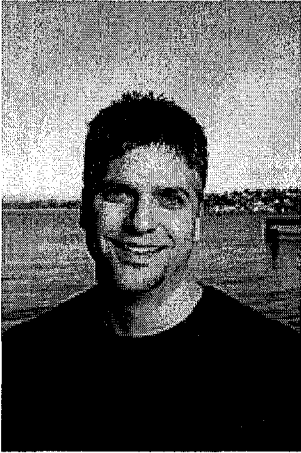


## Book Review: "The Art of Racing in the Rain"

Posted by [beclose](#) May 08, 2008 14:54PM

Couched in the drama of a young middle-class family in Seattle is one of those stories that may earn its place next to [Richard Bach's "Jonathan Livingston Seagull,"](#) [Paulo Coelho's "The Alchemist,"](#) and [Yann Martel's "Life of Pi."](#)

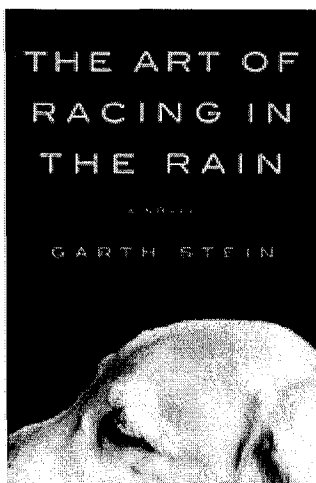


Garth Stein

[Garth Stein's](#) third novel, "[The Art of Racing in the Rain](#)" (Harper, \$23.95, 336 pages), is a fable with a heart. Like its best-selling brethren, it casts a sleeping spell on the readers' native cynicism and persuades us to dust off old questions about faith and humankind's better traits.

Stein's protagonist and narrator is Enzo, a Labrador-terrier mix. Enzo holds unshakable faith he has a human soul and that "when a dog is finished living his lifetimes as a dog, his next incarnation will be as a man." So, with a peaceful spirit, he approaches the day when he will be reincarnated as a human with those glorious instruments, thumbs. From his deathbed, Enzo tells the story of his life with Denny, an amateur race-car driver in Seattle. Their hopes are heroic: Enzo for a human body, Denny to race professionally.

Denny has a Zen-master talent for racing on wet pavement, a skill likened to that of Italian racing legend Ayrton Senna. "Denny is as good as Ayrton Senna," Enzo says. "But no one sees him because he has responsibilities."



Just when Denny's talent puts him on the brink of professional notice, brain cancer puts his wife in the hospital. His parents-in-law take his young daughter into their home and separate her from Enzo -- and their interference is only beginning. Enzo's sense of purpose and destiny are unshakable, but Denny is only human: He endures the ruin of his career, reputation, home life and financial independence with waning resolve.

Enzo observes, and helps where he can. "Gestures are all I have," he says. He uses them to punish the guilty and reward the virtuous, according his moral order for the world. His philosophy is part Zen, part law of attraction, and as Enzo often says, "That which we manifest is before us." He is a hopeful agnostic, full of platitudes that would sink the novel if they appeared in a human protagonist's head. But because Stein's guileless writing style persuades us to suspend our disbelief for a canine narrator, he neatly delivers the heart and soul of his story in a philosophy we thought we were tired of hearing. It's magic, indeed.

**Reading: Stein reads from "The Art of Racing in the Rain" at 7 p.m. Friday at Powell's Books at Cedar Hills Crossing, 3415 S.W. Cedar Hills Blvd., Beaverton.**