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# Richard Cleminson **ANARCHISM, IDEOLOGY AND SAME-SEX DESIRE**

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*Anarchism, Ideology and Same-Sex Love and Desire*

Richard Cleminson

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## 1. Context

Although it is regularly stated by those who show sympathy for anarchism or anarcho-syndicalism that these ideologies combat the general morality which exists and go against the ways of thinking of modern times, in fact sometimes anarchist ideology has done little more than prop up conservative, even reactionary ideas, often because anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists have allowed ideas which have come in from 'outside' to influence them greatly.

It is undoubtedly difficult to pass judgement on the thought of others in the libertarian<sup>1</sup> camp and more so on the judgements we ourselves uphold. It is often difficult to judge whether these ideas are in tune with basic libertarian ideas. Of course, we think and act to some extent within the constraints of this society and in accordance with our own ideological development. Further, it remains clear that at times the dominant ideology and morality affect us and our ideas and they may twist what we believe so that our conceptions fit their mould. Errors and mistakes are made, some of which will not be known for some years, but those past errors, or at least past actions and thoughts, should be considered and reconsidered as part of an ever-renovating set of ideas and activities which anarchism with its characteristic flexibility and anti-dogmatic stance develops.

Sometimes reactionary, religious and anti-libertarian positions become entangled in our thought and affect our actions. At times, our doctrines assimilate the dominant ideology and even integrate it into our set of ideas and become an apparently logical, integral part which is backed up by scientific or rationalist ideas which anarchists are always open to. In this short pamphlet I would like to analyse the ways in which Spanish anarchism during the 1920s and 1930s, often considered a 'golden age' of anarchism by many, discussed one particular theme in one particular journal of that time. The journal is *Estudios*, a particularly influential and intellectual journal of the time, and the theme I would like to examine is: same-sex desire or homosexuality.

## 2. *Estudios* the journal in the 1920s and 1930s

The journal *Estudios* was a direct continuation of the journal *Generación Consciente* which was directed by J. Pastor. *Generación Consciente* was established in 1923 in Alcoy, Valencia province and later moved to Valencia city. In 1929 it changed its name to *Estudios* and continued on very much the same lines as its parent and predecessor. *Estudios* was published until 1937, when



most likely the demands of the war and revolution in Spain halted its publication. In 1994 it was re-established by a collective in Barcelona.

*Generación Consciente* and *Estudios* both concentrated on topics which were linked to issues of sexuality and as such concentrated on matters linked to contraception, abortion, sexual morality, the nature of love, and later, eugenics (population improvement). *Generación Consciente* in 1923 affirmed that it wished to create a new 'conscious' generation of workers who were healthy and aware of their acts and thoughts and proposed the use of many means such as naturism and vegetarianism. Spanish anarchism since its beginnings had placed great emphasis on education and the acquisition of knowledge to sort people's problems out and these two reviews believed that it was necessary to promote knowledge and discussion to an otherwise mainly uneducated readership. In any case, the two publications concentrated on matters relating to sexuality and the 'personal' and their pages were filled with intricate discussions of the new kind of morality that they wished to introduce as an integral part of the anarchist social revolution.

Most discussions of what anarchists believed on the subject of issues of sexuality and free love have concentrated exclusively on one form of sexual relationship: heterosexuality. In older texts, and even in some of a more recent period, anarchist writers in proposing new sex moralities and 'free love' have concentrated almost exclusively on heterosexuality without considering the range of possibilities outside of that restricting parameter. In the same way, in the journal which is at the core of this article, *Estudios*, anarchist contributors concentrated mainly on heterosexual desire, often without stating so, but simply by assuming the connivance of the readership. Heterosexuality for these anarchists was the only viable form of living one's sexuality. In this way, anarchists, in the forefront in many senses of sociological and scientific questions, as well as those of a general nature, simply repeated the formulae of scientists and sexologists such as Sigmund Freud or others who 'explained' homosexuality as an infantile phase through which the person had to pass and surpass.

*Estudios* and many other Spanish anarchist journals adopted and repeated scientific formulae as if they were their own and justified them as consequent with anarchist thought and understandings. In the discussion which follows, the ways in which anarchism did this and what these particular anarchists believed will be examined.

