ROOTED IN THE OLD SOIL: EMMA GOLDMAN'S PATH TO SEXUAL MODERNISM

by

Levi Collins

(Under the Direction of Shane Hamilton)

ABSTRACT

Historians have treated the modernist cultural revolution of the 1910s as a sharp break from the "Victorian" past. This study argues that Emma Goldman, one of the major arbiters of sexual modernism, bridged nineteenth-century arguments about marriage and free love with modernist forms of the early twentieth century by examining the development of her ideals, the origins of her public image, and her memories of her sexual history. It shows that Goldman's mature sexuality developed out of a formative period in the 1890s which was heavily influenced by a half-century history of American sex radicalism. This study examines lectures and essays from the turn-of-the-century to the 1910s, press coverage from New York City in the early 1890s, and Goldman's memoirs and letters from the late 1920s. All three sets of documents show that Emma Goldman's ideas, acts, and attitude in the 1910s, which her contemporaries understood as alien and revolutionary, expressed strong traces of native-born ideals and experiences from the American past.

INDEX WORDS: Emma Goldman, Modernism, Sex Radicals, Bohemians, Sexuality, Free Love

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DEDICATION

For M who shared me with Emma

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INTRODUCTION

Emma Goldman never lived in Greenwich Village. She was born in Lithuania, spent her childhood in the German Empire and tsarist Russia, and immigrated to Rochester, New York as a teenager. In her youth, she survived tenement life on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, ran an ice cream parlor in New Haven, Connecticut, and studied nursing in Vienna, Austria. She also claimed to have rented a room in a brothel under a false name during a period of intense notoriety. Her most famous residence was a small apartment at 210 East 10th Street, New York, New York. In middle-age, she rode trains across the United States half of each year for almost a decade. She spent a year in prison on Blackwell's Island in the East River and another two in the Missouri State Penitentiary. In exile, she lived briefly in Soviet Russia and Weimer Germany, became an English citizen, wrote her memoirs in France, and observed the Spanish Civil War. She died in Canada, still hoping to return to the United States some day.

Only in death did Emma Goldman move to the Village. She resides there in history books amongst the early twentieth century's other radical icons – John Reed and Mabel Dodge, Randolph Bourne and Max Eastman. In this company, Goldman was the stocky, stentorian Jewish anarchist with the old-world accent and a long history of rankling the police. She introduced the younger intellectuals to free love, fed their disdain for authority, and symbolized free speech and political courage. Even if Goldman never had an address in the Village, she was a part of it. She socialized there, supported the new theaters there, and lived in a style that others moved there to live. She was eccentric – like the Village. She had wacky boyfriends, enjoyed parties, stayed up late, danced, drank, dressed in her own style, and talked about sex in public. Goldman did not have to live in the Village; she brought the Village to the rest of America. "More than any other downtown modern, Emma Goldman took New York's free

speech on the road," wrote Christine Stansell. "When this daughter of the Lower East Side stopped off to lecture in Saint Louis or Cleveland, it's doubtful that more than a few of her listeners would have thought of Hester Street or Second Avenue, but many probably thought they glimpsed the 'Bohemian Greenwich Village.'"[1] What matters then is not where she paid rent, but what she symbolized to her supporters, to her detractors, and to the peers whom she influenced. When early twentieth-century Americans thought about Emma Goldman, they pictured the bizarre mélange of feminism, sex, art, fashion, celebrity, literature, and politics that historians call "Modernism" and they called "Greenwich Village."

Emma Goldman brought much to the collection of ideas and styles that defined Greenwich Village in the teens, but by far, the liberated sexuality she advanced was her greatest contribution to American cultural revolution. As she traveled the country in the 1910s, Emma Goldman was a living symbol of sexual modernism. She stood for free love, birth control, women's equality, and free speech. She claimed that wives were the slaves and prostitutes of their husbands. She said women should forget about suffrage until they could forget about their reputations. She argued that sex was healthy and natural. She told people to talk to their lovers, spend time with them as friends, and allow them other relationships. She wrote about sex; she lectured about sex. She went jail for her support of birth control. And all of this sounded and looked like a completely new world. Supporters recognized in Goldman a breath of new life in a stale American culture. Opponents found in Goldman an aberrant foreign menace to the stability of their homes and their society. Intellectuals heard in Goldman the influence of new European currents of thought. But the sexual ideals and freedoms which Goldman spread across the United States in the early twentieth century were neither new nor alien, but originated in deep-rooted American experiences.

[1] Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century*, 2nd Ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 120

Emma Goldman's sexuality represented a bridge from nineteenth-century American life under the fetters of civilized morality to twentieth-century revolution against bourgeois cultural traditions. Goldman manifested this conversion from the old to the new in the beliefs she advocated, the public image she presented, and the private trials she had endured. In her ideals, she fused the work of antebellum American sex radicals who had hoped to reform middle-class institutions with contemporary European thinkers who argued for the abolition of bourgeois values. As well, in the opening moments of her fame in the 1890s, the press constructed a public image of Goldman resonant with Victorian anxieties over urban interlopers and suggestive of nineteenth-century memories of licentious sex radicals, but it contained not a hint of the revolution in American values she would come to represent. It would be many years before Goldman incited fears about the security of American morals not pocketbooks. Finally, Goldman recalled a long history of sexual education and experiences in her memoirs which she felt she had shared with her American contemporaries before the dawn of modernism. She shaped these memories into an emblematic story of a rebellious soul on her path to modern emancipation. The sexuality Emma Goldman represented in bohemian Greenwich Village was rooted deeply in the history of the forty years she spent traveling there. In fact, when Goldman arrived at her modern emancipation, she found that the society around her still had a lot of ground to cover. She had suffered notoriety, censure, ostracism, and loneliness for the new freedoms she had chosen, but she feared she would never be able to escape the past. It was too much a part of her and too much a part of the world around her. "The tragedy of all emancipated women, myself included," she wrote in 1925, is that "we are rooted in the old soil though our visions are of the future."[2]

This argument addresses several currents within the historiography of American cultural, sexual, and intellectual transformation. Firstly, this study encourages a deeper

[2] Emma Goldman to Alexander Berkman, September 4, 1925, *Nowhere at Home: Letters from Exile of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman*, eds. Richard and Anna Maria Drinnon, (New York: Schocken Books, 1975)

examination of Emma Goldman's place in American life. A disproportionate amount of Goldman scholarship has considered her life within a narrow biographical framework. Exploring the insights of Goldman's evolving sexuality is only one of many new approaches available to historians. The rich documentary sources from Goldman's life have the potential to answer a host of important questions about American culture, society, and politics at the turn-of-the-century; scholars should begin making these inquiries. Secondly, this study argues for a new vision of Emma Goldman as an American and an intellectual. For too long historians have characterized Goldman as an impulsive performer and a trivial social theorist without considering the innovative synthesis of new and old ideas which she accomplished. As well, scholars have portrayed Emma Goldman as an iconic outsider and immigrant; this study demonstrates her engagement with deep-rooted traditions and common experiences of nineteenth-century Americans. Thirdly, this analysis revises the conclusions of historians who have traced the development of radical critiques of marriage and sexual practice in the nineteenth century. Finally, this study tracks the roots of fin de siècle American modernism deep into the culture of the preceding century and in doing so clarifies Goldman's role as a primary arbiter of the intellectual rebellion of the teens and twenties.

For all of the importance scholars have attributed to Emma Goldman in the fruition of American modernism, few have sought to understand her evolution as an intellectual and a public figure. Biographies dominate the literature on Emma Goldman, and these works merely augment Goldman's published memoirs. Through their discovery of letters, lectures, and writings collected from archives across Europe and America, biographers have offered insight into Goldman's personal life and family history. They have explored the relationship between her ideals and her intimate affairs. They have uncovered many important influences on Goldman's anarchist and feminist beliefs. But they have failed to incorporate these findings into investigations of Goldman as a woman of her time. This is due in large part to the nature of biography which prizes narrative over analysis and highlights the subject's singularity. This

study is more a microhistory of Emma Goldman than a biography in that it posits discrete questions about the meaning of her evolving sexuality and conceptualizes her less as an extraordinary figure than as an exemplary one for uncovering the hidden roots of modern American sexuality. By focusing on a few questions about Goldman's ideology, public image, and memories, this study demonstrates the nineteenth-century American pedigree of a quintessential radical persona of the early twentieth century. The sources under examination here are not lately discovered, but Goldman's biographers have used them only to position her at specific points in time without asking the deeper meaning of their existence. This study assumes that the biases, experiences, and prerogatives of the authors of these sources shaped the facts – the truth – contained within them. This approach has allowed me to show that, at least in terms of her evolving sexuality, the ideas and experiences that Emma Goldman represented were not extraordinary after all, but in some ways, distinctly American.[3]

Emma Goldman's status as an American has been a subject of debate and a source of misunderstanding since her rise to public prominence. She personified much that set her apart from the mainstream of American culture: her Russian and Jewish heritage, her anarchism, her radical sexuality, and her feminism. During her life, the American government fought to define Goldman as an alien. After she had achieved national fame, the state voided her husband's naturalization through extraordinary measures, denying Goldman her claim to citizenship. After she criticized the country's entrance into the First World War, the United States deported her to Soviet Russia, ignoring her thirty-one years of residence. Goldman considered the United States her home and fought these measures. After losing her citizenship, she passed up

[3] John Chalberg, *Emma Goldman: American Individualist*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1991);Richard Drinnon, *Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman*, 2nd Ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Candace Falk, *Love, Anarchy and Emma Goldman*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984); Penny A. Weiss and Loretta Kensinger, eds., *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007); Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: an Intimate Life*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), and *Emma Goldman in Exile: From the Russian Revolution to the Spanish Civil War* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989); on the difference between microhistory and biography, Jill Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (June 2001), pp. 129-144

numerous opportunities to travel abroad fearing that immigration officials would deny her reentry. Goldman never gave up hope of a return to the United States after her deportation, writing to her fellow exile Alexander Berkman that she "longed for America like a woman to a man."[4]

Emma Goldman also imbibed the life, ideals, and traditions of the United States in the formation of her radical persona, suggesting much to her contemporaries that they recognized as their own. While acknowledging that she pursued an American audience consciously and thought of the United States as her home, scholars have treated Goldman as little more than a conveyer of cosmopolitan European ideas and behavior to young American modernists. Christine Stansell, the one scholar who has attempted an interpretation of Goldman's public and intellectual evolution, has argued that the decisive transformation Goldman achieved in her career was to abandon her Jewish identity after the turn-of-the-century in seeking a wider American audience. This study finds that Goldman began to stray from the Lower East Side's Jewish community and digest American intellectual influences within the first few years of her career. As well, in their first encounters with her in the early 1890s, the public associated Goldman with historical memories of the American past, and in her memoirs, Goldman described her sex life against the backdrop of her contemporary American milieu. In short the sexuality which she represented was replete with ideas, images, and experiences redolent of American beliefs, culture, and history. The influential historian Henry May suggested that the bohemians of the 1910s had only a passing familiarity with old Americans traditions of individualism and anarchism, but Emma Goldman, born in far off Russia, understood this

[4] Emma Goldman to Alexander Berkman, December 23, 1927, quoted in Falk, *Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman,* p. 3; Oz Frankel, "Whatever Happened to "Red Emma"? Emma Goldman, from Alien Rebel to American Icon, *The Journal of American History,* Vol. 83, No. 3 (December 1996), pp. 903-942

legacy quite well. In a real sense, the alien Goldman was giving Americans back a piece of their own history.[5]

In showing that Goldman's ideas, public persona, and private experiences carried the influence of nineteenth-century sex radicalism, this study asserts that this movement did not disappear at the turn-of-the-century, as previous scholars have suggested, but in important ways, survived and morphed into the cultural revolution of pre-war sexual modernism and feminism. Scholars have traced the first sex radical critiques of bourgeois marriage to the 1830s, and they have marked the zenith of the movement in the 1850s. They have argued that antebellum radicals were middle-class Americans who believed deeply in the republican rhetoric of equality, individuality, candor and merit-based relationships. They critiqued existing traditions because they hoped to salvage a fundamental pillar of society through reform of the double-standards, hypocrisy, ignorance, and materialism which prevented marriages from becoming meaningful relationships. Historians have found examples of this sex radicalism in the debates of New England Transcendentalists, the beliefs of Spiritualists, and most notably, the utopian experiments of religious and secular communitarians. Antebellum radicals pioneered concepts such as complex marriage, free love, and sexual continence in search of more honest sexual intimacy. Scholars have argued that these communities gave women more negotiating room in a patriarchal culture and led many participants to view sexuality as an important expression of individuality, or as Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz phrased it, they "placed sex at the core of being." After the Civil War, sex radicalism suffered serious setbacks and a significant winnowing of support due to legalized moral censorship. Each historian who has detailed the rise of this reform movement and interpreted its meaning within nineteenth-century American culture has ended their study before or at the beginning of the twentieth century. Some have mentioned Goldman as a late participant in sex radical discussions, but no

[5]Stansell, *American Moderns*, pp. 124-128

scholar has suggested how the images and ideas of sex radicalism influenced Goldman's life or her mature ideas. As this study shows, Goldman imbibed sex radical ideals as the foundation of her opposition to marriage, befriended the last generation of sex radicals in the 1890s, came of age under the same system of civilized morality against which the sex radicals had fought, and shaped her early persona in a public sphere still resonant with the memory of sex radical debates. In short, this study encourages historians of antebellum intellectual movements to look forward into the twentieth century to understand how the radical republican rhetoric of individuality and social equality affected analogous sentiments expressed at the start of the modernist period.[6]

This interpretation of Emma Goldman's evolving sexuality also encourages a reevaluation of the nature and origins of American modernism. Scholars of the intellectual developments of the early twentieth century have stressed repeatedly the European foundation of American modernism. They have detailed the contributions of Henri Bergson, Sigmund Freud, and Henrik Ibsen among a crowd of others. Historians have characterized the modernist revolt as a generational split in American culture as well. After all, American modernists called themselves the Young Intellectuals, obsessed over the "new", and wrote memoirs that chronicled their restlessness observing their parents' stale lives. The modernist movement, historians have argued, was a revolt against all that was old, traditional, "Victorian", and repressed about the culture of their childhoods. Modernism was release; it meant transformation; and it signified new birth. As Hutchins Hapgood wrote, modernists wished "to dynamite the baked and

[6] Martin Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism: the Biography of Ezra Haywood*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedmen, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988); Louis J. Kern, *An Ordered Love: Sex Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias – The Shakers, The Mormons, & The Oneida Community*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-century America*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002); Joanne Passet, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Equality*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Hal Sears, *Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America*, (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1977); John C. Spurlock, *Free Love: Marriage and Middle-Class Radicalism in America, 1825-1860*, (New York: New York University Press, 1988)

hardened earth so that fresh flowers could grow."[7] Daniel Bell argued that modernism represented a total assault on the dominant bourgeois culture represented by all established forms of art and morality. The new standards of culture, Bell claimed, were pertetually anti-conventional and brooked the establishment of no new traditions. This study revises this interpretation of modernism by showing that one of its primary arbiters founded some of her modern beliefs on the ideas of middle-class American Victorians. The press in the 1890s recognized much in Goldman's image reminiscent of nineteenth-century American experience. Her modernist transformation was born of terrible experiences with civilized morality not a youthful sense of generational ennui. She formed her sexual identity slowly over a period of two decades not in a sharp break from convention in the 1910s. Finally, Goldman's success in the early twentieth century touting ideas from the 1850s exposes a nostalgic bent for old republican rhetoric in the sentiments of Americans tacking enthusiastically into the incipient currents of modernist transformation.[8]

As a final note on the relevant historiography, this study must address itself, however grudgingly, to the problematic issue of class due to the nature of the radical movements from which Goldman extracted her ideas and to which she devoted herself during her lifetime. Especially fraught with difficulty, we must reach an understanding of what is meant by the phrases "middle class," "new middle class," and "bourgeois" as they appear throughout the separate chapters. On the one hand, scholars have argued that antebellum sex radicalism was a middle-class intellectual movement aimed at the reform and purification of American bourgeois society. The adherents to these early free-love platforms were members of a new middle class produced by antebellum commercial expansion. This status meant that they were usually lower

[7] Hutchins Hapgood, "Art and Unrest," *New York Globe and Commercial Advertiser*, January, 27, 1913, quoted in Stansell, *American Moderns*, p. 2

[8] Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, (New York: Basic Books, 1976); Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism, 1889-1963: The Intellectual as a Social Type*, (New York: Knopf, 1965); Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Time 1912-1917*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959); Stansell, *American Moderns*, (2009); Ross Weztsteon, *Republic of Dreams: Greenwich Village and the American Bohemia, 1910-1930*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002)

middle-class, laboring for themselves as entrepreneurs, small business owners, or artisans, no longer farming or earning a wage. These individuals preached a faith in candor, meritocracy, and individual freedom – a product of their image as "self-made men."[9] On the other hand, modernism was a decidedly anti-bourgeois movement, as Daniel Bell has argued, in that it revolted against what it saw as the tradition-bound, exclusive, and repressed culture of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie. Although many members of this movement came from middle-class homes, they propounded a vision of artistic and individual expression, sexual freedom, and public nonchalance which bourgeois culture forbid. They intended cultural revolution, not reform.

Recently, Sven Beckert has argued astutely that historians should show more care with the term "middle-class" when applied to nineteenth-century Americans, seeing a profound difference in the resources, status, and lifestyle available to the capitalists of the bourgeoisie and the small businessmen of the lower middle class. Members of the lower middle class may have differed, politically and materially from bankers, industrialists, and large merchants, but in their aspirations to eventually elevate themselves to a higher social status, they often adopted the cultural standards of the bourgeoisie more seriously than their social superiors. Beckert has shown that by the time Goldman rose to prominence New York's bourgeoisie had achieved an unprecedented amount of social cohesion and political consolidation. Common customs of conduct and manners, especially gender roles and rituals of family life, helped bind the small upper rank together but also spread throughout lower classes of society as they aspired to succeed to a better station. Therefore in speaking of "bourgeois" norms, this study refers to a large middling group of Americans which adopted their social superiors' sense of civilized behavior and respectability.[10]

[9] Spurlock, *Free Love*, p.114

[10] Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and "Propertied of a Different Kind: Bourgeoisie and Lower

Emma Goldman's evolution as a sexual theorist is the subject of the first chapter. It explores her ideas on marriage and free love from the beginning of her career in the 1890s until the maturation of her ideology in the 1910s and reveals the foundations of her anti-bourgeois denunciations of marriage in a middle-class American reform movement begun in the 1830s. Goldman's lectures, interviews, tour journals, and essays serve as the major sources for this study of intellectual development from 1896 until 1915. Most of the lectures and essays from this period were composed as attacks on marriage, an institution Goldman viewed as the fount of women's ignorance and inequality within civilized society. When she introduced this subject into her repertoire in 1896, Goldman delivered all of her ideas as lectures in German or Yiddish, letters, interviews, and short articles in radical publications. In the first half of her American career, she was influenced primarily by sex radical ideas and imagery of marriage as slavery, prostitution, a social ill, and a source of suffering for countless incompatible spouses. Around 1906, Goldman began writing essays for a native American audience. She published these ideas in her magazine, pamphlets, and books. Until 1916 when her American life began to unravel, Goldman fused her sex radical critique of marriage with ideas from European sexual modernists, such as Havelock Ellis, Sigmund Freud, and Edward Carpenter. Increasingly, these ideas showed the influence of psychological and sociological understandings of sex as an arena of self-expression and a necessity for healthy living. In her modernist period, Goldman celebrated sexuality as a source of self-knowledge, a test of an individual's courage to live freely, and an intimate form of communication between partners. This chapter also asserts that Goldman was able to develop her mature ideas through the benefits bestowed by her growing celebrity in the twentieth century.

The second chapter looks back to the earliest press coverage surrounding two events in Emma Goldman's early history from 1892 and 1893 to see how the English-speaking public

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Middle Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States," *The Middling Sorts: Explorations in the History of the American Middle Class*, eds. Burton J. Bledstein and Robert D. Johnson, (New York: Routledge, 2001)

perceived her sexuality during the incipient moments of her career. This approach allows a view of Goldman as a radical sexual figure before any premonition of the modernist rebellion of the twentieth century existed. Historians have never utilized the press' coverage of Goldman from the early 1890s except to pinpoint the details of her biography. These reports are full of clues to the broader cultural experience of their moment; they are not simply records of fact. They are historical documents containing traces of the motives and biases of the culture that produced them. When scholars have thought at all about the portrayal Goldman received in the papers, they have assumed for the most part that the negative reports that portrayed her as "a vampire, ready to kill again, and lick up the blood" spoke the entire coverage.[11] In his analysis of the coverage of her return tour of the United States in 1934, Oz Frankel demonstrated that the public and the press reacted to Goldman in much more complicated ways – applauding her, mocking her, and fearing her simultaneously.[12] The press reports from forty years earlier show a similar, but distinct pattern. In 1892 and 1893, Goldman posed both a terroristic and moral threat in the public mind. Her lover had shot a famous capitalist in 1892, and in 1893, with the country's economy on the brink of collapse, she seemed to have a singular influence over the angry, unemployed masses of New York. The press expressed admiration for Goldman's abilities, confusion over her social origins, curiosity about her unconventional sexuality, and ultimately, fears about her influence over the immigrant class. The chapter also demonstrates that Emma Goldman divulged very little about sex in the front of press during her first years in the public eye, but reporters filled in the gaps with associations they attached to free love which had a long history in New York City. In the 1890s, the public saw a lot to fear or disdain in Goldman, but they could not see the coming revolution which she represented in the 1910s.

The third chapter traces Emma Goldman's sexual history and development through the memories she recorded in her autobiography, *Living My Life*. The portrait of individual sexual

[11] Richard Drinnon, *Rebel in Paradise*, p. 89
[12] Oz Frankel, "Whatever Happened to 'Red Emma'? Emma," *The Journal of American History*, pp. 903-942

education and evolution which emerges from Goldman's memoirs complicates the existing thought on the development of American modernism. Since the sixties, historians have tended to argue that the development of modernism and greater sexual freedom in the 1910s was the product of a generational divide, and they have used the memoirs of bohemians, modernists, intellectuals, and flappers from the teens and twenties to argue that modernism was a total disavowal of the world of parents, a rejection of everything old, as if everything before had barely existed. "Everybody knows that at some point in the twentieth century America went through a cultural revolution," wrote Henry May. "At some point, if not an instantaneous upheaval, there must have been a notable quickening of the pace of change, a period when things began to move so fast that the past, from then on, looked static."[13] Goldman's memoirs certainly contained an element of this sentiment, but she also demonstrated an acute sense of what each stage of her past had taught her, a past rooted deeply in ideals from nineteenth-century American culture. In her forties by 1910, Goldman had a great deal of experience with old American values by the time bohemian rebellion consumed places such as Greenwich Village. If the famous modernists in the teens could choose to live a "life without a father" in Gertrude Stein's famous phrase, Goldman could not help but struggle with the meaning of hers. His beliefs had dominated her world for too long to disavow his existence. In her old age, writing *Living My Life*, Goldman showed how acutely the painful world of nineteenth-century morality had bled into her suffering in the modern world of the twentieth century. The past could never appear static to Goldman, no matter how quickly or how far she had fled from it.

This interpretation also adds to the biographical historiography by reading Goldman's life story as a constructed progression through an emblematic past. Scholars have struggled to understand the reality of Emma Goldman as a failed, bitter, and unhappy woman because almost all of them have approached her life with strong political sympathies. From the start,

[13] Henry May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time, 1912-1917*, (Knopf: New York, 1959), p. ix

Goldman emerged in the historiography as a politicized figure. Scholars such as Richard Drinnon and Alix Kate Shulman resurrected Goldman's memory in the sixties and portrayed her as a hero of free speech who had stood up to oppressive authority and the stifling status quo. In the seventies, the women's liberation movement turned Goldman into an icon of personal and feminist liberation. Her face appeared on t-shirts and people named their children in her honor. This popularization of Emma Goldman spurred a rash of scholarship and biography some of which uncovered serious inconsistencies between the feminist icon and the historical woman. The inclination to view her as a heroine has proven too inflexible for such a frustrating and frustrated subject. Recent biographers have had to shatter their idealized image of Goldman in the face of her personal failure and the ugly emotions that accompanied it. One major disharmony they claimed to expose was a dysfunctional love affair with her manager, Ben Reitman, which had enslaved the great feminist for almost a decade. Emma Goldman had constructed a philosophy which trumpeted the emancipating power of free love, the futility of romantic jealousy, and the importance of women separating themselves from bad romances at the same time that she allowed her lover to betray her, steal from her, and torture her emotions. Apparently, the freethinking idealist could be as feeble and lovesick as the rest of us.[14] The third chapter argues that these biographers have missed the real lesson of Goldman's sexual history in *Living My Life*. She meant to recount her sex life as a representative story of individual maturation in the midst of a period of broad cultural change, not as a candid revelation of her romantic traumas.

These three chapters emerge from different perspectives and different moments in Emma Goldman's life and they do not follow a chronological order. The first chapter examines Goldman as she approached the peak of her American career. In the lectures and essays that

[14] Oz Frankel has written a synopsis of the evolution of Goldman studies through the mid-1990s, beginning with the reception of her autobiography in the 1930s. Oz Frankel, "Whatever Happened to "Red Emma"?: Emma Goldman, from Alien Rebel to American Icon," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 83, No. 3 (Dec., 1996), pp. 903-942

form the documentary basis of this section, she was at the height of her intellectual powers and she expressed the concentrated fundaments of her sexual ideals. This chapter explores the ideal of sexual behavior and belief that Goldman propounded and shows her how she might have liked to be remembered – an influential, intellectual American. In the second chapter, we view Goldman at the beginning of her career, still very young, before she had begun to express ideas about sexuality or women's emancipation. This chapter examines the public image of Goldman and how her sexuality – unorthodox, radical, and challenging – affected the portrait presented to New Yorkers in the late nineteenth century. In this section, we capture an image of Goldman that is the creation of others – the press. They depicted her in a way that seems rather untruthful in the final analysis. She appeared as a joyless, lurking, plotting con artist when, in fact, the young Goldman, though certainly flawed, was a candid, idealistic, and adventurous person. Finally, we end with Emma Goldman at the most difficult point of her life – in exile, struggling with loneliness, disappointment, and painful memories. As she came to terms with the meaning of her agonies, she struggled to leave an account of what living her life meant. This chapter explores both Goldman's personal sexual experience and also her memories of her life. Goldman struggled to make sense of her life in the light of the high ideals she had set for herself and the public debasement she had endured. "It is not only the writing [that is difficult]," she told Alexander Berkman of the process, "it is living through what now lies in ashes and being made aware that I have nothing left in the way of personal relations from all who have been in my life and have torn my heart."[15] Although these three versions of Goldman emerge from different times and different sources, all show her sexuality in a state of formation which is both forward-looking and deeply indebted to the past.

