

Man/Boy Love and the Left

Roger Moody

Love between the growing and the grown has never been an issue on the traditional left. After all, traditional left groups are marked by their adult male domination. The result is that both women's and young people's aspirations to equality have been ignored.

Among less dogmatic radicals, however, love between men and boys has been recognized — even cultivated — for generations. It is deeply embedded in the comradely socialism of Edward Carpenter and Walt Whitman. It surfaces now and again in the writings of Henry David Thoreau, Hart Crane, James Joyce, E.M. Forster, and of course W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender and Christopher Isherwood during the thirties. Alexander Berkman describes as a “wonderful thing” the love between a fellow prisoner and a boy of about 15 recounted in his *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (1970). And there are several major works by Herman Hesse which are positively underpinned by pedophile eroticism (specifically *Narziss and Goldmund*).

There is also a virtually unbroken tradition, from the “new educationists” of the nineteenth century, through utopian socialism, to the libertarianism of the sixties, which links free love, self-awareness and the dissolution of barriers between adults and children, to social equality. Where sexuality between men and boys is most emphasized (as with William Paine's 1920 treatise, *A New Aristocracy of Comradeship*), the revolutionary content is least recognized. Harking back to ancient Greece, with its structural oppression of women and conquered minorities, has never been a very fruitful

exercise. Conversely, where the radical content in such relationships becomes a major driving force (cf. Homer Lane in his *New Commonwealth*, George Dennison in his *Street School* and John Holt, in his various learning situations) the eroticism is effectively sublimated. In fact the only contemporary radical educationist who makes man/boy love an issue is the only one for whom it poses personal dilemmas — the late Paul Goodman.

The “naive” defense of pederasty (as conducive to good social order and healthy development in the young) was, until very recently, the only one offered against the medical-psychiatric model. It held out for a remarkably long time: indeed, it only recently found an advocate in the person of the Danish psychiatrist, Thorkil Vangaard, (*Phallos*, 1972). But it was bound to crumble in the face of the onslaught by psychiatrists like Robert von Krafft-Ebing and Wilhelm Stekel. In a real sense, *pederasty* was defeated by the invention of *pedophilia* — and due not to the discovery of adult traumas brought on by infantile sexual experience, but to the creation of modern childhood.

Industrial capitalism, as Philippe Ariès has pointed out in *Centuries of Childhood* (1962), gave birth to the notion of the nuclear family. Henceforth children were to be abstracted from street life and amorphous communities, and brought up as potential wage-laborers. In a real sense, the marketplace ceased being a focus for surplus libido, and became a focus for surplus *value*. At that point, both women and children became increasingly confined to the home. More fundamentally, as conservative historians have failed to recognize — and leftists are only beginning to recognize¹ — sexuality for its own sake became proscribed. Generative sex eclipsed non-generative, and especially inter-generational, sensuality. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, in all Western European societies, homosexuality became indefensible. At the same time, father-daughter incest, though rigidly prohibited in pre-industrial societies, became acceptable so long as hidden. It is important to understand that this was due not simply to the growth of patriarchy and the subservience of women, but to a paramount concern to keep the nuclear family intact. Henry Ford would hardly have advocated his workers having it away with their 12-year-old daughters, or pubescent brothel girls. But I don't think he was too naive not to see that such “perversity” inevitably followed from the

destruction of meaningful conjugal love occasioned by commodity production.

My analysis here is drastically over-simplified, but I want to make a key point that is often lost in today's debates about pedophilia: especially the correlation between acceptance of non-ageist sexuality and a license for the prostitution of young girls. Historically, *both* gay relationships *and* man/boy love became subjects for prosecution, at roughly the same time and for similar reasons. Young girls also became protected by age-of-consent laws — but for very different motives. Girls were regarded as victims, both because they were and are exploited by men (the inevitable vicious result of patriarchy) and because their “proper place” was in the home. Initially, young boys were not regarded as victims, but as co-conspirators in a form of totally unacceptably intercourse. The notion of boy-as-victim is a post-Freudian concept. It certainly didn't exist (for example) when Oscar Wilde was dragged into court for consorting with telegraph boys, or at the time of the Vere Street scandals.

