

Voltairine de Cleyre and the Anarchist Canon

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ABSTRACT

Voltairine de Cleyre (1866-1912) is an important, but often ignored, figure in American classical anarchy-feminism. De Cleyre's works provide an important entrance point through which contemporary anarchist academics and activists can discuss feminism within past, present, and future radical movements. Her writings certainly leave us at the point of commencing an in-depth consideration of what a post-anarchist feminism might look like. Moreover, two of de Cleyre's major contributions to the field include the idea of anarchism without adjectives and her no-frills approach to public speaking and writing, both applicable to contemporary problems within the movement, especially in theoretical contexts. For these reasons, it is essential that Voltairine de Cleyre be consciously included in the anarchist canon.

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KEYWORDS

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Paul Avrich (1978), Voltairine de Cleyre's biographer, once wrote of her: "Voltairine de Cleyre remains little more than a memory. But her memory possesses the glow of legend and, for vague and uncertain reasons, still arouses awe and respect" (Avrich 1978, 6). Unlike Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, or even Goldman, Most, and Berkman, Voltairine de Cleyre remains a fringe character in the classical anarchist movement.¹ De Cleyre and I grew up sixty miles and one hundred years apart, but I never knew of her existence until a professor forwarded an article to me at the emergence of my fascination with anarchism and feminism. Although during her life de Cleyre lectured around the United States and Europe, wrote prolifically, and taught hundreds, if not thousands, of poor immigrants, her legacy remains ensconced in a few anthologies of selected works and a few Internet websites. She normally appears in bibliographies or list resources with only a few "important" works attached to her name—and often crowded out by other women anarchists of her time, such as the flamboyant Emma Goldman or the Haymarket widow, Lucy Parsons. Often, these women themselves are overshadowed by the men in the movement, especially those from Europe (all of whom, from what I can gather, happened to have luscious beards). But who was Voltairine de Cleyre?

The daughter of a French tinker father and a mother linked to the abolitionist movement, de Cleyre grew up in the heartland of the Midwest. She was born in Leslie, Michigan in November 1886, and her parents moved to St. Johns, Michigan when she was a small child after another one of their children had drowned in a creek. Avrich explains, "As a liberal and freethinker, Hector de Cleyre was an admirer of Voltaire, which, Voltairine tells us, prompted his choice of her name, though 'not without some protest on the part of his wife, an American woman of Puritan descent and inclined to rigidity in social views'" (Avrich 1978, 19). The family was extremely poor, and Voltairine's sister, Addie,

¹ To be clear, when I use the term "classic" or "classical" to modify anarchism, I am referring to the period of approximately 1848 to the mid-1930's, in which anarchism developed as a theory and global social movement.

recounted “we were among the *very poor*. There was no ‘Welfare’ in those days, and to be aided by any kind of charity was a disgrace not to be tho’t of. So we were all underfed, and bodily weak” (qtd. in Avrigh 1978, 21). Despite this poverty, and the friction it caused between Hector and Harriet de Cleyre, Voltairine grew up to show the capacity for extreme intellect. Avrigh describes her as an “intelligent and pretty child, with long brown hair, blue eyes, and interesting, unusual features. She had a passionate love for nature and animals. But, already displaying the qualities that were to trouble her personal relations in later life, she was headstrong and emotional” (Avrigh 1978, 24). Voltairine and Addie were voracious readers, and Voltairine began to write at an early age (Avrigh 1978, 25). Because of de Cleyre’s penchant for intellectual and artistic pursuits, her father, raised as a Catholic, decided she would be best served by an education in a Catholic convent.

