

Classic Poetry Series

**Frank O'Hara**  
**- poems -**

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# Frank O'Hara(27 March 1926 – 25 July 1966)

Francis Russell "Frank" O'Hara was an American writer, poet and art critic. He was a member of the New York School of poetry.

## <b>Life</b>

Frank O'Hara, the son of Russell Joseph O'Hara and Katherine (née Broderick) was born on March 27, 1926, at Maryland General Hospital, Baltimore and grew up in Grafton, Massachusetts. He attended St. John's High School in Worcester. He grew up believing he had been born in June, but in fact had been born in March, his parents having disguised his true date of birth because he was conceived out of wedlock. He studied piano at the New England Conservatory in Boston from 1941 to 1944 and served in the South Pacific and Japan as a sonarman on the destroyer USS Nicholas during World War II.

With the funding made available to veterans he attended Harvard University, where artist and writer Edward Gorey was his roommate. Although O'Hara majored in music and did some composing, his attendance was irregular and his interests disparate. He regularly attended classes in philosophy and theology, while writing impulsively in his spare time. O'Hara was heavily influenced by visual art and by contemporary music, which was his first love (he remained a fine piano player all his life and would often shock new partners by suddenly playing swathes of Rachmaninoff when visiting them). His favorite poets were <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/arthur-rimbaud/">Arthur Rimbaud</a> , <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/st-phane-mallarm-2/">Stephane Mallarme</a> , <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/boris-pasternak/">Boris Pasternak</a> and <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/vladimir-vladimirovich-mayakovsky/">Vladimir Mayakovsky</a> While at Harvard, O'Hara met John Ashbery and began publishing poems in the Harvard Advocate. Despite his love of music, O'Hara changed his major and graduated from Harvard in 1950 with a degree in English.

He then attended graduate school at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. While at Michigan, he won a Hopwood Award and received his M.A. in English literature in 1951. That autumn O'Hara moved into an apartment in New York City with Joe LeSueur, who would be his roommate and sometime lover for the next 11 years. It was in New York that he began teaching at The New School.

Known throughout his life for his extreme sociability, passion, and warmth, O'Hara had hundreds of friends and lovers throughout his life, many from the

New York art and poetry worlds. Soon after arriving in New York, he was employed at the front desk of the Museum of Modern Art and began to write seriously.

O'Hara was active in the art world, working as a reviewer for *Artnews*, and in 1960 was Assistant Curator of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions for the Museum of Modern Art. He was also friends with the artists Willem de Kooning, Norman Bluhm, Larry Rivers and Joan Mitchell.

In the early morning hours of July 24, 1966, O'Hara was struck by a dune buggy on the Fire Island beach. He died the next day of a ruptured liver. O'Hara was buried in Green River Cemetery on Long Island. The painter Larry Rivers, a longtime friend and lover[ of O'Hara's, delivered the eulogy.

### **<b>Poetry</b>**

While O'Hara's poetry is generally autobiographical, it tends to be based on his observations of New York life rather than exploring his past. In his introduction to *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, Donald Allen says that "Frank O'Hara tended to think of his poems as a record of his life is apparent in much of his work." O'Hara discussed this aspect of his poetry in a statement for Donald Allen's *New American Poetry*: "What is happening to me, allowing for lies and exaggerations which I try to avoid, goes into my poems. I don't think my experiences are clarified or made beautiful for myself or anyone else, they are just there in whatever form I can find them." He goes on to say, "My formal 'stance' is found at the crossroads where what I know and can't get meets what is left of that I know and can bear without hatred... It may be that poetry makes life's nebulous events tangible to me and restores their detail; or conversely that poetry brings forth the intangible quality of incidents which are all too concrete and circumstantial. Or each on specific occasions, or both all the time."

His initial time in the Navy, during his basic training at Sampson Naval Training Center in upstate New York, along with earlier years spent at St. John's High School began to shape a distinguished style of solitary observation that would later inform his poems. Immersed in regimented daily routine, first Catholic school then the Navy, he was able to separate himself from the situation and make witty and often singular studies. Sometimes these were cataloged for use in later writing, or, perhaps more often, put into letters and sent off to home. This skill of scrutinizing and recording during the bustle and churn of daily life would, later, be one of the important aspects that shaped O'hara as an urban poet writing off the cuff.

Among his friends, O'Hara was known to treat poetry dismissively, as something to be done only in the moment. John Ashbery claims he witnessed O'Hara "Dashing the poems off at odd moments – in his office at the Museum of Modern Art, in the street at lunchtime or even in a room full of people – he would then put them away in drawers and cartons and half forget them."

In 1959, he wrote a mock manifesto (originally published in *Yugen* in 1961) called *Personism: A Manifesto*, in which he explains his position on formal structure: "I don't ... like rhythm, assonance, all that stuff. You just go on your nerve. If someone's chasing you down the street with a knife you just run, you don't turn around and shout, 'Give it up! I was a track star for Mineola Prep.'" He says, in response to academic overemphasis on form, "As for measure and other technical apparatus, that's just common sense: if you're going to buy a pair of pants you want them to be tight enough so everyone will want to go to bed with you. There's nothing metaphysical about it." He claims that on August 27, 1959, while talking to LeRoi Jones, he founded a movement called Personism which may be "the death of literature as we know it."

He says, "It does not have to do with personality or intimacy, far from it! But to give you a vague idea, one of its minimal aspects is to address itself to one person (other than the poet himself), thus evoking overtones of love without destroying love's life-giving vulgarity, and sustaining the poet's feelings toward the poem while preventing love from distracting him into feeling about the person."

His poetry shows the influence of Abstract Expressionism, Surrealism, Russian poetry, and poets associated with French Symbolism. Ashbery says, "The poetry that meant the most to him when he began writing was either French – Rimbaud, Mallarmé, the Surrealists: poets who speak the language of every day into the reader's dream – or Russian – Pasternak and especially Mayakovsky, for whom he picked up what James Schuyler has called the 'intimate yell.'" As part of the New York School of poetry, O'Hara to some degree encapsulated the compositional philosophy of New York School painters.

Ashbery says, "Frank O'Hara's concept of the poem as the chronicle of the creative act that produces it was strengthened by his intimate experience of Pollock's, Kline's, and de Kooning's great paintings of the late '40s and early '50s and of the imaginative realism of painters like Jane Freilicher and Larry Rivers." This interaction between poet and painter is most evident in the poem, "Why I am Not A Painter", in which O'Hara compares the process of writing a poem called "Oranges" with a description of his friend Mike Goldberg's creation of a painting entitled "Sardines". Neither work in the end contains a reference to its

title.

O'Hara was also influenced by [William Carlos Williams](http://www.poemhunter.com/william-carlos-williams/) . According to Marjorie Perloff in her book *Frank O'Hara, Poet among Painters*, he and Williams both use everyday language and simple statements split at irregular intervals. Perloff points out the similarities between O'Hara's "Autobiographia Literaria" and Williams's "Invocation and Conclusion." At the end of "Autobiographia Literaria," the speaker says, "And here I am, the/center of all beauty!/writing these poems!/Imagine!" Similarly, Williams at the end of "Invocation and Conclusion" says, "Now look at me!" These lines show a shared interest in the self as an individual who can only be himself in isolation. A similar idea is expressed in a line from Williams's "Danse Russe": "Who shall say I am not/ the happy genius of my household?"

### **In Popular Culture**

In the 2011 film *Beastly*, the lovestruck main characters read O'Hara's poem *Having a Coke with You* aloud to each other.

In season 2 of the television series *Mad Men*, a character reading O'Hara's collection of poetry, *Meditations in an Emergency* appeared in the first episode, and again in the last episode which also used its title as the episode title. In the twelfth episode of season 2, Don Draper finds a copy of *Meditations in an Emergency* in Anna Draper's home in California.

In the season 1 episode of the HBO series *Bored to Death* entitled "The Case of the Missing Screenplay", the main character loses a screenplay written by Jim Jarmusch about the life of Frank O'Hara.

# 1951

Alone at night  
in the wet city

the country's wit  
is not memorable.

The wind has blown  
all the trees down

but these anxieties  
remain erect, being

the heart's deliberate  
chambers of hurt

and fear whether  
from a green apartment

seeming diamonds or  
from an airliner

seeming fields. It's  
not simple or tidy

though in rows of  
rows and numbered;

the literal drifts  
colorfully and

the hair is combed  
with bridges, all

compromises leap  
to stardom and lights.

