

the Defense of Civil Rights, and the more recent Helsinki Watch Groups are all well documented by Rubenstein. He carefully sets forth both their underlying philosophies and their activities. The complex relationship between the "Zionists" (Soviet Jews whose primary goal is emigration to Israel) and the democrats is also explored with great understanding.

In the chapter titled "Détente and the Dissidents" Rubenstein draws on Russia's historical debate over its relationship with the West. He goes back to the westernizer Pyotr Chaadaev and the Slavophile Konstantin Aksakov, both of whom espoused their positions more than a century ago, and finds echoes of these positions today in the views of Sakharov, a modern-day "westernizer"; Solzhenitsyn, often seen as a "neo-Slavophile"; and Roy Medvedev, who suggests that meaningful change is possible within the limits of Marxism-Leninism.

A part of Solzhenitsyn's attitude on détente is that certain economic difficulties like shortages of bread and meat and

fewer consumer goods might provoke widespread disaffection in the Soviet Union, perhaps even food riots similar to those that occurred in Poland in 1970. Then, according to Solzhenitsyn, the regime would be willing to relax controls.

"But this seems unlikely to happen," states Rubenstein, pointing out that after the riots in Poland there were no concessions in the Soviet Union. Here, however, Rubenstein's argument seems to me flawed in two respects. First, it is hardly reasonable to expect real concessions or relaxation of controls in one country (the USSR) if the riots, as in 1970, actually occurred in another country (Poland). And in view of what has just happened in Poland, who can say what would occur if 300,000 Soviet workers were to follow in the footsteps of their Polish comrades? Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn could very well be proven right. Faced with a similar situation, the Soviet authorities, like their Polish counterparts, may also be forced to "relax controls."

Although the workers in the Soviet Union have not yet reached the stage of unity and awareness of their own strength attained by the Polish workers, a fledgling workers' movement is under way in the USSR. The short-lived strikes which occurred earlier this year in Togliatti and Gorkiy cannot be compared with those at Gdansk, but neither can their significance be overlooked.

Rumblings about the creation of a free trade union in the USSR first spilled into the Western press in December 1977; a forty-five-year-old mine foreman from the Donetsk coal basin, Vladimir Klebanov, and a group of fellow workers met with Western correspondents and announced the creation of a Free Trade Union Association. A charter was drafted by the association and endorsed by 110 workers. Soviet authorities responded by dispatching the dissident workers to a variety of prisons and labor camps, and Klebanov and several associates were committed to psychiatric hospitals.

Late in 1978, Klebanov's group, practically destroyed, was followed by the Free Interprofessional Association of Workers (SMOT), which, in spite of the incarcerations that shrink its ranks, continues to survive. Like the human rights movement, SMOT is small in number (it represents 200 workers), but its very existence and emerging contact with the democrats give rise to a great deal of hope, both here and in the USSR. There was a time when Lenin and his friends comprised a not much larger group. □

CHRISTIANITY, SOCIAL TOLERANCE, AND HOMOSEXUALITY: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century, by John Boswell. University of Chicago Press, 424 pp., \$27.50.

Gods, gays, and scholars

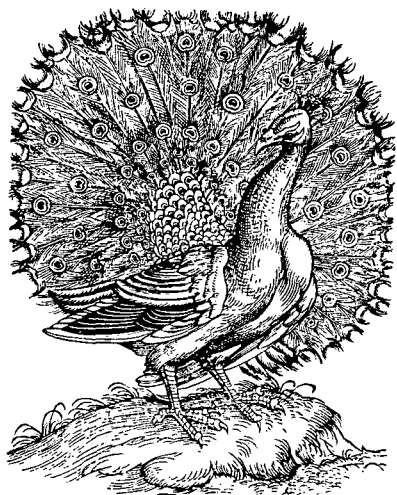
VERN L. BULLOUGH

HOMOSEXUALITY AS A field of study is out of the closet and into the university presses, a sure sign of academic acceptance. This is the third book dealing with homosexuality in history published by a university press in the past year. The change has been a rapid one. Just a few short years ago, one of the more prominent university presses refused to deal with the subject at all, fearful it would give the public the wrong impression. Now that the university presses have entered the arena, scholarly books about homosexuality will undoubtedly appear in increasing numbers. The indicators are already evident: Scholarly articles and monographs on the subject have spilled over from the few journals devoted to sexual studies to almost every kind of scholarly journal that can justify including an article about sexual behavior. The number of graduate dissertations in the field has escalated as students are no longer discouraged or forbidden from investigating stigmatized behavior and dangerous topics.

John Boswell's book goes over the same territory as some other recent books although not in quite the same detail. He briefly surveys homosexuality in ancient Greece, touches on events in Rome, and mentions some of the Biblical and early Christian attitudes, but his emphasis is on the Middle Ages, particularly the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and this is where the book is most valuable and original. Even in his summary of others' scholarship, however, Boswell emphasizes factors that too often are overlooked.