But, forty years into the twentieth century, the artificial construct “childhood” had finally triumphed. If the pederastic element in utopian-left thinking required a death-blow it came with the Second World War. Between 1958 and 1968, it experienced a brief revival — primarily because of the reaction of students in the affluent West (some as young as 11 or 12) to adult repression of both their social aspirations and their sexuality. This was the age of the *Little Red School Book*, the Oz trial in London (in which the anarchist editors appeared in schoolboy shorts and blazers), the West German “free sex” communes, and a few Kids Liberation groups.

The post-1968 repression knocked most of these initiatives flat on their face. In Britain, for example, the Secondary School Students Union moved from revolutionary demands to reformist programs concerned with school uniforms and dinners. “Free schools” in Britain — and to an extent in the USA — had to conform with local authority regulations, sometimes seeking local government funding in order to survive.

In the next decade, three further developments were to halt any burgeoning idea that children's autonomy and free adult/child sensuality might be inter-related. Unfortunately, they came from within the radical movement which was thrown up in the sixties itself.

First was the mainstream gay movement's readiness to adopt the medical-psychiatric model of pedophilia, and equate man/boy love with molestation. It was a strategy of pure self-defense, completely unrooted in historical or libertarian analysis. It involved — and still involves — a wholesale denial of the reality of many gay men's (and some lesbians') relationships and completed the re-structuring of the concept "gay" which had started in the twenties. It also resulted in contradictions which would have been ridiculous had they not been so pathetic.

The André Gide club in West Germany, for example, became a favorite haunt for gays, naturally forbidden to "minors." Yet Gide had himself been attracted by boys under 16. The main Dutch gay liberation organization, COC, vehemently protested its members' imperviousness to the attractions of young boys — at the same time it was publishing boy-love poetry, stories, and erotic portraits of pre-adolescent males.²

Second was the appropriation by part of the emerging women's liberation movement of the concept of child protection. "Our children" were now to be saved not only from gender stereotyping and patriarchy (good) but also from freer relationships outside the parental nexus and the home (not so good). What, to start with, may have been a defensive strategy against oppressive marriage has turned sometimes into an attack on male sexuality *per se*. But while straight-gay men have escaped criticism (and often, of course, been valuable allies to women's groups) their pederastic fellows have borne much of its brunt. Logically, this is not because gay men may "contaminate" boys with homosexuality — but with notions of virile superiority and the equation of sex with aggression. In fact, boys who have close sensual and sexual relationships with gay men might be thought — with equal logic — to be more gentle, comprehending and less *obsessive* than average, in their relationships with women — simply because they have experienced love without phallic domination. This last statement will, I know, be greeted with astonishment by some feminists who continue to see man/boy sexuality as a carbon copy of man/woman aggressivity. The point I wish to make is not that pederastic relationships are devoid of either physical or psychological imbalance: they are often not. But, when feminists accept the conventional version of a man/boy relationship (ironically, the only area in which they adopt wholesale the stereotype handed down by patriarchal society) and refuse to face

what actually may pass between a particular man and a particular youngster, the impression is strengthened that their fundamental fear is surrendering control over their sons' bodies. Not that their sons will be violated by sex with a gay man but, on the contrary, that they will embrace it.

Third was the retreat by the communes movement from the openness and political purpose which typified the sixties — to embracing the notions of privacy, exclusiveness and retrenchment that marked the seventies. Again, self-defense appears to have been the main objective: though, this time it was defense against internal dissidence. Children — except where brought along by their parents — became potentially disruptive elements threatening the clarity required for meditation, self-improvement or self-sufficiency. One exception seems to prove the rule: The Nuremburg Indianner-commune in West Germany, probably the only specifically pedophile commune in the world. A year ago, one of its adult members was arrested for consensual sex with another member who happened to be a child. So far as I can gather, very few West German libertarians voiced their disapproval of the event: none pointed out that a pedophile commune was the logical development of the free love movement in which many young West Germans had participated ten or fifteen years before.