Hector de Cleyre believed that an education at the convent in Sarnia, Ontario, would give his daughter the best education possible, while ridding her of bad habits (like reading stories), and promulgating good habits, such as “rule, regulation, time and industry” (Avrigh 1978, 30). As Avrigh recounts, Voltairine spent “three years and four months at Sarnia, from September 1880 to December 1883,” but that didn’t mean she agreed with the educational path upon which her father had set her (Avrigh 1978, 30). At fourteen years old, Voltairine de Cleyre was already showing signs of the headstrong, fearless woman she would become:

After a few weeks at the convent she decided to run away. Escaping before breakfast, she crossed the river to Port Huron. From there, as she had no money, she began the long trek to St. Johns on foot. After covering seventeen miles, however, she realized that she would never make it all the way home, so she turned around and walked back to Port Huron and, going to the house of acquaintances, asked for something to eat. They sent for her father, who took her back to the convent. (Avrigh 1978, 31)

This proclivity for tenacity and individualism would help to shape both de Cleyre’s character as well as her philosophical views concerning anarchism and “The Woman Question” later in

her life.²

De Cleyre graduated from the convent, with honors, when she was seventeen years old. From there, she returned to St. Johns to live with her mother and sister. For a while, she stayed with an aunt in Greenville, Michigan and later lived in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she edited a free-thought newspaper. Throughout this time, de Cleyre considered herself a free-thinker, but it was the Haymarket riots, and subsequent “trial” and execution of the Haymarket Martyrs that cemented de Cleyre’s philosophical ideals in the direction of classical anarchist thought. Later, she lived in both Philadelphia and Chicago, where she wrote, taught, and lectured, most of the time living in ill health and extreme poverty. She was a contemporary of Emma Goldman and other anarchists residing in the United States at the time—but she was different.

During her lifetime, de Cleyre was well known in anarchist and free-thought circles, and she was extremely productive concerning written discourse, including fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Avrich writes:

While lacking Emma’s notoriety and dynamic vitality, Voltairine nevertheless emerged as one of the leading figures in the American anarchist movement between 1890 and 1910. In Philadelphia, she was active both among native-born libertarians and among Jewish immigrant revolutionists, serving as a vital link between them. She contributed a steady stream of articles and poems, sketches and stories to a variety of radical journals, of which *Lucifer*, *Free Society*, and *Mother Earth* were perhaps the most important. (Avrich 1978, 94)

Although de Cleyre wrote about a number of topics, she is best known for her political and philosophical pieces concerning “The Woman Question.” Essays, which first began as speeches, such as “Those Who Marry Do Ill,” “The Woman Question,” and “Sex Slavery,” are often overshadowed by equally provocative and well-written pieces concerning anarchism. Essays such as “Anarchism and American Traditions,” “Crime and Punishment,” and

² By “The Woman Question,” I mean the debates surrounding the question of women’s rights in Europe and the United States in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Topics up for debate included marriage, working outside the home, legal rights (such as suffrage), as well as reproductive rights and prevention.

“The Economic Tendency of Freethought” are important pieces of a classical American anarchism.

It is important to understand that, although we often label Voltairine de Cleyre (as well as Emma Goldman, Lucy Parsons, and Louise Michel) as anarcho-feminists, the question of feminism, or “The Woman Question,” was extraordinarily different when comparing these women to their first-wave feminist contemporaries. Just a few years after Voltairine de Cleyre’s death, R.A.P (Robert Allerton Parker) penned an article for *Mother Earth* titled “Feminism in America.” In his article, he described the ambitions of the first-wave feminists in the United States. Parker wrote, “our American feminists are the exponents of a new slavery” (Parker [1915] 2001, 124). He levied several claims against them. The first was that the feminists, championed by Mrs. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, believed “All sexual activity must be sanctified by law and sterilized by respectability,” thereby expounding the “prudery and hypocrisy” trapping women into marriage or creating an environment of sexual enslavement (Parker [1915] 2001, 125). The second was that the first-wave feminists “[grew] eloquent over ‘work’ and ‘economic independence’—revealing a pathetic detachment from the woman who does work, who might tell them something of the ‘glory of Labor’” (Parker [1915] 2001, 125). Most white, upper-class women with rich husbands who fought for economic independence, Parker pointed out, really were only interested in the middle and upper class positions available, and he accused them of wishing “to become only the clean-handed slaves of the State, the Charities, the Churches, and the ‘captains’ of industry” (Parker [1915] 2001, 125). Furthermore, suffrage, or the right of women to vote in the United States, was something first-wave feminists used in order to persecute other women, as in California, where the Redlight Abatement Act was championed and voted upon by women to destroy the evils of prostitution (Parker [1915] 2001, 125). This was done in a way that recognized only the “immorality” of the prostitutes, rather than identifying the socio-economic conditions perpetrated by the Church and State, especially the lack of a social safety net and other viable economic opportunities for women that necessitated their induction into the world of sex for money. Of course, Voltairine de Cleyre would make clear in several of her essays and letters that marriage, for all intents and purposes, is (State- and Church-sanctioned) prostitution, too. Parker’s article does not explicate every stance of the first-wave feminists, but it does give us

enough of a platform from which to differentiate the feminism of Voltairine de Cleyre.