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For example, he is at his best in reexamining some of the sources in which translators and editors of the past have either deliberately ignored or disguised the existence of homosexuality by such devices as changing gender identity or putting sexual references into nonsexual terms. He is particularly, and I must say rightly, critical of the translations issued by the Loeb Library, usually regarded as the most scholarly of translations. One of the high points of his study is the chapter on "The Triumph of Ganymede: Gay Literature of the High Middle Ages." This is an original and insightful discussion of such writers as Baudri of Bourgueil (1046–1130) and such twelfth-century dialogues as the "Debate Between Ganymede and Helen," which compares homosexuality and heterosexual love. Also valuable is his treatment of the literature of Muslim Spain as it deals with gay themes.

Boswell is less good on what might be regarded as sexological topics. For example, he reports the Kinsey estimates of numbers and percentages of homosexuals without noting the limitations of such data. Kinsey did not survey the population of the United States, but rather drew a sample of American volunteers. What Kinsey reports is the percentages expressed by his volunteer sample. Boswell qualifies his statements by indicating that it is impossible to get data on numbers in the Middle Ages, but compounds his confusion by leaving the impression he is using the Kinsey reference scale for exclusively homosexual persons although almost none of the people in the Middle Ages he discusses would have met this definition. What Boswell is talking about is not gay people or even homosexual activities but attitudes toward gay people and literary references to homosexuality—which might not be the same thing.

The danger of this confusion is central to my disagreement with Boswell's thesis that the basic hostility to gay people did not emerge until the High Middle Ages. He argues that only toward the end of the twelfth century does ecclesiastical and civil hostility to homosexuality become dominant. Before that time Catholic Europe accepted homosexual bishops with equanimity and canonized people for whose homosexuality there was some evidence.

There is, however, a difference between homoerotic sentiments and homosexual conduct, between a literary metaphor and reality, and—above all—between the church's official stance and its ability to take action. For example, it

is by no means clear whether, when one addresses a friend in intimate, even romantic terms, this is an expression of homoerotic love or the custom of the day. Researchers find some of the same difficulty in dealing with expressions of affection between women in the nineteenth century, when terms and phrases that today would clearly indicate a les-

bian relationship might have been only a gushing form of endearment.

Catholic Europe accepted gay bishops with equanimity until the twelfth century, says Boswell.

This becomes important because I would argue that hostility to homosexuality was deeply engrained in the western church by St. Augustine, and reinforced by numerous other church fathers. It appears in the penitentials (early guides for confessors in fixing penances), which Boswell generously ignores, and in various other writings, some of which he quotes. Boswell dismisses some of this hostility by saying the church also condemned such activities as hypocrisy, gluttony, adultery, and prostitution, but he does not differentiate between any of these and homosexuality.

There was a difference, a radical difference, and this might be illustrated by comparing prostitution and homosexuality. St. Augustine also condemned prostitution but justified it as a necessary evil. For St. Augustine, prostitution might still result in conception, which he felt was the only justification for sex. Homosexuality, however, could not. There was also always the hope that the prostitute herself could be saved, and there was the continuous Biblical example of Mary Magdalene. No such charity was demonstrated by St. Augustine toward the person who actually engaged in homosexual activity. Though St. Thomas Aquinas and others questioned some of St. Augustine's assumptions, Aquinas essentially reaffirmed Augustinian standards.

CONDEMNING AN ACTIVITY and moving effectively against that activity are two different things, and during much of the Middle Ages the church was not in any position to do the latter. Still there were measures, like the Visigothic law code stipu-

tionalization of a religious condemnation of homosexuality, and this was carried over into both civil and common law. It also appears in many other areas of sexuality, as has been noted by James Brundage, authority on canon law at the University of Wisconsin.

Perhaps the best contemporary example in this election year would be the platforms adopted by the national political parties. They may mean little because the ability of the party to implement them is questionable. But if, let us say, the Republican party were to gain victory and a Jesse Helms could call the shots on "social issues," then the 1980 GOP platform would have to be taken more seriously. By the thirteenth century, the church was powerful enough to insist on the enactment of its long-held platform planks and effectively cemented its hostility to homosexuality. We have been chipping away at that structure ever since.

Obviously Boswell's thesis deserves a hearing. Are we dealing with an antagonism to homosexuality that is deeply embedded in the neoplatonic Augustinian tradition, as I hold, or are there more important factors, which Boswell does not name? Michel Foucault has argued that the change in attitudes came in the early modern period; Boswell takes it to the thirteenth century; I would argue that it is endemic to traditional Christian thinking. Boswell's work is important for raising the issue. Other researchers will have to give a definitive answer. Boswell's work can well serve as a cue. His book is well footnoted and includes references to most of the current work on the subject. The University of Chicago Press is to be commended for doing its usual excellent job—nowadays too rare among publishers—in the production and presentation of the book. □

GLORIA, directed by John Cassavetes.

