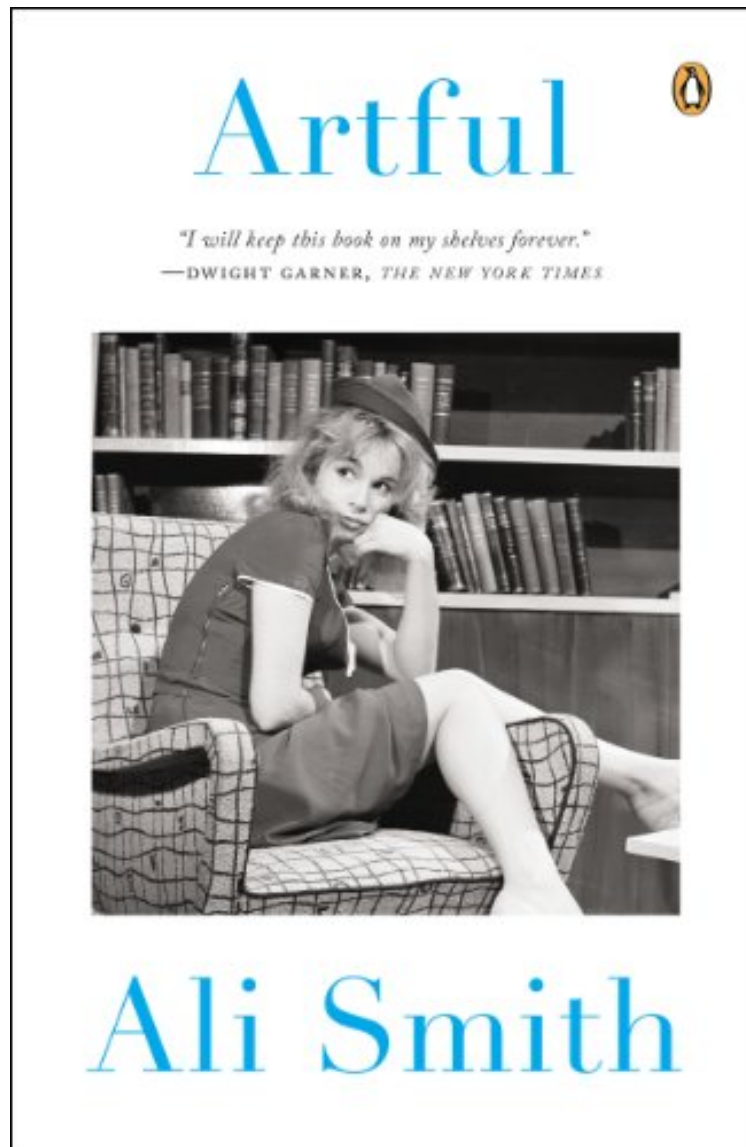


Artful

Ali Smith

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Ali Smith : Artful before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Artful:

16 of 16 people found the following review helpful. Artful-ly done!By Joseph Y ArsenaultAbsolutely loved this book. The lingering aura of a previous love devastates the reader by its pernicious poignancy. I read and then re-read the book and still enjoyed it. The essay form that Susan Sontag so brilliantly revolutionized comes to life here in ways she would have found admirable. There are not enough stars to stamp on this book. It's novel as poetry, essays as journal, fiction as criticism and vice versa. I can't praise Artful enough. It is not overly long or cryptically short. Just right!0 of