[15] Emma Goldman to Alexander Berkman, February 20, 1929*, Nowhere at Home*, p. 145

CHAPTER 1

Sow the Seeds of Discontent

Awaiting trial for attempting to incite a riot, Emma Goldman spent September 1893 in The Tombs, a jail in Lower Manhattan. She had told a crowd of the unemployed in that dire moment of economic depression to claim what no one would give them. "You demand bread," one report had her saying, "and if you cannot acquire it through peaceful means you will get it by force."[1] She urged the crowds to march to the homes of the wealthy and let them know of their hunger. The publicity resulting from the speech and her arrest attracted a visit from another minor celebrity, the journalist Nellie Bly, who reported the encounter in the New York *World* – the first extended interview with Goldman to appear in the mainstream press. Bly was impressed by the 25-year-old radical, charmed by her appearance, intelligence, and the polite frankness with which she presented her unconventional ideas. She referred to her admiringly as a "modern Joan of Arc."[2]

Among such banal topics as Goldman's age, siblings and shopping habits, Bly asked curiously for her subject's view of marriage. "We look upon marriage as the foundation of everything that is good," the journalist stated. "We base everything upon it. You do not believe in marriage. What do you propose shall take its place?" "I believe in a marriage of affection," Goldman responded. "If two people care for each other they have the right to live together so long as their love exists. When it is dead what base immorality for them still to keep together!" Emma Goldman was a recent immigrant to the United States. She had lived in the United States for only eight years, half of that under the watchful eyes of her family and the Jewish community

[1] "Badly Advised", *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, 22 August 1893, reprinted in *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years, Vol 1*, ed. Candace Falk (Berkeley, 2003) p. 145
[2] "Nelly Bly Again", New York *World*, September 17, 1893, reprinted in *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History, Vol. 1,* (2003), pp. 155-160

of Rochester, New York. The press portrayed her as a dangerous foreign threat at the time of this interview, and her audience still consisted of European immigrants to whom she lectured in German. Yet in this exchange with Bly, Goldman expressed beliefs rooted in American bourgeois ideals of individualism, republican equality, and conjugal love. When she told Nellie Bly, "Let there be nothing but voluntary affection," Emma Goldman unearthed ideals, images, and instincts fostered in the intellectual climate of the early American Republic.[3]

In the first fifteen years of her American life, Goldman built her theories of sexuality upon a foundational belief that marriage was a social evil – anathema to love and women's equality – borrowing heavily from the ideas and images of a half-century history of American communitarians and sex radicals. She voiced her beliefs in lectures, short articles in radical publications, and newspaper interviews such as the one Bly conducted. Goldman developed and expanded her social thought during this period, dating from 1896 until roughly 1905, but she had not yet begun writing the type of essays which marked her career as the publisher of *Mother Earth*. In her early lectures she conjured images of marriage as slavery, prostitution, and social insurance. She argued that a moralistic society forced ignorance and shame upon women when it dictated marriage as the only respectable setting for romance, sex, and childbearing. If a couple loved each other, she argued, they required no one's sanction to act upon it.

Although these beliefs lay far outside the American mainstream of her time, Goldman was drawing upon ideas that had existed in the United States since the 1830s. Sex radicalism, as historians have distinguished it, began with the development of a new middle class in the expansion and commercial boom of the antebellum period. The impetus and ideological foundations for marriage had shifted as young men broke bonds with close-knit communities and fashioned themselves as independent players in an itinerant country and a competitive marketplace. The conjugal family became a refuge, the sight of spiritual instruction and rejuvenation, and a source of respect and identity in the larger community. The bourgeoisie and

[3] Ibid, pp. 158-159

its aspirants placed love at the center of their marriages, in theory, and celebrated marriage as the foundation of a civilized society. The sex radicalism born of this period was a bourgeois attempt to restore love to marriage in order to reform a treasured ideal and save society in the process. Within a score of years, these conversations about how to save marriage evolved into arguments for abolishing it through the meditations of antebellum transcendentalists, communitarians, spiritualists, and proto-feminists. At one time, Americans had discussed ideas such as free love and the reform or prohibition of marriage in the public sphere without fear of legal suppression. One could read these ideas voiced in prominent New York newspapers, listen to leaders of various free-love movements speak in their communities, and even visit socialist, free-love communes as a form of curious entertainment. By the 1870s and 1880s this sort of open-mindedness was out-of-style, and by Goldman's time, free lovers faced censorship, prosecution and imprisonment at the discretion of public moralists such as Anthony Comstock.[4]

The ideas and images that nineteenth-century sex radicalism provided for the young Emma Goldman never disappeared from her beliefs, but in the second half of her American career she fused them with arguments about the importance of sexual knowledge, sexual expression, and sexual instinct that she found in contemporary European sources. Most important among the continental sexologists and psychologists to Goldman's development were Sigmund Freud, Havelock Ellis, and Edward Carpenter. She expressed these new developments in her old ideas in essays for her own magazine, *Mother Earth*, beginning in 1906 and later collected in her first book, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, published in 1910.

Goldman began to branch out socially as well, forming friendships among a budding generation of native-born American intellectuals, writers, and artists. They comprised a

[4] John C. Spurlock, *Free Love: Marriage and Middle-Class Radicalism in America, 1825-1860*, (New York: New York University Press, 1988), Joanne E. Passet, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Equality*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), and Hal D. Sears, *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America*, (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas: 1977), John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedmen, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002)

disparate group of Ivy League northeasterners, labor activists, relocated provincials, and wealthy eccentrics. They proposed the eradication of "Victorian" morality, the creation of a new literature, art, and theater representative of a broader spectrum of experience, greater social and economic equality, and the emancipation of women from stifling traditions which made them unequal in their homes, work and society. The revolution in thought and expression that these bohemians and Young Intellectuals brought about has become known as "modernism" and their redefinition of gender roles, "sexual modernism." As historians have noted, few individuals could claim a greater role in the provocation and dissemination of this modernist sensibility in the fin de siècle United States than Emma Goldman.[5]

Although many historians have credited Goldman's influence in the creation of American bohemia, they have never pondered the evolution of her social thought nor if her ability to cohere specific ideas about sex and marriage — some old American ones and some fresh European ones – was what made her so attractive to young native-born intellectuals. Scholars have overlooked Goldman's intellectual evolution partly because most have considered her social theory derivative and unimportant. Since Henry May described Goldman as "a great woman, though a thoroughly shallow social thinker," historians have tended to treat her as such.[6] The charge is not completely unfair. Much of Goldman's thought on social revolution, education, religion and literature bore the taint of the propagandist – simplistic, overwrought, unoriginal and often naive. Historians have avoided thinking about Goldman's ideas because they have perceived them as nothing much to think about. Goldman's skill and charisma as a public speaker have often overshadowed alternative images of her as an intellectual and a writer. Scholars have chosen to view her as a performer, riffing on well-known scripts. In doing so, they

[5] The literature on earliest modernists and bohemians is extensive. Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, (New York: Basic Books, 1976), Henry May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Time 1912-1917*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century*, 2nd Ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), Ross Weztsteon, *Republic of Dreams: Greenwich Village and the American Bohemia, 1910-1930*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002)

[6] Henry May, *The End of American Innocence*, pp. 302-329, quote on p. 307

have overlooked the fact that Goldman chose to imagine herself in large part as an intellectual. From as early as the Bly interview, we catch glimpses of this self-presentation when Goldman mentioned the importance of study and the fact that she spent most of her money on books. Later in her life, Goldman would invariably pose for photographs hunched over her reading desk with several open volumes or holding a large tome in her lap, always presenting herself as a thinker, a student, and a scholar. Beyond poses or pronouncements, she took the crafting of her ideas seriously, and although her influences are evident, she patched them together in a way that was distinctly her own. If historians continue to consider Goldman a serious influence on the creation of American modernism, at least as a prophet of free love, they must be willing to get over the rougher aspects of reading her theory, ask how she cobbled it all together, and what it that reveals about her historical moment.

Historians have recognized the influence of nineteenth-century sex radicalism in Goldman's ideas just as they have seen the impact of the sexologists and psychologists of the twentieth, but they have failed to fully trace the ideological blending that Goldman executed. By testing the chemistry of her ideas, we alter both our understandings of sex radicalism and sexual modernism. The scholars who have studied nineteenth-century free love and marriage reform movements have invariably ended their studies with Goldman, treating her as a particularly sensationalist member of the free love community, simply acknowledging the influence that older radicals had on her, or arguing that she constituted the tail end of a disappearing movement. Scholars of bohemia and modernism have demonstrated a similarly narrow view. Whereas the historians of nineteenth-century free lovers end with Goldman, historians of modernism claim Goldman's strong influence sparked a break with the past, but they treat her ideas as static as if they were always hers and needed no development before she "was discovered" in Greenwich Village by the native-born intelligentsia, in the words of Henry May. Goldman's biographers have similarly portrayed her sexual thought as static or have misunderstood how she fused particular sets of ideas together. For instance, Alice Wexler

posited that Goldman's influences were initially European sexologists based on the evidence that Goldman's autobiography mentions that she heard Freud lecture before it mentioned her meeting prominent sex radicals. In fact, Goldman's sexual thought formed a bridge from an older American reform movement to a youthful American rebellion – the former built the foundation for the latter. The middle-class sex radicalism of the nineteenth-century, founded in republican notions of equality and individualism, did not fizzle out in the fin de siècle Zeitgeist, and the sexual modernism of the twentieth-century did not materialize out of thin air. Emma Goldman had helped bind them together.[7]

The nineteenth-century sex radical movement provided Goldman with the ideals and images for her earliest lectures on free love and the abolition of marriage. She began speaking and writing on these topics in 1896, after her return from a year abroad though she had stated some of them publicly in interviews as early as 1892 and claimed to have believed in free love as early as 1889. Marriage, she said, was the cause of prostitution and a form of it as well. She also claimed that marriage was slavery and the wife was chattel to her husband. She argued that love should rule affairs between men and women. If romantic love was marriage's raison d'être and love could fail, Goldman asked why people should bind themselves for life. Finally, she asserted that moralistic thought separated men and women into artificial roles, caused deception, and led to marriages between people who misunderstood each other. By the time they realized their incompatibility they were trapped. Each of these ideas, though transformed to Goldman's purposes, came from the long-simmering sex radical movement which had preceded her arrival in the United States.

Emma Goldman encountered the ideals of nineteenth-century free lovers and antebellum prophets of republican individualism in the first decade of her life as an anarchist. By the time she had arrived in America, a powerful group of moral censors had dislodged and dispersed the sex radical movement far from the public sphere of mainstream American society,

[7] Ibid, p. 307

but sex radicals could still voice their ideals in a few small journals such as *Free Society* and *Lucifer, the Lightbearer*. Goldman wrote to these journals frequently at the turn-of-the-century and her familiarity with these publications brings to light at least one forum in which she would have come in contact with sex radical ideas. More importantly, Emma Goldman formed lasting friendships with the publishers and even some of the correspondents of these journals during her extensive travels of the United States in the waning years of the nineteenth century. She visited Moses Harmon in Chicago and the Isaak family in San Francisco, publishers of two of the most prominent sex radical journals. Goldman listed Harmon as major inspiration late into her life alongside such nineteenth-century figures as Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau. Goldman was a great lover of literature and had begun reading the works of Americans poets, writers, and intellectuals in English as early as 1893 during a year long prison sentence. Antebellum authors such as Thoreau and Whitman provided Goldman with a language of transcendent individualism which carried a deep influence in her personal philosophy throughout the rest of her career.

At the core of her sex radical ideals, Emma Goldman believed that love and desire gave legitimacy to relationships, and there was no sense in seeking the approval of any institution – church, state, or family – to justify romantic bonds. "There should be no marriage laws of state or church," she argued. "When a man and a woman become convinced that each can aid the happiness and well being of each other, they ought not hesitate to live together as man and wife." If people felt attraction, Goldman argued, they should enjoy each other's company freely, and if they loved each other, they should live together and raise a family without the sanction of a church or state. "I believe in the marriage of affection," Goldman told Nelly Bly. "That is the only true marriage. If two people care for each other they have a right to live together so long as that love exists." [8] Goldman worried that attraction and compatibility could be temporary and fickle and encouraged audiences to consider why they entrapped themselves in relationships

[8] Bly, "Nelly Bly Again," New York *World,* September 17, 1893

that might prove loveless, more a burden than a joy. “Marriage is a cumbersome and useless form,” she lectured. “Men and women who are congenial, and who are fitted for each other's society… should live together. If they discovered that they could not exist together happily then they should separate.”[9] “When [love] is dead,” she stated, “what base immorality for [husband and wife] still to keep together!”[10] Marriage laws were inflexible, argued Goldman, backed by artificial morality, and produced women’s poor status in society. “Contemptible marriage laws and the adherence to them tend to still farther increase [woman’s] degradation,”[11] she lectured. “When the girl of today dares to be led by her natural impulses,” she argued, “when she dares bid defiance to [morality] and be herself, when she dares give expression to her love, the hands of so-called charity instantly seize her and the child born of this love is taken off to the fondling asylum.”[12] Goldman’s belief in love went hand-in-hand with her condemnation of morality which exposed women to life-long disgrace if they expressed love outside of marriage while their wedded sisters were celebrated for their virtue whether or not they truly cared for their husbands. In Goldman’s mind, this basic hypocrisy poisoned the very marrow of social relations.

Goldman’s ideal “freedom of sex relations” and her attack on marriage originated in the arguments of American free lovers that love justified sexuality, and her beliefs also relied on the notion of individual sovereignty– an idea which helped propel the vigorous sex radical movement of the 1850s.[13] At its most basic definition, individual sovereignty meant that each person should be rewarded equally for the work and benefit that they added to the society. Josiah Warren, the architect of this idea, argued that an ideal society would reward people based on their individual investment. They could neither be coerced into an activity they did not wish to join nor reap the benefits of one that they had not helped to prosper. Warren’s middle-class

[9] "Socialist Idea of Marriage," The *Rocky Mountain News*, August 19, 1899, p.8, in Emma Goldman Papers (EGP)
[10] “Nelly Bly Again,” The New York *World*, September 17, 1893
[11] “The New Woman,” *Free Society*, February 13, 1898, p. 2, EGP
[12] "From San Jose," *Free Society*, July 23, 1899, p. 1, EGP
[13] Emma Goldman, “The New Woman,” *Free Society*, February 13, 1898, p. 2, EGP

audience was deeply attracted to his ideas of merit-based economic and social reward. "His conviction of sovereignty of the individual," historian John Spurlock noted, "reduced the middle-class ideal of independence to its economic nucleus and then universalized it."[14] In the 1850s, Warren attempted to put his theory to the test at Modern Times, a utopian community in New York, and the participants in his project turned individual sovereignty into a critique of marriage. Under a system in which the individual is sovereign over all their decisions and the consequences that fall to them, they theorized, marriage with its attendant life-long responsibilities and restrictions made no sense. In free love, an outgrowth of this critique, individuals entered into "contracts" with their partners motivated by the goal that each party could express love and attraction. Free lovers understood their relationship to be permanent only in the sense that physical and emotional attraction remained. Moral and religious systems were moot under a system of individual sovereignty as each person would have to define separately their own concepts of good and bad. Goldman embedded these ideas into the essential structure of her free love ideals and her arguments for woman's emancipation. "The individual is the ideal liberty," she wrote. "We owe no duty to anyone, save ourselves. When universal woman once comprehends this ideal, then all protective laws, intended for protection, which is indeed her weakness, will disappear, and this adulterous system goes, and with it charity and all its attendant ills."[15] Goldman agreed with the middle-class Americans who, almost a half-century earlier, concluded that anything less than complete individual freedom in love was sexual slavery.

Goldman repeated the imagery of marriage as slavery and the women as chattel in a patriarchal, moralistic, and materialistic society. Goldman used language such as "bound", "chained", "master", and "property" to illustrate the importance of free love. "Men and women

[14] Spurlock, *Free Love*, p. 114
[15] Emma Goldman, "The New Woman," *Free Society*, February 13, 1898, p. 2, EGP

groan under the iron yoke of our marriage institution," she declared.[16] She supported "freedom against slavery in the realm of the affections."[17] She asserted that society needed "an emancipated woman freed from the shackles of law, church and society."[18] She lectured that the "ordinary American woman is an obstacle to progress" capable of "little profound feeling." "What she spent on a showy, shoddy hat and paste jewelry as a girl," Goldman railed, "she spends on baby's clothes that will make the neighbors talk as a woman. She is shallow, and a principle means nothing to her."[19] She argued that women were "mentally and physically ruined by their slavery to fashion," stupefied by their love of display and material goods.[20] Goldman argued that marriage enslaved affection and social structures enslaved women, tamed and stupefied them, but more poignantly, she declared that married women became slaves to their family. When an interviewer asked, "Isn't woman [already] free?" Goldman responded incredulously: "Free! She is the slave of her husband and her children."[21] She lectured that marriage "gives the man the right and power over his wife, not only over her body, but also over her actions, her wishes; in fact, over her whole life." "The woman is chained to the house by a thousand duties," Goldman continued – encapsulating one of her most fundamental critiques of marriage, that it was essentially an economic arrangement and the foundation of a system of exploitation.

Goldman derived this slavery rhetoric from antebellum debates about republican equality and freedom. Beginning in the 1830s, a small but vocal group of Americans, exhausted with the glaring imperfections and hypocrisy of American society, voiced a dual critique of slavery and bourgeois marriage – both of which they felt epitomized "false relationships." By

[16] Emma Goldman, "Marriage," the *Firebrand,* July 18, 1897, p. 2, reprinted in *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years*
[17] "Various Voices," *Lucifer, the Lightbearer*, March, 1898, EGP
[18] "Summary of a Lecture," *Lucifer, The Lightbearer*, March, *1898,* EGP
[19] "Talk with Emma Goldman," the New York *Sun*, January 6, 1901
[20] "Emma Goldman in Stockton, California," *Free Society*, July 30, 1899, EGP
[21] "What is there in Anarchy for Women? – By Emma Goldman," *St. Louis Post Dispatch Sunday Magazine*, April 24, 1897*, Emma Goldman: A Documentary History, Vol.1*, p. 291

the 1850s, these dissidents had begun calling themselves radicals. Individual sovereignty was their central belief, and free love, in which men and women chose each other freely without the sanction of law or family, epitomized this concept. Fed up with the "bourgeois illusions and compromises" which they felt were poisoning American society, free lovers demanded "the immediate end of African slavery as well as for the end of married slavery."[22] In fact, some antebellum sex radicals argued that slavery in marriage had encouraged the expansion of African slavery because it had been the schoolhouse in which men learned to dominate others.[23] After the Civil War, the rhetoric of abolition survived within the sex radical and marriage reform movements. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who was not a free lover but was an ally of the famous sex radical Victoria Woodhull, used the image of the wife as chattel in her push for divorce reform.[24] "There is no other human slavery," she stated, "that knows such depths of degradation than a wife chained to a man whom she neither loves nor respects."[25] When Emma Goldman argued that society did not need "a new woman but an emancipated woman," she alluded to a debate born out of the anxieties of antebellum America.

Emma Goldman's description of marriage as slavery highlighted one of the signal differences between nineteenth-century sex radicalism and her particular set of beliefs. Goldman adopted a shared language and a belief in individual sovereignty from earlier American free lovers, but she founded her ideals in a very different impulse. While antebellum sex radicals initiated their critique of marriage in a milieu of evangelical Christian fervor and religious revelation, Goldman centered her free love beliefs in anti-capitalist sentiments. Some of the most serious challenges to traditional marriage before the Civil War began within religious movements such as spiritualism with its emphasis on emotional connection, John Noyes' Oneida community with its standard open relationships, and Mormonism with its

[22] Spurlock, *Free Love*, pp. 73-74, 139
[23] Passet, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Emancipation*, p. 13
[24] Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex*, p. 345
[25] Spurlock, *Free Love*, p. 210

polygamous families. Antebellum discussions of marriage also occurred within a period defined in part by the spread of evangelical Christianity and its attendant emphasis on egalitarianism.[26] Goldman, on the other hand, anchored her free love ideals in a spirit of anti-capitalist anarchism. By the time she had imbibed these ideas, sex radicals had stripped them of their religious spirit, and one of the largest groups of free lovers were native-born and immigrant anarchists. Goldman adopted free love as a part of her embrace of anarchism, but by the end of her first decade in the movement, she had begun to prize sexual emancipation as one of the clearest paths to social liberation from the evils of property and exploitation. Her stress on sexual matters put her at odds with prominent anarchists and philosophical founders of her movement and was not a blind adoption of a pre-established set of beliefs. In a sense, the anti-capitalist nature of her free love set her apart from the sex radicals who had come before her and her fervent sex radicalism defined her against her contemporaries in the anarchist movement.

Goldman believed that men and women wed not for love but to exploit their spouses, and in return for their sacrifices, they were compensated unfairly – the essence of a "false relationship" which the radicals of the 1850s had condemned. She argued that these arrangements made a sham of marriage, a servant of the wife, and the fount of sickness for the entire society. "[M]arriage relations, are the foundation of private property, ergo, the foundation of our cruel and inhuman system," she claimed. "With wealth and superfluity on one side, and idleness, exploitation, poverty, starvation, and crime on the other."[27] In a social and legal system in which men held all the power, Goldman reminded her listeners, even if women gained financial security and relief from wage labor through marriage, they were bound to suffer under the yoke of their husbands. "The alliance should be formed," she asserted, "not as it is

[26] Louis J. Kern, *An Ordered Love: Sex Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias – The Shakers, The Mormons, & The Oneida Community*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981)
[27] Goldman, "Marriage," *the Firebrand*

now, to give the woman a support and home, but because the love is there."[28] To do it any other way, Goldman argued, brought only dishonesty, suffering, and discontent. "Take the woman who marries for a home and fine clothes," Goldman told Nelly Bly. "She goes to the man with a lie on her lips and in her heart."[29] The vast majority of people built their marriages upon such lies no matter their social class, according to Goldman. The average workingman, tired from long days of unsatisfying work, valued a wife who was "a good cook and housekeeper; one that will look out only for his happiness, for his pleasures; one that will look to him as her lord, her master, her defender, her supporter." "The girl," mused Goldman, "has spent her childhood, and part of her womanhood, in the factory, feels her strength leaving her and pictures to herself the dreadful condition of ever having to remain a shopgirl, never certain of her work … [she feels] compelled to look out for a man, a good husband, which means one who can support her, and give her a good home."[30] "Isn't this the ideal home life?" a reporter asked Goldman. "Ideal home life, indeed!" Goldman replied incredulously. "The woman, instead of being the household queen, told about in story books, is the servant, the mistress, and the slave of both husband and children."[31] Goldman returned to the image of the wife as slave to stress that she was not only the property of her husband, but he expected her to be his servant as well. "At the present condition no man is worthy of the labor bestowed on him by women, who, in her household cares spends, on the average, more hours of toil than does the man," Goldman lectured, "and who at a correct financial valuation on her services as housekeeper, cook and drudge, as well as a nurse and trainer of her family, never can be repaid."[32] By treating marriage as a source of social security or an escape from a life of drudgery, Goldman argued that women

[28] "What is there in Anarchy for Women?" *St. Louis Post Dispatch Sunday Magazine*, April 24, 1897*, Emma Goldman: A Documentary History*
[29] Bly, "Nelly Bly Again," the New York *World*, September 17, 1893
[30] Goldman, "Marriage," *The Firebrand*
[31] "What is there in Anarchy for Women?" *St. Louis Post Dispatch Sunday Magazine*, April 24, 1897*, Emma Goldman: A Documentary History* "What is there in Anarchy for Women?"
[32] "Summary of a Lecture," *Lucifer, the Lighthouse*, March, 1898, EGP

simply enslaved themselves for life as the property of their husbands and the servants of their households.