### **3. The representation of homosexuality in *Estudios***

In order to analyse the representation of homosexuality by the anarchist journal *Estudios* this article will cite some references of articles which in the

1920s and 1930s discussed or just mentioned homosexuality. This of course will not be the last word to be written on this subject but by means of this analysis I would like to show how *Estudios* was interested in finding a 'solution' to a situation that the journal itself had problematised for the anarchists and which had in turn been problematised by psychoanalysts and members of the medical profession. Equally, I would like to show the importance wielded by sexological ideas in Spanish anarchism in their advancing of ideas on the 'causes' of homosexuality and even its 'cure'.

### **3.1 Homosexuality and the "Consultorio General" of *Estudios***

In many anarchist journals there was a "General Consultancy" section which was a kind of questions and answers forum where readers would write in and ask all kinds of questions ranging from the perils of masturbation to the construction of an anarchist communist society. In *Estudios*, this particular section, in accordance with the overall ethos of the publication, was mainly devoted to questions of a sexual nature. In its pages a vast range of questions on sexuality was to be seen and anarchist answers were provided. What is of interest to this particular article is that homosexuality was also extensively covered and that readers of the publication were asking these questions themselves. There are several points of interest here and I will discuss three. Firstly, even though it may seem rather obvious to say so, the fact that these questions existed and that they were made by (presumably) average anarchists, shows that the subject was an area of concern for them. Secondly, the existence of these questions shows that anarchism was sufficiently open to attempt to provide an answer to matters which had been problematised for that age. Many sectors of the left would have dismissed the discussion without so much comment. Thirdly, what is interesting in both the questions of the readers and the answers of the editorial committee is that they had all assimilated the language and the concepts used by psychoanalysts and the new sexologists. Some examples now follow.

In *Estudios* of April 1932, J. Ballester asked the following: "Why do two women do together what they should not do by natural law? Is this a vice? Can a woman like that live a married life and love a man, etc?"<sup>2</sup> The reply was quite clear: lesbian loves are an aberration of the sexual instinct. This may be as a result of many reasons, the reply continued, as a result of prejudice, through lack of sexual satisfaction, as a result of poor sex education. The answer carried on to say that there had been cases of sexual degeneration which were transitory and once the woman lived with a man this would be corrected. The reply also stated that a period of homosexuality was "almost normal" in men during adolescence. In the case of women, loving a man would normally cancel out any



lesbian feelings. Finally, the reader was encouraged to read Freud's works for more details.

In this case, the reply is very interesting. The use of terms such as 'degeneration' and 'aberration' display an evident psychoanalytical and sexological discourse. Any book of Freud's on sexuality or of other sexologists would use such terminology.

In a similar way, in *Estudios* of October 1932 one reader asked if sexual degeneration or perversion was hereditary or caused by environmental factors.<sup>3</sup> This debate over 'nature and nurture' is of course still continuing today. The reply to the above question supported the hereditarian hypothesis but also stated that the "large influence" of the environment should not be forgotten. Once again, the journal proposed that the reader should consult Freud.

On a different level, some readers wrote in to ask questions which probably concerned them personally. For example, F. Sabater wrote in to ask "Can an invert of 23 years be cured?".<sup>4</sup> The reply came back: if he really wants to be cured, of course this is possible, unless his body is so degenerate that this is unfeasible. Some months later the following was asked: "Can a homosexual cure himself?", and the reply was similar to the previous one.<sup>5</sup> In these two questions, the sexological terminology and the internalisation of the homosexual 'problem' is plain to see. The term 'invert' was used, first employed by Henry Havelock Ellis, and a cure to something which is constructed as undesirable, dangerous and degenerate is sought. As remains clear, the anarchists of *Estudios* reflected these ideas faithfully.

### 3.2 The treatment of homosexuality in articles in *Estudios*

On a less personal level, *Estudios* discussed homosexuality from the standpoint of one of Spain's most eminent doctors and surgeons: Gregorio Marañón. Marañón was the first Spanish scientist of name who examined the subject. In the first year of existence of *Estudios* three articles by Marañón appeared in its pages on the supposed differences between the sexes. Marañón, who based his ideas on the work of other scientists such as Lipschütz, and Ruiz Funes, constructed a theory of 'sexual differentiation' and of 'intersexual states'. While the doctor Magnus Hirschfeld in Germany had developed a similar theory, Marañón was the first to do so in the Spanish world.

