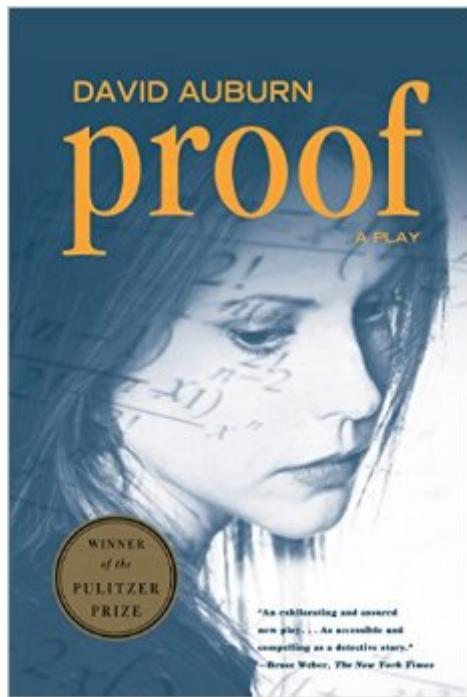


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Proof: A Play



Synopsis

Proof is the winner of the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. One of the most acclaimed plays of the 1999-2000 season, Proof is a work that explores the unknowability of love as much as it does the mysteries of science. It focuses on Catherine, a young woman who has spent years caring for her father, Robert, a brilliant mathematician in his youth who was later unable to function without her help. His death has brought into her midst both her sister, Claire, who wants to take Catherine back to New York with her, and Hal, a former student of Catherine's father who hopes to find some hint of Robert's genius among his incoherent scribblings. The passion that Hal feels for math both moves and angers Catherine, who, in her exhaustion, is torn between missing her father and resenting the great sacrifices she made for him. For Catherine has inherited at least a part of her father's brilliance -- and perhaps some of his instability as well. As she and Hal become attracted to each other, they push at the edges of each other's knowledge, considering not only the unpredictability of genius but also the human instinct toward love and trust.

Book Information

Paperback: 83 pages

Publisher: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 1st edition (March 5, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0571199976

ISBN-13: 978-0571199976

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 0.2 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (82 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #23,726 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #64 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > Dramas & Plays > Regional & Cultural > United States #6398 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > United States

Customer Reviews

Proof, by David Auburn, is a compelling and tautly beautiful play, ringing with a quiet elegance. Winner of the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the 2001 Tony Award for Best Play, I was introduced to it through the 2005 movie, which now having read the play I realize was an extremely good adaptation, as well as a very good film in its own right. It's the story of Catherine, a brilliant but somewhat neurotic mathematics student who has lived all her life in the shadow of her famous father, a groundbreaking mathematician revered the world over. The play begins with a dialogue

between Catherine and her father, in which he berates her for wasting her potential, while gradually, during the course of it, we discover that her father is insane, and has been for quite some time. He is living in semi-seclusion while Catherine looks after him. Then, as the conversation goes on, we - and Catherine - realize that her father is dead; as he calmly informs her "Heart failure. Quick. The funeral's tomorrow." From there, we are slowly sucked into a drama of at once deep intensity and lyrical lightness. Abruptly deprived of the man who, for better or worse, was the center of her existence for all her life, Catherine finds herself having to cope with life and relationships beyond her father, as Harold, a graduate student of her father's, begins going through all her father's journals to see if by some chance he wrote anything significant during his recent years of insanity. Catherine, immediately defensive and certain that her father wrote nothing but graphomaniac scribbles during the last few years, throws him out of the house.

David Auburn, *Proof* (Dramatists Play Service, 2001) I spent a good deal of my elementary and junior high school years reading plays, as I fancied myself an actor back in the day. A somewhat bad actor, to be sure, but I did manage to score the role of Reb Nahum in our fifth-grade production of *Fiddler on the Roof*. (Go me!) Acting in theater, however small, gave me a taste for reading plays, and it was quite enjoyable. Somewhere along the way, though, I tailed off, and it has only been recently (as in, in the past month) I've rediscovered the pleasure of reading a stage play. *Proof* is the second one I've encountered since starting again, and if the quality of these two is anything to go by, I've obviously been missing out on quite a bit in the quarter-century I haven't been keeping up. *Proof* is the story of a guy, a girl, and a mathematical equation. Which may not sound all that interesting when put that way, but it is. The girl is the daughter of a mathematical genius who suffered, while still young, a debilitating mental illness. (Think *A Beautiful Mind* without the paranoia and racism.) The guy is one of his doctoral students from the recent past, when he had a lucid year and briefly advised students at the local university again. The mathematical equation-- well, you'll just have to see, or read, the play. In a very short span of pages (seventy-four, to be precise), Auburn creates two compelling characters (and a few equally compelling minor players), puts them into a situation, and gives us enough to care about them in the most minimal fashion possible; while there's too much going on for the brevity of the play to really focus on the two of them, the reader still comes to understand much about their depth and various quirks.

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