



---

September 1996

## John O'Hara as an Ethnographer of Complex Society: Social Class and Ethnic Tradition in Southeastern Pennsylvania

Marshall Joseph Becker

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq>

---

### Recommended Citation

Colby Quarterly, Volume 32, no.3, September 1996, p.169-189

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Quarterly by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Colby.

# *John O'Hara as an Ethnographer of Complex Society: Social Class and Ethnic Tradition in Southeastern Pennsylvania*

By MARSHALL JOSEPH BECKER

## ABSTRACT

JOHN O'HARA'S YOUTH as an outsider looking in on the lives of the local elite provided him with a view particularly suited to describing what he saw. The evaluation of O'Hara's literary skills is best left to others. This study focuses on O'Hara's skills at depicting cultural and social class differences and offers suggestions as to the social dynamics and tensions that honed those skills. The task of recognizing the often subtle variations that separate social classes is one that professional social scientists find increasingly important in the understanding of contemporary American "society." Sociologists continue to wrestle with these matters, but O'Hara mastered them. His depictions of class differences in a complex society remain O'Hara's great contribution to American literature as well as to social science. John O'Hara was a good novelist, but his skills as an ethnographer were far better. O'Hara's ethnographic skill will be increasingly appreciated by scholars in the 21st century as America becomes increasingly complex.

## INTRODUCTION

JOHN O'HARA'S SPECIFIC "anthropological" skills have been recognized for at least fifty years. Lionel Trilling notes that O'Hara was a keen observer of American mores, and he differentiates O'Hara's skills from those of other authors.<sup>1</sup> Edith Wharton and Henry James observed their own social groups, without concern for members of the other classes in their larger society. O'Hara's approach, however, provides more than a simple ethnographic description of one social group. O'Hara's novels portray a complex juxtapositioning of class and ethnicity during the first half of the 20th century in a specific part of America. In essence, his multicultural anthropological analysis, using a comparative approach, long antedated the recent call for understanding among the various components of an increasingly complex modern society. Perhaps O'Hara himself recognized that his strengths lay in ethnography since he said, "I want to get it

1. Lionel Trilling, "John O'Hara Observes Our Mores" (review of *Pipe Night*), *New York Times Book Review* (18 March 1945):1,29, rpt. in Philip B. Eppard, ed., *Critical Essays on John O'Hara* (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1994), 41-44.

all down on paper while I can . . . I want to record the way people talked and thought and felt, and to do it with complete honesty and variety."<sup>2</sup>

Those elements of O'Hara's novels that provide indication of his ethnographic skills are the focus of this study. The goal is to provide a working model for those who may wish to pursue these anthropological matters in the writings of O'Hara or of any other author. Within the context of O'Hara's ethnographic style of reporting, the focus here will be on elements unique to O'Hara's work, his direct confrontation of questions of social class in America, and his attempts to understand their relationships and internal dynamics. This view of O'Hara's work, perhaps slightly obscured by his quest for fame and money, clearly refutes Brodkey's claim that O'Hara "did not pursue any would-be essential social truth or analysis of community in his novels, as Dreiser and Faulkner did in theirs."<sup>3</sup>

The ideal demonstration of O'Hara's skills as an ethnographer requires a tripartite analysis. First, O'Hara came from a relatively small community in central Pennsylvania and used this setting as his "central place." Therefore, a summary of what anthropologists mean by "community" will set the stage for understanding the social dynamics of his characters. Second, the extremely elusive subject of social classes, and how they can be evaluated as they existed in America, needs to be understood. Once features of social class are delineated, our attention may be directed toward the manner in which they were described by O'Hara. The third element of this analysis involves understanding O'Hara himself. Consideration of his social class as well as his feelings of marginality, and how these factors enabled him to see and understand the general rules of social class, serve as a basis on which we may build a theory of why he depicts these things so well in his fiction.

#### *Background:*

#### *Anthropological Goals and the Study of "Community"*

THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN the goals of the novelist and the ethnographer are increasingly evident in this post-modern age. The novelist, as an ethnographer, invariably grows up in a complex society and describes one or more of its component groups. Anthropologists are almost always born into complex societies, but most often they leave it to study the culture of people not yet bound in the problematic web of "civilization." As anthropologists increasingly turn to the more difficult task of describing peoples within a complex society, the slight differences between their goals and those of the novelist become more evident.<sup>4</sup>

Anthropology is concerned with every aspect of our species, *Homo sapiens*.

2. John O'Hara, "Foreward," *Sermons and Soda-Water* (New York: Random House, 1960), x.

3. Harold Brodkey, "The Roar of the Canon," *The New Yorker* 69.29 (13 Sept. 1993): 114.

4. Barbara Pym's training and associations with anthropologists may place her more clearly in the middle ground between the novelist and the ethnographer. She certainly merits Edmund Fuller's title of "An Anthropologist of the English Middle Class" (see "The Bookshelf," *Wall Street Journal* (25 May 1982).

Central to studies of this species is the understanding of the systems by which different groups or populations operate. These systems, called "cultures," and the rules of their operation form the fundamental concern of anthropological studies. Anthropologists who seek to collect data about the people sharing a single culture recognize the limitations of various possible ways of studying other people, whether they be human or primate. Over the past century we have perfected techniques of *participant observation* which enable scholars to conduct field work aimed at collecting data about the ways in which a specific group of people lives.

A critical problem in doing ethnography (writing about what people do) is defining the population whose system (culture) is to be studied. In the early days of anthropology, and to some extent to the present, this problem has been handled by selecting a self-defined population. These people could be the members of a hunting and gathering band who have a fairly well defined set of inborn members, or the residents of a tribal village. A tribal village incorporates all the inhabitants resident within a culturally closed society: one in which all the members are related by kinship. In such a village the largest cultural (social) unit recognized is the "tribe." The "tribe" includes all the affinally or consanguineously related people (kin) who are speakers of the same language and who live in one or more villages espousing a single cultural identity as the Nuer of Africa or the Puebloans of Acoma in the American southwest.

A tribal village is quite distinct from the kind of "community" that John O'Hara was born into and that he describes in his works. Research in complex societies such as our own had long been avoided by traditional anthropologists, who perceived the study of literate societies as matter for sociological inquiry. By the 1930's numerous social anthropologists were doing community studies as distinct from studying agrarian-based tribal societies. The distinction between a tribal village and such a "community" is central to contemporary anthropological research.

