

## **Considering Emma Goldman: Feminist Political Ambivalence and the Imaginative Archive**

Clare Hemmings (2018). Durham and London: Duke University Press. 304pp. \$99.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-6998-1, \$25.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-8223-7003-1

In *Considering Emma Goldman* Clare Hemmings looks at the life and work of a well-known figure in the history of the anarchist movement and attempts to think with Goldman about some important issues in contemporary feminist theory and politics. She does so through immersing herself in archival research. In Hemmings' configuration, the archive is taken as a multileveled plane of excavations including: a) Goldman's personal and political writings, 'the subjective archive'; b) the rich body of literature that has revolved around Goldman's words and deeds, 'the critical archive': and c) 'the theoretical archive', namely discourses, ideas and practices comprising Hemming's take of contemporary feminist and queer theories. In my reading, Goldman becomes Hemming's 'narrative persona', her interlocutor in challenging feminist misplaced certainties, while acknowledging 'ambivalence' at the heart of anarchist, feminist and queer discourses and practices then and now.

I very much enjoyed reading this book: it is well crafted, carefully researched and beautifully written. My best reading moments were in Chapter 4, where Hemmings throws herself into the adventure of imagining Goldman as a letter-writer, thus reconstructing her correspondence with her friend Almeda Sperry. This is in my view a very strong moment where Hemmings shows how using fiction as a research practice might look like. Unique as this contribution is, it is not the only one that Hemmings' scholarship offers. Her work throws fresh light on how to read 'the lives of others', but also on how to love, follow and at the same time disagree with influential historical and political figures in feminist, anarchist and labor histories, in short how to do ambivalence.

It is thus experimenting with the art of ambivalence that I will offer some critical thoughts on Hemming's rigorous and erudite research. Rich, as Hemming's archival imagination is, I had the feeling that it was somehow suppressed by the heuristic tripartite schema of the biographical-critical-theoretical archive. There were definitely more archival assemblages in her work, most notably 'the researcher's archive', which in a way sets the boundaries of the different archives that the author mined in writing the book. Hemmings sporadically refers to this archive, but she does not theorize it as such, even though what she configures as 'the imaginative archive' is an important component of it. Overall, 'the archive' becomes a slippery object in Hemming's epistemological tool box, and the boundaries between 'the archive' and what we generally take as 'discourse' are sometimes blurred. Given that letters are crucial in Hemmings' analysis to the point that they have inspired her to make a fictitious intervention in Goldman's 'subjective archive', I was also ambivalent about her take on epistolary analysis. In a way, I felt I wanted to learn more about the author's position in a rich body of feminist scholarship that revolves around epistolary analytics.

My final ambivalence revolves around the importance of considering materiality, trauma and persecution in making sense of a woman activist's life. I first encountered Goldman when writing a feminist genealogy of the seamstress and I have wonderful memories of working with Goldman's papers at Berkeley. My interest in Goldman was through the role she played in the gendered histories of the American labor movement in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In short I have always been stunned by the fact that Goldman was a

garment worker before she became anything else; that she became an activist while writing, studying, lecturing, sewing, hiding, travelling, wandering. I would have loved to see this part of Goldman's subjectivity as a worker, to have been highlighted and discussed more in Hemming's analysis. Despite the author's erudite reading, I felt that the process of 'becoming Emma Goldman' was somehow stiffened. What I therefore missed from Hemming's analysis is the interweaving of strong material entanglements in the different strands of Goldman's theoretical ideas, but also a deeper consideration of the traumatic effects of her deportation and life-long exile. Reading the book in the wake of extreme authoritarian and tyrannical bordering practices, I felt the need to know more about what it means to speak, write and act from a non-privileged nomadic position.

Despite or maybe because of its ambivalences, this is an excellent book that makes a significant contribution in contemporary feminist theory and will be read and used in a wide range of interdisciplinary contexts and levels. The author dedicates the book to her readers. It is now the reader's turn to thank the author for the gift of a rich and thought-provoking book.

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