

Dog Songs



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Who can resist a good dog book? OK so there are a few cat people out there (right here beside me in fact), and bird people, snake people, even for Heaven's sake, skunk lovers and gerbil-groomers. But what makes this book special is that it's a book of poems that gives tribute to the special dogs in renowned nature poet Mary Oliver's life.

There's Luke, the junkyard dog, Benjamin, the canine that is always dragging a chewed-through rope, Bear the small curly-haired who hates to stay overnight at boarding, Bazougey "that dark little dog/ who used to come down the road barking and shining," Ricky, the talker, and Percy named after the famous poet Shelley. Oliver penned a tribute to this hound mischievously patterned after Christopher Smart's "For I will Consider My Cat Geoffrey."

Luke was "born in a junkyard, / not even on a bundle of rags/ or the seat of an old wrecked car/ but the dust below." This beautiful German Shepherd loved flowers: "her dark head// and her wet nose/ touching/ the face/ of everyone." In the poem's closing Oliver expresses one thing dogs show us about the world: "we long to be--/ that happy/ in the heaven of earth--/ that wild, that loving."

The poems included here really capture the dogness of dogs: their wild energy, love of the outdoors and running, their way of sniffing knowledge from the world. A few are also very sad, especially "Her Grave." Here is a section of it, "It took four of us to carry her into the woods./ We did not think of music,/ but anyway, it began to rain/ slowly.// Her wolfish, invitational half-pounce.// Her great and lordly satisfaction at having chased something."

The essay concerns what happens when a stern rule-bound person takes over the dog catcher position in Oliver's small Massachusetts coastal town. Luckily, he doesn't last long and someone with a freer attitude takes over.

Because there were a bunch of holds, I read this book on my Kindle. The illustrations are more appealing on paper. But no matter many of the poems were gems and the essay entertained me.

Posted by Dory L. on December 16, 2013

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