

# Book review : D.J. West, M.B., D.P.M., Homosexuality

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through the eyes of the artist himself. Because of this both the artist and his work will always remain an incalculable element, for the artist does more than reproduce surface-impressions — he interprets the basic reality underlying surface impressions.

By the development of technical devices photography has to-day reached a fulfilment which enables a deeper insight than that granted to a painter of a bygone age. To depict reality is no end in itself and for that reason the modern photographer seeks ways and means to express his artistic aim beyond reality.

This photograph by Roberto Rolf, the well-known New York photographer serves excellently as an example of what may be termed the search for artistic form. If the young model had only been photographed the photo might conceivably be looked upon as a rather risky one. But it evades this pitfall. The unbearable heat of an afternoon in a huge city — a heat which makes all clothing, even the lightest, cling to the body, is felt here in a perhaps unorthodox but very vivid manner. Moreover the fact of this heat is illustrated by the position of the uplifted arms, covering the face turned away from the burning atmosphere. Here is an expression half tense, half relaxed caught and made beautifully static in the fraction of a second. The diagonal line and the wave-like strands cutting through the picture likewise testify in a masterly manner to that feeling of oppressive heat. This wave-like movement is ably duplicated in the body of the young model, thus enabling the onlooker to perceive the quality of a truly artistic photograph, no less masterly than the many others Roberto Rolf has given us previously.

And as Roberto Rolf is one of those exceptional photographers who instinctively understand how to depict the grace and beauty of young men in ever changing variations, we feel especially grateful to him. Female beauty is everywhere depicted in abundance, but the bewitching harmony of the male body is bashfully avoided by most photographers. One more reason for us to be proud to be able to show these exquisitely beautiful photographs to our friends.

*Rolf.*

## Book Review

*D. J. West, M. B., D. P. M., Homosexuality*  
Duckworth and Co., London, 15sh

In the introduction of his new book Dr. West says, 'In view of the secrecy with which our society shields itself from the spectacle of sexual abnormality, and the uncompromising denunciation by moralists of what they call 'unnatural vice', it is no surprise that the average person looks on Homosexuality with rooted aversion, and his ideas about it are crude. Male homosexuals have been variously regarded as degenerate personalities, moral pariahs who obstinately persist in tasting forbidden fruits, effete, 'pansy' types incapable of natural manliness, dangerous seducers of the young, victims of circumstance etc.' How well Dr. West knows

the subject he is dealing with is soon made clear when (page 32) he mentions that 'the habit of careless promiscuity grows into a compulsion, and as years roll by the ageing homosexual philanderer is left hanging about pathetically in public lavatories, or trailing his old haunts trying to bribe himself into the good graces of a younger man.' Harsh words, but true in many cases. However, after carefully stating his views on the whole subject one of Dr. West's conclusions, shared by many others, is to be found on page 105: 'It is now widely accepted that homosexuals may be useful, productive people and not in the least anti-social aside from their sexual peculiarity.' On page 109 we find: 'According to generally accepted opinion, it is virtually impossible to eradicate well-established homosexuality.' Dr. West quotes Dr. Desmond Curran, the well-known psychiatrist as stating 'that the chances of cure in confirmed cases are negligible and that the psychiatrist should concentrate on making the patient a better-adjusted homosexual and not aspire to convert him to heterosexuality.' 'The desirability of reform appears so obvious' (page 123) that Dr. West (page 122) comes to the conclusion that 'legal reform, in the sense of removing the penalty for homosexual acts between consenting adults, would go a long way towards the abolition of a particularly nasty form of blackmail and intimidation, and would help remove a heavy burden of fear and resentment from the minds of a considerable section of the community.' — Words which cannot be said too often.

This book is a frank and practical approach to the social and medical aspects of male homosexuality. The author's aim is to bring these problems into the open and to discuss them calmly, without bias, in the light of the most modern knowledge.

A summary of the facts about homosexual behaviour in primitive communities, in historical times, and in animals, leads up to a comprehensive description of the social, legal, and moral problem in this and other countries. In a review of the evidence about what causes homosexuality, endocrine, biological and psycho-analytical theories are all discussed. The supposed connection between homosexuality and other abnormalities, alcoholism and psychopathy, is dealt with sceptically. The author concludes that, while many factors come into the picture, homosexuality as seen to-day arises chiefly from fears and inhibitions about sex. He proceeds to put forward suggestions about how the development of homosexuality might be limited and also advises on the treatment of the confirmed homosexual. He finishes with a plea for a more liberal attitude to sex in general and a more sympathetic approach to sexually deviant individuals.

From the Foreword by Dr. Hermann Mannheim, Reader in Criminology, London School of Economics: 'No more appropriate moment could possibly have been found for the publication of a book on homosexuality than the present, when, following a number of sensational trials and a considerable amount of public discussion, a Departmental Committee set up by the Government is studying the whole thorny problem. However, the success of Dr. West's book will not be dependent on such chance factors; it can stand on its own feet.'

'His approach to the many and complex aspects of the subject is scientific and at the same time popular. Much harm has been done to it in the past by the extremists of various creeds, but the author is not one of them.'

Thank you, Dr. West, for your book.

'The Circle'.

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From: D. J. West, *Homosexuality*.

'The arguments in favour of reform are cogent. Legal penalties can be readily justified in the case of offences that involve palpable harm to other people — such as theft or drunken driving — but the supposed harmfulness of homosexual practices between consenting adults is less obvious. On any rational standard, heterosexual promiscuity, with its attendant risks of unwanted children and broken homes, does far more damage. The discrimination against homosexuals therefore seems unjust. It would be fairer if the laws were the same for heterosexuals and homosexuals, and penalties for prostitution, abuse of children, and seduction of minors did not take account of the sex of the participants. Enforced continence can produce unpleasant and sometimes dangerous effects in homosexuals and heterosexuals alike, and many persons will never submit to it whatever the law on the point. If the police were to track down and prosecute all transgressors, there would be utter chaos. The present method of selecting victims for prosecution is so obviously unjust as to bring the processes of the law into disrepute. Some persons fear that, given the liberty to indulge, homosexual practices would spread so widely as to endanger family life and lower the birth rate. Such fears are grossly exaggerated. No such dramatic result has been observed in Holland or in other countries that already exercise legal tolerance . . .'

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### *Sexual Offenders*

Sexual offenders are more liable to be misjudged by prejudice and ignorance, perhaps, than the majority of criminals, and bias is almost inevitable if their conduct is reviewed solely in the light of narrow personal experience and the tastes and distastes of the assessor . . . . Sexually anaesthetic men and women who are incompetent to pass judgment upon the inter-relationships of the sexes may be called upon as members of a jury to assess the guilt of a sexual offender, and sexual behaviour is often gauged by persons who regard any sexual activity as perverse unless it conforms to their accustomed and restricted pattern of behaviour.

Norwood East.