

8 December 2004

Prof Germaine Greer  
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Dear Prof Greer,

I recently bought your excellent book *The Boy*. I am a writer myself (details on my website). You will see that among my books is *The Sex Code: Morals for Moderns* published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson (Site Map 6.3). I am a barrister and during the passage of the recent Sexual Offences Bill I campaigned (unsuccessfully) against the proposal to criminalise under-16s for consenting activities (such as heavy petting) with age-mates (see Site Map 2.5.3).

I am very anxious about the fact that society offers no sexual role for pubescent boys who are under the age of consent, and indeed criminalises them for even slight consensual sexual activity with age-mates. I am working on a book about this and copied out the following from *The Boy* (page 59)-

'Cupid, with his bow and fiery arrows, is always male and always immature. He is male because he is the aggressor: in no myth does Cupid play a passive sexual role. He is a boy because a boy is more sexually active than a man, has more erections, produces more sperm and ejaculates more often. If society provides no legitimate outlet for boys' sexuality it will be expressed in ways that are chaotic and destructive.'

This is so much in line with my own thinking that I felt I must write to you. I ask for your permission to quote that passage. I have put it with a passage of my own which reads-

Do pubescent boys have sexual rights? If they don't, should they? Most fathers of such boys, forgetting their own intense traumatic youth in the usual inexplicable way, say no. Almost all of them say no, and feel like cuffing the boys. Often they do this. Naturally the boys feel resentment, along with their other adolescent frustrations.

That parental denial is a strange phenomenon, flying in the face of truth. By that I mean natural truth, the truth of nature – the boys' nature. There are many things wrong with our vaunted society, perched as we think at the apex of Western civilisation. This is one of them.

The present book addresses that wrong, in the interest of those fleeting pitiable creatures who find themselves to be, just for the moment, pubescent boys. Later it will be all right; they will be men. Just now it can be hell. I sympathise with that, and want to do something about it. Hence this book.

I define a pubescent boy as a male between the ages of twelve and fifteen. On the last stroke of the midnight before his sixteenth birthday, a boy suddenly becomes entitled in law to engage in whatever sexual activity he fancies, whether heterosexual or homosexual – provided of course it is within the general law applying to adults. Indeed so far as sex is concerned he has become an adult. Before that moment his situation is problematic.

What is a pubescent boy? I would say he is a boy upon whom puberty looms, or is present. He is in transition from childhood to manhood. He retains a certain girlish bloom, but shows signs of future virility. The law, as I have said, has placed his *terminus ad quem* at the sixteenth birthday. Equally arbitrarily I place the *terminus a quo* at the twelfth birthday. So this vital male creature has four years to live, and they can be very difficult years. Like me, all men have lived through them. Like me, many bear the scars. This book aims to lessen that trauma by admitting the truth and pointing a way forward.

Naturally I have to draw on the researches of those who have gone before. An important source is a 1968 book called *The Hothouse Society: an exploration of boarding-school life through the boys' and girls' own writings* by Royston Lambert, with Spencer Milligan (Weidenfeld & Nicolson). I shall call it *Hothouse*. The key here, so far as the present book is concerned, is that *Hothouse* contains many observations by pubescent boys themselves, taken under unusual conditions of trusted confidence that give them complete credibility. Many of these boys were pupils in single-sex boarding schools, which imparts a slant that obviously must be taken into account. When quoting from boys in what follows I make clear what type of school they were in.

It is very clear from the sources that pubescent boys do have sexual needs. When the boys are in single-sex boarding schools, these needs often perforce have a homosexual slant – though most such pupils are heterosexual in the vacations. At the outset I would like to mention two points made by the articulate boys recorded in *Hothouse*. One says, in relation to new arrivals at the school (aged around thirteen) that they are inspected in the showers, and then the older boys ‘admire so and so’s lovely botty’ (page 328). The other, a boy aged seventeen, says of his younger friend Dick : ‘The trouble with Dick is that’s he’s so sensual in bed. He writhes and wriggles fantastically’ (page 336). I shall try to show that these are key observations.

I will leave it there, having I hope quoted enough to show you what my book is about.

Yours sincerely,

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*Reply from Germaine Greer received 20 January 2005*

‘I wish I had known of *The Sex Code* when I was researching *The Boy*. Thank you for a very interesting letter.’

The above was written on the back of the following picture postcard, which shows *Cupid and Psyche in the Nuptial Bower*, a painting by Hugh Douglas Hamilton (1740-1808) dating from around 1793.

