

WRITING AGAINST DEMOCRACY:
ANARCHIST LITERATURE AND THE APORIA OF REPRESENTATION, 1880-1940

BY

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Abstract

This dissertation proposes “anarchist literature” as both a generic classification and a methodological orientation toward the overlapping fields of American literature and democratic politics. By expanding the boundaries of both literature and anarchism, it offers an important supplement to accounts of American literature between the Civil War and WWII. The defining characteristic of anarchist “texts” is their conflicted relationship to government and representation. Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century American anarchists took as their object of critique U. S. democracy, a tenuously, yet aspiringly representative form of governance. As U. S. government moved unevenly toward more complete electoral representation, anarchists questioned the validity of all forms of state power, in ways ranging from the dramatic assassination of a sitting president to the subtle permeation of anti-government thought into a wide range of texts. This project argues that representative democracy is only the most obvious face of a more comprehensive “logic of representation”: a structuring desire to *re-present*—to make known the absent subjects of politics and literature—which during this period folded multiple registers of representation back into the nation and its governance. This logic produces the aporia of representation, a paradox that has obscured the era’s widespread fascination with anti-government politics. By recovering a fractured, yet sustained tradition of anarchist literature, this study reveals the difficulties inherent in writing against the American democratic ideal and the paradox of critiquing governmental representationality through representational literary forms: anarchism appears as a formal conflict within a range of discourses, exposing the sublimated political unrest produced by the nation’s incomplete democracy.

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Chapter 1

Defining Anarchist Literature: Negative Critique and Representational Governmentality

The American worker remains loyal to the government and is the first to defend it against criticism. He is still the most devoted champion of the “grand and noble institutions of the greatest country on earth.” Why? Because he believes that they are *his* institutions, that *he*, as sovereign and free citizen, is running them and that he could change them if he so wished. It is his *faith* in the existing order that constitutes its greatest security.

—Alexander Berkman, *What Is Anarchism?*

Anarchist literature is the record of an aporia, an antinomy between the fundamental anarchist move to negate and the exigencies of U.S. democracy. From the 1880s to the 1930s, anarchism haunted the nation as a fundamental threat, yet according to most accounts, had little impact on the United States or its literature. In this project, I argue that anarchism’s minimized influence and its seeming disappearance are caused by and gesture toward the period’s logic of representation: a structuring drive to re-present. The experience of American citizenship asks individuals to represent and be represented in multiple registers. At the center of this representational impulse, we find democracy. During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, anarchism is asked, like citizens, to represent its politics in the public sphere. Yet, anarchism fundamentally denies that representation is a valid foundation for political life. Of course, from a certain perspective there is nothing paradoxical about this tension: the nation’s system of governance requires all politics to fit within its mechanisms, to adhere to its forms. For the anarchist, however, efforts to challenge American democracy invariably conflict with the nation, producing an antinomy: you may reject government, but you must do so through its forms. The discrepancy between the nation’s all-too-logical exclusion of anarchism and the aporetic nature of American anarchist critique are my central concerns, because they revise in

important ways our historical and theoretical narratives of the relationship between literature and politics. Through this study of “anarchist literature,” I probe the homologous representationality of American political and literary discourses to suggest both the reasons for anarchism’s disappearance (its purportedly minor impact) and the stakes of this absence.

In this introductory chapter, I outline the historico-theoretical definitions of anarchism and anarchist literature to lay foundation for the project’s wide-ranging analysis. Beginning with anarchism’s defining characteristic—negative critique—I move toward a directed cultural history of the relationships between anarchism, democracy, and American literature. This broad view of anti-government thought’s influence requires a working definition of anarchism, as well as a discussion of previous attempts to position anarchism within extant accounts of the era’s radicalism. By questioning the validity of models that categorize literature by its authors’ politics, exploring earlier efforts to conceptualize the connections between anarchism and literature, and detailing the overlap of anarchism with various constructions of liberalism, I establish a framework for considering texts’ anti-government valences.¹ After defining anarchism as an essentially negative philosophy—a political stance directed always *against* governmental power formations—I shift to the contemporaneous object of critique: American democracy, which I argue is only the most obvious face of a representational governmentality—an overdetermining impulse toward representation that produces the antimony as anarchists attempt simultaneously to reject and to utilize different representational registers.² Building from

1. Throughout this project, I read a variety of texts alongside the traditional material of literary studies. By juxtaposing analysis of scientific treatises, trial transcripts, and popular accounts of anarchism with plays and novels, I am able to offer both a cultural history of American anarchism from Haymarket to the 1930s and a more comprehensive account of the relationship between anarchism, democracy, and representation.

2. Below, I address the issue of representation in greater detail, but I should flag here my awareness of the problem of “representative democracy.” I do not imply the truly representational nature of U.S. (or any other) democracy. Instead, I evoke the pervasively idyllic democracy that many imagine as desirable, perhaps achievable, and at least worth working toward—a dream to be realized as governance better “represents” those it governs.

Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, who persistently describes representation as a unified concept, I consider literary representation alongside political and legal representation.³ As groundwork for my compound analyses of anarchism, literature, and culture, I contend that representation is the dominant rationality—the font of American citizen’s subjective experiences. Democracy is only one part of this rationality, homologous to and inextricable from infinite knowledges, practices, and strategies. Thus, when anarchism interrogates representational government without a wholesale rejection of representation, it attacks only a single part of a unified whole.

I conclude this introductory chapter with a brief description of my methodology and the formal characteristics of anarchist literature. Throughout this study, I attempt to enact anarchist negative critique. By refusing to offer positivistic closures, by illuminating irreconcilable tensions, I present anarchist literature as a question. Much like American anarchism, this project remains open. I read a series of “texts”—ranging from Frank Norris’s revealingly naturalistic explorations of social Darwinism, to actual acts of violence committed by Alexander Berkman and Leon Czolgosz, to the trials, deaths, and legacies of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti—not to offer another neat explanation for pre-WWII American anarchism’s short life and swift death, but to show the field of contestation in which anarchist critique struggles *through* representational forms of power. Despite its seeming diversity, the genre of anarchist literature has unifying traits, consistent thematic and formal concerns that link plays and novels to trial transcripts and scientific treatises. As I construct an archive and analyze these texts, I reveal the antagonistic sediments of democratic politics and gesture toward this study’s stakes: beyond providing both a new generic classification and a methodological orientation toward the

3. Pitkin claims that all forms of representation make “present . . . something . . . not present literally” (9). This universal and cohesive definition theorizes the connection between discourses as diverse as literature and democracy, and subtends my entire project.

overlapping fields of American literature and democratic politics, the study of anarchist literature suggests the nation's political horizon. By examining the anti-government residue permeating a range of discourses, I reveal the nation's uneasiness toward its still imperfect democracy and consider the significance of excluding politics that imagine social formations transcending even the fullest realization of representation.

Defining Anarchism: Liberty, Negative Critique, and the Problem of Liberalism

To define anarchist literature requires first offering an underlying definition of anarchism.⁴ The Greek *αρχη* or “arche” evokes the typical English (via Latin) derivatives connoting instantiations of power—monarch, oligarch, even patriarch—yet *αρχη* carries with it a more foundational meaning. In addition to “leader” or “head”—definitions consonant with the modern, governmental resonances of “arche”—the Greek *αρχη* can also refer to origins, beginnings, the root of that which exists.⁵ This metaphysical trace saturates and subtly reinforces linguistic and concrete power formations, suggesting a primacy to the “arche” that is both generative and natural. The origins of the words “anarchy” and “anarchism” are contained within these overlapping meanings: *αναρχία* and *αναρχ-ος* add the privative *αν* to *αρχη*, producing a word that implies most basically the negation of “arche.” While the modern “anarchism” connotes a political philosophy competing alongside others to explain origins and the consequent

4. This section details primary definition of anarchism. Anarchism's variants are numerous and stretch over a historical period extending far beyond the bounds of this project. Here, I offer a tentative, yet—for my purposes—foundational and structuring thread that precedes and to a large extent determines the multiple schools of anarchist thought.

5. I follow several anarchists who have defined anarchism in part from its etymological roots. Benjamin Tucker offered a similar reading in 1887: “Anarchy does not mean simply opposed to the *archos*, or political leader. It means opposed to the *archē*. Now, *archē*, in the first instance, means beginning, origin. From this it comes to mean a *first principle, an element*; then *first place, supreme power, sovereignty, dominion, command, authority*; and finally a *sovereignty, an empire, a realm, a magistracy, a governmental office* . . . [T]he word Anarchy as a philosophical term and the word Anarchist as the name of a philosophical sect were first appropriate in the sense of opposition to dominion, to authority” (*Instead of a Book* 112).

formation of headship, the ancient *αναρχία* contains a much deeper challenge: the negation or inversion of *αρχή* suggests a rejection not only of the various political “arche” and their undergirding metaphysics, but also of the link between origins and archic power formations. I offer this brief etymological exercise to argue that anarchism is best understood not simply as an alternative political formation, but as a political philosophy and practice built upon negation—a non-positivist orientation to questions of power that, especially in light of history’s numerous successful “arche,” functions primarily as critique, as the *αν* to the dominant *αρχή*.⁶

Following Sebastian Faure, I posit a definition of anarchism centered upon “the negation of the principle of Authority in social organizations and the hatred of all constraints that originate in institutions founded on this principle” (qtd. in May 61-62). If, as Todd May claims, “for the anarchist, it is the nature of power to oppress,” then the “negation” of oppressive power “is the goal to which anarchism aspires” (62). Without the initial negative impulse directed against governance, no political philosophy can be described properly as “anarchist.” Negation (or negative critique) is the primary characteristic that differentiates anarchism from positivistic radical movements and that will function as my operative definition in this study. Two qualifications are immediately necessary. First, I do not claim that anarchist theory emerges *a priori*, that it is disconnected from other philosophical and practical concerns, nor that it does not appear often within the context of metaphysical and/or natural assumptions (e.g., natural rights). To say that anarchism’s fundamental impulse is negation is not to detach it either from the forms of power it seeks to negate or from the precedent sense of human possibility that almost always underpins anarchist politics. Second, it is clear that most every major anarchist theorist has

6. The negative sense of anarchism and its etymology have been deployed as critique and in its defense. Max Eastman said of “anarchy”: it “is a privative word. It is a word that merely denies. When you grasp it, there is nothing in your hand. And the spirit of man will never be kindled to high endeavor by such a word, no matter how negative the actual thing he has to do” (47). As an anarchist, however, Tucker finds value in privation, because the etymology of anarchy contains its political goals: “*without dominion, without authority*” (*Instead of a Book* 112).

articulated positivistic proposals for the shape of anarchist society. The moment of negation, however, occurs logically between the social and intellectual formations that precede anarchism's appearance and its subsequent positivistic turn. This moment of negation is the moment at which anarchism as a meaningful political form appears and by which it is best defined.

All major anarchists reveal in their work an impulse toward negative critique, granting it a certain primacy. Mikhail Bakunin's *God and the State* offers a typical construction of negation's role in anarchist theory: "The liberty of man consists solely in this: that he obeys natural laws because he has himself recognized them as such, and not because they have been externally imposed upon him by any extrinsic will whatever, divine or human, collective or individual" (30). Contained within this brief passage are 1) the philosophical foundations of Bakunin's anarchist politics: he recognizes the metaphysical existence of "man" and "natural laws," and asserts the value of liberty;" 2) a gesture toward anarchist society—the implied ideal world, in which "man . . . obeys laws [only] because he has . . . recognized them;" and, most importantly, 3) the moment of negation—at the center of Bakunin's precedent natural liberty and future anarchist society there appears his object of critique (the external imposition of another's will). Restatements of the moment of negation occur throughout European and American anarchism: Spaniard José Llunas Pujols asks, "What, then, is an-archy in practice? The whole organization of society stripped of power, domination or the authority of some over others" (125). German Gustave Landauer insists, "Anarchism's lone objective is to reach a point at which the belligerence of some humans against humanity, in whatever form, comes to a halt." (138). And, in the United States, Emma Goldman, closely mirroring Bakunin, describes anarchism as "the philosophy of a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by man-made

law; the theory that all forms of government rest on violence, and are therefore wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary” (*Anarchism* 50).

At the center of this critique of government is a specific conception of “freedom” or “liberty,” which has often been called “negative liberty.” Isaiah Berlin famously defines negative liberty:

I am normally said to be free to the degree to which no human being interferes with my activity If I am prevented by other persons from doing what I could otherwise do I can be described as being coerced Coercion implies the deliberate interference of other human beings within the area in which I could otherwise act. You lack political liberty or freedom only if you are prevented from attaining a goal by human beings.
(“Two Concepts” 69)

He contrasts negative liberty with “positive liberty”: “the ‘positive’ sense of the word ‘liberty’ derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master” (“Two Concepts” 178). While admitting that “‘positive’ and ‘negative’ liberty . . . start at no great logical distance from each other” (“Introduction” 36), Berlin traces their “historically . . . divergent” development, which eventually caused them to come “into direct conflict with each other” (“Two Concepts” 179). In short, he distinguishes constructions of liberty-as-self-mastery from the negative assertion that “there ought to exist a certain minimum area of personal freedom which must on no account be violated; for if it is overstepped, the individual will find himself in an area too narrow for even that minimum development of natural faculties which alone make it possible to pursue, and even to conceive, the various ends which men hold good or right or sacred” (“Two Concepts” 171).

Building from Berlin, I argue that anarchist negative critique proceeds from negative

liberty toward positive liberty. He claims that “in the ideal society, composed of wholly responsible beings, rules, because I should scarcely be conscious of them, would gradually wither away. Only one movement was bold enough to render this assumption quite explicit and accept its consequences — that of the Anarchists” (195). What anarchists make explicit is the abolition of “rules,” law, and government, because negative liberty is the requisite condition for positive liberty. They sidestep Berlin’s historical divergence by locating a logical primacy to negative liberty: self-mastery cannot exist without negative liberty and it makes no sense to speak of positive liberty without the absence of government. Put differently, negative liberty functions as the *raison d’être* of negative critique. Since negative liberty seeks to “curb authority as such,” while positive liberty wants “authority placed in [the] own hands” of those who possess it (“Two Concepts” 212)—that is, since self-mastery translated to the ground of social relations precludes negative liberty—anarchists reject authority (i.e., government) as such, with positive liberty appearing as a possibility only after the conditions of negative liberty are achieved. This stark logical and temporal division denies Berlin’s “ideal case,” in which “liberty coincides with law: autonomy with authority” and distinguishes anarchism from various forms of liberalism (“Two Concepts” 195).

This distinction, however, is often overlooked, because of anarchism’s overlap with the disparate intellectual threads of liberalism, a link that complicates any definition of anarchism. The two philosophies do possess certain consonances, so to define anarchist literature requires addressing the ways in which four entwined, yet distinct liberal traditions affect our historical memory of anarchism: classical liberalism, laissez-faire liberalism and neoliberalism, reform liberalism and the liberal welfare state, and pejorative deployments of the “liberal” moniker. First, and most fundamental, there is classical liberalism, which bears marked similarities to

anarchism: it “primarily emphasize[s] negative freedom and political rights, and only incidentally touche[s] on economics” (Waligorski 3). More specifically, classical liberalism asserts “that no power, but only rights, can be regarded as absolute” and “that there are frontiers, not artificially drawn, within which men should be inviolable” (Berlin, “Two Concepts” 211). It is apparent that anarchism and liberalism share a fascination with “rights” and both recognize the potential threat posed by forms of “power” that curtail their exercise. Liberalism, however, diverges from anarchism’s focus on negative liberty, when it claims “the problem of political liberty [is] soluble by establishing a just order that would give to each man all the freedom to which a rational being was entitled” (“Two Concepts” 191-192). Both share the assumption that “the negative view may encompass a conception of freedom as the non-restriction of options” (Gray 63), but anarchism recognizes in government inherent restriction, while liberalism finds in government the assurance of negative liberty. As Berlin suggests, “all forms of liberalism . . . are less or more watered-down versions of [anarchism],” because anarchism more completely accepts negative liberty’s implication that law and government are superfluous formations if rights exist (“Two Concepts” 195). They both begin from negative liberty, but reach far different conclusions.

Two major descendants of classical liberalism come to the fore in the nineteenth century as “economic activity became the dominant activity in liberal societies” (Manent 46-47), and have since appeared in various forms, with multiple names. Conrad P. Waligorski calls these two strains “individual or laissez-faire liberalism” and “reform liberalism” (4-6). Both claim the classical liberal tradition, so in the twentieth century “liberal politics [have] vacillate[d] between exalting the state and defending against it” (Seigel viii-ix). On one hand, laissez-faire liberalism translates classical liberalism’s negative liberty into the “unabashedly and primarily economic . .

. assumption that self-interested individuals compete in markets . . . the results of which are just, even democratic” (Waligorski 4). This vein of liberalism runs from Adam Smith to the present and while not now popularly known as “liberalism” (in the United States, the “conservative” political agenda more closely matches it), it retains immense political currency as the neoliberal “theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey 2). Reform liberalism, on the other hand, “epitomizes the contemporary concept of political-economic liberalism” (Waligorski 6). It calls for the adaptation of “liberal principles to altered circumstances” (Waligorski 6)—for a complementary positive liberty, insured by government that can make classical liberal notions of freedom relevant to modernity. This is the liberalism of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal, “associated with economic regulation and the rise of the welfare state” (Rossinow 4).

Each of these political forms claims the liberal tradition and many of its trappings. Laissez-faire liberals bear a striking resemblance to “the procrustean individualism of nineteenth-century liberalism,” while contemporary “liberals” trace their heritage to the Progressive Era transformation of the liberal tradition into “a moderately democratic movement for fairness and security” (Rossinow 14). Anarchism is structured by the classical liberal problem—rights and the relation between freedom and government—and its multiple forms often are, correctly or not, linked to liberalism’s two dominant modern schools. The inalterable anarchist logic that moves from rights to the central question of negative freedom and then to positive self-mastery consistently refuses government, which leads some to confuse economic libertarianism with anarchist politics. Many anarchists also assert a positively egalitarian social

formation that might appear similar to idealized liberal government, but which can only be realized through the absence of government and thus is always secondary to negative liberty. This insistent misunderstanding of anarchism's relation to liberalism gives rise to the pejorative type of liberalism. During the interwar period, U.S. anarchists willing to sublimate political negative critique to economic positivism were welcomed into the "radical" fold by Leftists. Those who did not were dismissed as "liberals" and bourgeois apologists. In an interesting historical merger, some Leftists collapsed their disdain for Roosevelt's New Deal and their ideological differences with anarchists to create the pejoratively "liberal" category that encompassed all different forms of liberalism: whether classical, laissez-faire, or reform, pre-WWII "liberals" certainly were not on the Left.

For anarchists, the logical conclusion of assumptions about liberty and the necessary condition for its realization are hinged upon the negation of "domination," "belligerence," and "violence." Denying liberalism's security of liberty through government, anarchism asks: "What must be abolished [negated] . . . to secure liberty? First of all, of course, the thing that invades you most, that handicaps you or prevents your free activity; the thing that interferes with your liberty and compels you to live differently from what would be your own choice. That thing is government" (Berkman, *What Is?* 145). The negation of government—the condensation, crystallization, and embodiment of that which prevents liberty—is *the* defining characteristic of anarchism: even when they disagree about the practical method for abolishing government and the positivistic visions for what will follow its abolition, all variants of anarchism share this central theme.

Defining Anarchist Literature: Affinity, Modernism, Post-Structuralism?

Negative liberty and negative critique are the fundamental characteristics of all anarchism, yet efforts to explore the relationship between anarchism and literature rarely follow this basic definition, instead proposing models that rely on connecting anarchism to some other movement. Anarchist literature has previously been theorized in three major ways: the affinity model, the modernist turn, and the trans-historical post-structuralist linkage. The first two accept the much-reported death of anarchism—albeit in various forms—while the last neglects the historical specificity of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century American anarchism and thus simultaneously limits anarchism (by claiming it as a prehistory to post-structural philosophy) and expands it to the point of meaninglessness (by attributing to anarchism a critique of representation that extends far beyond the concrete governmental formations against which American anarchists directed their ire). Providing a cultural history of anarchism and a theory of anarchist literature requires engaging with these models, but each of these approaches presents problems and is insufficient by itself: by failing fully to recognize both anarchism's central tendency toward negation and its historical specificity, they both limit the scope of anti-government thought's influence and elide anarchism within some other literary-political narrative.

The few examples of “anarchist” literature haunting the margins of literary studies typically have been categorized by affinity: Voltairine de Cleyre's poems are anarchist, because she was an anarchist; works appearing in anarchist periodicals may or may not be anarchist (these magazines published works by socialists, communists, and other radicals as well); and poet Arturo Giovannitti is often labeled an anarchist, because of his affiliation with the I.W.W., a militant union to which many anarchists were attracted. This construction of anarchist literature

relies largely on the identifying characteristics used by those who study a more broadly imagined, Leftist literature. Since at least Walter Rideout's *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954* (1956) and Daniel Aaron's *Writers on the Left* (1961), the affinity model has been popular for locating authors' attachment to (or distance from) the contemporaneous Left. In its most basic form, the affinity definition relies on self-identification: radical literature is written by those who identify as radicals.⁷ This approach works for the most visible pre-WWII radicals, but many who had been drawn to the Left during the 1930s denied this affinity by the 1950s.⁸

To address this self-protecting dis-identification, Rideout, Aaron, and those who wrote after them, turned to affiliation, which took two major forms: organizational and ideological. In its most frequent form, organizational affinity relies on relative distance from the major communist entities of the period. Some writers became members of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA), many were involved with organizations intimately linked to the Comintern and CPUSA, and others expressed approval of Party actions. Ideological affinity is closely tied to organizational affinity, yet may rely on a more tenuous acceptance of radical thought: rather than applauding Party actions and supporting organizations directly linked to international communism, those affiliated ideologically might only demonstrate a general approval of the broad shift toward the Left. These various forms of affinity, however, present three major problems when applied to anarchists. First, after the Palmer Raids, few identified as anarchists.⁹

7. Some problems arise from self-identification as a method for literary categorization. For one, while many authors theorize the movements with which they are associated (e.g., Norris and realism/naturalism), the genres, movements, and periods to which we link writers are not coextensive with their self-identifications. In other words, were William Dean Howells to deny being a realist, he would not cease to be categorized as such.

8. Rideout and Aaron do deal at some length with writers who refused to disavow their Leftism, but political exigencies of the 1950s caused many either to deny any affection for the Left or to repent their former sins and condemn communism.

9. The Palmer Raids occurred during 1919 and 1920 as anti-anarchist sentiment peaked after WWI. During this period, the federal government arrested and deported many non-native anarchists. I discuss the Palmer Raids at greater length in my interlude between chapters four and five.

Much like the suppressive Cold War environment, post-WWI anti-anarchist fervor did not inspire vocal self-labeling as an anti-government agitator. This is not to say that there were nearly as many anarchists as socialists before WWI or as communists during the 1930s, but to point out that self-identification is a problematic historical luxury. Second, there is no domestic anarchist organization comparable to the CPUSA and international anarchist congresses were much less powerful than the Comintern, so organizational affiliation can be misleading (not to mention that many anarchists are skeptical of large-scale organization)—categorizing anarchist literature by proximity to anarchist organizations fails to account for the historical and ideological idiosyncrasies of anarchism. Third, and most important, affinity privileges intentionality. To define radical literature by its writers' distance from organizations or ideology is in a sense to define their works by their authors' politics. Thus, while self-identification and connections to an anarchist "movement" are important factors in the cultural history of American anarchism, they are insufficient to capture the manifestations of anti-government thought and the pervasive logic of representation permeating literature from the period.¹⁰

More recent attempts to address the specifically anarchist nature of literary culture shift away from direct affinity, but in doing also digress from literature. David Weir, David Kadlec, and Allan Antliff discuss anarchism and discuss literature, yet concern themselves far more with other related concepts: art, modernism, culture. Still, they stand as one major approach to the intersection of anarchism and literature. Post-structural theories of anarchism by May and Jesse S. Cohn, though they discuss literary texts only tangentially, stand as the other. On their surface, both of these discourses question the putative "death" of anarchism at the time of the Palmer

10. David Weir offers one strange twist on the affinity model by examining novels written about anarchist characters, such as Helen and Olivia Rossetti's *A Girl among the Anarchists* (1903) and Frank Harris's *The Bomb* (1908). The problems with categorization by subject matter seem obvious. One wonders: if novels about anarchists are anarchist literature, might *The Princess Cassamassima*, which Weir discusses two chapters earlier, be categorized as "princess literature?"

Raids, but they do so by articulating and sublimating anarchism to more prevalent concepts. Early in *Anarchist Modernism* (2001), Antliff claims that “anarchism was *the* formative force lending coherence and direction to modernism in the United States between 1908 and 1920” (1). Weir’s *Anarchy and Culture* (1997) offers a related thesis, positing that “anarchism succeeded culturally where it failed politically”—this success being “measured by the structural resemblance of much of twentieth-century culture to the political model anarchism provides” (5). In *Mosaic Modernism* (2000), Kadlec argues that “the early-twentieth-century assault on ‘first principles’ was also forcefully applied to language and genre by writers who were engaged with contemporary social issues and who found within these issues living applications of the broadly modern antifoundationalist premises set forth by anarchist political theorists” (4). Each suggests a generative role for anarchism: it is consonant with and formative of modernist aesthetics and modern culture.

The precise nature of anarchism, however, remains in question. Antliff writes consciously against the “‘affinity’ thesis, insisting that “anarchism could unfold entirely in an artistic context, as a mode of personal liberation” (*Anarchist Modernism* 1). He translates into a causal relationship the notion that an “artist’s creative freedom goes hand in hand with a politics that refuses power over others or hierarchical relations” (*Anarchy and Art* 14). Following Antliff’s claim that “anarchism . . . nurtured a revolt against the norms and institutions through which dominant forces in capitalist America sought to contain and channel social activity” (*Anarchist Modernism* 2), Weir asserts that modern, “heterogeneous, fragmented culture . . . emerged [and] looked a lot like anarchism” (157). In their effort to consider anarchism’s legacy, these scholars show the nation and its culture “absorb[ing] . . . anarchist tenets [which] came to foster a new kind of orthodoxy; it was this orthodoxy that led later American writers to use modern narrative

techniques to challenge the ‘foundations’ that anarchist assaults on ‘first principles’ had gradually come to cement” (Kadlec 9). For each, anarchism possesses philosophical affinity with elements of modernism (art, literature, culture) and thus can be theorized as the intellectual progenitor of the powerful movement that followed.

Such a perspective, though, is coupled with skepticism toward anarchist ideology and the efficacy of anarchist political practice. Weir repeatedly points to anarchism’s “fail[ure] to survive in political form,” claiming that “the anarchic style of modernism emerges just as anarchism diminishes” and finally admitting that “modernist culture is anarchistic only in a broad, conceptual sense that is remote from anarchism as a social movement and a historical force” (4, 200, 262). These few concrete studies of anarchism’s impact on American literature and its cognates do recognize that “anarchists . . . contributed to an evolving twentieth-century conceptual matrix”—that is, to modernism in all its forms—but doing so entails a certain distance from anarchism’s core principles (Kadlec 9). For instance, Antliff rejects the “strictly antigovernmental definition of anarchism” because doing so “cleave[s] off aesthetic issues from anarchist thought, thus marginalizing the movement’s significance for . . . artistic production” (*Anarchist Modernism* 1). To construct his “contested discursive field” of anarchism (*Anarchist Modernism* 2), Antliff provides a taxonomy of radicalism from 1908 to 1920, including Max Stirner, Friedrich Nietzsche, Leo Tolstoy, and Oscar Wilde alongside the I.W.W., the Socialist Party, and Bolshevism. His expansive scope and novel methodology add to our understanding of the relationship between anarchism and modern art (and thus, by proxy, modern literature), but ultimately, he begins with modernism and works back to anarchism, a tendency seen in each of these works: Weir, Kadlec, and Antliff examine what anarchism *became*, rather than what it was. This stance implies a revised “death” narrative—anarchism as such dies, while its descendent,

modernist art and/or culture, remains—and, as all three would doubtlessly admit, privileges art/aesthetics/culture over anarchism. By largely ignoring the strict anti-governmental nature of anarchism and focusing instead on the similarities between modernist culture and art and the aforementioned aspects of anarchist theory, these works repeatedly suggest the view that “the end result of democratic politics is hardly distinguishable from anarchy” (Weir 42). Essentially, modernist culture de-anarchizes anarchism, which both transforms, without eliminating, accounts of anarchism’s death and stops short of theorizing anarchist literature.

In *Anarchism and the Crisis of Representation* (2006), Cohn addresses this strain of anarchist studies: “The primary theme linking modernism and anarchism, in this . . . narrative, is the translation of an anarchist revolution against every form of domination into the Revolution of the Word fomented by Joyce and [others]—that is, the translation of an anarchist refusal of political representation into a generalized ‘resistance to representation’” (120). Cohn’s text outlines a theory of anarchism that draws from classical and modern anarchist thinkers, yet offers very little analysis of the historical and political realities of given moments and offers no significant attention to literary works. In it, he attempts to rehabilitate the possibilities of representation or, perhaps more accurately, to challenge the tendency to attribute a comprehensive anti-representationality to anarchism: he is anti-anti-representational. He sees in the work of Weir and Kadlec a questionable translation of the “anarchist project of stripping the would-be representatives of humanity of their political authority . . . into a program stripping symbolic representations . . . of their metaphysical authority” (121-122). In other words, Cohn takes issue with the sublimation of anarchism to the narrative of modernism, because such a thorough link between anarchism and anti-representationalism threatens to make anarchism politically impotent, if not philosophically meaningless:

Is it true, historically speaking, that anarchism has always rejected representation in all its forms? Is it possible to conduct political action without the use of symbolic representations—for instance, engaging in rhetorical persuasion, making factual claims about what is the case, assessing the opinions and consulting the wishes of the group, communicating intentions in order to coordinate action—in a word, without language? Does such a sweeping critique of representation leave room for anarchism, or for any radical project at all? Or is it possible for anarchists to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate representational practices? (Cohn 21)

Cohn argues against a body of work from the 1990s theorizing the relationship between post-structural theory and anarchism, best seen in May's *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* (1994). May attributes to (all) anarchism a proto-post-structural critique of representation, evoking the now commonplace assertion that representation equals domination:

The critique of representation in the anarchist tradition runs deeper than just political representation What motivates the critique of political representation is the idea that in giving people images of who they are and what they desire, one wrests from them the ability to decide those matters for themselves. Representation, in the anarchist tradition, must be understood not merely in its political connotations, but more widely as an attempt to wrest from people decisions about their lives. (47)

Here, May builds from later (and limited) anarchist claims that “Anarchism can be understood as the *generic* social and political idea that expresses negation of *all* power, sovereignty, domination, and hierarchical division, and a will to their dissolution” (Wieck 139). May weds these to post-structural critiques of representation/signification in order to define a “new type of

anarchism characterized by its “wariness about representation” (May 85), and to posit a link between the two in which causality and similarity entangle: “There is a tradition of political thinking that . . . possesses the kinds of general political perspective and analysis that could characterize it as a forerunner to current poststructuralist thought. That is the tradition of anarchism Like poststructuralism, anarchism rejects representational political intervention” (13). May’s elision of the philosophical space between post-structural theory and anarchist politics acts as an ahistorical slight of hand: he largely builds his argument about the broad anti-representationalism of anarchism from post-structuralism, then posits a new, post-structuralist anarchism that is consonant in its anti-representationalism. Only by trans-historically attributing post-structural thought to classical anarchists does May develop the pervasive critique of representation that he attributes to all anarchists.

Cohn’s more recent post-structural theorization of the relationship between anarchism and representation argues “anarchism has something to contribute to projects that seek a way out of contemporary impasses in hermeneutics, aesthetics, and politics something more and other than mere antirepresentationalism beyond the sterile opposition between an unsupportable ‘representationalist position’ and an incoherent ‘antirepresentationalist’ one” (14). In his effort to break down this representational polarity, Cohn distances himself from May and others who have sought to “make [anarchism] into a more suitable and up-to-date instrument for political practice” by “wedding it to post-structuralism,” because anarchist “opposition to representation was incomplete and inconsistent” (56)—the attribution of post-structuralist critiques of representation to early anarchists both creates an ahistorical link and misses the complexity of anarchist attitudes toward representation. Denying that “representation per se is oppressive” (170), Cohn defines anarchism: “In opposition to the politics of representationalism,

then, anarchism ultimately proposes not a simple rejection of representation, but a representational politics of duration and difference, motion and multiplicity” (256). He rejects both the notion that anarchism is pervasively anti-representational and the reflexive post-structural causality May proposes. In its place, Cohn theorizes through the “legacy” of anarchist politics, which “[constitute] identity through a plurality of representational systems” (256).

This legacy, while providing a thorough view of the complex imbrication of anarchism with representation, “most fruitfully contributes to the work of literary criticism” (93), by which Cohn means the act of interpretation. Anarchism’s legacy is constructed not as a historical analysis of the ways in which anarchists simultaneously question and enact representation, but as a suggestive tool for navigating contemporary hermeneutics, aesthetics, and politics. The recognition of “a certain continuity of practice between the activities of poesis and interpretation” and the desire to “to construct our interpretive practices as something other than the imposition of an all-powerful readerly subject’s design on a passive textual object” (Cohn 93) are insightful, but they make anarchism’s history at worst incidental and at best provisionally proscriptive. Cohn uses them to outline an ethical recuperation of “representation” that can salvage anarchism from the philosophical and logical failure of the anti-representationalists. Ultimately, Cohn ignores literature, focusing on how anarchism can inform our orientation toward the act of interpretation (whether we are interpreting literature or any other form of language) rather than on the ways in which anarchism has permeated literature.

This post-structural approach denies both the neat narrative that anarchism died with the Palmer Raids and the widespread claim that it survived only as an intellectual antecedent to modernism. In doing so, however, May and Cohn focus on the present, constructing a distinct,

yet parallel account of anarchism's influence that privileges other scholarly formations.¹¹

Throughout this study, I rely on key elements of May's and (especially) Cohn's work, while trying to maintain a focus on the U.S. from Haymarket to the 1930s. I echo May's attention to the consonance between anarchism and post-structuralism and engage with Cohn's theorization of representation, yet I foreground the historical specificity of American anarchism: seeking to avoid the disconcertingly trans-historical linkage between post-structural theory and pre-1930s anarchist philosophy, I propose that anarchist literature challenges representation, while simultaneously belying the thesis that anarchism can ever appear as comprehensively anti-representational. In addition, I question Cohn's anarchist-inflected recuperation of representation, because representation structures the anarchist antinomy. Anarchist literature epitomizes this tension, offering critique of democracy, while adhering to the representational logic that structures both politics and literature.

Representational Governmentality

This aporia emerges in the interstices of anarchism, literature, and democracy as the widespread influence of anti-government thought manifests through a troubled relationship to representation. Since "anarchism is concerned with present conditions," with *specific* "oppressions"(de Cleyre, "Anarchism" 70), anarchists tend to address the instantiation of government under which they live. Therefore, the modern sense that "anarchism is associated primarily with a rejection of representative democracy" (Cohn 21) is merely an admission that the anarchist movement has arisen most powerfully in countries with representative democracies:

11. For May, anarchism exists in a causally ambiguous relation to post-structural theory, while Cohn finds in anarchism an ethical approach to interpretation. Both trace backward from a contemporary formation, thus sublimating anarchism to some other narrative.

recognizing that “the whole system of representative government is an immense fraud” (Bakunin, “Representative Government,” 220-221), anarchists direct their critique against it. Importantly though, in the United States and other democracies, anarchists specifically challenge both practical and idealized forms of representative government. This comprehensive approach led late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century anarchists not only to reject extant and woefully imperfect democracy; they also denied that representation could ever be complete, and, even if complete representation were achieved, they argue it still would be unjust. This attack of one instance of the overdetermining impulse toward representation (i.e., a sustained critique of democracy), however, should not be confused with the wholesale rejection of representation. Rather, it is the cause of the anarchist antinomy. Anarchists reject representative government, yet the homologously representational field of American politics asks anarchism to represent itself in the public sphere—to become knowable as politics. Thus, as anti-government thought saturates literature, it produces a fissure within the texts: the literary works unquestionably are representational, yet they interrogate American democracy (which is, of course, practically and ideally representative). The aporia, then, is a symptom of the overarching representational governmentality, a unifying logic of representation that structures the American political arena, the subjective experiences of citizenship, and literature.

Understanding this overdetermining representationality requires locating anarchism within a specific set of power relations and foregrounding the problems arising from anarchists’ attempts to challenge them. Like May and Cohn, I believe post-structural theory provides a useful starting point for this analysis, but I deny the need to trace a century-long bridge between

anarchism and post-structuralism.¹² May claims that Michel Foucault's conceptualization of "modern power . . . could be called an 'anarchist' view of power," yet then contrasts "the anarchist *a priori* assumption of the suppressive nature of power" with Foucault's productive understanding of power (72-74). This central difference between anarchist and post-structuralist theorizations of the "nature of power" is not, as May insists, "a 'politically significant failure that bars anarchism from completing the journey down the tactical path along which it traveled,'" (75), but a revealing break: post-structural accounts of power can shed light on discrete historical problems without relying on trans-historical affinity.¹³

Foucault's theorization of power can be useful in part because it does not accept the immediate object of anarchist negative critique: the state. He structures his arguments through negative critique, but by arguing that power is not a monolithic force entirely circumscribed by the state, he makes visible the discursively structuring field in which anarchism appears. Foucault is less interested in the top-down function of state government than he is in the much more insidious and far-reaching mechanisms of power that operate through "tactics rather than laws . . . using laws themselves as tactics [,] to arrange things in such a way that, through a certain number of means, such and such ends can be achieved" ("Governmentality" 95).¹⁴

12. Much work on the link between anarchism and post-structural theory ignores historical events, philosophical disagreements, and the evolving intellectual climate in order to construct a cohesive trajectory (to construct anarchism as merely the progenitor of post-structuralism).

13. May conveniently detaches anarchism from post-structuralism by positing an incomplete trajectory: anarchists are proto-post-structural, except that they disagree about the "nature of power." For him, post-structural theory completes the intellectual journey of anarchism by reaching a conclusion that was anathema to classical and pre-WWII American anarchists. By glossing over this fundamental difference, May reveals the full extent to which he privileges post-structuralism as the perfected form of anarchism, while historical anarchism—and its profound disagreement—is simply a flawed progenitor rife with misunderstanding.

14. Order, classification, and management persistently fascinate Foucault. For example, *Discipline and Punish* discusses at great length the production of subjects in relation to the structuring of time, space, and bodies. In his later work on governmentality, Foucault synthesizes this focus into a theory of government as economy: "The art of government . . . is essentially concerned with answering the question of how to introduce economy — that is to say, the correct manner of managing individuals, goods, and wealth within the family (which a good father is expected to

Mitchell Dean clarifies, defining governmentality as the “conduct of conduct” (10). It “entails any attempt to shape with some degree of deliberation aspects of our behavior according to particular sets of norms and for a variety of ends” (Dean 10). He continues:

Government is any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape conduct by working through our desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs, for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes. (11)

Tracing a historical shift away from discipline toward new modalities of power, Foucault defines governmentality as “the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power” (“Governmentality” 103). This theory deprivileges the state by foregrounding not the ways in which society becomes more like the state, but the “governmentalization of the state” (“Governmentality” 103)—that is, the way in which it comes to embody a disseminated model of power. For Foucault, the state functions to governmentality as the prison does to the carceral system: as metaphor, condensed symbol, and idealized form. The state is one powerful instance of governmental social relations, not as anarchists often assert, the unified and bounded object of critique.¹⁵

do in relation to his wife, children and servants) and of making the family fortunes prosper — how to introduce this meticulous attention of the father towards his family into the management of the state” (“Governmentality” 92). Here, Foucault links the family and the nation, not to posit a transposition of the familial unit to monolithic governance, but to suggest a metaphor for properly disposing of resources (human or material) as the central role of state government. The state’s function, however, is consonant with Foucault’s notion of infinitely distributed power, because the state is only one of the vast number of discourses, strategies, and governing bodies that produce and inscribe the subject.

15. The field of governmentality studies includes several excellent theorizations of the discourses, strategies, and technologies that comprise the governmental rationalities of specific historical, geographical, and cultural formations. Nikolas Rose’s *Powers of Freedom* argues that “ideas of freedom have come to define the ground of our ethical systems, our practice of politics and our habits of criticism” (10) and thus locates “freedom” as the

To this diffuse, governmental notion of power relations, I add the centrality of representation: U.S. democracy is part of a diffuse and encompassing governmentality that relies on the logic of representation, which runs throughout freedom, citizenship, and the entire discursive field that shapes our experiences. It appears in various forms, with the state itself being only the most obvious. The assertion that U.S. federal government is a constitutional republic and thus a form of representative democracy is simple, commonplace, and contested. Clearly, U.S. democracy has not been and is not fully representative: the history of American politics is filled with examples of groups being excluded from selecting representatives and even from consideration as an individual or group that should be represented within our government. I suggest, however, that this makes U.S. democracy fully “representational,” because contained in the historical and linguistic formation of “representative democracy” is an unrealized ideal: democracy is the goal, while representation is seen as both the most effective means toward democracy and the most substantial hurdle in reaching it. Hatred, greed, and self-interest have consistently produced disenfranchisement and oppression, but democracy has sustained (as a practice and more importantly as a goal) largely because it putatively strives to make itself more representative. While it may appear reductive, my study is informed by this popular, idealized conception of democracy as progress—as an open-ended unfolding of political egalitarianism—not because it is (or is not) so, but because this self-critical definition contains democracy’s present and its potential future, both of which anarchism rejects. I accept this vision of increasingly representative democracy as the best case that even if achieved would still function

governmental rationality (or specific “governmentality” to transform Foucault’s general theory of power into a theoretical tool that can be used to explore the central logics of different sets of power relations) structuring much of twentieth-century life. Rose is interested in the operations of purportedly “free” actions and the way they relate to the state, but also reminds us that freedom and citizenship are not coextensive with the state: we may consider these structuring concepts in relation to the state, but they cannot be reduced to it, because microphysical governmental power runs throughout the state and the multiform apparatuses that are homologous to it.

through state government and thus would be unacceptable to anarchists. In a sense, the representative aspirations of American democracy are irrelevant to anarchists—the mechanisms of the state are incidental to the primary negation of government as such. Still, I characterize American anarchists from this period as anti-representational without echoing May’s claim of proto-post-structuralist anti-representationalism: they challenge democracy because it is government, not because it relies on representation. Anarchism’s critique of U.S. government is anti-representational in that it touches upon the problems inhering in political representation. This anti-representationality, however, is not comprehensive. The anarchist literature I discuss in this project provides a record of both the widespread influence of anti-government thought and a reminder that even challenges to democracy appear in representational forms.

As Brian Seitz contends, democracy and representation “have become inseparable from each other, an inseparability not of logic but of historical contingency” (157). This historical merger reveals that democracy need not be representative, but also that representation exists in multiple realms that precede and exceed its link to democracy. The admission that representation “in itself is ‘no thing,’ just a tool, and essentially neutral” (Seitz 108) supports the deprivileging of political representation that is necessary to demonstrate that state governance is only one part of the representational governmentality. What then does the “tool” of representation do in and through state government?

[W]ithout political representation we are without a conception of what political reality—the represented—is like; without it, political reality has neither face nor contours.

Without representation there is no represented—*and without political representation there is no nation as a truly political entity* Political reality only comes into being after the nation has unfolded itself in a represented and in a representation representing

the represented. Without representation, no democratic politics. (Ankersmit 106)

Although representation calls the nation into being, it is an essentially neutral tool invested with partisan weight through its relation to government. Add to this F. R. Ankersmit's claim "that in a representative democracy nobody can properly be said to be in the *possession* of legitimate political power, though there are people and institutions to whom the *use* or *exercise* of this power has been entrusted for a certain period" and it becomes clear that representation is a strategy, a logic, a mechanism through which power is exercised (121): democracy wields the tool of representation as an exercise of power that is justified and normativized by the reflexively constituted nation. Beyond the most obvious valences of democracy's representationality, "representation is . . . omnipresent in politics" (Ankersmit 235). Pitkin gestures toward the pervasiveness and unity of representation across multiple discourses:

representation does have an identifiable meaning, applied in different but controlled and discoverable ways in different contexts. It is not vague and shifting, but a single, highly complex concept There is . . . no great difficulty about formulating a one-sentence definition of this basic meaning, broad enough to cover all its applications in different contexts representation means, as the word's etymological origins indicate, *re-presentation*, a making present again representation, taken generally, means the making present in some sense of something which is nevertheless not present literally or in fact. (8-9).

Pitkin defines representation broadly enough to contain the entire field of politics, yet also to include multifarious other registers of representation: just as representational government calls into being the nation, these seemingly non-political registers homologously produce that which is not-present and which makes little sense apart from their representations. For example,

legal representation produces law, truth, criminality, defendants; literature produces multiple genres, fictive subjects, and an alternate field of politics. The homologous pervasiveness of representation scaffolds my implicit assertion that all literature is political, but I extend this platitude beyond the notion that literary works have the power to impact “real” politics. Rather, literature is political in that it functions in and through representation, which permeates, yet exceeds democracy as the structuring logic of which U.S. democracy is only one example.

My project begins with the assumption that underpinning government, politics, literature, and all other areas of experience is a “self-confirming cycle through which the social order is reproduced,” with representation at its center (Cohn 51). Cohn outlines this cycle:

1. Representational practices impose an appearance of sameness on the infinity of differences, giving rise to
2. the processes whereby diffuse social power is consolidated into its macroscopic institutional forms, producing
3. the phenomena of authority and hierarchy, which
4. blanket the visible universe with representations of sameness, which
5. underwrite the hypostasization of the representable sameness into the nature of things in themselves, which
6. reinforces the representationalist assumptions which
7. justify the dominant representational practices (Cohn 51)

While I differ in approach from Cohn, we share key assumptions about representation: it is productive/reproductive; it scaffolds “authority;” and it is self-reinforcing. I begin with these core premises to show that the products of diffuse power relations structured through representation are multiform and unpredictable, that the subjective experiences of political reality

are its most important product, and that American representational governmentality produces representations of subjective experience in various forms (politics, literature, etc.) that affirm *and* threaten democracy in fractured ways.

The main objective of Foucault's work is to "create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects," because the most effective method for elucidating the nature of power is to examine subjecthood—the specific subjective forms that social relations generate ("Subject" 326). I argue that in the United States, the process of being made subject is structured by representation: individuals are coded as citizens; each exists as a "political subject," which "is not an autonomous creature, not an originary consciousness" but a product of "the discursive and practical mechanisms of political representation [that] produce this political subject" (Seitz 5). More significantly, I accept that "the identity of the political subject produced by representation is both real and positive, that is, really and effectively there (it is a power formation), even if it remains tenuous, inseparable from its organization, not independent, and not as given over to it via simple substitution or translation in the traditional sense of the term but as constituted by representation" (Seitz 6). American citizens are represented by other subjects and thus to a certain extent, govern the nation. Simultaneously, however, they are required to govern themselves: they are enjoined to "effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault, "Technologies" 225). In short, the American governmental rationality conflates the work of governing the nation and governing the self through a nexus of strategies, techniques, apparatuses, and discourses that privilege both "the individual . . . the fictitious atom of an 'ideological' representation of society"

and the corporate economization of subjects within physical and political time and space (Foucault, *Discipline* 194). The best citizen is one who disposes of or economizes herself properly, but also the one who aids in the disposition or economization of others (i.e., the nation) through the mechanisms of democratic governance. U.S. democracy, with its corporate economization that occurs through representation, points to a pervasive representationality at the center of American political (subjective) life. To search for “anarchist literature,” I must keep present the anarchist negative critique of (representational) government while building my own negative critique of representational governmentality. I do so by exploring the subjects—fictive and real—produced in this era, the ways in which they challenge government, the pervasive need to represent, and the aporia appearing through the conflict of representation’s homologous registers.

Anarchist Methodology and the Form of Anarchist Literature

In this study I adopt the anarchist method of negative critique. My goal is to reveal a problem—the aporia of representing challenges to representational government—by identifying cultural and literary texts that constitute a field of anarchist literature. Much like the anarchists I study, I refrain from moving beyond the problem. This is not to say one might not theoretically reconcile the defining tensions of anarchist literature, but I seek to illuminate a historical problem that was not reconciled, perhaps not even recognized, at the time. If, as I contend, anarchist literature is best understood as a field of contestation in which the problems of democracy are problematically represented, it makes no sense to attempt to suture the fissures either of anarchism or of democracy. To show the aporetic nature of anarchist literature, I position it within a multiplicity of discourses, discuss a wide variety of texts, and explore the

different subject forms that move through both. That is, to reveal the problem, I examine “configurations of what Foucault calls ‘power/knowledge’ that produce, incorporate, exercise, and are coextensive with representation” (Seitz 4). In each of my chapters, I juxtapose intellectual, political, governmental, and literary discourses to demonstrate the interrelation and underlying homologousness of the impetus toward representation. This methodology does not produce an exhaustive narrative or taxonomy of anarchist literature. Rather, it offers a series of intensive textual archaeologies: working from texts to the forces that produce them and back again. In part, since anarchism’s place in American history from the 1880s to the 1930s is itself a question, I offer not a unified thread or even a succession of discrete historical shifts, but snapshots of the “literary” instances of anti-government sediment that always remain circumscribed by representation. Certain intellectual fixations run through much of what I discuss, but others are unique moments, singular manifestations of specific yet dynamic formations that arise from representation and contain challenges to representative governance. I discuss in great detail the era’s discourses of liberalism, anarchism, and literature and touch on scientific, journalistic, and legal discourses all to show the complex set of power relations that produce through representation.

These diverse discourses comprise anarchist literature. Clearly, each is distinct: the criminal trial has much different consequences than a naturalist novel; scientific treatises and modernist plays have contrasting goals. Yet, they share key formal characteristics. Most importantly, anarchist literature evidences a fascination with anti-government thought: each of the “texts” in this study engages with anarchism, whether through an exploration of sciences intersection with government, acts and discussions of violence, or considerations of Sacco, Vanzetti, and the justice of the nation. The form of these engagements is remarkably cohesive

and has three major elements: 1) Anarchist literature addresses the era's open question of government. As the nation's democracy continued to transform (in one popular narrative, moving toward perfection in fits and starts), literature both recorded and shaped the range of attitudes toward government. All anarchist literature approaches government as an unsettled, evolving formation. 2) Anarchist literature probes the boundaries and limitations of American democracy. By narrating literary and real characters, these texts figure the anarchist threat, suggesting the nation's failures and evoking anti-government rhetoric. 3) Anarchist literature forecloses on the possibilities of these threats. Each of the discourses I examine stops short of espousing anarchism: they gesture toward the flaws of representative government, yet their narratives return to American nationhood—constrained by the representational mandates of literature, they never fully imagine the implications of the anarchist threat.

The unifying force of anarchist literature's form and of this project's methodology comes from a sustained attention to subjecthood. The symbol of the anarchist threat to democratic governance manifests through subjects—fictive and real—which condense the aporia to its most basic form: subjects (individuals, people) are the reason for and form of anarchist critique; they represent both the need to negate government and possess the potential to do so. Yet, these subjects are structured by an infinitely distributed, self-reinforcing representational modality of power that cannot eliminate *their* power, but that makes critique, as such, a paradox. Each of my chapters examines subjects that cannot neatly be parsed: they are products of democracy's representational governmentality, but they also exceed it. They are a threatening byproduct that often crackles with agential menace. They may be managed (governed), but not eliminated. Anarchist literature representationally constructs alternate subjects that can only function as negative critique—as the appearance of a fracture, a challenge, a threat—because of the

representational regime that constructs subjects as political subjects.

In Chapter two, I reconsider the intellectual foundations of literary naturalism's social-Darwinian themes by reading Lockean liberal theory and individualist anarchism alongside Herbert Spencer's scientific and political works. Turn-of-the-century anarchists found in Spencer a useful, yet troubling amalgam of science and politics. His work offered a comprehensive scientific supplement to their anti-government politics, positing an evolutionary *telos* resembling the anarchist dream of non-coercive social relations. Spencer also, however, advocated classical liberalism, a political philosophy rejected by most American anarchists. His competing political visions are sutured together by social Darwinism, an immensely popular theory that linked biology, sociology, and government. In this chapter, I suggest a revaluation of social Darwinism in American naturalism, arguing that Spencer's social theory mediates between his universal evolutionary scientific theory and his free-market, libertarian political beliefs.

Chapter three builds from this discursive geography to discuss the influence of Spencer's work on Frank Norris's novels. Typically, American naturalist writers are imagined to have reproduced uncritically these prevalent social scientific theories, but I argue that Norris's works are narrative fields of contestation in which elements of liberalism and evolutionary science converge to produce an "anti-representational" fictive subject, a paradoxical form that reveals the unnaturalness of government. By analyzing Norris's *The Octopus*, *Vandover and the Brute*, and *McTeague*, I show how naturalism's engagement with Spencer—and the multivalent anti-government resonances of his work—records the anarchist threat to the nation. Taken together, chapters two and three show how the overlap of turn-of-the-century liberalism, science, and literary naturalism, produced texts that subtly challenge U.S. representative governance, yet do so through representational forms that reinforce the nation's sustaining logic.

My fourth chapter turns from fictive subjects to historical events, claiming that anarchistic violence functions as an anti-representational political act that is nevertheless represented in various media. By addressing violence from the Haymarket bomb to the Palmer Raids, with particular focus on the *attentat*—Alexander Berkman’s attempt to kill Frick and Leon Czolgosz’s assassination of William McKinley—I contextualize the relationship between acts of violence and efforts to represent them. Throughout the period, anarchists promote violence in their theoretical writings—when imagined abstractly, violence is a viable political tactic. Yet, when forced to respond to concrete acts of violence, anarchists equivocate: as they represent anarchist politics in the public sphere, they distance themselves from realized violence. In this chapter, I argue that the dominant logic of American politics establishes a “representational mandate” that severs anarchist theories of violence (propaganda by deed) from concrete acts of political violence. Examining this terroristic public face of anarchism—its consistencies and its disagreements—reveals the representational logic that structures self-proclaimed anarchists, their acts, and their writing.

Chapters five and six explore the transformation of Sacco and Vanzetti from immigrant anarchists to political cause célèbre and potent symbol of non-anarchist radical movements. In the first, I read correspondence and narratives by the two political martyrs alongside transcripts of their trial and publications by their defense committee to provide a prehistory of the Sacco-Vanzetti literary formation. Just after the Palmer Raids, Sacco and Vanzetti—both vocal anarchists—were arrested and subjected to criminal trial. This coercive interpolation serves to manage the anarchist threat, to force anti-government thought outside the margins of U.S. political discourse. The method criminal law uses to dispose of Sacco and Vanzetti, however, is not just execution, but a system of competing representations: anarchism is managed by forcing

it into a field of representation. Throughout Sacco's and Vanzetti's seven-year ordeal, however, they and their defenders participated in other discourses to represent the men outside the courtroom. My analysis of these entwined discourses shows both the overdetermining logic of representation and the paradox of producing the anarchist criminal subject within fields of representation against which their politics are defined.

The final chapter then examines literary texts written about Sacco and Vanzetti after their deaths. Upton Sinclair's *Boston*, Maxwell Anderson's *Gods of the Lightning* and *Winterset*, and John Dos Passos's *Facing the Chair* and *U.S.A.* all celebrate the men, yet reproduce the legal discourse that executed them. Rejecting the narrative of anarchism's neat death after the Palmer Raids, I demonstrate how it became sublimated to other radical and literary agendas: anarchism does not die, because it becomes the martyr for 1930s radicalism. By tracing Sacco's and Vanzetti's translation into symbol for the Left and the concomitant disappearance of their anarchism, I elucidate the historical nadir of American anarchism. Anti-government thought is not dead, but merely has been lost within other narratives. This chapter concludes by discussing the traces of anarchist residue and the stakes of anarchism's disappearance: Sacco and Vanzetti linger as reminders of democracy's limits.

Each of these chapters highlights a unique moment of anarchist literature emerging as political and literary concerns collide with the structuring logic of representation. Collectively, they outline a genre defined by the formal conflicts that appear in literary texts: the field of contestation in which anarchist critique struggles through representational forms of power and thus unearths the antagonistic sediments of democratic politics. By recovering a fractured, yet sustained tradition of anarchist literature, this project reveals the difficulties inherent in writing against the American democratic ideal and the paradox of challenging governmental

representationality through representational literary forms. It also, however, exposes the anti-democratic residue left by the period's unrealized egalitarian aspirations.

Chapter 2

Unnatural Selection: Science, Politics, and Literary Naturalism

Of all paradoxes, is there one that will exceed the paradox of our anarchists — men and women who so temperamentally filled with love for their fellows and who are so temperamentally opposed to violence that they are moved to deeds of violence in order to bring about, in the way they conceive it, the reign of love and cosmic brotherhood?

