The Poetics of the Queered Elegy: Frank O'Hara's "In Memory of My Feelings"

An Honors Thesis for the Department of English

Adam Sax

Tufts University, 2013

Acknowledgments

My Family: Robert, Nina, Daniel, and Michele

Advisors: Katie Peterson, Professor of the Practice of Poetry, English

John Lurz, Assistant Professor, English

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Chapter 1: Introduction and elegiac "patterning"

Frank O'Hara's poem "In Memory of My Feelings" does not behave like an elegy; yet this essay will seek to affirm that, as its title would suggest, this poem comes out of a tradition that memorializes that which is lost and seeks to affirm that which remains behind. Rather than treat the loss of the tangible, though, O'Hara's self-elegy treats the loss of the intangible, thus creating an elegy of feelings. As an elegy of feelings, of intangible emotive impulses, there is very little that can be said as to exactly what this "kind" of elegy entails, what exactly this "kind" of elegy is. Neither the normative processes of the elegy, that of performative mourning of a love-object and the subsequent reattachment of the mourner to a replacement object, nor melancholic, or unresolved mourning, suffice to elucidate the poetic circumstances, this particular moment of mourning.

Outside of the title, it is difficult to even say what the focus of the poem is; where or what exactly *is* the mourned subject? Despite the clear distinction of a mourned subject, the poem engages with levels of discourse pertaining to the subject of mortality and death, otherwise typically mourned subjects. Relatives die, "My father, my uncle,/ my grand-uncle and the several aunts. My/ grand-aunt dying for me, like a talisman, in the war"; strangers kill themselves "Five years ago, enamored of fire-escapes, I went to Chicago,/ an eventful trip: the fountains! The Art Institute, the Y/ for both sexes, absent Christianity," a description that alludes to the time Jane Freilicher accompanied O'Hara on a trip to Chicago and "had the extremely unpleasant experience of hearing a man make a suicide jump from his window" (Gooch, 185); grown men, aged and bearded, suffer from "constant anxiety over looks" while "[t]he conception of the masque [this bearded face] barely suggests the sordid identifications," implying a noted loss of innocence and youth, both troubling and mournful.

Simultaneously the poem treats elements of the bizarre and dream-like: a single self multiplies, "My quietness has a man in it, he is transparent/ and he carries me quietly, like a gondola, through the streets./ He has several likenesses, like stars and years, like numerals. My quietness has a number of naked selves"; the poem reinforces this multiplicity of self by the various, simultaneous activities of the any selves, "One of me rushes/ to window #13 and one of me raises his whip and one of me/ flutters up from the center of the track amidst the pink flamingoes", "My transparent selves/ flail about like vipers in a pail, writhing and hissing/ without panic"; the single self also appears to be of multiple ethnicities, social positions and other classifying elements, all at the same time,

> *I am a Hittite in love with a horse. I don't know what blood's*
> *in me I feel like an African prince I am a girl walking downstairs*
> *in a red pleated dress with heels I am a champion taking a fall*
> *I am a jockey with a sprained ass-hole I am the light mist*
> *in which a face appears*

creating a multiplicity of selves even where the "I" might be seen to evoke singularity.

The problem facing the speaker-mourner in "In Memory of My Feelings" is not that of "normal" morning, since normal mourning requires "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place [of a loved person or object]" (Freud, 3 [428]). Rather than function within this strict binary of replacing one love-object with another, the poem contains innumerable potential "objects" and innumerable selves, which serve to complicate and disrupt this binary process of mourning. The speaker has too many options, too many places and things, people and moments, that he can re-attach to. Peter Sacks in his book, The English Elegy, defines the work of mourning in the traditional elegy as "[a]t the core … the renunciatory experience of loss and the acceptance, not just of a substitute, but of the very means and practice of substitution," noting that, "[i]n each case such an acceptance is the price of

survival" (Sacks, 8). Though the poem ends in a moment of resolve and survival, the survival is not that of the mourner but that of the serpent:

> *and I have lost what is always and everywhere*
> *present, the scene of my selves, the occasion of these ruses,*
> *which I myself and singly must now kill*
> *and save the serpent in their midst.*

Here there is an accepted loss on the part of the speaker, but not for the good of himself, not for his own survival and "sanity" but, rather, in order to "save the serpent," the speaker-mourner sacrifices parts of himself, creating an image contrary to the preservation of the speaker-mourner as goal of the elegy. This same passage serves to obfuscate another possible way into the mourning of the speaker, that of irregular or melancholic mourning. The speaker's resolution at the end of the poem does not parallel the open and unanswered nature of "modern" melancholic elegies as suggested by Jahan Ramazani in his book Poetry of Mourning (Ramazani, 4), but rather the closed, resolved "normal mourning" as described by Sacks: in destroying "the scene of my selves" the speaker seems to re-focus himself and attach solely to the serpent.

In her critical study of the lyric poem Helen Vendler states that, "[l]yric poems spring from moments of disequilibrium: something has happened to disturb the status quo" (pg. 15, *PPP*). The death of a loved one, the loss of something precious, even the realization of the inevitable loss of one's own life, these events create such "moments of disequilibrium." The elegy is the expression of mourning as resolution or attempted resolution of the disequilibrium caused by the loss of something tangible, for in order to lose something, one must first possess said thing. What are we as readers then to make of an elegy that mourns, not a person nor any other tangible entity, but something entirely intangible? Can the elegiac process of performing the work of mourning act equally upon feelings as it does upon once living, tangible bodies? Such a diversion from the elegiac structures that Sacks and Ramazani embrace requires a kind of

re-definition of what the elegy does, against the normative function of this tradition, against the normative work of the elegy. "In Memory of My Feelings" queers the elegy in that it does not depict the act of mourning a lost object, but rather the act of mourning lost feelings, like losing parts of oneself, and the "irresolvability" of such an occurrence. Such a form of the elegy exists outside and in opposition to the normative behaviors (what the elegy *does*) of the elegy.

When it comes to mourning an abstraction, such as feelings, the poetic landscape of the elegy becomes difficult to navigate. This is due to the central act of the elegy; this act, as Sacks remarks, is for the elegist to do as Apollo does in mourning the loss of Daphne and turn "from the object of his love to a *sign* [of it]" (ibid, 5, *my italics*). In O'Hara's poem there is no physical object from which to turn away, but a number of signs. What I find so important in Sacks' argument is that the act of mourning, of turning away from the love object and replacing it with something else to fill that loss, has incredibly high stakes for the elegist. The process of the elegy is as life-saving as it is life-altering, "[a]t the core of each procedure is the renunciatory experience of loss and the acceptance, not just of a substitute, but of the very means and practice of substitution. In each case such an acceptance is the price of survival" (ibid, 8). Such a conclusion is a hyperbolic reading of Freud's assertion of death for those who remain in perpetual mourning, for those who are stuck in melancholia (Freud, 5 [431]).

This act of substitution alters the existence of the mourner, but not accepting such change implicitly carries the threat of the death of the poet-mourner himself. The potential death of the poet-mourner by way of unsuccessful mourning, by not achieving full "substitution," ties into Jahan Ramazani's binary theory of "normal mourning" and "melancholic mourning," which Ramazani, "adapt[s] from Freud to distinguish mourning that is unresolved, violent, and ambivalent" (pg. 4), an idea presented in his Poetry of Mourning. This book on the modern elegy

asserts that the shift in the elegy into the modern era was one of consolatory, "normal mourning" into melancholic mourning, in which the poet criticizes or even attacks the dead and himself, and where no complete "substitution" may be found (Ramazani, 4).

The elegy then becomes an immersion in loss, instead of a process toward redemption or transcendence. Despite this critical shift presented by Ramazani, the essence of the elegy remains one of poetic mourning, of resolving to accept death as not reconcilable. But in all instances, even those instances of self-mourning that Ramazani points out as "self-elegies," that mourned subject now lost or understood to soon be lost, was at one time living. What are we to make of an elegy that mourns, not a person, but something far less tangible; not life, but something far less revered: what do we make of an elegy that mourns the loss of feelings? Can we lose our own feelings in the way we lose loved-ones, and thus mourn them? Does death play a role in the conception of our selves and our emotions? Such are the questions imbedded into Frank O'Hara's self-elegy, "In Memory of My Feelings."

The critic Helen Vendler describes the lyric poem as, "*arranged* life – that is… formal constructions of life" (Vendler, 27), in that lyric poetry depicts real-life events but presents them through elements of "'analytic shape'" or "patterning in the poem that acts out one of the insights the poet has about the experience treated by the poem" (ibid., 31). Regarding the elegy, Sacks lays out these "patterns" in The English Elegy, such as an "emphasis on drama or " 'doing' " of the rituals of death (Sacks, pg. 19), elegiac questioning deflecting the "guilt" of the elegist (ibid., pg. 22), repetition of ritual or words/phrases (like names and questions) (ibid., 23-26), and immortality (ibid., 28). I find these "patterns" of "arranged life" that Sacks details helpful in unpacking "In Memory of My Feelings." Despite the poem's lack of a clearly defined mourned figure, it makes use of typical elegiac patterning, if only then to take such patterning and estrange

it from typical usage, sometimes coming into agreement with Ramazani's ideas of a "melancholic shift," but mostly the use of these patterns falls outside either Sacks' or Ramazani's delineations of the elegy. These shifts and rejections of the elegiac paradigm seem to reinforce Vendler's idea of "poetic shape" and how "we perceive poetic shape mostly through *oddness*" (Vendler, 33) or the way that the poem rejects norms of our lived experience as well as conventions of its own form.

In first considering the elegiac patterns of "In Memory of My Feelings," it is useful to look back on the phrase "in memory of" as it pertains to O'Hara. In his biography of O'Hara, City Poet, Brad Gooch addresses a short anecdote of O'Hara's father, Russell, who "In the midst of the Depression years… would often file unpaid debts away with the legend 'In Memory Of…,' written at the top" (Gooch, 19). This example introduces a key element of O'Hara's poem, re-appropriation. This phrase, used to commemorate the loss of human life becomes associated with loss of money. Through this act of re-appropriation or re-utilization, Russell O'Hara pokes fun at the time-honored phrase, while simultaneously suggesting an interconnectedness of life and those things that represent it, such as material wealth. The loss here is not the loss of life but rather the loss of a monetary investment; O'Hara's father would never see those debts repaid, debts of people who had lost everything in the Depression. The treatment of "feelings" in the title mirrors the treatment of the names of debtors, suggesting how "feelings" in this poem cannot be separated from the person or persons that felt them, and thus that their loss in some way is also a loss of at least part of the original "feeler." Conversely "feelings" also take on an ironic sentiment, since the Russell O'Hara's debtors' lives were not lost, only their monetary value to him, thus conveying a slightly melodramatic and hyperbolic sense of their "deadness," conveyed by the phrase, "In Memory Of…."

The poem begins in a state of procession, a common pattern of the elegy, as it is an engagement with the act of "doing" the ritual funeral act. The repetition of forms of "quiet" reinforces a sense of solemnity with this procession, evoking a sense of mourning:

> *My quietness has a man in it, he is transparent*
> *and he carries me quietly, like a gondola, through the streets.*
> *He has several likenesses, like stars and years, like numerals.*

This solemn atmosphere is undone, however, by the way in which the body is carried, "like a gondola." It is not that the image of how a gondola is carried (horizontal and over the shoulder) is so different from how pallbearers carry a coffin. The gondola simply does not fit into the constructed moment of a funeral procession, confusing paradigmatic expectations evoked both by the title and the ritual act of procession "through the streets." The estrangement of the funeral bier causes us disorientation, creating a "loose" elegiac performance, one that is not secured in traditional elegiac patterning. What is also odd in this opening sequence is that the speaker's vantage point of this pseudo-funeral procession is not of some outside spectator, like "Whitman" watching the casket of Lincoln from the crowd. Rather this observer is the carried body, the mourned subject itself (at least in this moment of the poem), placing the poem in the realm of the self-elegy.

