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Luisa Landová-Štychová
Marriage, Family, and Free Love
1912

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The author was a Czech anarchist during the 1910s. She was also a feminist, socialist, neo-Malthusian, and philosophical monist. In this piece, she argues that religion, capitalism, housework, and romantic love all alienate women from their interests and pursuit of justice. This piece was written in 1912, while she was an anarchist. It was a speech at an anarchist event and was printed in an anarchist journal. However, the author later became a member of parliament for the Social Democrats and then the Communists. Her activism focused on 'free love' and the critique of marriage, as well as birth control as an aspect of working-class women's liberation. (Note by Andrew McLaverty-Robinson; the original piece contains a longer introduction).

Translated by Melinda Reidinger

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Marriage, Family, and Free Love

Luisa Landová-Štychová

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In the gloom of the past we find traces of woman's freedom until the period when her maternal and civic rights were abolished with the fall of communism.

Woman, taken by surprise by nature, which had weakened her with involuntary, frequent motherhood – was made into man's prey. It's entirely logical that the male human being, who had already dared to set boundaries around a piece of land for himself, didn't hesitate to go farther and also appropriate for himself the female human being to give birth to his blood heirs.

Perhaps she resignedly surrendered – perhaps she defended herself and lost – we don't know. But it's certain that all of us proletarians – feel the weight of woman's humiliation most bitterly till the present day.

The well-known trinity – capital, militarism, and clericalism – have supports that are seemingly negligible, but actually the most powerful in marriage, even in its free form, and in the family.

A human being, as a father or mother, is more likely to let him or herself be oppressed by capital only when they have some level of certainty of the most miserable existence.

Poverty and alcohol tempt man to seek pleasure in woman's embrace, and from this is born a surplus of fodder for barracks and brothels. Human life becomes worthless.

And the cleric awaits his victim. Woman, exhausted by wage-earning and domestic work, weakened by frequent births and sleepless nights – the female human being without rights, overloaded with responsibilities, seeks support and solace in the place where until recently she was thundered against as a tool of the devil and the seducer of the miserable “stronger” sex. And they would still be thundering until today if women had not formed a strong bulwark for clericalism through their ignorance, or, among women with more awareness, an incomprehensible lack of character.

And in the female human being's traces of freedom in times of yore, we also seek a key to deciphering the problem of marriage and the family, which we have made so unnecessarily painful.

We are forced to guess this riddle by our fears for the fate of our ideals of freedom, equality, and the brotherhood of mankind – for who can guarantee that after some time these ideals will not be understood and applied in a perverse, contrary manner and that a new enslavement that is perhaps even worse will not arise and replace today's form of it!? Let's just take notice of the contradictions in the revolutionary parties themselves, despite that the ideas of freedom, equality, and universal brotherhood – are as clear as the Sun.

We say – these are personal interests, and shrug our shoulders. And these personal interests are more or less the interests of people who want to be, or already are, spouses and fathers, and who cannot and mustn't ignore them, despite their pure character. This shouldn't be overlooked.

Marriage itself, whether lawful or free, is nothing other than owning a human being. Either it originated in the delimitation of land, or it gave an impulse to said delimitation. This is indisputable.

Love is nothing more than an attack on personal freedom and on humanity itself.

The lover demands complete devotion from the beloved, and this often means ruthlessness toward others. Love demands understanding! But how! This requirement of understanding has nothing to do with the understanding conceived of by the modern free human being.

This is the so-called merging of souls, which is the relinquishment of one's own independent mental development, and this requirement is the origin of a great many misunderstandings, and unnecessary pain and arguments. A weak-natured woman usually understands her husband so perfectly that she becomes a complete caricature of him.

A woman who is stronger, but also the type who has common sense, becomes hypo-critical, cunning. She agrees with the man on everything, but manages things so that in the end she still does what she, herself, thinks is good. And a proud woman – one with strong individuality?

If she lacks nobility, she'll dominate the man. If she doesn't manage to do this, she's quarrelsome and intolerant. She has a vague inkling of the senseless humiliation of the female human being and is taking revenge for it.

A noble woman does not want to enslave a man – but she likewise does not want to be enslaved. Although she is still in thrall to the traditions of love, internally, mentally, she wants to live herself, free, and be attentive to her man just like to every human soul, respecting his freedom of opinions and expressions, but demanding the same for herself.