—Jack London, Unpublished Introduction to Alexander Berkman's
Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist

In the summer of 1901, only three months before William McKinley's assassination, ardent socialist and literary naturalist Jack London reviewed Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1903) for *Impressions Quarterly*. The review praises Norris for exploring “the heart of [the] people, simple, elemental, prone to the ruder amenities of existence, growling and snarling with brute anger under cruel wrong” (34). Noting that “[Norris] gives us something more than realism,” London credits him with achieving his naturalist ambition to capture “the soil . . . the passionate earth” alongside the “social forces” that seek to harness it (34-35). A few years later, Alexander Berkman asked London to write a foreword to his *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*. It echoes London's descriptions of *The Octopus* and gestures toward popular criticism of naturalism's subject matter:

It is a human document of anything but mean proportions. No one, unafraid of life and desiring to know life, can afford to miss this book. It is a chunk of life, torn out raw and bleeding. It sickens one with its filth, and degradation, and cruelty, with its relentless narration of the evil men do to men. It smells from the depths. Very well; then the depths are here. They are facts. We, who desire to be masters of life, must cope with these facts.

Though London praises this work—“This book is real; it is true”—his introduction was never published, because he could not abide Berkman's politics: “A socialist, writing an introduction to

the autobiography of an anarchist, may seem a bizarre thing; yet be it known that this socialist [is] in the opposite intellectual camp from this anarchist.”¹⁶

Here and elsewhere, London persistently returns to the link between naturalism’s representational strategies—verisimilitude, determinism, the juxtaposition of organic and social forces, the depiction of lower-class characters—and politics, because the “story of human destruction, of poor broken cogs in the remorseless grind of the industrial machine” requires recognizing the multiple forces that shape humanity (Review of *The Jungle* 99).¹⁷ Like many literary naturalists, he calls for an awareness of the biological processes that brought us to the industrial age: “You must not deny your relatives, the other animals. Their history is your history, and if you kick them to the bottom of the abyss you go yourself” (“Other Animals” 120). London, however, ties this scientific perspective to Marxian materialism, constructing an ethos that uses naturalistic themes to promote his political message. He makes self-consciously visible the intersection of science and politics that are present, yet sublimated in other naturalists’ works.

Written shortly before his foreword to Berkman’s *Prison Memoirs, Martin Eden* (1909) uses naturalist tropes to satirize the period’s fascination with Herbert Spencer and to promote socialism. London’s eponymous protagonist begins the novel as an ignorant former sailor, but is quickly transformed into a caricature of the Nietzschean individualist who derives his self-centered philosophy from Spencer’s evolutionary theory. Early in the novel, Martin is bewildered by the “abstruse formulas” of “Marx, Ricardo, Adam Smith, and Mill” and “warring social philosophies” that include socialism and anarchism. He soon discovers Spencer, however:

16. Berkman chose not to use the foreword. According to London, he “got someone else to write a more sympathetic one for him. Also, socially, comradely, he has forgotten my existence ever since” (Foreword).

17. His review of *The Octopus* attributes to Norris an inchoate “materialistic conception of history” (34). He rejects Berkman’s anarchism outright and suggests a socialistic bent (similar to his own politics) to Norris’s exemplary naturalism.

“And here was the man Spencer, organizing all knowledge for him, reducing everything to unity, elaborating ultimate realities, and presenting to his startled gaze a universe so concrete of realization that it was like the model of a ship such as sailors make and put into glass bottles. There was no caprice, no chance. All was law” (108). Spencer’s universal evolutionary theory signals Martin’s transition into an intellectual-artist and his subsequent class betrayal, decline, and eventual suicide. It is also, however, immediately connected to literary production. Martin’s conversion coincides with a recognition of the impersonal, mechanistic nature of publication and his desire to capture the “immensity of problems, of dreams, and of heroic toils,” when the vast amount of contemporaneous literature “dealt only with the commonplaces of life” (117). Spencer’s theories are closely tied to the literary act. Thus, when Ruth asks ““Why didn’t you select a nice subject?,”” the unstated answer is that the underbelly of life *is* life: London ties the content of naturalism to Spencerian evolution through the burgeoning intellect of the recently reformed brute (124).

In the latter part of the novel, Martin’s reverence for Spencer peaks at the same moment he becomes a literary success. On the day he mails “The Shame of the Sun” (an apologia for naturalism) to the magazine that accepts it—the first in a series of successes that are Martin’s personal downfall—he claims that Spencer “has impressed the stamp of his genius over the whole field of scientific research and modern thought” (324). Martin’s acceptance of Spencerian theory is entangled with his own ascent toward the literary achievements that see his naturalist work applauded only at the cost of him becoming a darling of the bourgeoisie. London’s mockery of Spencer and social Darwinism is signaled by Martin’s disgust when a reporter transforms “his reactionary individualism into the most lurid, red-shirt socialist utterance” (331)—a direct contrast with the author’s own unabashed socialism. This satire is solidified

when Martin commits suicide. His social “fitness” does not ensure success, or even his survival, merely turning him into a class traitor: the working-class’s “mode of life, which had once been his, was now distasteful to him” (363). London constructs a character who chooses individualism over class-consciousness, a decision that makes him part of the liberal bourgeoisie and thus shows the foolishness of social Darwinism.

I discuss *Martin Eden* at some length because it is critical of Spencer in a way that most scholars have not found American naturalism to be.¹⁸ Previous studies of the relationship between Spencer and literary naturalism tend to imagine writers who resemble Martin Eden as they express a largely unqualified acceptance of evolutionary mechanisms, social Darwinism, and the consequences of aberration.¹⁹ Naturalists’ awareness of Spencer is read as the explanation for deterministic plot and characterization: if a fictional character’s fate is determined, then Spencer’s universal evolutionary theory must be the sufficient cause. This chapter and the next seek to correct that reading by examining the complexity of Spencer’s influence and Norris’s profound ambivalence toward it. Naturalism’s conflicted preoccupation with turn-of-the century science does not always manifest itself in forms as overt as London’s vocal socialism and direct satire perhaps, but neither does it uncritically reproduce Spencerian science. Instead, Norris and others approach it as part of the widespread cultural fascination with

18. According to Thomas Riggio, Theodore Dreiser’s work is permeated by a “the notion he had derived from Herbert Spencer that physical, social, and psychological reality tended toward a mechanistic balance of forces” and numerous scholars have touched on the Spencerian elements of Norris’s work (20). I discuss this connection in more detail below.

19. In fact, *Martin Eden* frequently has been misread as an autobiography. This interpretation requires ignoring London’s political beliefs and does not account for the novel’s satire. Similar misreadings occur as other naturalists engage with Spencer. For example, scholars often pay no attention to Abraham Cahan’s socialism when examining his protagonist in *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917). Like Martin Eden, David Levinsky reads Spencer and enjoys an ironic “rise,” yet it is remarkable how few scholars read Cahan’s novel as satire.

evolution that, thanks to the “superorganic” elements of Spencer’s theory, extended far beyond biology (Carneiro xxxii).

In my next chapter, I show the traces of anti-government sentiment in Norris’s novels emerging from nineteenth-century debates over anarchism, liberalism, and democracy. These discourses permeate his work through a simultaneous attraction to and skepticism of Spencer. The late-nineteenth century saw the height of Spencer’s popularity, the rise of American literary naturalism, and the divergence of reform liberalism and classical liberalism. This unique confluence affected scientific, literary, and political discourses as each struggled with shifting images of nature, naturalism, and natural rights. These condensed formations all share a unifying concern: the discrete individual; the subject. Evolutionary science’s appeal arose largely from its explanation of the origins of humanity, and Spencer’s immense influence is explained by his homologous explanations of biological and social evolution; it offered a purportedly objective account of man’s relation to his surroundings. Naturalism depicted dual deterministic forces—biology and society—and their impact on characters as a literary consideration of this theme. And liberal theory continued its long investment in the proper relationship between individuals and government, even as it splintered into separate schools with much different ideas about how individual rights were best secured. The era’s fixation was not entirely new: these questions had structured a wide range of intellectual endeavors for centuries. Evolution’s advent, however, changed the nature of these conversations by linking humanity more intimately to a *process*—an apprehensible system that might explain the full scope of our existence.

In the United States, from the 1860s to the 1900s, no scientist was more visible than Spencer: biologists, sociologists, philosophers, and political theorists all reflexively engaged his

theories.²⁰ Spencer's *Synthetic Philosophy* traced all aspects of evolution to a unified mechanism, transforming the period's conversations about science: not only did evolutionary science make the connection between animal and man more intimate, it also coupled political and cultural debates to science in new ways. This synthesizing impulse made Spencer widely important, but also allowed his politics to inflect his science: marrying organic and social science to questions of governance and ethics, he both exceeded the cultural impact of other scientists and opened himself to a broad spectrum of criticism. As he shaped late-nineteenth-century science, he also became a political lightning rod, his amalgam of utopianism and conservatism frustrating everyone from anarchists to socialists, reform liberals to libertarians.

In what follows, I examine the liberal origins of Spencerian theory, his works' vacillation between liberalism and anarchism, and the ways in which these inconsistent scientifico-political positions relate to contemporaneous anarchism. By foregrounding the work social Darwinism does to suture Spencer's evolutionary anarchism to his classical, laissez-faire liberalism, I lay the foundation for my argument about the consequences of Norrisean naturalism's ambivalent critique. When Norris engages with Spencer, he enters into an entangled field of political philosophies and scientific theories. As he attempts fictively to construct the "natural," Norris narrates the multiple forces that determine turn-of-the-century subjects. This defining characteristic of literary naturalism—determinism—is not, however, the content of his work. It is the form: deterministic plot and fated characters are representational strategies that explore the overlap of science and politics. Norris's novels (to which I turn in chapter three) are narrative fields of contestation in which the debates around Spencer's work appear as competing

20. Richard Hofstadter claims that "Herbert Spencer, who of all men made the most ambitious attempt to systematize the implications of evolution in fields other than biology itself, was far more popular in the United States than he was in his native country" (5). He adds that "the sales of Spencer's books in America from their earliest publication in the 1860's to December 1903 came to 368,755 volumes, a figure probably unparalleled for works in such difficult spheres as philosophy and sociology" (34).

conceptions of the natural through characters who challenge extant social formations.

Understanding how Norris *re-presents* the effects of biological and social forces means first outlining the multiple, contemporaneous efforts to define the “natural”—the overlapping discourses of liberalism, evolutionary science, anarchism, and literary naturalism, each of which attempted to conceptualize the natural relationship between individuals and society.

The Liberal Origins of Spencerian Theory

By the time Spencer’s seminal *First Principles* was published in 1862, the basic tenets of liberal governance were widely accepted in his native England and in the United States. The notion that government’s primary function should be the protection of an individual’s rights saturated political discourse, even at moments when the realities of power did not match strategic constructions of government’s role. Contained within the quasi-utopian rhetoric of liberal government is the necessary assumption that the *individual*, the subject or citizen, exists and possesses rights. Writing about American literature roughly contemporaneous with *First Principles*, Milette Shamir recognizes “the cultivation of an atomistic, autonomous selfhood whose possessions and political rights protect from the intrusion of society”: liberal governance depends upon an individual who is discrete and imbued with “political rights” (23). Of course, while these rights may be “political,” liberals typically construct them as innate, inalienable, or natural.

Since at least John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* (1689), liberal theorists have been fixated by the naturalness of rights, repeating—in different forms—Locke’s understanding of the ideal interaction between free individuals and the public body: “all Men are naturally in . . . a State of perfect Freedom to order their Actions, and dispose of their possessions, and Persons

as they see fit, within the bounds of the Law of Nature, without asking leave or depending upon the Will of any other man” (269). According to Locke, the liberal subject possesses the natural executive right:

Man being born . . . with a Title to perfect Freedom, and an uncontrouled enjoyment of all the Rights and Privileges of the Law of Nature, equally with any other Man, or Number of Men in the World, hath by Nature a Power, not only to preserve his Property, that is, his Life, Liberty and Estate, against the Injuries and Attempts of other Men; but to judge of and punish the breaches of that Law. (323-324)

For Locke, this right precedes civil society and is the *raison d’etre* for all government. From this starting point, he builds an argument that civil society emerges out of prudence: enforcing one’s natural executive right is difficult without society, thus it is prudent to coalesce. This conception of the state unequivocally protects individual liberty, because it only *enforces* the rights that each subject naturally possesses.

Many liberal theorists from Locke to the present concern themselves primarily with assuring that government does not foreclose on any rights an individual would possess in the state of nature. Classical liberalism insists the state is charged with preventing individuals “from invading others Rights, and from doing hurt to one another” (Locke 271). This limited function requires maintaining what A. John Simmons calls “the essence of liberalism”: “a special kind of neutrality [that] laws must remain scrupulously neutral among competing moral, religious, or other personal or sectarian conceptions of the good life” (341). In its most basic, classical form, liberal theory posits a perfected form of governance that privileges neutrality and non-intervention, a civil society that enforces natural rights rather than creating new ones.

To produce his comprehensive theory of evolution, Spencer posits a homologous mechanism that operates across the full range of organic and social science: astronomy, geology, biology, psychology, and sociology. Political formations, one of the superorganic elements of Spencer's work, are located within the last of these fields. As he attempts to account for the evolution of governments alongside the evolution of the cosmos, the earth, and humankind, Spencer is forced to address his period's widespread acceptance of—and ongoing debates about—liberalism's most basic assumptions: the inviolable subject, natural rights, and the state's limited role.

On first glance, Spencer seems to accept with little reservation these essentially liberal tenets. Early in *First Principles*, he outlines an evolutionary political chronology. From groups that “represent rulers as gods or demigods,” governments shifted to a more subdued belief in “divine right” that “ascribe[s] unusual goodness, wisdom, and beauty to the monarch” (19-20). Then, monarchs were “entirely divested . . . of legislative power,” which brought Spencer to his present, a moment in which “we have established the personal liberties of the subject against the invasions of State power” (*First Principles* 21). Before he became the most important scientific mind of his generation, Spencer's political writing—including *Social Statics* (1850), which contains chapters titled “Political Rights,” “The Right to Ignore the State,” and “The Duty of the State”—brought him notoriety. One standard reading of this work asserts that he almost unequivocally accepted the evolution of liberal government as one of the “increasingly complex, heterogeneous societies whose members were increasingly interdependent and increasingly individuated” (Weinstein 13). On one hand, there is no disputing the strains of post-Enlightenment liberalism—a combination of utilitarianism and individualism—in Spencer's work, but his extensive writings should not be reduced to a unified endorsement of liberalism.

Engaging with the surrounding political discourses required Spencer to address liberalism, but his politics are neither simple nor consistent. He makes three major types of statements about government: 1) descriptive statements that explain how current formations evolved; 2) projective statements about how these formations will continue to evolve and the form they will take upon reaching stasis; and 3) immediately political statements about how contemporaneous governments *should* operate. Understanding the breadth of his statements about government requires analyzing both his purely scientific and overtly political work.

All three types of statement build from his central “law of equal freedom,” which informs every aspect of his theory. This law metaphysically precedes his systematic theory of evolution and is likely a part of that which initially catalyzed the mechanisms that comprise his “Knowable.”²¹ In its most basic form, the law of equal freedom insists “every man may claim the fullest liberty to exercise his faculties compatible with the possession of like liberty by every other man” (*Social Statics* 79). Here, Spencer echoes Locke’s natural executive right, recognizing “the natural right to liberty which . . . imposes on others only the negative duty that they forebear from interfering with the actions of the bearers of rights” (M. Taylor 242). This negative conception of freedom reveals his liberal tendencies: “Spencer’s moral and political philosophy hinges on the principle of equal freedom . . . [a]nd being a stringent principle, equal freedom renders Spencer’s [politics] authentically liberal” (Weinstein 33). He posits a discrete individual with the right to “fullest liberty” limited only by the liberty of others and thus implicitly accepts two of liberal theory’s core assumptions: there is a state of freedom that

21. The knowable constitutes that which philosophy can consider: “Getting rid of all complications, and contemplating pure Force, we are irresistibly compelled . . . to vaguely conceive some unknown force as the correlative of the known force” (*First Principles* 176).

transcends social formations; and individual freedom is not unbounded. Spencer, however, complicates classically liberal explanations for the origins of individuals and their rights.

Locke, for example, locates the natural executive right in the Law of Nature, a religious, metaphysical state that historically precedes—and thus produces—civil society. Spencer is unwilling to accept Lockean ontology. He places both religion and metaphysics in “the Unknowable,” proposing instead his law of equal freedom, which is of higher authority than all other laws” (*Social Statics* 217-218). This law, however, is a constituent part of evolution that structures the homologous evolution of individuals and governments: “forms of government . . . must be fit for those who live under them . . . that form which is fittest is that for which there is an instinctive preference” (*First Principles* 129). The simultaneous evolution of social formations and the individuals that populate them requires a distinction between the subject and civil society, and calls for a conceptualization of the relationship between the two. Spencer invests his work in this central question of liberalism, yet by offering descriptive, projective, and immediately political statements, he presents a complex—often-inconsistent—account of the relationship between individuals and governments.

The first of these categories frequently resembles classical liberal theory. For one, Spencer accepts another of liberalism’s defining fixations: the ability of individuals to appropriate property and subsequently, the duty of the state to protect their property rights. When Locke states that men have the natural right to “dispose of Possessions, and Persons as they think fit” he moves beyond discreteness as the defining characteristic of subjecthood: the subject not only *is*, he also *has*. That is, the subject has “*Property* in his own *Person*,” but also the capacity to “[mix] his Labour with [an object] and [add] to it something that is his own, and thereby make it his Property” (Locke 287-288). Classical liberalism figures a subject capable of mixing labor

with an object to remove it from the state of nature and thus possess it (Locke 288). Spencer, on the other hand, traces a gradual evolution of appropriation, of the prevalence of individual property. He recognizes even in animals a “sense of proprietorship,” asserts that the origins of appropriation can be seen in “primitive men,” and compares property to natural selection: it “is through the struggle for existence, first, by appropriating one another’s means of growth” that the subject has evolved (*Sociology* 469, 205). Thus, for Locke the ability to appropriate is a constitutive part of the innately rights-possessing subject, while Spencer traces a long evolution of property rights that have shaped the modern subject. Spencer complicates the liberal account as he attempts to theorize the mechanisms through which individuals, property, and governments evolved. He reproduces this subtle shift as he describes the stages of government’s evolution.

Spencer discusses the evolution of governments in *First Principles* and at greater length in his *Principles of Sociology* (the first volume of which was published in 1876). *First Principles* defines evolution as “the change from a diffused, imperceptible state, to a concentrated, perceptible state [through the] integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion” (284). According to Spencer, coalescence defines evolution—the concentration of individuals into heterogeneous, yet aggregated social forms is an evolutionary step homologous to biological adaptation or technological development. His work indicates astronomical, geological, and biological evolutions are in some sense progressive, implying that the emergence of government and the liberal subjects that comprise it are similarly positive developments. Spencer presents government as a *higher* state of evolution. Put differently, by constructing a theory of homologous evolution, in which everything from the stars to psychology evolve through identical mechanisms and in similar directions, Spencer must accept that all evolution is progressive or that none is. The growth from single-cell organisms to human consciousness is

symmetrical with the shift from atomized primitivism to “civilization” and government, so the anthropocentrism endemic in Spencer’s work logically dictates that government is superior to earlier social formations.²² This evaluative claim revises liberal accounts of civil society.

For Locke, civil society emerges when “every one of the Members hath quitted [their] natural Power, resign’d it up into the hands of the Community” (324). In classical liberal theory, civil society is the agglomeration of individuals submitting their natural executive right to the community. Of course, the state exists *only* to enforce the rights individuals possess in the state of nature: it does not create or restrict rights; it merely enforces those that exist prior to its formation. Therefore, individuals must voluntarily join civil society: “Men being . . . by Nature, all free, equal and independent, no one can be put out of this Estate, and subjected to the Political Power of another, without his own *Consent*” (Locke 330). Locke indicates that subjects enter civil society because it is prudent to do so. It is more efficient for a community that recognizes individual rights and the laws of nature to enforce these rights and laws than it is for the solitary subject. Spencer’s explanation, on the other hand, eliminates agency, replacing prudence with “natural selection”: “from a dynamic point of view, ‘natural selection’ implies structural changes along lines of least resistance” (*First Principles* 240). Like a river that seeks the least difficult path to the sea, governments emerge because they are efficient ways to manage subjects and their property: “when the wants of each are better satisfied by uniting his efforts with those of others than they would be if he acted alone” (*Sociology* 181).

Spencer’s universal theory suggests an evolutionary mechanism that gestures toward the Unknowable (but that is itself knowable) and that requires an examination of all phenomena in

22. I reproduce some of Spencer’s language here. Throughout his work he relies on borderline pejorative terms to describe non-European cultures, while using the word “civilization” as synonymous with a handful of ancient societies and the colonial powers from his period. This language reflects a prejudice that runs through many of Spencer’s texts. In fact, his arguments for social evolution are oftentimes circular: he assumes cultural superiority, then builds an argument for cultural evolution upon it.

relation to one another. This synthesizing impulse denies liberal causality, which attributes agential prudence to the natural subject: individuals are the genesis for civil society and without this causation neither makes much sense. In addition, many of Spencer's descriptions resemble an idealized version of liberal society: "In proportion as men are habituated to maintain their own claims while respecting the claims of others . . . there is produced a mental attitude at variance with that which accompanies subjection" (*Sociology* 239). Spencer, however, denies the Lockean chronology. Whereas Locke describes the movement from free subjects in the state of nature to free subjects in civil society, Spencer argues that social formations and subject forms evolve simultaneously, homologously, to suit one another. This revision signals the shift from Spencer's descriptive claims about what *has* evolved to his projective claims about what *will* evolve.

Evolutionary Anarchism, Classical Liberalism, and Social Darwinism

Throughout Spencer's work, attempts to describe contemporaneous instantiations of liberal government coexist with efforts to envision future political formations. These projective statements are one of the factors that have led many to characterize his work as an "unfolding of immanences" (Carneiro xli). Spencer denies that his theories "imply in everything an intrinsic tendency to become something higher" and insists "evolution does not imply a latent tendency to improve, everywhere in operation" (qtd. in Carneiro xlii). The language and content of *First Principles*, however, indicate the contrary as Spencer persistently returns to questions of teleology: "And now toward what do these changes tend? Will they go on forever? or will there be an end to them?" (*First Principles* 477). Beyond the implications of his overarching evolutionary unity I mention above (which would require him to distinguish humans as more

evolved than other animals without making them superior), Spencer consistently uses hierarchical language. He writes of “higher” and “lower” organisms. He refers to “primitive” persons or “barbarians” that stand in contrast to “civilization,” going so far as to create a cultural taxonomy that privileges the Roman Empire, several modern European nations, and a few other ancient cultures as “great civilized nations” that are more complex, more highly evolved than “simple societies” (*Sociology* 110-116). And he repeatedly uses the words “progress” and “progressive” to capture the movement of evolution. For Spencer, “evolution meant progress and thus assured that the whole process of life was leading toward some very remote but altogether glorious consummation” (Hofstadter 7). No particular endpoint is inevitable, or even reachable, but each element of his synthetic philosophy tends toward a state of perfection, toward the end of evolutionary progress.

With this forward-moving sense of evolution, Spencer must either accept that society has reached an apotheosis of sorts or assume that governments will continue to evolve. In his own moment, he recognizes the liberal “doctrine that the will of the citizens is supreme and the governing agent exists merely to carry out their will” as a positive development, but he does not see this doctrine as the final—hence best—evolutionary stage (*Sociology* 128). Spencer suggests that many mid-nineteenth-century governments successfully avoid transgressing the law of equal freedom and thus fulfill the state’s proper, limited role. That is, he endorses realized liberal government as progress. He also, however, details what I call “evolutionary anarchism,” a scientifico-political vision of the future in which social formations more fully embody equal freedom. Late in *First Principles*, Spencer writes of “the arrival at a state of human nature and social organization, such that the individual has no desires but those which may be satisfied without exceeding his proper sphere of action, while society maintains no restraints but those

which the individual voluntarily respects” (506). At this moment, he exceeds classical liberalism. To imagine the evolution of greater freedom or, more specifically, subjects that are capable of greater freedom, is quite different from the Lockean metaphysics in which subjects always already possess rights. Strict classical liberalism mandates that civil society can only enforce extant freedoms—it would be nonsensical to imagine the creation of rights that exceed “perfect freedom.”

To Spencer, his era’s liberalism represents only one step in the long process toward the law of equal freedom’s political actualization. This *telos* requires the continued evolution of human thought and social formations. First, he details the reconciliation of psychology with material conditions: “Supposing this state to be reached . . . experience will cease to produce any further mental evolution—there will have been reached a perfect correspondence between ideas and facts; and the intellectual adaptation of man to his circumstances will be complete” (*First Principles* 499). He then describes the concomitant teleological political formation:

The progressive extension of the liberty of citizens and the reciprocal movement of political restrictions, are the steps by which we advance toward this state [the state where individuals’ desires and government have evolved past the point of conflict]. And the ultimate abolition of all limits to the freedom of each, save those imposed by the like freedom of all, must result from the complete equilibration between man’s desires and the conduct necessitated by surrounding conditions. (*First Principles* 506-507)

By describing his static society as the perfect complementary evolution of desire and political reality, Spencer indicates that mid-nineteenth-century liberalism is only one step in the long process toward ultimate freedom. Given sufficient time, subject forms and social formations will

evolve to a point of complete reconciliation, a state that moves past liberalism, toward anarchism.

According to Frank H. Brooks, “the theoretical connections between . . . anarchism and liberalism seem obvious. While liberalism call[s] for individual liberty and a small state . . . anarchism call[s] for individual sovereignty and no state . . . anarchism seem[s] to be the logical extreme of liberalism” (39). Brooks’s claim, however, is overstated: anarchism may share certain foundational tenets with liberalism, but even an *ad absurdum* extension of liberal logic will not lead to a stateless conclusion. By definition, liberalism requires a state to mediate between discrete, rights-possessing individuals: the entire problem of liberal theory is to conceptualize the need for the state that can ensure natural rights. Philosophically, extending individual liberty might lead to the conclusion that the state should be abolished, but that conclusion moves beyond liberalism. Spencer’s static, utopian *telos* implies not merely the perfection of classical liberalism, but rather the anarchist vision of non-compulsion: if individuals evolve to the point that their desires are fully consonant with the law of equal freedom, the liberal state becomes superfluous, because there would be no conflicts to mediate. The culmination of social evolution eliminates the *need* for government and reaches an anarchist conclusion: fully evolved individuals can live harmoniously without compulsion, so government is unnecessary.

Spencer’s projective statements about government apply his general scientific theories and find that, ultimately, we will evolve to anarchism: not merely to the efficient negotiation of competing rights or the expression of collective will, but to a symbiosis appearing at evolution’s climax. He describes the direction of future evolution. Spencer’s overtly political comments, however, comprise a much different vein of work. His entire systematic theory aims to demonstrate the processes by which evolution occurs, the historical path it has taken, and the

direction it is headed, which leaves little room for critique. And, it would make little sense for him to *evaluate* the current stage of biological or even psychological evolution: they are merely steps—according to his own claims, neither good nor bad—that cannot be subject to a consideration of their rightness or their conduciveness to further evolution.²³ In other words, as Spencer describes the movement toward the static culmination of humanity’s mental evolution—the “perfect correspondence between ideas and facts”—he does not provide substantive comment on the ways we should direct future evolution. When commenting on forms of government, however, he frequently makes evaluative claims that are, in fact, immediately political. These statements diverge significantly from his evolutionary anarchism to affirm already evolved forms of government and to endorse laissez-faire libertarianism.

For instance, Spencer’s essay on representative government shows the system’s many flaws, accusing voters of crippling self-interest and a general lack of wisdom:

Even supposing that the mass of electors have a sufficiently decided *will* to choose the best rulers, what evidence have we of their *ability*? Is picking out the wisest man among them, a task within the range of their capacities? . . . [Voters] are but very sparsely gifted with wisdom.

That these should succeed in choosing from out their number the fittest governors, would be strange; and that they do not so succeed is manifest. Even as judged by the most common-sense tests, their selections are absurd. (“Representative” 174-175)

23. No matter the current state of being, evolution will continue and only from the perspective that some evolution is “good” and some “bad” could Spencer make evaluative claims about its stages. Of course, much of his work does imply a rightness or superiority: the movement from “barbarian” cultures to the civilized (European) world reveals Spencer’s tendency to characterize evolution as an upward movement. Nonetheless, he does not make the same sort of judgments of other facets of this universal evolutionary movement (e.g., geology, astronomy, psychology) that he does about the more immediately malleable areas of ethics and, most importantly for this project’s purposes, contemporaneous politics.

He adds the accusation that representative government creates laws in ignorance of scientific knowledge: “legislators persevere in their . . . notion, that an Act of Parliament duly enforced by state-officers, will work out any object: no question being put whether laws of Nature permit” (“Representative” 189). Reading “Representative Government” in light of *First Principles* might suggest again the future utopian stasis of evolutionary anarchism, but Spencer goes in a much different direction. After attacking the stupidity of voters and legislators alike and thoroughly eviscerating all representative government, he proceeds to find it superior to monarchy. Rather than positing an alternative, he places it in a false dichotomy and, not surprisingly, finds that elections work better than divine appointment: “It is clear . . . that representative government is especially adapted for the establishment and maintenance of just laws . . . And now mark that the objections to representative government awhile since urged, scarcely tell against it at all, so long as it does not exceed this comparatively limited function” (“Representative” 204). This fallacious shift does not properly belong to Spencer’s systemic evolutionary theory, because it makes a political statement emerging from his positions on “just laws” and the “limited function” of government.

Counter to evolutionary anarchism, Spencer’s political statements promote the state’s involvement to protect citizens’ body and property, signaling his embrace of property-based libertarianism, a stance that both ignores his own theory’s anarchist *telos* and conflates economic justice with political equality. In *Social Statics*—the text that led many to label Spencer an anarchist—he details government’s responsibility to protect its citizens, echoing the liberal marriage of bodies with property. He charges the state with insulating subjects from “those losses of life, of limb, or of the means of subsistence, which, under a state of anarchy, all are liable to” (*Social Statics* 296). This statement sets the era’s caricature of anarchism—a dangerous

free-for-all—as the only alternative to liberal government. Spencer endorses the laissez-faire role of government: equating body and property, the role of the state must be to protect both—and nothing more—a stance at odds with anarchism and later constructions of reform liberalism. Throughout his career, he repeats the classically liberal position that just laws must be limited, but are necessary—and *good*—because they insure property. As a scientist, Spencer asserts that “the limitation of the functions of the state [are] a natural corollary of the processes of evolution”—government will become unnecessary eventually—yet his immediately political statements defend government’s protection of property as a necessary good, even while insisting that “society [is] a complex, natural growth which it [is] beyond the capacity of social reformers to transform” (M. Taylor 137).²⁴

His evaluative statements about the proper role of government engage in contemporary politics, defending a platform at odds with his scientific theory. These political writings privilege property and imagine that genuine political equality will realize the law of equal freedom. There is a space between natural, evolutionary progress (i.e., Spencer’s science and his projective claims) and his political statements, which serve to naturalize extant forms of liberal government. Both circulate around questions of the natural/best relation between individuals and social formations, yet reach contrasting conclusions. They are roughly sutured, however, by

24. Importantly, these positions are not inherently irreconcilable: Spencer could mean simply to support the best possible political system at the time, fully recognizing that it would pass away as evolution continued. Still, there are differences between his comments about political formations and those about other aspects of evolution. The political uses of Spencer’s theories—from anarchists to the reprehensible policies bolstered by social Darwinism in the twentieth-century—gesture at very least to a widespread misunderstanding of his work. More likely, they indicate the complexity of the period’s discussions about science and politics. As Spencer attempted to make sense of the past and future, he necessarily engaged with the present, with all its disputes, inconsistencies, and open questions. His works then shaped these discussions. Thus, when Norris structures novels around Spencerian themes (as I discuss in chapter three), he brings with them reflexive cultural constructs that complicate any reading of naturalism’s engagement with evolutionary theory.

social Darwinism, perhaps Spencer's longest legacy.²⁵ This mechanism of social evolution was widely debated and was taken up by literary naturalists as they constructed their own visions of the "natural."

Richard Hofstadter's seminal *Social Darwinism in American Thought* defines turn-of-the-century social Darwinism as an ideological position wedding biology, sociology, and politics. He notes that aspects of evolutionary theory like "'struggle for existence' and 'survival of the fittest,' when applied to the life of man in society, suggested that nature would provide that the best competitors in a competitive situation would win, and that this process would lead to continued improvement" (6). Spencer's own words are perhaps more harsh: "so long as men are constituted to act on one another, either by physical force or by force of character, the struggle for supremacy must finally be decided in favor of some one; and the difference once commenced must tend to become ever more marked" (*First Principles* 420). Though his work does not unilaterally affirm inequalities, Spencer's synthetic philosophy encompasses biological and social mechanisms that operate homologously, so we must not see the distasteful elements of social Darwinism and thus detach it from other evolutionary changes: the question of "fitness" operates in the biological and social realms.²⁶ To reach the ideal equilibrium of personal desires and social formations, inferior specimens must be eliminated—such is the basic tenet of evolution (which, for obvious reasons, becomes troublesome when applied to the social world). Put differently, social Darwinism suggests the mechanism through which Spencer's static

25. Though labeled "social Darwinism," the sociological application of natural selection (or "survival of the fittest" as it often becomes when translated to the social realm) owes much more to Spencer than to Darwin. Robert L. Carneiro suggests it "might more accurately be known as 'Social Spencerism'" (xliii). For more on Spencer's social Darwinism, see M. Taylor, pp. 85-91.

26. There is no apology for a theory that claims "the capacity and the desire for any occupation [are] commonly associated" (*First Principles* 447). Spencer codes both poverty and success as states to which certain subjects have evolved a psychic preference and physical aptitude. His sociology reinscribes a stratified status quo and offers "scientific" support for reprehensible political movements.

utopian society will be realized: the reconciliation of mental conditions with material conditions is no more purely a matter of biological fitness than the evolution of different forms of government is a biological change. Spencer's comprehensive evolutionary theory requires the mechanism of fitness to work homologously, because evolution proceeds homologously. Social Darwinism is a constituent element of the process through which his static society is reached.

In the introduction to his abridgement of Spencer's *Principles of Sociology*, appropriately titled *The Evolution of Society*, Carneiro parses Spencer's social Darwinism, dividing it into forms within "the realm of social science" and those that "are tenets of political philosophy rather than scientific statements" (xliv).²⁷ Though the distinction is questionable, it gestures to the divide between Spencer's evolutionary politics and his contemporaneous politics as Carneiro attempts to negotiate the discrepancy between the two. Carneiro locates the form of "Social Darwinism [that] holds that the rapid elimination of 'unfit' individuals from society through the operation of natural selection will benefit the race biologically" as a political philosophy rather than a constituent element of Spencerian evolutionary theory, but this divide is too neat (xliv). Presumably, the endpoint of biological improvement would be the ideal equilibrium of personal desires with social formations. Through the mechanism of "fitness" and the elimination of inferior social specimens, social Darwinism portends the anarchist *telos* contained in Spencer's evolutionary theory. Spencer's laissez-faire conservatism appears in Carneiro's second form of social Darwinism, "which maintains that a society's economic system works best if each individual is allowed to seek his own private interests, and that therefore the state should not intervene in the economy" (xliv). This aspect of social Darwinism does not indicate a

27. At times, the introduction to *The Evolution of Society* appears to be an effort to recover Spencer from some of the more distasteful applications, events, and statements his theories spawned. He claims that the first two parts of the doctrine of social Darwinism—the ones that properly belong to "political philosophy"—may be "freely reject[ed]" if they are "out of harmony with one's own feelings and opinions without thereby discrediting any aspect of Spencer's sociology" (xliv).

teleological endpoint at all. Rather, it offers a straightforward capitalist model in which “the fittest business enterprises and economic institutions will survive and the unfit will go under” (Carneiro xlv). Here, we find the intersection of Spencer’s evolutionary anarchism and classical liberalism: social Darwinism bridges the divide. It is one of the major mechanism’s upon which his projective claims are built, but also a value that informs his immediate political beliefs. Though it does not eliminate the inconsistencies between these two registers, they are ameliorated by a mechanism that functions in both the scientific and political realms. This intersection also marks naturalism’s greatest interest in Spencer and the source of the anti-government resonances in Norris’s novels. Social Darwinism uneasily sutures disparate elements of Spencer’s work, but in the space it elides we find anarchist critique: recognizing the inconsistency of his work, late-nineteenth century anarchists took an ambivalent stance toward Spencer. Then, as Norris and others took social Darwinism as a theme, they brought with it these surrounding debates about government.

Spencer, Anarchism, and Unnatural Government

Benjamin Tucker may not be as well known as Goldman, Berkman, or de Cleyre, but his influence on American anarchism cannot be overstated. Though he wrote few book-length works, his efforts as a publisher and translator brought Bakunin, Stirner, and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon to American audiences. In addition, from 1881 to 1908 he edited *Liberty, Not the Daughter But the Mother of Order*, widely considered “the most important anarchist periodical to appear in the United States” (Brooks 1). The inaugural issue of *Liberty* contains Tucker’s understanding of the work he did through the journal:

Liberty enters the field of journalism to speak for herself because she finds no one willing to speak for her. She hears no voice that always champions her; she knows no pen that always writes in her defense; she sees no hand that is always lifted to avenge her wrongs or vindicate her rights. Many claim to speak in her name, but few really understand her. Still fewer have the courage and the opportunity to consistently fight for her. (“Our Purpose” 2)

For nearly thirty years, Tucker wrote, vetted, and published a range of anarchist materials that strove to offer a polyvocal, yet cogent exposition of individualist anarchism.²⁸ Among its many other contributions, the pages of *Liberty* include an internal debate—mediated by Tucker—about the naturalness of government, a conversation that circulated around liberalism and Spencer.

In his synthesized anthology of *Liberty*, Brooks claims that “‘liberalism’ per se was not a major topic in *Liberty*, but the issues it raised, particularly as it evolved in the nineteenth century, were” (40). He adds that anarchists “saw themselves as more consistent and radical than liberals in applying the logic of liberalism and criticized liberals for not having the courage of their convictions” (40). In short, anarchists’ stance toward liberalism “is more critical than thankful,” taking “liberalism’s concern with individual liberty . . . to extremes that liberals could not contemplate” (Brooks 2). The fundamental point of disagreement between the two—a shared fixation philosophically preceding both liberal and anarchist political theory—is the construction

28. For detailed biographical information on Tucker and general information about the publication history of *Liberty*, see the introduction to Brooks’s *The Individual Anarchists*, sections of David DeLeon’s *The American as Anarchist: Reflections on Indigenous Radicalism*, the foreword to *Individual Liberty* (attributed to the editor, C.L.S.), the various essays in *Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty: A Centenary Anthology* (edited by Michael E. Coughlin, Charles H. Hamilton, and Mark A. Sullivan), the third part (“The Maturation of American Anarchism as an Intellectual Force”) of James J. Martin’s *Men against the State: The Expositors of Individualist Anarchism in America, 1827-2008*, and Paul Avrich’s two short chapters, “Proudhon and America” and “Benjamin Tucker and His Daughter,” in *Anarchist Portraits*. All offer fragmented perspectives of Tucker’s life, his time publishing *Liberty*, and the major themes that recur in its pages. Together they offer an interesting, if incomplete view of the man and his work.

of the individual and her rights. Tucker and *Liberty* repeatedly deny the existence of “natural rights,” revealing already their skepticism toward Spencer:

The very corner-stone of Anarchistic philosophy is often supposed to be a paraphrase of Herbert Spencer’s “First Principles” of equal freedom, that “Every person has a natural right to do what he wills, provided that in the doing thereof he infringes not the equal rights of any other person.’ Yet there lurks in the expression a fallacy that correct thought must repudiate. (Lum 1)

Dyer D. Lum attributes this fallacious logic to those who make “natural rights” universal or metaphysical when they actually “are evolved, not conferred, and [thus] are not fixed and unalterable” (1). Tucker clarifies this stance, adding that “the whole matter of scientific politics is a question how far we had better give each other *a right to do* that which each may think *it is right to do*” (“Rights” 4). “The right to do” is Tucker’s version of political rights, which are not natural, but “put into execution only through contract, agreement In the absence of such a contract *the right to do* does not exist at all. It has not been called into existence” (“Rights” 4). Lum and Tucker indicate that rights are not divinely granted or innately possessed. They evolve out of civil society—Tucker’s “contract, agreement.”²⁹ This position, of course, inverts Locke: classical liberalism asserts natural rights that are best enforced through the prudent formation of civil society; anarchism posits rights that emerge at or evolve from the contractual formation of social organizations.

What remains in both positions, are rights, government, and a link between the two. This consonance may mark the disagreement over “natural rights” as more semantic than anything.

29. Tucker’s daughter, Oriole Tucker Riché, confirms that he did “[believe] in contracts” (Avrich, “Interview” 25). This position is reconcilable with anarchism, because contracts are voluntary and do not necessarily imply the involvement of or enforcement by the state.

Tucker elsewhere insists, “I do not admit anything except the existence of the individual, as a condition of his sovereignty To protest against the invasion of individual sovereignty is necessarily to affirm individual sovereignty” (“Anarchism and the State” 32). There appears to be little difference between “sovereignty” (that which the state must not restrict) and “natural rights” (that which the individual possesses before the state exists). Both liberal theory and anarchism accept an inviolable subject, variously described as possessing rights or as the sovereign master of his liberty, which is cast as the central measure for all government. This basic affinity, however, dissolves when the two philosophies conceptualize the practical relationship between individuals and government. Liberal theory defends the state, so long as it does not restrict natural rights, but merely enforces them. Anarchists, on the other hand, contend that government inherently restricts individual sovereignty. This distinction manifests as a disagreement about the naturalness of government, a question transformed in this period by the rise of evolutionary theory. Classical liberalism begins with natural rights and finds state government an acceptable, prudent, natural means for ensuring them, while anarchism rejects government as an unnatural restriction of sovereignty.

Almost all major anarchists point to government as unnatural, including the theorists who most profoundly influenced late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century American anarchism. For Bakunin, “freedom is the absolute right of every” individual (“Revolutionary Catechism” 76). Echoing liberal theory, he asserts that rights are grounded in the “inevitable power of . . . natural laws” against which “revolt . . . is impossible” (*God and the State* 28). Bakunin adds, however, that because government, by definition, exceeds individual sovereignty, it is unnecessary, unnatural, and doomed to failure. Peter Kropotkin similarly challenges the naturalness of state governance by pointing out that “the State is but one of the forms of social life” (“On

Anarchism” 141). In its place, he suggests an alternative “practice of mutual aid, which we can retrace to the earliest beginnings of evolution” (*Mutual Aid* 300). Kropotkin traces an alternate evolution of individuals and governance that shows an unnatural government at odds with individual’s natural propensities. Élisée Reclus notes that “in all ages there have been free men . . . living . . . in accordance with the primordial law of their own existence,” but decries the notion that “the state and all that it implies are any kind of pure essence” (131-132). He traces natural freedoms to the beginning of humanity while denying the essentiality, necessity, and naturalness of the state. In the United States, Johann Most and Emma Goldman perhaps most poignantly sever government from nature: “Are the laws made by man, the laws on our statute books, in conformity with the laws of Nature? No one, we think, can have the temerity to assert that they are. It is because the laws prescribed to us by men are not in conformity with the laws of Nature that mankind suffers from so much ill” (“Anarchy Defended”). This trope of natural individuals and unnatural government runs throughout anarchist theory, but at the end of the century it collides with Spencer’s career-long efforts to interconnect individuals and government with the full range of evolutionary progress.

Tucker was most heavily indebted to Proudhon, whose praise he sings frequently in *Liberty*: “[*Liberty* was] brought into existence almost as a direct consequence of the teachings of Proudhon, and [it] lives principally to emphasize and spread them” (“Statue to Proudhon”). He also translated Proudhon’s *What Is Property?*, among other works, and based much of his own theory on Proudhon’s ideas (Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits* 141). In Proudhon’s discussion of the naturalization of government (as opposed to government *as natural*), we see an early influence on Tucker: “The governmental idea sprang from family customs and domestic experience: no protest arose then: Government *seemed* . . . *natural to Society* . . . The prejudice in favor of

government having sunk into our deepest consciousness . . . every other conception has been . . . rendered impossible . . . Government has always presented itself to the mind as the natural organ of justice [emphasis added]” (*General Idea* 106-107).³⁰

As Tucker develops Proudhon’s ideas, he repeats the recurring theme of unnatural government and ties it to a scientific, materialist anarchism.³¹ When favorably comparing anarchism to state socialism, he writes that “one is metaphysical, the other positive. One is dogmatic, the other scientific . . . [state socialism] regards the state as a society *sui generis*, of an especial essence . . . with special rights and able to exact special obediences; [anarchism] considers the State as an association like any other” (“State Socialism and Anarchism” 15-16). Here is a strange union between Spencerian science and individualist anarchism, as Tucker’s post-Proudhonian theory indicates that government is not natural. Tucker argues that a scientific approach can lead us to recognize its unnaturalness. Much like Spencer’s evolutionary anarchism, Tucker’s epigrammatic description of anarchism suggests that current social formations (i.e., state government) are not the natural conclusion of individual liberty, without denying they have evolved. Science and political theory become inseparable as the science of politics and the politics of science mutually complicate one another.

The confluence of anarchism and science explains in part the link between Spencer and anti-government thought: anarchists found in his work scientific support for their political vision.

30. According to Paul Avrich, Tucker’s “greatest ambition was to publish the complete works of Proudhon in English translation,” but especially *The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, which “Tucker considered . . . Proudhon’s greatest work” (*Anarchist Portraits* 142). He did not translate or publish this work, but its influence upon him is profound.

31. In *What Is Property?* Proudhon argues that property is *impossible*, because it transgresses objective, material laws. He is not satisfied to argue that property is unjust, but instead seeks to demonstrate that it violates moral *and* mathematical, natural laws.

Tucker and other late-nineteenth-century American anarchists were drawn to science, believing not only that politics and power could be studied through objective, material methods, but also that such study would demonstrate the unnaturalness of government. In the period, a complex, yet recognizable discourse coalesces around the rhetorics of “freedom” and “naturalness.” This discursive field signals the admixture of the period’s dual fascinations: liberalism and evolutionary science, a combination that shaped and was shaped by anarchists and literary naturalists. Debates about Spencer’s shifting work crystallize the intersections of liberalism and science as anarchists attempt simultaneously to rely on and distance themselves from each. Tucker’s work succinctly expresses anti-government radicals’ ambivalence toward Spencer’s work. It elucidates the fracture between evolutionary anarchism and classical liberalism and provides a suggestive complement to Norris’s contemporaneous engagement with Spencer.

Tucker’s stance toward Spencer alternates between criticism and praise, an ambivalence typically read as a replication of Spencer’s shift from “earlier anarchism” to a “defense of the bourgeoisie and the status quo” by the late 1880s (Brooks 39). An 1891 issue of *Liberty* claims that while “in ‘Social Statics’ Mr. Spencer firmly advocated Anarchism . . . in subsequent treatises the position taken [is] radically different” (Yarros 2). Tucker’s writings reiterate this position, claiming that Spencer has “forgotten the teaching of his earlier writings, and . . . become a champion of the capitalist class” (“The Sin” 4). He accuses Spencer of political “sins,” yet credits him with “doing good, after all” (“The Sin” 4-5). Barely more than a year later, Tucker published parts of a response to Spencer’s *Man and the State*, which accuses him of “a relapse into Philistinism” and of “hastening the advent of . . . ‘slavery’” through a “defence of the wrongs of the present state of society” (Kelly 7). Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, Tucker praises Spencer’s *Social Statics* for “ably and admirably insist[ing] upon the right to ignore the

state” (“Relation” 27), yet at the same time, publishing articles that accuse Spencer of advocating “compulsory and aggressive [political] means” substantially counter to *Liberty*’s anarchist doctrine (Yarros 3).

Tucker’s embrace of Spencer’s earliest writing and rejection of his later work are emblematic of the anarchist response to Spencer, a profound ambivalence correlated to the distance between evolutionary anarchism and classical liberalism. Anarchists’ robust theorization of the natural touches upon the very core of anarchism’s divergence from liberalism. Like Spencer and liberals, anarchists were invested in efforts to conceptualize the natural, appropriate relationship between individuals and social formations. Of course, they rejected liberal government on its face, embracing Spencer’s static society as a scientific complement to anarchist political philosophy. As I noted above, anarchist philosophy exceeds liberal theory by inverting its logic: whereas Locke and others describe an imperfect state of nature that gives rise to liberal government, anarchists claim that government inherently restricts individual rights and thus call for a move away from state-based social formations. This is not, as Brooks claims, a *logical* extension of liberalism, but a *political* extension of individual rights. By calling for the abolition of the state, anarchists deny the liberal notion that government is a natural evolution of innate rights. In its place, they posit a social formation that resembles Spencer’s *telos*, arguing that government is both unnecessary and unnatural. The parallel discourse of literary naturalism reaches an unexpectedly similar—albeit more subtle—conclusion: efforts by Norris and other to grapple with the era’s complex scientifico-political theory and to produce a vision of the “natural” fictively confronts Spencer, leaving a residue of anti-government sentiment.

Forms of Determinism: The Science and Politics of Naturalism

Naturalism is not alone in its claim to verisimilitude, yet as a genre it has been categorized as something uniquely “naturalistic.” So, while it may seem a truism to point out that literary naturalism is an intervention into discourses of the “natural,” never has this tautology been unilaterally accepted. Since George Becker’s pithy assertion that naturalism equals “pessimistic materialistic determinism” (35), innumerable critics have offered competing definitions. Naturalism has been said to “[revel] in the extraordinary, the excessive, and the grotesque in order to reveal the immutable bestiality of Man in Nature” (Sundquist 13); it may contain a “fantasy, in which the circulation of currency becomes a natural phenomenon” (Benn Michaels 148); and it extends realism’s logic, “[adding] a biological and philosophical component to the writing of fiction” (Lehan 3). Though a single comprehensive definition is difficult, there are a few themes that run across the breadth of naturalist scholarship.³²

Perhaps the most widely cited early definition of naturalism comes from Donald Pizer’s *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (1966/1984):

I suggest that the naturalistic novel usually contains two tensions or contradictions, and that the two in conjunction comprise both an interpretation of experience and a particular aesthetic recreation of experience. In other words, the two constitute the theme and form of the naturalistic novel. The first tension is that between the subject matter of the naturalistic novel and the concept of man which emerges from this subject matter. The naturalist populates his novel primarily from the lower middle class or the lower class. His characters are the poor, the uneducated, the unsophisticated.

32. Donald Pizer’s introductory essay, “The Problem of Definition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism: Howells to London*, traces the history of and problems with definitions of literary naturalism. It functions as a useful counterpoint to Pizer’s multiple efforts to define the genre elsewhere.

His fictional world is that of the commonplace and unheroic in which life would seem to be chiefly the dull round of daily existence But the naturalist discovers in this world those qualities of man usually associated with the heroic or adventurous The naturalist . . . discovers in this material the extraordinary and excessive in human nature.

The second tension involves the theme of the naturalistic novel. The naturalist often describes his characters as though they are conditioned and controlled by environment, heredity, instinct, or chance. But he also suggests a compensating humanistic value in his characters or their fates which affirm the significance of the individual and of his life. (10-11)

Pizer's two tensions—between the mundane and the extraordinary and between the determined and the agential—appear in most studies of naturalism and speak to the genre's defining thematic fixations and formal characteristics. Too often, however, scholars limit the scope of these frictions or ruptures in Norris's novels by failing to account for the ways in which naturalism's fascination with determinism extends far beyond strictly literary constructions of the natural. The link between naturalism's deterministic tropes and science—especially in the form of social Darwinism—has been explored extensively and is now widely accepted as an essential consideration when writing about Norris and his peers.³³ Still, few have recognized fully the

33. Richard Chase's *The American Novel and Its Traditions* (1957) includes a section on Norris that reveals an already accepted link between his novels and science. Much of Pizer's work, including his two major studies of American naturalism—*Twentieth Century American Literary Naturalism and Realism* and *Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature—The Novels of Frank Norris*, and various essays all discuss Norris vis-à-vis evolutionary theory. More recent studies include Richard Lehan's *Realism and Naturalism: The Novel in the Age of Transition*, Bert Bender's *Evolution and "the Sex Problem": American Narratives during the Eclipse of Darwinism*, and Eric Carl Link's *The Vast and Terrible Drama: American Literary Naturalism in the Late Nineteenth Century*. All three offer excellent discussions of Norris's connections with Charles Darwin, Joseph Le Conte, Spencer, and other evolutionary theorists. The prevalence of this connection perhaps is most strongly signified by its appearance in works that do not focus on it, but must raise it to be part of the scholarly conversation around naturalism: Jennifer Fleissner's *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism* offers a feminist reading of American naturalism, but must contend with Darwin and Spencer in its introduction; Lon West's *Deconstructing Frank Norris's Fiction: The Male-Female Dialectic* and recent articles by Leigh Ann Litwiller Berte ("Mapping *The Octopus*: Frank Norris' Naturalist Geography") and Steven Frye ("Presley's

function of Pizer's tensions in Norris's work as he constructs around the pair a fictive critique of evolutionary science. Understanding this valance of his novels requires first examining each tension as Norris addresses them in his *Responsibilities of the Novelist* (1903), the touchstone for his conceptualization of naturalistic literature.

In many ways, Norris imagines the naturalist writer as a realist *par excellence*, transcribing the "real" as it happens: "you must learn to sit very quiet, and be very watchful, and so train your eyes and ears that every sound and sight shall be significant" (*Responsibilities* 158). This image of the novelist sitting silently, observing her world, is Norris's vision of the novelist whose work will be "dependent solely upon fidelity to life for existence" (*Responsibilities* 158). He continues, figuring the "muse of American fiction" as a "robust, red-armed *bonne femme*, who rough-shoulders her way among men and among affairs, who finds a healthy pleasure in the jostlings of the mob and a hearty delight in the honest, rough-and-tumble, Anglo-Saxon, give-and-take knock-about that for us means life" (*Responsibilities* 159). According to Norris, the American muse is no different from Americans: she forces her way through the crowded public sphere, embodying the essence of American citizenship. And more importantly, she inspires the novelist to write about her and her fellow citizens with honesty and forthrightness. Like many other realists, Norris speaks of an unalloyed representation of the "real." Elsewhere in his treatise, however, he claims that "accuracy is the attainment of small minds, the achievement of the commonplace, a mere machine-made thing that comes with niggardly research and ciphering

Pretense: Irony and Epic Convention in Frank Norris' *The Octopus*") all cite Pizer's work to establish the connection between Norris's fiction and evolutionary theorists, without detailing it; and articles by Link ("The Theodicy Problem in the Works of Frank Norris"), Mark Feldman ("The Physics and Metaphysics of Caging: The Animal in Late-Nineteenth Century American Culture") and Thomas Austenfeld ("A Happy Naturalist? Jeremy Bentham and the Cosmic Morality of *The Octopus*") each reference Spencer and/or Le Conte with varying degrees of engagement with the critical history of reading them alongside literary naturalism. The link between evolutionary science and Norris's naturalism pervades almost all scholarship on his work.

and mensuration and the multiplication table, good in its place, so only the place is small” (*Responsibilities* 175). Norris demands more from fiction than mere verisimilitude.

“A Plea for Romantic Fiction” is perhaps the most famous chapter in *The Responsibilities of the Novelist*. In it, Norris attacks realism as “the drama of a broken teacup, the tragedy of a walk down the block, the excitement of an afternoon call, the adventure of an invitation to dinner” (164-165). He is not satisfied with a realism that “confines itself to the normal life” (*Responsibilities* 164). Instead, he seeks a mode of realistic representation that moves beyond literary realism’s cursory examination: “Realism bows upon the doormat and goes away and says to me as we link arms on the sidewalk: ‘That is life.’ And I say it is not. It is not, as you would very well see if you took Romance with you to call upon your neighbour” (*Responsibilities* 165). Norris adds “Romance” to realism, because “to Romance belongs the wide world for range, and the unplumbed depths of the human heart, and the mystery of sex, and the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of man” (*Responsibilities* 167-168). He suggests the real cannot be captured unless one is willing to penetrate beyond the surface drama in William Dean Howells’s novels. To show the fullness of social and natural forces’ effects on the American subject, one must drop the “harsh, loveless, colourless, blunt tool called Realism” and take up romance, with its “noble purpose . . . mightier than mere amusement” (*Responsibilities* 164, 167). What Pizer sees as a tension between the “commonplace and unheroic” and the “heroic or adventurous” is not, for Norris, a tension at all—it is the essence of naturalism as a literary genre that can exceed realism’s vision of reality. Norris constructs the natural through a documentary attention to detail that ignores neither the mundanity and grotesquery of lower-class life nor the romantic hand of chance that touches even the most socially marginal subject. The

natural is real, but through Pizer's second tension, Norris ties it to the period's uniquely comprehensive impulse and thus to Spencerian science.