0 people found the following review helpful. ARTFUL by Ali Smith By E. S. Elliott Ali Smith in *Artful* is accomplishing her own creative fusion as she defines the term and creates her own simultaneous example. Creative fusion is basically a blurring of the lines of form, where one type of literary form is seamlessly blended with another. Words are only the symbols within the symbols of thoughts. For example, the form of poetry can be used to discuss political thought; a novel can really be a group of short stories; or a novel can be created from a number of autobiographical events blended with fictional ones. One of the first major literary works that accomplished this last example was Tom Wolf's *Look Homeward Angel*. The author wrote of his own life through thinly veiled fictional characters, but in a larger-than-life way. It is not until near the halfway point of her book that Ms. Smith begins to discuss the great novel *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens. Then later on she begins to reference the character of the "Artful Dodger" within the novel, until softly you realize that her book, which you are reading, is an artful reference in itself to the artful dodger, and therefore a salute to a literary giant that went before her. Personally, I had appreciated Dickens's love of the redemptive salvation theme of orphans in *Great Expectations* but my appreciation of his Victorian ebullience of phrase was satiated once I completed *A Tale of Two Cities*. Therefore, I never could bring myself to yet another Dickensian task of *Oliver Twist*, with its now modernly predictable ending of rags to some form of wealth, spiritual or otherwise. So ironically, I was only familiar with the literary term, "Artful Dodger", because it was embedded in the social psyche of my own culture in sumptuous proportions. In my reality, the awareness of the term "Artful Dodger" was akin to people quoting Bible or Shakespeare's verses and not knowing the source, except this time it was me in my own spotty literary knowledge base. The book is also quite shocking in its intimacy, because we walk right into her continuous soliloquy regarding the loss of her partner. She celebrates the literary skills of her lost love through this spiritual journey of writing as her own cathartic outlet. Her painstaking personal reckoning with grief is cloaked in their joint love of literature. This personal journey through grief reminds one of Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*, but in a more non-fictional vein. This work is a fusion of literary criticism, personal healing from grief, and it extends reverence to the creative process as salvation in itself, simply because the process provides personal meaning for each one of us. The finding of meaning through the daily slog of one's own life's ups and downs rings true with Viktor Frankl's seminal work *Man's Search for Meaning*. Summarily, if one finds meaning in all things, one touches eternity and can live forever. Viktor Frankl found this on his knees in a concentration camp, and survived to teach others through psychotherapy of the same accord. Ali Smith quotes Virginia Woolf suggesting synergy of thought, essence, reality and form in the quote "the born writer's gift of being in touch with the thing itself and not with the outer husks of words". More simply put a writer's gift of communication comes when you can reach out and touch a new thought with your mind without the fabric of the words impeding your path. This is delicate balance. This is the definition of artfulness. I have heard some teachers focus on teaching form really well, because they believe that if the form is driving towards perfection, then the content will naturally come and fill the worthy vessel. In my view, the risk in relying too heavily on the teaching method of emphasizing the importance of form over content is that the joy of creation in all of its tenderness can quite easily be killed. Of course, form is easier to grade objectively rather than content, so this is a natural outflow of our instruction system. Many a student has left the English department with a sour taste and mumbling, "But I'm not good at writing..." because they struggled with mastery of form. Yes there is balance in all, but whatever you do, write for your own joy and no other. Worshiping at the altar of form alone, which is quite easy to do in our "Just the facts, Ma'am" culture, can suddenly be akin to worshiping a death mask of the face of your beloved. I am about half way through Ms. Smith's work of non-fiction, and I look forward to slowly imbibing the rest, and see how my thoughts have evolved upon completion. Until then...

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. She absolutely loved it. By Boston Book Lover I bought this for my daughter who is a huge literature and poetry fan. She absolutely loved it.

"A stimulating combination of literary criticism, essay, and fiction" (The New Yorker) from the incomparable Ali Smith *Artful* is a celebration of literature's worth in and to the world—it is about the things art can do, the things art is made of, and the quicksilver nature of all artfulness. A magical hybrid that refuses to be tied down to either fiction or the essay form, *Artful* is narrated by a character who is haunted—literally—by a former lover, the writer of a series of lectures about art and literature. Ali Smith's heady powers as a novelist and short story writer harmonize with her keen perceptions as a reader and critic to form a living thing that reminds us that life and art are never separate.