

INTRODUCTION

Born in 1926, Frank O'Hara came to maturity in the late 1940s, and American society was not only conservative but also homophobic in the early 1950s, a time parallel to McCarthyism and its witch-hunts. Although the oppression of homosexuality had a long history, Americans' homophobia reached its zenith in the early 1950s. Homosexuals in a non-gay culture and society had to face polymorphous oppression. John D'Emilio exquisitely points out the venues of the oppression of homosexuality:

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, homosexual behavior was excoriated as a heinous sin, the law branded it a serious crime, and the medical profession diagnosed homosexuals and lesbians as diseased. Together they marked gay people as inferior—less moral, less respectable, and less healthy than their fellows. Exposure promised punishment and ostracism. It hovered about gay life as an ever present danger, always reminding homosexual men and women of the need for secrecy and careful management of information about their sexual preferences. (13)

Indeed, gay men have received unfavorable treatment, situated in an inferior status. The Judeo-Christian tradition, for example, instructs people to view the purpose of sex as being for procreation, not for recreation. Since homosexuals engage in non-procreative sex, it is natural for religious people to condemn homosexuals as sinful. “Although the world view of most twentieth-century Americans had ceased to be as biblically centered as that of their colonial predecessors, and although modern believers might be less inclined to expect ruin to pour down from heaven, religious teachings still shaped their views of sexuality and their sexual behavior to a large degree” (D'Emilio 13). Most Americans must have the prejudice in their minds that

homosexuals, having moral turpitude, are sinful, for the Church only sanctions heterosexuality. Prejudice equals oppression, however. Thus, born in a Catholic family and attending parochial schools, O'Hara must have felt oppressed when he was aware of his homosexual penchant. It is my speculation that O'Hara broke with Catholicism because he fully realized his sexual orientation and confronted face to face the "religious" oppression that he did not dare to oppose when he was a boy. During his Navy years, O'Hara wrote to his parents, "I hope you don't expect such church attendance of me when I get back" (qtd. in Gooch 83). This proves that O'Hara is determined to end his relationship with Catholicism.

Moreover, until the 1950s, the Catholic church, as well as the laws and the social trends, strongly supported censorship on obscene publications, including openly gay love poems. "During the 1930s the Catholic church established the Legion of Decency to evaluate movies and the National Office for Decent Literature to pass judgment on books, magazines, and comics" (D'Emilio 131). Both anti-obscenity groups successfully wielded their power and proscribed many publications. Following the lead of the Church, the laws and the public attitudes held that any publication pertaining to description and suggestion of sexual behavior was considered as an immoral influence on innocent minds, and therefore all of the "obscene" publications, such as *Ulysses* and *Catcher in the Rye*, were forbidden (D'Emilio 131). It is easy to see why Allen Ginsberg's graphically gay poem, "Howl," was accused of obscenity in the 1950s: "Its celebration of the specifics of homosexual life was calculated to shock, particularly its radical redefinition of the holy, and partly its deliberate use of 'forbidden' words" (Martin 166). The mid-twentieth-century America could not tolerate heterosexual obscene literature, let alone openly gay (love) poems. That is why, as David Eberly points out, "O'Hara chose (and it must be seen as a choice) not to publish most of his work during his

life, thereby shielding himself from possible prosecution and his poetry from emendation” (76). The Church, the laws, the social trends—all three successfully oppressed homophile publications in the 1950s.