Gloria hallelujah

STEPHEN HARVEY

JOHN CASSAVETES'S MOVIES have always attracted a small but highly demonstrative coven of admirers, and during a recent retrospective of his work at the Museum of Modern Art the New York City chapter filled every screening to capacity. These mavens avidly embrace the tenets of his art, best represented by the likes of *Faces*, *Husbands*, and *A Woman Under the Influence*—films that thrust their bloated, grainy, mottled selves at you, hoarsely shrieking that what they offer is Life Unexpurgated. The people trapped inside these movies tend to scream and punch and kvetch and cry in eternal long takes, photographed with overly deliberate artlessness. Others may find all this hyperthyroid inertia merely exasperating, but to Cassavetes aficionados, it's a harsh reflection of the tedium and pain of reality. As far as I'm concerned, his premises have been based on some rather frayed notions of naturalism, and are no more satisfying as art or diversion than they are persuasive in the mirror-of-truth department. For this school of thought, untethered emotion is the purest, most authentic form of human experience, best expressed via images so muddled and opaque that they must reveal the truth—if only because they don't look much like your standard moviemaking artifice.

Whether his vision is unsparing, as some claim, or merely stunted, Cassavetes's most recent films have been so thoroughly shunned by all but the most rabid devotees that Robert Altman

seems like a mass media icon by comparison. *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* expired with dispatch in the few theaters where it managed to surface, and *Opening Night* suffered a fate rare in moviedom: After a preliminary run in Los Angeles, it simply folded, never again to turn up for a commercial showing anywhere in the United States. No filmmaker can survive, in an economic sense, by remaining a cultists' darling, and few would want to in any case. Cassavetes's newest film, *Gloria*, grew out of his expressed desire to prove that he too could create a commercial movie accessible to a wider audience. If this be compromise, may it happen to every intransigently solipsistic filmmaker. With this movie, Cassavetes has disciplined his muse while freeing himself from crabbed case-history and leaping into the exhilarating realm of urban-based fantasy. The result is captivatingly eccentric—easily the most original American movie thus far this year.



In broad outline, *Gloria* doesn't seem to be such a startling departure for Cassavetes; once more he's created a vehicle for his resident diva, Gena Rowlands, and again the subject is a clutch of low-lives who hover close to mortal peril. This time, though, Rowlands is not her usual life-buffed victim. Here she embodies an underworld good fairy, swathed in the glad rags that are the divine right of every hard-boiled dame who ever sauntered and wise-cracked her way across the movie screen. Her right hand cradles, instead of a magic wand, a silver-plated revolver—expedient when you're being menaced by a

brace of gangland gorillas and not your basic assortment of Grimm hobgoblins. The beneficiary of all this heavenly intervention is, as usual, an ill-fated orphan, but scarcely an archetypal defenseless cherub: He's a half-Hispanic, street-smart urchin, his puny chest swelling with bravado and his lower regions stirred by an overly precocious libido. What's more, our heroine, Gloria Swenson, instinctively loathes kids (this one in particular), and her charge isn't exactly nuts about her either.

Cassavetes's basic inspiration was to combine an aura of authentic inner-city danger with fanciful touches out of old screwball comedies and gangland melodramas, so that you spend most of the movie poised between tense apprehensiveness about the fate of these out-matched underdogs, and howls of delight over the incongruous mixture. Secreted in an apartment house in the grim shadow of Yankee Stadium, Gloria bargains for nothing more than a cup of coffee when she knocks on a neighbor's door one day. Instead, what she gets is seven-year-old Phil (John Adames) thrust into her unwilling hands for safe-keeping; his daddy (Buck Henry), an accountant for the Mafia, has tattled to the feds, and the whole family has been marked for annihilation. This puts Gloria into something of a double bind, since these assassins, hot on the trail of the kid and of the financial records that are his father's legacy, turn out to be underlings of Gloria's own former sugar daddy, *il capo di tutt'i capi*, no less. So she and little Phil take it on the lam, and the rest of the film is a kind of backhanded, picaresque tribute to the grungy efficacy of the New York transit system, from gypsy cabs to the IRT local.

In fact, Gloria's first close encounter with these would-be hit men is a brutal and hilarious illustration of that old canard about never being able to find a cab in New York when you really need one. Gloria's quicksilver reflexes when she's cornered are matched by Cassavetes's deft orchestration of this sequence—a revelation of suspense and witty timing, especially compared with the torpid improvisational rhythms that are his usual forte.

Ms. Swenson is chock-full of surprises, and Rowlands plays her most winningly as a tangle of seeming contradictions. She shifts her weight uneasily from one foot to the other and lopes incognito through this Bronx backwater in magenta couture togs, looking about as inconspicuous as a mastodon in Yonkers. Back on her own turf, she's the

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