

# ‘A Feminist Disciple of Nietzsche’: The Case of Dora Marsden’s Unstable Anarchism

*Dominique Miething*

## ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a considerable number of anarchists grappled with the works of Friedrich Nietzsche. This article presents a highly peculiar reading of the German philosopher’s ideas by the radical suffragist and short time anarchist Dora Marsden. The adoption of concepts such as ‘master morality’, ‘genius’ or the critique of language enabled her to formulate a non-essentialist feminist identity. Failing to confront the elitism that haunts Nietzsche’s philosophy, however, Marsden’s anarchism eventually collapsed.

**Keywords:** *Dora Marsden, Friedrich Nietzsche, essentialism, feminism, reception history*

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## INTRODUCTION

In late 1911, the radicalism of a new journal called *The Freewoman* caused a stir inside the feminist movement. Its editor was the young activist Dora Marsden (1882-1960). Disappointed by what she perceived as the limitations of the British suffragists’ campaign for the vote, Marsden set out to infuse her journal with an emancipatory identity by choosing a title with implicitly Nietzschean qualities. Thus, in January 1913, an anonymous author aptly labelled Marsden ‘A Feminist Disciple of Nietzsche’.<sup>1</sup> Furthering this characterisation, I will argue that *The Freewoman’s* mindset drew on the idea of master morality, enabling anyone interested in emancipation to reach a definition of the self without relying on a binary logic; the idea of who women are, or who they may become, should not depend on the existence of a predefined model created by men. In other words, striving for the vote simply because men have it merely oriented women’s emancipation towards male standards.

Rather, Marsden equipped the 'Freewoman' figure with the rare heroic qualities of the genius, urging her to renounce social asceticism in favour of a free unfolding of individual desires. Finding inspiration in Nietzsche's critique of language, the Freewoman also refused to base her identity on the essentialist notion of 'Woman as such'.<sup>2</sup> Marsden's careless immersion in popular Nietzschean themes came at a price, however. The German philosopher not only provided the conceptual tools for the construction of the Freewoman figure but the imitation of his anti-egalitarian posture destabilised Marsden's anarchism.

This paper primarily aims to analyse the Nietzschean influence on Marsden. It thus provides an account of her ideological development prior to her endorsement of the Young Hegelian Max Stirner (1806-1856) and his radical individualism from August 1912 onward. A secondary aim is to gain a better understanding of why she turned away from anarchism altogether. Her move has usually been attributed either to Stirnerism alone or, if Nietzsche's influence is mentioned, only by casually crediting him with 'opening the egoist pathway'<sup>3</sup> to Stirner after 1890. Indeed, the ideas of Stirner, whose Egoism Marsden explicitly praises, and those of Nietzsche, whose philosophical motifs she had drawn upon before – albeit silently – merge to such an extent that it *seems* as if she moved from anarchy-feminism straight to extreme individualism by reading Stirner alone.

Proposing a more gradual process, I will argue that her tacit use of Nietzschean elitism eventually allowed for an authoritarian reading of Stirner's ideas to emerge in her thinking. To make Marsden's political trajectory comprehensible, the first part of the paper outlines her suffragist activism and her early anarchist sympathies, the latter of which served as a corrective to the deficiencies she deplored in bourgeois feminism. The second part then situates Marsden within the early Nietzschean cycles in the anarchist movement. Finally, the third and main part fleshes out the theoretical elements and feminist opportunities of her unacknowledged discipleship to the German philosopher in detail, including the related collapse of her anarchist affiliations.

## **SUFFRAGIST ACTIVISM AND EARLY ANARCHIST SYMPATHIES**

In 1903, Marsden left Manchester University with a degree in philosophy. She had committed herself to the advocacy for women's rights in previous years and had established contacts with some protagonists of the movement, among them Christabel Pankhurst (1880-1958), Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928), and Teresa Billington-Greig (1877-1964). In 1908, Marsden joined the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). When the WSPU offered her a paid position a year

later, she quit her teaching job to devote her energy to her political work. Around 1909, after experiencing state repression first hand through censorship, arrest and internment – for a while even in a straightjacket – she began sympathising with anti-authoritarian ideas.

Most noticeably between 1909 and the end of 1912, Marsden's feminism became more radical, temporarily permeated by anarchism. From the start of her political journey as an activist to its end as a lonesome editor, the prime force driving her political work was the freedom of the individual. 'It is why we believe in free institutions, and why in the last resort we recognise there is no law save the law of our own being, why we are anarchists, in short'.<sup>4</sup> Serving as a remedy to her dissatisfaction with mainstream suffragism, she exhibited her sympathies for some core tenets of this ideology: the practice of direct action, a distrust in hierarchical governance and in the state, and an anti-capitalist interest in syndicalism.

Marsden did not restrict herself to the classic modes of political participation – not in the least because one of the most important avenues in a representative democracy, voting, was not open to her as a woman. She confronted the bastion of male politics by drawing on the direct action repertoire of the anarchists. To arouse attention for women's enfranchisement, Marsden once hurled a ball through the front window of a political meeting venue; the inscription on the ball read 'bomb'. She was incarcerated several times for her protest against the structurally unjust treatment of women. On another occasion, the police had to carry her down from the rooftop of the Empire Hall in Southport after she vociferously interrupted Winston Churchill's speech while dangling from a vent hole in the ceiling.<sup>5</sup>

Such direct actions played an integral part of Marsden's activism, which she tried to substantiate theoretically. For instance, she characterised the hunger strike as an effective method for defending the voluntaristic individual. 'It is the intensive force of the will of the individual pitted against the extensive force of the will of the community [...] It is a final retort of a minority to the majority that would govern it without its consent',<sup>6</sup> she wrote.

The WSPU leadership finally grew tired of Marsden's unauthorised actions. After numerous disputes in 1910, she resigned from the organisation and left her job in January 1911.<sup>7</sup> Despite that the WSPU itself belonged to the militant wing of the women's movement, the leadership's continuous row with Marsden and others over strategic questions and their hierarchical mode of organising made clear that the frontiers of feminist discourse were still under exploration. 'We say that feminism is the whole issue, political enfranchisement a branch issue, and that methods, militant or otherwise, are merely accidentals',<sup>8</sup> Marsden explicated in the first issue of her journal. Her understanding of feminism as an intermediary for

the eventual dissolution of patriarchy into a humanist gender equilibrium became the starting point of her radical identity politics.<sup>9</sup> Although Marsden stayed true to the main goals of the women's movement – gender equality and the vote – she also moved further into the intellectual avant-garde as the editor of three successive journals, *The Freewoman* (1911-12), *The New Freewoman* (1912-14) and *The Egoist* (1914-15).<sup>10</sup>

Thinking about how to deal with the state, Marsden adopted a contradictory position. While she came to consider the attainment of the vote as futile for women's emancipation and wanted to see all Freewomen work for the 'destruction'<sup>11</sup> of government itself, she did not shy away from accepting limited state intervention. As Lucy Delap has shown, Marsden cultivated the idea that the state should retain a military apparatus, yet should abstain from interfering with its internal structure. Similarly, she advocated the nationalisation of the educational system, as well as placing mail delivery and public transportation under state control. Marsden even went so far as equipping the state with the power to administer the distribution of land and to punish those who barred access to it.<sup>12</sup> She stood equidistant between the socialist credo of abolishing private property and wage slavery after seizing control of the state, and the Liberal defence of private property.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of economics, Marsden advocated a notion of property that conforms with a highly individualistic outlook. She was convinced that the appropriation and possession of property directly depends upon the individual's intellectual and physical strength. Regarding economic hierarchies in society, women should escape their dependency from men: 'To this end she must open up resources of wealth for herself. She must work, earn money. She must seize upon the incentives which have spurred on men to strenuous effort – wealth, power, titles, and public honour'.<sup>14</sup> Such an affirmative stance towards capitalist wage labour seems to have been an expression of her desire to offer women an immediate way out of their precarious situation.

