complicated and murky twists of the plot are eventually worked through; en route, we see Gere's imprisonment in various vile cells, his interrogation with various degrees of violence, some attempts on his life, and the fumblings of the U.S. Embassy person assigned to help him—a man at least as interested in public relations with China as in Gere's fate.

The lawyer assigned by the Chinese state to defend Gere is, by an extraordinary coincidence, an attractive young woman who speaks English. (Bai Ling, humane and competent.) Since she remained silent during the Cultural Revolution when her parents were humiliated, she is determined to speak out for justice in Gere's case, once she is convinced of his innocence. If he pleads guilty, he will be let off with a life sentence; if he refuses, he will almost certainly be found guilty and sentenced to death. Lawyer and client decide to plead the truth: not guilty. This irritates Chinese officialdom.

Gere has often given affecting performances; here he is merely the star doing his job. We never feel that he is really facing near-certain execution. The riproaring adventures—the beatings he survives, the fleeing over rooftops—are all star bunkum, more of the mythology in which an ordinary man living a conventional life takes on physical challenges like a combination circus strongman and circus acrobat.

But the real embarrassment of the film is in its treatment of the libertarian lawyer who is vocal against Chinese oppression. If there were a Chinese ACLU, she would be a member. As is, the idea that she is allowed to work and to speak freely—to live—strains credulity. (Gere himself has led protests about Chinese practices, but he accepts this fantasizing script.)

I suppose I mustn't disclose the ending. Let's just say that the film stoutly keeps up its embarrassments right to the finish. •

The Professor of Desire

By Alan Wolfe

Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life by James H. Jones

(Norton, 937 pp., $39.95)

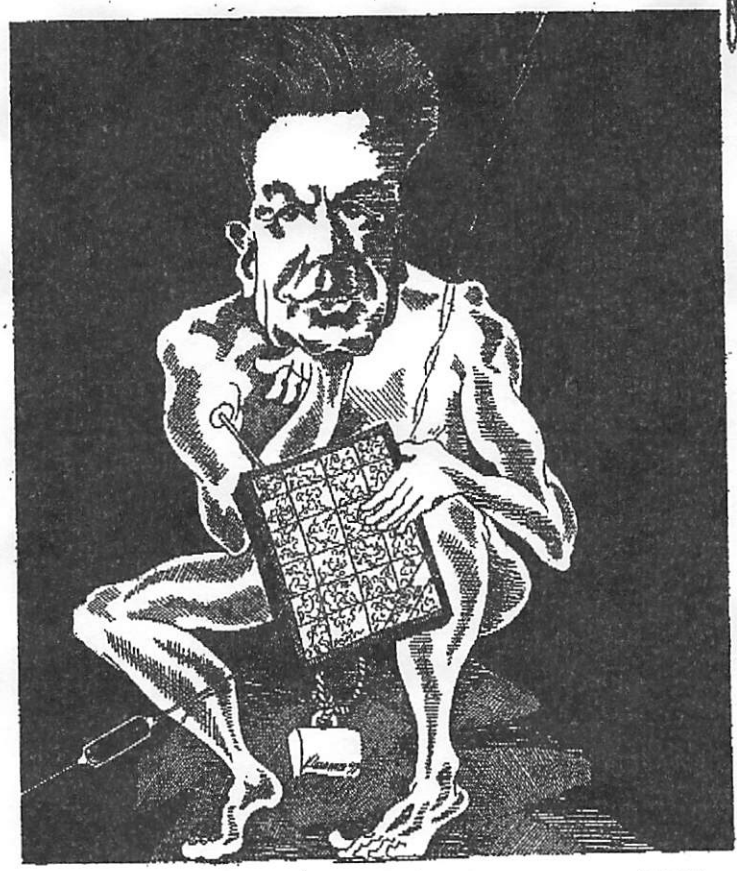
I.

Nothing in the background of Alfred C. Kinsey seemed likely to produce a man who would devote his life to the study of sex. He was born in 1894 and grew up in unbohemian Hoboken and South Orange, New Jersey, the son of a self-made shop teacher at the Stevens Institute of Technology. He was an Eagle Scout. A sickly boy, Kinsey worked diligently to please his repressive, dictatorial, sanctimonious, and ambitious father. That proved to be an impossible task. Turning his back on a career in engineering, Kinsey dropped out of Stevens to attend Bowdoin College. There he discovered that his impulse to collect things, when connected to his love of nature, made him a taxonomist—a biologist seeking to understand the world through patient observation rather than through experimentation or the newly emerging mathematics of population ecology. An accomplished, hard-working student, Kinsey took his doctorate at Harvard before assuming an assistant professorship at the then second-rate Indiana University.

