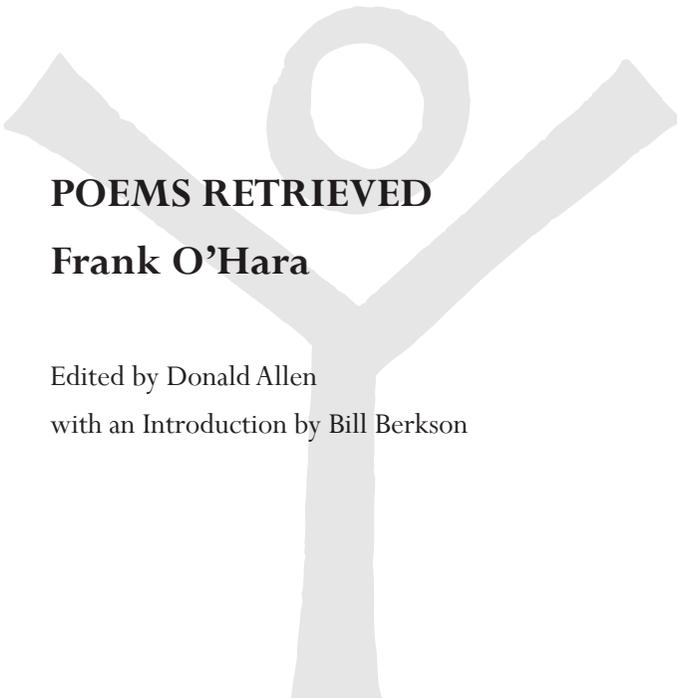


POEMS
RETRIEVED
Frank O'Hara

Edited by Don Allen
with an Introduction by Bill Berkson

ROYAL



POEMS RETRIEVED

Frank O'Hara

Edited by Donald Allen

with an Introduction by Bill Berkson



City Lights / Grey Fox
San Francisco

City
Lights

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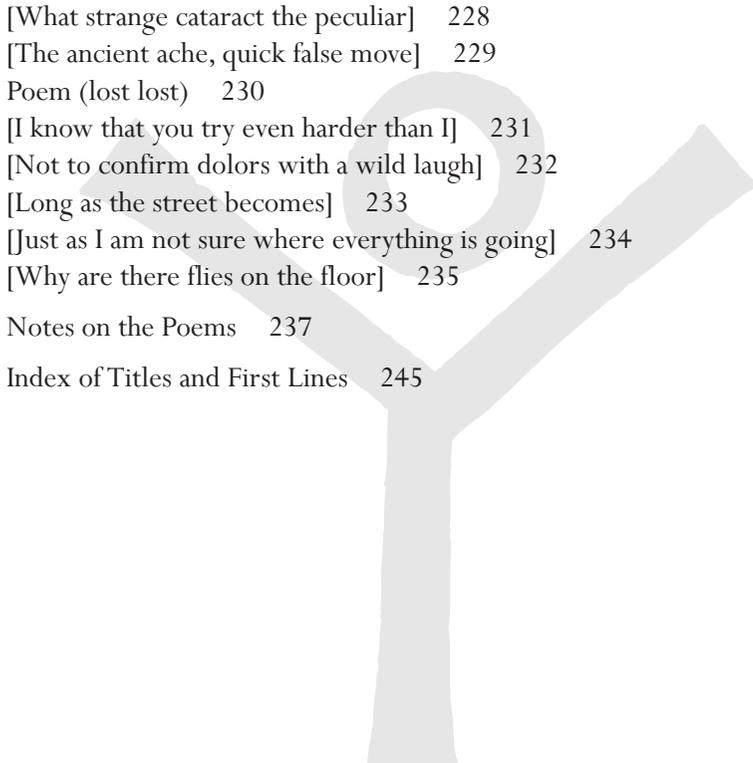
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City Lights

Editor's Note

Frank O'Hara was never very sanguine about publishing his poems. As early as the late spring of 1951, when his M.A. thesis, "A Byzantine Place—50 Poems and a Noh Play," won a major Hopwood award at the University of Michigan, he began to have doubts. On June 6, 1951, he wrote Jane Freilicher: "No publication goes with the Hopwood award, alas, and both Alfred Knopf and Herbert Weinstock of the same 'firm' told me it was next to impossible to publish poetry in our time. I think of this with absolute delight when I think how embarrassing my letters will be for my relatives when they have to dig my poems out of them if I ever do get published. Anyway you could fit the people I write for into your john, all at the same time without raising an eyebrow." (An irony of history: it was that "firm," Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., that published O'Hara's *Collected Poems* in 1971.)

