



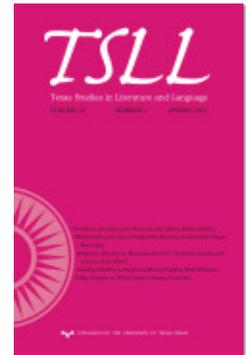
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Timothy Robbins

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Emma Goldman Reading Walt Whitman: Aesthetics, Agitation, and the Anarchist Ideal

Timothy Robbins

I want freedom, the right to self-expression, everybody's right to beautiful, radiant things. Anarchism meant that to me, and I would live it in spite of the whole world—prisons, persecution, everything. Yes, even in spite of the condemnation of my own closest comrades I would live my beautiful ideal.

—Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*

Do you suppose you will find in me your ideal?

—Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

In June of 1919, the Walt Whitman Fellowship International held a celebration commemorating the centennial of the birth of America's "good grey poet" weeks before his motherland signed the treaty that would end the first "great war" to connect the modern world. Yet with legislative peace on the global horizon, turmoil erupted at a local Whitman procession. The *New York Times* reported on the antiwar demonstrations led by "a series of radical speeches based upon [Whitman's] writings" ("Viereck Breaks Up" 17). George Smith, a local school examiner and the evening's host, came under fire from the board of education for virtually sanctioning the protests by reading aloud a telegram sent by Emma Goldman from a federal prison in Jefferson City, Missouri ("Must Explain" 2). Smith said that while he read Goldman's message he never "at any time or place expressed the slightest approbation of her reputed political or social doctrines or views" ("Smith Explains" 18). Predictably, he retreated from any association with the notorious "Red Emma."

Goldman (1869–1940) was arguably the United States' most distinguished antiwar voice. She was also the incarnation of the country's anarchist menace: Jewish, Russian, a brazen champion for the dispossessed, and an infamous preacher of "free love." Accordingly, certain Whitman enthusiasts—resentful that Goldman's cohort could criticize US policy

while embracing its poet of democracy—began to test these radical “political” interpretations in the editorial pages of the *New York Times*. One reader complained that this new bohemian “Whitman cult” was exasperating for the poet’s “older appreciators,” those who valued his verse “for its merits and not for its faults” (“No Boudoir Bolshevik” 12). For James F. Morton, the main “fault” of Whitman’s work was its very availability as propaganda. He explained that “to the fiery propagandist . . . any man or movement outside of the commonplace is necessarily allied to his own” (“Whitman Celebrations” 8).¹ According to Morton, Whitman’s poetry was rebellious to austere Victorian norms, but its use as fiery anti-American “propaganda” proved the naiveté of such “political” uses of art. For Emma Goldman, many Whitman enthusiasts faltered here: at the intersection of the artistic and the political. She maintained that Whitman was no “apologist and sponsor of the democratic institutions,” and that liberal commentators failed to comprehend the potentiality he sought in terms like “democracy” and “America” (Goldman, “Walt Whitman” 10). Her project of anarchist agitation instead revealed the way that *Leaves of Grass* constituted an eternal desire for freedom from the materials of the present, that Whitman’s “art is not only art, but a cause in the world in itself” (9).

This turn-of-the-century contest is only one manifestation of both the popular struggle over “political” readings of Whitman’s work and the stubborn divide between literary art and political life that underwrites it. The boundary has colored scholarly responses to Goldman’s art lectures and essays at large and her readings of Whitman in particular, often leading to their outright dismissal as “agitprop.” This essay resuscitates Goldman for the radical Whitman tradition—the poet’s leftist “reception history” charted most recently in Michael Robertson’s *Worshipping Walt: The Whitman Disciples* (2008). I intend to build on his perceptive survey of the radical adherents of Whitmanian democracy by examining Emma Goldman’s aesthetic and political work alongside her unpublished and neglected manuscript lectures on the poet in order to demonstrate the centrality of Whitman’s verse and life to the sustenance of her “beautiful ideal” of anarchism. *Leaves of Grass* was a model for her agitation. It stressed the creative capacity of the reader, providing a literary training ground for self-emancipation from hierarchy, in turn generating the individual agents who could create a new social order. As a political orator, Goldman carried forth Whitman’s “culture of democracy” by restaging it as a paradigm for modern anarchism’s own revolutionary cultural politics. She solicited Whitman for her political life’s greatest struggles, for freedom of expression, women’s emancipation, and sexual liberation, while transforming his poetic celebrations of the human body and collective expansiveness into lived resistance to “puritanical” state censorship. Culling biographical anecdotes to self-fashion her role as propagandist, Goldman reshaped Whitman and his prophetic verse in light of each new struggle. Calling on

“Children of Adam” to articulate women’s rights, “Calamus” to declaim sexual liberation, and *Democratic Vistas* to combat the rise of totalitarianism, she recharged that “beautiful ideal,” a democratic desire for freedom combined with her anarchist faith in individual creativity.

“Without *the ideal* there can be no revolutionary change”:
Goldman on Art and Agitation

Goldman expended much time and energy discussing the importance of literary imagination to anarchism in her early art lectures, and she was condemned for it from all sides—cultural and political. Liberal literati reproached her vulgar propagandizing, modernists critiqued her unsophisticated tastes, and the radical Left censured her middle-class indulgences. Contemporaneous artists and critics often discountenanced Goldman’s total politicization of culture. John Sloan, for example, noted in his diary after hearing Goldman lecture that she “demanded too much social consciousness from the artist” (qtd. in Drinnon, *Rebel* 201). The *Little Review*’s Margaret Anderson claimed that on the “matter of form,” Goldman believed it was “of second importance; I think it is first” (“An Inspiration” 435). Sloan and Anderson’s assessments, that Goldman ignored the revolutionary possibilities of formally innovative artwork, have remained until recently the centerpiece of critical discourse surrounding Goldman and *Mother Earth*, the periodical that she created and edited.

Describing itself as “[a] Monthly Magazine Devoted to Social Science and Literature,” *Mother Earth* was more commonly known as the prevailing anarchist voice on all issues political, economic, and cultural. In the course of its run (1907–1915), *Mother Earth*’s contributors, subscribers, and supporters constituted a roster of prominent US activists. While the magazine remains celebrated as the space of a radical counterpublic, it is equally infamous for what Richard Drinnon has called its “relative lack of literary and artistic importance” (*Mother Earth* 6). Craig Monk recently elaborated on this position, arguing that *Mother Earth* failed to live up to Goldman’s lofty avant-garde visions, since “in matters of art [she] remained concerned primarily with content—of a radical, political nature” (“Emma Goldman” 119). Goldman’s speeches and writings on Whitman, when treated by scholars at all, are correspondingly written off as crudely political, with little interpretive value. In his popular biography *Rebel in Paradise*, Drinnon highlighted sections of the surviving lectures only to reduce them to agitprop, contending that Goldman employed Whitman “propagandistically in the sense that she took from his poetry only those parts which were useful” (*Rebel* 200). In this persistent hermeneutic economy, utility signified propaganda, the instrumentalization of art’s aura and the spurning of its accompaniment, passive contemplation.

