

## **'To see this hollow institution as desirable is laughable'**

Dea Birkett vows she'll never say 'I do'

I am a mother in my 40s, and have been living with my boyfriend for a very long time. But I am not married, for one reason only. I don't want to be.

I didn't realise the hegemony marriage still holds until a few hours after my first child was born. I was lying in my hospital bed, when a photographer captured my daughter's first few hours. When they asked for my name, I replied, "Dea Birkett", so they asked: "Miss or Mrs?" I said, "Miss." I was handed a card, which read: "We also do weddings."

Even today, the presumption is that mothers want to get married. If they don't, it is because they can't: they are too old, ugly, or unloved. But three children later, the attractions of tying the knot still elude me. The sham begins at the wedding ceremony. The most unpalatable aspect of this costume drama is that it forces the bride and groom to lie. The "'til death us do part" promise is meaningless. It is not the same as making an oath that you will never move out of town, drive the family car more than 40mph, or buy a dog - all things you have some control over. Falling in and out of love is unpredictable. Promising to love someone forever is a promise no honest person would make.

I hope I will live happily ever after with my non-married man. But the only thing marriage guarantees is that you are more likely to stay married. You don't have to see your spouse for years - you can live in different countries - yet still be married. You don't have to do the decent thing - you can be adulterous or celibate. Happiness and fulfilment are not part of the package.

To see this hollow institution as a desirable moral position is laughable. Marriage isn't the gold standard for relationships. Singledom, in which someone is entirely free to leave if the relationship becomes intolerable, is surely a far more principled way to live.

I wouldn't presume to recommend living in supposed sin for everyone. But I do wish some people didn't rush so headily up the aisle. Although they may have the best of intentions (squeezing that new dishwasher out of the in-laws or getting their kids into a church school), they are colluding in a system that discriminates against New Spinsters like me. Nor do they try to change it from the inside; I haven't noticed armies of radical marrieds standing up for those couples who choose to stay legally separate. They are getting their tax allowance, pensions, full recognition of their parenthood. What should they care that the rest of us are denied such rights? I am proud that, despite huge financial incentives, I cannot be bought.

But what about this thing called love, the blissfully married cry? People kid themselves that marriage is a romantic match. But it is not about individuals. It is about the state sanction of certain kinds of relationship. The couple are immaterial; they are just a means of making sure that bonds are formed between appropriate sets of people - according to class, race, sexuality and disability. Marriages are about the bonding of two clans. Your spouse's family is part of the wedding deal.

This marriage of convenience - society's convenience - is not for me. I don't need my class, or my extended family, or the state to ratify my relationship. And certainly not a photographer on the maternity ward.

**Find words in the text meaning:**

- 1) to make a determined decision or promise to do something..... **vow, make an oath**
- 2) something which encourages a person to do something .....**incentive**
- 3) to act together secretly or illegally in order to deceive or cheat someone.....**collude**
- 4) having a hole or empty space inside.....**hollow**
- 5) to not be caught by someone.....**elude**
- 6) describes a fact or idea that is unpleasant or shocking and therefore difficult to accept, food that is unpleasant to taste or eat ..... **unpalatable**
- 7) approval or permission, especially formal or legal .....**sanction**
- 8) having a powerful effect, making you feel slightly drunk or excited .....**heady**
- 9) something which is not what it seems to be and is intended to deceive people, or someone who pretends to be something they are not .....**sham**
- 10) to say that an event or action will happen in the future, especially as a result of knowledge or experience ..... **predict**

**True or false?**

- 1) The author lives alone. .... **FALSE**
- 2) The author is old and ugly. .... **FALSE**
- 3) The author says everyone should stay single..... **FALSE**
- 4) The author says marriage does not guarantee you will not be cheated on..... **TRUE**
- 5) The author says you can promise to love someone your whole life..... **FALSE**
- 6) The author wants to buy a dog. .... **FALSE**
- 7) The photographer offered to marry her..... **FALSE**
- 8) Some people who marry expect a new dishwasher. .... **TRUE**
- 9) Marriage is a legal act sanctioned by the state..... **TRUE**
- 10) People who marry promise to love each other until they die. .... **TRUE**