Goldman also recognized that bourgeois notions of respectability led many women to marry in order to avoid public disgrace, and she answered this concern by comparing wives to prostitutes, the most disgraced women in society. She claimed that married women, no matter how unhappy they were, still felt superior to those who had no husband, and she compared marriage to prostitution in her lectures in order to shock her audiences and condemn liberal reformers as blind cowards and hypocrites. In the late nineteenth century, activists had transformed prostitution into a major issue of the moment, pitying and denigrating sex workers in what became known as the "social purity" movement. Although well-intentioned, these reformers refused to see how prone they themselves were to male violence, economic compulsion, and public morality. In their naiveté, Social purists often could not tell the difference between prostitutes and women who were enjoying the company of a date, and they had no way of conceiving of the fact that many women did not want their "help".[33] The young Emma Goldman saw their charity as self-righteous delusion. She laughed at how these "good goody people even suggest to confine this evil to one district in New York, in order to 'purify' all other districts of the city." Goldman called such ideas a "farce" and asked why these reformers don't "demand that all married inhabitants of New York be driven out because they certainly do not stand morally higher than the street woman." Goldman argued that as long as a husband owned the sexuality of his wife, a married woman of whatever class was worse off than a prostitute. "The sole difference between [a prostitute] and the married woman," Goldman exclaimed, "is that the one has sold herself into chattel slavery during life, for a home or a title, and the other one sells herself for the length of time she desires."[34] "Do away with marriage",

[33] Dubois and Gordon, "Seeking Ecstasy of the Battlefield," *Feminist Studies*, pp. 12-14
[34] Emma Goldman, "Marriage," the *Firebrand,* July 18, 1897, p. 2, EGP

she told Nelly Bly. "Let there be nothing but voluntary affection and there ceases to exist the prostitute wife and the prostitute street woman."[35]

Emma Goldman asserted that marriage was not only a form of prostitution but also the source of sexual traffic. She claimed that the system of civilized morality led scandalized women to sell their bodies and married men into their beds when it kept married partners in separate spheres, forced chastity upon young girls, and attached an indelible stigma to any woman who yielded to her natural passions. Women in the social purity movement had attacked prostitution, in part, because it posed a danger to them – the threat of venereal disease passed to them by their husbands. Like the social purists, Goldman recognized a double-standard for sexual behavior: society turned a blind eye to men who sought extra-marital sex while it forbade this behavior for women. She proposed in one lecture that the consecrating priest often handed the young virgin, in body and mind, to "some reformed rake for a husband,"[36] and in another, she noted that "while some skeptics hold the male transgressor of these ridiculous [moral] laws in contempt, he is excused and even encouraged by most in society."[37] Goldman argued that it was the same system of civilized morality which social purists hoped to save that forced an unnatural chastity upon young women and scandalized any who violated it. She insisted that it was their own code of prudishness which led men and women to trade favors discretely in the seedy parts of town. Goldman often referred to Mrs. (or Madame) Grundy, a character from eighteenth-century fiction, as her ideal of "prudishness, censorship, and the rigidity of social conventions."[38] Goldman claimed that women were their "own worst enemies." "They accepted the decrees of Mrs. Grundy," she explained, "and any woman who dared to disobey or step aside from the forms laid down by Mrs. Grundy was cast out of the pale

[35] Nelly Bly, "Nelly Bly Again," The New York *World*, September 17, 1893
[36] "Summary of a Lecture," *Lucifer, the Lighthouse*, March, 1898, EGP
[37] Goldman, "Sex Problems," *Free Society*, August 13, 1899, EGP
[38] Description of Mrs. Grundy from footnote, Falk, et al., *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History, Vol. 1,* p. 271

of society."[39] For Goldman, there was nothing unnatural about the expression of sexual urges, and she lamented the fact that women who chose to express sexuality were disgraced and unlovable in the eyes of society. "The heart is hampered and hedged in by all manner of ridiculous social and political laws and bad inhibitions," she argued, "and those who would live up to their natural inclinations are scorned, ostracized and even persecuted."[40]

Emma Goldman had adopted the argument that marriage was both a form and a cause of prostitution from her predecessors in the free love and sex radical movements. On the one hand, Ezra Heywood, an anarchist and free lover, had asserted in *Cupid's Yoke*, published in 1879, that marriage was as much a form of sex slavery as illegal prostitution. Under the current economic and moral code, Heywood claimed, a woman "faced the choice of selling her labor at a very cheap rate or selling her body (for a night as a whore, for a lifetime as a wife)."[41] On the other hand, Lillian Harmon, the daughter of the publisher of *Lucifer, The Lighthouse*, attacked the social purity reformers in the early 1890s. She argued that women had the right to regulate themselves and express their instincts freely. Harmon asserted that imprisoning sexuality in marriage would only exacerbate problems such as prostitution.[42] Emma Goldman discovered these ideas in sex-radical publications such as the *Firebrand*, *Lucifer, Free Society*, and *Liberty* which she read and corresponded with frequently. She also recalled meeting prominent sex radicals such as the Harmons, the Isaaks of San Francisco, and Kate Austen, a Missouri farm wife, in her memoirs. These late nineteenth-century free lovers openly defended women's rights to sexual expression and condemned any attempt to limit it within the traditional framework of marriage. Their open discussions of sexuality, especially in print, were daring and dangerous defenses of unpopular principles in the era of the Comstock Laws. They not only provided

[39] "Emma Goldman -- The Woman Anarchist Talks to Stocktonians Two Evenings," Stockton *Daily Record*, July 24, 1899, p. 5, EGP
[40] Goldman, "Sex Problems," *Free Society*, August 13, 1899, EGP
[41] Hal Sears, *The Sex Radicals*, pp. 162-163
[42] Joanne Passett, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Emancipation*, pp. 138-139

Goldman with ready imagery of marriage as prostitution with which to argue for her beliefs, but they also set an example of the importance of sexual discussion to the health of a free society.[43]

True expressions of romantic love required dialogue and understanding between the sexes, Emma Goldman argued, but as things stood, men and women knew very little about each other. Goldman believed in a meeting of minds in love, not just bodies and purses, but society had raised children separately and unequally. Woman, to be free, must be the mutual friend and mate of man," Goldman claimed.[44] Companionship, contact, and conversation would go a long way to mend the separate spheres. "Tell me," she asked an interviewer, "how can a woman go before a minister and take an oath to love 'this man' all her life? How can she tell by tomorrow, next week, if she may get to know this man and hate him? Love is founded on respect, and a woman cannot tell what a man is until she lives with him."[45] Children learned to think and act differently and to expect different outcomes in life based the artificial boundaries placed of their gender, Goldman asserted. "The boy is taught to be intelligent, bright, cleaver, strong, athletic, independent and self-reliant; to develop his natural faculties, to follow his passions and desires," lectured Goldman. "The girl has been taught to dress, to stand before the looking glass and admire herself, to control her emotions, her passions, her wishes, to hide her mental defects and to combine what little intelligence and ability she has on one point, to get profitably married." If people wished to overcome this conditioning, they would have to learn to meet as individuals and forget how men and women were supposed to act. "Society has kept both the sexes apart, the boy and the girl have been brought up along different lines," she added, so "that the two sexes hardly understand each other's nature."[46] She argued that society should allow children to develop their personalities freely without preconceived ideas of how each sex

[43] Horowitz, *Rereading Sex*, p. 358-403
[44] Goldman, "The New Woman," *Free Society*, February 13, 1898, EGP
[45] Bly, "Nelly Bly Again," The New York *World*, September 17, 1893
[46] Goldman, "Marriage," the *Firebrand*, July 18, 1897

should behave. This, she claimed, was a first step towards social equality and freedom. "The question of sex," she stated, "has no place in a great movement toward truth."[47]

For more than a half-century American free thinkers had been claiming that society pressed individuals into their narrow molds of bourgeois marriage and respectability, stifling their natural development. Beginning in the 1830s, American intellectuals elaborated the first suggestions of a long tradition of discontent with the mechanistic, mesmerizing, and rushed nature of a burgeoning commercial society. They argued that individuals, both men and women, should salvage the time to focus inwardly, to seek truth through experience, to converse with others about the nature of life, and to construct their own ethical and moral compasses. New England Transcendentalists were among the first Americans to propose such ideas. John Spurlock noted that the "New England sages came to see the individual as the fount of eternal truths and society as a conspiracy to silence these truths."[48] Eventually, this critique morphed into a suspicion of marriage customs. Transcendentalists believed that the quest of humanity was a search for the divinity within each individual, and this search could only begin when people could escape learned prejudices and artificial limits. Bourgeois marriage, by definition, constrained husbands and wives by designating separate spheres and placing barriers to free communication between them. Marriage, therefore, became an impediment to self-knowledge and social progress. Frances Wright, a writer and publisher, made similar arguments in the 1830s through her newspaper the *Free Enquirer* in New York City. Wright, in partnership with the communitarian Robert Dale Owen, emphasized the importance of sexual equality, education, and the injurious effects of tradition and censorship. The *Free Enquirer* challenged "the tyranny of custom and morality" and "the unnatural restrictions that the culture placed on women" in the words of historian Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz. Robert Dale Owen went on to write *Moral Physiology*, a book which advocated a scientific examination of the human body

[47] "Talk with Emma Goldman," the New York *Sun*, January 6, 1901
[48] Spurlock, *Free Love*, p. 43

and sexuality. As a Malthusian, Owen believed that frequent pregnancy was the major impediment to women's freedom and social progress, and he advocated his own birth control method in his book.[49]

After the Civil War, the arguments of such individualists for open discussion of sexual matters became more desperate and more dangerous. In the 1870s, a devout establishment of moral censors, inspired by evangelical religion, earned legislative legitimacy for their project under Anthony Comstock's leadership. The Comstock Law, passed by Congress in 1873 with the backing of the New York Y.M.C.A., promised vague, sweeping powers to a special agent of the United States Postal Service – a position designed specifically for Anthony Comstock. The law granted him the power to prosecute anyone who sold contraceptives, abortifacients, sexual implements, erotica, birth control literature, or any advertisements for birth control, abortion, or sex toys. It gave courts the right to seize and destroy any material a jury deemed "obscene or indecent" and indict anyone who produced, wrote, or printed it. The definitions of such terms were obviously broad, and appellate rulings grounded in common law held that the "obscene" material did not need to be aired publicly in court. Comstock used his law to prosecute pornography dealers and also pursued free lovers, doctors, and free speech advocates. From the 1870s forward, advocating open discussion of sexual matters became a federal crime in the United States, and free lovers and doctors willing to offer sex education became an endangered and embattled group.[50]

A small group of reformers and sex radicals continued to argue for open discussion of marriage and sexuality through the end of the nineteenth century, bravely challenging Comstock and leaving a legacy of resistance which inspired Emma Goldman. In her campaign to reform divorce laws, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for instance, championed the dissemination of physiological studies of sex for the establishment of a free and equal society. "Believing in

[49] Horowitz, *Rereading Sex*, pp. 50-69
[50] Ibid, pp. 358-385

exposing life to the open air," wrote Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, "Stanton and those in her camp … championed both the importance of sexual knowledge and the end of hypocrisy."[51] Sex radicals also called for open discussions of female sexuality. "Only uncensored investigation [of sexuality], not legislation, would eliminate 'sex evils from society,'" noted Joanne Passett in her study of sex radical women. This was not only a rebuke of Comstock's censorship but also of the social purity movement which sought to protect women with anti-prostitution and age-of-consent laws which hid young women from sexual knowledge instead of encouraging them to talk and learn about their erotic instincts. The sex radicals of the late nineteenth century argued that women did not need protection. They asserted that female sexuality was a meaningful expression of individuality. Therefore, society should not fight to constrain sex and sexual knowledge to avoid female disgrace and vice, but foster candor and intelligent discussion which had the power to "enhance a woman's physical and emotional well-being."[52]

Under the influence of these reformers and sex radicals, Goldman argued that men and women should begin conversing and learning about each other despite the shame and censorship spread by public moralists. Women, she claimed, were especially oppressed by the tenets of morality which demanded marriage but kept a strict silence about the "duties" of a wife. Goldman lectured against "the false education of [a girl] taught from infancy. That her mission was to marry, and thus have a claim for support on a man, and yet totally unfit, because of lack of knowledge of her sexual functions and rights, to become a mother."[53] "The duty of the wife," Goldman told one audience, was kept as an "impure subject for consideration to the young, unmarried woman, and thus the ignorant girl is forced into battle unprepared for life's consequences."[54] She beseeched her listeners to learn about their bodies and express their

[51] Ibid, p. 345
[52] Passet, *Sex Radicals*, p. 157
[53] "Summary of a Lecture," *Lucifer, the Lighthouse*, March, 1898, EGP
[54] Goldman, "The New Woman," *Free Society*, February 13, 1898, p. 2, EGP

natural impulses.[55] "The subject of sex is a sealed book to the girl," Goldman argued, "because she has been given to understand that it is impure, immoral and indecent to even mention the sex question."[56] She claimed that people needed to have the strength to stand against the moralists and "violently reproached women as being their own worst enemies" for readily ostracizing those who did not match society's vision of propriety.[57] "The sex act is simply the execution of certain natural functions of the human body, as natural, and healthful and as necessary when exercised temperately as the functions of the stomach, the brain, the muscles, etc.," Goldman contended. "We do not pay or consult a preacher or politician in the use of our other organs so why should we do so in the use of our procreative organs?"[58] She considered almost any interference with sexual expression the violation of a basic right and defended acts that were highly controversial during her time and some that remain so today. "Any act entered into by two individuals voluntarily [is] not vice," she asserted. "What is usually hastily condemned as vice by thoughtless individuals, such as homo-sexuality, masturbation, etc., should be considered from a scientific standpoint, and not in a moralizing way."[59] In her defense of sexual expression and sexual knowledge, Goldman returned to her belief in individual sovereignty. "The basic law of society is noninterference with the rest of its members: non-invasion," she contended; "the sex organs as well as all the other organs of the human body are the property of the individual possessing them and that individual and none other must be the sole authority and judge over his or her own acts."[60] Her arguments for conversation, education, and a scientific approach to sex suggested the emerging influence of sexual modernists on her beliefs, but Emma Goldman had to endure a period of considerable upheaval and

[55] "Summary of a Lecture," *Lucifer, the Lighthouse*, March, 1898, EGP
[56] Goldman, "Marriage," *The Firebrand*, 1897
[57] "Emma Goldman -- The Woman Anarchist Talks to Stocktonians Two Evenings," Stockton *Daily Record*, July 24, 1899, p. 5, EGP
[58] Goldman, "Sex Problems," *Free Society*, 1899, EGP
[59] "Report from Chicago," *Free Society*, Vol. 7, no. 19 (June 9, 1901), p. 3, EGP
[60] Goldman, "Sex Problems," *Free Society*, 1899, EGP

transformation before she was able to express the mature ideas and intellectual currents that characterized her years as a publisher and essayist.

Goldman's lectures were impressive displays – inspiring, riveting, and courageous demonstrations of her passionate belief in human freedom – but they were not the ideal medium for her to express the sociological and psychological complexities of the ideas she had begun to encounter by the turn-of-the-century. As well, she began to lose faith in the lasting power of her speeches on her exhausting tours around the country. At the beginning of her career, she had believed in the ability of an impassioned speaker to alter an audience forever in a single night. She recalled the first time she had witnessed her early mentor Johan Most on stage, thinking that "the spoken word hurled forth among the masses with such wonderful eloquence, such enthusiasm could never be erased from the human mind and soul." By the publication of her first book in 1910, something had changed for Goldman. "My great faith in the wonder worker, the spoken word, is no more," she wrote in her preface. "I have realized its inadequacy to awaken thought or even emotion … oral propaganda is at best but a means of shaking people from their lethargy: it leaves no lasting impression."[61] As early as the late-1890s, a decade before she would have the chance to publish her own works, Goldman had doubted her ability to change her listeners in the moment. "I am not going to bring about a revolution," she told the *Chicago Tribune*. "I have not the power, I am sorry to say, or I would do it tomorrow. I will be content if I sow the seeds of discontent."[62] As the Goldman matured and realized she could not upend society in day, she sensed the need to record her ideas in a more permanent and lucid form and conceived *Mother Earth*, the magazine to which she would devote herself for the final productive decade of her life in the United States. "At last my preparatory work of years was about to take complete form," remembered Goldman of the magazine's inception. "The spoken word, fleeting at best, was no longer to be my only medium of expression, the

[61] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1910), p. 47
[62] "Emma Goldman Has Her Say," Chicago *Tribune*, 30 September 1897, *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History, Vol. 1,* p. 288

platform not the only place where I could feel at home. There would be the printed thought, more lasting in its effect."[63] Goldman did not come to the point where she could publish and fund her own magazine, print her own books, or devote all of her time to propaganda solely through her own efforts. Her celebrity, the true financier of her endeavors as a publisher, had been as much a product of chance as ambition.

From her first entrance into the public sphere, personal and public tragedy had often delivered increasing fame into Emma Goldman's life. Her first bout with notoriety came in the aftermath of Alexander Berkman's attempted assassination of the steel magnate Henry Frick. This event, to which Goldman had been a conspirator, cost the young anarchist her closest companion for the next fourteen years. Goldman went to prison a year later when she aroused the ire of the New York authorities during a series of unemployment demonstrations in the midst of a severe economic depression. Upon her release, she was the most sought after radical speaker in the city. But nothing seems to have caused the same self-doubt, depression, and increased publicity as the assassination of President McKinley in 1901 by a deranged man named Leon Czolgosz. The assassin had met Goldman briefly in the months before he shot the President, and police had tried to connect her to the crime as an inspiration or conspirator. Czolgosz resisted the pressure to incriminate Goldman during his interrogation, but Chicago authorities detained her nonetheless. Investigators cleared Goldman of all connections to the crime, but her public sympathy for the assassin, who was tried hastily and executed, drove a wedge between the anarchist movement and its most prominent voice. In the aftermath of this event, Emma Goldman left public life and assumed a false name to live in anonymity. After a period of lonely introspection and a public backlash against official repression of the free-speech rights of anarchists, Goldman reemerged more famous than ever. Before 1901, Goldman had worked long hours as a seamstress, a nurse, and a midwife to support herself while she pursued her career as a propagandist, but after McKinley's assassination, her lecture tours generated

[63]Emma, Goldman, *Living My Life*, (New York: Knopf, 1931), p. 377

enough income to give her freedom for study and respite. She also gained entrance to fresh intellectual circles in New York. "My public life grew colorful," remembered Goldman. "I could afford to take longer rests between [nursing] cases. It gave me the opportunity to do much reading that had been neglected for some time." [64] Her growing celebrity and the evolving sympathy for her in liberal circles also provided a new audience for her ideas. "I myself now ceased to be considered anathema: on the contrary, the very people who had been hostile to me began to seek me out," she recalled. "Various lecture forums, like the Manhattan Liberal Club, the Brooklyn Philosophical Society, and other American organizations invited me to speak. I gladly accepted because of the opportunity I had been wanting for years to reach the native intelligentsia."[65] As a result of both ambition and accident, Goldman was able to conceive of herself as an intellectual who should record her ideas for posterity, and she produced a body of work over the following decade that showed the influence of European sexual modernists and found a ready audience among a group of restless young Americans.

From 1906 to 1917 when Emma Goldman did the bulk of her writing, American metropolitans witnessed the emergence of a class of intellectuals hammering a total critique of bourgeois art, morality, and politics. They promoted socialism, women's professional and social freedom, free speech, experimental poetry, fiction, and drama, eccentricity, adventure, revolution, sex, and just about anything that was "new." Goldman's anarchism provided the "noblest of radical dreams" of individual emancipation to these young modernists in the words of Henry May.[66] Bohemians heard Goldman lecture, read her books, sought her friendship, and wrote about her in their magazines. "Whoever means to face the world and its problems intelligently must know something about Emma Goldman," wrote Margaret Anderson in the *Little Review* in 1910. "As the enemy of all smug contentment of all blind acquiescence in things as they are, and as the prophet who dares to preach that our failures are not in wrong

[64] Ibid, p. 337; Stansell, *American Moderns*, p. 123
[65] Goldman, *Living My Life*, p. 335
[66] May, *The End of American Innocence*, p. 305

applications of values but in the value themselves, Emma Goldman is the most challenging spirit in America."[67] Twenty years into her career, Goldman had touched a nerve in American society.

In her essays from this period, Goldman maintained the foundation of sex radical ideas and imagery from in her lectures, but she began to propose arguments she had found in contemporary European intellectual currents as well. Essays such as "The White Slave Traffic" and "Marriage and Love" were replete with images of marital prostitution and shackled wives. She denounced moral censors and the separation of the sexes in "Victims of Morality" and "The Hypocrisy of Puritanism." She mocked progressive reformers in "Woman Suffrage" and "The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation." Then she sprinkled a new accent of sociological and psychological complexity to her old philosophy arguing the benefits of a scientific approach to sexual knowledge, a celebrating of the body's natural functions, encouraging emotional intimacy between men and men, and defending intuitive expressions of sexual desire. She had discovered these ideas in the works of Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter, Ellen Keys, and Sigmund Freud. These European modernists were psychologists, sociologists, and doctors whose work had begun to drift across the Atlantic around the turn-of-the-century. The historian Paul Robinson called them "sexual enthusiasts" for their embrace of sexuality as a valid field of inquiry and their denunciation of popular antipathy to sexual expression and variety.[68]

Havelock Ellis, an English psychologist, made an early and powerful impact on Goldman's ideas through his defense of sexual practice as a valid field of inquiry into human psychology. Strains of Ellis' influence are evident in her lectures from as early as 1899, but in her essays Goldman had begun to make explicit reference to facts and opinions from Ellis' *Psychology of Sex*, especially his studies of prostitution. Ellis understood that he was arguing against the mainstream of his society when he claimed that sexuality deserved scientific study and also defended masturbation, homosexuality, and sexual variety as natural human behavior.

[67] Margaret Anderson, "The Challenge of Emma Goldman", *The Little Review*, (May 1910)
[68] Paul Robinson, *The Modernization of Sex: Havelock Ellis, Alfred Kinsey, William Masters and Virginia Johnson*, (New York, 1978), p. 2

Much like Goldman, Ellis was "a fierce critic of the traditional Western concept of marriage," according to Paul Robinson, arguing that it made "a substantive relationship into a formal one."[69] Ellis' work encouraged a spirit of tolerance rare in his day and offered an early critique of narrow bourgeois limits on acceptable behavior which stifled natural forms of sexual expression.

Emma Goldman channeled Havelock Ellis' work to argue that society forced both ignorance and fear of sexual matters which left men and women ignorant of their own physical and psychological natures. She argued that repression of sexual conversation and education produced numerous detriments to modern society: spreading disease, stifling emotional development, and exposing young women to exploitation. "The Church, as well as Puritanism, has fought the flesh as something evil; it had to be subdued and hidden at all cost. The result of this vicious attitude is only now beginning to be recognized by modern thinkers and educators," she wrote.[70] Consider venereal disease, Goldman suggested. "By its methods of obscurity, disguise, and concealment, Puritanism has furnished favorable conditions for the growth and spread of these diseases," she wrote, but "venereal diseases are not a mysterious or terrible thing, the penalty of the sin of the flesh, a sort of shameful evil, branded by purist malediction, but an ordinary disease which may be treated and cured."[71] Like Ellis, Goldman stressed the benefits a scientific or medical approach to sex could have on the lives of ordinary young men and women. In an atmosphere of repression, children learned to fear the functions of their bodies, but if they could understand their sexuality rationally, not morally, as adults they could address common problems such as disease or sexual dysfunction calmly and without shame, benefiting the whole society.

[69] Paul Robinson's entire first chapter explores Havelock Ellis' theories and his impact on the study of sexuality in Western history. Ibid, p. 29
[70] Emma Goldman, "The Hypocrisy of Puritanism," *Anarchism*, p. 176
[71] Ibid, p. 181

Emma Goldman asserted that sexual ignorance curtailed the development of human personalities, slowed intellectual growth, and left women prone to the slavery of marriage and the exploitation of prostitution. Children could learn nothing about the emotions and sexual urges they felt in a society controlled by "the hard traditions of social morality," Goldman claimed. "The majority of parents," she wrote, "consider it as something indecent and improper, something disgraceful, almost criminal, to be suppressed and fought like some terrible disease." This ignorance and suppression turned the child's burgeoning sexuality into "vulgarity and coarseness through the stupidity of those surrounding it, so that everything fine and beautiful is either crushed altogether or hidden in the innermost depths, as a great sin."[72] Young women suffered the detrimental effects of this suppression disproportionately, "reared as a sex commodity" yet "kept in absolute ignorance of the meaning and importance of sex."[73] Goldman stressed the absurdity of a culture which sanctified the woman's role as wife and mother but avoided any public discussion of the sexual aspects of conjugal intimacy. "From infancy, almost, the average girl is told that marriage is her ultimate goal," Goldman wrote, "Like the mute beast fattened for slaughter, she is prepared for that." Yet because it is "indecent and filthy for a respectable girl to know anything of the marital relation," she continued, "the prospective wife and mother is kept in complete ignorance of her only asset in the competitive field –sex." The ignorance of sexual matters cemented lasting damage to women who learned only one path for their lives but were kept ignorant it promised, and under a system of civilized morality that punished any deviation from the singular acceptable norm, women peaked curiously behind the curtain suffered even greater punishment. "It is safe to say," Goldman wrote, "that a large percentage of the unhappiness, misery, distress, and physical suffering of matrimony is due to the criminal ignorance in sex matters that is being extolled as a great virtue." [74] In another essay, she stated that "so long as a girl is not to know how to take care of herself, not to know the

[72] Emma Goldman, "The Child and Its Enemies," *Everyman*, December, 1914, p. 21-22
[73] Emma Goldman, "The Traffic in Women," *Anarchism*, p. 190
[74] Emma Goldman, "Marriage and Love," *Anarchism*, p. 237

function of the most important part of her life, we need not be surprised if she becomes an easy prey to prostitution, or to any other form of a relationship which degrades her to the position of an object for mere sex gratification."[75] Thus, Goldman argued that only candid articulation of human sexuality could alleviate the coarseness, marital discontent, and unnecessary spread of venereal disease that plagued society.

