

Mary Oliver

On Thy Wonderous Works I Will Meditate

(Psalm 145)

1.

All day up and down the shore the

fine points of the waves keep on
tapping whatever is there: scatter of broken
clams, empty jingles, old
oyster shells thick and castellated that held
once the pale jewel of their bodies, such sweet

tongue and juice. And who do you
think you are sauntering along
five feet up in the air, the ocean a blue fire
around your ankles, the sun
on your face on your shoulders its golden mouth whispering
(so it seems) *you! you! you!*

2.

Now the afternoon wind
all frill and no apparent purpose
takes her cloud-shaped
hand and touches every one of the
waves so that rapidly
they stir the wings of the eiders they blur

the boats on their moorings; not even the rocks
black and blunt interrupt the waves on their
way to the shore and one last swimmer (is it you?) rides
their salty infoldings and outfoldings until,
peaked, their blue sides heaving, they pause; and God

whistles them back; and you glide safely to shore.

3.

One morning

 a hundred pink and cylindrical
squid lay beached their lacy faces,
 their gnarls of dimples and ropy tentacles
limp and powerless; as I watched
 the big gulls went down upon

this sweetest trash rolling

 like the arms of babies through the
swash—in a feathered dash,
 a snarl of delight the beaks fell
grabbing and snapping; then was left
 only the empty beach, the birds floating back over the waves.

4.

How many mysteries have you seen in your
 lifetime? How many nets pulled
full over the boat's side, each silver body
 ready or not falling into
submission? How many roses in early summer
 uncurling above the pale sands then

falling back in unfathomable

 willingness? And what can you say? Glory
to the rose and the leaf, to the seed, to the
 silver fish. Glory to time and the wild fields,
and to joy. And to grief's shock and torpor, its near swoon.

5.

So it is not hard to understand

 where God's body is, it is
everywhere and everything; shore and the vast

fields of water, the accidental and the intended
 over here, over there. And I bow down
 participate and attentive

it is so dense and apparent. And all the same I am still
 unsatisfied. Standing
 here, now, I am thinking
 not of His thick wrists and His blue
 shoulders but, still, of Him. Where, do you suppose, is His
 pale and wonderful mind?

6.

I would be good—oh, I would be upright and good.
 To what purpose? To be shining not
 sinful, not wringing out of the hours
 petulance, heaviness, ashes. *To what purpose?*
Hope of heaven? Not that. But to enter
 the other kingdom: grace, and imagination,

and the multiple sympathies: to be as a leaf, a rose,
 a dolphin, a wave rising
 slowly then briskly out of the darkness to touch
 the limpid air, to be God's mind's
 servant, loving with the body's sweet mouth—its kisses, its words—
 everything.

7.

I know a man of such
 mildness and kindness it is trying to
 change my life. He does not
 preach, teach, but simply is. It is
 astonishing, for he is Christ's ambassador
 truly, by rule and act. But, more,

he is kind with the sort of kindness that shines

out, but is resolute, not fooled. He has
eaten the dark hours and could also, I think,
soldier for God, riding out
under the storm clouds, against the world's pride and unkindness,
with both unassailable sweetness, and tempering word.

8.

Every morning I want to kneel down on the golden
cloth of the sand and say
some kind of musical thanks for
the world that is happening again—another day—
from the shawl of wind coming out of the
west to the firm green

flesh of the melon lately sliced open and
eaten, its chill and ample body
flavored with mercy. I want
to be worthy—of what? Glory? Yes, unimaginable glory.
O Lord of melons, of mercy, though I am
not ready, nor worthy, I am climbing toward you.