Brad Gooch: On "A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island"

Reading through the stack of poems later in his apartment on West Fourth Street, Koch came across for the first time "A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island," a poem that was to become a favorite anthology piece, which O'Hara hadn't shown to anyone while he was alive. A variation on Mayakovsky's "An Extraordinary Adventure Which Befell Vladimir Mayakovsky in a Summer Cottage," the poem had been written by O'Hara on July 10, 1958, when he was visiting Hal Fondren at his rented house at Fire Island Pines, not far from the spot where he would be hit almost exactly eight years later. The poem consists of a conversation between the Sun, who wakes O'Hara and complains petulantly, "When I woke up Mayakovsky he was / a lot more prompt," and the apologetic poet's comment, "Sorry, Sun, I stayed / up late last night talking to Hal."

"I almost fell off my chair," remembers Koch. "It was Frank talking about his own death." In the following months, Koch often read the poem at poetry readings to audiences who were invariably moved by its almost too neatly prophetic parting stanza:

"Sun, don't go!" I was awake at last. "No, go I must, they're calling me." "Who are they?" Rising he said "Some day you'll know. They're calling to you too." Darkly he rose, and then I slept.

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