Emma Goldman used Edward Carpenter and Ellen Key's defense of modern romantic intimacy into a refinement of some basic sex radical beliefs, prevalent in her early lectures that love alone justified sexuality and artificial social barriers prevented love's true consummation. Carpenter, an Englishman, and Key, a Swede, had argued that sexual relationships should contain intellectual and emotional intimacy. In *Love's Coming of Age*, Carpenter wrote that "marriage shall mean the mean friendship as well as passion, that a comrade-like equality shall be included in the word love."[76] Key made a similar argument in her book, *Love and Marriage*. Although Americans had begun marrying for love long before the turn-of-the-century, they often socialized separately, and middle-class ideals still elevated women as wives and mothers to a sanctified pedestal that protected them from worldly, political, or intellectual cares. Modernists, such as Carpenter and Key, argued that lovers should share their everyday cares, intimate emotions, and ambitions. In the metropolitan bohemia of the twentieth century, romantic partners valued each other's company and conversation, and sensed consciously that this was a divergence from the rest of American society. Men and women in Greenwich Village knew that people had affairs everywhere, they knew that young, unmarried people had sex in towns and cities all over the Unites States, but as one young bohemian put it, "in the provinces you could not talk to your lovers."[77]

[75] Goldman, "The Traffic in Women," *Anarchism*, p. 190
[76] Edward Carpenter, *Love's Coming of Age*, (New York: Mitchell Kennerly, 1911), p. 122
[77] Ellen Kay Trimberger, "Feminism, Men, and Modern Love: Greenwich Village, 1900-1925," *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, eds. Ann Snitow, et al., (New York Monthly Review Press, 1983), p. 133

Goldman argued that the separate spheres of civilized morality fostered an inherent emotional and instinctual incompatibility in men and women – an "insurmountable wall of superstition, custom, and habit" – which prevented the realization of Carpenter's "comrade-like equality." The institution of marriage had created a "life-long environment of the two sexes," Goldman wrote, "an environment so different from each other that man and woman must remain strangers." "Marriage," she added, "has not the potentiality of developing knowledge of, and respect for, each other, without which every union is doomed to failure." With women trained to attract a husband through superficial means and men taught to show only strength and self-control, how could they possibly meet in equality as honest and intimate friends? After she snared her husband, with little left to gain, the average wife "becomes reckless in appearance, clumsy in her movements, dependant in her decisions, cowardly in her judgment, a weight and a bore, which most men grow to hate and despise."[78] Friendship and sensitivity, she argued, were critical to the function of sexual relationships. "Sex emotions and love are among the most intimate, the most intense, and sensitive expressions of our being," she wrote. "They are so deeply related to individual physical and psychic traits as to stamp each love affair an independent affair, unlike any other love affair." Without open dialogue, sympathy, and warmth, Goldman and the modernists claimed, sexual partners would fail to understand or conform to each other's desires, but if women succeeded in fashioning a relationship of equality and understanding, they would enjoy "the most intense and sensitive expressions of our being" – what Ellen Key called "soulful sensuousness."[79]

Emma Goldman also applied her beliefs about intimacy to her critique of the "new woman" of the turn-of-the-century who had remained single for the sake of her professional life and forfeited the joys of sexual companionship. As someone who worked to support herself and valued her independence, Goldman empathized with these women. In her memoirs, she

[78] Goldman, "Marriage and Love," *Anarchism,* p. 235
[79] Emma Goldman, "Jealousy: Causes and a Possible Cure," *Red Emma Speaks*, ed. Alix Kate Shulman, (Random House: New York, 1972), and Trimberger, "Feminism, Men, and Modern Love," p. 133

discussed befriending and nursing many single, professional women during her years. Their apprehension of men and marriage was legitimate, she agreed. Most men were ill-equipped to love intellectual, empowered, and independent woman in equality. "One cannot help but see that the higher the mental development of woman," Goldman wrote, "the less possible it is for her to meet a congenial mate who will see in her, not only sex, but also the human being, the friend, the comrade and strong individuality, who cannot and ought not to lose a single trait of her character." Women, she argued, should not lower themselves to their companion's standards nor reduce themselves to the prejudices of society. She wrote that "the problem that confronts us today, and which the nearest future is to solve, is how to be one's self and yet in oneness with others, to feel deeply with all human beings and still retain one's own characteristic qualities." The solution was not to renounce all relationships with men, but to have the courage to face the condemnation of society by having a lover in equality outside of marriage. "[The new woman's] narrow, Puritanical vision banished man, as a disturber and doubtful character, out of their emotional life," she wrote, leaving essential impulses unfulfilled – her desire for intimacy, for sex, and for children. "Emancipations should make it possible for woman to be human in the truest sense," she reminded her audience. "Everything within her that craves assertion and activity should reach its fullest expression; all artificial barriers should be broken."[80] To avoid becoming "an artificial being," modern woman "will have to do away with the ridiculous notion that to be loved, to be sweetheart and mother, is synonymous with being slave or subordinate,...with the absurd notion of dualism of the sexes, or that man and woman represent two antagonistic worlds." Goldman had expressed a similar idea in lectures in 1901 when she stated that "the feminine mind needs rubbing against the masculine mind," arguing that the two sexes should not contest but complement each other.[81] "A true conception of the relation of the sexes will not admit of conqueror and conquered," she added in 1910; "it

[80] Emma Goldman, "The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation," *Anarchism*, pp. 219-220, 225, 231
[81] "Talk with Emma Goldman," the New York *Sun*, January 6, 1901

knows of but one great thing: to give of one's self boundlessly in order to find one's self richer, deeper, better. That alone can fill the emptiness, and transform the tragedy of woman's emancipation into joy."[82] The idea that women, as well as men, required sexual fulfillment to reach their full potential was critical to the development of Goldman's social thought and her life as well. Many sex radicals had promoted the importance of female sexuality against the grain of mainstream attitudes, but Goldman fused this belief with Sigmund Freud's claims about the psychological and physiological effects of sublimated desire to argue the necessity of intuitive and instinctual sexual expression. Simply put, if an individual stimulated one's mind and feelings, there was no reason – especially society's prejudice – to deny them the body.

Sigmund Freud exerted an enormous effect on Emma Goldman's ideas about sexuality at a time when most of her contemporaries were ignorant of his work, but not necessarily in the way most historians and biographers have assumed. When Goldman was writing her essays in the first fifteen years of the twentieth century, Freud's was not yet a household name, and his work was not yet influential even in the American psychiatric community until the 1920s. Goldman, however, possessed two advantages which led to her early discovery of Freud. Firstly, she had studied nursing at the Allgemeines Krankenhaus in Vienna in 1895. During her stay, the twenty-six-year-old Goldman had snuck into a few of Freud's lectures.[83] This fact has led many historians to believe that Freud's influence on Goldman's sexual thought began in 1895, but it's not actually apparent in her lectures or writings until much later, 1908 and after. Most likely, her ability to speak German as a native tongue was more beneficial to her incorporation of Freud's theories into her own than her early contact with the eminent doctor. This would have allowed her to read his books and essays, if she could get her hands on them, much earlier than her fellow Americans. Goldman's essays displayed her familiarity with Freud's *Three Essays on*

[82] Goldman, "Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation," *Anarchism*, p. 231
[83] Goldman, *Living My Life*, p. 184

the Theory of Sexuality (1905) and "'Civilized' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness" (1908).

In these works, Freud spoke about the benefits of individual sexual fulfillment and the vitiating effects of sexual ignorance and suppression, ideas that Goldman would incorporate into her own theories. Freud had argued in *Three Essays* that the sex drive did not originate from the need to reproduce, but from the need to satisfy genital pleasure. Marriage was a way for prehistoric civilized man to ensure that the source of this pleasure remained close. If he was going to plow fields all day, he could not be wasting time searching for his next date with gratification. In modern civilized life, society had circumscribed the fulfillment of sexual desire to the conjugal bed, and Freud argued that this posed a series of related problems. Firstly, marriage with its emphasis on reproduction as the goal of sex did not offer enough sexual gratification. Civilized morality dictated sexual abstinence from the unmarried – a potentially long and unnatural suppression of vital urges. Thirdly, civilized morality kept women ignorant about their sexual urges before marriage stifling their intellectual and emotional growth and instilling a sexual frigidity that lasted in married life. "The preparation for marriage," Freud wrote, "frustrates the aim of marriage itself."[84] Freud believed that human beings could not exorcise sexual urges, only suppress them, in which case they would find expression in "perversion" or neuroses. "Anyone qualified to investigate the conditioning factors of nervous illness," Freud wrote, "will soon be convinced that the increase of nervous disorders in our society is due to greater restrictions placed on sexual activity."[85] As well, Freud argued that the path a young person chose to the fulfillment of sexual desire would be a proving ground for how they would seek to fulfill all the goals of their lives.[86] Therefore, if they chose to suppress their desire for sexual gratification, they would suppress their desires for all the instinctual goals of

[84] Sigmund Freud, "'Civilized' Sexual Morality and Nervous Illness," originally published in 1908, reprinted in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. David McLintock, (Penguin Classics: London, 2002), p. 99
[85] Ibid, p. 96
[86] Ibid, p. 99

their life – creative, professional, and emotional. Chastity, sexual ignorance, and ingrained frigidity corrupted each new generation and led to increasing occurrences of mental illness. Man had constructed civilization to alleviate suffering, Freud argued, but in doing so, he had provided a new source of anguish. "The baleful influence of civilization," he stated, "is reduced to the harmful suppression of sexual life in civilized peoples (or classes) by the 'civilized' sexual morality prevailing in them."[87]

Goldman adopted Freud's arguments about the enervating and disfiguring effects of sexual suppression to her discussion of young girls who could not find a respectable release for their erotic impulses. She argued that the pre-marital chastity and sexual ignorance cramped the development of women from an early age. "It is due to this ignorance that the entire life and nature of the girl is thwarted and crippled," she wrote.[88] A young girl falls in love with a respectable young man, Goldman imagined, but "Morality decrees that unless he can marry the girl, she must never know the raptures of love, the ecstasy of passion, which reaches its culminating expression in the sex embrace." The young man of course "must make his pile first, must save enough to establish a home," and after "many long weary years," the "young, beautiful flower" becomes "the celibate, the famished and withered human plant."[89] Goldman, like Freud, argued that psychological effects of celibacy could be severe. "The young flower, with every fiber aglow with the fire of life, with all her being crying out for love and passion," she argued, "has no outlet. She develops headaches, insomnia, hysteria; grows embittered, quarrelsome, and soon becomes a faded, withered, joyless being, a nuisance to herself and everyone else." [90] "Absolute sexual continence is imposed upon the unmarried woman, under pain of being considered immoral or fallen," Goldman added, "with the result of producing neurasthenia, impotence, depression, and a great variety of nervous complaints involving diminished power of work,

[87] Ibid, p. 88
[88] Emma Goldman, "Victims of Morality," (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1913), p. 2, EGP
[89] Ibid, p. 3
[90] Ibid, p. 4

limited enjoyment of life, sleeplessness, and preoccupation with sexual desires and imaginings."[91] Goldman also argued that sexual frustration could lead to social problems such as prostitution when working-class women suffered the combined conditions of civilized morality and industrial labor. "Girls, mere children, work in crowded, over-heated rooms ten to twelve hours daily at a machine, which tends to keep them in a constant over-excited sex state," she wrote. "The street or some place of cheap amusement is the only means of forgetting their daily routine… It is hard to say which of the two factors brings the girl's over-sexed condition to a climax, but it is certainly the most natural thing that a climax should result." "The moralists," Goldman added, "condemn a girl for all eternity, because she has gone from the 'path of virtue'; that is, because her first sex experience has taken place without the sanction of the Church."[92] These occurrences, Goldman argued, were the first step toward lasting disrepute and prostitution. She also asserted that sexual frustration could spoil the lives of bourgeois women as well. "The overwrought and oversexed middle class girl," she claimed, "hedged in her narrow confines with family and social traditions, guarded by a thousand eyes, afraid of her own shadow – the yearning of her inmost being for the man or the child, must turn to cats, dogs, canary birds, or the Bible Class." Emma Goldman argued that the unnatural suppressions of celibacy forced psychological discontent which manifested itself in physical ruin. She concluded that the "cruel dictate of Morality" was "shutting out love, light, and joy from the lives of innumerable Victims."[93]

But Goldman refused to end on such a depressing note and crafted Freud's insights into an impassioned challenge to women and men who could see the detrimental effects of civilized morality to bravely explore their sexual desires, regardless of what moralists thought. If suppression was a primary source of unhappiness, Goldman suggested, allow people to express their sexual urges, intuitively and uncompromisingly and a better world will follow. She

[91] Goldman, "The Hypocrisy of Puritanism," *Anarchism*, pp. 177-178
[92] Goldman, "The Traffic in Women," *Anarchism,* p. 192
[93] Goldman, "Victims of Morality," p. 4, EGP

recognized that a revolution in the thoughts of women, even emancipated women, was necessary to overturn tradition. "Until woman has learned to defy the [moral censors] … to listen to the voice of her nature, whether it call for life's greatest treasure, love for a man, or her most glorious privilege, the right to give birth to a child, she cannot call herself emancipated" Goldman wrote. "The greatest shortcoming of the emancipation of the present day, lies its artificial stiffness and its narrow respectabilities, which produce and emptiness in woman's soul that will not let her drink from the fountain of life." According to Goldman, woman needed to open herself up to her natural desires, to "her love instinct, and her mother instinct," "to permit the boundless love and ecstasy contained in the deep emotion of the true woman, sweetheart, mother, in freedom," and "to cut loose." The modern emancipated woman was nothing more than "a compulsory vestal, before whom life, with its great clarifying sorrows and its deep, entrancing joy, rolls on without touching or gripping her soul" because she refused to exorcise "the internal tyrants" of morality which "seem to get along as beautifully in the heads and hearts of the most active exponents of woman's emancipation, as in the heads and hearts of our grandmothers." Independent women, according to Goldman, had to overcome "the dread of love for a man who is not her social equal; the fear that love will rob her of her freedom and independence; the horror that love or the joy of motherhood will only hinder her in the full exercise of her profession." "Can there be anything more outrageous," she asked rhetorically, "than the idea that a healthy, grown woman, full of life and passion, must deny nature's demand, must subdue her most intense craving, undermine her health and break her spirit, must stunt her vision, abstain from the depth and glory of sex experience until a "good" man comes along to take her unto himself as a wife?"[94] Goldman even went as far as to argue that men and women should allow their partners free rein to explore their sexual desires with others. "Two people bound by inner harmony and oneness," she wrote, "are not afraid to impair their mutual confidence and security if one or the other has outside attractions, nor will their relations end in

[94] Goldman, "The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation," *Anarchism,* pp. 233-243

vile enmity."[95] Goldman put great faith in desire, instincts, attractions, and the naturalness of sexual feeling. Essentially, she argued that sexual cravings were clues for the human soul to find contentment. By denying natural impulses, out of fear of dependence or disgrace, people missed the opportunity to experience a full-flowering of their personalities and intellect, and in turn, this prevented the betterment of the society as a whole. In this culminating point of her modernist beliefs about sexuality, she returned to the central impulse of her sex radical ideals: a conviction in individual sovereignty and the certainty that one person's fulfillment changed the whole society.

For over a half-century from Henry May to Christopher Lasch to Daniel Bell to Christine Stansell, scholars have investigated the development of intellectual modernism in American life. They have found its origins in the pulsing immigrant neighborhoods of Lower Manhattan, the feminist agitations and academic revolutions of the late nineteenth century, the generational discontent of young educated people, the influence of militant labor, socialism, Marxism, and anarchism. They have emphasized a sharp break with the past. The existing scholarship has argued that American intellectual modernism was obsessed with the "new" in art, politics, and culture. In an amendment to this historiography, this study reveals a deep interaction between Emma Goldman's mature modernist ideas on sexuality and marriage and the American past. Certainly, her ideas represented the flowering of new impulses in American intellectual life, which incorporated many new seeds of thought from across the Atlantic, but Goldman cultivated them in a bed dug deep in the foundations of antebellum American radicalism. If her ideas about sexual psychology and scientific sexual knowledge appeared decidedly foreign blooms, she fostered them in the same republican ground of individualism, equality, and idealism tilled by Josiah Warren and Henry David Thoreau.

[95] Goldman, "Jealousy: Its Causes and Cures," *Red Emma Speaks: Selected Writings and Speeches by Emma Goldman*, ed. Alix Kate Shulman, (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 173

CHAPTER 2

"The Goldman Woman"

When Nellie Bly arrived to interview Emma Goldman in the fall of 1893, she thought she would encounter a vile sociopath, and she assumed her readers shared her prejudices. "Do you need an introduction to Emma Goldman?" she wrote. "You have seen supposed pictures of her." Bly prepared for "a property-destroying, capitalist-killing, riot-promoting agitator" – "a great raw-boned creature, with short hair and bloomers, a red flag in one hand, a burning torch in the other; both feet constantly off of the ground and 'murder!' continually on her lips." Even if Bly was having a bit of fun caricaturing this hovering specter of female radicalism, she was also describing the genuine fears Goldman aroused in many readers of the New York papers. Emma Goldman's polite, intellectual manner stunned Bly, and her appearance astonished her even more. Goldman impressed Bly as "[a] little bit of a girl, just 5 feet high, including her boot-heels, not showing her 120 pounds; with a saucy, turned-up nose and very expressive blue-grey eyes that gazed inquiringly at me." She wore a "modest blue serge Eton suit, with a blue muslin shirtwaist and scarf, had no suggestion of bloomers, and the light brown hair, not banged but falling loosely over her forehead and gathered in a little knot behind, was very pretty and girlish." Bly had entered expecting an uncivilized fiend but found an "unusual and extraordinary woman" who liked to shop for books—"Think of that, you girls who put every dollar upon your backs!" – and bathing – "as if recalling the oft-repeated declaration of Anarchists' hatred for soap."[1]

[1] "Nelly Bly Again", The New York *World*, September 17 1893, *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years, Vol. 1,* (2003), pp. 155-160

Bly's reaction epitomized the effort of journalists in the 1890s to comprehend Goldman and her unorthodox sexuality. Emma Goldman broadcast a cipher of disparate signals regarding her ambitions, her class, and her sexuality. In the 1890s, Goldman looked and often acted the part of a decent and polite young woman, but she argued for freedoms which bourgeois society forbid. Still in her early twenties, she was attractive though not a great beauty. She showed intelligence, charisma, candor, and a gift for public speaking. She dressed modestly in a neat, feminine style. Reporters often mistook her for an educated, middle-class girl, slumming amongst the working class, although Goldman had never gone to high school and worked long hours as a seamstress in order to live. At the same time, she posed a terroristic and moral threat to bourgeois society. In 1892, her lover, Alexander Berkman, had shot a famous capitalist in a botched assassination. The following year she appeared to hold a singular influence over New York's unemployed masses during a moment of frightful economic depression. A city court tried her for attempting to ignite a bread riot and sentenced her to a year in prison. Along with this she disavowed marriage and declared the right to have as many lovers as she wished. On stage, she shouted insults and provoked crowds and policemen fearlessly. She defended the acts of assassins and called respected citizens murderers. She kept the company of rough men in disreputable places, drank beer, and smoked cigarettes. Her persona combined femininity with aggression, modesty with irreverence, and allure with danger.

Mainstream newspapers struggled to grasp how Goldman's polite manners, feminine appearance, and acute intelligence cohered with her brash persona, radical politics, immigrant background, and free-love ideal. Although reporters often presented themselves as knowing, objective observers of unconventional personalities who saw the duplicity of Goldman's act, the press coverage from papers such as the New York *World*, *Times*, and *Daily Tribune* presented a confused amalgam of admiration, novelistic description, humor, hack science, gossip, and fear-mongering. Turn-of-the-century journalists found both a heel and a headliner in Emma

Goldman. They exclaimed that she presented a peril to the republic – "the most dangerous woman in America" became a well-worn epithet – but they also publicized her movement, admitted her qualities, printed her speeches verbatim, detailed the minutiae of her appearance, and reported her sex life as news. Reporters often referred to her as "the Goldman Woman" unsure what she was and what she represented.

In their first encounter with Emma Goldman, the press labored to decipher her social origins, the meaning of her sexuality, and the secret of her appeal because they sought to understand what, if any, threat she posed to the social order. They did so without any premonition of the cultural revolution she would come to represent for many Americans. Goldman had yet to begin expressing her own distinct views about marriage, sexuality, or bourgeois morality, and she was discrete with most of the press when asked about her personal life. Reporters had only Goldman's appearance, her public poses, gossip, and the historical memories and cultural associations she triggered as tools to discover her meaning. They came to view Goldman's sexuality as a threat, but only because they feared she could use it to incite class conflict during a period of grave economic trouble. These reports expose serious public anxiety about the danger which lay hidden or disguised within the expanding, anonymous, industrial city of the late nineteenth century. More importantly for this study, they show that Emma Goldman's public persona would have to evolve significantly before Americans came to see her as a threat to the chastity of their sons and daughters and not the sanctity of their property.

Although they often expressed shock and dismay at her words and actions, reporters never implied that Goldman represented anything new or unseen in the history of the city. In fact they often displayed familiarity with anarchist politics and free love beliefs, and rooted their interpretations of Goldman in established biases against nineteenth-century radical movements. Much like her ideas, Goldman's public image belonged to a deep history of American radical

dissent. Anarchists, feminists, and free lovers were established sects in the public life of New York City, and each group had put forth prominent women before Emma Goldman's arrival. American anarchism had peaked in the 1880s under the leadership of Johan Most who was still the most prominent speaker in the movement in 1892 when Goldman first appeared in the English-language newspapers. Female anarchists were common enough, some far more attractive than Goldman. Reporters on the Lower East Side were well-versed in the tenets of anarchism and radical politics in general. Free love was a much older tradition in American life with a great deal of activity focused within and right outside of New York City. Since the 1830s, Americans had been debating and experimenting with various challenges to legalized marriage, premarital chastity, and conjugal monogamy. As recently as the 1870s, a female sex radical and advocate of free love, Victoria Woodhull, had achieved celebrity status in New York, run for president, and caused an uproar when she publicly exposed Henry Ward Beecher's affair with a parishioner's wife. The press incorporated all of these historical and cultural associations in the construction of Emma Goldman's public image.

The story of this press coverage is a tale of turning-points – for Emma Goldman, New York City, the nation, and even the newspaper industry. Emma Goldman endured a seismic disruption in the course of her American life and an early peak of celebrity in the early 1890s. During these years, she broke from her mentor, Johann Most, to become an independent voice in the anarchist movement; Alexander Berkman – her closest companion and lover –began a fourteen-year prison term for attempting to assassinate a steel magnate; and a New York court gave her a year of her own on Blackwell's Island for attempting to incite a riot during an unemployment demonstration. By the end of 1893, she was the best known radical in New York City, and by the end of the decade, she was the face of anarchism for the whole nation. The city and the nation also entered the last decade of the nineteenth century in a state of flux. New York had experienced a period of vast economic and industrial growth in the aftermath of the Civil War, and by the 1890s, it housed a powerful and vastly-enriched bourgeoisie which increasingly

distanced itself and its values from that of the largely-immigrant working class.[2] At the same time, Americans were poised on the precipice of Progressive reform, attempting to understand the modern forces that were disrupting their small-town lives.[3] In 1893, in the midst of great change, a massive depression struck the United States and devastated the industrial working class. The bourgeoisie faced the prospect of riots while Goldman led demonstrations through the streets of Manhattan.

The New York press also capped a period of massive upheaval in the 1890s. With print barons, such as Joseph Pulitzer, William Randolph Hearst, and Adolph Ochs grabbing the reins of the big New York dailies, newspapers completed a shift away from political patronage and business reporting toward an industry focused on the guts and grind of city life, eye-catching headlines, reform-minded muckraking, and professionalized writers with big ambitions.[4] At the turn-of-the-century newspapers had come to value accuracy, urban adventure, journalistic rivalry, self-promotion, and above all else, circulation numbers. At the moment Alexander Berkman shot Henry Frick in July 1892 and lofted Emma Goldman on to the stage of American celebrity, the New York press was daily increasing its appetite for stories of urban life, sex danger, and larger-than-life personality. Covering the news no longer meant promoting political parties or supplying information useful to commercial interests; the papers now battled for circulation numbers. This meant lowered prices, incessant self-promotion, and the quest for a headline grabbing story. Entertainment value became a prerogative of even the most staid, fact-obsessed editors.

At the same time, staff writers began to professionalize a code that idealized accuracy, urban realism, and novelistic storytelling. The ideals of "fact and color" began to rule the

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[2] Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)
[3] Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967)
[4] Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News*, (New York: Basic Books, 1978), and Christopher Wilson, *The Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era*, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1985),

newsroom with an educational and instructive bent in journalistic writing and an increased emphasis on presenting photographic truth. "In their allegiance to the facts," Michael Schudson writes, "reporters of the late-nineteenth century breathed the same air that conditioned the rise of the expert in politics, the development of scientific management in industry, the triumph of realism in literature and the 'revolt against formalism' in philosophy, the social sciences, history and law."[5] Journalists spoke of responsibility to the public. One writer broadcast the spirit of the times, claiming that he strived for "the courage to observe human virtues and frailties as they showed on the lens."[6] The emphasis on fact and color in late nineteenth-century reporting began to cross-pollinate with a burgeoning American literary movement of realism or naturalism. Journalism careers began to draw young men who fancied themselves future novelists, like Theodore Dreiser, Jack London, Upton Sinclair and Stephen Crane who all started in newsrooms. They saw the metropolitan environment as a spectacle, which in effect worked against their own ideals of objectivity and accuracy. "The endless pursuit of the stunt, for all its heroic potential, actually only pitted the reporter against any news ethic which might have called for sociological balance or even accuracy," noted Christopher Wilson. "Rather than approaching anything like a social average, the reporter's turf was preeminently anti-normative: slums, Wall Street, police courts, White Houses. If an incident was commonplace – well, by definition it was not news."[7] This search for urban variety, color, and heroic potential led the New York dailies down to the Lower East Side in 1892 and 1893 for Emma Goldman was certainly not commonplace.

Goldman caught the attention of the public and the press because she impressed them as a gifted speaker, a charismatic personality, and someone who had the attention of the masses. Not even the most vocal cynics denied this attraction. "'Emma Goldman, Emma Goldman! We want to hear her,' was frequently heard above the murmur of the crowd," the *Tribune* reported.

[5] Schudson, *Discovering the News*, p. 70
[6] Ibid, p. 73
[7] Christopher Wilson, *The Labor of Words*, p. 35

"The crowd swayed to and fro and shouted approbation to the speakers on the truck."[8] "She speaks beautiful German, her delivery is excellent, and her gestures always graceful," stated another reporter. "Even one who loathes the vile doctrines she preaches cannot help being moved for the moment by her impassioned oratory."[9] The press noted Goldman's apparent fearlessness admiringly as well. "She didn't look a bit frightened," read the New York *World*, "She seemed rather to court being slaughtered and the way she clenched her fist and pounded the hot air was enough to make any policeman think twice before he arrested her." Report after report on the radical agitations in the summer of 1893 agreed with this writer's conclusion that Goldman "was the best speaker of the evening."[10] Goldman had attracted the gaze of the press because reporters observed that she had caught the notice of the people.

