

Devotions by Mary Oliver: A Review

I have wanted to review a book of poetry, but it has been difficult to find it. Fortunately Mary Oliver's book fulfills the two criteria I set: a clearly recognized major poet and, above all, accessibility to readers who not ordinarily attracted to poetry. So, I looked at Seamus Heaney, Nobel laureate, and Billy Collins, one of America's leading and most popular poets. They did not fully pass the accessibility test. Then along comes Mary Oliver's *Devotions*.

Mary Oliver's first volume of poetry was published in 1963. *Devotions* is a selection by the author from her many books of poetry since then. Born in Ohio, Oliver found Provincetown, Massachusetts, and lived a life of walks in nature, close observation, tender recording of her awestruck experiences of nature: pets, air and wind, birds, flowers, leaves, clouds. It seems as though each day must be an intimate revelation to her of how precious our existence is. One small example.

THE STORM

Now through the white orchard my little dog

romps, breaking the new snow

with wild feet.

Running here running there, excited,

Hardly able to stop, he leaps, he spins

until the white snow is written upon

in large exuberant letters,

a long sentence, expressing

the pleasures of the body in this world.

Oh, I could not have said it better myself.

Bob McDonnell

