



# The Leaf And The Cloud: A Poem

*Mary Oliver*

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With piercing clarity and craftsmanship, Mary Oliver has fashioned an unforgettable poem of questioning and discovery, about what is observable and what is not, about what passes and what persists. As the U.S. Poet Laureate, Stanley Kunitz, has said: "Mary Oliver's poetry is fine and deep; it reads like a blessing. Her special gift is to connect us with our sources in the natural world, its beauties and terrors and mysteries and consolations." The *Boston Globe* has called Mary Oliver "a great poet . . . she is amazed but not blinded." And the *Miami Herald* has said: "The gift of Oliver's poetry is that she communicates the beauty she finds in the world and makes it unforgettable."

## The Leaf And The Cloud: A Poem Details

Date : Published October 17th 2001 by Da Capo Press (first published 2000)

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Author : Mary Oliver

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# From Reader Review The Leaf And The Cloud: A Poem for online ebook

## Dhartridge says

I reread parts of this book every so often. It's the book to read excerpts from when my ashes are scattered. Transportive.

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## Jenn says

I particularly love Gravel - her poetry helps us place ourselves in the right frame of mind for facing our own mortality each day and accepting it.

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## Holli Keel says

Gorgeous, deep, and captivating. I read the book in one half-hour sitting. I love her connection to nature and her uncertainty and questions. Hard to explain how her words make me feel, so here are a couple of favorite excerpts:

“Listen, I don’t think we’re going to rise  
in gauze and halos.  
Maybe as grass, and slowly.”

“And certainly and easily I can see  
how God might be one rose bud,  
one white feather in the heron’s enormous, slowly opening wing.

It’s after that  
it gets difficult.”

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## Alison Whiteman says

Mary Oliver is obviously amazing. She will pull you to a place that is both profound and simple. Walk wherever you are and notice the beauty of nature. -AW

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## Weiyi says

Maybe the world, without us,  
Is the real poem.

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## mwpm says

I don't know what I expected from *The Leaf and the Cloud*... Before reading *The Leaf and the Cloud*, the only other poetry collection I had read by Mary Oliver is *American Primitive* ... Dedicated to James Wright, *American Primitive* follows in the poet's example of nature-themed poetry. Indeed, the collection is preoccupied with nature, as the title ( *American Primitive* ) suggests. If I expected the same from *The Leaf and the Cloud* is because of the expectations set by *American Primitive* , and by the book's title (*The Leaf and the Cloud*).

Don't get me wrong, I'm not opposed to natural imagery or nature-themed poems. I haven't read any of James Wright's poems, but I liked *American Primitive* . I liked it enough to want to read more of Oliver's poetry. But I couldn't have expected how much I would like *The Leaf and the Cloud*.

A book-length poem in seven parts, *The Leaf and the Cloud* takes the reader in so many directions. Full of questioning and longing, clarity and revelation. Indeed, the poem is described by the publisher as being about "questioning and discovery, about what is observable and what is not, about what passes and what persists". But this only begins to describe *The Leaf and the Cloud*. The poem is all of this and more...

I am touching a few leaves.  
I am noticing the way the yellow butterflies  
move together, in a twinkling cloud, over the field.

And I am thinking: maybe just looking and listening  
is the real work.

Maybe the world, without us,  
is the real poem.  
- From the Book of Time, 1 (pg. 17)

The sweet-faced cat,  
the good goat,  
the golden feet of the hen -  
the sealed jug of her egg -

the black mole's long-knuckled hands,  
the spears of the grass,  
the sun on everyone's back, yours and mine.

Also the poem on the page,  
also the painting on the white wall;  
also the instruments and the arms holding them  
and the voices issuing from them.

The turnip, the cabbage, the crook-necked squash;  
the three blue bowls;  
the fork and the knife.

The sailboat,  
the dragger swaying above its heavy nets,  
the pink dory crossing the bay with two boys and a dog.

I'm never sure  
which part of this dream is me  
and which part is the rest of the world.

*Therefore.*  
- Riprap, 3 (pg. 26 - 27)

what does it mean, that the world is beautiful -  
what does it mean?

The child asks this,  
and the determined, laboring adult asks this -

both the carpenter and the scholar ask this,  
and the fisherman and the teacher;

both the rich and the poor ask this  
(maybe the poor more than the rich)

and the old and the very old, not yet having figured it out, ask this  
desperately

standing beside the golden-coated field rock,  
or the tumbling water,  
or under the stars -

*what does it mean?*  
*what does it mean?*  
- Gravel, 6 (pg. 42-43)

In an interview, the poet Billy Collins suggested that the ending of a poem is "something that didn't exist before, that the poem brings, calls into existence, through a series of steps..." In Oliver's *The Leaf and the Cloud* the reader encounters precisely what Collins described: the steps by which the poet reaches the end of the poem. Throughout the poem, Oliver stops to consider what the poem (still in process) may be. As if the ending of the poem were a physical object. Something on the distant horizon, the details of which she can't yet make out. Something she is moving toward, but hasn't yet reached...