In the second chapter of *The Responsibilities of the Novelist*, "The Novel with a 'Purpose,'" Norris outlines three types of novels: those that "tell something," those that "show something," and those that "prove something" (21). For Norris, naturalism falls in this last category: "The third, and what we hold to be the best class proves something, draws conclusions from a whole congeries of forces, social tendencies, race impulses, devotes itself not to a study of men but of man" (*Responsibilities* 21-22). He reveals his novels' ambitious scope as they strive to synthesize the cultural *and* scientific "elemental forces" that shape humanity. Read in the context of turn-of-the-century science, these ambitions gesture toward a literary effort to capture the interconnectedness of life in a way similar to Spencer: Norris refuses to discount either of Pizer's tensile nodes, proclaiming a commitment to the various determining "forces" discussed by scholars of American literary naturalism for the last fifty years. Supplementing his definition, Pizer claims that Norris and other naturalists "depict contemporary middle-and lower-class life free from superficial notions of the ideal and supernatural as controlling forces in experience, and they too find man limited by the violent and irrational within himself and by the oppressive restrictions within society" (*Twentieth-Century* 5). This bifurcation of deterministic forces into those "within himself" and those "within society" mirrors Norris's own view of the "elemental forces" shaping subjects in turn-of-the-century America.

This division of causality—what Link calls "The Forms of Determinism" (*Vast and Terrible* 100)—ceases to be a division, however, when one recognizes the Spencerian evolutionary theory inflecting Norris's work.³⁴ If individuals and social formations evolve

34. This dual causality touches on the comprehensiveness of Norris's intentions and the cultural forces that shaped it. Dividing determinism into two types, however, also signals Norris's ambivalent relationship to Spencer

simultaneously, with both being suited to each other through homologous and coterminous processes, then all elemental force can be traced to Spencer's universal evolutionary mechanism. Evolutionary theory shapes naturalistic fiction and is as vital to the Norris's construction of the "natural" as the realism-romanticism blend. Most basically, Norris's engagement with Spencer, evolution, and social Darwinism is explained by the widespread circulation of these theories in late-nineteenth-century American culture, which caused the distance between humans and animals to shrink. Mark Feldman claims that "during this period, representations of animals were used to rethink the human—in particular the structure and nature of human interiority" (161). By establishing a biological link between humans and animals, scientists opened space for the consideration of humans as animals in a way previously unthinkable. So, when Pizer locates "major themes of biological determinism" in Norris's work, he is gesturing toward innate characteristics, toward the inescapable animality determining Norrisian characters ("Biological Determinism" 27). Richard Lehan adds that Charles Darwin "strengthened the plausibility of the preexistent biological idea that species have a mechanism enabling them to evolve" (99). This further reinforces the cultural notion "that man was limited, shaped, conditioned" (Pizer, *Twentieth-Century* 4). Most scholars of literary naturalism accept that these scientific principles are a large part of naturalist writers' understanding of the individual, and that they saturate Norris's work. As Mohamed Zayani contends: "naturalists were heavily influenced by . . . the belief that heredity determines human character" ("From Determinism" 344). Norris's connection to Darwinian evolution, however, is twice removed. His work owes much more to Spencer, whom he likely learned about from Joseph Le Conte.

and other scientists. Spencerian evolutionary theory insists that individuals (biology, psychology, etc.) and social formations (sociology, government, etc.) evolve parallel to another, so it makes little sense to separate these determining forces. By noting disparate forms of determinism, Pizer, Link, and others illuminate Norris's skepticism toward Spencer. He clearly was fascinated with evolutionary science, but did not uncritically accept its adherents' conclusions.

There is no concrete evidence beyond his fiction that Norris knew much about Darwin or Spencer. We know that he was a student at the University of California at Berkeley when Le Conte was a professor there, that he took Le Conte's "geology and zoology courses . . . in his junior year," and that "he . . . voluntarily attended at least some of Le Conte's lectures on reproduction" (McElrath and Crisler 122). In their efforts to downplay the impact Le Conte had on Norris, which "since the mid-1960's has been a veritable *idée fixe* among all but a few interpreters of Norris's life and work," Norris's biographers doubt that he "attended Le Conte's straightforward philosophical lectures and the colloquies in which he participated, or read any of his publications" (McElrath and Crisler 122). They are quick to point out that "Norris never directly referred to Le Conte in his writings," yet they admit that on Berkeley's campus, "Le Conte himself was an object of high interest" and that "[evolutionary theory] was 'a fairly fixed thing with the undergrads at [the] time' [being] widely understood and generally accepted as verified" (122-123). At very least, Norris was familiar with Le Conte, who shared Spencer's late-career fascination with Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and whose work included the theory "that evil is a necessary condition of evolution . . . arising from the lower stages of existence" (Bender 38). Le Conte's classes and, to a lesser extent, the entire science curriculum would have been influenced by Spencer. In his autobiography, Le Conte credits Spencer with exceeding Lamarck, Darwin, and T.H. Huxley by generalizing evolutionary theory "into a universal law of nature" (335). He accepted Spencer's work as foundational to his own, so the appearance of Le Conte's influence—"reflected in all of Norris's novels"—already contains the widespread impact of Spencer (Bender 35). Spencer's universal evolutionary theory was widely known and Le Conte was not Norris's only exposure to it: Norris's minister was "an evolutionist [who] invoked

Darwin as well as Herbert Spencer when calling for personal improvement and social amelioration” (McElrath and Crisler 368).

The age of literary naturalism coincides with the age of Spencer: as Link claims, this period was saturated by the “metaphysics of evolution” (*Vast and Terrible* 69). As naturalists set out to imagine the “natural” through literature, they entered into a fraught field of science and politics, making similar, yet competing claims about evolution, individuals, and government. Often, their works explore directly the era’s science, using it to shape form and plot. By taking Spencer’s theories as inspiration, content, object of critique, Norris and others re-present contemporaneous debates over the natural/proper relationship between individuals and social formations—they fictively engage liberalism and science. Naturalism’s formal strategies represent these discourses, proposing, challenging, and rejecting their various constructions of the natural. Though not always overt like *Martin Eden*, naturalist novels fixated on Spencer linger as political texts: recording and reshaping these disputes, they reproduce traces of the period’s highly visible anti-government thought.

Chapter 3

Anarchism and the Brute: Frank Norris's Anti-Government Atavism

Exhausted he was, nerveless, weak, but this apathy was still invaded from time to time with fierce incursions of a spirit of unrest and revolt, reactions, momentary returns of the blind, undirected energy that at one time had prompted him to a vast desire to acquit himself of some terrible deed of readjustment, just what, he could not say, some terrifying martyrdom, some awe-inspiring immolation, consummate, incisive, conclusive. He fancied himself to be fired with the purblind, mistaken heroism of the anarchist, hurling his victim to destruction with full knowledge that the catastrophe shall sweep him also into the vortex it creates.

—Frank Norris, *The Octopus*

Frank Norris was not an anarchist. In fact, he likely would have identified himself as a proud, patriotic American.³⁵ As noted in this project's first chapter, however, the logic of representation complicates affinity and intentionality. His desire to write novels that “prove something” did not lead Norris to write explicitly political texts, but merely to touch on the

35. In *Frank Norris: A Life*, Joseph R. McElrath, Jr. and Jesse Crisler address the accusations that Norris's work includes racism and imperialist sentiment. They deny neither (though there is a sense that they wish to de-emphasize them) and further characterize Norris as patriotic. While clearly a work can transcend or contravene an author's political commitments, Norris's pro-American, pro-democracy stance also is more complicated than most recognize. For one, while much is made of Norris's war writing (seen as largely patriotic), many of his writings focus on military technology, rather than on the uses to which it is put. For example, both “On a Battleship” and “Moving a Fifty-Ton Gun” evidence the realist's fascination with verisimilitude and, though neither critiques government's offensive use of weaponry, they also do not praise unequivocally its function. The line between fascination and endorsement is blurred. More troubling is Norris's stance toward the two wars on which he reported. He traveled to South Africa during the Boer War and to Cuba during the Spanish-American War. Again, his writings do not condemn the war and in both cases his sympathies lie with the Anglo side. He supported the British colonization of the Boer republics and sided with American troops in Cuba. Both demonstrate Norris's persistent Anglo-centrism, but in one case he supports a traditional colonial power extending its empire (the British), while in the other he supports a new colonial force overthrowing another (the United States' effort to “liberate” Cuba from Spain). Clearly, in neither case is his stance anarchist, but there is a substantive difference between the ways in which he writes about war and the form and style of his naturalist fiction. McElrath and Crisler note that Norris's articles on the Spanish-American War suggest “restraint” designed to “preserve the dignity of his subjects” (303-304). This restraint stands in stark contrast to the descriptions of lower-class indignities and brutal violence we see in *Vandover* and *McTeague* (the squalor, grotesquery, and brutality that provoked disgust in many reviewers). It seems that Norris is willing to deploy naturalism, with its focus on degradation, in the construction of fictive subjects, but when confronted with the horrors of war and the “real” people they affect, he is far more sympathetic. This formal distinction can account for fiction that transcends its author's prejudices. In other words, while I do not deny Norris's abhorrent racism and implicit imperialism, Norrisian naturalism's unique formal characteristics—its constructions of the “natural”—represent subjects and their determinants in a manner that exceeds Norris's conscious political and racial views.

political facets of the “thoroughly American experience” (“To Howells” 34). Produced in an atmosphere saturated by evolutionary science, political liberalism, and the specter of anarchism, Norrisian naturalism seeks to construct the “natural” and thus produces texts with wide-ranging political implications. For example, Norris did not recognize *The Octopus* as a political novel: he imagined it as the first part of a “big Epic trilogy,” centered on the “Niagara of Wheat rolling from West to East,” a topic “so big that it frighten[ed] him,” but that touched on politics only as one part of a complex issue (“To Howells” 34).³⁶ Even before its publication, however, *The Octopus* resonated with political implications. In a letter to Mrs. Lilla Lewis Parks—who wished to see him write a defense of railroad trusts—Norris wrote:

Singularly enough I had already determined to attempt to handle this very subject of Trusts in my first novel on wheat, as involved in the problem of transportation. But as the title of this first book—“The Octopus”—suggests, I am enlisted upon the other side. The corporation (wh. is another name for trust) of the Southern Pacific R.R. is a very poignant issue with us in California and from what we know of it there we are not led to consider it as legitimate or tolerable. (44)

After its publication, critic Bailey Millard lamented Norris’s move away from the “adventure-romance genre” of *Moran of the Lady Letty* toward “fictions designed to develop an argument and prove a point” (McElrath and Crisler 341). It seems the ambitious effort to write an epic

36. Norris wrote to longtime friend Harry M. Wright, explaining the genesis of his wheat trilogy: “I am leaving for California It has happened quite unexpectedly, but is the result of a talk I had with the firm here [Doubleday and McClure Co. Publishers]. They believe with me that the big American novel is going to come out of the west—California. They have an idea that I can write it and it would be cruel and heartless to disillusion em. I’ve got an idea thats as big as all out-doors & McClure is going to back me up while I put it through and me pay goes marching on the whiles. It involves a very long, very serious and perhaps a terrible novel. It will be all about the San Joaquin wheat raisers and the Southern Pacific, and I guess we’ll call it The Octopus. —catch on? I mean to study the whole question as faithfully as I can and then write a hair lifting story. Theres the chance for the big, Epic, dramatic thing in this, and I mean to do it thoroughly. —get at it from every point of view, the social, agricultural, & political. Just say the last word on the R.R. question in California” (35). His intentions were literary, with politics being only one necessary aspect to capture the “whole question.”

centered on the conflict between landowners and railroad trusts could not avoid intervening in politics. The obviously political elements of *The Octopus*—recognized from its initial publication to the present—have overshadowed the traces of contemporaneous political debates that necessarily permeate Norris’s work as he attempts to narrate the nation’s structuring “elemental forces.”

During the 1890s, Norris worked as a journalist, writing many articles and covering two wars, all while completing several novels. He lived in Boston, New York, and San Francisco and traveled widely. This same decade saw Berkman’s failed *attentat*, Sante Geronimo Caserio’s assassination of French president Sadi Carnot, and the killing of Empress Elizabeth of Austria by Luigi Luccheni. Perhaps more potent to a nation still haunted by Haymarket, Spaniard Santiago Salvador threw two bombs into an orchestra pit in 1894, while in France, August Vaillant famously attacked the French National Assembly with a nail bomb. Even though there had been few major acts of anarchist violence in the United States, these sensational events had two significant effects. First, they cemented the caricature of anarchists as dark, dirty, bomb-throwing degenerates, an image that circulated freely during the period. They also, however, increased interest in anti-government activism, giving anarchists a public venue to explain their philosophy against the backdrop of violence. Throughout the 1890s and into the 1900s, Goldman and others were widely visible through letters to the editor, articles, and speeches covered by radical and mainstream periodicals. Articles by and about Goldman appeared in the *San Francisco Call* and *The Oakland Enquirer*, among other newspapers, while journalists across the country addressed anarchism’s contradictions. Put bluntly, Norris’s brief period of literary productivity occurred at a time when anarchism—as a political philosophy and concrete threat to life, property, and

nation—was unavoidable: it penetrated contemporaneous discussions of science and politics, and thus it is no surprise that we find overt and subtle traces of anarchism in Norris's work.

Of Norris's novels, *The Octopus* most naturally lends itself to the context of anarchism. For one, it includes the only concrete instance of anarchism in Norris's work. Late in the novel when a bomb is thrown through S. Behrman's window, Norris evokes the era's anarchist caricature: Presley acts only after a lengthy conversation with Caraher, the lone anarchist character in any of Norris's novels. In this chapter, however, I will show how the overt presence of anarchism in *The Octopus* belies, yet gestures toward, a pervasive strain of anti-government thought in Norris's works. Drawing from the real-life Mussel Slough Tragedy (1880), *The Octopus* offers a sweeping account of the conflict between the railroads and California wheat farmers, an ongoing dispute in which the author undoubtedly sided against the railroads. Norris wrote the novel as a stridently anti-trust work, figuring the contest between two concretized abstractions: monopoly capital, represented by the railroad, and "the people," represented by a small group of farmers (McElrath and Crisler 341). Peopling the novel almost exclusively with middle- and upper-class characters, Norris relies on aspects of Spencerian theory, but his focus on corporate conflict—the evil railroad against the apparently good (but nevertheless well-to-do) farmers, who stand for "the people"—sublimates social Darwinism's individualist ideology. I argue that the absence of the "brute" figure distances the novel from the confluence of liberalism and science, thus subduing the anti-government threat. Put differently, while *The Octopus* traditionally has been read as the most explicitly political of Norris's texts, his earlier brute novels are equally rich with political import. By representing the consequences of aberration, devolution, and atavism, *McTeague* (1899) and *Vandover and the Brute* (1914) supplement anarchism's obvious appearance in *The Octopus*. All three engage with the period's various

constructions of naturalness; collectively they both demonstrate the far-reaching influence of anarchism and reveal a fracture as naturalism's representational strategies challenge the nation's evolving democracy.

The Octopus

Norris begins his wheat trilogy with anarchism: "Just after passing Caraher's saloon" (3). This opening clause references the anarchist as location, as a position against which movement of other characters is measured, signaling the strangely subdued role of the era's menace: anarchism is an absent presence for most of the novel, intervening at some moments, more frequently disappearing. The only moments when Caraher plays a significant role are when he "seduces disgruntled workers to . . . acts of random pointless violence" (Redding 102). Both Dyke, who, swindled by railroad freight charges, commits armed robbery and Presley, the poet who sees his rancher friends killed by agents of the railroad, fall under Caraher's influence prior to their violent acts. Dyke visits the saloon and listens to Caraher about the best way to respond to the railroad trust's greed: "There's one thing only [the trust] does listen to, one thing it is frightened of — the people with dynamite in their hands, — six inches of plugged gaspipe" (357). Similarly, just before Presley throws a bomb into Behrman's window, he speaks with Caraher. Presley leaves the saloon like "a man whose mind is made up" (543). Contrary to Pizer's claim that the novel depicts simple "end-of-the-century dread of anarchism," *The Octopus* shows an awareness extending beyond dread (*The Novels of Frank Norris* 152). Not once does the character insistently described as anarchist enact violence; he merely inspires others to do so, catalyzing violence through anarchist rhetoric.³⁷ This is Norris's conception of

37. In *The Novels of Frank Norris*, Pizer discounts any significant political theme in or effect of the novel: "*The Octopus* is not a novel about class war or about the downtrodden" (121). His choice to ignore the aspects of the

the overt anarchist threat: a seductive appeal to violence, rather than violence as such. He likely did not intend to minimize the threat of anarchism, yet even in a novel containing literal explosions, anarchism's complexity is present. *The Octopus* narrates anarchism without reducing it to violence, though the era's rhetoric often did. It seems that naturalism's exploration of science, politics, and the individual somehow precludes turning Caraher into the stereotypical bomb-throwing anarchist. This oddly, subtly sympathetic portrayal of anarchism occurs in part because of Norris's engagement with Spencer.

At first glance, *The Octopus*, seems to rely heavily on Spencer's theory of "force," the "ultimate of ultimates," a persistent immutability that can change forms, but never disappears, and that is the most intimate link between the Unknowable and the knowable (*First Principles* 174, 194-203). For Spencer, force is the sufficient cause for all evolution. *The Octopus's* conclusion implies a similar conception of force as railroad magnate S. Behrman literally is killed by wheat, the "mighty world-force, that nourisher of nations, wrapped in Nirvanic calm, indifferent to the human swarm, gigantic, resistless" (*Octopus* 651). Wheat transcends any effort to direct its flow and seems for a moment to circumscribe the full range of Norris's elemental forces as an organic symbol for Spencer's unified evolutionary progress. According to Spencerian theory, however, force is singular: it cannot be parsed out of unidirectional movement. Following Spencer and Le Conte, Norris conceptualizes force broadly, linking it to

novel that tell the "story of man as a social being" held for many years and is indicative of a lack of politicized readings of Norris's work (121). June Howard's work, on the other hand, offers an account of the ideological work of naturalist literature: "naturalist novels . . . process ideological material that characteristically invents a lived relation to two increasingly inescapable aspects of the conditions of existence in late nineteenth-century America: the decisive dominance in economic and social life of market relations in a national and even global economy; and the presence of class struggle in a nation with a constantly increasing, largely immigrant urban proletariat that was both very vulnerable to the recurrent economic depressions and relatively visible to other classes" (71-72). I follow Howard by analyzing the potent social, economic, and political forces that shaped Norris's novel. One of these forces was the dual (violent and non-violent) anarchist threat to government, which manifested across scientific and political discourses and that permeated Norris's work in part through his structuring use of Spencerian themes.

“evolution, mechanization, instinct/primitivism, biology, nature, vitality, economics, politics, and spirituality,” but he does not uncritically reproduce Spencer’s *Synthetic Philosophy* (Berte 204). He does offer a central image of force, but then juxtaposes multiple actors to create a taxonomy or hierarchy of *forces*.

First and most obvious is the titular railroad, “the Octopus,” a “vast power, huge, terrible . . . with tentacles of steel clutching into the soil, the soulless Force” (*Octopus* 51). In *First Principles*, Spencer uses the locomotive engine as an example of evolution’s comprehensive movement: “Consider, first, the complicated set of changes that precede the making of every railway,” like the creation of new laws and regulations, the appearance of new occupations, and the proliferation of economic, political, and scientific knowledges necessary to plan and to justify rail expansion (*First Principles* 449). The next evolutionary step involves the physical changes to landscape, the various labor functions needed to provide raw materials, and the appearance of new publications. Finally, “come the changes, more numerous and involved still, which railways in action produce on the community at large,” like “economical distribution,” travel, amelioration of class differences, and the rapid dissemination of information and literature (*First Principles* 450). Spencer does not directly praise the railroads, but he clearly sees their expansion as one part of a unified evolutionary process. Norris conversely pits organic force against the railroad—he distinguishes between aspects of evolution in a way Spencer does not. Certainly, organic force plays a special role in *The Octopus*—as Norris offers an encomium to wheat and an indictment of the railroad—but by depicting a struggle between the two, Norris separates levels of the natural. Wheat triumphs over those who arrogantly imagine themselves superior to it and to “the people,” but wheat is not alone in its resistance. Anarchism lingers as a

complement to wheat: it too stands in the way of the railroad, presenting a parallel, violent challenge.

Arthur Redding, in the only substantive analysis of anarchism in *The Octopus*, claims that the multiple threats inspired by Caraher result only in a “radical deferment of political possibilities” as “Norris appeals to the natural, the wheat” (106). This reading asserts that “insurrection is doomed,” because it cannot significantly influence more powerful forces (Redding 104). Howard adds a link between the novel’s “two central images of the brute as the railroad and the insurrectionary mob,” yet these images are not equivalent, nor closely related (128). Since the railroad seeks to constrain the untamable flow of wheat, it is depicted as unnatural, thus locating anarchist attacks as parallel to wheat, *not* to the railroad. Norris stops short of narrating anarchism as “natural,” but by opposing trusts in multiple forms—from terrorism to organized defense against corrupt government—anarchism resists being labeled unnatural. Impotent perhaps, but not unnatural, because it is aligned with wheat, against the railroad. Through a deterministic plot that separates and juxtaposes fractured elements (organic, technological, economic, political) of Spencer’s theory, *The Octopus* suggests the “natural” is not fully determined. The novel opens with Caraher, yet concludes with S. Behrman drowning in wheat, with the anarchist nowhere to be found. Anarchism disappears in the end, but throughout the novel, it plays a role widely ignored up to now.

What Redding and others ignore is the appearance of a range of anarchism in *The Octopus*: Caraher, Dyke and Presley show the caricatured vision of anarchism’s violence, but “The League” of ranchers who form a voluntary defense group, resemble non-coercive anarchist forms of social organization. The League denies the railroad’s right to take their land, a resistance that climaxes with the bloody struggle that Norris describes as “the last fight between

the Trust and the People, the direct brutal grapple of armed men, the law defied, the Government ignored” (*Octopus* 516). They defend their land with violence, evoking Tucker’s assertion that “the essence of government is invasion,” and that armed action is a viable response to “acts of direct and indubitable interference and trespass” (“Resistance to Government” 36, 39). This group provides the touchstone for issues of governance and the natural in *The Octopus*. On one hand, they are described as resisting government in a violent battle with the railroad that mirrors the novel’s individual acts of violence. On the other hand, they crystallize Norris’s ambivalence toward anarchism: unlike Norris’s brute novels, *The Octopus* directly considers Spencerian theory and government alongside one another, a formal choice that strangely limits the power of its anti-government sentiment.

In contrast to his descriptions of Dyke and Presley, whose violence the novel rejects as at best futile, Norris appears conflicted about the League. The text vacillates between attributing to them anti-government sentiment and narrating their efforts to create an alternative form of governance. For one, the obvious choice to head the League is Magnus Derrick, a man called “the Governor”—hardly a symbol of anarchism—whose ethical code temporarily hamstrings the group’s efforts to fight the railroad trust. Despite the Governor’s reservations (coded as superiority), the League undertakes a campaign against the trust, using the railroad’s methods: they use bribery and manipulation to get their officials appointed to governing committees. Instead of circumventing or combating government, they attempt to use its constituent mechanisms—public and covert—to rig the game in their favor. They use political machinations to take over the system, rather than denying or ignoring it. Then, once they are driven to defensive violence, they still do not assert a complete disregard for government. “The People” are in a struggle against the immediate corrupt instantiation of government, not against

government as such. As Tucker points out, “those who protest against the existing political State, with emphasis on the existing, are not Anarchists, but Archists. By objecting to a special form or method of invasion, they tacitly acknowledge the rightfulness of some other form or method of invasion” (“Anarchism and the State” 32).

Shortly after the battle between the railroad and the League, Norris narrates what appears to be a continued climax: in a contentious town-hall meeting, “the People” swell toward “the fierce clamour of riot and insurrection” (*Octopus* 544). Their uproar, however, quickly turns to criticism of Magnus Derrick. The crowd censures the Governor as “a man who loves authority,” who “*didn’t* manage right,” and who put defense of his own property above “the lives of [his] fellow-citizens” (547-548). The League has failed to govern properly. Norris’s tentative symbol of organic resistance to government is rejected by the people for its failure to replace corrupt railroad governance. This moment signals Norris’s ambivalence toward anarchism, as well as the connection between The League’s resistance and Caraher’s influence. As the town-hall rejects The League’s alternate form of government, Presley gives an impassioned speech invoking American idylls and calling for a return to liberty, but “the people would not consider him” (553). He offers reactionary patriotism, but even this is too revolutionary for the crowd. The crowd’s unrest is directionless and static—it is merely another facet of their helpless apathy, a furious, yet impotent supplement to the “indifference of the People” (*Octopus* 304). Their immobility drives Presley to violence.

Of course, Presley’s attempt to kill S. Behrman is no more effective than the League’s defensive violence. His bomb explodes, but spares the railroad official. Dyke’s violence may be tenuously linked to anarchism through Caraher, but Presley’s actions are more overtly political. Dyke robs a train and shoots a railroad employee. He takes their money, of which they have

more than he could ever steal, and harms a laborer who is meaningless to the railroad's overall function. In addition, the reader is more intimately connected to Presley. The novel's consciousness is most closely tied to him and his response to the horrors of railroad aggression, and the people's paralysis mirrors the reader's reaction: the railroad trust is evil and *something* must be done. The novel, however, does not follow through on Presley's violently anarchist motivations. Rather than represent his impotence as vividly as that of the League and the crowd, Norris chooses to truncate his rage. After Presley throws the bomb into Behrman's home, the novel abruptly jumps forward a month. Presley's fury has been tempered, the "heat of his rage had long since begun to cool" and he has sunk into the "listlessness of great fatigue" (*Octopus* 620, 561). Strangely, in a novel where causation and determination are paramount, this temporal shift obscures an unexplained rejection of the violence Caraher espouses. Behrman did survive Presley's attempted murder, but that alone does not explain his complacency. The novel brings its readers and its characters to the point where violent reaction against the economic-political oppressor seems a logical response, but then abruptly backs away from its own implications.

The poet and the novel inexplicably shift as Presley rejects Caraher's anarchism and the novel retreats from its most strictly political considerations. The novel's final three chapters narrate Behrman's death, the tragic consequences of the trust's actions (through the pathetic plight of the Hooven family), and the railroad President's explanation of supply and demand. After anarchism's explosion, Norris refocuses on the continuing struggle between wheat and the socio-economic forces that seek to control it. This harsh transition eliminates anarchism in all its variants: the novel shifts from rhetorical and physical violence at its climax to a rapid resolution that replaces political agency with elemental determinism. Organic force and economic force will continue to struggle, but the potential for individuals or groups to redirect them has been

discarded in lieu of a pseudo-Spencerian inevitability. The appearance and disappearance of anarchism in *The Octopus* signals a unique naturalist effort to re-present anarchism—to grapple with violent and voluntary challenges to politico-economic injustices. In the end, however, Norris's narration of multifaceted anarchism remains incomplete: his fascination with Spencerian force exceeds his direct address of anti-government politics. *The Octopus* has been recognized as Norris's most consciously political novel, yet by entangling Spencer directly with the problem of "The People," it encounters a representational limit: representing the fight over who gets to govern ends only with competing, inescapably determining evolutionary forces. In *McTeague* and *Vandover*, Norris approaches similar subjects obliquely, structuring his novels around a critique of social Darwinism that requires exploring the intersection of individuals and government. The formal trope of the brute turns away from "the People" and produces a liminal space for alternate subjects. Norris's brute novels represent the natural individual contesting unnatural government and thus allow for the possibility of anarchism that, in *The Octopus*, vanishes with the explosion of Presley's bomb.

Vandover and the Brute

Unlike *The Octopus*, *Vandover and the Brute* includes no anarchists, no explosions, and none of the epochal struggle by the railroad trusts to subdue the wheat and by the farmers to resist the railroads. It does, however, include many of the same Spencerian themes. Though not published until 1914, *Vandover* was written before *The Octopus*, during the same period as *McTeague*.³⁸ Unlike *McTeague*, *Vandover* was not a success initially. It was rejected by

38. Norris began work on *Vandover* as early as 1889 (McElrath and Crisler 108-109). The novel likely changed significantly in the intervening years, but we know that he made significant progress on the manuscript in 1895 (McElrath and Crisler 160-166). It seems that *Vandover* and *McTeague* were written almost simultaneously, with sections of both appearing in periodicals during the mid 1890s.

Doubleday and McClure in 1899 and would not appear in print until 1914, when Norris's brother Charles published it (McElrath and Crisler 362, 441 n 16).³⁹ In both novels, Norris reveals a fascination with the tropes of evolution, devolution, and fitness, structuring the novel's formal determinism around the brute's relation to his social surroundings.⁴⁰

Vandover's titular struggle with his inner brute plots an atavistic devolution as theme and plot converge: much like he does in *The Octopus*, Norris chooses an element of Spencer's systematic evolutionary theory—in this case the popular and contentious social Darwinism—to explore the “natural.” As Ronald E. Martin claims, the “popular American conception of evolution . . . reinforced [Norris's] sense of the universe as a deterministic mechanism” (153). This novel, however, does not take as its subject triumphant, immutable force (wheat), but instead, a lone, determined individual, who is part middle-class youth, part animal. Through the decline of an initially typical protagonist, Norris builds a critique of Spencer by showing the determining factors that direct Vandover's descent and thus question social Darwinism. Charlie Geary's role as the conscious embodiment of late-nineteenth-century social Darwinism

39. *McTeague*, on the other hand, drew attention to Norris as a writer of note, even though reviews were mixed. The primary criticism was directed at its attention to “seamy places [and] sordid or nasty things” (“A Rough Novel” 38). This focus led some to hope “that Mr. Norris's next plot will fall in more pleasant places” (“Briefer Notices” 35). The more extreme examples of this critique panned Norris, claiming that “we can scarcely conceive it possible to find much more unpleasant characters” (“McTeague” 54). One reviewer suggests that “no person will be the better for reading it” (“Literature” 46). Another assures the public “the story is not a pleasant one in any possible sense of the word” (“A Western Realist” 46). Many critics, however, praised the novel as “a fine and a powerful piece of work” (Lummis 52). Norris was even labeled the “American Balzac” (Gilder 48). Among the positive comments, Willa Cather's glowing review stands out. She calls *McTeague* “an immense achievement,” a “vigorous and bold” exploration of “truth in the depths” (44). William Dean Howells's review of the novel mirrors the critical ambivalence, praising Norris for his realism—“it abounds in touches of character at once fine and free, in little miracles of observation, in vivid insights, in simple and subtle expressions. Its strong movement carries with it a multiplicity of detail which never clogs it”—but mocking his “insistence on the love-making of those silly-elders, which is apparently introduced as an offset to the misery of the other love-making” (40).

40. Importantly, both these texts predate Norris's major work detailing his naturalistic methodology. While writing *McTeague* and *Vandover*, his theory of naturalism was less conscious, more intuitive. Just as the direct address of politics in *The Octopus* limit its possibilities, so does the critical codification of Norrisian naturalism recast his earlier novels: the brute novels fictively define naturalism, using representation rather than exposition, leaving marginal space for anti-government sentiments.

demonstrates the irreconcilability of social “fitness” with the law of equal freedom, and in doing so evokes the anti-government elements of Spencer’s work and the discourses surrounding it.

From its opening page, the novel portends Vandover’s decline: even as a young man “he [is] able to recall . . . little of his past life” (3).⁴¹ He moves constantly away from the past in a yet undetermined direction, but already distanced from former stages of life. Born to a bourgeois, property-owning father, Vandover is depicted as the upper-middle-class liberal citizen. Admittedly, the novel shifts quickly to the origins of the brute, but his social and biological origins locate him as average and upstanding, neither poor nor extraordinarily rich, a recognizable type within his social milieu and within the era’s fiction. He “seem[s] to be a born artist” and in ways he resembles any typical bourgeois protagonist, a proto-artist with the leisure and social connections to develop his craft (11). At very least, Vandover is not *only* the brute. As Link claims, the novel allows “the possibility that the brute might be defeated” (*Vast and Terrible* 157). Vandover’s story could be a standard coming-of-age story that does not end in atavism, but follows the “maturing Vandover” toward the realization of his artistic “potential”

41. Numerous works describe *Vandover* as a story of decline or as a battle between one’s better self and the brute within. The novel’s title signals its theme and most every scholar who has written about it has noticed the protagonist’s downward movement. Pizer reads the novel as a “weak . . . sensual man [causing] his own destruction,” but also as a rumination on “the larger forces” that precipitate this end (*Novels of Frank Norris* 39). Others find “sexual corruption and degeneration” causing the “bestialization of an individual debauchee” (S. Williams 710); the “innate degraded state of the primitive, or lower class and [the] inevitable destruction of the upper class by its unmediated contact with the primitive” (Rossetti 46); or a “predetermined path toward disintegration” (Hussman 25). Even those who wish to explain Vandover’s decline through a non-Spencerian paradigm accept that the novel tends toward determinism and atavism: Myles Weber claims Vandover moves from “[Thorstein] Veblen’s category of predatory barbarian” to the category of “the peaceful savage,” a move that might seem to be moral ascension, but that is accompanied by Weber’s assertion that Vandover is “forced” into his final circumstances (221, 230); Dana Seitler argues that *Vandover* “reveal[s] a literary and social history of the way sexual desire has been conceptualized in U.S. culture,” plumbing “widespread cultural fascination with, and fear of, modern sexual perversity,” but also reads its plot as “the bestial decline of [an] individual” (526); and Lee Clark Mitchell finds in the novel an argument that “circumstance and heredity are less constraining than the power of language itself,” but still accepts its “deterministic vision of experience” and Vandover’s destruction (387-388). Overall, the history of criticism of *Vandover and the Brute* includes no denial of Vandover’s decline and, while there are a variety of approaches to the cause of his decline, most scholars of naturalism place this novel within the standard Norrisean context of Le Conte, Spencer, evolutionary theory, and social Darwinism.

(King 13). The novel's critique begins with this space of potential to provide the full import of Vandover's atavistic trajectory.⁴²

The first appearance of Vandover's brutishness occurs when he is still a boy. At church, he hears the minister's litany include the phrase "all women in the perils of child birth" and connects this reference to the "abominable talk of the High School boys" (10). The "terse and brutal truth" resonates with his "lower, animal intuition" and Vandover develops an "overwhelming curiosity . . . for the knowledge of vice" (10-11). These "first stirrings of sexual instinct" may, as McElrath suggests, be "natural stirrings to which he has been taught to respond in a 'moral' way" (31), but the brute's awakening is attributed to knowledge about sexuality, not sexual knowledge, as such.⁴³ In addition, the brute is connected to the lack of "feminine influence about Vandover" and to his artistic temperament (11). Early in the novel, Norris codes Vandover's internal struggle between artistry/femininity and the innate brute—awakened by young Vandover's encounters with religion, science, and sexuality—inexorably compelling him toward animality. This reading finds a biological unfitness that forecloses social Darwinism's role: if Vandover is naturally, inherently the brute, then the social aspects of evolutionary natural selection are irrelevant. In *Vandover*, however, deterministic causality does not follow such a neat path.

For one, Vandover's indiscrete, illicit sexuality is not the cause of his decline, but its mode: he devolves through sexual unfitness, not because of it. Certainly, in turn-of-the-century

42. His capacity to be Vandover—and not "the brute"—is tied to his class position, confirmed by his repugnance at the conditions upon a "second-class boat": he "never imagined that anything could be so horribly uncomfortable or disagreeable" (123-124). Shortly after this trip, Vandover inherits his father's property and, while not as wealthy as he had hoped, he now owns property, can live off of its income, and is free to pursue his art (164-169). Wealth is a constituent element in the novel's construction of Vandover's alternate paths.

43. He *learns* about sexuality, which at best indicates a tenuous causal connection between instinctive sexuality and his devolution.

culture, morality is one factor of social fitness, yet Vandover is not simply a debauched rake that takes advantage of women and suffers the consequences. He has sex with Ida Wade, though he has no intention of having a relationship with her. She seeks marriage, but he ignores her and she kills herself. Both his sexual actions and his calloused disregard reveal a moral unfitness, but he is not yet the full brute. He is still capable of reform:

He had never seen more clearly than now that other life which it was possible for him to live, a life that was above the level of self-indulgence and animal pleasures It was all the better half of him that was aroused — the better half that he had kept in check Vandover the true man, Vandover the artist, not Vandover the easy-going, the self-indulgent, not Vandover the lover of women. (112)

His reaction reasserts the consistent possibility that he can be an upstanding citizen, but also shows that his sexual proclivities do not signal the brute's ascendance. Upon Ida's death, Vandover is not animal, he is not shunned, he is not poor. He is still capable of reorientation and his "moral" decline, while a measure of social unfitness, is not the sufficient cause of his final devolved state.

Vandover's atavistic trajectory becomes steep once he has sex with Ida, but importantly the brute does not fully emerge until *after* the actions that are often claimed to be its apotheosis. The novel's deterministic plot links his moral flaws to economic problems and thus allows for Geary to become the ultimate cause of Vandover's final decline. Upon inheriting his father's property, Vandover has a large number of investments and rental properties he might oversee, but "by the end of three weeks Vandover had sickened of the whole thing," so he "turned over the supervision of his affairs and his property to Adams & Brunt, declaring that he could not afford to be bothered with them. This course was much more expensive and by no means so

satisfactory from a business point of view” (169). The novel describes Vandover’s refusal to manage his own business in negative terms, narrating the convergence of his moral and economic shortcomings as dual registers of unfitness. Vandover’s lack of fitness for business, however, is not the *cause* of his decline. His inability to manage his finances or curtail his gambling lead to abject poverty, but like his relationship with women, his business failings are an avenue to the devolved state rather than its cause. Both registers of unfitness place Vandover within a social Darwinian hierarchy, but neither fully explains the novel’s determinism. Norris’s critique shows Geary as the necessary and sufficient cause of Vandover’s fate: his success demonstrates that social Darwinism is not merely an evolutionary mechanism, but a determining force. This causality contradicts Spencer’s law of equal freedom and demonstrates its irreconcilability with social natural selection. Geary’s deterministic role ruptures the suture between evolutionary anarchism and thus evokes the anarchist ambivalence toward Spencer: anti-government thought appears through the critique of social Darwinism.

Much of Norris’s salient critique circulates around the notion of adaptability. Evolutionary science indicates the ability to adapt is central to evolution, because it ensures survival.⁴⁴ Biologically, adaptation is a long-term development—species adjust to their environment or become extinct—but within the social realm, it is a short-term assurance of success: the fit individual can adapt to her surroundings and thrive. *Vandover*, however, inverts this evolutionary mechanism: the protagonist’s adaptability precipitates his devolution.

44. Spencer discusses adaptation toward the end of *First Principles* in his section on “equilibration,” which is the peak of evolutionary progress, the moment when all evolving substances reconcile themselves: “When through a change of habit or circumstance, an organism is permanently subject to some new influence, or different amount of an old influence, there arises, after more or less disturbance of the organic rhythms, a balancing of them around the new average condition produced by this additional influence . . . If we see that a different mode of life is followed, after a period of functional derangement, by some altered condition of the system—if we see that this altered condition, becoming by and by established, continues without further change; we have no alternative but to say, that the new forces brought to bear on the system have been compensated by the opposing forces they have evoked. And this is the interpretation of the process which we call *adaptation*.” (494-495).

Throughout the novel, Norris describes Vandover's adaptability: he quickly "become[s] accustomed to his father's death and . . . rearrange[s] himself to suit the new environment" (159). When finally cast out of his social circle, "his pliable character . . . rearranged itself to suit the new environment" (207). Adjusting to life without his father and many of his friends seem benign, but more often Vandover adapts to brutish surroundings: "Little by little the brute had grown, and he, pleasure-loving, adapting himself to every change of environment . . . had allowed the brute to thrive" (215). Eventually he "literally *become[s]* the brute" through the "fatal adaptability to environment which he had permitted himself to foster throughout his entire life, and which had led him to be contented in almost any circumstances" (316-317). This inversion of adaptation presents a direct challenge to Spencer, who insisted "the inherent malleability of character is a condition for the emergence of liberal institutions and liberal morality" (Weinstein 24).

By using the language of evolution to describe Vandover's transformation, Norris inverts social Darwinism, making adaptability a precipitant of brutishness rather than a key to survival.⁴⁵ The novel's form follows an atavistic trajectory, yet unfitness does not explain Vandover's devolution, because he is not entirely unfit: he possesses biological and social advantages. According to the era's social Darwinian ethos, Vandover's background, coupled with his ability to adapt, should insure success. Norris challenges the pseudo-scientific application of natural selection to the social world by constructing a character that *becomes* unfit, which is different than saying he *is* unfit. His sexual and economic failures provide the avenue for his decline, but the brute's ascendance is catalyzed by the novel's potent symbol of social Darwinism: Charlie

45. Echoing *The Octopus*, Vandover speaks of a "great, mysterious force that spun the wheels of nature and that sent it onward like some enormous engine . . . driving before it the infinite herd of humanity . . . driving it recklessly, blindly on an on toward some . . . vague unknown end," but in this case Norris's focus is on the individual, not the epochal (230-231).

Geary, whose fitness contrasts with both Vandover and Dolliver Haight to suggest specific, determining registers of success.

Geary and Haight, “two San Francisco boys,” appear very early in the novel, as Vandover’s friends at Harvard, where “the three were continually together” (17). Vandover finds Haight “steady, sensible and even worthy of emulation,” but it is Geary’s “dictatorship” to which Vandover submits, allowing Geary to make many of his practical decisions (18-20). For much of the novel, their friendship is mere context for Vandover’s internal struggle, but Geary’s dominion over his friend presages the “shrewdness, industry, and trickery” that buttress his legal career, his political aspirations, and his role in Vandover’s final degradation (Pizer, “Evolutionary Ethical Dualism” 556). Geary embodies the period’s caricature of the social Darwinian. He is driven by greed and is a natural politician: “politics fascinated him — such a field of action seemed to be the domain for which he was precisely suited” (327-328).⁴⁶ His aspirations and opportunistic actions capitalize on Vandover’s mistakes (the Ida Wade affair; his mismanaged finances) and Geary emerges as the novel’s determining force. In other words, Vandover is made unfit by the embodied representation of social Darwinism.

Geary is “parasitic, immoral, and ruthlessly organized” and he is directly tied to law and politics (Lewis 119). As the intercessor between Vandover and the legal mechanisms that adjudicate Hiram Wade’s lawsuit, he finds an opportunity. Vandover is “as ignorant of the law as he is of business,” so he gladly accepts Geary’s dubious advice. (253). At this point, Geary’s “dictatorship” shifts as he embraces the perfect storm of social Darwinian possibility in its most

46. Norris even chose a name that signified high-level California politics. Geary shares his name with John W. Geary, the first mayor of San Francisco. Haight also is likely named for Henry H. Haight, governor of California from 1868-1872. Geary and Haight are also the names of streets in San Francisco: the streets were named for Mayor Geary and Governor Haight (Lupton 7). Another of Vandover’s friends is named Ellis. San Francisco’s Ellis Street is named for A. J. Ellis, a “prominent businessman” town-councilman, and “a member of the convention that framed the State constitution in September, 1849” (Lupton 7). Norris surrounds Vandover with characters named for familiar Californians who enjoyed great economic and/or political success.

base form: violating legal ethics, he advises Vandover not to retain an attorney, because Geary has devised a way to benefit financially and professionally. By mediating a resolution, he can win favor with his law office and bilk Vandover out of his property. These avaricious actions have two interrelated effects: they crystallize Norris's critique of social Darwinism by showing conscienceless betrayal and they precipitate Vandover's devolution.⁴⁷

Immediately following Geary's self-serving legal advice, Vandover foresees the brute's ascendance: "A new thought had come to him. Wretched as he was, he saw that in time his anguish of conscience, even his dread of losing his reason, would pass from him He saw clearly that nothing could save him In a little while the brute was to take all" (248). Geary appears as an "instrument of the law," thriving on social Darwinian struggle, consumed by an "innate desire of getting the better of a competitor" (251, 261). Norris inverts social Darwinism's notion of adaptation throughout the novel, but at Vandover's atavistic fulcrum, it reappears in the image of Geary, the depraved epitome of social fitness and adaptability. Vandover's treatment of Ida and his business ignorance are the mechanisms of his downfall, but Geary is the determining force. His persistent presence connects two distinct yet intertwined facets of Vandover's devolvement. The first and most frequently discussed aspect of Vandover's brutishness is his literal animality: he begins to act like a wolf. Just after Geary's swindle, Vandover loses all his property. The time between Vandover's loss of property and the first instance of pure animality

47. Geary's role contrasts greatly with Haight, who perhaps has more reason to wish harm on Vandover. Haight is in love with Turner Ravis, who is presumptively engaged to Vandover. Haight discusses his feelings with Turner, but she feels committed to Vandover. He seems in position to exert an influence similar to Geary, but he is not described with the same language of "fitness." For one, Vandover is able to in small ways use Haight (e.g., he passes a bad check on him). In addition, even after Vandover's sexual transgression comes to light, Haight does not end up marrying Turner Ravis because he contracts a disease (likely syphilis) from Vandover's prostitute friend, Flossie. Like Vandover, Haight loses his social position (as signified by an inability to marry Turner), but he contracts syphilis through an accident rather than through volitional action: in a strange Norrisian coincidence, Flossie kisses him on the mouth the same night that he is cut by a broken glass. Early in the novel, Haight attributes to women a "natural intuitive purity" (101), but his demise occurs through the aggressive actions of an impure woman. Together, his naivety and unwillingness to exploit Vandover become part of Norris's satire: the consequences of even minor "unfitness" are extreme.

is elided—they occur within a few pages of each other. Norris’s formal juxtaposition condenses time and signals causality. Geary drives Vandover toward animality: ““He came back . . . running along the floor upon the palms of his hands and his toes He kept rattling his teeth together, and every now and then would say, way down in his throat so it sounded like growls, “Wolf — wolf — wolf.””” (276). Gradually, this temporary animalism “gain[s] upon him; little by little his mind slipped from his grasp. The wolf — the beast — whatever the creature was, seemed . . . to grow strong in him from moment to moment” (309). If, as Dana Seitler contends, the novel “script[s] his social decline as a biological degeneration,” this state should be Vandover’s evolutionary nadir, but it is not (533).

The next chapter occurs some two years after Vandover loses his property and becomes more brute than man. Here, as in *The Octopus*, Norris condenses chronology, but in *Vandover* there is no thematic shift: Vandover’s devolution and Geary’s achievement have continued uninterrupted.⁴⁸ The animal instinct still controls Vandover at times, but he has not become “undifferentiated, [an] animal through and through,” because neither Geary nor Norris is done with Vandover (Feldman 173). In the final two chapters, Vandover approaches Geary for a loan. His former life of relative wealth is so far distant that he cannot remember it: ““I ain’t never had bonds. What bonds? Oh yes . . . I had to sell those”” (331). He goes to Geary, who is now quite successful and who unequivocally attributes his success to social fitness: “Other men had striven and attained . . . why should not he? Every man for himself — that was his maxim. It might be damned selfish, but it was human nature: the weakest to the wall, the strongest to the front” (328). Geary’s reaction to Vandover’s debased state is satisfaction, “exultation over his

48. Contrary to Sherwood Williams’s claim that the end of the novel lapses into “a montage of competing narratives so disorienting the reader is never sure how he lost” everything he owns, Norris’s formal juxtaposition fluidly depicts cohesive causality (730).

misfortunes” (334). He does not loan Vandover money; he puts him to work. As the novel closes, Vandover is a laborer, cleaning detritus from Geary’s properties. Norris considers devolution beyond animality and finds the working class to be the lowest depths of atavism. The novel concludes with a contrast between Geary and Vandover, the fit and the unfit, the success and the brute, but this is Vandover’s story. Contrary to readings of the novel that accept Vandover’s self-pitying view that his “degeneration is . . . the result of his own self-indulgence” and that tacitly reinscribe the social Darwinian hierarchy—Geary as Vandover’s evolutionary superior—*Vandover* is not about evolutionary success (Astro 402).⁴⁹ In fact, the novel presents a challenge to previous interpretations of Norris’s work that suggest he imagined “human experience [to be] explainable by reference to an absolute, unified, and true body of knowledge” (Martin, R. 148). *Vandover* presents a complex critique of the era’s evolutionary theory—Norris questions the unity of Spencer’s popular philosophy. In doing so, he engages with anti-government thought in ways subtler than the topic’s appearance in *The Octopus*, but that nevertheless show the influence of anarchism on literary naturalism.

This influence materializes most basically through Norris’s representation of the tragic convergence of incomplete evolution (the innate brute within Vandover) with social Darwinism (Geary), which he ties strongly to economic and political success. By sympathizing with his flawed main character and refusing uncritically to champion Geary’s “victory,” Norris questions the justice—the naturalness—of a symbolic embodiment of the very combination anarchists

49. I consciously differ with Pizer’s reading of the novel: “The dialectic of the novel, then, is that within the struggle for existence permeating all life the animal nature of man exerts itself in two ways. A Vandover, surrendering to the sensual, will lag behind and be crushed. A Geary, exploiting a brute force to push ahead, will be in the forefront of the herd and will escape such agents of the struggle as disease and poverty” (*Novels of Frank Norris* 41). Pizer is correct to distinguish the two poles of a social Darwinian hierarchy, but, like most scholars who have discussed determinism in *Vandover*, he substitutes an abstract reliance on Norris’s supposed application of evolutionary science and thus misses the determination of one character by another. That is, he overlooks the critique of social Darwinism and the complex valences of “determination” in the novel.

recognized as the unresolvable problem of government: Geary's fitness for finance and politics make him a condensed image of the oppressive state, a reminder that capitalism and government produce negative consequences. The link between Norris's fictive exploration of the natural and contemporaneous anti-government sentiment, however, does not operate most strongly through direct symbolism. *Vandover* is not an allegory. Norris's novel instead offers a complex exploration of the period's debates about evolution and government. While in *The Octopus*, anarchism haunts the plot as a potentially disruptive, yet not entirely negative counterpart to immutable nature, in *Vandover* anti-government sentiment appears subtly as Norris constructs a novel around the disputed intersection of science and politics. The naturalist forms of determinism manifest as a consideration of social Darwinism that detaches Spencer's evolutionary utopia from his classical liberalism and thus opens the same ambivalent space in which anarchists alternately embraced and rejected Spencer's politico-scientific work. Beyond a clumsy symbol, Geary shows the incompatibility of social Darwinism with freedom and equality; he crystallizes the anarchist critique of Spencer's immediate politics by demonstrating that government presents an obstacle to evolution.

Vandover begins the novel as an apparently typical late-century bourgeois citizen, certainly not guaranteed to succeed, yet possessing all that he might need to do so: talent, property, social connections. Deep within him, however, stirs the brute. Perhaps this animalistic potential is an inherited, Lamarckian characteristic or simply a remnant of humanity's evolutionary past. Regardless, the brute triumphs over Vandover's civilized side only through the social Darwinian contest: Geary's fitness drives him to animality. One reading of brute novels suggests they are straightforward accounts of natural selection: the fit social specimen rises, while the unfit brute declines. This interpretation requires, however, that we imagine Norris to

sympathize with Geary and to offer a narrative in which the morally and economically inept Vandover deserves his debased state. Geary's methods—his willingness to defraud his friend—and the novel's final, sympathetic portrayal of Vandover show that Norris critically evaluates Spencer's mechanism for social evolution. Refusing to locate social Darwinism within a comprehensive schema, *Vandover* depicts it as unnatural. Geary's actions cause Vandover to devolve biologically as well as socially: beyond the obvious social ramifications of social Darwinism, Norris links the working-class with animals in a literal relationship.

Geary's ruthless fitness shows social Darwinism to be a counter-evolutionary force as he catalyzes his friend's atavistic path into sub-humanity—into a lower state of evolution. Granting this role to social Darwinism detaches it from Spencer's systematic theory and ruptures the link between his evolutionary anarchism and his laissez-faire liberalism. Ultimately, *Vandover* shows the two are incompatible. By questioning the evolutionary role of social Darwinism, Norris challenges the applicability of natural selection to non-biological arenas. He does all of this by constructing a plot replete with betrayal, treachery, and tragedy. At the center of this narrative, we find an example of fitness defined by his economic and political prowess—Geary is a symbol of the laissez-faire liberalism that Spencer often espouses and that anarchists saw as contradictory to his evolutionary anarchism. The specter of turn-of-the century anti-government thought appears as Geary's social Darwinism precludes movement toward Spencer's static utopian society. It is unnatural—a key indicator of critique within Norris's ethos—in two interrelated respects. First, it causes devolution. Narrating the tragic contest between Geary and Vandover removes social Darwinism from universal evolutionary theory by showing that it is a mechanism neither tending toward heterogeneous aggregation nor the utopian static society.

Rather, social Darwinism operates as an unnecessary, destructive force that causes biological regression and social malfeasance.

It does so because, as *Vandover* suggests, social Darwinism unnaturally countermands the law of equal freedom essential to Spencer's systematic thought. If, as Spencer insists, "everyone ought to have freedom of action, that everyone has a right to [exercise their] faculties," then Geary prevents the realization of equal freedom (Weinstein 37). Norris depicts social Darwinism as the antithesis of this law, as an inherent contradiction to evolution's apotheosis when mental states and social formations will reach harmony. He takes up the era's fascination with evolution, accepting key elements of Spencer's universal theory, yet he rejects the social mechanism that sutures evolutionary anarchism and classical liberalism. This critique evokes anarchism's ambivalence toward Spencer and leaves an unresolved interrogation of government's role—of its naturalness. At the same time, however, Norris's critique is incomplete and conflicted. By beginning with the recognizable liberal subject who appears in a space of potential (to be either citizen or brute), Norris limits his exploration of alternate subject forms: Vandover never actually becomes an animal. Instead, he is a worker, still to be governed. *McTeague* bursts through this timidity and pushes the logic of deterministic naturalism beyond the scope of democratic government.

McTeague

Many have read *Vandover and the Brute* as a largely autobiographical novel, which partly accounts for the abridgement of Vandover's determined devolution: associating atavism with Norris himself makes stopping short of pure bestiality almost inevitable. While there are some similarities between Vandover and Norris—both lived in San Francisco, attended Harvard,

and aspired to be painters—these autobiographical elements indicate not a direct narration of Norris’s life, but merely the recurring image of the naturalist writer throughout the novel. This image is divided between three characters: sometimes Vandover embodies the naturalist, but at other moments, Geary and Bancroft Ellis stand in for Norris.

Ellis is the naturalist as objective gaze: possessing a “curious passion for facts and statistics . . . his pockets were full of little books and cards [including] a little book . . . that gave the plan and seating capacity of every theater in the city . . . a tiny Webster’s dictionary . . . and “a ‘Vest Pocket Edition of Popular Information’” (46). He collects artistic, linguistic, and common knowledges. Geary, on the other hand, is the realist narrator, describing the mundane events of his day in great detail: “In the evening he would tell [Vandover] everything he had done that day; the things he had said, how many lectures he had cut, what brilliant recitations he had made, and even what food he had eaten” (18). The naturalist *artist*—synthesizing objectivity, realism, and representation—however, is realized through Vandover, whose incomplete great painting, “The Last Enemy,” figures naturalist art and gestures toward *McTeague*. Vandover imagines his “first masterpiece”: “A British cavalryman and his horse, both dying of thirst and wounds, were to be lost on a Soudanese desert, and in the middle distance on a ridge of sand a lion should be drawing in upon them” (64). This painting resembles the final scene of *McTeague*: Mac with his mule, dying of thirst in the desert, Marcus stalking him. Yet this painting is never finished; it is barely begun. Vandover loses the physical faculty to produce the work, which parallels the novel’s incomplete critique of social Darwinism. The naturalist writer is divided, both determinant (Geary) and brute (Vandover), the product of democracy’s logic of representation (Norris as U. S. citizen) and the would-be artist representing the deterministic effects of governance (Norris as a writer exploring the era’s discourses of “the natural” and

generating a contested interstices of natural subjecthood and unnatural government). *Vandover*'s autobiographical elements foreclose on the full implications of the novel's determinism, yet point to the simultaneously written *McTeague* as the crisis of naturalist art: what cannot be completed in the novel is realized in the novel's incomplete painting.

Early in the novel, Vandover is the proto-artist and potential citizen. His artistic frustration and devolution commence from a bounded subject position that would require far greater decline to end where *McTeague* does (in a distorted version of "The Last Enemy"). Both *Vandover* and *McTeague* narrate atavism, each depicting a character that devolves toward brutishness. Yet, whereas Vandover begins in a space of potential and devolves to his final debased state, *McTeague* initially possesses none of Vandover's socio-economic privilege. He too follows an atavistic trajectory, but his initial differences from Vandover alter the brute's path. From the novel's outset, *McTeague* is below the threshold of liberal subjecthood, so rather than devolving from potential to animality, he moves from a debased state to an even more debased state, a narrative arc punctuated by pathetic and futile assertions of a liberal subjecthood he never possesses. *McTeague* is a "creature governed by, and thus knowable from, routine" (Brown 55). Unlike Vandover—who at novel's end is still a discrete individual—*McTeague* has undefined boundaries between himself and the fictional world he inhabits, which in key ways makes him an anti-liberal subject. He can fall farther and more substantively reveal unnatural government because he is not a veiled representation of the naturalist author nor the bounded liberal subject whose complete debasement occurs as a member of the working class.