Recent criticism, however, has begun to reassess Goldman's opinions on literature. Lynne M. Adrian, for example, redefines Goldman's aesthetic as "artful living," where the "beautiful ideal" of anarchist politics functions as a kind of radical artwork alongside avant-garde invention ("Artful" 218). Alan Antliff's *Anarchist Modernism* traces Goldman as a nodal point on the congregating scenes of experimental art and radical politics among the Greenwich Village bohemians (29). Esther Post argues that *Mother Earth* was a delightful aberration from the stringently political and economist Left simply in its attempt "to fuse modern art and politics," proof that Goldman refused "to limit her radical ideologies to narrow political concerns" ("Circus" 50–51). While this new scholarly tendency celebrates Goldman as a networker, nurturer, and patron of "modern" culture, redemptive critics tend to overcompensate for her actual literary preferences—Whitman and Tolstoy over Stein and Joyce—and in the process effectively bracket the interdependence of art and politics.

The extent to which Goldman embraced "modernism" is quite contestable ground. Kathy Ferguson, in her critical biography *Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Street*, explains the negotiation of the "split" by readmitting Whitman into Goldman's cultural work. Ferguson maintains that Goldman deftly balanced the rhetorical fields of modernism, "the aesthetic form most associated with her political agenda," with those of romanticism and realism, the discursive sources "upon which she implicitly drew" (182). Ferguson's framework displaces the aesthetic/political gulf onto a temporal lag between artistic genres. She can then explain Goldman's use of Whitman as a term of mediation, a sort of radical "romanticism." *Leaves of Grass* showed her that "beauty and joy were as important as freedom and justice to anarchism," thus infusing Whitmanian democracy with "anarchist energies" (195). While certain trends in modernist aesthetics seemed to disregard a direct and radical political message, "romanticism" and "realism" provided a domain in which to contemplate the beautiful, as well as the bildungsroman narrative logic most in line with Goldman's beliefs about human consciousness and political action.

While the "escapism" of experimental art undeniably posed a threat to her anarchist commitments, Goldman and *Mother Earth* did support the drama of Eugene O'Neil, the poetry of Lola Ridge, and the artwork of Man Ray. All are figures who may sit awkwardly within the designation "modernism" but firmly within a strain of twentieth-century expressivism that fused "romantic" form with "modern" content. One of the aims of this essay, then, is to resituate Ferguson's insightful juxtaposition of Goldman's politics with literary genre—an important contribution to the critical discussion of anarchism and the arts—within the shifting political contexts of Goldman's art lectures (most specifically her Whitman speeches) and

theoretical writings on propaganda, in order to flesh out the integral connection for Goldman between aesthetics and agitation.²

Indeed, Goldman's anarchism was fully devoted to cultural propaganda, and she and her cohort vigorously debated—usually in the pages of *Mother Earth*—the strategy of studying literature as a means to politically mobilize the working class. Ben Reitman, Goldman's tour manager and sometime lover, held that agitators *must* supply imaginative literature to workers in order to “revolutionize and broaden their attitude toward life, that they may indeed be prepared to live in true liberty” (“Tour” 212). Reitman went so far as to claim that if he were to “hand a man one of Hauptmann's plays” or “call a man's attention to William Morris,” he had “done more for him than if [he] had influenced him to join a movement” or “sold him a dozen pamphlets” (212). In her monthly column, “The Ups and Downs of an Anarchist Propagandist,” Goldman agreed that literature provided a superior model for propaganda, since any “creative effort which portrays life boldly, earnestly, and unafraid, may become more dangerous to the present fabric of society than the loudest harangue of the soap-box speaker” (172). The visionary character of literature was vital to the practice of anarchist agitation, and the relationship composed the core of Goldman's aesthetic theory.

While Goldman never published a distinct corpus of art philosophy, she did leave behind a virtually untapped collection of speeches, pamphlets, and letters that deal recurrently with aesthetic matters. “Art and Revolution,” a lecture she revised and recited regularly, underscored the importance of the artistic order for Goldman's anarchism, its value condensed in the opening line: “Art exists not to confirm people in their tastes and prejudices, not to show them what they have been before, but to present them with a new vision of life” (“Art and Revolution” 1). For Goldman, “revolutionary art” arose less from a realist sensibility to “tell it how it is” than by way of an aesthetic that staged the present while holding open the idea of another life emerging in each moment's potential. The “new vision” pregnant in each instant is the work's “beautiful ideal,” a concept explicated by Goldman in a letter to comrade Warren Starr Van Valkenburgh. She explained to Starr that beauty was “innate rather than acquired,” and argued that it was only due to the repression of authoritarian institutions like the state, the church, and private property that the masses had “no incentive to cultivate an appetite for anything but the most sordid and common-place” (“W. S. Van Valkenburgh” 2). The duty of the anarchist agitator was to generate the incentive.

Goldman maintained that depressed conditions alone would not be adequate to arouse people, because “without *the ideal* there can be no revolutionary change” (2). Goldman's arrogance concerning the base tastes of the working class conveys her (unfortunate) distrust of “the masses” *sans*

the guidance of the heroic agitator. But it is important to separate Goldman, in the context of the radical Left, from other forms of elitism. In contemporary Marxian theories of art, "beauty" and the "aesthetic" constituted bourgeois ideological constructions founded on the exclusion of the proletariat. Goldman instead proposed a sort of activist-oriented revision of the Kantian aesthetic ground: her "beautiful ideal" provoked the awakening of a universal impulse inherent in "humanity" and possessed the utopic power that could shake the masses out of their political indifference.

Because turn-of-the-century anarchism was a relatively flexible political philosophy, built on a welcoming spirit of rebellion against all hierarchy and injustice, it became an ideological home to all sorts of bohemians, left-leaning artists, and vagabonds. For this reason, literature produced "for" anarchists is rare in comparison with the organized efforts of socialist writing clubs or the Communist Party's cultural apparatus. Goldman was one voice amid a chorus of left-wing Whitmanites; the poet was celebrated by agrarian populists in Kansas, industrial socialists from Chicago, and hard-line communists in New York for similar values of freedom and comradeship. Mike Gold, an impassioned lover of Whitman and the cultural guru of American communists, anticipated the party's reconception of the poet in his 1921 manifesto, "Towards Proletarian Art," where he proclaimed the good, gray poet the "heroic spiritual grandfather" of literary communism (*Anthology* 67). Implicit in the language of genealogy is a generational telos culminating in a modern roster of worker-writers. For Gold, Whitman was *the* proto-proletarian author, a working-class "rough" who produced marvelous verse, but who faltered by envisaging "the grand dream of political democracy" as the "completion of all the aspirations of proletarian man" (68). Because Gold was tied to an idea of revolution as rupture, Whitman could pass the poetic torch but not illuminate the pathway of a communist future of letters. By contrast, Goldman and the anarchists read in Whitman a discontinuous yet always rechargeable spirit of rebellion. Before "humanity" can rebel against the ruling class, individuals must struggle against a ruling idea: that human beings are not fit to govern themselves.

