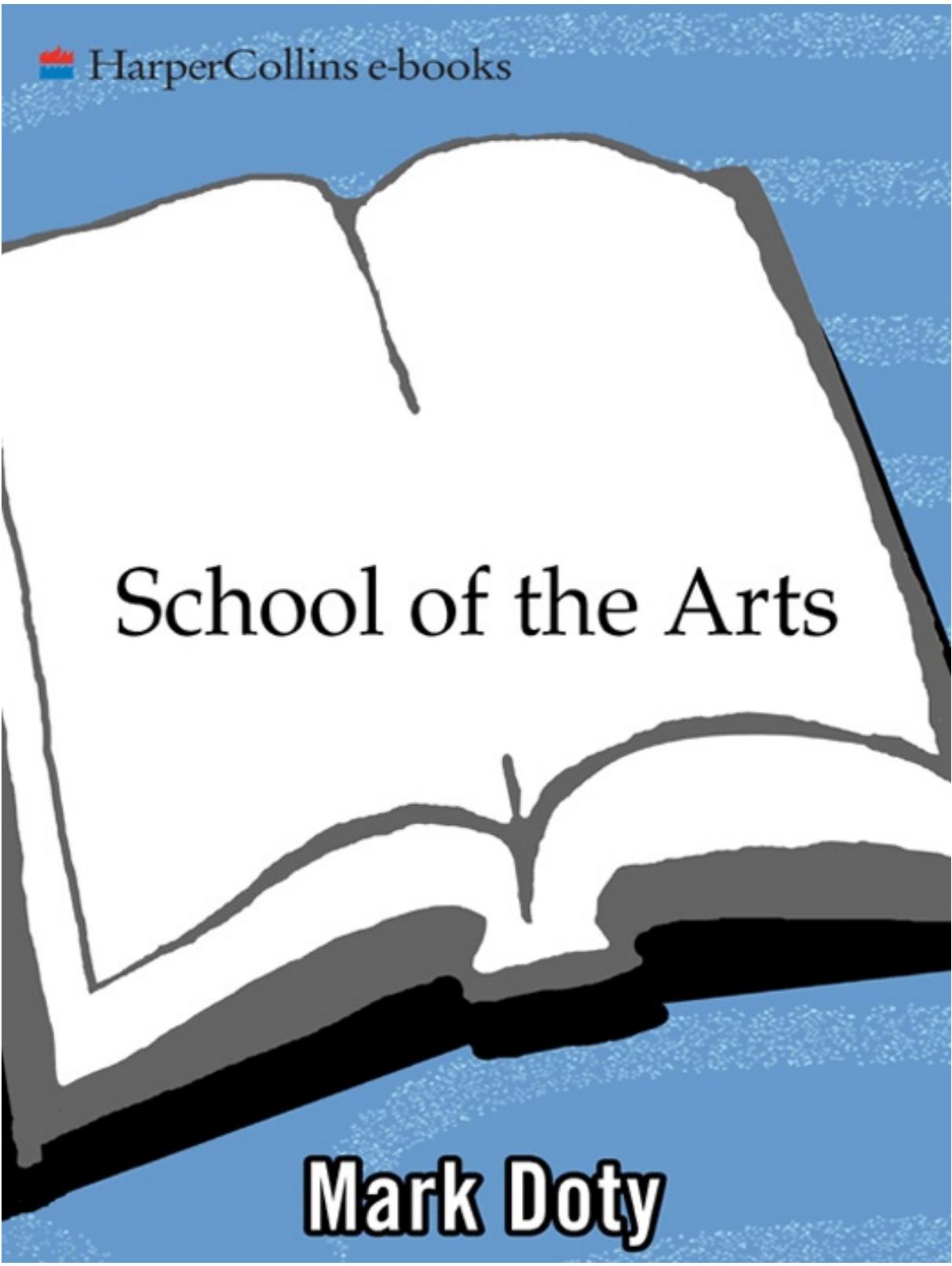


 HarperCollins e-books



School of the Arts

Mark Doty

School of the Arts

Poems

Mark Doty

 HarperCollins e-books

To God—

If you have formed a Circle to go into
Go into it yourself & see how you would do

—William Blake

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Heaven for Helen

Helen says heaven, for her,
would be complete immersion
in physical process,
without self-consciousness—

to be the respiration of the grass,
or ionized agitation
just above the break of a wave,
traffic in a sunflower's thousand golden rooms.