According to Bill Brown, *McTeague* is to be understood through the relationship of "things" to habit: "*McTeague* . . . poses both an epistemological understanding of how habit constitutes the material world for the perceiving subject, and a psychological understanding of

how habit constitutes the self” (54). Brown argues that the subject is shaped through repeated (and repetitive) interactions with objects. Using similar language, William Dow contends that *McTeague* can best be understood through “the predictability, sameness, and stability” of San Francisco’s Polk Street (29). Both these views attribute the structuring of naturalist characters to the objective world, but per Spencerian evolutionary theory, biology is not the only arena in which one finds “force, law, and causal relationships” (Link, *Vast and Terrible* 104). The superorganic sphere of evolution is equally determining. Prior to the anti-governmental assertions of extreme liberalness I detail below, the boundaries of McTeague’s subjectivity disappear within his social and material world. We first see his boundaries disappearing at the beginning of the novel:

It was Sunday, and according to his custom on that day, McTeague took his dinner at two in the afternoon at the car conductors’ coffee joint on Polk Street. He had a thick, gray soup; heavy, underdone meat, very hot, on a cold plate; two kinds of vegetables; and a sort of suet pudding, full of strong butter and sugar. On his way back to his office, one block above, he stopped at Joe Frenna’s saloon and bought a pitcher of steam beer. It was his habit to leave the pitcher there on his way to dinner. (1)

Using what Brown calls “iterative narration,” Norris makes “Polk Street appear through the lens . . . produced by McTeague’s habitual actions” (55).⁵⁰ McTeague appears through the mediation of his habits: rather than being by defined by a space of potential, he is reflexively constituted by the dual registers of basic animal survival (eating and drinking) and urban surroundings. In other words, he is defined by instinctive drive and the social space of Polk Street: the novel’s opening

50. Brown defines iterative narration as the “substitut[ing], for an account of discrete events, the account of events that recur in an iterative series . . . replac[ing] synthesizing summary with an exemplary abstraction” (54). This narrative strategy signals a difference between Vandover’s unique series of actions and McTeague’s habitual, almost automatic (non-volitional) actions.

lines show a subject already part brute and almost entirely merged with the social and the material.

Norris further exposes McTeague's precarious subjecthood through his relationship with Marcus Schouler, who later becomes both McTeague's nemesis and an embodied representation of government. Early in the novel, McTeague's interactions with Marcus are almost entirely one-sided: the "stupid, ignorant, vulgar" dentist nearly disappears in the face of his friend's verbosity: "Marcus quivered with rage . . . 'I say it's outrageous. I'd a knifed him in another minute. It was an outrage. I say it was an outrage'" (22, 8). The dentist's response? "'Sure it was,' McTeague hastened to reply. 'Sure, sure'" (8). His response is a non-response: he speaks quickly, saying precisely what Marcus wishes to hear. Here we begin to see the irreconcilability of deterministic naturalism and liberal subjecthood. McTeague is repeatedly described as dumb, stupid, brutish, and animalistic, so it can be no wonder that his friend—smarter and seemingly less determined—can force responses that come more from himself and from disciplinary objective structures than they do from McTeague. Evoking Geary, Marcus possesses the ability to discuss politics, namely the "labor question": "He discussed it at the top of his voice, vociferating, shaking his fists, exciting himself with his own noise" (10). McTeague is struck dumb by his friend's confidence and grasp of politics. Not quite an emblem of social Darwinian fitness, Marcus at least is recognizable as a citizen, while McTeague is already the atavistic brute lacking the boundedness and political participation that define the liberal democratic subject.

Perhaps most telling are the instances in which Norris's language comes closest to attributing liberal subjecthood to McTeague and the ways he is subsequently re-merged into his social and objective worlds. One of these moments is a further description of McTeague's friendship with Marcus: "They took a great pleasure in each other's company, but silently and

with reservation, having the masculine horror of any demonstration of friendship” (40). The novel attributes to both men the horror of intimacy as an erosion of boundaries, but the chapter’s movement from this point is remarkable.⁵¹ Later in this same scene, McTeague reveals his feelings for Trina to Marcus whose “self-delusion that he really had his heart set on Trina when she was available to him, makes perfect sense” in light of the novel’s “overarching theme of humanity’s most striking incorrigibility, wanting what it does not possess and not wanting what it does possess” (Hussman 60-61). Regardless of Marcus’s actual desire for Trina, McTeague, a huge man, confesses to Marcus, and Marcus *gives Trina to McTeague*: “‘Well, say, Mac,’ he cried, striking the table with his fist, ‘go ahead. I guess you—you want her pretty bad. I’ll pull out; yes, I will. I’ll give her up to you, old man’” (44). Later in the novel “an immense joy” will seize McTeague, “the joy of possession;” he will be overjoyed to possess Trina, but in this moment he does not take her, she is given to him (141).⁵² As Hildegard Hoeller notes, “Marcus . . . is transformed by his sacrifice into a new man,” because Marcus is the one who, according to the period’s classical liberalism, enacts freedom: he must possess before he can gift (91).⁵³ McTeague, though, simply stands by as an inactive recipient. In a sense, McTeague has already mixed his labor with Trina; he performs his job, dentistry, on her. If Trina is property (which the novel repeatedly indicates), McTeague should have appropriated her, should have possessed her

51. Shamir characterizes this horror as “the view that intimacy with the male other . . . is a principal threat to the masculine self” (214).

52. Notably, McTeague forces his will on Trina. Though her possession (the lottery prize) is in many ways central to the novel, she never seems to have possession of her self. Instead, her ownership is left to be hashed out by the novel’s male characters. Obviously, as others have indicated, Norris’s gender dynamics are not progressive. Both Trina and Maria Macapa are victims of domestic violence and more broadly subject to the caprice of male characters. I do not wish to delve into the implications of a property-system in which a woman may own property, yet herself be property at the same time. For my purposes it is sufficient to point out that she is property within the novel, while noting here that Norris’s depiction of women is at times reprehensible.

53. According to Locke, property is always appropriated, “annexed [to exclude] the common right of other men” (288). Obviously, Marcus’s annexation of Trina is troublesome, but this scene confirms the difference between the two men. Marcus can navigate property and politics, while in both cases, McTeague only stammers his admiration.

at the moment he mixes his labor with her, but he does not. Presumably Marcus possesses her, because she is his to give to McTeague. So, shortly after Norris attributes to McTeague a concern about intimacy that might erode his subjective boundaries, the novel reestablishes the indeterminacy of the line between McTeague and the outside world by describing him as non-appropriative. He remains below the threshold of Marcus's and Vandover's liberal subjecthood.

A similar moment marks the beginning of McTeague's decline and signals government's important deterministic role. Not long after magnanimously gifting Trina to his friend, Marcus turns McTeague into city officials for practicing dentistry without a college education. As he tries to make sense of the city's letter demanding he end his practice, McTeague struggles to disentangle himself from his socio-political surroundings: "He couldn't understand. What had a clerk at the City Hall to do with him? Why couldn't they let him alone?" (207). On a certain level, he cries for liberal government—one that only protects, never asserting itself beyond the enforcement of natural rights—but his relationship to property and his disappearance into social, objective surroundings indicate that he can never be the constitutive subject of liberal government. Norris's critique of Spencer appears as the novel detaches McTeague from government, illuminating the dissonant evolution of individuals and social formations: McTeague is not the citizen for whom liberal government is natural. Beginning the novel as a sub-subject, McTeague inhabits, without participating in, a governed world, and in his first meaningful encounter with government, he is preemptively excluded. The brute cannot understand, so he finds himself contravening the government *he is not the evolved subject of*, but *to which* he is subject. From this point forward, Norris's efforts to construct the natural directly juxtapose the sub-subject's agential, yet directionless actions with the constant, coercive hand of government.

This division is crystallized by the divergent trajectories of Mac and Marcus. Marcus's anger over Trina's lottery winnings—a possession he unwittingly gave away when he gifted her to McTeague—estranges the friends, a development that coincides with Marcus's rise in the community: "Marcus was becoming involved in the politics of his ward. As secretary of the Polk Street Improvement Club—which soon developed into quite an affair and began to assume the proportions of a little Republican machine—he found he could make a little, a very little more than enough to live on" (174). He returns to the McTeagues "holding his hat and his cane—the black wand of ebony with the gold top presented to him by the Improvement Club" and leaves them "like a clap of thunder struck" (199, 207). Marcus, who establishes himself as a force within a localized, yet powerful political arena, is able to interact within the public sphere in a way McTeague cannot: Marcus's subject form is sufficiently bounded to insure that it will not be lost in democratic relations. McTeague, on the other hand, the exemplary brutish, naturalist subject, entirely determined by superorganic forces that elide any difference between his exterior and interior, lingers as a sub-subject: he has already disappeared; he is not the ideally atomized unit of representative democracy. When McTeague learns of Marcus's ascent and his betrayal, he becomes preternaturally aware of his own limitations—he momentarily senses his sub-subjecthood, but can do little about it. Instead, he devolves toward the novel's determined conclusion, an atavistic trajectory that, unlike *Vandover*, is punctuated by violent outbursts against the forces he cannot understand. These reactions allow Norris to interrogate the naturalness of governance as the specter of anarchism emerges through McTeague's hyper-liberal assertion of freedom: he is not the atomized citizen evolved to suit the liberal state, so his actions exceed the limits of government.

It is no surprise that Marcus catalyzes McTeague's reaction, but neither is it shocking that Trina—the site of his later violence—functions as the immediate revelator of his plight. Unfortunately for her, Trina interprets McTeague's relationship to the political world, thus locating herself as the fulcrum for his violent assertion of exaggerated liberalism: ““Oh, Mac, you've got to quit,’ she wailed. ‘You can't go on. They can make you stop. Oh, why didn't you go to a dental college? Why didn't you find out that you had to have a college degree’” (209). “Sluggish and slow-witted at best,” McTeague does not realize his fate, but “little by little Trina made the dentist understand the calamity that had befallen them” (209). He lacks the credentials to be a dentist, the “requisite clinical/scientific gaze that defines professionalism in medicine,” and the intelligence to see what his inadequacies signify (Schierenbeck 69). Marcus may be the cause of McTeague's downfall, but Trina becomes the tragic face that haunts him, reminding McTeague that “you ain't a dentist any longer; you ain't a doctor. You haven't the right to work” (206). As McTeague's “possession” she suffers the consequences of his violent liberalism, a sudden subjectivity beyond democracy, but her murder and his flight are not the first appearance of anarchism in the novel.

Early in the novel, while the dentist's feelings for Trina are still new, Norris foreshadows McTeague's hyper-liberalism and the novel's conclusion: “It seemed so simple to him, since he loved Trina, to take her straight away to himself, stopping at nothing, asking no questions, to have her and by main strength to carry her far away somewhere, he did not know exactly where, to some vague country, some undiscovered place, where every day was Sunday” (32). This thought occurs before Marcus gives Trina to McTeague and shifts from a notion of property compatible with the liberal state—an appropriative impulse—to the trace of anarchism as he imagines every day a Sunday (a day on which government does not function and dentists do not

labor). In connection with Trina, McTeague imagines a world without laws. His fantasy is cruelly distorted later in the novel. He seeks this world, but only after destroying his love and his property. Another of the novel's traces of anarchism is also attached to violence. On the night Marcus throws his knife at McTeague, when "death . . . stooped and passed, leaving a trail of terror and confusion," McTeague sees his friend ranting about politics (112):

"I am a free American citizen, ain't I? Well, then, by damn! If the authorities do not, or *will* not, afford me protection for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, then my options are at an end; I withhold my taxes. I do—I do—I say I do. What? . . . Yes, I'd go to jail, but because I—I am crushed by a tyranny, does that make the tyranny right. Does might make right?" (110-111)

Two elements of this scene are striking. First, is Marcus's inability to move beyond democracy: his entire diatribe asserts freedom only within the boundaries of government. He expects political liberalism to serve its purpose by protecting his "life, liberty, and . . . pursuit of happiness." Not only does he at first struggle to articulate any resistance, he finally expostulates only his willingness to go to jail in the face of tyranny. He will not resist American government beyond his *right* to be imprisoned for not sacrificing some of his property (through taxation) to the state. Marcus appears to be the ideal democratic citizen—one that will not appeal to fundamentally anti-government politics even in the face of tyranny

In addition, McTeague watches "Marcus with eyes full of trouble and perplexity" (111). Is he troubled by Marcus's political stance because it questions American government or because it does not question the ideological foundations of the state? Norris's constant reminders of the dentist's stupidity seem to foreclose the latter possibility: McTeague likely would not think Marcus is too conservative, but the link between anarchism and violence—a link reiterated

through McTeague's later actions—and McTeague's response to Marcus's violence raise the specter of anarchism nonetheless. The dentist leaves the bar, striding "out . . . the door like a raging elephant" (115). Again we see McTeague momentarily verge upon liberalism beyond democracy: he does not stop to consider the possibility of jail; he merely acts. The contrast between Marcus's secure liberalism, well suited to American politics and unable to imagine life beyond it, and the flashes of violent liberalism that sometimes emerge from McTeague's sub-subjecthood, subtly raise the question of anarchism. They only come to the fore, however, when his animalistic urges gain ascendancy.

From the moment Trina explains to McTeague his fate, he devolves. He works only sporadically; he drinks heavily and abuses his wife; he regresses to a slovenly state worse than before he met Trina; and Norris describes him as a devolved creature:

At noon he would retire to a bit of level turf around an angle of the shore and cook his fish, eating them without salt or knife or fork. He thrust a pointed stick down the mouth of the perch and turned it slowly over the blaze. When the grease stopped dripping, he knew that it was done, and would devour it slowly and with tremendous relish, picking the bones clean, eating even the head. (263)

Though beginning the novel already below the threshold of liberal subjecthood, McTeague still declines further toward the primitive while Marcus, Polk Street, and San Francisco all continue progressing toward the unseen evolutionary *telos*. As McTeague continues to decline, his relationship to property becomes prominent. The defining characteristic of classical liberalism, private property, becomes paramount leading up to McTeague's assertion of extreme, violent liberalism and his consequent renunciation of government. Three "possessions" are particularly important: Trina's hoard of money, Trina herself, and McTeague's concertina. McTeague's

exaggerated demonstration of liberalism begins when he steals Trina's stash, an event that sets the stage for his violent assertion of brutal freedom. Norris does not describe the theft, only Trina's discovery of it:

She dropped on her knees before the trunk and tossed back the lid and plunged her hands down into the corner underneath the wedding dress, where she always kept the savings. The brass match safe and the chamois-skin bag were there. They were empty.

Trina flung herself full length upon the floor, burying her face in her arms, rolling her head from side to side. Her voice rose to a wail.

“No, no, no, it's not true; it's not true; it's not true.” (273)

By stealing Trina's money, McTeague at last asserts the essential element of liberalism: he appropriates property, but only in a distorted way. The act of robbery functions as a twisted form of labor. More important than his means of appropriation, however, are the consequences of it: by stealing Trina's money he relinquishes ownership of Trina. McTeague knows he cannot return to their home. He gives up the property that was given to him, so that he can appropriate property for himself. In other words, he finally enacts liberalism by obtaining his property and renouncing Marcus's gift. He then leaves Trina—at last, in part, her own property—with his newly appropriated property, but leaves behind one of his prized possessions: his concertina.⁵⁴

McTeague's sense of ownership of objects other than Trina is not highly developed until he steals from her. He never thinks of the concertina he left behind, but after the theft, he sees it in the music store for which he works and in which he lives: “that [concertina] is mine” he tells the clerk, “it was *stolen* from me” (289). Norris then explains that “McTeague had sadly missed his concertina,” though there is no reference to it between the time he leaves Trina and its

54. Incidentally, we know little about the concertina's origins or McTeague's acquisition of it. The same is true of most of his possessions at the novel's beginning.

appearance in the music shop (290). He misses property that he did not previously recognize as property only after appropriating other property.⁵⁵ With his newfound sense of property's value and *his right to appropriate it*, McTeague pays part of the price to repurchase the concertina and promises himself that "he'd get that seven dollars from [Trina], or he'd know the reason why" (291). This moment is the turning point at which McTeague's assertion of liberalism tips from a freedom that might learn to function within government to an anarchistic hyper-liberalism: the specter of anarchy rises through the marriage of property and violence. Trina stands at the intersection of the two.

The final act that drives McTeague away from San Francisco, away from the center and emblem of political and social life, is his murder of Trina. He goes to her for money; he turns to his former property for the means to buy the property of which she has deprived him and for the five thousand dollars, which only in a state of paradoxically coexisting devolution and liberalism, he recognizes as rightfully belonging to him. Trina was his property, thus what she owns belonged to him, yet while he owned her, he received no benefit from the money. She refuses to give him any money, McTeague attacks her, and she resists: "But her resistance was the one thing to drive him to the top of his fury. He came back at her again, his eyes drawn to two fine twinkling points and his enormous fists, clenched till the knuckles whitened, raised in the air" (294). McTeague murders Trina, placing himself at the mercy of the law, if he chooses to stay (as we imagine Marcus might, since jail—itself a part of the state—is the only available form of resistance to government), but he does not.⁵⁶ McTeague promptly flees San Francisco,

55. Zayani argues that "finding out that Trina has sold his concertina" causes McTeague to feel a "deprivation . . . homologous to the loss of the phallus" (*Reading the Symptom* 91). McTeague still possesses his phallus, but he now understands that he has the power to acquire more; he has not been castrated, but engorged.

56. If, as Jennifer L. Fleissner argues, McTeague is turned "into a sentimental victim by [Norris's] condemning, if not demonizing, the compulsively hoarding Trina" (205), then her murder illuminates her own status as victim, to both the reader and the state.

because while Norris might portray him to the reader as victim, he is merely a criminal in the eyes of the law. He retreats into the primitive landscape from which he emerged, returning to the pre-evolved wasteland outside of Norris's comparatively civilized urban setting.

Once McTeague leaves the city, the novel proceeds quickly toward its climactic scene, moving through a series of increasingly remote, decreasingly governed locales. McTeague returns to the Big Dipper mine, a strange mix of technology and desolation: "Here and there at long distances upon the canyon . . . one heard the prolonged thunder of the stamp mill . . . gnashing the rocks to powder with its long iron teeth . . . gluttoned . . . with the very entrails of the earth, and growling over its endless meal like some savage animal, some legendary dragon, some fabulous beast" (299). The Big Dipper transitions McTeague from the hectic urban world to the stark ruin of rural California, but retains reminders of the world he has left behind. There he feels haunted by government, and by the similarities between his treatment of Trina and "the way the miners, with their machines, treat the mountains at the Big Dipper mine" (Cavalier 129). The consequences of his actions are invoked by the brutality of civilization's impact on the landscape, so some "brute instinct clamored for recognition and obedience," driving him farther from the state, compelling him toward complete separation (306).

McTeague next arrives in Keeler, the staging point for his attempt to remove himself definitively from the reach of government. He spends little time in the town, soon leaving with Cribbens to search the countryside for gold, but even the company of one man is too much for McTeague's newly liberal subjectivity: the state's pursuit still haunts him, so he strikes out into "the red-hot alkali of Death Valley" (327). Only there, in a place where "everything as far as the eye could reach, to north, to south, to east, and west, lay inert, absolutely quiet and moveless under the remorseless scourge of the noon sun" can McTeague realize the apogee of his

coterminous devolution and hyper-liberalism: the state of nature that precedes and exceeds government (330). His violent assertion of liberalism takes him beyond his immediately determining surroundings, but, in the U. S., anarchism can only be lived in isolation. Otherwise it serves as nothing more than political rhetoric, one more voice in a crowded public discourse. Norris's character, determined by objective forces, cannot express liberal subject without fully removing himself from the site of government. The state, however, is not finished with McTeague.

During an era in which "the autonomous individual envisioned by liberalism as equipped with free will and responsible for his or her actions, increasingly came to be replaced by the sociobiological concepts of social Darwinism and natural selection," Norris's most famous character enacts the political struggle against biological determinism (Seitler 526-527). Though sharing much in common with Vandover, the form of McTeague's devolution taps more completely into contemporaneous political discourses: the novel's representation of a violently asserted hyper-liberalism evokes the debates surrounding Spencerian evolutionary theory and social Darwinism. Norris resolves the narrative, however, with a different sort of determinism. Pushing past the truncated critique of Vandover, McTeague shows the inescapable determinism and unnatural consequences of government.

The novel's penultimate chapter ends with Marcus's sudden appearance in the middle of Death Valley: "Hands up. By damn, I got the drop on you!" he says to McTeague (337). The final chapter begins by describing how he tracks McTeague into the desert and describes the last bitter struggle between McTeague and Marcus, who embodies the socio-political world that will not let McTeague escape:

Suddenly the men grappled, and in another instant were rolling and struggling upon the hot, white ground. McTeague thrust Marcus backward until he tripped and fell over the body of the dead mule . . . McTeague tore the revolver from Marcus' grip and struck out with it blindly. Clouds of alkali dust, fine and pungent, enveloped the two fighting men, all but strangling them.

McTeague did not know how he killed his enemy, but all at once Marcus grew still beneath his blows. (347)

For a single moment it seems as if McTeague has won. He and his violently acquired subjecthood will be free to exercise liberty apart from governmental interference. He can realize the anarchic vision of perfect freedom. But, with a “sudden last return of energy” Marcus handcuffs himself to McTeague: “Marcus was dead now; McTeague was locked to the body” (347). Norris leaves us not with the image of anarchism's perfect freedom—a gesture toward Spencer's evolutionary anarchism and its classically liberal roots—but with a reassertion of government: the death of an emblem of government, even the death of *a* government, does not create the conditions for anarchism. *McTeague* ends on a doubly deterministic note: the brute cannot escape his objective fate, but neither can the subject escape government.

Norris imagined his work as “an instrument, a tool, a weapon, a vehicle” and sought to create “the completest expression of our civilization” (*Responsibilities* 5, 7). As many scholars have noted, Norris's literary “tool” relies heavily on evolutionary explanations of the natural, a field dominated by Herbert Spencer in the late-nineteenth-century. Spencer's presence, however, extends beyond some tepid evolutionary ethos saturating the text. *The Octopus*, *Vandover*, and *McTeague*, are not simple reiterations of Spencerian science. Instead, they reproduce—and thus

take part in—the era’s broad debates about evolution, liberalism, and governance. By considering, complicating, and at times discarding Spencer, they produce a fictive image of the natural, an unresolved field of contestation that re-presents the nation’s conflicted views of science and politics. In *The Octopus*, Norris juxtaposes Spencerian force with violent and voluntary challenges to government. By the novel’s end, though, anarchism has disappeared within the epochal struggle between the railroad and wheat. In the brute novels Norris avoids overtly political topics, yet by considering the causes of atavism, he produces an unsettled vision of the natural that reverberates with anti-government thought.

Beyond the obvious biological atavism, *Vandover* and *McTeague* offer characters determined by something beyond heredity and social unfitness. Neither novel resolves the conflict of various constructions of the “natural,” but both include a partial critique of Spencer. *Vandover* begins as a recognizable liberal subject—a potential citizen—and is driven to animality and labor. Narrating the social Darwinian struggle, *Vandover* complicates Spencerian evolutionary theory, showing that adaptation and fitness have unnatural consequences. *McTeague*, though, does not possess *Vandover*’s potential. From the novel’s outset, he is indistinguishable from his surroundings—a sub-subject who then enacts a distorted hyper-liberalism. According to Spencer, individuals and governments evolve concomitantly, but Norris represents the troubling intersection of the two: when the sub-subject appears, incapable of enacting purportedly natural liberalism, atavism replaces evolution—Spencer’s unified theory is fractured. In both novels, government is central to the relationship between the individual and his determined trajectory, around which the Norrisean “natural” is constructed. The brute is not a natural byproduct of evolution, but the formal effort to address problems of naturalness arising from the period’s fascinations with liberalism, science, and anarchism.

Norrisean naturalism is in key respects Spencerian, but Norris's stance toward Spencer is ambivalent. His novels effect a literary reflection of the nebulous, contentious debates circulating around the natural relationship between individuals and social formations. Norris's work is not a reconciliation of, but a negotiation between these competing, overlapping constructions of the natural: Spencer alternately defends extant government and describes an evolutionary *telos* free from government; classical liberalism imagines natural rights, but government as merely prudent; anarchists accept natural rights, but find government to be neither natural or prudent. Norris's amalgam of realism and romanticism generates a narrative field of contestation where elements of all these ideologies interact. Ultimately, the naturalist subject pierces the surrounding elemental force, Darwinian struggle, and liberal government by re-presenting the unnaturalness of governed individuals.

Chapter 4

“Wild and foolish acts”: Anarchism, Violence, and the Representational Mandate

I killed the President because he was the enemy of the good people, the good working people.

—Leon Czolgosz

Five months after *The Octopus* was published, with its fictive political violence, the nation was shaken by its most substantial act of anarchist violence before or since. When Leon Czolgosz shot President William McKinley in September 1901, Berkman was in prison, but many American anarchists—Most, de Cleyre, Goldman, and others—were living in a state of relative freedom. Certainly, they were unpopular, but the anti-anarchist fervor following the Haymarket bombing was for many a distant memory and twentieth-century anti-anarchist immigration laws were yet to be passed. The turn-of-the-century was a time of some peace for anarchists: caricatured by the press and harassed by local citizens and governments as they might be, the hysteria prompted by acts of violence attributed to anarchists had ebbed substantially. The assassination of a sitting American president by a man claiming to be an anarchist, however, changed everything. Chronologically, it is neither the first nor the last instance of anarchist violence in this era, but the symbolic value of killing the embodied head of U.S. representative democracy at the beginning of a new century makes it a natural starting point for considering the relationship between anarchism, violence, democracy, and representation. The nation’s rage was roused and every anarchist had to respond: would they claim Czolgosz and his act? Or would they distance themselves from the solitary actions of a potentially deranged simpleton?

Shifting from the previous two chapters’ focus on fictive subjects and the threat they pose to representational government, this chapter addresses McKinley’s assassination alongside other acts of American political violence in order to theorize anarchists’ stance toward violence, the

popular reduction of anarchism to arbitrary violence, and the structural relation between the two.⁵⁷ Norris's work offers a naturalist challenge to unnatural government, but outside of fiction, real people were killing and real people were dying. These concrete, historical manifestations of anti-representationality reveal the ambivalent, fractured, contradictory relationship between anarchism and anarchist violence—between propaganda and the deed. I begin with the 1886 Haymarket bomb as a catalyst for the growth of American anarchism, then shift to a discussion of the ways in which important anarchists (many of whom were drawn to anarchism in the wake of Haymarket) approach the issue: what are the variety of philosophical stances toward the validity, usefulness, and morality of political violence? The anarchist theory of propaganda by deed offers a theoretical stance toward the potential value of violence. This potential, however, is called into question by real-life acts of violence committed by self-described anarchists—like Berkman's failed *attentat* and McKinley's assassination—and the numerous other instances of violence during the 1900s and 1910s that circulated around the radical movement and were attributed to (or blamed on) anarchists. These dual facets of political violence—as theory and as act—collide when anarchists are forced to respond to realized violence. Highly publicized anarchist violence reveals a fundamental ambivalence.⁵⁸ Through an analysis of anarchist

57. This chapter contrasts with Redding's *Raids on Human Consciousness* by focusing to a greater extent on concrete instances of violence attributed to anarchists. Redding's text offers an excellent theorization of violence as "a set of distinct but interrelated problems" or an "idea," but defines violence quite broadly to include rhetorical violence, sadomasochism, etc. (2). I, on the other hand, narrow my scope to acts of violence in the United States and anarchists' responses to them in order to explain the structuring governmental rational and the anarchist paradox produced by it.

58. In part, this chapter is designed to correct misapprehensions of the relationship between anarchism and violence that have circulated from the 19th century to the present. Many studies of American anarchism either 1) repeat the popular conflation of the two or 2) divide anarchists into two types: the violent and the non-violent type. Some critics even absurdly alternate between the two so as to most effectively demonize anarchists. Of course, much of this work appears during the Cold War, when most radical philosophies were pilloried (even in scholarly works). The anarchists I discuss in this chapter were for many decades dismissed as irrelevant historical oddities: "Revolutionary anarchism . . . is a failure" because anarchists "are romantic reactionaries" (Suskind 172). Since, by the 1970s we can rest assured "that there is . . . no oppressed working class," anarchism, violent or otherwise, can be ignored along with every other radical ideology (Suskind 173).

reaction to Berkman's attempt on Frick and Czolgosz's assassination of McKinley (which often resemble the reactions of those who do not recognize any possible value in propaganda by deed), this chapter demonstrates a remarkably consistent split between anarchists' orientation to theoretical violence and their response to actual violence—a fracture characterized by a strong logical defense of violence and an equally potent aversion to violent acts.

This ambivalence is structured by a representational mandate: in the United States during this period, the impetus toward representation is so great, that violence itself—an agential act with consequences prior to representation—is forced to become propaganda. Ambivalence appears as a manifestation of the anarchist aporia: the effort simultaneously to challenge and deploy homologous registers of representation. Anarchists reject U.S. representative government and its inherent violence, thus they must allow for the possibility of violent reaction. But, at the same time, violence must be represented—and hence *represent* a political position—to have any meaning, which creates the paradoxical responses I discuss in this chapter. In short, the United States' dominant governing rationality produces both the drive toward violence and the fraught representations of violence. To explain further, much straightforward anarchist propaganda (propaganda by word) proposes violence. It operates through rhetoric, a form that makes sense within American political discourse: espousing a position, even a radical one, is logically consonant with U.S. governance, so anarchists can rhetorically challenge democracy, while still adhering to the overdetermining logic of representation. Actual anarchist violence, however, cannot be part of American governance or the surrounding political discourse. Thus, anarchist propaganda suggests violent deeds *a priori*, but rejects them *a posteriori*, because the rhetoric of violence fits within the governing rationale while the violence itself does not.

The ambivalence of anarchists toward violence is in fact an endemic trace of the

pervasiveness of representation's governing force. Though widely feared, the philosophy of violence is acceptable, because it re-presents the nation's evolution: calling for violence against an instantiation of government is well within the tradition of U.S. political life—it is a representable philosophy. Violence itself, though, is fundamentally anti-representational. It rejects rhetoric, challenges democracy, yet is banished from anarchism. Rather than a cause-effect trajectory in which anarchists who theorize/justify the use of violence claim responsibility for acts of violence, we see violence rejected even by those who theorized its logical necessity. Put differently, anarchist subjects who enact anti-representational violence become the subject of anarchism's anti-violent representation.⁵⁹ This transformation of violence into propaganda reveals that the logic of representation reinforces democracy and interdicts political movements that reject or wish to exceed its vision of complete representation: anarchist violence suggests the drive to re-present as a structuring mechanism that circumscribes politics to the exclusion not only of assassination and explosion, but also any philosophy that imagines progress beyond the realization of fully “representative” governance.

American Anarchism, Violence, and Propaganda by Deed

The Haymarket events—the bomb, the subsequent arrests and executions, and the widespread admission that the convicted men were not guilty of any real crime—are remembered by many as a dark period in American history. The Haymarket trial is “one of the most unjust in the annals of American jurisprudence” (Avrich, *Haymarket* xi). This travesty was

59. Cleary, American anarchists rarely considered violence in a vacuum and the acts of violence themselves comprise an addition to anarchist theory. Almost without exception, however, anarchists from this period disavow acts of violence—even those who preached its value and who enacted violence themselves. This chapter traces not so much a unified anarchist stance toward violence, as a consonant set of responses that gesture toward some central impulse or force. In what follows, I explain this impulse: a representational mandate—a drive to make anarchist theory knowable within American political discourse—that crystallizes this project's concern with anti-government politics' paradoxical relationship to representation.

compounded by the curtailment of free speech and unwarranted outrage at the scourge of anarchism that many late-nineteenth-century Americans believed must be “obliterated from Illinois and from the Nation” (“Not Vengeance”). In addition to the miscarried justice and anti-anarchist rage, Haymarket had another important effect: it inspired many from the generation of anarchists that would rise to prominence in the United States during the subsequent three decades. According to Paul Avrich, “the chief factor in [de Cleyre’s] conversion to anarchism was the execution on November 11, 1887, of Albert Parsons, August Spies, George Engel, and Adolph Fischer” for their alleged role in the Haymarket bombing (Avrich, *American Anarchist* 47). In a speech just months after McKinley’s assassination, de Cleyre admits her initial response to reading the headline “Anarchists throw a bomb in a crowd in the Haymarket in Chicago”: “They ought to be hung” (“The Eleventh of November” 289). Fifteen years later, she expresses shame at this rash judgment and realizes “what [these anarchists] had stood for was a very high and noble ideal of human life . . . a clearer vision of human right”—a reaction that catalyzed her political transformation (290). Two short years after Haymarket, de Cleyre was writing essays on anarchism (Avrich, *American Anarchist* 51).

Similarly, Goldman “marked her political transformation [at] the chilling moment when she became aware of the horror and significance of the death of the Haymarket anarchists” (Falk, “Forging” 6). Hearing a speech in which Johanna Greie spoke of the “innocent blood of the Haymarket martyrs calling for revenge,” Goldman was forced to reconcile Greie’s radical position with the “papers [which] called these men anarchists, bomb-throwers” (*Living My Life* 9). Out of this disconnect, she came to learn about anarchism and, upon hearing of the Haymarket martyrs’ execution, found “a great ideal, a burning faith, a determination to dedicate myself to the memory of my martyred comrades, to make their cause my own” (*Living My Life*

10). Like de Cleyre, the miscarriage of justice following an act of violence connected to anarchism, inspired Goldman to learn about and embrace anarchism.

It is important to recognize the relation of violence and anarchism beyond the typical conflation of the two. Clearly, newspapers from this period painted anarchists as inherently violent and the image of the bomb-throwing anarchist was ubiquitous. The connection, however, is more complex, because anarchists themselves see a link between their conversion to anarchism and violent events: Goldman and de Cleyre credit the Haymarket violence and government responses to it with their conversion to anarchism. Before exploring the ways in which violence and anarchism intersect, it is vital to recognize the causal relationship: violence circulating around anarchists inspires new anarchists who in turn theorize violence and respond to later violent acts. Anarchism existed in the United States before 1886, but Haymarket “for the first time . . . brought anarchism to the attention of the general public, identifying it with terrorist violence and inspiring a horror of its teaching and practices” (Avrich, *Haymarket* 454).⁶⁰ Haymarket marks a turning point in American history, a moment in which anarchism becomes a significant element of the discourse surrounding labor and radicalism.

To understand anarchism’s relationship to violence, we must begin with one of its broadest concepts: direct action.⁶¹ Anarchists reject mechanisms for change that are structured by government, thus they eschew voting and similar overtly political methods for social

60. Avrich adds that the Haymarket explosion “marked the climax of one of the most bitter industrial struggles in America’s experience” (*Haymarket* 454).

61. As a theory, direct action does not belong exclusively to anarchism. Many radical and democratic political philosophies theorize and advocate direct action as an addition or alternative to political action. For instance, William E. Trautman’s *Direct Action and Sabotage* (1912) defines direct action from the socialist perspective in non-violent terms as “the withdrawal from the job, the suspension of operation, the withdrawal of efficiency [to curtail] the economic power of the capitalist class” (11). Trautman claims that “violence, destruction of life [is] needless and useless” (37). For him, direct action does not imply violence; in fact, violence undermines legitimate direct action.

transformation: they “reject states and all those systematic forms of inequality states make possible. They do not seek to pressure the government to institute reforms. Neither do they seek to seize state power for themselves. Rather, they wish to destroy that power, using means that are—so far as possible—consistent with their ends” (Graeber 203). Built upon the general assumption that laws are tools of oppression and the specifically American charge that majorities use representative democracy to oppress, direct action stands in contrast to the systemic reduction of all political action to those techniques sanctioned by government (namely voting).⁶² As de Cleyre points out, almost no one rejects direct action outright: “The majority of thinking people are really opportunist, leaning, some perhaps more to directness, some more to indirectness as a general thing, but ready to use either means when opportunity call for it” (“Direct Action” 274). She argues that those who accept political action do not reject direct action, but that anarchists must, by definition, rely solely on direct action, because “the basis of all political action is coercion; even when the State does good things, it finally rests on a club, a gun, or a prison, for its power to carry them through” (“Direct Action” 275). Put bluntly, direct action is the political modality of anarchist theory. While the theory and practice of direct action are responsible indirectly for anarchism’s violent reputation, they do not necessarily imply or deploy violence. Theorists of propaganda by deed—a type of direct action—however, do entertain the possibility of violent action to effect political change.

The concept of propaganda by deed emerges in the 1870s and can be most “directly traced to “Bakunin who . . . declared: ‘Now we all have to embark together on the revolutionary

62. Unlike autocratic governments against which direct action has different methods and meanings, Goldman sees in the United States an ignorant, governing majority: “In politics, naught but quantity counts. In proportion to its increase, however, principles, ideals, justice, and uprightness are completely swamped by the array of numbers” (*Anarchism* 69). The “masses” hinder “the American struggle for liberty” and function as an “annihilator of individuality, of free initiative, of originality” (*Anarchism* 76, 78). American direct action stands in opposition to democratic government, which operates through voting and claims to be the more or less direct realization of majority rule.

ocean, and henceforth spread our principles no longer by words but by deed” (Cahm 76). Errico Malatesta frequently is attributed with coining the phrase and helped to define it in 1873 (Stafford 39). He and Carlo Cafiero claim “the insurrectional fact, destined to affirm socialist principles by deeds, is the most effective means of propaganda and the only one which, without tricking and corrupting the masses, can penetrate the deepest social layers and draw the living forces of humanity into the struggle” (qtd. in Cahm 78). Malatesta and Cafiero do not espouse violence directly, but gesture toward insurrection or revolution as a logical, factual possibility. Their version of direct action moves beyond passive methods of resistance: all propaganda by deed may be direct action, but not all direct action is propaganda by deed. Cafiero goes further, asserting that “our action must be permanent rebellion, by word, by writing, by dagger, by gun, by dynamite” (152). Similarly, Paul Brousse—the major French proponent of propaganda by deed—advocates “fight[ing] back, defend[ing] oneself” violently if necessary (151). The violent rhetoric of propaganda by deed in part explains the popular reaction to radicals (especially anarchists), but we must recognize that their language is not always reflected in action and that the debate over insurrectionary deeds continued for several decades.

For Malatesta and Cafiero, the value of deeds is found in propaganda: insurrectional acts will inspire others to join “the struggle.” Brousse echoes this sentiment, indicating that the measure of acts is found in the “idea” behind them, which “having sprung to life . . . will march, in flesh and blood, at the head of the people” (151). Both Italian and French theorists of propaganda by deed value the act for its symbolic and inspirational value: the goal is propaganda; the deed is merely the mechanism. Kropotkin, on the other hand, asserts that the “propaganda effect . . . is not . . . the primary motive for involvement in an act of revolt,” because “an act of revolt should be a serious act of war—not a dramatic gesture” (Cahm 103).

Kropotkin is one of the most important influences on American anarchism and he asserts that propaganda by deed is a bit of a misnomer: “when individuals, outraged by the system, attempted to take the life of a man, they did so because he was a viper whom they hated—not because they wanted to make propaganda” (Cahm 110). Propaganda by deed is not a unified theory—international anarchists debated it throughout the period and even those who espoused it shifted positions over time—but an ongoing conversation that American anarchists enter into from the 1880s to the 1910s.⁶³

American anarchists, including Most, de Cleyre, Goldman, and Berkman, had not only to address the continued disagreement about violence’s usefulness, but also to respond to acts of violence committed by or attributed to anarchists. As framework for the following discussion of American anarchist theorizations of and responses to violence, I propose these basic definitions: direct action is an umbrella theory, which includes a continuum of actions encompassing all political activity that does not fit within government structured mechanisms. Propaganda by deed is a theory that relies on more violent rhetoric—which accounts for its intimate link to violent acts committed by radicals—yet it sublimates violence as such to its propagandistic effects. Actual acts of violence, however, while potential instances of direct action and/or propaganda by deed, cannot necessarily be reduced to either theory. In other words, asserting that violence simply is the realization of anarchist theory (either the theory of direct action or propaganda by deed) requires reproducing the popular turn-of-the-century conflation of anarchism with violence and ignoring the complex, often contradictory, efforts of anarchists to address violence.

The question of anarchist violence emerges from their stance toward government: if

63. For a thorough history of the international development of propaganda by deed as a theory, see “Propaganda by Deed: The Development of the Idea” and “Kropotkin and Propaganda by Deed,” the third and fourth chapters of Caroline Cahm’s *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872-1886*.

government is violence, then to what extent may anarchists use violence to fight violence? Most considerations of direct action and propaganda by deed begin with this assumption. As Malatesta argues, “government oppresses mankind . . . either directly, by brute force, that is physical violence, or indirectly, by depriving them of the means of subsistence” (*Anarchy* 7). Government relies on direct or indirect forms of violence, and attempts to filter all responses to this violence through political action. Thus, anarchists must theorize methods for political change that step outside politics proper. Berkman claims that “government . . . stand[s] for disorder and violence [while] anarchism . . . means order without government and peace without violence” (*What Is Anarchism?* 138). He and most other anarchists conceive of themselves as ultimately peaceful, yet they are confronted with the inherent violence of government against which they stand. Therefore the question of violence becomes complicated: if government is violence and anarchism sets as its goal the destruction of government, what tactics are permissible? Can a peaceable philosophy strategically utilize violent means to reach a theoretically peaceful end? These assumptions and questions run throughout American anarchist efforts to theorize violence.

Johann Most

Most is arguably the first, most important anarchist to live in the United States. American anarchism was, in its earliest stages, dominated by Germans, and Most was the German superstar. He edited a vastly influential anarchist journal (*Freiheit*), inspired many others to adopt anarchist politics (including Goldman), and vocally advocated the use of violence for political ends. As perhaps the seminal figure amongst anarchists espousing violence, Most provides an early example of radical ambivalence toward it. On the surface, he appears unquestionably to promote violent direct action. He moved to the United States after being

arrested “for glorifying the killing of Tsar Alexander II . . . by . . . ‘Nihilists’” (Nomad 273). He supported the use of dynamite to overthrow American government (Trautmann 155). He even published *Revolutionary War Science*, “a manual on the techniques as well as the dangers of explosives and revolutionary warfare” (Goyens 99). Most’s text includes advice on “the acquisition of money and the purchase of explosives,” the manufacture of effective bombs, and “hints about placing all kinds of deadly chemicals in various delicacies which were to be served at the dinners of the rich” (Nomad 287).⁶⁴ Quite simply, Most was the late-nineteenth-century voice of anarchist violence, “the incarnation of satan, a wild beast run amuck, leaving chaos and destruction behind him . . . the synonym of dynamite and nitroglycerin, and of everything else that is dangerous, evil and vicious” (Goldman, “Johann Most” 19).

This image of Most, however much he cultivated it—unequivocally claiming that “violence is justified against tyranny”—owes as much to popular images of the anarchist as it does to his theories and action (qtd. in Trautmann 79). By 1878, in stark contrast to his praise for the Czar’s assassins a few years later, “Most . . . denounced [an] attempt on the life of the kaiser [and] produced a lecture . . . on ‘assassinations and social democracy’ that stressed the peaceful intentions” of his politics (Goyens 92). Over the next two decades, “Most began to temper his advocacy of revolutionary terrorism [and] questioned the benefits of violence as early as 1887” (Goyens 100). And, “for all his rhetoric, Most never committed a violent crime” (Goyens 100). Overall, he seems to vacillate between advocating violence and retreating from his most extreme stance; to preach violence, but not to practice it. Here, one of the biggest proponents of anarchist violence expresses a fundamental ambivalence that arises from his efforts to reconcile proposed

64. *Confronting Fear: A History of Terrorism*, edited by Isaac Cronin, contains a brief translated excerpt from *The Science of Revolutionary Warfare* (or *Revolutionary War Science*, as alternately translated). It begins: “Today, the importance of explosives as an instrument for carrying out revolutions oriented to social justice is obvious. Anyone can see that these materials will be the decisive factor in the next period of world history” (17).

violent actions with the theory of propaganda by deed:

Since the end justifies the means, propaganda-by-the-deed is right. Furthermore, without propaganda-by-the-deed, propaganda-of-the-word is useless; the execrable social order has not been built on paper and ink, and paper and ink will not destroy it. Propaganda-by-the-deed will unsettle the complacent, agitate the unsettled, and enrage the agitated—terrorize opponents, win comrades, and rouse the masses—by quick, decisive, well-timed violent acts that confound oppressors and inspire the oppressed. But unless directed and aimed at things the masses dislike, propaganda-by-the-deed will redound to damage the Cause. Accordingly, not every act of terrorism is an instance of propaganda-by-the-deed. Blowing up buildings, setting fire to factories, cutting telegraph lines, shooting officials, lynching informers, stabbing policemen, poisoning clerics, and castrating spies are admirable in themselves (any act against tyranny today is an act for a better tomorrow); but if misguided, such terrorism will not secure the future for the revolution. (Most, qtd. in Trautmann 99-100)

In a trope common amongst radical theorists, Most advocates propaganda by deed, including violence, but reserves the right to judge each violent action based on its propagandistic results. He may admire violent actors and question the efficacy of propaganda by word, but as a propagandist, Most imagines the revolution occurring more through propaganda than the violent actions themselves. Put differently, he produces propaganda by word, which argues for the tactical validity of violence, but only insofar as it is useful propaganda: violence is circumscribed by the need to represent anarchism. Like Malatesta, Cafiero, and Brousse, Most sublimates violence to propaganda and sets a precedent that most American anarchists follow after him.

Voltairine de Cleyre

Turning to anarchism in the late 1880s, de Cleyre quickly became one of the movement's leading voices, a figure without the public image of Goldman and thus spared from continuous harassment, but nevertheless an unapologetic anarchist who espoused direct action and theorized violence until her death in 1912. Like many anarchists, her life was surrounded by violence (none of which she directly caused), which inspired a sustained, yet not entirely cohesive effort to address its appropriate function.⁶⁵ De Cleyre's first anarchist mentor was Lum, "an uncompromising rebel for whom violence, including terrorism, was a necessary . . . weapon in the struggle against government" (Avrich, *American Anarchist* 60).⁶⁶ Historians disagree about the nature of de Cleyre's attitude toward violence. Avrich recognizes a "distinct shift" around the turn of the century (*American Anarchist* 138). Eugenia C. DeLamotte, however, rejects the notion that she "moved further and further toward support of forcible methods," suggesting instead that de Cleyre's "position was complex but consistent over time" (51). This critical disagreement is indicative of the pervasive ambivalence of anarchists toward violence: many accept the theoretical possibility of anarchist violence (either as propaganda or for its direct effect), but when confronted with acts of violence and their consequences, their position shifts.

De Cleyre's ambivalence arises from her inability to reject violence *per se* and her sympathy for violent actors, coupled with a simultaneous rejection of the logic of anarchist violence. Like other anarchists, she asserts "that the state is by nature violent . . . and can be expected to breed many other kinds of violence," including anarchist acts (DeLamotte 63). From the time she adopted anarchism until her death, de Cleyre "many times . . . stated or clearly

65. Her conversion to anarchism was inspired by the Haymarket tragedy, she was active during Berkman's attack on Frick, McKinley's assassination, and the *Los Angeles Times* bombing (1910), and she was shot by one of her former students.

66. She was also heavily influenced by Kropotkin (DeLamotte 39).

implied that violence in self-defense is justified” (DeLamotte 56). She “supported various armed struggles [including] the Mexican Revolution” (DeLamotte 57). She also speaks highly of historical instances of violence, like Bacon’s Rebellion and indicates that “there were times when . . . violence was required” (“Direct Action” 275, 277). What Avrich reads as a shift toward violence and DeLamotte as a complex, yet static attitude, is in effect a refusal to condemn those who commit acts of violence, uncomfortably coexisting with a theoretical aversion toward the acts: she understands why these individuals used violent means, but she disagrees with them. This manifestation of the anarchist ambivalence toward violence has at its core a logical conundrum.

De Cleyre sees logical causation in violent acts: the violence of government and capitalism drives individuals to extreme action. She expresses sympathy with Czolgosz, the McNamara brothers (*L.A. Times* bombing), and even Herman Helcher, the man who attempted to murder her: “he is sick;—had he not been sick in brain he would never have done this thing” (“Appeal” 200). Helcher and Czolgosz are lumped into de Cleyre’s category of “Accidental or Occasional Criminals,” those “who, through tremendous stress of outward circumstance, and possibly some mental disturbance arising from those very notions of the conduct of life which form part of their moral being, suddenly commit an act of violence” (“Crime and Punishment” 135).⁶⁷ The weight of life becomes too great for some who lash out violently, and thus are

67. De Cleyre’s other two types are the “born criminal” and the “criminaloid.” She disputes Cesare Lombroso’s research, yet indicates that some, “however few in number (and they are really very few) are . . . born criminals, —people who through some malformation or deficiency or excess of certain portions of the brain are constantly impelled to violent deeds” (“Crime and Punishment” 134). The criminaloid “class is the most numerous of the three” and includes “criminals . . . endowed with strong desires and unequal reasoning powers [who] cannot maintain the uneven battle against a society wherein the majority of individuals must all the time deny their natural appetites, if they are to remain unstained by crime” (135). For de Cleyre, the key difference between the criminaloid and the accidental criminal is the amount of stress required to drive the individual to crime. The criminaloid has a physical and perpetual tendency toward crime, while the accidental criminal only breaks under “tremendous stress” (135). Presumably, both types indicate societal inequity, but Czolgosz—who likely never committed a crime before McKinley’s assassination—fits within the latter group.

worthy of pity, not punishment. But neither are they worthy of honor, for de Cleyre denies the potency of their actions. She may refuse to denounce those who use violence, but she “cannot see the logic of forcible physical resistance” (“Events” 86), because “it is not the business of Anarchists to preach wild and foolish acts, —acts of violence. For, truly, Anarchism has nothing in common with violence, and can never come about save through the conquest of man’s minds” (“Our Present Attitude” 297-298). De Cleyre sees most violent expressions as “pitiable acts undertaken almost without the actor’s control” (DeLamotte 69). For her, they logically follow from violent government: “some desperate and life-denied victim of the present system [will] strike back at it, by violence” (“Our Present Attitude” 298). DeLamotte attempts to draw a distinction between these pitiable, purely reactive acts and others that include “the added element that rather than being simply the logical outcomes of oppression by people pushed to the breaking point . . . also expressed some conscious social or political commitment, whether rightly or wrong acted upon” (67). Even politically motivated violence, however, contrasts with “de Cleyre’s basic position that resistance by means other than force is the logical position” (DeLamotte 62). She views anarchism as fundamentally peaceful—it is illogical to attack government with its own violent methods, just as it is pointless to use government-sanctioned political action.

Essentially, the anarchist ambivalence toward violence appears in de Cleyre’s work as two competing logics: government violence causes other violence, but violence is not logically consistent with anarchism (even when combating government violence). She will not deny that those who preach and/or use violence are anarchists, but she is frustrated with the circumscription of direct action that occurs through anarchist violence and mainstream responses to it: “‘Direct Action’ has suddenly acquired in the general mind a circumscribed meaning, not at

all implied in the words themselves, and certainly never attached to it by [anarchists]” (“Direct Action” 273). De Cleyre laments that direct action has become synonymous with ““Forcible Attacks on Life and Property”” (“Direct Action” 273). As a proponent of direct action she argues that non-forcible direct action is logically consonant with anarchism and thus most effective in achieving it. She is angered then that violent acts directed against government—which, according to her, are caused by government’s inherent violence—lead to her theory being labeled as violent. The intersection of de Cleyre’s dual logics with the popular image of anarchism places her in a position not entirely dissimilar from Most. He is the face of anarchist violence, yet expresses an ambivalence toward it; de Cleyre can neither embrace nor fully reject violence, because to do either would be to ignore one of her logics.

De Cleyre’s distinctive ambivalence is perhaps best captured by what she codes as a shift over time in her view of the Haymarket martyrs. At first, she thinks they should be hanged because they “had thrown the bomb, unprovoked, into a mass of men and women, from a wicked delight in killing” (“The Eleventh of November” 289). She does not accept wanton violence, but she sets up an alternative that is the polar opposite: “what they were hanged for was preaching [anarchism] to the common people” (“The Eleventh of November” 290). Obviously, de Cleyre does not believe the men executed for Haymarket were perpetrators of violence. However, her contrast between mindless violence and the advocacy of anarchism reveals a consistent aversion to violence, including the explosion that led her become an anarchist. The bomb may be the violent catalyst for Haymarket, but it is not anarchism. Actual violence drops out of the picture. She never comes to accept the value of the Haymarket bomb. She simply looks away from the violence and sees the men’s words—she judges them martyrs, because they were killed “for telling the people” that “government is, has always been . . . oppression and revenge” (“The

Eleventh of November” 292). For de Cleyre, the bomb is a logical response to government violence, yet it is not the logical anarchist response; thus her evaluation of the martyrs, and of anarchism, must ignore the actual violence.

Emma Goldman

Most may have been the United States’ first prominent anarchist to be targeted by journalists as a violent madman, but Goldman’s centrality to American anarchism and her connection to several acts of violence (especially Berkman’s *attentat* and Czolgosz’s act) made her a prolonged lightning rod for popular venom. From her beginnings in the movement, she was associated with the violent wing of anarchism. Most was one of her “earliest mentors” and her initial stance toward “propaganda by the deed bore the important influence of Kropotkin” (Falk, “Forging” 15-16). During the 1890s, Goldman’s public image was not significantly detached from her beliefs. Newspapers clearly embellished the image, but her writings reinforce media portrayals, which quote her preaching forcible expropriation: “You demand bread, and if you cannot acquire it through peaceful means you will get it by force” (“Badly Advised” 145-146).⁶⁸ Goldman’s long career (she was subject to public scrutiny in the U.S. from the early 1890s until her deportation in 1919), however, includes what some argue is a shift—seen most profoundly around 1901—in both her position on violence’s potential and in her “manner of addressing” it (Falk, “Forging” 16).⁶⁹ Like Most, Goldman is often quoted advocating violence, specifically

68. Journalists may not have captured the nuances of her position, but it was not wholly inaccurate to claim that Goldman belonged “to the wildest school of Anarchists [who] maintain the right of individuals to seek vengeance for private or public wrongs” (“Berkman’s Career Here” 100).

69. Candace Falk argues that Goldman’s “position on violence . . . was more complex than reported and was often misunderstood by the mainstream press” (“Forging” 70). Falk sees a distinction between Goldman’s desire “to prove that all anarchists don’t ‘carry bombs in our coat pockets’” in the popular press with the “more nuanced, carefully crafted expression of her position” in anarchist periodicals, yet also contends that “Goldman’s attitude about violence . . . was inconsistent” (“Forging” 70).

forcible expropriation, yet like Most it is doubtful that she ever enacted political violence. In addition, like de Cleyre, Goldman refuses to reject all violence as her later writings address the reasons that acts of violence occur. Goldman bridges the ambivalence of Most and de Cleyre, using violent rhetoric and the rhetoric of violence, while questioning violence's effectiveness and looking to its logical causation rather than its position within anarchism.

We may question journalistic veracity when Goldman is quoted claiming she has “never advocated ‘force’ [because] anarchy has nothing to do with force and violence” (“Miss Emma Goldman” 341), especially when in her private correspondence she insists “I never said anything of the sort” (“To Marie Goldschmidt” 432). But what do we do with other manifestations of Goldman's inconsistency? For example, she praises the anarchist Gaetano Bresci's assassination of Italy's King Umberto as a “good and noble, grand and useful” act designed to “free mankind from tyranny” (“Gaetano Bresci” 456), when less than three years earlier she denounced another anarchist, who killed Empress Elizabeth of Austria: “Even if this man Luccheni declared himself an Anarchist, I would be the first one to say he is not one. Any man who understands the philosophy of anarchy could never commit such folly. The philosophy of anarchy forbids the destruction of human life” (qtd. in “New York Anarchist” 347). Goldman sometimes expresses admiration of anarchist violence, other times denounces it; speaks of the value of force, then tempers the claim. Ultimately, I find unconvincing Falk's suggestion of a chronological shift or stark divide between Goldman's efforts to shape the public image of anarchism in mainstream newspapers while articulating her *real* views in anarchist periodicals. The obvious inconsistency in Goldman's public and private statements on violence indicates the pervasive anarchist ambivalence toward it: she may preach violence and support some violence, but she frequently distances actual violence from anarchism.

