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A

ANARCHISM AND THE  
POLITICS OF HOMOSEXUALITY

by

TERENCE S. KISSACK

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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## Introduction: Anarchism and the Politics of Homosexuality

Homosexuality first became a topic of political interest in the West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Though various early nineteenth century political thinkers, such as Jeremy Bentham and Charles Fourier, devoted attention to the question of homosexuality and its place in the social order, the increased level of discourse on the topic of same-sex love which emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was part of a quantitative and qualitative shift in the political and sexual cultures of the West.<sup>1</sup> This development is best documented for Northern Europe, especially Germany and England. In these countries intellectuals and reformers such as Karl Heinrich Ulrich, Edith Ellis, Anna Rueling, Edward Carpenter, Helen Stocker, and John Addington Symonds published and circulated defenses of same-sex love. In 1897 the German sexologist and sex radical, Magnus Hirschfeld formed the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, the world's first homosexual rights organization. The SHC published a journal, sponsored lectures, did outreach to media, clergy and other professionals, and lobbied for legal reforms. The members of the SHC and the other activists of the period were radical intellectuals producing new forms of knowledge and political ideas. They spoke to and helped draft new cultural and medical definitions of homosexuality, forged new political terms and goals, and articulated sharp critiques of oppressive social norms

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<sup>1</sup> On Bentham and Fourier see *We Are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook of Gay and Lesbian Politics*, eds. Mark Blasius and Shane Phelan (New York: Routledge, 1997), 15 – 33 and Saskia Poldervaart, "Theories About Sex and Sexuality in Utopian Socialism," in *Gay Men and Sexual History of the Political Left*, eds. Gert Hekma, Harry Oosterhuis, and James Steakley (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1995), 41 - 67.

and values. These activists helped create new forms of political and social consciousness that shaped the lives of millions of people.<sup>2</sup>

Historians have not documented a similar development of a politics of homosexuality in the United States during this period. This is not to say that Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were silent on the question of the moral, social, and cultural meaning of same-sex love. As in the rest of the developed world America witnessed a dramatic increase in the level of interest in homosexuality. Sexual behavior and identity were the subjects of a number of discursive practices ranging from the law, psychiatry, journalism, and literature.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Barry D. Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* (Boston: Twayne, 1987); Phyllis Grosskurth, *The Woeful Victorian: A Biography of John Addington Symonds* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964); John Lauritsen and David Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement, 1864 – 1935* (New York: Times Change Press, 1974); James Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany* (New York: Arno Press, 1975); Jeffrey Weeks and Sheila Rowbotham, *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (London: Pluto Press, 1977); Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet Books, 1990); Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society: The Regulation of Society Since 1800*, Second Edition (London: Longman, 1989); *Lesbians in Germany, 1890s – 1920s*, eds. Lillian Faderman and Brigitte Eriksson (Tallahassee, FL: Naiad Press, 1990); and Charlotte Wolff, *Magnus Hirschfeld: A Portrait of a Pioneer in Sexology* (London: Quartet Books, 1986)

<sup>3</sup> See Peter Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); John C. Burnham, "Early References to Homosexual Communities in American Medical Writings." *Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality* 7, no. 8 (August 1973), 34, 40 – 41, 46 – 49.; George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890 – 1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, eds. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 467 – 476; John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); Martin Duberman, *About Time: Exploring the Gay Past* (New York: Meridian, 1991); Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A* (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1976); Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay/Lesbian Almanac: A New Documentary* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983); Jonathan Ned Katz, *Love Stories: Sex Between Men Before Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Steven Maynard, "Through a Hole in the Lavatory Wall: Homosexual Subcultures, Police Surveillance, and the Dialectics of Discovery in Toronto, 1890 – 1930," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 2 (October 1994), 207 – 242; Lawrence Murphy, "Defining the Crime Against Naturē: Sodomy in the United States Appeals Courts, 1810 – 1940," *Journal of Homosexuality* 19, no. 1 (1990), 49 – 66. ; Michael D. Quinn, *Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth Century Americans: A Mormon Example* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Siobhan Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); and Jennifer Terry,

There were, however, few Americans who produced political defenses of same-sex love similar to those being penned by the European sex radicals.

The first known autobiographical account written by a self-identified homosexual, Claude Hartland's *The Story of a Life: For the Consideration of the Medical Community*, was published in 1901 in St. Louis. Hartland's book is a reformist work. Wracked by guilt and a sense of having been afflicted with a terrible disease, Hartland dedicated his narrative "to the physicians, who have at their heart the welfare of their fellow man" in the hopes "that it may be a means by which other similar sufferers may be reached and relieved."<sup>4</sup> Hartland appealed to doctors and other moral authorities in an attempt to soften their largely negative views of same-sex love.

The only pre-World War I era American work comparable to that being produced by the European activists of the period is Edward Irenaeus Prime-Stevenson's *The Intersexes: A History of Simisexuality As a Problem in Social Life*. *The Intersexes* engages with the texts of other reformers and seeks to add new perspectives and information to the unfolding debate about the place of same-sex love in Western culture. But Prime-Stevenson published his book only after moving to Italy. One hundred and twenty five copies of Prime-Stevenson's work were printed in 1908 by a small, private English-language, press in Rome. The circulation of Prime-Stevenson and Hartland's work was extremely limited.<sup>5</sup>

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*An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Claude Hartland, *The Story of a Life: For the Consideration of the Medical Community* (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1985 [1901]), xiii.

<sup>5</sup> John Lauritsen, "Edward Irenaeus Prime-Stevenson (Xavier Mayne) (1868 – 1942) in *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context*, ed. Vern L. Bullough (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2002), 35 – 40.

Not surprisingly there were no political organizations on the order of the SHC in the United States in this period. There is mention of one group, but the veracity of the account describing its existence is questionable. In an autobiographical narrative published in 1922, Earl Lind claimed to have been a member of a New York group called the Cercle Hermaphroditos which formed “to unite for defense against the world’s bitter persecution of bisexuals.”<sup>6</sup> By “bisexual” Lind meant men, like himself, who were sexually attracted to men. According to Lind, members of this group, which “numbered about a score,” met at “Paresis Hall,” a resort located in New York City’s Bowery that was well-known as a hang out for “fairies,” or effeminate homosexuals.<sup>7</sup> Though members of the group shared their experiences with job discrimination and the risk of random street violence they did not take any action beyond coming together for mutual support. At best, then, the group, assuming it existed, was in the words of George Chauncey a “loosely constituted club” which offered support and recreational opportunity to its members.<sup>8</sup> The Cercle Hermaphroditos published no pamphlets, journals, or books, sponsored no lectures, and left no evidence of pursuing any activities outside of Paresis Hall. In fact, outside of Lind’s account, there is no evidence that the organization actually existed. And as the historian Jonathan Ned Katz notes, “it is difficult to know exactly where Earl Lind’s accounts pass from fact to fiction.” The story of the Cercle Hermaphroditos, Katz writes, may well be “apocryphal.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Earl Lind, *The Female Impersonators* (New York: The Medico-Legal Journal, 1922), 151.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 164, 146.

<sup>8</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 43.

<sup>9</sup> Katz, *Gay American History*, 366. More recently Katz seems to take Lind’s claims more seriously. See Katz, *Love Stories*, 297 – 307. I think that Katz’s more skeptical initial appraisal is correct.

The absence of a group such as the SHC or a figure on the order of Carpenter would seem to set off the United States from the overall pattern of Western culture. But this apparent American exceptionalism is just that, apparent and not real. There was, in fact, a vital, engaged, political discussion of homosexuality in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unlike in Europe, however, this politics did not emerge from a nascent homosexual rights movement nor was it articulated by homosexual intellectuals. Rather the first sustained consideration of the social, ethical and cultural place of homosexuality that occurred in the United States took place in the context of the English-language anarchist movement. From the mid-1890s through the 1920s leading figures in the English-language anarchist movement debated the subject of same-sex passion and its place in the social order. Among Americans they were alone in doing so; no other political movement or notable public figure of the period dealt with the issue of homosexuality. Anarchist sex radicals like John William Lloyd, Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Leonard Abbott, and Benjamin R. Tucker published books, wrote articles, and delivered lectures in cities across the country that dealt with the subject of same-sex love. Guided by their political ideas these anarchist sex radicals devoted considerable resources defending the rights of women and men to love whosoever they wished regardless of whether their partners were men, women, or both.

The American anarchists were well aware of the homosexual political discourse being produced in Europe. Anarchists like John William Lloyd and Emma Goldman, for example, were profoundly influenced by the ideas and work of

Carpenter, Hirschfeld, Havelock Ellis and other European sex radicals. The anarchists were avid readers of the work of sexologists who they identified with the overall project of sexual reform. In their travels overseas the anarchists met with their European counterparts, sharing ideas, and providing a conduit through which the ideas percolating in Europe reached an American audience. The European sex radicals were equally aware of the work of the American anarchists. Hirschfeld praised Goldman as “the first and only woman, indeed one could say the first and only human being, of importance in America to carry the issue of homosexual love to the broadest layers of the public.”<sup>10</sup> The anarchist sex radicals were eager participants in a transatlantic sexual politics that sought to end the legal and social oppression of homosexuals and create new forms of scientific knowledge. The anarchists brought to this transatlantic reform movement their own passionate belief in the possibility of revolutionary social and cultural transformation.

The politics of homosexuality forged by the American sex radical anarchists was unprecedented and unique in the United States. The anarchists were alone in successfully articulating a political critique of American social and legal rules and norms governing same-sex relations. Certainly they reached a far larger audience than did Prime-Stevenson and Hartland, neither of whom had access to the resources available to the anarchists. Of course, there were individuals who struggled to carve out a space for themselves by claiming social space within cities and refusing to conform to normative gender and sexual codes. These “immediate, spontaneous, and personal” struggles are part of what the historians Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis have identified as “pre-political forms of resistance” within gay

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Lauritsen and Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement*, 37

and lesbian communities.<sup>11</sup> But these efforts did not result—at least directly—in the creation of a body of political ideas and rhetoric that engaged the legal, social, and cultural social norms that regulated homosexuality. Resistance to homophobia at the level of the individual was largely evanescent, limited, and easily rolled back. “Pre-political forms of resistance” cannot substitute for a political critique that challenges the actions of the state in a sustained and rational manner.

The politics of homosexuality documented and analyzed in this dissertation was a precursor of the gay and lesbian rights movement that emerged in the United States in the post World War II era. Nearly half a century before the establishment of the first gay and lesbian rights groups the anarchists made homosexuality a subject of political debate. Anarchist sex radicals developed and sustained a far-ranging and complex critique of normative social and sexual values that circulated across a relatively broad public. Able and willing to draw on the resources of their movement, anarchist sex radicals made homosexuality a topic of political discourse and debate and in so doing helped shift the sexual, cultural, and political landscape within which they and other Americans operated. The anarchist sex radicals threw themselves into a fractious debate that has only grown in volume and salience over the hundred years since they first began to address the question of homosexuality’s place in American culture. While the contemporary homosexual rights movement is not the lineal descendent of the anarchist movement, the turn of the century sex radicals examined in this book raised many of the questions that continue to be at the heart of American sexual politics.

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<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 186.

The politics of homosexuality articulated by the turn of the century anarchist sex radicals grew out of their overall ideals and goals. The men and women active in the anarchist movement wished to rebuild all aspects of life according to the principles of liberty and self-rule. The anarchists worked to bring about a revolution in which all forms of human association and desire would be transformed. Work, love, friendship, consumption, art, literature, patterns of settlement and almost all other aspects of life would all be born anew. In the words of Emma Goldman:

Anarchism...stands for the liberation of the human mind from the dominion of religion; the liberation of the human body from the dominion of property; liberation from the shackles and restraint of government. Anarchism stands for a social order based on the free grouping of individuals for the purpose of producing real social wealth; an order that will guarantee to every human being free access to the earth and full enjoyment of the necessities of life, according to individual desires, tastes, and inclinations.<sup>12</sup>

The scope and audacity of the anarchist's goals meant that no subject was off limits for discussion. Though Goldman does not specifically discuss sexuality in the passage quoted above, the fundamental principle that underlay the politics of homosexuality that she and other anarchist sex radicals developed is here expressed. The anarchists insisted that there should be no external authority to govern people's personal or public associations; all "desires, tastes, and inclinations" should be respected and given room to flourish. The anarchist sex radicals' critique of social attitudes, laws, and religious doctrine that condemned love between members of the same sex was a product of a vision of complete and far-reaching social change.

The anarchists were in profound conflict with the values and rules of the society in which they lived. They denounced the heavy hand of law and tradition as,

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<sup>12</sup> Emma Goldman, "Anarchism: What it Really Stands For," in *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York: Dover, 1969 [1917]), 62.

in the words of Alexander Berkman, “the greatest impediment to man’s advance, hedging him in with a thousand prohibitions...weighing his mind down with outlived canons and codes, thwarting his will with imperatives of thought and feeling, with ‘thou shalt’ and ‘thou shalt not’ of behavior and action.”<sup>13</sup> Anarchism, at least in the eyes of those who espoused it, was an attempt to clear away the dead weight of the past in order to permit new growth. The anarchists pursued a social revolution that they hoped would free all aspects of life from the control of hierarchal relationships. All persons would be free to establish living, work, and social relationships of their own choosing. This utopian bent led them to question the rules of the world they lived in. The anarchists, according to Margaret Marsh, “of all the radicals and reformers of the latter half of the nineteenth century [and early twentieth century], came closest to a total renunciation of not only law and government but also traditional cultural values and social norms.”<sup>14</sup> The movement’s dissident culture fostered and enabled the challenging of social taboos including those surrounding same-sex love.

Different anarchist sex activists staked out varying positions on the question of homosexuality. The politics of homosexuality articulated by anarchist sex radicals was essentially an intellectual and cultural debate carried out by individual activists within the movement. In part this reflects the nature of the movement. “The essence of anarchism,” as James Joll points out, “was freedom of choice and the absence of central decision making.”<sup>15</sup> An attempt to enforce a false unity among the various

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in William O. Reichert, *Partisans of Freedom: A Study in American Anarchism* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Press, 1976), 417

<sup>14</sup> Margaret Marsh, *Anarchist Women: 1870 – 1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 3.

<sup>15</sup> James Joll, *The Anarchists* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1964), 162.

voices in the movement would obscure more than it revealed. Benjamin Tucker, for example, framed his politics of homosexuality as an abstract discussion of individual rights not as a defense of persons who were homosexuals. He made no reference to identity, whether individual or community, and avoided use of sexological terminology. Goldman, on the other hand, spoke of homosexuals as a persecuted minority deserving of better treatment. She corresponded regularly with sexologists and was greatly influenced by their ideas. “As an anarchist,” she told Magnus Hirschfeld, “my place has always been on the side of the persecuted.”<sup>16</sup> Though both Tucker and Goldman agreed on the larger principles of absolute individual autonomy the style of their delivery and their political rhetoric was markedly different. No single position on the ethical, cultural and social place of homosexuality emerged from the anarchist movement. There was broad, unceasing, and impassioned debate over any number of critical questions within the movement including issues dealing with sexuality. This dissertation captures and analyses the specific ways that the anarchists dealt with the question of same-sex love.

This is not a study of a broad-based social movement of homosexuals nor is it a study of gay anarchists. While some of the anarchists I discuss below were attracted to members of their own sex, for the most part the anarchist sex radicals did not identify as homosexual nor did they claim to speak for all homosexual men and women. Although I do consider the individual psychology of the activists I examine for the most part I focus on the politics produced by the anarchists. This is a study of public pronouncements not private actions or feelings except as they related to the

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<sup>16</sup> Emma Goldman, “The Unjust Treatment of Homosexuals,” in Katz, *Gay American History*, 379

creation and shaping of political discourse. The anarchists were not, in the main, interested in the politics of homosexuality because of personal or parochial reasons.

The anarchist sex radicals were interested in the question of the ethical, social and cultural place of homosexuality because it lies at the nexus of individual freedom and state power. What use a person can make of his or her body is a fundamental question of any social or political order. The anarchist sex radicals examined in this dissertation addressed the question of same-sex love because policemen, moral arbiters, doctors, clergymen, and other authorities sought to regulate homosexual behavior. This fact was most clearly demonstrated to the anarchists by the Oscar Wilde trial of 1895. In the decades following the Wilde trial, the anarchists found multiple opportunities to return to the critical questions raised by the state's attempt to restrict personal life. The anarchists reacted against the attempt of the state and other authorities to control and suppress the free expression of erotic desire and the autonomy of the individual.

While there has been some work done on the sexual politics of a number of European anarchists, historians of American anarchism have not fully appreciated the importance of the anarchist's politics of homosexuality.<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that the

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Cleminson has published a number of essays on the politics of homosexuality in the Spanish anarchist movement in the 1930s and edited a collection of articles on homosexuality from *Revista Blanca*. See Richard Cleminson, *Anarchism, Ideology, and Same-Sex Desire* (London: Kate Sharpley Library, 1995); Richard Cleminson, "Male Inverts and Homosexuals: Sex Discourse in the Anarchist *Revista Blanca*" in *Gay Men and the Sexual History of the Political Left*, 259 – 272; and *Anarquismo y Homosexualidad: Antología de Artículos de la Revista Blanca, Generación Consciente, Estudios e Iniciales*, editor Richard Cleminson (Madrid: Ediciones Libertarias, 1995). Hubert Kennedy has done a great deal of work on the German anarchist John Henry Mackay who, writing under the pseudonym Sagitta, produced a number of defenses of same-sex love in the early twentieth century. As Mackay's writings are in German I have not dealt with them. Mackay was, however, a close friend of Tucker and the relationship between the two men is of interest. See Hubert Kennedy, *Anarchist of Love: The Secret Life of John Henry Mackay* (New York: Mackay Society, 1983) and Hubert Kennedy, *Dear Tucker: The Letters of John Henry Mackay to Benjamin R. Tucker*, ed. Hubert Kennedy (San Francisco: Peremptory Publications, 1991). See also Walter Fahnders, "Anarchism and

phenomenon has gone completely unnoticed. Several studies of anarchism, in particular biographies of Emma Goldman, have noted the fact that the anarchists spoke out against the unjust treatment that gay men and lesbians faced.<sup>18</sup> For the most part, however, these studies do not examine the homosexual politics of Goldman and her comrades in any depth. More often than not the anarchist discussion of homosexuality is noted briefly as yet another example of how the anarchists defended individual rights. Of course, any study of anarchist sexual politics must begin with this basic truth but it cannot end there. This dissertation gives greater texture and richness to the largely anecdotal evidence that currently constitutes our understanding of the relationship between American anarchism and the politics of homosexuality. In the pages that follow I examine why the anarchists began to address the social, ethical, and cultural place of homosexuality, how they went about doing so, what discourses—for example sexology and literature—shaped their thinking on the matter, and, to the extent we can know, what effect these efforts had.

Historians and political scientists working in the field of American gay and lesbian studies have also overlooked the work of the anarchist sex radicals. This is largely because the anarchists do not fit the models of gay and lesbian identity and politics that has come to dominate historical and political discourse in the post World

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Homosexuality in Whlhelmine Germany: Senna Hoy, Erich Muhsam, John Henry Macaky,” in *Gay Men and the Sexual History of the Political Left*, 117 – 153. There is no monographic study of anarchism and the politics of homosexuality for Europe or any single European nation.

<sup>18</sup> Candace Falk, *Love, Anarchy and Emma Goldman* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984); Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); and Bonnie Haaland, *Emma Goldman: Sexuality and the Impurity of the State* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1993). See also Blanche Wiesen Cook, “Female Support Networks and Political Activism: Lillian Wald, Crystal Eastman, Emma Goldman.” *Chrysalis* 3 (1977), 43 – 61. Cook and Haaland do grapple with these questions, though to different ends. Cook’s study, however, is short while Haaland’s work while longer is largely historiographical and interpretive and does not rely on significant archival research. Though I disagree with Haaland on a number of points I have nonetheless found her book to be very useful. Marsh’s study of anarchist women also has material on anarchism and the politics of homosexuality.

War II era. The anarchists and the politics of homosexuality they produced are not easily recuperated into current social, cultural, and political categories. They were not “gay activists” nor did they operate within the bounds of liberal, civil rights discourse. Those who study the history of the politics of homosexuality have tended to focus on those organizations and individuals who share the largely liberal, reformist outlook and tactics of post-World War II gay and lesbian politics. Anarchists did not seek to reform legal codes nor did they lobby politicians in order to get the police to stop raiding clubs and bars frequented by homosexuals. Their vision for change was something more fundamental, a radical alternative to the principles of the established rules of the American social order. Contemporary scholars more readily recognize the European activists of the period, which accounts, I would argue, for the fact that they are better known. Carpenter, Hirschfeld, Ulrichs, and other European activists are easily assimilated into modern narratives of political progress and community building and their politics are legible within the context of contemporary strategies for social change. The sexual politics of these anarchist sex radicals was embedded in the larger political discourse of anarchism—they wrote as anarchists not as homosexual rights activists. This is not a study of gay and lesbian anarchists, rather it is an examination of what anarchist sex radicals had to say about the legal, cultural, and social status of same-sex love.

That historians have not fully documented the work of the anarchist sex radicals is due in part to the way in which the Left developed in the United States. From the late nineteenth century through the early decades of the twentieth century anarchism was a vital force in the United States; thousands were active in

organizations ranging from experimental schools to labor unions; anarchist journals, such as *Liberty* and *Mother Earth*, enjoyed considerable readership; and thousands attended lectures by leading anarchists. But the anarchist movement in the United States never recovered from its suppression during and immediately after World War I when most of its journals were shut down and several of its most important activists were imprisoned and deported for the crime of sedition. In the 1920s and 1930s what remained of the movement was overshadowed and dogged by the ascendant Communist Party. The CP came to dominate the Left in a way that excluded and marginalized the ideas and perspectives of the anarchists. For many Americans the history of the Left is synonymous with the history of the CP or its various Marxist-Leninist critics. There is little room in the American historical imagination for libertarian socialism. As anarchism faded from collective memory, the accomplishments of those who fought for a more equitable social, economic, and sexual order languished in the archives. Though there was a resurgence of interest in anarchism and other forms of libertarian socialism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, many Americans—even those engaged in radical sexual politics—remain largely unaware of the rich history of the politics forged by those who dedicated their lives to the anarchist movement. It is my hope that this dissertation recovers and gives proper attention to the important role that anarchist sex radicals have played in the history of the Left and the history of the politics of homosexuality.

Before outlining the chapters of the study that follows I must address the question of language, terms and definitions. Turn of the century American anarchism was complex; there was no party platform that delineated the shared goals and

methods that anarchists espoused. The anarchists were united in their defense of individual freedom, and their opposition to capitalism and to the state, but they were divided over the questions of ultimate goals, means, and methods. Anarchists passionately debated questions such as who should own the means of production? Is syndicalism compatible with anarchism? And what is the nature of free love? Because of its opposition to capitalism, anarchism is considered a variant of socialism. It is important to remember, however, that while anarchists are socialists not all socialists are anarchists. When I use the term socialist I am more often than not describing those on the Left who did not reject government as a useful tool for social change. These would include members of the Debsian Socialist Party and the Communist Party all of whom sought to achieve their goals by the seizure—though peaceful or violent means—of the state and by state appropriation of the means of production. Anarchists of all varieties specifically rejected this strategy. “We do not,” wrote Emma Goldman, “favor the socialistic idea of converting men and women into mere producing machines under the eye of a paternalistic government. We go to the opposite extreme and demand the fullest and most complete liberty for each and every person to work out his own salvation upon any lines that he pleases.”<sup>19</sup> Opposition to the state is the fundamental principle upon which anarchism rests. I also use the term libertarian, which in the context of post-World War II American political thought has a distinct set of meanings. When I use it I do so in the spirit that the turn of the century anarchists used it, to indicate a politics that rejected all forms of hierarchy and domination.

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Everett Marshall, *Complete Life of William McKinley and the Story of His Assassination* (Chicago: Historical Press, 1901), 76. Marshall’s book contains an interview with Goldman.

If anything, the language I use to describe same-sex sexuality is even more loaded. Terminology—whether to use the word gay, lesbian, homosexual, queer, homogenic, invert, sexual deviant, bisexual, or something else entirely to describe the subjects of one’s study—haunts the history of the history of sexuality like no other field. Entire library shelves are filled with studies that carefully excavate the genesis, dispersion, and social effects of sexological, popular, and legal categories naming same-sex love. The question of terminology is made all the more difficult since there was no shared language used by those writing about same-sex sexuality—anarchists or otherwise—at the turn of the century. The *mélange* of language employed at the time reflects the fact that there was a wide and oftentimes conflicting variety of ideas about the nature, cause, and morality of same-sex behavior and identity. For some it was a horrible sin, one “not to be named,” for others it was a scientifically curious anomaly, and for still others it was a deeply rooted set of feelings and desires for which there was no name. The anarchists examined below drew promiscuously from the wide array of terms available to them. Rather than attempt to impose a false unity on what was a fractured and often contradictory ideological landscape, I have decided to preserve the variety of terms used to describe same-sex love at the turn of the century. Of course it is impossible not to rely on some term to describe the subject of one’s study, if only for heuristic purposes. I have decided to rely mainly on the term “homosexual,” a word that was itself coined in the late nineteenth century, as a neutral descriptive term. I only rarely use the terms gay and lesbian. When I employ the terms used by the person whose politics I’m examining, I submit them to analytic

pressure. This somewhat unstable set of terms may be confusing, but it is a confusion that reflects the temper and culture of the time.

The chapters of my dissertation are thematic rather than strictly chronological. The first chapter is a broad introduction to the anarchist movement with particular emphasis on anarchist sexual politics. One cannot understand why the anarchists would be interested in the question of same sex love without understanding who the anarchists were and what they stood for. I use this chapter therefore to identify the variants of anarchism that existed during the period, describe the rough scope and reach of the movement, and place the movement within the context of American culture. I argue that sexuality was a key concern of English-language anarchists in the United States. This reflects the fact that the English-language anarchist movement was more middle-class in composition than its non-English speaking sister movements in the United States and abroad. In the course of my discussion I identify the main figures within the movement who wrote on the subject of homosexuality. I compare the anarchist's sexual politics of sexuality with those of the socialists and discuss early—meaning pre-1895—treatments of the subject of homosexuality by English language anarchists.

The second chapter examines the role that the Oscar Wilde trial played in the formation of a politics of homosexuality within the anarchist movement. Wilde's conviction and imprisonment brought a new and sharp focus on the issue of same sex relations to a broad public. The imprisonment of one of the world's best-known celebrities was a scandal of enormous proportion. Conservative moralists on both sides of the Atlantic saw in Wilde's fall a sign of incipient moral decadence that only

further diligent policing could hold back. Nearly alone among their contemporaries the anarchist sex radicals rallied to Wilde's defense. Benjamin R. Tucker was an especially keen defender of Wilde during the fallen writer's most desperate hours. Wilde made homosexuality a political issue for the anarchists in a way it had not previously been. What had been a very minor concern of anarchist sex radicals was transformed into an issue that received increasing levels of attention. The Wilde trial highlighted the way in which the state sought to control and regulate the free expression of erotic desire. In the years after the trial Wilde remained a key figure in anarchist discourse on homosexuality.

The third chapter examines how the work of Walt Whitman functioned in anarchist discussions of the moral and cultural place of same-sex love. In the late nineteenth century anarchists who discussed Whitman's work in terms of sexual politics did so with reference to heterosexuality. By the early twentieth century this began to change; tracking the increased awareness and salience that the issue of same-sex love was developing in the larger culture. In this chapter I am particularly interested in the work of an anarchist named John William Lloyd. In the first decade of the Twentieth century Lloyd described himself as a "Whitmanite." He saw in Whitman's poetry and prose—and the work of Whitman's emulator and admirer Edward Carpenter—a language with which to model same-sex love. Whitman's representation of "the manly love of comrades" was at the heart of Lloyd's politics of homosexuality. But the changing cultural and sexual context made Lloyd's rhetorical strategies untenable. I will leave the details of this intricate story to the chapter but suffice it to say that by the second half of the 1910s Lloyd was no longer willing or

able to couch his sexual politics in the terms of “comradeship.” But Lloyd was not the only anarchist sex radical to discuss Whitman’s sexuality. The last part of this chapter examines how Goldman used Whitman to address the issue of homosexuality. By comparing the various ways in which different anarchist sex radicals used Whitman in their politics I am able to examine how culture and politics inform each other.

The fourth chapter examines the way in which anarchist sex radicals used discussions of prison to frame their politics of homosexuality. Prison has been and remains a key institution through which Americans understand homosexual behavior and identity. As early as the 1820s American prison reformers and prison authorities discussed homosexual behavior among inmates. Overwhelmingly these reformers and administrators were concerned with stamping out what they perceived to be a vicious and immoral practice. What is striking about the anarchist’s discussion of prison homosexuality is their refusal to see it simply as an emblematic manifestation of a repressive institution. The anarchists understood the phenomenon of sex in prison through the prism of their larger sexual politics. In this chapter I spend considerable time examining Alexander Berkman’s *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, one of the most important texts to emerge from the pre-WWI anarchist movement. While this text has rightly been appreciated as a political work concerned with prisons and the larger ideas of anarchism I argue that its sexual politics—specifically the way in which it examines same-sex love—has been under appreciated. Berkman’s memoir is a key work in the history of the politics of homosexuality. It is

among the most important texts dealing with same-sex love written in the United States in the first half of the Twentieth century.

The fifth chapter examines how the anarchists drew upon and helped shape the discourse of sexology. The anarchist sex radicals were drawn to the work of those sexologists—like Magnus Hirschfeld and Edward Carpenter—that they felt reflected their own views. Activists like Goldman and Lloyd believed that the clear light of rationality when applied to the question of sexuality would sweep away the vestiges of “Puritanism” in the United States. In this chapter I pay special attention to the speaking tours of Emma Goldman, who regularly included talks on homosexuality in her lecture repertoire. Goldman’s speeches were part of her effort to educate the public about the nature of homosexual desire and of what life was like for homosexual men and women. They were, in other words, part and parcel of the sexological project, which believed that through sex education and the scientific study of desire social values and mores could be reshaped. I examine how Goldman framed her discussions of homosexuality and how her talks were received. Goldman was an extremely charismatic speaker and her discussions of the social and moral place of homosexuality were very popular. Goldman’s lectures were unprecedented in their scope and reach and were a critical part of the anarchist politics of homosexuality.

The sixth and final chapter examines the terrible impact that WWI had on the anarchist movement. During the war anarchist journals were shut down and in the immediate aftermath of the war several of anarchist sex radicals were deported. The rise of the Communist Party also damaged the anarchists since CP activists went out of their way to marginalize the anarchists. They succeeded in seizing the Left. The

sexual politics of the anarchists was a casualty of this political and cultural calamity. I examine how a number of anarchists tried to continue their work within the confines of the post-WWI political, social, and cultural environment. Despite this narrowing of political opportunity the ideas generated by the pre-WWI anarchist sex radicals persisted as an important influence in the life of intellectuals, bohemians, and activists. I examine the lives and work of Kenneth Rexroth, Elsa Gidlow, Jan Gay, and others as a way to capture these patterns of persistence.

My conclusion touches upon the revival of anarchism that occurred in the Western World in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Following the historian George Woodcock I argue that this second wave of American anarchist activity constitutes a new phase of the history that I am examining; it lies beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless I hint at the complex relationship the New Radicals, as Woodcock calls them, had with their predecessors. I am, of course, particularly interested in how the sexual politics of anarchism intersected with the politics of homosexuality. I analyze this intersection within the context of the dramatically different sexual and cultural context of pre-WWI and post-Stonewall America. In the contemporary political world “gay and lesbian” is the dominant term within the politics of homosexuality whereas in the world that I am here concerned with “anarchism” was the key term. This reversal of terms—and the massive social, political and cultural changes that this reversal signals—renders any claims for simple continuity between the two periods problematic. The gay liberation and lesbian feminist politics forged in the late 1960s were certainly influenced by the work of the pre-WWI anarchist sex radicals but they represent a distinct and new phase in the history of the politics of homosexuality.

## **Chapter One: “The Right to Complete Liberty of Action:” Anarchism, Sexuality and American Culture**

In 1912 Will Durant left Catholic seminary and joined the teaching staff of the Ferrer Center, an anarchist cultural center located in New York City. The Ferrer Center was one of many countercultural institutions created by turn-of-the-century anarchists who sought to construct a new world in what they saw as the decaying and corrupted body of the existing order. Durant would eventually become one of the twentieth century’s most popular historians but at the time he was a young man in search of himself. In addition to his teaching duties, Durant was asked to deliver a series of lectures on the topic of sex. Durant’s talks included a presentation on free love as well as lectures on ‘Prostitution, Its History, Causes, and Effects,’ ‘Homosexualism,’ and ‘Sex and Religion.’”<sup>1</sup>

Durant’s lectures proved to be quite popular. His discussion on “Sex and Religion” attracted a crowd of “some sixty anarchists, socialists, single-taxers, and free-lovers,” a diversity of political opinion and perspective that reflected the heterodox ideological culture of the anarchist movement. According to Durant, audience members “were glad to hear me dilate on sex as one of the sources of religion, and to learn that the phallus had in many places and forms been worshipped as a symbol of divine power.”<sup>2</sup> Unlike the people at the Ferrer Center, the leaders of the Catholic Church were not amused. Shortly after his talk Durant’s brother, Ben, called to tell him that the *Newark Evening News* “has a story, on the front page, about

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Uhry Abrams, “The Ferrer Center: New York’s Unique Meeting of Anarchism and Art,” *New York History*, July 1978, 311. Abrams does not discuss Durant’s lectures at any length.

<sup>2</sup> Will Durant and Ariel Durant, *A Dual Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), 38.

the Bishop excommunicating you because of your lecture last Sunday.”<sup>3</sup> By choosing to speak at the Ferrer Center, Durant forfeited his respectability and joined the ranks of anarchists, bohemians, disaffected intellectuals and others interested in exploring new ways of living and loving.

We do not know what if anything the Bishop thought about Durant giving a lecture on “Homosexuality.” Though, as we shall see below, clerics of the period did speak to the subject of same-sex behavior, the intense concern regarding homosexuality evidenced by contemporary religious leaders is a post-World War II phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately there exists no known transcript of Durant’s address. Durant drew on a number of discourses and influences in drafting his speech on same-sex love. He seems to have had a personal interest in the subject of same-sex eroticism. Just prior to taking his job at the Ferrer Center, Durant shared a room with “a handsome Neapolitan, with the figure of Michelangelo’s David.” His admiration for his roommate’s body later struck him as having an erotic component. “There must have been a trace of the homosexual in me,” Durant mused, “for I enjoyed looking at him, especially when he undressed for the bath.” The living David that he shared a room with was not the only man whose beauty Durant remarked upon. “I surprised my intimates,” he confessed, by the frequency with which he voiced his “admiration for the male body.”<sup>5</sup> Whether Durant acted on his feelings is unclear but

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<sup>3</sup> Will Durant, *Transitions: A Sentimental Story of One Mind and One Era*, (Garden City: Garden City Publishing, 1927) 168.

<sup>4</sup> In, *Same-Sex Dynamics Among Nineteenth Century Americans*, D. Michael Quinn traces the development of discussions of homosexuality within the Mormon Church from the Nineteenth Century through the 1970s. There are, however, no comparable studies for other denominations and faiths.

<sup>5</sup> Will and Ariel Durant, *A Dual Autobiography*, 39.

he was interested enough in the topic to have informed himself on the subject and be willing to speak to an audience about it.<sup>6</sup>

In constructing his speech Durant may have consulted with some of the leading figures associated with the Ferrer Center, a number of whom—including Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman—had or shortly would deliver public presentations on the topic of same-sex love. Perhaps Alden Freeman, one of Durant’s closest friend and himself a homosexual, helped Durant flesh out his thoughts on the topic of same-sex love. Freeman, who donated frequently to anarchist causes, paid Durant’s salary at the Ferrer Center and may have underwritten the cost of his friend’s lecture series. We do know that Durant drew upon the nascent science of sexology in exploring his topic. His use of the term “homosexuality” indicates as much. Durant’s neologism is a variant of the word homosexual itself a new term coined in 1869 by the Hungarian sexologist Karoly Maria Benkert, and not introduced into English until the 1890s.<sup>7</sup> Durant felt comfortable in using such new terms because he could expect that his Ferrer Center audience, interested as they were in the subject of sex, would be familiar with the new terminology being coined by sexologists. Emma Goldman, Leonard Abbott, or other Ferrer Center figures could have introduced Durant to this relatively new scientific literature.

Durant’s talk on “homosexuality” did not elicit a particularly strong reaction from the Ferrer Center audience. By contrast Durant’s other presentations sparked lively discussions. Following Durant’s talk on “Sex and Religion,” for example, his

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<sup>6</sup> The only clearly erotic relationship that Durant speaks of in his biography is his love for and marriage to a young Ferrer Center student named Ida Kaufmann. Kaufmann, who Durant affectionately called “Puck,” followed Durant to Columbia after he left the Ferrer Center for the halls of academia. Kaufmann changed her name to Ariel Durant and co-authored many of Will Durant’s historical texts.

<sup>7</sup> Katz, *Gay and Lesbian Almanac*, 16.

audience asked “hundreds of questions” of him.<sup>8</sup> But when it came to the lecture on “homosexuality,” the Ferrer Center audience had relatively little to say. This may reflect the fact that Durant’s lecture was not the first time that anarchists had discussed the issue of homosexuality; the topic was common enough so as to be unremarkable. For decades before Durant came to the Ferrer Center anarchist sex radicals had defended the right of men and women to love whomsoever they wished. Nearly ten years before Durant gave his lecture, Emma Goldman, one of the era’s best know anarchists, stated plainly in a talk she gave in Chicago that “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 no other must be the sole authority and judge over his or her acts.”<sup>9</sup> At least since the trial of Oscar Wilde of 1895, which gave the issue of homosexuality a salience it had lacked among American anarchists, the basic principle that each person was “the sole authority and judge of his or her acts” had been applied by anarchists to the question of same-sex relations. In the aftermath of the Wilde trial anarchist sex radicals argued that as long as the sex was consensual the gender of the participants was beside the point. The idea that “almost every symbol in religious history, from the serpent of paradise to the steeples on the churches in nearby Fifth Avenue, had a phallic origin” was a novelty for Durant’s audience.<sup>10</sup> The fact that two people of the same sex might love each other and seek to express that love through sex was not, apparently, remarkable. Talk of homosexuality was old hat for those who attended lectures at the Ferrer Center,

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<sup>8</sup> Durant, *Transitions*, 167.

<sup>9</sup> Emma Goldman quoted in S. D., “Farewell,” *Free Society*, 13 August, 1899, 2. This article provides excerpts of on of Goldman’s speeches.

<sup>10</sup> Durant, *Transitions*, 167.

nothing to get worked up about, and certainly not a topic to generate scandal or disapproval.

The blasé attitude of Durant's Ferrer Center audience stands in stark contrast to how the topic of homosexuality was greeted in other forums of the day, when, that is, it was discussed at all. Durant's lecture was, in fact, a rather rare occurrence. Outside of anarchist meetings and lecture halls there were few public venues where the topic of homosexuality was discussed. More importantly, the political, social, and cultural context for the public discussions of homosexuality that did occur was radically different than that in which Durant spoke.

In 1907, for example, Dr. Georg Merzbach, a colleague of the German sexologist and homosexual rights activist Magnus Hirschfeld, traveled to the United States and delivered a series of lectures on what Merzbach called "our area of specialization." In March of that year Merzbach spoke before the New York Society of Medical Jurisprudence. His "select audience" included lawyers and doctors and "three ministers" that Merzbach had taken pains to invite. Merzbach spoke before doctors, psychiatrists, lawyers and clergymen because these professions had a vested interest in the topic of sexuality; they crafted policy and practice that shaped the lives of people whose emotional and erotic commitments revolved around members of their own sex. Despite—or perhaps because of the—novelty of his address, Merzbach was able to tell Hirschfeld that he "made a truly sensational impression" upon the gathered professionals. Unlike the members of the Ferrer Center, Merzbach's audience spent nearly two hours asking questions of their visitor. Though some audience members advised their colleagues to act with tolerance when

dealing with homosexuals others felt homosexuality called for drastic countermeasures. Merzbach fielded questions such as “Doesn’t homosexuality lead ultimately to paranoia or other psychoses?” and “Can homosexuality be eradicated by castration?” from doctors and other professionals eager to fine tune their methods of intervention.<sup>11</sup>

The activists who founded the Ferrer Center were opposed to the kind of power wielded by the people who attended Merzbach’s lecture. Merzbach’s audience was made up of professionals who operated the regulatory institutions that meted out judgment, penalty, and cure to patients, prisoners, and supplicants seeking redemption from illness, crime, and sin. It was their job to establish and enforce norms of human behavior. The types of questions fielded by Merzbach would have been unimaginable at the Ferrer Center; the institutions that could enforce such drastic solutions to the so-called problem of homosexuality would have been unacceptable to anarchists. Durant’s Ferrer Center audience approached the topic of sexuality, politics, and education from a radically different perspective, one grounded in their political ideals of absolute freedom of individual expression and association. The anarchists had a critique of the kinds of power exercised by the elites who formulated and enforced the punitive, negative view of same-sex love expressed in the questions posed to Merzbach by some of his audience members. The “sex act,” according to Goldman, “is simply the execution of certain natural functions of the body and since “we do not pay or consult a preacher or politician” when choosing to breath, walk or otherwise use the body, why should people do so when using the sexual organs?”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Dr. Georg Merzbach, “We Have Won a Great Battle,” in Katz, *Gay American History*, 381 – 382.

<sup>12</sup> Emma Goldman quoted in S. D., “Farewell,” *Free Society*, 13 August 1899, 2.

The anarchists rejected the idea that the professional authorities who attended Merzbach's presentation should have the power to make decisions about the most intimate parts of the lives of people other than themselves.

Durant's talk on "homosexuality" reflected the larger mission of the Ferrer Center. The men and women who visited the Ferrer Center attended lectures on sexuality in order to better appreciate and understand the diversity of human life and expression. The activists who ran the Ferrer Center sponsored lectures on a wide variety of topics in the hopes of furthering the coming of a society in which no one would govern the life choices of others. By rejecting all forms of hierarchy the anarchists hoped to craft a world in which work, culture, and love were freely expressed and enjoyed. The anarchists envisioned a world in which each person was her or his own master; no outside authority would constrain the actions of others. Durant's audience attended his talk not because they had a professional stake in the subject of the lecture but because the topic of sex, variation, and free expression interested them. When it came to the exploration of the ethical, social, and cultural place of same-sex love in American culture there was a sharp divide between the libertarian atmosphere of the Ferrer Center and the more censorious lecture halls of the New York Society of Medical Jurisprudence.

The anarchist sex radicals addressed the subject of homosexuality in the context of a radical political movement. Homosexuality was not the only aspect of sexuality that the anarchists debated. In accordance with their ideas about self-rule, for example, they rejected marriage, which they viewed as a coercive institution. Rather than be forced to submit passion to the cookie cutter pattern of marriage,

which bound one person to another and which was policed by both church and state, the anarchists argued that individuals should have the possibility of creating their own relationships. “Commonly calling themselves free lovers,” writes historian Margaret Marsh, “Anarchists believed that adults could decide what type of sexual association they desired and were capable of choosing the nature and the duration of that association.”<sup>13</sup> Unlike many of their contemporaries the anarchists did not insist that the only legitimate sexual relationships were those between a man and woman bound to each other in holy matrimony. Nor did the anarchists tie sexual expression to reproduction. At a time when it was illegal to circulate birth control information through the mail, the anarchists were early and loud supporters of the right of women to control their fertility. More than a few anarchists spent time in jail for their efforts to end what they saw as the injustices of the American system of laws and values that regulated sexual behavior. It was in the context of their overall critique of American sexual mores and rules that the anarchists considered the question of homosexuality.

In order to understand how it came to pass that homosexuality became a topic of political debate and discussion amongst the anarchists one must first understand what the anarchists stood for and what the movement looked like. This chapter provides a brief overview of the main characteristics of the movement, with a special emphasis on the sexual politics developed by the anarchist sex radicals. While later chapters examine the issue of how these men and women dealt with the issue of homosexuality in more depth, this chapter seeks to outline how the subject came to be of such relative importance among the anarchists. No other political movement of the period spent so much effort in exploring and defending the social, cultural, and

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<sup>13</sup> Marsh, *Anarchist Women*, 69 – 70.

political rights of men and women whose erotic lives were focused on members of their own sex. The anarchist sex radicals were unique among their contemporaries for dealing with issues of burning importance for people whose voices were seldom heard and little respected.

The sexual politics of the anarchists reflected the larger political values and goals of the movement. The anarchist, writes Richard Sonn, “sought freedom from domination and the right to determine his or her own destiny in workplace, family, and school, while rejecting all forms of hierarchy—that of the academy, of the church, of social class, of ‘correct speech’ as defined by elites—as well as those coercive arms of the state, the army, the police, and the judiciary.”<sup>14</sup> According to the anarchists, all manner of needs and desires would find expression in the future society operated under anarchist principles. Writing in 1905 for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Peter Kropotkin, a Russian nobleman who renounced his title and became one of the best-known anarchists of his time, attempted to define anarchism for a general readership. Anarchists, he wrote, advocate a “theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government—harmony in such a society being obtained ... by free agreements ... constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of need and aspirations of a civilized being.” This would be a society run according to the lights of those who constituted it; they would obey no authority other than their own consciences. In Kropotkin’s words, “man would not be...limited in the exercise of his will by fear of punishment, or by obedience towards individuals or metaphysical entities, which both lead to depression of initiative and servility of mind.” Freed from religious and

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Sonn, *Anarchism* (New York: Twayne, 1992), 46.

secular law and regulations people would be able to construct lives that best reflected and fulfilled their desires. Like most anarchists, Kropotkin did not give any concrete guidelines for what an anarchist society might look like. Future arrangements, Kropotkin contended, would “result from an ever-changing adjustment and readjustment of equilibrium between the multitude of forces and influences” in society.<sup>15</sup>

In the United States two variants of anarchism attracted significant membership: communist anarchism and individualist anarchism. The two strains differed from each other in several ways, most notably in their ideas about property ownership and in the means of bringing about social change. Communist anarchists—such as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman—believed that property should be held in common while individualist anarchists—like Benjamin R. Tucker—believed that individuals should have control over the means of production. And while some communist anarchists countenanced the use of political violence individualists tended to eschew violence entirely. Not all anarchists can be fit into such neat categories. Though the distinctions between communist and individualist anarchism was of utmost importance to some, a number of anarchists, including figures like John William Lloyd, downplayed the differences between the two camps. Lloyd’s ideas were a mixture of communalism, individualism, and ideas drawn from other strands of reformist and radical thought. Though the variations among communist and individualists were important, the basic principles of self-rule,

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Kropotkin, “Anarchism,” in *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets*, ed. Roger Baldwin (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968), 284–5.

freedom of individual expression, opposition to hierarchy, and the defense of social and individual dissent was the essential heart of anarchism.

It is difficult to construct a simple profile of those who joined the anarchist movement. Anarchists found converts among the poor and the wealthy, native-born Americans and recent immigrants. Some generalizations, however, can be made with relative certainty. In the United States, communist anarchists tended to be immigrants and more often from the working class, while individualist anarchists were often native-born, middle-class Americans. Anarchists were concentrated in cities in the Northeast, Midwest, and Pacific Coasts though there were pockets of activism along the industrial frontier in the Western and Southern states. The Southern states were not a hospitable environment for anarchism or for any form of radical politics that threatened to challenge the racial and class order established in the post-Reconstruction years. Because the South attracted few immigrants, violently suppressed activism on the part of African Americans and other working class people, and had a relatively small and unsophisticated middle class there was no constituency for anarchism in the South as there was in cities of the North and West. Emma Goldman, for example, very rarely ventured below the Mason-Dixon Line during her many years as a public speaker. Not surprisingly, given the concentration of African-Americans in the South, there were few black anarchists. In this, anarchists resembled the Socialist Party and other Left groups of the pre-WWI era. Women, however, were well represented among the anarchists, both in leadership positions and among the rank and file. Rather than being relegated to “women’s auxiliaries,” as they were in so much of the turn-of-the-century Left, women were at the center of the

English-language anarchist movement. Anarchist women were especially important in the construction of the idea of free love and the critique of oppressive gender patterns. Anarchism appealed to wide variety of people for an equally wide number of reasons.

While the various ethnic groups active in the anarchist movement did cooperate at times, for the most part they remained divided along linguistic and cultural lines. When in 1900 activists from the United States attended an anarchist convention in Europe, for example, they discussed the different ethnic groups separately, acknowledging the distinct trajectories of each community. In her report to the general assembly, Emma Goldman carefully distinguished between what she termed the “American” movement, meaning the English-language movement, and the “foreign,” or immigrant movements, in the United States. James F. Morton told his European comrades that “the methods of propaganda differ greatly according to the place, language, and nationality” of the anarchist groups.<sup>16</sup> The immigrant anarchists largely conducted their political and cultural activities in their native tongues. There were German, Yiddish, Italian, and English anarchist journals published in the United States and leading figures within the respective language groups largely communicated in their birth language. This meant that the movement was effectively separated into language groups. Though Emma Goldman and Berkman delivered lectures in a variety of languages their audience members would have been lost had they come to the lecture hall on the wrong night. With few exceptions—Voltairine de Cleyre being the most notable—the native-born anarchists were linguistically

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<sup>16</sup> “Rapports du Congrès Antiparlémentaire International de 1900” in *Les Temps Nouveaux Supplément Littéraire*, (November 1900), n.p. Translations are my own.

separated from the new immigrant groups like the Italians, Eastern European Jews, and Russians. Benjamin Tucker spoke French but John William Lloyd, more typically, spoke only English. While key figures such as Goldman bridged the movement's linguistic divides, most anarchists had limited contact with comrades from other language groups.

The turn of the century was, in the words of the historian Richard Sonn, the “heyday of the international anarchist movement.”<sup>17</sup> It is estimated that in any given year between 1880 and 1920 “there were at least fifteen to twenty thousand committed anarchists in the United States, and perhaps an additional thirty to fifty thousand sympathizers.”<sup>18</sup> There was most likely a high rate of turnover in the movement which meant that over the course of this roughly forty-year period hundreds of thousands of people became familiar with the ideas, goals, and leaders of the movement. But the influence of anarchism cannot simply be measured by tallying up numbers of activists. The anarchist's influence on American social and cultural thought was disproportionate to the size of the movement itself. Writers, artists, bohemians, radicals, intellectuals and reformers—among them Jack London, Alice Hamilton, Eugene O'Neill, Margaret Sanger, Hutchins Hapgood, Frank Harris, Robert Henri, William James, and Margaret Anderson—were all drawn to the ideas and passionate spirit of the anarchists. In this regard the anarchist movement of the turn-of-the-century can be compared to the Communist party of the nineteen-thirties. Like the Communists, the anarchists “considered themselves revolutionaries, marching...along the path of human liberation.” Their “deep faith in their cause and

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<sup>17</sup> Sonn, *Anarchism*, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Marsh, *Anarchist Women*, 10.

its ultimate triumph” was a powerful draw.<sup>19</sup> Such dedication and idealism attracted the attention of many outside the movement; fellow travelers who lent their support and helped magnify the influence of the movement. The dedicated core of anarchist activists was complemented by a much larger shadow movement of those who might not have been willing to embrace the full scope of anarchist ideology but nonetheless acknowledged the power and relevance of its critiques of power.

The participation of a few anarchists in some of the more spectacular acts of political violence strongly colored their reputation. Anarchists, for example, were blamed for the Haymarket Tragedy of 1886, a confrontation in Chicago between workers and police that resulted in the death of eight police officers and an unknown number of demonstrators. Eight anarchist activists were arrested and convicted for their alleged participation in the incident. One of the convicted anarchists committed suicide in prison, four were hanged, and three spent years in prison before being pardoned by Governor John Peter Altgeld. The trial was accompanied by a wave of anti-anarchist and anti-socialist feeling which swept the nation. Anarchism’s influence among members of the native-born working class suffered a severe setback. Middle class and elite Americans were even more horrified by the thought of what might happen should the anarchists succeed in their nefarious plots. The reaction of many Americans can be gauged by the behavior of the young Theodore Roosevelt, who was in the Dakotas trying his hand at ranching at the time of the Haymarket

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<sup>19</sup> Harvey Klehr and John Haynes, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 7.

Tragedy. When news of the events in Chicago reached the range, Roosevelt gathered with his cowboy friends to burn the accused in effigy.<sup>20</sup>

In 1901 a young anarchist named Leon Czolgosz assassinated President McKinley. Though Czolgosz insisted that he acted alone, his actions set off another wave of anti-anarchist hysteria resulting in the arrest of a number of anarchists. Theodore Roosevelt, now president of the United States, attacked what he viewed as a dangerous threat to the nation. “The anarchist,” he declared, “is a criminal whose perverted instincts lead him to prefer confusion and chaos to the most beneficent form of social order...The anarchist is everywhere not merely the enemy of system and of progress, but the deadly foe of liberty.” Roosevelt called for vigorous repression of anarchism. “No man or body of men preaching anarchist doctrines should be allowed at large ...Anarchist speeches, writings, and meetings are essentially seditious and treasonable.” In order to stem the spread of these seditious ideas, Roosevelt called for changes in the immigration laws. “We should aim,” he proposed, “to exclude absolutely not only all persons who are known to be believers in anarchistic principles or members of anarchistic societies, but also all persons who are of low moral tendency or unsavory reputation.”<sup>21</sup> Roosevelt’s view of the anarchists as a kind of political and moral infection that required containment and drastic surgical cure was common. As the historian Margaret Marsh argues, “Americans viewed anarchists as the harbingers of chaos.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 401.

<sup>21</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, “First Annual Address,” in *The State of the Union Messages of the Presidents, 1790–1966*, volume 2, 1861–1904, ed. Fred L. Israel (New York: Chelsea House, 1966), 2016, 2017, 2024.

<sup>22</sup> Marsh, 8.

In order to understand Roosevelt's outrage with the anarchists it is important to understand that in addition to presenting a physical danger the President felt the anarchists were a threat to the nation's moral fiber. Along with political disorder the anarchists were associated with sexual chaos. The idea that anarchism would bring about an erotic revolution was both fascinating and deeply frightening to many Americans. Newspaper accounts denouncing the anarchists rarely missed the opportunity to note that the anarchists were "free lovers" whose ideas threatened the sanctity of the home and hearth. Writing in the *American Law Review* in 1902, James Beck described the anarchists as "mental and moral perverts."<sup>23</sup> In his 1901 address Roosevelt portrayed the anarchists as a moral danger to the country and associated them with sexual disorder. The anarchists, Roosevelt thundered, were "perverted" and equal to "persons who are of low moral tendency." Of course, Roosevelt and Beck's statements came immediately following McKinley's assassination. But their words also reflect the fact that the anarchists devoted considerable resources—in lectures, publications, and political organizing—to addressing how power operates at the most intimate levels of human life. In their attempt to construct a new sexual ethics, anarchists addressed a wide variety of topics including birth control, marriage, obscenity, and homosexuality. "The sex question," Emma Goldman believed, was "one of the most vital of our time."<sup>24</sup> Goldman and her comrades challenged the notion that the only legitimate form of erotic expression was sex between married people, ideally for procreative purposes. To those who felt that sexual conduct outside the bonds of marriage was a danger to the social order the anarchists were not

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Richard Drinnon, *Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 323

<sup>24</sup> Emma Goldman, "En Route," *Mother Earth*, December 1908, 353.

merely harbingers of political violence they were symptoms of moral decay and sexual chaos.

Roosevelt was not alone in noting the anarchist's interest in sexuality, though not all observers were as critical as the President. The writer Hutchins Hapgood, who was a great admirer of the anarchists, wrote that they were "extreme rebels against sex conventions."<sup>25</sup> A good deal of the attraction that the anarchists held for Hapgood was their rejection of what he felt to be the stifling sexual norms with which he was raised and against which he was in rebellion. Some accused the anarchists of doing little else but seek sexual liberation. Hapgood's contemporary Floyd Dell observed that the anarchists, unlike the state socialists, "have left the industrial field more and more and have entered into other kinds of propaganda." They "have especially 'gone in for kissing games.'"<sup>26</sup> The anarchists according to Dell "seemed to lay more stress on the importance of Freedom in the relations of men and women than in the other relations of human society."<sup>27</sup> Dell's comment regarding anarchist "kissing games" was made as an epigrammatic criticism, but it reflects a basic truth: Anarchism was the only political movement of the time to treat issues of sexual liberation as fundamental to the project of human emancipation. The anarchists, according to historian David Kennedy, "demanded not only political but also

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<sup>25</sup> Hutchins Hapgood, *A Victorian in the Modern World* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1939), 202.

<sup>26</sup> Floyd Dell, *Woman as World Builders: Studies in Modern Feminism* (Chicago: Forbes and Company, 1913), 58.

<sup>27</sup> Floyd Dell, *Intellectual Vagabondage; An Apology for the Intelligentsia* (New York: George H. Doran, 1926), 158-159.

aesthetic and especially psychological revolution. And the cutting psychological theories the anarchists consistently invoked aimed at one central fact of life: sex.”<sup>28</sup>

The fact that anarchists were associated with revolt in matters social as well as political constituted part of their appeal. The mixture of sexual transgression, political upheaval, and idealism was a powerful draw for middle-class people wanting to experience psychological freedom. Young Durant felt a frisson of liberation when, shortly after leaving the seminary, he found himself delivering talks on sex at the Ferrer Center. The breathless description of his adventures that appear in Durant’s autobiographical works give ample evidence of the excitement he felt when he joined the anarchist ranks. Others felt the same way. In *A Girl Among the Anarchists*, Isabel Meredith, the tale’s narrator, describes the appeal of anarchism in terms that illustrate the degree to which it was seen as a path to personal liberation. “The right to complete liberty of action,” Meredith writes, “the conviction that morality is relative and personal and can never be imposed from without...and that consequently no man has a right to judge his fellow; such and similar doctrines which I heard frequently upheld, impressed me deeply.”<sup>29</sup> Meredith was the pseudonym of Helen and Olivia Rossetti, the nieces of the English painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who were active in the anarchist movement in their youth. The Rossettis edited *The Torch: A Revolutionary Journal of International Socialism* that featured contributions from Emma Goldman, George Bernard Shaw, Emile Zola, and Ford Maddox Ford.

