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## Emma's Passion (Commitment)

On April 26, 1908, a soldier, William Buwalda, went to a lecture at Walton's Pavilion in San Francisco. When it was over, he walked up and shook the hand of the lecturer. For that, Buwalda was court-martialed and sentenced to five years at Alcatraz. Perhaps he should have known better: Emma Goldman was the most notorious woman in America. By her own admission she had helped plan the shooting of industrialist Henry Clay Frick, which was carried out by her friend and lover Alexander Berkman. Her name had been widely, if erroneously, associated with the assassination of an American president and an Italian king. She was known as an anarchist, an atheist, and a proponent of free love: she was everything repellent to the religious and moral ideals of America. If the notion of shaking someone's hand as a criminal offense ever made any sense, it made sense in the case of "Red Emma."

I am not defending assassination as a form of political discourse, but though I think the shooting of Frick was criminal and counterproductive, one must understand the circumstances. On July 6, 1892, Frick's hired guards killed nine striking steel workers in Homestead, Pennsylvania (the strikers also killed several guards). Berkman and Goldman were intensely sensitive to the plight of the strikers, whose working conditions were miserable; they took the killings personally. Such empathy for the suffering of others, while it led in this case to attempted murder, is itself admirable; it is a quality shared by martyrs and saints through the ages. The passion and compassion that led Goldman to take such a drastic step

when she was just twenty-three consumed her whole life, and that made that life one of the most interesting and emblematic in American history.

Emma Goldman was an incredibly passionate person in every aspect of her life: in her sexuality and commitment to love, her politics, and her absorption in the arts. Goldman lived, loved, and hated with total intensity, and the people around her, and, indeed, finally the world, lived more intensely because of her.

### EMMA AND ANARCHISM

Journalist William Reedy gave the following description of Goldman at the height of her notoriety and charisma: “She’s a little woman, somewhat stout, with neatly wavy hair, a clear blue eye, a mouth sensitive if not of classic lines. She is not pretty, but when her face lights up with the glow and color of her intense enthusiasm she is remarkably attractive. She has a fine manner, easy without swagger, free without trace of coarseness, and her smile is positively winsome. Conversationally, she is a delight. Her information is broad, her reading in at least three languages is almost limitless. She has wit and humor too, and a compelling sincerity” (LA, 12).

Emma Goldman was born in Lithuania, then part of Russia, in 1869. She emigrated to the United States in 1885 and settled in Rochester, New York. The rest of her immediate family also eventually settled in Rochester. Factory workers throughout the country were agitating for an eight-hour workday, and soon after Emma arrived in the United States, during a demonstration in Chicago’s Haymarket Square, a bomb was thrown that killed seven policemen. Anarchist leaders were arrested and sentenced to death on scant evidence. Goldman, like many other American radicals, later traced her political awakening and interest in anarchism to those events.

These days, “anarchism” sounds like a crazy advocacy of chaos, associated with a lunatic fringe. But at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, anarchism was a widespread and serious political position. Anarchism is, simply, the doctrine that state power should be minimized and, ideally, eliminated. It seemed particularly compelling to Europeans who lived miserably under autocratic regimes, such as those of Russia and Germany, and the view had such brilliant

nineteenth-century exponents as Mikhail Bakunin and prince and scientist Peter Kropotkin. Goldman herself was attracted to what one might call the “spiritual liberation” that anarchism promised: she foresaw a flourishing of the arts, of sexuality in all of its forms, and of human knowledge. Eventually, Goldman heard lectures by Sigmund Freud, who argued that many ills of the individual and of societies were caused by the repression of sexual and creative energies. Freud’s theories struck an immediate chord in a woman who was conflicted about her own ardent sexuality and about femininity. Goldman was also deeply immersed in the thought of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, history’s greatest and most poetic opponent of Christian morality, though Nietzsche himself would have associated Goldman’s egalitarianism precisely with Christianity.

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century and in the first two of the twentieth, Russian and German immigrants came to the United States seeking economic and political liberation, but they often found that their new country was not a material improvement over the old. America was in the period of its most rapid industrial expansion, and immigrants, many of whom had been farmers, shopkeepers, or professionals at home, were introduced to the drudgery of production in factories or in industries that supported factories, such as steel and coal. Immigrants brought the politics of the radical Left and its critique of capitalism with them, and they found clear applications for these ideas in their new country. The two main camps on the intellectual landscape of the Left in the late nineteenth century were anarchism and Marxist socialism. The Marxists favored the nationalization of industry and centralized state authority after a proletarian revolution. Anarchists urged a general decentralization and saw state power as being allied with the economic power of industrial capitalism. They believed that the elimination of the state could lead to a golden age in which human creative potential would be unlocked. Goldman says this in her famous autobiography, *Living My Life*: “I want freedom, the right to self-expression, everybody’s right to beautiful, radiant things” (LL1, 56).

