Remembering Revolutionary Women:
The Cultural Afterlives of Louise Michel, Emma Goldman and Sylvia Pankhurst

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Revolutionaire Vrouwen Herinnerd:
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# Table of Contents

**Introduction** ............................................................................................................................................. 1  
Remembering Revolutionary Women .............................................................................................................. 3  
Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst: Case Studies ............................................................................................... 5  
Memory, Contention and Gender: The State of the Field .................................................................................. 6  
Memory Work and Memory Workers: Conceptual Framework ........................................................................ 8  
How are these figures remembered? ................................................................................................................. 10  
...as individuals .............................................................................................................................................. 11  
...as revolutionaries ....................................................................................................................................... 14  
...as women .................................................................................................................................................. 16  
Who are they remembered by? ....................................................................................................................... 17  
Why are they remembered? ............................................................................................................................ 20  
Path-Dependent Memory: Approach ................................................................................................................ 24  
Material .......................................................................................................................................................... 26  
Roadmap ......................................................................................................................................................... 28  

**The Mythologisation of Louise Michel** .................................................................................................... 35  
Methods and Roadmap .................................................................................................................................. 36  
Louise Michel’s Life Story .................................................................................................................................. 38  
Previous Work on Michel’s Afterlives .............................................................................................................. 41  
Louise Michel’s Symbolic Availability ............................................................................................................ 44  
Militant Michel .............................................................................................................................................. 46  
Moral Michel .................................................................................................................................................. 51  
Michel both Militant and Moral ......................................................................................................................... 54  
Michel’s Writing ............................................................................................................................................. 56  
Contentious Attachments, 1905–1971 ............................................................................................................. 59  
Michel’s Funeral and Statue ............................................................................................................................. 61  
Psychologising Michel .................................................................................................................................... 63
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communist and Socialist Biographies</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival Work</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anarchist Biographies</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus Attachments, 1971–2023</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith Thomas’s Michel</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michel as National Figure</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise Michel’s Transnational De-Territorialisation</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National/Transnational Divergences</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michel in the United Kingdom</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Remembering ‘Red Emma’</strong></td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roadmap</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma Goldman’s Life and Beliefs</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reparative Remembrance</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Work on Goldman’s Afterlives</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma Goldman’s Symbolic Availability</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Living My Life</em></td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival Work</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radical Feminist Emma</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reparative Remembrance in Auto/biographies</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustaining Feminist Emma</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fictionalised Goldman</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Emma Goldmans</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Unsettled Afterlives of Sylvia Pankhurst</strong></td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roadmap</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents

- Sylvia Pankhurst’s Life Story ................................................................. 144
- Symbolic Availability ............................................................................. 147
- Pankhurst’s Published Writing .............................................................. 148
- Archival Work ......................................................................................... 149
- Writing Pankhurst’s Life, 1960–2018 ..................................................... 151
- Non-textual Mediations, 1960–2018 ...................................................... 156
- Dramas of the 1960s and 1970s .............................................................. 156
- Singling Out Sylvia in the 21st Century .................................................. 158
- Centennial Changes, 2018–2023 ............................................................. 161
- Contemporary Mnemonic Stakeholders ................................................ 164
- Conclusion .............................................................................................. 169

**Conclusion** .......................................................................................... 177

- Remembering Louise Michel, Emma Goldman and Sylvia Pankhurst ....... 178
- Remembering Revolutionary Women .................................................... 180
- Memory and Activism ............................................................................ 182
- Further Research .................................................................................... 184
- Coda ....................................................................................................... 185

**Acknowledgements** ............................................................................. 187

**Summaries** ......................................................................................... 189

- English .................................................................................................. 189
- Dutch .................................................................................................... 191

**References** .......................................................................................... 195

- Primary Sources .................................................................................... 195
  - Louise Michel .................................................................................... 195
  - Emma Goldman ................................................................................ 199
  - Sylvia Pankhurst .............................................................................. 201
Introduction

In 2007 British dance-pop sensation Sophie Ellis-Bextor released her fourth studio album *Trip the Light Fantastic* with the Universal-owned label Fascination. Halfway into the album is the song “If I Can’t Dance”, a heady disco number of thumping synths and a tight rhythm that pulses under Ellis-Bextor’s sultry vocals. The song opens with a distanced rendering of Ellis-Bextor’s voice singing repeatedly, “If I can’t dance, if I can’t dance, oh baby, if I can’t dance, if I can’t dance…” As the volume grows and the beat sets in, she matches antecedent to consequent in a voice of unwavering conviction: “If I can’t dance then I don’t want…aaaaany part in your REVOLUTION”.

Such reference to “revolution” is unexpected coming from Ellis-Bextor, who in many respects typifies the sort of “girl power feminism” (Snyder 2008) that has come to be associated with the 00s and 90s: more interested in succeeding within existing structures than in tearing them down. And although some of the lyrics appear to gesture vaguely towards revolutionary symbols and ideas – “Can you see the action in my head, the town we’re painting turning red. We need a new wave I can ride, if we are ever going to turn this tide. Politicise my own endeavours, I’ve no use for your protocol” (Ellis-Bextor 2007) – for the most part Ellis-Bextor concentrates on extolling the pleasures of the dancefloor. “If I Can’t Dance” is a catchy confection with no apparent radical agenda. Nevertheless, heavy on dancing and light on revolution as it is, this song has roots in the revolutionary culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, recalling and reusing a quote attributed to the infamous anarchist Emma Goldman, whose invocation of the perils of a joyless revolution have made their way through the decades into Ellis-Bextor’s glitterball-world.¹

The tangled trajectories that lead to Ellis-Bextor’s moment of vague recollection depend on the repeated mediation and remediation of Goldman’s words for political and commercial ends. Goldman’s acclaimed 1931 autobiography *Living My Life* details a moment in which, at a party of radicals in New York City, a fellow revolutionary cautions her that it did not “behoove an agitator to dance” to which she indignantly retorts: “I did not believe that a Cause which stood for a beautiful ideal, for anarchism, for release and freedom from conventions and prejudice, should demand the denial of life and joy” (1970, 56). This matching of *joie de vivre* with political commitment – with the liberatory denial of restraints imposed both by wider society and by the radical movement she was a part of – was vital to Goldman’s eventual adoption by the Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1960s and 70s. Popularised as a feminist

¹
foremother, her life and ideas became the subject of biographical works and fictional reimagining across theatre, novels, film and more. In 1973, so the story goes, “If I can’t dance, I don’t want to be in your revolution” was coined by an anarchist printer, who sold T-shirts emblazoned with the quotation underneath an image of Goldman at a festival in Central Park celebrating the end of the Vietnam War (Shulman 1991). And from there to Ellis-Bextor’s song? The path is murky.

“If I can’t dance…” has appeared on placards and graffiti the world over. I have found Goldman’s misquotation on postcards, on a tea towel, on pictures of tattoos circulating on the internet and, unexpectedly, in an exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris December 2021, in which the Colombian artist Daniel Otero Torres’s installation (*Si no bailas conmigo, no hago parte de tu revolución*) brought together plants, ceramics and cardboard cut-outs of dancing women to “bear witness to the forgotten and overshadowed women fighters in liberation struggles and movements from the 20th century to now” (Otero Torres 2021). Goldman’s words, or at least some spirit of her words, shift through locales, languages and modes, used variably as a call to the dancefloor, a rebuke to political seriousness, an intervention on behalf of the women history has overlooked or, perhaps more simply, a way to sell some T-shirts. In her adoption by political actors in the mid-twentieth century and her subsequent transmission as a reified figure of historical importance, Emma Goldman is detached from the historical milieu she was once a part of. The social framing and associative connection between her words and her person slips in and out of focus: Otero Torres’s installation cites her as progenitor of the quotation, Ellis-Bextor’s song does not.

These various invocations show some of the ways in which women revolutionaries from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century linger in our cultural imaginaries to this day. The journey of this quotation and misquotation demonstrates Goldman’s presence within and across social movements: her selection as an individual figure for counterhegemonic history-making; her burgeoning presence in mainstream feminisms; and her changing relations to powerful cultural institutions like pop-producing record labels and art galleries. The many iterations of “If I can’t dance…” show that the pasts we receive are never fixed but collectively, partially, changingly, *remembered*. Evocations of historical revolutionaries are fractured and complex, subject to constant revisions and reinterpretations over time.

The meanings and associations attached to a public character are progressively altered by the work of people like Sophie Ellis-Bextor or Daniel Otero Torres. Both their uses of the
quotation hint at Goldman’s status as a political actor, her relationship with a putative revolution. But in the former any resonance with Goldman’s anarchist politics is fleeting at best. In the latter, although Goldman is cited more intentionally and emphatically, she is a figure of resistance rather than revolution: a cypher for those women fighters who have been “forgotten and overshadowed”. Both instances contribute to Emma Goldman’s posthumous representation, but the nature of their contribution to her longstanding remembrance remains unexplored.

**Remembering Revolutionary Women**

The field of memory studies emerged from research into the cultural formation of the nation state at the end of the nineteenth century. In the course of the twentieth century, it developed a central focus on legacies of war, genocide and mass human rights violations (Reading and Katriel 2015, 2). Corresponding with this emphasis on historical injustice, the connection between remembering and mourning has been a prevailing interest and, with it, a dominant concern with trauma – its representation, how it is processed, and the ways in which it is transferred to subsequent generations. This has brought a related concentration on the figures of the perpetrator, victim and witness in both public and academic discourses around cultural memory. However, over the past ten years, studies have begun to question the potential costs and omissions inherent in the field’s erstwhile framing of memory in violent and traumatic terms and there has been a repeated call for the study of memories that are positive, hopeful and future facing (Reading and Katriel 2015; Rigney 2016; Eyerman 2016; Zamponi 2018; Merrill, Keightley, and Daphi 2020; Berger et al. 2021; Gutman et al. 2023).

Thus ‘Remembering Revolutionary Women’ contributes to a growing body of scholarship that considers the interactive relationship between cultural memory and civil resistance, exploring the importance of memory to activism and *vice versa.* So far, studies at this juncture have concentrated on the role of memory in social movements. There is little work to date that considers the cultural memory of individual activists, whose lives so often surpass the timescale of a social movement and therefore provoke a different set of questions (are they remembered for the complexity of their lives, or their involvement in specific events or causes? how does their remembrance relate to that of the collectives they were once a part of? are they represented as icons? as heroes? as role models? as fallible? as empathic?).

Activists, whose lives have been lived in defiance of the status quo, do not fit the mould of national hero, nor that of victim and perpetrator. Without the impetus for national unity that
gives rise to commemorative efforts by powerful states, or the moral imperative that prompts the remembrance of trauma, the collective motivation for remembering contentious individuals is less immediately apparent. In place of institutionally-backed or monumental commemorations, the cultural memory of activists is kept in circulation by forms of multi-agential memory work that are contingent and frequently more grassroots in nature. To understand the remembrance of individuals who have opposed the powerful structures and conventions of their day, we require an approach to the workings of cultural memory which focuses attention on the active role of remembering subjects and the groups they form.

Furthermore, those scholars who have considered the *longue durée* representation of activists have done so from outside of memory studies and their subjects have been men (see for example Ziff 2006, Riall 2008 or Scalmer 2011). Women activists have on the whole had less access to political power than their male comrades; they have been less celebrated, are less culturally visible and are more likely to be judged negatively, treated in isolation or seen as divisive. Their position as outsiders is therefore doubly compounded: first as oppositional figures and secondly by virtue of their gender. Again and again, they fall foul of what Lucie Drechselová calls the “gendered exclusionary processes that are affecting today’s memory production market” (2022, 131). Given these dynamics, the motives, processes and effects of remembering women activists have been largely overlooked, often subsumed by a characterisation of historical women as powerless and forgotten subjects. This study analyses the cultural representation of Louise Michel (1830–1905), Emma Goldman (1869–1940) and Sylvia Pankhurst (1882–1960) to address the question of how – with what narratives, framings, emphases, media, rhetoric – individual women activists are remembered.

In doing so, I build new bridges between studies of memory and those of reputation and auto/biography, to show both the path-dependency of Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s remembrance (which demonstrates how the choices available to mnemonic actors in each period are bound by the previous uses to which a figure has been put) and the continued reliance of that remembrance on the memory work of dedicated groups and individuals. My comparative approach takes stock of common and repeated patterns in the remembrance of these women across locations, periods and levels of popularity. I argue that their cultural remembrance depends on their salience to a given social movement and that, in generating that salience, the availability of symbolic resources from their lifetime, in combination with the work of those I term mnemonic stakeholders, plays an essential role.
From this point onwards, this introduction lays out the tools with which I have explored these afterlives: first introducing the choice of case studies; next describing my contribution to existing scholarship and then presenting my apparatus, both conceptual and material. It ends by providing a roadmap of the chapters that follow.

**Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst: Case Studies**

Over the course of nearly a hundred years, Louise Michel, Emma Goldman and Sylvia Pankhurst, consistently and publicly agitated for political transformation, acting in stark opposition to the official and unofficial restrictions of their day. With recourse to differing communist and anarchist traditions, their politics invariably called for radical breaks with prevailing economic and social structures to emancipate all of humankind. Over an extended period, they were remarkable for their energetic pursuit of many causes and campaigns across borders, from promoting birth control to Ethiopian independence, from opposition to animal cruelty to agitation for women’s suffrage.

Set against “the century of the biggest upheavals in political modernity” (Traverso 2021b, 219), the parallels between Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s stories are many: their mobility, their marginality, their many causes, their long lives, their prolific writing, and their unwavering commitment to the destruction of capitalism. They lived in prominent defiance of the prevailing gender norms of their day, with its expectations of passivity, subservience and domesticity – although all three were also deeply critical of the women’s movements of their day. In the multiplicity of their transnational causes Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst stand apart from other prominent women revolutionaries of the era, whose activities were concentrated on a particular region, nation, or primarily within a single movement; or who, as in the case of Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919), were killed in struggle whilst relatively young. Constantly outliving the social movements they were a part of, these figures’ lives beg the question posed by Margareta Jolly in her work on the relationship between the lifecycle of a social movement and that of an individual: “Do life stories help us to understand patterns of dissent and consent?” (2011, 363).

All three correspond closely to Enzo Traverso’s recent description of a type he labels the “revolutionary intellectual” (2021b, 219–333). Set against a historical background (1848–1945) of growing industrialisation, urbanisation and a burgeoning mass society, Traverso identifies an international revolutionary ‘intelligentsia’ of socialists, communists, anarchists and other fighters for racial, gendered or national liberation, who acted together and separately
to dismantle the status quo.\textsuperscript{5} He insists that this group had distinctive political characteristics, foremost the congruity of their political thought and action and their dedication to living a revolutionary life. Yet Traverso’s list of these revolutionary intellectuals, clearly rooted in a particular historical moment, is heavy on men and light on their women counterparts: twelve (including Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst) of a total 124.\textsuperscript{6}

The small number of women revolutionary intellectuals on Traverso’s list indicates the scarce posthumous representations of their lives. It is reflective of the limited opportunities available to turn-of-the-century women and the patriarchal hierarchies of many of the movements they were a part of. His selection reveals the gendered nature of mnemonic processes, guided by societal dynamics that promote certain narratives at the expense of others. As Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith write: “gender is an inescapable dimension of differential power relations, and cultural memory is always about the distribution of contested claims to power” (2002, 6). In the cases of the representation of Louise Michel, Emma Goldman and Sylvia Pankhurst, this contestation recurs throughout the cumulative memory work of later generations. Much as they were antagonising figures during their lives, their afterlives have also been largely driven by those operating in an antagonistic relation to the dominant institutions of their time and place.

**Memory, Contention and Gender: The State of the Field**
Advancing memory studies’ growing concern with the cultural memory of civil resistance and struggles to change the world, Ann Rigney calls for renewed interest in the memory of hope in civic life: “hope has an anticipatory logic,” she writes, “one that is not based on inevitability, but on mere possibility. It is life-affirming and future-oriented in a minimalist way: it indicates an enduring attachment to something of value in face of its present absence and past denial” (2018, 370). Two aspects of this statement are central to this study. First, Rigney’s invocation of “enduring attachment” as a necessary premise for the remembrance of hope. And secondly, her location of the impetus for that attachment in a sense of “present absence and past denial”. As memory studies moves away from the imperative paradigm of “never forget!”, associated first and foremost with memories of trauma and violence, the question of why remember – why remember hope? – enters the foreground. The pull of the past and the promise it might offer for the future replaces the negation of never again. Enduring attachment in the face of present absence and/or past denial offers a perspective from which to understand the motivation to
remember resistance, a perspective that necessarily emphasises the importance of the connection between those who do the remembering and the subjects they remember.

In the same article, Rigney goes on to propose a “memory-activism nexus” (2018, 372), which calls for examinations of the interplay between “memory activism” (Gutman 2015; Gutman 2017; Wüstenberg 2017; Gutman and Wüstenberg 2021), in which memories of certain things are actively encouraged or discouraged in the interest of affecting future remembrance; the memory of activism, primarily the mediation and remembrance of past civil resistance; and memory in activism, examining how memories of past resistance are mobilised in the present.\(^7\) Far from offering each point as a separate phenomenon, the memory-activism nexus highlights the overlapping and interactive nature of memory activism, the memory of activism and memory in activism, complicating any linear or direct sequence from past to present to future. A number of recent works have begun, implicitly and explicitly, to study the role of gender in the memory-activism nexus, although they do not necessarily use this term (Reading 2016, Crozier-De Rosa and Mackie 2018, Chidgey 2018; Altunay et al. 2019).\(^8\)

These works engage with the intersection between memory, contention and gender in ways which recognise many points within the memory-activism nexus. However, they tend to centre their analysis around either memory in activism or memory activism.\(^9\) In this vein, Red Chidgey’s Feminist Afterlives: Assemblage Memory in Activist Times (2018) builds a comprehensive theory and methodology of assemblage memory – “an exploration of how the images, ideas and feelings of past liberation struggles become freshly available and transmissible in times not of their making” (2018, 1) – and explores a number of feminist memory assemblages to highlight the mobility, contingency and restlessness of “activist memory” (2018, 5). Chidgey’s study’s focus is the present. She explores “hypervisible” (2018, 4) cultural memories that have a clear presence in contemporary feminism, memories which “construct the present moment, and a political position in it, by invoking a point of time out of which the present moment unfolds” (2018, 20 my emphasis). Chidgey’s starting point is the abundance and importance of these memories for today’s feminist movements. In terms of the memory-activism nexus, her emphasis is on memory in activism.

By contrast, this study focuses on the memory of activism, comparing how the remembrance of selected individuals has changed over time. Inevitably this includes discussions of memory in activism (think of the anarchist printer who first put Goldman’s quotation on a T-shirt) and occasionally of memory activism, (there have for instance been active campaigns to have a statue of Sylvia Pankhurst erected). But my starting point reaches
back to Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s lives, and explores their representation in shifting and successive presents. My interest is in the diachronic processes through which these figures come to be remembered as individuals, as revolutionaries and as women. As a result, their mobilising potential – including but not limited to the ways in which they are read for feminist ends – can never be assumed a priori.

I therefore return consistently to the question of why we remember hope, or more specifically, why remember these women as vectors of hope? This study makes the claim that the analysis of the attachments claimed by individual, and groups of, remembering subjects to those they remember plays a vital part in understanding the cultural afterlives of revolutionary women. Through a reading of Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s afterlives that moves between the macro (how has their cultural memory broadly changed over time?) and the micro (how are they remembered in significant texts?) I analyse the rhetorical modes through which those involved in acts of remembrance express a relationship with individuals. This study shows the labour that has gone in to remembering these women, often against the odds, and the ways in which that labour has successfully and less successfully affected their reputations over time.

**Memory Work and Memory Workers: Conceptual Framework**

Looking at the long-term cultural memory of Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst, my work follows a longstanding assumption that memory adheres to and revolves around single prominent characters who, as they accrue symbolism and cultural value over time, become “sites of memory” (Nora 1997). However, a central conjecture of this study is that the remembrance of revolutionaries is rarely, and in its early stages never, driven by top-down institutional commemorative structures. Moreover, in instances in which revolutionaries are commemorated as part of an explicit effort to counter dominant or hegemonic narratives, there often remains a strong patriarchal bias. Revolutionary women have seldom occupied a prominent place in official histories of any kind. Where their presence has been noted – for instance the small number of women on Traverso’s list of “revolutionary intellectuals” – their memorability tends to be assumed, leaving the full extent of their remembrance and the dynamics behind it unexplored.

I argue that the remembrance of revolutionary women, marked by bottom-up or grassroots initiatives, is strongly driven by particular remembering subjects’ sense of their own personal, political, ideological stake in their object of remembrance. This stake provides the
impetus for “memory work” (Kuhn 2002, Jelin et al. 2003), conceived of as a self-conscious process that works inherently against the grain of hegemonic narratives. “Memory work,” writes Annette Kuhn, “undercuts assumptions about the transparency or the authenticity of what is remembered, taking it not as ‘truth’ but as evidence of a particular sort” (2010, 303).

To conceptualise memory work, I draw from Sophie Van den Elzen’s recent research into the use of histories of slavery and abolition in the early women’s movement, in which she shows the centrality of memory work in forming the past into a useful narrative for the present. However, while Van den Elzen conceives of memory work starting in the present, in that it is “not primarily a recuperative effort, but begins at the point of mediation” (2021, 24), this study makes a distinction between the work undertaken by actors during Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s lifetimes and those remembering them posthumously. I use the term “symbolic availability” to show the ways in which specific tropes, images and narratives are generated through material artefacts and archives, as well as traditions of mediation, to create the conditions for later remembrance. Cultural memory is always governed by the principle of scarcity, which entails that the past’s availability is limited by the “selectivity of recall, the convergence of memories, the recursivity in remembrance, the recycling of models of remembrance and memory transfers” (Rigney 2005, 6). A figure’s symbolic availability defines the opportunities and limitations for later memory work, but it is qualitatively different from that work in that there is less self-consciousness about what might be gained or lost for the future as a result of representation. Questions of attachment are less pertinent to the formation of symbolic resources during a figures’ lifetime.

In analysing the memory work that develops (and is developed by) the cultural afterlives of Louise Michel, Emma Goldman and Sylvia Pankhurst, this study brings memory studies into dialogue with theories from auto/biography studies, reputation studies and, more broadly, gender and literary studies. Memory studies already overlaps with several of these fields, with longstanding ties to both literary and gender studies. However, I tread new ground in highlighting the particular innovations offered by cross-fertilization with reputation and auto/biography studies, recognising that the former offers paradigms for studying the long-term legacies of individuals, whereas the latter provides analytical tools with which to understand the intersubjective relations that inspire the remembrance of resistance.
How are these figures remembered?

Following previous studies, I conceive of memory as dynamic, evolving and processual (Zelizer 1995; Olick and Robbins 1998; De Cesari and Rigney 2014). This follows from Astrid Erll’s description of cultural memory as “the construction and circulation of knowledge and versions of a common past in socio-cultural contexts” (2011, 113). Remembrance does not offer an objective view of the past but is made up of subjective, imagined and qualified reconstructions, which reveal as much or more about the present in which they are recalled and the person doing the recalling as they do about the past that they pertain to. (For this reason, I tend to use the more active term “remembrance” rather than broader and more deterministic references to “memory”.) Such reconstructions may objectify past events, but they are necessarily selective and thereby will never be wholly ‘true’ or ‘accurate’.

The cultural memory of these revolutionary women develops through successive mediative acts operating as a feedback loop whereby agents create cultural objects, these objects shape prevailing narratives around a given figure, and these narratives go on to inspire future acts of creation. Memory is formed and sustained through “a multimodal process, which involves complex interactions between medial, social (and ultimately cognitive) phenomena” (Erll and Rigney 2009, 10). Every mediation of the past is consequently also a remediation, only conceivable because of what has preceded it, drawing “on available media technologies, on existent media products, on patterns of representation and medial aesthetics” (Erll and Rigney 2009, 4). The ancestors to an act of mediation can be thought of in terms of “premediation”: “cognitive schemata and patterns of representation that are available in a given media culture [...], and which already preform the events that we later remember through mediation” (Erll and Rigney 2009, 8). Considering the mediation, remediation or premediation of different memories places them in a connective network across time and space.

Iterative remediation is therefore essential to keeping cultural memory actively in circulation. However, progressively unchanging, limited or conservative acts of remediation – in which a figure becomes stuck to particular narratives or tropes – might also suggest a kind of stagnation, whereby a memory becomes “inert” (Olick and Robbins 1998). Central to this project is the notion that memory endures through dissensus. Here I use Rigney’s term “intertextual antagonism” (1990, 47) to describe the process by which each new remediation of a historic event justifies its production by the perceived misjudgements of the last. Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s biographers, to give an example, must justify their place on the
literary marketplace by pointing to the perceived gaps and inaccuracies of their predecessors. The importance of contestation in keeping memories alive and circulating is predicated on the idea that there is something new or different to say, or a new or different way in which to say it. Total consensus therefore becomes synonymous with stagnation and in due time with forgetting. This study therefore focuses on those mediations which innovate or antagonise, troubling existing representations of Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst.

In part, the challenge of exploring cultural memory as a plurimedial constellation lies in connecting different scales of memory, from individual cognition to that of a small collective to an enormous collective. Representations of the past move and are moved across and between “social frameworks” (Halbwachs 1975), such that, through remediation, work on the memory of an individual may inform that of a small group, a social movement, even a nation – and vice versa. But the movement of memory across these frameworks is not without its restrictions. Cultural afterlives are shaped and defined by memory’s navigation of the boundaries between different frameworks.14

Despite the boundaries they crossed during their lives, the nation state remains an important social framework in the development of Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s afterlives. I take up De Cesari and Rigney’s notion of “transnational memory” (2014) to consider the ways in which memory is simultaneously contained by and supersedes socially and culturally designated national frameworks. Transnational memory emphasises the movement of memory through interlocking levels, from the local to the global, “that are often sites of dissensus and differentiation, of productive if unequal encounters” (De Cesari and Rigney 2014, 3). At different points in their afterlives, representations of Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst are contained by, are used to uphold, or transcend national frameworks. This study pays consistent attention to the tension between the remembrance of these figures within national frameworks (in France, the United States and United Kingdom respectively) and their own avowed internationalism.

...as individuals
As the field of memory studies has mostly inclined towards studying the remembrance of events, most notably the Second World War, my focus on the remembrance of individuals comes with a new set of challenges. A person’s life (especially those of my case studies, who all lived for a long time) is likely to be considerably longer than a distinct event, making the process of memorialisation particularly selective. Conversely, an individual can be visually
represented by a single image in a way that is rarely possible for an event, idea or movement. Under various guises Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst are offered as exemplars or role models; they have the propensity to become ‘celebrities’ in a way that would not be possible for an event or movement – a propensity which stands at odds with the notions of collective power inherent to the movements they were once part of.

In my endeavour to understand the cultural remembrance of individuals, I make use of a conception of “afterlives” (Ross 2002; Rigney 2012) to refer to the network of mediations of Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s lives that have been produced since their deaths. In the context of cultural memory studies this term has been used more broadly to describe the legacy of specific cultural objects, events or narratives.15 The afterlife has something in common with the idea of a legacy but, rather than implying that a past event is over, the concept of afterlives envisions such events as actively alive.

I expand on this understanding of afterlife by specifically exploring the afterlives of individual lives. Here I draw on studies of reputation, taking reputation as defined by Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang as “a prevailing collective definition based on what the relevant public ‘know’ about the artist” (1988, 84). In their study, four elements account for the durability of a particular reputation: an actor’s efforts to preserve and protect their reputation in their own lifetime; the availability of active agents who remember them straight after their death; the links the actors and/or those remembering them have to a wider network; and retroactive interest in their records and in the “symbolic representation of [their] emerging cultural or political identities” (Lang and Lang 1988, 86). Lang and Lang also provide a useful perspective for considering the important position of the social networks around an artist in maintaining their reputation. They refer to a “satellite effect” (1988, 95), whereby the reputations of certain figures are strengthened by their association with other better-known figures. A relatively established and stable reputation must be complemented by a certain amount of sustained discovery and rediscovery to provoke contestation and sustain that reputation. But a historical figure’s contemporary relevance is also highly affected by their symbolic associations – such as their connection with a particular place – and their ideological congruence – the extent to which they might be used for the furtherance of a cause. The socio-political context in which an act of remembrance takes place is essential to the way in which it contributes to an individual’s reputation: Sophie Ellis-Bextor’s song is part and parcel of currents that underpin early twenty-first century feminism.
An understanding of reputation (building on, alongside Lang and Lang, Fine 1996; Jansen 2007; Fine 2014; Jasper et al. 2020) informs my analysis of various elements of memorability, from the circumstances during or directly after a revolutionary’s life that make that particular individual memorable, to the salience of that memory to existing commemorative modes. In several important respects Lang and Lang’s focus on artists is analogous to my own on revolutionaries. Both groups are public, if potentially countercultural or peripheral, figures. Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst, like these artists, were all prolific producers of cultural artefacts. Crucially, this includes producing records of their own lives: Michel and Goldman both wrote memoirs that went on to play a central role in their remembrance; Pankhurst too wrote extensively and often autobiographically about the movements she was a part of. Alongside subsequent remembering subjects, these revolutionaries have a stake in their own remembrance. The memorability of a revolutionary’s afterlife is dependent on attempts by the individuals themselves and by those around them to project their activism into the future. Equally the potential for retroactive interest from, or even appropriation by, later ideologically aligned groups stands for both artists and revolutionaries: as artistic trends ebb and flow so too do political movements. Nonetheless there is a central distinction between the case of artists and that of revolutionaries. In the case of the former, future subjects respond to the objects that they have produced as much, if not more than, the associations around their person. As this study will explore, revolutionaries are less directly tied to particular creative works and their afterlives are liable to be more nebulously associated with clusters of ideas, movements or events related to the person themselves.

My exploration of reputation therefore extends studies such as those of Lang and Lang, Jansen and Fine. I argue that Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s cultural afterlives include types of memorability that cannot be straightforwardly attributed or traced to the availability of resources or the memory work of later actors. Their remembrance is also affected by the more imprecise work of the rhetoric and narratives through which they are abstracted, de-contextualised and come to stand for an exalted set of, often superhuman, qualities.

The limitations of reputation studies are most evident in the case of Louise Michel who, over the course of her afterlives, regularly takes on fictive, even miraculous, characteristics such that aspects of her reality and the mechanisms behind her reputation are obscured. In such instances she is mythologised, transformed from a historically specific figure into a symbol of revolutionary strength (with a close association to Joan of Arc). This notion of mythologisation is indebted to Roland Barthes’ famous definition of myth as a “language” (2006, 10) or “type
of speech” (2006, 107), characterised by its form rather than its content. As a myth becomes increasingly formalised, its meaning is impoverished and it becomes the “accomplice of a concept” (Barthes 2006, 117), or of several concepts. In Barthes’s description a myth is defined by the purposes for which it is used, often serving a particular ideological function. Myths therefore fulfil important roles in providing social cohesion, “as tools for national/local/collective self-definition and identity transfer” (Dobre and Ghiță 2017, 2). Myth is not a stable category: objects may move in and out of mythical language. As in other forms of collective remembrance, myths are constructed and reconstructed over time to meet contemporary needs.

Michel’s mythologisation renders her ahistoric: she appears timeless, and the origins of her story are obscured. Simultaneously she develops an exemplary and heroic function. Providing a paradigm through which others might frame their actions, she seems to offer opportunities for identification while simultaneously evincing unattainability and mystery. This dynamic of knowability/unknowability plays a central role in her remembrance, exceeding the more pragmatic framework that reputation studies advances. Nevertheless, reputation studies – and in particular the field’s focus on the active agents who maintain a given reputation – provides key tools for establishing changes in and distinctions between reputational trajectories.

...as revolutionaries
Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s identities as revolutionaries are constructed and reconstructed through successive acts of mediation, starting from their own and that of their contemporary comrades. While epistemologically varied, their political beliefs were not isolated or wholly freethinking but, in line with Traverso’s prototype, embedded in existing liberatory projects of “anarchism, socialism, communism; gender, racial or national emancipation” (2021b, 325). Their revolutionary politics were characterised by a unity of theoretical ideas – their opposition to the mechanisms of capitalism, militarism, nationalism – and actions – which included acts of physical resistance, vandalism and, in the case of Michel and Goldman, their involvement in assassination plots. Thought and praxis were always combined. During their lifetimes these figures moved between positions at the centre of
revolutionary collectives, to periods spent on the outskirts of the movements they were associated with. They were seen variably as leaders, outliers and even pariahs.

Their continued remembrance as revolutionaries develops in close relation to the rise and fall of various forms of contentious politics over the course of the late nineteenth to early twenty-first centuries, and the past ideas, movements or events their practitioners chose to commemorate. Not only are Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst remembered for their roles within various social movements, but they are also primarily remembered by social movement actors. The political identities of such actors are themselves informed by their readings of Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s ideas and acts. As Francesca Polletta writes in her work on the legacy of Martin Luther King: “representations of the past shape and, indeed, constitute interests and identities” (1998, 482). As the currency of “revolutionary” lost traction over the course of the twentieth century (Traverso 2021), these figures have been identified with different monikers of contention, as “militants”, “activists”, “campaigners” or “rebels”. Recognising the changing meanings of these terms over time, I describe Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst as “revolutionaries”, on the grounds that it is semantically closest to the ways in which they described themselves, and also use “activist” to encompass more recent constructions, whereby they are often seen more as reformers than transformers.

In building the revolutionary afterlives of my case studies, those remembering them may be acting individually, or more commonly as part of a network, involving close friends or associates, fellow campaigners or even artists and performers. Given the large number of causes these figures were involved in, the motivations behind later subjects’ recollections are often various and disputed: anarchist groups contest Louise Michel’s recent appropriation as an anti-imperialist, suggesting that this element of her politics cannot be separated from her anarchism; Emma Goldman’s acolytes debate her position on violent versus non-violent resistance; a biographer of Sylvia Pankhurst dismisses growing claims that she was an ‘intersectional’ feminist. And, despite the fact that all three opposed the women’s movements of their day for its reformist and limited constitutional focus, their afterlives have been significantly affected by broader developments in feminist movements over the course of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Feminists were not the only political collectives commemorating them. Throughout their afterlives tensions have emerged in characterisation of these figures across different political agendas, including sustained questions about whether to promote them as feminists occludes or complements understandings of their radicalism. Committed groups of anarchists,
in Michel and Goldman’s case, and socialists or communists in Pankhurst’s case, have tended to resist the remembrance of these figures as feminists *avant tout*. However, in all three cases the historicising impulse of ‘second-wave’ feminists in particular has had a significant impact on the circulation of their memory since the late twentieth century.¹⁶

--- as women

Whether identifying them as feminist foremothers or debating that identification, those engaged in remembering Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst actively *gender* them, reading them as “women” with a particular set of expectations and affordances in relation to that identification. Central to my project therefore is an understanding of gender as a historical concept that changes in meaning over time. Following a longstanding contention within studies of gender, I consider the category “woman” as historically constructed and malleable, exploring how developing notions of gender – from the late nineteenth century to the present day – affect (and in some instances are affected by) Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s changing representation. And, while the relationship to feminism of these three is never taken as a given, this project itself follows in the footsteps of insights and methodologies from feminist memory studies, taking up Altunay and Pető’s conjecture that this subsection of the field has “alerted us to the ways in which the past shapes the present, and all of ‘us’ in the present, in multiple and deeply gendered ways” (2016, 5).

Gender is produced and maintained through its prefiguration and performance. As Judith Butler writes in their conceptualisation of gender performativity: the “anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning is the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object” (Butler 1999, xiv). Butler draws from the Foucauldian notion that regulatory power produces self-regulating subjects to theorise performativity as a discursive, material and embodied practice, which produces that which it identifies or names. Crucially performativity cannot be confined to a singular action but operates through repetition of set citations. This leads to the possibility that eventually a reiterative deconstructive performance may be able to alter a gender category.

Given that it centres around mediated *representations* of women revolutionaries, this study takes into consideration the “readability” (Butler 2011) of the bodies being portrayed, considering them as/as part of texts. These representations reveal, and contribute to, the constraints placed on or attributed to women revolutionaries and the agency ascribed to them
in different contexts. The regulatory schemata which govern this readability are not preordained but historically constructed and changeable. In exploring the remembrance of revolutionary women, my interest is in the ways in which their gender is fixed and unfixed over time in close relation to socio-political developments. I follow Joan W. Scott’s call for investigations which both acknowledge gender as a broad analytic category and take into account the specificity of both historic contexts and individual subjects. Changes in social relationships correspond to changes in definitions of gender but these can also work in the opposite direction: changes in definitions of gender may affect social relationships, although these changes will always be working against existing normative concepts. Gender construction therefore extends into the public and institutional spheres, upheld by a historically specific polity and economy. As this study will show, the interests of the state affect the ways in which revolutionaries are gendered, both directly (as in national celebrations of “exceptional historical women”) and indirectly (for instance through the work of those within cultural institutions).

The imagination offers an antidote to such ossifying systems: “feminist movements are not the inevitable expression of the socially constructed category of women, but the means for achieving that identity”, writes Scott (2011, 19). Mobilisation around gender has historically come from collective fantasies based on what gender should mean, pushing against the limitations surrounding what gender is ‘allowed’ to mean in our society. Gender research, Scott argues, is therefore the study of the relationship between the normative and the imagined. She believes we have to ask “under what conditions, and with what fantasies the identities of men and women – which so many historians take to be self-evident – are articulated and recognized” (Scott 2011, 21). A study of the three figures’ afterlives up to the present day (starting with the earliest accounts of Louise Michel’s activities dating from the 1870s) must therefore respond to material that spans a period of over a hundred years, taking account of the changing fantasies of gender across this period and its relation to conceptions such as recognition, freedom or equality.