Taxonomists, as James Jones patiently explains, were divided into "lumpers" and "splitters." Lumpers, the dominant group, believed that there were relatively few species in nature, so that the task of the scientist became one of classifying individual organisms into pre-existing categories. Kinsey strongly dissented from this Platonic essentialism. In his view, most attempts to designate distinct species owed more to the scientist's need to bring order to reality than to the diversity of life itself. Kinsey focused his research on gull wasps, tiny parasitic insects that leave growths on their hosts, most commonly oak trees. Splitter that he was, he reasoned that the more gull wasps he collected, the more new species he could identify. So collect he did—all over the country, then all over the world. Kinsey seemed very much the typical Midwestern academic. He married Clara Bracken McMillen, an Indiana University undergraduate whom he met during his job interview, and before long they owned a large house in town and pro-

duced four children. He published his research on gull wasps with Indiana University Press to a few generally positive reviews, and wrote a textbook designed to make money.

Yet not all was well with his career. For one thing, he had committed himself to a very old-fashioned kind of science; Kinsey, said Robert Kroc, one of his younger colleagues (and the brother of Ray Kroc, the entrepreneur who created MacDonald's), was the first scientist he ever met who studied evolution outside the laboratory. Moreover, Indiana University suffered under the reign of an old president more interested in settling scores than in advancing the prestige of his institution. And, perhaps to Kinsey's chagrin, no offers from elite institutions came his way. Still, Kinsey was keeping busy. His voracious work habits had led him to read whatever sex manuals he could find. "You know, there isn't much science here," he told Kroc. In 1937, the trustees of Indiana University appointed a new president named Herman Wells; and when students began to agitate Wells for more relevant sex education, Kinsey volunteered, and was asked to design a course on marriage.



ALFRED C. KINSEY BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Kinsey's expertise in biology colored the course from the start. He appeared to be teaching just the facts of nature; but he presented himself as a scientist, and so he was quite graphic in his depiction of sexual organs and sexual acts, and he claimed to be entirely non-judgmental about human sexual practices. Ultimately the explicitness of the course aroused the opposition of many on campus, and by 1940 Kinsey was forced to withdraw from it. But by then the die was cast.

Kinsey had transformed himself into a sex researcher. He would never again teach a marriage course—indeed, within a few years he would not teach at all. Kinsey was rescued from his professional malaise by the Committee for Research in Problems of Sex, a standing committee of the National Research Council. The Rockefeller Foundation, which financed the NRC, had for years been seeking to shift the work of the CRPS in the direction of human sexuality. Kinsey appeared as a godsend to Robert Yerkes, the NRC's director, who now could appease Rockefeller with a serious scientist in command of extensive data concerning human sexual behavior.

For Kinsey had not just been teaching about sexuality. As part of his course on marriage, he had begun to administer a questionnaire to students asking them about their sexual experiences; and this was eventually transformed into a face-to-face interview. Flush with his success at eliciting information, Kinsey interviewed everyone he could find. He had even gone to Chicago and won the trust of its very suspicious homosexual community. By the time he approached Yerkes, Kinsey had obtained the sexual histories of more people than anyone else in history. His collection would soon include Yerkes himself. Inviting his funders to Bloomington, Kinsey told them that they could not appreciate his interviewing skills unless they agreed to provide their sexual histories. Remarkably, Yerkes and his two colleagues agreed.

Within six years the Rockefeller Foundation would be making huge grants to Kinsey to support his Institute for Sex Research. Wells, the university's president, was thrilled; but he was also wary, and so he encouraged the Institute to establish itself as an independent corporation. It came into existence officially in 1947. Kinsey's relations with his backers were never smooth. Determined to reap the prestige of the Rockefeller name, Kinsey trumpeted his relationship with the Foundation, alienating Yerkes and violating the gentlemanly code of discretion to which foundation trustees adhere. Ultimately the Foundation, under pressure from conservatives in Congress, would drop Kinsey. But by then he had published his books, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* in 1948, and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* in 1953.

Kinsey brought out the results of his sex research with a medical publisher, and he laced his account with dense prose and technical terms, but everyone knew these books would be best-sellers; and their sales exceeded the wildest expectations. Clearly large numbers of Americans were ready to receive the news that nothing erotic ought to be alien to them. Now famous and rich, Kinsey no longer needed Rockefeller patronage. Yet he never raised much money after the Foundation withdrew its support; many interlocutors introduced Kinsey to rich potential donors, but he was a terrible fund-raiser, unable to "close" a deal by making the crucial "ask" for funds.