This may strike you as a completely unrealistic ideal. Emma Goldman might well have agreed with that. The distance between the ideal and the reality in which she lived was, for her, an inspiration, though also, of course, a deep torture. She fought her whole life long to keep hold of her ideal in the face of a reality that, as she aged, seemed to become ever

more recalcitrant to transformation, both in the public sphere and in her personal life. "I'd rather do without reality if my ideal is forever to be abused, insulted, spat upon, dragged through the mud" (LA, 4), she wrote in a letter to a lover. Goldman always struggled to make ends meet. She worked in a clothing factory as a young woman in Rochester, and she tried, at one time or another, salesmanship, freelance writing, massage, cooking, running an ice cream parlor, and nursing. She founded and edited the magazine *Mother Earth*, and she struggled constantly to make enough as a lecturer to keep it operating. She was as aware as anybody could be of the pressures on average working people and of the distance between those struggles and the possibilities that could be released in a true liberation.

But she did not allow those possibilities to degenerate into a useless utopian ideology. She fought, first of all, to live by them and to live up to them. An important formative experience occurred early in her career as an agitator. Johann Most, perhaps the most eminent American anarchist, had sent her on a lecture tour to present his views. Most declared himself opposed to half-measures, and he argued against reducing the workday to eight hours on the grounds that to do so would only disguise the basic exploitation inherent in capitalism. Goldman gave a speech to that effect in Buffalo, a speech filled with biting sarcasm about those who would devote themselves to such a tiny goal as reducing the workday by a few hours. When she was finished, a tired old workman got up and told her that he was unlikely ever to see the overthrow of the capitalist system, but that a few more hours of leisure each week could transform his life in a very practical way. Goldman was ashamed of her own argument, and though she never let go of her distant ideal, she also never again despised small, practical reforms.

#### SEXUALITY AND LIBERATION

Emma Goldman was, shall we say, extremely sexually active. Indeed, she seems to have viewed it as her right or perhaps even her responsibility to take her pleasure as freely and fully as possible. And yet as she describes each of her affairs in her autobiography, we find that she always united sex with love: her passions were not merely sexual; they were simultaneously spiritual. When she was forty, she struck up an affair with Ben

Reitman, a man known as “The King of the Hoboes,” of whom her friends thoroughly disapproved. She found, as time went on, that this disapproval had been well earned: Reitman was pursuing numerous women and embezzling funds from Goldman’s political work. Though she eventually found the strength to break with him, she describes the titanic struggle in her soul between passion and good sense. A major theme of her autobiography is a conflict between her public persona of what might be considered ultramasculine confrontation and her desire for something approaching traditional gender divisions in her love relationships.

Since Goldman’s correspondence with Reitman came to light and was reproduced in Candace Falk’s biography, the extreme tension with which Goldman lived in sexual roles and relations has become even more obvious. Goldman was by no means the first American advocate of “free love” and the sexual liberation of women; Victoria Woodhull held many of the same positions in the 1870s, for instance. Among other things, Goldman rejected monogamous marriage and the various constraints that lovers and spouses impose on one another in their relationships. She was, hence, committed to a kind of political critique of jealousy as an emotion that, as we would now put it, serves the patriarchy by tending to treat people as possessions. But her jealousy of Reitman is palpable and rendered all the more irritating by her attempt to deny that it motivates her. Indeed, it is fair to say that there is a certain desire for submission to Reitman portrayed in this correspondence that seems surprising and disappointing in a radical of her stripe and that, sadly, expresses itself in an incessant carping, whining, and begging, all to the effect that he should act in a more responsible and recognizably masculine way. In part, though, this simply makes her pursuit of an ideal of sexual liberation more poignant and more urgent. Indeed, various traditional sexual roles have proven to be some of the most intractable to reform of human characteristics, because they are some of the earliest and most definitely inculcated. Goldman’s internal conflicts have been shared by generations of feminists, but that of course hardly vitiates the critique of gender roles; rather, it renders it all the more personal and important. And if at the worst it leads to a certain sort of hypocrisy in which the ideal that is advocated publicly is violated privately, it also lends the advocacy of the ideal a personal urgency: one knows what the constraints are as intimately as possible and, hence, one also stands most deeply in need of the liberation that one prescribes.

Goldman reflected on her own conflicts in this regard and used them to help move toward a vision of sexual equality. Over and over, she found that her lovers wanted to marry her and limit her political work; even the most radical men she took up with had the impulse to make her a homemaker. And perhaps more disconcertingly to her, she found that she herself wanted her lovers to be faithful and attentive. Indeed, one of the most basic themes of her voluminous correspondence with Reitman is her attempt to justify her desire for his fidelity in a way that is compatible with her advocacy of free love. She never solved such conflicts satisfactorily, and, indeed, a theme of her entire life is her inability to find lasting and satisfying love. But living simultaneously on both sides of this dilemma brought humanity to her analysis of what it meant to be a woman and her vision of a free sexuality. After a failed affair, she declared, "If I ever love a man again, I will give myself to him without being bound by the rabbi or the law, and when that love dies, I will leave without permission" (LL1, 36). Her vision of liberation was expressed when, as a young woman in Rochester, she went to a party and danced with an enthusiasm that was regarded as sexually inappropriate by her family. Goldman's characteristic response was: "I will dance! I will dance myself to death!—what more glorious end!" (LL2, 19). A few years later, when an anarchist activist informed her that it was unseemly for such a famous agitator to dance, she replied that anarchism meant freedom of expression and a release into every form of beauty and pleasure. Thousands of T-shirts have quoted Emma: "If I can't dance, it's not my revolution".