If alone I am  
able to love it,

the serious voices,  
the panic of jobs,

it is sweet to me.  
Far from burgeoning

verdure, the hard way  
in this street.

Frank O'Hara

# A City Winter

1

I understand the boredom of the clerks  
fatigue shifting like dunes within their eyes  
a frightful nausea gumming up the works  
that once was thought aggression in disguise.  
Do you remember? then how lightly dead  
seemed the moon when over factories  
it languid slid like a barrage of lead  
above the heart, the fierce inventories  
of desire. Now women wander our dreams  
carrying money and to our sleep's shame  
our hands twitch not for swift blood-sunk triremes  
nor languorous white horses nor ill fame,  
but clutch the groin that clouds a pallid sky  
where tow'rs are sinking in their common eye.

2

My ship is flung upon the gutter's wrist  
and cries for help of storm to violate  
that flesh your curiosity too late  
has flushed. The stem your garter tongue would twist  
has sunk upon the waveless bosom's mist,  
thigh of the city, apparition, hate,  
and the tower whose doves have, delicate,  
fled into my blood where they are not kissed.

You have left me to the sewer's meanwhile,  
and I have answered the sea's open wish  
to love me as a bonfire's watchful hand  
guards red the shore and guards the hairy strand,  
our most elegant lascivious bile,  
my ship sinking beneath the gutter's fish.

3

How can I then, my dearest winter lay,  
disgorge the tasty worm that eats me up  
falling onto the stem of a highway  
whose ardent rainbow is the spoon's flat cup  
and in the vilest of blue suited force



enamored of the heated needle's arm  
finds the ministrant an own tongue's remorse  
so near the blood and still so far from harm,  
thus to be eaten up and gobbled down  
volcanoes of speedometers, the strike  
that heats the iris into flame and flow'rs  
the panting chalice so a turning pike:  
you are not how the gods refused to die,  
and I am scarred forever neath the eye.

4

What are my eyes? if they must feed me, rank  
with forgetting, in the jealous forest  
of lustrous blows, so luminously blank  
through smoke and in the light. All faint, at rest,  
yet I am racing towards the fear that kills  
them off, friends and lovers, hast'ning through tears  
like alcohol high in the throat of hills  
and hills of night, alluring! their black cheers  
falling upon my ears like nails. And there  
the bars grow thick with onanists and camps  
and bivouacs of bears with clubs, are fair  
with their blows, deal death beneath purple lamps  
and to me! I run! closer always move,  
crying my name in fields of dead I love.

5

I plunge deep within this frozen lake  
whose mirrored fastnesses fill up my heart,  
where tears drift from frivolity to art  
all white and slobbering, and by mistake  
are the sky. I'm no whale to cruise apart  
in fields impassive of my stench, my sake,  
my sign to crushing seas that fall like fake  
pillars to crash! to sow as wake my heart

and don't be niggardly. The snow drifts low  
and yet neglects to cover me, and I  
dance just ahead to keep my heart in sight.  
How like a queen, to seek with jealous eye  
the face that flees you, hidden city, white  
swan. There's no art to free me, blinded so.

Frank O'Hara

# A Quiet Poem

When music is far enough away  
the eyelid does not often move

and objects are still as lavender  
without breath or distant rejoinder.

The cloud is then so subtly dragged  
away by the silver flying machine

that the thought of it alone echoes  
unbelievably; the sound of the motor falls

like a coin toward the ocean's floor  
and the eye does not flicker

as it does when in the loud sun a coin  
rises and nicks the near air. Now,

slowly, the heart breathes to music  
while the coins lie in wet yellow sand.

Frank O'Hara

# A Step Away From Them

It's my lunch hour, so I go  
for a walk among the hum-colored  
cabs. First, down the sidewalk  
where laborers feed their dirty  
glistening torsos sandwiches  
and Coca-Cola, with yellow helmets  
on. They protect them from falling  
bricks, I guess. Then onto the  
avenue where skirts are flipping  
above heels and blow up over  
grates. The sun is hot, but the  
cabs stir up the air. I look  
at bargains in wristwatches. There  
are cats playing in sawdust.

On  
to Times Square, where the sign  
blows smoke over my head, and higher  
the waterfall pours lightly. A  
Negro stands in a doorway with a  
toothpick, languorously agitating  
A blonde chorus girl clicks: he  
smiles and rubs his chin. Everything  
suddenly honks: it is 12:40 of  
a Thursday.

Neon in daylight is a  
great pleasure, as Edwin Denby would  
write, as are light bulbs in daylight.  
I stop for a cheeseburger at JULIET'S  
CORNER. Giulietta Maina, wife of  
Federico Fellini, &acute; bell' attrice.  
And chocolate malted. A lady in  
foxes on such a day puts her poodle  
in a cab.

There are several Puerto  
Ricans on the avenue today, which  
makes it beautiful and warm. First

Bunny died, then John Latouche,  
then Jackson Pollock. But is the  
earth as full of life was full, of them?  
And one has eaten and one walks,  
past the magazines with nudes  
and the posters for BULLFIGHT and  
the Manhattan Storage Warehouse,  
which they'll soon tear down. I  
used to think they had the Armory  
Show there.

A glass of papaya juice  
and back to work. My heart is in my  
pocket, it is Poems by Pierre Reverdy.

Frank O'Hara

# A True Account Of Talking To The Sun On Fire Island

The Sun woke me this morning loud and clear, saying "Hey! I've been trying to wake you up for fifteen minutes. Don't be so rude, you are only the second poet I've ever chosen to speak to personally

so why aren't you more attentive? If I could burn you through the window I would wake you up. I can't hang around here all day."

"Sorry, Sun, I stayed up late last night talking to Hal."

"When I woke up Mayakovsky he was a lot more prompt" the Sun said petulantly. "Most people are up already waiting to see if I'm going to put in an appearance."

I tried to apologize "I missed you yesterday." "That's better" he said. "I didn't know you'd come out." "You may be wondering why I've come so close?" "Yes" I said beginning to feel hot wondering if maybe he wasn't burning me anyway.

"Frankly I wanted to tell you I like your poetry. I see a lot on my rounds and you're okay. You may not be the greatest thing on earth, but you're different. Now, I've heard some say you're crazy, they being excessively calm themselves to my mind, and other crazy poets think that you're a boring

reactionary. Not me.

Just keep on  
like I do and pay no attention. You'll  
find that people always will complain  
about the atmosphere, either too hot  
or too cold too bright or too dark, days  
too short or too long.

If you don't appear  
at all one day they think you're lazy  
or dead. Just keep right on, I like it.

And don't worry about your lineage  
poetic or natural. The Sun shines on  
the jungle, you know, on the tundra  
the sea, the ghetto. Wherever you were  
I knew it and saw you moving. I was waiting  
for you to get to work.

And now that you  
are making your own days, so to speak,  
even if no one reads you but me  
you won't be depressed. Not  
everyone can look up, even at me. It  
hurts their eyes."  
"Oh Sun, I'm so grateful to you!"

"Thanks and remember I'm watching. It's  
easier for me to speak to you out  
here. I don't have to slide down  
between buildings to get your ear.  
I know you love Manhattan, but  
you ought to look up more often.

And  
always embrace things, people earth  
sky stars, as I do, freely and with  
the appropriate sense of space. That  
is your inclination, known in the heavens  
and you should follow it to hell, if  
necessary, which I doubt.

Maybe we'll  
speak again in Africa, of which I too  
am specially fond. Go back to sleep now  
Frank, and I may leave a tiny poem  
in that brain of yours as my farewell."

"Sun, don't go!" I was awake  
at last. "No, go I must, they're calling  
me."

"Who are they?"

Rising he said "Some  
day you'll know. They're calling to you  
too." Darkly he rose, and then I slept.