“The Psychology of Political Violence” exemplifies this strategy. First delivered as a lecture in 1909, then published as part of *Anarchism and Other Essays* in 1910, this essay is Goldman’s longest sustained attempt to theorize the relationships between government, anarchism, and violence (Falk, *Making Speech Free* 435n16). In it, she echoes de Cleyre, claiming that acts of political violence are produced “by the tremendous pressure of conditions, making life unbearable to [some] sensitive natures” (*Anarchism* 92). For Goldman, “the wholesale violence of capital and government [prompts] political acts of violence” (107). Government is violence and any concomitant anti-government acts “are but a drop in the ocean” (107). Past the midpoint of her career and after Berkman and Czolgosz enacted political violence, Goldman is willing to absolve them by explaining the logical causation of their acts, but she stops short of embracing those acts as valid forms of direct action. She too is frustrated with the popular circumscription of direct action, but she goes further than de Cleyre, distancing anarchism from violence in several ways. First, she suggests “a great number of acts, for which Anarchists had to suffer, either originated with the capitalist press or were instigated, if not directly perpetrated, by the police” (86). She may very well be correct, but she then adds that even those “acknowledged Anarchists [who] committed acts of violence . . . were not impelled by the teachings of Anarchism” (91-92). Finally, she returns to the logical, psychological cause of violence, positing that the acts cannot be measured in terms of the practical fight against government. “the question . . . is not whether [violent] acts were practical, any more than whether the thunderstorm is practical” (91). Goldman wrote often on this theme: “As if an act of this kind can be measured by its usefulness, expediency, or practicability. We might as well ask ourselves of the usefulness of a cyclone, tornado, a violent thunderstorm, or the ceaseless fall of the Niagara waters. All these forces are the natural results of natural causes” (“Tragedy at

Buffalo” 475). Each of these moves separates the act of violence from anarchism. Either the acts were not committed by anarchists or the acts were committed by anarchists, yet not in the spirit of anarchism, because the violence of government produces violent reactions that cannot properly be called anarchist. At the beginning of “The Psychology of Political Violence,” Goldman quotes Alvin F. Sampson to elucidate the link between government and violence:

[Violent acts] have, from time immemorial, been the reply of goaded and desperate classes, and goaded and desperate individuals, to wrongs from their fellowmen, which they felt to be intolerable. Such acts are the violent recoil from violence The guilt of these acts lies upon every man and woman who . . . helps to keep up social conditions that drive human beings to despair. (83-86)

Government is the necessary *and* sufficient cause for violence: its presence explains reactive violence and these acts in turn demonstrate government’s continued effect. Goldman insulates anarchism by collapsing government and violence into a cause-effect loop, yet she never reduces violence to government: all government is violence, but not all violence is government. In this space remains the anarchist ambivalence.

As the most visible anarchist figure in the United States for several decades, Goldman played a large role in shaping the movement’s public image, but her work does not reveal full support for or absolute rejection of violence as political strategy. Rather, she seems genuinely torn and persistently inconclusive: she uses the rhetoric of violence and is surrounded by violence attributed to her and her friends, yet the appearance of consequential violence leads her to pull back. As with de Cleyre, Goldman first looks to explain violence’s relationship to government and then either avoids connecting violence to anarchism or structures the link such that violence belongs always to government, a rhetorically evasive move. Neither can fully reject

the acts or the actors, because to do so weakens their arguments about the horrors of government: violence may not be anarchist, but it helps prove they are right about government. Goldman alternates between disavowing violence and using it—both as rhetoric and evidence. Her ambivalence is not created by an effort to resist caricatures depicting her as a bomb-wielding terrorist. It is systemic, arising from the paradox of anarchism's attempts to function within and through democracy's representational mandate.

Berkman, Czolgosz, and the *Attentat*

It requires little evidence to show that Berkman at one point espoused violence as a legitimate anarchist tactic. He shot a man for political reasons, enacting his politics of direct action and propaganda by deed in a way that no other important American anarchist did: he theorizes through action rather than offering a rhetorical theory of action. Understanding his views of violence, then, demands examining the *attentat* that precede his detailed explanations about the value of violence, because more so than any other American anarchist, Berkman undergoes a chronological shift: his time in prison alters his attitude toward violence and its effectiveness. Like Most, de Cleyre, and Goldman, he continued to advocate direct action well into the 1910s, but he reconceived the role of violence (“Reflections” 4).⁷⁰ In 1892, Berkman sees the events at Carnegie Steel’s Homestead Works as an opportunity for direct action: “I must

70. Berkman was inconclusively linked to both the 1908 Union Square bomb in New York City and the 1916 San Francisco Preparedness Day explosion. Falk notes that “Berkman, the veteran anarchist organizer, continued to function in a quasi-clandestine manner, working closely with the Anarchist Federation of New York City, whose member Selig Silverman blew himself up in Union Square. Berkman was secretary of the Anarchist Federation” (“Raising” 44n79). In 1916, Berkman was editing *The Blast* in San Francisco. He defended Tom Mooney and Warren Billings both in writing and as a “tireless organizer, mobilizing workers . . . to protest in behalf” of the two men (Fellner 115). This activity brought increased scrutiny and eventually the magazine was silenced and Berkman sent to prison again. Neither of these cases has been connected to Berkman and, considering his later statements about the use of “terroristic” tactics, it is doubtful he had any hand in their planning. The past and present whispers linking Berkman to violent acts long after 1892 demonstrates more his role as a lightning rod attracting attributions of violence than they do any substantive involvement in violent political activities.

form a definite plan of action . . . a tremendous struggle is taking place at Homestead: the people are manifesting the right spirit in resisting tyranny and invasion” (*Prison Memoirs* 6). Since he believes that “the killing of a tyrant is in no way to be considered as the taking of a life,” Frick’s murder is justifiable, a viable anarchist strategy (*Prison Memoirs* 7). Many years later, however, Berkman persistently eschews violence, claiming that “the teachings of Anarchism are those of peace and harmony . . . of the sacredness of life” (*What Is Anarchism?* 140). He goes further to argue that “Anarchism means OPPOSITION to violence, by whomever committed, [because] Anarchists value human life” (“Down With the Anarchists” 6). In thirty years, Berkman shifts from a stance that allows for the forcible removal of a tyrant to one that opposes all violence and values all life. This shift serves as an elucidating fulcrum, revealing the representational mandate and consequently explaining the fractured anarchist stance toward violence.

Following Haymarket, popular sentiment about anarchism was split. On one hand, anarchists were still viewed as a scourge, a menace, a threat to stable governance. Haymarket also, however, “kindled widespread interest in anarchist personalities and ideas and did more to disseminate the anarchist message” than direct propaganda had done (Avrich, *Haymarket* 432). Haymarket represents a bizarre highpoint for American anarchism: a moment of violence caused by, attributed to, and/or circulating around anarchists portended the movement’s “fullest flowering” (Avrich, *Haymarket* 433).⁷¹ Certainly, most in the United States probably shared and never recanted de Cleyre’s initial reaction, but some converted to anarchism and many others at very least questioned the American government’s response to it. The Haymarket explosion signals a violent genesis of American anarchism’s peak, yet it is not so much the bomb that precipitates this rise as the “the unfairness of the trial [and] the savagery of the sentences”

71. Avrich notes that the period between “the late 1880s and the First World War” saw a surge in anarchist activity for which “Haymarket itself, to a notable extent, was responsible” (*Haymarket* 433).

(Avrich, *Haymarket* 433). In a propitious twist, anarchists found in the aftermath of Haymarket a perfect example of government's heavy-handed and misguided efforts to manage the populace. Neither the prosecution nor the media ever successfully established the true source of the bomb, so the farcical trial and unjust punishments resonated with many throughout the country. Strangely enough, the turning point for American anarchism begins through a literal explosion, yet the criticism of government occurs as anarchism is detached from the violence. If anarchists are *not* the perpetrators of violence, then government is unjust. Cause and effect are tangled by the multiple instantiations of violence, action, reaction: the prosecutors in the Haymarket case accuse the defendants of fomenting the actions, even if they did not make or throw the bomb; anarchists point to government as the cause of violence, both the bomb and the punishment of martyrs. Each serves to disconnect anarchists from violence and provides the backdrop for future acts and theorizations of anarchist violence.

A mere six years after the bomb exploded in Chicago, a self-professed anarchist marched into Henry Clay Frick's office, shot him, and reasserted the link between anarchism and violent political tactics. During the Homestead strike, Frick desired to "restart operations as soon as possible," so he requested Pinkerton troops to protect scab workers (Warren 85).⁷² On July 6, 1892, less than a week into the strike, these troops arrived:

The Pinkerton men arrived as expected; but they were spotted by a lookout They were followed and a warning was sounded in Homestead. For the last mile of the journey upriver, they were subjected to rifle fire from the banks. When they tried to land at the works, there was more firing, and they in turn began shooting After landing they had

72. Shortly after the strike began, Frick announced "that [Carnegie Steel Company] would no longer negotiate with the Amalgamated Association" (Schreiner 77). From the outset, he had no intention of negotiating in good faith and planned to break the union through strong-arm tactics.

to make their way for almost a mile through a crowd of strikers and their families and supporters. (Warren 85)

By the end of the day, seven workers were dead. Hearing this news in New York, Berkman was resolute: “‘Homestead!’ he exclaimed. ‘I must go to Homestead’ . . . We must bring [the workers] our great message and help them see that it was not only for the moment that they must strike, but for all time, for a free life, for anarchism” (Goldman, *Living My Life* 85). He was convinced that “the psychological moment for an *Attentat*” had arrived, that “a blow aimed at Frick would . . . call the attention of the whole world to the real cause behind the Homestead struggle” (Goldman, *Living My Life* 87). Berkman committed to kill Frick.

Seventeen days after the battle between Homestead’s workers and Frick’s Pinkerton strikebreakers, Berkman barged into Frick’s office with a revolver. He describes the *attentat*:

With a quick motion I draw the revolver. As I raise the weapon, I see Frick clutch with both hands the arm of the chair, and attempt to rise. I aim at his head . . . With a look of horror he quickly averts his face, as I pull the trigger. There is a flash, and the high-ceilinged room reverberates as with the booming of cannon. I hear a sharp, piercing cry, and see Frick on his knees, his head against the arm of the chair . . . “Dead?” I wonder. I must make sure . . . I take a few steps toward him, when suddenly the other man, whose presence I had quite forgotten, leaps upon me . . . I would not hurt him: I have no business with him. Suddenly I hear the cry, “Murder! Help!” My heart stands still as I realize that it is Frick shouting . . . I hurl the stranger aside and fire at the crawling figure of Frick. The man struck my hand,—I have missed! He grapples with me, and we wrestle across the room . . . I thrust the revolver against his side and aim at Frick, cowering behind the chair. I pull the trigger. There is a click—but no explosion! . . .

[S]uddenly something heavy strikes me on the back of the head I sink to the floor, vaguely conscious of the weapon slipping from my hands Painfully I strive to rise Not dead? . . . I crawl [toward Frick] I must get the dagger from my pocket—I have it! Repeatedly I strike with it at the legs of the man near the window. I hear Frick cry out in pain—there is much shouting and stamping—my arms are pulled and twisted, and I am lifted bodily from the floor . . . For an instant a strange feeling, as of shame comes over me; but the next moment I am filled with anger at this sentiment, so unworthy of a revolutionist. With defiant hatred I look [Frick] full in the face. (*Prison Memoirs* 33-35)

Beaten into submission, Berkman was dragged from the room, confident that his *attentat* “would strike terror into the soul of his class [as] the first terrorist attack in America” and that all would “know that an Anarchist committed the deed” (*Prison Memoirs* 59).

In one respect, Berkman’s assault was quite successful: his few short moments in Frick’s office suddenly brought anarchism to the center of the Homestead dispute and generated fury against anarchists not seen since Haymarket. The press began a “ferocious campaign” demanding “for the police to act, to round up ‘the instigators, Johann Most, Emma Goldman, and their ilk’” (Goldman, *Living My Life* 99). Haymarket increased interest in anarchism through a disconnection of anarchism from violence, but here was a self-professed enemy of all government shooting one of the country’s leading industrialists. At Homestead, anarchists—and consequently anarchism—were undoubtedly responsible for violence, even if that violence was a response to Frick’s own violent tactics (a fact lost on the public). For six years, Most and other anarchists had been able to theorize the relationship between anarchism and violence with a certain detachment: the Haymarket martyrs were perhaps not responsible for the bomb and the

United States seemed insulated from the violence seen in many European countries. Berkman enacted propaganda by deed—theorizing through action—and anarchists were forced to react.

Nine years later, a twenty-eight-year old, working-class Polish-American shook the United States again. First elected in 1896, William McKinley is remembered mostly for his intensification of American imperial presence: his “was the administration during which the United States made its diplomatic and military debut as a world power” (Phillips 1). During McKinley’s first term, the United States won the Spanish-American War and thus took control of Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines, and (temporarily) Cuba, and annexed Hawaii (Dobson 36).⁷³ McKinley combined this colonial acquisitiveness with political acumen, an uncanny ability to stay “just ahead of popular sentiment and [commit] himself just when it peaked”—he was a master of gauging, reacting to, and “influencing public opinion” (Dobson 24-25).⁷⁴ Still, while anarchists may have been angered by the expanding influence of American government around the world and by McKinley’s tendency more than others to take “literally his duty as a representative of the people,” they for the most part viewed him as they did every other president (Dobson 24). He was “the chief representative of our modern slavery” (Berkman, *Prison Memoirs* 417). For anarchists, the position—not the person inhabiting it—is most important, because the president embodies representational government (a vital distinction I return to below). Like Frick, McKinley happened to be the face of oppression, but as president he was the condensed symbol of American democracy. A strike at McKinley was a strike at American government.

73. In addition, after the 1899 Tripartite Convention, McKinley signed an executive order officially recognizing U.S. control of American Samoa (R. Hamilton 2:111).

74. McKinley’s marriage of aggressive foreign policy to remarkable political savvy led to his “drubb[ing] of William Jennings Bryan in the 1900 presidential election and made him “overwhelmingly popular” (R. Williams 159, 166).

On September 6, 1901 with McKinley “at the peak of his power,” Leon Czolgosz, who had waited all day in line with other attendees of the Pan-American Exposition for the chance to shake hands with the president, pulled out “an Iver Johnson .32-caliber pistol, which he fired twice into the President” (Rauchway 3):

The first shot sounded muffled like a small firecracker explosion. The President rose on his toes, clutching his chest, then started to pitch forward. A mushroom of smoke issued from the handkerchief [which Czolgosz used to conceal the gun]. Then came the second crackling report. For one long ghastly second no one moved. The long line froze. Those surrounding the President, so gay and confident a moment before, stood transfixed like the incredulous witnesses to a hideous dream. Smoke was still pluming from the assassin’s revolver Pale and grim, the assassin crouched before the President. There were no histrionics. No historic utterance fell from his lips Czolgosz was grimly silent and efficient He steadied his revolver at a 45 degree angle, ready to pump a third shot into the President’s helpless body [but two men] acted almost simultaneously [bringing] the assassin crashing to the floor [while at] the same moment [a bystander] swung his giant fist connecting solidly with the assassin’s skull. (Johns 94)⁷⁵

Soon, the press spread Czolgosz’s purported confession: “I am an anarchist I fully understood what I was doing when I shot the President. I realized that I was sacrificing my life” (Rauchway 19). Or, as alternately and more sensationally reported, “I am an Anarchist—a disciple of Emma Goldman. Her words set me on fire” (Johns 123).

Again, with a few quick gunshots, the link between anarchism and violence was

75. At that moment, McKinley was still alive and no one yet knew why Czolgosz had shot him. A week later, “[McKinley’s] heart failed to respond to stimulation . . . in the evening he lost consciousness,” and early on September 14, he died (Briggs 239). Czolgosz was convicted and sentenced within two weeks of McKinley’s death. On October 29, he was executed.

reasserted. Anarchists and the popular press debated the extent of Czolgosz's anti-government political beliefs and activities, but because he professed to be an anarchist, there was a widespread attribution of his violent act to anarchism's teachings and a consequent increase in anti-anarchist sentiment. Several months before the assassination, Czolgosz heard Goldman give a speech in which "she gave a rundown of the recent violent measures enacted by Anarchists, obliquely praising them" (Johns 35). He sought out anarchists, asking "naive questions about the existence of secret revolutionary societies" (Baginski 6). These queries led those in the movement "not [to] take him seriously," and then to print a warning in *Free Society* five days before the assassination suggesting that Czolgosz was a spy (Johns 41-42). For practical reasons, anarchists tried to distance *themselves* from Czolgosz in the months following his *attentat*, but they went farther by distancing Czolgosz from *anarchism*. Over one hundred years later, though, it seems clear that while Czolgosz was not intimate with the era's prominent anarchists nor affiliated with any anarchist organizations, he did—like many other anarchists—progress from socialism to anarchism, he did wish to learn more about the movements, its theory, and its practices, and he did act on his political beliefs in a violent manner. In other words, Czolgosz's act has more in common with Berkman's *attentat* than with Haymarket: in each case a self-professed anarchist enacted violence for political reasons—there is no question about the immediate source of the violence. These two shootings confirmed the public image of violent anarchism.⁷⁶ Both acts also required anarchists to reconsider and rearticulate the role of violence. McKinley's assassination appears quintessentially anarchist: Czolgosz struck at the representative head of democracy. Yet neither *attentat* was universally embraced by anarchists.

76. During the next two decades, acts of violence occurring around labor unrest were almost always attributed to anarchists. The Union Square bomb, the *L.A. Times* explosion, and the San Francisco Preparedness Day bomb in 1916 all circulated around anarchists, even though none were linked conclusively to the movement.

Anarchists equivocated, disavowing the seemingly logical extension of their ideas. When confronted by realized violence, they shunned those who theorized through action rather than words. These responses illuminate the structural cause of anarchism's ambivalence toward violence: Berkman and Czolgosz acted in the name of anarchism, yet each saw their act transformed by representation.

Propaganda Indeed: Anarchists and the Representational Mandate

Immediately after Berkman's *attentat*, Goldman attended a meeting at which Most expressed doubt about reports of Berkman's act: "It is probably the usual newspaper fake. It must be some crank or perhaps Frick's own man, to create sympathy for him. Frick knows that public opinion is against him. He needs something to turn the tide in his favour" (Goldman, *Living My Life* 1:97). Goldman was incensed by Most's skepticism. Once he could no longer write off the attack as a fake, Most continued to demean both Berkman and to distance anarchism from the *attentat*: "In a country where we are so poorly represented and so little understood as in America, we simply cannot afford the luxury of assassination . . . Berkman [sic] . . . has stimulate[d] the most idiotic prejudices of idiotic Americans and thereby awakene[d] . . . the inevitable campaign against Anarchists" (qtd. in Falk, *Made for America* 119n2). Finally, the international wave of individual acts of violence had come to the United States and Most, "the world's leading terrorist was deriding an act of terrorism" (Trautmann 182). He repeatedly insisted that "America is not the place for assassinations" and that Berkman damaged the anarchist cause through his actions (Goyens 131). The anarchist movement was divided, with many "remain[ing] loyal to Most and violently oppos[ing] his critics" (Nomad 295). Others, like Goldman, were furious: "Most, whom I had heard scores of

times call for acts of violence, who had gone to prison in England for his glorification of tyrannicide—Most, the incarnation of defiance and revolt, now deliberately repudiated the *Tat!*” (*Living My Life* 1:105). The dispute climaxed as Goldman rose during one of Most’s lectures and challenged him to prove his accusations against Berkman. She “then pulled out [a horse]whip and leaped towards him. Repeatedly [lashing] him across the face and neck, then [breaking] the whip over [her] knee and [throwing] the pieces at him” (*Living My Life* 1:105).

The competing responses to Berkman’s actions, however, might be remembered differently if it were not for Goldman’s subsequent rise to prominence and Berkman’s own writings. For, many in the anarchist movement agreed with Most. Tucker refused to “praise” Berkman, claiming “it would be comparatively easy to dispose of the Fricks, if it were not for the Berkman. The latter are the hope of the former. The strength of the Fricks rests on violence; now it is to violence that the Berkman appeal” (“Save Labor” 2). *Egoism* too distanced itself from Berkman: “As for Frick and Berkman, I have no use of either . . . Berkman, electing himself where he is not nominated, punishes the tyrant and suffers the consequences of his acts himself, and of the two, is the most desirable citizen, although neither is desirable” (“My Teaspoon” 2).⁷⁷ Certainly others praised Berkman, including *Solidarity*, which depicted him as a Christ figure: “You, workmen, meditate this lesson. Berkman was your friend. He gave his life for you . . . He stood alone taking on himself the whole burden of responsibility, as Christ is said to have taken on himself the sins of mankind” (“Sentenced!” 1). Goldman, however, largely stood alone in her vociferous attacks on Most and her unrelenting defense of Berkman, and only her prominence allowed this dispute to be perceived as “the greatest scandal in the history of

77. The language of this repudiation is telling. Berkman is criticized for “electing” himself and for not being a desirable “citizen.” Both terms evoke and reinforce democratic governmental mechanisms and fault Berkman—whose words and actions stand against American government—for not living up to them. *Egoism*’s take on Berkman’s *attentat* serves as example of the collective ambivalence of anarchists toward violence—one that reveals an uncritical acceptance of that against which Berkman and others were fighting.

Anarchism” (Nomad 295).

Goldman read in Most’s response a “change of position regarding propaganda by deed,” a shift that divided anarchists “into two inimical camps,” but his disavowal of the *attentat* neither signals a shift nor does it contradict other anarchist responses to violence in 1892 or the following few decades (*Living My Life* 1:106). In retrospect, Goldman’s defense of Berkman is the remarkable outlier. It is one of the only instances in which a major American anarchist claimed a violent act. But her desperate effort to stand by Berkman should not be interpreted as a wholesale embrace of violent political tactics or even an unequivocal endorsement of the attack on Frick. Goldman’s defense instead is one part personal—she loved and revered him—and one part residue of the anarchist ambivalence toward violence. Very often it appeared as character defense (and a simultaneous attack on Most) and, when she did defend the act, her language is evasive: “The heroically brave attempt of Comrade Berkman to liberate human society from a beast” (“Attention!” 123). Note the focus on the nature of the attempt itself (“brave”) and the act’s intent (the removal of a “beast”). Neither addresses the specifically anarchist nature of the act or challenges Most’s contention that the *attentat* damaged the movement. Elsewhere, Goldman attacks Most for not “using this act for propaganda purposes,” which signals the real point of debate (“Submitted” 121). Goldman chastises Most less for disavowing violence than she does for his apparent rejection of propaganda by deed: he betrays anarchism by failing to realize the propagandistic possibilities of Berkman’s *attentat*. In the internal anarchist debate around the attempt on Frick, the *attentat*’s target becomes irrelevant, as does the outcome of the violence. The disagreement between Most and Goldman reveals the relationship of anarchism to violence as always a question of propaganda and thus begins to demonstrate anarchist ambivalence’s structural cause: propaganda adheres to the representational mandate, while

violence does not.

While this debate raged, Berkman went to trial, was convicted, and was sentenced to 22 years in prison. His *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* mirrors the core of Most's and Goldman's dispute: the *attentat* should be measured by its propagandistic effects. Written during the fourteen years Berkman served (1892-1906) and published in 1912, the *Prison Memoirs* include a narrative of Berkman's first few weeks in prison. During this period, he learned Frick survived the attack, realized the various ways in which his act was being misunderstood, and prepared for his trial, when he would have an opportunity to explain the reasons for the *attentat*. At first, Berkman experiences a sense of failure upon learning Frick survived:

If Frick had died, Carnegie would have hastened to settle with the strikers. . . . With the elimination of Frick, the responsibility for Homestead conditions would rest with Carnegie. To support his role as the friend of labor, he must needs terminate the sanguinary struggle. Such a development of affairs would have greatly advanced the Anarchist propaganda. However some may condemn my act, the workers could not be blind to the actual situation, and the practical effects of Frick's death. But his recovery. . .
(67)

Very quickly, however, his self-policing image of the ideal revolutionist forces him to reject such a simplified measure of success:

As if the mere death of Frick was my object! The very thought is impossible, insulting The insignificant reptile, Frick,—as if the mere man were worth a terroristic effort. I aimed at the many-headed hydra whose visible representative was Frick. The Homestead developments had given him temporary prominence That alone had made him worthy of the revolutionist's attention. (58)

Berkman convinces himself that Frick's survival is immaterial—ultimately claiming that “the same results may occur whether Frick lives or dies”—and that the anarchist cause can still be served through propaganda (67). After the fact, he eliminates the possibility of any real effects from Frick's death, thus making the *attentat* purely propaganda. Berkman's internal struggle brings him to the same place as the Goldman-Most debate: can his actions be used for anarchist propaganda?

As the act and its immediate result become incidental, Berkman prepares himself to interpret the act for the outside world. Even in prison, when he tries to explain the meaning of his act to his working-class fellow prisoners, he is thwarted: “Why can't they understand the motives that prompted my act? Their manner of pitying condescension is aggravating. My attempted explanation they evidently considered a waste of effort” (50-51). Out of Berkman's initial inability to shape others' reaction to the *attentat*, emerges a critical detachment of propaganda and the deed: “To be sure, an *Attentat* on a Frick is in itself splendid propaganda. It combines the value of example with terroristic effect. But very much depends upon my explanation. It offers me a rare opportunity for a broader agitation of our ideas. The comrades outside will also use my act for propaganda. The People misunderstand us . . . they must be enlightened” (57). He still clings to the propagandistic value of the deed itself, but admits that the propaganda by word that follows the deed is crucial. Berkman realizes that “The People”—for whom he attacked Frick—“may fail to comprehend” the attack's meaning (59). Thus, his anger toward Most arises from the negative effect his repudiation will have on propaganda: “He will minimize the effect of my act, perhaps paralyze its propagandistic influence altogether” (85).

Strangely, the agential violent actor conforms his interpretation of his own violent act to the anarchist discourse outside the prison, in which Most, Goldman, and others discuss its

consequences with relative impunity. Perhaps we can explain away Berkman's attitude as a strained response to failure, but in any case, he translates the deed into propaganda and thus elucidates the intersection of anarchist ambivalence toward violence and the theoretical construct of propaganda by deed. The *attentat* as an act has real consequences (bullets entered Frick's body; a directly oppressive and willfully violent industrialist was nearly killed), but the anarchist stance toward violence always theorizes away from them: generally, through propaganda by deed, the deed is always sublimated to propaganda; specifically, Berkman's attack on Frick is further sublimated to propaganda after the deed. The anarchist ambivalence toward violence is a byproduct of this sublimation of violent deeds to propaganda.⁷⁸

In his *Prison Memoirs*, Berkman effectively relegates violence to a minor occurrence that has no independent meaning, but is merely the genesis of an opportunity for propaganda, and, in this case, has not successfully educated workers. The work implies that violence's role within American anarchism is to be determined by its propagandistic effect, which produces self-reinforcing, yet fundamentally undercutting logic: only violence that advances anarchism is anarchist. This circular reasoning captures the sublimation of violent deeds to propaganda, explains the anarchist ambivalence toward violence and, functions as an anarchist aporia, because it conforms to democracy's representational mandate: only violence that is represented (turned into propaganda) fits within American democracy, but anarchist violence is inherently

78. Berkman conceptualizes his own act as the creation of an "opportunity," rather than a consequential anarchist act in itself: "my comrades . . . will use the opportunity to the utmost to shed light on the questions involved" (59); and again, "[Frick] lives. Of course, it does not really matter. The opportunity for propaganda is there" (97). Berkman finds failure only in the anarchist inability to propagandize through his act: "Oh, if labor would realize the significance of my deed, if the worker would understand my aims and motives, he could be aroused to strong protest, perhaps to active demand But when, when will the dullard realize things? When will he open his eyes? Blind to his own slavery and degradation, can I expect him to perceive the wrong suffered by others?" (122). Presumably, the worker would be no less ignorant if Frick had died.

anti-representational. While violence may seem a poor alternative to other political acts, Berkman's *attentat* elucidates the limits of political possibility as anarchist efforts to challenge government are filtered through the drive to structure all politics as representation. This unifying logic of democracy produces the anarchist paradox and gestures toward the difficulty of positing *any* alternative to extant forms of U.S. government. One might propose changes *within* the nation, but even literal explosions are quickly circumscribed by the logic of representation: any substantive threat—whether the threat involves bullets and bombs or simply a fundamental revision of democracy's re-presentation of its citizens—can be reduced, neutered, or redirected through representation. This paradox becomes clearer in the wake of McKinley's assassination.

Czolgosz's attack on McKinley generated "a wave of hysteria worse than the one after Haymarket, as the assassin's victim was not a local policeman but the President of the United States" (Avrich, *American Anarchist* 133-134). Anarchists throughout the country were arrested and anyone "expressing the least sympathy with Czolgosz" ran the risk of being "tarred and feathered or threatened with lynching" (Avrich, *American Anarchist* 134). The most significant act of violence ever attributed to an American anarchist simultaneously called for anarchists to locate Czolgosz's violence within anarchist theory and produced an environment in which the slightest praise of Czolgosz might be met with violent reaction. The anti-anarchist rage, however, does not fully explain anarchist responses to McKinley's assassination, for many did express sympathy for Czolgosz (more so as time passed).⁷⁹ The nature of their sympathy and their

79. A handful of anarchists embraced Czolgosz's *attentat*. *Fired by the Ideal: Italian-American Anarchist Responses to Czolgosz's Killing of McKinley* (2002) translates and reprints a collection of several Italian anarchist responses (first printed in Spring Valley, Illinois's *L'Aurora*, an Italian anarchist periodical) from the few years following the assassination. Some duplicate de Cleyre's causal focus and the common complaint of post-assassination harassment targeting all anarchists, but others praise Czolgosz in no uncertain terms: "Leon Czolgosz is an anarchist. That much is certain . . . [he] reacte[d] in the most effective manner against the head of a government to the tyrannical impositions of which he was obliged to submit" (Ciancabilla 12-13). *Fired by the Ideal* reveals several facets of the anarchist reaction to McKinley's assassination. First, it offers a glimpse of the underground response—few anarchists were willing to express any support for Czolgosz. Second, it demonstrates a

evaluation of the act confirms the anarchist ambivalence toward violence and gestures toward its cause.

Ironically, Most, who nine years earlier disavowed assassination as a legitimate tool of American anarchism, was one of the first anarchists to be harassed following Czolgosz's attack on McKinley. On the day of the shooting, *Freiheit* "contained an article on the general question of tyrannicide by the old revolutionary Carl Heinsen, then dead for a number of years" (Goldman, "Johann Most" 34). The timing was unfortunate for Most, who a week later was "arrested . . . and put in prison once again" (Goyens 101). Most's arrest for the publication of a provocative, yet unrelated article demonstrates the immediate anti-anarchist outrage: the police sent a man to jail who already had rejected individual acts of political violence in the United States, which "further convinced him that terrorism was wrong and counterproductive" (Goyens 101). De Cleyre, on the other hand, did not condemn Berkman and was confronted with the need to address a concrete act of anarchist violence for the first time in 1901.

Like many anarchists, de Cleyre's initial reaction was subdued. She maintained a low profile in Philadelphia, not speaking publicly about Czolgosz and focusing primarily on the aftermath of the assassination—the anti-anarchist fervor and her suddenly harassed friends, rather than on the assassination's relevance to anarchism—in her private correspondence. During McKinley's presidency, de Cleyre had "sharply criticized [his] administration for its expansionist policies," yet "she regretted Czolgosz's action" (Avrich, *American Anarchist* 137). It was not

degree of disagreement amongst anarchists. The extent of this disagreement, however, is unclear. The most visible anarchists adhere to their structuring ambivalence, as do some of these laudatory responses. Perhaps the public gaze—which, for example, Goldman was subject to more strongly than Spring Valley's Italian anarchists—affects the shape and degree of ambivalence. Third, even in their most effusive moments, the Italian anarchists who praise Czolgosz return to the *attentat*'s propagandistic effect: the "*attentat* does a lot more to focus attention upon the mistakes of the authorities and the drawbacks to the calling of king or president than the votes cast against them or the boos from the populace" (Ciancabilla 13). Ultimately, those willing to cheer McKinley's death still measure its value in terms of propaganda.

until 1907, however, that she addressed the assassination at length. Published a few months before de Cleyre insisted “Anarchism has nothing in common with violence,” “McKinley’s Assassination from the Anarchist Standpoint” repeats some of her frequent themes: violence is caused by government; desperate individuals react violently to government; these individuals are worthy of pity. De Cleyre recognizes McKinley’s centrality to American governmental violence, excoriating him as “the representative of wealth and greed and power”: “Upon his hand was the ‘damned spot’ of official murder, the blood of the Filipinos, whom he, in pursuance of the capitalist policy of Imperialism had sentenced to death. Upon his head falls the curse of all the workers against whom, time and time again, he threw the strength of his official power” (302). She sets up the logic of government violence once again: government is violence, thus government spawns violence.

De Cleyre, however, does not endorse Czolgosz’s act. Instead, she pities this “naive and devoted soul,” whose death is parallel to McKinley’s (303). She feels for Czolgosz and understands his action (it is explained by social conditions—he simply reacts), but does not see it as anarchist, because “not Anarchism, but the state of society . . . is responsible for the death of both Czolgosz and McKinley” (301). Her entire essay on McKinley’s assassination explains why an individual might be driven to violence, but not specifically why an anarchist might be driven—not by madness, but by anarchism itself—to kill McKinley. By constructing a singular logic that explains both deaths, de Cleyre places McKinley and Czolgosz in the same position. Both are victims of government. Of course, this conflation erases any distinction between the embodied head of American representative democracy and his self-professed anarchist assassin and totally removes anarchism from the equation. She may pity Czolgosz and implore others to see the cause of his act, but the meaning of his action is posited as a direct result of government,

as a recapitulation of de Cleyre's anti-McKinley rhetoric, not by the teachings of anarchism. De Cleyre entirely sidesteps the anarchist nature of the assassination, thus safely returning to the ground of *theoretical* violence. The "anarchist standpoint" relies on logical and rhetorical strategies that translate the violent action into propaganda (the dissemination—or representation—of anarchist theory) by completely separating violence (the very real killing of one man by another) from anarchism.

At the time of McKinley's assassination, Most no longer supported anarchist violence; after it de Cleyre was relatively immune from harassment. Goldman and Berkman, on the other hand, were affected by Czolgosz's act in a way many were not. Berkman had to respond to an *attentat* much like his own (but successful: McKinley died), while Goldman became a magnet for anti-anarchist vitriol after Czolgosz and the popular press implicated her in the assassination. Newspapers suggested that Goldman was Czolgosz's co-conspirator and from that moment forward "her life would forever be entwined with Czolgosz's act; the outside world, which may not have known her name before, would now associate Goldman with acts of terror" (Falk, "Forging" 76). Police nationwide sought her arrest and within a week she was taken into custody in Chicago and questioned for five days before the Chief of Police became convinced of her innocence: "'Unless you're a very clever actress, you are certainly innocent. I think you are innocent, and I am going to do my part to help you out'" (Goldman, *Living My Life* 1:302). Investigators in Buffalo were unable to gather any grounds for extradition and eventually Goldman was released without charge. There was no direct link between her and McKinley's assassination, "but, even in the absence of any formal establishment of guilt by association or official punishment," she remained linked to McKinley's assassination and returned to the subject in many of her writings over the next decade (Falk, "Forging" 76).

Most of Goldman's comments about Czolgosz resemble de Cleyre's. She pities him—"he was a soul in pain, a soul that could find no abode in this cruel world of ours"—and sees in his act evidence that government produces violent reaction ("Tragedy" 476). She also, however, refers to Czolgosz's act as an *attentat*, granting it a political significance most anarchists denied, a meaning that Goldman struggled to define (*Living My Life* 1:312). In 1902, Goldman refuses to label Czolgosz's *attentat* as "unanarchistic," because "Anarchism claims the right of Defense against Invasion and Aggression of every shape and form and no one . . . can deny that those in Power are the Invaders [sic], and McKinley certainly was one of them" ("To Walter Channing" 95). In the same letter though, she claims "not [to] know whether Czolgogz [sic] was an Anarchist" (95). Here, she repeats her theoretical stance toward defensive violence, yet stops short of claiming the assassination for anarchists. Goldman, who consistently chides those anarchists who write Czolgosz off as a madman, does not locate his violence as part of anarchism; she merely asserts that it is not contrary to anarchism. Later, she continues to question Czolgosz's anarchist credentials: "no evidence exists to indicate that Czolgosz ever called himself an Anarchist No living soul ever heard Czolgosz make that statement, nor is there a single written word to prove that the boy ever breathed the accusations. Nothing but ignorance and insane hysteria" (*Anarchism* 89).

Goldman accepts the political intent of Czolgosz's act by calling it an *attentat*, but it is located in a political nonspace: neither anarchist nor unanarchist; directed against government, yet not properly part of anti-government politics. Goldman's negative definition is a magnified example of the anarchist ambivalence toward violence and evidence of the structuring representational mandate. Her effort to theorize *through* actual violence relegates the act to a political void: self-defensive violence against government enacts the theory of violence espoused

by Most, de Cleyre, Goldman, and Berkman, yet still is not anarchist violence. Goldman obscures, avoids, rejects the connection between anarchism and violence by subtly disavowing Czolgosz's *attentat* because *he does not represent anarchism*. Czolgosz "has wounded government in its most vital spot," so why not embrace his act as a legitimately anarchist attack on government ("Tragedy" 477)? Because anarchism must consolidate itself to have any meaning within representational government. It must be a tangible political entity to which the populace (democracy's ideal governing force) can look. It must be represented. Through no effort of her own, Goldman, within a few short days became the public face of American anarchism. Whether as a punching bag for sensationalistic media or simply as the most prominent available anarchist, Goldman suddenly represented the anarchist response to Czolgosz's violence.

From Haymarket until McKinley's assassination, the anarchist ambivalence toward violence manifested itself through individually and collectively conflicting rhetoric, logic, and action. As anarchists attempted to represent the nature of their political philosophy, anarchist, violence served a dual, paradoxical role as a pillar of their theory (propaganda by deed) and as a specter haunting both anarchists (who distanced themselves from actual violence) and the nation as a whole. To have meaning within American political discourse, anarchism can illuminate the violence inherent to government, can preach defensive violence's validity, but cannot represent real violence. Berkman's act, and to a much greater extent, McKinley's assassination, had the effect of forcing anarchism to represent itself in relation to concrete acts of violence. Ironically, the death of American government's representative leader turned the eyes of the nation toward anarchism and thus established Goldman as a representative leader analogous to McKinley. Goldman might reject this position, but for the majority of Americans, she represents anarchism.

Because American democracy structures all government (rhetoric, politics, discourse) as representational, the anti-representational violent act has no meaning until it is represented. And, when pressed to represent, Goldman continues the anarchist ambivalence in an extreme manner, by making Czolgosz's act a political absence. Anarchism represents and violence is excluded. Thus, the anarchist ambivalence must be understood as the rhetorical byproduct of efforts to maintain anarchism within American political discourse, which produces the anarchist aporia: representing anti-representational politics. McKinley's assassination heightens the necessity of representation, representing anarchism, and distancing anarchism from anti-representational acts. Berkman's reaction to the assassination from prison confirms the central cause of ambivalence and defines propaganda by deed as the proper theoretical and actual stance of anarchism toward violence within representational-governmental discourse.⁸⁰

Berkman's analysis (1928) directly addresses the comparative value of the two *attentats*. Since he considered the matter of Frick's survival inconsequential, Czolgosz's success in killing his target is irrelevant. The measure of the act comes from its propagandistic effects:

As to Leon, I know very well that in my prison letter I told you that I understood the reasons that compelled him to the act, but that the usefulness, socially, of the act is quite

80 When Most repudiated Berkman's *attentat*, Goldman was furious, but when Berkman questioned Czolgosz's attack on McKinley, she was heartbroken:

How can I forget your stand on Czolgosz's act? It was a greater blow to me than anything that happened during that terrible period. It affected me more than Most's stand on your act. After all, Most had only talked about violence. You had used it and went to prison for it. You had known the agony of repudiation, condemnation, and isolation. That you could sit down and cold-bloodedly analyze an act of violence nine years after your own, actually implying that your act was more important, was the most terrible thing I had yet experienced. (Goldman, "To Alexander Berkman" 107)

Nearly three decades after McKinley's assassination, Goldman considers Berkman's response hypocritical, but his refusal to endorse Czolgosz's *attentat* is another instantiation of the anarchist ambivalence. And Goldman's frustration with Berkman arises more from the ambivalence than it does from an endorsement of the act, because "[a]cts of violence, except as demonstrations of a sensitive soul, have proven utterly useless" ("To Alexander Berkman" 107). She defends Czolgosz, but not the attack, and expresses disgust with Berkman because he focuses exclusively on violence (leaving Czolgosz's "sensitive soul" out of the question). She insists that "to say that a political act is less valuable [is] nonsense" ("To Alexander Berkman" 107).

another matter. I hold the same opinion now. That is why we do not condemn any such acts, because we understand the reasons. But that does not mean that we cannot form our opinion about its social effects and usefulness [A] terroristic act should take in consideration the effect on the public mind—not on comrades So I think that my act, not because it was mine, but because it was one easy to understand by most people, was more useful than Leon's. Though I am in general now not in favor of terroristic tactics [t]hat acts of violence accomplish nothing, I do not agree at all. ("To Emma Goldman 109).

John William Ward argues that Berkman introduces "an element of pragmatic political calculation" that he did not use to evaluate his own *attentat* (258). Ward, like most other scholars, however, fails to recognize the nature of Berkman's political calculations. In this short letter, Berkman contends that violence does accomplish something, then defines the criteria by which individual acts should be judged: the extent to which the public can understand and be affected by the act. McKinley's death means nothing in itself and the act is reduced to propaganda. Berkman's apparent hypocrisy is in fact an extreme instance of the anarchist ambivalence toward violence—his *attentat* is good; Czolgosz's is not—but his explanation illuminates the ambivalence's cause:

I do not believe that this deed was terroristic; and I doubt whether it was educational because the social necessity was not manifest In Russia, where political oppression is popularly felt, such a deed would be of great value. But the scheme of political subjection is more subtle in America. And though McKinley was the chief representative of our modern slavery, he could not be considered in the light of a direct and immediate enemy of the people; while in an absolutism, the autocrat is visible and tangible. The real

despotism of republican institutions is far deeper, more insidious, because it rests on the popular delusion of self-government and independence. That is the subtle source of democratic tyranny, and, as such, it cannot be reached with a bullet” (*Prison Memoirs* 416-417)

Berkman’s ambivalence emerges from the unique structure of American governance. McKinley is only the embodied representation of oppression, not its cause. Under representative democracy, an attack on the representative head is meaningless as violence, but Berkman goes farther by evaluating the propagandistic value. In short, his response to Czolgosz’s *attentat* immediately discounts the violence, because in the United States, the source of government oppression cannot be touched by violence, then continues to evaluate all acts of violence on their ability to represent anarchism.

Berkman defines his own *attentat* as an attempt “to express, by my deed, my sentiments toward the existing system of legal oppression and industrial despotism . . . to give it a blow—rather morally than physically—this was the real purpose and signification of my act” (qtd. in Falk, *Made For America* 132-133n3). For him, the “signification” of his act—its “moral”—constitutes its value. He evaluates Czolgosz’s act by the same criteria. Both cases, however, entirely eliminate violence. Berkman does not conceptualize the American *attentat* as a real attack on the embodied representation of governance. The nature of democratic government requires that anarchism’s violence appear as a representational, representable, representative attack on democracy. In other words, Berkman reveals that the American version of propaganda by deed is the anarchist strategy for making anarchism knowable within the American political discourse. It cuts across the anarchist ambivalence, simultaneously bridging the divide between violent acts and their representation and structuring anarchist representations of violence to fit

within the dominant American governmental rationality.⁸¹

Propaganda—the representation of anarchism as one amongst a variety of competing political philosophies—adheres to the representational mandate. Violence does not. Anarchist ambivalence toward violence reveals the central paradox of anti-government politics: to challenge democracy’s defining representational logic, anarchists must transform their politics—even those acts that exceed the logic of representation—into representation. This logic reinforces democracy by circumscribing all political action: any substantive threat that does not fit within the discourse (i.e., that does not re-present both the subjects of governance and a recognizable, unified political philosophy) is simply *not politics*. Ultimately, anarchist violence elucidates the threshold of democracy’s potential by showing that some acts, positions, beliefs are preemptively excluded. Only by conforming these radical political ideologies to the logic of representation can they appear. Though we may still question the efficacy and the morality of Berkman’s and Czolgosz’s violent acts, these *attentats* manifest the lingering questions of American democracy: to what extent can the full breadth of political subjects be re-presented by governance? What are the consequences of exclusion? And, how can radically progressive political movements imagine something beyond democracy—beyond even the utopian vision of complete and identical representation that anarchism rejects?

81. Falk unintentionally gestures toward the representational mandate while discussing Goldman: “Despite the European view that advocacy of violence (the subject of the day) and advocacy of free expression (a concept central to Americans that Europeans often found baffling) represented diametrically opposed poles of political thought, in Goldman’s anarchist lexicon, these paradoxical positions were absolutely consistent” (Falk, “Raising” 60). In the United States, we see a collapse of the two issues into one that results from the nature of violence and its relationship to anarchism: representative politics produce the necessity of representing anarchism, thus erasing the distance between the right to represent about violence and its advocacy. In other words, Goldman speaks from the American anarchist position, which sees no distinction between advocating violence and the right to free expression, because violence is always translated into representation. Both fit perfectly within the American representational governmentality.

Interlude
Anti-Radical Legislation and the “Death” of American Anarchism

I looked at my watch. It was 4:20 A.M. on the day of our Lord, December 21, 1919. On the deck above us I could hear the men tramping up and down in the wintry blast. I felt dizzy, visioning a transport of politicals doomed to Siberia, the *étape* of former Russian days. Russia of the past rose before me and I saw the revolutionary martyrs being driven into exile. But no, it was New York, it was America, the land of liberty! Through the port-hole I could see the great city receding into the distance, its sky-line of buildings traceable by their rearing heads. It was my beloved city, the metropolis of the New World. It was America, indeed, America repeating the terrible scenes of tsarist Russia! I glanced up—the Statute of Liberty!

--Emma Goldman (*Living My Life*)

The two decades following McKinley’s assassination were punctuated by acts of violence circulating around and attributed to anarchists. The period was also marked by several anti-anarchist laws. Occasional violence and persistent government efforts to manage the anarchist threat exist in logical symbiosis: according to de Cleyre and others, government spawns violent reaction; violent acts in turn produce government response. Each major act of violence forced anarchists to restate their stance toward violence. After McKinley’s assassination, fewer anarchists vocally espoused violence even in theory, but the anarchist ambivalence continues to appear throughout the 1900s and 1910s. The Union Square bombing (1908), the *Los Angeles Times* explosion (1910), and the San Francisco Preparedness Day (1916) attack all raised the specter of anarchist violence—even when in no way linked to anarchists—because of the popular conflation of anarchism and violence.

Selig Silverstein blew himself up in Union Square and though he “insisted he’d acted alone . . . the police and the newspapers assumed otherwise” (Rasenberger 94). Again, police harassed anarchists whose only connection to the bomb was political affinity with the bomber. Four years later, an explosion at the *Los Angeles Times* building “sent twenty *Times* employees

to their death” (Robinson 3). James B. and John J. McNamara were later convicted for the act and for “dynamiting the Llewellyn Iron Works in Los Angeles, a follow-up job” (Robinson 6). Neither man claimed to be an anarchist, yet anarchists became the target of popular outrage, with the lead investigator claiming that the bombing was part of “a war with dynamite . . . a war of Anarchy against the established form of government of this country. It was masked under the cause of Labor” (Burns 11).⁸² Even violence directly attributed to other radical political movements was linked to anarchism. And then, at 2:04 P.M. on July 22, 1916 a bomb exploded along the Preparedness Day parade route in San Francisco, “scatter[ing] bodies, dropping them in bleeding mounds for more than 50 feet” (Gentry 18). Within the week, Warren Billings, Tom Mooney, and others were arrested for the crime. Mooney had been interested in socialist theory and involved with socialist organizations for nearly a decade prior to 1916: “He had found answers to life’s problems in Socialist literature” (E. Ward 58). Billings was perhaps more radical—from the outset his labor activities were associated with the IWW—but like Mooney, he was more socialist than anarchist (Gentry 52-53). No matter, because Goldman and Berkman, who had known Mooney prior to the explosion, knew “that it wouldn’t be long before [investigators] attempted to connect them with the crime” (Gentry 116). Whenever violence occurred, the public “turned to outrage” and called for “vengeful justice [to] be done” (E. Ward 14). They were not alone, but anarchists, whether responsible for violent acts or not, were almost

82. John J. McNamara was “the secretary-treasurer of the International Union of Bridge and Structural Iron Workers” and, according to Burns, both men “were pictured as martyrs” by many socialists (12). Of course, as lead investigator, Burns was disgusted with any support for the McNamaras. Nevertheless, the two accused men enjoyed widespread support from socialists throughout the country. For example, Samuel Gompers published *The McNamara Case*, in which he claimed that “to the trade union world and to the mass of sympathizers with trade unionism, the probabilities that any trade unionists had had anything to do with the explosion had become less and less” (11). The McNamaras undoubtedly were socialists and just as surely were not anarchists. Socialist support for their cause centered around their innocence—had they been anarchists or had they admitted to the bombing, they likely would not have enjoyed such widespread support (socialists did not set up a defense fund for Czolgosz). The link between this specific violent act and anarchism came about solely through extant notions of anarchism and violence: if violence occurs, anarchism must be to blame.

always one sight of this vengeance.

The anarchist response to these multiple violent acts predictably was confused. In the latter two instances, anarchists pointed out that the violent subjects were not anarchists, even though there was no real need to disavow them, because none claimed to be anarchist. According to Goldman, “though [the McNamaras were] denounced by the press as anarchists, [they] were, as a matter of fact, good Roman Catholics and members of the conservative American Federation of Labor” (*Living My Life* 1:479). By 1910, anarchism’s culpability was indirect—it was implicated without question, because it was permanently linked to violence by Berkman and Czolgosz. Regardless, anarchists typically joined the broader labor movement, which sought to prove the accused men’s innocence.⁸³ The response to violence erroneously attributed to anarchists was no different than their response to violent acts committed by self-professed anarchists: create distance from the act; allow for the theoretical possibility of violence; reject or avoid comment about the value of specific acts.

As usual, de Cleyre looked to the violence’s logical causation, “not condemning the perpetrators but attempting to understand the power dynamics involved” (DeLamotte 64). Her “Direct Action,” in which she laments the circumscription of the phrase, was written largely in response to the McNamara brothers. Before she dismisses the power of violent acts, de Cleyre takes issue with one socialist who contrasts John Brown’s revolt with the McNamaras “secret and murderous methods,” only to argue that Brown used the same methods (278-279). She parallels the two events, yet avoids comment on either. She does not defend the McNamaras, but responds to their violence just as she does to Czolgosz: social conditions structure both the

83. Or, at very least, to eliminate responsibility for deaths. During the McNamara trial, the two brothers “changed their innocent plea to guilty” hoping for acquittal or lesser punishment because they “intended no loss of life” (DeLamotte 64). I address the fixation with innocence and guilt at great length in the following chapter.

expression and method of violence, so the violence itself (as a political strategy) is beside the point.⁸⁴

In *The Blast*, Berkman rails against “labor leaders and their editors [who] repudiat[e] the McNamaras . . . on the plea that Organized Labor cannot ‘afford to encourage violence’” (“Resistance” 2). He does not, however, endorse the *L.A. Times* bombing—his anger comes from labor’s unwillingness to defend the McNamaras. He disdains labor’s rhetorical timidity. Berkman reiterates one half of the anarchist ambivalence (propaganda by deed or the theoretical advocacy of violence), ignoring the other (real violence or even a comment on its). After the Preparedness Day explosion, Berkman echoes de Cleyre, contending that violence is “an act resulting from the very evils which [anarchism] seeks to abolish” (“Violence” 142). These various explosions and anarchists’ reactions to them do not differ significantly from those before 1901: their ambivalence continues, because, especially in the wake of McKinley’s assassination, the representational imperative remains. To be present in American political discourse, they must represent about violence, while violence itself disappears in a nonspace. If anything, increasingly oppressive anti-anarchist laws amplified the necessity of representation.

The unsettled question of guilt after Haymarket made it difficult to pass anti-anarchist laws, yet several attempts were made between the bombing and McKinley’s assassination. In 1888, 1889, and 1894, bills were introduced in one or both houses of Congress that would prevent anarchists from entering the country (Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti* 129-130). Their intent was clear: to exclude any “avowed anarchist or nihilist or one who is personally hostile to the principles of the Constitution of the United States or to the forms of Government to enter the

84. De Cleyre seems somewhat amused by the socialists’ response to the McNamara case: “It is quite entertaining for those who [are] trying to get a line on what socialism does stand for to contrast” the various positions, one of which insists that the McNamaras are not socialists, the other that direct action is a valid part of socialism (“To Harriet de Cleyre”).

country” (qtd. in Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti* 129).⁸⁵ Each of these legislative efforts to manage anarchism through immigration policy failed to pass. Czolgosz’s *attentat*, however, provoked outrage sufficient for the legal codification of anti-anarchist sentiment. During his first address to Congress following McKinley’s death, new president Theodore Roosevelt asserted that anarchists “should be kept out of this country” (qtd. in Rauchway 146).⁸⁶ In 1902, New York State passed the nation’s first anti-anarchist law and the next year, Congress seconded Roosevelt, passing the first federal immigration law to single out anarchists (Falk “Raising” 16). The Immigration Act of 1903 “officially barred entry to alien anarchists—mandating that all immigrants swear upon arrival that their political persuasion was not anarchism” (Falk, “Raising” 17).

Defining anarchists as those “persons who believe in or advocate the overthrow by force or violence of the Government of the United States, or of all governments, or of all forms of law, or the assassination of public officials,” the law prevented anarchists from immigrating to and from visiting the United States (Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti* 130).⁸⁷ The law was strengthened in 1907, forcing any anarchist in the United States who was not an American citizen to risk being denied reentry if he or she left the country and face the possibility of deportation if any legal

85. Falk claims that the 1894 law “didn’t pass, in part because of discomfort at designating an abstract political idea rather than conduct as grounds for exclusion. Despite the pervasive anti-radical undercurrent in Congress, this bill stirred conflict over the issues of fairness owing to the lack of a uniform definition of anarchism that could encompass both ideas and practices” (“Raising” 17n32).

86. The fear of anarchists frequently was coded as some sort of foreign menace. Leon Czolgosz, however, was born in the Detroit, Michigan area (Briggs 280-281). The individual who finally inspired enough horror for government exclusion of anarchists was a native-born American.

87. Six months after its passage, British anarchist John Turner was arrested and an order issued for his deportation (Falk, “Raising” 22).

grounds could be found.⁸⁸ Each instance of violence attributed to anarchists after 1903 confirmed the need for these laws and provided the foundation for a series of WWI-era anti-anarchist bills that culminated with the 1917 and 1918 Immigration Acts. The latter was a more restrictive law that expanded those eligible for deportation to any “aliens who advise, advocate, or teach, or who are members of, or affiliated with any organization, society, or group, that advises, advocates, or teaches opposition to all organized government . . . the overthrow by force of the Government of the United States or of all forms of law . . . the unlawful damage, injury, or destruction of property, or . . . sabotage” (qtd. in Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti* 133).⁸⁹ It also allowed for “any alien, who, at any time after entering the United States, is found to have been at the time of entry or to have become thereafter, a member of [these] classes of aliens [to] be taken into custody and deported” (qtd. in Murray 14). Suddenly, in response to continued violence (often attributed to anarchists), the WWI surge in patriotism (in contrast to many anarchists, including Berkman and Goldman, who implored eligible young men not to register for the draft), and rampant anti-Bolshevism (which more than ever conflated all radical political positions), any anarchist immigrant could be deported at any time. This new law initiated a series of arrests and deportations, spawned a violent reaction to increased oppression, and signaled the beginning of the first red scare.

The 1917 Immigration Act allowed for the arrest of Luigi Galleani and his followers, vocal advocates of anarchist violence, but this law “proved inadequate for the requirements of deportation” (Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti* 130-131). The 1918 law, however, proved more than

88. Goldman was arrested on grounds that she violated the 1907 Immigration Act. According to the warrant for her arrest, she “entered the United States without inspection, contrary to the terms . . . of the Act” (“Federal Warrant” 254).

