but I got a wee bit tired of entering each poem there at the end knowing that he was going to talk about the passage of time and loss. Maybe it was too explicit for me -- maybe I just didn't want to read about his dogs getting old and dying when I'm so worried about my cat right now -- maybe I just got lazy as a reader and was just ready to move on to something else. Worth coming back to and figuring out. But not now.

Ashley says

Mark Doty is a talented poet, able of creating vivid scenes in his reader's mind. His poetry is peculiar in structure, but this only adds to the palpability of the poetry. The poems themselves are artworks. However, I don't think that his poetry will be appreciated/enjoyed by everyone as he describes and discusses (very) controversial topics through his poetry...