Frank O'Hara



# Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul

It is 12:10 in New York and I am wondering  
if I will finish this in time to meet Norman for lunch  
ah lunch! I think I am going crazy  
what with my terrible hangover and the weekend coming up  
at excitement-prone Kenneth Koch's  
I wish I were staying in town and working on my poems  
at Joan's studio for a new book by Grove Press  
which they will probably not print  
but it is good to be several floors up in the dead of night  
wondering whether you are any good or not  
and the only decision you can make is that you did it

yesterday I looked up the rue Frémicourt on a map  
and was happy to find it like a bird  
flying over Paris et ses environs  
which unfortunately did not include Seine-et-Oise

which I don't know

as well as a number of other things  
and Allen is back talking about god a lot  
and Peter is back not talking very much  
and Joe has a cold and is not coming to Kenneth's  
although he is coming to lunch with Norman  
I suspect he is making a distinction  
well, who isn't

I wish I were reeling around Paris  
instead of reeling around New York  
I wish I weren't reeling at all  
it is Spring the ice has melted the Ricard is being poured

we are all happy and young and toothless  
it is the same as old age  
the only thing to do is simply continue  
is that simple  
yes, it is simple because it is the only thing to do  
can you do it  
yes, you can because it is the only thing to do  
blue light over the Bois de Boulogne it continues  
the Seine continues

the Louvre stays open it continues it hardly closes at all  
the Bar Américain continues to be French  
de Gaulle continues to be Algerian as does Camus  
Shirley Goldfarb continues to be Shirley Goldfarb  
and Jane Hazan continues to be Jane Freilicher (I think!)  
and Irving Sandler continues to be the balayeur des artistes  
and so do I (sometimes I think I'm 'in love' with painting)  
and surely the Piscine Deligny continues to have water in it  
and the Flore continues to have tables and newspapers  
and people under them  
and surely we shall not continue to be unhappy  
we shall be happy  
but we shall continue to be ourselves everything  
continues to be possible  
René Char, Pierre Reverdy, Samuel Beckett it is possible isn't it  
I love Reverdy for saying yes, though I don't believe it

Frank O'Hara

# Animals

Have you forgotten what we were like then  
when we were still first rate  
and the day came fat with an apple in its mouth

it's no use worrying about Time  
but we did have a few tricks up our sleeves  
and turned some sharp corners

the whole pasture looked like our meal  
we didn't need speedometers  
we could manage cocktails out of ice and water

I wouldn't want to be faster  
or greener than now if you were with me O you  
were the best of all my days

Frank O'Hara

# Ann Arbor Variations

1

Wet heat drifts through the afternoon  
like a campus dog, a fraternity ghost  
waiting to stay home from football games.  
The arches are empty clear to the sky.

Except for the leaves: those lashes of our  
thinking and dreaming and drinking sight.  
The spherical radiance, the Old English  
look, the sum of our being, "hath perced

to the roote" all our springs and falls  
and now rolls over our limpness, a daily  
dragon. We lose our health in a love  
of color, drown in a fountain of myriads,

as simply as children. It is too hot,  
our birth was given up to screaming. Our  
life on these street lawns seems silent.  
The leaves chatter their comparisons

to the wind and the sky fills up  
before we are out of bed. O infinite  
our siestas! adobe effigies in a land  
that is sick of us and our tanned flesh.

The wind blows towards us particularly  
the sobbing of our dear friends on both  
coasts. We are sick of living and afraid  
that death will not be by water, o sea.

2

Along the walks and shaded ways  
pregnant women look snidely at children.  
Two weeks ago they were told, in these

selfsame pools of trefoil, "the market  
for emeralds is collapsing," "chlorophyll  
shines in your eyes," "the sea's misery

is progenitor of the dark moss which hides  
on the north side of trees and cries."  
What do they think of slim kids now?

and how, when the summer's gong of day  
and night slithers towards their sweat  
and towards the nest of their arms

and thighs, do they feel about children  
whose hides are pearly with days of swimming?  
Do they mistake these fresh drops for tears?

The wind works over these women constantly!  
trying, perhaps, to curdle their milk  
or make their spring unseasonably fearful,

season they face with dread and bright eyes,  
The leaves, wrinkled or shiny like apples,  
wave women courage and sigh, a void temperature.

3

The alternatives of summer do not remove  
us from this place. The fainting into skies  
from a diving board, the express train to  
Detroit's damp bars, the excess of affection  
on the couch near an open window or a Bauhaus  
fire escape, the lazy regions of stars, all  
are strangers. Like Mayakovsky read on steps  
of cool marble, or Yeats danced in a theatre  
of polite music. The classroom day of dozing  
and grammar, the partial eclipse of the head  
in the row in front of the head of poplars,  
sweet Syrinx! last out the summer in a stay  
of iron. Workmen loiter before urinals, stare  
out windows at girders tightly strapped to clouds.  
And in the morning we whimper as we cook  
an egg, so far from fluttering sands and azure!

4

The violent No! of the sun  
burns the forehead of hills.

Sand fleas arrive from Salt Lake  
and most of the theatres close.

The leaves roll into cigars, or  
it seems our eyes stick together  
in sleep. O forest, o brook of  
spice, o cool gaze of strangers!

the city tumbles towards autumn  
in a convulsion of tourists  
and teachers. We dance in the dark,  
forget the anger of what we blame

on the day. Children toss and murmur  
as a rumba blankets their trees and  
beckons their stars closer, older, now.  
We move o'er the world, being so much here.

It's as if Poseidon left off counting  
his waters for a moment! In the fields  
the silence is music like the moon.  
The bullfrogs sleep in their hairy caves.

across the avenue a trefoil lamp  
of the streets tosses luckily.  
The leaves, finally, love us! and  
moonrise! we die upon the sun.

Frank O'Hara

# As Planned

After the first glass of vodka  
you can accept just about anything  
of life even your own mysteriousness  
you think it is nice that a box  
of matches is purple and brown and is called  
La Petite and comes from Sweden  
for they are words that you know and that  
is all you know words not their feelings  
or what they mean and you write because  
you know them not because you understand them  
because you don't you are stupid and lazy  
and will never be great but you do  
what you know because what else is there?

Anonymous submission.

Frank O'Hara

# At Joan's

It is almost three  
I sit at the marble top  
sorting poems, miserable  
the little lamp glows feebly  
I don't glow at all

I have another cognac  
and stare at two little paintings  
of Jean-Paul's, so great  
I must do so much  
or did they just happen

the breeze is cool  
barely a sound filters up  
through my confused eyes  
I am lonely for myself  
I can't find a real poem

if it won't happen to me  
what shall I do

Frank O'Hara



# At Night Chinamen Jump

At night Chinamen jump  
on Asia with a thump  
while in our willful way  
we, in secret, play

affectionate games and bruise  
our knees like China's shoes.

The birds push apples through  
grass the moon turns blue,

these apples roll beneath  
our buttocks like a heath

full of Chinese thrushes  
flushed from China's bushes.

As we love at night  
birds sing out of sight,

Chinese rhythms beat  
through us in our heat,

the apples and the birds  
move us like soft words,

we couple in the grace  
of that mysterious race.

Frank O'Hara

# Autobiographia Literaria

When I was a child  
I played by myself in a  
corner of the schoolyard  
all alone.

I hated dolls and I  
hated games, animals were  
not friendly and birds  
flew away.

If anyone was looking  
for me I hid behind a  
tree and cried out "I am  
an orphan."

And here I am, the  
center of all beauty!  
writing these poems!  
Imagine!

Anonymous submission.

Frank O'Hara

# Ave Maria

Mothers of America

let your kids go to the movies  
get them out of the house so they won't  
know what you're up to  
it's true that fresh air is good for the body  
but what about the soul  
that grows in darkness, embossed by  
silvery images  
and when you grow old as grow old you  
must  
they won't hate you  
they won't criticize you they won't know  
they'll be in some glamorous  
country  
they first saw on a Saturday afternoon or  
playing hookey  
they may even be grateful to you  
for their first sexual experience  
which only cost you a quarter  
and didn't upset the peaceful  
home  
they will know where candy bars come  
from  
and gratuitous bags of popcorn  
as gratuitous as leaving the movie before  
it's over  
with a pleasant stranger whose apartment  
is in the Heaven on  
Earth Bldg  
near the Williamsburg Bridge  
oh mothers you will have made  
the little  
tykes  
so happy because if nobody does pick  
them up in the movies  
they won't know the difference  
and if somebody does it'll be  
sheer gravy  
and they'll have been truly entertained

either way  
instead of hanging around the yard  
    or up in their room hating you  
prematurely since you won't have done  
    anything horribly mean  
    yet  
except keeping them from life's darker joys  
    it's unforgivable the latter  
so don't blame me if you won't take this  
    advice  
    and the family breaks up  
and your children grow old and blind in  
    front of a TV set  
    seeing  
movies you wouldn't let them see when  
    they were young

Frank O'Hara

# Call Me

The eager note on my door said "Call me,"  
call when you get in!" so I quickly threw  
a few tangerines into my overnight bag,  
straightened my eyelids and shoulders, and

headed straight for the door. It was autumn  
by the time I got around the corner, oh all  
unwilling to be either pertinent or bemused, but  
the leaves were brighter than grass on the sidewalk!