That Marsden gave priority to economic power over political participation also reflects her moderate interest in syndicalist uprisings. She particularly valued the 'insurrectionary part'<sup>15</sup> of this direct-democratic union model, encouraging women to found their own syndicalist chapters.<sup>16</sup> Despite these occasional displays of sympathy for workers' strikes, nothing connected her to the socialist strand of anarchism; she valued workplace struggles only insofar as they were a mild form of will power – Nietzsche's voluntarism already looming in the background – and not primarily as a means in the conflict between labour and capital.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, Marsden's ignorance of a clear sociological understanding of economic exploitation

paved the way for a vulgar anticapitalism. Both factors help explain why she also succumbed to the antisemitic delusion of a Jewish world conspiracy.<sup>18</sup>

This account of Marsden's anarchism comes in broad strokes. Still, it should suffice to make clear the shaky foundations of her thought, which were composed of an ever-increasing individualism, *ressentiment* driven anticapitalism, and an ambivalence towards the role of the state. All of these components destabilised her anarchist sympathies from early on; to some degree, it was only a question of time before she finally turned away from them.

Indeed, it is debatable whether Marsden should be considered an anarchist at all or rather be classified as a philosophical Egoist following Max Stirner's main work *The Ego and Its Own* (1848).<sup>19</sup> At the theoretical heart of *The Ego and Its Own* lies the notion of 'Eigentum', usually translated as 'ownness' but more literally rendered as 'property'. Both English words capture the specific problems of Stirner's theory of 'Eigentum', for his text makes it almost impossible to differentiate between a desired character trait ('ownness') and a tangible good ('property'). In his work, Stirner uses 'Eigentum' to denote all qualities of the individual, such as his or her abilities, desires, and will to do something. In the world of the Egoist, everything is oriented towards preserving her or his unique identity. This is where 'Eigentum' in the material sense comes in.

Private property was for Stirner the expression and guarantor of the individual's being. Still, Stirner deemed it misguided to assume the existence of a natural or positive 'right' to property. The Egoist standpoint considers the claim to a patch of land as a pure matter of power. Thus, the earth 'belongs to him who knows how to take it, or who does not let it be taken from him, does not let himself be deprived of it. If he appropriates it, then not only the earth, but the right to it too, belongs to him. This is *egoistic right*: *i.e.*, it is right for *me*, therefore it is right'.<sup>20</sup> In this way, Stirner's formula is susceptible to a might-makes-right worldview, and thus contains the seeds of authoritarianism; whoever wants to become free, in the logic of Stirner, must side with those who can assert themselves. At best, the Egoist will only tolerate equality and solidarity – some key principles of anarchism—as long as he or she benefits from them. Other readings of Stirner are certainly possible and the anti-authoritarian Egoist deserves its place in the anarchist tradition, yet what I am concerned with here is not a general inquiry into his thought, but with what became of it at hands of Marsden.

Scholars have identified Marsden as a promoter of freedom in the tradition of Stirner and have placed her in proximity to the individualist camp of anarchism.<sup>21</sup> Since an in-depth discussion of her possible place in the anarchist canon exceeds the purpose of this paper, and because I suspect the bulk of the relevant arguments

are akin to whether Stirner himself should be classified as an anarchist,<sup>22</sup> I will limit myself to outlining Marsden's tacit Nietzscheanism below. Additionally, I will analyse why it bears some responsibility for her eventual embrace of *some* authoritarian implications of Stirnerism, as well as her abandonment of anarchism. Her Nietzschean elitism, left uncriticised, is one among other factors that prevented her interest in Stirner from converging with the social anarchists' considerably more careful reading of Stirner's ideas. For example, Emma Goldman and Robert Reitzel valued Stirner's attack on Christianity, while Herbert Read praised his fiercely anti-dogmatic spirit.<sup>23</sup> Unlike Marsden, none of them drifted into an apologia for domination, because their emphasis on equality as an unconditional prerequisite for the liberation of the individual guarded against any potential elitism. All of them however, including Marsden, displayed a tendency to treat Stirner and Nietzsche as part of the same philosophical tradition, making the two German philosophers' ideas almost indistinguishable.<sup>24</sup> The following sections spotlight the decisive role that her implicit Nietzscheanism played in Marsden's anarcho-feminism.

## DISCERNING NIETZSCHE'S INFLUENCE ON MARSDEN

Around the turn of the century, a fascination with Nietzsche rippled through the United Kingdom. Older reception histories convey that for a long time it was exclusively men, such as George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells, who introduced Nietzsche's iconoclastic thoughts to an intellectually minded public.<sup>25</sup> Sure enough, the early British reception began in avant-garde circles, the hotbeds for modern ideas in art (e.g. Expressionism), politics (e.g. Socialism, Feminism, and Individualism) or psychology (e.g. Freud's psychoanalysis, Le Bon's crowd psychology). Channelling Nietzsche's thoughts through the pages of John Basil Barnhill's *The Eagle and the Serpent* (1898-1902) and Alfred Orage's *The New Age* (1907-1922), these relatively small journals prepared the intellectual ground from which Marsden's implicit reading would eventually emerge.<sup>26</sup>

After her resignation from the WSPU, Marsden published with Mary Gawthorpe (1881-1973) the first issue of *The Freewoman* in November 1911. Gawthorpe, who had befriended Orage at the Leeds Art Club, significantly helped to shape the new journal in the spirit of *The New Age*. Both Marsden and Gawthorpe's editorial work fostered Orage's influential and arguably both overt and more liberal Nietzscheanism. They combined it with lingering debates on the battle for women's rights and the burgeoning tradition of Anglo-American literary modernism. Both *Freewoman* editors adopted the controversial character of *The New Age*, allowing for a broad spectrum of opinions. Therefore, Robert Scholes'

observation that the latter's pages were filled by a 'turbulent, volatile left, in which anarchism and authoritarianism rubbed shoulders, and politics mixed with art more deeply than in other places',<sup>27</sup> is equally true of the former journal. *The Freewoman's* radicalism surpassed Orage's editorials so much that Marsden's later co-editor of *The Egoist*, Harriet Shaw Weaver (1876-1961), alluded to Zarathustra's loneliness and quipped that the later *New Freewoman* 'must have been edited on a mountain top it breathed so heavily the spirit of freedom'.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, Marsden's editorship did not feature at all in earlier scholarly investigations on Nietzsche's reception. Her biographers and other publications on feminism and modernism<sup>29</sup> have since set out to correct this omission. Bruce Clarke, for instance, argues that the Freewoman figure can be seen as a 'feminist retort to Nietzsche's Übermensch'.<sup>30</sup> Maria Camboni similarly claims that the 'freewoman was the joint product of Emersonian individualism and the Nietzschean cult of the superman'.<sup>31</sup> Both are right insofar as the vocabulary and numerous conceptual borrowings from the German philosopher's works – such as master and slave morality, genius and the order of rank- certainly point to his influence.

