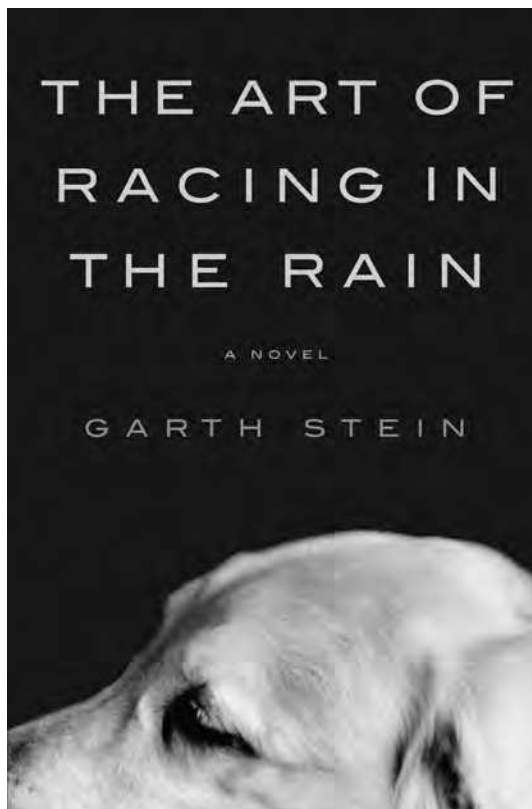


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BOOKS BY MOLLY TEMPLETON

Not All Dogs Go to Heaven

Some have other destinations in mind



THE ART OF RACING IN THE RAIN, fiction by Garth Stein. HarperCollins, 2008. Hardcover, \$23.95.

auto shop when he's not racing. Auto racing becomes a metaphor for life in Enzo's eyes as much as Denny's: The car goes where your eyes go. You have to be ahead of where you are, looking down the track at what's coming as you pull out of a sharp turn. You have to be aware, but relaxed. You have to have timing.

And timing can be a bitch. In his previous book, *How Evan Broke His Head and Other Secrets*, Stein's narrator had a hard time connecting with his teenage son; here, Denny Swift has a hard time keeping his young daughter after the wrenching loss of his wife. Her parents, believing themselves far better suited to raise Zoë, slap him with a custody suit; another accusation drags things out for years. There's something almost over the top about the disasters that befall Denny, but they're grounded in Enzo's quiet observation and distress. He knew what was wrong with Eve;

his sharp canine nose told him something smelled wrong. And he knows the truth about what happened late one night after an exhausting drive home from a cabin. Enzo is both narrator and audience, standing in for the reader who wants things to turn out right but is powerless in the story's grasp, turning pages, waiting anxiously as Denny's future and career shift in his grasp and sitting excitedly in the passenger seat as Denny drives a new course, building to a roar of speed and exhilaration via a specialist's deep and true knowledge of how to do something.

The gentle simplicity of Stein's writing carries his new novel through even the predictable and tearjerking final chapters.

for the way it takes him to the places a dog can't go. The Weather Channel, says Enzo, is not about weather. It's about the world.

The limitations of a dog's existence make Enzo a more interesting narrator than a cynic (or a cat person) like myself might suspect. His perspective is restricted both physically and out of love for his family; anything threatening to Denny, his daughter Zoë or his wife Eve is not welcome in Enzo's world, and no one else commands his attention like these three. Enzo can only watch, and bark, and push a sock ball to Zoë's feet. And there's plenty to watch — and plenty of reasons to try to distract a small girl — in Denny's life over the course of *The Art of Racing in the Rain*, which takes its title from one of the many things Denny talks to Enzo about. Denny is a race car driver who works in an

The Art of Racing in the Rain is a sweet, sentimental book, but the gentle simplicity of Stein's writing carries it through even the predictable and tearjerking final chapters. Enzo's narration can be a little formal, lacking contractions and with a tendency to lecture here and there, but the tone suits the dog, who after all is narrating in a foreign language: ours. Stein's balancing act of human concerns and dog nature, human family and dog body, can be so absorbing that when Enzo behaves like a dog, devouring a squirrel or running with his nose to the ground, it's almost a shock, so close to human is he. But he's not quite there — yet.

EW

Garth Stein reads from *The Art of Racing in the Rain* at 6:30 pm Wednesday, July 30, at the Downtown Library.

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