It now seems that the situation is changing again. Pedophilia has unquestionably become a major public issue in Britain and the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent in the US, West Germany, and France. There are also pedophile support groups in Belgium, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, while organizations concerned with sexual politics have made adult/child sexuality a major subject of discussion in Canada (especially *Body Politic*), and Italy.

Different issues are crystallized by different groups. For example, French gay writers — notably Guy Hocquenghem and Tony Duvert — and the feminist Leila Sebbar are currently locked in deadly combat over the role which "phallogratie" (phallic power) plays in sex between men and boys.³ This does not appear to be a key debating point among Canadian feminists or British women's groups, who are more concerned with the maldistribution of power generally, between adults and children.

Again — the onslaught on North American gays and pederasts engineered by Anita Bryant and Judianne Densen-Gerber (*inter*

alia) in the late 1970s found its counterpart in a campaign mounted in Britain by Mary Whitehouse, her National Viewers and Listeners' Association, and Cyril Townsend, a Conservative Member of Parliament. But, whereas the behest to "Save our Children" produced a closing of gay ranks in the US, it had virtually the opposite effect across the Atlantic. No British gay organization openly opposed the infamous Protection of Children Act (1979), and as recently as 1980, the two major British gay organizations (Campaign for Homosexual Equality in England and Wales, and the Scottish Homosexual Rights Group) invoked the "no danger to boys" rationale in defending a homosexual youth worker dismissed from his job. While the wholesale attack on boy-lovers three years ago in Boston stimulated the formation of NAMBLA (North American Man/Boy Love Association), and some political changes within Massachusetts itself, the arrest in late 1978 of the executive committee of PIE (Paedophile Information Exchange) provoked a deafening silence from British gays — and the formation of only one, minute support group.

Within the Netherlands, too — the one country where debate about pedophilia is not accompanied by outraged verbal or physical attack — two broad tendencies have developed since 1977. The "old style" Pedophile Workgroups campaign for abolition of age of consent laws and public acceptance of adult/child sex, while the newer *jeugdemanicipatie* (youth freedom)" groups try to root their demands in the concept of children's liberation.

Only in the Netherlands do traditional communist or socialist parties relate meaningfully to the issue at all. By and large they support demands by the newer left-wing and anti-war parties in Parliament for an abolition of the age of consent, with the result that this has ceased to be a thoroughly radical demand in the Dutch context. When the Rotterdam police encourage men in their sexual liaisons with boys, as a means of containing juvenile delinquency (actually, a potential strategy first perceived by the Danish police chief Jens Jersild back in the sixties) — we can see a familiar pattern emerging: in effect, a modern version of "keeping the kids off the streets"; another channeling of juvenile libido.

A huge variety of analyses and demands are now being made by groups and individuals in western countries. Back in 1975, when I wrote the first "confessional" article by a boy-lover to appear in the

British radical press⁵, I conjectured that, by lifting the taboo on discussion of adult/child sexuality, we would be exposing a mass of contradictions in our own thinking, as well as society at large. I think I've been proven correct in this. But what I failed to see then — like many others concerned with sexual politics — was how the ground of our perceptions would have to shift: away from debate as to the "rights" of adults to love children who are not physiologically "their own", to the right of children to define their own sensual relationships with adults; away from concepts of damage and harm (in effect, a reflection of the false debate projected by psychiatrists) to practical ways in which the young can make real *choices*; away from merely determining children's sexual "needs" to showing both children and ourselves how sexuality is *used* — by all persons in all relationships — to obtain gratification, security, control or release.

One of the major problems with which we have to deal remains that of definition. If our baseline demand is sexual freedom — true sexual choice — for human beings of any age, is it best located within the sexual freedom "movement" (*viz.* Childhood Sensuality Circle of California), the mainstream gay rights movement, or radical gay and women's groups? Does a man who loves young boys "come out" as gay? If so — where does that leave the man who loves young girls? Does a woman who loves young boys identify as a feminist, or a woman who loves girls, primarily as a lesbian?

