

J. D. O'Hara

A Valediction: Forbidding Summer School

*Over at last, over at last and done,
done to a turn and overdone, like this
clumsy beginning. So the course began,
stumbling thrice on the threshold with clumsy feet,
and dragged its sluggish length through noise and heat,
and sagged in sticky air, and would not run.*

It's not the heat, it's your ...

(Parthian retreat).

*Cool in their air-conditioned clique
the poets prattled on, smooth cheek
of Hopkins by fat Thomas jowls;
Hardy morose and proud of it;
Auden's high-spoken slang and wit
affirming brain, accepting bowels;
Pound making modern verse unique;
Eliot shoring up with books
neuroses, his high-camp beginning
small guide to late concern with sinning;
Yeats' fine aristocratic looks
and noble voices, noble end
in satire and in whole-souled life
proving that fair needs foul for wife;
and Stevens, though a hasty last
and, sadly, comprehended least,
sent gaudy pictures whirling past
and hurled gay words at past and priest.*

*To no avail. Their blooming, buzzing confusion
(William James' view of our phenomenal world)
whirled on unheard. Humped or propped or slumped
on solid chairs, too solid flesh and thought
melted and dripped, mildewed and drooped, drugged.*

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*Dylan boomed... and echo there was nought.
Eliot was precisely, primly glum...;
no one complained or concurred. Hidebound and gagged,
patient as peasants, blank as immigrants
you underwent the babble of strange tongues
and breathed the strange rich air with sagging lungs
and felt, perhaps, a strange desire to dance
or sing or shout. Perhaps. But numb mind lagged
behind, and dragged its feet, and whined.*

Oh well.

*It's only one more summer shot to hell.
Others will come. There's time. You live and learn.
Seasons return, and you have time to burn.*

*With a hard, gem-like flame?
Enough. End game.*

Graduate Seminar

Nothing is serious.
Something, if it exists,
is put in doubt.
We shall discuss this.
Everything you see
you first must know.

That may be so.
Undoubtedly it is.
Full proof would weary us.
Perhaps a list?

I will be brief. You too. What do you see?

Massed patches of varying intensity
(assuming, please, that we know about
mass, patch, variation, and intensity).

Begin with basics. Yes. You warm my aged heart.
Patches of varied light. Excellent start.
I call them colors and give them names.
Now you may do the same.

Masses of colors, then, we see.

But there are three dimensions there.

Where?

Follow this list (you asked for lists) of clues.
Perception has its rules, like other games.

We see now that we see bulk, matter, space.
Colored things, and everything in place.

Welcome news.

Now, do you see a car?

Perhaps we do. Tell us what they are.
Give us the clues.

You see traps clearly. Now, do you see nothing?

Perhaps we do. The clues?

There are none. No more lists. Nothing to use.

Nothing to lose, then, sir, if nothing leads to nothing.

And somethings never lead to, never equal, everything.

But now you're merely joking, sir. Games with words
can only be what that Frenchman called absurd.

Take things from everything; nothing remains.
Explain all things; nothing is unexplained.
Nothing is serious. Let's try once more:
this vacuum we so naturally abhor
... but there's the bell. And that's what bells are for.