When the press wasn't treating her so favorably, Emma Goldman also served as fodder for comic scenes. Her public persona was so grave and potentially threatening that newsrooms used her to caricature the absurdities of urban life. The New York *Times*, for instance, rarely took Goldman or her fellow Anarchists seriously. Christopher Wilson has noted that the *Times* typically directed its reporting toward middle-class readers and rarely tried to arouse any shock or fear concerning their stability. In August of 1893, when the rest of the New York press was suggesting that the unemployed masses might riot, a *Times* writer joked that "when one receives notice that one is going to be blown up by dynamite, clearly the best thing one can do is to go down into the basement and search the cellar." The reporter then detailed a slap-stick journey through downtown New York in search of the "Anarchist scare" which he argued was a form of amusement manufactured by the beer hall owners to attract drinkers. "For fear that the entertainment provided by these amateur [speakers] might flag, and that the urgent thirst begotten by the fetid atmosphere might relax," cracked the *Times*, "a real bona fide blood and thunder votary of the science had been secured in the person of Emma Goldman." Goldman

[8] "Untitled," New York *Tribune*, August 22, 1893
[9] "Anarchy," The *Illustrated American*, September 9, 1893
[10] "They Talked a Great Deal," The New York *World,* August 2, 1893

"looked rather more beerthirsty than bloodthirsty," it continued, but "delivered a speech which made the empty glasses outside the hall fairly ring."[11] In another humorous story, the *World* reported on a May Day celebration in 1892 in which a group of socialists hitched a horse to the wagon from which Goldman was speaking and sent her off into the streets "with one tremendous wail." In her memoirs, she remembered the crowd slowly following behind her down the street, but the *World* had her yelling toward the stunned crowd until they could not hear her. [12] Even her trial in the fall of 1893 became a comic scene, as Goldman attempted to wring a decent interpretation of one of her speeches from an inept translator who stumbled through a line of German poetry she had quoted. "Alas, poor Schiller," quipped the *World's* reporter. These attempts at humor often came at the expense of immigrants and in some sense communicated unease within the English-speaking public about the alien presence they felt in their city. This sense of anxiety permeated the attention and dissection devoted to Emma Goldman's appearance and sexuality.[13]

Reporters described Goldman in novelistic depth and attempted to decode her hidden character for their readers. They argued that they had special expertise which allowed them to see beyond Emma Goldman's surfaces. They were not only describing her; they were revealing her. One reporter for the New York *World* boasted explicitly of this ability. This observer "had the privilege of studying the great and good of various lands for some years back," he wrote, and he "paid particular attention to [Emma Goldman]" at a rally in 1893. Before beginning his description this reporter felt it was necessary to provide his credentials. Goldman, after all, was not a simple subject to describe. She possessed a complexity that a less experienced reporter might miss. "The lower part of her face has a most determined look," he wrote. "Her mouth is strong. It indicates decided character. Her nose is a good nose with meaning. Below the eyes, however, her face indicates strength rather than refinement, but her eyes and forehead are not

[11] "Untitled," The New York *Times*, August 22, 1893
[12] "Anarchists in Charge," The New York *World,* May 3, 1892
[13] "Trial Coverage," The New York *World*, October 6, 1893

at all such as the finest police force in the world needs dread." "She looks," the reporter concluded, "as though she had made up a countenance for some determined effort and had had that countenance petrified and made permanent. She looks, if one may approach her with a comparison bordering on levity, like a woman with housecleaning perpetually on her mind."[14] In the end, the reporter decided that Goldman was a confidence artist. She wore a look of gravity, but to an experienced observer, betrayed her inner weakness through her eyes. This highlights an important role these reporters felt they had to play in the urban environment of the late nineteenth century. In the treacherous anonymity of the city, they claimed the ability to protect their readers from real dangers and expose false threats.

In unraveling Emma Goldman's true nature, reporters often focused on a division in her facial features from which they inferred a duality in her nature: feminine delicacy paired with masculine aggression. The sharp break occurred between the top and bottom halves of Goldman's face, reading the upper part, beginning at her eyes, as pretty and womanly and the bottom part, below her nose, as strong and unattractive, much as the *World*'s expert had. "She seemed rather pretty", read another report from the New York *World*, but "as she turned her head the tendons bulged out into scrawniness and blotches here and there and added to the sharp disappointment one met after leaving the upper part of the face." [15] The New York *Times* ran a report in 1893 in which the theme recurs. "There is almost a semblance of beauty about her face," it read. "The upper part of her countenance was by no means bad looking, but her mouth and chin are ill-shapen and give to her face a peculiar drawn expression that came out at its worst."[16] "Her head is shapely; her forehead low and white; her eyes are of bluish gray and she wears glasses," an article in *Harper's Weekly* stated. "Her nose is small and well shaped and her complexion almost colorless. Her mouth is sensual, the lips being full though lacking in

[14] "Untitled", The New York *World*, August 20, 1893
[15] "Anarchy's Den," the New York *World*, July 28, 1892
[16] "Emma Goldman on Trial," New York *Times*, October 5, 1893

color. Her teeth are bad and when she talks or laughs her face loses it comeliness."[17] "Her eyes are beautifully clear and gray, her forehead is fine and low," noted a San Francisco reporter later in the decade, but added that her "small nose is a bit blunt and the thin lips have a habitual disdainful curl that is far from pleasing."[18] Goldman had an exaggerated under-bite that made her mouth bend into a frown. Although she was light-hearted among friends, in front of the press she displayed an acerbic sense of discomfort, and many of these reporters had observed Goldman not at leisure but on stage where she antagonized her audience and called them "slaves", "fools", and "sheep". In part, these reporters felt that the ugliness of Goldman's mouth was what they heard come out of it. In 1895, a phrenologist conducted a study of Goldman's personality as manifest in her facial features, in which he found that "signs of destructiveness and alimentiveness are very pronounced in the form of the mouth, and it is chiefly in the mouth and the eyes that we may detect the signs of quality and temperament which account for the woman's disposition to attack the present social fabric." "In the form of the chin and mouth," he continued, "we have the phase of persistence that may be called tenacity, and which is often referred to in popular parlance by a comparison with the bull-dog."[19] Even as many saw delicacy and beauty in her eyes, in the early 1890s reporters read underlying traits of strength, destructiveness, and ugliness in Goldman's mouth.

Reporters also displayed a strong preoccupation with the quality and neatness of Emma Goldman's appearance and style of dress from which they attempted to fix her social class. Nellie Bly's interview from 1893 indicated why Goldman's dress was important when considering her character. "Do you care for dress at all?" Bly asked. "'I like to look well, but I don't like very fussy dresses. I like my dresses to be plain and quiet, and, above all things,' here she laughed as if recalling the oft-repeated declaration of Anarchists' hatred for soap, 'I love my

[17] "Anarchists in New York," *Harper's Weekly Magazine*, August 20, 1892
[18] "Emma Goldman, Anarchist," the San Francisco *Call,* April 27, 1898, EGP
[19] "Character in Uncommon People: A Pair of Anarchists," *Phrenological Journal and Science of Health*, February, 1895, in *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History*, p. 215

bath. I must be clean.'" Bly's annotation hinted at the strong prejudices with which the popular press approached the young radical.[20] Frequently, reporters stated or intimated similar notions that Anarchists and immigrants, more broadly, were a filthy lot, and it warranted noting how Goldman differed. Two New York *Times* reports from her trial in October of 1893 conveyed similar portraits. "She was attired in a well-made dress of black," wrote a New York *Times* reporter, "with balloon sleeves, and on her head she wore a neat turban hat. Her step received additional springiness form a pair of high-heeled French shoes."[21] "Her dress was neat and most un-Anarchistic in its neatness," noted another report. "There was no suspicion of the fashionable modiste about its cut and fit, to be sure, but it was well made, perfectly clean, and showed off the little Anarchist's trim figure to good advantage."[22] Both passages called attention to the neatness of Goldman's appearance and the quality of the clothing she wore, and the latter explicitly contrasted her with other Anarchists in both her orderliness and "perfect" cleanliness. These writers were attempting, in effect, to judge Emma Goldman's social origins from the quality of her dress. As a *Harper's Weekly* writer pointed out, Goldman "seemed to have come from a higher social class and to be better educated than the [other anarchists] I had met."[23] The *Illustrated American* also noted that Goldman was "exceedingly well-educated."[24]

Goldman and her defenders understood the associations her behavior and dress could trigger for observers in the public sphere and attempted to manage her image by portraying her as cultured, well-mannered, and sober. She did not pander to popular opinion by any means, but she did display a keen awareness of the representation she was receiving in the press. "I hate reporters," Goldman told the New York *World*. "I suppose you will write a lot of lies," she added. "You all do, because your people must pander to the capitalists who give you bread, and

[20] "Nellie Bly Again," New York *World,* September 17, 1893
[21] "Anarchy Her Only Faith," New York *Times*, October 7, 1893
[22] "Emma Goldman on Trial," New York *Times,* October 6, 1893
[23] "Anarchists in New York," *Harper's Weekly Magazine*, August 20, 1892
[24] "Anarchy," *The Illustrated American*, September 9,1893

the capitalists like to read the lies about us Anarchists."[25] Nelly Bly found Goldman reading a recent issue of the *Illustrated American* when she went to interview her in jail but failed to mention that the magazine had run a scathing profile of anarchists on the Lower East Side. Goldman's first comment to Bly expressed her feelings about the article. "I do not want anything published about me," she said, "because people always misjudge and exaggerate." In the conversation that followed, Goldman opened up to Bly who was far more sympathetic than most of the press. She represented herself carefully as sober, hard-working, and conscientious. When Bly asked what Goldman liked to do with the money she earned as a seamstress, she answered that she had "spent it all on books." "I kept myself in poverty buying books," Goldman noted, "so long as I had something to read I did not mind hunger or shabby clothes."[26] While she was certainly not offering a portrait of herself as demure, subordinate, or virginal to meet any bourgeois ideal of femininity, Emma Goldman was seizing an opportunity to shape her public image in a more positive light. She displayed a marked discretion in the presence of journalists. She knew that she had to be careful how she represented herself, often erring on the side of propriety. She acknowledged her opposition to marriage and her relationship with Berkman, but she ended interviews summarily on several occasions when reporters began to dig further into her personal affairs. ""You reporters are too impertinent," she told one group.[27] Biographers have noted that Goldman maintained this sense of prudence throughout her career, observing "propriety in her personal relationships so as not to compromise her political platform." Ross Wetzsteon noted that Goldman "conducted her many love affairs with considerable circumspection – never displaying affection in public, always registering in separate hotel rooms – and behaved with a respectability that sometimes made her feel

[25] "Anarchy's Den," The New York *World*, July 28 1892
[26] Bly, "Nelly Bly Again", The New York *World*, September 17, 1893
[27] "Anarchy's Den", The New York *World*, July 28 1892

sordid."[28] Goldman's lawyer at her trial in 1893 also attempted to manipulate the confusion over Goldman's comportment to her advantage. In his closing statement, Oakley Hall, a former mayor of New York, pled to the jury: "You must have been struck by her appearance on the stand. She is a lady of refinement; indeed, what might under some circumstances even be called an elegant lady." Hall argued that society was safe with Emma Goldman in its midst. She posed no threat; this was evident in her sophistication.

While Goldman could pass as cultured and feminine, the press often found her openly flouting respectable codes of dress and decorum. They recorded examples of her acting untamed and reckless just as habitually as they had observed her appearing erudite and amusing. Goldman may not have dressed in the stereotypical bloomers of emancipated women and free lovers; she may have proven herself a talented and charismatic young woman; but she defied the most basic bourgeois notions of public behavior for women of class. During her trial in October, 1893, the *Times* noted an instance in which Goldman casually disrobed in court. "The defendant was evidently determined to make herself as comfortable as possible for the day's ordeal," the reporter noted snidely. "She took off her coat, a cheap-looking affair of black cheviot, placed her hat and veil on top of it, and then settled herself down."[29] At a protest in 1893, "[Goldman] was without a hat," a reporter noticed, "the rain had drenched her hair and clothing and altogether she presented a most disreputable appearance." "She did not make a speech, but drank a lot of beer," the writer added.[30] At the same series of rallies, a New York *World* reporter commented that Goldman "wore no jacket and took her hat off at intervals when she got tired of wearing it. Altogether, she impresses an unbiased observer as a rather reckless but quite sincere young woman." "Miss Goldman looks like a woman who would jump overboard to save a friend or who might stab a gentleman in the abdomen if she got to thinking

[28] Ross Wetzsteon, *Republic of Dreams, Greenwich Village: The American Bohemia, 1910-1960*, (New York: Simon & Schuster,2002), p. 209
[29] "Emma Goldman on Trial," New York *Times*, October 5, 1893
[30] "Anarchists Kept in Check," The New York *Times*, August 20, 1893

about it and decided that she ought to do so," the report concluded.[31] While some reporters argued from Goldman's neat appearance that she possessed manners and high education, others inferred from her lack of decorum that she was unhinged, impulsive, and possibly dangerous. One New York *Tribune* writer observed that Goldman, about to give one of her speeches, looked "like a she-wolf, imperfectly tamed" pacing upon a stage.[32]

The press represented Goldman in ways that presaged the descriptions of young working women of the 1920s and invoked contemporary chauvinism toward feminists when they described her behavior as mannish and overly casual. Nelly Bly referenced these associations when she anticipated meeting "a great raw-boned creature, with bobbed hair and bloomers" caricaturing the style and wardrobe of activist women. While Goldman attested to loving clothes and feminine wares, her style and her manner were clearly more relaxed than bourgeois norms of the 1890s. The New York *World* noted that Goldman "stoops over about as the average mannish young woman of fashion" – in reference to the fact that Goldman did not wear a corset. In the same article, there were other insinuations of Goldman's masculinity. Describing her movement through a mass protest, it stated that "when she tired of all the attentions of the crowd, [Goldman] sprang upon a passing car without asking the conductor to check his steeds. Miss Goldman is steady of arm and foot."[33] Evoking the casual boyishness of Goldman swinging herself up on to the moving vehicle, the author contrasted her behavior implicitly with a mannered, feminine approach to mounting an omnibus only after it had stopped. In a sense, etiquette was a way of communicating that a person belonged and believed in society. When Goldman comported herself in opposition to rules of decorum which held women to be weak, subordinate, apolitical, and kept under the protection of men, she showed that she did not believe in the social order.

[31] "An Earnest Woman," The New York *World*, August 20, 1893
[32] "Untitled," New York *Tribune*, August 22, 1893
[33] "Miss Goldman Cheered," The New York *World,* August 20, 1893

The New York press also found an unsavory side of Emma Goldman manifested in the public spaces in which they were able to locate her and the people they met there. These were downtown beer halls, taverns, and theatres where anarchists gathered and radical organizations held their meetings. In reality, these were lively rooms, where men and women ate, drank, sang and held intellectual conversations in a polyglot of languages. The press depicted these rooms as clogged with acrid smoke, reeking of cheap beer, dark, ugly, and almost unbearable to the senses of respectable people. The New York dailies portrayed the patrons as a subhuman class – unhygienic, stupid, and violent. No description could do justice to the "ratlike demeaner of these people," stated a piece in the New York *Times*.[34] An article from the *World,* referring to Goldman as "the toothless queen of the Reds," commented that "she was dressed in a cheap blue and white striped dress, wore her glasses, and her hair was as much awry as it is at 2 o'clock in the morning when she holds court in 'Tough Michel's' beer cellar."[35] Zum Groben Michel's, referred to here, was a Lower East Side bar in the 1880s and 1890s, and the epitome of a radical hangout upon which reporters tested their skills for grotesque description. In the summer of 1892, it served as the site of a small showdown when a group of reporters went looking Emma Goldman after Alexander Berkman's arrest. The *World* referred to the bar as "Anarchy's Den" and set the "rather pretty" Goldman "[a]lone in that gathering of hard-faced, half clad men, enveloped in a dense atmosphere of choking smoke, she reclined placidly in a barroom chair, reading."[36] "I mention the things I saw in this bar room this minutely because it is the one place in New York where avowed anarchists meet without any disguise," stated one *Harper's Weekly* article. "It is a loathsome place in itself and there is one thing very certain that these rabid reformers who are trying to disturb the serenity of all existing society are not having much fun while they are about it." The people inside were "shabby and from the appearance of their hands not unacquainted with hard labor" though it was "fair to conclude that the men in Tough

[34] "Untitled," The New York *Times*, August 22, 1893
[35] "They Talked a Great Deal," The New York *World,* August 1, 1892
[36] "Anarchy's Den," The New York *World,* July 28, 1892

Mike's were out of employment."[37] In a similar vein, the *World* also described the attendees of an anarchist meeting as "wild-eyed, unshaven, unclean and foul-mouthed men and about a score of hard-featured, cigarette-smoking women, crowded the hall." "The smoke burdened air was so nauseating," the article read, "as almost to stupefy those unaccustomed to it, the people stood there and shrieked with delight that was only measured by the violence of the speeches made."[38] These disreputable creatures were Emma Goldman's companions, the press meant to drive home. These uncouth surroundings were her natural environs. Whatever she might appear in public, this vile brood was her company when anarchists met "without any disguise."

The press stressed their confused impressions of Goldman – delicate yet severe, refined yet wild, feminine yet boyish – often in the same article, sometimes in the same glance at her facial features, because these disparities highlighted the work reporters felt was in front of them. The journalistic slumming of the 1890s which produced the earliest glimpses of Emma Goldman was born of twin realities of American urban life in the late nineteenth century: national communications networks and the geographic sprawl of cities. The creation of wire news services – the Associated Press and its competitors – had decreased the value of national news for city papers such as the *Times*, *World*, and *Tribune*. Since it was available to everybody, national news offered no one paper a competitive advantage. This development increased the value of local news. The stretching of the cityscape had the same effect. As the growing class of white collar workers moved to new neighborhoods, they began to see their cities as more exotic but less knowable. As the distance from city centers and working-class districts to middle-class neighborhoods increased, so did many readers familiarity with the bustle, squalor, and ambiguity of urban life. The newspaper of the 1880s and 1890s became a "use-paper" in the words of Michael Schudson – "the daily journal as a compendium of tips for urban survival."[39] Reporters saw it as their duty to explain the city to its inhabitants, to warn of danger, uncover

[37] "Anarchists in New York," *Harper's Weekly,* August 20, 1892
[38] "Wild Anarchist Talk," The New York *World,* August 2, 1892
[39] Schudson, *Discovering the News,* p. 103

shams, dispel rumor, and titillate their readers with vignettes of metropolitan variety. As local news became more valuable to both the newspaper and it readers, young newspapermen fashioned themselves as experts, adventurers, and decipherers of the urban maelstrom. Therefore, reporters, as interpreters and expositors of city life, had to unravel the conflicting associations Emma Goldman evoked in order to expose the true nature of her threat to the social order.

Many decided that Goldman was an obvious fraud as was the movement she represented – a sort of confidence game that the press needed to expose. They argued that she presented an appearance of gravity, respectability, and candor in order to gain the attention of the immigrant working class and the English-speaking public as well. But her intentions were deceitful and self-interested. Her only goals were publicity and social unrest. "It is evident that [Goldman] wants as much advertising as she can get," stated a *Harper's Weekly* article. "Of the autonomist group of anarchists, the Goldman woman was the only one who did not strike me as being thoroughly sincere."[40] The *Illustrated American* quoted a police captain to this same effect: "He considers that Emma Goldman would not at all object to being sent to the [Blackwell's] Island for a few weeks, when she could return to her haunts and pose as a martyr."[41] In the New York *Times,* especially, reporters portrayed Goldman as part of a racket of anti-capitalist incendiaries who were stirring up trouble for personal profit. The *Times* labeled the string of mass unemployment demonstrations that led to Goldman's arrest in 1893 "The Battle of the Kegs," suggesting that entrepreneurs had manufactured the uproar to attract business to their halls for the speeches. The *Times* argued that the mass demonstrations on the Lower East Side in the summer of 1893 had nothing to do with unemployment and fears of starvation, and felt it needed to expose the other radicals, like Goldman, for their deceptive arts. "It is a cynical comment on the professions of 'poverty' and 'starvation' and 'homelessness' put forward by

[40] "Anarchists in New York," *Harper's Weekly Magazine*, August 20, 1892
[41] "Anarchy," *The Illustrated American*, September 9,1893

these fugacious and migratory 'reformers' that they began their work bright and fresh and with the renewed vigor that follows and comes of hearty breakfasting," noted a reporter. "Nearly every man wore good clothes – filthy and greasy, it is true, but filth and grease are merely badges of their tribe." Whereas Goldman had pretended to be everything from a respectable lady to a stern revolutionist in order to gain importance and publicity, the "unemployed" marchers acted beleaguered and impoverished simply to have some excuse to cause a riot. [42]

These reporters felt that they were serving the public by exposing the truth behind Goldman's artifice, but they also revealed their own anxieties about the world of strangers that characterized life in the modern industrial metropolis. In her study of mid nineteenth-century conduct manuals, Karen Haltunnen discovered profound residual fears amongst middle-class urban dwellers of the unknown up-and-comers who hoped to capitalize on the social mobility of the antebellum market revolution and join respectable society. Haltunnen described a meticulous apparatus of decorum which the middle class used to indentify status, belonging, and authenticity. Two great threats typified the fragility of the bourgeois social order in the world of strangers: the confidence man and the painted woman. These emblems of hypocrisy represented the dangers faced by vulnerable young men in their worldly affairs and the threat of intrusion upon the mannered realm of middle-class society. The charismatic confidence man went "in search of victims to dupe, deceive, and destroy" while the painted woman, sometimes a prostitute but often "a woman of fashion" poisoned society "by dressing extravagantly and practicing the empty forms of false etiquette." In a sense, the press implied that Emma Goldman represented aspects of both the confidence man and the painted woman, and it was the reporter's job to expose her before she had a chance to dupe, deceive, or poison society. This helps explain the attention to Goldman's dress, her public behavior, and her facial features, and highlights the assessments many reporters made about Goldman's sincerity or the hypocrisy of

[42] "Anarchists Mild as Lambs," The New York *Times,* August 23, 1893, p. 1

her public poses. Unlike either the confidence man or the painted woman, Goldman did not threaten to penetrate or corrupt bourgeois society, but through her manipulations of the immigrant working class she posed a threat of destruction and disorder. And the press argued that Goldman's device in this act of seduction was her wanton sexuality.[43]

Emma Goldman offered the press very little information or insight in their endeavor to understand this aspect of her personality. Although reporters expressed interest in her sexual history and beliefs, at her most forthcoming moment, she admitted only that she had lived with Alexander Berkman and, as an anarchist, did not believe in marriage. Until her interview with Bly in the fall of 1893, one of the latest reports examined in this study, Goldman never expanded on this information or hinted at any larger sexual ideology. Whether she was still forming her incipient theories on sex or simply did not wish to share her beliefs with meddlesome reporters, Goldman never spoke on the issue of free love. Most immigrant anarchists in the late nineteenth century viewed free love as more of an anti-religious stance than as a celebration of eroticism as it would become for Goldman; her opposition to marriage in 1892 and 1893 may still have been but a part of this anti-institutional bent. Although her interview with Bly suggests that Goldman had begun to think seriously about free love by the time of her arrest, her biographers have claimed that she did not begin reading the work of American writers and libertarians, the first influences on her sexual theories, until her prison sentence later in 1893 and 1894. Only after her release did Goldman begin lecturing on the topic of marriage and sexuality. Therefore, her conspicuous silence on the issue of free love in the press clippings from 1892 and 1893 was probably a result of her own discretion but also provides evidence that she had yet to establish well-developed thoughts of her own on the importance of sex.[44] Goldman's silence did not stop the press from reporting on her sexuality; it only limited the accuracy of the information at their disposal.

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[43] Karen Haltunnen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. xiv-vx

[44] Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*, (New York: Pantheon, 1984) pp. 78, 93

The papers relied on gossip, public poses, and Goldman's meager divulgences to explain her sexual history and beliefs, and they also incorporated popular presumptions about free lovers into their accounts. There had been a long history of sex radicalism in the United States since the middle of the nineteenth century, and much of it had occurred in close proximity to New York City. The communitarian economic experiment that gave birth to free love in the early 1850s, Modern Times, was located near New York. Its founders, Josiah Warren and Stephen Pearl Andrews, remained in the city and gave lectures on individual sovereignty throughout the 1850s. A New Yorker, Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, published the first free love polemic in 1852. In the 1860s and 1870s, New York remained the center of the free love movement where prominent believers could defend their ideals openly in Horace Greeley's New York *Tribune*. In the 1870s, Victoria Woodhull published a free love newspaper in the city and caused a major controversy when she announced that the Brooklyn preacher Henry Ward Beecher was an adulterer and a free love sympathizer. Woodhull's exhibitionism drew the attention of Anthony Comstock, also based in the New York, and weakened public acceptance of sex radicalism and free speech. By the 1880s, free love became associated with cranks, eccentrics, reprobates, and publicity hounds such as Woodhull.[45] When the press encountered Emma Goldman in the 1890s, it drew on these historical associations with sex radicalism in the absence of much real information.

In the public image it constructed for Goldman, the press incorporated popular suspicions that free love encouraged, even required, women to bestow their sexual favors unreservedly. The *World* claimed to have tracked down a man who was an old Russian friend of Alexander Berkman. He told of a brief reconnection with his former comrade in America. "Berkman was living with Miss Emma Goldman as his wife," the man observed. "[Another man] also lived with the girl at the same time, she being what the Anarchists call 'a community wife' to

[45] John C. Spurlock, *Free Love: Marriage and Middle-Class Radicalism in America, 1825-1860*, (New York: New York University Press, 1988), Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-century America*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002)

both of them." He also recalled attending a meeting in which Goldman spoke. "She advanced the idea that women had a perfect right to live with a 'community' of husbands; that such was in fact a duty as well as their pleasure," Berkman's old friend remembered. "She also believed that men had the right to have a 'community' of wives."[46] Goldman could not have given such a speech; either the reporter or his source had fabricated it. She had not begun lecturing about free love at the time of the report, let alone several years before when Berkman's friend was supposed to have attended the meeting. The ideas about free love propounded in the article must have come from popular assumptions about sex radical beliefs. In this report, Goldman's public image had been refracted through the existing conjectures, rooted in nineteenth-century history, about what it meant for a young woman to disavow marriage.

When reporters focused on Goldman's love life, they also argued that she used sexuality as a tool to control the weak men she could attract from the immigrant radical movement. The papers argued that Goldman had led Berkman to commit his crime through her sexual wiles, and used other lovers to further her political purposes. "[To] Berkman's intimacy with Emma Goldman could be ascribed his fearful Anarchy," read the New York *Daily Tribune*, "for she is probably the most bitter and best known woman Anarchist in New York." An "intimate friend of John Most," the report also noted, Goldman "is strong-minded, and would naturally exercise a great influence over a weak man like Berkman."[47] Johan Most had achieved unrivaled eminence as an anarchist in the 1880s, and he had given Goldman her first opportunity to lecture for the movement. For a short time, they had been romantically involved. Several reporters picked up this gossipy tidbit and intimated that Goldman had used Most to climb to her current status. "Anarchist John Most and Emma Goldman were sweethearts five years ago," the New York *World* stated. "Then Most and Emma could be seen often promenading through

[46] While Emma Goldman discussed her opposition to marriage in interviews during 1892 and 1893, this is the only report of her having lectured before 1896, and according to the timing of the report, she would have made the remembered speech in 1889. The report also misrepresents Goldman's later views on marriage and free love grossly. "Berkman Always an Agitator", The New York *World*, July 29, 1892

[47] "Untitled," New York *Daily Tribune*, July 26, 1892

Tomkins Square Park." "Most has been saying uncomplimentary things in his organ, *Die Freiheit*, about Emma," remarked the reporter. "She had no newspaper to answer back, but everybody who knows her knows that she can talk."[48] The *Illustrated American* repeated this tale. "At one time the friend of Johann Most," it read, "she transferred her affections to Bergman [sic]… but since Bergman [sic] has been in prison, Miss Goldman has accepted the address of more than one admirer, for consistency does not appear to be a tenet of the anarchistic faith."[49] These papers implied that Emma Goldman used her lovers to gain recognition and influence. She had manipulated Most's desires to gain entrance to radical circles, and she had duped Berkman into shooting Henry Frick, a crime that had further increased the spotlight on her. Reporters warned that she would probably use her affections to continue achieving her ends.