Funny, I thought, that the lights are on this late  
and the hall door open; still up at this hour, a  
champion jai-alai player like himself? Oh fie!  
for shame! What a host, so zealous! And he was

there in the hall, flat on a sheet of blood that  
ran down the stairs. I did appreciate it. There are few  
hosts who so thoroughly prepare to greet a guest  
only casually invited, and that several months ago.

Frank O'Hara

## Chez Jane

The white chocolate jar full of petals  
swills odds and ends around in a dizzying eye  
of four o'clocks now and to come. The tiger,  
marvellously striped and irritable, leaps  
on the table and without disturbing a hair  
of the flowers' breathless attention, pisses  
into the pot, right down its delicate spout.  
A whisper of steam goes up from that porcelain  
urethra. "Saint-Saëns!" it seems to be whispering,  
curling unerringly around the furry nuts  
of the terrible puss, who is mentally flexing.  
Ah be with me always, spirit of noisy  
contemplation in the studio, the Garden  
of Zoos, the eternally fixed afternoons!  
There, while music scratches its scrofulous  
stomach, the brute beast emerges and stands,  
clear and careful, knowing always the exact peril  
at this moment caressing his fangs with  
a tongue given wholly to luxurious usages;  
which only a moment before dropped aspirin  
in this sunset of roses, and now throws a chair  
in the air to aggravate the truly menacing.

Frank O'Hara

# Chinamen Jump

At night Chinamen jump  
on Asia with a thump  
while in our willful way  
we, in secret, play

affectionate games and bruise  
our knees like China's shoes.

The birds push apples through  
grass the moon turns blue,

these apples roll beneath  
our buttocks like a heath

full of Chinese thrushes  
flushed from China's bushes.

As we love at night  
birds sing out of sight,

Chinese rhythms beat  
through us in our heat,

the apples and the birds  
move us like soft words,

we couple in the grace  
of that mysterious race.

Frank O'Hara

# Digression On Number 1, 1948

I am ill today but I am not  
too ill. I am not ill at all.  
It is a perfect day, warm  
for winter, cold for fall.

A fine day for seeing. I see  
ceramics, during lunch hour, by  
Miró, and I see the sea by Leger;  
light, complicated Metzingers  
and a rude awakening by Brauner,  
a little table by Picasso, pink.

I am tired today but I am not  
too tired. I am not tired at all.  
There is the Pollock, white, harm  
will not fall, his perfect hand

and the many short voyages. They'll  
never fence the silver range.  
Stars are out and there is sea  
enough beneath the glistening earth  
to bear me toward the future  
which is not so dark. I see.

[Click here to view the painting this poem was written about:  
Jackson Pollock's "Number 1 \(1948\)"](#)

Frank O'Hara



## Five Poems

Well now, hold on  
maybe I won't go to sleep at all  
and it'll be a beautiful white night  
or else I'll collapse  
completely from nerves and be calm  
as a rug or a bottle of pills  
or suddenly I'll be off Montauk  
swimming and loving it and not caring where

—

an invitation to lunch  
HOW DO YOU LIKE THAT?  
when I only have 16 cents and 2  
packages of yoghurt  
there's a lesson in that, isn't there  
like in Chinese poetry when a leaf falls?  
hold off on the yoghurt till the very  
last, when everything may improve

—

at the Rond-Point they were eating  
an oyster, but here  
we were dropping by sculptures  
and seeing some paintings  
and the smasheroo-grates of Cadoret  
and music by Varese, too  
well Adolph Gottlieb I guess you  
are the hero of this day  
along with venison and Bill

I'll sleep on the yoghurt and dream of the Persian Gulf

—

which I did it was wonderful  
to be in bed again and the knock  
on my door for once signified "hi there";

and on the deafening walk  
through the ghettos where bombs have gone off lately  
left by subway violators  
I knew why I love taxis, yes  
subways are only fun when you're feeling sexy  
and who feels sexy after The Blue Angel  
well maybe a little bit

—

I seem to be defying fate, or am I avoiding it?

Frank O'Hara

## For Grace, After A Party

You do not always know what I am feeling.  
Last night in the warm spring air while I was  
blazing my tirade against someone who doesn't  
interest

me, it was love for you that set me  
afire,

and isn't it odd? for in rooms full of  
strangers my most tender feelings

writhe and

bear the fruit of screaming. Put out your hand,  
isn't there

an ashtray, suddenly, there? beside  
the bed? And someone you love enters the room  
and says wouldn't

you like the eggs a little

different today?

And when they arrive they are  
just plain scrambled eggs and the warm weather  
is holding.

Frank O'Hara

# Having A Coke With You

is even more fun than going to San Sebastian, Irún, Hendaye, Biarritz, Bayonne  
or being sick to my stomach on the Travesera de Gracia in Barcelona  
partly because in your orange shirt you look like a better happier St. Sebastian  
partly because of my love for you, partly because of your love for yoghurt  
partly because of the fluorescent orange tulips around the birches  
partly because of the secrecy our smiles take on before people and statuary  
it is hard to believe when I'm with you that there can be anything as still  
as solemn as unpleasantly definitive as statuary when right in front of it  
in the warm New York 4 o'clock light we are drifting back and forth  
between each other like a tree breathing through its spectacles

and the portrait show seems to have no faces in it at all, just paint  
you suddenly wonder why in the world anyone ever did them

I look

at you and I would rather look at you than all the portraits in the world  
except possibly for the Polish Rider occasionally and anyway it's in the Frick  
which thank heavens you haven't gone to yet so we can go together the first  
time

and the fact that you move so beautifully more or less takes care of Futurism  
just as at home I never think of the Nude Descending a Staircase or  
at a rehearsal a single drawing of Leonardo or Michelangelo that used to wow me  
and what good does all the research of the Impressionists do them  
when they never got the right person to stand near the tree when the sun sank  
or for that matter Marino Marini when he didn't pick the rider as carefully  
as the horse

it seems they were all cheated of some marvelous experience  
which is not going to go wasted on me which is why I am telling you about it

Frank O'Hara

# Homosexuality

So we are taking off our masks, are we, and keeping  
our mouths shut? as if we'd been pierced by a glance!

The song of an old cow is not more full of judgment  
than the vapors which escape one's soul when one is sick;

so I pull the shadows around me like a puff  
and crinkle my eyes as if at the most exquisite moment

of a very long opera, and then we are off!  
without reproach and without hope that our delicate feet

will touch the earth again, let alone "very soon."  
It is the law of my own voice I shall investigate.

I start like ice, my finger to my ear, my ear  
to my heart, that proud cur at the garbage can

in the rain. It's wonderful to admire oneself  
with complete candor, tallying up the merits of each

of the latrines. 14th Street is drunken and credulous,  
53 rd tries to tremble but is too at rest. The good

love a park and the inept a railway station,  
and there are the divine ones who drag themselves up

and down the lengthening shadow of an Abyssinian head  
in the dust, trailing their long elegant heels of hot air

crying to confuse the brave "It's a summer day,  
and I want to be wanted more than anything else in the world."

Frank O'Hara

# In Memory Of My Feelings

My quietness has a man in it, he is transparent  
and he carries me quietly, like a gondola, through the streets.  
He has several likenesses, like stars and years, like numerals.

My quietness has a number of naked selves,  
so many pistols I have borrowed to protect myself  
from creatures who too readily recognize my weapons  
and have murder in their heart!

Though in winter

they are warm as roses, in the desert  
taste of chilled anisette.

At times, withdrawn,

I rise into the cool skies

and gaze on at the imponderable world with the simple identification  
of my colleagues, the mountains. Manfred climbs to my nape,  
speaks, but I do not hear him,  
I'm too blue.

An elephant takes up his trumpet,

money flutters from the windows of cries, silk stretching its mirror  
across shoulder blades. A gun is "fired."

