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1898

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Marriage is immoral

René Chaughi

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Two people, a man and a woman, love each other. Do we think they'll be discreet enough not to announce from house to house the day and hour when...? We think wrong. These people won't stop until they've informed everyone of their plans: relatives, friends, suppliers, and neighbors will be told. Until then, they won't believe the "thing" is permissible. And I'm not talking about marriages of convenience, in which immorality is flagrant from the outset; I deal with love, and I see that, far from purifying it and giving it a sanction it doesn't need, marriage debases and debases it.

The future husband approaches the father and mother and asks permission to sleep with their daughter. This is already in dubious taste. What do the parents respond? Eager to assimilate their daughter to these ladies as foolish, ridiculous, and distinguished as they are rich, they want to know the contents of her purse, her position in the world, her future— In a word, to find out if he's a serious fool. There's no better expression to describe this dealer.

Let's look at our accepted young man. Let's not think the series of immoralities is over: it's only just beginning. Of course, each goes to his notary, and long and bitter merchant-like arguments begin between the two parties, in which each wants to receive much

more than he gives; in other words, in which each tries to make his own deal. Whatever little affection the two young men may have for each other, their parents seem determined to dispel, tainting and drowning it under sordid concerns for profit. Then come the warnings in which it is announced, with the sound of trumpets, that on such a date, Mr. "X" will fornicate, for the first time, with Miss "Y."

Thinking about these things, one wonders how a reputable and modest girl can endure all this without dying of shame. But it is, above all, the wedding day, with its absurd ceremonies and customs, that I find profoundly immoral and, let's put it bluntly, obscene. The bride appears dressed up—as the ancients adorned victims before immolating them on the altar—in ridiculous attire; those white garments and those orange blossoms form a completely out-of-place symbol: they draw attention to the act about to take place and become shamefully insistent.

Shall I talk about the guests? About their pretentiously foolish way of dressing, their trappings as laughable as they are emphatic, their pompous and silly manners, their extraordinarily uglinessy games? Shall I enumerate all these people, stretched, plumped, groomed, pinned, squeezed, curled, stuffed into their clothes, their feet bruised in tight boots, their hands compressed by gloves, their necks crushed by false collars; this whole world worried about soiling itself, eager to devour, "hungry," as the poet calls them, come hoping to procure one of those meals that mark the epoch in the life of a freeloading man?

How can two young people resolve, without repugnance, to begin their bliss in front of such an abominably grotesque decoration, to make their love amidst these masks and amidst such disgusting caricatures?

In the street, people run to see them: they are completely comical; gossips appear at the doors, children scream and run. Everyone tries to catch a glimpse of the bride: the men with greedy eyes, the women with degrading glances; And, all around, we hear vulgar

this is monstrously abominable! For this is a slavery worse than the others, more infamous and more horrifying than any! What can be more forcing for a woman than to be possessed in spite of herself? Isn't the sexual act, depending on whether it is consented to or not, the greatest joy of joys or the greatest of humiliations?

Ah, if freedom is in accord with morality, it must exist in the matter of love, or anywhere else! This marriage is nothing more than public violence prepared for an orgy.

that such a delicate and important revelation be inaugurated before an assembly of drunks.

Ah! Look, wretch, look at all these honorable people spitting up the excess food they choked on. These are the virtuous people who profess a rigid morality. They are married too; their revelry has received legal sanction and the divine seal; even the deformed monkeys they produce are of a higher quality than the rest. Look at them: this one here has a whole brood of offspring in the city; the other has his heirs manufactured by the neighbor above; Mr. and Mrs. "X" scratch each other daily; those are separated, these are divorced; this old man bought that beautiful girl at a good price; this young man married that old woman for her money; as for that marriage over there, everyone knows it's prospering, despite being held up as a model, thanks to the wife's escapades and the husband's complacently closed eyes. And it is, perhaps, the least repugnant of all, since, at least, those two understand each other perfectly. But all these people are honorable; they have all registered. Their filth has received the approval of the man with the tricolor sash and the man with the surplice. That's why they are welcomed everywhere, while the doors are closed to those who have committed the folly of loving each other loyally, without a number and without any ceremony. The bridal chamber...!

Theoretically, the betrothed knows nothing of the mystery of the sexes; she ignores the true, sole purpose of marriage. If she knows anything, it is fraudulently and in contempt of maternal instructions. What, then, is this "yes" she has given in response to a demand whose full significance she is unaware of? What regard, then, for her personality in all this, disposing of her body without her consent, leaving her, angel of candor, flower of purity, in the arms of an overexcited and unconscious pepper? What! You will give your daughter to some random individual, who barely knows you, perhaps plagued by strange vices, in whom carnal, sexual education has taken place who knows where; you will abandon her to make her their secret fantasy, and that without warning her? For

allusions to the wedding night, double-meanings that imply—oh, so discreetly!—that the husband will not have a bad time. And she, poor girl, the sweet lamb, cause and end of such stupid jokes, three-quarters of which undoubtedly reach her ears, is hiding in a corner of the carriage, behind the favorable obesity of her parents? Oh no! She, shamelessly enthroned in her carriage, leans out of the window smiling to attract the attention of the crowd. And what makes her radiant with joy, much more than the love of her fiancé and legitimate physiological satisfaction, is considering herself looked at and envied; it is being able to outshine—even if only for a day—the worst-dressed, to mock her old friends who remain single, to arouse jealousy and sadness around her, in short, to flaunt those immodest clothes that offer her to the laughter of the public and should fill her with shame. All in all, this is revoltingly cynical.