The poem is not the world.  
It isn't even the first page of the world.

But the poem wants to flower, like a flower.  
It knows that much.

It wants to open itself,  
like the door of a little temple,  
so that you might sleep inside and be cooled and refreshed,  
and less yourself than part of everything.  
- Flare, 8 (pg. 5)

So I will write my poem, but I will leave room for the world.  
I will write my poem tenderly and simply, but  
I will leave room for the wind coming the grass,  
for the feather falling out of the grouse's fan-tail,  
and fluttering down, like a song.  
- Work, 7 (pg. 14)

O what is beauty  
that I should be up at  
four A.M. trying to arrange this  
thick song?  
What is beauty that I should  
bow down in the fields of the world, as though  
someone, somewhere  
made it?

O, what is beauty  
that I feel it to be so hot-blooded and suggestive,  
so filled with imperative

beneath the ease of its changes,  
between the leaves and the clouds of its thousand  
and again a thousand opportunities.  
- Riprap, 2 (pg. 26)

I was somewhat irked by the religious connotations of Oliver's "blessings". But it is an improvement upon Gospel of Matthew's blessings...

Blessed [are] the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed [are] they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.  
Blessed [are] the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.  
Blessed [are] they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.  
Blessed [are] the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.  
Blessed [are] the pure in heart: for they shall see God.  
Blessed [are] the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.  
Blessed [are] they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are ye, when [men] shall revile you, and persecute [you], and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.  
- Matthew 5:3-11 (King James Version)

Bless the fingers,  
for they are as darting as fire.  
Bless the little hairs of the body,  
for they are softer than grass.  
Bless the hips  
for they are cunning beyond all other machinery.  
Bless the mouth  
for it is the describer.  
Bless the tongue  
for it is the maker of words.  
Bless the eyes  
for they are the gifts of the angel,  
for they tell the truth.  
Bless the shoulders  
for they are a strength and a shelter.  
Bless the thumb  
for when working it has godly grip.  
Bless the feet  
for their knuckles and their modesty.  
Bless the spine  
for it is the whole story.  
- Rhapsody, 5 (pg. 35-36)

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### **Charlene says**

53 pages . . . one poem, with many parts, lines that had meaning to me (and may have more or different meaning to me when I read them again later).

I enjoyed the spiritual connections with nature in the poem and I especially like the line, "A lifetime isn't long enough for the beauties of this world . . ."

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### **Tania says**

This is one of my favorite books of all time. I find something new in it every time. I love giving it as a gift. It has a thought or voice for all seasons of life.

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### **Eli Brooke says**

cathartic crying and an impulse to recite/memorize, which hasn't happened in years

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## **Ashley says**

The Leaf and the Cloud is a long poem divided up into sections and verses. It is a gorgeous collection of observations of the natural world, questions about the world unseen, and recognition of the interconnectedness of all beings. This is a collection to own for sure; it begs to be read and reread, the pages need to be dog eared and referred to whenever you need to be uplifted, or to be validated in your questioning, or simply to feel a renewed connection with life.

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## **Lydia says**

“And I am thinking: maybe just looking and listening is the real work.

Maybe the world, without us, is the real poem.”

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## **Sandra says**

The year begins to wind down and when the leaves fall in basketsfull I reach for Mary Oliver again. This is the most spiritual of writing, with the sense of wonder in the Great Mystery that lifts me above myself. This will be my 8th reading of this marvelous book. Thank you, Mary Oliver!

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## **Melissa Luna says**

This woman is a genius. She is the gold standard of poets, and easily moves me to tears.

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## **Lorraine says**

This book is lovely. Oliver's poetry is attuned to nature and the rhythms of the seasons; she is full of wonder, and that's the point for her--wonder in the rose, in the butterfly, in the whale, in the corn. Her thesis is the same as Merleau-Ponty's (and incidentally, Dirk Gently's)--everything is connected; everything is participant. She meditates in these poems on what it is to live in the world and what it means to leave it. Now that she has left this world, it is comforting to read that all she saw beyond that rent in the veil is light, light, light.

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## **N. Moss says**

loved it - reminds me of Verlyn Klinkenborg, but in poetry. Such an exultant and patient love of the natural world. I've never read anything of hers before and I am in love



