

## About “Why I’m not a Painter” by Frank O’Hara

By Alireza Shams

Although this poem is one of the classic poems of the New York School style; it is different from “I do this, I do that” poems. It is “I do this, we do this”; for example in line 7 where we have “I drink, we drink” and it is because O’Hara tells us about two artists and two artworks. This poem is both non-narrative and anti-narrative. It doesn’t start with “once upon a time” and we don’t see a series of cause-effect events. Even the poem doesn’t answer the main question, “Why I am not a painter”, clearly. In an overall view, it is about visiting a painter friend, Goldberg, by a poet, O’Hara, in his studio when he is painting; but not surprisingly, O’Hara doesn’t provide any detail of the painting and its creativity process. Also the reader cannot find the content of O’Hara’s poem: “Oranges”. We only have the title of these artworks. In this style, the subject doesn’t matter for poet.

The poem tries to clarify the differences between painting and poetry by focusing on O’Hara’s work. He tries to keep adding words until he has an entire page and also he needs more: “There should be so much more”; while Goldberg is taking things out of his painting: “It’s too much”. The first three lines are an introduction to the poem. After that we have two stanzas of thirteen lines each. The second Stanza discusses Goldberg’s work and the third one focuses on O’Hara’s poem and brings all together.

This poem seems to be a true story because of using present tenses by O’Hara. Also he uses real names, characters and events. But the whole story is not true. O’Hara wrote “Oranges” in 1949 many years before meeting Goldberg who painted “Sardines” in 1955. In fact, in this poem, the first spontaneous feeling of the reader is not true and what seems to be a chanceful accident, the meeting between the poet and the painter at that time, is the product of a calculation and planning. The question is why O’Hara has selected “Oranges” to discuss the differences between painting and poetry? In my view, He wants to show how a poet use words to describe the colorful world but a painter needs to use paints to create a picture of nature.

O’Hara keeps his breaking style in this poem. Lines are broken on words like “just”, “well”, “be” and etc. Usually the next line starts with the end of the previous sentence. This method attracts readers to focus on what the poet wants. One interesting example is on line 27 where “life” is connected to how terrible orange is and in line 10 and 12 we have breaks after and in the middle of “days go by” which comes right after “life” again. In this case, we can see two similar concepts, which are located at the beginning and the end of different lines, are somehow connected.