Hence creative endeavors by anarchists were not tested against the dicta of a political program and art was not used to advance a politics, but a set of principles—antiauthoritarianism, individual freedom, mutual aid—were thought to spring organically from artistic invention. Christian socialist Roland Sawyer elaborated on the formulation in *Mother Earth*, connecting agitators, "the saviors of society," to the "deathless names in literature—great moral teachers and prophets, Shelley, Whitman, Morris, Emerson, Thoreau, Zola, Tolstoy . . . who used literature as a medium of agitation" ("Agitator" 420). Robert Henri placed Emma Goldman in a comparable pantheon of propagandists—"Whitman, Ibsen, Tolstoi, Kropotkin"—who "with ideas and the rarest quality of courage . . . talk plainly to us as though we were

free thinking creatures" ("Appreciation" 415). Such commentary illustrates the crucial overlay of agitation and aesthetics with education. Goldman and her followers recognized that the circulation of poetry, drama, and fiction was not just a supplement to anarchist pamphleteering but superior, for the practice and care taken to read, comprehend, and discuss literature was in itself pedagogy for the revolution.

"Walt liberates the whole of man":
Leaves of Grass as Anarchist Philosophy

In her pamphlet-essay for the movement, "Anarchism: What It Really Stands for," Goldman defined her politics as "the philosophy of a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by man-made law" (*Anarchism* 52). Instead of the socioeconomic chaos that some promised would follow from its lawlessness, Goldman named anarchism "the teacher of the unity of life" (52). This facilitative role spoke not only to Goldman's faith in the capability of the individual for social autonomy, but to anarchist agitation's pedagogic character. Goldman perceived a similar role in Whitman's work, as she stated plainly in one lecture: "Walt liberates the whole of man and brings him into harmonious blending with nature, in Oneness with the liberating factors of life" ("Walt Whitman" 5). Rather than worship at the altar of an exalted humanism—a charge perpetually leveled at "classical" anarchism—*Leaves of Grass* collapsed hierarchical and imposed dichotomies: body and soul, good and evil, man and nature, the individual and community, in order to envision, as Goldman put it, the "human" as he appears in anarchism, "all equally related to life, all interwoven with society, yet each unto himself a personality" (6). Whitman's poetic rendering of the individual as intrinsically connected to—even speaking as—the social whole provided a language for the fantasy of anarchism, a political paradigm absent "artificial barriers," when "the differentiation between society and the individual, the aggregate and the unity will be no more" (6). Indeed, Goldman's Whitman was hardly a prophet of representative governance as it existed in the nineteenth-century American state, and she conceived her Whitman lectures as an apology for the poet's true democratic philosophy; to demonstrate how Whitman was as "unlike the average democrat, as the anarchist is unlike the typical Bourgeois" (10). In her evolutionary-libertarian conviction, Goldman felt that the final erasure of psychological constraints, social and ethical mores, and their external embodiments in the institutions of the state could occur only through the *return* of the authentically human, harmonized with the self and others.

Goldman's definition of anarchism moved between the same registers, engaged with the same problem, as Whitman's democratic poetry: the negotiation of the individual and society, or, in Whitman's words, the

"I" and the "en-masse." In the opening couplet of "One's-Self I Sing"—a poem which first appeared as the inscription to the 1867 version of *Leaves of Grass*—Whitman clarified the political "theme" of the work: "One's-Self I sing, a simple, separate person, / Yet utter the word Democratic, the word en-Masse" (*Poetry and Prose* 165). The dialectical pairing expresses Whitman's theory of political development, his insistence on the primacy of the individual, distinctive subject and "yet" the promise of a democratic future of interconnected selves. Whitman refused the static division of human life into body and mind ("Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy"), man and woman ("the Female equally with the Male I sing"), but held that the processual "[f]orm complete is worthier far" (165). Goldman's concept of political consciousness is founded on a similar progressive assumption, as Janet Day puts it, to "create the social conditions that enable an individual to develop a consciousness of self" and mature into a social personality ("Individual" 109). In "The Individual, Society, and the State," Goldman designated the self as the first and final moment of the social dialectic, describing the organic process with a Whitmanian flourish: the individual as a self-emergent "cosmos in himself," her consciousness both inherent and "a thing of growth" (*Anarchism* 88). "Individuality" was simultaneously unique to each person and common to all of humanity, yet dislocated and perverted by "Individualism," the embodiment of "economic laissez-faire: the exploitation of the masses by the classes by means of legal trickery, spiritual debasement, and systematic indoctrination" (89). According to Goldman, to break these despotic societal bonds, free and creative expression must be recognized and cultivated through education. In the early part of the century anarchist pedagogy was a developing and frequently discussed field, with a rich tradition parented by Leo Tolstoy and Francisco Ferrer. In the course of this international dialogue, agitation and pedagogy merged to become practically indistinct, since their methods dealt with both stirring the intellect and preparing desire for an anarchist revolution.

Remarkably, both approaches also cohered around interpretations and uses of Walt Whitman and his work, with the Modern School, an anarchist-run alternative education center in New York, as the institutional nexus (*Modern School* iii). The mantra of the Modern School was that education must be "a process of drawing out, not of driving in" (*Red Emma* 120). Goldman recognized the success of "libertarian education" in its development of the child "through knowledge and the free play of characteristic traits, so that he may become a social being, because he has learned to know himself" (*Red Emma* 121). This was an interesting paradox for the teacher and the agitator both. Though the idea of a "spontaneous" unfolding of social consciousness through creative, free expression underwrote the anarchist project, the role of the facilitator was the conscious

development of this process. Anarchists believed that if individuals were given the space to express themselves as selves, rather than be molded by authoritarian institutions, they could develop in any number of ways but always in coherent community with others.

Leaves of Grass provided such a literary space and was a foundational text for the Modern School's libertarian education.³ Among the many anarcho-Whitmanites on faculty was Elizabeth "Fanny" Ferm, a lifelong teacher and pioneer in radical pedagogy. In an essay published in *Mother Earth*, Ferm examined the politics of Whitman's work with a pedagogical cast of mind and found his poetry's "natural" and "child-like" attitude an exemplary model for democratic personhood ("Democracy" 27). Ferm argued that the child and Whitman both are "natural democrats" due to their refusal to discriminate, their propensity toward inclusivity, and their insistence on passionate self-exploration; for "the child, like Whitman, is not curious about God, but very curious about himself and the life about him" (28). Like the nondifferentiating egoism of the child, Whitman's capacious "I," a cosmos of the self, acted as a structuring metaphor for anarchist education. Inherently antiauthoritarian, Whitman and the child refuse to accept external rule but instead begin at the level of self-interrogation, comprehending and foregrounding internal experience as the spirit of social existence. Ferm's Whitmanian pedagogy demonstrated that agitation, like education, must not attempt to teach the individual to be a democrat but begin by "recognizing that *he is one*" (20). Her theory restaged for the classroom that antiauthoritarian pact Whitman persistently forged between poet and reader; for instance in the evocative address of "To You," where the poet—like the anarchist instructor—pledged, "I am he who places over you no master, owner, better, / God, beyond what waits intrinsically in yourself" (*Poetry and Prose* 375–76). Through Whitman, Ferm established that intrinsic "growth" was simply "an awakened consciousness toward something which has *always existed*" and that, allowed the freedom to develop, the human condition innately tends toward the "beautiful ideal" of anarchism—an aspect of *Leaves of Grass* that Goldman developed as a method of agitation on her lecture tours ("Democracy" 20).