Unlike the first-wave feminists, de Cleyre was not rich and, although she was educated, she lived her entire life in poverty with the lowest classes of immigrants. De Cleyre, too, discusses the issue of economic independence, but very differently than her first-wave feminist contemporaries. Moreover, she was staunchly against the right of women to vote because voting only encouraged the illegitimate authority of the state. Lastly, de Cleyre encouraged women to be knowledgeable about birth control, never to marry, and especially never to live with a man, because doing so only perpetuated the sexual slavery of woman as housekeeper. Of course, this was in direct opposition to the first-wave feminists' cry of modesty and chastity. Unlike first-wave feminists, de Cleyre also was acutely aware of the interaction between the State, Church, and freedom, relative to the ways in which women were trapped into lives of enslavement of marriage, or childbirth, or even working low-wage jobs. For de Cleyre, women were not meant to be modest mothers or wives; rather, they were to behave and be treated as human beings, just as much as any man, regardless of class or wealth.

Voltairine de Cleyre needs to be included in the anarchist canon. In making this argument, I outline the purpose of the canon as a concept, especially in literature, which, I argue, seamlessly translates into the field of anarchist thought. This is especially true since anarchism was, and still is, a mainly intellectual labor, much in the same way as literature and literary criticism. Furthermore, both developed and became enmeshed in cultural discourse in the mid- to late 19th century. After a brief look at the purpose of the canon, I explore the anarchist canon as developed in the 19th and 20th centuries, which still reflects how we study anarchism today. Finally, I explain why Voltairine de Cleyre needs to be included in the anarchist canon, including her contributions to "anarchism without adjectives" and what her anarchist philosophy can tell us today about contemporary politics and post-anarchism. Recognizing de Cleyre's place in the anarchist canon is important because she provides new lines of flight for contemporary anarchist and feminist thought. This is especially important for both academics and activists who feel the need to legitimize the roots of anarchist thought socially and historically, because de Cleyre's life and works offer numerous ways in which to approach questions beleaguering us still today.

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Even within other circles besides anarchism, de Cleyre is ignored. In her book *Gates of Freedom*, Eugenia C. Delamotte wrote that she hoped her analysis and anthologization of de Cleyre's letters, non-fiction, literature, and poetry would "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" (Delamotte 2004, 13). Not only is there little mention of de Cleyre in connection with anarchism, she is practically non-existent in terms of feminism, literature, and Michigan or U.S. history. Voltairine de Cleyre needs to be actively included in anarchist canonical studies, specifically because of what we can learn about her anarchism without adjectives and other views in light of contemporary anarchist and post-anarchist study and activism.

Before we begin to discuss the inclusion of de Cleyre in the anarchist canon, it is imperative to situate the anarchist canon in relation to the idea of a canon in general. Because my background is in literature, I have been formally acquainted with canons for years. For many literature degrees, the only required class that cannot be stricken from one's course plan is a course on Shakespeare. I believe that looking at what two authorities in the field of literature, Harold Bloom and Matthew Arnold, have to say about the literary canon will help us to understand the formation, limitations, and pragmatic liminalities of the anarchist canon. Lest we forget, the premise of a canon and formal education are inexorably linked. Formal education, at least in the Western tradition, is generally considered to have begun at institutions centered on religion. The canon was a means to streamline the texts that teachers needed to teach and students needed to study. And, of course, it all came down to what education is still best at these days: control.