The press raised alarms about Emma Goldman's ability to manipulate the mass of uncivilized, brutish immigrants whose company she kept. This hazard became clear during the interview at Zum Groben Michels when reporters told of being forcibly expelled from the bar during their meeting with Goldman. The New York *Daily Tribune* stated that at the "beer shop the Anarchists resorted to violence to prevent a reporter from getting news." The paper claimed that Goldman tired of a line of questioning about her relationship with Berkman and "[a]fter asking her a few questions which she refused to answer the reporter was set upon by about ten Anarchists who struck him and threw him into the streets."[50] The New York *World* detailed a similar encounter under the subheading "THE OTHER ANARCHISTS AROUSED". "One by one the swarthy, half-clad and grimy Anarchists in the front room had been coming near to where their queen sat," recounted the article. "With her eyes glancing with a significant look at the group of her friends, she said in a voice far louder than was necessary, so loud that it could have been heard in the front room: 'I have nothing to say. Will you not let me alone?' As if her words

[48] "They Talked a Great Deal," The New York *World,* August 1, 1892
[49] "Anarchy," *The Illustrated American*, September 9, 1893
[50] "Untitled", The New York *Daily Tribune*, July 28, 1892

were a signal, half a dozen Anarchists closed about the reporter, waving their fists in the air and hurling oaths and objurgations in German and Russian at the reporters. One man stood near a table with an ice-pick in his hand." The *World* concluded its article with Goldman beaming in satisfaction over her control of the men in the bar, "a glad and proud look was on her face, and while she made a feint display of quieting her slaves her pale face took on some color and she stood there wreathed in smiles amid smoke and beer fumes."[51] Much as they had in detailing her relationships with Berkman and Most, these reporters alleged that Goldman manipulated the men around her, even to violent acts.

Emma Goldman, most reporters agreed, had built her popularity on the allure of her sexual licence. They expressed apprehension that she might manipulate the appetites of her followers to germinate disorder, but she might also pique their lusts to the point that she too could lose control. Reporters argued that her well-known sexual past had played a role in her rise to the top of anarchist politics and remained the fount of her popularity. The *Times* described her as "the not very fair but decidedly fleeting Emma" – "the 'wife' of 'the man that sent away for murder' (so goes the east-side phrase)." "To find her was to find the very center of the Social Revolution," the article read, "for at present the Social Revolution is confined to an idiotic rush of Polack and Russian peddlers and cabbagers and bushelman in pursuit of [Emma Goldman]." The writer called attention to Goldman's notorious history with Berkman and described her as "fleeting" in the same breath as he reported her unrivaled position in the radical protests on the Lower East Side, thus suggesting a connection between the "idiotic rush" to see her and the promise of her sexuality. Another writer described Goldman as a sort of anarchist sex symbol – "an object of envy to all the women … because of the devotion and attention shown her by the sterner sex."[52] The *Illustrated American* also hinted that her audiences' devotions were sexually charged. "The goddess of these unattractive youths is Emma

[51] "Anarchy's Den," The New York *World,* July 28, 1892
[52] "Wild Anarchist Talk," The New York *World,* August 2, 1892

Goldman," noted the reporter. "When this woman appears at the Proletariat Club there is a rush to greet her and when she addresses the members she arouses them to the highest pitch of excitement." *Harper's Weekly* even argued that Goldman had found her way into the movement because it was the one place where people would accept her sexual appetites. "I could not help but thinking," read the article, "that she was a very vicious woman whose vice happened to lead her into this circle."[53]

Goldman's appeal to her radical followers was a powerful and combustible force, the press found, so much so that she might even lose control of that which she had released. They discovered this in the mass protests of August 1893 when Goldman was the figure of the moment. Everywhere they went on the Lower East Side, the masses had raised her to an unparalleled stature. "The crowd followed Miss Goldman with most altering persistency," read the New York *World*. "It crowded about her, crossed in front of her and cheered her when she stopped for breath. Men on the street who recognized her pointed her out to friends sitting up on fire escapes, shouting her name out proudly, and all things conspired to make the young lady feel that she was a personage."[54] At times the mob's fervor even might even threaten the object of its affection. The *Tribune* described an incident in which Goldman had barely escaped from the rush of masses after one of her speeches. "Right at her heels came the crowd numbering many hundreds, and comprising a choice collection of the lowest, vilest ruffians in the city," noted the reporter. "Shouting, cheering , yelling and whistling they ran after her, driving against her from time to time and irresistibly impelling her forward as on the crest of a wave. Once she staggered and fell and her friends dragged her from under the heels of the mob. Twice her hat was knocked off, and at last, she walked or ran, bareheaded, dodging and twisting like a hare, for a means of escape."[55] In this instance, Goldman barely avoided being consumed by the thirst she had fostered. In typically xenophobic language, the *Times* brought home the lesson of

[53] "Anarchists in New York," *Harper's Weekly*, August 20, 1892
[54] "Miss Goldman Cheered," The New York *World,* August 20, 1893
[55] "Untitled," The New York *Daily Tribune,* August 22, 1893

Goldman's unnatural appeal. It described her audience as "hatchet-faced, pimply, sallow-cheeked, rat-eyed young men of the Russian-Jew colony" and "bleating Anarchist sheep." "On these depraved, diseased, diabolical natures the appalling nonsense of creatures like Goldman falls like alcohol on a kindling flame," argued the *Times*. "Intoxicated by the hysteric shrieks of such monsters, born to infect and endanger society, these young Russian Jews … are ready to go out upon the streets like a Malay drunk on bhang or an elephant mad with musth and run amuck."[56] In short, Goldman was trying to send the mob raging into a bout of destruction like an unleashed wild fiend in heat, the paper claimed. Although the press assumed Goldman desired the power to start this trouble, no one knew if she had the power to control it.

In the sweltering days of August 1893 when Emma Goldman reached a peak of her early celebrity, the threat of angry mobs from the Lower East Side marching through the streets was not an improbable or melodramatic alarm. As the nation struggled with economic depression, the working class suffered massive unemployment with no social welfare net to save them from homelessness and starvation. While reporters from the New York *Times* attempted to reassure their readers that Goldman was a fraud and conditions on the Lower East Side weren't that bad, they also revealed serious anxieties about the unknown threat posed by the foreign mob below them. The papers presented a confused picture of Goldman's sexuality because she had yet to begin defining herself for them. Reports suspected that she posed a hazard to the social order, but they had to decipher that danger through indirect means. They searched her appearance, her clothes, her behavior, the gossip that surrounded her, and historical memory for clues to her meaning. In the end, they drew a composite sketch of Emma Goldman as a fraudulent interloper, a licentious woman, and a radical temptress drawn from nineteenth-century experiences and anxieties. But they could not yet see the true aim of Goldman's sexuality, which was to free their sons and daughters from the very prejudices used to describe her.

[56] "Anarchists Mild as Lambs," The New York *Times,* August 23, 1893, p. 1

CHAPTER 3

The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation

In December of 1934 *Harper's Monthly Magazine* ran a piece entitled "Was My Life Worth Living?" by Emma Goldman. The author had been in exile from the United States since 1919. She had published her memoirs, *Living My Life*, three years earlier and would die in less than five years. Although she remained active until her end, she was entering old age, staring at ugly realities of poverty and loneliness and contemplating her legacy. The world stood on the brink of massive destruction. Goldman had witnessed firsthand the revolting nature of Soviet Communism. Dictatorships were the vogue throughout much of Europe. The United States remained crippled by the Great Depression and struggled with the implications of federal intervention in the economic and social life of the republic. Conscripts from the world's most powerful nations would begin fighting the Second World War in less than a decade. "It is strange what time does to political causes," the *Harper's* editors wrote. "A generation ago, it seemed to many American conservatives as if the opinions which Emma Goldman was expressing might sweep the world. Now she fights almost alone for what seems to be a lost cause." The global political inertia ran so far from Goldman's opposition to government, hatred of militancy, and defense of free speech that the editors of the magazine patronized their contributor as a bizarre relic. "We offer [her ideas] as an exhibit of valiant consistency, of *really* rugged individualism unaltered by opposition or by advancing age." [1]

Goldman defended her anarchist vision of the world and its prospects for the future, and interwoven in her testament, she attempted to transcend the inertia of contemporary politics by

[1] Emma Goldman, "Was My Life Worth Living?", *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, (December, 1934), p. 52

arguing for an enduring, collective experience of American rebellion. Despite dangers of authoritarian rule, militarism, and economic depression, she claimed that each generation could rediscover the spirit of rebellion. History had provided the lives of past martyrs, heroes, rebels, and individualists to inspire and steel these future revolutionaries. "In my own case my convictions have derived and developed from events in the lives of other as well as from my own experiences," she wrote describing what had maintained her faith. "What I have seen meted out to others by authority and repression, economic and political, transcends anything I myself have endured." According to Goldman, America had provided its own rich trove of "heroic figures to humanity, who in the face of persecution and obloquy have lived and fought for their right and the right of mankind to free and unstinted expression." Goldman listed Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, the anarchist Voltairine de Cleyre and the nineteenth-century sex radical Moses Harman among these heroes. "True, the price they had to pay was high," she added. "They were deprived of most of the comforts society offers to ability and talent, but denies when they will not be subservient. But whatever the price, their lives were enriched beyond the common lot."[2] In a sense, she claimed these were collective individuals whose experiences belonged to all future rebels to use their rich lives as guides for their own struggles. Their lives had embodied both universal conflicts and the particular social battles of their times. In her final statement to America, Goldman implicated herself into this company of rebel heroes. The merit of her life, she suggested, was not to be found in any success she had achieved but in the example she had set and the experiences she had recorded for future generations of Americans.

Goldman had planned her autobiography, *Living My Life,* as the record of her rebellion and the social struggles she personified. She felt her experiences represented collective American movements for freedom. She wrote to a friend that her autobiography recounted more than "my own private and personal experiences" but also reconstructed the "slice of

[2] Ibid, p. 55

American life I portrayed."[3] Goldman hoped her readers would learn what life had been like for a radical woman during her years in America; how it felt to challenge family, public prejudice, and state authority for greater individual freedom; and what pleasures and pains followed these choices. This meant reliving difficult memories, some deeply personal, and it also meant dealing with topics which she might have otherwise left untouched such as her sexuality and her tumultuous relationships with men. But few fin de siècle rebellions impacted American culture more than the revolt against civilized morality on which Emma Goldman had made a significant impact. If she meant to use her life as an example of collective struggle, she would have to tell the story of her own rebellion against the sexual morality of her time and place however difficult that might be.

Emma Goldman feared that her sex life would become an object of lurid curiosity when she was planning her memoirs. She sensed acutely the pitfalls of writing explicitly about sex. It would not only threaten the publication of her book, but more importantly she feared it would detract from the lessons she hoped her life could teach. "I certainly don't intend to make it a sensational sex story," she wrote a close friend. "I want the events of my life to stand out in bold relief from the social background in America and the various events that helped to make me what I am: a sort of conjunction between my own inner struggle and the social struggle outside."[4] For Goldman, sex was an essential part of life and deserved a place in her narrative, but she would only describe the emotions it communicated and the social battles it represented. "For me, at any rate, it will be utterly impossible to describe the physical side which is, after all, very limited, while the psychological is rich and varied," she wrote to Frank Harris who had written a sexually-explicit memoir. "I feel that the effect of the sexual relation is psychological and cannot be described in mere physical terms."[5] Goldman struck a compromise in *Living My*

[3] Emma Goldman to John Haynes Holmes, n.d, EGP
[4] Falk, *Love, Anarchy and Emma Goldman*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), p. 7
[5] Emma Goldman to Frank Harris, August 7, 1925, in *Nowhere at Home: Letters from Exile of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman*, eds. Richard and Anna Maria Drinnon, (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), pp. 129-130

Life. She discussed her love life but left out the physical details. Instead she described what sex meant to her, how she had learned about her sexuality, and how her experiences compared with her contemporaries. In telling the story of sex life in such terms, Goldman conceived a document that consciously placed her sexual choices against the background of the cultural history of the United States.

Goldman was also aware of the changes that had occurred in American sexual behaviors in the 1920s after her forced return to Europe. In the years of her exile, large numbers of American youths had adopted "naughty" activities, such as smoking and drinking, and defied old norms of respectable sexual behavior. The bohemianism of the 1910s, in which Goldman had played a major role, had influenced this youth culture by setting models of unconventional or disaffected attitudes with which the youth of the twenties could play. Goldman distanced herself from the youth culture of the 1920s. She argued that it was founded in frivolity, not strong ideals of individualism like her own, and in "Was My Life Worth Living?" noted that it turned back on whatever progress it had experienced at the first note of difficulty in the 1930s. In crafting *Living My Life*, Goldman felt the need to show that the work of women's emancipation and equality was far from finished. Even if greater opportunities had opened for women in the 1920s and even if the rules of morality had been bent and stretched, Goldman recognized that men would still not treat her or her contemporaries in America as equal. She wrote to Alexander Berkman about "a longing for fulfillment which few modern women find because most modern men too are rooted in the old traditions." "They too want the woman as a wife and mother more than as lover and friend," she continued. "The modern woman cannot be the wife and mother in the old sense, and the new medium has not yet been devised, I mean the way of being wife, mother, friend and yet retain one's complete freedom. Will it ever?"[6] By stressing her own sexual development over the course of the late nineteenth century and early

[6] Emma Goldman to Alexander Berkman, September 4, 1925, Ibid, p. 125

twentieth century, Emma Goldman hoped to demonstrate the feelings of a woman who had hoped to escape the traditions of the past and could not yet realize that possibility. Her autobiography would leave a map and a relic of that attempt.

In *Living My Life* Emma Goldman sketched a three-part journey over time and space to show the sexual choices of conformity and resistance offered to her by the old world of religious morality, a new world of urban radicalism and emancipation, and a modern world of bohemian individualism. She argued for her life as the site of monumental transformations in American sexual culture over the course of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. She wrote the story of the emotional life of a woman as she rebelled against civilized morality of family and religious tradition and later embraced the difficulties of modern individuality and freedom. Goldman felt that her rich personal history had steeled her against the disappointments that struck the young bohemians of Greenwich Village who had shared her sexual revolution in the 1910s. "[They] knowing nothing of the world's past, attempted new forms of life and art pulled from the air," she wrote. "They were thrust back into submission and futility because they were lacking in an ideal and were further hampered by a sense of sin and the burden of dead ideas in which they could no longer believe."[7] Goldman argued that she had passed through the fires of nineteenth-century sexual morality and sex radicalism to forge the sexual modernism of the twentieth century. Imbued with an individualist ideal and the lessons of the past, she could pursue love and work, independence and companionship. Despite her satisfaction that she had not retreated from her vision of freedom, Goldman acknowledged that this pilgrimage across the American sexual landscapes of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries brought her mostly suffering, ostracism, and loneliness. But she portrayed her decisions as the only ones a woman committed to personal liberation could have made, and so she recorded her experiences for future generations.

[7] Goldman, "Was My Life Worth Living?", *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, p. 54

Emma Goldman had experienced a half century of emotional torture, loss, betrayal, isolation, persecution, irrelevance, and failure. Her parents had shown her very little care and a great deal of unkindness, and upon her arrival in the United States, she had abandoned them to live independently. An early marriage had proven disastrous. Her closest friend and first lover spent fourteen years in prison, often in solitary confinement, for a crime she had helped him commit. She served her own prison sentences, faced hounding by police and censure on every speaking tour. Another long relationship failed and the man drank himself to death after the breakup. Her magazine teetered on the brink of insolvency forcing her to return to the road year after year to raise money. Her most passionate love affair was a ten-year gauntlet of misbehavior, immaturity, and infidelity which ended with Goldman heartbroken. At the time she was summing up her life's work in her autobiography and "Was My Life Worth Living?," Goldman relived this suffering powerfully. The American government had deported her in 1920, making her and the anarchist movement quickly irrelevant. The Roosevelt administration allowed her to return in February 1934 for a short publicity tour, but she had agreed to restrict her speech to her less controversial topics. She found herself literally a carnival act, being recruited by freak show promoters, and in the age of radio and movies, her lectures were less well-attended than they had been at the peak of her career. In the end, the government did not allow her to stay, and she died five years later.

Biographers have struggled to understand the legacy of Emma Goldman as a conflicted, lonely, and unhappy woman. In part, they have approached their studies with political and private sympathies, and thus came away shocked at the weakness and confusion suffered by their icon and hero. As well, they have contrasted the tortured Emma Goldman of love letters, with the idealistic Goldman of political writings, and the wistful Goldman of her memoirs. This disconnect has led several biographers to argue that Goldman hid painful parts of her romantic history to protect the purity of the ideals which she represented. The interpretation of Goldman's memoirs and her late letters which follows argues that these biographers have

misunderstood the significance and lessons of Goldman's sexual history as she remembered it in her old age. Certainly, Goldman's correspondence exposed her as a woman who was prone to emotional dependence and abuse at the hands of a lover, and the calm, reflective tenor of the memoirs misrepresent the severity of the anguish she suffered because of her love affairs. But this study accepts the discord between Goldman's emotions, ideals, and memories as perfectly natural and assumes that neither mail, nor memoirs, nor essays by themselves expose the true beliefs and experiences of Emma Goldman. Her letters, after all, are just as prone to delusion and misrepresentation as her memories; the passions of the moment are as blinding as the rationalizations of age. Goldman shaped the memories of her sexual history purposefully in writing *Living My Life*, not necessarily to hide uncomfortable aspects of her past, but to expose the social significance of her modern drama.

Goldman composed the memories of her sex life as a tragedy in three acts marking a progression from the civilized morality of the nineteenth century to the sexual modernism of the twentieth. She linked particular moments in the evolution of her education and experience as meaningful chapters in an emblematic story. In the first act, Goldman came of age under the repressed, frigid traditions of her parents' religious morality. Under their tyrannical watch, she experienced the violence, ignorance, and psychological turmoil brought about by a moralistic denial of sexuality. In the second act, Goldman described her first years of independence from family and the orthodox Jewish community among anarchists and radicals in the bustle of New York City. This period marked Goldman's sexual, spiritual, and intellectual awakening. She took her first lovers, began her career as a propagandist, and experienced her first bout of celebrity. She also observed the lives of others who had rebelled against the established order and critiqued the mistakes they had made on the path to individual emancipation. In the third act of her American tragedy, Goldman experienced modern love with Ben Reitman. She detailed their instinctual sexual attraction and the joys of sharing her work with him, but she also described the betrayal, distance, and quarrelling that destroyed their relationship. For

Goldman, the brutality of her parents' repression, the heroic example set by American sex radicals, the sexual theories of modernist intellectuals, the neuroses and weaknesses of her lovers, and the suffering she witnessed in the lives of her contemporaries all instructed and informed her mature sexuality.

Although the choices Goldman embodied represented a break from the past, her description of her life showed that she sensed significant continuities in American sexual expression from the mid-nineteenth century into the early twentieth century. She also observed different sexual cultures existing at the same time. Interestingly, Goldman judged some women who had made difficult choices to forgo family life for careers, women we might consider pioneers, as lacking the courage to move as far as she had away from the sexual culture of a previous generation. She also judged harshly many free-spirited bohemians of the teens and twenties for not having the proper grounding in radical history and social ideals to make their rebellions meaningful. Goldman's form of emancipated sexuality required both the idealism to cleave from the past and a deep grounding in its history. In her exile, she looked back at her American life and concluded, not that her sexual ideals had been flawed, but that they were too advanced for the time in which she had tested them. "The price we modern women and men too pay for our development and growth is very great and painful, but one must go ahead or remain in the dull state of the cow," she wrote. "For it is not only the modern woman, but all civilized people who pay a certain price for their awakening."[8]

In the opening chapters of *Living My Life*, Emma Goldman described the sexual education of her childhood as a series of stinging encounters with the festering strictures and superstitions of civilized morality and Jewish tradition. She used her parents' joyless marriage, an aborted romance from her beloved sister's youth, and her own experiences of puberty and adolescence as examples of the repressed, loveless, and violent relationships of an old culture

[8] Emma Goldman to Alexander Berkman, September 10, 1925, in *Nowhere at Home*, p. 134

against which she had rebelled. Through the stories of her formative years, she demonstrated her first-hand knowledge of many of the practices about which she had lectured and written during her American career. Although Goldman may have been exceptional in the breadth of her experience, many of her recollections of the old culture of Russia and the stale society of Rochester shared much with the ordinary sex lives of Jews, Eastern European immigrants, and many American women in the 1870s and 1880s. Goldman differed from the everyday experience of women of her class, age, and ethnicity only in the fact that she so aggressively rebelled against what many others simply accepted as the burdens of their sex.

Throughout her public life and in her autobiography, Goldman portrayed her childhood as marked by serious unhappiness caused in large part by her father's violent temper. She had grown up in a petit-bourgeois family that emigrated several times during her childhood from Lithuania to Germany to St. Petersburg. Her father had married her mother, an older widow with children, and had lost the money bequeathed to her in a failed business venture. He worked as an innkeeper and a government official and, in America, became a small business owner in Rochester. When Goldman was born, her father had wanted a boy, and as she told it, he never forgave her for it. He was the type of man, she claimed, who felt that "all a Jewish daughter needs to know is how to prepare gefüllte fish, cut noodles fine, and give the man plenty of children," and so he denied her an opportunity to attend Gymnasium and began trying to get her married when she was fifteen. [9]

Goldman understood her father's violent temper as the product of an unsatisfying sex life. She used her parents as an example of a pain-filled marriage based on economic stability and religious mandate. "My parents," she wrote, "had been brought together in the traditional Jewish orthodox fashion, without love. They were mismated from the first." When they married, Abraham Goldman was a man with "a fire of passionate youth" and "an intensely

[9] Emma Goldman, *Living My Life (LML)*, (New York: Knopf, 1931) p. 12

sexual nature." Goldman's mother, Taube, worn out by pregnancy, motherhood, and the death of her first husband sought only security in the marriage and "fought back his insatiable hunger" for sex leading to the cental tension in the family. Goldman came to this conclusion late in her father's life when "[w]ith the decline of health came also a lessening of his erotic vitality and a resultant psychic change" which had mellowed his temper. [10]

Goldman's analysis of the shortcomings of parents' relationship recalled a basic fact of arranged married life in the period before romance and companionship came to define courtship. She used their example to portray an old world which had begun to fade at least in middle-class American households by the latter half of the nineteenth century. Goldman's parents were Lithuanian Jews, not Americans, and the dominant trends that led to the rise of marriages based on romantic love were not a part of their experience. John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedmen found that American domestic lives changed in the early 1800s due to competitive market forces which led men to work outside of home, drove down the birthrate, and lessened the influence of religion and community in policing conjugal morality. These phenomena led to marriages in which morality became internalized in a domestic sphere overseen by virtuous wives. The rationale for sex slowly decoupled from reproduction, and marriages incorporated strong notes of companionship and mutual caretaking.[11] Goldman's parents were not privileged to these transformations. A tight-knit orthodox Jewish community would have arbitrated their marriage – watchful and disapproving of deviations from tradition. According to Goldman, her father saw his family as subjects and workers, and the anti-Semitism resident in the areas in which they lived would have curtailed his opportunities to envision himself as a free individual or a competitive, self-made man. In essence, her parents' relationship represented a type of sexuality many Americans had discarded by the time she immigrated but for Goldman was a painful reality of the old generation she knew before moving to New York City. In her essays,

[10] Ibid, p. 447
[11] John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), pp. 73-84

she often criticized the economic security which couples sought in family life. In her autobiography, she drew upon her own parents as the inspiration for this critique arguing that the frustrations which resulted from this impulse far outweighed the benefits it provided.

Emma Goldman also portrayed her parents as emblems of damaging sexual superstition. In a novelistic flashback, she recalled her earliest sexual impressions, emotions, and experiences while lying in bed, as a teenager, next to her "trembling" husband, stunned with the discovery of his impotence on their wedding night. She remembered her mother catching her masturbating as a six-year-old child while dreaming about a young peasant playmate in Lithuania. She recalled awaking with her mother holding her right hand and screaming "If I ever find [you] again like that, I'll whip you, you naughty child!" She also recounted her first period at the age of eleven and how her mother slapped her across the face when she discovered the menstrual blood on her bed and assured her the assault was "necessary for a girl … when she becomes a woman, as a protection against disgrace."[12] Apparently, through this folk tradition, Jewish mothers warned their daughters of the pains of childbirth and the price of respectable womanhood.[13] Goldman found the practice revolting. Frightened, aching and looking only for parental support, she described it as one of several incidents from her youth that left her confused, ignorant, and fearful of the allure of sexual experience – compelled toward it but associating it with disrepute and pain.