Curiously enough, Marsden refers to Nietzsche only once in her articles, three years after *The Freewoman* ceased to exist. This was after she had moved away from her short-lived anarchist sympathies for good and fully embraced an exclusive Stirnerian worldview incompatible with the idea of non-domination. Evoking a standard contemporary comparison between Stirner and Nietzsche, Marsden remarked:

The Germans are virile and their virility comes out in their thinking. Incisive, penetrating, there is the memory of an edge felt somewhere left even when they are dull. And when they are not dull! Stirner was a German, born and buried in Berlin. Of course the English can only gather there was a German Nietzsche: something a little more flashy and possessing considerably less 'edge'.<sup>32</sup>

Marsden was certainly not alone in mentioning Stirner and Nietzsche in the same breath. Selwyn Weston, a contributor to other anarchist journals, such as Guy A. Aldred's *The Herald of Revolt*, had also named Stirner as Nietzsche's forebear in the *Freewoman's* January issue of 1912.<sup>33</sup>

Such an assumption was symptomatic of an ongoing controversy among anarchists since the 1890s, primarily divided by the fault line of the individualistic and socialistic strands of this ideology. The individualist camp, represented by John Henry Mackay, Benjamin R. Tucker and J.L. Walker, broadly considered Nietzsche ill-suited for the liberation of the individual from domination. These three writers

bemoaned the recurring contradictions in his works, as well as his misogyny and an inconsistency towards the role of the state.<sup>34</sup> By contrast, social anarchists such as Emma Goldman, Max Baginski and Gustav Landauer prized Nietzsche's voluntarism as well as his critique of culture, morality and positivism, while at the same time staying clear of his anti-humanist tendencies.<sup>35</sup> Peter Kropotkin raised the social anarchists' critical distance to an almost pathological antipathy against Nietzsche's 'bourgeois individualism',<sup>36</sup> suspecting it of fuelling the individualist strand of anarchism.<sup>37</sup> As we shall see, Marsden occupies a rather strange position within this long-standing row, for she never discussed Nietzsche, yet affirmatively engaged with his motifs: a move untypical for individualist anarchists such as herself. Carried away by the *Übermensch*-rhetoric, Marsden exclaimed in December 1911: '[Women] will push open the door of the super-world'.<sup>38</sup>

Providing an explanation for this discrepancy between the presence of Nietzsche's ideas and their lack of explicit mention, Lucy Delap's indispensable study on *The Feminist Avant-Garde* meticulously documents how the notions of genius, of the exceptional individual, the great personality, or the 'superwoman', became commonplace within Anglo-American feminist literature before the First World War.<sup>39</sup> Delap skilfully locates the political thought of Marsden in this discourse and highlights how many other 'advanced feminists' also took part in an 'introspective turn', that is, 'a desire to seek liberation not through 'externals', such as rights granted by men, but through internal transformation of one's psyche and sexual being'.<sup>40</sup> What is missing from Delap's and other scholarly analyses, however, is the curious interplay between Marsden's implicit reading of Nietzsche, her blending of this with an explicit Stirnerism, and the incipient collapse of her anarchism towards the last quarter of 1912. I aim to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive account of her appropriation of Nietzschean concepts and their utility for the construction of her Freewoman figure.

## **FREEWOMEN AND BONDWOMEN**

In the first issue of her journal, Marsden outlines the character traits of the Freewoman in a deliberately provocative manner. By first painting a negative image of 'Bondwomen', she creates, and hence compares, two psychological types, which, I shall argue, correspond to Nietzsche's dichotomy of master and slave morality. Freewomen, according to Marsden, distinguish themselves through 'spiritual separateness' from Bondwomen. Harboursing a submissive personality structure, Bondwomen are mere decorative ornaments of other people, incapable of reaching personal autonomy. This portrayal of Bondwomen caricatures the dominant



position among those suffragettes, who, as Marsden perceived it, ask for external political freedom to be bestowed upon them by the democratic state instead of simply taking those freedoms from men, that is, on the basis that women already exist as free individuals.<sup>41</sup>

Nietzsche's slave morality concept appears to have inspired the psychological characteristics of the Bondwoman type. Women, Marsden asserts, have perpetuated their historically disadvantaged position in society through their compliant behaviour. Holding men alone responsible for women's misery is an expression of slavish disposition or, as Nietzsche has it, of '*ressentiment*',<sup>42</sup> meaning the intellectual move to locate the source of one's own suffering exclusively beyond the reach of one's own responsibility. Because of this, men have never accepted women as equal and are now opposed to their demands.

The opponents of the Freewomen are not actuated by spleen or by stupidity, but by dread. This dread is founded upon ages of experience with a being who, however well loved, has been known to be an inferior, and who has accepted all the conditions of inferiors. Women, women's intelligence, and women's judgement have always been regarded with more or less secret contempt, and when woman now speaks of 'equality' all the natural contempt which a higher order feels for a lower when it presumes bursts out into the open. [...] Women as a whole have shown nothing save 'servant' attributes. All those activities which presuppose the master-qualities, the standard-making, the law-giving, the moral-framing, belong to men. Religions, philosophies, legal codes, standards in morals, canons in art have all issued from men, while women have been the 'followers,' 'believers,' the 'law-abiding,' the 'moral,' the conventionally admiring.<sup>43</sup>

For Marsden, it is within the powers of women themselves to become conscious of their 'master-qualities' and to extract from them the possibility of achieving a Freewoman's status. Hers are the attributes of Nietzsche's master morality type in which Marsden sees the key to female emancipation. This, of course, is on the condition that women adopt them willingly and assert sovereignty over their own identity.

Beginning with the 'Bondwomen' article, motifs imported from Nietzsche's works, such as that of the master and slave moralities, gave Marsden's politics an inegalitarian twist. This was not because these motifs in themselves are necessarily elitist, but because she introduces them tacitly and without reference to the subtleties present in the original. Here, the concept of master and slave moralities is a socio-psychological description of two conflicting types that may exist 'inside the

same person even, within a single soul'.<sup>44</sup> Yet, the way Marsden implicitly portrays Free- and Bondwomen as mirror images of Nietzsche's concept fails to differentiate between ideal types and real human beings, the former of which she assigns to a harsh either/or category of the latter.

As many social anarchists' positive references to Nietzsche prove, there was liberating potential in his philosophy as well as a deeply inegalitarian undertone. Marsden captured the core aspect of Nietzsche's aristocratic posture, and this announced itself semantically as a 'master' attitude, but she neglected to consider that this is always open to interpretation and that it need not materialise politically as an ideal. If the long Nietzsche reception history teaches us anything, it is that the early Nietzscheans did not uniformly adopt a straightforwardly 'elitist' understanding of Nietzsche's work. They advanced diverse interpretations, following the inner contradictions of his statements and posthumous editorial commentaries testify to this.

