

College Guild

P.O. Box 6448, Brunswick, ME 04011

POETRY CLUB II

Unit 4 of 7

Poems by Mary Oliver & Meredith Davies Hadaway

This unit contains modern day poems by two American women, Mary Oliver and Meredith Davies Hadaway. Oliver is from Massachusetts, and she is a well known writer with many books to her credit. She is a winner of the National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize for poetry. The enclosed poems, "I Am the One", "Percy (Nine)", "Red Bird Explains Himself", and "Ocean" are from the book *House of Light*. "Wild Geese" is from *Dream Work*; you may remember this poem from Creative Language, Unit 5. Davies Hadaway, from Maryland, is a musician, writer, and reviewer. Her poems "Rupture", "Tuxedo", and "On the Fly" are from her first book, *Fishing Secrets of the Dead*. Both women use their love of nature as the inspiration for many of their poems.

1. Carefully read all eight poems. Then, select and discuss four of them.

2. Write four original poems of your own.

TUXEDO

Black sleeves and empty
pockets. It was my father's, then
my husband's. The pants

let out, later taken
in. Onyx studs and cufflinks
snapped shut in a satin

box. Cummerbund, bow tie, all pieced
together in a garment bag that hangs
like a secret. Emptied

pockets. Sleeves
that once held me steady
on high blue heels.

I AM THE ONE

I am the one
who took your hand
when you offered it to me.

I am the pledge of emptiness
that turned around.
Even the trees smiled.

Always I was the bird
that flew off through the branches.
Now

I am the cat
with feathers
under its tongue.

RUPTURE

Together, in our small boat, we troll the waters
beneath Fossil Rock – a carved-out ledge that hangs
above the Chester’s western bank and teems
with prehistoric sea-life frozen in the cliff.

Downriver, on the eastern edge, geologists
have discovered that a matching cliff preserves
the other half of creatures interrupted
in their journey into stone. A perfect

fit, if only these two halves could ever
reunite. We troll beneath the one
and then continue down the other side. Fish
are drawn to rocks as if they sense their history
and their future, both. We drag our baited line
through water, stop, rebait and start again.
How much farther, we wonder, in our lifetime,
will these two shorelines drift apart?

PERCY (NINE)

Your friend is coming I say
to Percy, and name a name

and he runs to the door, his
wide mouth in its laugh-shape,

and waves, since he has one, his tail.
Emerson, I am trying to live,

as you said we must, the examined life.
But there are days I wish

There was less in my head to examine,
not to speak of the busy heart. How

would it be Percy, I wonder, not
thinking, not weighing anything, just running forward.

ON THE FLY

When a Christmas wreath-turned-
yellow leads a finch to build her nest
beside my door, one

inadvertent slam propels her panic
with such force she knocks her home
right off its hook and flies away.

I find debris and pine needles on the brick:
one egg, unbroken, and two just-hatched
twists of leg and beak. No way

to know if they’ve survived except the one
who nuzzles closer to my open palm:
a pulse with feathers – and barely that –

but that at least. I re-hang the wreath and tuck
the nest in. Who am I to say a bird won’t come back

to a house of fading seasons
and banging doors?

OCEAN

I am in love with Ocean
lifting her thousands of white hats
in the chop of the storm,
or lying smooth and blue, the
loveliest bed in the world.
In the personal life, there is

a heart-load for each one of us
on the dusty road. I suppose
there is a reason for this, so I will be
patient, acquiescent. But I will live
nowhere except here, by Ocean, trusting
equally in all the blast and welcome
of her sorrowless, salt self.

RED BIRD EXPLAINS HIMSELF

“Yes, I was the brilliance floating over the snow
and I was the song in the summer leaves, but this was
only the first trick
I had hold of among my other mythologies,
for I also knew obedience: bringing sticks to the nest,
food to the young, kisses to my bride.

But don't stop there, stay with me: listen

If I was the song that entered your heart
Then I was the music of your heart, that you wanted and needed,
And thus wilderness bloomed there, with all its
followers: gardeners, lovers, people who weep
for the death of rivers.

And this was my true task, to be the
music of the body. Do you understand? for truly the body needs
a song of spirit, of soul. And no less, to make this work,
the soul has need of a body,
and I am both of the earth and I am of the inexplicable
beauty of heaven
where I fly so easily, so welcome, yes
and this is why I have been sent, to teach this to your heart.”

WILD GEESE

You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clear blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes

