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ROMANTIC LOVE AND THE END OF NATIONALISM

Walt Whitman and Emma Goldman

ROMANTIC TRAGICOMEDY STARTS with two people falling in love. For some social reason, they are unable to be united. This social inhibition is usually enforced by representatives of traditional social order, frequently parents. A rival is often included among the blocking characters as well. One lover is often exiled, while the other is often imprisoned. When the lovers are separated, the rival may have some temporary success. However, in the complete, comic version, the lover returns (perhaps through the good offices of some helper figure, or through some accomplishment when away). He is reunited with his beloved, frequently after defeating the rival. The final reunion of the lovers may also involve a larger familial reunion or reconciliation as well. This is most often a reconciliation of the lovers with their parents. In some cases, however, the lovers may have a child. In this case, the final reunion of the lovers brings them together with their children as well.

The nationalist implications of heroic and sacrificial plots are straightforward. This is less true of the romantic plot. Indeed, the romantic plot seems to operate directly

against one aspect of the heroic plot and thus against the corresponding nationalistic ideas. The usurpation/restoration sequence in heroic stories serves to reaffirm social hierarchy. In contrast, the union of the lovers, in most cases, directly contradicts the social hierarchy of the in-group. The authority of parents or community leaders is overthrown for the preferences of the children. Moreover, the reasons for the separation of the lovers often have to do with identity categories, such as class, caste, ethnicity—or even nationality. If the separation is due to nationality, then the romantic plot is likely to work against the other component of the heroic plot as well. While the heroic plot sets the national in-group against the national out-group in military conflict, the romantic plot may join the two national groups together, challenging the entire idea of national divisions. On the other hand, if the separation is due to some subnational division—class, caste, ethnicity, religion—then the romantic plot may operate in a nationalistic way. Specifically, the celebration of the lovers' union suggests the importance of uniting those subnational groups. Indeed, the romantic emplotment of nationalism is particularly likely to arise and have broad influence during periods of subnational division (just as sacrificial plots are particularly likely to arise and have broad influence during periods of national devastation and military despair). In this case, the rejection of internal hierarchy is likely to be the rejection of a false or usurping leadership, a leadership that promotes national division rather than national unification.

The result of all this is that romantic emplotment tends to operate in one of two ways. On the one hand, it constitutes the most intense opposition to subnational divisions, including the divisions enforced by purgative sacrificial narratives. In this form, it often underlies liberal varieties of nationalism.¹ This use of romantic tragicomedy is suggested by Doris Sommer's work on Latin America and, in a more complex way, by Katie Trumpener's analyses of British colonial narratives (see 133–37, 141, 146, 148, 329–32). For example, Sommer writes that “Latin American romances are inevitably stories of star-crossed lovers who represent particular regions, races, parties, or economic interests which should naturally come together” (75). Moreover, she points out that the pattern is not confined to the Americas.

1. Of course, this model need not lead to liberalism. For example, we saw a variation on this general use of romantic emplotment in Hitler's treatment of Germans outside Germany. In that case, the “subnational” divisions were not a matter of regions or races, but of states. Hitler's program for unifying that putatively divided nation was hardly liberal. On the other hand, Hitler's case seems unusual. The general tendency of this model is toward a broadly inclusive politics that is starkly opposed to purgative nationalism.

Specifically, she explains that “As in Latin America, European foundational fictions sought to overcome political and historical fragmentation through love” (84).²

But, again, this is only one use of romantic tragicomedy. Romantic tragicomedy simultaneously constitutes the most intense opposition to national in-group/out-group divisions. Thus, it underlies certain forms of internationalism. More generally, the impulses of romantic tragicomedy are almost invariably against hierarchy, against group categorization, against in-group/out-group divisions, and in favor of individual freedom and choice. As such, this prototype almost always pushes against nationalism and against orders of social authority, even in those cases where the focus is on subnational reconciliation. Consider, for example, Mani Ratnam’s celebrated film, *Bombay*. A Hindu and a Muslim fall in love. They marry in defiance of their parents’ bigotry and lead a happy, indeed joyous family life. But Hindu/Muslim riots—ignited by the inflammatory speeches of illegitimate national leaders—almost lead to the death of their children. The parents save their children by bravely facing the rioters and appealing to their common identity as Indians. The film concludes with Hindus and Muslims ending the riots and joining hands in national unity. The film clearly involves a romantic emplotment of nationalism. It directly celebrates the nation in doing so. Yet, at the same time, it is clear that our sympathy with the couple and their children would be no different if the Hindu were Indian and the Muslim were Pakistani and if their children were nearly killed in war between nations rather than in riots within a nation. Moreover, if these leaders are illegitimate because they undermine the human relations of ordinary people through the enforcement of subnational identity categories, other leaders should be illegitimate because they undermine the human relations of ordinary people through the enforcement of national identity categories.

In short, there are both nationalist and antinationalist uses of the romantic plot.³ However, even the nationalist uses commonly have antin-

2. A recent European example may be found in Margarethe von Trotta’s 1995 film, *The Promise*. It treats two lovers, Sophie and Konrad, separated by the construction of the Berlin wall. Their longing for union parallels and exemplifies the longing of East and West Germany. Their reunion occurs when the separation of East and West Germany ends.

3. There is actually a third common use of this structure as well, a use that is not precisely nationalist or antinationalist. Specifically, literary works often employ the romantic plot allegorically in treating nationalism. A remarkably frequent form of this allegory involves the love triangle. In this version, the beloved (male or female) represents the nation and the two rivals represent different possible futures for the nation. It is up to the nation to choose one or the other. Commonly, the author strongly prefers one rival (i.e., one possible future for

ationalist implications, which may be more or less overt. Put differently, the prototype is not easily confined to a narrowly nationalistic use. It structures events and orients our sympathy for characters in such a way as to resist in-group/out-group divisions, including national divisions, and their associated social hierarchies. In the following pages, then, I will consider one nationalist, though ultimately somewhat ambiguous case of romantic emplotment, and one antinationalist case. There are many straightforward instances of nationalist literary works that involve romantic emplotment. Some of these have been discussed at length by other writers, as I have just noted. For that reason, I will consider a less straightforward case, a work in which the romantic emplotment operates more covertly—thus a transitional case in which the analysis of that plot is potentially more illuminating. Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* is perhaps the closest thing the United States has to a national epic. Specifically, “Song of Myself” is widely recognized as a powerful statement of American national self-definition. Though it involves some localized elements of the heroic plot, it is primarily romantic. Indeed, it has all the characteristic elements of the romantic plot. But Whitman eschews overt narrative connections. Thus, the larger emplotment of the poem’s nationalist politics is not at first obvious. It becomes clear only when interpreted in light of the romantic prototype.

In keeping with the antinationalist tendency of romantic emplotment, Whitman’s nationalism continually spills over into universalism or non-national globalism. Some other writers have taken up this nonnational globalism more thoroughly and explicitly. I will conclude with a look at a nonliterary and (apparently) nonnarrative case in which romantic emplotment leads to an overtly internationalist and antiauthoritarian politics—Emma Goldman’s *Anarchism*. These two writers allow us to return to the United States, treating another strand of American thought, one very different from that of *Independence Day* and President Bush, but also (if to

the nation) and the point of the work is to urge his or her readers to adopt that choice for the nation’s future. I briefly outlined three cases of this sort—from Rabindranath Tagore, Derek Walcott, and Peter Abrahams—in chapter 3. Other cases would include sections of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Petals of Blood*.

I leave this use of the romantic prototype aside here as such allegory is confined to explicit, fictional stories. In other words, in these cases, the romantic plot has definite literary consequences. But it is not clear that it has any practical, real-world consequences (beyond the straightforward rhetorical consequences of associating a particular national policy or practice with a character we like and a rival policy or practice with a character we do not like). Moreover, it is a formal use of the structure, for it does not involve any particular view of nationalism or policy for the nation. Virtually any positions may be associated with the lovers.

a lesser degree) different from that of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

WALT WHITMAN

Romance, Race, and the Pansexual Nation

As is well known, the first title of “Song of Myself” was “Poem of Walt Whitman, an American.” Whitman changed this to “Song of Myself” after the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*. The history of the title is suggestive, for it indicates how we are to understand the “self” of the poem—the self is, first of all, an American.⁴ In other words, the self being sung in the poem is the self defined by the national category. (Contrast, say, “Poem of Walt Whitman, a Man.”) Even without the first title, the point would be clear from the poem, which catalogues the various people and places that comprise the “self” of the poem’s speaker. That “self” is clearly America. The poem begins “I celebrate myself, and sing myself,” this is not mere personal narcissism, but the celebration and singing of the nation, a specification of the standard metaphorical model, THE NATION IS A PERSON. When he says that “every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you” (l. 3), he is not speaking nonsense, but referring to the shared “self” of Americans.

Of course, without “an American” in the title, this shared self could simply be shared humanity or even shared life. Indeed, the poem develops in this direction, passing beyond the nation to larger aggregates, following the universalizing impulse of romantic emplotment. But the link with America in particular becomes clear quickly. “My tongue,” thus both his linguistic idiom and the actual organ that (we might imagine) sings this song, is “form’d from this soil, this air.” His speech is not, then, English, but American, the product of just this physical place, and the air breathed in and out by all the other American speakers. Moreover, “every atom of my blood” (l. 6) derives from this soil and air as well. Taking up another

4. Of course, the fact that Whitman removed the phrase is important also. It may suggest an ambivalence about the strict categorial identification of the self as an American. As Peter Rabinowitz pointed out to me, the removal could be taken to “suggest that [Whitman] felt the first title was too nationalistic.” I completely agree with this point. As will become clear by the end of this section, I believe that Whitman’s poem begins with a nationalist orientation, but is continually moving away from nationalism toward internationalism. Such ambivalence or shifting between stressing and downplaying the category of “American” is, then, just what we would expect, given the internationalist impulse of romantic emplotment and Whitman’s particular development of that emplotment.

standard nationalist metaphor, *THE NATION IS A FAMILY*, he asserts that his ancestry, his “blood,” is American. What we share with the speaker, “every atom,” becomes by association “every atom of . . . blood,” thus kinship. The self’s national identity encompasses or substitutes for ethnic identity. Whitman goes on to reject divisive belief systems as well, putting “Creeds and schools in abeyance” (1. 10). In the course of the poem, Whitman repeatedly repudiates organized religions.

These few opening lines set out Whitman’s nationalist ideas clearly. The United States faced several threats to national identification. One was a continued sense of unity with England. This is a transnational, language-based identification. Whitman deals with this through the affirmation of an American language, “form’d from this soil.” Indeed, part of the influence of Whitman’s poetry, and “*Song of Myself*” in particular, derives from his practical development of American English as a poetic idiom. A second danger was ethnic division, both sub- and transnational. He deals with this in the usual way of affirming a metaphorical familial/ethnic connectedness—shared blood—of Americans. A third possible conflict was religious, which was again sub- and transnational. His response in this case, a response very much in keeping with that of America’s “founding fathers,” was to reject the validity of religious categories. (On the attitude of the founding fathers toward organized religion, see Allen.)

But Whitman knows perfectly well that other divisions threaten American unity. Indeed, those are the difficult ones. Language, ethnicity, and religion were relatively limited in their divisive impact. The risk in these cases was less that national unity would end, that a national categorial identification would be lost, than that it would be weakened by other—primarily transnational—identifications. In contrast, both regional and racial identifications threatened to end the nation as such through sharp subnational conflicts. Indeed, those two forms of subnational identification were inseparably intertwined. Citizens of the slaveholding states increasingly identified themselves regionally rather than nationally. This identification was bound up with their racial identification. Both identifications were enhanced in the usual ways. Within the national context, slaveholding had become highly salient, functional, affective, and oppositional. (Obviously, it had been salient, functional, affective, and oppositional in other contexts—for example, plantation life—from the outset.) One point of conflict concerned just how enduring it would be.

This situation of internal division fostered romantic emplotment in the usual way. In Whitman’s case, however, that emplotment was complicated by a number of factors. First, his primary metaphorical schema for the

United States was THE NATION IS A PERSON. Thus, he sought to model the nation (metaphorically) on a person and (narratively) on the union of lovers. This creates some obvious difficulties. Whitman solves these difficulties in part simply by accepting imagistic contradictions. Indeed, he affirms the necessity of contradiction toward the end of the poem, when he writes, “Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes.)” (11. 1324–26). This is not a celebration of illogic, but an acknowledgment that no single image or statement can encompass the diverse ideas and attitudes found in a nation. America is large. It contains multitudes. These multitudes do not always agree. In fact, they probably never fully agree. On the other hand, Whitman was seeking to enhance the sense of unity as well. His poem does not set out to fragment Americans, quite the contrary. A combination of these images—America is one; America is not one, but a division that seeks union—helps to suggest this complexity in a way that is unifying without being reductive or what Bakhtinians would call “monological.”

Perhaps more important, he shifts among different levels of “self” in the course of the poem. At times, “myself” is the overarching nation. At times, however, “myself” is the poet celebrating the nation—not simply Whitman as a biographical person, but Whitman as a sort of principle of agency that could be any American, anyone who sings about America, as the lover sings about the beloved. Put differently, “myself” is at times the nation as a whole and at other times those individuals that comprise the nation. In the terminology of ancient Indian thought, which is as apt for Whitman as for Gandhi, it is both the *ātman* and *brahman*; it is both the individual soul and the Absolute—here, a sort of national Absolute—that is ultimately not different from the individual soul.⁵ Of course, the romantic plotment bears primarily on “myself” as an individual. It is this poet, singing of America, who would be separated from his beloved by national disunion.

But there is a further complication here. The subnational threat Whitman faced was not a simple regional division for which he could imagine a straightforward, healing union. Many such divisions may be imaginatively reconciled by joining lovers from each side. But uniting a white northerner and a white southerner would not have resolved the dilemma. It would have left out the black population. It would have healed the regional split while exacerbating the racial opposition. Whitman had no inclination to do this.

5. For a discussion of Whitman’s relation to Indian philosophical thought, specifically Vedāntism, see Chari.

However, a simple union of black and white would not have worked either. This would have deepened the cleft between the north and the south.

Whitman's primary strategy for dealing with these problems was to generalize the sexual union, extending it everywhere.⁶ The poem becomes, in a sense, pansexual⁷ (or, as James Miller puts it, "omnisexual" [see chapter 6 of his *Leaves of Grass*]⁸). By encompassing all Americans in a sort of sexual ambiance, Whitman partially avoids the problem of choosing blacks over southern whites or vice versa. He also partially reconciles his collective and individualistic uses of "myself."

On the other hand, the generalization of sexual union is not entirely even-handed. Specifically, there is nothing in the poem that suggests a particular union of the poem's "self" with southern whites. Whitman does mute his criticism of southern whites. This has led some interpreters to criticize him for not being adequately antiracist (see, for example, Simpson). However, it seems clear that this is a necessary result of his nationalist purposes. He cannot strive to unify the nation while vilifying most people in one region of the nation. Moreover, he makes clear that one is an American whether one is good or bad. To cultivate national unity, national acceptance of a national categorial identification, is not the same thing as claiming that all members of the nation live up to national ideals. In any case, he does not draw from his pansexual America a particular sexual union of northern and southern whites. He does, however, suggest the sexual union of whites and blacks. In this way, he takes up more fully the romantic solution to racial division. At the same time, he tempers this by suggesting sexual unions among regionless whites and by partially occluding the sexual aspects of the black-white union.

After all this, there is still one further complicating factor—Whitman's own sexuality.⁹ When he imagined romantic union, he most powerfully imagined the union of men. Moreover, this imagination was closely related

6. This is not to say that Whitman recognized the problems self-consciously and set out to resolve them by extending sexuality in this way. In certain cases, he was no doubt self-consciously aware of problems and solutions. In general, however, it seems more likely that he had a looser sense that some ways of singing America were not quite right, while others were more consistent with his ideas and feelings.

7. A range of critics have stressed the importance of sexuality in Whitman's poetry. See, for example, Pollak for a recent, extended exploration of this topic.

8. I prefer pansexual as it avoids associations with omnivore and related words, suggesting instead such ideas as pantheism and thus Whitman's "sacralization of sexuality," as Ostriker put it (104).

9. Needless to say, the importance of Whitman's sexual orientation has not gone unremarked by critics. For an analysis of Whitman and his work, focusing on homosexuality, see Schmidgall.

to his imagination of national union. As Justin Kaplan put it, “manly love” was, for Whitman, “the ultimate democracy of the heart” (233). But he could only suggest that sexuality indirectly in the poem. He could not state it overtly. Thus, beyond the complications of specifying the romantic plot in a conciliatory manner, Whitman faced the necessity of concealing that plot insofar as it pointed not only toward miscegenation, but toward homosexuality as well.¹⁰ In combination with his need to encompass all divided groups, this further helped to foster the pervasive sexualization we witness in the poem. Specifically, pansexualization, by encompassing everyone, necessarily joins forbidden partners—blacks and whites, men and men. But, by the fact that it encompasses everyone, pansexualization does not make those forbidden unions salient.

In the second canto, Whitman introduces his pansexual relation to America. Moreover, he introduces a recurring image for that relation—immersion in water. The image is apt in its encompassing sensuality. Whitman’s sexuality engulfs the body of the nation as water engulfs the body of the swimmer. Specifically, he refers to the “atmosphere” (l. 17), which appears to be ambient American nature, the physical space of the nation that is, once again, so important for national identification. He explains that “I am in love with” this atmosphere (l. 18). This explicitly introduces the romantic motif. The self seeks romantic union with the national place. As a result, “I will go to the bank . . . and become undisguised and naked, / I am mad for it to be in contact with me” (ll. 19–20). Even when he is not in the water, water serves as a model for his relation to America. For example, just as his body is immersed in the waves, his “voice [is] loos’d to the eddies of the wind” (l. 25). The eddying movement is tacitly carried over to the next line and sexualized in the reference to the circling embrace of lovers—“A few light kisses, a few embraces, a reaching around of arms” (l. 26).

The third stanza expands on the motif of sexual union, explicitly generalizing it—and implicitly contrasting it with religious accounts of creation, thus with the divisive identity categories of religion. Whitman rejects “talk of the beginning or the end” (l. 39). He substitutes his pansexual understanding of life: “Urge and urge and urge, / Always the procreant urge of the world” (ll. 44–45)—what we share, “substance and increase, always sex” (l. 46). (The antireligious point becomes clearer when he asserts that

10. Indeed, it seems that he concealed the homosexuality even from himself. As, for example, Railton has noted, Whitman apparently “could never bring himself to acknowledge that his attraction to men was sexual.” Railton concludes that Whitman “was seriously repressed” (15).

there “will never be . . . any more heaven or hell than there is now” [11. 42–43].) In keeping with the familial model for nationhood, Whitman is stressing procreation. But this is not to say that the urge need always be procreative in order to be affirmative, creative, and unifying. Later in the canto, Whitman speaks of his “hugging and loving bed-fellow” who “sleeps at my side through the night, and withdraws at the peep of the day with stealthy tread” (1. 60). Though the image is ambiguous, “fellow” points more toward a man than a woman, and the image of the lover sneaking away from his beloved’s bed at dawn at least suggests some socially unacceptable liaison. Moreover, the 1855 version of the poem identified the “bed-fellow” as “God,” not a goddess or an unsexed “divine being.”

The suggested homosexuality of this scene is, of course, first of all a function of Whitman’s own feelings. It is also a matter of his embracing diverse outcaste groups, as Nussbaum has stressed. But it derives perhaps most importantly from Whitman’s attempt to combine romantic union with an affirmation of absolute national identity, an absolute identity well-represented by the all-encompassing being of God. Again, it is a sort of national version of ātman and brahman in spiritual realization. It is a union that is simultaneously a recognition of sameness. In this sense, the divine bedfellow and “myself” are one and the same. It is fitting that they have the same sex.

D. H. Lawrence famously criticized Whitman for “Myself monomania” (182; see Simpson 171 for a recent development of Lawrence’s objections). He connected this with Whitman’s celebration of “manly love” (176–78). But Lawrence’s criticism begins by understanding Whitman, “Myself,” as a necessarily limited individual outside the poem and, so to speak, outside the nation. I take it that the direction of Whitman’s affirmation is the precise opposite. The point is not to begin with “Myself” as a distinct, uncategorized individual and to assert that everything else is an instance of me (including my sexual partner). The point is to begin with the (national) collective and to recognize an identity across the seeming diversity. The national category becomes the most important identifier for me when I recognize that the nation is myself—and not myself merely as an abstract idea, but as a feeling, a drive. Thus, in the third canto, Whitman does speak of “the procreant urge” (1. 45), but when he explains that urge, he refers to something else: “always sex, / Always a knit of *identity*” (11. 46–47; italics added). Again, in the romantic emplotment of nationalism, the ultimate aim is precisely that union, that making one and identical. We see this later in the canto when Whitman takes up his image of fluid pansexuality again. “I . . . go bathe,” he tells us, “and admire myself” (1. 56). Here, we

see another function of the water image. When the water is still, it reflects back the image of the speaker, like a mirror. It shows him his own self. As such, what he sees must be identical with what he is. Indeed, that is the point of saying that “myself” is America. Again, they are one and the same—and they are a self intermingled with itself, like eddying currents. Thus, the “hugging . . . bed-fellow” reaches his arms around like the river or the watery wind of canto 2. When he departs, he leaves “white towels” (1. 61), what he used following the embrace of water and the reflection on the still surface.

The converse of this theme is taken up in canto 4 when Whitman locates himself in the ward, then the city, then the nation (1. 67), making the nation the highest and most encompassing category by which he defines himself. He speaks of a series of difficulties, beginning with the “indifference of some man or woman I love” (1. 70). He concludes with “Battles, the horrors of fratricidal war, the fever of doubtful news, the fitful event” (1. 72). The relation between the two is clear. The fratricidal war is also alienation in love. But Whitman responds to these romantic and personal divisions by tacitly assuming the voice of the nation (recall, here, the opening of the poem “what I assume you shall assume” [1. 2]). In that voice he tells us that these things “come . . . and go,” but “they are not the Me myself” (11. 73–74). What “I am,” he explains, is “unitary” (11. 75–76).

The fifth canto takes up the antiauthoritarian attitude that is part and parcel of the romantic plot, and thus contrary to the heroic plot. It begins by explaining that “the other I am must not abase itself to you, / And you must not be abased to the other” (1. 82). All those particular people that comprise the nation must be equal. None must be subordinated, for they are all one. Whitman repeats this idea at various points in the poem.

The sixth canto considers the physicality of the national land. Whitman focuses particularly on the grass—an apt image for, like a nation, it is a collective entity named in a singular noun, but composed of individual leaves, all rooted in the one soil. He then takes up the crucial subnational divisions, stressing unity once again. The grass, he explains, sprouts equally in all “zones”—which, this suggests, cannot be separated off arbitrarily from one another, but are necessarily continuous from north to south (see 1. 109). Most important, it grows “among black folks as among white” (1. 108). It is appropriate that the encompassing volume, *Leaves of Grass*, takes up this image as a guiding metaphor for Whitman’s entire project.

The seventh canto again manifests the pansexuality that characterizes the nationalism of the poem. Specifically, Whitman explains that “I am the mate and companion of people” (1. 137)—“mate” here meaning not only

“companion” (which would make the phrase repetitive), but also sexual partner. He, as a representative of all individuals, is united with the nation, the people, in both comradeship and all-encompassing sexuality. Together, they are a union. Recurring tacitly to the image of water and bathing, he calls out to his readers, “Undrape!” Implicitly recognizing the sexuality of the call, he reassures us “you are not guilty to me” (1. 145). Like water or the eddying air or lover’s arms he spoke of earlier, he too—the sexually encompassing nation—is “around” and “cannot be shaken away” (1. 147).

In my view, the poem reaches a sort of culmination in the following cantos, particularly cantos 10 through 13. Here the romantic emplotment becomes clearer. In connection with this, we understand more fully the purposes of Whitman’s national pansexuality and the associated water imagery. To interpret this section, it is useful to begin, not with canto 10, but with canto 11, for in this canto the sexuality is most overt. Understanding canto 11 gives us a better sense of just what is going on in the preceding and following cantos.

In canto 11, a young woman “by the rise of the bank” (1. 202) watches twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore. She delights in watching the “Little streams [that] pass’d over their bodies” (1. 211). Whitman goes on to explain that “An unseen hand also pass’d over their bodies, / It descended trembling from their temples and ribs” (11. 212–13). Martha Nussbaum has argued persuasively that this unseen hand is not only the hand of the woman, but the hand of Whitman as well (667).¹¹ At the very least, it parallels a scene from the following canto, where the speaker introduces “Blacksmiths with grimed and hairy chests,” explaining, “I follow their movements, / The lithe sheer of their waists plays even with their massive arms” (11. 219, 221–22). Here, Whitman’s delighted and sensual gaze recalls that of the young woman, implicitly connecting the two. More important, the unseen hand is not only that of the poet but that of all the agents he represents, all Americans who, in reading the poem, share the gaze of the young woman in another instance of the poem’s generalization of sexuality. Finally, the scene provides a sexual context for the more extended descriptions that precede and follow, descriptions that contribute importantly to the romantic emplotment of the nation as a unity across lines of forbidden love—crucially, interracial love, including interracial homosexual love.

11. Nussbaum also discusses the degree to which this section of the poem affirms female sexual desire against patriarchal repression (669–70). Indeed, Nussbaum stresses the anti-patriarchal elements of the poem, as have other writers (see, for example, Ostriker). These elements, too, are clearly bound up with romantic emplotment. We will see this connection again in the case of Goldman.

Now we may return to canto 10, which begins this intensely sexualized section of the poem. The speaker witnesses “the marriage of the trapper,” a white man. He continues, “the bride was a red girl.” The redness is her salient racial marker. “Her father and his friends” attend the ceremony wearing moccasins. The trapper holds the hand of his bride, whose “coarse straight locks descended upon her voluptuous limbs” (11. 185–86, 188). Whitman introduces interracial romantic union through Native Americans. This eases the reader into the topic as European–Native American unions are not so wholly tabooed as European–African ones. This is, of course, inseparable from the fact that, for European Americans, the subnational category of “Native American” (or “Indian”) is far less functional, affective, salient, and oppositional than the category “African American” (or “black”).

The next stanza of the canto turns to precisely the union of European American and African American. Whitman explains that a “runaway slave came to my house” (1. 189). What follows is not explicitly homoerotic. However, Nussbaum has argued forcefully that the relationship of these men is indeed sexual. She explains that this is suggested by the language of the passage and its parallels with preceding and following stanzas. Expanding on Nussbaum’s insights, we may note that the scene in some ways takes up where the marriage ends. We do not see the trapper take the “red girl” into his home. But we do see Whitman take the escaped slave into his kitchen. At this point, Whitman “brought water and fill’d a tub for his sweated body.” This is the image of immersion in water that Whitman so closely links with sexual union. The suggestion is furthered when he explains that he “gave [the runaway] a room that enter’d from my own” (11. 193–94). Their intimacy is such that Whitman “had him sit next to me at table” (1. 198). This most obviously means that they did not sit separately; they were not racially segregated at meals. But it also indicates that they did not sit across from one another. Rather, they sat in nearer physical proximity, like new lovers who do not wish to be physically separated even by the width of a table.

These stanzas suggest that, when Whitman envisions the reconciliation of the nation, its union, he envisions the marriage of the trapper and the “red girl,” the shared bathing, sleeping, and eating of the poet and the runaway slave. He imagines a forbidden romantic union across lines of subnational division.

The tenth canto ends with this oblique story of the slave. The eleventh comprises the story of the twenty-eight bathers and their lusty observer. The twelfth canto recounts Whitman’s own sexually tinged observation

of the blacksmiths. This observation is, again, parallel to that of the young woman with the bathers. It is significant for the poem's romantic nationalism for it suggests a union of different economic classes. More important, the thirteenth canto introduces us to "The negro that drives the long dray of the stone-yard." Whitman dwells on this figure "steady and tall," noting how "His blue shirt exposes his ample neck and breast and loosens over his hip-band." He admires "the black of his polish'd and perfect limbs." He concludes, "I behold the picturesque giant and love him" (11. 226–27, 229–30). The statement may seem to be a simple expression of Platonic admiration. In context, however, it seems clear that it is more. That "more" has nationalist resonances. Here again, Whitman has suggested the romantic emplotment of national unity. He does not dwell on the fact that such love is forbidden, in the way that most romantic stories do. There is no need for such an emphasis here. Such social intolerance is all too obvious—as are its effects on national unity.

The fifteenth canto takes up the motif of interracial sexual union to treat the mixing of different races and ethnicities as a distinctively positive American trait. Whitman refers to the "groups of newly-come immigrants" who "cover the wharf or levee," pairing these with the African slaves who "hoe in the sugar-field" and the "overseer" (11. 285–86)—all immigrants. More important, he refers to a "half-breed" and a "quadroon girl" (11. 282, 278). Having affirmed American unity in the opening cantos, Whitman now turns to the diversity of America. Having made Americans a metaphorical family, he now acknowledges their literal ethnic variety. Having tied Americans to the land, he now recognizes that they have immigrated to the land. Most significant, however, having tacitly acknowledged their racial divisions, he now indicates that the sexual union of races is not only metaphorical, but literal as well—and, indeed, metaphorical at a second level, for in a sense all Americans become such quadroons and half-breeds, part of a nation that is itself mixed in race. Despite the criticisms of Simpson (see 186–87) and others, this section does not pass over the crimes of racism, when the "quadroon girl" is "sold at the auction-stand" (1. 278). Yes, Whitman does tacitly appeal to white identification with a girl who is three-quarters white. But that identification only encourages whites to imagine themselves in the position of the slave girl. It only helps to make us all aware that all our "blood" mingles together, for we are all one nation—a quadroon nation that is itself only in part white.

Unsurprisingly, the canto concludes with sexual union: "The old husband sleeps by his wife and the young husband sleeps by his wife" (1. 326). They are without race and without region. Or they are every race and every

region, as well as every class. At the end of this canto, unity emerges once more from diversity. Indeed, it is at this point that the speaker explains the name of the poem: “of these one and all I weave the song of myself” (l. 329). Again, that self is the nation.

Whitman makes the preceding points more explicitly in the sixteenth canto, where he names the United States “the Nation of many nations” (l. 334). Here, in affirming the oneness of all Americans, he simultaneously acknowledges a prior range of origins, albeit a range of origins that must be superseded in the new “Nation.” Capitalizing “Nation” suggests that the United States is a higher principle, a greater and fuller unity than the smaller bonds it encompasses. That higher unity is, implicitly, romantic. The smaller bonds are precisely what must be loosened or even undone in the promiscuous sexuality of “National” union.

The first subnational division Whitman names is regional. Of regions, the first distinction he makes, and then denies, is the one based on slaveholding. The speaker affirms his self, thus America, to be “A Southerner soon as a Northerner” (l. 335). He then names his state affiliations—Connecticut, Kentucky, Louisiana, Georgia, Indiana, Wisconsin, Ohio, and so forth. Following regions, he turns to race, class, and religion, explaining, “Of every hue and caste am I, of every rank and religion” (l. 346). Here, too, it may seem that he is passing over the injustices of slavery. But he is not. He is, rather, setting out to overcome all subnational divisions, all categorical identities other than that of the nation. This crucially includes the affirmation of national identity that would align it with racial and ethnic identity. That is why he is of every hue or race. That is why the quadroon girl can suggest America itself. That is why the poet, speaking as America, can say “I resist any thing better than my own diversity” (l. 349). He is resisting any form of alignment nationalism by articulating an American sense of national self as encompassing all races, ethnicities, religions, and so forth.

Whitman’s assertion of national unity that encompasses diversity, is not only a rationally considered repudiation of alignment nationalism and, of course, subnationalism. It is, again, an instance of romantic emplotment as well. Romantic stories are routinely about union across opposed identities. The separation of the lovers is the result of social division—the separation of classes, castes, ethnic groups, tribes, rival families. The romantic plot pushes invariably toward an affirmation of oneness across socially defined differences. I have been suggesting that the patterns we find in Whitman’s work—the opposition to subnational divisions and categorical identifications, the affirmation of unity across social distinctions, the

sexualization of this unity as a physical union—are not accidental. It is not mere chance that Whitman interweaves interracial marriage and eroticism with his poetic work to overcome subnational division with union. Rather, it is the manifestation of an underlying structure, a structure that guides his imagination of agents, relations, actions, events, identities—specifically, the romantic structure.

Indeed, as I have already pointed out, the emotional and conceptual logic of romantic emplotment is so opposed to categorial identification and so favorable to union that romance almost invariably pushes beyond the nation as well. In keeping with this, Whitman turns from the affirmation of national identity to the affirmation of a broader unity. The following canto begins with the admission that “These are really the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands” (1. 355). The crucial word in this sentence is “lands.” Here, Whitman is extending this same affirmation of unity to all nations. Indeed, he ends the canto by tacitly denying nationhood itself. He takes up once again the image of the grass, the grass that is continuous across the regions of the United States. Now it is universal. “This is the grass that grows wherever the land is and the water is,” he tells us; “This is the common air that bathes the globe” (11. 359–60)—the sexually encompassing bath now embraces not the nation, but the entire world.

I cannot discuss the whole poem in this detail. However, it is important to remark on some striking features of what follows. The eighteenth canto introduces the topic of battle, speaking of victors and vanquished. But Whitman asserts that he will celebrate the vanquished. In other words, he introduces heroic emplotment to reject or undermine it. This and the following cantos are, in part, self-consciously antiheroic in their rejection of hierarchies of social authority as well, including the hierarchies sanctioned by religion (a crucial part of the heroic plot, as we have seen). Thus, he asks, “Why should I pray? why should I venerate and be ceremonious?” (1. 398). He insists that no social subjugation is right, claiming that “Whoever degrades another degrades me” (1. 503). He praises animals because “Not one kneels to another” (1. 690). In direct opposition to the usurpation part of the heroic plot, he will “beat the gong of revolt” (1. 496).

Unsurprisingly, throughout this antiheroic section, Whitman repeatedly recalls the romantic and sexual. He “give[s] the sign of democracy” by allowing “long dumb voices” to speak (11. 506, 508)—not the voices of the heroic victors, but the voices of the vanquished. Crucially, these are “Voices of sexes and lusts” (1. 517). The “Prodigal” shares with him “unspeakable passionate love” (11. 446–47). The image of water returns: “You sea! I resign myself to you. . . . I undress. . . . Dash me with amorous

wet" (11. 448, 451, 453). Later, "Picking out here one that I love," Whitman goes "with him on brotherly terms" (1. 700). The image seems innocuous enough. But immediately following this, he refers to the "gigantic beauty of a stallion, fresh and responsive to my caresses" (1. 701). The reader cannot help but recall the "negro" with his horses, a "picturesque giant" (11. 225, 230) whom the speaker loved in canto 13. Whitman "embrace[s]" the stallion with his heels (1. 705) and "His well-built limbs tremble with pleasure" (1. 706). The description fits a horse. But at the same time it allows the expression of "forbidden voices, / Voices of sexes and lusts . . . /Voices indecent by me . . . transfigur'd" (11. 516–18). Here, once again, we have the unity of the nation. And, once again, it is not the unity of battle, of heroism. Rather, it is a sexual union across forbidden lines.

Despite all this, a curious thing happens in the thirty-third canto. Whitman suddenly shifts toward the heroic mode ("Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself" [1324–25]). He speaks of "the dense-starr'd flag . . . borne at the head of the regiments" (1. 747). He goes on to discuss "some great battle-field" (1. 813). In canto 34, he recounts the conflict at Goliad. He tells of John Paul Jones in 35. He seems suddenly to embrace the heroic emplotment of nationalism. But in canto 36, he recounts the aftermath. It is a paradigmatic epilogue of suffering. As the victorious American "captain . . . coldly giv[es] his orders," Whitman points to "the corpse of the child that serv'd in the cabin" (11. 932–33). It is the standard image of the innocent youth that dies in battle and triggers remorse. The devastation is multiplied. There are only "two or three officers yet fit for duty" (1. 936). They are surrounded by "Formless stacks of bodies and bodies by themselves, dabs of flesh upon the masts and spars" (1. 937). The speaker now suffers the remorse that follows the enthusiasm of war. "I am possess'd," he tells us, "I . . . Embody all presences outlaw'd or suffering / See myself in prison shaped like another man" (11. 396–98), presumably a man who, a short time earlier, was the enemy. Thus, he undermines the glorious fantasy of belligerence found in the heroic narrative (specifically in the threat/defense sequence). He goes on to challenge the internal hierarchy (thus the usurpation/restoration sequence) as well, explaining that "Not a mutineer walks handcuff'd to jail but I am handcuff'd to him and walk by his side" (1. 952).

After this brief detour into heroic narrative and the epilogue of suffering, Whitman returns to romantic emplotment for the remainder of the poem, though with some differences. The thirty-ninth canto in a sense brings us back to the marriage of the trapper and the "red girl." It also takes up the image of water and the pansexuality of the opening. However,

it changes the girl to a man, and it complicates that sexuality. The canto begins by introducing “The friendly and flowing savage” (1. 976). The term “flowing” suggests the ambient sexuality that has served as a model for national unity in earlier parts of the poem. Whitman then brings up the crux of ideological opposition between Europeans and Native Americans (as well as Africans)—“civilization.” Whitman asks “Is he waiting for civilization, or past it and mastering it?” (1. 977). The usual European view would be that the savage desires civilization, or rejects it, or is blissfully unaware of it. But Whitman suggests that the Native American may in fact have gone on to another stage, surpassing European practices. This admiration for the Native American is simultaneously an affront to European biases and an affirmation of a common view of America—that we distinguish ourselves in part by an incorporation of the wisdom of the natives. In the next stanza, the “flowing savage” comes to represent all of America as Whitman names all the places from which he might have come—Iowa, Oregon, California, “the Mississippi country” (1. 979), and so forth. The sexuality follows. “Wherever he goes,” Whitman tells us, “men and women accept and desire him.” Moreover, “They desire that he should like them, touch them, speak to them, stay with them” (11. 981–82). Again, the union of the nation is an interracial sexual and romantic union—in this case a union that is both hetero- and homosexual, as well as one that crosses all regions of the country.

The fortieth canto continues the idea. Whitman addresses the earth as “old top-knot” (1. 990), a term of familiarity, referring to a Native American.¹² He continues, “Man or woman, I might tell how I like you, but cannot . . . might tell that pining I have, that pulse of my nights and days” (1. 991). The point is once more the same narrative point—the longing of America is Whitman’s longing for union across racial lines, a romantic and sexual union.¹³ Subsequently, he refers to the “cotton-field drudge” (1. 1003), suggesting the slaves. He tells us, “On his right cheek I put the family kiss” (1. 1004)—the kiss of a brother, or the kiss of a husband or wife. Either way, *THE NATION IS A FAMILY*. Subsequent cantos stress the ubiquity of national sexual union. His “lovers” form a crowd. They are everywhere—“streets and public halls . . . rocks of the river . . . flowerbeds, vines, tangled underbrush.” They come to him “naked . . . at night . . .

12. See Bradley et al. 1762n.8.

13. The longing is not by any means unique to Whitman. Leslie Fiedler has argued influentially that a sort of interracial, homosexual—if also “innocent” (12)—marriage is one of the most important and most definitive motifs of American literature.

Bussing my body with soft balsamic busses, / Noiselessly passing handfuls out of their hearts and giving them to be mine” (11. 1172–76, 1178–79). In themselves, these are, of course, isolated moments with only limited narrative content. But why do they occur here, what are their source and function? It could be a matter of mere chance that he links this sexual and romantic union—and its associated repudiation of racial, regional, religious, and other identities—with the unity of the nation. Or there could be some cognitive reason for the continual recurrence of these images of love, particularly forbidden love across identity categories, and the connection of these images with a specifically antihierarchical nationalism. Again, it seems extremely unlikely that this very clear pattern in Whitman’s poem is the result of chance. It is, rather, explicable by reference to an underlying cognitive structure, a standard structure for emplotting actions and events, including those that bear on nationalism—romantic tragicomedy.

But here, again, at the end of the poem, the romantic structure pushes Whitman toward something beyond the nation. In a typically romantic scene, he leads his beloved “upon a knoll, / My left hand hooking you round the waist.” But his beloved is not at all typical—“each man and each woman.” As he holds these countless lovers “My right hand points to landscapes.” Here, one might expect that it points to landscapes of the nation, of the northern and southern regions that he wishes to unite in the nation, of all (and only) the states of the Union. But that is not where he points. Rather, his right hand directs us to “landscapes of continents” (11. 1207–9). In the fiftieth canto, he further extends this connection between universalism and sexuality. He speaks of something “in me” that he cannot name. He speaks of being “Wrench’d and sweaty” first. But “calm and cool then my body becomes.” Afterward, “I sleep” (11. 1309–11). This inner “it” that is “without name” (1. 1312) is the force that drives his sexual desire, that makes his act “Wrench’d and sweaty,” then turns his body “calm and cool” before sleep. It is, he explains “union” (1. 1318), but it is not the Union of his particular nation. Rather it is even “more than the earth” (1. 1314).

Though not developed extensively in the course of the poem, this global humanism—or even biologism, uniting and celebrating all life—is a sort of telos for the implicit narrative trajectory of the poem. However national Whitman’s orientation was initially, his romantic emplotment of the nation pushed inexorably beyond the nation.

In a sense, Whitman’s use of the romantic plot ends where that of Emma Goldman begins.

EMMA GOLDMAN

Romance Against Nationalism

Emma Goldman did not write novels or make movies. However, her political thought was pervaded by the romantic structure. Indeed, her concern with romance was explicit, for she treated romantic love as an important political topic—just as one would expect from her adoption of romantic emplotment. More exactly, Goldman imagined politics through a romantic narrative prototype because she imagined happiness, first of all, as romantic union. Romantic union is, again, the happiness prototype that generates romantic tragicomedy, just as the happiness prototype of social domination generates heroic tragicomedy.

Romantic modeling has, at best, an uneasy relation with the heroic emplotment that is fundamental for nationalism. As a result, writers drawing on the romantic prototype often repudiate the heroic structure—and nationalism along with it. We find this to some extent in Whitman. But that repudiation is much more thorough, explicit, and extensive in Goldman. It is perhaps most obvious in her opposition to national war, thus the threat/defense sequence that serves to rationalize national war. But it extends to the usurpation sequence as well. Indeed, she understands tyranny in terms of romantic oppression, not heroic usurpation. Thus, she claims that the results of “our present social structure” are “broken hearts and crushed lives” (440–41)—in short, romantic tragedies. In keeping with this, she does not criticize a particular “usurping” social hierarchy in order to affirm the importance of loyalty and obedience to a “true” (or divinely mandated) hierarchy. Rather, she broadly denies the authority of social hierarchies to inhibit the free choice and personal happiness of ordinary individuals. Perhaps most important, she rejects the very foundation of heroic emplotment, the standard social prototype for happiness. In “Was My Life Worth Living?,” Goldman brings up “What is generally regarded as success—acquisition of wealth, the capture of power or social prestige”—in other words, the happiness goals that structure heroic tragicomedy. She comments that “I consider [these] the most dismal failures” (443).

Goldman did not write extended treatises comparable to, say, Gandhi’s commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā* or Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. Her political views are expressed largely in short essays and speeches. I will concentrate on her broad statement of her principles in “What I Believe.” The essay is divided into seven sections, which briefly treat topics broached elsewhere in her work. I will bring in other essays as they bear on the particular points developed in those sections.

Property

In the first section of her essay, Goldman is concerned primarily with the private ownership of the means of production. This leads to exploitation of workers, who toil to produce “mountains of wealth for others” (50). Of course, this analysis—which she shares with most socialists—does not presuppose a romantic emplotment. Yet, from the outset, there are suggestions that she is tacitly drawing on a model of romantic union to understand social relations generally. Readers of Goldman’s other writings are likely to sense in this section a tacit parallel between forced labor and forced marriage. Economic necessity drives people to pile up wealth for others, placing them in a “humiliating and degrading situation” (50). This is precisely the problem for women in marriage. Marriage, she argues elsewhere, is something into which women are coerced, by either parental (especially paternal) authority or economic need. At this point, the woman becomes, precisely, the *property* of the husband—after she has, in effect, been the property of her parents (again, particularly her father). Put differently, labor today is like marriage today. The latter is out of keeping with the prototype of happiness as (freely chosen) romantic union. As Goldman makes clear in, for example, “Marriage and Love,” the opposite of romantic union is economically motivated sex—either that found in a prudent marriage or that found in prostitution. In both cases, the woman has sold herself. Similarly, a worker “must sell his labor” in order to survive. Moreover, all these forms of selling oneself are “humiliating and degrading” (50).

Goldman contrasts the humiliating and degrading work forced on most people today with the possibility for truly fulfilling work that is, she maintains, offered by Anarchism—the comic conclusion of a social tragicomedy. Goldman implicitly understands this fulfilling work in terms of romantic union. Thus, she explains that the nature of a person’s work should be determined by his or her “latent qualities and innate disposition” (50). The description fits marriage better than labor. Latent qualities are just what romantic union should develop. Disposition is just what leads someone to prefer one mate over another. Put differently, one might have expected work to be determined by one’s manifest skills (not latent qualities) along with individual and social needs (rather than one’s dispositions). I am not saying that Goldman was wrong to put things the way she did. But there are many possible ways of characterizing work that is not humiliating and degrading. Goldman’s precise selection seems to have been guided, in part, by a tacit romantic model.

The romantic model becomes clearer when Goldman turns from production to consumption. She maintains that one's consumption should be based on "one's physical and mental appreciations and . . . soul cravings" (50). Goldman was opposing mindless consumerism long before others saw this as a problem. But, here too, one might have expected a statement referring to genuine needs and, beyond that, objects of real enjoyment. Instead, she chooses an idiom that reveals what her ideal model is—again, romantic union. A consumer does not choose a new commodity on the basis of "physical and mental appreciations." Physical and mental appreciations apply to another person, a person one desires and admires—paradigmatically, in romantic love. Similarly, even in the ideal society, one would rarely buy objects (e.g., a new table, a jacket) on the basis of one's "soul cravings."¹⁴ That is how one chooses a spouse—or, rather, that is how one chooses a spouse in a romantic plot when one is not constrained by economic necessity.

Finally, Goldman makes a general statement about her ideal society, the society promised by Anarchism, a society "based on voluntary co-operation of productive groups" (50). The vision is general, and certainly need not be based on the romantic model. However, in context, it is reminiscent of the productive group formed by the lovers who have resisted social authority in order to enter into a voluntary (rather than a coerced) union. Moreover, in Goldman's view, groups of both sorts are unions of equals and thus a matter of cooperation, not subordination.

Other essays make these points more directly. As I have noted, in "Marriage and Love" Goldman stresses the "practical" way in which people approach marriage. She laments that "The time when Romeo and Juliet risked the wrath of their fathers for love . . . is no more" (208). Rather, a woman makes her marriage decision by asking "Can the man make a living? Can he support a wife?" Directly contrasting romantic love with consumerism, she bemoans the fact that a young woman's "dreams are not of moonlight and kisses" but of "shopping tours." The result is "soul-poverty and sordidness" (208). Subsequently, she links the paternal authority that stifles women in coerced marriages with "that other paternal arrangement—capitalism" (210). In this way, she interprets, and condemns, the evils of capitalism directly in terms of the evils of the blocking characters in romantic tragicomedy.

Most important, in "Marriage and Love" Goldman makes clear just

14. Of course, one might employ a sort of ironic hyperbole, saying that one has soul cravings for slacks, when of course one has only consumerist envy. But there is no reason to believe that Goldman is being ironically hyperbolic here.

what her utopia is, the utopia suggested in her reference to voluntary cooperation. It is not a life of wealth or power. It is, rather, "a beautiful life." Spelling out her prototype for happiness, she explains that "love in freedom is the only condition of a beautiful life" (213). Indeed, her economic program here appears as a mere means to the fostering of love in freedom. In this essay, it is clear that prosperity is not an end in itself. Prosperity is a way of ending the economic coercion of marriage. Thus, Goldman writes that "High on a throne," a person "is yet poor and desolate, if love passes him by. And if it stays, the poorest hovel is radiant with warmth, with life and color." But, she explains, "love is free" and "it can dwell in no other atmosphere" than freedom (211). Part of that freedom is economic.

Government

As I have emphasized, the romantic prototype almost invariably involves the condemnation of hierarchical social authority. In political thought, that condemnation is often generalized from intimate, familial units to the national structure of social authority, which is to say, government. (This generalization is facilitated by the fact that the hierarchy of authority in the family commonly serves as a model for thinking about national government, as we have seen.) Such antigovernment politics are precisely what we find in Goldman. Indeed, Goldman goes so far as to maintain that "whatever is fine and beautiful in the human expresses and asserts itself in spite of government, and not because of it" (51). Again, Goldman does not celebrate, for example, "whatever is proud and courageous in human accomplishment," as one might expect from a heroic plotment. Rather, she phrases her ideal in romantic terms, in terms of beauty and expressiveness. With slight rephrasing, the comment could be applied to stories in which the lovers defy paternal authority, as in the case of Romeo and Juliet who "risked the wrath of their fathers for love" (208): What is fine and beautiful in Romeo and Juliet expresses and asserts itself in spite of parental governance, and not because of it.

But the opposition to government is not solely a generalization of the romantic antagonism toward paternal authority. It is also part of a systematic opposition to the heroic plotment of social relations. Here, too, the heroic narrative is the default assumption for social thought. However, this does not mean Goldman accepts the heroic plotment. Rather, it means that she must address it and oppose it, for its hierarchies and antagonisms are pervasive and incompatible with her romantic ideals. Specifically, her

opposition to government is an opposition to the presuppositions of the usurpation/restoration sequence of the heroic plot; it is an opposition to the idea that there is a right order to society and that some members of society are or should be superior to others. (She turns to the other part of heroic emplotment, the threat/defense sequence, in the following section, which treats militarism.)

These points are reenforced in many of Goldman's essays. In "Anarchism: What It Really Stands For," Goldman explains how Anarchism allows the expression of beauty: "In destroying government . . . Anarchism proposes to rescue . . . the independence of the individual from all restraint and invasion by authority" (72). The crucial term here, I believe, is "invasion." Invasion suggests, not interference in public acts, but interference in private decisions. It suggests entry into the personal sphere of the individual. In this context, the "restraint" takes on personal resonance as well, and the entire statement appears to reflect an underlying model of happiness as personal—thus, prototypically, romantic—choice.

Goldman makes the point more explicitly in "Was My Life Worth Living?" There she answers the question of why she "maintained such a non-compromising antagonism to government." She briefly mentions economic issues, then goes on to a more heartfelt response. Government "comes into private lives and into most intimate personal relations, enabling the superstitious, puritanical, and distorted ones to impose their ignorant prejudice and moral servitudes upon the sensitive, the imaginative, and the free spirits" (434). She goes on to treat the literal relations between government and romantic union, discussing divorce laws and the enforcement of marriage. Here, Goldman is not only seeing government regulation as similar to interference in romantic love. She is pointing to a direct governmental role in preventing romantic union and substituting coerced marriage. In other words, a key point in her brief against government is its direct role as a blocking figure in real love stories.

In "Marriage and Love," she implicitly sees government as being still more actively destructive in this regard. Specifically, she suggests that government sets out even to uproot love. However, in keeping with the common idealization of love in romantic tragicomedy, she asserts that this is impossible: "All the laws on the statutes, all the courts in the universe, cannot tear it from the soil, once love has taken root" (212). It is interesting that Goldman uses a metaphor that is closely associated with nationalism. Again, having roots in the soil is one way in which a people's relation to a national place is commonly imagined. Goldman takes up this standard nationalist metaphor and makes it thoroughly personal and individual—

and thoroughly antinational. The soil is the lover's heart, not a physical place marked off by the boundaries of a state; the love is a feeling of one individual for another, not the loyalty of a person to an in-group and the "traditions" it imposes, which almost invariably include constraints on romantic union.

In "The Individual, Society and the State," Goldman characterizes "progress" in a way that is fully consistent with these points. She does not understand progress in terms of, say, dominating nature or satisfying physical needs. Rather, she explains progress as the "enlargement of the liberties of the individual with a corresponding decrease of the authority wielded over him by external forces" (110). What is striking about this statement is that Goldman clearly intends it to cover everything from government to such physical necessities as food. Thus, Goldman subsumes not only the social but the physical happiness prototype beneath the personal happiness prototype. In other words, in Goldman's scheme, increasing plenty is simply a way of increasing individual freedom—and that freedom has free choice in marriage as its prototype.

In the same essay, Goldman mentions those nonconformist thinkers who managed to express beauty and who "served as the beacon light" for others (115). These great rebels "dreamed of a world" different from our own. But it was not a world of greater bounty or (heroic) accomplishment. It was a world of the "heart's desire" (115). The phrase applies most readily to one's romantic beloved. Here too, then, Goldman tacitly models the ideal society on the prototype of personal (not social or even physical) happiness, romantic union.

Finally, it is worth noting that Goldman extends her implicit critique of the heroic emplotment by addressing the religious sanction given to social hierarchy. Thus, in "The Individual, Society and the State," she ridicules the claim that "power" is "divine" and arguments claiming "to prove the sanctity of the State" (114). She is unremitting in her condemnation of the ways in which supernatural ideas have been used to bolster social hierarchy. She even goes so far as to claim that "All progress has been essentially an unmasking of 'divinity,'" of what is "alleged" to be "sacred" (114).

Militarism

In the next section, Goldman turns from the internal aspect of the heroic plot (social hierarchy and government) to the external aspect—war. In the heroic narrative, this is invariably represented as a matter of threat and

defense. However, in the real world, claims of danger, and assertions that one is engaging only in self-defense, are routinely used to justify aggression and conquest. Goldman's critique of militarism is straightforward. She demystifies the process of war as one of "cold-blooded, mechanical" killing (52) in which individuals are degraded to the condition of tools in the hands of commanders. Her first aim in saying this is to deheroicize war. She wishes to separate the real thing from the narratives that portray war as an occasion for glorious individual achievement, a time when brave individuals undertake the salvation of their society from a demonic enemy. She directly contrasts the main principle of military society, "unquestioning obedience," with a founding tenet of American society, "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." She contends that the latter is not defended by the former, but disallowed by it. This is true most obviously within the armed forces, for the soldier is asked to surrender his or her individuality to the military authorities and the government. As a result, he or she cannot be said to have liberty, and cannot make the individual choices involved in the pursuit of happiness. But the conflict between militarism and the pursuit of happiness applies outside the armed forces as well. Under the guise of defending itself against an external threat, governments make even a "free country" into "an imperialistic and despotic power" (52).

It is also suggestive that Goldman refers to the buildup of a standing army as a loss, not only of money, but of the "hearts' blood" of the people. Had she merely said "blood," one might have inferred that her objection was to the loss of life. But by including the word "heart," she suggests again a romantic element. One's "heart's blood" is not simply the physical blood in one's veins, the blood that defines one's physical life. Rather, it is the feeling that makes that life worthwhile, the passion—especially, the passion of romantic love. Of course, Goldman is not claiming here that the military buildup has directly caused people to lose romantic love (though she does suggest that this may partially be the case). Rather, her claim is that militarism creates a society that is directly opposed to the ideal society, and that ideal society, again, is modeled on romantic union. Militarism, she contends, "is indicative of the decay of liberty and of the destruction of all that is best and finest in our nation" (54). She understands and evaluates that general decay of liberty against the prototype of liberty in romantic choice. Any decline from that prototype is aptly metaphorized as a loss of hearts' blood.

Goldman goes on to criticize the heroic employment of war by asserting "human brotherhood" (55) over the dehumanization of enemies. She exposes the unheroic perversity of those who wish "to hurl dynamite

bombs upon defenseless enemies from flying machines” (54). She calls on ordinary people to reject both heroic and sacrificial emplotments, by saying to “their masters” that “We have sacrificed ourselves and our loved ones long enough” (54–55).

Here, too, other essays repeat and elaborate on the main ideas. In “The Individual, Society and the State,” Goldman takes a stand on identity categories that anticipates recent research on the formation of in- and out-groups. The “State,” she contends “is nothing but a name.” To treat it as a reality is “to make a fetish of words” (113). In a remarkable response to the divinization of the nation, she goes on to say that “The State has no more existence than gods and devils have” (113). These claims run directly against the heroic emplotment of society. They reject the in-group identity such emplotment fosters and sanctifies. They repudiate the ways in-groups use that emplotment to mobilize aggression against putatively demonic enemies. In contrast with the heroic view, Goldman argues that “the only reality” is “the individual” (113). The nation exists “only” as “a collection of individuals” (111). Of course, Goldman is not unaware that many people believe an individual has certain definitive or essential properties that make him or her part of a group. These are, of course, precisely the properties that are used, not only to command patriotism and self-sacrifice for the nation, but also to block romantic union. The lovers cannot be joined because he is white and she is black, he is Muslim and she is Christian, he is a Montague and she is a Capulet. Unsurprisingly, Goldman rejects all such identity categories, thus all such limitations on love as well as all commands for patriotic devotion. “The living man,” she tells us, “cannot be defined; he is the fountain-head of all life and all values; he is not a part of this or that; he is a whole” (111).

Goldman devotes an entire essay—“Preparedness: The Road to Universal Slaughter”—to what is, effectively, a critique of the threat/defense scenario and its hypocritical invocation in aggression and conquest. The central claim of the essay is that a stress on defense is not a way of preventing war, but a way of provoking it. In Goldman’s words, “Supposedly, America is to prepare for peace; but in reality it will be the cause of war” (353). She goes on to treat, not only munitions, but identity categories as part of “defense.” She explains that “the most dominant factor of military preparedness and the one which inevitably leads to war, is the creation of group interests” (354). Wars are allowed by the definition of in- and out-groups, and by claims about interests of the in-group—as well as the related dehumanization of “enemy” out-groups. In connection with this, during a period when European colonialism was spreading across the globe, she

reversed the standard opposition between the civilized Europeans and the primitives they were taking in hand. She sought to undermine this particular in-group/out-group division and its dehumanization of the out-group. With obvious irony, she speaks of “savage tribes, who know nothing of Christian religion or of brotherly love” as being the only humans who are not in “the deathly grip of the war anesthesia.” Using “race” to refer to humans, not to subgroups, she explains that “the rest of the race is under” a “terrible narcosis” (347).

Finally, Goldman suggests a more direct opposition between romantic love and war. In connection with this, she follows the general optimism of romantic emplotment and asserts the ultimate triumph of romantic love. For example, in “Marriage and Love,” she writes that “Man has conquered whole nations, but all his armies could not conquer love” (211). The implication is that there is a literal contradiction between love and war. In other words, there is not only a conflict in social models between the heroic and the romantic; there is a more direct, practical conflict as well.

Free Speech and Religion

The next section of “What I Believe” treats freedom of expression and freedom of association. These have obvious relations to the romantic plot. The links are particularly clear in the case of association, for freedom of association is just what the blocking figures deny to lovers. Despite this, Goldman’s discussion of these topics does not seem to draw very significantly on romantic models. The advocacy of free speech and association are certainly related to her tacit romantic emplotment, as is clear elsewhere in the essay (particularly in the concluding section). In this section, however, her treatment of these issues is more straightforwardly pragmatic.

The brief fifth section treats religion. Here, Goldman returns to her inversion of the civilized/primitive hierarchy. She first explains that “Religion is a superstition that originated in man’s mental inability to solve natural phenomena” (56). Here, Goldman clearly suggests that science is superior to religion. But Goldman’s concern is not purely epistemological. Science is progress because, in giving us genuine understanding of the natural world, it increases our freedom. Again, this view of progress is bound up with Goldman’s tacit use of the romantic prototype. But does this construal mean that the “civilized” world of Europe is superior to the supposedly “primitive” world of, say, Africa. In other words, does this criticism of religion justify a colonialist division between an in-group and an

out-group? Here, again, Goldman challenges a hierarchy that is central to colonialist heroic emplotment. She states that “Organized churchism has stripped religion of its naïveté and primitiveness” (56). In other words, modern religion has set aside the initial, prescientific functions of religion. However, this has not given rise to an increase in freedom, thus progress. Rather, modern “churchists” have “turned religion into a nightmare that oppresses the human soul and holds the mind in bondage” (56–57).