A "community" may resemble a village in some mechanisms of its operation but includes several components which are fundamental to distinguishing it from a tribal village. A "community" is what A. L. Kroeber called a "part-society."<sup>5</sup> That is to say, the members of a community have an orientation primarily within this residential unit, but also recognize affiliation with a larger society. Their daily activities take place within their residential unit but they recognize, or are conscious of, belonging to a larger body of people with whom they may have no kin relationships. In fact, although everyone in the "community," or group with residential unity, may personally know or at least know about every other member, social class differences may separate or limit their interactions.

5. Alfred L. Kroeber, *Anthropology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948), 248.

A mining town as well as an agrarian-based village may be considered as a "community." Each exists in close relationship to an urban situation, but each community has the size and "flavor" of a "village" rather than a city. The examination of "communities" provided anthropologists with a means of testing their techniques on these adjuncts to a "complex" society as represented by large cities. To some extent the people of the community who act as mediators (political, economic) with the outer world tend to be the higher-status individuals or their representatives. The interactions with the outer world generally take the form of trade in agrarian or other local products, bought and sold by grain merchants, for metals or finished goods such as autos and tractors. Hence, the "community" is a residential unit that is "part" of the larger society as Kroeber suggested.<sup>6</sup> By way of contrast, one might note that a tribal village has greater autonomy or independence in that it is a self-contained social and economic unit even though it may enjoy the benefits of trade for certain kinds of luxury or utilitarian goods. The critical limits may be described in terms of self-sufficiency, with the tribal village remaining independent of the goods produced in the outer world. Once the village becomes dependent on this two-way flow it becomes, by definition, a "part-society" or community orbiting and dependent upon the technological products of an urban center.

Such communities show all the elements of a social class structure that are found in an urban situation, only in a less complex form. In a small community members of the various social classes superficially share a general "cultural" tradition in the sense that they verbally acknowledge a "general" set of rules and laws. Considerable differences exist, however, in how each group in the community translates or participates in this system, and these differences mark the distinctions between the social classes. These differences include more than type of work; variations may be in language use, clothing style, and type of housing and car as well as in "implicit" aspects of culture such as academic goals and the ways that these are pursued. Compounding this diversity are differences between ethnic groups of approximately the same social class. What makes a complex society difficult to study are these multiple cultural traditions and all of the internal class distinctions of each of them. A tribal village, with but one culture, is far easier to study even if that culture is class-stratified or has clear "social ranking." An urban society and the communities in its orbit are by definition "complex" and correspondingly difficult to understand. Yet recognition of the component parts of an urban society is the first step to working out the impressively complex structure that is essential to its workings.

America, obviously, is a complex society in which numerous ethnic tradi-

6. *Ibid.*, 274.

tions and quite a few true cultures operate within an incredibly complex mix.<sup>7</sup> Any urban area provides an example of this phenomenon.<sup>8</sup> However, in rural areas one still finds "communities" continuing to operate. In some rare cases, such as with Native Americans who live in traditional villages and continue to use their own language and hold to the old rules of their respective cultures as best they can, true cultures are to be found within the geopolitical unity which we call the United States of America.

### *Social Class in America*

STUDIES OF "COMMUNITIES" within the United States have included those studies which focus on small towns in various sections of the country.<sup>9</sup> The primary problem with the early examples of these studies is that they accepted the geopolitical boundaries of the towns as adequate delineators of "culture" while ignoring sociocultural considerations such as class and ethnicity. Rather than focusing on a specific class (e.g., lower middle) researchers become lost among an ill-defined "middle America," a kind of ideal type that is rarely found as an actual functioning or specific group. Their view of America appears painted by Norman Rockwell. An outstanding review of these difficulties, as seen from the sociological perspective, was published by M. M. Gordon in 1950.<sup>10</sup> Lloyd Warner's earlier attempt to identify social classes had sought to define rigid boundaries within which each member might be identified clearly.<sup>11</sup> That search reflected the sociological perspective which sought to impose borders (or definitions) from the observer's point of view rather than studying a self-defined group to determine what behaviors are shared by the members. This problem was addressed by Warner through a more complex analytical approach that came as close to understanding the subject as any academics would.<sup>12</sup>

In introducing his classic work on social class, Warner notes the focus of works by social scientists:

Until recently, they have lagged behind the novelist in investigating what our classes are, how they operate in our social lives, and what effect they have on individual lives.<sup>13</sup>

By the end of his study, perhaps aware of the shortcomings of their own findings, Warner believed that future scholars would better understand American

7. B. N. Colby and P. L. Van den Berghe, *Ixil Country: A Plural Society in Highland Guatemala* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1969); B. E. Griessman, sub-ed., "The American Isolates," *American Anthropologist* 74 (1972): 693-734.

8. Abner Cohen, ed., *Urban Ethnicity* (London: Tavistock, 1974).

9. W. Lloyd Warner, "Social Anthropology and the Modern Community," *American Journal of Sociology* 46 (1941): 785-96.

10. Milton M. Gordon, *Social Class in American Sociology* (New York: McGraw, Hill, 1963 [paperback reissue of 1950]).

11. W. Lloyd Warner, "American Caste and Class," *American Journal of Sociology* 42 (1936): 234-37.

12. W. Lloyd Warner, Marchia Meeker, and Kenneth Eells, *Social Class in America* (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1949), 49. For a critique see H. W. Pfautz and O. D. Duncan, "A Critical Evaluation of Warner's Work in Community Stratification," *American Sociological Review* 15.2(1950): 205-15.

13. *Ibid.*, 6.

society using a dual approach:<sup>14</sup>

Through careful study, the American novels and scientific monographs are capable of yielding valuable knowledge and contributions to what we must learn about the behavior of Americans.

Long before anthropologists turned their skills and methods toward the study of urban society or its component parts, Lloyd Warner had issued the call and had noted, perhaps with envy, O'Hara's skills in depicting the individual groups that compose a complex society:<sup>15</sup>

For the scholar interested in the analysis of social class in America, they are often springs of information, occasionally graced with the magic insight of sensitive observers. By manipulating character, scene, and plot, the literary artist reports on what he feels and thinks about the social reality: the social scientist, partly controlled by the discipline of his training, observes many of the same facts and reports in direct statement what he has discovered. To use the materials from the novels, the social scientist must analyze its symbols and translate them into the data of science. . . . Scientific documentation about the nature of our status system is greatly strengthened by the contemporary novels which have realistically reported on the current American scene. . . . Names of authors and their books immediately come to mind . . . John O'Hara's *Appointment in Samarra*. . . .

