

## Upstream: Selected Essays

*Mary Oliver*

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## Upstream: Selected Essays Mary Oliver

Comprising a selection of essays, *Upstream* finds beloved poet Mary Oliver reflecting on her astonishment and admiration for the natural world and the craft of writing.

As she contemplates the pleasure of artistic labor, finding solace and safety within the woods, and the joyful and rhythmic beating of wings, Oliver intimately shares with her readers her quiet discoveries, boundless curiosity, and exuberance for the grandeur of our world.

This radiant collection of her work, with some pieces published here for the first time, reaffirms Oliver as a passionate and prolific observer whose thoughtful meditations on spiders, writing a poem, blue fin tuna, and Ralph Waldo Emerson inspire us all to discover wonder and awe in life's smallest corners.

## Upstream: Selected Essays Details


Date : Published October 11th 2016 by Penguin Press

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Author : Mary Oliver

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## From Reader Review Upstream: Selected Essays for online ebook

### Bree Hill says

Mary Oliver takes us on a trip through the natural world which she claims is a necessity for her to write. This is a collection of essays and they are so beautiful.

The beginning started out really strong for me. Towards the middle although I appreciated the essays on other poets that fuel her soul, it was a tad slow but then she picked right back up at the end. There is an essay in here about a little spider that I've been thinking about since I read it.

I will refer to this for a long time.

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### Jaelyn Day says

I lack the ability to really describe all the ways I loved, devoured, and re-devoured this book so I'll leave it at that. Really one of the brightest spots in an otherwise challenging year for new books.

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### Cathrine ?? says

#### 4★

If you were to take a walk upstream what would you notice?

Exploring the twin pleasures of writing literature with essays on Whitman, Wordsworth, Poe, and Emerson and then the observations of the natural world—seeing it, hearing it, and responding to it, are the inspiration in this collection by poet Mary Oliver.

She so beautifully describes the watery world of fish swimming in blue pastures, sunflowers that are more wonderful than any words about them, and wild roses as an immutable force whose purpose is to strike our heart and saturate it with simple joy.

She observes a spider raising her young, gives sanctuary to an injured gull, then ponders the terrible mystery of the endlessly hungry owl.

There are reflections on the way life used to be in small towns when bears were more welcome, dogs could roam free, and dwellings were constructed like patchwork quilts.

Her certainty is that the natural world is necessary in order for her to write and anyone with an affinity for the same would love this new offering. I savored it each morning with my coffee in one hand, my e-reader in the other, and the sunrise in my vision. A real treat but so difficult not to include direct quotes with my thoughts on it (the only downside to ARCs).

Thanks much to NetGalley & Penguin Press.

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### Jenny (Reading Envy) says

Mary Oliver can do no wrong in her poetry. She is one of my favorite voices, reflecting on nature, reflecting on relationships. She is happy to live a life that isn't well-traveled, but rather one that notices, that breathes.

This book of essays reflects that philosophy. Some are on home, some are on other writers, some are on scrambled turtle eggs. I was cooing over the beautiful writing on the plane, much to my seatmates' chagrin. This would be a good addition to an essay collection OR for fans of poetry.

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## Julie says

I have a weird relationship with Mary Oliver. I own, and have read, several of her books. Most of them are poetry, but a couple of them are essay collections (as Upstream is). I generally like most of her books, and it excites me to see someone making some kind of a living off selling poetry. Though, where Ms. Oliver lives (a beaver hut?) is yet to be determined by me.

Sometimes, when I'm reading her work, I'm smiling or nodding and really feeling groovy. For instance, in this collection, she ponders poetry:

I learned from Whitman that the poem is a temple-or a green field-a place to enter, and in which to feel. Only in a secondary way is it an intellectual thing-an artifact, a moment of seemly and robust wordiness-wonderful as that part of it is. I learned that the poem was made not just to exist, but to speak, to be company.

And creativity:

The most regretful people on earth are those who felt the call to creative work, who felt their own creative power restive and uprising, and gave to it neither power nor time.

And when I'm reading lines like these, I feel like Ms. Oliver is a kindred spirit, and I feel proud of her writing and long career. . .