Besides religion, the law was also unfavorable to the existence of homosexuals. Lawmakers, perhaps influenced by religious teachings, were convinced that homosexuals were not only sinful but also criminal. Lawmakers made laws to prohibit sexual intercourse between men. “Although most states abolished the death penalty for sodomy in the half century after independence, all but two in 1950 still classified it as a felony. Only murder, kidnapping, and rape elicited heavier sentences” (D’Emilio 14). Sexual intercourse between men, or “sodomy” as people called it, was not only condemned by the Church but also prohibited by the law. 48 states regarded sexual intercourse between men as a serious crime; in other words, the majority predetermined that most homosexuals were criminals. However, the majority were not always right. Why did same sex intimacies have to be punished? If heterosexual behavior was banned, what would most people feel? Moreover, law enforcement officers, claiming to maintain law and order, often raided gay bars unexpectedly: “Vice squad officers, confident that their targets [homosexuals] did not dare to challenge their authority, were free to engage in entrapment” (D’Emilio 14-15). The police were free to harass homosexuals and treat them unjustly. “Anxious to avoid additional notoriety, gay women and men often pleaded guilty even when the police lacked sufficient evidence to secure convictions” (D’Emilio 15). Lawmakers wrongly put their prejudice against homosexuals into practice; what was worse, law officers abused their power and entrapped homosexuals. No doubt, in terms of legal aspects, homosexuals had been treated violently as criminals. This kind of punishment formed a concrete oppression to homosexuals in the 1950s.

With the advent of the medical treatment of homosexuality, homosexuals faced

another form of oppression. Homosexual behavior was stigmatized by the Church as a sin and branded by the law as a crime. Psychiatrists and psychologists, then, treated homosexuality as a disease. As Jonathan Ned Katz points out,

The historical change in the conception of homosexuality from sin to crime to sickness is intimately associated with the rise to power of a class of petit bourgeois medical professionals, a group of individual medical entrepreneurs, whose stock in trade is their alleged “expert” understanding of homosexuality, a special-interest group whose façade of scientific objectivity covers their own emotional, economic, and career investments in their status as such authorities. (130)

Since the medical professionals alleged that they understood homosexuals and diagnosed homosexuality as sickness, people had no reason to question their authorities and therefore believed that homosexuals were sick. Besides, “Hollywood movies like *Now Voyager* and *Spellbound*¹ introduced these doctors of the mind into the popular culture. Increasingly, Americans came to view human sexual behavior as either healthy or sick, with homosexuality falling into the latter category” (D’Emilio 17).

The original intention of the medical doctors was to display sympathy for homosexual patients and to make homosexuals become healthy; in other words, the doctors wanted to cure homosexuals. William Menninger, an army psychiatry consultant, said that homosexuals “have immature personalities which make them and their lives and some of the personal relations grossly pathological. Like any sick person, they deserve understanding instead of condemnation” (qtd. in Spencer 350). Although Menninger was trying to show his sympathy towards homosexuals, he was actually condescending, for the idea that gays are not healthy, whether physically or mentally, was embedded in his mind. As for homosexuals, they were treated like

guinea pigs. The doctors had a wide range of medical experiments on homosexuals: from psychotherapy and hypnosis, to electric shock and aversion therapy, to castration, lobotomy and so on.² “Whatever beneficent results medicine might promise, by the mid-twentieth century it had in fact branded homosexual men and women with a mark of inferiority no less corrosive of their self-respect than that of sin and criminality” (D’Emilio 18). At the mid-twentieth century, medical views of homosexuality, coupled with religion and law, had made homosexuals feel that they were sinful, criminal, and sick—a burden that the majority had fiercely imposed on homosexuals without really sensing the oppression that homosexuals had to face.

With the coming of McCarthyism and its witch-hunts, homosexuals faced a new form of oppression unprecedented in American history. The Church, the law and the medical experts had already made homosexuals uncomfortable. In the early 1950s, U.S. Republican Senator Joseph R. McCarthy even targeted Communists and homosexuals, who were said to be almost as dangerous as Communists. On February 9, 1950, McCarthy delivered a speech to Republicans in Wheeling, West Virginia. It was known as the Wheeling Speech.³ In that speech, McCarthy alleged that 205 Communists had infiltrated the State Department (Fried 1). Next day in an interview with a reporter in Salt Lake City, McCarthy told the reporter that he had “the names of 57 card-carrying members [not 205 members] of the Communist party” (Fried 78). After that, McCarthy and his accomplices did nothing but viciously smeared the reputation of innocent people, straight and gay alike, and ruined their lives for good. Specifically, for example, “Senator Joseph McCarthy, just embarking upon his career as an anticommunist crusader, charged that an unnamed person in the State Department had forced the reinstatement of a homosexual despite the threat to the nation’s safety” (D’Emilio 41). Providing his support for the campaign of McCarthy, Guy George Gabrielson, Republican National Chairman, claimed,

