



## Poems Retrieved

*By Frank O'Hara*



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This volume completes the publication of all the poems Frank O'Hara wrote between 1950 and his tragic death in 1966. "O'Hara the quintessential Postmodernist . . . His work is a kind of watershed, a culmination of the Modernists' efforts to exploit the city, and a prototype of the poetry to come."—Neal Bowers

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## Poems Retrieved By Frank O'Hara Bibliography

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Companion to an earlier volume, *Early Writings* (1977), and the original *Collected Poems* (1971), this is a portion of an anticipated complete collected poems of O'Hara. American poet Bill Berkson's introduction comments on O'Hara's self-described act of writing as 'at once as mysterious and practical as there has ever been of the relation of poetry to experience.' VERDICT: Add to the aforementioned companion volumes to create a loose *Collected*, or let stand as is. Either way retrieve an O'Hara collection--he's essential."--Annalisa Pesek, *Library Journal*

"For those of us who adore the meandering colloquialisms of this quintessential New York School poet, finding this trove of drafts and wanderings is an extra treat. O'Hara's inimitable exuberance pushes through, crafting a poetry that can explode out of almost anything, dramatizing the music of thinking. 'The sea was calm and pale. / Almost polite. Whatever / had it meant to us, what / will you mean to me, does / nothing end?' asks O'Hara. He can't answer, of course. Things do end. Thankfully, we get more of him."--Tess Taylor, *Barnesandnoble.com*

"Scholars and first-time readers will delight in this previously uncollected volume of O'Hara's poems..."--*American Poet*

"What we have here is a lot of poetry worth experiencing, and a radiant reminder that the later work is connected to gifts O'Hara displayed as a young man. Read and recite these poems. Dance a little while you do . . ." -- Barbara Berman, *The Rumpus*

"A revised and expanded edition from the essential West Coast publisher City Lights in San Francisco. Frank O'Hara was the epitome of the New York City poetry scene in the second half of the Twentieth century . . . O'Hara was a livewire poet."--Sophia Nitrato, *Beat Scene Magazine*

". . . *Poems Retrieved* is a welcome edition to any reader's bookshelves--be she a casual peruser or a credentialed O'Hara scholar."--Erika Jo Brown, *The Quarterly Conversation*

"The 'revolutionary piano thunders' and genius Frank O'Hara is re-retrieved in this essential condensary of solid gems, companion to all the other oeuvre. Yet no burden here. He wears his erudition and urgency lightly, and his kinetic juxtaposing 'moves' keep startling scholars, fans, and new converts alike. Pleasure morphs with a metaphysical zone as O'Hara's polished surface is cut into deeper to form complex and spirited love poems. They only grow stronger, more mysterious, through vintage time and space. When I met him I saw that jaunty leonine head leading the generous heart 'and my wristwatch became rusty with happiness.'"

--Anne Waldman, poet and author of *The Iovis Trilogy*

"While the reputation of many mid-twentieth century poets has declined, Frank O'Hara's keeps rising and rising: today's readers cannot get enough of his brave, jaunty, self-lacerating, funny, poignant, mysterious, and always surprising lyric. *Poems Retrieved*, originally published in 1977 by the late Don Allen's Grey Fox Press and long out of print, contains more than 200 pages of poems that Allen found after he had assembled the monumental *Collected Poems* for Alfred A. Knopf in 1971. As Allen noted in his Preface, and as Bill Berkson shows us in his excellent new introduction, these 'poems retrieved,' ranging as they do over

O'Hara's entire career, are a necessary complement to the *Collected*, an integral component of the poet's oeuvre. No one interested in O'Hara's poetry--indeed, no one interested in the poetic ethos of the American 1950s and '60s--can afford to be without this volume."--Marjorie Perloff, Professor Emerita of English at Stanford University, and author of *Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters*

"I'm proud to say that I still have my original copy of *Poems Retrieved* published by Grey Fox Press in the late 1970's. Many thanks and respect to City Lights, and of course to Donald Allen, for making these wonderful poems, by one of America's very greatest poets, available once again! --Jim Jarmusch, filmmaker

"The gentle intelligence and hip urbanity that Frank O'Hara expressed in his writing, indeed as a person, has nearly vanished, as much as the city that inspired him. His love for the wild vision, in all its artful abstraction, and his erudite passion for the common muse, has proven to be the true resonant poetry of our anxious human condition. We need him."—Thurston Moore, musician

"I can't seem to get ahold of enough Frank O'Hara. *Poems Retrieved* operates as a kind of further casebook, offering separate luminous slivers of his day to day life. Readers will fill in the gaps themselves through lucid dreaming of Frank. His measure is always gushing forward to float the next incredible image, 'into the hot spring of her blood and her lips, wet with the flavor and the subtle scales, glitter against the horizon.' His colors rise to the surface of our language, etruscan gold split with flashing bolts of violet, and all of this action is still tailored to a very lived in (to die for) tone of voice. *Poems Retrieved* has been lovingly revamped and now includes a knockout introduction by Bill Berkson. He traces with ease and acuity O'Hara's early fearlessness within forms and his eventual rise to full strength, 'Not that posturing was gone, but that he had realized the postures appropriate for him and the poems.'" -- Cedar Sigo, author of *Stranger in Town*

"One of the many pleasures this volume offers is the opportunity to see O'Hara's lightning-quick mind in motion, comparing these newly discovered poems with the O'Hara that we already know. Behind 'The Day Lady Died' lingers the ghost of its beginnings, a tiny poem entitled '[it is 4:19 in Pennsylvania Station]' where we can see O'Hara rehearsing for the great spotlight number to come. *Poems Retrieved* is a boundless bonanza of O'Hara's version of delight."--D.A. Powell, author of *Useless Landscape, or A Guide for Boys*

"[The poems] like O'Hara (was) are urbane and hip, filled with abstraction, humor, mystery, poignancy and lyricism. Here is what poetry was in the America of the 50s and 60s."--Reviews by Amos Lassen.com

#### About the Author

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 Arthur Rimbaud, Stéphane Mallarmé, Boris Pasternak, and Vladimir Mayakovsky. 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.

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