89. For the Act’s complete definition of anarchists and more information about the law, see “Deportations Delirium,” the eighth chapter of Avrich’s *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background*.

sufficient and inspired what Louis F. Post calls the “deportations delirium,” a series of raids spearheaded by U.S. Attorney General, A. Mitchell Palmer. In 1919, New York’s Lusk Committee investigated the “nature of radicalism” in America (Pfannestiel 19). Then, the U.S. Senate’s Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary considered “Bolshevik Propaganda” and its tendency to “incite the overthrow the Government of this country” (U.S. Senate 6). That same year, bombings occurred throughout the country. In April and May several bombs were delivered or intercepted while in the mail: “an explosive package was discovered at the home of Seattle Mayor Ole Hanson. The next day an explosion at the Atlanta home of former Senator Thomas Hardwick Thirty-four more bombs were intercepted before reaching their targets,” all addressed to public figures from Supreme Court Justices to John D. Rockefeller and J. P. Morgan (Powers 22). On June 2, bombs exploded within minutes of each other in Philadelphia, Boston, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, New York and other cities (Post 39-40). Most significantly, one of these well-orchestrated attacks targeted Palmer’s Washington, D.C. home. Palmer narrowly avoided the brunt of the explosion. Strewn across the scene “were about fifty leaflets signed ‘THE ANARCHIST FIGHTERS’” (Hagedorn 221).⁹⁰

Once again, anti-representational anarchist violence appeared, but this time, American democracy had laws in place to prevent any subsequent translation of this violence into representation: without anarchist publications, there was no major venue to turn violence into propaganda. Palmer “obtained from Congress an increase in his appropriation for the specific purpose of the detection and prosecution of persons committing crimes against the United States” (Dunn 21). With this money, he created a new arm of the fledgling Bureau of

90. In *Sacco and Vanzetti*, Avrich argues at great length that the Galleianist group of Italian Anarchists likely were responsible for many if not all of these explosions, including the bomb at Palmer’s home, which went off early, killing its carrier, Carlo Valdinoci (156).

Investigation and ushered in the height of the red scare. Feeding on Americans' anti-anarchist hysteria, Palmer arrested large numbers of anarchists: "Homes were invaded without search warrants and men taken into custody because they roomed with suspects Altogether, the Justice Department arrested about 650 people in New York Even more flagrant violations of civil liberties occurred in other cities" (Coben 220). Very few of those arrested were later deported, but Palmer's raids were a success on many levels. He inspired terror in most anarchists, who rightfully feared that they might be arrested and/or deported at any time. He "basked in the warm glow of public approval" as Americans saw results and protection from the radical menace (Coben 221). And, he successfully deported both Goldman and Berkman on the so-called "Soviet-Ark," which set sail from New York just before Christmas, 1919 (Post 1).

By the beginning of 1920, Most and de Cleyre were long dead, Berkman and Goldman were banished to Russia, and American anarchism was dealt a blow that has typically been interpreted as fatal. Thus, when Wall Street was rocked by an explosion that killed 83 people in September 1920, the carnage resonated only as a reminder of the need for continued vigilance against the anarchist threat—as a twitch of anarchism's lifeless body (Gage 1). The link between anarchism and violence remained, but popular sentiment and legal methods had combined to eliminate it as a substantial threat to American representative democracy. By the time of the Wall Street bomb, the new faces of anarchism—Sacco and Vanzetti—sat in a Massachusetts jail, awaiting their trial. Arrested shortly after the conclusion of the red scare, the two men would, for the next decade, define anarchism's American presence and signal its low point.

Chapter 5
 “The Sticky Filaments of Law-Words”: Legal Discourse and Sacco and Vanzetti

The jury system appeals with peculiar force to the great masses of common people. Through their service on the jury, the shoulder of every citizen, whatever the accident of his birth or station, tingles with that matchless precept of the law that all men are born free, equal and independent.

—Charles Coleman, “Origin and Development of Trial by Jury”

Eight months before his execution and more than six years after his arrest, Bartolomeo Vanzetti wrote a letter from Charlestown Prison to Mary Donovan. This letter explains in great detail his daily routine: “At six o’clock in the morning, the wing’s bells rings once . . . 7 A.M., a second ring; we must be ready to go and have breakfast . . . 8 A.M., a third ring; now we must have our room clean and orderly and be ready to leave it . . .” (“To Mary Donovan” [1926] 224). Vanzetti outlines ten distinct phases of his day—from early morning to lights out—each punctuated by a bell or whistle, each governing the prisoner’s time and body. He describes the litany of religious services on “the Lord’s day” at length, but most of Vanzetti’s schedule is concerned with eating, sleeping, cleanliness, or work—with the mundane, but inescapable details of the incarcerated individual’s life. Toward the letter’s conclusion, he claims that “the only thing of which the State does not economize on us, is ‘religious dope’”: he recognizes himself as a subject in much the same way as Foucault will describe the carceral subject some 50 years later (225). In fact, Vanzetti’s letter anticipates both Foucault’s descriptions of disciplinary power and the defining rationality of governmental power: the economization of the subject. In this brief, seemingly innocuous “tableau of our daily life routine,” Vanzetti—the anarchist—gestures toward the reality of his, and Nicola Sacco’s, lives (224). Upon their arrest, these two men are turned from anti-government radicals into constantly governed subjects, from anarchist

individuals into the subject of various, competing discourses all striving to produce knowledge around them. They are Foucault's docile bodies, but the discipline of the prison is far from the sole discursive formation structuring their subjecthood.

Along with Haymarket, the Sacco-Vanzetti affair is one of the few historical moments when large numbers of Americans felt sympathy for anarchists: it was another case of potential injustice—of incomplete justice. These two violent events bracket the height of American anarchism, with the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti marking its end as a political force. In the wake of the Palmer Raids, the final few instances of anarchist violence, and the subsequent rise of Marxian radicalism, the highly public ordeal of two anarchists makes, for many, a neat concluding chapter. This narrative, however, relies largely on the re-presentation of Sacco and Vanzetti by adherents to almost every political philosophy *except* anarchism. Arrested for robbery and murder in May 1920, Sacco and Vanzetti were incarcerated for more than seven years. During that time, many prominent public figures, including several authors, came to Sacco's and Vanzetti's defense, attacking the state's failures, its blindness and its callousness. For the period's progressive and radical communities, Sacco and Vanzetti signified a systemic, yet correctable flaw in governance. Thus, they criticized the courts for their bias, chastised Massachusetts Governor Alvan Fuller for ignoring evidence and refusing to pardon the men, and lamented the plight of two humble immigrants. The forms of their protest varied from vocal (and convincing) arguments about Sacco's and Vanzetti's innocence to public demonstrations calling for retrial or release. Though historians still debate their guilt, in retrospect it appears that Sacco and Vanzetti were unjustly executed, even by the era's legal standards. The *meaning* of these events, however, remained to be constructed: Sacco and Vanzetti were dead and—according to the dominant narrative—so was American anarchism.

Their legacy was determined by those who interpreted the significance of this tragedy as, in the years following their deaths, Left-leaning and progressive writers found the propitious creation of working-class martyrs who clearly indicated the need for economic revolution or reform. This chapter, along with the next, approaches not so much the plight of Sacco and Vanzetti, as the consequences of their re-presentation—the disappearance of anarchism. The literary memory of Sacco and Vanzetti consists almost entirely of a few works written during the late 1920s and 1930s: Upton Sinclair's *Boston*, Maxwell Anderson's *Gods of the Lightning* and *Winterset*, John Dos Passos's *The Big Money*, multiple poetry anthologies, and a handful of other works were written as commemorative reminders of the nation's capacity for injustice. These works challenge the state's abuse of power. Yet, they reject the strict anti-statist (and anti-government) politics of their martyrs. The Sacco and Vanzetti legacy is narrated by socialists, communists, progressives, and liberals—these are the posthumous fictions that comprise their literary memory. Nearly all depict them as simple rebels, critical of the era's injustice, but only incidentally anarchists—they are unwittingly and unjustly the target of anti-radical fervor in interwar America, but not, as they were during their lives, radicals amongst radicals, calling for the complete abolition of government.

The Sacco and Vanzetti trial and the literature written in its wake each acts as a discursive field of justice, seeking to resolve contradiction, produce truth, and restore equality. Both are limited in their conciliatory power, yet importantly, both rely on similar logic: by *re-presenting* facts, actions, and people that precede and extend beyond the limits of its discourse, each produces a narrative, an interpretation with the potential for violence. These two discrete registers should not be reduced to one another, but the trial precedes the literature in a causal relationship. Without their convictions and executions, the litany of writers from the 1930s could

not use Sacco and Vanzetti as their martyrs. The obvious causality, however, obscures a more pervasive consonance: relying on representation, both locate Sacco and Vanzetti in a governmental discourse—whether it be democracy’s necessary enforcement of criminal law or the critique of the nation by radicals and progressives demanding a more perfect democracy—and thus delegitimize anarchism’s rejection of government *as such*.⁹¹ To recognize the logical consistency of literary narration with legal interpretation’s violence produces a rupture in which we find “areas of human experience that neither law nor literature find themselves equipped to address” (Murphy 74). Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s anarchism remain as residue, as both instance of and theory for the unaddressable.

In chapter six, I analyze novels and plays that articulate Sacco and Vanzetti to American literary Leftism—texts that made them potent symbols of miscarried justice by minimizing their anarchist politics. These texts signal the absorption of the Sacco-Vanzetti tragedy into a standard history of communist- and socialist-dominated radical literature, a scholarly narrative confirmed by critics writing in the eight decades since the famed execution. In this chapter, I offer a corrective prehistory to this narrative by considering the events that precede Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s transformation into symbols for the Left—the seven years that make them the subject of history and radical literature. While many authors, literary and scholarly, have explored law’s impact on Sacco and Vanzetti, it remains to show how the relationship between their trial and the literature written about it extends beyond narrative content. Novels and plays built upon their memory narrate the collision of anarchism with criminal law’s inscriptive violence. In doing so, they reveal the representational logic that overdetermines the trial and the literature.

91. Clearly, literature allows for more “equivocations, ambiguities, obscurities, confusions, and loose ends” than a trial does (Felman 95), but literary formations also can tend toward closure in a manner similar to the trials they depict.

In what follows, I explore the discursive forces that turn Sacco and Vanzetti from strident anarchists and anonymous criminals into *the* radical cause célèbre of this period: their experiences—and their image—is essential to any study of literary representations of anarchism, but how do they become this nodal point for the intersections of liberal, radical, and progressive politics during the 1920s? Through this chapter and the next, I show that the Sacco-Vanzetti literary formation operates as a homologous discourse that *reproduces* the trial, its techniques, and its paradoxes. This reproduction exposes the representational logic structuring literature and law alike, yet simultaneously contains the anarchist sediments that exceed them both.⁹² To understand how authors translate individual anarchists into a unified, generic symbol for the 1930s Left requires analyzing the nature of U.S. criminal legal discourse and the politically expedient, yet aporetic appearance of Sacco and Vanzetti within it. To lay foundation for my analysis of texts by Sinclair, Anderson, and Dos Passos, this chapter examines the criminal trial's interpretive political violence, the resulting disposition of the nation's anarchist threat, the residue left by this effort to bring to justice anti-government politics, and the logic that structures legal *and* aesthetic discourses. Elucidating these various elements requires parsing the different forms of representation that circulate around Sacco and Vanzetti.

First, I detail the era's criminal legal discourse, which relies on a structuring logic of representation and functions through representational mechanisms to fulfill its corrective role: re-disposition of insufficiently governed subjects. By examining the specific nature of U.S. criminal

92. A large body of scholarship focuses on the ways in which law does (or should) rely on literature and literary interpretation and on the ways literary texts represent legal discourse. This work includes much nuanced theorization of the relationship between registers of narration/interpretation—a causally reflexive interaction between law and literature. In my final two chapters, I conceptualize a historically specific link between the Sacco-Vanzetti trial and the works written about it. Indebted to the broad array of works that address other specific moments, formations, and phenomena, I explore a discrete, yet important consonance between the trial and the literature that gestures toward a structuring logic of representation impacting legal interpretation and literary narration in similar ways during the 1920s and 1930s.

law and the adversarial trial, this chapter describes the production of different subject types (defendant, criminal, etc.). It also, however, discusses the unique conundrum facing anarchists subjected to these representational strategies. Second, I analyze the texts Sacco and Vanzetti produced. They wrote numerous letters, made statements in the courtroom, and even published pamphlets during their incarceration. These primary, personal accounts provide both a substantially less mediated representation of the men's politics and a counterpoint to the trial: while they dwell against their will within the concretized symbol of governed transgression, the resonance of anti-democratic individual anarchism still appears in many of their writings, not yet exterminated by legal discourse. Third, I turn outside the courtroom and prison walls, to the materials produced by the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee (SVDC). These works link the first two forms of representation to the literary texts detailed in the following chapter: in their effort to influence the legal proceedings, SVDC publications indicate a tension between anarchist rejections of representation and the necessarily representational methods (propaganda and art) used to re-present Sacco and Vanzetti to the public. Many SVDC pamphlets inscribe the men into a representational modality quite similar to criminal law, against which they write. Their rhetoric functionally mirrors—even reinforces—legal discourse, yet before Sacco and Vanzetti are executed, we still see traces of their strict anti-government politics. Their deaths, however, signal the nadir of American anarchism, because their martyrdom allows them to become emblems of non-anarchist radicalism. This chapter begins with the modest claim that to understand the much-studied literature written after their deaths we must first understand the nature of Sacco's and Vanzetti's transformation into a symbol of miscarried justice. Tracing the origins of the Left's embrace of Sacco and Vanzetti reveals the paradoxical challenge anarchism presents to American democracy and American literature: these two executed anarchists suggest

an interrogation of the representationality at the core of American political life—one that reveals the stakes of representation's function as form of and legitimization for extant power relations.

Criminal Law and Representation

While often reduced to a curious personality quirk, the anarchism of Sacco and Vanzetti is central to their trial and thus vital for understanding the temporary suturing of radicals, progressives, and liberals it precipitated and the later articulation of their image to the Left. The confrontation of their politics with American criminal law produces the subject of radical literature from the 1920s and 1930s: authors deploy Sacco and Vanzetti as martyrs, symbols of the need for an interwar challenge to the manifestly unjust elements of American governance. Prior to these literary representations, though, the criminal trial interpolates their anarchism into a field of representation, which is a more politically efficacious act than executing them.⁹³ In other words, the political meaning of their ordeal emerges from the trial's process rather than its outcome. By translating the Sacco-Vanzetti trial into a limited, hence remediable flaw in the nation's governance, authors who construct their martyrdom unwittingly replicate the criminal trial: Sacco and Vanzetti are incidental; their anarchism is the subject of the trial and of the literature—it becomes the martyr that dies to inspire a generically Leftist group consciousness.⁹⁴ Their martyrdom betrays their lived anarchism.

Criminal law manifests itself differently in unique historical moments, yet tends to elucidate and reinforce the contemporaneous logic of governance. To twist the proverbial claim that a society can be measured by its prisons: the form of criminal law is indicative of and

93. I use the word "interpolate" in contradistinction to the always already "interpellated" in order to highlight the coercive *re*-subjectification of Sacco and Vanzetti.

94. As Rebecca Hill contends, "stories of martyrs are critical to the formation of group consciousness; they are used to lead masses to challenge state power" (19).

reflexive with the sustaining logic of power relations. The putative role of American criminal law is the reassertion of justice in the face of transgression. U.S. democracy conflates the need to govern the self and the need to govern the nation through interconnecting “technologies of citizenship [that] promote . . . autonomy, self-sufficiency, and political engagement,” and thus produce “democratic citizens [as] both the effects and the instruments of liberal governance” (Cruikshank 4). From the foundational assertion that all citizens are the subject *of* legal discourse—they are its *raison d’être* (a nation governed by and for its citizens), its immediate catalyst (they elect officials and pass laws), and even its mechanism (they serve on juries)—emerges the ideal citizen, one who disposes of herself properly, but who also aids in the disposition of others (i.e., the nation) through the mechanisms of democratic participation.⁹⁵ Of course, not all subjects reach this level of self-governance, so they are potentially subject *to* criminal legal discourse, which uses a distinct set of techniques to produce criminals.⁹⁶

U.S. criminal law begins with the (often chimerical) legal assumption of political/moral equality, imbuing each citizen with overlapping rights and responsibilities, with symbiotic Constitutional liberty and individual culpability. This imbricated space of coextensive freedom and obligation is the experience of American subjecthood, a position intimately tied to representation. Americans are coded as citizens who are represented by other subjects and thus to a certain extent, govern the nation. Criminal law hovers as a corrective, equalizing force: all citizens are nominally subject to it and any violation constitutes a multifaceted inequality typically and most simply imagined as a debt to society. By addressing the abdication of certain

95. I consciously am overstating these claims and referring to an idealistic image of democracy. Clearly, under many purportedly democratic governments, this ideal is far from reality.

96. Criminal legal discourse is an “organised, coherent sets of techniques,” which does not imply a central malevolence, but only a coherence to its logic (Kendall and Wickham 151). Each set of power relations relies on specific techniques and coalesces around distinct (yet potentially multiple) logics. I use the Sacco-Vanzetti case to reveal a unifying logic running through multiple discourses of the 1920s and 1930s.

forms of self-governance and establishing categories of transgression, criminal law *produces* the inequality and provides the structural mechanisms for redress.⁹⁷ It is one amongst many systems that categorize individuals, assert “normative standards” (Binder 89), and insure the nation’s continued existence, but its function is limited to the placement of insufficiently self-governed subjects into new categories: defendant, criminal, death-row inmate, martyr.

At the center of U.S. democracy’s criminal law from this era, we find the adversarial trial, a complex, shifting, yet cohesive set of practices that claims to restore equality through the “dream of objective adequation—this dream that the world can be resolved into matching terms” (Dimock 6). This structuring subjective desire for punishment allows for the reassertion of “commensurability” *cum* equality (Dimock 6). In the case of Sacco and Vanzetti, the criminal trial is re-narrated by authors after their deaths: self-conscious literary critiques of law’s failures leave multiple layers of representation. These sedimented discourses make the study of literature about Sacco and Vanzetti inseparable from analysis of his trial and gesture toward the logic that runs through both. As Robert M. Cover argues, “law and narrative are inseparably related” (“Nomos and Narrative” 5). The mutually constitutive relationship between these fields, however, reserves for “legal interpretation” dominion over the “field of pain and death,” over the administration of violence (Cover, “Violence” 1606-1607). While we should not ignore the physical and psychological results of the criminal trial, to focus exclusively on the corporeal

97. The breakdown of citizen-subjecthood inscribed as criminality requires a mechanism to “coercively impose” those “principles concern[ing] what we must do, what is required of us” (Narveson 15-16). The trial forcibly disposes citizens who inadequately govern themselves. The role of criminal law within this system of overlapping representation is the disposition of transgressive subjects. The contentiousness of criminal legal discourse’s role in governance—and its obvious historical failures—make analyzing it difficult. As the putative safeguard of order and security, criminal law preemptively forecloses upon anarchism. To discuss the relation of the two requires critically engaging with the question of criminal law’s self-reinforcing necessity and thus risks appearing to demonize a potentially neutral tool of governance. In this chapter, I approach criminal law by considering its objective, though clearly disputable role as a dispositive discourse. If, as Foucault argues, “with government it is a question not of imposing laws on men, but of disposing things,” then the dispositional qualities of criminal law are delimited and stripped of the negative connotations analysis might imply (Foucault, “Governmentality” 95).

effects of legal interpretation unduly limits both the wider ramifications of court decisions and the impact of efforts fictively to retry the case.⁹⁸

Criminal law includes knowledges in a variety of shapes and forms, from acts to physical objects, procedures to guiding strategies. Sacco and Vanzetti are subject to their era's most disciplinary techniques: they are arrested and jailed; they must sit at the defendant's table and stand at the witness stand; they must file affidavits and lodge objections; they must dwell in the death house and "suffer the punishment of death by the passage of current of electricity" through their bodies (*The Sacco-Vanzetti Case: Transcript* 4905). Each of these reinscribes Sacco and Vanzetti as individuals, but their trial couples these mechanisms with management of the nation's anarchist menace. From the nation's genesis, the jury trial was conceived as a right, a process assuring individual liberty that still fulfilled its corrective function (Levy 85). It is a constitutional right, with civil trial guaranteed by the seventh amendment of the Bill of Rights and criminal trial assured by Article III, Section 2, but its practices and laws are drawn from common law, which often provides the matrix for judgment and also defines how the judge and jury must apply extant law (K. Scott 1-2). Jury trials are right and precedent, guarantee and practice, the spatial and logical embodiment of a "conceptual structure" that "gain[s] force with each repetition" (Dayan 184). They also doubly reinforce democratic governance, mediating between presumptively equal citizens and producing a space for the practice of citizenship: serving on juries fulfills self-governing democratic citizens' responsibility to be "politically engaged advocates and public-spirited, deliberative participants in collective decision making"—

98. Cover claims that "legal interpretation is . . . a practical activity . . . designed to generate credible threats and actual deeds of violence," which restricts pain and death to actualized and potential violence always governed by the act of legal interpretation ("Violence" 1610). In other words, he does not imagine the process of interpretation to be violent as such, nor does he extend the potential for violence beyond the specter of "law" to include other forms of governance. In addition, Cover insists that literature is one of the discourses that do not practice "collective violence," because they "bear only a remote or incidental relation to the violence of society," further limiting the diffusely violent effects of multiple forms of narrative and interpretation ("Violence" 1606n15).

jury trials produce justice and citizen-subjects (Gastil, et al 12).

The difference, however, between a civil jury trial—in which two legally equivalent citizens seek justice—and a criminal trial is significant. In a criminal trial, the defendant stands not against another potentially commensurable entity (an individual, corporation, etc.), but against the state *in toto*. The inequality appears as a debt calling for payment, but the ledger necessarily privileges the state: the best the accused can hope for is erasure of debt, because the state accepts no liability.⁹⁹ It fills one term of the trial's equation, but also haunts it as referent and operative mechanism: only from a perspective at odds with the foundational logic of the criminal trial (i.e., one that rejects the assumption of innocence) can we imagine the state to “lose.”¹⁰⁰ In other words, the criminal trial presents a unique challenge to democratic governance: it resonates with and provides scaffold for other technologies of democratic citizenship, yet it proceeds from an inequality of sorts, one that operates through the criminal courtroom's layered representations.

Mirroring the nation's representative democracy, American criminal trials rely on representation: the defendant and the state each are represented by attorneys, but the state also appears through the judge and jury. Writing shortly before Sacco and Vanzetti's arrest, Delphin M. Delmas couples praise for the essential democracy of jury trials with a defense of the state's multiplied representation in the courtroom: “The essential function of all governments of free men is to administer justice—in other words, to regulate the conduct of the community [and] the

99. Acquitted individuals may in cases of egregious abuse seek compensation in civil courts or, in extreme cases, file criminal charges against agents within the system, but there is no true inversion of the criminal trial's “State v. _____.”

100. The precedent for the presumption of innocence was firmly entrenched by the end of the 19th century. Coffin v. United States (1895) asserted that “the principle that there is a presumption of innocence in favor of the accused is the undoubted law, axiomatic and elementary, and its enforcement lies at the foundation of the administration of our criminal law” (453).

conduct of others . . . through accredited representatives In our country, the people's sense of justice is enforced by delegation—by judges and by juries" (247). He culminates his praise for juries and democracy by insisting that since "the people" have "the right . . . to make their own laws," they must also have the "right to administer them":

As laws are the formal expression of the people's sense of justice applicable to future possible conduct, so verdicts are the expression of the people's sense of justice brought to bear upon past actual conduct. In one case, the popular will is voiced by accredited spokesmen called legislators; in the other it is voiced by equally accredited spokesmen called jurors. In the one, the rule prescribed is an abstract expression of the people's will; in the other, it is a concrete application of that will. The ultimate aim of both is justice—the people's justice. (256)

Delmas summarizes the historical argument that jury trials are a synecdochical figure for democracy, because they allow representational administration of law. They microcosmically reproduce the nation and its practices of citizenship: the jury comprises individual subjects who stand for the state and its collective citizenry. When Sacco and Vanzetti are interpolated into court proceedings, they enter into the nation's dispositive field of representation. Their attorneys represent their interests, while the prosecutor speaks for the state. The judge is the presumptively impartial arbiter, but he is either elected by the state, and thus a direct realization of representative government, or as was the case in 1920s Massachusetts, appointed by an elected official, and thus an indirect realization. Similarly, the jury comprises citizens who, regardless of their actual involvement in government, are presumably structured by laws adequately to self-govern—they are not subject to corrective reinscription, so they can stand alongside the other officers of the court.

The proscribed rituals of the jury trial—from *voir dire* to the lawyer’s rhetoric to the judge’s potent symbols of order—circulate around and are sublimated to the innocence-guilt dyad. From the moment Sacco and Vanzetti are arrested until their sentencing, the entire process is defined as the effort to “prove” guilt or, if that proof is lacking, to assume innocence: the jury ultimately must place defendants on one side of the polarity; such is their *duty* to the state. This binary rests on a legal dichotomy: in the eyes of the law, one is guilty or innocent. With Sacco and Vanzetti, for instance, there is no question that two men were gunned down in broad daylight.¹⁰¹ The event itself was undisputed and the trial occurred merely to place the accused on one or the other side of the division—to produce the crime and the criminal.

Herein lies one of the first paradoxical residues that legal justice cannot eliminate. The anarchist challenges government and its laws and thus denies the binary from the outset: innocence and guilt only have meaning within a system that already assumes crime as a categorical possibility. A trial cannot question the fundamental divide between innocence and guilt, which creates an anarchist antinomy: to “prove” one’s innocence is to submit to the governmental apparatus through which transgression is recognized, labeled, and secured, while to refuse it is to subject oneself to the harshest elements of the discourse. Tragically, Sacco and Vanzetti suffer on both counts. Most efforts to engage with the courts on their behalf fall prey to its binary logic, but they still are found guilty and executed.

In his charge to the jury, Judge Webster Thayer outlines the trial’s stakes and the jury’s responsibility, which he ties to citizenship:

Mr. Foreman and gentlemen of the jury . . . the Commonwealth of Massachusetts called upon you to render a most important service. Although you knew that service would be

101. Frederick Parmenter and Alessandro Berardelli were shot and killed during a robbery outside of the Slater-Morrill Shoe Company on April 15, 1920.

arduous, painful and tiresome, yet you, like the true soldier, responded to that call in the spirit of supreme American loyalty. For he who is loyal to God, to country, to his state and to his fellowmen, represents the highest and noblest type of true American citizenship, that which there is none grander in the entire world The law grants to every person the same rights and privileges, and imposes upon each corresponding duties, obligations and responsibilities. (*Transcript* 2239-2241)

The jurors' noble investment in the nation, however, follows the potentially disqualifying *voir dire* question, "Have you an interest in the trial or result of these indictments?" (*Transcript* 2). Before they are chosen for the jury, each citizen must temporarily disavow "interest" in the orderly continuation of government as ensured generally by law and specifically by the criminal trials' disposition of transgressive subjects. They enter the courtroom as citizens, but also as imaginary blank slates. During the trial, the jury functions only as an "important cog in the wheels and machinery of justice," assured that they "are not taking away the lives of the defendants by finding them guilty of a murder . . . the law takes away their lives" (*Transcript* 2236-2237). At the trial's conclusion, however, they are reminded of their role: the "rights and protection of the people" from whom they are chosen—once again, they are citizens, fully "interested" in the case (*Transcript* 2263). The demands of democratic citizenship supersede the fiction of impartiality and the judge-jury-prosecution stand as a multifaceted embodiment of power unified through representation.

This tripartite appearance of the state relies on representational logic to scaffold the court's claims to discern the truth: the defense and prosecution represent the accused and the state respectively, while the judge referees their claims and the jury combines them into the truth. The trial's putative equality (the State of Massachusetts v. Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo

Vanzetti) is complicated by the judge and jury. Collectively the state's representatives replicate the nation's governance, showing that the act of legal judgment (interpretation) is consonant with U.S. forms of republicanism: representative agents enact separate powers that combine to govern individuals, establish law, and secure the nation. Again, Sacco's and Vanzetti's positions as defendants in an American criminal trial, while unproblematic in the context of law, are made paradoxical by their anarchism: they stand against government, but are especially critical of the democracy under which they live.¹⁰² While on trial, they are forced to defend themselves—on U.S. criminal law's terms—against the court's multiple state agents. From 1920 to 1927, Sacco and Vanzetti are subject to interrogation, imprisonment, trial, execution. Each serves a function, but from the moment of their arrest until their death, they all are part of the legal pursuit of “proof,” to establish guilt, which has at its center the trial's logic of combinatory representation. Sacco and Vanzetti repudiate government, its immediate, ideal subject form—citizenship—and the modes of representation that bind the two, but once subject to the trial's coercive inscription, they are interpolated into an overdetermined governmental system that produces the literature written about them and consequently determines their legacy.

Saccoandvanzetti: Conspiracy and the Production of Guilt

After being classified as defendants, the guilt of Sacco and Vanzetti was established by two historically specific and subsequently maligned techniques: the conflation of two men into a

102. Before swearing in the jury, Judge Thayer made a brief speech to the court about the claims of government and the “rights” of the defendants: “Massachusetts guarantees protection to all citizens It is one of the boasts of the American law that . . . all shall receive the same rights, the same privileges, and we must see to it that a trial . . . is held according to American law and according to American justice The defendants are entitled to it. The Commonwealth is entitled to it, and as part of the government of this Commonwealth, it is a duty of this court to see that both parties have exactly that kind of trial” (*Transcript*, 1:47). Obviously, the state's “right” to a trial transcends the defendant's right. The “fair” trial only operates once we assume the validity of laws and the need to enforce them.

unified legal subject, and the production of knowledge through the troubled pairing of identifying testimony and “consciousness of guilt.” These two names—Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti—or, more commonly, Sacco and Vanzetti (or Sacco-Vanzetti as an even more closely connected adjective) are popularly conflated into a single symbol of failed governance, but this link occurs first through their criminal trial. They were close, but not best friends; both anarchists, but not politically inseparable. Their personal histories and political ideologies are in fact quite distinct, with their linkage occurring first at their trial, which collapses the two into a single legal subject and signals the initial symptom of their disappearing anarchism.¹⁰³

Though both men were arrested at the same time, Vanzetti was accused not only of the Braintree crime (the Dedham trial) for which they are famous, but also of an earlier holdup in Bridgewater, MA (the Plymouth trial).¹⁰⁴ He was convicted quickly and thus came to the Dedham trial already labeled as criminal, a stigma that tainted Sacco by association. Vanzetti recognized that “the Plymouth conviction was a stepping stone toward the electric chair, for both [men],” but also knew that Thayer would deny them separate trials (*Background* 36). He worried that “Sacco [would] sit on the dock beside a man already convicted on a similar charge” and feared that a joint trial would allow the prosecution to use evidence of one man’s guilt to convict both (*Background* 36). With the consequences of this conflation in mind, “Sacco requested a separate trial on the ground that his association with Vanzetti would . . . result in prejudice

103. Though the two men did know each other before their arrest, they were separated during their confinement. As a convicted criminal, Vanzetti was sent to Charlestown prison, while Sacco was held in the Norfolk county jail (Watson 101). They were reunited for the first time in the courtroom (Watson 103). For the next several years, the vast majority of contact between Sacco and Vanzetti would occur in the courtroom. They had little time to communicate with each other and each had far more correspondence with others than with his co-defendant.

104. “Sacco . . . to the dismay of the prosecution, was able to prove that he had been at work on December 24,” the day of the Bridgewater crime (Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti* 203). Vanzetti was not able to substantiate his alibi and had Sacco not had “proof” of his whereabouts, he likely would have been charged with the crime as well.

against him,” but Thayer denied his request (Fraenkel 27). The elision of difference between the two is both expedient and consonant with legal logic: through the category of “crime” (even while still assuming innocence), the law collapses two men into one and forever turns Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti into Saccoandvanzetti, the now commonplace construction representing once distinct individuals.

In his opening statement, prosecutor Fred Katzmann confirms the state’s intent to fuse Sacco and Vanzetti through the framework of conspiracy: “in this case you have got a group of men . . . conspiring The law is this, gentlemen. If two or more conspire to kill and do any joint act looking towards the killing and do kill, one is as guilty as the other” (*Transcript 77-78*). Connecting the men creates a self-referential singularity that allows identifying testimony and consciousness of guilt to apply equally and indiscriminately to each man: witnesses who saw only Sacco were used as evidence against Vanzetti and the men’s actions between April 15 and their arrest on May 5 were interpreted as a unified indicator of guilt. The witness stand gives the jury the opportunity to “size up each witness . . . sometimes by instinct and sometimes by analysis” (*Transcript 77*). In concert with the jury’s instinct and analysis, it is endowed with nearly mystical powers to produce binding legal truth. Much of the testimony at Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s trial circulates around identifying the accused and calling into question the veracity of purported eyewitnesses, so the jury is asked to evaluate the credibility of various identifications. Judge Thayer instructs that “identity becomes an essential fact in these cases that must be proved by evidence [testimony], and any evidence that tends to establish such fact is admissible” (*Transcript 2252*).¹⁰⁵ He claims for the jurors the responsibility “to determine this fact of identity,” but adds, “the law does not require that evidence shall be positive or certain in order to

105. Thayer goes on at some length about “identification,” indicating that he considers it one of the case’s key points and one of criminal law’s central strategies.

be competent” (*Transcript* 2252-2253). In other words, the law dictates that they *must* produce the truth of identity, but the law does not require certainty from those offering testimony. While subject to criminal trial, Sacco and Vanzetti are described to the jury by a litany of individuals who need not be “positive” in their claims, because the witness stand shifts the responsibility onto the jury. The courts function like a shell game, constantly shifting the loci of interpretation. Vanzetti decried the absurdity of establishing identity, while the SVDC and, later, authors like Dos Passos and Sinclair, question the truth of witnesses’ identifying testimony. In doing so, however, they reproduce the underlying logic: legal testimony may be true or false, but these judgments refer back to the interpretive process, indicating an internal rather than ideological flaw.

The prosecution called several witnesses who were nowhere near Braintree on April 15, but who could attest to Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s behavior shortly before, during, and after their arrest. This testimony was used to establish “consciousness of guilt,” a quasi-psychological legal fiction—established by, but not dependent on, testimony—that assumes guilty individuals will, amongst other revealing behaviors, lie to protect themselves, while innocent individuals will always tell the truth.¹⁰⁶ In his response to one of the defense’s many motions for a new trial, Thayer claims that “these verdicts did not rest . . . upon the testimony of the eyewitnesses The evidence that convicted these defendants was . . . evidence that is known in the law as ‘consciousness of guilt’” (*Transcript* 3514). According to Felix Frankfurter’s famous analysis of the case, consciousness of guilt is based on the assumption that “the conduct of Sacco and

106. Consciousness of guilt (alternately known as tacit admission of guilt) is still used in U.S. courts, though 80+ years of increasing defendant’s rights and appeals courts’ decisions have reduced its scope. In *United States v. Begay* (2009), the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the use of consciousness of guilt in a criminal trial.

Vanzetti after April 15 was the conduct of murderers” (35). In his charge to the jury, Thayer outlines in great detail the importance of this mechanism:

Therefore, the mind being conscious of every bodily act theretofore committed, it knows whether or not such act is one of innocence or guilt. If it indicates guilt, that is evidence of consciousness of a guilty act, and evidence of a consciousness of a guilty act is evidence tending to prove commission of such guilty act, and evidence of the commission of a criminal act tends to prove the identity of the author of such criminal act. To be more specific, the real question is, do the actions, conduct and speech of the defendants on the night of May 5, 1920, and at other times, indicate that their minds were conscious of having committed some crime? (*Transcript* 2257)

Contained within the judge’s slippery slope is the assumption of guilt as not only a legal category, but also a subject position with corporeal symptoms.¹⁰⁷ Sacco and Vanzetti are located as “guilty” through the legal consideration of the ways in which they act vis-à-vis the innocence-guilt dichotomy, which is itself a scaffolding logic of criminal law. The trial simply translates them into a preexisting set of strategies that “go into the mind of the man, the intent . . . and why he acted,” but only insofar as one’s mental state can be compared to the polarized constructions of innocence and guilt (*Transcript* 1735). To the judge’s eye, the jury’s decision—the legally binding result of the trial that Thayer repeatedly defends—is based less on physical evidence and strict identifying testimony than on consciousness of guilt, which is established by statements

107. Osmond K. Fraenkel divides this consciousness of guilt into four categories: “(1) the events at the Johnson house [On the night of their arrest, Sacco and Vanzetti went with Mike Boda and Ricardo Orciani to the house of Simon Johnson, a mechanic, to pick up Boda’s car. There is some dispute over what the men intended to do with the car (collect and hide literature, move dynamite, etc.), but they did not take the car that night. Mrs. Johnson called the police, the men behaved in a way that would later be characterized as indicating consciousness of guilt, and Sacco and Vanzetti left to board a streetcar. They were arrested on that streetcar a short time later]; (2) the actions of the defendants upon arrest; (3) the armed condition of defendants; (4) the misstatements made by the defendants after arrest” (409). Thayer focuses though almost exclusively on this last category: “[f]alsehoods intentionally told . . . [t]o the investigator” of the Braintree holdup (*Transcript* 3520).

Sacco and Vanzetti made immediately after their arrest.¹⁰⁸ They are subject to the law's pursuit of guilt before they know the crime of which they are accused and long before their trial begins.¹⁰⁹

Progressive and radical writers later ridicule consciousness of guilt, but they do so by explaining why Sacco and Vanzetti acted as they did rather than by attacking its logic. Even Vanzetti defends their response as the “consciousness of guilt as radicals . . . we feared punishment for our radical activity,” not for the alleged murders (*Plymouth 10*). From the moment of their arrest, Sacco and Vanzetti are located within a criminal system they reject not only because it accuses them, but also because it is an arm of governance. No amount of effort using its tools, strategies, and processes can be satisfactory, because anarchism is unutterable, unknowable within it. The antinomy of anarchism emerges from their simultaneous rejection of all government and their being made subject to its logic. This irreconcilable tension is meaningless within the context of the nation and its sustenance, but paramount for understanding

108. The physical evidence in the Sacco-Vanzetti case was very limited. On the night of their arrest, revolvers were found on both men. The prosecution attempted to show that Sacco's gun was taken from the crime scene (and belonged to one of the victims, Alessandro Berardelli). The bullets taken from Sacco's gun were compared to the bullet that killed Berardelli. The defense and prosecution presented contrasting expert testimony about these cartridges. There is some indication that the bullets or Sacco's gun (the presumptive murder weapon) were tampered with or replaced during the trial. In addition, at the time of his arrest, Vanzetti was carrying a shotgun shell, which supposedly linked him to the Bridgewater crime (one of the bandits fired a shotgun at the armored truck). The prosecution also introduced a cap they claimed to have found at the crime scene and that they tenuously connected to Sacco by a hole that was either caused by Sacco hanging it repeatedly on a hook (the prosecution's claim) or by the police officer who found it (the claim of Sacco's and Vanzetti's defenders after the trial). The prosecution also presented the car in which several witnesses claimed to have seen Sacco and Vanzetti on the day of the incident. This Buick—which likely was used to commit the crime—was found in the woods. It became subject to disagreement when a previously overlooked bullet hole was found upon further examination. The only other pieces of evidence introduced at the trial that might be considered physical are the anarchist speech (written by Vanzetti) found in Sacco's pocket at the time of his arrest; documents used to establish Sacco's and Vanzetti's alibis; and their respective body parts: Sacco's hand and Vanzetti's moustache, which were used by witnesses as their identifying features. Quite simply, Sacco and Vanzetti were not convicted under a preponderance of physical evidence. For legal analysis of this evidence, see Frankfurter's *The Case of Sacco and Vanzetti: A Critical Analysis for Lawyers and Laymen* (1927), Robert H. Montgomery's *Sacco-Vanzetti: The Murder and the Myth* (1960), and *Postmortem: New Evidence in the Case of Sacco and Vanzetti* (1985) by William Young and David E. Kaiser.

109. According to Vanzetti, he and Sacco did not know the crime of which they were accused when they were arrested. They assumed their arrest was “[a]nother deportation case” (*Story 16*).

Sacco and Vanzetti's transformation into generic martyrs for the left. While defending consciousness of guilt, Thayer unwittingly invokes the paradox: "the [defense's] claim was that the introduction of evidence of radicalism, *though by the defendants themselves*, was so prejudicial to their rights, that they did not and could not have a fair and impartial trial [emphasis added]" (*Transcript* 3521). The judge derisively suggests that their anarchism had nothing to do with the trial's outcome. In a brief few pages, Thayer not only asserts the existence of mechanisms that can uphold convictions even in the absence of concrete evidence, he also mocks the position that radicalism, however introduced to the courtroom, precludes fairness. Thayer's two claims are, in fact, mutually reinforcing, constituent elements of legal logic: Sacco and Vanzetti are convicted because they acted guilty; their actions were claimed by some to be manifestations of murderers' guilt, and by others the guilt of anarchists; yet Thayer denies that legal interpretation might be influenced by the defendant's politics. Anarchism is ultimately irrelevant, because the court deems it so, just as the defendants must be executed, because they have been found guilty—the logic of representation disposes efficiently of Sacco and Vanzetti and their anti-government beliefs.

Nevertheless, the trial cannot eradicate fully the absent presence of anarchism: Sacco and Vanzetti exist within the criminal legal discourse as metonymic representation of themselves—legal subjects that only through the incomplete adequation of justice can be considered commensurate with themselves (Dimock 57-95). They continue, however, to represent themselves outside the courtroom and the prison. Sacco's and Vanzetti's efforts to impact the court often rely on its logic, but other of their writings contain more prevalent traces of anti-government politics. The ineradicable excess of their lived anarchism appears as Thayer's exclusion, hinting at the nature of the anarchists' transgression and thus at the inescapably

logical, though unspeakable consequences of the trial: it kills Sacco and Vanzetti, but also subjects their anarchist politics to the reinscribing authority of representationality. The court conspicuously denies all interest in anarchism, thus banishing it from the nation's stabilizing discourse of criminal law, yet simultaneously produces the martyrs for an alternate radicalism.

The Paradox of Self-Representation

Sacco and Vanzetti each communicated with their lawyers, friends, and the public outside the courtroom. These extra-judicial utterances reveal men with different visions of anarchism—two discrete individuals who, only through the trial's logic can be imagined as singular. Their letters and publications reveal prejudices, fears, and political beliefs often quite distinct from one another. Each of the two men spoke during the trial and each wrote letters during his imprisonment, but Vanzetti left a far more extensive record than Sacco: he published articles in radical periodicals, wrote multiple pamphlets, including his famous *The Story of a Proletarian Life* (1923) and *Background of the Plymouth Trial* (1927), and composed hundreds of letters between 1920 and 1927.¹¹⁰ At times, Sacco and Vanzetti did release joint statements, but these were always written by Vanzetti: "I have been asked to write a letter, also in Nick's name, . . . a letter written by me and signed by both of us" (Vanzetti, "To Alice Stone Blackwell" [1925] 158). Later, Sacco refused even to sign Vanzetti's writings: though he left fewer texts, Sacco did not consider himself politically identical to Vanzetti.¹¹¹

110. Though the full reasons for this disparity are complex, two stand out: Vanzetti knew English much better than Sacco and Sacco seemed more devastated by the effects of prison. Sacco undertook several hunger strikes, was committed to a mental institution where he "regained his sanity," and generally wanted the entire ordeal to end (Watson 229). By the time of their execution, Sacco was prepared to die, to end the horror of his ordeal. It seems he had neither the means nor the desire to communicate as extensively as Vanzetti.

111. Here, legal discourse's conflation of the two men is reproduced by the relative preponderance of Vanzetti's rhetorical production: interested parties at the time and our historical memory turn the two men into Sacco and Vanzetti by looking almost exclusively to Vanzetti's work for information about both men's anarchism.

The few existing examples of Sacco's self-representation reveal an at times contradictory response to his ordeal. He often resists the legal proceedings, but also expresses dissatisfaction with SVDC efforts to extricate him from the trial. During her testimony, for instance, the prosecution asked Lola Andrews (one of their key witnesses) to identify the man she saw during the Braintree holdup. She pointed to Sacco and said "That man there," at which point "Sacco jumped to his feet. 'I am the man?' he shouted. 'Do you mean me? Take a good look.'" (Watson 119). He disregards proper courtroom decorum and disrupts the court to question the witness directly, disregarding the trial's highly structured forms of truth-production. Specifically, he interrupts Andrews before she can speak his name in the courtroom (Watson 119).¹¹² Later, he writes his own lawyer, Fred H. Moore, with a similar purpose: "I thought to send you these few lines to advise you and all your philanthropist friends . . . to not print any more these letters with my picture and name on, and to be sure to take my name out if they should print any more of these little pamphlets" (21-22). Throughout his letters, Sacco defensively, yet blindly, challenges the authority of others to represent him. Elsewhere, however, Sacco recognizes value of U.S. democracy, speaking of the "good citizen of these country" ("To Mrs. Jack" 11), praising the decidedly non-anarchist socialist Eugene Debs ("To Leonard Abbott" 35), and gesturing toward "the tradition of freedom of the United States" ("To Mrs. Codman" 50).

Whereas the breadth of Vanzetti's writings allow us to see a complex, yet unified politics, Sacco's attitude toward American democracy and its dispositive legal discourse is persistently inconsistent: his letters and courtroom statements reveal a man distraught by his interpolation within this field of representation, but who does not unilaterally reject governance. In his longest

112. Like Sacco, Vanzetti momentarily disrupts the legal discourse, calling one of the prosecution's witnesses a liar, but unlike Sacco, Vanzetti's anarchistic stance toward the trial is consistently supported by his writings (Fraenkel 57).

statement to the court, Sacco speaks highly of Abraham Lincoln and “Abe Jefferson” who “fight for the free country, for the better education, to give chance to any other peoples” (*Transcript* 1877). Earlier in his testimony, when asked ““Did you love this country in the last week of May, 1917,”” Sacco responded, “That is pretty hard for me to say in one word,” but when pressed, answers “Yes” (*Transcript* 1867). We have a record of Sacco’s efforts at self-representation, but he appears to reject what American government has done and is doing, rather than expressing an outright rejection of U.S. democracy or an anarchist repudiation of all government. In this respect, he mirrors the SVDC’s contemporaneous representations of Sacco and Vanzetti and portends the later, non-anarchist deployment of the two men as generic radical symbol: America is failing itself to a greater or lesser extent and either needs to live up to its own ideals or experience a fundamental restructuring of its governance. Ironically, detached from Vanzetti, Sacco likely would be remembered as an inarticulate, mildly radical murderer—or not be remembered at all. As Sacco and Vanzetti, however, Vanzetti’s writing becomes Sacco’s beliefs.

Unlike Sacco, Vanzetti espouses a consistent and vigorous anarchism, which is not to say his politics are not complex: they shift over time, vary by venue, and demonstrate a nuanced anti-government stance. His encounter with U.S. criminal law produced two major registers for Vanzetti’s self-representation: statements circumscribed by criminal legal discourse and those through which anarchism interrogates the discourse. His multiple venues carry different expectations and have varying goals, but collectively they expose the paradox of challenging representational governance through representation. Vanzetti’s statements within the courtroom and his writings published by the SVDC express a tempered version of his radical beliefs, while his non-SVDC writings contain his more radical anti-government sentiments. This discrepancy

results from discursive constraints, conscious strategy, and a general failure to recognize the intersection of the two.

Vanzetti's trial testimony and his most famous work, *The Story of a Proletarian Life*, are largely narrative: storytelling is the strategy that Vanzetti, his attorneys, and the SVDC use inside and outside the courtroom to influence his legal fate. At the Dedham trial, "Vanzetti testified about his youth and his early experiences, giving a summary of his life history down to April 15th, 1920. He detailed his movements on that crucial date and thereafter up to the time of his arrest" (Fraenkel 69). The trial's form mandates that Vanzetti's self-narration be mediated through layers of representation: he can answer only questions posed by officers of the court. In addition, this narrative must be Vanzetti's alone. His alibi may be corroborated, but his personal history cannot be detailed, because "testimony about [his] good character" was forbidden during the trial, at the request of the defense: "'The Commonwealth assents to the request of both of the defendants that all evidence heretofore offered in the course of this trial to the effect that either or both of said defendants bore the reputation of being peaceful and law-abiding citizens be stricken from the record of this trial'" (*Transcript* 1629). Recognizing the court's implicit bias against criminality, the defense sought to prevent the jury from learning of Vanzetti's previous conviction by restricting the narration of Vanzetti's life to his own limited storytelling, because all evidence about the character of a criminal can only harm him and Sacco.¹¹³ The additional, understandable desire to downplay Vanzetti's anti-government radicalism washes the narrative of all overt political content. The criminal trial requires those who claim to represent Vanzetti strategically to constrain his self-narration so that earlier inscriptions are hidden and so that the magnitude of threat he presents is minimized.

113. Incidentally, it is almost certain that the jurors knew of Vanzetti's earlier conviction. His arrest and Plymouth trial were covered widely in newspapers before the potential jurors were summoned for the Dedham trial.

The vast majority of Vanzetti's testimony addressed either 1) the story of his life, which could not be supported by other witnesses; or 2) the specific narratives that construct his alibi and explain his actions before, during, and after the alleged crime. Neither leaves room for the expression of anarchist ideas, but it should be no surprise that criminal trials limit any fundamental challenge to their sustaining logic: layers of representation sift all expression, making the courtroom *apolitical*, yet allowing the trial to fulfill its role as the correctively dispositive defender of the nation's political structure. Importantly, however, Vanzetti's *The Story of a Proletarian Life* relies on narration and similarly effaces the extent of his radicalism, thus demonstrating the reach of representational logic outside the court. Written in 1923—before Vanzetti felt comfortable enough to publish in English (his second language)—the pamphlet was translated by Eugene Lyons, a longtime member of the SVDC, whose communist politics made the committee's anarchists distrust him (Watson 178).¹¹⁴ Its tone and political content differ starkly from Vanzetti's personal letters and later works in English. *The Story* effectively de-radicalizes Vanzetti through a narrative strategy that relies on relation rather than polemic.

The pamphlet signals its purpose by expressing regret that “very few of our people . . . are at all familiar with the personalities of the two men,” then quickly begins to show Vanzetti's affinity with the intended audience: “[Vanzetti] has maintained an equable temper and keen interest in world affairs, and his thirst for knowledge is unabated” (3). Written by progressive activist Alice Stone Blackwell, this foreword contains no mention of anarchism, nor any suggestion of Vanzetti's radical politics. Vanzetti echoes this approach later in the text, portraying himself as “an industrious, dependable workman, [whose] chief fault was in trying so

114. Lyons later published *The Life and Death of Sacco and Vanzetti* (1927). I do not deny Lyons's good intentions or mean to imply that any agenda trumped his desire to see the men cleared of the Braintree crime. I merely wish to flag his political orientation as a way of indicating the layers of mediation between Vanzetti's self-representation and our reception of it.

hard to bring a little light of understanding into the dark lives of my fellow-workers . . . [a man] deeply interested . . . in the things of the intellect” (15). The SVDC concerned itself with the defense of Sacco and Vanzetti in the public sphere only insofar as it might affect their legal fate, so it is no wonder that SVDC publications—even those written by Vanzetti himself—dilute their radicalism.

Overall, the pamphlet reads like a fictive *bildungsroman*, with Vanzetti’s opening lines distancing him from the content: “My life cannot claim the dignity of an autobiography. Nameless, in the crowd of nameless ones” (5). Elements of the story belong to Vanzetti’s past, but *The Story* is the narrative of a generalized, quasi-radical constituent part in a larger collective, not the specifically anarchist individual on trial for murder. Here, the anarchist paradox appears in the sublimation of Vanzetti’s political beliefs to strategic exigency: his trial shapes even his self-representation to focus on influencing the state’s decisions rather than on challenging its validity, a pattern seen in most SVDC publications and continued by radical authors after Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s deaths. In *The Story*, many references to radicalism are deprecatory. Vanzetti calls his childhood “one of the happiest periods of my life”: “I was twenty years old; the magic age of hopes and dreams, even to those who, like myself, turn the pages of life’s book precociously”—anarchism is reduced to precociousness (6). Later, Vanzetti distances himself from the worker who, after a “long period of fruitless searching for work . . . had lost his taste for labor” (12). The disappointed worker suffers “the repeated impact of disappointment and insult, hunger and deprivation, [and] develops a certain indifference to his own fate” (12). Vanzetti is one of the “herd” of proletarians and he “learns . . . class-consciousness,” but his is a palatable radicalism (13-14). He is not the lazy, broken worker and the breadth of his intellectual

labor tempers his radicalization: he reads the Bible and Dante alongside Marx and Kropotkin (18).

This modulation of Vanzetti's radicalism appears alongside the SVDC's central strategy: the pamphlet presents Vanzetti's alibi and thus produces extralegal counter-discourse that can intervene in the ongoing aftermath of the trial. It chastises Judge Thayer and exhorts public sympathy for this narratable human:

There was not a vibration of sympathy in [Judge Thayer's] tone when he [imposed the sentence]. I wondered as I listened to him, why he hated me so. Is not a judge supposed to be impartial? But now I think I know—I must have looked like a strange animal to him, being a plain worker, an alien, and a radical to boot. And why was it that all my witnesses, simple people who were anxious to tell the simple truth, were laughed at and disregarded? (16)

Radicalism appears here as a charge against Thayer—as an explanation of bias—rather than as a defining characteristic of Vanzetti. It is an atmosphere or context for the miscarriage of justice. The story of Vanzetti's proletarian life is represented as only incidentally radical, but decidedly unjust. In this text, Vanzetti represents himself, but the purpose, the venue, the necessity of representation all intersect to reveal an extension of the criminal trial. As a work designed to correct the courts by addressing the citizens whom the criminal trial is designed to protect, it conforms to the nation's representational logic. We briefly see the unerasable presence of anarchism as Vanzetti declares himself “until the last instant . . . an anarchist,” but his politics are as incidental to the story as they are to the court's proceedings (20).¹¹⁵

115. This reading of *The Story* questions Barbara Harlow's stark distinction between “literature [that,] abstracted from the historical and institutional conditions that inform it . . . can serve . . . to underwrite . . . repressive . . . structures designed . . . to police dissent [and] literature of prison, composed in prison and from out of the prison experience, [which] is by contrast necessarily partisan, polemical” (4). While recognizing the value of Harlow's

The logic of representation overdetermines Sacco's and Vanzetti's trial, theirs and others' efforts to affect it, and the literature that makes them martyrs, but it is not an unassailable force: the fragmented pursuit of justice structures the trial and the discourse that circulates around it, yet also produces the discursive residue of their anarchism inside and outside the courtroom. Several of his letters and *Background of the Plymouth Trial* are examples of the liminal expressions that exceed the representational logic of justice and illuminate the absent presence of anarchism that runs through discourses around Sacco and Vanzetti.¹¹⁶ One might expect the radical content of Vanzetti's letters to be understated, because most of them are addressed to upper-class liberal women who have taken up the Sacco-Vanzetti cause because they believe the legal system has failed, not because of ideological affinity with the men. His letters indicate that he respects, even reveres these women, yet he refuses to temper his beliefs: they consistently demonstrate Galleani's influence on an anarchism that embraces the potential of political violence and rejects all governance.¹¹⁷

Many of Vanzetti's letters explain his reasons for embracing anarchism and assert his strict anti-government politics against the recipients' relative conservatism: "I cannot share your confidence in 'better government,' because I do not believe in the government, any of them,

claims about the potential reformatory power of prison literature, I question her dichotomous inside-outside, repressive-dissenting construction. The prison and, more importantly, carceral logic, do produce certain subjective forms, but in relation to overall rationales of power, prison inmates and "free" citizens are subject to homologous techniques and the literatures they produce can take any number of forms (those that support and those that challenge extant power relations).

116. These texts linger as Dimock's "'non-trivial' . . . a crucial supplement to any model of presumptive totality and generalizability" (91).

117. Avrich's *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* argues convincingly that Sacco and Vanzetti were allied with a group of Galleanists who openly advocated and secretly utilized violence, thus debunking the popular image of the two men as simpletons and pacifists. Vanzetti's letters express an appreciation for Galleani's writing, calling him "the strongest writer" and indicating all other living writers "are gnomes compared to him" ("To Virginia MacMechan" 104). Vanzetti also admits Galleanists are "fanatic," even by radical standards ("To Mary Donovan" [1925] 163).

since to me they can only differ in names from one another (“To Maude Pettyjohn” [1925] 143). He recognizes the marginality of his political stance—“Of course, we Anarchists are so because we differ in opinions from all the other humans who are not Anarchists” (“To Elsie Hillsmith” 94)—and classifies himself as a “voluntarist” who rejects all coercive governance (“To Maude Pettyjohn” [1926] 222). Vanzetti’s position requires distancing himself from other radical political movements, a distinction indicating both significant ideological differences and practically meaningful divergences in the public’s perception: “‘Radicalism’ is a very general term, applicable to several parties and doctrine each of which differs from the other ones. Both Nick and I are anarchists—the radical of the radical—the black cats, the terrors of many, of all the bigots, exploitators, charlatans, fakers, and oppressors . . . [other radicals] are authoritarian . . . we believe in no State or Government” (“To Sarah Root Adams” 274).¹¹⁸

The need to reiterate his specific radicalism arises in part from his belief in class-consciousness, an obvious overlap with multiple varieties of Leftism. Like the communists, he looks to the working class:

The lower are the best. The unpolitical masses who make life possible, are naturally well gifted, relatively good, purely good in all that survives in them of primordial. But they are dwarfed, brutalized, corrupted, cowardized by thousands of years of slavery, servilism, bestial toiling, sordity, poverty, unspeakable suffering, ignorance, and worse of all, by honors. But in spite of all this shame, horror and disgrace, they are the only ones who look to the stars and not the mud. Nor are they guilty. Guilty is the church, the monarchy, the capitalism, the militarism, the Burocrasy, and the yellow, pink, red, scarlet bad

118. This quote comes from a letter written a few months before his death, at a time when Vanzetti (and Sacco) have begun to be articulated to other radical movements. By reasserting his strict anti-government stance, Vanzetti attempts to disentangle himself from the progressive politics of upper-class members of the SVDC and from the “radical” politics of those who are already deploying him as a symbol of generic radical martyrdom.

shepherds, demagogues and politician. (“To Alice Stone Blackwell” [Sept. 1924] 129-130)

Vanzetti, however, rejects communism’s practical experiments and its ideological foundation. He criticizes the Soviet Union, claiming “[t]he bolshevik government is giving up to the international capitalism, all Russia’s natural resources, land, mine, forests, fishery, wells” and regretting that “the Russian workers shall work for the State and the foreign Company” (“To Maude Pettyjohn” [1923] 105). He also, however, further argues that from an anarchist perspective, the revolution was destined to fail: “The proletariat cannot become a ruling class; it can dethrone the actual ruler and place its leaders in their place, but in so doing the revolution would be in vain” (“To Leonard Abbott” 214). Recognizing the rise of communism, Vanzetti distances himself from the “the communists [who] want power” (“To Alice Stone Blackwell” [June 1924] 125). Without rejecting violence or evolution, he denies the validity of any revolution that subsequently creates a state.