Her version of feminism was remarkable for its comprehensiveness and for its radical critique of gender roles: "[Woman's] development, her freedom, her independence, must come from and through herself. First by asserting herself as a personality, and not as a sex commodity. Second by refusing the right to anyone over her body; by refusing to bear children unless she wants them; by refusing to be a servant of God, the State, society, the husband, the family, et cetera, by making her life simpler but deeper and richer" (A, 211).

The young Goldman was sexually abused by one of her teachers, and at fifteen she was a victim of what we would today call "date rape." "After that," she writes, "I always felt between two fires in the presence of men. Their lure remained strong, but it was always mingled with violent revulsion" (LL1, 23). This conflict was played out again and again as Goldman found ecstasy with a man and then came to feel constrained. About sex

with her lover Ed Brady, she wrote: "I understood its full beauty, and I eagerly drank its intoxicating joy and bliss" (LL1, 120). But she and Brady eventually split because he could not understand her commitment to political activism; he wanted her home, cooking his meals. Goldman's sense that marriage involved sexual coercion reflected previous feminist attacks on marriage as "legal prostitution," influenced the critique of marriage by radical feminists later in the century, and governed her personal commitment to remain single.

Goldman's was a conflict typical of women early in the twentieth century who attempted to question or defy traditional women's roles. She posed nude for a drawing by her lover Modest Stein; the drawing was later destroyed in a jealous rage by Ben Reitman. The price one paid for adhering to traditional roles—limitation of life prospects to those of a wife and mother, ceding of economic and personal power to men—was at least matched by the price one paid for defying them. If a woman attempted to have a serious professional career, she might expect to be shunned by some men and socially ostracized in some respectable circles, though possibilities were opening up in the figure known as the "new woman." Goldman wrote as follows about women she knew in the first decade of the twentieth century: "Most of the women claimed to be emancipated and independent, as indeed they were in the sense that they were earning their own living. But they paid for it by suppression of the mainsprings of their nature; fear of public opinion robbed them of love and intimate companionship. It was pathetic to see how lonely they were, how starved for male affection, and how they craved children. Lacking the courage to tell the world to mind its own business, the emancipation of women was frequently more of a tragedy than traditional marriage would have been" (LL1, 371). Goldman felt this dilemma acutely in her own life. She decided not to have an operation that might have made it possible for her to have children, and she took sexual companionship in a variety of unconventional ways. But she remained very aware of what she had sacrificed in the process and of the concrete dilemmas standing in the way of a true liberation of American women.

Goldman's sexual passion was volcanic from her adolescence to her old age, and she asserted her passion, claimed it, and tried to gratify it at a time when to do that was a truly radical gesture. Most of her sexual career was spent trying, as a feminist and a critic of conventional morality, to find love and pleasure in a world of constraints.

Her sense that sexuality could be coercive and also liberating led to her commitment to making information about birth control publicly available. The Comstock laws made it illegal to distribute birth control devices or information through the mails, an offense for which Goldman was arrested and jailed several times. Her advocacy of birth control was bound up with her sense that having many children greatly diminished the life choices of poor women: "Most of them lived in continual dread of conception; the great mass of the married women submitted helplessly, and when they found themselves pregnant, their alarm and worry would result in the determination to get rid of their expected offspring. It was incredible what fantastic methods despair could invent: jumping off tables, rolling on the floor, massaging the stomach, drinking nauseating concoctions, and using blunt instruments" (LL1, 185–86). The inability to control whether they became pregnant made sex for poor women a hated task, and it drove them toward abortion. And though Goldman, as a nurse, knew how to induce abortions, she could not bring herself to do so. She concluded that birth control was an absolute necessity for the economic, sexual, and medical well-being of women, and she lectured on the subject all over the country. It is a bit hard for us now to imagine an era when birth control was regarded as criminal and unnatural, but Goldman risked her freedom every time she raised the subject.

The phrase "free love" came in the 1960s to refer basically to indiscriminate sex, but for Goldman, as for her predecessors such as Woodhull, it concerned not promiscuity but voluntariness: it meant simply that love was to be given and taken without coercion. "Free love," for Goldman, was a political critique of the institution of marriage. She opposed all institutions that she saw as limiting freedom, and it did not take a great deal of research to see that the institution of marriage often was not a free choice for women at the turn of the century. When Goldman was newly arrived in Rochester and working as a "factory girl," she married Jacob Kersner. She left him quickly, upon finding out that he was impotent, and that they were incompatible on other grounds as well. Nevertheless, Kersner made it hard for her to extricate herself from the marriage, and it is not clear whether they were ever actually divorced. Kersner gave her American citizenship, but little else, and Goldman turned decisively against the institution of marriage as being unutterably limiting to women's prospects. She also came to appreciate the importance to women of free sexual expression for all persons. "Sex is the source of life. . . . Where sex

is missing, everything is missing. . . . [S]exual sensibility [is] greater and more enduring in woman than in man" (LA, 160). She defended the rights of homosexuals and was among the first Americans to do so publicly, and it is probable that she had at least one brief affair with a woman.

