

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry

MARY OLIVER
**DREAM
WORK**



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Dream Work, a collection of forty-five poems, follows both chronologically and logically Mary Oliver's American Primitive, which won for her the Pulitzer Prize for the finest book of poetry published in 1983 by an American poet. The depth and diversity of perceptual awareness-so steadfast and radiant in American Primitive-continue in Dream Work. Additionally, she has turned her attention in these poems to the solitary and difficult labors of the spirit-to accepting the truth about one's personal world, and to valuing the triumphs while transcending the failures of human relationships. Whether by way of inheritance-as in her poem about the Holocaust-or through a painful glimpse into the present-as in "Acid," a poem about an injured boy begging in the streets of Indonesia-the events and tendencies of history take on a new importance also. More deeply than in her previous volumes, the sensibility behind these poems has merged with the world. Mary Oliver's willingness to be joyful continues, deepened by self-awareness, by experience, and by choice.

Dream Work Details

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From Reader Review Dream Work for online ebook

Marianne Elliott says

I was given this book in February by a woman who must have seen right though me and known exactly what my dehydrated little soul was crying for. I was beginning to emerge from a dark, dark winter and here was Mary Oliver - choosing to find joy in each moment, choosing to celebrate triumph where it was to be found, choosing to find beauty in the world.

Many of the poems in this collection are deeply and precisely perceptive meditations on the creatures of nature - a dogfish, a shark, milkweed, black snakes, moths or a pair of marsh hawks. She captures in her poems the spiritual quest to be 'fully present' in a moment or a scene.

Some of the most well-known poems in this collection are also amongst my favorites: 'The Journey' and 'Wild Geese'.

From 'The Journey'

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you,
kept shouting
their bad advice -

From 'Wild Geese'

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.

This slim little collection of poems now comes with me everywhere I go. I dip into it to inspire me when, left to my own devices, I am losing a sense of wonder in the world. I go back to it over and over again to remember how words, simple words on a page, can change the course of a person's day, week, year.

Kelly says

I do not know if there is any one in the world who has a soul as beautiful and delicate as Mary Oliver's.

A friend gave me this book for Christmas, knowing how I love Wild Geese and The Journey. It proved to be good medicine for me, finishing the collection as I did on a day that I stayed home sick and feverish. I don't know how she can create poems of such nuanced complexity while remaining so incredibly simple-- Her poems somehow equally acknowledge the suffering in life and glorify the beauty of it.

Favorite poems included: The Visitor (I saw what love might have done had we loved in time), One or Two

Things (For years and years I struggled just to love my life. And then the butterfly rose, weightless, in the wind. Don't love your life too much," it said, and vanished into the world), Coming Home (believing in a thousand fragile and unprovable things, looking out for sorrow, slowing down for happiness, making all the right turns right down to the thumping barriers to the sea, the swirling waves, the past, the future, the doorway that belongs to you and me) and Sunflowers (the long work of turning their lives into a celebration is not easy).

Jade says

This is my favorite book of poems thus far. It is the only book of poems I ever completed and then turned right back to page one to read straight through again. While I am in a hurry to leave my house right now, I have to say this book touched my life in its humble, quiet, reflective voice. It's a voice that doesn't assume it knows more than it honestly does at the time. It suggests more than it tells and shows both the beautiful and the painful in meanings that go beyond a critic's capacity.

antoanelia safca says

If you think poetry is not quite for you, or you find it a bit intimidating, these poems are going to challenge that 'fear' and refusal of poetry. Her language is so simple, relatable, and yet expressive. I thought there was an irresistible humility to her tone, a refusal to 'poeticise'. I re-read it as soon as I finished it and I will most likely read it again.

sylas says

Maybe my favorite Mary Oliver book of all time.

(SPL 2018 book bingo: LGBTQIA author or character)

Maria says

“Everywhere in this world his music
explodes out of itself, as he

could not. And now I understand
something so frightening, and wonderful –

how the mind clings to the road it knows, rushing
through crossroads, sticking

like lint to the familiar.”

It's impossible not to notice the differences between *Dream Work*, *Why I Wake Early* and *Felicity*. The *feeling* is not of growth, in-between the lines you won't find whispers of evolution. No, Mary Oliver is just as immense across her body of work. What seems to change is the way she *perceives*, the way she *deals* with, said immensity.

Dream Work is a deep breath that requires you to close your eyes and forget the world for just one second. *Dream Work* is the moment when you reopen your eyes to face a new world. *Dream Work* is *rebirth*.

“Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.”

There's an odd sense of time... almost as if we are floating in someone's conscience, where past, present and future all exist on the very same frame.

