



JANUARY NEWSLETTER
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FRIENDS OF AMERICAN WRITERS CHICAGO


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President's Message

CHRISTINE SPATARO, *President*

It seemed only yesterday that we had our first luncheon and yet September is behind us and February is here—another luncheon, another speaker. I am keenly aware of time passing. Last month we learned about The American Writers museum and this

month we will discover American women artists who have been obscured. We at FAW are not only committed to encourage writers but also to present our members with programs that are varied, relevant and interesting. We hope you have enjoyed our programs thus far, and we will strive to present more of the same. 

JANUARY PROGRAM

**DONNA SEAMAN, Adult Books
Editor, Booklist**
**Life Equals Art: Trailblazing
Women Artists.**

TAMMIE BOB



You've probably heard Donna Seaman on NPR reviewing books or interviewing authors in her lively, engaging manner. Seaman wears many hats, all of them book related: Donna Seaman is a Senior Editor for *Booklist*, a freelance reviewer, and essayist. The recipient of Illinois Arts Council grants, Seaman has received the James Friend Memorial Award for Literary Criticism, the Writer Magazine Writers Who Make a Difference Award, several Pushcart Prize special mentions, the Studs Terkel Humanities Service Award, and Literacy Chicago's Literacy Hero Award, in recognition of all that she does to encourage reading. She is a member of the advisory council for the American Writers Museum.

The National Book Critics Circle named Donna Seaman as a finalist for the Nona Balakian Citation for Excellence in Reviewing. Seaman is the creator of

the anthology *In Our Nature: Stories of Wildness*, and her author interviews are collected in *Writers on the Air: Conversations about Books*. Seaman has taught and lectured at the University of Chicago, Columbia College Chicago, and Northwestern University.

Recently this accomplished bibliophile wrote a book of her own, *Identity Unknown: Rediscovering Seven American Women Artists*, and this will be the topic of her presentation for FAW's February luncheon.

We're all at least somewhat familiar with Frida Kahlo and Georgia O'Keefe, but are they the female sum of America's art history? In many art books, women artists have been marginalized with cold efficiency, summarily dismissed in the captions of group photographs with the phrase "identity unknown" while each male is named.

Donna Seaman brings to dazzling life seven of these forgotten artists, among the best of their day: Gertrude Abercrombie, with her dark, surreal paintings and friendships with Dizzy Gillespie and Sonny Rollins; Bay Area self-portraitist Joan Brown; Ree Morton, with her witty,

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oddy beautiful constructions; Loïs Mailou Jones of the Harlem Renaissance; Lenore Tawney, who combined weaving and sculpture when art and craft were considered mutually exclusive; Christina Ramberg, whose unsettling works drew on pop culture and advertising; and Louise Nevelson, an art-world superstar in her heyday but omitted from recent surveys of her era.

These women fought to be treated the same as male artists, to be judged by their work, not their gender or appearance. In brilliant, compassionate prose, Seaman reveals

what drove them, how they worked, and how they were perceived by others in a world where women were subjects—not makers—of art. Featuring stunning examples of the artists' work, *Identity Unknown* speaks to all women about their neglected place in history and the challenges they face to be taken as seriously as men no matter what their chosen field—and to all men interested in women's lives.

Be sure to make your reservations for the February program, and bring your friends! This promises to be an outstanding program.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Luncheon Reservations

The February 2019 meeting of the Friends of American Writers will be held on Wednesday, February 13. Luncheon reservations for this meeting are due no later than 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, February 10. Please note, this deadline is firm. No reservations will be accepted following this date and time. To reserve, contact only Pat Adelberg (847-588-0911) or Peggy Kuzminski (1-773-710-8637). This is a different contact number for Peggy, so please replace the old one you have.

If you wish a permanent reservation, please mention it to Peggy or Pat when you call. All Board members automatically have permanent reservations. Also, a reminder that no permanent reservations are held over from last year to this year.

