Tadeusz Pióro. *Frank O'Hara and the Ends of Modernism*. Warsaw: Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw, 2013. 244 pages.

In the course of a conversation we had last year, a fellow specialist in American poetry and poet in his own right referred to Tadeusz Pióro as "an authority on O'Hara and Ashbery" as well as a "good, interesting" poet. The other phrases my colleague used to describe Pióro's literary stature were "formally advanced" and "somewhat similar to the New York School." The epithets I have just quoted strike a chord with one familiar with Pióro's monograph on the author of *Lunch Poems*, published shortly before the above-mentioned talk took place. The Frank O'Hara who emerges from Pióro's study is intriguing as both man and poet, and the experimental, ever-challenging character of his *œuvre* is brought to the fore. Pióro is careful—and, in my view, rightly so—not to overdose on biographical references; he does, nevertheless, manage to place O'Hara in the context of his association, both human and literary, with John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch or Barbara Guest as well as—or perhaps first and foremost—with the leading visual artists of the day. While the literary and artistic luminaries of mid-twentieth-century New York and the socio-aesthetic context of the city at large are not ignored, it is O'Hara's poetic output that Pióro focuses on.

The Norton Anthology of American Literature points out that "O"Hara's example encouraged other poets—John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, and James Schuyler" (Baym 2: 2647) and that his "bravado was a rallying point for these writers outside the more traditional and historically conscious modernism of Pound and Eliot" (Baym 2: 2647). Both statements could serve as epigraphs to Pióro's study, in which the framework of modernism is also the point of departure, as the very title of the monograph, *Frank O'Hara and the Ends of Modernism*, demonstrates. The expression "ends of modernism" serves as the title of the study's first chapter as well, followed by two more, "Modernism and the Avant-Garde" and "Reading Frank O'Hara." In the introduction to the book, Pióro explains that the word "ends" is meant to signify "closure or demise as well as intentions or goals" (30). He also specifies that "[t]hroughout this book, references to Modernism denote primarily its avant-garde and experimental aspects, while the term High Modernism appears in reference to works and authors academically canonized in America during O'Hara's lifetime" (39) with "Vladimir Mayakovsky or Antonin Artaud fall[ing] under the former rubric" (39) and Eliot coming under the heading of High Modernism. The former two are chosen from among European modernists, and with good reason, since both resurface, to a greater or lesser degree, in O'Hara's work and views on poetry. While in his study Pióro does not undertake comparative analysis as such—with the exception of a poem by Mayakovsky set against an O'Hara poem—and concentrates on the American poet, he does attempt to put him in a

larger literary and aesthetic context. Pióro's book confirms my view that virtually every discussion of Anglo-American modernist, or indeed modern, poetry inevitably harks back to French symbolism. Consequently, references to Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud recur throughout the text, as do interesting observations on the affinities between their respective visions and O'Hara's poetics.

As anyone familiar with the basic biographical details of O'Hara's life knows, the poet of "Biotherm" had strong professional and personal connections with New York's vibrant art scene in the 1950s and 1960s. An employee at the Museum of Modern Art, he was an art critic as well as the promoter and personal friend of several exponents of Abstract Expressionism. To quote the Norton Anthology again, "this was more than a way of making a living; it was also making a life" (Baym 2: 2646). Reminding us that Marjorie Perloff calls O'Hara a "poet among painters" (15), Pióro's monograph suggests it was a way of making poetry as well, since it was the American poet's ambition to do in his own medium what the American abstractionists did in painting. In consequence, readers and exegetes of O'Hara can hardly afford to ignore references to the visual arts while examining his poetry: as Pióro points out, "the High Modernist aesthetic of painters such as Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock was crucial to his development as a poet" (39–40), which is why "both the poetic and the painterly 'idioms' should be considered in assessing O'Hara's position within, and beyond, Modernism" (40). Importantly, however, Pióro does not stop his analysis of the analogies between O'Hara's poetry and the visual arts at the achievements of Jackson Pollock and his fellow Action Painters. He extends his "painterly" reading of O'Hara to encompass Andy Warhol, an artist who was to the second half of the twentieth century what Pollock was to the mid-twentieth-century art scene. Pióro thus sees the American poet's *œuvre* as suspended between the achievements of the two greatest American painters of the last century.