Who are they remembered by?
Changing notions around the gendered affordances of revolutionary women, and other aspects of their identification, are brought about by the successive work of remembering subjects. Women revolutionaries are subject to a double bind whereby they are twice negated in the construction of prevailing historical narratives: as outsiders in their commitment to
overthrowing existing power structures and because of their gender. Those working to recall them work against the grain and often express an explicit stake in how the objects of their work are remembered.

These mnemonic stakeholders are a type of remembering subject who self-consciously contribute to and produce what Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering have termed “mnemonic imagination” (2012). They demonstrate the extent to which the dynamics of memory offer scope to think creatively about new and different ways of being in the world: “The mnemonic imagination is the means by which, in our responses to the past, we are able to exceed our own limits in the present” (Pickering and Keightley 2012, 12). Although they may have personal or social connections with the remembered subject, such actors are primarily related by their shared interest in the mediation of a particular historical figure and their involvement in the intertextual antagonism that keeps memory in circulation. In this way they act as memory workers who invest huge amounts of time and energy in producing new narratives or reproducing old ones. Mnemonic stakeholders are both the creators who mediate the past and the disseminators who link up the spaces, creating connections between different media objects. They work individually and in small collectives.

The stake they claim in remembering is motivated by a desire for mnemonic change which may be overtly political. But it may also be more ill-defined, personal, or brought about by a mixture of motivations. Equally, a mediation produced by a less politically-motivated subject may be taken up, circulated, even remediated by memory activists with a specific agenda. As I will show, the impact of mnemonic stakeholders depends on the coincidence of their memory work with a wave of contention that leads to the circulation of their memory work and, in so doing, elicits new mnemonic stakeholders. This conceptualisation recognises the contingency with which memory is produced while attending to what its producers have to say about their motivations, intentions and labour. To reflect this, I identify those active agents who claim a stake in a remembered subject’s afterlives as mnemonic stakeholders, whereas I use “remembering subjects” or “mnemonic actors” to connote those looser and less explicitly invested groups who also form part of the social and medial networks that imagine and sustain a revolutionary’s cultural remembrance.

In focusing on the interaction between remembering and remembered subjects, this study also draws from the field of life narrative studies and, in particular, two essential aspects. Firstly, it recognises that both biography and autobiography are purposefully constructed and
reliant on a restricted narrative that is based on the availability of symbolic resources. Despite their own declarations or intentions, those writing lives necessarily remember particular aspects of a subject’s life, rather than forming an objective presentation of facts. In the act of recording the life of another (taking writing as stand in for myriad mediate acts), those remembering them display, reflect on and articulate their own identities. Secondly, life narrative studies explore the ways in which mediated lives offer spaces out of which new subjectivities can be formed and in due course circulated, enacting a cycle which sees alternative or divergent representations open up the possibility of new versions of their lives. This mirrors the dynamic by which representations of Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst contribute to and are affected by their cultural remembrance. In the relationship between memory and life narrative studies, the former set out to understand the dynamics behind the circulation of a text whereas the latter analyse a text’s potential to provide new models of how to live a life.20

To understand the dynamic of mnemonic stakeholders in relation to life narratives, and therefore to the remembered subject, I make use of Liz Stanley’s notion of “auto/biography” (1992). Contending that modernist biographies are built on a “realist fantasy”, in which the text claims a precise reference to its historical subject and the author presents rather than argues their case, Stanley calls for a postmodernist reorientation towards the biographer as an interpreter, a “socially-located person” (1992, 7–8) who constructs rather than represents. In reference to this composite textual form – in which the biographer is in a sense also narrating their own life in the act of crafting the life of their subject – Stanley coins the mirroring or reflective term auto/biography, which she particularly locates in works of feminist life writing. Stanley’s conception allows for an intricate account of the intersubjective dynamics behind works of feminist life writing and a corresponding focus on the creative acts and, more centrally to my study, the creative actors that construct a given work.

As has been consistently emphasised, life narratives often recount “exemplary” lives wherein their subjects are presented as potential role models to their readers and their writers (Lee 2009). In light of such debates, Stanley conceives of “biography and autobiography as ideological accounts of ‘lives’ which in turn feed back into everyday understandings of how ‘common lives’ and ‘extraordinary lives’ can be recognised” (1992, 3). Stanley’s suggestion is that a distinctively feminist auto/biography does away with a “reductionist spotlight attention to a single unique subject” and instead pays attention “to social location and contextualisation and in particular to subjects’ position within not apart from, their social networks” (1992, 250). It recognises that arguments and knowledge are contingent, and that the author’s voice
emanates from a socially located position. Furthermore, as selective creative agents, auto/biographers rely on the pre-existence of literary tropes and narrative schemata, as well as the availability of records. “[T]he personal story of a remembered past,” life writing scholars Smith and Watson write, “is always in dialogue with emergent cultural formations” (2010, 83). In the afterlives of these figures, auto/biographical acts both produce and are produced by cultural memory.

Starting with their written accounts of their own lives in autobiography or memoir, auto/biographies of various stripes have been central to Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s remembrance. These range from more traditional trade or academic biographies to theatrical or cinematic productions, comics, artistic installations and more. My focus on particular texts recognises them as important producers of intertextual antagonism. It is in longform versions of Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s lives that their prevailing representation is in some way challenged and innovation occurs. Over the course of this study, close readings of life narratives are alternated with wider-focussed analyses of those mediations in which these existing representations are sketched, sustained and repeated. These life narratives tend to inform even the more fleeting cultural forms – such as slogans or photographs – that form part of the plurimedial constellations of these figures’ afterlives and act as “reminders” (Rigney 2021) of their story.

Why are they remembered?
All this is to say that, as Chidgey writes, the “question of labour and agency remains an important form of tension within activist memory studies. […] The non-human artefact or process does not care about the memories it is generating, after all” (2018, 50, my emphasis). ‘Remembering Revolutionary Women’ attends to questions of labour, agency and attachment, focusing on the memory work that makes up revolutionaries’ afterlives. Chidgey goes on to note that:

Attachments operate within affective economies, following Sara Ahmed (2004), whereby affects (pre-cognitive sensations) and emotions (socially scripted feelings such as pride, pleasure, inspiration and so forth) serve to orientate individuals, communities, bodies, spaces and things.

(2018, 43)

Through its analysis of claims, or the absence of claims, of attachment between remembering and remembered subject, I foreground questions of care in the construction of revolutionary
afterlives and extend Chidgey’s notion of attachment as a constitutive dynamic in memories of activism.

Attachments are not intrinsic or predictable but contingent, they result from the congruity and intermingling of elements which may be varyingly aesthetic, emotional or, pertinently to my case studies, political. Attachments take different shapes and come in various, albeit intertwined, forms. “To say that we are attached to a work of art,” Rita Felski writes, “is to say that we have feelings for them. It is also to say that they matter, that they carry weight” (2020, 28). Attachments of the sort dealt with in this study are always mediated, dependent on changing trends and available tropes, and remediated: one subject’s expression of attachment reacting to that of another. The presentation of attachments in longform and shortform mediations has differing intensities. (Someone who, say, commits to write a whole biography of Pankhurst displays a more intense attachment than a protester with a famous Goldman quotation on a banner.) Remembering subjects regularly make claims to attachment as they bring innovation or change to a remembered subject’s story, thereby legitimising this action. This study therefore pays particular attention to those longform mediations through which the course of an individual’s afterlife is altered, or which exemplify a broader change to their remembrance.

To understand the contingency of attachments in the afterlives of Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst I develop Felski’s taxonomy of strands of identification (which she considers one form of attachment alongside attunement and interpretation). These strands are 1. alignment, 2. allegiance, 3. recognition and 4. empathy. Complicating Felski’s readings of attachments, I argue that readers can never have direct access to a remembering subject’s feelings or desires and instead read these strands as different rhetorical modes through which attachments to the remembered subject are claimed.

Felski’s strands suggest various political and/or personal forms of attachment. Alignment indicates a horizontal if differential or even impersonal power relation. In Felski’s terms it depends on the “directive force of narration, description, and point of view” (2020, 94). In my case studies, alignment is often indicated by the expression of similar but not wholly shared values – perhaps through the use of their words in a slogan or song. It implies some distance between past and present. Allegiance is suggestive of a commitment to the shared values or cause between remembering and remembered subject. It “speaks to the question of how ethical or political values – that is, acts of evaluating – draw audiences closer to some figures rather than others” (Felski 2020, 96). Given that my case studies are mostly
remembered as political figures, a rhetoric of allegiance in which they stand for a political ideal plays a particularly dominant role in their cultural afterlives. Often in these cases, the remembered subjects are abstracted, so that they operate on a different symbolic plain from that of the remembering subject. While in the case of recognition, which is predicated on likeness, there is a description of or allusion to interpersonal proximity and an implied level of equality between remembering subject and the remembered subject, which is unlikely to apply to the remembrance of groups or events and seems particularly apposite to the remembrance of Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst as and by individuals. This estimation of likeness is greater still in the case of empathy, an attachment that relates to the sharing of feelings and the evocation of concerned responses, possibly in the form of feeling with or feeling for a particular character. These positions of alignment, allegiance, recognition and empathy may appear in different combinations, with different emphases, but they offer a useful tool in delineating the myriad motivations claimed for remembering revolutionary women.

Adopting the term “reparative remembrance” (Dawson 2014) this study further identifies a rhetoric of repair (which has a close relation to the four strands of attachment Felski identifies) as characteristic of the remembrance of Louise Michel, Emma Goldman and Sylvia Pankhurst. I bring Dawson’s concept into conversation with Patricia Stuelke’s recent (2021) work on repair to conceptualise reparative remembrance as a strategy for showing the importance of historical figures in the present. A rhetoric of repair is founded on claims that remembrance will fix gaps in the historical record and do justice by achieving recognition for figures who have been overlooked or maligned. In the examples of Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst, the phenomenon of reparative remembrance is inextricable from the rise of second wave feminism in the late twentieth century, the ebb and flow of the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM), and the corresponding growth of feminist historiography – entailing a certain amount of narrowing of their legacy to promote feminist causes. Since this period, however, a reparative rhetoric that involves less overtly feminist mediations, such as the reclamation of Michel and Pankhurst as anti-imperialists, have also affected the remembrance of these figures.

The reparative remembrance that dominates these figures’ afterlives is built upon three central tenets. Firstly, mnemonic stakeholders are explicit about the way which in which they themselves have shared experiences with their subject, prompting descriptions of close empathetic attachments and providing a personalised continuum between actions in the past
and their own in the present. Secondly, they set out to show how contemporary movements might actively learn from their subjects’ actions and experiences as mediated by auto/biography: building on the capacity of life writing to foster intersubjective ties between reader and remembered subject, they present these historical women as role models. Thirdly and analogously, stakeholders express the responsibility they feel to use their writing to mend a gap in this historical record, both by exorcising existing negative stereotypes about deviant women and circulating awareness of their ideas and lives.

In line with Stuelke, I see repair as a historically located phenomenon. Following the same trajectory as many of the radical social movements of the 1960s, feminists who had been involved in the WLM later spent less time protesting in the streets and many became involved with political and pedagogical institutions. A number of the socialist, communist and anarchist feminists of the 1970s found work in academia. From the late 1970s onwards, feminist historians studied and produced women’s history as a corrective to centuries of masculinist accounts of the past, establishing it as an alternative to mainstream history and “probing the past to produce accounts of women’s lesser economic and political experience and to chart the rise of movements for change” (Smith 2001, 30). They offered accounts of historical women as restorative alternatives to masculinised heroes and as a challenge to prevailing negative depictions of defiant women as dangerous and insane. This approach to past women sought to affirm affective connections across historical periods, providing a genealogy to feminist struggle that might lend it greater legitimacy. As such, the project of repairing the historical record often proposed a shared affective experience between past and present actors. The rhetoric of repair deployed by feminist writers turned to solidarity as an “affective register” (Berlant 2011, 226), building notions of recognition and empathy into their rhetoric of repair.

In this study I identify reparative remembrance as consistently linked to second-wave feminism in shaping the afterlives of my case studies. Despite their own ambivalences about women’s movements, this movement has had a lasting impact on Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s cultural memory. The lifespans of my chosen case studies (from Michel’s birth in 1830 to Pankhurst’s death in 1960), along with their remembrance up to now, move through different peaks of feminist mobilisation. Intersecting with these, the rise and fall of different forms of revolutionary thinking creates versions of Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst that compete with their feminist remembrance. As a result, reparative remembrance – and particularly the notion that amending the historical record to represent more women might be
a political act – often complicates the memory work of those who remember these figures on the basis of allegiance to an ongoing cause.

Path-Dependent Memory: Approach

My method for researching revolutionary afterlives relies heavily on the method of “path-dependent memory work” (Jansen 2007, 953), which traces variations in how an historic individual’s reputation develops along axes of “its salience in society, its valence, and its imputed ownership” (Jansen 2007, 962), together making up their reputational trajectory. (Although as indicated earlier, my study also tests the limited capacity of this approach to encompass fictionalising forces.) Path-dependency echoes the basic premise of cultural memory studies that memory is continuously being remediated and so that each new version of the past depends on an earlier version in some way.

The salience of a memory is dependent on its successful connection to a given social milieu. This understanding of salience is akin to Armstrong and Crage’s use of “resonance” (2006, 724), with which they describe the ways in which a “commemorative vehicle” (2006, 725) appeals to a given audience. Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s salience to different social movements at different times is a driving force throughout their afterlives. I elaborate on Jansen’s concept to show how that salience is also the result of work by mnemonic stakeholders, who draw from available resources from a figures’ lifetime to make a case for their contemporary relevance.

Valence, which refers to the positivity, negativity or ambivalence attached to a given figure, plays a less constitutive role in their remembrance. While all three were negatively depicted during their lifetime they have rarely been remembered since in anything other than positive terms. The positive terms with which these figures have been recalled is a direct result of the fact that those who choose to remember them are mostly supportive of their actions – albeit in different ways.

Changes of and challenges to ownership are intrinsic to the productive dissensus that fuels these figures’ remembrance. Issues of ownership play out in the proprietorial attachments that remembering subjects express to those they remember and often come down to debates around claims of legitimacy based on political continuity. As Jansen notes, “at issue is which group can legitimately be said to descend from or represent the essence of a given figure” (2007, 963). Ownership is of particular concern when it comes to the legacy of politically
involved individuals since it relates to political position-taking in the present. Combinations of values, formed along the three variables of salience, valence and ownership provide stakeholders – Jansen uses Fine’s concept of “reputational entrepreneurs” – with “different sets of inherited symbolic conditions” (2007, 964). These variables provide the basis for intertextual antagonism as mnemonic actors interpret and reinterpret the conditions they inherit, often changing the nature of a variable so that, for instance, a figure’s valence becomes positive rather than negative.

To explain these changes, I borrow the terms territorialisation, de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation from the Deleuzean framework offered in Chidgey’s model of assemblage memory. “Through a memory lens,” Chidgey writes, “territorialisation refers to how representations of the past become stuck and secured to particular scenes of belonging and bodies” (2018, 43). Territorialised memories are characterised by their stability or cohesion and, in this study, that cohesion comes from a salient association between the life being remembered and aims and values of the group doing the remembering. Where this happens Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst come to be associated with a relatively stable, unified and predictable selection of social framings and characterisations – often standing as a metonym for a particular social movement. In territorialised form, representations are familiar and easily identified, lending themselves to reproduction, including through shortform mediations, and these memories are readily circulated. However, in line with Deleuze and Guattari’s original conception, memories are also de- and re-territorialised as cultural practices and those of mediatisation shift. De-territorialisation, as in Chidgey’s model, “refers to the opening up of memory, to consider new connections, critiques and intersections” (2018, 111). Cultural memories of Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst are de-territorialised when these figures’ salience, valence or ownership change in meaningful ways, fracturing and challenging the presiding associations with which they have been recalled. Re-territorialisation signals a return to a less fractured, more consistent state and often happens in tandem with de-territorialisation. (Deleuze and Guattari make a distinction between relative de-territorialisation, which occurs alongside re-territorialisation, and absolute de-territorialisation in which, in these terms, a memory would effectively no longer circulate (2004).) Following this logic, I examine the ways in which, through memory work and in correlation with shifting social conditions, Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s salience, valence or ownership change and their memories are (de-/re-) territorialised.
Structurally, I follow Jansen’s model of path-dependent memory, examining the salience, valence and ownership of each historic figure across three historical moments (Jansen 2007, 965). 1) How the figures were represented during their lifetimes, looking at the revolutionaries’ accounts of their own lives, alongside their representation by their contemporary supporters and detractors, often in the press. 2) Their remembrance at critical junctures in their reputational trajectories after their lives but before memory work going on today. With its emphasis on turning points in their remembrance, this ‘moment’ corresponds with slightly different periods for each figure. However, given the importance of second-wave feminism for all three, the 1970s emerges as a key period across the board. 3) Recent use of these figures. Presenting a contemporary assessment of these figures’ remembrance, the final section of each chapter is the most disparate and least similar across the three chapters.

As described in the discussion of reputation above, the choices available to mnemonic actors in each period are bound by the previous uses to which a figure’s commemoration has been put, rather than being entirely determined by the demands of the present. This approach counters any suggestion that cultural memory straightforwardly evidences the needs of the present. Instead, it demonstrates the ways in which remembrance always draws from the concerns and availability of material in continuous pasts.

**Material**

Louise Michel, Emma Goldman and Sylvia Pankhurst all left behind sizeable archives of writing, photographs and ephemera, to which more and more has been added over the years. The three have appeared across the world in the form of biographies, novels, films, theatrical performances, portraits, cartoons, songs, installations and digital databases. Alongside commemoration through parades and marches, or their appearance on protest banners and T-shirts, they have had schools, streets, medical centres and awards named after them. The material that makes up their cultural afterlives is vast and various in terms of its medium, origin and the social framework to which it fits.

Each case study supplements a wide-frame view of Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s changing remembrance over time and across different media with close readings of the ways in which they are crafted as subjects in mediations that have a fundamental de-/re-territorialising function. I focus in particular on longform and narrative media, that stand as “portable monuments” (Rigney 2004) to their lives. The choice of these mediations is governed
by their significance within wider relational networks and their roles in, for instance, developing models or subject positions that are central to Michel, Goldman or Pankhurst’s continuing representation. Rather than analysing these texts in isolation, I see them as relational, “nodal points in a plurimedial network, their meaning in part dependent on other media of remembrance with which they resonate” (Rigney 2022, 10). These auto/biographies are analysed in relation to more shortform or fleeting mediations of Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s lives and ideas. In some instances, I look more in depth at prominent shortform mediations, but always with a focus on their connections to the versions of these figures that have been developed in longer forms.

The balance between close readings of longer narratives and a more zoomed out approach to more cursory sources differs across my case studies, depending on the existence of previous studies. Existing research has begun the process of narrating and analysing aspects of Michel and Goldman’s remembrance – notably Sidonie Verhaeghe’s Vive Louise Michel! Célébrité et postérité d’une figure anarchiste (2021a), Claude Rétab’s Art vaincra! Louise Michel, l’artiste en révolution et le dégoût du politique (2019), Clare Hemmings’s Considering Emma Goldman: Feminist Political Ambivalence and the Imaginative Archive (2018) and Oz Frankel’s article “Whatever Happened to ‘Red Emma’? Emma Goldman, from Alien Rebel to American Icon” (1996). The place of these works in this study is two-fold. On the one hand, they inform my understanding of Michel and Goldman’s remembrance, contributing particularly to sections of the chapters that seek a wide-frame view of their memory. On the other, they themselves are objects of analysis, demonstrative of changing patterns in these figure’s remembrance.

In the case of Sylvia Pankhurst, there is no academic work to date that offers an equivalent exploration of her cultural memory and my overview of available mediations is more comprehensive. These materials include works of auto/biography alongside archival materials, performances, websites and interviews that I undertook with prominent mnemonic stakeholders (an undertaking which effectively adds me to their numbers). These materials were gathered through internet searches, trips to the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, to the People’s History Museum in Manchester, the British Library and the archives of the British Film Institute in London. In the cases of Michel and Goldman such comprehensiveness was neither feasible nor, given previous works on their afterlives, necessary. Alongside the locations mentioned above I went in search of traces of their lives in anarchist bookshops in European cities. For the chapter on Michel I visited Paris, looking at
material on her in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, la Médiathèque Marguerite Duras, la Musée de l’histoire vivante in Montreuil, and visiting streets, squares and buildings named after her.

The corpora I have assembled are inevitably affected by own skills and limitations as an English and French speaker, living in Western Europe and trained in literary analysis, rather than more distant or data-driven methods. My argument builds from a preoccupation with the qualitative details of cultural representation, of patterns in narrative and rhetoric that reverberate between texts. It is by attending to these patterns in well-circulated and well-received mediations that we can come to better understand the justifications and motivations behind the remembrance of revolutionary women, and so characteristics of their afterlives.

Roadmap
The three chapters that follow this introduction move chronologically from the past to the present, both in the order in which the case studies are considered and in the structuring of each chapter. ‘The Mythologisation of Louise Michel’, the first case study, examines Louise Michel’s cultural remembrance since her death in 1905 up until the present day – with a particular focus on a shift in the mode of that remembrance in the 1970s. It starts by examining contemporary texts and images to explain the nature of Michel’s reputation at the time of her death in 1905 and the symbolic associations – particularly those in which she is termed la vierge rouge, the Red Virgin, and those in which she is compared to Joan of Arc – that go on to characterise her afterlives. I then consider her cultural remembrance in three parts. The first considers the early years of her remembrance in France, from 1905 to 1971, the second takes account of the period 1971 to 2023 and the third looks at Michel’s contemporary remembrance outside of France.

My analysis moves between considering Michel’s broad plurimedial representation and close readings of her portrayal in her own writing and in Edith Thomas’s 1971 Louise Michel: La Vellèda de l’anarchie, the most influential biography of her to date. I describe how she was co-opted and mythologised by the French Communist Party in the early to mid-twentieth century, to the disappointment of her anarchist supporters, and how in the later twentieth and early twenty-first century she has often been appropriated by the Republican state, again despite anarchists’ misgivings. I take Michel’s remembrance in the United Kingdom as a case
study for her transnational afterlives and demonstrate that there remain contexts in which her cultural memory is de-territorialised.

This chapter shows how, although her reputation has waxed and waned, especially in France, Louise Michel’s cultural presence has remained significant. I argue that Michel’s remembrance has been sustained by a consistent antagonism between mythologising and de-mythologising accounts of her person and of her life. As a myth, Michel is represented as the spirit of revolutionary power, superhuman and enigmatic. Her de-mythologisation, which can also be described as an attempt at de-territorialisation, comes about through reparative attempts to humanise her, casting her as a personable figure who is capable of inspiring forms of attachment that are less hierarchical and more intimate. Centrally, this dynamic is fuelled by a high level of equivocation around her gender; Michel’s status as a woman informs the ways in which remembering subjects attempt to deconstruct her myth, as well as enabling her construction as a mythical symbol of the revolution.

The next chapter, ‘Remembering ‘Red Emma’ carries out a similar analysis of the cultural afterlives of Emma Goldman, again with a stress on the late 1960s/early 1970s as a pivotal moment. Of my three case studies, this one provides the strongest instance of reparative remembrance. This chapter makes the case that Goldman’s afterlives have been dominated by a consistent set of concerns and characterisations from which have rarely been de-territorialised. These characterisations were established through her apparent ‘resurrection’ by feminists in the 1960s and 70s, who were interested in a reparative search for appropriate historical role models. The chapter presents the resources these feminists drew from: Goldman’s autobiography and archive. It provides an overview of her remembrance which explains the origins and after-effects of her feminist reclamation across different sorts of mediations, supplemented by an analysis of the narrative and rhetorical strategies of three central auto/biographies (one from 1971 and two from 1984) and their paratexts. The final section considers the exclusions and omissions from this characterisation.

This chapter affirms the importance to her cultural afterlives of Goldman’s adoption by second-wave feminists. It suggests that her continuing availability of her memory as a mobilising force for later movements is largely thanks to the work of a small number of mnemonic stakeholders, who emphasised their attachment to her on the basis of her gender and her radicalism, and the conjunction of this memory work with broader historicising impulses in second-wave feminism. While Michel is remembered as a myth, Goldman is increasingly represented as a character, associated with a set of established ideas and qualities. However, I
complicate suggestions that Goldman’s reclamation effectively came out of nowhere by showing how Goldman’s self-fashioning played a central role in shaping her remembrance. As an agent in her own remembrance, the repair of Goldman’s reputation is a particularly interactive process. It is founded on the presence of her own representational work, which infuses the memory work of later subjects.

The final chapter ‘The Unsettled Afterlives of Sylvia Pankhurst’ takes the same set of concepts and methods and applies them to a less well-remembered figure. I look at the ways in which the cultural afterlives of Sylvia Pankhurst resist stable territorialisation. With a smaller scale, the plurimedial network that makes up Pankhurst’s remembrance is more or less definable and this chapter takes a more granular approach than the previous two. I assess the basis for Pankhurst’s remembrance through an overview of her published works and archives, and address her remembrance from her death until the late 2010s in two parts: the first focusing on textual representations, the second on cinema, television, artistic installations, radio, theatre and other forms of public performance. Based on interviews I undertook with a number of active remembering subjects, which are discussed in the last part, the chapter establishes a renewed interest in Pankhurst in recent years which celebrates her as an ‘intersectional’ feminist.

My enquiry shows that Pankhurst’s remembrance is the outcome of the reparative memory work of a few interlinked and overlapping groups of mnemonic stakeholders. She has been remembered variously as a feminist, a socialist, a pacifist, a communist, an anti-racist and an anti-imperialist, often in line with changing political contexts; other mediations of her life celebrate her in more general, less overtly political, terms. Despite this range, Pankhurst’s commemoration has fundamentally remained the preserve of invested individuals and small collectives who respond to and remediate the story of her life. She has not been fixed into an icon or recognisable ‘character’ and her remembrance has never taken on its own momentum, in the way that that of Goldman or Michel has. Fundamentally I argue that Pankhurst’s remembrance is limited by the fact that it has not become connected to a significant body of activists working in concert for a particular cause and has not been given momentum by a social movement wave.

The argument that builds over the course of these chapters gives new understanding to the hard-won remembrance of oppositional figures, demonstrating the extensive work that goes into remembering representations of hope. Cultural memories of individual revolutionary
women endure because of an encounter between significant representational resources from their lifetimes and the commitment of later subjects to promoting their story. And, as the distinctions between these figures shows, that memory is only likely to grow further if it is salient to a contemporary social movement.

To return again to the example with which this introduction began: it was a drive towards reparative remembrance which occasioned the circulation of Goldman’s autobiography *Living My Life* in the mid- to late-twentieth century. The impetus behind the appearance of Goldman’s warnings of a dance-less radicalism on a T-shirt in 1973 and in Ellis-Bextor’s catchy chorus thirty-four years later came from a sense that history had left Goldman out, that activists in the present must do justice to her story and that she might offer guidance to later feminists. From the political involvement of those who read and responded to Goldman’s writing in discrete texts, through many mediations to reach Ellis-Bextor’s light evocation of a revolutionary tradition, this example gives a sense of how the cultural memory of revolutionaries moves through different social frameworks. Across a sweep of over a hundred years, revolutionary women have been and continue to be reclaimed as historical precedents, appearing in guises ranging from mythologised embodiments of the revolution to all-purpose party-girls. This study tells the story of that process.

1 Although Ellis-Bextor writes her own music and openly discusses her influences in interviews, information that might demonstrate her familiarity with Goldman’s life and ideas, beyond this famous misquotation, is not readily available.
2 This body of work includes the ‘Remembering Activism: The Cultural Memory of Protest in Europe’ (ReAct) project that this study is a part of. ReAct develops from the conviction that our ability to understand contemporary social movements is predicated on a deeper comprehension of their relationship to the past. The project analyses the relationship between civil resistance and cultural memory in Europe since the late nineteenth century and constitutes the first in-depth exposition of memory and activism over this period (*Remembering Activism: The Cultural Memory of Protest in Europe* | *Universiteit Utrecht* n.d.). ReAct asks: how is activism culturally remembered? And correspondingly, how do activists mobilise cultural memory?
3 “Contentious” here draws from social movement studies, in which the notion of a social movement is framed by a generalised conception of “contentious politics” (Tarrow 2011). This encompasses related forms of collective action – such as revolutions, rebellions, riots or strikes – and can be understood to denote occurrences in which “collective actors join forces in confrontations with elites, authorities, and opponents around their claims or the claims of those they claim to represent” (Tarrow 2011, 4).
4 My use and understanding of the term “remembering subjects” is indebted to the work of my colleague Duygu Erbil.
5 This period starts with the uprisings of 1848, known as the ‘Springtime of the Peoples’, and culminates with the end of the Second World War in 1945. Admitting the flexibility of these historical boundaries, Traverso notes that, before 1848, equivalent pariah figures, “emerged from a social structure inherited from the Old Regime” and that after 1945 “they transmigrated to the colonial world” or “found a welcoming haven in academia” (2021b, 222–23). Thus, the tail end of Pankhurst’s political activity – running from 1945 to 1960 and centred predominantly around questions of Ethiopian independence and Pan-Africanism – corresponds with the declining presence of the revolutionary intellectual in Europe.
6 Beyond those considered in this study, the women on Traverso’s list are Louise Bryant (1885–1936), Vera Figner (1852–1942), Ruth Fischer (1895–1961), Alexandra Kollontai (1872–1952), André Léo (1824–1900), Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919), Flora Tristan (1803–1844), Vera Zasulich (1851–1919) and Clara Zetkin (1857–1933).
These figures can broadly be divided into two camps: those remembered as Marxists, mostly from Eastern Europe (Figner, Fischer, Kollontai, Luxemburg, Zasulich and Zetkin); and those from Western Europe and the United States (Bryant, Léo and Tristan), who are remembered primarily as feminists, notwithstanding their respective allegiances to communism, anarchism and socialism.

7 Rigney’s “memory-activism nexus” is echoed in a recent issue of Mobilization in which Priska Daphi and Lorenzo Zamponi offer a roughly equivalent nexus of “memories of movements”, “movements about memory” and “memory in movements” (2019).

8 These works on the role of gender in the memory-activism nexus contribute to a pre-existing body of work at the intersection of gender and memory studies. See Altnay and Petó for a comprehensive overview (2016, 7–8).

9 Crozier de Rosa and Mackie’s Remembering Women’s Activism is an exception to this as it studies the memory of activism through a comprehensive examination of multiple transnational case studies, with a particular focus on statues and other public monuments. However, Remembering Women’s Activism does not actively explore patterns in the memory of women activists and its influence on the present study is more empirical than it is theoretical.

10 While Bernhard Forchtner’s Lessons from the Past? Memory, Narrativity and Subjectivity (2016) offers a taxonomy of a “rhetorics of learning” (2) from past wrongdoings, there has been no equivalent work on positive memories of the past, past ‘rightdoings’ so to speak. This study offers its exploration of ‘rhetorics of attachment’ as a companion to Forchtner’s study.

11 Although Rosa Luxemburg, who has been remembered as a Marxist martyr and considered a historic hero by the USSR, is a figure who in many respects bucks this trend.

12 See endnote #8 for the intersection of memory and gender. See Crownshaw 2010, Erll 2011 or Rigney 2012, for discussions of literature and memory.

13 The study of memory has led to a proliferation of interrelated terms, social memory, collective memory, public memory, etc. – across a range of disciplines. The genealogy of my use of cultural memory can be traced to the work of Jan and Aleida Assmann in the late 1980s, who began to distinguish two forms of Maurice Halbwachs’s mémoire collective: communicative and cultural memory (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995). Jan Assmann argues that the death of eyewitnesses to historic events, such as the Holocaust, brings about a transition from collective memory, in which knowledge of the past is passed down through living memory and everyday personal interactions, to cultural memory which is dependent on mediation to inform remembrance (see Erll 2011, 29 for a detailed description of the two types). Cultural memory surpasses the timeframe of an individual life, and its central feature is its reliance on mediation.

14 Exploring the movement of memory has been a central aspect of what Chidgey has termed the “third” phase of memory studies, with a focus on “how memories move between generations, media and transculturally, across variant cultures and social groups, as a malleable entity and set of materials” (2018, 51). This focus has led to the expansion of a series of distinct but overlapping terms. From Levy and Sznaider’s notion to “cosmopolitan memory” (2002) to Bond and Rapson’s exploration of “transcultural memory” (2014) to Rothberg’s “multidirectional memory” (2009), memory scholars have sought to conceptualise the global circulation of memory, outside of the strictures of the nation state.

15 Rigney takes “afterlife” to refer to the long-term movement of stories, working “beyond the analysis of discrete cultural products to the examination of the migration of stories across cultural spheres, media, and constituencies and its effect on social relations” (2012, 12). In this instance, she is referring particularly to the afterlives of written texts. While, in her work on May ‘68 and its Afterlives (2002), Kristen Ross uses “afterlives” to consider the enduring repercussions of a historic social movement that has been “overtaken by its subsequent representations” (Ross 2002, 1), arguing that the events of the protests themselves can no longer be separated from their cultural memory.

16 In considering the impact of changing concerns and intensities of gender-related contention over the course of the past hundred or so years, I take up the metaphor of feminist waves. I deploy the term ‘wave’ as a heuristic to describe different periods of heightened feminist mobilisation, while acknowledging the complications and imperfections of this device (as outlined in Henry 2012). I take ‘first wave’ to describe the feminism of the period from roughly the late 1800s to 1920, ‘second wave’ to describe the 1960s and 1970s, ‘third’ to describe the 1990s and ‘fourth’ a digitally-based feminism with a strong focus on intersectionality, originating around 2014. I further use the moniker of Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) to denote the organisational base of second-wave feminism and, recognising the contingency and overlapping nature of these ideas within the WLM, occasionally identify more specific groups as variably socialist, anarchist or radical feminists. This schema enables me to identify how my case studies’ construction as feminists develops in correlation with broader historical patterns.

17 Analogous to Keightley and Pickering’s “mnemonic imagination” (2012), Anna Reading refers to the “feminist mnemonic imagination”, specifically looking at “how gender and memory is figured in the human imaginary at significant historical transition points” (2016, 61).
There is overlap here with Gutman and Wüstenberg’s definition of memory activists as “actors (individual or collective), who engage in the strategic commemoration of the past in order to achieve or prevent change in public memory by working outside state channels” (2021, 2), and indeed plenty of those with a stake in Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s cultural remembrance fit this mould. However, many of the subjects who appear in this study are excluded from this categorisation by virtue of their direct or indirect relation to the state as academics or heritage professionals. State-affiliated actors, including academic experts, do not qualify as memory activists in Gutman and Wüstenberg’s terms because: “The work of an historian qua historian is crucial for how a society understands its past, but it is not activism. If a university or a museum adopts a policy or commissions an exhibition that challenges the mnemonic status quo, then this may be a significant development in the politics of memory, but we do not see it as activism” (Gutman and Wüstenberg 2021, 3–4).

My identification of “mnemonic stakeholders” further holds close equivalence with a number of interrelated terms. Fine’s “reputational entrepreneurs” (1996), Vinitzky-Seroussi’s and Teeger’s “memory agents” (2010) or Jordan’s “memorial entrepreneurs” (2006). However, with its emphasis on the idea of a stake in a given memory, this concept seeks to bring further attention to the motivation behind these subjects’ remembrance.

There has been very little work at the intersection of memory and life writing studies. Existing studies – such as Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir (2017) Representations of Forgetting in Life Writing and Fiction – tend to think through the effects of collective memory on the writing of auto/biography, rather than the other way round.

Notions of reparative remembrance have been considered in relation to some of the jurisprudential aspects of the relationship between remembrance and reparation: Dawson’s article on “The Desire for Justice, Psychic Reparation and the Politics of Memory in ‘Post-Conflict’ Northern Ireland” thinks of reparative remembrance in psychological terms as the “reestablishment of trust” (2014, 281). However, Stuelke’s specific characterization of repair has yet to be reflected on in the context of memory studies.

Stuelke further connects this wider socio-political pattern to a turn to repair within queer feminist criticism, following the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) who promotes reparative, as opposed to paranoid, reading. Elsewhere Clare Hemmings (2014) has argued for the importance of understanding the entwined nature of paranoia and repair, seeing them as “orientations towards or away from others (see Ahmed, 2006), rather than simply turns” (2014, 28), exploring the motivations and mechanisms that lie behind them.
The Mythologisation of Louise Michel

“Louise Michel n’est à personne” [Louise Michel belongs to no one], argued the anarchist writer Sébastien Faure in January 1905 (Galera 2016, 67) or, as recorded in another, less snappy, version, “Louise Michel n’appartenait pas seulement à l’anarchie, mais à la Révolution toute entière, sans se soucier des chemins qui y mènent” [Louise Michel did not only belong to anarchy, but to the entire Revolution, regardless of the paths that led to it] (Rétat 2017, 19).23 Shorthand or not, Faure’s message is clear: Louise Michel transcends appropriation. She cannot be claimed. Her memory will never be the property of a single group but stands instead for an idea that is greater than any one movement. Furthermore, Faure casts Michel’s own politics as somehow elemental, eclipsing factionalism to embody an oppositional impulse that supersedes questions of ideology, origins, means, cause and effect.24 In 1905, the year of her death, Michel appears as she often does over a hundred years later. She is suggestively resonant yet curiously devoid of context, a representation of revolutionary fervour but one who stands outside time, with a faint air of otherworldliness. No one owns Louise Michel, Faure suggests – pitching into a debate over Michel’s funeral in which rival factions of anarchists, socialists and freemasons struggled for symbolic control over the proceedings – because how can you own the revolution?

