

NO DEVOTIONS



Noah Berlatsky

Uncreative Poems for Mary Oliver

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LJMcD Communications

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The logo for LJMcD Communications features the letters 'LJMcD' in a large, elegant, cursive script. Below this, the word 'COMMUNICATIONS' is written in a smaller, clean, sans-serif font. A thin horizontal line is positioned directly under the 'COMMUNICATIONS' text.

*Poetry may be personal. Or it may not.
It depends on who you are.
—Mary Oliver*

Reckless

I myself.

It.

It is.

It me

like blue.

Believe—

twice

emerged tips my

deep,

reckless seizure.

I,

sweet.

Just I tumbled.

I: will live life but.

I: if lives life is wise?

I up I myself.

Still,

I myself

blue red.

My felt like!

My is red

trees.

Kept
tremble
felt tug.
“My life!”
cried.
But.
Pried
its stiff
very,
terrible.
It
wild,
full.
But little by little,
left,
kept
deeper deeper.

Did see it?
Did see it, silvery –
perfect silk it
its; lilies,
its?
Did it,
music – like trees – like
ledges?
Did see it, just–
sky, its feet
Like, its Like river?
Did feel it, it?
Figured is?
Life?

Like
purse

buy me, purse;
like

like iceberg,

I step full:
is it be like?

I
I time,
I,

I life,
field,

music,
music.

It's I my life
I bride.
I my.

It's I
if I my life.

I myself,
full.

I up simply visited.

Wild Geese

Be.

Miles desert.

Let

it.

Tell me I will tell.

Pebbles

deep trees,

rivers.

Wild geese, blue.

Itself,

like wild geese—.

Kept tide.

Belly.

If picture I smile
perfectly eyes.

Smile?

*

I, I
it, like; I
my life
like
it;
I
my life; I,

I, I

little.

*

It summer.
I were,
ripples
it
gesture, sleeve
fit.

*

I
be. We,
we?

*

My life,
I tell it, I.

It's—
few just,
survive.

I be.
Simple.

Gets it,
swim fires.

*

I little
better up
future is.

*

If time

it.

Summer

I—

is my,

is up—

is eyes.

Lifts.

I is.

I,

be idle blessed, fields,

is I.

Tell me, else I?

Die?

Tell me, is it

wild life?

Uses
(My sleep I)

I me
full

It me
gift.

Trees

Is me trees,
Quiet
Little every,
Little.
I time, I time,
Birds,
Build my life few wild.
It me,
Little.

Is me still trees.
But let it.
If, let tell it.
I my.
Times true,
Every crisis.

I it were, but it is.
Ever music mild?

I

my ripped

summer
my; my

it is.
creeks by is
my life

bells; is.

But First

Little, tilted.
Its eye
like; feet were
butter. Speed. But
circle it
silvery,
its,
itself edged,
it tussled,
like,
lifted itself, butter,
still,
it flew my,
blue sky,
it?

I

I. Will, will rivers,
will
it, if
I it?
I, I, will I be,
I better?
Will I ever be, even
it I, well.
Is my I just it,
I get?
I.
It up. My.

Is, us,
fire.
I.
Sky,
be
its timeless else
we fly.

Rise.
It
like.

Rise,
dive
deeply, flukes
tipped.
We,
just it will;
it is surge
see first time,
dive,
blue
split see
sky–
like ever–
like;

silks
we
wet fire,
I.

I,
slippery.
I will,
it
flipper.
I lives.

It is try
life, will ever
like,
its spirit
fly
fields fire.

Mussels

Dim
recesses,
clusters,
fistfuls,
deeps
tide,
feed,
blue
little.
Tide
I;
I,
I,
my
best, biggest.
I decide,
twist wet,
eyes see,
see, like.
My.

Pulitzer Prize
primitive

respite
life by
by.

I've, is best
if strict.
I prefer just tree.
I I ever be successful?

I,
better—
summer—
flies my its
its.

