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"Finally, I Noticed Enough": A Guided Meditation on Mary Oliver's "The Moths"

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In our increasingly fast-paced world, mindfulness can serve as critical scholarship, as well as a contemplative practice. Mindfulness is a practice based in Buddhist thought, and, as Gisela Ullyatt notes, in Mary Oliver's poetry, "mindfulness is a transformative experience because awareness of the moment brings about a conscious awakening of the mind" (117). Our conscious awakening to the present becomes a radical act of protest in a technological world that invites constant movement, split attention, and dazed inattentiveness. This mindfulness-based meditation recording utilizes Oliver's poem, "The Moths," as a source for contemplation and an exploration of stillness as dissent. Made in the style of contemporary meditation videos, it combines the experience of mindfulness meditation with poetic listening for an immersive, meditative, and literary experience. Listeners can engage with the poem and with mindfulness simultaneously, a practice meant to attune them to both mindfulness and the conscious choice to stop, for a moment, the relentless rush of postmodernity.

Like many of Oliver's poems, "The Moths" outlines a journey from the frenzy of postmodern life to occasional bursts of balance, even when the world threatens to pull you off-center. In contemplating this poem, I also consider how the minute flutterings of moth wings, in some ways, is the panacea for which many of us yearn. In many of her pieces, Oliver's sensuous details invite the reader (or, in this case, the listener) "to be more mindful...of the present moment" (Ullyatt 129).

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Calling Oliver's work "writing-as-mindfulness," Kirsten Hotelling Zona suggests that her poetry "facilitates neither self-realization nor self-abdication but the paradoxically selfless practice of full presence" (123). This sensual emphasis weaves itself through Oliver's body of work, especially in "The Moths," as she calls attention to how the "wings of the moths catch the sunlight" or "slip between the pink lobes of the moccasin flowers." Noticing, she suggests, holds a cumulative effect; the more we practice, the more we are healed by the experience. For Oliver, taking a few moments to perceive the usually imperceptible is a practice that "leads you to notice more and more." Then, she suggests, you will eventually "notice enough." In that infinitesimal pause, we realize that the solution to our busy-ness might be found in quiet moments of peace, stolen between meetings or conversations or commutes. Preferably, these moments build upon each other, until we, too, will have noticed enough. Oliver and the meditation recording ask us to make mindfulness a way of life. Instead of a perfunctory or intermittent practice, mindfulness is a mode of living we can all adopt.

More importantly, Oliver critiques "the world," which may or may not be salvageable. If we are "so full of energy...always running around," we risk losing ourselves in the process. Yet, as we engage with Oliver's poetry through meditation, we can both contemplate the world (as in the natural world of trees, flowers, insects, and green ponds) and the "world" (as in the ephemeral world of commerce and competition). Mindfulness, she seems to say, is for all of us. It is a lifelong appreciation of soft wings, glistening petals, and moments of quiet contemplation between our many commitments and expectations. Our reflexive experience of poetry—and of life—melds in the few minutes it takes to thoughtfully experience the present, outside the world's persuasive call to frenzied action.

Specifically, "The Moths" emphasizes mindfulness as a potential balm for the frenetic pace of postmodern life. Early in the poem, Oliver describes herself as "so full of energy," strenuously avoiding the impulse to stop and think. For then, she speculates, she might wonder if the world "can't be saved," and "the pain [of this thought] was unbearable." Many of us might relate. The post-digital world includes social media addiction, relentless advertising, political polarization, and a variety of other postmodern ills. Meanwhile, the act of stopping reflects a kind of inverted critical scholarship; Oliver—and the meditation—ask the listener to slow down, to perform a different kind of scholarship by allowing the poem and meditation to speak to the listener's subjective experience of the world. Through radical subjectivity, each listener is invited to join in the revisionist act of refusing to participate—even for a brief moment—in "running around, looking at this and

that." The act of stopping and thinking thus becomes its own scholarly project, as well as a protest against pressures to participate in the right-now speed of contemporary technology.

Taken reflexively, Oliver's words form a union of mindful mentoring, as if Oliver herself is teaching us how to be. We, too, may find ourselves "always running around" as digital technologies facilitate newer, faster, and more plentiful ways to do so. Oliver wrote this poem in a decade comparatively less busy than our own, and yet her point rings true today—perhaps even more so. The rising action of the poem reminds us of the frenetic pace found all too often on social media platforms, in news media channels, in conversations with friends, family, and colleagues, or simply from existing in the postmodern milieu. Oliver's words provide a pause to reflect on our own place in the world, as well as what our personal choices may be within it. Among thousands of meditation texts widely available on the internet, Oliver's "The Moths" provides a unique and meaningful moment to grin at our own reflections (as she does in the eighth stanza). Oliver's journey can be our journey; we, too, can one day notice enough.

Works Cited

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