Louise Michel (1830–1905) devoted most of her seventy-four years to political struggle. She was an unyielding revolutionary who called for the complete destruction of the prevailing social order and the creation of a radically new and equal society. During her lifetime, she became a leading figure in the events and aftermath of the Paris Commune of 1871 and was one of the most celebrated and well-known militant speakers in Europe from the 1880s onwards. At the time of her death in 1905, her fame was already substantial and hotly contested: as J. Didier Giraud writes, she “was on her way to becoming an historic figure, a legend, and a universally recognised icon of the revolutionary woman” (2010, 152). Michel’s popularity has waxed and waned, but in France, if not around the world, her life has been widely mediated and her cultural presence has remained significant. “Qui ne connaît le nom de Louise Michel ?” writes historian Claire Auzias, “Biographies et articles de presse de tous bords ne manquent pas pour évoquer ce personnage dont la célébrité ne cessa d’augmenter de son vivant, et se poursuivit tout au long du XXe siècle” [Who doesn’t know the name Louise Michel? There is no shortage of biographies and articles which, from all sides, evoke this character whose fame never ceased to grow during her lifetime and has continued to throughout

35
the twentieth century] (1999, 7). Michel’s name, in this characterisation, takes on the same capacious hyperbolic quality as in the quotation from Faure. She is a phenomenon defined by her interpreters, the incarnation of a set of values. To turn to Jansen’s axes, despite much contestation during her life, she has appeared as a figure recalled with a principally positive valence since shortly after her death. Her salience ebbs and flows in relation to different political movements, first communism and then feminism. Michel’s appeal to different social movements, and the contentions between them have further fuelled her remembrance. Broadly, her salience follows a positive uptake as she becomes an increasingly well-known figure from the late twentieth century onwards. Only Michel’s ownership remains fraught.

Statements like those of Faure or Auzias, in which the attachments of remembering subjects are characterised by a notion of Michel as a myth, have dominated Michel’s afterlives. Cast as a saintly or superhuman figure, Michel tends to “fade from view under the weight of her legend” (Higgins 1982, 213): the suggestion is that some true version of Michel has been lost in her repeated remediation. Carolyn Jeanne Eichner also problematises Michel’s dominance in depictions of the women of the 1871 Paris Commune, on the grounds that the “assumption that a single person could stand for all, minimizes the importance of revolutionary women and reduces them to a type” (2004, 6). Her characterisation in mythic forms has been met with countervailing attempts to de-mythologise her, humanising Michel in reparative terms. Such attempts challenge the myths surrounding her and seek to cast her as a personable figure who is capable of inspiring forms of attachment that are less hierarchical and more interpersonal, such as recognition or empathy. This chapter shows how Michel’s remembrance is sustained by a consistent antagonism between mythologising and de-mythologising accounts. Centrally, it considers the formative role of gendered readings of Michel in this de-/mythologising dynamic: Michel’s status as a woman enables her construction into a mythical symbol of the revolution but it also informs the ways in which remembering subjects seek to deconstruct that myth and claim identification with her. A high level of equivocation around her gender has steadily fuelled her remembrance.

Methods and Roadmap

The approach taken in this chapter distinguishes between those mediations which repeat an established version of Michel and those in which her representation shifts, detaching her from a particular framing or narrative. Mediations in the first category of established versions tend
to recall Michel in short-hand terms through her name or image; their engagement with historical truth is limited and their effect is to promote her symbolic ideological value. They often function as “reminders of a narrative” (Rigney 2021), fleeting references to past events or people that provoke recognition of a territorialised memory. I have surveyed these images, archives, commemorative performances, poetry, theatre, lectures and physical monuments for the ways in which they reinforce a particular vision of Michel. In the second category, I focus on Michel’s own life writing and Edith Thomas’s influential biography, Louise Michel: la Velléda de l’anarchie (1971), as works that either form the basis for or change the direction of Michel’s cultural afterlives. These texts make claims to truth about the events of her life in a storied form and provide the narratives which more ephemeral “reminders” refer to.

This chapter begins with an overview of Michel’s life, which sets out the events that colour her afterlives, and an explanation of previous work on Michel’s remembrance. From there, it develops roughly chronologically. I use Jansen’s model of path-dependency to show how the memory work that makes up Michel’s afterlives depends on historical factors, “limited both by the context in which it is undertaken and by the available past” (Jansen 2007, 960). Building on the contention that Michel’s representation through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been affected by her symbolic significance during her lifetime, the section on ‘Louise Michel’s Symbolic Availability’ is made up of representations of Michel from 1871 to 1905, including those that appear in her own writing. Looking at both positive and negative representations of Michel, I consider two of the defining myths that emerge in those years and have continued to characterise her afterlives: those in which she is termed la vierge rouge, the Red Virgin, and those in which she is compared to Joan of Arc. This analysis is followed by an examination of Michel’s autobiographical writing, with a close reading of her memoirs and account of the Commune, in light of their construction of a unified ‘Louise Michel’ and their role in evoking future claims of attachment.

Michel’s posthumous reputation is considered in three sections. ‘Contentious Attachments, 1905–1971’ discusses the territorialising role of ‘early’ remembering subjects, active from 1905 to 1971, working through initial commemorations of her death, biographies and the formation of her archives, revealing the strength of the mythologisation of Michel in this period. In ‘Consensus Attachments, 1971–2023’ I look at how Michel is de- and reterritorialised in the mid to late twentieth century as a site of greater coherence and presented as a positive role model. This section focuses on Thomas’s biography of Michel as both cause and symptom of a turning point in Michel’s remembrance that took place around the early
1970s. Finally, as an antidote to previous accounts of her remembrance, in ‘Louise Michel’s Transnational De-territorialisation’, I examine Michel’s international reputation and its relation to her position as a national myth. Using the example of Michel’s remembrance in the United Kingdom, this section explores how and why people remember her in a different national context wherein Michel’s memory is more fluid and de-territorialised – although perhaps enroute to being re-territorialised as a figure of transnational solidarity.

Louise Michel’s Life Story

Accounts of Louise Michel’s life have been subject to constant retellings and revisions as different events are played up or down and apocryphal stories develop. In an attempt to provide the key components of memories of Michel that appear in narrative form, this overview draws from many of the texts discussed in more detail later in this chapter (Boyer 1927; Planche 1946; Moser 1947; Michel 1979; Michel and Herszkowicz 1997; Hart 2001; Feeley 2010; Verhaeghe 2012; Gauthier 2013; Bantman 2017; Thomas 2019; Rétat 2019; Verhaeghe 2021a).

Born on 29 May 1830, in a château in Vroncourt, a village in the North-East of France, Michel’s childhood was marked by a tension between the full and wide-ranging education that she received and the narrow range of opportunities available to her. Her mother, Marianne Michel, was a serving-maid for the Demahis family. Her father, according to most accounts, was the Demahis’ son, Laurent. Following the death of her grandparents, who had cared for and educated her, Michel left Vroncourt at the age of 21 to train to become a primary school teacher and began teaching at small schools within the region.

She became interested in radical teaching methods and was drawn to Paris, where she set up her own day school. Here, she was drawn to atheism and natural history; she continued to write extensively, joining the Union of Poets and keeping up a lengthy correspondence with Victor Hugo (1802–1885), to whom she had begun writing as a young woman; and she participated fervently in various political groups. This was during a time of turbulent political activity: a republic had been declared following popular uprisings in 1848 but, three years later, it was overthrown by Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, the nephew of the more famous Napoleon. Michel had not yet come to the anarchist politics that would inform her later life; instead she embraced a loosely defined socialism which focused on the power of the masses to bring about change and emphasised the cruel subjugation of domestic labourers. At this point, she still believed in the French Republic as a force for equality and emancipation. However,
she strongly opposed France’s 1870 declaration of war against Prussia, participating in anti-government demonstrations. During the Prussian siege of Paris, Michel took on a role similar to that she went on to play in the Paris Commune, providing medical support for the wounded and besieged.

In February 1871, the Prussian army defeated the French and a Third Republic was declared, led by Adolphe Thiers (1797–1877). Shortly after this, the people of Paris, aided by the National Guard, took control of the city. They refused to accept the authority of Versailles’s rule and the Third Republic, and declared the Paris Commune. Michel was involved in the Commune right from the start. On 18 March 1871, she was among a group of women who faced down army troops sent from Versailles. The troops refused to fire on the women and instead turned on their own commander, an action which precipitated the beginning of the Commune. During the weeks of the Commune, through March to May of that year, Michel seems to have been everywhere. She built on her already strong relationships with many of the Commune’s dominant figures, including Jules Vallès (1832–1885), Auguste Blanqui (1805–1881) and Théophile Ferré (1846–1871), who is often cited as her lover. She was passionate in her support for the Commune, in particular for the women, and, as Thiers’s troops launched their final assault, Michel was on the barricades defending the city.

Defined by Friedrich Engels as the “supreme example of proletarian dictatorship” (1891), the Commune went on to have a substantial legacy (Bos 2014; Ross 2015; Rigney 2018), considered as the source of many of the subsequent defining symbols of revolution: the barricade; the red flag; and Eugène Pottier’s *L’Internationale* (Traverso 2021b, 202). Michel’s metonymic link to the Paris Commune has varied: sometimes she is the face of the Commune, its sole recognisable actor; elsewhere her actions in 1871 form an indistinct background to wider analyses of her motivations and character. Through these changing associations Michel becomes moored to and unmoored from different values: from morality to rebellion, independence to selflessness, liberty to pedagogical rigour.

At the end of the Commune, Michel escaped the bloody fate of most of her fellow Communards. She was arrested and brought to Arras prison, where she was held for two months awaiting trial. On 16 December 1871, Louise Michel appeared before the 4th Council of War and was tried on a litany of charges. Offering herself as a sacrifice to the Commune’s cause, she reportedly stated “si vous n’êtes pas des lâches, tuez-moi!” [if you are not cowards, kill me!]. The judges refused to do so, fearing that this would help create a martyr; instead, she was condemned to exile in the French colony New Caledonia. On the journey to New
Caledonia, Michel, influenced particularly by Nathalie Lemel (1827–1921), embraced anarchist politics. During her time in New Caledonia, she became interested in the culture of the indigenous Kanaks and, unusually among the exiled French Communards, became involved in Kanak struggles against French imperialism. After more than six years on the island, in July 1880, France granted an amnesty for the exiled Communards and Michel returned to Paris in November of that year.

Michel’s status as a former Communard secured her a ready audience and she spent the 1880s and 90s speaking in tributes to the Commune, as well as giving popular lectures on a wide range of radical and anarchist causes across the country. She published numerous works on Kanak culture and the history of the Commune and continued to write plays, poetry and novels. Following her experiences in New Caledonia, she consistently condemned French imperialism overseas. In March 1883, Michel was arrested and imprisoned for taking part in a rally of unemployed people through Les Invalides in Paris. At this protest she carried a black flag, which has since become an anarchist symbol. She was sentenced to six years’ solitary detention in Clermont-de-l’Oise prison but, after the death of her beloved mother, her sentence was reduced and Michel was pardoned. Around this time, Michel began writing her memoirs, which were published in 1886, enabling the greater circulation of her story and ideas. In 1888, Michel was shot in the head by a would-be assassin while addressing an anarchist meeting in Le Havre. She refused to press charges and, according to some versions of events, continued her tour with a bullet in her head.

In 1890, after repeated harassment by the authorities, Michel found her life in Paris untenable and fled to London, where many of the old Communards and other exiled European radicals had wound up. Michel lived there in exile for five years as part of a lively network of revolutionaries, opening a school for the children of political refugees. Eventually she returned to France and recommenced her speaking tours. She spent the remaining years of her life travelling between London, Paris and other European cities giving lectures and attending conferences, despite her declining physical health. She joined a revolutionary faction of the Freemason’s Lodge that was involved in the commemoration of the Paris Commune and the struggle against capitalism. And in the latter part of 1904, she made a trip to Algeria, presumably building on her relationships with Algerian exiles who had also been sent to New Caledonia and speaking against French imperialism. Following her visit to Algeria, Michel arrived in Marseilles unwell and tired out. She died there in the Hotel Oasis on 9 January 1905.
She was 74 years old. At her own request, Michel was buried beside her mother in the cemetery of Levallois-Perret in the north-west of Paris. She had, for many, already attained a mythological status.

**Previous Work on Michel’s Afterlives**

Louise Michel’s sizeable cultural memory has become increasingly recognised, particularly within a French national context. In the past few years, a number of publications have considered the arc of her remembrance over time, highlighting the memory work that has gone into building and sustaining her as a legendary public figure.

The most popular and widespread of these emphasise Michel’s reputation as a figure of national importance rather than describing or analysing her international afterlives, attesting to the claim that “outside of France her history and legacy are not widely known” (Maclellan 2004, 1, emphasis mine). Works by French scholars and/or written in the French language, including the two most substantial and comprehensive texts on Michel’s remembrance to date – Claude Rétat’s *Art Vaincra! Louise Michel, l’artiste en révolution et le dégoût du politique* (2019) and Sidonie Verhaeghe’s *Vive Louise Michel! Célébrité et postérité d’une figure anarchiste* (2021a) – vastly outnumber publications on her memory written within an international milieu, including those of Maclellan, Gay L. Gullickson and N.S. Goldberg. A recent interest in understanding how Michel came to be an emblem of the Commune and how, more widely, she has maintained a public presence can be seen as a reflection of the “memory boom” (Huyssen 2000) of the early twenty-first century and an expansion of her fame in France since the late twentieth century.

Verhaeghe’s *Vive Louise Michel!* provides an account of Michel’s reputation during her life and after her death. It is a linear narrative with a clearly defined temporal and spatial scope, essentially covering the period 1880–2013 in France. Verhaeghe opens with proof of Michel’s celebrity, describing how her name functions as an antonomasia for a particular type of political woman. Verhaeghe’s work is consistently attuned to the particular historical conditions in which Michel is remembered in French politics. Noting that Michel’s reputation during her lifetime is not enough in and of itself to account for the strength of her posterity, *Vive Louise Michel!* charts her changing appropriation in terms of broader historical patterns in twentieth and early-twenty first century thought. This research undercuts an exclusive focus on Michel as a persona and has an essentially demythologising function: it provides depth and background to mediations of her life, be they republican or anarchist. It builds from the

41
suggestion that the prominence of Michel’s remembrance rests on two mysteries. Firstly, how is she so famous despite being a woman? And, secondly, how is she so accepted by the French state despite being a radical figure?²⁷

These questions are closely related to my own, but Verhaeghe approaches them as a social historian rather than via the study of cultural memory. She successfully provides a story of the changing qualities of Michel’s remembrance without seeking to reach conclusions about any particular affective or aesthetic qualities of Michel as a figure. Vive Louise Michel! provides important background to this study but our central concerns are not the same: her interest is firmly in how Michel’s remembrance grows, develops and changes rather than why. For instance, Verhaeghe does not mention Michel’s writing in any depth. Moreover, the strictly chronological nature of Vive Louise Michel!, which so successfully demonstrates the relationship between its subject and changing political moods, does not allow for diachronic links between versions of Michel from different periods. And, consistent with its interest in the historical development of Michel’s reputation, the study does not include the sort of in-depth analysis of different versions of Michel that links Michel’s self-inscription to her contemporary reputation. As a result, the Louise Michel that emerges from Vive Louise Michel! is curiously voiceless, constantly mediated by other people; the sole words of hers which reach into the present day are those of the apocryphal anarchist slogan “le pouvoir est maudit, c’est pour cela que je suis anarchiste” [power is cursed, that’s why I am an anarchist].

Elsewhere, the question of Michel’s weight as a contemporary figure becomes not just a political question, as it is for Verhaeghe, but also an aesthetic one. Stylistically, these other mnemohistories tend to read more like creative or literary works.²⁸ For example, in Maria Claudia Galera’s Le mythe Louise Michel (2016), Michel’s reputation and her qualities as a famous figure are assumed but their meaning comes under analysis.²⁹ Provoked by the fantastical nature of Michel as a historical figure, Galera asks why the desire to change the world might require a human face. Galera herself appears as an actor in this untangling as she explains her intimate attachments to Michel: “Ayant appartenu à la tribu des utopistes contemplatifs, j’ai été moi-même séduite par des personnages comme Louise Michel avant d’avoir lu ses mémoires” [As a contemplative utopian, I was myself seduced by Louise Michel long before I had read her memoirs] (2016, 17). These abstract alignments take on more material forms as the narrator, Galera, traces the knot of Michel’s memory around France, visiting her childhood home in Haute-Marne, the building on the rue Hudon where her school
was once located and the site in Auberive where Michel was imprisoned after the Commune. Along the journey, Galera recounts many of the mythologised events of Michel’s story: her childhood wildness, her rejection of potential suitors as a young woman, her bravery during the Commune, her trial.

Galera weaves into this the story of her own discovery of Louise Michel during her youth in Brazil, how she first heard Michel’s poetry on the barricades in Sao Paolo in 1984 (2016, 35) and her striking sense of connection to Michel’s myth ever since. Galera creates a Louise Michel who is a figure of lost pasts, passively watching over the present. Here, her work echoes that of the Hôtel oasis: pour Louise Michel (2005), a poetry collection produced at the centenary of Michel’s death which creates a collage of Michel’s own writing along with a series of new poems and short pieces of prose. Despite purporting to search for the woman “derrière l’icône” (Jacquier-Roux 2005, 7), the collection returns repeatedly to Michel’s unknowability and a vague sense of her as an emblem for international freedom. Michel is a political actor, but the details of her politics are less important than her abstracted presence, resting more on her inexplicability and strangeness than on her ideological associations.

A characterisation of Michel as creator is also the subject of Réat’s Art vaincra!. Arguing that Michel’s writing has been undervalued, Réat close reads Michel’s work with a keen awareness of Michel’s position as artist and brings those readings into conversation with the work of contemporary creators (from artists to scientists). She assembles an argument for the importance of Michel’s work, including a small series of drawings and a discussion of her musicality (Michel played both the piano and harp (Réat 2019, 89)). Beyond this, Réat contends that Michel’s belief in the beauty of the revolution is itself proof of her aesthetic sensibility. Rather than following her changing political allegiances, Art Vaincra! works through the changing aesthetics of Michel’s remembrance.

Despite their different forms and focuses, these creative and historic works display a keen sense of Louise Michel’s symbolic fecundity. She is either referred to as a transcendent or fantastical figure, as in Galera, or her associated fantasies are tested and probed to find more about the woman herself, as in Verhaeghe. It is these two oppositional approaches that I refer to as mythologising and de-mythologising in memory work on Michel. As a myth, Michel is both known and unknown. As in Barthes’ conception of myth, mythologised representations of Louise Michel open her up to new ideas while simultaneously limiting the depth in which those ideas are reckoned with. Myth, he writes, “points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us” (2006, 115). Myths are not simply stories or
clusters of stories but reflect particular ideals and aspirations, like “a magical mirror like the Lady of Shalott’s, reflecting a people and the beliefs they produce, recount, and hold” (Warner 2016a, xxxv). Mythologised Michel seems to offer the possibility of an identifiable role model, while simultaneously evincing unattainability. She is therefore resistant to claims of attachment on the basis of recognition or empathy. Correspondingly, attempts to de-mythologise Michel often try to ‘humanise’ her, to show her limitations and foibles and to claim attachments on more intimate bases.

My comparative approach brings attention to the ways Michel is individualised, gendered and nationalised in light of dynamics in the afterlives of other revolutionary women. This work builds on that of Verhaeghe, Rétat, Galera and others to show how, in the productive tension between mythologising and de-mythologising versions of her, Louise Michel becomes a salient figure for a range of different social movements.

**Louise Michel’s Symbolic Availability**

In this section I consider resources, both material and immaterial, from Michel’s lifetime that have contributed to the shaping of her afterlives. I draw from the work of mythographer and critic Marina Warner on the figures of Joan of Arc and the Virgin Mary (both of whom inflect Michel’s representation) and that of historian Gay L. Gullickson on the women of the Paris Commune. As Verhaeghe insists, at the time of her death in 1905 Michel was not “une coquille vide” [an empty shell] (2021a, 10) but a figure laden with symbolic significance. Michel’s popularity and her availability as a capacious symbol was the result of her own political actions and her self-inscription through writing, as well as the ways in which the press, both sympathetic and unsympathetic, used her representation to illustrate their political allegiances.30

For those who were hostile, Michel was often treated as a symbol of wider concerns about the Commune, revolutionary socialism and feminism (Verhaeghe 2021a, 98). Her defenders responded in kind. For most of the period between her return from exile in 1880 and her death in 1905, tensions between supportive, often sanctifying, versions and those that were detractive, often pathologizing, seem to have kept her in the public eye. She became fixed in a series of seemingly incompatible and highly gendered images. Their corresponding nicknames oscillated between images of her as a dangerous militant (*la louve de la Commune*) and those
that cast her as a source of moral surety and strength (*la bonne Louise*), or even those that moved over time from the former to the latter (*la vierge rouge*).

Within this divided representation, the Paris Commune took on a dual function in the construction of her public image. For instance, the trial at the end of the Commune provided proof to the argument of those who deemed Michel unstable and of unsound mind, while, for her supporters, it showed the monumentality of her commitment to the revolution (Verhaeghe 2021a, 27). Michel’s emergence as a single figure from the masses of the Commune took different forms. On the one hand, she was an individual in her own right, separated from her comrades and presenting as an almost supernatural figure: the singular Louise Michel who inspired rapturous crowds. On the other hand, her portrayal during her lifetime is intimately linked to that of the Commune and its participants.

In this associative connection between Michel and the Commune, Michel embodied a wider tendency whereby, while the male form is used to depict individuals, the female form is perceived as “generic and universal, with symbolic overtones” (Warner 1996, 12). Looking at such symbolic overtones in the particular context of the Paris Commune, Gullickson has traced the depiction of female Communards, noting that women’s actions were immediately considered far more noteworthy than those of their male comrades – an observation which might go some way in explaining the consistency with which Michel was presented as the face of the Commune. Gullickson shows how female Communards were turned into targets for the expression of political and moral judgements about the Commune’s wider workings and existence, so that they came to embody the successes or failures of the Commune itself. She goes on to describe the prevailing stereotypes applied to the women of the Commune as: “the innocent victim, the scandalous orator, the amazon warrior, and the ministering angel” (1996, 12), with each caricature reflecting positive and negative nineteenth-century judgements of appropriate ways for a woman to behave. The victim and angel are considered appropriate, natural and acceptable. The orator or warrior are unnatural and unacceptable. The recurrence of these stereotypes in Michel’s representation demonstrates her symbolic malleability and the lively battle that occurred over her image, which worked as proxy for wider tensions between political factions. The fact that they are all applied to her at various points also accounts for some of the reach of Michel’s reputation in the latter years of her life; their otherworldly qualities (Amazonian, angelic) contributed to her mythologisation and construction as a gendered and contentious subject in ambivalent ways.
In demonstrating Michel’s symbolic flexibility at the time of her death, I start with depictions of her as orator or warrior, whom I term ‘Militant Michel’, and move on to her as a victim or angel, ‘Moral Michel’ – concluding that posthumously the two versions have often been combined, ‘Michel both Militant and Moral’. For each of the characterisations, I analyse a few images of Michel that I believe exemplify wider trends in her representation. Following this, I examine Michel’s own writing, arguing that her self-presentation further paved the way for her depiction as a mythical revolutionary.

**Militant Michel**

Many of the oldest available images of Louise Michel come from anti-Commune sources. In these, she tends to be represented as a character akin to the stereotype of the “amazon warrior”, which Gullickson identifies as the epithet most regularly applied to the female defenders of the Commune (1996, 86). In its earliest iteration, the depiction of Michel as Amazon stood as a demonstration of her wildness, danger and her rejection of the boundaries of her gender. The rise of this image of Michel resulted both from her own actions – claims for instance that she carried a knife to the funeral of her murdered comrade Victor Noir might well be rooted in reality (Verhaeghe 2021a, 26) – and from the press’s adoption of her as a symbol of danger.

Visual and textual representations of Michel as violent and dangerous appeared throughout the 1880s and 90s in more and less hostile publications, such as *Le Gaulois* (an antagonistic and conservative journal), *Le Grelot* (a satirical anti-clerical republican publication) or *Le Figaro*. To take one example, *Le Grelot*, which was active between 1871 and 1903, published numerous unsympathetic cartoons of Michel, many by the artist Alfred Le Petit, who produced similar images of Michel for a number of pro-Versailles publications. The cover of an 1881 edition of *Le Grelot* epitomises Michel as a threatening and dangerous figure. In it she is undeniably heathen and violent: clench-fisted with her red flag tightly grasped in the other hand. It is unclear whether the strap across her body holds a weapon. In line with other descriptions of non-male activists from this time, she is ‘unnatural’ in her androgyny; Michel is demonstrably not a man and yet her aggression excludes her from any contemporaneous notion of womanhood so that she stands outside of either ‘natural’ gender.
In the cartoon, Michel’s only companion is a witch’s familiar, the black cat of anarchism, a further allusion to her otherness. The cat leans forwards in an enraged manner that mirrors Michel, suggesting a close allegiance between feral woman and feral animal. The caption emphasises their connection further: “Fort en colère de n’avoir pu encore perdre son chat.” [Very angry, she has still not lost her cat]. Adding to the vision of a sorcerer’s lair, Michel’s drooping Phrygian cap (a symbol of the French Revolution) points to her victim: a bust of the anti-Commune statesman Léon Gambetta hanging from the gallows. In the ‘uncivilised’ guise of a quasi-magical figure who rejects all expectations of nineteenth century femininity, she represents a great threat to the status quo.

Michel’s physical appearance in this cartoon is consistent with an obsessive interest in her looks that returns throughout the work of her contemporary detractors and is apparent across imagistic representations of her from this time. Her violence and her otherness are both shown as sources of danger, often through pathologising descriptions of her unnatural appearance or potential insanity. Her ugliness is emphasised, and her face appears in a variety of distorted shapes, with wispy hair, thin lips, a large nose, sometimes even sharp bestial teeth; she is always in motion and almost always dressed in red. Although Michel became a
recognisable public figure, her image continued to follow a particular series of tropes and types. For instance, dehumanising characterisations of her person regularly represented her as an animal, often a she-wolf, focusing on both her lupine physical appearance and her malign quasi-mystical presence as proof of her monstrous moral degeneracy and disregard for societal norms (see, for example, an extract from *L’Univers* in Verhaeghe 2021a, 100). Elsewhere she is shown as an archaic figure, placed in close relation to the tricoteuses of the French Revolution. Like the characterisations of her bestiality, these representations deny or constrain any possible interpersonal connection between the viewer and Michel, linking Michel to the violence of the past as evidence of her perceived primitivity, sub-humanity and place outside contemporary society.

Michel’s gendering is intrinsic to these representations: her status as a woman offers further grounds for repulsion and her perceived willingness to step across gender lines stands as a demonstration of her madness. Indeed, Michel herself appears to have had little regard for the confines of gender. As a member of both men’s and women’s Vigilante Committees during the Commune, she wrote in her memoirs that someday in the future the women’s and men’s committees should be combined (Michel 1979, 121). The fact that, on several occasions, she dressed in the uniform of the National Guard (the people’s militia who guarded Paris first during the Franco-Prussian war and later during the Commune) caused outrage in her day. This deviance is immortalised in a photograph of her from 1871, where, with her hand on her hip in a soldier’s attire, she meets the camera and viewer’s gaze directly, somewhat warily and with inescapable steadiness.

In adopting this dress and demeanour, Michel asserts herself as a military hero, actively assuming a vital element of what Gullickson calls “the dominant negative representation of the militant woman [at the time]” as an “unattractive, unfeminine, unmarried, menopausal, badly or falsely educated, hysterical feminist who carried a gun and dressed in men’s clothing” (2014, 845). Michel’s gender performance confidently takes on some masculine characteristics, playing with the rigid genre that Gullickson outlines and with conventional notions of heroism.
Indeed, Michel’s crossdressing has since been read as a sign of her unique liberation. The photograph of Michel-as-soldier was reproduced as a postcard, and it remains one of the most readily available images of Michel to this day, prompting Galera to place Michel in a genealogy of various women who have dressed as men to take power or to move unobserved through spheres dominated by men. She interprets Michel’s cross-dressing as an expression of her freedom: “Cette image d’une femme manipulant des armes est l’hyperbole de la figure libertaire qui correspondait à la radicalité de leur projet de société et qui consacrait l’obstination de leurs gestes” [This image of a woman bearing arms exaggerates a liberated figure that corresponds with her radical social project, consolidating the strength of her actions] (2016, 59). Galera places gendered ambivalence at the heart of Michel’s myth and reads her cross-dressing as a forthright refusal to adhere to the gendered norms of the day, a reading that accentuates Michel’s own role in her mythmaking. Rather than being an accident of various historical events, in this account, the trajectory of Michel’s reputation comes to rest on her own subversive acts of creation. Galera’s interpretation is in line with a wider pattern within Michel’s afterlives which celebrates the same qualities that she was repudiated for during her lifetime, prompting praise of her exceptionality from later remembering subjects. Negative
depictions of Michel as a dangerous or disturbed combatant morph into those of her as a brave and noble warrior.

In this, Michel’s association with the singularity and courage of Joan of Arc – who Marina Warner sees as standing for “the ideal expression of female virtue” (2016b, xv), a virtue centred around independence, adventure and courage – plays an important role. Joan of Arc’s story is so famous that it cannot be confined by association with any particular media or form: “she is a heroine of history” (Warner 2016b, xxxiii).37 Warner’s work reverberates with Pierre Nora’s seminal work on French national lieux de mémoire (and, more specifically, Michel Winock’s chapter in Nora’s 1992 volume of Les lieux de mémoire) which demonstrates the pervasiveness of Joan of Arc’s remembrance in French culture and her corresponding availability as an image of specifically female strength, from which Michel’s association with the myth builds.

From written representations by the fifteenth-century clergy to nineteenth-century encyclopaedia entries to twentieth-century cinema, and ranging from a symbol of the people to a romantic figure to a patriotic one, Joan of Arc was representationally transformed from a historical person to a myth figured as the saviour of the French people.38 Joan emerges as a singular figure whose image is pulled in different directions. On the one hand, she eludes conventional categories through which women might attain renown: “neither a queen, nor a courtesan, nor a beauty, nor a mother, nor an artist of one kind or another, nor – until the extremely recent date of 1920 when she was canonized – a saint” (Warner 2016b, xxxvi). On the other, as Warner posits is so often the case with female figures, representations of Joan tend to revert to stereotypes: the Amazon, the knight errant, etc. The myth of Joan of Arc amalgamates several appealing traits. She is consistently young, brave, lucky, virginal, eccentric, committed to her own convictions. She is undeniably female and yet has an intriguing tinge of androgyny. Her supposed virginity, like Michel’s, protects her from many of the most negative characteristics applied to other women, her crossdressing functions as an indication of her singularity. Above all, Joan of Arc is exceptional, unbound from any given context in the same way as Michel in her most extreme mythologisations.

Joan of Arc is a particularly attractive figurehead for social movements, ranging from the suffragettes to waves of protest in the 1960s to the far-right and Le Penn’s Front National: “In the post-war reign of the teenager, Joan of Arc became a symbol of a rebel with a cause, a Rimbaud with a halo. She stood for civil disobedience and youth protest, especially against
pressure from the state…” (Warner 2016b, xxi). She has no external legitimisation but speaks truth to power, as a voice against corruption and inequity. This version of her myth is particularly pertinent to Michel’s: not only does she provide a model of female bravery and aggression, but it is one with a distinctly oppositional flavour. Correspondingly, Verhaeghe identifies the first comparison of Michel to Joan of Arc in an 1879 edition of the revolutionary paper La Rue (2021a, 65). Michel herself evokes Joan of Arc in her poetry (Thomas 2019, 27), on her return from exile the senior statesman Gambon leads the crowd in “a round of applause for Louise, whom he compared to Joan of Arc” (Thomas 2019, 172) and a letter she receives in Clermont prison compares her to Joan, writing that “[y]our great heart has bled for the misery of the people” (Thomas 2019, 244).

Joan of Arc’s trial is central to her depiction. The documents which attest to it, which were published and readily circulated in the mid-nineteenth century, stand as proof of her bravery and her unflinching certainty in her own position. The fact that this trial led to Joan’s death is a central part of her mythologisation (Warner 2016b, 250). The abrupt dramatic end to Joan’s life contributes to her aestheticization, the sense that her story was abruptly ended while she was still in her prime. Her heroism depends on her purity, her liberation from circumstance, “saved from spoiling by a glorious end” (Warner 2016b, 257). In this way, the comparisons between Michel and Joan of Arc go beyond their moral purity and bravery. Michel’s trial has a self-conscious echo of Joan’s, adding mythical weight to her potential self-sacrifice. It is “[I]mpossible de ne pas penser au procès de Jeanne d’Arc lorsque l’on dépouille le dossier des interrogatoires de Louise Michel,” [impossible to not think of the trial of Joan of Arc when looking at Louise Michel’s interrogation files] writes Michel Ragon (1999, 25). His words echo roughly a century of the same comparison. Michel’s status as a symbol of superhuman civil disobedience builds from the representations of her detractors and is carried forwards by its salient parallels to the readily available myth of Joan of Arc.

Moral Michel
The characterisation of Louise Michel in works such as those in Le Grelot stand in sharp contradistinction to those tropes produced by Michel’s own contemporary admirers and supporters, who created hagiographic associations that have extended long into Michel’s afterlives. These depictions often give Michel a religious referent. Framed by comparisons with the Virgin Mary, she seems to embody her most famous moniker, la vierge rouge, that has shifted over time from a negative to positive valence. Michel’s identification as a woman, and
therefore an anomaly in hegemonic historical narratives of the nineteenth century, is the crux of this nickname.

There are inherent tensions in the very idea of a red virgin, which “fait référence aux différentes appartenances du personnages, du sacré au profane, du divin à l'humain, du légendaire à l'historique, ce qui le rend extraordinaire et le situe à plus forte raison dans la dimension du mythe” [refers to different characteristics, from the sacred to the profane, from the divine to the human, from the legendary to the historical, rendering her extraordinary and all the more situated in a mythical dimension] (Galera 2016, 49). And the origins of this name show the alternating valences of Michel’s reputation. It originated with her friend Clovis Hughes’s 1881 novel La vierge rouge – which was not actually about Michel – and was picked up by the anti-communard press and fitted to Michel as part of a wider venture to discredit her on the grounds of her gender and sexuality. Alongside her radicalism, with the designation of her as “red”, her feminised body was marked as central to her identity, corroborating suggestions that her dangerous actions were caused by her sexual frustration (Verhaeghe 2021a, 114–18). However, in line with the broader trend of Michel’s afterlives, the negative connotations of la vierge rouge have dissipated over time so that the moniker has come to stand as proof of her strength, bravery and saintliness.

Anticipating her work on Joan of Arc, Warner’s 1976 book on the Virgin Mary, Alone of All Her Sex, outlines the process by which faith has done away with any sense of Mary’s place in history, so that “the historical process that changes the character of the Virgin is seen merely as gradual discovery of a great and eternal mystery, progressively revealed” (2016a, 340). The distinguishing features of Warner’s Mary are her multiplicity and her pervasively essentialised gender: “The Virgin Mary, a polyvalent figure who appears under many guises, is the Church’s female paragon, and the ideal of the feminine personified” (2016a, xxxvi). Considering this ideal, Warner frequently returns to a set of excessively “virtuous” characterisations: Mary is pure, merciful, gentle, sweet, good, “the paragon of virginity” (Warner 2016a, 70), whose chastity spares her from original sin. However, in the preface to the latest edition of Alone of All Her Sex, Warner argues that, despite a historical view of the Virgin Mary as submissive, she has recently become a more countercultural figure. In this iteration she is associated with the strength of the oppressed against their oppressors, appearing to “the poor, unlettered, downtrodden, children, women, the overworked and underpaid, a strand of her story that casts her as an appropriate symbol within the Occupy movement”
(Warner 2016a, xxiii). In this iteration her gender does not submissively back up the status quo but enables her to act as a disruptive figure, suggesting that she might have a role in social movements. Corresponding with such multivalence, more recent designations of Michel as the Red Virgin offer her up as the embodiment of a series of exalted contradictions: she becomes an emblem of both (self-)denial (virginly) and of revolutionary action (red); of this world and not of this world.

To take an example, Michel appears in this guise in the famous work of the painter Jules Girardet who stood at the opposite end of the political spectrum from Alfred Le Petit and was vehemently pro-Commune. Girardet cited Michel and the Commune as his favourite subjects and produced a number of works that refer to central moments in Michel’s life, using images that echo visual accounts of the lives of saints and showing the many trials and tribulations that Michel passed through on her path to greatness. Girardet’s paintings chime with a version of Michel as a figure of intense morality, goodness and charity who would give up anything, even her life, for the people. This image of Michel was particularly widespread around the time of her imprisonment following the protest at les Invalides (Verhaeghe 2021a, 63), and these paintings fuel contemporary and ensuing imaginings of Michel as a saintly or deified figure.