To say that endorsing these positions and living this life took courage is an understatement. Goldman was almost alone in speaking with complete frankness to large audiences about the whole constellation of issues concerning the sexual liberation of women, and, indeed, of men. If she had not already been regarded as a monster for her general political views, she would have been for this. Even to speak of homosexuality, except perhaps in the context of abnormal psychology, to say nothing of endorsing it as a legitimate form of sexual expression, was grounds for being ostracized. Advocating such positions in public made her a whore and a pariah in the eyes of most Americans. The sense that one gets from *Living My Life*, however, is that Goldman herself did not regard speaking of such things in public as particularly difficult or heroic. Rather, by her own account, she had no choice: once she had figured out what she believed, she simply had no option but to say it. Her passion impelled her to speak. That is something that many heroes have in common: they do not regard themselves as heroes. Many people who have done great or difficult things say later that they did it because they had to. Goldman was one of them: she spoke her truth with great courage and power but never lost her humility.

### THE POLITICAL AGITATOR

Goldman lived fully and loved utterly, but she would not be known to us at all were it not for her work as an author and agitator. For she tried not only to live up to her ideals personally but to make them real for everyone. Her public persona was unprecedented for a woman in America, and, indeed, precious few American men have ever displayed her guts and dedication. She spent the first ten years of the twentieth century on a virtually unending lecture tour of the country, speaking sometimes to a few farmers in Nebraska and sometimes to audiences of thousands in major cities, such as at the rally at which Buwalda shook her hand. When she arrived at that rally in San Francisco, she found a huge police presence, literally hundreds of officers. It turned out that a rumor was abroad

that Emma Goldman intended to blow up the Pacific fleet, which was then moored in the harbor. Indeed, the chief of police had valiantly declared that he would protect the fleet from “the whole bunch of Emma Goldman and her gang” (LL1, 426). With a typically Goldmanesque flourish that both defused the ridiculous rumor and expressed her defiance of the police, she declared from the platform that such an act would be a waste of perfectly good bombs.

Goldman was arrested dozens of times, and attempts of all kinds were made to silence her. After William McKinley was assassinated in 1901, several states passed blatantly unconstitutional laws against the public advocacy of anarchism specifically to keep her from speaking. Goldman and Berkman finally were deported to Russia in 1919 in the wake of their agitation against the First World War. (The night before they left, Henry Clay Frick died. Berkman’s famous remark: “deported by God.” [LL2, 709]) She entered the United States only once after that, but she never ceased to regard it as her home.

Goldman’s opposition to American involvement in the First World War was as controversial as any position she took in her career and, again, led directly to her deportation. She was not opposed to war in general; as an advocate of armed revolution, she certainly was no pacifist. Some leftists supported American involvement in the war; they saw it as a battle against German tyranny. But Goldman’s analysis, like that of the Socialist Party under Eugene Debs, was that the war was a struggle among capitalists for control of world markets; thus she opposed all sides. She advised men to avoid the draft and held mass meetings to urge them to do so. That was a crime, and she was, as usual, arrested several times. In England, she lectured against the war and was shouted down, but she managed in the end to articulate her analysis. That analysis must have been compelling, for the audience passed a strong antiwar resolution with only a single dissenting vote. Goldman addressed the dissenter as follows: “There is what I call a brave man who deserves our admiration. It requires great courage to stand alone, even if one is mistaken. Let us all join in hearty applause for our daring opponent” (LL1, 257).

Goldman and Berkman, like many American leftists, particularly those of Russian birth, raised money and other forms of support for the Russian revolution. They were among the first Americans to declare their support for the Bolshevism of Lenin and Trotsky, and Goldman crisscrossed the country speaking about the situation in Russia and raising

support for the Bolsheviks. After she was deported to the Soviet Union in 1919, however, it did not take her long to realize that the Soviet system was as autocratic as the monarchy that it had replaced, and indeed that in many ways it was a greater and more systematic threat to freedom. Anarchists had helped bring Lenin to power, but they were almost immediately imprisoned. Those who voiced their misgivings about the revolution often were exiled to Siberia, “disappeared” into the gulag, or summarily executed. The Cheka, Lenin’s secret police, introduced a massive system of surveillance and converted a significant portion of the Russian population into spies. When sailors in Kronstadt, many of whom were anarchists, rebelled, they were put down in a Bolshevik bloodbath. The command economy instituted by Lenin and Trotsky was a miserable failure as factories and farms lay idle while people starved.

Nevertheless, most American radical leftists stayed faithful to the Bolsheviks. John Reed, for example, whose career was dramatized by Warren Beatty in the movie *Reds*, continued to write glowing dispatches for the American press. When he met Goldman in Petrograd, he endorsed the execution of dissidents enthusiastically: “To the wall with them! I say. I have learned one mighty expressive Russian word, ‘*razstrelat*’ (execute by shooting)” (LL2, 740).