If the man is intellectually and emotionally intelligent, these kinds of people live more quietly than others. But not more happily. It is only a compromise, for the woman in a relationship that has

crystallized this way always remains in the second place. These are small things to look at – but we mustn't overlook them. They make up an important element in the upbringing of our children, from whom we would like to raise the liberated people of tomorrow.

The upbringing of men has been so far perverted – that a man in the household takes the position of a big child. He is unable to serve himself! If he is searching for something, he causes havoc in the wardrobe, the dresser, and perhaps also on his own desk, and in the drawers designated exclusively for his things. Daily dusting, occasional general cleanup – they make him terribly disgruntled. In these cases he is completely biased against the apartment's hygiene and considers it to be a useless effort. He annoys the woman over every button. And I even know men who speak very seriously about women's equality, but they will let their wives clean not only their clothing, but also shine their shoes, even though they could do it very easily themselves. I could count on the fingers of one hand the men I know who, in the case of their wife's illness, would be able to take care of the children, cook, wash dishes, and sweep up. It's not an innate male ineptitude. Only his petty male conceit makes him so clumsy.

You will object to me that the man, as the breadwinner, has the right to rest when he returns tired from the workshop, office, etc. – Certainly! But a woman also has this right! A man gladly acknowledges this, but which one will compromise some of his rights as “head of the family” and enable his wife to also exercise this right!? Many of them simply tell the woman that she should better divide her work and her personal time. It's perhaps the same as when a bourgeois blames a worker for not better dividing his insufficient wages.

Housework!

Constant cleaning, necessary, absolutely necessary, whether from a medical, moral, or economic perspective.

Housework!

man needs – she would poison man’s blood and suck out all of his strength, and she would be his most dangerous, most pertinacious enemy. *And it is precisely the woman whom Nietzsche claimed is cured, redeemed – the woman-mother, and next to her the even more wretched victim of marriage and the family, the woman prostitute, brutally kicked away from human society.* – Both until now silent, suffering, revolting until now only in their inner being – both of them have the fate of Nietzsche’s overman in their hands.

Perhaps always and everywhere underappreciated, and at the same time it sucks the freshness out of faces, joy out of life, it breaks pride, and makes mules out of women.

Notice the schedule of chores and whether there is one that the woman can cross off. Every day it’s the same thing. Cooking, washing dishes, airing out the rooms, cleaning up, feeding the children, putting on clothing – this all repeats three times every day. Every week to 14 days washing laundry, ironing. Sometimes a general cleanup.

And free time?

It’s scarce, and here it’s necessary to use it for sewing and mending.

And in the evening – the woman is often deathly tired, but she still resignedly performs the intimate marital duty, joylessly – rather with fear of her cares growing with a new burden of pregnancy and nights drowsing off by the cradle – but yet with a secret satisfaction that the man is still faithful. This casual faithfulness is her full reward for all the sufferings – sufferings that are small, but constant, which are tiring in the same way as a light rain that lasts for several days, during which one becomes numb and forgets that somewhere the sun is shining.

Where will she find time for self-education and raising children?

And this is a happy woman, for the man’s income suffices to support her and their children. But what about a working-class woman? By day she is, in the true sense, sucked dry by capital – and by night, she is literally beaten down by her duties as a housekeeper, wife, and mother.

The question comes to mind – who are we actually working for – who receives the sweet fruit of our doubts and our martyrdom?

Will it be our children – children of proletarians already cursed in their mothers’ wombs, women who cannot – are not allowed to live in such a way that they will bring forth strong and healthy children!? Where is that terrible, silent ally of capital that makes woman so horribly patient -?

It's marriage – a narrow, circumscribed family circle.

The perverse upbringing we have already submitted to and which habituated the man to ruin within the woman, right in the period of love, her perhaps subconscious longing for independence, and with the fatuous admiration of a male animal he spoiled her capacity for self-knowledge.

He sweetly offers to be the stake around which she, the beautiful, exquisite flower, will wind herself. The young woman very happily allows herself to be convinced that she is an exquisite flower and that it's necessary for her to have this kind of stake next to her for support. What actually drives today's human being to marriage? By this, I mean the intelligent human being who is sufficiently far enough along in his development that he enters a free marriage. It isn't only the illusion of love and a perverse maternal or paternal instinct.

I think there is far more of the dread of solitude in the longing for "merging".