Goldman chose these two incidents as tokens of the sexual education her traditional parents could not provide her and the fear surrounding childhood sexuality that plagued public discourse in the nineteenth century. Whatever the actual events that inspired her recollections about her mother's reaction to her masturbation and her first menstrual cramps, Goldman had filtered the memory of these incidents through fifty years of change in the medical and social understandings of children's sexuality, women's reproductive health, and the importance of

[12] Goldman, *LML*, p. 21
[13] Falk, *Love, Anarchy and Emma Goldman*, p. 19

frank discussion of sexual function. As a nurse in the immigrant neighborhoods of the Lower East Side and Brooklyn, Goldman had witnessed the effects of poor sexual education, and as an advocate of birth control in the teens, she had fought for changes in the public health of the immigrant community. She described the poor women whom she had served as midwife who lacked the slightest education about their bodies and suffered one debilitating pregnancy after another. She wrote that they lived "in continual dread of conception; the great mass of married women submitted helplessly, and when they found themselves pregnant, their alarm and worry would result in the determination to get rid of their expected offspring."[14] Goldman saw a vision of herself in the unwanted offspring "marred and maimed by poverty and still more by ignorant misunderstanding," but she also identified with their mothers, raised on folk knowledge, with just a slap in the face, or some similar tradition, as guides to their sexual health. [15]

Additionally, in these memories, Goldman confronted the silence on childhood sexuality that permeated nineteenth-century medical discourse. From the 1830s through the 1850s, a new movement of physicians, armed with scientific discoveries such as the replacement of humoral theory, created a new platform of understanding about sexual function. Reform physiology attempted to offer good advice to a society on the move, one in which young men and women now left home to seek hard, disciplined work in the cities and parents anxiously gauged their children's chances of success in a competitive market. The new science turned masturbation into a menace both to young individuals and the society at large. Medical experts argued that the human body could not withstand much sexual excitement without suffering damage to the nervous system, insanity, and even early death. Reform physiologists viewed masturbation in young men, on the one hand, as a lack of self-discipline and a depletion of their vital energies better used for productive careers.[16] On the other hand, they thought

[14] Goldman, *LML*, p. 185
[15] Ibid, p. 61
[16] Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), pp. 86-105

masturbation indicated premature pollutions of the pure minds of female children. As one reform physiologist wrote, women's minds remained "in a natural state – unperverted, unseduced, and healthy" until someone introduced them to sex – hopefully, their husbands.[17] Masturbation signified that perversion had entered a young woman's mind, and carried to an extreme, it could lead her into disgrace and vice instead of a respectable, secure marriage. Goldman was appalled by such ideas, having come under the influence of sexual modernists such as Sigmund Freud, who affirmed children's sexuality, and Havelock Ellis, who celebrated frank sexual discussion and disavowed any notion that masturbation was harmful. In her account of this childhood "masturbation scare", Goldman rebuked the notion that children lack sexuality without outside perversion.

Still in her wedding night trance, Goldman recollected a sexual assault she suffered in her youth as a parable of the violent predation that naïve working-class girls had to endure in a patriarchal society. Factory girls faced risk and reward in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century United States when they sought the freedom and adventure of commercial amusements in the company of men. Forced to work to support their struggling families, young women often took advantage of the separation from their scrutinizing elders and formed reciprocal relationships with young men in which they received treats or admission to amusements in return for their companionship. These women enjoyed the gay atmosphere of restaurants, dance halls, parks, and movie houses after the monotony of the shop floor and tense, crowded conditions in their apartments. They also risked disrepute at the hands of the men treating them who often expected kisses, petting, and even sex for amusements they had provided.[18] Goldman recounted a very similar experience to this American phenomenon of "treating" from her life in St. Petersburg. At the age of fifteen, Goldman worked in a factory, and on her way home from work each night, young men competed for her attention and that of all

[17] William A. Alcott, *The Physiology of Marriage*, quoted in Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex*, p. 106
[18] Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusement: Working Women and Leisure in Turn of the Century New York*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986)

her girlfriends. One particular man, a hotel clerk, singled out Goldman and after weeks of persuasion, convinced her to let him take her to a pastry shop. Eventually, the young clerk tricked her into going to a hotel room where he raped her. "Strange, I felt no shame," she wrote, "only a great shock at the discovery that the contact between man and woman could be so brutal and so painful." Goldman reported only feeling shame when she returned to the society of her family life and could not confide of the incident even to her beloved sister. "After that I always felt between two fires in the presence of men," she wrote. "Their lure remained strong, but it was always mixed with violent revulsion." This story demonstrated Goldman's experience with the violent sexuality of a predatory, patriarchal society in which a young victim could not even seek comfort from her family for fear of disgrace.[19]

While it seems unlikely that Goldman wandered through such an illuminating series of memories on the night of her marriage and recalled doing so almost forty years later, she crafted *Living My Life* so that she had thought of them at this given moment to explain how she had come to marry a man about whom she had been so utterly ignorant. At the time of marriage, Emma Goldman was working long hours to support herself and add to her family's income. She claimed to have come to the United States with her sister as a teenager to escape her father's plans to marry her. But in the country which she imagined as a place of freedom, she found herself entrenched in a Jewish community with the same intentions for a young girl as her father. She recalled the night she had arrived in Rochester when she overheard a man telling her family that he could get her a job. "The wages will be small," she remembered him saying, "but she will soon find a feller to marry. Such a buxom girl, with her red cheeks and blue eyes, will not have to work long. Any man will snatch her up and keep her in silks and diamonds."[20] Although this thought appalled Goldman, she married Jakob Kershner only a year after her arrival in America. She was eighteen years old, and she claimed that Kershner had made her

[19] Goldman, *LML*, p. 23
[20] Ibid, p. 12

less lonely. He spoke "real Russian", unlike most of her Yiddish relatives, and claimed to love reading and dances which appealed to Goldman. Apart from this, he was one of her only companions. She worked exhausting hours and lived in close quarters with the rest of her family. Her walks to the shop with Kershner and their visits on free days were the only friendship and relaxation which she had experienced since her immigration. After only four months, he asked her to marry him, and she agreed with hesitation. "We knew so little of each other," she recalled. "He said he'd wait as long as I pleased, but there was already so much talk about our being out together so much."[21] Goldman emphasized that her youthful marriage was a result of both her loneliness and her fear of scandal under the watchful eyes of the Jewish immigrant community.

Goldman spoke to common experiences of the late nineteenth century in these memories of her life as an immigrant factory girl shuffled into a quick, unpleasant marriage. Although middle-class reformers and critics of immigrant culture at the turn-of-the-century often expressed dismay at the crowded quarters, the presence of unrelated boarders, and the lack of privacy that characterized the living arrangements of ethnic neighborhoods, these communities often policed their own rigid system of sexual morality and tradition. When Goldman recalled "so much talk" pressuring her into marriage, she referred to a community of eyes and voices suspicious and watchful of any deviation from the chastity that religious and cultural mores demanded. "The 'promiscuous mingling' in apartment hallways, and street corners," which shocked the middle-class observers of immigrant life, "could serve as a kind of protection, keeping young girls under watchful eyes and guaranteeing that their virginity remained unviolated," as D'Emilio and Freedman noted. The type of marriage that Goldman found in the Jewish community in Rochester, even with her beloved sister Helena whom she noted could never have married the man she truly loved because he was a gentile, was based on staving off

[21] Ibid, p. 19

the effects of exhausting of work and augmenting the frightening prospects for survival in a foreign land. "The hard conditions of life they faced," wrote D'Emilio and Freedman, "often militated against the romantic attachments or the intense, spiritualized passion that the middle class valued."[22] Contrary to Progressive analyses, high birthrates occurred in these communities because families had emigrated from rural communities in many cases where more children meant more workers and where sex and birth control education did not exist, as in Goldman's recollections.

In her autobiography, she used the painful memories of her early life to recount the lessons that the old world of civilized morality had taught her and make sense of the difficult, lonely path she would take in her life. At the age of twenty, Goldman left her husband, separated from her family, and turned her back on the painful world of her childhood. Whatever would happen after this point, Goldman carried the lessons of her early experiences to inform and influence the sexual choices and ideology of her adulthood. Relationships without love were cauldrons of abuse and suffering. Medical knowledge that could not frankly discuss human sexuality was dangerous superstition. Societies in which young men and women remained separate, chaste, and unequal allowed ignorance to fester and rapine violence to pluck its victims. Emma Goldman revealed the traumas of her childhood and adolescence in order to sketch a portrait of the reality that had fueled her rebellion. She crafted the beginning of her autobiography to show that she was a product of the same society that she later denounced. That culture, embodied in her own family, provided a foil to Goldman's difficult existence for the rest of her life. Although she remained close to certain members of her family, and even reconciled with her father before he died, they stayed on the margins of *Living My Life*. While Emma Goldman transitioned to a bittersweet life of fame mixed with political persecution, poverty, and personal turmoil, her family prospered in the United States. Her father became a

[22] John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedmen, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), p. 185

successful owner of a furniture store and a respected member of the Jewish community of Rochester. Her youngest brother attended Columbia University and became a physician. Most of her nieces and nephews attended college and established themselves as professionals and intellectuals. Perhaps in portraying her childhood as such a violent and traumatic period, she had accounted, to herself at least, for the forces that had driven her away from the consolations and opportunities of conformity and respectability.[23]

Emma Goldman portrayed the second act of her sexual life as a formative moment of awakening but also as a transitional stage in which she encountered many new ideas and absorbed the lessons and learned the limits of nineteenth-century radicalism. She recounted her first experience with free love and several significant romantic relationships after her move to New York City. She also defined her own ideals against other women who had made unconventional or scandalous choices for the sake of their personal and professional independence. Goldman met members of the waning sex radical movements of the nineteenth century and digested their ideas and their influence into her own ideology. Goldman described this period of her sexual life to show the limits and disappointments of female emancipation at the end of the nineteenth century which preceded the revolutions in sexual thought and behavior of the early twentieth century.

In *Living My Life*, Goldman recalled her sexual awakening and her introduction to free love occurring within her first days in the anarchist movement as if New York had embraced her at once with both radical politics and sexual freedom. She claimed to meet Alexander Berkman – her first lover, her lifelong comrade, and the man whose crime would make her famous – within the first day she had spent in the city. Goldman fashioned a fundamental connection between her inception as an anarchist and her nativity as a free lover, remembering her first night with Berkman taking place on the anniversary of the defining moment of American

[23] Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 39-40

anarchism. Throughout her public life, Goldman had claimed that the execution of the Haymarket anarchists on 11 November 1887 had converted her to the movement. In *Living My Life*, she stressed the importance of this date by noting the anniversary of the "Chicago martyrdoms" year after year as if it marked the central point of her calendar. She claimed to have begun her love affair with Berkman on the second anniversary of the Haymarket executions, her first in New York City. That night she heard her mentor, Johan Most, give a fiery speech which she absorbed with erotic rapture. "I was caught in the storm of his eloquence," she wrote, "tossed about, my very soul contracting, and expanding in the rise and fall of his voice. It was no longer a speech, it was thunder interspersed with flashes of lightening." Upon arriving back at her apartment, still reeling from the power of Most's message, Goldman took Berkman up to her room. "My body began to shake as if in a fever," she wrote. "An overpowering yearning possessed me, an unutterable desire to give myself to Sasha, to find relief in his arms from the fearful tension of the evening."[24] In her memories, Goldman melded her radical and sexual emancipation realizing them on the same night; her sexual awakening had become an integral moment in her political awakening.

Goldman experimented with several men during her first two years in New York and recalled falling in love with three of them at the same time. Along with Berkman, Goldman also slept with another male roommate, Fedya, and her mentor in anarchist politics, Johan Most. Fedya, Berkman, and Goldman lived for a brief period in an apartment commune with another young woman, and Goldman reported falling for her roommate while her first lover was away for several days. Most and Goldman became involved romantically after he had persuaded her to take up speaking for their cause. It was common for small communes of anarchists to live together in the city and practice free love. Hutchins Hapgood, a journalist and Goldman's friend, described encountering the same "convention of unconventionality" during his dalliances

[24] Goldman, *LML*, p. 45

with Chicago anarchists. "[T]he unnatural idealism of the group," he wrote, "made it obligatory on the part of the male not only to tolerate but to encourage the occasional impulse of the wife or sweetheart toward some other man; or on the part of the woman, a more than tolerant willingness to have her man follow out a brief impulse with some other woman." Hapgood, a sympathetic voice, was careful to point out the difference between this behavior and what appeared to him as the libertine attitude of the 1920s. Describing the inevitable jealousy that entered these arrangements, he wrote that "libertarian ideals… gave to this way of living a certain pathetic dignity. Certainly, in comparison with the unbridled outburst of sexual looseness which took place among all classes after the World War, there was something almost academic in the sex conduct of these Chicago groups."[25] Sex radicals defined these arrangements as varietism, taking multiple lovers at the same time. Goldman's youthful experiment was the only time in *Living My Life* that she described juggling multiple lovers, and she was careful to depict primarily the emotional character of these relationships.

Emma Goldman characterized her decision to have multiple sexual partners as sensitivity to how diverse personalities could arouse her differently. Still in her early twenties during these relationships, Goldman was only beginning to form the ideals that would drive her future work, and as a charismatic, impassioned young woman, she was experimenting with new freedoms. Looking back from a remove of nearly four decades, Goldman stressed how each man had "stirred" different feelings in her and "touched" her in different ways. These affairs were formative experiences, she argued, which helped her to understand the various strands that made the whole of her personality. She respected the absolute fire and conviction with which Alexander Berkman dedicated his energy to anarchism even though he relegated her to a lower place than his ideals. She wrote that Berkman's "intensity, his uncompromising fervor, irritated and drew me like a magnet." Goldman admired this passion, but she knew she could not share it

[25] Hutchins Hapgood, *A Victorian in The Modern World*, 2nd Ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), p. 278

completely. "He loved the Cause more than anything else in the world," she recalled. "For that he would forgo even our love. Yes, and his very own life."[26] But Goldman valued life beyond politics; she also loved art, literature, amusements, and her friendships. Fedya, an artist, shared her enjoyment of aesthetic pleasures, and as Goldman recalled, Berkman often criticized his friend's "spendthrift and incurable bourgeois" habits such as purchasing flowers or expensive clothes for her. "I felt [Berkman] left something untouched in me," wrote Goldman, "something Fedya could perhaps waken to life. Yes, it must be possible to love more than one!"[27] Finally, she found in Most – a much older man and veteran of radical politics – a role-model of oratorical and intellectual strength. "Most's appeal to me was not physical," Goldman wrote. "It was his intellect, his brilliant abilities, his peculiar contradictory personality that fascinated me."[28] She also viewed her love for him as a gift to a man who had served the movement and had suffered for it. "Something mysterious stirred me," she recalled of their first sexual encounter, "something entirely unlike the urge towards [Berkman] or the sensitive response to Fedya." "'All for the Cause,' [Berkman] had so often said," remembered Goldman. "The fighter next to me had already given all for the Cause. But who had given for him? He was hungry for affection, for understanding. I would give him both."[29] Her body could be a gift, a sacrifice for a great man who had sacrificed much in Goldman's view. She quarreled with Most and publicly excoriated him shortly after the end of their affair, but she must have identified with her old lover as she wrote *Living My Life* –now a scarred, forlorn veteran of radical politics herself. In the radical idealism of Berkman, the aestheticism of Fedya, and the lonely sacrifice of Most, Goldman had looked back on her youth in New York and found the disparate notes that characterized her life foreshadowed in the personalities of early lovers.

[26] Goldman, *LML*, p. 46
[27] Ibid, p. 45
[28] Ibid, p. 72
[29] Ibid, p. 49

By stressing the emotional attractions of her early New York relationships, Emma Goldman also echoed the ideas of nineteenth-century sex radicals. These free thinkers had revolted against a dominant view of sex as simply the means to procreation. Sex radicals sustained their defense of eroticism by offering love as the reason and permission for sexuality, "lifting it from the realm of the purely carnal." They celebrated sex as a tool for expression, communication, and vitality and rebelled against the notion that a man should own his wife's body. These reformers had placed "sex at the core of being" in the words of Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz. More than procreation or simply the expression of physical desire, sex founded in love helped men and women develop their personalities and gain self-knowledge. Emma Goldman justified her youthful experimentations with free love and varietism with very similar ideas.[30] In *Living My Life*, Goldman argued that she gained the courage and resilience to fight for sexual equality not only from the ideas of sex radicals but also from the friendship of the remaining leaders of the nineteenth-century free love movement. By the time she had emerged as a public figure, the movement survived only in small pockets and isolated households scattered across rural settlements and bohemian enclaves of the United States. These final guardians of nineteenth-century sex radicalism communicated through subscription journals in which they could share ideas, relate their experiences, and feel part of a community even while they were geographically and socially isolated. Goldman read these periodicals and formed friendships with their publishers and correspondents.

In her memoirs, she claimed that she was comforted and emboldened in the presence of others who shared her willingness to defend unpopular and scandalous ideals. She recalled meeting the Isaaks family, a clan of San Francisco anarchists who published *Free Society*, a forum for sex radical ideas, and noted that even within the anarchist community, a strong belief in sexual freedom could be controversial. "For their insistence on sex equality they were

[30] Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex*, pp. 251-270

severely censored by many anarchists in the East and abroad," she wrote. "I had welcomed the discussion of these problems in their paper, for I knew from my experience that sex is as vital a factor in human life as food and air." These shared beliefs and the commitment to voice them "helped to establish a personal bond between us besides our common anarchist ideal," recalled Goldman.[31] She related a similarly encouraging experience at a meeting with Moses Harmon, an eminent figure in American sex radicalism, during a trip to Chicago. "During the talk I expressed doubt as to whether the approach to sex, so coarse and vulgar in America, was likely to change in the near future and Puritanism be banished from the land," recalled Goldman. Harman steadied her in this crisis of faith, she remembered, remarking on his long history in the sex radical movement. "I have seen such great changes since I began my work," she quoted Harman as saying, "that I am convinced we are not far now from a real revolution in the economic and sexual status of woman in the United States. A pure and ennobling feeling about sex and its vital role in human life is bound to develop."[32] Goldman also recalled her brief stay with Kate Austen, a Missouri farm wife and sex radical writer, who refreshed and bolstered her commitment to free love. Austen, remembered Goldman, had struggled to spread her beliefs among poor, isolated neighbors, a much tougher audience in many ways than her own. "The farmer has nothing but long and arduous toil in the summer, and empty days in the winter. Sex is all they have," Austen informed her. "How should these people understand sex in its finer expressions, or love that cannot be sold or bound? It's an uphill fight, but we must strive on."[33] Through these three encounters Goldman showed the lessons and encouragement she received from the sex radical tradition in America, and she carried her memories of these people and their struggles into the twentieth century as exemplars of brave, hopeful, and stubborn idealism.

Emma Goldman portrayed her youth in the anarchist movement as a period of sexual awakening and emotional growth, but she also described a time rife with confusion and personal

[31] Goldman, *LML*, p. 224
[32] Ibid, p. 219
[33] Ibid, p. 243

turmoil caused by her burgeoning reputation. She had exposed herself to public scorn and abuse as a young female critic of civilized marriage and understood the precariousness of her prominent position. From Frances Wright to Victoria Woodhull, no woman had discussed sexuality so openly, defended free love so publicly, and withstood the backlash of entrenched moralists in America. Goldman knew she had exposed herself to derision even in the presence of anarchists who theoretically opposed all church and state-sanctioned marriage. "Among American radicals in the East I had met many men and women who shared my view on [free love] and had the courage to practice their ideas in their sex life," remembered Goldman. "But in my own immediate ranks I was very much alone."[34] Even Peter Kropotkin, one of the intellectual founders of anarchism, could not understand the importance of sex in Goldman's beliefs. "We became involved in a heated argument about the place of the sex problem in anarchist propaganda," wrote Goldman of her first meeting with the aging philosopher. "Peter's view was that woman's equality with man had nothing to do with sex; it was a matter of brains."[35] Goldman remembered a series of moments in which such expressions of chauvinism and caution concerning her defense of female sexuality emerged from prominent figures within her own movement not to mention those outside of it.

As her celebrity grew during her twenties, Emma Goldman suffered most acutely from the insecurities and reservations of lovers who became tired of the dangers and separations inherent in her work. Ed Brady, with whom Goldman was involved for over seven years, was the most important figure in her personal life during the 1890s. Brady befriended her in the aftermath of Alexander Berkman's imprisonment and remained in her life as a lover and friend until his death in 1902. In the first days of their relationship, Brady had taught Goldman the ecstatic joys of sex. "My own sex life had always left me dissatisfied, longing for something I did not know," Goldman recalled. "In the arms of Ed I learned for the first time the meaning of the

[34] Ibid, p. 224
[35] Ibid, p. 253

great life-giving force. I understood its full beauty, and I eagerly drank its intoxicating joy and bliss."[36] He also supported her professional development, encouraging her trip to Vienna to study nursing and a later voyage to Europe to continue her medical education. Ed Brady was a sensitive partner and respected her radical ideals, but in the end, he wanted her to stop her lecture tours and start a family. "He was not the first to expect that of me, but he might as well know that I would never be that," Goldman wrote, recalling an argument with Brady. "I had believed he was different. . . . Perhaps he, too, loved only the woman in me, wanted me only as his wife and the bearer of his children." Goldman interpreted Brady's desire for a family as "the man's instinct of possession, which brooks no deity except himself."[37] Goldman refused Brady's desire for a family to continue her work as an anarchist, and it cost her their relationship. Brady became bitter and ridiculed the modern ideas she was exploring. "Under the pretext of a great love you have done your utmost to chain me to you, to rob me of all that is more precious to me that life," she recounted yelling at Brady during a fight. "You are not content with binding my body, you want also to bind my spirit! . . . . You're rooted in the old."[38] Goldman split with Brady after this argument and left for a lecture tour. The failure of this relationship and Brady's possessive behavior devastated Goldman and led her to question whether she should forgo hope of devoting herself to both a man and her work. "Men had been able to do the world's work without the sustaining power of love; why should not also women?" asked Goldman. "Or is it that woman needs love more than man? A stupid, romantic notion, conceived to keep her for ever dependent on the male."[39] After Brady died an alcoholic and miserable family man, Goldman revisited her fears that her idealism would prevent her from finding love. "The stars could not be climbed by one rooted in a clod of earth," she wrote. "If one soared high, could he hope to dwell for long in the absorbing depths of passion and love? Like all who had paid for

[36] Ibid, p. 120
[37] Ibid, p. 151
[38] Ibid, p. 127
[39] Ibid, p. 244

their faith, I too would have to face the inevitable. Occasional snatches of love; nothing permanent in my life except my ideal."[40] Goldman remained alone for a decade after the failure of her relationship with Ed Brady although she recounted numerous casual love affairs in her memoirs. He had left an indelible impression on Goldman's beliefs; she had learned that equality in love meant a man who could share her with her work. Maturing to the next stage of her life, Goldman remembered sensing that her inability to compromise her ideals would always cost her the security of lasting love.

Ben Reitman dominated the next and final act of Emma Goldman's tragic love life. Between 1908 and 1917 he served as a lover, a manager, and a major source of accomplishment, passion, turmoil and anguish. Goldman characterized their relationship as "the Great Grand Passion" of her days. She described Reitman as charming, handsome, free-spirited, and indispensable as a promoter. Conversely, Goldman portrayed her lover as a child, a coward, a mama's boy, and a sexual deviant. She felt the need to defend her relationship with Reitman repeatedly in *Living My Life* and did so by stressing the impulsive, instinctual desire she felt for him. She described his pull as something she had never felt before and something she could not resist until eight or nine years into their relationship. The choice, as she remembered it, was between the pain of being with him and the torture of his being away. She had her ideals as well to buoy her against the jealousy he caused her. She had talked too much of free love to walk away from a man whom she loved but whose promiscuity bedeviled her. She would attempt to change him with her love and her politics. Finally, Ben Reitman allowed Emma Goldman to work. Past lovers had left her behind to seek their fate as revolutionaries, minimized the role a moment could play in anarchist politics, or demanded that she stop placing herself in danger in return for a settled family life. Reitman not only encouraged her work but joined it – touring almost six months of every year, drawing large crowds for her lectures, and providing her with

[40] Ibid, p. 353

companionship on strenuous train rides and in distant cities. Along on these tours, he cheated on her, stole from her, and undermined her work with his undisciplined behavior. This mixture of sweet and sour was modern love in the modernist period of Emma Goldman's American adventure. It was not bliss or cohesion by any stretch of the imagination, but neither were most of the relationship that defined sexual modernism in the second decade of the twentieth century. Goldman's was just one of many failed experiments in a new type of love, but there was no question about her returning to what had come before.

Ben Reitman was an American original of such bold and absurd colors that he seems better suited to the pages of a comic novel than to reality. Born in 1879, Reitman was ten years younger than Goldman. He had grown up in Chicago to immigrant parents of whom only his mother remained to raise him. As the only Jew in his neighborhood, Reitman indentified with social outcasts from a young age – African-Americans, prostitutes, and most especially, hobos. He began tramping at eleven, hopped trains across the West and Southwest, made it to Europe before he was twenty, and in a strange twist, had attended medical college and earned an M.D. by the time he was twenty-five. Despite the professional degree, Reitman was uncouth, unstable, and unfocused. When Goldman met him, he was operating a storefront outreach for Chicago's homeless, the Hobo College, which provided medical care, food, and help in the search for safe housing. He would return again and again to medical practice throughout his life, but Reitman was never able to make a stable income. It seems that he could not inspire himself to show up for work enough. He did make a mark as an expert in the treatment and prevention of venereal disease, especially syphilis, wrote articles and a book about it, and played a significant role in the pre-World War I birth control agitation – serving a prison sentence for his public stance. Reitman, as Goldman would quickly discover, was also an inveterate womanizer. He called the affairs his "obsessions," they caused him deep shame, and he apparently felt that he could not help himself. He married several times including a woman he'd begun seeing while he

was still involved with Goldman and fathered children by his wives, but he could never make these arrangements last.

Ben Reitman allowed Goldman her career as a propagandist, something she had never fully enjoyed in any serious relationship in the past. She stressed this point in her autobiography and drew a direct contrast with her past love affairs. Looking back on the important men in her life, Goldman wrote that she had possessed a "great hunger for someone who would love the woman in me and yet who would also be able to share my work." Alexander Berkman had been "too obsessed by the Cause to see much of the woman who craved expression" while Johan Most and Ed Brady had "wanted merely the woman" in her.[41] Berkman had left her behind in the moment when she most wanted to be with him – in Pittsburgh when he had attacked Henry Frick – and spent the next fourteen years in prison. Most and Brady had thought of her political work as a passing phase that they hoped they could persuade her to abandon, and according to Goldman both men had wanted her to sacrifice her career to bear them children. Reitman offered to jump on tour with her within weeks of their first meeting in Chicago. Goldman found it "wonderful to have someone with me on the long and weary tramps through the country, someone who was lover, companion, and manager."[42] She wrote that Reitman "brought me deeper devotion and a complete consecration to my work."[43] This assistance fulfilled a critical longing for a woman who valued her work above all else and had seen many of her contemporaries forced to choose between the love of a man and the fulfillment of a career. She showed a deep appreciation for the fact that Reitman celebrated her work, joined it, and made it more profitable.