Luncheon will be served at 12:00 noon in the main floor dining room of the Fortnightly Club of Chicago, 120 W. Bellevue Place. The cost is \$45 per person, payable by check (preferred) in the front lobby on the day of the meeting. For group reservations, we ask that only one person make the reservation to avoid confusion. Please note, if you make a reservation and you cannot attend, you must cancel no

later than 6:00 p.m. on the Sunday preceding the meeting. Reservations not cancelled must be paid for by the member.

Looking forward to seeing you there.

Literature Awards Committee

TAMMIE BOB, *Chair*

With less than two months to go, the committee's work is progressing well with our new winter schedule, meeting twice a month since January. More books are being read and eliminated faster, while some really terrific books are emerging as favorites. This despite an average attendance of about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the 14 of us, as various people slip away for a few weeks of cruising (mostly the Far East this year—ask them about their trips!)

We have eliminated over forty books and the hard part will be, as it always is, choosing the winners. This year, the number of really good books far surpasses what we saw last year, so we are having some wonderful discussions and will have to make some hard decisions.

Consider joining this committee for next year. New members are always afraid the amount of reading will be onerous, but find that it is not. You can ask any of us about that as well!

Young People's Literature Committee

ANGELA GALL, *Chair*

"Love loves to love love."
—James Joyce

It's February, and we all know what that means! Snow is in the air. Errgh...not if you're a lover of books. February is the perfect time to silence the cell phone, brew some hot chocolate, and snuggle up to a nice, long novel.

Perhaps the real reason February is such a flawless month for reading is because it is in this month that we remember our first love. According to Robert Aris Willmot, "A first book has some of the sweetness of a first love."

And perhaps reading in February reminds us that there is no greater love than the love we harbor in our hearts for characters we have encountered along the way.

One of these characters is Mr. Darcy from *Pride and Prejudice*.

"Mr. Darcy from *Pride and Prejudice* is the epitome of romance. Handsome, never sure of what he is thinking, doing quirky romantic things like sending Elizabeth notes—all make a character I'd like to meet."

—VIVIAN MORTENSEN

Another is Count Rostov from *A Gentleman from Moscow*. "His circumstances changed, but his manners and care for others never did. He was able to have friendships with the young and old."

—PEGGY KUZMINSKI

And, there is the incomparable Frederick Douglass. "I've been in love with Frederick Douglass from the moment I read his autobiography in the 11th grade. His impeccable writing, ability to overcome adversity, and impressive portrait on the cover, made for a 17 year affair of teaching his book to unappreciative teenagers."

—ANGELA GALL

Perhaps we wouldn't be so madly in love with characters from books if we didn't come across such heart palpitating lines such as this:

"Do I love you? My God, if your love were a grain of sand, mine would be a universe of beaches." —WILLIAM GOLDMAN, *The Princess Bride*

"He's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same." —EMILY BRONTË, *Wuthering Heights*

"He stepped down, trying not to look long at her, as if she were the sun, yet he saw her, like the sun, even without looking." —LEO TOLSTOY, *Anna Karenina*

The Young People's Literature Committee met on January 16th. We are so in love with many of our books this year. "My very favorite character is Omu from the picture book *Thank You, Omu*. Omu was said to have made a scrumptious stew, which she shared with her friends in her community."

—TANYA KLASSER

If perchance you find yourself feeling a little out of sorts on a certain day in February, remember your one true love! Reading!



You Must Read This!

In keeping with the theme of reading and writing by talented women, we don't have to go far from home to recognize one of the best. FAW's very own Roberta Gates has written a brilliant novella entitled *Number 12 rue Ste-Catherine*. It was published in the December issue of "The Write Launch" <<http://thewritelaunch.com/back-issues/december-2018>>. (Readers will need to scroll through the other genres—poems, short stories, etc.—to get to it, though.)

The story takes place on a single day in Vichy France as the various characters converge in a room that will determine their destiny. This is a stellar piece, and definitely worth seeking out.

JUST A REMINDER

Readers & Reviewers will be meeting on March 13 to discuss *Little Fires Everywhere* by Celeste Ng, a much-praised book that was written by one of our 2015 winners.

FEATURE ARTICLE

by SHIRLEY BAUGHER

A FAREWELL TO MARY OLIVER

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life.