The condescending lead article 'Bondwomen' accelerated the process of bringing male stereotypes to the fore and elicited angry letters from the journal's readers. This is hardly surprising given that suffragist organisations worried about their public image and the necessary support for their ideas. Mainstream suffragists feared the sexual radicalism of Freewoman activists might undermine their political struggle for the right to vote or equal pay. Yet, according to a typical patriarchal argument of the times, even these moderate demands would disturb domestic harmony between men and women. As Joannou has shown, some suffragist authors accepted debates against regressive arguments and tried to remain as diplomatic as possible in their responses to both keep from scaring away potential allies and keep the radical *Freewoman* at a distance.<sup>45</sup> Guy A. Aldred thus concluded: 'The powerful enemies of woman's freedom are to be found in the camp of feminism itself, and not in that of the anti's. And they are all marshalled under the one banner—the banner of "Respectability"'.<sup>46</sup>

The concept of the Freewoman still required more elaboration. Marsden specified the profile of her journal and its theoretical perspective on the women's movement: 'Our journal will differ from all existing weekly journals devoted to the freedom of women, inasmuch as the latter find their starting-point and interest in the externals of freedom. They deal with something which women may acquire. We find our chief concern in what they may become'.<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche's influence on this conception can be uncovered as follows.

Marsden criticised the exclusive demand for the political enfranchisement of women because it represented a final act, ultimately leading to the inescapable stagnation of feminist emancipation as soon as suffragists attained this goal. The

attainment of the vote ('what they may acquire') amounted to a fatal finality analogous to the Platonic state of being: the unalterable essence of an idea, or, expressed philosophically, the objective metaphysical reality of an entity 'as such'. In our case of the suffragists, this finality refers to the abstract notion of equality.

Marsden opposed such a permanent state of 'being' with a state of permanent change ('what they may become'). This mirrored Nietzsche's praise of Heraclitus, who had postulated the processual character of the world in opposition to Plato's preference for a fixed state of forms or ideas.<sup>48</sup> According to Marsden, then, the self-confident becoming of every individual woman aims at the assertion of her own identity, which functions without the conceptual framework of a pre-defined male sphere of politics. This is a central aspect of Marsden's radical feminism.

The Freewoman figure is chiefly interested in psychology. She wants to lose her spiritual shackles, which explains why physical, political or economic topics were subordinate to mental liberation. Marsden's critique of the suffragists remained harsh and ingrained with Nietzschean elitism against all those who fight for the vote:

'Votes for Women' are not integrally bound up with the conception of the Freewoman, although considering the circumstances and conditions of things in England at this time, it is inevitable that feminists should insistently be demanding votes. 'Voting' is no attribute of a 'master' mind, nor even of a 'free' mind. It is merely a rough and ready expedient, whereby the weak may be protected from the marauding instincts of certain ill-developed 'strong'. There is no reason, for instance, why Bondwomen should not have votes. Voting powers for the mass mean nothing more than an instrument of protection, and Bondwomen in particular should be given this means of protection, their more robust sisters being relatively less in need of it. Thus, we hold the vote should like the air and a pure water supply, be free to all.<sup>49</sup>

According to Marsden's polemic against the demand for suffrage, then, the personal rather than the political realm defines a Freewoman's notion of freedom.

Nevertheless, the evolutionary perspective adopted here leaves open the possibility of an individual's transformation from Bondwoman to Freewoman, even if Marsden herself believed that only a quarter of all women would ever seize upon this possibility.<sup>50</sup> As we have seen, she acknowledges the vote as a temporary protection for all those who are still in the transformation phase towards becoming a Freewoman. Irritated by the gulf between the traditionally egalitarian aspirations that Marsden had once adopted, for example, on the issue of equal pay of women

and men, and her now increasingly elitist positions, Mary Gawthorpe urged Marsden to clarify her true ideological commitments:

Are you really an anarchist? Do you really deny government in the philosophical sense even? ... Do you really regard all men as 'free', remembering that your original appeal to freewomen could, as yet, only be made to one in four women? ... What I want to know is –Are you in actuality opposed to Government as Government?<sup>51</sup>

Marsden responded in the same issue:

We shall make use of Government whenever we can to its own detriment or to our advantage. We shall lose no opportunity of doing it an injury. We work for its destruction ... As for Votes for Women, we think the women will be very quick to see the nature of government. Unless they get it soon (and then forget it) the more thoughtful among them will cease to ask for it. They should battle with Government itself.<sup>52</sup>

Marsden unflinchingly formulated the goal of a stateless society but failed to answer Gawthorpe's understandable irritation, as Marsden retained the notion of a spiritually divided women's movement. Anarchist contempt for the state therefore turned into an exclusive attitude reserved for the few Freewomen, who would actually make strategic use of the liberal freedoms guaranteed by the state, setting themselves apart from the less advanced Bondwomen.

## **SELF-LIBERATION THROUGH GENIUS**

The lead article 'Bondwomen' had prompted a broad range of reactions, from euphoric support to personal insults. Marsden obviously felt an obligation to clarify some of the issues raised by her readers and to sharpen the profile of what the Freewoman figure may stand for. Remaining adamant about the Freewoman's distinguished status, Marsden assured: 'To be a freewoman one must have the essential attribute of genius'.<sup>53</sup>

Even though Marsden does not specify her source, in all likelihood, she excavated the notion of genius from Nietzsche's philosophy, subsequently integrating it into the construction of the Freewoman's identity to distance herself from the political struggle of the suffrage movement in favour of creative self-development. The primacy of personal – *not* political – freedom, and the status of genius, onto-

logically depend on one another. Only those women who could exhibit features of the genius would want to assert their freedom. Conversely, only those capable of physically asserting their freedom have the quality of genius at their disposal. Just as the young Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) had singled out the artist as the epitome of genius and ascribed to it the glorification of life,<sup>54</sup> so too did Marsden stipulate that any Freewoman's ideal required genius.

Genius is an individual revelation of life-manifestation, made realizable to others in some outward form. So we hold that anyone who has an individual and personal vision of life in any sphere has the essential attributes of genius, and those who have not this individual realization are without genius. They are therefore followers – servants, if so preferred. We called them Bondwomen. We maintain that to accept the fact that great numbers of individuals are born without creative power in regard to any sphere of life whatever, argues no more cynicism than it would to accept the fact, and the statement of it, that coal is black and snow is white.<sup>55</sup>

Marsden's definition of the genius exhibits some contradictions. For instance, she yields to Nietzsche's elitist attitude insofar as she believes that the majority of people are born without any chance of individuality or creativity. A few sentences later, however, she concedes, that 'so many women appear ordinary, not because they are born ordinary, but because they are bundled pell-mell into a sphere in which they can show no special gift; and because they are expected to be so bundled, they are deprived of that training which would enable them to make their individual revelation communicable, that is, of their chance to become artists'. The idea of self-liberation could thus only resonate with those women

who have already shown signs of individuality and strength, and it is just here that the cult of the freewoman becomes plainly distinguishable from that of the Suffragist. If it is the work of the Suffragist women to guard the rear, it is that of the Freewomen to cheer the van. The cult of the Suffragist takes its stand upon the weakness and dejectedness of the conditions of women [...] We believe that it is to the Freewomen we have to look for the conscious setting towards a higher race, for which their achievements will help to make ready, and their strivings and aspirations help to mould.<sup>56</sup>

Here, Marsden adds further qualities to her feminist Nietzscheanism: the development of the individual's will and strength, as well as its ability to suffer; economic,

political and personal autonomy; and the leading role of the cultural avant-garde within the women's movement. The genius-style Freewoman unites all these aspects. Interestingly, Marsden makes clear the Freewomen's dependence on Bondwomen, for both gather around the metaphorical 'van' of emancipation. Thus, she frames feminism as a shared project with certain roles assigned to different people. By recognising this co-dependence, Marsden softens the elitist claims of the Freewoman figure, while at the same time solidifies its alleged superiority. Hence, this uncritical acceptance of social hierarchy undermined every anarchist potential that the Freewoman may have had during Marsden's dissociation from the suffragists organisations on the grounds of their strict top-down decision-making procedures. She used her experience of the suffrage movement to formulate a general philosophical view of the autonomous individual. Anarchistic elements initially informed this view, but were soon diluted when she re-cast the Freewoman as an exclusive identity for the few, resulting from the import of such Nietzschean concepts as the genius.