Goldman, like Berkman and other anarchists (including Kropotkin), quickly became a dissident in the Soviet Union, just as she had been in the United States. Indeed, her experiences in the former eventually tempered her condemnation of the latter. When as a distinguished revolutionary she met with Lenin, she did what very few people had the guts to do: she confronted him with his own horrors. She protested to his face the treatment of those who disagreed with him politically and the economic policies that were leading to mass starvation. In the United States, she had refused to work through the system, on the grounds that the government simply represented the interests of capitalist oligarchs. In Russia, she believed at first that the government was a revolutionary force acting on behalf of the people, and she protested and petitioned that government over and over regarding its injustice to others. She soon realized, however, that the Soviets were even less interested in political freedom and justice than were those who had tried to silence her in and deport her from America. She spoke out in Russia at the risk of her life, and she and Berkman spent much of the rest of their lives fighting the false image of the Soviet Union held by leftists throughout the world.

Her break with the Bolsheviks—early, consistent, and vociferous—alienated her from the international Left. By the end of her life, she was desperately poor, exiled from America (which, in spite of all her attacks, she loved), disheartened, and largely forgotten by the public. But she continued until the very end of her life to fight for her positions, and she was extremely active in supporting the anarchists in the Spanish Civil War. She died in 1940 in Toronto, after having a stroke during a card game. Her last words were: “Goddamn it, why did you lead that?” (LA, 513)

#### PROPAGANDA BY DEED

Let us now consider the matter of Emma Goldman and assassination. In their early twenties, Goldman and Berkman planned the assassination of Henry Clay Frick. Berkman, like Goldman, was an immigrant and an anarchist, though he was more rigid and doctrinaire in his positions than she. Berkman eventually wrote such books as *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* and *What Is Communist Anarchism?*, which are among the best documents of the anarchist movement.

Henry Clay Frick was perhaps the most hated industrialist of his era, world famous for his brutality toward and exploitation of his workers whether they were on strike or not. After his Pinkertons fired on strikers at Homestead during a pitched battle, Berkman swore an oath to kill him, and Goldman gave him her support. Berkman tried to make a bomb, but his experiments failed. In order to supply Berkman with a revolver and in order to pay for her own ticket to Pittsburgh to help him, Goldman resolved to “go out on the street” as a prostitute. Indeed, prostitution was a theme in Goldman’s life: she later lived in a brothel and still later worked as a nurse for one of New York’s most prominent madams. By her account, however, she never actually had sex for money. Her first customer turned out to be a benefactor who realized that she was a novice and gave her money just to talk. Still, she got her revolver.

Berkman travelled to Pittsburgh, forced his way into Frick’s office, and shot him three times. When some of Frick’s workers pulled him away, Berkman struggled free, and seeing that Frick was still alive, slashed at him with a dagger. He was then subdued. Frick survived, while Berkman went to prison for fourteen years. Goldman celebrated him from the

speaker's platform as a hero and a martyr, while privately berating herself for not raising enough money for a better pistol.

Johann Most, though he was ostensibly an advocate of armed struggle and had a few years earlier declared his love for Goldman, repudiated Berkman's attempt on Frick and even hinted that Frick himself had paid Berkman to attack him as a public relations stunt. The next day, Goldman attended a rally at which Most spoke. She demanded loudly that Most withdraw what he had said about Berkman. When he refused, she pulled a whip from her cloak and horsewhipped Most across the stage. She then broke the whip over her leg and threw the pieces at him.

Later she hatched a scheme with Berkman to break him out of the Western Penitentiary in Pittsburgh by tunneling under the prison from the basement of a nearby house. Her friends succeeded in opening a hole into the yard, but the tunnel was discovered and reported by children playing in the deserted house. No one was ever arrested for the escape attempt, but it was widely and rightly believed that Goldman was one of the planners.

In 1896, four years after the attempt on Frick, the prime minister of Spain, Canovas del Castillo, had 300 trade unionists arrested in connection with an explosion during a religious procession. Many of the prisoners, among whom were a number of anarchists, were tortured. Confessions were extracted, and some of the prisoners implicated others. Goldman started a campaign to bring the conditions of the prisoners to the attention of the American public. At a large public meeting, she said that "if I were in Spain now, I should kill Canovas del Castillo" (LL1, 189). A few weeks later, Castillo was indeed assassinated by an anarchist. Pursued by the press, Goldman denied knowing the assassin (though he frequented anarchist circles in London with which Goldman was familiar) but also praised him for acting while others had only talked. Of the lesson she learned from this event she wrote: "behind every political deed of that nature was an impressionable, highly sensitized personality and a gentle spirit. Such beings cannot go on living complacently in the sight of great human misery and wrong. Their reactions to the cruelty and injustice of the world must inevitably express themselves in some violent act, in supreme rending of their tortured soul" (LL1, 190).