As though to make certain his prediction would come true he proceeded throughout his short life to send poems to friends, to composers, to editors, often without bothering to retain a copy. (This, of course, was before the Xerox machine.) Many poems survive only because they were included in the Hopwood award thesis, for instance, or were carefully preserved by devoted friends and by curators of manuscript collections.

One puzzle was the "Poem" beginning "Here we are again together," which O'Hara wrote in April 1954. When Ben Weber the next year wanted poems to set as songs, O'Hara gave him his only copy of several poems including this one. Weber composed music for the first stanza and published it as his Song Opus 44, in *Folder*, No. 4, 1956. (His setting of the second stanza was not completed.) And it is only through the late Ben Weber's great kindness and generosity that I am now able to present the whole poem in this volume.

When I set out to edit the *Collected Poems* in the late sixties I felt I had little or no indication of what O'Hara himself might have included in such a volume had he lived—apart, that is, from the poems he had already published in books and magazines. True, I had studied a manuscript of some

100 early, short poems in 1961 when he wanted my advice on what to include in *Lunch Poems*. And he had shown me at various times the poems that were later published as *Love Poems*, as well as some longer poems for possible publication in *Evergreen Review*, *The New American Poetry*, and other projected collections. From correspondence with his contemporaries and from his own lists of poems for various proposed publications I was able to add most of the poems that fill out *The Collected Poems*.

But there remained many poems of which I had never heard, or doubted that he would have published without revising, ones that seemed too similar to other poems of the same period or were too fragmentary. In the course of restudying the manuscripts and collecting his correspondence, however, I came to realize that O'Hara at one time or another would most likely have published all of his poems, and that the present volume was the logical and necessary completion of their publication. (It is of course entirely possible that more unknown poems may yet come to light.)

Dates of composition from the manuscripts are given in brackets below the poems; undated poems are placed where any evidence suggests they belong.

I am greatly indebted to Robert Fizdale, Joan Mitchell, Lawrence Osgood, Larry Rivers, Ned Rorem, Ben Weber, and Mary E. Cooley (Secretary, The Hopwood Room, University of Michigan Library), and Mary E. Janzen (MSS Research Specialist, Special Collections, The Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago) for copies of "lost" poems. And I am very grateful to Maureen O'Hara, John Ashbery, Bill Berkson, Zoe Brown, Margaret Cooley, Jane Freilicher, Mike Goldberg, David Kermani, Joseph LeSueur, Duncan MacNaughton, Merle Marsicano, Roger Shattuck, Alex Smith, Patsy Southgate and Anne Waldman for warmly appreciated assistance in preparing this volume for publication.

Donald Allen
1977/1996

Introduction

Bill Berkson

One is always eager to know more of the ins and outs and specific circumstances of Frank O'Hara's poems, including the relations between individual poems and others that they sometimes surprisingly connect to. The more complete the telling, it seems, the greater the mystery of detail. Just as O'Hara could write, "What is happening to me, allowing for lies and exaggerations which I try to avoid, goes into my poems"—a statement at once as mysterious and practical as there has ever been of the relation of poetry to experience—the poems make you curious about their occasions because they are so clear about what happens in them. Of course, as O'Hara also insisted, a poem is its own occasion, and between one poem and the rest, in the wide span of his poetic output, occasions and the poems that rise to them combine and refract in lifelike ways. "Poetry is life to me," after all, was another way of O'Hara's telling what went into his poems.

Many of the poems in *Poems Retrieved* are refractive with others in O'Hara's huge output, as the book itself is with the other compendious books that show his range, thematic, formal and otherwise. Types of poems occur both in and out of sequence; there are surges into new territory and doublings back. The editor Donald Allen's dedication of the book "For Edwin Denby who asked, 'And when will we have the *complete* poems of Frank O'Hara?'" suggests that, together with its companion volume *Early Writing*, which appeared concurrently under Allen's Grey Fox imprint in 1977, he meant both volumes of previously uncollected work to be hinged to the original *Collected Poems* until a new edition (complete, per Denby's urging) could be prepared. Lacking that, the three books stand together as representative of such completion.