Marsden's genius concept nevertheless differs from Nietzsche's by a completely different historico-spatial context. While Marsden looked to the present, naming the British actress Ellen Terry (1847-1928) as the prototype of genius, Nietzsche looked to the past, where Napoleon embodied his example par excellence.<sup>57</sup> Implicitly questioning Nietzsche's choice, Marsden equipped the genius with an anarchist distrust in political power: 'Napoleon, with his lust for a following from the world was really poles apart from genius',<sup>58</sup> she wrote in an essay on 'Leadership'. 'Power', though an existential prerequisite for genius, may only be used for the individual's development, otherwise it would corrupt its bearer immediately: 'Its legitimate use is to make him [sic!] a greater soul; its illegitimate [use] is to direct it towards the subordination of his fellows'.<sup>59</sup> A genius makes use of power for his or her spiritual self-realisation only; a leader, however, abuses power in order to exert control over his or her followers. According to Delap, this particular argument was again directed at the WSPU leadership.<sup>60</sup>

By contrast, the young Nietzsche considered it the task of the state to 'prepare the creation and the appreciation of genius'.<sup>61</sup> The genius itself should keep up 'the servitude of the masses, their submissive obedience, their instinct of loyalty to the rule of genius'.<sup>62</sup> In Marsden's early texts, we do not encounter such glorification of domination, because her anarchism, on most occasions, negates the state as a positive point of reference for feminist emancipation. The sole but decisive link between Marsden and Nietzsche lies in the idea of creative individualism.

The concept of genius in the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche is a complex one that changes from his early to later years. Throughout, however, 'genius' remains a 'counter-concept'<sup>63</sup> because of its inner dynamic, as literary scholar Jochen Schmidt

has neatly observed. Schmidt's elaboration of its three core facets illustrates the potency of this concept's influence on Marsden's radical feminist identity politics:

On the *philosophical* horizon of nihilism, the genius is defined intellectually: as 'free spirit', which dissolves all orders and transcends all borders through an anarchistic individualism, even continuously overturning all self-imposed laws. Arbitrariness and randomness in its agitation are the dimensions of the genius once its theoretical behaviour translates into practice – not least the practice of language. On the horizon of *political* reaction against mass society and the democratic 'herd', the genius is defined aristocratically. On the horizon of the *philosophy of life* the ingenious creative being appears at times idealistically heightened in the form of the all-transcending Übermensch, at times naturalistically reduced to the instinctive being of the barbarian or the beast.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the different contextual use in Marsden's case, the ingenious Freewoman fulfils similar functions as the genius does in Nietzsche's philosophy. She is equally exquisite: first, when dividing the women's movement into geniuses and non-geniuses, and second, when mirroring the aristocratic ideal. 'The gifted', she writes, 'might be a natural aristocracy, practising the code of a higher order – a chivalry based on conscious strength'.<sup>65</sup> Considering the Freewoman in this way, then, there is no surprise that her 'spiritual separateness' from Bondwomen conceptually parallels Nietzsche's 'pathos of distance'.<sup>66</sup> To complete the picture, Marsden's denigration of the suffragists also bears dangerous resemblance with Nietzsche's scorn for 'the people' as a democratic subject and the idea of '*suffrage universel*, i.e. the dominion of *inferior men*'.<sup>67</sup>

## SOCIAL ASCETICISM

The construction of the Freewoman figure rested on the conscious setting of new moral standards. This in itself qualifies the project of Dora Marsden as Nietzschean. In the first instalment of a five-part series titled 'The New Morality', she reflected on this necessary change of thinking. To visualise the challenges society would face if women's demands were put into practice, Marsden, writing at the end of 1911, contemplated the possibility of a coming war between nations. In light of such scenario, people would have to understand

the disorder of living according to the law, the immorality of being moral, and the monstrousness of the social code. We are compelled to recognize we

are not asking a small thing, but a big thing, which, in the sphere of industrial labour alone, will necessitate as much reorganisation as would be forced upon men by a successful German invasion and occupation. Another eight million women seeking paid labour in the land! That is not a small thing! Nor is it a small thing to be in opposition to the moral code under which one lives [...] We therefore seek to formulate no morality for superwomen. We are seeking a morality which shall be able to point the way out of the social trap we find we are in.<sup>68</sup>

Marsden identified two significant barriers for female emancipation. The first consisted of women's economic dependence on men, as well as women's confinement to the domestic sphere. Both were kept in place through the laws of the state. The second barrier was sexual conservatism, an issue avoided by the official suffragist bodies. These organisations treated Marsden with hostility for tackling the psychological disposition of women to ignore their sensual desires, particularly against suffocating theological standards of chastity. She reached this assessment of the situation through Nietzsche's notion of the ascetic ideal, practically linking it with the reactive stance of women towards their own sex lives. 'Women ... are the social ascetics',<sup>69</sup> Marsden declared. Attacking sexual conservatism in this way, she echoes Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality*, where he sneered at the 'three great catchwords of the ascetic ideal': 'poverty, humility, chastity'.<sup>70</sup>

Searching for the reasons of the ascetic ideal's persistence, Marsden made two equally dubitable claims: first, that women have completely internalised the Christian faith; and second, that men, by contrast, have stayed pagans, which is why slave morality did not strike roots in their psyche. It is without question, Marsden wrote, that

the doctrine of self-renunciation, which is the outstanding feature of Christian ethics, has had the most favourable circumstances to ensure its realisation, and with women it has won completely – so completely that it now exerts its influence unconsciously. Seeking the realisation of the will of others, and not their own, ever waiting upon the minds of others, women have almost lost the instinct for self-realisation, the instinct for achievement in their own persons.<sup>71</sup>

The third instalment of the 'New Morality' series offers a reflection on an appropriate alternative to the ascetic ideal. Distancing herself from the classic marriage model, Marsden discussed different variants of sexual relationships and concluded that only a 'limited-monogamy' was a possible solution for any Freewoman. The



needs of each individual woman are what this issue was to be measured up against. Neither the old 'indissoluble-monogamy' nor polyamorous affairs could satisfy a Freewoman. The decisive criterion is the amount of passion that one individual feels for the other. 'Consequently, passion negates promiscuity'. The Freewoman's inherent individualism would thwart the devotion to multiple people at the same time, Marsden cautioned, since 'passion ... is absorbing, jealous, exclusive, and individual'. A life-long relationship is rare and once passion has evaporated, the only sensible thing to do is to end it. A Freewoman must not be prohibited from doing so by social norms or marriage laws enforced by the state.<sup>72</sup>

Marsden showed an awareness of how the ascetic ideal formed the cultural and institutional basis of society. She did not expect a sudden change in the moral values among women because both their psychological need for protection and their authoritarian desire to be respectable were too great. Only the Freewoman's inner conviction would resist the external authority of the state's laws and would lead her to practice a new sexual morality. Marsden explicitly referred to the Freewoman as a 'Libertarian Anarchist'<sup>73</sup> on this issue.