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<sup>28</sup> David Kennedy, *Birth Control in America: The Career of Margaret Sanger* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 12 –13. Kennedy’s comment is true in terms of the English-language anarchists examined in this dissertation. His remarks are less apt when describing the non-English language movement and foreign movements.

<sup>29</sup> Isabel Meredith, *A Girl Among the Anarchists*, introduction Jennifer Shaddock (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1992) 18. See the introduction by Shaddock for the story of *The Torch* and Helen and Olivia Rossetti.

The Rossetis, Durant, and other men and women on both sides of the Atlantic, were attracted to anarchism because it served them, in the words of the Rossetis, in their attempt to “free [themselves] from all the ideas, customs, and prejudices which usually influence [their] class.”<sup>30</sup>

The volatile mixture of personal emancipation, sexual liberation and political radicalism also colored Hutchins Hapgood’s interest in anarchism. Hapgood wrote several works on anarchism and befriended leading figures in the movement. Goldman wryly commented that her friend would not have known what to write about were it “not for the radicals.” Hapgood writes “well enough,” she teased, “but is so poor in material.”<sup>31</sup> Hapgood was drawn to the anarchists because they symbolized revolt in all facets of life. Hapgood wrote so often and so favorably of the anarchists that Mabel Dodge Luhan claimed that “he did a great deal to make their cause weaker, in a way, because by writing sympathetically of them, he helped remove the terror of them from people’s mind.”<sup>32</sup> But it was precisely the intimation of transgression that drew Hapgood. “People who are regarded as evil,” Hapgood wrote, “have often had for me a strange and haunting appeal.”<sup>33</sup> Mary Berenson, who like Luhan gathered artists and intellectuals around her, claimed that Hapgood was “seeking for God and the Absolute among thieves, anarchists, prostitutes, and pederasts.”<sup>34</sup> Berenson’s juxtaposition of anarchists, prostitutes, and pederasts

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>31</sup> Emma Goldman to Ben L. Reitman, 28 August 1912. *Emma Goldman Papers: A Microfilm Edition. 20,000 documents in 69 Reels.* Falk, Candace, Ronald J. Zboray et al., eds. (Alexandria: Chadwyck-Healey, Inc., 1991), reel 6.

<sup>32</sup> Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Movers and Shakers* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985 [1936]), 59.

<sup>33</sup> Hapgood, *A Victorian in the Modern World*, 201.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Barbara Strachey, *Remarkable Relations: The Story of the Pearsall Smith Family* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1981), 207.

indicates the degree to which political revolt was associated with sexual deviance and how both phenomena were linked to anarchism. It was precisely this complex mix of associations that drew Hapgood to the feet of Goldman and her colleagues. The mixture of social revolt, sexual deviance, and idealism associated with anarchism was a powerful psychological resource for those seeking to escape conventional lives.

We should not, however, confuse the ways in which the anarchists were perceived, even by some of their admirers, with how the anarchists saw themselves. Anarchist sex radicals did not see themselves as acting to bring about disorder. They wished to construct a new social and sexual order and dealt with issues of sexuality in a serious and sustained way. Nor were all anarchists enthusiastic about pursuing sex and gender politics. In fact, some of the most famous anarchists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were extremely conservative in their sexual politics. The mid-century, French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, for example, thought women's emancipation and birth control would usher in a "Pornocracy" and his unpublished writings contain frequent condemnations of sodomy.<sup>35</sup> Johann Most, a leading figure in the American German-language anarchist movement and a contemporary of Tucker and Goldman, equaled Proudhon in misogyny and antipathy toward sexual liberalism. Most believed that women who entered the anarchist movement were "sexual opportunists" and insisted that the women in the American anarchist movement were "stupid."<sup>36</sup> Peter Kropotkin, though hardly as vehement as

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<sup>35</sup> See Angus McLaren, "Sex and Socialism: The Opposition of the French Left to Birth Control in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, July-September 1976, 485 and David Bergman, *Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self-Representation in American Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 143.

<sup>36</sup> Frederic Trautmann, *The Voice of Terror: A Biography of Johann Most* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 92.

Proudhon or Most, shared their suspicions of sexual politics. When Will Durant told Kropotkin that he intended on visiting the eminent sexologist Havelock Ellis, Kropotkin advised Durant not to go warning that “the detailed study of sex ... always led to morbidity and perversion.”<sup>37</sup> Kropotkin issued a similar warning to Emma Goldman when she was visiting London. In both cases Kropotkin spoke in vain. Neither Durant nor Goldman heeded his advice to avoid the likes of Ellis.

In the United States class and ethnicity, themselves largely overlapping categories, marked the lines of difference as to whether or not a particular anarchist chose to put sexuality at the heart of her or his politics. In general, working-class, immigrant anarchists were wary of sexual politics while their largely middle-class, English-speaking peers were more enthusiastic in their advocacy of free love and more expansive in their interpretation of what that might allow. Leading individualist anarchists, such as Ezra and Angela Heywood and Moses Harmon, for example, devoted much more attention to the subject of sex, the rights of women, and the politics of culture than did communist anarchist leaders like Johann Most. These are large generalizations and therefore limited in their veracity. Any number of immigrant, working-class anarchists cared passionately about the application of anarchist principles to private life. Robert Reitzel, for example, the editor of the Detroit based, German anarchist publication *Der arme Teufel* (*The Poor Devil*) was “one of the first in America to speak positively of homosexuality.”<sup>38</sup> And leading communist anarchists in the English language movement, including Berkman and Goldman, devoted considerable resources to the pursuit of questions of sexuality.

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<sup>37</sup> Will Durant, “An Afternoon With Kropotkin.” Unpublished manuscript, Joseph Ishill Papers.

<sup>38</sup> Hubert Kennedy, “Johann Baptist von Schweitzer: The Queer Marx Loved to Hate,” in *Gay Men and the Sexual History of the Political Left*, 90.

Goldman, in fact, was one the most famous sex radicals of her day, a name to shock, delight, and conjure with.

In the United States the English-language anarchists—whether communists or individualists—shared an interest in the politics of sexuality. This distinguished them from their peers in Europe and from their non-English speaking comrades in the United States. Harry Kelly wrote in *Mother Earth* about this disjuncture between the “European” and the “American” movements. “The sex question,” Kelly wrote, “is probably more in evidence in the American Anarchist movement than in the European.” Though Kelly described the ideological division as being one between the continents it applied perfectly well to the different language groups within the United States, “European” meaning foreign-born, non-English-speaking anarchists and “American” meaning the largely native-born, English-speaking movement. Kelly, who titled his essay, “Anarchism—A Plea for the Impersonal,” was not altogether pleased with this development. He was troubled that the foreign-language anarchists “concern themselves more with the mass movement than we do; they fight the capitalist; we fight Comstock.”<sup>39</sup> While a number of English-language anarchists shared Kelly’s misgivings about the devoting so much attention to sexual politics, the majority of Kelly’s comrades were less troubled. The pages of *Mother Earth*, where Kelly’s piece appeared, are filled with essays exploring various aspects of the “sex question” including articles on birth control, free love, jealousy, and homosexuality.<sup>40</sup> In spite of Kelly’s “plea” the English-language anarchists in the United States were

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<sup>39</sup> Harry Kelly, “Anarchism: A Plea for the Impersonal,” *Mother Earth*, February 1908, 559.

<sup>40</sup> See *Anarchy!: An Anthology of Emma Goldman’s Mother Earth*, for a sample of the kinds of essays that appeared regularly in Goldman’s journal.

notable for the amount of resources, time, and efforts they devoted to applying anarchist principles to the politics of personal life.

The issue of homosexuality proved to be a particularly contentious one among the various anarchist communities. Goldman, for example, was constantly fighting what she called the “‘respectability’ in our ranks.” Her immigrant anarchist comrades “condemned me bitterly,” she wrote, “because I had taken up the cause of the Homo Sexuals [sic] and Lesbians as a persecuted faction in the human family.” Goldman rejected their criticism as stemming from an overly “economic” view of life. “Very few of them,” Goldman felt, “have come within miles of the intricacies of life that motivates human action.”<sup>41</sup> From the perspective of her anarchist critics, Goldman was wasting critical resources speaking on topics of secondary importance. For them, the issue of economic injustice was of paramount importance. Goldman’s anarchist critics were also wary of what they saw as the negative publicity that such action generated. “Anarchism,” in their view, “was already enough misunderstood, and anarchists considered depraved; it was inadvisable to add to the misconceptions by taking up perverted sex-forms.” The disapproval of her comrades deterred Goldman little, and in fact generated the opposite effect. “I minded the censors in my own ranks,” wrote Goldman, “as little as I did those in the enemy’s camp. In fact, censorship from comrades had the same effect on me as police persecution; it made me surer of myself, more determined to plead for every victim, be it one of social wrong or moral prejudice.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Emma Goldman to G. Heiner, 1-8 June 1934. *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 31.

<sup>42</sup> Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, 555.

This is not to say that English-language anarchists did not engage in what now might be called homophobic outbursts. In 1915, for example, *Mother Earth* published an essay by Robert Allerton Parker attacking “Feminism in America.” Parker, who coined the term “birth control,” was a teacher at the Ferrer Center.<sup>43</sup> In his essay Parker described feminism as “an amusing and typical instance of feminine intellectual homosexuality,” a description which belittles the goals of feminism and imputes a negative value to same-sex love. This was, by this point, a tired accusation, one already made by conservative critics of the women’s movement. Ironically, Parker’s attack focused on the sexual conservatism of the turn-of-the-century women’s movement. He criticized the leading figures of the movement for choosing the side of “organized morality” and accused them of being “clean-handed slaves of the State, the Charities, The Churches, and the ‘captains’ of industry.”<sup>44</sup> Though Parker’s analysis of the women’s movement was widely shared by other anarchists, his language and style of attack were not. Parker’s contribution to *Mother Earth* is not indicative of a broadly shared feeling against homosexuality. *Mother Earth*, which at the time was edited by Alexander Berkman, carried essays that represented a diversity of voices. Not all statements that appeared in the journal were shared by all of the people associated with it. Nonetheless examples such as Parker’s essay complicate any effort to recuperate the pre-World War I anarchist sex radicals as wholly and completely “gay positive.”

Whatever their shortcomings, anarchist sex radical’s views distinguished them from their contemporaries on the Left. The non-anarchist Left held to what has come

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<sup>43</sup> On Parker see the introductory notes to the article in *Anarchy: An Anthology of Emma Goldman’s Mother Earth*, ed. Peter Glassgold, (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2001), 124.

<sup>44</sup> R.A.P., “Feminism in America, *Mother Earth*, February 1915, 392-394.

to be called the Victorian sexual code. It was wedded to notions of female purity and insistent on the need to curb the supposedly baser instincts of men. The historian Mari Jo Buhle describes the majority of Socialist Party members as being “social purity-oriented” who “hoped to stave off the invasion of capitalism into personal life and attempted to preserve the ideals of a presumably preexisting sexual morality.”<sup>45</sup> Daniel DeLeon, the leader of the Socialist Labor Party from 1890 until his death in 1914, absolutely rejected the notion that socialism implied the end of marriage and the sexual liberation of women. Following the demise of the capitalist mode of production, women would be safely ensconced in the home. “Accordingly,” writes L. Glen Seretan, “she would be excluded from work outside the home and no longer ‘unsexed’ by having ‘to compete with men in unseemly occupations,’ while the dross of capitalism’s morally corrosive environment—promiscuity, adultery, and divorce—would not again degrade her.”<sup>46</sup> Though a political rival of DeLeon, Eugene V. Debs, the leader of the SPA in the pre-World War I, shared some of his foes conservative views regarding women’s place. “Debs,” writes Nick Salvatore, “saw women as subsidiary to his main concerns, in orbit around and tangential to the leading actors...their fathers, husbands, and brothers.”<sup>47</sup>

The anarchists were quick to note that the sexual and gender politics of most American socialists did not differ significantly from that of their capitalist rivals. Emma Goldman held that those radicals who refused to engage “the sex question”

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<sup>45</sup> Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870 – 1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 249.

<sup>46</sup> L. Glen Seretan, “Daniel DeLeon and the Woman Question,” in *Flawed Liberation: Socialism and Feminism*, ed. Sally M. Miller (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 6.

<sup>47</sup> Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 229.

were hardly worse than the mainstream moralists she struggled against. She bemoaned the fact that it was possible to meet radicals “permeated with bourgeois morality in matters of sex, thanking the Lord they are not like the other fellows.”<sup>48</sup> It is unclear from the context of Goldman’s text whether she is referring to radicals “thanking the Lord” they are not homosexual, i.e., “like the other fellows.” Goldman was continually frustrated with what she perceived as the conservative nature of American radical culture.

Benjamin R. Tucker’s essay “State Socialism and Anarchism” illuminates just how far the anarchists and the socialists diverged on the question of sexual politics. In his essay Tucker was concerned with showing how the two schools of thought differed and how they were alike. Unlike the socialists, the anarchists, according to Tucker, were not timid in dealing with the subject of sexuality. Adopting a mocking tone, Tucker writes that while socialists did not wish to dwell on “so delicate a matter as that of the relations of the sexes, the Anarchists do not shrink from the application of their principle” in whatever arena of life. Sexuality, writes Tucker, like all other aspects of life, should be governed by individual desire in free association with others. Anarchists:

acknowledge and defend the right of any man and woman, or any men and women, to love each other for as long or as short a time as they can, will, or may. To them legal marriage and legal divorce are equal absurdities. They look forward to the time when every individual, whether man or woman, shall be self-supporting, and when each shall have an independent home of his or her own, whether it be a separate house or rooms in a house with others; when the love relations between these independent individuals shall be as varied as are individual inclinations and attractions.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Emma Goldman, “En Route,” *Mother Earth*, December 1908, 353.

<sup>49</sup> Benjamin R. Tucker, *State Socialism and Anarchism*, ed. James J. Martin (Colorado Springs: R. Myles, 1972), 21-22.

Although Tucker's language—"relations between the sexes"—assumes a heterosexual couple, the logic of his analysis undercuts such a narrow reading. Tucker's abstract, legalistic language does not rule out a homoerotic reading of his sexual politics. Nowhere, either in this passage or elsewhere, does Tucker list that which is not permitted in sexual relations. Anarchists, according to Tucker, furnish no "code of morals to be imposed upon the individual." The attempt to regulate the lives of others, he argued, is itself the problem. Prefiguring the line of argument that he would take when discussing the Oscar Wilde Trial of 1895, Tucker wrote that "Anarchists look upon attempts to arbitrarily suppress vice," he stated, "as in themselves crimes."<sup>50</sup>

It is difficult to know how a contemporary reader would have interpreted Tucker's passage in regards to the matter of homosexuality. Tucker's phrasing allows for the possibility that two or, indeed, more than two men or women would enter into consensual relations with members of their own sex. Tucker's gender-neutral wording reflects his intention of treating women and men with absolute equality. Neither sex has a monopoly on sexual desire or inclination toward acting out on those desires. But the result—grammatically as well as politically—is the creation of the grounds for a homosexual reading of his sexual ethics. This reading is most available in the passage that states that anarchists "look forward to the time ... when the love relations between ... independent individuals shall be as varied as are individual inclinations and attractions."<sup>51</sup> Here the gender of the people involved in sexual relations disappears nor is the nature of their desire specified. It might be a man attracted to

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<sup>50</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>51</sup> loc. cit.

other men or a woman attracted to both men and women. In either case Tucker was willing to accept their desires as legitimate and worth pursuing. The emphasis on the right of individuals to pursue their desires and attractions as they see fit was the bedrock on which anarchist sexual politics rested. Whatever consenting individuals desire to do with others they are perfectly within their rights to do. Should two “independent individuals” who share “inclinations and attractions” wish to pursue “love relations” then no one has the right to interfere with their choices. As the historian Laurence Veysey notes, Tucker’s sexual politics implies the right to explore “the full range of sexual experiments.”<sup>52</sup>

The anarchists understood that love and sex were not innocent of power. They worked to expose the exercise of hierarchy and domination that lay behind moral codes. Some viewed sexual repression as a tool of political, social, and economic oppression. Arguments against the suppression of birth control, for example, were often framed as attempts on the part of the ruling elites to manipulate demographics with an eye toward extending their power. The anarchist writer C. L. James attacked President Roosevelt’s call for large families and his vehement opposition to birth control by arguing that the “social view ... that propagation ... is a duty” was merely a ploy to ensure that “food for gunpowder should [not] fail.”<sup>53</sup> Roosevelt’s dreams of an American military colossus, James implied, could only be achieved with an abundant supply of soldiers, administrators, and workers. The president’s admonitions against family planning were the perfect prescription for a

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<sup>52</sup> Laurence Veysey, *Communal Experiments: Anarchist and Mystical Countercultures in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 430.

<sup>53</sup> C. L. James, “Sex Radicalism,” *The Demonstrator*, 5 April 1905, 3.

growing military and economic power. James insisted that Roosevelt's sexual politics were intimately tied to his dreams of creating a rival to the European empires.

Challenging normative ideas about sex seemed to some anarchists to be a revolutionary act in and of itself. William Thurston Brown argued that in "the sex question is bound every human right, every human possibility, every human fulfillment. And you can't deal with [the] sex question sanely, manfully, effectively, without finding [yourself] under obligation to completely overturn this whole system of things, and build a new society from the ground up."<sup>54</sup> Rejecting the argument that agitation on the sex question was a waste of time better spent on more serious matters, James S. Denson believed that "emancipation from sexual superstition will bring economic reorganization much more quickly than economic reorganization will bring emancipation from sexual superstition." This is so, Denson wrote, because, having tasted the fruits of sexual liberation, free woman or man will chafe under the burdens of "present economic institutions" and in consequence "the energies of that sex radical are likely to be called into play to help on progressive industrial movement."<sup>55</sup> An anonymous writer self-titled "Ego" agreed with Denson, writing, "Free love will gradually undermine existing economics."<sup>56</sup> Sex, in other words, was the key to social transformation an idea that neatly turns crudely materialist analysis of the relationship between sex and gender relations and economic structures on its head. Sex, according to Denson, Brown and their colleagues was not an

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<sup>54</sup> William Thurston Brown, *The Evolution of Sexual Morality* (Portland: The Modern School, n.d.), 11.

<sup>55</sup> James S. Denson, "Sexual and Economic Reform—A Question of Precedence," *Free Society*, 24 April 1898. n.p.

<sup>56</sup> Ego, "Relation of the Sexes," *The Alarm*, 24 November 1888. n.p.

epiphenomenal bubble but a powerful set of relationships, desires, and behaviors that structured the cultural, economic, and cultural life of all Americans.

Anarchist sex radicals challenged the code of respectable reticence that dominated middle-class culture. Angela Heywood, who along with her husband Ezra Heywood published *The Word*, an anarchist, free love journal, argued, for example, that rather than engage in literary evasions people should make use of plain language when speaking of the sexual organs and the sex act. Among the terms that Heywood suggested were the terms “cock,” “cunt,” and “fuck.” Needless to say Heywood’s enthusiasm for what she called “sexnomenclature” was not widely shared outside the anarchist movement.<sup>57</sup> But Heywood’s desire to speak plainly about the body was widely shared among the anarchists. John William Lloyd, for example, wrote a poem entitled “Finger Eleventh, Finger of Love” in praise of the penis, and another entitled “Love-Mouth” honoring the vagina. When the body is “reckoned obscene,” Lloyd insisted, “life reeks” and “love rots.” He condemned those “ashamed of the beauty of the animal form” and rebuked those who denied the use of “the passionate words of sex-admiration.”<sup>58</sup> While many Americans declined to discuss homosexuality on the grounds that it was obscene—a crime not to be named among Christians—the anarchist sex radicals felt that censoring sex talk was the true obscenity.

Anarchist sex radicals rejected the notion that sexuality was bestial and that morality was a product of divine authority. In another of his poems, entitled “O Passionate Ache,” Lloyd defended what he characterized as the “animal” act of sex,

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<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Jesse F. Battan, “‘The Word Made Flesh’: Language, Authority and Sexual Desire in Late Nineteenth Century America,” in *American Sexual Politics: Sex Gender, and Race Since the Civil War*, eds. John Fout and Maura Shaw Tantillo (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 113.

<sup>58</sup> John William Lloyd, *Psalms of the Race Root* (n.p., n.d.), 1-4

stating, “would God that we were all more animal for no animal knows lust or sins against the liberty of its mate, or condemns the natural as vile.” Sexual desire, writes Lloyd, is “as pure as the hunger and thirst in your stomach.” Lloyd neatly inverts the theological arguments used against so-called crimes against nature. “It is not the animal we are to fear,” he wrote, “it is the perverted human, it is that which *rapes*, that which vindicates the conventional as more holy than Nature.”<sup>59</sup> Michael Monahan argued that though “the animals are frankly unmoral” they “do not die of paresis, or syphilis or any of the disorders mentioned in the *Psychopathia Sexualis*.”<sup>60</sup> Monahan’s reference to the diagnosis of paresis and his mention of *Psychopathia Sexualis* is an indirect naming of same-sex eroticism. Paresis was a form of mental illness associated with homosexuality, used most infamously in the name of New York’s Paresis Hall, a dance hall frequented by “fairies.”<sup>61</sup> Likewise, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, Krafft-Ebing’s tome on sexual deviation, was a locus classicus of homosexuality. Monahan’s discussion of the “natural” is ironic in that animals, held to be much closer to nature than humans, are free of the supposed sexual illnesses that plague humanity. Both Monahan and Lloyd are playing with the idea that animals are freer in their sexual liaisons. The problem with sex isn’t that it is innately immoral but that people believe that it is immoral and are therefore racked with guilt when they pursue erotic pleasure. Animals romp with wild abandon, unplagued by modern psychosexual ills. Rather than condemn certain acts as “unnatural,” Monahan and Lloyd appeal to the “unmoral” laws of animals to justify a wide variety of pleasures

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<sup>59</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>60</sup> Michael Monahan, *The Papyrus: A Magazine of Individuality*, March 1905, 15.

<sup>61</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 33.

and to rebuke those who, in their minds, to shore up oppressive, man-made sexual norms.

One of the key—if not the most important—elements of anarchist sexual politics was a critique of marriage. Their antagonism to marriage placed the anarchists squarely in opposition to sexual American norms. Marriage was a binding institution policed by the state and sanctioned by religious authority. Divorce was difficult to procure, though the number of divorces rose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This development was bitterly opposed by those who “clung to the view of marriage as a lifelong, sacred commitment, and considered divorce a ‘contagion.’”<sup>62</sup> In 1888 the Supreme Court asserted that wedlock “is more than a mere contract. The consent of the parties is of course essential, but when the contract to marry is executed by the marriage, a relation is created between the parties which they cannot change.”<sup>63</sup> The concern expressed by the justices did not diminish with the coming of the new century. In 1905 President Roosevelt “issued a special message to the Senate and the House alerting members that a growing number of Americans believed that the sanctity of marriage was held in ‘diminishing regard’ because the ‘the divorce laws are dangerously lax and indifferently administered in some of the States.’”<sup>64</sup> Roosevelt and those who shared his opinions viewed marriage as the bedrock upon which the moral and social order of America rested.

While Roosevelt lamented the apparent collapse of marriage, the anarchists were among the institution’s most fervent critics. Women, the anarchists claimed,

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<sup>62</sup> Marilyn Yalom, *A History of the Wife* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 286.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 183.

<sup>64</sup> Glenda Riley, *Divorce: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford, 1991), 115.

were the main victims of the tyranny of the marriage bed. Though “man ... pays his toll” in marriage, Emma Goldman wrote, “as his sphere is wider, marriage does not limit him as much [it does] woman.”<sup>65</sup> Voltarine de Cleyre described the married woman as “a bonded slave, who takes her master’s name, her master’s bread, her master’s commands, and serves her master’s passions; who passes through the ordeal of pregnancy and the throes of travail at his dictation—not at her desire; who can control no property, not even her own body, without his consent.”<sup>66</sup> De Cleyre was disdainful of the conservative defense of the sanctity of marriage and the home. In a speech entitled “Sex Slavery,” de Cleyre denounced both “the Church” and “the State” as twin pillars of authoritarianism. She mocked those who sang the praises of the good wife: “Stay at home, ye malcontents! Be patient, obedient, submissive! Darn our socks, mend our shirts, wash our dishes, get our meals, wait on us and *mind our children!*”<sup>67</sup> The anarchist critique of marriage was premised on the idea that women as well as men deserved to live their lives free from the authority of others, be they police agents, priests, or husbands. “All our social institutions, customs, arrangements,” in the words of John William Lloyd, “should be expressions of the motive that the woman must always be free.”<sup>68</sup>

The principle equal treatment of women and men had a direct impact on the anarchist sex radical’s homosexual politics. Rather than attempt to enforce a single standard of behavior—that of sexual restraint—anarchists wished to extend to women

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<sup>65</sup> Emma Goldman, “Marriage and Love,” in *Anarchism and Other Essays*, 228.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Paul Avrich, *An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltarine de Cleyre* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), 160.

<sup>67</sup> Voltarine de Cleyre, “Sex Slavery,” in *Women Without Superstition: “No Gods—No Masters:” The Collected Writings of Women Freethinkers of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Annie Laurie Gaylor (Madison: Freedom From Religion Foundation, 1997), 363.

<sup>68</sup> John William Lloyd, *The Free Comrade*, April 1911, 117.

the access to sexual pleasure enjoyed, if only ideally, by men. In 1899 Emma Goldman gave a lecture in San Francisco in which she defended the right of women to seek out love whenever and wherever they might find it. “Why,” Goldman asked, “should not the woman enjoy the same right if she so pleases?”<sup>69</sup> As the historian Margaret Marsh has shown, Goldman and other anarchist women “forged an explicit link between sexuality and self-realization” and in so doing rejected the notion of women as asexual guardians of purity.<sup>70</sup> Having eschewed the role of moral guardians anarchist sex radical women were more willing to accept non-normative sexual contact and relationships including those between people of the same sex as valid and worthy.

In place of marriage the anarchists championed what they called “free-love unions.” When Durant spoke at the Ferrer Center on the subject of free love in 1912 one of those in attendance remarked that many of his audience members “were living in free love at the time.”<sup>71</sup> Free love unions were consensual relationships unsanctioned by church or state, which either party could leave at will. One of the more famous—not to say infamous—advocates of free love during the late nineteenth century was Victoria Woodhull. Though an inconsistent anarchist at best, Woodhull’s view of free love expressed in her speech entitled “The Principles of Social Freedom,” is a succinct, albeit extreme, statement of the principles of free love. “To those who denounce me,” Woodhull proclaimed, “I reply”:

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<sup>69</sup> Quoted in S. D., “Farewell,” *Free Society*, 13 August 1899, 2.

<sup>70</sup> Marsh, *Anarchist Women*, 91.

<sup>71</sup> Will Durant and Ariel Durant, *A Dual Autobiography*, 46.

Yes, I am a Free Lover. I have an inalienable, constitutional and natural right to love whom I may, to love as long or as short a period as I can; to change that love every day if I please, and with that right neither you nor any law you can frame have any right to interfere. And I have the further right to demand a free and unrestricted exercise of that right, and it is your duty not only to accord it, but as a community, to see that I am protected in it. I trust that I am fully understood, for I mean just that, and nothing less!<sup>72</sup>

Though she did not address the possibility that her choice of lover might include women in her speech, the logic of Woodhull's argument did not preclude it. Quite the contrary, the principle of free love implied the defense of any and all consensual relationships regardless of the gender of the individuals involved. Because of their critique of marriage the anarchists found themselves able and willing to speak to the issue of homosexuality when, as in the case of Oscar Wilde, the issue came to the fore. The anarchist critique of marriage opened up a space within which same-sex eroticism could be legitimated. The anarchist discourse of free love produced a sexual politics radically different from that pursued by those who wished merely to reform the institution of marriage. The radical potential of their critique of normative patterns of heterosexuality can be measured by the extent to which the anarchists dealt with same-sex relationships.

On questions regarding the politics of sexuality the Socialist Party was far more conventional than the anarchists. This is especially true in regards to the question of same-sex eroticism. While some socialists—particularly intellectuals like Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Crystal and Max Eastman—wrote about sexuality, no American socialist addressed homosexuality to any meaningful extent when

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<sup>72</sup> Victoria Woodhull, "The Principles of Social Freedom," in *The Victoria Woodhull Reader*, ed. by Madeline B. Stern (Weston, Mass.: M& S Press, 1974), 23-24.

articulating their sexual politics.<sup>73</sup> In the first decades of the twentieth century the only time the socialist press examined the subject of homosexuality was when the Eulenberg Affair broke in Germany. Named after Philipp Eulenberg, a member of Kaiser Wilhelm II's inner circle, the scandal involved "a series of courts-marital concerned with homosexual conduct in the army as well as five courtroom trials that turned on the homosexuality of prominent members of Kaiser Wilhelm's entourage and cabinet."<sup>74</sup> The scandal was precipitated by a series of scandalous revelations by Maximilian Harden, the publisher of *Die Zukunft (The Future)*, an independent weekly. Harden had known for some time about the sexual tastes of some of the Kaiser's entourage but had restrained from making the information public. A series of sharp disagreements with imperial policy led Harden to use the information about Eulenberg and others to attack the Kaiser. Harden was also motivated because he believed that "homosexuality was becoming rampant" and that, unless exposed, this vice would eat away at the German nation.<sup>75</sup>

German socialists saw the Eulenberg Affair as a golden opportunity to smear imperial rule with the taint of sodomy. The sexual behaviors of the country's leaders provided the socialists with ammunition with which to delegitimize the regime.

American socialists also used the Eulenberg Affair as a cudgel with which to beat

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<sup>73</sup> In fact, with few exceptions, the non-libertarian left did not deal with the subject of homosexuality until the 1970s, when they were forced to confront the new sexual politics of the post Stonewall period. The Communist Party and many of the various Trotskyite and Maoist sects failed to articulate a defense of same-sex relations. Well into the seventies the CP, Revolutionary Communist Party, and other Marxist-Leninist groups were openly hostile to the political claims of gay men and women. See David Thorstad, "Homosexuality and the American Left: The Impact of Stonewall," in *Gay Men and the Sexual History of the Political Left*, 319 – 349.

<sup>74</sup> James Steakley, "Iconography of a Scandal: Political Cartoons and the Eulenberg Affair in Wilhelmin Germany," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, eds. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey (New York: New American Library, 1989), 223.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

their opponents. In 1908, for example, an article appeared in *Wilshire's* revealed in the “staggering blow” delivered to the “ruling classes of Germany.” The publication reproduced a cartoon that had appeared in the German press. It shows Harden pulling back a curtain to reveal a dinner party presided over by the emperor. The partygoers are depicted as pigs and the caption of the cartoon reads, “Ladies, and gentlemen, behold the set that ruled Germany.” Also reproduced in the article are the words of August Bebel, one of the leaders of the German Socialist Party: “How hideously disgusting are the things brought to light at this trial; how disgusting are those who have met ruin in this investigation and must bear the responsibility!”<sup>76</sup> Bebel’s words give some indication of the vituperation that the Eulenberg Affair engendered. *Wilshire's* eagerly reproduced this acidic tone for its readers. Without making direct accusations the implication that the ruling elites of both countries were decadent, corrupt, and rife with homosexuality was a key to the socialist papers interest in the scandal.

Emma Goldman’s journal, *Mother Earth*, also reported on the Eulenberg scandal revealing that “his Majesty’s most intimate friends have a strong penchant for the charms of—their own sex.” However, the tone of *Mother Earth*’s reportage on the scandal is significantly different than that featured in *Wilshire's*. Rather than use the Eulenberg Affair as an opportunity to tar the emperor and his court as a pack of “hideously disgusting” animals exposed by the clear light of day, *Mother Earth* pokes fun at the outrage of the supposedly upright German people, the “good faithful subjects of the Fatherland,” who “stand aghast” at the conduct of their nobility. *Mother Earth* argues that the mindset of those who look for moral leadership from

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<sup>76</sup> “A German Muckraker,” *Wilshire's*, January 1908, 11.

their rulers was at the heart of the scandal. It is the fact that the Germans countenanced an Emperor, not the fact that the Emperor or members of his court had relationships with other men that is the problem. If the “good, faithful subjects of the Fatherland” didn’t place their emperor on a pedestal than there would be no occasion for scandal. The public condemnation of the emperor’s coterie smacked of the values of an outraged bourgeoisie: “religion, morality, and *das deutsche Gemuth* [the German soul or temperament].”<sup>77</sup> The varying reactions to the Eulenberg Affair on the part of *Mother Earth* and *Wilshire’s* illustrate the important differences between the sexual politics of the socialists and the anarchists.

The anarchists may also have been more reluctant to use the Eulenberg Affair because they were aware that the moral outrage of the sort that swirled around the emperor could be dangerous. Since anarchists were identified with sex radicalism any political critique that prioritized normative moral standards—particularly those involving sexual conduct—could prove dangerous. In such a climate the anarchists themselves were liable to become targets of censors and purity crusaders. And in fact, *Mother Earth* notes that one of the “first practical steps” taken by authorities eager to “restore the weakening faith” of the emperor’s subjects was to initiate “a campaign of persecution against the Berlin anarchists.”<sup>78</sup> The German government deflected attention away from its own supposed immorality by attacking the anarchists, the quintessential immoralists of the age.

While their views were nowhere near as caustic as the socialist critics of Eulenberg, the first generation of anarchist sex radicals did not view homosexuality

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<sup>77</sup> “Observations and Comments,” *Mother Earth*, November 1907, 366.

<sup>78</sup> loc. cit.

with tolerant eyes. Centered largely in the Midwest the first wave of English-language anarchists were active in the three decades following the Civil War. Though there were not many discussions of same-sex love made by anarchists in the 1870s, 1880s, and early 1890s those mentions that did appear were largely negative in tone. Like many of their non-anarchist contemporaries these pioneering anarchists, as the historian Hal Sears has pointed out, “considered homosexuality to be a physical disease or, at best, a psychic and moral perversion.”<sup>79</sup> This was true even for those anarchists who kicked against the constraints of normative sexual ideas. In the course of her defense of free love, for example, the anarchist Lois Waisbooker condemned homosexuality. Though she praised the beauty of the ancient Greeks who, she believed, “followed the leadings of unperverted nature in their conjugal relationships,” she lamented what she called “Grecian degeneracy”—that is, homosexuality. The homosexuality of the Greeks “was brought about not by following the leadings of nature but by departure therefrom.” According to Waisbooker, “artificial or anti-natural modes of living were substituted for the native simplicity of earlier times.” Centuries of war, Waisbooker wrote, “destroyed all the nobler, the better endowed specimens of Grecian masculinity, leaving only the ... sordid, the craven, the malformed in mind in body” alive. “It is any wonder,” she asked, “the Greeks degenerated?”<sup>80</sup> Had the Greeks remained faithful to “unperverted nature” no such acts would have been tolerated.

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<sup>79</sup> Sears, *The Sex Radicals*, 226.

<sup>80</sup> Lois Waisbooker, *My Century Plant* (Topeka, Kansas: Independent Publishing Company, 1896), 11. Waisbooker was born in 1820. The shift in the anarchist movement on the question of homosexuality which occurs at the turn of the century was, at least in part, a generational one.

Waisbooker was not alone in making such arguments. In 1890, Moses Harman wrote that “abnormal sexuality,” which for him included homosexuality, “is the result of the attempted enforcement of a false standard or morality, false from nature’s standpoint.”<sup>81</sup> Similarly, in 1885 C. L. James wrote, “vices are so largely the fruit of excessive wealth, abject poverty, overwork, oppression, and despair that with the removal of these causes they may be expected to become rare.”<sup>82</sup> In other words, once the inequities of intolerance and economic disparity disappear “vice” will no longer flourish. The idea that homosexuality was a sign of corruption—an idea that motivated much of the socialists glee in covering the Eulenberg scandal—was fairly widely held among a number of English language anarchists in the 1870s, 1880s, and early 90s. It should be noted however that none of the anarchist sex radicals who discussed homosexuality argued that persons who engaged in same-sex behavior should be condemned or persecuted. The kind of vitriolic attacks made by the Socialist press against Eulenberg is absent from the few anarchist discussions of homosexuality written by the first wave of activists. The insistence on the rights of individuals to pursue their own desires was a paramount ideal, one that constrained and shaped anarchist sexual politics even when, as in the case of Waisbooker, the working out of this principle was somewhat less than consistently applied.

By the late nineteenth century, however, anarchist writing on homosexuality took a radical departure from the views expressed by Waisbooker, Harman, and other members of the first wave of anarchist sex radical politics. This transformation was

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<sup>81</sup> Moses Harman, *Digging for Bedrock* (Valley Falls, Kansas: Lucifer Publishing Company, 1890), 168.

<sup>82</sup> C. L. James, “Anarchism: The Discussion of Its Principles Continued,” *The Alarm*, 8 August 1885, 3.

visible in both quantitative and qualitative ways. First, the number of times that anarchist sex radicals discussed homosexuality increased markedly. Leading anarchists like Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman were regularly presenting talks that explored the social, cultural and ethical status of same sex love. Second, the tone of these presentations was quite different from the early, more sporadic mentions of homosexuality by anarchist activists. While Waisbooker believed homosexuality was a sign of decadence, anarchists like Tucker defended same-sex love as a rather pedestrian expression of human erotic variability. Beginning in the mid 1890s leading anarchist sex radicals began to actively defend the rights of men and women to love members of their own sex. Homosexuality had become one of the topics that the anarchist sex radicals devoted considerable attention to. No other Americans—outside of the medical, legal, and religious professions—devoted so much time and effort to exploring the social, moral, and ethical place of same sex love. And no Americans of the period developed a political understanding of the right of men and women to love whomsoever they wished, whenever and wherever they wished, in the manner of their choosing.

There are several reasons for the remarkable shift in attitude. The early American anarchists had emerged from largely from rural and small towns. In the 1870s and 1880s the movement's leading papers, such as *Lucifer the Lightbearer*, were published in Kansas and other Midwestern, largely rural states. By contrast *Mother Earth* was published in Greenwich Village, a markedly different cultural and social environment than the world inhabited by Waisbooker and her contemporaries. Tucker began publishing *Liberty* in Boston but by the end of the century he had

moved to New York. There he opened a bookstore on Sixth Avenue that, according to an account that appeared in the *New York Herald*, featured “more anarchist literature than...any other one place in the United States.”<sup>83</sup> For a time, Lloyd worked as a nurse in New York, though he maintained a small home in New Jersey. The more cosmopolitan anarchists of the new century were exposed to the more variegated sexual subcultures of the turn of the century urban landscape. In the context of New York City, homosexuality was unremarkable.

Members of the second wave of anarchist sex radicalism were also more familiar with the sexological literature on homosexuality that began to appear in the late nineteenth century. Much of this sexological literature—or at least the texts favored by the anarchists—were themselves products of nascent political efforts on the part of homosexual men and women. When, for example, John William Lloyd discussed homosexuality and Greece he did so under the influence of the work of Edward Carpenter whose studies of the sex life of the ancient Greeks were inspired by his desires to find historically validating examples of his own desires. This was a very different vision of the place of homosexuality in Greek society than that held by Waisbooker. The new sexological work being produced in Europe circulated widely among the anarchists. Lloyd was hardly alone in his reading patterns. In addition to reading Carpenter, for example, Goldman read Ellis, Hirschfeld, and other sexologists. The anarchist sex radicals examined in the pages below were consumers of the expanding science of desire and their sexual politics were shaped by it.

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<sup>83</sup> “Only Books that Teach Anarchy are Sold in this Sixth Avenue Shop,” *New York Herald*, April 12, 1908, 6.

But the most important reason for the shift in the way anarchist sex radicals viewed the question of homosexuality, however, is that by the end of the nineteenth century homosexuality became a focus of surveillance and regulation by police and other authorities. This increased level in the attention given homosexuality is visible in the fact that by the late nineteenth century convictions for the crime of sodomy jumped and medical journals began to feature articles on the subject. The level of police interest and the increase in medical literature on the topic of same-sex love were directly related. For example, in 1892, Dr. Irving Rosse, a physician from Washington D.C. read a paper at a meeting of Medical Society of Virginia that documented the extent of what he called the “Perversion of the Genesis [procreative] Instinct” in the nation’s capitol. It also documents the degree to which homosexuality had become an issue of concern for the police:

From a judge of the District police court I learned that frequent delinquents of this kind have been taken by the police in the very commission of the crime, and that owing to defective penal legislation on the subject he is obliged to try such cases as assaults or indecent exposure. The lieutenant in charge of my district, calling on me a few weeks ago for medical information on this point, informs me that men of this class give him far more trouble than the prostitutes. Only of late the chief of police tells me that his men have made, under the very shadow of the White House, eighteen arrests in Lafayette Square alone (a place by the way frequented by Guiteau) in which the culprits were taken in flagrante delicto...<sup>84</sup>

Dr. Rosse’s account is typical of the medical case studies and narratives that began to appear in the United States at this time. In many of these texts, physicians document the degree to which police authorities had become interested in these “crimes of sexuality” and indicate their willingness to assist in this project. In his description of the men who frequented Lafayette Park, Rosse links homosexuality

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<sup>84</sup> Irving C. Rosse, “Homosexuality in Washington, D. C.” in Katz, *Gay American History*, 42.

with Charles J. Guiteau, the disgruntled political aspirant who assassinated President James Garfield in 1881. The trial that followed became an important precedent in the judgment and treatment of the criminally insane. This conflation of crime, insanity, and homosexual reflects the commonly held belief that sexual attraction, much less activity, between members of the same sex was a danger to the moral and social order. Because of these beliefs, the police were increasingly vigilant in their pursuit of those who engaged in homosexual acts. Dr. Rosse and other professionals often assisted the police in their efforts to contain what was viewed as a growing moral and social problem.

It was not by accident nor idiosyncratic reasons then that the anarchist sex radicals discussed below began to struggle with the legal, social, and moral status of same-sex love. At a time when few Americans cared to defend the rights of men and women whose sexual and emotional life were made the target of arrest, moral censure, and social ridicule the anarchists were not afraid to do so. Though the first generation of English-speaking anarchists in the United States had devoted relatively little attention to the issue of homosexuality the second wave of American anarchist sex radicals adopted new views and their level of engagement with the issue was far greater. This level of interest on the part of Tucker, Goldman, Lloyd, Berkman and other anarchists mirrors the escalating level of interest that the police and other moral regulators were giving the subject. As the police began to step up their efforts to hunt down and arrest people like those poor souls caught “in flagrante delicto” in Lafayette Park, the anarchists began to step up their attacks on the police and their ideological allies and assistants. The anarchist politics of homosexuality examined by this

dissertation was created in the context of a dialectical contest of oppression and resistance. This dialectic was starkly illustrated by the Oscar Wilde trial of 1895, and it is to that trial and the response to the trial that it prompted among the anarchists that we now turn.

## Chapter Two: The Wilde Ones: Oscar Wilde And Anarchist Sexual Politics

In 1900 Emma Goldman and her friend Dr. Eugene Schmidt took a walk in Paris's beautiful Luxembourg Gardens. Among the subjects the two discussed was the fate of Oscar Wilde, the English writer sentenced to two years of hard labor in a spectacular show trial in 1895 for committing "acts of gross indecency with men." Wilde moved to France following his release from prison. Goldman, who was in Paris for an anarchist conference, was to have met Wilde the evening prior to her walk, but she missed the opportunity. Dr. Schmidt and Goldman clashed over whether or not Wilde's imprisonment was justified. In her autobiography, *Living My Life*, Goldman paints a vivid description of her defense of Wilde and of the doctor's reaction:

During our walk in the Luxembourg [Gardens], I told the doctor of the indignation I had felt at the conviction of Oscar Wilde. I had pleaded his case against the miserable hypocrites who had sent him to his doom. "You!" the doctor exclaimed in astonishment, "Why, you must have been a mere youngster then. How did you dare come out in public for Oscar Wilde in puritan America?" "Nonsense!" I replied; "no daring is required to protest against a great injustice." The doctor smiled dubiously. "Injustice?" he repeated; "it wasn't exactly that from the legal point of view, though it may have been from the psychological." The rest of the afternoon we were engaged in a battle royal about inversion, perversion, and the question of sex variation.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately Goldman missed her chance to meet with Wilde. He never recovered from his prison sentence and died shortly after Goldman's trip to Paris. Wilde died in exile, having fled England under the darkest of clouds. Convicted before the bar and the court of public opinion Wilde's reputation as a poet, playwright, and social critic was overshadowed by the turn of the century's most spectacular sex crime trial.

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<sup>1</sup> Goldman, *Living My Life*, 269.

Goldman's heated exchange with Dr. Schmidt was not the only time that she defended Wilde against those who condemned him. Throughout Goldman's life Wilde served as a touchstone for her views on sexuality. Wilde was a glaring example of the harm done when the state mobilized its tremendous powers in the pursuit of enforcing common prejudices. Many of Goldman's colleagues shared her outrage at the imprisonment of Wilde. During Wilde's trial and in the years immediately following it the anarchists rose to Wilde's defense. They attacked Wilde's jailers and argued with those who approved of his prosecutor's actions. The efforts of Goldman and other anarchists on Wilde's behalf constitute the first articulation of a politics of homosexuality in the United States. In lectures, in articles in movement journals such as *Liberty*, *Lucifer the Light Bearer*, and *Mother Earth*, and in confrontations like that which Goldman had with Dr. Schmidt, anarchist sex radicals rose to the defense of the disgraced writer. The Wilde case came to serve as a lens through which the anarchists understood the ethics of same-sex eroticism.

Wilde's conviction was a wake up call for the anarchists. The trial prompted the anarchists to engage in an examination of the social, moral, and legal place of same-sex desire. The raw use of judicial power to convict a man for pursuing his desires was a vivid illustration of the kind of abuse that the anarchists most ferociously opposed. The prosecution of Wilde was illustrative of the growing state interest in the regulation of sex. Convictions for sodomy and other sex crimes increased markedly in the late nineteenth century in the United States and abroad. Beginning in the 1870s laws such as the Comstock Act, which prohibited the transmission of birth control information through the mail, and the Labouchere Act,

under which Wilde was convicted, began to crowd statute books in the United States and Western Europe. This expansion of state power was the source of conflict with the anarchists who viewed such developments with great wariness. As the state began to seek ever-greater control over the private lives of its subjects the anarchists reacted to that exercise of power. Anarchist sex radicals were nearly alone in defending the rights of people to choose their own partners free from state interference or social condemnation.

The anarchists had, of course, always been wary of state power. Opposition to the state was a fundamental tenet of all anarchists. The French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon expressed this sentiment well:

To be governed is to be watched over, inspected, spied on, directed, legislated at, regulated, docketed, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, assessed, weighed, censored, ordered about, by men who have neither the right nor the knowledge nor the virtue. To be governed means to be, at each operation, at each transaction, at each movement, noted, registered, controlled, stamped, measured, valued, assessed, patented, licensed, authorized, endorsed, admonished, hampered, reformed, rebuked, arrested. It is to be, on the pretext of the general interest, taxed, drilled, held for ransom, exploited, monopolized, exhorted, squeezed, tricked, robbed; than at the least resistance, at the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, abused, annoyed, followed, bullied, beaten, disarmed, strangled, imprisoned, machine gunned, judged, condemned, deported, whipped, sold, betrayed, and finally mocked, ridiculed, insulted, and dishonored. That's government, that's its justice, that's its morality!<sup>2</sup>

Proudhon's animus towards the state was precisely the kind of outrage that the American anarchist sex radicals felt at Wilde's conviction. The attack on Wilde was a stark example of the way in which the police "spied on," "docketed," "abused," "bullied," imprisoned," "deported," and "ridiculed," people who violated laws which regulated sexual activity. Benjamin Tucker, who translated much of Proudhon's

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in John Ehrenberg, *Proudhon and His Age* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996), 109.

work in his youth, denounced those who attacked Wilde using language that reflected Proudhon's deep distrust of state power. "Men who imprison a man who has committed no crime," Tucker proclaimed, "are themselves criminals."<sup>3</sup> The Wilde case was a perfect example of the nature of the quality of "justice" and "morality" pursued by the state in its enactment of new sex laws.

The Wilde trial was a critical turning point in the American anarchist's view of homosexuality. Up until the scandal there was relatively little discussion of the moral and social place of homosexuality among anarchist sex radicals. The mentions of homosexuality that do appear in anarchist texts prior to the Wilde trial tended to be negative in tone. After the Wilde trial, however, the anarchist sex radicals addressed homosexuality with greater frequency and in a more favorable light. In many of the post-Wilde trial discussions the scandal is referenced either implicitly or explicitly. This is not to say that the Wilde trial was the only or even the main cause of this shift. Certainly there were other causes, not least of which was the rising attention paid to the topic by medical and state authorities. Across the Western world same-sex relations were being named and judged with increasing frequency. The anarchists were responding to the policing of homosexuality because the issue was of rising concern to the society in which they lived. To some extent one can argue that the Wilde case is merely the best known of a number of different indicators that interest in the topic of homosexuality was growing. The anarchist defense of Wilde was a part of a larger debate and discussion of homosexuality that took place at the turn of the century in the both the United States and Europe.

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<sup>3</sup> Benjamin R. Tucker, "The Criminal Jailers of Oscar Wilde," *Liberty*, 15 June 1895, 4.

The Wilde trial was not the first time sexuality served as a source of conflict between the anarchists and state authorities. Anarchist sex radicals were quite familiar with the pernicious effects of sex-crime prosecution. In 1886, for example, Lillian Harman, the daughter of the anarchist sex radical Moses Harman, pledged her love for Edwin. C. Walker in a free love ceremony that was condoned by neither church nor state. The town of Valley Falls, Kansas, where Harman and Walker lived, was outraged and the morning after their “marriage” Walker and Harman were served with arrest warrants for the crime of unsanctified, unsanctioned cohabitation. Walker was sentenced to seventy-five days in jail, Harman to forty-five days; the couple was not to be released until they covered court costs. The couple eventually spent six months behind bars before agreeing to pay their fine and court costs.<sup>4</sup> Other anarchist sex radicals faced similar harassment from state authorities. Ezra Heywood, one of the leading native-born anarchist sex radicals of the late nineteenth century, was jailed numerous times for offending public morals. Heywood was convicted for circulating information on birth control, for publishing “obscene” works—such as Walt Whitman’s poetry—and for attacking the social, legal, and economic inequities of marriage. Heywood served a number of years in prison for his crimes.

Heywood was involved in one of few discussions of homosexuality among anarchists that occurred prior to the Wilde trial. In 1890 Heywood was sentenced to two years hard labor for, among other things, publishing a letter from Dr. Richard O’Neill, a New York physician who sympathized with the anarchists. The letter, which was judged to be obscene, was largely concerned with sexual abuse of wives

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<sup>4</sup> See Hal Sears, *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in Victorian America* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas), 81 – 96.

within marriage but it also discussed homosexuality. In his letter O'Neill describes how a "Mr. P. C. of California wrote" to him "asking if I could cure him of an insatiable appetite for human semen." Mr. P. C. wished to stop "roaming all over the country trying to find men to allow him to 'suck them off'" and hoped that Dr. O'Neill might have a "cure."<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that though Heywood made it clear that he disapproved of Mr. P. C.'s behavior he did not excoriate Mr. P. C. nor did he urge O'Neill to treat his patient harshly. Heywood believed Mr. P. C.'s behavior was the result of the ill organization of the society in which he lived. It was the social order, not Mr. P. C. that needed reformation. Unfortunately, Heywood had little opportunity to engage in any further discussion of homosexuality. Like Wilde, Heywood died shortly after his release from prison, most likely from the tuberculosis he had contracted while behind bars. Cases such as Heywood's set a precedent for the anarchist's view of Wilde's trial.<sup>6</sup>

Wilde's ordeal was a familiar one to the anarchists, and their determined opposition to the exercise of state power to regulate morals was in keeping with the history of their sexual politics. In the aftermath of his arrest and imprisonment Wilde became a totemic figure among the anarchists. They felt that the attack on Wilde was an attack on many of the values they held most dear. In her lectures and writings on drama and art, Goldman held up the disgraced writer as an exemplary engaged intellectual whose views she shared. In her essay "Anarchism: What it Really Stands For," Goldman cites Wilde approvingly a number of times. "Oscar Wilde," she writes, "defines a perfect personality as 'one who develops under perfect conditions,

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 110-111.

<sup>6</sup> See Martin Henry Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism: The Biography of Ezra Heywood* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989)

who is not wounded, maimed or in danger.’” Goldman interprets Wilde’s words as implying his endorsement of anarchist economic and social arrangements. “A perfect personality,” she continues, “then, is only possible in a state of society where man is free to choose the mode of work, the conditions of work, and the freedom to work.”<sup>7</sup> In a 1907 lecture delivered to an audience in Portland, Oregon, Goldman called Wilde’s play “Lady Windemere’s Fan” a work that expressed the “revolutionary spirit in modern drama.”<sup>8</sup> In 1912 the *Denver Post* reported that in the course of one of her talks Goldman “glorified Wilde, and intimated that while society forgives the criminal, it never forgives the dreamer.”<sup>9</sup> Goldman saw Wilde as an anarchist—in spirit if nothing else. While acknowledging that Wilde “like all true artists is terribly contradictory,” Goldman felt that much in Wilde’s thought “is pure Anarchy.”<sup>10</sup> Wilde, in other words, expressed in his work many of the same ideas Goldman felt were vital to achieving a free and worthwhile life.

Even before his trial Wilde was connected with anarchism. Though he was not himself an anarchist, Wilde allied himself with movement causes at a number of points in his life. Following the Haymarket Tragedy of 1886, for example, he signed a petition seeking clemency for the condemned American anarchists. Wilde felt as Alexander Berkman did that the conviction of the defendants was obtained through “perjured evidence” and “bribed jurymen” and motivated by “police revenge” and the desire on the part of “money interests of Chicago and of the State of Illinois” to

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<sup>7</sup> Emma Goldman, “Anarchism: What It Really Stands For,” in Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York: Dover, 1969 [1917]), 55.

<sup>8</sup> “Roosevelt is not Friend of Labor,” *The Oregonian*, June 3, 1907

<sup>9</sup> “Mild Comedy at the Tabor; Virile Talk at Woman’s Club: Emma Goldman,” *Denver Post*, 22 April 1912.

<sup>10</sup> Emma Goldman to Ben Capes, 23 June 1925. *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 15.

“punish and terrorize labor by murdering their most devoted leaders.”<sup>11</sup> The petition, which included signatures by Eleanor Marx, Edward Carpenter, William Rossetti, William Morris, George Bernard Shaw, Olive Schreiner, and Annie Besant, was sent to Richard J. Oglesby, the Governor of Illinois, who eventually commuted the death sentence of two of the condemned Chicago anarchists.<sup>12</sup> Given the high visibility of the Haymarket Tragedy in the mythology of the anarchist movement it is not surprising that Wilde’s actions were praised in the movement. Before the scandal that engulfed his life and memory, Wilde had a well-deserved reputation of being a cultural critic of decidedly progressive tendencies.

On at least one occasion Wilde spoke of himself as an anarchist. In 1893 the French journal *L’Ermitage* conducted a poll of writers and artists asking them their political views. Wilde responded that he considered himself “an artist and an anarchist.”<sup>13</sup> One year later Wilde repeated his claim. “We are all of us more or less Socialists now-a-days,” he said. “I think I am rather more...I am something of an Anarchist.”<sup>14</sup> By making these claims Wilde aligned himself with what he saw as the rebellious, individualistic tendencies of anarchism. He was not a member of any anarchist groups nor did he provide material support for movement causes. For Wilde and those disaffected intellectuals like him anarchism meant a spirit of discovery, a rejection of received ideas, and the desire to lead one’s life free of social conventions. This is what he meant by saying that he considered himself “an artist and an anarchist.” In Wilde’s mind the two ideas—art and anarchy—were related in

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<sup>11</sup> Alexander Berkman, *What is Communist Anarchism* (New York: Dover Publication, 1972 [1929]) 59 – 60.

<sup>12</sup> See Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy*, 353.

<sup>13</sup> Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism*, (London: Freedom Press, 1996 [1935]), 213

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Karl Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* (New York: Norton, 1992), 20.

as much as they both promised a way to refashion the self in new and unfettered ways. Wilde's mixture of artistic ferment and ideas inspired by and borrowed from anarchism was a fairly commonplace feature of life among bohemian circles in London, Paris and other cities in Western Europe.<sup>15</sup> One can find a similar conjunction of ideas and tendencies in the United States in people such as Margaret Anderson, Robert Henri, Sadakichi Hartmann, Floyd Dell, and James Gibbons Huneker.<sup>16</sup>

Wilde drew on anarchist ideas and texts in the construction of his own work. In his first play, *Vera; or The Nihilists*, for example, Wilde quotes *The Catechism of the Revolutionist* a political tract written by the anarchists Mikhail Bakunin and Sergei Nechaev.<sup>17</sup> Prior to his death in 1876 Bakunin was the leading anarchist of the era. A Russian who embodied almost every stereotype of that country's revolutionary tradition, Bakunin fought with Karl Marx for control of the socialist movement. Nechaev was a young protégé of Bakunin; the two met in Geneva in 1869. Within months of their meeting the two men composed *The Catechism*. The rhetoric of defiance and social revolt found in *The Catechism* assured it a long and infamous history. The language of the tract mirrors the revolutionary fervor that Bakunin and Nechaev fed upon as they wrote. According to *The Catechism*, the revolutionary "has broken every tie with the civil order and the entire cultured world, with all its laws,

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<sup>15</sup> See Beckson, 3 – 31. And Mark Bevir, "The Rise of Ethical Anarchism in Britain, 1885 – 1900," *Historical Research* (June 1996): 143 – 165.