Kinsey died in 1956 a frustrated and angry man. He had failed to complete his lifework: volumes on topics including homosexuality, prostitution, Negro sex, and sex offenders were planned. And the critics had already begun to wield their knives. Such distinguished representatives of American letters as Margaret Mead, Geoffrey Gorer, Lionel Trilling, and Lawrence Kubie were critical of Kinsey's books. America had entered the golden age of the Eisenhower years. The country did not seem interested in replacing its religious and moral prohibitions on sex with Kinsey's naturalistic, anything-goes advice.

II.

Within fifteen years of Kinsey's funeral, the Food and Drug Administration approved a birth control pill, *Penthouse* made its first appearance in England, Johns Hopkins became the first American medical school to perform sex change operations, San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury blossomed, *Human Sexual Response* by Masters and Johnson was published, topless waitresses became the rage, new movies such as *I am Curious Yellow* portrayed new levels of sexual explicitness, the Stonewallers rioted in Greenwich Village, and Kate Millett wrote *Sexual Politics*.

We now know from Jones's book that Kinsey anticipated the sexual revolution not only by what he wrote, but also by what he did. There was a private life behind the public figure—and, we are frequently told, a shocking one. A workaholic and a man of authoritarian temper, Kinsey employed a number of graduate students who were expected to share his passion for long workdays and to accompany him on field trips. An inveterate exhibitionist, he would frequently walk around naked in camp. His surviving letters reveal a scatological Kinsey, a man fascinated with burlesque shows, graphic descriptions of sexual acts, and juvenile sexual boasting. An atmosphere of homoeroticism pervaded these all-male field trips, Jones writes: "It is not hard to suspect that oral sex was going down under canvas tops." (Jones's language in that sentence is especially unfelicitous.) Jones is convinced that Kinsey had fallen in love with one of his students, Ralph Voris, and that he had designs on others as well. No wonder he wanted so much to study Chicago's gay community, for there "he could slip away and engage in furtive, anonymous sex with the crowd that patronized Chicago's 'tea rooms,' slang for the public urinals frequented by homosexuals interested in quick, impersonal, faceless sex."

Voris died young, but soon thereafter Kinsey found "the third and final love" of his life: Clyde Martin. According to Jones, Martin resisted, and suggested sex with Kinsey's forty-two year old wife (and first love) Clara. The world's most famous sex researcher quickly agreed. Martin would be only the first of her many extramarital lovers, most of them taken with Kinsey's permission—if not his active encouragement. Kinsey's Institute for Sex Research was rapidly turning into a free sex zone. Martin, who was hired as an interviewer and would later be listed as one of the authors of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, watched helplessly as his wife began an affair with Paul Gebhard, another member of Kinsey's staff. And the third chief interviewer, Wardell Pomeroy, was the most promiscuous of them all, "a kind of equal opportunity Don Juan" who would sleep with as many people of either sex as he could.

For all his kinkiness, however, Kinsey was not Pomeroy. Indeed, Kinsey appears to have had very few lovers, male or female. Kinsey got his pleasure indirectly: "Watching others have sex satisfied both the scientist and the voyeur in Kinsey," Jones writes. Take those interviews. It is not hard to conclude that Kinsey's desire to interview everyone he could find was his version of Leporello's catalogue aria: he was excited by the conquests in other people's sex lives. But Kinsey was not just a metaphorical voyeur. In 1949 Kinsey hired a photographer for his staff, and his job was to film the members of Kinsey's circle having sex with each other and masturbating for the camera.

The newly hired photographer, William Dellenback, later told Jones about Kinsey's deeply ingrained masochism. In front of the camera, Kinsey would take an object such as a swizzle stick, place it into the urethra of his penis, tie up his scrotum with a rope, and then pull on the rope as he pushed the object in deeper. Masochism, Jones informs his

readers, is like a drug addiction; once the masochist gets accustomed to a certain level of pain, more intense techniques have to be found. That explains why Kinsey once circumcised himself without anesthesia—or why, on another occasion, he tied the usual knot around his scrotum but then threw the other end of the rope over a pipe, took it with his hand, jumped off a chair, and hung there in the air as the pressure increased.