I just lie like, time
true:
me, will, ever.

I up
be I,
my, my—
stuff.

Vulture's

Vulture's
but.

Just
by
yet
I keep
I
keep
birds
be
us?

Sweet

I.

Will field
sweet?
Will bite its?
Will lift its?
Will rivers?

I

Gritty gift.

II.

Visit trumpets.

Will.

Tides will be believe.

Will be,
will be respectful.

Will itself, like:
let me.

III.

Is my,
my.
I tell is I.

Is just little eyes.

It's.

It's wrist its pulse.

It's.

It's.

It's feels like.

Just!

Still.

IV.

I my,

me

I

my.

If I,

will put it?

I like.

I like give.

V.

We; we, we.

If.

VI.

Let me.

Exists?

If by—

life?

VII.

I, I myself.

I.
I,
difficulty.
I rule my.
I, I put pile.
Will be (is).

I.
I is.
I, I,
I.

I risk tell, is I?
It.

Field Is

I live
times.

Is,
is.

Field,

I.

It, speckled eggs.

I.

Felt
electricity City.

Cd Pm

Cd w.

C dg. m

u. Cud

uc up d i dw

fm f wi.

i piig mig

I dm f i f c,

ifvig u.

I i f umm wi i umiu fui,

m udig i, v,

dfu f gi.

M w cd i, i im

w mu v w v w d, c,

f u w, d if-dgd v

f wm iv f I, d; m

i w i m u

f u cuiig wd umig.

I f w,

i immu cd,

w gw cu u; w p

uv iv,

if w c, ig f

c di f, m

cud d fw.

D I

If u udd d uxpcd fj,
d i. Giv i i. P
f iv d w w dd.
W wi, d v f
d. D muc c v dmd.
I, lf m p f. Pp i
i i w f fgig c, mim
mig pp ic
pw i wd. I cud ig,
u v i u ic i i i
w v gi. W, f c.
W, wv i i, d fd
f i p. J i md cm.

U f w
(I m p I dmd i pm)

M I vd c gv m
x fu f d

I m udd
i, w gf.

M. d I v pgud c wi u diffe f m f. u i i ic. M. wi d u. w
pd; I w i dw d d ud d g dm; I w w pii pig u f fc f. g M.
fig. I f I g d dg f d we m p v w. m u cu gi d p dp, fi,
dw. u gi gi, wi p i dppig, d u v i, pfu, d wp w. W f w
M. cm m ig w I f w I'v wid w. I w ifig, d wdfu.

g w diffe id i c f u, i i c f u mvic, dig u w w' i, w ii, w
c pfc piid gu v dic v i. I upc i mvic i mw w u i, u iv c
d cmpi wi i giig d iquiig fc. d f cu f i, diffe d mvic
upiig, p f ic f if. If u muc i mf, w I f u, u f m? I ig m f
v d M. d dmi. m w i f f i i v w d, d m wd i wd dcipi f u
mi. uc f u p xcim i f gif f u if g.

—*g ifd*

How Do Hummingbirds Survive Winter?

Noise that vomits and
is always thinking about
power, gender, jeans,
empathy.

I can write about these issues.
Pretty boring.
And that's my childhood
imposed by power structures,

and mustache longing,
and who seems most natural as president.
A seemingly inexhaustible font of laugh-out-loud
manuals and period issues of Penthouse:

intolerable cruelty.
Watch ads now
if you're not both a crank and a great artist;
every week the system of privilege and white
supremacy

shows that boys can shun and ostracize with the
best
of them.

There is no such thing as objective criticism or
journalism.

The last horror movie that got me
always turns everything into a call for people to
vote

without end,
refusing to fight fascism
with the best greatest albums of all time.

Please be prepared to do brief code reviews
that sleep in summer and through the winter.
You say grief
in op-eds, think pieces.
But grief is like being attacked with force beams
by a
 supervillain.