It is not unusual for the poet to address his dead or dying self in the genre of the self-elegy. The oddness of the speaker as the apparent mourned subject in "In Memory of My Feelings" is simply that he does not remain the mourned object. The poem reflects this shift of mourned object, away from the speaker, through the movement of the speaker; his inability to remain stationary, as a dead body should, creates another level of oddness:

> *At times withdrawn,*
> *I rise into the cool skies*
> *and gaze on at the imponderable world with the simple identification*
> *of my colleagues, the mountains.*

Here, the speaker, who was only moments before being carried, is now high above the earth, at a vantage where the "number of naked selves" are indecipherable and only his "colleagues, the mountains" in their awesome magnitude can be seen. As Ramazani points out, this form of self-aggrandizement of the elegist, particularly in late Yeats poems (Ramazani, 205), is common in the self-elegy. The self-elegy as a genre of elegy promotes the poet-elegist and creates a certain place for the poet in the "poetic discourse" that should out last his death (pg. 215, ibid.) But in putting the speaker in rank with mountains, the poem also creates an incredible distance between the speaker and those "selves" that are also part of him, part of his "quietness."

It is these "selves" that proceed to enact a horse race when, "[a] gun in 'fired.'" This scene appears out of place in the middle of a funeral procession, but this act of a horse race carries with it ritual components to the funeral act as well, presented when

> *An elephant takes up his trumpet,*
> *Money flutters from the windows of cries, silk stretching its mirror*
> *Across shoulder blades. A gun is "fired."*

I would argue that each of the bizarre instances above contain ritual elements of the funeral and mourning acts. The gun being "fired" as well as the trumpet are part of the formal military funeral. The "cries" are typical signs of mourning, though made odd in this scene, produced by windows, rather than mouths or persons. Even the silk "stretching… across shoulder blades" seems to evoke the style and manner of funeral garments, made from fine materials and only worn on certain somber occasions. These elements that I have pointed out are well hidden among seemingly disconnected elements such as elephants, windows and mirrors; these abstractions detract from the overall process of mourning and "doing" of the ritual act. This "hiddenness" of the elegiac "patterning" within "In Memory of My Feelings" serves to suggest a meshing of concrete form and the abstractness of feeling; it is after all "feelings" that are mourned, feelings

which tend to behave much like the abstract elements of the poem, rather than the more concrete elegiac "patternings."

Still some elements of the elegiac "patterning" seem to jump right out at the reader, such as this line in the middle of section 4,

Grace
to be born and live as variously as possible.

The enjambment of this line produces the appearance of an epitaph on the page. While it is possible to read the line as defining the concept of "Grace," the way "Grace" is off-set from the line sets it apart and above the line, like a name on a headstone. Though not by definition one of Sack's elegiac elements, the epitaph functions as a part of the death ritual; like the firing of rifles, music, and special garments, the epitaph has a certain role in the performance of the ritual. Within the structure of the poem, it reminds the reader of the elegiac framework of the poem, just as the poem proceeds to entrench itself in more non-sequiturs and disconnected associations. By reminding us of the elegy and the customs of death, the poem turns back to its elegiac roots, while simultaneously embracing the surrealist associations of the "I am" repetitions to come. The elegaic "patterning" can then be seen as more of a loose framework for "In Memory of My Feelings," keeping the surrealist elements of the poem in some semblance of focus, while continuing to associate and disassociate at random.

In this following passage, we find an invocation of "vegetation gods", namely through the repetition of "ferns." Sacks posits that, "the greatest influence on the form of the elegy has been the rituals associated with the death and rebirth of vegetation gods" (Sacks, 19), suggesting renewal and rebirth, linking to concepts of immortality, "suggested by nature's self-regenerative power," which "rests on a principle of recurrent fertility" (ibid., 27).

> *I haven't told you of the most beautiful things*
> *in my lives and watching the ripple of their loss disappear*
> *along the shore, underneath ferns,*
> *face downward in the ferns*
> *my body, the naked host to my many selves, shot*
> *by a guerilla warrior or dumped from a car into ferns*
> *which are themselves* journalières.

The poem does not link the speaker, "I," with this concept of perennial renewal. Rather it enforces the mortality of the subject by creating a final resting place for him in direct relation, "underneath," "face downward in," "into," the ferns, described as *journalières* or renewable vegetation. The cyclical pattern of nature presents itself through the ocean along the "shore" in which the speaker watches his "lives" "disappear" at the beginning of this section. This imagery acknowledges the temporality of those ripples made by the speaker in the infinite ocean. Through scenes of nature, the poem emphasizes the mortality of the speaker, but does not reconcile this mortality through signification of the speaker after death. There is no immortality granted to the speaker, and nature appears as apathetic to his transient nature as he seems to be in his melancholic state. The melancholia present in this passage finds itself in how the speaker's mourning despite nature's apparent ambivalence. Despite his status within the poem as "subject," the great violence done to the speaker takes precedent over "the most beautiful things/ in my lives," which, rather than revealed, are lost like ripples in the sea.

In drawing attention to these instances of elegiac "patterning" within "In Memory of My Feelings," it is not my goal to reduce the poem to a non-committal, apathetic self-elegy. Rather I want to suggest that despite trends of both the traditional and more modern elegiac traditions running throughout, the poem invites a sense of mourning, that eludes both frameworks. By way of the title, we are to understand that the mourning of "feelings" does involve traditional elements of mourning, but since we are dealing in terms of abstractions, rather than concrete life

and death, these elements must be able to move within a much looser frame: pallbearers are able to multiply at a moments notice, while still retaining their ritual duty; the speaker is able to be in one moment present in the moment of ritual yet a moment later high above, removed entirely and aggrandized beyond mere mortality; renewal of life is present and inseparably tied to mortality, yet simultaneously impartial and removed. By understanding these odd behaviors of normative elegiac patterning within this poem, the reader can reconcile the "bizarre" as function of mourning outside of said normative elegiac "patternings." Mourning something intangible, such as feelings, requires definition against the normative functions of the elegy; such a "definition" is found through the study of the queered elegy "In Memory of My Feelings" by Frank O'Hara.

Chapter 2: Walking through the poem, articulating the process of seeing

At first read, "In Memory of My Feelings" seems a continuous flow of thought and feeling, merging and converging. These thoughts and feelings mingle by way of fictions as well as autobiography from the poet's life. There appears to be no concrete "space" nor specific "moment," which critics such as Helen Vendler would have one find and examine. The images of the poem seem to blend, one right into the next, converging "reality" with non-sequiturial nonsense. The critic James Breslin compares writing about "In Memory of My Feelings" to "trying to write on water" and recommends, rather than try to derive meaning from each individual section and image, "to articulate the processes we follow as we read it" (pg.13, "The Contradictions of Frank O'Hara"). In order to better understand this poem, one needs to comprehend the movement of the poem, how it channels the realms of both the "real" and fictional, and in doing so creates a viable poetic "space" that can be analyzed. The following is a

mapping of the poem "In Memory of My Feelings," indebted to a previous mapping done by the critic Marjorie Perloff in her book, Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters.

Section 1

"In Memory of My Feelings" begins in procession, reminiscent of the funeral procession of the traditional elegy discussed in the previous chapter. We see the speaker carried "like a gondola, through the streets," the gondola symbolic of the funeral bier and the "several likenesses" symbolic of pallbearers. This traditional scene of the funeral procession soon becomes disrupted; these pallbearers take on an infiniteness, "like stars and years, like numerals," becoming "a number of naked selves," in danger from "creatures who from creatures who too readily recognize my weapons/ and have murder in their heart!" One sees these "dangerous creatures" as both separate, multiple "creatures" and at the same time singular about their *single* heart.

The poem moves from mock-funeral procession into horse race as, [a] gun is "fired," and

> *One of me rushes*
> *to window #13 and one of me raises his whip and one of me*
> *flutters up from the center of the track amidst the pink flamingoes,*
> *and underneath their hooves as they round the last turn my lips*
> *are scarred and brown, brushed by tails, masked in dirt's lust,*
> *definition, open mouths gasping for the cries of the bettors of the lungs*
> *of earth.*
> *So many of my transparencies could not resist the race!*

At once, we notice how unwieldy, how out of control the speaker's "selves" are, seemingly in the style of Seuss's "Thing 1 and Thing 2." Marjorie Perloff notes that "After this nightmare scene… there is only emptiness, a self in fragments: 'dried mushrooms, pink feathers, tickets,/ a flaking moon drifting across the muddied teeth'" (Perloff, 143). Such a scene, denoting a fragmentary state, can also be read as a condensing of the previous scene, placing this "nightmare" into tangible, digestible images. In the same way that this section reflects a

fragmented speaker, it also reflects a grab at control of the poetic landscape by the speaker, breaking said landscape down into graspable fragments.

The poem introduces the serpent in the midst of this fragmentary state, through its "imperceptible moan of covered breathing,/ love of the serpent!" Here, by way of a juxtaposition of the physical serpent with an emotional reaction, the poem contrasts the serpent's hidden physical presence but overt emotional presence, extracting "love" from the speaker. After the introduction of the serpent, we find the speaker aligned horizontally with the serpent, "I am underneath its leaves as the hunter crackles and pants/ and bursts," leaving us to wonder what exactly "it" is that possesses the leaves. What is clear from this passage is that there is an overt danger present in "the hunter," which the speaker works to avoid by identifying with the serpent. The poem emphasizes the serpent/ hunter opposition in the line, "The serpent's eyes/ redder at sight of those thorny fingernails, he is so smooth!" where fear becomes manifest in the redness of the serpent's eyes and maliciousness of the hunter becomes manifest in his "thorny fingernails," which contrast the serpent's "smoothness."

This section ends with the "transparent selves" of the speaker taking upon the likeness of serpents themselves, "like vipers in a pail, writhing and hissing/ without panic," presenting an uptake of control on the part of the speaker, newly identifying with the serpent. This change of the "selves," with their containment "in a pail," occurs with a change in the serpent "to resemble the Medusa," a merger of human and serpent. Perloff remarks that this section "ends on a note of death; the poet's old self must die if it is to be reborn" (ibid, 143), which would be commonplace in the self-elegy. The death of the elegist creates a poetic landscape suitable for said elegist to mourn his very existence. What is "queer" about any hints of the death or death at all are that they are just that, hints; Perloff herself even admits that what is frightening in this

section is the "very indeterminacy" created by what she calls a "surrealistic fantasy" (ibid). While in a traditional self-elegy one might expect to see the clear contemplation of the dead speaker by the living speaker, we find such a clear binary lost among the multiple "selves" that run rampant and uncontrolled through this section and the poem at large.

