MARY OLIVER

b. September 10, 1935

d. January 17, 2019

"I want to say: all my life / I was a bride married to amazement. I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms."

Mary Oliver was a Pulitzer Prize-winning American poet who wrote with reverence and poignancy about the natural world. She published 15 collections of poetry during her more than 50-year career.

Oliver was born and raised in Maple Heights, Ohio, outside of Cleveland. She was sexually abused as a small child. In her early teens, she wrote her first poems in the neighboring woods, where she sought refuge from a difficult homelife.

Oliver attended Ohio State University and Vassar College, but never completed her degree. Profoundly inspired by the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay, she lived for a time during the 1950s in Millay's home, helping the poet's sister organize papers after Millay's death. There, Oliver met her life partner, Molly Malone Cook, a photographer.
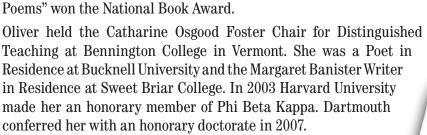
In the 1960s Oliver moved to Provincetown, Massachusetts, to be with Cook, where the couple remained for more than 40 years. Though Oliver was open about her sexuality, she fiercely protected her privacy.

Her highly acclaimed poetry provided a window into the natural world.

In 1963 Oliver published her first collection, "No Voyage and Other Poems." Known for the accessibility of her writing, she intentionally avoided "fancy" words. Her blank verse is rich with earthy themes stemming from her observations both of nature and the excesses of modern civilization. Many of her poems are based on memories of Ohio and Provincetown.

Oliver earned prestigious fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. Her list of honors includes an American Academy of Arts & Letters Award and the Poetry Society of America's Shelley Memorial Prize. In 1984 Oliver won a Pulitzer Prize for "American Primitive," her fifth collection of poetry.

In 1990 her collection "House of Light" won the Christopher Award and the L. L. Winship/PEN New England Award. In 1992 her "New and Selected Poems" won the National Book Award.

Oliver held the Catharine Osgood Foster Chair for Distinguished Teaching at Bennington College in Vermont. She was a Poet in Residence at Bucknell University and the Margaret Banister Writer in Residence at Sweet Briar College. In 2003 Harvard University made her an honorary member of Phi Beta Kappa. Dartmouth conferred her with an honorary doctorate in 2007.

Oliver died in Florida of lymphoma. She was 83. The New York Times published her obituary.

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