



MALMÖ UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF CULTURE
AND SOCIETY

Frank O'Hara: A Story in Names

Romanos Chatzidimitriou

English
Bachelor Thesis
15 credits
Spring 2019
Supervisor: Magnus Nilsson

Abstract.

This paper is an analysis of two poems by the American New York School poet Frank O'Hara. The two poems analysed here are "The Day Lady Died" and "Adieu to Norman, Bonjour to Joan and Jean-Paul." Both poems have O'Hara's distinctive 'I do this, I do that' style which is characterised by a conversational tone and a narrative of everyday events in New York City. O'Hara's poetry has long been criticized by the literary community for being targeted to a coterie circle, specifically to his friends and artists in the New York School in the 1950s and early 1960s. Because these criticisms partly derive from the considerable amount of proper names O'Hara includes in many of his poems, the following analysis will be based on the proper names included in the poems. By using two different theories/typologies to analyse the poems, this paper finds the proper name to be a core part of the narrative of the poems and an important source of information for the context in which the poems were written.

Table of Contents.

Abstract.....	1
Introduction.....	3
Coterie and Frank O’Hara.	6
3. Analysis of "The Day Lady Died" Using Lytle Shaw's Category System.	9
4. Analysis of "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul" Using Lytle Shaw's Category System.....	14
5. Analysis of "The Day Lady Died" Using Roland Barthes's '5 codes of Narrative'.	21
6. Analysis of "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul" Using Roland Barthes's '5 codes of Narrative'.	28
Conclusion.	33
Works Cited:	34

Introduction.

In the various criticisms of Frank O'Hara, positive or negative, the reoccurring theme is whether the poet should have a canonical status, along with other poets of his time like Allen Ginsberg and John Ashbery, or whether his work was esoteric, directed to his New York School friends and colleagues, and in summary, coterie. This problem arises mostly from the style and language Frank O'Hara used in his poetry. Many of his poems are filled with a tremendous number of proper names that to an average reader, or a reader who is simply not familiar with O'Hara and the New York School of Poets, seem absurd and make the poems inaccessible.

The first major study on O'Hara addressing this issue was Marjorie Perloff's *Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters* first published in 1977, 11 years after the poet's death. In her 1997 re-publication of the book, Marjorie Perloff mentions in her introduction.

When *Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters* was published twenty years ago, O'Hara was a coterie figure, adored by his New York School friends and acolytes, especially by the painters whose work he exhibited and wrote about-- but otherwise regarded (when regarded at all) as a charming minor poet (xi).

In this paper, I will be analyzing Frank O'Hara's poems "The Day Lady Died" and "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul." These poems include a large number of proper names, which is an important reason that his work has been viewed as inaccessible and coterie. This analysis will be done by focusing on the proper names within the poems. For each of the poems, we will apply two theories/typologies.

First, Lytle Shaw, in his book *Frank O'Hara: The Poetics of Coterie*, introduces a system of categorizing these proper names with which we can better understand O'Hara's

work. That system includes three categories – first, proper names that there is no need to know who they refer too. Second, proper names that initially appear unknown but can be easily accessible through research. And, finally, proper names that refer to well-known figures (Shaw 45). For my paper, I will take each proper name and try to initially find its ‘owner’ and their relationship with O’Hara (if there is any) and then to see how they relate to the time and place that the poem was written in, and how they relate to other proper names within the poem.

I will analyze the proper names for both poems again, this time using the system that Roland Barthes introduces in *S/Z*. This system includes 5 codes for narrative that can be applied to show the function of any passage, sentence, or word in a text (in this paper we will refer to the proper names analyzed with Barthes’s theory as ‘units’). The five codes reveal five types of functions that the units can have: the Hermeneutic Code (HER) operates in units that create mystery and suspense, the Proairetic Code (ACT) operates on units that signify action and behavior, the Semantic Code operates on units that signify symbols and secondary or metaphorical meanings, the Symbolic Code (SYM) operates in combinations of semantic units or in units that have several semantic functions, and finally the Cultural Code (REF) signifies units that refer to universal bodies of knowledge like religion, science, literature, pop culture, etc. (Barthes 18-20). All these codes will be defined again and shown through examples in sections 5 and 6.

It should be noted however, that I will not be using the system of the codes in the same way the Roland Barthes does in *S/Z*. That is because his method is very disciplinary and helps him make observations on literature and narrative through a very long (size-wise) system of analysis that I would not be able to keep up in this paper, and that would not be convenient for the style of analysis I am aiming for with these poems. Furthermore, Barthes connects the cultural references of the codes with general cultural constructs, whereas my

focus is much more specified on the network of symbols in the poems themselves. Instead I will be using the codes more liberally, and without following Barthes's specific format of the units (still with providing explanation on why each unit functions under a respective code) so that I can focus on the narrative within the poem.

Having analyzed the proper names, both for finding their root and relation to the real-life poet, and then solely for their narrative function under the 5 codes of narrative, we will be able to show how they can operate as entries for the reader to make the poem accessible, in contrast to what most readers believe, which is that the proper names are a big part of the reason that the poems are inaccessible. Furthermore, we will be able to see how the proper names structure the poem as a whole, and function as a focal point within the narrative.

Coterie and Frank O'Hara.

To start discussing Frank O'Hara we first must understand the meaning of coterie and why he is considered to fall under that category. Upon reading in general, we have many times encountered texts that seemed inaccessible; like they were pushing us away. The reasons for that may vary from text to text. Some have language that is too complex, some are incredibly dull. But coterie is a category of texts that fall into a different, but equally strong, type of literary quagmire. It occurs when we feel that what we are reading was not meant to be read by us, but rather targets another, specific but unknown, group of individuals. So, what exactly is it?