Section 2

The section opens with death: "The dead hunting/ And the alive, ahunted," perhaps a pointed misspelling of the more appropriate "haunted." Death seems to pit the dead against the living, instilling the dead with the essence of, and the living with the terror of, the hunter from the preceding section. Perloff argues that unlike the previous section, section 2 has a "perspective… of more straightforward autobiography" (ibid), attributing a connection rather than a animosity between the aforementioned first two lines of this section. While one can assert certain connections between O'Hara's life, as accounted in City Poet, and the familial chronology in this section, (all of the relatives listed as deceased had died by the time O'Hara set about writing "In Memory of My Feelings"), there remain certain "connections" that do not correlate to the actual biography.

Perloff argues that the speaker asserts that the deaths of

> *My father, my uncle,*
> *my grand-uncle and the several aunts. My*
> *grand-aunt dying for me, like a talisman, in the war,*

are all "for me," for the speaker. It is important to note, however, how in these lines the break created by the period separates "[m]y grand-aunt," ostensibly O'Hara's great-aunt Lizzie (Gooch, 33), from the other relatives. This separation suggests a deviation from the factual chronology in regards to the "grand-aunt," since O'Hara's great-Aunt Lizzie died during the World War II, not *in* it. The speaker hyperbolizes this death, by claiming it was "for me, like a

talisman, in the war," asserting a heroic value. There then comes a kind of identification between the speaker and the dead, leaving the identifications with the serpent, when the speaker describes "her eyes aslant/ like the invaded, but blue like mine." At once one sees "otherness" and identification bridging a mortal gap, the gap between life and death where mourning exists, remarked in the next line as "[a]n atmosphere of supreme lucidity, /humanism,/ the mere existence of emphasis," a bond compounded by "Marines reciting the Arabian ideas," emphasizing a human interconnectedness.

Through her reading, Perloff comes upon a certain "irony," since "these relatives did not die 'for' the poet [speaker] at all, but that their death was supposed to pain and trouble him" (Perloff, 144). We can read this "irony" also merely as the passing of time, that these deaths, after "[m]y/ 12 years since they all died," no longer carry the weight that they once did, presenting the non-ironic relationship between memory and time. The poem represents this relationship of memory and time in regards to mourning through how the speaker attempts "to count them as they die," and carrying no irony at all. Perloff contends, however, that such an exercise of counting is shown as "meaningless," "this is the way memory does not, indeed cannot operate" (ibid, 144). This distance provided by time allows the speaker to retreat, like the serpent, into hiding, into "the coolness of a mind/ like a shuttered suite in the Grand Hotel/ where mail arrives for my incognito." We can surmise that this "incognito," which allows the speaker to hide and avoid the faces of death represented in his deceased relatives, is the serpent, carried over from section 1, thus reinforcing the relationship of hiddenness and safety, which the serpent symbolizes.

Section 3

In this section the poem diverges from the chronological autobiography of section 2 and immerses the reader in a fictive landscape of the "classic" worlds of Arabia and Greece. Implicit in such time travel is the hiding or burying of memory and thus a distancing from mourning and the pain of loss. The result is a perverted sense of the past where there is the delusional sense that "we have advanced, France,/ together into a new land, like the Greeks, where one feels nostalgic/ for mere ideas." One then understands the risk presented earlier in the section by a figure "digging" and finding "there is water, clear, supple, or there/ deep in the sand where death sleeps, a murmurous bubbling/ proclaims the blackness that will ease and burn," as the ability to "dig" past the mask of history and find truth, but risk pain.

This "blackness," "a murmurous bubbling," is oil, literally the decomposed remains of the dead. In this moment the poem aligns the remains of the dead and hiddenness, a desire to suppress memory and thus pain, only to have it surge forth after desperate digging for water, something to sustain life. Thus in the search for life, for water, the pain of the past reemerges, and the speaker reencounters such pain, "where truth lies on its deathbed like an uncle/ and one of me has a sentimental longing for number." According to Perloff, the speaker's solution as to the "number" problem, of being one of many and suffering in this mob of numbers, is that of taking upon "the role of the hero" (ibid, 144). The figure of hero-play is "Lord Nelson" who "is all dead," reinforcing the notion of ridiculousness of elevation, of trying to lift oneself out of mere "number" by heroic stature, since we are all equalized in death. The section ends in the reemergence of oil, discovered by Lord Nelson and "his mistress," after they seem to have found paradise. Such a scene presents the false notion of such paradise, reminding the reader of notion of equalization in death and the failure of the use of history as a place in which to hide.

Section 4

This section begins with the acknowledgment of the identity of the "lover of history," that thing which "hides" "beneath these lives" of the heroes and deceased of the past. This figure once again is the serpent, "tongue out/ leaving a globe of spit on a taut spear of grass/ and leaves off rattling his tail a moment," returning to the poem, after having been hidden in the last sections by the preoccupation with history, which he uses to disguise himself. One begins to draw conclusions between the serpent and the kind of safety that he provides for the speaker from "the hunter." No longer can one be certain that the hiddenness allowed by identification with the serpent, as the speaker so readily does in the first section, provides the kind of safety the speaker needs.

Where there was once clear identification, one now finds a separation of the serpent from the speaker. The speaker thrusts himself forward, returning to autobiography and placing himself as active within the narrative, when he recounts "Five years ago, enamored of fire-escapes, I went to Chicago,/ an eventful trip: the fountains! the Art Institute, the Y/ for both sexes, absent Christianity." Despite the overt play of the speaker in this section, death remains hidden, even beyond the detail of the poem itself, seemingly absent from the consciousness of the speaker. The irony of the notion of the "fire-escapes" and the "eventful trip" is that "Jane," Jane Freilicher, "had the extremely unpleasant experience of hearing a man make a s suicide jump from his window" (Gooch, 185). Though the speaker has seemed to free himself of the guise of the serpent, the act of hiding from death has become the act of hiding death itself, removing it from the poetic landscape, or at least attempting to do so.

Not only does the relationship with death shift, but the multiple selves come again to the forefront of the poem. The speaker establishes his presence, consuming and controlling the

various "selves," which had run about uncontrolled in section 1. Using the "I" to assert his presence, the speaker claims,

> *I am a Hittite in love with a horse. I don't know what blood's*
> *in me I feel like an African prince I am a girl walking downstairs*
> *in a red pleated dress with heels I am a champion taking a fall*
> *I am a jockey with a sprained ass-hole I am the light mist*
> *in which a face appears*
> *and it is another face of blonde I am a baboon eating a banana*
> *I am a dictator looking at his wife I am a doctor eating a child*
> *and the child's mother smiling I am a Chinaman climbing a mountain*
> *I am a child smelling his father's underwear I am an Indian*
> *sleeping on a scalp*
> *and my pony is stamping in the birches,*
> *and I've just caught sight of the Niña, the Pinta and the Santa Maria.*

Perloff argues that "[b]y running together two clauses in one line…, and breaking a clause in half at a line-end" the poem "stresses the multiplicity of selves, the chaos and plentitude of life" (Perloff, 145). What Perloff misses is that in the actual naming of these "various selves" the speaker has taken upon a conscious act of control, a conscious act of reclaiming that which had gotten away with him and had been "carrying" him, controlling him, at the beginning of the poem. The component of "Grace," which allows for this shift to occur, will be discussed in a later chapter.

Section 5

This section begins with a direct address of the serpent by the speaker, "[a]nd now it is the serpent's turn," taking him out of hiding, while simultaneously drawing a divide between the speaker and serpent, who, at the outset of the poem, were aligned so closely. The speaker restructures the relationship between himself and the serpent, "I am not quite you, but almost, the opposite of visionary," allowing us to observe the struggle for separation through this incomplete, "but almost," "identification." Through the use of the second person pronoun, "you," for the first time, the speaker indicates a structural divide between himself and the serpent. Such

use of "you" is common in O'Hara's poetry, particularly in his love poems, addressed to an unknown "you" (such as in the case of "To the Harbormaster" and "Having a Coke with You"), while simultaneously addressing a reading public; the public and private are thereby inextricably blended. O'Hara speaks to this mode of address, that of the open and public "you" made personal and intimate by the details provided in the poem, in his poetic manifesto "Personism."

In this final section of "In Memory of My Feelings," the poetic circumstances surrounding the serpent imitate that of an intimate love, as signified by the both public and personal "you." While in a love poem the subject of the "you" signifier would be the focal point of the poem, and the implicit love object, no such conclusion may be drawn from the serpent, who is "coiled around the central figure,/ the heart/ that bubbles with red ghosts." Thus the heart, not the serpent, is the "central figure," the mourned subject of this elegy, and as part the central of the speaker, the heart reinforces the self-elegiac pattern of the poem. Such a conclusion, that the heart rather than the serpent or even the speaker is the "central figure," is odd; the heart has not been present throughout the entirety of the poem, and arrives hidden beneath the "coils" of the serpent. The figure of the serpent, as aligned/ misaligned with the speaker, will be discussed in-depth in the final chapter of this paper.

The "selves" return, now constituting the vessels of "of the most beautiful things/ in my lives," asserting once more their power over the speaker, who now rather than hide, embraces by accepting the "beauty" that they bring him. But this embrace is short-lived; "my body, the naked host to my many selves, shot/ by a guerilla warrior or dumped from a car," thus bringing to fruition the speaker's fears that the acceptance of his multiplicity of being will be his down fall. Therefore he must forgo

> *what is always and everywhere*
> *present, the scene of my selves, the occasion of these ruses,*

which I myself and singly must now kill
and save the serpent in their midst.

Perloff writes that, with these lines, "the poem concludes triumphantly" (ibid., 146), but for whom? In killing the multiplicity of self in order to save the serpent, one understands that what is lost, more so than the "selves," is "the heart," lost beneath the coils serpent. In Perloff's assessment, "the 'serpent self' triumphs over 'the occasion of these ruses'" (ibid, 146), but such a conclusion requires that the serpent *be* the self, be aligned with the speaker completely. Rather, the speaker has no other choice than to be rid of the ruses or sacrifice his "heart," the core of his feelings, which the serpent controls. Thus what is mourned here is the loss of "these ruses" as well as the loss of emotional liberty, an ability symbolized through a multiplicity of self which must "die," and consequently mourned through the poem. The queerness of this elegy is thus born out of the need to mourn the loss of, not a love object, not the self, but an aspect of the self, a certain liberty of feeling.

Chapter 3: "For James Dean" and the Poetic Environment

O'Hara's elegy "In Memory of My Feelings" is an elegy that stands outside the tradition and normative constructions of the elegy in order to mourn "feelings," instead of a tangible, physically losable love-object. This "queered" elegy may be most easily understood through the vantage constructed by its juxtaposition to another of O'Hara's elegies, "For James Dean." This elegy, written "the Wednesday after the crash" that took James Dean's life, "shows the influence of classical elegies, which the movie star's death inspired O'Hara to read, including Milton's 'Lycidas,' Tennyson's 'In Memoriam,' and Shelly's 'Mourn not for Adonais' " (Gooch, 266). These "classical" elegies align themselves to the elegiac tradition, as they are structured to mourn the loss of a physical love-object, namely a person, such as Tennyson's Arthur Hallam or

Whitman's President Lincoln. Therein, we find much of what one would expect to find in an elegy, beginning in regards to the emotional climate of the poem. A climate of anger and condemnation toward the unconquerable Fates consumes the speaker in "For James Dean."