—MARY OLIVER

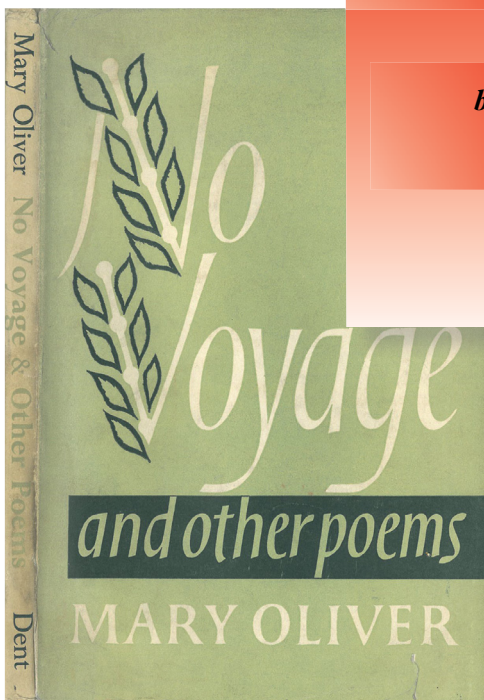
On January 17, 2019, Mary Oliver left her wild and precious life behind, but not her words which, fortunately, will be with us forever; and not before giving us some valuable instructions for living a life:

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.

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For those of you who might not know of Mary Oliver, she was one of our most talented and critically acclaimed poets. She won a Pulitzer Prize in 1984 and the National Book Award in 1992. The New York Times described her as "...a phenomenon and far and away, this country's best-selling poet."

Biography

Mary Oliver was born in September 1935 in Maple Heights, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland. She described her family as dysfunctional and her childhood as difficult. She wrote that her father was a social studies teacher and an athletics coach in the Cleveland public schools and a harsh man. She said very little about her mother. In an interview with Maria Shriver years later, she admitted having been sexually abused as a child and experienced recurring nightmares as a result. She spent a great deal of time outdoors walking and reading and grew to love the natural world. Writing enabled her to establish her place in that world.

Mary attended the local school in Maple Heights and began writing poetry when she was 14 years old. Her creative urges were strengthened in the summer of 1951 when she went to the National Music Camp at Interlochen, Michigan. Not only did she write, but she joined the percussion section of the National High School Orchestra. At 17, she visited the home of the Pulitzer Prize winning poet Edna St. Vincent Millay in Austerlitz, New York where she formed a friendship with the poet's sister

Norma, and the two spent the next seven years organizing Edna's papers. Oliver went on to study at Ohio State University and Vassar College, though she did not receive a degree at either school.

In 1963, at the age of 28, Mary Oliver published her first collection of poems, *No Voyage and Other Poems*. Through the years, she established herself at a number of universities, among them Case Western Reserve, Sweet Briar, and Bennington, Vermont. She taught at Bennington and received awards both for excellence in teaching and for her poetry. Her books *House of Light* and *Selected Poems* were both honored, the latter bringing her the National Book Award. With each suc-

ceeding poem, she turned more and more toward nature for the sense of wonder that it instilled in her. She once said, "When it's over, I want to say: all my life, I was a bride married to amazement. I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms." The fruits of that marriage yielded *New and Selected Poems* (1992); *Why I Wake Early* (2004); and *New and Selected Poems, Volume 2* (2004.) During this time, her poems and essays also appeared in *The Best American Poetry* (1999-2000) and *Best American Essays* (1996, 1998, and 2001.)

In the late 1950s, Mary Oliver met the photographer Molly Malone Cook, who became her agent and her partner. The two were together for over forty years, until Cook's death in 2005. During that time, they lived in Provincetown, Massachusetts which Mary loved because of the "marvelous convergence of land and water, Mediterranean light, fishermen who made their living by hard and difficult work, residents, visitors, artists, and writers.

The Poetry of Mary Oliver

Much of Oliver's poetry comes from memories of her youth in Ohio and her later life in Provincetown. Her influences are clearly Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau. She stated that her favorite poets were Walt Whitman, Rumi, Hafez, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats.

