

EDUCATION: VASSAR STYLE

It was billed as a forum on "Literature, Homosexuality, and Catholicism in the Nineteenth Century," featuring Richard Dellamora from Trent University in Canada and Ellis Hanson from Cornell. That gave us pause. It gave us more pause when we learned that it was being held on the campus of Vassar College and was being sponsored by the English Department, the Office of the President and the Queer Coalition.

This mega-educational event was held on April 12. Though the room was set for 250 people, only 50 showed up, and half of them bolted before it ended. We know this because we had a mole in the crowd. After all, if they are going to accuse Catholics of being secretive, we might as well earn our stripes. Here's what we learned.

Only about 10 percent of the lectures dealt with Catholicism. Most of it centered on literature and homosexuality. Like good deconstructionists, the gay professors analyzed the sentence structure, looking no doubt for some hidden meanings. Too bad someone didn't ask them to explain what the meaning of is, is.

Professor Hanson went first, speaking on "Love for Love's Sake," a topic that admittedly has a nice ring to it. Unfortunately, Hanson's understanding of love allowed him to equate Christianity with sadomasochism, thus proving that professors are capable of extracting the ugly from the beautiful.

Hanson charged the Church with being both homophobic and homoerotic, and made it known that his new book, *Exquisite Pain: The Art of Erotic Suffering*, will soon be published. Surely the President's Office will buy a few copies though it is not certain whether anyone else will.

Professor Dellamora spoke on "*The Well of Loneliness* and the Rhetoric of Sexual Dissidence." The lousy turnout for this

magisterial discussion does not speak very well for Vassar, but maybe there was another Queer Coalition event going on that evening on campus. In any event, Dellamora said that the Crucifixion is a symbol of sexual dissidence and that Adam's catching of the blood of Christ represents some type of exchange of body fluids. This lecture, we are glad to note, was free.

One final item. When we first heard about this forum, Patrick Scully called the president's office to inquire about the nature of the talks. He was told in no uncertain terms that the president, Frances Daly Ferguson, wanted us to know that she supports free speech and gay rights. What this had to do with his question, we still don't know. But we know this: the president is a member of the board of trustees of the Ford Foundation, the generous benefactor of Catholics for a Free Choice.