While Goldman was in France in 1900, studying medicine and exploring the European anarchist movement, an Italian-American anarchist, Gaetano Bresci, from Paterson, New Jersey, shot and killed King

Umberto of Italy, probably to protest the killing of starving rioters by Italian soldiers in Milan in 1898. It was the third attempt on Umberto's life. Goldman had known Bresci in New Jersey, and she had admired his Italian-language anarchist newspaper. There is no reason to suppose that Goldman was directly involved in the killing, and this time she expressed reservations to her friends about the political uses of murder. But she again publicly defended the assassin, and even decades later, in her autobiography, she referred to his "great sacrifice" (LL1, 289).

The following September, President William McKinley was in Buffalo for the opening of the Pan-American Exposition. He was shaking hands in a receiving line when anarchist Leon Czolgosz pulled out a pistol concealed in a handkerchief and shot him twice. Though the wounds were not considered mortal, the president died eight days later as the result of an infection. Goldman, back in the United States now, was thirty-two. She certainly knew Czolgosz, who had attended a number of her lectures and had favorably impressed her with his earnest manner and what she called his "dreamy" eyes. Goldman denied any complicity in the assassination, however, and no evidence was ever produced that she had anything directly to do with it. But the first headlines after the assassination specifically implicated Goldman. The papers claimed that Czolgosz had confessed that Goldman had done the planning. Goldman was in St. Louis on a lecture tour, and she was chased around the country by dozens of detectives. As she took a train from St. Louis to Chicago, she overheard passengers, not knowing that the notorious Emma Goldman was on the train, calling her a "bloodthirsty monster" and saying that she should be hung. Her friends in Chicago thought that, innocent or guilty, she would be beaten or killed in police custody. They had good reason for their fears: Czolgosz was in such poor shape from beatings that he could barely attend his trial.

Her friends urged her to flee the country and offered to help smuggle her out, but detectives burst into the house where she was hiding in Chicago. Goldman was the only one there. She pretended to be a Swedish maid, and she was bringing off the ruse successfully until one of the detectives found a fountain pen with her name on it. She was arrested, interrogated at a grueling pace over several days, and accused of everything short of actually pulling the trigger. She was allowed to communicate with no one, except to receive letters threatening her life. On one occasion, she was indeed beaten. When she was told that she would have

to undergo a “full body search,” she told the matron, “you’ll have to kill me first” (LL1, 307). But there was no evidence against her, and eventually she was freed.

She immediately began to raise money for Czolgosz’s defense and described him in speeches all over the country as an idealist, a dreamer, and a patriot. Putting it mildly, that kind of approach to an assassin is morally questionable, and Goldman, though she later expressed some reservations, never unequivocally repudiated the killing. But defending Czolgosz also took almost unbelievable fortitude. She had already been condemned as a murderer in many of the country’s newspapers and by many politicians, not only for McKinley’s assassination but for the attempt on Frick. The anarchist movement itself was thrown into utter disrepute by McKinley’s assassination; if the Haymarket riot established the caricature of the insane, bomb-throwing anarchist bent on mindless destruction, then the McKinley assassination confirmed it. The assassination was the occasion for a national crackdown on anarchism and the passage of laws against its advocacy. Berkman’s attack on Frick decisively turned public opinion against the strikers at Homestead and even made Frick something of a hero. In fact, 100 years later, the public attitude toward anarchism has not recovered from this spate of killings and assaults: it was strategic idiocy.

But Goldman did not back down for a moment, though in order to find a place to live she started using a pseudonym. When crowds jeered or attacked her, she stood her ground, often defusing the situation with deft humor, as when she said that killing McKinley or any American president was hardly worth the trouble, on the grounds that American presidents had little real power. Other anarchists, including Johann Most, immediately disassociated themselves from Czolgosz. But just as she had with Berkman a decade earlier, Goldman defended Czolgosz, even while privately expressing her regret for the McKinley assassination. In an interview given to a Chicago newspaper while she was in jail and McKinley struggled for life, she said that if she were allowed to, she would try to nurse McKinley back to health; she was working as a nurse at the time, and she viewed it as her obligation to relieve the suffering of any human being. But she also expressed her sympathy with Czolgosz and her belief that the inhuman treatment of working people led inevitably to acts of violence, and that this treatment, rather than Czolgosz himself, should be blamed for McKinley’s death.

Such declarations took tremendous physical and moral courage. Goldman continually faced arrest and deportation, and many people thought she should be killed and threatened to kill her. I do not think that Goldman purposefully fed this hysteria, but she was heroically indifferent to it. Indeed, in a long life of extreme hardship caused by her beliefs, I do not believe that there is a single instance in which Goldman allowed what she said to be affected by the tone of public opinion, or by the likely consequences to herself of her advocacy. She was provocative, but not for the sake of provocation; she was provocative because she always said exactly what she thought.

Czolgosz was strapped into the electric chair at dawn on October 29, 1901, and was pressed one last time to implicate Goldman in the assassination. His refusal to do so constituted his last words. He was then electrocuted. When Goldman died almost forty years later, the obituaries still associated her with McKinley's assassination. She herself had summarized her position in a letter to Reitman in 1910: "What we do insist upon and maintain is that violence is only the last medium of individual and social redress. If no other method is left, violence is not only justifiable, but imperative, not because anarchism teaches it, but because human nature does and must resist repression" (LA, 139).