She is known for her vivid observances of the natural world, often identifying with that world to the point where the two are inseparable. She writes of the things

she observes on her walks: woods, ponds, and the sun-filled harbor of Provincetown, “no more than a blue comma on the map of the world, but, to me, the emblem of everything.” Sometimes, she would start out with no thought of writing, but was so overcome by what she saw that she regretted having no writing implements to record her thoughts. She started hiding pencils in trees along her routes and carried a three by five notebook for putting down her thoughts and impressions. One critic said that she was a “patroller of the wetlands in the way that Thoreau was an inspector of snowstorms.”

Oliver, who had been treated for lymphoma, died at her home in Hobe Sound, Fla., on Jan. 17. She was 83 and a rarity even among poets for her many published works—more than 20 volumes of verse, including *American Primitive*, the collection that won the Pulitzer in 1984. Her work also sold well. Writers borrowed her lines as epigraphs and readers held them close—and taped them up and tweeted them out and even tattooed them—because Oliver gave fresh spirit to old ideas in purposefully plain speech.

If you know only one line of Mary Oliver’s poetry, it is likely a question she posed, one that sums up the infectious wonder that ran through her verse like veins through a leaf. “Tell me,” the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet wrote in “The Summer Day,” “what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”

The Summer Day

By Mary Oliver

*Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean--
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of
up and down--
who is gazing around with her enormous and
complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly
washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll
through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
With your one wild and precious life?*

And one more for good measure—there’s no such thing as too much Mary Oliver.

Sometimes

By Mary Oliver

*Something came up
Out of the dark.
It wasn't anything I had ever seen before.
It wasn't an animal
or a flower,
unless it was both.*

*Something came up out of the water,
a head the size of a cat
but muddy and without ears.*

*I don't know what God is.
I don't know what death is.*

*But I believe they have between them
some fervent and necessary arrangement.*

*Sometime
melancholy leaves me breathless...*

*Water from the heavens! Electricity from the source!
Both of them mad to create something!*

*The lighting brighter than any flower.
The thunder without a drowsy bone in its body.*

*Instructions for living a life:
Pay attention.
Be astonished.
Tell about it.*

*Two or three times in my life I discovered love.
Each time it seemed to solve everything.
Each time it solved a great many things
but not everything.
Yet left me as grateful as if it had indeed, and
thoroughly solved everything.*

*God, rest in my heart
and fortify me,
take away my hunger for answers,
let the hours play upon my body*

*like the hands of my beloved.
Let the cathead appear again—*


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SHIRLEY BAUGHER
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*the smallest of your mysteries,
 some wild cousin of my own blood probably—
 some cousin of my own wild blood probably,
 in the black dinner-bowl of the pond.*

*Death waits for me. I know it, around
 one corner or another.
 This doesn't amuse me.
 Neither does it frighten me.*

*After the rain, I went back into the
 field of sunflowers.
 It was cool, and I was anything but drowsy.
 I walked slowly, and listened
 To the crazy roots, in the drenched earth,
 laughing and growing.* 



FAW MEETINGS 2018-19

A reminder of the FAW meetings for 2018-19. Be sure to mark your calendars. You won't want to miss a single one!

OCTOBER 10, 2018

Steve Venturino
 Speaking on Daniel Deronda

NOVEMBER 7, 2018

**Exploring Historical Fiction:
 A Panel of Three Writers**

Connie Hamilton Connally
 (author of *The Songs we Hide*)

Kelly O'Connor Mcnesse
 (author of *Undiscovered Country*)

Devin Murphy
 (author of *The Boat Runner*)

DECEMBER 12, 2018

interFRIENDtions will perform
 Christmas and Hannukkah music

JANUARY 9, 2019

The American Writers' Museum will send a representative

FEBRUARY 13, 2019

Adult-Books Editor
 Booklist Reviews

MARCH 13, 2019

Patricia Frazier
 National Youth Poet Laureate

APRIL 10, 2019

Leslie Goddard, actress
 As Rachel Carson

FRIDAY, MAY 3, 2019

Awards Luncheon