Deliberately positioning herself within the cultural avant-garde, we see how Marsden's claim to the leading role in the efforts for feminist emancipation can hardly be separated from pure elitism when it comes of the construction of the Freewoman figure. Roughly six months after her article series, Marsden wrote that on the way to a balanced relationship between the sexes, one should bear in mind the following:

Moral institutions are dissolved, not by the multitude, but by the higher moral consciousness of the few. A handful of moral, thinking, articulate freewoman are more than a multitude of the unmoral, inarticulate bond. In these things the battle is decided by rank and not by numbers.<sup>74</sup>

The integration of the notion of an order of rank, which forms the internal scheme of Nietzsche's aristocratism, completes the elitist bias of Marsden's collapsing anarchism. Even if the order of rank's application remains limited to the moral consciousness of the Freewoman or the unconsciousness of the Bondwoman, a possible transition from a mere intellectual meaning of 'rank' to a political meaning with an anti-egalitarian thrust remains wide open. Nietzsche himself makes clear at various points in his works that the existence of an 'order of rank' precludes 'equality and equal rights'.<sup>75</sup> Marsden's unaccredited reading is congruent with Nietzsche's assumption.

## CRITIQUE OF LANGUAGE, OR: THE STRUGGLE AGAINST ESSENTIALISM

The ideological departure from anarchism was a gradual one for Marsden. An important interim lay in her turn towards the critique of language. It was a development 'from literal to linguistic insurrection',<sup>76</sup> intended to problematise the dominance of the individual through the medium of language; therefore, it was a development that still possessed anarchist sensibilities. However, at the end of her ideological transformation on the pages of her three journals, the radical anarchist feminism she once promulgated now had dissipated. *The Egoist* stood for a genderless individual. Specifically, female emancipation was no longer the issue. What is of interest is the manifestation of Marsden's critique of language, with which she approaches her ideological breaking point. This is the final aspect of her Nietzsche interpretation that still remains part of the anarchist Freewoman.

The anarchist critique of language formulated by Dora Marsden weaves together two threads originating from two main sources: Stirner's nominalism and Nietzsche's reflections on the interrelationship between grammar and identity, which he lays out in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Stirner starts from the premise that '[l]anguage or "the word" tyrannies hardest over us, because it brings up against us a whole army of *fixed ideas*'.<sup>77</sup> Under the influence of this assumption, Marsden struggled against the dominance of abstract ideals, to which people would sacrifice their lives. Commonly used catchwords such as 'freedom', 'equality', 'solidarity' or 'justice' neither possess a fixed essence nor core meaning. Therefore, every one of these catchwords is nothing but an 'empty concept'. Attacking her favourite opponent, liberal feminism – in particular its public representative Christabel Pankhurst – Marsden demonstrated the detrimental consequences of evoking such concepts in everyday political practice. The suffragists, she believed, would idolise 'the Cause' – that is, the vote – and declare an unconditional devotion as a precondition for its attainment. The more one devotes to it, the larger this goal appears. From the alleged selflessness follows self-abandonment, as evidenced by Pankhurst's life: 'She began to "lead a cause", and imperceptibly the Cause became Leader – leading where all causes tend – to self-annihilation [...] What Cause? The Cause of the empty concept [...]'.<sup>78</sup>

Marsden radicalised her stance towards feminism in the same essay published in January 1913. Here, Stirner's nominalism lead her to an irritating finding: 'Accurately speaking, there *is* no "Woman Movement"'.<sup>79</sup> Of course, she did not deny the physical existence of a community of women fighting for political integration, but Marsden addressed the overarching essentialism. For Marsden, *the* women's movement was just as unreal as any other abstract concept. She thus argued:

A very limited number of individual women are emphasising the fact that the first thing to be taken into account with regard to them is that they *are* individuals and can not be lumped together into a class, a sex, or a 'movement' [...] 'Woman as such' [...] has no reality: the subordination of the individual to the Interest (another word for Cause) of motherhood, or the 'Interest of the Race' is the old trick, subjugating the real to the unreal. A woman as a mother, takes on the accidental 'mother characteristic' merely by the way, wholly for her own satisfaction. She is so because she wants, not because of any wants of the community, the State, the Race, or any other faked-up authority.<sup>80</sup>

From here on, Marsden adopts an anti-essentialist standpoint. Her feminist critique of language further builds upon Nietzsche's observation that all concepts are created 'through our equating what is unequal'<sup>81</sup> and that it seems tempting to presume 'a deceptive principle in the "essence of things"'<sup>82</sup> Marsden thus resists any claim of representation that the prominent leaders of the women's movement exerted over her. Nobody should speak on her behalf by virtue of speaking for all women, since the construction of one's own identity hinges not upon a concept 'as such', but on what the individual wants. This is where Stirner's primacy of the 'I' intersects with Nietzsche's voluntaristic 'will to power' over oneself. In both cases, the individual remains in full control over the definition of her or his own identity. It does not recognise any other linguistic authorities.

Conducting a critique of language demands etymological attentiveness, opined Marsden, because the unquestioned usage of widespread catchwords has led to an inflationary, and hence meaningless, use of language. Ideally, language should serve as a precise instrument for human beings and not a domineering medium of order to which the individual must succumb. One year later, Marsden thus poignantly formulates, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God", they will say. To blast the Word, to reduce it to its function of instrument is the enfranchisement of the human kind: the imminent new assertion of its next reach in power'.<sup>83</sup> We can infer what this method was supposed to look like from Marsden's essay 'The Heart of the Question'. Here, she dissects the term 'dignity', popular among contemporary democrats. According to common use, 'dignity' refers to a state of mind, signifying someone's 'worth'. Its Anglo-Saxon root 'Weorthan' in turn originally meant 'to become', and in this lies the key for a better understanding, Marsden explains, because:

the worth of a man or woman comprises more than material property: it includes ability, skill, beauty, in women – sex, everything in short which repre-

sents power to achieve one's own ends and satisfactions. It includes everything one owns, and nothing of that to which one has a titular claim only. All 'as such' claims for instance are invalid: they have no potency off paper. One's claims as Woman, as Man, as Wife, claims to 'Justice,' 'Right,' to 'Equality' are nothing – so much empty sound. One may claim, with sense, just what one has the power to get.<sup>84</sup>

Marsden thus reaffirms her earlier prioritisation of personal over political freedom, however, now strengthened by her critique of language. Demanding abstract ideals seems illusory to her, because those could only be real as long as the individual possesses the physical strength to enforce them.

