

BARS

In contemporary American English, a bar is a premises licensed to sell liquor by the glass to the public. In addition food may be served and entertainment offered. From ca. 1935 to 1970 the "gay bar" was the premier institution of the male homosexual community. There were no homosexual enclaves without at least one. Unlike other commercial establishments, crossing the threshold of a gay bar brought the patron immediately from neutral or hostile territory into "gay space," where only the rules of one's own community applied. The pivotal role of the bars was affirmed by the dubious accolade of police raids and shakedowns. Their positive functions notwithstanding, the popularity of the bars is linked to the high rates of alcoholism among gay men and lesbians.

Several reasons for the pivotal role of the bars in the male homosexual community may be noted. There is the well-known effect of alcohol in reducing inhibitions, which tend to rise to a higher threshold in those of deviant sexuality than in others. Also, in the Anglo-Saxon world drinking itself carries overtones of taboo, reinforced by recurrent temperance campaigns, which achieved a complete though ephemeral victory in the United States Prohibition (1920-33). Finally, bars have traditionally played a role in male culture as a whole.

It has been said that the bar itself is an institution limited to the English-speaking world. But if we alter the terms of the inquiry slightly to include *taverns* and *cabarets*, we can see that this is not so. Of course, public houses where liquor is served will vary in atmosphere and amenities according to national traditions, regulations, and customs.

Historical Perspectives. The first memorable association of male group drinking with homosexuality takes us back to Plato's dialogue, *The Symposium*, though this event, like other *symposia*, took place (presumably) in rented prem-

ises and only invited guests were present. The origins of the word *tavern* lead back to Roman shops, including wine shops, with open counters on the street. A more immediate source is the taphouse of late medieval Europe, where one could not only purchase drink but linger in the company of others. That patrons often became rowdy and licentious is shown by the common charge that such places were the "Devil's school." At the beginning of the sixteenth century Niccolò Machiavelli seems to have frequented a homosexual (or mixed) tavern in Florence. At the end of the century the English dramatist Christopher Marlowe presented his subversive views in a place which must have tolerated homosexual custom, if not actually soliciting it. In these two cases it is difficult to be certain about the actual character of the places; they belong to the general realm of the criminal underworld. In the early eighteenth century the nature of the London *molly houses* becomes very clear: they were private places of homosexual entertainment and assignation. After their unmasking, however, the various vigilance societies seem to have prevented a recurrence. In the middle of the nineteenth century the curtain lifts again, with the continental Bohemian *cafés*, with their mixed clientele of artists, would-be artists, prostitutes, and sexual nonconformists.

Toward the Present. Scholars can first monitor an ecology of gay bars as such in Berlin after 1900, where a host of them, operating more or less openly, was surveyed by Magnus Hirschfeld. In the 1920s lesbian bars and cabarets flourished in Germany, alongside the male ones. At this time American gay bars appeared, but as part of the speakeasy underworld, because of Prohibition. Their atmosphere has been recorded in such period novels as Lew Levinson's *Butterfly Man* (1934), Blair Niles's *Strange Brother* (1931), and Robert Scully's *A Scarlet Pansy* (1933).

Once Prohibition was ended, the states established boards to control li-

cencing, and these could be used to harass operators of gay bars. Places that succeeded in staying open had to maintain a low profile, being located oftentimes in unfrequented warehouse areas and with little in the way of a sign. More elegant establishments were sometimes found in the interior of hotels. Thus it was necessary to know someone to discover the "special" bars. Many patrons were regulars, attending night after night, and an informal pecking order grew up among them. Needless to say, the loyalty of the regulars was assiduously cultivated by the owners. Some patrons would seek advice from bartenders, though this habit was less common than in straight bars because the gay bartenders, chosen for their looks, tended to function as sex objects enveloped in an atmosphere of narcissistic aloofness. Partly for protective camouflage, straight couples out for a "different" evening were welcomed. Some male bars had one or more regular heterosexual women patrons, much treasured counselors who served as unofficial "den mothers." In small localities bars would cater to both men and women, but in large places they could be quite specialized, some for a younger, others (the "wrinkle bars") for an older crowd, some admitting only an elegant clientele, others hosting "rough trade." As a general rule, the bigger the city, the more specialized were the types of bars found there. Large cities also displayed a contrast between cozy neighborhood bars, with a social emphasis, and high-intensity places attracting a crowd from a broad radius.