In the introduction to *Re-evaluating the Literary Coterie* a book on literary coteries from 1580 to 1830 in England, Will Bowers and Hannah Leah Crummé attempt to pin down the term, but even then, in a study with various examples, the term remains elusive but always with the same result; inaccessibility.

...the word was originally used for associations of *cotiers*, or tenants of humble cottages. The first English usages referred either to political factions, revolutionary or religious, or to social networks in aristocratic society (3).

There were various reasons that O'Hara's poetry came to be seen as addressed to a coterie, from many readers and especially critics. His queer style of writing, unpopular and mainly misunderstood in the '50s, was one of the main ones. But the one that this paper is concerned with is, of course, the proper names.

The New York School's poets were a group of ivy league educated individuals (especially from Harvard University and Columbia University). Kenneth Koch, a centric figure and poet of the movement, was a professor at Columbia for many years, and Frank O'Hara himself taught at Columbia for a year. In the poetry of O'Hara, many of the proper

names require some education on art and poetry to know them, and that whole facade certainly contributes to why the New York School of Poets is often referred to as coterie and not just as a literary group. In *Re-evaluating the Literary Coterie* we learn for the term coterie

Despite its humble roots, its French flavour suggests something exclusive, and gives a more highbrow definition than the Anglo-Saxon ‘club’, which was used for periodic social meetings at taverns over a hundred years earlier (3).

Even though this paper focuses solely on the analysis of the proper names, it would be inconclusive to not mention the effect that homosexuality and queer culture had on the relation between the New York School of Poets and coterie. In the next page of the previously quoted book we also learn this about the term

The tension between the idea of a group banded together by a minority religion, political cause, or profession, and a network that represents privileges of class and wealth underpins the idea of the ‘coterie’... (Bowers and Crummé 4)

Of course, homosexuality is none of these things and it is certainly not a privilege of class. But what it is, is something that separated the New York School from the contemporaries, something more than just style and artistic philosophy. Because in the case of the New York School, and especially in the case of O’Hara, the term coterie was pinned on him rather unjustly by critics who were not too eager to study his work thoroughly. However, the goal of this paper is not to defend all of O’Hara’s poetry against its coterie view, but to study whether the proper names, which constitute such a big part of that view, can be the guide to accessing O’Hara’s poetry. We do that to provide an example against the notion of coterie.

That is why, apart from Shaw’s typology of categories, we need Barthes’s codes of narrative, in order to have an analysis that views these proper names purely (or as purely as

we can) through a narrative perspective. The two analyses will inevitably clash, and form a bigger, clearer image of O'Hara's two poems, but the analysis should also be able to provide a meaning individually (even if they do not display the full depth of the two poems when the analysis are viewed individually).

3. Analysis of "The Day Lady Died" Using Lytle Shaw's Category System.

"I go on to the bank / and Miss Stillwagon (first name Linda I once heard)" Miss Stillwagon has come to be a recognizable figure in O'Hara's poetry, primarily because "The Day Lady Died" is arguably O'Hara's most well-known poem, but also because of the way it strikes the reader. There is no explanation about who that person is. The poet could have said 'the banker' or 'the lady behind the desk', but he uses her last name and then ponders about whether "Linda" is her first name as he "once heard." Of course, in the narrative of the poem, we understand that the poet has encountered "Linda" before since she "doesn't even look up my balance for once in her life." This type of proper name falls under Lytle Shaw's first category of "names that are simply too obscure to register — ones that pointedly lack context, from "Miss Stillwagon" ... to "Walter Wanger" ... and "Helen Parker" (32).

To argue for the names in this category we need, as Shaw suggests, to escape the notion that "that O'Hara is simply interested in the sounds of these or all proper names" (33) and look further into their function. This can be done by using a narrative theory (as we will do in section 4), but it is also essential to identify their usage under Shaw's typology, in order to be able to access them. Shaw admits that the names are "too obscure to register" (32) but goes on to argue that this is part of their function.

The names are recalcitrant matter — designating identities from which we (and here this "we" includes O'Hara) are held at a careful distance. To universalize them is therefore not adequate; instead, they are strategic remainders that block our easy identification. The effect of these names depends upon a version of the contextual loss — at the double levels of speaker and reader... (33)

Thus, the poet obliquely admits to the reader that he is supposed to feel estranged when reading about “Miss Stillwagon.” It does not matter who she is; what matters is to acquire a degree of distance from the poem, to look at it from outside. Why this is necessary (or at least complementary) for the poem, is partly because the ‘I do this, I do that’ style that O’Hara follows might make the reader forget that the speaker is at a distance.

“I get a little Verlaine / for Patsy with drawings by Bonnard although I do / think of Hesiod” Here we have four proper names but only one that cannot be so easily identified. At first we’d consider “Patsy” as a proper name that belongs to Shaw’s first category, but some research into the New York School would quickly show that “Patsy” is O’Hara’s friend Patsy Southgate, a writer and translator, with important impact on the movement and significant works in Paris especially with the Paris Review. This makes the reference fall under Shaw’s second category

those names, initially just as unknown, that pick up such a “family” only contextually, through a self-consciously minor form of canonization, in his work — O’Hara’s friends, such as Alfred Leslie, Norman Bluhm, Bill Berkson, John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, and Joe LeSueur, among many others (Shaw 32)

When it comes to the function of the second category, Shaw presents two main arguments on how it differs from the first. First, she argues that O’Hara results in a sort of promotion of his New York School friends, forming a sense of canonization of many artists. Secondly, through repeating second category names throughout many poems “repetition in different contexts teaches new glosses” (Shaw 33). For that argument, she presents the example of Kenneth Koch, a name that appears in *Collected Poems* 15 times.

