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New And Selected Poems, Volume One



Synopsis

When *New and Selected Poems, Volume One* was originally published in 1992, Mary Oliver was awarded the National Book Award. In the fourteen years since its initial appearance it has become one of the best-selling volumes of poetry in the country. This collection features thirty poems published only in this volume as well as selections from the poet's first eight books. Mary Oliver's perceptive, brilliantly crafted poems about the natural landscape and the fundamental questions of life and death have won high praise from critics and readers alike. "Do you love this world?" she interrupts a poem about peonies to ask the reader. "Do you cherish your humble and silky life?" She makes us see the extraordinary in our everyday lives, how something as common as light can be "an invitation/to happiness,/and that happiness,/when it's done right,/is a kind of holiness,/palpable and redemptive." She illuminates how a near miss with an alligator can be the catalyst for seeing the world "as if for the second time/the way it really is." Oliver's passionate demonstrations of delight are powerful reminders of the bond between every individual, all living things, and the natural world.

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Customer Reviews

Every poem in this book is a gem, and the collection made me want to read her complete works. While this is definitely not "religious poetry" of the greeting card variety, it is an expression of a deep spiritual awareness. Oliver's poems often reveal an amazement and wonder at being alive. Poetic skill and heightened awareness are so well-integrated, those who are looking for well-crafted poetry will certainly find it, and those who are looking for an awakening of consciousness may also find

that. Although Oliver's environment, her field of play, is nature, I wouldn't reduce her to a "naturalist poet." Nature is always interpreted and absorbed by her vision. Nature reveals its secrets to her, but they are the secrets of her own soul. In her poetry, nature is the oracle that reveals the human psyche. But I should include Oliver's own words, because no prose critique can do justice to the intoxicating natural imagery of her poems. In the poem "Peonies", the richness and fertility of nature mirror the same qualities of the imagination: This morning the green fists of the peonies are getting ready to break my heart as the sun rises, as the sun strokes them with his old, buttery fingers and they open- pools of lace, white and pink- and all day the black ants climb over them, boring their deep and mysterious holes into the curls, craving the sweet sap, ... The poem ends with a challenge that reverberates through the book. In spite of the sense of death looming sometimes on the edge of the poem (and our lives), sometimes at the center, are we willing to fully experience life? Do you love this world? Do you cherish your humble and silky life?

Mary Oliver overwhelms my visual and auditory senses with her language; it is precise and controlled; her imagery is brilliant. Using carefully chosen words she captures the "essence" of living things in the natural world. Each work is masterful and seems a deep meditation that leaves a reader feeling refreshed and somehow privy to a personal, even private part of the poet as an investigator and witness to nature and its secrets. Each time I read one of her poems I feel as if she is inviting me into the woods with her to witness the natural world in all of its sacredness. I have yet to read a poem of hers that disappointed me. Her mood-infused poem "Rain" (the first poem in the book) is sublime; and "Mushrooms" is glorious! Read "Mushrooms" slowly and listen to the language; see the imagery in the mind: Rain, and then the cool pursed lips of the wind draw them out of the ground---red and yellow skulls pummeling upward through leaves, through grasses, through sand; astonishing in their suddenness, their quietude, their wetness, they appear on fall mornings, some balancing in the earth on one hoof packed with poison, others billowing chunkily, and delicious---those who know walk out to gather, choosing the benign from flocks of glitterers, sorcerers, russulas, panther caps, shark-white death angels in their torn veils looking innocent as sugar but full of paralysis: to eat is to stagger down fast as mushrooms themselves when they are done being perfect and overnight slide back under the shining fields of rain. My God!

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