She credited him as a great publicist and manager who joyfully completed work she found distracting and distasteful. She had been travelling across the United States since the

[41] Goldman, *LML*, p. 433
[42] Ibid, pp. 424-425
[43] Ibid, p. 461

1890s attempting to keep a nation-wide network of anarchists, free lovers, and labor activists revived and inspired through the force of her charismatic lectures. Tours involved exhausting travel, month-long stays in cities with frequent excursions into nearby towns, accommodations which often amounted to the guest bedroom of a sympathetic family, all-night discussions of politics and ideas with local admirers, and frequent run-ins with police, politicians, and even vigilantes who attempted to prevent her from speaking. The road was lonely, draining, and sometimes dangerous. For Goldman to carry on a serious love affair with a man, he would have to sacrifice his career to hers or vice versa. With Reitman, she had met someone who was willing to make her career his own. "As travelling companion he had made my trip a new, delightful experience," she wrote, and he was "most comforting in releasing me from the petty annoyances and details involved in travelling."[44] He was also gifted at creating publicity for her lectures. "With complete absorption and abundance of energy," Goldman remembered, "Ben had achieved wonders in the size of our meetings and the increased sales of literature."[45] This was critical to her operation in the years when ticket and book sales on her lecture tours were the major source of funding for *Mother Earth*, the foundation of her enterprise. The period in which Reitman looked after Goldman's tours were the years of her greatest success – the most active and inspired time of her life. In 1910, Goldman delivered over 120 lectures in 37 cities to an estimated 40,000 individuals, and in later years, she would estimate that she had spoken to even larger numbers.[46] Reitman booked the halls, placed advertisements in the local papers, printed and sold the tickets, and oversaw the travel arrangements. Years after their break-up during the time she was composing her memoirs she expressed the significance of Reitman's contribution to her career and the anarchist movement in a letter to Alexander Berkman, who had criticized her former lover. "It was Ben's help which had kept *Mother Earth* alive, as well as our publishing work," she reminder her friend, "without him I would never have been able to

[44] Ibid, pp. 433-434
[45] Ibid, p. 433
[46] Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*, p. 166

publish my two books, Voltairine [De Cleyre's], and yes, your [Prison] Memoirs. Let us be fair, dear Sash, it was Ben who helped me raise thousands of dollars which kept up a houseful of people and enabled me as well as yourself to do what we have done between 1908 and 1917."[47]

Emma Goldman prized Reitman's willingness to share her work keenly, for prior to meeting him she had feared her devotion to it would be repaid with loneliness like many of the "New Women" of her time. In both her essays and her autobiography, Goldman detailed her impressions of the unmarried professional women she had encountered during the first decade of the twentieth century. She felt that despite their struggle to gain professional and political equality many "emancipated" women remained imprisoned in a system of patriarchal morality. Goldman argued that women should not have to face the decision between a profession and the sexual and emotional pleasures of marriage. Only the fear of moral censure had made middle-class women "compulsory vestals" if they chose to work because they feared loving a man outside of marriage. "Until woman has learned to defy [her fears]," Goldman asserted, "to stand firmly on her own ground and to insist upon her own unrestricted freedom, to listen to voice of her nature, whether it call for life's greatest treasure, love for a man, or her most glorious privilege, the right to give birth to a child, she cannot call herself emancipated."[48] In *Living My Life*, Goldman recounted a period in which she operated a massage parlor in New York. She counted many professional women among her clientele and had become friendly with them in the course of her work. "Most of the women claimed to be emancipated and independent," she wrote, "as indeed they were in the sense that they were earning their own living. But they paid for it by the suppression of the mainsprings of their natures; fear of public opinion robbed them of love and intimate comradeship." [49] Goldman did not criticize these women but empathized with them. Although she did not suffer from the same fears as her

[47] Emma Goldman to Alexander Berkman, May 14, 1929, in *Nowhere at Home*, p. 149
[48] Emma Goldman, "The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation," *Anarchism and Other Essays,* (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1910) pp. 223, 228
[49] Goldman, *LML,* p. 365

clients, she believed that her relationship with Ed Brady had almost derailed her life's work and in its aftermath, she recalled wondering if loneliness was the price paid by "those who for ever reach out for the heights, for some ideal of exalted aim that excludes aught else."[50] At the time she was conceiving and writing her memoirs, Goldman, living alone in exile, again felt that her commitment to her ideals had cost her the comforts of a loving relationship.

Goldman observed a complex phenomenon of her historical moment when she spoke about the emancipated women who sought relief in her massage parlor. Beginning in the 1870s, middle-class women had begun to seek higher levels of education with a small but significant number of girls attending college. They defied old standards of their class that had kept women out of the professions with home and family as their sole responsibilities, and they faced strong prejudice in doing so. Some critics had even argued that an education would ruin a woman's child-bearing capacity. Many members of the first generation of college-educated women were unwilling to transition comfortably into traditional marriages after exploring their intellectual strengths and defying the slander of a chauvinistic society. Studies have shown that these women delayed marriage and child birth until later in life or avoided them altogether in significant proportions compared to other women of their generation. "They have spent half a lifetime in fitting themselves for their chosen work," a president of Bryn Mawr noted, "and then may be asked to choose between it and marriage. No one can estimate the number of women who remain unmarried in revolt before such an alternative." Late nineteenth-century women often adapted to unmarried life by forming intimate same-sex relationships. These women enjoyed many of the emotional benefits of conjugal life by cohabitating, owning property, and often sleeping together in life-long partnerships sometimes known as "Boston marriages"

[50] Ibid, p. 343

without any conception of themselves as homosexual. Although not in all cases, these relationships often contained a strong romantic bond between the two partners.[51]

Historians have argued that these relationships strengthened women in their resistance to the unfair imperatives of civilized morality, but Emma Goldman asserted that they could not substitute the things a woman should have the courage to claim. "It was pathetic to see how lonely they were," Goldman wrote, "how starved for male affection, and how they craved children." If these women wanted to work at a profession and still wanted a man in their lives, Goldman argued that they should have the guts to have both. To be clear, she was not opposed to homosexuality as being an "unnatural" choice nor to the idea that a woman should live alone. Goldman bravely defended homosexuality during her American career, touring with a lecture entitled "The Intermediate Sex" in the 1910s, and she had lived alone for most of her adult life. What galled Goldman was not that these women loved other women nor that they lived independently, but she felt that these choices sublimated longings which their propriety prevented them from pursuing. "Lacking the courage to tell the world to mind its own business," she wrote, "the emancipation of the women was frequently more of a tragedy than traditional marriage would have been."[52] Goldman had narrowly escaped a traditional marriage in Rochester while still in her teens. Later, Ed Brady had tried to persuade her to give up her work, make a home, and have his children. She had held on to the hope that she could have both the companionship of a man and her career, and she had emphasized in her autobiography that Ben Reitman had allowed her that.

Goldman also defended her relationship with Reitman on the grounds of an overwhelming, instinctual attraction to him. This argument bears the influence of the modernist ideas which she had begun to incorporate essays on free love during the earliest part

[51] D'Emilo and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, p. 191
[52] Goldman, *LML*, p. 371

of her affair with Reitman. She described her longing for Reitman as primal, impulsive sexual desire. She wrote about an "irresistible craving for the touch of the man." She remembered being "caught in the torrent of an elemental passion I had never dreamed a man could rouse in me" and "responded shamelessly to its primitive call, its naked beauty, it ecstatic joy."[53] Goldman referred repeatedly to her instinctual hunger in her letters to Reitman. She wrote that he "awakened the woman in me, the savage primitive woman" and described her "wild primitive passion" for him. [54] Twenty years before her autobiography, she had argued that an essential weakness of wedlock, celibacy, and bourgeois society were that they forced men and women to deny elemental desires for sexual expression which caused unnecessary emotional and even physical strife. In arguments that mimicked Sigmund Freud's notion of the sublimating burden of civilization, she warned that people could only achieve self-knowledge and fulfillment if they yielded to their natural desires – something that institutional marriage did not allow. She had described love as "nature's demand", "defiant passion", and an "all-compelling force,"[55] emphasizing both the draw of sex and the resistance that family, society, and one's rational mind might place in its path. Goldman had resisted Reitman's fascination to her for a time, describing "an inner barrier I could neither explain nor overcome." Goldman recalled that she had only ceded her will to "nature's demand" after an oracular dream sprung from her subconscious. "Flames were shooting from his finger-tips and slowly enveloping my body," she wrote. "I made no attempt to escape them. I strained towards them, craving to be consumed by their fire." [56]

Goldman stressed her elemental passion for Reitman in part to explain why she had stayed with someone who had caused her a great deal of pain over the course of their relationship. In *Living My Life*, she detailed a litany of his abuses, betrayals, and failures.

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[53] Ibid, p. 420

[54] Emma Goldman to Ben Reitman, quoted in Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*, p. 149; Emma Goldman to Ben Reitman, quoted in Falk, *Love, Anarchism, and Emma Goldman*, p. 241

[55] Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Assoc., 1910), pp. 237,241-242

[56] Goldman, *LML*, p. 420

Reitman "tested my soul a hundred times," Goldman wrote. Apart from his "erotic adventures" with "all sorts of women," Reitman's behavior humiliated Goldman both publicly and amongst her friends.[57] Whereas Goldman and her colleagues fearlessly agitated for their political causes in the face of angry crowds and hostile authorities, Reitman responded poorly to the threat of physical peril. "There was no relying on him in a critical moment," wrote Goldman. "I grieved to realize that Ben was not of heroic stuff."[58] She also complained that Reitman clashed with her anarchist friends who thought he was foolish and immature. "He was his own self when we were alone but he became a changed creature in the presence of my friends," she remembered. "With them he would grow nervous, inarticulate, and dull, or he would ask silly questions that made them suspicious of him. I was sick with disappointment."[59] Most of the problems Goldman faced with Reitman surfaced within the first year of their relationship, but they remained together for almost a decade before he left her for a young woman about the give birth to his child. In *Living My Life*, Goldman acknowledged that Reitman made her suffer but explained that she was more miserable without him. "Nights I would determine to cut myself loose once and for all and not even accept his letters," she wrote. "The morning would find me eagerly scanning the mail for the handwriting so electrifying in its effect on me." Due to the fact that they lived in different cities for long periods of their relationship, they conducted their romance through the mail for long periods. Goldman wrote that his letters were "like a narcotic" which "put my brain to sleep" but "made my heart beat faster," but she could have been describing his presence as well. "To be away from Ben meant sleepless nights, restless days, sickening yearning," she confessed. "To be near him involved conflict and strife, daily denial of my pride. But it also meant ecstasy and renewed vigor for my work."[60] For many years, Goldman

[57] Ibid, p. 461
[58] Ibid, p. 514
[59] Ibid, p. 435
[60] Ibid, pp. 522, 527

explained, the primitive attraction she felt for Reitman and his unique contribution to her life's work atoned for all his misbehavior.

With all of its qualities and all of its flaws, Emma Goldman's relationship with Ben Reitman represented modern love in her modernist period, and she recalled her affair with him to show that the pleasures of sex remained pocked with suffering even when freed from the judgments of family, state, church, and society. During their decade together, a bohemian sensibility infused with radical politics, radical art and radical sexuality imprinted itself on the intellectual life of the American metropolis. Emma Goldman befriended, instructed, and socialized with the young adventurers who took it upon themselves to demolish the old culture and get famous doing it, and as Christine Stansell has argued, "[i]n her public persona, she represented the eclecticism of the metropolitan intelligentsia" to her audiences. With Reitman by her side, she lecture about modern art and drama, free love, radical politics, homosexuality, and the latest labor uprisings in provincial towns and cities across America – an English-speaking Russian Jew who seemed to know more about what was happening in the world than her audience had ever met. Unlike many, Goldman chose not to romanticize the brief excitement of this period which dissipated at the precipice of the First World War and the apolitical excess of the twenties. The slow suffering of her life with Reitman provided a corrective to any formulation of that time as a new frontier in the development of the human race.[61]

Emma Goldman was not alone in facing the unkind realities of sexual modernism, and the problems she encountered with Reitman evoked many of the problems that other bohemian women faced with their lovers. The desire to work, socialize and have sex on par with men had inspired modern women of the teens and twenties to disregard tradition's guidance. In avoiding their mothers' mess, they strolled into their own. This is not to say that their men resisted their

[61] Christine Stansell, *American Moderns*, pp. 121

aspirations for equality. Bohemian men embraced feminism. In 1914, the Greenwich Village writer Floyd Dell wrote in the *Masses* that "Feminism is going to make it possible for the first time for men to be free." These utopian prophets supported the ideal of woman's rights, but they often failed to live up to their ideals of complete equality between the sexes in their personal actions.[62]

Modernist lovers encountered problems in their sex lives, professional lives, social lives, and home lives in attempting to break free so sharply from the security of the past. Sexual modernists propagated the idea that both men and women should enjoy sex, and they should be free and honest in seeking partners outside of their primary relationship. In practice, men took this as an excuse to philander indiscriminately and suffered serious bouts of jealousy when their lovers followed their lead in experimenting with multiple lovers. Other bohemian men found it difficult to remain attracted to women who engaged them intellectually. Sexual modernists espoused a woman's right to work and seek economic independence, but in cases where the female partner achieved greater success this often caused men despair and competitiveness, as it did in Goldman's relationship with Reitman. Modernist relationships also aimed to fuse friendship and sexual love so that couples ideally would confide in each other and support each other. In many cases, this led bohemian men to seek succor and unconditional emotional comfort from their spouses and partners, and if women resisted this maternal role, they faced accusations of coldness or aloofness. These friendship-romances could become cauldrons of anger, misunderstanding, and suspicion. Neith Boyce and Hutchins Hapgood, a well-known bohemian couple, wrote a play inspired by their marriage entitled *Enemies* in which each wrote the other's lines, and they publicly excoriated each other for their failings. Finally, there were the problems of home and children. Although they might have given lip service to women's equality, men of the 1910s were completely unprepared to envision a world in which they shared

[62] Ibid, p. 266

domestic responsibilities. Bohemian women were often stuck cleaning, cooking and caring for children at a time when they sought professional employment in ever increasing numbers and domestic service was becoming increasingly rare. Some modernist women even proposed separate living arrangements with their husbands to keep the romance alive and encourage their men to care for themselves. Goldman never complained about feeling like Reitman's servant, but she did struggle to find a suitable arrangement of cohabitation. In the one instance in which they lived together, Goldman had to invite Reitman's mother into the home and the situation blew up within a few months.

Most of the best-known bohemian marriages and relationships failed, and most of the men, as did Reitman, ended their lives in marriages with women who did not challenge them as equals and forgave their sexual adventures. In light of all of this, the only unique aspect of Goldman's experience was that she had argued a free love, anti-marriage position and stuck to it for the remainder of her life. As Christine Stansell corroborated in her study of bohemian Greenwich Village, "the structures of sexual modernism proved highly elastic in their ability to accommodate elements of the old sexual hierarchy."[63]

Prominent biographers have missed the connection between Goldman's depiction of her affair with Reitman and the experiences of other modernists as well the relationship between her early sexual history and the lives of her contemporaries. Instead they have focused on the contradictions between the version of Reitman in *Living My Life* and the "reality" portrayed in

[63] Ellen Kay Trimberger discussed the inability of men in the Greenwich Village bohemia of the 1910s to suppress their egos in egalitarian relationships and stay attracted to women who stimulated them intellectually. She also detailed the Boyce-Hapgood marriage and the likelihood that modernist men would leave bohemia for the comforts of a traditional family. "Feminism, Men, and Modern Love: Greenwich Village, 1900-1925," *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, eds. Ann Snitow, et al., (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), pp. 131-152. Christina Simmons wrote about how sex radical "men's support for nonmonogamy often meant extending and attempting to legitimize sexual privileges, to have a secure claim on one woman while also having access to others," and argued the rarity of sustained anti-marriage positions. "Women's Power in Sex Radical Challenges to Marriage in the Early-Twentieth-Century United States," *Feminist Studies*, Vol, 29, No. 1 (Spring, 2003), pp. 168-198. Christine Stansell detailed the promises and disappointments of modernist sexuality in 1910s Greenwich Village in the seventh and eighth chapters of *American Moderns* – quotation on p. 227.

their correspondence. The hundreds of letters the two lovers exchanged over the years they were together showed an erotic side of their relationship absent from the memoirs as well as a sense of Goldman's enslavement to her feelings for Reitman only briefly alluded to in her recollections. The revelatory and intimate tone of *Living My Life* "concealed the self-doubt and weakness Emma had experienced," wrote Falk. "She settled for a crude portrayal that emphasized the sharp contrast between Ben's crude nature and her own refined and civilized character." Falk concluded that Goldman could not "face the questions that [the] relationship [with Reitman] raised about the viability of her own dreams and expectations, when translated from abstract political principles into real life."[64] Alice Wexler claimed she "found herself constantly questioning Goldman's veracity" because of the disconnect she found between her letters and her memoirs. "I wanted to show how she attempted to create a new kind of female hero who was outspoken both in her sexuality and her politics," Wexler wrote. "Still, at times, I approached the autobiography more as a prosecuting attorney than as a sympathetic critic."[65] Wexler admitted to the inner conflict Goldman aroused in her calling her "admirable and irritating." She wrote that she "was often dismayed by [Goldman's] self-deceptions and vanities."[66] Although both biographers sympathized with Goldman, they focused on finding the "truth" about Goldman's experiences through her correspondence – exposing pride where Goldman claimed heroics, bitterness where Goldman claimed righteousness, and weakness where Goldman had claimed strength.

In part it is the very sympathies Falk and Wexler hoped would aid their understanding of Emma Goldman that has clouded their vision of *Living My Life* and what it reveals about Goldman's sexuality. Certainly, there is an obvious dissonance between the relationship uncovered in Goldman's letters with Reitman and the one described in her memoirs. The

[64] Candace Falk, *Love, Anarchy and Emma Goldman*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), p. 8
[65] Alice Wexler, "Emma Goldman and the Anxiety of Biography," *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women*, ed. Sara Alpern et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 40
[66] Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*, p. xix

discrepancy lies not in the conflicts Goldman recalled, but in the sheer recurrence of the problems. In essence, she admitted to every aspect of the relationship that had caused her difficulties in *Living My Life*, but her letters do not reveal the everyday recurrence of these troubles chronicled in the language of pain and disappointment. If Goldman's readers can hear about the difficulties of her time with Reitman in her autobiography, they experience them viscerally in her correspondence. When Falk and Wexler found these letters, they were shocked at how their icon, their idealistic heroine had allowed a man to torture and ensnare her emotions for almost a decade due to her addiction to the sexual fulfillment she found with him. They followed the decade of pain and lust brought about by Reitman's entrance into Goldman's life and asked why she had glossed over this story in her memoirs. Both argued that Goldman's relationship with Reitman had led her to question her belief in free love as an emancipating ideal for women. "That so independent and strong a woman as Goldman – and so ardent a champion of free love – should find herself caught in a deep erotic dependence suggests the continuing power of those unconscious "internal tyrants" that Emma herself so eloquently denounced," wrote Wexler.[67] Falk used one of Goldman's letters to make the argument for her. "I'd rather do without reality," Goldman wrote to Reitman, "if my ideal is forever to be abused, insulted, spat upon, dragged through the mud."[68] Perhaps Goldman did question her beliefs during the more bitter periods of her relationship with Reitman, but what these biographers have missed is that Goldman meant her memoirs not as a justification of ideals but as a history of how she came to them.

The key to understanding Goldman's history of her sex life, one that leads us away from discussions of fallacy and inconsistency, is to consider the difference between the dramatist and the performer. Historians, biographers, and critics have too often clung to the idea of Goldman as an actress. This impulse arose out of the image of Goldman as an emotional lecturer who

[67] Ibid, p. 278
[68] Emma Goldman to Ben Reitman, in Falk, *Love, Anarchy and Emma Goldman*, p. 4

knew how to manipulate an audience, feed off its love or its hate, and controls the temper of a room from the stage. The earliest reviewers of *Living My Life* initiated a tendency to view Goldman's story as a performance with emphasis on the emotionalism of her writing and instinctive life choices she had detailed. "The political lecture was a form of theater," wrote Herbert Leibowitz, "and Emma an oratorical diva who knew how to spellbind an audience." When it came to her autobiography, Leibowitz claimed the lessons of the stage led her astray. Goldman's writing in *Living My Life* was "too exhibitionistic, too stentorian, as if aimed at the crowd in the back of the hall."[69] Alice Wexler attempted to free Goldman's autobiography from the critique that it was an improvisation, a spewing of emotions, by pointing out the novelistic elements of the book. However, she too returned to the metaphor of performance claiming that Goldman "regarded the autobiography as a dramatization rather than an exploration of her life, yet another dramatic performance in a lifetime of performances on a variety of public stages."[70] Goldman, they argued, had voiced her ideology and lived her life as an improvised performance leading her into hysterical overreaction, confusion, and misstep. Oz Frankel has pointed out the gendered nature of this construction of Goldman as emotional, instinctive, and unreflective – perhaps even out of control.[71] Goldman, however, saw herself not as a performer but as a dramatist composing the scenes that conveyed the significance of her life.

Both Falk and Wexler have erred in attributing a "truth" to Goldman's letters that they have refused to her essays and her memoirs. The fact is that all three forms represent flawed versions of Goldman's real beliefs and experiences. Her letters written to Reitman in the midst of a fight or a passionate longing shaped her present thoughts to her purposes as much as her memoirs altered her recollections of the past. Wexler came to this conclusion after she published her studies of Goldman. "Perhaps the letters, too, were a kind of performance," she

[69] Herbert Leibowitz, *Fabricating Lives: Explorations in American Autobiography,* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), pp. 158-159
[70] Wexler, "Emma Goldman and the Anxiety of Biography," p. 42
[71] Frankel, "What Ever Happened to "Red Emma"?, *Journal of American History*, p. 908

wrote, "in which she dramatized herself as the suffering martyred mother or the unhappy heroine."[72] We also have to assume that Goldman molded her depictions of her relationships before Reitman, for which no corroborating letters exist, as much if not more than the descriptions Falk and Wexler have questioned. As well, we can assume that her experiences with Reitman – the good and the bad – played a significant role in the beliefs she documented in the essays she wrote – almost all of them during their relationship. Therefore, no document from Goldman's life tells the correct story, but if we approach them correctly, we can uncover the story she hoped to convey.

We gain more than historical facts if we consider *Living My Life* as a composed and considered work, as a reconstructed pattern of experience. We gaze upon lessons that Goldman believed she learned, definitions of the separate periods she understood herself passing through, and challenges and barriers she sensed that particular times, places, and cultures put in her path. At least in terms of romance and sex, Emma Goldman meant for a pattern to emerge from her memoirs through which she illustrated the pitfalls, dangers, and snares of love in both an old age and a new one. Goldman saw herself as a collective individual and intended her autobiography to expose the collective trials of love during a life in revolt. If Goldman believed in a collective experience of American individualism to instruct each newborn generation of rebels, then her life story was a deposit into the collective memory bank. Her memoirs placed her at the axis of an old American sexual rebellion and new one.

In composing her memoirs, Goldman did not hide from the suffering caused by love and sex as Candace Falk argued. She did not shroud the loss and heartbreak she experienced, but shaped it into a tragedy in three acts. In this drama, a young heroine struggled for freedom and personal happiness but, in the end, suffered great pain. In the first act, Goldman observed the sexual standards and morality of an old world, both in Europe and her first American home of

[72] Alice Wexler, "Emma Goldman and the Anxiety of Biography," *The Challenge of Feminist Biography,* p. 43

Rochester. She learned the costs of living with the civilized morality of her family. She watched her parents suffering and lived with sexual ignorance and violence into her teenage years, culminating in a disastrous marriage. In the second act, she experienced a sexual awakening during the early years of her life as a radical in New York City. She learned to trust her sexual impulses and defined the happiness she hoped to have in her romantic and professional life. As well, she averted the snares of several men who hoped to constrain her in traditional relationships. In the third act, love caught Goldman by surprise, and she suffered the consequences of adoring a childish and untrustworthy man who nonetheless attracted her completely. Love punished Goldman severely during this final act, cementing in her a feeling of ultimate loneliness and severely testing some of her most beloved ideals. In the end, she concluded that her radicalism was too revolutionary for a modern world still in formation. What she would call the tragedy of woman's emancipation is that she could envision a world in which a free, independent and sexual woman could exist happily but she could not yet live in it.

CONCLUSION

A century ago Americans filled theaters and halls and living rooms across the country to hear Emma Goldman speak. She repaid their attention by insulting their most beloved institutions. She hated their religion; she loathed their capitalism; and she bemoaned the very existence of their government. And then she told them that marriage was slavery, prostitution, and the source of their deepest unhappiness. Goldman was hopelessly naïve when it came to government, economics, and religion; few listeners ever took her seriously on these subjects. But Emma Goldman touched a nerve when it came to her ideas on marriage and love.

Beginning in the 1910s and continuing throughout the twentieth century, American sexual norms have undergone a cataclysmic upheaval. Emma Goldman met shock and censure when she propounded ideas such as free love in the early twentieth century. Today, we call free love "dating." Goldman went to jail less than a century ago for defending contraception. Today, the birth control pill is a daily ritual for about a hundred million women. In her time, Goldman met women who sacrificed family life and even their sex lives to have careers because marriage meant dependence and domesticity. This was such an unusual practice that these people were called "New Women". Women pursue careers and education as seriously as men today. Not only can we talk about sex now, we are flooded with images, information, and discussion of sex. Sexual freedom is no longer the rebellion; it is the norm.

Countless, small changes led to the great, enveloping transformation of American sexuality. Young Americans stopped agreeing with their parents' lives. The media and commercial technology boomed in the early twentieth century. A growing number of Americans received an education, took better jobs, and had more money and more free time for leisure.

They went to war. Americans heard jazz and rock and roll. Americans began to define themselves as consumers.

Back at the beginning of these changes in the 1910s, Emma Goldman presented a message that appealed not to the newest sensibilities in American's lives but to old ideas founded in traditional republican sentiments. She talked about individuality, freedom, love, and candor. Americans began applying these ideas to their reforms of sexual norms as far back as the 1830s. Goldman also understood her experiences as common trials of past Americans. In essence, the visions of the future Goldman showed to twentieth-century moderns were rooted deep in the old soil of the American past.

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