“Perhaps as dangerous as the actual Communists are the sexual perverts [homosexuals] who have infiltrated our Government in recent years” (qtd. in Katz 92). The reason for this anti-homosexual witch-hunt was preposterous. On December 16, 1951, *New York Times* reported:

A Senate investigating group labeled sexual perverts today as dangerous security risks and demanded strict and careful screening to keep them off the Government payroll. [. . .] Stressing the risk that the Government takes in employing a sex deviate or keeping one on the payroll, the subcommittee said: “The lack of emotional stability which is found in most sex perverts, and the weakness of their moral fiber, makes them susceptible to the blandishments of foreign espionage agents.” (qtd. in Katz 99)

According to the subcommittee, the lack of emotional stability and the weakness of moral fiber constituted the reason for eradicating homosexuals from government agencies. Such reasoning was not valid at all. Under the full-scale investigation, homosexuals were not only labeled as sexual perverts but also treated as threats to national security. Thus, afraid of being accused of harboring homosexuals, government agencies either dismissed homosexuals or made them resign automatically. In the first sixteen months of Executive Order 10450, which was issued by President Eisenhower in 1953, “the Eisenhower program removed homosexuals from government at a rate of forty per month” (D’Emilio 44). Clearly, homosexuals had to suffer from political oppression when it came to employment in the government.

Besides government agencies, McCarthy and his supporters also targeted homosexuals in the military. The military had a deep-rooted disdain for homosexuals. Throughout World War II, “the US Army and Navy both described

homosexuality as a ‘constitutional psychopathic state’ and homosexuals as ‘sexual psychopaths’” (Spencer 347). On August 31, 1952, a *New York Times* news story wrote, “A Navy spokesman said today an officer allegedly involved in homosexuality had been relieved of his ship command and had submitted his resignation from the service” (qtd. in Katz 101). That news story also said that 24 seamen were not honorably discharged because of their involvement with homosexuality (Katz 102). Therefore, the need for hiding one’s gay identity must have been essential for homosexuals in the military. Soon after his graduation from St. John’s High School in 1944, O’Hara joined the Navy. He survived the risk of exposure in the Navy for two years—a fact that proves O’Hara must have worn a mask and lived double lives during his service.

McCarthyism and its witch-hunts had become outrageous. People from various walks of life could not only sense the oppression but also denunciate McCarthy and his campaign. For instance, John Ashbery, deeply oppressed, confessed that he could not write anything from 1950 to 1951:

It was a terribly depressing period both in the world and in my life. I had no income or prospects. The Korean War was on and I was afraid that I might be drafted. There were anti-homosexual campaigns. I was called up for the draft and I pleaded that as a reason not to be drafted. Of course this was recorded and I was afraid that we’d all be sent to concentration camps if McCarthy had his own way. It was a very dangerous and scary period. (qtd. in Gooch 190)

Although it was an exaggeration that Ashbery related McCarthy’s anti-homosexual campaign to the fact that homosexuals were sent to concentration camps like Auschwitz in Nazi Germany, people did feel to different degrees that McCarthy was like Adolf Hitler. Arthur Eisenhower, brother of the president, actually spoke out for

most Americans, “When I think of McCarthy, I automatically think of Hitler” (qtd. in Matusow 119). Eisenhower also believed that McCarthy promoted this witch-hunt, not for the sake of national security, but for his own sake, saying, “He [McCarthy] wants to keep his name in the papers at all costs. He follows the old political game which is ‘whose name is mentioned the most in politics is often selected for the highest office’” (qtd. in Matusow 119). Trying to be a household name and thus keeping a high profile, McCarthy had sacrificed the reputation and lives of innocent people and treated them as a steppingstone for his personal political career, making the early 1950s riddled with anxieties imposed by his policy.

