

## Rebus

by Jane Hirshfield

You work with what you are given,  
the red clay of grief,  
the black clay of stubbornness going on after.  
Clay that tastes of care or carelessness,  
clay that smells of the bottoms of rivers or dust.

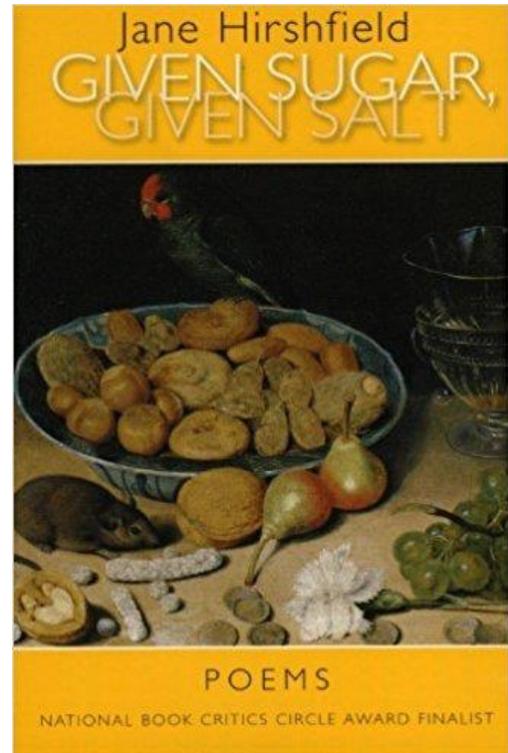
Each thought is a life you have lived or failed to live,  
each word is a dish you have eaten or left on the table.  
There are honeys so bitter  
no one would willingly choose to take them.  
The clay takes them: honey of weariness, honey of  
vanity,  
honey of cruelty, fear.

This rebus—slip and stubbornness,  
bottom of river, my own consumed life—  
when will I learn to read it  
plainly, slowly, uncolored by hope or desire?  
Not to understand it, only to see.

As water given sugar sweetens, given salt grows salty,  
we become our choices.  
Each *yes*, each *no* continues,  
this one a ladder, that one an anvil or cup.

The ladder leans into its darkness.  
The anvil leans into its silence.  
The cup sits empty.

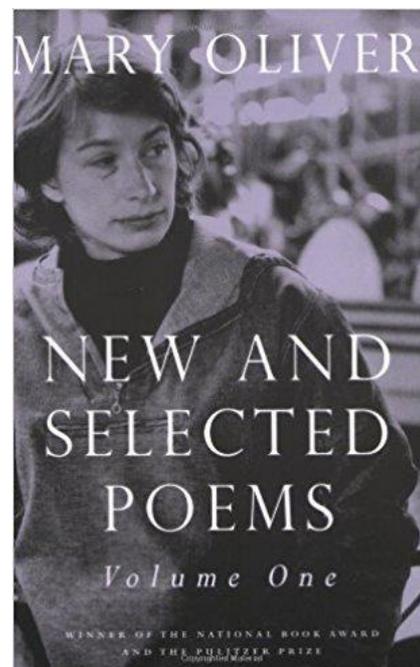
How can I enter this question the clay has asked?



## Wild Geese

by Mary Oliver

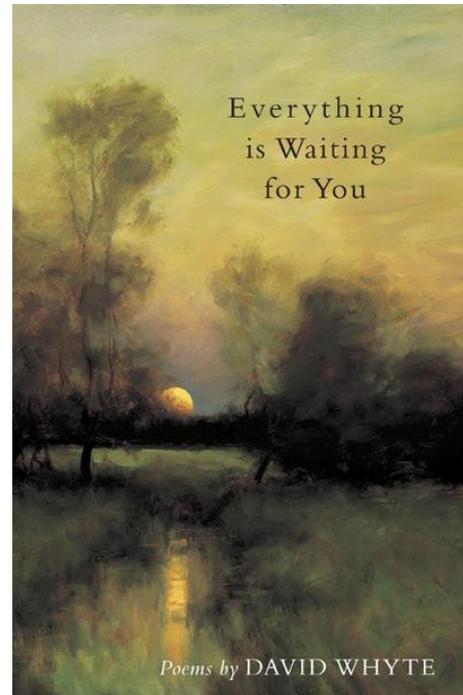
You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun 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 clean 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.



**Sometimes**

*By David Whyte*

Sometimes  
if you move carefully  
through the forest  
breathing like the ones  
in the old stories  
who could cross  
a shimmering bed of dry leaves  
without a sound,  
you come to a place  
whose only task  
is to trouble you  
with tiny  
but frightening requests  
conceived out of nowhere  
but in this place  
beginning to lead everywhere.  
Requests to stop what  
you are doing right now,  
and to stop what you  
are becoming  
while you do it,  
questions  
that can make  
or unmake  
a life,  
questions  
that have patiently  
waited for you,  
questions  
that have no right to go away.



**Wild Geese**

*by Wendell Berry*

Horseback on Sunday morning,  
harvest over, we taste persimmon  
and wild grape, sharp sweet  
of summer's end. In time's maze  
over fall fields, we name names  
that went west from here, names  
that rest on graves. We open  
a persimmon seed to find the tree  
that stands in promise,  
pale, in the seed's marrow.  
Geese appear high over us,  
pass, and the sky closes. Abandon,  
as in love or sleep, holds  
them to their way, clear,  
in the ancient faith: what we need  
is here. And we pray, not  
for new earth or heaven, but to be  
quiet in heart, and in eye  
clear. What we need is here.