If Kinsey's private sexual habits were extreme, so were some of his public views. A man on a mission, Kinsey would bring to sex the same concern for efficiency and technique that Frederick Winslow Taylor, another student at the Stevens Institute of Technology, brought to industrial production. Like all revolutionaries, Kinsey was reluctant to find enemies among those who shared any part of his agenda. Sympathetic to prisoners arrested for sex crimes, he would ultimately come to believe that even pedophiles were unfairly persecuted. Incest, including child abuse, Kinsey seemed to suggest, was much ado about nothing; so long as children did not make a big deal of their experiences, no real harm, he believed, could come to them. Kinsey, Jones concludes, "saw civilization as the enemy of sex." In his life and his work, Kinsey was, according to Jones, "the architect of a new sensibility about a part of life that everyone experiences and no one escapes."

III.

James H. Jones's book, a quarter-century in the making, is a fascinating account of a fantastic American. Jones, the author of a previous book on the Tuskegee experiment, is a historian with a knack for writing books about the past that are bound to be discussed in the present. He is not a great stylist, but he manages to hold his reader's attention as he moves exhaustively through a proliferation of increasingly peculiar detail. Yet what held my attention most has little to do with the sensational side of Kinsey's sex life. Jones's discussion of such matters as the controversies around Kinsey's methodology and the politics of foundation support are far more interesting than his accounts of how Kinsey wrestled with his own libido.

Erotic arousal, Kinsey and his coauthors wrote regretfully in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, "could be subject to precise instrumental measurement if objectivity among scientists and public respect for scientific research allowed such laboratory investigation." Since it did not, Kinsey had to settle for accounts that people themselves provided about their sexual lives. Kinsey took great pains to convince his readers that interviews could be an effective substitute for laboratory observations. In a general sense, he was right: selected carefully and interviewed correctly, we can learn much from people about human sexual behavior.

But Kinsey was careless in his selection. What, for example, constitutes an orgasm? Ever the splitter, Kinsey rejected the uniform descriptions of orgasm that he found in marriage manuals in favor of a six-point orgasm scale, ranging from primarily genital reactions (22% frequency) to "extreme tension with violent convulsion" in which "the legs often become rigid, with muscles knotted and toes pointed ... breath held or gasping, eyes staring hard and tightly closed ... whole body or parts of it spasmodically twitching, sometimes synchronously with throbs or violent jerking of the penis" (16%). His source for this simultaneously clinical and pornographic description was "adult observers for 196 preadolescent boys"—pedophiles, one presumes, observing very closely indeed.

Moving from definition to classification, Kinsey and his colleagues described the frequency of orgasm among men by age, social class, occupation, and religion. (Orthodox Jews, he found, were the least sexually active people in America.) Again, Kinsey was instinctively attracted to the unrepresentative, such as men who were unusually sexually active. "Our large sample," the authors wrote, "shows that, far from being rare, individuals with frequencies of 7 or more [sex acts] per week constitute a considerable segment (7.6%) of any population." Was it reality or fantasy that led Kinsey to pen this sentence: "Where the occupation allows the male spouse to return home at noon, contacts may occur at that hour of the day, and, consequently, there is a regular outlet of fourteen to twenty-one times per week"? And so it went. Between 92% and 97% of American males masturbate. "The number of college-bred males who have some premarital intercourse is high enough to surprise many persons." Use of prostitutes was common, if unevenly distributed by social class. 37% of men experienced orgasm through homosexual contact at least once in their lives. Finally, there was sex with animals, "the only chapter in the book," wrote Lionel Trilling, "which hints that sex may be touched with tenderness." But even here Kinsey was precise: "The accumulative incidence figures for animal intercourse go to about 14 per cent for the farm boys who do not go beyond grade school, to about 20 per cent for the group which goes into high school but not beyond, and to 26 per cent for the males who will ultimately go to college."

Kinsey informed his readers that he had collected 5,300 sexual histories, "forty times as much material as was included in the best of previous studies." This may have impressed the general reader, but no scientist could be taken in by Kinsey's boasting. Utterly eclectic in his methods, Kinsey interviewed wildly disproportionate numbers of college students, prisoners, people willing to be interviewed, and people preoccupied with sex. He could have multiplied his interviews by a hundred and still have come away with a group of Americans whose sexual conduct would have been abnormal. By the late 1940s, statisticians had discovered that scientific sampling was far more effective in representing a given population than exhaustive but futile efforts to interview everyone. Yet Kinsey refused to engage in proper sampling techniques, making it impossible for him to make even near-accurate generalizations about the distribution of sexual behaviors among the American population.