We encounter the speaker in "For James Dean," much like Milton's speaker in "Lycidas," addressing the "gods" as "the ambassador of a hatred/ who knows its cause." The reader is struck with an unprecedented amount of personal investment from the speaker, a level of personal investment lacking in O'Hara's better known "I do this, I do that" poems. Such directed emotion, such direction at all, is absent in "In Memory of My Feelings," where an atmosphere dictated by "quietness" and "cool skies" shifts suddenly to one where "[a]n elephant takes up his trumpet,/ money flutters from the window of cries" and "[a] gun is 'fired,'" producing the effect of an indeterminate emotional atmosphere. Exactly the opposite effect is created by the consistent anger present in "For James Dean." Said anger holds the poem together, unlike "In Memory of My Feelings," which appears like a series of disconnected vignettes, rather than pointed, performative mourning. Emotion and therefore feeling seems to then remain inconsistent in "In Memory of My Feelings," shifting between two poles, and even meshing moments of heat and intensity with those of detached coolness.

The cause for such shifting and meshing is unclear. While the reader can trace a gradual shift of emotion from anger at loss to mournful acceptance of loss in "Lycidas," signaled by the presentation of flowers, "[t]o strew the Laureat Herse where Lycid lies" (Miltion, ll. 151), the emotional climate of "In Memory of My Feelings" remains in an erratic state of limbo, shifting from cool to hot, from "the coolness of a mind/ like a shuttered suite in the Grand Hotel" to "rockets" that "splay over a *sposalizio*" along with the frantic "celebration,/ the trying desperately to count them [the rockets] as they die" in section 2. This shift between the binary of

heated excitement and calm coolness becomes obscured in section 3, where there is "a tremor/ as runners arrive from the mountains/ bearing snow," meshing the intensity of the moment with the cold snow, juxtaposed shortly by a figure "lying in an oasis one day," meshing the heat of the tropical oasis with the apparent relaxed coolness of the scene. Implicit in such a rapidly shifting emotional climate of the poem, what we will refer to as "poetic environment," is the suggestion of what makes mourning "feelings" different from mourning an actual object: the fluidity of feelings, their ability to appear and disappear, but presumably never be forever lost.

Apathy as "coolness" does not permeate from "For James Dean." Though the speaker does call for "Peace!" in stanza 5, the cause for "peace" is "to be true to a city/ of rats and to love the envy/ of the dreary, smudged mothers/ of an arcane dejection." One can only assume this "dejection" is the source of the speaker's frustration and anger, a "dejection" that he can only guess at, since the gods keep such answers "beyond [their] wall/ of air," and "withhold [their] light/ from painstaking paths!" of the speaker. This frustration at the unknown turns to elegiac questioning, verging on a kind of rhetorical answering, in stanza 8, when the speaker addresses the gods once again, asking "Is it true you high ones, celebrated/ among amorous flies, hated the/ prodigy and invention of his nerves?" Such questioning which challenges the authority of the "gods" contrasts starkly with the classic elegiac questioning of "Lycidas" as well as in Tennyson's "In Memoriam" wherein questions are directed at the deceased, such as "What art thou then? I cannot guess" (Tennyson, ll. 5, Sec. 130), or the assumed reader, such as "[d]o we indeed desire the dead/ Should still be near us at our side?/ Is there no baseness we would hide?/ No inner vileness that we dread?" (ibid. ll. 1-4, Sec. 51). In both examples the challenge is toward the speaker himself, at his limits and baseness as human, rather than at the pettiness and vanity of the "gods" as present in "For James Dean."

While we understand that all instances of questioning are rhetorical devices, the implications of the questioning in O'Hara's elegy are that of a boldness not seen in Tennyson's classic elegy. The desire to have the dead still alive, the desire to undo the will of God or "gods" is seen as a "baseness" and "vileness" in "In Memoriam," while the speaker in "For James Dean" acknowledges such flawed nature as shared between himself and the deceased. By comparing himself in stanza 4 to the deceased, "as one whose filth/ is like his own, of pride/ and speed," the speaker in "For James Dean" qualifies himself through this connection of character to speak for the deceased, making the elegiac connection not merely through love of the dead, but through a common humanness, a common mortality. Mourning thus becomes personalized; this is not to the say that mourning in the traditional elegy is not personal, but rather the personal is made manifest within the speaker himself in "For James Dean" and thus personalized simultaneously with the permanent loss of an external "other," a love-object outside the speaker. Thus loss becomes a personal stake for the speaker, in that he too can die, he too is a temporal body. Without mourning the loss of the self, without entering the territory of the self-elegy, "For James Dean" touches upon the core of the self-elegy, which is extrapolated on in "In Memory of My Feelings."

"In Memory of My Feelings" takes this aspect of personalized mourning and removes the level of the "other." There is no separation between the mourned self and the various other "selves" present in "In Memory of My Feelings"; rather they are all part and parcel of the same "speaker." Considered on the same introspective level, the "selves" of the speaker are kept within this frame by the consistent use of the possessive "my" such as in "[s]o many of my transparencies could not resist the race!" in section 1, and the repetitive qualifications the speaker uses throughout the "I am" catalogue in section 4:

I am a Hittite in love with a horse. I don't know what blood's
in me I feel like an African prince I am a girl walking downstairs
in a red pleated dress with heels I am a champion taking a fall
I am a jockey with a sprained ass-hole I am the light mist
in which a face appears
and it is another face of blonde I am a baboon eating a banana
I am a dictator looking at his wife I am a doctor eating a child
and the child's mother smiling I am a Chinaman climbing a mountain
I am a child smelling his father's underwear I am an Indian
sleeping on a scalp

The aspect of connection through common personality as presented in "For James Dean" is transcended here by an actual "being," by an existing as the mourned self or "selves" in the moment of the poem. However, what the speaker "is" becomes indistinguishable from what he "is not," thus leaving the direction of mourning, what is being mourned, as unfocused as the direction of the emotions caused by such mourning. The blur between the mourned and the mourner is thus a tenant of the queered elegy in that the normative elegy centers upon a separation between the mourned subject (James Dean, Arthur Hallam, even Yeats himself in his self elegies) and the speaker. As Sacks argues in light of the traditional elegy, "few elegies or acts of mourning succeed without seeming to place the dead, and death itself, at some cleared distance from the living" (Sacks, 19). In contrast to Sacks' traditional elegy, the queered self-elegy has no "distance from the living," and "succeeds" regardless, but in a way that does not fall under the normative value of "success" delineated by successful mourning.

The separation between elegist and elegized remains consistent in "For James Dean." The unconventional affinity for the deceased as well as the unconventional address of the "gods" remain within the normative framework of the elegy in that they in no way alter the performance of said elegy. The performative quality of mourning within the poem, the act or "doing" of the elegy, remains consistent with the norms of traditional elegies, though albeit in an unresolved

form. The anger of the speaker does not go away, but rather the poem ends in a final act of defiance:

> *I take up*
> *the nourishment of his pale green eyes,*
> *out of which I shall prevent*
> *flowers from growing, your flowers.*

The speaker's resentment and anger remains unresolved, harkening towards Jahan Ramazani's assertion of the modern, non-resolving elegy. The elegist, though more brazen than one might consider traditional, still finds himself mourning the deceased with tears, with feelings of loneliness and anguish, and with physical responses such as blood rushing to the face, as during intense weeping. Such performative aspects are listed in stanza 6:

> *as long as the beast in me maintains*
> *its taciturn power to close my lids*
> *in tears, and my loins move yet*
> *in the ennobling pursuit of all the worlds*
> *you have left me alone in, and would be*
> *the dolorous distraction from,*
> *while you summon your army of anguishes*
> *which is a million hooting blood vessels*
> *on the eyes and in the ears*
> *at that instant before death.*

In keeping with the traditional performative acts of mourning, the speaker succeeds in elegizing James Dean in a way that is still recognizable to the reader, that resonates as common, if not also normative. The speaker does what he is supposed to do, though in perhaps a more bold and zealous way that is indicative of the poetry of O'Hara, as shown in other poems such as, "A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island." This boldness does not transcend elegiac code; the mourning/ mourned binary remains, as well as the directed emotional landscape of the poem. The poem remains recognizable as an elegy, though an elegy that has bent the rules, not blatantly ignored them, as "In Memory of My Feelings" does.

The use of vegetation, namely flowers, was touched upon earlier, but is a perfect example of the elegiac departure witnessed in "In Memory of My Feelings." In the traditional elegy, flowers are used to signify an acceptance of loss and compromise with the uncontrollable "fates" of death. In "For James Dean" the speaker prevents the growth of flowers, and thus their presentation to the "gods," stating: "I shall prevent/ flowers from growing, your flowers." The flowers' purpose, that of appeasing the "gods," is made clear in their qualification in the final line of the poem as "your flowers," the "gods" being the implied "you" of the poem. This sentiment starkly counters that of "In Memoriam" where the speaker declares, "'Tis well; 'tis something; we may stand/ Where he in English earth is laid,/ And from his ashes may be made/ The violet of his native land" (Tennyson, ll. 1-4, Sec. 18). Yet in either elegiac case, that of "For James Dean" or the more traditional elegies like "Lycidas" and "In Memoriam," flowers maintain their normative value: a presentation of acceptance of death on the part of the mourner.

Vegetation, presented as ferns in "In Memory of My Feelings," hold a value wholly outside their normative function:

> *... watching the ripple of their loss disappear*
> *along the shore, underneath ferns,*
> *face downward in the ferns*
> *my body, the naked host to my many selves, shot*
> *by a guerilla warrior or dumped from a car into ferns*
> *which are themselves* journalières.

Sacks refers to vegetation in the elegy as representing the cyclical nature of life and death, with the cycle of the seasons and the sun, an idea reinforced by the ferns' description as "journalières," implying a daily renewal (Sacks, 28). Yet these renewable objects do not carry with them the effective force of their counterparts in the traditional elegy. While vegetation plays an active role in the normative elegy, the ferns in O'Hara's queered self-elegy effect nothing; they are passive objects. "Loss" disappears beneath them, the body of the speaker is killed and

"dumped from a car into" these ferns, but they do not "do" anything. The flowers of "Lycidas" signal a shift from anger at, to the acceptance of, death, while the catalogue from lines 141 through 151 presents the sheer magnitude of the mourning ritual. The ferns do nothing; as passive objects they contrast the action of loss and death happening around them. Thus the value of vegetation shifts from the normative representation of renewal of life to queered passivity toward the actions and behaviors of people. Simply put, vegetation of the queered elegy does not care about the life or death of the speaker, the mourned subject.

In looking at the queered elegy "In Memory of My Feelings" in juxtaposition to O'Hara's earlier elegy "For James Dean" we encounter two contradictory poetic environments. Anger, at the gods, at the speaker's own human limitations, envelope the poetic environment of "For James Dean." We would think that "In Memory of My Feelings," an elegy ostensibly about the loss of "feelings," would have a distinct poetic environment. Instead, we encounter emotions that span a fantastical range and moves through such emotional peaks and valleys with incredible speed and dexterity. The poetic environment of "In Memory of My Feelings" shifts as if one moment were not codependent upon the next, lending the poem an atmosphere of vignettes, one followed by another, simultaneously sharing and blending emotions, creating a blurred effect between the various scenes of the poem.

The moments of "For James Dean" remain tied together through a consistent and traceable emotional pattern, similar to those traditional elegies of Milton and Tennyson. Even those elements within the poem that reflect emotional shifts, such as vegetation, take on a new passive existence in the queered elegy. These ferns stand outside their active "doing" counterparts of the normative elegies in that they are passive to the trauma and struggle of the speaker, rather than reflecting his own behaviors of mourning. Thus can we see the queered

elegy as existing in poetic environment that is impartial to his own suffering. The queered elegiac landscape is impartial in regards to the poem's actual performance or "doing" of mourning, that is, until the introduction of "Grace."

