Anne asks: “I’d actually like to hear a little more

About how you apprehend this poem,

About what it says to you…

About what it says to you?

;)

a.”

First- a note about “apprehend”- to begin answering, I looked up the definition of apprehend, and found that it can also mean “to arrest someone for a crime,” which I had forgotten.

Second- I’ve thought a lot about her usage of “shall” and “should”… and the dash between them, like waves breaking on the shore, it is a break in the sentence… I am reminded of boogie boarding at the beach, how you have to wait, watching the waves build and the water curling, rolling, rushing, for that moment when the wave finally begins to curl over and the first bits of white foam collect at the edges- this is how you know the wave is almost ready, and kicking furiously, you move in to meet it, anticipate where it will inevitably break, and once you are at that spot, rush to turn the board and your body around toward the shoreline –

The split second before it crashes, catching you, carrying you back in—

It is thrilling to move so easily through the ocean, as the wave does, to be supported by it.

I feel this movement in her poem, the building, tension, apprehension, then the crash, and the flood of relief; her reassurance, as the wave spreads itself thin, reaching up the sandy shore.

Left this piece of writing for what I thought would be a momentary cigarette break—

But instead found myself in deep conversation with a friend who I had previously not been on speaking terms with –

There is relief in reconciliation.

But I shall—

I should return to this poem.

I wondering for a while about the importance of “shall” and “should.” Both are auxiliary verbs (I thought too, about auxiliary and it’s synonyms: additional, supplementary, helping, supporting), but there are certain nuances which dictate their individual uses… “Shall” is insistent, demanding, inevitable. It declares something unavoidable, a requirement given by an authority. However, Oliver negates this authority through interruption, refusing to complete the command, instead, she rewrites the sentence with “should”—

“Should” a strong suggestion, of something that could be done, but is not required. There is flexibility in “should.” Almost like, resignation, the author shifts from the urgency of “shall” that might drive her to do something radical about her misery, into “should”, allowing herself the room to do little more than contemplate her misery.

I just realized that I’ve accidentally skipped two pages. For a second, I was annoyed by the interruption in this piece of writing. But then I thought: of course. I have made a gigantic dash in my writing. This process has been full of breaks and interruptions: smoke breaks; coffee breaks; the break down of silence between two people; the inevitable break of down, visible from a window in the library.

“Excuse me, I have work to do”

Excuse me- we say when asking forgiveness for interrupting someone.

How polite of the ocean, in her lovely voice, to ask forgiveness from someone so small, for fulfilling her purpose in our lives. For regulating the tides and the moon and our Earth; for keeping us in existence.

I think I would be moved too, then, to be so small, yet important enough to be spoken to by the ocean, who is constantly at work, a fact that can often go unappreciated.

I hardly like to be alone, but the beach in the morning is one of those few exceptions, and when I look at the water, I am happy. I am filled up by the vastness and importance of the ocean. My reaction to Mary Oliver’s words is visceral; it reaches into the depths of my own body into memory and recalls to the surface of my skin the feeling of sea breeze, and the coolness of sand before it has been heated by the sun, uncharacteristically smooth against the soles of my feet.

I like to sit and watch the ocean at work, undisturbed.

I can imagine too then, that I would be moved so deeply, that I would need to write the feeling down into words… it is a difficult task, to describe in language, the complexities of fullness. It is all at once, an awareness of how small and how important we are… I know it is some variation of love, but I do not have a word for it.

I’ve been thinking a lot throughout writing about the sea and how easy it was for me to assign it a gender, womanhood, a human invention. I am bothered by my own projection, but still can’t shake the perception of the ocean as distinctly female. I could probably blame it on years of cultural associations of what on this earth symbolizes womanhood, but then I think it would be easier for me to let go of the idea itself. I think it is more likely that I am searching for something in the sea, and her words, that I can identify with, and in wanting to be more like the sea, I try instead to make the sea more like me.