Prices were high to take care of bribes and payoffs that were regularly required. Hitches in this system led to raids, as a result of which the patrons would be carted off to the police station and their identities taken—which could be disastrous for some. Hence an atmosphere of clandestinity and danger was always present, heightening the attraction for some patrons. The more ambitious places provided live entertainment, including semiprofessional performances by

drag queens. The chief functions remained socialization and cruising, both of which were promoted by milling patterns. While it was the aim of patrons in search of a quick pickup to have one drink, find a partner, and go home, the bar owner's interest dictated causing him to linger, drinking more and more. Some of this "stay a while" effect was achieved through positive attractions, such as a pool table, but often loud music inhibited conversation, while floor layout, dim lighting, and decor discouraged speed. In this respect the gay bar stood at the opposite pole from the fast-food outlet, where lights were bright and everything was done to encourage quick eating and departure. Some bar owners maximized patronage by having one clientele, usually heterosexual, during the day, and another, the gay crowd, at night.

Gay Liberation. Much of this atmosphere disappeared in the 1970s, when bars became more open and friendly. These changes were made possible by the heightened activity of the gay liberation movement in the phase which began, significantly enough, with the 1969 raid on New York City's Stonewall Inn and the ensuing riot. Bar owners were quick to take advantage of the increased commercial possibilities, and a few created huge discos noted for their elaborate sound systems. In addition to their legal sales of liquor, these places saw considerable consumption and trading of drugs by patrons. Some of the more ordinary bars took on a greater civic responsibility helping to distribute movement literature and newspapers, and permitting their premises to be used for charity dances in support of AIDS victims and other causes. Unlike the pre-1970s bars where sexual activity was strictly forbidden, some bars had "back rooms" where a full range of sexual acts was consummated in the dark. In the era of AIDS, however, most of this orgiastic gratification ceased.

Comparative Perspectives. In Europe the gay bar was a characteristic of northern countries, especially Germany

and Scandinavia. Somewhat different was the homosexual pub in Britain, which tended to retain the homey comforts of the national tradition. The tourist trade of the 1960s helped to promote the spread of the gay bar to southern Europe, while Japan continued to evolve its own distinctive variation, which had existed for a number of decades.

Lesbian bars have always been relatively few. This paucity is only partly attributable to the fact that lesbians have less spending money. Historically, the virtual monopoly of homosexual bar culture by men reflects the fact that women were at one time not welcome in most bars in general, or had to be accommodated in special rooms adjacent to the rough-and-tumble of the bar itself. Although feminist pressure has removed the rules that excluded women, the custom of social drinking retains vestiges of male culture in our society.

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BARTHES, ROLAND (1915–1980)

French literary critic and social commentator. Barthes introduced into the discussion of literature an original interpretation of semiotics based on the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. His work was associated with the Structuralist trend as represented by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Julia Kristeva, Tzvetan Todorov, and others. Attacked by the academic establishment for subjectivism, he formulated a concept of criticism as a creative process on an equal plane with fiction and poetry. Even those favorable to his work conceded that this could amount to a "sensuous manhandling" of the text. The

turning point in his criticism is probably the tour de force *S/Z* (Paris, 1970), analyzing Balzac's novella about an aging castrato, *Sarrasine*. Here Barthes turns away from the linear, goal-oriented procedures of traditional criticism in favor of a new mode that is dispersed, deliberately marginal, and "masturbatory." In literature, he emphasized the factor of *jouissance*, a word which means both "bliss" and "sexual ejaculation." Whether these procedures constitute models for a new feminist/gay critical practice that will erode the power of patriarchy, as some of his admirers have asserted, remains unclear.

Using the concept of dominant ideology of Marxist provenience, Barthes also wrote perceptive analyses of advertising and fashion. Apart from a study of contemporary Japan (*L'Empire des signes*, Paris, 1970), he addressed French literature and culture almost exclusively. Nonetheless, he won many adherents in the English-speaking world, in large measure because his works convey an indomitable verve and infectious relish of the subjects he discussed. These qualities, rather than any finished system, account for his continuing influence.

Barthes, who never married, was actively homosexual during most of his life. Although his books are often personal, in his writing he excluded this major aspect of his experience, even when writing about love. Because of the attacks launched against him for his critical innovations, he was apparently reluctant to give his enemies an additional stick with which to beat him. Barthes' posthumously published *Incidents* (Paris, 1987) does contain some revealing diary entries. The first group stems from visits he made, evidently in part for sexual purposes, to North Africa in 1968–69. The second group of entries records restless evenings in Paris in the autumn of 1979 just before his death. These jottings reveal that, despite his great fame, he frequently experienced rejection and loneliness. Whatever his personal sorrows, Barthes' books remain