

Water Snake
by Mary Oliver

I saw him
in a dry place
on a hot day,
a traveler
making his way
from one pond
to another,
and he lifted up
his chary face
and looked at me
with his gravel eyes,
and the feather of his tongue
shot in and out
of his otherwise clamped mouth,
and I stopped on the path
to give him room,
and he went past me
with his head high,
loathing me, I think,
for my long legs,
my poor body, like a post,
my many fingers,
for he didn't linger
but, touching the other side of the path,
he headed, in long lunges and quick heaves,
straight to the nearest basin
of sweet black water and weeds,
and solitude— like an old sword
that suddenly picked itself up and went off,
swinging, swinging
through the green leaves.