Frank O'Hara once speculated that the entirety of William Carlos Williams's poetry was one continuous epic expressive of the man's existence. Similarly, even while returning regularly to the discrete [discretionary?] delights of one or another of O'Hara's poems, to imagine the whole run of

them as bearing the logic of a unitary creation is helpful, too; it reinforces what one early lyric refers to as “this meaning growing,” an articulation of the curiosity and necessity that bind one work to the next. Some of the pieces in *Poems Retrieved* are very slight—fragments, really. Others, especially the very early ones, feel overly convoluted in their rhetorical maneuverings. Yet none are false. Both *Early Writing* and *Poems Retrieved* have their drastic side; as ultimate retrievals, they bypass whatever reservations O’Hara himself might have had about seeing these largely unpublished and otherwise fugitive works in print, even in so candid a setting as each edition proposes. Whatever he may have felt about those poems, the fact is, he retained them. “Because you don’t throw it away it is a poem,” he said once when the issue came up of what to do with things that don’t quite make the grade. Then, too, you can see why he never committed them to print and also why he kept them, because each has something in it distinctly worth keeping.

The retrievals that Donald Allen made of Frank O’Hara’s poems began in 1968 with his sorting through the manuscripts of poetry and prose in cartons and files that Kenneth Koch took away for safekeeping in two suitcases from Frank’s loft at 791 Broadway the night in July 1966 after Frank died—the nearly 700 items that first Kenneth and I and then Frank’s sister Maureen and her husband at the time, Walter Granville-Smith, subsequently photocopied a few weeks later. Together with the versions already published in books, magazines and anthologies, these manuscripts formed the textual basis for what Donald Allen—Don, as I came to know him as a neighbor in Bolinas in the 1970s—would call, when it first appeared, in 1971, “the splendid palace known as *The Collected Poems of Frank O’Hara*.” A pared-down volume, *The Selected Poems of Frank O’Hara*, also edited by Don, came out in 1974, followed the next year by the book of uncollected prose, *Standing Still and Walking in New York*. It was in the latter book that Don first used the term “retrieved.”

Donald Allen and Frank O’Hara became friends during the planning stages of *The New American Poetry*, for which O’Hara served as one of the prime consultants and in which he shares pride of place, by dint of space allotted (fifteen poems on thirty-one pages), a close second to the inclusions of Charles Olson’s poetry. Like Frank, Don had been with the U.S. Navy in the Pacific during World War II; after enlisting in 1941, he

worked with Navy Intelligence, gathering codebooks and data from interrogations and captured soldiers' diaries. By 1957, as the main instigator and editor of *Evergreen Review*, he had printed some of O'Hara's most important poems, including "Why I Am Not a Painter," "A Step Away from Them" and "In Memory of My Feelings," and O'Hara sought his advice on at least two books published in the mid-1960s, as well as two more projected collections that were left unrealized at his death. By no meager coincidence, Don began work on *The New American Poetry* in 1958, at just about the same time as *The New American Painting* exhibition, on which Frank had worked for the Museum of Modern Art starting in 1957, embarked on its two-year tour of eight European cities. Following on *The New American Painting's* status as the signal gathering of first- and second-generation abstract expressionists to travel overseas, Don claimed that the poets showcased in his book represented "the dominant movement in the second phase of our twentieth-century literature and already exerting strong influence abroad."

We do not respond often, really, and when we do it is as if a light bulb went off.
—"Nature and the New Painting," 1954

The present *Poems Retrieved* follows the lead of the second, revised 1996 Grey Fox edition by comprising 214 poems, including two added to those already in the first: the 1952 satire "It's the Blue" and an alternate version of the poem from 1956 inspired by a Philip Guston painting. Each of those later additions furthers an understanding of the general culture O'Hara made for himself and the uses he put it to, all part of the biography of the work. The relation, for instance, between the title line "It's the Blue," a literal translation of the phrase "C'est l'azur" from André Breton's "Au regard des divinités," and the character "John Myers," the target of O'Hara's quatrains, may appear obscure until you recall that the actual John Bernard Myers, beside being a puppeteer and, as director of the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, the publisher of O'Hara's first book, also had been managing editor of the New York Surrealist magazine *View* and the main proponent of the idea that, for O'Hara's work and that of the poets of the New

the moment and ends with a vision of “the future/which is not so dark.” The “I” in front of two separate paintings sees differently, markedly altered. In *Collected Poems*, Donald Allen placed the Pollock before the Guston, followed in turn by the well-known “Why I Am Not a Painter.” Part of the interest in these art-inspired poems is the idea that whatever occurs to one in front of anything—a work of art or another person, for that matter—is not just a valid response, but probably the truest one.

This sense of someone in front of things extends to that of the poet himself before his poem, deciding, as he can, what happens there. Toward the end of the notes, probably from sometime in 1956, for a talk called “Design Etc.,” O’Hara proposes the act of writing a possible poem (one that may yet become identifiable among those he actually did write) as well as defining what that poem won’t be. In practice he envisions Design as a near-mythological force of

clearheaded-poetry-respecting objectivity, without which the most sublime and inspired love lyrics or hate-chants would just be muddy rantings. As the poem is being written, air comes in, and light, the form is loosened here and there, remarks join the perhaps too consistently felt images, a rhyme becomes assonant instead of regular, or avoided all together for variety and point, etc. All these things help the poem mean only what it itself means, become its own poem, so to speak, not the typical poem of a self-pitying or infatuated writer.

