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Lola Landau, “The Companionate Marriage” (1929)

German-Jewish writer Lola (Leonore) Landau (1892-1990) was best known as a poet, but she also wrote plays, radio plays, and articles for various publications. This article appeared in *Die Tat*, a Jena-based monthly magazine that was devoted to culture and politics and mainly read by the educated middle class. In it, Landau discusses a new model of marriage which had been described by American juvenile-court judge and social reformer Ben Lindsey (1869-1943) in his book *The Companionate Marriage* (1927). The book’s progressive thoughts on contraception and divorce in particular triggered fierce criticism beyond the United States. In the late phase of the Weimar Republic, the conservative reaction against the social revolution of the 1920s was increasingly felt as well. In 1933, Lola Landau escaped to England and eventually emigrated to Palestine.

The Companionate Marriage

Marriage, as the cell of collective life, has always possessed a social significance that raises it far above the happiness of two individuals or the purely expedient consideration of protecting the interests of descendants. That is how marriage as a model in miniature of human community acquired its ethical idea. It became the primal basis of the larger cellular structure and the source of fruitful and constructive forces.

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By the end of the previous century the bourgeois marriage had evolved into an economic institution; the family had become a small trust with the earnings and operation of capital. The magnetic attraction of monetary accumulation, however, led increasingly to marriage for money, which suppressed its original sense of ethical community.

While a hypocritical social morality artificially maintained the old forms and symbols, they had long since rigidified into dead formulas. Venerable words like fidelity, home, and family lost their incantatory power since their content had become merely apparent. Meanwhile, however, the elemental life force of youth pressed onward under the thin veneer of convention, rooting out new paths for itself. Unnoticed, a mighty revolution in ways of life had already been completed in reality when people first began to discuss openly the crisis in marriage.

At the center of these fermenting forces is the woman of our day. As an autonomous person economically and intellectually independent from the man, the new woman shattered the old morality. The compulsory celibacy of the young woman and the indissolubility of marriage were invalidated by the straightforward reality of life. The independent woman of today, just as much as the man, assumes for herself the right to a love life before marriage, the more so since marital togetherness for the woman can signify nothing but a faint future possibility given the current numerical deficiency of men.

In this way, the psychological attitude of women toward marriage changed fundamentally. Women no longer wait for marriage, frequently not even desiring such a tie for themselves, which they fear might hinder their free development. While in previous times the life of a young woman was little more than a period of preparation for marriage, which she then took on as a full-time occupation, the woman of today is scarcely capable of accepting marriage as her life's work. Back then household activities and the never-ending work of motherhood taxed a woman's energies to the utmost. Today there is some relief to be had in the private household from modern conveniences, and birth control, a matter of utter economic necessity, either shelters women from motherhood or interrupts it with long breaks. Certainly, by being able to prevent conception, the woman has escaped from the slavery of her own body; but at the same time she is deprived of the elemental happiness of fulfilled tranquility. The woman—whose natural maternal energies, through no fault of her own, have to lay fallow today, who, just like the man is forced at an early age into the work-a-day grind—searches for a substitute experience of her vitality and finds it in fruitful employment, usually outside the home. The occupational independence thus gained signifies as well a looser psychological tie to the man. The home is no longer the fortified garden of profound and happy rest. Family life is also subject to the effects of the transformation; it is already being replaced, in part, by the self-tutelage of the young, by group life that takes the children out of their parents' house.

Who would want to deny that this reorganization unsettles certain essential emotional values, that it silences a kind of gentle atmospheric music! But development marches to a relentless beat. No wishful romanticism can force woman back to her earlier way of being. The bourgeois woman has also become a worker. Her face, too, is chiseled by the hard mechanism of our time; she too is subject to the depersonalization and leveling of our age. And she too will slowly have to assume the shape of the new female personality in order to stand beside the man as an equal and complementary companion.

If, however, the man of today continues to seek the woman of yesterday, his creature, the pliant helpmate, he will be bitterly disappointed not to find her anymore.

Marriage and its value as the cell of community is threatened with crisis. For new ideas of marriage have not yet caught on. What is permitted today? Nearly everything. But what is truly good? What is bad? The warning signals of inhibition no longer function. Everywhere, however, one notes the confusion, the aimlessness, a tortured seeking, and in between, the impotent smile of flippancy.

In his book, *Companionate Marriage,* Ben Lindsey, the American juvenile-court judge, has attempted to save marriage from this chaos by lending it a new form. As impossible as it is simply to transpose his reform proposals into our European conditions, he nevertheless offers fruitful suggestions from his socially critical point of view. Lindsey would like to introduce, alongside permanent marriage, the companionate marriage as a second legal form of marriage. Companionate marriage in his sense denotes the lawful tie between two young people who, in the first years, use birth control to avoid having children, so that they can check carefully whether their respective characters will match harmoniously in the long run.

If the first rush of love has passed and the young people have been disappointed in their expectations, then the companionate marriage can be dissolved quite easily. All that is required for divorce is a simple, mutual agreement. Nor is there any obligation of support, since they have no responsibility for children and the wife has continued in her occupation. If, however, the two people live happily with each other, then after a certain trial period they can change their companionate marriage into a family marriage and fulfill their desires for children.

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The marriage of the future will perhaps be the companionate marriage, but in a much broader sense than Lindsey's. It will mean not only a childless trial marriage for young people but the ever-maturing challenge to live a full life. It will reestablish in another form its original idea of community and grow into a fruitful cell in the overall cellular state. It will unite the woman, with her informed views and matured heart, to the man as a comrade, and two free personalities will march along the same path toward a great goal, allowing the uniform beat of their steps to blend into a single rhythm.

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