"The most human document in literature":
Leaves of Grass and the Form of Agitation

The trajectory of Goldman's vocation as a rabble-rouser deploying Whitman's verse is extensive and profound. She first found the occasion to study English and "familiarize herself with the great American writers," including Walt Whitman, during an early prison stay at Blackwell's Island in 1893 (*Anarchism* 6). Whitman rapidly became a regular subject in her lectures, articles, essays, letters, and political pamphlets, and was even the inspi-

ration for the anarchist magazine of record.⁴ The back matter of *Mother Earth* often vended, alongside works by such anarchist luminaries as Peter Kropotkin, Michel Bakunin, and Louis Proudhon, the “Poems of Walt Whitman” for 75 cents, while the inner pages recirculated dozens of full texts and excerpts from Whitman’s works.⁵ There was also considerable overlap between *Mother Earth*’s anarchist networks and the progressives comprising the Walt Whitman fellowships. Indeed, Goldman attained a considerable amount of her political education in the United States through the poet’s disciples—“all of whom came from the political and cultural left,” as Michael Robertson notes in *Worshipping Walt*—and “insisted that *Leaves of Grass* should be interpreted in primarily moral and spiritual terms” (5). Undoubtedly, the most significant political connection Goldman made among Whitman’s devotees was Horace Traubel—poet, editor, and literary executor; Traubel was also the most fervent in pronouncing *Leaves* a practical guide to life and action. Traubel not only edited and published the bulk of Whitman’s posthumous work, but he also founded the *Conservator* (1890–1919), a journal of radical cultural analysis, and established the Walt Whitman Fellowship International in an effort to carry the poet’s literary and political legacies into the twentieth century (Robertson, *Worshipping Walt* 239). The fellowships, ostensibly gathered—in print and in person—to celebrate Whitman’s poetry, more often read *Leaves of Grass* as a sourcebook for socialist revolution. As Robertson explains, “Traubel functioned as a propagandist,” using the *Conservator* and the fellowship to “spread the gospel of Whitmanesque socialism” (256). Due chiefly to Traubel’s undying literary devotion and activist persistence, Whitman’s poetry became a vital literary resource for many turn-of-the-century radicals.

Through the Whitman networks, Goldman was introduced to the period’s leading socialist thinkers, including Edward Carpenter and Eugene Debs, in addition to Traubel (Goldman, *Living My Life* 569). In fact, it was Traubel who supplied Goldman with the Whitman texts and criticism she used to prepare her aesthetic lectures. In her 1934 biography *Living My Life*, Goldman recalled how she “enjoyed the hours spent in [Traubel’s] sanctum, filled with Whitman material and books as well as with the files of his own unique paper, *The Conservator*,” determining that she had “got more from [Traubel] of Walt than any biographer” (568). Their relationship survived to the end of Traubel’s life, and Goldman sustained her friend’s mission of spreading Whitman’s words to agitate for social change for decades to come. In a 1916 letter to Traubel regretfully turning down an invitation to speak at the annual fellowship banquet, Goldman apologized for not yet having her “Whitman lecture finished,” but she purchased two plates to the birthday dinner and “50 circulars” from Traubel to distribute on her upcoming lecture tour (Horace Traubel).

More significant, perhaps, than the redissemination of Whitman's words was how importantly his language and life figured in Goldman's enduring occupation as an "oral agitator" (*Anarchism* 42). Goldman was the nation's most infamous firebrand. On the platform she was "perhaps the most accomplished, magnetic speaker in American history" according to biographer Richard Drinnon (*Notable* 57). Poet Sadakichi Hartmann also celebrated the "magnetism of Emma Goldman's sledgehammer style" ("Voltairine" 92). Even US attorney Francis Caffey, the opposing lawyer in the trial that led to Goldman's deportation, admitted that she was "a woman of great ability and of personal magnetism, and her persuasive powers are such to make her an exceedingly dangerous woman" (qtd. in Drinnon, *Rebel* 200). The undeniable attraction of Goldman's performances was as formative for future anarchists as it was perilous to those in power.

Though Goldman's "one great longing" from essentially her first days on American soil had been to speak well enough to "reach the masses," over time she grew to doubt the effects of "oral propaganda"—which might initially arouse people from their ennui but left "no lasting impression" (*Anarchism* 42). Goldman reasoned that "the very fact that most people attend meetings only if aroused by newspaper sensations . . . is proof that they have no inner urge to learn" (42). "Sensation" seemed a fitting term with which to describe the status of her late lecture performances, where her speeches were, as Esther Post observed, increasingly "viewed by both press and the American public not as political events, but rather as popular entertainment" ("Circus" 59). The more legend spread of Goldman's political theatrics, the more attention she drew—larger gatherings of spectators, larger contingents of press, and larger police forces lining the outsides of venues. While greater crowds meant greater opportunity for a select few to be struck by Goldman's tongue, hundreds gathered simply to experience the sideshow.

Leaves took center stage in Goldman's internal wrestling with the media of agitation. Once she accepted that oral propaganda was "fleeting at best," Goldman repositioned her energies to "printed thought," which was "more lasting in its effects" (*Living My Life* 377). Because readers would come seeking books only if already "intensely interested in progressive ideas," Goldman established that the process of reading turned on the interest, agency, and self-development of the reading subject (*Anarchism* 42). The anarchist can "plant the seeds of thought [but] whether something vital will develop depends largely on the fertility of the human soil," an impression parallel to her notion of an innate "beautiful ideal" (42). Goldman thus settled on a paradoxical Whitmanian insight: the relation between the writer and the reader is "more intimate than that between speaker and listener" (42). She embraced the shift in agency that this configuration

suggested, celebrating the relative autonomy of the reader; for the fact that books were only what “we read *into* them” reconfirmed “the advantage of written over oral expression” (42–43). Because the reader/spectator/pupil wills the meeting, encountering text/propagandist/teacher on relatively equal terms, the process exemplifies free choice. Literature then, through the guidance of the educator-agitator, exemplified anarchist consciousness-raising. It could facilitate the development of freedom by providing a means of disruption, a “new vision” that left the words on the page open for adoption in a spontaneous assortment of ways while forging a community of radical readers in the process.

This reciprocal rapport is exactly how Whitman framed *Leaves of Grass*. In “A Backward Glance o’er Travel’d Roads,” Whitman explained the dialogic character of his writing “scheme” when he wrote: “The reader will always have his or her part to do, just as much as I have had mine. I seek less to state or display any theme or thought, and more to bring you, reader, into the atmosphere of the theme or thought—there to pursue your own flight” (*Poetry and Prose* 656). Betsy Erkkila illuminates the radical undertones of this process, declaring “Whitman’s insistence on the reader’s creative role” as his “revolutionary strategy, his attempt to collapse the traditionally authoritarian relation between poet and audience, text and reader by transferring the ultimate power of creation to the reader” (*Whitman* 91). For Whitman, the method is a democratic gesture; for Emma Goldman the exchange is akin to a “mutual aid” of reading. The author and the reader jointly cultivate new ideas together across space and time, where an ideal from the past can physically *touch* a person in the future, urging her into resistance. It is as Whitman described the “greatest poet” in his preface to the 1855 *Leaves*: “The touch of him tells in action” (*Poetry and Prose* 24).