Girardet’s 1871 painting shows Michel with a group of disaffected prisoners; she appears, glowing and pointing the way forward in an echo of Delacroix’s 1830 *La Liberté guidant le peuple*. Another, *L’Arrestation de Louise Michel*, depicts her arrest earlier that year (a demonstration of the speed with which Michel was already being transformed into the incarnation of the Commune). Michel is forceful and angry, but also powerless, at the head of a blurrily painted crowd that looks more like one of protest than of arrest. Her comrades reach out to her but are held back by the guards, who tower over them on horseback. With the vague outline of more mounted soldiers behind, she is encircled and trapped. Physically, Girardet’s versions of Michel bear little resemblance to photographs and other portrayals of her. In place of Michel’s high forehead, long nose and fine hair, she has a Madonna-like oval face and cascades of thick dark hair. Michel becomes an idealised imagining of the innocent feminised victim of anti-communard violence. For those familiar with Michel’s legend, these scenes prefigure the moment of her trial, the site of her near martyrdom. In their scale, drama and muted tone, Girardet’s depiction of Michel as somewhere between ‘scandalous orator’ and ‘innocent victim’, takes on a hagiographic power, in which her suffering foreshadows her eventual sacrifice. Images like these work alongside those of Michel as Amazonian warrior to further confirm her mythologisation.

**Michel both Militant and Moral**

The tension between these opposing poles – Michel as wild, menacing and solitary versus Michel as a heroic leader who endures gross injustice and cruelty – gives a sense of the dynamism of Michel’s portrayal during her lifetime, as different political sides struggled to impose their own narrative. Fanning the flames of both positive and negative public intrigue, such contestation served to magnify Michel’s reputation during her life. However, of these two rival accounts of Michel’s activism, ultimately the admiring vision would win out.\(^{30}\) It is Girardet’s sanctification of Michel, rather than Le Petit’s demonisation, that can be seen to have had the more long-lasting influence on her remembrance. His painting of Michel’s arrest now stands in a Museum in Saint-Denis, proof of the contemporary institutionalisation of a positive version of her story (‘Louise Michel, “une lumière pour nous tous” - Musée d’art et d’histoire Paul Eluard’ n.d.).

With the success of a positive vision of Michel since her death, the two strands showing her as combatant and as saint have often moved towards a version in which the associative
stereotypes of Joan of Arc and the Virgin Mary are brought closer together. Their delineations as ‘virgins’ renders these figures exceptional and offers, in a patriarchal bind, a mode through which their strength and devotion can be accepted despite their identification as women. It stands as a demonstration of the limited representational options offered to individual revolutionary women. Michel’s body becomes exceptional, desexualised and objectified she stands as a symbol of the people’s struggle.

The extent to which a favourable representation of Michel during her lifetime has played an essential role in her ensuing remembrance can be seen in the lasting influence of Victor Hugo’s poem *Viro major*, written in December 1871 around the time of Michel’s trial.41 Opening with the dead of the Commune, the poem honours Michel, presenting her as an example of revolutionary struggle and moral strength.42 Her readiness to face death drives the verses forward, each building on the hyperbole of the last. Here is Michel in extreme mythic form: Hugo compares her to brave women from the Bible and antiquity, he deems her “terrible et surhumaine” [terrible and superhuman]. He surmises that she has not come from the same mortal realm as anyone else and is untroubled by the petty squabbles of ordinary man. Michel belongs in the heavens, “Car, chêtifs comme sont les vivants d’ici-bas,/Rien ne les trouble plus que deux âmes mêlées,/Que le divin chaos des choses étoilées” [For, puny as those living below are,/Nothing troubles them more than two mingled souls,/Than the divine chaos of starry things]. Hugo also seems to anticipate the complaints and criticisms of Michel’s detractors. He notes, for instance, that her anger is a shield for her love – “L’âpre attendrissement qui Dort sous ta colère” [The bitter tenderness that sleeps under your anger] – and sees her battling against the power of her oppressors.43 The Michel of *Viro major* is a figure defined by opposition and by transcendence of that opposition.

The poem represents a version of Louise Michel who is able to assimilate the accusations of her detractors so that they become superlative proof of her strength, close to that which Michel sought to project of herself. It is embedded in texts ranging from Fernand Planche’s anarchist biography of the mid-twentieth century (1946, 64) to the title of Paul Mason’s 2017 play *The Divine Chaos of Starry Things*, so that Hugo’s poem plays a pivotal role in the construction of Michel’s myth across later accounts of her life. In this respect, Michel’s reputation benefits from the “satellite effect” (Lang and Lang 1988, 97) of its association with Hugo’s renown.
Michel’s Writing

Alongside the contributions of her contemporaries, Michel’s symbolic availability has been significantly reliant on her self-presentation in writing. Louise Michel was an avid writer. Her life stories and, in particular, her accounts of the events of the Commune have been instructive for subsequent understandings of both. For years, her history of the Commune sat alongside that of Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray’s *Histoire de la Commune de 1871* (1876) as one of the key eyewitness accounts. Alongside these, Michel left behind a wealth of unpublished texts – although much of her poetry and political writing has tended to take a backseat in her remembrance.44

Michel’s autobiographical inscriptions record her past actions for future political mobilisation. They present clear opportunities for her to assert her own agency and to “claim the ‘authority of experience’ both explicitly and implicitly” (Smith and Watson 2010, 27). The subject positions she occupies across these autobiographical acts have gone on to affect the ways she has been read and, therefore, the attachments that can be claimed by subsequent actors. Her 1886 memoirs and her 1898 account of the Paris Commune have been lasting staples of her memory – perhaps a reflection of the ways in which, as Verhaeghe argues (2021b, 3), she has until recently been seen as a historically or politically important figure, rather than a literary or artistic one.45 Versions of both texts have been circulated publicly since their original publication, including in translation, and these works remain central to academic and historic endeavours to understand Michel’s life and times. The image of Michel that emerges supports the superhuman vision of her in works like *Viro major*.

Michel suggests that the very idea of writing her memoirs caused her “une répugnance pareille à celle qu'on éprouverait à se déshabiller en public” [a reluctance similar to that one would feel undressing in public] (Michel and Herszkowicz 1997, 19), but subsequent readers have pointed out that the memoir provided a conscious opportunity for Michel to construct an ideologically consistent version of herself (Translators’ Introduction, Michel 1981, xiii). For instance, she takes the opportunity to counter rumours that she secretly had money and explains defensively why she took a carriage through Paris on one occasion (she was injured rather than lazy or superior). Setting the record straight on these and other fronts, Michel’s writing strives to show her revolutionary consistency and demonstrates her self-consciousness about her legend and her legacy.
The memoirs tell a dramatic tale that frames their subject in heroic terms. Michel’s life is not recounted chronologically, and factual episodes are consistently and randomly supplemented by lyrical descriptions or emotional poetry. Mirroring the hero’s journey, the “narrating ‘I’” (Smith and Watson 2010, 29) divides Michel’s life into a period of training and learning and one of action: “la première, toute de songe et d'étude; la seconde, toute d'événements” [the first, all dreams and study; the second, all events] (Michel and Herszkowicz 1997, 17). The memoirs were written during a prison sentence and shortly after the death of Michel’s beloved mother, whose passing is evoked continuously throughout. They are emotionally charged, variably jubilant and despairing, and haunted by a grief that provides impetus and urgency to the narrative. Grief over her mother’s death is mingled with mourning for the dead of the Commune and the siege of Paris, becoming as much political as personal. As she moves swiftly between important episodes in her life, Michel’s intensely nostalgic account of her past is never far from an expression of her hope for the future. She depicts herself as a martyr to the revolution, who has suffered so that others can strive: “Maintenant je suis désintéressée de la vie, tout est fini, et je serai dans le combat suprême (celui où nous donnerons tous) froide comme la mort” [Now I am uninterested in life, everything is over, and I will be in the supreme battle (the one we give everything to) cold as death] (Michel and Herszkowicz 1997, 73). To the extent to which she writes as a historian, it is as one with clear future-facing designs, who sees their chronicling as part of a distinct effort to change the course of events to come.

The eclectic form of the memoirs promotes the blurring of distinctions between fact and fiction that facilitate readings of Michel as a legendary figure. Lyrical fantasies, both those that Michel consumes and those that she imagines, are intertwined with detail-oriented and “surprisingly accurate” (Translators’ Introduction, Michel 1981, xii) reports of events of public record. The effect is twofold: historical certainty is downplayed, and mythical salience elevated. Michel’s account of herself confuses and surpasses the boundaries of reality, thereby contributing to her own mythologisation. She registers her early interest in myth and legend from the stories of her grandfather, and tentatively places herself in the lineage of the wild women of Gaul. With this close connection to the mythical and fantastical, Michel is often equivocal about the truthfulness of her own account, repeatedly reminding the reader of her own act of creation. Her portrayal of her voyage to New Caledonia is told in particularly vivid and experimental terms: it includes an episode in which Michel sees a ship that she has already
seen in her dreams, suggesting a fine line between the internal and external worlds of the memoirs.

Throughout her memoirs, Michel’s anarchism is a constant, albeit more in terms of a frequent call to action to her reader than as an integrated part of the story of her life. As such, the moments of political expression are light on theoretical detail and heavy on passionate manifesto. Again and again, the text returns in quasi-mystical, prophetic terms to the coming revolution. Michel is positioned as a vector for the revolution, frequently offering herself up as sacrifice to the cause in the service of which she has lived her whole life. And despite her growing reputation as one of the Commune’s leaders, Michel’s memoirs display a keen desire that she should be perceived as part of the collective rather than in charge. More fundamentally, the memoirs maintain a sense of the collective over the individual, as Michel highlights the central importance of other thinkers, activists and friends in her life. They are often multivocal, as Michel’s own voice is entwined with accounts of speeches, newspaper reports, letters and manifestos written by other people. This polyphony renders Michel herself as public property, folding her story further into the earliest remembrance of the Paris Commune. In the relationship between this shared Michel and the portrayal of a specific and cultivated image of Michel (as, for instance, a barbarian who loves the smell of cannon powder (Michel and Herszkowicz 1997, 176)), the memoirs provide a link between her mythologised civic presence – her status as the face of the Commune – and her fantastical personal stories.

Michel’s memoirs were written nineteen years before her death and do not account for the last years of her life. She did not produce any further work explicitly telling her own story. However, in 1898 she published La Commune : histoire et souvenirs, a lengthy account of the workings of the Commune, consolidating her reputation as a central witness to the events of 1871. Although it includes some poetry, opening with works by Victor Hugo and Paul Verlaine, the text is altogether less lyrical than Michel’s memoirs. La Commune situates the Commune within a wider historical context, providing narrative details on its background and aftermath: the text opens with the crimes of the empire (L’agonie de l’Empire), moves on to the Republic, the Commune itself (Les jours de la Commune), the massacre that ended it (L’hécatombe) and its consequences (Depuis). Written in the late 1890s, La Commune gives a sense of distinct distance between the events of the Commune and the present day. Claiming the Commune as a prologue for the coming revolution, Michel’s motive for capturing its essence is pedagogical: “La Commune était morte, mais la révolution vivait. Cette incessante
éclosion de tous les progrès, dans lesquels à chaque époque a évolué l'humanité, compose d’âge en âge une forme nouvelle” [The Commune was dead, but the revolution lived on. The unstoppable blossoming of humanity’s evolution has advanced in every age, as it composes a new form from age to age] (Michel 1999, 289). Michel as narrator is a teacher who hopes the revolutionaries of the future will learn from this experience.

Even more so than in her memoirs, for most of this history Michel’s “narrated ‘I’” (Smith and Watson 2010, 60) is a shadowy presence. It is only towards the end, as she is sent into exile, that the narrative becomes more personal. Michel’s historical role in the Commune is exposed indirectly in instances in which she is an invited speaker or important guest. Instead, her emphasis is on the collective that created the Commune and *La Commune* returns continuously to *les foules* [the crowds] or *les essaims* [the swarms] who filled the Parisian streets. The writing is littered with carefully cited quotations and factually presented details regarding who said what, where and when.51

From these texts, Michel emerges as a clear participant in her own mythologisation. Her testimony is evasive about her presence in the most renowned events of her life, adding mystery to her representation. Her written construction of an ideologically anchored and consistent self, influenced and inspired by fantastical forces and an unswerving commitment to future revolution, is akin to an act of bequest. This writing colours her afterlives, suffusing them with Michel’s status as medium of revolutionary struggle and a lasting and dynamic contention over the nature and means of that struggle. Resources from Michel’s life provide an essential basis for her remembrance.

**Contentious Attachments, 1905–1971**

This section accounts for the work of remembering subjects, starting from Louise Michel’s death in 1905 up until the early 1970s, a moment at which the centenary of the Paris Commune and the changing concerns of the French Left, including the rise of second wave feminism, mark a turning point in Michel’s remembrance. This was a period in which many of Michel’s supporters and detractors sought to destabilise or even undo her mythologisation, while others mythologised her further. In showing Michel’s early transformation into a symbol of the revolution, I alternate between reminders of the story of her life, drawing from Verhaeghe’s work, and my own readings of longform works of life writing and the formation of Michel’s archive. Overall, this period reinforced the mythologised version of Michel presented in her memoirs and, although contested changes of *ownership* are a constant feature of these years,
the basic narrative of Michel’s life, and the rhetorics that inflected it, remained largely consistent.

Over the period since her death, Michel has held symbolic importance for different groups of remembering subjects associated with different social movements, from communists, to socialists, to feminists and with a contingent of anarchists regularly protesting her adoption by other movements. At her death, Michel’s mythologised reputation as an extraordinary figure was well established. The Dutch politician, Domela Nieuwenhuis, during his anarchist phase, referred to Michel as being cut from the same cloth as Catholic saints (Bos 2014). Similarly, the writer and Communard Henry Bauër argued that Michel’s pious appearance put her in sharp opposition to the public image of the pétroleuses, “Elle a la bonté angélique, l’inaltérable douceur, la patience inépuisable, le dévouement, l’abnégation d’une sainte” [She has the angelic goodness, the unalterable gentleness, the inexhaustible patience, the devotion, the abnegation of a saint] (1895, 277). But these are not the only ways in which Michel was deemed superhuman. Tributes to Michel’s life consistently return to the intensity of her physical presence, her incredible charisma and her exhilarating powers as an orator. After a speech she gave on Trafalgar Square in 1896, another Dutch radical, Alexander Cohen, reminisced: “Haar verschijning kon niet dramatischer. Geheel in het zwart gekleed, op dat voetstuk tussen twee enorme leeuwen, de armen gespreid, met haar hortende stem was ze mooi, een schrikwekkende en dreigende schoonheid. Ik kreeg er kippenvel van...” [Her appearance could not be more dramatic. Dressed entirely in black, on the pedestal between two enormous lions, arms spread, with her voice trembling she was beautiful, a terrifying and threatening beauty. It gave me goosebumps…] (Cohen 1976). Others attested to the power of her cadence: her biographer Edith Thomas includes a quote by the contemporary historian Daniel Halévy who wrote that “[H]er words were not all that extraordinary. But her voice, the instrument itself was extraordinary, it had an electrifying resonance” (Thomas 2019, 396). During Michel’s lifetime, much of her reputation appears to have been carried by her voice and body, which were deemed to hold an exceptional power – inciting her acolytes to worship her. But after her death, how might remembering subjects capture this embodied power and enigmatic charisma?

Throughout these years, a characterisation of Michel as an all-purpose revolutionary figure competed with a more detailed vision of her as an anarchist thinker. While bringing Michel onto a slightly less superhuman plane, claims to attachment in these characterisations
remain hierarchical. They are primarily formed on the basis of a sense of allegiance to a higher ideal – whether communist, socialist or anarchist – that places Michel within a genealogy of exceptional figures who have opposed and challenged the status quo, embodying the ideas of a given movement.

Michel’s Funeral and Statue
Louise Michel’s death in 1905 prompted a scramble to understand the remarkable reach of her reputation and trace a relation between her symbolic power and saintly goodness on the one hand and her corporal physicality and female body on the other. The depiction of her funeral in a cartoon by Albert Peter-Desteract shows an enormous procession, with a crowd of supporters surging through the Parisian streets. Only the tops of their heads are visible and yet, far from appearing as a homogenous mass, Peter-Desteract’s cartoon demonstrates the huge range of people to whom Michel and her ideas appealed: rich and poor are side by side, accompanied by women and children. These assorted individuals are given a visual unity that asserts their coherence through the repetitions of the same shades of red, black and brown in their clothing. Drawn in the year of her death, the cartoon indicates the phenomenal extent of Michel’s standing at the time, as both a famous and infamous public figure.

In reality, Michel’s funeral was far from a display of unity: its organisation became the site of a battle between anarchist and other groups of a sort that would go on to affect much of Michel’s remembrance. Similar tensions resurfaced around Michel’s commemoration in the form of a statue by the sculptor Émile Derré. The statue was exhibited at the Grand Palais, some months after Michel’s death (Rétat 2019, 139) – a testimony to the relatively institutionally acceptable nature of its subject by this stage. Derré’s statue shows Michel as la bonne Louise, her most convivial nickname, a figure of charity and care. With outstretched hand, she looks into the middle distance while guiding a cherubic child. A cat presses its head against the hem of her dress adoringly. Michel is depicted here as a teacher, a maternal presence and an angelic being, gazed at lovingly. She is a saintly figure who is nonetheless human and proportionate.
However, the statue’s location continued to evoke tensions between political factions. In 1921, it was eventually placed in Levallois-Perret, the same suburb in which Michel’s grave can be found (Verhaeghe 2021a, 170–78). The statue remains there to this day, sitting on an unremarkable patch of lawn off the Rue de Président Wilson, a few minutes’ walk from Michel’s grave. Levallois-Perret is now also the location of a metro station named after Michel and a busy shopping street called Rue de Louise Michel.

Like the argument over the organisation of Michel’s funeral, those that formed around her statue show the changing tensions within her remembrance. As, on the whole, those with a negative stake were less interested in remembering her over the longer term, so the representational struggle took place between different groups with interests in upholding a positive, but divergent, vision of Michel. For the socialist or communist groups promoting her statue’s erection, Michel took a more symbolic form: her myth was one of moral qualities, goodness, bravery, strength of will. For anarchists, the details of Michel’s politics and her embeddedness in a wider anarchist network were vital. It is in this vein that the anarchist poet Laurent Tailhade attempted to recentre attention away from debates around the statue and onto Michel’s writing: “elle n'a que faire d'un monument pour vivre dans la mémoire des hommes libres ; c'est son œuvre, au contraire, qui leur montre le chemin de la Liberté” [she does not need a monument to live on in the memory of free men; it is her work instead that shows them
the path to Freedom] (quoted in Rétat 2019, 13), putting the specifics of her ideas centre stage. Anarchist mnemonic stakeholders continued to work on emphasising the details of her ideas, but they were not the dominant force behind the circulation of her memory in these first years after her death. Nevertheless, these varied and multifaceted competing versions of Michel show the pertinence of “intertextual antagonism” (Rigney 1990, 47) as a driving force in cultural remembrance, beyond the remit of textual media. As Michel’s valence became wholly positive, so debates about her ownership entered the fore. The years that followed saw the steady emergence of more longform mediations of Michel’s life, in which mnemonic actors claimed their particular attachment to her and were explicit about their stake in her remembrance. The effect was to territorialise Michel’s remembrance, furthering her connection to the Commune and her status as a revolutionary symbol.

**Psychologising Michel**

Given the main mnemonic actors in the period following her death claimed attachment to her memory on the basis of political allegiances, the first written account of Michel’s life came from an unlikely source: a German sexologist named Karl von Levetzow. In the year of her death, he published a character study of Michel in which he set out an argument to prove her homosexuality. Von Levetzow’s work followed in the tradition of many of Michel’s contemporary anti-revolutionaries who put an intense focus on her private life, often suggesting that she had “tastes against nature” (Mullaney 1990, 307). Yet Von Levetzow's motivations were different. Working in a school of sexologists associated with Magnus Hirschfield, Von Levetzow was invested in demonstrating the commonplace nature of homosexuality. His account of Michel’s life builds a steady (if essentially absurd) case for her supposed lesbianism, from her ‘mannish’ physical appearance, through to her wild behaviour in childhood, her unusual engagement in revolutionary politics and, finally, her apparent “erotic dislike of men” (Mullaney 1990, 310). These fundamentally de-mythologising allegations went on to have a substantial effect on later biographers and, in particular, on the insistent framing of her as a pious and virginal figure whose only lover was the revolution. In 1923, none other than Emma Goldman wrote a significant retort to Von Levetzow’s piece that epitomises this desexualised and re-mythologised Michel. Despite starting from a point that “nothing could add or detract from her” (1923, n. pag.), Goldman quickly turns onto the defensive. Against suggestions of Michel’s masculinity, Goldman is effusive about Michel’s excess of femininity – writing, for instance, that her “power of endurance through physical suffering was hardly equalled by men”
Goldman’s riposte reaffirms Michel’s mythologised dimensions and clearly expresses her attachment to Michel as a revolutionary symbol who must not be discussed in potentially prurient terms.

An alternate response to Von Levetzow’s work was Ernest Girault’s first full biography of Michel, which also presents itself as a character study. *La bonne Louise: Psychologie de Louise Michel* (1906) trades off Girault’s proximity to Michel during her lifetime as the source of various assertions about her personality. As part of Girault’s emphasis on his closeness to Michel while she was alive, those parts of her life where he was present are told in particular detail. With its focus on “*Sa physionomie, son caractère, son tempérament, sa mentalité, les dernières années de sa vie*” [Her physiognomy, her character, her temperament, her mentality, the last years of her life] (Girault 1906, n. pag) and inspired by the question ‘who was Louise Michel?’ , *La bonne Louise* certainly sets out to unpick an already received understanding of Michel’s mythologisation. Girault humanises his subject, refuting the claim that Michel wished to die for the revolution and suggesting instead that her indifferent attitude towards her life was more a depressive’s suicide wish than anything more political (1906, 35). Nonetheless, Girault continuously affirms Michel’s exceptionality as an individual, seeing her life as driven by the intensity of her passions and her extraordinary perseverance. In this vein, he counters Von Levetzow’s essay with claims about Michel’s apparent infatuation with fellow Communard Théophile Ferré, which he presents as the catalyst for many of her actions.

Von Levetzow’s article and *La bonne Louise* show the speed with which Michel’s death prompted attempts to understand her on a personal level and explain the person behind the revolutionary. Such attempts would reappear more forcefully in later mediations of her life in a pattern that encompasses attempts to humanise her, rendering her as a figure that might prompt attachments on the bases of recognition or empathy. It also encompasses endeavours to pathologise her, so that her supposed extraordinariness crosses into abnormality. There is not always a clear distinction between the two and, in both versions, Michel’s gender is a latent concern: how, these remembering subjects ask, within the confines of such a patriarchal society, could this woman have achieved such prominence?

**Communist and Socialist Biographies**

Far more significant than any psychological analysis, was the impact on Michel’s remembrance of the formation of the French Parti Communiste (PC) in 1921 (Verhaeghe 2021a, 151). The
PC imbricated a memory of the Paris Commune into a wider history of social struggle wherein it was seen as constituting a proto-Soviet protest and Michel, already an emblem of the Commune, entered a conceptual pantheon of revolutionary figures. This enabled her close association with characters like Rosa Luxemburg, despite their apparent political differences (Verhaeghe 2021a, 193). The timing of Michel’s funeral, 20 January 1905, the same day as the Bloody Sunday which precipitated the Bolshevik Revolution, provided heightened significance in these accounts. The PC’s celebration of Michel was particularly marked by commemorations of her death, which took the form of marches to and gatherings at her grave in Levallois-Perret.

However, this adoption of Michel as a revolutionary symbol does not seem to have been founded on any great engagement with the nuances of her story and, for a considerable period following the publication of Girault’s 1906 biography, there appears to have been little interest in further recording and narrating the story of Michel’s life.

The next equivalent work is Irma Boyer’s Louise Michel: “la vierge rouge” published in 1927. Boyer was an active member of the French socialist party (SFIO), although, as Verhaeghe points out, unlike the PC, the SFIO were relatively uninterested in Michel. (She attributes this disinterest to the academic approach to historical role models of socialists at the time and the relative difficulty of constructing Michel as a theorist (2021a, 235).) The biography hinges its interpretation of Michel’s life on the idea that she has been consistently unappreciated. The results are hyperbolic in their estimation of Michel’s powers. With a preface by Henri Barbusse that concurrently praises Boyer’s representation for its “veracité” (1927, i) Boyer suggests that the only criticism that might be made of Michel is that she was ultimately too good. On the first page, Michel is compared to Joan of Arc and thereafter Boyer is insistent about her subject’s exceptional status. Boyer’s sanctifying perspective stresses her allegiance to Michel and does not diverge from or dispute the version of Michel that was contemporary at the time.

A short pamphlet by Anne-Léo Zévaës published in 1936 offers the only definitive account of the PC’s version of Michel. This was published through the CDLP, a Communist press, as part of a series on “épisodes et vies révolutionnaires” (Zévaës 1936, n. pag). In it, Zévaës maintains a sense of Michel as a challenge to the status quo, claiming that the bourgeois press still labelled any potentially dangerous woman a “Louise Michel” and ending with a comparison between Michel and the women fighting in the Spanish Civil War, themselves “véritables Louise Michels” (Zévaës 1936, 38). Aligned with other PC representations, Michel is shown as a romanticised figure of the revolution, rather than a theorist, a warrior rather than
a writer or thinker. Zévaës’s pamphlet provides an example of the Communist mobilisation of the Commune and of Michel’s story as it became increasingly concretised, official and mythologised, first for the PC and eventually for other groups. Attachment to Michel in these works is represented in the form of allegiance, maintaining a myth of her as a revolutionary *par excellence*.

Archival Work

By the 1930s, several histories of the Commune written by its participants had been published and archival centres for documents of the Commune had been founded – making Michel’s remembrance more concrete and official. These include the *Musée de l’histoire vivante* in the historically left-wing suburb of Montreuil and a Marxist library in Paris. However, given Michel’s extensive written accounts of her own life and its documentation by her contemporaries, particularly in relation to the Commune, Michel’s archival records played an inconspicuous role in her remembrance at this stage. Michel’s papers were collected by Lucien Descaves (1861–1949) and sold to the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam by his son Pierre Descaves in 1936.\(^{58}\) The IISH was alone in the world at this time, in terms of institutions accommodating the papers of revolutionary figures. (In the same year as Michel’s papers were deposited, Emma Goldman decided it was the perfect location for her own papers to be kept.) Descaves began assembling the collection during Michel’s lifetime, acquiring documents from auctions or booksellers and through private individuals who were acquaintances of Michel, with the aim of writing her first biography. The biography was never written, and it is unclear what happened to the project. Descaves’s memory work nonetheless changed the nature of biographical work on Michel, demystifying some of her image as remembering subjects had better access to material and further instituting her place in a radical memoryscape. And, whereas the archives of Pankhurst, or even Goldman, reveal the clear presence of mnemonic stakeholders, Michel’s archive easily surpasses Descaves’s contribution, showing the involvement of a collection of looser, more various groups with a strong stake in Michel’s symbolic status.\(^{59}\)

At present, although the IISH holds the largest collection of materials on Michel, it is by no means the only archive connected to her. Work published by a collective of historians, the Colloque Louise Michel, at the Université de Provence lists thirteen archives that contains work on Michel, stretching across France, the Netherlands and the USSR (Centre d’Etudes
Féminines de l’Université de Provence 1982, 8). These fall into two broad categories: state archives that hold material on Michel’s activities, including for the purposes of surveillance, and those which are more localised, often more explicitly political, containing examples of Michel’s writing or writing about her by her supporters. The work of the Colloque demonstrates some of the breadth of Michel’s reach and, given the extent to which material about her life has been stored, the consistency of some of her afterlives. Dating back to the inauguration of Descaves’s collection, the drive to collect and shape archival material on Michel’s life speaks to an attachment to the detail of her story, resistant to her total transformation into Parti Communiste lore.

Anarchist Biographies

Descaves himself was regularly involved in establishing and maintaining Michel’s reputation. As well as participating in the organisation of commemorative events, he provided the preface to François Moser’s 1947 Une héroïne: Louise Michel, testifying to the strength of Michel’s character based on his personal knowledge of her (1947, 7). Showing an awareness of a burgeoning body of life writing on Michel, Descaves situates Moser’s biography alongside other biographies and lauds Irma Boyer’s for its particular “dévotion et fidélité” (1947, 8). The appearance of varying accounts of Michel’s life reflects the way in which, by the 1940s, there was a loosening of the hold of the PC and a growing sense that Michel’s remembrance might be up for grabs. Anarchists, who were more engaged in understanding the details of Michel’s thought than the PC, claimed a different sort of attachment to her: one which relied more on shared concerns and less on a slightly blurred and generalised figure of radical adversity.

The same contentious dynamic is apparent in Fernand Planche’s Vie ardente et intrépide de Louise Michel (1946), which opens with Planche, a militant anarchist, lamenting the lack of complete or proper understanding about Michel in his contemporary environs. He complains, for instance, that young people know nothing about Michel other than her name (1946, 9). Planche’s complaints are not so much directed against the lack of general knowledge about Michel’s achievements as against his strong sense of her communist appropriation. The Vie ardente et intrépide de Louise Michel concludes with a tirade against modern society and the authoritarianism of Marxism. Planche rails against politicians who visit Michel’s grave as he tries to enforce the idea that Michel belongs to the people: “la bonne Louise,” he writes, “elle est à nous” (Planche 1946, 210). Here he echoes wider anarchist sentiment: from the 1930s onwards, anarchist groups increasingly held their own, smaller and separate,
commemorative events in opposition to the PC and published articles criticising the Communist Party’s monopolisation of Michel’s memory. “Elle est à nous, toute à nous, rien qu’à nous” [She is ours, all ours, only ours], wrote Sébastien Faure in 1935 (Verhaeghe 2021a, 206), a far cry from his earlier statement about Michel’s uncontainability and a demonstration of his concern that her symbolic potential had been stretched too far.

Through the period reaching from Michel’s funeral to Planche’s biography and, to some extent, beyond, the characterisation of Michel as a revolutionary figure – a myth of goodness and bravery, intrinsic to memories of the Commune – competes with a vision of her as an anarchist – embedded in a political network and with a more precise set of political principles and theories. Whereas the CP’s version of Michel is so mythologised that stakeholders’ recognition of her as a fellow political actor essentially falls by the wayside, these anarchist commemorations attempt to build an attachment on the basis on alignment, in which Michel is their comrade. Even when Michel’s politics are not in the forefront, as in Zévaès’s pamphlet, her memory is still one associated with social movement history. Michel is characterised by her struggle against a continued hegemonic power, which is seen to reach from her lifetime into stakeholders’ presents. By the mid-twentieth century, the increasing availability of historical material furthers a more intricate and less symbolic remembrance.

The twenty or so years following the Second World War was a rather inert period in Louise Michel’s remembrance. Despite the frictions between communists and anarchists regarding to whom she ‘belonged’, the declining popularity of the PC seems to have led to a dwindling in her commemoration. Verhaeghe notes that the deaths of the war briefly reactivated the memory of the dead of the Commune, prompting, for instance, the establishment of the Rue Louise Michel in Levallois-Perret. At the same time, she suggests that the, once lively, commemorations around Michel’s death became less politically motivated, less publicised and were increasingly poorly attended (2021a, 211). This period of de-territorialisation is identified elsewhere: Galera suggests that Michel was not well-remembered in the years leading up to the 1960s (2016, 17); she proposes that those historians who went on to take an interest in her from the late 1960s onwards identified themselves as restoring their subject to public prominence on the basis of their ownership and so re-territorialising her cultural memory.
Consensus Attachments, 1971–2023

This section takes account of mediations produced post–1971, in which the framings which had characterised Michel’s remembrance up to that point – her political exceptionalism, her sexual exceptionalism or her moral exceptionalism – remain in play but are linked to new political configurations. With the rise of second wave feminism, Michel’s cultural memory is gendered in a way that turns her femininity from a concern, or a sign of her dangerousness, into a site of celebration. As Michel’s representation increased exponentially over this period, her story became a site of growing consensus. The influence of, and claims to attachment made by, particular individuals or smaller groups becomes less discernible.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s several events coincided to bring about a renewal of public interest in Louise Michel in France. Following on from a wave of protest in 1968, the 1971 centenary of the Commune corresponded with a decline in the PC’s dominance in shaping remembrance of the event and growing interest from other groups who stood outside or even against the PC, including the Situationists and the philosopher Henri Lefebvre (2021a, 216–17). The Commune was of growing interest to a new generation of politicians and to those working in universities, where ideas of historiography were also undergoing a transformation (Verhaeghe 2021a, 221). Verhaeghe charts a new separation between the remembrance of the Commune and that of Michel, as feminist activists and historians in the 1970s began to analyse and celebrate her as an exceptional individual. Additionally, Michel was becoming an increasingly important figure for the SFIO and, in particular, for feminists within the party. They positioned Michel as a relatively uncontentious figure: her anarchism passed unmentioned, while her caring and goodness seem to have been prized above her oppositionality. Thus, new remembering subjects became interested in building or deconstructing her myth. To go deeper in understanding how Michel’s cultural memory changed, I analyse the rhetoric of attachment in Edith Thomas’s Louise Michel: la Velléda de l’anarchie (1971) as the definitive account of Michel’s life and as exemplar of a turning point in Michel’s remembrance.

Edith Thomas’s Michel

Published in 1971, a year after its author’s death, Thomas’s biography of Louise Michel both contributes to and corresponds with a changing tide in Michel’s remembrance. Thomas was of a generation of feminist historians, often socialists, who had a keen engagement in social history, the workers’ movement and became interested in Michel’s story and her potential as a
feminist figure. This initiated a renewed interest in Michel’s writing and the connection between past and present struggles. In some of these accounts Michel appears as a feminist role model specifically for her ability to fight against the patriarchy. In others, such as Thomas’s, she is received as the embodiment of a set of exalted feminine ideals.

Thomas’s biography uses a rhetoric of recognition to relate both writer and readers to Michel. Although Michel was a well-known figure, hardly in need of restitutive work to put her on the historical record, Thomas’s biography has a reparative function nonetheless. It constructs a version of Michel that queries and counters the dominant mythical mode in which she had been remembered, building attachments based on empathy rather than allegiance. Thomas exhibits a desire to find a connection to Michel in personal terms and avoid out-and-out mythologisation, highlighting Michel’s exceptionality as a person rather than as a superhuman being.

Thomas’s attempts to counter Louise Michel’s mythologisation takes several distinct forms. She defines her own distance from previous mythologising biographical works, maintaining close attention to her sources while undercutting the veracity of previous accounts. She places Michel’s actions within an activist genealogy, providing historical precedents and successors in the form, for instance, of the participants in May ’68. Her historiographical project is rooted in identification, so that Michel’s individual personality, or even psychology, comes to the fore and any mentions of Michel’s perceived saintliness are coloured by this perspective, as are judgements about Michel’s intentions and self-representation. This leads to a mediation which highlights her gender and her romanticism. Finally, La Velléda de l’anarchie is explicit about the construction of a mythical aura around Michel in her lifetime, exposing the early dynamics and mechanisms behind that mythologisation.

Thomas herself was a celebrated feminist scholar, in part for her memory work on revolutionary women. She was a member of the PC until 1949, when she quit the party, and her work shows an inclination to distance herself from the old traditions of the French Left. She worked as a journalist, a novelist, an archivist (as a curator at the Archives Nationales for many years) and was a pioneer in the writing of women’s history. In a 2016 collection on Fifty-One Key Feminist Thinkers, there is an account of Edith Thomas that hinges on her continuous and unswerving commitment to “freedom” throughout her life (Chilcoat 2016, 223). As well as being an active member of the PC, she was a member of the French Resistance and an anti-colonialist. Chilcoat emphasises the extent to which Thomas’s historical work came out of a
sense of her debt to the historical women who had preceded her, part of a familiar drive to construct a memoryscape for her own political actions. “In almost all of her writing,” Chilcoat notes, “she turned to both fictional and real characters with whom she identified but who were at the same time specific individuals uniquely shaped by their particular moment and circumstances in history” (2016, 225, my emphasis). The role of identification seems particularly relevant to her work on Michel. Alongside her biography of Michel, she wrote on the pétroleuses and on Joan of Arc.

La Velléda de l’anarchie was the first comprehensive study of Michel’s life. It uses a wealth of archival material, including Descaves’s collection in the IISH, and remains a touchstone in such mediations. The text abides by the form of a conventional, lives of “great men” biography (Lee 2009): Michel is individualised so that, although its scope changes over the course of Michel’s life – from Haute Marne to Paris to international radical networks – the perspective remains tightly focused on Michel herself with limited digressions or historical context. Thomas’s sources change over the course of the narrative so that, for example, Michel’s memoirs heavily inform the description of her childhood but, as she becomes an increasingly public figure, Michel’s own characterisation of her life recedes. The last third of the biography deals with a period after Michel had written her memoirs and so relies entirely on other sources.

In the introduction to the biography, Thomas is direct about her rejection of what she perceives to be an unsatisfactorily hagiographical approach to Louise Michel’s life. She lists existing biographies – by Girault, Boyer, Planche, Hélène Gosset – to note that “whatever the author’s political allegiance, an excess of blind devotion has produced yet more legend-binding” (2019, 11). Keeping her own past in the PC at arm’s length, she suggests that famous revolutionaries tend to get the same treatment as saints (referring to the USSR as the apotheosis of this behaviour) in a way that damages both “literature and historical accuracy” (2019, 11). Thomas presents her own approach as one of historical truth-finding and is explicitly coy about her attachment to Louise Michel (to whom she refers familiarly as “Louise” throughout). In a detached manner, she indicates that her first reaction to Louise Michel, who she discovered while researching the pétroleuses, was one simply of curiosity; she felt Michel would be an interesting and important subject for biographical enquiry because of her vast textual output. Later in the biography, she muses about her sense of interpersonal attachment to Michel: “I look at the photograph of this very old woman and I am touched with pity and, perhaps, a slight twinge of guilt. For as I’ve worked at this book I have sometimes laughed at her ingenuousness,
and I should have felt a growing admiration instead” (2019, 398). Prompted by this image of Michel’s frailty, Thomas shows the desire for empathy that lies at the heart of La Velléda de l’anarchie.