Kinsey's approach to sex was as scientific as *Peyton Place*. And since his methods were so poor, Kinsey and his coauthors left their readers with the impression that there was far more sex taking place in America, and far more exotic sex, than corresponded to the real life experiences of those readers. The message was that people should listen to Kinsey rather than to their conscience, their God, or their superego. It was quite explicit in Kinsey's text: a wide variety of sexual activities "may seem to fall into categories that are as far apart as right and wrong, licit and illicit, normal and abnormal, acceptable and unacceptable in our social organization. In actuality, they all prove to originate in the relatively simple mechanisms which provide for erotic response when there are sufficient physical or psychic stimuli." Properly instructed by Kinsey's improper data, they would be free to engage in premarital sex, pursue extramarital affairs, act out their homoerotic fantasies, and jettison whatever inhibitions prevented them from claiming their share of the Gross National Orgasm.

In theory, peer review should have stopped Kinsey from embarrassing his discipline, his university, and himself. Yet the Rockefeller Foundation continued to pour money into his coffers. Periodic appraisals of his work commissioned by the Foundation never raised the issue of sampling, or did so only to back off. Responding to the concern of Kinsey's editor that the statistics be "bullet proof"

against attack, Alan Gregg of the Rockefeller Foundation assured him that Kinsey's methods had been thoroughly reviewed by experts; he also agreed to write a preface endorsing Kinsey's investigations as "sincere, objective, and determined." Kinsey even survived, for a time, a review of his data commissioned by the American Statistical Association that was carried out by three of the most high-powered statisticians in America.

The most far-reaching scandal narrated by Jones has nothing to do with masochism and everything to do with the irresponsibility of scientists and foundation officers. Perhaps they admired Kinsey's message. More likely, they were unwilling to admit a mistake. Whatever the reason, they abused every canon of proper scientific procedure to support research that, for all its volume, was as shallow as it was sensational. In endorsing Kinsey, his backers were endorsing the idea that sexual repression was a bad thing—a proposition for which scientific evidence is, to say the least, lacking.

As it turns out, a group of contemporary scientists has developed the accurate samples that Kinsey never did. *The Social Organization of Sexuality*, by Edward O. Laumann, John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels, appeared in 1994; and while it is not the last word on American sexual habits, it is a far more reliable guide than *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Anticipating the kind of reception that Kinsey received, the authors wrote a technical version of their book for a university press and, with the help of a journalist, a popular version designed for the best-seller lists. Best-sellerdom never came to pass. And the reason was quickly obvious. When social scientists tell the real truth about sex, they are telling people—whose own experiences, after all, constitute the story—what they already know.

In the realm of sex, Laumann and his colleagues found, Americans are boringly conventional. Homosexuality is roughly as common as most people think it is: 2.8% of men think of themselves as gay, 1.4% of women. Adultery is quite uncommon: 90% of married women and 75% of men report monogamy. Very few Americans are attracted to, or interested in, passive anal intercourse, having sex with a stranger, violent sex, or group sex. Sexual athletes—highly promiscuous people with many sexual partners in the course of a year—are very rare. These data are obviously not without flaws. People will often over-report or under-report their sexual experiences, depending on who they are and who they are talking to. Still, the data do seem to show that, for most people most of the time, sex is just one experience among many: pleasurable, valued, important, but central neither to their identity nor to their mental health.

The lesson of the Laumann book is clear. If sex researchers are scrupulous and fair, determined to capture reality as it is, then they will generally find nothing very dramatic to report. If they are attracted however, to the study of sexuality to make a point, then they will distort reality, as Kinsey did, in the service of some larger cause. Sexuality is now a booming academic subject. Many of those engaged in it have points that they wish to make. They want to show that our common categories—homosexual/heterosexual, male/female, normal/abnormal—are arbitrary conventions. Or they want to take the side of the sexually stigmatized. But the most common point is that sex itself is a good thing, which means that restraints on sex are bad.

Whether or not any of these points need to be made is not my concern here. What is true, however, is that the very act of making them distorts the study of sex, for it rules out of order or dismisses out of hand people who willingly accept sexual repression, who think it is right to pass judgment on those who cannot control their sexuality,

who are convinced that human beings were given the gift of sexuality primarily to make children, who believe that some kinds of sexual behavior are joyous and others are sick.

IV.