The intimate though unsettling touch of aesthetic agitation speaks to Goldman’s persistent assertion that

the greatness and supremacy of Walt consists in the fact that he was human, all too human. It is the essentially human in him which makes his work “Leaves of Grass” the most human document in literature. For did he not himself tell us of “Leaves of Grass”: “He who touches this touches a man”? There is certainly no other work which *touches man* as this extraordinary book. It is intended not [as] a book but a living human being with all its contradictory impulses, emotions, thoughts and aspirations. (“Fragment” 841b–42, 2–3, italics mine)

Whitman crafted *Leaves of Grass* as a book-object and literary work to be the creative rendering of the living, speaking organism—through cover design, title puns, lyrical imagery, and rhetorical address. C. Carroll Hollis,

who discussed Whitman's oratorical poetics in his landmark *Language and Style in "Leaves of Grass,"* referred to Whitman's famous line (and one of Goldman's favorites), "Camerado, this is no book, / Who touches this touches a man" as "the most successful metonymic trick in poetic history" (252). As "Walt" "springs from the pages" into the willing mind of the reader, a human presence is staged to stand in for the voice of the orator; the rhetorical pose provided the catalyst for his poetics. Goldman cherished this dual sense of touch: the reader's body intently caressing the face of the page and the rejoining tongue inserting thoughts in the minds of readers.

While Whitman conceived *Leaves* to germinate in the minds of audiences, Goldman relentlessly fastened its words with sledgehammer magnetism. Consequently, the latter sections of this essay will turn from the "formal" characteristics of Whitman's influence on Goldman's agitation to the deployment of his verse and prose in her political practices. To explore the ways in which Goldman's activism positioned Whitman's work in the early part of the twentieth century it is essential to look at her manuscript lectures on the poet. The composition of these Whitman talks combined biography, poetry, and prose with turn-of-the-century social issues, political theory, and personal memoir to form a radical "cluster" made for propaganda. Of the two extant speeches that remain in the *Emma Goldman Papers* archive, the only uncut lecture, "Walt Whitman," emphasizes the poet's "revolutionary" representations of bodily sensuality in the sanctified realm of verse, while pitting his life as a parallel struggle for free expression against state censorship. The second surviving document, "Walt Whitman / Emma Goldman—Fragment," contains segments of at least two different speeches. One dates from 1916, "Walt Whitman: Liberator of Sex," and discusses the "homo-sexual" nature of the "Calamus" cluster while revising Whitman's own "sex differentiation" as a symptom of democratic inclusivity. The later fragment appears to have been written around 1927; it references Stalin and Mussolini as imminent global threats while reflecting on the possibilities for Whitmanian democracy and anarchism within the shadow of totalitarianism.⁶ Goldman's lecture tours brought her all over the United States and addressed hundreds of issues and themes, but her rubric of resistance centered her struggles against three institutions and their attendant channels: as she put it, "Religion, the dominion of the human mind; Property, the dominion of human needs; and Government, the dominion of human conduct" (*Anarchism* 53). As a result, Goldman's readings of Whitman transformed and adapted to situations as they developed on the ground in three specific and overlapping struggles: freedom of expression, women's emancipation, and sexual liberation. Popular critical themes in *Leaves of Grass*, the carnal body and universal love, were re-created as models for anarchist agitation, while

Whitman's biographical controversies turned his life into an exemplar for the prophetic agitator.

"The great liberator of the human body":
Leaves of Grass and Anarcha-feminism

In the fight for free expression at the turn of the century, no figures more embodied state censorship and moral constraint than Anthony Comstock and the Society for the Suppression of Vice. Founded in 1873 to "super-
vise public morality," the society ignited a censorship campaign with the anti-obscenity Comstock Act, which deemed the postal circulation of any textual object of "immoral nature" a misdemeanor (Wood, *Struggle* 3). The law incited immediate and longstanding conflicts ranging from outrage over the sexual imagery of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* to the suppression of "free love" in anarchist periodicals. Goldman seized on the continuity of these persecutions and turned opposition into evidence of the regenerative spirit of sexual rebellion. In "The Hypocrisy of Puritanism," Goldman argued that through his censorship Comstock had "made life itself impossible," since, like art, "life represents beauty in a thousand variations" and needs the breadth of "a gigantic panorama of external change" (*Anarchism* 167). His "puritanism" instead inhibited "every natural and healthy impulse" and circumscribed the free development of psychological and artistic processes (167). "Comstockery" and its suppression of Whitman's verse, with its unapologetic, sometimes orgiastic, celebration of the naked body, was a deterrent to psychosexual (and by extension moral) development, and a restriction on love and its physical incarnation. Goldman and the anarchists rebelliously praised the "quivering jelly of love, white-blow and delirious / juice"—sexual imagery that exploded the threshold of the conventional in poetry (qtd. in "Walt Whitman" 8). And in her advocacy of Whitman's free and frank sexual expression, Goldman was literally dragged out of lecture halls by police and incensed citizens.

Thus, Whitman's life and work became important cultural and political fulcrum points for the free speech and free love struggles of the early twentieth century.⁷ According to Goldman, his "song of sex," the "Children of Adam," was "the first to cry out for the liberation of sex, the first to tear off the Puritanic rags which disfigured the bodies of men and women" and give voice to the sensualized human body ("Fragment" 13). In an earlier Whitman lecture, Goldman reaffirmed the significance of the "Adam" cluster, pronouncing that if Whitman "had written nothing else but 'A Woman Waits for Me,' or 'One Hour to Madness and Joy,' he would have gained for himself a niche among the immortals, not only as poet but as the great liberator of the human body" ("Walt Whitman" 13–14). Goldman then recited exemplary lines from "A Woman Waits for Me":

Sex contains all, bodies, souls,

...

All the governments, judges, gods, followed persons of the earth,
 These are contained in sex, as parts of itself, and justifications of itself
 (qtd. in "Walt Whitman" 7-8)

In Goldman's reading of *Leaves*, all planes of thought, all social life, and all political expressions transpired from the substance, acts, and pleasures of the physical body. Whitman's poetry emancipated the "procreant urge" of human civilization to be enjoyed by women as well as men.

Combining biography and poetry, Goldman collapsed Whitman into his work, restaging his life—the ultimate "iconoclas [*sic*] of Puritanism"—as the persecuted, radical agitator ("Fragment" 13). In both lecture documents, she recycled the anecdote of Whitman's dismissal as clerk at the Bureau of Indian Affairs: *Leaves* fell into the hands of Secretary of the Interior James Harlan, who, as Goldman retold it, "promptly declared the work immoral which cost Walt his position" ("Walt Whitman" 2). She also related Comstock's obstruction to the attempted publication of *Leaves* with Boston's Osgood and Company in 1882, and Whitman's much rehearsed chat with Emerson where the latter evidently asked that he excise the salacious parts of his work, which (in this narrative) Whitman defiantly refused. Goldman drew upon Whitman's censorship misfortunes to produce a continuum of excessive repression: "[T]he Society for the Suppression of Vice with Anthony Comstock as its patron saint had by that time begun its evil operations [and] for the shame of the American spirit be it said, that that Society is still on the job" ("Walt Whitman" 2). As a result, Whitman's life proved that the hounded agitator was eventually substantiated through the course of history. *Leaves of Grass* proffered a challenge to nineteenth-century censorship laws, an aesthetic model for free love that glorified "the sexual senses without any limitation whatever," and a tradition which Goldman could reinvigorate for the identity of the sex-rebel agitator ("Walt Whitman" 8).