American social classes are often revealed in literary, if not scholarly, ways, during and after the years in which Warner wrestled with the problem. Tennessee Williams' play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, had been produced in 1947 and won its author a Pulitzer Prize the following year. The core of this drama, and those following in that tradition, is this conflict not only between the personalities of lovers but between their distinctly different values as generated by the "cultural traditions" of two very different social classes. Also critical in *Streetcar*, as in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and to some degree *A Rage to Live*, is the gender of the "partner" of higher social class. This topic will be pursued below after a consideration of some elements of social class.

Warner's evaluation of class includes factors that indicate the stratification of class within ethnic lines and possibly localized within regions of the country. Baltzell's belief that a national upper class emerged after 1900 includes two suppositions that remain to be demonstrated.<sup>16</sup> One is that there *exists* a national cross-ethnic upper class, and the other is that this coalesced at the turn of the century. If we take Baltzell's hypothesis as a given, there remains O'Hara's data to suggest the presence of status differences reflecting regions of the country (and, perhaps, the world). Thus Alfred Eaton's status in *From the Terrace* was that of a "country cousin," and O'Hara makes clear that he did *not* have free access to New York society but entered it through social connections, hard work, and perhaps most important—luck.

During the years following Warner's 1949 study increasing attention was

14. Ibid., 248.

15. Ibid., 231–32.

16. Edward Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentleman* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1958). See also C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford UP, 1956).

directed toward the analysis of American society through the data provided by fiction. Two examples serve to illustrate this trend. In the more scholarly vein, E. Digby Baltzell acknowledged the value of the novel in providing a record of the various segments of American society.<sup>17</sup> Baltzell specifically placed O'Hara among the authors generating significant information for this record. A more literary approach was taken by Michael Millgate, whose work offers useful insights into the history of these concerns. Robert Wilson also took an "author as ethnographer" approach to literature, offering views from a sociological perspective on the social dynamics seen in eight specific "societies," each at a specific point in time, as depicted by eight different writers. Wilson's work, as that of so many others, fails to consider either social class or ethnicity as critical components within a complex society. The homogenized view of American society simply does not reflect the social dynamics of America or of any other country with a cultural mix.<sup>18</sup>

In a closed social group such as the upper class of a complex society, one can often recognize the ruling group by dress, language use, or other criteria used by the group, consciously or not, to maintain their self-identity. Sumptuary laws once attempted to create legal boundaries when the new class (middle) of merchants found themselves in an economic position to dress like the elite. Differences in the power structure enabled the elite to establish sumptuary laws. By the 1940s American elite still defined their social class membership primarily by kinship, but these were also reinforced by decisions concerning the purchase of specific goods and by a host of other behaviors that together reflected group identification. O'Hara had an eye and a concern for these decisions as did no other novelist. Sinclair Lewis in *Babbitt* notes that cars were status markers in the city of Zenith. Lewis said that the family automobile indicated its social rank as precisely as the grades of the peerage denoted rank among English families. However, Lewis was not as precise in detailing the makes of vehicles nor in developing the complex set of "explicit designs for living" shared by any single social group in his fiction. Lewis makes a sociological generalization that reinforces what we may know, thereby creating a verisimilitude in his works that makes them easy reading. O'Hara provides ethnographic detail. When

17. Edward Digby Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1964).

18. Michael Millgate, *American Social Fiction: James to Cozzens* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964); Robert N. Wilson, *The Writer as Social Seer* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1979). Note also may be made that many "Marxist" scholars also tried to get into this act such as Dale L. Johnson, ed., *Class and Social Development: A New Theory of the Middle Class* (Beverly Hills, Ca.: Sage Publications, 1982). They had as much success at depicting American social classes and ethnicity as Marxist governments had at running various countries. See Lee Sigelman, "Politics and the Social Order in the Work of John O'Hara," *Journal of American Studies* 20 (1986): 233-57, rpt. in Eppard (n.1), 206-28; also Edward Digby Baltzell, *An American Business Aristocracy* (New York: Collier Books, 1962).

O'Hara's perceptions on the complexities of American society are also reflected in his address, "Fellow Americans," delivered to Judge Paul Leahy's class for naturalization, 15 December 1952, in Wilmington, Delaware. The six unnumbered typescript pages are now in the Special Collections of Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pa.



O'Hara describes a car it is preceded by a description of its owner that is less a description of an individual than of a member of a social class. Then, as *further* evidence of lifestyle, O'Hara tells the reader what kind of car she or he drove.

The elite maintain their identity (social borders) through membership in clubs and other closed groups, but fundamental limitations are created as in any true culture through their marriage patterns. The elite know who they are, and who is in their group, and therefore who is not in. They can always answer the question of who *you* are by asking their more genealogically informed kin or by consulting the Blue Book.<sup>19</sup>

The in-group represented by the elite needs only one question: whether a person is in or out of their group. Thus one of O'Hara's characters, who is in, is not at all interested in meeting or knowing a movie actress, who is obviously out; not to mention the concept that "theater people" comprise an entire "class" of traditionally disreputable people. The only reason any of the elite might have interest in the non-elite is in order to avail themselves of their services. The middle class exists to serve others; the upper class (like the new lower class) serve only themselves. Members of the upper class are always polite and always interested in all individuals, putting everyone at ease with good manners and easy conversation. When dealing with social inferiors this facilitates effective utilization of services. This includes maids and waiters as well as physicians, Irish or otherwise. The social interaction is meant to achieve the goal in the most pleasant and efficient manner possible and acts as a facilitating mechanism that in no way trespasses across the very real boundary of social class.

### *O'Hara's Description of the Social Class Hierarchy in Pennsylvania*

BEFORE TURNING TO THE analysis of a specific work by John O'Hara the reader should be aware of a subordinate thesis concerning his reasons for being interested in this subject in the first place. Warner and his colleagues noted that "Any social analyst using the novel must take account of the status of the author. . . ."<sup>20</sup> My contention is that O'Hara's position in society provided the motivation for his carefully drawn studies, but that his desire to emulate the upper classes as well as his intellectual perspicacity resulted in ethnographic portraits of the highest standard.