Later, at the mayor's office, where an ordinary gentleman officiates, with no other prestige than the display of a blue, white, and red sash. After the desolate reading of a few articles of an idiotic code, humiliating and insulting to the dignity of the two beings to whom it applies, the individual from the patriotic sash delivers a vulgar, pedestrian speech, and all is finished. Here are our two heroes definitively united. Without that preliminary hubbub, tonight's fornication would have been an improper and criminal act; but thanks, no doubt, to the magic words of the man with the tricolor sash, that same act is a healthy and normal act... What am I saying! A social duty. Oh, mystery before which the Trinity is nothing more than child's play!

For my part, I would have believed just the opposite. It seems to me that a young man and a young woman who decide to engage in sexual intercourse for the first time would have tried to avoid publicity first. Sexual intercourse, even when performed in secret, is still disturbing; even more so in the presence of witnesses. It seems immoral, and the moral, noble, and delicate thing to do is to go and confide in a funny pen-pusher, obtain a permit, and be registered

and numbered, like racehorses whose offspring are monitored or herds that are wisely bred.

How can we fail to see that if the State requires these outrageous formalities, it is only out of self-interest, so as not to lose sight of its taxpayers, to keep them in a spirit of obedience, and to be able to easily lay hands on future offspring? You must be registered somewhere; and if not at the Mayor's Office, then at the Police Prefecture. On the list, always on the list; we cannot escape. Marriage is a means of further enslaving men. Defend it, then, as an instrument of domination, as a support of the current order, if you will. But don't talk about morality.

The procession forms up to go to church. Will a religious marriage provide the sanction that civil marriage has not been able to grant to the union of two young people? Yes, if they believe in one God and see the priest as his earthly representative. In that case, there's nothing to be said. Granted, all that's allowed, and nothing should be surprising.

But this isn't the case most of the time. Some don't set foot in any church after their First Communion. And if they enter today, it's to do like the others: for convenience and, above all, to make the ceremony more beautiful, the celebration more complete; to perform their service in an even brighter, more brilliant light.

During Mass, the ladies murmur, whisper, arrange the folds of their dresses, trying to assert their graces and splashing each other, making faces under the lustful glances of the men. The latter, looking sideways, throw out fat phrases, feeling impatient to be burdened with such women. And while the priest, with a mocking expression, admonishes the newlyweds, the sexton raids the pockets of those present.

The young couple have begun their union by lying to themselves and to others, accepting a faith that is not their own, lending their example to beliefs they judge perhaps harmful, certainly erroneous, and at which they will be laughed at behind the scenes. This beautiful debut of existence in lies and hypocrisy seems to

be the final sanction of their union, the mysterious seal that proclaims it holy and irrevocable. This morality is, for us, the height of immorality. Beware of it.

Once the guests have had their fill, they take to their carriages again, to display themselves one last time before the public: "Look carefully at the bride dressed in white, ladies and gentlemen; she is still pure; but tonight she will no longer be. It is that gallant young man who will see to it. Dry your eyes, for it costs nothing." For a moment, they'll be invited to touch it. All the passersby perk up at the sight of this curious beast... which they dream of possessing. How much unconsciousness must a girl have to endure that without her heart leaping?

The day, so well begun, ends even better. The union of bodies is preluded, through a general graphic custom. Some, in view of the wedding, fast for many days. They stuff themselves. The excess of food and wine swells the face, injects the eyes, further dulls the brain; the stomachs become congested and so do the lower abdomen. In a tacit agreement, all thoughts converge on the work of reproduction; conversations become genital. In veiled phrases, the good mischief of our fathers is reproduced; all the delicious pornography that flourished under the French sun triumphs again. Laughter mingles with the belches of labored digestion. And all eyes eagerly watch the growing suffocation of the wife's cheeks. In vain. The chaste girl with the pure forehead seems as relieved by this ignominy as an old senator in a brothel. She doesn't complain.

And thank goodness that at dessert some picaresque couplet doesn't come along to once again excite the guests' eroticism, and a simulation of confusion becomes necessary in the bride's house. It seems as if they want to debase, in the eyes of the newlyweds, the function for which they have united; they seem to want to make it more bestial than it really is, as if it were necessary that its fulfillment be accompanied by indigestion, as if it were indispensable