But then. . . she'll start talking about those "open mouthed" kisses that she plants on trees and sticks and animals and whatnot, and it puts into my mind that bizarre moment from Elizabeth Gilbert's memoir, "Eat, Pray, Love" when, at a yoga camp or wherever the heck she was, she suddenly mounts a tree and initiates foreplay.

Folks, I love nature, but I love it the way E.B. White loved it, the way that Larry McMurtry and his characters love nature. As in. . . Damn, would you just look at that view?!

So, after a few of these. . . "open mouthed" expressions of nature devotion, I came to these lines (dear God, please let someone be reading this review right now, because I need some hand holding here):

Once I put my face against the body of our cat as she lay with her kittens, and she did not seem to mind. So I pursed my lips against that full moon, and I tasted the rich river of her body.

Say what now?? Wha?? I literally read these two sentences about ten times in a row, then brought the book to my husband and read them aloud and asked, "Is she saying what I think she's saying?"

My husband's face recoiled in a grimace and he said, "What in hell are you reading??"

Exactly.

I'm sorry, Ms. Oliver, there's some good stuff here, and I love Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson, too, but I gotta draw the line somewhere.

And, please. . . stay away from my cats.

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### **Diane Barnes says**

I've always loved her poetry, but, until now, never read any prose by Mary Oliver. Her writing is wonderful and peaceful and cleansing. Magic.

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### **Shelly says**

This is a beautiful book. It's a collection of essays that by the end feel a little memoir-ish, in a good way. There are essays mostly on nature and small bits of Mary Oliver's life. Literature essays are also here with a special focus on Emerson, Poe, and Whitman. The entire collection is good, but I especially enjoyed the ones focused most on nature, though the Poe one was rather interesting.

(I received an ARC of Upstream from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.)

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### **Jamie says**

Incredibly beautiful and just awe-inspiring how she was able to express her passion for literature and nature within such small essays.

Certain essays were written so vividly, that I felt right there with her, seeing what she had seen when she was describing the woods. Absolutely loved this book.

4.5 Stars

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### **L.P. Logan says**

This book is beautiful, capturing revelations and insights that the average human being would fail to make on their own . . . which events are then offset by the detailed accounts of a spider killing a cricket (gross), the author nursing on her newly-made mother pet cat (even grosser), and other oddities that entirely distract from the awesomeness that observed, removed, from the author and her general sphere.

I'm still scratching my head as to whether I even liked these poetic essays or not, which is why i'm giving this particular work a solid three stars. Right in the middle. Because what is beautiful, is undeniably beautiful. But that which is bleh, is just down right uncomfortable to read and takes away from that beauty.

If poetic essays/ramblings are your thing, then by all means, check this one out.

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## Dana says

Mary Oliver's essays, like her poems, are a soothing balm for the soul.

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## Laura says

Reading anything Mary Oliver writes is always a soothing balm to the soul for me. I suppose I feel such a kinship with her writing because I love spending time tramping about in the woods and fields near my home taking in the nature around me, and she writes about the natural world so beautifully. No matter what she writes about, whether it be nature, or about one of the writers from the past that she loves so well and that have made such an impression on her, or the beloved town where she lived for a number of years, or her writing process and where she finds the inspiration for it, there is always something to be found that is thought provoking or just simply breathtaking.

Some of my favorite quotes from this book:

*Through these woods I have walked thousands of times. For many years I felt more at home here than anywhere else, including our own house. Stepping out into the world, into the grass, onto the path, was always a kind of relief. I was not escaping anything. I was returning to the arena of delight.*

*You must not ever stop being whimsical.  
And you must not, ever, give anyone else the responsibility for your life.*

*Teach the children... Give them fields and the woods and the possibility of the world salvaged from the lords of profit. Stand them in the stream, head them upstream, rejoice as they learn to love this green space they live in, its sticks and leaves and then the silent, beautiful blossoms. Attention is the beginning of devotion.*

*I am one of those who has no trouble imagining the sentient lives of trees, of their leaves in some fashion communicating or of the massy trunks and heavy branches knowing it is I who have come, as I always come, each morning, to walk beneath them, glad to be alive and glad to be there.*