<sup>16</sup> While a number of very good studies have examined the relationship between artists and anarchism in Europe, particularly Paris, very few studies of the American cultural landscape have done so. An exception is the excellent book, Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time, 1912 – 1917* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992 [1959])

<sup>17</sup> Who authored the *Catechism* is a matter of some historical debate. Paul Avrich argues that it was largely the work of Nechaev, although certainly Bakunin had a great influence on the work. On the relationship between the two men see Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 32 – 52.

proprieties, social conventions and...ethical rules.”<sup>18</sup> Once the revolutionist has taken this dramatic step he must struggle ceaselessly to bring down the powers that be. It is not hard to understand why Wilde—a sharp critic of Victorian morality whose personal desires put him in the position of being an outsider—would be drawn to Bakunin and Nechaev’s manifesto. Ironically, the London production of *Vera* was shut down following the assassination of Czar Alexander II; a case of life imitating art which might have pleased Wilde, except for the fact that his play was now seen as too controversial for the stage.

Wilde was clearly drawn to the revolutionary rhetoric of *The Catechism* but the intense nature of the relationship between Bakunin and Nechaev—which was the subject of gossip and political slander—may also have piqued his interest. When Bakunin met Nechaev he was smitten; the two were inseparable. According to the historian E. H. Carr, “[Bakunin] began to call young Nechaev by the tender nickname of ‘boy’... [and] the most affectionate relations were established.”<sup>19</sup> Almost immediately rumors about the nature of the two men’s friendship began to circulate. Bakunin was said to have written a note to Nechaev promising total submission to the younger man’s desires; it was signed with a woman’s name “Matrena.” To those who traded in this story Bakunin’s apparent inversion of gender terms with his protégé smacked of homosexuality. Though Carr does not believe that Bakunin and Nechaev were erotically involved the historian George Woodcock argues that there “seems to have been a touch of submerged homosexuality” running like a current between the

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<sup>18</sup>Sergei Nechaev, *Catechism of the Revolutionist* (London: Aldgate Press, 1989), 4.

<sup>19</sup>E. H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin* (New York: Vintage, 1961), 392.

two men.<sup>20</sup> Whatever the case, rumors of the two men's relationship, fed in large part by political rivals, circulated in the Left. The historian Hubert Kennedy argues that Marx used the accusation of homosexuality against Bakunin in his successful attempt to expel his ideological foe from the First International in 1872.<sup>21</sup> What exactly Wilde knew of these rumors is unknown but should he have heard of Bakunin's infatuation with Nachaev, a distinct possibility given the apparently broad circulation of the rumors, it doubtless would have intrigued him.

Wilde's politics like those of the anarchists were forged in "reaction against industrialization, urbanization, modernization—against what we can more precisely call the growth of bureaucratized corporate structure[s] in the context of capitalist social relations."<sup>22</sup> Critics of the late nineteenth centuries economic, social, and political conditions, Wilde and the anarchists sought to beautify and dignify labor. They juxtaposed an ideal world of creativity and craftsman-like dedication and pleasure in work to the conditions one could find in modern industry. Wilde expressed this vision on his tour of the United States, which he undertook in the early 1880s. In Bangor, Maine the local paper reported that Wilde "thought a great mistake of the age is found in the unwillingness to honor the mechanic, the working man, and his pursuits as they should be honored."<sup>23</sup> This is what Goldman meant when in her 1912 Denver lecture she approvingly cited Wilde's contention that "the secret of life

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<sup>20</sup> George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 143.

<sup>21</sup> Hubert Kennedy, "Johann Baptist von Schweitzer: The Queer Marx Loved to Hate," in *Gay Men and the Sexual History of the Political Left*, 86 – 89. My discussion of Bakunin and Nechaev's relationship is heavily indebted to Kennedy.

<sup>22</sup> Eileen Boris, *Art and Labor: Ruskin, Morris, and the Craftsman Ideal in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), xi.

<sup>23</sup> *Bangor Maine Commercial*, October 4, 1882 quoted in Rose Snider "Oscar Wilde's Progress Down East" *New England Quarterly*, XIII (1940): 11.

is in art.” Wilde’s discussion of aesthetics was intended as a critical discourse and not merely a list of suggestions on housekeeping, fashion, and visual and literary arts. Wilde championed art for its ability “to disturb the monotony of type, the slavery of custom, the tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of machine.”<sup>24</sup> These are all values that one can find expressed in any number of anarchist publications in the United States and England during this period.

Wilde’s best-known political text, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, was seen by contemporaries as an anarchist text. Wilde’s essay was reprinted widely across Europe and was popular in the United States.<sup>25</sup> The historian George Woodcock argues that “the uncompromisingly libertarian attitude of [*The Soul of Man Under Socialism*] has much...in common with the ideas of ...Peter Kropotkin.” Written in 1891, Wilde’s essay “had to be published for a time as *The Soul of Man* in order to avoid objections from publishers and distributors.”<sup>26</sup> Wilde’s rhetoric and goals bore a striking resemblance to those espoused by anarchists. Though somewhat vague as to how the social transformation he seeks would be brought about, Wilde maintained that the implementation of his utopian ideas “will lead to Individualism.” He rejected the idea of state ownership of the means of production and offered critiques of Marx that were very similar to those made by Bakunin. Wilde warned that “If the Socialism is Authoritarian; if there are governments armed with economic power as they are now with political power; if, in a word, we are to have Industrial

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<sup>24</sup>Oscar Wilde quoted in Jeffrey Escoffier, “Oscar Wilde’s Politics: The Homosexual as Artist as Socialist” *The Gay Alternative*, 10 (1975), 6.

<sup>25</sup> George Woodcock, “Introduction” Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (London: Porcupine Press, n.d.), vii-viii.

<sup>26</sup> Christopher Hitchens, “Oscar Wilde’s Socialism” *Dissent* (Fall, 1995): 516.

Tyrannies, then the last state of man will be worse than the first.”<sup>27</sup> This was a vision that Goldman and her comrades could embrace and is precisely the kind of passage she had in mind when she called his essay “pure Anarchy.”<sup>28</sup>

Despite his ideological affinities with libertarian socialism Wilde did not receive unanimous praise from the anarchists. In 1891 Benjamin R. Tucker critiqued Wilde for his muddled thinking. Tucker was angry that commentators spoke of Wilde as an anarchist. “The newspaper paragraphers,” Tucker wrote, “all discuss Oscar Wilde’s article on ‘The Soul of Man Under Socialism’ and talk of his conversion to Anarchism, thus again showing that they are hopelessly incapable of understanding either what Oscar Wilde says or what Anarchism means.”<sup>29</sup> Wilde, in Tucker’s estimation, was not rigorous enough in his distinctions and was too given to the kind of fuzzy, utopian feelings that Tucker delighted in dissecting. In his review of *The Soul of the Man Under Socialism* Tucker quoted Terence V. Powderly’s views of Wilde’s brand of socialism. Powderly, the Grand Master of the Knights of Labor, was skeptical of Wilde’s ideas:

Oscar Wilde declares that Socialism will simply lead to individualism. That is like saying that the way from St. Louis to New York is through San Francisco, or that the way to whitewash a wall is to paint it black. The man who says that Socialism will fail and then the people will try individualism—i.e., Anarchy—may be mistaken: the man who thinks they are one and the same thing is simply a fool.<sup>30</sup>

Tucker’s use of Powderly’s words should not be taken as an endorsement of the Grand Master of the Knights of Labor on Tucker’s part. Powderly was a bitter

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<sup>27</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, reprinted in George Woodcock, *Oscar Wilde: The Double Image* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989), 257 – 258.

<sup>28</sup> Emma Goldman to Ben Capes, June 23, 1925, *Emma Goldman Paper*, reel 15.

<sup>29</sup> Benjamin R. Tucker, “On Picket Duty,” *Liberty*, April 4, 1891, 1.

<sup>30</sup> Terence V. Powderly, “Editorial,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor* quoted in Benjamin R. Tucker, *Instead of a Book: By a Man Too Busy to Write One* (New York: Benjamin R. Tucker, 1893), 37.

opponent of the anarchists; he felt they had tainted the labor movement with the smell of dynamite and disorder.<sup>31</sup> Tucker reciprocated Powderly's disdain and hardly approved of Powderly's views. But in Tucker's view even a broken clock tells the right time at least twice a day. Despite Tucker's disagreements with Wilde the fact that both he and Powderly felt compelled to respond to *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* illustrates the extent to which Wilde was taken seriously as a social critic by his contemporaries. One of the tragedies of the Wilde trial is that Wilde's politics has been almost completely overshadowed by his role in the century's most scandalous sex trial.

It was not just *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* that came under critique. In 1885, Tucker's colleague, John William Lloyd, took Wilde to task in the pages of *Liberty* for having written a poem that Lloyd felt maligned anarchism. Wilde had written a "Sonnet to Liberty," which decries "anarchy" and praises the virtues of "order." The poem expresses Wilde's fear of "the mob." It is possible, though beyond the scope of this study to explore in any detail, that Wilde's awareness of himself as a sexually dissident figure may have heightened his sense of the very real dangers of the tyranny of the majority. Certainly the public reaction to his conviction in 1895 was an illustration of how "the mob" can act with great cruelty. But such a reading of Wilde's politics were lost on Lloyd who took great umbrage at Wilde's use of the term anarchism to mean disorder. It is, in fact, somewhat amusing to read the heated responses that the (mis)use of the term "anarchy" could provoke in the anarchist press. An anthology of such ideological outrages could easily be compiled. In the case of Wilde's transgression, Lloyd literally rewrote "Sonnet to Liberty,"

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<sup>31</sup> See Terence V. Powderly, *Thirty Years of Labor, 1859 to 1889* (Philadelphia, 1890), 271-288.

changing its name to “The Sacred Thirst for Liberty.” In his new and improved version poem Lloyd lambasted Wilde as a ‘false-tongued poet,” and defended anarchism.<sup>32</sup>

Despite their criticisms of Wilde, the anarchists rallied to his defense when, in 1895, he was swept up into the scandal that would end his career. Wilde was actually involved with a series of trials all of which revolved around questions of his sexuality and public reputation. The first trial was prompted by Wilde’s suit against the Marquess of Queensbury, the father of Wilde’s lover, Lord Douglass, for defamation of character. Queensbury left a note at a club that accused Wilde of being a sodomite. Wilde challenged the accusation feeling that to let it stand would be damning. In short order the case against Queensbury collapsed and Wilde was brought up on charges of having committed “acts of gross indecency.” Lord Douglass, who enjoyed considerable protection as a member of the nobility, was not brought before the bar. In the trials that followed Wilde’s relations with a number of male prostitutes were divulged. Although the more salacious details of the evidence were kept out of the press, Wilde’s relationship with the young men he spent time with was widely understood to be sexual. In addition to exposing his real life sexual relationships the prosecution spent considerable time elucidating texts, such as *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, searching in Wilde’s work for further proof of his dark nature.

Wilde was sentenced to two years of hard labor by a judge who could barely restrain his loathing of the man who stood before him. Like the judge, many of Wilde’s contemporaries were deeply stirred by the exposure of the rather pedestrian fact that acts of male homosexuality were regularly practiced in the city of London.

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<sup>32</sup> “A Criticism and Reply” *Liberty*, December 26, 1885, 1.

The Wilde scandal was of international dimensions. The English press covered the unfolding of the trial in fascinated detail, though the specific nature of the charges made against Wilde were not made public. In the United States the press was even more studious in maintaining an embargo on what they viewed as the more sordid aspects of the trial, though hints and insinuations appeared almost everywhere and Wilde's ordeal was well known. Some of the American press, such as Salt Lake City's *The Desert News*, did cover the trial—eighteen front-page stories and two editorials—but like their English counterparts, they kept the exact nature of the charge unspoken.<sup>33</sup> This censoring zeal was evident in the fact that in America, as was reported in the pages of Tucker's *Liberty*, Wilde's works were pulled from bookstore and library shelves.<sup>34</sup> The entire country seemed caught between endlessly discussing Wilde's fate and desperately trying to avoid mention of any of the carnal reality of the acts for which he was being jailed. This resonant silence was typical of the treatment of the subject of homosexuality during this period.

Wilde's American reputation was savaged. An amateur archivist of the period documented more than 900 sermons preached between 1895 and 1900 on the subject of Wilde's sins. Other guardians of public morality spoke out. In 1896 the president of Princeton, concerned for the welfare of his charges, compared Wilde to Nero, the Roman emperor infamous for fiddling while Rome burned.<sup>35</sup> Wilde's plays *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which were being produced in New

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<sup>33</sup> On the *Desert News* see Quinn, *Same-Sex Dynamics Among Nineteenth-Century Americans*, 314-315.

<sup>34</sup> Benjamin Tucker, "On Picket Duty" *Liberty*, April 20, 1895, 1

<sup>35</sup> See Thomas Beer, *The Mauve Decade: American Life at the end of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1926), 126-129. Beer thanks "Mr. Charles Cleary Nolan for the use of his ... Wildiana and his monstrous collections of American religious eloquence." (Beer, 267)

York at the time of his trial, were closed and a proposed traveling production of *A Woman of No Importance* was canceled.<sup>36</sup> For years after his release from jail Wilde was reviled. “The worst of his writing,” opined the *New York Times Saturday Review* in 1906, “is beneath contempt and some is revolting.”<sup>37</sup> A contemporary poem by Elsa Barker—whose work, it should be noted, was considered an indication of a minor Wilde revival—described Wilde as a “laureate of corruption” comparable to Satan in his fall. “We loathe thee” wrote Barker, “with the sure, instinctive dread of young things for the graveyard and the scar.”<sup>38</sup> From such revivals all writers should be protected. Once a widely read poet and essayist over the course of his trial Wilde became a symbol of “corruption” a person who was “beneath contempt.”

Wilde’s trial brought the question of the ethical, social, and legal status of homosexuality in the United States into sharp focus. While there had been previous scandals involving same-sex behavior—for example the Alice Ward / Freda Mitchell case of 1892—the media attention paid to Wilde was unprecedented.<sup>39</sup> Havelock Ellis, the English sexologist, received a number of letters from Americans on the trial and its impact. “The Oscar Wilde trial,” according to Ellis, “with its wide publicity, and the fundamental nature of the questions it suggested, appears to have generally contributed to give definitiveness and self-consciousness to the manifestations of homosexuality, and to have aroused inverts to take up a definitive attitude.”<sup>40</sup> The trial forced many people to confront the issue of same-sex desire. The press’s

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<sup>36</sup> Richard Ellman, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Knopf, 1988), 458.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in “The Oscar Wilde Revival,” *Current Literature*, November 1906, 521.

<sup>38</sup> Elsa Barker, “Oscar Wilde,” *Current Literature*, July 1907, 106.

<sup>39</sup> On the Alice Ward / Freda Mitchell case see Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers*.

<sup>40</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Volume II: Sexual Inversion* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Company, 1928), 352. See also Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side: Towards a Genealogy of a Discourse on Male Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 98 – 99.

discretion was ineffective in keeping the details of Wilde's ordeal out of public notice. Private correspondence of the period was less reticent in treating the details of Wilde's trial. M. Carey Thomas followed the unfolding scandal and sent press clippings of the coverage to her passionate friend Mary Garrett. "I have hopes," Thomas wrote Garrett, "he will get off." The intrepid shopper on American college campuses could purchase a set of photographs, bound in scarlet, entitled "The Sins of Oscar Wilde."<sup>41</sup> By the time he entered jail, Wilde had "been confirmed as *the* sexual deviant for the late nineteenth century."<sup>42</sup>

Anarchists were among the few public defenders of Wilde during his trial and its aftermath. They intervened forcefully in the ongoing debate that the trials set off. In conversation and in print Goldman "pleaded his case against the miserable hypocrites who had sent him to his doom."<sup>43</sup> Others were equally outraged. In a cutting rejoinder to the religious leaders who were denouncing Wilde's sins, Mr. J. T. Small, a contributor to *Liberty*, asked whether Tucker might offer "a 'sermon' on the cowardice and hypocrisy of society in the way they are hustling Wilde's books out of the public libraries."<sup>44</sup> Though no sermon was forthcoming, Tucker did reprint a condemnation of Wilde's "daily torture" in prison that the author Octave Mirabeau, himself an anarchist, wrote for a French journal.<sup>45</sup> Mirabeau's reaction was widely shared among French artists and bohemian anarchists. *La Revue Blanche* (*The White Review*), for example, carried an article by the anarchist Paul Adam entitled "The

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<sup>41</sup> On personal correspondence see Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *The Power and Passion of M. Carey Thomas* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1994), 286 – 287; and Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side*, 98. On "The Sins of Oscar Wilde" see Ellman, *Oscar Wilde*, 575.

<sup>42</sup> Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side*, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Goldman, *Living My Life*, 269

<sup>44</sup> Tucker, "On Picket Duty," *Liberty*, 20 April 1895, 1.

<sup>45</sup> Octave Mirabeau, "Oscar Wilde's Imprisonment," *Liberty*, 13 July 1895, 6-7.

Malicious Assault” which protested Wilde’s arrest and in 1896 a group of anarchists sponsored performances of Wilde’s play, *Salome*. The painter Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec provided an illustration for Adam’s article and designed the poster for *Salome*.<sup>46</sup> The reprinting of Mirabeau’s article in the pages of *Liberty* indicates the degree to which Tucker was aware of and influenced by the European discussion of the Wilde case.

The American anarchists refused to allow Wilde’s works to be censored. To express solidarity with Wilde and to protest the widespread suppression of his work the anarchist journal *Lucifer the Light Bearer* reprinted selections of Wilde’s writings during and after his trial. Excerpts of Wilde’s work had already appeared in the magazine but in the context of the trial they took on a new importance. The writer’s novels, plays, and poems were cited by the prosecution and were condemned as obscene. Wilde’s texts, the prosecution argued, expressed the corrupt nature of their creator; they were dangerously steeped in the lusts for which their author was condemned. The suppression of Wilde’s writing was a result, in part, of the belief that reading works such as *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* could lead to readers emulating Wilde. In an editorial in *Lucifer the Light Bearer*, Lillian Harman ridiculed the notion that Wilde’s texts could lead others to engage in homosexual acts. Like J. T. Small, she condemned the widespread suppression of Wilde’s work. C. L. James also defended Wilde in the pages of *Lucifer*. Though James believed that Wilde’s actions could be classified as a vice, he rejected the idea that homosexuality was a mark of insanity or that it was unnatural. And he certainly refused to accept the

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<sup>46</sup> Richard Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Siecle France* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 176. See also Alexander Varias, *Paris and the Anarchists: Aesthetes and Subversives During the Fin de Siecle* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996).

idea that there existed a basis for state regulation of homosexual behavior. If homosexuality is a vice, he argued, it is a minor one, akin to taking snuff or gambling. And unlike taking snuff, homosexuality had, according to James, a respectable pedigree. In the style of a number of contemporary apologists for homosexuality, James pointed out that the Greeks had permitted and even encouraged same-sex relations. Wilde's behavior in other words was hardly unprecedented. Given the high regard for Classical Greece that existed at the time, James felt that the condemnation of Wilde by the learned classes of England and America was hypocritical.<sup>47</sup>

Of all the anarchists writing in the immediate context of the trial, Tucker was the most ferocious in his defense of Wilde. "The imprisonment of Wilde," wrote Tucker, "is an outrage that shows how thoroughly the doctrine of liberty is misconceived."<sup>48</sup> Like Goldman, Tucker believed that those who hounded Wilde were "miserable hypocrites." The condemnation of Wilde was for Tucker an indictment against the culture that charged him:

A man who has done nothing in the least degree invasive of any one; a man whose entire life, so far as known or charged, has been one of strict conformity with the idea of equal liberty; a man whose sole offense is that he has done something which most of the rest of us (at least such is the presumption) prefer not to do—is condemned to spend two years in cruel imprisonment at hard labor. And the judge who condemned him made the assertion in court that this was the most heinous crime that had ever come before him. I never expected to hear the statement of the senior Henry James, uttered half in jest, that 'it is more justifiable to hang a man for spitting in a street-car than for committing murder' substantially repeated in earnest (or else in hypocrisy) from an English bench.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Sears, *The Sex Radicals*, 227-228.

<sup>48</sup> Tucker, "The Criminal Jailers of Oscar Wilde," 4-5.

<sup>49</sup> loc cit.

This passage is perhaps the best contemporary defense of Wilde written on either side of the Atlantic. It is also a fine example of Tucker's learned and caustic pen. Tucker uses the conviction of Wilde to charge and convict those who presume to stand as the moral arbiters of their society. Wilde's jailers, Tucker insists, not Wilde, were the criminals. This unequivocal response would come to dominate the anarchist sexual politics of homosexuality in the years following Wilde's conviction. Wilde's conviction starkly illustrated for the anarchists the danger of allowing the state to regulate same-sex relations.

In his defense, Tucker questions the presumption that Wilde's desires were not widely shared. Tucker acknowledged that many men had sexual relations with other men and did so to no one's detriment. One can even read Tucker's words as implying that most men—"most of the rest of us"—might find themselves in Wilde's place if they acted on desires that were commonly held despite the "presumptions" that they reside only in a distinct category of men. This was, according to the historian George Chauncey, a fairly common understanding of the nature of male sexual behavior: a man might seek sexual release through any number of partners, the gender of the partner being of less importance than the fact that they played the role of the receptor.<sup>50</sup> Wilde's age and status would have signaled to most persons that he was the "dominant" partner in his relationships. Wilde was a "normal man," capable and willing to satisfy his desires in a number of different ways. What then, Tucker asked his readers, made Wilde such a monster? It was hypocritical in the extreme, Tucker implies, to jail a man for an act that was in fact common. The cynical explanation for the judge's harshness is that the court was fully aware of how

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<sup>50</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 43, 84 – 85, 88 – 96, 140 – 141.

common Wilde's actions were. It was precisely because Wilde's desires were common that the court reacted with so much fury. Wilde's conviction was a show trial meant to put fear into the hearts of all who strayed.

Tucker was especially sharp with those on the Left who joined in attacking Wilde. The *Daily Chronicle* of London, a publication associated with the Fabian socialists, was lambasted for "outdoing" the "Philistine press in its brutal treatment of Oscar Wilde." Tucker could not resist implying that the position of the *Daily Chronicle* was a natural result of the Fabians' "brutal political philosophy." Tucker did allow that some of those who were "in semi-bondage to the same brutal philosophy" did rise to the occasion, though they did so he implied against the dictates of their beliefs. The Rev. Stewart D. Headlam, the editor of the *Church Reformer*, was "led, by his natural love of liberty and sympathy with the persecuted, in the magnificent inconsistency of becoming Oscar Wilde's surety." Tucker also gave "heartiest thanks" to Selwyn Image, a contributor to the *Church Reformer*, who wrote that "whatever in past days may have been [Wilde's] weaknesses, follies or sins, he has behaved in the hour of trial with a manly courage and generosity of spirit which I fear few of us under similar circumstances would have been virile and self-sacrificing enough to exhibit." It was most unusual for Tucker, whose disdain for religion was well established, to quote a minister. Given the almost universal condemnation of Wilde Tucker was forced to seek out allies in strange places.<sup>51</sup>

Tucker's laudatory note of Image's description of Wilde as behaving "with a manly courage and generosity of spirit" was very much in keeping with the general depiction of Wilde that one finds in almost all anarchist texts. The anarchist sex

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<sup>51</sup> Tucker, "The Criminal Jailers of Oscar Wilde," 4-5.

radicals much preferred the “serious” Wilde of *The Soul of a Man Under Socialism* over the decadent, languid, feminized depictions of Wilde that were often mobilized by the writer’s critics. This is in keeping with the way in which both defenders and critics of Wilde used gendered imagery. Though attacks on Wilde almost never failed to illustrate his effeminacy, a representation that drew upon and helped reinforce ideas of homosexuality as being a product of gender inversion, those who defended him either avoided any mention of his gender identity or framed his actions as gender appropriate. The anarchist sex radicals who defended Wilde invariably portrayed him as being noble, strong, and resolute in facing his accusers. Although few of them used the overt “manly” language that Image employed, the general tone of their representations of Wilde is consonant with Image’s terms. The anarchist sex radicals who rose to his defense represented Wilde as a “normal man,” albeit one whose sexual tastes ran afoul of the law and social opinion.

In addition to taking on Wilde’s European critics Tucker lashed out at some of his American foes. The statements of Dr. E. B. Foote Jr. particularly incensed Tucker. Foote was a liberal physician who, along with his father, helped fund free-love and free-speech efforts. The Footes were noted opponents of Comstock; Foote Sr. had been arrested for violating the Comstock laws prohibiting the distribution of contraceptive literature.<sup>52</sup> The younger Foote gave generously to the anarchist press including *Lucifer the Lightbearer*. In later years he supported Goldman’s *Mother Earth*. On the question of Wilde, however, Foote Jr. found himself in agreement with the poet’s jailers. Foote argued that Tucker let Wilde off easily. Wilde’s crime, according to Foote, was “seducing” the young and impressionable “to his evil ways,”

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<sup>52</sup> On the Footes see Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, and Sears, *The Sex Radicals*.

and these were acts that could not easily be excused. In a letter he sent to *Liberty*

Foote elaborated on this theme:

One who has any knowledge of the men of his class well knows that one of their worst points is the disposition to seek out and make new victims of promising youth. This is made evident in their own confessions as quoted in Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*. ... It can hardly justify the let-alone policy when they set up shop to increase the "cult" of this sort of aesthetic culture; for they are not at all satisfied to find each other out (among the perverts of the same taste), but they are "hell-bent" on discovering fresh, virile, healthy, vigorous, and unsophisticated young men of whom to make victims for vampires. You may say that youth should be so instructed and trained as to be safe against the wily, seductive attractions of even such glittering genius as that of Wilde and so say I; but, if State interference is permissible anywhere, it is against the vicious invasion of the family, which lures to destruction the finest specimens of manhood. ... Men of the ... Wilde type don't recognize any youthful age limit, and boys are their constant prey ... They can't and won't keep to themselves, and so a few—too few—get their deserts.<sup>53</sup>

Foote framed his attack on Wilde as a protection of the family and as a condemnation of those who, like the English writer, supposedly preyed on the young. Given the danger that these men presented state intervention in the form of policing and punishment was merited. Only in this way, Foote implies, can the plague—an infection similar to the curse of the vampire—be stopped. Foote finished his letter to *Liberty* by comparing Wilde to Jack the Ripper and lamenting that fact that Wilde was sentenced to serve only two years at hard labor and not twenty.

Foote's condemnation of Wilde for his seduction of "young innocents" was in keeping with contemporary accounts that demonstrated, in the words of Ed Cohen, "an obsessive concern with the effects of Wilde's 'corrupting influences' on the younger men with whom he consorted."<sup>54</sup> Of course, Wilde did have sex with men

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<sup>53</sup> E. B. Foote Jr., "Liberty Run Wilde," *Liberty*, 13 July 1895, 6.

<sup>54</sup> Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side*, 198.

younger than himself. He was convicted on evidence that he had casual sexual relations with male prostitutes whose age ranged from late teens to early twenties. By suggesting that Wilde was seducing “innocent youth,” rather than hiring male prostitutes Foote was able to sharpen his attack. Wilde responded to just such accusation in court, where he defended his relations he had with the young men in question. When asked what was meant by “the love that dare not speak its name,” a coded reference to homosexuality drawn from a poem by Lord Alfred Douglas, Wilde himself made reference to the disparity in age between himself and his partners: “The love that dare not speak its name,” said Wilde, “in this century is such a *great affection of an elder for a younger man* as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, as such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare.”<sup>55</sup> These were carefully chosen references; linking Wilde to some of the most celebrated figures of Western history. But this illustrious genealogy did little to counter critics like Foote who argued that Wilde had corrupted the young men he had sex with. Foote mobilized all the powers of the medical profession—citing the authority of Krafft-Ebing as well as undocumented anecdote—to make the case that homosexuality is intrinsically linked to the seduction of youth. Foote’s rhetoric speaks of vampires, the “cult” of the Wilde type, and “the invasion of the family,” and paints an image of literary decadence run amok, threatening the hearth and home through the display of “glittering seductions.” Against the threat to youth and the family posed by blinding glamour of the Wilde type Foote argued that the only real protection is the power of the state.

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted in *Hidden Heritage: History and the Gay Imagination: An Anthology*, ed. Bryne Fone (New York: Avocation Press, 1980), 197.

While Tucker did not depict Wilde's relations as partaking of the glories of Ancient Athens or Elizabethan England he found Foote's characterizations of the relationships Wilde had with his sexual partners wildly off the mark. Foote stressed the diabolical, hypnotic powers of Wilde but Tucker totally rejected the idea that Wilde had played the role of the seducer. The young men Wilde had relations with were, according to Tucker, responsible for their own behavior; they were not innocents whose lives had been ruined by Wilde. There was in fact no crime involved since the behavior being policed was engaged in by two consenting individuals. If Wilde were tried in the "court of equal liberty instead of ordinary law," Tucker wrote, the charges against him "would have been promptly dismissed on the ground that the alleged victims (not only Lord Douglas, but the others) were themselves mature and responsible persons and, as such, incapable of any seduction of which justice can properly take cognizance."<sup>56</sup> Wilde's partners may have been young, in other words, but they were hardly naïve. It was dangerous to think otherwise. The charge of seduction was an amorphous and problematic one. To argue that Wilde's sexual partners needed the protection of the state would be to legitimize external authority and begin down a slippery slope of increased moral vigilance on the part of the police. Tucker, always wary of the state, argued forcefully that people should be allowed to make their own choices, even at the risk of making mistakes they might later regret. In the words of one of his colleagues, "a bestowal of the liberty to do wrong is an indispensable condition of the acquisition of the liberty to do right."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Tucker, "A 'Liberal' Comstock," *Liberty*, 13 July 1895, 2-3.

<sup>57</sup> James F. Morton Jr., "The Many Roads to Liberty," *The Agitator*, 15 February 1911.

The Wilde case was not the first time that Tucker had dealt with the issue of sexuality and the age of consent. In 1886, for example, Tucker protested attempts to raise the age of consent, the age at which a person might freely enter into sexual intercourse. The campaign to raise the age of consent swept the nation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, fed by lurid tales of child prostitution and anxiety over the sexualized culture of urban leisure. “The argument for raising the age of consent,” according to historian Robert Riegel, “was that a man would be much less likely to seduce a young girl [into prostitution] if he realized that the law would classify the act as rape.”<sup>58</sup> The problem with this logic, in Tucker’s mind was that it interfered with the liberty by bringing the state into the bedroom. If, Tucker argued, the passions of a “girl of seventeen ... of mature and sane mind, whom even the law recognizes as a fit person to be married ... [should] find sexual expression outside of the ‘forms of law’ made and provided by our stupid legislatures” it was of no interest to anyone but the girl and her lover. The campaign to raise the age of consent, Tucker argued, “belongs to that class of measures which especially allure stiff-necked moralists, pious prudes, ‘respectable’ radicals, and all other divisions of the ‘uncoquid.’” He rejected the notion that raising the age of consent was necessary to protect the “honor” of young women, arguing that one could not more “dishonor a woman already several years past the age at which Nature provided her with the power of motherhood than by telling her that she hasn’t brains enough to decide whether and in what way she will become a mother!”<sup>59</sup> Other anarchist sex radicals, like Lillian Harman who herself entered into a free-love relationship with a thirty-seven year old

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<sup>58</sup> Robert E. Riegel, “Changing American Attitudes Toward Prostitution,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* (July-September 1968), 451.

<sup>59</sup> Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 161.

man at the age of sixteen, agreed with Tucker.<sup>60</sup> Unsparingly logical in his arguments, Tucker applied the same principles he articulated in the case of young women to the case of Wilde and the young men he had sex with.

Tucker characterized Foote's letter as "the most intolerant, fanatical, and altogether barbarous utterance that has come from a professed ultraliberal since I have been engaged in reform work." He reminded the younger Foote that his father had also been sentenced to jail on charges of immorality. Foote Jr.'s intemperate words, Tucker stated, "justify me in reminding Dr. Foote Jr., that, in the eyes of the public, to be convicted by Comstock is scarcely a less disgrace than that which has fallen upon Oscar Wilde." Tucker lashed out at Foote, taking him to task for misrepresentation and for "betray[ing]...the fanatic's hatred of sin rather than the sane man's desire to protect against crime." Tucker refused to even consider the question of Wilde's sanity since "all noninvasive persons are entitled to be let alone, sane or insane." Tucker defended Wilde's work, stating that "his writings are a permanent addition to the world's literature" and arguing that "even [Wilde's] enemies admit that he has been perhaps the most influential factor in the achievement of that immense advance in decorative art which England and America have witnessed in the last decade."<sup>61</sup>

Other anarchist papers picked up Tucker's defense of Wilde and his condemnation of Foote's response. *The Firebrand* very nearly repeated Tucker's own words. "Certain people," the *Firebrand* noted, "who thought they knew as much as Dr. Foote thinks he knows would have sentenced E. B. Foote Sr. to twenty years imprisonment for his

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<sup>60</sup> Linda R. Hirshman and Jane E. Lanson, *Hard Bargains: The Politics of Sex* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 131.

<sup>61</sup> Tucker, "A 'Liberal' Comstock," 2-3.

writings, and yet strange to say, the junior Foote does not seem to comprehend that he is in exactly the same frame of mind they were in.”<sup>62</sup>

Four years after his heated exchange with Foote, Tucker was presented with the opportunity to help Wilde contribute yet another “addition to the world’s literature.” Tucker, who maintained his own press, was the first American publisher of “The Ballad of Reading Gaol,” one of Wilde’s last major work of art. “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” is a powerful depiction of the cruelty of crime and punishment. The narrative poem describes the hanging of C. T. Woolridge, a man convicted of murdering his wife. The reader is left with the distinct impression that the punishment inflicted on Woolridge is no less a crime than the original murder that sealed his fate. “The poem,” in the words of Richard Ellman, “had a divided theme: the cruelty of the doomed murderer’s crime; the insistence that such cruelty is pervasive; and the greater cruelty of his punishment by a guilty society.”<sup>63</sup> “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” is a bleak condemnation of mankind’s capability for violence; in the words of Wilde’s poem “each man kills the thing he loves.”<sup>64</sup> In words that echo the title of Wilde’s *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, Tucker wrote that in Wilde’s prison poem “we get a terrific portrayal of the soul of man under Archism.”<sup>65</sup> It is, of course, possible to interpret Wilde’s poem as an attack on his own treatment by a “guilty society.” Tucker certainly thought so; in his endorsement of the poem he wrote, “I especially commend its perusal to Dr. E. B. Foote Jr., who thinks that Wilde should

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<sup>62</sup> *The Firebrand*, 21 August 1895

<sup>63</sup> Ellman, *Oscar Wilde*, 532.

<sup>64</sup> Oscar Wilde, “The Ballad of Reading Gaol,” in Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man and Prison Writings*, ed. Isobel Murray (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 170.

<sup>65</sup> Tucker, “The Ballad of Reading Gaol,” *Liberty*, March 1899, 5.

have been imprisoned for twenty years.”<sup>66</sup> Publishing Wilde’s poem was as much an act of sexual radicalism as it was an effort to awaken public opinion against the terrors of the judicial system.

Though the ballad was brought to press in England in 1898, Wilde was unable to find an American publisher. Not even “the most revolting New York paper,” he wrote his friend Reginald Turner, would touch his work.<sup>67</sup> In other words, not even the sensational press—whose coverage of crime and punishment was legendary—would print “The Ballad of Reading Gaol.” Tucker, who publicly defended the fallen poet during his trial, was more than willing to publish Wilde’s poem. He set aside a number of other printing jobs and produced two editions of the poem: a handsomely bound book that sold for a dollar and an inexpensive pamphlet available for the price of ten cents. Tucker encouraged his readers to “purchase a bound copy for his own library, and one or more copies of the pamphlet to give away.” He also asked that his supporters “help this book to a wide circulation by asking for it at bookstores and news stands in his vicinity.”<sup>68</sup> Tucker was apparently successful in his endeavor. In May 1899 he wrote a friend “The Wilde book has already brought me many queries from strangers regarding my other publications, and has given our work much publicity.”<sup>69</sup>

Tucker’s edition of “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” was widely reviewed in the mainstream press. This was most likely due to the continuing scandalous reputation of Wilde; his name continued to sell tabloids even after his release from prison.

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<sup>66</sup> loc cit.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Beckson, *London in the 1890s*, 229

<sup>68</sup> Tucker, “The Ballad of Reading Gaol,” 5

<sup>69</sup> Benjamin Tucker to Henry Bool, May 21, 1899, Ishill Collection.

Many of the reviewers confirmed Wilde's estimation of how Americans perceived him. *The Literary World*, which like most publications identified Wilde as the poem's author even though the author was identified only as C.3.3 (Wilde's cell number), found that the poem "expresses a sickening sympathy for the criminal." The reviewer gives Tucker's edition a backhanded compliment that plays on Wilde's tainted identity by noting that the poem's "publication in this present dainty form seems due...to the morbid attraction of its author's name."<sup>70</sup> Given the author's damaged reputation *The Philadelphia Inquirer* thought it "surprising that there should be any demand for what Wilde may write." Other papers were not so harsh. *The Albany Press* said of the ballad "it is horrible, gruesome, uncanny, and yet most fascinating and highly ethical." *The New York Sun* thought it "a pathetic example of genius gone to the dogs" but allowed "those who love the queer in literature will make a place for it on their bookshelves." *The Portland Oregonian* held a higher view of Wilde's poem but reproached the author for "much unnecessary gloating over 'great goutts of blood.'" And in a review that must surely have warmed Tucker's heart the *Pittsburgh Press* wrote, "B. R. Tucker, of New York, has just published one of the most remarkable poems of recent times. ... Those who are craving for a sensation ... will do well to make themselves the possessors of this weird and pathetic ballad of a jailed one."<sup>71</sup>

It is unclear whether the readers of the reviews of "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" would have understood the reviewer's frequent characterizations of the work as "queer" or "weird" to imply sexual deviance. Such words did not necessarily convey

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<sup>70</sup> Oscar Wilde, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," *The Literary World*, 19 August 1899, 268.

<sup>71</sup> See "The Critics on Oscar Wilde's Poem," *Liberty*, May 1899, 4, 5, 8.

any notion of erotic deviation. Though George Chauncey argues that the word “queer” was used at the turn of the century by men who “identified themselves as different from other men primarily on the basis of their homosexual interest,” it was not synonymous with homosexual.<sup>72</sup> However given the reputation that Wilde had acquired since his imprisonment any text associated with him would have some connotation of homosexuality. Certainly the use of the terms “morbid,” “sickening sympathy,” “gruesome” and “criminal” by the reviewers all served to remind readers of the recent trials and scandal. The mixture of words drawn from medical, moral, and legal categories indicate the various and complex ways in which these discourses formed the matrix within which same-sex relations were viewed by journalists and critics. By refusing to allow themselves to be governed by the injunctions implicit in the condemnation of Wilde’s work as “morbid” or “queer” the anarchists were contesting the dominant view of Wilde and those like him.

Tucker’s reaction to the Wilde case was typical of the response that the anarchists had to Wilde’s conviction. There are, for example, some striking similarities between Goldman’s defense of Wilde against her friend Dr. Schmidt in 1901 and Tucker’s critique of Foote six years earlier. In both cases the anarchists were willing to contest the power of medical authorities to define the boundaries of acceptable behavior. Goldman’s characterization of Wilde’s conviction as a “great injustice” also parallels Tucker’s view of the courts actions. And like Tucker, Goldman published and helped circulate some of Wilde’s work. In one of the first editions of *Mother Earth*, Goldman published an excerpt from Wilde’s essay *De Profundis*. Written while still in prison this essay describes Wilde’s struggle to make

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<sup>72</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 10.

sense of his fate. Like “The Ballad of Reading Gaol,” *De Profundis* contains passages that are sharply critical of State power and the abuses of prison life. “Society,” writes Wilde, “takes upon itself the right to inflict appalling punishment on the individual, but it also has the supreme vice of shallowness, and fails to realize what it has done.”<sup>73</sup> A number of Wilde’s works, including *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* and the “Ballad of Reading Gaol” were advertised in the pages of *Mother Earth* and bookstores and individual readers could order the works through the Mother Earth Publishing Company.

Wilde became a powerful symbol within anarchist political discourse. In a letter to the German sexologist and homosexual rights activist Magnus Hirschfeld, Goldman explicitly linked her defense of Wilde to her anarchist politics. “As an anarchist,” she wrote, “my place has always been on the side of the persecuted.” Wilde, hounded by moralists and driven to an early grave, was an object lesson in the way in which outsiders were treated. “The entire persecution and sentencing of Wilde,” Goldman wrote, “struck me as *an act of cruel injustice and repulsive hypocrisy* on the part of the society which condemned this man.” In protesting the treatment of Wilde, Goldman was protesting the way in which all “the persecuted” were treated.<sup>74</sup> Goldman even used a stanza from Wilde’s “Ballad of Reading Gaol” as preface to an article she wrote about Leon Czolgosz, the young man who assassinated President McKinley in 1901. Though Goldman did not condone Czolgosz’s actions she argued that he was a tragic product of a social order ruled by violence and coercion. Goldman compared Czolgosz to the prisoners that Wilde

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<sup>73</sup> “The Ennobling Influence of Sorrow (From Oscar Wilde’s “De Profundis,”)” *Mother Earth*, July 1906, 13

<sup>74</sup> Goldman, “The Unjust Treatment of Homosexuals,” in Katz, *Gay American History*, 379.

describes in his poem. That “inmates” go mad and strike out at their jailers is, as Goldman saw it, a “tragedy,” but it is hardly unexpected.<sup>75</sup>

Other anarchists drew on Wilde’s texts in the years following his imprisonment. John William Lloyd chose an excerpt from Wilde’s essay *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* as a preface to his utopian novel, *The Dwellers in the Vale Sunrise*. In the passage Lloyd excerpted, Wilde looks forward to the day when “the true personality of man ... will grow naturally and simply.” In that future world, “man” will “not be always meddling with others or asking them to be like itself. It will love them because they will be different.”<sup>76</sup> Wilde’s text could signify libertarian social and cultural politics outside the realm of sexuality per se. *Dwellers in the Vale Sunrise*, for example, has a strong message of racial egalitarianism. Published in 1904, portrays the life of a utopian community which models itself after “Indians, Eskimos, and other savages.” Though the term “savage” has a jarring quality for contemporary readers Lloyd used it in an ironic sense. This group of men and women, whose neighbors call them The Tribe, believe that these non-Western people’s “social relations...are superior to the white man’s.” Sometimes called “white Indians” by their neighbors, The Tribe is a multiracial community that includes “some real Indians ... and people of all colors, even one Chinaman.”<sup>77</sup> Lloyd’s representation of a racially and ethnically diverse social group living in harmony, though marred somewhat by a paternalistic tone, is a literary rebuke to the rising tide of Jim Crow and other forms of institutionalized racism that characterized turn of the

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<sup>75</sup> Goldman, “The Tragedy at Buffalo,” *Mother Earth*, October 1906, 11

<sup>76</sup> John William Lloyd, *The Dwellers in the Vale Sunrise* (Westwood, Mass: Ariel Press, 1904), 4.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

century America. Wilde's text, which celebrates difference, was a perfect accompaniment to Lloyd's vision of a racially harmonious utopia.

Lloyd cites Wilde within his novel as a political authority. At several points in the novel Lloyd stages debates about economic or social questions between representative figures such as an urban socialist, a "natural man," a wise elder. These discussions serve as a way to explore the variety of possible solutions available to the pressing problems of the day. At one point, James Harvard, the urban socialist whose very name bespeaks learning, defends the use of machinery against those who feel that industrial development and modernity are inherently oppressive. "There is nothing abnormal about machinery," Harvard tells his listeners. "Kropotkin is right when he says our present killing servitude to the machine 'is a matter of bad organizations, purely, and has nothing to do with the machine itself;' and Oscar Wilde is right when he claims that the machine is the helot on which our future civilization shall rise."<sup>78</sup> Following Wilde and Kropotkin, Harvard argues that machines will free humanity from the need to perform tasks that sap the soul and body. Instead people could devote themselves to cultivating their higher faculties. Lloyd's use of Wilde as a political thinker was very much in keeping with way in which *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* and other texts were referenced by anarchists and others on the Left.

Lloyd's decision to use Wilde's text as a preface to his work illustrates how the disgraced writer's work functioned as a powerful and polyvalent resource for the anarchists. Lloyd made use of both the content of the text he selected—the literal meaning of Wilde's words—and the fact that by using the words of a man who was

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 165 – 175. See Veysey, *Communal Experiments*, 27.

convicted and tried for living his life as he chose, the anarchists were challenging the powerful forces of moral opprobrium and social hierarchy. The passage from Wilde's essay that Lloyd used as a preface advocates a liberal attitude toward social regulation and a celebration of variety in human expression. The economic principles of Wilde's variant of socialism had obvious appeals to the anarchists. Wilde's vision of a world in which difference is tolerated and even celebrated fits well with Lloyd's anarchist politics.

But in the wake of his trial, the use of Wilde was also a strategic use of a signifier in Lloyd's sexual politics. Lloyd was one of the few anarchist sex radicals of the period who had personal investment in the issue of homosexuality. Lloyd's attempt to grapple with the moral and social place of same sex love is explored in greater detail below but the fact that Lloyd himself was drawn to men does color any interpretation of his choice of Wilde as textual frame for his novel. Though Lloyd's novels are little known among critics of homosexuality in American literature, *The Dwellers in the Vale Sunrise* is strongly marked by Lloyd's homoerotic desires. The main character, Forrest Westwood, reflects what the historian Laurence Veysey characterizes as "the author's bisexual imagination."<sup>79</sup> Westwood, who reads Greek and Latin and wears nothing but a pair of knee-length trousers, is a combination of the Native American and Classical literary signifiers of same-sex desire.<sup>80</sup> The novel

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<sup>79</sup> Veysey, *Communal Experiments*, 20.

<sup>80</sup> See Robert K. Martin, "Knights-Errant and Gothic Seducers: The Representation of Male Friendship in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," in *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, eds. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey Jr. (New York: Meridian, 1989). Native Americans, whom Lloyd saw as the apotheosis of the "natural man," fascinated him. "The American aborigine," he wrote, "was the noblest savage of his time, if not all time." Lloyd believed that Indian society was a prime example of anarchist ideas put into practice. "Here," he wrote, "we find a remarkable condition of individual liberty and responsibility, equality, fraternity, and solidarity." (*Liberty*, 23 November 1889, 6.) In the early 1900s, Lloyd traveled to the Southwest—"at the

is replete with passages in which Westwood's body is lovingly described. Westwood, though a member of The Tribe, is a singularly independent figure. He exists outside of the bonds of social convention and heterosexual pairing, living his life on the social and erotic margins of respectability. *The Dwellers in the Vale Sunrise* belongs to genre of homoerotic writing that the literary historian Gifford has identified as the "natural model" of homoerotic representation which celebrates "the homosocial dream of the Bachelor and the Brotherhood, nearly always idealized to some degree, often featuring an Edenic landscape of freedom away from the pressures of the civilized world, where men could live with men and be free of constraints."<sup>81</sup> The citation of Wilde's most famous political text would quite usefully frame Lloyd's homoerotic literary utopia.

In addition to excerpts of Wilde's poetry and prose, articles on Wilde were featured in anarchist publications. The first issue *The Free Spirit*, for example, featured a story by Rose Florence Freeman entitled "Oscar Wilde," which describes her experience of encountering Wilde's work as a young girl. Her experience deeply shaped Freeman's views of sexuality and moral boundaries. After reading a story by Wilde, Freeman approached a librarian to find out more about the author. "She told me the skeleton facts and in her eyes I read evasion." When Freeman "asked what he had done that they sent him to prison," the librarian gave an "equivocal reply." Eventually "and by persistent effort I discovered Oscar Wilde was sent to prison for a

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invitation of my gentle and warm-hearted Pima friend, Edward Herbert Weston"—and wrote a study entitled *Aw-aw Tam Indian Nights*, in which he chronicled the "mystic and legendary tales" of the "simple, kindly, hospitable people" he lived with. See John William Lloyd, *Aw-aw-tam Indian Nights; Being the Myths and Legends of the Pimas of Arizona* (Westfield, NJ: The Lloyd Group, 1911).

<sup>81</sup> James Gifford, *Daynesford's Library: American Homosexual Writing, 1900 – 1913* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 12-13.

sin which was called unnatural.” Freeman rejects this condemnation, seeing in Wilde a spirit “utterly free and Pagan.” She “conceded to every being the right of sexual expression in whatever mode best enhanced his dream or fulfilled his desire.” Despite the best efforts of those who condemned and continued to silence him Wilde’s voice emerged triumphant. “Those who have strutted before you,” Freeman concludes, “mouthing their little morals and chuckling at your downfall have themselves been consigned to that oblivion toward which they so anxiously and with such foolish futility endeavored to turn you, their superior.”<sup>82</sup> This vision of a triumphant Wilde was an apt symbol of Rose’s own rejection of the values of the society in which she lived.

In several texts anarchists identified themselves with Wilde. In 1916 Ben Reitman, Goldman’s lover and lecture tour organizer, published a poem entitled “Vengeance” in *Mother Earth*. Reitman wrote the poem while imprisoned for the distribution of birth control information. Reitman’s poem, though it does not rise to the level of “The Ballad of Reading Goal” or *De Profundis*, contains many of the same themes as Wilde’s prison texts. The fact that Reitman was jailed for a sex crime makes the comparison with Wilde’s ordeal all the more compelling. “Vengeance” denounces those who put him behind “cruel steel walls” and denounces the “District Attorney” who “can send 100,000 to prison” and the “Judge who can take the light and liberty from 10,000 people.”<sup>83</sup> These agents of the state are complicit in an unjust and oppressive system. Reitman makes the comparison between his own imprisonment for a sex crime and that of Wilde by explicitly referencing Wilde

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<sup>82</sup> Rose Florence Freeman, “Oscar Wilde,” *The Free Spirit*, Volume I, Issue I, 1919, 18 – 20.

<sup>83</sup> Ben Reitman, “Vengeance,” *Mother Earth*, July 1916, 529.

throughout his poem. In one passage Reitman tells his reader “I have been reading . . . Wilde” and, in direct emulation of Wilde he signs his poem using only his cell number, “Cell 424.” In Reitman’s poem and other anarchist texts Wilde functioned as a powerful symbol with which to express the way in which the state worked to enforce sexual norms through imprisonment, censorship, and harassment. The anarchist publication *Free Society* echoed this sentiment when it printed an excerpt from “Ballad of Reading Gaol” under a new title: “The Prisoners.”<sup>84</sup>

In January 1917 Berkman placed an excerpt from Wilde’s poem “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” on the cover of his periodical *The Blast*. One of the most quoted passages from the poem it reads: “But this I know, that every law that men have made for man, since first man took his brother’s life, And the sad world began, but straws the wheat and saves the chaff with a most evil fan.” The excerpt is overlaid on an illustration by Robert Minor that depicts a lynch mob chasing a lone man who is running for his life. In the background of this image of mob violence a scaffolds loom. This lone figure could be Wilde; certainly the use of the poet’s words would suggest this. The depiction of a lone man running from a mob was very much in keeping with how the anarchist portrayed Wilde’s treatment by his tormentors. But the figure could also be an anarchist running from his persecutors. At the time the cover was published anarchists had come under increasing attack due to the patriotic hysteria stirred up by the mounting debate concerning the entry of the United States into World War I. Berkman and others on the left felt besieged by those who were beating the drums of war and accusing their opponents of being un-American. The image was prescient. *The Blast* was shut down by the authorities shortly after the

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<sup>84</sup> “The Prisoners,” *Free Society*, August 25, 1901, 1.

issue appeared. Wilde, here signified by the quotation of his text, had become a powerful symbol to the anarchists. He was a tragic figure with whom the anarchists could identify with and on whose behalf the anarchists made their case.

Even before the trial and imprisonment that made him a martyr in their eyes, Wilde had appealed to the anarchists. The libertarian tone and content of Wilde's political writing and his occasional ideological self-identifications with anarchism were well known among his anarchist readers. Wilde's imprisonment cemented his political bond with the anarchist. Anarchists like Goldman or Berkman identified themselves with Wilde's experience. The defense of homosexuality became a way for them to expose the workings of the "the miserable hypocrites" who acted through the state in the name of morality, justice, and the defense of order. Wilde's ideas about the value of individualism and the injustice of society as it was then organized echoed many of their own. With his conviction, imprisonment, and early death Wilde rose to the level of a martyr. He came to signify something more than the prejudice against what Goldman called "inversion, perversion, and the question of sex variation." Wilde became a symbol of the struggle to transform society that the anarchists were pursuing. Sexual freedom, personal liberty, the freedom from coercion by the state, and the ideals expressed in *The Soul of a Man Under Socialism*, all came together in the figure of Wilde. By defending Wilde's right to love whom so ever he wished the anarchist sex radicals were making a larger claim about the quality of the just society. From 1895 on the defense of homosexuality was no longer a peripheral concern for the American anarchists but a persistent topic of discussion.

### Chapter Three: Free Comrades: Whitman and the Shifting Grounds of the Politics of Homosexuality

In 1905 Emma Goldman and her comrades gathered at her New York apartment to plan the launch of her new journal, *The Open Road*. The title was inspired by the work of Walt Whitman, a celebrated figure among many anarchists who saw in his work a lyrical validation of their own beliefs. Goldman felt that Whitman was “the most universal, cosmopolitan, and human of the American writers.”<sup>1</sup> Goldman’s associate Leonard Abbott claimed that “The central motive of Whitman’s best-known and most characteristic poetry is revolutionary.”<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, *The Open Road* was already taken and Goldman was forced to choose a new title, *Mother Earth*. But Goldman continued to champion Whitman. In a 1907 *Mother Earth* article entitled “On the Road,” Goldman urged her readers to follow Whitman on the “open road, strong limbed, careless, child-like, full of the joy of life, carrying the message of liberty, the gladness of human comradeship.” This bracing message of adventure, exploration and solidarity reflected Goldman’s understanding of Whitman as a herald of a new world. Whitman’s poetic voice depicted “wonderful vistas” which indicated a way out of the cramped society against which the anarchists struggled.<sup>3</sup>

Among the destinations that Whitman’s “open road” suggested to his anarchist readers was sexual freedom. Whitman’s work, Leonard Abbott declared,

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Drinnon, *Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 160.

<sup>2</sup> Leonard Abbott in *The Centenary of Walt Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass,” Selected Excerpts From the Writings of Various Authors*, ed. Joseph Ishill (Berkeley Heights, N.J.: Oriole Press, 1955), 55.

<sup>3</sup> Emma Goldman, “On the Road,” *Mother Earth*, April, 1907, 65. On the history of *Mother Earth* see Peter Glassgold, “Introduction: The Life and Death of *Mother Earth*,” in *Anarchy: An Anthology of Emma Goldman’s Mother Earth*, ed. Peter Glassgold (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2001), xv – xxxvi.

constituted “a direct assault upon Puritanism” which “called for a complete revision of sex-values.”<sup>4</sup> In both form and content the writings of the “Good Gray Poet,” as Whitman was sometimes called, presented a challenge to the genteel tradition of Victorian reticence. “No one can read ‘*Leaves of Grass*,’” wrote a contributor to the anarchist journal *Free Society* “without feeling that sex is sacred to Whitman in a way almost new to the unilluminated world.”<sup>5</sup> Whitman challenged the “distinction between sexual (bad) and spiritual (good)” hierarchy of values that, according to Jonathan Ned Katz “haunted” American culture.<sup>6</sup> In an essay entitled “Walt Whitman: Poet of the Human Whole,” William Thurston Brown declared that “If Whitman had done nothing else than sing the sacredness of the body and declare that the body is just as divine, just as clean, just as holy, just as sacred as ever the soul has been thought to be, he would have earned the never-dying gratitude of all the unborn myriads of human beings that are to come into this human world.”<sup>7</sup>

The anarchists were not alone in seeing in Whitman’s work a message of sexual liberation. Among Whitman’s most passionate admirers were readers who saw in him a defender of homoerotic desire. According to Leonard Abbott, “Homosexuals all over the world have looked toward Whitman as toward a leader.”<sup>8</sup> Whitman’s work provided these readers a language to discuss same-sex love free of the taint of sin, crime, degeneration, and insanity. The English critic John Addington Symonds wrote of Whitman that “no man in the modern world has expressed so

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<sup>4</sup> Leonard Abbott in *The Centenary of Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass,"* 55.

<sup>5</sup> W.F.B., “Literature: Review of Milla Tupper Maynard’s Walt Whitman,” *Free Society*, March 8, 1903, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Katz, *Love Stories*, 249.

<sup>7</sup> William Thurston Brown, *Walt Whitman: Poet of the Human Whole* (Portland: The Modern School, n.d.), 27

<sup>8</sup> Leonard Abbott, “The Anarchist Side of Walt Whitman,” *The Road To Freedom*, March, 1926, 2

strong a conviction that ‘manly attachments,’ ‘athletic love,’ [and] ‘the high towering love of comrades,’ is a main factor of human life, a virtue upon which society will have to rest, and a passion equal in its permanence and intensity to sexual affection.”<sup>9</sup> Symonds and other readers were especially responsive to Whitman’s Calamus poems that described love between men as “the dear love of comrades.” Edward Carpenter, for example, first encountered Whitman’s work at the age of twenty-five. “What made me cling to [Whitman] from the beginning,” he later recalled, “was largely the poems which celebrate comradeship. That thought so near and dear and personal to me, I had never before seen or heard fairly expressed; even in Plato and the Greek authors there have been something wanting (so I thought).”<sup>10</sup> Carpenter’s encounter with Whitman’s work shaped him profoundly. In addition to writing essays on the subject of sexuality, including same-sex love, Carpenter composed a collection of poems entitled *Towards Democracy* that echoed the themes of *Leaves of Grass*.

Whitman’s poetry and the homoerotic interpretations of Whitman’s work produced by critics like Carpenter influenced a number of anarchist sex radicals. Whitman was a key figure through which a politics of homosexuality emerged in the anarchist movement. In the early twentieth century the nature and quality of the erotic desire represented in Whitman’s work became the topic of conversation among a number of anarchist sex radicals. Unlike Wilde, however, Whitman was not involved in a dramatic scandal, trial, or moment when the subject of homosexuality was brought into sharp, public visibility. Whitman obscured his erotic attraction to

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<sup>9</sup> John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion: A Classic Study of Homosexuality* (New York: Bell Publishing Company, 1984 [1896]), 183. See also John Addington Symonds, *Walt Whitman: A Study* (London: John C. Nimmo, 1893).