Images of exchange,
and of untrammelled nature.

But if we're to become part of it all,
won't our paradise also involve

participation in being, say,
diesel fuel, the impatience of trucks
on August pavement,
weird glow of service areas

along the interstate at night?

We'll be shiny pink egg cartons,
and the thick treads of burst tires
along the highways in Pennsylvania:

a hell we've made to accompany
the given: we will join
our tiresome productions,
things that want to be useless forever.

But that's me talking. Helen
would take the greatest pleasure
in being a scrap of paper,
if that's what there were to experience.

Perhaps that's why she's a painter,
finally: to practice disappearing
into her scrupulous attention,
an exacting rehearsal for the larger
world of things it won't be easy to love.

Helen I think will master it, though I may not.
She has practiced a long time learning to see.
I have devoted myself to affirmation,
when I should have kept my eyes on the ground.

Flit

—dart—an idea
arcs the cold, then a clutch
of related thoughts;
slim branches don't even
flicker with the weight
of what's landed;
animate alphabet
whizzing past our faces,
a black and white hurry,
as if a form of notation
accompanied our walk,
a little ahead of us
and a bit behind. If we
could see their trajectory,
if their trace remained
in the winter air,
what a tunnel they'd figure:
skein of quick vectors

above our heads,
a fierce braid,

improvised, their decisions
—the way one makes poetry

from syntax—unpredictable, resolving
to wild regularity

(thought has to flit
to describe it, speech

has to try that hurry).
A scaffolding,

a kind of argument
about being numerous.

Thread and rethread—alight.
Study. We might be carrying

crumbs. We're not. I wish.
Their small heads cock,

they lift (no visible effort,
as if flight were the work

of the will only), light,
a bit further along,

and though they're silent

it seems you could hear
the minute repeating registers
of their attention,
*———, *———, the *here you are*
yes here you yes.

Pronoun reference unclear.

Who looks at us

—an aerial association
of a dozen subjectivities,

or a singular self
wearing, this snowy afternoon,

twelve pair of wings?

Collectivity of sparks,

sparkling collectivity? Say *live*
resides not inside feathers or skin

but in the whizzing medium.

No third person.

Sharp, clear globe of January,
and we—the fourteen of us—

the thinking taking place.

We is instances of alertness,

grammar help me.

Mind in the ringing day,

a little of us ahead

and a bit behind,

and all that action

barely disturbs the air.

Heaven for Stanley

For his birthday, I gave Stanley a hyacinth bean,
an annual, so he wouldn't have to wait for the flowers.

He said, Mark, *I have just the place for it!*
as if he'd spent ninety-eight years

anticipating the arrival of this particular vine.

I thought poetry a brace against time,
the hours held up for study in a voice's cool saline,

but his allegiance is not to permanent forms.

His garden's all furious change,

budding and rot and then the coming up again;

why prefer any single part of the round?

I don't know that he'd change a word of it;

I think he could be forever pleased

to participate in motion. Something opens.

He writes it down. Heaven steadies

and concentrates near the lavender. He's already there.

Ultrasound

Blackboard covered with a dust
of living chalk, live chaos-cloud
wormed by turbulence: the rod glides
and the vet narrates shadows
I can't quite force into shape:
His kidneys might...the spleen appears...
I can't see what he sees, and so
resort to simile: cloudbank, galaxy
blurred with slow comings
and goings, that far away. The doctor
makes appreciative noises,
to encourage me;
he praises Beau's stillness.
I stroke the slope beneath
those open, abstracted eyes,
patient, willing to endure whatever
we deem necessary, while the vet
runs along the shaved blonde
—blue-veined, gleaming with gelled alcohol

to allow sound to penetrate
more precisely—a kind of wand,
pointing a stream of waves
—nothing we could hear—
to translate the dark inside his ribs
onto this midnight screen.
The magic pen slides, the unseen's made—
well, far from plain.