Among those academic writers who have a point that they wish to make is James H. Jones, who, when all is said and done, treats Kinsey as a hero because he was willing to attack sexual repression. To be sure, Jones writes, Kinsey was a man consumed by demons: "somewhere along the lines, he veered off the path of normal development." Attracted to men, but forced to lead a conventional life, Kinsey was drawn to the study of human sexuality in order to find in science answers to his personal sexual confusion. Yet Jones is enthralled. Comparing his subject at one point to Martin Luther and John Calvin, Jones writes that "if Kinsey's views were amoral, they also reflected a strong dose of common sense." As odd as Kinsey's sexual habits may have been, "his problems, albeit in exaggerated form, were the nation's problems." Kinsey's "great achievement was to take his pain and suffering and use it to transform himself into an instrument of social reform, a secular evangelist who proclaimed a new sensibility about human sexuality."

Since he has a point that he so ardently wishes to make, Jones runs the risk of distorting Kinsey in roughly the same way that Kinsey distorted American sexual behavior. The parallels between Jones and Kinsey are striking. Like Kinsey, Jones has written a book exhaustive—even obsessive—in its detail. Kinsey was one of the first 77 Eagle Scouts in America. The labels he used to classify his gall wasps were three-eighths of an inch by five-eighths. Between 1919 and 1937, he wrote 3,193 pages. His fully developed interview schedule contained a maximum of 521 items. Kinsey completed exactly 7,985 sexual histories. And so on. Jones is a splitter, not a lumper: he classifies Kinsey's output with the same passion for variety and detail with which Kinsey classified gall wasps. "Kinsey thrived on meticulous tasks," Jones writes. So does his biographer.

Precision is a virtue. But in this case it is something else as well. Jones stresses that Kinsey was an expert manipulator of public opinion, a man so taken by his image that he tried to manipulate the reviewers of his books and the stories written about him in the press. "Everything about the book," Jones writes of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, "was designed to impress the reader with the richness of Kinsey's empirical data." In portraying numbers with such exactitude, Jones, too, is engaged in image management. If Kinsey was determined not to leave any stones unturned in his campaign to convince Americans that his approach to sex was scientific, Jones will leave nothing to chance to convince his readers that Kinsey is worthy of epic treatment.

Yet the strongest correspondence between Kinsey and Jones is that both are voyeurs. Jones is as fascinated by Kinsey's sex life as Kinsey was by the sex lives of his 7,895 people. Indeed, Jones's book can be understood as an effort to record Kinsey's sexual history. If, as Jones stresses, Kinsey used his ability to obtain sexual histories in order to exercise power over those he interviewed, Jones will seek even more power by putting the power-hungry Kinsey in his place.

One of the most sensitive methodological issues with which Kinsey had to deal was whether the histories that he obtained were accurate. To ensure their truth, Kinsey went to great lengths. He preferred an interview to a questionnaire, which required him to commit to memory all the questions that he would ask. To assure confidentiality, all transcriptions were carried out in a complex code that only very few people ever learned. No one can ever know whether Kinsey's meticulous methods produced accurate accounts. But we do know one case where the truth of a sexual history can be questioned: James Jones's.

It is important to make distinctions here. The source for Jones's treatment of Kinsey's masochism is the filmmaker who recorded his adventures. If these films are to be believed—and I see no reason why they should not be believed—then Kinsey was a very strange guy. But was he a homosexual? If he was, what kind of homosexual was he? With whom did he have sex? Was he a participant or an observer in those Chicago "tea rooms"? One of the consequences of Kinsey's work is that America is now more open in its discussion of sex. But it was not open while Kinsey lived; and therefore Jones has a choice: he can admit that there are things he will never know about Kinsey's sex life, or he can engage in conjecture. Invariably, he does the latter.

"Despite the injunctions of his religion, despite the vigilance of parents, teachers, and police, and despite the warnings of social hygienists who shaped the sex education programs of his beloved YMCA and Boy Scouts," Jones writes of his subject as a young man, "Kinsey masturbated." And Kinsey, unlike other boys, was moved to extreme self-condemnation when he masturbated. If there is a source for these conclusions, it is the conversations that Kinsey had later in life with Paul Gebhard. But those conversations, at least according to Jones's references, dealt with problems of sexual repression of youth in general rather than with Kinsey's personal behavior. Indeed, the only examples of camp-inspired masturbation cited by Jones deal with people other than Kinsey who attended summer camp in the 1950s, not, as Kinsey did, in 1912 and 1913.

