

[The Other Kingdoms](#)

[by Mary Oliver](#)

Consider the other kingdoms. The trees, for example, with their mellow-sounding titles: oak, aspen, willow.

Or the snow, for which the peoples of the north have dozens of words to describe its different arrivals. Or the creatures, with their thick fur, their shy and wordless gaze. Their infallible sense of what their lives are meant to be. Thus the world grows rich, grows wild, and you too, grow rich, grow sweetly wild, as you too were born to be.

[Zazen on Ching-t'ing Mountain](#)

[by Li Po](#)

The birds have vanished down the sky.
Now the last cloud drains away.
We sit together, the mountain and me,
until only the mountain remains.

[What Gorgeous Thing](#)[by Mary Oliver](#)

I do not know what gorgeous thing
the bluebird keeps saying,
his voice easing out of his throat,
beak, body into the pink air
of the early morning. I like it
whatever it is. Sometimes
it seems the only thing in the world
that is without dark thoughts.
Sometimes it seems the only thing
in the world that is without
questions that can't and probably
never will be answered, the
only thing that is entirely content
with the pink, then clear white
morning and, gratefully, says so.

[At Blackwater Pond](#)

[by Mary Oliver](#)

At Blackwater Pond the tossed waters have settled
after a night of rain.

I dip my cupped hands. I drink
a long time. It tastes
like stone, leaves, fire. It falls cold
into my body, waking the bones. I hear them
deep inside me, whispering
*oh what is that beautiful thing
that just happened?*

[The Peace of Wild Things](#)

[by Wendell Berry](#)

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Poem 133: The Summer Day, by Mary Oliver

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean –

the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down –

who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.

Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down

into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,

how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,

which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

with your one wild and precious life?

When I Am Among the Trees

by Mary Oliver

When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.

I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
but walk slowly, and bow often.

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".

One or Two Things, by Mary Oliver

1

Don't bother me.

I've just
been born

2

The butterfly's loping flight
carries it through the country of the leaves
delicately, and well enough to get it
where it wants to go, wherever that is, stopping
here and there to fuzzle the damp throats
of flowers and the black mud; up
and down it swings, frenzied and aimless; and sometimes
for long delicious moments it is perfectly
lazy, riding motionless in the breeze on the soft stalk
of some ordinary flower

3

The god of dirt
came up to me many times and said
so many wise and delectable things, I lay
on the grass listening
to his dog voice,
crow voice,
frog voice, *now*,
he said, and *now*,

and never once mentioned *forever*,

4

which has nevertheless always been,
like a sharp iron hoof,
at the center of my mind.

5

One or two things are all you need
to travel over the blue pond, over the deep
roughage of the trees and through the stiff
flowers of lightning - some deep
memory of pleasure, some cutting
knowledge of pain.

6

But to lift the hoof!
For that you need
an idea.

7

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.

Wild Geese

by Mary Oliver

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.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
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.