No chartable harmony,
less anatomy than a storm
of pinpoints subtler than stars.

Where does a bark upspool
from the quick,
a baritone swell
past the sounding chambers?
You can't see that, or the clock
built into the wellspring,
or that fixed place from which
a long regarding of us
rises. It wasn't cancer,
wasn't clear, we didn't see, really,
anything. He's having trouble

keeping up his weight;
his old appetites flag,
 though on the damp morning trails
 he's the same golden hurry.
Today I'm herding the two old dogs
 into the back of the car,
 after the early walk, wet woods:
Beau's generous attention must be
 brought into focus, gaze pointed
 to the tailgate so he'll be ready to leap,
and Arden, arthritic in his hind legs,
 needs me to lift first his forepaws
 and then, placing my hands
under his haunches, hoist the moist
 black bulk of him into the wagon,
 and he growls a little
before he turns to face me,
 glad to have been lifted—
 And as I go to praise them,
as I like to do, the words
 that come from my mouth,
 from nowhere, are Time's children,

as though that were the dearest thing
a person could say.

Why did I call them by that name?

They race this quick parabola
faster than we do, as though
it were a run in the best of woods,

run in their dreams, paws twitching
—even asleep they're hurrying.

Doesn't the world go fast enough?

We're caught in this morning's
last-of-April rain, the three of us
bound and fired by duration

—rhythm too swift for even them
to hear, though perhaps we catch
a little of that rush and ardor

—furious poetry!—
the sound time makes,
seeing us through.

The Hours

Big blocks of ice
—clear cornerstones—
chug down a turning belt
toward the blades of a wicked,

spinning fan; scraping din
of a thousand skates and then
powder flies out in a roaring
firehose spray of diamond dust,

and the film crew obscures
the well-used Manhattan snow
with a replica of snow.

Trailers along the edge of the Square,
arc lamps, the tangled cables
of a technical art, and our park's

a version of itself. We walk here
daily, the old dogs and I glad
for the open rectangle of air

held in its frame of towers,

their heads held still and high
to catch the dog run's rich,
acidic atmosphere, whitened faces
—theirs and mine—lifted toward gray
branches veining the variable sky.

Today we're stopped at the rim:
one guy's assigned the task
of protecting the pristine field
a woman will traverse
—after countless details are worried
into place—at a careful angle,
headed toward West Fourth.

They're filming *The Hours*,
Michael's novel, a sort of refraction
of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Both books
transpire on a single June day;
that's the verb; these books do
breathe an air all attention,
as if their substance were a gaze
entirely open to experience, eager
to know—They believe
the deepest pleasure is seeing

and saying how we see,
even when we're floored
by spring's sharp grief, or a steady
approaching wave of darkness.

In the movie version, it's winter;
they're aiming for a holiday release,
and so must hasten onward.

Someone calls out *Background!*
and hired New Yorkers begin
to pass behind the perfect field,
a bit self-conscious, skaters
and shoppers too slow to convince,
so they try it again, Clarissa passing
the sandblasted arch
bound in its ring of chain-link,
monument glowing gray against the gray.

A little less now in the world to love.

Taxi on Bleecker, dim afternoon, after
a bright one's passing, after the hours
in stations and trains, blur of the meadows
through dull windows, fitful sleep,
heading home, and now the darkness inside

the cab deeper than anything a winter afternoon
could tender. Nothing stays, the self
has no power over time, we're stuck
in a clot of traffic, then this: a florist shop,
where something else stood yesterday,
what was it? Do things give way that fast?
PARADISE FLOWERS, arced in gold
on the window glass, racks and rows
of blooms, and an odd openness on the sidewalk,
and—look, the telltale script of cables
inking the street, trailers near, and Martian lamps,
and a lone figure in a khaki coat poised
with a clutch of blooms while they check her aspect
through the lens: Clarissa, of course,
buying the flowers herself.
I take it personally. As if,
no matter what, this emblem persists:
a woman went to buy flowers, years ago,
in a novel, and was entered
by the world. Then in another novel,
her double chose blooms of her own
while the blessed indifferent life