By comparison to the traditional elegiac poetic environment, the queered poetic environment does not care about its speaker, the elegist. Rather he is left in a space dictated by fluctuating emotions, emotions that shift too often and too quickly to exude empathy for his loss. Furthermore, the loss experienced by the speaker in "In Memory of My Feelings" is itself intangible and liable to fluctuations, not in terms of "feeling," but rather in terms of its actual identity. We find the poetic landscape of "In Memory of My Feelings," what happens in the poem, a victim of the poetic environment, how to poem treats its subjects. This aspect of "In Memory of My Feelings" is a queered feature of said elegy because under normative circumstances, the poetic landscape of the elegy, that of mourning the lost love-object, dictates the poetic environment of the elegy, that of empathy for the subjects, both elegist and elegized. In reversing this relationship, "In Memory of My Feelings" queers the elegiac poetic environment.

Chapter 4: Empathy, (f)or the love of "Grace"

The elegy, the poem of mourning and loss, cannot be inextricably separated from the love poem. Mourning is an act of forced separation from a love object, after which Freud believed, "the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (Freud, 4 [430]), which protects the mourner from the psychological malady of melancholia, caused by "an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness in contradistinction to mourning" (ibid, 4 [430]). The elegy, in order to fulfill its performative duties, in order to mourn the loss of a lost love object, must concern itself with

love, since the existence of love in the first place is what requires mourning to occur. Without love, there would be no cause for mourning; detachment from objects would be simple, with no risk of affliction if separation were not to occur. Thus the elegy holds within in its normative tradition the love poem itself. The love poem is less defined, less mechanical than the elegy, thus allowing it to exist simultaneously within the frames of other more structured poems, such as the elegy. It should then come as no surprise that the love poem can exist within even within the most estranged elegiac environments, the queered elegy in particular. What love does within this "queer" environment is the concern of this chapter.

As a queered self-elegy, an elegy that functions outside the normative constructs of the elegy, thus defining itself against the tradition which it rejects, one might expect that "In Memory of My Feelings" would treat love in a similarly "queer" manner. Such a manner would evoke the queered presence of multiplicity where there existed normative singularity; such a manner would require the focus of love, like loss, be diffuse and spread through multiplicities and refractions of the greater whole. What one finds though is another kind of "queering" created by the split within a single signifier between a concrete signified and a transient, mutable signified. Simply put, the name "Grace" exists within the frame of "In Memory of My Feelings" as both a physical love object, Grace Hartigan, and a transient emotion, the feeling of "Grace." Though both of these signifiers function normatively within the frame of the poem, their simultaneous signification create an altogether new signification that exists outside the normative loss-of-love-object framework of the elegy. Making "Grace" a queered elegiac love-object means that the poem treats "Grace," not as something lost, but something found that in turn may cause something to be lost, thus creating a cycle of lost/ found that does not exist in the normative elegy.

Frank O'Hara's relationship with Grace Hartigan was one of artistic collaboration on a professional level and, on an emotional level, one of love. When they first met, "[they] became pals – often talking on the phone about parties, art, boyfriends," but this friendship soon transformed into a "shared… amorousness of the sort that O'Hara tended toward with the special women in his life" and according to Hartigan, she and O'Hara "'fell in love… If a homosexual and a heterosexual could be in love, it was a falling in love…'" (Gooch, 212). Implicit in this sentiment of an "amorousness… with the special women in his life" is the ambiguous sexuality that O'Hara embodied, even after his "coming out" as a homosexual (in no grandiose way, however; O'Hara's sexuality, though overtly "gay," was seldom without a female love-object, which serves to obfuscate or "queer" his otherwise "gay" image). "Queerness" of the post-modern variety with its broad definition of sexual pursuit and attraction was not part of O'Hara's self-understanding; he was wholly pre-queer. That is not to say though that the same emotional consequences carried within a queer body were foreign to O'Hara. We can read the limitation of O'Hara's queer expression into the signifier of "Grace" via Grace Hartigan, as she appears in "In Memory of My Feelings."

This "limitation" becomes apparent when Hartigan refuses sexual intimacy with O'Hara. This pinnacle of their romantic endeavors occurs during a trip he and his sometimes-lover, sometimes-roommate, Joe Lesueur, took to Hartigan's summer retreat. After dinner on their first night, Lesueur recalls,

> *"it came time to turn in, which was when he [O'Hara] made known his intentions, and he did so within easy earshot of me [Lesueur], when he stopped at Grace's bedroom door and entreated her to let him join her for the night. … as gracefully as she could manage, and not without a show of affection, she turned Frank down"* (Lesueur, 106)

This come-on was no light-hearted affair, as O'Hara makes clear to Lesueur when the latter tries to make light on the incident upon their return to New York and ends up berated by O'Hara. In

addition, O'Hara demands that Lesueur "'never mention it to anyone'" (ibid., 106), a rather uncharacteristic request coming from the man who seems to be able to leave it all on the page as honestly and intimately as if he were talking to an old friend or a lover. This particular "digression" smacks of the jealousy of a spurned lover, yet it reveals in many ways the complicated sexuality of the poet, too often unacknowledged, which seems to be reflected in the dynamic split within the signifier of "Grace."

Though O'Hara wrote "For Grace, After a Party" in 1954, about two years before "In Memory of My Feelings," one still finds evidence of this complex signification around "Grace," between the person and a transient, even spiritual, state of being:

> *You do not always know what I am feeling.*
> *Last night in the warm spring air while I was*
> *blazing my tirade against someone who doesn't*
> *interest*
> *me, it was love for you that set me*
> *afire,*
> *and isn't it odd? for in rooms full of*
> *strangers my most tender feelings*
> *writhe and*
> *bear the fruit of screaming. Put out your hand,*
> *isn't there*
> *an ashtray, suddenly, there? beside*
> *the bed? And someone you love enters the room*
> *and says wouldn't*
> *you like the eggs a little*
> *different today?*
> *And when they arrive they are*
> *just plain scrambled eggs and the warm weather*
> *is holding.*

The informal "you" address of the poem is distinctly O'Hara; this informality raises the level of intimacy, building the tension between the speaker and subject, "Grace." The identity of this "you" as "Grace" is revealed in the title, but kept out of the body of the poem itself. This act of naming the subject, the love-object, only in the title is typical of O'Hara's poetry, particularly in

the love poems, such as "To the Harbormaster" and "Joe's Jacket." In keeping the named love-object out of the poem itself, O'Hara creates a poetic environment that is purposefully ambiguous, while implying an intimacy as if to say, "if this poem is for 'you,' 'you' will know without me telling you." We find the act of addressing the love-object indirectly as "you," rather than outright by name, is replaced in "In Memory of My Feelings," with the direct address of "Grace."

"Grace" appears like a name on an epitaph, perched alone, above the remainder of the enjambed line, in some way anticipating what would become O'Hara's own epitaph. The line,

Grace
to be born and live as variously as possible.

appears in the middle of the fourth part of "In Memory of My Feelings." By extracting the beginning words of the next sentence of the poem, "[t]he conception," which occupy the space following this line and sit immediately beneath "Grace," one sees the physical distance "Grace" takes on the page from the clause that defines it, as if to resist, yet ultimately yield, to this particular definition. Its isolation from the poem seems to allude to the dedication line, "To Grace Hartigan," which serves as the first reference to "Grace" in the context of the poem. This "instance" of "Grace" rests not quite a part, not quite separate from the poem itself. The poem complicates the significations of "Grace" by initially presenting "Grace" as strictly an entity, a person, then later as an idea, a "way of being," merged with the signification of this person, and by presenting the signifier as both in and outside the confines of the poem. "In Memory of My Feelings" presents the split within the signifier of "Grace" more directly and as more at odds with itself than in "For Grace, After a Party."

One finds the signification(s) of the *entity* of "Grace," of Grace Hartigan the person, not only by name, but also through allusion to her art within the poetic landscape of "In Memory of

My Feelings." Marjorie Perloff in *Poet Among Painters* notes how the line "Grace/ to be born and live as variously as possible" refers to the previous lines,

> *One of me is standing in the waves, an ocean bather.*
> *or I am naked with a plate of devils at my hip.*

which serve here as an allusion "to two Hartigan nudes" (Perloff, 79), "Ocean Bathers" and "Frank O'Hara and the Demons" (ibid., 210, note 7). Perloff argues that "[O'Hara] seems to identify even with the figures in Grace's paintings, entering, so to speak, the world of her canvas" (Perloff, 79). Perloff suggets that this insertion of Hartigan's art into the poem allows for "identification" between "O'Hara," or the speaker, with these "other" artistic works, outside the context of the poetic landscape. Thus the speaker moves from the poetic landscape into the artist's canvass, so to speak; this same portal allows the world of the canvass to move into the poetic landscape, taking its speaker, "Grace," with it, thrusting "Grace" into the poetic landscape.

This mobility granted to the signifier of "Grace," moving between artistic mediums of canvas and page, draws a stark contrast to the "Grace" of "For Grace, After a Party." While the signification of the person of Grace Hartigan is fluid, moving through "true" signifiers (i.e. her name) and mimetic signifiers (i.e. her art), her signification within O'Hara's earlier love poem to "Grace" is replication-focused or loosely representational, not even to the point of mimesis. Perloff notes astutely that in "For Grace, After a Party," "O'Hara lets one 'image' bleed into another even as Hartigan does in her painting" (ibid., 79), thus implying a kind of becoming or replicating of Hartigan's art. Therein exists a one way signification of poem to painting, of implied "poet" to implied "painter," of lover to love object. The relationship of "clean" signification, signifier to signified in one direction, contrasts with the complicated and unclear signification moving between canvass and poem, flowing from the painter to poet and back again, in "In Memory of My Feelings."

There has been little discussion so far as to the "other half" of "Grace"; that is, so far the focus of this discussion has been placed solely upon "Grace" as the signifier of Grace Hartigan, the person. The other side of the signification coin is the metaphysical aspect of "Grace," the feeling that "Grace" creates within both poems. "Grace" creates a poetic environment that concerns itself with a state or states of "being," rather than a formal entity, such as the person of Grace Hartigan. It is most likely that O'Hara first encountered the Christian concept of grace during his adolescent years at a parochial school. Yet his metaphysical concept of "Grace" in both of the two aforementioned poems lacks any formal Christian connotations. Like the Chicago YMCA in section four of "In Memory of My Feelings," the environments of O'Hara's poems "In Memory of My Feelings" and "For Grace, After a Party" seem to revel in an embrace of "absent Christianity," while still playing upon the framework of the traditionally Christian theme of "Grace."