All of these practices emerged from the primacy of the body in Goldman's readings of Whitman. As Goldman put it, Whitman was "interested in the whole of man," not as an abstract philosophical concept or otherworldly servant but in order to expose "the human body to the glowing light of the day [and] liberate our senses from hypocrisy" ("Walt Whitman" 6-7). The liberation of the body from Victorian taboo held special discursive significance for Goldman's work in women's rights. Though she is now popularly known as one of the earliest proponents of anarcha-feminism, Goldman never used the term. The movement for the emancipation of women consumed much of her activist work, however, and considerable effort was spent writing articles, giving lectures, and

disseminating pamphlets on issues such as abortion, contraception, and marriage. Still, Goldman fits uneasily into the legacy of first-wave feminism, a movement led in large part by white, formally educated women of middle-class origin and characterized by its emphasis on voting rights and moderate reforms. For her, the “tragedy” of this view of woman’s emancipation was that it reduced the “woman problem” to the realm of state legislation. She felt that “new women” ought not kowtow to the sanction of patriarchy in order to join in the activity of the public sphere; instead she saw the “enslavement” of women rooted in the very paternal power afforded the state to make this allowance.

In “The Tragedy of Woman’s Emancipation,” an essay published in the first edition of *Mother Earth*, Goldman explained that while the parliamentary efforts for civil rights were “very good demands,” true emancipation began “neither at the polls nor in the courts” but in a “woman’s soul” (*Anarchism* 213). Legislative repression, which Goldman referred to as “external tyranny,” was not as harmful or as deep-rooted as its coincident “internal tyranny,” the psychic dominion imposed by structures of power. Oppression passed through the unassailable idea of hierarchy, rather than being fixed in the economic or juridical order of a society. Her “feminist” theory called for radical inclusivity and a demand for self-autonomy in all spheres—political, economic, and sexual. She believed that equality between men and women could not be achieved through the “superficial equalization of human beings”; instead individuals of both sexes had to learn together “how to be oneself, and yet in oneness with others” (214). As if channeling Whitman, Goldman chanted her treatise: “pettiness separates, breadth unites, let us be broad and big” for a “true conception of the relation of the sexes . . . knows of but one great thing: to give of one’s self boundlessly, in order to find one’s self richer, deeper, better. That alone can fill the emptiness, and transform the tragedy of woman’s emancipation into joy, limitless joy” (225). Goldman looked to expand the category of the “human” by extralegal means—direct action, agitation, poetry—where the law marked some beings as less than others.

In its panoramic view of expansion, Goldman’s feminism drew much from Whitman’s poetry, both its radical vista of sexual equality and its unabashed engagement with the female body. In one lecture, Goldman directly commissioned Whitman for the fight: “Walt Whitman believed in the equality of the sexes—he wanted her to be as free and equal as the man. He saw woman take her place in literature, art, political and social life to ‘show what are her inner potencies, powers, and attributes’” (“Fragment” 16–17). Whitman’s visionary verse “saw” women *take* place next to men. It provided an imaginative landscape, where—and here Goldman cited from “Song of the Broad-Axe”—“women walk in public processions in the streets the same as the men, / Where they enter the public assembly

and take places the same as the men" (qtd. in "Fragment" 19). Whitman's prophetic poems informed and strengthened feminist struggle, since "especially woman . . . even more than man, was bound to the block of Puritanism" ("Walt Whitman" 13). As Goldman saw it, women's bodies were materially regulated by state suppression and spiritually alienated by the dictates of "puritanical" governments and religions, and *Leaves* offered a functional poetic to articulate women's fundamental rights, discursively and imaginatively. Whitman's "emancipation of sex" once more personally liberated Goldman by authorizing free love, a foundational element of Goldman's ideal. For only in freedom could love grow to encompass a vision of the common whole *and* root itself in the social unconscious so that "all the laws on the statutes, all the courts in the universe, cannot tear it from the soil" (*Anarchism* 236).

Goldman sought a radical inclusivity that was intimately personal for "free love," and thus paused over Whitman's theory of adhesive affection, the erotic fraternity expressed in his "Calamus" poems. While revising a version of this Whitman lecture in 1927, Goldman reached a dilemma concerning the logical conclusion of adhesiveness, a contradiction, as she put it in a letter to Evelyn Scott, stemming from the fact that "while being a champion of women's independence, [Whitman] never cared for women" (*Nowhere at Home* 141). According to Goldman, this incongruity was even recognized by Whitman, who flung "the red rag in the face of the Puritan Bull, then spent the rest of his life in trying to explain what he meant by some of his ideas on sex" (141). The growing assumption among many who had read "Calamus" was that "Walt had a very strong homosexual streak," an inference even a sex rebel and freethinker like Goldman was unprepared to make in her early Whitman speeches (141). Goldman began giving her "Walt Whitman: Liberator of Sex" lecture in 1916. In its earliest versions, she praised the poet's openness regarding sexual relations but made no mention of the "homoerotic aspect of Whitman's work" (Kissack, *Free Comrades* 91). Goldman acknowledged Whitman as a "homo-sexual" artist only after her immersion in the newly flourishing international debates on sexology. The scientific study of human sexuality, sexology emerged as a field with the 1897 textbook *Sexual Inversion*, by Havelock Ellis, procured institutional legitimacy with its own scholarly periodical, the *Journal of Sexology*, in 1908, and reached an apex in 1919, when Magnus Hirschfeld founded the Institute of Sexology in Berlin. For Goldman, who later played an active role in these transatlantic debates, sexology redeemed Whitman's own controversial sexual biography, even enriching his democratic poetics.

Goldman circuited her study of sex psychology through a rereading of *Leaves of Grass*, making her not only one of the first American readers to open up "the nature of his Calamus poems" but one of the first to po-

liticize, radically, Whitman's own "homo-sexual nature" ("Fragment" 15). Following the central claim from "In Paths Untrodden," the opening poem of "Calamus," that he "Resolv'd to sing no songs to-day but those of manly attachment," Goldman, like many after her, read Whitman's intensely personal cluster as an extended sexual confession (*Poetry and Prose* 268). She tied biography to verse in Whitman's "letters to Peter Doyle," with whom the poet's relationship "lasted for years and . . . was imbued with much fervor and passion" ("Fragment" 16). Weighing the textual evidence, Goldman gathered that Whitman was "very strongly intermediate in his sexual feelings" ("Fragment" 16). "Intermediate sexuality," a nineteenth-century sexological concept made popular by Edward Carpenter, theorized a hybrid "third gender" (9). According to Carpenter's speculations, sexual attraction ranged on a spectrum from the hypermasculine to the hyperfeminine, but included no "natural" drives compelling opposite ends toward one another. Instead, few actually occupied the extreme poles of heterosexual attraction and, as Carpenter observed, "there are great numbers in the middle region who (though differing corporeally as men and women) are by emotion and temperament very near to each other" (9). Ironically, his sexology viewed erotic attraction through the lens of biology, where men attracted to other men were simply thought to have inherent feminine impulses.

