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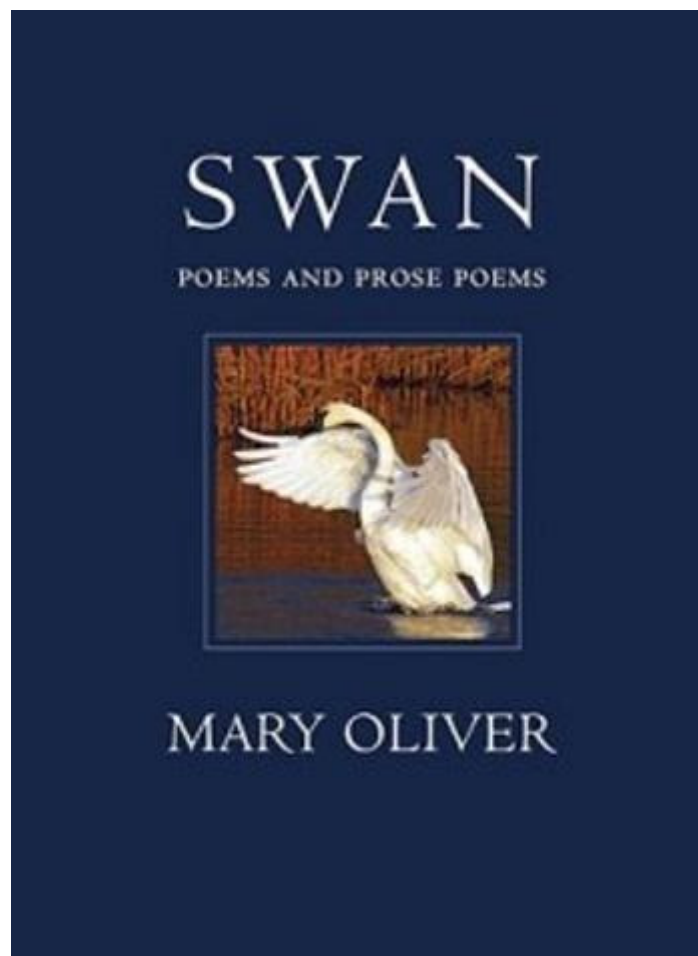
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The Write Place At the Write Time Book Review- Hot off the Presses



Cover Image of Swan by Mary Oliver

**The Write Place At the Write Time Book Review
Presents: *Swan* by Mary Oliver**

Author bio: Drawing her inspiration deeply from the New England setting of Provincetown, Mary Oliver gives profound glory to the natural world through her poetry that has earned her the Pulitzer

Prize, the Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship and the American Academy and Institute of Arts & Letters Achievement Award amongst many other honors in her long career.

For further information on this book, please click on the cover image~

REVIEW By Vince Corvaia~

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, Mary Oliver has published more than 20 books of poetry since 1965. Her latest, *Swan*, is as fine as anything she has written.

Her theme, if there can be said to be one, can be found in the book's first poem, "What Can I Say," where she advises, "Take your busy heart to the art museum and the / chamber of commerce / but take it also to the forest." Oliver understands the need to live in the worlds of art and commerce, but she also sees the need to be in touch with nature. Nature, with all of its beauty and perils, is Oliver's landscape.

In "For Example," Oliver rescues a wounded gull, which, on the drive "to the place where sometimes, sometimes not, / such things can be mended," leaps onto the back of the driver's seat and attacks her. Yet she understands what is happening. "But we all know, don't we, how sometimes / things have to feel anger, so as not / to be defeated?" She declares, "I love this world, even in its hard places." That too could be the book's theme. Not all of the natural world is gentle—much of it is

brutal—yet Oliver accepts it unconditionally as a world into which we have been invited, “even in its hard places.”

In “Percy Wakes Me (Fourteen),” Oliver’s dog wakes her early and expects to be reprimanded, but here is Oliver’s response: “How wonderful you are, I say. How clever, if you / needed me, / to wake me.” It’s a love poem, and a fairly innocuous one, until the end, where Oliver raises the bar and challenges the reader: “This is a poem about Percy. / This is a poem about more than Percy. / Think about it.”

Oliver throws a similar curve at the end of the title poem, which is arguably the book’s masterpiece. “Swan” poses a series of questions to the reader, beginning with, “Do you too see it, drifting, all night on the black river?” She asks us if we see it “rising into the silvery air, / an armful of white blossoms”; ultimately she asks seven questions, the final three resonating like thunder in the heart of the reader: “And did you feel it, in your heart, how it pertained to everything? / And have you too finally figured out what beauty is for? / And have you changed your life?” Some people say poetry is irrelevant. A poem such as “Swan” can indeed change a life, if read carefully enough.

There’s another poem about Percy, “The Sweetness of Dogs (Fifteen).” The poet and her beloved pet go out to watch the moon rise. We get an idea of just how affecting nature can be, as “the moon rises, so beautiful it / makes me shudder, makes me think about / time and space, makes me take / measure of myself” – this is more than mere imagism. This is the poet interacting with, reflecting on, the natural world.

An Afterword at the end of the book, a poem named simply "Percy," acknowledges his death. We have come to know this poet, come to know her dog, and we are moved, perhaps to tears, by this bond between reader and written word.

Mary Oliver is a gift to the world's literary community. Her poems take us beyond our four complacent walls into the world we perhaps only knew as children, if at all. Swan is a fitting testament to her gift, her skill, and her relationship to that world.

FEATURED EXCERPT~

http://www.beacon.org/client/client_pages/maryoliver.cfm

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