The breadth of what Frank O’Hara took to be poetry is reflected in the many kinds of poems he wrote. The quick release from riveted (and riveting) attentiveness to direct response being his mission and *métier*, the rate of response, as well as the wide net cast by his attentions throughout, is extraordinary, as if the world would stop without his continually remarking on its activities. Turning the pages of any of his collections, you wonder what he didn’t turn his hand to, what variety of poem he left untried or didn’t, in some cases, as if in passing, anticipate.

*I see my vices
lying like abandoned works of art
which I created so eagerly
to be worldly and modern
and with it*

About Frank O'Hara's earliest writings John Ciardi, whose workshops O'Hara took at Harvard, recalls: "He showed his brilliance rather than his feelings. That was a point I often made in talking about his writing. I think, in fact, it was when he used his brilliance to convey rather than to *hide behind* that he found his power." What John Ashbery calls O'Hara's "period of testing" continued for some time beyond his student years, and, sensibly enough, a good three-quarters of *Poems Retrieved* is taken up with poems dating from that time (roughly 1950–1954), after which anything he wrote was less prone to fall short of the mark. As late as 1952 in New York, he is still signing poems with his Hopwood Award pen name "Arnold Cage." The run-of-the-mill poem of this period is liable to feature an array of theatrical posturings, all the while betraying the intent of summoning, by way of letting an adopted artificial language play out, consistencies of real wit and eloquence. Part of O'Hara's youthful testing was his willingness to try out, beside a slew of poetic personae, any available forms and genres: accordingly, among the poems here are epigrams (many of those spot-on), eclogues, calligrams, sestinas, sonnets, quatrains and tercets and rhymed couplets, birthday poems and envois, poems in prose, one-liners and lines of great mystery and beauty ("Sentimentality, aren't you sunset?" "Do you know what the phiz really/looks like?"). There are fragments that stay fragments and have a kind of inviolable strength, like bits of antique parchment, of the fragment as such. The more extraneous early poems tend toward bumpy rides accelerated by mock exclamations and questions that go nowhere, along with nasty arty quips and fripperies that echo Frank's readings in *amuse-bouche* modernists like Ronald Firbank and Ivy Compton-Burnett. What is striking, however, is the sheer number of such poems and their earthier counterparts—how intent he was, by way of experiment traditional and otherwise, on working through to the "tough heart of art," the "real right thing"—and also

how attuned he was to the existential stakes involved. Meanwhile, the method in such silliness as some of the poems proclaimed—the seriousness with which O’Hara was already protecting his gift “from mess and measure”—would be apparent to anyone used to the drab alternatives of self-seriousness and pretense as normally (then as now) rampant in the officialese of American poetry.

As Kenneth Koch recalled, the poems of Frank’s he first read in the early fifties were “sassy, colloquial and full of realistic detail”; realistic, one might add, because so quick to register the gists of the going styles:

*We loved our bodies,
navyblue sneakers
Frank Sinatra
and pistachio frappes,
it’s all in our heart and dirtied there*

The later fifties, by comparison, show all the same qualities combined with a new assurance as to how they go together, which allows for the candor of

*What I really love is people, and I don’t much care whom
except for a few favorites who fit, which you understand.
It’s like the sky being above the earth. It isn’t above
the moon, is it? Nor do I like anyone but you and you.*

and:

*if there were no cameras
I would not know this boy
but hatred becomes beauty anyway
and love must turn to power or it dies.*

By 1956, the year O’Hara turned 30, pretty much all the archness and other signs of struggle towards being, in Rimbaud’s classic phrase, “absolutely modern” were abandoned in discovering an originality so “with it” in his own regard as to leave outside determinations behind. Not that

posturing was gone, but that he had realized the postures appropriate for him and the poems. The work, with its various turns of autobiographical patter and declaration, had become, as John Ashbery put it, “both modest and monumental, with something basically usable about it.” Right before the reader’s eyes, so to speak, diverse textures of feeling come into focus in the imaginary present tense of another person’s energetic consciousness:

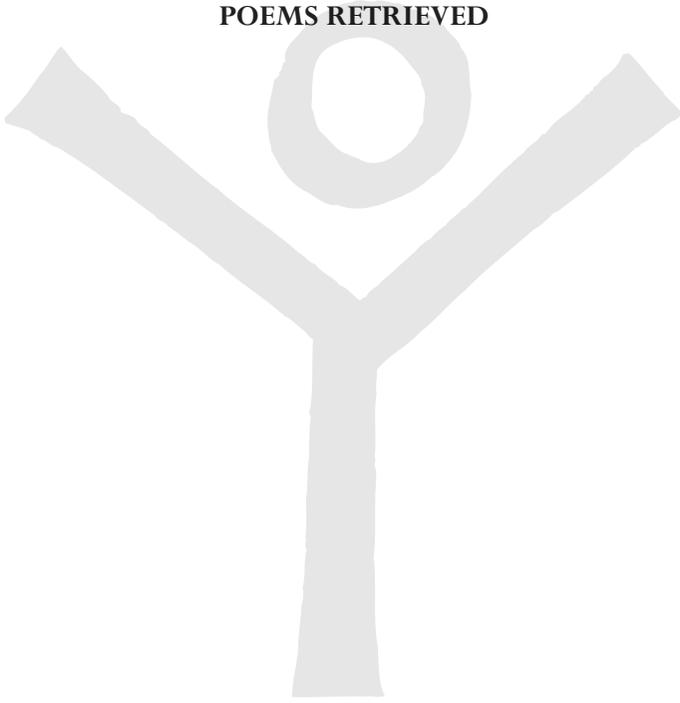
*Why are there flies on the floor
in February, and the snow mushing outside
and the cats asleep?*

*Because you came
back from Paris, to celebrate your return.*

San Francisco, 2012

City Lights

POEMS RETRIEVED



**City
Lights**

**Noir Cacadou
or the Fatal Music of War**

We were standing around
with guitars and mandolins
when the war ended. Yes.

The sea was calm and pale.
Almost polite. Whatever
had it meant to us, what

will you mean to me, does
nothing end? It was dull
as a spider's banquet. Just

twangings and a wave or
two. "Japee!" someone called
through his high red beard

and the Admiral said "Men
you were admirable." We
loved him as I love you. More,

and it meant nothing, simply
a remark after another war.
We were gay, we had won, we

dressed in stovepipes and
danced the measure of being
pleased with ourselves. That is

why I want you, must have
you. Draw the black line where
you want it, like a musical

string it will be love and lovely
and level as the horizon from
our exotic and dancing deck.

Your beard will grow very
fast at sea and you will
not know what instrument

you are patting. It will mean
a lot to you until the lines
stop vibrating and become

a thin black cry that ends.
But no admiral will speak
yet, we've a lot to do first.

I'm not ready for my costume.
We'll beat the gong, yell
out our uneatable tongues,

wallow lasciviously in arms.
You'll see how easily we
provoke the waves, although

the sextant shakes and positions
get difficult. And every dawn
the whine will go up, the black

look that means love is near.
We'll draw our own lines
and be what the sea tries

to talk about. Then afterwards
we'll help each other dress, lay
flowers at the dummy's feet.

A Doppelgänger

Do you mean that
my gaze is not a look
and my clothes decide
like a Delacroix banner
what will happen to-
morrow although they
are quite foreign to me
hide thoughtful flesh?

Do you mean that
my yellow hair like
thrashing wheat hangs
wild over my forehead
and blue limpets peer
above my cheekbones
Rilkean discoveries?

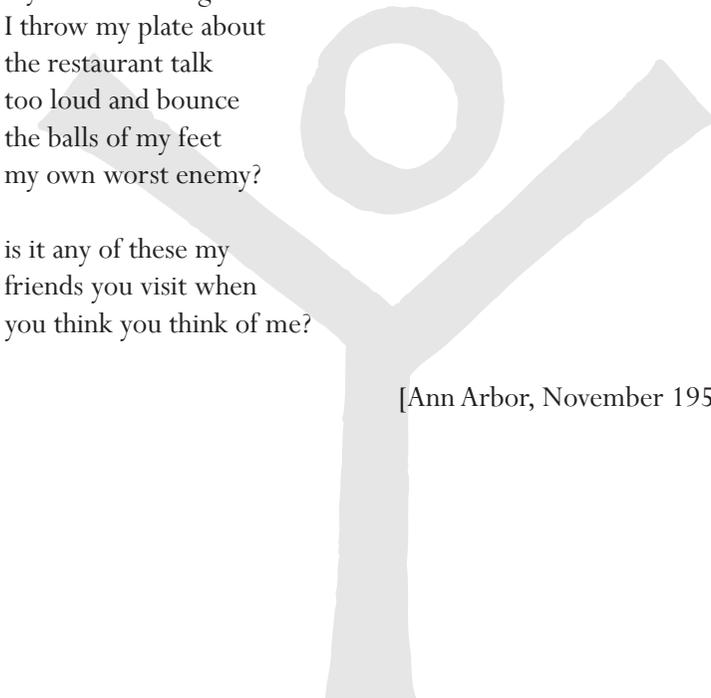
Do you mean that
one fierce hand drags
by a thumb from my
appendix while the
other photographs old
ladies and my black
eyes roll and swagger
down Washington Street?