Goldman combined this formulation with her anarchist interpretations of *Leaves of Grass* to imbue "sexual intermediacy" with a will to democratic expansion. Not only was Whitman's sexuality nothing to apologize for, it was the cause of his "universal all-embracing capacity for love" ("Fragment" 17). If Whitman was a middle gender, indiscriminate in love, then his "ideas of universal comradeship [were] conditioned in his magnetic response to his own sex. So was his extraordinary sensitiveness to the nature of woman conditioned in the fact that he had considerable femininity in him" ("Fragment" 17). From "Calamus," Whitman's "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand" demonstrated Goldman's point in practice. Standing in for the material book, the poet erotically invites the reader: "Here to put your lips upon mine I permit you . . . Or if you will, thrusting me beneath your clothing, / Where I may feel the throbs of your heart" (*Poetry and Prose* 270). Whitman's "I" pleads with his new partner to then "[c]arry me when you go forth over land or seas; / For thus merely touching you is enough, is best, / And thus touching you would I silently sleep and be carried eternally" (270). The poem thus reveals that it is not "by reading it that you will acquire [its meaning]," but only through Whitman's distinctive indiscrimination, an erotics of reading where meaning is felt through intimate touch and always open to variation with any passing reader or lover (270). For Goldman, Whitman's indefinite physical attractions, combined with the libidinous energy of his probing "I,"

not only demonstrated his universal grasp of the human subject, but also reinforced the democratic “cruising” element of *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman’s book—that “human document”—was, like its author, open to and touched by every wandering eye and caressing finger. His radical democratic love, the seductive invitation to promiscuity, sexual and intellectual, reimagined physical touching as sensualized postures of democratic inclusion and anarchist boundlessness.

Still, the crux of this imaginative process for Goldman is Whitman’s perpetual conversion of the sexual into the political. The poet’s “all-embracing” sensual touch must always be recognized as a model for political love. Goldman argued that the affection developed between poet and reader in *Leaves of Grass* becomes “truly universal” in political practice with Whitman’s “beautiful attitude to the outcast—the criminal, the prostitute—to every derelict made by man’s inhumanity to man” (“Fragment” 17). Goldman recounts “You Felons on Trial in Courts” as a case study, where Whitman stands together with “You felons on trial in courts, / You convicts in prison-cells—you sentenced assassins, chain’d” (qtd. in “Fragment” 17). As if returning the physical embrace of the reader, Whitman empathetically imagines the criminal with him and within him, testifying:

I walk with delinquents with passionate love,
I feel I am of them—I belong to those convicts and prostitutes myself,
And henceforth I will not deny them—for how can I deny myself?
(qtd. in “Fragment” 18)

Crucially, Goldman admits the “homo-sexual” nature of “adhesiveness” denied by Whitman in his lifetime, and at the same time arrives at the political meaning he extended to the term in the wake of the Civil War: “[A]ffection shall solve the problems of / Freedom yet” (*Poetry and Prose* 449). After World War I and the ensuing “red scare,” this ideal, that through cultural affection individual human freedom can be retained in an egalitarian, collective future, proved once again essential for Goldman’s revolutionary anarchism.

“To build the new life out of the ruins of the old”:
Leaves as a Theory of Revolution

Whitman’s project of collective inclusion expanded the representational field of poetry to include prostitutes, workers, and African slaves embraced with love as subjects of a future democracy. Goldman perpetually radicalized his republican promise as the aesthetic vehicle for anarchist revolution. But the promise faced a grave challenge in the final decades of Goldman’s life, as alternative visions of social totality—communism,

fascism, and free-market imperialism—spread across the world. Shortly after that 1919 Whitman banquet, in the thick of the “red scare,” Goldman was deported to Russia at the dawn of a frenzied insurrectionary change-over. She threw herself into the project of communist revolution and was personally appointed by V. I. Lenin to head a number of cultural projects (Wexler, *Exile* 36). Over the course of her two-year return to her motherland, Goldman was troubled by Lenin’s increasing centralization of economic affairs and suppression of political dissent. The final act occurred in March of 1921, when sailors and peasants revolted against Bolshevik repression at Kronstadt—a naval base located on a small island in the Gulf of Finland—and were brutally crushed by the Red Army. Goldman departed Russian soil for the last time that year, a mortal enemy of communism. In the dark days that followed, a physically and financially insecure Goldman trekked precariously through Germany, England, France, and Spain before returning to North America. She would give one homecoming lecture tour in the United States and then settle into her final resting place in Toronto, Canada.

In the last decade of her life, “red” Emma fell out of favor with the red Left, as the Communist Party became the theoretical and political home to internationalists, labor organizations, and utopians of all kinds. The Communist Party USA had accumulated sixty thousand members—including former anarchists and Goldman supporters—by the fall of 1919. By 1935, the year the party provided the “popular front” umbrella to all groups opposed to fascism, communism gained many more contributions from popular writers, artists, and intellectuals, the former bastion of culture-focused anarchism (*Oxford Companion* 149). Deprived of the political currency for the lecture circuit, Goldman dedicated this period to the development of a new model for anarchist social change. Together with the two-volume *My Disillusionment in Russia* (1923–24), which related the fallout of the Russian Revolution, and her much-acclaimed autobiography *Living My Life* (1931), Goldman also retooled her Whitman lecture to face the new transnational threats and remake the revolutionary spirit. Despite differences in genre, all of these texts interrelate as ways of revising a life and philosophy which now appeared “infantile” to a professional Left and misguided to pragmatic liberals.

Any reconception of revolution after Kronstadt would need to take into account what Goldman believed was the primary reason for the Bolshevik takeover: the people’s “unreadiness” to challenge the “state idea” (Drinnon, *Rebel* 305). Because economic “institutions and conditions rest upon deep-seated ideas,” the “state idea” of revolution accomplished only “political scene shifting and institutional rearrangements” (*Further Disillusionment* 171). As Goldman maintained, the reorganization of the “means of production” had failed to produce a free and just society

because the real struggle for liberty takes place first on the plane of ideas. She re-pitched the Bolshevik debacle as a manifestation of an eternal conflict between the "authoritarian principle" and the "libertarian idea," where the inclination of the state was "to concentrate, to narrow, and monopolize all social activities," while the Whitmanesque nature of revolution was, on the contrary, "to grow, to broaden, and disseminate itself in ever-wider circles" (*Disillusionment* 257). As Berenice Carroll explains, Goldman's idea for a "reconstructive revolution" was rooted in a "transvaluation of values" stressing "equity, justice, dignity, and liberty for the individual" over political or economic strategy ("Revolution" 171). This theorization was only a reformulation of one of Goldman's beloved passages from *Democratic Vistas*. She recited in her early Whitman speech:

[T]he true nationality of the States, the genuine union, when we come to a mortal crisis, is, and is to be, after all, neither the written law, nor, (as is generally supposed,) either self-interest, or common pecuniary or material objects—but the fervid and tremendous IDEA, melting everything else with resistless heat, and solving all lesser and definite distinctions in vast, indefinite, spiritual, emotional power. (qtd. in "Walt Whitman" 11)

The emphasis on the dispersive, subterranean nature of human values and ideas helped reposition cultural dissemination and development at the center of Goldman's revolutionary theory.