We start where the river is born. There isn't too much water, there isn't yet the pressure or the *urgency* of having to find a path. Then we reach midcourse. That's when the fear of losing one's identity takes shape in speed and sometimes total chaos translated in tides. The goal is to reach the ocean, to become one with it. But what does it mean? Will one stop *being* for the ocean to be *whole*?

This book feels like the acceptance of being part of something bigger and still *being*.

“For years and years I struggled
just to love my life. And then

the butterfly
rose, weightless, in the wind.
'Don't love your life
too much', it said,

and vanished
into the world.”

A journey of self-discovery, understanding, acceptance, respect and forgiveness.

Rebecca Foster says

This book was good for my soul. A few of the poems are absolute treasures, so simple yet powerful that I read them four or five times over. Among those I would number “Morning Poem,” “Wild Geese” and “The Moths,” all of which I plan to read several more times, and maybe even try to memorize, before I return this

book to the library. Usually Oliver's way into wisdom is through nature, and the poems' voice is as often "you" as it is "I," making these universal sentiments that I can't imagine anyone failing to find of comfort. I much preferred this to my first Oliver collection, *Felicity*.

Some favorite lines:

"I wanted / to hurry into the work of my life; I wanted to know, / whoever I was, I was // alive / for a little while." (from "Dogfish")

"have you dared to count / the months as they pass and the years // while you imagined pleasure, / shining like honey, locked in some / secret tree?" (from "Whispers")

"For years and years I struggled / just to love my life. And then // the butterfly / rose, weightless, in the wind. / 'Don't love your life / too much,' it said, // and vanished into the world." (from "One or Two Things")

Zoe says

I can't get over "Wild Geese"--I've read it and read it and written it on scraps of paper and read it again. "You do not have to be good" feels like the most important declaration I've ever read, and to find it in a poem, and to find it in a poem by Mary Oliver, feels like such a gift. I also love "Sunrise"--"You can / die for it-- / an idea, / or the world." And "The Moths": "If you notice anything, / it leads you to notice / more / and more." And "Shadows": "whatever / the name of the catastrophe, it is never / the opposite of love."

If you think Mary Oliver only writes about ponds and geese and forests, you have to work backward a little bit and read "Dream Work" -- it is so necessary and so beautiful.

Heather Caliri says

Every time I read Mar Oliver's work she helps me see more clearly the beauty AND darkness of the world.

Kirsty says

I have wanted to read Mary Oliver's poetry for some years now, but have been left a little underwhelmed by my first experience of it. Whilst there is a lot of beauty within these poems, some of them lack substance. I wasn't blown away by any of Oliver's writing, despite the fact that it is often pretty, and none of the individual poems stood out for me. A little disappointing, particularly after I had expected to be dazzled.

Jamie says

Sigh. Mary Oliver is a most beautiful poet. I thought that reading a volume of her "New and Selected" books was all the Oliver I needed unless it was brand-new but I was wrong. *Dreamwork* is a collection of poems that have more personal content, more bearing of pain than the others I've come across. Take for instance this

excerpt from "Dogfish":

I wanted
the past to go away, I wanted
to leave it, like another country; I wanted
my life to close, and open
like a hinge, like a wing, like the part of the song
where it falls
down over the rocks: an explosion, a discovery;
I wanted
to hurry in to the work of my life; I wanted to know,
whoever I was, I was
alive
for a little while.

Doesn't she just sum it up, folks? A round of applause for Mary Oliver, please!

Liz says

My favorite of Mary Oliver's illustrious works.

Amanda says

THE FIRE

That winter it seemed the city
was always burning - night after night
the flames leaped, the ladders pitched forward.
Scorched but alive, the homeless wailed
as they ran for the cold streets.
That winter my mind had turned around,
shedding, like leaves, its bolts of imagination -
drilling down, through history,
toward my motionless heart.
Those days I was willing, but frightened.
What I mean is, I wanted to live my life
but I didn't want to do what I had to do
to go on, which was: to go back.
All winter the fires kept burning,
the smoke swirled, the flames grew hotter.
I began to curse, to stumble and choke.
Everything, solemnly, drove me toward it -
the crying out, that's so hard to do.
Then over my head the red timbers floated,

my feet were slippers of fire, my voice
crashed at the truth, my fists
smashed at the flames to find the door -
wicked and sad, mortal and bearable,
it fell open forever as I burned.