<sup>10</sup> Edward Carpenter in *The Centenary of Walt Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass,”* 30.

men and on at least one occasion he explicitly rejected the suggestion that his work represented same-sex desire.<sup>11</sup> Not surprisingly therefore anarchist discussions of Whitman's work in relationship to sexuality are uneven, complex, and shifted over time. While some saw in his celebration of comradeship a representation of same-sex desire others read an affirmation of intense friendship and social bonds. In the nineteenth century the anarchists' discussions of Whitman's work and sexuality was largely concerned with the legitimate boundaries and expression of heterosexual desire. It is only in the twentieth century that discussions of Whitman's work in relationship to homosexuality begin to appear in the anarchist press. This process mirrors the way in which ideas about homosexuality evolved in the opening decades of the twentieth century. During this period the meaning of Whitman's work and what it implied about its author and admirers reflected the increased salience of the understanding of the homosexual as a distinct personality type and of sexuality as a key to understanding human psychology.

By tracing the anarchist discussions of Whitman and sexuality carried out by a number of anarchists—among them Benjamin Tucker, John William Lloyd, Leonard Abbott and Emma Goldman—we can get some sense of the ways in which the shifting sexual norms and beliefs of the society in which they operated shaped the anarchist's politics of homosexuality. Lloyd, in particular, is an interesting figure in this regard. In the early twentieth century Lloyd made a number of statements regarding the social and ethical status of homosexuality with specific reference to Whitman. Lloyd referenced Whitman's work in direct and indirect ways in an attempt to construct a politics of homosexuality. Lloyd's relationship with Whitman

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<sup>11</sup> Katz, *Love Stories*, 257 – 271.

was mediated by his reading of the writing of Carpenter and other European critics and sex radicals whose changing interpretation of Whitman's work brought the "Good Gray Poet's" erotic nature in to ever-sharper focus. But Lloyd had difficulty negotiating the rapidly changing sexual and political landscape of the early twentieth century. Ultimately he found the unstable sexual landscape too treacherous for him to negotiate. Goldman—in the years following her expulsion from the United States—also found her views of Whitman's sexuality and the meaning of his work dramatically altered by her encounter with European critics of the "good gray poet's" work. As in the case with Wilde, American anarchist sex radical's treatment of Whitman's sexuality and the political implications of those understandings were profoundly shaped by the work of European sex radicals.

In the nineteenth century the discussion of the erotic nature of Whitman's work by American critics and readers focused on poems that represented relations between men and women. There were, for example, numerous attacks on Whitman's series of poems grouped under the title "The Children of Adam," which contained works such as "A Woman Waits for Me." In this poem Whitman declares that "all were lacking if sex were lacking" and that "I pour the stuff to start sons and daughters fit for these States, I press with slow rude muscle."<sup>12</sup> This was not the kind of language that went unnoticed. In 1897, for example, the anarchist journal, *The Firebrand*, was censored for reprinting "A Woman Waits for Me." But until the twentieth century, Whitman's homoerotic texts, notably his "Calamus" poems, beloved of readers such as Carpenter and Symonds, elicited little in the way of hostile

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<sup>12</sup> Walt Whitman, "A Woman Waits For Me," *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman: Two Volumes in One* with an introduction by Malcolm Cowley, (Garden City: Garden City Books, 1948), 124.

commentary. This is not to say that the homoerotic elements of Whitman's work went completely unnoticed. As early as 1855, for example, Rufus Griswold published one of the few nineteenth century discussions of the homoerotic currents in Whitman's work. He condemned Whitman as a being a "monster" of "vileness" and denounced his work for representing the "*Peccatum illud horribile, inter Christianos non nominandum*," ["the horrible sin not to be named among Christians"] a traditional legal and religious phrase used to name same-sex acts.<sup>13</sup> But Griswold's attack, though ferocious, was little commented upon; its indirect language reflected the difficulty of dealing with "sins" thought so "horrible" that they could "not be named among Christians." That he used Latin rather than English in making his charge made his accusation all that more obscure.

The anarchist discussions of Whitman and his work in the nineteenth century reflected the prevailing interpretations of the erotic implications of Whitman's work. The discussions and debates that did occur in the movement made reference to illicit relations between men and women. In 1882, for example, Benjamin Tucker engaged in a fight over the attempt to censor *Leaves of Grass*. In the spring of that year Oliver Stevens, the district attorney of Suffolk County, Massachusetts moved to prevent Whitman's publisher, James R. Osgood, from bringing out a second edition of *Leaves of Grass* and sought to ban the sale of the book in the Boston area. Osgood buckled under the pressure and Whitman was forced to find another publisher. In response to the district attorney's actions Tucker procured a number of copies of the *Leaves of Grass* from Whitman's new publisher. He then "inserted an advertisement

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Byrne R. S. Fone, *A Road to Stonewall, 1750 – 1969: Male Homosexuality and Homophobia in English and American Literature* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 43.

conspicuously in the daily papers of Boston, as well as my own journal, offering the book for sale.” In other words, Tucker refused to allow Whitman’s work to be censored; he defied the actions of the district attorney through direct action. Tucker’s bold move succeeded. Within the year Tucker reported to *Liberty’s* readers “‘Leaves of Grass’ is now sold openly by nearly all the Boston booksellers. I have won my victory, and the guardians of Massachusetts morality have ignominiously retreated.”<sup>14</sup>

Though Whitman’s work was attacked because of its supposedly salacious nature, neither Stevens nor Tucker make any mention of homoerotic elements in Whitman’s work. To their eyes, as to most of their contemporaries, Whitman’s defense of comradeship did not read as homoerotic. Nineteenth-century Americans did not equate closeness between men—even if expressed with kisses and hugs—with homosexuality. “Intense, even romantic man-to-man friendships,” writes Jonathan Ned Katz, “were a world apart in the era’s consciousness from the sensual universe of mutual masturbation and the legal universe of ‘sodomy,’ ‘buggery,’ and the ‘crime against nature’ (legally, men’s anal intercourse with men, boys, women and girls, and human’s intercourse with beasts).”<sup>15</sup> Romantic friendships between members of the same sex were a respectable and valued element of middle-class social life. Homosexuality, which was identified with the sin of sodomy and not with a specific personality type, was ill defined. This conceptual obscurity meant that a wide range of same-sex intimacy was tolerated. “Romantic lovers and sodomites,” writes Katz, “inhabited different spheres, leaving a great unmapped space between them.”<sup>16</sup> In the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth century Whitman’s depiction of “the

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<sup>14</sup> Benjamin Tucker in *The Centenary of Walt Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass,”* 66 - 74.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Ned Katz, *Love Stories*, 6.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

manly love of comrades” was taken to be a commonplace, if somewhat excited, praise of friendship. It was only at the turn of the century that such close bonds began to be suspect.<sup>17</sup> Whitman, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues, straddles the homosocial world of the nineteenth century and the “homosexual/homophobic world” of the twentieth century.<sup>18</sup> The relative lack of attention paid to the homoerotic content in Whitman’s work in the nineteenth century was a function of fact that “the homosexual” was an inchoate figure. It would not be until the twentieth century that a more clearly defined notion of a “homosexual Whitman” and a language that could express such a concept would emerge.

Though Tucker makes no mention of the homoerotic elements of Whitman’s work his defense of Whitman did contribute, indirectly, to Tucker’s politics of homosexuality. The efforts to censor Whitman sharpened Tucker’s critique of State regulation of public morals and personal behavior. Reflecting on his fight with Stevens over the merits of Whitman’s work, Tucker mocked “the ever watchful State” that rushes to protect “pure and innocent youth” from the harmful effects of thoughts and words. Tucker admitted that some might be offended by Whitman’s frank discussion of the body but argued that the costs of censorship are much higher. And though he hardly believed that reading Whitman would lead to illicit behavior, Tucker insisted that even were this true the costs of suppressing sexuality were too great. “There is no desire, however low,” Tucker insisted, “whose satisfaction is so

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<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of the periodization of this change see Steven Seidman, *Romantic Longings: Love in America, 1830 – 1980* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 109 – 117. See also “Introduction,” In *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, eds. Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey Jr. (New York: New American Library, 1989), 5.

<sup>18</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 202. Sedgwick focuses on English readers of Whitman, among them John Addington Symonds and Edward Carpenter.

fraught with evil consequences to mankind as the desire to rule, and its worst manifestation is seen when it is directed against the tongues and pens and thoughts of men and women.” Tucker maintained that the state, and not works of literature, was the real threat to the health of society. “Abolish the State,” he concluded, “and leave obscenity run its course.”<sup>19</sup> Tucker’s line of reasoning in his attack on Stevens was almost exactly the same that he employed in responding to what he called the “criminal jailers of Oscar Wilde” some thirteen years after his fight with “the guardians of Massachusetts morality.”

Like Goldman’s *Mother Earth*, Tucker’s journal *Liberty* carried numerous discussions of Whitman’s work and their relevance to anarchism. “Walt Whitman,” Tucker wrote, “is an economist as well as a poet—and of the right and radical sort too.”<sup>20</sup> *Liberty* reprinted critical articles on Whitman and offered readers the opportunity to order Whitman’s work. Tucker was keen to remind his readership that he had stood by Whitman in the poet’s hour of need. *Liberty* even reported on the lives of Whitman’s associates. When William Douglass O’Conner, one of Whitman’s earliest admirers, died in 1889, *Liberty* carried an extensive obituary written by Horace Traubel, Whitman’s caretaker and one of his most devoted literary progeny. Whitman, who followed Tucker ever since being defended by him in 1882, wrote approvingly of the O’Conner obituary to friends.<sup>21</sup> It is clear from his conversations with Traubel and others that Whitman was a reader of *Liberty*. Whitman was not an anarchist—despite the best efforts of some of his radical readers

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<sup>19</sup> Benjamin Tucker, “Obscenity and the State,” *Liberty*, 27 May 1882, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Benjamin Tucker, “On Picket Duty,” *Liberty*, October 28, 1882, 1

<sup>21</sup> *Walt Whitman: The Correspondence: Volume IV: 1886 – 1889*, ed. Edwin Havilland Miller (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 372.

to make him so—but he did admire the fire of the anarchists. The fact that Tucker and other anarchists sex radicals were among his defenders in the 1870s and 1880s figured greatly in shaping Whitman’s regard. “Tucker,” Whitman told Traubel, “did brave things for ‘Leaves of Grass’ when brave things were rare. I could not forget that.”<sup>22</sup>

One of the most vocal advocates of Whitman in the pages of *Liberty* was John William Lloyd. In a poem entitled “Mount Walt Whitman,” written on the occasion of Whitman’s death in 1891, Lloyd mourned the passing of the “great, gray rock.” Whitman, Lloyd declared, was the “poet of Nature, comrade of free men” whose passing is scarcely to be believed. “Other poets have been Olympian” Lloyd wrote, “But you are Olympus itself.”<sup>23</sup> Lloyd’s admiration of Whitman was directly related to the poet’s erotic sensibility. In an essay on Whitman’s poetry published in *Liberty* in 1892, Lloyd praised what he saw as Whitman’s honesty in treating the body and sexuality. Whitman, Lloyd wrote, had “noble contempt for mealy-mouthedness which the great and the greatly-in-earnest have always shown, his words go to the birth of things, without shame or sham.” He was the poet of “the rude, blunt man of simple ideas, direct action, and untamed loves and hates.”<sup>24</sup> So passionate was Lloyd’s advocacy of Whitman that Lloyd’s own sexual politics were compared to that of Whitman. “Comrade Lloyd,” wrote C. H. Cheyese, “is a passionate lover of freedom, and believing, like Whitman, that sex is the basis of all things, he unhesitatingly

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Tucker in *The Centenary of Walt Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass,”* 73.

<sup>23</sup> John William Lloyd, “Mount Walt Whitman,” *Egoism*, May 1892, 1.

<sup>24</sup> John William Lloyd, “A Poet of Nature,” *Liberty*, May 7, 1892, 3

voices his thought on sexual relations.”<sup>25</sup> Lloyd’s feelings for Whitman were such that he became identified with the “Good Gray Poet” within the movement.

In October 1902, Lloyd returned to a discussion of Whitman and sexuality. No longer a contributor to *Liberty*, Lloyd published his essay in *The Free Comrade*, a small journal he wrote and edited. The very title of Lloyd’s journal echoes Whitman’s rhetoric of the “manly love of comrades.” Lloyd began by resolutely affirming his attraction to the opposite sex. “The love of man for woman has been known to me, I can literally say, from my infancy. An aureola of beauty and divinity surrounded all women in my thoughts—a feeling that has rather grown with the years than lessened.” But recently, Lloyd continued, the range of his desire had expanded to encompass men as well as women “so that now the whole human race, in general and particular” stood before him “in innate worshipfulness and loveliness.” Men, as well as women, fired Lloyd’s desire—illuminated as they were in an “aureola of beauty and divinity.” This statement, though indirect and cautiously asexual, is the strongest public declaration that Lloyd ever makes about his own erotic interest in men.<sup>26</sup>

In his essay Lloyd states that two men transformed his views on the subject of love and sex: Walt Whitman and Edward Carpenter. “I owe much,” he wrote, “to the teaching of Whitman and Carpenter.” They were responsible for awakening in Lloyd a love of “the whole human race”—that is, men as well as women—and giving him a vocabulary with which to express his feelings. Carpenter and Whitman’s sexual ethics were refreshingly free of traditional injunctions against sexual pleasure. “Whitman and Carpenter,” wrote Lloyd, “rejoice in the fleshly-body of the human soul, which to

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<sup>25</sup> C. H. Cheyse, “Dawn Thought,” *Discontent*, April 10, 1901, 1.

<sup>26</sup> Lloyd, *The Free Comrade*, October 1902, 6.

them continually smiles from every crevice.” According to Lloyd the two poets had moved beyond the “abominable asceticism which grew like a fungus on early Christianity” and which holds “all normal human joys and functions as the baits on Hell’s trap.” Their ethics allowed for an open defense of the body; an ethics of life rooted firmly in the natural expression of human desire. By arguing that Whitman and Carpenter’s work could serve as a basis for a sex positive ethics, Lloyd avoided having to directly discuss the sin of sodomy.<sup>27</sup>

Though Lloyd was particularly effusive in regards to Carpenter’s work, he recognized the Englishman’s debt to the writings of Whitman. “Carpenter is to Whitman,” Lloyd wrote, “as Elisha to Elijah, as John to Jesus, as Plato to Socrates.”<sup>28</sup> Carpenter himself was the first to acknowledge his debt to Whitman. In an essay that appeared in the same year as Lloyd’s essay was published, Carpenter wrote that “Whitman by his great power, originality, and initiative, as well as by his deep insight and wide vision, is in many ways the inaugurator of a new era of mankind; and it is especially interesting to find that this idea of comradeship, and of its establishment as a *social institution*, plays so important a part with him.”<sup>29</sup> Compared to “Whitman’s full-blooded, copious, rank, masculine style” Carpenter felt that his own was “milder ... as of the moon compared with the sun.”<sup>30</sup> A number of critics echoed Carpenter’s remarks. Havelock Ellis’s first impression of Carpenter’s work was that it was

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Iolaus: An Anthology of Friendship*, (New York: Pagan Press, 1982 [1902]), 188.

<sup>30</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Towards Democracy* (London: Gay Men’s Press, 1985 [1885]), 415.

“Whitman and water.”<sup>31</sup> Lloyd was more kind. Carpenter was, for Lloyd,

“Whitman’s truest comrade, understood him best, is his best interpreter.”<sup>32</sup>

Lloyd focused on Carpenter’s work rather than Whitman’s in his 1902 article because Carpenter, unlike Whitman, dealt explicitly with same-sex desire in his writing. Carpenter began writing about the topic of same-sex love in the closing years of the nineteenth century. At first these essays were shown only to friends. In the mid-1890s, however, the Manchester Labour Press published a number of pamphlets, notably *Homogenic Love, and Its Place in a Free Society* and *An Unknown People*, in which Carpenter explored what he called “homogenic love.” “Homogenic” like “Uranian” and the “Intermediate Sex” were all terms Carpenter used to discuss same-sex erotic relationships. Initially Carpenter’s works, which did not have a broad distribution, circulated through private networks, particularly those in progressive and radical circles. That Lloyd was familiar with these works indicates that Carpenter’s early writings on homosexuality traveled across the Atlantic. Carpenter also produced work that hinted at but did not explicitly deal with the topic of homosexuality. These texts were published by mainstream printers and had a broad circulation in both England and the United States. For example, in the same year that Lloyd wrote his essay Carpenter published *Iolalus: An Anthology of Friendship*, which gathered together historical and literary examples of intense same-sex friendships. The title refers to the Greek, demigod Hercules’s love for the mortal Iolalus—an impeccable touchstone for a treatment same-sex love. Though Carpenter devotes much of his book to a study of Greek texts he dedicated an entire chapter of

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<sup>31</sup> Havelock Ellis, *My Life* (London: Neville Spearman, 1967), 163.

<sup>32</sup> John William Lloyd, *The Free Comrade*, October 1910, 46.

*Iolaus* to Whitman's poetry of "comradeship." According to Jonathan Ned Katz, *Iolaus* was "one of the first collections of homosexually relevant documents of male-male intimacy."<sup>33</sup>

Carpenter's writings on same-sex love were critical in the development of Lloyd's sexual politics. In his 1902 *Free Comrade* article Lloyd makes specific reference to a number of Carpenter's works. He clearly indicates the extent to which the English sex radical's work influenced his thinking:

I think most of the moderns feel as I felt—that the love of man for man, and woman for woman was an abnormal if not a sinister thing, if at all intense or inspired by physical beauty. And perhaps it is well for Carpenter in his little books on "Homogenic Love," "An Unknown People," and in the recent "Iolaus," to remind us that friendship between those of the same sex is a spontaneous and inborn passion—in every way equal in intensity and tragedy to that between the sexes—to a multitude of human beings in our midst, and that among the ancient Greeks it was not only a respectable love, but the love, about which all the honor and joy and pride of the people centered.<sup>34</sup>

Lloyd was drawn to Carpenter's representation of homosexuality as a deep and warm friendship. As depicted in Carpenter's *Iolaus*, homosexuality resembled nothing so much as the love that supposedly flourished among Greek warriors. The marshalling of Greek texts were important since as Lloyd points out, same-sex relationships had a "respectable" place in that society. As a great admirer of Whitman, Lloyd was struck by Carpenter's claim that Whitman's work will usher in a new Greek age.

Whitman's work suggested to both men that the "social institution" of comradeship, which is too often "socially denied and ignored", will "arise again, and become a recognized factor of modern life."<sup>35</sup> Through accumulating examples of same-sex

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<sup>33</sup> Katz, *Gay American History*, 364.

<sup>34</sup> John William Lloyd, *The Free Comrade*, October 1902, 6-7.

<sup>35</sup> Carpenter, *Iolaus*, 188 – 189.

friendship Carpenter sought to develop a respectable genealogy for homogenic love. He hoped to show, in Lloyd's words, that "the love of a man for his comrade was a passion pure and divine." Lloyd was keenly aware of the power of Carpenter's strategy. Seen in the light of thousands of years of "passion pure and divine" homosexuality was hardly "abnormal" or "sinister." On the contrary it was, according to Lloyd, "utterly altruistic, faithful unto death," equal in quality and kind to the love "common between men and women of our day."<sup>36</sup> The language and terms associated with friendship could describe passionate attachment between members of the same sex without recourse to the language of sin, crime, or pathology.

In his essay, Lloyd sought to refute the notion that male homosexuality was effeminate. "It would be easy to show," he wrote, "that in almost every instance such homogenic love takes place where national ideas are military and masculine."<sup>37</sup> By insisting on the masculine nature of male-same sex love Lloyd was distancing himself from the figure of the "fairy," a man who signaled his erotic attraction to other men through his inversion of the masculine conventions of gait, dress, and mannerisms. Because of their transgression of gender and sexual norms fairies were subject to acts of ferocious violence. Earl Lind, a self-described "fairy" and the author of the 1918 memoir *The Autobiography of an Androgyne*, tells of being thrown off an army base by a soldier named "Murphy." According to Lind, Murphy toyed with him by lifting him by his hair, carrying him to the gate of the base, and throwing him on the road, kicking him and "crying out for me to get along home, while I was screaming in

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<sup>36</sup>John William Lloyd, *The Free Comrade*, October 1902., 7.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 6-7.

fright.”<sup>38</sup> This was not unusual treatment. In fact soldiers, according to Lind, were “the easiest of conquests”; those outside the armed services were less likely to treat him well.<sup>39</sup> In addition to enduring near constant acts of violence Lind was subject to verbal attacks and blackmail, behavior that accompanied almost all his sexual and social relations. Given the violence and social ostracism “fairies” faced it is not surprising that Lloyd, like Carpenter, John Addington Symonds, and others influenced by Whitman, argued “same-sex passion is quintessentially manly.”<sup>40</sup> These men clung to Whitman’s figure of the comrade in part because it provided them with protection against the accusation that they were fairies.

Lloyd concluded his discussion of Carpenter’s sexual politics by asking his readers to open themselves up to the possibility of variety in love. This call for tolerance places homosexuality within a broad spectrum of loving and noble human relations:

When we once enlarge ourselves on this matter of love, draw a free breath, so to speak, and take a really brave look around, we shall find that nothing but our superstitions on one hand and our selfish meanness on the other has kept us from a whole world of love and lovers always ready and waiting for us. There is no reason why every kind of love that has ever been known to man should not be accepted,

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<sup>38</sup> Earl Lind, *Autobiography of an Androgyne* (New York: Medico-Legal Journal, 1918), 212-3. On the figure of the fairy see George Chauncey, *Gay New York*. In his laudable attempt to emphasize the resistance and inventiveness of the men he studied, Chauncey acknowledges but downplays the violence fairies dealt with on a near-daily basis. For example, while he makes use of Lind’s autobiography he does not discuss his treatment when visiting army bases. And though Chauncey makes the argument that fairies were fairly well integrated into working class culture we know very little about the texture of everyday life of men such as Lind. How for example, did tradespeople, landlords, and employers outside of the sex and entertainment business treat fairies? Also absent from Chauncey’s study is any discussion of the role of religion in shaping the view of same-sex sexuality. There is admittedly little information on such matters but absence of negative reports hardly supports the contention there was relatively little prejudice. The very sources that seem to indicate a relative tolerance of fairies among the working class are also filled with examples of incredible violence and hatred.

<sup>39</sup> Lind, *Autobiography of an Androgyne*, 117.

<sup>40</sup> Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde, and the Queer Moment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 110.

purified, understood, embraced, and wisely made to yield its joy and service to the life of every one of us. Larger! Larger! —Let us be more! Let us give and accept more.<sup>41</sup>

“Larger” was a key term in Lloyd’s political rhetoric. He may have acquired the term from Carpenter, who used the term “larger Socialism” to describe his own politics.<sup>42</sup> In both men’s political lexicon “larger” carries both the connotation of the moral high ground and an implicit endorsement of the diversity of sexual desire and activity. In this passage Lloyd implies that to restrict one’s inclinations or to restrict those of others bespeaks a limited understanding of the multiplicity of human desire. This paean to sexual tolerance is very much in keeping with anarchist arguments regarding the expression of desire free of external authority.

Lloyd presents same-sex eroticism as being squarely within a normalizing range of a “larger love”; it is neither deviant nor marked as sharply distinct from heterosexual desire. “If you have the Larger Love,” he wrote in 1901, “every woman will be to you as lover, mother, sister, or daughter, and every man will be to you a lover, father, brother, or son.”<sup>43</sup> This eroticized human family is at the very least open to the possibility of same-sex relations. Every person regardless of gender presents the possibility of friendship or sex—the two not being mutually exclusive. Elsewhere Lloyd would go further, stating in an essay published in 1902 that “Our Hero must be that man or woman who can love the most men and women in the most beautiful, large, tender, and fearless way.”<sup>44</sup> In a poem published that same year entitled “Not the Lover Who Loves But Me,” Lloyd employed the language of comradeship and

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<sup>41</sup> Lloyd, *The Free Comrade*, October 1902, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter, 1844-1929: Prophet of Human Fellowship* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 115.

<sup>43</sup> John William Lloyd, *The Free Comrade*, September 1901, 7.

<sup>44</sup> Lloyd, *The Free Comrade*, August 1902, 6.

“largeness” to represent an eros which presented a reader with a multiplicity of possibilities regarding the gender, number, and nature of the lovers portrayed. “I love liberty more than all,” wrote Lloyd, “My lover must love immensity/And all the great things more than me.../the comrade-touch is the closest kiss.”<sup>45</sup> These are not unequivocal defenses of homosexual desire—but that is precisely the political effect that Lloyd sought through the use of the concept of the “larger love.” Like Whitman and Carpenter, Lloyd used “evasion and indirection [as] strategies to encode homoerotic content.”<sup>46</sup> For Lloyd, and for many of his contemporaries, the conceptual distinction between “homosexual” and “heterosexual” desire was still fuzzy. The inclusive reach of the larger love allows for a wide range of possible desires and places those desires within a spectrum of respectable relationships.

Lloyd read Carpenter and Whitman as political as well as poetic masters. This is not surprising given that both men had written essays and poetry that directly addressed political questions. Carpenter, who Lloyd felt was “the greatest man of Modern England,” was widely known among socialists for his poetry anthology entitled *Towards Democracy*.<sup>47</sup> The “democracy” that Carpenter urged his readers to seek was an individual, psychological and social liberation as well as an economic and political one. “*Towards Democracy*,” writes Stanley Pierson, “foretold of the liberation of man’s natural desires or instincts from the repressions of civilization.”<sup>48</sup> Lloyd clearly appreciated the political implications of *Towards Democracy*. In 1902

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<sup>45</sup> Lloyd, *The Free Comrade*, May 1902, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Bryne R. S. Fone, *A Road to Stonewall: Male Homosexuality and Homophobia in English and American Literature, 1750 - 1969* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 95.

<sup>47</sup> Lloyd, *The Free Comrade*, October 1902, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Stanley Pierson, “Edward Carpenter: Prophet of a Socialist Millennium,” *Victorian Studies* (March 1970), 306.

he wrote that Carpenter's anthology was "one of the great books of the world ... a book full to bursting with human love, tender, insistent, compassionate, comprehending, cheering, consoling, exalting, a book manly and virile, breathing man's and Nature's ozone from every sentence." Comparing Carpenter directly to political figures he admired, Lloyd wrote that "the 'Democracy' of which [Carpenter] prophecies and chants is the 'Anarchy' of Kropotkin, the 'institution of the dear love of comrades' of Whitman, the 'fellowship' which is the 'life' of [William] Morris—the world of emancipated men, free and loving."<sup>49</sup> This mélange of social critics, literary figures, and revolutionaries was reflective of Lloyd's eclectic politics.

Reading Whitman and Carpenter as political texts was not an idiosyncratic act on Lloyd's part. "The poet of comradeship," writes Whitman scholar Charles B. Willard, "gather[ed] about him a comitatus of devoted adherents."<sup>50</sup> A member in good standing of this group, Lloyd employed the term used by the most devoted followers of Whitman to describe themselves: "Whitmanites."<sup>51</sup> In Canada, England, and the United States Whitmanite Societies formed, sponsoring journals, lectures, and providing forums for the discussion of literature and politics.<sup>52</sup> William James, a skeptical observer of this phenomenon, wrote that Whitmanites were "infected ... with [Whitman's] love of comrades," and were eager to form societies, publish

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<sup>49</sup> Lloyd, *The Free Comrade*, October 1902, 5.

<sup>50</sup> Charles B. Willard, *Whitman's American Fame: The Growth of His Reputation in America After 1892* (Providence, R.I.: Brown University, 1950), 32. See also Harold Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England* (New York City: Russell and Russell, 1973).

<sup>51</sup> John William Lloyd, "The Overlook," *Ariel*, March 1907, 7.

<sup>52</sup> On the U.S. and England see Willard and Blodgett. On Canada see Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Homo and Hetero Sexualities, Revised Edition* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1996) 123 – 124.

journals, and write, “hymns modeled on Whitman’s ‘peculiar prosody.’”<sup>53</sup> In his book *The Changing Order: A Study of Democracy*, Oscar Lovell Trigg, one of the best known of the American Whitmanites, argued, “Whitman is the first great prophet of cosmic democracy. . . . The entire volume of ‘Leaves of Grass’ is dedicated to the cause of unity—unity in oneself, unity with others in love and comradeship, unity of states in nationalism, unity of mankind in a spiritual identification.” Like Lloyd, Trigg was also drawn to Carpenter’s work, which seemed to spell out in greater detail the political implications of Whitman’s own more evasive voice. Trigg prefaced *The Changing Order* with an excerpt from Carpenter’s *Towards Democracy*.<sup>54</sup>

Lloyd did not abandon his anarchism when he threw in his hat with the Whitmanites. He continued to be active in the anarchist movement, though, in an act that illustrates his complex—not to say confused—political affinities, he also became a member of the newly launched Socialist Party. Lloyd advocated what he called “free socialism,” a mixture of libertarian and communitarian impulses. Socialism was for Lloyd a moral impulse toward community while anarchism was a set of ideas with which to throw off the dead weight of traditional morals. Both freedom and community, Lloyd argued, were necessary elements of the good life. Leonard Abbott, one of Lloyd’s closest colleagues expressed the idea thusly: “To those who have lived selfishly and for themselves only, Socialism will come as a gospel summoning them to thought and activity in behalf of large social ends. To those who have been repressed by social custom and habit, who need, above all, self-realization

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<sup>53</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1902), 85.

<sup>54</sup> Oscar Lovell Trigg, *The Changing Order: A Study of Democracy* (Chicago: Charles Kerr & Company, 1905), 267.

and a clearer vision of their own powers, Anarchism will seem the indispensable message.”<sup>55</sup> Anarchism, which was especially useful as a key to rethinking social and sexual codes, persisted as a strong element of Lloyd’s thinking.

Of course, not every single Whitman enthusiast was engaged in a defense of homoeroticism. Some of Whitman’s fans were shocked to learn what their peers saw between the lines. One American who read John Addington Symonds’s study of Whitman acknowledged that “a part of it reaches the high water mark of criticism” but he recoiled at Symonds’s erotic reading of the Calamus poems. “It seems that ‘Calamus’ suggests sodomy to him...I think that much learning, or too much study of Greek manners and customs, hath made this Englishman mad.”<sup>56</sup> Most of Whitman’s readers interpreted the bonds of “manly comradeship” as signifying platonic intensity of feeling between and among men—including friendship and class solidarity. Such intense feelings among men were widely celebrated on the Left. Nick Salvatore’s biographical study of Eugene V. Debs, the leader of the Socialist Party, properly identifies the central place that “manliness” and “brotherly love” held in Debs’s ethical vision. Debs was given to rapturous exhortations on behalf of “the ties and bonds and obligations [that] large souled and large hearted men recognize as essential to human happiness.”<sup>57</sup> Such statements are nearly interchangeable with Lloyd and Carpenter’s apologies for homoerotic love. It was the imprecision of the boundaries between deviant and respectable desires and relationships that made Whitman’s work so attractive to Carpenter and Lloyd. Whitman’s rhetoric of comradeship was

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<sup>55</sup> John William Lloyd, *The Free Comrade*, July 1911, 157-158.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Clara Barrus, *Whitman and Burroughs: Comrades* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1968 [1931]), 313.

<sup>57</sup> Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 88.

multivalent and could speak to a specific idealization of same-sex desire and to a set of powerful political and social values.

In many ways Lloyd modeled himself on Carpenter. The two men even looked alike. Both sported beards and wore the clothes of a workingman or hardy farmer. Both men represented themselves in publications and photos in relaxed poses wearing broad hats and collarless shirts. This was, of course, the very style of dress that Whitman, who thought of himself as “one of the rougns,” favored.<sup>58</sup> But the connections between Lloyd and his English counterpart were more than sartorial. In *The Free Comrade* and elsewhere Lloyd promoted Carpenter’s work and identified his own work with that of his English counterpart. Carpenter’s politics, like Lloyd’s, was “in harmony with the main tenets of anarchist thought.”<sup>59</sup> Both men were reformers, sex radicals and champions of Walt Whitman. They embraced a non-sectarian socialism, arguing, in the words of Carpenter that, “We are all traveling along the same road.”<sup>60</sup> Lloyd’s ideological kinship with Carpenter was well known among his contemporaries. In a tribute published in England two years after the death of Carpenter in 1929, Lloyd was described as “Carpenter’s most devoted American disciple ... who did more than any other follower in the United States...to familiarize [Americans] with his doctrines.”<sup>61</sup> According to a profile by Leonard Abbott that appeared in 1902 in the pages of *The Comrade*, a publication aligned with the Socialist Party that published a wide array of Whitmanite poetry and essays,

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<sup>58</sup> Malcolm Cowley, “Introduction,” *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman*, 10.

<sup>59</sup> William O Reichert, “Edward C. Carpenter’s Socialism in Retrospective,” *Our Generation* (Fall-Winter 1987-88), 187.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter, 1844 – 1929: Prophet of Human Fellowship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 97 - 98

<sup>61</sup> Will S. Monroe, “Walt Whitman and Other American Friends of Edward Carpenter,” in *Edward Carpenter: In Appreciation*, ed. Gilbert Beith (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), 152.

Lloyd “inherited Whitman’s breadth” but he was “in a special sense the brother of Edward Carpenter.”<sup>62</sup>

It is possible that Abbott, who moved to the United States from England in the late 1890s, introduced Lloyd to Carpenter’s writings on same-sex love. Abbott met Carpenter “at a Socialist meeting in Liverpool, England” in 1895 where Carpenter “spoke on ‘Shelley and the Modern Democratic Movement.’” Following his talk Carpenter led the assembly in a chorus of “his Socialist hymn, ‘England Arise,’” a poem from his collection *Toward Democracy*.<sup>63</sup> Meeting Carpenter deeply marked Abbott. Carpenter, he wrote, “has been a living influence in my life during all this time.”<sup>64</sup> Carpenter was especially important in shaping Abbott’s sexual politics. According to the historian Paul Avrich, Abbott “specifically linked his admiration for Whitman, Carpenter, and Wilde with his interest in homosexuality.” Abbott called Carpenter a ‘homosexual saint’ and his *Love’s Coming of Age* a “modern classic.”<sup>65</sup> Abbott may have passed on copies of Carpenter’s unpublished writings on “homogenic” love to Lloyd shortly after the two men met in the early 1900s.

By 1910 Abbott joined Lloyd in editing and writing *The Free Comrade*. The two men split the pages of the journal between them. Their collaboration was a natural one as Abbott shared many of Lloyd’s interests and enthusiasms. Like Lloyd, Abbott embraced both the Socialist party and anarchism, seeing the two as complementary rather than contradictory. Abbott also shared Lloyd’s high regard for Whitman and Carpenter. In his introduction to the journal’s readership Abbott wrote,

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<sup>62</sup> Leonard Abbott, “J. William Lloyd: Brother of Carpenter and Thoreau,” *The Comrade*, July 1902, 225.

<sup>63</sup> Leonard Abbott, “Edward Carpenter, A Radical Genius,” *The Road to Freedom*, September 1931, 7.

<sup>64</sup> Leonard Abbott, “Edward Carpenter: A Recollection and a Tribute,” *The Free Spirit*, May 1919, 39.

<sup>65</sup> Paul Avrich, *The Modern School* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 172.

“the prophets of the gospel we preach are such as Shelley, William Morris, Walt Whitman, [and] Edward Carpenter.” Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* and Carpenter’s *Towards Democracy*, he added, “are the scriptures of our movement.” Both men were convinced of the importance of sexual politics. Abbott believed “that much of the storm and conflict of life during the next fifty years—perhaps the next five hundred—years will center about the problems of sex.” In the first issue of the *Free Comrade* that the two friends worked together on, Abbott and Lloyd pledged to dedicate themselves to creating a world in which sexual diversity was valued. In the pages of their magazine the two men advocated a social order in which “those who love many as spontaneously as others love one” as well as people with “homogenic” feelings could freely express their desires.<sup>66</sup>

In addition to his essays in *The Free Comrade*, Lloyd addressed same-sex eroticism in the pages of other Whitmanite journals. In 1909, for example, Lloyd broached one of his favorite subjects—sex and social change—in the pages of *Ariel*. In his essay Lloyd linked contemporary sexual mores with the economic and political rules of the day. “More than economics, more than religion,” Lloyd proclaimed, “the sex question will be the battle ground for those who stand for or against Socialism. . . . For a very little thought and watching must show any open mind that our present sex-relations are absolutely part and parcel of our present system—nay are fundamental and typical.”<sup>67</sup> In order to enact change on the factory floor, Lloyd implied, the “sex-relations” must be revolutionized. Marriage, in particular, needed to be dismantled; it was the nexus wherein gender and class oppression were fostered and maintained.

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<sup>66</sup> Leonard Abbott, *The Free Comrade*, July 1910, 11.

<sup>67</sup> John William Lloyd, “The Overlook,” *Ariel*, January 1909, 23.

Men and women in marriage became either “a parasite” or “a spiritless, dog-like slave.”<sup>68</sup>

Lloyd proposed alternatives to these deadening “sex-relations” that went far beyond abolishing marriage. Rather than prescribe a single ideal relationship, Lloyd envisioned a complex array of sexual combinations. “I believe,” he wrote, “that for a long, long time, and perhaps forever, all sex-relations will be experimented with and tried—all that ever have been and others as yet undreamed of.” The landscape would not be totally unfamiliar. In the future some “couples ... will ... cling together ... a monogamy perfect because natural, spontaneous, unforced, and irrepressible.” This is, of course, a fairly traditional description of free love unions; two people bound together by their wills alone, free of any external authority. Lloyd preferred the option of what he called “varietism” in which “demi-god men ... will draw and hold the hearts of many women” and “queenly and goddess women” will compel the “worship” of “many men.”<sup>69</sup> Varietism was a key element in Lloyd’s notion of the “larger love.” Margaret Marsh argues that varietism held particular appeal to anarchist women, who responded to its “implicit denial of emotional possession.”<sup>70</sup> This vision of an array of alternatives to marriage very much reflects the anarchist critiques of sexuality with which Lloyd was intimately familiar.

Lloyd included same-sex sex relations in the utopian future he sketched out in his essay in *Ariel*. Among the cast of characters included in Lloyd’s sexual taxonomy are those attracted to members of their own sex. According to Lloyd, in addition to those who “will come near to loving the entire opposite sex ... there will be those

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 25

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 27

<sup>70</sup> Marsh, *Anarchist Women*, 172.

strange ones who, on whatever plane, high or low, can love only those of their own sex.” Lloyd is careful in this article not to identify himself with the “strange ones” he describes. In fact by describing same-sex love as “strange” Lloyd is distancing himself from those who “can love only those of their own sex.” While certainly more ambivalent than his enthusiastic praise of “homogenic love” in *The Free Comrade* in 1902, Lloyd’s discussion of an alternative sexual ethics is nonetheless significant. Lloyd’s vision of a future in which “there will be strange love-groups and anomalous families different from any now seen or deemed possible” is remarkable for its break with contemporary mores.<sup>71</sup>

Though at times strikingly radical in his critique of sexual mores, Lloyd’s sexual politics and his willingness to articulate them were fragile. Lloyd confined his discussion of same-sex sexuality to his own journal and the pages of other small journals situated on the fringes of the utopian Left. Outside the protective penumbra of the Whitmanite movement, Lloyd felt vulnerable; he was unwilling to be identified as a “strange one.” The shifting ideas about homosexuality that were increasingly being discussed in the larger society also made Lloyd’s particular sexual politics—which very much relied on a blurry distinction between “comradeship” and “homogenic” love—increasingly problematic. By the first decade of the twentieth century the “manly love of comrades” was no longer viewed as entirely innocent of erotic desire. In this changing context Lloyd’s sexual politics and sense of security could be easily shattered. This is precisely what happened in 1911. In that year, Lloyd turned again to the subject of homoeroticism in the pages of *The Free Comrade*. And as in 1902, the discussion of same-sex attraction centered on Whitman. But this time

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<sup>71</sup>John William Lloyd, “The Overlook,” *Ariel*, January 1909, 27-28.

Lloyd denied any association with the man he had, nine years earlier, cited as one of his greatest influences. Lloyd explicitly distanced himself from Whitman in order to prevent being identified as an overly enthusiastic advocate of “comrade love.”

Though in 1902 Lloyd praised Whitman as a “prophet” in 1911 Lloyd renounced him. “I am in no sense that I can see a disciple of Whitman,” declared Lloyd. “I never particularly admired Walt’s prose and certainly never followed it.” This is an explicit rejection of Lloyd’s 1902 statement and of the work that Lloyd had been carrying out in *Ariel* and other Whitmanite journals. Lloyd admitted that he found the “music” of Whitman’s words pleasing but not “the content of his words.” The man who Lloyd had once praised as the “Mount Olympus” of poetry had fallen dramatically in his estimation. But at the heart of Lloyd’s dismissal of Whitman was the dangerous subject of Whitman’s sexuality. Lloyd announced that Whitman’s works were suspicious in a specific sense; they reeked of homosexuality. “The ‘sexual motive’ of Whitman,” Lloyd now wrote, “presented itself to me, rightly or wrongly, as largely a homosexual motive, and homosexuality was something from which I always shrank, for me the hardest thing in life to understand.”<sup>72</sup> Lloyd’s rejection of Whitman amounted to a denunciation of “homosexuality;” this was both an act of literary criticism and sexual politics.

Lloyd’s statement can only be read as a moment of literary, political, and sexual panic. He spurned not only the possibility that Whitman had influenced his work but that his actions might resemble those of the poet of “the manly love of comrades.” In his renunciation Lloyd jettisons language he had previously employed, such as Carpenter’s term “homogenic love” and Whitman’s “comrade,” in favor of

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<sup>72</sup> John William Lloyd, *The Free Comrade*, September-October 1911, 175-7.

the more clinical term homosexuality. This too was an act of distancing. Lloyd could not use the term comradeship, since to do so would betray his own familiarity with Whitman's work, and signal the very terms that betrayed Whitman's "homosexual motive." Instead Lloyd spoke as a detached sexologist, using the more clinical, expert, term homosexual. Just as the language of comradeship had served to place homoerotic relations within the broader realm of same-sex friendship celebrated within Whitmanite texts, now the use of the word homosexuality positioned Lloyd outside that world as a dispassionate observer. Lloyd was negotiating his own relationship to the "homosexual motive" through his use of language.

In order to understand the reasons for Lloyd's actions it is important to reconstruct the context in which they occurred. Doing so allows us to isolate and make visible larger social and cultural transformations of the understandings of same-sex love that were sweeping through American society. The immediate cause of Lloyd's panicked response was a speech that George Sylvester Viereck gave in the fall of 1911 at the University of Berlin. A transcript of Viereck's talk was published in the American journal *Current Literature*, which Viereck helped to edit, and reported on in at least one anarchist journal other than *The Free Comrade*.<sup>73</sup> Viereck's talk, like an agent in a chemical reaction, brought to a head a series of developments at the heart of which lay the meaning of Lloyd's identification with Whitman. Lloyd's radically different public statements—the first articulated in 1902, the second responding to a broader audience in 1911—regarding his relationship to the work of Whitman reveals the complex and shifting ways in which Whitman's work was being reinterpreted as ideas about sexuality changed. Lloyd was

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<sup>73</sup> See "Literary Notes," *The Agitator*, 15 July 1911.

negotiating an evolving social, literary, and political landscape and doing so in different cultural contexts. As the context changed so to did Lloyd's ability and willingness to identify himself with Whitman.

In his Berlin lecture, Viereck divided American poetry into four schools, the first of which includes those "poets, who like Whitman ... sing the song of comradeship," and advocate a "far-reaching democracy." Viereck included Lloyd this group. In Whitman's work Viereck was quick to "find an erotic note." Whitman's poems can be read, Viereck argued, "as studies in the psychology of sex." In Lloyd's writing, said Viereck, this sexual subtext is brought to the fore and even exaggerated. "J. William Lloyd over-emphasizes the sex motive of Whitman." Viereck reduces Lloyd's "creed" to "sex worship" inspired by the poet of comradeship.<sup>74</sup> This juxtaposition of psychology, sexuality, and poetic interpretation was apparently the trigger that set off Lloyd's panicked response. It should be noted that Viereck nowhere uses the term "homosexuality" in his talk. Nonetheless, Lloyd interpreted his being linked to Whitman as an imputation of homosexuality. Whitman had become a charged symbol of the "homosexual motive."<sup>75</sup>

The fact that it was Viereck who delivered the lecture was itself of key importance in understanding Lloyd's response. Viereck was known as a decadent, libidinous poet—the very antithesis of the manly Whitmanite. Whereas Whitman and his admirers masked homoerotic desire within the penumbra of comradeship, Viereck amplified his dissident persona. According to a friend of Viereck named Elmer

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<sup>74</sup> George Sylvester Viereck, "The Ethical Dominant in American Poetry," *Current Literature*, September 1911, 323-4.

<sup>75</sup> *loc cit.* It is possible that in the original Berlin lecture, of which Lloyd may have had some knowledge, Viereck used the term homosexuality when discussing Whitman.

Gertz, “The esoteric in love fascinated [Viereck] because it afforded new whips with which to scourge the Philistines.”<sup>76</sup> Viereck delighted in letting his friends know that at age sixteen he wrote a novel titled *Elinor, The Autobiography of a Degenerate*. The novel’s protagonist passes “through every imaginable phase of sex experience,” reflecting the author’s “knowledge of Casanova, Krafft-Ebing, the Marquis de Sade, and Zola’s ‘Nana.’”<sup>77</sup> Though the novel, “a veritable catalog of lust,” was never published “it was talked about in the Viereck circle.”<sup>78</sup> Though less explicit than *Elinor*, Viereck’s published work also featured strong homoerotic themes. One of his first collections of poetry, *Nineveh: and Other Poems*, includes works that depict the Roman emperor Hadrian’s love for the beautiful youth, Antinous, and a poem on the subject of Mr. W. H., the young man said to have inspired some of Shakespeare’s love sonnets.

It is also significant that Viereck gave his address in Berlin. At the turn of the century Germany was the only country where an organized, visible homosexual rights movement was emerging. In 1897, for example, Magnus Hirschfeld, the famous German sexologist and activist, established the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee in Berlin. Hirschfeld was only one of several influential sexologists, including Krafft-Ebing, Moll, and Ulrich, whose work was first published in the German-speaking world.<sup>79</sup> Hirschfeld was particularly important in this regard because Viereck knew him personally. George’s father, Louis Viereck, a socialist who spent time in prison

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<sup>76</sup> Elmer Gertz, *Odyssey of a Barbarian: The Biography of George Sylvester Viereck*, (Prometheus Books, 1978), 34.

<sup>77</sup> George S. Viereck, *My Flesh and Blood: A Lyrical Autobiography with Indiscreet Annotations*, (New York: Liveright, 1931), 58.

<sup>78</sup> Gertz, 34-5.

<sup>79</sup> See James Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany* (New York: Arno Press, 1975).

for his politics, sponsored Hirschfeld's first lecture in Germany. Hirschfeld continued to keep in contact with the Viereck family after their move to the United States. According to Gertz, "George ... succeeded his father in the line of friendship." Hirschfeld's ideas about the origin and nature of homosexuality differed sharply from those embraced by Lloyd. Hirschfeld maintained that male homosexuals constituted a "third sex," a sexological version of the fairy and a strikingly different gendered construction than the Whitmanite comrade. This connection with Hirschfeld and Germany would have made Viereck's speech seem all the more fraught with meaning to Lloyd.

Lloyd's reaction to Viereck's talk—and the latter's association with homosexuality—was further colored by the fact that Leonard Abbott, Lloyd's friend and colleague, worked alongside Viereck at *Current Literature*. The historian Laurence Veysey states that Abbott and Viereck were lovers.<sup>80</sup> Though the sources Veysey cites in his study are no longer available, there is evidence to support Veysey's claim that Abbott and Viereck were romantically linked. Elmer Gertz, who knew both men, wrote that they "took to each other at once." The two men shared an interest in homoerotic desire. This interest was, in part, articulated through the figure of Whitman. According to Gertz the two men "admired Walt Whitman and had a fascinated intellectual curiosity about the variation of the sex instinct." Viereck and Abbott were not discrete about their relationship. According to Gertz, Viereck once entertained Abbott by singing "A Little Maid of Sappho" to him by moonlight in

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<sup>80</sup> Veysey, *Communal Experiments*, 89, n. 22. Veysey had access to papers held by Abbott's son, William Morris Abbott.

Harvard Stadium.<sup>81</sup> And Viereck dedicated the poem “The Ballad of the Golden Boy,” a homoerotic retelling of the poet Robert Le Gallienne’s ode to a “Golden Girl,” to Abbott. Viereck’s poem describes Leonardo Da Vinci gilding the naked body of a beautiful “lad whose lips were like two crimson spots.” The effect is fatal, but the youth dies happy that he has been transformed from lowly apprentice into “Great Leonardo’s Golden Boy.”<sup>82</sup>

One of the more interesting aspects of Lloyd’s response to Viereck’s Berlin speech is the complete absence of any mention of Carpenter. In his rejection of Viereck’s identification of him as a follower of Whitman, Lloyd lists Emerson, Josiah Warren, William Morris, Thoreau, and even Lester Ward as critical influences on his thought. These thinkers, not Whitman, Lloyd insisted are the ones to whom he was intellectually and politically indebted. Poor Carpenter—who in 1902 had merited the title of “the greatest man of modern England”—is completely absent in this list of worthies. Again, as with Whitman, Lloyd’s problem with Carpenter was that the latter had become a marker for homosexuality. By 1911 Carpenter’s work on same-sex love had reached a far broader audience than they had reached when Lloyd first discussed Carpenter’s work in 1902. Carpenter’s pamphlets published by the Manchester Labour Press had circulated in relatively small circles but by 1911 Carpenter began to address homosexuality in the texts published and produced by his mainstream publisher. For example, the 1906 edition of Carpenter’s *Love’s Coming of Age*, his most widely read book, discussed “homogenic love” whereas previous

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<sup>81</sup> Gertz, *Odyssey of a Barbarian* 55-59, 83.

<sup>82</sup> George S. Viereck, “The Ballad of the Golden Boy” in *The Candle and the Flame* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1912), 25-8. See also and “Marginalia,” in *The Candle and the Flame*, 108.

editions had not. By 1908 Carpenter republished his Manchester Labour Press pamphlets as chapters in his book, *The Intermediate Sex*, the first of his major publications to deal exclusively with same-sex love. By 1911 therefore it was no longer strategically wise for Lloyd to have cited Carpenter in his denunciation of Viereck's speech. A panicking Lloyd could not possibly benefit from hiding behind the quintessential "homogenic" intellectual.

Lloyd's reluctance to identify himself with Carpenter reflected the fact that Carpenter's increasingly open treatment of same-sex love led to public attacks on his sexual politics. In 1909, for example, M. D. O'Brien, an ardent Catholic and member of the antisocialist Liberty and Property Defense League, published "Socialism and Infamy: The Homogenic or Comrade Love Exposed: An Open Letter in Plain Words for a Socialist Prophet." The title of O'Brien's essay references the dual nature of the term comrade in Carpenter's political discourse, bringing to the surface the ways in which "comrade" signified both male lover and working class solidarity. Though O'Brien was no fan of socialism he felt even more strongly about "homosexual lusts" which he believed ought "to be treated in a lunatic asylum, or in a lethal chamber." O'Brien accused Carpenter of seeking to destroy the moral fiber of the working class by turning them away "from their wives to the male 'comrades,' who are more capable of satisfying their unnatural appetites." Apparently O'Brien feared that the male members of the British working class were on the verge of being lured from their marriage beds by the siren-like lure of Carpenter and his fellow "comrades." This notion of innocence seduced by the call of decadence mirrors the kinds of claims made by Foote in his attack on Wilde. In concluding his attack, O'Brien called upon

the readers of Carpenter's work to reject the call of comradeship. "Angels and ministers of grace defend us," he proclaimed, against "the comrade love's effect upon the comrades!"<sup>83</sup>

Similar attacks were made on Carpenter in the United States. One in particular, which appeared in *Socialism: The Nation of Fatherless Children*, a Catholic anti-socialist tract, is of special interest because it links Leonard Abbott, Lloyd's associate, to deviant sexuality. The authors of *Socialism: The Nation of Fatherless Children*, David Goldstein and Martha Moore Avery, identify Abbott as "a leading socialist of New York" who wrote approvingly of Carpenter in the pages of *The Comrade*. They cite Abbott's review of Carpenter's *Love's Coming of Age*—which Abbott proclaimed "as suggestive and notable a treatment of this subject, from the socialist point of view, as has yet appeared in the English language"—as a sign of Abbott's degenerate morals. "Yes," Goldstein and Avery mock Abbott, *Love's Coming of Age* "is indeed suggestive," not of a utopian future but "of the period of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the days before God commanded these vile spots to be wiped from off the face of the earth."<sup>84</sup> In other words, Carpenter was a siren of sodomy luring men to their doom and Abbott a willing accomplice in his evil plot. Like their British counterpart, M. D. O'Brien, Goldstein and Avery made explicit what was largely implicit in Carpenter's work. In doing so they linked Abbott and the Whitmanite defense of the "manly love of comrades" to the sin of sodomy. It is not

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<sup>83</sup> M. D. O'Brien, "Socialism and Infamy: the Homogenic or Comrade Love Exposed: An Open Letter in Plain Words for a Socialist Prophet," in *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality: A Sourcebook*, ed. Chris White (London: Routledge, 1999), 23.

<sup>84</sup> David Goldstein and Martha Moore Avery, *Socialism: The Nation of Fatherless Children* (Boston: Thomas J. Flynn and Company, 1911), 164-5. Like many critics of the Left, the authors blend together members of the Socialist Party, utopians, and anarchists in one huge free-love conspiracy.

clear whether Lloyd was aware of Goldstein and Avrey's attack on Abbott and Carpenter but the fact that such attacks were being written on both sides of the Atlantic is an indication of the mounting stakes of claiming kinship with Whitman and some of his most ardent admirers.

At the heart of Lloyd's reaction to Viereck's Berlin speech, however, is the shifting identification of Whitman with homosexuality. Beginning in the 1870s "scattered gay readings" of Whitman's work were published.<sup>85</sup> As the century closed however the number of "gay readings" increased. By 1887 the Cuban revolutionary Jose Marti, who greatly admired Whitman's work, felt it necessary to rebuke those "imbeciles" who, "with a prudishness worthy of school boys ... believed they found in 'Calamus' ... a return to Virgil's vile desire for Cebetes or Horace's for Gyges and Lyciscus."<sup>86</sup> Here again the Greek signifier was mobilized in order to name homosexual desire. By the 1890s sexual readings of Whitman began refer to the emergent medical discourse on homosexuality. In 1898, for example, a review of an edited collection of Whitman's letters that appeared in *The Chap Book* noted that the poet was a figure of interest among "sexual psychopathists."<sup>87</sup> The phrase used by the reviewer is strikingly similar to the title of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, the most famous sexological text of the late nineteenth century. By the early 1900s increasing numbers of readers (Lloyd being one of them) were seeing in Whitman's "manly love of comrades" something more than a defense of same-sex friendship. These sexualized interpretations of Whitman cast suspicion on those who championed

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<sup>85</sup> David Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography*, (New York: Knopf, 1995), 198.

<sup>86</sup> Jose Marti, "Walt Whitman," in *Marti on the U.S.A.*, selected and translated by Luis A. Baralt (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), 10.

<sup>87</sup> "Whitman and War," *The Chap Book*, 15 February 1898, 290. See also Fone, *A Road To Stonewall*, 182 – 189.

the “good, gray poet’s” verse. One early twentieth-century German critic of Whitman went as far as to “suggest there might be a homosexual conspiracy designed to ‘sell’ Whitman’s ‘homosexual ideas’ to the world in the guise of ‘healthy’ poetry.”<sup>88</sup> In his talk Viereck was essentially identifying Lloyd as a member of this “homosexual conspiracy.”

Viereck was himself responsible for a very public exposé of Whitman as a homosexual. In an article that appeared in *Current Literature* in 1906, Viereck reported on the work of a “German medical writer” named Eduard Bertz. In 1905 Bertz wrote a study of Whitman for Magnus Hirschfeld’s journal of sexology, *Jahrbuche fur sexuelle Zwischenstufen* [*The Yearbook for Intermediate Sexual Types*]. “Dr Bertz,” wrote Viereck, “speaks of Whitman as a ‘homosexual.’” In his essay Bertz cited the work of John Addington Symonds, Marc Andre Raffalovich, Edward Carpenter, and Max Nordau. “Dr. Bertz,” Viereck tells his readers, “comments of the strange mixture in Whitman of sensuous elements and religious frenzy, and on his exaggerated feminine compassion and love for humanity.” What some had championed as the “manly love of comrades” was, according to Bertz, really an “exaggerated feminine” trait. Viereck finished his essay by noting that some of Whitman’s German fans had taken sharp issue with Bertz’s work, insisting that Whitman was “the prophet of a new world and a new race” and not an apologist for homosexuality.<sup>89</sup> Viereck made clear that he believed Bertz to be the better judge of Whitman’s character and work.

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<sup>88</sup> Walter Grunzweig, “Whitman in the German-Speaking Countries,” in *Walt Whitman and the World*, eds. Gay Wilson Allen and Ed Folsom (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1995), 165.

<sup>89</sup> “The Feminine Soul in Whitman,” *Current Literature*, July 1906, 53-56. The author of this article is not identified but it must have been Viereck, who read German and was quite interested in sexology.

Lloyd's response to Viereck's 1911 Berlin talk has to be understood in the context of these multiple layers of signification and association. Viereck's speech brought into focus the erotic elements of Lloyd's attachment to Whitman in a way that Lloyd found deeply disturbing. The mounting awareness of what Lloyd called "the homosexual motive" in Whitman's work proved troublesome. By the second decade of the twentieth century an increasing number of public discussions of homosexuality were being produced and read by medical authorities, moral arbiters, jurists, journalists, and other social commentators. The boundaries between homosocial and homosexual relations were being policed with greater severity. Whitman was one of the figures used to illustrate and examine this process. Articles like the one on Bertz, which appeared in *Current Literature* in 1906, were examples of the way in which the conversation was carried out. Here and elsewhere Whitman was increasingly being identified as an exemplary "homosexual." In 1911 Lloyd was caught in the middle of this sharp and contested conversation about sexual identity; feeling exposed in a way that he had not in 1902.