Take the example of Kenneth, the poet Kenneth Koch, whose first name appears in fifteen of O’Hara’s *Collected Poems*. In the simplest of these

appearances, as when we are told that Kenneth is “large, locomotive” (*CP* 75) or “excitement-prone” (*CP* 328), characterizing details accumulate without a poem-to-poem plot structure that converts this accumulation into narrative actions. As we learn features of Kennethness — including the speaker’s admiration for his writing — the result is similar to what Roland Barthes describes as “the novelesic without the novel” (Barthes *S/Z* 5) (33-34).

We will view one of the examples of Kennethness in the Analysis of “Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Jean, and Jean-Paul,” but it does not make much difference. That is because on the way we are analysing the poems (taking singular examples as an ‘entrance’ to O’Hara’s style) we cannot see the repetition that Shaw argues for happening. What is then that differentiates first category names from second category names?

I would argue that even though a big part of their function (the one Shaw argues for) is lost, there is still the difference that these people had an effect on O’Hara’s New York and the New York School. Of course, this is a more fleeting function. For example, in this poem, we encounter three second category names, Patsy, Mike, and Mal Waldron. For the first two, there is some meaning that is contextually given to the names (a meaning that we will fully explore at the analysis of the poem under Barthes’s codes). For example it is easy to distinguish that Mike had a closer relationship with O’Hara than Patsy did, because O’Hara immediately knows what gift to get Mike: “for Mike I just stroll into the PARK LANE / Liquor Store and ask for a bottle of Strega” but struggles to pick one for Patsy “but I don’t, I stick with Verlaine / after practically going to sleep with quandariness.” That is an interesting piece of information for someone who is specifically interested in the relationship of the artists of the New York School, but it does not directly affect the larger meaning of the poem which concerns the death of Billie Holiday and the feeling of shock after finding out someone

you love and admire has died. However, the second category name Mal Waldron does affect the bigger picture contextually.

In the last lines of the poem, we have “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.” This is O’Hara remembering Lady Day (Billie Holiday) through a moment in which he was moved by her. As Micah Mattix states in his analysis of the poem: “O’Hara does not contrast the everyday events of the first four sections with the extraordinary event of listening to Billie Holiday sing, but with the memory of listening to her sing” (145). But where does Mal fit in this remembrance? Well, Mal Waldron’s full name is Malcolm Earl "Mal" Waldron and he was a jazz pianist, composer, and arranger in New York in the 1950s. If we did not know who he was we’d still be able to enjoy and be moved by this brilliant last stanza but to know that Mal Waldron is an artist who produced art in New York, and an artist that O’Hara knew, pulls us in, closer to the speaker on an emotional level. Even though the fact that the “5 SPOT”’s “john door” refers to a famous NYC jazz club is something seemingly insignificant, Mal Waldron gives us the opportunity of significance, depending on in what depth we would like to view the poem.

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

The title “The Day Lady Died” and “her face” are third category references. The face, of course, belongs to Billie Holiday, one of O’Hara’s icons. Even with minimum knowledge of what the poem is about, most readers would understand that reference, or at least every reader who is familiar with Billie Holiday, making Shaw’s third category fitting "better-known proper names that seem to loose more established (if contested) attributes and gain a

surrogate, often queer, “family” of associations.” (32). Billie Holiday is mentioned in this poem as a core part of it, and the poem would be empty without her, but this is not the function that Shaw tends to highlight about the use of third category names in O’Hara’s poetry.

In the poem’s third stanza, after visiting the bank and when trying to pick a gift for Patsy, the speaker mentions five 3rd category names: “Verlaine,” “Bonnard,” “Hesiod,” “Richmond Lattimore,” and “Genet.” According to Shaw “the point is a kind of energized connection that strips famous names of established connotations, while highlighting others.” (34) Thus, some kind of commentary is contextually attributed to the names. This commentary is not necessarily directed to the names themselves, but most likely to Patsy, who is the subject of the stanza and the choosing of the gift.

4. Analysis of "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul" Using Lytle Shaw's Category System.

"Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul" is a poem with a similar style to "The Day Lady Died," the style being the 'I do this, I do that' type. For starters, both mention that they take place in New York City (even though the majority of O'Hara's poetry does) and although they were written on a different day, they are written in almost the same time of day; here the poet begins writing at "12:10," and on "The Day Lady Died" he begins at "12:20." Of course, where "The Day Lady Died" had a more precise 'meaning', in "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul" the poet strives to capture a more fleeting feeling of resilience against the struggles of routine-based life. In his paper "Frank O'Hara and the End of Bureaucracy" Professor in the English department at the University of Texas of the Permian Basin, Jason Lagapa states:

O'Hara offers an altogether different view of working conditions and labor in "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul" (*LP* 34), in which he promotes a perception of work and time based not on regimentation but on individual and aesthetic liberation (14).

But as in the previous analysis, we are not going to analyse this poem directly, but obliquely, through its proper names, and whatever meaning they offer to us.

In the very title, "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Jean and Jean-Paul," we have three proper names, two of them happen to fall under Lytle Shaw's second category of proper names and the third, according to my research, under the third category. First, we have Norman whose full name is Norman Bluhm. He was an American abstract expressionist painter, a member of the New York School, and a friend of Frank O'Hara. Of course, as with all the second category proper names of these two poems, we are not going to study how the

repetition of the names “teaches new glosses” (Shaw 33). “Joan” also falls under the second category, her full name being Joan Mitchell, a leading figure of the New York school in 1950s. For the third name, I expected to find another artist (most likely from the New York School). Instead, the research kept leading me back to Jean-Paul Sartre which initially did not make much sense comparing it to the two other names in the title.