In 1954, when Frank O’Hara wrote “Homosexuality,” New York City was not friendly to gays. Under the censorship and influence of McCarthyism, there was a prevailing conformity in the United States, including sexual conformity, and homosexuals often anxiously lived under that kind of pressure. As John D’Emilio further points out,

The widespread labeling of lesbians and homosexuals as moral perverts and national security risks gave local police forces across the country a free rein in harassment. Throughout the 1950s gays suffered from unpredictable, brutal crackdowns. Men forced arrest primarily in bars and cruising areas such as parks, public restrooms, beaches, and transportation depots, while women generally encountered the police in and around lesbian bars. (49)

Gay men in New York were harassed by the police unexpectedly before the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969 (three years after O’Hara’s death).⁴ Once they got caught by law enforcement officers, their names, addresses and workplace might be exposed in the newspaper, and then these people would be labeled as sexual deviates. “A gnawing insecurity pervaded the lives of gay men and women” (D’Emilio 49). No doubt,

O'Hara must have been threatened by the New York police, facing a belligerent reaction against homosexuality.

O'Hara senses the hostility against homosexuality and puts the pain of being gay in New York in "Homosexuality,"⁵ which is partly an ekphrastic poem inspired by James Ensor's *Self-Portrait with Masks* (Ferguson 93). O'Hara begins to depict the pain of gay men's wearing the masks and the shadowy side of urban homosexual life:

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

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

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

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

will touch the earth again, let alone "very soon."

It is the law of my own voice I shall investigate.

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

in the rain. It's wonderful to admire oneself

with complete candor, tallying up the merits of each

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

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

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

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

(Collected Poems 181-82)

As Russell Ferguson observes, “O’Hara wrote a number of poems dealing directly with gay issues, many of which are extraordinarily explicit for a period in which even veiled allusions were considered daring” (93). “Homosexuality” is one of these poems. Alice C. Parker comments on this poem, saying that “O’Hara re-creates, in a twenty-two line poem, the ‘presence’ of the subterranean side of the reality of homosexual life in the contemporary urban milieu” (103). In this poem, the gay poet addresses himself to the homosexual community rather than to the heterosexual readers. He begins the poem by asking a self-deprecating question: “So we are taking off our masks, are we, and keeping / our mouth shut? as if we’d been pierced by a glance!” The pronoun “we” refers to the collective members of the gay community, including the poet, for homosexuals are forced to wear “masks.”

O'Hara begins the poem sarcastically “only to shift abruptly into a paean to New York’s public bathrooms, where anonymity and veiled identity offered a kind of extraordinary freedom from the official world, his voice clearly one of experience and pleasure” (Ferguson 93). Many gays, including O'Hara, have to be Janus-faced: in the daytime, they have to display their male bravado and act like straight men; at night or in private, they remove their heterosexual disguise. Leading a double-faced life is very painful for all gays, the poet included. The use of “we” suggests that the poet is talking to the addressee proper and the reflexive addressee, namely, to other gays and to himself. Together they start to think of the question. This question is “made sarcastic by the repetition and reversal of ‘we are’—‘are we?’ and then by the exclamation of the subjunctive final clause” (Parker 93). Right at the beginning, the tone is deliberately made sarcastic. Parker in her book also points out, “The tone of the poem is a combination of sarcasm, scorn, cynicism, self-depreciation, and irony, but beneath, or woven into the tone, is the sustained voice of the pain” (93).