19. The *Social Register: Philadelphia* (1976) had, since about 1877, provided the local elite with a handy reference to the members of their group (New York: Social Register Association). This blue bound volume for the "Blue Bloods" was generally referred to as the "phone book" (who could possibly want to call someone not in the Blue Book?). By 1977 the various social registers in those cities where the American elite resided had been coalesced into a single, national register. This is issued in a winter and summer edition (e.g., *Social Register*, Winter ed., Vol. 105 [New York: Social Register Association, 1991]). The elite need not use any of the means which Erving Goffman notes as applying in general to group identification: *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959).

20. Warner et al. (n. 12), 242.

O'Hara's situation is summarized nicely by Arthur Mizner<sup>21</sup> who notes that O'Hara knew:

what it felt like to be one of an Irish doctor's eight children, to have flunked out of a couple of obscure schools and been unable to go to Yale because his father died and there was not enough money. Something certainly gave him his astonishing alertness to the fine social distinctions of American life, that half envious but wholly understanding and acutely observant curiosity which is the source of his early works.

Mizner also pointed out:

The early O'Hara held what Lionel Trilling has called "his exacerbated social awareness" wholly under the control of these "sound emotions" which, if they were not profound, were shrewd and generous.

From these emotional roots there blossomed in O'Hara a most scholarly concern with the facts. Granville Hicks<sup>22</sup> commented on this predilection as follows:

O'Hara takes himself seriously as a social historian, and fiction offers no more carefully documented account of American life in the first half of the twentieth century than *From the Terrace*. The reliance on facts, public facts and private facts, have taken O'Hara a long way.

O'Hara understood social class by virtue of his own position in the structure of a small American town, and later by his position in "society" as a whole. The problems of identifying social classes within ethnic "groups" in America, and any other complex society, have barely been touched by anthropologists. Insights into the techniques by which such "cultural units" as a single social class within a well defined ethnic tradition might be identified have been suggested through O'Hara's works. O'Hara may have provided some of the solutions to these problems from the area which he knew best: the coal region within which his ethnic heritage (Irish) and his father's achievements as a doctor of medicine worked to place John O'Hara in a peculiar category, looking at the local elite as an outsider.<sup>23</sup> O'Hara lacked the social position and the economic power to actually enter the elite group within which he had almost grown up. Although he lacked the social class membership, he had extraordinary skill as an ethnographer and documented as no one else the details of class and ethnicity found in a multiethnic American town.<sup>24</sup>

21. Arthur Mizner, "Something Went Seriously Wrong," *The New York Times Book Review* 63.47 (Nov. 23, 1958): 1, 14, 1.

22. Granville Hicks, "Literary Horizons: The Problem of O'Hara," *Saturday Review* 41.48 (Nov. 29, 1958): 14-15, 14.

23. Charles W. Bassett, "John O'Hara: Irishman and American," *John O'Hara Journal* 1.2 (1980): 1-81.

24. John Updike in "Exile on Main Street," *The New Yorker* (17 May 1993): 91-97, notes that Sinclair Lewis, who was another example of a doctor's son but one who did have a Yale education, "became an anthropologist among his own people." Lewis also touched on social class differences but does not detail and define them the way O'Hara does. Colin Wilson in *The Outsider* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1956) provided a direct literary description of a specific "marginal man." Novelists may all be marginal to their society, being (or feeling themselves) neither clearly of one class or another. This problem of self-identity is recognized by Brodkey (n. 3), 114.

*Ethnic Traditions*

ETHNIC GROUPS IN PENNSYLVANIA in the first half of the 20th century, by their languages and often by their clothing styles, could be identified as distinct social units. The maintenance of these boundaries was the concern of the older members, and of anthropologists interested in understanding these cultural processes. Anthropologists generally examine groups with distinct languages, dress, etc., but ethnic identity can be a more difficult subject when the differences are as minimal as those described by O'Hara. Barth discusses the ways that ethnic traditions can be sustained even during the long, multigenerational process of social class "mobility."<sup>25</sup> A family may over generations shift from, let us say, the lower middle class to the upper middle class and still maintain ethnic identity through language use and certainly through the "values" of the group. Thus a lower-class Irish family might, through ability and diligence through time, shift into the lower middle class while still retaining their Irish identity. This is a phenomenon that the novelist O'Hara understood better than Barth the anthropologist.

O'Hara could distinguish between the English and the German tradition with ease due to the continuity of language use or accents in the area of Pottsville, Pennsylvania. More significantly his observations provide support for my own observations regarding differences between the German and the English ethnic traditions in Philadelphia, differences that remain evident even after 300 years of joint habitation in southeastern Pennsylvania.

O'Hara, the astute observer, has given us a series of works that focuses on the coal country of his birth, a body of work far more detailed in its ethnographic coverage than that provided by an award-winning work of an anthropologist<sup>26</sup> or of an historian who focuses on the upper class.<sup>27</sup> O'Hara's works are far more than simply autobiographical,<sup>28</sup> as he himself said he wanted them to be. Brodkey faults O'Hara for describing events rather than simply telling a good story.<sup>29</sup> O'Hara certainly produced many a good short story among the more than 400 that he wrote,<sup>30</sup> but he was doing great ethnography at the same time. O'Hara's works constitute a collection from which we can assemble ethnographic data of outstanding accuracy, detailing the lives of the inhabitants of

who suggests that "an anomaly in social class often leads to the concentrated effort that brings early success to a writer." Such success need not come early, but the "anomaly" may be essential. The female author as an "anomaly" may be a gender equivalent of social class differences.

25. Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1969), 9–10.

26. Anthony F. C. Wallace, *St. Clair: A Nineteenth-Century Coal Town's Experience with a Disaster Prone Industry* (New York: Knopf, 1987).

27. Edward Davies II, *The Anthracite Aristocracy: Leadership and Social Change in the Hard Coal Regions of Northeastern Pennsylvania, 1800–1930* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois UP, 1985).

28. Matthew J. Bruccoli, ed., *Gibbsville, Pennsylvania* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1992).

29. Brodkey (n. 3), 118–19.

30. Matthew J. Bruccoli, ed., *John O'Hara: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1978).

Pottsville. These were the people O'Hara knew best.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand we may contradistinguish between the detailed ethnography of O'Hara and the works of James Michener as an historian/entertainer. Michener records various facts and figures relating to the people who are the (regional) subjects of his "researches," but they are amorphous personalities or characters and not members of any specific culture.