"Falling in love with another man is a defining moment in the life of any homosexual," Jones writes. "Until it happens, many men can deceive themselves about their true sexual identity." For Jones, Kinsey's "defining moment" was his relationship with Ralph Voris. Given the times it would be unlikely that any incontrovertible proof of a sexual relationship between Kinsey and Voris exists. And none does. Kinsey kept a picture of Voris on his desk. He also wrote intimate letters to him, although mostly the intimate details were about his marital sex life. If those letters are amorous, the passion seems to go one way, with Kinsey constantly trying to keep the relationship close, even over Voris's resistance. Two individuals told Jones of a sexual relationship between the men, one of whom added that he too had slept with Kinsey; but their testimony is ambiguous, for one says simply that Kinsey "was in love with Voris from day one," which does not necessarily imply sex, and the other only thinks that he knows when a homosexual relationship between the men began, which means he is guessing. And in any case both did not want their names used and are cited as "anonymous." Thus their testimony cannot be checked.

Other sources are cited by name. One of them called attention to Kinsey's exhibitionism. Another described a night when Kinsey was in a foul mood because he and his students slept in a hotel. "Griped and sulked about everything," he wrote in his diary. "I guess because he couldn't sleep in his damn, prick nibbling tent." This observer, Jones comments, usually meant what he said, so that we should take "prick nibbling" as a literal description of what went on. Kinsey sent erotic books to this man as well. All of them dealt with heterosexual sex, but this was "entirely in keeping with Kinsey's approach," Jones writes.

Does all this add up to definitive proof that Kinsey was, as Jones insists, "homosexual"? Hardly. For one thing, Kinsey was a married man with four children, all of which suggests that, if he was

attracted to men, he was also bisexual. And Kinsey may have been satisfied by prattle, rather than by actual contact. By insisting that the category "homosexual" applies to Kinsey, Jones uses a term whose meaning has been shaped in the 1980s and 1990s to describe conduct that took place more than half a century earlier. A historian more sensitive to evidence and to the texture of the times should have more respect for ambiguity.

About the camping trips, at least, there is evidence of homosexual attraction, however inconclusive. When Jones writes about Kinsey's research in Chicago, however, he steps over a line into irresponsibility. He informs his readers that Kinsey sought sexual release in the underground gay scene, even though he cites no sources. And when he does cite a source—a letter that Kinsey wrote to Voris—he notes that Kinsey avoided any mention of any sexual adventures. Bereft of data, Jones turns surreal: "Although it is highly unlikely that he abandoned himself to those outings very often, Kinsey must have relished the arrangement." Absent any data, Jones cannot know anything. And so he should not say anything.

One's first impulse is to charge Jones with sensationalism so as to sell books. But the odd way in which Kinsey's life and Jones's scholarship intertwine suggests another explanation. For Jones, Kinsey was engaged in an effort to overturn a "Victorian" sexual code. Yet Jones fails to appreciate what Steven Marcus has called the "other Victorians," such as the author of *My Secret Life*, who, like Kinsey, recorded sexual adventures of all kinds. Since Kinsey did have a secret life, he was as much a Victorian as he was a rebel against Victorianism. And since Jones is so determined to uncover Kinsey's secret life, he, too, is more Victorian than he realizes.

There are many ways to be obsessed with sex. One is to suppress it. The other is to find it everywhere—and if it is found to be homosexual or in any way "deviant," so much the better. All of which suggests that Kinsey's contribution to America's sexual revolution is more ambiguous than it appears. The usual way in which these things are treated—certainly the matter is treated this way in Jones's book—is to suggest that different historical periods are characterized by different degrees of sexual openness. As society swings from repression to liberation, not only are people freer to express their sexuality, but individuals with sexual tastes outside the mainstream experience less pain and suffering.

But there is another way to read the events since Kinsey's day. It is to suggest

that Americans have always been consistently conventional in their private sexual behavior and consistently fascinated by public accounts of other people's sexuality. Obviously there have been times when American sexual manners changed: the Pill clearly transformed the rules of sexual engagement, though even in this case the 1990s are witnessing a return to more conventional sexual patterns. From this perspective, what we call a sexual "revolution" is not so much a change in actual behavior as a shift in cultural emphasis, in public consciousness about sexuality.

And even such a shift does not involve a swing from a time when sex is at the center of public consciousness to a time when it is at the periphery. In America, sex is never at the periphery. Sometimes the American fascination with sex tends to result in prohibition and censorship, while at other times it produces exhibitionism and curiosity. Sex can be a force for procreation and joy, and it can be a force for chaos and irresponsibility. Americans make their peace with both sides of sex by varying their public representation of it while changing their private practice of it as rarely as technology will allow.