Once the lyrical language of the "manly love of comrades" had been transformed into the more clinical discourse of homosexuality Lloyd no longer found it comfortable to speak on the topic of same-sex love. In fact, Lloyd seemed to retreat from public life after his run in with Viereck. By September of 1912 *The Free Comrade*—in which two years earlier Abbott had declared that Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and Carpenter's *Towards Democracy*, "are the scriptures of our movement"—ceased publication. Lloyd continued to contribute to anarchist periodicals but the

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The author of the *Current Literature* article clearly had an understanding of German and was also familiar with the work of Ellis, John Addington Symonds, Ulrich, Hirschfeld, and other sexologists.

volume of his work tapered off. No more would Lloyd champion the work of Whitman and Carpenter. The associations that both men's name and texts had accumulated were too dangerous for Lloyd.

This does not mean that Whitman's sexuality ceased to be of interest among the anarchists. Nor does it mean that Whitman was no longer useful as a way to discuss homosexual desire and its social, ethical and cultural place in society. Following her deportation from the United States for anti-conscription activity during the First World War, for example, Goldman developed a lecture on Walt Whitman that had a special focus on the latter's homosexuality. There are, however, important differences between Lloyd and Goldman's treatment of Whitman and homosexuality. Goldman did not adopt Whitman's language of comradeship rather she read it symptomatically as an indication that Whitman was a homosexual. This act of translation—which Lloyd found so very threatening—was for Goldman the key to understanding Whitman's work and personality.

Goldman, who was a great fan of the "Good Gray Poet," does not seem to have discussed Whitman's relationship to homosexuality before the 1920s. She did deliver a lecture in 1917 entitled "Walt Whitman, The Liberator of Sex" but this lecture apparently made no mention of the homoerotic aspect of Whitman's work. And though Goldman delivered lectures on homosexuality before her exile she did not, as far as we know, make mention of Whitman in them. This fact indicates the uneven and complex nature of the ways in which Whitman's relationship to homosexuality emerged as a topic of discussion among anarchists—and Americans more broadly—in the first decades of the Twentieth century. Prior to her years of

exile Goldman continued to view Whitman much as Tucker had in the early 1880s, as a sexual rebel but one whose erotic rebellion did not extend beyond the boundaries of heterosexuality. It is only after the First World War that Goldman began to reexamine her understanding of Whitman and the meaning of his work.

Though Goldman knew them both, neither Abbott nor Lloyd shared their views on the homoerotic aspects of Whitman's work with her. Both men were careful to compartmentalize their discussion of Whitman; they felt implicated in any discussion of the topic of same-sex love in a way that Goldman did not. Both men felt vulnerable to being marked as sexual deviants, even among friends and comrades whose sexual politics quite explicitly included a defense of same-sex love. This was not an unusual thing for public intellectuals grappling with the deeply personal and volatile issue of homosexuality. Carpenter responded in much the same way as Lloyd and Abbott did at several points in his life. When, for example, a reviewer for the *British Medical Journal* published a particularly hostile review of *The Intermediate Sex* Carpenter responded by writing a letter to the *BMJ* in which he maintained "there is not a single passage in the book where I advocate sexual intercourse of any kind between those of the same sex." He insisted that he was merely advocating "sincere attachment and warm friendship."<sup>90</sup> Carpenter may have been particularly anxious to respond to the *BMJ* since it was a voice of medical authority, one of the key discourses shaping emergent notions of the homosexual as a distinct psychological type. In judging the actions of Carpenter, Lloyd and Abbott it is important to keep in mind the social context in which they operated. All three men had to articulate their

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<sup>90</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet Books, 1990), 81.

politics what the historian Jeffrey Weeks has identified as “the shadowy area between honesty and public scandal.”<sup>91</sup>

Like Lloyd, Goldman came to think of Whitman as a “pronounced Homo” by reading the work being produced by literary critics and others exploring the meaning of Whitman’s text and life. Goldman wrote her friend Ben Capes in 1927, that she was “gorging myself on everything pertaining to Walt Whitman. [including] Biographies, commentators, and his own writing.”<sup>92</sup> Much of the new Whitman scholarship reflected the rising influence of psychological explanations and understandings of sexuality. In Europe, where Goldman lived following her deportation, this type of work was fairly advanced. Bertz, for example, had expanded his thinking on the subject considerably since the early 1900s, publishing a series of articles on Whitman and same-sex love. But even in the United States interpretations of Whitman as a “homosexual” were increasingly visible. In 1922, for example, Earl Lind wrote that Whitman “stands foremost among American androgynes...many passages of *Leaves of Grass* and *Drumtaps* exist as proof.”<sup>93</sup> Even the mainstream press began to reflect this emerging discussion of Whitman as the classic “American androgyne.” In the late 1920s, for example, *Harper’s Magazine* published an article by Harvey O’Higgins, which argues that the “sexual expression” in Whitman’s poetry “is dangerously near the homosexual level.” Influenced by the popular Freudian theories of the day O’Higgins commented that Whitman’s condition is “to be expected” since the poet’s “sexual impulse is anchored by a mother-fixation and [was] unable to achieve a heterosexual goal.” Neatly reversing Lloyd’s admiration of

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<sup>91</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>92</sup> Emma Goldman to Ben Capes, 12 November 1927. *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 19.

<sup>93</sup> Earl Lind, *The Female-Impersonators*, 36.

Whitman's masculinist representation of homosexuality, O'Higgins maintained that Whitman's defense of "the manly love of comrades" was, proof of his psychological condition: "like many another case of arrested development he was always 'a man's man.'"94

Though she was far less hostile than O'Higgins, Goldman's interpretation of Whitman was also informed by the idea that his work expressed his essential psychological nature. Always an eager reader of sexologists and psychologists Goldman was an early advocate of the theory that homosexuality was an innate drive that permeated the entirety of a person's life, work, and spirit. Her willingness to identify Whitman as a homosexual reflects her own belief, expressed on numerous occasions, that sex—conceived of as a drive or motivating urge—was the key to understanding much of human psychology. In order to understand Whitman, in other words, it was essential to deal honestly with the root of his personality. With homosexuality increasingly viewed as a fundamental psychological trait rather than a stigmatized act, Whitman's work took on a new meaning. Goldman was soon convinced that Whitman's "whole reaction to life and to the complexities of the human spirit can be traced to his own complex sexual nature."<sup>95</sup>

Goldman believed that Whitman had deliberately obscured the nature of his work and personality in order to protect himself against homophobic attacks. Goldman recognized this fact because she herself felt the lure of secrecy when speaking about sex, politics, and revolution. She began preparing her lecture on

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<sup>94</sup> Henry O'Higgins, *Alias Walt Whitman* (Newark: The Carteret Book Club, 1930), 39, 35. This short work is a reprint of the *Harper's* article.

<sup>95</sup> Emma Goldman to Evelyn Scott, 21 December 1927, in *Nowhere at Home: Letters from Exile of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman*, eds. Richard and Anna Maria Drinnon (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 141.

Whitman and homosexuality just as she started work on her own autobiography. She wrote a friend that she felt that she faced problems similar to Whitman's own struggle with disclosure and secrecy. "I feel," Goldman wrote, "that it will be extremely difficult to write a frank autobiography." She compared her own struggle to be truthful with Whitman who Goldman wrote "began his career by flinging the red rag in the face of the Puritan Bull, and then spent the rest of his life in trying to explain what he meant by some of this ideas on sex and love." Goldman might face the same need for discretion because of the difficulty of writing a personal narrative that preserves the privacy of friends and family. Whitman was, Goldman thought, more interested in protecting his own reputation than in revealing the truth about himself. Though "his 'Calamus' poems are as homosexual as anything ever written ... he absolutely denied it, and even advanced the story, whether true or not has never been proven, that he was the father of six children."<sup>96</sup> Goldman was intent on exposing the true nature of Whitman in her lectures.

Goldman acknowledged that Whitman's need to obfuscate was due to the homophobia of the culture in which he lived. "I am inclined to think," she wrote, "that even his most devoted friends, with the exception of Horace Traubel, would have dropped him like a shot if he had openly owned up to his leanings." This fear was precisely what led Lloyd to act in the manner that he did in 1911. Goldman lamented the fact that the truth about Whitman's sexuality was continuing to be denied. "This is best seen," she argued, "by the constant apologies that nearly all of his American and English biographers and commentators are making." In Goldman's opinion, in denying this side of Whitman his critics were diminishing the stature of

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<sup>96</sup> loc cit.

their subject. “The fools do not seem to realize that Walt Whitman’s greatness as a rebel and poet may have been conditioned in his sexual differentiation, and that he could not be otherwise than what he was.”<sup>97</sup> In her lectures Goldman challenged “the fools” who continued to deny the fact of Whitman’s “sexual differentiation.”

Goldman saw it as her mission—and as a progressive step in her sexual politics—to clearly identify Whitman as a homosexual. This strategy did not work for Lloyd. Lloyd fled “the homosexual motive” in Whitman’s work while Goldman sought to bring it into sharper view. Though Lloyd advocated for the right of people to love members of their own sex his politics of homosexuality was dependent on plausible deniability. As long as “the manly love of comrades” could remain unmarked in the larger social context of same-sex romantic friendship and homosocial bonds Lloyd felt relatively safe. But as the discourse of homosexuality shifted, becoming increasingly defined by a notion of a distinct psychological type, Lloyd’s political language and his sense of safety collapsed. When, in 1911, the cognitive dissonance between “the manly love of comrades” and “homosexuality” became too great, Lloyd retreated from any association with Whitman. For Goldman the reverse was true. As Whitman became increasingly identified as a homosexual, she was able to use him to discuss sexual ethics in a new way. She believed that by telling the truth about Whitman’s nature she was opening up the subject for greater discussion and clearing the way for social tolerance. What silenced Lloyd created the opportunity for Goldman to speak. Rather than follow a pattern of increasing openness and disclosure we find that the changing social and sexual landscape within which they worked—as illustrated in the shifting views of Whitman—inhibited and

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<sup>97</sup> loc cit.

enabled different anarchist sex radicals to speak out on the moral, legal, and social status of same-sex love.

## Chapter Four: “Love’s Dungeon Flower”: Prison and the Politics of Homosexuality

In the summer of 1916 Ben Reitman, Emma Goldman’s lover, was released from Queen’s County Jail. Reitman had been imprisoned for distributing birth control information. Shortly after his release Reitman addressed a gathering of supporters at New York City’s Lenox Hall. “I was sent to jail,” he declared, “because I believe in happy, welcome babies and because I believe that motherhood should be voluntary, and also because Judges McNerny, Moss, and Russell decided that I had broken the law and must pay the penalty.”<sup>1</sup> Reitman used the occasion of his talk to condemn the penal system and the society that created it. “Jail, Judges, [and] Governments,” he declared, “are all miserable failures. They are the greatest forces for evil and they succeed in maintaining themselves only by ignorance and fear.”<sup>2</sup> This is a fair representation of the anarchist view of prisons and the judicial system. To Reitman and his colleagues prisons were the concrete manifestation of turn-of-the-century America’s hierarchical, undemocratic, and brutal social, political, and economic order. Speaking in the shadow of the war in Europe Reitman told his audience that, “In a decent society we will need neither jails nor judges any more than we will need wars.”<sup>3</sup>

To illustrate the absurdity of the prison system Reitman described the fate of a number of the men he met behind bars. He highlighted cases that dramatized the deleterious consequences of the “repeat offender” laws then on the books in New York. These laws mandated that second offenders receive lengthy and harsh

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Reitman, “Speech Delivered at Lenox Hall after His Release from Prison,” *Mother Earth*, August 1916, 583.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 581

<sup>3</sup> *loc. cit.*

sentences. Among the cases that Reitman shared with his audience was that of a “young fellow...arrested on the charge of pederasty, a common form of homosexuality.”<sup>4</sup> Reitman presents the prisoner’s story as clear evidence of the brutal and unenlightened nature of the judicial system:

The Judge sentenced him to the penitentiary for fourteen years. As far as the Judges and the police are concerned, all the literature on that subject might never have been written. The Judges and the police and everybody else merely said that the boy was a degenerate and a dangerous criminal, and now for fourteen years he must languish in a hell all because God made him that way.<sup>5</sup>

It is unclear what Reitman means by “pederasty.” The term was used to describe relations between an adult and a minor but it could also refer to relations between two adults. Reitman describes the prisoner as a “young fellow” and a “boy” so it is possible that he was the younger partner. More likely Reitman is using the term without specific reference to age-structured homosexual relations. We also don’t know if aggravating circumstances such as prostitution or public sex prompted the “young fellow’s” arrest. Nor is it clear whether the prisoner’s prior conviction, which doomed him to a lengthy prison stay, was a sex crime or some other charge. Whatever the case, Reitman dismissed the idea that the prisoner’s actions rose to the level of criminal offense. The man had done nothing, in other words, for the court to concern itself with.

In his attack on the court’s view of the “young fellow’s” sexuality Reitman castigated the court for its ignorance of “the literature on [the] subject.” The judges, in other words, were not versed in the new sexological discourse on homosexuality that the anarchist sex radicals were familiar with. Since they were unfamiliar with

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 583.

<sup>5</sup> loc cit.

what Reitman saw as the enlightened, scientific perspective on such questions they were merely acting out their bigotry and cruelty. How else, Reitman implies, could one explain sentencing a “boy” to fourteen years “all because God made him that way?” Reitman understood homosexuality as an existential condition not a sin or a crime and he lashed at what he saw as the judge’s lack of knowledge. Reitman’s audience might have flinched at his mention of God—anarchists were overwhelmingly atheists—but they surely agreed with Reitman’s view that a sentence of fourteen years for “a common form of homosexuality” was outrageous. Like Reitman they too saw the court’s actions as betraying a sad lack of knowledge, an ignorance that they might well have expected from the bench but that was lamentable nonetheless. And, of course, the very fact that the state should regulate sexual acts was anathema to the anarchists.

That Reitman should discuss homosexuality in the context of a speech on the subject of prisons is unremarkable. Since the establishment of the modern American prison system in the early nineteenth century, reformers, prison authorities, and former prisoners wrote accounts of prison life that made mention of sex behind bars. As early as 1826, Louis Dwight, a prison reformer, wrote to inform government officials that in institutions “between Massachusetts and Georgia...the sin of Sodom is the vice of prisoners.” Sex between prisoners was, in Dwight’s words, a “dreadful degradation” which needed to be stamped out. Having informed the authorities Dwight hoped they would take action. “*Nature and humanity,*” he wrote, “*cry aloud for redemption from this dreadful degradation.*”<sup>6</sup> In the decades that followed Dwight’s report, many such pronouncements were made. In 1919, for example, Kate

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<sup>6</sup> Louis Dwight, “The Sin of Sodom is the Vice of Prisoners,” in Katz, *Gay American History*, 27 – 28.

Richard O'Hare, a member of the Socialist Party, lamented the "ugly fact that homosexuality exists in every prison and must ever be one of the sinister facts of our penal system."<sup>7</sup> Though writing nearly one hundred years after Dwight, O'Hare was in agreement with her predecessor that homosexuality was an ill disease bred in prison yards. By the early twentieth century there existed "a large literature on homosexuality among...prisoners."<sup>8</sup> This literature largely reflected the view that sex in prison was an illicit, immoral, and criminal behavior; an evil weed that flourished in the hothouse environment of the nation's jails.

The views of American anarchist sex radicals who wrote on homosexuality and prison differed in crucial ways from other social critics and prison reformers who wrote on the subject. When anarchists wrote about sex in prison they did not approach the topic from a relentlessly negative perspective. O'Hare's opinion stands in sharp contrast to those of Reitman and other anarchist sex radicals. O'Hare was, of course, a well known member of the Socialist Party, an organization whose sexual politics were strikingly different from that of the anarchists. The contrast between O'Hare's views and those of the anarchist sex radicals is all the more striking when one realizes that O'Hare was actually imprisoned with Emma Goldman when she made her observations. Both women were jailed in the Missouri State Penitentiary for violating the Espionage Act. While in jail the two became friends, but O'Hare did not seem to have absorbed Goldman's views on the question of homosexuality. Goldman knew about same-sex relations among prisoners but nowhere does she denounce them in the manner of O'Hare. In fact, in a letter to Magnus Hirschfeld,

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<sup>7</sup> Kate Richards O'Hare, "Prison Lesbianism," in Katz, *Gay American History*, 69.

<sup>8</sup> Katz, *Gay American History*, 578, n. 69.

Goldman suggested that her politics of homosexuality was informed by the knowledge she gathered during her prison stays.<sup>9</sup> And while O'Hare denounced the homosexual relations she saw in the Missouri State Penitentiary, Goldman's only memory of her prison stay was of the "warm heart beneath Kate's outer coolness."<sup>10</sup> Goldman was not a fan of the Missouri State Penitentiary but unlike O'Hare, she did not use the fact of prison homosexuality as a way to denounce the prison system. She did not lash out at the relationships she, like O'Hare, was witness to. The anarchist sex radicals did not see an organic link between the brutality of the prison system and same-sex relations.

The anarchists understood the phenomenon of homosexuality in prison through the prism of their larger sexual politics. Reitman, for example, presents the "young fellow" as a victim of injustice not a tragic product of a warped system. Of course, Reitman was not defending sexual exploitation and violence in prison. But that is exactly the point. Rather than critique prison life by exposing what O'Hare called "the sinister facts of our penal system" Reitman uses his discussion of prison to defend those who practice homosexual acts. The only "sinister fact" Reitman sought to expose was that someone who practiced a "common form of homosexuality" should be sentenced to jail for fourteen years. Other anarchists, such as Alexander Berkman, did condemn the sometimes brutal world of prison sex but he did not stop there. Unlike O'Hare and those who shared her views, Berkman also wrote about consensual, loving relationships between prisoners. Like Reitman, Berkman's analysis of sex behind bars was informed by his larger political beliefs. The anarchist

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<sup>9</sup> Emma Goldman, "The Unjust Treatment of Homosexuals," in Katz, *Gay American History*, 379.

<sup>10</sup> Goldman, *Living My Life*, 667. See also Haaland, *Emma Goldman*, 174 - 176.

sex radicals used their attacks on prisons as an opportunity to explore and defend the social, ethical, and cultural place of same-sex desire in American culture.

Accounts of prison and prison life were a familiar genre of anarchist writing. A number of leading figures in the movement spent time in jail and later wrote about their experiences. These accounts were important political texts within the movement. For example, Peter Kropotkin's account of his imprisonment and escape from the Czar's jails and his short imprisonment in France, *In Russian and French Prisons*, was well known among movement activists. "Here," wrote Leonard Abbott in a review of Kropotkin's work that appeared in *Mother Earth*, "are the very throb and passion and romance of the revolutionary struggle."<sup>11</sup> Goldman, Berkman, Reitman, and other anarchists also wrote about prisons and like Kropotkin they used their stories of imprisonment to explore major themes in anarchist thought.

*In Russian and French Prisons* only hinted at the existence of homosexual relations in prisons. In this matter Kropotkin, whose views of same-sex sexuality reflected the less tolerant sexual politics of the European and non-English speaking American anarchists, was in full agreement with the authorities that ran the prison system. Of the existence of homosexuality, wrote Kropotkin, "I shall say only what will be supported by all intelligent and frank governors of prisons, if I say that the prisons are the nurseries for the most revolting category of breaches of moral law."<sup>12</sup> Though he never names the "breaches of moral law" of which he speaks he points the reader to other prison literature that is less reticent in dealing with the sex lives of prisoners.

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<sup>11</sup> Leonard Abbott, "An Intellectual Giant," *Mother Earth*, December, 1912, 328.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Kropotkin, *In Russian and French Prisons* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1991 [1906]), 335 – 336.

Kropotkin's views do not reflect the sexual politics of the English-speaking American anarchists. It is remarkable that when it came to the question of homosexuality Kropotkin found his views and the views of those who ran prisons to be in complete sympathy. Anarchists did not generally cite the views of "intelligent and frank governors of prisons" in their discussion of prison life. Kropotkin's views are in sharp contrast to those held by the American anarchist sex radicals. Reitman's defense of the "young fellow," for example, is quite different from Kropotkin's harsh condemnation of homosexuality. Reitman's more accepting attitude of the variation of sexual desire is far more representative of the sexual politics of the American English language anarchist movement. Even when discussing prison sexuality the governing principles of free love that guided the anarchist sex radicals in their thinking remained paramount.

By far the most famous prison text written by an American anarchist that discusses the moral and social status of same-sex love in the context of prison is Alexander Berkman's *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*. Berkman's book is an account of the fourteen years he spent in Pennsylvania's Western Penitentiary following a failed assassination of Henry Clay Frick, the manager of Andrew Carnegie's steel empire. Published in 1912 Berkman's book was widely reviewed inside and outside the anarchist movement. Some of his mainstream critics dismissed *Prison Memoirs* as the rationalization of a killer; others saw more. A reviewer in socialist journal, *The Coming Nation*, stated that Berkman's work "is a great human document, a remarkable presentation of prison conditions, and an intimate study of

prison types.”<sup>13</sup> Writing for *Mother Earth* a young Bayard Boyesen said that “here, from an Anarchist, is a book of rare power and beauty, majestic in its structure, filled with the power of imagination and the truth of actuality, emphatic in its declarations and noble in its reach.”<sup>14</sup> Boyesen’s praise reflected the high regard in which Berkman’s book was held among anarchists and those sympathetic to their message.

In order to ensure that his book reached as broad an audience as possible, Berkman sought out a writer to compose an introduction for his memoirs. Berkman first approached Jack London, who had himself spent time in prison and had expressed some sympathy for anarchist ideas.<sup>15</sup> London’s introduction proved too permeated by his socialist ideas—he was a member of the Socialist Party—for Goldman and Berkman who ultimately declined to use it. To replace London, Berkman turned to Hutchins Hapgood. Hapgood was wildly enthusiastic about the text and fascinated by anarchism. His introduction was extremely complimentary. “I wish,” Hapgood wrote, “that everybody in the world would read this book ... because the general and careful reading of it would definitely add to true civilization.” Hapgood believed that Berkman’s book would help “do away with prisons” and he commended Berkman’s skill at illustrating the human relationships that structure prison life. “[*Prison Memoirs*] shows, in picture after picture, sketch after sketch,” Hapgood wrote, “not only the obvious brutality, stupidity, [and] ugliness permeating the institution, but very touching, it shows the good qualities and instincts of the human heart perverted, demoralized, helplessly struggling for life; beautiful

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in “What the Critics Say,” *Mother Earth*, March 1913, n.p.

<sup>14</sup> Bayard Boyesen, “Prison Memoirs,” *Mother Earth*, February 1913, 424.

<sup>15</sup> Alex Kershaw, *Jack London: A Life* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997). Kershaw suggests that London had a sexual relationship with another prisoner during his jail stay (36 – 38.)

tendencies basely expressing themselves.”<sup>16</sup> Although Hapgood was clearly a partisan voice his enthusiasm reflects the fact that *Prison Memoirs* is one of the most important and widely read texts to emerge from the turn-of-the-century anarchist movement.

Homosexual desire, in all its manifestations, is a key theme of the *Prison Memoirs*. *Prison Memoirs* documents not only the coercive sexual culture of prisons—rape and prostitution—but also the consensual loves that existed behind bars. It is this aspect of the work—its careful consideration of the possibility of love between people of the same sex—that makes Berkman’s text such a rare document within the corpus of prison writing. Written from an insider’s perspective, Berkman’s work is an astute sociological and psychological analysis of the intimate life of prisoners. Prison life according to Berkman is deeply marked by “the swelling undercurrent of frank irrepressible sex drive.”<sup>17</sup> In several lengthy passages, Berkman recounts the sexual and emotional brutality, pleasures, and desires shared by his fellow prisoners. Near the end of his book Berkman devotes an entire chapter to the moral, ethical, and social place of same-sex desire. Berkman presents love between inmates as a form of resistance to the spirit-crushing environment of prison. The representations of homosexuality in *Prison Memoirs* span the full range of human emotions and behavior. *Prison Memoirs* contains one of the most sustained considerations of the ethical, social and cultural place of same-sex relations of any of the published works produced by the turn of the century anarchists. It is one of the

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<sup>16</sup> Hutchins Hapgood, “As Introductory,” in Alexander Berkman’s *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Company 1912), ix – xi.

<sup>17</sup> Berkman, *Prison Memoirs*, 263.

most important political texts, as opposed to literary works, dealing with homosexuality to have been written by an American before the 1950s.

The representations of homosexuality in the *Prison Memoirs* are complex. Berkman's text is not a simple defense of same-sex love. In fact, Berkman was quite critical of much of what he witnessed in jail. This is especially true in the beginning of the book. Berkman's first reaction to the existence of prison homosexuality is shock and disgust but by the end of his narrative Berkman has considerably altered his view of homosexuality. In his memoirs Berkman describes the evolution of his attitudes toward same-sex prison relationships. He tells how his initially horrified response to homosexuality is replaced with understanding and even an appreciation for the erotic and loving relations between men. As one late twentieth-century critic suggests, a reader could very easily find his or her "moral attitudes" transformed by the vicarious experience of Berkman's own change of thought. Swept along by Berkman's revealing autobiographical work, the reader experiences the process by which the author "moves from a cold and abstract idealism to a warm and sympathetic identification, even to an unembarrassed and untroubled acceptance of the reality of homosexual love."<sup>18</sup> This analysis mirrors that made by Hutchins Hapgood, who wrote in his preface that reading *Prison Memoirs* "tends to complicate the present simplicity of our moral attitudes. It tends to make us more mature."<sup>19</sup>

Berkman and the staff of *Mother Earth* presented Berkman's treatment of same-sex relations in prison as a major theme of the book. The letters sent to *Mother Earth*'s subscribers seeking prepublication subscriptions for Berkman's book clearly

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<sup>18</sup> John William Ward, "Violence, Anarchy, and Alexander Berkman," *New York Review of Books* (November, 5 1970), 27.

<sup>19</sup> Hutchins Hapgood, "As Introductory," x.

indicated that the sex life of prisoners was among the topics that Berkman dealt with. Advertisements for *Prison Memoirs* that appeared in *Mother Earth* highlighted the “homosexual” (the term used by the advertisements) content of the work. Following the book's publication Berkman delivered lectures on homosexuality that drew upon the material in his memoirs. The lectures served to advertise the book and elaborated upon the sociological and political implications of the text. Berkman's lectures both presented the erotic life of prisoners to a broad audience and contained a defense of the right of individuals to love whomever they wish. In a number of ways *Prison Memoirs* was marketed and presented as a significant contribution to the understanding of the social and moral place of same-sex desire. In promoting the book, Berkman and his colleagues foregrounded the sexual politics of *Prison Memoirs*.

Contemporary reviewers noted Berkman's “frankness of utterance” in regards to his treatment of homosexuality. “No detail of prison life is lost on Berkman's mind,” a reviewer for *Current Literature* wrote in December 1912. “He dramatizes in particular, the abnormality of the prison situation. He shows us what happens when men are separated from women, when sex-instincts are repressed.” The reviewers themselves, however, were less than “frank,” choosing to omit any explicit discussion of homosexuality all the while hinting at its presence. The reviewer for *The Coming Nation* told readers only that Berkman's book includes descriptions of “the hideous personal degradations fostered by the prison atmosphere.”<sup>20</sup> The *San Francisco Bulletin* played at the edges of what could and could not be named in public discourse:

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<sup>20</sup> “Two Indictments of Our Prison System,” *Current Literature*, December 1912, 673.

The book has one great fault which may go far to hurt its effect. True to his tenets, Berkman has excluded nothing from his account. There are things done in prisons which a writer must be content to pass over lightly; many which he must absolutely omit if his book is to be universally read. These things Berkman has told in detail.<sup>21</sup>

By not naming those “things done in prison which a writer must be content to pass over lightly” the *Bulletin’s* reviewer was carefully observing the rules of decorum to which Berkman refused to adhere. Of course, by indicating that the book was filled with these forbidden facts the reviewer was, if anything, heightening their salience. The unspoken jumps from the page. This is the same kind of resonant silence that commentators used in treating the Oscar Wilde trial and other sexual scandals of the period.

A number of reviewers attacked Berkman’s book because it dealt openly with the subject of homosexuality. Berkman, like many authors a keen follower of the critical readings of his work, collected some of these negative reviews. Typical of these criticisms are the words of one reviewer, who thought *Prison Memoirs* “a book by a degenerate.” The reviewer found Berkman’s work to be “indecent ... both a glorification of assassination and an apology, even justification, of unmentionable crimes.” Shocked by the frank nature of Berkman’s text, the reviewer declared, “Mr. Comstock had better look into this work.” This critic, like others who wrote for what Berkman characterized as the “bourgeois press,” was not explicit in his or her discussion of the sexual content of the book, but the words used to describe it—“unmentionable crime,” “degenerate,” “indecent”—more than hinted at why Mr. Comstock, the best-known sexual purity advocate of the period, should take interest in the book. Berkman characterized the negative reviews he collected as coming from

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in “What the Critics Say,” *Mother Earth*, March 1913. n.p.

the pens of “intellectual Mrs. Grundys.”<sup>22</sup> By calling his critics “Mrs. Grundys” Berkman implied that the sexual content of his work not Berkman’s analysis of prison was central to the negative reviews he received. His critics found the sexual politics of *Prison Memoirs* as objectionable as the book’s anarchist politics. What the critics did not understand is that the two aspects of the book’s politics were integrally related.

Though attacks on the sexual politics of Berkman’s book were not uncommon, a number of readers appreciated the humanistic tolerance with which Berkman treated sexual relations between inmates. Berkman’s representations of same-sex relations in prison drew a particularly passionate response from homosexual readers. Among the book’s most devoted champions of Berkman’s work was Edward Carpenter. When Goldman visited Carpenter following her expulsion from the United States she found that Carpenter and his lover George Merrill expressed a great deal of interest in Berkman’s memoirs. Carpenter insisted that she “tell him about Alexander Berkman.” He felt, Goldman wrote in her autobiography, that the memoirs were “a profound study of man’s inhumanity and prison psychology.”<sup>23</sup> Carpenter bought the book shortly after its publication and “found it full of interest and suggestion.” Not satisfied with a single reading, Carpenter “return[ed] to it again and again.”<sup>24</sup> In a letter to Berkman, Goldman was rather blunt about why she believed Carpenter and Merrill showed such interest in *Prison Memoirs*. “I am sure,” she

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<sup>22</sup> Alexander Berkman, “October 19th, 1912,” Alexander Berkman Archive, International Institute of Social History.

<sup>23</sup> Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, 979-80.

<sup>24</sup> Edward Carpenter, “Introduction,” Alexander Berkman, *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (London: The C. W. Daniel Company, 1926), n.p.

wrote Berkman, “their interest is mainly because of the homo part in your book.”<sup>25</sup> Though crudely put, Goldman’s analysis was correct. Like a number of his readers, Carpenter was drawn to Berkman’s sensitive and politically charged examination of same-sex desires and behaviors among prisoners.

Given the central place that sexuality has in his narrative, Berkman’s readers must have been surprised to learn how naïve the author was about homosexuality when he first entered prison. Berkman gives his readers the impression that he had never heard of or even imagined the possibility that members of the same sex could be erotically attracted to each other. The extent of Berkman’s blindness regarding homosexuality is almost comical. In a chapter entitled “The Yegg,” Berkman, who was twenty-one when he arrived in jail, describes an older man’s attempt to convince him to become his “kid.” This is the first time that Berkman is forced to confront what was until then a topic hidden in prison slang and innuendo opaque to him.<sup>26</sup> While working side by side in one of the prisons workshops, the older man, known as Boston Red or Red, regales Berkman with tales of his life on the road as a “yegg,” or tramp. Part of that life was the sexual pleasure that tramps took in their “kids.” Red, no stranger to prison walls, drops hints about his relationship with “kids,” notably a

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<sup>25</sup> Emma Goldman to Alexander Berkman, 28 May 1925, *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 15.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Berkman’s relationship with “Wingie.” Wingie’s interest in Berkman has a physical component but Berkman remains ignorant of this. At one point Wingie gives Berkman’s “cheek a tender pat.” Berkman steps back “with the instinctive dislike of a man’s caress.” Berkman’s phrase seems to indicate that he believes that physical touch between men is “instinctively” uncomfortable. Unlike Red, however, Wingie does not push the matter; he is embarrassed by his clumsy attempt at seduction. He tells Berkman, “a faint flush stealing over his prison pallor,” that he was only “trying” him. Berkman, clearly clueless, wonders what all this could mean. “What could he have meant,” he writes, “by ‘trying’ me?” See Berkman, *Prison Memoirs*, 144 – 145.

teenager named Billie, in an attempt to seduce Berkman. Unfortunately for Red, Berkman has not the faintest clue that he is the object of Red's sexual interest.<sup>27</sup>

Growing frustrated with Berkman's naiveté, Red becomes increasingly direct. He tells Berkman that he intends to "assume benevolent guardianship over you; over you and your morals, yes sir, for you're my kid now, see?" Berkman's reaction—puzzlement over what Red means—spurs the "yegg" on. Red tries to "chaperone" Berkman in what he calls "moonology ... the truly Christian science of loving your neighbor, provided that he be a nice little boy." Berkman still does not understand the drift of the conversation and replies by asking, "How can you love a boy?" Red, expanding a bit on the lingo of prison sex, at last comes to the point, stating, "A punk's a boy that'll ... give himself to a man. Now we'se talkin' plain." A "punk," in other words, is the submissive sexual partner of an older tramp or a prison inmate.

Having finally understood Red, Berkman reacts violently, accusing Red of advocating "terrible practices." Even more maddening to Red, Berkman states, "I don't really believe it, Red" and asks whether there are "no women on the road?" Red, shocked at Berkman's ignorance and moral outrage, accuses the anarchist of acting like a "holy sky-pilot" or minister. Red insists that once the young man "delved into the esoteric mysteries of moonology" and "tasted the mellifluous fruit on the forbidden tree" he would change his opinions. When Berkman brushes him aside, Red, rejected, tells him that "you'll know better before your time's up, me virtuous sonny."<sup>28</sup> It is possible that Berkman portrayed himself as naive in order to represent for the reader the emotional impact of his entrance into the sexual life of American

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 160 – 165.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 169 – 171.

prisons. By staging his encounter with homosexuality in prison as a loss of innocence, Berkman was including his audience in the experience of life behind bars in a way that mere sociological description could not achieve.

Berkman concludes his description of his exchange with Red by recounting his feelings of incredulity and shock at what he had been told:

His cynical attitude toward women and sex morality has roused in me a spirit of antagonism. The panegyrics of boy-love are deeply offensive to my instincts. The very thought of the unnatural practices revolts and disgusts me. But I find solace in the reflection that "Red's" insinuations are pure fabrication; no credence is to be given them. Man, a reasonable being, could not fall to such depths; he could not be guilty of such unspeakably vicious practices. Even the lowest outcast must not be credited with such perversion, such depravity. ... [Red] is a queer fellow; he is merely teasing me. These things are not credible; indeed, I don't believe they are possible. And even if they were, no human being would be capable of such iniquity.<sup>29</sup>

At this point in his narrative Berkman sounds very much like Dwight, O'Hare, and Kropotkin and other reformers, who condemned sexual relations among prisoners. Though Berkman did not make the argument that the kinds of relationships pursued by men such as Red were a product of prison life he nonetheless denounced them as partaking of the hierarchical and brutal nature of the prison system. This reflects the fact that Berkman is being asked to play the role of a passive sexual partner to an older man. Clearly this was not a role that Berkman was willing to entertain. The horror that Berkman displays in his reaction to Red was likely heightened and fueled by the fear of domination that haunted him in prison. As a prisoner Berkman was already rendered subject to the will of other men. Already seething with rage and overwhelming feelings of impotence at having failed in his attempt to kill Frick, the thought of being made a "kid" brought Berkman to the edge of violence.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 173.

Throughout his narrative Berkman condemns Red and other men who pursued relationships with younger, vulnerable partners. According to Berkman some prisoners were so intent on their pursuit of sex that they were known as “kid men.”<sup>30</sup> In addition to recounting his encounter with Red, for example, Berkman also describes an inmate named “Wild Bill,” a “self-confessed invert” who is well known for his pursuit of “kids.”<sup>31</sup> Inasmuch as they aggressively pursue homosexual pleasure Red and Wild Bill resemble very much the fairies described by Chauncey. Red, for example, tells Berkman that he prefers “kids” to women. “Women,” Red states, “are no good. I wouldn’t look at ‘em when I can have my [kid].”<sup>32</sup> Wild Bill and Red actively pursue other inmates. A fellow prisoner recounts how Wild Bill “had been hanging around the kids from the stocking shop; he has been after ‘Fatty Bobby’ for quite a while, and he’s forever pestering ‘Lady Sally,’ and Young Davis, too.” At one point in *Prison Memoirs* Wild Bill is “caught in the act” with an inmate named Fatty Bobby behind a shed in the prison yard.<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that “kids” were not necessarily young. “Kid” was a passive sexual partner of an older prisoner and not necessarily an adolescent or a young boy. It is unclear how old Fatty Bobby and Lady Sally are though we are told that Young Davis is nineteen years old.<sup>34</sup>

Berkman’s anarchist politics played a role in how he viewed the sexual relationships of men in prison. He could not accept the subordinate status of “kid” for himself or for any other inmate. This put him in conflict with the value system of many of his fellow prisoners. According to Chauncey, most inmates were indifferent

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 325.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 243.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 257.

<sup>34</sup> For a useful discussion of age-structured homosexuality see Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs*.

to the behavior of men like Wild Bill. Having a kid was a sign of power. “The wolf’s behavior led him to lose little status among other prisoners; if anything he gained stature in many men’s eyes because of his ability to coerce or attract a punk.”<sup>35</sup> But unlike the majority of his fellow prisoners, Berkman was not a product of the rough bachelor subcultures. The domination and hierarchy that characterized so much of prison life, including the relations between “kids” and “kid men,” were anathema to Berkman’s anarchist principles. Not that Berkman condemned all age-structured same-sex relationships; at several points in his memoirs he offers positive examples of such pairs. What Berkman found so profoundly problematic about the behavior of men like Wild Bill and Boston Red is that they treated their “kids” as marked inferiors. Berkman did not object to homosexual relations, he objected to sexual exploitation.

While a social analysis of homosexuality in prison is beyond the scope of this dissertation it is important to note that the portrayal of “kid men” in *Prison Memoirs* significantly complicates our current understanding of how sexuality, gender, age and identity operated at the turn of the century. The identity of the “kid man” indicates that the prison population recognized a social role for the “active homosexual.” Chauncey argues that such an identity did not exist; only passive partners were marked by sexual difference. “Most prisoners,” he writes, “like the prison authorities, seem to have regarded the wolves [a term for the dominant partner] as little different from other men; their sexual behavior may have represented a moral failure, but it did not distinguish them from other men as the fairy’s gender status did.”<sup>36</sup> But the notion

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<sup>35</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 95.

<sup>36</sup> loc. cit.

of a “kid man” seems to contradict this. Like fairies, “kid men” were marked by their sexual desires; they were known for seeking out sex with other males. But neither Wild Bill—whose very name conjures up one of the great masculine icons of the period—nor Boston Red are described as feminine. This is not to say that gender—which overlapped with and was reinforced by differences in age—was not a primary language through which prison sexual relations were symbolically organized. Some of the youths Wild Bill and Red pursue, such as “Lady Sally,” are clearly feminized. But “kid men” are presented as masculine and aggressive, in this they do not differ from the stereotypical portrayal of manhood. But both men are identified by their erotic interest in other males, a difference which marks them off from other men. Chauncey may be right that “the line between the wolf and the normal man, like that between the culture of the prison and the culture of the streets, was a fine one,” but it was a line that Berkman found meaningful.<sup>37</sup>

Had Berkman gone no further in his investigation of the moral and social status of homosexuality in prison his work would have been no different from that of Kropotkin or O’Hare. But it is here that Berkman’s text differs sharply from those of so many other writers. For in addition to portraying the sexual brutalities of prison life Berkman also explores the existence of loving, mutually supportive relationships among prisoners. Unlike Kropotkin and O’Hare, Berkman portrays the ways in which love in prison—what at one point in his narrative he calls “love’s dungeon flower”—could feed the spirit and body of the men who lived in prison. Erotic desire between men, in other words, is, at least in some of its manifestations, directly counterpoised to the values of the prison system which Berkman so powerfully

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<sup>37</sup> loc. cit.

condemns in his book. It is these portraits that transfixed readers such as Carpenter and others hungry for positive public representations of their own private desires. In a culture that systematically denied the possibility and value of warm, loving, and empowering homosexual relationships the representation of such relationships is a powerful act. Thus in evaluating the sexual politics of Berkman's text one must consider the ways in which representations of homosexuality function in specific cultural contexts. Because of the importance that these relationships had for Berkman's reading public it is worth examining them in some detail.

By far the most remarkable account of love among prisoners that Berkman provides in his memoirs are those that describe his own affection for a number of young men. The first of Berkman's romantic friends is named Johnny Davis. Davis is a young man of noticeable physical beauty; Red comments on his attractiveness and Wild Bill was said to have "pestered" him constantly. Berkman too acknowledges the beauty of Davis. Berkman titled the chapter in which he describes his relationship with Davis "Love's Dungeon Flower," a reference both to the nature of the two men's feelings for each other and to Davis's radiance compared to the drab interior of the prison. Davis and Berkman worked in the prison hosiery department but the two men's relationship did not move beyond simple camaraderie until both men were locked up in adjoining cells in solitary confinement. Berkman was placed in solitary for allegedly "destroying State property, having possession of a knife, and uttering a threat against the Warden." Davis was placed in solitary because he had stabbed a man, "Dutch Adams," who like Wild Bill was attempting to initiate a sexual relationship with Davis. Foiled in his efforts, Adams resorted to spreading rumors that

“he used” Davis. Afraid that his “mother might hear about it,” Davis, tells Berkman that “he couldn’t stand it” and so stabbed Adams.<sup>38</sup> Davis’s actions indicate the degree to which shame and dishonor could be attached to the position of being a “kid.” Confined to a lonely cell and unaware if Adams is alive or dead, Davis dwells on the possibility of his being hanged for murder.

Berkman’s attempt to calm Davis and reassure him that all was not lost is the means by which their relationship evolves and deepens. Berkman tries to convince Davis that Adams might not die and argues that the circumstances of his case might work in the young man’s favor. Berkman reminds Davis of “the Warden’s aversion to giving publicity to the sex practices in the prison, and remind[s] the boy of the Captain’s official denial of their existence.” Davis is relieved by these words and responds to Berkman’s kindness. As their conversation unfolds Berkman notes “with a glow of pleasure,” that there is a “note of tenderness in [Davis’s] voice.” The two grow closer. Davis is soon using Berkman’s nickname “Sashenka”—an affectionate diminutive of Alexander—and convinces Berkman to call him “Felipe,” the name of “a poor castaway Cuban youth” whom the young man had read about. Berkman, like so many other prisoners, is not immune to Davis’s charms. As they drift off to sleep, Berkman pictures “the boy before me, with his delicate face, and sensitive, girlish lips.” The feminization of Davis, the imagery of lips, and the focus on the young man’s physical beauty signals Berkman’s growing attraction to the youth and foreshadows what comes next in the narrative.

When on the following day the two begin speaking again, the erotic element of their relationship “flowers.” Davis asks Berkman whether he is in his thoughts and

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<sup>38</sup> Berkman, *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, 316, 319.

Berkman replies, “Yes, kiddie, you are.” Davis tells Berkman that he too has been thinking of him. After exacting a promise that Berkman won’t “laugh at” him he confesses to his friend the depth of his feelings. “I was thinking,” Davis shyly admits, “I was thinking, Sashenka—if you were here with me—I would like to kiss you.” Far from being horrified, Berkman responds with deep pleasure. “An unaccountable sense of joy,” he writes, “glows in my heart, and I muse in silence.” Davis, alarmed by his friend’s silence, asks, “What’s the matter ... are you angry with me?” Berkman reassures Davis that he is not angry; quite the contrary. “No Felipe, you foolish little boy,” writes Berkman, “I feel just as you do.” That very evening, Davis is taken from solitary, and as he passes Berkman’s cell he whispers, “Hope I’ll see you soon, Sashenka.” Berkman, “lonesome at the boy’s departure,” sinks into sadness.<sup>39</sup>

Unfortunately, Berkman was never able to receive his kiss. Davis died shortly after his release from solitary. Berkman, unaware of his friend’s death, fantasizes about helping to gain freedom for his Davis. Once out of the prison, mused Berkman, “I shall strain every effort for my little friend Felipe; I must secure his release. How happy the boy will be to join me in liberty!”<sup>40</sup> Berkman hoped to give Davis the gift of freedom, but death intervened. The resulting mixture of stillborn desire and loss haunts Berkman and for some time Berkman obsesses about Davis. Although he corresponds regularly with several young female admirers, Berkman dwells on his dead friend. One correspondent sends him a picture of herself but, Berkman confesses to his readers that, her “roguish eyes and sweet lips exert but a passing impression

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 321–4.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 343.

upon me. My thoughts turn to Johnny, my young friend in the convict grave.”<sup>41</sup>

Though one of Berkman’s fellow inmates with whom Berkman shared his correspondence developed “a violent passion for the pretty face [of Berkman’s female admirer],” Berkman ignores the lure of his admirer’s image and nurses his feelings for Davis.

Berkman’s relationship with Davis is difficult to evaluate. It falls somewhere along the spectrum of friendship and erotic relations. There was both a strong emotional component to the pair’s feelings for each other and a physical—if only imaginary—component to the relationship. The extent of their physical intimacy—and hence whether or not one can fairly describe Berkman and Davis’s relationship as homosexual—is unclear. I argue that, within both historic and contemporary definitions, the two men’s relationship had a strong element of homoeroticism. Though as far as we know the two men did not have sex they did participate in an erotic fantasy. Berkman felt drawn to Davis’s “delicate face, and sensitive, girlish lips” and he thrilled at the thought of kissing the youth. Davis for his part seemed all too aware of his own charms—physical and otherwise—and was quite willing to use them on Berkman. The language exchanged between the two men is erotically charged. Berkman feminized Davis and referred to him as “kiddie,” a word freighted with sexual connotations, and both Davis and Berkman used terms of endearment with each other. All of these elements—a kiss, terms of endearment, pining, and feelings of abandonment—are common enough in same-sex friendship of the period, but the intensity of feeling between the two men—of a sort missing in the cold cells of the prison—is depicted as uncommonly powerful. That element of passionate

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 350.

intensity gives the story of “Sashenka” and “Felipe” a powerful place within *Prison Memoirs*.<sup>42</sup>

Davis was not the only man to whom Berkman developed a strong attachment while in prison. Berkman also introduces the reader of the *Prison Memoirs* to an inmate he refers to as “my young friend Russell.” Russell, who was “barely nineteen,” possesses a “smiling face,” “boundless self-assurance,” and “indomitable will.”<sup>43</sup> The description of the relationship between the two men is quite moving, and speaks to the intense feelings that Berkman had for some of his fellow prisoners. Readers were impressed with the depth of feeling the Berkman was able to convey. Bayard Boyesen wrote that “the incidents connected with the story of young Russell” are among the “most beautiful passages in the book.”<sup>44</sup>

As in the case of Davis, Russell and Berkman’s relationship is ignited when Russell is put in solitary. The youth manages to communicate with Berkman through notes, but the strain of the separation and the harassment of the guards take its toll on the youth, who begins to “look pale and haggard.” Berkman’s anxieties grow, as does his fondness for the boy:

With intense thankfulness I think of Russell...A strange longing for his companionship possess me. In the gnawing loneliness, his face floats before me, casting the spell of a friendly presence, his strong features softened by sorrow, his eyes grown large with the same sweet sadness of “Little Felipe.” A peculiar tenderness steals into my thoughts of the boy; I look forward eagerly to his notes. Impatiently I scan the faces in the passing line, wistful for the sight of the youth, and my heart beats faster at his fleeting smile.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> On the politics of historical interpretation and homosexuality see Blanche Weisen Cook, “The Historical Denial of Lesbianism.” *Radical History Review* 20 (Spring – Summer 1979): 60 – 65.

<sup>43</sup> Berkman, *Prison Memoirs*, 403.

<sup>44</sup> Boyesen, “Prison Memoirs,” 423.

<sup>45</sup> Berkman, *Prison Memoirs*, 401 – 402.

Berkman comes to regard Russell in much the same way he regarded Davis.

Berkman feminizes Russell; his transformation into a second “Little Felipe” is accompanied by a “softening” of his features and his eyes grow large and luminous. Berkman’s mood rises and falls on the sight of Russell. Just as with Davis, Berkman imagines the possibility of the two sharing freedom. Berkman’s strongest feelings for his young friends are forged in the crucible of solitary. The “gnawing loneliness” of solitary added a special force to the feelings that Berkman had for Davis and Russell. The fact that Berkman was physically separated from the young men may also have created a psychological space within which his homoerotic fantasies—free of the actual possibility of consummation—could develop.

Unfortunately the parallels between Russell and Davis extend even to their early deaths. Russell, suffering from “a chill,” is placed in the prison hospital. Desperate for news about his friend, Berkman feigns “severe pains in the bowels, to afford Frank, the doctor’s assistant, an opportunity to pause at my cell.” Berkman asks about Russell and is told that the youth is paralyzed, the victim of a mistake on the part of another of the doctor’s assistants. Told that he will surely die, Russell bemoans his fate and sends Berkman piteous notes. Berkman purposefully wounds himself so that he will be sent to the infirmary. Once there he steals to Russell’s bedside. Unfortunately, little can be done. Russell falls asleep and Berkman “silently ... touch[es] his dry lips” and departs. Whether this “touch” is a kiss, or whether Berkman lightly stroked Russell’s lips with his fingers we cannot know. Denied further visitation, Berkman is later told of Russell’s death by Frank. “His last thought,” Frank reports, “was of you.” Berkman adds a dramatic detail: Frank tells

him that at the moment of his death, Russell cries out, “Good Bye, Aleck.”

Berkman’s account of Russell’s death and the agonized portrayal of his reaction to the loss of his friend bespeaks the strength and tenor of emotion that tied the two men together.<sup>46</sup>

Berkman struggled to depict and understand the nature of his relationships with Davis and Russell. He attempts to define and defend the possibility of mutual, freely chosen, loving relations between men in an environment that was by its very nature adverse to such relationships. Berkman clearly disapproved of the coercive nature of the “kid love” that everywhere flourished around him. His initial reaction to Red’s overtures and his disapproving remarks about “kid men” and “kid business” illustrate this. But Berkman’s friendships were, in many ways, similar to those he was so critical of. The language Berkman used to describe his feelings for Russell—“strange” and “peculiar”—indicate that they existed at an intense pitch. He was clearly infatuated with Davis and Russell. Davis’s offer of a kiss sent Berkman into rapture and there is a hint that Berkman kissed Russell as the young man lie dying. Elsewhere in his text however, Berkman denies that he felt any “physical passion” for his young friends but this is true only if one accepts the most limited and arid definition of the term “physical passion.” Berkman does, however, admit that he loved Russell “with all my heart” and his sadness at the loss of Davis reflects a similar depth of feeling.<sup>47</sup> How then did Berkman square such feelings with the furious condemnation of “kid love” that he unleashed on Red?

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 403–8.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 440.

Berkman resolves the problems posed by his relationship with Davis and Russell by introducing into his narrative a moral and ethical dialogue on the subject of homosexuality. In a chapter entitled “Passing the Love of Woman,” Berkman recreates a discussion he had with a friend of his, George, on the subject of homosexuality. The title references the relationship of Jonathan and David, two Biblical figures said to love each other with a love “passing the love of women.” This relationship was a common reference point for nineteenth-century discussions of homosocial and homoerotic relations between men.<sup>48</sup> George is presented as an eminently knowledgeable, authoritative, respectable person with whom Berkman speaks about a subject that is omnipresent in prison. In this chapter Berkman places the subject of homosexuality under explicit scrutiny. This is, in fact, the only chapter in which Berkman uses the word “homosexuality,” as opposed to “kid love” or “kid business.” “Passing the Love of Women” is Berkman’s effort to settle the question of how the reader is supposed to understand and differentiate between the coercive homosexuality practiced by Wild Bill and the loving relationships that Berkman had with Russell and Davis. This chapter is a dramatic treatment of a topic that Berkman struggled with both in his literary art and in his life.

While it is quite possible that Berkman had talks with his fellow inmates on the subject of homosexuality, it is likely that George is a literary creation. George is a rhetorical device created to put forth a reasoned discussion of sex in prison. Certain facts hint at this. For example, George is said to have been raised in the “Catholic tradition” and to have a great-grandfather who “was among the signers of the

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<sup>48</sup> On David and Jonathan see Quinn, *Same-Sex Dynamics and Nineteenth-Century Americans*, 112 – 113.

Declaration.” This is an unlikely pedigree since only one Catholic was among the signers. George also happens to be a physician; he is first identified in *Prison Memoirs* by his nickname “Doctor George.” That a descendant of an old American family, of wealth and professional standing, came to be locked up for “sixteen years for alleged complicity in” “a bank robbery...during which [a] cashier was killed” is hard to believe.<sup>49</sup> George is a very unlikely inmate but a very compatible foil for a dialogue on the ethical, social, and cultural status of same-sex love.

George’s politics—sexual and otherwise—mirror those of Berkman. Unlike nearly all of Berkman’s other fellow inmates George has considerable sympathy for anarchism. George can “pass the idle hours conversing over subjects of mutual interest, discussing social theories and problems of the day.” Though George is not an anarchist he is interested in the “American lecture tour of Peter Kropotkin” and considers himself a “Democrat of the Jeffersonian type,” a description that sounds remarkably like Benjamin Tucker’s notion of anarchists as “unterrified Jeffersonians.” George is also familiar with the discourse of sexology. Though prior to his imprisonment “he had not come in personal contact with cases of homosexuality,” George’s medical training allows him to speak with some authority on the subject. The use of the clinical term “homosexuality” signals George’s knowledge and provides legitimacy to the discussion. A layperson would not be as useful a participant in a dialogue meant to establish the morality of a subject most often treated as a medical and psychological condition. George is a liberal scientist, the perfect person with whom Berkman can converse on a touchy subject.

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<sup>49</sup> Berkman, *Prison Memoirs*, 430–4.

In “Passing the Love of Women” George confesses to Berkman his love for a young prisoner named “Floyd.” He tells Berkman that he first noticed Floyd as he passed in a hallway. “He had been in only a short time,” George recounts, “and he was rosy-cheeked, with a smooth face and sweet lips—he reminded me of a girl I used to court before I was married.” George begins to take particular interest in Floyd’s health, assisting him with “stomach troubles” and securing for him “fruit and things.” Floyd, who was “small and couldn’t defend himself,” found in George a protector. The feelings the older man felt for the youth increased over time. “For two years,” George tells Berkman, “I loved him without the least taint of sex desire.” But over time George’s feelings deepened:

by degrees the psychic stage began to manifest all the expressions of love between the opposite sexes. I remember the first time he kissed me. ... He put both hands between the bars, and pressed his lips to mine. Aleck, I tell you, never in my life had I experienced such bliss as at that moment. ... He told me he was very fond of me. From then on we became lovers. I used to neglect my work, and risk great danger to get a chance to kiss and embrace him. I grew terribly jealous, too, though I had no cause. I passed through every phase of a passionate love.<sup>50</sup>

George’s feelings for Floyd are very much like those that Berkman felt for “Felipe” and Russell. In both cases the friendship is structured by a significant age difference; the youth is feminized in the eyes of the older man; the older man is concerned with the general welfare of the beloved; and the attraction and emotional bond are mutual (or at least the older man experienced them as such). In telling George’s story, Berkman is retelling his own story. Of course, the significant difference between George’s relations with Floyd and Berkman’s relationship with young men is that George admits that his love “manifest[ed] all the expressions of love between the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 437-9.

opposite sexes.” Berkman never reveals whether he had a physical relationship with another man while he was in prison.

Like Berkman, however, George is unsure of how to understand his experience of attraction to another male. He struggles with the meaning of his love for Floyd. George tells Berkman that he wants to “speak frankly” on a subject about which “very little is known ... much less understood.” The strain of the attempt is obvious. The “veins on [George’s] forehead protrude, as if he is undergoing a severe mental struggle.” George insists that he approached Floyd with pure intentions. “Don’t misunderstand me,” George tells Berkman, “it wasn’t that I wanted a ‘kid.’ I swear to you, the other youths had no attraction for me whatsoever.”<sup>51</sup> Floyd was different from the other inmates. He was a “bright and intelligent youth of “fine character.” George’s interest in Floyd was, he insisted, not merely physical. He “got him interested in literature, and advised him what to read, for he didn’t know what to do with his time.” In other words, George is not a ruthless “kid man,” like Red or Wild Bill. And George, unlike Red, does not prefer the company of “kids” to that of women. In fact George is happily married. “Throughout [George’s] long confinement,” Berkman tells us, “his wife had faithfully stood by him, her unflinching courage and devotion sustaining him in the hours of darkness and despair.”<sup>52</sup>

George carefully distinguishes his feelings for Floyd from the type of feelings that “kid men” had for their partners. George’s animus, however, is directed against the youthful partners not the older men. Berkman relates that George was “very bitter against the prison element variously known as ‘the girls,’ ‘Sallies,’ and ‘punks,’ who

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 438.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 429.

for gain traffic in sexual gratification.” These youth according to George “are worse than street prostitutes.” Though George described Floyd as looking like a girl, the contrast between the flagrant behaviors of the “Sallies” and Floyd’s respectable demeanor was a way to exorcise the taint of effeminacy from the two prisoner’s love for each other. Floyd may have been pretty enough to attract George’s attention but he was not a “street prostitute.” This condemnation functions as a way to distinguish what Floyd and George shared from the taint of effeminacy and prostitution. George needed to reassure himself that his relationship with Floyd was something nobler than a sexual transaction. George insists that he was not merely interested in “sexual gratification;” his motivations were of a finer caliber.<sup>53</sup>

The physical nature of his relationship with Floyd disturbed George. He tells Berkman that despite the “passionate nature” of his love he “felt a touch of the old disgust at the thought of actual sex contact.” Perhaps Red, who expressed a rougher, working-class sexual ethos, was untroubled by sex with his “kids,” but George was of a different class and cast. Kissing and embraces were innocent enough but genital contact, most likely anal sex, “seemed to me a desecration of the boy.” Even though Floyd “said he loved me enough to do even that for me,” George told Berkman, “I couldn’t bring myself to do it; I loved the lad too much for it.” This was not mere lust, George insisted, “it was real, true love.” Despite Floyd’s apparent willingness to have sex, George denies that he had genital intercourse with his beloved. The relationship ended when Floyd was transferred to another cellblock. George was bereft. “I would be the happiest man,” he told Berkman, “if I could only touch his hand again, or get one more kiss.”