Rather than compare O'Hara with those authors whose relationship to him lies only in that they also write, a category including sports columnists and others whose products are fundamentally dissimilar, we might better examine authors who may share important social and personal characteristics, in particular that of sociological marginality. Similarities between O'Hara and Thomas Hardy or William Faulkner have been noted on numerous occasions.<sup>32</sup> One important characteristic which they share is that they all occupy a position marginal to that sector of society which occupies the highest social status. O'Hara and Hardy are identical in that they might be described as members of the disaffected middle class. More importantly they were not members of the upper class, and both recognized and strongly felt their relative social positions. Both wrestled with this dilemma in their fiction and, one may infer, in their lives as well. Brodkey describes what he calls "O'Hara's difficulty in portraying Wasps."<sup>33</sup> O'Hara viewed the elite through not very smiling Irish eyes, without caring how they wished to present themselves in all their Cheeverian dullness. Those that O'Hara depicts, such as Julian English or Grace Caldwell Tate, are the most flawed examples: great examples of how *not* to be a "Wasp."

When a society is *perceived* as permitting social mobility, such as America, or when the middle class has access to goods and even relationships with members of the upper class, an assumption may be made that one can alter one's social class. One can demonstrate easily any change in status or change in income, but social class does not change. Thus Abrahamson suggests that five ways of "improving" social status exist in modern America: marriage, personality, special talent, sheer perseverance and education.<sup>34</sup> In fact, none of these vectors can actually alter one's own social class, and O'Hara knew it. O'Hara could see *how* one's descendants might become a member of the upper class as in *The Lockwood Concern*.<sup>35</sup> O'Hara knew all about culture and family. He knew that social class derived from sources other than achieved income or oc-

31. O'Hara's major work depicting the predominantly agricultural region immediately to the south of his own coal country, *The Lockwood Concern*, appears to be part autobiography and part wishful thinking. This book is a textbook in which the dynamics of change in social class over time are carefully detailed.

32. Joseph Browne, "John O'Hara and Tom McHale: How Green Is Their Valley?" *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 6.2 (1978): 57-64.

33. Brodkey (n. 3), 116.

34. Stephen Abrahamson, "Our Status System and Scholastic Rewards," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 25 (1952): 441-50.

35. See n. 31.

cupation, such as his father attained. *The Lockwood Concern* could serve as a textbook of social class dynamics, delineating the multigenerational processes involved in making a deliberate effort to change a family's social class. In our consideration of O'Hara as an ethnographer this observation regarding his awareness of cultural *process* is critical. O'Hara's father's "trade" and income, without investments and connections, did little to alter his ascribed status and provided no benefits to his son, John. Jacqueline Kennedy also knew this. When asked if her son was attending a fashionable preparatory school "to become a gentleman," she replied that it takes three generations to make a gentleman. This answer suggests that she believed that Joseph Kennedy did not qualify, and one may speculate as to whether she considered John Kennedy to be of her "class."

Thomas Hardy, another author with clear understanding of the impossibility of an individual's having social class mobility and the realization of the difficulties in describing class dynamics, wrestled with these matters in much of his fiction. Hardy's work parallels that of O'Hara in many respects. From his early and relatively optimistic *A Pair of Blue Eyes* to the later *Jude the Obscure*, more realistic in its awareness of social class boundaries, Hardy portrayed cultural differences and interactions in England at the end of the nineteenth century. *A Pair of Blue Eyes* includes an interesting interplay between a woman of higher class than the male protagonist, a pattern which characterizes this kind of situation. Reversing the roles of the sexes of the protagonists produces a different genre of fiction.

Elfride in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is a "modern" woman in the 1990's sense but shackled by cultural traditions. She is assertive and able, but forced by implicit rules of culture to play a passive role in her own social set. Thus she generates a relationship with Stephen, whose passivity (either in personality or as a function of social class differences) causes her to back away from him. Elfride, like so many women in this ambivalent position, depends upon an assertive, sometimes even abusive, male to control their joint behavior. Social expectation—now some might say biological expectation—on the part of the female, with Elfride as an example, is that the male will make decisions and act in a dominant and/or controlling role. One may assume that the chauvinist statements by males that females "like to be abused, managed, etc." may reflect a subtle awareness of this kind of behavior so aptly described by Hardy. Gender roles and relationships are more directly treated by Prof. Bassett (see this volume).

Considering Hardy's life and concerns as related to Abrahamson's observations, one may note a number of important congruencies. Hardy had a special talent and had considered the possibility of marriage, much as he described it in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, as a means by which he might alter his position in the clearly ranked society of Victorian England. Despite Hardy's perseverance, great

intellect, and productivity, he could not obscure the fact of low-status birth. These considerations in literature of the stability of class despite various attempts to alter it or change status have not been equally well covered in the scholarly literature. Robin Fox's attempt to elicit the role played by marriage in facilitating social mobility in modern Britain depends on plays and novels.<sup>36</sup> Although the dynamics of marriage as understood through anthropological theory are employed in this analysis of literature, the attempt is an exercise for a popular audience and does little to set the stage for further study.

The clarity of social description provided by Hardy involves more than just his masterful use of prose. The situations described by O'Hara and by Hardy accurately reflect the conditions of a complex society which is class-stratified and ethnically varied. Furthermore, if we examine the philosophies of these authors we find that O'Hara and Hardy tell us more about middle-class revolutions than all the sociologists of the world. The middle-class scholar, writer, or business person feels the constraints of class and the barriers established by the upper classes (real or imagined). From these members of the middle class and their frustrations come authors such as Hardy and O'Hara and revolutionaries like Mao Zedong and the Buddha. These middle-class "revolutionaries" seek means to change society rather than to describe it; their repeated failures tell us how little they understand the workings of these systems.

John O'Hara came to understand his own society and his situation in it: his "station in life." This can be seen in the character of James Malloy, O'Hara's alter ego, who appears throughout his fiction. O'Hara obviously identified with the gentry in his fiction, vicariously living the life of the ethnic English upper class through his works. He, or his characters, could assume the position of the dominant group to which he aspired with all their flaws and foibles intact.