The manufactured consent we need
is maximum Tom Cruise charm and oleaginous
 raffishness.

I got my heart broken early;
blood started spurting out

of the balanced, thought-provoking study of
 antisemitism.

The noble ruler dispensing stern justice
deserves an award for trenchant hypocrisy.
It's highly regarded.

Just Praying Some Suit Validates the Art You Like

This doesn't have to be zero sum;
I can see that production values are fairly high.
It's a love steeped in disavowal—
a handful of primitive stone,
a widescreen lint roller.
They don't want to reduce poverty;
the goal of building a fictional world
is cultural eccentricity.
Thanks to *Psycho*
the sound is slicker, which you may or may not
like.

The Book Makes No Real Sense

It's \$50/year;

we want to hear YOUR stories,
freelance writer.

A negative conformism:

Superman kills people,
drenching his adorable protagonists,
in a conversation about college
that moves the needle

of 3,000 soporific articles.

It's time for very strong sleep narcotics—
the tidy narrative closure
of Italian film composer Ennio Morricone.

If renting all those movies taught me anything
by the soft glow of the Christmas tree—
relying on others is what makes us
the same damn storyline,

a particularly bleak delusion.

Motherhood and the Iron Throne:
that's about intimidation
of Stepford Wives;

put the fear into
contemporary perspectives on popular culture—
but George Bailey is not a common, ordinary yokel
Cary Grant plays some other guy,

a single sorrowing suckling tapeworm segment
defined by definitions.

I could spew out incoherent idiocy
and emerging library technologies

and wear wisdom's shroud.

There's no need to fetishize it.

More white guys for president—
you step back through lichen.

The robots revolt and kill us all,
not by the ocean

going viral on TikTok,
yelling at the kids to get off his grass?

No Devotions

No felicity
Not this morning
The world I don't live in
No whistling swans
No storage
Not for Tom Shaw
I know no one
Not that little beast
Not the pond
I haven't just said
No gift

No blue horses
I haven't read Lucretius and I don't go to the pond
Not undemure nor unrespectable
Not Stebbin's Gulch
Not Franz Marc's horses which are not blue
On not meditating, sort of
No loneliness
Stones don't feel
Not drifting
No blueberries
No vulture's wings
No gorgeous thing

No dog songs
No storm
Not Percy (one)
No little dog's rhapsody in the night

Not Percy (nine)
Not Benjamin, who came from nowhere
The dog has not run off
Not Bazougey
Not her grave
Not the poetry teacher
Not the first time Percy didn't come back

Not a thousand mornings
I don't go down to the shore
I didn't happen to be standing
Three things to not remember
No lines written in the days of growing darkness
Not an old story
Not the instant
No tides
The poet doesn't compare human nature to the ocean
 from which we didn't come
No life story
Not Varanasi

No swan
I didn't worry
I don't own a house
Yes, hesitate
No swan
Not passing the unworked field
How I don't go to the woods
Not on the beach

Not evidence

No violets
We don't shake with joy
No thanks to the field sparrow, whose voice is not
 delicate nor humble
No lessons from James Wright
Not almost a conversation
Not beginning with the grass that is not sweet
No evidence
No prayer
Mysteries, no
Not at the River Clarion

Not the Truro bear and no other adventures
No other kingdoms
No gift
No coyote in the dark, no coyotes remembered

No red bird
No night herons
No mornings at blackwater
No orchard
Never
No invitation
From this river, when I was a child, I did not drink
We should not be well prepared
No meadowlark sings and I do not greet him
Not of the empire
Not red
No night and no river
No self-portrait
Not with the blackest of inks

No thirst
When I am not among the trees
When the roses don't speak, I don't pay attention
Six failures to recognize the lord
Not Gethsemene
The poet does not think about the donkey
Not praying
Not every poet writes a poem about unrequited love
I won't meditate on thy wondrous works
No chat
No thirst

