

GATES OF FREEDOM



Voltairine de Cleyre in 1901, the year of "Anarchism," "The Death of Love," and "Ave et Vale." (Courtesy of the Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library.)

GATES OF FREEDOM

Voltairine de Cleyre

and the Revolution of the Mind

With Selections from Her Writing

Eugenia C. DeLamotte

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For Carl

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Part One

REVOLUTION of the MIND



Voltairine de Cleyre in 1891, the year of “The Gates of Freedom.” (Courtesy of the Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library.)

INTRODUCTION

I believe the hardest question in the whole solution of the problem of human justice, is how to make people think equality is possible. . . . The problem, “how to get rid of institutions” always means the problem of getting the institutions out of men’s minds first.

—Voltairine de Cleyre,
“Ye Have the Poor Always with You”

Life and Work

Voltairine de Cleyre belongs to a group of writers in the United States—late-nineteenth-century freethinkers, anarchists, and sex radicals—who are excluded not only from the canon in general but even from the most progressive textbook anthologies. This exclusion renders their achievements invisible; it also obscures the broader social, cultural, and political context of many canonical authors, including such figures as Mark Twain and Walt Whitman. De Cleyre has been the subject of excellent historical work, beginning with Paul Avrich’s biography and followed by Margaret’s Marsh’s chapter in *Anarchist Women*, but with the exception of Catherine Palczewski’s important considerations of her rhetoric and views of sexuality, and Wendy McElroy’s positioning of her work in the context of nineteenth-century anarchist feminism, the project of exploring her place in American literary history has only just begun. For that

reason, everyone who writes on de Cleyre has the privilege of retelling once again—and once again with the hope of a widening audience—the story of her life.

Voltairine de Cleyre was an American anarchist feminist who published hundreds of works—poems, sketches, essays, lectures, pamphlets, translations, and short stories—from the 1880s until her death in 1912 at the age of forty-five.¹ Born in 1866 into the poverty of a working-class family in Michigan, she inherited the New England abolitionist background of her mother's family and the French freethinking and communist background of her father, who named her for Voltaire. Despite his philosophical commitments and revolutionary roots, her father sent her to a convent school, which she said left “white scars” on her soul and drew her “Will” inexorably toward “the knowledge and assertion of its own liberty” (“Making” 156). Soon after graduating, in 1886 and 1887 she became a writer and lecturer in the cause of freethought, an eclectic movement that included atheists, agnostics, and deists as well as religious thinkers (Unitarian, transcendentalist, sometimes Quaker) who shared a scorn for religious dogma as a source of truth or authority; a rejection of biblical miracles and the divinity of Jesus; an aggressive, activist commitment to separation of church and state; and an insistence that human progress depends on the exercise of each individual's reason with regard even to subjects held most sacred. The term *infidel* was often applied to all of them, and many, including de Cleyre,² used it themselves as a matter of course to describe their philosophy. The related term *liberal*, at first designating in a nineteenth-century American context simply a belief in separation of church and state, was eventually applied to a whole constellation of beliefs associated with freethinkers' diverse but always “infidel” views across a broad political, social, and cultural spectrum. Many of them by the end of the century also described themselves as “radical.”³ Over the course of history, de Cleyre confidently predicted, “It is the radical who always wins at last” (“Crime and Punishment” 174).

De Cleyre's career as a freethinker was propelled in unexpected directions when the sequence of events that Paul Avrich has called “The Haymarket Tragedy” began on the night of May 4, 1886, at an anarchist rally near Chicago's Haymarket Square to protest police violence in the McCormick Harvester strike. As storm clouds gathered near the end and the crowd began leaving, police suddenly marched on the three hundred or so remaining protesters. Confronted with a column of 180 policemen and an order to disperse peacefully, the last speaker, Samuel Fielden, replied, “But we are peaceable,” and then to a repeated order

agreed, "All right, we will go." As he was stepping down from the speaker's wagon a bomb exploded and the police began firing wildly, hitting each other as well as members of the crowd. Possibly a hundred people were wounded; eventually the death toll included seven policemen and at least seven or eight civilians (David 198–204, 281–85; Avrich, *HT* 197–210).

De Cleyre said later that "when the echoes of the Haymarket bomb rolled through the little Michigan village where I then lived, I, like the rest of the credulous and brutal, read one lying newspaper headline, 'Anarchists throw a bomb in a crowd in the Haymarket in Chicago', and immediately cried out, 'They ought to be hanged'" ("Eleventh" 23). In a trial that became notorious all over the world, eight anarchists were arrested and sentenced, five to death by hanging and three to long prison terms.⁴ They were not condemned, however, for throwing the bomb, since it was easily proved that none of them did so, and the police never found the perpetrator, whose identity cannot be conclusively established even today. Instead, they were sentenced for advocating ideas that could be argued to have inspired the unidentified bomb-thrower. As de Cleyre said in 1903, "The infamy of that trial has passed into history" ("Making" 156). John Altgeld, governor of Illinois, concluded in 1893 after an extensive review of the trial that every aspect of it—from the selection of obviously biased jurors, to police influence of testimony with threats of torture and bribes of money and jobs, to the sheer "fabrication" of evidence, to the judge's unprecedented final instructions to the jury that the state need not prove that the defendants had influenced the perpetrator or even find out who the perpetrator was—represented a serious miscarriage of justice (David 494–95; Avrich, *HT* 422–23). For de Cleyre as for many others, it represented even more: the awakening of a question as to whether "justice under law" is ever possible ("Making" 156). She was especially struck by the state attorney's insistence that Anarchy was on trial. In other words, she said, "It is a political opinion which is to be hanged, here in this astounding Republic, which sprang into existence as the expression of the free political opinion" ("November 11th" 7). The Haymarket martyrs were, in her words, "done to death for speaking" (6).

Not long after November 11, 1887, when Albert Parsons, August Spies, George Engel, and Adolph Fischer were executed (Louis Lingg had committed suicide in prison the day before), de Cleyre herself was an anarchist. Her anarchist tendencies were "ripened . . . to definition" by the Haymarket affair; after a brief espousal of socialism inspired by a

speech by Clarence Darrow in December 1887, she lost a debate to a brilliant anarchist and began studying anarchism in earnest (“Making” 156–57). The message of the Haymarket anarchists, she concluded, was simply “that real justice and real liberty might come on earth; that it was all false, all unnecessary, this wild waste of human life, of bone and sinew and brain and heart, this turning of people into human rags, ghosts, piteous caricatures of the creatures they had it in them to be, on the day that they were born; that what is called ‘economy’, the massing up of things, is in reality the most frightful spending—the sacrifice of the maker to the made” (“Our Martyred” 17–18). Her conclusion echoed August Spies’ statement to the court: “You may pronounce the sentence upon me, honorable judge, but let the world know that in A.D. 1886, in the State of Illinois, eight men were sentenced to death because they believed in a better future, because they had not lost their faith in the ultimate victory of liberty and justice!” (Avrich, *HT* 286). Not only were the accused men innocent and their trial a sham, de Cleyre had come to believe; their ideas were the key to human freedom.

Within the next few years de Cleyre forged her lifelong vocation as an anarchist activist. Settling in Philadelphia, she earned a scant income by teaching English in the Jewish immigrant community, where she put down deep emotional roots, learning Yiddish well enough to read the Yiddish anarchist papers and translate some articles into English. Her friend George Brown said she often taught from seven in the morning until eleven o’clock at night (Kelly et al. 150); even so, she engaged at the same time in an arduous schedule of writing, translating, editing, organizing, and speaking. Most of her speaking engagements were in the eastern and midwestern United States, but she lectured also in England, Scotland, and Norway—sometimes to small audiences, but often to hundreds; sometimes to over a thousand.⁵ The *New York Tribune* reported in 1902, “Her writings are said to be known to anarchists all over the world” (“Dying” 5). The wide international circle of her acquaintance included anarchist writers and activists from Russia, England, Scotland, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Norway, and Mexico, among them some of the major theorists and revolutionaries of her time—Peter Kropotkin, Louise Michel, Errico Malatesta, Ricardo Flores Magón.

In the last eight years of her life she suffered from a long illness that included a terrible roaring in her ears, which she described to her friend Nathan Navro as “louder than the noise of the locomotives stationed within a few yards from her house” (Avrich, *AA* 184). Except for a brief period from 1904 to the spring of 1906 (Avrich, *AA* 185–89), she

nonetheless persisted in her work. When she died in 1912, long before most of the prominent anarchists of her generation, over two thousand people attended her burial in Waldheim Cemetery, next to the tomb of the Haymarket martyrs. In a memorial issue of *Mother Earth*, one of the many anarchist journals that had published her work, Alexander Berkman described her contemporaries' sense of her: "Her life was a protest against all sham, a challenge to all hypocrisy, and an inspiration for social rebellion" (Kelly et al. 153).

Yet the inspiration of which Berkman spoke has been almost lost to subsequent generations of feminists, despite the startling contemporary relevance of de Cleyre's ideas. On the op-ed page of a twenty-first century newspaper, almost any of her positions—her call for the abolition of prisons, her attacks on the ideological distortions of history textbooks, her opposition to an educational system that measures "every child's head . . . by every other child's head," her arguments that a standing army is "a standing menace to liberty," her analyses of the economic interests behind American interventions abroad, or her insistence that the term *literature* should be expanded to include "the poorest, paltriest dime novel, detective story, daily newspaper report, baseball game account, and splash advertisement"⁶—would bring her to the heart of current debate across a range of disciplines, including literary criticism. Her feminist rhetoric and analysis, often eerily prophetic of Shulamith Firestone or *Sisterhood is Powerful*, retain their power to elate or scandalize her readers, just as the most famous incident of her life retains its dramatic impact.

In December 1902, Herman Helcher, a former student of de Cleyre, shot her three times point blank as she was boarding a streetcar. "The boy who shot her was taken the next morning to her bedside for identification," one of her friends recalled. "She said she knew him as a comrade and former pupil, and when they asked her if she recognized him as the man who shot her, she said, 'No'" (Duff 106–7). Refusing to identify or testify against her assailant, de Cleyre "wrote him a letter of forgiveness" (Duff 107) and raised money for his defense. The *New York Tribune* quoted her reasons: "I desire to spare this man from punishment, because in my opinion punishment is illogical, brutal, stupid and cowardly. All so-called criminal acts are in my opinion manifestations of disease, either in society or in the individual. I would consider it as senseless to punish Herman Helcher [*sic*] as to punish a fever patient for seeing visions" ("Won't Appear" 4). To a Philadelphia newspaper she explained, "I have no resentment towards the man. If society were so

constituted as to allow every man, woman and child to lead a normal life there would be no violence in this world. It fills me with horror to think of the brutal acts done in the name of government. Every act of violence finds its echo in another act of violence. The policeman's club breeds criminals" (*Philadelphia North American*, Dec. 24, 1902, qtd. Avrich, AA 175). This incident was one of many that caused de Cleyre to be revered in her lifetime not only as a powerful voice, but as a powerful exemplar, of anarchist thought.

Ideology and Imagination

When Paul Avrich introduced the works of Voltairine de Cleyre to a modern audience in his still definitive biography (1978), he stressed the need for a commensurate study of her literary contribution. This book is intended in part as a response to that call, which has gone essentially unheeded for a quarter of a century. Since then, important shorter studies have enhanced our understanding of the intersections between de Cleyre's life and her anarchist feminism (Marsh), her broader place in anarchist feminist history (McElroy), her views on sexuality and her rhetorical techniques (Palczewski). The time has come for a longer critical study that takes into account the full range of her work in order to establish her place in the history of progressive literary art in the United States.

Angela Davis describes "progressive art" as assisting people "to learn not only about the objective forces at work in the society in which they live, but also about the intensely social character of their interior lives" (200). Throughout her brief but prolific career as a writer, de Cleyre worked to create just such a "progressive art" aimed at provoking social and psychological transformation—an art that would enable her to speak herself and her readers free of the dominant ideologies of her day. The challenge of "getting the institutions out of men's minds" defined the development of that art not only at the level of its revolutionary content, but also at the level of rhetoric, narrative structure, and poetic form. It is at this level, in fact, that de Cleyre works in the most interesting ways to destabilize the ideological configuration of her readers' interior lives, disrupting habits of imagination that confine it within dominant ideological paradigms. This study, then, explores the literary strategies de Cleyre used to create rhetorics of self-decolonization: ways of rearticulating internal and external experience in terms of opposi-

tional paradigms that make resistance to oppression imaginable and therefore possible.

The significance of this inquiry is twofold. First, it is intended to illuminate the work of one of the most original American feminists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The analysis presented here is based on a reading of the many works de Cleyre published in small anarchist and freethought periodicals, as well as her correspondence and some unpublished manuscripts. On a number of these works no literary scholar has commented at all; none of the fiction discussed in this study has received any literary critical attention, for example, and one of the works discussed in chapter 3, her story "The White Room," has received no mention in any publication on de Cleyre. Second, de Cleyre was a significant force in a major turn-of-the-century social movement—one of the two or three such movements with the most dramatic, if finally unrealized, potential to transform American society and culture at its roots. Setting her work in this broader context demonstrates not only her literary significance but the importance of her work for the fields of feminist theory, women's studies, literary and cultural studies, and progressive social and cultural analysis.

Part I: Revolution of the Mind

One reason de Cleyre's rich intellectual legacy has been left essentially unclaimed for so long is its deep-rootedness in the milieu of late-nineteenth-century anarchism—a context that, from her day onward, has been subject to widespread misrepresentation, compounded in our own time by misappropriations of the term *anarchist* for ideas and actions that de Cleyre would have abhorred. To recover her legacy, then, involves recovering its historical context. For this reason, chapter 1, "Freeing Thought," examines the roots of what de Cleyre called her "opposition to things as they are," exploring the social and intellectual context of her early involvement with freethought and her progression to anarchism as reflected in her essays, lectures, and poetry. In particular it examines her relation to "infidel" and "liberal" thought, beginning with her lecture "The Economic Tendency of Freethought" (1890), a blasphemous sermon against "the fiend, Authority." In its structure this work traces the logic of de Cleyre's early move from freethought to anarchism, as does her diptych of poems "The Christian's Faith" and "The Freethinker's Plea" (1887). In these poems the characteristic fusion of Enlightenment

rationalism and high romanticism in de Cleyre's poetry first manifests itself in the imaginary landscapes (spacescapes, in this case) that she offered for her readers' interior explorations of what it might feel like to become "free." The chapter concludes with de Cleyre's understanding of freedom in the context of the particular versions of anarchism she engaged.

With the context established in chapter 1 for de Cleyre's general interpretation of, and relation to, anarchism, chapter 2, "Fated Fruit," approaches one of the most difficult issues in her work, her analysis of violence. The chapter distinguishes among three different categories: her most general position on whether violence is ever justified; her position vis-à-vis other anarchists in internal debates about the use of individual acts of violence as a tactic for spreading anarchism and anarchist views; and her perspective on the relationship between various categories of individual violent actions on the one hand and state violence on the other. Setting her complex interpretations of violence in the context of the spectrum of anarchist positions on violence and the historical shifts in those positions during her career as a writer, this chapter argues against the idea that de Cleyre began as a pacifist and later embraced a different position. The argument is based on an analysis of her criteria for evaluating acts of violence, whether by governments, desperate victims of the social "order," theoretical anarchists, or those who erroneously identify their ideas as "anarchist." Arguing that for de Cleyre those criteria depended on the relation of the act in question to the exercise of human freedom, the chapter looks specifically at her images of McKinley and Czolgosz in "McKinley's Assassination from the Anarchist Standpoint," of Bresci in her essay "Anarchism," and of the mother who kills her child in her poem "Betrayed." It provides a more extended analysis of three of her works: her poem "Ut Sementem Feceris," on a woman flogged to death in czarist Russia; her essay on the martyred Spanish educational reformer Francisco Ferrer; and her story "A Rocket of Iron," about an industrial accident that provokes an explosion of revolutionary consciousness. (Like the works analyzed in chapter 1, none of these has received critical attention of any kind.) The latter is notable for its intriguing representation of the narrator's consciousness, in which a sequence of narrative reversals draws readers toward various interpretations that are then disrupted or refuted. The chapter argues that this shifting of representation enacts the shifts in vantage point necessary for seeing the full complexity of de Cleyre's views on forcible resistance.

One of de Cleyre's major interests was the question of how women in

particular can resist the configuring of their inner lives by the social, political, and economic configurations of an oppressive society. Her analysis of women's oppression and resistance is the subject of chapter 3, "Sex Slavery," one of the key terms in her work that associate her with the movement known as "sex radicalism." De Cleyre's feminist elaboration of sex radical principles, fused with her anarchist principles more generally, makes her one of the most revolutionary feminists writing at the turn of the twentieth century. It is this aspect of her writing that has brought her the most important critical attention she has received in recent years in the work of such critics as Marsh, McElroy, and Palczewski. This chapter seeks to move beyond the frontiers of that work by taking into account a wider range of sources, including several stories of which there has been no published analysis, as well as de Cleyre's feminist essays, articles, and lectures. These sources help identify the close intertwining of questions of love, sexuality, and economic justice in de Cleyre's anarchist feminist thought: her scathing psychological and economic indictments of marriage in "Sex Slavery," "The Death of Love," "They Who Marry Do Ill," and "The Case of Woman vs. Orthodoxy"; her analysis of the connections among sex slavery, wage slavery, and ideologies that divide the soul from the body in her stories "To Strive and Fail" and "The Sorrows of the Body"; her contributions to anarchist ethnical theory in "The Past and Future of the Ladies' Liberal League"; and her analysis of gender oppression as a version of class oppression in "The Heart of Angiolillo." An extended analysis is devoted to this story, an antiromance that explores the interlocking physical, psychological, and social dynamics of sex slavery in an account of a couple who set out idealistically to pursue the path of sexual freedom but become trapped in a killing relationship of subordination and dependency.

Chapter 3 concludes with an analysis of de Cleyre's most complex and intriguing consideration of the relation between sex slavery and the institutions in "men's minds": her story "The White Room," in which an artist's conception of his wife is figured in a symbolic architectural space he creates for her but from which, paradoxically, she is excluded for the fifteen years during which it is his secret lifework. Drawing on Judith Butler's discussion of abjection and discursive materialization in *Bodies That Matter*, the conclusion of the chapter discusses the White Room as a figure for the process by which the ideological construction of the perfect virtuous wife is identical both to the construction of the husband's subjectivity and to the abjection—here the literal casting-out—of the real woman, who becomes homeless as a result of his grand project. It

ends with de Cleyre's perspective on a paradox Butler describes: that the "abjected outside . . . is, after all, 'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation" (3).

De Cleyre's resistance to the construction of "woman" embodied in "The White Room" was part of her lifelong engagement in what Gerda Lerner has called "a struggle for the control of the symbol systems of a given society" (222). Such struggle was at the core of her understanding of the word *revolution*, which she defined as "some great and subversive change in the social institutions of a people, whether sexual, religious, political, or economic." She cites as an example the "great religious revolution" of the Reformation: "a profound alteration in human thought—a refashioning of the human mind" ("Mexican Revolution" 254). In the service of such a refashioning, de Cleyre crafted a rhetoric that would dismantle a hegemonic discourse and construct an oppositional set of metaphors capable of reconfiguring (to invoke Althusser's description of ideology) her audiences' "imaginary relation . . . to the real relations in which they live" ("Ideology" 155). This rhetoric is the subject of chapter 4, which argues that de Cleyre's quintessential rhetorical device is a spiraling art of repetition that, through its turnings and returnings, becomes not only a call for revolution but a rhetorical enactment of revolution: a liberation of words to liberate the mind.

Part II: Selected Writings

The analysis described thus far constitutes part I of *Gates of Freedom*. Part II provides a selection of de Cleyre's work, organized thematically in sections. Section 1 corresponds to the biographical sketch in this introduction, providing a chronological overview of the hope, despair, and solidarity revealed in de Cleyre's achievements as a letter writer. Section 2, "Freedom, Justice, Anarchism," corresponds to chapters 1 and 2, with a chronological selection of works representing de Cleyre's analysis of violence, its causes, and the failures of the justice system. Section 3, which corresponds to chapters 3 and 4, focuses on her views of women, sexuality, and the body.

In choosing works for this necessarily limited selection, I have been guided first and foremost by the need for textually accurate transcriptions of all of de Cleyre's feminist work, most of which is included unabridged in section 3. The space limitations resulting from the completeness of that section have necessitated abridging slightly some texts presented in sections 1 and 2. The guiding principle has been to pre-

serve passages of most relevance to current social and political debates; to avoid cutting anything directly relevant to “the woman question”; and to cut primarily from works that are accessible in the 1914 *Selected Works*, Franklin Rosemont’s collection of her poetry (*Written in Red*), or Paul Avrich’s collection of the Haymarket speeches (*The First Mayday*). I have chosen to omit entirely some long and important texts, even though they are discussed in part I, which are available in the collections mentioned above or in relatively accurate web versions. These include, most notably, “The Economic Tendency of Freethought,” the feminist poem “Betrayed,” and “Francisco Ferrer” and “Direct Action,” versions of which are available at the Anarchy Archives website (Pitzer College), a rich, invaluable, and constantly expanding resource for research in the history of anarchism.⁷

My hope is that these selections, together with the analysis presented in part I, will help to end de Cleyre’s long exclusion from the canon of U.S. literatures, an exclusion puzzling not only because of the extent of her work but because of her literary achievement. *Gates of Freedom* is thus a response to the need for a major literary study of a writer who was arguably the most radical, revolutionary feminist at the turn of the twentieth century--one whose relevance early in the twenty-first century will become more clear as more work on her continues to emerge.

One

FREEING THOUGHT

... not in demanding little, not in striking for an hour less, not in mountain labor to bring forth mice, can any lasting alleviation come; but in demanding much—all.

—Voltairine de Cleyre,
“The Eleventh of November, 1887”

Freethinkers

“The history of intellectual progress is written in the lives of infidels,” freethinker Robert Ingersoll proclaimed in 1894 (“Voltaire” 177). In the hundreds of works Voltairine de Cleyre published from the 1880s until her death in 1912—poems, sketches, essays, lectures, pamphlets, translations, and short stories¹—she was proud to count herself among the infidels. De Cleyre defined freethought broadly as “the right to believe as the evidence, coming in contact with the mind, forces it to believe. This implies the admission of any and all evidence bearing upon any subject which may come up for discussion” (“Economic Tendency” 3). Among the many subjects that came up routinely in late-nineteenth-century free-thinking circles were marriage, sexuality, birth control, women’s rights, race relations, labor relations, evolution, the existence of God, and the relation of the individual to the state.² The names of freethought peri-

odicals reflected their commitment to follow truth wherever it led: the *Boston Investigator*, the *Truth Seeker*, the *Open Court*, the *Liberal*, and at the far left end of the spectrum *Lucifer, the Light Bearer*. As a young freethinker in 1886, de Cleyre wrote for and then edited a now lost periodical, the *Progressive Age*, presumably of a similar nature (Avrich, AA 40).

The ideas espoused by such periodicals, and by the various “secular” and “liberal” organizations for whom de Cleyre lectured, had their origins in eighteenth-century French rationalism, to which de Cleyre, of course, owed even her name. American freethinkers traced their more recent heritage to American revolutionaries whom the French writers influenced, especially Thomas Paine, an object of near idolatry among some of de Cleyre’s peers. Paine had vehemently opposed “the adulterous connection of church and state” and rejected all religious creeds, the divine authority of all religious texts, and all forms of organized religion. In *The Age of Reason*, the sensationally controversial book of 1794–95 that led Teddy Roosevelt a century later to call him a “filthy little atheist” (S. Warren 111), Paine announced his belief in “one God, and no more,” his hope for “happiness beyond this life,” his belief in “the equality of man,” and his concept of religious duty: “doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow-creatures happy.” Saying, “My own mind is my own church,” he set about systematically, and with an acerbic contempt for anything that cannot be rationally demonstrated, to disprove almost every tenet on which Christian churches were founded (948–49 and *passim*). In de Cleyre’s day as in ours there was a society named for Thomas Paine, and his books were regularly advertised in the freethought periodicals to which she contributed. American freethinkers often copied both his style and his ideas; indeed de Cleyre imitates his method in an early lecture, “The Economic Tendency of Freethought” (1890), which opens with a quotation from Paine but proceeds immediately to a systematic attack on the one aspect of religious thought he had not rejected, the existence of God.

De Cleyre’s terse deconstruction of deism in “The Economic Tendency of Freethought,” so indebted to Paine’s own methods, bespeaks—even in her ability to go beyond him—the liberatory effect he must surely have had on her life as she struggled out of the spiritual and intellectual crisis of her late adolescence. This effect is evident in a diptych of poems she wrote in 1887, “The Christian’s Faith” and “The Freethinker’s Plea,” which she introduced with a note: “The two following poems were written at that period of my life when the questions of the existence of God and the divinity of Jesus had but recently been settled,

and they present the pros and cons which had been repeating themselves over and over again in my brain for some years" ("Christian's Faith" 18). The form of the second poem, heroic couplets, announces the kinship of "The Freethinker's Plea" with eighteenth-century rationalism, reflected strongly in the deist view that grounds its argument: "Then learn the law if thou would'st live aright; / And know no unseen power, no hand of might, / Can set aside the law which wheels the stars; / No incompleteness its perfection mars" (24). De Cleyre argues here for a law-abiding, Newtonian nature and a corresponding system of natural justice that accounts, in purely natural and logical terms, for the truth of the biblical decree that we will sow what we reap ("Think not, O man, that thou can'st e'er escape / One jot of Justices' law"). But the rationalist argument is fused with a passionately Romantic view, strongly inflected by transcendentalism, which comes close to replacing a deity with a deified Nature. Transfigured by this romanticism, Paine's moral imperative of contributing to others' happiness expands into a more sweeping, ecstatic version of his creed of human equality:

Then let your life-work swell the great flood-tide
 Of love towards all the world; the world is wide,
 The sea of life is broad; its waves stretch far;
 No range, no barrier, its sweep may bar. . . .
 Go down into the felon's gloomy cell;
 Send there the ray of love: as tree-buds swell
 When spring's warm breath bids the cold winter cease,
 So will his heart swell with the hope of peace.
 Be filled with love, for love is Nature's God;
 The God which trembles in the tender sod,
 The God which tints the sunset, lights the dew,
 Sprinkles with stars the firmament's broad blue,
 And draws all hearts together in a free
 Wide sweep of love, broad as the ether-sea.
 No other law or guidance do we need;
 The world's our church, to do good is our creed.

(24, 26)

This fusion of Enlightenment rationalism and high romanticism was to characterize all of de Cleyre's work; it provided a logical and activist vision of her place in the world, but also a substitute for the affective dimensions of the religion she was renouncing. In the first poem of the

diptych, “The Christian’s Faith,” these dimensions are present in the wrenching emotion of Jesus’ desperately longing plea for all sinners, significantly including “prisoners in cells”—a phrase to which “the felon in his cell” corresponds in “The Freethinker’s Plea”—to accept the “gifts of penitence, / Forgiveness and charity and hope!” Jesus stretches “hands of mercy through the bars,” offering his crucifixion to expiate the prisoner’s “deep guilt” and promising seductive “peace” for all: martyrs, sinners, mourners, those who suffer, those who “live for others’ good” (22). The blank verse, contrasting with the optimistic heroic couplets of the second poem, accentuates the tragedy of this first, Christian plea of the diptych—not only Jesus’ urgency as the lines end with his call unanswered, but also, in the light of the next poem, the implicitly tragic consequences of offering a mere symbol, the cross, as a response to the literal fact of human suffering. In “The Christian’s Faith” the prisoner is presumed guilty, in need of expiation; and those who live for others are somehow subtly summoned away from that commitment, called toward a “peace” that will transcend their engagement with the problems of their fellow humans. “The Freethinker’s Plea,” in what is clearly a specific rebuttal, ends with the prisoner’s hope of “peace” deriving from human action—a real person’s descent into the felon’s cell. Interestingly, Jesus’ call for his disciples to visit those in prison is imputed in these poems not to him but to the freethinker; the internal debate represented by the diptych centers not on the historical Jesus, whose teachings some freethinkers admired, but rather on the idea of a Savior whose divine sacrifice, as opposed to earthly and human expressions of love, is erroneously viewed by the Christian as a solution to the world’s problems.

While Paine’s influence is strong in “The Freethinker’s Plea,” the poem also reveals de Cleyre’s early rejection of his deism; the ending seems to eschew even his tentative hope for an afterlife, and the poem’s emphasis on a universe ruled by inexorable natural law, without intervention by a higher power, seems carefully to exclude the deist idea of a creator who set those laws in motion. The “God” of this poem is love, “Nature’s God,” not the deist watchmaker. As Sidney Warren points out in his history of freethought, “Although the more radical freethinkers worshipped at the shrine of Thomas Paine,” the “true inheritors of his philosophy” were the Free Religionists, the most conservative wing of the freethought movement (110). Free Religionists organized the National Liberal League to work for separation of church and state, and later, in response to some members’ desire to expand its agenda (to include, for

example, such “liberal” goals as women’s suffrage), succeeded in sustaining that focus under the new, less ambiguous rubric of the American Secular Union. It was under the auspices of this organization that de Cleyre delivered her lecture “The Economic Tendency of Freethought” to the Boston Secular Society.³ The deist legacy of the American Secular Union, as well as its almost exclusive dedication at this time to the question of separation of church and state, sheds some interesting light on de Cleyre’s tributes to, and departures from, Paine in this speech, which undoubtedly traces, in its structure, the logic of her early move from freethought to anarchism.

Ironically appropriating a traditional sermon structure for her infidel purposes, she opens her lecture with a reference to a text from Paine, cited as a preacher might cite an opening verse from the Bible: “On page 286, Belford-Clarke edition, of the ‘Rights of Man’ . . .” Later she underscores the analogy to a sermon by referring to another quotation as “a sort of supplementary text,” which she presents, however, with calculated disregard for accuracy: “taken, I think, from a recent letter of Cardinal Manning, but if not Cardinal Manning, then some other of the various dunce-capped gentlemen.” The pairing of faithfulness to chapter and verse in Paine with an airy refusal even to verify the name of her clerical source is a comment on the relative sanctity of her sacred and secular points of reference. The cardinal is just any one of many interchangeably dunce-capped religious fools who recently objected to a monument to the freethinkers’ martyr Giordano Bruno; Paine was an individual who thought for himself, an author with a name (like Bruno’s) that we can be sure of. Appropriately for a blasphemous sermon against “the fiend, Authority” in any form, however, de Cleyre immediately undercuts even Paine’s authority with her attack on deism, and proceeds to accord Manning a perverse, or inverse, authority by proving that his frightened predictions about the atheist and anarchist tendencies of freethought are exactly right.

In this, as in her deconstruction of deism, de Cleyre’s (relatively) conservative audience would not for the most part have wished to follow, but her procedure in this lecture, presumably with exactly this audience in mind, is to push freethinking methods to their furthest logical limit, applying them even to freethought itself. Having dismantled any rational basis for deism, she disproves in short order the existence of God, demonstrates that the logic of atheism is the logic of anarchism since both refuse homage to Authority, and urges that freethinkers pursue

their syllogisms to their logical conclusions. She argues that the true tendency of freethought is, first, beyond deism and toward atheism, and then beyond a preoccupation with religious questions toward an antigovernment stance: a recognition that vesting supreme authority in government repeats the mistake of conceptualizing supreme authority as God. In both cases a concept of privileges granted by an authority (God, government) is substituted for the concept of rights: "Once more the hypothesis is that the Government, or Authority, or God in his other form, owns all the rights, and grants privileges according to its sweet will."

At issue, implicitly, is the American Secular Union's myopic focus on separation of church and state. Freethinkers who continue unquestioningly to support the state despite their opposition to the church fail to see that they have merely chosen a new God: "Do you know what you do?—Craven, you worship the fiend, Authority, again!" ("Economic Tendency" 3). Stop "digging, mole-like, through the substratum of dead issues" centered on religion, she urged; there is no point in wasting time hugging oneself in the camps of dead enemies—those who burned Bruno at the stake in 1600, for example. Freethinkers should stop "gathering the ashes of fires burnt out two centuries ago"—an image that, by implication, places freethinkers in the intellectual camp of their already-dead enemies the cardinal and his fellow dunces. The great questions now are not religious or political but economic: "the crying-out demand of today is for a circle of principles that shall forever make it impossible for one man to control another by controlling the means of his existence" ("Economic Tendency" 3)

Does freethinking, as Cardinal Manning (or some such person) insists, lead to the subversion of social and civil order? De Cleyre answers triumphantly in the affirmative, if "social and civil order" means the travesty of "order" that constitutes the status quo. Her proof reveals the influence of another enlightenment freethinker, Mary Wollstonecraft, whose impact on de Cleyre it would be hard to exaggerate. De Cleyre admired her as much as she did Paine, deploring the absence of equal recognition for Wollstonecraft among freethinkers: "It shows that their pretended equality belief is largely on their lips alone" ("Past" 43). The integration of gender and class issues in de Cleyre's demonstration that the current "order" is a farce reveals that women's issues, which modern critics have sometimes sorted into a separate category in analyzing her works, were central to her social criticism from the very beginning.

Social Order! Not long ago I saw a letter from a young girl to a friend; a young girl whose health had been broken behind a counter, where she stood eleven and twelve hours a day, six days in the week, for the magnificent sum of \$5. The letter said: "Can't you help me to a position? My friends want me to marry a man I do not like, because he has money. . . ." Social Order! When the choice for a young girl lies between living by inches and dying by yards at manual labor, or becoming the legal property of a man she does not like because he has money!

Walk up Fifth Avenue in New York some hot summer day . . . Look at palaces going to waste, space, furniture, draperies, elegance. . . . Then take a car down town; go among the homes of the producers of that idle splendor; find six families living in a five-room house. . . . Space is not wasted here. . . . This is social order!

Next winter, when the "annual output" of coal has been mined, when the workmen are clenching their hard fists with impotent anger . . . while the syndicate's pockets are filling. . . . Moralize on the preservation of social order! . . . watch a policeman arrest a shoeless tramp for stealing a pair of boots. Say to your self, this is civil order and must be preserved. . . .

Subvert the social and civil order! Aye, I would destroy, to the last vestige, this mockery of order, this travesty upon justice!

Break up the home? Yes, every home that rests on slavery! Every marriage that represents the sale and transfer of the individuality of one of its parties to the other! Every institution, social or civil, that stands between man and his right; every tie that renders one a master, another a serf; every law, every statute, every be-it-enacted that represents tyranny; everything you call American privilege that can only exist at the expense of international right. ("Economic Tendency" 7)

As the progress of this argument makes abundantly clear, the antiauthoritarian principles of freethought, including enlightenment feminism, had laid the groundwork for de Cleyre's move toward a position beyond them; and it seems reasonable to suppose that the steps in this argument, published only two years after de Cleyre began her career as an anarchist, reproduced the progress of her own ideas as she moved out of an Enlightenment-based version of freethought toward anarchism. The relation, and tension, between the two positions is implicit in the fact that while she presented this lecture to the freethinking Boston Secular Society, she published it in the anarchist journal *Liberty*, one of many

periodicals whose names—the *Rebel*, the *Alarm*, the *Firebrand*, *Frage Arbeter Shlime* (Free voice of labor), *Free Society*, *Freedom*, *Freiheit* (Freedom), the *Herald of Revolt*—reveal both their ties with, and their distance from, the freethought to which journals such as the *Investigator* or the *Truth Seeker* were dedicated. Freethought and anarchism were close in some respects; if not all freethinkers were anarchists by any means, on the other hand most anarchists were freethinkers (Avrich, AA 39). But there was in fact a greater distance than this might imply between de Cleyre's association with the *Progressive Age* and with *Liberty*, a distance measured by the long year and a half of the Haymarket affair of 1886–87. Soon after the end of it—her progress mediated by Darrow's socialist interpretation of labor issues and her readings in anarchist theory—the broad outline of the anarchist views de Cleyre would elaborate over the course of her career was in place.

A Normal Life

When Herman Helcher shot de Cleyre on December 19, 1902, her refusal to prosecute him or even identify him as the assailant was based on the central tenets of anarchism as she and her anarchist contemporaries articulated them: that society must be reconstituted on a foundation of human liberty to allow each individual “a normal life”—a life “in full possession of [one's] selfhood”; that to this end “the sources of life, and all the natural wealth of the earth, and the tools necessary to co-operative production, must become free of access to all”; and that such a social order can exist only in the absence of government, which “is, has always been, the creator and defender of privilege; the organization of oppression and revenge” (“Eleventh of November” 26; “Direct Action” 240; “Eleventh of November” 27).

In place of government, all forms of which “rest on violence, and are therefore wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary,” anarchists called for “a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by man-made law” (Goldman, “Anarchism” 50); “a condition of society regulated by voluntary agreement” (*MotherEarth* 7.5, July 1912: 155). What condition this might be, especially what economic system it might entail, was a source of debate, but about the essential requirement—“no compulsion,” as de Cleyre put it—there was agreement, based on the principle that human freedom requires “the total disintegration and dissolution of the principle and practice of authority” (“Anarchism” 112; “Our Present Attitude” 79–80). For that reason, at the core of every anarchist vision of the “new

social order” was a decentralized arrangement of people in charge of their own productive lives, joined in forms of association that would enrich, rather than diminish, their freedom. As Kropotkin explained in his article on anarchism for the 1911 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, these associations would be created by mutual agreement and would be, like all “organic life,” not fixed and immutable but open to change in response to ever-changing circumstance. In place of a rule by law and authority,

harmony [would be] obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilized being. In a society developed on these lines, the voluntary associations which already now begin to cover all the fields of human activity would take a still greater extension so as to substitute themselves for the state in all its functions. They would represent an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes and degrees, local, regional, national and international—temporary or more or less permanent—for all possible purposes: production, consumption and exchange, communications, sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection, defence of the territory, and so on; and, on the other side, for the satisfaction of an ever-increasing number of scientific, artistic, literary and sociable needs. On the contrary—as is seen in organic life at large—harmony would (it is contended) result from an ever-changing adjustment and readjustment of equilibrium between the multitudes of forces and influences, and this adjustment would be the easier to obtain as none of the forces would enjoy a special protection from the state. (“Anarchism”)

As for the economic system implied in such arrangements, the spectrum of theory ran from individualist anarchism at one end to communist anarchism at the other, with a range of ideas in between: socialism, mutualism, the various ideas that coalesced into anarcho-syndicalism by the turn of the century, and other theories of collectivism and voluntary cooperation. De Cleyre’s 1901 lecture “Anarchism” and her lecture “The Economic Phase of Anarchism” describe her sense of the differences among these theories, and of the different role economic theory in general played in American as opposed to European anarchism. Writing for a European audience in “The Economic Phase of Anarchism,”

she explained that while most European anarchists entered the movement “by the door of economy,” Americans originally “got at anarchism from the political and social side,” and as a result developed distinctive “notions of anarchist economy” that are “quite different” from those of the Europeans. The older generation of American anarchists, she says, see these notions as a *sine qua non* of anarchism, while “the younger recruits”—“the new lights,” among whom she includes herself, “do not exaggerate the economic credo,” and do not require a particular economic “label” as a sign of membership in “the circle of the elect.” Having begun with these caveats, she proceeds to describe the “two great divisions” of individualism and communism, locating collectivism as a middle position “representing the concession of socialism to individualism,” and mutualism as a middle position representing the reverse. All positions begin with the assumption that because “what no man has produced, no man can lay more social claim to than another,” everyone is rightfully entitled to what every government in history has sought to deny: “equal social right to the use of the earth.” The disagreements arise over the question to which this assumption leads: “What kind of land tenure under freedom would best secure the free right of man to the use of the earth, and tend most to destroy the germs of a rebirth of government?” (1–2).

Individualism, she explained in her essay “Anarchism,” took “let alone” as the “key-note” of its economic program, assuming that the basic “institutions of Commercialism, centering upon private property, are in themselves good, and are rendered vicious merely by the interference of the State” (108). Individualist anarchists would thus keep such fundamental arrangements as “employer and employed, buying and selling, and banking,” but change practices of land ownership by basing it on use, with periodic redistributions based on community decisions, and an option for those who disagreed with those decisions to move to unoccupied “outlying lands” (108–9). Individualists, she says, emphasize competition as a great boon in a free society, opening “new avenues of industry.” To this de Cleyre responds with suspicion: “As to opening up new industries, which looks rather glittering, it’s a serious question whether there are not a deal too many industries already. Competition has brought the world’s products to our doors. It is a question whether it would not be better for us to go out of our doors into the world. It is also a question whether it would not be better instead of dragging things over the earth to develop the capacities of the earth about us” (“Economic Phase” 12).

This critique she identifies with anarchist communism (it was also her own, reiterated in other forms elsewhere, although she consistently rejected communism). Anarchist communism, she says, looks to obviate the need for “complicated administrations” by relying on cooperative association and local resources (“Economic Phase” 12), emphasizing worker self-regulation and organization into “independent producing groups” that take what they need and deposit the rest in warehouses for others to use (“Anarchism” 106). De Cleyre saw anarchist communism as an “evolution” of anarchist socialism, the distinction being that the former emphasized “more self-reliant development of home resources,” while anarchist socialism assumed much the same economic and urban development as then existed, only with the state, “the business agent of the property-owning class,” vanishing in tandem with that class. Anarchist mutualism placed the trade union at the center of “the free co-operative group.” Eliminating the need for employers, the union would “issue time-checks to its members, take charge of the finished product, exchange with different trade groups for their mutual advantage through the central federation, enable its members to utilize their credit, and likewise insure them against loss” (“Anarchism” 106, 103–4, 111).

One of de Cleyre’s major criteria for evaluating each economic position was the interpretation it offered of the state and its origins. She criticized anarchist socialists for assuming that the state has a simple origin in “a certain material condition” which, if eliminated, will simply eliminate the state; she saw the state as rooted not merely in material conditions but also in “the religious development of human nature,” and the task of eliminating it as therefore more complex than anarchist socialists believed. The individualists went too far in the other direction, she thought, relying exclusively on their understanding of the spiritual, metaphysical origins of the state and discounting its material origins. The truth lies not somewhere between these insights, she said, but in a “synthesis” (“Anarchism” 103–4, 105, 110–11).

Much of the debate about the ideal economic arrangements under anarchism centered on what kinds of collective arrangements were compatible with individual freedom. De Cleyre wrote satirically, for example, of communist schemes for regulating supply and demand: “Madam, about how many balls do your boys lose annually over the neighbors’ fence? . . . Miss, have you a lover? Ifso, how often do you write him, and how many sheets of paper do you use for each letter? . . . This is not intended as personal, but merely to obtain correct statistics upon which

to base next year's output" ("Glance" 10–11). Although de Cleyre was eclectic enough for Leonard Abbott to mistake her for an individualist anarchist (268)⁴ and Emma Goldman to mistake her for a communist anarchist (de Cleyre, "Correction" 473), for most of her career she took a stand in neither camp, preferring some middle ground between what she and most other anarchists saw as the dangerous egotism of the extreme individualists on the one hand—"the self the centre and circumference of all consideration" ("Philosophy of Selfishness" 2872)⁵—and, on the other, the danger that communist anarchism would simply, as nonanarchist forms of socialism threatened to do, reconstitute state authority in another form.⁶

Abbott quoted de Cleyre, in his review of her posthumous *Selected Works*, as saying she was an individualist anarchist, without explaining (or realizing?) that she later changed that position. De Cleyre did refer to herself in 1892 as having been one of the "individualists" in an earlier debate between individualists and communists ("Glance" 10), and she took this side in her 1893 speech "In Defense of Emma Goldman: The Right of Expropriation" when she distinguished between Goldman's views and her own: "Miss Goldman is a Communist; I am an Individualist. She wishes to destroy the right of property; I wish to assert it" (217). While several of her letters to her mother are equally unequivocal and consistent in rejecting communism (e.g., summer 1893), her embrace and then rejection of Individualism is more complex. In "The Economic Phase of Anarchism" she calls attention to the individualists' need to guarantee security of property, which would require some kind of voluntary associations whose definitions of crime and systems of punishment would vary widely from place to place, depending on the subscribers' degree of "brute instinct" or enlightenment. "I confess that I am not in love with all these little states, and it is . . . the thought of the anarchist policeman that has driven me out of the individualist's camp, wherein I for some time resided" ("Economic Phase" 13).

What she meant by individualism in such statements is more clear from "A Suggestion and Explanation" (1900), in which she refers to herself as having been, but no longer being, "an Individualist in economy, of the Dyer D. Lum order." Lum serves in de Cleyre's essay "Anarchism" as the example of "Anarchist Mutualism," which she calls "a modification of the program of Individualism, laying more emphasis upon organization, cooperation, and free federation of the workers" (111).⁷ Although *mutualism* is a term from Proudhon, de Cleyre uses the American Proudhonian Benjamin Tucker, editor of the influential anarchist periodical

Liberty, as an example of the individualism from which she is distinguishing Lum's mutualism ("Anarchism" 111); indeed in "The Economic Phase of Anarchism" she calls Tucker individualism's "high priest" (5). The distinction implies that even when she called herself an individualist anarchist, what she meant by that term was Lum's mutualist individualism rather than Tucker's version of individualism, which she saw as deriving in part from his lack of direct personal contact with industrial oppression and workers' associations.⁸

Eventually, as Avrich has demonstrated, de Cleyre took a position that the Spanish anarchists Ricardo Mella and Fernando Tarrida del Mármol, followed by Elisée Reclus and Errico Malatesta, advocated in the 1890s as "Anarchy without adjectives" (Avrich, AA 149–50). "I am an Anarchist, simply, without economic labels attached," she replied when Goldman misidentified her to the Amsterdam Congress as a communist anarchist ("Correction" 473). "I am not now, and never have been at any time, a Communist," she explained. "I was for several years an individualist, but becoming convinced that a number of the fundamental propositions of individualistic economy would result in the destruction of equal liberty, I relinquished those beliefs. In doing so, however, I did not accept the proposed economy of Communism, which in some respects would entail the same result" ("Correction" 473).

In general de Cleyre's economic vision was based on a confidence that true freedom would produce forms of society we have yet to imagine: "I simply leave the form of future economy to the future, assured of one thing: *it is the height of folly to build a system for the future based upon present mechanical development. I reckon always that the as yet undeveloped factor, the unknown, will revolutionize all our economic schemes. . . .* Meanwhile all plans involving more liberty are good, as tentative effort in the right direction" ("Suggestion"). She believed that the economic forms a truly free society would take cannot be fully imagined in an unfree society, would depend anyway on local conditions, and might well combine arrangements that are now assumed to be incompatible. Anarchism, she said, "is not an economic system; it does not come to you with detailed plans of how you, the workers, are to conduct industry; nor systemized methods of exchange; nor careful paper organizations of 'the administration of things.' It simply calls upon the spirit of individuality to rise up from its abasement, and hold itself paramount in no matter what economic reorganization shall come about" ("Anarchism" 112, 100–101). In her view as in Kropotkin's, the formal details of the new society would develop naturally, organically. In the meantime, the task of anarchists

was not to dissipate their unity in debates over the merits of this or that system but to agitate for the conditions of liberty that would be germinal for a new order: most fundamentally, the abolition of government and the establishment of “world wide freedom to use all natural sources”; “the restoration and the perpetual indivisibility of the earth and the great stores within her bosom” (“Ye Have the Poor” 12; “Our Martyred” 18).

What de Cleyre envisioned most broadly as the new social order was a “nationless world” of free individuals; more explicitly, “thousands of small communities stretching along the lines of transportation, each producing very largely for its own needs, able to rely upon itself, and therefore able to be independent” like its individual members (“November Eleventh, Twenty Years Ago” 41; “Anarchism and American Traditions” 134). In such a world “all natural resources would be forever free to all, and the worker individually able to produce for himself sufficient for all his vital needs, if he so chose, so that he need not govern his working or not working by the times and seasons of his fellows” (“Anarchism” 112). Such a system would bring an end to the “economic insanity” of “dragging products up and down the world, which is the great triumph of commercialism.” De Cleyre gives as an example of this insanity a friend in Philadelphia who makes shoes in a factory next to the house of a senator. The senator’s wife orders shoes from a Chicago firm, which orders them from this same factory next to her house, which ships them from Philadelphia to Chicago, where they are then shipped back to Philadelphia to the senator’s wife—“while any workman in the factory might have thrown them over her backyard fence!” (“Why” 29). In contrast to such insanity, “Anarchism affirms the economy of self-sustenance, the disintegration of the great communities, the use of the earth” (“Anarchism and American Traditions” 133).

As this statement suggests, de Cleyre assumed that a “normal life” is one in communion with nature, and she longed for a social transformation involving “The death of cities, the people resurgent upon the land” (“November Eleventh” 11).⁹ Like most anarchists of her day,¹⁰ however, she did not oppose industrialization, only the horrifying consequences of the means by which industry was controlled and operated: the loss of the dignity of labor, the theft of the products of labor from those who produced them, the grotesque overproduction of useless “things, things, things” while the workers who produced them starved for basic necessities, the concomitant production of false “needs” and artificial desires, the military imperialism necessary to create and sustain global markets

to support the whole system of exploitation, and the necessarily violent, repressive role of the state in protecting the interests of the tiny minority who profit from that exploitation (“Dominant Idea”).

Voluntary Abundance

Both the agreements and disagreements among anarchists of de Cleyre’s generation came out of a long tradition of moral, social, and political philosophy. Typically,¹¹ American anarchists traced their intellectual legacy to late-eighteenth-century British and American political theorists who believed individual liberty could be realized only by the elimination or severe curtailing of state institutions. These theorists, to some of whom freethinkers also traced their lineage, included Thomas Jefferson, whose pronouncements on the dangers of government de Cleyre often quoted (e.g., “Anarchism and American Traditions” 119–20, 125; “Anarchism in Literature” 140); Thomas Paine, whose view that “Governments are, at best, a necessary evil” de Cleyre cites as a foreshadowing of anarchism (“Anarchism in Literature” 140); and William Godwin. De Cleyre admired Godwin’s arguments in *Political Justice* against state institutions, including marriage. She quoted his call for the abolition of marriage (“Marriage is law and the worst of all laws. . . . Marriage is an affair of property and the worst of all properties”), and saw him as “more deeply radical” than either Jefferson or Paine because of his concern with economics: “‘My neighbor,’ says he, ‘has just as much right to put an end to my existence with a dagger or poison as to deny me that pecuniary assistance without which I must starve’” (“Anarchism in Literature” 140–41).

Beyond these Enlightenment predecessors, American anarchists looked to the nineteenth-century American inventor and social innovator Josiah Warren (ca. 1798–1874), to whom de Cleyre refers in “Anarchism” (111). Warren was the founder in 1833 of the first American anarchist journal, the *Peaceful Revolutionist*. Believing that “The man of virtuous soul commands not nor obeys” (qtd. Reichert 68), Warren sought a social arrangement that would lead to a higher expression of human potential through the social harmony that can only develop in an atmosphere of true liberty. He argued that individuality is “the vital principle of order”; that “the absolute SOVEREIGNTY OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL” is the true foundation for social harmony; that the only legitimate function of government is the protection of that “self-sovereignty,” which “rises ABOVE ALL INSTITUTIONS”; and that the regulation not of each other but

of our commerce with each other is the proper means of achieving true civilization. By regulating our commerce rightly, we can “withdraw the elements of discord, of war, of distrust and repulsion, and . . . establish a prevailing spirit of peace, order, and social sympathy” (*True Civilization* 169; *Equitable Commerce* 18, 12; *True Civilization* 10ff.; *Equitable Commerce* 19, 12, xi). Beginning in 1827, Warren experimented in the right regulation of commerce by opening “Time Stores” where exchange was based on payment in hours of labor, and by founding three experimental communities. The first, in 1835, soon failed, but one of them, Utopia, was quite successful for almost thirty years, from around 1846 to 1875. Another, Modern Times, succeeded briefly until its fame drew an influx of eccentric “impostors” whose nudism, self-starvation, polygamy, and other such newsworthy activities contributed to its demise (Reichert 66–68, 74–75). The notoriety of Modern Times was based in part on its association with sexual freedom, which Warren, although not a personal advocate of free love (worse than a “crown of thorns” for those who try it), saw “as a clear, direct expression of an individual’s self-ownership” (Reichert 75; McElroy, “Free Love”).

Warren was one of many early anarchist or protoanarchist thinkers who sought to reframe the question of the just constitution of society in economic rather than political terms. All of them saw the systems of order they advocated as inevitable or necessary final stages in historical progress toward what Warren called “true civilization” and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was apparently the first, in 1840, to call “anarchy”—a term he appropriated to designate a principle of order rather than disorder.¹² By anarchy he meant the absence of a “sovereign” in any form, “the insufficiency, of the principle of authority” as the basis for order in society, and “the government of each man by himself”—an “absolute liberty, which is synonymous with order” (Proudhon 89, 90, 95).

Proudhon defined anarchy as “a form of government or constitution in which public and private consciousness, formed through the development of science and law, is alone sufficient to maintain order and guarantee all liberties” (92). He saw society as in fact moving “closer . . . every day” to this form of order based on the absence of government—on the rejection not only of a sovereign but of authority altogether: “the notion of authority, like the notion of an absolute being, is only an analytic concept that is powerless to provide a constitution for society, regardless of the source of authority and the manner in which it is exercised” (90). Proudhon deplored all government:

To be governed is to be . . . noted, registered, enrolled, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished . . . trained, ransacked, exploited, monopolized, extorted, squeezed, mystified, robbed; then, at the slightest resistance . . . repressed, fined, despised, harassed, tracked, abused, clubbed, disarmed, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed. (Qtd. in Avrigh, *AP* 142)

He called for a peaceful social transformation whereby, through a "People's Bank" and a system of "mutualism" (what his influential American proponent William B. Greene termed "mutual banking" [Avrigh, *AP* 138–39]), producers of goods and services exchange them on the basis of equivalences in hours of labor, money is lent at almost no interest, and the power to earn interest on capital, together with any need for a state, dissolves into a system "based on free agreement and regulated by mere account keeping" (Kropotkin, "Anarchism").

Proudhon's definition of liberty as "not the daughter but the mother of order" was the masthead of one of the foremost anarchist periodicals in the United States, Benjamin Tucker's *Liberty*, a formative influence on de Cleyre in her first explorations of anarchist thought ("Making" 157). Proudhon's other most famous aphorism was the sometimes misunderstood "Property is theft"—that is, the false conception of property derived from Roman law, as opposed to the idea of "real property" that de Cleyre explains as meaning "to the producer the exclusive possession of what he has produced" (Kropotkin, "Anarchism"; de Cleyre, "Anarchism" 110). Proudhon's emphasis on theft as the basis of the current social order strongly informs de Cleyre's views of property, especially as expressed in her recurrent images of the "theft of the sea and air" ("Bastard Born" 37), "the thievery of pure air . . . the robbery of toil" ("Economic Tendency" 3); the illicit "appropriation" of "the earth, the money, and the machines" ("Direct Action" 233). "I wish a sharp distinction made between the legal institution of property, and property in the sense that what a man definitely produces by his own labor is his own," she said in 1908. "It is the legal institution of property which has produced this condition, in which the elemental cries of humanity are swelling up in a frightful discordant chorus, because the elemental needs of humanity are being denied" ("Our Present Attitude" 78–79).

Proudhon's sense that the elimination of monarchy is a stage on the road to eliminating government itself would have placed him, to writers

like de Cleyre, self-evidently in the line of thought in which she located the architects of the American Revolution (most prominently Thomas Jefferson), as well as the American transcendentalists, whose writings from the 1830s through the 1850s, like Josiah Warren's, provided American anarchists with one of the distinctively American precedents they were fond of citing to prove that "the spirit of Anarchism, so far from being a foreign importation, is rooted in our very soil" (Abbott 266). De Cleyre called attention to Emerson's "spiritual Anarchism": "from the serene heights of self-possession, the Ego looks out upon its possibilities, unawed by aught without" ("Anarchism in Literature" 145). Thoreau was even more clearly a predecessor, especially in "Resistance to Civil Government," in which he responded to Jefferson's dictum, "That government is best which governs least" with what anarchists saw as the logical next step: "That government is best which governs not at all" (1672). Many anarchists of de Cleyre's generation also admired Walt Whitman as a great voice and embodiment of anarchist principles. De Cleyre praised him as "the stanch [staunch] proclaimer of blood and sinew, and the gospel of the holiness of the body. . . . supremely Anarchist" ("Anarchism in Literature" 143, 152), but her friend George Brown noted that just as she "cared little for Shakespeare and much for Olive Schreiner," she found Swinburne "glorious" and "Whitman hardly interesting" (Kelly et al. 150). Both her prose and poetry reveal that she preferred Byron, Swinburne, Rossetti, and most of all Shelley: "*He* was the Prometheus of the movement, he, the wild bird of song, who flew down into the heart of storm and night, singing unutterably sweet the song of the free man and woman as he passed" ("Anarchism in Literature" 147).¹³

De Cleyre would have been most strongly influenced, however, by what Kropotkin described as "modern anarchism," which he saw as emerging after Proudhon, and of which the most prominent early "leading spirit" was Michael Bakunin (1814–1876) (Kropotkin, "Anarchism"). Bakunin's abhorrence of church and state, his collectivism—in the sense of the call for "labour groups and free communes" to own in common "all necessities for production" (Kropotkin, "Anarchism")—and his role as Marx's chief opponent in the struggle over decentralization that led to Bakunin's purging from the First International in 1872, made him a powerful influence on many anarchists in the United States in the 1870s and 1880s (Wexler 46–47; Avrich, *AP* 26–27, 29). Among these were the Haymarket martyrs Albert Parsons and August Spies (Avrich, *HT* 115, 124),¹⁴ whose ideas and experiences in turn influenced de Cleyre. Bakunin's influence in the United States was thus

at its peak just as de Cleyre began studying anarchism in the wake of the Haymarket incident and of the 1888 debate in which, newly influenced by Clarence Darrow, she argued the socialist side against an anarchist whose rebuttals pushed her toward her first serious engagement with anarchist writings ("Making" 157).

De Cleyre never attributes her ideas to Bakunin by name, perhaps because of his association with an ethical code she would not have condoned, or perhaps because she was more drawn to the works of Kropotkin by the time she had hit the full stride of her career in the 1890s, the period during which his ideas came to dominate American anarchist theory, according to Alice Wexler (47).¹⁵ Even so, in speeches throughout her career de Cleyre referred approvingly to the ideas of Haymarket martyrs drawn from Bakunin;¹⁶ she was strongly influenced at the turn of the century by anarcho-syndicalism, which drew on Bakunin's vision of freely federated trade unions as "living germs" of a new social order (Avrich, *AP* 30); and she admired the Industrial Workers of the World, founded in 1905 and influenced by Bakunin's theories (Avrich, *AP* 30). In "Direct Action" (1912), one of her last works, de Cleyre praised the IWW as the only union to recognize that there was a "social war" going on (232).

In addition, Bakunin's popular *God and the State* had been translated into English in 1883 by Benjamin Tucker (David 102, 107; Avrich, *AP* 28), whose periodical *Liberty* was such an important formative influence on de Cleyre's anarchism, and his works were advertised in this and other periodicals de Cleyre read. Whatever his direct and indirect influence on de Cleyre, church and state figure prominently as the twin pillars of oppression in such works as "Sex Slavery" or "The Economic Tendency of Freethought," the latter of which she published in *Liberty*. Because vehement opposition to the church was a staple of the free-thinking tradition that de Cleyre inherited from her father and confirmed during her ferocious emotional struggles against the authoritarian regime of her convent school ("Making" 156), Bakunin's views on religion would already have been congenial to her. Further, Bakunin's pairing of church and state as co-oppressors resonated with freethinkers' traditional opposition to an "adulterous" union of the two, which the "Liberal" and "Secular" organizations that sponsored so many of de Cleyre's lectures were dedicated to severing.

In addition to her tours for the American Secular Union in the late 1880s, for example, de Cleyre lectured in Kansas in 1890 and 1891 for the Woman's National Liberal Union, founded in 1890 by the free-

thinking feminist Matilda Joslyn Gage (Marsh 60).¹⁷ De Cleyre shared Gage's interest in the ways church and state collude to oppress women particularly; she also shared the platform with Gage, Olympia Brown, Marietta Bones, and Helen Gardener at the first convention of the WNLU, as the *Washington Post* reported, mistaking the impoverished, working-class de Cleyre for one of the educated elite: "Miss Voltairine de Cleyre, a tall, Vassar-like maiden, then gave a highly scientific discussion of 'The position of woman in the present crisis.' It was hardly a paper for a public, miscellaneous gathering, but suited rather to the class-room. . . . 'The latter half of the century bids fair to run with more streams,' she declared, 'than flowed from the throne of Louis Seize a hundred years ago.' This blood-thirsty sentiment met with enthusiastic approval" (qtd. Brammer 17, 18). The WNLU had been founded partly in protest against the exclusive focus of the National Woman Suffrage Association on votes for women—a goal that anarchists, by definition, saw as fundamentally irrelevant to social transformation. As Marsh points out, Gage's organization passed some resolutions that were "congenial to the anarchist viewpoint": a resolution, for example, "That the centralization of power, whether in the Church or in the State, is dangerous to civil liberty and to individual rights, and . . . must be constantly and firmly opposed" (qtd. Marsh 60).

Freethinkers opposed the union of church and state, and most opposed the church; anarchists also opposed the state—"God in his other form" ("Economic Tendency" 3)—and saw the church as logically imbricated with current forms of the state by its very nature. Hostility to religion and the church were thus, by definition, a given in most anarchist thought, expressed, for example, in a workers' march through downtown Chicago in 1885 with banners reading "Down with Government, God, and Gold" (Avrich, *HT* 93) or in Johann Most's much-reprinted essay "The God-Pestilence."¹⁸ When de Cleyre argued in "The Economic Tendency of Freethought" that the logical tendency of freethought is not only atheist but antigovernment, in effect she was arguing that freethinkers should recognize the second of Bakunin's two authoritarian "bêtes noires," church and state, as a logical concomitant of the first.

De Cleyre's long meditation on religion throughout her career derived no doubt both from freethought and anarchist theory and from the indelible imprint of the convent school. Her Grand Rapids freethought paper, the *Progressive Age*, included essays that her friend and lover James Elliott implies were particularly expressive of her anger

at the Catholic Church, as the editions he had found (now apparently lost) contained “a number of articles by her on convent life” (letter to Ishill, Feb. 3, 1917). In a letter to her sister from Pittsburgh dated “February 7, E.M. 288” (Era of Man, 288 years after Bruno’s martyrdom by the church), she rejoices at an overflow audience for her lecture on “Convents”: “the biggest house . . . that has been in the hall in three years.” Similarly, her 1887 article “Secular Education,” calling for an end to religion in the schools, invokes a fearful vision of the influence of the church in general—a “vast array of falsely instructed minds, fortified with the barrier, ‘Thou shalt not think’” (774). The church is a “rich, grinding, hated, accursed monopoly” (775), a juggernaut rolling over “the writhing form of mental liberty” (774); and the Catholic Church, with its “nefarious schemes,” its “dark and damnable doctrine of ignorance,” and its elaborate organizational network, is most dangerous of all: “There are 225 000 000 Catholics in the world, and the United States has its full proportion of them. Do you realize the power of that army of dupes . . . ? Do you realize that they multiply like rats, and are daily and hourly making proselytes? . . . Do you realize that the stratum of our liberties has a sub-stratum . . . honeycombed, tunneled through and through by these never-ceasing never-tiring forces . . . [?]” (774).

This intense hostility to religion placed de Cleyre squarely in the tradition of the most angry and blasphemous freethinkers, especially in her early years. It underlies many of her most sarcastic rhetorical flights, such as her irreverent deconstruction of a passage from Song of Solomon (“Case of Woman vs. Orthodoxy”) and her description of the New Testament as a “garbage-heap of logic,” although she sees in this heap a mixture of the “most beautiful” stories among the “most repellent” (“Ye Have the Poor”). In general de Cleyre’s anarchism was closely bound up with this rebellion against religion; indeed, in “The Making of an Anarchist” she concludes that “what Anarchism finally means” is “the whole unchaining of life after two thousand years of Christian asceticism and hypocrisy” (162). Her early mentor (perhaps lover) Dyer D. Lum inspired her with his easy ability simply to renounce his religious background, thus achieving a liberation—an “unchaining of life”—that she found more difficult to attain. As a “man of action,” she said, Lum had the advantage over her, the “theorist”: “Having ‘weighed Him, tried Him, found Him naught,’ he threw the Jewish God and cosmogony overboard with as much equanimity as he would have eaten his dinner. . . . the man of action . . . settles the question at once; if there is any suffering attached to the attempt, he suffers once and has done with it; while

the theorist, the fellow who walks tiptoe round the edge of the battlefield, dies a hundred times and still suffers on" ("Dyer D. Lum," *SW* 289).

Such passages imply a complete rejection of religion intellectually; at the same time they suggest an emotional kinship to the religious sensibility, something that has always been recognized in interpretations of de Cleyre as a kind of anarchist nun. In addition, even de Cleyre's intellectual views on religion were more complex than might at first appear, as many of the occasional references to religion throughout her letters and publications confirm. In an address commemorating Thomas Paine, for example, she praised him for taking a position with which she—and most freethinkers—did not agree, a religious position that offended both the faithful and the infidel French philosophes. She was touched by his perception that

underneath the gewgaws and tinsel of religions the undying heart of man, the man of all the past, had been expressing its noblest aspirations. And Paine stripped off the tinsel and said, "Put your hand here,—it beats"; and because he tore the tinsel, the orthodox would have stoned him; and because he said "it beats," the philosophers would have whetted the knife. And between the two he stood firm, proclaiming what he believed, not counting the cost. ("Thomas Paine" 282)

De Cleyre, too, recognized the humanity of the "beating heart" of religion. Most strikingly, her essay "The Philosophy of Selfishness" in 1891 warned against the dangerous tendency to respond to "the death of God" by descending into mere egocentrism, "making self the centre and circumference of all consideration" (2872). Bound up in the trappings of religious devotion, she says, there was always "something that was true," which might be lost if mere individualism replaces the kind of selfless devotion to a cause expressed in earlier ages through religion.

Indeed, although de Cleyre subscribed initially to the idea that anarchism and religion were incompatible, she eventually came to believe instead, with C. I. James, "that one's metaphysical system has very little to do with the matter"—that even a belief in God could be compatible with anarchism, as in Tolstoy's case ("Anarchism" 97). She nonetheless retained an intense personal hostility toward religion throughout her life, expressing it wordlessly even on her deathbed as a priest passed by her hospital room (Avrich, *AA* 235). "God is deaf, and his church is our worst enemy" ("Sex Slavery" 350–51) is a characteristic example of her

view, as is a stanza from one of her poems attacking the church's disregard for material need:

You have seized, in the name of God, the
Child's crust from famine's dole;
You have taken the price of its body
And sung a mass for its soul!

("The Gods and the People" 52)

De Cleyre never reneged on this general viewpoint, but her work is nonetheless full of biblical allusions; as a Protestant at the convent school she was allowed to read the Bible (Avrich, AA 31), and perhaps she took advantage of this small liberty as a form of rebellion. At any rate, she knew the Bible well and chose her biblical references carefully, using them primarily for two purposes. First, she often throws in the faces of oppressors the prophecy of their scriptures that those who sow the wind reap the whirlwind (Hos. 8:7), and that the measure they now mete out will be measured to them again (Matt. 7:2). "[I]n the end the reckoning will be paid," she said in 1906 of a wave of repressive laws against anarchists: "You will burn it in, and brand it deep into the sluggard brains of the people at last, that their brothers are to be hunted down and killed for trying to liberate them. You will have taught them the lesson of cruelty; and they will show you that they have learned it. 'For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be meted back unto you again, and heaping full'" ("Memorial" 33). Her sense that such retributions are the consequence of natural, not divine, law infuses the irony with which she calls attention to oppressors' disregard of their own scriptures. Second, she uses biblical allusions to reveal the ironic distance between the teachings of the "outlaw" Jesus and the current practices of "Christian" nations whose civilization is supposedly based on his ideas. Thus, for example, in her defense of Goldman's expropriation speech, she quotes the whole of Matt. 23:2-7 and 13-33, with its attack on the scribes and Pharisees who love the uppermost rooms at feasts, devour widows' houses, are full of extortion and excess, resemble whited sepulchres hiding dead men's bones, and partake of the prophets' blood. The passage culminates in the peroration: "Ye serpents! Ye generation of vipers! how can ye escape the damnation of hell!" De Cleyre follows this long Bible reading with an indignant commentary: "Yes; these are the words of the outlaw who is alleged to form the foundation stone of modern civilization, to the authorities of

his day. Hypocrites, extortionists, doers of iniquity, robbers of the poor, blood-partakers, serpents, vipers, fit for hell!" ("In Defense" 207–8).

In keeping with this view of Jesus as a protoanarchist (a view she elaborately rejects in "Ye Have the Poor," however), de Cleyre compares Goldman's advice to the hungry to take bread with Jesus' theft of corn on the Sabbath—"This grand, foolish person, this beggar-tramp, this thief who justified the action of hunger, this man who set the Right of Property beneath his foot, this Individual who defied the State . . ." (208). Many anarchists were fond of pointing out that their ideas accorded better with Jesus' teachings than did the practice of Christians who purported to believe those ideas. "Christmas Adventures of Jesus," an unsigned article published in *Mother Earth* for December 1907, is a typical example. In this sketch, Jesus returns to earth and visits the Holy Land, where he sees on display the very nails with which he was crucified—"of American manufacture, furnished to the foreign markets at lower prices than at home" (427). Discouraged by the marketing of his passion, he visits Europe, where he hears ubiquitous complaints that military budgets are "altogether inadequate to meet Christian demands" (428). At Ellis Island he is locked up as insane, then rescued by a preacher who sees his potential as a mission prayer-leader and kitchen help. Tramping the streets of New York at Christmastime, he reflects bitterly that he is "a success" after all—"as the unpaid agent of the department stores" (430). Finally he enters an anarchist meeting, where he briefly feels his own spirit on earth for the first time, just before the meeting is broken up by "a uniformed mob"—that is, the police (430).

Whether or not de Cleyre had an editorial hand in this piece, as is possible,¹⁹ it expresses one of her views of Jesus, whom she describes variously as a gentle, pitiable figure persecuted by the state for his beliefs; as a grand trampler of property rights; and as mistaken on key issues. While she sometimes quoted Jesus' "subversive teachings" ("Ye Have the Poor" 1) for purposes similar to those in "Christmas Adventures," she insisted that Christianity's founding on a belief in a supreme authority, supported by Jesus' explicit identification of himself with that authority, makes Christianity "utterly at variance" with anarchism despite some misleading similarities of the kind that always characterize opposites ("Ye Have the Poor" 9). Jesus said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's"; the anarchist says, "There is no Caesar, and there is no God—except of man's making" ("Ye Have the Poor" 12–13). Interestingly, one of de Cleyre's objections to Jesus was what she regarded as his version of communism: "The philoso-

phy of Christ was a simple voluntary communism among his disciples; The philosophy of Anarchism is voluntary arrangement by the people of their economic concerns, whether communistically or otherwise, and world wide freedom to use all natural sources" (12).

The title of De Cleyre's lecture "Ye Have the Poor Always with You," delivered in 1911 to what was presumably a small audience in the parlor of the Iroquois Hotel in Buffalo, points to her sense of the danger of Christianity as a rationale for inequality. She was disturbed particularly by the ascetic nature of Jesus' teachings, which she saw as the opposite of anarchism: "The philosophy of Christ was voluntary poverty. The philosophy of Anarchism is voluntary abundance" (12). Anarchism encouraged people to seize the abundant life to which they were entitled in this world; Christianity encouraged resignation and waiting. Her reactions to an African American church service in Atlanta sum up her sense of the dangers of religion. Listening outside the church door on the theory that in a city where African Americans were excluded from white gatherings she should not intrude on theirs, de Cleyre was disturbed by the "narcotic sleep" induced by religion (11). She seems to have been unaware of the African American liberation theology of her day, but would presumably have criticized its grounding in a concept of absolute authority anyway, since she saw authority as always and everywhere incompatible with freedom. It would be difficult, she thought, to wake former slaves from the "opium" of religion, to convince them

that nowhere is there a kingdom of God wherein the ignorant and the exploited shall be rewarded for their denial here; that nowhere shall useless suffering be made good; that nowhere shall they ever see the face of that dead man who said, "The last shall be first and the first last"; that he is dust and ashes like all the dead, and never rose and never will rise from it; and that they too shall pass and be no more, and leave no memory nor imprint of themselves save as they struggle here and now for the equal lives of men in this world. ("Ye Have the Poor" 12)

De Cleyre believed passionately that the struggle for "equal lives" in this world must be a real response to real needs. When the Mexican Revolution came, she remarked on some anarchists' slowness in taking up the cause, warning of the dangers of living "in the clouds of theory," becoming "so theory-rotted" that one is "helpless" to act ("Report" 62). Like anarchists all over the world, then, de Cleyre looked back not only

to a legacy of theories but of acts. Foremost among these was the Paris Commune of March 18–May 28, 1871, “the clinging point for many legends,” as she called it (“Paris” 243). In the Commune, the possibility of taking over a local government and transforming it along communal principles, many of which reflected anarchist ideals, was briefly realized before a horrific bloody suppression. De Cleyre saw the Commune as having failed because it was the work of too small a group of people, without the mass base that would have provided the insight necessary to avoid its most fatal mistake of leaving “common resources in private hands” and “stupidly defend[ing] the property right of its enemies” (“Commune” 11; “Paris” 246). “They attempted to break political chains without breaking economic ones,” she said, “and it cannot be done” (“Commune” 12). Nonetheless she revered the spirit of the Communards—“the redolence of outbursting faith, that rising of the sap of hope and courage and daring, like an incense of spring” (“Paris” 245). She spoke every March at commemorations of the Commune (Avrich, AA 96), and one of her last, unfinished projects was to translate a work of Louise Michel, the Communard “saint” to whom she has often been compared (Havel 13; Avrich, AA 234).

Finally, like most American anarchists of her time, de Cleyre was profoundly influenced by Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921), whose works began to appear in American anarchist journals in the 1880s, and whose popular *Appeal to the Young* appeared in English in 1887 (Avrich, AP 81; David 102). De Cleyre met Kropotkin in London in 1897; he also made highly publicized, successful tours of the United States in that year and 1901. Kropotkin wrote on the ethical basis of anarchism, one of de Cleyre’s interests, and elaborated the scientific basis of anarchism in his theories of “mutual aid” as an evolutionarily adaptive mechanism that characterizes all successful species. As de Cleyre paraphrases this part of his message, “men worked in common while they were monkeys yet; if you don’t believe it, go and watch the monkeys. They don’t surrender their individual freedom, either” (“Anarchism” 107).

De Cleyre’s anarchism was influenced in some way by all these strands of thought, from Paine and Warren, through Proudhon and the transcendentalists, to Bakunin and Kropotkin, as well as by her extensive study of many other anarchist writers and publications and by her broad reading in literature, always with an eye to what she saw as the “innumerable bits of drift here and there, indicative of the moral and intellectual revolt” of anarchism (“Anarchism in Literature” 140). She found such signs not only in Zola and Ibsen and Olive Schreiner, but also in

Edmund Burke, Hawthorne, Henry James; even in “a toady like Walter Scott” (“Anarchism in Literature” 150). In addition, despite her often impassioned atheism, she admired the pacifist Christian teachings of Tolstoy, who took his title *War and Peace* from Proudhon, and whose views de Cleyre, like many anarchists, regarded as a form of anarchism.

De Cleyre thus saw herself as part of this broad community of writers and thinkers, past and present, who shared in myriad forms a commitment to “Anarchy, the dream of social order without government” (“Eleventh of November” 27). Her infidel freedom of thought—including her infidel departures from the less radical version of freethought she inherited from Wollstonecraft and Paine—was translated not only into her prolific contributions as a speaker and writer, but into the goal of “*being what we teach*” (“Gates of Freedom”). Among her contemporaries she was, sometimes with irritation, noted for her success in that project. As Marsh says, de Cleyre’s insistence on living out her ideals “forced those who came in contact with her to confront her philosophy in the particular as well as in the abstract” (146). Most memorable in this regard was her letter to Senator Hawley after McKinley’s assassination by a supposed anarchist:

Dear Sir:—I see by this morning’s paper that you are reported to have said you would be willing to “give \$1,000 to have a good shot at an Anarchist.” I wish you either to prove that you were in earnest, or to make you retract the utterance as one unworthy of—I will not say a *senator*, but a *man*.