Why is the human being terrified by solitude?

It's a remnant of the implanted childhood fear of the dark. The human being is confused, seeing bogeymen in the darkness of his inner self because he is unable to truly light up within – the sharp, clear light of self-knowledge. He is afraid of himself.

He has created gods and given them all the beautiful traits that he would like to possess and doesn't believe he is capable of having. He curses his faults, denounces them, excuses them, but doesn't take any serious steps to eliminate them. What would he have to do in order to be his own god?

He would have to be able to approach each one, big and small human soul, with such deep concern and understanding, perhaps the way Dostoevsky was able to – and he would have to refrain from spoiling these souls by propping them up, but instead show them the way to freedom as piercingly and ruthlessly as Nietzsche. And each such person would have to go through life healthy, strong, knowledgeable, and alone, along his own path, teaching

also rescue the female human being in the same way as the crops in meadows and fields are saved by the regulation of rivers.

Chemistry will free human beings from vulgar gratifications and effort in preparing food – it will make it impossible to exclude an entire class of people – namely, butchers – from the emotional culture, finding the nutrients necessary for the human body in legumes and grain products and is able to serve them to human beings in the most pleasing preparations.

Technology frees human beings from exhausting, enslaving work – Astronomy, which offers human beings a dizzying and yet much more subtle enjoyment than his digestive and reproductive systems.

Natural life will come into being. Human beings will eat and drink in order to be healthy and live, and they will have sex in order to rid their body of excess juices, and if they want, in order to cause new beings to come into existence.

Erotic sensations will become as obsolete as the sensations of duels or bull fights.

Thus, not only free love, but the free human being, internally immensely wealthy; free of prejudices, habits; full of understanding for every pain, every labor, every effort and error; able to go through life without moral delusions, without religious lies; without the support of official laws and still going straight, proud; living a life [that is] artistically balanced and beautiful. And here allow me one more small mention of Nietzsche, who had so cruelly laughed at women's nascent, timid desires. Woman can never and never forgive him. He is the only one who has the right not to be forgiven, for the sake of his beautiful, bold dream of the overman. For it could never come true if woman remained what she is now. Her sexual and maternal enslavement, even if released and elevated to divinity, would always and always exclude her from the rights of self-determination – it would make her soul dark, hateful, and only out of revenge, even if it were subconscious, she would overturn the concept of the free human being, of the naturalness of hu-

or irritation – these are symptoms that even the otherwise healthiest woman must bear. The birthing woman is always at the edge of a grave. Even the bravest often cannot suppress almost animal shrieks of pain. I know women who give birth almost every year and do so very easily, but they have still admitted to me – that they are terribly afraid of the awful pains in the critical moment of a child’s birth! Yet they otherwise boast of their bravery and prowess, because they are highly flattered by the praise of doctors and grandmothers.

The postpartum period and period of nursing – that is, convalescence. The mother’s torn-up insides heal. And during this period I’ve never heard either younger or older mothers saying they want to have another child later – each consoled herself that this is the last one. Does anyone have the right to impose the experience of these horrors of bodily pain again and again upon a woman as a civic duty, or else relegate her to sexual asceticism if she refuses motherhood!?

Even in this case, motherhood must be free. This bodily revolution, if it takes place more often, violates a woman’s health. If it takes place against her will, it cripples her mental development. For it’s the suffering that we take upon ourselves voluntarily that crystallizes human nature. Involuntary suffering numbs a person and makes them one-dimensional, prejudiced. And it is precisely for these reasons that we don’t have to fear that humanity will die out prematurely. Only its numbers will be limited, but on the other hand the inner worth of the human being will be increased and thus the life of each human unit will become more valuable.

A hitherto silent revolutionary, raped by capital, but dangerous to it, the subversive power of science and inventions, hastening the fall of private ownership, opens up entirely new perspectives to humanity. Doctors won’t be forced to stultify their nerves with difficult operations, dissecting rotting corpses. They will simply be teachers of health science. They will rescue human Marriage, Family, and Free Love¹⁹¹ beings from the causes of diseases. They will

himself and others, but not leaning on anyone and not holding anyone else up. Are we preparing children for life in this way? Do we truly see the future human being in a child, or merely a cute puppet or a burden!?