Clifton Fadiman suggests that in Stendhal's novels he "lay down the main lines of at least a dozen motifs which have engrossed novelists since his day: the revolt from the village . . . the sense of social inferiority. . . ."<sup>37</sup> Stendhal (Marie-Henri Beyle, 1783–1842) deals with matters that plague all modernizing societies with their rural-urban migrations. Stendhal depicted the dynamics between these rural and urban patterns: the civil and the wild, Jacob and the hairy Esau. "*The Red and the Black* is the classic study of the outsider" and "the first novel to announce the theme explicitly" and to give it classic formulation.<sup>38</sup> In order to "succeed," Julian Sorel must leave home as Alfred Eaton "needs" to leave his nest at the pinnacle of his small-town society to try his hand in a much

36. Robin Fox, "Marriage, Mobility, and Modern Literature," *Encounter with Anthropology* (New York: Dell Publishing Co. [Laurel ed.], 1973), Chapter 5, 113–29.

37. Clifton Fadiman, "Introduction," *The Red and the Black* by Stendhal (New York: Bantam Books, 1958), 6. Stendhal (Marie-Henri Beyle), *The Red and the Black*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff (New York: Liveright Publishing Co., 1926).

38. Fadiman (n. 37), 10–13.

hand in a much larger milieu. The driving force for these characters is the same as that which drives their authors.

Fadiman's discussion of the kind of novel that turns on what Trilling calls "The Young Man from the Provinces" also cites Trilling's brilliant essay on James's *The Princess Casamassima*. Trilling notes that for Hyacinth Robinson, from a London city slum, "his social class may constitute" the equivalence of being from another place such as "the Provinces."<sup>39</sup> Trilling also places Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* in the genealogy descended from Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* and Dickens' *Great Expectations*.

O'Hara shares the discontent of William Faulkner, but not the same problem which characterized many authors writing about the American south. Many of those people were wellborn but in a society severely disrupted by the lingering stresses of slavery and economic decline. These problems were peppered with matters of incest and social class. Rather than lamenting their position in that declining society, many "southern" writers found themselves at odds with the entire system, often escaping to the relief provided by residence outside their homeland. The Faulknerian tradition is *regional*.

O'Hara's ability to understand the attitudes of others and to recognize details of life and thought may reflect one's concern with identifying her/himself within the context of this larger society. This "presentation" of self is the core of Erving Goffman's thesis that an individual entering into the presence of others seeks general information which allows the observer to formulate an appropriate "presentation."<sup>40</sup> The data sought, according to Goffman's introduction, include socioeconomic status, the individual's self-conception, attitudes toward the observer, general competence, and other "facts" with which I do not necessarily agree.

### *O'Hara as an Ethnographer*

O'HARA'S NOVELS ARE FINE ethnographic records, autobiographical at their core but accurate in their detail. It should be no surprise that Alfred Eaton, looking back on his own life, describes himself as an anthropologist.<sup>41</sup> The value of this record, such as the documentation of life in "Gibbsville," is recognized by Bassett.<sup>42</sup> O'Hara recognized that he was better at recording than writing, often referring to his body of work as "social history." O'Hara is better than either Wallace or Davies at writing social history.<sup>43</sup>

39. Lionel Trilling, "Introduction," *The Princess Casamassima* by Henry James (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1948), rpt. in *Discussions of Henry James*, ed. Naomi Lebowitz (Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1962), 31-48. See also James W. Tuttleton, *The Novel of Manners in America* (New York: Norton, 1972).

40. Goffman (n. 19).

41. John O'Hara, *From the Terrace* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1958).

42. Charles W. Bassett, "Gibbsville: John O'Hara's Small-Town Armageddon," *Critical Essays on John O'Hara*, ed. Philip Eppard (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1994), 233-39.

43. Wallace (n. 26); Davies (n. 27).

And lucrative it was for O'Hara. In addition to his better known works, O'Hara produced an impressive number of screenplays and columns for *Newsweek*.<sup>44</sup> Though O'Hara produced some of America's best short stories (402), his novels (14) will always remain "relegated to the second rank."<sup>45</sup>

O'Hara's use of factual material and the way in which he gathered it also impressed Rollene Waterman:

From his newspaper experience he learned to be a stickler for accuracy. In gathering material for *From the Terrace*, he talked to anyone who had useful facts—bankers, lawyers, Navy men, flyers—and wrote dozens of letters to verify the smallest detail.<sup>46</sup>

A review of these letters today might indeed confirm Waterman's hypothesis. My only quibble with Waterman relates to a general question of the accuracy of reporters in O'Hara's day, and if reporters *ever* are accurate in what they write. Accurate reporters seem to win Pulitzer Prizes, but there are lots of reporters out there. O'Hara is the kind of social scientist described by Leonard Reissman:<sup>47</sup>

The scientist is not a "free-floating" personality who can always remain aloof from the social milieu in which he lives. He, like other men, suffers the same human frailty, of being a creature of his own era; the interests that motivate him, even his role as scientist, are often the same interests shared by others. His procedures for scientific inquiry are objective in that they can be duplicated by others, in other places and other times, and thereby checked for reliability and consistency. . . . Furthermore, his ideas and his conclusions can only find acceptance outside the scientific community when they are ready to be believed by others.

O'Hara's descriptions of behavior may be accurate, and useful, reflections of class or ethnic traditions which one may verify through comparison with contemporary equivalents or descendants. The specific features of dialogue, however, may not be a precise replication of spoken language or usage. Dialogue in fiction is meant to appear to have a natural flow, but to do so actually smooths out the repetition and errors normally present in the spoken language.

Raymond O'Cain suggests that O'Hara's usage of "spoken" words may be an accurate reflection of contemporary usage specific to both ethnic groups and to social class.<sup>48</sup> Although these appearances may be correct in a scholarly sense, some cautions might be considered. O'Hara's artistic ability is not to be denied. In the course of his writing he may have projected some words into an anachronistic past, slipped New York slang or usage into the Delaware River drainage, or otherwise transposed time and place. Despite the overall accuracy of his portrayals, O'Hara sold his work as literature and not as ethnography. He had

44. Matthew J. Bruccoli, *The O'Hara Concern* (New York: Random House, 1975).

45. Brodkey (n. 3), 114.

46. Rollene Waterman, "Appt. with O'Hara," *Saturday Review* 41.48 (Nov. 29, 1948): 15.

47. Leonard Reissman, *Class in American Society* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1959), 9.

48. Raymond K. O'Cain, "Dictionaries Consult Me!" *John O'Hara Journal* 1.1 (1979): 29–34.



no reason to keep dates and locations in academic order, but quite probably he did so out of respect for reality. Although he may have been dissatisfied or unsettled in his relationship with the world of his birth, we have no reason to believe that he let art interfere with his clear and anthropological description of the world around him.