Harold Bloom, an authority in the field of literature from Yale University, wrote *The Western Canon*. Although the book concerns literature, a canon is a canon is a canon. Bloom argues that, originally, the canon meant the choice of books in our teaching institutions (Bloom 1994, 3). The canon was a necessity, especially in the last two centuries, because there was not enough time to read everything and even less time to waste wading through bad writing. Bloom writes, "The secular canon, with the word meaning a catalog of approved authors, does not actually begin until the middle of the eighteenth century, during the literary period of

Sensibility, Sentimentality, and the Sublime” (Bloom 1994, 20). This means the canon is a relatively new development in our academic and social consciousness, and one that grew up alongside social theories such as anarchism. Bloom, however, is not beleaguered by many of the questions plaguing anarchists sensitive to things like authority, control, and power. In fact, much of his book is filled with rants about the “resenters,” or people like feminists and multiculturalists who are trying to ruin literature with their damned cultural studies. But, in his defense of the canon—and with it Shakespeare, Milton, aestheticism, and elitist white male privilege—Bloom provides us with some tasty tidbits that help to illuminate the questions we ask when we even try to think about opening up, deconstructing, or blasting the canon.

Bloom’s stance reveals some very important and intriguing features about the ideology of canons. He writes, “The Western canon, despite the limitless idealism of those who would open it up, exists precisely in order to impose limits, to set a standard of measurement that is anything but political or moral” (Bloom 1994, 35). Bloom approaches this from a standpoint of necessity, but his diction is clear: “impose,” “limits,” and “standard” are the very words to which most anarchists stand opposed. Imposition, limitation, and standardization all require authority, power, and control. Bloom also explains, “All canons, including our currently fashionable counter-canons, are elitist” (Bloom 1994, 37). So, even in our journey to fillet and splay out the anarchist canon, how do we measure our own elitist intentions? Blasting the canon still requires ammunition, and ammunition is power.

Curiously, Matthew Arnold once wrote a book precisely about the role of canons concerning literature and thought and how they could be used to perfect society. He titled his book *Culture and Anarchy*. Of course, he was using the term anarchy to mean everything that would be bad and horrible in a cold, barren, valueless world. In proposing this dialectic, to put it simply, Arnold argues for a canon of all the good that has been said and written. Arnold levied in the preface to his work that, “culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world” (Arnold [1882] 2006, 5). The alternative to the canon—ignoring all the good that has been said and written—is pure anarchy. But this dialectic is no longer as clear, and perhaps it has never been, as Matthew Arnold portrays. Even though Arnold was in search of perfecting culture

through the use of good literature and thought, which would then lead to a classless society, he doesn't come to terms with the fact that any canon rests squarely on the shoulders of the elite and the hierarchy of (usually illegitimate) power in which they are ensconced. How can a canon of imperfect means be used to help perfect society? The answer is clear for neither Arnold nor for contemporary anarchist academics and activists.

The question of whether or not the canon is an appropriate concept for anarchism or post-anarchism is truly a question of pragmatism. While the concept of the canon is not truly ideologically congruent with any anarchist philosophy I have studied, it still exists. The concept of the canon may divide anarchists and freethinkers, especially as we continue to produce more and more information for consumption. Ideologically, it is obvious that the canon as currently conceived is not appropriate for anarchism as conceived contemporaneously. This also links with the practical problem of experts (such as Matthew Arnold, who was a literary critic), the power differential found therein, and the hierarchy necessary to produce, promulgate, and maintain both canonization and expertise. Obviously, there is an overlap between what is ideal and what is practical, and this in many ways mirrors the current symbiotic division between anarchist academics and anarchist activists—it is a disservice to pretend there is neither a problem nor a divide, but my goal has always been to work within the system to change the system. Evolution, not revolution, is what should differentiate our solutions from those of one hundred years ago.

Beginning with Max Nettlau's *Bibliographie de L'anarchie*, first published in 1897, the anarchist canon officially was Eurocentric, and mostly androcentric. While it is certainly true that the collection reflected the availability of texts to European-based Nettlau, and many women who were involved with the movement were not necessarily publishing, it still stands today as one of the most comprehensive guides to specific articles and books across nationalities and approaches of anarchism. While Nettlau's *Bibliographie* was a beginning, the anarchist canon still mostly revolves around those whom Nettlau identified as the major players of anarchism: Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin. These are the only people who have their own chapters in Nettlau's book. This trinity of European men as the authorities of classical anarchism remains today. In some places, it has been branched out to include Godwin, and later Goldman, Berkman, and sometimes Stirner and Abbot. Still, it is obvious that there is

a canon, and it continues to be misrepresentational across the lines of gender, class, and race even today. In contemporary anarchist writings, especially in the field of post-anarchism, almost all of the major players (e.g. Call, May, and Newman) are middle-class educated white men.