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 433.

Berkman's presentation of George's relationship with Floyd as being intimate, yet limited in physical expression, echoes that of other sex radicals who struggled to represent same-sex love free of reference to crime or sin. Like George, men such as Edward Carpenter and John Addington Symonds insisted that love between men was not merely sodomy but an especially intense form of friendship. Sex took second place in their descriptions of same-sex love. For example in one of his essays on "homogenic love" Carpenter downplayed the sexual nature of same-sex love:

Without denying that sexual intimacies do exist; and while freely admitting that in great cities, there are to be found associated with this form of attachment prostitution and other evils comparable with the evils associated with the ordinary sex-attachment; we may yet say that it would be a great error to suppose that homogenic love takes as a rule the extreme form vulgarly supposed; and that it would also be a great error to overlook the fact that in a large number of instances the relation is not distinctly sexual at all, though it may be said to be physical in the sense of embrace and endearment.<sup>54</sup>

Carpenter's description of same-sex love was an artful attempt to get around the moral stigma that attached to the genital expression of homosexual desire. Like George, who rails against the "sallies" and "girls," and "punks," who trade sex for food and other favors, Carpenter distances his vision of same-sex love from prostitution and other forms of illicit love. Playing down the sexual, Carpenter presented same-sex love as an intense spiritual and emotional bond. Berkman's chapter describing his conversation with George functions in exactly the same way. Berkman describes George's relationship with Floyd as something other than mere "kid business." Throughout his narrative Berkman downplays the physical, erotic

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<sup>54</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Homogenic Love and its Place in a Free Society*, (London: Redundancy Press, 1980 [1895]), 14-15.

element of those same-sex relationships, like those he had with Davis and Russell, which he wishes to present as noble and good.

Having finished telling the story of his love for Floyd, George looks to Berkman for his opinion. It's a moment fraught with tension. "You—you're laughing," George exclaims, "a touch of anxiety in his voice." George was concerned that Berkman would interpret his behavior as "viciousness"; most prisoners, George tells his friend, "take everything here in such a filthy sense." But Berkman reassures his friend that he understands perfectly and is more than sympathetic. "I think it is a wonderful thing; and George—I had felt the same horror and disgust at these things, as you did. But now I think quite differently about them." Like George, Berkman had come into prison with a strong distaste for homosexuality but, as Red had predicted, he had come to see things differently. The reason for this change of heart is that Berkman shared George's experience of love for a fellow prisoner. "I had a friend here," Berkman admits, "his name was Russell. . . . I felt no physical passion toward him, but I think I loved him with all my heart." Berkman does not mention "Felipe," his first "kiddie," but the reader would, of course, know of this relationship. Berkman finishes his talk with George by telling him that his anxiety is misplaced. "George," Berkman reassures his friend and his readers, "I think it a very beautiful emotion. Just as beautiful as love for a woman."<sup>55</sup>

As his date of release approached Berkman turned away from the relationships he had formed in prison. "Thoughts of women," he writes, "eclipse the memory of the prison affections."<sup>56</sup> But Berkman's interest in the nature and ethics of

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<sup>55</sup> Berkman, *Prison Memoirs*, 440.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 478.

“prison affections” continued. His first act in this regard was to insist on depicting his experience of same-sex sexuality and affection in prison in his memoirs. In her autobiography Goldman reports that one of the publishers who considered the manuscript “insisted on eliminating the chapters relating to homosexuality in prison” but Berkman refused to bowdlerize his text.<sup>57</sup> With the help of friends such as Lincoln Steffens and others who provided financial support, the Mother Earth Publishing Company was able to bring out *Prison Memoirs*. Goldman also solicited support in the form of advanced subscriptions and contributions from readers of *Mother Earth* in a letter that highlighted the sexual content of Berkman’s work. *Prison Memoirs*, she wrote, “promises to be one of the most valuable and original contributions to the psycho-revolutionary literature of the world.” Goldman’s letter indicates that Berkman’s manuscript treats the “Physical, Mental, and Moral Effects” of life behind bars including “The Stress of Sex” and “Homosexuality.”<sup>58</sup> The framing of *Prison Memoirs* as a “psychological” work—one advertisement in *Mother Earth* calls it a “contribution to socio-psychological literature”—is important given the central place that Berkman gives medicine and psychology, as personified in the figure of George, in his attempt to grapple with the ethics of homosexuality.<sup>59</sup>

Berkman further signals his interest in the politics of homosexuality by framing his text with the work of Oscar Wilde. As a preface to his memoirs, Berkman chose an excerpt from Oscar Wilde’s poem “The Ballad of Reading Gaol.” Wilde’s text is a perfect accompaniment for Berkman’s book, since both works condemn the prison system. The Mother Earth publishing company also realized that

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<sup>57</sup> Goldman, *Living My Life*, 484.

<sup>58</sup> Emma Goldman to unknown, 25 September 1911, *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 17.

<sup>59</sup> See advertisement in *Mother Earth*, January 1911, n. p.

there was a natural fit between the two men's work. In the back of the first edition of *Prison Memoirs* Wilde's poem and his essay "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" were offered for sale by mail order. Even before Berkman's prison memoirs were published Wilde's prison writings were being touted in the pages of *Mother Earth*. An excerpt from Wilde's essay *De Profundis*, which speaks to experience of imprisonment, appeared in one of the first issues of the journal. In *De Profundis* Wilde expresses his hope that if he is able to make of his prison years "only one beautiful work of art I shall be able to rob malice of its venom, and cowardice of its sneer, and to pluck out the tongue of scorn by the roots."<sup>60</sup> "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" and Berkman's *Prison Memoirs* are just such works. Both texts transform the fate of the condemned into moving and politically radical works of art.

Berkman was not alone in linking Wilde with the injustice of the prison system. In a letter to Hirschfeld, for example, Goldman condemned the cruel way in which Wilde was treated. The sentencing of Wilde, she wrote, "struck me as an act of cruel injustice and repulsive hypocrisy;" an unjust act by an unjust society. Goldman specifically linked Wilde's mistreatment with the oppression of homosexuals. Goldman championed Wilde because she told Hirschfeld, "As an anarchist my place has always been on the side of the persecuted."<sup>61</sup> Like Berkman, Goldman also made use of Wilde's work in her own writings on prison and the criminal justice system. In an essay attacking the prison system Goldman cited a section of "The Ballad of Reading Goal" which describes jails as sources of "poisonous air," which throttles

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<sup>60</sup> Oscar Wilde, "The Ennobling Influence of Sorrow," *Mother Earth*, July 1906, 14.

<sup>61</sup> Goldman, "The Unjust Treatment of Homosexuals," in Katz, *Gay American History*, 379.

those who were forced to breath it.<sup>62</sup> Other anarchists also cited Wilde's poem when discussing prisons. When Marie Ganz was in Queens County Jail she read "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" to her fellow inmates. According to Ganz, the prisoners listened "intently to every word, until they burst into tears."<sup>63</sup> Wilde's witness was a powerful document that reverberated throughout anarchist prison writing.

In naming Wilde as a literary and political inspiration, however, Berkman was choosing sides in a debate over sexuality—a debate that was most clearly symbolized by Wilde's trial and imprisonment for a sex crime that linked imprisonment, homosexuality, and political dissidence. It did not escape Berkman that in writing "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" Wilde was condemning the legal system that sent him to prison for homosexual acts. In *Prison Memoirs* Berkman frames Wilde's imprisonment as a political act. In the chapter "Passing the Love of Woman" Berkman writes that George "speaks with profound sympathy of the brilliant English man-of-letters ... driven to prison and to death because his sex life did not conform to the accepted standards." George exonerates Wilde of any wrongdoing, shifting the blame onto "the world of cant and stupidity."<sup>64</sup> This defense of Wilde, articulated in the context of the chapter in the memoirs that is most concerned with exploring the ethics of same-sex love, makes explicit what is implied by Berkman's selection of "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" as a preface to his own work. Choosing Wilde as a literary companion was a resonant act with a broad series of implications.

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<sup>62</sup> Goldman, "Prisons," in Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, 111.

<sup>63</sup> Marie Ganz, *Rebels: Into Anarchy and Out Again* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1919), 224. Ganz would later renounce her former colleagues, an ideological journey chronicled in her memoir.

<sup>64</sup> Berkman, *Prison Memoirs*, 434.

The clearest indication that Berkman remained interested in the question of the moral and social status of homosexuality is the fact that he gave a series of lectures on the subject after *Prison Memoirs* was published. Berkman, like Goldman and other anarchists, made frequent use of the lecture format in their propaganda work. Berkman developed and delivered a talk he called “Homosexuality and Sex Life in Prison,” which drew upon his observations and experience in prison. Unfortunately there are no surviving transcripts of Berkman’s public presentations on homosexuality, but two reports of such lectures appear in the pages of *Mother Earth*. Berkman’s lecture was an appeal for tolerance and better understanding of the diverse expressions of erotic desire. “Homosexuality and Sex Life in Prison” was apparently a popular speech, a further example of the commonplace observation that sex sells. In the words of Reb Raney, one of *Mother Earth*’s correspondents who heard Berkman speak in San Francisco in 1915, “the interest of the human family in the chief source of our earthly commotion seems never to recede from the boiling pitch.”<sup>65</sup> No doubt the popularity of sex as a lecture topic was one of the reasons Berkman chose to speak on the subject of “prison affections.” The money earned on one night could help underwrite weeks of more prosaic work. But if fundraising had been the only consideration Berkman could have chosen to speak on any aspect of sexuality; he spoke on same-sex eroticism.

Berkman’s homosexual politics reflected his pragmatic view of the ethics of sexual desire. In his lectures he contended, “you can’t suppress the unsuppressible.” To make a crime out of erotic desire was—he knew from personal experience in prison—cruel and bound to fail. You cannot regulate the fundamental human need

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<sup>65</sup> Reb Raney, “Alexander Berkman in San Francisco,” *Mother Earth*, June 1915, 152.

for emotional and physical affection. This position reflected basic anarchist doctrine as well as Berkman's experience behind bars. Berkman had begun his days in prison believing in the aberrant nature of homosexual sex but by the end of his sentence he had come to a less rigid view of human nature. According to one audience member, Berkman's "handling of the sex question exhibits a breadth and comprehension I have never seen surpassed." By insisting on the complexity of human sexual expression Berkman "show[ed] that the better we understand a problem the less liable we are to tangle the skein by grasping at a single thread."<sup>66</sup> Just as he did in *Prison Memoirs*, Berkman insists on treating the complexities of the human heart.

Berkman's treatment of the topic of homosexuality in his lectures reflected his political ideals. He advocated a tolerant disregard for the sexual habits of others, a position consistent with the principles of anarchism. He was apparently an effective speaker. Billie McCullough, who attended a series of Berkman's lectures in Los Angeles in 1915, was deeply influenced by what she heard. "He instinctively gives you credit for having common sense," McCullough wrote, "and therein is the effectiveness of his work." By disguising radical notions in commonplace garb, Berkman gained leverage among his audience members. McCullough, for example, found her views transformed by Berkman's presentation. "I've read Ellis and a few others along these lines," she reported, "but had remained a narrow-minded prude, classifying all Homosexualists as degenerates." But having heard Berkman speak on the subject McCullough declared that she now had a "clearer vision" of a subject she had previously considered as a psychological and moral disorder. So powerful was

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<sup>66</sup> loc cit.

Berkman's argument in favor of sexual liberalism that she felt that his "lecture should become a classic."<sup>67</sup>

Any possibility that "Homosexuality and Sex Life in Prison" would "become a classic" was cut short by Berkman's imprisonment in 1917 on the charge of obstructing conscription following the entry of the United States into World War I. Arrested in New York, Berkman was sentenced to two years in Atlanta Federal Prison. Though far shorter than his earlier period imprisonment, Berkman's stay in Atlanta was just as harsh. He spent seven months in solitary for denouncing the beatings administered to his fellow inmates. Berkman was unbowed. As he had done in the Western Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, Berkman attempted to expose the rank and cruel conditions in Atlanta. After his release Berkman published an open letter to Atlanta's warden, Mr. Zerbst, in which he protested the "criminal neglect of sick prisoners ... the unwholesome food ... the favoritism of men with 'pull,' the discrimination against political prisoners, the corrupt system of 'stool pigeons,' the fake trails at which the work of one drunken guard outweighs that of a dozen soldiers, political prisoners, and other inmates of character and integrity, whose sole crime consisted in the expression of an unpopular opinion during the war." Berkman even protested the low pay of the prison guards! "The struggle for existence," noted Berkman, denies the guards and their dependents a decent living and "makes the guards surly, cranky, and quarrelsome" and prone to "vent their misery and ill-humor upon the unfortunates in their power."

In Atlanta Berkman again confronted "kid business" and once again he denounced it. In his letter Berkman warned the warden, "I have not yet even hinted at

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<sup>67</sup> Billie McCullough, "Alexander Berkman in Los Angeles," *Mother Earth*, May 1915, 113.

the existence and the actual encouragement of homosexual practices. ... I have not started yet, Mr. Zerbst, but I *will*, and that very soon.”<sup>68</sup> [Italics in original] It is somewhat jarring to hear Berkman describe homosexuality as an “aberration” given his advocacy of sexual liberalism and his claims that love between men could be a “wonderful thing.” But Berkman was not referring to consensual relations between men; he was denouncing the sexual exploitation of inmates, a practice that was apparently tolerated and even encouraged by Zerbst and the prison guards. Berkman had made similar charges in *Prison Memoirs*. He always made quite clear distinctions between the ethical nature of sexual acts that were freely entered into and those that were coerced. Despite his threats Berkman was unable to take on Zerbst and the federal prison system. Upon his release Berkman was deported to the Soviet Union, never to return to the United States.

But Berkman’s departure from the United States did not bring an end to his political activism, including his interest in sexual politics. In the mid 1920s Berkman and Goldman sought to have *Prison Memoirs* reissued in England. They approached Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis asking them to write a preface for the new British edition. The choice of Carpenter and Ellis was not casually arrived at. Both men had written on the subject of prison reform, a fact that the two anarchists were well aware of. In one of her essays on prisons Goldman cited the work of both Ellis and Carpenter to support her contention that “nine crimes out of ten could be traced, directly or indirectly, to our economic and social inequities, to our system of

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<sup>68</sup> Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, *A Fragment of the Prison Experience of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman* (New York: Stella Comyn, 1919), 20.

remorseless exploitation and robbery.”<sup>69</sup> Most importantly, the two men, and in particular Carpenter, had expressed sympathy for the anarchists. Carpenter had even played a role in assisting a number of English anarchists, known as the Walsall Anarchists, who had been imprisoned for their political activities.<sup>70</sup> But by the time the two men were approached with the idea of writing a preface for Berkman’s book the greatest claim to fame that either man had was their respective writing on sexuality. And more to the point, both men were associated with the scientific study of homosexuality and with efforts to ameliorate the lives of homosexuals. A preface by either Carpenter or Ellis would highlight those sections of the *Prison Memoirs* that dealt with sex behind bars.

Ellis declined the offer but Carpenter, whose interest in Berkman’s book was longstanding, readily accepted the request to help relaunch *Prison Memoirs*. By writing a preface to Berkman’s memoirs Carpenter could address a number of issues that he cared deeply about. Carpenter’s critique of prison and the legal system were quite similar to those made by anarchists. He denounced prisons as “an epitome of folly and wickedness” in which “the state is seen, like an evil stepmother, beating its own children, whom it has reared in poverty and ignorance.”<sup>71</sup> This echoes the views of Berkman who wrote that prisons were “but an intensified replica of the world beyond, the larger prison locked with levers of Greed, guarded by the spawn of hunger.”<sup>72</sup> Of course, Carpenter was also intrigued by Berkman’s politics of homosexuality. The historian Jeffrey Weeks argues that Carpenter’s interest in

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<sup>69</sup> Goldman, “Prison,” 116.

<sup>70</sup> See David Nicoll, *Life in English Prisons: Mysteries of Scotland Yard* (London: Kate Sharpley Library, 1992), 22.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter*, 114.

<sup>72</sup> Berkman, *Prison Memoirs*, 225

prisons and the politics of sexuality were connected. By writing about those who society scorns and punishes Carpenter was protesting his own status as an outsider. “In the position of modern-day criminals,” Weeks writes, “Carpenter saw a model for his own position as a homosexual, as an outlaw of society.”<sup>73</sup> It is possible that this kind of metonymic equivalence of “the prisoner” with “the homosexual” was part of what motivated Berkman’s relatively sympathetic treatment of same-sex relations behind bars. Since those who committed homosexual acts were by definition outlaws and anarchists had a decided bias for those who stood outside the law, it follows that defending homosexuality was an act of defiance against the law and those who enforced them.

While his prison reform politics was an important reason why Carpenter decided to write a preface for *Prison Memoirs*, by the time Carpenter was asked to write the preface to Berkman’s book he was much better known as a sex radical than a prison reformer. In the early years of the century Carpenter had published a number of works, such as *Love’s Coming of Age* and *Intermediate Types Among Primitive Folks*, which dealt explicitly with homosexuality. In 1914 Carpenter assisted in the founding of the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology (later renamed the British Sexological Society), becoming the group’s first president. The BSS aimed to provide a forum “for the consideration of problems and questions connected with sexual psychology, from their medical, juridical and sociological aspects.” To that end the group sponsored lectures and published pamphlets treating same-sex desire. According to Weeks, “public education on homosexuality was a major theme from

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<sup>73</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet Books, 1990), 71.

the beginnings of the society.” Carpenter was among the most active members of the BSS in this regard. Agreeing to write an introduction to Berkman’s book fit in perfectly with the BSS’s stated desire to throw light on “sexual psychology, from their medical, juridical, and sociological aspects.”<sup>74</sup>

Goldman convinced Carpenter to write a preface to *Prison Memoirs* by arguing that doing so would give him the opportunity to highlight the sexual politics of Berkman’s book:

I know of no one in England or A[merica] who is so fit to introduce Berkman’s work on his prison experience and all that went with those dreadful fourteen years than you. You who have so ably pleaded against prisons, you who have understood the suffering and hopelessness of the victims of our cruel social fabric. And there is also your deep human understanding of the men and women who in their sex psychology divert from the so-called normal and who are branded by our social and ethical stupidity as degenerate. Indeed, there is no other great figure in this wide land who could and would do justice to the work of Alexander Berkman and the subjects he treats therein.<sup>75</sup>

Goldman’s praise of Carpenter’s reform work culminates with her praise of his defense of those “men and women who in their sex psychology divert from the so-called normal.” This is not merely an attempt at flattery but reflects the fact that by the 1920s Carpenter’s reputation had been strongly colored by his writings on sex. Goldman and Berkman were quite aware of Carpenter’s reputation and were willing to trade on the sexual aspect of *Prison Memoirs* in order to promote the book. Anarchist tracts may not have been good business in the 1920s but books on sexuality were best sellers. As Goldman herself told Berkman, “Economic subjects do not draw, only current events...or sex.”<sup>76</sup> But the decision to choose Carpenter was not

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 131 – 132.

<sup>75</sup> Emma Goldman to Edward Carpenter, 29 October 1925, *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 15.

<sup>76</sup> Emma Goldman to Alexander Berkman, May 15-16, 1927, *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 18.

entirely based on market considerations. *Prison Memoirs* was a significant work of sexual politics. Asking Carpenter to write a preface highlighted an aspect of Berkman's book that many, Carpenter among them, found compelling.

Carpenter's preface, which appeared in 1926, was a modest contribution, hardly one page in length. Carpenter was older and had difficulty working at his former pace. Though he employed a less forceful voice than that of the young Hutchins Hapgood, Carpenter shared Hapgood's enthusiasm for the value of the book. He did not expect every reader to "embrace Alexander Berkman's theories, nor yet to approve the act which brought upon him twenty-one years among the living dead" but Carpenter was sure that anyone who picked up *Prison Memoirs* would be impressed by the "deep psychological perceptions and the fine literary quality of the work." Carpenter makes no direct mention of the sexual content of Berkman's book but he hints at the range of human emotions and behaviors treated therein. "There are in the book," wrote Carpenter, "cameos describing how friendships may be and are formed and sustained even in the midst of the most depressing and dispiriting conditions." These gems cut from common rock reveal, according to Carpenter, a beauty that one would not expect to find behind the walls of a jail. In addition to providing a "vivid picture of the sufferings of those detained in American prisons," Carpenter felt that Berkman "makes one realize how the human spirit—unquenchable in its search for love—is ever pressing outward and onward in a kind of creative activity." The creative activity extends to the inmates' struggles to find companionship behind bars. The English edition's dust jacket echoes Carpenter's coy

language, promising readers that Berkman's book describes, "life as it is lived inside prisons...nothing is left out."<sup>77</sup>

In addition to asking Carpenter to write a preface for his work Berkman once again made use of Oscar Wilde's "The Ballad of Reading Gaol." This was the same excerpt that was included in the first American edition. Carpenter's oblique reference to the sexual content of *Prison Memoirs* was echoed by the inclusion of an excerpt from Wilde's poem on the page opposite his preface. The two men represented different aspects of the social position of homosexuals within society: the victim and the rebel. Wilde was the symbol of the tragic consequences of state regulation of erotic desire and expression. The anarchist sex radicals had long used Wilde as a key figure in the politics of homosexuality. Carpenter was a much less tragic figure, signaling a fighting spirit that Berkman himself exhibits in prison. For an English reader in particular, the names Oscar Wilde and Edward Carpenter would have resonated with homosexual desire and with the politics engendered by that desire.

The circulation of the English reissue of *Prison Memoirs* in the United States is unknown. There was a second American edition published in 1920, though obviously it did not have Carpenter's preface. But a reader did not need Carpenter's guidance to understand that *Prison Memoirs* is one of the most important political texts treating same-sex desire of the early twentieth century. Few other books of the period—I would argue none—are as nuanced or sophisticated in their approach to the question of homosexuality. *Prison Memoirs* is not an apologia for same-sex love. Berkman's text is a complex investigation of the question of same-sex love in the context of a brutal environment. Unlike the majority of the writing of prison

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<sup>77</sup> Edward Carpenter, "Introduction," in Berkman, *Prison Memoirs*, n.p.

reformers and ex-convicts Berkman does not use homosexuality as a club with which to beat the prison system. While Berkman does not hesitate to condemn the often brutal nature of prison social and sexual relations he does not stop there. In addition to acknowledging and condemning the exploitation of “kids” in prison, Berkman portrays consensual, supportive relationship between members of the same sex. These relationships included those Berkman had with other prisoners, relationships which helped Berkman survive his many years in jail. *Prison Memoirs* is a key political text in the body of works that the anarchists produced on the subject prisons and on the ethical, social, and cultural place of same-sex desire in American society.

## Chapter Five: “‘Urnings,’ ‘Lesbians,’ and other strange topics’: Sexology and the Politics of Homosexuality

In 1902 John William Lloyd expressed his hope that he would “live to see the day when we shall have an American (better still an International) Institute and Society of Sexology, composed of our greatest scientists, philosophers, physicians, and men and women of finest character studying sex as fearlessly as geology, discussing it as calmly as the ‘Higher Criticism,’ and publishing it far and wide in a paper which no Church nor State can gag.”<sup>1</sup> Like geologists or readers of esoteric texts this gathering of “men and women of finest character” would untangle the layers of desire and identity, providing a road map to the complicated inner world of sexual desires. Lloyd hoped his group of scientists, learned scholars, and doctors would study sex free from the threat of state censorship and theological injunction. Though produced by professionals the knowledge emanating from this learned council would be provided to a broad audience in an easily available publication. Lloyd was careful to point out that the people associated with the “International Institute and Society of Sexology” would not serve the needs of the state. Members of the group would not pronounce on the sanity of a patient or the culpability of a prisoner. The “International Institute and Society of Sex” would constitute a vital organ of a free society run in accordance with the principles of anarchism.<sup>2</sup>

Lloyd’s vision failed to come to fruition, but he was not alone among the anarchists in wishing to see the topic of sex receive more “scientific” attention. Like the myriad psychiatrists, sociologists, doctors, and others who contributed to the field

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<sup>1</sup> John William Lloyd, *The Free Comrade*, August 1902, 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> Marsh writes that “Lloyd thought of himself as a social scientist seeking the means by which society could be made both virtuous and free.” Marsh, *Anarchist Women*, 82.

of sexology, anarchist sex radicals published articles, delivered lectures, and distributed literature dealing with a broad variety of sexual topics. In doing so they hoped to bring clarity to a subject they felt was too little understood. Emma Goldman, one of the most famous—not to say infamous—sex radicals of the early twentieth century, was particularly interested in sexology and the politics of sexuality. “Nowhere,” she observed, “does one meet such density, such stupidity, as in the questions pertaining to love and sex.” Goldman expended considerable time and resources fighting this “puritanical mock modesty.”<sup>3</sup> She felt compelled to speak on the politics of personal life. “Nothing short of an open, frank, and intelligent discussion,” she wrote, “will purify the air from the hysterical, sentimental rubbish that is shrouding these vital subjects, vital to individual as well as social well-being.”<sup>4</sup> The “puritanical mock modesty” of American culture could be dangerous. Goldman’s fellow anarchist, Hulda Potter-Loomis warned that “many physicians and scientists...declare that restrained or restricted sexual desire has been the cause of insanity in thousand of cases.”<sup>5</sup> Like the sexologists the anarchist sex radicals fought to counter what they felt were ill-conceived, uninformed, and dangerous ideas about the nature of sexual desire and its role in shaping individual psychology.

That Lloyd should call for an international sexological society reflected the fact that the American anarchist sex radicals favored European sexologists over their local counterparts. To some extent this reflects the fact that European sexologists were far more productive than the Americans. There was simply more and better-

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<sup>3</sup> Emma Goldman, “En Route,” *Mother Earth*, December 1908, 353.

<sup>4</sup> Emma Goldman, “What I Believe,” in *Red Emma Speaks*, 57.

<sup>5</sup> Hulda Potter-Loomis, *Social Freedom: The Important Factor in Human Evolution* (Chicago: M. Harman, n.d.), 6 – 7. See Veysey, *Communal Experiments*, 29.

known work being written in Europe, especially in England and Germany.<sup>6</sup> But the anarchist's preference for European scholarship was also a function of their political values. When it came to the question of sex, the anarchists felt that the United States was, as one contributor to *Mother Earth* wrote, "a provincial and hypocritical nation."<sup>7</sup> This was particularly true in regards to the question of homosexuality. The anarchist sex radicals were deeply influenced by the work that European sexologists had produced on the subject of same-sex love and desire. Goldman claimed, for example, that it was the "works of Havelock Ellis, Krafft-Ebing, Carpenter, and many others which made me see the crime against Oscar Wilde."<sup>8</sup> Goldman and other anarchists drew on the work of European sexologists in their attempt to define the ethical, social, and cultural place of same-sex desire.

The connections between the anarchist sex radicals and European sexologists went beyond mere familiarity with published texts. Anarchists sought out and communicated with the scientists they admired. And a number of sexologists were interested in the work of the anarchist sex radicals. In 1913, for example, Lloyd visited England where he met Carpenter and Ellis. In a letter to a friend Lloyd told of "my...visit to Carpenter" which included a trip with Carpenter's lover, George Merrill, "to the 'Pub.'"<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately Lloyd offers little detail on the nature of his adventures with Carpenter and Merrill. This is, of course, in keeping with Lloyd's guarded attitude when it came to revealing information about his personal life. Lloyd

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<sup>6</sup> On the relative underdevelopment of American sexological work as compared to European sexology see Bert Hansen, "American Physicians' 'Discovery' of Homosexuals: 1880 – 1900: A New Diagnosis in a Changing Society," in *Framing Disease: Studies in Cultural History*, eds. Charles E. Rosenberg and Janet Goldin (Rutgers, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> "Observations and Comments," *Mother Earth*, August 1911, 166.

<sup>8</sup> Emma Goldman to Magnus Hirschfeld, January 1923, *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 13.

<sup>9</sup> John William Lloyd to Joseph Ishill, March 30, 1922, Ishill Collection.

was more forthcoming about his visit with Ellis. “I told him who I was,” Lloyd later recalled, “and remarked that I did not suppose he remembered me, but I had once exchanged a letter with him, and that I came from America.” Lloyd was flattered when Ellis proclaimed “Oh yes! I remember all about you” and quickly retrieved two of Lloyd’s works from a bookshelf as well as “some clippings about me.” Though certainly pleased by Ellis’s warmth, Lloyd claimed not to be surprised that the Englishman should give him such an enthusiastic welcome. Their friendship was “not so strange,” Lloyd thought, “for we were both sexologists (I ... an amateur, he ... a master).”<sup>10</sup> In Lloyd’s mind, he and his fellow anarchist sex radicals were members in good standing of the “International Institute of Society and Sexology.” They were all struggling to deal with the increasingly salient problems of sexuality and its place in modern life.

The anarchist sex radicals were drawn to those sexologists whose work seemed to them to be useful correctives to contemporary prejudices and moral rules. When, for example, Goldman heard Sigmund Freud speak at Clark University in 1909 she felt that “his simplicity and earnestness and the brilliance of his mind combined to give one the feeling of being led out of a dark cellar into broad daylight. For the first time I grasped the full significance of sex repression and its effects on human thought and action.”<sup>11</sup> The anarchist sex radicals read much of the sexological literature, as Goldman did Freud, as a roadmap out of “a dark cellar.” Goldman told Magnus Hirschfeld that his works “have helped me much in shedding light on the very complex question of sex psychology, and in humanizing the attitude of people

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<sup>10</sup> John William Lloyd, “Havelock Ellis: The Listener,” unpublished manuscript, Ishill Collection.

<sup>11</sup> Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, 173.

who came to hear me.”<sup>12</sup> Lloyd praised Ellis’s work in very similar terms. He thanked Ellis for “redeeming the study of sex from shame and reproach, and elevating it to its proper place as among the most fundamentally essential sciences.”<sup>13</sup> Bolton Hall, a friend of Emma Goldman, echoed Lloyd’s words, writing of Ellis that “when nobody else believed in telling the truth about sex, when it was as much to proclaim oneself an outcast to say that sex was clean and beautiful when rightly used, he dared to say and said it in such a way that he was heard and made it easy, at long last, for us to speak.”<sup>14</sup> The anarchists read the sexologists’s writings as useful analytic and political tools in their attempts to challenge sexual rules and regulations.

The anarchists’ linkage of sexology and radical sexual politics may strike some as odd. Much has been written on the negative impact of sexology on the lives of those marked by sexual difference: its deforming and false claims of objectivity; its imposition of warped subjectivities on powerless people; and its complicity with the legal and cultural oppression of sexual difference. In her intellectual biography of Emma Goldman, Bonnie Haaland is critical of Goldman for adopting the “vocabulary” of the sexologists which contributed to the “pathologization of sexuality by classifying sexual behaviors as perversions, inversions, etc.”<sup>15</sup> Haaland is not alone in seeing sexology as a tool of oppression. “The sexologists,” according to Lillian Faderman and Brigitte Erikson, “emphasized...the unusual, i.e., abnormal

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<sup>12</sup> Emma Goldman to Magnus Hirschfeld, January 1923, *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 13.

<sup>13</sup> John William Lloyd, “Havelock Ellis: The Most Satisfactory Great Man I Ever Met,” in *Havelock Ellis: An Appreciation*, ed. Joseph Ishill (Berkeley Heights, N.J.: Oriole Press, 1929), 167

<sup>14</sup> Bolton Hall, “Havelock Ellis: A Most Radical and a Most Courageous Pioneer,” in *Havelock Ellis: An Appreciation*, 202 – 203.

<sup>15</sup> Haaland, *Emma Goldman*, 165.

nature” of same-sex love.<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Ned Katz is also strongly critical of the sexologists, particularly the medical establishment. “The treatment of Lesbians and Gays by psychiatrists and psychologists,” he writes, “constitutes one of the more lethal forms of homosexual oppression.”<sup>17</sup> How then to explain Lloyd’s call for a sexological society run according to anarchist principles? It would seem impossible, to paraphrase Audre Lourde, that the anarchists could have used the master’s tools to bring down the master’s house.

The portrayal of sexology presented by Haaland, Katz, and others is overly negative. Sexology was a complex set of texts, practices, and influences that was wielded by cultural and political players in contradictory ways. It was not a monolithic institution that spoke power to the powerless. The study of same-sex desire and behavior, writes Vernon Rosario, has been used “in order to legitimize opposing political aims: the normalization and defense of homosexuality, or its pathologization and condemnation.”<sup>18</sup> The field of sexology—which was the purview of a broad array of scientific, humanistic, and literary scholars of both professional and amateur standing—was deeply contested. While some sexologists worked hand in hand with regulatory institutions others worked to undermine the ideas that enabled and legitimated the policing of human desire. A number of leading sexologists, such as Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and Edward Carpenter, were themselves homosexuals whose scholarship was part of a larger political project. Readers of the

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<sup>16</sup> Lillian Faderman and Brigitte Erikson, “Introduction,” *Lesbians in Germany: 1890s – 1920s* (Tallahassee, FL.: Naiad Press, 1990), x – xi. See also Sheila Jeffries, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880 – 1930* (London: Pandora, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> Katz, *Gay American History*, 129.

<sup>18</sup> Vernon A. Rosario, “Homosexual Bio-Histories: Genetic Nostalgias and the Quest for Paternity,” in *Science and Homosexualities*, ed. Vernon A. Rosario (New York: Routledge, 1997), 3. See also Henry L. Minton, *Departing from Deviance: A History of Homosexual Rights and Emancipatory Science in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

works of Carpenter, Ulrichs, and their peers and the hundreds of men and women who collaborated with the sexologists by submitting their life stories for study believed, in the words of Vernon Rosario, “that objective science would dispel centuries of moral and legal prejudice against homosexuals.”<sup>19</sup> Though the critiques of sexology presented by Faderman and others are valid, they are one-sided and overly negative. Sexology was in many instances a powerful challenge to the crudest forms of social, cultural, and legal oppression. Anarchist sex radicals, though not uncritical of sexology, shared the vision of the practitioners of the new science of sex. Sexology was a multivalent discourse that can only be analyzed in light of how it was used, by whom, and to what end.

Anarchist sex radicals helped to circulate sexological texts in the United States. In the late 1880s and 1890s, for example, Benjamin Tucker made available literature and social criticism that dealt with questions of sexuality through his publications and his New York City bookstore. In part, this reflected the fact that risqué literature sold well and helped underwrite the works on banking and land reform that Tucker so loved. But Tucker also sought to make available knowledge about sex that he felt was in keeping with his basic political principles. In the early 1890s, for example, he created the Sociological Index, a clipping service that featured “the most important articles...that appear in the periodical press of the world.” The Index was advertised in *Liberty* and readers could order articles listed in the Index for a fee. One of the sections in the Sociological Index was “Sex.” Here one could find articles entitled “Progress of National Divorce Reforms,” “German Prudery,” and

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<sup>19</sup> Vernon Rosario, “The Science of Sexual Liberation,” *The Gay and Lesbian Review: Worldwide* (November-December, 2002), 37 – 38.

“Girl Student Life in Zurich.” Other sections of the index, such as “Ethics” and “Belles-Lettres,” also carried articles on the subject of sexuality. Most of the articles were from English-language publications but the contents of the foreign press were also made available. Tucker, a Francophile, was especially keen on making available the works of French authors.

In addition to providing the Sociological Index to its readers, *Liberty* also advertised books for sale that treated the topic of homosexuality. Interested readers needn't visit Tucker's bookstore in order to have access to what was often called “advanced” literature. Among the books Tucker made available was the first English edition of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis: With Especial Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct*. This book, essentially a collection of annotated sexual biographies, played a critical role in the consolidation of medical discourse of sexuality and sexual identity. For many people whose erotic and emotional life focused on members of their own sex, Krafft-Ebing's book functioned as a mirror within which they could see themselves. The very logic of the work—which highlights variation and personal history—militates against the idea that sexual mores can conform to hard and fast rules. Though it has had quite a number of critics, *Psychopathia Sexualis* was, in its time, a reformist tract. According to the historian Harry Oosterhuis, “some of his colleagues suspected him of too much sympathy toward sexual deviants.” Critics of Krafft-Ebing charged him with disseminating ‘homosexual propaganda,’ and many believed that his pleas for decriminalization went way too far.”<sup>20</sup> By making works

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<sup>20</sup> Harry Oosterhuis, *Step Children of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry and the Making of Sexual Identity* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 186.

such as *Psychopathia Sexualis* available to a broad audience, Tucker was acting to spread and reinforce new ways of thinking about sexual identity and behavior.

At times, Tucker's dissemination of sexological literature took a more direct route. In 1889, for example, *Liberty* published an essay by Edward Carpenter entitled "Custom." This essay, which first appeared in the English journal, *Fortnightly Review*, and was later collected in Carpenter's *Civilization: Its Causes and Cure*, is a critique of the role of "custom" in determining tastes, behaviors, and morals. In his essay Carpenter employs a comparative analysis that seeks to show that social and cultural values are products of social forces and not ordained by divine rules or regulated by the laws of nature. Once we systematically examine the "customs in which we were bred," Carpenter argues, "they turn out to be only the practices of a small narrow class or caste; or they prove to be confined to a very limited locality, and must be left behind when we set out on our travels; or they belong to the tenets of a feeble religious sect; or they are just the products of one age in history and no other."<sup>21</sup> The seemingly timeless, ancient, and sanctified in our culture are in fact, Carpenter argues, historical constructs reflecting particular class, regional, or religious interests. They should not, therefore, carry the binding imperatives that we ascribe to them. The ideas and values of the world in which Carpenter lived, in other words, were subject to revision.

Though "Custom" does not explicitly treat homosexuality it foreshadows the type of arguments Carpenter would make in his essays on "homogenic love" and "sexual inversion." "Custom" argues that beliefs about what is right and wrong in matters of sex are subject to geographical, temporal, and cultural variation. When we

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<sup>21</sup> Edward Carpenter, "Custom," *Liberty*, 2 February 1889, 7.

examine “the subject or morals,” Carpenter notes, we find that they “also are customs—divergent to the last degree among different races, at different times, or in different localities; customs for which it is often difficult to find any ground in reason or the ‘fitness of things.’” Though moral codes are arbitrary they are nonetheless vigilantly policed. “The severest penalties,” Carpenter observes, “the most stringent public opinion, biting deep down into the individual conscience, enforce the various codes of various times and places; yet they all contradict each other.” The enlightened person, Carpenter goes on to say, should seek to shrug off the dead weight of history. In order to be able to appreciate the fullness of life we must open ourselves to new habits, actions, and tastes. The liberated woman or man of the future will, he writes, “eat grain one day and beef then another ... go with clothes or without clothes ... inhabit a hut or a palace indifferently.” And this tolerant embrace of difference will extend to sex. Carpenter hoped that in the future people “will use the various forms of sex-relationship without prejudice. ... And the inhabitants of one city or country will not be all alike.”<sup>22</sup> Tucker found Carpenter’s praise of diversity and toleration to be an excellent addition to the work on sexuality and psychology that he made available to his readers.

Though Tucker was familiar with the work of Carpenter, Krafft-Ebing, and Ellis, he did not employ sexological vocabulary. Nowhere in his writing on sex, for example, does Tucker identify someone as a homosexual, invert, intermediate type, homogenic lover, or, for that matter, a heterosexual. In his defense of Wilde, for example, Tucker does not identify Wilde as a homosexual nor does he speak of sexual identity or community. In great part this is due to Tucker’s insistence on the

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<sup>22</sup> *loc. cit.*

primacy of the individual. In his political discourse Tucker always spoke of the right of individuals to meet their needs and desires in free association with other individuals. He tended to use gender neutral, non-specific language when doing so. Tucker's sexual politics were couched in the language of the categories of choice, rights, and limits, an abstract line of reasoning that was not rooted in identity. As long as a person was willing to bear the full cost of his or her actions Tucker would defend their right to act as they wished. He defended those who engaged in "vice," for example, because people had a right to act according to their own dictates so long as they did not harm others. Tucker's political perspectives were informed by his wide reading in psychological and sociological discourse but he did not adopt the language and rhetoric of the sexologists when framing his sexual politics.

Among the anarchist sex radicals, Goldman was the most voracious consumer and distributor of sexology. She was an enthusiastic participant in debates over sex, read sexological literature, attended lectures by psychologists, sociologists, and other professionals, and befriended the spokespeople of the new science. This is not to say that Goldman always agreed with what she heard and read. Goldman could be a sharp critic. She wrote Ben Reitman that Dr. Stanley Hall's 1912 lecture on "Moral Prophylaxis" was "really ... awful." While she appreciated that Hall "emphasized the importance of sex," giving it "almost as much credence to it as I," she was troubled that a minister introduced Hall and that the doctor argued, "We need sex instruction to preserve Christianity, morality, and religion."<sup>23</sup> This linking of religion, sexual morals, and regulation was anathema to Goldman. She respected the work that Hall had done in the field of psychology, but she "felt sorry for the American people who

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<sup>23</sup> Emma Goldman to Ben Reitman, 13 July 1912. *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 6.

were accepting such infantile stuff as authoritative information.”<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately for “the American people” Hall’s presentation was representative of thinking about sex among the country’s professionals. Like her colleagues, Goldman was rather disappointed in American sexologists, rarely citing them other than to refute their work.

Goldman had a decided preference for European sexologists. She particularly admired Carpenter, Ellis, and Magnus Hirschfeld, all of whom she viewed as social critics and dissidents. Goldman especially agreed with their liberal views on homosexuality. Goldman wrote to Ellis that she acquired his book *Sexual Inversion* in 1899 and “carried [it] off to America as [one of] my greatest treasures.” *Sexual Inversion*, which was coauthored by John Addington Symonds, was one of the first English language publications dealing with same-sex relations. Ellis was notably more favorable towards the subjects of his study than many of his contemporaries. In the words of Vern Bullough, he “struggled to avoid any language of pathology” and “attempted to emphasize the achievement of homosexuals.”<sup>25</sup> Goldman was a devoted Ellis fan. “I followed your work,” Goldman told Ellis, “read nearly all I could get hold of and introduced them to the mass of people I was able to reach through my lecture work.”<sup>26</sup> Goldman identified Ellis and his ideological kin as part of a larger movement for social justice, one with which she identified and helped foster. By helping to make *Sexual Inversion* better known Goldman felt that she was

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<sup>24</sup> Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, 575.

<sup>25</sup> Vern Bullough, *Science in the Bedroom: A History of Sex Research* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 81.

<sup>26</sup> Emma Goldman to Havelock Ellis, 27 December 1924. *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 14.

aiding in the amelioration of the social and ethical status of the men and women Ellis wrote about.

Goldman may have been especially drawn to Ellis's work because his study on homosexuality was—indirectly—linked with anarchism. When it first appeared in England, *Sexual Inversion* was published by the same press as that used by the Legitimation League, an anarchist sex reform group that advocated free love unions and ending the social ostracism of illegitimate children and their mothers. The Legitimation League operated a bookstore and published a journal, *The Adult*. The police, convinced that the Legitimation League was intent of destroying English morals, monitored the group's activities. The appearance of Ellis's work offered the police an opportunity to attack the anarchists. In 1898 an undercover police agent purchased a copy of *Sexual Inversion* from George Bedborough the editor of *The Adult* who was working at the Legitimation League's bookstore. In the words of Ellis the police hoped to “crush the Legitimation League and *The Adult* by identifying them with my *Sexual Inversion*, obviously, from their point of view, an ‘obscene’ book.”<sup>27</sup> Ellis learned of Bedborough's arrest on the charge of selling *Sexual Inversion*, described by the police as “a certain lewd, wicked, bawdy, and scandalous libel,” from a telegram sent him by the American anarchist Lillian Harman, who was traveling in England at the time. Though the Legitimation League was severely affected by the police actions, Ellis was undeterred and continued to conduct and

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<sup>27</sup> Havelock Ellis, *My Life*, 300

publish his research. This complex intertwining of the path Ellis and the anarchists may well have inclined Goldman to identify Ellis's views and politics with her own.<sup>28</sup>

Goldman saw the work of those she identified as progressive sexologists as blending seamlessly with the larger goals of anarchism. Like them she believed that the study of human nature in the light of science was an indispensable step in the march towards freedom. Goldman went so far as to call Carpenter and Ellis anarchists. This was not a novel interpretation of Carpenter, whose name had been associated with the project of anarchism by Lloyd and Tucker. Carpenter cultivated his kinship with the anarchists. He assisted Peter Kropotkin in researching his book *Fields and Factories* and contributed a very flattering greeting to a *Mother Earth* special issue celebrating the life and work of Kropotkin. Ellis, despite his tangled history with the Legitimation League, was less quick to ally himself with the anarchists. When told of Goldman's opinion of him, Ellis demurred. But Ellis's refusal of the title of anarchist did not dissuade Goldman. "I am amused," she wrote her friend Joseph Ishill, "at Ellis's statement that he is not an Anarchist because he does not belong to an organization." Goldman praised Ellis's "philosophical outlook" which she believed was "infinitely bigger and more important than that of many people who go under the name of Anarchists."<sup>29</sup> Ellis, in other words, was an anarchist in spirit if not in name.

Through her interest in the work of sexologists Goldman was exposed to contemporary medical and psychological ideas on homosexuality. In 1895, for example, she heard a lecture on homosexuality delivered in Vienna. Goldman was in

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<sup>28</sup> On the Legitimation League and Ellis see Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800, Second Edition* (London: Longman, 1989), 180 – 181.

<sup>29</sup> Emma Goldman to Joseph Ishill, 23 July 1928. *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 20.

the city to pursue training as a nurse with a special emphasis on obstetrics and gynecology. The lecture, delivered by a “Professor Bruhl,” made a significant impact on Goldman. This was apparently the first time that she heard the subject of same-sex love treated in a scientific manner. Initially Goldman found the doctor’s talk “mystifying.” In his presentation Bruhl “talked of ‘Urnings,’ ‘Lesbians,’ and other strange topics.” This was Goldman’s introduction to the sexological discourse on homosexuality. In the decades that followed Goldman would become quite familiar with these new terms but at the time they were novel. The audience members also fascinated Goldman. There “were strange,” Goldman recalled, consisting of “feminine-looking men with coquettish manners and women distinctly masculine, with deep voices.” Bruhl’s lecture introduced Goldman to the emergent and increasingly powerful medical and psychological language of sexual difference. By observing her fellow audience members Goldman also learned about the semiotics of sexual identification that “urnings” and “lesbians” crafted for themselves.<sup>30</sup>

Sexological literature had a great impact on how Goldman conceptualized the politics of homosexuality. Goldman absorbed the sexologist’s worldview, speaking of homosexuals as a distinct category of humanity: an identity that had psychological, social, and cultural manifestations. Goldman employed the language of sexology—“homosexuals,” “inverts,” “intermediate types,” and “homo-sexualists”—in her writing and lectures. The inconsistent use of terms reflects the fact that there was no single dominant framework or set of ideas that Goldman embraced. When it came to the literature on sex Goldman was a promiscuous reader. However, one cannot discount the importance of the larger political and social analysis that Goldman

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<sup>30</sup> Goldman, *Living My Life*, 173.

brought to any social question. The discourses that shaped Goldman's sense of sexuality reflected both the specialized medical and psychological discourse of sexology and the broader currents of thought and politics within which Goldman operated. Goldman was drawn to those sexologists whose work best fit in with her basic political ideals. She was accustomed to thinking of oppressed groups: the working-class, women, ethnic minorities. Hutchins Hapgood said of Goldman that she "always associated anybody in any way frowned upon by middle-class society, no matter whether they should be frowned upon or not, with the general victims of an unjust order."<sup>31</sup> Goldman, who was never so alive as when defending the downtrodden, was predisposed to see homosexuals as an oppressed social group; they were another set of "outcasts" that needed a champion.<sup>32</sup>

Like Tucker, Goldman and her associates helped circulate the sexological literature they admired in the United States. Goldman's own writings and lectures on love and sexuality make frequent references to the work of Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, and Magnus Hirschfeld, helping to introduce this work to her audiences. Books by Carpenter, Ellis, and other sexologists were sold on Goldman's lecture tours and offered as premiums to subscribers to *Mother Earth*. In 1912, for example, subscribers who sent in \$5.00 would receive "Berkman's 'Prison Memoirs,' Proudhon's 'What is Property,' Frank Harris's 'The Bomb,' Kropotkin's 'Russian

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<sup>31</sup> Hapgood, *A Victorian in the Modern World*, 466.

<sup>32</sup> Bonnie Haaland agrees that sexology was influential in shaping Goldman's sexual politics but sees this influence as pernicious. This damage takes the form, Haaland argues, of false consciousness. "While Goldman obviously felt she had been liberated by the sexologists, as witnessed by her willingness to talk openly about sexual matters, she was at the same time, contributing to the sexologists' pathologization of sexuality by classifying sexual behaviors as perversions, inversions, etc." In other words, Goldman was merely repeating the misrepresentations of the sexologists. (Haaland, *Emma Goldman*, 165.)

Literature,’ and Edward Carpenter’s ‘Love’s Coming of Age.’”<sup>33</sup> Both Carpenter’s book and Berkman’s memoirs include substantial material on same-sex eroticism. Those who subscribed to *Mother Earth* would therefore be provided with a relatively rich library of literature treating homosexuality. In addition, many issues of *Mother Earth* carried advertisements that offered “important books on sex” and “anarchist and sex literature” for sale. Readers of the November, 1915 issue of *Mother Earth* could order August Forel’s book *The Sexual Question: A Scientific, Psychological, Hygienic and Sociological Study of the Sex Question*, a work that according to the ad copy addressed “Homosexuality ... and other important phases of sex.”<sup>34</sup> Goldman’s journal and her lecture tours were important channels for the dissemination of sexological literature.

In addition to advertising the work of sexologists, *Mother Earth* published articles by sexologists and non-anarchist sex radicals. In 1907, for example, Goldman’s journal carried an article by Dr. Helene Stocker entitled “The Newer Ethics.” Stocker was a German feminist who supported divorce law reform, the free circulation of information about contraception, and access to legal abortion. Stocker was also a member of Magnus Hirschfeld’s Scientific-Humanitarian Committee. “The Newer Ethics” is an examination of the “sex question” in light of the work of the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche. While Stocker does not directly address the question of homosexuality in her essay she argues—in a manner remarkably similar to Carpenter—that in matters of love people should “not bow slavishly to custom.” According to Stocker, Nietzsche’s work “teaches the beauty

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<sup>33</sup> Emma Goldman to Joseph Ishill, 31 December 1912. *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 6.

<sup>34</sup> See advertisement, “The Sexual Question by August Forel,” *Mother Earth*, November 1915.

and purity of love, which for hundreds of years has been branded as vicious by the unhealthy imagination of the church.” People, Stocker argued, should pursue their passions free of guilt. The new ethics, she wrote, “strikes at the root of the old and confused notions, which identify ‘morality’ with the fear of conventional standards, [and] ‘virtue’ with ‘abstaining from sexual intercourse.’”<sup>35</sup> Though not an anarchist herself the views expressed by Stocker in “The Newer Ethics” were in concert with those held by the anarchist sex radicals.

Several of Goldman’s colleagues shared her interest in sexology, homosexuality, and the politics of sexuality. Ben Reitman, who was Goldman’s lover during the years she was most actively interested in the politics of homosexuality, is especially important in this regard. According to Candace Falk, “Ben had always been fascinated with and sympathetic to homosexuality.”<sup>36</sup> At the age of twelve Reitman began to ride the railways, mixing with the men and boys who traveled from city to city seeking employment. This largely male world was characterized by a rough sexual culture in which homosexual behavior was not uncommon.<sup>37</sup> This early experience of the sexual subculture of casual laborers, tramps, and hobos seemed to have marked Reitman; he retained a lifelong interest in the life he had as a youth. In the late 1930s, for example, Reitman published a book, *Sister of the Road: The Autobiography of Box-Car Bertha as Told to Ben Reitman*, which listed “well-marked homosexuals” as one of the categories of people who took to the road.<sup>38</sup> When Reitman became a physician he continued to move in social worlds in which

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<sup>35</sup> Helene Stocker, “The Newer Ethics,” *Mother Earth*, March 1907, 17 – 23.

<sup>36</sup> Falk, *Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman*, 423-424.

<sup>37</sup> See Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs* and Chauncey, *Gay New York*.

<sup>38</sup> Ben Reitman, *Sister of the Road: The Autobiography of Box-Car Bertha as Told to Ben Reitman* (New York: Sheridan House, 1937), 283.

homosexual behavior was common. He lived his life at the margins of respectable society. Reitman's biographer writes that "underworld types and down-and-outs gravitated to Ben's office, as did prostitutes, pimps, dope addicts, and sexual perverts."<sup>39</sup> Given their mutual interest in homosexuality and sexology, it is likely that Reitman shared his personal observations and knowledge with Goldman.

Goldman's most notable interventions in the politics of homosexuality were her lectures. Lectures were one of the key tools used by both anarchists and sexologists in their attempts to spread their ideas. Goldman was a powerful speaker whose stage presence, according to Christine Stansell, was "by all accounts mesmerizing."<sup>40</sup> Though portrayed as a rabble-rouser in the popular press much of Goldman's power as a speaker resulted from her willingness to treat controversial subjects, like sex, dispassionately. This is not to say that she was not an entertaining speaker. When Goldman lectured on the subject of "Sex" at Harry Kemp's college in Kansas the "hall was jammed to the doors by a curiosity-moved crowd." Those who came for a show were no doubt disappointed. Goldman did not treat the subject of her talk in a sensational fashion. According to Kemp, Goldman "began by assuming that she was not talking to idiots and cretins, but to men and women of mature minds." But when one of the professors jumped to his feet to denounce Goldman's too frank manner of speech, Goldman responded by poking fun at the outraged moral guardian. In a fit of temper the professor shouted at the top of his lungs: "Shame on you, woman! Have you no shame?" The professor's outraged outburst set off the

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<sup>39</sup> Roger A. Burns, *The Damndest Radical: The Life and World of Ben Reitman, Chicago's Celebrated Social Reformer, Hobo King, and Whorehouse Physician* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 16.

<sup>40</sup> Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 132.

gathered students who Kemp writes, “howled with indescribable joy.” Goldman shared in their mirth and “laughed till the tears streamed down her face.” According to Kemp “the four days she remained [on campus] her lectures were crowded.”<sup>41</sup>

Goldman delivered most of her lectures on homosexuality in the years 1915 and 1916. There is no clear reason why these years should be the high water mark for Goldman’s interest in the politics of homosexuality. Perhaps the heightened radicalism of the war years created a context in which Goldman felt she could speak out on controversial topics. As the war in Europe unfolded the political climate of the United States heated up. The nation was torn by debates over intervention, pacifism, and the politics of empire. In this hot house atmosphere Goldman addressed a wide variety of topics including homosexuality. One could draw an analogy with the late 1960s and early 1970s when the politics of the Vietnam War, the rise of the New Left, the turn towards Black Power and radical variants of Feminism, created a cultural and political context in which the politics of homosexuality were radicalized.<sup>42</sup>

Goldman had addressed the issue of same-sex love in lectures prior to 1915. In 1901, for example, the journal *Free Society* published a report on a lecture she gave in Chicago that touched on the moral and ethical place of same-sex love. In her talk Goldman “contended that any act entered into by two individuals voluntarily was not vice. What is usually hastily condemned as vice by thoughtless individuals, such as homo-sexuality, masturbation, etc., should be considered from a scientific

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<sup>41</sup> Harry Kemp, *Tramping on Life: On Autobiographical Narrative* (Garden City, NJ: Garden City Publishing Company, 1922), 286 – 287.

<sup>42</sup> See Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Dutton, 1993)

standpoint, and not in a moralizing way.”<sup>43</sup> Goldman’s argument in 1901—that consensual relations and behaviors that cause no harm to others should in no way be regulated—was the basic message of all her presentations on the subject of homosexuality. She thought of this analysis—informed as it was by her readings in sexology—as a scientific rather than moralistic viewpoint. By the mid nineteenth-teens, however, Goldman’s lectures offered more than a simple defense of homosexuality. She began to speak as an authority on the subject. Goldman’s lectures were exercises in sexological education. Her sociological and psychological perspectives on homosexuality were reflected in the content of her talks. It was from this perspective that Goldman addressed the topic of homosexuality in her lectures in the years immediately before the war.

Like the sexologists she admired Goldman derived much of her information on same-sex affection from her own observation and social analysis. Goldman acknowledged that she learned much of what she knew about homosexuality from her friends and acquaintances. In 1915, for example, she wrote a friend encouraging her to attend her lecture on the “Intermediate Sex ... because I am speaking about it from entirely a different angle than Ellis, Forel, Carpenter and others, and that mainly because of the material I have gathered during the last half dozen years through my personal contact with the intermediate, which has lead me to gather the most interesting material.”<sup>44</sup> Goldman’s personal relations with “intermediate types,” a term Carpenter used to describe homosexuals, enriched her understanding of

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<sup>43</sup> Abe Issak Jr., “Report from Chicago: Emma Goldman,” *Free Society*, 9 June 1901, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Emma Goldman to Ellen A. Kennan, 6 May 1915, *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 9.

sexuality and may well have provided her with the impetus to expand upon a theme which previously had been one of several topics that she treated in her lectures.