I am an Anarchist, have been such for fourteen years, am publicly known to be such, having both spoken and written much upon the subject. I believe the world would be far better off if there were no kings, emperors, presidents, princes, judges, senators, representatives, governors, mayors, or policeman in it. I think society would have great profit (and more in the omission than the commission) if instead of making laws, you made hats—or coats, or shoes, or anything of some use to someone. I hope for a social condition in which no man restrains his fellow but each restrains himself. I refer you to the catechism enclosed, an expression of the principle of the Anarchists of Philadelphia.

Now if you desire to have a good shot at an Anarchist, it will not cost you a \$1,000.

You may by merely paying your carfare to my home (address below) shoot at me for nothing. I will not resist. I will stand straight

before you at any distance you wish me to, and you may shoot, in the presence of witnesses.

Does not your American commercial instinct seize upon this as a bargain?

But if the payment of the \$1,000 is a necessary part of your proposition, then when I have given you the shot, I will give the money to the propaganda of the idea of a free society in which there shall be neither assassins nor presidents, beggars nor senators.

VOLTAIRINE DE CLEYRE.

Philadelphia, 807 Fairmount Ave.

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Two●

FATED FRUIT

Anarchists are opposed to every kind of violence; everyone knows that. The main plank of anarchism is the removal of violence from human relations.

—Errico Malatesta

Anarchism has nothing in common with violence, and can never come about save through the conquest of men's minds. But when some desperate and life-denied victim of the present system does strike back at it, by violence, it is not our business to heap infamies upon his name, but to explain him as we explain others, whether our enemies or our friends, as the fated fruit of the existing "order."

—Voltairine de Cleyre,
"Our Present Attitude"

The Question of Methods

De Cleyre's position on the means by which "the dream of social order without government" could be realized belongs to a late-nineteenth-century anarchist debate too complex to be rendered here in full, but its broad outlines are necessary to frame clearly her particular version of anarchism and the revolutionary rhetoric she developed to express it. As she said, "Apart from the question of ideals, there is the question of method. 'How do you propose to get all this?' is the question most fre-

quently asked us" ("Making" 162). It was also a question frequently asked among anarchists themselves, although there was fundamental agreement on one major point: the necessity for "direct" methods of bringing about social transformation rather than indirect, "political" methods. By definition as opponents of government, anarchists agreed in rejecting the ballot box—the "dice-box" de Cleyre called it in "Sex Slavery" (343)—because, in the words of a more modern anarchist slogan, "No matter who you vote for, the government will get in." As Kropotkin explained, because the state throughout history has been "the instrument for establishing monopolies in favour of the ruling minorities," it is impossible to use it for the purpose of destroying those monopolies; thus anarchists should eschew any tactics, such as the formation of political parties, that would have the effect of "infusing fresh blood" into the state (Kropotkin, "Anarchism"). This rejection of "political" means for change went hand in hand with the call for social revolution—a fundamental change in the entire social order that would establish individual liberty by restoring free access of all to the earth's resources, as opposed to some form of alleviation that would fix small inequalities but leave intact the structural framework supporting them. "There are those," de Cleyre said, "who think they know precisely how overwork and underwork and poverty, and all their consequences of spiritual enslavement, are to be abolished. Such are they who think they can see the way of progress broad and clear through the slit in a ballot box" ("Paris" 251–52).

The anarchist emphasis on direct action was founded in a view Noam Chomsky describes: the location of freedom in the productive life of the individual rather than, for example, in the forms and procedures of representative democracy. Anarchists of the tradition he is referring to¹ criticize representative democracy, "First of all because there is a monopoly of power centralized in the State, and secondly—and critically—because representative democracy is limited to the political sphere and in no serious way encroaches on the economic sphere. Anarchists of this tradition have always held that democratic control of one's productive life is at the core of any serious human liberation, or, for that matter, of any significant democratic practice" (*Radical Priorities* 245–46). In de Cleyre's words, "to be free one must have liberty of access to the sources and means of production." In her thinking about the American Revolution, she concluded "that the political victory of America had been a barren thing; that a declaration of equal rights on paper . . . was after all but an irony in the face of facts; that what people wanted to make them really

free was the right to things; that a 'free country' in which all the productive tenures were already appropriated was not free at all . . ." ("Why" 22).

In keeping with this focus on control of one's productive life as the core of freedom, the method de Cleyre advocated for bringing about a new social order, the "New Time" ("November Eleventh" 13), was the immediate and direct expropriation, by the dispossessed from the dispossessor, of the resources of nature, machinery, and labor that no one is entitled to own, and to which everyone should have free access. In her paraphrase of the Haymarket anarchists' message, "You are not helpless . . . you workers who labor and do not share . . . you have only to learn . . . to trust yourselves to take your rights, by no indirection, through no intermediary, but openly on the spot where they are denied from the one who denies them . . ." ("November Eleventh" 9). De Cleyre's only arrest was at a 1908 anarchist demonstration at which she told some two thousand workers, according to the newspaper, that her audience should unite in "direct universal expropriation" of "the land, the mines, the factories."² One of her most powerful speeches was "In Defense of Emma Goldman: The Right of Expropriation," in response to Goldman's 1893 imprisonment for telling workers at a mass rally that, if the rich denied them work and bread, they should take bread. Opening with an allusion to Jesus' theft of corn on the Sabbath and his instructions to his disciples to steal a young colt because he had "need of it," de Cleyre cited Cardinal Manning's statement in the *Fortnightly Review* that "a starving man has a natural right to a share of his neighbor's bread." At fifty cents a copy, she remarked, his argument was merely "a piece of ethical hair-splitting to be discussed in after-dinner speeches by the wine-muddled gentlemen who think themselves most competent to consider such subjects when their dress-coats are spoiled by the vomit of gluttony and drunkenness," whereas Goldman made her statement to hungry working people and was therefore arrested (206–9). De Cleyre goes on, like Shakespeare's Mark Anthony (indeed she alludes to the passage) to praise Goldman's admonition while pretending, elaborately, not to praise it:

what shall those do who are starving now? That is the question which EMMA GOLDMAN had to face; and she answered it by saying: "Ask, and if you do not receive, take—take bread." I do not give you that advice. Not because I do not think the bread belongs to you; not because I do not think you would be morally right in taking it . . . not that I do not

think the world will ever be saved by the sheep's virtue of going patiently to the shambles; not that I do not believe the expropriation of the possessing classes is inevitable, and that that expropriation will begin by just such acts as EMMA GOLDMAN advised . . . (212–13)

Ideas such as those de Cleyre expressed in this lecture—the rejection of half-measures, the insistence on the complete restoration of all that has been unjustly stolen from the majority by a privileged few—were what set anarchist methods apart from those of most other groups who envisioned social change. Samuel Fielden, one of the two anarchists condemned to a life imprisonment in the Haymarket affair, had summed up the difference: “When a burglar enters the house, they tap him on the shoulder and say, ‘let’s us argue this thing; let’s harmonize: take seventy-five per cent of what I have but leave me the rest.’ We . . . say to him, ‘lay it down’ (Avrich, *HT* 93).³ De Cleyre described her turn toward anarchism as a realization that merely agitating for better wages or an eight-hour workday was not enough, “that all such little dreams are folly. That not in demanding little, not in striking for an hour less, not in mountain labor to bring forth mice, can any lasting alleviation come; but in demanding much—all” (“Eleventh of November 1887” 24–25). Eventually de Cleyre identified this ultimate demand for “all” with the anarcho-syndicalist strategy of a worldwide general strike (“Ave” 73; “Direct Action” 240–42). Workers “can win nothing permanent unless they strike for everything,—not for a wage, not for a minor improvement, but for the whole natural wealth of the earth. And proceed to the direct expropriation of it all!” (“Direct Action” 240). She rejected the idea that such an action would require an anarchist army to defeat the military forces the state would undoubtedly call out. The military would be powerless “against a real General Strike,” she argued—“against the solid wall of an immobile working-mass” who simply cease work, thereby revealing “that the whole social structure rests on them; that the possessions of the others are absolutely worthless to them without the workers’ activity” (“Direct Action” 241–42).

A general strike and direct expropriation were among the many tactics anarchists discussed, as were other forms of union action and the many kinds of “peaceful experiment” through which de Cleyre believed the only “final solution” could come (“Making” 162). These experiments included the establishment of anarchist communities, alternative forms of commerce such as mutual banking, and the founding of “modern schools” based on the models of the revolutionary Spanish educator

Francisco Ferrer, whose execution in 1909 brought his ideas worldwide renown. De Cleyre's lecture "Francisco Ferrer" (1910) reveals her special faith in education as a method of social transformation. Responding to those who were baffled that the Spanish government should execute a mere teacher, she mocked their conclusion that he must have been teaching "the overthrow of social order in Spain" by advocating "sedition, rebellion, riot, in his schools!" (300). The truth, she said, is that "the real offense was the real thing that he did" (302): teaching ideas—science, especially evolution and chemistry—that would indeed have the effect of "instigating the overthrow of social order in Spain" (300). That social order should and will be overthrown, she said, "and Ferrer was doing a mighty work in that direction" (300–301). At the same time she criticized those who concluded that Ferrer must have been a pacifist. He surely knew the kind of education he promulgated would lead to revolt, she said; his whole aim was to raise up a generation to resist tyranny. How they might resist was not his concern. He had himself participated in an abortive revolution in his twenties, but by the time of his execution his views had changed: "Slowly the idea of a Spain regenerated through the storm blasts of revolution, mightily and suddenly, faded out of his belief, being replaced . . . by the idea that a thorough educational enlightenment must precede political transformation, if that transformation were to be permanent" (311). She quoted approvingly what Ferrer told an old friend, Alfred Naquet, who continued over the years to advocate the forceful revolt that both of them had called for in their youth: "Time respects those works alone which Time itself has helped to build" (311).

De Cleyre's conclusions about Ferrer's methods offer an important insight into her own choices and perspectives. Ferrer hoped, she said, "to sap away the foundations of tyranny through peaceful enlightenment. He was right. But they are also right who say that there are other forces hurling towards those foundations; the greatest of these,—*Starvation*" (318). Here she is endorsing the choice of education, rather than "forcible resistance" ("Events" 21), as a method of achieving anarchist goals; on the other hand, she calls attention to the fact that other forces besides education are at work—forces, like starvation, that may propel their victims to more desperate, and violent, acts. Thus, running in counterpoint to her images of Ferrer as a peaceful educational reformer is a pattern of metaphor centered on the Virgin of Toledo, bedecked with "85,000 pearls, besides as many more sapphires, amethysts, and diamonds!"

Oh, what a decoration for the mother of the Carpenter of Nazareth! What a vision for the dying eyes on the Cross to look forward to! What an outcome of the gospel of salvation free to the poor and lowly, taught by the poorest and the lowliest,—that the humble keeper of the humble household of the despised little village of Judea should be imaged forth as a Queen of Gauds, bedizened with a crown worth \$25,000 and bracelets valued at \$10,000 more. . . .

And this in the midst of men and women working for just enough to keep the skin upon the bone; in the midst of children who are denied the primary necessities of childhood. (306)

De Cleyre represents this statue as an emblem of the church's role in sustaining a horrific system of oppression by withholding the kind of rational enlightenment Ferrer advocated. Clearly, she saw Ferrer's banquet for seventeen hundred starving children on a Friday, traditional Catholic day of self-denial, as an example of the anarchist "voluntary abundance" to which she opposed Jesus' "voluntary poverty" in "Ye Have the Poor Always with You." The church taught miracles and what would now be called creationism; Ferrer taught "the majestic story of the evolution of the cosmos," dispelling the authority of biblical miracles by teaching that "we are one in a long line of unfolding life that started in the lowly sea-slime!" (315). With Ferrer's death, she says, darkness closes in for a time "on the circle of light he lit," and "the Virgin of Toledo may wear her gorgeous robes in peace" (320). But against the Virgin of Toledo's temporary ascendancy she sets another image, "Our Lady of Pain," "Our Lady of Hunger" (319)—emblem of the other "forces" at work in addition to Ferrer's peaceful methods. This other lady hovers "somewhere, somewhere, down in the obscurity. . . . She is still now,—but she is not dead. And if all things be taken from her, and the light not allowed to come to her, nor to her children,—then—some day—she will set her own lights in the darkness" (320).

This image is not a call for forcible resistance, nor does it rescind or even detract from the statement that Ferrer was "right" in his choice of methods—right that time, not the sudden and mighty "storm blasts of revolution," must help build whatever lasts through time. It is not a call for violent revolution but a prophecy that, whether prepared or not by an educational enlightenment such as the one Ferrer proposed, the explosive will to human freedom, which refuses to be consigned to darkness, will find an outlet. The image of the Lady of Pain setting "her own

lights in the darkness” echoes an earlier reference to “the smoke and flame of the burning convents of July, 1909” (318), in the insurrection Ferrer was wrongly accused of instigating. The echo, then, is ironic: Ferrer cast a circle of light in the darkness of superstition whereby a fabulously wealthy church, together with the state, oppresses the Spanish people; he was ostensibly executed for inciting such violence as the firing of the convents; with his death the darkness closes in again and makes it inevitable that the lights set in the darkness next time will not be the light of education but, out of the darkness of hunger and pain, the torches of revolution.

It is typical of de Cleyre to leave the implications of this image at the level of metaphor; it is also typical that she should pair it with a carefully nuanced tribute to Ferrer’s peaceful method of education—a tribute that insists “He was right,” rejects nonetheless the interpretation of Ferrer as a Tolstoyan pacifist or “non-resistant,” and emphasizes, in passing, his long friendship with a man who disagreed with him as to the advisability of immediate forcible revolution. These careful nuances are fundamental to de Cleyre’s work, and should serve as a caution against reading her unambiguously as one of “The Tolstoyans,” as Reichert does, or even as someone whose views on the question of forcible resistance shifted dramatically over time from nonresistance to the advocacy of some forms of violence.

The background of the term *non-resistant* is important here; in the United States it was laden with the history of internal abolitionist debates, during the decades leading up to the Civil War, about the ethical status of ending slavery by the violent means of armed conflict. “Non-resistants” supported nonviolent means only (the modern term *nonviolent resistance* renders their theory and practice more accurately). Quakers, who have historically renounced all “outward strife” and “carnal weapons” on religious grounds, were a strong presence in this debate. Designations of certain anarchist views as “Quaker” in anarchist debates on forcible resistance at the turn of the century undoubtedly register an allusion to this antebellum abolitionist context, as does the term *non-resistant* in the writings of de Cleyre and other anarchists;⁴ whenever she questions nonresistance as a method there is, in the background, the whole question of how the slaves could ever have been freed without some form of violence. This is not to say that, from her anarchist position, she supported the violence of a state to achieve that goal; indeed she saw the Civil War as an unjust move to consolidate state power rather than a just war on slavery (letter to mother, May 27, 1907).⁵

De Cleyre's complex position on the question of "forcible resistance" belongs to a historical context, dating back to the 1870s, that a long legacy of distorted representations of anarchism in the media makes it difficult for modern readers to see clearly. The reason for this difficulty is that any discussion of anarchist debates on the use of force inevitably raises the specter of the crazed cartoon anarchist wielding bombs and dynamite. This caricature, invented in de Cleyre's day, has functioned since then to obscure the range and variety of anarchist positions, the important shifts in those positions that occurred even over the brief course of de Cleyre's lifetime both in individual anarchists' careers and across anarchist history more broadly, and, finally, the fundamental assumption on which anarchist discussions of pacifism, force, resistance, and nonresistance have consistently been based. This assumption is a good starting point for examining de Cleyre's position on the question of whether force should be used in self-defense and/or as a means of propagating anarchist goals and ideas. It is well summarized in the words of Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta: "Anarchists are opposed to every kind of violence; everyone knows that. The main plank of anarchism is the removal of violence from human relations."⁶ The debate follows from the question that then presents itself (in Malatesta's case, in the context specifically of the rise of fascism in Italy in the early 1920s). What response should anarchists make to the violence now present in human relations, whether enacted episodically in particular incidents of assault on individuals, or systemically through a social and economic arrangement that rests on and reproduces violence? As historian Staughton Lynd says, "The ultimate goal of all anarchists was a society that would function nonviolently without need of the aggressive state."⁷

Given this assumption, the question arose as to whether violence on the part of anarchists is ever justified as a means to this ultimately nonviolent, indeed antiviolent, end. On this issue there was a broad spectrum of opinion from 1875 or so onwards, ranging from nonresistance (pacifism or the "Tolstoyan" position) at one end to the advocacy of armed insurrection at the other, with a range of middle positions that regarded the use of force in self-defense as justifiable. Within these middle positions there was again a spectrum, ranging from a strict interpretation of self-defense as forcible self-protection against direct physical assault, to an argument that if the present system itself constitutes an ongoing physical threat to the lives and welfare of those it oppresses, the

forcible removal of that system is itself merely an act of self-defense. (The latter is in essence the argument de Cleyre's mentor Dyer Lum made in a letter of April 1, 1890.) Once again, for U.S.-born anarchists all these questions were posed against the recent background of antebellum debates on methods for ending slavery.

Overlaying the spectrum defined by the dichotomy of nonresistance and armed insurrection, and interpenetrating with it in various ways, was another spectrum, on which positions were defined (especially after the London congress of the anarchist International in 1881)⁸ with relation to the question of how anarchist ideals should be promulgated—through propaganda by the word alone? or also through “propaganda by deed”? If the latter, what legitimately constituted propaganda by deed—collective uprisings only (peaceful or armed), as the term originally implied? or also individual, extralegal acts of sabotage (burning municipal records, etc.) and attacks on or assassinations of “representative individuals of the existing order” (David 66)? Was the use of force justified in one case (e.g., the American Revolution or, later, the Mexican Revolution) but not in the other (e.g., Dyer Lum's proposal to dynamite Cook County Jail to release the Haymarket anarchists)? The distribution of anarchist views across these interrelated spectra changed significantly over time, especially over the last two decades of the nineteenth century. In particular, by the turn of the century a number of eminent anarchists had moved from support of individual terrorist acts to rejection and often abhorrence of such acts, and some advocates of active, armed resistance had backed off from that position. Saul Yanovsky, longtime editor of the anarchist Yiddish paper *Fraye Arbeter Shtime*, was an example. As Avrich says:

By [1901] . . . the apocalyptic fervor of the 1880s and 1890s, the belief that the social revolution was imminent and physical force unavoidable, had begun to fade. For the solution of social problems, Yanovsky concluded, anarchism needed a more constructive approach. Terrorism he had come to oppose with every fiber of his being. For him, a friend recalled, anarchism was “a philosophy of human dignity and cooperation, of love and brotherhood, not bombs.” “Direct action,” as the *Fraye Arbeter Shtime* put it, no longer meant violence or subversion, but rather the founding of libertarian schools, the fostering of workers' unions, the establishment of cooperative organizations of every type. Outraged by the assassination of President McKinley in 1901, Yanovsky insisted that anarchism, above

everything else, called for harmony and “peace among men.” Despite this, the offices of the *Fraye Arbeter Shlime* . . . were invaded and wrecked by an angry mob and Yanovsky himself was cornered and beaten. (AP 189)

De Cleyre has sometimes been classed, in her own time and ours, as a “Tolstoyan” or, alternatively, as a Tolstoyan who moved further and further toward support of forcible methods of “direct action.” I would suggest, on the contrary, that her position was complex but consistent over time, and that it belonged consistently to what she quite accurately described in 1903 as the broadest anarchist consensus: “while it would be idle to say that Anarchists in general believe that any of the great industrial problems will be solved without the use of force, it would be equally idle to suppose that they consider force itself a desirable thing, or that it furnishes a final solution to any problem. From peaceful experiment alone can come final solution, and that the advocates of force know and believe as well as the Tolstoyans” (“Making” 162).

Force, however—indeed, force for its own sake—was the single issue with which the media tended, with rare exceptions,⁹ to identify not only all anarchist tactics but all anarchist philosophy. As should be clear from the account of anarchism in chapter 1, or any historically informed description of anarchism from Kropotkin’s encyclopedia article to Chomsky’s “Notes on Anarchism” in *For Reasons of State*, the idea that violence is the essence of anarchism has always been a grotesque misunderstanding. In de Cleyre’s words from a newspaper interview after Herman Helcher shot her, “Contrary to public understanding, Anarchism means ‘peace on earth, good will to men.’ Acts of violence done in the name of Anarchy are caused by men and women who forget to be philosophers—teachers of the people—because their physical and mental sufferings drive them to desperation” (qtd. Avrich, *AA* 175). Nonetheless, the view that anarchism stood for violence instead of “peace on earth” spread rapidly in the mainstream press from the 1870s through the early 1900s as a result of several factors.

Foremost among these factors was the use of violence against strikers and demonstrators in the labor agitation that marked these decades—struggles for the eight-hour day, better wages, and the right to unionize, for example. Police, militia, and private security forces harassed, intimidated, bludgeoned, and shot workers routinely in conflicts that were just as routinely portrayed in the media as worker violence rather than state violence; labor activists were also subject to brutal attacks, threats of

lynching, and many other forms of physical assault and intimidation.¹⁰ In the United States, the question of how to respond to such violence became a critical issue in the 1870s, with the upswelling of labor agitation and attempts to suppress it violently. In the Socialistic Labor Party, to which many people who later identified themselves as anarchists originally belonged, German immigrants in Chicago debated *die Bewaffnungsfrage*—the question of self-defense or the “question of arming” (Avrich, *HT* 45; David 59). Should members of the SLP display arms and munitions in their marches to show that they would not be physically intimidated from their goals? Some did, organizing from 1875 into armed groups such as the *Lehr und Wehr Vereine* (Education and Defense Societies) for mutual protection at polling places and in demonstrations. Others argued against such displays (Avrich, *HT* 45–46). Certainly the spectacle of armed and uniformed immigrants marching in the streets was not interpreted by the media as what these groups announced it was—self-protection against potential assaults on their rights as citizens (see Avrich, *HT* 46). As Henry David explains, *die Bewaffnungsfrage* was a source of increasing dissension in the SLP by 1878, the year after the “Great Strike” that originated with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and spread nationwide, first to other railway lines and then to many other sectors of the workforce.¹¹ Forcible repression of this strike, which led to the death of many workers, inspired the organization of new armed clubs, “quasi-military societies” determined to resist such violence in the future; SLP leadership eventually forbade such clubs, but they persisted nonetheless (Avrich, *HT* 45–46).

Two other factors played into this context of antilabor violence and self-defense: the European revolutionary context from which many immigrant labor activists in the United States came and to which many socialists and anarchists looked for their theoretical grounding, and an increasingly bitter disillusionment with the electoral system in the United States, in which the SLP had invested a great deal of time, energy, resources, and hope. A turning point in this progressive disillusionment was a spectacular case of fraud in which election judges conspired to deprive a socialist alderman of his victory but were ruled not guilty in an expensive trial (David 58–60). At the same time, tightening political repression in Europe produced a new emphasis among European revolutionary groups not only on armed insurrections but also on a broadening of “propaganda by deed” to include individual attacks on representatives of the current social order. Concurrently with “the broadening of the physical force tendency” among European revolu-

tionaries and the infusion into the American labor movement of German socialists after Bismarck's repressive measures against activism in 1878, there was a move among many members of the SLP away from political action and toward "physical force" not merely as a means of self-defense but more broadly as the means to social revolution. All of these factors resulted in a split within the SLP, with those favoring political action remaining in the party and those favoring direct action, including force, forming social revolutionary clubs (David 59–62). All of the Haymarket anarchists advocated force in some form; as de Cleyre puts it, "They were revolutionists, who believed that the revolution could not be wrought out peacefully, because of the historic tendency in the possessors to use force, whenever their privileges are threatened. They said so: they advised their fellows to prepare for these things" ("Our Martyred" 18). Public desire to see them hang for the bomb they were so easily proved not to have thrown was in part linked to a sense of this fact.

In addition, public perceptions of anarchism as inherently violent were deeply influenced by the media's partial and frightened glimpses, especially through such figures as the German immigrant Johann Most, of a strain of anarchism, born out of revolutionary movements in Europe, that insisted on active offensive action against the "property beast," the "reptile brood" of capitalists, who could otherwise be counted on to "crush the people" first: "Kill or be killed is the alternative. . . . No use of trying reform. The Gordian knot can be cut only by the sword" (qtd. Avrich, *HT* 66–67). Most's speeches and articles were infused with what can only be described as an impassioned advocacy of violence—not, he said, "from love of gore," but because history has taught us "there is no other way to free and redeem mankind" (qtd. Avrich, *HT* 67). His biographer Frederic Trautmann quotes typical pronouncements: "Shoot, burn, stab, poison, and bomb." "Revolutionaries with the courage of your convictions and the sense to assassinate: ready, aim, FIRE!" (*Freiheit*, June 11 and July 23, 1881; qtd. Trautmann 44). When the czar was assassinated, Most published the story, bordered in red, under the boldface headline "AT LAST!" and urged the killing of a monarch per month (*Freiheit*, March 19, 1881, qtd. Trautmann 45). This was far from the way de Cleyre or Tolstoy or even the fiery Emma Goldman spoke; nonetheless the media saw Most—not for his vision of freedom, which they effectively censored, but for his views on methods, which they confused with his ultimate goals—as the quintessence of anarchism rather than one among many anarchists who held a range of views. His role in the media as the embodiment of anarchism was fixed

when Thomas Nast, the cartoonist who popularized the Democratic donkey and the Republican elephant, portrayed anarchism in the figure of a crazed, unkempt, belligerent but also cowardly Most, wielding dynamite (Trautmann 90).

Thus there is no question that for a brief period in anarchist history, including part of de Cleyre's adult lifetime, some anarchists favored the use of "force" to accomplish the goal of social revolution and/or propaganda—not just collective armed uprisings against oppression (acts that many nonanarchists as well as anarchists would have supported), but individual acts of dynamiting or assassination such as those advocated by Most.¹² Henry David, in his history of the Haymarket affair, sees "increasing dependence upon illegal activity" as a hallmark of revolutionary movements in the 1870s and 1880s (66); it was during this period that the definition of "propaganda by deed," understood in the late 1870s as a "social" phenomenon—"acts of insurrectional nature performed by small minorities"—shifted to mean individual acts as well. He sees this shift as a response to the increasing repression in Europe, which made group actions by revolutionaries more difficult and reliance on individual acts more important (67–68). In her biography of Goldman, Wexler says that during the 1870s and 1880s, "anarchists . . . urged a vigorous propaganda of word and deed, including insurrectionary tactics by secret conspiratorial groups and individual acts of revolt—destruction of property and even assassination—to dramatize social evils and galvanize the masses" (45). Avrich likewise refers to the 1880s and 1890s as a period of "apocalyptic fervor" characterized by "the belief that the social revolution was imminent and physical force unavoidable" (*AP* 189). Henry David gives several examples of this fervor, including a contemporary historian's prediction of vast upheaval incited by social revolutionaries, and a prophecy in the anarchist *Arbeiter-Zeitung* that the "already approaching revolution" will be "much grander than that at the close of the last century, which only broke out in one country" (Feb. 23, 1885, qtd. David 127).

It was in this context that, in 1892, Alexander Berkman, in one of the incidents that helped associate anarchism with violence in the American media, attempted to assassinate Henry Clay Frick, an act he regarded at the time as a form of "propaganda by deed." Some years later the eminent anarchist editor Benjamin Tucker sarcastically referred to Berkman's folly in imagining that "vast progress toward the acme of human achievement is made when a knife is stuck into a millionaire" (Kelly 167), an evaluation with which most anarchists probably agreed. Wexler

points out that Berkman, newly arrived from czarist Russia, was at that time “steeped in a revolutionary tradition” in which the *attentat*—“the assassination of a powerful agent of oppression” such as a czar—“had historical precedent and rationale”; as she says, his identification with Rakhmetov, Chernyshevsky’s hero in *What Is to Be Done?* “suggests his remoteness from American traditions of protest.” By 1901 he had realized that the *attentat* had no meaning in an American context, where despotism is not concentrated in central tyrannical figures but, as he said astutely in his *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, “rests on the popular delusion of self-government and independence” (Wexler 110, 63, 64, 111–12). The facts that Berkman’s critic Tucker likewise admired *What Is to Be Done?* which he translated into English, and that Johann Most criticized Berkman’s act, arousing Goldman’s ire, are yet other indications of the complexity of the issues, and of how little the media understood internal anarchist discussions of force as a tactic.

The year of McKinley’s assassination, 1901, is an ironic marker for the point by which many anarchists had shifted their positions on individual “propaganda by deed.” The assassin, Leon Czolgosz, allegedly claimed he was an anarchist, although according to Emma Goldman, who was arrested for supposedly having inspired him, the fact that he made such a statement was never substantiated (“Psychology” 88). In response, there was a frenzy of public hysteria similar to the one that led to the conviction of the Haymarket anarchists. The attack on Yanovsky after he had actually condemned the assassination was typical of incidents across the country both in its brutality and its irony. Goldman’s first reaction to the assassination, quoted in the *New York Times* for September 11, 1901, is indicative of the gap between anarchist philosophy and the public apprehension of it: “I do not know surely, but I think Czolgosz was one of those downtrodden men who see all the misery which the rich inflict upon the poor, who think of it, who brood over it, and then, in despair, resolve to strike a great blow, as they think, for the good of their fellow-men. But that is not Anarchy. Czolgosz . . . may have been inspired by me, but if he was, he took the wrong way of showing it” (qtd. Wexler 106).¹³ Johann Most publicly condemned the act, as did other prominent anarchists. As Wexler says, by this time “most anarchists . . . had long since repudiated any belief in individual propaganda of the deed. . . . most had come to share the view of Kropotkin that masses, not individuals, make the social revolution, and that ‘propaganda of the deed’ meant mass resistance to state oppression, collective action against tyranny, the spontaneous response of the people during a revolution—not individual acts of vio-

lence" (Wexler 298 n. 27, 109).¹⁴ This was a move back from the broadening of "propaganda by deed"; thus even at the theoretical level, the period during which a small minority of American anarchists participated in what Avrich calls a "cult of dynamite" (*HT* chap. 12) was short.

De Cleyre's Position

Against this complex historical background, it is important, in discussing de Cleyre's position on violence, to distinguish among three different categories: her position in general on whether violence is ever justified; her position vis-à-vis other anarchists in internal debates about the desirability or nondesirability of using individual acts of violence as a tactic for spreading anarchism and anarchist views; and her perspective on the relationship between various categories of individual violent actions on the one hand and state violence on the other. First, then, it is clear that over the course of her career de Cleyre identified herself with the majority of anarchists,¹⁵ who favored peaceful methods rather than methods of "force" (e.g., "Events," "Our Present Attitude," "Making"). Again and again she argued that there is "no end of retaliations unless someone ceases to retaliate" ("Making" 163) and that nonviolent methods are therefore the only logical ones.¹⁶ Even so, her position on the question of self-defense meant she was not a strict pacifist; hence her emphatic insistence in 1910, in response to the way anarchist comrades had billed her lecture tour in Buffalo, that "once for all, I am not a Tolstoian, or a non-resistant" ("Tour Impressions" 323).¹⁷ Many times throughout her anarchist career she stated or clearly implied that violence in self-defense is justified. Further, she called attention to the fact that working people's smallest efforts to reclaim what has been stolen from them—"an hour less of labor, a small wage-increase"—bring forth extraordinary violence on the part of the state, which shoots people down in the road for the most "paltry" demands. For this reason, she thought, any effort to reclaim all that has been stolen—the earth's resources, the working person's own labor, the means of production—can probably be expected to meet with even greater violence than that meted out in response to smaller demands ("Our Martyred" 18–19).

The idea that, against such violence, the use of force in self-defense would be justified seems to have been de Cleyre's position from at least some time before the midpoint in her career as an anarchist. It is expressed again and again in her Haymarket speeches beginning with

"November 11th" in 1897, in which she refers to the bomb as the "Vengeance" (6, 7, 8). It should be noted that de Cleyre here represents the bomb as following, rather than preceding, the firing of police on the protesters at the Haymarket demonstration, although it now seems certain that the bomb came first: "We see Parsons, Spies, Fielden speaking. . . . Then the police, marching in double column, coming down Desplaines Street, turning about—firing! A man falls, struck by a police bullet. He clutches his side and writhes upon the ground; a thin line of blood oozes out. Others have fallen. Suddenly a Vengeance . . ." (6). In her Haymarket speech two years later she elaborates on the views implicit here, saying that the bomb, whoever threw it, was a "just" response to state violence ("if ever in this world an act of violence was just," she ambiguously qualifies it), and that the deaths of the policemen killed by the bomb should be laid squarely at the door of the police captain whose "treasonable order" led them to violate the workers' rights of assembly and free speech ("November Eleventh" 12).

One might infer that, since de Cleyre called for direct expropriation as the means for inaugurating the new social order, and since she anticipated violent resistance to such an act, she also anticipated that expropriation should involve provisions for self-defense. She follows this syllogism through only in her Haymarket speeches, however, and not in her own voice but in paraphrases intended to resurrect the silenced voices of the martyrs; elsewhere it is left unsaid or is said relatively obliquely, perhaps because of her habitual care to minimize the possibility of being arrested for her speeches, or perhaps because of her evident ambivalence on this issue.¹⁸

Overtly and wholeheartedly, however, de Cleyre supported various armed struggles associated with revolutions. When the Mexican Revolution presented the opportunity to aid such a cause actively, she did so, working avidly from 1911 until her death in 1912 to raise money and support for the Mexican anarchists. On the other hand, she insisted again and again that "revolution" should never be confused with "armed rebellion," explaining that an armed rebellion may well be one "incident" in a revolution but that revolution itself is a sweeping, subversive change in social institutions ("Mexican Revolution" 302).¹⁹ She hoped such a change in her own society could come about nonviolently—that is, without violent reprisals by the authorities and the necessity for self-defense—although she was not optimistic. Thus she said, of the Haymarket martyrs (allying them, in a characteristic rhetorical move, with mainstream American heroes):

They believed that Lincoln and Grant were right, when they predicted further uprisings of the people, wild convulsions, in the effort to reestablish some equilibrium in possessions. . . . they may have been mistaken. It may be that the diffusion of ideas and of the spirit of freedom may take such hold upon the general mind, as will give us what we never yet have seen, a great social change without violence or destruction. Let us hope so. But hope cannot blind us to the fact that so far their prophecies have been fulfilled. . . . ("Our Martyred" 18)

Second, however, the fact that de Cleyre was compelled, only two years before her death, to refute "once for all" a perception shared by at least some of her comrades that she was a Tolstoyan or nonresistant is an important indication of the position she took in anarchist debates on the use of violence as a tactic not simply of self-defense but of active, aggressive, revolutionary efforts to bring about anarchist goals. She described her sense of the evolving anarchist debate over this kind of violence in 1903:

Formerly there were "Quakers" and "Revolutionists"; so there are still. But while they neither thought well of the other, now both have learned that each has his own use in the great play of world forces. . . . The spread of Tolstoy's "War and Peace" and "The Slavery of Our Times," and the growth of numerous Tolstoy clubs having for their purpose the dissemination of the literature of non-resistance, is an evidence that many receive the idea that it is easier to conquer war with peace. I am one of these. I can see no end of retaliations unless someone ceases to retaliate. But let no one mistake this for servile submission or meek abnegation; my right shall be asserted no matter at what cost to me, and none shall trench upon it without my protest. ("Making" 162-63)

Early in her career de Cleyre had been involved in some of the "Quaker"/"Revolutionist" debates she refers to here. Her interest in the friendship between Ferrer and Naquet undoubtedly reflected her own experience debating the question of force with her friends, as in her disputes in 1890 with Dyer D. Lum, who sometimes angrily, sometimes rather fondly, mocked what he saw as de Cleyre's excess of sentiment. Lum had at one point offered to dynamite Cook County Jail in aid of the imprisoned Haymarket anarchists (they declined), and wrote de Cleyre in 1891 of a mysterious other plan involving some violent act (see

Avrich, AA 65, 66; letter to de Cleyre, March 1, 1891). In one exchange he called de Cleyre's views on violence "Rot! Quaker rot!" and complained, for example, that her "damned over-loaded heart" would perpetuate the suffering of millions in Russia, merely out of concern to spare the life of the czar's children. He took offense at the word *retaliation* to describe acts of violence he regarded as "self-defense only"—"Retaliation? Hellfire, no! Defence? Yes" (Apr. 1, 1890). Lum's side of this argument reveals that de Cleyre's interpretation of self-defense was undoubtedly more narrow than his, which applied broadly to the right of the oppressed to resist forcibly not merely in individual instances but in "defense" against the perpetuation of a system of oppression that is already by definition an "invasion" of individual sovereignty. Alluding to a political prisoner, a woman who had been flogged to death in Siberia a few months before, Lum argued that the very existence of the czar, his wives, mistresses, and children is already ipso facto an "invasion" of individual sovereignty, and asked why the czar's children should be "spared to live—for what? For what? To perpetuate woman flogging?"

Although it has been argued that de Cleyre eventually came around to Lum's viewpoint (Avrich, AA 66), even in "Direct Action" and the extant Haymarket speeches she never construes "self-defense" so broadly. Her own response to the incident in Siberia, for example, a poem her editor entitled "Ut Sementem Feceris, Ita Metes" (As ye sow, so shall ye reap), emphasizes the fated, natural consequences of oppression in her most characteristic images of inevitable storm, explosion, harvest:

How many drops must gather to the skies
 Before the cloud-burst comes, we may not know;
 How hot the fires in under hells must glow
 Ere the volcano's scalding lavas rise,
 Can none say; but all wot the hour is sure!
 Who dreams of vengeance has but to endure!
 . . . certain is the harvest time of Hate!
 And when weak moans, by an indignant world
 Re-echoed, to a throne are backward hurled,
 Who listens, hears the mutterings of Fate!

(36)

The pairing of "fate" with "wait" seems significant. Who is it, in this poem, who needs merely to wait and endure in order for vengeance to come? Revolutionaries all over the world? The oppressed in Russia? Or

some sympathetic but distant observer? Dyer Lum, in his letter of April 1, 1890, asks what difference de Cleyre's own distance from Russia makes: "You . . . in—Russia? Would your habitat alter your nature?" Who, in this poem, is imagined as waiting, and who will act? Are those who wait and endure the same as those who will enact the vengeance? The imagery implies that the oppressed in Russia will inevitably rise up; what of the "indignant world"? De Cleyre represents the global echoes of the oppression inside Russia as magnifying and therefore accelerating the accumulation of hatred that will finally explode, but what is the role of the listener who hears this magnified sound, or the dreamer of vengeance who "has but to endure"? Are the one who dreams and the one who waits and the one who acts all the same, but at different moments in time? Or will the one who waits (outside, in the "indignant world"?) merely be watching and rejoicing when fate (in Russia, or elsewhere as well?) finally takes its course?

Whatever the ambivalences in this poem, and the ambivalences Lum identified in de Cleyre's position on violent "defense" and "retaliation" (vengeance?), de Cleyre supported mass revolutionary movements throughout her career and just as consistently and unambivalently identified with those who would not personally choose the use of dynamite, terrorism, and assassination as methods of bringing about the social revolution or propagating anarchist ideas. In 1907 she referred to herself as one of "those of us who eschew force and preach peace" ("Events" 21); after a bombing in 1908 she stated categorically, "Anarchism has nothing in common with violence" (Avrich, AA 140; "Our Present Attitude" 79). On the other hand, she said with equal conviction in "Anarchism" (1901) that each anarchist should choose individually the method best suited to him or her, and she offered a catalog of methods, including Tolstoy's pacifism; George Brown's peaceful union activism; Johann Most's fiery denunciations of the ruling class (in this catalog, by substituting a description of his rhetoric for a description of his method, she evades the question of what he advocated); Benjamin Tucker's advocacy of passive resistance for now, with the possibility of change in response to new circumstances; and the stern heroism of Gaetano Bresci, assassin of King Umberto I of Italy in 1900. In each case de Cleyre applauded the method as perfectly expressing the individual. "Ask a method?" she demanded. "Do you ask Spring her method? Which is more necessary, the sunshine or the rain? They are contradictory—yes; they destroy each other—yes, but from this destruction the flowers result" ("Anarchism" 115–17).

Similarly, in “Events Are the True Schoolmasters” (1907), whose title, a quotation from Lum, paid tribute to the friend with whom she had argued so intensely over these issues, de Cleyre called for those anarchists, including herself, who opposed violent methods as illogical to respect the fact that there is more than logic in this world: “There is feeling in the world, and a very great quantity of it . . .” (20). People moved by strong feeling may well act violently and illogically, out of suffering, or sympathy with suffering. Sometimes these actions, in fact, “break the line of the opposition and make room for wider action and farther-reaching effort” (20). She has come to recognize, she says, that those who support forcible resistance, which she herself sees as illogical,

are quite as much part and parcel of the movement towards human liberty as those who preach peace at all costs. . . . No doubt the believers in forcible resistance feel that those of us who eschew force and preach peace are on the wrong track; no doubt the censorious among them think we are a nuisance, a drawback, a damage to the movement, in fact, no anarchists at all. But let us neither read out nor be read out. The ideal of society without government allures us all; we believe in its possibility and that makes us anarchists. (21)

De Cleyre’s position on violence was complicated not only by her obvious sense that small individual explosions of violent rebellion paled in comparison to the larger governmental forces of violence against which they were directed, but also by her deep empathy with the feelings of outrage at injustice that moved some people to whom she was very close in the small world of anarchism—friends and even lovers—to advocate or practice what de Cleyre called “forcible physical resistance” (“Events” 20). She was extremely close to Dyer Lum, perhaps his lover; she also became friends with Berkman during his long imprisonment for assaulting Frick. Despite her evident ambivalence about this act (“I don’t, in the large, know whether it was good or bad” [letter to Berkman, July 10, 1906]), she initiated a correspondence in 1893 (Avrich, *AA* 195) and provided emotional and editorial support during the writing of his *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, published the year she died. Thus, at a personal level, her insight into the feelings and motives of those, like Berkman and Lum, who disagreed with the “Tolstoyan” aspects of her anarchism no doubt underlay her insistence on respecting others’ advocacy of violence, sometimes even their practice of violence, as a genuine expression of the anarchist spirit she shared with them.

One of many examples is a passage Paul Avrich quotes as evidence for his view (and Emma Goldman's) that de Cleyre eventually moved closer to Dyer Lum's position on violence than she was in the days when he mocked her sentimentality and called her "Gusherine": "I have gradually worked my way to the conviction that, while I cannot see the logic of forcible physical resistance (entailing perpetual retaliations until one of the offended finally refuses to retaliate), there are others who have reached the opposite conclusions, who will act according to their convictions, and who are quite as much part and parcel of the movement toward human liberty as those who preach peace at all costs" ("Events" 20–21). This passage, however, does not necessarily illustrate what Avrich calls her move "closer and closer to the position of Dyer Lum" (Avrich, *AA* 140). Immediately after it, she reaffirms her position as an advocate of the position opposite to that of "forcible resistance": "No doubt the believers in forcible resistance feel that those of us who eschew force and preach peace are on the wrong track" ("Events" 21). The emphasis in this passage is on her willingness to see that, despite her own position on the issue, the "general forward impulse" of the movement as a whole (which includes those who advocate force as well as those, like her, who oppose it) is "cutting new barriers," and "If someone cuts my course, why, then, I suppose I am cutting his at the same time" (21). At the core of the whole essay is one more iteration of de Cleyre's basic position that resistance by means other than force is the *logical* position—not the merely sentimental position of which Lum accused "Gusherine"—with the added qualification that she has come to realize that other, even diametrically opposed, positions can be as wholehearted expressions of love for human liberty as hers. The fact that the sentence Avrich quotes reiterates rather than recants her former position is emphasized by the surprising syntactic turn in the middle, as it veers decidedly away from the direction in which "I have gradually worked my way to the conviction that" seems to be steering it initially. This opening creates the expectation of a subsequent clause that might be expected to read something like, "but now I see that those who articulated other views were right." What follows, however, says only that she now realizes *there are other opinions*—something she already knew—which are (and here, presumably, is the only change she refers to) equally an expression of anarchism.

One motive for these sorts of rhetorical sleights-of-hand was de Cleyre's practical concern for unity across all the divisions that cleft the anarchist movement with sometimes dramatic discord, including Emma Goldman's attack on Johann Most with a horsewhip at a public lecture

when he criticized Berkman's *attentat* (Wexler 66) as well as the less dramatic dissonances of the long tension between Goldman and de Cleyre (Avrich, AA 86–87; Wexler 128–30). In light of such discord, de Cleyre, while urging nonviolent methods of resistance herself, nonetheless argued for honoring the *spirit* of each individual expression of anarchism, and deplored the self-satisfaction of “plumb-line anarchists” who think their own program for social transformation is the one infallible path. When events do not bear out their ideas, she said, they simply “give a look in their pocket-mirrors” to “behold ‘the face of Anarchy’ undergenerate,” and wash their hands like Pontius Pilate (“Events” 19–20). It was from these “reasonable, cool” anarchists that she sought to elicit a more complex understanding of others who might share “the ideal of society without government” but express the feelings underlying those commitments in illogical, perhaps violent, acts (“Events” 19–21).

De Cleyre's Views on Violence

All of de Cleyre's positions on the question of violence—her adamant preference for peaceful methods, her equally adamant insistence on the right to use force in self-defense, her opposition to dynamite as a tactic, her attempt to close ranks with those who took the opposite view, her call for pacifists to understand the emotional sources of violent acts—were facets of her fundamental assumptions about violence. The first of these assumptions is that the state is by nature violent and exists to protect a minority's appropriation, by force, of the earth's resources, of technological resources, and of human labor. The violence by which unjust privilege is claimed and maintained can be expected to breed many other kinds of violence, not only because it deprives people of what they need and are therefore driven to take by force, and because it may breed a violent desire for revenge, but because it produces sick, distorted forms of behavior (Helcher's shooting of de Cleyre, for example), by depriving people of a free, “normal life” of self-fulfillment. Helcher, she told a newspaper interviewer, was “crazy. Lack of proper food and healthy labor made him so” (qtd. Avrich, AA 174). Acts such as his should be met with sympathy and assistance, not condemnation and criminalization. “It is not the business of Anarchists to preach wild or foolish acts,—acts of violence,” de Cleyre said after the Union Square bombing.²⁰ “For, truly, Anarchism has nothing in common with violence, and can never come about save through the conquest of men's minds. But when some desperate and life-denied victim of the present system does strike back at it,

by violence, it is not our business to heap infamies upon his name, but to explain him as we explain others, whether our enemies or our friends, as the fated fruit of the existing 'order'" ("Our Present Attitude" 79).

Again and again de Cleyre explained acts of violence—sometimes those that other anarchists were repudiating—as just such “fated fruit.” The McNamara brothers are a good example. They were defendants in a celebrated court case of 1911 involving the 1910 bombing of a Los Angeles ironworks and—the heart of the case—an explosion of dynamite in Ink Alley next to the *Los Angeles Times* building that claimed twenty or more lives. A vigorous national and international campaign was organized on their behalf, during which the American Federation of Labor alone raised \$190,000 (Robinson 6–20). In court they then changed their innocent plea to guilty, shocking their supporters. Their lawyer Clarence Darrow explained his decision to defend them on the basis of his conviction that they intended no loss of life: James McNamara planted the dynamite outside, not inside, the building, and in an amount that would not be expected to harm anyone inside—a scare tactic to intimidate workers in nonunion shops, but not harm them (*Story* 181). Instead, the ink vapor in barrels stored in the alley exploded, consuming the building in a nightmare inferno that forced some of the burning workers to jump from windows (King).

De Cleyre's approach to this act of violence was to search out the causes, not condemning the perpetrators but attempting to understand the power dynamics involved. Unions everywhere denounced the McNamaras and called for retribution (Robinson 19–21), in a wave of anger and revulsion that de Cleyre insisted on interrogating. Her analysis derived from her views in general on crime and punishment, her views on the origins of violence, and her view that dominant ideology produces a selective sense of what is “violent.” Refusing to agree with the cry that the crime must be avenged because, whatever the motive, “Murder is murder,” as Teddy Roosevelt said, she asked how “murder” and criminality are commonly defined in labor struggles: “Who cries vengeance for the criminals who killed the workers in the Cherry mine? . . . Who now are the criminals responsible for the 200 miners buried alive at this moment at Briceville? Every day they murder more, calmly and cold-bloodedly, than died the Times disaster. . . .” She called on her readers to identify the “fundamental criminals” and the “fundamental crime” and then, instead of calling for vengeance on the McNamaras, address the underlying source of violence by calling for “the abolition of this scheme of property right for some in what belongs to us all, whereby we

are brought to this horrible [class] war, and driven to conclude that there is no way of getting any meager portion of what is ours but by violence" ("McNamara Storm"). As for Roosevelt's analysis, she said, "I had a vision before my eyes of a fleeing Spaniard running up San Juan hill, pierced through the back by a rough-rider—and I felt like saying in R's ear, 'Remember—Murder is murder'" ("Abundant Crop").

De Cleyre insisted on asking the right question—not what vengeance should be taken on the McNamaras, but what would make them do such a thing: "the main question this case puts to the World for its answer is, What are the causes which make men of good feelings, kindly and sympathetic men, as those who know them say these brothers are, come to the conclusion that destructive attacks upon property (I do not personally believe they ever meant to kill people) are justifiable." She answers that they must have been men who knew, unlike most of us, what it is like to work in an ironworks. Such dangerous work breeds "a recklessness toward life, which is the *spiritual toll humanity must pay for the iron triumphs of its iron civilization.*" Iron workers last at their job an average of ten years: "Try to understand what that means—the fallen, the crushed, the mangled, the maimed and lamed, the dead. Try to understand what sort of feeling that engenders in the breast of him who sees and feels it" ("Psychological Storm"). These incidents in the ironworks are "murders committed by Society." As if in confirmation of her almost visceral sense of the more fundamental violence against which the McNamaras were striking out, de Cleyre wrote Saul Yanovsky soon after the *Times* disaster about a horrifying instance of violence against labor organizers in San Diego. It had been incited, she felt, by *Times* owner Harrison Gray Otis, in an "outrageous editorial in which he proclaimed the vigilante propaganda" against labor. In a wave of antilabor violence she saw as only the beginning, four labor speakers had been murdered; reading how they were "compelled to stand with uplifted hands while one by one each was clubbed into insensibility,—and threatened with the revolver if their hands fell from exhaustion," she wrote, "made me deathly sick! In what manner of country are we living? And this is Otis's direct instigation. I'm only confoundedly sorry McNamara didn't hit *him* instead of his building, with the poor 20 scabs" (letter to Yanovsky, Apr. 15, 1911).

Two points of interest emerge in the preceding quotations: the use of "we" and "ours" in the description of the current class war, and the wish that McNamara had hit Otis instead of the poor nonunion workers. De Cleyre's reiterated "Try to understand" is the watchword here. The first-person plural represents a perhaps deliberately shocking insistence on

not pulling back from solidarity with the McNamaras at a time when almost everyone had done so, a call to her readers to recognize—empathetically—that the impulses that led them to contemplate violence (against property, not people in this case) are part and parcel of the suffering of all the dispossessed under the overt, sustained, and systemic violence of the possessors, whose normal *modus operandi* involves the sacrifice of, say, two hundred miners here and there. The emphasis is on the desperation produced by such violence, the sense it produces that there is no way to get what is rightfully “ours”—a word that calls for an empathy and solidarity intense enough to include the McNamaras—except through an answering violence. In the case of the letter, the wish that Otis had died instead of his workers has to do with the fact that if he had, the four labor organizers would not have been clubbed to death. In neither case is there a desire for gratuitous violence or an interest in the world of dynamite and plots that attracted Lum.

Similarly, in 1901 she had viewed McKinley’s assassination as a result of the violence permeating the current social and economic system, of which McKinley was himself a perpetrator and indeed a representative: “*not Anarchism, but the state of society which creates men of power and greed and the victims of power and greed, is responsible for the death of both McKinley and Czolgosz,*” she said. McKinley had blood on his own hands—the “official murder” of the Filipinos, “whom he, in pursuance of the capitalist policy of Imperialism, had sentenced to death.” However kind he may have been in private life, she said, is irrelevant; officially he “was the representative of wealth and greed and power”—of capitalism, which has made “a slaughter-house . . . of the world.” Thus he died “*not as a martyr, but as a gambler who had won a high stake and was struck down by the man who had lost the game*: for that is what capitalism has made of human well-being—a gambler’s stake, no more.” McKinley died because “The hells of capitalism create the desperate; the desperate act,—desperately!” Whether Czolgosz was an anarchist cannot be determined, she says, for no one even knows who he was—“A child of the great darkness, a spectre out of the abyss! Was he an Anarchist? We do not know” (“McKinley’s Assassination” 304–5). To her such violence as his was only to be expected from the “existing ‘order,’” a word she uses, here and elsewhere, as sarcastically as August Spies in his final speech before the Haymarket judge. “Go with me to the half-starved miners of the Hocking Valley . . . or pass along the railroads of that most orderly and law-abiding citizen, Jay Gould. And then tell me whether this order has in it any moral principle for which it should be preserved,” he had said (qtd.

Avrich, *HT* 286)—a position echoed in de Cleyre's sarcastic descriptions of "social order" in "The Economic Tendency of Freethought." In "Our Present Attitude," de Cleyre immediately juxtaposes with the word "order"—ironic sign of the profound dysfunction and *disorder* of the present system—the further irony that its most telling symptoms, "wild outbursts of desperation," are interpreted in the press as anarchism.

Such outbursts—violent symptoms—she saw as inevitable. Among the forms such symptoms took, however, de Cleyre made crucial distinctions on the basis of their relation to one central criterion: the exercise of human freedom. Some she saw as pitiable, desperate acts of compulsion, reactions to the poverty or brutal living conditions brought about by the underlying violence that sustains a system of property based on forcible theft. These acts she thought should elicit pity, not punishment. Some other acts of violence she seems to have seen as quite close to this category—equally "fated fruit" of the present "order"—with the added element that rather than being simply the logical outcomes of oppression by people pushed to the breaking point, they also expressed some conscious social or philosophical commitment, whether rightly or wrongly acted upon. In her comment that all desperate acts are erroneously read as "anarchist" she called attention specifically to the media's failure to make this distinction: "the elemental cries of humanity are swelling up in a frightful discordant chorus, because the elemental needs of humanity are being denied. . . . Now, in times like these, wild outbursts of desperation must be expected. . . . We must expect that such people will be called Anarchists, in advance. No matter what they themselves say, no matter what we say, the majority of people will believe they acted not as desperate *men*, but as theoretical *Anarchists*" ("Our Present Attitude" 79). Still another category she regarded as acts of the free human will, whether collective, as in the Mexican Revolution, or individual. In the latter category she placed Michele Angiolillo's revenge in 1897 on the man responsible for torturing hundreds of people, including many anarchists, in the fortress of Montjuich in Barcelona. In this category too she placed Bresci's assassination of Umberto.

Bresci was an immigrant weaver from Paterson, New Jersey, where he belonged to a group that published an anarchist paper Malatesta edited for a time, *La Questione Sociale*. As Emma Goldman told the story in her essay "The Psychology of Political Violence," Bresci read of a massacre in his native Italy, where famine had provoked a group of peasant women to go before King Umberto to beg for aid. In "mute silence" they held up their "emaciated infants," Goldman says—and Umberto's soldiers

opened fire. At a rancorous meeting of his anarchist group, Bresci took back his loan of a hundred dollars in what his comrades assumed was a selfish defection from their cause, then left for Italy with the secret purpose of assassinating the king (104–5). In “Anarchism,” de Cleyre’s catalog of different approaches to the question of “method,” from Tolstoy through Most, Brown, and others, opens out at the end, despite her own expressed preference for peaceful means, into an exalted vision of Bresci’s act:

For there are some whose nature it is to think and plead, and yield and yet return to the address, and so make headway in the minds of their fellowmen; and there are others who are stern and still, resolute, implacable as Judah’s dream of God;—and those men strike—strike once and have ended. But the blow resounds across the world. And as on a night when the sky is heavy with storm, some sudden great white flare sheets across it, and every object starts sharply out, so in the flash of Bresci’s pistol shot the whole world for a moment saw the tragic figure of the Italian people, starved, stunted, crippled, huddled, degraded, murdered; and at the same moment that their teeth chattered with fear, they came and asked the Anarchists to explain themselves. And hundreds of thousands of people read more in those few days than they had ever read of the idea before. (116)

The last sentence of this passage makes it clear that de Cleyre is giving an example of a justified and effective act of individual “propaganda by deed.” The imagery in this climactic passage—the white flare in the sky, portent of a storm with which the sky is heavy, almost ready to burst—together with the expropriation of Judah’s “dream” of God for the purpose of describing what is most heroic and free and therefore most profoundly real and human, not merely imaginary and superhuman, situates this vision of Bresci within de Cleyre’s most characteristic rhetoric of freedom. In particular it recalls her great poem “The Hurricane,” which opens on a seascape, image of incipient unrest:

The tide is out, the wind blows off the shore;
Bare burn the white sands in the scorching sun;
The sea complains, but its great voice is low.

The remainder of the poem moves through images of waves gathering and the voice of the sea deepening; at its climax the “thundering” sea

rolls over the “shell-crunched wall”—an image that tropes the will of the dispossessed, hitherto mute but now liberated in all its fury, as the thunderous voice of God.

Thus, while de Cleyre seems to have distinguished between heroic acts of force and pitiable acts undertaken almost without the actor’s control, her view that both are “fated fruit” means that in her analyses and representations of particular violent acts there is sometimes a fine line between the two categories. In the first, an individual or group of individuals acts freely, out of choice, against the forces that would crush it, but also out of the sheer logic of cause and effect that brings the whirlwind to those who sow the wind, a violent harvest to those who sow the seeds of violence. In the second, the human will is compelled to resist by circumstance—but then again not so much by circumstance as by its own free nature, which circumstance has compressed to explosive force. One of de Cleyre’s poems, for example, is the dramatic monologue of a mother who has murdered her child to spare it the poverty and ignominy its “illegitimate” birth entails. The mother, who has failed to find work because of the shame attached to her unmarried status, has in one sense been crushed by her social condition into this final defeat of killing her own child to spare it starvation and despair, yet she resists condemnation with an angry defiance, a sense that her own understanding of the situation sets her beyond the reach of her executioners (“Betrayed”).

Similarly, in de Cleyre’s story “A Rocket of Iron,” the protagonist is a man almost overwhelmed by the circumstances of his life at the Iron Works, pushed to what is perhaps the breaking point. At the climax, a fiery iron rocket shoots out of the furnace, bursting in a shower of “demoniac sparks” that kill two workers and maim another for life. As the protagonist stands calm amid the inferno, then carries his friend out to the ambulance, the imagery reveals that beneath his stoic exterior the explosion coincides with a similar explosion of some incipient revolutionary consciousness in him—some newly coherent resolve to act, which the narrator glimpses: “I fancied I saw upon the delicate curved lips a line of purpose deepen, and the reflection of the iron-fire glow in the strange eyes, as if for an instant the door of a hidden furnace had been opened and smouldering coals had breathed the air” (411–12). The content of this resolve is never revealed, because the story ends abruptly with the implication that, before this man’s inner freedom can burst forth like the rocket, he will die of tuberculosis. It is nonetheless evident that had he acted, perhaps violently, his act would have been a

response to the overwhelming violence of the social and economic system that has slowly been killing him.

"A Rocket of Iron"

This brief sketch from 1902 is notable for its intriguing representation of the narrator's consciousness, through which our view of the workers and their world is focalized in a sequence of narrative reversals that disrupt and reconfigure the interpretations into which we have just been drawn. This shifting of representation enacts the shifts in vantage point necessary for seeing the full complexity of de Cleyre's views on forcible resistance, which were as consistently multifaceted in 1902 as they were throughout her career. As the story opens, the narrator describes retrospectively a cold, misty October nightfall in the north, when she or he sat looking out a window at a some urban landscape peopled by ghostly, insubstantial figures. Eventually their blurred presence as they wind in zigzag lines through the "chill steam" rising from the river—"pale, drunken images of facts, staggering against the invulnerable vapor that walled me in"—takes on a more disturbing specificity. They are "hardly distinguishable," the narrator says, from the posts and pickets that weave among them like "half-dismembered bodies writhing in pain" (409). This image crystallizes the cold, disembodied, and disembodifying violence of the world these figures live in—a capitalist dreamscape in which the rendering of workers as mere substanceless shadows, the disregard for the reality of their tortured bodies, is identical to the most violent physical oppression. Indeed, this cold, depersonalizing violence is the same as the fiery violence that will later reduce a worker to "a seared human stump" (412).

The tone and atmosphere of this opening are similar to the tone and atmosphere of the simultaneously surreal and hyperreal daily lives of the miners in the opening chapters of a work much admired by anarchists of de Cleyre's generation, Émile Zola's revolutionary *Germinál*, a resemblance that becomes significant at the climax of the story. Unlike Zola, however, de Cleyre chooses a first-person narrator, an intriguingly outside/inside witness whose relation to the events poses some of the same questions as those posed by "Ut Sementem Feceris." Watching the workers through the mist, this narrator feels an increasingly desperate sense of oppressive, claustrophobic fatality that leads to a sort of psychological explosion, expressed physically as s/he finally rushes outside, "impelled by the vague impulse to assert my own being, to seek relief in struggle,

even though foredoomed futile—to seek warmth, fellowship, somewhere, though but with those ineffective pallors in the mist, that dissolved even while I looked at them” (409–10). In this surreal, atomistic landscape the act of asserting one’s “own being” seems particularly “futile,” as does the act of seeking warmth and fellowship. The ways in which the social “order” represented in this symbolic scene works against a feeling of human connection are rendered through the troping of the problem of solidarity as a problem of solidity. Each figure’s perception of the others must be momentary, erratic; these workers reduced to mere bodies are therefore body-less.

No history is given for the psychological state that leads the narrator to burst forth into this outside world, but the bursting forth, an analogy to the explosion of the rocket later, is associated with an oppressively intensifying sense of empathy, expressed physically in the narrator’s sensation of numbness: “My own fingers were curiously numb and inert; had I, too, become a shadow?” (409). This empathy is probably not based on class; we may assume the narrator, because of her observer status in the street among the “laborers” and in the crowded, poorer section of town in which she arrives after leaving her own oppressive room or rooms, is not herself a worker. Nonetheless she joins the workers out of a desire for human connection, is swept into the current of motion through the crowded streets, and arrives, ironically, at a source of warmth different from the one she sought: the heat emanating from the door of the Iron Works. At this point the first narrative reversal occurs, as the narrator revises her account of how she got here. The revision is a rethinking of memory: a revisiting and re-cognition of the past.

No, I remember now: there was something before that; there was a sound—a sound that had stopped my feet in their going, and smote me with a long shudder—a sound of hammers, beating, beating, beating a terrific hail, momentarily faster and louder, and in between a panting as of some great monster catching breath beneath the driving of that iron rain. Faster, faster—CLANG! A long reverberant shriek! The giant had rolled and shivered in his pain. Involuntarily I was drawn down into the Valley of the Sound, words muttering themselves through my lips as I passed: “Forging, forging—what are they forging there? Frankenstein makes his Monster. How the iron screams!” (410)

This first narrative reversal calls attention to the possibility of not hearing the sound of the sleeping giant—a sound that resonates with

other aural images in de Cleyre's work: the low complaint of the sea at the beginning of "The Hurricane"; the echoed moans in "Ut Sementem Feceris" that become "the mutterings of fate." It resonates, too, with other images of potentially explosive despair: the culminating image of Our Lady of Pain in "Francisco Ferrer," who may one day set her own lights in the darkness of privation, and the culminating image of Samson in "The Economic Tendency of Freethought": "The giant is blind, but he's thinking: and his locks are growing, fast" (7). All these are images of a phenomenon that might be missed, or forgotten, by those who do not share the most desperate oppression; the narrator's decisive return from such a forgetfulness underlines that fact. One could forget this sound, drift into imagining the factory without imagining the trapped, explosive force inside it—without hearing the scream of torture. We did not hear this at first; the narrator forgot it at first, but it is there; it was there all along: "No, I remember now. . . ."

The climax of the story reverberates with this sound of the explosive revolutionary force building up in the factory—a representation that reveals the forging of the workers' ultimate rebellion as the same process by which the wealth produced in the factory is created. The hero's face is sensitive, pale, "Hard with the hardness of beaten iron" (411). In "Francisco Ferrer," the fact that Our Lady of Pain replaces the Virgin of Toledo at the end of the lecture asserts an identity: the two are the same, because the opulent figure of the Virgin of Toledo is produced by the poverty of those whose hunger is figured in Our Lady of Pain. This is the same identity expressed in "A Rocket of Iron": the identity between the forging of the iron to produce wealth and the forging of the Man of Iron—of his revolutionary resolve. The workers' hammering, hammering, hammering is Frankenstein's forging of his monster. The creation of wealth is also the creation of poverty, and the creature, as in *Frankenstein*, may exact revenge. The iron screams and pants beneath the hammers; the workers who wield them, "like demons in the abyss" (411) forced to carry out their own torture, may perhaps, by implication, carry out their own revenge, as the monster did. The work exacted by the masters is the forging at the same time of wealth and revolt, an image of the fact that eventual retribution is always already implicit in injustice, which sows its own seeds of destruction.

After the rocket is cold the hero alone does not go back to work, but "goes out into the fog and night," his heart overcome not only with "the burden of the dying man" but "perhaps some mightier burden" (412). What this burden may be is perhaps implicit in the similarities between

de Cleyre's description of the factory and Zola's many comparisons of the perpetual sound of the drainage pump in the mine to "the congested breathing of a monster" (*Germinal* 7), its "heavy, labored breathing"—analogous to the illness and growing desperation of the miners themselves—"ceaselessly panting, night and day" (108). The description of de Cleyre's hero, as well, recalls Zola's hero Étienne as he goes off into the world to spread his revolutionary ideas at the end of the novel, and also the more ambivalent figure of Souvarine, the character Emma Goldman was presumably describing when she said that *Germinal* tells of "the tenderness and kindness, the deep sympathy with human suffering, of . . . men who close the chapter of their lives with a violent outbreak against our system" ("Psychology" 81–82). Souvarine, too, walks away at the end: "In the distance his shadow shrank and melted into the darkness. He was heading over there, into the unknown. He was calmly marching toward extermination, toward any place where there was dynamite available to blow up cities and men. He will surely be there on that day when the dying bourgeoisie will hear the pavement exploding under its every foot-step" (Zola 387).

Such echoes do not resolve, but heighten, the ambiguity of de Cleyre's story, which, unlike Zola's massive novel, overwhelming in its relentless sensory documentation of everyday oppression in the mines, is only a glimpse into the briefest moment of an ironworker's life. A sudden shift into and out of the present tense reinforces both the power and the evanescence of this moment as the man, transformed by his experience, passes through our line of vision just after the accident:

It was all over in half an hour. There would be weeping in three little homes; and one was dead, and one would die, and one would crawl, a seared human stump, to the end of his weary days. . . . There would be an entry on the company's books, and a brief line in the newspapers next day. But the welding of the iron would go on, and the man who gave his easy money for it would fancy he had paid for it, not seeing the stiff figures in their graves, nor the crippled beggar, nor the broken homes.

The rocket of iron is already cold; dull, inert, fireless, the black fragments lie upon the floor whereon they lately rained their red revenge. Do with them what you will, you cannot undo their work. The men are clearing way. Only he with the white face does not go back to his place. Still set and silent he takes his coat, "presses his soft hat down upon his thick, damp locks," and goes out into the fog and

night. So close he passed me, I might have touched him; but he never saw me. (SW₄12)

We are to imagine the man's heroism in resisting the masters of the inferno, as he steps out for a moment into the present, and yet immediately the narrative sinks into the past tense again:

For one instant the shapely, boyish figure was in full light, then it vanished away in the engulfing mist—the mist which the vision of him had made me forget. For I knew I had seen a Man of Iron, into whose soul the iron had driven, whose nerves were tempered as cold steel, but behind whose still, impassive features slumbered a white-hot heart. And others should see a rocket and a ruin, and feel the Vengeance of Beaten Iron, before the mist comes and swallows all. (412–13)

The lines are prophetic, but in the future tense as seen from the past—“And others should . . . feel the Vengeance. . . .” Only the mist, which has been associated from the beginning of the sketch with “that irresistible fatality which will one day lay us all beneath the ice-death” (409), remains in a clear, unconditional future, its inevitability intensified by the present-tense *comes* and *swallows*: “before the mist comes and swallows all.” As if to confirm the import of this ominous past-tense prophecy, there follows a line of asterisks and then another narrative reversal: “I had forgotten! Upon that face, that young, fair face, so smooth and fine that even the black smoke would not rest upon it, there bloomed the roses of Early Death! Hot-house flowers!” (413).

Forgetting plays a strange role in the reversals of this brief sketch. The narrator came to the Iron Works in a move to affirm her humanity in fellowship with other humans—but no, she forgot: actually she was drawn there by the scream of iron and the pounding of hammers, the sound of the sleeping giant before the explosion. For a moment, the vision of the Man of Iron made her forget the mist, emblem of mortality. She prophesies the man's “Vengeance”—a loaded word in de Cleyre's repertoire, figuring as it does at the end of her speech “November 11th” as a metaphor for the Haymarket bomb (8). But no, she had forgotten: he was about to die instead of doing some great deed. There will be no vengeance, then? Or might all the reversals point to some further reversal that lies beyond the sketch—in the narrator's, or the reader's, future? The narrator here plays the role of a witness who sees the workers indis-

tinctly but feels their oppression vicariously as well as experiencing a parallel sense of oppressive, claustrophobic mortality. From her misty observer's distance she must read the workers' lives as evidence of something, but they are blurred to her vision—only the “pale drunken images of facts, staggering against the invulnerable vapor” that walls her in and, implicitly, separates her from them. If they cannot be seen clearly, however, they can be felt empathetically: their ghostly shadow-lives in the fog, metaphors for the draining of their lives by factory work, are translated into the narrator's recognition that her own hands are “curiously numb and inert,” leading to her question, “Had I, too, become a shadow?” (409).

The imagery recalls two passages from de Cleyre's life: her joy in a brief meeting in 1911 with an “anarchistically” inclined working man, A. Johanssen, whose vitality she contrasted with the inaction of too many Hamlet-like anarchists “sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought” (letter to Yanovsky, Mar. 29, 1911); and her sense at the time of the Mexican Revolution that some anarchists (herself included?) had been living “in the clouds of theory,” “helpless” to act (“Report” 62). In the end the reversals of “A Rocket of Iron” evoke the dangers of not hearing, of hearing and then forgetting, of imagining action but forgetting the forces working against it—and then perhaps finally, of lapsing again into the foggy analysis of imperfectly apprehended “facts” and a sense of one's own numb hands.

Among the many functions of these shifts may be their representation of de Cleyre's multiple relation to the tragedies of oppression and the possibilities of resistance. The image of the observer's numb hands evokes the helplessness of those living in clouds of theory; in addition, the narrator is oppressed by a sense of mortality—a fact that, in the context of de Cleyre's life and work, may also evoke her premonition of the briefness of her chance to make some difference in the world. By the time she published this sketch in 1902, Dyer Lum had long ago committed suicide, and some of her promising students had, in a sense, faded into the mist in other ways, by turning from their youthful anarchism toward a more satisfied life of material comforts. She renders one of these incidents in her sketch from this same period, “Harry Levetin,” a long first-person narrative in the voice of a teacher whose poor immigrant student struggles desperately for an education, finally goes to medical school and gets an internship, writes gloriously of how much better it is to be a doctor than to tell working people at the end of a hard day that they are slaves (i.e., than to be an anarchist speaker), and then dies

of consumption just as his career is beginning. In a Haymarket speech in 1900 she referred to the fact that activists like her and her comrades tend to die young (“Our Martyred” 21). Both de Cleyre’s hope for, and despair of, social transformation are thus present in “A Rocket of Iron,” as well as a sense that it is hard to keep hope in one’s line of vision. To do so, one must forget mortality temporarily; it is possible to concentrate so overwhelmingly on one’s own sense of isolation and despair—or what appear to be the elusive realities of this mortal coil—that one forgets to hear the prophetic signs of revolution.

“Germinad!”

Throughout the narrative reversals of “A Rocket of Iron,” which problematize the possibilities of successful resistance, one vision is consistently sustained: that of the violence at the core of the economic system, which is responsible for the cold hell of “half-dismembered bodies writhing in pain” (409) at the beginning of the sketch, for the fiery explosion at its climax, and for the mortal disease of the hero at the end. That vision of the present “order” as inherently, overwhelmingly violent is one de Cleyre sustained throughout her life. It was because of it that she saw public outrage at the supposed threat of anarchist “violence” as a hypocritical deflection of attention from the real issue of human liberty: “it is not violence the ruling classes object to; for they themselves rule by violence, and take with the strong hand at every door. It is the social change they fear, the equalization of men” (“Our Martyred” 21). She was outraged at the pretense that it was force itself the government objected to:

What! These creatures who drill men in the science of killing, who put guns and clubs in hands they train to shoot and strike, who hail with delight the latest inventions in explosives, who exult in the machine that can kill the most with the least expenditure of energy, who declare a war of extermination upon people who do not want their civilization, who ravish, and burn, and garrote and guillotine, and hang, and electrocute, they have the impertinence to talk about the unrighteousness of force! (“Eleventh of November 1887” 170)

What wonder such a system should produce violence as its “fated fruit.”

This perspective reflects the fact that, like so many of her contemporaries, de Cleyre traced the inception of her anarchism to the Haymarket

affair. Whether or not it was an anarchist who threw the bomb—as it may well have been, and as de Cleyre herself may well have eventually known²¹—was of little consequence to her overall analysis of the sources of violence in the incident: the oppression that initiated the strike, the violent retaliation against the strikers, the whole system of laws that could be manipulated so easily to kill five men who had certainly not thrown the bomb. “There will come a time,” August Spies said just before he was hanged, “when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today!” (qtd. Avrich, *AA* 48). In the imagery of her speeches commemorating the Haymarket martyrs, de Cleyre pictures their deaths again and again as harbingers of a worldwide social transformation, the fulfillment of the prophecy that these strangled voices will be heard.²² In her Haymarket speech “The Fruit of the Sacrifice” she pictured the buried martyrs as buried revolutionary potential, awaiting inevitable resurrection: “immortal seed lain germinating in the furrow” (1). The word “germinating” was undoubtedly intended to suggest *germinal*—an electrifying word to de Cleyre and her contemporaries because of Zola’s novel. It became even more so two years after this speech, in 1897, when Michele Angiolillo cried out, “*Germinal!*” just before he was garroted for assassinating Antonio Cánovas del Castillo in revenge for the tortures of Montjuich.

De Cleyre’s poem “*Germinal*” and her short story “The Heart of Angiolillo” render her admiration for his passionate response to injustice after a group of those who had been tortured in Montjuich came to London to expose its horrors to the world. Like Angiolillo, de Cleyre met them, heard their stories in public and private, and saw their mutilations. She read his act as a portent, a seed of the resistance that must follow such oppression:

Germinal!—The Field of Mars is plowing,
And hard the steel that cuts, and hot the breath
Of the great Oxen, straining flanks and bowing
Beneath his goad, who guides the share of Death.

Germinal!—The Dragon’s teeth are sowing,
And stern and white the sower flings the seed
He shall not gather, though full swift the growing;
Straight down Death’s furrow treads, and does not heed.

Germinal!—the Helmet Heads are springing
Far up the Field of Mars in gleaming files;
With wild war notes the bursting earth is ringing.

Within his grave the sower sleeps, and smiles.
London, October, 1897

(65)

Even the incessant enjambments in this poem express the sense of an unstoppable force, as does its wild Romantic undercurrent, compressed by the tight poetic form in a miming of the always only temporary compression of the human will to freedom.