*O'Hara's Social Class: Why Do Ethnography?*

UNDERLYING O'HARA'S QUEST for accuracy was his social position relative to the local elite. His status in Pottsville's social hierarchy might be best described by the sociological term "marginal." Neither part of the group to which he aspired (the elite) nor wishing to be part of a second (the one into which he was born), O'Hara stood back, living and writing about the various aspects of the society as a whole. Brendan Gill, also the son of an Irish doctor, describes O'Hara as a "pushy outsider." Gill actually went to Yale *and* made "Bones." Gill probably knew much more about Ivy League social clubs than O'Hara but did not have the personal need to describe them. Gill notes that O'Hara's personality and his need to be recognized made it difficult to like him and worked against O'Hara's "success."<sup>49</sup> What is not clear is what O'Hara defined as success. Gill aptly describes this quest by quoting the inscription on O'Hara's tombstone, written for himself: "Better than anyone else, he told the truth about his time, the first half of the twentieth century. He was a professional. He wrote honestly and well."<sup>50</sup> O'Hara's success would have been more clear had someone else chosen to write these words about him!

O'Hara's position as a marginal person derives from the social position of his Irish family, considered as inferior to the local English gentry.<sup>51</sup> The Irish were not stigmatized by birth, they were simply "Irish" and therefore not part of the elite.<sup>52</sup> O'Hara's father's occupation as a physician provided high status<sup>53</sup> among the Irish and direct and physical contact with the elite. Yet the Irish descent of O'Hara's family takes precedence in the social system of the town.

Warner and his colleagues had difficulty in establishing a mechanism for describing a social class system which would have cross-ethnic validity. Their

49. Brendan Gill, *Here at The New Yorker* (New York: Random House, 1975), 277, 265-68. Marginal people such as O'Hara can identify with and understand the "traditional" situation of females in every part of society as their subordinated roles in each individual class or ethnic group give them a certain uniformity. No one in any of these "cultures" can be as close, and as closed out, as a wife. This understanding of female roles and depictions of female characters make O'Hara, Thomas Hardy, and many other dead white males important figures in the women's movement. The importance of gender as still another division in a complex society will not be pursued here.

50. Gill (n. 49), 279.

51. The term "marginal" is poorly defined in sociology, often reflecting an ethnocentric bias that assumes that the "researching" author's lifestyle is the correct model and all others are dissonant or examples of "failure." See Frederick J. Hoffman, ed., *Marginal Manners: The Variants of Bohemia* (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson and Co., 1962).

52. Harald Eidheim, "When Ethnic Identity Is a Social Stigma," *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1969), 39-57.

53. Warner et al. (n. 12), Table 7.

concentration in the "Jonesville" study limited the subjects to "Old American," a people whom they describe as "non-ethnic."<sup>54</sup> Since Warner's study dealt with a population derived from, or conforming to, the "English" tradition, the researchers tacitly recognize a basic feature of complex society—that ethnic traditions linger and maintain social lines which cannot be crossed with ease. Thus Doctor O'Hara was distinctly a high-status Irishman, but this position did not have transference to the English-descent establishment of Pottsville.

This thesis, that descriptions of social classes in John O'Hara's fiction have an accuracy which permits them to be used as ethnographic reports, can be confirmed no more easily than any work of ethnography can be validated. O'Hara, as an ethnographer, describes his society and its components with an incredible accuracy which reflects unerring observation of detail and, more important, how it works. He does not evaluate, nor criticize, nor attempt to infer how the system came to be. The test of my thesis, however, is not simple nor can it be achieved using the ethnographic information now at hand. We can use Warner's data on social class categories and demonstrate that O'Hara's characters are aptly described by comparing certain elements of their lives with sociological observations as noted below. I believe, however, that the value of O'Hara's works lies in the vast extent of his descriptions and particularly in his delineation of the "values" or "implicit" elements of the culture shared by the members of a given social class. These elements, which I believe to be the most vital in describing culture, remain to be tested through ethnographic data to be collected in the future.

These elements of social class in America continue to be poorly defined, yet they form the crux of our understanding the workings of a complex society. For the academic these data help to explain why brilliant students often fail to achieve goals or why some women perform differently from some men. The values of a social class may affect achievement potential, sex roles, and dozens of other behaviors which are seen, but often not distinguished, in contemporary society.

O'Hara could sketch these differences with a few words, not simply because he understood them but because he had a remarkable skill at presenting ethnographic description. When speaking of the widow of Joseph B. Chapin in *Ten North Frederick*, O'Hara juxtaposed her situation with that of a local member of a different social class:<sup>55</sup>

There was a butcher on the West Side of town who had less money than Edith Chapin, who lived on the East Side of town. The butcher had a Cadillac, and so had Edith Chapin, but the butcher's was newer . . . The 18th Street butcher was said to be getting rich; the Frederick Street widow was said to be in comfortable circumstances.

54. Ibid., 125.

55. John O'Hara, *Ten North Frederick* (New York: Bantam Books by arrangement with Random House, 1957).

With such short lines O'Hara distills the essence of American social class. Culling his works one can derive a far better picture of these characteristics because they reflect the values and ethos of class (the "implicit" designs for living) more effectively than had been achieved by sociological inquiry with its concentration on easily quantifiable attributes. Warner had attempted to identify social class by "quantifiable" means using an "Index of Status Characteristics." This index (ISC) includes evaluations of occupation, source of income, house type, and dwelling area. These more or less directly observable traits reflect the cultural values of an individual in indirect ways. While these criteria describe the "explicit designs for living" of a group of people, they do not deal with the values and mores (implicit designs) so fundamental to the "culture of a class." In some cases Warner<sup>56</sup> touches on these problems:

The very fact that the status placement of members of the upper-upper class is based essentially in "old family" membership indicates that, while individualism is important, it cannot easily be severed from the life of an individual . . . . Members of the low-upper class usually are lacking the upper-upper class characteristic of extended kinship identifications.

The maintenance of close extended family relationships may be one of the most significant mechanisms by which the upper-upper class (UU) maintains social boundaries. Baltzell confuses membership in this inborn group with the means by which outsiders may gain entry.<sup>57</sup> Baltzell's comment on the "elite" and how they may merge, as by marriage, with the upper class fails to recognize the strength of cultural tradition and ethnic barriers. Baltzell's statement is offered here with the readers' attention directed to the last sentence:

The elite concept refers to those individuals who are the most successful and stand at the top of the functional class hierarchy. These individuals are the leaders in their chosen occupations or professions; they are the final decision makers in the political, economic, or military sphere as well as the leaders in the law, engineering, medicine, education, religion, and the arts. . . . The upper class concept, then, refers to a group of families, whose members are descendants of successful individuals (elite members) of one, two, three, or more generations ago. These families are at the top of the social class hierarchy; they are brought together, are friends, and are inter-married one with another; and finally, they maintain a distinctive style of life and a kind of primary group solidarity which sets them apart from the rest of the population.