Vanzetti does not prefer violence: “I abhor useless violence. I would my blood to prevent the sheading of blood, but neither the abyss nor the earth, nor the heavens, have a law which condemns the self-defense” (“To Alice Stone Blackwell” [Feb. 1924] 119). He retains the right of violence as a means to eliminating oppression and state violence:

The only vengeance which could placate me is the realization of freedom, the great deliverance which would beneficiate all my friends as well as my enemies: All. But till that, the struggle goes on, til we are breath to breath with the enemy fighting short arms, till then, to fight is our duty, our right, our necessity. . . The slave has the right and duty to arise against his master. (“To Alice Stone Blackwell” [Feb. 1924] 120-121)

In his letters, Vanzetti finds a venue for self-representation that allows him to detail his views on

violence, communism, and anarchism, but the private nature of his letters limited their reach: his well-meaning correspondents translated their contents into a de-anarchized, non-violent image of an unjustly accused pacifist. Quite simply, the stridency of Vanzetti's anarchism was either ignored or willfully hidden by his liberal supporters. In *Background of the Plymouth Trial*, however, Vanzetti's self-representation retains his militancy.

Clearly it *represents*, but *The Plymouth Trial* nevertheless produces a fissure by combining efforts to influence the trial with Vanzetti's polemical anti-government beliefs. Engaging with criminal law's continuing attempts to dispose of him and Sacco and the SVDC's efforts to influence these decisions, Vanzetti's last major pamphlet produces a transgressive anarchist discourse. It addresses specific legal issues, presenting "statements of facts related to the case," yet also gestures toward the contradiction of the anarchist in the courtroom: Sacco and Vanzetti can never receive a fair trial, because both fairness and the structure of the trial are determined by forces defined against their politics (5). The "facts" Vanzetti presents are of two types: those that can be a part of criminal legal discourse and those that cannot. The former duplicates SVDC counter-discourse, but the latter leaves a residual trace unique in literature around the Sacco-Vanzetti affair: by pointing out the failures of almost every aspect of criminal law and positing anarchist "facts" that threaten the existence of government and its stabilizing corrective strategies, Vanzetti avoids the trap of judging law and governance by their own standards, challenging them as such.

The Plymouth Trial was printed by the organization that published *The Road to Freedom*, a staunchly anarchist periodical dedicated to the "social theory which regards the union of order with the absence of all direct government" ("Anarchy" 4). So, while *The Story of a Proletarian Life* was produced by an organization comprising many different political positions allied around

the goal of Sacco and Vanzetti's defense, the Road to Freedom Group produced a work concerned less with the plight of the two men than with the dissemination of anarchist ideas. These disparate purposes manifest themselves as differences in spirit, tone, and rhetorical mode. In *The Plymouth Trial*, Vanzetti is spiteful, angry, and sarcastic, but also logical, detailed, and specific. The earlier text narrates his life, but this piece narrates—and attacks—criminal law. Vanzetti recognizes its designs: “my elimination by legal means;” the management of transgression, the suppression of dissent, and the disposition of inadequately self-governed subjects (6). This pamphlet details the various mechanisms—criminal laws, administrative deportations, monetary rewards—by which he is interpolated. In it, Vanzetti accuses the judge of bias, but also implicates his own lawyers, failing to recognize any distinction between the layers of representation in U.S. courts. And, he denies the entire system's claim to authority: “we are not asking for anything of any government, not even justice, which we expect from the people” (12). *The Plymouth Trial* most completely expresses Vanzetti's anarchism, because it threatens the underlying rationale of law and criminality: if courts are merely the arm of U.S. government that manages transgression, then the anarchist position should be to attack it in every aspect and to deny the circular reasoning by which it claims the right to judge. In this text, Vanzetti acerbically disregards the trial's forced representation and offers a glimpse of the anarchist defiantly rejecting governance and its sustaining mechanisms. He also, however, records the consequences: “Thus ended the obscene parody of a trial know as the Plymouth trial, that *split my existence* [emphasis added]” (36). Vanzetti has been made subject to representational logic: he is now anarchist and criminal, a paradoxical duality that cannot be reconciled nor fully represented.

After his existence has been split, the trial has exhausted its pursuit of truth, and Thayer is prepared to announce the disposition of the now criminal subjects, Vanzetti is given the chance to speak. At his sentencing, he is still within the legal system, still constrained by its rules, so it is understandable that he initially expresses himself in its terms: “I am . . . innocent of these two crimes” (*Transcript* 4896). He then, however, proceeds to redefine crime: “I never committed a real crime in my life . . . I struggled all my life to eliminate crimes that the official law . . . condemns, but also that crime that . . . the official law sanctions . . . the exploitation and the oppression of the man by the man” (*Transcript* 4897). After redefining crime in a way that transcends American criminal law, he indicts the entire system as in *The Plymouth Trial*—judge, jury, prosecution, and defense are recognized and dismissed as part of a governmental system in which the anarchist and anarchism can only be subject to elimination. Vanzetti concludes with a poignant claim: “I am suffering because I am a radical and indeed I am a radical” (*Transcript* 4904). His statement falls on deaf ears. It is a formality, already structured, made doubly meaningless by its perfunctoriness and its radicalism. After the defendants speak, the court simply pronounces its conclusion: “This is the sentence of the law” (*Transcript* 4905).

The Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee: Counter-discourse and Collective Representation

Vanzetti’s final efforts at self-representation are futile if they are designed to redirect the trial’s outcome, because its techniques have run their course and fulfilled their function: the stability of government through the management of transgressive subjects. Justice is served. His and Sacco’s subsequent executions seemingly marks their emergence as potent symbols of injustice: “martyrs insist in the face of overwhelming force that if there is to be continuing life, it will not be on the terms of the tyrant’s law” (Cover, “Violence” 1604). Throughout their entire

ordeal, however, a wide array of political groups “struggled . . . over who Sacco and Vanzetti were [and] how they should be defended,” so before they “came to represent the fate of the left altogether,” they were slowly shaped into martyrdom by the surrounding discourse (Hill 163). At the center of these struggles is the SVDC:

In the beginning it consisted entirely of Italians, the foremost among them being Aldino Felicani, anarchist printer, a tall, ascetic-looking young man, soft-voiced and reserved. He would set up type for the circulars, and translate them into Italian. Others would address envelopes, and visit the meeting-places of radicals in neighboring towns, and circulate subscription lists. So would come a few dollars here and a few dollars there. At the outset there was no office, no secretary, only the volunteer labors of a few comrades. (Sinclair, *Boston* 280)

From these humble beginnings, the SVDC would produce a remarkable amount of material and see a concomitant reduction in the anarchist presence on the committee.¹¹⁹ For many reasons, the SVDC was dominated by non-anarchist radicals and progressives and their publications reflect this composition.¹²⁰ They sought “Not pardon, but Justice, not Clemency but A New Trial All true friends of this cause are urged to demand a new trial, by which we are sure to reach the end for which we are fighting — which is justice and liberty for Sacco and Vanzetti” (SVDC, “Not Pardon” 1). No anarchism appears here, just a misguided belief that a new trial can produce

119. For a concise account of the SVDC’s campaign and the ways in which it “transformed Sacco and Vanzetti from stalwart members of a small band of militant revolutionaries into ambiguous popular icons whose cause could be supported from any number of ideological standpoints” see Mary Ann Trasciatti’s “The American Campaign to Save Sacco and Vanzetti” (40). Trasciatti provides an overview of the committee’s history, its composition, and its rhetorical strategies.

120. One important reason is that during the 1920s, non-naturalized anarchists continued to face the threat of deportation for espousing anarchism or possessing anarchist publications. The same fear that led Sacco and Vanzetti to lie upon arrest probably suppressed the anarchist voice on the SVDC.

“justice and liberty.”¹²¹ This brief statement is emblematic of most SVDC efforts: they attempt to influence the trial through extra-legal discursive production by appealing directly to the self-governing public—which is already multiply represented in the courtroom—without evoking Vanzetti’s anarchist challenge to the system’s validity. Put differently, they argue that the system has failed in this case rather than expressing ideological disagreement with the system’s existence. They simply want legal discourse to categorize Sacco and Vanzetti as innocent. Ironically, SVDC publications use mechanisms similar to legal discourse and thus have similar consequences for anarchism.¹²² They effect a parallel conflation of subjecthood and reproduce legal discourses structuring rhetoric. In addition, they begin the process of translating Sacco and Vanzetti into generic radical symbols.

For one, SVDC publications often literally reproduce the trial. By offering the public an intimate view of the prosecution’s and defense’s cases, the SVDC implicitly reinforces the notion that “justice” and “liberty” can coincide with legal discourse’s knowledge production and innocence-guilt paradigm. As early as 1921 (the year of the Sacco-Vanzetti trial), the SVDC published an analysis of the trial in their pamphlet, *The Story of the Sacco-Vanzetti Case*. While admitting that “the case can only be viewed rightly against the background of immigrant life and industrial struggle,” most of the pamphlet is dedicated to answering the guiding question: “Did Sacco and Vanzetti commit the crime of which they are accused?” (3-4). This fixation on their innocence—on proving that the court erroneously categorized the men—runs throughout SVDC

121. Note also that “Justice” is capitalized when it is connected to “Clemency” and “A New Trial,” but not when connected to liberty. This statement appears in oversized print at the top of the *Official Bulletin*’s first page, and even the typeface choices seem to privilege legal discourse by calling attention to the committee’s efforts to defend Sacco and Vanzetti through legal discourse, not outside it.

122. Obviously, the consequences for the men’s bodies differ. The SVDC does not execute Sacco and Vanzetti, but they do elide their anarchism, thus establishing the pattern for post-execution representations of the Left’s martyrs.

publications. It appears in the *What Do You Think?: Nine Revealing Documents* pamphlet, as they reprint affidavits and legal “extracts” to preserve “the lives of two innocent men” (2). And again, just a few months before Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s executions, the SVDC’s *Official Bulletin* offers guiding questions written by a handful of elite Bostonians.¹²³ These questions focus exclusively on legal constructions of truth, asking, for example, “Is it admitted that of the six bullets found in the bodies of the murdered men only one could possibly have passed through the pistol found on Sacco?” (SVDC, “Pertinent Questions” 1). Much of the SVDC’s *Bulletin* and many of their pamphlets are direct dissemination either of language from within legal discourse or from the decidedly non-radical newspapers covering the trial.¹²⁴ In short, the SVDC is defined by its desire to *defend*, but this defense is constructed as an extension of legal discourse: distribution of multiple representations of the crime and the trial is imagined potentially to correct the verdict. By not challenging representational logic or the innocence-guilt paradigm, the SVDC unintentionally reinforces legal discourse: law has failed once, but it is not fatally flawed.

The SVDC does attempt to explain the specificity of and reasons for this failure. In *Conspiracy Against Sacco and Vanzetti*, they claim that “[t]he legal presumption of innocence in favor of the prisoner at the bar has faded into myth in these United States” (1).¹²⁵ Their common

123. The SVDC reprinted these questions in their entirety.

124. It is remarkable how little original text the SVDC produced. Many of their pamphlets are reprinted materials (either court documents or other text) and the *Official Bulletin of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee* is filled with snippets from the court transcript and subsequent filings, letters of support from a wide variety of persons representing a broad political spectrum, reprints of other radical and progressive publications, recycled editorials, and coverage of the trial by major newspapers (especially the *Boston Globe*). The SVDC reproduces legal discourse by quite literally reproducing material.

125. This title uses language of legal discourse, attempting to redeploy the construct through which Sacco and Vanzetti are linked as an image of culpability for all of those involved in the trial. While perhaps effective as counter-discourse (propaganda) the rearticulation of legal definitions is a questionable move that illuminates the many inconsistencies arising at the intersection of government and anti-government radicalism.

refrain is that Sacco and Vanzetti were convicted for their radical beliefs: “Was it of murder or of radicalism that Sacco and Vanzetti were convicted” (*What Do You Think?* 2)? What they fail to recognize is their own complicity, produced through a repetition of the trial’s rhetoric: they seek to participate in the realization of “justice” through legal means without seeing the paradox. To claim, as the SVDC does, that “[o]ur courts are just” is to mistake the inherent contradiction between Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s anarchism and the nation’s representative democracy for a less insidious and easily remediable instance of bias (“Statements of the Committee” 4). The SVDC’s contemporaneous representation of Sacco and Vanzetti expressed the desire to see them removed from legal discourse, but only on the discourse’s terms.

More problematic is the SVDC’s insistence on appealing to American democratic ideals in defense of Sacco and Vanzetti. Frequently, the *Official Bulletin* links the men’s plight to the founders of American democracy, like John Adams (SVDC, “John Adams Speaks” 8), and just as often plucks at its readers’ “American and Christian ideals” (SVDC, “The Seventh Christmas” 1). In part, these appeals are effective propaganda, a strategic choice to articulate convicted murderer-anarchists to less alienating movements, hence combating visceral prejudice and generating widespread support. Turning to “American ideals of justice and the voice of America,” however, privileges the extant mechanisms to which Sacco and Vanzetti are now subject (SVDC, *The Awakening of America’s Conscience* 1). Could the SVDC’s efforts have been successful and achieved a new trial, a not-guilty verdict, or a pardon (all legal means for extricating Sacco and Vanzetti from their interpolation)? Theoretically, yes. But that success requires tacit submission to the central logic of representation that sustains American democracy—requires ignoring Vanzetti’s critique of the entire system of governance.¹²⁶ The

126. I do not mean to diminish the tragedy of Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s deaths. I am sure both men would have preferred to live (though Sacco seems to prefer death to life in prison) and certainly would have preferred release.

conscious effort to re-present Sacco and Vanzetti with the goal of legal indemnification requires strategies that discuss their radical beliefs only insofar as they are the cause of the trial's practical breakdown (i.e., its failure to adhere to its own rules and fulfill American ideals). Just as anarchism cannot be represented in the courtroom, it cannot be represented in venues that seek to continue working through legal discourse.

The SVDC's strategy involves an appeal to the American public and a statement of faith in American laws, but it also seeks to mobilize a broad-based movement toward their ends. This combination signals the transition from Sacco and Vanzetti as anarchists interpolated within legal discourse, to Sacco and Vanzetti as symbols of generic American radicalism. During its seven years of active work, the SVDC transformed from a small, Italian-anarchist-dominated, shoestring-budget operation, to a *mélange* of socialists, communists, and liberal fellow-travelers with thousands of donors and no noticeably anarchist bent. Near the midpoint of the Sacco-Vanzetti affair, several events hastened the SVDC's transformation. In spring 1924, Fred Moore broke away from the SVDC to form the Sacco-Vanzetti New Trial League, in part to move away from the anarchist presence on the SVDC (Watson 248).¹²⁷ Moore's efforts were unsuccessful and he resigned from the case, while the SVDC remained the primary public voice for Sacco and

Nevertheless, Sacco and Vanzetti's ordeal was a symbolic struggle while they were still alive and remains a potent symbol after their deaths. Ultimately, the SVDC and their attorneys sublimated Sacco's and Vanzetti's anarchism to practical concerns, a choice structured by the nation's overdetermining representationality that is reproduced—in altered form—by radical authors.

127. Fred Moore had established a reputation as a lawyer for radicals well before the Sacco-Vanzetti case: "Between 1910 and 1920, Moore participated in every celebrated IWW trial" (Watson 86). Though he was never the lead attorney, Moore worked for the defense on the McNamara trial and the Ettor-Giovannitti trial (after the textile strike) and helped defend many other labor agitators and radicals (Watson 85-87). His radical ties did not place him at odds with the publicity-seeking faction of the SVDC, which wanted to use public interest to affect legal discourse. In fact, Moore "made every effort outside the courtroom to turn the proceedings into a political trial" (Topp 27). His efforts along with the later work of Mary Donovan and Gardner Jackson generated the groundswell of support amongst radicals and progressives, but also structured representations of Sacco and Vanzetti in terms of legal discourse, thus sublimating their anarchism.

Vanzetti.¹²⁸ They turned to William Thompson, “a buttoned-down conservative” attorney whose defense of Sacco and Vanzetti “would earn nothing but respect” from Thayer, the prosecution, and the public (Watson 253). This change roughly coincides with the rise to prominence within the SVDC of Mary Donovan (SVDC recording secretary) and Gardner Jackson (editor of the *Official Bulletin*). Bruce Watson claims that anarchists still “dominated” the committee (265), but Donovan, a “member of the Socialist party” (Sinclair 514) and Jackson, who “‘brought in a respectable, social, liberal element” (Watson 266), were its voice. In the years leading up to Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s executions, their immediate legal defense came from a conservative lawyer and their extra-legal public image was constructed almost entirely by a socialist and a liberal.¹²⁹ Obviously, the attorney was retained to help influence the trial, but the political makeup of the SVDC is one reason for the public reproduction of legal discourse. The progressive and Leftist leanings of the committee also make the appeal to collective subjective formations nearly inevitable.

As with reproducing aspects of the trial, appeals to joint action are by themselves merely indicative of a conscious strategy to use all available means toward Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s release. From this perspective, the heading “The Voice of Solidarity for the Triumph of Justice” (SVDC, “Voice of Solidarity” 6) above a list of donors and their dollar amounts is part of the rhetorical strategy to generate pressure on the Massachusetts’ courts, a recognition that only “if enough people of this country want them saved” will Sacco and Vanzetti live (SVDC, “The

128. Sacco was pleased by Moore’s departure, because he had always disliked Moore.

129. *Boston* notes that Jackson “was not a ‘radical” (515). Sinclair was a socialist willing to work through government, so his judgment of Jackson’s politics is particularly striking. Jackson may not have been at the opposite end of the political spectrum from Sacco and Vanzetti, but his selection as the voice for two anarchists seems strange.

Present Status” 1).¹³⁰ In their historical and political contexts, however, these statements are revealed as steps in transforming Sacco and Vanzetti into generic radical symbols. The SVDC’s rhetoric extends beyond consensus; it taps into Marxian political ideology and deploys the men as symbols in a struggle that extends beyond their current situation: “[Sacco and Vanzetti] have become a symbol of all the forward-striving portion of the working class” (SVDC, *Story of the Sacco-Vanzetti Case* 6). By articulating the men to the cause of labor—the collective working-class—the SVDC sublimates their anarchism to position them within the larger movement of economic radicalism. This connection to labor extends from the SVDC reprinting the AFL’s resolution to the use of the anarchists by communists who “needed martyrs” (Watson 278).

Ultimately, the SVDC achieved moderate success mobilizing the working class: donations poured in from unions around the country, strikes broke out around the world, and Sacco and Vanzetti became a rallying point for politically engaged members of the under-classes.¹³¹ In itself, this mobilization is consonant with Vanzetti’s (and to a lesser extent Sacco’s) anarchist ideals—temporary, organic coalescence—but the specific ways in which they are represented within legal discourse, by the SVDC, and after their deaths by radical and

130. The donor segment appears in several issues of the *Official Bulletin*. The SVDC published a full financial report, including a comprehensive donor list, in 1925. The *Financial Report of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee* includes the AFL’s resolution regarding the Sacco-Vanzetti case and thus doubly connects Sacco and Vanzetti to the more general, not exclusively anarchist, labor movement. They are represented in part by the AFL and simultaneously positioned within a vast community of donors who collectively comprise a political entity (made up of labor organizations, unions, and individuals from a range of political positions) organizing around an issue. Whereas legal discourse, conflates Sacco and Vanzetti within a single crime, the SVDC financial reports dilute them within a “solidarity” represented in monetary terms.

131. I say “moderate” success only because of the quick disappearance of public demonstration after Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s deaths and because of the political composition of public outcry. In the weeks before their executions, the SVDC (and by this time the mainstream media) fomented “a seemingly endless parade of public figures and foreign dignitaries” and “protest[s] in both Europe and Latin America” (Temkin 163). Liberal outrage accounted for no small number of these calls for justice, so the SVDC was quite successful in generating public pressure on the government and its legal discourse, but labor seems to have lost interest in the cause immediately following the execution and all that remains are the literary works and the political agendas to which they are attached. In other words, the mobilization of the working class—the cause to which Sacco and Vanzetti were articulated to raise funds for a more broad-based appeal—transformed into an almost exclusively literary movement.

progressive writers, reveal the paradox of representing anarchist politics. The SVDC reinforces legal discourse by appealing to the laboring section of the democratic nation, asking them to represent differently, to pressure the extant mechanisms, to ensure that transgressive subjects are governed properly, but still governed.

This counter-discourse provides the link between the ways in which Sacco and Vanzetti are interpolated into legal discourse's representational logic and the uses toward which their image will be put in the late 1920s and 1930s. Representing the anarchist subject necessarily places him in the realm of governance and the SVDC's efforts are no different: they operate only at the level of counter-discourse, eschewing direct action in favor of the representational strategy of collectivizing representative blocs within the nation that can alter the disposition of Sacco and Vanzetti by the nation. The history of Sacco and Vanzetti from their arrest until their execution is a story of seemingly competing, yet remarkably unified representations. Legal discourse forces them to represent and be represented; the SVDC reproduces both the form and content of these representations. Sacco and Vanzetti do not cease to be anarchists, but the act of representation conflates them, collectivizes them, reasserts the legitimacy of government, and sublimates their anarchism to expediency.

In his last known letter, written hours before his execution, Vanzetti expresses hope for the legacy of his death: "What I wish more than all in this last hour of agony is that our case and our fate may be understood in their real being and serve as a tremendous lesson to the forces of freedom—so that our suffering and death will not have been in vain" ("To H. W. L. Dana" 325). His hope is freedom, the anarchist vision of non-governance. On this same day, August 22, 1927, Vanzetti expresses his "[fear] that nothing but violent resistance could ever overcome . . . the present organization of society" (Thompson 9). To the last, his anarchism leads him to question

the efficacy of discourse, of representation in lieu of action. At midnight on August 23, Sacco and Vanzetti were legally exterminated, their representations forever detached from their lived anarchism.

Chapter 6

“we are two nations”: The American Left and Anarchism’s Nadir

Circumstances sometimes force men into situations so dramatic, thrust their puny frames so far into the burning bright searchlights of history that they or their shadows on men’s minds become enormous symbols.

—John Dos Passos, *Facing the Chair*

Not long after Sacco and Vanzetti were executed, Edna St. Vincent Millay published “Fear,” an attack on those in the United States who allowed them to die: “you do not at all know what an Anarchist is An anarchist, you insist, is a man who makes bombs and puts them under the State House” (5). Chastising the conservative and complacent masses, Millay defends Sacco and Vanzetti by stripping them of the capacity for violence—they simply “believ[ed] that human beings are naturally good” (5). “Fear” appears in the same SVDC publication that contained Thompson’s “Vanzetti’s Last Statement,” which details Vanzetti’s refusal to “issue a public statement advising [against] violence” (8). Despite Vanzetti’s recalcitrance, Millay repeats the SVDC theme: these anarchists were not violent; they were naïfs, unjustly subjected to flawed, yet salvageable government. Millay’s interest, however, is not to save Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s lives. They are dead and now the question of guilt shifts from the criminal trial’s pursuit of truth to public finger-pointing as *some* are found culpable. For Millay, “these men were put to death because they made you nervous” (5): she is innocent because she called for their release, because she writes of their harmlessness. Others are guilty, though, and more is at stake than the release of Sacco and Vanzetti. These new stakes are signaled by Millay’s recognition that she is “free to say these things [only] because [she is] not an Anarchist” (5). She does not “share the political opinions of these men with whose fate [she is] concerned” (6). The consequences now are the shape Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s martyrdom will take.

Millay, who was one of the many progressive writers drawn to the Sacco-Vanzetti affair, implicitly claims the right to represent the men. This right is coded as an accusation against an imagined “you”: I must speak for them, because you will only listen to non-anarchists. She is not an anarchist, nor even a radical, but merely a writer lamenting the “blue hem of Justice . . . being dragged in the mire” (6). She mourns the loss of two men incapable of violence who symbolize the failings of the American legal system and the American public. While still alive, the SVDC’s rhetoric can be read as well-intentioned efforts to save the men’s lives, but Millay chastises the public in the name of nameless pacifists who never existed.¹³² They are no longer subject to the criminal trial, but they are subject and symbol of a new representational modality: the narrative of American literary leftism. Writing only two months after their deaths, Millay strips them of their names, all unique identifying features, and any belief in political violence.¹³³ In place of these, Sacco and Vanzetti become martyrs to a generic cause.

In the years following 1927, writing about Sacco and Vanzetti was a veritable cottage industry: many works directly addressed the trial, and even more touched on the affair obliquely. The outpouring of support prompted poems from writers as diverse as Millay, Malcolm Cowley, Louis Ginsberg, Mike Gold, Lola Ridge, and Clement Wood. Lengthier works include *The Sacco-Vanzetti Anthology of Verse* (1927)—a small pamphlet containing poems by Ralph Cheney, Lucia Trent, and others—and *America Arraigned*, which was edited by Cheney and Trent and included poems by Countee Cullen, Kathleen Millay, and E. Merrill Root. Sinclair’s

132. Millay begins “Fear” with the line, “There are two names you would not hear me mention” (1). Throughout the piece, she refuses to name either Sacco or Vanzetti. On its surface, this choice may appear to be a poignant comment on their deaths, a further indictment of the apathetic public that refused to hear the SVDC’s pleas, but it can also be read as an important part of the transformation of Sacco and Vanzetti from specific individuals to de-anarchized symbols of America’s failings.

133. Millay’s entire explication of “Anarchism” is pulled from a dictionary. She does not seek to understand the complexity of anarchism or the individuality of anarchists any more than she claims to be an anarchist.

Boston and Anderson's *Gods of the Lightning* also appeared in 1928, as did H.G. Wells's *Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island* (which contains a brief section on Sacco and Vanzetti), signaling the high-water mark for post-execution literature. Their impact persisted, however, well into the 1930s, inspiring *Winterset* (1935), *The Big Money* (1936), and several other novels, including Nathan Asch's *Pay Day* (1930) and Bernard de Voto's *We Accept with Pleasure* (1934). As radical literature proliferated in the late 1920s and 1930s, Sacco and Vanzetti lingered as a popular topic, yet remarkably, almost none of this body of work—produced around and about Sacco's and Vanzetti's martyred bodies—was written by anarchists. Instead, literary depictions of the two anarchists have been written from other radical and progressive political positions. Sacco-Vanzetti texts comprise perhaps the most often recognized appearance of anarchism in American literature: here are works by prominent authors that celebrate the lives (and deaths) of two anarchists. The corpus built upon these anarchist corpses, however, adapts and transmutes SVDC tropes in order to construct a new narrative—works by Sinclair, Dos Passos, Anderson, and others provide the representations of Sacco and Vanzetti that largely circumscribe their legacy. In doing so, these texts operate homologously to the criminal trial, producing “truth” about the men that is perfectly consonant with the sustaining logic of both literature and politics, yet relegates anarchism to an aside, an historical quirk, a relative inconsequence.

Below, I analyze works by Sinclair, Anderson, and Dos Passos that both exemplify the creation of a narrative reproduced by literary scholars for decades and crystallize the problem of anarchism.¹³⁴ Whereas their trial used representational strategies to manage the threat anarchism

134. For a different perspective on literature about the Sacco-Vanzetti affair see Carol Vanderveer Hamilton's “American Writers, Modernism, and Representations of the Sacco-Vanzetti Case.” Hamilton addresses Sacco and Vanzetti in relation to the concept of literary modernism as it relates to “oppositional politics” (5). She sees their arrest, trial, and execution raising “a number of interrelated, layered issues [such as] racialised class politics . . .

presented to the nation, Sacco-Vanzetti literature represents the martyrs to sublimate their anarchism to a generic radical cause. From the 1920s to the present, Sacco and Vanzetti have symbolized a variety of political movements—from Millay’s liberal disappointment in her country to communists’ attempts to use two anarchists as a rallying point for the collective proletarian subject. Their anti-government politics virtually disappear within the representational strategies of other political agendas that do not call for the abolition of government.

By analyzing these literary, formal, political strategies, this chapter offers three complementary arguments. First, I argue that while putatively diverse, the radicalism subtending Sacco-Vanzetti literature produces a notably cohesive modulation of anarchism. Though these authors (and the scholars who have defined the broad genre of “radical literature”) begin from a multitude of political positions and deploy far different literary forms (straightforward realism and experimental modernism; fiction and drama), they all similarly relegate anarchism to the margins of their radical narratives. Second, I contend the construction of this narrative bears a structural affinity to the representational logic that sustains American democracy and its dispositive mechanisms (i.e., the criminal trial): my analyses of the Sacco-Vanzetti trial and Sacco-Vanzetti literature reveal an overdetermining representationality that links political participation with literary production within a unified affective matrix. And third, I elucidate the ineradicable presence of anarchism. Though managed, ignored, sublimated, and represented, anarchism remains as a residual challenge to the pervasive logic of representation. Denying both the possibility and value of politically re-presenting individuals, it haunts the trial and the literature as an unadequated threat. Together, this chapter’s three interconnected claims gesture

issues of rebellion and freedom . . . the formal strategies of the writers who attempted to represent the trial . . . and the way in which the assumptions about gender participated in, or were resisted by, those representations” (5). While I do not address the same concerns as Hamilton (with the exception of representational strategies, which we approach quite differently), her study is notable as one of the only explorations of Sacco-Vanzetti literature as literary assemblage.

toward the stakes of anarchism's appearance within legal and literary discourses: the paradoxical need for anarchists to represent their politics—to make them knowable—while simultaneously rejecting representation as a viable foundation for just social relations, allows us critically to examine the realities and aspirations of pre-WWII American government. Ultimately, asking why criminal trials and radical authors similarly effaced anarchism forces us to consider both the consequences of our structuring impulse toward representation and the limits of democracy.

Upton Sinclair: *Boston*

Of the radical authors who came to the defense of Sacco and Vanzetti, perhaps none is more important than Sinclair. Though he now is remembered almost exclusively for *The Jungle* (1906), from the 1900s to the 1920s, he was *the* American “radical” writer (especially after the death of London in 1916). As Floyd Dell claims in his 1927 *Upton Sinclair: A Study in Social Protest*, “he is the one figure, since the death of Debs, who commands the respect of all branches of the revolutionary movement” (186).¹³⁵ Sinclair's prominence, his attraction to radical causes, and his track record for writing sweeping fictional accounts of politico-historical problems make him seem a natural fit to write the lengthiest, most meticulously researched literary effort to address the Sacco-Vanzetti injustice. At over 700 pages, *Boston* accomplishes this goal. Sinclair deploys his realist style in order to “let the partisans of both sides voice their feelings and beliefs” (Sinclair vi). His purported objectivity, however, is complicated by the nature of his radicalism: Sinclair clearly was not an anarchist. Like many other defenders of Sacco and

135. Dell's text appeared in the same year Sinclair traveled to Boston to gather material for a novel about Sacco and Vanzetti, so at the time of their execution, Sinclair was important enough for one of the nation's most respected Left-leaning critics to write a book-length study of him. Dell's text begins with the goal of explaining to an often unappreciative American audience why Sinclair is “regarded throughout the world as his country's most distinguished literary figure” (11). He claims Sinclair is the living link to “a significant American literary movement . . . which was killed twenty years ago because there was too much troublesome truth in it, and which is only in these last few years being painfully born again” (187).

Vanzetti (and shapers of their legacy), Sinclair did not share their politics. Instead, as a socialist, he interpreted their deaths from a relatively mild Marxist stance.¹³⁶ For this reason, *Boston* exemplifies the shift from the SVDC's strategic attempts to extricate Sacco and Vanzetti from the criminal trial to posthumous literary efforts to re-present the meaning of their ordeal. Both discourses narrativize the men, effectively de-anarchizing them, but Sinclair's blend of journalistic realism and socialism transforms the fight to save Sacco and Vanzetti into a putatively "real" depiction that makes them generic symbols for the Left.

In the preface to *Boston*, Sinclair explicitly outlines his intentions: he "trie[s] to be a historian," an objective chronicler (vi). To write the "contemporary historical novel," he must avoid bias, offering only a verisimilar account: "So far as concerns the two individuals, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, this book is not fiction, but an effort at history; everything they are represented as doing they actually did" (v).¹³⁷ Before the novel begins, Sinclair elides the space between verifiable actions and actual significance through the mechanism of representation. He imagines himself and the novel as capable of objectivity and thus denies the effects of representation on Sacco and Vanzetti: since he produces a "surprisingly objective

136. Sinclair converted to socialism in 1904, shortly before writing *The Jungle* (N. Spencer 38). He remained an ardent, politically active socialist for the rest of his life. Though perhaps radical by some standards, Sinclair espoused a palatable version of socialism. He believed that extant governmental mechanisms could reform capitalism and salvage the essentially noble origins of the United States. In fact, less than a decade after Sacco and Vanzetti were executed, Sinclair ran for governor of California. His "radicalism" was close enough to the mainstream for him to serve as a "political messiah," breathing new life into the Democratic Party and mobilizing a politically diverse "progressive force" that altered the course of state and national politics (G. Mitchell xiii-xiv). For a highly specific exploration of Sinclair's politics, see Ivan Scott's *Upton Sinclair: The Forgotten Socialist*.

137. In part, Sinclair's insistence on his own impartiality may arise from his ambivalence about Sacco's and Vanzetti's guilt. Scholars continue to debate Sinclair's views on this issue. In 2005, a previously unknown letter was found, in which Sinclair supposedly "confesse[s] knowing that Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were guilty" (Mattson, "The Smoking Gun That Wasn't" B11). Kevin Mattson, however, discounts the purported revelation, claiming simply that "Sinclair struggled to write a historical novel that refused to turn immigrant laborers into innocent martyrs or just to tell 'lies'" (B11). It is still unclear what Sinclair might have thought about Sacco and Vanzetti, but it is likely that his views of the men were complicated if not contradictory. In either case, *Boston's* preface suggests that the author has no strong stance on the question of innocence or guilt—he merely presents the case for others to decide.

[narrative] relatively free from propaganda,” the reader simply can sift through the facts and judge the case, disregarding the political commitments of the author and the formal methods through which “facts” are filtered (Arthur 217).

Much like SVDC publications, Sinclair reproduces legal discourse from the outset. He writes for those who “want to know the truth,” but ignores the constructed act of truth production (v). He believes himself able to “portray what was wrong and unjust about the case . . . without turning Sacco and Vanzetti into innocent martyrs” (Mattson, *Upton Sinclair* 145). Notice the dual dichotomies: Sacco and Vanzetti may not be “innocent martyrs” but they are innocent or guilty; and the validity of the decision about their innocence or guilt is either just or unjust—it either realizes the potential justice of legal discourse, or it does not. The fiction of fictional objectivity functions in *Boston* through the same polarized logic of the criminal trial and SVDC rhetoric, but now Sacco and Vanzetti are dead. Their guilt or innocence is relevant only insofar as it serves some other goal. In *Boston*, this goal is a specific vision for radical change that shows government has functioned improperly, yet still can be reformed. While the appearance of Sacco and Vanzetti in a socialist’s novel is not inherently anti-anarchist, Sinclair’s formal choices confirm his reliance on legal discursive logic and affirm radical politics that reject Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s anarchism.

According to Sinclair, “[t]he decision to write [*Boston*] was taken at nine-thirty P.M. (Pacific Coast time), August 22nd, 1927: the occasion being the receipt of a telephone message from a newspaper, to the effect that Sacco and Vanzetti were dead” (v). He reportedly considered the novel an effort to “make the noble lives and example of these two men count in the future” (qtd. in Mattson, *Upton Sinclair* 143). Despite its genesis and intentions, *Boston* is not dominantly centered on Sacco and Vanzetti. Rather, the novel contains three major characters

whose experiences collectively narrate the Sacco-Vanzetti affair: Bartolomeo Vanzetti, Cornelia and Betty Thornwell (a dyadic pair with parallel plots that structure the limits of radicalism), and Boston (the city). Notably, Sacco appears infrequently throughout the novel. He is a secondary character, receiving little direct attention by Sinclair until *after* the men's arrest. This choice does not identically reproduce the legal conflation of Sacco and Vanzetti into a single crime, but it similarly reduces them to a single narrative and unified political position, a connection solidified and made permanent by their arrest.¹³⁸ Vanzetti is narrated as a character before the arrest; Sacco only becomes relevant as part of Vanzetti's past and part of the unified subject of the legal discourse.¹³⁹ In formal terms, Sacco is not a full subject in this novel, because his trajectory is limited to the time he spends within the legal discourse. Sinclair truncates Sacco in relation to the other characters, those who are represented in longer, broader, and deeper terms.

Vanzetti is narrated in greater detail, yet he too fills a strangely subdued role. He first appears in the novel's second chapter, a "tall and somewhat stooped man [with] the appearance of a grave and amiable walrus . . . a dignified man" (39). Initially, Vanzetti is narrated only through his connection with other characters, functioning as an embodied dispensation of radical thought. His main role in the early part of the novel is to educate Cornelia. They travel to Plymouth Rock and he begins, in Sinclair's representation of his broken English, to explain his ideology: "mosta people be good, wanta joostice . . . what is trouble wit' people is not badda heart . . . it is power, it is go-vernment" (53). This fictionalized Vanzetti speaks from a position resembling Vanzetti's lived anarchism, yet also echoes elements of the strategically deployed

138. Sacco is first mentioned more than 100 pages into the text, and even then Vanzetti narrates Sacco's life story. By focusing on Vanzetti, Sinclair makes Sacco a part of Vanzetti, just another facet of his experiences, a strategy that compounds the dismissive contemporaneous view that "Sacco is less in the picture because he is the lesser man" (A. Taylor 33). Only once the novel turns to events after May 5, 1920, after the two men have been connected by the legal discourse, does Sacco receive further attention.

139. The first appearance of the construction "Sacco-Vanzetti" occurs only a few pages after their arrest (221).

image of him as harmless: “I no t’ink war no more, no t’ink rivoluzione, politica laida! I go picka flower” (54). This overlap likely emerges from Sinclair’s ambivalence toward Vanzetti’s extreme radicalism. On one hand, Vanzetti is an exploited worker turned unjustly condemned criminal. On the other hand, he rejects governance at every level: “Organizzazione is trappa for worker, make heem slave! Union is joosta same as go-vernment” (59). He is one of the “anarchists [who do] not permit organization” and thus lives a brand of radicalism far different from Sinclair (60). The first several chapters of *Boston* vacillate between the pacifistic flower-picker and the anarchist “fighting man” (100). Throughout the novel’s early sections, however, Vanzetti is consistently reduced to an educational tool, a rock against which Cornelia can sharpen her burgeoning radicalism.

The fullest depiction of Vanzetti’s early life occurs once he meets Betty Thornwell. By this time, Cornelia has converted to pseudo-radical progressive politics, but her granddaughter is only just being introduced to the working-class Italian community. He tells the two women his story, from his peasant upbringing in Villafalletto to his radicalization in the United States. His self-narration, though, functions simply as a mechanism for the radicalization of others. Everything that made him an anarchist is prologue to *Boston* and Sinclair’s narration of Vanzetti comprises only the shifting politics of the Thornwell women and his time within legal discourse. As the novel progresses, Sinclair struggles to address the anarchist beliefs that he cannot abide and that are not useful for a socialist deployment of the martyred-radical image. The narrator fictively divests Vanzetti of violent intentions, explaining in third person how he found the notion that Galleanists were responsible for the recent rash of bombings to be “nonsense,” a farce confirmed by the government’s failure to find any bombs during their raids of anarchist homes (209). In fact, throughout the first third of the novel, neither the central characters nor the

narrator seem able to admit the possibility that Vanzetti would commit a violent act. Yet, upon his arrest, Sinclair begins to weave doubt into the novel. In an exchange with Cornelia, communist Pierre Leon first raises the possibility that Sacco and Vanzetti might be guilty:

“The first thing you have to know about an anarchist is what leader he follows.”

“Bart and Nick belonged to the Galleani group.”

“But Galleani is a militant . . .”

“I didn’t have that idea. Bart told me he was a militant—“

“But then, when an anarchist tells you he’s a militant, why don’t you believe him?” (231)

In the “real” lives of Sacco and Vanzetti, their arrest signaled the nation’s consideration of their innocence. In *Boston* the arrest marks a parallel shift from the naive belief that two anarchists are incapable of violence to a novelistic investigation of the evidence. From the conversation between Leon and Cornelia until the end of the novel, Sinclair’s “objectivity” requires a balanced perspective—maybe they are guilty, maybe they are not—but this balance actually is a reproduction of the trial’s discourse and the SVDC’s efforts to affect it. His efforts to produce “truth” suspend the development of Vanzetti as a character, because he is now re-presented through the novel, which has as its subject the justness of American legal discourse.

Though Vanzetti appears to be a central character, Sinclair sublimates him to other characters and to the “objective truth,” a construct homologous to the trial’s pursuit of justice. He enacts this strategy by minimizing the representation of Vanzetti’s present, by locating his formative experiences in the novel’s past, and by exploring what we do see of Vanzetti’s life always in terms of the justness of his discursive inscription by law. Together, these formal choices make Vanzetti a static character who does not grow, change, or move. He is an immovable ideological object against which Sinclair positions other characters, the journalistic

search for truth, and the socialist agenda implicit in his condemnation of the legal system's failures.

R.N. Mookerjee breaks *Boston*'s plot into the "Cornelia-Betty-upper-class plot" and the "Sacco-Vanzetti . . . plot" (102), a fair distinction.¹⁴⁰ However, his further claim that the Sacco-Vanzetti plot is the "main" plot is unfounded.¹⁴¹ Cornelia and Betty receive much of the novel's focus, with the "elderly Boston matron [Cornelia]" being Sinclair's "central character" (Arthur 217). Her centrality operates on several levels. First and most basically, she begins and ends the novel. *Boston* opens with the story of her husband's death, the event that prompts Cornelia's actions for the remainder of the novel, and ends with Cornelia attending Sacco's and Vanzetti's funeral, alive after they are dead. Second, she is the point of intersection for all of the novel's plot lines. Cornelia links the juxtaposed court cases that frame the novel: Sinclair's critique of the flawed legal system hinges on her presence.¹⁴² We can imagine the novel without Sacco and Vanzetti (they might be replaced with any working-class criminal trial from the era), but not without Cornelia. Third, and most importantly, she and the formally indistinguishable Betty are the only characters given the full range of fictional treatment. They change and their actions affect the plot of the novel. Formally, the novel is *about* Cornelia, her decision to reject a conservative past and to undertake a "lower class masquerade" through which she becomes

140. Mookerjee's *Art for Social Justice: The Major Novels of Upton Sinclair* contains one of the most extensive studies of *Boston*. While the author's analysis suffers from an unfortunate tendency to evaluate the "quality" of Sinclair's work (by several outmoded aesthetic and formal criteria), it is worthwhile as an extended examination of an understudied novel.

141. Mookerjee explains the novel's content as "the tagging on of a purely fictive set of characters, events and speech to what is essentially a real account of persons and events in a historical context" (103). I would invert this schema to argue that Sacco and Vanzetti's "real" life circumstances are tagged on, functioning as the setting for a story that is part proletarian *bildungsroman*, part political diatribe.

142. Sinclair structures *Boston* around both the Sacco-Vanzetti trial and the 1921 Willet case, in which "a group of Boston lawyers and bankers were found to have used their financial power to ruin an independent businessman" (Mookerjee 98). These two cases are contrasted: Sacco and Vanzetti are convicted and executed, while the wealthy businessmen are cleared of any wrongdoing. Cornelia's family is at the center of the fictionalized Willet case.

radicalized (Chura 169).

At the novel's outset, Cornelia belongs to the upper class. She is the recent widow of a former governor, completely detached from the lives of the working class, except through her connection to the male members of her family who exploit them. Upon her husband's death, Cornelia seizes "the opportunity to relinquish a social position that had become abhorrent to her and for which she had always been temperamentally unsuited [and to] seek refuge and self-renewal in anonymous lower class life" (Chura 168-169). She leaves home with nothing, takes a room in a working-class Italian home, finds a job at the cordage plant, and meets Vanzetti. Almost immediately, Cornelia begins to find first-hand (though questionable) class-consciousness. By the end of her first day as a laborer, she thinks, "[a]ll the love and fine sentiment in the world didn't matter a particle, so long as you had to sit here ten hours out of twenty-four making the same motions over and over!" (46). At this point, she is living the working-class life, but she has no hint of revolution or labor unrest, only a recognition that workers' lives are difficult. Some months later, Cornelia's hardship generates a concrete political idea: "Cornelia knew little about labor matters, but the elementary thought came to her that these ill-paid workers ought to have a union" (59). Her revelation is notable for its timidity—she is still in the earliest stages of class-consciousness, having progressed only to accept unionization as an option—and its arrogance in assuming that this "elementary" idea would be new to her "slow of wit" co-workers (58).

Cornelia's transformation is completed in short order and the narrator explains her relationship to the working-class: "for the rest of her life she would be an illustration of the fact, well-known in the labor movement, that members of the leisure class who take an interest in the cause are apt to become more radical than the workers themselves" (74). This downclassed

radical parvenu who will soon accept a \$5000/year income is described as more radical than the workers, including Vanzetti. *Boston* not only revolves around Cornelia, it builds the image of the radical subject through her growth. Even after seeing the horrors of government working to support industry, she insists, “I am not an anarchist” (121). Cornelia envisions labor organization as the answer, rejects violence, and not surprisingly voices Sinclair’s socialism. Just after the novel proclaims her “more radical than the workers” she goes to court, “hear[s] the workers testify as to unprovoked assaults . . . hear[s] a judge give the police a mild rebuke . . . and then [goes] back to the picket-line and [sees] the same thing going on precisely as if not judges or courts existed” (74-75). Her radicalism grows through the experience of working and striking alongside those who do not choose to be part of the laboring class, and through Vanzetti’s tutelage. His influence, however, is minimal. Cornelia never becomes an anarchist, instead growing into a pacifist socialism mirrored by the narrator. This political position is contrasted with the inefficacious anarchism of Sacco and Vanzetti that can only lead to death and that causes legal discourse to break down. By the time of Sacco and Vanzetti’s arrest, Cornelia’s political stance has solidified and the novel shifts from her *bildungsroman* to its extended attack on the failures of the legal system (not the system as such). She is able to “articulate from ‘inside’ criticisms of privilege, prejudices, and court procedure,” which allows her to mediate the spectrum of political positions contained in the novel (Hamilton 17).¹⁴³ To further refine Cornelia’s political position, she is contrasted with communists, including her granddaughter,

143. Throughout the remainder of the novel there appear several reminders of Cornelia’s place on this spectrum. Sinclair contrasts her with Quincy Thornwell, a stand-in for the entire conservative, capitalist family from which she comes. Quincy decries the current state of American democracy: “We built a nation on the basis of self-government, and we could do it because we had people who were capable of self-government. But when we let ourselves be overrun by hordes of peasants, we signed our own death warrant” (316). Against his quasi-fascist elitism, Cornelia seems radical, so the reader is reminded of the ideological distance she has traveled. Once again, she is the novel’s representation of the ideally efficacious agent: one who chooses to reject leisure and its concomitant retrograde politics, but who does not go too far and turn herself into a martyr.

Betty.

Betty's narrative arc almost entirely parallels Cornelia's. Both participate in a "downclassing adventure," both convert to a version of radical politics, and both function as dynamic characters in contrast to the stasis of Sacco and Vanzetti (Chura 170). Sinclair's doubling, however, allows him to narrativize the friction between various radicalisms. Cornelia represents Sinclair's socialism, Betty leans farther left, and neither embraces anarchism.¹⁴⁴ Sinclair's inclusion of twin-radicalized upper-class women creates space for the interaction of conservatism, liberalism, socialism, communism, and anarchism. Conservatism is rejected outright (the Thornwell family, excepting Cornelia and Betty, are portrayed negatively), liberalism and socialism are intimately linked (Cornelia's position, mirrored by the narrator and closest to Sinclair's politics), communism is acceptable in its least radical terms (Betty comes closer to socialism through her relationship with Joe Randall; Pierre Leon is not depicted in positive terms), and anarchism is an aside.

Boston's eighth chapter dramatizes this field of possibilities through a conversation between Cornelia, Betty, "Joe Randall, American socialist journalist . . . and Pierre Leon, French communist editor" (228). The four are together when they learn of Sacco and Vanzetti's arrest, a moment when several shifts occur in the novel. This turning point is punctuated by a conversation about "radicalism," circulating around the arrest of two anarchists, that does not include an anarchist voice. It crystallizes Sinclair's vision of radicalism's limits: anarchists can be represented, but ultimately they are not as politically effective or ideologically acceptable as the downclassed liberal socialist or the pseudo-communist. The conversation also elucidates

144. At one point Betty claims that "'law and order' talk will never fool me again," but then quickly laments the tendency "to teach labor that there can be no middle course, and no honesty or decency in the class struggle" (205). In other words, she begins to reject government only to fall back on upper-class decorum—law is a problem, but revolution is distasteful.

Cornelia's and Betty's positions. Leon questions their affinity with the working class:

Understand me, Comrade Thornwell, it is good of rich and cultured ladies to take an interest in the exploited workers; but you suffer always from the fact that you can't possibly realize how they actually feel . . . [your labor] wasn't practically real, because if you had been ill or out of a job, you'd have gone back to your family; it wasn't psychologically real, because you always knew you could, and you had the moral support of knowing you were a lady. No worker has that. (231)

He speaks of an essentialized proletarian subjecthood they can never possess, but that the narrator rejects. Leon's position is flagged, but discarded by the novel: it is too radical, too communist and it does not produce in either woman "a deep crisis of conscience" (Chura 173).¹⁴⁵ So, while Betty may identify as a communist, according to Leon, she cannot experience life as a working-class individual. Nevertheless, hers is the acceptable "communist" stance throughout the novel. Contrary to Mattson's claim that Sinclair was "uncritical of Communism" during this period (*Upton Sinclair* 146), *Boston* shows the author's rejection of overtly revolutionary radicalism: by discounting Leon and his essentialized conception of class-consciousness, Sinclair subtly promotes the tame Marxist politics shared by himself, Cornelia, and Betty. With Sacco and Vanzetti now in jail, non-anarchist voices can compete to define appropriately radical politics. Through this conversation, the novel signals the boundaries of acceptable radicalism: linking the bourgeoisie and the working-class, Cornelia and Betty represent the ideal balance of radical and moderate politics. They suggest the possibility of coalition and reject the value of revolution. Simultaneously, anarchism disappears as the novel transitions from downclassing to

145. The issue of communism is also raised through the repeated surfacing of Mike Gold, who Patrick Chura unconvincingly argues is also part of the model for Cornelia's character (166). Neither equating Cornelia's downclassing with Mike Gold's lower-class origins nor confusing her timid socialism with Gold's militant communism is accurate.

social critique: once the image of ideal radicalism is established, Sinclair shifts his attention to Boston, the novel's other major character.

Sinclair indicates a fascination with “what is great” in his eponymous character, an optimism that consistently tempers his outrage (vi). So, even as Boston emerges as the central figure in his critique, it remains potentially good. Like Cornelia and Betty, the city evolves, demonstrating an ability to change, grow, and learn. As with Cornelia, Boston begins as a Brahmin, defined by its elite, ignorant of its underclass. And, like Cornelia, it adjust to new information; it (or at least some of the city's citizens that *matter*) comes around to the “right” side of the issue: public pressure leads to the creation of the Lowell Commission and Governor Fuller's due attention. Eventually though, Boston fails in its treatment of Sacco and Vanzetti. Sinclair personifies the city in order to magnify the ways in which its courts and laws favor one group over another. The city is the distillation of Cornelia's early life, a flawed character clinging to an antiquated ideology, capable of change only through the political equivalent of Cornelia's personal transformation.

In Sinclair's novel, Boston stands in for the modern nation, a space in which citizens define their government, “a definition to be grounded either in the return to its original ideals or in the final rejection of them” (Marinaccio 622). So, Boston, Massachusetts may be the site of this particular injustice, but culpability extends beyond its borders—the city represents one tragic example of archaic laws and the slavish adherence to tradition born out of inequality. The novel, though, repeatedly evokes the essential goodness of the nation, several times mentioning Plymouth Rock, the American Revolution, and abolition. The city and the nation are capable of failure, but neither is irreparably broken. As the novel quotes Thompson saying, “Sacco and Vanzetti had ‘never had the kind of trial required by English tradition and by American

constitutional law as a prerequisite to taking away their lives” —legal discourse failed because it did not adhere to the laws it is meant to enforce (594). This specific failure, however, is compounded by the subsequent failures of other legal formations arising to address the case:

The three elderly blue-bloods [the Lowell Commission] had had a comparatively simple task laid out to them; they had been asked to decide whether Sacco and Vanzetti had had a fair trial. Was it owing to their age, or to their inexperience with criminal matters, or to their overwhelming prejudice, that they had been unable to stick to their task, but must keep confusing it with the question of whether Sacco and Vanzetti were guilty? (618-619)

Sinclair’s narrator criticizes the Lowell Commission for duplicating the courtroom rather than evaluating it, but in his effort to narrate a specific failure of the legal system, he butts into the unavoidable link between government, the nation as an instantiation of government, the laws the nation produces, and the legal discourse designed to govern subjects who transgress these laws.

This multiform juncture generates a complex relationship to “law.” At one point, the novel derisively quotes the corrupt Massachusetts Attorney General saying “‘Ours is a government of laws,’” but Sinclair’s derision is undermined by his insistence that laws are capable of justice, that flawed government, not government as such, is the problem (627). He later attempts to restrict the scope of his critique, but couches it in sweeping language: “It is the bench and bar of MA that is on trial . . . It is our entire system of criminal law” (656). Thus, when Thayer defends the courts, claiming that “the legal system of the great Commonwealth is infallible,” the novel imagines itself separating Thayer’s inane statement from the laws structuring the governing mechanism he defends (657). *Boston* attacks legal discourse’s results, but cannot reject it or government, which is odd only in a novel putatively about two anarchists

whose beliefs call for a rejection (a violent one if necessary) of all government. Sinclair's novel does not explore the logical answer to the question of why the discourse fails "justly" to dispose of two anti-government radicals. His tacit rejection of their radicalism allows his narrator's last optimistic statement regarding Sacco and Vanzetti inspired by Governor Fuller granting them a twelve-day stay of execution: the novel expresses the hope that "there could not be a total failure of law" (642). Law is the problem, yet Sinclair insists that law is the solution to this problem.

Boston illuminates the seemingly non-paradoxical nature of representing anarchists: following in the SVDC's wake, Sinclair produced a text entirely consistent with his political agenda. Just like the trial, the act of re-presenting Sacco and Vanzetti through fiction is itself not paradoxical—such is the nature of these discourses. The anarchism lingering within both law and literature, however, suggests the *aporia for anarchism*: as it is represented, it is de-anarchized. In *Boston*, the antimony appears as Sinclair depicts anarchists while summarily rejecting their anti-government stance, hence turning them into a generic radical symbol. For a brief moment near the time of Sacco's and Vanzetti's execution, when almost all avenues have been exhausted, the narrator sarcastically adopts the anarchist position:

Horror among the so-called "liberals," those of Boston, as well as those who had come from outside! They had staked all their hopes upon the courts; they had pleaded, argued, practically forced the defense committee to obey, to let them handle it, to put their trust in the processes of law. And here suddenly was the ghastly fact revealed in all its nakedness—there was no law! There was only the class struggle! (657)

To mock the liberals, Sinclair is willing to admit the futility of *this* effort toward political change, but here the absence of law is not the anarchist dream, it is a tongue-in-cheek reminder that law *can* be a tool for oppression or for class-based progressive politics.