However in his reading of the poem O’Hara introduces “Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul” saying “it’s for a friend of mine who was going to France and I had to hurry up and do it [write the poem] because I was having a farewell lunch with him.” Since the “Adieu” is addressed to Norman, and considering that the rest of the poem has a heavy connection with France and that Joan Mitchell spent most of her career working in France so it is very possible she might have been returning to New York at the time, it then makes sense that the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (who was a big influence for the poet) is ‘welcomed’ to New York. Of course, unlike the literal welcoming of Joan Mitchell, the welcoming of Sartre is probably a metaphorical one, since there is no record of the poet having any personal connections with him. Thus, O’Hara, within the very title of the poem, manages to mix together the second with the third category, or in a more practical sense, the literal with the metaphorical, giving us a preview of the style that will follow in the poem, where his thought will leap from his descriptions of his action and the city, with the memories and admiration for France, and finally his philosophical idea about how one must “continue.”

Moving on to the first stanza of the poem, Norman Bluhm reappears in the second line as the poet explains that he will be meeting him for lunch. The hectic atmosphere of the poem “ah lunch! I think I am going crazy” is only amplified by the mention of the weekend plans “at excitement-prone Kenneth Koch's.” Kenneth Koch is a reoccurring figure in O’Hara’s poetry as Lytle Shaw notices in his comments on second category names

Take the example of Kenneth, the poet Kenneth Koch, whose first name appears in fifteen of O'Hara's *Collected Poems*. In the simplest of these appearances, as when we are told that Kenneth is "large, locomotive" (*CP* 75) or "excitement-prone" ... (33)

Koch was a close friend of O'Hara and a central figure of the New York School. Because Kenneth Koch and O'Hara were mainly working and staying in New York (Koch working as a professor at Columbia and O'Hara working at MoMA) the speaker seems to be placing even the weekend leisure as a part of a routine he seems to be (at least while writing this poem) overwhelmed by. Instead, he would rather be "staying in town and working on my poems / at Joan's studio." Of course, Joan being Joan Mitchel as we previously saw in the title of the poem.

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

In the second stanza of the poem, the poet continues stating the rest of his friends coming back from France as Lytle Shaw confirms

This happens in a related way in O'Hara's well-known poem "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul," which first considers the movements of a group of friends between Paris and New York (28)

The artists of the New York School were in majority homosexual, and so were, of course, many of the artists living in New York in general. Paris was more tolerant of homosexuality

and also a huge cultural centre (as is today). These artists very often travelled back and forth between the two artistic capitals to work and collaborate and to see their favourite artists and museums.

Going back to proper names, what is most interesting about this stanza is the most famous name of them, “Allen.” Of course, “Allen” refers to Allen Ginsberg, the famous Beat Generation poet who happened to be a friend of O’Hara’s. Reading the poem at the time, even though Allen Ginsberg was already a very famous poet, we would have probably placed his named under Shaw’s second category. However, Allen Ginsberg has clearly become canonized and is now considered as one of the most important figures of recent American Poetry, and the leading figure of the Beat Generation. Thus, if we viewed the name individually, it would make sense to place it under Shaw’s third category. That said, we are not going to do that. That is because in the context of the poem, or even more specifically in the context of the stanza, “Allen” is referred to more as a friend, with his reoccurring problems of “talking about god a lot” (a line that most likely refers to Allen Ginsberg’s mental health issues), and with a reluctant anticipation of seeing him again when he arrives from France, and less as a reference as we saw third category names like Verlaine or Hesiod functions in the analysis of “The Day Lady Died.”

The name “Peter” most likely belongs to Peter Selz, most known as a historian of German expressionism, who worked as a curator at MoMA in the 1950’s, and who was also a friend of O’Hara’s. “Joe” was also a close friend of O’Hara’s, his full name being Joe LeSueur, an art critic, art historian, and educator. These two names are undeniably functioning under Lytle Shaw’s second category. They are not too obscure to register (some googling will give you the answer in an instant), but they’re certainly not well-known figures. What these names provide here, if they’re researched and discovered, is an insight to the psyche of the speaker, the interconnections between the friends, how “Joe has a cold and is

not coming to Kenneth's \ although he is coming to lunch with Norman.” The research turns the initially absurd lines to gossip, and depending on the willingness of the reader, gossip turns to insight and depth.

The small, third stanza of the poem is where the speaker escapes the details of his routine and gives in his more existential trail of thought, filled with a longing for France: “it is Spring the ice has melted the Ricard is being poured” and a general longing to escape: “I wish I were reeling around Paris \ instead of reeling around New York”. It contains no names, but it is a transition to the crescendo of the poem, the fourth and biggest stanza, containing a plethora of names to look into.

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

The selection of poems that are included in *Lunch Poems* dates from 1953 to 1964, when the book was finally published. Even though all of them were written at the same time of day, the year and events change throughout the collection. Passages like this one with a plural of targeted cultural references, playfully describe the world that the poem was written in, without necessarily directly addressing it. More specifically, the poem was written in 1959, when Charles “de Gaulle,” formerly the President of the French Republic was operating as the Minister of Algerian Affairs. And, of course, “Camus” referring to the philosopher Albert Camus who was born in French Algeria. These two names both belong in the third category, even if they gained their fame through entirely different paths. And they are contrasted in this line as Charles de Gaulle was only associated with Algeria for two years, and Albert Camus was living and working in France, but was forever associated with Algeria as a birth-right. Nevertheless, in the time and context of the poem, they both bring up

France and at the same time continue “to be Algerian” (as the artists of the New York School get inspired by France but continue to be themselves”).