City
Lights

Or do you mean that
my head is too high
I throw my plate about
the restaurant talk
too loud and bounce
the balls of my feet
my own worst enemy?

is it any of these my
friends you visit when
you think you think of me?

[Ann Arbor, November 1950]



City Lights

Poem

Green things are flowers too
and we desire them more than
George Sand's blue rose not
that we don't shun poison oak

but if it's a question of loco
weed or marijuana why how
can we not rush glad and wild
eyes rolling nostrils flaring

towards ourselves in an unknown
pasture or public garden? it's
not the blue arc we achieve
nor the nervous orange poppy at

the base of Huysmans' neck
but the secret chlorophyll
and the celluloid ladder hid-
den beneath the idea of skin.

[Ann Arbor, November 1950]

City Lights

Entombment

The wind is cold and echoes a banshee
off the red wall that peers into cemeteries.
And the yellow hearses arrive, laden
with nails and pikestaffs for decoration

of the alabaster bier into which your
rivulets of tears still eat their seams.
Poor shroud! that will be pleated by
the first dallying wind, thus unprotected

thus glamorized. "Anything worth having
is worth throwing away" they taught in
the synagogues and though He took rope
to their backsides they did not shut up.

Now they stand paling into a future
which will melt their crosses, caught
by the fish in their throats, gargoyles
themselves. Their cocks drop off. They cry.

[November 1950]

City
Lights

A Slow Poem

I wonder if you can die of
sadness What a way to go

A split-leaved plant bulges
out of the gloomy fireplace

and the three wide windows
are embarrassed by darkness

A few objects project themselves
into a sinister scatter, just

a corkscrew a can opener
a pen knife but all lethal

And my books and pictures
yearn toward me mentally as if

they were toys or games while
I stare at this green ceiling

And whine helplessly of
sadness What a way to go

City
Lights

In Gratitude to Masters

to Professor Roy Cowden

Sonnet

As the learned snow falls lightly on trees
and obscures them, seeming fragile at first,
intellectuality's modest thirst
embellishes its coronation frieze

upon human aspirations. And lest
the icy sun burn naked up the roots
this music through the whining wind so mutes
flailing gales that we are safe and seem best

to ourselves despite ambiguities,
for may we not call down protecting skies
at will? not blind, not rigid and screaming

may we not beg from subtlety's dreaming
light our lack? Finding in art that strength snow
clears, warming the barren earth, roots, fallow.

Envoi

Thus to the Professor
fly our small hands, not
spilling the soul to a confessor
nor in a mold caught

nor in training for flight.
But he leads us to the light,
there where it so naturally
falls upon the unknown sea.

Poem

Suppose that grey tree, so nude
and desperate,
 began to waltz
slowly in time to something we
are deaf to in the thickening snow.

Would it be merely trying to get
warm and true,
 as it seems one
does while dancing,
 or would this be
an invitation from the inanimate
world our bones,
 trying not to ache
with foreboding, seemed to warn us of
in early childhood?

Then, unenlightened by desire and
satisfied by very real dreams, we
were able briefly,
 as from a window,
to look bravely upon the baroque will
of objects,
 not knowing, in our clever
smile,
 who really felt the cold.

City
Lights

Poem

Poised and cheerful the
squirrel moves in the grey
tree passing upward into
the world's leafy aerial
away from us and eager for
the infinite

berry his
volatile eye rolls shyly
comprehensive and sees
us as specks in a corner
midway between the dull
earth and birds' rare
nests now

empty forever
fading into wider sky
leaves are all below
him wires farther from
each other our antennae
no longer conduct him
cold and gone

oh squirrel
why didn't you tell us
you knew how to get there!

City
Lights

Song

I'm going to New York!
(what a lark! what a song!)
where the tough Rocky's eaves
hit the sea. Where th' Acro-
polis is functional, the trains
that run and shout! the books
that have trousers and sleeves!

I'm going to New York!
(quel voyage! jamais plus!)
far from Ypsilanti and Flint!
where Goodman rules the Empire
and the sunlight's eschato-
logy upon the wizard's bridges
and the galleries of print!