Boston relies on research, verisimilitude, and presumed objectivity to position a series of subjects against one another: Vanzetti is the anarchist subject, denied the novel's full attention and only considered in relation to the upper-class characters and legal discourse; Cornelia and Betty are the properly fictive subjects, given full narrative treatment that demonstrates their ability to change and consequently allow Sinclair to consider multiple radical positions; and Boston is the subject of critique, an archaic set of persons and laws that must be reshaped, but only insofar as can be done through the novel's acceptable radical stance. Sinclair's realism locates Sacco and Vanzetti as the site of injustice, but in this novel, their anarchism precludes the ability to effect any change. By the novel's end, they are symbols for Boston's and the nation's failure to govern justly, which for Sinclair makes them "eternal symbols of a dream . . . of human society in which wealth belongs to the producers of wealth" (755). That is, a symbol of socialism realized and anarchism absent.

Maxwell Anderson: *Gods of the Lightning and Winterset*

Boston is Sinclair's only substantive statement on Sacco and Vanzetti. Anderson and Dos Passos contrast with Sinclair in multiple ways. For one, both wrote texts about Sacco and Vanzetti around the time of their execution and returned to the subject in the mid 1930s. And, both underwent a dramatic, yet prolonged, political transformation. Their literary returns to Sacco and Vanzetti offer challenges and opportunities for fuller understanding of their political deployment of anarchist subject matter: we can see the approach to the man change over time, and consider these changes in the context of the authors' shifting politics, which stand in stark contrast to Sinclair's relatively static socialism. In 1912, Anderson, then 23, declared, "I have become a Socialist" ("To John M. Gillette" 3). A few years later, in a letter to Sinclair, his life-

long friend, Anderson describes himself as “Bolshevistic” (13). By 1941, however, he believes “Communism is dangerous,” a threat to “democratic government” (“To Donald Ogden Stewart” 110). Like many fellow-travelers from this period, Anderson’s politics transform as he ages and as his political environment changes: around WWI he places himself on the Left, sympathetic to the Russian Revolution and opposed to American intervention in the world war (Shivers, *The Life* 47). By WWII, however, he rejects radical politics, and during the Cold War he “tolerat[es] the blacklising of former Communists” (DiNapoli, “Fragile Currency” 277). Perhaps predictably then, during the interwar period, Anderson’s politics are difficult to define at any given moment.

If any consistency is to be found in his political stances, it comes from being “deeply distrustful of all institutional authorities” (Shivers, *The Life* 7). At times, this inclination manifests as a belief that “American government is steadily encroaching on the individual’s rights and independence” (Shivers, *Maxwell Anderson* 137). This anti-authoritarian stance has even led some to label Anderson a “libertarian” and an “anarchist” (DiNapoli, “Fragile Currency” 277, 282). The malleability of Anderson’s politics makes him a paradigmatic example of one type of fellow traveler: he comes to socialism early in the twentieth-century, when it is the most prevalent brand of American radicalism; he approves of and is drawn to the rise of communism in Russia; he associates with Leftist playwrights such as Clifford Odets and the Group Theatre during the 1930s heyday of radical literature; he drops his pacifism during the anti-fascist, pre-WWII era; he turns to American democracy during WWII;¹⁴⁶ and he fully rejects communism during the Cold War. Anderson’s politics are an inchoate mix of “liberal” bourgeois individualism—an anti-institutional, yet malleable distrust for anything that intrudes upon one’s

146. Alfred S. Shivers argues that “Anderson . . . believe[d] that under any conditions except wartime, government was the natural enemy of the average citizen” (*The Life* 198). According to Shivers, “[t]he exigencies of total war had compelled him to reach a truce within his own democratic government” (*The Life* 198). Note the rejection of pacifism linked to the anti-fascism: Anderson is willing to accept both government and war to fight fascism. Like many radicals and progressives from the era, he appears to accept Popular Front logic.

“liberty”—and progressive economic ideas (i.e., his decades long infatuation with socialism and communism). In some, these dual concerns might combine into an anti-statist, economically egalitarian anarchism (as they do with Vanzetti), but in Anderson, they generate a pendulous politics swinging from reactionary to radical based on the historical moment’s ideological climate.¹⁴⁷ He is an example of the persistent difficulty in writing about literary radicalism: a dramatist articulated to radical and progressive political causes, writing in an era of radical literary politics, but fleetingly “radical” at best.

Whereas Sinclair’s *Boston* resonates with his professed socialism, Anderson’s plays and his politics embody a generic “radicalism”: though never fully embracing any of the era’s radical ideologies, he is often labeled radical, and thus is emblematic of the 1930s leftward drift by intellectuals and writers. Like many, he was attracted to the Sacco-Vanzetti affair, but the motivation for his attraction remains ambiguous and has been consistently misinterpreted. In fact, scholarship that discusses Anderson’s radicalism often deploys circular reasoning: he is drawn to the case because he is a Leftist; he is a Leftist because he is drawn to the case. His two plays, *Gods of the Lightning* and *Winterset*, do not define the complexity of his political journey, nor do they establish him as a staunchly radical playwright. They do, however, provide insight into the floating, generic literary radicalism of the 1920s and 30s. They deploy Sacco and Vanzetti as political symbols—they represent anarchism—but the nature of these symbols is fragmented and detached from the men’s own lived anarchism.

Co-written with Harold Hickerson, *Gods of the Lightning* was completed in spring 1928 and published in early 1929 (Avery xlii-xliii). It prompted a variety of immediate negative

147. During Anderson’s life, even his friends were confused by his politics. Odets once called Anderson “a damned reactionary, a fascist!” (Cantor 34). In a 1944 letter to the editor (sent to several newspapers), Anderson indicates that he has moved away from radical politics, claiming merely, “I vote Democratic or Republican as I please” (192).

responses to its perceived political transgressions and aesthetic shortcomings: “the Chief of the Licensing Division of the City of Boston, J. M. Case, ruled that [it] was practically ‘anarchist and treasonable’ and should not, therefore, be licensed for presentation in that city” (Shivers, *Maxwell Anderson* 106); it was dubbed “a failure” precisely because it was based on the Sacco-Vanzetti case and thus “missed a chance to [be] a decidedly finer play” (Clark 17-18); and it has since been called “an indignantly one-sided and propagandistic account of social injustice that is practically devoid of literary interest” (Shivers, *Maxwell Anderson* 106). Nevertheless, it was produced at the Little Theater, New York in October 1928 (Clark 17) and then revived by the Group Theatre in 1934 (Cantor 34), signaling some acceptance in Leftist literary circles.

Anderson’s characterization in the play appears to strive for a one-for-one corollary to Sacco and Vanzetti: “Vanzetti becomes Dante Capraro, the gentle and humane Anarchist” while “Sacco is greatly transformed into the native-born American James Macready, a militant International Woodsmen of the World leader” (Shivers, *Maxwell Anderson* 106).¹⁴⁸ The plot similarly veils the Sacco-Vanzetti case in the thinnest veneer, reproducing the SVDC’s message by depicting the arrest, trial, and execution of Capraro and Macready as a heinous injustice in which the mechanisms of law are distorted and misused to eliminate a radical threat. Certainly, the play attacks the legal system’s failures, but it does not offer a cohesive “left-wing message”

148. The play also includes Celestino Medeiros, a convicted murder who confessed to the Braintree crime and claimed “‘Sacco and Vanzetti had nothing to do with this job’” (Watson 259). Medeiros’s execution was delayed while Governor Fuller and the Lowell Commission considered his confession alongside other evidence, but ultimately they did not believe his story and he was executed the same night as Sacco and Vanzetti. In the play, “Madeiros [sic] is changed into the bleak-minded and fatalistic restaurant owner Suvorin” (Shivers, *Maxwell Anderson* 106). Jennifer Jones argues that Sacco and Vanzetti “are combined in the character of Capraro, a pacifist organizer,” but Macready clearly also contain elements of their story and their politics (83). She is correct to recognize a privileging of the “American man of action,” but Vanzetti’s labor organizing mirrors Macready’s IWW work and the similarities of the case and the play favor reading Sacco and Vanzetti as represented by Capraro and Macready, even if their reproduction is inexact and overlapping (83).

(Shivers, *Maxwell Anderson* 107).¹⁴⁹ Shivers, Jennifer Jones, and others imagine that Anderson set out to write a socialist play—they begin with the assumption that Anderson was radical. They then analyze the play and find it is not particularly radical in comparison to its radical author. Their misapprehension is in fact symptomatic of Anderson’s conflicted politics and his concomitantly untidy representation of Sacco and Vanzetti. In addition, these critics’ efforts to evaluate a play about two anarchists by comparing it to the author’s purported socialism, inevitably pushes anarchism to the margins. Like *Boston, Gods of the Lightning* emerges in the historical moment that Sacco and Vanzetti are transformed from living victims to potent symbols: it marks a politically inchoate playwright’s articulation of anarchism to a similarly diffuse—and increasingly generic—vision of radicalism.

The unsettled role of anarchism in the play occurs initially through Capraro and Macready who each reject government for different reasons. Macready says “government’s nothing so important. It’s a police system, to protect the wealth of the wealthy” (26).¹⁵⁰ Though linked to the IWW, his critique of government is purely economic. As a radical Leftist, Macready parrots Vanzetti’s economic ideology without embracing his anti-government stance. Capraro’s political stance, on the other hand, is simple anti-state anarchism, as revealed by his testimony during the play’s version of the trial:

Salter: Do you believe in capitalism?

149. Jennifer Jones reads the play as a “socialist drama” that merges “political protest with instinctive American worship of the individual” (89, 83). By claiming Capraro is a condensation of Sacco and Vanzetti and arguing that Capraro’s politics always come second to Macready’s, Jones attempts to demonstrate that the play “eviscerated the beliefs [Sacco and Vanzetti] died for” (94). She builds this argument, however, on the bald claim that “Sacco and Vanzetti were pacifists,” misreading their anti-war stance as the rejection of all violence (88). Ultimately, she accuses Anderson of focusing on an “American protagonist” at the expense of the “socioeconomic forces of race and class oppression that brought about the death of Sacco and Vanzetti” (93).

150. In her efforts to depict Macready as an unabashed liberal individualist who overwhelms Capraro’s anarchism, Jennifer Jones forgets that Macready is a Wobbly. He speaks from a political position similar to that from which she imagines Anderson trying to speak.

Capraro: No.

Salter: You believe that all property should belong to the workers?

Capraro: Property should belong to those who create it.

Salter: You are a communist?

Capraro: I am an anarchist.

Salter: What do you mean by that?

Capraro: I mean, government is wrong. It creates trouble.

Salter: You would destroy all government?

Capraro: It will not be necessary. I would rather wait till it was so rotten it would rot away . . .

Salter: You are against this government of ours?

Capraro: Against all governments. (78)

He denies being a communist, rejects government regardless of its implication in economic oppression, and, elsewhere, eschews all violence: “When you take violence into your hands, you lower yourself to the level of government, which is the origin of crime and evil” (26). Both Macready and Capraro contain elements of Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s specific lives and political beliefs and, like their real-life counterparts, both are executed by a less specifically flawed legal discourse.¹⁵¹ Perhaps reflecting his own conflicted politics, Anderson juxtaposes non-anarchist Leftism and strict anti-government anarchism, creating a field of indeterminacy. Yet, as in *Boston*, the narrative does not end with an execution: each work interprets the deaths meaning for its reader/audience. *Boston* ends with Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s funeral and the narrator’s

151. The one element of legal discourse that Anderson specifically attacks is consciousness of guilt. His fictionalized Judge Thayer (Judge Vail) denies a defense motion with the following justification: “It was obvious to me, and was no doubt obvious to the jury, that the identifications were completely discredited by the defense. The verdict of guilty was brought in on other grounds. In my opinion those grounds must have been the defendant’s consciousness of guilt, as shown by their actions after the crime” (90).

intrusive explanations of the lesson learned. *Gods of the Lightning*, written for the stage, cannot end the same way. Since it has no narrator, the final words must be placed in a character's mouth: Rosalie, Macready's lover, expresses the drama's closing sentiment. The remaining characters wait in the restaurant while Capraro and Macready are executed. They learn that the executions are occurring and Rosalie speaks the play's final lines:

Don't whisper it! Don't whisper it! Didn't you hear me say not to whisper any more?
That's what they'll want you to do—whisper it—keep quiet about it—say it never
happened—it couldn't happen—two innocent men killed—keep it dark—keep it quiet—
No! No! Shout it! They're killing them . . . Mac—Mac—my dear—they have murdered
you—while we stood here trying to think of what to do they murdered you! Just a
moment ago you had a minute left—and it was the only minute in the whole world—and
now—now this day will never end for you—there will be no more days . . . Shout it!
Shout it! Cry out! Run and cry! Only—it won't do any good—now. (106)

All but the last line of Rosalie's monologue gestures toward martyrdom, but her final sentence suggests fatalism: the deaths have no meaning and there is no need to "shout" about the injustice. This despondency has two ramifications. One is political: if *Gods of the Lightning* is a propaganda piece, a socialist play (failed or otherwise), then the fatalism contradicts the politics and denies Sacco and Vanzetti any legacy. Counter to Marxian theory, nothing can be done; all is hopeless, revolution and progress are impossible. The other is personal: the play is a tragedy playing out against the backdrop of a politicized trial, not a political tragedy. In this case, sharing the tragedy of their unjust deaths is meaningless, because they are still dead and Rosalie's individual sorrow will not be assuaged by individual or collective political action.

Ending the play on this ambivalent fatalistic note, Anderson leaves the audience with a

confusing array of political messages. He chooses to write about two anarchists; he creates characters who espouse pacifistic anarchism and those who speak for violently radical labor; he links these two positions through their placement within a legal system that is subject to the play's vague critique; yet he concludes by questioning the meaning and the lasting significance of their martyrdom. Anderson chooses Sacco and Vanzetti as subject matter, but through a pseudo-Leftist play that ends on a note either of political fatalism or apolitical loss, he sublimates anarchism. Though his ambiguous political agenda is not clearly tied to distinct Leftist ideologies, it is clearly not anarchist. *Gods of the Lightning* articulates Sacco and Vanzetti to the burgeoning, diverse, and crowded Left, constructing a generic martyrdom he confirms in *Winterset*.

Written and published in 1935 (Avery xlvii), *Winterset* was an immediate critical success (unlike *Gods of the Lightning*) and continues to hold a solid position in the dramatic canon.¹⁵² This success, though, tends to detach all political content from the play. Anderson conceived of *Winterset* as “an experiment, an attempt to twist raw, modern reality to the shape and meaning of poetry” (“Acceptance Speech” 295). In his introduction to the play, he discusses his yearning for a “great theatre in this country,” one that has “outgrow[n] the phase of journalistic social comment and reache[d] . . . into the upper air of poetic tragedy” (x, vi). While outlining these ambitions, he fails to mention Sacco and Vanzetti. Setting out to write a tragic verse play and thus “establish a new [dramatic] convention,” Anderson imagines himself to be participating in a purely literary endeavor with little political import (xi). According to Russell DiNapoli, Anderson saw the Sacco-Vanzetti subject matter as a sure way to receive publicity in the politically charged 1930s, “and he judged that if he handled the subject in a way that did not

152. It won the “first Drama Critics Circle Award ever presented” (Shivers, *The Life* 149).

infuse the potentially explosive event with newfound political life, a financial success might be achieved” (“Maxwell Anderson’s Misuse” 104).¹⁵³

Regardless of Anderson’s intent, the notion that *Winterset* is not political has retained remarkable traction: in the seventy-five years since it was written, scholars have focused on the play’s dramatic sources, conventions, and innovations, while ignoring almost entirely the historical event at its center.¹⁵⁴ It seems that when writing “propagandistic” plays, Anderson establishes a reputation for “Leftism” that is suspended temporarily when he writes “pure literature” (Shivers, *The Life* 148). Put differently, when considered in the context of dramatic innovation, *Winterset* is granted a reprieve from the taint of radicalism, but the overall context of Anderson’s work (including *Gods of the Lightning* and his Pulitzer-winning *Both Your Houses*) defines him as a “political” playwright and thus part of the formation of “radical” literature from this era.¹⁵⁵ In 1935, however, Anderson had not yet rejected communism and he still associated with and was produced by Left-leaning theatre groups. Despite its subsequent sterilization, *Winterset* no less directly addresses the Sacco-Vanzetti affair and radicalism than does *Gods of the Lightning*. In short, while *Winterset* is not frequently discussed as an example of radical

153. DiNapoli contends that “[Anderson] knew the topic would entice audiences to see the play” (“Maxwell Anderson’s Misuse” 101). He imagines Anderson as a mercenarily utilitarian figure, malevolently “exploit[ing] the Sacco-Vanzetti issue for other than artistic reasons” (101). DiNapoli offers little evidence to support his claim.

154. Some posit Shakespeare as Anderson’s biggest influence, reading *Winterset* as a “pastiche of various actions and characters from Shakespeare in a setting of typical problem-play materials” (Roby 196), a “Shakespearean hodgepodge” (John Bush Jones 34), and a modern interpretation of the Elizabethan “revenge tragedy” (Abernethy 185). Others suggest “Victorian poetry, the Book of Job, and Hebraic lore” as influences (Luckett 26). Some even look for traces of modern poetry, finding T. S. Eliot’s influence on Anderson (Luckett 26-27).

155. In part, *Winterset*’s reputation emerges from the contradictions of post-WWII literary scholarship. During the Cold War, anti-communist backlash, scholars must reconcile the play’s reputation as one of the best from the 1930s with its subject matter (Sacco and Vanzetti) and Anderson’s dalliance with the Left. Anderson’s rejection of communism makes the reconciliation possible, but scholars who wish to study *Winterset* must ignore any political significance in the play that might appear radical. Thus, they focus on the fiction of apolitical formal characteristics. I believe this scholarly juggling act accounts for the seemingly disconnected reputations of Anderson (still viewed as a Left-leaning fellow-traveler) and *Winterset* (long considered a brilliant, yet apolitical play that just happens to be about two anarchists).

literature, this absence is merely indicative of the genre's ever-evolving boundaries.¹⁵⁶

In *Winterset*, Anderson once again thinly veils his characters. Mio, the play's protagonist, is the son of Bartolomeo Romagna, a radical fish peddler. Romagna is a conflated image of Sacco and Vanzetti, combining Vanzetti's vocation with Sacco's fatherhood (Vanzetti had no children). And notably, Romagna never appears in the play's action: he haunts the text's dialogue, yet is not a character; he establishes the link to Sacco and Vanzetti, yet is a generic amalgam of both men's anarchism. In addition, *Winterset* includes Judge Gaunt (an obvious figuration of Thayer) and Garth, Trock, and Shadow, who represent the Morelli gang.¹⁵⁷ Set thirteen years after Romagna's execution, the play depicts Mio's search for the truth: he refuses to believe his father capable of murder and he has sought the guilty parties for years, eventually learning of and seeking out Garth. This quest is paralleled by Trock's efforts to kill anyone who might implicate him in the crime and by Judge Gaunt's aimless, insane wanderings, as he attempts to justify his court's verdict. These three paths converge on the night of the play's action, the same night on which Mio meets Miriamne and falls in love, providing a romantic plot that Anderson privileges over the Sacco-Vanzetti backdrop.

Radicalism appears early in the play. Trock has come to see Garth, worried that continued interest in the case will lead Garth to confess and implicate Trock. Garth asks, "who wants to go to trial again / except the radicals? . . . Let the radicals go on howling / about getting

156. It is difficult to separate contemporaneous assemblages of literary Leftism from subsequent efforts by critics to detail this history. Explaining the disappearance of anarchism within the diverse, yet discrete narrative of literary radicalism requires approaching the two as halves of a critical whole, but "radical literature" is not a static formation: clearly, Anderson was linked to the Left and the fact that scholars have not discussed *Winterset* in this context does not discount its obvious concern with Sacco and Vanzetti, a potent topic that unified disparate factions of the Left during the 1920s and 1930s.

157. In his confession, Medeiros implicated the Morelli gang. Many of Sacco's and Vanzetti's defenders insist that the Morelli gang are more likely bandits and that they committed the crime for which Sacco and Vanzetti were executed.

a dirty deal. They always howl / and nobody gives a damn” (14). Here, Garth gestures toward the continued interest in the Sacco-Vanzetti case, but reduces this interest to the “radical” element—many may still take a voyeuristic interest in the case, but only the radicals (the Left) are still interested in pursuing justice. Mio is aligned with this sustained “radical” interest, because he too seeks the truth: “No other love, / time passing, nor the spaced light-years of suns / shall blur your voice, or tempt me from the path / that clears your name” (50). He seeks the truth, because he must: “Will you tell me how a man’s / to live, and face his life, if he can’t believe / that truth’s like a fire, / and will burn through and be seen / though it takes all the years there are?” (70). Mio disbelieves legal discourse’s produced knowledge. He rejects it and seeks truth outside it—he wants to clear his father’s name, which is all that can be accomplished since Romagna is already dead.

At the same time, the judge roams the streets, defending the legal system: “Judge Gaunt’s gone off his nut. He’s got / that damn trial on his mind, and been going round / proving to everybody he was right all the time / and the radicals were guilty—stopping people / in the street to prove it—and now he’s nuts entirely / and nobody knows where he is” (15). The combination of Mio’s quest for truth contrary to legal discourse and Gaunt’s insane defense of the trial resemble *Gods of the Lightning*, suggesting a substantive critique of the system that convicted Sacco and Vanzetti. Thirteen years after the deaths, however, Anderson suspends this critique, reducing it to context for Mio and Miriamne’s fledgling romance. They meet and immediately fall in love. At this point, *Winterset*’s attack on the legal system fades as Anderson redirects the action: the play shifts from a pursuit of truth to an establishment of truth secondary to the pursuit of love.

Suddenly, the Judge is no longer described as insane and he begins to sound cruel, yet

reasonable in his defense of the verdict: "I know and have known / what bitterness can rise
 against a court / when it must say, putting aside all weakness, / that a man's to die. I can forgive
 you that, / for you are your father's son, and you think of him / as a son thinks of his father.
 Certain laws / seem cruel in their operation; it's necessary / that we be cruel to uphold them"
 (73). As Mio, Garth, Trock, and Judge Gaunt interact, criticism of the trial comes to the fore,
 with the tenement turning into a courtroom: Gaunt slips into his role as judge, calling for "Order,
 gentlemen, order! The witness will remember / that a certain decorum is essential in the court-
 room" (95). The fictive Judge Thayer, Morelli gang, and Sacco-Vanzetti family all reenter legal
 discourse and it is in this surreal recreation of the courtroom that Mio finds the truth he seeks.
 Romagna's innocence and Gaunt's complicity in the legal injustice are revealed, but Gaunt still
 defends the verdict:

Suppose it known, / but there are things a judge must not believe / though they should
 head and fester underneath / and press in on his brain. Justice once rendered / in a clear
 burst of anger, righteously, / upon a very common laborer, / confessed an anarchist, the
 verdict found / and the precise machinery of law / invoked to know him guilty—think
 what furor / would rock the state if the court then flatly said; / all this was lies—must be
 reversed? It's better, / as any judge can tell you, in such cases, / holding the common
 good to be worth more / than small injustice, to let the record stand, / let one man die. For
 justice, in the main, / is governed by opinion. Communities / will have what they will
 have, and it's quite as well, / after all, to be rid of anarchists. Our rights / as citizens can
 be maintained as rights / only while we are held to be the peers / of those who live about
 us. (98-99)

The romantic plot requires the resolution of critique, so Anderson dramatically retries the case.

In the seemingly obvious climax of Mio's life-story, he learns of his father's innocence, learns that the legal system failed him by succeeding in its main goal, the maintenance of social order. As in *Gods of the Lightning*, Anderson takes aim at the legal system and finds it corrupt. Mio's beliefs are confirmed and he can now spread word of Romagna's innocence: "Wherever men / still breathe and think, and know what's done to them / by the powers above, they'll know" (99). But he does not. From the time he learns the "truth" until the end of the play, Mio's love for Miriamne triumphs over his pursuit for the truth and the fatalism of *Gods of the Lightning* reemerges.

The fatalism in *Winterset* operates on two levels. First, after Mio learns the truth, the value of this truth (and its dissemination) is called into question. Miriamne's father Edras questions the value of pursuing the issue—"What will be changed / if it comes to trial again? More blood poured out / to a mythical justice, but your father lying still / where he lies now" (109)—then denies the value of what Mio has learned: "there is no truth" (117). This denigration of the play's revelation intersects with Miriamne's desire that he not reveal Garth's (her brother's) guilt. She asks Mio to keep their secret and he agrees: "I tried to say it / and it strangled my throat. I might have known / you'd win in the end" (125). Second, Mio's choice of Miriamne over his life-long goal of clearing his father's name proves meaningless when both characters die at the play's end. Mio abnegates "truth" for Miriamne and the hope of "learn[ing] to live like a man . . . to live and forget to hate," only to lose his life at Trock's hand (125).

In *Winterset*, Anderson attacks legal discourse much as he does in *Gods of the Lightning*, but once again he closes on a dual note of personal tragedy and political hopelessness. Any radicalism is sublimated to other concerns. In *Gods of the Lightning*, a play with inchoate radicalism that mirrors Anderson's shifting politics, anarchism becomes pacifist, irrelevant, and

impotent. Then, in *Winterset*, Sacco and Vanzetti linger as the nearly invisible background for dramatic innovation and poetic tragedy. In both cases, Anderson deploys the anarchists as neutered symbols of injustice: anarchism is sublimated, which in itself is not surprising, nor profound. But in the context of other literature from this period, Anderson's choices resonate more powerfully. Twice, he structures a play around Sacco and Vanzetti; twice, he tentatively attacks the legal system's failures; and twice, he minimizes the significance of this critique by ending with fatalism. *Gods of the Lightning* and *Winterset* evidence both the transformation of Sacco and Vanzetti into disarticulated symbols and the potency of this symbol to the interwar Left (and scholarly efforts to narrate it). Both plays essentially strip anarchism of its power and specificity, yet Sacco's and Vanzetti's appearance functions as a radical *bona fides*: touching on the Sacco-Vanzetti affair's injustice (even briefly) signifies Anderson's attachment to the broadly Leftist movement of the 1930s. The image of Sacco and Vanzetti is no longer meaningfully anarchist; it simply marks a pseudo-radical shell that can be filled with literary and political content.

John Dos Passos: *Facing the Chair* and *U.S.A.*

Dos Passos's disillusionment with the Left, turn to conservatism, and simultaneous decline in reputation are well documented.¹⁵⁸ The attention paid to his politics reflects his

158. Townsend Ludington's *John Dos Passos: A Twentieth-Century Odyssey* is the definitive biography and provides an adequate account of Dos Passos's politics. Ludington obviously is enamored with Dos Passos, so the text's descriptions of his politics (even his distasteful McCarthyism) often suffer, falling prey to an overwhelming approval of the man's life and work. Also see Granville Hicks's "The Politics of John Dos Passos" and W. Gordon Milne's "John Dos Passos," both of which claim to examine Dos Passos's politics in detail. In addition, John Trombold's "From the Future to the Past: The Disillusionment of John Dos Passos" addresses Dos Passos's vaunted political shift specifically. Unfortunately, I know of no thorough and convincing theorization of Dos Passos's relationship to the political Left and Right. I attribute this absence in part to a decline in interest in his work after *U.S.A.*, in part to his canonization as part of the literary Left (which tends to disregard his later work, as well), and in part to an unwillingness or inability to reconcile his polar political extremes and their manifestation in his novels.

importance: his unique combination of left-leaning politics and widely-praised literary style have made him a central figure to 1930s radical literature. That is, by writing novels that continue to be studied by a range of scholars, Dos Passos—as an object of study—fuses considerations of the political and aesthetic in a way few others do.¹⁵⁹ Like Anderson, Dos Passos is a quintessential example of the fellow traveler who later rejects radical politics, but his swing from left to right is perhaps more extreme. He similarly began his “radical adventure” at an early age (Aaron 34), he too was drawn to communism during the late 1920s and 1930s, and he wrote novels praised by Leftist literary critics (the *U.S.A.* trilogy especially). Then, he began to drift away from the Left during the anti-fascist era, eventually turning away from radical politics entirely and becoming a virulent reactionary during the McCarthy era. The range of political labels applied to Dos Passos is greater than those proposed for Anderson. He has been called everything from Jeffersonian liberalist (Ludington, *Fourteenth* 570), stubborn libertarian (Aaron 353), and anarchist (Ezell 504), to conservative Republican (Ezell 503). Most scholars, however, seem to accept Daniel Aaron’s 1961 description of Dos Passos’s interwar politics: “The radicalism of Dos Passos simmered in the early twenties, boiled furiously between 1927 and 1932, and began to cool thereafter” (348).¹⁶⁰

Most date Dos Passos’s political turning point around 1937, after which he “scorned [communism] as a political philosophy” (Ludington, *John Dos Passos* 396), renounced Soviet

159. *U.S.A.* is the most notable example of this connection. When it was published, critics noted its “radical” nature: “Dos Passos is a radical. This is important . . . because his communistic theories give him a definite and advantageous attitude toward the material he works with—since the communist, unlike the liberal, wholeheartedly accepts industry and all its natural consequences” (Hicks, “Dos Passos’s Gifts” 96). At the same time, the book was praised as a modernist masterpiece, prompting Jean-Paul Sartre to label Dos Passos the “greatest writer of [his time]” (80). From its publication to the present, Dos Passos’s trilogy has the rare distinction to be dually praised as an aesthetic achievement and a striking example of radical literature.

160. Recent critics code him during this period as a “Party sympathizer” (Wald 1) with “leftist convictions” (Benfey 99), a “committed man of the Left . . . grieving the injuries inflicted by American capitalism” (Moglen 91). Yet, since he “never fully committed himself to revolution” (Foley 425) and never joined the Communist Party (Milne 265), he is a fellow-traveler.

policy and the Communist Party (Wald 67), and embraced a preference for “the tyrannies of American monopoly . . . [over] the tyrannies of Communist ideologues” (Ludington, *Fourteenth* 421).¹⁶¹ Despite this later turn away from the literary Left, during the late 1920s and the first-half of the 1930s, Dos Passos was an important radical writer and continues to be referenced in studies of radical literature. His two texts that focus on Sacco and Vanzetti were written during his radical period, with *Facing the Chair* appearing in 1927, just before their execution, and *The Big Money* appearing in 1936, just before Dos Passos began to turn to the political right. Each of these texts deploys the anarchists with different immediate goals, but Dos Passos demonstrates a certain consistency: in the former, he attacks legal discourse to save the men; and in the latter, he attacks the nation to save the nation. In both cases, he concerns himself with salvaging what is good in the United States, rejecting Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s anti-government politics. Together, these two works illuminate both the consonance between efforts to save the men while alive and their posthumous representations, and the construction of a narrative of radical literature that sublimates anarchism to the 1930s Left.

Dos Passos was one of the many progressives drawn to the Sacco-Vanzetti case, but he went farther than many by writing *Facing the Chair: Story of the Americanization of Two Foreignborn Workmen*, which was published by the SVDC while Sacco and Vanzetti were still alive. In it, Dos Passos makes a public plea similar to other SVDC publications, but he does so in great detail and at great length. He seems more accurately to recognize (or at least more successfully to articulate) the forces to which Sacco and Vanzetti have become subject. He describes the legal failure as a “frame-up,” but recognizes the unintentional, inevitable nature of

161. The index to Ludington’s biography includes the following two entries: “Communism: Dos Passos’s early views on (before 1937)” and “Communism: Dos Passos’s later views on (after 1937).” Others substantiate his disaffection with the Left emerging around the time of the Spanish Civil War. Regardless of the exact dates (and I imagine the shift is less dramatic and more gradual than many suggest), Dos Passos definitely moved toward the political Right around or shortly after the time *The Big Money* was published.

this injustice: “The frameup is an unconscious (occasionally semiconscious) mechanism. An unconscious mechanism is a kink in the mind that makes people do something without knowing why they do it, and often without knowing that they are doing it. It is the sub-rational act of a group, serving in this case, through a series of pointed unintentionations, the ends of a governing class” (55). In other words, Dos Passos detaches legal discourse from the SVDC’s common tropes of individual treachery and conscious patriotism, replacing them with a general mechanism through which subjects govern and are governed. Sacco and Vanzetti are caught in this discourse:

For six years this man [at this moment, he speaks specifically of Sacco, but Vanzetti’s position is the same] has lived in the law, tied tighter and tighter in the sticky filaments of law-words like a fly in a spiderweb. And the wrong set of words means the Chair. All the moves in the game are made for him, all he can do is sit helpless and wait, fastening his hopes on one set of phrases after another . . . pushed towards the Chair by the blind hatred of thousands of wellmeaning citizens, by the superhuman, involved, stealthy, soulless mechanism of the law. (69-71)

Dos Passos implicates the entire system of governance, attacking citizenry and law. By recognizing the systemically inseparable functions of democracy, law, and punishment, he seems poised to challenge legal discourse from Vanzetti’s anarchist position—to reject it outright and to voice the betrayal and futility of calling for legal discourse to correct its own errors—but instead he turns, approaches the discourse on its own terms, and shifts the political content away from anarchism.

Facing the Chair operates almost entirely as counter-discourse preceding from the assumption that “[a]ll that is needed is that the facts of the case be generally known” (126). Thus,

Dos Passos spends the last third of the pamphlet debunking the prosecution's case and popular myths about the guilt of Sacco and Vanzetti. These facts are deployed to inspire the public to "[t]ell your friends, write to your congressmen, to the political bosses of your district, to the newspapers Call meetings, try to line up trade unions, organizations, put up posters. Demand the truth about Sacco and Vanzetti" (127). He calls for action, because his main objective is to "[s]ave Sacco and Vanzetti" (127). The coinciding recognition of legal discourse's governmental mandate and the desire to free Sacco and Vanzetti from it are not inherently anti-anarchist, but Dos Passos's counter-discourse moves away from their anarchist ideology in two ways: it calls for public outcry to affect legal discourse (rather than rejecting this discourse entirely) and it uses strategies that they, as anarchists, reject. He denies the possibility that they would use violence against government, yet makes much of his argument through Medeiros's confession (80-81). In a cruel twist, Dos Passos depicts Sacco and Vanzetti as harmless philosophical anarchists who can be freed by subjecting another man to violence—Medeiros can take their place as subject to trial and execution, a position that Vanzetti rejected outright: he resisted efforts to find the "real" criminals, because he did not wish anyone else to be subject to the American legal system.

Dos Passos's pre-execution defense of Sacco and Vanzetti portends the later deployment of the two men as potent symbols (in his own work and others'): "Sacco and Vanzetti are not the only men who have been framed, but they have become symbols" (20). Though Dos Passos may yearn to see them released, he also sees in them a symbolic value that transcends their lives by connecting to a larger political movement:

Sacco and Vanzetti are all the immigrants who have built the nation's industries with their sweat and their blood and have gotten for it nothing but the smallest wage it was

possible to give them and a helot's position under the bootheels of the Arrow Collar social order. They are all the wops, hunkies, bohunks, factory fodder that hunger drives into the American mills through the painful sieve of Ellis Island. They are the dreams of a saner social order of those who can't stand the law of dawg eat dawg. This tiny courtroom is a focus of the turmoil of an age of tradition, the center of eyes all over the world. Sacco and Vanzetti throw enormous shadows on the courthouse walls. (45-46)

Here, Dos Passos turns to his titular theme of "Americanization," the process of exploiting the working class (specifically immigrants, but presumably all "factory fodder") and their "radicalization . . . consistent with the nation's original values" (Marinaccio 620). Sacco and Vanzetti are "the symbolic representations of the entire anticapitalist movement" (Moglen 124). Again, his use of Sacco and Vanzetti as economic-political symbols does not in itself sublimate anarchism, but in light of the pamphlet's appeals to government-based progress, Dos Passos's political agenda appears specifically Leftist, but not specifically anarchist, because it allows for the continuation of democratic governance.

Primarily, *Facing the Chair* attempts to mobilize public outcry. Dos Passos often relies on self-interest to make his case: "It's time you realized fully, you who are reading this, man or woman, laborer or whitecollar worker, that if Sacco and Vanzetti die in the Chair as the result of a frameup based on an unlucky accident, your chance of life will be that much slimmer, if you ever come to be arrested as a result of a similar unlucky chain of circumstances" (81-82). He also, however, ties this self-interest to governance by reproducing the preface to a pamphlet titled *Illegal Practices of the Department of Justice*, which unironically explains how legal discourse violates legal discourse: it condenses the argument that the laws are not the problem, the failure to enforce the laws properly is. Without comment, Dos Passos cites, in defense of Sacco and

Vanzetti, a source that views their case as an “assault upon the most sacred principles of our Constitutional liberty” (52). This pamphlet continues its pro-government, pro-democracy, pro-United States rhetoric:

It has always been the proud boast of America that this is a government of laws and not of men. Our Constitution and laws have been based on the simple elements of human nature. Free men cannot be driven and repressed; they must be led. Free men respect justice and follow truth, but arbitrary power they will oppose until the end of time. There is no danger of revolution so great as that created by suppression, by ruthlessness, and by deliberate violation of the simple rules of American law and American democracy. (51)

Dos Passos uncritically deploys this letter “to the American people” as a strategic means of building consensus by marrying self-interest and American democracy (48). The letter, and *Facing the Chair* as a whole, censure American legal discourse and present counter-discursive claims to affect it, but ultimately he attempts to collectivize a disaffected populace around economic justice and the fear that the Sacco-Vanzetti case, left unaddressed, is a harbinger for the erosion of government’s ability to protect its citizens: if it can happen to Sacco and Vanzetti, it can happen to you, therefore you must act to correct this injustice, to force the law to operate as it should, and thus to ensure the proper and continued functions of government. Dos Passos’s *Facing the Chair* strikingly elucidates the paradox of representing anarchism, of deploying Sacco and Vanzetti as symbols of non-anarchist radicalism. He wishes to save two anarchists, but his representational efforts to do so sublimate multiple aspects of their anarchism. In fact, the specter of anarchy is deployed as a node of pro-government, generic Leftism: we must save these anarchists or risk proving our government a failure and move toward anarchy.

Most scholars claim that Sacco and Vanzetti—their arrest, trial, and execution—were the

inspiration for Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* trilogy.¹⁶² In the days leading up to their execution, Dos Passos, among other literary figures, protested and was arrested (Ludington, *John Dos Passos* 262). By that time, "Dos Passos had moved as far Left as he ever would" and was embittered both by the miscarriage of justice and literary indifference to it (Ludington, *John Dos Passos* 263-264). Pizer concurs, suggesting that the Sacco-Vanzetti affair "evoked a deep and initially destructive anger in Dos Passos," but that he was "determined to turn his anger to more productive use" (*U.S.A.* 28). Feeling "that writers on the Left had a responsibility" to rally around the case, Dose Passos determined to write *U.S.A.*, a sweeping fictional trilogy that might express the nation's frustration and illuminate its shortcomings from a Leftist perspective (Moglen 124). The genesis of *U.S.A.* and its place in the radical literary canon exemplify the disappearance of anarchism: a novel written by a non-anarchist, Left-leaning fellow-traveler as a "an explicit response to the Sacco and Vanzetti executions" (Moglen 125)—an angry reaction to the legal extermination of two anarchists; a novel, in which "the two figures transcend . . . their personal significance and [become] imaginative symbolic constructs to which could adhere a large body of fictional reality only remotely connected on the surface to their specific fates" (Pizer, *U.S.A.* 29); a novel that translates Sacco and Vanzetti into a symbolic center to which *U.S.A.*'s disparate parts and the formation of 1930s radical literature adhere. This ambitious effort remains the most substantial literary remembrance of Sacco and Vanzetti.¹⁶³

162. Pizer claims that it is "difficult to overestimate the importance of the Sacco-Vanzetti case as a crystallizing event in Dos Passos's imaginative life" (*U.S.A.* 29). No one questions that it provided the spark for *U.S.A.*, which Dos Passos began writing within months of their executions (Ludington, *John Dos Passos* 263-264).

163. Upon the appearance of the trilogy's first volume, *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), critics recognized the project's ambitiousness: "Dos Passos seeks to provide something corresponding to the symbolic figures of a national epic or saga" (Leavis 104). It was not universally lauded, but many critics praised the first volume, some to the point of labeling it "the most remarkable, the most encouraging American novel . . . since the War" (Wilson 87). The trilogy was praised both for its innovative juxtaposition of forms and the its scope, "power, range and beauty" (Ross 101). Dos Passos's contemporaneous and current reputation may pale in comparison to his modernist peers, but *U.S.A.*, both in the 1930s and in the present academy, stands as one of the single more important modern American works.

The 42nd Parallel announces Dos Passos's intention to construct "the speech of the people" (Dos Passos, *42nd Parallel* xx). To accomplish this goal, he uses a sweeping plot and multiple narrative strategies. Sacco and Vanzetti (as inspiration and, in *The Big Money*, explicit subject matter) intersect with the project's scope, Dos Passos's formal experimentation, critical and scholarly renown, and radical politics, to make *U.S.A.* a condensed example of how Sacco and Vanzetti's image becomes articulated to a collectively generic Leftist politics. Despite their generative role, Sacco and Vanzetti appear only in the last third of the trilogy's final volume. They appear at the climax of Dos Passos's critique. Most of *U.S.A.* relies on a combination of straightforward narrative and three complementary avant-garde techniques: the Camera-Eye, a stream-of-consciousness form often claimed to be Dos Passos's first-person account of his experiences; Newsreels, a collage technique that collects newspaper headlines, advertisements, songs, and other rhetorical ephemera to offer a jarring image of modernity's cacophonous media; and the biographies, which present different historical and/or radical figures with either praise (e.g., Big Bill Haywood) or scorn (e.g., J.P. Morgan). These three literary modes are interspersed with the stories of Mac, Janey, J. Ward Morehouse, Eleanor Stoddard, Charley Anderson, Joe Williams, Richard Ellsworth Savage, Eveline Hutchins, Mary French, and Margo Dowling. Dos Passos uses each of these characters to represent an indicative American experience—a narrative line of critique. As the trilogy develops, they interact with each other and seemingly move toward resolution (success, failure, death). This narrative arc is suspended, however, in *The Big Money* as both the characters' lives and Dos Passos's formal experiments coalesce around his scathing accusation against the nation. As the trilogy reaches its conclusion, we realize that these specific stories and images construct the people's speech only to set the stage for *U.S.A.*'s climactic diagnosis. In his trilogy's final volume, Dos Passos finally returns to his inspiration:

while his other characters may suggest a problem, Sacco and Vanzetti are the central, potent symbol for what ails the nation.

The Big Money represents aspects of the Sacco-Vanzetti affair through three of Dos Passos's four techniques: the narrative of Mary French, the Newsreels, and the Camera Eye. Notably, however, the novel's depictions of Sacco and Vanzetti are almost entirely indirect: other characters interact with the Sacco-Vanzetti case as context, but neither man appears as a character himself (as in *Boston*) or as once-removed character (as in *Gods of the Lightning* and *Winterset*). Though they are the trilogy's inspiration, Sacco and Vanzetti have transformed from characters to be depicted in their specific humanity (as Dos Passos does in *Facing the Chair*)—as individuals around whom radicals might rally toward a tangible end—into generically radical “Christ figures,” a constant or backdrop against which Dos Passos's imagined nation is constructed (Strychaz 120). They first appear in Camera Eye (49) as the unnamed narrator walks “from Plymouth to North Plymouth through the raw air of Massachusetts Bay,” viewing the symbolic site of American's immigrant beginnings alongside the Plymouth Cordage plant at which Vanzetti worked (348-349). This brief section deploys Sacco and Vanzetti as the subtext to Dos Passos's stream-of-consciousness ruminations about the plight of immigrants and the decline of the nation. They are the context of the United States in which Dos Passos lives and about which he writes. Nearly 900 pages into his trilogy, Dos Passos builds toward the climax of *U.S.A.* by connecting the “fishpeddler you have in Charlestown jail” to the “founders” of the nation (350). He returns to the theme of *Facing the Chair*, again suggesting that the nation has failed and locating the “speech of the people” as an animal cry under the weight of “your oppressors America” (350).¹⁶⁴

164. In *Mourning Modernity*, Seth Moglen offers a profound, directed analysis of Camera Eye (49) and Camera Eye 50. See pages 220-232 for his explication of these sections. For another look at The Camera Eye more

Sacco and Vanzetti next appear in the narrative of Mary French, daughter of a socially-aspiring mother and charitable doctor who spends her adult life moving from one radical organizing effort to the next. Like many labor activists in the late 1920s, Mary goes to “work on the Sacco-Vanzetti case with the new committee that had just been formed” (361). *The Big Money* portrays her involvement in the Sacco-Vanzetti affair as a natural step in her life: she works for the SVDC, protests and is arrested just as Dos Passos was, and returns to her labor work after they are executed—this is not the first nor last instance of her activism. Mary expresses Dos Passos’s feelings about the case: “‘If the State of Massachusetts can kill those innocent men in the face of the protest of the whole world it’ll mean that there never will be any justice in America ever again’” (362). Yet, her love for Donald Stevens allows greater exploration of the appropriate radical response to the case: “He argued with tradeunion officials, socialists, ministers, lawyers, with an aloof sarcastic coolness. ‘After all they are brave men. It doesn’t matter whether they are saved or not any more, it’s the power of the workingclass that’s got to be saved,’ he’d say” (367). Stevens is a communist, while Mary is not. He sarcastically chastises the agglomeration of Left-leaning, radical, and progressive forces coalescing around Sacco and Vanzetti for their callous sublimation of the two anarchists’ lives to the working-class movement. Upon their deaths, however, Dos Passos immediately translates them into a symbol of generic radicalism by narrating the execution-night, when Mary and Stevens are arrested and begin to sing *The Internationale* (370). In a complex series of moves, Dos Passos uses Stevens—a fictive embodiment of the communism Dos Passos already rejects—to indicate his disaffection with the labor movement (as represented by their non-confrontational, apathetic stance toward Sacco and Vanzetti), only to collapse Stevens and Mary back into a collective group of Sacco-

generally, see Juan A. Suárez’s “John Dos Passos’s USA and Left Documentary Film in the 1930s: The Cultural Politics of ‘Newsreel’ and ‘The Camera Eye.’”

Vanzetti defenders singing the internationally recognizable, yet non-specific, symbol of radical politics. He attacks the timid elements of the working class, structuring his critique around Sacco and Vanzetti.¹⁶⁵ All the while, Dos Passos enacts that which he condemns: while alive, Sacco and Vanzetti must be saved, but once dead they are The *Internationale*—the ubiquitous, yet generic symbol of radical politics.

In one of the more intimately connected transitions in *U.S.A.*, Newsreel LXVI picks up the Mary French narrative by continuing the Sacco-Vanzetti theme and The *Internationale* lyrics. This Newsreel intersperses lines of the radical anthem with newspaper headlines about the case: “HOLMES DENIES STAY . . . SACCO AND VANZETTI MUST DIE” (370). It also contains the most direct representation of either Sacco or Vanzetti, concluding with an excerpt from Sacco’s final letter to his son, Dante. This is one of only two moments in the text in which Sacco or Vanzetti is represented as Sacco and Vanzetti rather than as the narrative frame for Mary French or as part of the streaming consciousness of the Camera Eye’s narrator. Dos Passos never narrates Sacco or Vanzetti, he allows them to haunt the text as a symbol of American failures and radical possibilities, and the first opportunity he allows for an anarchist to represent himself is stripped of overt politics: “Much I thought of you when I was lying in the death house . . . I wish I could see you every moment, but I feel better that you will not come to the death house so that you could not see the horrible picture of three living in agony waiting to be executed” (370-371). Sacco speaks to his son as a father and any political ideology to which he or Vanzetti might adhere is lost within the many radical voices singing The *Internationale* in his memory.

Dos Passos’ fixation with Sacco and Vanzetti as the initial inspiration for formally

165. A few pages later, Dos Passos also attacks Stevens, portraying him as a self-absorbed, misogynistic ideologue who abandons Mary to travel to Russia and sees no value in her work. Eventually, his party-line communism stands in contrast to Mary, whose “commitment to individuals [is] overridden by the rhetoric of the organization” (Nanney 189). By the novel’s conclusion, he represents everything wrong with the American Communist Party, which Dos Passos disdained.

constructing “the speech of the people” culminates with the rapid juxtaposition of multiple techniques. Mary French’s narrative bleeds into the Newsreel and Sacco’s letter read against the backdrop of *The Internationale* sets up *The Camera Eye* (50), in which Dos Passos offers his final statement about Sacco and Vanzetti and his most poignant indictment of the nation. In the trilogy’s penultimate *Camera Eye*, Dos Passos mourns that “America our nation has been beaten by strangers who have turned our language inside out who have taken the clean words our fathers spoke and made them slimy and foul . . . they are ignorant of our beliefs they have the dollars the guns the armed forces the powerplants” (371). He laments the rise of those “who have bought the law,” blaming capitalism and corruption for the decline of the nation (371). He even includes Vanzetti’s own words—“If it had not been for these things, I might have lived out my life talking at streetcorners to scorning men”—to establish that “we stand defeated America” (372). The nature of this defeat is unclear, but by stating “all right we are two nations” (371), the narrator reveals Dos Passos’s political horizon. He speaks in terms of nation, of governance.

The absence of punctuation renders the final line—“we stand defeated America”—ambivalent: does Dos Passos explain to America that we stand defeated, or does he suggest that we, as America, stand defeated? Both possible readings speak in collective terms: “we” are defeated, whether “we” are “America” or not, but the latter indicates an acceptance of the value of America, the possible redemption of the nation. Despite Dos Passos’s vaunted political transformation, *The Big Money* shows a continued embrace of the era’s radical and progressive rhetoric. It speaks of collectivity and nationhood as Dos Passos connects himself to the Popular Front’s “struggle against oppression in all forms” (Nanney 197). This fight was central to much of the 1930s Left, but in many ways antithetical to the strictly anti-government anarchism of Sacco and Vanzetti. Dos Passos deploys Vanzetti’s words as the distillation of radical

symbolism: “Never in our full life can we hope to do such work for tolerance, for justice, for man’s understanding of man as how we do by an accident” (372). Sacco and Vanzetti inspire the mobilization of radical politics in the 1930s, while their anarchism disappears. Once dead, they become Dos Passos’s driving motivation to construct (to re-present) the nation.

Written shortly before Dos Passos’s purported shift to the political Right, *The Big Money* was criticized by some on the Left. Mike Gold, for instance, decries Dos Passos’s Trotskyism, points out that he was “a fellow-traveler, not . . . a Communist,” and dismisses the entire trilogy as “merde” (152-153). Gold’s language, though, only attributes to Dos Passos the wrong type of radicalism (Trotskyism and fellow-traveling); it does not label him as conservative or reactionary. So, while he may be judged insufficiently radical by the more staunchly communist faction of the literary Left, Dos Passos remains part of the formation of radical literature.¹⁶⁶ Some argue *The Big Money* does drift away from Dos Passos’s earlier, stronger Leftist sentiments, but the trilogy as a whole has been read consistently from its publication to the present as radical.¹⁶⁷ Building upon critics who claim that *U.S.A.*’s “collective protagonist is the nation itself,” Barbara Foley argues that “Dos Passos’s conception of historical contradiction is shaped by a Marxist notion of class struggle” and that he “subscribed to a class-based analysis of social conflict in *U.S.A.* and developed a narrative method that was profoundly dialectical and

166. Matthew Stratton’s recent “Start Spreading the News: Irony, Public Opinion, and the Aesthetic Politics of *U.S.A.*” claims that the trilogy’s “politics . . . fall outside the discursive bounds delimited by communism, liberalism, republicanism, and progressivism” (441). Stratton characterizes Dos Passos’s politics as “roughly and provisionally anarchist” (441), a claim that fails to address the specific nature of 1930s anarchism or even to interact with anarchism as a political praxis (rather than simply as anything that falls outside the limits of other ideologies). Like Stratton, I admit the difficulty in defining the politics or political limits of the novel, but the critical formation of radical literature has firmly included Dos Passos within his boundaries. In addition, there is no reason to characterize him as an anarchist.

167. Moglen points out that in contrast to *The 42nd Parallel* and *1919*, *The Big Money* expresses disaffection with the Left. The biographical vignettes represent only one “American radical,” Thorstein Veblen, which Moglen argues is textual evidence of Dos Passos’s “rage at the Left itself, whose leading institution seemed to him to be destroying all that he valued in the movement” (160-161). Moglen suggests that to his anger over the legal extermination of Sacco and Vanzetti, Dos Passos has added anger at the institutional formations of the political Left.

materialist” (425-426). Importantly, Foley approaches the text from a Leftist stance and thus shows the complex relationship between the historical intersections of radicalism with literature and critical efforts to define the genre of radical literature. She finds in *U.S.A.* a “revolutionary new form” that relies on “collective awareness . . . the product of a long and anguished battle with ideological conditioning” (436, 433). Foley’s *Radical Representations* provides a taxonomy of radical literature from 1929-1941 and she reserves a special place for *U.S.A.* in her discussion of the “collective novel,” a vein that formally constructs collectivity in place of the traditional novel’s individualistic focus. She not only locates Dos Passos within the radical tradition, she calls *U.S.A.* the exemplar of a specific type of radical novel: his desire to represent “the speech of the people” is realized through formal collectivity. Here, we find a major scholar and member of the contemporary Left arguing that a 1930s fellow-traveler’s novel, inspired by two anarchists, is exemplary radical literature.

Foley’s categorization of *U.S.A.* is only one of the many examples of anarchism disappearing within the narrative of radical (i.e., Leftist) literature: almost all studies of *U.S.A.* (and of Dos Passos) reference Sacco and Vanzetti, quickly tagging them as anarchists, but just as quickly forgetting that such a position has meaning or that it is not identical to Dos Passos’s politics. Kenneth M. Price goes so far as to claim that “Sacco and Vanzetti were versions of [Dos Passos]—simultaneously stigmatized outsiders and believers in the American dream of a better life” (221). The absurdity of the second part of Price’s claim (that two anarchists wanted to live the “American dream”) might be comical if the first part (the connection between anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti, the fellow-traveling, anti-institutional Dos Passos, and the literary Left as a whole) were not so frequently and uncritically repeated.¹⁶⁸ Neither *U.S.A.*, nor the scholarship

168. There seems to be some confusion arising from Dos Passos’s anti-authoritarianism, his “distrust of the ability of the political and economic systems of the United States to act with justice and humanity” (Koritz 148).

written about it, pays much attention to Sacco's and Vanzetti's anarchism. It is lost in collectivization, sublimated to the generic radicalism to which Dos Passos is articulated by history and scholarship.

From Sinclair's journalistic realism in *Boston*, to Anderson's dramatic poesy in *Winterset*, to Dos Passos's modernist experimentation in *U.S.A.*, the image of Sacco and Vanzetti remains markedly static: both in the texts themselves and in the scholarship that has shaped these and other works into the Sacco-Vanzetti vein of radical literature, their anarchism is absent. Typically, the two men are conflated or confused into a solitary (or at least unified) symbol of injustice; their anarchism is minimized by the authors' literary and political agendas; and by 1936 they remain as only incidentally anti-government reminders that U.S. government is flawed—that it is in need of repair. This consistency stretches across genres and the eighty years since their deaths, marking not a concerted effort to privilege some versions of Left politics over anarchism, but merely a confluence of literary, historical, and political forces that have forced anarchism to the margins. Radical politics in the 1930s were dominated by versions of Marxism, so a significant body of Leftist literature was produced. In turn, critics have defined radical literature in a way that reflects this dominance. These parallel effacements of anarchism show that form is implicated in the paradox of anarchism. No matter the genre, the act of re-presenting Sacco and Vanzetti reproduces their interpolation within legal discourse: they are made to represent, while the logic of representation preemptively excludes their politics. Anarchists are a threat, un-representable within U.S. political discourse. So, when they appear in our courts and

This distrust should not be interpreted as a rejection of governance. During both his fellow-traveling period and his conservative period, Dos Passos embraces the possibility of fixing government. He is disgusted by the injustices and inequality arising from capitalism, but he never questions the possibilities of democracy to correct these failures. In fact, by writing a trilogy designed to construct "the speech of the people"—to give voice to those who are voiceless—he demonstrates belief both in nationhood and in representation.

our literature, their politics are subject to management, disposition, elimination.

Nevertheless, Sacco and Vanzetti linger within radical literature as a provocative challenge, reminding us that two anarchists were—during the 1920s—*the* cause célèbre, and after their deaths, they became a rallying point for a political movement that tacitly rejected their beliefs. Sacco and Vanzetti themselves are the residue left by the homologous representational discourses of law and literature. Put differently, Sacco and Vanzetti evidence the aporia of anarchism: their experiences—their lived anarchism—remain as unadequated traces. Made subject to legal and literary processes of justice, they suggest a theorization of that which resists interpolation and that exceeds the limits of democracy. Anarchism interrogates the fundamental representationality of our politics and our literature, gesturing toward a perfected egalitarianism, a social formation in which freedom is complete and representation unnecessary. The traces of anarchist literature permeating a period in which the United States struggled toward more complete representation ultimately prompts us to question the nature of anarchism's threat—to ask what might lie beyond even the perfected American democracy.

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