One kind of "queer" lens would read O'Hara's concept of "Grace" as a kind of re-writing, out of and away from the Christian tradition that O'Hara was force-fed as a child in parochial school, a tradition that worked to demonize his later "queer" lifestyle. However, O'Hara's secular "Grace" moves beyond a mere re-writing of Christian metaphysics; in "For Grace, After a Party" one discovers O'Hara's "Grace" as an "odd" love. "Grace" is bound to the experience of love in "For Grace, After a Party," but imbued with a certain "oddness" revealed in the expression of said love, when we read that,

> *... it was love for you that set me*
> *afire,*
> *and isn't it odd? for in rooms full of*
> *strangers my most tender feelings*
> *writhe and*
> *bear the fruit of screaming.*

The speaker expresses such odd love or "Grace" through "screaming." The contradiction between "tender feelings" and "screaming" creates a rift between the poetic landscape, a party where the speaker sees someone he loves, and the poetic environment, love turned to screaming. Such a rift is indicative of "Grace"; this said feeling of "odd" love continues to separate the speaker from a linear reality, indicative of so many of O'Hara's "I do this, I do that" poems. After this moment of screaming the progression of the poem shifts; images begin to blend together and reality begins to bend to the whim of the speaker. It is as if this "screaming," this Ginsbergian "howl" or Whitmanian "barbaric yawp," works to call forth the power of "Grace," that this action is more an incantation of, than reaction to, "Grace."

Perloff contends this shift is a nod to Grace Hartigan's painting style, which blurs formally separate images into each other on the canvas. While we see this nod by O'Hara as an embrace of the Hartigan painting style, we should also consider how this blurring distorts the reality of the poem, signifying the "Grace" that occurs "after a party." "Grace" is an "odd" love in that it distorts linear reality, simultaneously imbuing the poetic environment with empathy toward the addressed "you."

> *Put out your hand,*
> *isn't there*
> *an ashtray, suddenly, there? beside*
> *the bed? And someone you love enters the room*
> *and says wouldn't*
> *you like the eggs a little*
> *different today?*

Whether this "you" is "Grace" or the speaker addressing himself in the second person is hard to tell; we come to see that this "odd" love has not only blurred the images and moments of the poem, but has blurred too the delineation between the speaker and "Grace," between love object and lover, between signified and signifier. Despite this blurred relationship between signifier and

signified, we still take into account how the poetic environment shifts in regards to the subject "you." The poetic environment in this passage concerns itself with the "you," and attends to its needs, providing it with an ash tray, a lover, and food; such a poetic environment is loving. In this way, we discover "Grace" to be a transformative state of love, a love that imbues the poetic environment with an empathy that seems to mold the poetic environment to care about its subject, the "you."

When inserted into the apathetic environment of "In Memory of My Feelings," a poetic environment that is emotionally removed from its speaker and subjects, "Grace" becomes constrained and the function of "Grace" changes. This "odd" love, something *experienced* in "For Grace, After a Party," becomes defined, becomes a verb, and thus contained, as the *ability* "to be born and live as variously as possible." This ability, however, seems to come with a kind of warning in the next line, in that the "conception of the masque," the creation of this fluid existence, "barely suggests the sordid identifications." This line stands out against the apathetic poetic environment, not just due to its position of resistance in relationship to the previous line, seeming to react in foreboding against the feeling of "Grace," but also in that the line's strong sentiment introduces a strong emotion itself, a feeling of reproach, into said poetic environment. With this change in the poetic environment, with this emotional shift from apathy to disgust, one encounters a shift in the poetic landscape as well. One finds the remainder of section 4 inundated with "identifications" which incite the inclusion of the poem's speaker, the elegist, for the first time:

> *I am a Hittite in love with a horse. I don't know what blood's*
> *in me I feel like an African prince I am a girl walking downstairs*
> *in a red pleated dress with heels I am a champion taking a fall*
> *I am a jockey with a sprained ass-hole I am the light mist*
> *in which a face appears*
> *and it is another face of blonde I am a baboon eating a banana*

I am a dictator looking at his wife I am a doctor eating a child
and the child's mother smiling I am a Chinaman climbing a mountain
I am a child smelling his father's underwear I am an Indian
sleeping on a scalp

Regardless of whether they are indeed "sordid" or not (though some clearly are), these identifications signal a shift in the poetic landscape. Their inclusion of the "I" brings the speaker, the elegist, into the poetic landscape, rather keeping him removed, represented only by his "many selves" that have dominated the poem until this point.

One easily notes the fluidity of existence attributed to "Grace," defined as the ability "to be born and live as variously as possible," in these "identifications." With each "identification," the speaker changes either ethnicity, sex, age or any other number of factors involved with identity. These "identifications" thus allow the speaker to "be born and live as" a multitude of persons. This "variety" subscribes to "Grace" as defined and contained within "In Memory of My Feelings," exuding none of the "odd" love of the "Grace" one finds in "For Grace, After a Party," love that works to change the poetic environment into something "lovely" and "loving." The apathetic poetic environment of "In Memory of My Feelings" effectively contains "Grace," expressing reproach for "Grace," and seemingly preventing it from altering the poetic environment in a way that expresses empathy for the speaker. In the final line of section 4, an empathetic poetic environment emerges, if only for a moment, displaying of the effect of "Grace" in "For Grace, After a Party."

As his list of "identifications" culminates, reinforcing the defined "Grace," the speaker maintains his presence within the poetic landscape with the pronoun "I." For the first time in the course of the poem, not only is the speaker placed within this poetic moment, but he is alone, unadorned by his multitude of selves:

I watch
the sea at the back of my eyes, near the spot where I think
in solitude as pine trees groan and support the enormous winds,
they are humming L'Oiseau de feu!
They look like gods, these whitemen,
And they are bringing me the horse I fell in love with on the frieze.

Here the speaker finds "Grace," the love that loves, present in "these whitemen," who bring to him a love object, who deliver love to him. Suddenly, the poetic environment seems to care about the speaker, providing him with "the horse I fell in love in love with," reminiscent of the moment in "For Grace, After a Party," when "someone you love enters the room/ and says wouldn't/ you like the eggs a little/ different today?" Both of these moments are imbued with an attention to the needs of the speaker, needs that have been ignored by the poetic environment of "In Memory of My Feelings" up until this point. In this poetic moment, we see "Grace" asserting a certain control over the poetic environment, as if rising out of the "ashes" of an apathetic poetic environment like "l'Oiseau de feu," a phoenix. We find the poetic environment now imbued with "Grace" and reborn as something different; in this moment, "Grace" compels the formerly apathetic poetic environment of "In Memory of My Feelings" to involve itself in the desires of the speaker, presenting the behavior previously only seen in the "Grace" of "For Grace, After a Party."

"Grace" is an unbounded love, a love that loves, a love that changes the poetic environment in which it exists. Simultaneously "Grace" is a love object. This love object can never be fully possessed, as in the case of the relationship of Frank O'Hara and Grace Hartigan, due to the limitations placed upon queer sexuality. Thus the poet's own relationship with "Grace" presents a certain inaccessibility, a certain degree of loss. Loss is compounded in the figure of "Grace," yet one finds love at its most powerful and pure in the feeling and experience of O'Hara's "Grace." The signifier of "Grace" exists in both the realm of the physical and

metaphysical, as a person and as a feeling, and represents within "In Memory of My Feelings" structural shifts and elements that seem to oppose one another. The loss signified in the physical "Grace" opposes the love found in the metaphysical "Grace." The queerness of "Grace" exists in this locusing, this condensing of the two poles of the elegy, of love and loss into one signifier. These two elements, in terms of the traditional elegy, co-exist separately; they are both present within the poetic landscape of the elegy, but never within the same poetic moment: there are moments of loss and there are moments of love; the speaker mourns the lost love object, but the love object itself does not signify this loss. In the queered elegy, as one finds in the signifier of "Grace," the love object, the signifier of love also signifies loss; these two contradictory elements co-exist within the same entity, yet are expressed by two separate sides, two separate significations, of said entity. Thus we understand the queered elegy, not necessarily as merging the concepts of loss and love, but as bringing them closer together, as bringing them beyond co-existence within the poetic landscape of the elegy into a single locus, a particular signifier. Such is the signifier of "Grace."

Chapter 5: The "irresolvability" of the "serpent" and conclusions

The previous chapter presented "Grace" as a signifier at odds with itself, relaying two contradictory, irresolvable "meanings." Within one signifier one finds the two emotional extremes of the elegy, love and loss, two extremes that cannot and will not be fully reconciled. This irresolvable signification plays into the poetic environment of "In Memory of My Feelings", an environment of apathy, an environment that for the most part behaves ambivalently towards its speaker. Such an environment contradicts normative behaviors of the poetic environment of the elegy, a space that is meant to console and contain the bereavement of the speaker. Instead,

we find bereavement overshadowed or forced out of focus by a surge of other emotions, diluting the "pure" emotional environment of the traditional elegy. In order to fully comprehend the effect of this irresolvable signification and ambivalent emotional environment, two instances of what James Breslin calls "opposing suggestions" within "In Memory of My Feelings," we must examine the figure of the serpent. Through the serpent, the poem manifests the act of queered mourning and thus makes apparent the work of the queered elegy.

As stated previously, the queered elegy functions as an elegy outside of the normative structures of the normative elegy, an elegy that does the work of mourning. The work of the queered elegy has yet to be defined in this work and for good reason: one cannot seek to define what one has not yet located. Through the comparison of "In Memory of My Feelings" to "For James Dean" in chapter 3, and the examination of "Grace" in chapter 4, one may begin to locate the "work" of the queered elegy. At this point it would seem that the "work" of the queer elegy exists, as queerness exists, in that which is not normative, as made clear by such critics as Lee Edelman in No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive and Donald E. Hall in Queer Theories. We have located this "queerness" in the behavior of poetic structure, as examined in the previous chapters, within "In Memory of My Feelings," since they function outside the normative structures of the elegy. The figure of the serpent plays into these queered elegiac structure, showing the "work" of the queered elegy, as an amalgamation of theses queered structures. A concrete definition of this elegiac "work" cannot exist, since the significations and readings discussed in previous chapters require a certain way of seeing and reading the poem. The serpent does, however, yield a certain amount of insight into the behaviors of the structures of the poem, behaviors, as the previous chapters reveal, function in ultimately queer ways.

The serpent appears three times in the course of "In Memory of My Feelings." In the first section of the poem, the serpent materializes out of left-over images of the "race," which the speaker's "transparencies could not resist."

> *Terror in earth, dried mushrooms, pink feathers, tickets,*
> *a flaking moon drifting across the muddied teeth,*
> *the imperceptible moan of covered breathing,*
> *love of the serpent!*

Out of the remnants of the "race," the locus of the speaker's loss of control of his many "selves," the serpent emerges in a declaration of love from the speaker. "Love of the serpent" is a product of the reassembling of memory: what is not clearly remembered, but rather recalled and reassembled in a sequence of fragmented images, resulting in love of the serpent. This love is not inferred or modestly stated, but rather declared, emphasized by the exclamation point, and separated from its source of initial germination, the remnants of memory, via physical distancing on the page. While the "transparencies" have run off and abandoned the speaker, the serpent appears out of the ruins as a love object, as all that is left for the speaker to cling to. Thus the poem presents "love of the serpent" as a reaction to loss; in this moment such loss is the loss of the "self" through a loss of control of the "transparencies" or "selves" of the speaker. Such a loss triggers a need for an external love object, the serpent.

Established as a replacement love-object, the serpent becomes a kind of pseudo-"self" for the speaker, more reliable and understanding than the speaker's "selves" of whom he has lost control. In this vein, the speaker himself begins to take on the qualities of the serpent. One finds the speaker hiding from the hunter, one of the "creatures who too readily recognize my weapons/ and have murder in their heart," as if the speaker is in fact the serpent. The speaker hides "underneath its leaves"; whose leaves these are remains ambiguous, but the physical location of the speaker, hidden and covered by "leaves," creates a parallel to the serpent, whose

"imperceptible moan of covered breathing" we recognize now as being covered by the same said "leaves." The trope here on "leaves," reminiscent of Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" cannot go ignored. If one considers these leaves as signifying both vegetable matter as well as pages of poetry, one discovers the speaker's position "underneath its leaves" as a metaphor for the refuge of the speaker within his own poetry. The serpent then would seem to be the vehicle by which the speaker moves within his poetry, and thus takes refuge from "the hunter" who would seek to harm him.