5 years before the poem was written Shirley Goldfarb permanently moved to France after living in New York for some years. She was an American painter, and her name here functions under Shaw’s second category. So does the name “Jane Hazan” or “Jane Freilicher” or in the one name O’Hara does not mention, Jane Niederhoffer, which also happens to be her family name. Jane Freilicher (as she is mostly known) was a painter and one of the very early members of the New York School. Although she did not live in France, her abstract expressionist style was mainly influenced by the French painter Pierre Bonnard. The humorous “(I think!)” at the end of the line addresses the many last names she changed through her two different marriages, as well as the fact that her first husband, Jack Freilicher, is the one who introduced her to the New York School, initially through Larry Rivers. Her second husband, Joe Hazan, was a businessman and a dancer who was not as close to the New York School artists as Jack Freilicher. That is what the poet is playing on; for him, it probably makes more sense for Jane to “continue” to be “Jane Freilicher.”

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

The last two lines of the poem are almost a tiny homage to French literature. The three authors featured function under Shaw’s third category. All of them are well known, and all of them are used as a form of reference, and their names operate not to directly address the existence of the authors or their works, but to conclude and add to the ‘meaning’ of the poem.

Paradoxically, then, it seems to be the inclusion of this string of French authors — Char, Reverdy, and Beckett — that allows the New York artists and writers at least the possibility of continuing to be themselves. But how, precisely, do the names do this? As bodies of exemplary writing, yes. But also, somehow, as better-known proper names — ones that already carry a charge of authority and are therefore in pointed contrast to the first names of O’Hara’s still-obscure friends (Shaw 28).

In 1959 the New York School artists are not canonized (for some of them; not canonized yet). Thus, the speaker explores this freedom. The people he admires are written in stone, unchangeable. But for the speaker and his friends, there is still the possibility of continuing to be themselves through the routine and the hectic lifestyle of New York City or Paris, and still, somehow, to manage to be happy despite all these. The mention of these French authors holds a point of reference, a mental safety net, for the poet to go back to when hope or resilience is necessary.

Seeing the poem through its proper names does not only give us an insight on the choices of these names that might initially seem random, but also helps us look at the poem from a kind of ‘map’. What becomes apparent then is how O’Hara’s thought starts very settled, organizing his week, and spotting his desire to just take a break and work on what he really enjoys instead of working at MoMA and keeping up with the pace of New York’s social life. There is when the poet thinks of his friends going through their similar but never identical troubles. And there is when the poet looks for hope, scoping out, gaining perspective, ending up on the people he admires and is influenced by, managing through a rather beautiful play of words and names thrown together to simply “continue.”

5. Analysis of "'The Day Lady Died'" Using Roland Barthes's '5 codes of Narrative'.

"The Day Lady Died"; the title is cryptic, with a sinister undertone, and filled with mystery. We do not know who the lady is (unless the poem has been introduced to us by someone before reading it) and we do not know how this particular day is going to be addressed and where her death will be placed within the poem. Nevertheless, we do know someone has died which by itself is an upsetting event for the reader. Thus, this title holds a hermeneutic function, operating under the 'HER' code. This code is one that provides the narrative with mystery, with something awaiting resolution. Of course, O'Hara makes us anticipate the resolution until the very end of the poem.

Let us designate as *hermeneutic code* (HER) all the units whose function it is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which can either formulate the question or delay its answer; or even, constitute an enigma and lead to its solution (Barthes 17).

In re-reading the poem, and in reading about the poem, we come to realize that O'Hara hints to who the "Lady" is within the very cryptic title. That is because one of Billie Holiday's nicknames was 'Lady Day', a nickname that O'Hara has inverted and hidden in plain sight. Thus, a reader who is perhaps awfully familiar with Billie Holiday would be able to come to the resolution of the mystery using only the title and maybe clues from the very first lines. After all, it is "1959" and a "Friday," which might be enough to assess that the deceased person is indeed Billie Holiday. And perhaps this conclusion would be easier to make for a reader who read the poem around the time when it was written, and even more so for a reader who lived in New York. For most of us though, the resolution of this mysterious title comes at the end of the poem with the lines

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

There we realize, with the help of Mal Waldron who comes under the Semantic (SEM) code as he is symbolically revealing to the death of Billie Holiday. The signifiers of the semantic code can signify either a theme (death, wealth, rebirth) or characterize an object or a character, as is done here. Roland Barthes keeps the definition of this code intentionally vague as he does not want to limit in any way the openness of the semes ('semes' being the part that constitute the Semantic code).

As for the semes we merely indicate them - without, in other words, trying either to link them to a character (or a place or an object) or to arrange them in some order so that they form a single thematic grouping; we allow them the instability, the dispersion, characteristic of motes of dust, flickers of meaning (19).

Here we should mention again that, because this paper strives to understand the function of the proper names within the poems, the semes (which will also be proper names) will necessary be sometimes linked to other proper names (characters) within the poem.

Regardless however of whether the reader knew or did not know from the beginning if the "Lady" was Billie Holiday, the title holds its function, it preserves the shock factor, the sorrowful undertones that O'Hara tries quite hard to forget in the rest of the poem, but which simply must be resolved.

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

Although this analysis is generating from the proper names of the poem, it would be impossible to form it without something mentioning the codes that come before them. The phrase “I go on to the bank” has a clear proairetic (ACT) function within the poem. That is because of the phrase itself signifying movement and continuity but also because of the way it has been placed; in the later part of the line, showing movement right after the stanza breaks.