De Cleyre grew up hearing her mother's nightly readings of Byron (Avrich, AA 25), and she loved the poems of Swinburne, Poe, and Ferdinand Freiligrath. Like the word *germinal*, August Spies' prophecy, "We are the birds of the coming storm," took deep root in her romantic imagination. What she said of Dyer Lum was equally true of her, but with a difference: "he believed in revolution as he believed in cyclones; when the time comes for the cloud to burst it bursts, and so will burst the pent up storm in the people when it can no longer be contained" ("Dyer D. Lum," *Freedom*). De Cleyre's vision of the field of Mars owes much to Zola's naturalistic evocations of the spontaneous, uncontrolled and uncontrollable rising up of the miners, whose misery has germinated underground and breaks in a stormlike fury. At the end of the novel we realize this outburst was only a prelude:

On all sides seeds were swelling and stretching, thrusting through the plain in search of warmth and light. There was a whispering rush of overflowing sap, the sound of seeds spread in a great kiss. Again, again, more and more distinctly, as if they too were rising to the surface, [the miners] were continuing to hammer. . . . Men were springing up—a black, avenging army was slowly germinating in the furrows, sprouting for the harvests of the coming century. And soon this germination would sunder the earth. (Zola 428)

De Cleyre was moved by such images. Like Dyer Lum, she believed in cyclones; unlike him, she did not therefore see violence as a moral imperative for herself, although much of her work includes impassioned, prophetic warnings of the potentially violent results of violent oppression. If the image of the cycle of violence begetting violence was central to de Cleyre's own advocacy of nonviolent methods, it was also central to the exultation she expressed again and again, especially in her Mayday speeches and in many of her poems, at every revelation of the natural law whereby those who sow the wind inevitably reap the whirl-

wind; a theme on which she played constant variations in every genre in which she wrote: lectures, essays, poems, stories, letters.²³ The wild hurricanes and furious storms, red lightning and cataclysmic upheavals, tempestuous seas bursting through the sea wall—metaphors of revolt that earned her Leonard Abbott’s praise as a “priestess of pity and vengeance”—express an exultant faith that human freedom is a tremendous, uncontainable natural force that will always reassert itself against suppression.²⁴ Her statement that Lum believed in the ultimate bursting of “the pent up storm” is followed by her own avowal: “So he believed, and trusted in the future. And I who trust in his philosophy trust that in that fire-hued day the spirit of my beloved teacher and friend will burn in the hearts of the strugglers for freedom, till it consumes away all fear, all dependence, all the dross of our ‘American slavery,’ and leaves them erect, proud, free, dauntless as he who has left to them the rich legacy of a life of thought and work in their behalf” (“Dyer D. Lum,” *Freedom*).

In general, de Cleyre’s analysis of violence and its causes was part of her larger view that true life, “a normal life,” can exist only in a condition of freedom, and that freedom is the natural element of the human spirit, which will simply assert itself again and again until the fundamental social and economic conditions that sustain freedom for every person on earth are met: “Humanity is a seething, heaving mass of unease, tumbling like surge over a slipping, sliding, shifting bottom; and there will never be any ease until a rock bottom of economic justice is reached” (“Mexican Revolution” 255). Until then, as she said in “Direct Action,” the class war

will go on as it has been going, in spite of all the hysteria which well-meaning people, who do not understand life and its necessities, may manifest; in spite of all the shivering that timid leaders have done; in spite of all the reactionary revenges that may be taken; in spite of all the capital politicians make out of the situation. It will go on because Life cries to live, and Property denies its freedom to live; and Life will not submit. (242)

Three

SEX SLAVERY

... there is no refuge upon earth for the enslaved sex. Right where we are, there we must dig our trenches, and win or die.

—Voltairine de Cleyre,
“Sex Slavery”

Theory and Practice

De Cleyre was not one of the great original theorists of anarchism at its most general level, although many of her lectures are brilliant and cogent syntheses of ideas drawn from her extensive reading of anarchist theory. She should be recognized, however, as a major—perhaps the major—theorist of anarchist feminism, despite the fact that she is almost invariably overshadowed in feminist histories by the more charismatic figure of Emma Goldman, whose ideas on women were in some respects far less revolutionary. Whereas Goldman could refer to “the innate craving for motherhood,” for example, and describe “love for a man” as “life’s greatest treasure” for a woman and “the right to give birth to a child” as “her most glorious privilege” (“Tragedy” 219, 222), de Cleyre rejected any essentialism that represented women in biological terms as naturally one thing or another. She argued as well against the essentialism that read the effects of the social construction of men as the normal

expression of their natures: “Little boys are laughed at as effeminate, silly girl-boys if they want to make patchwork or play with a doll. Then when they grow up, ‘Oh! Men don’t care for home or children as women do!’ Why should they, when the deliberate effort of your life has been to crush that nature out of them” (“Sex Slavery” 355). While Goldman emphasized the importance of the free and full expression of one’s emotional nature, saying that “the most vital right is the right to love and be loved” (224), de Cleyre never theorized freedom specifically in terms of a full access to love. Although she advocated free love, she was painfully alert to the danger that anarchist attempts to practice it might result in reinscriptions of women’s oppression, a subject Goldman does not discuss. De Cleyre objected, for example, to any permanent domestic arrangement between a woman and a man, whether it was officially designated as marriage or not:

But it is neither a religious nor a civil ceremony that I refer to . . . when I say that “those who marry do ill.” The ceremony is only a form, a ghost, a meatless shell. By marriage I mean the real thing, the permanent relation of a man and a woman, sexual and economical, whereby the present home and family life is maintained. It is of no importance to me whether this is a polygamous, polyandric, or monogamous marriage, nor whether it was blessed by a priest, permitted by a magistrate, contracted publicly or privately, or not contracted at all. It is the permanent dependent relationship which, I affirm, is detrimental to the growth of individual character, and to which I am unequivocally opposed. Now my opponents know where to find me. (“They Who Marry” 502)

For official versions of marriage she had nothing but contempt: “Marriage is not in the interest of women. It is a pledge from the marrying man to the male half of society (women are not counted in the State), that he will not shirk his responsibilities upon them! . . . I would strongly advise every woman contemplating sexual union of any kind, never to live together with the man you love, in the sense of renting a house or rooms, and becoming his housekeeper” (“Woman Question” 108). The depth of de Cleyre’s opposition to “marriage” is revealed, paradoxically, in the only one of her letters that could be termed cynical, in a passage no one to date has quoted in a discussion of her work. Writing to her mother, she refers to having considered marriage to a man named Bentley for purely economic reasons.

You ask me if I had married him would I have said: "All right, you can have her, but not me too." No indeed. If I had married him I would have done it as a pure business transaction. That's all I ever considered it. I would never, under any circumstances marry a man I loved. And I didn't want him for his person, but for his money. I only would have married then, as a legal means of getting the money. If I could have got it just as well without marrying him, I'd have lived with him that way. But I knew who I was dealing with. And since I had resigned principle and made up my mind to a bargain and sale business, I wasn't going to sell without surety for my bargain. And as for what he did with himself after he paid me, what did I care. He might have had mistresses by the score for all of me.

For all that I intended to be square with my part of the bargain, and would have done my best to have made his home pleasant.

Needless to go over the circumstances that got me in so degraded a state of mind. You know how the finances were; and perhaps, a little, of how badly I wanted to write, which I could not do (and have never since been able to do) for want of a little quiet security. But all that was an old story, and would not, of itself, have been sufficient to break down principles of action. It was just simply that I didn't see any use in living anyhow so far as love was concerned. It didn't make much difference to me who I lived with; and I thought I could make you and Addie [her sister] a nice place to rest in after so many years of misery. I admit it was a disgraceful state of mind to be in, and that no one ever condemned that sort of thing more than I have. But that's the way it was. (And I don't imagine the life would have been more unpleasant than lots of people live either). . . .

The idea of taking from one we love, is also an old point of disagreement, between you and me. . . . to me, any dependence, any thing which destroys the complete selfhood of the individual, is in the line of slavery, and destroys the pure spontaneity of love. It is communism, and communism, in any form, is revolting to me.—For the same reason, while I would do away with the individual "home" with its waste of forces (as Andrews says 12 matches, 12 little fires, 12 little tea-kettles where one match, one stove one tea-kettle would do), and have instead magnificent palaces, spacious grounds, all the glory of architecture and sculpture, a theater in every house, a fine library, swimming rooms, bath-rooms, everything on a large scale—I would also have an arrangement where every individual should have a room, or rooms for himself exclusively, never subject to the intrusive familiari-

ties of our present “family life.” A “closet” where each could “pray in secret,” without some ~~one~~ persons who “loves” ~~them~~ him, assuming the right to walk in and do as they please. And do you know I was pleased beyond measure the other day to find that Wm. Godwin, the great Eng. Philosopher, and Mary Wollstonecraft, mother of Mrs. Shelley taught, and as far as possible practised the same thing just 100 years ago. (Letter to mother, summer 1893)

“Andrews” in this passage is Stephen Pearl Andrews (1812–1886), an abolitionist and early free love advocate, who extended Josiah Warren’s guiding principle, “individual sovereignty” to the “Realm of the Affection” (Sears 6). Andrews advocated “the entire abolition of the institution of Marriage as a legal tie to be maintained and perpetuated by force”; his description of the present state of the family is especially relevant to de Cleyre’s use of quotation marks around “home” and “family life,” similar to those she places around “order” in her sarcastic descriptions of the present social order in “The Economic Tendency.” The present-day family, in Andrews’s view, is “a very hot-bed of selfishness, which, while it provides for one’s own children badly enough, permits the children of others, equally good, to starve at one’s door, with the comfortable assurance that the responsibility belongs with someone else.” He announced an imminent “grand social revolution” after which the people will live in palaces, and the nursery will be “a Unitary Institution, scientifically organized and adapted to the new social state” (letter to the editor). Urging large nurseries run by professional childcare providers, Andrews “sought the radical restructuring of domestic life in order to dissolve the prevailing social bonds, so that pure and voluntary links, namely love and natural attraction, could replace arbitrary ones” (Sears 248). The invocation of Andrews in this letter casts a perhaps intentionally ironic light on de Cleyre’s confession that she once thought of marrying without love, purely for economic security and the chance to write without worrying about supporting herself. Andrews had urged domestic unions based on love alone: “Man and Woman who do love can live together in Purity without any mummary at all” (qtd. Sears 6).

The scare quotes around “home” and “family” mark the extent to which de Cleyre’s views on the status of women in her society diverged from mainstream gender ideology, as does her apparent plan at one time to marry a man who might well turn out to be a philanderer, and to marry him not for his “person”—that is, not for sexual attraction—but for the economic security it would give her, the freedom it would give

her in particular as a writer. Put this way, without the stress and emotion with which de Cleyre's description of her state of mind at the time is infused, her plan resembles exactly that put into action by many nineteenth-century women; despite ideals of companionate marriage and romantic passion, women's ability to support themselves was limited, economic motivations were a critical factor in many women's decisions to marry, and many wives saw men as unfortunately but inevitably inclined to philander. Thus her analysis of this moment in her life, this "degraded state of mind," is part and parcel of all of her writing on women as victims of the present "order." The cynicism of her plan, but also its embittered desperation, derives exactly from its dull acquiescence to that order—a compromise, however, from which she was happy to have backed off. She did so as well in another, even more striking case, her decision that her child would be raised by his father, not by her.

Later in the same letter quoted above, de Cleyre refers twice quite casually to this man, James Elliott, a friend and former lover, by whom she became pregnant in 1889, early in her Philadelphia years. She seems to have considered an abortion and then rejected it on medical advice, but regarded the baby as the father's responsibility before its birth and therefore as his responsibility afterwards (Marsh 130). The available documents do not enable us to discern the exact circumstances. De Cleyre had been living with Elliott at the time. Had he insisted on sex when de Cleyre did not want it? Had he been responsible for birth control and failed to use it? Did he talk her into trying the inaccurate version of the rhythm method that was practiced then, and she got pregnant? Were they practicing coitus interruptus, or one of the other nonorgasmic versions of sexual contact popular among free lovers, and he lost self-control? There is no way to know. What is clear is that not very long after her child's birth in June 1890, possibly in the throes of postpartum depression, she left for Kansas, arriving in November (letter to mother, Nov. 16, 1890) and remaining to lecture and write for a year before returning to Philadelphia. At that point the story becomes more murky. She is, for example, referred to as having essentially abandoned her child, and there is no question that her letters rarely ask for or impart any news of Harry; Marsh points out that not one of her extant letters even refers to him before 1906 (130). In one famous incident, indeed, she was asked by her sister Addie if the child might come live with his aunt and be raised by her, and de Cleyre replied, "It's nothing to me, what Elliott does with his boy" (Avrich, AA 72–73). The language suggests, at least,

that her anger toward the father who brought this child into the world was permanent.

On the other hand, she maintained friendly and even affectionate contact with Elliott and his mother, who raised the child down the hall from de Cleyre in the rooming house where they all lived for three years until Elliott and his son moved to a nearby neighborhood in 1894 (Marsh 130), and she contributed child support for his brief effort to get a technical education (which he basically wasted, she thought) as well as attempting (unsuccessfully) to teach him piano. Despite these points of contact, he supposedly did not know until he was fifteen that she was his mother, a fact (if it is indeed a fact) that is puzzling since she gave him a weekly allowance from the time he was ten (Avrich, *AA* 72). He did eventually learn of the relationship, and by all accounts became one of her greatest admirers, taking her last name and naming his first daughter for her (Avrich, *AA* 73). She obviously interacted with him; it is from him, for example, that we know that Dyer Lum was the person who smuggled the dynamite cigar with which Haymarket martyr Louis Lingg committed suicide in his cell before his scheduled execution (Avrich, *AA* 64)—a fact, together with others he supplied after her death, that implies at least some long conversations. She wrote Alexander Berkman in July 1906 of a wonderful midnight trip to Valley Forge with “my youngster,” who was quite possibly boarding with her: she speaks of both of them having to get up early to go to work the next day, and in a letter to her mother of May 27, 1907, she refers to not having charged Harry rent “since October.” In the same letter she tells how Harry has repaired her mother’s rocking chair several times, describes how he “came home radiant with the discovery that there is a machine whereby a single man can raise twenty tons!” and refers to taking only part of the rent-money he offered as “just part cancellation of an old debt”—her debt to him, perhaps? Later, on August 15, 1911, she wrote to her sister, “It’s all nonsense about Harry De Claire becoming a priest; he is an ignorant boy and an alcoholic wreck; they wouldn’t take him in for a minute.”

Whatever her views of Harry, when de Cleyre was dying he accompanied her friend Nathan Navro to her bedside in the Chicago hospital. Paul Avrich cautions against “judg[ing] her too harshly” under her personal and historical circumstances, but one might caution also that it is hard to see, through the lens of her friends’ and family’s assumptions about gender, exactly what the circumstances were. Without necessarily defending whatever defense mechanisms de Cleyre used to justify her

relations with Harry, it is also useful to ask with what degree of harshness we would evaluate the behavior of a late-nineteenth-century father, rather than a mother, who left his child with the mother and grandmother to go on a long lecture tour several months after his child's birth, returned to live in the same rooming house, supplied financial support out of a meager salary used also to support an aging mother, went on outings and shared confidences with his child, lived with him for a time when the son was sixteen, died with him at his bedside, and was memorialized in a grandson's name.

Interestingly, we have de Cleyre's own evaluation of a father who abandoned his whole family in order to pursue his work for the cause of anarchism, N. H. Berman ("Burmin" in the manuscript from which I am quoting), a Russian nihilist who immigrated to the United States. In a sketch after his death, de Cleyre tells how he "deserted all prospects and personal responsibilities, to throw himself into what he conceived to be the near-approaching social upheaval and regeneration of the world." Convinced that the labor protests in the United States in the mid 1880s were "the premonitory rumblings of the great International revolt, he left position, friends, family, without a parting word, to bear his part in what seemed to him the only thing of importance in this world, literally 'taking no thought of the morrow.'" The biblical allusion allies this radical desertion of family with the radical disregard for earthly responsibilities that Jesus seems to have advocated (a sort of stamp of approval, if not a disguised appeal to biblical authority for such behavior); on the other hand, de Cleyre acknowledges that "to the ordinary mind" this might seem an "almost cruel act." She gives Berman's answer to such charges, from what we might assume was one of her own conversations with him: "Ah those little ones at home, and the others—were there not thousands just as innocent and helpless to whom I owed so much!" De Cleyre paints him, although in a generally positive light, as a fanatic—"fanatic offspring of the great fanatic race" of revolutionary Russians who martyred themselves for the cause, and as someone who, ordinarily "tender and loving beyond the heart of common men," was nonetheless "so indifferent to acts of simple responsibility" as to act callous and even vindictive to anyone (including even at times his lover de Cleyre?) who seemed "derelict to the high demands of the Social Revolutionary character" ("N. H. Burmin"). It is impossible to know how de Cleyre would have compared this extreme case of insensitivity to family and friends, which she seems to have experienced directly at times despite Berman's tenderness and love, with her own decision to leave Harry in the care of his father.

Margaret Marsh has pointed out that it is not advisable to analyze de Cleyre's theoretical writings on women without understanding her personal life (131); at the same time de Cleyre's views on women's oppression should also be considered on their own merits, as critical contributions to the history of feminist thought. De Cleyre has never been seen, and probably did not see herself, primarily as a feminist theorist;¹ indeed most of her writings are not directly about the woman question. Those that are, however, are not only among the best articulations of the radical feminist theories of her time (ideas she shared, for example, with such figures as Lillian Harman, Angela Heywood, and Matilda Joslyn Gage),² but also go beyond them in her analyses of women's oppression as part of a larger system.

To begin with only one example, when de Cleyre was writing her mother about Wollstonecraft and Godwin, she was involved in a women's group, the Ladies' Liberal League, founded in 1892. Her lecture on this group in 1895 reveals that she joined after the initial act of rebellion that inaugurated the group; thus, she was not one of its founders, as is sometimes suggested. However, her account indicates that she helped to shape the organization significantly—perhaps, Marsh has suggested, as a local Philadelphia counterpart of feminist Matilda Joslyn Gage's Woman's National Liberal Union, for which she had lectured in Kansas from 1890 to 1891 (see Marsh 61–60). We might infer from the group's name that de Cleyre's participation was, as Marsh says, a short-lived effort at coalition-building with nonanarchist feminists (61); like Gage she would probably have selected a name with the word *woman* in it rather than *lady*, a term that reeked of the class system and implied a decorous restraint instead of the tendency to “kick” that she identifies as the Ladies' hallmark.

Nonetheless, she uses the name to humorous advantage in various ways; indeed the lecture in general is an example of de Cleyre's wittier style, beginning with her comparison of this short history to a huge two-volume work by religious-history scholar Ernest Renan (1823–1892). Some of her Jewish students had given her this *History of the People of Israel* for Christmas in 1893, and she speaks of it glowingly in a letter to her mother (Jan. 23 [1894]). Her self-comparison to Renan is partly self-deprecating humor; she is the “historian and prophet” of an obscure three-year-old women's group in Philadelphia, while Renan's massive scholarship engages the vexed question of science and religion in the context of the long history of the Jews, linking their messianic hopes to

his own prophetic hope for earthly justice “without a compensatory heaven” (Wardman). Even so, the comparison has its serious side: like Renan, de Cleyre speaks of science, history, and justice, and like him she is concerned with centuries of oppression. Renan argues that his great subject is “of interest to the philosophic mind”; de Cleyre says hers is, too—or if not, “so much the worse for the philosophic mind.” This is only half a joke: one of her subjects is the hypocrisy of male freethinkers who would happily claim a “philosophic mind” but have not devoted much genuinely “free” thought to the topic of their own hereditary authority over women.

De Cleyre defends the Ladies’ “kicking” against that authority—first and foremost, the authority of their male-dominated parent organization—from the ethical perspective implied in an image of sap climbing upward to the flower, which she cites as Kropotkin’s. The metaphor appears in his *Anarchist Morality*, as part of a quotation from ethical theorist Jean-Marie Guyau (1854–88):

The moral sentiment of duty which each man has felt in his life, and which it has been attempted to explain by every sort of mysticism, the unconsciously anarchist Guyau says, “is nothing but a superabundance of life, which demands to be exercised, to give itself; at the same time, it is the consciousness of a power.”

All accumulated force creates a pressure upon the obstacles placed before it. *Power* to act is *duty* to act. And all this moral “obligation” of which so much has been said or written is reduced to the conception: *the condition of the maintenance of life is its expansion.*

“The plant cannot prevent itself from flowering. Sometimes to flower means to die. Never mind, the sap mounts all the same,” concludes the young anarchist philosopher.

It is the same with the human being when he is full of force and energy. Force accumulates in him. He expands his life. He gives without calculation, otherwise he could not live. If he must die like the flower when it blooms, never mind. The sap rises, if sap there be.

Be strong. Overflow with emotional and intellectual energy, and you will spread your intelligence, your love, your energy of action broadcast among others! This is what all moral teaching comes to. (108–9)

De Cleyre’s reference to this passage locates her anarchist feminism in a context in which it has not been placed before—as a contribution to

anarchist ethical theory. In her day as in ours, feminist demands were often seen as ungrateful, ungenerous, focused on petty desires for equity in contexts that matter little in the larger scheme of things (but in which, of course, men happen to have the advantage). The second wave of feminists refused to make the coffee for their comrades in the Civil Rights struggle; de Cleyre's Liberal Ladies refused to run the fund-raisers for Liberal men. Indeed they resisted entirely the men's idea of what their group should be—an old-fashioned “auxiliary,” such as still exists in many women's civic clubs of today. The ladies refused this status, de Cleyre explains, because they “love liberty and hate authority”—a sentiment that inevitably expresses itself “‘as the sap climbs upward to the flower,’ to make use of an illustration from Kropotkin.” Considering the context of this image in Kropotkin's argument, de Cleyre's allusion to it implies that women's “non-submission, insubordination, rebellion, revolt, revolution, . . . non-acquiescence to injustice” is not some petty demand for what Kropotkin calls “mere equity,” but springs from the most profound moral impulse of human nature. This impulse is the force that will ultimately bring about true equality, which he defines not as equity alone but as “plenitude of existence” (105) for every individual.

American feminist Margaret Fuller had argued her case for women's full access to the sources of life and happiness on the basis of one simple fact: “human beings are not so constituted that they can live without expansion” (36). De Cleyre's many exultant images of expansion and release suggest that her feminism was based on a similar insight, similarly derived from an excruciating personal sense of the “subordinated cramped circle” circumscribing women's lives (“Why” 20). She would have resonated strongly to Kropotkin's vision of equality as “plenitude of existence, the free development of all [one's] faculties,” to his statement that expansion is a fundamental condition of life, and to his moral imperative: “Overflow with emotional and intellectual energy . . . spread your intelligence, your love, your energy of action broadcast among others” (105, 109). Her image of the sap rising in the flower associates the rebellions of the Liberal “Ladies,” in all their apparent insignificance, with this great moral imperative—with the acts of those men and women who, in Kropotkin's view, “make true morality, the only morality worthy the name” (108).

Thus, to understand de Cleyre's contributions to feminist theory fully in their historical context, it is necessary to place them in the broadest contexts of anarchist theory such as Kropotkin's. It is also necessary to see that de Cleyre's intellectual inheritance as a late-nineteenth-century

anarchist included a legacy of claims for sexual freedom and the rights of women that began with Godwin, Paine, and Wollstonecraft in the late eighteenth century and flowered, by way of various free-love movements in the mid-nineteenth century, in the ideas of the “sex radicals.”³ Godwin, as de Cleyre approvingly quotes, had described “the institution of marriage” as “a system of fraud . . . law and the worst of all laws. . . . an affair of property and the worst of all properties” (qtd. in “Anarchism in Literature” 141). De Cleyre consistently refused any domestic arrangement that looked like “the permanent dependent relationship” of marriage. In 1897 she wrote to a lover, Samuel H. Gordon, in language that recalls Wollstonecraft’s description of married women as slaves, but also suggests that the “enslavement” she experienced in some of her affairs included a sense of bondage to her own feelings, and a desire, which she wanted to resist, for exclusive possession (enslavement) of the beloved:

If you want me back I shall come all the sooner if you treat me as a free woman and not as a slave. Last summer I wanted to enslave you—at least so much that my days and nights were tears because you preferred other people to me, though theoretically I know I was wrong. I will never, *never* live that life again. It is not worth while *living* at that price. I would rather die here in England and never see your beautiful face again than live to be the slave of my own affection for you. I will never, let come what will, accept the condition of married slavery again. I will not do things for you; I will not *live* with you, for if I do I suffer the tortures of owning and being owned. (Qtd. Avrich, AA 84)

As this tormented relationship with an anarchist who she felt wanted to trap her in “married slavery” makes clear, sexual freedom in the 1890s did not necessarily imply a commitment to gender equality, any more than it did in the 1960s when it resurfaced along with anarchism as a major cultural movement. Not all anarchists were feminists by any means; indeed de Cleyre devoted some vigorous prose to attacking those who were not—for example, in “Sex Slavery,” “They Who Marry,” “The Heart of Angiolillo,” “The Past and Future of the Ladies’ Liberal League,” “The Gates of Freedom.” But anarchists’ opposition to the state meant that most rejected in theory, and many in practice, the state institution of marriage, in favor of various kinds of sexual and emotional relationships—whether monogamous, “varietist,” or serially monogamous—contracted freely between individuals. Most anarchists, at least in theory,

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Emma Goldman's *Mother Earth*, in which de Cleyre published much of her work from 1906 to 1912. a, Back cover, March 1907, with an ad for Moses Harman's sex-radical *Lucifer, the Light Bearer*, in which de Cleyre published "The Gates of Freedom." Note the endorsement by George Bernard Shaw. b, Front cover, April 1907. The nude woman in a natural setting suggests the connections between anarchist and sex-radical theories of freedom. (Courtesy of the Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library.)

applied their abhorrence of “supreme authority” (“Economic Tendency”) in any form to an analysis of sexual relations and gender arrangements, which they believed must be reconstituted on a revolutionary new basis. Most notable among these were the sex radicals associated with Moses Harman’s periodical *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* in Kansas (later Chicago) and Ezra Heywood’s *The Word* in Princeton.

This fundamental commitment did not imply agreement on details, however, about which the readers of *Lucifer* in particular engaged in energetic disputation. What version of abstinence is best—Alphaism (sexual activity only for procreation), or Dianaism (“frequent and free sexual contact” in “affectional,” rather than “passional” ways, “chaste pleasure” without orgasm)?⁴ Is contraception liberatory for women or only another avenue for male domination? Is monogamy or varietism preferable? (The letter to her mother quoted above suggests that de Cleyre might not have objected to varietism, although she seems to have practiced serial monogamy herself). With regard to the latter question, R. B. Kerr contributed a sci-fi varietist allegory in which an irrational law on the planet of Jupiter that no one may listen to more than one tune stands in for the irrationality of late-nineteenth-century sexual morality. In passing, Kerr also raises the issue of sexual education, one of the major concerns of sex radicals:

... the young of Jupiter are brought up in great ignorance. They are closely watched, cannot go out after certain hours, and are only allowed to read selected books which do not allude to music.

At last when old enough, each Jup is taken into a large and gaily decorated hall. In the center is a table covered with musical boxes done up in frills of many colors, and each containing one piece of music. From these the young Jup may choose one. Of course he cannot hear the different tunes played over before choosing, but must judge by the frills and the colors.

... Music being a wicked and forbidden thing, whatever concerns it arouses the most breathless excitement in the breast of everybody. Every eye, and every available eye-glass or opera glass, is fixed upon the young Jup as he makes his choice. If he hesitates, and looks first at one box and then another, the onlookers wink and nudge their neighbors, and it is whispered that the youth would like to hear more than one tune if he dared, and who knows if he has not already heard some music! (243)

Kerr points the varietist moral, by way of an earthly visitor's reprimand of the Jups for their increasingly desperate and repressive restrictions on the love of beautiful music: "You kill each other in bloody wars, and cheat and lie, and hate and oppress one another; but all these things can be forgiven. The one unpardonable sin is to love a beautiful thing unlawfully. Would it not be well to get rid of some of the hatred in your planet before you abolish any of the love?" (243).

Behind these *Lucifer* debates, there was a set of metaquestions regarding who should be asking questions in the first place. Specifically, should men be involved in discussions of sexual issues at all, or should they "keep from the sex-question their profane and polluting touch"? To this latter suggestion, by "Mrs. Whitehead," a reader named Lena Belfort protested on three grounds: the "sex-question" is no more sacred than any other, women should not be regarded as "purer than men," and the "sex-problem" is important to both sexes. Further, "We have not got down to 'bed-rock' until we have stripped the sex-question of its 'spiritual' incubus as well as of its ecclesiastical and other authoritarian encumbrances"—a statement that shows why sex radicalism was so congenial to anarchists, and vice versa. On the same topic another reader, Walter Hurt, calls for writers to "refrain from personalities" (as in Mrs. Whitehead's ad hominem argument, presumably), and informs readers that he has met Mrs. Whitehead and finds her decidedly inclined to dogmatism. He recommends that those who devote their energies to sarcasm should turn them instead "to the promotion of the propaganda of liberty and reason," and denounces Whitehead's imagery of pollution as itself "a most pronounced profanity." Since humans are male and female biologically, both must contribute to the solution of the "sex problem"; otherwise there may well be "a cessation of evolutionary process, and Nature's reversion to the hermaphroditic form of the protoplasm" (*Lucifer*, 3d ser. 7.24, 189–90). Ironically, Mrs. Whitehead was regarded as profane by a quite different reader, the U.S. government, when her anticontraception letter in another controversy became part of the case against the editors of *Lucifer* for "obscenity" (Sears 76).

De Cleyre contributed to the *Lucifer* debate on the topic, "Why does love die?" arguing in essence that the very question is a waste of time. Love dies because everything dies; the death of love is simply natural, although idealists, more inclined than others to experience this death in terms of "'storm and stress' and bitter surrender," are also more likely to "try to galvanize the corpse" long after, and waste their energies "shovel-

ing ashes upon a grave.” The image interestingly recalls that of “The Economic Tendency of Freethought,” in which freethinkers are urged to give up the old dead issues, cease “gathering the ashes of fires burnt out two centuries ago,” and move on from religious to economic questions. The echo points to the close intertwining of questions of love, sexuality, and economic justice in de Cleyre’s anarchist feminist thought. De Cleyre urges those who mourn the death of love to move on to larger views: “Have you nothing more in your heart than the desire to experience an old thrill? Are there no injustices for you to protest against? Are there no ideals of a better society for you to realize?” (“Death” 291). *Lucifer* was focused most specifically on the “sex problem,” although in an anarchist context; as in her speech to the freethinkers, de Cleyre urges her audience to take the broadest view possible by attaining what she calls here a vision of “the larger distances.” In a sex-radical context this means moving beyond the eye-to-eye contact of individual love relations to “an ocean-sweep of thought,” a vision that reflects “the eyes of the whole human race . . . the fathomless depths of even sympathy for all that moves across the panorama of the world” (290).

Implicit in this critique of those who worry about why love dies is a warning against the possibility that sex radicalism can be a dangerous form of individualist anarchy—the kind she described in “The Philosophy of Selfishness.” In “Death of Love” she allies herself with *Lucifer*’s stands for sexual freedom, while nonetheless criticizing an obsessive focus on sexuality as the primary issue of the day: “Freedom for sex, I will call with you, as I have ever done; and if there are Sapphos among us, why let them ‘burn down to the socket’ with that driveling idea of soaking one’s individuality forever in the individuality of some body or bodies. But the most of mankind are not so. Let such realize that freedom for sex does not mean one must always be worrying about his sexual existence” (291). The acerbic tone bespeaks de Cleyre’s personal history of “storm and stress” with regard to the “sex problem,” which included the relationship with Gordon, in which both took poison after an argument, as well as the relationship with Elliott that ended in pregnancy. At the same time it bespeaks her philosophical distance from those who, like Goldman, exalted the free sex relation as a primary avenue of freedom, or who made it the center of their focus as did the writers in *Lucifer*, the “you” from whom de Cleyre seems to be distinguishing herself in this passage.⁵

Whatever the differences among subscribers to *Lucifer*, the content of their disputes points to what the sex radicals, including de Cleyre, fer-

vently agreed on, and for which some of them were willing to go to jail: sexuality, the human body, and birth control should be discussed openly without any “authoritarian encumbrances”; the resolution of the “sex question” is integral to the establishment of freedom in human relations; sex education is crucial to the health and well-being of women and men; the freedom to live a full and fulfilled life includes the free enjoyment of the body, without ignorance, fear, and repression. In addition, women’s freedom, sexual and otherwise, depends on the “superior right of woman to control in all matters pertaining to sex” (*Lucifer*, Nov. 26, 1886, qtd. Sears 103). The woman must be free to say yes or no in every context, including marriage, because it is the woman who can be forced. Further, a woman who has been forced is no more impure, as E. C. Walker wrote, “than a man whose watch has been stolen is morally degraded” (74). Among anarchist sex radicals, the minor disputes, however hotly contested, were also grounded in a clear agreement, at least, about what the important questions were: With regard to love and sexuality, what ideas and practices will liberate women from “sex slavery” to men, and liberate human sexuality in general from the repressive control of church and state? Concomitantly (and it is here that the unfortunate entanglement of the birth-control movement with eugenics has its roots), what sexual practices, and ideas about sexuality, will insure the birth of free and healthy individuals able cast off the shackles of wage slavery? Some of the physiological theory behind sex-radical ideas included the notion that the physical, mental, and moral health of the child depends on the mother’s emotional state at conception. If the mother was not engaging in the act of sex freely, the child would be physically and intellectually weak, perhaps with criminal tendencies (Sears 121).

In a whole society based on the suppression of women and the distortion of sexuality, there would be many such physically, intellectually, and morally stunted individuals; hence de Cleyre’s references, in “Sex Slavery,” to the “disease, stupidity, criminality” (347) of children born in supposedly legitimate and virtuous marriages but, by implication, begotten through the “lust” of the father and the sex slavery of the mother. In the words of the editor, Moses Harman, the motive for his most courageous stands—those that landed him in jail for “obscenity”—was a belief “that woman, through prenatal impression, could make her child strong or weak, could make it symmetrical or deformed, could make it a philosopher or an idiot, could make it a ‘degenerate’ of the lowest type or build it so well that it would need no regeneration . . . woman’s primal

right to self-ownership, in marriage as well as out, should never be denied her, this in the interest of the unborn even more emphatically than as a matter of justice or humanity to woman herself" ("Supposed Prenatal Influence" 290). To create a free society, then, mothers must be free in general; in particular, they must be free in their choice to have or not have sexual intercourse, and free to decide whether any particular act of intercourse will produce children. The intervention of the state in sexual matters, including marriage, was seen in this light not only as an intrusion on self-sovereignty but as a hindrance to evolution: in anarchist/sex-radical Ezra Heywood's words, "since every human being has a clear right to be well-born, the marriage institution is a State Intrusion which destroys love, hinders intelligent reproduction, causes domestic discord, and enervates, corrupts and poisons the sources of life" (*The Word*, April 1875, qtd. Sears 120). The emphatic rejection here of any external regulation of private sexual matters is one reason why the anarchist sex-radical focus on women's freedoms of sexuality and reproductive choice should not be confused with more popular, nonanarchist manifestations of eugenics ideas based in the same pseudoscience.⁶ Further, an anarchist argument that unfree mothers are used to reproduce an unjust society could of course be made without recourse to eugenics; indeed de Cleyre, like some other readers of *Lucifer*, argued against a focus on eugenicist explanations that turned attention away from systemic social and economic oppression (de Cleyre, *Lucifer*, Apr. 6, 1898, cited Sears 126).⁷

Whatever her disagreements with the editor and readers of *Lucifer* on various issues, it provided a venue for one of de Cleyre's most important anarchist feminist manifestos, "The Gates of Freedom," originally a lecture delivered in Kansas in 1891 at a Liberal convention. In de Cleyre's writings on the woman question, recognizing the pattern of allusions is often a key to her most important arguments. "The Gates of Freedom" is a case in point, framed as it is by allusions to two very particular invocations of freedom: James Russell Lowell's abolitionist poem "The Present Crisis" (1844) and Olive Schreiner's feminist allegory, "Three Dreams in a Desert" (1882/87). In the middle is another key allusion, to "Our Fathers Are Praying for Pauper Pay" (1854) by working-class English poet Gerald Massey. De Cleyre's freethinking audience would have known these works, as well as the theories of Proudhon and Wollstonecraft that underpin her argument. However, as always when she spoke to freethinking or anarchist audiences, she was conscious that many progressive men had not consistently applied their general read-

ing on freedom to the question of women; thus she addresses herself to those who know Proudhon's dictum that "Property is theft" but who may not have not considered one "ugly actuality": women are property. In particular she attacks an article by Edward Drinker Cope (1840–1897), a paleontologist and Lamarckian evolutionist. Cope remained on her list of targets for some time; the Ladies' Liberal League invited him to speak in 1893, and de Cleyre's sarcastic account of his explanation that women do not deserve equality because their bones are inferior provides an amusing moment in her history of the group. A note in the *Pennsylvania Nationalist* for December 23, 1893, reveals that de Cleyre probably gave him a run for his money in person as well: "Don't miss hearing Miss de Cleyre next Tuesday evening at 'L.L.L.' Ridge Ave. and Green St. She will undoubtedly 'go' in a lively manner for Prof. Cope's 'scalp.' We hope Prof's adherents will be there in force, it will make a lively time, for the lady is a logician with oratorical ability." The freethinking editor who published Cope's article in the *Monist*, Paul Carus, also published de Cleyre's "Ut Sementem Feceris" and "The Philosophy of Selfishness" in his periodical *Open Court*—a good indicator of the diversity of opinions on "the woman question" to be found even in the most advanced circles. Although freethought and anarchist periodicals were important venues for feminism, they were also replete with sexist articles such as Cope's, an indication of the challenge anarchist feminists faced in dialogue even with supposedly freethinking men.

It is this challenge de Cleyre takes on as she opens her lecture, which, like "The Economic Tendency of Freethought" the year before, is designed to force a complacent liberal audience to see that in some ways they are unwittingly locked in the past. As in that lecture, she begins with a famous "text"—this time from Lowell's "The Present Crisis." For an audience steeped in the legacy of antislavery, there was no need to cite the eminent New England author of the famous line "They have rights who dare maintain them." Indeed the brief quotation would have evoked the whole context: Lowell's jeremiad against those who fetishize the creeds of past iconoclasts—the Mayflower Pilgrims, for example—but are ready to burn their present-day counterparts at the stake.

Worshippers of light ancestral make the present light a crime;—
Was the Mayflower launched by cowards, steered by men behind
their time?

Turn those tracks toward Past or Future, that make Plymouth Rock
sublime?

They were men of present valor, stalwart old iconoclasts,
 Unconvinced by axe or gibbet that all virtue was the Past's;
 But we make their truth our falsehood, thinking that hath made us
 free,
 Hoarding it in mouldy parchments, while our tender spirits flee
 The rude grasp of that great Impulse which drove them across the
 sea.

They have rights who dare maintain them; we are traitors to our
 sires,
 Smothering in their holy ashes Freedom's new-lit altar-fires;
 Shall we make their creed our jailer? Shall we, in our haste to slay,
 From the tombs of the old prophets steal the funeral lamps away
 To light up the martyr-fagots round the prophets of to-day?

New occasions teach new duties; Time makes ancient good uncouth;
 They must upward still, and onward, who would keep abreast of
 Truth;
 Lo, before us gleam her camp-fires! we ourselves must Pilgrims be,
 Launch our Mayflower, and steer boldly through the desperate
 winter sea,

Nor attempt the Future's portal with the Past's blood-rusted key.

(68)

Although Lowell was not a freethinker, his insistence that the new-lit altar-fires of freedom are being smothered by appeals to what counted for freedom in the past articulated well the freethinkers' insistence on finding truth for themselves. De Cleyre appropriates Lowell's lines even more specifically for anarchist feminism, as a warning to those who want to create a new world without new views on women. The allusion to Lowell's vision of Truth-seekers' progress "upward still, and onward" sounds the first note of de Cleyre's eventual appeal, by way of evolutionary theory and the new science of "sociology," to the idea that "justice is progressive!"

De Cleyre associates the drive toward justice with what another poet, Gerald Massey, had called "the might of the inward 'must,'" in a poem that begins with an allusion to Shakespeare's *Henry VI*: "The smallest worm will turn, being trodden on." De Cleyre alluded to this line in the title of her poetry collection *The Worm Turns* (1900) and in her great speech "On Liberty," only one indication of her poetic kinship with Massey. His poem opens, "Smitten stones will talk with fiery tongues, /

And the worm, when trodden, will turn," and moves toward a call for action that ends with a reference to sex slavery:

When the heart of one-half the world doth beat
Akin to the brave and the true,
And a tramp of Democracy's earthquake feet
Goes thrilling the wide world through,—
We should not be living in darkness and dust,
And dying like slaves in the night;
But, big with the might of the inward "must,"
We should battle for freedom and right!

For our Fathers are praying for Pauper pay,
Our Mothers with Death's kiss are white;
Our sons are the rich man's Serfs by day,
And our Daughters his Slaves by night.

(148-49)

Sex slavery is of course at the heart of de Cleyre's own cry for justice, which centers on the sex-radical argument for woman's "freedom to control her own person." Here the other allusion that frames the essay appears: South African feminist Olive Schreiner's powerful allegory of woman's physical subjection, from "Three Dreams in a Desert" (1882). As the first dream opens, the first-person narrator looks across a vast desert at two distant figures. One stands; another lies with a huge burden on its back, "and the sand was thick about it, so that it seemed to have piled over it for centuries." A dream-guide beside the narrator explains that this creature lying on the sand "is woman; she that bears men in her body." No one since the time of "the oldest recorded memory" has ever seen her move, but her footprints in the ancient clay nearby reveal that once she "wandered free over the rocks" with her companion, the man beside her. The interpreter explains that "ages ago the Age-of-dominion-of-muscular-force found her, and when she stooped low to give suck to her young, and her back was broad, he put his burden of subjection on to it, and tied it on with the broad band of Inevitable Necessity." Since then she has lain there: "And I looked and saw in her eyes the terrible patience of the centuries; the ground was wet with her tears, and her nostrils blew up the sand."

Why doesn't the man beside her simply leave and go on without her? the dreamer asks, and the interpreter points: the man cannot move

either, but does not know the reason—another band, which binds him to the woman on the ground. As the narrator watches, the cord tying the burden to the woman is broken asunder, the burden rolls from the woman's back, and the interpreter explains that the use of the brain instead of muscles for survival in the new age of machines is responsible: "The Age-of-muscular-force is dead. The Age-of-nervous-force has killed him with the knife he holds in his hand, and with that knife of Mechanical Invention he has cut the band that bound the burden to her back." A light comes into the woman's eyes and she raises her head. The dreamer watches:

And I saw the creature struggle: and the drops stood out on her.

And I said, "Surely he who stands beside her will help her?"

And he beside me answered, "He cannot help her: she must help herself. Let her struggle till she is strong."

And I cried, "At least he will not hinder her! See, he moves farther from her, and tightens the cord between them, and he drags her down."

And he answered, "He does not understand. When she moves she draws the band that binds them, and hurts him, and he moves farther from her. The day will come when he will understand, and will know what she is doing. Let her once stagger on to her knees. In that day he will stand close to her, and look into her eyes with sympathy."

And she stretched her neck, and the drops fell from her. And the creature rose an inch from the earth and sank back.

And I cried, "Oh, she is too weak! she cannot walk! The long years have taken all her strength from her. Can she never move?"

And he answered me, "See the light in her eyes!"

And slowly the creature staggered on to its knees.

And I awoke . . . (68–75)

The first dream thus allegorizes woman's bodily oppression, man's inevitable bond to her, her liberation through the end of the evolutionary necessity for the dominance of sheer muscle-power and, hence, the end of man's domination over woman. It is followed by a second allegory of a woman seeking the way to the Land of Freedom beyond a river she may never get to cross, and then by a third vision:

I dreamed I saw a land. And on the hills walked brave women and brave men, hand in hand. And they looked into each other's eyes, and they were not afraid.

And I saw the women also hold each other's hands.
 And I said to him beside me, "What place is this?"
 And he said, "This is heaven."
 And I said, "Where is it?"
 And he answered, "On earth."
 And I said, "When shall these things be?"
 And he answered, "IN THE FUTURE." (83)

The word "Freedom" in de Cleyre's title suggests both the context of the Lowell poem—abolition and, hence, what she calls here "the abolition of woman's slavery"—and also the context of Schreiner's visionary search for gender equality. De Cleyre concludes with what her audience would have recognized as a reworking of Schreiner's allegory, creating a fourth vision to go between the end of the first dream—the moment when Schreiner's figure struggles to her knees after her long wait for freedom—and the beginning of the next, when we find her, or another similar woman, arriving at a river, the last barrier between her and the Land of Freedom. In the interstice between the two dreams, de Cleyre imagines, this time in an American landscape, "the figure of a giantess, a lonely figure out in the desolate prairie with nothing over her but the gray sky, and no light upon her face but the chill pallor of the morning."

The image recalls one of her favorites from another Schreiner work: the "gray dawn" that presides over the feminist heroine's death at the end of *The Story of an African Farm* (1883). Early in the book this heroine, Lyndall, articulates a social-constructionist version of feminism very close to de Cleyre's and similarly inflected with the ideas of Wollstonecraft, arguing that the world says to men, "Work!" and to women, "Seem!" Lyndall sees women's supposed biological nature as a social effect, produced by the gendered aspects of childrearing: "We fit our sphere as a Chinese woman's foot fits her shoe, exactly, as though God had made both—and yet he knows nothing of either" (pt. 2, chap. 4). Lyndall's struggles to define herself outside of gender norms, including norms for sexual morality, end in mortal illness after childbirth. In her delirium near the end, she begs her lover to keep the shutter closed against the "Grey Dawn," the only thing she has ever feared—and which does indeed finally signal her death (pt. 2, chap. 12). De Cleyre would probably have read this ending in the light of a favorite passage from the "Three Dreams," in the dream of the woman on the riverbank, looking toward the Land of Freedom on the other side. An allegorical figure of Reason explains that those who create a path to the edge of the river, even

though they die without achieving their goal, in time create a bridge of bodies. She asks, "Over that bridge which shall be built with our bodies, who will pass?" and he answers, "The entire human race" (82–83).

De Cleyre's image of the giantess alone on the prairie with the gray sky above her and "the chill pallor of the morning on her face" signifies a new beginning rather than an end, but the evocation of Schreiner also evokes some ominous undertones. In *The Story of an African Farm* Lyndall may triumph psychologically but she also dies, and the gray dawn she dreaded creeps in over her dead face at the end; likewise, in "Three Dreams" the woman seeking the Land of Freedom will die at the river's edge without attaining her goal. Even so, in the bittersweet metaphor de Cleyre admired, the seeker at the river will not die in vain; she will be part of the "bridge of bodies" across which all humanity will finally pass to the new heaven on earth.

If "The Gates of Freedom" sets forth de Cleyre's cautiously optimistic feminism, another long manifesto, "The Case of Woman vs. Orthodoxy," reflects the deep basis of that optimism in a material analysis of women's lives. This lecture appears on the front page of the *Boston Investigator* for September 19, 1896, just below the masthead: a picture of the Thomas Paine Memorial Building, beneath which are the motto "Devoted to the Development and Promotion of Universal Mental Liberty" and a selection of books identified by authors' names, including Jefferson, Hobbes, Ingersoll (a prominent author of witty "Infidel" commentaries on the Bible), and—the one book that is open—Paine. In keeping with this display of freethought scriptures, de Cleyre opens her lecture "The Case of Woman vs. Orthodoxy" with a disapproving quotation from Gen. 3:16—God's announcement of Eve's penalty for eating the fruit of the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden.

De Cleyre would have been interested in the contemporary debate over this passage, traditionally a cornerstone of Christian arguments that God decreed woman's subjection to man. Among those who had recently weighed in on the feminist freethought side were the authors of *The Woman's Bible*, published in 1892 and 1895 by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and a committee including Lillie Devereux Blake, a radical feminist de Cleyre cited in a letter to her sister (Jan. 16, 1888). Stanton pointed to "the courage, the dignity, and the lofty ambition" of Eve in the scene with the tempter, who "roused in the woman that intense thirst for knowledge, that the simple pleasures of picking flowers and talking with Adam did not satisfy." After this noble portrait, "The curse pronounced on woman is inserted in an unfriendly spirit to justify her degradation

W. J. ...

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, SEPTEMBER 5, 1883.

WHOLE NO. 2725.

10170 K.

WILLIAM DEAN. FOSTER.
JOHN P. HEDCOCK. FOSTER.
The names of those who have

Beauty in the matter of Nature shows
 a variable taste. If Nature has no marks of
 beauty in her, there she is all ugliness. If
 the maker has no marks of beauty to show
 (God) then he is all ugliness. Order in
 Nature shows mechanical skill. Order in
 the matter (God) shows mechanical skill. If
 Nature had no marks of order in her, there
 she would be all confusion. If the maker
 had no marks of order in him, there would

It is that one variety furnishes the broods-
nest, and the other the roots, there would be
a more perfect commingling of their se-
men. Each bird thus continues its line
by germ, bud, or root, as it is called,
before it is cast.

There is a great deal of work to be done in the future, and it is hoped that the results of the present study will be of some use to the community.

—Tawarikh Qandahar, 1880.

"Love your enemies?" "If so ever did?" Not I; and even the Orthodox Deity rhymes this tyrannical command, for where there is truth, love dies; not rage. Friendship, liberty, and equality, are the seeds of hate.

• *Deinum Ficus*, "in Latin words:—

I had myself in readiness, at my two weeks' interval in the next twelve months, to enter into a contest with my formidable and responsible party, to pay any state or national debt by writing medium in the words of the sum of ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS, if he will induce me to do so.

In my previous message containing there or more

Masthead of the *Boston Investigator*, freethought periodical in which de Cleyre published "The Case of Woman vs. Orthodoxy." Note the prominence of Thomas Paine in the array of freethought scriptures. Note also the place of publication, Paine Memorial Hall. (Courtesy of the Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University.)

and subjection to man.” Stanton continues with some matter-of-fact practical advice for avoiding the “sorrow” referred to in the curse: “With obedience to the laws of health, diet, dress, and exercise, the period of maternity should be one of added vigor in both body and mind, a perfectly natural operation should not be attended with suffering.” She concludes briskly, “We hear the opinion often expressed, that woman always has, and always will be in subjection. Neither assertion is true. She enjoyed unlimited individual freedom for many centuries, and the events of the present day all point to her speedy emancipation.” Blake follows with a commentary comparing Eve’s conduct and the “dastardly” conduct of Adam: “Had he been the representative of the divinely appointed head in married life, he assuredly would have taken upon himself the burden of the discussion with the serpent, but no, he is silent in this crisis of their fate. Having had the command from God himself he interposes no word of warning or remonstrance, but takes the fruit from the hand of his wife without a protest.” Of the supposed “curse” that Eve shall be subject to Adam’s rule, Blake asks, “Is it not rather a prediction?”—one, she says, that has indeed been accurate (24–27).

De Cleyre begins “The Case of Woman” with the question as to *why* this prediction has been accurate: why have women accepted this “doom of the gods” without rebelling? Both her answer and her oppositional prediction of sweeping, imminent change are grounded in an analysis of historical changes in women’s material conditions. She considers the story told in Genesis 38, for example, in which the patriarch Judah has sex with a woman he assumes is a harlot, not realizing it is his widowed daughter-in-law Tamar, who is tricking him into giving her a child—and some tokens that will identify him—after he failed to follow through on his promise to marry her to his son Shuah. Informed later that his daughter-in-law is “with child by whoredom,” he orders her to be “burnt,” but she produces the tokens and is saved. De Cleyre’s point is that Judah is ready to burn his daughter-in-law for being a harlot, but sees his visit to a harlot (as it turns out, the very same “harlot”) as of no moral consequence. She concludes that the pressure to reproduce, created by the dire material conditions of the time and place, forced Tamar and others like her in the Bible to defy even the seventh commandment in order to fulfill the command to “be fruitful and multiply.”

In the course of emphasizing the importance of material forces in the social evolution of gender roles and relations, de Cleyre aims some attacks at the “orthodox” whose focus is on the spiritual instead. Her assault on orthodoxy climaxes in a critique of Proverbs 31—a chapter no

one with a sense of humor will want to miss, she says. The irreverent Bible commentary that follows was a sort of blasphemous freethought genre, practiced by the “infidel” Robert Ingersoll (whose book graces the *Investigator* masthead above de Cleyre’s article), the authors of *The Woman’s Bible* (as in the passage above), and sometimes, in milder form, by Mark Twain. A typical example is Ingersoll’s account of the Creation: “After the sleep fell upon this man, the Supreme Being took a rib, or as the French would call it, a cutlet, and from that he made a woman” (“Liberty”). Rereading the famous praise of the woman whose price is above rubies in a similar fashion, de Cleyre looks for the material reality masked by the scripture writer’s praise, beginning with the word “price” and proceeding with a detection, between the lines, of the slavish role this woman really plays in her family. Her scorn for the scripture writer’s spiritualizing of the perfect wife’s so evidently material value reveals the tight connection between her theorizing of religion and her theorizing of women’s condition, which is clearly a version of materialist (although not Marxist) feminism.

This focus on materiality, inevitably tied to an interest in evolutionary theory for de Cleyre’s generation of freethinkers and anarchists, also characterizes her last great feminist manifesto, “They Who Marry Do Ill” (1907). Together with “Sex Slavery,” “The Case of Woman vs. Orthodoxy,” and “The Gates of Freedom,” this essay lays out the fundamentals of her anarchist feminism; it also exemplifies her skill at analyzing connections among the psychological, material, and sexual oppressions of women. In the course of the argument she advocates free love, birth control, healthy recognition and fulfillment of women’s sexual desire, and a view of evolution based on a role for “consciousness” in determining which gender relations will be adaptive for social progress toward individual liberty. All of these positions locate her very precisely in the context of current debates not only between progressive and conservative thinkers, but among freethinkers themselves.

First, the argument is informed both by de Cleyre’s particular views on evolution and by disagreement with those who hold other views, especially on the relation of evolution to gender norms. Her starting point defines her ethical position as part of her belief in evolutionary theory: “there is no absolute right or wrong; there is only a relativity, depending upon the continuously though very slowly altering condition of a social race in respect to the rest of the world.” The definition of “right”—as identified by “the successful conduct of social beings”—depends on what serves a society’s changing need, which “for the most part” results from

“unconscious response” to environmental pressures. At this point, however, she diverges from Thomas Henry Huxley, Karl Robert Eduard von Hartmann, and her old mentor/lover Dyer D. Lum (writers on evolution with whom she formerly agreed) by claiming a role for “consciousness” in the evolutionary direction of human society (500). This claim is critical to her feminism; without asserting a role for conscious choice in “the course of social development” (500) it would be difficult to counter her opponents’ arguments—also based on evolutionary theory—that current gender arrangements are by definition the best adaptations to current environmental conditions. Having asserted the role of consciousness “in the decision of social problems” (501) de Cleyre acknowledges that marriage did serve to maintain a previous social order based on the class system, but she dismantles the argument that current gender arrangements serve society well *in its present progressive tendency*, which is toward the creation of a truly free individual as a basis for social order.

But what if a marriage is happy? Marriage does not promote individual growth and development; thus, from “the viewpoint that the object of life should be the development of individuality,” those happy in marriage “have lived less successfully than many who may not have lived so happily.” In this insistence on liberty rather than happiness as the crucial determinant of a successful life de Cleyre anticipates in some ways the position of Simone de Beauvoir some forty years later, when she declared her interest “in the fortunes of the individual as defined, not in terms of happiness but in terms of freedom” (xxxiv).

In addition to locating de Cleyre in terms of a debate about gender and evolution, “They Who Marry” also contributes to a sex-radical debate on marriage, a hot topic in freethought and anarchist circles. Some sex radicals chose to marry; Moses Harman’s daughter Lillian, for example, married Edwin Walker (the E. C. Walker referred to above)—but in a ceremony so iconoclastic that they were both imprisoned immediately for “unlawfully and feloniously” cohabiting without being legally married. Part of the marriage ceremony involved this declaration by Walker: “Lillian is and will continue to be as free to repulse any and all advances of mine as she has been heretofore. In joining with me in this love and labor union, she has not alienated a single natural right. She remains sovereign of herself, as I of myself and we . . . repudiate all powers legally conferred upon husbands and wives” (qtd. Sears 85). Although this position was radical enough for the freethought paper *Truth Seeker*, which commended the couple, from an anarchist point of view marriage raised the question of the dangers of participation in insti-

tutions established by the church and state—by definition sources of violence and oppression. Benjamin Tucker's *Liberty* therefore attacked the couple for betraying anarchism by calling their union a "marriage" and attempting in court to establish its legality (Sears 85–86, 102). Although de Cleyre does not refer directly to this incident, "They Who Marry Do Ill" is her contribution to the anarchist/sex-radical debate on marriage, played out in this speech as part of an actual debate with an opponent who argued that "They Who Marry Do Well." De Cleyre, characteristically, extends the term *marriage* to include all de facto marriages entered into by such couples as Harman and Walker—or, more tragically, David and Effie in "The Heart of Angiolillo," a story about the connections of sex slavery and wage slavery in an anarchist couple's failed attempt at free love.

Sex Slavery and Wage Slavery

From de Cleyre's perspective, achieving Kropotkin's "plenitude of existence" or Schreiner's "Land of Freedom" depended integrally on the elimination of "sex slavery" as one of the underpinnings of the current social order. In her anarchist-sex-radical view, sex slavery was inextricably intertwined with "wage slavery," a term that dated, in the American context, to the 1830s and was widespread beginning in the 1870s in the aftermath of the Civil War (Avrich, *HT* 19). De Cleyre analyzed their connection with particular subtlety. In the first place, she saw the repression of a healthy enjoyment of the body as one aspect of the physical subjection of workers that was necessary to the continued exploitation of their labor. Her sketch "The Sorrows of the Body" portrays the physical and psychological consequences of internalizing the church and state ideology that makes a hierarchical division of soul and body, which, she said elsewhere, are not even separate: in freethought,

souls are no longer perceived as monarchs of bodies laying down all manner of laws for the bringing into subjection of the physical members, but rather soul, or mind, or whatever name may be given to the psychological aspect of the bundle called an ego, is one with the body, subject to growth, to expansion and to decay, adapting itself seasonably to time and to circumstances, modified always by material conditions, intimately connected with the stomach, indissolubly related to the weather, to the crops, and to all other baldly commonplace things. ("Case of Woman" 1)

In “The Sorrows of the Body,” a first-person narrator recounts in interior monologue the relentless enslavement of her (or his) body to its obvious monarch, the soul, which hounds the body relentlessly to renounce its own pleasures and work for some higher good. The speaker first suffers desperately under the relentless suppression of her desires, then gradually loses the capacity even to distinguish them. When she is finally granted the touch of another body, which she had longed for, she cannot feel it. At the end the soul finally grants a reprieve, but the body can summon up from the graveyard of its desires only a death wish: a shadow of its old desire to roll naked on the sand or float “along the salt crests” of the sea (451), toward which the speaker looks in nerveless, exhausted longing as the sketch ends. Here the work ethic is equated with the suppression of sexuality, and both are equated with the kind of hierarchical privilege on which wage slavery is based: the soul commands the body; those who profit from labor command those who labor. Further, since in fact the soul is itself “modified always by material conditions” (“Case of Woman” 1), the collapse of the body is the same as a kind of spiritual collapse; whatever vision animated the soul’s tyranny will go unrealized.

In de Cleyre’s terms the major demand of anarchism was “no compulsion”—“the total disintegration and dissolution of the principle and practice of authority” (“Anarchism” 112; “Our Present Attitude” 79–80). “The Sorrows of the Body” explores a psychological form of compulsion based on an *internal* practice of authority. Its source is the ideology of hierarchy in general, as well as a particular religious ideology that separates a “body” from a “soul” and gives the “spiritual” precedence over the sensual. In the course of examining this internalized ideology and its utter destruction of “the power to want,” this terse sketch encapsulates the tight connections among de Cleyre’s views on religion, sex slavery, labor, class hierarchy, and the body—views that are in turn bound up with the intense love of nature she expresses in so many of her letters and poems, and here in a sensuous opening paragraph describing desire for bodily contact with blades of grass, sea foam, “a clean long stretch of sunshiny sand,” the taste of food “straight from the cool ground” (451). Related to that love was a hatred of urban life and a conviction that a free society would be one in which the free individual would be profoundly in touch with the natural world—a unity she herself experienced hiking in Norway or watching the sun rise on vacation; one that she missed on learning of a comet she could have seen if she had not been living in a city (letters to mother, Sept. 2, 1903; to Addie, Sept. 14, 1900; to

mother, summer 1893). In this sketch, sexual freedom is dependent on a free relationship to work; a full and free connection to nature depends on free enjoyment of the body—and all of these freedoms are aspects of each other.

The connections among sex slavery, wage slavery, and ideologies that divide the soul from the body are made even clearer in “To Strive and Fail,” a sketch of a young woman’s exhausted efforts to play the zither late at night, after her grueling work is over for the day. She fails and quits, realizing that her life, like that of her father and grandmother and all the conquered, “silent generations” (450) beyond them has no room for her deepest passions. In a sense her wage slavery is a form of sex slavery because her passion has been bought, at a pitiful wage; the central image of the story is her lack of control over her own body, the fingers she simply cannot move to express her desire. In this sketch the passions of the “soul”—here de Cleyre appropriates the term in a positive sense, for her own uses—must be expressed through the body; if the body is oppressed, the soul sickens, just as in “Sorrows of the Body” the tyranny of the “soul” sickens the body.

In the second place, de Cleyre saw sex slavery and wage slavery as linked because of the simple fact that the subordination of women in marriage was itself a kind of wage slavery. She demanded that every woman ask, “Why must my body be controlled by my husband? Why may he take my labor in the household, giving me in exchange what he deems fit?” (“Sex Slavery” 348–49). The first question cannot but evoke an image of sexual control; the second refocuses our gaze, or rather double-focuses it, so that we must see male control of women’s sexuality and male control of women’s labor as two dimensions of the same problem: women’s lack of control of their own bodies.

De Cleyre’s story “The Heart of Angiolillo” explores the interlocking physical, psychological, and social dynamics of this problem in an account of an anarchist couple who set out idealistically to pursue the path of freedom but, despite their supposedly liberating decision to “live their love lives without the consent of Church and State” (422), become trapped in a relationship of subordination and dependency that literally threatens to kill the wife. De Cleyre brilliantly identifies the subordination as the wife’s, but the dependency as the husband’s. Not a physical abuser, he unthinkingly wears down his wife’s body by exploiting her labor; she must carry the baby, find work, buy food if she has any money to do so, and in general see that his bodily needs are met at the expense of her own, while he gads about discussing social reform with his friends.

The irony is implicit but unmistakable: the husband's parasitic dependency on the wife's labor both inside and outside the home duplicates the class inequality his reformist ideas presumably reject. The woman is clearly, in anarchist terms, the "slave" of the man to whom she has bound herself for ever, who sadly explains to his friends, behind her back, that she has been unable to share fully in his grand ideas and the relationship has not turned out as he had hoped. He then invites these friends for tea—as he informs her casually at the last minute, although she has literally been starving to support him and cannot imagine what she will serve.

When such men as this "creeper" inflict their dependency on another man, such as a father or brother, the narrator says, it eventually leads to a break-off, and everyone comments on how the other man should have cut him loose to fend for himself even sooner. But when the dependency is on a woman,

a mother or a sister or a wife or a sweetheart, she encourages him to think he is a wonderful person, that all she does is really his own merit, and she is proud and glad to serve him. If after a while she doesn't exactly believe it any more, she says and does the same; and the world says she is a fool,—which she is. But if, in some sudden spurt of masculine self-assertiveness, she decides to fling him off, the world says she is an unwomanly woman,—which again she is; so much the better. ("Heart" 423)

This analysis of men's tyranny over women as a form of male dependency is an extension of Wollstonecraft's insights into the relations between gender and class inequality in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, expressed through her many analogies between the rule of a parasitic aristocracy and the rule of men—both of whom, by implication, dominate their subjects by mere "right" of birth. The remedy is to refuse completely a gender paradigm in which being a womanly woman is complacently equated with being a fool. But this woman, Effie, does not conceptualize her situation in terms that would allow her to be "unwomanly"; committed to social justice for other oppressed people, she is nonetheless powerless to free herself.

De Cleyre's representation of Effie's gender oppression as a version of class oppression—sex slavery as wage slavery—is enhanced by the structure of the story, which alternates metonymically, in increasingly rapid juxtapositions that culminate in a surreal fusion, between descriptions of

Effie's private domestic dilemma and descriptions of the London anarchist community's concern for the prisoners in Montjuich. Effie, her husband David, and David's new friend Angiolillo are all at a meeting where letters from the tortured are read (de Cleyre reprints one); thus the accounts of the imprisonment and tortures in Montjuich, including the letter in which Noguès explains how torture wore him to the breaking point of betraying his friends, are juxtaposed with the accounts of Effie's metaphorical imprisonment in a domestic relationship with a man whose exploitive dependency is wearing down her physical and emotional resistance. Her despair at the suffering of the Spaniards begins to merge with her despair at her own situation; hearing Sebastian Sunyer's letter from prison she thinks, "Why does he want to live at all, why does anyone want to live, why do I want to live myself?" (427). Angiolillo has watched Effie and David's relationship with an increasing concern colored by the somber atmosphere of their mutual concern for Cánovas's victims in Spain. The pace of the juxtapositions of the two situations quickens as Angiolillo takes Effie home from the meeting and they discuss both problems almost simultaneously.

This simultaneity renders with striking complexity the imbrication of gender oppression with other forms of oppression in de Cleyre's feminist theory. Angiolillo offers to support Effie until her health improves, love her with no expected return, and thereby help her break off a relationship he believes is literally draining her life away. On one level, their encounter plays out like a scene from a traditional romance, except that the value judgments attached to the roles and speeches are inflected with de Cleyre's anarchist feminism, which makes the whole representation a critique of every gender paradigm that underlies traditional romance. This critique destabilizes all the romance conventions, which slip in and out of focus as the traditional romance gaze that should make sense of them is made to shift back and forth among unsatisfactory conventional readings. Thus, for example the heroine comes clearly into focus as a virtuous woman, but she is also what traditional romances would stigmatize as fallen. Traditionally her problems—even her impending death—would be attributed to her sexual immorality, but the narrator invites the reader into a confidential admission that Effie's problems are exactly the same as those of many women who married conventionally. De Cleyre makes it clear early in the story that while some people would blame Effie's problems on the fact that she chose to live with a man without the blessing of the church, her disregard for conventional sexual morality is not the source of her problems. Similarly,

Angiolillo looks like the dark, sympathetic, charismatic hero who offers rescue, as the dark sympathetic Italian romance hero traditionally does, but the impetus for the rescue is his feminist insight into a woman's oppression, and he is careful to offer some form of aid that will not, as in traditional romance, ascribe all the agency to himself. Furthermore, the woman he is trying to rescue belongs, by traditional standards, to another man, to whom she has made a lifetime commitment—a fact that should, by romance standards, make Angiolillo the dark, charismatic Italian villain instead of the dark charismatic Italian hero. It is, of course, precisely this property relation, this “owning and being owned” as de Cleyre called it in her letter to Gordon, from which he wants to rescue Effie; the happy ending of the marriage plot has been the unhappy beginning of this one. And then on the other hand again, by conventional standards this is no marriage, although de Cleyre makes us see it as so clearly a marriage that it suffices to damn *all* marriages. So Angiolillo is not the villain either; he is the hero—not of a romance plot, however, but of another one, the interwoven story of his revenge on Cánovas for the horrors of Montjuich. As the hero of the Effie/David plot, he fails because Effie is locked emotionally into a romance plot in which he cannot unambiguously play the role of rescuer.

The disruptions of the romance-reader's ability to keep the traditional narrative pattern of romance in focus are thus intensified by Effie's effort, like that of the tortured prisoner, not to betray her friend—to be faithful to her supposedly sex-radical commitment by remaining faithful to the romance script that she has misread, or tried to rewrite, as a sex-radical script. To Angiolillo's proposal, she says staunchly that she did not take David one day to leave him the next, which sounds and is noble, except that, as Angiolillo has pointed out, her long-suffering heroine-ism is destroying not only her but David, whom it debilitates morally even as it debilitates her physically. The traditional womanly romance virtue of patient forbearance is rendered here not only as illusion and foolishness, but as dangerous even for the men it might be thought to benefit. Finally Angiolillo asks Effie for a kiss, which she refuses out of a sense of sexual honor that, by this point, looks simply irrelevant to the issues at hand, as if it were the answer to some other question than the real one: what act is necessary to make all three of these lives free instead of miserable?

At another level and at the same time, the climactic scene between Effie and Angiolillo is a discussion about what act is necessary to free the prisoners of Montjuich, and all the oppressed people they represent,

and about whether personal problems have any meaning in this larger context. Effie asks Angiolillo how he can even think of engaging in this scene with her when other people are being tortured. In de Cleyre's version of Angiolillo's act, his resolve to kill Cánovas seems to spring from this moment, as he asks how Effie would feel were she to hear that the man responsible for the anarchists' suffering in Spain was dead. Angiolillo leaves and honorably tells David what happened; David in response does the only thing he ever does, talk: "the creeper . . . talked a great deal about being better in future to the girl" (430). Angiolillo then, as every turn-of-the-century reader of de Cleyre's story knows and has been anticipating, goes off to Santa Agueda, assassinates Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, and cries out "Germinal" just before he is garroted. De Cleyre's juxtapositions of Effie's suffering and the suffering of Cánovas's victims—a juxtaposition that her fictional Angiolillo obviously understands not as two oppressions but as two faces of the same oppression—culminate in a fused image of the two as Effie dreams she is in the torture chamber of Montjuich, hears the agony of the prisoners, tries to beg for mercy, sees the garrote, hears Angiolillo cry "loud and clear . . . like the sharp ringing of a storm-bringing wind, 'Germinal,'" wakes to hear a bell tolling his last word, throws out her arms to give him the kiss he asked for, and wonders whether this is all her fault (431).

The style of this story, particularly the strained sentimentalism of its opening, is hardly to modern literary tastes, but it has some remarkable subtleties. Effie's suffering and the suffering of those tortured in Barcelona, for example, are not presented as simple analogies. We hear of a prisoner's resistance worn down by torture until he implicates his friends; we see Effie's resistance worn down; we see that the two plots express a connection between state and domestic versions of supreme authority. Even so, Effie's sense that her problems are nothing compared to the suffering in Montjuich is obviously correct. But then on the other hand, Angiolillo's presence as the hero of both stories draws the two kinds of oppression into the same line of vision; we see them as two facets of the same oppressive system. Angiolillo is a liberator who urges Effie to take her freedom from a man who makes her life a torture; he is also a hero who avenges those whom a tyrant made to suffer and die. But David is not a tyrant in any conventional sense; he is only a "creeper" and moocher, who takes unthinkingly what he did not earn without recognizing the killing labor that sustains his life. The contrast itself, however, illuminates both men's role as oppressors. The analogy between the pitiful "creeper" and the aristocratic prime minister suggests the economic

basis for Cánovas's tyranny; he belongs to the ruling class that takes, as by right of birth, the products of others' labor, just as David takes the products of Effie's labor because he is the man and she is the woman. From the other direction, the analogy suggests that the creeper's unthinking exploitation of Effie is a form of tyranny, although it looks like something more benign.

More subtleties unfold from the initial transition between the Effie/David plot and the Montjuich/Angiolillo plot, a paragraph that draws together issues of gender, class, and religion. The narrator has just recounted how Angiolillo came to Effie and David's flat one day to carry the baby out for awhile so Effie could rest, after which "The creeper suddenly discovered that he could carry the baby." Immediately, in the next sentence, the subject turns:

All this happened in the days when a pious queen sat on the throne of Spain. With eyes turned upward in much holiness, she failed to see the things done in her prisons. . . . While she told her beads her minister gave the order to "torture the Anarchists"; and scarred with red-hot irons, maimed and deformed and maddened with the nameless horrors that the good devise to correct the bad, even unto this day the evidences of that infamous order live. But two men do not live,—the one who gave the order, and the one who revenged it. (425–26)

The juxtaposition links the obliviousness of David, the high-minded and presumably atheist reformer whose mind is on loftier social questions, with the religious obliviousness of the queen. Looking to their own souls, both can ignore their responsibility for the bodily suffering of others. The message is clear: theoretical anarchism uninformed by the practice of gender equality merely reinscribes the bodily subordination of one class to another, making Effie's ostensible sexual freedom a reinscribed sex slavery.

Further, the queen's status as a woman of (literally) the ruling class makes the analogy between her and David especially interesting. This is a woman, but a woman with privilege; her class gives her a power analogous to the power of male supremacy. David's power in his family is analogous to a queen's power over her subjects. Then again, the queen abuses her power by effectively abdicating to a man the nitty-gritty, physical details of her responsibilities; David becomes doubly a tyrant by abdicating to a woman the responsibility for the nitty-gritty, physical details of his family life. Wollstonecraft not only compared the rule of

men over women to the rule of tyrants and aristocrats over those of other classes; she also compared women to queens who, to be equal to men and gain true “power over themselves” rather than a warped, manipulative power over men, must give up their pedestals, which are only a disguised form of powerlessness anyway. In the juxtapositions of the queen and Cánovas with David (the biblical little guy who set out to fight a giant but somehow became a king and destroyed his family by abusing his power), and in the confluences of Effie’s private domestic story with the story of Angiolillo’s public revenge, de Cleyre presents one of the most complex analyses to be found anywhere in American literature of the intersections of “wage slavery” and “sex slavery,” and of their intersections, in turn, with the tortured and torturing relations among state violence, domestic violence, capitalist violence, and psychological self-violence.

“The White Room”

The imbrication of feminist analysis with broader anarchist analysis in “The Heart of Angiolillo” is a key to their fusion more generally in de Cleyre’s work. As Catherine Palczewski says, while de Cleyre “rarely combined her views of women and anarchism in the same discourse,” they “were always closely linked in her thought” (1993, 146). Although de Cleyre said over and over that the immediate incident that propelled her toward anarchism was the Haymarket executions, when she described the underlying reasons for her turn to anarchism she cited, “Above all,” her outrage at the subordination of women, including “a bitter, passionate sense of personal injustice” at “the subordinated cramped circle prescribed for women in daily life, whether in the field of material production, or in domestic arrangement, or in educational work; or in the ideals held up to her on all these various screens whereon the ideal reflects itself” (“Why” 20). De Cleyre’s analysis of power relations in general was thus deeply intertwined with a more specific analysis of women’s subordination, through the coercive authority of church and state, to sexual control by men.⁸ Just as she identified government with coercive violence, she identified male supremacy with the violence of “sex slavery,” a term that itself implied the profound identity of women’s economic and sexual subordination. It was around her sense of this identity that de Cleyre elaborated her feminist theory, in such works as “Sex Slavery” (1890), “The Gates of Freedom” (1891), “The Case of Woman vs. Orthodoxy” (1896), “Why I Am an Anarchist” (1897), “The Woman

Question" (1897), "They Who Marry Do Ill" (1907), and a number of essays, poems, and lectures on Mary Wollstonecraft.

An emphasis on individual liberty was the crux of her anarchist feminism, as it was of her anarchism more generally. She saw women as deprived of liberty "by socialization, by the institution of marriage, and by the social pressure to reproduce" (Palczewski 1993, 146); the remedy lay in economic, emotional, and sexual independence. Her anarchist emphasis on direct action as the choice of method meant that her rejection of sexist institutions, both in theory and in personal practice, was absolute: women must simply "take" their liberty as a right, not ask men for it as if it were a privilege to be dispensed by a higher authority. She called on women to see their oppression clearly, and to act directly and unequivocally in response. Arguing for recognition that women are property, she attacked the evolutionist Cope for his cheerful description of woman as the half of the species that willingly enters the "contract" of marriage to receive "support and protection" in return for "the services she renders him in the capacity of a wife." De Cleyre reads these obviously sexual and reproductive "services" as a theft of women's property in their own bodies: "Young girls! if any one of you is contemplating marriage remember that is what the contract means. The sale of the control of your person in return for 'protection and support'" ("Gates," *Lucifer* 8.36). Throughout her adult life she rejected, and called on others to reject, any such transaction. No biography or biographical sketch of de Cleyre, from her day to ours, fails to mention the harmony between theory and practice in her life. This focus is even more appropriate in the light of de Cleyre's rhetorical practices, which are grounded in a very specific understanding of the relationship between oppositional theory and oppositional action. De Cleyre said, "I believe the hardest question in the whole solution of the problem of human justice, is how to make people think equality is possible. . . . The problem, 'how to get rid of institutions' always means the problem of getting the institutions out of men's minds first" ("Ye Have the Poor" 5).