In line with Thomas’s interest in elaborating a genealogy of radical women, La Velléda de l’anarchie assesses Michel’s gendered position within a revolutionary tradition. Rather than identifying Michel as an aberration of history, this approach gives her clear precedents and antecedents. In this vein, Michel is twice compared to the activists of May 1968: first suggesting their similarities, “[s]he would undoubtedly have taken to the barricades in May 1968, urging the rebellious students on by word and deed” (2019, 13); and then corroborating Michel’s ultimate superiority, “[h]er imagination knew no limits. […] The students of May ’68 were a timid bunch, compared to Louise Michel” (2019, 186). Bringing Michel’s actions into the present, she emphasises her far-sightedness and position on the right side of history: “Louise never changed her mind on the subject of female suffrage [which she opposed], and subsequent events have proven her right” (2019, 294). Thomas does not rely on the power of Michel’s myth to prove her historical value and impact, instead she gives a calculated assessment of her role during the Paris Commune and concludes that she indeed made a real difference and was instrumental to its successes and longevity (2019, 80).

Thomas includes descriptions of Michel that attest to the pragmatic success of her actions and those that are critical of her as a romantic, and fundamentally unrealistic, actor. Michel’s passion is shown as the catalyst for her revolutionary action. Thomas consistently returns to the idea that, “Louise was an idealist and a mystic; her Revolution was an emotional affair of charity and political opposition to Versailles” (2019, 81). However, she does not see Michel’s emotionality or浪漫ism as running counter to her status as a rigorous political actor capable of enacting change. Instead, these qualities are seen as fundamental to Michel’s revolutionary power and the legacy of that power, placing her personality at the heart of her politics.

Thomas’s biography consistently addresses Michel’s mythologisation head on. Drawing on her own work on Joan of Arc, Thomas brings this other paragon of the heroic woman into her analysis as an attestation to Michel’s mysticism, her personal strength and poetic nature. However, Thomas rarely lets her subject’s apparent saintliness go unremarked upon and seems determined to get behind appearances and understand Michel’s methods and motivations. “Her faith,” she judges, “was naïve” (2019, 399). Regarding the indefatigable
lecturing of Michel’s later life and her readiness to offer herself up to hostile courts and trials, she writes “since – despite every provocation she could offer, her convictions, her imprisonments – bourgeois society still hadn’t seen fit to make Louise Michel a martyr…well then, she’d at least die preaching the Faith” (2019, 378). In this reading, Michel has an individualised desire for martyrdom, which is more the result of personal morality or ego than collective compassion. It is typical of Edith Thomas’s consistently equivocal relationship with Louise Michel as a biographical subject in that, on the one hand, she challenges an image of Michel as a woman of the people, motivated by pure altruism and, on the other, she locates Michel’s strength in her exceptionality of character.

Thomas is also often directly dismissive of Michel. She is for instance critical of Michel’s relationship with money, describing it as “cavalier” and observing that “[s]aints and revolutionaries do have their awkward side…” (2019, 43). The undercurrent that runs through these dismissals gives a faint, and suspicious, sense of Michel as a performer. Thomas variously refers to “the singular role that she had created for herself” (2019, 12) or describes her trial at the end of the Commune in theatrical terms with Michel as “actress” (2019, 125). This notion of Michel as playing a role affects Thomas’s reading of Michel’s writing, where she often injects doubt into Michel’s versions of events. Sometimes this doubt takes the form of warm references to Michel’s fantastical imagination. Elsewhere Thomas suggests that Michel’s life was not quite the cohesive story that she herself made it out to be. It chimes with her suggestion that there is a “whiff of ostentation” (2019, 398) around Michel’s goodness and generosity. Seeking to understand her as a woman, in vaguely psychological terms, Thomas deals with her morality rather than her politics.

In a further act of de-mythologisation and de-politicisation, Thomas reveals the processes through which the myth of Louise Michel was constructed by those around her. She shows how Michel was sustained by her supporters.67 La Velléda de l’anarchie tracks the growth of its subject’s legend, moving from imprisonment after the Commune (during which there were rumours she had ridden in “a funeral procession in a carriage which was drawn not by horses, but by some National Guards” (2019, 122)) through the growth of her reputation in exile, to the huge crowds that greeted her return, all building towards her incredible fame as a radical speaker capable of drawing enormous crowds. As testimony to this, Thomas describes how the publishers of Michel’s memoirs decided “to write a preface since, though everyone thought they knew Louise Michel, a distinction had to be made between the legend and the reality” (2019, 269). Thus, Thomas shows the lineage of her own attempts at de-mythologisation,
revealing a repeated friction between Michel the woman and Michel the revolutionary symbol – “a prisoner of her public image” (187) – that was already there during her lifetime.

Ultimately, however, Thomas’s biography did not succeed in bringing about the deconstruction of Michel’s myth. Instead, it has helped craft a new one, built more on Michel’s personality than her actions. Rather than seeing Michel as an emblem of revolutionary strength, Thomas’s biography inspires claims to attachments to Michel based on empathy rather than allegiance, taking her as a woman, a human being with personal strength and foibles. It paves the way for a re-territorialised version of Louise Michel in which her politics are represented in moral terms and her gender is emphasised. In this iteration she is, as a recent conference on feminist struggle described her, a feminist “avant l’heure” (Bréchemier and Laval-Turpin 2017, 57).

Michel as National Figure
Louise Michel’s popularity with second-wave feminist activists and historians soon led to a wider growth in her popularity and, in a somewhat unlikely turn of events, her eventual acceptance as a historical figure within the national narrative of the French Republic. In Verhaeghe’s account, the election of François Mitterand in 1981 and his appointment of Yvette Roudy as minister for women’s rights cemented Michel’s ready public circulation (2021a, 240). This is exemplified by the first French celebrations of International Women’s Day (8 March) in 1982, in which Michel’s was among several portraits of important historical women exhibited at Saint-Lazare station. For the same event four years later, a stamp depicting Michel was issued: “l’histoire des femmes devient un objet d’action publique,” writes Verhaeghe, “Elle s’inscrit dans une stratégie politique qui met en avant une histoire des femmes individualisée, centrée sur quelques personnalités dont la légitimité est reconnue par leur « mérite » en tant que femmes « exceptionnelles »” [women’s history became an object of public attention. She is part of a political strategy that promotes an individualised history of women, centred on a few personalities whose legitimacy is recognised by their ‘merit’ as ‘exceptional’ women] (2021a, 244–45). Michel became a symbol of national importance.

The stamp reproduces a lithograph by A. Néraudan (alternately Néraudau) from 1871, that is based on a number of photographs – including mugshots by the Versailles photographer Eugène Appert. This image of Michel was popularised in the 1970s after it was turned into a stencil by the publishers Maspero and used on the cover of a 1976 edition of her memoirs (Rétat
2019, 161). It shows up on Wikipedia pages about Michel in 23 languages, as well as on Wikipedia pages on anarchism and on the Paris Commune. It can be found on posters for late twentieth century anarchist protests, on t-shirts sold online and on editions of Michel’s memoirs and numerous biographies. It is, as Rétat puts it “comme un logo” (2019, 161), for a widespread view of the revolutionary as a historical figure. The image encompasses and transcends all the stereotyped representations of Michel that have previously been discussed in this chapter. The medium of etching allows for some smoothing out of reality and some idealisation, but Michel remains recognisably the same very human woman as in photographs, she has wrinkles around her eyes, a small set-back chin and the same wispy hair. She is neither an idealised angel nor a militant witch or virago. More obviously feminine than masculine, Michel is simultaneously fierce, steadfast in her gaze, unsmiling, and also warm, even vulnerable, with a concerned and faintly furrowed brow. Here Michel is an icon, an exceptional historical woman of great national importance.


Michel’s adoption by the French Republic inscribed her in a teleological narrative of political progress: a strong woman who had fought against the oppressors of the past. While earlier attempts to name public places after her had been met with political resistance (Verhaeghe 2021a, 262), following Mitterand’s election there was a flourishing of ‘Louise Michel’ public sites and buildings. Stressing the reach of the characterisation of Michel as a national hero, Vive Louise Michel! provides an overview of her appearances in school textbooks which correlates with a sense of her growing presence since the early 1980s. A 2016 study of the naming of streets in France determined “Louise Michel” as the 61st most
popular choice and the fifth most popular choice among women’s names (after Notre-Dame, Marie Curie, Jeanne d’Arc and George Sand) (Garnier 2016). Crowning this was the designation of the Place Louise Michel, a large square in Montmartre under the Sacré Cœur: the very church that had been built to celebrate the failure of the Paris Commune (Traverso 2021b, 174). The square was originally named after the painter and illustrator Adolphe Willette. In 2004 the local council decided to change the name of the square on the grounds of his anti-Semitism and to replace his with a name that clearly stood against discrimination (Verhaeghe 2021a, 274). Galera sees the naming of the square as part of a new alignment with the remembrance of the Commune – a place passed by millions of tourists which stands as a “monument édifié afin de purifier Paris des traces laissées par les jours sanglants de la Commune” [monument built to purify Paris of the traces left by the bloody days of the Commune] (Galera 2016, 67). And, despite the anti-Commune associations of the Sacré Cœur, Verhaeghe establishes it within a continuum whereby Michel is celebrated as a new myth – a figure of national progress, liberty and feminism – and points out that the square’s inauguration was marked by anarchist protests against Michel’s institutionalisation (Verhaeghe 2021a, 274).

Michel’s status as a figure who stands against discrimination is a further addition to the inventory of symbolic political positions ascribed to her. In recent years, reports of her activity in New Caledonia and Algeria have become more and more numerous, and Michel has been read as an anti-colonial or anti-racist activist. Joël Dauphiné’s La déportation de Louise Michel: vérité et legendes (2006), for example, addresses her time in New Caledonia as a lacuna of historical research and uses her memoirs, letters and historical accounts from other sources to piece together a description of her experiences and actions. The identification of Michel as an anti-colonialist enables the circumvention of her anarchism, separating out her wider belief in internationalism and treating the end of imperial expansion as part and parcel of a drive to end militarism, the nation state and authoritarian power. It provides a clear sense of affinity between contemporary political projects and those of the past, a sense of “affective connection across [in this case temporal] difference” (Berlant 2011, 25) of a sort characteristic of reparative modes, expanding Michel’s myth to show more evidence of her contemporary salience.

In a further reparative effort, many recent mediations of Michel’s life have also turned to her writing, interpreting her as an undiscovered literary figure and promoting the republication
of her work. Verhaeghe identifies the double role of these mnemonic stakeholders: “ils participent à la fois à produire du sens [...] et à mettre en place les structures de transmission de la mémoire de ces textes” [they participate both in producing meaning...and in setting up the structures for transmitting the memory of these texts] (2021b, 5). Their efforts can be seen as a continuation of the work done by feminist historians in the late twentieth century.70 Rétat’s Art Vaincral therefore forms part of the wider memory work that seeks to reclaim Michel as a literary figure. Alongside figures like Gauthier and Véronique Fau-Vincenti, the holder of her collection at the Musée de l’histoire vivante, Rétat has been a driving force behind the publication of several of Michel’s works in the early twenty-first century.71 In Rétat’s version of her life and memory, Michel’s activism is interwoven with her artistic practice, forming part of one unified endeavour.72 The concentrated effort of a few mnemonic stakeholders to respond to Michel’s writing, analysing her words and retrieving forgotten texts, demonstrates Michel’s status as a myth but also seems to offer a glimpse behind the construction of that myth. Once more there has been anarchist opposition to this approach, with complaints that the analysis of Michel as a literary figure overshadows her status as a political actor: up to the present day, different versions of Michel, with corresponding claims to attachment, continue to compete, further fuelling the production of her afterlives.

Louise Michel’s Transnational De-Territorialisation

Given the importance of Michel’s incorporation into the narrative of the French Republic, how and by whom has she been remembered outside of this national context? In an article on Michel’s exile in London in the last decades of her life, historian Constance Bantman notes the “methodological nationalism” (2017, 995) that has characterised her remembrance. As well as identifying masculinist historiographic tendencies that have undermined the efficacy of Michel’s political activity – putting an emphasis on her emotions and sentimentality, her instinct over her agency – Bantman argues that Michel’s successful self-presentation across national boundaries has been understudied. “She was certainly an international ‘star’ beyond anarchist circles, acutely aware of her image and ‘the potential of her self-representation and platforms’,” she writes, “but this should not be equated with a lack of political substance since all her interventions were underpinned by a clear and consistent political vision” (2017, 1000). However, supported by the same pattern of dynamic and far-reaching representation during her life and into her afterlives, Michel has continued to be a recognisable figure in a range of contexts outside of France, mostly appearing in connection with anarchist movements or other
strands of the radical Left, and biographies of her have continued to appear in European languages from Dutch to Danish.\textsuperscript{73}

Offering a coda to the rest of my chapter, this section suggests that Michel’s transnational representation has been less fixed, more fragmented and de-territorialised than the national version. Michel’s transnational remembrance therefore presents a diversion from the dominant ways in which she has been remembered nationally: in this context, she often appears in a less symbolic form and more weight is given to her anarchism. Similarly, Michel’s gender seems to assume a less central role when she is represented transnationally rather than nationally. Following the logic of this chapter, outside France, Michel has not been mythologised to the same degree and, correspondingly, those with a stake in Michel’s remembrance and the nature of their attachments are more identifiable. I develop this argument by looking at Michel’s invocation in non-French studies, building an account of her transnational cultural memory through both shortform and longform mediations.

**National/Transnational Divergences**

Michel’s transnational memory now reaches far and wide and has followed broadly the same trajectories as her national remembrance. Until the late twentieth century it was essentially the preserve of left-wing groups – there were two battalions named after her in the Spanish Civil War (Pintado Gutiérrez and Castillo Villanueva 2019, 70) – thereafter the upturn in her French reputation prompted the increased translation of her memoirs and other writing into various different languages.\textsuperscript{74} There is evidently a close relationship between French and transnational characterisations of Michel. For instance, recent French characterisations of Michel as a literary figure or anti-colonial activist have provoked similar scholarly responses from around the world. Kathleen Hart, an American academic, wrote an article (2001) analysing Michel’s writing within a tradition of oral storytelling which allows her to form a connection to both her Gaul ancestors and indigenous people in New Caledonia and so takes Michel as a truly transcendentental figure. While, a recent German publication, *Louise Michel oder: Die Liebe zur Revolution* (Hervé 2021), combines a selection of her writing with biographical accounts and commentary by the editor, providing a further indication of Michel’s burgeoning international reputation as a literary figure.

But elsewhere, transnational perspectives have challenged French understandings of Michel. In a Spanish language article (2021) María Migueláñez brings an anarchist perspective
to the recent boom in publications of Michel’s writing, picking up on the memory work of Xavière Gauthier and Claude Rélat among others. Martínez places her analysis alongside work by Bantman, Auzias, and Verhaeghe and pushes against the de-politicisation associated with the recent construction of Michel as revolutionary-writer rather than a writer-revolutionary. Martínez looks at the publication of Michel’s writing in a transnational framing and points to early translations of her writing carried out by Spanish anarchists at the publishing house Sempere in 1908, shortly after Michel’s death (2021, 35). Her article points out the pitfalls of considering Michel within the bounds of the nation state and challenges her French territorialisation for failing to take into account her transnational appeal both during and after her life.

Given the close relationship between the remembrance of Louise Michel and that of the Paris Commune, the different emphases of transnational and national celebrations of the centenary of Paris Commune seem revealing. In France, the celebrations demonstrated the Commune’s “extraordinary symbolic dimension” (Traverso 2021a) and the extent of its assimilation into a Republican narrative: Traverso points to the oddity of the Commune’s exuberant centenary celebrations being shortly followed by the 200th anniversary of the death of Napoleon. In this context, the dominant image of Michel was a softened one, in which she tends to appear as a romantic figure. Yet the Commune has never been solely a French concern. The event itself is “politically generative because of its ability to connect with both the local and the global” (Forster 2021, 89). Transnational celebrations have highlighted the global afterlives of the Commune, often relating it to subsequent decolonising movements: Traverso’s article lists successors from Mexico to Tunisia, from Spain to the Kurdish fighters of Rojava. The Louise Michel of these representations is an out and out militant. Often depicted dressed in the costume of the National Guard, she appears as a soldier on a battlefield.

Correspondingly, removed from those groups of French mnemonic actors who have dominated her cultural afterlives, Michel’s transnational remembrance generally gives greater weight to her anarchism. This point was explicitly addressed in a 1990 article by Marian Leighton that seeks to establish the details of Michel’s “anarcho-feminism”, lamenting the fact that the only full-length biography on her in English is that of Thomas. More recently, in a lecture about The Divine Chaos of Starry Things, the play he wrote about Michel’s time in New Caledonia, British writer and journalist Paul Mason claims that he could never have made the play for a French audience (Mason 2017). Mason suggests that this is because The Divine Chaos of Starry Things gives a critical account of Michel, depicting the less attractive nuances
of her relationship with the Kanak people of New Caledonia. He further proposes that Michel has to a large degree been claimed by the French establishment, whereas outside France there are anarchists with tattoos of Louise Michel from “Barcelona to Buenos Aires” (Mason 2017). Mason is not explicit about how Michel is remembered by these groups – although the evocation of Louise Michel tattoos suggests it is as something of an icon, a visual reminder rather than a fully-fledged myth – or how her reputation has reached them. But his claim is backed up by anarchist websites from around the world that cite Michel as a role model in fighting for the cause.76

Mason’s contention that anything that might be read as criticism of Michel would not be well-received in France is touched on briefly in Verhaeghe’s Vive Louise Michel!. Towards the end of her chronological recounting of Michel’s remembrance, Verhaeghe mentions a 2005 article by Élisabeth Claude which explores the possibility that Michel had a lesbian relationship with her companion of later years, Charlotte Vauvelle (in Verhaeghe 2021a, 286). Taking this article as a starting point, Verhaeghe develops a brief explanation of persistent, non-French, reactions to Michel which explore her as a queer figure, from Von Levetzow after her death and Goldman in the 1920s to the 1976 work of Jonathon Ned Katz. Until recent versions that present Michel as a queer feminist, such as Claude’s, this strand of Michel’s remembrance in France has essentially been overshadowed by a mainstream national memory that focuses instead on her virginity and/or on her potential romantic or sexual relations with Hugo or Ferré.77 Neither Von Levetzow’s study, nor Goldman’s response to that study are ever cited in French accounts of Michel’s life (Verhaeghe 2021a, 288). It seems consistent that this queer reading of Michel, which until very recently would have been judged as wholly negative by a homophobic state, is largely absent from her national remembrance.

Michel in the United Kingdom

Louise Michel’s remembrance has taken a different trajectory even in the nearby context of the United Kingdom. Despite spending many of her last years within a thriving London network of anarchists and other exiled radicals, and having learnt to speak English, Michel has a liminal position in cultural memory in the UK. There are few signs of a continuum of interest in her activities. She is mentioned in several biographies and accounts of London radical circles in the early twentieth century (see for example her appearance in Sylvia Pankhurst’s writing (1999, 91)) but, more generally, her times in London have left few traces. There is no plaque
on the site of the Charlotte Street school for the children of exiled anarchists that she ran from 1891–92, nor on the street she lived in East Dulwich. Where her reputation has persisted, it appears to be mainly among those with a specific interest in radical history – and therefore the Commune – traceable back to the large-scale emigration of ex-Communards to the UK. However, in the past ten years or so, some more prominent mediations have brought Michel to the fore. Michel’s re-emergence in the UK in the twenty-first century is linked to the work of specific mnemonic stakeholders, who often cite a strong allegiance-based attachment to her story as their motivation.

Paul Mason, as mentioned above, provides a good example of this tendency. A prominent commentator and a vocal anti-capitalist who has been active in British politics for many years, Mason has evidently had a sustained interest in Michel’s activism for a long time. His 2010 book _Live Working or Die Fighting: How the Working Class went Global_ contains a chapter comparing the Commune to events in Amukoko Nigeria in 2005. Michel is depicted as an “instinctive rebel” (2010, 79), a visionary and a mystic with incredible energy, imagination and an insatiable drive to free all in her path from oppression. “For Louise Michel,” he writes, “no amount of liberation in the real world would be enough: neither the battlefield, the class struggle, nor the women’s movement could satisfy her creation energy. It poured out into her imagination” (2010, 90). In this way Mason reinforces Michel’s mythologisation as a figure whose political projects transcend the ‘real’ world. In referring to the joint pressures of the ‘class struggle’ and the ‘women’s movement’, he updates her struggle. In the conclusion to _Live Working or Die Fighting_ he notes that, since the rise of neo-liberalism in the 1980s, Michel’s life seems positively modern. His promotion of her makes a claim to repair a historical omission by showing Michel’s enduring political relevance.

In Mason’s play _Why It’s Kicking Off Everywhere_ (performed at the Young Vic theatre in London in March 2017), Louise Michel is literally brought into the present day (‘Why It’s Kicking Off Everywhere’ n.d.). Based on a book in which he addresses the spate of protests and revolutions that swept the world in 2011, Mason took on the role as the play’s narrator. Michel, who appears dressed in the uniform of the National Guard, acts as the narrator’s conscience – a revolutionary guide from the past who is able to bring experience to the uprisings of the present. This representation repeats many of the tenets of Michel’s French mythologisation: she is recognisable by her costume and appears as the voice of the revolution. But, as a cypher for the narrator and isolated from her contemporaries, she occupies both a more global and a more internalised or personal position than in most French mediations.
Mason’s attachment to Michel’s story culminates in *The Divine Chaos of Starry Things*, first performed in a London theatre in the spring of 2017. His depiction of Michel can be traced to sources that are often overlooked in her memory in France, specifically her exile. And, as described, he insists that the effect of its non-French creator and non-French intended audience is to bring new urgency to Michel’s story.

Mason’s championing of Louise Michel in a British context can be connected to other twenty-first century representations. The creators of a 2016 comic book version of Michel’s life cite Mason’s 2001 radio programme as an important source (Talbot and Talbot 2016, 129). Bryan and Mary M. Talbot’s *The Red Virgin and the Vision of Utopia* provides a potted history of the key events of Michel’s life in simple yet characterful black, white and red drawings. In a 2016 radio programme that includes a section on Michel, both Mason and Mary M. Talbot, (a scholar working in critical discourse analysis, language and gender) feature as experts on her life (‘BBC Radio 3 - Free Thinking, Revolutionary Thinking: Paul Mason, Bryan and Mary Talbot, Dacher Keltner’ 2016). The recurrence of both these figures can be seen as an indication of quite how small the group of mnemonic stakeholders in the United Kingdom is. It also demonstrates the strongly politicised nature of Michel’s British remembrance: like Mason, the Talbots have a longstanding interest in radical politics.

As its full title suggests, *The Red Virgin* puts a particularly strong focus on Michel as a utopian thinker: it was published to coincide with the 400th anniversary of the publication Thomas More’s *Utopia* and identified as “celebrating the utopian urge in 19th-century literature and politics and the origins of science fiction” (Talbot and Talbot 2016, n. pag.). Michel’s ideas are threaded through the narrative of her life, which is presented in detail with copious footnotes that distinguish “fact” from “literary license”. She is compared to other contemporary thinkers, set against a background of nineteenth century ideas and ideologies. The Michel of the comic is direct, confident and brave; she is also presented as unusually prescient in terms of her understanding of scientific innovation, a figure who might help us think about the future as well as the past. A review of *The Red Virgin* further suggests this two-way temporal projection, opining that “Although it is a long time since anyone bar the neoliberal right believed that history was on their side, it is always nice to feel that you have a usable past” (Hatherley 2016). The comic gestures to the mobilisation Michel’s mediation might inspire.

The Talbots’ version of Michel’s life is evidently closely related to the dominant French representation. In line with this observation, *The Red Virgin* was almost instantly translated
into French, seemingly the only published comic about Michel in that language and marking a rare instance of a representation of Michel being transported from a British to a French context rather than vice versa.\textsuperscript{81} This is perhaps proof of the perceived difficulty in having a fresh take on Michel within France. In line with Mason’s contention, the transnational version of Michel’s memory seems to be one emerging out of clear political allegiances in which she is remembered more as an anarchist, with a focus on the details of her political belief rather than her as a more all-purpose symbol. Placed alongside Kropotkin or Bakunin, this version de- and re-territorialises her, concentrating on her radicalism and putting greater emphasis on her life after the Commune.

**Conclusion**

In late August 2020, Louise Michel’s name made headlines around the world. This was not prompted by a commemoration of the Paris Commune, nor was it the result of a celebration of the defining figures of French history. The Louise Michel in question was in fact an enormous ex-Navy ship rescuing refugees from the Mediterranean, commissioned and financed by the famous millionaire street artist Banksy. On 28 August, during its first mission, the Louise Michel ran into trouble. Her crew of ten had set out to reach 89 people stuck on a dinghy but on their way they passed another boat with 130 more on it (‘The Story Behind Banksy’s Pink Refugee Rescue Boat’ 2020). Having helped all these people on board, the Louise Michel was overcrowded, and the crew were forced to send out a distress signal. The event rippled through the international media, prompting many stories about the involvement of the mysterious Banksy, whose identity is largely unknown.\textsuperscript{82}

Until 2020 this ship had been called *Suroît* and was used by the French customs authorities. Banksy’s involvement came through his correspondence with Sea Watch, a German NGO, and an activist called Pia Klemp, whose own ship had recently been impounded. Banksy wrote to Klemp, offering to fund a new boat and describing himself elusively as “an artist from the UK” (‘M.V. Louise Michel, August 2020’ 2021). He reportedly paid for the boat with the proceeds from recent sales of his art about the refugee “crisis” (‘The Story Behind Banksy’s Pink Refugee Rescue Boat’ 2020). Although Banksy’s involvement was mostly limited to providing financial support for the Louise Michel, his aesthetic mark is all over the boat itself and the media response to it. In a stark rejection of the ship’s naval past, the Louise Michel is decorated in bright pink, with the word “rescue” emblazoned across its hull. On its side is a large version of one of Banksy’s most instantly recognisable pieces, *Girl with Balloon*,

83
a stylised black and white block print of a small girl reaching for a balloon – except in this instance she is wearing a life jacket and reaching for a pink buoy in the shape of a heart.83

The Louise Michel’s website promotes its mission in terms of transnational activism: “The MV Louise Michel and our crew of activists and volunteers actively resist the discriminatory power structures of nationalism, racism, patriarchy and capitalism”, “We on board the Louise Michel believe we are all individuals, nationality should not make a difference to what rights one has and how we treat each other” (‘M.V. Louise Michel’ 2022).84 Those wishing to support this work are urged to think beyond charity as a solution and consider the structural issues behind the refugee ‘crisis’. A corresponding video produced by Banksy explains that their rescue mission is the result of politicians turning a blind eye to human suffering, “Because EU authorities deliberately ignore distress calls from ‘non-europeans’” (banksy.blog 2020). The ship’s Twitter account follows each missive with the hashtag “Solidarity and Resistance” (‘LouiseMichel (@MVLouiseMichel) / Twitter’ n.d.). With members of the crew who identify as anarchists (Cowles 2020), the Louise Michel’s activities could be seen to follow in the footsteps of its namesake.

Nonetheless, the press coverage, whether positive or negative, centred around Banksy, not Louise Michel. Praise for the artist’s altruism was met with suggestions that the ship was a stunt, “walking the fine line between activism and self-promotion” (‘Banksy’s “M.V. Louise Michel” at Sea Rescuing and Raising Awareness’ n.d.), or that the involvement of the celebrity artist, who has huge personal wealth and a vexed relationship with the neoliberal market, threw an uneasy light on the ship’s purported mission. “This is not only about the ethics of human life or activism,” wrote one reviewer, “but also about a system of economic and reputational profit that converts humanitarianism and tragedy into opportunistic spectacle” (Sharp 2020). With a debate over Banksy’s politics to chew on, Michel’s name either passed without comment or was relegated to a few sentences early on, in which she was mainly described as “the anarchist feminist Louise Michel” or occasionally “the French anarchist feminist Louise Michel” (eg. Tondo and Stierl 2020; ‘The Story Behind Banksy’s Pink Refugee Rescue Boat’ 2020; ‘M.V. Louise Michel, August 2020’ 2021). In an overview of news reports on the ship’s activities, I found only one in English that led with a more detailed discussion of Louise Michel herself. This was published by the Morning Star (a socialist paper) and opened with a quotation from Michel about the Kanak rebellion before developing into an interview with a member of the crew who verified that they themselves had chosen the ship’s name, regarding Michel as
the “perfect encapsulation of what we believe” (Cowles 2020). This idea, that Michel’s life and beliefs lie at the heart of the ship as a phenomenon, is a total anomaly in accounts and responses to “Banksy’s Louise Michel”.

The M. V. Louise Michel underlines the relationship between two strands in Louise Michel’s cultural afterlives. Most publicly, it stands as a demonstration of Michel’s flexibility as a mythical figure. As with the Virgin Mary of Warner’s preface or the Place Louise Michel in Montmartre, the ship’s characterisation of Louise Michel encompasses an all-purpose fight against oppression. It shows successful mythologisation as an exercise in mystery and abstraction. Like the enigma of Banksy himself, which has fuelled whole books, documentaries and court cases, Michel’s unknowability has powered her representation. The extent of her remembrance is such that understanding the attachments of individual remembering is largely impossible and often irrelevant.

Running alongside this mythologised strand is a parallel one in which there are small numbers of clearly recognisable mnemonic stakeholders who identify with Michel politically. In the example of the ship, its very naming is the result of the allegiance of a few European activists. This more(attached), more-political vision of Louise Michel has a clearer presence outside of France, where she has not reached the same mythologised status. Yet given the porous boundaries of national representations in the global age, Michel’s national remembrance seeps into her transnational memory: witness the inevitable branding of her as a “French anarchist feminist”. The dominant way in which she has been remembered continues to have a strong mythologised dimension.

This last point is, in essence, the argument of this chapter, which shows the dynamics of territorialisation in conditions of path-dependency throughout Michel’s cultural afterlives. From tensions during Louise Michel’s lifetime and following the development of Michel’s representation through a series of divisive gendered stereotypes, I have tracked the emergence of a prevailing characterisation of Michel as a saintly militant figure, buoyed up in part by self-realisation in Michel’s life writing. Across the periods 1905 to 1971 and 1971 to the present day, this chapter has assessed the presiding characterisation of Michel in national memory and shown two different ways in which Michel is territorialised into a mythologised form. In the first period Michel’s mythologisation is both the result of, and contributes to, her salience to the French CP. In the second period the same goes for the Republican state. Across both, anarchists with a clearly defined stake in Michel’s story have protested against this co-option of her memory. I have suggested there was a pivotal phase around the start of the second period,
in which an interest in repairing the historical record led feminist historiographers to seek a de-mythologised and more ‘relatable’ version of the anarchist, capable of inspiring empathy. As a counter example to these national characterisations, this chapter then gave an account of Michel’s transnational remembrance: taking her memory in the United Kingdom as a case study showing how there remain contexts in which Michel’s transnational remembrance is more radical, less mythologised and de-territorialised.

Michel’s gender is intrinsic to each stage of this overview, central to any characterisation of her as exceptional and to every attempt to frame her memory. Across her afterlives, Michel’s often-disputed performance of womanhood is ambivalent. Her gender entails that her representation by anti-Communards is all the more graphic and vivid, separating her from other prominent Communards and allowing her to become a locus for all the ‘worst’ excesses of the Commune: a metonymic link which then carried over into positive assessments of her activities. A positioning of Michel beyond rigid gender categories, which owes much to the prevalence of the Joan of Arc myth in French culture, has aided her singularity and contributed overwhelmingly to her mythologisation. Attempts to de-mythologise Michel have also rested on her status as a woman, with stakeholders seeking to form attachments on the basis of empathy (of the sort that, as I shall show, populate Goldman’s afterlives). A less- nuanced representation of Michel’s gender has played an important role in her transformation into an acceptable myth for the French state: Michel’s status as an outstanding woman has eased some of her more radical political associations. In this vein, it seems telling that Michel is repeatedly claimed as an “anarchist feminist” in articles on Banksy’s boat. Michel’s investment in women’s liberation is undeniable and the characterisation of her as a “feminist” – a term she herself would not have used and would not have been used about her until the late twentieth century – prominently and rapidly genders her. It amplifies the centrality of gender in her revolutionary struggle and suggests a more hegemonically acceptable angle to her characterisation as an anarchist. The mirror image of this also applies: across Michel’s transnational radical counter-memory, Michel’s gender is given less focus. Nonetheless, the power of Michel’s gendered national mythologisation is such that they largely overshadow alternative representations.

Louise Michel’s cultural afterlives demonstrate the usefulness of a path-dependent approach to the remembrance of oppositional figures. As she is territorialised, de-territorialised and re-territorialised over time, elements of previous Louise Michels hold strong. The symbolic
conditions laid down during her lifetime become essential to the multi-agential memory work that transforms her into a figure of national acclaim. So too is her apparent salience to successive social movements, from communism to feminism. Nonetheless, this case calls into question Jansen’s suggestion that clear ownership is a central condition for a figure to have a flourishing reputational trajectory. This chapter has argued that, despite many attempts at co-option across over a hundred years, no group has ever had a dominant hold on Michel’s remembrance. She remains resistant to definitive ownership, enigmatic, ungraspable, a figure too mythological ever to be closely associated with a single mnemonic stakeholder or small group. Sébastien Faure’s words, used in the context of infighting at her funeral, can still be applied to describe her remembrance today: *Louise Michel n’est à personne.*

23 Unless otherwise stated all translations are my own.
24 Sébastien Faure (1858–1942) was a close associate of Michel’s in the last few years of her life. Originally a socialist, he turned to anarchism in the late 1880s and went on to cofound the anarchist paper *Le Libertaire* with Michel. Long after Michel’s death, Faure continued to pay homage to her greatness. “Il serait difficile de se prononcer et j’imagine que l’aurore qui enveloppa d’un cercle resplendissant cette tête admirable, est faite de tout cela,” he wrote in 1935 (Verhaeghe 2021a, 15).
25 Accounts differ as to whether the black flag predates this moment as an anarchist sign or whether Michel was indeed the source of its symbolism.
26 Verhaeghe lists various instances in which figures have been deemed a variation on a Louise Michel-original: including Emma Goldman “la Louise Michel américaine,” or Emmeline Pankhurst as “une Louise Michel britannique” (Verhaeghe 2021a, 5).
27 In answering these questions, Verhaeghe has researched a wealth of historical media. The introduction states that she has surveyed 31 different newspapers from 1871–2013. These were chosen for their accessibility and their diversity of perspective, with a focus on the most highly mediated events of Michel’s lifetime (her return from New Caledonia, commemorations of the Commune, her imprisonment following the protest at les Invalides, the assassination attempt made on her in Havre and her death and burial), as well as subsequent anniversaries of her death and of the Commune (Verhaeghe 2021a, 11–13). These resources are amplified by public papers (Michel’s papers from the police archives, the IISG collection, that in the *Musée de l’histoire vivante*, etc.), private archives (such as that of the *Association des Amies et amis de la Commune de Paris–1871*) and a collection of other images, biographies, historical works, songs, films and television programmes. As this mighty corpus shows, the aim of *Vive Louise Michel!* is to provide a sweeping and far-reaching narrative overview of Michel’s remembrance in France up to a recent date.
28 There is a categorical distinction between *Art Vaincra!* on the one hand and *Vive Louise Michel!* on the other in the way they describe Michel’s afterlives. Both works reveal how Michel has been laden with a symbolic significance that appears, in Barthes’s terms, to be natural rather than historical. However, Rétat – a researcher of 19th-century literature and in particular Romanticism – emphasises the literary or aesthetic qualities in the remembrance of Michel’s image. In contrast, Verhaeghe draws attention to the civic stakes in Michel’s adoption by different groups, with a strong sense of the changing political narratives around her over time and attachments built from alignment or allegiance. Correspondingly, *Art Vaincra!* presents much like a coffee table book, with glossy pages of images of Michel and a selection of her writing. *Vive Louise Michel!,* on the other hand, roots its enquiry in sociological understanding, posing the central question: how come Michel remains such a well-known figure today?
29 “Quand on s’intéresse à un personnage féminin qui joue encore le rôle d’un mythe dans les mouvements de masse, pense-t-on d’abord à la beauté légendaires des grandes héroïnes ? Louise Michel fut-elle-aussi laide qu’on le dit ?” (Galera 2016, 8).
30 Verhaeghe notes that Michel was active at a time in which there was a surge in literacy levels and suggests that the press played an increasingly important role over the course of Michel’s lifetime (2021a, 79–80).
31 Michel was unusual among the communards. Not only did she survive the violence of the Commune’s final days, but she also spent many of her remaining years in France. Indeed, her eight years of exile in New Caledonia
created an aura of mystery and excitement around her, often based on her moment of near martyrdom at the end of the Commune, so that, when she returned to France in 1880, she was already a hero for many. As one of – or often the – dominant actor(s) associated with the memory of the Paris Commune, and despite her own aversion to the very notion of leadership, Michel came to stand as the lead figure of a collective of activists. As Verhaeghe describes (2021a, 28), this was in part a feature of a burgeoning worker’s movement and their desire for figureheads, to whom she was seen as emblematic of the revolutionary ideals that the Commune fought for. Her essential role in early commemorations of the Commune furthered this link.