Why does Frank O'Hara want to speak to his readers in an ironic and sarcastic way? The answer is in the final couplet. In the final couplet, a love manifesto is uttered—“It’s a summer day, / and I want to be wanted more than anything else in the world.” O'Hara voices his desire “after keeping quiet during all his years in parochial school and the Navy” (Gooch 197). The basic human need is to love and to be loved in return. Heterosexual couples can walk hand in hand in broad daylight, put one’s arm around the partner’s waist, or kiss in the open road without the sneer and condemnation from passersby, but homosexual couples cannot. When a gay man takes his partner in his arms, they would definitely be “pierced by a glance!” Homosexuals, however, also need to love and to be loved in return. As for those single gays, they go out at night to find a partner at gay bars, “latrines,” “park,” “railway station,” or some secret places. Therefore, the poem is also addressed to

the heterosexual public, for the heterosexual readers cannot realize how much gay men suffer unless they are in gays' shoes. Besides, as Edmund White puts it, "What I want to stress is that before 1969 only a small (though courageous and articulate) number of gays had much pride in their homosexuality or a conviction that their predilections were legitimate" (236). In the 1950s, most gays, the poet himself included, defined their homosexuality in negative terms, internalizing the negative impression that the heterosexual majority had in mind. O'Hara in the poem refers himself to "that proud cur at the garbage can // in the rain." Although he takes pride in himself, he associates himself with a proud cur at the garbage can. How proud can that be? Truly, O'Hara uses his homosexuality not as a celebration but as a self-depreciation. "Homosexuality" negates the celebration of homosexuality and focuses on the pain of urban homosexuals in search of a companion.

Facing polymorphous oppression in real life, O'Hara needs to express his desire, feelings and thoughts by a secret and campy language in the poems. "Homosexuality" is full of this campy language. Camp is a coded language of homosexuality. Only those who are gay or close to gay men can decode camp and understand its meaning. This "private" language thus shields the poet from "public" interrogation. In her famous essay, "Notes on 'Camp'" (1964), Susan Sontag writes, "Indeed, the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration. And Camp is esoteric—something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques" (105). For example, O'Hara categorizes gay men by their character and dress into four groups: the "good," "the inept," "the divine ones," and "the brave." The "divine" gays, obviously, refer to drag queens or the transvestites, who are often dressed in womanly apparel, ribboned headdress, and feathered scarf, wearing heavy perfume and make-up. These men act effeminately and exaggeratedly, deporting themselves like women. It would be interesting here to

associate O'Hara's categorization of gay men with the actual classification of homosexuals by the military.

By 1945 military officials had broken down the sodomist [homosexual] into yet more categories: latent, self-confessed, well-adjusted, habitual, undetected or known, true, confirmed and male or female. Not content with that, their categories continued into almost twenty other variations and it must have struck them that it was well-nigh impossible to classify the "variants of deviant sexuality," in the way they were doing. (Spencer 350)

The categories that had been previously invented by the military were "a pathetic, sexual pervert, a true sodomist, confirmed pervert or moral pervert" (Spencer 349). Compared to the military's numerous categories, O'Hara's categories appear to be less spectacular. In "Homosexuality," O'Hara is parodying the military's homophobic and nonsensical categorization.

Moreover, Sontag believes that "Camp is modern dandyism" (116). Camp by nature is playful, and it involves a complex relation to serious issues. Camp creates humorous representation of human experience. As Chuck Kleinhans observes, "Camp humor is a strategy for reconciling conflicting emotions [. . .]" (187). In other words, camp for gay people is a way of dealing with the hostile and heterosexual society. In "Homosexuality," the poet's journey of investigation is about "tallying up the merits of each // of the latrines." O'Hara reports "14th Street is drunken and credulous, / 53rd tries to tremble but is too at rest." The report itself is humorous, but beneath the playful style lies the voice of pain of being a gay in a heterosexual society in search of a companion. While facing an unfriendly society, O'Hara chooses an esoteric language, or camp, as part of his poetic strategy to deal with the antagonistic situation. By using camp, O'Hara reveals his intense desire,

feelings and thoughts to the gay community and conceals them from the homophobic heterosexual majority. In the process of using camp, gay people are capable of communicating with each other and identifying with the secret experience. As for heterosexual readers, only when they undergo the unpleasant experience gay people have gone through can they truly appreciate camp humor. After all, the basic human need for gay and straight alike is to love and to be loved in return.