One of me rushes

to window #13 and one of me raises his whip and one of me  
flutters up from the center of the track amidst the pink flamingoes,  
and underneath their hooves as they round the last turn my lips  
are scarred and brown, brushed by tails, masked in dirt's lust,  
definition, open mouths gasping for the cries of the bettors for the lungs  
of earth.

So many of my transparencies could not resist the race!

Terror in earth, dried mushrooms, pink feathers, tickets,  
a flaking moon drifting across the muddied teeth,  
the imperceptible moan of covered breathing,  
love of the serpent!

I am underneath its leaves as the hunter crackles and pants  
and bursts, as the barrage balloon drifts behind a cloud  
and animal death whips out its flashlight,  
whistling

and slipping the glove off the trigger hand. The serpent's eyes  
redde at sight of those thorny fingernails, he is so smooth!

My transparent selves

flail about like vipers in a pail, writhing and hissing  
without panic, with a certain justice of response  
and presently the aquiline serpent comes to resemble the Medusa.

Frank O'Hara

# Jane Awake

The opals hiding your lids  
as you sleep, as you ride ponies  
mysteriously, spring to bloom  
like the blue flowers of autumn

each nine o'clock. And curls  
tumble languorously towards  
the yawning rubber band, tan,  
your hand pressing all that

riotous black sleep into  
the quiet form of daylight  
and its sunny disregard for  
the luminous volutions, oh!

and the budding waltzes  
we swoop through in nights.  
Before dawn you roar with  
your eyes shut, unsmiling,

your volcanic flesh hides  
everything from the watchman,  
and the tendrils of dreams  
strangle policemen running by

too slowly to escape you,  
the racing vertiginous waves  
of your murmuring need. But  
he is day's guardian saint

that policeman, and leaning  
from your open window you ask  
him what to dress to wear and  
to comb your hair modestly,

for that is now your mode.  
Only by chance tripping on stairs  
do you repeat the dance, and  
then, in the perfect variety of



subdued, impeccably disguised,  
white black pink blue saffron  
and golden ambiance, do we find  
the nightly savage, in a trance.

Frank O'Hara

# Lines For The Fortune Cookies

I think you're wonderful and so does everyone else.

Just as Jackie Kennedy has a baby boy, so will you--even bigger.

You will meet a tall beautiful blonde stranger, and you will not say hello.

You will take a long trip and you will be very happy, though alone.

You will marry the first person who tells you your eyes are like scrambled eggs.

In the beginning there was YOU--there will always be YOU, I guess.

You will write a great play and it will run for three performances.

Please phone The Village Voice immediately: they want to interview you.

Roger L. Stevens and Kermit Bloomgarden have their eyes on you.

Relax a little; one of your most celebrated nervous tics will be your undoing.

Your first volume of poetry will be published as soon as you finish it.

You may be a hit uptown, but downtown you're legendary!

Your walk has a musical quality which will bring you fame and fortune.

You will eat cake.

Who do you think you are, anyway? Jo Van Fleet?

You think your life is like Pirandello, but it's really like O'Neill.

A few dance lessons with James Waring and who knows? Maybe something will happen.

That's not a run in your stocking, it's a hand on your leg.

I realize you've lived in France, but that doesn't mean you know EVERYTHING!

You should wear white more often--it becomes you.

The next person to speak to you will have a very intriguing proposal to make.

A lot of people in this room wish they were you.

Have you been to Mike Goldberg's show? Al Leslie's? Lee Krasner's?

At times, your disinterestedness may seem insincere, to strangers.

Now that the election's over, what are you going to do with yourself?

You are a prisoner in a croissant factory and you love it.

You eat meat. Why do you eat meat?

Beyond the horizon there is a vale of gloom.

You too could be Premier of France, if only ... if only...

Frank O'Hara

# Mayakovsky

1

My heart's aflutter!  
I am standing in the bath tub  
crying. Mother, mother  
who am I? If he  
will just come back once  
and kiss me on the face  
his coarse hair brush  
my temple, it's throbbing!

then I can put on my clothes  
I guess, and walk the streets.

2

I love you. I love you,  
but I'm turning to my verses  
and my heart is closing  
like a fist.

Words! be  
sick as I am sick, swoon,  
roll back your eyes, a pool,

and I'll stare down  
at my wounded beauty  
which at best is only a talent  
for poetry.

Cannot please, cannot charm or win  
what a poet!  
and the clear water is thick

with bloody blows on its head.  
I embrace a cloud,  
but when I soared  
it rained.

3

That's funny! there's blood on my chest

oh yes, I've been carrying bricks  
what a funny place to rupture!  
and now it is raining on the ailanthus  
as I step out onto the window ledge  
the tracks below me are smoky and  
glistening with a passion for running  
I leap into the leaves, green like the sea

4

Now I am quietly waiting for  
the catastrophe of my personality  
to seem beautiful again,  
and interesting, and modern.

The country is grey and  
brown and white in trees,  
snows and skies of laughter  
always diminishing, less funny  
not just darker, not just grey.

It may be the coldest day of  
the year, what does he think of  
that? I mean, what do I? And if I do,  
perhaps I am myself again.

Frank O'Hara

# Meditations In An Emergency

Am I to become profligate as if I were a blonde? Or religious  
as if I were French?

Each time my heart is broken it makes me feel more adventurous  
(and how the same names keep recurring on that interminable  
list!), but one of these days there'll be nothing left with  
which to venture forth.

Why should I share you? Why don't you get rid of someone else  
for a change?

I am the least difficult of men. All I want is boundless love.

Even trees understand me! Good heavens, I lie under them, too,  
don't I? I'm just like a pile of leaves.

However, I have never clogged myself with the praises of  
pastoral life, nor with nostalgia for an innocent past of  
perverted acts in pastures. No. One need never leave the  
confines of New York to get all the greenery one wishes--I can't  
even enjoy a blade of grass unless i know there's a subway  
handy, or a record store or some other sign that people do not  
totally \_regret\_ life. It is more important to affirm the  
least sincere; the clouds get enough attention as it is and  
even they continue to pass. Do they know what they're missing?  
Uh huh.

My eyes are vague blue, like the sky, and change all the time;  
they are indiscriminate but fleeting, entirely specific and  
disloyal, so that no one trusts me. I am always looking away.  
Or again at something after it has given me up. It makes me  
restless and that makes me unhappy, but I cannot keep them  
still. If only i had grey, green, black, brown, yellow eyes; I  
would stay at home and do something. It's not that I'm  
curious. On the contrary, I am bored but it's my duty to be  
attentive, I am needed by things as the sky must be above the  
earth. And lately, so great has \_their\_ anxiety become, I can  
spare myself little sleep.

Now there is only one man I like to kiss when he is unshaven.  
Heterosexuality! you are inexorably approaching. (How best  
discourage her?)

St. Serapion, I wrap myself in the robes of your whiteness  
which is like midnight in Dostoevsky. How I am to become a  
legend, my dear? I've tried love, but that holds you in the  
bosom of another and I'm always springing forth from it like  
the lotus--the ecstasy of always bursting forth! (but one must  
not be distracted by it!) or like a hyacinth, "to keep the  
filth of life away," yes, even in the heart, where the filth is  
pumped in and slanders and pollutes and determines. I will my  
will, though I may become famous for a mysterious vacancy in  
that department, that greenhouse.

Destroy yourself, if you don't know!

It is easy to be beautiful; it is difficult to appear so. I  
admire you, beloved, for the trap you've set. It's like a  
final chapter no one reads because the plot is over.

"Fanny Brown is run away--scampered off with a Cornet of Horse;  
I do love that little Minx, & hope She may be happy, tho' She  
has vexed me by this exploit a little too.--Poor silly  
Cecchina! or F:B: as we used to call her.--I wish She had a  
good Whipping and 10,000 pounds."--Mrs. Thrale

I've got to get out of here. I choose a piece of shawl and my  
dirtiest suntans. I'll be back, I'll re-emerge, defeated, from  
the valley; you don't want me to go where you go, so I go where  
you don't want me to. It's only afternoon, there's a lot  
ahead. There won't be any mail downstairs. Turning, I spit in  
the lock and the knob turns.