The problem of getting the institutions specifically out of *men's* minds was one of de Cleyre's great interests in her fictional representations of sex slavery, as "The Heart of Angiolillo" reveals. Perhaps her most complex and intriguing consideration of this issue is to be found in a much shorter story (until now apparently unnoticed), "The White Room," which takes up just a little over a column and a half in the London anarchist publication *Herald of Revolt*. The first half of the story is devoted entirely to an elaborate metaphor of a man's conception of his wife, ren-

dered in the form of “an artist’s masterpiece,” the “White Room” of the title. The artist-husband has created this unique room with his own hands, out of a material he invented:

It was not square nor long nor round, nor any regular shape, such as we are used to thinking of rooms; it was wider here and narrower there, and had strange turns and niches, and carvings, and arches; and in all these there were bits of statuary, or tiny fountains, or flowers, or curious sea-things, gathered from many shores, shells and corals and ocean feathers, picked up years apart.

The rhythms of this long sentence are typical of the whole hypnotic description of the White Room, with its skylight, its “white and gleaming” ceiling, its walls covered by “the wild, fantastic tracery of the frost forests on our winter windows,” its white statues and snowy silken curtains around the “small bed,” its silver fish and white birds, its white divans and white velvet rugs “wrought in strange patterns by his own deft fingers.” There is a silver-stringed harp and an impressionist picture of “the white light of a day as it lies on sky and water—only a stretch of sky and water . . .” In a vase are three white lilies. The artist has been working on the room for fifteen years; the story begins on the day he finishes this surprise gift for his wife, “the Soul of the White Room, herself the whitest thing, his pure-faced Scandinavian girl, with the chiselled face that looked out with saint’s eyes from under its aureole of pale hair. . . .”

At this point, the rhythmic, wavelike evocation of beauty, reminiscent of the unity of effect de Cleyre admired in Poe’s poetry, crashes suddenly against a description of the wife’s real life “in the dirty, narrow city alley.” The couple at first had to live there because of the artist’s poverty; more solvent later, he nonetheless kept the alley apartment as their mutual home, depriving his wife of his company while he was away working on his secret project and denying her the few trifles she asked for—all as a buildup to the great surprise of the White Room, which he is now ready to show her as soon as the third white lily reaches a perfect state of openness. Thinking happily of the unveiling he has planned for the next day, when “she would see his white dream, of which she was the angel—had been for so many years,” he arrives home in the alley to discover a note telling of her weariness of staying in this room which he perhaps experienced differently because “his life had lain outside,” and saying she will not return. The artist takes it philosophically. He continues to live in the alley, “But still he went alone to the house under the trees by the water-

side, and saw that the White Room was kept very white, long after the lilies had withered." One night he finds his wife drunk and dying in the gutter and carries her to the house by the river where he lays her, "all soiled," on the white bed in the White Room. Just before she dies she comments on his masterpiece, which she interprets as some alcoholic nightmare: "Ugh! The horrid fancies in the liquor! It looks all white, WHITE, like a dead-house! Powdered gravestones! Ugh! If there were only a bit of blue or red." The artist, having learned his lesson too late, buries her "under violets and carnations, with no white stone at foot or head."

De Cleyre's critique of dominant gender ideology in this story concerns the husband's paradoxical exclusion of his wife from what he imagines as her true home. His wife is the "angel" of the special home he envisions just for her, but his Angel in the House is, ironically, not there; only *he* has been there for the whole fifteen years of their marriage, happily constructing the perfect image of her, and a perfect image of their home. The place where the real woman lives—her real home, as opposed to this fantasy home—could not be more different from the wonderful place in which her husband imagines her during all the years he devotes to the project. The fact that she is trapped in the sordid tenement apartment while her husband, who thinks he is living with her, actually lives elsewhere, is the logical consequence of his fantasy.

In all this the White Room is a figure for the displacement of a real woman by the "True Woman" of nineteenth-century gender ideology: it reveals that the supposed definition of women's true nature, and the true nature of the homes of which they are supposedly the presiding angels, is so remote from their reality as to exclude them entirely. Throughout this marriage, the husband happily inhabits a fantasy of what his wife's desire must be; meanwhile the small efforts she makes to express her will are ignored in order to keep alive the man's fantasy of her will. The life of the husband's fantasy, then, is identical with the death of the wife, which is the logic behind the last scene: what he sees as the ideal home is for her a "dead-house."

It is useful here to draw on Judith Butler's discussion in *Bodies That Matter*, indebted to Irigaray and Kristeva, of the process whereby "a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies" is constructed, not as the opposite of "the domain of intelligible bodies" but as "its constitutive outside"—"the unspeakable, the unviable, the nonnarrativizable that secures and, hence, fails to secure the very borders of materiality" (xi, 188), "an abjected outside, which is, after all, 'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation" (3). In the construction of the white room,

made of some special new material the artist invented, the materializing of the wife as an empty white space is paradoxically identical to her radical exclusion from it. It is this exclusion that constitutes the White Room, constructs it; it exists only *because she is not there*. Or in the words of Coleridge's poem "Constancy to an Ideal Object," "She is not thou, and only thou art she." The artist's creation of this room thus tropes the process by which the ideological construction of the perfect virtuous wife is identical both to the construction of the husband's subjectivity and to the abjection, here the literal casting-out, of the real woman. But there is no such casting out; as Butler says, the "abjected outside . . . is, after all, 'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation" (3).

The final, filthily material presence of the abjected woman on the snow-white bed expresses this logic; the abjection of her real body was the "founding repudiation" around which the room was constructed. The meaning of this repudiation is evident in the fact that, after the wife's death, the philosopher-artist sits on his tenement stoop in the evenings and watches "other women's children" at play. In late-nineteenth-century terms, this fact probably means not only that he and his wife had no children but also that they had no sex, as the symbolism of the white lily for whose opening he waits just one day too long also suggests. In the gender ideology de Cleyre was attacking, the moral "whiteness" of (white) women was specifically asexual, as indicated by the imagery of frost and snow and the smallness of the white bed. The wife was to sleep in this small bed alone, we can assume, as if, indeed, she were to be the last of the room's white statues, herself the final and perfect artifact of her husband's imagination.

Another way of saying all this is to say that the two homes of the story—the White Room and the room in the alley—are, from an ideological standpoint, two pictures of the same place. The dark urban tenement, which is an incidental part of the husband's life and the whole of his wife's, and the house by the river where he works to perfect what he regards as his wife's true dwelling, are not separate as he imagines, but identical; what appears to be the line between them is actually the schizophrenic division between a wife's real position in the "prison cell" of home, as de Cleyre calls it in "Sex Slavery," and the very different position she occupies in her husband's imagination. In the artist's imagination for these fifteen years, his wife is perfectly happy living in the dream home he is creating for her; meanwhile he will not even buy frames for the few pictures she has collected to add some color to the drab walls of her real home. She has her own idea of art, but that signifies nothing to

the artist, whose idea of art is bound up with his false idea of *her*. Her aesthetic subjectivity, her ability to appreciate beauty on her own terms, is swallowed up in her status as an aesthetic object. The artist's idea of beauty comes to life in the fantasy home he creates for his wife, which coexists separately, and ironically, with her actual experience of home throughout what are for her the sad and empty years, and for him the happy and fulfilled years, of their marriage. Put this way, the story of the two homes expresses exactly de Cleyre's view of marriage not only as "property and the worst of all properties," in Godwin's terms, but as mystification and the worst of all mystifications.

Whether de Cleyre intends the whiteness of her female protagonist to signify racially, it undoubtedly does; the artist reads his Nordic wife's color as especially pure, the quintessence of what one would expect in a woman who is an "angel." (We can assume, for all sorts of reasons, that he would not have created a black room for a woman who was similarly black.) As Paula Giddings pointed out in *When and Where I Enter*, the ideology of "true womanhood" applied in dominant ideology only to white women; true women were white by definition and, as this story makes clear, the whiter the better. Focusing on the psychological and material ramifications of such ideology for a "white" white woman, de Cleyre represents the extreme limit of this kind of moral and emotional whiteness as the blankness of death. Related to this racialized/gendered idealization of the wife is—as always in de Cleyre's analyses of sex slavery—the question of economics, ownership, property. In "The White Room," the artist-husband's idealizing of his wife has the effect of depriving her materially of property, a deprivation ironically based on his reverence for what Cheryl I. Harris has analyzed, with relation to chattel slavery in the United States, as "the merger of white identity and property." Under slavery, as she points out, "it became crucial to be 'white,' to be identified as white, to have the property of being white."⁹

In the case of "The White Room," the wife's property of whiteness becomes the husband's property, reified in the property of the White Room itself—ostensibly the wife's special room, but in fact a space from which she is materially excluded. The husband denies her the trifles she would like to own, planning this one grand gift. Never asking what she wants, he instead creates the white room to express his idea of what she *is*. Thus, paradoxically, his depriving her of material things imprisons her not only in ideality but also in materiality. Idealized out of and into the white room, she is figuratively imprisoned in the room from which she is excluded. This exclusion/entrapment is one of the paradoxes of

the woman's discursive materialization through the workings of ideology. The wife of de Cleyre's story is imprisoned in this white room she has never seen, because it objectifies her husband's conception of her; it is here, in a sense, that he "keeps" her, which is the same as keeping her in the dirty home in the alley.

The only defiance in "The White Room" is a self-defeating one; the wife's decision to leave the prison of her marriage amounts to a death sentence. The angriest passage in "Sex Slavery" is de Cleyre's description of this impossibility of escape:

It has often been said to me, by women with decent masters, who had no idea of the outrages practiced on their less fortunate sisters, "Why don't the wives leave?" Why don't you run, when your feet are chained together? Why don't you cry out when a gag is on your lips? Why don't you raise your hands above your head when they are pinned fast to your sides? Why don't you spend thousands of dollars when you haven't a cent in your pocket? Why don't you go to the seashore or the mountains, you fools scorching with city heat? . . . "Why don't the women leave!" Will you tell me where they will go and what they shall do? . . . there is no refuge upon earth for the enslaved sex. Right where we are, there we must dig our trenches, and win or die. (351-52)

As bell hooks says, "Opposition is not enough. In that vacant space after one has resisted there is still the necessity to become—to make oneself anew" (*Yearning* 15). For de Cleyre's heroine resistance creates no space at all; the male artist creates his own space, but she has none of his resources.

The problem of material resources as it intersects with gender issues is foregrounded as well in de Cleyre's story "At the End of the Alley," a grim account of the narrator's visits to an increasingly impoverished laundress, who at first works hard but eventually succumbs to alcoholism and despair in the wake of her husband's death from consumption. He had thought of suicide, but stopped talking of it when visitors from his church told him it would prevent his wife from collecting the life insurance. Although the story could well be fiction, one of de Cleyre's letters reveals that it is a faithful account of her visits to the woman who washed her shirts (letters to Yanovsky, Mar. 29, Apr. 27, 1911). "As to the insurance," she writes Yanovsky after he has read the sketch, "you are altogether wrong. The thing occurred precisely as I have written it; the

woman's name was just what I wrote it, and her words too. The church people told him *he ought not to deprive his wife of the insurance money*. . . . The woman has gone clean to hell now." The laundress embodies the hopelessness of even the smallest ambition within the present system, which must therefore, in the words of one of her lectures, be destroyed "to the last vestige" ("Economic Tendency" 7).

In "The White Room," as in "The Heart of Angiolillo," de Cleyre is an antiromancer. The White Room in which de Cleyre's heroine dies is one of the classic places of romance, as its relations to the *mise-en-scène* of "Ligeia" suggests. There are unmistakable shades of Poe's story in de Cleyre's picture of the fantastic room to which an artistic protagonist of obsessive sensibility brings his beautiful blonde and fair-skinned victim-wife ("the fair-haired and blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine" in Poe; the nameless "Scandinavian" wife in de Cleyre). De Cleyre's innovations are vehicles for much of her critique of the sexism with which Poe's places of romance are typically imbued. Here we have the fantastic trceries, the minute, perhaps pathological attention to detail in the decor, the draperies and rich, strangely wrought carpets. But unlike the lurid gold and black of the orientalized interior created by Poe's crazed artist-figure (a "bridal chamber" centered on the "bridal couch"), everything here is white—a traditional symbol of sexual purity that de Cleyre makes into a symbol of horror and of death. In "Ligeia," the beautiful Lady Rowena is the innocent foil for the dark, dramatic, more racially and sexually ambiguous Ligeia; the narrator-artist's sin is to violate that purity in the "unhallowed hours" of what is implied to be his, but not her, sexual pleasure. In de Cleyre's story the artist's sin is to *imagine* such purity: to impute an imaginary moral nature of unspeakable whiteness to a real woman. The horror in this antiromance is marriage; the white room represents the wife's entrapment in a marriage that cannot be fulfilling, and her one effort to be free of that horror, by leaving her husband, ends only in the worse poverty of homelessness. The romantic, sexist imagination of de Cleyre's artist-villain creates a class division between himself and his wife, as he lives much of the time in a house by the water and she lives in the dirty urban tenement.

In bell hooks's words, "one can only say no, speak the voice of resistance, because there exists a counter-language. While it may resemble the colonizer's tongue, it has undergone a transformation, it has been irrevocably changed" (*Yearning* 150). For de Cleyre, places of romance are places of will-lessness, enervation, sex slavery. The White Room functions as a critique of its very existence as a setting for romance—the

artist's romance with his ideal fantasy-wife. The real wife's ironic exclusion from the room means that her husband has no room for her in his imagination, and her final presence in his ideal room merely seals that irony. In de Cleyre's fiction about women, romance is by nature inimical to the resistant, oppositional will—most specifically, women's will to resist oppression.

In short, "The White Room" is a fierce antiromance, a story about the mortal dangers of romance, and the tragic catharsis emanates from a sense of those dangers coupled with a social vision that would seem, at least on the surface, to be deeply pessimistic. In fact, however, a fundamental optimism underlies it: the husband's final recognition of his wife as an independent consciousness is no less revolutionary for being too late; even the irony here thus makes a space for the possibility of a radically transformed imagination. Such optimism is the basis of de Cleyre's project of analyzing the social, psychological, and cultural dynamics of oppressive ideology as a shaping force in the lives of the characters on whom her stories focus. If she regards ideology both as a social force and as a force that configures the inner life, she also looks equally, in the same glance, at the possibility of liberating the imagination to conceive a new social order. As she said in "Anarchism," what is needed is to let oneself "go free, go free beyond the bounds of what *fear* and *custom* call the 'possible'" (114). In "The White Room," these are the bounds that the artist only tragically thinks he is transcending by creating his unique masterpiece. Attempting to give his revolutionary ideas material form, he ends, like the husband in "The Heart of Angiolillo," by reinventing one of the oldest oppressions. On the other hand, his mind is capable of being changed, even if too late, and de Cleyre presumably writes this little parable in an effort to change other minds before the more mundane, real-life stories for which this romantic story stands come, in real life, to their inevitable tragic end.

Four

REFASHIONING THE MIND

It is the radical who always wins at last.

—Voltairine de Cleyre,

Crime and Punishment

Freeing Words, Freeing Thought

To go free, “beyond the bounds of what *fear* and *custom* call the ‘possible,’” was de Cleyre’s lifelong project, and the project of inspiring such freedom in her readers animates all of her narrative and rhetorical strategies. Central to this project was the challenge of getting rid of institutions in the mind, which defined de Cleyre’s analytical and rhetorical practice in general, and indeed her life work: a brilliant, relentless engagement in the process Gerda Lerner has called “a struggle for the control of the symbol systems of a given society” (222). De Cleyre’s interest in history was in great measure an interest in such struggles, which were at the core of her definition of the term *revolution*. A revolution, she said, is “some great and subversive change in the social institutions of a people, whether sexual, religious, political, or economic. The movement of the Reformation was a great religious revolution; a profound alteration in human thought,—a refashioning of the human mind” (“Mexican Revolution” 304). All of de Cleyre’s work was rooted in the faith that “a refash-

ioning of the human mind” can lead to the revolutionary transformation of material relations. Underlying all her projects as a speaker, writer, and political activist was the idea set forth in Thomas Paine’s description of France in 1793, in the passage she took as her opening “text” in “The Economic Tendency of Freethought”: “The mind of the nation had changed beforehand, and a new order of things had naturally followed a new order of thoughts” (3). For this reason, in some form or other her subject is always the material and psychological workings of the dominant ideologies of her day, which she attacks from two interestingly related directions. On the one hand she exposes a dominant form of mystification that misrepresents material relations as spiritual or psychological essences; at the same time, she works to insert psychology into an understanding of how material relations work, appealing to the logic of feelings to circumvent the mystifying illogic of ideology.

In the service of that transformation, she crafted a rhetoric that would dismantle a hegemonic discourse and construct an oppositional set of metaphors capable of reconfiguring (to invoke Althusser’s description of ideology) her audiences’ “‘*imaginary*’, ‘*lived*’ relation” to “their conditions of existence”; their “imaginary relation . . . to the real relations in which they live” (“Marxism” 233; “Ideology” 155). The quintessential device of this rhetoric is a spiraling art of repetition that returns again and again to key images and metaphors of whatever discourse she is working to discredit, restating them with a difference—sometimes subtly disorienting; often shocking or blasphemous. Forcing her auditors to hear and visualize those terms in a new way each time, she destabilizes their conventional meanings, prying them loose from their predominant ideological contexts to reveal, through a system of ironic reversals, that the dominant symbol systems of her society are themselves riddled with ironic reversals in which such terms as *rights* or *legitimate* or *revolution* or *American history* denote the opposite of what they should mean. In the course of her arguments, this art of repetition, through its turnings and re-turnings, becomes not only a call for revolution but a rhetorical enactment of revolution: a liberation of words to revolutionize the mind.

De Cleyre’s lecture “Sex Slavery,” delivered in 1890, is a powerful example of this rhetoric. It begins with an image of the aging Moses Harman pacing up and down in his prison cell, condemned on a charge of “obscenity.” Harman had been sentenced to five years hard labor for publishing a letter on the subject of marital rape in *Lucifer*—probably the first printed discussion of that issue in U.S. journalism (McElroy, *Freedom* 135).¹ As Sears argues convincingly, Harman’s printing of a group of

“obscene” letters was intended as a provocation, a “comprehensive test case” of laws, created by Anthony Comstock, under which the post office had broad powers of censorship over the transmission of birth-control information and the discussion of sexuality in print (76). In 1886 Harman issued a statement that, despite laws prohibiting the use of certain words, *Lucifer* would not censor the language of any letter submitted to the editor. Soon thereafter he received, and promptly published, a letter from W. G. Markland containing the word *penis*. As de Cleyre described it, this letter told of a young woman who, “lacerated by unskilful surgery in the birth of her babe, but recovering from a subsequent successful operation, had been stabbed, remorselessly, cruelly, brutally stabbed, not with a knife, but with the procreative organ of her husband, stabbed to the doors of death, and yet there was no redress!” Because the letter “named that organ by its own name, so given in Webster’s dictionary and in every medical journal in the country,” Harman was convicted: “He gave a concrete example of the effect of sex slavery, and for it he is imprisoned” (348). De Cleyre’s ostentatious avoidance of the “obscene” word used in the Markland letter renders in starkly ironic terms the real obscenity here: it is the “procreative organ”—that is, the organ of life—with which the husband stabbed his wife “to the doors of death.”

This irony is linked to de Cleyre’s most characteristic rhetorical devices, which emerge early in the lecture in her impassioned attack on the laws that would place a gentle old man like Harman in jail, leaving his wife to anxious, lonely waiting for five long years:

Why? Why, when murder now is stalking in your streets, when dens of infamy are so thick within your city that competition has forced down the price of prostitution to the level of the wages of your starving shirt-makers; when robbers sit in State and national Senate and House, when the boasted “bulwark of our liberties,” the elective franchise, has become a U.S. dice-box, wherewith great gamblers play away your liberties; when debauchees of the worst type hold all your public offices and dine off the food of fools who support them, why, then, sits Moses Harman there within his prison cell? If he is so *great* a criminal, why is he not with the rest of the spawn of crime, dining at Delmonico’s or enjoying a trip to Europe? If he is so bad a man, why in the name of wonder did he ever get in the penitentiary? (343)

The assumption rendered here in the dense interweaving of categories that dominant ideology mystifies as mutually exclusive—the

assumption that political, economic, ideological, judicial, and gender injustice are all one—is the analytical basis for de Cleyre’s art of repetition, which relies on shifts back and forth from one artificially segregated register of language, thought, and social reality to another, in order to expose the conventionally accepted boundaries between them as illusory. The linked ironic couplings of dinner at Delmonico’s with crime, of prostitution with wages, and of shirtmakers with prostitutes is the prelude to de Cleyre’s argument that women’s oppression, institutionalized in marriage (and prostitution, low-paid wage labor, etc.), is based on the collusion of church and state in an inversion of values derived from a degrading view of women that acts as a “stupefying narcotic to true morality” and leads to the defense of “virtue” as a mask for defense of crime. In the course of the argument, the nature of this inversion becomes more and more clear as “virtue” exchanges meanings with Moses Harman’s “obscenity” through the shifts in de Cleyre’s use of certain key repeated words, most notably the word *prison*:

He looked, this obscenist, looked with clear eyes into this ill-got thing you call morality, sealed with the seal of marriage, and saw in it the consummation of *immorality*, impurity, and injustice. He beheld every married woman what she is, a bonded slave, who takes her master’s name, her master’s bread, her master’s commands, and serves her master’s passion; who passes through the ordeal of pregnancy and the throes of travail at *his* dictation,—not at her desire; who can control no property, not even her own body, without his consent, and from whose straining arms the children she bears may be torn at his pleasure, or willed away while they are yet unborn. It is said the English language has a sweeter word than any other,—*home*. But Moses Harman looked beneath the word and saw the fact,—a prison more horrible than that where he is sitting now, whose corridors radiate over all the earth, and with so many cells, that none may count them.

Yes, our Masters! the earth is a prison, the marriage-bed is a cell, women are the prisoners, and you are the keepers. . . . and sanctified by the angelic benediction of a piece of paper, within the silence-shade of a marriage certificate, Adultery and Rape stalk freely and at ease. (344–45)

The bitter distillation of ironies in this passage reduces to absurdity a whole symbol-system centered on the concept of “home”—that “shelter . . . from all terror, doubt, and division,” as John Ruskin had called it, “a

sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth. . . . And wherever a true wife comes, this home is always round her" (100). One need only recall such reverent effusions to realize the mystical associations the word *home* had accrued in conventional gender ideology by the late nineteenth century and, in contrast, de Cleyre's blasphemy in insisting that home means the reverse of everything it is used to denote. Similarly, one need only think of the many late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century feminist appeals based on explicit or implicit images of homemaking as woman's true vocation, with the world as woman's home and thus her rightful place,² to realize the distance between de Cleyre and many of her feminist contemporaries. Whether or not all of them subscribed to the whole ideology of home and domesticity that dominated middle-class literature of the day (in different ways depending especially on the race of the writers and readers) a wide range of feminists were at least willing to use it as a rhetorical means to their own ends. De Cleyre was not. Far from trying to insinuate her subversive ideas into the most acceptable ideological contexts by turning the key terms of those contexts to her own uses, she calls the terms themselves explicitly into question.

Much of this interrogation operates through shifts of the context she provides for words that recur throughout her argument. Many of these are key ideological terms; others are wedges on which she pounds again and again to split those terms loose from their supposed referents. Thus the image of crime that can "stalk freely" under the protection of the marriage certificate alludes back to the crime of murder "stalking" the streets, but the return to the word now transposes the image to reveal the ironic transpositions of which the social and legal system is constituted. It is legal for a man to murder his wife with a weapon it is illegal to name; murderers stalk freely in the streets while Harman is imprisoned for condemning murder; the true criminals, far from being imprisoned, rise to the top of society; the "morality" they enact into law, in collusion with the church, actually sanctifies crime, which "stalks" not most ominously in the street but in the home. On the pivot of this sanctified word the argument makes its most dramatic turn: Moses Harman is in prison for seeing that "home" itself is a worse prison, for women, than the prison in which he is confined while their legal murderers go free. The personification of Adultery and Rape, stalking "freely and at ease," cannot but evoke an image of the actual person who commits them: the man free and at ease in his home, "stalking" his wife—his "bonded slave." At the same time, the word "slave" repeats with a difference the opening

description of Harman as “this chattel slave, whose hard toil is taken by the State” (342), and the picture of home as the “shelter-shadow” of “sanctified” crime resonates ironically with the opening picture of Harman’s wife, who for the five years of his imprisonment will suffer from a “broken” and “desecrated” home (342–43).

In these opening images the state, by creating prisoners, is the home-breaker and home-desecrator, and as the argument plays out, state and church are exposed as promoting a version of “home” that is prison. Wives are not free, Harman is not free; and around these two now complementary images of the enslaved and imprisoned man and woman, as the speech circles back to them from each new point of departure, accrues layer on layer of irony. The ironies coalesce in de Cleyre’s demystification of the concept of “virtue,” whose perverted function as a justification of “sex slavery” she attacks in a trenchant discussion of legitimacy, illegitimacy, and the double standard that requires wives to submit sexually to their husbands, without themselves desiring sex, in order to keep the husbands at home, and therefore “virtuous.” “Virtue!” she concludes: “What an *obscene* thing ‘virtue’ is!” (347). By this point the spiral of repetition has left the conventional meanings of *obscene* and *virtue* far behind, in a reversal that operates in part by unmasking the supposedly spiritual as degradingly material, indeed “obscene.” At the heart of this central irony is an attack on the ways women’s oppression has been mystified as an expression of spiritual and moral *essences* rather than crassly material and economic *relations*: a control of, indeed a traffic in, bodies. “The question of souls is old,” de Cleyre says bluntly—“we demand our bodies, now” (350).

In certain ways the irony on which these moves depend is a staple of much late-nineteenth-century anarchist writing in the United States, one of its most characteristic rhetorical devices. This is not to imply that all anarchist orators and writers were ironists, by any means; as Paul Avrich has pointed out, for example, Kropotkin (whom de Cleyre much admired), was not at all an ironist in his speeches, unlike Johann Most, for example, whose speeches were full of irony (AP 86), and whom de Cleyre admired much less. But in the United States, the major anarchist publications during de Cleyre’s adulthood, from Harman’s *Lucifer* to Tucker’s *Liberty* to Goldman’s *Mother Earth*, were imbued with irony of all kinds and degrees, on subjects ranging from internal anarchist disputes to Anthony Comstock and his “obscenity” laws (a popular butt of sex-radical jokes), to Christianity (as in “Christmas Adventures of Jesus” in *Mother Earth*).

The anarchist affinity for irony is explained by the fact that irony so often derives from an unstated but highly salient disjunction between an absurdity on the one hand and, on the other, the terms and tone in which the *representation* of that absurdity imply that it is natural and normal, a banal given of daily life. Irony, in other words, is always engaged at some level with the conventional sense of what is normal and natural that constitutes ideology. Among late-nineteenth-century American writers, no one worked harder than anarchists to undermine that sense, which belongs to the “common” sense on which ideology is based. If one’s goal is to reveal that what most people think is a banal and unquestionable given of daily life is in fact the most bizarre, ridiculous, and unnatural state of affairs imaginable—to prove, for example, that the use of money in economic transactions is absurd (“Why I Am an Anarchist”), or that government is “unreal” (“The Economic Tendency of Freethought”), or that the quotidian routine of almost any school classroom has nothing whatsoever to do with education (“Modern Educational Reform”)—then irony is a perfect method, because it works precisely by using words in a way that calls attention to their common usage while turning that usage on its head. To understand irony as a hearer or reader—to catch on to the understated dissembling of the eiron³—is, in the case of these writers, not only to recognize, through the reversals of meaning in certain words, that one localized instance of absurdity is being represented as a normal, unquestionable given; it is to recognize as absurd a whole system of symbols that purport to identify what is simply natural and therefore immutable. To understand de Cleyre’s irony, then, is to be educated out of the conventional meanings of certain words altogether.

It is in this sense that de Cleyre’s manipulation of irony differs most fundamentally from that of other more conventional ironists of the period. Mark Twain is an instructive contrast. In one sense, his political essays and sketches attacking imperialism situate him so far outside the pale of the conventional imperialist wisdom of the day that he was unable to publish what is arguably the most ironic of them, “The War Prayer.” Twain’s admiration for Thomas Paine, as well as for Ingersoll—whom, according to William Dean Howells, “he called an angelic orator, and regarded as an evangel of a new gospel, the gospel of Freethought” (S. Warren 43)—suggests his affinity with “infidel” ideas far to the left of those with which he tends to be associated in classrooms, anthologies, and such standard reference works as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Even so, in comparison with de Cleyre’s ironies, Twain’s are always at least

capable of being construed as functioning (although they do not always have to function in this way) squarely within a set of conventional paradigms that would have been acceptable to mainstream Americans—assumptions about the “civilizing” nature of women, for example, or the existence of God, or the fundamental rightness of the American democratic process.

De Cleyre, in contrast, never appeals to the authority of conventional ideology to make her ironies work, although her methods for ensuring that they work vary with her varying audiences. The Haymarket speeches, for example, made each year to what would have been a predominantly anarchist audience, are scathingly, bitterly ironic, and they rely on an appeal to her audience’s deep sense of the irony of the Haymarket tragedy itself—a sense the general American public did not share. Speeches she made to mixed audiences are also likely to contain ironic passages calculated to appeal to those who already agree with her, but in those speeches she works simultaneously, through the use of the spiral of repetition I have described, both to strip key ideological terms of their conventional meanings and to guide her hearers through an intellectual/affective process of breaking down the conceptual dividing lines, or walls, that mystify certain issues by defining them as belonging to nonoverlapping categories. Such divisions separate the question of criminal justice from the question of economic justice, for example, or the issue of prostitution from the issue of women’s wages. These walls are the support system for a whole ideological edifice of class and gender oppression, because they obscure the connections that make this oppression a system rather than a set of discrete, coincidental episodes.

De Cleyre’s ability to reveal the illusory nature of such categorical divisions goes far to account for her contemporaries’ memory of her speeches as rigorously logical, speeches that made the hearers see things clearly. She was also exceptionally effective at calling into question the fundamental meaning of words: *rights* or *home* or *virtue* or even *government*. The latter, she argues, refers to nothing at all. Like the existence of God, the existence of government cannot be anywhere demonstrated; anywhere you go to find it, you will be told it is not there, but somewhere else: not in the “legislative halls” but in the statutes; not there but in the legislators who made them; not there but in the White House; not there but in the “people”; and so on (“Economic Tendency” 7). Even the least conventional of the more conventional ironists of the period were not interested in calling conventional terms, definitions, and categories so radically into question; on the contrary, ironists like Twain relied on a

fundamental appeal to those definitions to recall readers to the common sense those categories represent. And this common sense is, in the end, simply the prevailing ideology.

Thus, although an extended comparison of de Cleyre to other ironists of the period is not possible here, several points are worth noting in the context of my argument for the revolutionary nature of her rhetorical methods. First, de Cleyre differs from nonanarchist ironists in the radical operation of her spiral of repetition, which at the same time reveals key ideological terms as profoundly divided from their ostensible meanings and dissolves the false dividing lines between categories that dominant ideologies mystify as separate. From nonanarchist ironists, then, de Cleyre differs profoundly both in her assumptions as to what is normal and natural—all the assumptions that constitute ideology—and in her methods. From other anarchist ironists she differs, not in her fundamental assumptions, but simply in the unusual subtlety and success of her methods.

Margaret Grant's article "Modesty," published in *Mother Earth*, where de Cleyre published much of her mature work, provides an example. Proposing to investigate the meaning of this important term, Grant begins with a dictionary definition of modesty as "natural delicacy or shame regarding personal charms and the sexual relation," searches earnestly for this modesty among those presumably closest to nature—children ("I was shocked, appalled") and savages ("Alas!" some tribes consider clothing itself shameful)—moves on to non-Western civilizations (Turkish women wear veils but also trousers, "betraying the fact that they had legs—or should I say limbs? Can a woman be modest who does not hide her le—limbs, I mean?"), and resolutely concludes that since the dictionary must have been wrong about "natural" delicacy, modesty must be artificial and specific to our civilization "but no less necessary for that reason." Studiously compiling (with some difficulty, she admits, due to certain complicated discrepancies) a list of what constitutes modesty in our culture, she arrives at some clarity. A modest woman in our civilization is one who does not expose her breasts to view in the daytime or while nursing. In evening wear she may expose them "very freely," however, and on the street she may wear "a girdle, which while it injures her internal organs," allows the breasts to "move about" provocatively. She hides her legs except at the seashore, where she may show them "with perfect frankness" although to do so while seeking health through exercise would be "shameful." She declines ever to mention "the excretory processes of the body" even if the result is illness:

“what right-minded female would not rather suffer any anguish of mind and body than even hint to a male any such need on her part?” She may refer to “actual maternity,” but references to “possible maternity” should make her blush or, preferably, faint.

Having denaturalized the word *modesty* completely, Grant concludes that, whatever “modesty” is, women should throw it “to the winds” for the sake of health, and behave “like some of those shameless creatures who really seem to glory in their sex”—that is, like those “savages” who are closer, in fact, to nature. “Shall we do so?” she demands. Then, in a conclusion characteristic of many such essays of the period, she propels all the accumulated ironies of the essay into one extreme, extravagant outburst that abandons the traditionally modest pose of the eiron by completely unmasking her anger: “Indeed, we shall not. Do I not know your answer? Let us go on in the good old modest way; sick and ailing all our lives, but not sacrificing one shred of the precious conventions that we have collected about us at such a terrible cost. Let us live maimed, deformed, decrepit, ignorant, half-sexed caricatures of women—but let us be modest!” (30–34).

Such outbursts are designed to move the audience into the speaker or writer’s own ironic perspective by making any other position absurdly untenable. Who would choose, freely, to live “maimed, deformed, decrepit, ignorant, half-sexed”? Or, in the case of the extravagant ending of de Cleyre’s “Sex Slavery,” who would choose, by claiming Moses Harman was indeed an obscenist who got what he deserved, to “Kill him! Kill him!” (357–58)—which is what, she implies, his prison sentence will do? The strategies de Cleyre shares with many of her anarchist contemporaries are evident in the similarities between Grant’s ironies and hers. What distinguishes her uses of irony from those of which Grant’s “Modesty” is representative, however, is the particular form de Cleyre’s repetitions take, and the linguistic subtlety she brings to bear on the process of detaching signifiers from conventional signifieds in order to reveal the discrepancies and incongruities inherent in what dominant ideology accepts as normal. Grant succeeds in calling the fundamental meanings of the word *modesty* into question, for example, but only hints at the underlying causes—sexual repression, gender inequality, even imperialism—of the explosive contradictions latent in the word as it is conventionally used. When de Cleyre, on the other hand, discusses “virtue” in “Sex Slavery,” she weaves a structure of repetition in which, every time the word appears, a new irony strips it of yet another of its conventional connotations.

De Cleyre enthusiastically recommended Poe's "Philosophy of Composition" to those who would write good poetry ("Poetry of Reform" 10). The sustained irony produced by the spiral of repetition in such works as "Sex Slavery" reflects her own method of achieving Poe's poetic goal, "unity of effect," in her prose. Her critiques of fellow anarchists' rhetoric are instructive. What she does not like in Emma Goldman's *Anarchism and Other Essays* is its disorganization ("a hastily compiled hodge-podge," she told Yanovsky in a letter, Mar. 6, 1911). What she does not like in "orators," as opposed to "lecturers" like herself, is extemporaneity and, especially, overreliance on repetition (Avrich, AA 41-42)—presumably both the kind of repetition that results from extemporaneous organization and the kind implicit in such devices as anaphora and epanalepsis. These kinds of repetition de Cleyre uses only sparingly and to well-calculated effect; they are more characteristic of her Haymarket speeches, intended to heighten the ardor of those already converted to her cause, than of the lectures she delivered before more mixed audiences whose minds she was seeking to "refashion." De Cleyre's auditors remembered her for her brilliance, the amount of information she provided in support of her arguments, her compelling logic, and her intensity (Hartmann 92; Goldman, *Voltaireine de Cleyre* 4).⁴ A speaker who wrote her lectures beforehand and read them aloud (Avrich, AA 42), she planned every move; many contemporaries commented on her meticulous habits of revision, as did she herself. That these habits contributed much to at least one anarchist classic, Berkman's prison memoir, is well-documented (Avrich, AA 199).⁵ Certainly they are evident in the unifying effect of her ironic repetitions in many lectures and essays.

To say that de Cleyre's well-calculated use of irony and repetition reveals a profound disjunction between signifiers and signifieds in the ideology she analyzes is not, of course, to suggest that her analysis privileges the realms of signifiers over that of signifieds, or that she reveals the arbitrariness of the line between them, or that her rhetorical methods celebrate indeterminacy, despite the fact that linguistic "free play" might seem in keeping with her overall philosophy of Liberty. On the contrary, for de Cleyre the process of detaching signifiers from signifieds is often an unmasking of the fact that a particular ideology has already done so: that its whole discourse is founded on an appropriation of terms for uses that profoundly betray what she sees as their real meanings. "Over and over again, names, phrases, mottoes, watchwords, have been turned inside out, and upside down, and hindside before, and sideways, by occurrences out of the control of those who used the expres-

sions in their proper sense" ("Direct Action" 220). Outrage at such distortions informs all her attacks on state appropriations of such terms as *rights* or *revolution* or *rebellion* or *liberty*, which it is always her project to reappropriate. At times she does so painstakingly and overtly, as in her extended analysis of what the history books make Shays' Rebellion mean ("Anarchism and American Traditions" 124), or what "Mexican Revolution" means in the press, both mainstream and progressive ("Mexican Revolution" 265–66). Elsewhere, often in another part of the same essay or speech, she relies on quick disequilibrating maneuvers in which she seems to snatch meanings from their falsifying contexts, restoring them, in passing, to their rightful places as she sweeps by on her way to some other end. Thus, en route to the conclusion that the Mexican Revolution is in full swing and should be supported, she describes Zapata, in the first quick third of a sentence, as "a fighter of the style of our revolutionary Marion and Sumter" ("Mexican Revolution" 263), in one move re-revolutionizing the American "revolution" and asserting that the Mexican Revolution expresses "our" (i.e., in its rightful meaning, American) ideals.

The case of such words as *home*, *virtue*, *marriage*, *prison*, and *criminal* is different, in that for de Cleyre their very existence is a product of an oppressive social structure that will vanish with the advent of "the remedy. . . . LIBERTY!" ("Sex Slavery" 356). In the case of the word *marriage* in particular, this view indicates de Cleyre's distance from yet another group of her contemporaries, for whom "home" or "marriage" properly described something that was desirable, but in a form that current institutions, especially legal institutions, made it difficult to achieve. For de Cleyre it was not that the word *marriage* should have a positive meaning but has been used to cover up something unjust, something rightly described by another term, "sex slavery." In her view there can simply be no such thing as what the word purportedly describes; marriage, and every arrangement resembling it, will necessarily be, ipso facto, sex slavery. As she stated unequivocally, "They Who Marry Do Ill." Hence her insistence that those who eschew the marriage ceremony but nonetheless maintain a sexual and economic "permanent dependent relationship" (like Effie and David) are still participating in "marriage"—by which term she means, she says, "the real thing," whatever name it goes by ("They Who Marry" 502).

Thus de Cleyre's demystifying of the words *home* or *marriage* is not an unmasking of the fact that a particular ideology has misappropriated their rightful positive meanings, but an unmasking of what she sees as

their true referent: “the real”—and negative—“thing” that the words represent. Similarly with the words *prison* and *criminal*. It is not that prisons should exist but mean something else, or have different people—the real “criminals”—in them. The existence of “the fundamental criminals,” as she elsewhere called them (“McNamara Storm”), is the reason for prisons, which house the victims of the real crimes—people in whom the violence of the state has bred an answering violence (like the woman in “Betrayed” who killed her “illegitimate” child), or people who steal “because their rights are stolen from them before they are born” (“Crime and Punishment” 192). Abolishing the “fundamental crime”—“this scheme of property right for some in what belongs to us all” (“McNamara Storm”)—would eliminate both prisons and the need for them.

Oppositional Metaphors and Dominant Ideas

But de Cleyre’s rhetoric is not merely a demystification of other people’s rhetoric. She crafts her own discourse of liberation, anchored in an oppositional set of metaphors to replace those she deconstructs. Her essays and stories as well as her poetry are filled with images of the natural and inevitable: of growth, unbounded spaces, vast cosmic motion, violent upheavals and storms; the sublimity and self-sufficiency of the individual “Will.” Many, perhaps all, of these images are associated with her ideas of evolution and progress, which are part and parcel of her faith in the free inquiry of science, as opposed to the servile subjections of religion. What might appear a disjunction between this emphasis on science and the high romantic tone evoked by her storms and hurricanes and volcanoes and freewheeling stars is in fact an index to her rhetorical power, which derived (as the comments of her contemporaries on her lecture style make clear) from a fusion of analytical rigor with what Franklin Rosemont calls her “hauntingly wild and violent lyricism” (12). Jay Fox’s memorial essay in the *Agitator* for July 15, 1912, paid tribute to this fusion of feeling and intellect in her work and life: “She has left the stage, but her memory will linger long, like the odor of a fragrant rose crushed at full bloom; like the impress of a great thot flasht on the mind.”⁶ The smell of a rose and the lightning illumination of a great thought—the imagery evokes de Cleyre’s prose and well as her poetry. Her speeches and essays are full of carefully researched evidence: she provides statistics, dates, sources; she compares histories of the same event. At the same time, the emotional power that animates her analysis

is overwhelmingly present in such images as the one that introduces “The Dominant Idea”: the exultant description of a morning-glory vine dead but nonetheless blooming in the “red lightning” of a midnight storm (79–80).

It is typical of de Cleyre that this impassioned lyrical image should function simultaneously as the first logical step in a carefully reasoned argument and as an affective point of access to her ideas, an imaginative experience for her audience to enter as a means of simultaneously conceptualizing and *feeling* her most important term, “liberty.” In de Cleyre’s rhetoric such images are an invitation to an interior performance of the freedom that would characterize a new social order that has not yet been created, but which that interior experience, by virtue of the material force of ideas, can help to create. Her readers experience breadth, space, and nature, through an expansive rhetoric of waves, floods, stars wheeling, a seed bursting upward, a voice breaking up through the sod of a woman’s grave, “a free / Wide sweep of love, broad as the ether-sea” (*Written in Red; Worm Turns*; “Bastard Born” 37; “Freethinker’s Plea” 26). Such experiences operate as psychological direct expropriations of what she again and again emphasizes that the beneficiaries of the current economic system have stolen: “the sea and air!” (“Bastard Born” 37). Through the ideal/material experience of the imaginary bodily sensations evoked by such images, her revolutionary rhetoric produces an interior, psychological enactment of the new order of things that will “naturally,” as Paine said, follow a new order of thoughts.

The word “naturally” is crucial; it is an *interior* experience of an outward life in nature that de Cleyre creates in her representations of the enacting of liberty in a social, political, economic world whose institutions are mystified as natural and normal. Concomitantly, her predominant imagery pictures the voicing and enactment of resistance as itself a natural, inevitable force. When the sea finally crashes through the “shell-crunched wall” in “The Hurricane,” the superhuman power it tropes is suddenly revealed in all its human splendor:

Thou metest wage, O People.
Very swiftly,
Now that thy hate is grown:
Thy time at last is come;
Thou heapest anguish,
Where thou thyself wert bare!
No longer to thy dumb

God clasped and kneeling,
Thou answerest thine own prayer.

(35)

The line “Thou metest wage, O People” is dissonant with the clash of ironies: archaic religious language alludes to modern industrial wage slavery; the “People,” as the blasphemous delayed antecedent of “Thou,” appropriate the place both of wage-payers and—as in the image of **B**resci in “Anarchism”—of God meting out justice. The words “thou” and “thine” are an example of de Cleyre’s ironic wrenchings of words out of their customary orbits; conventionally used in prayers to God, here they apostrophize the oppressed who come to realize that they must simply take what they have prayed for.

The image is one of de Cleyre’s most passionate representations of self-decolonization, which for her always implies the rejection of any supreme Authority—church, government, God—and the bursting free, in the mind and in the world, of individual agency. De Cleyre’s first significant poem, “The Burial of My Past Self,” evokes eloquently her personal experience of such liberation after long inner struggle:

The seed must burst before the germ unfolds,
The stars must fade before the morning wakes;
Down in her depths the mine the diamond holds;
A new heart pulses when the old heart breaks.

And now, Humanity, I turn to you;
I consecrate my service to the world!
Perish the old love, welcome to the new—
Broad as the space-aisles where the stars are whirled!

(17)

Intriguingly, whether there is any biographical referent or not, the “love” the narrator is burying with her past self here seems to be a fused double reference to freedom from the hold of human love on her emotions and the hold of religion on her conscience and sensibility. Like the broad sweeping imagery of “The Freethinker’s Plea,” this bears an interesting relation to the expansive imagery of de Cleyre’s peroration in “The Death of Love,” with its call for sex radicals to replace mere personal and individual love with love for all humanity.

In this poem and everywhere in de Cleyre’s work, revolution is thus

affective and intellectual as well as social, political, and economic. Indeed, in "Why I Am an Anarchist," a prose account of her personal revolution, the structural primacy of *feelings*, to which Palczewski has called attention,⁷ implies a view of emotion as a kind of insight, a logic, that bypasses the constraints ideology places on merely intellectual vision. In this essay, de Cleyre's representations of her early feelings of injustice provide an oppositional counterpart to the way hegemonic ideologies depend on a sense of the natural and normal and inevitable, on a sense that the injustices of the status quo are, as her "thinking part" kept assuring her, "nobody's fault" (18). What holds together the web of any post-Enlightenment Western ideology is the mechanism by which it convinces subjects that perceptions of its illogic are *merely* feelings and therefore illogical. Because ideology is one's "lived," "imaginary" relation to real conditions (Althusser)—and also one's experienced and felt relation—the intrusion into consciousness of *feelings* of a different relation has to be managed, accounted for in the logic of the web itself.

"Why I Am an Anarchist" traces de Cleyre's anarchism to such intrusions, describing, in a catalog of her early emotional reactions to "repression in all forms" (18), the progressive rending of the net of ideology that constrained her intellect to see that repression as "nobody's fault."⁸ Through this catalog of emotional reactions, Cleyre exposes as *intellectual* absurdities the economic structure of society ("people with five hundred dollar brains getting five thousand dollar educations" while poor children work); "conventional dress, speech, and custom" ("we must conform to the anonymous everybody who wears a stock-collar in mid-summer and goes décolleté at Christmas") the education system ("every child's head measured by every other child's head"), novels ("there should be . . . people with some other motive in walking through a book than to get married at the end"), conventional historiography ("the count of elections, the numbering of administrations!") and then, "Above all . . . the subordinated cramped circle prescribed for women in daily life" (18–20). Echoing through this account are phrases describing her early impulses toward freedom: "an unending protest. . . the instinct of liberty. . . an instinctive decision . . . a wild craving . . . indignation . . . consciousness . . . an ever-present feeling . . . an eager wish . . . a constant seeking. . . a general disgust . . . a desire. . . a desire . . . a desire . . . unrest . . . an overpowering sentiment . . . A never-ending query. . . a steady dissatisfaction . . . a disgust . . . a bitter, passionate sense . . . an anger . . . sense of burning disgust. . . intense sympathies . . . cravings . . . longings. . . clamors . . . bitternesses" (18–21).

These phrases describing “sympathies,” as opposed to “conscious reasoning,” work rhetorically as those impulses worked in her life, exploding, with the directness of their insight, the ideology that renders as normal and natural what is unnecessary, unnatural, and absurd. It is the knowledge provided by feelings—the preeminent *logic* of their refusal to be “satisfied” with absurdities that the “intellect” or “thinking part” (18) sees, through the web of ideology, as necessary givens—that shows up the idiocy of the conventional logic that can find no cause for injustice, and therefore no solution. (As in the case of a modern president who said about inequities in abortion funding: “Sometimes life is unfair.”)

De Cleyre’s appeal to the clarity of emotional logic expresses an assumption crucial to her ability to create a rhetoric capable of disrupting the workings of “institutions” in the mind. One of the most important devices of dominant ideologies is their way of masking the internal contradictions that would, if revealed, cause them to implode around their own ironies. This is the mechanism de Cleyre works to undo by exposing those ironies; it is also the mechanism she is working to undo by providing alternative internal experiences of liberty. Taken as a whole, her work builds up an oppositional landscape of the mind—a world of breadth, motion, change, evolution; of wheeling stars, surging waves, dead flowers blooming in the dead of night through sheer force of will. This interior landscape is charged with a tremendous energy that becomes itself an implicit call to action, as is also the case with the spiraling, revolutionary rhetoric of her essays and speeches, which explode in such climaxes as this imagistic, metaphoric definition of anarchism:

Ah, once to stand unflinchingly on the brink of that dark gulf of passions and desires, once at last to send a bold, straight-driven gaze down into the volcanic Me. . . . Once and forever to realize that one is not a bundle of well-regulated little reasons bound up in the front room of the brain to be sermonized and held in order with copy-book maxims or moved and stopped by a syllogism, but a bottomless, bottomless depth of all strange sensations, a rocking sea of feeling. . . . And then, to turn cloudward, starward . . . letting oneself go free, go free beyond the bounds of what *fear* and *custom* call the ‘possible.’ (“Anarchism” 113–14)

All of these evocations of inner freedom, all of de Cleyre’s efforts to shatter the interior hegemony of the dominant social, cultural, and economic paradigms of her society, are predicated on her faith in the power

of the refashioned mind to refashion the world by freeing itself from the bounds of what dominant ideology defines as “possible.” This faith underlies her critique of vulgar materialist conceptions of history in “The Dominant Idea,” which is grounded in a perception that even some supposedly oppositional ideologies sustain oppression, as do the dominant ideologies she attacks in “Sex Slavery,” by mystifying the relations between ideas and materiality. While regarding materialist historiography as an important corrective to the view that ideas have a God-like independent existence, she debunks the notion that ideas *merely* mirror the material, insisting on the reality of the dead vine’s bloom—“the force of purposive action, of intent *within* holding its purpose against obstacles *without*” (84).

Our modern teaching is that ideas are but attendant phenomena, impotent to determine the actions or relations of life, as the image in the glass which should say to the body it reflects: “*I shall shape thee.*” In truth we know that directly the body goes from before the mirror, the transient image is nothingness; but the real body has its being to live, and will live it, heedless of vanished phantoms of itself, in response to the ever-shifting pressure of things without it. (80–81)

De Cleyre’s placement of this metaphor of the live body and the illusory image in the glass situates it in the context of the paradox of the life of the “dead” vine, the opening metaphor that established, from the beginning, that what seems inanimate may be alive. The image of the dead vine is repeated with a difference in the image of the danger of seeing our ideas (and therefore ourselves) as illusions, dead, unreal—and therefore, she implies, incapable of blooming.

It is thus that the so-called Materialist Conception of History, the modern Socialists, and a positive majority of Anarchists would have us look upon the world of ideas,—shifting, unreal reflections . . . so many mirror appearances of certain material relations, wholly powerless to act upon the course of material things. Mind to them is itself a blank mirror, though in fact never wholly blank, because always facing the reality of the material and bound to reflect some shadow. To-day I am somebody, to-morrow somebody else, if the scenes have shifted; my Ego is a gibbering phantom, pirouetting in the glass, gesticulating, transforming, hourly or momentarily, gleaming with the phosphor light of a deceptive unreality, melting like the mist upon the hills.

Rocks, fields, woods, streams, houses, goods, flesh, blood, bone, sinew,—these are realities, with definite parts to play, with essential characters that abide under all changes; but my Ego does not abide; it is manufactured afresh with every change of these. (80-81)

To this “lamentable error” de Cleyre responds that mind is no “powerless reflection” but “an active modifying agent” and that the opposite idea is morally debilitating, producing self excuses (“My conditions have made me so”) that brook no rebuttal: “poor mirror-ghosts! how could they help it!” (81-83). To prove that ideas do shape material reality, de Cleyre recounts the “dominant idea” of each historical age as expressed in its material creations. Arriving finally at the modern age, with its mindless production of “mountain ranges of things” and its shopping districts “where the tilted edges of the strata of things are exposed to gaze”—all of which simply expresses, self-reflectingly, the dominant idea “the Much Making of Things”—she suddenly returns shockingly to the image of the mirror: “Such is the dominant idea of the western world, at least in these our days. You may see it wherever you look, impressed plainly on things and on men; very likely, if you look in the glass, you will see it there” (87-89).

In terms of the spiral of repetition, this image of the mirror brings us one step closer to the final irony de Cleyre will explore: “the so-called Materialist Conception of History” (81) is itself, she subtly insinuates, a reflection of the dominant emphasis on *things*, and those who adhere to that conception, whatever their supposedly oppositional ideology, are in practice powerless to express their ideas as a force in the world. Indeed, de Cleyre finally implies that, in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, the materialists’ “will” being “rotted by the intellectual reasoning of it out of its existence” (92), the dominant materialism of the age comes only too easily to reflect itself in their lives, as they should admit:

Take a good look into yourself, and if you love Things and the power and the plenitude of Things better than you love your own dignity, human dignity . . . do not fool yourself by saying you would like to help usher in a free society, but you cannot sacrifice an armchair for it. Say honestly, “I love armchairs better than free men, and pursue them because I choose; not because circumstances make me. I love hats, large, large hats, with many feathers and great bows; and I would rather have those hats than trouble myself about social dreams that will never be accomplished in my day. The world worships hats, and I wish to worship with them.” (93-94).

De Cleyre here portrays even the materialist-“anarchist’s” speech, with its breathy repetitions of “hats” (alliterated with “have”) and its self-dramatizing alliteration of *w*’s, as mirroring the obsessive, mechanical production of “things . . . Things . . . things . . . things . . . things” (87) that constitutes the mindless “idea” of the age. Against such mirror-talk, with its repetitive mass-production of hats, hats, hats, hats, de Cleyre asserts her own credo in a subtly different kind of repetition: “the dominant idea of the age and land does not necessarily mean the dominant idea of any single life” (89). The mirror-image-with-a-difference created by the repetition of “dominant idea” with different modifying phrases emphasizes that the individual mind need not reduplicate the world, need not be a mirror-ghost. In keeping with this assertion, the last two paragraphs of the essay suddenly turn the term “dominant idea” itself upright, revolutionizing it. Until now the term has meant the idea by which we will be dominated if we yield to mere circumstance; at the end it means we can choose our “own allegiance,” a Dominant Idea that “conquers and remoulds Circumstance” (94).

De Cleyre often, as in the passage about hats and armchairs, turns her revolutionizing rhetoric on those who are supposedly in her own camp. Beginning a speech against censorship with a humorous story about the policeman who concluded that her book of revolutionary poems, *The Worm Turns*, need not be confiscated (“Oh, that’s all right; that’s something about worms”),⁹ she first speculates as to how this interpretation could have been supported by the first poem in that volume, “Germinal,” with its reference to “sowing” and the “field of Mars.” She then rings changes on the word “worms” until it has turned, itself, from a metonymy for the foolishness of censors to a metaphor for the spinelessness of those who share her views on censorship but will not speak up (“On Liberty” 142–43). The worm itself will turn when trodden, but there are supposed revolutionaries who will not lift a finger in defense of free speech. In her plea for the imprisoned Harman, likewise, although her opening witticism about Delmonico’s implies an audience likely to agree that capitalists are criminals, she does not assume that the men in that audience are innocent of the crimes “Sex Slavery” foregrounds. Thus the ironies she has been developing throughout the lecture circle around eventually to settle on those auditors who may themselves have boasted, as did one of her supposed comrades, “‘I will be boss in my own house’—a ‘Communist-Anarchist,’ if you please, who doesn’t believe in ‘my house’” (349). Beginning with the tribute issue of *Mother Earth* after her death, almost everything written about de Cleyre records her fierce efforts to eliminate such contradictions from her own life. Both her life

and works were animated by the possibility of not only conceptualizing but enacting what bell hooks calls “an oppositional world view” (*Feminist Theory* 163; *Yearning* 15)—making it the intellectual, affective, social, and political space one inhabits.

“Ave et Vale”

One of de Cleyre’s most intriguing meditations on such a possibility is her essay on the Norwegian anarchist Kristofer Hansteen, which traces, with moving subtlety, the complex fusions of interior and exterior, ideal and material, in the life of a profoundly spiritual man dedicated to the material realization of a new order of thought but unconscious of the *gendered* relations between ideas and materiality in his own home. In keeping with the eulogistic tone of the essay, its spiral of repetition is not ironic but lyrically paradoxical, beginning with the opening description of Hansteen as “Of the earth, unearthly—” (“Kristofer Hansteen” 52), a line she describes herself as having written and left unfinished during an illness over two years before his death, when she had been planning an essay on his work. “And now that I am ready to pick up the thread of life again,” she says, “I read that he is dead—of the earth no more, he who hardly ever belonged to it” (52). Developing the theme of Hansteen’s unworldliness, his “delicate, half-aërial personality” (52) and his nonetheless physically strenuous commitment to real-world change, at the end de Cleyre arrives at a “sense of puzzlement” at the family relations that allowed him both to remain so unworldly and to pursue so unremittingly his work in the world.

It was then and it is now a wonder to me how in that mystical brain of his, replete with abstractions, generalizations, idealizations, he placed his love for wife and children; strong and tender as it was, one could appreciate at once that he had no sense of the burden of practical life which his wife seemed to have taken up as naturally hers. . . . Nor did the fact that his unworldliness doubled her portion of responsibility seem to cause him to reflect that she was kept too busy, like Martha of old, to “choose that good part” which he had chosen. Thinking of it now, still with some sense of puzzlement, I believe his love for human creatures, and especially within the family relation, were of that deep, still, yearning kind we feel towards the woods and hills of home; the silent, unobtrusive presence fills us with rest and certainty, and we are all unease when we miss it; yet we take it for

granted, and seldom dwell upon it in our active thoughts, or realize the part it plays in us; it belongs to the dark wells of being. (56)

This incongruity between Hansteen's family relations and his work for human freedom comes to replace "of the earth, unearthly" as the paradox, or rather "puzzle," with which we are left at the end. The word "home," so thoroughly scorned in "Sex Slavery," has an interesting function in this passage: "home" here is a natural place, outside rather than inside, and our relationship to a natural place is the natural, fundamental relationship of home. In this context, Hansteen's love "within the family relation" is only analogous to, not identical with, the love for a natural "home" that we all have. The point, of course—the "puzzle"—is that Hansteen unthinkingly put his wife in the position of *being* this natural place—of being, in fact, nature. This implication, together with the reference to the work his wife took up "as naturally hers," reveals that even here in this personal essay de Cleyre is engaged in her project of getting institutions out of the mind by exposing as artificial and culturally determined what a dominant ideology mystifies as natural.

The most lyrical passage of the essay, the midpoint of the spiral of repetition of words associated with earth, nature, and unearthliness, is a description of Hansteen guiding de Cleyre through the art galleries of Kristiania, drawing on his experiences hiking as a boy with his grandfather: "He knew the lights upon the snow and rocks, just what time of the year shone on the leaves, where the wood-paths wound, the dim glories of the mist upon the fjords, the mountain stairways in their craggy walls, and the veiled colors of the summer midnight. And he knew the development of Norwegian art life and literary life, as one who wanders always in those paths, mysteriously lit" (53). Like the evocation of the "dark wells of being" at the end of the essay, this passage celebrates Hansteen as a deeply natural man—so much a natural man that his tour through an urban art gallery, his knowledge of culture itself ("art life and literary life") is a continuation of his boyhood hikes through the "wood-paths." Looking at pictures of his childhood landscapes, he could tell what was outside, or perhaps inside, the representation: where the paths led. These descriptions, with their emphasis on what is "dim" and "veiled" and "mysterious," add yet another layer to the meanings of the words "Of the earth, unearthly"; in them Hansteen's love of nature, art, and literature, all bound up together, is invested with a spirituality that is nonetheless "of the earth."

Hansteen's ties to nature, so movingly described, inform the com-

plexity of the ending, with its “puzzlement” that such a man should have failed to question whether his wife’s humble role was really “natural.” The allusion to Martha and Mary—and perhaps implicitly to the contradiction in Jesus’ praise of Mary’s gender-role violation even as Martha was providing for his earthly needs—suggests it was a gender ideology associating men with mind and women with body that made the contradiction of earthly unearthliness sustainable in the real world of Hansteen’s anarchist activism. Thus, like the ironic repetitions of de Cleyre’s more scathing political speeches and essays, the turnings and returnings of the paradoxical repetition in this personal essay—“Of the earth, unearthly”—unlock the central contradiction of an ideology, which is in this case also the central ideological incongruity of her subject’s life. Once again, as in “Sex Slavery,” she reveals dominant gender ideology as depending on a mystification that allows the material relations organized around women’s functions in society to be apprehended, indeed interiorized, as spiritual essences: as a question of “virtue,” or a mystical sense of “home,” for example. The “puzzle” is subtly expressed; the eulogy is a touching tribute to a man de Cleyre liked and whose activism and anarchist commitment she respected despite her perception of the gap in his understanding of his own life. In addition, de Cleyre situates her view in some sort of alliance with those of his aunt Aasta Hansteen,¹⁰ a preeminent Norwegian exponent of women’s rights, whom she mentions early in the essay as an “outlandish and even outrageous” but also clearly admirable critic of “masculine prerogative” (53). The final effect of the essay is that it situates Hansteen’s contradictions in relation to de Cleyre’s views on what is unnatural and contrary to the cause of human liberty in any exercise of “masculine prerogative” (53), no matter how saintly the man or how valuable his work, while also suspending them in a final “puzzlement” that acknowledges her friendship with a man who was only mortal, but also “of the earth” in the most spiritual sense.

The last sentence of the eulogy returns to the theme of earthliness in a different way, in the image of Hansteen as a “Dear, falling star of the northland,” an “aërial” being, in other words, that has fallen finally to earth. Like the opening sentence, the final sentence also contains an aposiopesis. “Dear, falling star of the northland,—so you have gone out, and—it was not yet morning” (56). The final dash returns us to the opening line of the eulogy and de Cleyre’s identification of that line with a period in her life when “all my MSS. ended with a dash” (52). One is perhaps supposed to be expecting some other final phrase here: “you

will always be remembered,” for example. Instead, we are told, “and—it was not yet morning,” meaning that the dawn of anarchism has yet to come. After the opening, de Cleyre had continued, “And now that I am ready to pick up the thread of life again I read that he is dead . . .” (52). At the end, the invitation to pick up the thread of life—of Hansteen’s life in its noble dedication—is clear. The dash has been linked metonymically to “the thread of life” that may be broken at any moment; we are invited to pick it up and continue in Hansteen’s work, realizing its fragility and therefore the urgency of the task. Paradoxically, the broken threads at the beginning and end of the essay tie Hansteen’s life to de Cleyre’s, and both to the life of the reader.

It is typical of de Cleyre to read a personal life in ideological terms, because to engage, from an “oppositional worldview” (hooks) in the “struggle for the control of the symbol systems of a given society” (Lerner) is to work at disrupting the characteristic metaphors and images in which people describe their experiences to themselves: the languages in which they live those experiences intellectually, emotionally, socially, politically. It is to contest all of the modes in which they apprehend reality, with the aim of freeing them to imagine themselves and the world in new ways. De Cleyre was adamant in her determination to sustain an oppositional “dominant idea” born of her realization, after Haymarket, “That not in demanding little” is the world transformed, “but in demanding much—all . . .” (“Eleventh of November 1887” 24–25). On New Year’s Day at the turn of the twentieth century, she wrote a poem, “Ave et Vale,” about the injustices she hoped would be redressed in the next hundred years, looking forward with determined confidence to the herald of those changes, the ringing out of a general international strike:

Comrades, what matter the watch-night tells
That a New Year comes or goes?
What to us are the crashing bells
That clang out the Century’s close?

What to us is the gala dress?
The whirl of the dancing feet?
The glitter and blare in the laughing press,
And din of the merry street?

Do we not know that our brothers die
In the cold and dark to-night?

Shelterless faces turned toward the sky
Will not see the New Year's light!

Wandering children, lonely, lost,
Drift away on the human sea,
While the price of their lives in a glass is tossed
And drunk in a revelry!

.

Do we forget them, these broken ones,
That our watch to-night is set?
Nay, we smile in the face of the year that comes
Because we do not forget.

We do not forget the tramp on the track,
Thrust out in the wind-swept waste,
The curses of Man upon his back
And the curse of God in his face.

The stare in the eyes of the buried man
Face down in the fallen mine;
The despair of the child whose bare feet ran
To tread out the rich man's wine;

The solemn light in the dying gaze
Of the babe at the empty breast,
The wax accusation, the sombre glaze
Of its frozen and rigid rest;

They are all in the smile that we turn to the east
To welcome the Century's dawn;
They are all in our greeting to Night's high priest,
As we bid the Old Year begone.

Begone and have done, and go down and be dead
Deep drowned in your sea of tears!
We smile as you die, for we wait the red
Morn-gleam of a hundred-years

That shall see the end of the age-old wrong,—
The reapers that have not sown,—
The reapers of men with their sickles strong
Who gather, but have not strown.

For the earth shall be his and the fruits thereof
And to him the corn and wine,
Who labors the hills with an even love
And knows not "thine and mine."

And the silk shall be to the hand that weaves,
The pearl to him who dives,
The home to the builder; and all life's sheaves
To the builder of human lives.

And none go blind that another see,
Or die that another live;
And none insult with a charity
That is not theirs to give.

For each of his plenty shall freely share
And take at another's hand:
Equals breathing the Common Air
And toiling the Common Land.

A dream? A vision? Aye, what you will;
Let it be to you as it seems:
Of this Nightmare Real we have our fill;
To-n'ght is for "pleasant dreams."

Dreams that shall waken the hope that sleeps
And knock at each torpid Heart
Till it beat drum taps, and the blood that creeps
With a lion's spring upstart!

.

And this shall be in the Century
That opes on our eyes to-night;
So here's to the struggle, if it must be,
And to him who fights the fight.

And here's to the dauntless, jubilant throat
That loud to its Comrade sings,
Till over the earth shrills the mustering note,
And the World Strike's signal rings.

Philadelphia, January 1, 1901

(70-73)

In her lecture "Crime and Punishment," which calls for an understanding that crime is not simply a natural, inevitable fact, a "thing-in-itself," but something that has causes and can be ended, de Cleyre acknowledged the apparent futility of voicing such ideas in her world. Judges who oppose the death penalty continue to sentence men to death, she says; prosecutors "exhaust their eloquence and their tricks" to convict people; others testify "against sinners; and then they all meet in church and pray, 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.'" Underlining the irony that the words of Jesus should be repeated without their meaning, his voice silenced even in its preservation, she says, "And I know that just as the voice of Jesus was not heard, and is not heard, save here and there; just as the voice of Tolstoy is not heard, save here and there; and others great and small are lost in the great echoless desert of indifferentism, having produced little perceptible effect, so my voice also will be lost, and barely a slight ripple of thought be propagated over that dry and fruitless expanse; even that the next wind of trial will straighten and leave as unimprinted sand." But she goes on,

Nevertheless, by the continued and unintermitting action of forces infinitesimal compared with the human voice, the greatest effects are at length accomplished. A wave-length of light is but the fifty-thousandth part of an inch, yet by the continuous action of waves like these have been produced all the creations of light, the entire world of sight, out of masses irresponsive, dark, colorless. And doubt not that in time this cold and irresponsive mass of indifference will feel and stir and realize the force of the great sympathies which will change the attitude of the human mind as a whole towards Crime and Punishment, and erase both from the world. ("Crime and Punishment" 176-77)

It was the object of de Cleyre's revolutionary rhetoric to change "the attitude of the human mind as a whole" so that the very perception of what is and is not a natural, given "thing-in-itself" changes. Her voice has, as she predicted, almost been lost, and what she envisioned so hopefully as our present in "Ave et Vale" is still the future. Indeed, that poem could equally well have been dated January 1, 2001, and published without a change. But if those facts underscore de Cleyre's description of her voice as only a ripple over a vast expanse of desert, they should also call attention to her relevance today. De Cleyre's method of exposing the way

dominant ideology mystifies material relations by recasting them as spiritual or psychological essences has important implications for contemporary feminist thought, and of progressive political thought more generally. At the same time, in such essays as “Sex Slavery,” “The Dominant Idea,” and “Why I Am an Anarchist” she was an early and important pioneer in the project, still ongoing a hundred years later, of inserting an understanding of psychology into an understanding of how material relations work, and how they can be changed. As Karl Mannheim says of ideology, “A society is possible in the last analysis because the individuals in it carry around in their heads some sort of picture of that society.”¹¹ De Cleyre’s revolutionary rhetoric is aimed at revolutionizing a set of mental pictures that make an oppressive society possible. In her effort to bring about “a new order of things” by creating “a new order of thoughts,” she crafted a rhetoric of self-decolonization aimed at disrupting the ideological configuration of her readers’ interior lives, freeing them to rearticulate those lives in terms of oppositional paradigms that would allow them to imagine radical change.

De Cleyre’s most important legacy to progressive American literary and political traditions in the twenty-first century is her insistence on that act of imagination. Her stance toward the relationship between ideas and action, theory and social revolution; her interest in disjunctions between intellectual and political transformation; her insistence both that ideas shape material relations and that women must leave behind “the question of souls” in order to “demand our bodies”; and her representations of political interiorities¹² as well as of the material force of ideas establish her right to a place in contemporary feminist debate in particular. The fact that readers can still be scandalized by de Cleyre’s attacks on the ruling ideologies of her day attests to her still scandalous relevance to ours. By the same token, her art of transformative repetition still has the transforming power to make her readers hear again, look again, see a different picture—or see in the picture, as did Kristofer Hansteen for all his limitations, the world beyond the frame.



Voltairine de Cleyre at her desk, Summer 1898. (Courtesy of the Joseph Ishill Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University.)

Part Two●

Selected Writings of VOLTAIRINE de CLEYRE

Section One

DE CLEYRE'S LIFEWOR

Hope, Despair, Solidarity

De Cleyre was a voluminous letter writer, and her letters are a microcosm of the strengths that characterize her work in every other genre; in them, in fact, we see much of the literary potential that she herself felt she never fully developed. To supplement the biographical sketch in the introduction, this collection opens with chronologically arranged excerpts from letters that express the heights and depths of de Cleyre's experiences as a friend, sister, daughter, lover, and comrade who had committed her life to the advocacy of human freedom. Even in this small selection we hear the rich range of her voice, speaking with an organizer's urgent efficiency in the appeal for money for the Mexican Defense League; a friend and comrade's honesty in the letters to Yanovsky and Hansen; a nature poet's sensibility in a letter to her sister. We hear her deep sadness at the death of her friend and lover Nahum Berman as well as her excoriating anger at Gordon's and her mother's criticisms of her supposed "impracticality" even as she choked silently on the memory of the sacrifices she had made to give them over a thousand dollars of her hard-earned money.

The letters are preceded by one of de Cleyre's early poems, "The Burial of My Past Self," written in Greenville, Michigan, in 1885, where she

lived briefly with her aunt in her first move toward independent adult life. Strongly marked at the beginning with traces of the bitter spiritual and intellectual struggles of de Cleyre's adolescence as well as the high Romantic poetry she admired, it builds to the clarity and self-assertion of all her later work, including the letter to her mother reprinted next under the title "New and Strange Ideas," dated December 18, "E.M. 287." It was written at a time of flux in de Cleyre's early career, just over a month after the hanging of the Haymarket anarchists on November 11, 1887, a few days after her first real exposure to socialism, and about a month before her definitive turn toward anarchism. At the time she was a freethought lecturer, speaking and publishing on such topics as the importance of "secular education" (i.e., keeping religious perspectives out of the schools) and the evils of convents. The heading reflects the reformed, secular system of dating selected by Liberals at an 1882 convention and used on the masthead of Moses Harman's sex-radical periodical *Lucifer*. De Cleyre read and occasionally contributed to *Lucifer*; she would also write one of her most important feminist manifestos, "Sex Slavery" (1890), in response to Harman's imprisonment for "obscenity" (see chap. 3). "E.M." means Era of Man, replacing A.D. (Anno Domini, Year of Our Lord), with a starting point of Giordano Bruno's burning at the stake in 1600 for the heresy of preferring the authority of science to that of the church (Sears 49). Although de Cleyre's mother came from an abolitionist heritage, part of Voltairine's iconoclastic inheritance, she was also a rather conservative Presbyterian. In this letter de Cleyre elaborates on her own defiance of religious, social, and political orthodoxy, a revolt that has obviously already shaken what she elsewhere terms her mother's "Puritan-poisoned soul" (letter to Addie, August 15, 1911).

In typically uncompromising style, she plunges into a sex-radical discussion of marriage followed by references to "coal-kings" and "salt-own-ers"—signs, as Avrich says, of her new socialist views inspired by Clarence Darrow at a Thomas Paine memorial convention (AA 45–46). Darrow was a freethinker, prounion lawyer, and spellbinding orator, now most often remembered as the defense lawyer in the Scopes "monkey trial" of 1925, in which an indictment for teaching evolution became a classic test-case of "secular education." De Cleyre had lectured on freethought hero Paine; Darrow spoke on labor issues, in what de Cleyre called "my first introduction to any plan for bettering the condition of the working-classes which furnished some explanation of the course of economic development" (Avrich, AA 45). Her shift from socialism to thinking along anarchist lines would come soon hereafter, in 1888; meanwhile

the references to anarchism and the list of the anarchists recently sentenced in the Haymarket incident show that she has already decided the supposed “damage” the Haymarket martyrs did, or advocated, pales beside that done in the name of Standard Oil and the mine owners.

By the time of the next selection, “Civilizing the World,” a long letter to de Cleyre’s sister Adelaide on September 4, 1900, de Cleyre was writing from almost exactly the midpoint of her career. This letter provides one of the best glimpses into her application of anarchist theory to current events, and also into some of her most salient personal characteristics—her love of animals and of nature, her loyalty as a friend and family member. Like most of her letters to family, it is full of tender concern for their well-being, mixed both with a certain exasperation at their ideas about how life should be lived, and a faith that they share at least some views in common. A lifelong opponent of marriage, for example, de Cleyre seems happy enough that her sister is married to a man who suits her, although she wonders nervously whether her views on Bresci’s assassination of King Umberto might diminish her welcome in Addie’s house. Nonetheless, her comments on recent U.S. imperialism assume Addie’s agreement, at least to some extent. In addition, the reference to Coleridge implies their shared love of Romantic poetry, a heritage from their mother.

De Cleyre also seems to expect Addie to recognize her reference to “Lyndall” and the “Gray Dawn” (see chap. 3). Schreiner’s *Story of an African Farm* (1883) was not on everyone’s reading list, although it was favored by freethinkers (Robert Ingersoll praised it, for example), and certain feminists, who found the tragic heroine Lyndall a cogent proponent of their ideas. Perhaps Addie had read Schreiner at de Cleyre’s suggestion; if she read it on her own, that implies a certain intellectual adventurousness—one shared, in a smaller degree, even by de Cleyre’s Presbyterian mother, who had married a freethinker, after all. On the other hand, Addie was no sex radical, and de Cleyre’s evoking of Lyndall—a sex-radical pioneer who dies without attaining the Land of Freedom but prepares the way for others—perhaps implies her real views on marriage, so palpably withheld in her opening congratulations to Addie.

Several other aspects of this letter deserve comment: the specific allusion to the war on the Philippines and recent events in China, the references to Gordon and Elliott, and the sad passage on “my friend who died.” The exporting of injustice through U.S. military and commercial imperialism was one of de Cleyre’s major concerns during this era; arriving home from her trip to Europe in 1897, she had written a Scottish

friend, “Yes, I am once more in the land of the patriot and the home of that proud bird which steals everything it can from smaller birds” (to Will Duff, Nov. 24, 1897). The letter to Addie is in the same vein; as it shows, de Cleyre had heard the secretary of state’s speech defending the Philippine war on the basis of “Markets—markets,” a rhetoric she preferred, at least, to McKinley’s quasi-religious rhetoric of a civilizing mission to the heathen. McKinley claimed to have embraced this mission after long prayer revealed to him that we should just “take” the Philippines. As historian Howard Zinn remarks, “The Filipinos did not get the same message from God,” and mounted an anti-U.S. insurrection in 1899 (313). The two rhetorics de Cleyre criticizes were often mixed together, as in a speech of January 9, 1900, by Senator Albert Beveridge, who both declared, “We will not renounce our part in the mission of our race, trustee, under God, of the civilization of the world” and spoke glowingly of the financial consequences: “The Philippines are ours forever. . . . And just beyond the Philippines are China’s illimitable markets” (qtd. Zinn 313). As de Cleyre was writing, China was a target of fierce competition among the imperial powers, who had nonetheless recently cooperated in a joint military suppression of the Boxer Rebellion against foreign influence. De Cleyre and Addie agree that the Chinese should have been left alone, permitted to resist Western-style modernization and be a “back number” (like an out-of-date periodical) if they want.