As the hunter proceeds to search for the speaker, "as the hunter crackles and pants/ and bursts, …/ and animal death whips out its flashlight, /whistling/ and slipping the glove off the trigger hand," one finds that the speaker and the serpent continue to intertwine. One can no longer be certain who is in actual danger, the serpent or the speaker (or perhaps both), when "[t]he serpent's eyes/ redder at sight of those thorny fingernails," at the sight of the hunter, signal that he too, like the speaker, is avoiding the hunter. The fear and rage manifest in those "red eyes" parallels the fear and rage of the speaker who earlier in this same section alerts the reader to the "many pistols I have borrowed to protect myselves." We find that the description of the serpent as "so smooth" directly contrasts the hunter with his "thorny fingernails"; even their breathing is juxtaposed. The serpent, as mentioned previously, is the source of "the imperceptible moan of covered breathing," while the hunter, "crackles and pants/ and bursts," which features his human breathing, while simultaneously exaggerating it, turning "the hunter" into a kind of monster. By identifying with the serpent, by taking upon himself the position of hiddenness and horizontality beneath the leaves, the speaker avoids the hunter for the time being. Thus through identification with the serpent, the speaker finds safety.

Through such identification the speaker regains control of his "selves," who, after the speaker's own identification, become serpents themselves. At the end of section 1, the speaker's "transparent selves" reappear as "vipers in a pail, writhing and hissing/ without panic," suggesting that the vivaciousness and fearlessness, which caused them to run-off and escape the speaker's control in the "race," are still present, despite their being contained. Such attributes now are contained within the "pail," a containment that seems to come exclusively with the "selves" becoming "vipers," showing the serpent's power, not only over the speaker, but over those parts of the speaker that the speaker himself has failed to control. With said accumulation of power, the serpent transforms, "the aquiline serpent comes to resemble the Medusa," producing the recognizable image of the merger between serpent and human. Marjorie Perloff reads this transformation as an invocation of death, which would imply that the serpent has worked to trick the speaker; by this interpretation, the serpent has replaced "the hunter" and become one of the "creatures who too readily recognize my weapons/ and have murder in their heart" (Perloff, 143). The reading here, however, suggests a re-signification of the figure of the Medusa, not as a figure of death, but as the manifestation of the merger of the speaker and the serpent. Through my reading, the Medusa shows the queered elegy's ability to transform a signifier of death into a signifier of power and resilience. Thus we start to see the work of the queered self-elegy as that of empowerment through the attainment of a new self, rather than mourning the loss of the self.

The poem achieves this work of empowerment in regards to the speaker through his identification with an object outside of himself, namely the serpent. This bond, which creates the Medusa, is a kind of attachment, similar to the attachment required in completed, normal mourning. Jahan Ramazani claims such successful mourning by re-attachment has been replaced

in the modern elegy by "melancholic" or incomplete mourning (Ramazani , 3-4). "In Memory of My Feelings" contradicts that assertion, in so far as an attachment does occur. What is crucial to this attachment, what "queers" this mode of atachment, is that, despite its creation of a new, empowered speaker in line with the normative elegy, it simultaneously creates (as opposed to mends) a loss, the loss of "the scene of my selves" in the final section of the poem. Before arriving at that point, it is critical to understand the influence of the serpent on sections 2 and 3 of "In Memory of My Feelings."

In sections 2 and 3 of "In Memory of My Feelings," the speaker moves through histories, both personal and public. Section 2 focuses on the autobiography of the poet himself, recounting his dead relatives,

> *My father, my uncle,*
> *my grand-uncle and the several aunts. My*
> *grand-aunt dying for me, like a talisman, in the war,*

and merging these memories with memories of the campaign in the Pacific during World War 2, "rockets over the wrinkled/ invasion of the Australians." These memories, however, are adorned by fictional descriptions and episodes, such as the aunt "dying for" the speaker, the speaker traveling to Borneo, and "a rusted barge/ painted orange against the sea," all of which serve to create what Perloff calls "the autobiographical convention inside out, fusing fantasy and realism" (Perloff, 141). What Perloff observes is not so much the queering of the autobiographical convention, since autobiography still serves its normative function, which is to move the poem chronologically through and recount loss in the life of the speaker. What this corruption of the traditional autobiographical convention does do is merge real and fiction, paralleling the merger of the of the speaker (the real) and the serpent (the fiction) into the Medusa. After the speaker recounts for a second time the loss of his relatives, reinforcing the chronology of his loss,

My 10 my 19,
my 9, and the several years. My
12 years since they all died, philosophically speaking

he then proceeds to bring the reader into the current moment,

And now the coolness of a mind
like a shuttered suite in the Grand Hotel
where mail arrives for my incognito,

a moment that contrasts the normative state of mourning, as discussed in chapter 3, due to its "coolness." Such a moment contrasts the intensity of "The dead hunting/ the alive, ahunted," which more closely reflects the emotional intensity of the traditional elegy. By way of his "incognito," who can be none other than the serpent, the speaker exits the high emotional stakes of the traditional, normative elegy where death is calculated and kept track of and enters the emotional environment of "coolness" and apathy of the queered elegy.

Section 3 functions as an abridged history of western civilization. This "history" begins in Arabia, proceeds then to the "mountainous-minded Greeks," then "into Persia," followed by Rome, embodied by "the Roman copies." The "history" then proceeds to France, which has, along with the speaker, "advanced…/ together into a new land,…, where one feels nostalgic for mere ideas." One can suppose that this "new land," coming out of old Europe and formed with "mere ideas," is the United States, "where truth lies on its deathbed like and uncle/ and one of me has a sentimental longing for number." This "longing for number" continues the movement of apathy between sections, now a feature apparent in the new world, as it is a feature of the new serpent-hybrid speaker; the loss of the counting of deaths, "the trying desperately to count them as they die" in section 2, has extended into this "new land." We find the serpent, though indirectly, in the formation of the "new land," a land that upholds the "coolness" of the serpent-speaker. Where the serpent is in this section is not altogether clear, but the perseverance of

apathy suggests the indirect presence of the serpent as bearer of the poetic environment of this queered elegy.

The figure of the serpent, as opposed to his mere influence or suggested presence, returns in section 4,

> *Beneath these lives*
> *the ardent lover of history hides,*
> *tongue out*
> *leaving a globe of spit on a taut spear of grass*
> *and leaves off rattling his tail a moment*
> *to admire this flag.*

The reader discovers that the serpent's "disappearance" in the last two sections was in fact "hiddenness," that he was there "beneath these lives," both the specified lives of the autobiographical history and the unspecified lives of the various civilizations. However, the re-appearance of the serpent is short-lived; as discussed previously in the chapter on "Grace," the speaker emerges in section 4 through the pronoun "I," identifying with a series of persons, none of whom are the serpent. By tracing the serpent's relationship to the speaker, by understanding him as an "incognito" and a hiding place for the speaker, we see him as a kind of "masque." The break with the serpent arises due to the speaker's realization of a "sordidness," a dirtiness displayed outright in the catalogue of "I am" identifications, but hidden in regards to the serpent. In this moment, the complexity of the serpent is fully realized, the speaker encounters the complication of serpent as "masque," with both positive qualities of protection as experienced in the first section of the poem, but now conflated by "sordid" or negative qualities. The "I am" catalogue reflects these opposing qualities through the juxtaposition of identifications like, "I am a girl walking downstairs/ in a red pleated dress with heels" and "I am a doctor eating a child," which describe aesthetic beauty as well as unconscionable, barbaric acts.

The experience of "Grace," which in the previous chapter was found to instigate the multitude of "identifications" of the speaker through a shift in the poetic environment, causes the speaker to split from the serpent, undoing the Medusa. We can infer that "Grace" is also a force of change in the speaker in regards to his relationship with the serpent, not just a force of change for the poetic environment. This inference shows that the poetic environment cannot be inextricably separated from the poem's speaker. Through a shift in the poetic environment away from apathy, "Grace" frees the speaker from the "coolness" and apathy induced by the serpent. The empathetic poetic environment causes this emotional shift, forcing the poem to begin to care about the speaker, bringing him "the horse I fell in love with on the frieze." This moment of joy after the "I am" catalogue both undoes the control of the serpent while reaffirming a change in the speaker; he is now outside of the serpent's control, the serpent having been replaced through alternative "identifications" in the "I am" catalogue. Yet this "I am" catalogue cannot go unnoted as a moment of assertion of control of multiple, named "selves," seeming to establish the speaker as once again in control of his many selves, clean and "sordid," that contrasts the speaker in section 1, who was unable to control his "naked selves."

In the concluding section of the poem, we encounter a clearer image of the new serpent/ speaker relationship. The speaker, signified through his personal pronoun, "I," freed through a series of "identifications" brought on by the experience of "Grace," now faces his once sole-identifier, the serpent, now signified by the pronoun "you." The personal pronouns "you" and "I," a trademark of O'Hara's poetry, have been so far absent in "In Memory of My Feelings." When introduced in this section, as if in conversation, the poetic environment shifts again, now bringing the reader into an intimate address of the speaker to the serpent, "[a]nd now it is the serpent's turn./ I am not quite you, but almost, the opposite of visionary." One sees an

"identification" similar to those of the "I am" catalogue, but this identification is incomplete, "I am not quite you, but almost," thus distancing the speaker from the serpent, but not excluding the serpent completely.

By having the serpent "coiled around the central figure, the heart/ that bubbles with red ghosts, since to move is to love," the poem draws attention away from the serpent, eliminating his "centrality" and placing said "centrality" on "the heart/ that bubbles with red ghosts." At the same time, we cannot ignore how the serpent grasps the heart, how the act of "coiling" holds within itself a dual signification of both protection and death. As James Breslin notes, "[t]he serpent coiled around the heart may be embracing, it may be protective, it may be threatening to choke the heart" (Breslin, 13). Such an open signification reflects the essence of "Grace," which contains both unbounded love and love unfulfilled, as well as the apathetic/ empathetic emotional environment of "In Memory of My Feelings." Through the juxtaposition of the serpent and the heart, the poem reiterates the "irresolvability" present within the previously discussed signifier "Grace" and the overall poetic environment. The poem compounds said "irresolvability" as it introduces yet another figure into the poetic landscape, the reader himself. "When you turn your head/ can you feel your heels, undulating? that's what it is/ to be a serpent"; such a question implies an outside reader, one who has observed the actions of the serpent and speaker, but, as one might suppose, is confused as to how to reconcile such a complicated relationship. This image of "heels" "undulating" encapsulates the significations of the serpent in that it shows two separate units, two heels, moving back and forth in unison, from one extreme to the other. Here the poem illustrates the movement of the speaker and serpent between sordidness and beauty, between mourning and celebration, as "undulation," as a movement singular, yet divided.