Frank O'Hara

# Melancholy Breakfast

Melancholy breakfast  
blue overhead blue underneath

the silent egg thinks  
and the toaster's electrical  
ear waits

the stars are in  
"that cloud is hid"

the elements of disbelief are  
very strong in the morning

Frank O'Hara



# Morning

I've got to tell you  
how I love you always  
I think of it on grey  
mornings with death

in my mouth the tea  
is never hot enough  
then and the cigarette  
dry the maroon robe

chills me I need you  
and look out the window  
at the noiseless snow

At night on the dock  
the buses glow like  
clouds and I am lonely  
thinking of flutes

I miss you always  
when I go to the beach  
the sand is wet with  
tears that seem mine

although I never weep  
and hold you in my  
heart with a very real  
humor you'd be proud of

the parking lot is  
crowded and I stand  
rattling my keys the car  
is empty as a bicycle

what are you doing now  
where did you eat your  
lunch and were there  
lots of anchovies it

is difficult to think  
of you without me in  
the sentence you depress  
me when you are alone

Last night the stars  
were numerous and today  
snow is their calling  
card I'll not be cordial

there is nothing that  
distracts me music is  
only a crossword puzzle  
do you know how it is

when you are the only  
passenger if there is a  
place further from me  
I beg you do not go

Frank O'Hara

# Music

If I rest for a moment near The Equestrian  
pausing for a liver sausage sandwich in the Mayflower Shoppe,  
that angel seems to be leading the horse into Bergdorf's  
and I am naked as a table cloth, my nerves humming.  
Close to the fear of war and the stars which have disappeared.  
I have in my hands only 35c, it's so meaningless to eat!  
and gusts of water spray over the basins of leaves  
like the hammers of a glass pianoforte. If I seem to you  
to have lavender lips under the leaves of the world,  
I must tighten my belt.  
It's like a locomotive on the march, the season  
of distress and clarity  
and my door is open to the evenings of midwinter's  
lightly falling snow over the newspapers.  
Clasp me in your handkerchief like a tear, trumpet  
of early afternoon! in the foggy autumn.  
As they're putting up the Christmas trees on Park Avenue  
I shall see my daydreams walking by with dogs in blankets,  
put to some use before all those coloured lights come on!  
But no more fountains and no more rain,  
and the stores stay open terribly late.

Frank O'Hara

# My Heart

I'm not going to cry all the time  
nor shall I laugh all the time,  
I don't prefer one "strain" to another.  
I'd have the immediacy of a bad movie,  
not just a sleeper, but also the big,  
overproduced first-run kind. I want to be  
at least as alive as the vulgar. And if  
some aficionado of my mess says "That's  
not like Frank!", all to the good! I  
don't wear brown and grey suits all the time,  
do I? No. I wear workshirts to the opera,  
often. I want my feet to be bare,  
I want my face to be shaven, and my heart--  
you can't plan on the heart, but  
the better part of it, my poetry, is open.

Frank O'Hara

# On Seeing Larry Rivers' Washington Crossing The Delaware At The Museum Of Modern Art

Now that our hero has come back to us  
in his white pants and we know his nose  
trembling like a flag under fire,  
we see the calm cold river is supporting  
our forces, the beautiful history.

To be more revolutionary than a nun  
is our desire, to be secular and intimate  
as, when sighting a redcoat, you smile  
and pull the trigger. Anxieties  
and animosities, flaming and feeding

on theoretical considerations and  
the jealous spiritualities of the abstract  
the robot? they're smoke, billows above  
the physical event. They have burned up.  
See how free we are! as a nation of persons.

Dear father of our country, so alive  
you must have lied incessantly to be  
immediate, here are your bones crossed  
on my breast like a rusty flintlock,  
a pirate's flag, bravely specific

and ever so light in the misty glare  
of a crossing by water in winter to a shore  
other than that the bridge reaches for.  
Don't shoot until, the white of freedom glinting  
on your gun barrel, you see the general fear.

Click [here](#) to view the painting this poem was written about:  
Washington Crossing The Delaware"



## Personal Poem

Now when I walk around at lunchtime  
I have only two charms in my pocket  
an old Roman coin Mike Kanemitsu gave me  
and a bolt-head that broke off a packing case  
when I was in Madrid the others never  
brought me too much luck though they did  
help keep me in New York against coercion  
but now I'm happy for a time and interested

I walk through the luminous humidity  
passing the House of Seagram with its wet  
and its loungers and the construction to  
the left that closed the sidewalk if  
I ever get to be a construction worker  
I'd like to have a silver hat please  
and get to Moriarty's where I wait for  
LeRoi and hear who wants to be a mover and  
shaker the last five years my batting average  
is .016 that's that, and LeRoi comes in  
and tells me Miles Davis was clubbed 12  
times last night outside BIRDLAND by a cop  
a lady asks us for a nickel for a terrible  
disease but we don't give her one we  
don't like terrible diseases, then  
we go eat some fish and some ale it's  
cool but crowded we don't like Lionel Trilling  
we decide, we like Don Allen we don't like  
Henry James so much we like Herman Melville  
we don't want to be in the poets' walk in  
San Francisco even we just want to be rich  
and walk on girders in our silver hats  
I wonder if one person out of the 8,000,000 is  
thinking of me as I shake hands with LeRoi  
and buy a strap for my wristwatch and go  
back to work happy at the thought possibly so

Frank O'Hara

## Poem (At night Chinamen jump)

At night Chinamen jump  
on Asia with a thump

while in our willful way  
we, in secret, play

affectionate games and bruise  
our knees like China's shoes.

The birds push apples through  
grass the moon turns blue,

these apples roll beneath  
our buttocks like a heath

full of Chinese thrushes  
flushed from China's bushes.

As we love at night  
birds sing out of sight,

Chinese rhythms beat  
through us in our heat,

the apples and the birds  
move us like soft words,

we couple in the grace  
of that mysterious race.

Frank O'Hara



## Poem (Hate Is Only One Of Many Responses)

Hate is only one of many responses  
true, hurt and hate go hand in hand  
but why be afraid of hate, it is only there  
think of filth, is it really awesome  
neither is hate  
don't be shy of unkindness, either  
it's cleansing and allows you to be direct  
like an arrow that feels something

out and out meanness, too, lets love breathe  
you don't have to fight off getting in too deep  
you can always get out if you're not too scared

an ounce of prevention's  
enough to poison the heart  
don't think of others  
until you have thought of yourself, are true

all of these things, if you feel them  
will be graced by a certain reluctance  
and turn into gold

if felt by me, will be smilingly deflected  
by your mysterious concern

Frank O'Hara

## Poem (Lana Turner Has Collapsed!)

Lana Turner has collapsed!  
I was trotting along and suddenly  
it started raining and snowing  
and you said it was hailing  
but hailing hits you on the head  
hard so it was really snowing and  
raining and I was in such a hurry  
to meet you but the traffic  
was acting exactly like the sky  
and suddenly I see a headline  
LANA TURNER HAS COLLAPSED!  
there is no snow in Hollywood  
there is no rain in California  
I have been to lots of parties  
and acted perfectly disgraceful  
but I never actually collapsed  
oh Lana Turner we love you get up

Frank O'Hara

# Poem [“Khrushchev is coming on the right day!”]

Krushchev is coming on the right day!

the cool graced light  
is pushed off the enormous glass piers by hard wind  
and everything is tossing, hurrying on up

this country  
has everything but politesse, a Puerto Rican cab driver says  
and five different girls I see

look like Piedie Gimbel  
with her blonde hair tossing too,  
as she looked when I pushed  
her little daughter on the swing on the lawn it was also windy

last night we went to a movie and came out,

Ionesco is greater  
than Beckett, Vincent said, that's what I think, blueberry blintzes  
and Khrushchev was probably being carped at

in Washington, no  
politesse  
Vincent tells me about his mother's trip to Sweden

Hans tells us  
about his father's life in Sweden, it sounds like Grace Hartigan's  
painting Sweden

so I go home to bed and names drift through my  
headPurgatorio Mercado, Gerhard Schwartz and Gaspar Gonzales,□ all  
unknown figures of the early morning as I go to work

where does the evil of the year go

when September takes New York  
and turns it into ozone stalagmites

deposits of light  
so I get back up  
make coffee, and read François Villon, his life, so dark

New York seems blinding and my tie is blowing up the street  
I wish it would blow off

though it is cold and somewhat warms  
my neck  
as the train bears Krushchev on to Pennsylvania Station

and the light seems to be eternal  
and joy seems to be inexorable  
I am foolish enough always to find it in wind

Frank O'Hara

## Poem [‘The eager note on my door said, ‘Call me,’’]

The eager note on my door said ‘Call me,  
call when you get in!’ so I quickly threw  
a few tangerines into my overnight bag,  
straightened my eyelids and shoulders, and

headed straight for the door. It was autumn  
by the time I got around the corner, oh all  
unwilling to be either pertinent or bemused, but  
the leaves were brighter than grass on the sidewalk!

