

Beyond Dyke Bars

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We'd like to register an objection to the choice of play produced by the Bennington Drama Division. The objection is not against the production or the acting, which were excellent, but to the treatment of lesbianism. That lesbianism is even mentioned in the lines of a contemporary play shows some measure of progress, but we wonder why, in any straight film, play, or book that does mention it, lesbians are always portrayed as unattractive, perverted, sinister, and--the favorite--humorless. Women Behind Bars shows lesbians as all these things and more: namely, that they would really prefer to be with men. In Women Behind Bars, whenever the man character enters, he is immediately the most desired AND the most sane person on stage. This is not only offensive to all women, but it is also a misinformed depiction of one important place: In 1965, a Bennington freshman on NRT was held at the Women's House of Detention (the locale for this play) for political activist work (we believe). When she was acquitted, she revealed to the public the neglect, mistreatment, and brutality that ~~xxx~~ went on within its walls. Her main accusation was not, however, against the other women, or even the matron or guards, but against the visiting doctors--men--who regularly molested the women they "examined."

Tom Eyan's Women Behind Bars was obviously not intended to be historically accurate, or even to contain a considered political opinion (other than a justifiable protest against prisons). We realize that the play is designed basically as entertainment, and we, like others, were able to enjoy it on that level. But politics exists even when unintended, and bigotry exists especially when unintended. All of us want to see plays, watch movies, and read books that examine society--gay, straight, and in between--from a wide range of viewpoints. But this is a never-ending struggle for lesbians: the only image of lesbianism reflected back at ourselves is of sick, violent, predators too ugly to catch a man. We can only hope that the reality of lesbianism (exhuberance! intelligence! daring! sexiness! contentment!) is so much in evidence around campus that the Woment Behind Bars slurs will soon be forgotten.

--members of the lesbian community