I have established that there is such a thing as an anarchist canon. It has existed for a long while and will continue to exist under the present conditions until we have practically, not theoretically, figured out another line of flight. There may be a time when the anarchist canon does not exist, but it is encompassed within so many larger challenges, such as power, hierarchy, the academy, and hegemony, that the only pragmatic solution is to shape it to our ideals and needs, not pretend it does not exist. Therefore, de Cleyre's inclusion in the canon is important because of her views on the intersection of anarchism and feminism, anarchism without adjectives, and her contributions to contemporary anarchist thought and practice.

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Voltairine de Cleyre wrote about and advocated for numerous issues and philosophical considerations. As an anarcho-feminist, de Cleyre is notably best remembered for her radical solutions to questions of gender and sex. According to Sharon Presley, in "No Authority but Oneself," de Cleyre's "importance as a feminist rests primarily on her willingness to confront issues such as female sexuality and the emotional and psychological, as well as economic, dependence on men within the family structure" (Presley 2005, 191). Presley continues, "Voltairine and the anarchist feminists did not just question the unfair nature of marriage laws of that time, they repudiated institutional marriage and the conventional family structure, seeing in these institutions the same authoritarian oppression as they saw in the institution of the State" (Presley 2005, 192). Three of de Cleyre's numerous works discuss these issues particularly important to anarcho-feminism: "The Political Equality of Women," "The Woman Question," and "Those Who Marry Do Ill."

In the essay "The Political Equality of Women," which first appeared in 1894, de Cleyre argued there is no such thing as "rights" because, without the power to enforce certain actions, there can be no respect. She reasoned women must become economically independent in order to have power and thus have the same "rights" as men. She pointed out that, when women stop

being and wanting to be the “protected animal,” then they will truly become individuals and have equal claim to liberty and equality. De Cleyre wrote, “She is no more the protected animal; she becomes an individual. She suffers, and dreams of ‘rights.’ She claims some other cause of consideration than that of wife, mother, sister, daughter; she stands alone, she becomes strong, and in recognition of her strength presses her claim of equality” (de Cleyre [1894] 2005, 242–243). Unlike other first-wave feminists, de Cleyre carefully revealed the heart of the issue: equality can only come from within the women’s movement, one individual woman at a time. Women should not sit around and wait for equality to be bestowed upon them; rather, they must stand up and claim it. Furthering her feminist position, de Cleyre gave an “insider’s” critique of the anarchist movement and offered a solution for all anarchist women.

In “The Woman Question,” de Cleyre established that sexism does exist in the anarchist movement even if the men of the movement, and even some women, argue otherwise. She urged all women, especially anarchist women, never to engage in marriage. De Cleyre wrote, “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” (de Cleyre [1913] 2005, 223). De Cleyre saw marriage as the epitome of what the anarchists were fighting against, except, instead of it being a public institution, such as government, it was a private and personal institution. De Cleyre’s solution may be even more radical than her critique of marriage, especially for the time. She stated, “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” (de Cleyre, [1913] 2005, 223). She encouraged women, instead, to live independent lives and study sex. She emphasized that a woman should never have a child unless it is wanted, and unless the woman is able to provide for it only by herself. This advice still rings eerily true, especially today, in a world that still uses marriage as a tool of the State and Church to regulate bodies. Voltairine de Cleyre’s view that marriage is meretricious is a common theme throughout her writings.

In “Those Who Marry Do Ill,” for instance, de Cleyre asserted “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’” (de Cleyre [1908]

2005, 206). She defined marriage as a sexual and economic relationship where the values of home and family are maintained. In doing so, she explained that moral paradigms are constructed for the benefit of society; thus, those who marry because it is “the right thing to do,” are only buying in to a utilitarian paradigm that “best serves the growing need of that society” (de Cleyre [1908] 2005, 197). She observed that marriage restricts the growth of the individual. In addition, the primary purposes of marriage as she viewed it—child rearing and fulfilling sexual appetites—are better served, in the hopes bringing about of lasting love and respect, in rare and impermanent unions.