I'm going to New York!
(to my friends! mes semblables!)
I suppose I'll walk back West.
But for now I'm gone forever!
the city's hung with flashlights!
the Ferry's unbuttoning its vest!

[New York, January 1951]

City
Lights

A Pathetic Note

Think of all the flowers you've ever seen
and remember me to my mother, or be kind

to some white-haired blue-eyed old lady
who might remind me of Grandaunt Elizabeth

were I with you. When you go down West
Fourteenth Street think of Africa and me,

why don't you? and be careful crossing
streets. Keep photographing the instant

so that in my hysteria I will know what
it is like there; and while my teeth rot and

my eyes seem incapable of the images I'd
hoped, I will know you are at least all right.

While I write this eleven windows stare,
clothes hanging on the wall stir testily.

The ceiling's miles away. I'm sitting on
the floor. Since I last saw you things

are worse. What can I do without love,
without honor, without fame? Can you see

me? It is evening. Other people's lights
are going on, I think. But not your friend's.

[New York, January 1951]

Poem

Just as I leave the theatre
you come in the door. Or I

receive a letter saying you
are a policeman. My day retches

amidst its studies and you
are rigid with hauteur for

months. But then by expert
montage, a mountain growing

out of a diamond, the same
principle, you appear before me.

I spill your whiskey: you are
beautiful! When my back is

turned you still love me.

Mirrors go blind in our flame.

[New York, February 1951]

City
Lights

Windows

This space so clear and blue
does not care what we put

into it Airplanes disappear
in its breath and towers drown

Even our hearts leap up when
we fall in love with the void

the azure smile the back of a
woman's head and takes wing

never to return O my heart!
think of Leonardo who was born

embraced life with a total eye
and now is dead in monuments

There is no spring breeze to
soften the sky In the street

no perfume stills the merciless
arc of the lace-edged skirt

[Ann Arbor, February 1951]

A Byzantine Place

1 At a Mondrian Show

How excited I am! My piggy
heart is at a traffic intersection

However I run a mirror slaps
me in the face I'm not tired

of being told I'm beautiful yet
Shall I ever be that ghost of

a chance the right money on
the right nose Our portraits

hang restlessly and kick their
feet while we run around alas!

2 My Face in the Street

That I must do these things
for you find the fortunate bird
and kill where he flies so strong

is there any simple event this
does not answer? As still
oh my people as still life I'm
your bowl of bread and your
black thought Do not question
me Sustain my panic my grope

3 A Sketch of Mallarmé

They're not funny
the unfled flights
the unlaughed laughs
the eye on the beach

that's forever awash
and I can no longer
snigger, Ted, as when
you gave me the picture

then it was easier
only the flesh was sad
and these white silences
hadn't pinned me down

It's for ever I write
because the struggle may
knock the breath out of me
I want someone to know

4 A Program for Music

Have you heard music
that's like a hand around
the heart a lace hand?

not a maker or pusher
but an unzipping of images
in the vulgar grottos

an essential passion
that ignores no tear or whim
and addresses the hobbyhorse

as elegantly as the bridge
and cries beware the blue sky
sometimes love gets lost

5 The Naked Element

Move the mountains
over closer

 I intend
to dance if I wish

I climb on pierstakes
higher eagles
 to love
in an airplane of clouds

and we do wingdings
on the wind
 get bloody
rolling over stars

it's all in your heart
and here

 if I please
you are all my love

[Ann Arbor, February 1951]

City
Lights

Lines Across the United States

The night's getting black
The train is cold
My back aches already

I don't want to smoke
We're going too fast
Our windows hurt the air

Last night I was sick
And this morning worse
I threw my self into this coach

The wheels slice quickly
The rails do struggle
The mirrors shake like puddles

I'm sitting all night
I didn't buy a pillow
My watch got broken last week

I've not done much
I've loved too little
And I'm tired of running

[Between New York & Ann Arbor,
March 1951]

City
Lights

An Epilogue: To the Players of *Try!Try!*

1 John Ashbery

If I get sick you'll fly
to me, John, and not eat dinner
on the plane for sheer worry.

If it's night the red lights
will affright you of my blood letting,
and your verse will flood

with memories of all those
choral compositions on prison themes
we both have so enjoyed.

Indeed, my health will fail
in apprehension for your nerves, then
rally to greet you strongly.

The words I write for your voice
will always, I hope, resound as your own
lilting and agate love of ears.

2 Jack Rogers

Not lissome and not
gruntingly wholesome, your

humor's a Rasputin of emphasis,
Jack, a charade in front of

Mother Superior, the sub-
stantial unwillingness to

charm that frightens our
giggles into eager screeches!