Once settled in Toronto, Goldman set out to regain audiences of workers and intellectuals and to re-stir that incentive for the "beautiful" anarchist ideal (Wexler, *Exile* 173). Creativity and imagination were reaffirmed as cornerstones of Goldman's political and aesthetic theories, for only when "the libertarian spirit pervades the economic organizations of the workers" and the "manifold creative energies of the people can manifest themselves" could a revolution develop based on the "fullest play of personal initiative and collective effort" (*Further Disillusionment* 147). The play of the personal and collective led her instinctively back to Whitman.⁸ As Goldman enlisted Whitman's aid against the intensifying tyrannies of the late 1920s and early 1930s, her lectures turned to his most unmistakably radical and oppositional prose and poetry—the rallying cry of *Specimen Days*, the manifesto form of *Democratic Vistas*, the condemnation of exploitation in *With Walt Whitman in Camden*. She tactically mined and compiled samples of Whitman's most shocking maxims, corralled in one plea to Horace Traubel: "I want the people . . . the whole body of the people . . . to have what belongs to them" ("Fragment" 12/849). Goldman's choices reflect an attempt to reawaken and refashion Whitman's dedication to a social whole from below unequivocally opposed to centraliza-

tion from above. The antifascist, anticommunist Whitman was a visionary poet for egalitarianism to come *and* a powerful champion of liberty in the here and now.

Whitman's prophetic voice—which pronounced "fifty years ago what the mass of his countrymen still do not see"—took on a different tone now for Goldman, a newly exigent and inimical tenor ("Fragment" 13). Although the failure of Whitman's readers to take hold of the ideal had left democracy "a dream in America" and a "dictatorship, black and red shirted" in Europe, Goldman found in Whitman a genuine prophetic appeal to "see in the present conditions a *democratic ideal*, conditions which drive, trump upon and degrade man into the very dust" ("Fragment" 19; "Walt Whitman" 6). To agitate for absolute liberty in a state of emergency, Goldman rediscovered the spirit of the educator-propagandist in "what Walt Whitman wrote to a European Revolutionair [*sic*]," finding that it still held "good for the revolutionair [*sic*] of the whole world today" ("Fragment" 19). The speech concluded with Goldman reciting "To a foil'd European Revolutionaire" as the battle cry for the forgotten and exiled agitator, showing how the ostensibly modest act of reading could sustain revolutionary spirit. As she declared via Whitman, only "when there are no more memories of heroes and martyrs . . . shall liberty or the idea of liberty be discharged from that part of the earth" ("Fragment" 20–21). Whitman's defiant and hopeful hymns to the bourgeois revolutions of Europe nearly a century earlier could have returned ironically to Goldman as she surveyed what these democracies had become. Instead, *Leaves* recuperated a ghostly image of resistance in which she could place herself, the perpetual agitator, alongside Whitman as "great speakers and writers exiled in distant lands" ("Fragment" 19).

Goldman's triumphant yawp—"[W]e need Walt Whitman now more than ever . . . his indomitable courage, his beautiful comradeship, his stirring song, that we may not falter in our efforts to build the new life out of the ruins of the old"—crystallizes the fusion of aesthetic imagination and political resolve necessary for her anarchism ("Fragment" 19). Her ideal, that liberty and beauty were concepts inherent to the human condition, required a lifetime cycle of lessons and struggle. Goldman took up Whitman's self-naming as the "sworn poet of every dauntless rebel," as if she, the *epitome* of the dauntless rebel, were among Whitman's "poets to come" (*Poetry and Prose* 497, 175). Whitman articulated his strategy for writing poetry to the future there, when he claimed that "not to-day is to justify me and answer what I am for, / But you, a new brood, native, athletic, continental, greater than before known, / Arouse! For you must justify me" (175). Goldman owed Whitman much. His expressive imagery of expansion and inclusion permeated her political writings and speeches, influenced her oral and written propaganda, and armed her with a verbal

arsenal to lead struggles for the radical equality of women and the absolute freedom of love. She therefore spent her life “justifying” Whitman and answering the call of the many critics who decried her propaganda for the revolution as the negation of beautiful verse. It took the revolutionary-to-come to understand that there was no more beautiful image to poeticize than the revolutionary ideal.

*University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa*

NOTES

I am grateful to Ed Folsom and Kathleen Diffley for their careful readings of this article and their generous comments.

1. Charles Willard drew the same conclusion in his 1950 reception study, *Whitman's American Fame*. He opposed the fellowships, groups “devoted to Whitman propaganda” and “famous for their noisy radicalism,” preferring authentic “enthusiasts” and “literary critics” (73–74). Anarchists and socialists used Whitman “to promote their own special interests” and had “no noticeable effect on his reputation” (230). The success of his interpretation is surprising, since Goldman herself was responsible for recirculating Whitman more expeditiously than any university press.

2. It is worth noting that even Goldman's commitment to politically expressive art for the purpose of propaganda did not allay some leftists' suspicions that Goldman's art talks focused on frivolous issues, like literature, over the “material” realities of the working class, labor strife, and capitalist exploitation. Most notably, Goldman's lover and lifelong comrade Alexander Berkman always disputed their political efficacy. He reasoned that “if only a few people understand the art you talk about that's the proof that it's not for humanity” (qtd. in Anderson, *My Thirty Years War* 126–27).

3. The level to which the Modern School was influenced by Whitman is telling. A Whitman portrait even decorated the halls of the campus, hung on the walls of the Ferrer Center alongside the portraits of other “libertarian radicals” such as Tolstoy, Ibsen, and William Morris (Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism* 26). The school's magazine, the *Modern School*, ran a Walt Whitman month in April–May 1919; and many of New York's Whitmanites taught there, like Leonard Abbot, who gave lessons in American literature and creative writing (Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism* 26).

4. In 1905, Goldman settled on the title *The Open Road*, inspired by Whitman's “Song.” Threat of legal action from an existing magazine forced her to change it.

5. The following poems were republished in *Mother Earth*: “Envy,” *Mother Earth* 1.3 (May 1906): 2; *Leaves of Grass* (excerpts), *Mother Earth* 12.1 (March 1917): 1; “I Sit and Look Out,” *Mother Earth* 11.6 (August 1916): 561.

6. In a letter to Evelyn Scott dated November 21, 1927, Goldman discussed in detail the Whitman lecture she was preparing, even lifting entire sections regarding Whitman's relationship with Peter Doyle from the speech into the letter, or vice versa (*Nowhere at Home* 141).

7. The *Firebrand* incident is one popular example linking Whitman and the anarchists in battle. In September of 1897, Goldman gathered in solidarity with the

recently detained editor of the Portland-based anarchist periodical; Henry Addis had come under scrutiny for the distribution of the magazine's latest copy, an issue deemed indecent for its republication of Walt Whitman's "A Woman Waits for Me" (Goldman, *Documentary History* 312–13).

8. While in Toronto Goldman once again relied on the Whitman network to obtain reference books on various lecture topics, but particularly for the revision of her Whitman talk. She later noted: "I came upon a rich Walt Whitman collection, owned by Mr. H. F. Saunders, the secretary of the Toronto Walt Whitman Fellowship" (Goldman, *Living My Life* 991).

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