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 cul-
ture 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 drink-
ing 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 inter-
pretation of semiotics based on the work
of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure.
His work was associated with the Structu-
ralist trend as represented by Claude Lévi-
Strauss, Julia Kristeva, Tzvetan Todorov,
and others. Attacked by the academic
establishment for subjectivism, he formu-
lated 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 advertis-
ing and fashion. Apart from a study of
contemporary Japan (L’Empire des signes,
Paris, 1970), he addressed French litera-
ture and culture almost exclusively.
Nonetheless, he won many adherents in
the English-speaking world, in large meas-
ure because his works convey an indomi-
table 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 per-
sonal, in his writing he excluded this major
aspect of his experience, even when writ-
ing about love. Because of the attacks
launched against him for his critical inno-
vations, 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
to attest a remarkable human being whose activity coincided with an ebullient phase of Western culture.


Wayne R. Dynes

**BATHHOUSES**

As a result of the general expansion and commercialization of male homosexual life after World War II, the institution of the gay bathhouse became a fixture of major cities of Europe and North America. In these establishments only a small area of the premises is devoted to immersion tubs and sauna rooms; the bulk of the floor space consists of cubicles which are used for resting and for consensual sexual encounters. Other rooms are given over to nonsexual entertainment (television, billiards, music).

**Historical Perspectives.** Today's gay bathhouses stem ultimately from a cultural tradition that can be traced back over two millennia. In every society in which public baths flourished, the institution was shaped not only by its specific characteristics, but also by the values and norms of the larger community.

In ancient Greece the baths formed part of the highly developed practice of physical culture and athletics. Archeologists have uncovered bath buildings adjoining the palaestras or training grounds of athletes. By attaching the bath to the athletic (and to some extent military) function of physical fitness, the Greeks broke with the sacral and ritual tradition of Near Eastern lustration—the religious bath—which nonetheless has a successor in the continuing Jewish custom of the mikva or ritual bath.

The Romans attached far more importance to public baths than did the Greeks, creating imposing structures known as *thermae* for the purpose throughout their empire. Originating under the Roman republic, the bath as an institution reached its height when Rome had extended its dominion throughout the Mediterranean. Amounting almost to secular cathedrals, the baths served a variety of individual and social requirements. Thermae fulfilled a need for personal cleanliness in an era when private baths were all but unknown. In addition to care of the skin, they fostered physical culture in the broader sense through exercise and massage facilities. Baths whose waters had a high sulfur content served medicinal purposes, anticipating modern spas. Then the baths were indoor arcades, permitting strolling patrons to meet friends and business associates, exchanging pleasantries and information. Some of the more imposing Roman baths embraced cultural and educational functions by offering public lectures and making libraries available to clients. Finally, Roman baths offered a convenient gathering place for those in quest of sexual release. Initially, such contacts were necessarily homosexual, since only men were admitted to the baths. Later, under the Roman Empire, some baths were open to women, for the most part female attendants who also served as prostitutes. Thus the Roman baths offered a kaleidoscopic variety of disparate, yet related functions.

As part of its inheritance from the Roman empire, the civilization of Islam continued the custom of offering bath facilities for health and pleasure, alongside the ritual baths required by Koranic law. Medieval Islamic sources indicate that baths of the former class were used not only for health reasons, but for socialization and homosexual contacts. Significantly, modern bathhouses of Europe and America have been termed "Turkish Baths," and sometimes boast tiled decor recalling this Muslim institution.

Strongly discouraged by Christian moralism in the early Middle Ages, public baths nonetheless reappeared in medieval cities as an essential aspect of sanitation, beginning in the twelfth cen-