*I learned from Whitman that the poem is a temple--or a green field--a place to enter, and in which to feel.*

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## julieta says

I liked most of these essays, especially the one about Whitman, and some of her writing is wonderful. She is evocative, and beautiful. The last part I thought was a bit much with the spider and the cricket and all that. Too much nature for me. Maybe I should not have read it while I was having lunch. I was not too crazy about the ones where she began speaking of animals and giving them personalities, the owl one, and the one about the dog, the one about the gull. She is a wonderful writer, but I can't say the whole thing drove me crazy, the first part definitely. Still very much worth it. I kind of love the cover, too.

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## **Jamie says**

You can tell these essays were written by a poet. It's a love of the language as much as the natural world.

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## **Jennifer says**

*"I quickly found for myself two such blessings -- the natural world, and the world of writing: literature. These were the gates through which I vanished through a difficult place."*

In in this exquisite collection of essays, national treasure Mary Oliver uses her poetic talent and gifts of observation to reflect on topics ranging from the beauty of the natural world, to the connectedness of all beings, to the need for solitude, and the genius of some of America's literary masters. As with the poetry for which Oliver is best known, this is a quiet, reflective, and soulful book best savored rather than rushed.

4.5 stars

Thank you to NetGalley and Penguin Press for a galley of this book in exchange for an honest review.

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## **Dannii Elle says**

Actual rating 4.5 stars.

I received this book in exchange from an honest review from NetGalley. Thank you to the author, Mary Oliver, and the publisher, Penguin Press, for this opportunity.

This is a selection of essays, written in a beautiful and abstract style, concerning a variety of topics; from the history of Emerson, the laying of turtle eggs in the sand, Poe's concern over the uncertainty of the universe and the adventures of a common house spider.

I enjoyed some more than others, purely because I had more interest in the topics discussed, rather than some being of weaker constitution than others. All had a transcendent and divine tone to them that felt like meditation in the written form. The essays concerning natural elements were of particular evocative delight.

I also loved exploring the essays concerning Gothic literature. I did in-depth studies on the subject for my under-grad university degree, before making this the primary focus of my post-grad Masters degree, and her thoughts would have been of unparalleled help if I had discovered them during this time. Now they just hold a great interest for me and her littering of classical Gothic texts in this made me so excited to continue my exploration of the genre.

Despite the academic focus of these short essays, they were written with such a graceful and dignified beauty that they read like extended poems, which is, indeed, their point. They have definitely heightened my appreciation and understanding of both the wonders of the natural world and great past literary figures.

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## Tiffany Reisz says

Some delightful stuff in here. A bit hit or miss but really good writing. I'm sure I'll revisit a couple of the essays.

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## Diane S ? says

4.5 I have read her poetry for years, she in one of my favorites but until this book I never knew she was an essayist. The beautiful writing and thoughts that are expressed in her poetry are also expressed in her writing. Thoughts on creativity, need for solitude, the wonder of the natural world, and those writers that she has loved since her youth.

Divided into three sections, the last two tying back to the first. Emerson, Poe, Whitman, those writers she finds indispensable to her own thoughts, peace of mind, fuel for her soul. I read these at night, before bed a few at a time and cherished the time I spent with them. Filled with special insights and wonder this was a special and beautiful read.

ARC from Netgalley.

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## Caroline Gerardo says

ARC copy signed made me cry when I open the cover. Read while sitting outside with Cleveland National Park at my home. Tears, nods, the taste of gooseberries found hiking all in this book. We get better with wisdom of time. A book for writers, naturalists and those with a beating soul

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## Ariel says

In her essay collection, *Upstream*, Mary Oliver sets us on a trail through forest and by shore as she expertly layers in experience and thought from essay to essay. A collection of three parts, the latter two being expansions on the first, *Upstream* is Oliver's beautifully writ reflection on where she comes from, her kinship with the natural world and its wild ones, and the authors that have warmed her blood and quickened her own ink.