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there in the hall, flat on a sheet of blood that  
ran down the stairs. I did appreciate it. There are few  
hosts who so thoroughly prepare to greet a guest  
only casually invited, and that several months ago.

Frank O'Hara

# POEM EN FORME DE SAW

I ducked out of sight behind the saw-mill  
nobody saw me because of the falls the gates the sluice the tourist boats  
the children were trailing their fingers in the water  
and the swans, regal and smarty, were nipping their "little" fingers  
i heard on swan remark "That was a good nip  
though they are not as interesting as sausages" and another  
reply "Nor as tasty as those peasants we got away from the elephant that  
time";  
but i didn't really care for conversation that day  
i wanted to be alone  
which is why i went to the mill in the first place  
now i am alone and hate it  
i don't want to just make boards for the rest of my life  
i'm distressed  
the water is very beautiful but you can't go into it  
because of the gunk  
and the dog is always rolling over, i like dogs on their "little" feet  
i think i may scamper off to Winnipeg to see Raymond  
but what'll happen to the mill  
i see the cobwebs collecting already  
and later those other webs, those awful predatory webs  
if i stay right here i will eventually get into the newspapers  
like Robert Frost  
willow trees, willow trees they remind me of Desdemona  
i'm so damned literary  
and at the same time the waters rushing past remind me of nothing  
i'm so damned empty  
what is all this vessel shit anyway  
we are all rushing down the River Happy Times  
ducking poling bumping sinking and swimming  
and we arrive at the beach  
the chaff is sand  
alone as a tree bumping another tree in a storm  
that's not really being alone, is it, signed The Saw

Frank O'Hara

# Rhapsody

515 Madison Avenue  
door to heaven? portal  
stopped realities and eternal licentiousness  
or at least the jungle of impossible eagerness  
your marble is bronze and your lianas elevator cables  
swinging from the myth of ascending  
I would join  
or declining the challenge of racial attractions  
they zing on (into the lynch, dear friends)  
while everywhere love is breathing draftily  
like a doorway linking 53rd with 54th  
the east-bound with the west-bound traffic by 8,000,000s  
o midtown tunnels and the tunnels, too, of Holland

where is the summit where all aims are clear  
the pin-point light upon a fear of lust  
as agony's needlework grows up around the unicorn  
and fences him for milk- and yoghurt-work  
when I see Gianni I know he's thinking of John Ericson  
playing the Rachmaninoff 2nd or Elizabeth Taylor  
taking sleeping-pills and Jane thinks of Manderley  
and Irkutsk while I cough lightly in the smog of desire  
and my eyes water achingly imitating the true blue

a sight of Manahatta in the towering needle  
multi-faceted insight of the fly in the stringless labyrinth  
Canada plans a higher place than the Empire State Building  
I am getting into a cab at 9th Street and 1st Avenue  
and the Negro driver tells me about a \$120 apartment  
"where you can't walk across the floor after 10 at night  
not even to pee, cause it keeps them awake downstairs"  
no, I don't like that "well, I didn't take it"  
perfect in the hot humid morning on my way to work  
a little supper-club conversation for the mill of the gods

you were there always and you know all about these things  
as indifferent as an encyclopedia with your calm brown eyes  
it isn't enough to smile when you run the gauntlet  
you've got to spit like Niagara Falls on everybody or

Victoria Falls or at least the beautiful urban fountains of Madrid  
as the Niger joins the Gulf of Guinea near the Menemsha Bar  
that is what you learn in the early morning passing Madison Avenue  
where you've never spent any time and stores eat up light

I have always wanted to be near it  
though the day is long (and I don't mean Madison Avenue)  
lying in a hammock on St. Mark's Place sorting my poems  
in the rancid nourishment of this mountainous island  
they are coming and we holy ones must go  
is Tibet historically a part of China? as I historically  
belong to the enormous bliss of American death

Frank O'Hara



# Sleeping On The Wing

Perhaps it is to avoid some great sadness,  
as in a Restoration tragedy the hero cries 'Sleep!  
O for a long sound sleep and so forget it! '  
that one flies, soaring above the shoreless city,  
veering upward from the pavement as a pigeon  
does when a car honks or a door slams, the door  
of dreams, life perpetuated in parti-colored loves  
and beautiful lies all in different languages.

Fear drops away too, like the cement, and you  
are over the Atlantic. Where is Spain? where is  
who? The Civil War was fought to free the slaves,  
was it? A sudden down-draught reminds you of gravity  
and your position in respect to human love. But  
here is where the gods are, speculating, bemused.  
Once you are helpless, you are free, can you believe  
that? Never to waken to the sad struggle of a face?  
to travel always over some impersonal vastness,  
to be out of, forever, neither in nor for!

The eyes roll asleep as if turned by the wind  
and the lids flutter open slightly like a wing.  
The world is an iceberg, so much is invisible!  
and was and is, and yet the form, it may be sleeping  
too. Those features etched in the ice of someone  
loved who died, you are a sculptor dreaming of space  
and speed, your hand alone could have done this.  
Curiosity, the passionate hand of desire. Dead,  
or sleeping? Is there speed enough? And, swooping,  
you relinquish all that you have made your own,  
the kingdom of your self sailing, for you must awake  
and breathe your warmth in this beloved image  
whether it's dead or merely disappearing,  
as space is disappearing and your singularity

Frank O'Hara

## Song (Did You See Me Walking By The Buick Repairs?)

Did you see me walking by the Buick Repairs?  
I was thinking of you  
having a Coke in the heat it was your face  
I saw on the movie magazine, no it was Fabian's  
I was thinking of you  
and down at the railroad tracks where the station  
has mysteriously disappeared  
I was thinking of you  
as the bus pulled away in the twilight  
I was thinking of you  
and right now

Anonymous submission.

Frank O'Hara

## Song (Is It Dirty)

Is it dirty  
does it look dirty  
that's what you think of in the city

does it just seem dirty  
that's what you think of in the city  
you don't refuse to breathe do you

someone comes along with a very bad character  
he seems attractive. is he really. yes. very  
he's attractive as his character is bad. is it. yes

that's what you think of in the city  
run your finger along your no-moss mind  
that's not a thought that's soot

and you take a lot of dirt off someone  
is the character less bad. no. it improves constantly  
you don't refuse to breathe do you

Frank O'Hara

# Spleen

I know so much  
about things, I accept  
so much, it's like  
vomiting. And I am  
nourished by the  
shabbiness of my  
knowing so much  
about others and what  
they do, and accepting  
so much that I hate  
as if I didn't know  
what it is, to me.  
And what it is to  
them I know, and hate.

Frank O'Hara

# Steps

How funny you are today New York  
like Ginger Rogers in Swingtime  
and St. Bridget's steeple leaning a little to the left

here I have just jumped out of a bed full of V-days  
(I got tired of D-days) and blue you there still  
accepts me foolish and free  
all I want is a room up there  
and you in it  
and even the traffic halt so thick is a way  
for people to rub up against each other  
and when their surgical appliances lock  
they stay together  
for the rest of the day (what a day)  
I go by to check a slide and I say  
that painting's not so blue

where's Lana Turner  
she's out eating  
and Garbo's backstage at the Met  
everyone's taking their coat off  
so they can show a rib-cage to the rib-watchers  
and the park's full of dancers with their tights and shoes  
in little bags  
who are often mistaken for worker-outers at the West Side Y  
why not  
the Pittsburgh Pirates shout because they won  
and in a sense we're all winning  
we're alive

the apartment was vacated by a gay couple  
who moved to the country for fun  
they moved a day too soon  
even the stabbings are helping the population explosion  
though in the wrong country  
and all those liars have left the UN  
the Seagram Building's no longer rivalled in interest  
not that we need liquor (we just like it)

and the little box is out on the sidewalk  
next to the delicatessen  
so the old man can sit on it and drink beer  
and get knocked off it by his wife later in the day  
while the sun is still shining

oh god it's wonderful  
to get out of bed  
and drink too much coffee  
and smoke too many cigarettes  
and love you so much

