

Classic Poetry Series

Frank O'Hara

- poems -

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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, ´ 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 At 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
to 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
and 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 some 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.

Anonymous submission.

Frank O'Hara

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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

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,

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As we love at night
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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
Mir6, 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

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

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
reddden 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

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"](#)

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

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 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

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