32 Between 1880 and 1899 Michel appeared on the cover of Le Grelot at least ten times (Verhaeghe 2021a, 84).

33 Today this cartoon, and others like it, are readily available images of Michel. Several of Le Petit’s drawings circulate online where they now represent an anachronistic minority, standing in clear contradistinction to most images of Michel which are positive and laudatory. My survey of these images depends both on those available online, including in digitalised archival collections, and those which appear within books on Michel across the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first century.

34 The caption refers to a popular song from 1881, “C’est la mere Michel qui a perdu son chat’, that was often used to harass Michel at public lectures (Verhaeghe 2021a, 95), particularly when she was inexplicably late. The song continued to be sung by French children well into the twentieth century (Oliver 2005).

35 Such caricatures have clear precedents in the cartoons used to depict women active in the 1848 uprising, which played on the perceived ridiculousness of women taking on ‘men’s’ roles and frequently depicted public-facing women as sexually deviant (Strumingher 2012).

36 Examples of the postcard version of Michel as a National Guard are accessible in the archive of the Musée de l’histoire vivante in Montreuil.

37 Warner’s work on Joan of Arc tracks the myth’s entanglement in Christian iconography and her ambivalent role in French nationalism, wherein she has been adopted as a symbol for monarchists and republicans, conservatives and socialists, feminists and the far right. She is particularly interested in the increased intensity of the last of these adoptions in recent years.

38 In the nineteenth century, for instance, Winock identifies three images of Joan, “the Catholic saint, the incarnation of the patriotic people of France, and the patron of exclusive nationalism” (Winock 1998, 454), which are variably distinct and intertwined but demonstrate the flexibility and utility of her symbolic function. Equally, throughout Warner’s exploration of Joan of Arc’s afterlives, she is concerned with Joan’s relation to other sets of myths and symbols.

39 La vierge rouge was not the first instance of Michel garnering a nickname about her sexuality. She was already known as la vierge de la Commune, la pucelle de Belleville or la vierge au pétrole.

40 The notion that representations of Michel with negative valence have not endured corresponds with work by Kristen Ross (2015) on the afterlives of the Paris Commune in which she notes that over time celebratory representations of the Paris Commune came to outweigh those that were negative, as those with a negative stake in the event’s representation had little interest in furthering its commemoration.

41 Hugo was not the only contemporary poet to produce works about Michel. Paul Verlaine’s 1888 “Ballade en l’honneur de Louise Michel”, for example, also often appears in later mediations of her life.

42 Aya de Yvon’s massacres in the combat, Le peuple sur sa croix, Paris sur son grabet, La pitié formidable était dans tes paroles ;
Tu faisais ce que font les grandes âmes folles, Et lasse de lutter, de rêver, de souffrir,
Tu disais : J’ai tué ! car tu voulais mourir.
Malgré le maudisseur qui, s’acharnant sur toi,
Te jetait tous les cris indignés de la loi,
Malgré ta voix fatale et haute qui t’accuse,
Voyaien resplendir l’ange à travers la méduse.

43 This is despite the fact that Michel first and foremost saw herself as a poet, rather than a prose writer. Claiming that you could not be born in the part of Haute-Marne that she was and not be touched by a desire to be a poet, Michel wrote extensive poetry, a number of plays and even, although it is not entirely clear she was the author, an anarchist version of Eugène Pottier’s post-Commune composition L’Internationale, called “L’Internationale noire” (1897) – in 1865 she had already written a Marseille noire (Stivale 1996, 45). Her writing interweaves lyrical passages, manifesto-like explanations of her political ideas and more detached accounts of her surroundings. It was often romantic in nature, passionate in its hope for the coming revolution and melancholic in remembering those lives already lost. Although she is rarely remembered as a poet, Michel’s poetry appears to have had a sizeable contemporary audience, demonstrating the productive crossover between the literary avant-garde and the radical political forums of her day (McGuinness 2015, 52–53). The publications of her works are
frequently noted in the contemporary press (Verhaeghe 2021b, 6). Correspondingly, Michel was in close conversation, whether figuratively or literally, with many of the celebrated French writers of the late nineteenth century.

45 In recent years, a number of scholars have considered Michel’s writing from the perspective of literary criticism, often comparing her to contemporary figures (Sivale 1986; Hart 2001; McGuinness 2015). Verhaeghe (2021b) shows the increasing number of publications of Michel’s writing since the later twentieth century.

46 The narrating “I” is the teller of the autobiographical narrative – although they are inevitably split and multiple, speaking in many different voices (Smith and Watson 2010, 59–60).

47 “[T]antôt, racontant les grands jours, les luttes épiques de la première République, il avait des accents passionnés pour dire la guerre de géants où, braves contre braves, les blancs et les bleus se montraient comment meurent les héros” (Michel and Herszkowicz 1997, 28).

48 “Si je prends pour ma pensée et ma plume le droit de vagabondage,” she writes, “on conviendra que je l’ai bien payé” (Michel and Herszkowicz 1997, 17).

49 She writes that she is not as brave as rumoured and appeals to the reader not to mythologise her further: “Je ne suis pas méritante, puisque je suis ma pente comme tous les êtres et comme toutes les choses, mais je ne suis pas non plus un monstre. Nous sommes tous des produits de notre époque, voilà tout. Chacun de nous a ses qualités et ses défauts” (Michel and Herszkowicz 1997, 277).

50 “Il faut, pour revivre l’époque,” Michel writes, “entasser les documents, parler la langue de ce passé de vingt-six années, vieux de mille ans, par les scrupules enfants des hommes héroïques qui faussaient si bon marché de leur vie” (1999, 136). The Commune is already rendered the stuff of legend and throughout Michel is insistent on the historicising drive of the whole project. “La Commune à l’heure actuelle est au point pour l’histoire,” she writes (Michel 1999, 13).

51 As Verhaeghe has noted, Michel is particularly insistent on recording with precision the sheer number who were killed in the final days of the Commune: “Donner un chiffre aux morts de la Commune semble donc un élément central de la reconnaissance du massacre de la Semaine sanglante, et avec lui se joue une lutte pour la légitimité et la mémoire” (Verhaeghe 2012, 32). As an attempt to establish the official record, Michel’s fixation with the number of dead serves as a reminder of her own stake in the Commune’s remembrance. Combined with her descriptions of Paris as an effective tomb, it demonstrates her position as both actor and witness.


53 With thanks to Maarten Goossens for the translation.

54 In this instance the dispute was primarily between the boulanger Henri Rochefort, who had financially supported Michel for many years and offered to pay for the funeral, and the anarchist Ernest Girault. The anarchists felt that the funeral should be an opportunity to rally; Rochefort accused them of exploiting Michel to their own political ends. Verhaeghe contextualises this conflict, finding its roots in the Dreyfus Affair that had begun in 1894 (Verhaeghe 2021a, 159). Ultimately it was the anarchists – the anti-boulangists and dreyfusards – who came out top in this dispute. Reports of the funeral describe it as a revolutionary occupation of public space and a chance to show the continued presence of the workers’ movement on the Parisian streets (Verhaeghe 2021a, 167–68).

55 Two successive committees were formed, both campaigning for the statue to be moved to Montmartre on the basis that it could come to stand for Michel’s presence in the area. As these campaigns ran on, they promoted a symbolic connection between Michel’s remembrance and the workers’ movement and attempted to tie her to a patriotic ideal. However, it seems that Michel’s reputation still held enough sting to prevent her monumentalisation in central Paris. Furthermore, the whole idea was consistently opposed by anarchist collectives, who felt that erecting a statue to Louise Michel was anathema to everything she stood for. They protested against both the legitimacy of the committee organising the statue’s location and took an iconoclastic perspective on the very notion of paying homage to individuals (Verhaeghe 2021a, 180–81).

56 See Marie Marmo Mullaney’s article on ‘Sexual Politics in the Career and Legend of Louise Michel’ (1990) for an in-depth analysis of the ways in which these claims played out through Michel’s afterlives.

57 The CDLP series included works on Kamo, Georges Dimitrov, Marx, the Commune, June 1848 and various famous Bolshevists.

58 Descaves senior was a naturalist novelist famous for his anti-military novel Sous-Offs (1886) and was politically sympathetic to Michel. Although he was not himself an anarchist, on several occasions he bridged the gap between anarchist and other groups with a stake in Michel’s remembrance. For instance, he spoke at an anarchist rally organised in Michel’s honour around the time of her funeral (Verhaeghe 2021a, 162), but he was also a member of the first non-anarchist committee that campaigned to have Derré’s statue put up in Paris (Verhaeghe 2021a, 172).
In addition to the papers that Descaves had collected, the IISH archives now hold a wealth of material connected to Michel’s afterlives, including posters from French anarchist movements in the 1980s and even a 1938 photograph from the Spanish Civil War of “las guardarias Louise Michel”. Within these representations particular tropes are regularly repeated: references to Michel as “la bonne Louise”, “la mère Louise” or most often “la vierge rouge” and numerous caricatures with a high forehead, long nose, wispy hair, tattered dress and often carrying a black flag that is symbolic of anarchism.


Planche had himself been vital to the reinvigoration of the French anarchist federation along anti-Stalinist lines at the end of the Second World War (Verhaeghe 2021a, 209).

Lefebvre and the Situationists had long been interested in the spatial and ideological implications of the Paris Commune. Lefebvre’s La Proclamation de la Commune: 26 Mars 1871, first published in 1965, read the Commune as an urban festival and critique of everyday life (Lefebvre 2018).

“[L]e travail d’Édith Thomas est aujourd’hui considéré comme une référence, ce dont témoigne la citation quasi systématique de cet ouvrage dans les biographies ultérieures. Les représentations autour de Louise Michel sont donc profondément marquées par ce schéme interprétatif qui valorise ses qualités dites féminines (un courage marqué par une profonde bonté, une abnégation totale à la cause qu’elle défend, un engagement militant porté par la passion du dévouement) et qui met l’accent sur sa production romanesque et poétique.” (Verhaeghe 2021b, 10).

Alongside Thomas’s biography, Paule Lejeune’s Louise Michel, l’indomptable (1978) is also in this tradition. Lejeune worked as a researcher at the University of Rouen. Her work is the only biography of Michel that is published by a feminist press.

Proof of its successful circulation, Thomas’s is the only biography of Michel to have been translated into English (published in 1980) and remains in print to this day. Unlike the English translation of Michel’s memoirs, the English translation of Thomas’s biography is remarkably close to the French original. The translator notes that they have gone for as literal translation as possible with the aim of maximum “accessibility” (Thomas 2019, 10).

At points, Thomas laments a lack of clear records. She notes the jumbled nature of Michel’s biography with some suspicion: “The exact chronology of events in Louise Michel’s life is extremely difficult to determine, for her Mémoires are virtually the only source of information and in that book she keeps changing directions, covering her tracks, skipping essential points and going off on irrelevant tangents, almost as if she were trying to conceal something” (2019, 30). Thomas demonstrates a particular disdain for Girault as a reliable source: “Unfortunately, we cannot follow this Algerian trip by studying the usual sheaves of exhaustive (and exhausting) governmental and police reports. There are none. […] This means we must take Girault’s word for it” (2019, 387). This corresponds with a wider wariness of more hagiographic versions of Michel’s life, which Thomas sees herself working against.

“Louise needed crowds, she needed to plunge into their midst, make direct contact in crowded halls, whether the reception was enthusiastic or hostile” (2019, 170)

By 1989 some of these textbooks contained an extract from her memoirs (Verhaeghe 2021a, 257), while a study of sexist stereotypes in school textbooks published between 2005 and 2008 finds Michel to be the only woman presented as an active individual (Sinigaglia-Amadio 2010). Alongside her presence in academic textbooks, Michel has appeared as a figure in various French children’s books. For instance, Gérard Dhôtel’s Louise Michel : non à l’exploitation (2010) gives a romantic account of her life, with particular focus on her love for Ferré, but nonetheless situates her within a genealogy of revolutions and workers’ movements.

Such reminders of Michel’s narrative, as a story of national protest, are epitomised by the 2008 film Louise-Michel – the comedic story of workers in a children’s clothing factory who want to assassinate their boss – in which Michel’s name stands as a vague symbol of defiance to authority (Delépine et al. 2008).

Xavière Gauthier, for instance, Michel’s most recent biographer was also responsible for the 2005 publication of her correspondence. Gauthier was herself active in second wave feminism, and her readings of Michel tend to emphasise her gender. Her biography, which by its own description is written in the style of a novel, is explicit about its desire to work from Michel’s writing, to build on Michel’s account of her own life given in her memoir.

“J’ai écrit ce livre avec elle,” she writes (Gauthier 2013, 11), expressing a clear identification with her subject.

Rétat was instrumental in having Michel’s novel La Chasse aux loups published by a publishing house who normally specialise in literary classics (Verhaeghe 2021b, 4).

Given that revolution is the great unknown, Rétat reasons, Michel’s ready embrace and promotion of revolutionary politics is an act of extraordinary imaginative power: “elle est aveugle, reconnaissant l’obscur et,
du même mouvement, revendiquant l’art, avec une certitude de toucher, de déclencher, sans savoir exactement où, quand, quoi et comment” (Réauté 2019, 21). This characterisation of Michel as an aesthetically charged figure infuses Réauté’s version of her afterlives. Art vaincrà! contains a substantial section on Michel’s posthumous mythologisation through art, which places her in “la grande tradition du mythe révolutionnaire” (Réauté 2019, 107). Réauté considers Michel’s material commemoration through an analysis of various sites dedicated to her memory, including Derré’s statue, a 1968 fresco made by socialist painter Boris Taslitzky, monuments in Vroncourt and Nouméa and street art connected to Michel, cultural artefacts ranging across time and space and from the more permanent to the transient.


74 Her memoirs were not only translated into English in 1981 but also into German in 1977. Her work on the Commune, which up to the late 1960s/early 1970s had only appeared in Spanish (1904) and Russian (1926), was translated into Italian (1969, 1971), Japanese (1971) and, more recently, Spanish again (2014, 2016).

75 “Estos procesos memorialísticos han oscurecido, sin embargo, la dimensión teórica y política de la militancia y la escritura de Louise Michel” (Martínez 2021, 23).

76 See for instance the radical website libcom.org which has a sizeable digital archive of material on Michel.

77 Evaluations of her love for either Hugo or Ferré, if not both, of these men run throughout French meditations of Michel’s memory. The most extreme incarnation of this tendency is Yves Murie’s self-published work Victorine : le grand secret de Louise Michel which describes the writer’s “intime conviction” (Murie 1999, 9), not only that Michel and Hugo had an affair but also that that affair produced a child called Victorine.

78 In 2013 he chose her as the subject of an episode of the BBC radio programme Great Lives, setting out the key events of her life and lamenting her limited reputation in the UK (‘Great Lives - Series 31 - Paul Mason on Louise Michel - BBC Sounds’ n.d.).

79 Reviews of Divine Chaos focus on Mason’s political vision and historical accuracy rather than the play’s potential artistic merit, suggesting it comes primarily from a place of political, rather than aesthetic, intent (Gardner 2017, for example). In line with this, Mason has spoken about the thorough research he undertook in order to write the play. In addition to reading her writing and biographies, Mason visited archives in New Caledonia and spoke with the ancestors of Communards who were still living there (Mason 2017).

80 Although the Talbots show a version of Michel who is politically radical and quick to incite violence, in other respects the representation is familiar ground: she is strong-willed, an individual actor and characterised by an almost uncanny desire to protect those around her at all costs. Indeed, Martínez cites the comic as an example of the same depoliticising tendency that has characterised Michel’s wider remembrance: “La imagen que difunde es la de Louise Michel revolucionaria, romántica y abnegada, muy acotada al periodo 1871–1880 y muy afin a la biografía realizada por Edith Thomas en 1971. No hay ni rastro, sin embargo, de que Louise Michel escribiera sobre esos mundos utópicos que aparecían en su imaginación, ni tampoco, en realidad, de que Louise Michel fuera una escritora de fuerte impronta anarquista” (Martínez 2021, 34).

81 The Red Virgin has proved popular internationally and now has editions in Spanish (2016), Turkish (2018) and Greek (2019).

82 Indeed, Google Trends demonstrates a large spike in international searches for “Louise Michel”. Although this was not the case in France where Michel’s name is consistently a regularly searched term, presumably in part because of the many institutions, streets, etc. named after her.

83 The same image had recently been at the heart of a recent controversial performance by Banksy, in which a priceless copy of Girl with Balloon publicly shredded itself at a Sotheby’s art auction.

84 The ship’s crew aim to live out these principles internally as well as externally: the website noting that the Louise Michel is “captained and crewed by a team of rescue professionals drawn from across Europe. She runs on a flat hierarchy and a vegan diet” (‘M.V. Louise Michel’ 2022).

85 The other name mentioned as an option for the ship’s name is that of American abolitionist Harriet Tubman.
Remembering ‘Red Emma’

“Steampunk Emma Goldman Reads the New Declaration of Independence” was uploaded onto YouTube on 7 October 2011. The video’s title screen identifies that it was filmed the previous day on Liberty Plaza, New York City, right in the middle of Occupy Wall Street (OWS): anti-capitalist protests which began in New York and swept across the world. It opens to a shot of a person dressed in an old-fashioned high-collared shirt and small flat glinting pince-nez standing on a slightly raised platform in the middle of a bustling crowd. Some of the crowd remain still and watch with amused expressions while others pass by with only a glance as she addresses them in a ringing voice: “Hello! My name is Emma Goldman”. The crowd cheer their greetings and ‘Emma’ continues: “Perhaps some of you have heard of me… I have travelled through time to be with you in 2011 at Liberty Plaza, because I love what you are doing here! The New York Times said this Saturday that any attempt to clear this plaza would result… in the resurrection of Emma Goldman: TOO LATE!” (Noam Berg 2011). She raises her fist in the air in a triumphant gesture of defiance. The performer goes on to read from Emma Goldman’s 1909 essay “The New Declaration of Independence”, pouring out rabble-rousing phrases with breathless fervour. When she is finished the audience cheer and this apparition of Goldman enthusiastically gives her thanks. Her resurrection has evidently been a success and for the OWS crowds, her words, written more than a hundred years before, appear to hold strong and true.

This performance – stagy yet intimate, playful yet forceful, seemingly spontaneous but artfully calibrated and, above all, self-consciously aware of the power of theatricality to harness and mobilise public attention – fits with many characterisations of the anarchist revolutionary Emma Goldman (1869–1940). “Nothing in the way of OWS street theater,” writes Vivian Gornick, Goldman’s most recent biographer, “could have better invoked the spirit of the protest than the appearance of a principled anarchist, born nearly a century and a half ago” (2011). Summoned from the dead to once again address the ills of capitalist greed, Goldman’s ‘appearance’ at OWS marks her continued importance as a harbinger of radical change and the prevailing belief that her very words, combined here with some invocations of her person, will inspire such change.

Since her death in 1940, Emma Goldman has been subject to reimaginings in film, theatre, novels, song, artistic installations, memorabilia, and more. These range in the depth and detail with which they treat their subject, from comprehensive monographs on Goldman’s political potential to more incidental or fleeting invocations (as in the song by Sophie Ellis-Bextor or Daniel Otero Torres’s installation that opened this study) that use her image or allude to her words. The weight and emphasis of Goldman’s politics fluctuates across these representations. She has, over the years since her death in 1940, been cited as an inspiration for anarchist, anti-capitalist, freedom of speech, and LGBTQ+ campaigns. But her use as a mobilising figure for these social movements is largely the result of her reclamation in the mid-to late-twentieth century, when Goldman’s story was picked up by a new wave of activists, particularly feminists, who were interested in a reparative search for appropriate historical role models.

Indeed, in his taxonomy of reputational trajectories, Robert S. Jansen takes Goldman as an example of a figure whose “inherited symbolic conditions” (those available to early “reputational entrepreneurs”) have no salience, a neutral valence and were not owned by any prominent party. Despite these unfavourable conditions, he claims that she was “resurrected” by second-wave feminists from “collective amnesia” (Jansen 2007, 993). This is a familiar assertion in work on Goldman’s afterlives. “Emma Goldman’s name has re-emerged from obscurity,” wrote her early biographer Alix Kates Shulman in 1996, “to become a veritable password of radical feminism” (Goldman and Shulman 1998, 4). Despite the range of causes and campaigns that she was involved in, her deep-rooted internationalism and her own political identification as an anarchist above all else, Emma Goldman’s cultural memory has been
defined by the development of the American branch of the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) in the latter half of the twentieth century. Were it not for a relatively small number of radical feminists active in the 1960s and 1970s, it seems fair to say that Goldman would not be as well-known a figure as she is now. Emma Goldman’s remembrance has been formed and sustained through a reparative mode. This reparative remembrance is constructed through rhetorics of close attachment that reoccur across mediations of Goldman’s life, in which recognition and empathy colour and merge with expressions of allegiance and alignment.

However, this chapter counters suggestions, like Jansen’s, that Goldman’s reclamation effectively comes out of nowhere. Instead, I argue that claims that the symbolic conditions at the time of her death were unpromising fail to fully take into account the resources Goldman contributed towards her own remembrance and the central role played by her autobiographical self-fashioning. As with Michel, this chapter shows the importance of path-dependency in shaping Goldman’s afterlives: Goldman’s continued cultural presence as a revolutionary character has been secured by the combination of her own representational work, the salience that later subjects found in her and the work they undertook to bring about reparative remembrance in response to perceived political imperatives of the day.

Roadmap
My approach to Goldman’s afterlives is similar to that of the previous chapter on Michel. The structure of the chapter takes account of 1) Goldman’s representation during her lifetime, 2) her ‘resurrection’ by feminists in the 1960s and 70s, including the ongoing effects of this period, and 3) her contemporary remembrance. Each section broadly corresponds to the three historical moments Jansen identifies to determine the trajectory of a reputation (2007, 965). Once again, I have analysed the broad sweep of Goldman’s changing remembrance over time through the close reading of representations in some widely circulated longform mediations that develop the narrative of her memory; these are set alongside shortform cultural mediations that act as “reminders” (Rigney 2021) of prevailing narratives. ‘Remembering ‘Red Emma’ opens with an outline of Goldman’s life and beliefs, a further delineation of reparative remembrance as a constitutive force in her afterlives and a description of previous research into her cultural memory. From there, a section on ‘Emma Goldman’s Symbolic Availability’ makes the claim that Goldman’s writing and archive have established the fundamental material and symbolic conditions for her recollection in longform mediations. I close read her 1931 autobiography Living My Life as an expression of Goldman’s
agency, arguing that the performance of her gender therein works to construct a model of intertwined political and personal subjectivity that has been pivotal to her subsequent remembrance. Next, I explore Goldman’s afterlives as a ‘Radical Feminist’. Pointing out the negligible production of representations in the years immediately following her death, I provide a historical overview of her remembrance in the late twentieth century which is supplemented by an analysis of several central texts and their paratexts. This analysis highlights the centrality of a rhetoric of repair, rooted in second-wave feminism, in the circulation of Goldman’s afterlives. I then explore some of the after-effects of this reclamation in subsequent feminist readings of Goldman before going to look into the fictional representations that form a part of this reparative remembrance.

In the final part of this chapter, I follow Goldman’s cultural memory up to the present day. Here I consider the ways in which Goldman’s construction as a radical feminist has prioritised certain representations of her (most obviously focusing on her political ideas around gender) at the expense of others. I go in search of less prominent or visible mediations, in which Goldman is a more violent, anarchistic or transnational figure. Taking each of these characterisations in turn, I take stock of those instances in which Goldman’s remembrance could be seen to fall outside of the version of her presented in the preceding sections. While this endeavour demonstrates the presence of less-canonical memories, it also maintains a sense of the threads – most notably Goldman’s autobiographical writing – which tie together varying representations of the anarchist. By focusing on the role of reparative remembrance, I highlight the agency and commitment of memory workers who inspire and affect the continued circulation of Goldman’s remembrance.

**Emma Goldman’s Life and Beliefs**

Here I provide the bare bones of Goldman’s ‘story’. This account narrativizes a number of events in Goldman’s life that occupy prominent positions in her afterlives and outlines some central strands in her political ideas, as represented in her autobiography, biographical and broader historical works (Goldman 1970; Drinnon 1976; Wexler 1984; Falk 1990; Frankel 1996; Goldman and Shulman 1998; Goldman and Porter 2006; Ferguson 2011; Shulman 2011; Gornick 2013; Hemmings 2018).

Eventful, fast-paced and with an undercurrent of constant energy and activity, Goldman’s life “seems to have encompassed the activities of not one woman but of many”
(Wexler 1984, xv). Born in the Russian Empire (now Lithuania) in 1869 Goldman emigrated to the United States at the age of sixteen, living first in Rochester, New York State. Goldman became a committed anarchist following the trial and punishment of the ‘Haymarket Martyrs’: anarchist agitators whose mistreatment by the state turned them into a *cause célèbre*. In 1889, following an unsuccessful marriage to a man named Jacob Kershner, Goldman moved to New York City, where she became part of a group of international anarchists including Alexander ‘Sasha’ Berkman, who would go on to be a lifelong comrade, and Johann Most, who was for a while Goldman’s mentor.

In 1892 Berkman was sentenced to twenty-two years in prison after he attempted, in a planned act of ‘propaganda of the deed’, to assassinate the coke and steel magnate Henry Clay Frick. Goldman was also implicated in the attack. She had by this point begun to give anarchist lecture tours and was becoming an increasingly notorious public figure, labelled a dangerous woman by the American press. Berkman’s imprisonment became a defining feature of this period of her life. Alongside various attempts to shorten his sentence or help him break out of prison, she continued to give speeches at protests and demonstrations, to take part in anarchist campaigns across the country and, in 1895, travelled to Europe, training as a nurse in Vienna. When President William McKinley was assassinated by an anarchist in 1901, Goldman was undeservedly incriminated and arrested. For a while she changed her name and avoided public political appearances; instead, she travelled and acted as promoter for a Russian theatre troupe journeying across the States.

A few years later, and in a more permissive and progressive political atmosphere, Goldman once again became a public figure. In 1906 she helped found and became editor of the magazine *Mother Earth*, also hosting annual fundraising lecture tours for the magazine. In the same year, Berkman was released from prison. The ten to twelve years that followed, in which Goldman was arguably at her most popular, tend to be the most prominent in her remembrance. During this period, she gave huge and well-attended lectures on diverse subjects from birth control to modern drama, she wrote and published some of her most positively received works, she became involved in the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and was immersed in international causes. It was around this time that she met Ben Reitman, who became her tour manager and, on and off, her lover. With the U.S. involvement in the First World War, an increasingly hostile atmosphere led to multiple arrests of prominent radicals and in 1917 Goldman and Berkman were sentenced to two years’ imprisonment for opposing
military conscription. When they were eventually released, they were both deported, along with 247 other ‘alien radicals’, to the newly formed USSR.

Exiled in Soviet Russia, Goldman was bitterly disappointed by the revolutionary regime that she had previously supported wholeheartedly. Both she and Berkman were shocked by the Bolsheviks’ suppression of anarchism and their repressive attitudes towards freedom of speech. In 1921 the two left Russia and spent a restless few years travelling across Europe and Canada, where Goldman continued to write and lecture before settling in St Tropez in the south of France. It was here that Goldman wrote her autobiography Living My Life. After Berkman’s death in 1936, Goldman enlisted to help the Republican cause during the Spanish Civil War. She threw her energy into campaigning, visited Spain to see anarchism in practice and became the chief English language spokesperson for the Loyalists’ main anarchist organisation (CNT-FAI). When the Republicans were defeated in 1939, Goldman moved back to Canada, where she spent the remaining year of her life. She died in Toronto in 1940 at the age of 70 and, at her request, was buried in Chicago, next to the graves of the Haymarket Martyrs.

Goldman’s political career spanned a time when anarchism claimed a big following and she was involved in or associated with many of the most important anarchist events of the era in the United States: from the Haymarket affair to the McKinley assassination. Throughout her life Goldman maintained a strong and steady opposition to what she saw as the twin evils of militarism and capitalism. Like Louise Michel, she was a committed internationalist, both conceptually and practically: she considered nationalism to be an inextricable evil of capitalism and supported revolutions across the world. Indeed, late nineteenth century anarchism of the sort that both espoused was a fundamentally international movement, a global phenomenon which held the rejection of borders as one of its key principles (Anderson 2013).

In some respects, Goldman was at odds with the anarchist movement of her day (which had become more well-defined and established than it had been during Michel’s lifetime) – for instance, in her insistence on the importance of women’s emancipation. She fought to legalise birth control, preached the virtues of free love, the value of education, the transformative power of art and was politically committed to criticising prejudice against people of different sexualities. All these campaigns have since been considered part and parcel of Goldman’s anarchist vision. She also railed against the contemporary women’s movement of her day, which she saw as a pursuit for the elite and a distraction from class politics. She was outspoken in her condemnation of campaigns for women’s suffrage: writing in “The Tragedy of Women’s
Emancipation” (1906) that “[p]olitics is a reflex of business and the industrial world” (Goldman 2013, 35) and calling universal suffrage “our modern fetish” in “Woman Suffrage” (1910) (Goldman 2013, 59). Furthermore, after her criticism of the Soviet Union in My Disillusionment in Russia (1925) Goldman became something of a pariah for much of the American Left of her day, who were mostly supportive of Lenin’s activities.

This antagonism was characteristic, Goldman’s life was a lived with a keen awareness of the dangers of compromise. Her ceaseless agitation and preparation for revolutionary opportunity and her commitment to the transformative potential of human action, through protest and through everyday practices, was unerring.

Reparative Remembrance
Dramatized by the prevailing claim that she was rescued from inglorious obscurity, Emma Goldman’s remembrance serves as an exemplary case of the workings of reparative rhetoric in the cultural afterlives of prominent women. Goldman died in relative anonymity. Before her body was brought back to the United States from Toronto to be buried alongside the graves of the Haymarket martyrs in 1940, she had not been back to the United States since a short lecture tour in 1934, and, with the exception of residual negative depictions in the press and the rekindling of her memory amongst her one-time comrades, she received limited attention in the years directly following her death. From the 1960s onwards this began to change. Goldman rose to notoriety in the burgeoning WLM, first in the United States and then more internationally, with a consistently expressed sense of urgency that her story must be shared. These feminists were invested in reclaiming an alternative version of the past, one which has previously been overlooked or diminished, often in order to provide a visible pathway to – and mobilise further – struggles in the present.

As noted in this study’s introduction, Patricia Stuelke locates a “reparative turn” (2021, 4) in the latter half of the twentieth century, the same period as Goldman was ‘rediscovered’, in both activist and scholarly spheres. Stuelke argues that the passage of 1960s social movements into institutions of learning and artistic or literary production correlates with a burgeoning rhetoric of “repair” which promoted a turn to affect and feeling in practices of dissent. This transition corresponds with what Lauren Berlant has termed a shift to a “politics of intimacy” (1997, 7) over the same period. Here, the political sphere – at least in the United States, though in their later work Berlant identifies similar shifts in Western Europe – emerges as an affective space marked by sentimentality: “a space of attachment and identification that
is not saturated merely by ideological or cognitive content but is also an important sustainer of people’s desires for reciprocity with the world” (Berlant 2008, xi). The turn to sentimentality in politics that Berlant examines is central to the development of a reparative turn of the kind described by Stuelke. Both promise “affective connection across difference” (Stuelke 2021, 25), call to humanise and to feel with, and replace “the ethical imperative toward social transformation” with a “vaguely civic-minded ideal of compassion” (Berlant 2008, 41).

Such affects saturate Goldman’s apparent resurrection. The project of claiming her as a feminist figure has its origins in the memory work of a few prolific writers who, through acts of mediation and remediation, have integrated ideas about their own relationships with Goldman into the formation of her cultural afterlives. These mnemonic stakeholders stress their sense of “attention and identification” with her, their sense of connection despite their temporal difference.

Goldman is therefore used to straddle past, present and future, providing a purposeful invocation of the past, in the present, in order to alter the trajectory of the future. “Engaging in the work of feminist genealogy is to learn from the experience, disappointments and theoretical inspiration of women who have come before us,” writes Lori Jo Marso in an article that reads Goldman’s life in service of a radical critique of intimacy: “This represents one step towards breaking the cycle of endless repetition of the same battles” (2003, 317). Promoting Goldman as an antidote to patriarchal historicising, remembering subjects show a concern for the processes of memory work as a form of knowledge production. Their furtherance of Goldman as a historical example self-consciously suggests that her remembrance will fix gaps in the historical record. With the aim of intervening as well as uncovering, the investment of these actors in their memory work does not claim to be objective or neutral. Instead, they narrate and describe variations on the intersubjective relationship between themselves remembering Goldman and Goldman as remembered subject.

Expressions of affective intimacy between mnemonic stakeholders and Goldman tend to emphasise the events of Goldman’s life and character over the substance of her theoretical ideas. Her representation is not necessarily de-politicised but, with great emphasis on the self as the starting point for collective liberation, it develops new and different political resonances. Such emphasis on Goldman’s story comes with implications for the ways in which she is gendered. “Stories,” writes Francesca Polletta in her work on the political effects of storytelling, “are generally thought to be more affecting but less authoritative than analysis, in
part because narrative is associated with women rather than men, the private sphere rather than
the public one, and custom rather than law” (2006, 177). Through acts of storytelling Goldman
is interpellated as a remarkable public character – taking characters as “close approximations
of real human beings, only more compelling and more familiar” and representing “something
people are, in contrast to other roles that they simply do” (Jasper et al. 2020, 3) – with an
emphasis on her gender. The recollection of Goldman as a public character increases the
circulation of her ideas but it often also comes at the cost of a thorough engagement with them,
superseding recollection of her as a political actor.

Previous Work on Goldman’s Afterlives

As set out above, this chapter pursues the idea that Goldman’s cultural afterlives have been
dominated by a reparative version of her that was formed by the early WLM in the United
States. My discussion of this representation is indebted to the work of Oz Frankel (1996) and
Clare Hemmings (2018), who both explore and examine Goldman’s afterlives, in Frankel’s
case as part of a cultural historical sketch of Goldman’s burgeoning celebrity and in Hemmings’
case as an enquiry into queer feminist theorising.

Frankel charts Goldman’s progression as a figure who was both more accessible and
more palatable to a wider American audience than many of her radical contemporaries. He
documents how Goldman was ‘discovered’ and mobilised by the radical arm of the women’s
movement as part of a legitimising effort to narrate their own genealogy and construct historical
background for a contemporary struggle (1996, 919–23). The article describes a flurry of
popular mediations in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and explores how, from there, following
a trajectory consistent with the movement of much of second wave feminism, Goldman’s
remembrance moved into the academy. Frankel concludes that by the time he was writing at
the end of the twentieth century Goldman still held a clear position in feminist imaginaries, for
activists and academics, but much of her simplicity as a famous name had diminished and she
was a somewhat fractured figure.

Hemmings’s work frames responses to Goldman within a politics of ambivalence. Hemmings
points out that Goldman’s allure for feminists, including contemporary feminists, comes from her
(apparently anachronistic) intertwining of the personal and the political. Goldman “sought to politicise
nature” (Hemmings 2018, 153), drawing the connection between these different spheres in her own theorising. The idea that the transformation of politics in intimate or domestic terms might bring about a sea change in social attitudes across a range of
issues has continued to resonate with feminist and queer understandings of inequality and oppression. Hemmings’s work suggests that remembering subjects hold on to Goldman’s contradictions as testimony to an intertwining of personal and political that they see as necessary for feminist analysis.

Both works implicitly explore how the version of Goldman formed by feminist readings of her life and work since the 1960s changes in relation to wider waves of contention. And further agree about the ways in which this version develops in close response to the availability of materials from Goldman’s life, the discoveries of which are arguably prompted by wider social shifts in attitudes towards feminism and anarchism. The Goldman who emerges from these works is often positioned between seemingly irreconcilable poles. So for Hemmings, “Goldman is frequently cited as embodying the kind of radical spirit that is most needed in the present if the political and methodological deadlock between neoliberal and socialist forces is to be broken” (2018, 1) and for Frankel, “[T]he often crossed but still anxiety-ridden line between radicals and liberals would become the subtext of much commemoration of Goldman later in the century” (1996, 918). They show how, in the realm of Goldman’s appropriation as a feminist foremother, the indeterminacy of many of her political positions – as they developed, transformed and were recast over the course of her seventy-year-long life – has had a particularly generative effect, proliferating new interpretations and mediations.

The present study is indebted to these works and develops them in several respects. Firstly, it seeks to uncover how Goldman’s reputation as a feminist is formed through relational processes: in interactions between remembering and remembered subjects and in the “intertextual antagonism” (Rigney 1990) between accounts of her life. I give new weight to Goldman’s self-presentation and tease out the motivations which are claimed for her retrieval. Secondly, this chapter considers the counter side to Goldman’s reparative remembrance as a feminist by questioning the potential exclusions from such a characterisation. The aim, by the end of this chapter, is to better understand why Goldman’s afterlives have developed in accordance with Frankel and Hemmings’s accounts.