#### ASSESSMENT

If Emma Goldman lacked any of the four cardinal virtues described in the Introduction—commitment to something greater than one's own ambitions, integrity, self-reflection, and connectedness—it was reflection. First of all, she was not an original thinker. She took up a series of already well-staked-out feminist positions. Her anarchism was that of Peter Kropotkin. The greatest personal influence on her opinions was Alexander Berkman, whose version of communist anarchism she endorsed almost without exception or qualification. In the 1,000 pages of her autobiography, there is virtually no sign of growth or change in her positions from the time of her first political awakening after the Haymarket executions to her death in Toronto in 1940. One might put the best face on this and say that Goldman was consistent, but frankly her consistency is unnerving. In *Living My Life*, she several times briefly expresses doubts about assassination as a political technique, but these expressions are quick,

superficial, and followed by elaborate rationalizations. Goldman would have been more important as a thinker, though perhaps less effective as an agitator, had she reflected critically on her own opinions and had she allowed events to throw those opinions into doubt. Her rigidity kept her from being an important political thinker, and left her defending actions that were indefensible.

Nevertheless, Emma Goldman's life, though problematic, was also deeply heroic. The heroism is inseparable from the problems; Goldman's virtues and vices are of a piece. Her passion and commitment know few equals in American history, and rarely have passion and commitment found conditions that required more courage. But passion and reflection are qualities that are difficult to hold in solution: passion tends to overwhelm reflection and reflection to hold passion in check. Even Goldman's greatest flaw as a public figure—her lack of reflection—was necessary to her astonishing life.

Arrested and jailed many times for her opinions—including a year in the federal penitentiary in Jefferson City, Missouri—she could not be silenced. She explored fearlessly topics that were utterly taboo, such as homosexuality and abortion. Indeed, she created a public persona that was itself taboo, and she demonstrated by example a new way to be a woman. Goldman fought for freedom her whole life, and her life demonstrated what she meant when she spoke of freedom. Hence, it also showed how severely freedom was limited. Goldman endured a lifetime of struggle and the hatred of millions of people in order to live freely and help others achieve freedom.

In that sense, Goldman was a prototypical American: though an immigrant, she saw herself as the inheritor of Samuel Adams and Tom Paine, as an advocate of the American ideal of freedom and as a gadfly reminding Americans how far they were from realizing that ideal. Her particular combination of vaudeville and subversion could have happened nowhere else, and it was taken up by figures such as Abbie Hoffman a half century later. She took up the same gadfly role in the Soviet Union, in England, and late in life in Canada and in Spain during the Spanish Civil War. She lived, believed, wrote, and fought with total intensity and total authenticity: she had the guts to be exactly herself and to do that on the largest possible stage. When she first spoke in public, she froze and could not even remember her subject, but she persisted and became one of the most accomplished public speakers in American history. People

flocked to see her, in part because they could not believe that she was really saying such things, or simply being Emma Goldman, in public. Indeed, one vaudeville impresario, noticing her ability to attract crowds, offered her a lucrative deal to take the stage between the acrobats and comics.

What Goldman had, then, was rare passion and authenticity. These are virtues in public life that are less common than is commonly supposed. Because she possessed these virtues in abundance, Goldman opened this century toward a new way of understanding gender roles and the meaning of freedom. But passion and authenticity, it might be argued, also were Goldman's vices. The very same strength of character that allowed her to upbraid Lenin to his face when everyone else who had done so had suddenly disappeared allowed her to plan the assassination of Frick and defend assassination in general as a legitimate form of political expression, ultimately doing great harm to her own causes. The same passion that allowed her to explore her sexuality in a way that few women could also moved her toward extremism. The commitment made her stick to her guns in any situation and that made her an equally effective critic of John D. Rockefeller and Trotsky also was the rigidity that, by her death on May 14, 1940, had made her seem largely irrelevant to world events.

People are more complicated than ethics. We might try to figure out whether Goldman's overall effect on the world was positive or negative, but any such utilitarian calculation would be too elaborate and conditional to be useful. We might try to tote up the morally admirable and morally reprehensible acts that she committed: the lives she saved and the lives she helped take, for example, but that too is an obscure procedure. To assess Goldman accurately, we must squarely address her character. I have been trying to do that by listing her virtues and vices, as Aristotle and perhaps William Bennett might suggest that I do. But what we see when we do this is that Goldman's virtues *are* her vices.

Take away Goldman's passion and Buwalda never goes to Alcatraz, Frick never gets shot, and perhaps McKinley survives. But take away her passion, and you take away one of the first explicit political defenses of homosexuality, take away the impassioned critique of American institutions that led finally to a new respect for freedom of speech, and take away the writings and speeches that exposed to the world what the Soviet system was really like.