Frank O'Hara and the Ends of Modernism presents the poet in question as a representative of "the last avant-garde" (29), a term Pióro borrows from David Lehman. Stressing O'Hara's individualistic approach, conspicuous in, *inter alia*, his "anti-manifestoes," the author of the monograph looks at the poetry he examines in terms of its avant-gardist and experimental dimension. Rimbaud's poetic vision, marked by his search for "a new poetic language" (61), becomes a springboard for what Pióro terms "the rhetoric of excess" (61), aimed at hiding "overwhelmingly powerful and painful emotions" (64) and taking poetic shape in O'Hara's (anti-)elegies. The "poets from Rimbaud's lineage" (81) who must be considered relevant to the American poet include Mayakovsky, whose lyric is compared to one of O'Hara's. This, in turn, leads Pióro to examine O'Hara's "construction of subjectivity" (83), which, equivocally enough, is also its "destruction" (83), in the closing section of Chapter One.

In Chapter Two, the author scrutinizes the links between the notions of boredom, newness and the avant-garde, as well as those between heroism and avant-gardism in both art and life. Looking into O'Hara's writings on Pollock, the monographer argues that the real subject of the texts in question is as much the painter as the poet himself. Pióro also points out O'Hara's sense of inferiority *vis-à-vis* visual artists such as Pollock or de Kooning. While Abstract Expressionism, whose modernist character is emphasized in the monograph, may seem an inevitable point of reference when it comes to O'Hara, the realism-based Pop Art and its pope, Warhol, typically seen as a reaction against the former art movement and, as Pióro reminds us, provoking O'Hara's initial skepticism as well as hostile reactions on the part of Abstract Expressionists themselves, may be less so. The monographer shows how the phenomena central to Pop Art and popular culture, such as consumerism, mechanical reproduction and spiritual death, are relevant to O'Hara's poetry, rounding off the chapter with a section on O'Hara's use of register typical of films, television or comic strips which inscribe themselves into Warholian "pastiche, or repetition" (158).

As its title suggests, Chapter Three is concerned with various ways of reading the poet of *Second Avenue*. In Pióro's own words, the aim of the chapter—as well as, I believe, of the study in its entirety—is "to expose the resistance of O'Hara's poems to critical approaches that privilege poetic artifice over mimetic realism, or vice versa" (163), though, admittedly, "[s]triking a balance between the two within the bounds of a single reading is very hard indeed, perhaps even self-defeating in a rhetorical sense" (163). The inevitable conclusion is that O'Hara's poetry invites "readings, which cannot be integrative" (189), but are likely to be "multiple" (189). This explains why Pióro takes the opportunity to return to some of the poems dealt with earlier in the monograph. He also embarks upon an extensive and absorbing reading of "Biotherm," a poem important for both biographical and artistic reasons. Struggling with what he calls O'Hara's "resistance to interpretations" (200), the monographer awakens us to the impossibility of applying certain set interpretive habits to the American poet's work: "one of his points, I suspect, is for us to stay in the dark, to abandon the hope of finding an answer to this riddle, the kind of hope that even today rewards scholars solving the riddles of *Ulysses* or the *Cantos*. In other words," Pióro concludes, "he's trying to impose another mode of reading, distinct from the one his generation was developing to tackle the most resistant works of High Modernism" (181–82).

In the opening paragraph of his book, Pióro notes that despite "grow[ing] consistently, the number of critical works on O'Hara's poetry remains relatively modest" (11). This alone would suffice to make his study a worthwhile project. However, Pióro's monograph is valuable in more than one respect. The readers are made to realize that O'Hara's is a poetry that makes great demands on their