O'Hara's 1954 love manifesto that "I want to be wanted more than anything else in the world" not only voices his pain of being gay in search of a lover but also pre-dates the relationship between him and Vincent Warren. At the age of 33, O'Hara met the beloved of his life, Vincent Warren. After their first encounter on August 6, 1959, this twenty-year-old dancer had become O'Hara's new muse. After Frank O'Hara started the relationship with Vincent Warren in 1959, O'Hara wrote a sequence of love poems on and off for his beloved until the end of this relationship in 1961. In many ways, the Vincent Warren poems are like Shakespeare's sonnet sequence, even though they are not sonnets. For instance, as Feldman puts it, "The [Vincent Warren] poems illustrate O'Hara's love at various stages, and even more important, (whether or not O'Hara intended it) they comprise a true sequence" (127). Although this remarkable sequence of love poems was first defined and referred to as "the Vincent Warren poems" by Marjorie Perloff (216, n. 41), Jim Elledge's statement—"Between August 1959 and July 1961, Frank O'Hara wrote a number of love poems chronicling his relationship with the Canadian dancer Vincent Warren, from its nervous but exuberant birth to its quietly despairing demise (226)—serves as a more appropriate definition of the Vincent Warren poems. O'Hara never meant to construct a love poem sequence that we now call the Vincent Warren poems, for at the same time that he was writing the Vincent Warren poems, he was also writing other poems. Besides, there is no publication of *The Vincent Warren Poems* in themselves,

even though there should be a separate collection of these amazing love poems. My intention of studying Frank O'Hara's Vincent Warren poems is to see how the poet deals with anxieties: anxiety about the oppression of homosexuality, anxiety about the lapse of time, and anxiety about the finale of the relationship. Many critics—Marjorie Perloff, Alan Feldman, Jim Elledge, to name only a few—talk about a Vincent Warren poems in general. Each of the three critics has their own definition of the Vincent Warren poems.⁶

This thesis discusses, at a time when gay men were treated as sexual perverts and hunted by the homophobic public, how and why Frank O'Hara expresses his love in a secret way, how O'Hara deals with the fleeting moments of love, happiness and sex, and transforms the *carpe diem* motif in gay love poems, and finally focuses on the erotic moment and sees how O'Hara uses sexuality to transcend to another world. Having put the Vincent Warren poems in a cultural and historical framework, I will examine the intrinsic qualities, as well as the extrinsic elements, in the Vincent Warren poems. That is to say, I will adopt a formalist approach, together with cultural and historical approaches, to explore the Vincent Warren poems. While focusing on the close readings of some of the Vincent Warren poems, the thesis examines O'Hara's poetics as it memorializes the "anxious pleasures and pleasurable anxiety" of the homosexual relationship in the 1950s and 1960s (*Collected Poems* 406). Situating the Vincent Warren poems within their cultural and historical contexts allows me to encapsulate O'Hara's gay life in the late 1950s and early 1960s. A synthesis of contradictions, O'Hara enjoys the "anxious pleasures" in his relationship with Vincent Warren; full of "pleasurable anxiety," O'Hara feels so much alive, simply being with Vincent Warren. All these wonderful details of "anxious pleasures and pleasurable anxiety" are written in the Vincent Warren poems, which thus depict a gay relationship in the mid-twentieth-century America.