Generally, Voltairine de Cleyre’s anarcha-feminism can be characterized in part by a commitment to the rugged individualism of the American pioneer, as depicted in Turner’s “Frontier Thesis.” Her philosophy of anarcha-feminism is situated, in part, in a classic liberal understanding of the individual, while, at the same time, exposing the personal as political. Although de Cleyre advocated for sovereignty of the individual, especially of women, she also clearly saw the need for personal responsibility. Unlike many other feminists, de Cleyre did not defer to a cult of womanhood nor did she participate in representational politics on behalf of womankind. Rather, her criticism and precise articulations of the infringement of women’s liberty extended just as much to men as to women. De Cleyre not only advocated for the liberty of women, but she also forcefully championed personal responsibility. Like Kropotkin, de Cleyre knew that women could just as easily gain opportunity only to “throw domestic toil on to another woman” (Kropotkin [1906] 1972, 143). Although de Cleyre may be best remembered and revered for her work with feminism, she also became the head of an important movement within anarchist circles.

Early in her anarchist philosophical history, de Cleyre was known for her individualism, but abandoned it in favor of mutualism; however, she never did evolve into a communal (or communist) anarchist as Emma Goldman once reported (Avrich 1978, 147–149). Her upbringing probably caused her retention to values other than communism, as Avrich writes, “As the offspring of small-town America, Voltairine de Cleyre remained distinctly more individualistic in her outlook than the immigrant Kropotkinites among whom she lived. And as she craved independence and privacy in her own life, she prescribed them for society as a whole” (Avrich 1978, 148). Because of her commitment to a rugged individualism, she was often at philo-

sophical odds with other players in the field, such as Emma Goldman. But this came at a time when the anarchist movement, especially in the United States, was beginning to round a corner. The anarchist movement had branched into four major and myriad smaller lineages of philosophical and pragmatic pursuit. The concepts of socialism, communism, individualism, and mutualism began to cause great friction within the movement. Voltairine de Cleyre, like many others, saw this fracturing and worried about a movement that, although infamous, was still relatively small and very young (both chronologically and in the development of theory).

The solution, for de Cleyre, was a concept from the Spanish anarchist movement championed by Ricardo Mella and Fernando Tarrida del Marmol (Avrich 1978, 149). Known as “anarchism without adjectives,” “this notion of an unhyphenated anarchism, of an anarchism without labels or adjectives,” was developed to counteract the “bitter debates between mutualists, collectivists, and communists in the 1880s . . . which called for greater tolerance within the movement regarding economic questions” (Avrich 1978, 149).

De Cleyre advocated early on for the different factions of anarchism to cooperate. In her essay, “Anarchism,” she commented, “Remember, also, that none of these schemes is proposed for its own sake, but because through it, its projectors believe, liberty may be best secured. Every Anarchist, *as an Anarchist*, would be perfectly willing to surrender his own scheme directly, if he saw that another worked better” (de Cleyre 1914, 112). Interestingly, the discontentedness between the factions played out in Voltairine herself. She expounded:

Personally, while I recognize that liberty would be greatly extended under any of these economics, I frankly confess that none of them satisfies me. Socialism and Communism both demand a degree of joint effort and administration which would beget more regulation than is wholly consistent with ideal Anarchism; Individualism and Mutualism, resting upon property, involve a development of the private policeman not at all compatible with my notions of freedom. (de Cleyre 1914, 112)

Many anarchists of the time were of the mind that it was inappropriate to decide what kind of society and economic modes would engender the ideal anarchist society; rather, to do so would

be to project an illegitimate authority upon the future. She explained, “Liberty and experiment alone can determine the best forms of society. Therefore I no longer label myself otherwise than as ‘Anarchist’ simply” (de Cleyre 1914, 158). It is not only for her promulgation of anarchism without adjectives that de Cleyre should be included in the anarchist canon, but also for her unique position as a born and raised Midwestern American.