In a first article, Marañón affirmed that (biological) sex was an absolute in most cases and could be reduced to two halves which could not be confused.<sup>6</sup> These were the feminine and the masculine. In the gonads or sexual glands there were the traces of the two sexes resulting in a 'bisexual' embryo. Whilst both biological sexes survived, one gained a position of dominance over the other. If

this process of sexual differentiation did not occur correctly, the adult human would display signs of 'intersexuality'. In these cases, there could be hermaphrodites, male homosexuals or 'virilised' women.

Marañón developed these ideas in the second part of the article a month later.<sup>7</sup> For Marañón, in women, inversion or 'virilisation' was something which did in fact possess certain advantages since they brought the woman closer to masculinity, but inversion in men was negative since it weakened their 'virility', showing in this way his gender bound and misogynistic philosophy. For Marañón the key to the process of sexual development is the 'differentiation' of both sexes, that is to say the 'virilisation' of men and 'feminisation' of women.

For Marañón, then, the problem is solved if both sexes obey their supposed nature and conform to rigid gender roles and a rigid concept of emotional and erotic sentiment between people, understanding heterosexuality as the only possible path to be followed. Luis Huerta, a pedagogue and scientist, before the appearance of the Marañón articles, had praised the latter as having brought about great understanding of the homosexual phenomenon.<sup>8</sup> With Marañón, Huerta pointed out, the homosexual was no longer considered perverse or a reprobate in the same way as with Lombroso people learned to be understanding with the delinquent. In the words of Huerta: "Neither the homosexual nor the delinquent mend their ways as a result of strict punitive measures. The only efficient remedy is through a more human culture and through a more perfect organisation of social and health services and of scientific policy".<sup>9</sup> Anarchism, or at least the kind of anarchism of the journal *Estudios*, no longer viewed homosexuals as destructive, vice-ridden persons but rather as unfortunates who needed help and a cure. It was a significant step, but one which still positioned anarchism leagues away from an acceptable and libertarian position on the matter. This step was to be consolidated by one of the principal voices in anarchist circles for sexual liberation: the doctor Félix Martí Ibáñez.

### 3.3 The doctor Félix Martí Ibáñez and his "Considerations on Homosexuality"

The doctor Félix Martí Ibáñez, like doctor Isaac Puente, was one of the health workers who participated in the anarchist movement of the 1930s. Martí Ibáñez, who became the Director of the Catalan Health and Social Services during the revolution, can be considered one of the most important anarchist sexologists of the period. He wrote a great deal for *Estudios* as well as for other journals and in 1935 provided the most extensive analysis from an anarchist point of view of homosexuality in *Estudios*. In his article "Considerations on Homosexuality" he described the stages of hostility and permissiveness towards homosexuality.<sup>10</sup> He saw homosexuality as a trans-historical, trans-cultural and unchanging



phenomenon but stated that a new scientific stage had been entered which extracted "homosexuality from the field of unjust law, dogmatic morality and base pornography, in order to include it the serene field of Endocrinology and scientific Psychology".<sup>11</sup>

Martí Ibáñez in his article then proceeded to write about what he believed were the two kinds of homosexuality: homosexuality-perversion and homosexuality-inversion. The former was practised voluntarily and the latter responded to an "irresistible call of the instincts".<sup>12</sup> After covering the different theories he affirmed that "those persons of normal sexuality are obliged to lighten the cross of those who live a deviated sexuality..."<sup>13</sup> in order that the aberration of the sexual instinct can be eliminated "so achieving that each man has nothing else in his mind but the loving image of a sweet and self-sacrificing woman".<sup>14</sup>

#### 4. Conclusions

There are several conclusions I would like to advance from this analysis of the treatment of homosexuality by the journal *Estudios*. On a positive note, it must be acknowledged that anarchism was sufficiently open to be able to take this subject on board and debate it in a fairly sensible manner especially as the subject matter was certainly taboo at the time of writing. However, the anarchism of *Estudios* as it did this adopted and repeated theories which were not its own and in an effort to analyse subjects rationally and scientifically tried to advance a 'solution' to something that had been problematised for the anarchist movement by psychoanalysis and moralistic medicine. This is perhaps not the place to consider the effects of sexologists' discourse on homosexuality and sexuality in general and on homosexuals of both sexes in particular but it must be stated that these theories often produced an internalisation of guilt, inadequacy or downright deviance.<sup>15</sup>

In the same way, as anarchism accepted the current scientific voice on the subject, it prescribed a supposedly natural form of sexuality contained within the limitations of heterosexuality. Anarchism also advanced rigid sex roles and heterosexuality was promoted as the correct form of sexuality which would help eliminate same-sex desire between people.