As for the main body of this thesis, although all of the love poems are dated and it is natural for readers to read the Vincent Warren poems in chronological order, the chapters in this thesis will not discuss O'Hara's poetry chronologically. Instead, I will arrange my chapters according to the topics: (1) Esoteric, (2) Ephemeral, and (3) Erotic. In an electronic article, "Rebel Poets of the 1950s," Steven Watson comments on the poetry of the New York School Poets—"New York's environment provided a brilliant backdrop for their poetry, alive with odd juxtapositions, shuttling at top speed between high culture and pop culture. The quotidian details of life and the social activities of friends provided the basis for elegant, witty riffs on modern urban life." O'Hara's poetry, full of seemingly unimportant details, is sometimes considered to be frivolous. O'Hara puts everyday details in most of his love poems for the purpose of remembering that he lives in the immediate present. Thus, the details in the Vincent Warren poems are not trifles but the evidence of his gay existence. Most of the Vincent Warren poems, even including O'Hara's prophetic poem "Homosexuality," contain the esoteric, ephemeral and erotic elements. This thesis will investigate the three detailed elements in O'Hara's love poems as a way of re-creating and reconceptualizing a model of O'Hara's gay life at mid-century. I will demonstrate that the Vincent Warren poems epitomize the homosexual relationship in a non-gay culture. First, the oppression of homosexuality results in the esoteric language, and O'Hara reveals his love for Vincent Warren by this coded language. Then, I will relate the esoteric language to the notion of grabbing the fleeting moments of love and happiness. The oppression of homosexuality causes anxiety for the poet and thus forces a kind of celebration of the present moment. Eros is one of the fleeting moments that O'Hara attempts to capture in case it disappears.

In chapter I, I will analyze why and how O'Hara utilizes a secret and private language to express his love for Vincent Warren. Facing an antagonistic reaction

against homosexuality, O'Hara is aware that he needs to be careful and hide his love. In order to avoid public aversion and to make a compromise with the homophobic society, O'Hara uses camp in his love poems as his strategy to deal with the unfriendly situation, providing "Having a Coke with You," "Poem V (F) W," and "St. Paul and All That" as examples of a secret and campy language. The esoteric elements in the Vincent Warren poems—the language of the visual arts, the lack of gender identification in the addressee, name-dropping, the use of St. Paul, masquerading, the paratactic style, to name just a few elements—are appropriated as the poet's poetic camouflages to express his love for Vincent Warren in a hidden way.

After introducing the oppression of homosexuality as the background for O'Hara's esoteric poetry, in chapter II, I will demonstrate how O'Hara deals with the fleeting time and transforms the *carpe diem* motif in gay love poems. The reality is cruel for homosexuals in a homophobic society, and O'Hara is aware of the ephemerality of short-lived happiness. With the young Vincent Warren, life for O'Hara is too wonderful to be dominated by the anxiety about the homosexual oppression and the lapse of time. That may be why O'Hara writes "I do this I do that" poems, or what I call the "gay" *carpe diem* poems, to capture the present moment. By doing so, O'Hara transforms the *carpe diem* motif. I will use "straight" *carpe diem* poems, such as Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" and Robert Herrick's "Corinna's Going a Maying" as a contrast to the Vincent Warren poems and then prove that while Marvell and Herrick merely philosophize about the need to seize the day, O'Hara is already seizing the day in his love poems to Vincent Warren. For example, in "To His Coy Mistress," there is a *carpe diem* pattern: (1) If we had all the time in the world, I could wait forever; (2) However, the fact is that time is limited and that we do not have eternity; (3) Therefore, let us love and seize the day. In a traditional *carpe diem* poem, there is usually a compression of time for

the addressee. In O'Hara's poem, however, it is the addressor who feels the lapse of time and who is seizing the day. The oppression causes the poet's anxiety and thus forces the speaker to live in the moment as it is presented in "Personal Poem," "Steps," and "Sudden Snow."

Chapter III will extract the erotic moment from the fleeting moments and emphasize O'Hara's anxiety about the foreseeable finale of the relationship, discussing how O'Hara moves from the personal to the impersonal, from the physical to the metaphysical, from mortality to immortality and sometimes vice versa. Most of the Vincent Warren poems contain homoerotic content to different degrees, and some of them are written to capture the moment of sex. Sex is like a key to an internal heaven, and Vincent Warren is the key holder. In the erotic love poems, the body is often used as a sexual diving board for the poet to transcend from earth to an internal heaven, a space he has a lot of trouble reaching, let alone staying. O'Hara needs a sexual relationship in part to take him to this different world. In addition, when O'Hara attempts to use the body to rise to the internal heaven, he will immediately fall and "touch the earth again" (*Collected Poems* 182). O'Hara is caught between the urge to transcend and the force to stay on the ground. The tension between the mortal and the immortal, between the personal and the impersonal, between the physical and the metaphysical is never resolved. In short, O'Hara attempts to use the body as a sexual diving board to jump to a spiritual world, but eventually he fails. This chapter will mainly focus on "Poem [Twin spheres full of fur and noise]," "You Are Gorgeous and I'm Coming" and "To You," together with a brief discussion of "Poem 'À la recherché d' Gertrude Stein,'" "Naphtha" and "Saint." When the body disappears, the sexual diving board will also vanish. That is partly why O'Hara is always anxious about the end of the relationship, afraid to lose Warren. What would happen if the relationship ends?