Almost all well-known anarchists from the classical period originate from Europe, and this definitely has impacted the portrayal of anarchist philosophy in the canon. Along with Lucy Parsons, Voltairine de Cleyre is one of the few anarchists, and especially women anarchists, who originally hail from the United States. She is, to the best of my knowledge, the only active anarchist of the classical period born in the Midwest, and especially in a small frontier-like town. As stated earlier, this informed both her feminism and “anarchism without adjectives.” She always retained an individualism not found in anarchist adherents of European influence. This individualism and commitment to privacy as part of liberty was integral to a feminism promoting economic and sexual independence (as well as independence from the Church and State in private matters, such as birth control). Furthermore, de Cleyre’s physical proximity to the Haymarket Affair was important (she was living in St. Johns, Michigan, only about 250 miles away). The Haymarket Riots, and subsequent trial of the Haymarket Martyrs, was the event that instigated her shift from freethinker to anarchist, and she would later be buried in Waldheim cemetery next to the monument dedicated to the men hanged for their anarchist ideals.

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Including Voltairine de Cleyre in the anarchist canon is especially important for post-anarchism, and her contributions to the field are relevant to contemporary imaginings of anarchist theory and practice. “Axiom //. Anarchism Is Not a Men’s Movement (That’s Capitalism),” of Sandra Jeppesen’s “Things to Do with Post-Structuralism in a Life of Anarchy,” partly states, “Anarchist theory will have to include intersectional anarcha-feminism, and not as an afterthought or an additional chapter (like, ‘Oops! Almost forgot the women/queers/ people of colour/indigenous peoples/people with disabilities’), but in understanding the crucial role women . . . play in anarchist organizing structures, theoretical development, direct action tactics, anti-oppression commit-

ments, cultural production, etc.” (Jeppesen 2011, 155). The previous quotation is an exiguous part of a chapter in *Post-Anarchism: A Reader*, one of the most comprehensive anthologies of contemporary anarchist thought. A brief look in the index reveals that essays in this collection mentions fascism more than feminism and Gilles Deleuze more than gender. The upshot is the volume is chock-full of talk of sexuality (including the GLBT community), which is extraordinarily exigent in contemporary anarchist theory. Unfortunately, because of the somewhat limited scope of sexuality studies, feminist inquiry and feminist analysis still stand as the most appropriate theoretical framework through which we should view anarchist studies.

Much more needs to be read and written about the intersection of anarchism and feminism. While some has been written about the theorists themselves, such as de Cleyre and Goldman, it is rare to find scholarship engaging their writings. More often than not, it is the way they lived their lives that intrigues scholars, which then also includes a brief gloss-over of their major contributions. Few know that de Cleyre wrote both poetry and fiction, and that Goldman has essays concerning drama. Who is engaging robustly with these texts and their ideas, instead of with the authors’ lives? Perhaps a few, but it is not enough.³

This is especially true of post-anarchism. There have been many articles and publications articulating, investigating, and defending theories associated with ideas like power, hegemony, late capitalism, neoliberalism, and the like. Post-anarchism has even opened up a place through which new areas of study like queer anarchism are faring quite well. But where is a post-anarchist reading of contemporary feminism? Where is a post-anarchist analysis of classical anarchy-feminism? There are a few, but certainly not enough. It seems to me that these questions, rather than being repressed, have fallen victim to an affected dispassion: we’ve been there and done that, and now there are some shiny new French post-structuralists just sitting there waiting to be poked and prodded and played with. Of course, I

³ Recent Voltairine de Cleyre scholars include Sharon Presley, Crispin Sartwell, and A.J. Brigati, and recent Emma Goldman scholars include Candace Falk, Vivian Gornick, Marian Morton, and Martin Duberman. Anarchist biographer Paul Avrich has also undertaken much scholarship on both of de Cleyre and Goldman, and his writings are invaluable for any study of either’s life and work.

like a good Deleuzian post-anarchist analysis as much as the next person, but there is other, extremely pertinent, work to be done.

Post-anarchism needs more scholarship and activism utilizing anarcha-feminists like Voltairine de Cleyre. To be clear, there has been some scholarship utilizing Emma Goldman, but since when has heralding one person's ideas as representative of an entire movement spanning multiple nationalities, ethnicities, lifestyles, time periods, etc. ever been a good idea? Goldman receives a goodly portion of the small beam of the limelight because of her flamboyant attitude, evocative media personality, and many arrests, but she should not be the default anarcha-feminist, nor held up as the stereotypical classical anarchist woman. No person should be the default figure of her or his time period or belief system, and this concept is even more heinous when it comes to members of traditionally underrepresented groups.