If we interpret her essay in this way, the affinity with Stirner's mockery of universalistic categories is unmistakable. The 'I' will enjoy what he or she has the power to take. If we look to a more Nietzsche oriented interpretation, the emancipation of women depends less on what she possesses (equality, the vote, etc.), than on what she desires and strives to become. The activity for which the Freewoman uses her powers is what defines her. Put differently: identity is determined through doing, not being – an idea that we have already examined above in the debate surrounding Marsden's 'Bondwomen' article in 1911.

Any Freewoman's own desires were the 'salubrious key to "becoming"', comments David Kadlec, who was the first to observe that Marsden's critique of language took her cue from Stirner *and* Nietzsche 'in associating the ascetic or reactive renunciation of instinctual satisfactions with the Platonic devotion to static "concepts" and "ideals"'.<sup>85</sup> Delineating these two influences from one another is not easy. Yet it is possible since Nietzsche's particular importance for Marsden 'lay in his analysis of the grammatical foundations of asceticism'. Kadlec's elaborations are central, for he has traced how Nietzsche

attuned Marsden to the broadly pathological significance of the necessary relationships between subject and predicate and between substance and attribute. Marsden's championing of vitality as a more solid ground of identity than the body itself was derived from [...] Nietzsche's conception of the ontological priority of becoming over being, of the deed over the doer.<sup>86</sup>

Marsden applied these insights of Nietzsche to sexual politics, concluding that the suppression of women's sexual needs would pose a greater harm to their health and well-being than sexually transmittable diseases.<sup>87</sup> In contrast, Christabel Pankhurst, in her eugenicist tract *The Great Scourge* (1913), had suggested that such

diseases could only be contained if women would attain the vote in order to impose chastity upon men. Pankhurst's Puritanism enraged Marsden. She rejected the reactive character of such political agendas, highlighting the absurdity of projecting the solution of the problem at hand onto the male body, which in turn reduced women's agency to dull passivity.<sup>88</sup>

Sensitized by Nietzsche's linguistic observations, Marsden considered the sort of identity formation resulting from such masculinising of women to be hostile to life and propelled by *ressentiment* – notwithstanding that this would conflict with her earlier praise of men's purported adoption of paganism and their related celebration of vitality. Nietzsche's *Genealogy* offered a new way of looking at the process of identity formation by disclosing the grammatically generated illusion of divorcing the subject from the predicate. In aphorism §13, he compares the behaviours of birds of prey and lambs to illustrate this problem. In doing so, he explains the origin of their respective understanding of what it means to be 'good'.

Since birds of prey naturally hunt lambs, the latter would consider the former to be evil and themselves to be good. From the perspective of the lamb, this certainly makes sense, but it would be absurd to accuse the birds of prey of their behaviour, because just as one would not expect lambs to go hunting, one cannot demand from the birds of prey to waiver their behaviour. The only decisive criterion is strength, something that the birds of prey evidently have and cannot suppress. Nietzsche says that the lambs' assumption that birds of prey would be able to exercise restraint is a misunderstanding, caused by

the seduction of language (and the fundamental errors of reason petrified within it), which construes and misconstrues all actions as conditional upon an agency, a 'subject', can make it appear otherwise. And just as the common people separates lightning from its flash and takes the latter to be a *deed*, something performed by a subject, which is called lightning, popular morality separates strength from the manifestations of strength, as though there were an indifferent substratum behind the strong person which had the *freedom* to manifest strength or not. But there is no such substratum; there is no 'being' behind the deed, its effect and what becomes of it; 'the doer' is invented as an afterthought, – the doing is everything.<sup>89</sup>

According to Nietzsche, strength alone determines the identity of the strong, as seen in the case of the birds of prey. Conversely, when the weak derive their identity from their non-activity – that is, in the case of the lambs, the self-perception of being good due to the renunciation of hunting – they have elevated their lack of

strength (weakness) into the determining of what it means to be 'good'. This interpretative manoeuvre enables them to reactively distance themselves from the 'evil' birds of prey.

For Nietzsche, this is a false de-coupling of one's identity from one's activity, the latter of which should be the decisive factor. The 'unbiased "subject" with freedom of choice' thus constitutes a 'lie',<sup>90</sup> or, as Nietzsche expressed it a little less harshly elsewhere, 'grammatical habits'<sup>91</sup> that purport the subject's competence to act, even though the predicate determines the subject's activity. On a formal level, Nietzsche's allegory may be plausible. When carried over to the real of human reason, however, it simply seems absurd and only regains its plausibility in the psychological master-slave-relationship. It is here that the slaves define their own physical weakness as a 'good' virtue, stemming from their *ressentiment* against the masters.

In *The Egoist*, Marsden later declares: 'Our war is with words and in their every aspect: grammar, accident, syntax: body, blood, and bone [...] Philosophical "problems" will transmute automatically into grammatical leakages'.<sup>92</sup> Without ever having explicitly built the Freewoman's identity upon Nietzsche's reflection on the grammatical formation of the subject, Marsden's thoughts nevertheless testify to a corresponding sensibility. Taking the example of the differing stances towards sexuality in men and women, she argues:

whereas with men sex is an appetite which demands food, with respectable women sex as a need seeking its own satisfaction has to be ignored. This accounts for the existence of the 'womanly woman', essentially a person who lays herself out to be 'sought', in whom, far from thinking of seeking on her own account, would (doubtless truthfully) declare that she has no impulses she might possibly seek to satisfy. She belongs to the category of women who one generation ago were denominated by the title of 'the sex'. She was without desire, but (for a consideration) she gave herself as a satisfaction. Men had the hunger: the womanly woman was the loaf. So that whereas men had a sex, women were the sex, which regarded as a 'commodity', she sold in the best market. Being a property, and not a hunger which, satisfied, is got rid of, sex in the womanly woman cannot be laid aside. It is to be available when called upon, dependent not upon their own desires, but the desires of those to whom it is sold.<sup>93</sup>

Following the picture that Marsden paints here, the 'womanly woman' is regarded as respectable because she renounces her own desires and strives for the satisfaction of men. She has no sex, but is reduced to her gender. As such, she merely wants to

be sought after and generates her identity from this, even though this in itself is not an activity. The man, on the other hand, defines himself through his activity: having sex is a manifestation of strength. The respectable woman in turn defines herself through *ressentiment*, that is, through the renunciation of her desires, because if she – grammatically considered – has no sex, abstinence is now declared a virtue. This is similar to the lambs' move in the example given by Nietzsche, who shows how their 'goodness' is derived from being suppressed by their masters. Seen from this angle, the non-activity of the 'womanly woman' is a manifestation of weakness, which forms identity via *ressentiment*, because the grammatical construction suggests abstinence is an activity.

Every Freewoman schooled in Nietzsche's critique of language, so it appears, should attempt to overcome the reactive identity of a sex object. For 'the innately chaste womanly woman' is – as Kadlec has remarked on Pankhurst's eugenicist proposals concerning the containment of sexually transmittable diseases – 'an entity who was both conceptually and grammatically masculinized through the imperatives of widespread sexual diseases'.<sup>94</sup> Obviously, Stirner's nominalist 'Ego' offered similar means for the creation of a new female identity devoid of abstract concepts while also launching an anti-essentialist attack against normative universals. However, our focus has been on Nietzsche and his implicit contribution to the Freewoman's identity formation, that is, how through her own activity alone the Freewoman can assert her status as an autonomous subject without recourse to an abstract ideal of the woman 'as such'.

