

Mary Oliver, much-honored and often-quoted poet, dies at age 83

Her poetry about the natural world evokes the harmony of creation in Genesis 1, one scholar wrote.

by [Christian Century staff](#) in the [February 13, 2019](#) issue



Mary Oliver (Facebook)

Mary Oliver, perhaps the poet most quoted by contemporary pastors and preachers, died January 17 at home in Florida at age 83. She had lymphoma, news sources reported. She had won a National Book Award and a Pulitzer Prize, among other honors.

In [a 2017 essay in the *Christian Century*](#), Debra Dean Murphy calls her “a mystic of the natural world,” and cites three elements of Oliver’s poetry that are enriching for Christians: “her way of regarding the created order,” which encourages “a deeply theological vision of the world”; “a deep love of neighbor”; and a “relative lack of theological sophistication” that challenges “the cynicism of our times.”

Murphy notes resonances between Oliver’s poetry and “the liturgical poem of Genesis 1 in which all of creation exists in a harmony of relationships that the Creator perceives as beautiful.” In [a poem published in the *Century* in 2006](#), “Coming to God: First days,” Oliver wrote of learning to kneel into the world of the inscrutable: “Then I will move no more than the leaves of a tree / on a day of no wind, / . . . like the wanderer who has come home at last.”

Oliver’s poems are about “what it means to attend to what is before us in any given moment,” Murphy wrote. “They are occasions for transfiguring the imagination and a summons to wonder and delight.”

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