Goldman's lectures were often the means by which she met the "intermediate types" she befriended. In 1914, for example, Goldman met Margaret Anderson who had come to hear Goldman speak. Sexual radicalism was a key element of Goldman's appeal to Anderson. Goldman, according to Anderson, "whose name was enough in those days to produce a shudder" was "considered a monster, an exponent of free love and bombs."<sup>45</sup> For Anderson, who had set herself on the path of bohemian rebellion, this aura of danger was part of Goldman's fascination. Anderson introduced Goldman to her lover, Harriet Dean. The couple published *The Little Review* a journal of art and culture. Goldman described the two as a classic butch-femme couple. According to Goldman, Dean "was athletic, masculine-looking, reserved, and self-conscious. Margaret, on the contrary, was feminine in the extreme, constantly bubbling over with enthusiasm."<sup>46</sup>

Dean and Anderson were drawn into Goldman's political efforts and the controversy they produced. The two women helped arrange Goldman's lectures in Chicago; tickets for the lecture were sold out of the offices of *The Little Review*. Dean's family, who lived in the city, was mortified. They offered to pay for the printing cost associated with Goldman's lectures if she would agree to refrain from speaking on free love. Anarchism, it would seem was an acceptable topic of conversation but free love was out of bounds. The Dean family seemed not to have appreciated the fact that free love and anarchism were, for all practical purposes, the

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<sup>45</sup> Margaret Anderson, *My Thirty Years' War: The Autobiography, Beginnings and Battles to 1930* (New York: Covici Friede), 55.

<sup>46</sup> Goldman, *Living My Life*, 531.

same thing. Surprisingly, the family seemed not to have objected to Goldman's intention to lecture on the subject of the "Intermediate Sex." It is possible that they were unaware of the lecture or could not understand what the subject of the talk was from the title of the speech. Or perhaps Dean's family did not perceive Dean and Anderson's relationship as being sexual in nature or, if they did, perhaps they were too scandalized to speak of the topic directly. It is also possible, though unlikely given the horror with which they reacted to the idea of the family name being associated with the doctrine of free love, that they were indifferent to the nature of Dean's relationship with Anderson. Whatever the case, Goldman refused to change her lecture topics, and Dean and Anderson stood by her.

Anderson and Dean gravitated towards anarchism because it promised psychological, social, and sexual freedom. "Anarchism," exclaimed Anderson, "was the ideal expression for my ideas of freedom and justice." In short order, the pages of *The Little Review* were filled with praise of anarchism. Goldman was invited to contribute to the magazine. She returned the favor by writing in the pages of *Mother Earth*, "I cannot advise our readers more urgently to subscribe to Margaret C. Anderson's magazine." Goldman praised *The Little Review* as a "magazine devoted to art, music, poetry, literature, and the drama," one which approached these subjects "not from the point of view of *l'art pour l'art*, but for the sake of sounding the keynote of rebellion in creative endeavor."<sup>47</sup> Goldman viewed Dean and Anderson as fellow radicals who were melding art and activism in an attempt to create new social relations. Anderson and Dean's unconventional sex life was part of their rebellion.

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<sup>47</sup>Emma Goldman, *Mother Earth*, October 1914, 253.

“Strongly individualized,” Goldman observed, “they had broken the shackles of their middle-class homes to find release from family bondage and bourgeois tradition.”<sup>48</sup>

It is impossible to know whether or not a statistically significant number of Goldman’s admirers were homosexuals. But Dean and Anderson were hardly the only homosexuals who were drawn to Goldman. Goldman also received support from a New Jersey man named Alden Freeman. In 1909 Freeman, a wealthy man who lived in East Orange, New Jersey, shocked his neighbors by offering his estate to Goldman when other venues were closed to her. Goldman delivered her talk to a large and excited audience. For Freeman this was an act with deep personal resonance. According to Will Durant, at the time a friend of both Freeman and Goldman, “Freeman ... signaled his freedom from tradition by having Emma Goldman lecture on the modern drama in the barn of his home.” The reason for Freeman’s surprising hospitality to Goldman was that he was a “homosexual, ill at ease in the heterosexual society that gathered about him.” As a homosexual Freeman felt alienated so he “sympathized with ... rebels and contributed to their projects.”<sup>49</sup> There was an intimate relationship, Durant suggests, between Freeman’s feelings of sexual difference and his interest and support of anarchism. Following Goldman’s “barn” lecture Freeman provided financial support to Goldman and kept in touch with her even after her exile from the United States.

Others seemed to have felt as Freeman did. There is the fascinating story, for example, of the influence that Goldman’s lectures had on the life of Alberta Lucille Hart. Though born a woman in 1892 Hart chose to live his life as a man. Anarchism

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<sup>48</sup> Goldman, *Living My Life*, 531.

<sup>49</sup> Will and Ariel Durant, *A Dual Autobiography*, 37.

played a role in this dramatic process of personal reinvention. Hart struggled with his identity and his relationships. In 1916, “[Hart] heard many lectures by Emma Goldman and became much interested in anarchism.”<sup>50</sup> The lectures and subsequent investigations into anarchism gave added impetus to Hart’s decision to live his life as he saw fit. He eventually moved to a new city where he married a woman and pursued a career as a physician. This was the kind of act of individualism that Goldman’s ideas spoke to. Goldman’s unyielding defense of the right of the individual appealed to Hart at a critical point in his life. Because of her willingness to speak on behalf of homosexuals and others considered deviant, Goldman seemed to have held a special appeal to those men and women whose sexual desires or gender identity led them to feel “ill at ease” in the society they lived in.

The most interesting relationship between Goldman and one of her admirers is the case of Almeda Sperry who met Goldman after hearing Goldman speak on the politics of prostitution. A working-class woman who lived in the industrial town of New Kensington, Pennsylvania, Sperry had both male and female lovers. Her politics were as unconventional as her sex life. Inspired by Goldman, Sperry flung herself into the anarchist movement. For a number of years she worked tirelessly to help Goldman in her efforts to broadcast her anarchist ideas. In 1912, for example, she worked to secure a lecture hall for Goldman in New Kensington and wrote to her

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<sup>50</sup> Dr. J. Allen Gilbert, “Homosexuality and Its Treatment,” in *Gay/Lesbian Almanac: A New Documentary*, ed. Jonathan Ned Katz (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), 272. In his analysis of the story Katz insists on claiming Hart as a lesbian. He writes that Hart’s marriage “involves two women, one of whom...passes for a male—two women living and loving together, two Lesbians.” (p. 277) Katz is also very critical of Hart’s physician, Dr. Gilbert. While it seems to me that Gilbert is tolerant and even helpful in facilitating Hart’s gender transformation, Katz sees Gilbert’s actions as “one more example of the pernicious treatment of Gay people by the medical profession.” (p. 278)

friend, “You’ve got to come, Emmy, for the people need you awfully.”<sup>51</sup> Sperry also distributed anarchist literature on behalf of Goldman. “I am going to get a list of all the radical people in this valley,” Sperry wrote Goldman, “and I mean to visit them all! I want to make my place the headquarters for Anarchist literature in the Allegheny Valley and I will.”<sup>52</sup>

As her interest in anarchism grew so to did Sperry’s feelings for Goldman. This proved to be a point of conflict between the two women. In one particularly telling letter Sperry wrote that Goldman had appeared to her in a dream. The imagery of the dream is strongly erotic:

You were a rose, a great yellow rose with a pink center—but the petals were folded one upon the other so tightly. I prayed to them to yield to me and held the rose close to my lips so that my warm breath might persuade them to open. Slowly, slowly they opened, revealing great beauty—but the pink virginal center of the flower would not unfold until the tears gushed from my eyes when it opened suddenly revealing in its center a crystal drop-dew. I sucked the dew and bit out the heart of the flower. The petals dropped to the ground one by one. I crushed them with my heel and their odor wafted after me as I walked away.

The violent eroticism of Sperry’s dream is characteristic of her exchanges with Goldman. Sperry seems to have been angry with Goldman though clearly she was also very drawn to her. Goldman did hug and kiss Sperry but the meaning of her actions is unclear. While there is some indication that, in the words of Blanche Wiesen Cook, Goldman may have “experimented” with Sperry, most likely Goldman’s understanding of the meaning of this physical contact was different from that of Sperry.<sup>53</sup> As the historian Jonathan Ned Katz writes, “the letters indicate that

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<sup>51</sup> Almeda Sperry to Emma Goldman, 1 November 1912. *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 6.

<sup>52</sup> Almeda Sperry to Emma Goldman, 18 October 1912. *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 6.

<sup>53</sup> Cook, “Female Support Networks and Political Activism,” 57. See also Haaland, *Emma Goldman*, 172 – 174.

Goldman returned Sperry's affection, though with less passion and desperate need than Sperry felt."<sup>54</sup> The tone of Sperry's letters—their insistent, baroque quality—bespeaks a measure of erotic frustration. Sperry wanted to deepen her physical contact with Goldman but Goldman resisted. The tortured imagery of Sperry's poem is an expression of how she experienced Goldman's refusal of her advances.

In spite of her feelings of ambivalence towards her, Sperry fascinated Goldman. Goldman introduced Sperry to her friends including Hutchins Hapgood and Ben Reitman. Reitman, whose sexual adventurism was infamous, proposed to Sperry that she join him and Hapgood in a threesome. Sperry refused. Alice Wexler argues that Reitman's proposal was motivated, at least in part, by his attraction to Hapgood, a strikingly handsome man.<sup>55</sup> Reitman certainly interpreted Goldman's interest in Sperry as being sexual in nature. Goldman denied having a sexual attraction to Sperry but she was clearly enthusiastic about her new friend. She described Sperry to her colleague Nunia Seldes as “the most interesting of American women I have met.” Goldman considered Sperry's letters “wonderfully interesting” and “a great human document.” For a while Goldman toyed with the idea of publishing them.<sup>56</sup> Sperry was aware of Goldman's sociological interest in her. In a letter, Sperry wrote of Goldman—using a third-person construction that matched form to content—“Perhaps she is just studying me—all my personalities for the good of her cause—studying this peculiar product of our civilization.”<sup>57</sup> Sperry was quite perceptive. Goldman was

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<sup>54</sup> Katz, *Gay American History*, 523.

<sup>55</sup> Wexler, *Emma Goldman*, 309, n. 35. See also Stansell, *American Moderns*, 296 – 297.

<sup>56</sup> Emma Goldman to Nunia Seldes, 4 October 1912, *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 6.

<sup>57</sup> Almeda Sperry to Emma Goldman, 21-22 October 1912, *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 6 .

studying her; she was one of those “intermediate types” who supplied Goldman with “interesting material” for her lectures.<sup>58</sup>

Goldman addressed her lectures on the topic of same-sex eroticism to a broad audience. Unlike most presentations by physicians and other professionals, Goldman’s talks were open to the public and held in accessible venues. There were occasional public lectures on homosexuality, such as those given by Edith Ellis, the wife of Havelock Ellis, who visited Chicago in 1915, but they were rare. Lecturers like Ellis usually spoke only in major cities, and their tours were limited in scope and reach. Goldman’s lectures were advertised in *Mother Earth*, and Ben Reitman also promoted her speeches by placing schedules of Goldman’s lectures in the non-anarchist press. Goldman spoke in large and small cities across the nation, addressing audiences in New York, Chicago, St. Louis, Washington, D. C., Portland, Oregon, Denver, Lincoln, Nebraska, Butte, Montana, San Francisco, San Diego, and other cities. She spoke in a wide variety of venues from local labor halls to New York City’s Carnegie Hall. Goldman estimated that 50,000 to 75,000 people a year heard her speak. Though not every listener came to her presentations on homosexuality the numbers of people who heard Goldman speak on the topic of same-sex love were significantly higher than any other of her contemporaries.<sup>59</sup>

Goldman’s lectures on homosexuality drew large and responsive crowds. On the night of a presentation in Chicago in 1915 Goldman feared the worst as the evening “was visited by a perfect cloudburst,” an event known to ruin many a public gathering. Nonetheless, she was happy to report, “a large and representative audience

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<sup>58</sup> Emma Goldman to Ellen A. Kennan, 6 May 1915, *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 9.

<sup>59</sup> Peter Glassgold, “Introduction: The Life and Death of *Mother Earth*,” in *Anarchy!: an Anthology of Emma Goldman’s Mother Earth*, ed. Peter Glassgold (Washington D. C.: Counterpoint, 2001), xxvi.

braved the storm” to hear her speak.<sup>60</sup> In that same year, a report by “Anna W.” on one of Goldman’s lecture on “homo-sexuality” given in Washington, D. C. was published in *Mother Earth*. Goldman, writes Anna W., is a “sympathizer and true friend of the socially outcast,” who “in the face of strenuous general opposition to the discussion of a subject long enshrouded in mystery and persistently tabooed by all other public speakers ... delivered a most illuminating lecture on homo-sexuality.” Goldman’s lecture drew a large crowd. According to Anna W. a “dignified, tense, and eager audience crowded the hall to its fullest capacity.” Consumed by curiosity audience members actively sought information from Goldman. “The frankness and celerity with which they questioned and discussed,” Anna W. asserted, “were evidences of the genuine and deep interest her treatment of the subject had aroused.”

<sup>61</sup> Goldman was clearly responding to a thirst for public discourse on the topic.

Goldman was more forceful than other speakers in her exploration of the social, ethical and cultural place of same-sex desire. Margaret Anderson, for example, thought Edith Ellis paled as a speaker in comparison to Goldman. Ellis’s speech did not go “quite the whole distance” and—comparing Ellis to Goldman—Anderson argued that Ellis’s stage presence did not “loom as large as some of her more ‘destructive’ contemporaries.” The reference to Goldman’s “destructive” power is a playful jab at Goldman’s unmerited reputation as a bomber and her well-merited reputation as an “explosive” speaker. Ellis, on the other hand, failed to grasp the nettle. Though she cited Carpenter’s work Ellis did not discuss “Carpenter’s social efforts in behalf of the homosexualist.” Instead of engaging in a direct political

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<sup>60</sup> Emma Goldman, “Agitation En Voyage,” *Mother Earth*, June 1915, 155.

<sup>61</sup> Anna W., “Emma Goldman in Washington,” *Mother Earth*, May 1916, 517.

confrontation Ellis merely pointed to the fact that not all homosexuals were to be found in insane asylums; some occupied thrones or were famous artists. But Anderson was unimpressed. “It is not enough to repeat that Shakespeare and Michael Angelo and Alexander the Great and Rosa Bonheur and Sappho were intermediaries: how is the science of the future to meet this issues?” Ellis had underestimated her audience and failed to “talk plainly.” Having heard Goldman speak on the subject Anderson lamented that Ellis could not have emulated her more “destructive” contemporary. “I can’t help comparing [Ellis],” Anderson wrote, “with another woman whose lecture on such a subject would be big, brave, beautiful...Emma Goldman could never fail in this way.”<sup>62</sup> Goldman’s political passions and her engagement with the “science of the future” led her to be more direct and confrontational in her discussion of matters others treated with kid gloves.

It is difficult to know what effect Goldman’s words had on her audience members. How many came because they were searching for answers about their own feelings? Did they find those answers? The examples of Anderson, Sperry, Hart, and Freeman would seem to indicate that they did find Goldman’s talks useful. But what of those who perhaps had not given homosexuality much thought prior to hearing Goldman speak? Did they attend the lectures for a lark? Were some of her audience members engaging in a form of sexual slumming? And what was the result of their having heard Goldman? Anna W. was convinced that the lectures were transformative. She wrote, “I do not hesitate to declare that every person who came to the lecture possessing contempt and disgust for homo-sexualists and who upheld the attitude of the authorities that those given to this particular form of sex expression

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<sup>62</sup> Margaret Anderson quoted in Katz, *Gay/Lesbian Almanac*, 363 – 366.

should be hounded down and persecuted, went away with a broad and sympathetic understanding of the question and a conviction that in matters of personal life, freedom should reign.”<sup>63</sup> It is easy to dismiss Anna W.’s enthusiasm, but it is quite possible that for many, Goldman’s lectures were important influences in shaping their opinions on matters of morals and social tolerance.

For some, Goldman’s lectures were the first time that they heard a matter of visceral importance to their lives aired without reference to Sodom and Gomorrah, the insane asylum, or the legal code. As in the case of Almeda Sperry and Margaret Anderson, audience members often sought out Goldman following her lectures. Goldman responded to their attention. In her biography she wrote of the “men and women who used to come to see me after my lectures on homosexuality ... who confided in me their anguish and their isolation.” Striking a somewhat dramatic and protective tone, Goldman noted that they “were often of finer grain than those who had cast them out.” Her audience members seem to have taken an active role in seeking out information about themselves; this no doubt explained their presence at Goldman’s lecture. “Most of them,” according to Goldman, “had reached an adequate understanding of their differentiation only after years of struggle to stifle what they had considered a disease and a shameful affliction.” Goldman felt that anarchism had a special message to those who spoke with her about their deep psychological struggles. “Anarchism,” Goldman believed, “was not a mere theory for a distant future; it was a living influence to free us from inhibitions, internal no less than external.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Anna W., “Emma Goldman in Washington,” *Mother Earth*, May 1916, 517.

<sup>64</sup> Goldman, *Living My Life*, 556.

Goldman's message of tolerance was a perfect foil to the bitter denunciations of moralists. In her autobiography, Goldman recorded the impact her lecture had on one of her listeners. According to Goldman the young woman who spoke with her at the end of the evenings discourse "was only one of the many who sought me out."

The young woman shared with Goldman the story of her struggles:

She confessed to me that in the twenty-five years of her life she had never known a day when the nearness of a man, her own father and brothers even, did not make her ill. The more she had tried to respond to sexual approach, the more repugnant men became to her. She had hated herself, she said, because she could not love her father and her brothers as she loved her mother. She suffered excruciating remorse but her revulsion only increased. At the point of eighteen she had accepted an offer of marriage in the hope that a long engagement might help her grow accustomed to a man and cure her of her "disease." It turned out to be a ghastly failure that nearly drove her insane. She could not face the marriage and she dared not confide in her fiancé or friends. She had never met anyone, she told me, who suffered from a similar affliction, nor had she ever read books dealing with the subject. My lecture had set her free; I had given her back her self-respect.<sup>65</sup>

The young woman's ignorance of homosexuality is striking. As a member of a respectable family, likely of middle-class background, Goldman's listener apparently was not familiar with women and men who lived queer lives. Nor had she come across sexological literature, news accounts, or fiction that described her "disease." The young woman had never met someone who openly deviated from the gender and sexual norms of her family's social milieu. But clearly medicine and psychological health—or "disease" in this case—was the framework through which she understood herself. How this young woman came to this understanding is unclear since, she told Goldman "she had never read books dealing with the subject." The young woman's internalization of psychological and medical models of identity speaks to the

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<sup>65</sup> loc. cit.

pervasiveness of these relatively new discourses. She may never have directly confronted texts that framed sexual desire as a question of “health” or “disease” but she had adopted the perspective nonetheless. Goldman’s use of sexological discourse may have been liberating to the young woman, as it offered an alternative though still familiar way of seeing herself free of negative connotations.

Goldman did not encounter much official resistance to her presentations on homosexuality. There exists only one known attempt to censor Goldman that involved, at least in part, the fact that she was speaking out on same-sex love. According to Goldman, her 1915 tour “met with no police interference until we reached Portland, Oregon, although the subjects I treated were anything but tame: anti-war topics, the fight for Caplan and Schmidt, freedom in love, birth-control, and the problem most tabooed in polite society, homosexuality.”<sup>66</sup> The Portland police arrested Goldman as she was about to deliver a lecture on birth control, on the grounds that distributing information about contraceptives was illegal. Ben Reitman, who organized the tour, was also arrested. The judge who heard the case released the prisoners—since the lecture had been halted, no information had been distributed. This tactical error on the part of Portland’s moral arbiters allowed the judiciary to extricate all involved from what might have proved to be a most sensitive public proceeding.

The evening prior to her arrest Goldman had delivered a talk on homosexuality. The fact that she was likely to deliver her talk again was, in part, responsible for her troubles. Goldman’s arrest was precipitated by the actions of Josephine DeVore Johnson, the daughter of a local minister and the widow of a judge.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 555.

Johnson wrote a letter to Portland's mayor in which she specifically mentions Goldman's lecture, "The Intermediate Sex (A Study in Homosexuality)," as part of the offense against public morality that threatened their fair city. Goldman's "advocacy," wrote Johnson, "is a new and startling note, and one that cannot be struck in this city without questions being asked as to how it is permitted." The fact that admission to Goldman's lecture was open to the public was of great concern to Johnson. Portland's Collegiate Socialist Club was promoting the lecture series and planned on providing "intellectual people" with complimentary tickets. Johnson was particularly worried as "there are some young boys who attend Miss Goldman's lectures" and more might be expected to come see Goldman speak in the future. Johnson's portrayal of Goldman's lecture suggests a dangerous mixture of intellectuals, anarchists, youth, and sexual deviants. Goldman's "unspeakable suggestions," insisted Johnson, must not be allowed to sully the innocence of Portland's youth.<sup>67</sup> Johnson's insistence that the mayor act to protect Portland is an illustration of the complex ways in which homosexuality was both silenced and made the subject of discourse—in letters, official actions, and other sites—at the turn of the century.

It is in fact not true that Goldman was, as Johnson insisted, striking "a new and startling note" to Portland's public life. Goldman's arrest was the final echo of one of the turn of the century's most notorious local sex scandals. The issue of homosexuality had erupted into public light in Portland three years before Goldman came to town. In November 1912, the police raided the Portland YMCA and arrested more than twenty men on charges of sexual indecency. These men implicated others;

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<sup>67</sup> Josephine DeVore Johnson to William H. Warren, 5 August 1915. *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 56.

eventually fifty men were indicted. A panic spread through the city as some men fled arrest and others were horrified to learn that a supposed bastion of good morals was a den of perversity. According to the historian John Gustav-Wrathall, “this scandal not only implicated members of the YMCA’s traditional constituency—middle-class, male Protestants of ‘high moral standards’—but it vividly brought to public attention the existence of a lively cruising scene on YMCA premises, and the existence of a gay subculture not only in Portland but in virtually every major city in America.”<sup>68</sup>

Peter Boag writes that the 1912 Portland YMCA scandal was “the greatest of the era’s and region’s same-sex vice scandals.”<sup>69</sup> The YMCA participated in the purge of its members by cooperating with the police, expelling suspect members, and holding a community meeting to address the public’s concerns. While YMCA officials sought to contain the scandal, the *Portland News* “sarcastically characterized men involved in the scandal as ‘nice, charitable, boy-loving men.’”<sup>70</sup> This was the context in which Johnson, Portland’s mayor, and Goldman battled for the city’s soul. Without the scandal Portland’s authorities may well never have acted to silence Goldman. The barely healed wounds of the 1912 scandal were inflamed by Goldman’s open treatment of a subject that Johnson and the city’s mayor wanted to return to obscurity.

*Mother Earth* wasted little time in publishing “A Portrait of Portland,” a scathing review of Goldman’s arrest. The essay’s author, George Edwards, lampoons the false modesty of the town’s moral custodians when it comes to the question of homosexuality. He also reminds his reader that the outrage Portland’s leaders

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<sup>68</sup> John Donald Gustav-Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger by the Hand: Same-Sex Relations and the YMCA* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 161.

<sup>69</sup> Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs*, 3. Boag’s is the most extensive study of the scandal and of homosexuality in the turn-of-the-century Northwest.

<sup>70</sup> Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger by the Hand*, 165.

displayed was an act, a display of false modesty. “No thinking person,” Edwards wrote, “minded very much the facts which came to light a year or two ago regarding the prevalence of homosexuality in that city. They knew that every city includes homosexuals in proportion to its size, and that their natural congregating places are the Y. M. C. A.’s [sic].” The author assumes that *Mother Earth*’s readers are among those “thinking people” who are familiar with the geography of sex in America’s cities. And like Goldman, Edwards assumes that there exists a distinct population—proportionate in size to the general population—that can be identified as homosexual. In other words, homosexuals live in cities and occupy an identifiable social space. This was, of course, the great “discovery” of the sexologists, a finding trumpeted in medical journals and psychological literature of the period. The readers of *Mother Earth* and those who attended lectures by Goldman and other anarchist sex radicals were kept abreast of these developments in the social and sexual sciences. The language and analysis employed by Edwards is indicative of the extent to which the terms and concepts of sexological discourse had permeated the anarchist movement.

In his attack on the Portland authorities, Edwards makes use of a gendered language of “prudery” and “modernity,” coding the latter as male and the former as female. He contrasts Goldman’s modern, sexological perspective to those of Portland’s authorities who “like the old time ‘ladies’ were properly shocked when anybody mentioned their legs.” Rather than face the facts, Portland’s “old time ‘ladies’ ... pretended that [they had] no such members.” Those who came to Goldman’s lecture expecting to hear of salacious goings-on at the local YMCA were disappointed. “The lecture,” Edwards reported, “proved perfectly respectable,

although requiring a little closer concentration to facts and logic than Madame Portland was used to bestowing on any discourse.”<sup>71</sup> Goldman spoke in the measured voice of the expert on human sexual behavior, not at the hot pitch of the pornographer. Though anarchists were often portrayed as bomb-throwing lunatics they were, in fact, more often on stage than behind a barricade. Like the sexologists they admired, the anarchist sex radicals sought to bring what they thought of as the cold, rational light of science to bear on a topic that others preferred to keep hidden from view. In spite of the fact that she was fueled by her political passions, Goldman approached the subject of homosexuality from a dispassionate perspective. This is not to say that Goldman’s lectures did not spark controversy. Mrs. Johnson’s response is just one indicator of the extent to which talk about homosexuality, even of the most reserved sort, led to strong reactions among those who felt their most deeply held moral values to be at risk.

One of Goldman’s last interventions in sexology and the politics of homosexuality occurred in the early years of her exile. In 1923 she wrote Magnus Hirschfeld to protest an article that appeared in his journal, *Jahrbuche fur sexuelle Zwischenstufen* [*The Yearbook for Intermediate Sexual Types*]. The article, written by Dr. Karl von Levezow, argues that Louise Michel, a hero of the Paris Commune and a well-known French anarchist, was a homosexual. Goldman, though careful to state that she had “no prejudice whatever, or the least antipathy to homosexuals,” absolutely denied Levezow’s interpretation of Michel’s life.<sup>72</sup> Hirschfeld, on the other hand, shared Levezow’s views. “I was shocked,” Goldman wrote Havelock

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<sup>71</sup> George Edwards, “A Portrait of Portland,” *Mother Earth*, November 1915, 312-313.

<sup>72</sup> Goldman, “The Unjust Treatment of Homosexuals,” in Katz, *Gay American History*, 376.

Ellis, “when I saw the photographs of that marvelous woman among the collection of homosexuals in Dr. Hirschfeld’s house. I was shocked not because of any squeamishness on the subject, but because I knew Louise Michel to be far removed from the tendencies ascribed to her.”<sup>73</sup> Goldman clung to the legend of Michel as the “Red Virgin.” On its surface this name refers to the fact that Michel never married, but it also signals a narrative of self-refusal and enforced simplicity, the story of a woman who spent her life in struggle on behalf of the oppressed. In Goldman’s eyes, Michel was a model of devotion who had given up all physical pleasures on the altar of the revolution.

Levezow painted a very different portrait of Michel. He put sexual and gender deviance rather than political commitment and admirable selflessness at the heart of Michel’s personality. In his essay Levezow argues that Michel was a classic example of a “sexual invert.” “A more virile character than hers,” Levezow concluded, “cannot be found even among the most masculine of men.” As a child, the doctor observes, Michel had indulged in tomboyish behavior, going so far as to play with toads, bats, and frogs. He pointed to Michel’s physical appearance as proof of her lesbianism. Michel was, the doctor thought, masculine in regard, possessing, “flat lips,” “bushy eyebrows,” and a moustache “that would awaken the envy of a high school student.” Levezow thought her unattractive—Michel had lips that did “not invite to be kissed”—and interpreted this as a sign of Michel’s inverted sexual nature.<sup>74</sup> In addition to the somatic and childhood signs of inversion, Michel spent her entire life in the masculine pursuits of politics. Michel’s anarchist beliefs, in other

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<sup>73</sup> Emma Goldman to Havelock Ellis, 27 December 1924. *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 14. .

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Marie Mullaney, “Sexual Politics in the Career and Legend of Louise Michel,” *Signs* (Winter 1990), 310 – 311.

words, were the result of her sexual nature. Only a sexual invert would live a life that so contradicted the imperatives of her biological sex.

Goldman's forceful repudiation of Levetzow's work must be seen as a continuation of an already established debate about Michel's sexuality. Michel had been accused (and in this context accused is the correct term) of having "tastes against nature" well before Levetzow wrote his essay. Perhaps the charge was inevitable given the facts of Michel's life. As Marie Mullaney has argued, "Pioneering women who stepped outside conventional social roles were branded as sexually variant simply because of their public activism or political commitment."<sup>75</sup> Rumors about Michel's relationships with other women began to surface following her imprisonment in France's prison colony of New Caledonia. In prison Michel forged a tight relationship with a fellow inmate named Natalie Lemel. After Michel's return to France suspicion was cast on her friendship with another colleague, Paule Minck. All three women were revolutionaries who led unconventional lives. The charge of lesbianism brought against these women was directly related to their gender and their political activism. Michel was quite conscious of the fact that she was accused of being a sexual deviant. She wrote in her memoirs, "If a woman is courageous ... or grasps some bit of knowledge early, men claim she is only a 'pathological' case."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 300.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 322. Haaland argues that Goldman and Michel were sexually attracted to each other; that they were 'lovers.' This is based on Goldman's description of her meeting with Michel—a meeting one should note that lasted all of a few hours. "The afternoon spent with Louise was an experience unlike anything that had happened till then in my life. Her hand in mine, its tender pressure on my head, her words of endearment and close comradeship, made my soul expand, reach out towards the spheres of beauty where she dwelt. (Goldman, *Living My Life*, 166 – 168). I find Haaland's interpretation to be a forced reading of Goldman's text. See Haaland, *Emma Goldman*, 168.

Goldman may also have been quick to attack Levetzow because she too faced hostile comments that focused on her sexuality and gender identity. In the late 1920s, for example, she wrote a friend joking that since she was fond of Berkman's girlfriend "the next rumor that will go around...will be that I am a Lesbian and trying to get her away from him for myself!"<sup>77</sup> Like Michel, Goldman was described as masculine in appearance and behavior. Harry Kemp went so far as to compare Goldman to Theodore Roosevelt, something that neither she nor the President would have appreciated. Goldman, wrote Harry Kemp, "made me think of a battleship going into action."<sup>78</sup> Will Durant described Goldman as "a strongly built and masculine woman." Other men echoed his description. When Durant asked a group of men attending one of Goldman's lectures, "What do you think of her?" one responded by calling her "an old hen," another agreed but added, "she's more like a rooster." These remarks served to belittle Goldman, and she resented them. Durant conceded that were he to have spoken directly to Goldman "she would have told me, in her sarcastic way, that a woman may have other purposes and functions in life than to please a man."<sup>79</sup> In her critique of Levetzow, Goldman lived up to Durant's prediction. She accused Levetzow of seeing "in women only the charmer of men, the bearer of children, and in a more vulgar sense, the general cook and bottlewasher of the household." The vigor of Goldman's response to Levetzow's article was to some degree a response to the many men who took Michel's and Goldman's bravery and intellect as signs of sexual and gender deviance.

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<sup>77</sup> Emma Goldman to Emily Holmes Coleman, December 16, 1928. *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 28.

<sup>78</sup> Kemp, *Tramping Through Life*, 285.

<sup>79</sup> Will Durant, *Transitions*, 151-2.

It is easy to see in Goldman's response to Levetzow's essay a sign that she felt, in the words of Blanche Wiesen Cook, "a profound ambivalence about lesbianism as a lifestyle." Perhaps Goldman's zeal in attacking Levetzow betrays ambivalence, but one can take this argument too far. And, in fact, Cook acknowledges that Goldman was not "homophobic."<sup>80</sup> The full extent of Goldman's thoughts on the subject has to be considered in coming to a judgment. Through the course of her life Goldman argued that in matters of love all desires inasmuch as they are freely chosen are deserving of social toleration. She expressed her personal views in a letter to a friend who expressed some distaste for homosexuality. "One need be no prude," Goldman wrote, "to feel diffident about phases of sex tendencies one is not familiar with." But such feelings were no basis for discrimination. Goldman herself saw "absolutely no difference in the tendency itself" and reassured her friend that "homosexuality has nothing whatever to do with depravity."<sup>81</sup> Goldman's sexual politics would not find much favor in the context of today's polarized sex wars; it neither satisfies those who condemn sexual difference as a sign of cultural decadence nor those who seek to celebrate "gay pride." Goldman's position on the social, ethical, and cultural place of homosexuality was very much a product of the anarchist movement in which she played so critical a role.

In formulating her sexual politics Goldman like other anarchist sex radicals drew on the work of Ellis, Carpenter, Hirschfeld, and other sexologists. They did not do so uncritically. Anarchist sex radicals favored those sexologists who they felt best reflected their values. Nor were the anarchists unwilling to contest the findings of the

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<sup>80</sup> Cook, "Female Support Networks and Political Activism," 56. See also Mullaney, "Sexual Politics in the Career and Legend of Louise Michel," 312-3 and Haaland, *Emma Goldman*, 164 - 177.

<sup>81</sup> Emma Goldman to Thomas Lavers, 27 January 1928. *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 19.

men and women they admired. As in the case of Goldman's critique of Hirschfeld and Levetzow, anarchist sex radicals were willing to challenge sexology and sought to shape it. Through their publications, public lectures, and personal relations the anarchist acted as conduits for new ideas about human nature and sex. They saw themselves as participants in a transatlantic debate about the moral, ethical, and social place of homosexuality—equal members in an imagined “International Institute and Society of Sexology.” Through their work anarchists contributed to the remaking of cultural and political representations of homosexuality and to ideas about what role same-sex desire had in the making of the public and the private self.

## Chapter Six: Anarchist Sexual Politics in the Post World War I Period

The First World War, the Russian Revolution, and the Red Scare that it sparked nearly destroyed the anarchist movement in the United States. The sexual politics that flourished within the pre-war anarchist movement was a casualty of this terrible winnowing. Movement publications such as *Mother Earth* and *The Blast* were shut down and leading spokespersons were arrested. The end of the war gave the anarchists little relief. The rise of the Communist Party profoundly reshaped the culture of the Left leading to the further marginalization of the anarchists and their expansive political agenda. The CP was dismissive and hostile towards anarchism; anarchists found themselves spending much energy and resources defending themselves against attacks by Communists. CP activists did not believe that sexual politics were worthy of great attention. Particularly following the rise of Stalin the sexual politics of the American CP became largely indistinguishable from the mainstream society in which it operated. Although anarchist sex radicals continued to try and break into public discourse, they were stymied by the fact that they did not have access to publications and lecture halls. By the end of the Twenties the anarchist sexual politics of the pre-World War I era was largely forgotten.

But anarchism did not disappear. Small groups of activists persisted in advocating the ideas of libertarian socialism including the right of individuals to choose erotic and emotional relationships free from the interference of others. Anarchists continued to present lectures, publish pamphlets, and argue for the equal treatment of same-sex love. Activists also worked to keep alive the work of their

predecessors. The ideas of the pre-war anarchist sex radicals were transmitted in ways that have so far eluded detection and took forms that were unexpected.

Anarchism was a current in the artistic and social life of cities like Chicago and San Francisco. The ideas of the pre-war anarchists persisted as an important influence amongst sexual and cultural radicals and bohemians. The movement of the pre-war years did not reconstitute itself but the ideas that the movement's leading ideologues crafted continued to find an audience. People like Kenneth Rexroth, Elsa Gidlow, Jan Gay, and others were influenced by the ideas of the pre-World War I anarchist sex radicals. These figures in turn have shaped American culture. In these indirect and complex ways the sexual politics of Tucker, Goldman, Berkman and Lloyd have had an impact on the lives of individuals that has not been sufficiently appreciated.

The anarchist movement in the United States was a casualty of the fight over whether or not the country should support the English and French against the Germans and their allies. Those who supported America's entry into World War mobilized the police powers of the state to crush those who opposed entry into the war. Laws were passed to ensure conformity of thought and action. In 1917 Congress passed the Espionage Act which stated that "any person...who shall willfully cause or attempt to cause insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny, or refusal of duty in the military or naval forces of the United States, or shall willfully obstruct the recruiting or enlistment service of the United States...shall be punished by a fine of not more than \$10,000 or imprisonment for not more than twenty years or both."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Kathleen Kennedy, *Disloyal Mothers and Scurrilous Citizens: Women and Subversion During World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), xiii.

Shortly thereafter Congress passed the Alien Immigrant Act making possible the deportation of foreign-born radicals. In May of 1918 the Congress passed the Sedition Act, making it illegal to use “unpatriotic or disloyal language.”<sup>2</sup> Federal, state, and local agents now had the power to attack those whom they deemed a threat to the nation. As Randolph Bourne observed, “With the shock of war...the State comes into its own.”<sup>3</sup>

The fate of Berkman and Goldman is emblematic of the fate of the movement during the war. Because of their staunch antiwar activism the anarchists were singled out for special attention. In October 1918, for example, the Congress passed the Anti-Anarchist Act, authorizing the deportation of alien anarchists.<sup>4</sup> According to Eric Foner, “Even more extreme repression took place at the hands of state governments...thirty-three states outlawed the possession or display of ...black flags,” a symbol of the anarchist movement.<sup>5</sup> The police did not have to look hard to find the evidence they needed to convict. On May 9, 1916, for example, Berkman and Goldman helped to establish the No Conscription League. The League’s membership issued a statement that said “that the militarization of America is an evil that far outweighs, in its anti-social and anti-libertarian effects, any good that may come from America’s participation in the war.” Issuing a direct challenge to the Federal government the League promised to “resist

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<sup>2</sup> David Rabban, *Free Speech in its Forgotten Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 267.

<sup>3</sup> Randolph Bourne, “The State,” in *The Radical Will: Randolph Bourne, Selected Writings: 1911 – 1918*, ed. By Olaf Hansen (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), 356.

<sup>4</sup> Falk, 288

<sup>5</sup> Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 178.

conscription by every means in our power, and...sustain those who, for similar reasons, refuse to be conscripted.<sup>6</sup>”

For their statements and other actions Berkman and Goldman were arrested and convicted for working to undermine the war effort. Harry Weinberger appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States on behalf of Goldman and Berkman arguing that the defendants were convicted for expressing their views on a matter of public policy, a right explicitly protected in the First Amendment to the Constitution. The Court did not accept Weinberger’s petition; the government was in no mood to tolerate a broad interpretation of individual rights. As Leonard Abbott put it: “War inevitably means the steam-roller...Regimentation, uniformity, absolute obedience to authority are the acknowledged military standards.”<sup>7</sup> Using their newly established powers the authorities shut down anarchist publications and arrested individuals who opposed U.S. involvement in the war. Berkman and Goldman and other less well-known anarchists were sent to prison, awaiting the end of the war for their release.

But the end of the war in Europe did not bring an end to repression for radicals in the United States. This was due to the fact that during the war, Lenin and the Bolsheviks succeeded in establishing a communist state in Russia. There were also unsuccessful attempts to found “Red Republics” in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. The founding of the U.S.S.R. and the wave of revolutionary activity that swept post-war Europe terrified conservatives on both sides of the Atlantic. Many Americans thought that the forces of revolution were gathering at the door. A wave of bombings including a spectacular explosion on Wall Street seemed to usher in a

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<sup>6</sup> “No Conscription! Statement of the No Conscription League,” in *Life of an Anarchist: The Alexander Berkman Reader*, ed. Gene Fellner (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1992) 155-156.

<sup>7</sup> Leonard D. Abbott, “The War Hysteria and Our Protest,” *Mother Earth*, August 1917, 204.

radical assault. A virulent panic swept the country. In 1919 the American Legion, sworn to uphold Americanism and defeat Bolshevism, held its first convention. The federal government also acted. The U.S. Attorney General, A. Mitchell Palmer, rounded up and imprisoned foreign-born radicals in a series of police actions that have come to be known as the Palmer Raids. A number of anarchists, including Goldman and Berkman were among those seized. The U.S. then decided to deport the arrestees to the Soviet Union. Native-born radicals were spared this indignity, a fact that a number of them commented on. In 1927, for example, the anarchist Charles T. Sprading wrote Goldman “I was saved by being born right, of both the proper stock, and in the right country.”<sup>8</sup> But despite having eluded deportation Sprading was not unscathed. He and other radicals were cut off from their fellow activists and the movement within which they operated was greatly reduced.

Though they were unwilling immigrants, Goldman and Berkman approached the country of their birth with great hopes. Anarchists, like nearly all those on the Left, celebrated the founding of the U.S.S.R. Russian anarchists had played a key part in helping to overthrow both the Tsar and the Kerenskii government that followed the abolishment of Tsarist rule.<sup>9</sup> The Bolsheviks cultivated anarchists’ support by appropriating their political slogans such as “The factories to the workers, the land to the peasants.” Though the new government took actions that troubled the anarchists, these were largely dismissed as revolutionary growing pains. Before her deportation, for example, Goldman defended the Bolsheviks who, she said, “were

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<sup>8</sup> Charles T. Sprading to Emma Goldman, August 6, 1927, *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 18.

<sup>9</sup> On the complex relationship between the Bolsheviks and the anarchists see Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967)

human, like the rest of us, and likely to make mistakes.”<sup>10</sup> But within months her arrival in the U.S.S.R., Goldman had her illusions shattered. She witnessed the merciless persecution of the anarchists by the Tcheka, Lenin’s secret police. Berkman, whose revolutionary zeal was hotter than Goldman’s, was less willing to give up his hope. Eventually, however, he too came to see that the Bolsheviks were intent on total domination. In a cruel twist of fate the Tsar had returned to the Kremlin. In short order the Bolsheviks purged the anarchists and suppressed all their publications and activities. “The Soviet government, with an iron broom,” boasted Leon Trotsky, “has rid Russia of anarchism.”<sup>11</sup> Convinced, in the words of Berkman, that “the Revolution in Russia had become a mirage, a dangerous deception,” he and Goldman decided to leave the country.<sup>12</sup>

Berkman and Goldman went into exile with their hopes crushed and facing a bleak political future. Most of those on the Left, including old allies, were enraptured with the nascent Soviet state and they had little use for the jeremiads of the anarchists. While the communists, in the words of the historian Laurence Veysey, “could claim affiliation with the most hopeful large-scale revolutionary movement anywhere on the world horizon,” the anarchists appeared to be a defeated lot.<sup>13</sup> Everywhere the anarchists faced fierce attacks by communists who accused them of being irrelevant and anti-revolutionary. Former comrades, like the artist Robert Minor, who once designed cover art for *Mother Earth*, switched allegiances. Eric Morton, an American friend of Goldman, told Goldman that Minor, “is a real religious

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<sup>10</sup> Goldman, *Living My Life*, 698.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Joll, *The Anarchists*, 191

<sup>12</sup> Berkman, “The Russian Tragedy,” in *Life of an Anarchist: The Alexander Berkman Reader*, 244.

<sup>13</sup> Veysey, *Communal Experiments*, 166

communist now and is developing considerable religious intolerance, referring to those who differ from his sacred doctrines as *fake* revolutionaries.” [Italics in original] Morton told Goldman that his daughter who was active on the Left had heard much about her and all of it bad. “Good religious communists use you as a sort of bogey-man.”<sup>14</sup> Goldman felt betrayed. She wrote the writer Theodore Dreiser that “the Russian debacle and the war have shifted all values, most of all the values of integrity and fearlessness. The very people who posed as my friends are now among my bitterest enemies.”<sup>15</sup> The Russian Revolution utterly transformed the culture of the Left in the United States, marginalizing anarchist radicals and the ideas they had championed.

Although she was prevented from returning to the United States for any extended period of time, Goldman did manage to arrange a speaking tour in the U.S. in 1934. Her tour was restricted to 90 days and she was permitted to speak only on the subjects of literature and drama. She was not supposed to address political questions of any sort. The authorities believed that by restricting Goldman’s topics to that of literature they would preclude any controversial topics. This was not, however, a bar to Goldman’s addressing the subject of homosexuality. In a lecture on the subject of American drama, Goldman praised the play *The Children’s Hour* and Radcliff Hall’s novel *The Well of Loneliness*, both of which portray lesbian relations. Hall’s novel is, in fact, one of the best-known literary representations of lesbianism of the twentieth century. Its publication was accompanied by a sharp debate over whether or not the portrayal of homosexual relationships was by their very nature

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<sup>14</sup> Eric Morton to Emma Goldman, February 3, 1925 in *Nowhere at Home*, 42

<sup>15</sup> Emma Goldman to Theodore Dreiser, September 29, 1926, *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 16.

obscene. In addition to praising Hall's book, Goldman thought "The Children's Hour" was "beautifully written and beautifully produced."<sup>16</sup> But few people heard Goldman speak on such topics during her 1934 American tour. Goldman was no longer a figure who commanded attention. As Marian J. Morton writes, "Goldman's opposition to both capitalism and communism put her nowhere on the political spectrum."<sup>17</sup> *The Nation*, well aware that the center of the American Left lay in the Communist Party and its offshoots, put it quite bluntly: "Today the Anarchists are a scattered handful of survivors, and the extreme left is divided among the various communist groups. To them Emma Goldman is not a symbol of freedom in a world of tyrants; she is merely a wrong-headed old woman."<sup>18</sup>

The changing climate of radicalism in the post-war years was a critical element in the decline of anarchism. What strength anarchism enjoyed in the pre-war period was nurtured by the utopian, pre-Leninist socialism that some have called the "Lyrical Left." Anarchist sexual politics were well received within the Lyrical Left—and in fact shaped the temper of the times. People like Randolph Bourne who mixed together the personal and the political in a blaze of cultural production exemplified the Lyrical Left. Like many of his contemporaries Bourne championed "artists, philosophers, geniuses, tramps, criminals, eccentrics, aliens, freelovers and freethinkers" and all those who "violate any of the three sacred taboos of property, sex, and the State."<sup>19</sup> Self-consciously or not, Bourne, was embracing the basic principles of the anarchists. With the outbreak of the war, however, Bourne turned

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<sup>16</sup> "Drama Developing New Social Trend," *The Montreal Gazette*, March 6, 1935.

<sup>17</sup> Marian J. Morton, *Emma Goldman and the American Left: Nowhere at Home* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992) 138

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 138

<sup>19</sup> Randolph Bourne, "Old Tyrannies," in *The Radical Will*, 172

pessimistic. The titles of his essays sounded the “Twilight of the Idols” and the triumph of “The Disillusionment.” Bourne’s premature death in 1918 can be said to symbolize the end of a particular moment in the history of the U.S. The carnage of battle and the triumph of Leninism split apart the Lyrical Left. In his study of New York intellectual life, Thomas Bender argues that after the war, “the sort of innocent, non-doctrinaire eclectic ‘revolution’” associated with people like Bourne “was no longer possible.”<sup>20</sup> The anarchists were an important component of the Lyrical Left; its passing boded poorly for the fate of the movement. The sexual politics that had been such an important part of the anarchist movement and of the Lyrical Left were traumatically foreshortened.

A number of anarchist fellow travelers abandoned their old alliances, some in quite public forums. Will Durant, for example, published a number of works in the Twenties in which he made light of his former Ferrer Center associates. In *Philosophy and the Social Problem* Durant acknowledged that while he “loved” the anarchist “for the fervor of his hope and the beauty of his dream,” he felt that “the anarchist fails miserably in the face of interrogation.” He now believed that the anarchists had little to offer serious political thinkers. Order not liberty was the key to understanding political thought. “Freedom itself is a problem,” Durant maintained, “not a solution.” In a classic example of a backhanded compliment he concluded, “Only children and geniuses can be truly anarchistic.”<sup>21</sup> Hurt by Durant’s criticisms, Goldman wrote an American friend to denounce her onetime comrade. “I had no

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect: A History of Intellectual Life in New York City, from 1750 to the Beginnings of Our Own Time* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 245-246.

<sup>21</sup> Will Durant, *Philosophy and the Social Problem* (New York: The World Publishing, 1927), 208 – 209. Durant’s book is dedicated to Alden Freedman.

faith in him from the very beginning,” she wrote. “I had a feeling that he will use the movement as a stepping stone to fame and material success.”<sup>22</sup>

Durant was not an isolated case. Margaret Anderson also drifted away from her former friends. After having been targeted by the government for printing allegedly seditious materials during WWI, Anderson moved away from political topics. In the twenties she and her lover dropped discussions of anarchism from their journal and instead turned towards literary modernism. In Anderson’s words, “In the natural course of events I had naturally turned away from anarchism.”<sup>23</sup> This rejection of anarchism did not necessarily end her problems with the government however. Anderson was arrested for publishing selections for James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, a work that was considered obscene. Anderson’s change of heart angered her old comrades. Leonard Abbott said Anderson “represented the tragedy of the anarchist movement in America.”<sup>24</sup> Goldman, Anderson’s old friend, was disappointed, admitting that her former comrade’s commitment to anarchism was a passing phase and was “not actuated by any sense of social injustice.”<sup>25</sup> By placing their hopes for social transformation in the hands of what they came to see as fair weather friends the anarchists believed they made a fatal mistake.

Pre-war sex radicals who had been aligned with the anarchists also distanced themselves from their former colleagues. Margaret Sanger, for example, felt that her pre-war association with the anarchists “was a formidable albatross from which she

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<sup>22</sup> Emma Goldman to Joseph Ishill, December 29, 1927. *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 19.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Marsh, *Anarchist Women*, 42. Marsh’s discussion of Anderson is very good and has shaped my own interpretation of the post-war fate of anarchist sexual politics.

<sup>24</sup> Anderson, *My Thirty Years War*, 190

<sup>25</sup> Goldman, *Living My Life*, 531

was determined to cut loose.”<sup>26</sup> Before the war Sanger worked with Goldman and the anarchists who were among her most fervent champions. Goldman sold copies of her publication while on tour and helped publicize the struggles that Sanger had with the authorities. But in the years after the war the political base of the birth control movement changed and Sanger moved to appeal to the new base. According to the historian Nancy Cott, post-war birth control advocates “were...more social and politically conservative than... [the activists of] the 1910s and more numerous.”<sup>27</sup> The increasing conservatism of the movement and its growth were directly related. In order to grow birth control’s constituency, Sanger redefined herself as a health care activist offering helpful advice on how to improve life and not as a sex radical bent on transforming society. Sanger obscured her ties to the anarchist movement in order to make birth control palatable to a mainstream voting public.

The separation of Sanger’s sex radicalism from the political context in which it emerged in the prewar years was a telling development. The anarchists saw sexual liberation as only one element of “a total reconstruction of woman’s role, a reconstruction which also included the abolition of the nuclear family, economic independence, and psychological self-sufficiency.”<sup>28</sup> The defense of homosexuality that people like Goldman, Lloyd, and Tucker made before World War I was part of their larger vision of social and cultural change. Sanger and other sex activists were willing to jettison this broad agenda in order to win public acceptance for the narrowly defined right of birth control. To a great extent their efforts were successful. Birth control, though it remained controversial, was no longer associated

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<sup>26</sup> Burns, *The Damndest Radical*, 173.

<sup>27</sup> Nancy Cott, *The Growth of Modern Feminism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 91.

<sup>28</sup> Marsh, *Anarchist Women*, 94.

with free love and revolution. Some advocates for birth control built alliances with eugenicists and supported forced sterilization laws. In the 1920s, to paraphrase William O'Neill, it was possible to be a sex radical and a political conservative.<sup>29</sup> The anarchists were all too aware of this development. In 1927, Goldman told a Canadian newspaper "I am almost ashamed to champion [birth control] now that the staid House of Lords in Great Britain has taken it up!"<sup>30</sup> The defense of homosexuality that anarchist sex radicals had included in their sexual politics was not, however, shared by the House of Lords or the U.S. Congress. Birth control may have had its advocates but the more extreme claims for individual sexual rights were a casualty of the narrowing range of cultural and radical politics in the Twenties. The scope of sexual politics in the United States was narrowed significantly once it lost the presence of its most radical advocates.

The breakdown of the anarchist movement was accelerated by the collapse of the communication networks that the anarchists had devoted so much to building. Much of the literature that the pre-War anarchist movement produced was no longer available. Some of this eating away at the base of the movement had come before the war. Tucker's bookstore closed in 1908, destroyed by a devastating fire that consumed almost all his stock. Disheartened Tucker moved to France shortly after the fire. He lived with his free love companion and daughter in the South of France until his death in 1939. Though he intended to keep publishing *Liberty* from overseas the publication was never successfully revived. Tucker did attempt to keep engaged.

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<sup>29</sup> O'Neill writes that in the 1920s it became "possible to talk a radical stand on sex and a conservative one on women's social role." See William O'Neill, *Everyone was Brave: The Rise and Fall of Feminism in America* (New York: Quadrangle, 1969), 312

<sup>30</sup> "Emma Goldman Pays Visit to Hamilton," *The Spectator*, May 10, 1927.

From 1913 to 1914, for example, he contributed articles to Dora Marsden's *The New Freewoman*, an English journal that espoused the ideas of the radical individualist ideas of Max Stirner. *The New Freewoman* "explicitly connected sexual emancipation, evolutionary progress, and libertarian politics, along lines similar to Emma Goldman's concurrent anarcho-feminist campaign."<sup>31</sup> The precursor to *The New Freewoman*, *The Freewoman*, was condemned as 'immoral' for among other things carrying articles on lesbianism. Tucker, however, did not address the topic of homosexuality in his contributions to *The New Freewoman*. However, in the years after World War I, Tucker largely ceased his propaganda efforts. In 1926 Clarence Swartz reprinted a collection of Tucker's articles from *Liberty* for the American market but Swartz did so because, as he acknowledged in the preface, "For a number of years practically all of the literature of Individualist Anarchism has been out of print."<sup>32</sup> Despite Swartz's efforts there was little real change in the situation. Writing to his friend Joseph Ishill, William C. Owen lamented that, "our very best books...go out of circulation."<sup>33</sup>

Like Swartz, Ishill, a publisher working in Berkeley Heights, New Jersey, was among those who labored to keep works of interest to anarchists in production. Ishill's Oriole Press provided a venue for anarchist sexual politics, including discussions of the ethical, social and cultural place of homosexuality. In 1929, for example, Oriole Press produced a collection of essays celebrating the work of

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<sup>31</sup> Bruce Clark, *Dora Marsden and Early Feminism: Gender, Individualism, Science* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 69. See also S. E. Parker, "The New Freewoman: Dora Marsden and Benjamin R. Tucker," in *Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty: A Centenary Anthology*, eds. Michael E. Coughlin, Charles H. Hamilton, and Mark A. Sullivan (St. Paul: Michael E. Coughlin and Mark Sullivan Publishers, 1986) 149-157.

<sup>32</sup> Clarence Swartz, "Preface," in Benjamin Tucker, *Individual Liberty*, ed. Clarence L. Swartz (New York: Vanguard Press, 1926), v.

<sup>33</sup> William C. Owen to Joseph Ishill, December 30, 1923, Ishill Collection.

Havelock Ellis. Several of the essays in the book praise Ellis's work on the subject of homosexuality. Pierre Ramus remembered the impact that Ellis's book on "sexual inversion" made on him. "Almost twenty-six years ago," Ramus wrote, "Fred Burry, a Canadian fighter for freedom following in the footsteps of Walt Whitman, loaned us in Toronto a secretly circulating work of Havelock Ellis which in his native England was proscribed by prudery and hypocrisy and still is for the most part." Ellis's work seemed doubly special because, Ramus recalled, a friend of his "informed us that Havelock Ellis was also an admirer of Kropotkin."<sup>34</sup> As in the pre-war days, the contributors to Ishill's volume on Ellis cited the work of sexologists, anarchists, and poets in their political work. Ramus's mention of the supposed admiration Ellis had for Kropotkin is ironic given Kropotkin's skepticism toward's Ellis's own work. As noted above Kropotkin advised a number of his comrades to avoid visiting Ellis for fear that they might become swept up in the sexological project. Whatever their merits, the books put out by Oriole Press had a very small circulation; the Ellis collection, for example, was limited to 500 copies.

Los Angeles emerged as a center of the greatly diminished English-language anarchist movement. There a small band of activists formed The Libertarian League, which despite its name was closer to the pre-World War I anarchists than the post-World War II Libertarians. The League, which distributed anarchist literature and published the short-lived magazine *The Libertarian*, continued the work of the pre-war anarchists. In a 1925 letter to the anarchist Jo Labadie, Clarence Swartz, the League's treasurer, wrote "I have not receded an inch from my old position, and I

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<sup>34</sup> Pierre Ramus, "Havelock Ellis: The Greatest Investigator of the Mysteries of Sex," in *Havelock Ellis: An Appreciation*, 261 – 262.

think I am still standing on the same foundation that Tucker and the others built for us years ago.”<sup>35</sup> The League, whose advisory board included William Allen White and H. L. Mencken, fought for its vision despite limited resources. In his letter to Labadie, Swartz wrote, “While the magazine had to dim for lack of support, the Libertarian League is alive and functioning.” In addition to trying to keep old flames alive the League faced new battles. Swartz told Labadie, “We are now entering the fight against Bryant and the Fundamentalists in their attack on Prof. Scopes in Tennessee.”<sup>36</sup>

Among the topics the League addressed was the question of the ethical, social, and cultural place of homosexuality. League members used many of the arguments and cited the sources that the pre-war anarchists had used in making their case for sexual liberalism. In 1932, for example, the League underwrote the publication of a short study of Edward Carpenter. Thomas Bell, the author of the study, praised Carpenter as “the greatest of modern British Anarchists.” In the essay Bell discusses Carpenter’s writing on “homo-sexuality” in a favorable manner adding, “though Carpenter never in so many words, so far as I know, said that he himself was of that temperament it was pretty well understood that he was.”<sup>37</sup> Several of his friends, including Upton Sinclair, urged Bell to turn his essay into a book, but he found that publishers were uninterested. “They did not want it,” Bell told a friend since “as it is written for Anarchists and not for the general public.”<sup>38</sup> Books identified as “for

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<sup>35</sup> Clarence Swartz to Joseph Labadie, June 8, 1925. Labadie Collection,

<sup>36</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas H. Bell, *Edward Carpenter: The English Tolstoi* (Los Angeles: The Libertarian Group, 1932) 3, 15. The pamphlet was published following a Testimonial Dinner held in Bell’s honor by “all the local Libertarian organizations” and was intended to honor “Thomas H. Bell’s fifty years of social activity, all but the first three or four devoted to the Libertarian Movement.”

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Henry Bell to Joseph Ishill, July 29, 1930, Ishill Collection.