Mixed with this discussion of foreign policy are more personal references, to former lovers Samuel Gordon and James Elliott (see chap. 3), and “my friend who died.” Although Addie’s note with the letter in the Houghton Library collection says this friend was Dyer Lum, who committed suicide in 1893, the reference to seeing the friend “last winter” in Chicago, that is, 1899, together with his physical description, means he was certainly (as Avrigh assumes), Nahum Berman, with whom de Cleyre had been involved on a Chicago visit in 1899 (Avrigh, AA 128). Berman was the friend, discussed in chapter 3, who abandoned his family for the sake of his anarchist commitments. After his tragic mental illness and suicide just over a month before this letter, de Cleyre published a description of him in *Free Society* (July 22, 1900). At the end of the article, less tender and personal than her description to Addie but infused with the same love, she describes Berman’s “fanatic” streak and his unstinting work for three different anarchist publications, and pictures his suicide as a result of delirium exacerbated by poverty and frequent homelessness. She concludes, “Ah, if there was a Monster Incarnation of the Spirit of Authority, I would take that poor broken life of yours before Him, and

say ‘High God, this is your work; it is meet now that for this alone you should die’” (“N. H. Burmin”).

Other letters find de Cleyre in a more hopeful mood, as in the selection titled “To Print the Force of My Will,” written to her mother on May 27, 1907. At this time, de Cleyre’s son Harry, due to turn seventeen on June 12, seems to have been boarding with her for some months, as she refers to not having charged him rent “since October.” A few references to him crop up in other letters (e.g., to Alexander Berkman, July 1906; to her mother, May 27, 1907; to Adelaide Thayer, August 15, 1911), but generally her decision to give primary childcare responsibility to the father, Elliott, is reflected in Harry’s relative absence from her personal correspondence, at least the portion that has been preserved.

At this time, too, de Cleyre was worrying about how to get proper care for her aging mother. Her speculation that it would be difficult for her mother to live with her is borne out by a letter her mother wrote to Addie while visiting de Cleyre in November 1899. Writing while de Cleyre was away for a lecture tour, her mother told Addie she was taking this opportunity to clean de Cleyre’s apartment, deplored her habit of giving away the little money she made instead of spending it on better dresses, and reported with exasperation on her abstemious style of housekeeping (“only one knife, and that without a handle”) (Harriet de Claire¹ to Adelaide Thayer, Nov. 12, Dec. 7, Dec. 18, 1899). We have de Cleyre’s side of the story in a letter to Addie during the same visit, November 25, 1899, in which she wonders what “sort of things” her mother “does have in her in place of feelings” and complains angrily of her mother’s “gospel of clothes and dignity [multiply underlined].” With regard to the question of dresses, she implies that she sends money home to her mother instead of buying things: “And she scolds because I don’t have costly clothes . . . when by Heavens, I’d like to know in whose interest I went without clothes!!” There is more of the same in the letter to Addie of August 15, 1911, reprinted later in this section under the title “Impractical! Hell!” Despite their differences, however, she was a conscientious daughter, sending money regularly; giving advice about hair tonic (June 22, 1907); reporting news of her friends, in whom her mother took a great interest; telling her of newspaper coverage of her activities; discussing political, economic, and intellectual issues. On her trip to Norway she wrote a long exultant letter describing a hike among

1. De Cleyre was born Voltairine De Claire, but changed the spelling in 1887 or 1888 “as a token of her new identity” (Avrich, AA 40).

gorges and waterfalls (Sept. 2, 1903); on her trip to England she gave a long account of a pilgrimage to the tomb of her mother's beloved Byron and enclosed three blades of grass—"the nearest living thing to him"—from the churchyard (Oct. 7, 1897). And on April 11–12, 1912, she wrote, "whatever griefs I have caused you, have been because of divergent principles. . . . And when you go, if you go first, it will surely leave a great big desolate place in me,—like some deserted garden where a lonesome wind cries over the wasted things." She took her mother seriously as an intellect and even in some ways as a progressive thinker. Although she had obviously applied her feminist analysis of women's stifled opportunities to the example closest to home, for instance, it is interesting that she attributes to her mother two alternative expectations for her own life, both of which she has failed to live up to: either to have married a minister or doctor or to have "been one of these myself." In an era when neither profession was very accessible to women, or seen as an appropriate choice, the latter expectation suggests a strain of feminism in Harriet De Claire, part of the tremendous unrealized spiritual, intellectual, and emotional potential of which de Cleyre had written in her poem "To My Mother" (1889):

Some souls there are which never live their life;
Some suns there are which never pierce their cloud;
Some hearts there are which cup their perfume in,
And yield no incense to the outer air. . . .

(26)

Another poem might be paired with this, the elegy "Mary Wollstonecraft" (reprinted in section 3) in which she finds an alternative spiritual mother in the feminist theorist whose insights no doubt contributed to the contrast she draws between her own life and Harriet de Claire's.

Visiting her mother at her childhood home in St. John's, Michigan, two years later in 1909, de Cleyre was flooded with mixed emotions—not only those inevitably brought on by contact with her mother, but also aroused by her inner debate on a possible move from Philadelphia to Chicago. In the next selection, a letter to her best friend, Mary Hansen, she apologizes for waiting to write until she could decide; leaving Philadelphia would have meant leaving Mary, with whom she had lived during one of the most difficult times of her life, and to whom she had paid happy visits at an alternative community, Arden. She speaks of their

long friendship in an elegiac mode intensified by her recent trip to the site of her old convent school in Sarnia.

Mixed with the beautiful images of nature and friendship in this letter are piercing self-doubts, which surface dramatically in the letters from March 6 and March 29, 1911, reprinted with the title “Possessed by Barren Doubts.” When Saul Yanovsky, editor of the Yiddish anarchist journals *Fraye Arbeter Shtime* and *Di Fraye Gezelshaft*, submitted copies of these letters for possible inclusion in a memorial collection of de Cleyre’s works, he did so with misgivings. “They are mostly of a personal character,” he wrote. “Some of the letters were written, when she was very sick. Some of them, as you will see, are very pessimistic, and I am not sure at all whether it is advisable to have them published” (Sept. 18, 1930[?]). It is with something of the same misgivings that I present them here, as important examples of the kind of burnout many activists experience at one time or another, but also as documents that might nonetheless, because of their emotional force, stand out more saliently than they should, skewing our overall perspective on de Cleyre’s vigorous and essentially hopeful commitment to anarchist agitation throughout most of her adult life. The date of these letters, for example, precedes that of one of her greatest essays, “Direct Action,” delivered as a lecture in 1912—full of confident, stirring rhetoric that hardly bespeaks the “mixed up state of mind” she describes here. It is worth noting, as well, that after complaining bitterly to Yanovsky about her writer’s block, de Cleyre begins a new paragraph in a businesslike tone: “Now about the lectures, I *must* copy them because you couldn’t read them as they are” and says she will send him a two-part sketch, the second half of which “I wrote last week.”

Of special interest to contemporary readers are the references to Emma Goldman, with whom de Cleyre had begun a promising friendship in 1893 after her moving speech “In Defense of Emma Goldman: The Right of Expropriation.” She subsequently visited Goldman in prison, writing warm letters afterward. A plan to visit again, however, angered Goldman; de Cleyre wanted to bring Gordon, an admirer of Johann Most, who had called forth Goldman’s wrath by denouncing her friend Berkman (see chap. 2). These are the “personal reasons” referred to by de Cleyre for her rift with Goldman at one time. That time was in the past when this letter was written, although their repaired relationship never achieved what Goldman, at least, had originally seen as its potential. In 1910, the year Goldman published *Anarchism and Other Essays*, the book de Cleyre refers to in this letter, Goldman was already

riding the high tide of popularity—and notoriety—that sustained for decades her reputation as an electrifying orator (see Wexler 166ff.). These letters to Yanovsky, in contrast, were written at a time of numb despair, a deepening of the self-doubt that runs through some of de Cleyre's letters to Berkman in 1910 and flickers intermittently through the letter to Mary, in which she had exclaimed, "Oh the faith I *haven't* got is a large thing." However, even in the second letter to Yanovsky reprinted here, that faith seems to be resurfacing, as she calls on him for patience: "maybe I'll be some use to you yet." It returned in abundance soon afterward, with the fervor of her work in the cause of the Mexican Revolution during the last year of her life. The next letter, to Addie on August 15, 1911, comes from that period, as de Cleyre stopped to share some sisterly wisdom in the midst of her political organizing in Chicago, where she had finally decided to move in 1910. Reassuring Addie that she has not been singled out for her mother's displays of coldness, she angrily recounts her mother's attacks on her supposed impracticality in money matters.

At the time of this letter affirming her practicality, de Cleyre was at the height of her most efficient organizing effort, as treasurer for the Mexican Liberal Defense League. The group raised money for the Mexican anarchists and distributed their revolutionary paper, *Regeneración*. By way of contrast to her earlier despairing letters, then, an excerpt from this final period of agitation is included, a report of the group's recent work and a plea for contributions. Published as an article in *Mother Earth*, it nonetheless has the feel of a letter, this time to all anarchist comrades, known and unknown, whom she urges to leave the "clouds of theory" and commit themselves to action.

A Note on the Texts

In works published during de Cleyre's lifetime I have retained original punctuation and spelling. In transcribing de Cleyre's letters I have included her single and double strikeouts wherever they occur. In cases where she wrote the revision above the original knockout, I have put the revision just after the knockout.

The Burial of My Past Self²

1885

Poor Heart, so weary with thy bitter grief!

So thou art dead at last, silent and chill!

The longed-for death-dart came to thy relief,

And there thou liest, Heart, forever still.

Dead eyes, pain-pressed beneath their black-fringed pall!

Dead cheeks, dark-furrowed with so many tears!

So thou art passed far, far beyond recall,

And all thy hopes are past, and all thy fears.

Thy lips are closed at length in the long peace!

Pale lips! so long they have thy woe repressed,

They seem even now when life has run its lease

All dumbly pitiful in their mournful rest.

And now I lay thee in thy silent tomb,

Printing thy brow with one last solemn kiss;

Laying upon thee one fair lily bloom,

A symbol of thy rest;—oh, rest is bliss.

No, Heart, I would not call thee back again;

No, no; too much of suffering hast thou known;

But yet, but yet, it was not all in vain—

Thy unseen tears, thy solitary moan!

For out of sorrow joy comes uppermost;

Where breaks the thunder soon the sky smiles blue;

A better love replaces what is lost,

And phantom sunlight pales before the true!

2. See pp. 138–39. Source: *SW* 17.

The seed must burst before the germ unfolds,
The stars must fade before the morning wakes;
Down in her depths the mine the diamond holds;
A new heart pulses when the old heart breaks.

And now, Humanity, I turn to you;
I consecrate my service to the world!
Perish the old love, welcome to the new—
Broad as the space-aisles where the stars are whirled!

Greenville, Mich., 1885

New and Strange Ideas

*Letter to her mother, December 18, 1887*³

Gr. Rapids,⁴ Dec 18, E.M. 287.

Dearest Mother,

After six long weeks I received your most truly welcome note, which wasn't cross as I feared it would be.

Well I'm glad you're not angry at me, and I don't intend, I assure you, to do any more harm than the ordinary individual. If I advocate new and strange ideas it is because I think them right. They are no strangers to me; I have had the same thoughts for more than two years; but out of respect for your feelings never mentioned them until lately. That I do so now, is because I think you ought to know.

The trouble with people is they will not understand. They confound the doctrines of freedom with the vagaries of license. To talk the right of one's own personal possession to the majority of people, is casting pearls before swine.⁵—It is a fact that people are wedded so, to form and custom, that like the pharisee,⁶ they place all merit in the ceremony only forgetting the eternal principles of nature which can never be changed.

Forms and customs are arbitrary fashions of men and countries. What is virtue in one country is vice in another, and what is meritorious in one religion is without merit in another. A form of marriage is so very different even in different so-called christian nations, that a union by law in one is no union at all in another. It is even so in our different states. The Scottish law which married Geoffrey Delemayne and Anne

3. Source: Ms. Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMSAm 1614 (173).

4. De Cleyre had moved to Grand Rapids in 1886, after becoming a freethinker the year before while living briefly in Greenville, Michigan, with her aunt.

5. In Matt. 7:6 Jesus says, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you."

6. Jesus often criticized the Pharisees' meticulous attention to the outward forms of ritual.

Sylvester,⁷ is a law in the city of Chicago to-day. If a man and woman go to a hotel together, and acknowledge each other as man and wife, that is a marriage, even in the State of Illinois to-day, providing either party chooses to claim the other, and neither has another partner.

But no matter how much forms, laws, customs and religions change, a natural marriage is a marriage still to-day, as it will be in all the future; as it has been in all the ages.

It is so strange to me that you are so afraid of anarchy and socialism. I am neither one nor the other and the methods of the former are abhorrent to me. But why, why does the whole world point to anarchy as the great evil, when (~~the~~ no later than two weeks ago) the Lehigh Valley Coal and Iron Syndicate (nice law-abiding people) turned out their helpless starving miners who had struck for a little better wages than 7.5¢ and \$1.00 a day, and (in violation of the foreign contract labor law) have imported 3,500 Belgians, to work their mines. How can they do it? That law says: they shall not enter the ~~sea~~ ports of the U.S. It does not say they shall not come through Canada and cross over at Port Huron, Rochester, Detroit, Toledo etc.—And people ask why there are so many foreign anarchists over here.

The Coal Kings of Penn. have shut down the great Reading mines and in fact the most of the great system, turned their hungry miners out of employment, when the demand for coal is so great that, from its scarcity, the price is forced up to \$8.00 even here in this city.

The eastern operators refuse to sell but in limited quantities; the railroads won't furnish cars to haul, and Heaven only knows where the price will be when the cold weather begins. I must get an article I saw in the Open Court (Chicago) and send you.

Why out not far from here, where car-loads of coal were lying side-tracked, the farmers drove seventeen miles, broke into the cars, took the coal and left the money with a note bearing these significant words, "coal or blood."—This not more than a week ago.—Yet people fear anarchy.—Why those coal kings, those salt-owners who lease the Kenawha Valley wells for ninety-nine years and then shut them down thus throwing men out of employment, and making their own stock more saleable, these men like E. H. Harper of the Fidelity Bank, [Wheat?] crash etc., these Standard Oil men who either buyout or starve out all competition, and who control not only the oil but the gas plants of the principal cities of the U.S., these land thieves such as "John Par-

7. A form of marriage established by cohabitation rather than ceremony.

sons" had to deal with have done an incalculable amount more of damage than Spies, Parsons, Lingg, Engel, Fischer, Fielden, or Schwab⁸ ever thought of.—

Yes my winter dress and waists,⁹ and coat I need. Will you send them to Greenville by express about the end of the week. I am going there for Christmas and I'll get them. I'll pay the expressage. I'm almost frozen to death. No coat, no hat, no new dress,—nothing. I'm poor as a church mouse, but happy.

I am so sorry for your poor eyes. Wish I could help them. Addie wrote me last week. Was well. Good-bye and write soon.

Yours faithfully,
Voltai

8. The Haymarket martyrs.

9. Shirtwaist—older term for *blouse*.

Civilizing the World

*Letter to Adelaide de Claire Thayer, September 14, 1900*¹⁰

Torresdale, Sept. 14, 1900

Dear Addie:

This is the last day of my vacation. I have been a “half-timer” now for ten weeks, but the worship of Mammon¹¹ declares I must start in “full time” to-morrow. So I’m taking my last day to write you, for the Keeper of Mysteries only knows whether I’ll get another chance this year or not.

It has pulled me through the summer finely, and it has been a fe-r-ocious summer, just like the one when you were here; it never let go its grip till day before yesterday.

Well, old girl, I’m glad your present marriage appears to be a success, and “may it continue to wave.” Why did I think you spoke of marriage without love? Well if I had your last winter’s letter here I could tell you. But I don’t want to misquote, so I leave it. In general it was because Gene wouldn’t make a good husband etc., and an intimation that a husband needed to be accompanied by a home in order to be a success. But it’s of no account; if you are satisfied and Mr. Berry is, it’s distinctly nobody else’s business. And I rather guess he’s a goodish sort from the way you write.

The idea of taking a vacation up there some time is very alluring, if—I forgot what absence from the city costs me. I will have to get into a different trade before I can command “leave of absence.” And then, you know, do you think Mr. Berry, let alone yourself, would stand an anarchist in his house? A party that thinks that so long as starving people are shot, as in the streets of Milan or caged up in a state of siege as in Sicily,

10. Source: Ms. Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS Am 1614 (175).

11. Riche; the search for material gain, Luke 16.13: “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

for parading the streets and crying for bread, so long will the King¹² under whose orders they are shot get no worse than he deserves if he gets a bullet through him? That's what I think, and you folks mightn't like me around.

I was real pleased to know you were going to leave the things with Mother (barring the desk) because she was kind of mourning a wee little because things were going to look empty when you took them away; especially the book-case. I wonder if "yous" have been down to see her in company yet? Do Mr. B. and Mother hit it? She and Gordon¹³ hit it beautifully; he had his conservative, dignified, calm, and reasonable side out, most of the time when she saw him; and I suppose if I had been willing to do a lot of contemptible mean things for which I'd despise myself all my life I'd have the approval of both of 'em. I won't, and so I've got their condemnation; but I guess it won't cut much ice. I'm just the same friends with Gordon I always was, but he isn't satisfied with me because I won't agree to the regular program of married life (I don't mean the ceremony but the rest of it—exclusive possession, home, children, all that) so we don't see each other very often. I'm sorry, but I'll have to stand it. I've done the worst of my worrying over it, and have settled down to the facts.

Mother told me about her hair turning darker, but she didn't say it was the old brown. Do you know the reason? Ayer's Hair Vigor. I always keep it in the house since my own hair fell out so, and I made her put some on hers 'cause it was falling badly; and she took half the bottle home with her. It had already made it some darker.

And I think, old girl, if I were you, I'd try the stuff according to directions, which you told me you never did, and I think likely it would bring your brown back.

I suppose Mother enjoys her visit much more in retrospective; I told her she'd remember the grandeur of the Indian Rock and forget how tired she was. Wasn't she a trump, though, to walk all that way? I thought to myself you would never believe she did it, but she did—walked every inch from the falls to the top of the Rock and back. And it was worth while to see Niagara, and the mountains and the sea, even if she did find me a bit unpleasant to live with. But you know I had to drive her to most everything; and she was generally thinking I was "a despot" which I was,

12. Umberto I, assassinated by anarchist Gaetano Bresci, avenging the shooting of starving demonstrators demanding bread (see chap. 2).

13. Samuel Gordon, lover from whom she is distancing herself.

of course. What else can a body be, when folks fall on you like an inert mass and you have to lift 'em up on wheels before they go? If I weren't an anarchist I'd want to manage and rule and force everybody. Good reason why I know 'tisn't safe for folks to have power! As you observe[,] China (and others) have a good right to be a back number if they want to; and Mother had a perfect right to go to Mich. and back without seeing a thing, too,—only I bet she's glad now she didn't.

To get to something serious, yes, this Chinese affair is abominable; same as the Philippines and Porto Rico and Cuba and the rest of it.¹⁴ But when the American and European capitalists make up their minds to have markets they'll pull the North Pole out before they stop; I really don't know what they'll do by the time they have "civilized" Asia and Africa, and got them on the same business basis as themselves, i.e., producing a great deal more than they consume and hunting a place to sell the surplus (while their own folks starve and half-starve). But I reckon the social revolution will be along by that time, and say, "here, we can do away with this surplus ourselves." Did you read the Secretary of State's speech on the Philippine war, some six months ago? He delivered it here in Phila., and it was very plain and brutal indeed. "Markets—markets"—that was the whole burden of it. All the same it was better than McKinley's cant about "the sacred duty of civilizing." England and America both have taken up "the White Man's Burden" very disinterestedly (?).¹⁵ I wonder how you feel when you teach a history class now? How do you reconcile the Declaration of Independence and ~~these~~ the "Colonial dependency" position? And if you don't reconcile it, how do you expect to keep "a government job?"

I seem to run into flippancies, no matter how I try to be serious. Well, maybe you've quit teaching for good. Have you? You're at last what you used to say you'd be—a farmer's wife; (Mr. Schick don't count). Well, it seems to me the most peaceful and natural life left; as long as one stays on the fringes of the boil (mixed metaphor) one can remain tolerably unconscious of the vortex. But that too will get absorbed in time.

You seem to have an interesting little menagerie. Give 'em my love,

14. The Boxer Rebellion in China, the Spanish-American War of 1898, in which the United States gained Puerto Rico, and the U.S. war on the Philippines, begun in 1899.

15. The question mark, in the original, signals a joke or irony; for de Cleyre there was no question that the focus on "markets" revealed England and America to be hardly "disinterested" in their imperial ventures. The "white man's burden" was the supposed duty of morally superior Europeans and Americans to spread their enlightened civilization to the rest of the world.

one and all; and don't raise pigs and calves to kill. Don't raise pigs at all, 'cause you have to kill them. And let the calves grow up; don't betray their "beautiful confidence." I have still the kitten we picked up that day; he's had ten good solid weeks' vacation out here in the country and he looks good. Do you know what I feed him on. I buy a cheap can of salmon, and mix it with half a pound of raw oat meal, and it makes him several days' feed, and it makes his skin shine like a nice oat-fed horse's. Try oats on your cats! Did Mother ever tell you what a wild devil he was? How he went away last winter and was gone six weeks, and came back a wire of a cat, with his fur in measly tufts? All winter we tried to fix him decent and Mother gave him meat and milk steady; but he staid a wire and—nothing more. Of course he's all scars now from his labors, but they don't show unless you examine him. But I'm afraid when he goes to town he'll run off again.

I've had beautiful sunrise, and sunset, and moonlight, lots this summer. My bedroom faces the morning sun, and every day I could watch it rise without the trouble of getting up,—just watched many a time how the "Gray Dawn" that Lyndall dreaded so, came creeping over the grass, and then the pale lighting of the lamp in the east, and the long, low glimmer across the sky and the whitening of the atmosphere, and ~~then~~ then the rim of the great ball with its diamond spray shooting like a crown around it, and then the red ball itself all round and fire, and the underlining on the light clouds, and then—to lie down peacefully and sleep three hours more!

But I always love the moonlight and the starlight more,—so soft, and cool, and dreamy; you know that exquisite line in the Ancient Mariner,

"And the bay was white with silent light"

I've been so grateful to him¹⁶ for it many a time, as I looked out over the fields,—even the weeds so tender in that magic light,—and heard the low rippling of the wind along the corn.

My friend who died,—who was he? Oh, you never saw him—he was in St. Louis when you were here. He was one of those strange characters who loved life intensely, yet who can never adapt themselves to the conditions of it. He was a born savage, a wild man, in his love of nature,—and life, life, every manifestation of it. Always an optimist, though generally without a crust of his own; always ready to run to the ends of the

16. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, author of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

earth for “the end of the rainbow,” but ever unable to do half that amount of work for his own living. He had drifted half way over the world; blown about, so to speak, and knew five or six languages, and the literature of them, well. From a tramp job on a ditch or a railroad he would walk, blood-poisoned, into a hospital; drift out of it into a library, soak his soul in the fine art magazines, seek relief from hunger in the contemplation of a baby Cupid watching its image in a brook, borrow a quarter and give it to the first beggar between the ~~borrower and the lender~~ and the restaurant, and sit down in the corner of a cobbling shop and write a letter twenty pages long on the political forecast—which generally turned out right. He was a little bit of a thing, but with a head like Schiller’s,¹⁷ though not handsome otherwise.—Poor boy! Last winter when I was in Chicago when we went out doors he would always turn and pull my cloak together around me and tell me to fix my collar up, when his own clothes were so thin the wind must have cut like a knife through them and no overcoat, no scarf. And Chicago is fierce in November! Such a history! And such single-eyed devotion to a cause through buffetings that make my blood creep to remember. I cannot even bear to look at the lovely handwriting on his envelopes any more—it burns like fire. In those last days, before the final agony, he wrote me: “I am not writing you Love Letters; it is the blood of my heart that speaks because it can not keep quiet.”—And I was really a little annoyed at what seemed to me extravagance. That is the worst of it; we never know; two days after he went so terribly insane. Ah well, it’s over; I didn’t love him except as a friend and comrade; but I’d die tonight if it could bring him back; for he loved life, and I don’t care for it, and it was greatly because of me, tho’ there were other things. I’ll stop on this, for I can never see thro’ my glasses long when I begin to speak of him—its [*sic*] eleven weeks day after to-morrow since he died, but it’s all like yesterday to me. And I can’t make him dead,¹⁸ no matter how I reason on it. It seems to me he is always walking around with me.

I’ll get on an angry subject to cure the tears. Do you know that devil Elliott¹⁹ hunted up that other devil, Father, and then those two devils worry Mother? If she’d only do as I tell her—pay no attention to them, return their letters unopened, decline to take any messages! But she reads & worries! It is the opinion of all our acquaintances here that E. is

17. Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), German writer associated with the “Storm and Stress” movement.

18. I.e., imagine him being dead.

19. James Elliott, father of her child.

not right “in his intellects,” which of course excuses a good deal; but at the same time it doesn’t make his annoyances easier to bear. He is not satisfied with being told to get out of my house, and Mary’s house;²⁰ he won’t take even a kick. He has no self-respect whatever, but insists on intruding himself constantly everywhere.

Mary is well and sends her love to you. She is the same patient, sweet, quiet girl you knew, with a world of bravery in her placid submission. Susie is still living, and has fought herself into a state of recovery; not to be able to work, but to go about again. She makes me sick, though, when I see her, because she’s such a “rip-snorter.” I spent one day with her this summer; it will last me some time.

Before I close,—will you please send me by return mail the address of Mr. Stewart, Secretary of the National Educational Ass’n. I don’t know the city, etc.

The ~~rest~~ rest of the letter you can take your time to answer, but make it a short time if you can.

Yours with love,
Voltai

Sept. 17

Navro²¹ was just in and says to send his regards

20. Mary Hansen, one of de Cleyre’s best friends and an ardent coworker. De Cleyre lived with Mary and her partner George Brown after moving out of the boardinghouse where the Elliots lived, in 1894, and again in 1901 (Avrich, *AA* 130), and she was living with them when Helcher shot her.

21. Nathan Navro, faithful friend from 1896 when he first took English lessons from her, through her final illness.

To Print the Force of My Will

*Letter to her mother, May 27, 1907*²²

929 Wallace St.
May 27, 1907.

Dearest Mother:—

I'm like yourself, blue, these last weeks; due I presume mostly to the weather, which probably exerts on human beings the same sort of influence it does on everything else,—a repressive, deadening sort of one. I don't know whether "the sun's heat is giving out," or "the earth's heat is giving out," or there has been "~~an~~ a gradual elevation of surface," or "the pressure of low atmospheres has prevailed over higher ones," or "the next glacial epoch is due," but it's derved cold anyhow. I have a fire to-day, and it has never been out for a week together the whole spring. Eatables are all double price, consequently people unable to buy other things, consequently light demand for manufactured goods, consequently factories shutting down two months earlier than usual, consequently the unemployed ranks growing, consequently I suppose, a panic shortly. That's how I feel.

I have been thinking and thinking about your situation, and it really torments me that I can see no solution of it. I know you ought not to remain alone; that is certain. On the other hand, you couldn't stand it to live with me. I keep, and must keep, late hours; you must go to bed early and be quiet. I have no room here, and to rent room enough is beyond my means. You ought to have some one to take care of you, when you need it; on the other hand I just manage to worry through at taking care of myself. In every other respect you are better off there than here,—light, air, room, and ground floor. If I could find some one who would stay there, just for the sake of the home, and take care of you just the little that you need. But where shall I find such a person.

22. Source: ms. Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMSAm 1614 (173).

There is no question in my mind that your present increase in size is due to the general breaking down of the tissues, due partly to age and partly to your long years of mal-nutrition, as well as partly to local disease; but I don't think the latter cuts much ice, except in reference to your eyes, nose, and throat. The main thing is 50 years of deprivation. I think the cells are gradually breaking down and being absorbed leaving the intercellular substance flabby and stretchy. That is a thing that cannot be wholly stopped, but could be delayed by good living. But how in the world are you to get good living? Neither Addie nor I can do more than we do,²³ much as we would both like to.

I sometimes think about the house; but the trouble is, anything you could get for it, either by sale or mortgage would not last very long, and then you would probably outlive it and have no home; and that would be more horrible than anything else.

When I ~~remember~~ think of you, young and with life before you, and think how really little you wanted in this world,—just a home and a reasonable comfort, enough to eat and wear, and a little leisure to read or study,—it seems to me very awful that you shouldn't have got that little.

I'm not built like you. I couldn't fulfill your wishes for me, which were probably that I would have entertained your own principles, married some minister or doctor, ~~and~~ or been one of these myself, and kept up the traditions of life, as you conceive its highest expression,—that is, have a home, children, and a warm room for you,—I mean the idea that the parent gives to the child in youth and the youth returns to the parent in age.

All that is utterly foreign to me. I have wanted even less of life than you, for myself. I have cared neither for a home nor any of its addenda. But I have wanted a whole lot of other things, and I've got some of them. I have wanted to travel and see the whole world; I've seen some. I've wanted to print the force of my will—not over-rating it—on the movement of towards human liberty. And I have done that, to a certain extent. I have failed in one thing, and that was to hold a place in literature. And I think I have failed partly because I haven't cheek and persistence enough, and mostly because I've always had to do other things. But altogether I think I've had more satisfaction in my forty years than you in your seventy; and it seems to me awfully unfair that when one wanted

23. De Cleyre may be referring to her regular enclosures of money from her small earning, or to the possibility of moving in with her mother, or her mother living with either Addie or her.

only such simple and reasonable things, the end of it all should be so desolate. After all, you did get the little home, and I think you should not part with it. #[paragraph break?] As to the pension matter, I never think of it with anything but disgust. The whole pension-office is a rat nest, just like everything else the government touches,—full of thieves, who “milk the public cow.” Of course I shall be glad for you, if you ever get the money; it’s more honest for you to get it, than heaps that do. And I suppose you paid, in war-taxes on everything you ate, drank, and wore, more than you’ll ever get back in a pension. Still the idea of ~~unborn~~ people, unborn ~~at~~ at the time, being taxed to pay for that civil war and its ruins, never will seem anything but a huge injustice to me.²⁴ The legacy they got with the debt, viz: the strong central government, is worse yet than the debt. Well, I guess I better stop growling.

I wonder Addie never writes to me. Harry is well; he works variously; he was in the store steadily for awhile at \$1.50 a day, but couldn’t agree with the book-keeper. Then he hunted himself a sort of odd job place where he could work about as he pleased and got \$1.00 a day and board. Robinson sent for him again to go out two days a week with the wagon, and he kicked for \$2.00 a day and got it. This week he is going out three days in the week at the same rate. He hasn’t succeeded in getting any automobile job yet; and of the \$25.00 he spent on tuition I think he deliberately wasted about half. I am not going to give him any more money for schools of any kind, because he simply will not attend more than half the term. He still races after machines, and came home radiant with the discovery that there is a machine whereby a single man can raise twenty tons! But it seems to spend itself in curiosity; he doesn’t make any determined move to get into machine work. He has just bought a spring suit. I haven’t taken any rent from him since October, but now my work is getting dull, I’ll have to. He offered to give \$4.00 a month, but I won’t take more than \$2.50, because he has no room rightly to himself. Of course I consider this just part cancellation of an old debt. He has had an easy time of it for the last seven months anyhow. He spends very little of his money, and has now saved \$25.00 besides his suit, since March.

As to debts, last night I got Nathan²⁵ to give me the account of my ill-

24. She shared Dyer Lum’s perspective; he fought in the Civil War thinking it was about abolishing slavery and later concluded that it had really been about the extension of wage slavery and centralized power.

25. Nathan Navro, for a time de Cleyre’s lover, one of her most faithful friends to her death. He nursed her in the near-fatal illness of 1904–5 referred to here (Avrich, AA 79–80, 188–89).

ness. It cost altogether, from the time I gave up in April three years ago, \$1 825.95.²⁶ Of this a little over \$400 was my own. This winter I have paid back \$80.00. And last summer \$20.00, which makes \$100 off. I find that my debt to Nathan personally was \$88.00. To Kaufman it was \$82.00. I have paid N. \$50.00 and Kaufman \$25.00. \$5.00 I returned to Father Siegfried,²⁷ not liking to be in debt to a Catholic priest, even though he is so good a man.

Well, I won't be able to pay more till next year now, because the dull time is coming. Kaufman needs the money now, that's why I want to pay him, tho' he would never ask for it. I could have paid \$50.00 more only for the piano repairs.

I ~~wante~~ have many times wanted to send you your rocker, but I don't want to send it, without having a framework made around it so it won't get broken, and I don't know how to get that done, without paying too much for it. The chair is not so strong as it looks—Harry has glued it twice, where the arm came loose—and I think they would smash it. . . .

[The letter continues with news of friends, a promise to send "the Magazine" with a "little sketch" of de Cleyre's, and a comment on the anniversary of her father's death: "Yes, poor father is dead a year. He hadn't much out of his life either, had he?" It ends with a long account of a scandal involving Benedict Gimbel, of the department-store Gimbels, who was caught sexually abusing a young boy and killed himself by cutting his throat with a smashed pitcher. "Poor devil," writes de Cleyre, "so poor with all his million dollars,—and yet so loved by his brothers and his wife. . . . I'm not often sorry for rich men; but I was sorry for the Gimbel Bros. They acted like men and true brothers in the face of great shame." She concludes with an answer to her mother's question about her headaches—not so bad she can't teach, but always there even on the "best days"—and a reminiscence of St. Johns, her hometown in Michigan, where her mother lives.]

I don't see how the St. Johns people can build so many churches, when there is so little life there. It remains in my memory now like a "Deserted Village."²⁸ So very pretty, but dead. Good-bye. I hope I'll be gayer next time. Voltai.

26. A huge sum; in June 1911 she wrote of averaging \$12 to \$14 a week currently, but \$10 per week the previous year, and of once making an amazing \$19.50 a week for four straight weeks (letter to Mary Hansen, June 3, 1911). A month before her death she was averaging \$13.75 a week (letter to Alexander Berkman, March 18, 1912).

27. A priest whom she referred to elsewhere as "my revered friend" (Avrich, AA 219).

28. Allusion to Oliver Goldsmith's melancholy poem by the same name.

Do You Remember . . . ?

*Letter to Mary Hansen, December 6, 1909*²⁹

204 S. Lansing St., E
St. Johns, Mich. Dec. 6, 1909.

Dear Old Girl:—

Your second letter came to-day. I was going to answer the first one any how today. . . . every day I thought to answer it, but some way I couldn't make up my mind to write until I had settled whether to come back or not.

And I felt just like you said; as if I were far, far down a long black tunnel, with only unknown darkness before me, and a lot of immeasurable pain behind. And I looked back at you all, and thought over and over what going back means, and shook my head and went farther down the tunnel. And twice I was resolved not to come back, and had decided to go on to Chicago for this winter. . . . But at last, after a good hard sickness, I gave in and turned back. And though I'm acting against my judgment in some respects, and am very little hopeful of being satisfied in Philadelphia, I'm going back again next week or soon after; and so I hope, old girl, we'll see each other soon again, for it never was a pleasant thought that I was going far from you, and you've played as big a part in my life as I have in yours.

It is a long time, isn't it, since those days when we met up in poor Foster's stable, among the weevils and the scrap-iron. Life didn't look over-buoyant even then, and we didn't see all the black things a coming. I remember how awfully little your waist was, and how white your hands were. And I remember also being very much exercised in my mind when you went to live with G. B.³⁰ for fear he wasn't good enough! Did I ever tell you? We can all laugh about it now; but I'm still of opinion he

29. Source: Ms. Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMSAm 1614 (256).

30. George Brown, Mary's partner.

wasn't quite good enough. Did I ever tell you about that 4th of July, when you, he, Elliott, and I went down to 34th St to look at the fireworks; and I saw, as you and he stood on the box, or chair was it? how he pulled your head over and kissed you there in the crowd? It was dark, and I think no one else saw but me. And I've always been glad, dear girl, that that time I was shot I was living with you, though it made you so much trouble . . . [She continues with reminiscences of pets, then of Mary's concern about her relationship with her former lover Samuel Gordon]:

Do you remember the morning on Newmarket St. when Gordon had said something hard to me, and you came up and found me half on the floor, and asked me if he had struck me?—Did I ever tell you how both of us—both he and I—after we had a quarrel—went and took poison? And he came up in spite of all (I had taken some of that morphine of Tomsie's) and took me away to Dr. Morgan's, when we had told each other; and Dr. M. sent me to Horn and Hardart's for black coffee that made me vomit terribly, and G's own stomach was burned up with some stuff he had taken—his lips were black next day, and we were both like rags.

O Girlie, if we were to go on counting the old things—the infinitely little things, that have left the indelible mark. . . .

When I ~~went~~ came to Detroit, on my way here, I stopped off a week, and my cousin and I went up to Port. Huron (my old home with Father) and across the river to my old convent. Pt. Huron must have stopped when I left it, 26 years ago, and gone backward slowly ever since. Where once the busy sawmill chewed up logs and spit them out, no trace of life is seen; the mill is gone; discouraged piles of lumber stand leaning here and there, and rank weeds grow up to the rotting breakwater. Heaps of ruin where life was. Only one ferry wharf where two were once; the other not only dismantled but completely removed. This is on the Black River, in the heart of the city. By the great river wharf—the ~~wh~~ first place from which I ever saw live water—the blue St Clair, which is just really as blue as it has been all these years in my dreams—only lonesome, darkened buildings stood. Rotting piles stand by the ivy-covered waterworks, silently dropping away, bit by bit into the great current, where still the ships go up and down, as they used, but not stopping as they used. At Sarnia, the old convent is sold as an apartment house, the wide grounds sold in lots here and there, and three ugly dwelling houses built on them. . . .

Well, I wanted to go there these many years, and now I have been, and am satisfied, as you are when you have visited a graveyard. . . .

I have seen the glory of the moon on the snow once more; I had forgotten how wonderful it is. This is bigger than Arden, but we see the land and the sky here—and the great watching stars. . . .

Write soon. With love, Voltai

Possessed by Barren Doubts

*Letters to Saul Yanovsky, March 6 and March 29, 1911*³¹

2038, Potomac Ave.
Chicago, Mar. 6, 1911.

Dear Comrade:—

I am infinitely ashamed of myself for not having answered your letter of Dec. 12 before this; the trouble is I took the advice you gave literally; do you remember what you wrote? "The best thing it seems to me would be for you to drop letter writing and discuss the whole question" (i.e. the stagnation in our movement) "as thoroughly as you are able." Well, dear comrade, I did both: that is to say, not being able to discuss at all, I did not write at all!

And for all that I did not answer your letter at the time, I think I never felt so much that we were comrades as when I read it. The simple words: "The worst is, you don't know (and neither do I) what is to be done", made me feel more spiritually akin to you than I had ever felt in my life before.

It is true that I do not know, and I have lost the habit of thinking that I can acquire the power to know what is the trouble. I tell you I feel spiritually, morally, and mentally bankrupt! When I think of anything as a subject to write upon I am immediately smitten with a recognition of my own incompetence. I am as satisfied as ever that society is in bad shape, but I do not know how it should be remedied. The prolific confidence of old years, has died; I am possessed by barren doubts only. What I formerly wrote, what others write, seems to me very questionable assertion. It's not that I have the slightest idea that our opponents are right; their statements look just as foolish to me as they ever did; but I have no surety of our opposition.

Under this steady paralysis, how, dear comrade, is it possible to speak

31. Source: Ms. Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMSAm 1614 (178).

or write? What is one to do? Lay bare to the enemy, or the ignorant, or the enthusiastic, the confusion in one's own soul? Or on the other hand assume ~~and~~ ~~an~~ assurance one does not have, parrot one's past self, and repeat words as one recites something learned by heart?

I have been reading occasional reports of Emma Goldman's lectures and reviews of her book.³² The whole thing looks to me like a species of self-hypnotism on her part, and stupid indiscrimination on the part of the reviewers. The book is a hastily compiled hodge-podge of ill-assorted and ill-expressed ideas, in my opinion; the notion that she is "stirring the intellectual world in favor of"³³ etc., seems to me as comical a conception as that of the fly who thought the world had turned round when he went from the upper to the under side of his leaf.

The fault may lie in me, but that is the way all such things appear to me. I do not speak of her just because it is she, but as a sample of the impression made on me by people who think they are "doing things."

Now in such a state of mind, how is it possible to write. I would like to be able to write for F.A.S. or F.G. or M.E.³⁴ or any other journal of like nature; I would like to have something to say. But as soon as I look at it on paper, it looks foolish to me,—words, just; nothing in it!

For all that I ought to have copied the lectures which were already written, and sent them; but I have had a rather hard struggle to live here (to adapt myself to the climate), and have been sick a good deal. I feel lost and lonesome, unadapted to my surroundings, personally wretched most of the time. That must be my excuse.

The few people with whom I associate do their utmost to put some life into me, but they do not succeed. I am always trying to avoid chances of meeting people, instead of seeking them.

In spite of that, I have been dragged into a promise to speak here on the 18th of March, at a meeting arranged by the Bohemian group. I enclose a notice of it, which you may like to use in F.A.S.—Otherwise I do not think the Jewish comrades will know of the meeting, and they have arranged nothing themselves.

I don't know whom I have to thank for putting my "ad." in F.A.S. I

32. *Anarchism and Other Essays* (1910).

33. Presumably a quotation from one of the reviews that claimed Goldman's book was inspiring widespread support for anarchism.

34. Yanovsky's Yiddish anarchist papers, *Fraye Arbeter Shtime* (Free voice of labor) and *Di Fraye Gezelshaft* (The free society), and Goldman's *Mother Earth*. De Cleyre published in all three.

think Nathanson must have written it, because it's like one he put in for me here, which I would never have written myself. I do not pretend to teach either elocution or mathematics (beyond algebra). But anyhow the ad has been very useful and much more than the local paper. I have received no bill for it. To whom shall I write about it; the manager? You see I really do not know what to do because I am unused to advertising, altogether.

Please write to me as I have to you, not as one writes for publication, but to one's friend who is able to understand.

V. de Cleyre

2038, Potomac Ave.
Chicago, Mar. 29, 1911.

Dear Comrade:—

No, I don't feel ~~at all like~~ the least resemblance to indignation at anything you wrote me; I'm just glad you said what you felt. It makes me feel all the more that I hadn't the least real idea of you all those years. I never knew at all that under your apparent face of sneering and craft (that's what I didn't like about you—that appearance of guile, cunning, the devil knows what it is, that used to repulse me) you carried a sore and bitter heart—bitter at yourself.

I don't care that you call me a coward; maybe I am one, though it seems to me the trouble is something else: if I know myself, the trouble is this, that I don't know at all what I believe; and when I try to find out, my mind crumbles down in the effort; a terrible apathy comes over me, a mental ~~st~~ stupor; I sit staring at my own problems, like an idiot. I can't drive myself to go on.

It used to sound so sensible to me, years ago, when we said that "the economic concerns of the world can be adjusted etc., etc." Now, I say to myself, "What in the world do I know about economic concerns? Let any common business man ask me how any matter should be arranged, and I could not answer him. And I don't know if it is because I was a fool then, or I am a fool now, or ~~I am~~ a fool both times.

Now, in the name of common sense, why shall I go out in public simply to proclaim a mixed up state of mind, that changes from hour to hour, and lands nowhere; especially since I have not the mental force or

persistence to straighten myself? I think I'd have the courage to be a renegade, if I really were a renegade; but I'm not even that. The other fellow's propositions look just as idiotic to me as my own.

Yes: you're right. Anarchism wouldn't lose much, if the whole bunch of us bolted tomorrow. Maybe it would be even better off.

Last Sunday night I met A. Johanssen. Do you know him? Well, for an hour or so, I felt a sort of injection of life. The man is nothing, by conviction; but inclined anarchistically. But he is the coarse, virile, alert workingman—boisterous, offensive, hearty, strong. I think he "sleeps o' nights".³⁵—I felt that such men accomplish the changes in the world; that if one could talk intelligibly to such people, it would be worth while being an anarchist. The trouble is, we are all a bunch of small editions of Hamlet, "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." At least—maybe; and maybe not.³⁶ I'm uncertain about everything.

Now as to Emma's book; cui bono?³⁷ The thing isn't worth doing. Perhaps I should really be a coward,³⁸ if I could think it was worth while doing. Then it would be up to me to consider whether ~~it~~ I had courage to offend her, etc. But if I were ever so much her enemy, I shouldn't think it was worth while.

I don't think she is consciously deceiving; I think she somehow works herself into the conviction that she is doing wonders.

As for being accused of "envy", well they would say the same of me; they ~~did~~ say it—my own best-known comrades in Phila.—during the years when for personal reasons I was at odds with her. They said I was envious of her as a speaker, etc. All of which was nonsense, just as it's nonsense in your case. . . .

You haven't any idea how hard it is for me to write,—especially on Anarchism. It seems to me I have to put my brains in a press and just squeeze every word out. Maybe that will change some time. I tell you, because you seem to have the impression that it would be easy for me to write for the two papers.³⁹ And I would gladly enough write, if it wasn't

35. From Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* 1.2.32ff. Caesar notes Cassius's "lean and hungry look" as a sign of too much thinking: "Such men are dangerous." He would prefer to have about him men "such as sleep a-nights." The allusion to Hamlet, whose waffling and philosophizing ("to be—or not to be?") de Cleyre next likens to anarchist overtheorizing at the expense of action, is in the same vein.

36. Perhaps one of de Cleyre's rare jokes—or perhaps not.

37. Latin: Who benefits from it? What good is it?

38. A reference to Yanovsky's reply to her earlier depressed letter of March 6.

39. Yanovsky's two Yiddish anarchist newspapers.

such killing hard work to me. I can easier teach 10 fools than write one article!

I too am sorry, and very sorry, and wondering very much how it came about, that we never had any real insight into each other's personality so many years.

Now about the lectures, I must copy them because you couldn't read them as they are. I was so tired and disgusted when I finished them, that I never wrote them in readable shape.

I also want to send you (probably next week) ~~a pair of~~ two companion-piece sketches for Freie Gesellschaft.⁴⁰ The first was printed in M. Earth some 4 years ago; but the second, which is its sequel, I wrote last week. Both are literally true. . . .

Have patience with me, dear comrade, and maybe I'll be some use to you yet. The best thing you can do for me, is to write me sometime as you have in this letter. And never hesitate to say just what you feel; if you call me a coward 20 times over, or any other ~~d__n~~ thing, it's no offense, because it's spoken out of the same somber self-dissatisfaction, which is just as honest with itself.

I'll send that MSS. soon.

Voltairine

40. "At the End of the Alley."

Impractical! Hell!


*Letter to Adelaide de Claire Thayer, August 15, 1911*⁴¹

Aug. 15, 1911

Dearest Sister: Your letters just came this morning. . . .

Well, if things cannot be arranged for Detroit,—(or ~~even~~ for Mother to board even at \$4.50) then I shall have to give up my western idea⁴² and go and stay with her for a year. I have money enough to do that, but—what at the end of the year?—And a northern winter for me, a winter in a still place which is worst of all, (where there is much noise the ears don't trouble so much)⁴³ is a sure hell. I had torture enough here, and yet there were days together when I didn't go out of the house,—ten days sometimes. And even so I froze.

Yes, she writes just as sadly to me as to you. What you say about the coldness of Puritan morality is only too true; I have never paid any attention to said morality since I got old enough “to take notice”; I have let myself be myself in that respect. But I, no more than you, have any inclination to be affectionate with Mother. In fact, it's sometimes rather repulsive to me. She and Gordon once (Oh, they were a delectable pair!) were objecting to me as “impractical.” Impractical! Hell!—And I gave those two people over \$1000 between them! Addie, when I think of it now, my throat shuts up like a vise, and I pretty near strangle!—They wanted me to forsake my ideas that the world could be a free world, that some things are more worth than money and position; above all I shouldn't ride a diamond frame bicycle!!!!!!⁴⁴

Well, Mother saw I was getting hurt, and threw her arm around me, 

41. Source: Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMSAm 1614 (175).

42. An unrealized plan to go to California.

43. The ringing in her ears that she had suffered since 1904 (Avrich, AA 184).

44. Perhaps a reference to the cost of a bicycle or the controversy about whether women should ride; Susan B. Anthony described a bicycling woman as “the picture of free, untrammelled womanhood” (qtd. Larrabee 91). This controversy peaked in the 1890s, however (see Larrabee), and it seems unlikely that Gordon, at least, would be worried

~~was~~ and said some nice thing or other; it was all I could do to keep from jerking loose. If I had been like them I would have shrieked in their faces, “If I have to be practical I have to begin on you two first!”—They said that to me, to me that had gone without clothes, and shoes, and even food for them both!—It isn’t that I wanted their thanks; but I can’t stand that little mean limited way of talking and thinking; Mother is honest in it, of course; she thinks that way. But it irritates me; she to talk of “practicality”, who couldn’t “play the game” that is laid out according to rules she believes in; and I can play it, and have played it, and don’t believe in it, because I know its [~~illegible heavy strike-out~~] a mean handicapped arrangement with no square chances for 9/10 of the people; and so I am “impractical.”

Now don’t you ever think for one minute that it’s any easier for her and me to live together than for you two. She is just as offensive about my friends as about yours. Mary Hansen (a saint if there ever was one)—she always makes a sneering face when she speaks of Mary. Mary isn’t neat; that’s true; and every little uncleanliness Mother magnified into a capital crime. And when Mary in the goodness of her heart made me things to wear that ~~didn’t~~ cost much, Mother thought she dressed me badly because she was jealous of me. Now imagine anything so stupid!

Well, I don’t want to go on recalling those things; I just want you to know it isn’t because it’s you Mother says offensive things; it’s because it’s her nature. And I know you are wrong in thinking she has contempt for you. As much as is in her broken-down, aged, infirm, and Puritan-poisoned soul to love you, she does,—as much as she does me. I see it in her talk to me about you.

Your marriage, dear girl, was maybe not such a wise move; but it was loving, and that’s better than wise. And since Judd is at bottom good, I guess it’s “not so worse” all in all.—I think perhaps, now, Mother is so lonely she wouldn’t find so much fault as she used, if she were with him. But I hardly think she will want to go north. However she surprised me with that Soldiers’ Home proposition.⁴⁵—I don’t like it much, but there are some homes, I think, which are not so bad.

about this aspect of de Cleyre’s bicycling, although “diamond frame” may suggest that de Cleyre’s bike was not a ladies’ drop-frame or open frame, which allowed for wearing a dress while cycling, an issue that might have concerned her mother. The context suggests that the extravagance of buying a bike in de Cleyre’s tight financial circumstances was the issue. She talks happily of riding her bike in another letter.

45. The reference is to the possibility of their mother moving north to live with Addie and her husband, with whom she had found fault in the past, or to moving into a Soldiers’ Home (her suggestion) or some other such home. De Cleyre’s father, Hector De Claire, separated from Harriet during most of de Cleyre’s childhood, had died at the Soldiers’ Home in Milwaukee in 1906 (Avrich, AA 191).

It's all nonsense about Harry De Claire⁴⁶ becoming a priest; he is an ignorant boy and an alcoholic wreck; they wouldn't take him in for a minute.

St. Johns⁴⁷ appears to be a cripple of a place altogether, the people are either self-sufficient ex-farmers, or old folks waiting to go to each other's funerals.—By the way, did Mother have the water fixed when you were there? I have asked her twice but she hasn't answered.

Just at present I am barely worrying along making expenses. First summer in a strange city⁴⁸ is always so; and I'll have the same fight over in Los Angeles if I go there; but I really can't spend another winter in Chicago. I'm too restless.

Yes: Mother didn't care to go take care of her mother when she needed her children. I don't blame her either. Grandmother was the limit.

The waist is after all very nice; it washes and irons beautifully; I wish its tail had been a little longer; but anyhow it's nice.

I went to see ~~air ships~~ aeroplanes yesterday. Ten of 'em in the air together. Three accidents; they got too fresh, and one flew low into a telegraph post, and two flew into the lake. The first machine burned up; the men were not drowned. I suppose it's like looking at the steamboat in 1807. By 2007, the air ships will be practical carriers likely. . . .

Good-bye, old girl; comfort that poor man of yours; and you'll get comfort yourself thereby I expect. I wasn't able to send Mother cash this month, and she said she didn't need it.

With love,
Voltai

46. Her son, born June 12, 1890, now twenty-one.

47. St. Johns, Michigan, de Cleyre's childhood home, where her mother continued to live.

48. She writes from Chicago, where she had moved in October 1910.

Report of the Work of the Chicago Mexican Defense League⁴⁹

About the middle of May, 1911, a few comrades in Chicago, responding to the appeal of the Junta of the Mexican Liberal Party, took up the task of informing themselves as to the underlying causes of the great revolutionary struggle in Mexico, and of spreading that information among others, to the end that they, too, contribute their share in making this mighty effort of a people fruitful in the minds of the enslaved of the world.

The longer we studied developments, the clearer it became that this was a social phenomenon offering the greatest field for genuine Anarchist propaganda⁵⁰ that has ever been presented [presented] on this continent; for here was an immense number of oppressed people endeavoring to destroy a fundamental wrong, private property in land, not through any sort of governmental scheme, but by direct expropriation.

We, therefore, used every opportunity we could to win a hearing for the voice of the Mexican Liberals, *Regeneracion*, and to support it financially. We have not accomplished wonders, but we have done something; and it is with the hope of stimulating workers in other cities to do as well as we—and if better, we shall be only too glad—that I submit the following report.

At various picnics, private gatherings, and mass meetings we have sold copies of *Regeneracion*, or distributed freely the unsold copies, to the number of sixteen hundred. We have distributed four thousand copies of the leaflet "The Mexican Revolt" among the unions of this city; five thousand copies of W. C. Owen's leaflet on the McNamara case, showing that revolutionary action is the only possible cure for the evils under

49. Source: *Mother Earth* 7.2 (Apr. 1912): 60–62. She wrote this for the March 1912 Commune Commemoration, "the most beautiful I have known in years" (letter to Berkman, March 18, 1912).

50. Spread of information; a neutral term then.

which all civilized countries are suffering. We have sold some two hundred copies of Owen's pamphlet on the Cause, Progress, Purpose, and Probable Outcome of the Mexican Revolution, and figure on distributing two hundred more during the coming month.

We have given a good many lectures and short talks in the city, at the Scandinavian Liberty League, at I.W.W. Local 85, and the Open Forum. We have held one very successful international meeting, and are now arranging for another on the first of May.⁵¹ Our secretary, Honoré Jaxon, old-time land rebel of the Canadian northwest, visited England from August till March; had an excellent statement of Mexican conditions and the purposes of the revolution printed and distributed by the Standing Orders Committee of the British Trade Unions, beside several excellent interviews. . . . Returning through Canada, similar interviews were printed in the largest newspapers. . . .

I earnestly hope that those who read these lines will feel moved to form little local groups to do the same; no matter how little it is, it is something. And when we consider the uncomplaining poverty to which *Regeneracion's* workers reduce themselves (which may be seen from its weekly financial statements,—and I know no more speaking appeal than those careful accounts giving family men \$3.00 or \$5.00 a week to live upon) for the sake of thundering in the ears of this deaf world the battle-cry “Down with Authority—Land and Liberty,” I really wonder how the mass of those who are sympathetic in idea with libertarian movements can continue to prattle about “art,” “literature,” the latest imported violinist, and the aesthetic beauty of the concepts of Anarchism! While these men fight the battle, with starvation as companion.

Comrades! We are apparently on the eve of a war of invasion⁵² to protect scoundrels in possession of the stolen lands of Mexico, against the revolt of a people who are being exterminated through this iniquity. Have you, you who read this, done anything to stop this crime? At least to register your protest? Have you circulated a paper, a pamphlet, or a leaflet against it? Have you given a dollar to maintain the Word of Revolt?

I know many of you who sit in cafés hours at a time and discuss “Chanticleer”; spend dollars on theater tickets and concerts, and think nothing of expensive suppers. Do you think you are Anarchists? Do you know that

51. International day of labor agitation and celebration since the late 1880s.

52. Reference to possible U.S. intervention to protect property (especially American property) from expropriation by Mexican revolutionaries.

your comrades whose very lives are voluntarily thrown in jeopardy, hourly, are living on less than you throw away? And asking no better than to go on doing it, if you will bear your share in spreading the propaganda of Revolt?

The trouble with us all has been that for many years we lived in the clouds of theory, because conditions made it impossible to do much else; and now that the condition for real work is here, we are so theory-rotted that we are helpless to face it. In the words of the editor of the *Chicago Post*: "*The Anarchists took to kissing games.*" I who write have been as much to blame as any; let me shake off my blame by stirring you to awaken now. Cease theory-spinning about future society, and deal with what is before us, with what can be accomplished now.

Herewith I give financial statement of money received by me as treasurer of the League, and transmitted to the Junta at Los Angeles:

Collected on Subscription Lists in Chicago	\$66.06
" " " " in Philadelphia	9.00
" " " " in Rochester	9.75
" " " " in Buffalo	10.00
" " " " in St. Louis	2.75
" " " " in Atlantic City	1.00
Donated by three Chicago Arbeiter Ring Branches	8.00
Donated by Bakers Local 237	5.00
Sales of <i>Regeneracion</i>	41.50
Individual subscriptions	7.30
Collections and sales for leaflets and pamphlets	31.35
Proceeds of meeting	20.60
Collections of Group for <i>Regeneracion</i>	35.65
Total	\$247.96

April 1st, 1912, Chicago.

VOLTAIRINE DE CLEYRE, Treasurer.

Section Two

FREEDOM, JUSTICE, ANARCHISM

As the letters in the preceding section show, from de Cleyre's earliest days as a freethought agitator in Grand Rapids her attention was fixed on the inequality, desperation, and crime bred by the violence inherent in any so-called social "order" not founded on liberty. The pieces included in section 2—all central to the discussion in part I, chapters 1 and 2—give some idea of the range of her writing, from her early poem "The Hurricane" to her exultant lecture "The Commune Is Risen" a few months before she died.

The imagery of "The Hurricane" (1889)—of inevitable upheavals, torrential explosions of the human will in the face of deprivation and despair—is central to her view that the oppressed inevitably rise up in the end. In "A Rocket of Iron" (1902), she figures such an uprising in an explosion at an ironworks. Discussed at length in chapter 2, this story deserves to be as well known as other nineteenth-century works about industrial labor, most notably Rebecca Harding Davis's now widely taught "Life in the Iron Mills" (1861). Like Davis's story, de Cleyre's centers on a sensitive man, an ironworker, with a suppressed—finally tragically lost—heroic potential. As in that story, too, the narrative is ren-

dered in the first person by a somewhat enigmatic observer about whom we know almost nothing, and who seems at the same time intimate with and strangely distant from the events. If it can be established that de Cleyre read Davis, these links will become even more interesting. In any case, the contrast is instructive: the difference in their approaches bespeaks not only a difference of forty years in publication, but the difference de Cleyre's anarchism makes in her handling of the subject.

Both these works present de Cleyre's sense that the intolerable pressures of life under the present system produce inevitable explosions of the human will. Sometimes these explosions are heroic and transformative; at other times merely violent and tragic. Her own experience of such a tragedy, Herman Helcher's attempt on her life in December 1902, gave a personal dimension to her theorizing on the subject of law and violence, which can be seen in her appeal to comrades for money for Helcher's legal fees, published January 11, 1903. A few years later, a trip to Georgia, the same visit on which she overheard the African American church service mentioned in chapter 1, inspired her sketch "The Chain Gang" (1907), which Goldman considered one of de Cleyre's highest literary achievements. It expresses once again, both in personal and theoretical terms, her horror at the "justice" system. It is also one of her most powerful renderings of the indomitable human will to freedom and self-expression—the will she had early discovered in herself; the will in which she placed her faith that social revolution would finally succeed.

The will to imagine a new social order requires faith that such an order is possible—a faith that must in some sense be sustained by historical precedents. On March 18, 1871, in the midst of the chaos produced by the Franco-German war, ordinary working-people took over the city of Paris as government officials, the army, business owners, and members of the ruling class fled. The result was the Paris Commune, a revolutionary restructuring of social and economic life in which the old bureaucracy was dismantled; Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity—including rights for women—were proclaimed; power was vested in elected representatives subject to recall in the space of a day; professional police and army were replaced by a "people in arms" who elected their own officers; workers managed their own factories; co-ops proliferated. On May 28 the French government retook the city in a bloody siege of rape, torture, and massacre that left twenty-five thousand Communards dead and proved, Kropotkin said, "that there really are two classes in our modern society; on one side, the man who works and yields up to the monop-

olists of property more than half of what he produces and yet lightly passes over the wrong done him by his masters; on the other, the idler, the spoiler, hating his slave, ready to kill him like game, animated by the most savage instincts as soon as he is menaced in his possession" (Anderson; Avrich, *AP* 231–34; Kropotkin, "Commune").

In de Cleyre's day as in ours, anarchists were often criticized as idealists whose ideas of social order could never be put into practice. The Commune, brief though it was, offered proof those criticisms were wrong. Although it was not a thoroughgoing anarchist experiment or even an experiment based on full economic equality and liberty, it had many anarchist aspects and participants, and inspired anarchist theory and practice all over the world (Avrich, *AP* 234–35). At the time de Cleyre wrote her speech "The Commune Is Risen" for a commemoration in March 1912, she saw the Mexican Revolution as its latest incarnation; into it she poured all her hopes and energies in the last year of her life.

The Hurricane¹

1889

("We are the birds of the coming storm."—August Spies.)²

The tide is out, the wind blows off the shore;
Bare burn the white sands in the scorching sun;
The sea complains, but its great voice is low.

Bitter thy woes, O People,
 And the burden
Hardly to be borne!
Wearily grows, O People,
 All the aching
Of thy pierced heart, bruised and torn!
But yet thy time is not,
 And low thy moaning.
Desert thy sands!
Not yet is thy breath hot,
 Vengefully blowing;
It wafts o'er lifted hands.

The tide has turned; the vane veers slowly round;
Slow clouds are sweeping o'er the blinding light;
White crests curl on the sea,—its voice grows deep.

Angry thy heart, O People,
 And its bleeding
Fire-tipped with rising hate!
Thy clasped hands part, O People,
 For thy praying
Warmed not the desolate!

1. See pp. 68–69, 137–38. Source: *SW* 34–35. This edition includes a note: "Since the death of the author this poem has been put to music by the young American composer, George Edwards" (35).

2. Spies: a Haymarket martyr.

God did not hear thy moan:
Now it is swelling
To a great drowning cry;
A dark wind-cloud, a groan,
Now backward veering
From that deaf sky!

The tide flows in, the wind roars from the depths,
The whirled-white sand heaps with the foam-white waves;
Thundering the sea rolls o'er its shell-crunched wall!

Strong is thy rage, O People,
In its fury
Hurling thy tyrants down!
Thou metest wage, O People.
Very swiftly,
Now that thy hate is grown:
Thy time at last is come;
Thou heapest anguish,
Where thou thyself wert bare!
No longer to thy dumb
God clasped and kneeling,
Thou answerest thine own prayer.

Sca Isle City, N. J., August, 1889

A Rocket of Iron³

1902

It was one of those misty October nightfalls of the north, when the white fog creeps up from the river, and winds itself like a corpse-sheet around the black, ant-like mass of human insignificance, a cold menace from Nature to Man, till the foreboding of that irresistible fatality which will one day lay us all beneath the ice-death sits upon your breast, and stifles you, till you start up desperately crying, "Let me out, let me out!"

For an hour I had been staring through the window at that chill steam, thickening and blurring out the lines that zig-zagged through it indefinitely, pale drunken images of facts, staggering against the invulnerable vapor that walled me in—a sublimated grave marble. Were they all ghosts, those figures wandering across the white night, hardly distinguishable from the posts and pickets that wove in and out, like half-disembodied bodies writhing in pain? My own fingers were curiously numb and inert; had I, too, become a shadow?

It grew unbearable at last, the pressure of the foreboding at my heart, the sense of that on-creeping of Universal Death. I ran out of doors, impelled by the vague impulse to assert my own being, to seek relief in struggle, even though foredoomed futile—to seek warmth, fellowship, somewhere, though but with those ineffective pallors in the mist, that dissolved even while I looked at them. Once in the street, I ran on indifferently, glad to be jostled, glad of the snarling of dogs and the curses of laborers calling to one another. The penumbra of the mist, that menacing dim foreshadow, had not chilled these, then! On, on, through the alleys where human flesh was close, and when one listened one could hear breathings and many feet, drifting at last into the current that swept through the main channel of the city, and presently, whirled round in an eddy, I found myself staring through the open door of the great Iron Works. Perhaps it was the sensation of warmth that held me there first,

3. See pp. 69–76. Source: *SW* 409–13. Ellipses in original.

some feeling of exhilaration and wakening defiance in the flash and swirl of the yellow flames—this, mixed with an indistinct desire to clutch at something, anything, that seemed stationary in the midst of all this that slipped and wavered and fell away . . . No, I remember now: there was something before that; there was a sound—a sound that had stopped my feet in their going, and smote me with a long shudder—a sound of hammers, beating, beating, beating a terrific hail, momentarily faster and louder, and in between a panting as of some great monster catching breath beneath the driving of that iron rain. Faster, faster—CLANG! A long reverberant shriek! The giant had rolled and shivered in his pain. Involuntarily I was drawn down into the Valley of the Sound, words muttering themselves through my lips as I passed: “Forging, forging—what are they forging there? Frankenstein makes his Monster. How the iron screams!” But I heard it no more now; I only saw!—saw the curling yellow flames, and the red, red iron that panted, and the Masters of the Hammers. How they moved there, like demons in the abyss, their bodies swinging, their eyes tense and a-glitter, their faces covered with the gloom of the torture-chamber!

Only *one* face I saw, young and fair—young and very fair—whereon the gloom seemed not to settle. The skin of it was white and shining there in the midst of that black haze; over the wide forehead fell tumbling waves of thick brown hair, and two great dark eyes looked steadily into the red iron, as if they saw therein something I did not see; only now and then they were lifted, and looked away upward, as if beyond the smoke-pall they beheld a vision. Once he turned so that the rose-light cast forth his profile as a silhouette; and I shivered, it was so fine and hard! Hard with the hardness of beaten iron, and fine with the fineness of a keen chisel. Had the hammers been beating on that fair young face?

A comrade called, a sudden terrified cry. There was a wild rush, a mad stampede off feet, a horrible screech of hissing metal, and a rocket of iron shot upward toward the black roof, bursting and falling in a burning shower. Three figures lay writhing along the floor, among the leaping, demoniac sparks.

The first to lift them was the Man with the white face. He had stood still in the storm, and ran forward when the others shrank back. Now he passed by me, bearing his dying burden, and I saw no quiver upon brow or chin; only, when he laid it in the ambulance, I fancied I saw upon the delicate curved lips a line of purpose deepen, and the reflection of the iron-fire glow in the strange eyes, as if for an instant the door of a hidden

furnace had been opened and smouldering coals had breathed the air. And even then he looked up!

It was all over in half an hour. There would be weeping in three little homes; and one was dead, and one would die, and one would crawl, a seared human stump, to the end of his weary days. The crowd that had gathered was gone; they would not know the Stump when it begged from them with its maimed hands, six months after, on some street corner. "Fakir," they would say, and laugh. There would be an entry on the company's books, and a brief line in the newspapers next day. But the welding of the iron would go on, and the man who gave his easy money for it would fancy he had paid for it, not seeing the stiff figures in their graves, nor the crippled beggar, nor the broken homes.

The rocket of iron is already cold; dull, inert, fireless, the black fragments lie upon the floor whereon they lately rained their red revenge. Do with them what you will, you cannot undo their work. The men are clearing way. Only he with the white face does not go back to his place. Still set and silent he takes his coat, "presses his soft hat down upon his thick, damp locks," and goes out into the fog and night. So close he passed me, I might have touched him; but he never saw me. Perhaps he was still carrying the burden of the dying man upon his heart; perhaps some mightier burden. For one instant the shapely, boyish figure was in full light, then it vanished away in the engulfing mist—the mist which the vision of him had made me forget. For I knew I had seen a Man of Iron, into whose soul the iron had driven, whose nerves were tempered as cold steel, but behind whose still, impassive features slumbered a white-hot heart. And others should see a rocket and a ruin, and feel the Vengeance of Beaten Iron, before the mist comes and swallows all.

* * * * *

I had forgotten! Upon that face, that young, fair face, so smooth and fine that even the black smoke would not rest upon it, there bloomed the roses of Early Death. Hot-house flowers!

Appeal for Herman Helcher⁴

1903

Dear Comrades,

I write to appeal to you on behalf of the unfortunate child (for in intellect he has never been more than a child) who made the assault upon me. He is friendless, he is in prison, he is sick;—had he not been sick in brain he would never have done this thing.

Nothing can be done to relieve him until a lawyer is secured, and for that money is needed. I know it is hard to ask, for our comrades are always giving more than they can afford. But I think this is a case where all anarchists are concerned that the world may learn our ideas concerning the treatment of so-called “criminals,” and that they will therefore be willing to make even unusual sacrifices.

What this poor half-crazed boy needs is not [the] silence and cruelty of a prison, but the kindness, care and sympathy which heal.

These all have been given to me, in unstinted quantity. I can never express the heart of my gratitude for it all. Be as ready now to help the other who is perhaps the greater sufferer. With love to all,

Voltairine de Cleyre
Philadelphia, 807 Fairmount Av.

4. Printed in *Free Society*, January 11, 1903. Source: ms. Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS Am 1614.

The Chain Gang⁵

1907

It is far, far down in the southland, and I am back again, thanks be, in the land of wind and snow, where life lives. But that was in the days when I was a wretched thing, that crept and crawled, and shrunk when the wind blew, and feared the snow. So they sent me away down there to the world of the sun, where the wind and the snow are afraid. And the sun was kind to me, and the soft air that does not move lay around me like folds of down, and the poor creeping life in me winked in the light and stared out at the wide caressing air; stared away to the north, to the land of wind and rain, where my heart was,—my heart that would be at home.

Yes, there, in the tender south, my heart was bitter and bowed, for the love of the singing wind and the frost whose edge was death,—bitter and bowed for the strength to bear that was gone, and the strength to love that abode. Day after day I climbed the hills with my face to the north and home. And there, on those southern heights, where the air was resin and balm, there smote on my ears the sound that all the wind of the north can never sing down again, the sound I shall hear till I stand at the door of the last silence.

Cling—clang—cling—From the Georgian hills it sounds; and the snow and the storm cannot drown it,—the far-off, terrible music of the Chain Gang.

I met it there on the road, face to face, with all the light of the sun upon it. Do you know what it is? Do you know that every day men run in long procession, upon the road they build for others' safe and easy going, bound to a chain? And that other men, with guns upon their shoulders, ride beside them—with orders to kill if the living links break? There it stretched before me, a serpent of human bodies, bound to the iron and wrapped in the merciless folds of justified cruelty.

Clank—clink—clank—There was an order given. The living chain

5. Source: SW414-19.

divided; groups fell to work upon the road; and then I saw and heard a miracle.

Have you ever, out of a drowsy, lazy conviction that all knowledges, all arts, all dreams, are only patient sums of many toils of many millions dead and living, suddenly started into an uncanny consciousness that knowledges and arts and dreams are things more real than any living being ever was, which suddenly reveal themselves, unasked and unawaited, in the most obscure corners of soul-life, flashing out in prismatic glory to dazzle and shock all your security of thought, toppling it with vague questions of what *is* reality, that you cannot silence? When you hear that an untaught child is able, he knows not how, to do the works of the magicians of mathematics, has it never seemed to you that suddenly all books were swept away, and there before you stood a superb, sphinx-like creation, Mathematics itself, posing problems to men whose eyes are cast down, and all at once, out of whim, incorporating itself in that wide-eyed, mysterious child? Have you ever felt that all the works of the masters were swept aside in the burst of a singing voice, unconscious that it sings, and that Music itself, a master-presence, has entered the throat and sung?

No, you have never felt it? But you have never heard the Chain Gang sing!

Their faces were black and brutal and hopeless; their brows were low, their jaws were heavy, their eyes were hard; three hundred years of the scorn that brands had burned its scar upon the face and form of Ignorance,—Ignorance that had sought dully, stupidly, blindly, and been answered with that pitiless brand. But wide beyond the limits of high man and his little scorn, the great, sweet old Music-Soul, the chords of the World, smote through the black man's fibre in the days of the making of men; and it sings, it sings, with its ever-thrumming strings, through all the voices of the Chain Gang. And never one so low that it does not fill with the humming vibrancy that quivers and bursts out singing things always new and new and new.

I heard it that day.

The leader struck his pick into the earth, and for a moment whistled like some wild, free, living flute in the forest. Then his voice floated out, like a low booming wind, crying an instant, and fell; there was the measure of a grave in the fall of it. Another voice rose up, and lifted the dead note aloft, like a mourner raising his beloved with a kiss. It drifted away to the hills and the sun. Then many voices rolled forward, like a great plunging wave, in a chorus never heard before, perhaps never again; for

each man sung his own song as it came, yet all blent. The words were few, simple, filled with a great plaint; the wail of the sea was in it; and no man knew what his brother would sing, yet added his own without thought, as the rhythm swept on, and no voice knew what note its fellow voice would sing, yet they fell in one another as the billow falls in the trough or rolls to the crest, one upon the other, one within the other, over, under, all in the great wave; and now one led and others followed, then it dropped back and another swelled upward, and every voice was soloist and chorister, and never one seemed conscious of itself, but only to sing out the great song.

And always, as the voices rose and sank, the axes swung and fell. And the lean white face of the man with the gun looked on with a stolid, paralyzed smile.

Oh, that wild, sombre melody, that long, appealing plaint, with its hope laid beyond death,—that melody that was made only there, just now, before me, and passing away before me! If I could only seize it, hold it, stop it from passing! that all the world might hear the song of the Chain Gang! might know that here, in these red Georgian hills, convicts, black, brutal convicts, are making the music that is of no man's compelling, that floods like the tide and ebbs away like the tide, and will not be held—and is gone, far away and forever, out into the abyss where the voices of the centuries have drifted and are lost!

Something about Jesus, and a Lamp in the darkness—a gulping darkness. Oh, in the mass of sunshine must they still cry for light? All around the sweep and the glory of shimmering ether, sun, sun, a world of sun, and these still calling for light! Sun for the road, sun for the stones, sun for the red clay—and no light for this dark living clay? Only heat that burns and blaze that blinds, but does not lift the darkness!

“And lead me to that Lamp—”

The pathetic prayer for light went trembling away out into the luminous gulf of day, and the axes swung and fell; and the grim dry face of the man with the gun looked on with its frozen smile. “So long as they sing, they work,” said the smile, still and ironical.

“A friend to them that's got no friend”—Man of Sorrows, lifted up upon Golgotha,⁶ in the day when the forces of the Law and the might of Social Order set you there, in the moment of your pain and desperate accusation against Heaven, when that piercing “Eloi, Eloi, lama

6. Golgotha, or the Place of Skulls, site of Jesus' crucifixion.

sabachthani?"⁷ went up to a deaf sky, did you presage this desolate appeal coming to you out of the unlive depths of nineteen hundred years?

Hopeless hope, that cries to the dead! Futile pleading that the cup may pass,⁸ while still the lips drink! For, as of old, Order and the Law, in shining helmets and gleaming spears, ringed round the felon of Golgotha, so stand they still in that lean, merciless figure, with its shouldered gun and passive smile. And the moan that died within the Place of Skulls is born again in this great dark cry rising up against the sun.

