

Nature in the Neighborhood – March 2025 – There’s Poetry in Nature

Next month is National Poetry Month. Thirty days for us to celebrate poets and poetry!

In New England we have had our share of famed poets - Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, and Mary Oliver, to name a few. These, as well as many other poets throughout history and across cultures, have delighted in the beauty of nature and contemplated our connection to it - although, in his poem “**Trees**,” Joyce Kilmer admits that a poem cannot capture the poetry that is already in nature (“I think that I shall never see a poem as lovely as a tree ...”).

In honor of National Poetry Month, this month’s Nature in the Neighborhood shares with you several poems that nonetheless attempt to capture the wonder of nature and our spiritual and emotional relationship to it. Starting with the poem “**Sleeping in the Forest**,” where poet Mary Oliver shares her personal connection with nature:

*I thought the earth remembered me,
she took me back so tenderly,
arranging her dark skirts, her pockets
full of lichens and seeds.
I slept as never before, a stone on the river bed,
nothing between me and the white fire of the stars
but my thoughts, and they floated light as moths
among the branches of the perfect trees.*

As we in New England well know, nature is not always as welcoming - especially in the month of March. The poem “**March**” by William Cullen Bryant highlights this month’s “in like a lion, out like a lamb” unpredictable weather, starting with the harshness of late winter:

*The stormy March has come at last,
With wind, and cloud, and changing skies;
I hear the rushing of the blast
That through the snowy valley flies.*

But, by the poem’s end, he leaves us with the promise of the warmth of spring:

*Thou bring’st the hope of those calm skies,
And that soft time of sunny showers,
When the wide bloom, on earth that lies,
Seems of a brighter world than ours.*

In her poem “**Dear March – Come in**,” Emily Dickinson has a more playful way to express this month:

*Dear March —— Come in —
How glad I am —
I hoped for you before —
Put down your Hat —
You must have walked —*

*How out of Breath you are —
Dear March, how are you, and the Rest ——
Did you leave Nature well —
Oh March, Come right upstairs with me —
I have so much to tell ——*

Ms. Dickinson's nature poems can also be a little tongue in cheek – or perhaps tongue in beak? -- as in the start of her poem **"A Bird Came Down the Walk"**:

*A bird came down the walk:
He did not know I saw;
He bit an angle-worm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw.*

*And then he drank a Dew
From a convenient Grass—
And then hopped sidewise to the Wall
To let a Beetle pass—*

William Wordsworth's poem **"The World Is Too Much With Us**, written in 1807, shows us that concern over the environment started well before the 20th century. In this excerpt from his poem, he reflects on the way society's obsession with material progress has caused it to lose touch with the natural world:

*"The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!"*

*This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;*

In an excerpt of her poem **"Gratitude,"** Mary Oliver encourages us to not lose touch with nature and to notice and appreciate the simple wonders of the natural world:

*"What did you notice?
The dew snail; the low-flying sparrow;
the bat, on the wind, in the dark;
big-chested geese, in the V of sleekest performance;
the soft toad, patient in the hot sand;
the sweet-hungry ants;
the uproar of mice in the empty house;
the tin music of the cricket's body;
the blouse of the goldenrod.
What did you hear?
The thrush greeting the morning;
the little bluebirds in their hot box;*

*the salty talk of the wren,
who has tasted salt in a world
out of my reach;
the harsh, salt music of the sea."*

And Wendell Berry, in his poem "**In the Peace of Wild Things**," reminds us that we can find nature to be a source of renewal and strength:

*"When despair for the world grows in me
And I wake in the night at the least sound
In fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
Rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds."*

Along that same theme, I'll end with one of my favorite Robert Frost poems, "**Dust of Snow**." Here, the narrator's shift from despondency to a happier mood highlights the transformative power that nature can have:

*The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree*

*Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.*

You can celebrate National Poetry Month by reading poems about the natural world. Or perhaps by even penning your own poem! If you do write a poem, please send it to us at info@swampscottconservancy.org and we will include them on our webpage at swampscottconservancy.org.

In the meantime, we hope you'll get outdoors and treasure the poetry that is in the nature in our neighborhood.