Frank O'Hara

# The Day Lady Died

It is 12:20 in New York a Friday  
three days after Bastille day, yes  
it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine  
because I will get off the 4:19 in Easthampton  
at 7:15 and then go straight to dinner  
and I don't know the people who will feed me

I walk up the muggy street beginning to sun  
and have a hamburger and a malted and buy  
an ugly NEW WORLD WRITING to see what the poets  
in Ghana are doing these days

I go on to the bank  
and Miss Stillwagon (first name Linda I once heard)  
doesn't even look up my balance for once in her life  
and in the GOLDEN GRIFFIN I get a little Verlaine  
for Patsy with drawings by Bonnard although I do  
think of Hesiod, trans. Richmond Lattimore or  
Brendan Behan's new play or Le Balcon or Les Nègres  
of Genet, but I don't, I stick with Verlaine  
after practically going to sleep with quandariness

and for Mike I just stroll into the PARK LANE  
Liquor Store and ask for a bottle of Strega and  
then I go back where I came from to 6th Avenue  
and the tobacconist in the Ziegfeld Theatre and  
casually ask for a carton of Gauloises and a carton  
of Picayunes, and a NEW YORK POST with her face on it

and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of  
leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT  
while she whispered a song along the keyboard  
to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing

Frank O'Hara

# The Eager Note On My Door Said "Call Me,"

The eager note on my door said "Call me,"  
call when you get in!" so I quickly threw  
a few tangerines into my overnight bag,  
straightened my eyelids and shoulders, and

headed straight for the door. It was autumn  
by the time I got around the corner, oh all  
unwilling to be either pertinent or bemused, but  
the leaves were brighter than grass on the sidewalk!

Funny, I thought, that the lights are on this late  
and the hall door open; still up at this hour, a  
champion jai-alai player like himself? Oh fie!  
for shame! What a host, so zealous! And he was

there in the hall, flat on a sheet of blood that  
ran down the stairs. I did appreciate it. There are few  
hosts who so thoroughly prepare to greet a guest  
only casually invited, and that several months ago.

Frank O'Hara



# To The Film Industry In Crisis

Not you, lean quarterlies and swarthy periodicals  
with your studious incursions toward the pomposity of ants,  
nor you, experimental theatre in which Emotive Fruition  
is wedding Poetic Insight perpetually, nor you,  
promenading Grand Opera, obvious as an ear (though you  
are close to my heart), but you, Motion Picture Industry,  
it's you I love!

In times of crisis, we must all decide again and again whom we love.  
And give credit where it's due: not to my starched nurse, who taught me  
how to be bad and not bad rather than good (and has lately availed  
herself of this information), not to the Catholic Church  
which is at best an oversolemn introduction to cosmic entertainment,  
not to the American Legion, which hates everybody, but to you,  
glorious Silver Screen, tragic Technicolor, amorous Cinemascope,  
stretching Vistavision and startling Stereophonic Sound, with all  
your heavenly dimensions and reverberations and iconoclasm! To  
Richard Barthelmess as the 'tol'able' boy barefoot and in pants,  
Jeanette MacDonald of the flaming hair and lips and long, long neck,  
Sue Carroll as she sits for eternity on the damaged fender of a car  
and smiles, Ginger Rogers with her pageboy bob like a sausage  
on her shuffling shoulders, peach-melba-voiced Fred Astaire of the feet,  
Eric von Stroheim, the seducer of mountain-climbers' gasping spouses,  
the Tarzans, each and every one of you (I cannot bring myself to prefer  
Johnny Weissmuller to Lex Barker, I cannot!), Mae West in a furry sled,  
her bordello radiance and bland remarks, Rudolph Valentino of the moon,  
its crushing passions, and moonlike, too, the gentle Norma Shearer,  
Miriam Hopkins dropping her champagne glass off Joel McCrea's yacht,  
and crying into the dappled sea, Clark Gable rescuing Gene Tierney  
from Russia and Allan Jones rescuing Kitty Carlisle from Harpo Marx,  
Cornel Wilde coughing blood on the piano keys while Merle Oberon berates,  
Marilyn Monroe in her little spike heels reeling through Niagara Falls,  
Joseph Cotten puzzling and Orson Welles puzzled and Dolores del Rio  
eating orchids for lunch and breaking mirrors, Gloria Swanson reclining,  
and Jean Harlow reclining and wiggling, and Alice Faye reclining  
and wiggling and singing, Myrna Loy being calm and wise, William Powell  
in his stunning urbanity, Elizabeth Taylor blossoming, yes, to you  
and to all you others, the great, the near-great, the featured, the extras  
who pass quickly and return in dreams saying your one or two lines,

my love!

Long may you illumine space with your marvellous appearances, delays  
and enunciations, and may the money of the world glitteringly cover you  
as you rest after a long day under the kleig lights with your faces  
in packs for our edification, the way the clouds come often at night  
but the heavens operate on the star system. It is a divine precedent  
you perpetuate! Roll on, reels of celluloid, as the great earth rolls on!

Frank O'Hara

# To The Harbormaster

I wanted to be sure to reach you;  
though my ship was on the way it got caught  
in some moorings. I am always tying up  
and then deciding to depart. In storms and  
at sunset, with the metallic coils of the tide  
around my fathomless arms, I am unable  
to understand the forms of my vanity  
or I am hard alee with my Polish rudder  
in my hand and the sun sinking. To  
you I offer my hull and the tattered cordage  
of my will. The terrible channels where  
the wind drives me against the brown lips  
of the reeds are not all behind me. Yet  
I trust the sanity of my vessel; and  
if it sinks it may well be in answer  
to the reasoning of the eternal voices,  
the waves which have kept me from reaching you.

Frank O'Hara

# Today

Oh! kangaroos, sequins, chocolate sodas!  
You really are beautiful! Pearls,  
harmonicas, jujubes, aspirins! all  
the stuff they've always talked about

still makes a poem a surprise!  
These things are with us every day  
even on beachheads and biers. They  
do have meaning. They're strong as rocks.

Frank O'Hara

## V.R. Lang

You are so serious, as if  
a glacier spoke in your ear  
or you had to walk through  
the great gate of Kiev  
to get to the living room.

I worry about this because I  
love you. As if it weren't grotesque  
enough that we live in hydrogen  
and breathe like atomizers, you  
have to think I'm a great architect!

and you float regally by on your  
incessant escalator, calm, a jungle queen.  
Thinking it a steam shovel. Looking  
a little uneasy. But you are yourself  
again, yanking silver beads off your neck.

Remember, the Russian Easter Overture  
is full of bunnies. Be always high,  
full of regard and honor and lanolin. Oh  
ride horseback in pink linen, be happy!  
and ride with your beads on, because it rains.

Frank O'Hara

# Why I Am Not A Painter

I am not a painter, I am a poet.  
Why? I think I would rather be  
a painter, but I am not. Well,

for instance, Mike Goldberg  
is starting a painting. I drop in.  
"Sit down and have a drink" he  
says. I drink; we drink. I look  
up. "You have SARDINES in it."  
"Yes, it needed something there."  
"Oh." I go and the days go by  
and I drop in again. The painting  
is going on, and I go, and the days  
go by. I drop in. The painting is  
finished. "Where's SARDINES?"  
All that's left is just  
letters, "It was too much," Mike says.

But me? One day I am thinking of  
a color: orange. I write a line  
about orange. Pretty soon it is a  
whole page of words, not lines.  
Then another page. There should be  
so much more, not of orange, of  
words, of how terrible orange is  
and life. Days go by. It is even in  
prose, I am a real poet. My poem  
is finished and I haven't mentioned  
orange yet. It's twelve poems, I call  
it ORANGES. And one day in a gallery  
I see Mike's painting, called SARDINES.

Frank O'Hara

# Yesterday Down at the Canal

You say that everything is very simple and interesting  
it makes me feel very wistful, like reading a great Russian novel does  
i am terribly bored  
sometimes it is like seeing a bad movie  
other days, more often, it's like having an acute disease of the kidney  
god knows it has nothing to do with the heart  
nothing to do with people more interesting than myself  
yak yak  
that's an amusing thought  
how can anyone be more amusing than oneself  
how can anyone fail to be  
can i borrow your forty-five  
i only need one bullet preferably silver  
if you can't be interesting at least you can be a legend  
(but i hate all that crap)

Frank O'Hara