If but the living might hear it, not the dead! For these are dead who walk about with vengeance and despite within their hearts, and scorn for things dark and lowly, in the odor of self-righteousness, with self-vaunting wisdom in their souls, and pride of race, and iron-shod order, and the preservation of Things that Are; walking stones are these, that cannot hear. But the living are those who seek to know, who wot not of things lowly or things high, but only of things wonderful; and who turn sorrowfully from Things that Are, hoping for Things that May Be. If these should hear the Chain Gang chorus, seize it, make all the living hear it, see it!

If, from among themselves, one man might find "the Lamp," lift it up! Paint for all the world these Georgian hills, these red, sunburned roads, these toiling figures with their rhythmic axes, these brutal, unilluminated faces, dull, groping, depth-covered,—and then unloose that song upon their ears, till they feel the smitten, quivering hearts of the Sons of Music beating against their own; and under and over and around it, the chain that the dead have forged clinking between the heart-beats!

Clang—cling—clang—ng—It is sundown. They are running over the red road now. The voices are silent; only the chain clinks.

7. Jesus' words on the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34).

8. The cup of suffering that Jesus prayed he might be spared (Matt. 26:39, 42).

The Commune Is Risen⁹

March, 1912

They say "She is dead; the Commune is dead";
That "If she were living her earthquake tread
Would scatter the honeyless hornets' hive."

I am not dead, nor yet asleep;
Nor tardy, though my steps seem slow;
Nor feeble from the centuries' sweep;
Nor cold, though chill the north winds blow.
My legions muster in all lands,
From field, from factory, from mine,
The workers of the world join hands
Across the centuries and brine.

Never since those lines were sung by the great unknown poet, whose heart shone red through his words, has the pulse of the world beat so true a response as it is beating now. We do not stand to-day as mourners at the bier of a Dead Cause, but with the joy of those who behold it living in the Resurrection.

What was it the Commune proclaimed? With what hope did it greet the world? And why did it fall?

The Commune proclaimed the autonomy of Paris. It broke the chain that fettered her to the heels of her step-mother, the State. . . .

The Commune was a splendid effort to break the tyranny of the centralized domination with which modern societies are cursed; a revolt at artificial ties. . . .

"Paris is a social unit," said the communards; "Paris is, within itself, an organic whole. Paris needs no outside shell of coercion to hold it

9. The reference to the Resurrection in the opening paragraph of the essay confirms that the title alludes to the angel's words to the women who seek Jesus' body in the tomb—"He is not here; for he is risen" (Matt. 28:6). Source: *Mother Earth* 7.1 (Mar. 1912): 10-14.

together. But Paris owes no subservient allegiance to that traitorous tool at Versailles, which calls itself the government of France. . . .”

This was the word of the Commune, spoken to the world in the wild morning of the year 1871.

And the hope it built upon was this: When France beholds Paris fighting, the dream of '48¹⁰ will rise again; and all her communes will proclaim their freedom, even as we. And then we are bound to win, for the Versailles government cannot conquer a revolt which breaks out everywhere. And France once kindled, the peoples of other nations will likewise rise; and this monster, “the State,” which is everywhere devouring liberty, will be annihilated.

This was the hope that lit the eyes of the Commune with dreaming fire, that March day, forty-one years ago.

The hope was doomed to disappointment; within three months the glorious rebel fell. She had called, but the response did not come. Why? Because she had not asked enough. Because making war upon the State, she had not made war upon that which creates the State, that to preserve which the State exists.

With the scrupulous, pitiful Conscience which Authority has cunningly bred in men, the Commune had respected property; had kept its enemy's books, and duly handed over the balances; had starved itself to feed its foes; had left common resources in private hands. And when McMahon's troops¹¹ rode sabering through the streets of Paris, when Gallifet¹² the butcher was dashing out children's brains with his own devil's hands upon her conquered pavements, the very horses they rode, the very sabers that cut, had been paid for by the murdered.

Every day, throughout the life of the Commune, the Bank of France had been allowed to transmit the sinews of war to Versailles,¹³ the social blood been drained to supply the social foe. . . .

In short, though there were other reasons why the Commune fell, the chief one was that in the hour of necessity, the Communards were not Communists. They attempted to break political chains without breaking economic ones; and it cannot be done. . . .

I cannot speak for others. I cannot say how my comrades have felt during the long stagnant years, when spring after spring we have come

10. 1848, year of revolutions in Europe.

11. Marie-Edme-Patrice-Maurice Mac-Mahon, head of Versailles Army in suppression of Commune; later president of France (“Mac-Mahon”).

12. Gallifet, general who led the suppression of the Commune.

13. Seat of the French government.

together to repeat dead men's names and deeds, and weep over those whose bones lie scattered from Cayenne to New Caledonia. I know that for myself I often felt I was doing a weary and a useless thing, wearing out a habit, so to speak,—trying to warm my cold hands at a painted fire. For all these years since we of this generation have lived in America, there has been no stirring movement of the people of this continent to do a deed worth doing.

We have listened with curious fascination to our elders' stories of the abolition movement; we have welcomed the Russian revolutionists, and enviously listened to their accounts of deeds done or undone. We have watched the sharp crossing of weapons here and there in the ominous massing of Capital and Labor against each other all around us; but we have known perfectly well that there was little place for us in that combat, till it shall assume other lines than those which dominate it now, till it shall proclaim other purposes and other means.

All in vain it was for us to try to waken any profound enthusiasm in ourselves over the struggle of some limited body of workers, asking for a petty per cent. of wage. We understand too well that such a fight determines nothing, is like the continuous slipping backward of the feet in an attempt to climb a hill of gliding sand.

But now has come this glorious year of 1911–12, this year of world-wide revolt. Out of the enigmatic East a great storm sweeps; and though but little of its real breadth and height is visible or comprehensible to us, we understand so much: the immemorial silence has been broken, the crouching figure has up-straightened. The sources of our information are such that we cannot tell whether the economic regeneration of enslaved China has actually begun, or the revolt is political merely as our reports make it appear. Which ever it may be, one thing is certain: China is no longer motionless; she is touched with the breath of life; she struggles.

Across the sea, in the island of our stolid forbears, a portentous sound has risen from the depths; in the roots of human life, in coal-caverns, Revolt speaks. And England faces Famine; faces the Property-system, faces a mighty army of voluntarily idle men; beholds the upper and the nether stone of economic folly, and feels the crunching of those merciless wheels, and underground the earthquake rumbles wide,—France, Germany, Austria—the mines growl.

And yet this mighty massing, inspiring and threatening as it is, is for a petty demand—a minimum wage! Such situations produce enlightenment; at any moment the demand may change to "The Mines for the Miners"; but as yet it has not come.

Only here in our America, on this continent cursed with land-grabbing syndicates, into whose unspoiled fatness every devouring shark has set his triple row of teeth,—this land whose mercenary spirit is the butt of Europe—only here, under the burning Mexican sun, we know men are revolting for *something*; for the great, common, fundamental economic right, before which all others fade,—the *right of man to the earth*. Not in concentrated camps and solid phalanxes; not at the breath of some leader's word; but over all the land, from the border to Yucatan, animated by spontaneous desire and resolution, in mutually gathered bands, as freemen fight, not uniformed slaves. And leaders come, and leaders go; they use the revolution and the revolution uses them; but whether they come or go, the land battle goes on.

In that quickening soil, the sower's response is ready; and the peasant uproots his master's sugar cane and tobacco, replanting corn and beans instead, that himself and the fighting bands may have sustenance. He does not make the mistake that Paris made; he sends no *munitions* to the enemy; he is an unlettered man, but he knows the use of the soil. And no man can make peace with him, unless that use is guaranteed to him. . . .

Stronger and stronger blows the hurricane, and those who listen to the singing in the wind know that Senator Lodge was right when he said: "I am against intervention, but it's like having a fire next door."

That fire is burning away the paper of artificial land-holding. That fire is destroying the delusion that any human creature on the face of the earth has the right to keep any other from going straight to the sources of life, and using them. That fire is shooting a white illumination upon the labor struggle, which will make the futile wage war conducted in the United States look like baby's play.

Yes, honorable Senators and Congressmen, the house next door is on fire—the house of Tyranny, the house of Shame, the house that is built by Robbery and Extortion, out of the sold bodies of a hapless race—its murdered men, its outraged women, its orphaned babies.

Yes, it is on fire. And let it burn,—burn to the ground—utterly. And do not seek to quench it by pouring out the blood of the people of the United States, in a vile defense of those financial adventurers who wear the name American. . . .

Let it crumble to the ground, that House of Infamy; and if the burning gleeds fly hitherward, and the rotten structure of our own life starts to blaze, welcome, thrice welcome, purifying fire, that shall set us, too, upon the earth once more,—free men upon free land,—no tenant-dwellers on a landlord's domain.

In the roar of that fire we hear the Commune's "earthquake tread,"¹⁴ and know that out of the graves at Père-la-chaise, out of the trenches of Satory, out of the fever-plains of Guiana, out of the barren burial sands of Caledonia,¹⁵ the Great Ghost has risen, crying across the world, *vive la Commune!*

14. An image from *Hellas*, by Shelley, one of de Cleyre's favorite poets.

15. Sites of the suppression of uprisings. Père Lachaise Cemetery and the Satory Depot in Paris were scenes of Communard massacres (Avrich, *AP* 229, 235).

Section Three

ON WOMEN, SEXUALITY, AND THE BODY

“The questions of souls is old; we demand our bodies, now.” De Cleyre wrote these words in 1890; they could just as easily have been written in 1970, in any manifesto associated with the second wave of feminism. Although the anarchist feminism of Emma Goldman had a significant resurgence at exactly that point, de Cleyre’s feminist theory, arguably even more radical and far-reaching in its implications, has been until now for the most part unavailable to modern readers. For that reason—and because it is in de Cleyre’s feminist theory that we find her most radical legacy to progressive thought—this section of part II is more inclusive than the others, encompassing most of her available published writings on women, sexuality, and the body, together with some passages from letters in which she discusses women’s issues, including her own relations with men. Most of the works included are discussed extensively, others more briefly, in chapters 3 and 4 in part I. A few need a fuller introduction, provided below.

In 1886 de Cleyre established herself in Grand Rapids as an independent young woman, contributing to, then editing, the freethought paper *Progressive Age* and lecturing on the midwestern freethought circuit (Avrich, AA 40). In January 1888, in the letter here titled “Selling Their

Bodies,” she wrote her sister about the city, emphasizing its once unfamiliar aspects but implying that all this is now old hat to her: “Oh! But it used to seem to me the funniest thing to see a lodging house empty itself of its occupants mornings. . . .” In a turn toward the subject of women’s issues, de Cleyre alludes to Lillie Devereux Blake (1833–1913), a suffrage advocate, novelist, and (later) part of the “Revising Committee” that produced Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s *Woman’s Bible*, a feminist freethinking commentary that historicized sexism in the Bible and provided feminist readings of key passages on women. In January 1888 de Cleyre would have been interested in Blake’s suffrage agitation (although soon thereafter, as an anarchist, she would scorn the ballot box), and probably in her novel *Fettered for Life; or, Her Lord and Master* (1874). The mention of Blake is followed immediately by a paragraph detailing the kinds of misery de Cleyre has witnessed in Grand Rapids, focusing especially on women.

At the time she wrote Addie about prostitutes in Grand Rapids, she was reading the sex-radical publication *Lucifer*; two years later in 1890 she wrote “Sex Slavery,” in defense of its editor Moses Harman, sentenced to five years’ hard labor under Anthony Comstock’s obscenity laws (see chap. 3). De Cleyre’s object in presenting this lecture was to gather signatures on a petition for Harman’s release. What will be to some readers the rather puzzling ending is an ironic reference to the anarchist purity of those who might refuse to sign on the grounds that by definition, petitions to government authorities acknowledge that authority and thus constitute the kind of political participation that helps sustain the life of the state. The anger she expresses at the end of the essay is directed as well at anarchist men in the audience who, despite their supposedly advanced opinions, may be “tyrant radicals,” obviously subjecting women to “sex slavery,” and also at those who might actually agree that Harman’s publication is “obscene.”

The following year, *Lucifer* printed one of de Cleyre’s most acerbic calls for women’s liberation, “The Gates of Freedom,” a lecture originally delivered at a Liberal convention in Kansas in 1891. It includes a scathing metaphor of desexualized images of women as “‘too high, too pure, too ethereal, too angelic,’ etc., *ad nauseam*”—“draperous adjectives” that obscure the truth. To the clear-eyed, this “diaphanous vision” is “far too much like a stage angel, rising, not upon wings, but on a trap.”¹ Probably sometime around the midnineties (judging from the reference to Impressionism), she wrote “The White Room,” a fictional

1. I.e., a trap door that brings the angel up through the stage floor, but the word functions also as a pun.

meditation on just that sort of “trap.” It appeared in the London *Herald of Revolt* (“An Organ of the Coming Social Revolution”) in the memorial Voltairine de Cleyre issue of September 1913, advertised in the preceding issue as one in which “Much unpublished matter will be brought to light.” This story, listed on the first page as one of those included in the issue “from the pen of our late comrade” (99), may be the “matter” referred to.

One of de Cleyre’s great predecessors in the disruption of false images of women was Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), whose pervasive influence on her feminism is evident not only in her ideas but even in such rhetorical strategies as the attack on Cope in “The Gates of Freedom,” which resembles Wollstonecraft’s attacks on Rousseau in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). De Cleyre was demonstrably influenced by Wollstonecraft’s view of marriage as a form of prostitution, her comparison of (white middle-class) women to slaves, her core analogy between political tyranny and men’s domination of women, her call for women’s economic self-sufficiency, her refusal to distinguish between male and female virtue, her view that inferior education causes women’s apparent intellectual inferiority, and above all her insistence that woman’s first duty is not in relation to family members but as an individual, to her own self-development.

The poem “Mary Wollstonecraft” (1893) is inspired not only by the *Vindication* but by Wollstonecraft’s life, which included childhood experiences of domestic violence, a tormented affair that led to a suicide attempt, a desperate struggle for self-sufficiency in the absence of economic opportunities for women, a happy affair with William Godwin that nonetheless caused social ostracism even after their marriage, and an early, tragic death after childbirth (Godwin 10, 83–85, 103). De Cleyre had read Elizabeth Robins Pennell’s biography *Mary Wollstonecraft* (1885), which she cites in “The Case of Woman vs. Orthodoxy” (3), and which opens with a description that informs de Cleyre’s poetic vision of Wollstonecraft as a mother of sorrows, a suffering saint. As Pennell said, for many years “The young were bidden not to read her books, and the more mature warned not to follow her example, the miseries she endured being declared the just retribution of her actions” (1). De Cleyre may also have encountered Wollstonecraft’s life in Godwin’s memoir, which scandalized many readers with its frank treatment of her sexual freedom. If so, she had probably not finished the book at the time of this poem, since she wrote her mother several months later (summer 1893) of just having learned that after their marriage Wollstonecraft and

Godwin arranged separate spaces in which to work and have time to themselves (Godwin rented an apartment near their house)—a detail Godwin includes (109). Whatever the sources of her knowledge, Wollstonecraft's life impressed her with its tragedies and pain, born of a passionate struggle against gender norms with which de Cleyre would have identified. She paints Wollstonecraft as a pioneer long scorned and neglected, finally receiving her own vindication a century after her death.

The letter to her mother in which de Cleyre refers to Wollstonecraft is reprinted next under the title "If I Had Married Him." This is the rather startling and in some ways uncharacteristic letter, discussed in chapter 3, in which she refers to once having considered marrying for economic security. It thus provides an intriguing glimpse of her personal insights into the profoundly economic basis of gender inequality in marriages—something Wollstonecraft emphasized as well—and the pressures on women to succumb to that inequality. This letter is also noteworthy for its inclusion of one of the few passages in which de Cleyre envisions an ideal future in specific terms. Those who took exception to the present "order," as de Cleyre termed it in quotation marks, were called on, then as now, to come up with some alternatives. Creating such alternatives was an important aspect of anarchism, whether they took the form of experimental schools, "time stores" that substituted certificates of equivalent-hours-in-labor for money, free-love sexual arrangements, or model communities based on horizontal principles of organization. Although de Cleyre visited her friend Mary Hansen in an experimental "colony," Arden (letter to Hansen, June 3, 1911), and watched with interest experiments in the modern school movement, even teaching in one briefly, for the most part she did not herself participate directly in such alternatives. She was, however, deeply involved in creating the alternative forms of organization represented by the decentralized anarchist committees, conferences, and societies in which she collaborated with her comrades. Usually content to deflect questions about the future by saying that true liberty would bring about social forms we cannot yet imagine, she did in this letter describe her idea of the ideal home. Most of the remainder of the letter is included, not only for its relevance to other aspects of de Cleyre's work (her interest in Thomas Paine, for example; her comments on Governor John Altgeld's courageous pardon of the Haymarket anarchists), but also to set the reference to Bentley in the broader context of her life, in which it was only one episode, consigned, in her mind, to a psychological low point.

At the time de Cleyre wrote the preceding letter, she was involved in the Ladies' Liberal League, founded in 1892; her account of the league is included next, followed by "The Case of Woman vs. Orthodoxy" (both discussed in chapter 3) and "The Woman Question," a brief excerpt that the editor of the de Cleyre memorial issue of the *Herald of Revolt* says comes "From a lecture delivered in Scotland." It dates from her first visit there; she refers in a letter of September 27, 1897, to "an audience of 1200 last night at the 'Woman Question'" (letter to William, Maggie, and Peter Duff). The style, some of which is recognizably not hers, and the uncharacteristic punctuation—including erratic commas in the first paragraph and an uneven number of double and single quotation marks—suggests that this must be a summary of a speech heard by her Scottish friend Will Duff, who is described as contributing "Much of the matter . . . from his private collection of Voltairine's MSS" to this special issue (*Herald of Revolt* 3.8, 108). If so, the single quotation marks might indicate direct quotations from the speech, and the rest, in double quotations, Duff's redaction. The ellipsis appears in the original.

As in other feminist lectures before liberal, freethinking, or anarchist audiences, de Cleyre enters once again into the debate as to whether the "woman question" has any relevance to social revolution. As in "The Gates of Freedom" and "The Past and Future of the Ladies' Liberal League," one of her targets is the pseudoscience that purports to identify women's place as "naturally" and biologically in the home. Here again she points to the underlying classism of many generalizations about woman's essential nature that are in fact based on a socially constructed middle-class woman; here, as in her later piece "They Who Marry Do III," she attacks marriage—including supposedly liberated free-love arrangements—as detrimental to women. With regard to birth control, interestingly, she tells women not only to use it, but to avoid having a child—or even wanting one—unless they can support it financially, independent of a man. Later, back home from her tour, she mentions the issue in a more personal context in a letter to Will Duff, whose wife Maggie will have just had her new baby. She writes in a congratulatory mode but adds, "I hope this will be the extent of your family for some time, and that Maggie will make use of the advice I gave her to limit the number, no use to tell you men anything. You're all irresponsible" (Mar. 28, 1898).

The story reprinted next, "The Heart of Angiolillo" (discussed extensively in chapter 3), explores many of the themes of de Cleyre's theoretical writings on feminism, especially "They Who Marry Do III" and "The

Gates of Freedom,” as well as her writing on labor and economic inequality. The last line of the story hints that “Effie” and “David” are masks for names of a real couple; if so, their identity is unclear. Michele Angiolillo, however, was an identifiable historical figure (see chap. 2), as were Antonio Nogues, Tomás Ascheri, and José Molas, anarchists arrested and horribly tortured in the fortress of Montjuich after a bomb was thrown at a Corpus Christi festival procession June 7, 1896. (The perpetrator was later, most probably, revealed as French anarchist Jean Girault). Three hundred anarchists, as well as many supposed sympathizers (free-thinkers, republicans, etc.) were jailed. Nogues, Ascheri, and Molas were among eighty-seven tried in closed court. Their tortures, described in letters smuggled out of prison, were published worldwide in both the mainstream and alternative press. Some prisoners who were released described their experiences and showed their scars at the 1897 Trafalgar Square demonstration described in this story, which de Cleyre attended. Angiolillo, an Italian anarchist overwhelmed by news of these events, traveled to Santa Agueda where Spanish prime minister Antonio Cánovas del Castillo was staying, posed as a journalist, entered Cánovas’ hotel, and shot him point blank with a revolver.² He was executed by garrote shortly thereafter. Like anarchists everywhere, de Cleyre was haunted and inspired by his dying word, “*Germinal!*” She heard it both as a description, meaning that his death had only planted the seed of a resistance larger than his individual act, and as a call for that resistance, so that his defiance of tyranny would yield a harvest all over the world.

The antiromance elements of this story, discussed in chapter 3, appear in a different form in “The Death of Love” (1901), de Cleyre’s contribution to a *Lucifer* debate on why love dies. This brief piece encapsulates de Cleyre’s contempt for romantic love, but behind that contempt, which blazes with its own romantic intensity, is the shadow of her personal experience—from a devastating rejection by her first lover (see Avrich, *AA* 51–53) to her affair with James Elliott, which ended with the birth of their child (although their friendship did not), to her stormy affair with Samuel Gordon, whom she rejected after his evident desire for a conventional domestic arrangement became impossible to reconcile with her opposition to marriage. Although de Cleyre was an advocate of free love and birth control and insisted on keeping the “woman question” in the forefront of anarchist debate, she rejected the intense focus on questions of love and sexuality that made up the core of

2. This account is taken from Escnwein 191–97.

Lucifer's feminism. The reference in this essay to those who are obsessed exclusively with sexual issues is echoed in a letter to Will Duff after she sent him an edition of Walt Whitman: "I trust you are reading Whitman of a Sabbath morning regularly, and that you are becoming convinced that 'Sex contains all.' Poor old Harman can't get away from that, and no matter how *sound* he is on everything else, he is certainly 'balmy' on sex" (May 21, 1898).

In de Cleyre's day the question of sex inevitably raised the question of prostitution. De Cleyre contributed again to a *Lucifer* debate in 1902, this time responding to a discussion of the term *fallen women*, by another reader, Kate Austin. Austin had argued that "the only way to help a so-called fallen woman is to refuse point blank to recognize that she is fallen." Why should the woman who sells her body be "fallen" when the buyer is not? Prostitution is caused by unnatural suppression of sexuality, together with "economic slavery." Austin urged that we treat prostitutes as equals, conversing with them about topics of interest, from beer to books. De Cleyre attacks this argument as naive. Always alert to the ideological substratum of words used in everyday discussions, she first rejects the idea that prostitutes should not be seen as "fallen," then builds up to a rhetorical twist in which she describes them as indeed not "fallen" in the conventional sense, but fallen in that they are "felled" by a system beyond their control. Although elsewhere she subscribes to the view that marriage is prostitution—a man exchanges material benefits for the right to a woman's body—here she critiques sex radicals who allow that insight to blind them to the utter degradation of prostitutes under the present economic, religious, educational, and gender institutions of society. Her inclusion of "heredity" in the list of factors in prostitution should be understood in the context of the anarchist sex-radical idea, tied to Harman's version of eugenics, that sexual coercion (the norm under present gender arrangements that oppress women) produces inferior offspring; the implication is probably that prostitutes themselves were the children of oppressive sexual relationships.

The site of de Cleyre's descriptions of prostitution would be Philadelphia, where she lived at the time; the specific reformer she cites is Carrie (or Carry) Nation (1846–1911), an internationally famous Kansas temperance crusader who smashed saloons with hatchets, rocks, clubs, bricks, and hammers while singing, praying, and shouting religious imprecations. As she told the House of Representatives in Kansas, "You refused me the vote and I had to use a rock." Typically photographed with a Bible and hatchet (she sold souvenir hatchets to pay expenses,

including often-needed bail), she had made a widely publicized lecture tour the year before de Cleyre wrote this article (Kansas State; "Nation"). Part of her campaign was to "make converts of the prostitutes," whom she harangued and urged to give up their sinful ways, claiming status as "the prophet of God Almighty." An exhortation to prostitutes in Denver in 1906 captures the essence of her approach: "Shame on you! . . . Poor girls! Wash that red paint off of your cheeks. Wash off the marks of the thousands of false lips that have burned their lusts into your powdered throats" (Grace 244-47). De Cleyre had a different view of the causes—and remedies—of the sale of women's bodies.

In her view, of course, marriage was just such a sale. "They Who Marry Do Ill" (1907) is the last, or one of the last, of de Cleyre's works specifically focused on her feminist theory. It is discussed in chapter 3; here it should be noted that, as is often the case in the works reprinted in this volume, de Cleyre's allusions to now almost forgotten figures of radical history open windows on dimensions of her argument that would ordinarily be lost to modern readers. Her reference to Ernest Crosby (1856? 66?-1907) is an example. She cites his marriage in order to illustrate a couple's tragic ideological divergence in a case where, for practical and emotional reasons, it is impossible for them to separate. Crosby married a conservative woman, then, as de Cleyre says, "came into his soul's own at the age of thirty-eight" when he resigned his position as judge of the International Court at Cairo after Tolstoy's pacifist writings led him to oppose militarism and imperialism. He subsequently became an important leader of the anti-imperialist movement in the United States, actively opposing the war in the Philippines and military imperialism in general, along with other anti-imperialist writers and activists such as Mark Twain and William Dean Howells. A proud member of what he called "The Noble Army of Traitors and Heretics," he wrote an antiwar novel, *Captain Jinks, Hero* (1902); a book of poetry, *Swords and Plowshares* (1902); and trenchant essays which, like de Cleyre's, have a startlingly contemporary resonance today. They include "The Absurdities of Militarism" (1901), an ironic account of peace conferences conducted by men of war, and "Imperialism and Labor" (1900), which drew on his experiences in Egypt to analyze "The effect upon wages of annexing new countries overrunning with the cheapest kind of labor." Most interesting in the context of de Cleyre's argument is the fact that Crosby was an early theorist of what we would now call the social construction of masculinity. His essay "The Military Idea of Manliness" (1901) analyzed a critical shift in conceptions of masculinity associated with the move toward imperial-

ism in U.S. foreign policy at the turn of the century. The new ideal, he said, privileges the soldier as the embodiment of a manliness proudly associated with violence, bullying, destructive competition, and unthinking obedience to authority.³ Whether de Cleyre read this essay is not clear; if so, she would have recognized Crosby's theories of gender as compatible with her own.

Other significant allusions include a reference to the recently deceased Hugh O. Pentecost, sometime anarchist and editor of a prominent freethought journal, *Twentieth Century*. A month before this lecture, de Cleyre had written an article about his ideological vacillations, including his craven recanting of an earlier defense of the Haymarket martyrs, followed by swings back to some form of liberalism and then socialism. Long angered by his betrayal of the Chicago martyrs and his self-interested abandonment of anarchism during a failed bid to secure a position as district attorney, de Cleyre had finally achieved something of a reconciliation with Pentecost, which must have included his confiding in her the financial pressures, created by his marriage, that led to some of these betrayals. De Cleyre concluded that "in the summing up of his life, the balance must go to the credit side" but ended her ambiguous elegy on a sadly bitter note: "Would that he had died sooner, or not so soon" ("Hugh" 16).

Such betrayals on the basis of a desire for greater status or material comfort, driven by an inescapable emotional bond with a more conservative spouse, must have struck de Cleyre with personal force. Her earlier lover Gordon had drifted away from anarchism toward more material pleasures; Pentecost's and Crosby's marriages were a mirror of the compromises she had renounced—perhaps escaped—by refusing a permanent domestic bond with Gordon or even Bentley. Throughout her feminist writings, de Cleyre engages in a passionate struggle for women's emotional, intellectual, and economic independence. It seems she achieved that independence in her own life—and managed to reconcile it with the equally passionate bonds she established with friends, comrades, and lovers.

3. See Zwick for the biographical details included here and an edition of Crosby's anti-imperialist works.

Selling Their Bodies

*Letter to Adelaide de Claire Thayer, January 16, 1888*⁴

No. 54, Kent St.
Gr. Rapids, Jan. 16, 288

My Dearest Little Sis,

I'm so ashamed of myself to think I haven't answered your New Year's letter. It was such a nice letter too; so full of good things. But do you know I have on the average two letters every day and one's postage bill gets to be quite an item. . . .

Yes I get paid for my lectures, and on all but that Kalamazoo trip paid well.⁵ But then you know it costs more to live here than at home. Yes I board by the meal. You see this is a great town for boarding; one half the town boards the other half. Those who do not keep boarders do what is more popular; that is "keep roomers." And I'm a *roomer*. Oh! But it used to seem to me the funniest thing to see a lodging house empty itself of its occupants mornings like a rat nest, when the rats went out.—I had a lovely room last summer with dresser, marble-top table, commode, nice bed, rocker and all, and visitors received in a lovely parlor. But it was so far from the city, 8 blocks, I nearly killed myself walking. Rent is \$1.50 per week for room, and a meal ticket at restaurant 3.50 for 21 meals. I have never eaten but two meals a day in G.R., so my ticket's good for 10 days. You see this makes one's expenses about \$4.80 a week.

I'm glad you're in the journalism business and you'll assuredly "win the Derby" if you keep on long enough. There's nothing like perseverance and desire, in that, as in everything else, but it takes an amount of patience that exhausts me sometimes. Why of course let the editor copy

4. Source: Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS Am 1614 (175).

5. In later years she refused to lecture for pay; this shows she was paid on the freethought circuit.

that poem if he thinks it worth. By the way that was printed in the Buffalo Express one time. That little decoration day poem too was in the *Sunday News* (Buffalo) last May. I've got another one too, a temperance poem⁶ that I declaimed all over Montcalm county last spring. I'll send you that if you like, and another one, "Song in the Night," tho' I don't know as you'd like that so well.

O yes, you asked me who Mrs. Blake was. I ought to have said her other name, and you would have recognized it. It was, Lillie Devereux-Blake, the great woman's suffrage advocate.

I think you're about right on the question of being oblivious to suffering in order to be happy. I think I'm happier than I've ever been since I have been in this city, but yet one sees every day misery enough to make one's heart ache.—Within a month two children living a couple of blocks north . . . have died of starvation, and a week ago, a little woman I used to see last summer, died in a house on Spring St., all alone, of typhoid fever, and there wasn't a thing in the house to eat when they found her. The brick blocks are full of girls not more than 15, 16, and 18, who make their living by selling their bodies; and since the new chief of police has "pulled" so many houses, they have been compelled to seek positions at little or no wages in hotels. The result has been that the labor market in that direction is flooded while many mouths are empty. As one poor old woman pathetically said to me: "An honest woman can't get no job now, 'cause the places is all full of them girls." And where are the *men* who ruined those girls, though *they* are recognized in society as much as ever.—They're down in some hell hole of a saloon bragging about the wickedness they have done as quite an accomplishment and then going home (like Aleck)⁷ and accusing their wives of extravagance.

That was a pitiful thing you told me about the woman.⁸ Maybe it was all her fault, but I'm not quite so ready to believe her husband is any angel. It was awful to think of that terrible tramp through twelve miles of lonely woods and snow. She must have some dim remnants of ferocious courage about her. It's awful to think of her and the husband, and the children—but she is still a human being.

6. Many late-nineteenth-century feminists were involved in the temperance movement against alcohol consumption, in part because of its economic impact on families and its connection with domestic violence. This letter suggests that de Cleyre campaigned, at least this once, on the temperance circuit or included temperance in her freethought lectures, but the issue played no major role in her career.

7. Their cousin Maggie's husband.

8. I have not been able to identify this incident.

No I won't get sick—nothing shall persuade me.

I start on Monday next for Linesville, Penn., where I have a three day's work (\$15.00) and then to Pittsburg where I am on for two weeks I guess. Maybe I shall make [an] engagement at Alliance Ohio on return trip. Altogether I shall make \$40.00 clear beside board while there anyhow. Maybe more. That will take me out of debt and get me a new dress, and let me help mother a little. I'm going up to G'ville⁹ when I come back, and have my dress made. What would you think I ought to get. I want a nice dress to wear on the street. I would like black cashmere, but I suppose it isn't stylish. What is? You can always keep track of those things, and I don't know any more about them than the man in the moon. I wish I did, but somehow it seems as if that part of me was all a hole.

I *would* like to come and see you next spring. Do you suppose I could get a school to teach, or don't you think I could do it.—I like the city best in winter but I would so much like to get a whiff of the north.

I'll write you all about the smoky city, when I come back, or before if I can, and, how I get along.—By-bye—with lots of love—Voltai.

[Inserted at top of first page] Oh! *Please return Pa's letters. I want them.*

That party [triple underline] is—well, I'll tell you later. Who is the St. J. picture of [illegible]?

9. Her aunt's home in Greenville, Michigan, where she lived briefly after graduating.

Sex Slavery¹⁰

1890

Night in a prison cell! A chair, a bed, a small washstand, four blank walls, ghastly in the dim light from the corridor without, a narrow window, barred and sunken in the stone, a grated door! Beyond its hideous iron latticework, within the ghastly walls,—a man! An old man, gray-haired and wrinkled, lame and suffering. There he sits, in his great loneliness, shut in from all the earth. There he walks, to and fro, within his measured space, apart from all he loves! There, for every night in five long years to come, he will walk alone, while the white age-flakes drop upon his head, while the last years of the winter of life gather and pass, and his body draws near the ashes. Every night, for five long years to come, he will sit alone, this chattel slave, whose hard toil is taken by the State,—and without recompense save that the Southern planter gave his Negroes,—every night he will sit there so within those four white walls. Every night, for five long years to come, a suffering woman will lie upon her bed, longing, longing for the end of those three thousand days; longing for the kind face, the patient hand, that in so many years had never failed her. Every night, for five long years to come, the proud spirit must rebel, the loving heart must bleed, the broken home must lie desecrated. As I am speaking now, as you are listening, there within the cell of that accursed penitentiary whose stones have soaked up the sufferings of so many victims, murdered, as truly as any outside their walls, by that slow rot which eats away existence inch-meal,—as I am speaking now, as you are listening, *there sits Moses Harman!*

Why? Why, when murder now is stalking in your streets, when dens of infamy are so thick within your city that competition has forced down the price of prostitution to the level of the wages of your starving shirt-makers; when robbers sit in State and national Senate and House, when the boasted “bulwark of our liberties,” the elective franchise, has become a U. S. dice-box, wherewith great gamblers play away your liberties; when

10. Source: SW342–58.

debauchees of the worst type hold all your public offices and dine off the food of fools who support them, why, then, sits Moses Harman there within his prison cell? If he is so *great* a criminal, why is he not with the rest of the spawn of crime, dining at Delmonico's or enjoying a trip to Europe? If he is so *bad* a man, why in the name of wonder did he ever get in the penitentiary?

Ah, no; it is not because he has done any evil thing; but because he, a pure enthusiast, searching, searching always for the cause of misery of the kind which he loved with that broad love of which only the pure soul is capable, searched for the data of evil. And searching so he found the vestibule of life to be a prison cell; the holiest and purest part of the temple of the body, if indeed one part can be holier or purer than another, the altar where the most devotional love in truth should be laid, he found this altar ravished, despoiled, trampled upon. He found little babies, helpless, voiceless little things, generated in lust, cursed with impure moral natures, cursed, prenatally, with the germs of disease, forced into the world to struggle and to suffer, to hate themselves, to hate their mothers for bearing them, to hate society and to be hated by it in return,—a bane upon self and race, draining the lees of crime. And he said, this felon with the stripes upon his body, "Let the mothers of the race go free! Let the little children be pure love children, born of the mutual desire for parentage. Let the manacles be broken from the shackled slave, that no more slaves be born, no more tyrants conceived."

He looked, this obscenist, looked with clear eyes into this ill-got thing you call morality, sealed with the seal of marriage, and saw in it the consummation of *immorality*, impurity, and injustice. He beheld every married woman what she is, a bonded slave, who takes her master's name, her master's bread, her master's commands, and serves her master's passion; who passes through the ordeal of pregnancy and the throes of travail at *his* dictation,—not at her desire; who can control no property, not even her own body, without his consent, and from whose straining arms the children she bears may be torn at his pleasure, or willed away while they are yet unborn. It is said the English language has a sweeter word than any other,—*home*. But Moses Harman looked beneath the word and saw the fact,—a prison more horrible than that where he is sitting now, whose corridors radiate over all the earth, and with so many cells, that none may count them.

Yes, our masters! The earth is a prison, the marriage-bed is a cell, women are the prisoners, and you are the keepers!

He saw, this corruptionist, how in those cells are perpetrated such out-

rages as are enough to make the cold sweat stand upon the forehead, and the nails clench, and the teeth set, and the lips grow white in agony and hatred. And he saw too how from those cells might none come forth to break her fetters, how no slave dare cry out, how all these murders are done quietly, beneath the shelter-shadow of home, and sanctified by the angelic benediction of a piece of paper, within the silence-shade of a marriage certificate, Adultery and Rape stalk freely and at ease.

Yes, for that is adultery where woman submits herself sexually to man, without desire on her part, for the sake of "keeping him virtuous," "keeping him at home," the women say. (Well, if a man did not love me and respect himself enough to be "virtuous" without prostituting me, he might go, and welcome. He has no virtue to keep.) And that is rape, where a man forces himself sexually upon a woman whether he is licensed by the marriage law to do it or not. And that is the vilest of all tyranny where a man compels the woman he says he loves, to endure the agony of bearing children that she does not want, and for whom, as is the rule rather than the exception, they cannot properly provide. It is worse than any other human oppression; it is fairly God-like! To the sexual tyrant there is no parallel upon earth; one must go to the skies to find a fiend who thrusts life upon his children only to starve and curse and out-cast and damn them! And only through the marriage law is such tyranny possible. The man who deceives a woman outside of marriage (and mind you, such a amn [man] will deceive *in* marriage too) may deny his own child, if he is mean enough. He cannot tear it from her arms—he cannot touch it! The girl he wronged, thanks to your very pure and tender morality-standard, may die in the street for want of food. *He* cannot force his hated presence upon her again. But his wife, gentlemen, his wife, the woman he respects so much that he consents to let her merge her individuality into his, lose her identity and become his chattel, his wife he may not only force unwelcome children upon, outrage at his own good pleasure, and keep as a general cheap and convenient piece of furniture, but if she does not get a divorce (and she cannot for such cause) he can follow her wherever she goes, come into her house, eat her food, force her into the cell, *kill* her by virtue of his sexual authority! And she has no redress unless he is indiscreet enough to abuse her in some less brutal but unlicensed manner. I know a case in your city where a woman was followed so for ten years by her husband. I believe he finally developed grace enough to die: please applaud him for the only decent thing he ever did.

Oh, is it not rare, all this talk about the preservation of morality by

marriage law! O splendid carefulness to preserve that which you have not got! O height and depth of purity, which fears so much that the children will not know who their fathers are, because, forsooth, they must rely upon their mother's word instead of the hired certification of some priest of the Church, or the Law! I wonder if the children would be improved to know what their fathers have done. I would rather, much rather, not know who my father was than know he had been a tyrant to my mother. I would rather, much rather, be illegitimate according to the statutes of men, than illegitimate according to the unchanging law of Nature. For what is it to be legitimate, born "according to law"? It is to be, nine cases out of ten, the child of a man who acknowledges his fatherhood simply because he is forced to do so, and whose conception of virtue is realized by the statement that "a woman's duty is to keep her husband at home"; to be the child of a woman who cares more for the benediction of Mrs. Grundy¹¹ than the simple honor of her lover's word, and conceives prostitution to be purity and duty when exacted of her by her husband. It is to have Tyranny as your progenitor, and slavery as your prenatal cradle. It is to run the risk of unwelcome birth, "legal" constitutional weakness, morals corrupted before birth, possibly a murder instinct, the inheritance of excessive sexuality or no sexuality, either of which is disease.¹² It is to have the value of a piece of paper, a rag from the tattered garments of the "Social Contract,"¹³ set above health, beauty, talent or goodness; for I never yet had difficulty in obtaining the admission that illegitimate children are nearly always prettier and brighter than others, even from conservative women. And how supremely disgusting it is to see them look from their own puny, sickly, lust-born children, upon whom lie the chain-traces of their own terrible servitude, look from these to some healthy, beautiful "natural" child, and say, "What a pity its *mother* wasn't virtuous!" Never a word about *their* chil-

11. Prudish literary character from the late eighteenth century (hence "dead" later in the essay); her name denotes the voice of convention.

12. Sex radicals like Harman and, apparently, de Cleyre, believed that children conceived during intercourse undesired by the mother would be biologically defective—one basis of the unfortunate entanglement of feminism and eugenics in this period. Because anarchists opposed the state and any kind of coercion in general, however, anarchist eugenics was an argument for birth control and women's control of their sexuality, not for regulatory policies (see chap. 3).

13. As an anarchist, de Cleyre scorned the idea that government owes its legitimacy to the "social contract" theorized by John Locke and others; in her metaphor the social contract is a set of tattered garments (i.e., an inadequate cover-up for something else—coercion and violence, presumably), and the marriage license is a "rag" taken from it.

dren's fathers' virtue, they know too much! Virtue! Disease, stupidity, criminality! What an *obscene* thing "virtue" is!

What is it to be illegitimate? To be despised, or pitied, by those whose spite or whose pity isn't worth the breath it takes to return it. To be, possibly, the child of some man contemptible enough to deceive a woman; the child of some woman whose chief crime was belief in the man she loved. To be free from the prenatal curse of a slave mother, to come into the world without the permission of any law-making set of tyrants who assume to corner the earth, and say what terms the unborn must make for the privilege of coming into existence. This is legitimacy and illegitimacy! Choose.

The man who walks to and fro in his cell in Lansing penitentiary¹⁴ to-night, this vicious man, said: "The mothers of the race are lifting their dumb eyes to me, their scaled lips to me, their agonizing hearts to me. They are seeking, seeking for a voice! The unborn in their helplessness, are pleading from their prisons, pleading for a voice! The criminals, with the unseen ban upon their souls, that has pushed them, pushed them to the vortex, out of their whirling hells, are looking, waiting for a voice! *I will be their voice*. I will unmask the outrages of the marriage-bed. I will make known how criminals are born. I will make one outcry that shall be heard, and let what will be, *be!*" He cried out through the letter of Dr. Markland, that a young mother lacerated by unskilful [*sic*] surgery in the birth of her babe, but recovering from a subsequent successful operation, had been stabbed, remorselessly, cruelly, brutally stabbed, not with a knife, but with the procreative organ of her husband, stabbed to the doors of death, and yet there was no redress!

And because he called a spade a spade, because he named that organ by its own name, so given in Webster's dictionary and in every medical journal in the country, because of this Moses Harman walks to and fro in his cell to-night. He gave a concrete example of the effect of sex slavery, and for it he is imprisoned. It remains for us now to carry on the battle, and lift the standard where they struck him down, to scatter broadcast the knowledge of this crime of society against a man and the reason for it; to inquire into this vast system of licensed crime, its cause and its effect, broadly upon the race. The Cause! Let woman ask herself, "Why am I the slave of Man? Why is my brain said not to be the equal of his brain? Why is my work not paid equally with his? Why must my body be controlled by my husband? Why may he take my labor in the household,

14. Comstock's obscenity laws made Harman's offense not merely a crime but a felony.

giving me in exchange what he deems fit? Why may he take my children from me? Will them away while yet unborn?" Let every woman ask.

There are two reasons why, and these ultimately reducible to a single principle—the authoritarian, supreme-power, *God*-idea, and its two instruments, the Church—that is, the priests—and the State—that is, the legislators.

From the birth of the Church, out of the womb of Fear and the fatherhood of Ignorance, it has taught the inferiority of woman. In one form or another through the various mythical legends of the various mythical creeds, runs the undercurrent of the belief in the fall of man through the persuasion of woman, her subjective condition as punishment, her natural vileness, total depravity, etc.; and from the days of Adam until now the Christian Church, with which we have specially to deal, has made *woman* the excuse, the scapegoat for the evil deeds of *man*. So thoroughly has this idea permeated Society that numbers of those who have utterly repudiated the Church, are nevertheless soaked in this stupefying narcotic to true morality. So pickled is the male creation with the vinegar of Authoritarianism, that even those who have gone further and repudiated the State still cling to the god, Society as it is, still hug the old theological idea that they are to be "heads of the family"—to that wonderful formula "of simple proportion" that "Man is the head of the Woman even as Christ is the head of the Church."¹⁵ No longer than a week since an Anarchist (?) ¹⁶ said to me, "I will be boss in my own house"—a "Communist-Anarchist," if you please, who doesn't believe in "*my* house." About a year ago a noted libertarian speaker said, in my presence, that his sister, who possessed a fine voice and had joined a concert troupe, should "stay at home with her children; that is *her place*." The old Church idea! This man was a Socialist, and since an Anarchist; yet his highest idea for woman was serfhood to husband and children, in the present mockery called "home." Stay at home, ye malcontents! Be patient, obedient, submissive! Darn our socks, mend our shirts, wash our dishes, get our meals, wait on us and *mind the children*! Your fine voices are not to delight the public nor yourselves; your inventive genius is not to work, your fine art taste is not to be cultivated, your business facilities are not to be developed; you made the great mistake of being born with them,

15. 1 Cor. 11:3.

16. As with later parenthetical question marks after "radical," "respectable," and "purity," this is in the original, to call attention to the irony of certain words. De Cleyre implies that no true anarchist would choose the role of "boss"; no real "radical" would be a "tyrant"; what passes for "respectable" or "purity" is in fact "obscene."

suffer for your folly! You are *women!* therefore housekeepers, servants, waiters, and child's nurses!

At Macon, in the sixth century, says August Bebel,¹⁷ the fathers of the Church met and proposed the decision of the question, "Has woman a soul?" Having ascertained that the permission to own a nonentity wasn't going to injure any of their parsnips, a small majority vote decided the momentous question in our favor. Now, holy fathers, it was a tolerably good scheme on your part to offer the reward of your pitiable "salvation or damnation" (odds in favor of the latter) as a bait for the hook of earthly submission; it wasn't a bad sop in those days of Faith and Ignorance. But fortunately fourteen hundred years have made it stale. You, tyrant radicals (?), have no heaven to offer,—you have no delightful chimeras in the form of "merit cards"; you have (save the mark) the respect, the good offices, the smiles—of a slave-holder!¹⁸ This in return for our chains! Thanks!

The question of souls is old—we demand our bodies, now. We are tired of promises, God is deaf, and his church is our worst enemy. Against it we bring the charge of being the moral (or immoral) force which lies behind the tyranny of the State. And the State has divided the loaves and fishes with the Church, the magistrates, like the priests take marriage fees; the two fetters of Authority have gone into partnership in the business of granting patent-rights to parents for the privilege of reproducing themselves, and the State cries as the Church cried of old, and cries now: "See how we protect women!" The State has done more. It has often been said to me, by women with decent masters, who had no idea of the outrages practiced on their less fortunate sisters, "Why don't the wives leave?"

Why don't you run, when your feet are chained together? Why don't you cry out when a gag is on your lips? Why don't you raise your hands above your head when they are pinned fast to your sides? Why don't you spend thousands of dollars when you haven't a cent in your pocket? Why don't you go to the seashore or the mountains, you fools scorching with city heat? If there is one thing more than another in this whole accursed tissue of false society, which makes me angry, it is the asinine stupidity which with the true phlegm of impenetrable dullness says, "Why don't the women leave!" Will you tell me where they will go and what they shall

17. August Bebel (1840–1913), author of *Woman and Socialism*, classic Marxist analysis of the economic origins of patriarchy.

18. I.e., instead of offering women heaven in exchange for obedience to men, you can offer only your smiles—the smiles of a slaveholder.

do? When the State, the legislators, has given to itself, the politicians, the utter and absolute control of the opportunity to live; when, through this precious monopoly, already the market of labor is so overstocked that workmen and workwomen are cutting each others' throats for the dear privilege of serving their lords; when girls are shipped from Boston to the south and north, shipped in carloads, like cattle, to fill the dives of New Orleans or the lumber-camp hells of my own state (Michigan), when seeing and hearing these things reported every day, the proper prudes exclaim, "Why don't the women leave," they simply beggar the language of contempt.

When America passed the fugitive slave law compelling men to catch their fellows more brutally than runaway dogs, Canada, aristocratic, unrepugnant Canada, still stretched her arms to those who might reach her. But there is no refuge upon earth for the enslaved sex. Right where we are, there we must dig our trenches, and win or die.

This, then, is the tyranny of the State; it denies, to both woman and man, the right to earn a living, and grants it as a privilege to a favored few who for that favor must pay ninety per cent. toll to the granters of it. These two things, the mind domination of the Church, and the body domination of the State are the causes of Sex Slavery.

First of all, it has introduced into the world the constructed crime of obscenity: it has set up such a peculiar standard of morals that to speak the names of the sexual organs is to commit the most brutal outrage. It reminds me that in your city you have a street called "Callowhill." Once it was called Gallows' Hill, for the elevation to which it leads, now known as "Cherry Hill," has been the last touching place on earth for the feet of many a victim murdered by the Law. But the sound of the word became too harsh; so they softened it, though the murders are still done, and the black shadow of the Gallows still hangs on the City of Brotherly Love.¹⁹ Obscenity has done the same; it has placed virtue in the shell of an idea, and labelled all "good" which dwells within the sanction of Law and respectable (?) custom; and all bad which contravenes the usage of the shell. It has lowered the dignity of the human body, below the level of all other animals. Who thinks a dog is impure or obscene because its body is not covered with suffocating and annoying clothes? What would you think of the meanness of a man who would put a skirt upon his horse and compel it to walk or run with such a thing impeding its limbs? Why,

19. Philadelphia. De Cleyre had moved there in 1889 (Avrich, AA 70), but references to "your city" and "my own state" (Michigan) suggest she did not yet see it as home.

the "Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals" would arrest him, take the beast from him, and he would be sent to a lunatic asylum for treatment on the score of an *impure* mind. And yet, gentlemen, you expect your wives, the creatures you say you respect and love, to wear the longest skirts and the highest necked clothing, in order to conceal the *obscene human body*. There is no society for the prevention of cruelty to women. And you, yourselves, though a little better, look at the heat you wear in this roasting weather! How you curse your poor body with the wool you steal from the sheep! How you punish yourselves to sit in a crowded house with coats and vests on, because dead Mme. Grundy is shocked at the "vulgarity" of shirt sleeves, or the naked arm!

Look how the ideal of beauty has been marred by this obscenity notion. Divest yourselves of prejudice for once. Look at some fashion-slaved woman, her waist surrounded by a high-board fence called a corset, her shoulders and hips angular from the pressure above and below, her feet narrowest where they should be widest, the body fettered by her everlasting prison skirt, her hair fastened tight enough to make her head ache and surmounted by a thing of neither sense nor beauty, called a hat, ten to one a hump upon her back like a dromedary,—look at her, and then imagine such a thing as that carved in marble! Fancy a statue in Fairmount Park with a corset and bustle on. Picture to yourselves the image of the equestrienne. We are permitted to ride, providing we sit in a position ruinous to the horse; providing we wear a riding-habit long enough to hide the obscene human foot, weighed down by ten pounds of gravel to cheat the wind in its free blowing, so running the risk of disabling ourselves completely should accident throw us from the saddle. Think how we swim! We must even wear clothing in the water, and run the gauntlet of derision, if we dare battle in the surf minus stockings! Imagine a fish trying to make headway with a water-soaked flannel garment upon it. Nor are you yet content. The vile standard of obscenity even kills the little babies with clothes. The human race is murdered, horribly, "in the name of" Dress.

And in the name of Purity what lies are told! What queer morality it has engendered. For fear of it you dare not tell your own children the truth about their birth; the most sacred of all functions, the creation of a human being, is a subject for the most miserable falsehood. When they come to you with a simple, straight-forward question, which they have a right to ask, you say, "Don't ask such questions," or tell some silly hollow-log story; or you explain the incomprehensibility by another—God! You say "God made you." You know you are lying when you say it. You know,

or you ought to know, that the source of inquiry will not be dammed up so. You know that what you could explain purely, reverently, rightly (if you have any purity in you), will be learned through many blind gropings, and that around it will be cast the shadow-thought of wrong, embryo'd by your denial and nurtured by this social opinion everywhere prevalent. If you do not know this, then you are blind to facts and deaf to Experience.

Think of the double social standard the enslavement of our sex has evolved. Women considering themselves very pure and very moral, will sneer at the street-walker, yet admit to their homes the very men who victimized the street-walker. Men, at their best, will pity the prostitute, while they themselves are the worst kind of prostitutes. Pity yourselves, gentlemen—you need it!

How many times do you see where a man or woman has shot another through jealousy! The standard of purity has decided that it is right, "it shows spirit," "it is justifiable" to—murder a human being for doing exactly what you did yourself,—love the same woman or same man! Morality! Honor! Virtue!! Passing from the moral to the physical phase; take the statistics of any insane asylum, and you will find that, out of the different classes, unmarried women furnish the largest one. To preserve your cruel, vicious, indecent standard of purity (?) you drive your daughters insane, while your wives are killed with excess. Such is marriage. Don't take my word for it; go through the report of any asylum or the annals of any graveyard.

Look how your children grow up. Taught from their earliest infancy to curb their love natures—restrained at every turn! Your blasting lies would even blacken a child's kiss. Little girls must not be tomboyish, must not go barefoot, must not climb trees, must not learn to swim, must not do anything they desire to do which Madame Grundy has decreed "improper." Little boys are laughed at as effeminate, silly girl-boys if they want to make patchwork or play with a doll. Then when they grow up, "Oh! Men don't care for home or children as women do!" Why should they, when the deliberate effort of your life has been to crush that nature out of them. "Women can't rough it like men." Train any animal, or any plant, as you train your girls, and it won't be able to rough it either. Now *will* somebody tell me why either sex should hold a corner on athletic sports? Why any child should not have free use of its limbs?

These are the effects of your purity standard, your marriage law. This is your work—look at it! Half your children dying under five years of age, your girls insane, your married women walking corpses, your men so bad

that they themselves often admit *Prostitution holds against PURITY a bond of indebtedness*.²⁰ This is the beautiful effect of your god, Marriage, before which Natural Desire must abase and belie itself. Be proud of it!

Now for the remedy. It is in one word, the only word that ever brought equity anywhere—LIBERTY! Centuries upon centuries of liberty is the only thing that will cause the disintegration and decay of these pestiferous ideas. Liberty was all that calmed the blood-waves of religious persecution! You cannot cure serfhood by any other substitution. Not for you to say “in this way shall the race²¹ love.” Let the race *alone*.

Will there not be atrocious crimes? Certainly. He is a fool who says there will not be. But you can’t stop them by committing the arch-crime and setting a block between the spokes of Progress-wheels. You will never get right until you start right.

As for the final outcome, it matters not one iota. I have my ideal, and it is very pure, and very sacred to me. But yours, equally sacred, may be different and we may both be wrong. But certain am I that with free contract, that form of sexual association will survive which is best adapted to time and place, thus producing the highest evolution of the type. Whether that shall be monogamy, variety, or promiscuity matters naught to us; it is the business of the future, to which we dare not dictate.

For freedom spoke Moses Harman, and for this he received the felon’s brand. For this he sits in his cell to-night. Whether it is possible that his sentence be shortened, we do not know. We can only try. Those who would help us try, let me ask to put your signatures to this simple request for pardon addressed to Benjamin Harrison. To those who desire more fully to inform themselves before signing; I say: Your conscientiousness is praiseworthy—come to me at the close of the meeting and I will quote the exact language of the Markland letter. To those extreme Anarchists who cannot bend their dignity to ask pardon for an offense not committed, and of an authority they cannot recognize, let me say: Moses Harman’s back is bent, low bent, by the brute force of the Law, and though I would never ask anyone to bow for himself, I can ask it, and easily ask it, for him who fights the slave’s battle. Your dignity is criminal; every hour behind the bars is a seal to your partnership with Comstock.²²

20. Reference to a common argument that prostitution is a regrettable but necessary outlet for the male sexual drive in order to preserve the purity of marriage.

21. Used generically in this way, “race” in de Cleyre’s writing always means by default “the human race.”

22. Anthony Comstock, author of the obscenity laws under which Harman was imprisoned.

No one can hate petitions worse than I; and no one has less faith in them than I. But for my champion I am willing to try any means that invades no other's right, even though I have little hope in it.

If, beyond these, there are those here to-night who have ever forced sexual servitude from a wife, those who have prostituted themselves in the name of Virtue, those who have brought diseased, immoral or unwelcome children to the light, without the means of provision for them, and yet will go from this hall and say, "Moses Harman is an unclean man—a man rewarded by just punishment," then to you I say, and may the words ring deep within your ears UNTIL YOU DIE: Go on! Drive your sheep to the shambles! Crush that old, sick, crippled man beneath your Jugger-naut! In the name of Virtue, Purity and Morality, do it! In the name of God, Home, and Heaven, do it! In the name of the Nazarene who preached the golden rule,²³ do it! In the name of Justice, Principle, and Honor, do it! In the name of Bravery and Magnanimity put yourself on the side of the robber in the government halls, the murderer in the political convention, the libertine in public places, the whole brute force of the police, the constabulary, the court, and the penitentiary, to persecute one poor old man who stood alone against your licensed crime!²⁴ Do it. And if Moses Harman dies within your "Kansas Hell," be satisfied *when you have murdered him!* Kill him! And you hasten the day when the future shall bury you ten thousand fathoms deep beneath its curses. Kill him! And the stripes upon his prison clothes shall lash you like the knout! Kill him! And the insane shall glitter hate at you with their wild eyes, the unborn babes shall cry their blood upon you, and the graves that you have filled in the name of Marriage, shall yield food for a race that will pillory you, until the memory of your atrocity has become a nameless ghost, flitting with the shades of Torquemada, Calvin and Jehovah²⁵ over the horizon of the World!

Would you smile to see him dead? Would you say, "We are rid of this obscenist"? Fools! The corpse would laugh at you from its cold eyelids!

23. Jesus.

24. Licensed crime: marital rape.

25. Tomàs de Torquemada (1420–1498), Grand Inquisitor during the repressive reign of Ferdinand and Isabella in Spain, responsible for the torture of supposed heretics and sinners in the name of the Catholic Church and for the deaths of perhaps two thousand people at the stake; influential in the persecution of the Moors and the expulsion of some 160,000 Jews from Spain ("Torquemada"). John Calvin (1509–1564), leader of the Protestant Reformation, founder of a proverbially authoritarian theocracy in Geneva. With calculated blasphemy, de Cleyre includes the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, Jehovah, in this list of offenders against human freedom.

The motionless lips would mock, and the solemn hands, the pulseless, folded hands, in their quietness would write the last indictment, which neither time nor you can efface. Kill him! And you write his glory and your shame! Moses Harman in his felon stripes stands far above you now, and Moses Harman *dead* will live on, immortal in the race he died to free! Kill him!

The Gates of Freedom²⁶

[Address delivered before the Liberal Convention at Topeka, Kan., March 15, 1891.]

“They have rights who dare maintain them.” This is my text.

And the purpose of my lecture is threefold. First to state the facts concerning the actual of [*sic*] status of woman in relation to society as a whole—what position she really holds in human economy. Not, mind you, what classes of men regard her, not how “she is considered by the law,” not what she herself imagines, but the bald fact of what she is.

Second—to show upon what ground we demand certain “rights” in protest against conditions, which, however necessary they may have been in the past evolution of the race no longer satisfy the demands of a higher civilization.

And lastly—to point out the gates through which woman must pass to freedom.

What then is woman? Property! Since the days when Proudhon uttered his famous sentence, “Property is robbery”²⁷ the word has had an ugly sound in the ears of those who aim to realize the ideal glory of humanity. And I have no doubt that there are those among you—men—whose hearts have outgrown your heads, whose aspirations rise higher than your inheritances, who clothe hard facts with sentimental fancies, as ivy clothes the ruin, some of you who will feel outraged at me that I should declare this ugly actuality—that woman *is* property.

But facts are facts and stubborn things; and it is better to face a fact, staring it in the teeth, than to shield your eyes until you run against it unaware. Certainly there is no one to whom this truth is more unpalat-

26. See pp. 96–102. Source: *Lucifer* 8.35, 8.36, 8.37, 8.38., 8.39, 8.40, 8.41 (Apr. 10, 17, 24, May 8, 15, 22, 29, 1891), Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library.

27. See part I, chapter 1 for de Cleyre's debts to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865), especially her metaphors of theft.

able than to me—a woman. I remember well the lingering indignation that I felt when I read in the first issue of a scientific quarterly, *The Monist*, an article on “The Material Relations of Sex,” by no less a person than the noted evolutionist, Prof. E. D. Cope, proving the existence of property in woman beyond the possibility of cavil, and, what was worse, held up this condition of hers as an ideal in perpetuity, to cease following after which was for the race to virtually commit suicide.

It is very aggravating, (though perhaps I had better not admit it or the Cope’s [*sic*] will sneer “emotional sensibility—to be aggravated by a fact, womanish”) in other words it is mildly annoying, after one has successfully disposed of a mumbling theologian, or an artful doctor of laws, to then have a scientific man appear upon the scene, and, with all the dispassionate gravity of intellect, proceed to prove that the theologian and the lawyer were right. The worst is, that while priest and law draw their arguments from faith and prejudice, the scientist always backs his up with facts. This was what most chagrined me in the article to which I refer. There is no denying Prof. Cope’s facts, the only thing which is left is to dispute his conclusions.

What then were those facts? Learn, O you mothers, for what and to what you are bringing your daughters to the world, educating them to adorn themselves with all the graces of person, of intellect, and of morals! And learn what position it is you yourself hold, in this world which never tires of singing the glory of motherhood! Says Prof. Cope, (after speaking of the struggle of man against nature) “Woman, considered by herself, is subject to identical conditions. Her needs are the same, and her environments the same. But she is not so well endowed as man to supply the one or to meet the other. Her disabilities are of two kinds, physical and mental. The physical are: first, inferior muscular strength, and secondly child-bearing. The latter means more or less incompetence for active work at monthly periods, or several months of gestation and lactation, and some years care of children. The mental disabilities are: first, inferior power of mental co-ordination; and secondly greater emotional sensibility which more or less interferes with rational action.” After expatiating upon her resultant inability to cope with man in the competitive struggle for existence, (to which expatiations I shall refer later on,) he proceeds: “But Nature has supplied a most effective remedy. Woman, not being of the same sex as man, supplies a necessity which is almost universal, so that she is placed if she exercise reasonable care, in a position better than that of man in relation to the struggle for existence. The antagonist of man, his fellow-

man, is eliminated from the list of the antagonists of woman, and that is an advantage which can not be overestimated. Not only is man removed from the field as a competitor, but he becomes an active helper in resisting the forces of nature. More than this, he is willing, under the circumstances, to divide with her what he extracts from both man and nature. Were these the only benefits which woman derives from man they would constitute a sufficient reason for the usual preference she displays for his protection rather than for a life of independence. But she is herself possessed of a sex interest which is satisfied by such a relation. Not only this but her love of children constitutes a further inducement which is highly effective in bringing about her customary relations with man." . . . [ellipses in original] "*The support and protection given to woman by man, is, then, clearly rendered as an equivalent [sic] for the services she renders him*"²⁸ in the capacity of a wife. It is universally implied, if not distinctly stated in the contract between them, that she shall not be the wife of some other man, and that the children she bears shall be *THOSE OF THE MALE PARTY TO THE CONTRACT*." (Emphasis mine.) I wish that every word of these two sentences might plough deep furrows where they fall upon your woman's hearts. I wish you to understand clearly their full significance, realizing what this scientist means by "your services as a wife." He has so worded his sentences as to leave no doubt that the marriage contract is an agreement of man to protect and support woman in return for the gratification of his sexual appetite, and the bearing of children for *him*, not for her.

What is it then to occupy this position, this *enviable* position, if we are to credit Prof. Cope, in which the "antagonist of man, his fellow-man is eliminated": this *honorable* position of wife to which the wise, wise editors of the silly correspondence columns of society journals continually point young girls as the grand desideratum of courtship; what is it to be a woman? To be property! To be sure, you are a little higher kind of property than the rest of man's effects; the chattel-slave was a little higher kind of property than the planter's horse. You supply a somewhat more "universal need" than carriage-driving or even corn-planting. Hence you are somewhat dearer property. Nevertheless you are treated with upon exactly the same basis as the rest of man's live stock. You are housed, fed, clothed, "protected," *loved* (for men pat even their dogs' heads at times) in return for—what? The superintendence of *Man's* home, and the definite paternity, care and education of *Man's* children.

28. Typos in the original render this as "sor the services she renderi him."

Young girls! If any one of you is contemplating marriage remember that is what the contract means. The sale of the control of your person in return for "protection and support." The sad part of it is, the majority of women think it is all right. I have heard it from the lips of young girls, who, unwitting the meaning of their own words, talked earnestly of disposing of themselves to the individual most likely to house and clothe and protect them best. I have heard well-educated, bright, intelligent girls express themselves complacently concerning the fact that they were of no earthly use in the world save to adorn the display counters of the matrimonial market, where he who came to purchase might choose them. And I have turned away in disgust that they could be content to thus sacrifice their individuality to, as Prof. Cope says, display "her usual preference for man's *protection* rather than for a life of independence," turned from them in contempt only to go among the self-supporting working girls and find the same old sickening story. These regard with envy their idle sisters, as occupying the true position of unmarried women; and they, themselves, look forward to the same ultimatum; the day when they will no longer compete in the struggle for an independent livelihood, but be wedded, and supported, and *protected*, and bear children, for some man!

Worse than this prattle of girls, I have heard it from the lips of young married women whose dream of love has changed to ashes in a few short months; I have heard them helplessly accept the burden, so much heavier than they had dreamed, and despairingly say: "It is the lot of women. I am housed, fed, clothed, and *protected*. It was for this I surrendered the control of myself; and if my husband wishes me to have children I must bear them." "Ah!" said one woman to me, a woman who, though married but five years, had already borne three children, "it seems to me when my husband approaches me²⁹ as if my heart would turn to stone. *But I suppose I can do my duty by him.*" Her duty! Saddest of all, I have heard from the lips of white haired grandmothers who had gone down into the cold winter of woman's sacrificial existence, this same old lie, that the burden of indignity, and misery, and very martyrdom which Man puts upon this chattel which he houses, clothes, feeds and *protects*, is inevitable; and there is nothing for her to do but bear it—patiently. It is needless to repeat the justifications, the flimsy tinsellings, with which men cover up the facts concerning woman's position in relation to themselves. Even Prof. Cope degrades the intellect of his readers by assuring them that it is a much-to-be-coveted position, after distinctly proving

29. I.e., sexually.

Property in Woman. When those individuals who wish to protect women have dressed the truth in draperous adjectives of superlative falsity, such as “too high, too pure, too ethereal, too angelic,” etc., *ad nauseam*, it is, to one who looks with clear eyes at this diaphanous vision which they would have us believe the image of ourselves, far too much like a stage angel, rising, not upon wings, but on a trap.³⁰

I say right here, candidly, that *as a class* I have nothing to hope from men.* [*Author’s note: I have been criticised for this remark as “too sweeping.” I said then, and I say now, “as a class.”] No tyrant ever renounced his tyranny until he had to. If history teaches us anything it teaches this. Therefore my hope lies in creating rebellion in the breasts of women. And when I am discouraged it is never because of the attitude of men, since that is always to be counted upon; but because of the apathy, the passivity, the can’t-help-it-ness, or the religious slavishness of my own sex. I say religious slavishness because, with a very large percentage of women, the idea of her “lawful subjection” to man is a profound religious conviction, the result of a superfine theological deduction strong along through the Scriptures from Genesis to the Epistles beginning with “Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrows and thy conception; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee”; and concluding with, “Let the woman learn in silence with due submission, for the man is the head of the woman even as Christ is the head of the Church.” It is true that the major portion of Christian women, who believe the Bible, but don’t read it, know very little of those sentences; either they have never heard them, or, having heard, have simply lent to their reading the mechanical service of their ears, letting the sounds slide out as they slid in. Nevertheless this curse ascribed to Jehovah, and this command recorded by Paul, sank deep into woman ages ago—deep into her unconscious nature; that part of her which lies below the domain of intellect, but which in its dark, unknown soil ripens the germs of all her action.³¹ Submission has become a part of woman’s moral instinct. It is characteristic of woman, that what she *believes*, she *lives*; it becomes *her*. In this way the opinions of Messrs. the Gods,³² sanctified by much prayer,

30. I.e., a trap door that brings the angel up through the stage floor, but the word is of course also a pun here.

31. Theories of the unconscious were in circulation in psychological discourse, but de Cleyre’s use of the term most often refers to evolutionary theory.

32. “Messieurs les [name]”: polite form of reference in French—but for humans, not gods, in which case it would be ostentatiously irreverent. De Cleyre, who believes in no God or gods anyway, thus uses it with double sarcasm.

burning of tapers and smoking of incense, have made the ideal of wifehood uncomplaining slavery. Now why should it be otherwise? If the Law sanctions, and Religion sanctifies, and our ancestors were satisfied, and a large portion of humanity is still satisfied with this condition of affairs, why do we complain? This brings us to the second consideration, viz.: upon what grounds is our protest offered? And in answering the question I appeal from Prof. Cope to Sociology.³³ Now the first decision of Sociology is, that the very fact that a question is being agitated, the very fact that any considerable number of individuals, members of a class, or race, or sex, are, in popular vernacular, “kicking” about something, protesting against class, or race, or sex condition, is proof that the time for change is ripening. It is proof that this especial form of social growth is no longer adapted to the environment; that through many throes of death and birth the old idea of justice is dying, and the new is being born. All progress is marked by this transition from content to discontent, from satisfaction to pain, that is to say, from unconsciousness to consciousness.

Now *justice is progressive!* It does not follow that justice of one age is justice of the next. On the contrary the burden which our ancestors bore in no wise³⁴ fits our shoulders; yet that is not to say it did not fit theirs. If Humanity, in its upward course must needs pass through the pack mule stage of development, that is no reason to curse it on the one hand, nor insist that the race shall continue as pack mules on the other. I insist on this point of the progressiveness of justice, first because I do not wish you to think me a metaphysical dreamer, holding to the exploded theory that “rights” are positive, unalterable, indefinite somethings passed down from one generation to another after the fashion of an entailed estate,³⁵ and come into existence in some mysterious manner at the exact moment that humanity emerges from apedom. It would be quite

33. A new science in the late nineteenth century, associated with Darwinism, new conceptions of the term “social,” and a new focus on the possibility of scientifically improving “society”—also a newly inflected word (see Riley chap. 3). Subsequent references to “the pack mule stage of development” and Humanity’s natural “upward course” (i.e., upward evolutionary course) reflect popular misconceptions that Darwinian evolution implied progress. Cope was a theorist of evolution (although Lamarckian); hence, perhaps, her choice of evolutionary theory as a way of hoisting him on his own petard.

34. In no way.

35. A late-nineteenth-century audience would recognize the reference to entailed estates (typically a way of protecting a male line of descent) as a subtle joke about the assumption in most natural rights theory that the heir of these natural “rights” is by default male.

too difficult a matter to settle on the emerging point. I insist on the progressiveness of justice, because, however fierce my denunciation of present injustice may be, I none the less recognize it to have been the justice of the past, the highest possible condition so long as the aspirations of the general mind rose no farther—a part of invincible Necessity. And, last, I need the admission of the progressiveness of justice in order to explain my text, and prove my assertion that, however necessary the slavery of woman may have been, it is no longer in accord with the ideals of our present civilization.

In what consists the progress of justice?

Sociology,³⁶ putting its finger upon the movements of man in the past, viewing him in all the various stages of his social development, as the naturalist examines the petrifications of rocks and traces back the lineage of a country's flora or fauna, deduces from its carefully gathered facts this conclusion: Social progress consists in a constantly widening sphere of activity to individuals, and, of necessity, a corresponding diminution of the power of one individual, or set of individuals over others. That is, Sociology confirms what '93³⁷ proclaimed; Science applauds the Red Flag,³⁸ and carries as its banner the motto of the Commune: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.

Gradually, one after another, various forms of slavery, such as feudalism, chattelism, monarchism, have disappeared, or are disappearing. (Between you and me I think Republicanism is going along with them). Gradually Destiny, God, Law, Adaptation, whatever you choose to call this glorious fact, has "put down the mighty from their seat, and exalted them of low degree."³⁹ Yet, through it all, every inch of the ground has been disputed, and not one iota yielded up until those, upon whom had come the vision of greater liberty, a fore taste of "rights," had "dared maintain them," and through great struggle, risen to the dignity of a higher order of existence. It is in contemplating this struggle that we, who cry for the abolition of woman's slavery, receive our inspiration. It is in remembering that always before the coming of a "new dispensation" voices must cry in the wilderness, birds beat broken wings before the storm, that we take up our task, certain that where we lead or are driven

36. The new "social science," a term that implied not merely study of society but study with a view to improvement.

37. Revolutionary France in 1793.

38. Symbol of the Paris Commune of 1871, a short-lived revolution with anarchist characteristics (see introduction to sec. 2).

39. Luke 1:52.

“by the might of the inward must,”⁴⁰ others will follow. It is in realizing the vastness of humanity, the sublimity of the new ideal, the insignificance of “self,” that we forget pain in our endeavor to arouse this slumbering soul, that it may conceive its rights and *dare maintain them*.

But to the application of the deduction of Sociology, we say, if social progress consists in a constant tendency towards the equalization of the liberties of the social units, then the demands of progress are not satisfied so long as half society, Woman, is in subjection. If men are enjoying all their own “rights” and some of ours as well, that is not equality—that is privilege and spoliation. That is to say, the old conception of justice must give place to a new one, because Woman through a dimly roused consciousness, is beginning to feel her servitude; that there is a requisite acknowledgement to be won from her master before he is put down and she exalted to—Equality. This acknowledgement is, *the freedom to control her own person*.

You can have no free, or just, or equal society, nor anything approaching it, so long as womanhood is bought, sold, housed, clothed, fed, and *protected*, as a chattel. We upon whom the gray light has dawned,⁴¹ whose perceptions are no longer locked in the dull sleep of base content, we point you to our weary sisters who week after week, month after month, till years have dragged away, rise early in the morning to go through the discouraging round of petty duties which must be done just so often, every day, and all day long—often borrowing from the night the hours of sleep that she may finish some little thing the value of which will never be known, never even counted—less than a cipher. We point you to her sitting tonight perhaps, with folded hands at last, sitting alone by the firelight, after the long harassing day of little tortures, that wear the soul as pin-points gingerly pressed against the flesh wear the body, trying in the silence, to learn, (not from her husband—he’s at the lodge) but from her own poor unknown soul, this helpless chrysalis, which faintly stirs within her. Trying to learn if this is a fair bargain, a just thing, a righteous thing, that she should give the labor of her hands all these years, continually put in the background all her own desires and wait, wait, wait—till, from long denial, aspiration dies, and she is left an uncomplaining clod of clay, vested with the awful patience of despair. Sitting there, in the light of the fire, looking forward to this utter desola-

40. From a poem by Gerald Massey (see chap. 3).

41. Undoubtedly a reference to the “gray dawn” at the tragic climax of Schreiner’s *Story of an African Farm* (see chap. 3)

tion of spirit, which is creeping upon her as surely as time is creeping upon eternity; looking forward to the time when her husband shall have grown so far beyond her intellectually that he will pity her—Good God! *pity* her, at the same time that her company is irksome to him because of her “inferior powers of mental co-ordination,” sitting there in her dumb sorrow, bleeding to death inwardly, silently asking herself, “Is this justice? Is it equality?” Perhaps then she remembers the small beds up stairs with their glowing, health kissed sleepers, (perhaps a smile flits over her face as she dreams, followed by a spasm of reproach that she should, even by *by* [*sic*] a thought, begrudge them the life, the strength they have taken from her—those beloved children.) But after that comes the bitter remembrance, they are not *my* children—they are *his*. That, too, was part of the contract, that I should bear children for *him*, care and educate them for *him*. It was what I was to do in return for food, clothing, shelter and *protection*. They are not *my* children, any more than the calf men sell for veal, belongs to the cow.

After all—did she want them? When they were born, well, yes—she would not have them die. But before that, would she have chosen, voluntarily, to go through these years of martyrdom? Even for them? So many and so close together that to no one could she give the care requisite to really develop [*sic*] its nature? Terrible question! And the pang that goes with it, quivering outward to a visible shudder, till she shades her face from the firelight! The thought: “to which of them, unconscious, sleeping, trusting, am I the traitor? To the first and second in cheating them of their higher training by dividing my care with the fifth or sixth; or the fifth and sixth in deeming their existence a burden. Anyway, how could he decide what it was possible for me to do. How?” And so the bitter reverie goes on, concluded, no doubt, by a self-accusing start when she hears her husband’s hand upon the latch, and remembers that she has not put his slippers by the fire.