More needs to be written about contemporary feminism and feminists. Where are the articles and theories about post-anarchist feminism? What would a post-anarchist feminism even look like? What about women in contemporary movements like Occupy? Does the anarchist academic (or activist) still care that women make less than men—that, especially in the United States, women's rights and access to safe contraception and birth control are being eroded daily? What does it matter if we have rousing debates about hegemony and subjectivity using the evocative arguments of dead French theorists if I cannot find gainful employment at the rate of my male counterparts or if I cannot have access to a safe abortion if I have been raped or my life is in danger? Inclusion of Voltairine de Cleyre and her writings in the anarchist canon help us to confront these contemporary questions in our own world and in our own lives. Not only do de Cleyre's writings help to contribute to our understanding of feminism(s), but her works also hold great promise for schisms within contemporary anarchist circles.

Another contribution Voltairine de Cleyre makes to contemporary anarchism is her belief in anarchism without adjectives. This theory was the melting pot between different social and economic thought. Much of today's contemporary anarchist thought focuses only on the social aspects of anarchism—more of a how-to guide for individuals or particular countries, rather than a comprehensive theory or theories including economic tendencies. Although the anarchist movement has attacked neoliberalism, late-capitalism, and globalization, few major activists or theorists have provided anything but reactionary solutions. If

we are to fight against globalization, what are the alternatives? What are the possibilities that could be left in its place? Although such theories may seem prescriptive, the imagination of what could be is important so that, in de Cleyre's words, we can have at the very least the "freedom to try" (de Cleyre 1914, 113).

Yet another contribution de Cleyre can make to contemporary anarchist thought as well as to anarchist practice is her "no frills" attitude toward writing and public speaking. Unlike some of her contemporaries, and certainly totally opposite of the majority of the contemporary academic post-anarchist field, de Cleyre had little use for theoretical explications of anarchist thought. Avrich writes, "Pragmatic and skeptical by nature, Voltairine was repelled by stringent dogmas and arid theoretical schemes" (Avrich 1978, 154). He explained how a friend once said "She had little use for people of high-sounding theories. . . . It was activity she was seeking in preference to theories. She was an intellectual, yet without 'assuming the air of intellectuality in order to make others feel inferior in her presence'" (Avrich 1978, p. 154). De Cleyre preferred the company of "simple people, with active comrades, whose hearts are still beating for the Anarchist idea" (Avrich 1978, 154). De Cleyre's philosophy shows us that one can be both an intellectual and an activist, and that the two parties should indeed work together for social and political change. Furthermore, de Cleyre's habit of public speaking to comrades and "simple" people helped to provide the fusion between philosophy and activism she practiced. Most of her essays were actually first speeches. She would speak yearly at the anniversary of the hanging of the Haymarket Martyrs, and she would also speak across the country and at home in Philadelphia to gatherings and clubs. Once, she even took the podium to speak for Emma Goldman when Goldman had been arrested. It was this continual responsibility to people, not only in writing, but also in speech, that helped de Cleyre connect with her audience and stay grounded to the concerns of the masses. Public speaking is a useful form that has fallen by the wayside in the contemporary anarchist movement, and we generally only hear speeches dealing with anarchism at the height of a protest, when an academic is touring his book, or when a conference panel of paper-readers appears on YouTube. De Cleyre's anarchism was a people's anarchism, not an academic anarchism or a reactionary anarchism.

I urge those who read, teach, and talk of anarchism to include de Cleyre in their personal canons. It is as easy as picking up her

biography or a copy of her selected works. Although there are not many books about her or anthologies of her work, pieces by and about her are extraordinarily available if one chooses to look. Include her in research or just in a reading group. Much work needs to be done in the field of feminism as related to both contemporary and classical anarchism. Her literary works of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction have barely been touched. There is much work to be done with and because of Voltairine de Cleyre. Without her, the picture of anarchism is much impoverished.

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