Take away Goldman's passion and you eliminate her personal excesses, for example, her commitment to Ben Reitman, a love that alien-

ated her from her movement and cost her years of psychic torture and a tremendous price in self-respect. But take away her passion and you have a mere propaganda machine. When William Buwalda saw her speak, he was a soldier with fifteen years of exemplary service. He disagreed with what she was saying, but he was swept into confusion by her passion, and he shook her hand to express his respect for the depth of her beliefs. Buwalda became an anarchist not when he heard her speak but rather at the moment he was arrested for shaking her hand. Then he realized that the system Goldman fought was indeed oppressive; he came to believe that her passion was justified. Goldman was the opposite of the contemporary American politician who sketches out a series of positions through polling and focus groups: she endorsed only what she passionately believed, and she endorsed everything that she passionately believed. Even more important, perhaps, is that she allowed herself to believe passionately; she allowed herself to experience a deep empathy with those who suffered, and to express their pain in her own voice.

Emma Goldman, I am arguing, cannot be pulled into pieces. If we love what is admirable about her, we love also what is vicious, and that is really the dilemma of love: that you cannot pull a person apart and love only what you want to love. What you endorse in a person is inextricably bound up with what you despise. You cannot take what you like and leave the rest: bundles of virtue often are also bundles of vices: people are whole; they are not fissionable into moral atoms. We might say truly that Goldman was an extremist, perhaps a fanatic, or we might say truly that she was courageous, consistent, and passionate. What is most deeply interesting and troubling is that, finally, those qualities are the same as they are concretely expressed in Goldman's person.

In pursuing the ethics of virtues and vices, it is all too easy to fragment people in impossible ways, to turn them against themselves. If you condemn Goldman's extremism, you condemn her integrity. That is what I mean when I say that all of the qualities I have enumerated amount to one thing: truth. Whatever else Goldman was, she was true to herself, though sorely tried in particular by her relations with men and her resolution to transform gender roles in her own person. Buwalda disagreed with what he heard her say, but he knew, deeply, that she was utterly committed to its truth. Goldman never misrepresented herself in public in order to achieve popularity or win adherents. Instead, she offered a public example of authenticity: on the public stage before thousands or in the privacy of her own bedroom, she was absolutely Emma Goldman.

Again, in the history of ethics, there are two basic approaches. One can judge acts, or one can judge character. The first sort of ethics focuses on what people do, the second on what people are, but it is obvious that these two are inseparable. What you do demonstrates who you are, and your character leads, in most cases, to your actions. When we judge someone's character, we do it on the basis of what that person does and says: that's all we have to work with. And when we judge someone's actions, we take those actions to show something about who the person is. For example, we imprison criminals not only because they did something wrong, but because we believe that what they did shows something about who they are, and that their character makes it likely that they will do such things again in the future. It cannot be the case that someone consistently does morally reprehensible things and yet is really a good person: there is an inseparable connection between what you do and who you are.

So it matters, in an assessment of Goldman's character, what she did, and the context in which she did it. It matters that she conspired to assassinate Frick, for example. It also matters that Frick ruthlessly exploited his workers and had some of them shot. Many held Frick responsible for the Johnstown flood of 1889, which killed 2,209 people. The badly maintained dam that burst on May 21 of that year and sent a torrent as strong as Niagara Falls rushing into a residential neighborhood was owned by a hunting club, the dominant members of which were Frick and his partner and employer Andrew Carnegie. This accusation fitted Frick, because it painted him as avaricious down to sums that would have been insignificant to him, and callous to the point of criminality. In short, there have been worse candidates for assassination. It matters, too, that no convincing evidence has ever been provided that Goldman conspired in the assassination of McKinley or of anyone other than Frick, though we may regret that she lionized the assassins, and may even suspect some degree of complicity in some cases. As the Greenwich Village raconteur, Mabel Dodge said of Goldman and her friends: "I felt they had Plans. . . . I knew they continually plotted and planned and discussed times and places. Their obvious activity seems to be publishing the anarchist magazine *Mother Earth*, but beneath this there was a great busy humming complex of Planning; and many times they referred to the day when blood would flow in the streets of New York" (AM, 144).

It would have been better, in short, if Emma Goldman had been a saint. Or, we might put it this way: like all of us, Goldman would have been better had she been better. If her anarchism was accompanied by Gandhi's nonviolence, for example, then Goldman might have been a moral beacon to the ages. (Dorothy Day did try this approach.) But what I am saying is that the thought-experiment in which we mate Goldman and Gandhi is nonsense. Goldman could not have been an advocate of nonviolence and continued to be Goldman. If we take seriously the personality that we have found—its volcanic emotions, its extreme capacity for empathy, its thirst for opposition, and its overpowering spirit of adventure—then we must admit that it is not the personality of a saint. But it is the personality of a remarkable woman, of a woman who made a difference in a hundred ways for the twentieth century. Emma Goldman provided an example for all women in the affirmation of her sexuality and her internal struggle with gender norms; she provided an example for all human beings in her total disrespect for the evil of institutions. She advocated freedom, which is admirable, but she lived freely in a world enslaved, which is heroic.

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