In Aristotelian terms, in which praxis is linked to proairesis, or the ability rationally to determine the result of an action, we shall name this code of actions and behavior proairetic... (Barthes 18)

And right after we’re pushed into action “Miss Stillwagon (first name Linda” appears. It is an obscure name, as mentioned in the previous ‘Shaw based’ analysis of the poem. And it is also a name that operates under the Semantic (SEM) code. That is because it signifies firstly, the numerous times that the poet has been to the particular bank, and secondly that he is probably looking very casual, perhaps not in a ‘bank-appropriate’ (for the ‘50s at least) outfit. So much so, that the bank employee who O’Hara has met so many times, he has come to know her first name, finally decides that the man who continuously returns to the bank and probably successfully withdraws money does not need to be checked. Thus, a name that could be initially ignored as a fun, but perhaps needless detail, has provided the reader with a stupendous amount of information, hidden within a couple of ‘casual’, ‘everyday life’ lines.

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

This is the most proper name loaded part of the poem. O'Hara's mind drifts away as he tries to decide on a gift for "Patsy" and thinks of several artists and plays. But it only takes some structure to realize or to ignore his drifting (depending on how one wants to read the poem, or what one tries to gain from it).

Starting with "Verlaine," as every first idea is probably the best, the little book strikes the poet's eye in the bookstore. But it also tells us things about its subject, Patsy. Patsy as seen in the previous analysis being a writer and a translator is partly characterized by the choice of Verlaine. Thus, "Verlaine" operates under the Semantic (SEM) code, having a symbolic function. Of course, it is never too specific how exactly it characterizes "Patsy." This is what often perplexes readers of O'Hara. We know that "Patsy" exists, and he has a distinct personality. There is probably a reason why O'Hara is choosing to get him a "Verlaine," but this reason could be anything from the author being a favorite of "Patsy" to it simply having been mentioned in a then-recent inside joke between the two writers. The reader could start to do research on "Patsy" and his relationship with O'Hara, and that would be relatively closer to the philosophy the Shaw chooses to follow, but the reader could also treat "Patsy" as a character within the text who is only characterized by the fact that he is having dinner with the poet and that he is getting a "little Verlaine" as gift. The reader could also learn surface information about "Patsy" through a quick google search and find out that he is a translator and thus assume that "Verlaine" is in his upcoming translating endeavor. Whatever the reader wants or is pushed to assume the code remains. "Verlaine" operates to characterize "Patsy."

So then if "Patsy" is the 'subject' (in a more syntactical sense) of the two lines, how does it operate? "Patsy" here seems to operate under the proairetic code (ACT). That is because it is not symbolizing anything, or coming in antithesis with another symbol, but it does not create any sense of mystery either, it is simply there moving the poem forwards, to

the choosing of the gift, and to the poet's constantly drifting thoughts. And there is not much to say for units that operate under the proairetic code other than what action they are mobilizing (in this case the choice of the gift and the continuous walk of the poet through the city). However, completely isolating the name and applying the proairetic code could be problematic. Because how can a single name signify action. To solve that we only have to include the word "for" in the unit. The speaker will get the "little Verlaine" "for Patsy," therefore signifying the action. Because this analysis is fairly specified on the proper names using a system of codes that has intentionally been constructed to be open to interpretation, problems like often arise, but staying as much as possible in the scope of the proper names allows us the analytical entry to the poem, and to reveal their function.

After "Verlaine" and "Patsy," we encounter a storm of 3rd category names as we are witnessing the poet being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of literature he is surrounded by within the "GOLDEN GRIFFIN." "Bonnard," "Hesiod," "Richmond Lattimore," "Brendan Behan," and "Genet" are all very interesting choices for the reader who is interested in researching the influences and canons of the New York School (as done in the previous analysis), but for the current analysis they can all be seen as having a very similar function. They operate under the cultural code (REF).

...the cultural codes are references to a science or a body of knowledge; in drawing attention to them, we merely indicate the type of knowledge (physical, physiological, medical, psychological, literary, historical, etc.) referred to, without going so far as to construct (or reconstruct) the culture they express (20).

One could say that Verlaine also holds a Cultural function but there is really nothing stopping "Verlaine" from holding both functions at the same time (although it provides a sense of clarity to the analysis to first identify it as operating under the Semantic code). Thus, what

might (to a hardcore skeptic) initially seems like a rumble or even a brag by the poet, is actually a calculated attempt to surpass this feeling of pleasant confusion one gets as they're trying to choose a present for someone they love.

“Verlaine” though, is also mentioned twice. The second mention of Verlaine does not correspond with “Patsy” as much as the first one. It seems to be a simple conclusion after the poet’s indecisiveness. The most logical thing would be to see it as operating under the Cultural code along with the previously mentioned 3rd category names. However, it does correspond with the first mention of Verlaine. Together they seem to be operating (as two semes) under the Symbolic code (SYM). Barthes is the vaguest in defining the Symbolic Code. But what it is, is essentially the same function as the Semantic Code, but with a wider net of signifier; either a sort of network (big or small of semes, as is done here, or a signifier that signifies several things).

Moreover, we shall refrain from structuring the symbolic grouping; this is the place for multivalence and for reversibility; the main task is always to demonstrate that this field can be entered from any number of points, thereby making depth and secrecy problematic (19).

