

Mary Oliver (1935-2019)



This 1964 photo of Mary Oliver, titled "My First Clam," was taken by her longtime partner, Molly Malone Cook.

On the Beach

On the beach, at dawn:
four small stones clearly
hugging each other.

How many kinds of love
might there be in the world,
and how many formations might they make

and who am I ever
to imagine I could know
such a marvelous business?

When the sun broke
it poured willingly its light
over the stones

that did not move, not at all,
just as, to its always generous term,
it shed its light on me,

my own body that loves,
equally, to hug another body

I Know Someone

I know someone who kisses the way
a flower opens, but more rapidly.
Flowers are sweet. They have
short, beatific lives. They offer
much pleasure. There is
nothing in the world that can be said
against them.
Sad, isn't it, that all they can kiss
is the air.

Yes, yes! We are the lucky ones.

Mary Oliver, one of the most popular American poets, is known primarily as a nature poet. But she is also a queer poet. Please read this [LitHub post by Jeanna Kadlec](#). It briefly discusses the two Oliver poems above, and, more important, it shows some of the many reasons why (queer) literature matters. The post also discusses how and why the queerness of writers and their texts can be overlooked or erased, and it celebrates **queer reading**.

Optional:

To read more about Mary Oliver's relationship with her longtime partner, photographer Molly Malone Cook, see [this post](#) on Maria Popova's blog, *Brain Picking*. The post includes several of Cook's photos, including some of Oliver. If you'd like to read more short joyful love poems by Oliver, see this [Popova post](#).