It is not, however, the objective of this article to pass judgement on the editors and contributors of the journal *Estudios*. The main purpose of this article is to show how ideas which are outside of anarchist thought influenced anarchists' ideas and actions and to examine how those ideas became assimilated into anarchist ideology. The ways in which sexologists' ideas under the guise of 'science' crept into anarchist thought is a good example of this process of assimilation of ideas which are foreign to anarchism.

Nowadays, of course, ideas of a scientific and other nature do have their uses but if anarchists are to take ideas on board it is necessary to understand from whom these ideas emanate and what purpose they serve. The guiding light in this must be the adoption of ideas which do not contradict the basics of libertarian thought. In this way, anarchist ideology would adopt as a basis the theory and practice of free love in its true sense and not merely between people of different sex. Anarchists must further their understanding of the role of heterosexuality in the oppression of women and sexual desire which does not conform to that strict limitation. What should be furthered is the analysis and promotion of love and sex in relationships which do not suppose hierarchy, domination and submission, whether 'consented' to or not, power difference, sex roles, pain and a rigid expression. In *Estudios* of November 1929 J. Rutgers suggested: "Who knows if the day will come in which the superior class will be the bisexual, that is to say, composed of those who feel the same affection for one and the other sex..."<sup>16</sup> and whilst anarchists are not interested in inferiority or superiority, what they do want is the possibility of loving freely, either with men or with women, in accordance with people's freely formed mutual desires.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Here I use the term 'libertarian' as an alternative to 'anarchist' as it has meant this for a long time. I am aware that increasingly some feminists and others are using the term to denote a kind of 'sexual liberalism' which seems to allow a 'free market' approach to sexuality and which rejects many radical perspectives on the subject. This latter meaning is not that which I wish to convey here. Further down I use the term 'same-sex desire' as a more general term since 'homosexuality' has a medico-legal ring to it. I have not spoken of 'gay' as I do not think this term can be used to discuss same-sex desire and activity in the 1920s and 1930s since what it represents is mainly a product of post-1969 'gay' liberation.

<sup>2</sup>Estudios, 104, April 1932, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>Estudios, 110, October 1932, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup>Estudios, 122, October 1933, p. 45.

<sup>5</sup>Estudios, 127, March 1934, p. 46.

<sup>6</sup>Gregorio Marañón, "Nuevas ideas sobre el problema de la intersexualidad y sobre la cronología de los sexos", Estudios, 70, June 1929, pp. 17-23.

<sup>7</sup>Gregorio Marañón, "Nuevas ideas sobre el problema de la intersexualidad y sobre la cronología de los sexos", Estudios, 71, July 1929, pp. 24-31.

<sup>8</sup>Luis Huerta, "El marañonismo y la intersexualidad", Estudios, 69, May 1929, pp. 9-12.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. p. 11.

<sup>10</sup>Dr. Félix Martí Ibáñez, "Consideraciones sobre el homosexualismo", Estudios, 145, September 1935, pp. 3-6.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid. p. 4.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. p. 4.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. p. 6.

<sup>15</sup>For an analysis of the role of sexologists and their enforcement of heterosexuality as the only legitimate form of sexual desire and expression see Margaret Jackson, "Facts of Life' or the roticization of women's oppression? Sexology and the social construction of heterosexuality", in Pat Caplan (ed), *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality*, Tavistock, London/New York, 1987, pp. 52-81; Sheila Jeffreys, "Sexology and Antifeminism", in Dorchon Leidholdt and Janice G. Raymond (eds), *The Sexual Liberals and the Attack on Feminism*, Pergamon Press, New York, 1990, pp. 14-27; Sheila Jeffreys, *Anticlimax. A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution*, The Women's Press, London, 1990.

<sup>16</sup>Dr. J. Rutgers, "La ambisexualidad", Estudios, 75, November 1929, pp. 28-9 (28).