Eve Dangerfield says

David Ranney says

*When we're driving, in the dark,
on the long road
to Provincetown, which lies empty
for miles, when we're weary,
when the buildings
and the scrub pines lose
their familiar look,
I imagine us rising
from the speeding car,
I imagine us seeing
everything from another place --- the top
of one of the pale dunes
or the deep and nameless
fields of the sea ---
and what we see is the world
that cannot cherish us
but which we cherish,
and what we see is our life
moving like that,
along the dark edges
of everything --- the headlights
like lanterns
sweeping the blackness ---
believing in a thousand
fragile and unprovable things,
looking out for sorrow,
slowing down for happiness,
making all the right turns
right down to the thumping
barriers to the sea,
the swirling waves,
the narrow streets, the houses,
the past, the future,*

*the doorway that belongs
to you and me.*

I cannot speak intelligently about poetry, but this is a wonderful place to start.

rosamund says

First published in 1986, this collection follows Mary Oliver's Pulitzer-Prize winning *American Primitive*. It's hard to rank Oliver's collections because so many of them are excellent, but this is certainly one of the strongest. It contains some of her most iconic poems, such as *Wild Geese*, *One or Two Things*, *The Journey*, and one of my personal favourites, *The Moths*. In *The Moths*, she gives an impression of the importance of small facets of nature and how they change her perspective,

If I stopped
the pain
was unbearable.

If I stopped and thought, maybe
the world
can't be saved,
the pain
was unbearable.

Finally, I noticed enough.
All around me in the forest
the white moths floated.

How long do they live, fluttering
in and out of the shadows?

Some of these poems touch on more immediately painful or traumatic themes than Oliver's other work, such as *Rage*, where Oliver writes about the sexual abuse of a child. This poem is intimate, personal, and amazingly restrained. Oliver gets across the agony of the experience in just a few words as the father is

stumbling through the house
to the child's bed,
to the damp rose of her body,
leaving your bitter taste.

Here, Oliver shows us the delicate control she has when writing about the strongest emotions. Perhaps less successfully, she also talks about witnessed or remembered pain, such as seeing a wounded child in Jakarta in *Acid*, or in her *1945-1985: Poem for the Anniversary*, which is about the Holocaust. These poems are also emotive and restrained, but not as viscerally moving as *Rage*.

This is another collection that feels timeless, and it is staggering to read a collection where almost every poem feel like a classic and is a piece of writing I want to return to again and again. Oliver provides both solace and inspiration.

Ross says

*If the doors of my heart
ever close, I am as good as dead.*

A balanced, comfortable collection.

Zachary F. says

*You don't want to hear the story
of my life, and anyway
I don't want to tell it, I want to listen*

to the enormous waterfalls of the sun.

*And anyway it's the same old story--
a few people just trying,
one way or another,
to survive.*

*Mostly I want to be kind.
And nobody, of course, is kind,
or mean,
for a simple reason.*

*And nobody gets out of it, having to
swim through the fires to stay in
this world.*

-from "Dogfish"

This was one of those "right place, right time" reads for me. I've been a casual fan of Mary Oliver for years, but *Dream Work* came to me in a period of change and questioning and spoke to me where I was. It has all of Oliver's trademarks--the reverent love for nature and the body, the deceptive simplicity of language and meter, the abiding preoccupation with both stillness and flux--but it also seems somewhat darker, or at least more uncertain, than the other books of hers I've read. I get the impression Oliver was doing a lot of emotional growing as she wrote these poems, coming to terms with something difficult in her life or herself, and for that reason it was the perfect thing to read in my own season of growth and uncertainty. But I don't want to oversell the darkness here; these poems are often challenging, and sometimes painful, but the thing I felt most--the thing I always feel most when reading Mary Oliver--was inspiration. Not the insipid inspiration of Hallmark movies and motivational platitudes, not the fleeting sort of inspiration often synonymous with cheerfulness or excitement, but the hard-won (and therefore more meaningful) inspiration that comes when we accept the task ahead of us for what it is, or emerge from a shadowy period of testing into the light of new revelation.

A book I expect to cherish for a long time to come.

Sara says

I've given up listing which Mary Oliver poetry books are my favorites. Each one is so beautiful and heartfelt that all of them might as well share the tie for the number one spot. DREAM WORK is no exception. Each poem - be it about nature, relationships, or observations from Oliver's travels - is like a meditation. Some are spirited, joyful, and bursting with gratitude. Others are contemplative, introspective, and a bit melancholy.

I can't speak for Oliver herself, but DREAM WORK feels like one of her more personal collections. Certain poems have a darkness, an edge, or a sadness that not only set those pieces apart, but also twist inside you in a deep, familiar, and almost painful way. They're not designed to scare you - rather, they evoke a sadness or ache that's universal. This ability, which is alive and well in all of Oliver's work, is what makes her such an incredible poet.

Favorites: "Morning Poem," "Trilliums," "Rage," "Wild Geese," "The Journey," "A Visitor," "Orion," "One or Two Things," "The Swimmer," "Coming Home"

Spencer says

I needed this! Maybe it's my nostalgic mood or the changing leaves or necessity, but this collection is my favorite so far. I feel revitalized, connected, un-alone in my view of the universe. Oliver is a master!