We point you to this picture because it is not an extreme case. We do not show you the awful slavery of wifehood among the bitterly poor; we give no overdrawn example of a large family, no instance of horrible cruelty such as would be easy to give, such as our divorce courts teem with, but which it is a penitentiary offense to discuss in plain terms in a liberal paper. We give only the pathetic facts of the ordinary woman’s life; and we say the social contract between man and woman is an unjust, unfair, unrighteous contract—a contract which does not square with the law of equal freedom. We say this is the reason why there should be a radical change in the present relation of the sexes; and this brings us to the dis-

cussion of what most properly comes under the title of the lecture, The Gates of Freedom.

Clearly, if this contract which stipulates that there shall be protection and support from man in return for child bearing, rearing, and nursing, and home-making on the part of woman, if this contract is to be annulled, and woman to become a free individual, then certainly she must be self-sustaining; that is to say, become an industrial competitor with man. "But," says Prof. Cope: "It is self-evident that any system which looks to a career for woman independent of man, such as man pursues, is abnormal and injurious to her interest." For, "It is evident that were woman of the same sex as man, that is, were she simply another kind of man, she would soon be eliminated from the earth under the operation of the ordinary law of the survival of the fittest. This need not be through any agencies different from those now actually in operation among men under the ordinary circumstances of peaceful trade. And such is often the actual history of male men who possess marked feminine characteristics. It does not follow from this, that some women might not sustain themselves apart from men, in agriculture, trade, and the professions. This is especially possible where the struggle is not very severe; but in the cases which exist few are really independent of male assistance, which has furnished the capital, either of cleared land or money or as an appointing power. *The general result, as above stated, is self-evident from the facts.*" (Italics mine.)

I know there is a large class of sentimental reformers who hope to "enact" universal harmony, repeal the law of centrifugal force, and make facts to suit theories, to whom the mention of the word competition is like "flaunting a red flag" etc., and whose comprehension of the woman question is about as deep as their understanding of socialism; I know these persons will be ready to supplement the position of Prof. Cope with a scheme of State organization which they call co-operation, whose motto instead of being equal liberty is equal slavery, and one of whose intents is to make woman dependent upon "the State" instead of upon a husband. Their argument is very specious. It runs like this: One of the most important and necessary services is rendered to the State by woman, viz: race-reproduction. Every mother therefore deserves the support and protection of the State. *O tempora! O mores!*⁴² Proteus⁴³ reap-

42. "O times! O manners!" from Roman author Marcus Tullius Cicero.

43. In Roman mythology, a son of the sea god Neptune, noted for his shape-changing ability. The allusion implies that in centralized versions of socialism, as opposed to anarchism, the husband, patriarchal "protector" of the wife he exploits, shape-shifts into the state, which plays the same role.

pears! Again to be protected and supported! And her children to belong to—whom? The State!

With all due respect to the intentions of my sentimental friends, let me say that any scheme which proposes to *pay* women for being mothers, is a degrading thing to her; and I care not whether it comes from Prof. Cope or Edward Bellamy.⁴⁴ We have declared war—a few of us—and we accept no such treaty; we will be satisfied with nothing less than that maternity shall be put beyond the necessity of price—dependence. This means that we intend to be industrially independent; that we consider ourselves perfectly able to compete with men in a *free*field, and when our battle is won, as won it will be some day though none of us will live to see it, the body of woman will be her own, and husbands must meet their wives on the proud footing of equality.

But Prof. Cope says that in that case we shall die off the face of the earth under the operation of the law of the survival of the fittest, we are an inferior kind of beings who must necessarily go to the wall in the fierce competition for the means of existence; our services would not be in demand; we should be continually out of work! How ill squares this pronouncement of the scientist with the laboring-man's protest: "The women are taking our places." Haven't you heard it? Haven't you heard how in the New England factories, one after another the male weavers have disappeared and the "women have taken their places." Haven't you heard how in the shoe factories of Philadelphia and New York and Boston shoe-workers are out of employment because in the fierce competition for places women have learned to work cheaper and live cheaper than men. I'm not defending this suicide of the giant Labor which takes place when the people combat each other for the chance to serve masters. But I am taking Prof. Cope on his own ground, and showing that even were this present horrible throttling of free competition by monopoly to go on, this "cut-throat competition" of handicapped laborers, there is quite as much likelihood that "men would die off the face of the earth" as women. I have mentioned textile manufactures and shoe-making; add to this hatting, tailoring, shirt-making, glove-making, book-binding, thread manufacture, in which the number of women outnumber the men three to one (and it would be easy to make the list longer); and you will perceive that in these cases under the law of the survival of the fittest, men have been obliged to succumb. Do you tell me "man fur-

44. Edward Bellamy (1850–1898), author of the widely read utopian novel *Looking Backward, 2000–1887* (1888), which de Cleyre here criticizes for its centralized version of socialism.

nished the capital?" Bless my soul, why don't you say that of the men whose places they took! No! "Man" didn't furnish the capital. But certain individual men, by means of a masculinely instituted law, have *stolen the capital* which both men and women produced. I don't think we owe them any particular acknowledgement of inferiority on that account; unless, perhaps, an inferiority of rascality.

Inferior! Yes I am willing to admit that in certain things we are inferior to men. Also in certain things, men are inferior to crocodiles. For instance, their teeth are not as long and savage; their mouths are hardly as capacious. The time was when the mastodon trod through might geologic forests, king of the earth, the fittest to survive. The forests are gone, the environment is altered, the mastodon has disappeared. In strength he was superior to man; but the demand for strength gave way before the development of brain. The age of the dominion of muscular force is past; in the language of Oliver Schreiner, "the age of the dominion of Nervous Force, has cut the band of Inevitable Necessity with the knife of Mechanical Invention." It doesn't require a great body nor a powerful arm in order to engage in the productive labor of the day. No terrible amount of power is needed to press an electric button, or turn a screw. I have seen a most splendidly developed muscular negro⁴⁵ breaking cobble stones at \$1 per day, while a white-handed delicate girl was operating a typewriter at \$1,000 a year. I do not pretend to say that these rewards were just; but that if you *will* instance muscular strength I must show that the greatest rewards of your own economic system are not for muscular strength. Dexterity and skill are the requirements of the age. It is often urged, as proof of woman's inferiority, that she is not able to "bear arms." I don't think any of us feel very bad about this. I think the majority of enlightened women regard war as a barbarism, and the phrase "bearing arms" a sinister satire on modern christianity. Nevertheless if it comes to that Gens. Grant and Sherman⁴⁶ could have learned a lot from Sophia Perovskai.⁴⁷ The dreadful science of modern warfare teaches that there too, it is skill, not numbers, not muscular strength, which counts. No longer the forced marches, the masses of foot and horse, the unwieldy

45. The lower case *negro* is not, in this period, a sign of disrespect; the move to capitalize it came later; see Hornsby (135); Harley (236). The use of lower case for *Christianity*, however, is surely intended as a sign of deliberate disrespect from an atheist, in a freethought newspaper.

46. Ulysses S. Grant, commander of the Union forces in the Civil War; William Tecumseh Sherman, Union general famous for his devastating march through Georgia.

47. Solya Perovskaya, member of the Russian revolutionary group Narodnaya Volya, which planned the 1881 assassination of Czar Alexander II. Perovskaya was hanged.

movements of a thousand, or a hundred thousand men. No! A single figure in the darkness, a flash, a blast—and the work of an army is done! Was the figure man or woman?

Such is the progress of mechanics and chemistry, and with their further development we may look for a race of people constantly degenerating in muscles and strengthening in nervous power. So the first objection is invalid. The second is that woman labors under an irremedial physical disadvantage in that she must bear and train children.

Regarding the periodical “unfitness of woman for active work,” I hardly think it worth while noticing. The thousands upon thousands of actively employed women toiling ten hours a day year in and year out in our factories and shops disprove that. It is the exception, not the rule, that there is any discontinuance of work on that account. Regarding the bearing of children, while we have not sufficient evidence to prove that it can ever be a purely painless affair, universally speaking, yet recent experiments in sanitary science go to prove that a moderate amount of exertion during gestation is not only uninjurious, but rather beneficial; and by far the greater part of the suffering incident to maternity is due to ignorance, improper diet, improper dress, uncongenial surroundings and sexual slavery to a husband. Yet, withal, this physical disability, even as it is, need not prove the perpetual barrier to independence which Prof. Cope would make of it. For in the future society, the future, which even while we speak is beginning to shape and glow among the mists that seethe up from the cauldron of change, in the future society the price of independence, either for man or woman, will not be what it is today. In the future society, under the operation of the same inexorable law which scientists constantly invoke, the isolated home and its entire economy will have passed away. Division of Labor and Socialism will have entered the household. Not only will there be economy of time, labor, and adaptability so far as washing, ironing, cooking, sweeping, dusting, sewing, patching, darning and dish-washing is concerned, but it will also be learned that not every woman should give her energy to a species of hen-with-one-chicken raising of a child because she happens to be its mother. It will be learned that while one woman may be a very good mother, it does not follow that she is a good nurse or good teacher; that there can be no greater curse to a child than to take it for granted that because a certain man and woman were its progenitors, that therefore it must submit to their method of nursing, training and education no matter how utterly incompetent they may be. I am a perfect rebel to this idea. I know that it is quite possible to love one’s parents, even to revere them; and yet

be so thoroughly incompatible with them that both love and reverence may be worn out by the constant friction of tendency and repression. I believe that more children are ruined by their fathers' and mothers' misunderstandings and general incapability than would be safe to enumerate. And I look forward to the time when the selfishness and the narrowness engendered by the individual home and individual training, the freaks of character born of this blundering of incongruous natures upon one another, as a day golden in the skies of children no less than women.

What do I mean? The socialistic nursery where *women and men* who succeed in reaching the natures of children, who recognize their task to be one worth learning well, making a specialty of, not an addenda to some other life work, will be employed as teachers are employed in colleges. No one today doubts that for by far the largest portion of our children, the educational institution is a much more serviceable instrument than a private tutor. No one imagines any more that every mother should teach "reading, writing, and arithmetic," to her children. That work has gone into more competent hands. So it will be with the nursery.

Is this shocking? Yet it is true that I mean just this—an economy of mothers. It is true that I believe no more pitiable waste of life attends our present social system than the unnecessary and mischievous waste of child-nurses! Anyhow, whether it is shocking or not, whether I advocate it or don't, this very thing is already growing up in your cities. I know of more than fifty cases where women have found it better to enter the lists of industrial competition, and engage for their young babies the care of others by nature much better fitted for the task. And these cases I know from no special investigation on my part. They came under my notice in my daily life in a large city.

Thus Socialism disposes of the physical bars to independence. We are now to consider the mental disabilities. These are, says Prof. Cope, "first, inferior powers of mental co-ordination, and second greater emotional sensibility which more or less interferes with rational action." I admit these things. But given equal opportunity, and the same environment which developed the present intellectual superiority of man will soon develop the intellectual equality of woman. We are inferior in these things, because we have never had the chance to be equal. See! My left hand is less dexterous than my right. Why?

All my life long I have been doing most things with my right hand. I button shoes with the left; in that particular work it is the more cunning of the two. So with men and women. Men are exceedingly awkward about those things to which they are not accustomed; so are we. But as

the left hand may grow to do the same things that the right does, so we too shall learn, as soon as opportunity is free and we have had time to adapt ourselves to the conditions of self-dependence. Mind you, I never expect men to *give* us liberty. No, Women, we are not *worth* it, until we *take* it.

How shall we take it? By the ballot? A fillip for your paper rag! The ballot hasn't made men free, and it won't make us free.

By advocating the destruction of any and every barrier, the abolition of every law whereby the sources of wealth are held out of use;—in other words by advocating the complete liberation of land and capital. By holding in view the ideal of a society so organized that two hours labor per day would be more than sufficient for the needs of the day. By insisting on a new code of ethics founded on the law of equal freedom; a code recognizing the complete individuality of woman. By making rebels wherever we can. By ourselves *living our beliefs*. “Propaganda by the deed”⁴⁸ is the favorite expression of the revolutionist. We are revolutionists. And we shall use propaganda by speech, deed, and most of all, life—*being* what we teach.

My liberty is dearer to me than any slavery of silk. My individuality is worth all the opprobrious epithets, all the gall and wormwood, it has ever cost to maintain it; and not because it is I, but because of the truth which I live.

O Woman! When I think of all the ages you have waited—waited! When I think how man has asked of you everything, every desire born of his selfishness, accepted of you every sacrifice, taken from you ruthlessly even your few dear hours of peace, as the Rich, who have appropriated it all, strike from his hand the Beggar's crust, for pastime; when I remember how he has studied and achieved at your expense, while you drudged patiently to win time for him, till all your hopes lay white, and still, and stiff, within your breast; when I remember the arid, barren, unchanging days that come afterward—and then—death in the desert!⁴⁹—when I remember it all, and think of it all, it seems as if my heart had turned to tears, and they—were frozen.

And then, in my dreams, I see the figure of a giantess, a lonely figure out in the desolate prairie with nothing over her but the gray sky, and no light upon her face but the chill pallor of the morning. And I see her looking upward and whispering: “How broad it is! It is cold and dark and

48. See chapter 2 for the meanings of this complex term.

49. Reference to Schreiner's figure of the woman in the desert (see chap. 3).

frowning; but it is broad—and high!” Such will be your figure, O Woman, such your words in the day of your emancipation. In the day when you break from your cell, this warmed, round cell, whose horizon-wall is your children’s life, whose light is your husband’s eyes, whose zenith is your husband’s smile. Better the pitiless gray of the clouds than the white ceiling of a prison; better the loneliness of the prairie than the caress of a slave-born child; better the cold biting of the wind than a Master’s kiss. “Better the war of freedom than the peace of slavery.”

The White Room⁵⁰

Date uncertain

It was an artist's masterpiece. He had wrought it all with his own hands, after his idea, which grew as he wrought. It was not square nor long nor round, nor any regular shape, such as we are used to thinking of rooms; it was wider here and narrower there, and had strange turns and niches, and carvings, and arches; and in all these there were bits of statuary, or tiny fountains, or flowers, or curious sea-things, gathered from many shores, shells and corals and ocean feathers, picked up years apart. The light came from above, as all light should, and the dazzling beauty of the ceiling was like a broken arc from a cave's roof, so white and gleaming was it with the strange substance he had made; and the walls had all the wild, fantastic tracery of the frost forests on our winter windows, which God paints—but no man.⁵¹ The statues were all white, of unflawed marble; and the silken curtains, looped back from the small bed, were snow. The fish in the little fountains had silver scales, and in the recess where he had made an aviary were four pure-plumed birds. And all the flowers and all the curious sea-things were white. The divans were of spotless velvet, and the rugs upon the glistening floor, wrought in strange patterns by his own deft fingers, were of white velvet, too. There was a little case of books, bound in blanch covers, and beside it a silver-stringed harp mantled in a strainless [*sic*: stainless?] sheath. There was one picture, only one. If it had been made for sale! But now there is only I to write of it—I, who saw it once long after all was finished. He was an impressionist, my artist, long before the impressionists began to make a noise in the world. He painted the white light of a day as it lies on sky and water—only a stretch of sky and water—seen of a summer afternoon, when the clouds drift like curled feathers and the boats are sleeping on Canarsie

50. See pp. 115–23. Source: *Herald of Revolt* (London) 3.8 (Sept. 1913): 103.

51. The reference to God as the frost artist is presumably not that of the atheist de Cleyre but rather a fictitious first-person narrator, whose identity we do not know, who claims to have seen this (fictional) painting.

Bay.⁵² That was the last touch to the White Room, except the Easter lilies he placed in the great vase between the tall wax tapers. He had been working fifteen years till that day—for her, the Soul of the White Room, herself the whitest thing, his pure-faced Scandinavian girl, with the chiselled face that looked out with saint's eyes from under its aureole of pale hair, as if the breath of the High One had blown upon her, and no other. So she had seemed to him when he married her, and so, with his steadfast love, she seemed to him now. Fifteen years! And he had said no word to her in all that time of the marvel he was creating for her—all with his own hands, which was the only true art. It had taken very long. And all that time he had wondered and searched and wrought, for her, only for her, she had been living with that beautiful, meek, white patience of hers, in the dirty, narrow city alley, where they had *had* to live when young and poor, complaining of nothing—only now and then wishing for a little more of his presence, suggesting, perhaps, some little trifle, which he did not buy, partly to prove her excellence, partly because of the great thing he was making. And when he saw a darker blue of disappointment settle in her eyes, he would say, "My girl shall have something far better some day."

And now it had come to pass. To-morrow he would take her, when the third lily should have opened a little wider. She would see his white dream, of which she was the angel—had been for so many years. She would then understand what she had been to him, who had not wrought for the praise of men, but for one woman only.

And, thinking so, he turned into the alley-way, lifting his eyes to the small-paned window.

There was no light.

Yes, she had gone. There was a letter, badly spelt and written, but it told a world. She had waited, she had been patient, she had served, she had not asked much, she had been promised, as we promise children stars in the morning if they sleep now. She had wanted a little, only a little, every day; nothing grand, nothing more than ordinary; a common rag-carpet would have done, a cheap frame or so for the bright prints she had saved to trim the naked walls; some other little things, no matter what now; she knew she would never get them. He had not noticed, perhaps; his life had lain outside; he had seen things. But for her it had been so weary. She was going away; it was wrong, most like, but she would not come back.

⁵². In Brooklyn, New York.

Now, the artist was a little more than an artist. He was a philosopher, too. So he did not act like a common man. He did not groan to his friends, nor take to drink, nor talk of suicide, nor grow sour to men and bitter to women. He lived on in the old place, quite the same. He played with other women's children, and sat late at the door on summer nights reading his paper by the street-light. But still he went alone to the house under the trees by the waterside, and saw that the White Room was kept very white, long after the lilies had withered.

And the end of it all was that one night he found her in the gutter, quite drunk and dying. And he took her in his arms and rode with her to the water-side, and carried her into the White Room and laid her, all soiled, on the white bed, and there she died. Just before, she unclosed her misty eyes and shuddered: "Ugh! The horrid fancies in the liquor! It looks all white, WHITE, like a dead-house! Powdered gravestones! Ugh! If there were only a bit of blue or red."

He dug her grave with his own hands. He worked all night to line it with the gayest blooms of Life, and laid her in when the morning was streaking crimson against the azure. To-day she sleeps under violets and carnations, with no white stone at foot or head.

Mary Wollstonecraft⁵³

1893

The dust of a hundred years
Is on thy breast,
And thy day and thy night of tears
Are centurian⁵⁴ rest;
Thou to whom Joy was dumb,
Life a broken rhyme,
Lo, thy smiling time is come,
And our weeping time.
Thou who hadst sponge and myrrh,
And a bitter cross,
Smile, for the day is here
That we know our loss;
Loss of the undone deed,
Thy unfinished song,
Th' unspoken word for our need,
Th' unrighted wrong;
Smile, for we weep, we weep,
O'er the unsoothed pain,
The unbound wound, burned deep
That we might gain.
Mother, of sorrowful eyes,
In the dead old days,
Mother of many sighs,
Of pain-shod ways;
Mother of resolute feet
Through all the thorns,

53. See pp. 212–13. Source: holograph ms., Labadie collection. In *SW*a slightly different version ends with a composition date: “Philadelphia, April 27th, 1893.”

54. Century-long. Printed as “centur’ne” in *SW*, which has many other minor variants and one more significant: “the just man” instead of “Justice” in line 32.

Mother, soul-strong, soul-sweet!
Lo, after the storms
Have broken and beat thy dust
For a hundred years,
Thy memory is made just,
And Justice hears!
Thy children kneel and repeat:
"Though dust be dust,
Though sod and coffin and sheet
And moth and rust
Have folded and molded and pressed,
Yet they cannot kill;
In the Heart of the World at Rest
She liveth still."

If I Had Married Him⁵⁵

Letter to her mother [Between June 30 and August 29, 1893]

Dearest Mother:

Yes, I *did* forget to enclose the Bentley letter last time—or rather I looked in the envelope and tho't I saw it inside and let it go without further examination. It's in this time sure. Not much of it, which is thoroughly characteristic.

You ask me if I had married him would I have said: "All right, you can have her, but not me too." No indeed. If I had married him I would have done it as a pure business transaction. That's all I ever considered it. I would *never*, under any circumstances marry a man I *loved*. And I didn't want him for his person, but for *his money*. I only would have *married* then, as a legal means of getting the money. If I could have got it just as well without marrying him, I'd have lived with him that way. But I knew who I was dealing with. And since I had resigned principle and made up my mind to a bargain and sale business, I wasn't going to sell without surety for my bargain. And as for what he did with himself after he paid me, what did I care. He might have had mistresses by the score for all of me.

For all that I intended to be square with my part of the bargain, and would have done my best to have made his home pleasant.

Needless to go over the circumstances that got me in so degraded a

⁵⁵ Source: ms. Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library. Labadie Collection notes refer to a date supplied in the manuscript, "1893 January 13," as apparently incorrect, based on the reference to Altgeld's pardon, signed on June 26, 1893. A heading of summer 1895 is supplied in another hand but is obviously also incorrect. De Cleyre's references to "the panic" and the president's fishing trip allow for an accurate dating of the letter as sometime after June 30 and before August 29, 1893. The economic "Panic" of 1893 was overtaking the country when President Cleveland needed surgery for oral cancer; press reports of his ostensible fishing trip were a cover-up to allow him to undergo the operation and recuperate without exacerbating economic instability ("Second"). Although the truth did not fully become public for many years, the Philadelphia press reported on the real reason for the trip on August 29 ("Grover Cleveland").

state of mind. You know how the finances were; and perhaps, a little, of how badly I wanted to write, which I could not do (and have never since been able to do) for want of a little quiet security. But all that was an old story, and would not, of itself, have been sufficient to break down principles of action. It was just simply that I didn't see any use in living anyhow so far as love was concerned. It didn't make much difference to me who I lived with; and I thought I could make you and Addie a nice place to rest in after so many years of misery. I admit it was a disgraceful state of mind to be in and that no one ever condemned that sort of thing more than I have. But that's the way it was. (And I don't imagine the life would have been more unpleasant than lots of people live either).

He wouldn't have been a bit more faithful to ~~her~~ me than to ~~me~~ her—not a bit. Faithfulness depends on one's *own* character—not on that of the person you happen to love. It may influence ~~it~~ you for a season—but innate tendencies will ever assert themselves. But I wouldn't have cared.

The idea of *taking* from one we love, is also an old point of disagreement, between you and me. I am more willing to take from a stranger than a lover. I do not speak of gifts, or tokens of love, which are always precious and impose no sense of obligation. But to me, any dependence, any thing which destroys the complete selfhood of the individual, is in the line of slavery, and destroys the pure spontaneity of love. It is communism, and communism, in any form, is revolting to me.—For the same reason, while I would do away with the individual “home” with its waste of forces (as Andrews says, 12 matches, 12 little fires, 12 little tea-kettles where one match, one stove one tea-kettle would do), and have, instead magnificent palaces, spacious grounds, all the glory of architecture and sculpture, a theatre in every house, a fine library, swimming rooms, bath-rooms, everything on a large scale—I would also have an arrangement where every individual should have a room, or rooms *for himself exclusively*, never subject to the intrusive familiarities of our present “family life.” A “closet” where each could “pray in secret,”⁵⁶ without some ~~one~~ persons who “loves” ~~them~~, him, assuming the right to walk in and do as they please. And do you know I was pleased beyond measure the other day to find that Wm Godwin,⁵⁷ the great Eng. philosopher and

56. Matt. 6:6. Jesus criticizes those who publicize their devotion: “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”

57. William Godwin (1756–1836), late-eighteenth-century political theorist, whose views on government in such works as *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) led anarchists to view him as a forerunner. Among the institutions Godwin attacked was marriage (see chaps. 2 and 3).

Mary Wollstonecraft, mother of Mrs. Shelley taught, and as far as possible practised the same thing just 100 years ago.

I began this letter last Sat., but had to break off; and it is now Monday. And oh! I had such a *beautiful* present this morning. How I wish you could see it. I think you remember the old gentleman at Santa Cruz who sent me the sea-weeds. Well some time ago he wrote for my picture. Of course I had none, but wrote him a nice letter, and told him how much I liked the sea-weed and how I wished I had some more. And to-day he sent me the most beautiful, *beautiful* little book, with all different kinds, 25 separate pieces, more lovely than I ever saw. Oh, the work, that dear old man (78 yrs. old) was at! And he puts in a very fine photo of himself with these words: "I will put my picture in as pasteboard to protect the moss-book."

About my kitty. . . . [There follows a discussion of her cat, which had died recently, and of some local gossip of interest to her mother].

Do you know I didn't even know *there was a comet* visible till I got your letter. You don't know what it is to live in this accursed mass of brick and stone. We see only *patches* of sky. I haven't seen the comet yet, and don't expect to. . . .

[She responds to her mother's enclosure of an obituary of someone she thought de Cleyre knew.]

Business is bad, worse, worst. Phila. lies in the penumbra of the panic, and the umbra steadily approaching. Banks fail daily, the factories are stopping. Even the big "Traction Company" (street-car) now making a lot of improvements in order to use electricity had no money to pay its hands, and negotiated a big loan from the banks, which, God knows, may "bust" to-morrow. And, as Elliott⁵⁸ says: "Nero fiddles while Rome is burning"—the newspapers report "how many fish the president caught at Buzzard's Bay."

I have been reading Conway's Life of Paine.⁵⁹ How I wish you could! not so much for Paine's sake as for the magnificent piece of historical work it is. I never understood either the American or French Revolution half so much before. It is about 800 pages. Is full of the correspondence of Jefferson, Washington, Monroe, Condorcet, Danton and others. He

58. One of various casual references to James Elliott, father of de Cleyre's child, that show they remained friends over the years. In 1893 she was still living in the same rooming house as Elliott, his mother, and Harry.

59. Thomas Paine, author of *The Age of Reason* and hero of freethinkers and American anarchists (see chap. 1).

explored the archives of Eng. France and America, besides hunting up private persons without number.

Next week I shall send you the report of Gov. Altgeld in pardoning the anarchists.⁶⁰ And if the American people don't blush at their record, they have no shame in them. Brave man! He has killed himself politically to save three poor workingmen! He deserves a wreath of laurels. And in the ages he'll get it too—as Paine is getting his own now—after 100 years.

Elliott was pleased at your late praise of his Byron.⁶¹ I would be glad to read Beecher's "Star Papers."⁶² No mistake, he was a fascinating writer.

I'm glad you wrote soon, and hope you will again.

Very Lovingly,

V.

Nothing from Addie yet. Oh—return B's letter please.

60. See the introduction. John Peter Altgeld (1847–1902), governor of Illinois, whose investigation of the Haymarket trial led him to pardon the three anarchists imprisoned when the other five were condemned to death. De Cleyre's prediction that he was ending his political career for the sake of "three poor workingmen" proved true; his bid for reelection failed in 1896, and he retired to private law practice with Clarence Darrow ("John P. Altgeld").

61. His essay on Byron?

62. Henry Ward Beecher's *Star Papers, or, Experiences of Art and Nature* (1855), presumably recommended to de Cleyre by her mother.

The Past and Future of the Ladies' Liberal League⁶³

1895–96

I have assumed a serious and severe office that of historian and prophet. But, pardon me, I intend to be neither serious nor severe; for this is an occasion rather for exchanging greetings and putting ourselves in good humor than being serious, and my talk will be somewhat governed thereby.

Our history is short, but, to borrow a ponderous phrase of Renan's "of interest to the philosophic mind."⁶⁴ At last [least] it ought to be; if it is not so much the worse for the philosophic mind.

We were born in February 1892, and like the celebrated author of *Innocents Abroad*,⁶⁵ we ran alone ten minutes after we were born,—only he had the misfortune to get tangled up in his long clothes, while we, being the child of the New Woman and the New Man, (comparatively new I mean, not of the "bloomer"⁶⁶ yet, but considerably outside orthodox traditions) we were never swaddled in long clothes, but kicked freely and healthily from the beginning. I spoke with levity, but if we had dubbed ourselves the Kicking Society, in all seriousness it would not have been amiss. The first act of our life was to kick against an unjust decree of our parents, and we have unflinchingly stood for the kicking principle ever since. Now, if the word kicking is in bad repute with you, substitute non-submission, insubordination, rebellion, revolt, revolution, whatever

63. See pp. 87–90. Source: *The Rebel* 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 (Oct. 20 and Nov. 20, 1895, Jan. 1896).

64. What Renan actually says is that, for the philosophic mind, there are only three histories of primary interest: Greek, Jewish, and Roman (11). De Cleyre is adding the Ladies Liberal League to this list.

65. Mark Twain, who was on the fringes, at least, of freethought, both as an admiring reader of such "infidels" as Robert Ingersoll and as a writer of joking accounts of Bible stories and satires on Christianity, missionaries, and imperialism.

66. Baggy predecessor of modern pants for women, associated with feminist dress reform in de Cleyre's day and named for the woman who did most to popularize it, Amelia Jenks Bloomer (1818–1894).

name you please which expresses non-acquiescence to injustice. We have done this because we love liberty and hate authority, and the sentiment is bound to find vent somehow, "as the sap climbs upward to the flower," to make use of an illustration from Kropotkin.

How then, some stranger will inquire, does it happen that you, standing for so bold a principle, have such an—*innocuous* name,—*Ladies' Liberal League*? Sirs, though our parents were reformers, men and women grown gray in a good cause, we beg you to remember that they are gray, and to look leniently on their foibles. We are the child of the Friendship Liberal League, and that worthy society, grand and courageous as it has been and still is, and no one enjoys paying so deserved a tribute better than I, has yet approached that mellowness of age when it has a tendency to smoothness and respectability. Respectability is a sort of secular saint to be considered in the matter of baptisms, and "*Ladies*" is a very respectable word. Besides our dear parents, as is often the case with parents, conceived us quite otherwise, than as we turned out to be. They had an idea of forming a sort of machine wherethrough the working force of the women of the Friendship League could be brought to bear upon the Liberal Hall Association plan; in other words we were to be a Ladies Aid, after the model of the church,⁶⁷ and make money after the manner of women, by fairs, sociables, picnics, excursions, et cetera. We were to smile men into ticket-buying, and shame them into candy purchase, and wheedle them into ice-cream. I presume that bedquilts done up gorgeously with silks and ruffled at ten cents a ticket may have been distantly in view. I could not say authoritatively; I did not join the society until after the girls had decided they were born for other purposes. How came it about? Well, the trouble lay right here: our parents assumed that the child was wise enough to earn the money, the best way it could, but not wise enough to control it after it was earned; the child thought otherwise. In that difference of opinion rebellion began, and continued till a complete separation took place, and the L. L. L. set up in business for itself.

It's a long way off now, but some of us still remember with pleasure the quiet Monday evening gatherings at the home of our secretary, where we used to meet and pass a cosy, nestled up time, getting to understand ourselves. Time has weeded us out a little: three of us, one young, one old, one middle-aged, have gone to shadow. Two of them had secu-

67. A damning joke on the male freethinkers of the Friendship Liberal League, accusing them of taking their nemesis the church as a model for the treatment of women.

lar funerals,⁶⁸ a matter which might not have been easy to manage but for the friendships formed and prolonged through and by the L. L. L. (So we hold it out to you as an inducement, if any of you are thinking of dying. Come into the fold in order that you may go out of it as a true rebel.) You may take that as a joke, but it is really a very serious matter. And no one knows till he gets to be a freethinker and starts to die, or some of his freethought friends do, what a difficult thing it is for a piece of cold human clay to escape the clutch of the church. "Are you there, my friend", says she adjusting her spectacles to take a good survey of you: "Aha! now I have you at last! Your obstreperous mouth is closed, and I shall damn you at ease—with the fairest set of lies my agent⁶⁹ can set forth. Oh, you all come to me in the end." And don't we though! Are we not made mock of in the very clods? Our whole lives belied? Our works gainsaid?

Well, as I said, some have gone to the shadow; some concluding that the trend of the more active spirits was too radical, have withdrawn. Blessings go with them! We were sorry to part with them, we wish they could have gone with us; but we couldn't halt. We remember them as comrades; and when the evening firelight throws its gleams on the wall, and the pictures of the old quiet days before we dabbled in public-mixing matters flash in the illuminated rosy shadow, their faces are still there. Some are dead, some left behind, and some gone, not of their will but of the bitter Will of—God or the Devil or whatever other cursed tyrant it is who separates people who do not want to be separated, that says to a man "Go thou", and he goeth."⁷⁰ This is the worst of partings.

When a friend goes to death, we know that it is well,—with him at least; when he says, "I don't like your road; I like the other way better" we may disagree with him, but we know that he is satisfying himself, doing as we would choose to do under similar conditions; but when a friend extends his hand and says, "Good-bye; I don't know when I'll see you again. I've tramped the city over for a job, but it's no use"; or when one night he sits particularly quiet and you don't know quite what ails

68. Since religious funeral ceremonies were the norm, freethinkers might not necessarily be buried according to their wishes.

69. The officiating priest, minister, etc.

70. A strange choice of biblical allusions for a description of death, perhaps intended ironically. In Matthew 8 and Luke 7, a Roman centurion approaches Jesus and asks that his palsied servant be healed. He says he is unworthy to have Jesus enter his house but knows, as a man in a chain of authority, that a simple command will suffice: "speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this [man], Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth [it]." Jesus praises his exemplary faith (Matt. 8:8–13).

him, and don't want [to ask] for fear of offending, and the next night and the next and the next, a stranger sits in his chair, and he never comes again, and you know in your unwilling heart that he is lost in the eddy of the black night, that strain eyes as you will you will never see aught of him again but a wavering fading shape melting away in the unresting mist, then, then you feel like taking down the Fathers of the Church⁷¹ and learning how to curse systematically!

Dead, and deserted, and gone; but there are many of the old faces yet, and we feel as stout-hearted as we ever did, and now and then some new ones come in to help us. Not many—we wish we were more; but “valuable articles are done up in small packages”, and I am sure the originator of that clever saying must have had his prophetic eye on the L. L. L. when he said it. These additions came about, principally, at the time we joined our fortunes in part with those of the Radical Library, an institution somewhat older in years and good works than ourselves, founded for the purpose of supplying a defect in our public libraries by furnishing radical works upon all subjects at a slight expense to readers, and being open at an hour when working men may avail themselves of it.

At this time we took upon ourselves the onerous duty of paying rent, which is, was, and ever shall be an everlasting, unmitigated curse, and assuming a slightly more public character, though still retaining the purely social form. It was in the room then occupied that the question of rising finances first became urgent. In the beginning it had been mostly income and no outgo. The rent paying altered the situation, as did likewise the panic⁷² which afflicted us in common with the poor fellows whom Ward McAllister⁷³ tells us were cut down from \$15,000 to \$10,000 a year, and cut most of us down to below zero. Our dues were only five cents a week and most of them not paid. The outlook was dubious, sky heavily mottled and no light visible.

Just here appeared the stroke of genius in the shaping of our destiny. There were two members of the society, (out of respect to whose modesty I forbear to mention the names, but if anybody guesses I won't say

71. The church fathers, i.e., the early Christian theologians. In typical freethinkers' style, de Cleyre suggests one might take their old books down from the shelf to read—but only in order to learn how to curse better.

72. The financial Panic of 1893 during Grover Cleveland's administration. Note her later reference to the panic as having been “engineer[ed].”

73. Ward McAllister (1827–1895), wealthy socialite and freelance journalist who fashioned a sort of profession out of upper-class snobbery. De Cleyre refers sarcastically to his writing on the woes of the superrich reduced to a meager ten thousand dollars a year during the Panic. De Cleyre did well to earn six hundred dollars a year, her income for 1900 (Avrich, AA 123–24).

no) who proposed to wring success from despair, by doubling, nay tripling, the expenses, and opening a public lecture course. There were those of us who shrugged the shoulders as who should say, "I don't wish to be answerable for the consequences." I was one of them. But the daring two, who probably couldn't have paid a demand note for \$1.00 between them at the time, so deeply had the iron of the engineers of the panic been driven home, these daring two went ahead; and to the saving grace of daring must be attributed our salvation at this critical juncture. The thing went! A good intellectual treat was offered to the public, and the public partook freely and didn't grumble about paying for it. And such has been our experience all the time; whenever we have done ourselves justice in the matter of good speakers the audience has been willing to testify to its appreciation.

Let us right here get an understanding of the principles which governed the making up of these programs, in fact our existence as a Liberal League. We know that there is forbidden fruit waiting to be gathered, the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and we propose to put up a step-ladder before every get-at-able apple and help ourselves and others to it. We do this by means of the free platform. Questions of science, usually locked within the walls of colleges and only to be approached through tuition fees and expensive books, and that with due reverence and non-questioning belief, have been here presented, by scientific men and women who were willing to break the trust and divulge the secrets of science without money or price; and afterward they have been discussed by the layman.

I don't mean to say that these discussions have been altogether without their amusing and even objectionable features. Many will no doubt be able to recall instances of that sort, when the layman has made rather a mess of science, and spoken somewhat to the confusion of the scientist and the ladies. But what of that? When we adopted the principle of liberty we accepted all that went with it. We realized that the fool has as good a right to his opinion as the wise man, and that only through the expression of opinion can the wise man be discerned from the fool, or the one capable of receiving enlightenment receive it.

Among our scientific lecturers has been Dr. M. V. Ball of the Eastern Penitentiary, who is at present becoming noted as the opponent of the scientific Presbyterianism of "that learned donkey Lombroso,"⁷⁴ as

74. Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), author of influential pseudoscientific proofs that criminal tendencies are inherited. "Scientific Presbyterianism" refers to the Calvinist/Presbyterian doctrine that an individual's salvation or damnation is predestined. De Cleyre believed inequality, not heredity, produces crime.

Alexander Berkman styles the celebrated Italian expounder of criminal anthropology. Dr. Ball has spoken a word before us for the criminals, those voiceless children of the Sacrifice, whom Society first creates, then damns. Dr. Frances Emily White of the Woman's Medical College, has spoken likewise a word for "humanity's eternal priestess", the prostitute, another social sufferer. Prof. E. D. Cope,⁷⁵ the world's great paleontologist, together with others of perhaps less distinction but not necessarily less worthy of a hearing, have addressed us.

We have given a good portion of our time to the discussion of economic questions, which together with the sex question seem to be of the greatest interest to our attendance. The advocates of Co-operation, Populism, Proportional Representation, Single Tax, Prohibition, Woman Suffrage, Free Money, Socialism, Anarchism, Anarchist-Communism, and Revolution all had a hearing. (And we are anxious to give it to them again any time a good speaker is forthcoming.) We have listened to Doctor Metzler on socialism, Messrs. Hetzel and Stevens on the Single Tax, Mr. Kitson on Free Money, all noted authors, with numerous other speakers, including the well-beloved Chas. W. Mowbray, the jolly comrade with the great head and greater heart. We had the honor indeed of introducing him to Philadelphia, though we had not the honor of his subsequent arrest under our auspices. This arrest by the way, which occurred between Christmas and New Years last year, had the effect of increasing our audience by a number of ambiguous personages, of large girth, somewhat casklike in shape, big around the middle and pointy towards top and bottom.⁷⁶ It is unfortunate to be built that way, because there seems to be some sort of secret affiliation between these human casks and a very mal-odorous occupation. Whenever we see one particularly round and vicious and sleepy-looking, who gazes at the big gold ring on his little finger when Prof. Cope is talking about the Tertiary and Quarternary [*sic*] epoch as if he wished it were Aladdin's and would transport him by wishing to a good beer saloon, we don't exactly know, you know, but we strongly suspect what he is there for.

Of course this class of person is very unpromising; still, as St. Paul says, "Faith, hope and Charity, and the greatest of these is Charity." These people may have somewhere down in the immense fog-bank of their understandings, a feebly fluttering thing that tries to beat its unused

75. See the discussion of "The Gates of Freedom" (chap. 3).

76. Police detectives. Mowbray, an editor of the *Rebel*, was a militant, revolutionary British anarchist lecturing in the United States, arrested for sedition and incitement to riot at a meeting of the LLL in 1894, just after his speech. Dr. Cleys organized a defense fund and got him out of jail (Avrich, AA 103).

wings towards the light. The chances are it will be smothered;—but we'll do our best to give this weak little subconscious ego a square show. We will do our best to make these important issues interesting and instructive to the detectives and police of Philadelphia, and we sincerely hope that they may eventually be able to learn something.

We have again not been unmindful of the fact that there are ethical and moral and educational questions pressing for consideration. We were determined to run into no rut, to become no petty propagandist "group"⁷⁷ with but one idea to hawk, in and out of season, to confine ourselves to no particular class of subjects; we said: "Some people haven't settled their account with God yet—let us let them tell us why; some people feel the need of a reconstruction of the principles of religion into an ethical system, and believe that the proper understanding of these principles will give a better nucleus for the concentration of the efforts of life, than he who is cast adrift without such can command. In some this reconstruction has taken the form of theosophy,⁷⁸ in others unitarianism,⁷⁹ in others spiritualism,⁸⁰ in others Whitmanism.⁸¹ As to Unitarianism we have been addressed by the Rev. W. I. Nichols, a most courteous and delightful speaker, from whom we learned that Unitarianism means essentially the development of the individual, no bars being placed on his unfoldment—precisely what most of us are aiming at. And indeed the large tolerance of this Unitarian, with its sweet reverence for the individual's right, might serve as a gentle lesson to our intolerant ones, who want to scream God out of heaven, forgetting that he is not there but in the human heart—the heart which bleeds bitterly for its idols. As to Theosophy we have been favored by speakers from England, by Dr. Charlotte Abbey,⁸² by that stern thinker and exquisite poet, Wayland Smith; while as to Whitmanism we have been instructed by that ardent

77. The negative terms here are "group" and "hawk," not "propagandist"; "propaganda" lacked the negative connotations it has now.

78. Mystical, quasi-religious movement associated with interests in the occult and supernatural and a commitment to universal brotherhood.

79. A form of Protestantism that became a breeding ground for American transcendentalism, which celebrated the soul's divinity.

80. A popular nineteenth-century movement involving attempts to communicate with the dead (manifested in spirit-rappings, floating tables, etc.), and in many cases a belief in intuitively perceived "spiritual affinities" superior to legal marriage (Scars 7-9).

81. A mildly (at least) satirical term. Although anarchists generally admired Walt Whitman's celebrations of the "body electric," de Cleyre and Goldman joked about those who made him a religion.

82. Author of *Walt Whitman's Unsung Songs* (1898).

exponent and disciple, Thomas Harned⁸³ and right loyally has he spoken for his teacher.

Upon the strangely obscure but terribly important question of the education of children we have been more than interested by that good and gentle woman, Constance McKenzie, Superintendent of the kindergarten of Philadelphia, and not less so by that equally good though not so pleasantly employed lady, Mary O'Reilly,⁸⁴ factory inspector, under whose pitying eye the sorrows of enslaved childhood are daily revealed.

Finally the sex question, more intensely important to us than any other, because of the interdict which generally rests upon it, because of its immediate bearing upon daily life, because of the stupendous mystery of it and the awful consequences of ignorance of it. We have considered the relative positions of the sexes, biologically, ethnologically, historically, economically, politically,—if there is a way we haven't considered them we would like to know it; it would make a good evening. Among the speakers on this all absorbing topic was the brilliant halfbreed, Honore J. Jaxon, one of the leaders of the Riel uprising in 1887, for whose head the British government wants to pay \$10,000.⁸⁵ He told us how the much belied aboriginal woman lived in her aboriginal conditions, in relation to lover and husband as well as in other matters. It isn't altogether satisfactory, but it has the advantage over the whites' system, in that the squaw can at any time she pleases, tap the drum and say to the council, "I here give away Blacktail to whoever wants him." We whites are expected to fee a lawyer first.

The noted woman lawyer, Mrs. Kilgore,⁸⁶ has given us of her eloquence; the bright little journalist, Mrs. Symonds, the strong though quiet Henrietta Westbrook;⁸⁷ the scholarly Miss Craddock, who has made deep researches into ancient symbolism, believes in the possibility of marriage between spirits and mortals, and has been denied a platform

83. A literary executor for Whitman; a Whitman collection at the Library of Congress hears his name.

84. Socialist labor advocate, later active as a publicist for unions in the 1910 Chicago garment workers' strike (Buhl).

85. De Cleyre's anarchist friend Jaxon, a Canadian Métis (here rendered as "halfbreed," not necessarily disrespectful in their day), participant in the Métis rebellion led by Louis Riel.

86. Carrie Sylvester Burnham Kilgore (1838–1909), first woman graduate of the University of Pennsylvania Law School. After fierce struggles, she was admitted to more and more courtrooms, including the U.S. Supreme Court in 1890 (Parker).

87. Author of *The Actor's Child: A Study of Heredity or Anti-natal Influences* (1900); de Cleyre's opponent in the debate on whether "They Who Marry" do well or ill.

by every thin-shelled liberal society in the city, because she thinks that can happen now which every ex-Christian freethinker once devoutly believed did happen nineteen hundred years ago!⁸⁸ Observe how little they are really changed, since they are now as ready to persecute belief as once they were to persecute unbelief.

And there have been others and others and others, after all which others, (enough to make it modest) myself, who always go in as filling, when no one else is available, which is what I am doing at present, please your worships. I trust some well-disposed person will now say something agreeable about the filling of the goose being the best part.

Of course we have put forward all these questions because we, as a society, do stand for equality, without which there is no liberty. Like others our idea of equality is more or less misty; that is, it is a vast principle seen indistinctly in the twilight of dawning perception, whose outlines will become sharply defined bit by bit in the noon-day of experience only. Nevertheless it serves us as a guide. It goes without saying that had we been without this guide we should not have been so impartial. From the orthodox, in or out of an *ism*, you may expect to hear but one side; from us you have a right to expect all sides. So we begged the reactionists to come; and they came in the person of Prof. Cope and the witty *litterateur*, Ralph Raleigh, who hankers deeply after the woman of King Solomon's ideal, who looked well after the household and didn't mix into her husbands club-house affairs, who took what he "provided for her" and made the most of it, who sat near him when he made speeches and wiped her eyes with tearful pride when the audience applauded him, and took him home afterward and put him to bed with a warm toddy, and kept the children quiet so he could sleep, and brought the paper to him so he could read about himself when he woke up, and said "Yes, my dear," when he exclaimed "This reporter is a beast," and "No, my dear," when he declared that "no true woman would ever mix in public matters," and that and that. Mr. Raleigh longs for the good old days, and the ease and restful quiet of the woman who didn't know anything and didn't want anything. Blessed woman! She got precisely what she wanted.

Then Prof. Cope upset our whole kettle of fish by telling us that our bones weren't of the right sort for progress to get inside of them. That's

88. Immaculate conception. This is probably Ida Craddock, a sex reformer hounded by Anthony Comstock, author of the notorious obscenity laws opposed by sex radicals. "Repeatedly arrested . . . for such pamphlets as 'The Wedding Night' and 'Right Marital Living,'" she committed suicide in 1902 rather than return to prison (Scars 262).

bad; that's very bad. Most women can get all around a man in the matter of fixing their skills and eyes and teeth and hair; but bones—bones now are a hard matter to fix. It's just possible though that, because that is the one thing we don't know how to do yet, the men, who don't know how to make one hair look like ten or put a sparkle in a dull eye, or carmine on a shriveled lip the men may have invented the superior advantages of their bones for spite. At any rate we are not convinced, which is perhaps the reason we have borne it so complacently.

Again we have been smitten in the house of our friends, when we least expected it. It's hard to have smiled and smiled and wagged our heads in satisfaction while compliments were being showered on us, only to find in the end that we have been tricked into listening to a humiliating accusation. It has an effect so distressingly like those stories that begin so charmingly in a quaint little log-cabin in the West, picturesquely embowered in sunflowers and corn, and wind up with Warner's Log Cabin Remedies, \$1.25 a bottle! It is aggravating to a degree to hear a person suavely tell us he is the "friend of woman," that every right he has she ought to have, that he hails the bicycle and bloomer with joy,—and then turn and bow and say, "But then, Madam Chairman, a woman always has been, is, and ever shall be two or three degrees behind—*Me*. There are no sudden breaks in evolution; if woman should really advance abreast of men it would overthrow our entire modernized conception of biology, in fact, our entire cosmogony, which is manifestly absurd, I am perfectly willing that women should do whatever they wish, but they will never be able to do anything as well as men. They are hopelessly, irredeemably, everlastingly mediocre." This, I say, is painful. But we have borne with this sort of person too. Are we not liberal?

One more item of history and I proceed to the prophecy. I refer to the recognition, by an annual commemoration, of the life and services of Mary Wollstonecraft, the great pioneer of the woman's equality movement among English speaking people. It is to the discredit of our free-thinking world that while they have set apart a day to recognize the services of Thos. Paine, the friend of Mary Wollstonecraft, they have not thought of giving to this, or any other woman, such recognition. It shows that their pretended equality belief is largely on their lips alone. In this little society we are endeavoring to right that wrong, and to place an illustrious woman's name in the forefront, in its old companionship.

What do we intend to do in the future? Why to *keep on!* To give every creature with a grievance a chance to air it. If there were a poor knock-kneed, spavined, groaning old overworked dray-horse in all Philadelphia

that could talk, we'd have him here to tell us about it. And right sorry I am that such cannot speak! If there is a woman or man in all this country that has a proposition to better things, and can make it intelligible, let him come! If there is a subject tabooed on every other platform as dangerous, let it walk up.

Strangers, come, give us your hands; be one of us; read our books, or rather the books of the **R**adical Library;—the tax is small and the gain great. You will find poets, historians, novelists, economists, back there, a glorious company. Go make their acquaintance.

To the L. L. L. you may be admitted without money or price. Give what you are able and disposed; we have no dues. We open our doors, our hands, our hearts to you, and to the future.

Strange feet are coming down the pathway of the dawn; flitting shadows cross the early streaks of light. An east wind is blowing. The weather-wise say that it brings storm. Perhaps. Heavy mutterings have for some time been heard. Let us then, who are for liberty, form here a circle of comradeship that no storm can break.

The Case of Woman vs. Orthodoxy⁸⁹

1896

"I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children, and thy desire shall be unto thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."⁹⁰ Thus descended the anathema from the voice which thundered upon Sinai; and thus has the curse gone echoing from away back there in the misty darkness before the morning of history rose upon men. Sorrow, sorrow, sorrow—and oh! how many million voices wail, wail endlessly. "Sorrow is my portion and pain is my burden; for so it was decreed of the Lord God, the Lord God who ruleth and whose creature am I. But oh, the burden is heavy, very heavy. I have been patient; I have borne it long; I have not complained; I have not rebelled; if I have wept, it has been at night and alone; if I have stumbled, I have gone on the faster. When I have lain down in the desert and closed my eyes and known no more, I have rebuked myself. I have remembered my mother, and been patient and waited, waited. But the waiting is very long."⁹¹

This is the cry of the woman heard in the night of the long ages; ghost-forms flitting through the abyss, ghost-hands wrung in the ancient darkness come close and are laid upon the living, and the mournful cadence is reintoned from the dead by the quick,⁹² and the mournful, hopeless superstition which bound the hearts and the souls of our foremothers, lengthens out [its] weary chain and binds us, too. Why it should be so, why it has done so for so long, is one of the mysteries which a sage of the future may solve, but not I. I can see no reason, absolutely none, why women have clung to the doom of the gods. I cannot understand why they have not rebelled. I cannot imagine what they ever hoped to gain by

89. See pp. 102–5. Source: *Boston Investigator* 66.24 (Sept. 18, 1896): 1–3. Annie Laurie Gaylor points out that Easter was apparently the occasion of this lecture on woman's subordinate place in Christian orthodoxy (364).

90. Gen. 3:16 (see chapter 3 on feminist analyses of this passage in de Cleary's day).

91. Not a quotation, but an imagined monologue uttered by millions of women.

92. The living.

it, that they should have watered their footsteps with tears, and borne their position with such abnegation. It is true that we are often offered explanations, and much force may be in them, but these explanations may serve only to account for the position. They do not account for woman's centurian⁹³ acceptance of, and resignation to, it. Women are, we know, creatures of their environments, the same as are men; and they react on their environment in proportion to their capacities.

We know that women are not now, and, with some few tribal exceptions, probably never were, as strong as men are physically. But why in common sense sorrow should therefore be their lot, and their husbands should rule over them, and why they should uncomplainingly accept this regime, is one of the, to me, incomprehensible phenomena of human history. Men, enslaved, have, to speak expressively, "kicked"—kicked vigorously, even when the kicking brought to them heavier chains; but we have never, till very recently, had anything like a revolt of women. They have bowed, and knelt and kissed the hand which smote them. Why? Notwithstanding all of its pretensions to be the uplifter and the glorifier of women, there never has been, there never will be, anything for them in orthodoxy but slavery. And whether that slavery be of the sordid, gloomy, leaden, work-a-day sort or of the gilded toy-shop variety, whether it be the hard toil and burden of workwomen or the canary-bird style of the upper classes, who neither toil nor spin, the undertone and the overtone are still the same: "Be in subjection; for such is the Lord's will." In order to maintain this ideal of the relation of master and of subject between men and women, a different method of education, a different code of morals and a different sphere of exertion were mapped out for women, because of their sex, without reference to individual qualifications. As a horse is designed to draw wheels because it is a horse, so have women been allotted certain tasks, mostly menial, because they are women. The majority of men actually hold to that analogy, and without in the least believing themselves tyrannical or meddlesome, conceived themselves to be justified in making a tremendous row if the horse attempted to get over the traces.

That splendid old veteran of Freethought, George Jacob Holyoake,⁹⁴ in a recent article, one of a series now running in the *Open Court*, has pertinently observed that the declaration that thought is by its very

93. Century-long.

94. George Jacob Holyoake (1817–1906), English secularist, leader in the co-op movement, last person imprisoned under British blasphemy laws ("Holyoake").

essence free is an error, because as long as speech, which is the necessary tool of thought, is not free, the intellect is as much hampered in its effort to think as a shoemaker without tools is in attempting to make a pair of shoes. By this same method, viz., the denial of the means of altering it, was the position of woman maintained, by subordinating her physical development to what was called delicacy, which *ought* to have been called by its proper name, *weakness*, by inculcating a scheme of morals which made obedience the first virtue, suppression of the will in deference to her husband (or father, or brother, or, failing these, her nearest male relative) the first deduction therefrom, by a plan of education which omitted all of those branches of knowledge which require the application of reason and of judgment, by all of these deprivals of the tools of thinking the sphere was circumscribed and guarded well. And by the penalties inflicted for the breaking through of these prescriptions, whether said penalties were legal or purely social and voluntary, the little spirit which was left in woman by these limitations was almost hopelessly broken. It is apparent, therefore, that if in all these ages of submission women have hopelessly accepted that destiny, if they have never tried to break these forbidding barriers, they will not do so now, with all of their added centuries of inheritance, unless the relentless iron of circumstances drives them across. (Later, it will be my endeavor to show that this iron is already pressing down).

It may not be flattering to have this conviction thrust upon us; but it may be less disagreeable if I explain what I mean. In former times, when people trod upon the toes of gods every time they turned about, moral ideals and social ideals were looked upon as things in themselves descended from on high, the gift of the gods, Divine patterns laid down without reference to climate, to race, to social development, or to other material things, matters of the soul without relation to bodily requirements. But now that gods speaking the tongues of men have vanished like vapors at sunrise, it is necessary, since it is evident that morality of some sort exists everywhere out of very different sorts under different conditions, to find some explanation of these psychic phenomena correlated with the explanation of physical phenomena. For souls are no longer perceived as monarchs of [bodies] laying down all manner of laws for the bringing into subjection of the physical members, but rather soul, or mind, or whatever name may be given to the psychological aspect of the bundle called an ego, is one with the body, subject to growth, to expansion and to decay, adapting itself seasonably to time and to circumstances, modified always by material conditions, intimately con-

nected with the stomach, indissolubly related to the weather, to the crops, and to all other baldly commonplace things. In contemplating this revised version of the soul one will, according to the bent of one's nature, regard this view as a descent from spiritual height, rendering things coarse and gross, or, on the other hand, he will see all things clothed in the glory of superb equality, he will not say: "I am sunken to the indignity of a cabbage," but "this common plant is my brother and, the brother of things greater than I, serving equally well his part; there is no *more or less, smaller or greater*; Life is common to us all."

Now, therefore, upon this basis, the basis of the perpetual relation between physical foundations and ethical superstructure, it is seen that if this be an acting principle now, so it has ever been, and will be as long as mind and matter constitute reality. Hence the ethics said to have been delivered by Jehovah upon Sinai was truly the expression of social ideas compatible with the existing physical conditions. Not less so the ethics of bees, of ants, or birds, and of the Fiji Islanders; and not less so the ethics of to-day, which, despite the preservation of the outward shell of the decalogue, are indeed vastly changed.

The conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing in regard to the status of woman is this:—Material conditions determine the social relations of men and women; and if material conditions are such as to make these relations impossible of maintenance, they will be compelled to assume others. This is the explanation of the expression, "driven across the barriers." What no amount of unseasonable preaching can accomplish material necessity will force even in the face of sermons to the contrary. Not that I undervalue the service of the advance guard, the preaching of new thought. On the contrary, the first and best praise is due to the "voice crying in the wilderness." And I say that such a voice is the first faint vibration of the world-soul in response to the unease of world-body created by the shifting of conditions, whether it so proclaims or not, whether it cries wisely or not. I say that those who call for the breaking of the barriers will always precede the general action of the masses; but I add that were it not for the compulsion of material necessity the preaching would be barren. What I wish to express in order to illustrate my point clearly is, first, that the orthodox view of the ethics of woman's relations and her social usefulness was a view compatible with a tribal organization, narrow geographical limits, the reign of muscular force, the necessity of rapid reproduction; second, that those conditions have given place to others demanding an utterly different human translation.

Before the invention of the means of transportation, when, according to the story, it took forty years for the Israelites to explore a tract some three hundred miles in length (though one may perhaps venture to credit them with better time than they credit themselves with), when, at any rate, a high mountain was a serious obstacle and a good-sized river a natural boundary for tribal wanderings, people were necessarily very ignorant of the outside world. Within the limits valuable pasture and farm lands were debatable grounds, debatable by different tribes, in terms of hue and cry, of slungshot and arrows, and other such arguments. War was a constant condition, the chief occupation of men. Now we who are evolutionists know that those tribes and species survived in the world which obeyed the fundamental necessity of adaptation; and it is easy to see that with a rapid rate of mortality and a non-correspondent rate of increase a tribe must have rapidly gone to the wall. Any nation which might have put its mothers up in battle would have been weeded out simply because the part played by the mother in reproduction requires so much longer a period than that played by the father. To produce warriors—that was the chief purpose of a woman's existence! Nothing in herself, she became everything when regarded as the race preserver. Therein lay her great usefulness; and in reading the sometimes nauseating accounts of the behavior of women in ancient times in Judah, the phase of human development in its entirety should be borne in mind. The mothers of Isaac and of Ishmael, Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah, the daughters of Lot, should never be viewed from the standpoint of nineteenth century morals, but from that of the tribal organization and the tribal necessities, which forced upon them the standard of "Multiply and replenish the earth"⁹⁵ as the highest possible conception of conduct.

Yet, singular to observe, co-existent with this very ideal and with the very polygamous practices of the patriarchs, are found records of the most horrible punishments inflicted upon women for the breaking of the seventh commandment. As may be seen in the story of Tamar and Judah, the punishment to be inflicted upon her was burning alive, though nothing is said of Judah's. The Talmud has many accounts of tests by "the bitter water" for women, while men were subjected to nothing more than a fine. [() Bitter water was simply poisoned water; the innocent were supposed not to be injured, the guilty to fall dead in the

95. The command given to the first man and woman by God in Gen. 1:28: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it."

marketplace, exposed to the public gaze). Nevertheless, such was the stringent necessity for rapid reproductions [*sic*] that women defied danger and instinctively continued to fulfill that race-purpose, though the law of Moses, already codifying the conditions of peace (not as yet existent), recognized war and its accompaniments as transient, and giving place to a stricter moral behavior.

As I said before, I do not perceive for the life of me what the women saw in all of this for them; I don't see why they should have been interested in the tribal welfare at all, or in the dreary business of bearing sons for other women's sons to slay. But since the war-environment was the one under which they were born and reared, since no other purpose for them had ever been thought of, by either the dead or the living, it is not surprising that they did not see matters at all as I do. Nowadays, that the majority of English and of French speaking peoples at least see that the requisite ethics is the *limitation of population* within the means of subsistence, these direct descendants of the Judaic ideal are subject rather to a jest among the enlightened of their own race. Thus Zangwill,⁹⁶ in the "Children of the Ghetto,["] puts this speech in the mouth of one of the Jewish grandmothers: "How is Fanny?" inquired the visitor. "Ah, poor Pesach! He has never done well in business! But blessed be He. I am soon to have my seventh grand-child." How fearfully potent is the force of heredity may thus be seen, since to this day these women walk through your streets, wan, faded, humped, distorted, hideous women—women all bone and jaw and flabby flesh, grotesque shadows from the past, creatures once trim and beautiful, but whose beauty went long ago to fulfill the order of the Lord of Sinai.

The primal division of labor is thus seen to have been one of sex. The business of men was to fight, of women to produce fighters. To men were the arts of war; to women were those of peace. Later in the time of Solomon, when material conditions among the Jews had already altered, we see the effect of the continuance of this division beyond the epoch which created it. Already monadism [nomadism] has been abandoned; and the settled mode of life has been begun. The conditions of war, though still often maintaining, bore no comparison to former prevalence; and the aforeward warrior was hence frequently idle.⁹⁷ Was it thus with woman? Oh, no,

96. Israel Zangwill (1864–1926), author of *Children of the Ghetto: A Study of a Peculiar People* (1892).

97. Like some other sentences in this essay, this one seems uncharacteristically strained and pedantic, perhaps a sign of a heavy editorial hand.

Men may come and men may go,
But she goes on forever⁹⁸
With her work.

Listen to this delectable account in Solomon, said to be the opinion of King Lemuel concerning a truly blessed woman; behold how her duties have gone on increasing. 'Tis the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs; and let no one with an appreciation of the humorous miss it. It begins rather inconsequently with something about wine-drinking, and runs into the question at issue in the tenth verse; just why, no one is able to understand. It bears no relation to what has preceded it. Here it is:

"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies." (You'll be convinced of that before you've done;—diamonds either.)

"The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil." (They don't generally need much of that if Lemuel means the sort of "spoil" which most modern husbands get.)

"She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life." (That's in general; what follows is specific.)

"She seeketh flax and wool and worketh willingly with her hands." (So much for clothes; victuals now.)

"She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth food from afar." (Goes where she can get it cheap, of course.)

["]She riseth also while it is night, and giveth meat to her household and a portion to her maidens." (Careful that they should not overeat and get sluggish. It is well to keep the girls tolerably hungry if you want them up before daylight.)

"She considereth a field and buyeth it; with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard." (Trades, too, see?)

"She girdeth her loins with strength and strengtheneth her arms." (Nowadays she'd do that with a bicycle⁹⁹ instead of a plow.)

"She perceiveth that her merchandise is good; her candle goeth not out by night." (That means that she works all night, too; for she wouldn't burn candles for nothing, being economical.)

"She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff." (The woman is all hands!)

98. Tennyson, "The Brook": "For men may come and men may go, / But I go on forever."

99. Bicycling for women was touted by feminists as physically and mentally liberating (Larrabee).

"She stretcheth out her hands to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy." (Hands again!)

"She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet." (How Mephistophelian the whole household must have seemed.)

"She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple." (The woman must have had forty days in a month and thirteen months in a year.)

"Her husband is known in the gates when he sitteth among the elders of the land." (I thought that he'd be up somewhere about the gates! I thought that he wouldn't be having much to do but sit with the elders! I thought that he'd not be stopping about the house much!)

"She maketh fine linen and selleth it, and delivereth girdles unto the merchant." (I should think that she might send him around delivering.)

"Strength and honor are her clothing, and she shall rejoice in time to come." (There is certainly not much chance for her to rejoice in the time which has already come.)

"She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness." (Verily, I should have expected her to be shrewish.)

"She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness." (This paragraph was unnecessary; we had reached that conclusion before.)

"Her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her." (Well, in all conscience, 'tis as little as he could do; and he ought to do it well, since there is a deal of fine rhetoric usually going about among the elders and around the gates; and he has plenty of leisure to "get onto it.")

"Many daughters have done virtuously; but thou excellest them all." ("Sure.")

"Favor is deceitful and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised." (That is to console her for getting ugly with all of that work.)

"Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates." Oh, thou who has bought and planted and reaped and sold, spun and woven and girdled and clothed, risen and travelled and gathered and given, borne all, done all, ordered all, saved all, we will *"give thee of the fruit of thy hands,"* and prate about it up at the gates! Verily, verily, the woman is far above rubies.

But alas for Lemuel and for Solomon, conditions then were also mutable. And perhaps a friend of mine who has expressed herself upon this

passage, is right in her judgment that, as men never exalt a thing until it is beginning to wane and to vanish away, therefore it must have been that this sort of woman was on the decrease before Solomon began to repeat Lemuel. It does not lie within the scope of my lecture to trace the economic development which multiplied the diversion of labor, creating classes having separate and conflicting political interests, which will continue to clash until the process has either, by being pushed to its extremity, destroyed itself and reaccomplished independent production, or until some more correct political solution be found than any at present existing. What I wish to observe is merely that up to the dawn of the Revolutionary period this manifold splitting of humanity's occupations did not affect the primal division of the complementary labors of the sexes. Within the limits set by the original division, however, classes did arise. Among women these classes were principally two; the overworked drudges of the poor, and the pampered daughters of wealth. Is it [It is] not possible to say whose condition was the most lamentable. For to both was still maintained by preacher, by teacher, by lawyer and by doctor the old decree: "Thy husband shall rule over thee." Of the latter class there were but few previous to the Revolution. The rugged condition of pioneer life in the New World afforded small opportunity for the growth of a purely parasite class; that has arisen since. But in the Old World the women of the landed aristocracy, as likewise those of the developing mercantile class, constituted, though not a majority, yet a good percentage of the whole sex. So large a portion, in fact, that a whole stock of literature, which might have been labelled, "The Gospel of Jesus specially adapted to the use of society women," arose and flourished; preachers busied themselves with it; doctors wrote scores of verses on the preservation of beauty and the delicacy of the lazy; rhetoricians frilled and furbelowed the human toy by way of exercising their art; lawyers rendered learned opinions upon "lovely woman"—they all took their turn and they all did her a bad turn. The entire science of life, as laid down in this literature for these women, was to make husband-traps of themselves. Their home training and their educational facilities were in line therewith. Nothing solid, nothing to develop or even to awaken the logical faculties, everything to develop the petty and the frivolous. The art of dressing, the tricks of assumed modesty, the degradation of intellect by continually curbing and straining it in to fit the patterns of God and of his servants—that the servants said that is was God's pattern [*sic*—that the servants *said*, that is, was God's pattern]—such was the feminine code.

About this time there arose the protest which conditions were bound

to force. It was all very well for the dumb drudges and the well-fed toys; but society has ever between its extremes a middle product which fits in nowhere. This is recruited from both sides, but, at that time, mostly from the upper classes being squeezed down into the ranks of the non-possessors. There were women, daughters of the formerly well-to-do, incapable of the very laborious life of the lowly, unable to reascend to their former superior position; upon these were forced the necessity of self-support. Most of them regarded it as a hard and bitter lot, and something to be ashamed of. Even literature, now considered a very fine source of support for women, was then a thing for a woman to keep still about if she engaged in it. The proper thing to do was to lay hold of on [an] honorary sort of husband, support one's self and him, and pretend that he did it. So disgraceful was social usefulness in woman! Such was the premium on worthlessness!

Now, out of this class one who did not do the proper thing, one who protested against the whole scheme arose,—the woman whose name many now delight to honor as the author of the “Vindication of the Rights of Woman,”—Mary Wollstonecraft. One of her biographers, Mrs Pennel, states that she was the first woman in England who openly followed literature as a means of livelihood. (It is worthy of note that Mr. Jonson,¹⁰⁰ her employer, was one of the Freethinkers of the time, Paine's printer, as well as Mary Wollstonecraft's.)

Nowadays the idea conveyed by the expression, “Women's Rights” is the idea of casting a ballot. Then it meant the right to be treated as serious beings having some faint claim to comprehension. The orthodox code never had, never has, admitted, and never will admit, anything of the kind until it is forced to do so. It is not surprising, therefore, to know that this woman was not orthodox. She found out that if ever a woman expected to have rights she must first pitch the teachings of the priests overboard. And not only priests, but their co-adjutors, men of the scientific “cloth” indeed,¹⁰¹ who see that priestcraft is all wrong for them, but all right for women—men who hunt scientific justifications for keeping up the orthodox standard.

For a long time the seed sown by the author of the “Rights of Women” [*sic*—Woman] lay on seemingly barren ground; and the great prophet of

100. Joseph Johnson, late-eighteenth-century publisher of such radical writers as Wollstonecraft, Paine, and William Blake.

101. I.e., men cut from the same cloth, a joke on “men of the cloth,” a common term for the clergy.

the coming woman was, as usual, maligned, travestied, hissed and hooted, save by the select few. The reason for this is now apparent. Conditions had not so far developed as to create a *class* of women having none to depend upon except themselves; there were only sporadic specimens here and there, thence the old traditions fortified by the ancient possibilities remained firm. But now that the irresistible tide of economic development is driving women out of the corner wherein they lay drifted for so many thousand years, the case is different. And I, for one, bless the hour when a stinging lash drove women forth into the industrial arena. I know that it is the habit of our labor reformers to bewail the fact that men can no longer “support their wives and their daughters”; it is held up as the chief iniquity of the capitalist that he has broken up the poor man’s family life; the “queen,” poor tinsel queen, has been taken from her realm, the home, into the factory. But while I credit the capitalist with no better motive than that of buying in the cheapest market, I bless him from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot for this unintended good. This iron-shod heel has crushed the shell of “woman’s sphere”;¹⁰² and the wings will grow—never fear, they will grow. No one will accuse me of loving the horrors of modern society, no one will suppose that I want them to continue for one moment after the hour when it is possible to be rid of them. I know all of the evils resultant to woman from the factory system; I would not prolong them. But I am glad that by these very horrors, these gigantic machines which give to me the nightmare with their jaws and teeth, these monstrous buildings bare and many-windowed, stretching skyward, brick, hard and loveless, which daily swallow and spew out again thousands upon thousands of frail lives, each day a little frailer, weaker, more exhausted, these unhealthy, man-eating traps which I cannot see blotting the ground and the sky without itching to tear down, by these very horrors women have learned to be socially useful and economically independent—as much so as men are. The basis of independence and of individuality is bread. As long as wives take bread from husbands because they are not capable of getting it in any other way, so long will the decree obtain: “Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee,” so long will all talk about political “rights” be empty vagaries, hopeless crying against the wind.

102. The doctrine that men and women had completely separate “spheres,” with women’s being exclusively domestic, was a linchpin of nineteenth-century gender ideology.

There are those who contend that once the strain and the stress of commercialism are over, women will resume their ancient position, “natural,” they call it, of child nurses and home-keepers, being ruled and protected. I say, no: the broken chain will never be re-forged. No more “spheres,” no more stops or lets or hindrances. I do not say that women will not be nurses and home-keepers at all; but I *do* say that they will not be such because they have to, because any priest so reads the ancient law—because any social prejudice checks them and forces them into it rather than allowing full, free development of natural bent. I say that the factory is laughing at the church; and the modern woman, who grasps her own self-hood, is laughing at the priest. I say that the greater half of the case of Orthodoxy *vs.* Woman is won—by woman; through pain, and misery and sweat of brow and ache of hand, as all things worth winning are won. I don’t mean that nothing remains to be done; there is as much in pursuing a victory as in winning it in the first place. But the citadel is taken—the right of self-maintenance—and all else must follow.

From the aforesaid sterile ground the seeds are springing green. This is the season to pluck life from the tombs, the time of transfiguration when every scar upon the earth changes to glory, when before the eyes of man appears that miracle, of which all traditions of resurrection and of ascension are but faint, dim images, figures passing over the glass of the human mind, the projection of man’s effort to identify himself with the All of Nature. This miracle, this blooming of the mold, this shooting of green peas where all was brown and barren, this resurrection of the sunken snow in tree-crowns, these workings, these responses to the knocking of the sunlight, these comings forth from burial, these rendings of shrouds, these ascensions from the graves, these flutterings, these swift, winged shadows passing, these tremolos high up in the atmosphere,—is it possible to feel all of this miracle and not to dream? Is it possible not to hope? The very fact that every religion has some kind of symbolic festival about the returning time of the spring, proves that man, too, felt the upspringing in his breast—whether he rightly translates it or not, ’tis sure that he felt it, like all organic things. And whether it be the festival of a risen Christ, or of the passage of Judah from the bondage of Egypt, or the old Pagan worship of light, ’tis ever the same—the celebration of the breaking of bonds. We, too, may allow ourselves the poetic dream. Abroad in the April sunlight we behold in every freedom-going spark the risen dead—the flame which burned in the souls of Hypatia, Mary Wollstonecraft, Frances Wright, Ernestine L. Rose, Harriet Mar-

tineau, Lucretia Mott, that grand old negress, Sojourner Truth, our own brave old Lucy N. Colman,¹⁰³ and all of the beloved unknown whose lives ingrafted on the race what *their* tongues spoke. We, too, proclaim the Resurrection.

103. A distinguished list of feminist foremothers, all freethinkers noted for self-assertive iconoclasm: Hypatia (ca. 370–415 C.E.), ancient Greek philosopher; Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), English author of the feminist manifesto *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*; Frances Wright (1795–1852), Scottish-born abolitionist, advocate of women's rights, birth control, and secular education; Ernestine Rose (1810–1892), Polish-born abolitionist and suffrage advocate who sparked reforms in women's property rights; Harriet Martineau (1802–1876), English founder of the sociological study of women's condition, including domestic violence; Lucretia Mott (1793–1880), American abolitionist, an organizer of the 1848 Seneca Falls women's rights convention; Sojourner Truth (c. 1797–1893), ex-slave, orator, abolitionist, woman's rights activist famous for her "Ain't I a woman?" speech; Lucy Colman, abolitionist, women's rights advocate, education reformer.

The Woman Question¹⁰⁴

1897

(From a lecture delivered in Scotland.)

“A section of Anarchists say there is no ‘Women Question,’ apart from our present industrial situation. But the assertion is mostly made by men, and men are not the fittest to feel the slaveries of women. Scientists argue that the nutritive functions of society are best performed by the male—the reproductive by the female, the food finding is done away from, the rearing of children at, home; and if woman enters the industrial arena she will suffer in her distinctive powers. Amongst the working-classes this is not so, as the women work hard at home duties, and sometimes take in sewing, or go out washing for other people. Woman’s domestic work is the most ill-paid labour in the world. Marriage is not in the interest of women. ‘It is a pledge from the marrying man to the male half of society (women are not counted in the State), that he will not shirk his responsibilities upon them[’]! Marriage is discredited, by its results as well as by its origin. Men may not mean to be tyrants when they marry, but they frequently grow to be such. It is insufficient to dispense with the priest or registrar. The spirit of marriage makes for slavery. Women are becoming more and more engaged in industry. ‘This means that other doors are open to her than the door of menial service. It also means that just as men have developed individuality, because of their being thrown into all sorts of employment and conditions,’ so likewise will women. And with the development of diversity will come the irrepressible desire for its expression, and by consequence the necessity of such material conditions as will permit that expression.

“The unattainability of quietude in the ordinary home militates against such conditions, whilst the ‘abominably uneconomical’ way in which the work is done—being on an infinitesimally small scale a laun-

104. Source: *Herald of Revolt* (London) 3.8 (Sept. 1913): 108.

dry, bakery, lodging-house, restaurant, and nursery rolled into one—also doom the home. ‘With, however, the introduction of ideas bound to follow the introduction of female labour into industrialism, the home in its present form must go. . . . meanwhile, I would strongly advise every woman contemplating sexual union of any kind, never to live together with the man you love, in the sense of renting a house or rooms, and becoming his housekeeper.’ [Ellipsis in original.]

“As to the children, seeing the number of infants who die, the alarm is rather hypocritical; but, ignoring this consideration, ‘first of all it should be the business of women to study sex, and control parentage—never to have a child unless you want it, and never to want it (selfishly, for the pleasure of having a pretty plaything), unless you, yourself alone, are able to provide for it.’

