



Girls In The Back Room: Looking At The Lesbian Bar

Kelly Hankin

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The lesbian bar has long been seen as a mysterious place, steeped in mythologies of clandestine meetings and sexuality that is alluring because it is wayward and sinful. In *The Girls in the Back Room*, Kelly Hankin focuses on the lesbian bar, looking at the way it is portrayed in such films as *Foxy Brown*, *The Killing of Sister George*, *Basic Instinct*, *Bound*, and *Chasing Amy*; in television series like *The Simpsons*, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, *Roseanne*, *Ellen*, and *Sex and the City*; and in independent, lesbian-produced documentaries.

Hankin examines the lesbian bar through a consideration of the ways its representation in popular culture both oppresses and nourishes lesbian cultures. In popular commercial entertainment, she finds, the view of the lesbian bar as a private space for those who practice aberrant sexuality implicitly reinforces heterosexual spatial and social privilege. Through her in-depth history of the production of 1968's *The Killing of Sister George* and the deception involved in director Robert Aldrich's use of a real lesbian bar and its patrons, for example, Hankin uncovers the heterosexist preconceptions in evidence on both sides of the camera. She argues that lesbian-produced works effectively challenge this paradigm, articulating and confirming positive visions of lesbian public life and identity. *The Girls in the Back Room* provides an engaging historical and theoretical analysis of the visual lesbian bar as a revelatory intersection of gender, sexuality, and space.

Kelly Hankin is an assistant professor of English at Old Dominion University.

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