Oliver's essays on Whitman, Emerson, and Poe are insightful pieces that were immensely enjoyable to read. They offer perspective and interpretation on both each author's work and the motivation behind it. I would eagerly recommend Oliver's essays as strong companion pieces to experiencing and/or revisiting each author in turn. Oliver illumines wonderful points about these specific authors as well as literature as a whole. As with the assertion, from her "Emerson: An Introduction," that

"The best use of literature bends not toward the narrow and the absolute but to the extravagant and the possible. Answers are no part of it; rather, it is the opinions, the rhapsodic persuasions, the engrafted logics, the clues that are to the mind of the reader the possible keys to his own self-quarrels, his own predicament. This is the crux of Emerson, who does not advance straight ahead but wanders to all sides of an issue; who delivers suggestions with a kindly gesture—

who opens doors and tells us to look at things for ourselves. The one thing he is adamant about is that we *should* look— we *must* look— for that is the liquor of life, that brooding upon issues, that attention to thought even as we weed the garden or milk the cow."

The aspect of Oliver's *Upstream* that most connected me with her writing and most moved me to start reading her poetry is her ability to vividly capture the impress and beauty of the wild. Her prose is warm honey dripping from fresh honey comb and freshly spilled blood on snow. It holds a visceral heat and weight to it that is stirring and captivating. It made me think of *Waldeinsamkeit*, the 'untranslatable' German word for "the feeling of being alone in the woods" with *wald* meaning wood/forest and *einsamkeit* meaning loneliness or solitude. More yearn for than think of really. Thanks to an old yet never sated etymology addiction and a penchant for eagerly grabbing the bait whenever an article like "50 Untranslatable Words From Other Languages" pops up in my radar, *waldeinsamkeit* is what comes to mind when I think of having an intense connection with nature. Where one can be swallowed up by the underside of a trees' leaves or the glow surrounding the moon on a windy night; a perfect contentment in solitude while everything breathes around you. I can't say 'breathes' is really the word, that it really expresses a clear expression. That *otherness* felt in nature, as in literature and the poignance of both, is beyond my abilities of description but Oliver does it credit in her essay titled "Staying Alive".

"In the first of these—the natural world—I felt at ease; nature was full of beauty and interest and mystery, also good and bad luck, but never misuse. The second world—the world of literature—offered me, besides the pleasures of form, the sustentation of empathy... and I ran for it. I realized in it. I stood willingly and gladly in the characters of everything—other people, trees, clouds. And this is what I learned: that the world's *otherness* is antidote to confusion, that standing *within* this otherness—the beauty and the mystery of the world, out in the fields or deep inside books—can re-dignify the worst-stung heart."

*Upstream* is a collection I can definitely see myself revisiting and I look forward to reading more from Mary Oliver. I think it holds a wealth of inspiration for introspection and there are pieces of it that are still tumbling around my head and working themselves into all sorts of channels. Pieces that need to continually traipse about my mind in lewdly luminescent & emboldened letters as a consistent reminder such as,

"You must not ever stop being whimsical.  
And you must not, ever, give anyone else the responsibility for your life."

I'd like to thank NetGalley for giving me the chance to discover, read, and review a new-to-me author with this ARC.

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## ?Kimari? says

I know it's silly, but I'd love to have tea with Mary Oliver and Annie Dillard.

Some of my favorite bits from *Upstream*:

If this was lost, let us all be lost always. The beech leaves were just slipping their copper coats; pale green and quivering they arrived into the year. My heart opened, and opened again. The

water pushed against my effort, then its glassy permission to step ahead touched my ankles.  
The sense of going toward the source.

I do not think that I ever, in fact, returned home.



Come with me into the field of sunflowers is a better line than anything you will find here, and  
the sunflowers themselves far more wonderful than any words about them.



I read my books with diligence, and mounting skill, and gathering certainty. I read the way a  
person might swim, to save his or her life. I wrote that way too.



The world is not what I thought, but different, and more! I have seen it with my own eyes!



Let me always be who I am, and then some.

You might also enjoy:

- ★ Dog Songs
  - ★ A Thousand Mornings
  - ★ Pilgrim at Tinker Creek
  - ★ Dawn Light
  - ★ A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There
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