

objective reality, rather than cultural constructs imposed upon it.

However this may be, the concept has been adopted by some sectors of the gay movement as a tool for internal criticism. In bars and other places where encounters are intended to lead to sexual contact, the treatment of other individuals as sex objects may be said to be reasonable and expected. But where this procedure passes over into business or political activity, to the point that articulate and persuasive individuals who do not happen to be goodlooking are ignored or passed over in favor of men who are "cute," this seems a waste of human resources as well as a source of unhappiness to those who are the victims of it. Some critics of the pattern have proposed the alternative term *looksism* as a more convenient descriptor. A similar phenomenon, known as *ageism*, works to the disadvantage of older gay people. This overemphasis on sexual attractiveness is to some extent explainable by the fact that gays as a group are united only by their sexual preference, and by the fact that they have been stigmatized by the host society because of it. Still, to the degree that it is prevalent in gay male circles—less so in lesbian ones—it may serve to bolster stereotypes that gay people are superficial and frivolous.

The concept of sexual objectification has been traced to the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1726–1804), who in his *Lectures on Ethics* presented the sexual act as the mere manipulation of an object by a subject, in effect masturbation *à deux*—unless the relationship is redeemed by the altruism of marriage. In the twentieth century, the notion of objectification has been widely diffused by Freudian psychoanalysis, where *object* may be defined in three ways: (1) the goal toward which the organism's instincts or drives are directed, be it a person, a thing, or a fantasy; (2) the focus of love or hate; and (3) that which the subject perceives and knows, in keeping with the traditional philosophy of knowledge. This analysis

has the advantage of showing that confusion has been caused by conflating the neutral sense (3)—from which it follows that the very process of cognition continually and inescapably enmeshes one in subject-object relations, without thereby imposing any distorting or reductive effect—with (1) and (2), which entail a charge of emotion suffusing the object so as to enhance or demean it. Moreover, the everyday sense of the word object suggests a tendency to turn persons into things, though this is in no way required by sense (3).

While the existing terminology is not ideal, it must be conceded that the psychosocial phenomenon of sexual objectification exists, and that when it is allowed to intrude into all sorts of spheres of human activity where it is in fact dysfunctional, it may stifle the personal development of those who are subjected to it. At the same time, it is necessary to recognize that sexual selection is indeed selection, and human beings are unlikely to free themselves from this component of their phylogenetic legacy, or the ongoing physiological processes that underlie such selection. Thus the ideal of treating human beings in terms of equality of respect, discarding inappropriate sexual objectification, should be inculcated and promoted, but one should harbor no illusions about the immanence of its universal realization. This tension is one of the many complications of civilization itself.

Wayne R. Dynes

### O'HARA, FRANK (1926–1966)

American poet and art critic. Raised in Worcester, Massachusetts, O'Hara served in the Navy from 1944 to 1946, and then attended Harvard and Michigan Universities. The most important experiences during his college years were probably his visits to New York, where he met a number of poets, as well as painters of the rising Abstract Expression-

ist school. He settled in New York in 1951, working for the Museum of Modern Art, where he organized exhibitions of contemporary art. O'Hara wrote books of art criticism (*Jackson Pollock*, 1959; *Robert Motherwell*, 1965), and also sought the collaboration of artists in his own creative endeavors. He believed that the support of painters in particular was useful to him in escaping the suffocation of the reigning academic tradition in poetry.

His plays, which were often produced in avant-garde theatres, included *Love's Labour*, *Awake in Spain!*, and *The Houses at Fallen Hanging*. He published only six small collections of poems; others were found only in letters to friends or written on a hoarded scrap of paper. During his lifetime, however, O'Hara enjoyed an extensive word-of-mouth reputation, and his inclusion in anthologies began to bring him to a wider audience. On the morning of July 24, 1966, he was accidentally struck by a beach buggy on Fire Island, the gay resort where he spent his summers, and died shortly thereafter.

Like his older contemporary Wallace Stevens, O'Hara was influenced by the French avant-garde poets; indeed his relation to his favorite painters recalls that of Guillaume Apollinaire and the Cubists. Yet O'Hara tempered his mandarin sources of inspiration with eclectic infusions of popular culture and the kaleidoscope of the New York scene. His use of everyday-speech rhythms recalls the beat cult of spontaneity. Less observed by many critics is the fact that many of his poems are sophisticated transcriptions of the bantering "queens' talk" common among gay men at the time. After his death O'Hara's work did much to free American poetry from the domination of a fading academic tradition. At the same time however, his fondness for ephemeral, campy, and trivial motifs restricted the scope of all but a few poems.

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## OLD TESTAMENT

This conventional term is the Christian name for the Hebrew Bible, which the Church incorporated into its own scriptural canon. The **New Testament** constitutes the additional scriptures of Christianity, and some churches supplement the Hebrew Bible with the Deuterocanonical (or Apocryphal) books. Jewish tradition divides the Old Testament into three parts: the Law (the first five books ascribed to Moses), the Prophets (most of the historical books and all of the prophetic writings except Daniel), and the Writings (all the other books including Daniel). For Jews it is the first five books, the Torah, that are authoritative; and in the third of these the death penalty is explicitly prescribed for male homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13). Although there is scant evidence for the actual enforcement of this law by Jewish courts, it is known that in later Christendom it cost the lives of thousands of homosexual men from the later **Middle Ages** to modern times.

*Negative Texts.* The Old Testament itself is an intricate body of literature, varied and complex; each of the literary units is a product of its own time and place, and a great deal of it is not easily understood without extensive delving into the languages and cultures of the principal nations of the ancient Near East that influenced the nascent monotheism of Israel and the later Jewish community in the Persian Empire. Genesis, the opening book, contains in chapters 18 and 19 the infamous story of Sodom. This narrative never actually says that the Cities of the Plain were destroyed because of homosexuality, but indicates that their sins "cried to heaven for vengeance." In the story the male inhabitants of Sodom are shown attempting to commit gang rape on two