**Emma Goldman’s Symbolic Availability**

Goldman’s management of her own remembrance – primarily in her 1931 autobiography *Living My Life*, but also through the organisation of her archival material – stands as a bulwark to her afterlives. The resurgence of interest in Goldman’s life took her autobiography as its
starting point and 1970 alone saw the publication of three new editions of *Living My Life* which, as Frankel perceptively points out, “combined an accessible, albeit at times vague, radical ideology with a flesh-and-blood political heroine” (1996, 923). Variably pithy and passionate, *Living My Life* was essentially treated as a repository of ideas and observations from which a radical character could be built. To this day, the text stands as the definitive “portable monument” (Rigney 2004) to Emma Goldman and the mechanism behind much of her remembrance.

I interpret Goldman’s autobiography using Smith and Watson’s taxonomy of various “autobiographical ‘I’s” to treat the teller of the story themselves as produced by and productive of multiplicity. The “real” or historical ‘I’ amounts to the Goldman who was once alive, acting outside of the text, and is therefore fundamentally unknown to her readers. The narrating “I” is the speaker of the autobiographical narrative – although she is inevitably split and multiple, speaking in many different voices. The narrated ‘I’ is the subject of the autobiographical narrative. Finally, the “ideological ‘I’” (Smith 1988, 105) accounts for the availability of certain modes and models of personhood for a given narrator.92 Ideological ‘I’s offer relational and historically contingent subject positions which the autobiographical narrator may, wittingly or unwittingly, adopt and adapt.

Previous work has considered *Living My Life* through the paradigm of life writing studies: see Martha Watson’s third chapter in *Lives of Their Own: Rhetorical Dimensions in Autobiographies of Women Activists*, which explores how “Goldman assumes the rhetorical burden of conveying cogently the ‘truth’ of anarchism” (1998, 32), or Herbert A. Leibowitz’s somewhat paternalistic psychoanalytic reading of the work as “barren of self-knowledge” (1991, 14) in *Fabricating Lives: Explorations in American Autobiography*. However, none of these works connect their readings of her autobiography to Goldman’s ensuing cultural afterlives. My concern here is to understand how, through the interaction of these voices, Goldman’s self-representation has influenced the development of her remembrance and, in particular, its prominent position within radical feminism. I argue that *Living My Life* constructs a self who is both politically anchored and personally conflicted: facets which have prompted subsequent remembering subjects to build an idea of Goldman as a relatable or aspirational feminist subject, salient to the struggles of later movements.
*Living My Life*

When Goldman began to write the story of her life in 1927, she contacted many of her friends and other correspondents asking them to make copies of her side of their exchanges. This request seems to have been well-received. For one thing, Goldman was a prolific letter writer, reportedly writing up to ten in a day, and many of those she contacted had held on to old letters in the conviction that they might come to be of some historical importance (Falk, Cole, and Thomas 1994). In recognition of this process, Goldman the narrator opens *Living My Life* with a short note of appreciation, which thanks those who returned her “mountains” of letters and enthuses that her life “owes everything to those who had come into it, stayed long or little, and passed out. Their love, as well as their hate, has gone into making my life worthwhile” (Goldman 1970, vii). She depicts her life as kind of collective outcome of many lives and perspectives, both positive and negative. Correspondingly, towards the end of *Living My Life* she weaves into the narrative her friends’ growing insistence that she should write her life story, uniting narrator with narrated: “‘A woman of your past!’ he [her friend the writer Howard Young] exclaimed; ‘just think what you could make of it!’” (985). The act of recounting her life and telling her story is situated within a communal call, an effective invitation for future interpreters to join in. In line with this communal focus, Goldman’s autobiography is extremely long and restlessly eventful, featuring an ever-changing cast of characters and political concerns that move in and out of focus at a rapid rate. Towards the end, Goldman changes country so frequently that is often unclear exactly where events are taking place. Wexler’s comment that *Living My Life* “resembled a sprawling nineteenth-century novel” (Wexler 1992, 38) seems apt. The autobiography evokes Henry James’s attack on the novels of that time as “large loose and baggy monsters” (1934, 84).

A literary self-consciousness pervades Goldman’s writing. *Living My Life*’s very title suggests life as an activity, something to be carried out or performed. *Living My Life* is aligned, playfully, with an American literary tradition that details and extols the tale of immigrant success, a known phenomenon for many of Goldman’s early readers. Opening with its protagonist’s arrival in New York, “It was the 15th of August 1889, the day of my arrival in New York City. I was twenty years old. All that had happened in my life until that time was now left behind me, cast off like a worn-out garment” (1970, 3), the narrative is structured to focus on Goldman’s Americanness. Her arrival in New York takes the place of the scenes of
early childhood common to a conventional life story and is given the weight of the primary event from which Goldman’s character is constructed.

This account reproduces many of the tropes of the ‘American Dream’. Goldman describes, for example, her journey to the United States in terms of euphoric wonder: “Helena [her sister] and I stood pressed to each other, enraptured by the sight of the harbour and the Statue of Liberty suddenly emerging from the mist” (1970, 11). (Indeed, this description is a function of Goldman’s historical imagination rather than her lived experience: the statue, in the year she arrived in the United States, was not yet assembled or on its pedestal (Goldman et al. 2003, 5).) The narrative moves forwards chronologically and, although it does include flashbacks to Goldman’s childhood in Russia, these are mostly revealed through discussions of her earlier years with new friends and comrades in the United States. After these digressions, Goldman always arrives back to the ‘present’.94 Her life before New York is variably shown as behind a closed door or as a cast-off garment; where it is included, it is for its explanatory power, lending logic to her actions since arriving in New York. (It is worth noting that, writing from exile in France and keen to return to the country in which she was best known, Goldman had strong motivation for shedding an affirmative light on her loyal commitment to the United States.)

Not only does Goldman align herself with an American literary tradition but she places her activism firmly within an American genealogy of protest. Central to this heritage is the trial and punishment of the eight ‘Haymarket Martyrs’, four of whom were hanged in 1887. These events have a catalysing effect on Living My Life and are positioned as the driving force behind Goldman’s actions. A page titled “My Social Awakening” sets out the killing of the Haymarket martyrs as the moment of Goldman’s anarchist conversion: “The innocent blood of the Haymarket martyrs was calling for revenge […] something new and wonderful had been born in my soul. A great ideal, a burning faith, a determination to dedicate myself to the memory of my martyred comrades” (1970, 9–10). Foregrounding her moment of conversion in religious terms, Living My Life crafts a self who has their roots in accounts of salvation, adhering to conventions of the classical autobiographical subject and writing “as a form of devotion in the service of a spiritual examination” (Smith and Watson 2010, 105). Goldman’s desire to avenge the martyrs’ deaths provides the autobiography with narrative momentum. References to the injustice of their punishment and to her sense of connection to their struggle crop up repeatedly.95 The martyrs’ haunting presence as Goldman’s forefathers (she calls herself their “spiritual child” (1970, 307)), despite the fact that she had never met them, provides a core
sense of activism as a social undertaking: dependent on remembrance and capable of comradery across divisions of life and death.

Following this moment of anarchist conversion, ‘the cause’ takes up a central position in constructing the text’s ideological ‘I’. With the Haymarket Martyrs celebrated as both mentors and comrades, the anarchist cause becomes the object of intimate curiosity and intense emotion. *Living My Life* returns often to the question of how to reconcile commitment to the cause with feelings of pleasure and joy or appreciation of beauty. This is perhaps at its most resonant in a passage which, Shulman suggests, gave rise to the popular quotation with which this study began: “If I can’t dance I don’t want to be in your revolution” (Shulman 1991) and other variations. In this passage, Goldman describes a dance organised by Jewish radicals in New York in which a cousin of Berkman’s reproaches her:

With a grave face, as if he were about to announce the death of a dear comrade, he whispered to me that it did not behoove an agitator to dance. […] I grew furious at the impudent interference of the boy. I told him to mind his own business, I was tired of having the Cause constantly thrown into my face. I did not believe that a Cause which stood for a beautiful ideal, for anarchism, for release and freedom from conventions and prejudice, should demand the denial of life and joy.

To love the cause, she suggests, is also to love to dance, to have fun – a sentiment which ebbs and flows but remains at the heart of *Living My Life*. (The sloganized versions of this moment understandably ignore the fact that Goldman, fearing Berkman’s remonstration, stopped dancing after this interaction.) As Frankel points out, a sense of alignment with this sentiment is constitutive of representations of Goldman as a “vital spirit” (1996, 922) that recur throughout her feminist adoption.

Likewise, it is Goldman’s proclaimed zeal for the cause that lends pathos to other parts of *Living My Life*. When, for instance, she comes to terms with her loss of faith in the USSR, this realisation is felt in terms of a dramatic existential loss: “…now Bolshevism was shorn of its pretence, its naked soul exposed to my gaze. […] I was stunned, baffled, the ground pulled from under me” (1970, 755). Goldman the narrator imbues the narrated Goldman with a strong and consistent sense of her underlying values; even in her moments of doubt or change, such as this, she retains a core certainty that the strength of her “gaze” might uncover the truth. She draws her reader into the apparent totality of her vision. Goldman’s rendering of her commitment to a core set of ideas goes on to lay the groundwork for strong ethical or political attachments expressed by later subjects who cite her conviction as inspirational.
But the appeal of Goldman’s self-realisation in *Living My Life* is also based on her vulnerabilities and her equivocations, particularly in her narrated ‘I’’s complicated relationship with gender. *Living My Life* is more acutely focused on Goldman’s ‘outer life’ than her ‘inner life’ and Goldman’s gender is mostly reflected in the way people treat her, the expectations they appear to have of her and her reactions to those expectations, both affirmative and destructive. This dynamic often appears in the perceived mismatch between Goldman’s violent reputation and her approachable, even mild, appearance. During a stint in prison, a doctor reacted with indignation to the card on her bed which describes her crimes: “Inciting to riot,’ he read. ‘Piffle! I don’t believe you could hurt a fly. A fine inciter you would make!’ he chuckled…” (137). Fellow anarchists express similar sentiments: in one scene Goldman reacts against her comrade Robert Reitzel,

“Look at her!” he [Reitzel] cried, “look at her; does she resemble the monster pictured by the press, the fury of a hetætra? Behold her black dress and white collar, prim and proper, almost like a nun.” He was making me embarrassed and self-conscious. “You are praising me as if I were a horse you wanted to sell,” I finally objected.

(205)

The introduction of these moments offers salient narratives for later feminists: Goldman is perceived to be performing a role outside of the confines of femininity and is hurriedly reinterpreted as conforming and benign. By reporting Goldman’s rejection of such constrictions, as in her objection to Reitzel, *Living My Life* signals an awareness of these strictures and her place outside of them. Further accounts of Goldman’s contradiction of gendered stereotypes signal her individuality and her rejection of ‘women’ as a collective. Goldman appears to disdain any markers of femininity. “[W]omen” or “mere females” are branded as a collective with a set of unattractive attitudes and behaviours, whereas *Living My Life* presents Goldman as an individual outside of that collective, her own agent.

But this is not the end of the story. Goldman the narrated ‘I’ plays up aspects of her gender for theatrical effect: she consistently brings questions of sexuality and gender into more traditional anarchist discussions; she stands up for women’s rights; and tries to make sense of the relationship between femininity and her sense of self. When the alternative is being compared to a man, Goldman hurries to demonstrate her position as a woman. In some of the autobiography’s most intimate moments, Goldman narrates her, sometimes reluctant, similarities to other less ‘exceptional’ women. In these instances, Goldman’s identification as a woman is linked to her vulnerability, her openness and a potential loss of control. These representations set the tone for, what Hemmings calls, “ambivalence” in Goldman’s later
remembrance: the self that is constructed by Living My Life enacts a gendered performance which is often individualised, setting Goldman aside from other women, but it remains embedded in an awareness that individual experiences are inculcated within wider structures of power and control.

Living My Life’s capacity to elicit recognition or empathy in its later readers comes in part from Goldman’s expression of her vulnerability and her attempts to make sense of the fractured nature of her position as subject. She expresses this fracture in terms of her own feelings of heterogeneity, which she again compares to apparent wholeness of her male role models, writing that

I was not hewn of one piece, like Sasha or other heroic figures. I had long realized that I was woven of many skeins, conflicting in shade and texture. To the end of my days I should be torn between the yearning for a personal life and the need of giving all to my ideal.

Unlike the men around her, Goldman describes a boundary between the personal and the political that is flexible and porous. (Goldman’s relationships with men take up far more of Living My Life than her relationships with women which, especially in the first volume, are notably few.) Likewise, when the artist Robert Henri asks her to sit for her portrait, saying that he wants to depict the “real Emma Goldman”, Goldman responds “But which is the real one? […] I have never been able to unearth her” (529). Goldman’s writing undermines the traditional autobiography’s implicit claim to give an account of a unified self. Instead, the autobiographical ‘I’s of Living My Life act against each other. The text sets out to trace the many influences, as much external as internal, that go into forging Goldman’s sense of self. It shows and preserves how the media help construct Goldman’s public performance of notoriety.99 As Wexler writes: “Her public persona with its aura of sex and violence, was one of her most powerful creations” (Wexler 1984, 278). Living My Life describes how Goldman’s name appears increasingly in the press between 1889 and 1921 (although these dates are never explicitly mentioned), even to the extent that Goldman’s reputation sometimes slips out of her own control, and she is accused of actions that she has not been involved in.

Goldman’s sense of the power of her name and her ability to wield it as a political instrument increases over the course of the autobiography. She often refers to herself in the third person, exclaiming that she “Emma Goldman, the anarchist” will not be forced (279) or that “you cannot buy Emma Goldman” (353). With time, this association of her name with bravery and oppositionality contributes to the fixing of Goldman’s reputation. When describing
her deportation from the United States, she includes an instance in which a journalist refers to her in the third person while questioning her: “That is the end, Emma Goldman, isn’t it?” a reporter remarked. ‘It may only be the beginning,’ I flashed back” (710). Mimicking the language of the press, both Goldman and the reporter show an awareness of Goldman as a public figure with a lively reputation, who is detached or at least somewhat separate from the embodied Goldman answering the question. Goldman includes accounts of the reach of this reputation, cementing and projecting the self who is constructed by Living My Life as an international celebrity and an assured public character.¹⁰⁰

In keeping with the dynamism of the autobiography, its sense of ‘living’ as a charged action and expression of agency, Goldman concludes with a poetic reflection on the fullness of her life: “My life – I had lived in its heights and its depth, in bitter sorrow and ecstatic joy, in black despair and fervent hope. I had drunk the cup to the last drop. I had lived my life. Would I had the gift to paint the life I had lived!” (993). Ending with an allusion to creation, Goldman as writer is reinstated into the narrative, a reminder that she has just had a stab at painting this life. Affirming herself as the authority on her life, Goldman’s autobiography formulates a subject who must be read primarily in relation to the United States; who sits within – and hopefully will go on to affect – a radical continuum; who holds loyally true to a solid ‘cause’, with a fierce, confident and calculated public persona; and yet who is complex, unanchored by gendered structures and has a fractured sense of self. Correspondingly, Goldman’s militancy and her engagement in substantive political debate are overshadowed by a focus on her inner life and far-reaching reputation. The literary qualities of Living My Life both align with existing traditions and reject them, carving out a space – as we will see in its later uptake – for new subjectivities and models for living.

Archival Work

Alongside Living My Life, Goldman’s archive would go on to play a formative role in her afterlives. In 1939, eight years after the autobiography’s publication and a year before her death, Goldman donated her collected papers to the International Institute for Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam – the same location as those of Louise Michel. Sasha Berkman, her lifelong companion, had died in 1936 and, since Goldman was organising and archiving his papers, she decided to do the same with her own (Falk 1990, 389; IISH). Although she had already collected much of her old correspondence in order to write Living My Life, the process
of going through her own and Berkman’s papers prompted a period of intense and often difficult reflection, as Goldman’s letters from this time demonstrate.101

By giving the IISH her own papers alongside those of Berkman, Goldman gave weight to their connection, presenting them as a pair who belonged together. (In the years before Berkman’s death, their friendship had been complicated by Goldman’s thorny relationship with Berkman’s lover Emmy Eckstein.) It also meant situating both of their stories in a European context, far away from their adopted home of the United States and alongside a cohort of notably international historical figures. Goldman held the IISH in high esteem, writing to her friends Lillian and William Mendelsohn she described the archive as “perhaps the most unique in world” and went on to say: “It certainly has the most perfect collection, dating over a hundred years of Anarchist writing in every language of the world, and an equally great mass of material of the social struggle in general” (Goldman 1939b). Indeed, the IISH now contains the papers of many of Goldman’s correspondents (such as Mollie Steimer and Senya Fleshin), deposited either by friends of relatives or by themselves, perhaps a demonstration of the magnetism of the Goldman and Berkman collections.

The ‘Emma Goldman Papers’ in the IISH come mostly from the years 1907 to 1939. The majority of Goldman’s earlier papers had been confiscated by the police during their successive arrests and raids on the Mother Earth offices. When Goldman attempted to track down this material, she found that it had been destroyed (Falk 1994, 10). The IISH papers are accompanied by a short biographical note which situates Goldman firmly within an anarchist social circle, alongside Berkman, Most and Reitman. It further mentions the state in which the materials were deposited – “roughly arranged in envelopes, folders and portfolios with many pages of letters and texts dispersed or missing” (IISH) – an indication of Goldman’s desire, however unsuccessful, to present the remnants of her life in an orderly form. Unsurprisingly given her prolific letter writing, Goldman’s correspondence forms the bulk of the archive, now arranged alphabetically by the name of Goldman’s interlocutor. The papers also include photographs, identity papers, published writing, drafts, newspaper and magazine clippings. Much of this is arranged under headings related to Goldman’s many interests and causes: “anarchism and communism”, “art and revolution”, “child and education”, “Irish drama”, “Russian literature”, “women’s emancipation”, etc. Since their arrival at the IISH, the Emma Goldman Papers have gone through two Remediations. In the early 1990s they were published on microfilm, which enabled their greater accessibility outside of the archive building as they
were copied for new collections. In the mid 2010s they were digitised and made freely available online. These transformations both result from and contribute to the advancing of Goldman’s remembrance from the mid-twentieth century onwards: Falk refers to “documents discovered after, and in some cases as a result of, the publication of the microfilm collection” (Goldman et al. 2003, 85).

Goldman’s decision to place her papers in this location is characteristically calculated and self-conscious, demonstrating a firm conviction that her political activity would outlive her. She also intended to use the archive she had deposited for future interpretations of her own experiences and of those around her, writing that “Someday I will come back here [the IISH] … to really make order and perhaps to use what Berkman has left and also my own writings for a third volume of ‘Living my Life’, or perhaps an autobiography of Alexander Berkman or a collection of letters from diverse people” (Goldman 1939a). This approach anticipated subsequent researchers, for whom the IISH collection became a touchstone for any longhand interpretation of her life. It forms the basis for the first biography of Goldman, Richard Drinnon’s 1961 Rebel in Paradise. Thereafter the, predominantly American, researchers remembering Goldman made the journey to Amsterdam for their research, the necessity of this trip demonstrating the tensions between Goldman’s attempts to provide herself with a transnational legacy and the American-inflected remembrance has subsequently dominated her afterlives. The archive stands as further proof that the longevity of Goldman’s memory rests on the crafting of a powerful character, who expresses nuances, contradictions and open vulnerabilities, combined with a fiercely held assertion of beliefs. Countering Jansen’s notion that no one ‘owned’ Emma Goldman at the time of her death, I have suggested that Emma Goldman took ownership of her own reputation. Through the accounts she gave of her life, she created a self-assured rendition of her story. But the subsequent circulation of this story was dependent on the conscious memory work of later stakeholders.

**Radical Feminist Emma**

In a 2003 special issue on women and ageing for The Women’s Review of Books, Alix Kates Shulman, Goldman’s first explicitly feminist biographer, reflected on turning 70 by considering Goldman at this age: “Emma Goldman died at 70 and claimed to have had her most fulfilling love affair at 65. When I was in my 30s writing a biography of her, I thought that 70 was not too young to die and 65 was rather old to have great sex. Now I think neither” (2003). In this way, Shulman charts her own changing understanding of her social environment,
conventions and mores as reflected through her relationship with Goldman. Similarly, Hemmings recounts her discovery and seduction by Goldman in personal and affective terms: noting her initial “awe”, the “fantasies” Goldman inspired about how she might live her life and describing how she “relished” Goldman’s critique because it resonated with her own politics (2018, 9). “Goldman,” she writes, “reflected back to me my youthful interest in fashioning myself as an assertive subject” (2018, 10). These sorts of depictions reverberate throughout Goldman’s remembrance. Through ‘Red Emma’s’ exposure of her own self-inscription and the apparent candour with which she grappled with the world around her, she becomes an open book for her devotees to read and connect with.103

In what follows I describe the genesis of Goldman’s remembrance as a radical feminist, before moving on to this characterisation’s key features, looking at the nature of reparative remembrance in (and around) three auto/biographical works and seeking to untangle how and why a number of pivotal mnemonic stakeholders claim to remember Goldman. From here, I show how this form of remembrance infuses feminist responses and Goldman’s fictional representation, offering proof of the salience that this memory work would go on to have to a wider movement. This version of Goldman first appeared in the 1960s, a decade which saw a growing interest in anarchism and, in 1961, the publication of the first significant (though now out of print) biography of Goldman: Richard Drinnon’s Rebel in Paradise. Drinnon’s work stands as a precursor to Goldman’s feminist adoption. Attempting to understand Goldman’s relationship to the society around her and dwelling on her context rather than her character, Drinnon took a sympathetic approach to his subject. He had already written his PhD in 1957 on Goldman and was himself a political activist involved in anarchist campaigns. The preface of Rebel in Paradise states:

To choose Emma Goldman as a subject is already to say something forcibly, one way or another, about the writer’s values. [...] I may as well record here at the outset, then, that I like her and trust her. No doubt my basic sympathy for the radical style in politics helped shape this empathy and understanding.

(Drinnon 1976, vii)

Drinnon is unequivocal, if potentially somewhat defensive, about his positive and unguarded approach. Narrating his attachment to her in terms of her ideas more than her person, the rhetoric is that of allegiance above all else. His starting point is one in which Goldman is an outcast, her ideas treated with derision and worthy of further attention. Through his biography, Drinnon began the memory work of linking Goldman’s thought and actions to his contemporary social movements.
Emma Goldman’s ensuing adoption as a symbol for second-wave feminists was not necessarily an obvious or a straightforward one. Goldman had, after all, been a lifelong critic of feminism. By the time of her death, she was an outcast from the international Left because of her criticism of the USSR – making her appeal to the ‘New Left’ all the more unlikely. Nevertheless, in several key respects she fitted snugly into the mould of the ideologies explored by social movement actors in the 1960s and 70s. Much of Goldman’s appeal to the WLM can be attributed to her emphasis on sexual freedom as a site of constant struggle and a necessary condition for successful revolution. Throughout her life’s work and writing, Goldman had put women at the centre of her exploration of the joint dangers of militarism and capitalism. This focus distanced Goldman from those of her anarchist contemporaries, whose starting point was systemic destruction rather than individual liberation, and appealed to the nascent WLM, with its prevailing mantra that the personal is political and its new understanding of the political in intimate terms.

In her elevation as an iconic feminist figure, Goldman was often represented in close relation to a set of recognisable gendered stereotypes. As in the case of Louise Michel, representation by these stereotypes enabled the further circulation of her image, adhering to pre-existing narrative and representational schemata. Frankel separates these clichés into two groups (1996, 921–22). In the early days of her reparative remembrance, Goldman was a paragon of female defiance: a “superwitch” and a “woman warrior” or a saint and a martyr, who displayed her loyalty to her cause through her acceptance of suffering. In the second group, corresponding with a shift to interest in her personality rather than her politics, Goldman was either the girlish spreader of free love, dancing her way through revolutions, or a mature, nurturing matriarch. While the first group of these stereotypes – the witch or the saint – replicate the patriarchal objectification of women in morally absolute terms, either wholly bad or wholly good (resonating with many images of Michel), the second pair of lover and mother offer slightly more flexible models that women themselves might identify with. The grandmotherly stereotype, which reads Goldman as a warm and nurturing figure, often also emphasises Goldman’s Jewishness, an element of her identity which played an important role in Goldman’s early adoption (Frankel 1996, 936). Popular readings of her life in the late twentieth century emphasised her Jewishness as a way of understanding her position as an ‘outsider’, the multiple ways in which she was derided and oppressed.104 Although she rarely drew attention to this facet of her identity herself, Goldman’s Jewishness forms another potential point about which remembering subjects expressed feelings of identification. Many
of the feminist researchers who have chosen to work on and write about Goldman are themselves Jewish.

**Reparative Remembrance in Auto/biographies**

The writers of *To the Barricades: The Anarchist Life of Emma Goldman* (1971), *Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman* (1984) and *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life* (1984), Shulman (1932-), Falk (1947-) and Wexler (1942-) have certain similarities. All three are American, Jewish and were involved in or attached to the WLM. These writers all reproduce aspects of Goldman’s autobiography (which had become “required reading” (Falk 1990, xi) for the WLM). They describe themselves as inspired to continue the story which Goldman had started to tell in the same medium and to reflect on their own lives in the process of writing. Their texts provide nodal points in the development of Goldman’s afterlives in the mid-to-late twentieth century, showing how she was territorialised into a radical feminist role model and demonstrating the shifting rhetoric of attachment that both corresponded with and contributed to her changing salience. In keeping with the idea that life writing can be thought of as part of a network rather than contained within a discrete narrative, this section also looks at the paratexts which provide the authors’ testimonies on their research and writing process and in which these auto/biographers express multivalent desires for Goldman’s company or approval. Their personal approach suggests that Goldman’s memory is strongly maintained at a social level, through the passing on of an individualised connection whereby each stakeholder has their own personal “Emma” as friend, mother or mentor.

Given Frankel’s description of the progressive movement of Goldman’s memory from popular protest culture and into the academy, it is worth noting that Shulman, the first of the three (writing ten years before Wexler and Falk), was not an academic but an activist and writer of fiction, memoirs and essays. *To the Barricades* was intended for a young adult audience and constitutes the fullest account of Goldman’s life to follow Drinnon’s. As a demonstration of how Goldman could be a role model for the women’s movement, it set out to offer inspiration for adult feminists of the present and for younger feminists of the future. Following its publication, Shulman went on to produce several other influential works that are either directly or indirectly about Goldman.105

Published in the same year, Falk and Wexler’s biographies depict a more complex attachment between writer and their subject, expressive of a greater level of unease about the
feminist territorialisation of Goldman. In different ways, both straddle a line between trade biography and academic history, with Falk’s leaning towards the former, Wexler’s the latter. Falk, who first became interested in Goldman while working on a political theory PhD in the 1970s, has gone on to be editor, founder and director of the Emma Goldman Papers Project (EGPP) based in the University of California, Berkeley and now the largest archive of material on Goldman, with the outcome that she has been “…engaged in collecting, archiving, writing and publishing works by or about Emma Goldman for almost four decades” (Falk 1990, 501). Wexler, a professional historian, produced several books about Goldman in the 1980s, of which An Intimate Life was the first. She has since moved on to topics less closely relevant to Goldman.

Each of these biographies builds on different genres, from the coming-of-age story to social history. The conventions associated with these genres, moving from more playful or literary to ‘fact-based’ and detail-oriented, signal the changing direction of Goldman’s reputation between the 1960s and the 1980s as many feminists began to relate to her in more critical ways, less as an all-purpose role model and more as a political thinker. Moreover, the different sources used by these writers are indicative of the new material available on Goldman in the latter half of the twentieth century and the changing perspectives that material enabled.

To the Barricades is characterised by sharp moral distinctions that give Goldman’s life fairy tale-like qualities. Hence Russia is a “storybook land” (Shulman 2011, 8); Goldman is a plucky young heroine with “incredible energy” (20) and a romantic vision, “[s]he had seen enough loveless marriages to know she would only marry for love” (21); and Frick, who Berkman attempted to assassinate, is a villain “unscrupulous in his climb to power” (49). Goldman’s trajectory is one of powerlessness to power. At first, she is forced to serve her nasty father “like some mere Cinderella” (14) but later, in a chapter entitled “Superwitch”, Shulman explains that eventually “[h]er very name brought terror to thousands of hysterical people” (64); similarly, she repeatedly uses Goldman’s hyperbolic nickname “Queen of the Anarchists” (79). Goldman’s movement to becoming a commanding public figure is thus described in terms of her movement between a number of, notably gendered, stock characters – not unlike those Frankel identifies within her remembrance more generally. To the Barricades relies heavily on Living My Life. However, it does not contain detailed citations and does not mention the IISH archive. Shulman also acknowledges her debt to Drinnon and lists his work. With the exception of Goldman’s published writing, To the Barricades works off secondary rather than primary accounts of Goldman’s life. The biography’s symbolic connection to a
fantastical world highlights Goldman’s singularity and sets her loose from historical context. Her proximity to fantastical female figures, from witches to Cinderella, puts her gender at the heart of her story.

If Shulman’s biography is a fairy tale, then Falk’s is an epistolary romance. Love, Anarchy and Emma Goldman relies on new source material to uncover a more ‘private’ Goldman. Republished in 2019 and the only of these texts to appear in translation, Falk’s is arguably the most well-received of Goldman’s biographies. The 2019 cover proclaims it “A New York Times most notable biography”, a clear indication of its more mainstream appeal and the fact that Falk has become an essential stakeholder in (or even a gatekeeper of) Goldman’s memory. The EGPP has its roots in Love, Anarchy and Emma Goldman (1984). Having already assembled much of the material to write the book, Falk went on to further strengthen Goldman’s remembrance by gathering any material she could and forming the EGPP. Situating the biography in an “era of resurgent feminism” she explains that it “highlighted what Goldman identified as her source of strength – her ability to align herself to the future” (Falk 1990, 9). The biography marks a shift in Goldman’s afterlives based on increased interest in and availability of archival material from her life, thereby presenting challenges to previous, perhaps less critical or complicated, feminist readings of her activism, which hinged upon her portrayal of herself in her autobiography. Falk’s discovery of Goldman’s letters to her lover Ben Reitman provoked vexed responses to the perceived gap between what Goldman practised and what she preached.

In the biography’s preface, Falk describes the EGPP and explains that “[n]o such comprehensive concordance was available when I wrote Love, Anarchy. Emma’s story, beloved especially by Jewish historians, second-wave feminists, anarchists and other political activists, is rendered primarily as though she had existed solely in the political sphere, driven by pure allegiance alone to the cause for which she sacrificed her safety and security” (1990, xxv). Falk cites attachment as the central drive behind Goldman’s remembrance and stakes out a claim to originality in attempting to locate the person behind the cause. The biography seeks to set out the story that has not been told in Living My Life. Its motivation is reparative. Accordingly, Love, Anarchy has an unconventional structure, opening in 1927 with Goldman beginning to write the story of her life; Goldman’s own act of autobiographical inscription is framed as the impetus for Falk’s. Quoting from a letter Goldman wrote to Berkman, in which she states that the autobiography would cover her “public persona, not the private individual”
(1990, 3), Falk implicitly expresses her aim to do the precise opposite and reveal the private individual for all to see. She justifies the biography’s presence in the literary marketplace in terms of intertextual antagonism in relation to Goldman’s own writings.

Despite containing elaborate footnotes, a bibliography and index, the main sources Falk draws from are Goldman’s correspondence, especially with Reitman. Falk argues that Goldman’s prolific written correspondence was not just a means of communication but can be seen as the way in which Goldman set out to understand her own life, “to ground her own experience” (Falk 1990, xiv) – further contribution to the argument that Goldman took a pivotal role in creating the basis for her own remembrance. The letters anchor Falk’s account of Goldman’s life, so that whole pages are sometimes taken up with Goldman or Reitman’s writing (for example 134–35). In this way Falk’s biography once again echoes Living My Life which is also based on Goldman’s old correspondence. Given Reitman’s erratic presence in Goldman’s life, their letters dominate the first half, retreat during the years Goldman is sent to Russia and return, more sporadically, in Falk’s account of the final ten or so years of Goldman’s life. Love, Anarchy has an intimate focal point: Falk’s concern is primarily for the characters in Goldman’s life and their relations with her.

Unlike To the Barricades and Love, Anarchy, Wexler’s An Intimate Life only covers the first part of Goldman’s life, as far as her deportation. As its title suggests, An Intimate Life deals with Goldman’s internal life. Wexler shows a consistent awareness of Goldman’s psychological state. For example, in her consideration of Living My Life she writes that: “Goldman herself may have exaggerated the picture [of her unhappy childhood], it does help account for her later sense of herself as a starving being, and for her passion to feed and mother other people, which seems to have been partly a way of giving others what she had always longed for herself” (Wexler 1984, 15). Goldman is treated as a puzzle; her motives are unpacked and considered at every available moment. Again, her personhood is stressed over her politics.

An Intimate Life is, however, a more traditional work of scholarly research than the biographies of Shulman or Falk. It provides copious historical context, including sections which are not directly about Goldman but give the background to a particular moment. In the introduction Wexler’s intentions are made clear: she describes her attempt to separate the “historical” Goldman from “myth, fiction, and controversy” (Wexler 1984, xvi), a motivation which echoes Edith Thomas’s reparative reading of Louise Michel. She consistently includes footnotes that indicate the use of a range of material. For example, in a single paragraph (for
instance on 6–7) there are four separate notes which refer back to a letter in the IISH, an article from Shulman’s *Red Emma Speaks: Select Writings and Speeches by Emma Goldman* (1972), a death certificate in a New York State archive, two separate interviews and *Living My Life*. In keeping with this comprehensive approach, Wexler often notes divergences between different accounts of Goldman’s life, such as, “in either November of 1886 (Lena’s date) or February of 1887 (Emma’s date), she and Kersner were married” (Wexler 1984, 31). Such moments of narrative distance, in which Wexler’s sources are laid before the reader, are in line with Frankel’s contention that, by the 1980s, Goldman had moved from being uncritically revered to becoming subject to detailed and nuanced analysis. Works like Wexler’s, that seek to de-territorialise Goldman, have much in common with slightly earlier attempts, such as that by Thomas, to de-mythologise Michel.

The degree to which each of these auto/biographies is reparative depends on the period of its production. Writing in the early 1970s, Shulman’s approach to Goldman is alert to its own act of reclamation: “nowadays few people have heard of Emma Goldman,” she writes in the introduction, but a “new generation of radicals are taking up Emma Goldman’s fight. Like her, they are willing to face jail, exile, and even death because they believe the world must be made over according to a new vision” (2011, 6). Shulman situates her biography within this wave of protest, implying that Goldman’s life has the capacity to mobilise a new cohort of activists. In her 1984 essay “Living Our Life”, Shulman explores her own deep-rooted sense of connection with Goldman, explaining its roots within the WLM. She describes the life-altering effect of her first WLM meeting, her enthusiasm for writing about Goldman’s experiences and her early belief in the profound continuity of Goldman’s struggles with those of the movement. In particular Shulman celebrates Goldman’s suitability as a poster girl for the WLM, given her keen perception that both the personal was political and the political was personal. In Goldman’s writing, Shulman finds a straightforward relation between her own concerns and those of Goldman, tied together as political (and correspondingly personal) actors.

Despite an emphasis on Goldman’s importance to the wider women’s movement, the central relationship which Shulman represents in “Living Our Life” is not one of collective or public presence but one of intense intimacy between auto/biographer and auto/biographical subject as two struggling individuals. The she uses a rhetoric of empathy, rather than alignment, allegiance or even recognition. Shulman refers to her “relation” to Goldman in terms of
reciprocity: “I, her biographer, have shaped her life, and she, my subject, has shaped mine. For better or worse, we're a couple. (Nonexclusive, naturally; she insists passionately on free love!” (2012, 134). This sense of give and take is such that Shulman sees herself as indebted to Goldman. She describes how, on finishing To the Barricades, she was tempted to begin researching Ben Reitman (“Like Emma, I found him fascinating and sexy” (Shulman 2012, 147)) but felt her responsibility now was to keep ‘rescuing’ historical women. Imbuing her long-dead subject with considerable agency, she explains that “Emma had had a hand in rescuing me from what seemed like a dangerously passive life, the least I could do was carry on the rescue operation” and says she “hoped to repay some of the debt I owed her for lending me her life as a subject and for helping my career” (2012, 147–48). Goldman is brought alive in her words: with an emphasis on repair, Shulman acknowledges the mobilising potential of life stories on both a collective and a deeply personal level.

But Shulman does not see her relationship with Goldman simply as one of interchange between two active parties. Instead, her understanding of her own experience is described as being so proximate to Goldman’s that it blends with it. As the essay’s title suggests, they cohabit in a life. Their intertwined creative ventures are central to Shulman’s sense of intimacy with the object of her remembrance. The pair become co-authors through Shulman’s remediation of Living My Life, which she endorses both for its content – as a detailed portrayal of Goldman’s life – and for its power to inspire questions of craft and mediation pertinent to her own writing process: “How did one begin to reflect upon the fluid multiplicity of experiences that comprise a life?” (2012, 144). Shulman sees her very skills and methods as biographer taking their lead from those of Goldman as autobiographer, writing that she learnt “to reflect on a life in the workshop of Emma Goldman” (2012, 147). These skills and methods reappear in Shulman’s storying of her own life. As in Stanley’s notion of auto/biography, the act of biographical writing diffuses into autobiographical writing. Eventually Shulman senses Goldman metaphorically lifting off the page and appearing as a character in her own story, so that, in moments of difficulty, she “felt the encouraging hand and smiling nod of Emma behind me” (2012, 143). Fantasy and reality are indistinguishable: Goldman’s memory, she determines, has such inspirational quality, offers so much hope, that it affects not only Shulman’s political awareness but her perception of her own reality.