Of course, we and our children are the victims not only of social disorder, but also maternal love. Today’s human being lives far from a true understanding of nature. He is incapable of closer relations with her. He is satisfied with a sensation of her – he doesn’t know her deep, healing breath.

Solitude terrifies him! – he doesn’t find an indestructible joy from the wondrous beauty of the life of grass, trees – and free-living animals within himself. He doesn’t suffer because a bird fears him – that everywhere he went, he brought only fear!

He is able to pile up beautiful words about nature, he calls her a goddess – but instead of getting drunk by oxygen, sunlight, and knowledge, he would rather get drunk on alcohol.

Maternal love! Isn’t it rather a blemish on woman’s nobility? Isn’t it the only thing that makes the crystallization of a sense of justice and humanity impossible? The human being who loves – is unjust.

I’m speaking here only of what I myself have experienced internally as a woman and mother, and what I have also observed in other mothers. That maternal love is an offshoot of private ownership – that maternal love is what most hinders the fraternization of humanity, deep recognition of oneself and others – that through its untimely tolerance or senile willfulness destroys the longings of young souls for free flight, and instead of the fresh, cool, clear air, it teaches them to love the – unhealthy, stinking warmth. It offers them, instead of exquisite artistic experiences for body and soul – vulgar, unwholesome gourmandizing, indulgence of the excretory organs. For this is the way Nietzsche’s motto of “living one’s life fully” – is understood by people reared by maternal love – perversely, just like everything these rare souls gave them that was beautiful. Certainly, Nietzsche didn’t imagine the overman as an

emaciated, anemic creature with rotten lungs, a spoiled stomach, dying of syphilis. And would we be allowed to hope that people reared by maternal love, reared in this way, will be capable of bearing the ideal of socialism and the ideal of the free human being? And something more. The family unit would make woman's freedom impossible. The concept of self-determination, not only for children, but also for the woman herself, has become illusory. Two paths would appear here. Either being free, and by this freedom I mean the woman applying her abilities in any field whatsoever of science, labor, or art – and relinquishing maternity, for it would be wrong for her children to be excluded from family life – or she can be a mother and then – because, according to present opinions, a mother is best as the caregiver for her children and the protectress of the family – give up her demands for development and applying her other skills.

I think this “either/or” would be unnecessary, cruel, and humiliating for woman.

After all, there are still people – men and women, who are truly artists in the matter of understanding a child's soul, who feel an internal need to live with children and give them all the most beautiful things that they have inside themselves.

For them, there is no such concept as “someone else's child”. They simply see a child, a tiny human being prepared to take much of what is given to him.

Why shouldn't these born educators educate the children of those who lack these educational capabilities – but who have other abilities that this arrangement will allow to develop without disruption.

Why should adults and children get in one another's way? Why not admit the most natural relationship – the free development of the child among other children – a childhood without scolding, and truly sweet?

Many utter the words “barracks for children – a barracks education” with horror.

If anything can be termed a barracks education, it's today's education – if it can even be called education at all.

The entirely natural, and in the future, necessary, establishment of free motherhood and free childhood – cannot be equated by far with the idea of today's institutes for children – for example – orphanages. There, they make automatons – not people – out of children.

Children belong among other children! So that human beings needn't fear solitude, so that they can find themselves and understand the seeming chaos of billions of worlds and suns – and so they will cease being the arrogant masters of nature or its humiliated victims, it is necessary that already as children they should know the joy and pain of a broad, communal life.

And I would like to see our anemic children transferred to these dreaded barracks.

The airy bedrooms – always clean cots without heavy down bedding, only with light, soft covers – tepid baths in the morning, choice fare, nutritious, free of the crude juices of slain creatures – life in gardens – full of movement, creating hardiness but also entertaining – in such a way – so that already in tender childhood work becomes the sweetest friend of mankind. And in between, moments of silence and solitude of the educators with the children – the child will himself choose and listen to the one he understands best.

I think that our proletarian child would return with a heavy heart to a narrow family life, and I dare say that even the spoiled children of the bourgeoisie also wouldn't gladly go back to it. There, they would certainly lose the pain of overstuffed stomachs and the boredom of their social position.

Let's return once more to the woman-mother. They say there's a burning question of to what extent motherhood is harmful or beneficial to a woman's health and intelligence – and whether it is truly necessary for people to multiply in unbounded numbers. Pregnancy is, in any case, an illness. Nausea, dizziness, depression,