

design of a poem seem as natural as the hummingbird pausing at the trumpet vine is one sign of how gifted a poet Oliver is.

Her *New and Selected Poems* won the National Book Award in 1992 and includes work from six previous books. She has published prolifically throughout her career, with over a dozen books since 1992, including several essay collections and handbooks on writing.

The Black Snake

When the black snake
flashed onto the morning road,
and the truck could not swerve—
death, that is how it happens.

Now he lies looped and useless 5
as an old bicycle tire.
I stop the car
and carry him into the bushes.

He is as cool and gleaming 10
as a braided whip, he is as beautiful and quiet
as a dead brother.
I leave him under the leaves

and drive on, thinking
about *death*: its suddenness,
its terrible weight, 15
its certain coming. Yet under

reason burns a brighter fire, which the bones
have always preferred.
It is the story of endless good fortune.
It says to oblivion: not me! 20

It is the light at the center of every cell.
It is what sent the snake coiling and flowing forward
happily all spring through the green leaves before
he came to the road.

1979

In Blackwater Woods

Look, the trees
are turning
their own bodies
into pillars