Anarchists” could no longer find publishers, and despite Ishill and the League’s efforts there were no anarchist publishing groups able to bring a project like Bell’s to market. While the Tucker’s edition of “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” and Berkman’s *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* were reviewed by mainstream journalists Bell found it difficult to have his work even considered by publishers.

In addition to publishing pamphlets the League sponsored lectures on the subject of homosexuality. In the late 1920s, Bell spoke to the League’s membership on the subject of Wilde’s life and work. The response to the lecture was very enthusiastic but not necessarily completely satisfactory to Bell. He found that his audience wanted to hear all about Wilde’s personal life but not about his politics. Bell wrote Ishill that although the talk “was supposed to be on [Wilde] as an Anarchist...it was made too evident to me that they also were very keen to hear about him as a Man. I had to tell them over and over again the dramatic story of his later years, of the tragedy of his trial and how it came about.”<sup>39</sup> The success of his lecture led Bell, who had been Oscar Wilde’s secretary for a brief period, to write a study of Wilde. Bell’s analysis very much reflected the pre-World War I anarchist’s understanding of Wilde as a political and sexual radical. In his essay Bell wrote about “Wilde’s bold social ideals” and he treats “Wilde’s homosexuality...frankly and fearlessly.” Reflecting the interests of his audience Bell went out of his way to make sure that the disgraced poet’s “sexual philosophy is given fairly and fully

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Henry Bell to Joseph Ishill, August 14, 1930, Ishill Collection.

without whitewash.”<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately Bell died in a car crash and did not live to see his manuscript published.

The League’s connection to the politics pre-war anarchist movement was more than ideological. John William Lloyd was on the Libertarian League’s advisory board though according to Swartz “he had backslid some.”<sup>41</sup> Lloyd moved to California in the early 1920s. Lloyd continued to write but he was isolated; he described himself as a “literary hermit.”<sup>42</sup> Lloyd ensconced himself in a tiny house he built on a hill in the countryside outside of Los Angeles. Abba Gordin, who lived with Lloyd for nearly a year, described a typical day of Lloyd’s life. “Lloyd,” Gordin writes, “takes care of his trees, fig-trees, apricots, and vines, waters his flowers and plants, and sings and writes, and studies and works and hopes—and out of his window of his cabin his ‘Workshop of Dreams,’ and the transom of his soul, looks and sees the high mountains, covered with snow of ages and wisdom, and he is self-reliant, and as hopeful, and as serene and as sure and as tuneful as they, who have seen the beginnings of all beginnings and know the end of all ends.”<sup>43</sup> The dreamy, spiritual tone of Gordin’s description is reflected in Lloyd’s writing, such as *From Terrace-Hill Overlooking: Poems of Intuition, Perception, and Prophecy*, which increasingly in the post-war years turned to mysticism.<sup>44</sup> One of the last laudatory mentions of Lloyd’s work appeared in 1945 in *Message of the East*, a Vedantist

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<sup>40</sup> Cassius V. Cook, “Synopsis: Thomas H. Bell, Author, Oscar Wilde without Whitewash” (Los Angeles: Rocker Publication Committee, n.d.) 7. This pamphlet was intended to solicit funds to help pay for the publication of Bell’s book on Wilde. A copy can be found in the Ishill Collection.

<sup>41</sup> Clarence Swartz to Joseph Labadie, June 8, 1925. Labadie Collection,

<sup>42</sup> Biographical Notes, “John William Lloyd,” in *Sex in Civilization*, Eds. V. F. Calverton and S. D. Schmalhausen (New York: AMS Press, 1976 [1929]), 687.

<sup>43</sup> Abba Gordin, “J. William Lloyd,” *The Road to Freedom*, April 1932, 33. This is the second part of a two-part article the first of which appears in the March 1932 issue of *The Road to Freedom*.

<sup>44</sup> John William Lloyd, *From Hill-Terrace Outlooking: Poems of Intuition, Perception, and Prophecy* (Los Angeles: Samuel Stebb, 1939)

publication. The author of the essay, a woman known as “Sister Daya,” wrote that Lloyd was a “wise man” whose “legacy of mystic philosophy is too little known.”<sup>45</sup>

Lloyd did publish a few articles and essays on sexuality in the post-World War I years but he was largely silent on the social, ethical, and cultural status of homosexuality. Though he was among those who encouraged Thomas Bell to expand his essay on Carpenter into a book, Lloyd no longer was a vocal, visible champion of Carpenter. Nor did Lloyd make use of the term “comradeship” in his political writing. Lloyd’s only mention of same-sex love during this period—he uses the term “homosexuality”—occurs in a pamphlet published privately in 1931 entitled “The Karezza Method Or Magnetation: The Art of Connubial Love.” Karezza, a term first used by Alice B. Stockham, a late nineteenth-century sex reformer, is essentially sex without male ejaculation. Karezza is similar to the ideas about male sexual behavior that John Humphrey Noyes advocated at his commune at Oneida.<sup>46</sup> In his pamphlet Lloyd goes to great length to discuss the putative benefits that both men and women can enjoy through the practice of karezza. One of the greatest benefits, according to Lloyd, was that women’s sexual desires would, by virtue of the fact that coitus would be extended, have a better chance of being satisfied. It is in this context that Lloyd makes mention of same-sex love. In an aside on the nature of sexual desire and its expressions he argues, “that some women are more masculine than the average man, and vice versa.” According to Lloyd, the various combinations that can arise from the mixture of feminine and masculine forces in men and women “accounts for much

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Veysey, *Communal Experiments*, 33.

<sup>46</sup> See Lawrence Foster, “Free Love and Feminism: John Humphrey Noyes and the Oneida Community.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 1 (Summer 1981): 165 – 183.

of the phenomena of homosexuality.”<sup>47</sup> Homosexuals are, in this construction, men who share certain features of women or women who share certain features of men. Lloyd does not seem to be referring to visible attributes—whether a person expresses outward signs of the opposite biological sex—but to the nature of the inner sex drive. This short passage is all that Lloyd has to say on homosexuality. Lloyd, whose interest in the “comrade-kiss” was no longer prominent in his writing, does not discuss what possible benefits of the practice of karezza might have in same-sex relations.

Like many of his colleagues, Lloyd found it increasingly difficult to find publishers for his work. This was true despite the fact that friends such as Havelock Ellis continued to champion Lloyd’s writing in England and in conversations with his American friends. Ellis wrote Joseph Ishill that though Lloyd “has warm admirers on this side,” he was too little appreciated in the United States. Ellis was frustrated that “publishers...are shy” of Lloyd’s writings.<sup>48</sup> In 1929, however, Ellis succeeded in persuading George Allen and Unwin, Edward Carpenter’s publisher, to bring out Lloyd’s *Eneres or the Questions of Reksa*. Ellis wrote an introduction to Lloyd’s book in which said that “Lloyd belongs to the class of ‘prophets,’ as in England Edward Carpenter who had a high regard for Lloyd—the class of people, that is to say, who have a ‘message’ to their fellow-man.”<sup>49</sup> The metaphor of “prophecy” was apt. The themes and style of Lloyd’s book are those of a work of spiritual inquiry.

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<sup>47</sup> John William Lloyd, “The Karezza Method or Magnetation: The Art of Connubial Love,” (privately published, 1931).

<sup>48</sup> *The Unpublished Letters of Havelock Ellis to Joseph Ishill*, ed. Joseph Ishill (Berkeley Heights, N. J.: Oriole Press, 1954), 68, 82.

<sup>49</sup> Havelock Ellis, “Introduction,” in John William Lloyd, *Eneres or the Questions of Reksa* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1929), 11.

The title, Lloyd explains for his reader, is a reference to the structure of the text which he constructed as a dialogue between an inquisitive youth and an older man: “Eneres (pronounced E-ner-es, accent of the second syllable), the Serene—the Old Man—is myself, and Reksa—the Asker—is likewise myself.”<sup>50</sup> Though *Eneres* contains a brief chapter on sex, Lloyd makes no mention of homosexuality. Ellis does, however, mention that Lloyd had written a text entitled *The Larger Love* which unfortunately “remains for the present unpublished—it is considered unsuitable for a still too prudish generation—though until it is published the full scope of Lloyd’s outlook in relation to his own time will not have been made clear.”<sup>51</sup> Ellis failed to note that Lloyd wrote about the “larger love” before the war. It was not the “still too prudish” nature of the public that limited Lloyd’s ability to publish rather it was the fact that Lloyd could no longer draw on the resources and audience of the pre-World War I anarchist movement.

Lloyd’s last American publication on the subject of the politics of sexuality appears in *Sex and Civilization* a collection of articles that V. F. Calverton co-edited in 1929. One of the most prominent sex radicals of the twenties, V. F. Calverton wrote and edited a number of important texts on sexuality. Though identified with the Communist Party Calverton was not representative of the sexual politics of the CP or the post-war left. His views, according to the historian Leonard Wilcox, were “permeated with assumptions about personal growth and cultural revolution inherited from the 1910s’ ‘Lyrical left.’”<sup>52</sup> In his essay for *Sex and Civilization*, entitled “Sex

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<sup>50</sup> John William Lloyd, “A Foreward,” *Eneres*, n.p.

<sup>51</sup> Ellis, “Introduction,” *Eneres*, 17.

<sup>52</sup> Leonard Wilcox, “Sex Boys in a Balloon: V. F. Calverton and the Abortive Sexual Revolution,” *Journal of American Studies* 23 (1989), 9.

Jealousy and Civilization,” Lloyd essentially reiterates the free love ideas he developed in the anarchist movement but he makes no mention of his former or current political affinities. Neither the term anarchism nor libertarianism appears in the index of *Sex and Civilization*. Nor does Lloyd deal with homosexuality in his essay. In fact, Calverton’s volume contains only brief and decidedly ambivalent discussions of same-sex eroticism. Lloyd did not seem eager to highlight the continuity, however diluted, his contribution to Calverton’s book shared with the sexual politics of the prewar anarchists. *Sex and Civilization* may have been a daring book for its day but its themes and tone are not half as daring as what appeared in *Liberty* in the 1890s, in *The Free Comrade* in 1902, or in *Mother Earth* in the years shortly before the war.

The leading figures of the post-World War I Left were, with few exceptions, not eager to explore the politics of personal life. Leninism, which dominated Leftist political discourse, “rejected many of the feminist and sex radical-traditions” of the prewar left.<sup>53</sup> The Communist Party was, especially when compared to the prewar anarchists, a redoubt of heteronormative attitudes. There was for a time in the early Twenties a popular perception that the revolution in the USSR would usher in a wave of sexual liberation and women’s emancipation. Books with titles like *The Romance of New Russia*, published in 1924 by Magdeleine Marx, portrayed the Soviets as pioneers of sexual freedom.<sup>54</sup> But despite the high hopes of Marx and others, the

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<sup>53</sup>Linda Gordon, *Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right* (NY, 1977), 209–210. See also, Mari Jo Buhle, “Free Love,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Left: Second Edition*, eds. Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, and Dan Georgakas (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 24; Buhle, *Women and American Socialism*, 323; and Constance Coiner, *Better Red: The Writings and Resistance of Tillie Olsen and Meridel Le Sueur* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>54</sup> Magdeleine Marx, *The Romance of New Russia* (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1924)

Soviet state was not a libidinal paradise. In the American CP sexual politics were looked upon as a mere diversion from more serious matters. CP intellectuals, for example, chastised Calverton for indulging in supposedly petty pursuits. Malcolm Cowley writing in the *New Republic* called Calverton one of “the sex boys, in their balloon of rhetoric... sailing far above the physical reality of their subject.”<sup>55</sup> Calverton, in other words, was guilty of prioritizing the cultural superstructure over the economic base, a political heresy that was not permitted.

Though “a growing intolerance of the sex issue among orthodox Leftists” was already evident in the 1920s, the Stalinization of the American CP was a deathblow to the possibility of the CP sponsoring a radical sex politics.<sup>56</sup> The anarchists were sharply critical of this development. In a short work published in 1936 in the anarchist journal *Vanguard*, David Lawrence lampooned the CP’s sexual politics. Lawrence’s satire, entitled “In a Soviet Village: A Morality Play,” features a cast of characters including “Ivan, the Chairman of the Village Soviet,” “A Sprinkling of Chekists and Red Army Men,” “A Chorus of Komsomols,” and “A Poet from the Dneiprostroy Union of Super-Stakhanovite Penmen.” The poet who “won the praise of Comrade Stalin, a medal, and a grant of money for producing triplets,” declaims lines like: “Women’s place is in the kitchen/Its time she stopped promiscuous bitchin’. The emancipated woman is a fright/Become a copulating Stakhanovite.” The play also features a phonograph that announces the latest party line to the assembled villagers:

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Wilcox, “Sex Boys in a Balloon: V. F. Calverton and the Abortive Sexual Revolution,” 21

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 20. See also Laura Engelstein, “Soviet Policy Towards Male Homosexuality: Its Origins and Historical Roots,” in *Gay Men and the Sexual History of the Political Left*, 155 – 178 and Patrick Pollard, “Gide in the U.S.S.R.: Some Observations on Comradeship,” in *Gay Men and the Sexual History of the Political Left*, 179 – 195.

The family is the basis of the Socialist Society. Sexual freedom is anarchy. Long live Stalinism. Lenin had only one wife...who are you to have more? Permanent marriage not permanent revolution. Who are we to interfere with the laws of Go...er, dialectical materialism.<sup>57</sup>

Lawrence implies that the Soviets were theocrats, as eager as any prelate to judge sinners and advise chastity or marriage for their charges. He slams their regressive gender politics and implies that the productivist ideology of Stalinist Russia extends even to the bedroom, where it seems good citizens are expected to reproduce according to five-year plans. The readers of *Vanguard* no doubt also appreciated the insider jokes about the CP sprinkled throughout the play. For example, Stalin's ideological battle with Trotsky is lampooned in the phrase "permanent marriage not permanent revolution." Lawrence also self-consciously contrasts anarchist sexual politics to those of the CP, making a tongue in cheek reference to "sexual freedom" as "anarchy."

Unlike the anarchist sex radicals the CP took a dim view of homosexuality. When homosexuality did appear in the pages of CP publication it was most often as an occasion for satire. In 1941, for example, Mike Quin, a leading party figure in San Francisco, wrote a story for the *People's World*, the CP's Pacific Coast daily newspaper, which portrays Rudolph Hess, Hitler, Churchill, and Roosevelt as stereotypical pansies.<sup>58</sup> Quin presents his story in the form of a conversation between

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<sup>57</sup> David Lawrence, "In a Soviet Village: A Morality Play," *Vanguard*, Aug/Sept. 1936, 7-8.

<sup>58</sup> Quin wrote his satirical essay in the months between the Nazi-Soviet pact and the German invasion of the USSR, a period when the CP turned against its Popular Front allies with great vigor. During the Popular Front, which lasted from 1935 to 1939, the Communist party allied itself with a broad array of progressive forces, going so far as to support President Roosevelt in his reelection bid. In 1939 however, Stalin signed a peace treaty with Hitler and joined with Germany in attacking Poland. He called upon Western European and American communists to return to a policy of revolutionary ultraism. This shocking development led many liberals and non-communist socialists to resign from

two “common men,” Mr. O’Brien and Mr. Murphy. O’Brien tells Murphy that Hess, a Nazi who parachuted on Scotland in the hopes of negotiating an end to war with the English, was “trying to land on a pansy bed” and smelled of “perfume when they picked him up.” According to O’Brien, Hess was well received by the English elite. “The upper classes,” he tells Murphy, “are never mad at each other in a war.... The millionaires all stick together, war or no war.” The evidence of the British elites’ complicity with Hess is visible in the fact that both Hess and his elite English friends have “toe nails...painted red.” Soon, Murphy tells his friend, Hess will journey to the US where “most of the upper-class finks wind up.” Quin uses his story to suggest that working class people everywhere needed to come together against their common enemy, the upper classes. He warns his readers that there will be a battle of “red ideas against red toe-nails”—a clash between honest working folks and decadent upper class pansies.<sup>59</sup> Quin’s queer baiting is typical of the tactics communists used to smear fascist—and in this case liberal democratic—leaders and movements.<sup>60</sup>

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Popular Front organizations and vow to never again work with communists. The abrupt disavowal of the Popular Front illustrates how the “Communist party’s position in American life...was always hostage to Soviet foreign policy.” (Klehr and Haynes, *The American Communist Movement*, 92.) Quin’s text is a quintessential product of the short-lived Nazi Soviet pact but its mobilization of homophobia as a political tool was reflective of the culture and sexual politics of the CP.

<sup>59</sup> Mike Quin, “A Pansy Parachuter,” in *On The Drumhead: A Selection from the Writing of Mike Quin: A Memorial Volume*, ed. Harry Carlisle (San Francisco: Pacific Publishing Foundation, n.d.) 118 – 119. Alan Berube’s work on the San Francisco based Marine Cooks and Stewards Union, a union that had a significant CP presence, is a striking exception to this pattern. In their fight to gain control of the union CP organizers openly appealed to the gay men working on board ships. However, it is unclear that the CP’s overall view of the subject—the party line advocated across the country—on homosexuality was affected by this particular battle. Quin, after all, was a leading figure in San Francisco’s CP. While the activities of the rank and file are important to document, the CP “was not merely a collection of people who shared membership in a social organization. It was a Leninist party with certain goals, visions, and plans, however perfectly or imperfectly these were realized or carried out by the membership.” (Klehr and Haynes, *The American Communist Movement*, 5) In other words, it matters what the party line was because the CP was an organization which enforced a uniformity of belief and action. Any evaluation of the merits or demerits of the CP on a given issue must take this into consideration. If the CP had come to power what would have been their policy on homosexuality? I would argue that the sentiments expressed in Quin’s story would have been the governing principles for policy. That having been said, the relationship between the CP and the politics of homosexuality

Paradoxically as the Left was turning towards a more conservative politics of sexuality, the American public was feeling freer to experiment and test the bounds of the crumbling Victorian sexual system. The anarchists found it hard to build an audience for radical sexual politics in a decade in which sexual liberalism and social freedom seemed to be on the rise. When Goldman came to visit Canada in the late 1920s, for example, she found herself asked about “flappers” and companionate marriages. Whereas in the pre-war years newspapers had regularly denounced the anarchists as free love radicals, Goldman’s ideas no longer seemed to raise the hackles of the press. The *Toronto Star* reported “Miss Goldman found the women of today far advanced over those of a generation ago.”<sup>61</sup> The *Toronto Daily Star* went so far as to claim that Goldman’s ideas regarding companionate marriage had merit. “Companionate marriage,” the paper declared, “would give young people a chance to find out if they were really mates.” And since Goldman also advocated “easy divorce” there would be no danger of mismatched youngsters being imprisoned by the bonds of matrimony.<sup>62</sup> This is a misrepresentation of Goldman’s free love politics, but it illustrates how ideas that were once radical could be assimilated into current debates and ideas. In fact, Goldman was reported as being behind almost every cultural shift of the era. In an article entitled “If you Like Jazz you’re Classed

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are complex. For example, Harry Hay, one of the founders of the gay rights group the Mattachine Society, was radicalized by his experience in the CP. It should be noted, however, that Hay had to leave the CP in order to pursue his sexual politics. It would have been impossible for Hay to do otherwise as the CP had a policy of actively discouraging the membership of gay men and women who would not remain silent about their private lives.

<sup>60</sup> See Lauritsen and Thorstadt, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement*, 61 – 62; Andrew Hewitt, *Political Inversion: Homosexuality, Fascism, and the Modernist Imaginary* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); and Harry Oosterhuis, “The ‘Jews’ of the Antifascist Left: Homosexuality and Socialist Resistance to Nazism in *Gay Men and the Sexual History of the Political Left*, 227 – 257.

<sup>61</sup> “Emma Goldman, in Canada, Puts O.K on Flapper, *The Toronto Star*, November 6, 1926.

<sup>62</sup> “Emma Goldman Advocates Companionate Marriage, *The Toronto Daily Star*, February 9, 1927

as Anarchist,” the *Toronto Star Weekly* recorded Goldman as characterizing jazz as “anarchistic, the very spirit of youth, essentially a revolt against outworn traditions and restrictions.”<sup>63</sup>

But the sexual liberalism of the twenties, commented on by contemporaries and scholars alike, was an empty victory for the anarchists. People seemed more than happy to accept what to the anarchists seemed dangerously watered down compromises. If all jazz fans were anarchists then what exactly did being an anarchist mean beyond enjoying mild forms of social rebellion and cultural novelty? And if “flappers” are the pentultimate expression of liberated womanhood what need was there for further critiques of the gender system? Anarchism, as presented in the Canadian press’s interpretation of Goldman’s ideas, is a willful, “youthful” butting against the strictures of tradition for the purposes of amusement. The political content of anarchist critiques of sexuality and gender relations have been utterly evacuated from this understanding of what Goldman, Lloyd, Tucker, and Berkman were trying to accomplish. In the Twenties radical critiques were watered down by banalities and the politics of pleasure articulated by the anarchist sex radicals withered. “Ideas that had been avant-garde in the prewar years,” writes the historian Leslie Fishbein, “became the clichés of the postwar years.”<sup>64</sup>

The anarchists were frustrated by what they felt to be the shallowness of what passed as sexual emancipation. Berkman wrote to Goldman about his mystification regarding the lifestyle associated with the “so called ‘modern girl,’ especially the American girl:”

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<sup>63</sup> “If you Like Jazz You’re Classed as Anarchist,” *The Toronto Star Weekly*, December 19, 1926.

<sup>64</sup> Leslie Fishbein, *Rebels in Bohemia*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1982), 206.

They have become 'emancipated' from the old inhibitions, but they have not replaced them by any really earnest idea or deeper feeling. It is just a kind of superficial sexuality without rhyme or reason. More sensuality than anything else. At the bottom of it is an inner emptiness, sexual and otherwise...and...men...look upon these types of girls very lightly, even scornfully, except that they want to use them.... they cannot really grow into a deeper affection for them, for there is a hidden lack of respect and understanding. They consider them light and just good enough to spend a little time with.<sup>65</sup>

Berkman viewed the emancipation of "the modern girl" as a sham and the actions of modern men as reprehensible. What was missing was a political context with which to understand and guide sexual liberation. Goldman shared his disillusionment. As Goldman told the *Toronto Daily Star*, "People refuse to see...that sex is the greatest force and the most beautiful thing in the world if its powers are rightly harnessed and directed. Where love is missing everything is missing."<sup>66</sup>

Viewed from the perspective of the politics of homosexuality, Berkman and Goldman's attack on the too easy thrills of the twenties has considerable merit. As Linda Gordon has pointed out "the sexual revolution" of the postwar period "was not a general loosening of sexual taboos but only of those on nonmarital heterosexual activity."<sup>67</sup> In fact, historian Gary Kinsman suggests that the sexual revolution of the twenties was a seedbed of homophobia.<sup>68</sup> As the rules governing heterosexual dating were liberalized, homosexuality was increasingly a focus of surveillance. Advice literature, for example, "singled out 'homosexuality' as a distinct category of sexual deviance...a pathological symptom of an individual's failure to achieve a normal

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<sup>65</sup> Alexander Berkman to Emma Goldman, August 1929, in *Nowhere at Home*, 161.

<sup>66</sup> "Emma Goldman Advocates Companionate Marriage, *The Toronto Daily Star*, February 9, 1927

<sup>67</sup> Gordon, *Woman's Bodies, Woman's Right*, 392.

<sup>68</sup> Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire*, 69 – 71.

state of heterosexuality.”<sup>69</sup> This dialectic of liberalization and surveillance may help account for the popularity of the pansy performance. As George Chauncey has documented, the Twenties witnessed a “pansy craze,” a fascination with male homosexuality as represented by the comical, extremely fey figure of the pansy.<sup>70</sup> The pansy performer may have been widely celebrated but he garnered little respect. The pansy performance essentially involved a sophisticated audiences of heterosexual couples on dates laughing at the figure of a ridiculously over the top gay male figure. In staging this display of erotic and gender deviance the pansy was illustrating the boundaries of proper conduct for his audience.<sup>71</sup>

Though there was an increase in the number of venues where gay men and lesbians could pursue their erotic and emotional needs, the expansion of social freedom was paralleled by a contraction of the politics of homosexuality. The increase in the number of identifiable gay and lesbian venues may in fact have released some of the pressure for sexual liberation that fueled the anarchist critiques of anti-sodomy laws and other oppressive measures. The historian James Steakley, though speaking of Germany, argues that the decline in homosexual politics in the twenties can be explained at least in part by the fact that “it was far easier to luxuriate in the concrete utopia of the urban subculture than to struggle for an emancipation which was apparently only formal and legalistic.”<sup>72</sup> Similar developments unfolded in the United States. Greenwich Village, for example, developed a reputation as a

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<sup>69</sup> Steven Seidman, *Romantic Longings: Love in America, 1830 – 1980* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 88 – 89.

<sup>70</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 301 – 329.

<sup>71</sup> This dynamic is very much like that described by the historians of “whiteness.” See Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995) and David Rodiger, *The Wages of Whiteness and the Making of the American Working Class, Revised Edition* (London: Verso, 1999).

<sup>72</sup> Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany*, 81-82

gay-friendly enclave in part because the pre-war anarchists made the area a social center of the movement. But in the post-war years that political presence was absent. Lillian Faderman argues that though the “Villagers prided themselves on being ‘bohemian,’” their sex radicalism—dominated by heterosexual men—was tepid and uneven. “Although lesbianism was allowed to exist more openly there than it could have in most places in the United States, even in Greenwich Village sexual love between women was treated with ambivalence.”<sup>73</sup> Though gay men and lesbians found a place in the Village, without a clearly articulated political critique of sexual norms it was difficult to challenge the “ambivalence” that permeated even the most liberal of social worlds.

There were some defenders of the rights of gay men and lesbians in the inter-war decades but they possessed neither the resources nor the political commitments of the prewar anarchist sex radicals. In 1925, for example, the Society for Human Rights, a homosexual rights group located in Chicago was established by a small number of activists. Henry Gerber, the SHR’s leader, modeled the organization on Hirschfeld’s Scientific-Humanitarian Committee. Although radical in its sexual politics the SHR was a thoroughly law-abiding organization. Seeking to minimize controversy, the SHR pledged that it stood “for law and order; it is in harmony with any and all general laws insofar as they protect the rights of others, and does in no manner recommend any acts in violation of present laws nor advocate any matter inimical to the public welfare.”<sup>74</sup> Unfortunately, this pledge of allegiance did little to safeguard the group’s members. The SHR managed to put out two issues of its

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<sup>73</sup> Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Penguin, 1991) 82

<sup>74</sup> “Charter: Society for Human Rights, Inc.,” in Katz, *Gay American History*, 387.

journal, *Friendship and Freedom*, before reporters for the *Chicago Examiner* exposed its activities leading to the arrest of most of the membership. Henry Gerber was fired from his job at the Post Office. The SHR's members, isolated and without recourse, were unable to reconstitute the organization. Not until the post-World War II homophile movement would organizations similar to the SHR be established.

Despite the changing political and social climate of the Twenties and the decades that followed, the ideas and influence of the pre-war anarchist sex radicals continued to be felt. Anarchists and those influenced by the pre-war anarchists were a presence in some of the gay-friendly bohemian clubs of the post-war era. In early 1920s, for example, Kenneth Rexroth worked at The Green Mask, a Chicago club run by June Wiener, a "friend of Emma Goldman" who "came from an old Jewish Anarchist family." Wiener's girlfriend Beryl Bolton also worked at the club. Rexroth's own political history was shot through with anarchist influences. His grandfather considered himself an anarchist and in his youth his parent's took their young son to cafés such as Polly's Restaurant which was frequented by members of Emma Goldman's circle. Rexroth was steeped in the history and mythology of the movement. Kenneth's father, for example, made sure that his son knew about Alexander Berkman's fourteen-year prison ordeal.<sup>75</sup>

The atmosphere of The Green Mask combined literary and political modernism and sexual and gender liberalism. The club hosted poetry readings and lectures by Sherwood Anderson and the lawyer Clarence Darrow and housed, in Rexroth's words, "a small permanent family of oddities" including "a hermaphrodite violinist;" the "great female impersonators Bert Savoy, Julian Eltinge...[and] Carole

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<sup>75</sup> See Linda Hamalian, *A Life of Kenneth Rexroth* (New York: Norton, 1991), 3 – 5.

Normand, ‘The Creole Fashion Plate,’ known to her friends as ‘The Queer Old Chafing Dish;’” a “little Mexican fairy known as Theda Bara, and her knife-toting pal, who weighed about four hundred pounds, the Slim Princess;” as well as “a very light, freckled-faced Negro.... who claimed to be the illegitimate son of a British admiral and a Haitian princess.” This faux aristocrat “had dyed red hair, ultraconservative clothes in the height of fashion, and wore an egg-shaped eyeglass without ribbon or rim.”<sup>76</sup> The mix of high and low culture and the truly wild social scene fostered by the club was at least in part a product of the political heritage of the club’s owner.

Rexroth also visited a more sober club—in all senses of the word—called The Gray Cottage. Located next door to a bookshop run by a Dutch man who had been one of the leaders of the Rotterdam Commune, The Gray Cottage was owned by Ruth Norlander and Eve Adams. Norlander and Adams “wore men’s clothes and for years traveled about the country selling *Mother Earth*, *The Masses*, and other radical literary magazines.” *Mother Earth* had been suppressed during the First World War but the magazine’s message continued to resonate. According to Rexroth, both women “were convinced libertarians and part of the [anarchist] movement.” Their club “was a great deal more intellectual and radical than the Green Mask.” Though The Gray Cottage was “the most bohemian of the bohemian tearooms of the Chicago North Side” it attracted a less spectacular crowd than the Green Mask. Norlander and Adam’s café “attracted few customers from show business...and none of the tough homosexuals who came into the Green Mask.” The Gray Cottage’s customers “were cast more upon the pattern of Edward Carpenter...than lady prizefighters and drag

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<sup>76</sup> Kenneth Rexroth, *An Autobiographical Novel* (New York: Doubleday, 1966) 162-167

queens and cheap burlesque girls.”<sup>77</sup> At the Gray Cottage, the ideology of libertarian socialism was foregrounded while at the Green Mask anarchism expressed itself in the creation of a social space free from society’s norms and rules.

It is not surprising that The Green Mask and The Gray Cottage should be located in Chicago. Rexroth claims that among the writers, artists, and activists he associated with in Chicago in the Twenties, “Most people called themselves anarchists.”<sup>78</sup> The city was home to the Free Society group, which according to the anarchist Sam Dolgoff was “the most active anarchist propaganda group in the country.”<sup>79</sup> Rexroth frequented the Dill Pickle, a club located near “Bughouse Square, where every variety of radical sect... was preached from a row of soapboxes every night in the week when it wasn’t storming.” The “political radicals among [the Bughouse Square speakers] hung out at the Dill Pickle and constituted the inner core of club membership.”<sup>80</sup> The sexual politics of the pre-war anarchists was a persistent influence in the social worlds Rexroth moved in. The Dill Pickle and Bughouse Square were places where sex was openly discussed, though more often than not in a ribald tone. One of the Dill Pickle’s leading characters, for example, “had an amazing talent for getting really important scholars to talk for him—under a lewd title, such as “Should the Brownian Movement Best Be Approached from the Rear?”<sup>81</sup> Rexroth also knew “a little man with tousled yellow curls” who “had been a famous war resister but by the time I knew him he had only one subject on the soapbox...the pleasures of oral sex, and its answers to the Problems of Malthus and

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 260

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>79</sup> Sam Dolgoff, *Fragments: A Memoir* (Cambridge: Refract Publications, 1986) 39.

<sup>80</sup> Rexroth, *An Autobiographical Novel*, 137

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 136. Browning was a popular term for anal sex.

Marx.”<sup>82</sup> Despite their creative engagement with Marx, the denizens of the Dill Pickle and the Bug Club were not representative of the local CP dominated socialist scene. According to Rexroth the “Anarchist and IWW free-lance soapboxers” he enjoyed listening to, were “completely disillusioned with the organized radical movement.”<sup>83</sup>

Chicago was also the home of Goldman’s old lover and tour manager Ben Reitman. Like Rexroth, Reitman was a member of the Dill Pickle and a figure in Chicago’s demimonde. Though no longer an anarchist, Reitman remained interested in the subject of sexuality and radical politics. Reitman was a frequent visitor to anarchist meetings. In 1931 he reprised his old role, helping to sell anarchist literature at a gathering held in honor of Kropotkin. Reitman devoted a considerable amount of time to working with those on the margins of society. According to Dolgoff, Reitman had a well-deserved reputation as “a distinguished physician, specializing in venereal and allied diseases.” In addition to his medical practice, Reitman was the director of the Chicago School for Social Pathology. Dolgoff was impressed with the fact that Reitman “was deeply concerned with the plight of the ‘misfits,’ the prostitutes, the homeless, the hobos, the tramps, the derelicts, the ‘dregs of society,’ who, when I knew him, crowded the flop houses and dingy saloons of the skidrow on West Madison Street.”<sup>84</sup>

Reitman showed a continuing fascination with the life of gay men and lesbians. In 1937 Reitman helped “Box Car Bertha” write *Sisters of the Road*, a book which told the story of Bertha’s “fifteen years of wandering, a hobo, traveling from

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 140

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 138

<sup>84</sup> Dolgoff, *Fragments*, 51 - 52.

one end of the country to the other.”<sup>85</sup> At the end of Bertha’s narrative Reitman added an appendix intended to answer the question “what makes sisters of the road?” Among the reasons Reitman cites are “sex irregularities.” He believed, he told Goldman, “homosexual women...make up a large proportion of the hitch-hiking, intellectual women of the day.”<sup>86</sup> These same women, according to Reitman, had an affinity for radical politics. The sisters of the road included “anarchist communists of the Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Peter Kropotkin types” as well as “Individualists anarchists of the Max Stierner [sic], Tucker, and Frederick Nietzsche types.”<sup>87</sup> These findings should be taken with a grain of salt. Reitman’s work tells us far more about Chicago’s bohemian world of sexual and radical politics than about the life of women hoboes in the 1920s and 1930s. Reitman extrapolated from the world he knew, one in which homosexuality and anarchism existed in overlapping social circles, to the larger world.

Reitman’s daughter, Jan Gay, was also interested in the ethical, social, and cultural place of homosexuality. Like the pre-war anarchists Gay had a “commitment to science as a significant avenue to social reform.”<sup>88</sup> Just as Goldman and Lloyd had in their day, Gay sought out and worked with the European sexologists she admired. Beginning in the 1920s Gay interviewed hundreds of lesbians in Europe and America using techniques and strategies she learned from the German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld. In the mid-1930s Gay played a key role in founding the Committee for the Study of Sex Variants, an American organization led by Robert Latou Dickinson.

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<sup>85</sup> Reitman, Preface,” *Sister of the Road*, n.p.

<sup>86</sup> Ben Reitman to Emma Goldman, March 11, 1934, *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 30.

<sup>87</sup> Reitman, *Sister of the Road*, 310

<sup>88</sup> Minton, *Departing From Deviance*, 46

Eventually Gay's findings were incorporated into George W. Henry's *Sex Variants: A Study of Homosexual Patterns* published in 1941. But the publication of *Sex Variants* was not the triumph for Gay that it should have been. Apart from a few minor acknowledgements, Henry made no mention of Gay's work. Dejected and feeling betrayed, Gay stopped her research on homosexuality.<sup>89</sup>

Gay's work on the question of homosexuality was greatly influenced by the pre-war anarchists, a fact that has not been adequately documented. Gay and her father were in contact well into her adulthood and through him Gay was connected to the legacy of anarchist sex radicalism of which he was a part. In 1931, for example, Reitman wrote to Goldman that Gay "seems to be doing wonderfully well." He told his former lover that his daughter "is writing a book with Prof. Magnus Hirschfeld, [entitled] "Women without Men."<sup>90</sup> Unfortunately the book that Gay was working on with Hirschfeld was never completed. Gay was likely brought into contact with Hirschfeld, the greatest influence in her intellectual development, through the efforts of the prewar anarchist sex radicals. In the same year that Reitman wrote Goldman about his daughter, Goldman received a letter from Gay. "I was interested and delighted," Goldman writes Gay, "to hear that you had met my good friend, Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, and glad to see that you are about to do a book with him. I daresay it will prove to be of value."<sup>91</sup> The fact that Gay kept both her father and Goldman abreast of her work with Hirschfeld reflects the fact that she understood that

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<sup>89</sup> Gay did, however, continue work on sexuality. In 1932, Gay published *On Going Naked*, a study of nudism that was banned in a number of states. The book was the basis for a film, *This Naked World*, which was released in 1935.

<sup>90</sup> Ben Reitman to Emma Goldman, February 9, 1931, *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 23.

<sup>91</sup> Emma Goldman to Jan Gay, February 13, 1931, *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 23. Goldman refers to Gay by her birth name, "Helen."

her relationship with Hirschfeld owed something to the relationship he had with her father and her father's colleagues.

Gay was not the only lesbian intellectual of her era whose life and work was shaped by the political legacy of libertarian socialism. Anarchism also played a critical role in the life of the poet Elsa Gidlow. Born in 1898, Gidlow spent a considerable part of her life in a struggle, in her words, to "get a room of my own" and "find my kind of people."<sup>92</sup> In 1923 Gidlow published *On a Gray Thread* the first volume of explicitly lesbian poetry in North America. In 1926 Gidlow moved to the San Francisco Bay Area where she lived until her death in 1986. During her time in the Bay Area Gidlow was an active member of the lesbian community and of the region's diverse artistic and political worlds. Anarchism was a subtle current within the overlapping social milieus that Gidlow moved. When Gidlow met Rexroth, who like her had also moved to the Bay Area, they formed a "friendship based on respect for one another's poetry, political orientation, and sexual orientation."<sup>93</sup> The libertarian values of the worlds of radical art, anarchism, and the sexual culture of the Bay Area were interwoven. Sometimes this could be expressed in silly, but telling, ways. For example, the Bay Area poet Jack Spicer and his lover John Ryan once referred to themselves as the "Interplanetary Services of the Martian Anarchy."<sup>94</sup> The name of this fabulous society of two plays on the freedom or "anarchy" that the Bay Area's social and artistic world afforded Spicer and Ryan.

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<sup>92</sup> Elsa Gidlow, *Elsa: I Come With My Songs* (San Francisco: Booklegger Press, 1986) 66. See Kinsman, 65, 124.

<sup>93</sup> Hamalian, *A Life of Kenneth Rexroth*, 47.

<sup>94</sup> Lewis Ellingman and Kevin Killian, *Poet Be Like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 57.

Gidlow's engagement with anarchism came, ironically, in the immediate aftermath of WWI and the Russian Revolution. At the same time that thousands were streaming out of the movement, their dreams of social revolution shattered, Gidlow embraced the ideals of the prewar anarchists. The war seemed to be particularly troubling for Gidlow and her friends. "Our fledgling adult consciousness," she wrote, "was lit for the start by war's murderous phosphorescence. Every value we had absorbed became suspect." The revolution in Russia did not seduce Gidlow. While many saw Lenin as a harbinger of heaven on earth, Gidlow looked askance at those who argued that "a new Russian dictatorship must be countenanced and the 'liquidation' (a disinfected new term) of individuals justified." Troubled, Gidlow looked for answers and found them in the intellectual tradition of libertarian socialism. "Emma Goldman," she would later recall, "had dawned on my horizon." In the very year that the *Buford* set sail, Gidlow told her friends, "I believe I am an anarchist."<sup>95</sup>

While her embrace of Goldman's legacy was heartfelt, Gidlow's anarchism was significantly different from that of the pre-war movement. Though she believed that "society must be radically transformed, not for any one group or class, but for all of us," in practice Gidlow's anarchism reflected her desire for personal liberation.<sup>96</sup> Her commitment to anarchism was rooted in her personal experience, not in an engagement with the kinds of issues—gradual reform versus revolution, the merits of various methods of propaganda, and capitalism versus collective ownership—that exercised her predecessors. In her memoirs she admitted, "neither I nor my

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<sup>95</sup> Gidlow, *Elsa*, 81 – 82.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 300.

companions were ready to take to the streets, soap boxes, or brave jail.” Gidlow and her friends “could not see salvation in any brand of politics.” A forlorn crew adrift in a sea, their “abiding faith was in art, in the fruits of the spirit, in personal integrity and responsibility to one another.”<sup>97</sup> This was an inward-looking anarchism, one that served as a guide for interpersonal relationships not revolutionary social change. To be sure, Goldman and the prewar anarchists put great stress on the politics of personal life but they did so in the context of a mass movement with broad economic and social goals. But by the time Gidlow encountered anarchism, the movement—with the exception of a few small groups—was gone. Gidlow’s libertarianism was a powerful yet strangely attenuated variant of its prewar mother.

Gidlow’s profession of anarchism was intimately related to her sense of personal rebellion. In 1928, for example, Gidlow mused in the pages of her journal on the relationship between her politics, her place in society, and her personality:

Another ghost of memory: I wonder what has become of that good little hunchback, Frank Genest, who once called me—poor little shy, silent me at eighteen! —an ‘enemy of society!’ I hardly knew what ‘society’ was: hardly knew it existed. Perhaps that was enough to make me its enemy in his eyes. My natural ‘anarchism’ was perhaps evident. I don’t think I ever had any particular feeling of enmity towards society, even when I found out what it was. Simply, I always knew I was alone; knew I always should be; took it for granted in fact; knew that I must act out of my own need and vision, ignoring authority. Does that make me an anarchist?<sup>98</sup>

It would be hard to imagine Berkman or Tucker writing about anarchism in the way that Gidlow does here. Eschewing fiery anarchist critiques of society, Gidlow adopts the pose of the outsider, someone who “always knew I was alone; knew I always

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>98</sup> Elsa Gidlow, December 26, 1928, unpublished journal, 66 – 67. Archives of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society of Northern California, Elsa Gidlow Collection.

should be.” She makes no reference to economic injustice, strategies for propaganda either by word or deed, or the need to challenge state power. In fact, Gidlow exhibits some discomfort with identifying herself as an anarchist. Her use of quotation marks around the word anarchism signals a certain distance, indicating to the reader that she does not mean anarchism, an ideology of fundamental social and political change, but ‘anarchism,’ the natural expression of a youthful, rebellious spirit.

Gidlow’s anarchism, her gender and sexual politics, and her identity as a poet reinforced each other. As a lesbian and an artist Gidlow felt doubly alienated from the society in which she lived. Gidlow turned to the legacy of Goldman in the creation of new forms of expression with which to understand and appreciate herself as a woman whose emotional and sexual life was built around her relationship with other women. Her willingness to defy convention was, in part, a product of her understanding of the need for individuals to be free to construct their own rules of personal and social conduct. This feeling was magnified by her self-image as an artist, an individual who was able to see that “drabness, tedium, injustices were not the whole of life.”<sup>99</sup> For Gidlow, artists like lesbians, were in conflict with the world in which they lived. Gidlow felt that “perhaps the artist, the lesbian artist in particular, always will have to survive within the interstices of the chicaneries and despotism of any power structure.”<sup>100</sup> The norms and rules of that society were, she believed, explicitly hostile to her desires and work. Anarchism challenged power structures and empowered individuals. It was, in short, particularly suited to Gidlow’s intertwined identity as a radical, a poet, a lesbian, and a feminist.

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<sup>99</sup> Gidlow, *Elsa*, 67.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 301

Gidlow understood anarchism as a doctrine of individual empowerment not as the ideological product of a mass movement. This is the critical difference between the anarchism of Gidlow and Goldman. The activists of the prewar movement addressed questions of sexuality in the course of pursuing broad social change. Gidlow was interested in anarchism because it allowed her to explore and expand the boundaries of her life. This view of anarchism was shared by many who gravitated to it in the post World War I decades. These men and women, writes Sam Dolgoff, “did not conceive anarchism as an organized social revolutionary movement with a mass base and a definite ideology, but as a bohemian ‘lifestyle.’” Dolgoff was disturbed by this development which he believed “meant regression to a form of organization not much above local groups and an intimate circle of friends.”<sup>101</sup> But what Dolgoff lamented was precisely what Gidlow and others sought—a refuge from what they perceived to be a hostile, unpalatable world. The work of Goldman, Berkman, Tucker, and other anarchist sex radicals served as a valuable resource for men and women who—in the spirit if not in the form of their anarchist predecessors—continued to insist on the right of all women and men to live their life according to their own lights.

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<sup>101</sup> Dolgoff, *Fragments*, 93

## **Conclusion: Anarchism, Stonewall, and the Transformation of the Politics of Homosexuality**

In the last third of the Twentieth century anarchist ideas about free love, non-hierarchical social systems, and libertarian socialism were rediscovered by a new generation of activists, bohemians, and alienated youth. The phenomenon was most visible on college campuses. Near the end of 1960s, a friend of George Woodcock, a leading figure within the anarchist revival, told Woodcock that his students had seemingly all become anarchists. When the professor asked the 160 students in his Contemporary Ideologies class to identify themselves “ninety of them choose anarchism in preference to democratic socialism (which came in next with twenty-three votes), liberalism, Communism, and conservatism.” Woodcock notes that the student’s enthusiasm was shared by many of their teachers. “Since 1960 more serious and dispassionate studies of anarchism have appeared than during the previous sixty years of the century.”<sup>1</sup> Goldman, especially, has been the subject of this wave of academic study. There have been a number of biographies of Goldman published since 1960 and The Emma Goldman Papers Project has undertaken the systematic collection of texts documenting Goldman’s life and work.

There are, however, important differences between the anarchism of the turn of the century and the anarchism of the late Twentieth century. “The anarchists of the 1960s,” Woodcock argues, “were not the historic anarchist movement resurrected; they were something quite different, a new manifestation of the idea.”<sup>2</sup> At the turn of

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<sup>1</sup> George Woodcock, “Anarchism Revisited,” in *Anarchism and Anarchists* (Kensington, Ontario: Quarry Press, 1992), 44.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 45. See also Martin Duberman, “Anarchism Left and Right,” *Partisan Review*, (Fall, 1966), 615; David E. Apter, “The Old Anarchism and the New—Some Comments,” *Government and*

the century anarchists could identify themselves with a worldwide, mass movement with tens of thousands of activists. Though the anarchists examined in this dissertation were not members of the peasant and working-class anarchist majority, they drew strength from the knowledge that theirs was a movement with a mass constituency. Tucker, Lloyd, Goldman, Berkman, Abbott, and their comrades believed in and struggled for a social revolution that would transform every aspect of life. Today's anarchists, like Rexroth, Gidlow, and the denizens of The Green Mask, are more likely to be relatively isolated individuals or members of small groups. For the most part today's anarchists have given up on the idea that a revolution is possible. Instead they focus on building a counter-culture within the body of the present social order, what the theorist Hekim Bey has called "Temporary Autonomous Zones." Contemporary anarchists have not reconstituted the level of organization, scale, and mission that the pre-World War I anarchists had.

The political culture of the two periods—the context in which the respective anarchist movements operate—is also quite different. At the turn of the century the Left was a vital and visible force within American society. Socialists governed cities, ran presidential candidates, and shaped public discourse to a far greater degree than in today's America. The anarchists were not, of course, thrilled with the idea of elected socialist representatives but they benefited from the fact that radical alternatives were taken seriously. During the years when Tucker, Lloyd, Goldman, and Berkman were active the Left constituted a significant force in American political culture. Hundreds of thousands of Americans subscribed to socialist publications, voted for socialist

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*Opposition*, (Autumn, 1970), 403; and Paul Goodman, "The Black Flag of Anarchism," *New York Times Magazine*, (July 14, 1968), 10 – 22. Veysey, on the other hand, argues that there exists "a more continuous underground tradition" that ties the Old and the New anarchism together (Veysey, 40 – 41).

candidates, claimed membership in socialist organizations, including anarchist groups, and socialism was a powerful force within organized labor. Although the Left enjoyed a burst of life in the late 1960s and early 1970s it did not enjoy the same place in American society that it had at the turn of the century. The anti-Vietnam War and Civil Rights movements of the last third of the century were influenced by Left activists but unlike in the earlier period of political activism the Left did not take the form of a mass movement rooted in the American working class.

The style and rhetoric of anarchist discourse was also quite different at the turn of the century. Goldman, Tucker, Lloyd, and the other turn of the century anarchists did not discount the spontaneous, the idiosyncratic and the marginal but their enthusiasm was grounded in Nineteenth century ideas of progress, reason, and rationality. Contemporary anarchists tend to stress the spontaneous, the eclectic, the temporary, and the irrational. Bey has called for anarchists to fashion “a practical kind of ‘mystical anarchism,’ ...a democratization of shamanism, intoxicated and serene.”<sup>3</sup> To be sure there are anarchists, Murray Bookchin being the most notable example, who vigorously oppose Bey’s vision of anarchism. Bookchin identifies himself with “an idealistic, often theoretically coherent Left that militantly emphasized its internationalism, its rationality in its treatment of reality, its democratic spirit, and its vigorous revolutionary aspirations.”<sup>4</sup> Note, however, that Bookchin speaks of this Left in the past tense; the title of the essay in which he discusses his ideological beliefs is entitled “The Left that Was: A Personal

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<sup>3</sup> Hekim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchism, Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 1991), 63.

<sup>4</sup> Murray Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (San Francisco: AK Press, 1995), 66.

Reflection.” Bookchin is referring to the culture of the Left that flourished at the turn of the century before the Russian Revolution. I do not mean to take sides in this debate rather I wish to point out that the culture, ideas, social basis, rhetoric, and style of anarchism that exists today is quite different than that which flourished in the United States in the decades prior to WWI.

The sexual and gender politics of the turn of the century anarchists was one of the reasons that they found a constituency in the years since the late 1960s. Alix Kates Shulman, for example, found a ready audience for her discussions of Goldman’s sexual politics in the early 1970s. Shulman, who admired Goldman’s defiance of “the sexual hypocrisy of Puritanism,” found her political commitments to women’s liberation mirrored in the libertarian ideals of the anarchists. “Anarchism by definition,” she wrote, “and radical feminism as it has evolved, are both fundamentally and deeply anti-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian.”<sup>5</sup> Shulman would go on to publish a biography of Goldman and edit a collection of Goldman’s own writings, most of which had fallen out of print.<sup>6</sup> Goldman was by far the most republished turn of the century anarchist but she was not the only person whose work found new readers. Lloyd’s pamphlet on Karezza, or male continence, was republished in California in 1973 and again, in French, in Montreal in 2000. This is not to say this new audience was always aware of the ideological roots of the works they were reading. Lloyd’s work proved particularly appealing to those readers who identified his work as an example of Eastern religious and philosophic traditions. The

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<sup>5</sup> Alix Kates Shulman, “Emma Goldman’s Feminism: A Reappraisal,” in *Red Emma Speaks*, 17. See Alix Kates Shulman, *To the Barricades: The Anarchist Life of Emma Goldman* (New York: Ty Crowell Co., 1971). See also Oz Frackle, “Whatever Happened to ‘Red Emma’? Emma Goldman from Alien Rebel to American Icon,” *The Journal of American History* (December 1996): 903 – 942.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

Canadian pamphlet identifies Lloyd's work as an example of "Occidental tantric" thought and was published by Ganesha Press, the name of which references a Hindu god.<sup>7</sup> It is notable that most of Lloyd's political work, much of which he composed in the pre-WWI years was not reprinted. It was, in other words, Lloyd's sexual politics, not the anarchist roots of those politics that his new readers found appealing.

Gay liberationists, radical feminists, and lesbian feminists (not exclusive categories by any means) were all drawn to the work of the turn of the century sex radicals. The texts of the pre-WWI anarchist sex radicals found new readers among contemporary sex radicals. For example, Jonathan Ned Katz's groundbreaking collection of primary documents entitled *Gay American History* published in 1976 included excerpts from Goldman's autobiography, Sperry's letters to Goldman, and selections from Berkman's *Prison Memoirs*. But here again the link between the politics of the two periods is complicated. The rediscovery of some of the anarchist's politics of homosexuality did not signal a renaissance of the turn of the century anarchist movement. Katz's book is not an anarchist anthology; it is a gay liberation anthology. The ideas of the anarchists were attractive to gay liberationists and lesbian feminists to the extent that they reflected the libertarian sexual politics of those particular movements. But the larger political goals of the anarchists are not particularly attractive to contemporary gay and lesbian political activists. Though there were and are anarchists active in both gay liberation and lesbian feminist groups the majority of men and women active in gay liberation and lesbian feminism do not

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<sup>7</sup> See John William Lloyd, *The Karezza Method; or Magnetation* (Hollywood: Phoenix Press, 1973) and John William Lloyd, *Karezza, L'Art de L'Amour: La Voie de L'Extase Sexuelle: Un Tantrisme Occidental* (Montreal: Editions Ganesha, 2000). Veysey had already noted that in the twenties and thirties Lloyd found readers among adherents of Eastern religious traditions.

reject American traditions of representative democracy or capitalism. The pull of the liberal political culture of the contemporary gay and lesbian movement acts to tame whatever revolutionary impulse remains in the anarchist texts which circulate in the movement.

This is not to discount the important and as yet under appreciated ways in which the work of turn of the century anarchists has shaped contemporary gay and lesbian politics and culture. Elsa Gidlow, for example, was an important figure in the post-WWII Bay Area's lesbian community. Her work in that community was, at least in part, inspired by the ideas of the anarchists she read in her youth. Her willingness to rebel against dominant social values and her insistence on the rights of individuals to fulfill their desires and needs reflects the spirit of Goldman that so influenced her in her youth. In the pre-Stonewall era Gidlow was a supporter of the Daughters of Bilitis, the first American lesbian rights organization. In the 1970s Gidlow published a number of important lesbian feminist works including *Sapphic Songs* and *Ask No Man Pardon: The Philosophical Significance of Being Lesbian*. Gidlow made her home, Druid Heights, into a center of the women's community and retreat for artists and writers. "Women," Gidlow wrote, "often came to me at Druid Heights to share their dilemmas, especially those they have as lesbians in a culture that excludes them and family patterns they cannot fit into."<sup>8</sup>

But here again the connections between Gidlow's politics and those of Goldman and her comrades are complicated. Though the inspiration for establishing Druid Heights had roots in Gidlow's larger political ideas the retreat was not an anarchist center. And though Gidlow discusses the influence anarchism had on her

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<sup>8</sup> Gidlow, *Elsa*, 301

life in her autobiography her memoir is not an anarchist text comparable to Goldman's autobiography or Berkman's *Prison Memoirs*. Anarchism was part of Gidlow's political inheritance but as the lesbian feminist community grew the ideas generated by its leading ideologists—Gidlow being one of them—began to displace the bohemian anarchism of her youth. Although, like Gidlow, many lesbian feminists and gay liberationists embraced a broad politics that addressed questions of economic justice as well as social equality for homosexuals the modern homosexual rights movement is largely a single-issue interest group operating within the context of American liberal democracy. Today's sex radicals may know Goldman for her claim—an apocryphal one—that “It's not my revolution if I can't dance,” but they are likely less to be familiar with Goldman's impassioned critiques of capitalism. The anarchists were radicals who dealt with issues of sexuality as part of their larger revolutionary goals. Today's gay and lesbian activists, many of whom, for example, support the right to marry, are both radical and conservative. They seek inclusion within the boundaries of American culture, not the fundamental restructuring of that culture.

Ironically, Goldman herself was critical of single-issue style homosexual politics. In particular Goldman was eager to refute what she believed to be “one predominant tendency among homosexuals: ... their attempt to claim every outstanding personality for their creed.” The way in which Hirschfeld and Levetzow discussed Michel was a case in point. Levetzow had added her to the gallery of famous homosexuals, albeit in a way that repeated some of the charges made by Michel's worst critics. Hirschfeld had gone so far as to hang a portrait of Michel in

his house. This was, Goldman believed, a classic case of overcompensation in the face of oppression. “It may be psychologically conditioned in all persecuted people to cling for support to the exceptional types of every period,” Goldman wrote. “While seemingly a benign impulse,” she warned, “this tendency to celebrate one’s own” could lead to parochialism. “Persecution breeds sectarianism; this in return makes people limited in their scope, and very often unfair in their appraisal of others. I rather think that ... Levetzow suffers from an overdose of homosexual sectarianism.”<sup>9</sup> Goldman expressed the same idea somewhat less diplomatically when in 1924 she wrote Havelock Ellis that she could not tolerate the “narrowness” of many of the lesbians she met; they were a “crazy lot” whose fixation on the conditions of their own oppression to the exclusion of all other matters grated on her.<sup>10</sup> I think it is safe to say that Goldman’s reaction to the Michel case and her frustration with the “narrowness” of the lesbians she met while in exile was shaped by the fact that she herself was frustrated in her political goals. Goldman’s life in exile was a nearly continuous experience of frustration. She may well have been venting that frustration on the very “victims of oppression” that she championed. But nonetheless Goldman’s critique reflects the different political goals and ideas of the anarchist sex radicals and those activists who pursue single-issue sexual politics.

Ultimately it does not matter if the pre-WWI anarchists were or were not the direct forbearers of the contemporary lesbian and gay rights movement. In order to truly understand and appreciate the lives and work of Tucker, Goldman, Lloyd, Abbott, Berkman and their comrades they need to be seen within the context of their

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<sup>9</sup> Emma Goldman “The Unjust Treatment of Homosexuals,” in Katz, *Gay American History*, 377.

<sup>10</sup> Emma Goldman to Havelock Ellis, 27 December 1924, *Emma Goldman Papers*, reel 14.

own time. In post-Stonewall America it is hard to appreciate the originality and bravery of the anarchist sex radicals. In their day they were nearly alone in defending the rights of people to express their erotic feelings free from the threat of arrest and social ostracism. When, for example, Oscar Wilde was thrown in prison for “crimes against nature” the anarchists rose to his defense while others cheered his fall. They refused to let his voice be silenced, and they worked to ensure that others did not share his cruel fate. In the decades that followed anarchist sex radicals lectured, wrote, and argued about the fundamental political and moral questions raised by the Wilde trial. Almost alone among their contemporaries the anarchist sex radicals addressed the issue of homosexuality within the context of their larger political goals: no mainstream politician did so; no major independent intellectual did so; no leading American scientific figure did so; and no social critic saw the question of the social, ethical and cultural place of same-sex love as worthy of their time. The work of the anarchist sex radicals was unique and valuable. It is time that we acknowledge and honor their accomplishments.

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