The inclusion of the reader, allying him with the "you," makes him one with the serpent, thereby implying that the reader is also a source of simultaneous protection and destruction of the speaker; after all, as the speaker notes, such "undulation" is "what it is/ to be a serpent." The speaker addresses the reader, revealing to him that, "I haven't told you of the most beautiful things/ in my lives, and watching the ripple of their loss disappear/ along the shore," bringing back into focus the beautiful multiplicity of the self, reminiscent of the beautiful "identifications" in the "I am" catalogue. However, the speaker reveals that he is losing these "selves." We attribute loss to "the naked host to my many selves, shot by a guerilla warrior," bringing up images of "the hunter" from section 1 of the poem. Again, the speaker is threatened by "creatures who too readily recognize my weapons/ and have murder in their heart!" Yet this time, rather than hiding and identifying with the serpent, the speaker accepts these losses.

And yet
I have forgotten my loves, and chiefly that one, the cancerous
statue which my body could no longer contain,
against my will
against my love
become art,
I could not change it into history
and so remember it,
and I have lost what is always and everywhere
present, the scene of my selves, the occasion of these ruses,
which I myself and singly must now kill
and save the serpent in their midst.

The acceptance of these lost selves comes with an inability to contain them, "against my will/ against my love." Now, in contrast to the "vipers in a pail," the speaker comes to terms with his "selves" as inevitable losses. In the end, the speaker stands alone, faced with "the occasion of these ruses,/ which I myself and singly must now kill," in order to "save the serpent." There appears a conflict in the logic of the speaker's conclusion, since the use of the serpent was to contain the selves that are now lost or purposefully "killed" by the speaker. Therein lies the

"irresolvability" of the serpent; while he is a tool of containment, of saving "the scenes of my selves," we understand his dual function as a way of mourning, a way for the reader to replace his "forgotten loves" allowing the release of said "selves," and achieving a kind of completed mourning.

What shapes a queered elegy in all of this, in the "undulation" of the serpent as both figure and signifier, in the at-odds significations of "Grace," in the inconsistent, fluctuating emotional environment of the poem at large, is the creation and maintenance of an "irresolvability." The traditional elegy, by the standards presented by Sacks in the first chapter of this essay, is a poem about resolution. Mourning is completed when loss is accepted and the mourner re-attaches to a new love-object. One observes re-attachment in the speaker when he dismisses "the scenes of myself" in order to "save the serpent," but we should not be so hasty as to label such re-attachment as successful mourning. The serpent in no way replaces the lost "selves," and cannot, since it cannot even achieve the status of a full "identification" with the speaker. Perhaps then the speaker is left in incomplete, unresolved mourning, what Ramazani contends is the status of the modern elegy. The acceptance of loss on the part of the speaker, acknowledging the "the cancerous/ statue which my body could no longer contain," contradicts such a notion, since to stay in a mode of unresolved mourning would thereby be to remain with the "creatures who too readily recognize my weapons/ and have murder in their heart" and to endure the murder of "the naked host to my many selves" again and again. In this case, we can see unresolved mourning as perpetual mourning and thus "resolved" in its ceaselessness.

The queered elegy defies the notion of the speaker that "the scrutiny of all things is syllogistic." Logic becomes void where emotions reign supreme. "In Memory of My Feelings" is a self-elegy that performs outside the norms of the self-elegy. It does not resolve loss, but rather

perpetuates it, understands loss as a part of a pattern of "irresolvabilities" that carry on throughout the structure of the poem. The speaker cannot fully attach, nor can he fully separate, from any of the proposed love-objects within the poem; he is both with and without, simultaneously resolved in his mourning and unresolved. The reader is left with an "irresolvable" puzzle, since it is quite impossible to lose, "what is always and everywhere/ present," since any process of academic logic, in which both Sacks and Ramazani place their arguments, becomes voided by a poetic landscape dictated by emotion. It may be best then to begin again, to let oneself be taken by the poem, to let oneself be carried "like a gondola, through the streets," rather than to force the poem into any "syllogistic" mold.

Appendix 1:

IN MEMORY OF MY FEELINGS[1]
To Grace Hartigan

1

My quietness has a man in it, he is transparent
and he carries me quietly, like a gondola, through the streets.
He has several likenesses, like stars and years, like numerals.
My quietness has a number of naked selves,
so many pistols I have borrowed to protect myselves
from creatures who too readily recognize my weapons
and have murder in their heart!
though in winter
they are warm as roses, in the desert
taste of chilled anisette.
At times withdrawn,
I rise into the cool skies
and gaze on at the imponderable world with the simple identification
of my colleagues, the mountains. Manfred climbs to my nape,
speaks, but I do not hear him,
I'm too blue.
An elephant takes up his trumpet,
money flutters from the windows of cries, silk stretching its mirror
across shoulder blades. A gun is "fired."
One of me rushes
to window #13 and one of me raises his whip and one of me
flutters up from the center of the track amidst the pink flamingoes,
and underneath their hooves as they round the last turn my lips
are scarred and brown, brushed by tails, masked in dirt's lust,
definition, open mouths gasping for the cries of the bettors of the lungs
of earth.
So many of my transparencies could not resist the race!
Terror in earth, dried mushrooms, pink feathers, tickets,
a flaking moon drifting across the muddied teeth,
the imperceptible moan of covered breathing,
love of the serpent!
I am underneath its leaves as the hunter crackles and pants
and bursts, as the barrage balloon drifts behind a cloud
and animal death whips out its flashlight,
whistling
and slipping the glove off the trigger hand. The serpent's eyes
redder at sight of those thorny fingernails, he is so smooth!
My transparent selves
flail about like vipers in a pail, writhing and hissing

[1] as found in *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*

without panic, with a certain justice of response
and presently the aquiline serpent come to resemble the Medusa.

2

The dead hunting
And the alive, ahunted.
My father, my uncle,
my grand-uncle and the several aunts. My
grand-aunt dying for me, like a talisman, in the war,
before I had even gone to Borneo
her blood vessels rushed to the surface
and burst like rockets over the wrinkled
invasion of the Australians, her eyes aslant
like the invaded, but blue like mine.
An atmosphere of supreme lucidity,
humanism,
the mere existence of emphasis,
a rusted barge
painted orange against the sea
full of Marines reciting the Arabian ideas
which are a proof in themselves of seasickness
which is a proof in itself of being hunted.
A hit? *ergo* swim.
My 10 my 19,
my 9, and the several years. My
12 years since they all died, philosophically speaking.
And now the coolness of a mind
like a shuttered suite in the Grand Hotel
where mail arrives for my incognito,
whose façade
has been slipping into the Grand Canal for centuries;
rockets splay over a *sposalizio*,
fleeing into the night
from the Chinese memories, and it is a celebration,
the trying desperately to count them as they die.
But who will stay to be these numbers
when all the lights are dead?

3

The most arid stretch is often richest,
the hand lifting towards a fig tree from hunger
digging
and there is water, clear, supple, or there
deep in the sand where death sleeps, a murmurous bubbling
proclaims the blackness that will ease and burn.
You preferred the Arabs? but they didn't stay to count

their inventions, racing into sands, converting themselves into
so many,
embracing, at Ramadan, the tenderest effigies of
themselves with penises shorn by the hundreds, like a camel
ravishing a goat.
And the mountainous-minded Greeks could speak
of time as a river and step across it into Persia, leaving the pain at home to be converted into statuary. I adore the Roman copies.
And the stench of the camel's spit I swallow,
and the stench of the whole goat. For we have advanced, France,
together into a new land, like the Greeks, where one feels nostalgic
for mere ideas, where truth lies on its deathbed like an uncle
and one of me has a sentimental longing for number,
as has another for the ball gowns of the Directoire and yet
another for "Destiny, Paris, destiny!"
or "Only a king may kill a king."

How many selves are there in a war hero asleep in names? under
a blanket of platoon and fleet, orderly. For every seaman
with one eye closed in fear and twitching arm at a sigh for Lord Nelson,
he is all dead; and now a meek subaltern writhes in his bedclothes
with the fury of a thousand, violating an insane mistress
who has only herself to offer his multitudes.
Rising,
he wraps himself in the burnoose of memories against the heat of life
and over the sands he goes to take an algebraic position *in re*
a sun of fear shining not too bravely. He will ask himselves to
vote on fear before he feels a tremor,
as runners arrive from the mountains
bearing snow, proof that the mind's obsolescence is still capable
of intimacy. His mistress will follow him across the desert
like a goat, towards a mirage which is something familiar about
one of his innumerable wrists,
and lying in an oasis one day,
playing catch with coconuts, they suddenly smell oil.

4

Beneath these lives
the ardent lover of history hides,
tongue out
leaving a globe of spit on a taut spear of grass
and leaves off rattling his tail a moment
to admire this flag.
I'm looking for my Shanghai Lil.
Five years ago, enamored of fire-escapes, I went to Chicago,
an eventful trip: the fountains! the Art Institute, the Y

for both sexes, absent Christianity.
At 7, before Jane
was up , the copper lake stirred against the sides
of a Norwegian freighter; on the deck a few dirty men,
tired of night, watched themselves in the water
as years before the German prisoners on the *Prinz Eugen*
dappled the Pacific with their sores, painted purple
by a Naval doctor.
Beards growing, and the constant anxiety
over looks. I'll shave before she wakes up. Sam Goldwyn
spent $2,000,000 on Anna Sten, but Grushenka left America.
One of me is standing in the waves, an ocean bather,
or I am naked with a plate of devils at my hip.
Grace
to be born and live as variously as possible. The conception
of the masque barely suggests the sordid identifications.
I am a Hittite in love with a horse. I don't know what blood's
in me I feel like an African prince I am a girl walking downstairs
in a red pleated dress with heels I am a champion taking a fall
I am a jockey with a sprained ass-hole I am the light mist
in which a face appears
and it is another face of blonde I am a baboon eating a banana
I am a dictator looking at his wife I am a doctor eating a child
and the child's mother smiling I am a Chinaman climbing a mountain
I am a child smelling his father's underwear I am an Indian
sleeping on a scalp
and my pony is stamping in the birches,
and I've just caught sight of the *Niña*, the *Pinta* and the *Santa Maria*.
What land is this, so free?
I watch
the sea at the back of my eyes, near the spot where I think
in solitude as pine trees groan and support the enormous winds,
they are humming *L'Oiseau de feu!*
They look like gods, these whitemen,
And they are bringing me the horse I fell in love with on the frieze.

5

And now it is the serpent's turn.
I am not quite you, but almost, the opposite of visionary.
You are coiled around the central figure,
the heart
that bubbles with red ghosts, since to move is to love
and the scrutiny of all things is syllogistic,
the startled eyes of the dikdik, the bush full of white flags
fleeing a hunter,
which is our democracy

but the prey
is always fragile and like something, as a seashell can be
a great Courbet, if it wishes. To bend the ear of the outer world.
When you turn your head
can you feel your heels, undulating? that's what it is
to be a serpent. I haven't told you of the most beautiful things
in my lives, and watching the ripple of their loss disappear
along the shore, underneath ferns,
face downward in the ferns
my body, the naked host to my many selves, shot
by a guerilla warrior or dumped from a car into ferns
which are themselves *journalières*.
The hero, trying to unhitch his parachute,
stumbles over me. It is our last embrace.
And yet
I have forgotten my loves, and chiefly that one, the cancerous
statue which my body could no longer contain,
against my will
against my love
become art,
I could not change it into history
and so remember it,
and I have lost what is always and everywhere
present, the scene of my selves, the occasion of these ruses,
which I myself and singly must now kill
and save the serpent in their midst.

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