These passages suggest a connection between religion and the sorts of social constraint that are the primary obstacle to happiness in the romantic narrative. Elsewhere, Goldman opposes religion to romantic union more directly. Specifically, she discusses conventional morality, which is invariably underwritten by religion. In combination with economic coercion, conventional morality results in mental illness and the spread of venereal disease. Specifically, “Morality” allows a woman to experience “the raptures of love, the ecstasy of passion, which reaches its culminating expression in the sex embrace” only when married. But economic coercion prevents marriage except when the man has enough money “to establish a home and . . . to provide for a family” (171). The result is “hysteria” and a “joyless” existence for the woman, and venereal infection for the man. The man’s infection comes from contact with a prostitute, who is herself “the victim of Morality, even as the withered old maid is its victim” (172). In short, religion (along with political economy) is the cause of great crimes. These crimes are, paradigmatically, crimes against romantic union. It is interesting to see how Hitler and Goldman take up some of the same social problems—prostitution and venereal infection—yet treat them so differently. Hitler, again, places venereal disease in the context of a sacrificial narrative that makes it part of social punishment for a sexual sin. For Hitler, this punishment can be ended only through sacrifice, particularly sacrifice of the putative sinners. Goldman, in contrast, places prostitution and infection in a romantic context, viewing them as the outcome of authoritarian inhibition on free love. Thus, Hitler responds with an assertion of authoritarianism while Goldman responds with an affirmation of freedom.

Marriage and Love

Goldman ends her overview of Anarchism with a discussion of marriage and love. This is not only the final component of her Anarchist program; it is also the culminating topic. She treats six areas in which Anarchism seeks to transform society. She saves romance for the concluding and

most important position. She opens this section with a passage that retrospectively makes clear the importance of free speech to her romantic emplotment. Marriage and love, she writes, “are probably the most tabooed subjects in this country.” One cannot discuss these topics without “scandalizing” people. But it is crucial to have “an open, frank, and intelligent discussion” of them (57).

She goes on to contrast marriage and love, maintaining that marriage “furnishes the State and Church with a tremendous revenue” and a “means of prying into” people’s lives (57). Here, she indicates quite clearly why a romantic model of politics leads her to a rejection of both state and church. She also once again identifies interference in romantic union as the prototypical social evil. Similarly, in her essay on jealousy, Goldman maintains that “Every love relation should by its very nature remain an absolutely private affair. Neither the State, the Church, morality, or people should meddle with it” (215). Conversely, “legal, religious, and moral interference are the parents of our present unnatural love and sex life” (219; the metaphor of “parents” here is not unrelated to the romantic narrative prototype). Despite these dismal consequences of church and state repression, Goldman goes on to affirm the optimism of romantic tragicomedy. Specifically, she asserts that “from time immemorial,” love “has defied all man-made laws,” thus state-based legal systems, as well as “conventions in Church and morality” (57).

Thus far in this section, Goldman has indicated that her opposition to government and church, as well as her strong support for free speech—hence three of her five components of Anarchism—derive at least in part from a tacit establishment of romantic union as the prototype of happiness. She goes on to explain that marriage is opposed to love by making the woman “chattel” for her husband. Here, we glimpse the romantic model behind her criticism of property as well. In “Jealousy,” she elaborates on the point, claiming that “monogamy . . . came into being as a result of the domestication and ownership of women” and that “the Church and the State” have “justified jealousy as the legitimate weapon of defense for the protection of the property right” (217). This leaves only the opposition to war. She has already discussed how war is a mechanization of murder. In this section, she discusses motherhood and love as forming the only possible source for the safe and secure production of new life. The contrast with war and its production of death is implicit but unmistakable. In short, this culminating section indicates clearly that Goldman’s deepest concerns—about property, government, militarism, free speech, and religion—are inseparable from her modeling of happiness on romantic union

and her employment of social oppression and liberation in terms of romantic tragicomedy.

Finally, Goldman extends her treatment of love beyond the topics treated so far by taking up feminism. She writes that the liberation of women will involve several things. First, it will entail “loving a man for the qualities of his heart and mind,” not for his money. This may seem to make the woman dependent on the man. But it does not. This choice presumes economic autonomy on the part of the woman. However, Goldman does not bother to mention this because, for her, that economic independence is not an end in itself. Plenty and domination are not her goals. For her, again, the exemplary case of happiness is the union of lovers. Economic autonomy is simply a necessary condition for achieving that end. Second, emancipation means that women will “follow that love without let or hindrance from the outside world” (58). I should emphasize that she does not say, “follow that man,” but “follow that love.” This is not a matter of the woman subordinating herself to the man. That happens in cases of economic dependency. Following one’s love, in contrast, is a matter of the woman—and the man—pursuing the one paradigmatic good. Here, the romantic narrative is unmistakable, for that narrative concerns, precisely, following one’s love, and how that free action is blocked by hindrance from the outside world. Finally, the liberated woman will affirm “free motherhood” (58). This is Goldman’s own development of the narrative structure. It is sometimes the case that romantic tragicomedy extends beyond the simple union of the lovers to the birth of a child. Goldman takes up, emphasizes, and elaborates on this part of the story. Here, too, her view contrasts with that of heroic and sacrificial nationalists, who stress the posterity of the nation, not that of lovers. Moreover, she again takes up the common nationalistic image of the citizen as a plant. But, in this case as well, she reverses its significance. Specifically, she maintains that a free, loving couple provides the only atmosphere in which “the human plant”—thus a plant that is not defined by any national or other in-group—“can grow into an exquisite flower” (58). Even the imagery here (the flower) draws on the standard, springtime imagery of romantic union (for a range of examples from different traditions, see my “Literary Universals and Their Cultural Traditions.”)

Needless to say, the ideas in this section are developed in other writings as well, most obviously in the essay “Marriage and Love.” There, too, the relation of her political views to the romantic prototype is unmistakable. For example, with respect to feminism, she takes up the paternalistic—and, roughly, heroic—idea that a woman needs the “protection” of a man. She

responds that a woman does not need any “protection” beyond “love and freedom” (211). Indeed, in that same essay, Goldman celebrates love in terms that should eliminate any lingering doubts about her tacit prototype for happiness and her tacit emplotment of social action. “Love,” she writes, is “the strongest and deepest element in all life, the harbinger of hope, of joy, of ecstasy”; it is “the defier of all laws, of all conventions”; it is “the freest, the most powerful moulder of human destiny” (211).¹⁵

In sum, Whitman provided us with a moving portrait of what America could be if all Americans accepted his gentle, embracing vision of nationalism. Repudiating heroic and sacrificial models, with their pain and death, he substituted an unabashedly sexual, romantic story for the nation. But, ultimately, this vision fails as nationalism. Whitman’s tacit story pushes inexorably beyond nationalism or any in-group/out-group division to a sense of international unity across all people, perhaps even across all sentient beings. In my view, that failure is the greatest value of the poem, and of the ideas it expresses.

Similarly, Goldman provides us with a remarkable instance of romantic emplotment. But, in her case, it is never an emplotment of nationalism. From the outset, it is an emplotment of humanity undivided by national or other boundaries. Her activism and her more abstract reflection were oriented by a prototype of happiness as romantic love, and a correlated prototype of sorrow as romantic separation. Her thinking about social change was organized by a romantic emplotment that included standard *dramatis personae* (such as the interfering father) and even standard imagery. Her opposition to government, private property, religion, war, restrictions on speech and assembly was bound up with her imagination of an ideal world in terms of romantic comedy and her associated rejection of heroic and sacrificial emplotments. The result was, in my view, a deeply humane vision

15. After her discussion of substantive Anarchist goals, Goldman has a concluding section on the means of achieving those goals. This section is largely irrelevant to the concerns of this chapter. However, Goldman does in effect criticize the justification of violence through standard heroic emplotments. Thus, she argues against the usual heroic story in which revolutionaries are cast in the role of illegitimate usurpers. She explains that it is hypocritical to condemn revolutionaries, since “Every institution today rests on violence; our very atmosphere is saturated with it” (59). At the same time, she differentiates her position from the usual revolutionary narrative as well (see 60). That narrative is itself a heroic story in which the currently dominant group (e.g., the bourgeoisie) has usurped the place of the society’s rightful leadership (e.g., the proletariat, itself guided by the vanguard party). In this way, the section continues her criticism of heroic emplotment.

of society. Goldman's work suggests the power—or perhaps I should say beauty—of a romantic, therefore antinationalistic imagination of human social life. But it also suggests why the romantic prototype has existed only at the margins of political discourse. That discourse has, it seems, invariably been dominated by the terror and counterterror of heroic and sacrificial nationalisms. Goldman's optimism is inspiring. Sadly, it does not seem warranted.

