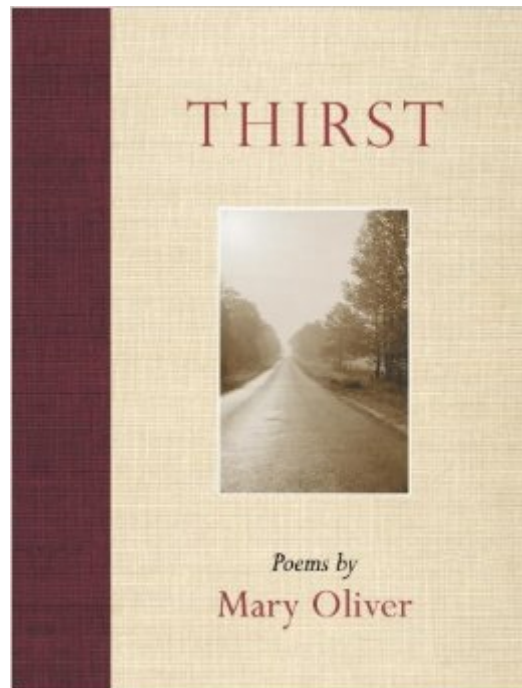


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Thirst: Poems



Synopsis

Thirst, a collection of fortythree new poems from Pulitzer Prizewinner Mary Oliver, introduces two new directions in the poet's work. Grappling with grief at the death of her beloved partner of over forty years, she strives to experience sorrow as a path to spiritual progress, grief as part of loving and not its end. And within these pages she chronicles for the first time her discovery of faith, without abandoning the love of the physical world that has been a hallmark of her work for four decades.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Live long enough, live deep enough, and you will find, as Mary Oliver does in these 43 poems collected in "Thirst," that all grief edges joy, all joy is edged by grief. It is only in a deep and courageous immersion into life, and perhaps also that place beyond life, that one can fully experience this wonder, a kind of yin and yang, the light beside the shadow, phenomenon that is living with thirst, quenched or unquenched. There is nothing pretentious about Oliver's poetry. She is simplicity and purity itself. Thirst is how she approaches living, and now dying - in her expression of grief for the loss of her longtime life partner. This does not change how she approaches living, only intensifies it. "My work is loving the world," she writes in her opening poem, "Messenger." She observes the world, then observes herself in it, part and parcel. "Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums./Here the clam deep in the speckled sand./Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?/Am I no longer young, and still not half-perfect? Let me/keep my mind on what matters,/which is my work,/which is mostly standing still and learning to be/astonished." Much of this collection is Oliver's

conversation with God having a conversation with her. Their dialogue is filtered by nature, where everyplace is a place of worship and every living thing ministering to her and she reciprocating. Her dogs speak of unconditional love and simple acceptance, an exchanged gaze with a snake is looking into the eyes of divinity (and not the darker side). Praying can be done through the weeds in a vacant lot. The words do not have to be elaborate, Oliver writes, "but a doorway/into thanks, and a silence in which/another voice may speak.

In the very first line of the very first poem of Mary Oliver's new collection of poetry, entitled *Thirst*, she says "My work is loving the world" (*Messenger*). In the very last poem of this slim volume, she says "Love for the earth and love for you are having such a long conversation in my heart" (*Thirst*). These poems bookend a new affirmation of faith for Oliver: For the first time in her life, at the age of 71, she is writing from an apparent Christian framework, loving the world of marshes, ponds, beaches, bears and dogs and the Creator of all these things she has so long loved. These are poems that celebrate the world of Creation, that praise the Creator, that walk through grief (Oliver lost her long time partner and agent, Molly Malone Cook, in 1995) into resolute hope, that point beyond nature and grief to the Giver of all. Her love of nature might be seen in the way she addresses it as addressing a good friend, as in "When I Am Among the Trees," where she says "Around me the trees stir in their leaves and call out, 'Stay awhile.' The light flows from their branches. And they call again, 'It's simple,' they say, 'and you too have come into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled with light, and to shine.' There are poems about ribbon snakes, roses, a great moth, otters, Percy (her dog), and that great conversation ("And still I believe you will/ come, Lord: you will, when I speak to the fox,/ the sparrow, the lost dog, the shivering sea goose, know/ that really I am speaking to you" (*Making the House Ready for the Lord*)). And then there is grief.

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