If we think of this choice of the present as the struggle of the stanza, the two “Verlaine” open and close and narrate the choice. Within them the poet is tortured by the overwhelming number of possibilities but as soon as he decides to “stick with Verlaine” the struggle stops (although it does leave its mark resulting to the poet “going to sleep with quandariness”).

and for Mike I just stroll into the PARK LANE

Liquor Store and ask for a bottle of Strega

The next stanza holds only one proper name and one pronoun. It begins with the choice of the second present, which comes much easier for the author. Again, in order to characterize our proper name, we need to veer off the philosophy of the analysis and mention

that the “bottle of Strega” characterizes “Mike” in the same way that “a little Verlaine” characterizes “Patsy.” Also, similarly “Mike” operates under the proairetic code, moving the action within the stanza. Also, the very fact that the poet is much quicker in picking up a present for “Mike” informs the reader that their relationship is probably closer and that he has had to pick up a present for him many times before. After all, the poet chooses to just “stroll into the PARK LANE / Liquor store” with ease and the choice of the present will certainly not cause him “quandariness.”

“and a NEW YORK POST with her face on it” By the end of the stanza the ‘fun part’ of the poem comes to an end and the heartbreaking part makes its entrance. Even though the poet does not provide us with an actual proper name, but only a pronoun, it seems appropriate to analyze the unit in the same manner. “her face” of course being the face of Billie Holiday, and the “NEW YORK POST” announcing her death. Here it seems that the unit is operating under the Hermeneutic code (HER) not quite fully yet providing the resolution that is needed for the title, but certainly beginning to. It also interrupts the narrative of the choice of the present. The poet has built expectation with the previous stanza that the choice of the present will be peacefully concluded within the stanza but as soon as we thought it would be, something terrible suddenly comes into play providing this unworldly shock we experience when finding out someone we know or admire has died. Of course, the natural continuation of the line is in the last stanza where we encounter one last proper name, “Mal Waldron.” This proper name operates under the Semantic code (SEM) characterizing (or rather confirming) that the “Lady” with “her face” on the “NEW YORK POST” who “whispered a song along the keyboard” is indeed Billie Holiday.

6. Analysis of "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul" Using Roland Barthes's '5 codes of Narrative'.

As with the three previous analyses, we'll again start from the title. In contrast with "The Day Lady Died" which functions under the hermeneutic (HER) code, with "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul" we jump right into the action of the poem, making the names Norman, Joan, and Jean-Paul all function under the proairetic (ACT) title. In this occasion, it would not make much sense to completely separate the proper names in order to analyse them. However, the title does contain two units that function under the proairetic code (ACT). The first being "Adieu to Norman" and the second "Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul." It could be argued that the two units function under the hermeneutic code (HER) if one asks the question 'why are we saying goodbye to Norman and hello to Joan and Jean-Paul' but it seems more accurate to interpret them as units that already give as much information about what's happening and instead focus more on the action of the speaker who is saying farewell to one friend and right away welcoming two more. Thus, the title gives the reader the feeling of movement more than it does that of the mystic. However, that is only to say that the proairetic title is present for the reader. For example, Barthes in his analysis of the title "SARRASINE" (17), he places the unit as functioning under the Hermeneutic Code (HER) but also notices that it has some functions that note to the Semantic Code (SEM).

It is 12:10 in New York and I am wondering

if I will finish this in time to meet Norman for lunch

"Norman" here, as in the title, functions under the same code. As we have seen before with the Proairetic Code (ACT), it is better to analyse the name along with the word/words that precede in order to define the action. In this case, we would consider the unit "to meet Norman" to function under the Proeraitic Code (ACT). In contrast with the "The Day Lady

Died” here the proairetic code does not move the speaker to actual action that he would describe, but rather to a whirlpool of thought that as we saw in the analysis of this poem using Shaw typology, slowly develop to more and more philosophical aphorisms about literature and life

what with my terrible hangover and the weekend coming up
at excitement-prone Kenneth Koch's

Kenneth Koch here operates symbolically but in a number of ways (that all signify a similar feeling). The unit, examined as “excitement-prone Kenneth Koch’s,” functions under the Semantic Code (SEM). What it signifies is the frustration of the speaker. The friend is “excitement-prone” about the upcoming weekend which should bring joy, but the contradicting mood of the author is making Kenneth’s excitement to be more of a nuisance. Where this comes together is when we examine the function of “Joan’s studio”

I wish I were staying in town and working on my poems
at Joan's studio for a new book by Grove Press

“Joan’s studio” also functions under the Semantic Code (SEM), signifying to what the speaker finds appealing but cannot have due to his social responsibilities. “Joan’s Studio” is a symbol for content, in the mind of the reader arises a place of work and maybe even peacefulness. The two units contradict each other and according to Barthes antithesis is one of the most recognizable characteristics of the Symbolic Code (SYM). Therefore, the two semes come together in an (A\B) form and function together, signifying the core dilemma that tortures the mind of the speaker in this first stanza

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

Moving on to the second stanza we have the passage, as we saw in the previous analysis, of O'Hara's friend returning from France. If we take the unit "Allen is back" (and we can do the same with "Peter is back" and "Joe has a cold") we notice that it functions under the Proairetic Code (ACT) because they signify an action. However, this observation does not have much to contribute to our analysis since this action, if viewed only as actions, are very isolated and do not really affect the narrative of the poem as a whole. What it would be more resourceful to do with these units is to see how they function under the Semantic Code as semes. "Allen," "Peter," and "Joe" are all returning to the place that the speaker is at, and that he is viewing with distaste "I wish I were reeling around Paris / instead of reeling around New York / I wish I weren't reeling at all." The condition that his friends are in (damaged mental or physical health) after being back in New York signifies to the feeling of discomfort and despair the speaker is experiencing. This becomes much more apparent having studied the background of these names in the previous analysis of the poem, but what is particularly interesting here is how we can see the three semes "Allen," "Peter," and "Joe" come together with a unified function under the Symbolic Code (SYM), even though they address different people and problems. The signifying thus is about the speaker and not the people mentioned. The three semes can also function under the symbolic code in antithesis with "Kenneth's" if we consider 'Kenneth's' as a seme. However, this would not have much effect on the function of the Symbolic Code (SYM) whose function would remain the same. The names "Kenneth" and "Norman" in this passage, seem to primarily operate under the Proairetic Code (ACT) because they signify action ("coming to Kenneth's") and behavior ("to lunch with Norman").