No poems
No hum
No lead
No oxygen
No white heron rising over blackwater
No honey locust
No song of autumn
No fireflies
No poet with his face in his hands
Not wild, not wild
No north country
No terns

No blue iris
Not lying on the grass at Blackwater
No sea leaves
Not morning at Blackwater
You wouldn't live then
How the grass and the flowers didn't come to exist, a
tale not about God

Why I don't wake early
Why I don't wake early
Not spring at Blackwater: I don't go through the
 lessons already learned
Not mindful
Lingering in unhappiness
No daisies
No goldenrod, not late fall
Not the old poets of China
No logos
No snow geese
Not at Black River
No beans
No arrowhead
The temple begins and ends right here

No long life
Just as the calendar began to say not summer
Don't imagine
Not the softest of mornings
Carrying no snake to the garden

Not owls and no other fantasies
Not the dipper
Not spring
While I was not writing a poem to celebrate summer,
 the meadowlark didn't sing
No catbird
No backyard

We know nothing

No summer poem
No loon
No winter at Herring Cove
No mink
No blue iris
You aren't standing at the edge of the woods
No roses
No stones
No white-sided dolphins on a summer's day

No leaf and no cloud
No flare
Not from the book of time

No west wind
You haven't ever tried to enter the long black
branches
No white butterflies
No Round Pond
No black oaks
I am not among the early risers
No fox
Not from the poem "No West Wind"

No white pine
May not
No! No!
Not in Pobiddy, Georgia
No porcupine
No wrens
No mockingbirds
I did not find a dead fox

No morning glories
Not August
No toad
I did not look up
No sea mouse

No poems
No sun
No goldenrod
Not when death comes
No whelks
No goldfinches
No poppies
No water snake
No white flowers
No peonies
No egret
No rice
No rain
Not picking blueberries, not in Austerlitz, New York,
1957
Not October

No house of light
Some questions you won't ask
No last instructions from the Buddha
No summer day
No spring
No little owl lives in the orchard
No kookaburras
No roses, not in late summer
No white owl flies into and out of no field

Not Singapore
No hermit crab
No kingfisher
No swan
No turtle
No loon on Oak-Head Pond
Not five A.M., not in the pinewoods
No herons

No dream work
No things
No morning poem
No wild geese
No shadows
No journey
No poem
No kinds of deliverance
No black snakes
No poem for no anniversary
No sunflowers

No American primitive
No August
No kitten
No moles
Not Clapp's Pond
No first snow
No ghosts
No skunk cabbage
No snakes
No white night
No fish

No humpbacks
No meeting
No roses
No blackberries
Not Tecumseh
Not in Blackwater Woods

Not Three Rivers Poetry Journal
No poems for James Wright
Not at Blackwater Pond
No rabbit
No poems for James Wright

No moons
Not sleeping in the forest
No snakes in winter
No music lessons
Not entering the kingdom
No night traveler
No Beaver Moon—no suicide
No last days
No black snake
No Truro bear
No mussels
No snow moon—the black bear does not give birth
No strawberry moon
No pink moon—no pond
No Aunt Leaf
No farm country
no lamps

Not the River Styx, Not Ohio

Not learning about the Indians
Not going to Walden
No night flight

No voyage and no other poems
No voyage
Not Jack
Not beyond the snow belt
No swimming lesson
Not on winter's margin
No return
No morning in a new land

Apology and Acknowledgements

The poems in this chapbook are all based on the writing of Mary Oliver. Some were created by removing from Oliver works (poems, essays, marketing copy) all words including the letters of my first name: n, o, a, h. Others remove all letters of my first and last name. Others were composed by googling each line of Oliver's poem along with my name and then replacing that line with text from one of the top search results. The last poem was formed by negating the title of every poem in Oliver's famous selected poems, *Devotions*.

Thanks to Goose for posing for the cover, to my wife for cover design help, and to my daughter and Bert Stabler for reading some of these in drafts.

About the Author

Noah Berlatsky is not Mary Oliver.

This is not our proper work.