When O'Hara was in love with Warren, his love poems were hemmed around by anxieties: anxiety about the oppression of homosexuality, anxiety about the lapse of the fleeting moments, and anxiety about the end of the relationship. Although anxieties inevitably permeate O'Hara's love poems, he has tasted the bittersweetness and the sweetbitterness in this relationship. This kind of "anxious pleasures and pleasurable anxiety" epitomizes the bittersweetness and the sweetbitterness of a gay relationship in a non-gay culture (*Collected Poems* 406).

Notes

¹ *Now Voyager*, starring Bette Davis, was released in 1942, whereas *Spellbound*, starring Ingrid Bergman, was released in 1945.

² For the detailed medical reports on the treatment of homosexuals, see Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay American History*, 129-207.

³ Because the actual Wheeling Speech was not recorded, there are different versions of it. For versions of the Wheeling Speech, see Albert Fried, *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare*, 78-80.

⁴ In 1969, New York City mayor, John Lindsay, authorized the police cleanup of the infamous gay bars. As John D’Emilio points out, “The Stonewall Inn was an especially inviting target. Operating without a liquor license, reputed to have ties with organized crime, and offering scantily clad go-go boys as entertainment, it brought an ‘unruly’ element to Sheridan Square, a busy Village intersection. Patrons of the Stonewall tended to be young and non-white” (231). On Friday, June 27, 1969 (O’Hara’s 43rd birthday), two policemen raided the Stonewall Inn. Out of the inveterate repression of their accumulated anger, gay men and women struck back when seeing a lesbian struggling with a police officer. As the first officially documented gay riot in history, the Stonewall Rebellion became a significant watershed in the long-silenced history of homosexuals. After the Stonewall event, gays were more willing and daring to voice themselves in the public sphere. As D’Emilio notes,

The Stonewall riot was able to spark a nationwide grassroots “liberation” effort among gay men and women in large part because of the radical movements that had so inflamed much of American youth during the 1960s. [. . .] The apocalyptic rhetoric and the sense of impending

resolution that surrounded the Movement by the end of the decade gave to its newest participants an audacious daring that made the dangers of a public avowal of their sexuality seem insignificant. (233)

That is to say, after the Stonewall event, gays were willing to come out of the closet, though many still remain closeted in order to avoid the potential vituperation and discrimination from “gay bashers.”

⁵ Unless specified, all of Frank O’Hara’s poems, including “Homosexuality,” come from Donald Allen, ed., *The Collected Poems of Frank O’Hara* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1995).

⁶ Marjorie Perloff devoted eight pages to the Vincent Warren poems (156-63 and 216 n. 41). Alan Feldman, defining 46 poems as the Vincent Warren poems, also devoted eight pages to them in his *Frank O’Hara* (126-33 and 163 n. 7). Jim Ellege’s “The Lack of Gender in Frank O’Hara’s Love Poems to Vincent Warren” lists the titles of 21 poems that the studies of Perloff and Feldman do not include (226-37). As for my own definition of the Vincent Warren poems, I intend to include some new poems, together with most of the poems that these three critics have mentioned in their works, which would make the Vincent Warren sequence—from the beginning poem “Joe’s Jacket” to the ending poem “Poem [lost lost]”—add up to 78 in total. Here I would like to thank my thesis advisor Prof. Raphael Schulte for arranging the Vincent Warren sequence for me and having inspired me so much in terms of the Vincent Warren poems.