

Karolína Turynová:

“Everything is in the poems”: Frank O’Hara in Personism

BA Thesis

Advisor’s report

This thesis by Karolína Turynová explores Frank O’Hara’s somewhat personal and ironic poetic movement, Personism, emphasizing its style, historical context, and literary significance. The work analyzes O’Hara’s poems, particularly those embodying Personism, and contrasts them with his more theoretical prose writings and those of some of his peers to demonstrate how O’Hara’s poetics fits within the landscape of American poetry.

The introduction situates Personism within the broader landscape of post-war American poetry. It discusses O’Hara’s mock manifesto, “Personism: A Manifesto,” which critiques and parodies the prescriptive tendencies of literary movements like Modernism and Postmodernism.

The first chapter examines O’Hara’s manifesto as a prose poem, highlighting O’Hara’s rejection of formal poetic structures and his playful critique of literary manifestos. The chapter examines O’Hara’s use of irony, allusions, and his unique blend of personal and historical references.

The second chapter delves into O’Hara’s use of allusions to friends, contemporary artists, and specific New York City settings, which create a sense of intimacy and immediacy in his poetry. The “techniques of proximity” are described as key to the Personist style, making the reader feel personally engaged with the text.

The third chapter positions O’Hara’s work between various literary movements, such as the Beats, Modernism, and the Confessional poets. The chapter explores how Personism stands out through its rejection of prescribed literary rules and its focus on personal, immediate experiences. This chapter also performs a fruitful reading of O’Hara’s poem “Having a Coke with You.”

The thesis concludes by emphasizing Personism’s role as both a critique of academia and a celebration of the personal in poetry. O’Hara’s work is presented as both a mockery of and a genuine alternative to the formal constraints of other literary movements.

The thesis provides a thorough analysis of O’Hara’s work, effectively situating it within its historical and literary context. The detailed examination of O’Hara’s unique poetic techniques highlights his innovative approach to poetry. The thesis successfully argues that Personism, while a mock movement, provides valuable insights into O’Hara’s creative method and the broader literary landscape, while utilizing a rich array of secondary resources.

Overall, this is a very well-written and insightful thesis on O’Hara’s work and American poetry after World War II more broadly. Karolína worked very independently, arriving at her central arguments and conclusions on her own. I was impressed by her knowledge, her ability to conduct deep and broad research to find insights, and to use that research to arrive at compelling and interesting conclusions. She has an advanced understanding of this body of poetry and a trenchant mode of thought and writing. She finished her thesis at the last minute, which did not allow me to provide as much input and editing as I would have liked, but overall I think the final result is excellent.

For the sake of discussion, I have two questions for the defense:

1. Why would Donald Allen invite poets like O'Hara to include personal statements on their poetic method in *The New American Poetry*? Consider how the inclusion of these statements positions these poets and the so-called "New American" poetry within the landscape of American poetry after World War II.
2. How would our understanding of O'Hara's poetry be different if he had not published his manifesto? Does the manifesto apply to all of his poetry or only the poems you highlight in the thesis? Have later poets utilized O'Hara's manifesto in their own work?

Based on the above, I recommend a grade of **1: výborně**.



Stephan Delbos, MFA, PhD
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