Alfred C. Kinsey—the Midwesterner, the family man, the product of a proper Christian upbringing, the scientist—grew up in an atmosphere of sexual repression and led a revolution for sexual openness. But how much really changed? Father and son were linked in ways that neither could appreciate, for neither was capable of accepting sex as just a part of life: no more, no less. It is in this sense (and it is absent from Jones's book) that Kinsey was a representative American. Once we had Anthony Comstock and Maria Monk. Now we have Jesse Helms and Karen Finley. It is a cliché to say that the censors and the exhibitionists need each other; but it is also true that they do not understand each other. The censors hear about public accounts of sexuality and believe that people are actually doing such things in their bedrooms. And the exhibitionists listen to the censors and believe that people will, if the censors get their way, stop doing whatever they are doing in the privacy of their bedrooms. Neither seems all that much concerned with what actually happens behind the closed doors. For what goes on there is more interesting to the parties involved than it is to all those trying so desperately to listen in. And that is why it is fitting that those doors stay closed. •

The Obelisks' Tale

By Anthony Grafton

Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism by Jan Assmann

(Harvard University Press, 276 pp., $29.95)

Go to Rome, and you will find yourself in Egypt. In Bellini's enormous oval piazza before St. Peter's, and amid the swarms of tourists in the Piazza Navona, and in the street by the Lateran, there rise obelisks. Most of these huge stones have spoken more than one language. Shaped to celebrate the appearance of the sun god Re, they usually bear hieroglyphic inscriptions that commemorate the achievements of Egyptian pharaohs. Centuries after these great rulers and their kingdom turned to dust, their monuments were brought, with great technological ingenuity and at fantastic expense, from Egypt to Rome. In this new setting, they attested to the power of the Roman conquerors who had brought the oldest of human civilizations under their control.

In the centuries after Rome fell, so did almost all the obelisks. Only one of them, the Vatican obelisk, survived the Middle Ages standing. No ancient historian explained exactly what this column had meant, as first cut in Egypt or as appropriated in Rome. It had no hieroglyphic inscription (not that anyone could have read one). But Christian memory supplied a new context and a new meaning for the blank stone shaft. Originally located in the Circus of Nero, the obelisk had witnessed the Crucifixion of St. Peter. It had, in fact, soaked up his blood, becoming a precious relic of the early Church. The Vatican obelisk gradually became an uncanny, even magical object. Tour guides reported that Virgil had teleported it to Rome from Jerusalem, where it had originally formed part of Solomon's Temple.

In the late Renaissance, Pope Sixtus V moved the Vatican obelisk from its old position to the one in which it now stands, and began erecting others in squares around the city. This staggeringly difficult job, carried out by Domenico Fontana, Sixtus's favorite architect, required the joint efforts of hundreds of men turning dozens of capstans. It turned into a massive media event, celebrated by rituals, poems, and pamphlets too many to count. But it was not without its paradoxes.

Sixtus V became a legend not for his interests in cultural history but for his austerity and his determination. (Legend recalls that he entered the conclave after the death of his predecessor bent over and supported on a stick, which he hurled away as soon as his colleagues had elected him on the assumption that he was too feeble to serve for more than a few years.) He improved Rome's public finances, assured its water supply, and attacked the longstanding problems of banditry in the countryside and prostitution in the city. (Predictably, he had more success with the former than with the latter.) He also straightened roads to make Rome the stage for a magnificent series of processions which emphasized the universalist claims and enormous resources of the Church Militant. When Sixtus moved obelisks, he used them to provide dramatic markers for the new processional routes. Formally exorcised, surmounted with a cross, and explicated with inscriptions, they now gave testimony to the triumph of the religion of Christ over the diabolic superstition and magic of the Egyptians.

What place could Egypt have—except as the object of abuse—in the triumphant projects of a church that, a few years after Sixtus V died, would burn Giordano Bruno alive in the Campo de' Fiori when he persisted in calling for a revival of the Egyptian religion? The answer is, quite a prominent one. By the middle of the seventeenth century, Athanasius Kircher was advising Bellini as he mounted smaller obelisks on his sculptured fountain of the Four Rivers in the Piazza Navona and on an elephant before Santa Maria sopra Minerva. In the eclectic spirit of high Baroque culture, Kircher saw the obelisks not as the work of the devil but as the remains of the lost high philosophy of the Egyptian priests. He celebrated their hieroglyphs as a language more profound than any alphabetic one—a language created by priests, the signs in which corresponded directly by their very nature to the things they referred