Your grin across a room
makes me draw a sabre to

charge my nearest and
dearest friend for the fun

of it! And your voice in
my typewriter attempts to

tease the wit out of serious
situations, so we won't be

wrong goosing psychiatrists
for the sake of our guts.

3 Violet Lang

Image of all felinities
and Grand Lady of the
turnpikes, in decadent verse
you'd be a giantess but I,
in good health, exclaim you
mine! and speak familiarly.

Dancer always, to me, and
tea room's despaired-of voyou,
you are my Bunny and other
people's Violet, a saint of
circumstance and the dangerous
Birthday Party. I quote you
back to yourself in all women
and love you as if *Symposium*
had not been writ in jest.

Kiss me. We'll never again fight
in a cafeteria of friends. I want
your voice in my ear so the sun
will be hotter, and as Bermudas
make us dizzy we'll clamber over
mountains as red and yellow as
clowns, shouting to John and Jack:
"Hurry up! Poo, poo! Tra la!"

Poem

I can't wait for spring!
this year — dare I say it?
I'm ready, I'll grab and
hold, roll over and over
in the sweet bulbs, smell
of dirt and musk and
nectar and air, and then
I'll leap erect as any
adolescent reading sweet
Petronius into that
ravishing! raving! that
blue blue sky!
O soave fanciulla!

[Ann Arbor, March 1951]

Poem

This vessel I've chosen
is a zebra in the open

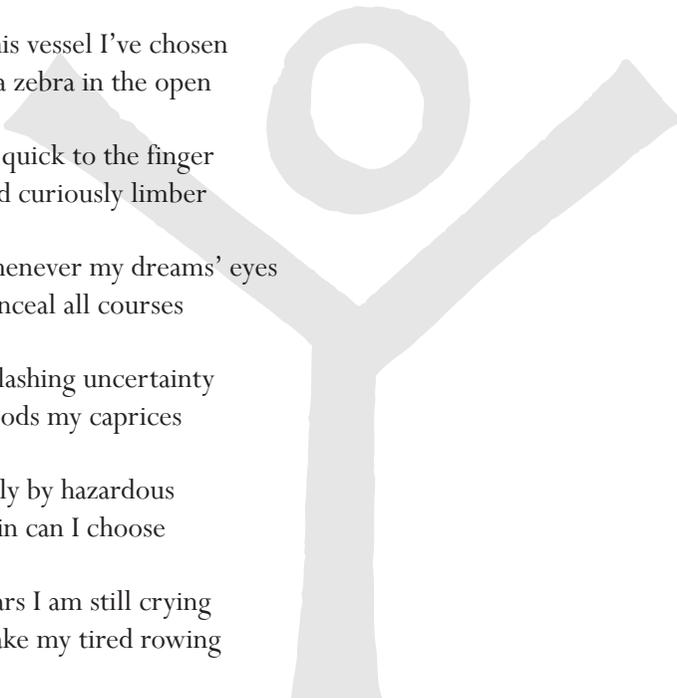
so quick to the finger
and curiously limber

whenever my dreams' eyes
conceal all courses

a flashing uncertainty
floods my caprices

only by hazardous
pain can I choose

tears I am still crying
wake my tired rowing



City Lights

Voyage à Paris

What's the sense
of going to Paris
if you're not going to be
the Eiffel Tower?

If Cleopatra
has had a breast
removed, watch out!
but feel for yourself.

I don't love
the widespread rise on
precipitate winds,
my strut's a thumb-

your-nose, my ribs? hah!
my feet in a meadow of stars
hear spherical music.
None of your elevators!

I will climb the Seine.
And the Nile. The world's
a baseball in your mitt,
in my fingers a balloon.

O tour Eiffel, o clouds,
o Egypt, you're not tired!

[Ann Arbor, March 1951]

for my kids I'm good at all
three”

indeed you are, I
added hastily with real ad-
miration before anyone else
could get into the poem, but
Arnie, damn him! had already
muttered “yes you are” not
understanding the fun of
idle protest.

John yawked
onto the ottoman, having eyes
for nought but the dizzy
Violet, and George thought
Freddy was old enough to
drink. Gloria had not been
invited, although she had
brought a guest.

What
confusion! and to think
I sat down and caused it
all! No! Lyon wanted some
one to give a birthday
party and Bussy was born
within the fortnight the
only one everybody loves. I
don't care. Someone's going
to stay until the cows
come home. Or my name isn't

Frank O'Hara

[Ann Arbor, April 1951]