## CONCLUSION

A pronounced inegalitarianism pervades and destabilises Marsden's anarchism. I attribute this to her uncritical borrowings from Nietzsche's philosophy. Her peculiar reading differs from that of most anarchists insofar as Marsden never reflected upon the elitist problems associated with the ideas of master morality, order of rank, etc. An adequate counter example is Gustav Landauer, who explicitly criticised the German philosopher's mockery of solidarity, as well as his primitive understanding of capitalism.<sup>95</sup> In contrast to Landauer, Marsden slowly cast off her anarchism, moving ever closer to Stirnerian egoism, until she reached an ideological breaking point in September 1914. From then on, anarchist beliefs seemed to her a mere 'Illusion'.<sup>96</sup>

Imitating Nietzsche's own rants, Marsden denigrated the anarchists as 'Christianity's picked children'.<sup>97</sup> Her unacknowledged mentor lacked any factual knowledge of the anti-authoritarian left and only ever wrote about it in the most

stereotypical fashion. Both Nietzsche and Marsden, however, shared the same yardstick for assessing anarchism's value, namely, whether or not it enhances the growth and vitality of the individual. 'One may assert an absolute equivalence between *Christian* and *anarchist*: their purpose, their instinct is set only on destruction',<sup>98</sup> reads one of Nietzsche's negative verdicts. Marsden, convinced that the anarchists aim only at limiting the 'will to create, to construct', also came to believe that their humanist morality would unnecessarily hinder the development of vital instincts. Moreover, she suspected the anarchists of buckling under the 'market-place cry about levelling "down"' and that they would impose a 'spiritual embargo' on whoever would dare to dissent.<sup>99</sup> Their ideology's core claim – 'domination of man by man is *wrong*'<sup>100</sup> – finally sufficed to her as evidence for declaring 'genuine anarchism' completely shot through with Christianity's ascetic ideal. Therefore, it would only result in 'Death'.<sup>101</sup>

The philosophical scaffold built around the masterful genius, as well as the critique of asceticism, language and morality, initially seemed a promising avenue for developing the theoretical foundations of anarcha-feminism; to Marsden, it offered a built-in anti-essentialism. Ironically though, while all of these Nietzschean elements aided with the construction of the Freewoman figure, they would, when incorporated without further probing, eventually contribute to its destruction. Shedding the anti-authoritarian prefix 'an-' from 1914 on, this growing elitism had already prepared for Marsden's eventual 'Archist'<sup>102</sup> stance. Only up to this point is it logically possible to discern the implicit reading of the German philosopher that had informed the Freewoman's anarchism in preceding years.

Dominique Miething teaches courses in the history of ideas, political theory and civic education at the Otto-Suhr-Institute of Political Science (Free University Berlin). He is the author of 'Overcoming the preachers of death: Gustav Landauer's reading of Friedrich Nietzsche', *Intellectual History Review*, 2016.

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  29. Anne Fernihough, *Freewomen and Supermen. Edwardian Radicals and Literary Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde*; David Kadlec, *Mosaic Modernism. Anarchism, Pragmatism, Culture* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).
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  34. John Henry Mackay, 'On Nietzsche', *The Eagle and the Serpent*, 2 (3) (Jan-March 1901): 23; Benjamin R. Tucker, *Liberty*, IX (19) (#253, 7 January 1893): 3; James L. Walker, 'Introduction' In Max Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, Steven T. Byington (trans.), (London: A.C. Fifield, 1912), pp xv-xvi.
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  42. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Carol Diethe (trans.), Keith Ansell-Pearson (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p20. Emphasis in the original.
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  47. Dora Marsden, 'Views and Comments', *The Freewoman*, 1 (1) (23 November 1911): 3.
  48. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, R.J. Hollingdale (trans.), (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p46.
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  50. Marsden, 'Commentary on Bondwomen', p22.
  51. Mary Gawthorpe, 'What is Individualism?' *The Freewoman*, 2 (45) (26 September 1912): 375-379 (376f.). First cited in Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde*, p156.
  52. Dora Marsden, *ibid.*, p379.
  53. Marsden, 'Commentary on Bondwomen', p21.
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64. *Ibid.*, p145. Emphasis in the original. Translation from the German is mine.
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67. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (trans.), Walter Kaufmann (ed.), (New York: Random House, 1967), p458. Emphasis in the original. Cf. the divergent emphasis in the authoritative typescript: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe, Bd. 11*, by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (eds), (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999), p61.
68. Marsden, 'The New Morality', p62.
69. Dora Marsden, 'The New Morality.—II', *The Freewoman*, 1 (6) (28 December 1911): 101.
70. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p78. On Nietzsche's misogyny within his account of the 'ascetic ideal' see, for instance, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, pp68 and 113-116.
71. Marsden, 'The New Morality', p62.
72. Dora Marsden, 'The New Morality.—III', *The Freewoman*, 1 (7) (4 January 1912): 121.
73. Dora Marsden, 'The New Morality.—V', *The Freewoman*, 1 (9) (18 January 1912): 161-162 (162).
74. Dora Marsden, 'The Immorality of the Marriage Contract. A Commentary', *The Freewoman*, 2 (35) (18 July 1912), p164.
75. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p31; Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p11f. For an elaboration of the concept in Nietzsche's thought, see Robert Guay, 'Order of Rank', In *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, John Richardson and Ken Gemes (eds), (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp485-508.
76. Clarke, *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism*, p201.
77. Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, p462. Emphasis in the original.

78. Dora Marsden, 'The Lean Kind'; 'Views and Comments', *The New Freewoman*, 1 (1) (15 June 1913): 1-5. Emphasis in the original.
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81. Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, In *The Portable Nietzsche*, Walter Kaufmann (trans.), (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), pp42-47 (46).
82. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p34.
83. Dora Marsden, 'I Am', *The Egoist*, 2 (1) (1 January 1915): 1ff.
84. Dora Marsden, 'The Heart of the Question', *The New Freewoman*, 1 (4) (1 August 1913): 62.
85. Kadlec, *Mosaic Modernism*, p105.
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88. Dora Marsden, 'The Chastity of Women', *The Egoist*, 1 (3) (2 February 1914): 44-46.
89. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p26. Emphasis in the original.
90. *Ibid.*, p27.
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92. Marsden, 'I Am', pp1-4. As Andrew Thacker notes, Marsden's critique of language in a way makes her a forebear to the poststructuralist feminism of Julia Kristeva. See 'Dora Marsden and *The Egoist*', *English Literature in Transition*, 36 (2) (1993): 176-196.
93. Marsden, 'The Heart of the Question', p64.
94. Kadlec, *Mosaic Modernism*, p118.
95. Cf. Miething, 'Overcoming the Preachers of Death ...'
96. Dora Marsden, 'The Illusion of Anarchism', *The Egoist*, 1 (18) (15 September 1914): 341-344.
97. *Ibid.*, p341.
98. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ*, R.J. Hollingdale (trans.), (London: Penguin Books, 1990), pp188-194 (192). Emphasis in the original. See also Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, pp15, 48, 116 and 151; Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p90.
99. Marsden, 'The Illusion of Anarchism', p344.
100. Dora Marsden, 'Some Critics Answered', *The Egoist*, 2 (2) (1 February 1915):17-20 (18). Emphasis in the original.
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