“Men, on the other hand, may contribute to their children’s support: but in virtue of this support being voluntary they would be put into a position where their opportunity of having anything to say in the management of the children would depend on their good behaviour.”

The Heart of Angiolillo¹⁰⁵

After 1897

Some women are born to love stories as the sparks fly upward. You see it every time they glance at you, and you feel it every time they lay a finger on your sleeve. There was a party the other night, and a four-year old baby who couldn't sleep for the noise crept down into the parlor half frightened to death and transfixed with wonderment at the crude performances of an obtuse visitor who was shouting out the woes of Othello. One kindly little woman took the baby in her arms and said: "What would they do to you, if you made all that noise."—"Whip me," whispered the child, her round black eyes half admiration and half terror, and altogether coquettish, as she hid and peered round the woman's neck. And every man in the room forthwith fell in love with her, and wanted to smother his face in the bewitching rings of dark hair that crowned the dainty head, and carry her about on his shoulders, or get down on his hands and knees to play horse for her, or let her walk on his neck, or obliterate his dignity in any other way she might prefer. The boys tolerated their fathers with a superior "huh!" Fourteen or fifteen years from now they will be playing the humble cousin of the horse before the same little ringed-haired lady, and having sported Nick Bottom's ears¹⁰⁶ to no purpose, half a dozen or so will go off and hang themselves, or turn monk, or become "bold, bad men," and revenge themselves on the sex. But her conquests will go on, and when those gracious rings are white as snow the children of those boys will follow in their grandfathers' and fathers' steps and dangle after her, and make drawings on their fly leaves of that sweet kiss-cup of a mouth of hers, and call her their elder sister, and other devotional names. And the other girls of her generation, who were not born with that marvelous entangling grace

105. See pp. 109-15, 214-15. Source: *SW* 420-32.

106. In Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the queen of the fairies makes an ass of Nick Bottom by giving him a donkey's head and pretending to love him.

in every line and look, will dread her and spite her, and feel mean satisfaction when some poor fool does swallow laudanum¹⁰⁷ on her account. Smiles of glacial virtue will creep over their faces like slippery sunshine, when one by one her devotees come trailing off to them to say that such a woman could never fill a man's heart nor become the ornament of his hearthstone; the quiet virtues that wear, are all their desire; of course they have just been studying her character and that of the foolish men who dance her attendance, but even those are not doing it with any serious motives. And the neglected girls will serve him with home-made cake and wine which he will presently convert into agony¹⁰⁸ in that pearl shell ear of hers. And all the while the baby will have done nothing but be what she was born to be through none of her own choosing, which is her lot and portion; and that is another thing the gods will have to explain when the day comes that they go on trial before men; which is the real day of judgment.

But this isn't the baby's story, which has yet to be made, but the story of one who somehow received a wrong portion. Some inadvertent little angel in the destiny shop took down her name when the heroine of a romance was called for, and put her where she shouldn't have been, and then ran off to play no doubt, not stopping to look twice. For even the most insouciant angel that looked twice would have seen that Effie was no woman to play the game of hearts, and there's only one thing more undiscerning than an angel, and that is a social reformer. Effie ran up against both.

They say she had blood in her girlhood, that it shone red and steady through that thin, pure skin of hers; but when I saw her, with her nursing baby in her arms, down in the smutching grime of London, there was only a fluctuant blush, a sort of pink ghost of blood, hovering back and forth on her face. And that was for shame of the poverty of her neat bare room. Not that she had ever known riches. She was the daughter of Scotch peasants, and had gone out to service when she was still a child; her chest was hollowed in and her back bowed with that unnatural labor. There was no gloss on the pale sandy hair, no wilding tendrils clinging round the straight smooth forehead, no light of coquetry or grace in the glimmering blue eyes, no beauty in her at all, unless it lay in the fine, hard sculptured line of her nose and mouth and chin when she turned her head sideways. You could read in that line that having spoken a word

107. Opium, available as a medicine.

108. I.e., into the agonized pleadings of love.

to her heart, she would not forget it nor unsay it; and if it took her down into Gethsemane,¹⁰⁹ she would never cry out though by all forsaken.

And that was where it had taken her then. Some ready condemner of all that has been tried for less than a thousand years, will say it was because she had the just reward of those who, holding that love is its own sanction and that it cannot be anything but degraded by seeking permissions from social authorities, live their love lives without the consent of Church and State. But you and I know that the same dark garden has awaited the woman whose love has been blessed by both, and that many such a life lamp has flickered out in a night as profound as poverty and utter loneliness could make it. So if it was justice to Effie, what is it to that other woman? In truth, justice had nothing to do with it; she loved the wrong man, that was all; and married or unmarried, it would have been the same, for a formula doesn't make a man, nor the lack of it unmake him. The fellow was superior in intellect. It is honesty only which can wring so much from those who knew them both, for as to any other thing she sat as high over him as the stars are. Not that he was an actively bad man; just one of those weak, uncertain, tumbling about characters, having sense enough to know it is a fine thing to stand alone, and vanity enough to want the name without the game, and cowardice enough to creep around anything stronger than itself, and hang there, and spread itself about, and say, "Lo, how straight am I!" And if the stronger thing happens to be a father or a brother or some such tolerant piece of friendly, self-sufficient energy, he amuses himself awhile, and finally gives the creeper a shake and says, "Here, now, go hang on somebody else if you can't stand alone", and the world says he should have done it before. But if it happens to be a mother or a sister or a wife or a sweetheart, she encourages him to think he is a wonderful person, that all she does is really his own merit, and she is proud and glad to serve him. If after a while she doesn't exactly believe it any more, she says and does the same; and the world says she is a fool,—which she is. But if, in some sudden spurt of masculine self-assertiveness, she decides to fling him off, the world says she is an unwomanly woman,—which again she is; so much the better.

Effie's creeper dabbled in literature. He wanted to be a translator and several other things. His appearance was mild and gentlemanly, even super-modest. He always spoke respectfully of Effie, and as if momen-

109. The Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus wept and prayed the night of the arrest leading to his crucifixion.

tously impressed with a sense of duty towards her. They had started out to realize the free life together, and the glory of the new ideal had beckoned them forward. So no doubt he believed, for a pretender always deceives himself worse than anybody else. But still, at that particular period, he used to droop his head wearily and admit that he had made a great mistake. It was nobody's fault but his own, but of course—Effie and he were hardly fitted for each other. She could not well enter into his hopes and ambitions, never having had the opportunity to develop when she was younger. He had hoped to stimulate her in that direction, but he feared it was too late. So he said in a delicate and gentlemanly way, as he went from one house to the other, and was invited to dinner and supper and made himself believe he was looking for work. Effie, meanwhile, was taking home boys' caps to make, and worrying along incredibly on bread and tea, and walking the streets with the baby in her arms when she had no caps to make.

Of course when a man drinks other people's teas a great many times, and sits in their houses, and borrows odd shillings now and then, and assumes the gentleman, he is ultimately brought to the necessity of asking some one to tea with him; so one spring night the creeper approached Effie rather dubiously with the statement that he had asked two or three acquaintances to come in the next evening, and he supposed she would need to prepare tea. The girl was just fainting from starvation then, and she asked him wearily where he thought she was to get it. He cast about a while in his pusillanimous way for things that *she* might do, and finally proposed that she pawn the baby's dress,—the white dress she had made from one of her own girlhood dresses, and the only thing it had to wear when she took it out for air. That was the limit, even for Effie. She said she would take anything of her own if she had it, but not the baby's; and she turned her face to the wall and clung to the child.

When the tea-time came next day she went out with the baby and walked up and down the surging London streets looking in the windows and crushing back tears. What the creeper did with his guests she never knew, for she did not return till long after dusk, when she was too weary to wander any more, and she found no one there but himself and a dark stranger, who spoke little and with an Italian accent, but who measured her with serious, intense eyes. He listened to the creeper, but he looked at her; she was quite fagged out and more bloodless than ever as she sat motionless on the edge of the bed. When he went away he lifted his hat to her with the grace of an old time courtier, and begged her pardon if he had intruded. Some days after that he came in again, and brought a

toy for the baby, and asked her if he might carry the child out a little for her; it looked sickly shut up there, but he knew it must be heavy for her to carry. The creeper suddenly discovered that he could carry the baby.

All this happened in the days when a pious queen sat on the throne of Spain. With eyes turned upward in much holiness, she failed to see the things done in her prisons, or hear the groans that rose up from the "zero" chamber in the fortress of Montjuich, though all Europe heard, and even in America the echo rang. While she told her beads her minister gave the order to "torture the Anarchists"; and scarred with red-hot irons, maimed and deformed and maddened with the nameless horrors that the good devise to correct the bad, even unto this day the evidences of that infamous order live. But two men do not live,—the one who gave the order, and the one who revenged it.

It happened one night, in April, that Effie and the creeper and their sometime visitor met all three in one of those long low smothering London halls where many movements have originated, which in their developed proportions have taken possession of the House of Commons, and even stirred the dust in the House of Lords. There was a crowd of excited people talking all degrees of sense and nonsense in every language of the continent. Letters smuggled from the prison had been received; new tales of torture were passing from mouth to mouth; fresh propositions to arouse a general protest from civilization were bubbling up with the anger of every indignant man and woman. Drifting to the buzzing knots Effie heard some one translating: it was the letter of the tortured Noguès, who a month later was shot beneath the fortress wall. The words smote her ears like something hot and stinging:

"You know I am one of the three accusers (the other two are Ascheri and Molas)¹¹⁰ who figure in the trial. I could not bear the atrocious tortures of so many days. On my arrest I spent eight days without food or drink, obliged to walk continually to and fro or be flogged; and as if that did not suffice, I was made to trot as though I were a horse trained at the riding school, until worn with fatigue I fell to the ground. Then the hangmen burnt my lips with red-hot irons, and when I declared myself the author of the attempt they replied, 'You do not tell the truth. We know that the author is another one, but we want to know your accomplices. Besides you still retain six bombs, and along with little Oller you deposited two bombs in the Rue Fivaller. Who are your accomplices?'

"In spite of my desire to make an end of it I could not answer any-

110. See the introduction to this section.

thing. Whom should I accuse since all are innocent? Finally six comrades were placed before me, whom I had to accuse, and of whom I beg pardon. Thus the declarations and the accusations that I made.

. . . I cannot finish; the hangmen are coming.

Noguès."

Sick with horror Effie would have gone away, but her feet were like lead. She heard the next letter, the pathetic prayer of Sebastian Sunyer, indistinctly; the tortures had already seared her ears, but the crying for help seemed to go up over her head like great sob; she felt herself washed round, sinking, in the desperate pain of it. The piteous reiteration, "Listen you with your honest hearts," "you with your pure souls," "good and right-minded people," "good and right-feeling people," wailed through her like the wild pleading of a child who, shrieking under the whip "Dear papa, good, sweet papa, please don't whip me, please, please," seeks terror-wrung flattery to escape the lash. The last cry, "Aid us in our helplessness; think of our misery," made her quiver like a reed. She walked away and sat down in a corner alone; what could she do, what could anyone do? Miserable creature that she was herself, her own misery seemed so worthless beside that prison cry. And she thought on, "Why does he want to live at all, why does any one want to live, why do I want to live myself?"

After a while the creeper and his friend came to her, and the latter sat down beside her, undemonstrative as usual. At the next buzz in the room they two were left alone. She looked at him once as she said, "What do you think the people will do about it?"

He glanced at the crowd with a thin smile: "Do? Talk."

In a little time he said quietly: "It does you no good here. I will take you home and come back for David afterward." She had no idea of contradicting him; so they went out together. At the threshold of her room he said firmly, "I will come in for a few minutes; I have to speak to you."

She struck a light, put the baby on the bed, and looked at him questioningly. He had sat down with his back against the wall, and with rigidly folded arms stared straight ahead of him. Seeing that he did not speak, she said softly, falling into her native dialect, as all Scotch women do when they feel most: "I canna get thae poor creetyer's cries oot o' ma head. It's no human."

"No," he said shortly, and then with a sudden look at her, "Effie, what do you think love is?"

She answered him with surprised eyes and said nothing. He went on: "You love the child, don't you? You do for it, you serve it. That shows you

love it. But do you think it's love that makes David act as he does to you? If he loved you, would he let you work as you work? Would he live off you? Wouldn't he wear the flesh off his fingers instead of yours? He doesn't love you. He isn't worth you. He isn't a bad man, but he isn't worth you. And you make him less worth. You ruin him, you ruin yourself, you kill the child. I can't see it any more. I come here, and I see you weaker every time, whiter, thinner. And I know, if you keep on you'll die. I can't see it. I want you to leave him; let me work for you. I don't make much, but enough to let you rest. At least till you are well. I would wait till you left him of yourself, but I can't wait when I see you dying like this. I don't want anything of you, except to serve you, to serve the child because it's yours. Come away, to-night. You can have my room; I'll go somewhere else. To-morrow I'll find you a better place. You needn't see him any more. I'll tell him myself. He won't do anything, don't be afraid. Come." And he stood up.

Effie had sat astonished and dumb. Now she looked up at the dark tense eyes above her, and said quietly, "I dinna understand."

A sharp contraction went across the strong bent face: "No? You don't understand what you are doing with yourself? You don't understand that I love you, and I can't see it? I don't ask you to love me; I ask you to let me serve you. Only a little, only so much as to give you health again; is that too much? You don't know what you are to me. Others love beauty, but I—I see in you the eternal sacrifice; your thin fingers that always work, your face—when I look at it, it's just a white shadow; you are the child of the people, that dies without crying. Oh, let me give myself for you. And leave this man, who doesn't care for you, doesn't know you, thinks you beneath him, uses you. I don't want you to be his slave any more."

Effie clasped her hands and looked at them; then she looked at the sleeping baby, smoothed the quilt, and said quietly: "I didna take him the day to leave him the morra. It's no my fault if ye're daft about me."

The dark face sharpened as one sees the agony in a dying man, but his voice was very gentle, speaking always in his blurred English: "No, there is no fault in you at all. Did I accuse you?"

The girl walked to the window and looked out. Some way it was a relief from the burning eyes which seemed to fill the room, no matter that she did not look at them. And staring off into the twinkling London night, she heard again the terrible sobs of Sebastian Sunyer's letter rising up and drowning her with its misery. Without turning around she said, low and hard, "I wonder ye can thenk about thae things, an' yon deils burnin' men alive."

The man drew his hand across his forehead. "Would you like to hear that they,---one,—the worst of them, was dead?"

"I think the worl' wadna be muckle the waur o't,"¹¹¹ she answered, still looking away from him. He came up and laid his hand on her shoulder. "Will you kiss me once? I'll never ask again." She shook him off: "I dinna feel for't." "Good-bye then. I'll go back for David." And he returned to the hall and got the creeper and told him very honestly what had taken place; and the creeper, to his credit be it said, respected him for it, and talked a great deal about being better in future to the girl. The two men parted at the foot of the stairs, and the last words that echoed through the hallway were: "No, I am going away. But you will hear of me some day."

Now, what went on in his heart that night no one knows; nor what indecision still kept him lingering fitfully about Effie's street a few days more; nor when the indecision finally ceased; for no one spoke to him after that, except as casual acquaintances meet, and in a week he was gone. But what he did the whole world knows; for even the Queen of Spain came out of her prayers to hear how her torturing prime minister had been shot at Santa Agueda, by a stern-faced man, who, when the widow, grief-mad, spit in his face, quietly wiped his cheek, saying, "Madam, I have no quarrel with women." A few weeks later they garrotted him, and he said one word before he died,—one only, "Germinal."

Over there in the long low London hall the gabbling was hushed, and some one murmured how he had sat silent in the corner that night when all were talking. The creeper passed round a book containing the history of the tortures, watching it jealously all the while, for said he, "Angiolillo gave it to me himself; he had it in his own hands."

Effie lay beside the baby in her room, and hid her face in the pillow to keep out the stare of the burning eyes that were dead; and over and over again she repeated, "Was it my fault, was it my fault?" The hot summer air lay still and smothering, and the immense murmur of the city came muffled like thunder below the horizon. Her heart seemed beating against the walls of a padded room. And gradually, without losing consciousness, she slipped into the world of illusion; around her grew the stifling atmosphere of the torture-chamber of Montjuich, and the choked cries of men in agony. She was sure that if she looked up she should see the demoniac face of **P**ortas, the torturer. She tried to cry, "Mercy, mercy," but her dry lips clave. She had a whirling sensation, and

111. I think the world wouldn't be much worse for it.

the illusion changed; now there was the clank of soldiers' arms, a moment of insufferable stillness as the garrotte shaped itself out of the shadows in her eyes, then loud and clear, breaking the sullen quiet like the sharp ringing of a storm-bringing wind, "Germinal." She sprang up: the long vibration of the bell of St. Pancras¹¹² was waving through the room; but to her it was the prolongation of the word, "Germ-inal-l—germinal-l-l—" Then suddenly she threw out her arms in the darkness, and whispered hoarsely, "Ay, I'll kiss ye the noo."¹¹³

An hour later she was back at the old question, "Was it my fault?"

Poor girl, it is all over now, and all the same to the grass that roots in her bone, whether it was her fault or not. For the end that the man who had loved her foresaw, came, though it was slow in the coming. Let the creeper get credit for all that he did. He stiffened up in a year or so, and went to Paris and got some work; and there the worn little creature went to him, and wrote to her old friends that she was better off at last. But it was too late for that thin shell of a body that had starved so much; at the first trial¹¹⁴ she broke and died. And so she sleeps and is forgotten. And the careless boy-angel¹¹⁵ who mixed all these destinies up so unobservantly has never yet whispered her name in the ear of the widowed Lady Canovas del Castillo.

Nor will the birds that fly thither carry it now; for *it was not "Effie."*

112. A London church.

113. Yes, I'll kiss you now.

114. Difficulty, not court trial.

115. Cupid; perhaps also a pun on Angiolillo's name.

The Death of Love¹¹⁶

1901

A very miscellaneous set of reasons, those which Lucifer has received as to why love dies. May I add one more to the assortment? And may I preface that it seems to me all the answers I have read are open to the same criticism, viz: that of hunting with a telescope for reasons of all sorts of doubtful probability, while the simple thing to do is to look with a naked eye at immediate facts. Love dies just as every manifestation of life dies, and dies the quicker in proportion to its intensity.

True, there can be no universal "standard of measurement," by which it can be determined that love, if expended in such a degree of intensity, will last so and so long. We are all mixed in different proportions, and one may love long and fiercely and another but indifferently and for a brief season also. But in general the love season of life is youth, and like the other feelings of youth [it lives?] out its time and has done. The shifting environment of life presses upon the ego, and moulds it in this shape today; tomorrow in that. And as this or that element of the physical mixture comes uppermost the desires of it, the direction of its activities change.

Truly, the change is not wrought out without war in the soul. Love, as well as the mere animal playfulness of youth, is not relegated to the background without protest. And as it is always hard, nay really impossible, to see one's own true reflection in a looking-glass since the mere intent to see stiffens the play of the features, so it is impossible for the individual soul to look impartially upon itself and realize the changes wrought within it. In general I find, however, that it is your hard headed Philistine,¹¹⁷ your soul that never felt aught but the outmost ripples of a strong

116. See pp. 93-94, 215-16. Source: *Lucifer* 5.26 (Sept. 21, 1901): 290.

117. Archetypal enemies of the Chosen People in the Jewish scriptures; contemptuous term for people of no culture or intellect.

sensation, your creature of the earth earthy,¹¹⁸ who is able to recognize the passing of love, much more tranquilly than our idealists, to whom, on account of the vortices of feeling within themselves, the death of love comes in “storm and stress”¹¹⁹ and bitter surrender, and who, long after the thing is dead, try to galvanize the corpse.

Useless to reason with such a one; he will go on painting conditions under which it might have been otherwise; he will rake the skies of imagination for fancies to reanimate his corpse, until the energy of his soul has exhausted itself. Formidate if then those other energies for which the flowering time has come, and for whose sake love *MUST DIE*, are called into active play by outer circumstance. If not; if in their half-unfolded state they suffer blight, if nothing stirs those faculties wherein the power of growth still lies, then life dies when but half-spent, and “the dead buries the dead;”¹²⁰ all the days of their death they go on shoveling ashes upon a grave, and planting dream-blooms whose roots can suck no life from that barren earth.

It has usually been my lot to stir up a veritable hornet buzz among the contributors of *Lucifer*, (old readers will remember the controversy arising over “His Confession,” and other articles) and I presume my assertion that love *MUST DIE* will again provoke the expression of opposition. Believe me, it is from no desire to take a singular attitude, or to arouse the spirit of opposition for the sake of hearing what will come out of it, that I am writing this. For indeed it might be said, “If you have taken a seat among the Philistines, and have come to an end of your idealism, you might be satisfied to hug your ugly barren fact to your own withered breast, and not throw it among us, who will at least still maintain some hope of joy by seeking ways to prolong the echoes from the harp of love.”¹²¹

118. Ironical allusion to 1 Cor. 15:42–47, a description of the Resurrection, in which a “natural body” (“of the earth, earthy”) is sown and a “spiritual body” raised. As an atheist, de Cleyre does not believe in the resurrection of the dead, nor would her freethinking opponents who belong in the camp of the “idealists” sucked into the vortex of romantic love. Love, de Cleyre implies, dies because it is, like the lovers, mortal, and there is no more resurrection for love than there is for the human body. The only resurrection available for these idealists is an unnatural Frankenstein-like galvanizing of the corpse.

119. “Storm and stress”—*Sturm und Drang*: late-eighteenth-century German Romantic literary movement that involved simultaneous reveling in and suffering from the intensest passions, exemplified in Goethe’s hero Young Werther (1774), who kills himself for love.

120. Matt. 8:21–22: “And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.”

121. From “Love took up the harp of Life . . .” in Tennyson’s “Locksley Hall,” tormented dramatic monologue of a betrayed lover.

But, comrades, I am not a Philistine; I am more of an idealist than any one of you, ("though I say it myself, that shouldn't.") It is just because I believe in *living* ideals, that I protest against this senseless waste of yours. There is something better than picturing the dreamy joy of watching a man's face, or listening to the music of a woman's voice; it has its time—a time when it is graceful, when it is fit to fill a life from center to circumference; but for pity's sake, admit that "spooning"¹²² is not the business of existence for a man and woman with the sap of life receding from cheek and eyelid and flecks from the swollen rivers of Autumn upon their heads. Something larger should dwell in the eyes of these than this petty vision of each other. This love you strain yourselves so to preserve and which sits so well on glossy brown heads, and rich red lips, but is so ridiculous on age-shrunk skin and whitening hair, is a very selfish thing compared with the immense vistas that should be opening out before you. The beauty of color and curve is going from you, but the nobility and grace of form grows hourly more beautiful if it be fed upon thoughts which broaden and lighten it up. Kisses for the cheeks' rounded carmine, but an ocean-sweep of thought for the brow whose glory will remain unto the end of age; eye to eye the lovers of youth, sensuous and humid with the juices of physical life; but the eyes of the whole human race, nay all that lives, reflected in the vision of him whose soul has come upon the larger distances, the fathomless depths of even sympathy for all that moves across the panorama of the world.

You, who sit with your head bent over your plate to avoid the gaze of the eyes you once longed for, you who sit alone wondering why the hand that once sought yours seeks it no more, have you nothing larger to do with your life than mope away about yourself and your concerns? Have you nothing more in your heart than the desire to experience an old thrill? Are there no injustices for you to protest against? Are there no ideals of a better society for you to realize? Is there no cowardice in the world into which you may throw the weight of your courage? Is there no ignorance struggling its helpless way which you may do your share to lighten? Do these, and you will begin to draw deep breaths again, the languor of dying love will fall away like a garment; you will experience not the old sensation, but a new one, as life-giving in its season as the other. You will know the strength of asserted personality, made good in the social stream. The emptiness of an existence, mawking and moaning in

¹²². Slightly dismissive, condescending term for courtship involving tender, mostly verbal expressions of affection and associated especially with young love.

its eddy for what Time has swept beyond its commingling, will be filled with upbearing force to carry it out once more to the mid-current, and this time with the power of being *alone*—strong and self-resourceful, winning the weaker to its side and imparting its strength to them in turn.

Freedom for sex, I will call with you, as I have ever done; and if there are Sapphos¹²³ among us, why let them “burn down to the socket”¹²⁴ with that driveling idea of soaking one’s individuality forever in the individuality of some body or bodies.¹²⁵ But the most of mankind¹²⁶ are not so. Let such realize that freedom for sex does not mean one must always be worrying about his sexual existence. Let not his conviction that love should be free¹²⁷ effervesce so much in his head that he is unable to recognize himself as part of the general processes of nature, and when he finds his free bird dying as well as the caged one, construct all manner of arrangements of dubious desirability for keeping it alive.

Love—when free—dies in its due season. It dies to make way for other activities, equally imperative in the building up of character. Don’t seek to prolong the agony; let it die in peace.

123. Sappho (ca. 610–ca. 580 B.C.E.), Greek poet of love, from the island of Lesbos, remembered today for celebrating love between women but just as likely in de Cleyre’s day to be remembered for her supposed leap from a cliff after a man, Phaon, rejected her.

124. From Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, bk. i, as quoted in the preface to Shelley’s *Alastor*: “The good die first, / And those whose hearts are dry as summer dust / Burn to the socket!”

125. Probably a nod (albeit sarcastic, in the context) to those sex radicals who advocated “varietism” rather than monogamy or serial monogamy.

126. Here as elsewhere, de Cleyre and other feminists of her generation used *mankind* and the generic *he* and *his* to refer to all humans, including women.

127. “Free love” referred to emotional and sexual commitments entered into without consideration for church or state law or ceremony.

The Hopelessly Fallen¹²⁸

1902

I generally like what Kate Austin says and always admire the spirited way she says it; but I feel moved to write a word of disagreement with her and others concerning this attitude towards “fallen women.”¹²⁹ I do not know just what class of persons are included in that category; but from K.A.’s general blunt, straightforward, non-equivocating nature, and her strong determination to apply her faith under all circumstances, I suppose she means all, beginning with the young girl who has once deviated from the rigid line of conventional morality, and been found out, to the inmates of the vilest brothel.

Now I can but think that had she lived in a city, where she must inevitably sooner or later, have seen prostitutes at their trade, that she would be compelled to admit either that their native morality was of such a low type that they never could fall, or that they had certainly fallen.

A week ago, at the corner of two busy streets not far from where I write, a woman in a most shocking state of intoxication, her face bleeding from a fisticuff fight with other inmates of the house, with no clothing but a long draggled torn chemise, rushed into the street, and commenced shouting abuse at everything and everybody; a policeman arrested her; he was as decent about it as the case allowed, did no clubbing, used no bad language; the crowd that always collects at such a scene gathered rapidly; at the patrol box, the woman jeered and mocked the policeman, and finally taking in her fingers the mass of corrupt matter, blood, etc., streaming from her nostrils smeared it on the policeman’s back. “——— you,” he growled “stop that!” She laughed with the satisfaction of one who has done something “smart,” and winked at the crowd. When the patrol wagon came she got in lightly and gaily as her

128. Source: *Lucifer*, 3d ser., 6.21 (June 5, 1902): 161.

129. Author of “Who are the Fallen?” *Lucifer* 6.17 (May 8, 1902): 130. See introduction to this section.

drunken reel permitted, and calling to the crowd: "Ta—ta: see you again," was driven away.

Now what is the use of pretending to yourself that such a creature has not fallen? And she is the very ordinary type of the prostitute. In her infinite degradation, she has one compensation: *she does not care*. She is light-hearted about it. In her sober state, she eats her dinner, and if in company with one of her kind discusses "the points" of her latest male acquisition. I have heard one say to another: "She can't have that old man—that old man's mine." If she is alone, she manages by every species of vulgar ribaldry to draw attention to herself. If she gets herself put out, perhaps arrested, so much the better. She has no sense of shame at being frowned or stared at; she feels complimented by it; she has advertised herself. If she finds a young man easy with his money and soft-hearted she devises melting stories, which an hour later in company with some old bald-headed customer she laughs at; or she drugs him and steals his watch.

If Carrie Nation comes to pray, they all kneel down and shed tears and are pious beyond conception; when she has gone they imitate her and get especially drunk to celebrate the event. You can no more talk reform to such women than to the paving stones. You cannot talk anything to them. They understand nothing but how to get a drink and how to "make something." To do something outrageous, shocking, attention-drawing—that is their trade. The foulness of their language is simply the index of their thoughts, if what goes through their brain can be called thoughts! It matters not how they came to be so, if you are going to do anything with them at all you must begin by understanding that they are so; that they are fallen to an almost unfathomable gulf of degradation.

It is useless to fly out with "the respectable married prostitute is just as bad." Whether she is or not, is not to the point; it cures nothing; it does not alter *this* case. And my own personal belief, from much witnessing and much reflecting, is that for women who have become confirmed prostitutes there is no help. They do not want to be helped. They do not admire your society. They do not like your company. They do not want you. They like drinking, gambling, eating, and wallowing. They see others who are a little older than themselves, hideous, diseased, beggars; they hear these old hags proclaiming themselves cheap at the corner of the saloon, and boasting how high-priced they were once. But not one of them all but imagines she is gifted with a cunning to outwit that fate; and they reason no further.

For the young woman who has made the mistake of deviating from

her own rule of right-doing, the remedy is to give her a better rule if her mind is capable of receiving it—a knowledge of sexual physiology and its demands; if not, then let her stick fast to her religion and its promise of forgiveness to the transgressor. For the beginner in the bargain and sale business, even, it may be that much might be done, if she has any real character, firmness, decision. But for these others it seems to me, that nature having mercifully administered the antidote of utter moral paralysis and rot in return for their physical degradation, the most sensible thing is to let them alone. You will not make a drunken man sober by telling him that he is; you will not make the prostitute self-respecting by talking to her as if she were Leo Tolstoi.¹³⁰ Let them both alone; that is what they want of you. And spend your efforts where they will be of some possible avail. Undoubtedly these poor wretches are the victims of economic conditions, of sexual superstitions, of religious lies, of bad heredity. While these institutions flourish, for every one you try to save, a hundred new ones will be made. Go your way and try rather to give light to the young, and let those others alone to die upon the wheel whose revolutions hurt you far more to look upon than them who are bound upon it. They *are* fallen; they are *felled*; snapped off from all moral life at the root. Such is our society. Smile.

130. Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), internationally acclaimed Russian novelist and theorist of nonviolent resistance, much admired by de Cleyre. The title of his novel *War and Peace* was taken from anarchist theorist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and freethinking anarchists like de Cleyre regarded him as one of them despite his Christianity.

They Who Marry Do Ill¹³¹

1907

(A lecture presenting the negative side of the question, whose positive was argued under the heading "They who marry do well," by Dr. Henrietta P. Westbrook; both lectures delivered before the Radical Liberal League, Philadelphia, April 28, 1907.)

Let me make myself understood on two points, now, so that when discussion arises later, words may not be wasted in considering things not in question:

First—How shall we measure doing well or doing ill;

Second—What I mean by marriage.

So much as I have been able to put together the pieces of the universe in my small head, there is no absolute right or wrong; there is only a relativity, depending upon the continuously though very slowly altering condition of a social race in respect to the rest of the world. Right and wrong are social conceptions: mind, I do not say *human* conceptions. The names "right" and "wrong," truly, are of human invention only; but the conception "right" and "wrong," dimly or clearly, has been wrought out with more or less effectiveness by all intelligent social beings. And the definition of Right, as sealed and approved by the successful conduct of social beings, is: That mode of behavior which best serves the growing need of that society.

As to what that need is, certainly it has been in the past, and for the most part is now indicated by the unconscious response of the structure (social or individual) to the pressure of its environment. Up till a few years since I believed with Huxley, Von Hartman, and my teacher Lum,¹³² that it was wholly so determined; that consciousness might dis-

131. See pp. 105–7. Source: *Mother Earth* 2 (Jan. 1908): 500–511.

132. Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895), eminent popularizer of Darwin's evolutionary theories. Karl Robert Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906), author of *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1870, English trans. 1884). Dyer D. Lum (d. 1893) anarchist comrade-mentor-lover of de Cleyre.

cern, and obey or oppose, but had no voice in deciding the course of social development: if it decided to oppose, it did so to its own ruin, not to the modification of the unconsciously determined ideal.

Of late years I have been approaching the conclusion that consciousness has a continuously increasing part in the decision of social problems; that while it is still a minor voice, and must be for a long time to come, it is, nevertheless, the dawning power which threatens to overthrow old processes and old laws, and supplant them by other powers and other ideals. I know no more fascinating speculation than this, of the rôle of consciousness in present and future evolution. However, it is not our present speculation. I speak of it only because in determining what constitutes well-being at present, I shall maintain that the old ideal has been considerably modified by conscious reaction against the superfluities produced by unconscious striving towards a certain end.

The question now becomes: What is the growing ideal of human society, unconsciously indicated and consciously discerned and illuminated?

By all the readings of progress, this indication appears to be the *free individual*; a society whose economic, political, social, and sexual organization shall secure and constantly increase the scope of being to its several units; whose solidarity and continuity depend upon the free attraction of its component parts, and in no wise upon compulsory forms.

Unless we are agreed that this is the discernable goal of our present social striving, there is no hope that we shall agree in the rest of the argument. For it would be vastly easy to prove that if the maintenance of the old divisions of society into classes, each with specialized services to perform—the priesthood, the military, the wage earner, the capitalist, the domestic servant, the breeder, etc.—is in accord with the growing force of society, then marriage is the thing, and they who marry do well.

But this is the point at which I stand, and from which I shall measure well and ill-doing; viz.: that the aim of social striving now is the free individual, implying all the conditions necessary to that freedom.

Now the second thing: What shall we understand as marriage?

Some fifteen or eighteen years ago, when I had not been out of the convent long enough to forget its teachings, nor lived and experienced enough to work out my own definitions, I considered that marriage was “a sacrament of the Church,” or it was a “civil ceremony performed by the State,” by which a man and a woman were united for life, or until the divorce court separated them. With all the energy of a neophyte free-thinker, I attacked religious marriage as a piece of unwarranted interference on the part of the priest with the affairs of individuals, condemned

the “until-death-do-us-part” promise as one of the immoralities which made a person a slave through all his future to his present feelings, and urged the miserable vulgarity of both the religious and civil ceremony, by which the intimate personal relations of two individuals are made topic of comment and jest by the public.¹³³

By all this I still hold. Nothing is more disgustingly vulgar to me than the so-called sacrament of marriage; outraging all delicacy with the trumpeting of private matters in the general ear. Need I recall, as an example, the unprinted and unprintable floating literature concerning the marriage of Alice Roosevelt,¹³⁴ when the so-called “American princess” was targeted by every lewd jester in the country, because, forsooth, the whole world had to be informed of her forthcoming union with Mr. Longworth! But it is neither a religious nor a civil ceremony that I refer to now, when I say that “those who marry do ill.” The ceremony is only a form, a ghost, a meatless shell. By marriage I mean the real thing, the permanent relation of a man and a woman, sexual and economical, whereby the present home and family life is maintained. It is of no importance to me whether this is a polygamous, polyandric, or monogamous marriage, nor whether it is blessed by a priest, permitted by a magistrate, contracted publicly or privately, or not contracted at all. It is the permanent dependent relationship which, I affirm, is detrimental to the growth of individual character, and to which I am unequivocally opposed. Now my opponents know where to find me.

In the old days to which I have alluded, I contended, warmly and sincerely, for the exclusive union of one man and one woman as long as they were held together by love, and for the dissolution of the arrangement upon the desire of either. We talked in those days most enthusiastically about the bond of love, and it only. Nowadays I would say that I prefer to see a marriage based purely on business considerations, than a marriage based on love. That is not because I am in the least concerned for the success of the marriage, but because I am concerned with the success of love. And I believe that the easiest, surest and most applicable method of killing love is marriage—marriage as I have defined it. I

133. A common sex-radical position—e.g., at the “autonomistic” marriage of Edwin C. Walker and Lillian Harman, Walker began his statement by calling public marriages “essentially and ineradicably indelicate, a pandering to the morbid, vicious, and meddling element in human nature” (Scars 85). It was also a view forcefully expressed in Grant Allen’s 1897 novel *The Woman Who Did*, which de Cleyre admired.

134. Daughter of Theodore Roosevelt, Alice Roosevelt (1884–1980) was a favorite subject of the media, recently obsessed with her 1906 marriage to Congressman Nicholas Longworth.

believe that the only way to preserve love in anything like the ecstatic condition which renders it worthy of a distinctive name---otherwise it is either lust or simply friendship---is to maintain the distances. Never allow love to be vulgarized by the common indecencies of continuous close communion. Better be in familiar contempt of your enemy than of the one you love.

I presume that some who are unacquainted with my opposition to legal and social forms, are ready to exclaim: "Do you want to do away with the relation of the sexes altogether, and cover the earth with monks and nuns?" By no means. While I am not over and above anxious about the repopulation of the earth, and should not shed any tears if I knew that the last man had already been born, I am not advocating sexual total abstinence. If the advocates of marriage had merely to prove the case against complete sexual continence, their task would be easy. The statistics of insanity, and in general of all manner of aberrations, would alone constitute a big item in the charge. No: I do not believe that the highest human being is the unsexed one, or the one who extirpates his passions by violence, whether religious or scientific violence. I would have people regard all their normal instincts in a normal way, neither gluttonizing nor starving them, neither exalting them beyond their true service nor denouncing them as the servitors of evil, both of which mankind are wont to do in considering the sexual passion. In short, I would have men and women so arrange their lives that they shall always, at all times, be free beings in this regard as in all others. The limit of abstinence or indulgence can be fixed by the individual alone, what is normal for one being excess for another, and what is excess at one period of life being normal at another. And as to the effects of such normal gratification of normal appetite upon population, I would have them consciously controlled, as they can be, are to some extent now, and will be more and more through the progress of knowledge.¹³⁵ The birth-rate of France and of native Americans¹³⁶ gives evidence of such conscious control.

"But," say the advocates of marriage, "what is there in marriage to

135. Reference to birth control devices and information, which the Comstock Act of 1873 prevented from being distributed by mail. Sex radicals campaigned against the Comstock statutes and made their originator, Anthony Comstock, a butt of many jokes, including naming a birth control device the Comstock Syringe. His statutes survived intact until the 1930s (Scars 70-74).

136. The term in this period meant native-born (as opposed to immigrant) citizens of the United States, by default Euro-American. De Cleyre deduces from lowered birthrates in this period that nonimmigrant whites, like the general population of France, use birth control.

interfere with the free development of the individual? What does the free development of the individual mean, if not the expression of manhood and womanhood? And what is more essential to either than parentage and the rearing of young? And is not the fact that the latter requires a period of from fifteen to twenty years, the essential need which determines the permanent home?" It is the scientific advocate of marriage that talks this way. The religious man bases his talk on the will of God, or some other such metaphysical matter. I do not concern myself with him; I concern myself only with those who contend that as Man is the latest link in evolution, the same racial necessities which determine the social and sexual relations of allied races¹³⁷ will be found shaping and determining these relations in Man; and that, as we find among the higher animals that the period of rearing the young to the point of caring for themselves usually determines the period of conjugality, it must be concluded that the greater attainments of Man, which have so greatly lengthened the educational period of youth, must likewise have fixed the permanent family relation as the ideal condition for humanity.¹³⁸ This is but the conscious extension of what unconscious, or perhaps semi-conscious adaptation, had already determined in the higher animals, and in savage races to an extent. If people are reasonable, sensible, self-controlled (as to other people they will keep themselves in trouble anyway, no matter how things are arranged), does not the marriage state secure this great fundamental purpose of the primal social function, which is at the same time an imperative demand of individual development, better than any other arrangement? With all its failures, is it not the best that has been tried, or with our present light has been conceived?

In endeavoring to prove the opposite of this contention, I shall not go to the failures to prove my point. It is not my purpose to show that a vast number of marriages do not succeed; the divorce court records do that. But as one swallow doesn't make a summer, nor a flock of swallows either, so divorces do not prove that marriage in itself is a bad thing, only that a goodly number of individuals make mistakes. This is, indeed, an unanswerable argument against the indissolubility of marriage, but not against marriage itself. I will go to the successful marriages—the marriages in which whatever the friction, man and wife have spent a great

137. "Races," or species, closely allied to humans ("Man")—presumably other primates.

138. Here and through the end of the paragraph de Cleyre summarizes her opponents' views, which she intends to disprove, that present gender arrangements are evolutionarily adaptive.

deal of agreeable time together; in which the family has been provided for by honest work decently paid (as the wage-system goes), of the father, and preserved within the home by the saving labor and attention of the mother; the children given a reasonable education and started in life on their own account, and the old folks left to finish up life together, each resting secure in the knowledge that he has a tried friend until death severs the bond. This, I conceive, is the best form that marriage can present, and I opine it is oftener dreamed of than realized. But sometimes it is realized. Yet from the viewpoint that the object of life should be the development of individuality, such have lived less successfully than many who may not have lived so happily.

And to the first great point—the point that physical parentage is one of the fundamental necessities of self-expression: here, I think, is where the factor of consciousness is in process of overturning the methods of life. Life, working unconsciously, blindly sought to preserve itself by generation, by manifold generation. The mind is simply staggered at the productivity of a single stalk of wheat, or of a fish, or of a queen bee, or of a man. One is smitten by the appalling waste of generative effort; numbed with helpless pity for the little things, the infinitude of little lives, that must come forth and suffer and die of starvation, of exposure, as a prey to other creatures, and all to no end but that out of the multitude a few may survive and continue the type! Man, at war with Nature and not yet master of the situation, obeyed the same instinct, and by prolific parentage maintained his war. To the Hebrew patriarch as to the American pioneer, a large family meant strength, the wealth of brawn and sinew to continue the conquest of forest and field. It was the only resource against annihilation. Therefore, the instinct towards physical creation was one of the most imperative determinants of action.

Now the law of all instinct is, that it survives long after the necessity which created it has ceased to exist, and acts mischievously. The usual method of reckoning with such a survival is that since such and such a thing exists, it is an essential part of the structure, not obliged to account for itself and bound to be gratified. I am perfectly certain, however, that the more conscious consciousness becomes, or in other words, the more we become aware of the conditions of life and our relations therein, their new demands and the best way of fulfilling them, the more speedily will instincts no longer demanded be dissolved from the structure.¹³⁹

How stands the war upon Nature now? Why, so,—that short of a plan-

139. I.e., we can make conscious choices about gender arrangements rather than blindly following once-useful but now superseded instincts for maximizing procreation.

etary catastrophe, we are certain of the conquest. And what is perfecting the conquest? Consciousness! The alert brain! The dominant will! Invention, discovery, mastery of hidden forces. We are no longer compelled to use the blind method of limitless propagation to equip the race with hunters and trappers and fishers and sheep-keepers and soil-tillers and breeders.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, the original necessity which gave rise to the instinct of prolific parentage is gone; the instinct itself is bound to die, and is dying, but will die the faster as men grasp more and more of the whole situation.¹⁴¹ In proportion as the parenthood of the brain becomes more and more prolific, as ideas spread, multiply, and conquer, the necessity for great physical production declines. This is my first contention. Hence the development of individuality does no longer *necessarily* imply numerous children, nor indeed, *necessarily* any children at all. That is not to say that no one will want children, nor to prophesy race suicide.¹⁴² It is simply to say that there will be fewer born, with better chances of surviving, developing, and achieving. Indeed, with all its clash of tendencies, the consciousness of our present society is having this driven home to it.

Supposing that the majority will still desire, or let me go further and say *do* still desire, this limited parentage, the question now becomes: Is this the overshadowing need in the development of the individual, or are there other needs equally imperative? If there are other needs equally imperative, must not these be taken equally into account in deciding the best manner of conducting one's life? If there are not other needs equally imperative, is it not still an open question whether the married state is the best means of securing it? In answering these questions, I think it will again be safe to separate into a majority and a minority. There will be a minority to whom the rearing of children will be the great dominant necessity of their being, and a majority to whom this will be one of their necessities. Now what are the other necessities? The other physical and mental appetites! The desire for food and raiment and housing after the individual's own taste; the desire for sexual association, not for reproduction; the artistic desires; the desire to know, with its thousand ramifications, which may carry the soul from the depths of

140. Compare her argument on "Mechanical Invention," taken from Olive Schreiner, in "The Gates of Freedom."

141. I.e., through education we can *consciously* speed up this evolutionary process that would have happened naturally in any case.

142. Allusion to one argument against birth control. Dr. Cleyre, vehemently opposed to racism, would not have shared the underlying assumption.

the concrete to the heights of the abstract; the desire to do, that is, to imprint one's will upon the social structure, whether as a mechanical contriver, a force harnesser, a social rebuilders, a combiner, a dream translator,¹⁴³—whatever may be the particular mode of the personal organization.

The necessity for food, shelter, and raiment, it should at all times lie within the individual's power to furnish for himself. But the method of home-keeping is such that after the relation has been maintained for a few years, the interdependence of one on the other has become so great that each is somewhat helpless when circumstance destroys the combination, the man less so, and the woman wretchedly so. She has done one thing in a secluded sphere, and while she may have learned to do that thing well (which is not certain, the method of training is not at all satisfactory), it is not a thing which has equipped her with the confidence necessary to go about making an independent living. She is timid above all, incompetent to deal with the conditions of struggle. The world of production has swept past her; she knows nothing of it. On the other hand, what sort of an occupation is it for her to take domestic service under some other woman's rule? The conditions and pay of domestic service are such that every independent spirit would prefer to slave in a factory, where at least the slavery ends with the working hours. As for men, only a few days since a staunch free unionist told me, apparently without shame, that were it not for his wife he would be a tramp and a drunkard, simply because he is unable to keep a home; and in his eyes the chief merit of the arrangement is that his stomach is properly cared for. This is a degree of a helplessness which I should have thought he would have shrunk from admitting, but is nevertheless probably true. Now this is one of the greatest objections to the married condition, as it is to any other condition which produces like results. In choosing one's economic position in society, one should always bear in mind that it should be such as should leave the individual uncrippled—an all-around person, with both productive and preservative capacities, a being pivoted within.

Concerning the sexual appetite, irrespective of reproduction, the

143. A reference to Freud and the newvocation of psychoanalyst? Freud was a topic of discussion among anarchists, at least to some extent: his lectures in Vienna impressed Goldman as early as 1896 (Wexler 48). Although de Cleyre may be noting his rising importance in this list of vocations, his influence is nowhere evident in her uses of the term *unconscious* in this lecture, which harks back to Hartmann and evolutionary theory rather than the new psychological theories of Freud.

advocates of marriage claim, and with some reason, that it tends to preserve normal appetite and satisfaction, and is both a physical and moral safeguard against excesses, with their attendant results, disease. That it does not do so entirely, we have ample and painful proof continuously before our eyes. As to what it may accomplish, it is almost impossible to find out the truth; for religious asceticism has so built the feeling of shame into the human mind, on the subject of sex, that the first instinct, when it is brought under discussion, seems to be to lie about it. This is especially the case with women. The majority of women usually wish to create the impression that they are devoid of sexual desires, and think they have paid the highest compliment to themselves when they say, "Personally, I am very cold; I have never experienced such attraction." Sometimes this is true; but oftener it is a lie—a lie born of centuries of the pernicious teachings of the Church. A roundly developed person will understand that she pays no honor to herself by denying herself fullness of being, whether to herself or of herself; though, without doubt, where such a deficiency really exists, it may give room for an extra growth of some other qualities, perhaps of higher value. In general, however, notwithstanding women's lies, there is no such deficiency. In general, young, healthy beings of both sexes desire such relations. What then? Is marriage the best answer to the need? Suppose they marry, say at twenty years, or thereabout, which will be admitted as the time when sexual appetite is most active: the consequence is (I am just now leaving children out of account) that the two are thrown too much and too constantly in contact, and speedily exhaust the delight of each other's presence. Then irritations begin. The familiarities of life in common breed contempt. What was once a rare joy becomes a matter of course, and loses all its delicacy. Very often it becomes a physical torture to one (usually the woman), while it still retains some pleasure to the other, for the reason that bodies, like souls, do most seldom, almost never, parallel each other's development. And this lack of parallelism is the greatest argument to be produced against marriage. No matter how perfectly adapted to each other two people may be at any given time, it is not the slightest evidence that they will continue to be so. And no period of life is more deceptive as to what future development may be than the age I have just been speaking of, the age when physical desires and attractions being strongest, they obscure or hold in abeyance the other elements of being.

The terrible tragedies of sexual antipathy, mostly for shame's sake, will never be revealed. But they have filled the earth with murder. And

even in those homes where harmony has been maintained, and all is apparently peaceful, it is mainly so through the resignation and self-suppression of either the man or the woman. One has consented to be largely effaced, for the preservation of the family and social respect.

But awful as these things are, these physical degradations, they are not so terrible as the ruined souls. When the period of physical predominance is past, and soul-tendencies begin more and more strongly to assert themselves, how dreadful is the recognition that one is bound by the duties of common parentage and the necessities of home-keeping to remain in the constant company of one from whom one finds oneself going farther away in thought every day.—“Not a day,” exclaim the advocates of “free unions.” I find such exclamation worse folly than the talk of “holy matrimony” believers. The bonds are there, the bonds of life in common, the love of the home built by joint labor, the habit of association and dependence; they are very real chains, binding both, and not to be thrown off lightly. Not in a day nor a month, but only after long hesitation, struggle, and grievous, grievous pain, can the wrench of separation come. Oftener it does not come at all.

A chapter from the lives of two men recently deceased will illustrate my meaning. Ernest Crosby, wedded, and I assume happily, to a lady of conservative thought and feeling, himself the conservative, came into his soul’s own at the age of thirty-eight, while occupying the position of Judge of the International Court at Cairo. From then on, the whole radical world knows Ernest Crosby’s work. Yet what a position was his, compelled by honor to continue the functions of a social life which he disliked! To quote the words of his friend, Leonard Abbott,¹⁴⁴ “a prisoner in his palatial home, waited on by servants and lackeys. Yet to the end he remained enslaved by his possessions.” Had Crosby not been bound, had not union and family relations with one who holds very different views of life in faith and honor held him, should we not have had a different life-sum? Like his great teacher, Tolstoi, likewise made absurd, his life contradicted by his works, because of his union with a woman who has not developed along parallel lines.

The second case, Hugh O. Pentecost. From the year 1887 on, whatever were his special tendencies, Pentecost was in the main a sympathizer with the struggle of labor, an opposer of oppression, persecution and prosecution in all forms. Yet through the influence of his family relations, because he felt in honor bound to provide greater material com-

144. Friend of de Cleyre; educational reformer, founder of two anarchist colonies.

fort and a better standing in society than the position of a radical speaker could give, he consented at one time to be the puppet of those he had most strenuously condemned, to become a district attorney, a prosecutor. And worse than that, to paint himself as a misled baby for having done the best act of his life, to protest against the execution of the Chicago Anarchists.¹⁴⁵ That this influence was brought to bear upon him, I know from his own lips; a repetition, in a small way, of the treason of Benedict Arnold, who for his Tory wife's sake laid everlasting infamy upon himself. I do not say there was no self-excusing in this, no Eve-did-tempt-me taint, but surely it had its influence. I speak of these two men because these instances are well known; but everyone knows of such instances among more obscure persons, and often where the woman is the one whose higher nature is degraded by the bond between herself and her husband.

And this is one side of the story. What of the other side? What of the conservative one who finds himself bound to one who outrages every principle of his or hers? People will not, and cannot, think and feel the same at the same moments, throughout any considerable period of life; and therefore, their moments of union should be rare and of no binding nature.

I return to the subject of children. Since this also is a normal desire, can it not be gratified without the sacrifice of individual freedom required by marriage? I see no reason why it cannot. I believe that children may be as well brought up in an individual home, or in a communal home, as in a dual home; and that impressions of life will be far pleasanter if received in an atmosphere of freedom and independent strength than in an atmosphere of secret repression and discontent. I have no very satisfactory solutions to offer to the various questions presented by the child-problem; but neither have the advocates of marriage. Certain to me it is, that no one of the demands of life should ever be answered in a manner to preclude future free development. I have seen no great success from the old method of raising children under the indissoluble marriage yoke of the parents. (Our conservative parents no doubt consider their radical children great failures, though it probably does not occur to them that their system is in any way at fault.) Neither have I observed a gain in the child of the free union. Neither have I observed that the individually raised child is any more likely to be a success or a failure. Up to the present, no one has given a scientific answer

145. The Haymarket martyrs (see chaps. 1 and 2).

to the child-problem. Those papers which make a specialty of it, such as *Lucifer*, are full of guesses and theories and suggested experiments; but no infallible principles for the guidance of intentional or actual parents have as yet been worked out. Therefore, I see no reason why the rest of life should be sacrificed to an uncertainty.

That love and respect may last, I would have unions rare and impermanent. That life may grow, I would have men and women remain separate personalities. Have no common possessions with your lover more than you might freely have with one not your lover. Because I believe that marriage stales love, brings respect into contempt, outrages all the privacies and limits the growth of both parties, I believe that "they who marry do ill."

NOTES TO PART I

INTRODUCTION

1. No one who writes on de Cleyre can fail to be indebted to Avrich's meticulously documented biography, based on many oral histories as well as hundreds of written anarchist sources, including every word de Cleyre wrote that is still available in the major archives of anarchism as well as the archives of even her most minor correspondents. Readers of earlier biographies by Emma Goldman, Hippolyte Havel, and others should be aware that Avrich corrects many fundamental inaccuracies in all the work that precedes his. Since his biographical work, several scholars have made important contributions to our sense of de Cleyre's position in feminist history: Margaret Marsh (*Anarchist Women*), Wendy McElroy (*Freedom, Feminism, and the State*), and Catherine Palczewski, who did the groundbreaking work on de Cleyre's rhetoric and her views of sexuality in "Voltairine de Cleyre" and "Voltairine de Cleyre: Sexual Slavery and Sexual Pleasure in the Nineteenth Century," respectively. A further study tentatively entitled *Anarchist Women and the Feminine Ideal: Sex, Class, and Style in the Rhetoric of Voltairine de Cleyre, Emma Goldman, and Lucy Parsons*, by Linda Diane Horwitz, Donna Marie Kowal, and Catherine Helen Palczewski, forthcoming from Michigan State University Press, will use further rhetorical analysis of de Cleyre to show how her obstacles as a woman "became areas of non-gendered possibility" in the creation of anarchic feminist discourse.

2. De Cleyre does not use the term often, but this casual use of it is illustrated in a letter of January 22, 1893, when she tells her mother how kind the editor of the *Investigator* had been to her: "I enclose you his letter to see how nice he was, and so you won't think all infidel men are bad men, like you said once."

3. On the history of freethought see S. Warren; Brown and Stein.

4. "[A]ll eight were found guilty; seven were condemned to death and one (Neebe) to fifteen years in jail (the sentences of Schwab and Fielden were afterwards

commuted to life imprisonment" (Avrich, *FM*, i). The three condemned to imprisonment were pardoned in 1893 after Altgeld's review of the case.

5. E.g., in Glasgow at several lectures in 1897 and in Chicago on November 11, 1908 (Avrich, *AA* 119, 205). In 1903 she addressed an audience of eight hundred in Christiania, Norway (Avrich, *AA* 182).

6. In "Crime and Punishment," "Anarchism and American Traditions" (123–25), "Why I Am an Anarchist" (19), "Anarchism and American Traditions" (130), and "Literature the Mirror of Man" (375), respectively.

7. Users of this archive should note, however, that its goal thus far has not been to preserve strict textual accuracy but to make an enormous body of material widely available, and occasionally more accessible to modern readers by means of some modernizations of de Cleyre's original diction, phrasing, and punctuation. Some of these changes affect access to original meanings and style. Although most of the transcription errors are minor, a few (e.g., some reversals of "conscious" and "unconscious" in "They Who Marry Do Ill") distort or reverse meanings.

CHAPTER 1

1. On the volume of her work, see Avrich, *AA* 7.

2. See Brown and Stein; S. Warren; Sears; Blatt; and articles in a wide range of Freethought periodicals, including *Lucifer*, *The Truth Seeker*, *The Boston Investigator*, and *The Open Court*.

3. The published lecture is identified in *Liberty*, February 15, 1890, as "delivered before the Boston Secular Society"; Palczewski, in "Voltairine de Cleyre," identifies the auspices as the American Secular Union; see also Avrich, *AA* 42–43. Sidney Warren describes the origins and goals of the American Secular Union, originally the National Liberal League, and its association with the Free Religious Association (30, 34–35, 36, 41, 96ff.). On the focus of the American Secular Union on separation of church and state, embodied in the "Nine Demands of Liberalism," first published in 1872 (rpt. in S. Warren 161–62), see Sears 36–39 and S. Warren 167–68. The agenda established by the nine demands included revoking tax exemptions from ecclesiastical property; discontinuing employment of chaplains in national and state legislatures and institutions supported with public funds (prisons, asylums, etc.); eliminating use of the Bible in public schools; replacing judicial oaths with simple affirmation; repealing blue laws; repealing laws aimed at enforcing "Christian morality" instead of natural morality and equal rights; eliminating privileges accorded to any religion in the national and state constitutions or in administration of the law. Avrich points out that de Cleyre, "a lifelong secularist and anti-Catholic," continued to publish and lecture in freethought venues "long after anarchism had displaced atheism as her primary ideological commitment" (*AA* 39).

4. Abbott quotes de Cleyre, in his review of her posthumous *Selected Works*, as saying she is an individualist anarchist, without explaining (or realizing?) that she later changed that position.

5. The quotation is from de Cleyre's attack on one tendency in "radical freethought," and the context is the question of a basis for ethics, "in the face of the death of God" (2872). De Cleyre's ethical position here, however, is one she applied broadly throughout her career; it undoubtedly contributed to her rejection of the extreme individualist position, as well as her attraction to Kropotkin's emphasis on "mutual aid."

6. On the fearnonanarchist forms of socialism inspired in anarchists, see "A Suggestion," "Anarchism," and de Cleyre's translation from Yiddish of L. I. Peretz's "Hope and Fear."

7. Lum, according to Avrich, was eclectic in his economics, scorning "the ultra-egoists" and involved throughout his life with labor unions, but also critical of collectivism, predicting that eventually it would lead to a "Bismarckian web" (AA 56–57). Avrich sees de Cleyre as following Dyer Lum's views in *The Economics of Anarchy*, "rejecting both communism and collectivism in favor of mutualism and voluntary cooperation" (AA 58).

8. This is one of many reasons that de Cleyre's views should be sharply distinguished from contemporary Ayn Rand-style libertarianism, the key tenets of which are diametrically opposed to her views on capital and labor and her strong focus on union action as a means of bringing about social revolution.

9. In the context, this is a paraphrase of one of the Haymarket anarchists, in a passage intended to resurrect their strangled voices, but de Cleyre's many evocations of a rural life as the ideal confirm that she agreed.

10. On anarchism as not "inherently anti-industrial" see Avrich, HT88–89.

11. As in "Anarchism and American Traditions." For other sources of American anarchism see Reichert's discussions of such early figures as Elihu Palmer (1764–1806), a freethinking preacher and writer against "King-craft and priest-craft" (33); Sidney H. Morse (1832–1903), who argued, "If the law is within, there is liberty. If it is without there is bondage" (55); Nathaniel Rogers (1794–1846); Henry Clarke Wright (1789–1870), who said, "To swear allegiance to any human government is to call God to witness that you will obey a power that assumes the right to reverse his decisions at pleasure" (48); Adin Ballou (1803–1890); and J. A. Etzler, author in 1833 of *The Paradise within the Reach of all Men, without Labor, by Powers of Nature and Machinery* (Reichert, chaps. 1–3).

12. Kropotkin ("Anarchism"), and subsequent historians of anarchism, have identified Proudhon's as the first such use of the term.

13. Her lasting admiration of Swinburne is evident in her use of two stanzas from his "Before a Crucifix" in "In Defense of Emma Goldman" (218–19) in 1893, and again of one stanza in "The Defiance of August Spies" in 1910 (43).

14. Wexler sees Bakunin as having been supplanted by Kropotkin, whom she regards as coming to "dominate the thinking of the movement in America" in the 1890s (47), but Avrich traces Bakunin's influence in the United States, "a significant following," through the emergence of anarcho-syndicalism and the 1905 founding of the IWW, and on through World War I, with a decline between the two world wars and a significant revival in the 1960s and after (AP 30–31).

15. See also David: "By the 'nineties . . . both the New York and Chicago movements became more distinctly anarcho-communist, due largely to the influence of Kropotkin" (533).

16. E.g., in the Haymarket speeches from 1895 to 1910 collected in *The First May-day*.

17. Marsh refers to this as the "Women's National Liberal Union," but the stationery on which de Cleyre wrote her mother from Kansas on November 16, 1890, has the letterhead "Woman's National Liberal Union." The use of this letterhead suggests that she was closely associated with the WNLU at this time.

18. In 1980, Most's biographer Frederic Trautmann said that "The God-Pestilence" had "been continuously in print in several languages since its publication in 1887" (6).

19. The style more closely resembles Goldman's, but de Cleyre apparently edited

much of what Goldman and Berkman wrote in *Mother Earth* (Carl Nold to Agnes Inglis, Jan. 18, 1931, qtd. in Marsh 149).

CHAPTER 2

1. I.e., some quite specific schools of anarchism-with-adjectives—"libertarian socialist or anarcho-syndicalist or communist anarchist, in the tradition of say Bakunin and Kropotkin and others" (245). However, the description applies to de Cleyre's views on this particular issue.

2. *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, February 21, 1908, 1, qtd. Marsh 113, Avrich, *AA* 200.

3. "They" denotes the Trades Assembly; "we" denotes "we Socialists," anarchism being, as Kropotkin says, the "left wing" of socialism ("Anarchism").

4. On these debates and the role played in them by Ezra Heywood, a pivotal figure between abolitionism and anarchism, see Blatt (chap. 2). See also Forest, and see Reichert's discussion of the New England Non-Resistance Society, founded in 1838 by such figures as Wendell Phillips, Amasa Walker, Abby Kelly, William Lloyd Garrison, and Adin Ballou (46ff.). In their "Statement of Principles" they committed themselves, in Reichert's summary, "to a totally nonviolent rejection of formal government on the grounds that political power and war so intertwined that it is not possible to have one without the other" (47).

5. On these debates and the role played in them by Ezra Heywood, a pivotal figure between abolitionism and anarchism, see Blatt (chap. 2).

6. *Umanita Nuova*, August 25, 1921. "Anarchism and Violence: Selections from Anarchist Writings, 1896-1925 by Errico Malatesta," ed. David Poolc, Radio 4 All, http://www.radio4all.org/redblack/books/a_violent.html (July 4, 2003).

7. *Non-violence in America: A Documentary History* (Indianapolis, 1966), xxxi, qtd. Reichert (47). See also Reichert on the importance of nonresistants in the history of anarchist thought (47).

8. See David 64-68.

9. Exceptions included some newspaper accounts of Peter Kropotkin's tour of the United States in 1897 and 1901 (see Avrich, *AP* chap. 5), which occurred, however, before the assassination of McKinley by a supposed "anarchist," as well as a newspaper account of de Cleyre's speech on "Crime and Punishment" after her refusal to prosecute Helcher: "One reporter even wrote that 'anarchism is really the doctrine of the Nazarene, the gospel of forgiveness'" (Avrich, *AA* 180). The view of anarchism in this account, of course, was almost as erroneous and unsubtle as the usual view it reversed, as de Cleyre's "Ye Have the Poor" explains.

10. This was Kropotkin's interpretation of the background of media views of anarchism as violent by nature; it seems clearly borne out by American labor history in this period. See for example Zinn chaps. 10, 11; David 57; Avrich, *HT* chaps. 2, 3, 13; see also Painter on violence against labor, reactions to American labor agitation in relation to reactions to the Paris Commune, and the creation of armories and the National Guard in response to labor unrest (15-22).

11. David 59. See Avrich on this strike and its long-lasting repercussions (*HT* chap. 3); Painter 15-17; Zinn 240-46.

12. Avrich's account of Albert Parsons's development as a thinker, activist, organizer, and lecturer during this period suggests that the move toward "insurrectionary tactics" was a gradual one, in response to the violence brought to bear against labor activism in this period. See his chapter on Parsons in *The Haymarket Tragedy*.

13. As Wexler has pointed out, Goldman began quickly to move "From a reasoned plea for psychological understanding . . . toward romantic glorification"; eventually her passion for defending Czolgosz led her to say that he "was indeed 'one of us'" (109, 298 n. 28). Her first statements to the press, however, were more representative of the view taken in the wider anarchist community, where Czolgosz, in his brief contact with anarchists, had used an alias and exhibited strange behavior that led them to assume he was a spy.

14. Wexler cites Martin A. Miller, *Kropotkin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 175. David dates the turn away from emphasis on propaganda by deed from the Haymarket incident; indeed he sees an immediate swing in this direction on the part of anarchist periodicals, with the exception of Most's (532–33). See the quotation from the *Alarm* in the note below.

15. See Avrigh, AA xiii.

16. Apparently she cited the "logic" of Jesus on this issue in her dispute of 1890 with Dyer Lum, who was so overcome with outrage that he had to resort to aspersions on Jesus' masculinity: "[Jesus a logician! A half-man, who never—well!]" (letter to de Cleyre, April 1, 1890).

17. See n. 4 above.

18. On her circumspection in this regard see Marsh 112–13.

19. Cf. Dyer Lum's *Alarm* editorial, November 5, 1887, the issue in which he took over editorship for Parsons during his imprisonment for the Haymarket bombing. Despite Avrigh's demonstration that Lum was himself an admirer of dynamite and an advocate of individual terrorist acts, David's analysis of this editorial as a move away from Parsons's more incendiary rhetoric would also seem to be correct. Lum here makes the distinction de Cleyre makes later, between violent "incidents" in a revolution and the revolution itself: "When the *Alarm* reappeared on November 5, 1887, under Dyer D. Lum's guidance, a leading editorial declared that force was not essential 'to a revolution, nor is its use generally successful.' A revolution is not made by 'Barricades, revolts, riots. . . ; they are but incidents of one'" (David 532–33).

20. Avrigh identifies this bombing as the context for the article (AA 140).

21. See Avrigh, *HT* chap. 27, AA 62; Painter 48 n. 19.

22. E.g., "November Eleventh, Twenty Years Ago," 40.

23. E.g., "'Tis the roar of the whirlwind ye invoke / When ye scatter the wind of your brother's moans" ("Bastard Born"); "the rulers of the earth are sowing a fearful wind, to reap a most terrible whirlwind" ("Economic Tendency").

24. E.g., in her poetry, for example the last stanza of "Betrayed," and in "The Hurricane." See Abbott, "A Priestess of Pity and Vengeance," *International*, August 1912, qtd. in Avrigh, AA 10. This was double praise, since the phrase had been used of famous Commune Louise Michel (Avrigh, AA 14).

CHAPTER 3

1. *Feminism* is not a term de Cleyre used of herself, although in contemporary terms Margaret Marsh is right in saying that de Cleyre "considered herself a feminist" (128). Most of the thinkers whom Marsh aptly, from our contemporary viewpoint, refers to as "anarchist-feminists" would have associated the actual term *feminist* with what Emma Goldman scorned as the pseudo-emancipation that mistakenly equated freedom with bourgeois equal rights within a political status quo based on fundamental inequalities of class. Cf. bell hooks's view that feminism is not agitation for rights equal to those of men (which men? of what class? what race?) but resistance to sexist oppression inseparable from resistance to race and class oppression.

2. On these figures see Sears; Blatt; McElroy's *Freedom, Feminism, and the State* (including her introductory essay "The Roots of Individualist Feminism in 19th-Century America"; Lillian Harman's "Some Problems of Social Freedom"; and Angela Heywood's "Body Housekeeping"); and Brammer.

3. On this movement in general see the pioneering work of Sears and Spurlock.

4. On this debate see Sears 76, 211–15.

5. For a different emphasis, see Palczewski, "Voltaireine de Cleyre: Sexual Slavery and Sexual Pleasure in the Nineteenth Century," for an argument that "The centrality of sexual freedom in de Cleyre's thinking cannot be underestimated" (57).

6. See Sears 120ff.; for a good scientific overview of eugenics see Graves chap. 6. As Sears says, too, "Not to be confused with the later prescriptive eugenics of the Progressive Era, anarchistic eugenics held that enslaved, male-dominated mothers could only perpetuate a race of slavish humans. . . . a mother's submission to sexist laws, it was believed, would affect the unborn child" (121). On the other hand it must be said that some articles in *Lucifer* have a decidedly classist, although never overtly racist, inflection (Thomas Dixon, who bizarrely sent *Lucifer* a review copy of his book *The One Woman* [*Lucifer*, 3d ser., 7.32: 252], is the butt of various sarcasms, and readers' shared opposition to racism was taken for granted). Harman's increasing focus on arguments from eugenics as the journal moved toward its final incarnation as the *American Journal of Eugenics* in 1907 points to the problematic nature of his belief that "it is the quality of population . . . that will bring 'salvation' from plutocratic rule" (Harman, "Remarks" 115). De Cleyre never shared this focus; one of her few allusions to it is in "Sex Slavery," a lecture in the campaign to free Harman from prison.

7. Other progressive theorists and activists criticized eugenics as well; Clarence Darrow, in his essay on Voltaire, remarked, "Had the modern professors of eugenics had power in France in 1694. . . . [t]heir scientific knowledge would have shown conclusively that no person of value could have come from the union of his father and mother. In those days, nature had not been instructed by the professors of eugenics and so Voltaire was born" (<http://www.positiveatheism.org/hist/darrow5.htm>).

8. For an excellent discussion of de Cleyre's views on sexuality see Palczewski's "Voltaireine de Cleyre: Sexual Slavery and Sexual Pleasure in the Nineteenth Century."

9. "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106:1710–45 (qtd. Nerad 361).

CHAPTER 4

1. On the general context see Spurlock 227ff. On this incident see Sears 74–80, 107–17; Marsh 77; McElroy, "Roots" 14–15; and Day. For the letter, published spring 1886, see Sears 74–76. Wendy McElroy identifies the letter itself as "perhaps the earliest discussion in American journalism of forced sex in marriage as constituting rape" (*Freedom* 135). For details of Harman's various convictions and imprisonment see Spurlock 228–29; and Day. By Day's account, Harman was first arrested for this and other "obscene" aspects of *Lucifer* in 1887 and was brought to trial on this particular letter in 1890, when the result was a five-year sentence and three-hundred-dollar fine. He was released on a writ of error after seventeen weeks, then incarcerated again when an adjusted sentence was imposed in 1895. By this time he had already served more time in prison, in 1892, for publishing another "obscene" letter (Day 136–43). If Day's dates are correct, then de Cleyre's lecture would have been delivered in 1890 in the seventeen weeks before August 30 when he was released. Avrich dates it in this year (AA 158), whereas Palczewski dates it "probably 1890" (1993, 154) and Marsh dates it 1892 (77).

2. See Ryan, who quotes Florence Kelley, "Women by natural instincts as well as

long training have become the housekeepers of the world, so it is only natural that they should in time become effective municipal housekeepers as well" (230).

3. See Frye on the eiron as self-deprecator, and irony as "a technique of appearing to be less than one is, which in literature becomes most commonly a technique of saying as little and meaning as much as possible, or, in a more general way, a pattern of words that turns away from direct statement or its own obvious meaning . . ." (40).

4. See for example Sadakichi Hartmann, who emphasized her "logical sequence," "abundance of information, thought and argument," and "subdued enthusiasm" (92); Goldman, who emphasized her brilliance, "original thought" and "inner fire" (*Voltaire* 9, 32); George Brown, who described her as "rhetorical, showy, and a little shallow" (qtd. in Kelly et al. 148); Jay Fox ("she had the power of holding one with her eloquence while she packed his mind full of ideas" [qtd. in Avrich, *AA* 42]), and Avrich, who surmises that her style resembled the intense, impressive, electrifying style of Kropotkin rather than the more "flamboyant, histrionic" style of Goldman or Johann Most (*AA* 41).

5. Avrich notes, "Her comments and corrections, always careful and to the point, are preserved in the Berkman Archive" (*AA* 199).

6. The spelling reflects the reformist spelling policy of the *Agitator*: *enarf*, *shud* for "should," etc.

7. Palczewski sees de Cleyre as departing from a usual anarchist emphasis on the primacy of rationality and a tendency "to dismiss emotion" (1993, 148), an emphasis that, considering the work of Emma Goldman (as opposed, for example, to that of Benjamin Tucker), should not be overstated. (Marsh, in contrast, says de Cleyre "exemplified the anarchist fascination with spontaneous emotion, with feeling, with intuitive insight" [102].) While it is clear that de Cleyre, as Palczewski says, directly addresses "fellow Anarchists" who would prefer her to "[proceed] immediately to reasons" (de Cleyre, "Why" 17), and that in some senses she did see "emotion as equal to rationality" (Palczewski 1993, 148), I would argue that de Cleyre's focus is more specifically on the ways in which conventional ideology constrains the intellect by means to which emotion is not so susceptible. In suggesting that her emphasis is on using the *logic* of feelings to circumvent the mystifying illogic of ideology, I thus also read de Cleyre from a different perspective than Marsh, who sees her related essay "The Making of an Anarchist" as, among other things, "an attempt . . . to demonstrate that rational conviction can grow from temperamental predilections" (139).

8. Palczewski uses the term "catalogue" for this section of the speech and aptly describes de Cleyre here as "guid[ing] audience members through a montage of events, feelings, and sights that led her and, if successful, would lead them to embrace anarchism" (1993, 149).

9. Or, in Emma Goldman's version (perhaps based on de Cleyre's private recounting of the event?), "Hell, it's only about worms" (*Voltaire*).

10. De Cleyre spells it "Aosta." Aasta Hansteen was one of the preeminent figures in the Norwegian women's movement in the second half of the century, author of a pamphlet entitled "Woman Created in the Image of God" (1888–89), and supposedly the model for the characters Lona Hessel and Tante Ulrikke in plays by Ibsen and Gunnar Heiberg respectively (Rasmussen 245, 257). Her early feminist work met with ridicule; her appearance, "her violent language, and quasi-philosophical way of reasoning roused laughter, and her meetings often broke up in disorder and rowdiness" (*American Scandinavian Review* 26 [1938]: 348). In response to her notoriety she left Norway and lived in the United States for nine years: "As she later expressed it, Aasta Hansteen decided to emigrate because the ground was burning beneath her feet" (Rasmussen 246). As Janet E. Rasmussen says, "Aasta Hansteen (1824–1908)

was well known in the intellectual and upper-class circles in Norway's capital, for her unconventional behavior set her apart from her contemporaries. Aasta Hansteen had the distinction of being Christiania's first female portrait painter, the first Norwegian woman to deliver public lectures, the first woman to publish in the *nynorsk* language, and, along with Camilla Collett, a pioneer in the Norwegian women's movement " (245). By the time de Cleyre wrote about Kristofer Hansteen in 1906, Aasta, it seems, was revered instead of mocked; after a nine-year exile in the United States she had returned to Norway in 1889, by which time "the Norwegian feminist movement had taken firm root, and Aasta Hansteen could be welcomed home as one of its pioneers" (Rasmussen 265). An 1895 article in the *Englishwoman's Review of Social and Industrial Questions* reported on a celebration of her seventieth birthday that a representative of the newspaper *Dagbladet* "said the ladies who were about to greet her on her seventieth birthday, would, no doubt, remember that she had suffered 'for her enlightenment,' at the same time as they expressed their joy over the growth their cause had made from that day when Asta [*sic*] Hansteen, mocked and ridiculed, had taken her stand among the foremost of their champions" (92). De Cleyre's mention of Hansteen, then, is a code for a long history of courageous feminist work and an obvious reference, although somewhat veiled, to the absence of feminist practice in her nephew's domestic arrangements.

11. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (1949; rpt. New York: Harvest, 1964), xxiii, quoted by James H. Kavanagh in his discussion of ideology in Lentricchia and McLaughlin's *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (309).

12. Helen Thompson's term, from the title of the MLA session "Political Interiorities, Feminist Materialities: Haywood, la Mettrie, and de Cleyre" (Eugenia DeLamotte, Natania Meeker, and Helen Thompson, MLA Convention, December 1999).

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA: Avrich, *American Anarchist*

AP: Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits*

FM: Avrich, ed., *First Mayday*

HT: Avrich, *Haymarket Tragedy*

SW: de Cleyre, *Selected Works*

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