There is a marked tendency within some organizations dominated by boy-loving men (such as Britain's PIE and Belgium's Studiegroep Pedofilie) to throw these irksome questions to the winds and call for free sex for everyone. But PIE, at least, has been unable to head off feminist criticism that sexual liberation, isolated from dissolution of patriarchy and social inequality, may simply confirm adult male domination. This has resulted in PIE spokesman Tom O'Carroll arguing a position dangerously close to that of the conservative Scottish Homosexual Rights Group's executive committee — that certain forms of sexual expression are appropriate to certain age groups.⁶ And the libertarian Campaign Against Public Morals (CAPM), which takes PIE to task at almost every intellectual turn, itself invokes the law as the last resort to protect children from certain adult impositions. (I've no doubt it's possible to be radical and still use the law on assault in specific instances of abuse, as women against rape do. What concerns me is that libertarians lend indiscriminating support to demands for heavy penalties against

"men who attack kids" as an easy sop to their critics, and without discussing how children can be enabled to meet such aggression with their own organizations — such as the Dutch kindertelefoon network.)

In the last five years, there has rarely been a day in which I haven't had to consider some of the issues touched upon in this article. From my original inclination to dissociate myself from gay liberation I have moved — through long discussions with feminist women, growing friendships with gay men and several deep relationships with boys — to identification as a person who is gay, because I love boys. And yet — every ground on which I appear to safely stand one moment, gives way at the next. I argue for the re-integration of man/boy love into a radical gay perspective, while realizing that this leaves heterosexual pedophiles out in the cold. And if I maintain that men who love girls will have to wait for the disappearance of patriarchy, it smacks suspiciously of the argument I've had to face only too often from straight gay men: let's get homosexuality accepted first, and *then* we can start the pedophile revolution. One day I feel I am giving security to a young friend, by encouraging the view that his attraction to other males "makes me queer." Another day, I find I'm disturbed by a Gay Information Service advisor who announces: "We're getting kids as young as 11, who know they're gay." Do they really know? Or are they simply saying that they like sex with other boys or men? And what right have I to question their self-knowledge anyway?

I started this article by pointing to the profound historical roots which love between men and boys has in what (for want of a better term) I call the utopian-left tradition. Even if that tradition has survived (and may actually be reviving in western Europe) the perception of pederasty has drastically changed and will — under the impact of feminist thinking, gay liberation praxis and above all, children's changing self-awareness — never be simple again.

It may well be that the final, as yet unheralded, social revolution will have the profoundest consequences. After imperialism, racism, sexism and species-ism the battle is now being joined against ageism. Whereas many of us have never been colonized, discriminated against for our ethnic origins, our gender or our species, we have all been children, and it is doubtful if any of us has escaped some trauma as a consequence.

The one fundamental question we are left with is not whether the grown and the growing will make love together — that is now more certain than ever before — but whether the experiences will help overcome structural oppression.

As a radical who also loves boys, I believe they can.

NOTES

1. See, for example, René Scherer's *Emile Perversi* (Paris: Laffont, 1974), and *Paedophilia and Public Morals* published by Campaign Against Public Morals, London, 1980.
2. I'm relying on a recent study of COC's publications carried out by Theo Sandfort and published in the radical Netherlands gay journal, *Homologie*, September, 1980.
3. See Leila Sebbar's *La Maman et le Pédophile* (Paris: Editions Stock, 1980) and Tony Duvert's counterblast, *L'Enfant au Masculin* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1980).
4. See *Pan* (Amsterdam), 2, 1979.
5. *Peace News* (London), October, 1975.
6. See chapter six in Tom O'Carroll's *Paedophilia: The Radical Case* (London: Peter Owen, 1980).

Roger Moody, a former editor of Peace News, is author of Indecent Assault (London: Word is Out/Peace News, 1980). He has worked against capital punishment, vivisection, agribusiness, hunger and war. Unashamedly libertarian, he brings a Marxist analysis, wedded to a passionate belief in non-violent revolution, to his current work with native people's groups and children in urban adventure playgrounds. This essay is an original contribution to this anthology.