

BIGOTED SOULMATES

To some, Lenny Bruce was the most creative comic of the 1950s, a man who broke new grounds and was victimized for his “obscene language.” To others, Bruce was a full-mouthed, drug dealing, whiskey-bingeing, wife-cheating, unpatriotic, racist, anti-Catholic. The latter is description is the most accurate.

Bruce was arrested for violating the obscenity laws because he violated them. And, contrary to popular opinion, the Supreme Court has never said that obscenity qualifies as free speech under the First Amendment. Therefore, Bruce was a criminal.

Bruce’s bouts with alcohol and drugs are indisputable and so is the fact that he killed himself with heroin at the age of 40 in 1966. He skipped out on a three-month commitment to the Merchant Marines to marry his wife, a woman he met while she was a stripper. He then proceeded to cheat on her; the marriage lasted five years. “Nigger” was a word that rolled off his lips with alacrity and his fondness for bashing Catholicism was never questioned.

With such impeccable credentials, it is no wonder that today’s cultural elites regard Bruce as a hero and a victim. The truth is he was a bigot and a bum.

We say this because HBO ran an interesting portrait of Bruce over the summer that was nominated for awards. Our problem is not with HBO but with some of the pro-Bruce reviewers. Take Ellen Gray, for example.

Gray wrote a piece about the documentary on Bruce for the *Philadelphia Daily News*, a trendy paper not known for its kindness to the Catholic Church. She admits that Bruce engaged in “diatribes on religion,” and even says that it “angered” a lot of Catholics (it would be a mystery if it didn’t). But she also goes one step further: she says that Bruce’s arrests for drugs in Philadelphia (and elsewhere) were carried out by “the

largely Roman Catholic police forces in many cities.” Gray has no problem saying this, but she no doubt would bristle if she read that anti-Catholic movies are made by the largely Jewish producers in Hollywood.

Gray also takes shots at the Catholic League. She is fuming that “the relatively small Catholic League” has been able to kill “Nothing Sacred” and is now forcing Miramax to jump through hoops because of “Dogma.” She concludes from this that “some of the walls Bruce sought to tear down are still standing.”

What Gray means is that the power of the Catholic League means that Bruce didn’t quite succeed in subverting Catholicism. She is right about that, though it is obviously a sore spot for her. We hope she gets used to this because we have no intentions of caving in to bigots like her, anymore than the Catholics of the 1950s and 1960s caved in to her soulmate, Lenny Bruce.

You can write to Ellen Gray at the *Philadelphia News*, 400 N. Broad St., Philadelphia, PA 19130.