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

The lines in the passage above first function under the proairetic code. “de Gaulle continues,” “Shirley Goldfarb continues” (the first time it’s mentioned), “Jane Hazan continues,” and “Irving Sandler continues” give the imagery of action and movement through the repetition of the verb “continue” that follows each of the names. The same can be said for the units “as does Camus,” “to be Shirley Goldfarb,” and “to be Jane Freilicher.” That is because these units signify behaviour, and work as the continuation of the previous actions.

We come to notice that because the very nature of the proper name is symbolic (they represent something), they can always function as a seme. The question is at what degree and whether it considerably affects the narrative of the poem. The proper names in the first three lines of the passage above, if viewed with their semantic function, form three short consecutive Symbolic (SYM) networks, that ‘open’ and ‘close’ within the line. The speaker creates an antithesis in each of the three lines to note to the connection to France (de Gaulle – Camus) and to the New York School finding itself or the rather, managing to preserve its artistic identity (Shirley Goldfarb – Shirley Goldfarb, Jane Hazan – Jane Freilicher). However, it is necessary in order to grasp the meaning of this antithesis to go back to the previous analysis of this poem and put the proper names into context. This partly contrasts Barthes’s remarks on “The proper name”

We occasionally speak of Sarrasine as though he existed, as though he had a future, an unconscious, a soul; however, what we are talking about is his *figure* (an impersonal network of symbols combined under the proper name "Sarrasine"), not his person (a moral freedom endowed with motives and an overdetermination of meanings): we are developing connotations, not pursuing investigations; (94)

The issue is that the world of *Sarrasine* analysed in *S/Z* considers, as it's logical for its context, the proper names as the representation of the respective character, and thus when Barthes analyses the proper name he cannot reference a real person behind the proper name because there is none. In O'Hara's poetry however, the proper name can operate both as a character within the narrative and as a person. It is interesting therefore to see how the little information the reader has about the real person behind the proper name, the more it is useful to understand it as a character (as in the case of "Miss Stillwagon"). When confronted by second category names, it depends on the reader and their knowledge or willingness to research the New York School to see the name as more than a character, but also it depends on the usage of the name within the poem ("Patsy" in "The Day Lady Died" can be easily viewed as a character, but "Shirley Goldfarb" is more resourceful to the reader after some research). That is why in the passage above the speaker is comfortable putting third category names (de Gaulle, Camus) and second category names (Shirley Goldfarb, Jane Hazan, etc.) together, and with a very similar narrative function.

As for the ending of the poem, where we have three third category names, their function seems to be under the Cultural Code (REF), signifying to France a general idea of hope.

René Char, Pierre Reverdy, Samuel Beckett it is possible isn't it

I love Reverdy for saying yes, though I don't believe it

Here it is easy to see that the names do not function as characters, even though the speaker has selected these references carefully to enchant the meaning of the poem.

Conclusion.

Even though focusing solely on two poems has prevented us from applying Lytle Shaw's remarks that the repetition of second category names teaches us "new glosses" (33), we have come to realise a similar conclusion. That is, that the repetition of certain 'categories' of names throughout the narrative of the poem, teaches as new glosses about the way we must view them. When comforted with names of the first category that are "too obscure to register" (Shaw 33) we must treat them as characters in the narrative that signify or reveal information about the speaker, especially when viewed symbolically. On the other hand, third category names that are keener to operate under the Cultural Code (REF), should be read as references (which should not be difficult for the reader since they are generally well-known references). The most interesting of the categories is, of course, the second category of names, which is also the hardest one to define. What we have proved, however, is that it is possible to understand O'Hara even if the reader does not know all the names, by viewing them as characters in the narrative, and in relation to references that the reader does understand. However, the plurality and the depth of the poem does increase, once the reader decides to research names that they do not understand.

Therefore, it is somewhat reasonable to say that Frank O'Hara is not fully accessible without some knowledge of the New York School art scene since references and names are a big part of many of his poems. Nevertheless, it is unreasonable to presume that his poetry is directed to a coterie crowd, since even two of his most name-packed poems can be accessed (partly) without the help of research. Furthermore, we come to understand that this 'doubleness' in the function of the proper names in O'Hara's poetry is part of the plurality of the poems. The proper name operates both as a character and as a reference to a real person, at the same time enhancing the narrative of the poem and providing the reader with context about the specifics of the time and place that it was written in.

Works Cited:

Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*. Blackwell, 1990.

Bowers, Will, and Hannah Leah Crummé, editors. *Re-Evaluating the Literary Coterie, 1580-1830: From Sidney to Blackwood's*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Mattix, Micah. "Naming Things: Frank O'Hara and 'The Day Lady Died.'" *SPELL - Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature*. Swiss Association of University Teachers of English, 2006.

Lagapa, Jason. "Frank O'Hara and the End of Bureaucracy." *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, vol. 75, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1–22.

O'Hara, Frank. *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*. Edited by Donald Allen. University of California Press, 1995.

O'Hara, Frank. *Lunch Poems*. City Lights Books, 1964.

O'Hara, Frank. "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul".

Perloff, Marjorie. *Frank O'Hara, Poet among Painters*. University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Shaw, Lytle. *Frank O'Hara - The Poetics of Coterie*. Edited by Alan Golding et al. University of Iowa Press, 2009.