In fact, the upper-upper class (UU) differs vastly from people who simply have money. Sociologists often fail to recognize that the rights and obligations of "kinship" are the true nature of its structure, not simply the acknowledgment of genealogical relationships. Thus those born to the UU (the inborn "members") who have no "capital" and live from the meager income of their professions still belong to, marry among, and remain in their group. Yet those people

56. W. Lloyd Warner, *American Life* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1953), 11.

57. Baltzell (n. 16), 6-7; see also n. 19.

who seem to be among the “elite” who have gained wealth by success in any field of endeavor and who move *toward* the lower-upper class form the “nouveaux riches” (parvenus). They may have skills and wealth, but rarely family connections with the upper class, a primary group requirement which Baltzell recognizes. Only those born of generations of wealth *and* who have intermarried with the UU ultimately merge with them. The parvenus may marry in (after all, they do have money), but no member born within the UU group will ever forget that there is a parvenu amongst them—for as long as anyone alive can recall the social origins of the outsider, and perhaps longer. The UU form what sociologists call a “primary group,” a group bound by kinship.

*Class: Social Stratification as Seen in A Rage To Live*

JOHN COBBS DESCRIBES *A Rage to Live* as “the most total portrait of a community in the O’Hara canon.”<sup>58</sup> Cobbs notes that its dominant theme is that of the social hierarchy in Fort Penn. The distinctions are based on background, breeding and behavior. Thus in Fort Penn it is better to be Polish than Black, Italian than Polish, Irish than Italian, and Pennsylvania Dutch than Irish. But this is only in terms of ethnic background because for the elite—or at least the male elite—one’s behavior is irrelevant to membership. This is clearly demonstrated by the behavior of Julian English in *Appointment in Samarra*. Cobbs focuses on the class conflict that is central to O’Hara’s works, a focus rarely taken by reviewers of O’Hara’s books. The denial that social class exists in America, a rather declassé as well as a common academic posture, may underlie this attitude. More likely many readers do recognize, on a cognitive level, the centrality of class as a theme in O’Hara but lack an ability to describe what O’Hara can depict with such ease.

As a novelist O’Hara needed to describe the aberrations within the elite class, such as Julian English, not simply because he wished to point out that the human condition has no regard for class. If O’Hara’s central “literary” goal was simply anthropological he could have become an anthropologist—if he had gone to university! But his goals of writing simple ethnographic description, dull studies of householders and their servants, were tempered by a need to earn a living. In the world of fiction there are rules seldom broken involving drama and plot and the variations on these themes that produce marketable products. These rules were applied in O’Hara’s classic study of social class “mobility,” *The Lockwood Concern*, which is perhaps the least studied of his works. Dealing with the willful desire of someone with money, but not of the upper class, to change the class of his *heirs*, the plot is commonly read as a family history focusing on a series of personalities rather than the study in social class dynam-

58. John Cobbs, “Caste and Class War: The Society of John O’Hara’s *Rage to Live*,” *John O’Hara Journal* 2.1 (1979): 24–34, rpt. in Eppard (n. 1), 168–75.

ics that it is. But O'Hara was not good with individuals, and the four generations of Lockwoods all appear as caricatures rather than as members of the same lineage. But the book shows what O'Hara knew about social class and may explain why he seemed to revel in the ostentation of the lower-upper class—knowing that he himself could never be part of America's elite.

### *Conclusions*

O'HARA, THE IRISH DOCTOR'S SON, learned that he was different from the English-Welsh doctor's son who lived on the same street, just as a Black child from the same area learned the same realities of life. Perhaps when, as a child, he was withdrawn from the Protestant school and sent to a Catholic school and made to mingle with the obviously non-elite, did he realize what class was all about. By the time that O'Hara had some experience with private secondary schools he must have learned that the elite of Pottsville were relatively lower in status than the elite of Philadelphia. His experiences and scholarly mind may have led him to see that there were also differences between the gentry of New York and that of Philadelphia, differences tinged with ethnocentric snobbery. In ever increasing circles his mind sought out new and different cultures to know and understand. His last work, *The Ewings*, takes O'Hara's readers to Cleveland and the home of William B. Ewing.<sup>59</sup> Ewing is the son of a prominent Cleveland manufacturer who wed Edna Everett, the product of a line of Michigan manufacturers. This gradual westward migration of O'Hara's locals does not reach the west coast despite O'Hara's considerable efforts as a screen writer. The view "From the Terrace" is the closest O'Hara came to examining the west coast, and it is not a very clear view at all. The farther O'Hara wandered from "home" the less sharply delineated are his characters and their respective cultures.

O'Hara identified best the inborn social groups that he grew up with, describing the culture of the elite of his home area as well as all the other distinct cultures that then surrounded him. O'Hara contradistinguished the elite from other groups that shared the same town and same society in the fashion of a superlative anthropologist. Some literary and social critics fault him for ignoring historical change. He did not. O'Hara saw clearly that change took time and that cultural tradition inevitably remains stable in a way which biased social scientists refuse to see. O'Hara, as a master scholar, recognized the slow processes of cultural change and demonstrated a keen understanding of the enculturation process. His philosophy appears to have been guided by the observation that those born to a position in any society live as a member of their group, and those who are not born to that group may only write about it.

59. John O'Hara, *The Ewings* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1972).

*Acknowledgments*

SINCERE THANKS ARE DUE Vince Balitas for encouraging me to continue this line of research. Thanks also are due Ferna Majewicz and Lucille Mitchell for extensive help in the preparation of the original manuscript in the pre-computer age. The logistical support provided by the Gillon Foundation and the Department of Anthropology of the University of Pennsylvania (Dr. G. Possehl) is gratefully acknowledged.

An abbreviated version of this paper was presented at the John O'Hara Conference (Pottsville, Pa.), 11 October 1980. Any errors in the statement of facts or in the interpretation of events, meanings or causes are, like the theories presented, solely the responsibility of the author.