Candace Falk is similarly unequivocal about Goldman’s monumental influence on her life. In a piece of writing comparable to “Living Our Life”, she reflects on the process behind Love, Anarchy and her connection to Goldman in a preface to the revised edition, six years
after it was first published. Falk portrays her route to writing a biography of Goldman as quasi-miraculous, the outcome of unusual happenstance. In 1971, accompanied by her dog Emma, Falk visited a friend’s guitar shop outside Chicago. (At the time, she writes, “almost everyone in the new women’s movement was naming things after Emma Goldman” (Falk 1990, xi).) On hearing the dog’s name, the owner remembered that he had once came across some of Goldman’s letters in the back of the shop. He then produced what turned out to be passionate letters written by Goldman to Ben Reitman. As a researcher with a keen interest in social history, Falk was delighted and set off to photocopy the letters. She then noticed one in which Goldman expressed how exposing and embarrassing it would be for others to read them, stopped copying and “resolved to keep Emma’s secret” (1990, xiii). Like Shulman, Falk’s sense of intimacy with Goldman can be discerned in her consistent use of the activist’s first name and her evident desire to do right by her and not to let her down. Keeping “Emma’s secret” infers a level of recognition and empathy. Once again, Goldman is brought alive as a character whose needs, wants and desires are to be considered and reckoned with.

Following the description of the discovery, Falk explains why she changed her mind and decided to publish the letters after all. This justification hinges on Goldman’s own interweaving of her public persona and private life in both thought and deed. Falk argues that the letters should be with Goldman’s other papers and that existing biographies have not sufficiently examined Goldman and Reitman’s relationship. Falk holds up her own personal attachment to Goldman as proof of her suitability as biographer. “I was also confident that my respect for Emma Goldman would enable me to tell the story of her private life in a sensitive manner that might cast new light on her inspiring but elusive political vision” (1990, xiii). She backs up this contention with the inclusion of a letter to her from Goldman’s old anarchist friend Mollie Steimer. Steimer writes that she was initially concerned that publishing the letters would damage Goldman’s reputation and provoke “futile discussions” but concedes “to judge from your letter, you are a sincere, interesting and sympathetic woman who (I hope) will do justice to Emma” (1990, xvi). The language of “respect and “justice” underlines the intensity of these felt attachments to Goldman: she is a figure to be looked up to and admired. Her death does not diminish this in the eyes of her old friends; if anything, it augments it. Falk provides these details as an overture to describing the extent to which understanding and contextualising the letters “changed the course of my own life” (1990, xiii), as her story and “Emma’s” become intertwined. Elsewhere she notes that “[b]iographers, like me, often find themselves
unsuspectingly living much of their own lives in pursuit of capturing and recording the spirit of their subjects” (Falk 1990, 423). The written life becomes a link between her subject’s life and her own. Falk’s proclaimed stake in remembering Goldman is knotty, coming from both accident (finding the letters) and a strongly felt intent (that brought about the Papers Project), but pulling together all the different threads within this knot is her sense of recognition of Goldman as a precedent and a companion.

Wexler too has produced accounts relating Goldman’s presence in her own life, which stand supplementary to her biography. In an edited collection on The Challenge of Feminist Biography (1992), Wexler’s chapter “Emma Goldman and the Anxiety of Biography” depicts her striving to make sense of and manage her attitudes towards her subject. She places her research on Goldman in relation to wider historical events. This framing means that her relationship never quite has the intimacy of Shulman or Falk’s more hermetically sealed bonds. But, in creating links between Goldman and later socio-political worlds, Wexler’s account suggests an alternative rhetoric of attachment, one in which a more public-facing and traditionally political version of Goldman is carried through time to become a plausible commentator on events contemporary to Wexler.

In another blurring of the boundaries between author and their subject, Wexler elides Goldman and her mother, who at the time was unwell. She explains this comparison by way of her own and, speculatively, other women’s need for role models: “In Emma Goldman, I am certain I was seeking an alternative mother to take her place, a woman whose strength and courage in overcoming obstacles could inspire me as well. ‘We think back through our mothers if we are women,’ wrote Virginia Woolf. And since thinking back through my own shipwrecked mother was fraught with anxiety, and even terror, thinking back through Emma Goldman seemed especially attractive” (1992, 38). Wexler’s invocation of Woolf promotes the idea that the guides to the past available for women are necessarily those they have close affective (even familial) ties to. In an act which genders and familiarises Goldman, Wexler appropriates her as an effective ancestor.

With Goldman at one remove, a proxy mother rather than a proxy self, Wexler is more ambivalent than Shulman or Falk about her attachment to Goldman’s own record of her life: “From early on in my research, I recognized Goldman’s 1931 autobiography as a major ally, obstacle, and rival” (1992, 38). She contends that both Drinnon and Shulman’s works are relatively uncritical of Goldman’s presentation of herself and portrays Living My Life as akin to a nineteenth-century novel, a comparison which casts doubt on the text’s veracity. She notes
that – until Falk’s discovery of her correspondence with Ben Reitman – “one could find little intimate information about Goldman apart from her letters to Alexander Berkman at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam” (1992, 39). Writing in the aftermath of the discovery of the Reitman letters, Wexler describes how she struggled to get out from under the weight of Goldman’s account of her own life and how she ended up relying on the autobiography far more than she had intended, while simultaneously questioning the reliability of Goldman’s narration at every turn. With the benefit of hindsight, Wexler writes that she might have been more accepting of the performativity of Goldman’s writing: “Were I writing today, however, I would accord less weight to considerations of ‘factuality’ or ‘fairness,’ and I would emphasize the feminist implications of Goldman’s own construction of herself as multiple and contradictory” (Wexler 1992, 41). Wexler demonstrates Goldman’s central importance in her consequent representation: any account of her life must grapple with her own account of herself.

Wexler’s struggle with Goldman as a participant in her own remembrance mirrors a wider uncertainty in Wexler’s relationship with Goldman as a subject. In a statement that brings Goldman off the page and into her life as a potential intimate she discloses that, “I wanted to like her more than I did” (Wexler 1992, 48). She contextualises the idea that liking Goldman might be important for remembering her by using the testimonies of other feminists, such as Shulman, who describe how they discovered in Goldman a great example and guide. Furthermore, Wexler expresses some doubt and disappointment about the relationship between the approach taken in her biography and those that resurrect Goldman as a model feminist: “I found myself in the uncomfortable position of criticizing a heroic figure who was already considered a role model” (1992, 48). Ultimately however, Wexler sees her “uncomfortable” project as an importantly humanising one. She ‘accepts’ Goldman as a powerful, if ambivalent, figure who “has taken up a permanent residence in my life as part of a feminist network of the imagination, an alter-ego, an Other/Mother with whom I continue to argue and identify” (1992, 49). In the preface to An Intimate Life she suggests that her own difficulty in untangling Goldman mirrors Goldman’s difficulty in untangling herself.120 Regardless of how much Wexler does or does not “like” Goldman, this line of questioning (and her conclusion) puts empathy at the centre of Goldman’s remembrance. Goldman’s self-storying, primarily in Living My Life, emerges as a central element in generating this attachment, regardless of its valence. Whether Goldman is a text to be read, or ghost-like guide, remembering subjects
imagine a close and reciprocal relationship in which creativity goes both ways. Despite shifting
the representation of Goldman in some ways (such as placing her in a historical continuum
with other anarchists) Wexler’s text does not have the de-territorialising effect on her memory
that Thomas’s does in relation to Michel. Goldman’s canny self-presentation as a public
character, the committed work of mnemonic stakeholders, the timing of that work in coinciding
with second-wave feminism, and the long-lasting impact of that movement in the framing of
historical women, meant that the Goldman remembered by the early WLM has not been de-
territorialised in a way that the Michel of the Parti Communiste was.

**Sustaining Feminist Emma**

Evaluations of Goldman’s status as a companion, of her ‘likability’, are not only a feature of
early remembering subjects’ work but are characteristic of much feminist scholarship on
Goldman since. And although Goldman’s potential as a feminist precedent is often
subsequently questioned, the patterns found in early auto/biographies continue to this day,
furtherting a version of her as a historical character who exists outside of a specific historical
milieu and offers a potential role model to later feminists.

With the growth of the EGPP in the 1980s, Goldman’s distinctive status as the primary
builder of her own archive changed. In an Editor’s Note that echoes Goldman’s introduction
to *Living My Life*, Falk stresses the importance of scholarly collaboration and generosity in the
creation of the archive, which has received contributions from those interested in Goldman
from many different walks of life.\(^{121}\) Goldman is remembered by both sympathisers and
adversaries, with surveillance records from the FBI providing a counterexample to celebratory
reports of her activities. The EGPP both sought out and produced existing mediations of
Goldman’s life and Falk expresses gratitude to those associates of Goldman’s who agreed to
have their accounts of Goldman recorded, transcribed and included.\(^{122}\) The creation of the
EGPP has secured the institutionalisation of Goldman’s memory, something that Falk’s
Editor’s Note is keen to note the ‘irony’ of:

The government of the same nation that expelled her has posthumously repatriated her
memory by sponsoring the collection and publication of her papers. The National Historical
Publications and Records Commission, influenced by the new appreciation for the diversity
of America’s documentary heritage that arose in the 1960s, deemed Goldman important
enough to endorse the collection and publication of her papers.

(Falk, Cole, and Thomas 1994, 2)
The Editor’s Note is silent about why the government might endorse Goldman’s memory and what the repercussions of such endorsement might be. But the processes by which Goldman is seen to be ‘important enough’ for state-sponsored remembrance are connected here with the broader historicization of the 1960s; Goldman’s significance is tied to the fate of the ‘New Left’ and the WLM.

At the start of the twenty-first century, Falk and several colleagues set out to publish a four-volume series that would contain a significant selection of material from the EGPP, titled *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years*, with the aim to simplify the task of future researchers and other potential remembering subjects. At the time of writing, three of these have been published: in 2005, 2007 and 2012, covering Goldman’s life in 1890–1901, 1902–1906 and 1910–1916 respectively. Each volume contains chronologically arranged copies of original texts from the archive, some of which have been translated into English, alongside annotations and footnotes. The editors describe these volumes as “more” than material for biographical work, citing their prospective value as “an indispensable collection for studying the history of American social movements” (Goldman et al. 2003, xviii). In keeping with this, the volumes’ blurb cites their propensity to redefine “the historical memory of Emma Goldman and illuminate[s] a forgotten yet influential facet of the history of American and European radicalism”. The focus of the collection is therefore on the material’s potential as a source of historical discovery. In this vein, the foreword is determined to establish the nature of the collection’s relationship with *Living My Life*, emphasising the unreliability of Goldman’s autobiography, in light, for instance, of “repeated government confiscations of her personal papers [which meant] she rarely could confirm dates and places” (Goldman et al. 2003, 4). This desire to fix Goldman as a notable historical radical seems part of a wider call, apparent since the 1980s, to take her theoretical ideas seriously, engaging in intertextual antagonism with earlier accounts that focus on the story her life or character. The EGPP now functions as a centre for Goldman’s memory, aiming both to collect and disseminate her ideas. And, despite the international nature of its content, it relocates the nucleus of Goldman’s remembrance from Europe to the United States – the *Documentary History* will not go beyond Goldman’s exile. With its origins in Falk’s biography, the EGPP stems from the time of Goldman’s apparent resurrection in the late twentieth century and the life writing produced on her from around this period.
The question of how or whether to take Goldman seriously as a political exemplar has continued to beleaguer her remembrance since the era of Shulman, Falk and Wexler’s auto/biographies. With the publication of many more works of life writing from both radical and centrist perspectives that give different weight to her feminism and anarchism, Goldman remained a lively site of interpretation.124 Responses to the representation of Goldman as a more complicated role model in Falk’s work have been divergent. Sometimes they take the form of expressions of empathy with Goldman as a compromised figure, wherein Goldman is claimed to be “just like us” (Hemmings 2018, 63). However, they also include judgements on Goldman’s actions and critical attempts to distance her, to show why and how she is an imperfect example. For example, Lori Jo Marso exalts the importance of studying Goldman’s life and work for contemporary feminism on the grounds that Goldman constitutes “an example of how even the most radical and forward-thinking women can get trapped by the contemporary patriarchal norms under which they live, often even unconsciously internalizing these norms” (2003, 306), thereby provoking questions about the role of intimacy in feminist praxis.

The relation between Goldman’s life and her ideas also remains a vexed. Providing an overview of feminist accounts of Goldman’s life, Ferguson claims there is a tendency since Falk to read Goldman in psychological terms, with critical attention overwhelmingly focused on “the relation between her erotic life and her politics” (2011b, 733). She concludes that Goldman’s contribution to feminism is “better” found by centring on her political vision rather than providing accounts of her compromised life. Meanwhile Wexler, in a 1984 essay entitled “Emma Goldman and Women”, posits that, Goldman was an actor not a theorist: “it is clear that Emma's experience was far more complex than the simple advice she dispensed from the lecture platform […] despite theanguished richness of her own erotic life, she was unable to reflect on it in any fruitful way” (1985, 162). In depictions of her as an actor rather than a theorist, the political tradition Goldman identified with is given less weight and her anarchism tends to recede from view. Thus Goldman’s personal life is politicised, and her politics personalised. She is sanctioned as a good example in terms of her public persona, if not her private self. Splitting her life and activism along these lines enables a reading of Goldman which acknowledges the less desirable aspects of her ‘feminism’, only to side-line them.

Indeed, Hemmings notes a repeated pattern in which Goldman is claimed as a feminist, found wanting and then reclaimed despite her flaws, citing the example of reactions to the Reitman letters, where her “bad” feminism is confronted, excused and even used a proof of her, easy to identify with, vulnerability (2018, 60). There is a duality to this pattern: one stroke
registers disappointment at Goldman’s inability to meet feminist expectations; another reaches for explanations. The pattern underlines the complications of remembering Goldman’s ‘whole’ person so that she can be a comprehensive model and source of inspiration; in claiming her as a character in Jasper et al.’s terms, she is identified by what she is as much as what she does. These debates show both the centrality of attachment as a dynamic in Goldman’s remembrance and the difficulty this poses in resolving issues about who or what precisely is the object of that attachment.

Goldman’s salience to the WLM has been essential to her remembrance. The centrality of the “feminist mnemonic imagination” (Reading 2016) lies at the heart of Goldman’s cultural memory since the 1960s, providing opportunities to conceive of new futures, as well as new creative connections with the past. In an act that stands as testimony to this characterisation of Goldman’s memory, the final chapter of Hemmings’s monograph presents a strong sense of her character through fiction. Working from letters sent to Goldman by her lover Almeda Sperry, the replies to which have been lost, Hemmings writes Goldman’s imaginary responses in a masterful recreation of her subject’s voice. Ultimately, Hemmings’s Goldman letters attest to the importance of a fictional element within the reclamation of historical figures, especially those based on a queer or feminist affective attachment: “I yearn for what is missing in this fragmentary sexual archive, and see that yearning as central to telling sexual history differently, even as it implicates me in ways I might prefer to override” (Hemmings 2018, 166). Goldman’s feminist remembrance is inextricable from the self-storying of feminist subjects, their needs, desires and fantasies.

**Fictionalised Goldman**

The prevalence of creative work in Goldman’s afterlives in the late twentieth century shows the increasing salience of her reputation. As the facts of her life and features of her character stabilised into fixed shapes, her representation began to move from the truth-finding realms of biography or history into more hybrid and creative forms, such as historical fiction. Goldman moved from being primarily of interest to political groups into a more mainstream cultural realm of arts and entertainment. Such representations no longer rely on self-conscious memory work or calls to repair (indeed some might say this historical record has been successfully repaired). Goldman the imagined character surpassed Goldman the historical figure and her remembrance became to some degree untethered from the specifics of her contemporary
context.\textsuperscript{125} Two of the most visible fictionalisations of her story, E. L. Doctorow’s novel \textit{Ragtime} (1974) and Warren Beatty’s film \textit{Reds} (1981), are considered in this section, demonstrating the relationship between their representations of Goldman and her characterisation in feminist auto/biography. Both works (taking Beatty’s position as auteur-director to be somewhat akin to an author), adhere to distinctions of the genre of historical novels in which part of their appeal is that they remediate historical knowledge in an aesthetic form.\textsuperscript{126}

Doctorow’s 1975 novel \textit{Ragtime} is a tightly woven tapestry of different stories that take place in New York City between the years 1902 and 1912. Its cast includes both well-known figures from the past and fictional characters, centring around the intertwined lives of three families: one white and wealthy, one black and a father and daughter who are Jewish immigrants. Written in short sharp sentences of assertive prose, the plot moves the characters artfully between different spheres – economic, social, gendered and historical. An undercurrent of violence runs through every action, which threatens to (or eventually does) explode. The relationship between the depiction of a fragile political environment and the social flux of Doctorow’s time of writing in the mid–1970s have been the subject of some critical reflection. \textit{Ragtime} has been the focus of numerous academic articles from influential critics of postmodernism. Their works tend to focus on the novel as, what Linda Hutcheon has termed, “historiographical metafiction” (1988), examining the ways in which boundaries between historical and literary texts are self-consciously blurred.\textsuperscript{127} Despite sustained inquiry into its relationship with historical referents, there is no work to date, other than that of Frankel, that specifically considers the novel’s representation of Goldman.\textsuperscript{128}

Published at the height of her adoption by the WLM, Goldman appears here as a prototypical feminist and functions as the political centre of the novel, a connector between disparate (fictional and non-fictional) characters, and a source of inspiration. By the time of the novel’s publication, Doctorow was already a commercially and critically successful novelist and \textit{Ragtime} became a bestseller. Both its repeated publication and its remediation have furthered the spread of Goldman’s cultural memory: it spawned a 1981 film and a 1998 musical of the same name. Goldman does not appear in the film version. Scenes with the Goldman character were filmed but were left out of the final cut but she does reappear in the musical version, with her own number “The Night That Goldman Spoke at Union Square”, harnessing her undoubted capacity for theatricality.
Set in and around New York, the novel belongs to and plays with a self-consciously American setting, which has much in common with that of *Living My Life*. However, despite including historical figures in the narrative, and evidently drawing on sources like Goldman’s autobiography (in one scene (139–143) the Goldman character delivers a lecture which could have been plucked from its pages), *Ragtime* plays fast and loose with historical specificity. The historical figures (Goldman, Harry Houdini, J. P. Morgan, Henry Ford, etc) are used to question received ideas about the past. Inserted into a fictional narrative in which they act outside of the bounds of the historical record, these characters are set free. The effects of this liberation are multiple. Operating outside the strictures or conventions of historical fact, *Ragtime*’s historical figures are able to articulate new possibilities or frameworks from which to think about the past. Conversely, they become effective avatars: identifiable by their famous names and characteristics rather than their stories or ideas. In the novel, the symbolic associations of Goldman’s name in 1975 is more important that the historical details of her life at the turn of the century.

Doctorow’s Goldman character appears as a stand in for feminists of the 1970s. Even the novel’s blurb refers to an Emma Goldman who “preaches free love and feminism” – a characterisation which emphatically avoids Goldman’s militancy, anarchism, etc. Her reputation precedes her: as a big historical character, the novel builds suspense ahead of her arrival. We hear that she once gave the chorus girl Evelyn Nesbit a “lashing” (7) with her tongue. When Goldman does appear, she is giving a speech about Ibsen at a Socialist Artists’ Alliance of the Lower East Side. Doctorow describes her in familiar terms: notorious, a rousing speaker but not “physically impressive”. Goldman is presented as a caricature of radical feminism; in a vaguely erotic scene, she demands that Nesbit remove her corset, which she sees as an emblem of male power. *Ragtime* works in conscious relation to and further territorialises the feminist version of Goldman that had recently emerged.

Despite its more burlesque aspects, Doctorow’s Goldman captures a mood for social change in the novel, conveyed in her ability to find moments of connection with other characters. A character known only as “Younger Brother” finds himself at a congregation in the office of *Mother Earth* with Goldman at its heart. In this “great stinking congress garlicked and perfumed in its own perspiration” (139), Goldman is the standout orator: “Her voice was strong. As she moved her head and gesticulated the light flashed from her glasses” (139). Goldman’s glasses are shields from or mirrors of the outside world, they come to stand as a
synechdoche for her wider presence. She is reflected in and refracted by the people around her, the “journalists, bohemians, artists, poets and society women” (140) who she is busily interacting with.\(^{129}\) In keeping with this sociability, Goldman’s interaction with Younger Brother is characterised by the importance she gives to shared experience. She chides him for his introspection – “I cannot sympathize. You think you are special, losing your lover. It happens every day” (142) – and presents a hazy politics of the personal: “In this room tonight you saw my present lover but also two of my former lovers. We are all good friends. Friendship is what endures. Shared ideals, respect for the whole character of a human being” (143). Doctorow echoes the ideas of \textit{Living My Life}, but their remediation into this fictional narrative also allows a depiction of their repercussions. Younger Brother is deeply affected by this interaction and goes on to dedicate his life to radical politics. While the substance of Goldman’s beliefs is not examined, this scene establishes her as a potentially inspirational literary and revolutionary figure. Goldman is a connective node within Doctorow’s complex network of characters, capable – through the offering of her wisdom – of bringing together different social groups, domestic concerns and public politics, fiction and reality.

Goldman as sage returns in Beatty’s film \textit{Reds}. Released six years after \textit{Ragtime}, \textit{Reds} charts a slightly later period in American history. The film presents a version of Goldman which, in line with my earlier discussion, had shifted from being a second-wave-feminist-before-her-time to a more fractured historical figure; briefly de-territorialised from the WLM and re-territorialised into a history of the American Left. Rather than describing multiple social groups, \textit{Reds} is an effort to capture a particular strand of American bohemia, covering the lives of the communist journalists John Reed and Louise Bryant between roughly 1915 and 1920 and, in particular, their early excitement at the Russian Revolution. \textit{Reds} was a longstanding project for Warren Beatty, who produced, directed and starred in the film, having already begun work on it in several years earlier. With a running time of three and a half hours, \textit{Reds} is a huge budget Hollywood epic which received sizable attention from fans and critics alike. Controversially considered the “first Hollywood film to make a hero of a Communist” (Rosenstone 1982, 299), \textit{Reds} was subsequently nominated for several Oscars and Maureen Stapleton won ‘Best Supporting Actress’ for her portrayal of Goldman, a fact that increased Goldman’s visibility.

\textit{Reds} dissolves and complicates boundaries of historical fact and fiction. Historical events provide background and sometimes affect the personal drama but, with a tight focus on Reed and Bryant’s relationship, \textit{Reds} is as much a love story as anything else. Yet as Leger
Grindon writes, the film “self-consciously promoted its claims to historical explanation…” (1993, 91). These claims are derived largely from recorded interviews with people who had been alive during the years Reed and Bryant were active and were either in their social circles or knew them. The feature film is interspersed with these testimonies, often in such a way that the voice of the interviewee is overlaid with footage from the film. The testimonies prompt questions about what happened which is then resolved by the action of the film itself in a way that presents Reds as historical authority. In other instances, the testimonies render the action we have just watched vague, so that the testimonies become authoritative. One interviewee mentions Emma Goldman, as if just remembering her, and we are presented with a still image of Goldman as played by Stapleton. Like Ragtime, the straddling of fact and fiction opens up opportunities for Goldman’s remembrance – she can be Maureen Stapleton, she can win an Oscar – and closes them down – to the extent she exists outside of the fiction of the film, she is an obscure personal memory.

Though less thematically resonant than Ragtime, Reds too echoes Living My Life in the political ideas and organisations that it deals with. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the distribution of birth control, the practicalities of free love and the relationship between the American Left and the USSR all have a place in Beatty’s realisation of the period. Goldman receives plenty of screen time. Despite this strong presence, and the film’s apparent involvement in many of the causes she held dear, the Goldman of Reds is a far more muted figure than that of Ragtime or, for that matter, that represented in the writing of the WLM. Straight-talking and serious, she cares about the coming revolution above all else and there is little sense of her sociability. Rather than fiery, she is stern, judgemental and somewhat maternal in her interactions with Reed and Bryant. Goldman’s self-awareness, which in other mediations is performative and playful, becomes self-deprecating. When Reed visits her in prison before her deportation, she asks for her picture to be put in a magazine with the title “The Most Powerful Country in the World is Scared of this Woman” (Beatty, 1981). This trading off her own appearance of harmlessness is familiar, yet with Stapleton’s delivery there is a hint of resignation. Without any companions in sight (even in the USSR Berkman does not appear), this Goldman is determined but independent, even detached.

Reds is anomalous in the canon of Goldman’s cultural remembrance: the figure it depicts is more static than active. Modest and caring, she occupies a feminised position. Even when this Goldman changes her attitude towards the USSR, there is a sense of passivity. Events
are happening to her; she is decidedly not making them happen. In his (1982) critique of the film, Robert A. Rosenstone argues that because of its flattening of Reed’s political ideas, the motivation behind his actions is never clear. Perhaps the same accusation of flattening can be levelled against Beatty’s Goldman. While it exhibits an involvement in a range of causes beyond those that are prevalent in her radical feminist memory (birth control, free love, etc.), ‘Emma Goldman’ in this depiction seems little more than a name. The film shows the cost of being installed in a pantheon of historical characters. Goldman becomes an emblem a bygone radicalism rather than – as those mnemonic stakeholders who began the project of ‘repairing’ her story hoped – a figure who resonates with the political ideas of the present. The representational gap between Reds and work such as Hemmings’s reimagining of Goldman’s letters to Sperry shows the stretching (as well as the continued relevance) of Goldman’s memory over the period since her resurrection by the WLM.

Other Emma Goldmans

“A lighthearted portrait of Goldman as a cultural rebel, the woman who dances in the revolution has been evoked on t-shirts and etched into the public consciousness for more than thirty years since the reprint of her autobiography in 1970,” writes Falk, “Although not completely inaccurate, this image ignores the darker shadows of her political militancy” (Goldman et al. 2003, 3). As Falk suggests, despite the desires of auto/biographical writers like herself to understand and investigate Goldman in her entirety, the whole Emma warts and all, their portrayals of her necessarily play up certain elements to the detriment of others. They tend towards representations of Goldman which actively gender her, emphasising her salience to contemporary feminisms. Meanwhile, the violence of her activism is downplayed, the intricacies of her anarchist politics are often subsumed by accounts of her personal life and her internationalism is overshadowed by her Americanness. These elements are largely absent from longform works, such as those of Shulman, Wexler and Falk, and from many shortform reminders of their narratives, such as the use of Goldman’s “If I can’t dance…” quotation.

This section considers possible versions of Goldman that stand outside of or seek to de-territorialise the dominant characterisation, summoning different associations with Goldman’s name. Hoping to build a more complete version of Goldman’s cultural memory I have gone in search of mediations that reckon with her violence, her anarchism and her internationalism. Drawing from search engine results and visits to anarchist bookshops and bookfairs, I take each of these three elements in turn to explore their place in Goldman’s afterlives and relationship
to those memories of her that have been projected through feminist auto/biographical writing. I conclude that, although alternative memories of Goldman exist, they tend to be overshadowed by (or by the remnants of) her feminist reclamation.

I turn first to representations of Goldman’s involvement in political violence, which appears as an omission throughout her afterlives. Despite Goldman’s support of violent tactics in early life, her active disavowal of these methods later on (including in *Living My Life* (1970, 536)) has tended to override her former reputation as a violent threat to the status quo. As Ferguson observes, “commentators on Goldman since her re-emergence as feminist icon in the 1970s have celebrated her commitment to a radical vision of human freedom, not her participation in revolutionary violence” (2008, 747); while Frankel gives the example of an exhibition organised by the Emma Goldman Papers Project celebrating her promotion of free speech and reproductive rights, “two themes [which] tied Goldman’s legacy to the political sensibilities of the day” (1996, 922). Goldman’s championing of freedom of speech has often been elided with a liberal and rights-based politics in which her relationship with insurgency is downplayed.

To the extent that questions of violence do crop up in her afterlives, they revolve instead around Goldman’s denunciation of state violence or her claim that the “most violent element in society is ignorance” (Goldman and Shulman 1998, 63). In this instance Goldman’s remembrance can be seen to follow the wider pattern of what Andreas Malm calls “strategic pacifism” (2020, 34), whereby – particularly since the late twentieth century – past militancy is actively misremembered as civility and revolutionary violence goes unrecognised as a component of activist struggles. The previous chapter showed how this pattern plays out in Michel’s afterlives, where violence is either rendered in vague and lyrical terms as proof of otherworldly bravery, or Michel is feminised in such a way that characterisations of her as a teacher and all-round carer obscure any reckoning with her militancy. Despite the extent to which J Edgar Hoover’s famous description of Goldman as the most “dangerous woman in America” is worn as a badge of honour by many of those remembering her, there is little trace of the violence of Goldman’s politics across her remembrance.

Goldman’s anarchism does remain an essential element through much of her afterlives, despite a tendency for it to play second-fiddle to feminism in representations of her as an anarcho-feminist. The centrality of Goldman’s anarchism to her remembrance has ebbed and flowed in relation to the broader history of anarchist uptake in the West. In the years directly
following her death, to the extent to which she was remembered, it was as an anarchist revolutionary. But faced with the threats of growing nationalism and the First World War, on the one hand, and the institution of the USSR and pull of communism on the other, the scope of anarchist influence declined after the early twentieth century, with the Spanish Civil War as a final flurry (Woodcock 1962), and early anarchist-led mediations of Goldman seem to have tailed off. Meanwhile Goldman’s growing representation as a radical feminist prototype in the 1960s, 70s and 80s has sometimes obscured any thorough reckoning with her anarchist ideals. Take for example Falk’s claim that: “Goldman's lasting influence is evidenced most clearly in the specific realms of freedom she espoused – in free speech, in sexual freedom – more than from the general promotion of anarchism that propelled her intellectual and political work” (Falk, Cole, and Thomas 1994, 4).

Yet my visits to anarchist bookshops and book fairs in London, Paris and Amsterdam over the past few years, confirm Goldman’s prevailing presence as a site of anarchist memory.131 These trips yielded a wealth of alternative editions of Goldman’s writing, such as pamphlet forms of her essays “Anarchism: What it Really Stands For” and “The New Declaration of Independence”, published by radical publishers PM Press, and further political writings inspired by her life and ideas. The presence of these mediations chime with the introduction to the Documentary History which suggests that, notwithstanding the suppression of anarchism by state authorities during and after Goldman’s lifetime, “because there was a strong written and oral tradition among anarchists, the continuity of their culture and lore was assured” (Goldman et al. 2003, 2). The underground nature of this lore and relatively small impact of anarchist subjects on the development of Goldman’s cultural afterlives can be attributed to their limited “memory capital” (Reading 2023). Standing outside of, and often in opposition to, powerful cultural institutions such as universities, anarchist versions of Goldman are less likely to be accorded status and circulated widely. They are therefore less consolidated and more ephemeral.

However, the visibility of Goldman’s anarchism may be changing. Writing in 2018, Hemmings suggests a renewed – academic if not popular – interest in Goldman that counters the prevalent reading of her as a radical feminist figure by paying fresh attention to her anarchism, mirroring “a renewed political and intellectual interest in anarchism more generally over the last ten or so years” (2018, 2). The formidable academic corpus of works on Goldman now contains several that navigate the details of her anarchist thought, particularly in more recent years (Weiss and Kensinger, 2007; Ferguson, 2011; Hemmings, 2018). Moreover, a
number of these works posit that Goldman’s gender has had a stifling effect on the recognition of her theoretical innovation, provoking readings of her personal life to the detriment of a thorough consideration of her political ideas. Nevertheless, where it is present, Goldman’s remembrance as an anarchist seems to develop in conscious relation to her remembrance as a radical feminist.

The same might be said with regard to Goldman’s remembrance as an internationalist and, correspondingly, her transnational afterlives. As demonstrated from her appearance in anarchist spaces around Europe, Goldman’s cultural memory maintains a position in anarchist publics outside of the United States. Yet there remains little trace of the time she spent in Europe. There is the archive in Amsterdam but nothing to mark the unhappy months she passed in the United Kingdom and no physical remnants to attest to her years in St Tropez. Goldman’s involvement in the Spanish Civil War has a limited presence in early mediations of her life: it is presented as a footnote to her time in the United States. Indeed, David Porter’s collection of Goldman’s writing on Spain, originally issued in 1983, states that, up to that point, Goldman’s “analysis and activism concerning the Spanish anarchists were barely discussed in print” (Goldman and Porter 2006, 1).

Where Goldman is commemorated outside of the United States her remembrance has tended to have developed out of, rather than alongside, her representation in the United States, as in the appearance of “if I can’t dance…” in Ellis-Bextor’s song. In 2017 a site commemorating Goldman was constructed for the 11th Kaunas Biennial in the Lithuanian town where she was born. Artist Karolina Freino placed a small beacon in the river which produced flashes of morse code which visitors could read with their phones. Over the course of around twenty days, the beacon ‘read out’ the entirety of Living My Life. Rendered in code, Goldman’s words provide a connection between the physical location of her birth and her life story and taking Goldman’s writing as the carrier of her essence. Years after the fact Goldman’s availability remains predicated on her “resurrection” in the 1960s and the powerful account of her personal life and American affiliation performed in Living My Life. The dominant remembrance of Goldman remains as an American radical feminist.

**Conclusion**

As I was writing the last part of this chapter, a friend gave me a postcard from an anarchist event in Amsterdam. On it is a photograph of a work of street art which depicts four strange,
childlike cartoon figures holding hands, an illuminati sign floating in the air and a more aggressive figure holding a paint roller who is poised to paint over and erase the large black words “IF I CAN’T DANCE TO IT IT’S NOT MY REVOLUTION”. The back of the card says “REVOLUTION (Emma Goldman)” and “Street Art: Augsburg/Berlin/Istanbul”, but I have not found further information about where and when this photograph was taken or how it ended up as a postcard circulating in the Netherlands.

The paths from Emma Goldman’s life to this itinerant piece of memorabilia are opaque. The postcard, like Ellis-Bextor’s song, seems to represent a diluted and garbled version of the activist. Even the quotation itself has lost its initial connotations, with the puzzling double “it”. Does it mean that the revolution is to be danced to? That the revolution is a revolution of dance? Goldman’s supposed quotation is evoked but not replicated in form or content. And yet, Goldman’s words give her remembrance power: this unanchored mediation conveys the huge reach of those words. The ephemeral street art, more easily circulated in its small portable postcard form, remedies Goldman’s writing from the 1920s and 30s to evoke a revolutionary spirit.

This chapter has demonstrated the path-dependency of Emma Goldman’s cultural afterlives, starting with her lifetime and moving through to the present day. It has tracked the creation of a radical feminist version of Goldman, starting in the 1960s. And shown the personal and collective stakes that inform the memory work behind this creation, in which rhetorics of allegiance, empathy, recognition and alignment interact to build a case for the reparative necessity of remembering Goldman. Demonstrating the longstanding effects of Goldman’s ‘resurrection’ I have explored the difficulties of finding versions of her that diverge
significantly from or destabilise her territorialisation as a radical feminist. Goldman’s salience to this movement has, as Jansen points out, had a fundamental impact on her remembrance. However, this chapter has also established that Goldman’s posthumous salience depends on the symbolic power created during her life; the performative and literary qualities of Goldman’s own self-representation have been vital to the circulation of her afterlives. My reading has demonstrated that this so-called resurrection has been an interactive process, to which Goldman’s telling of her own story was fundamental.

This chapter therefore confirms the hypothesis offered in my work on Louise Michel that the availability of symbolic resources from their lifetimes is an essential basis for the remembrance of contentious individuals. Given that, unlike Michel, Goldman died in relative obscurity, this chapter extends the argument of the previous one. It shows the substantial role played by remembering subjects who both circulate those resources and remediate a revolutionary’s life – creating carriers of memory that compete with each other through a process of “intertextual antagonism” (Rigney 1990) and catalyse further mediations. As her memory is mediated and remediated, elements of Goldman’s appearance, her story or the way in which that story is told become fixed and effectively territorialised. Consequently, as in the case of Louise Michel, representations of Emma Goldman manifest repeated tropes and associations: from her glinting pince-nez to her passion for dancing and its liberatory consequences.

Unlike Michel, who reaches a greater level of symbolic abstraction, Goldman’s humanity is always emphasised. This distinction has its roots in their autobiographies as much as it does in the motivations and interests of the mnemonic stakeholders. From her own writing to her ‘appearance’ at Occupy Wall Street, Goldman is crafted as a public character, both in terms of Jasper et al.’s definition of public characters as “close approximations of real human beings, only more compelling and more familiar” (2020, 3), and in keeping with Rita Felski’s description of characters as “portmanteau creatures” who we identify with so that “we connect through them to other persons as well as to other things” (2020, 91). Goldman’s propensity for relatability and her revolutionary vision of a free world have been powerfully and successfully merged in her afterlives, despite the complications, tensions and omissions of this characterisation.

86 “[W]e hold these truths to be self-evident: that all human beings, irrespective of race, colour or sex are born with equal right to share at the table of life”, “the history of the American kings of capital and authority, is the history of repeated crime, injustice, oppression, outrage and abuse”, “the nameless millions are at the mercy of
ruthless wealth gatherers, unscrupulous law makers and corrupt politicians”, “each and every individual is, and ought to be, free!” (Noam Berg 2011).

87 Goldman’s autobiography describes a scene in which she has a heated argument with the anarchist philosopher Peter Kropotkin about “the place of the sex problem in anarchist propaganda” (Goldman 1970, 253) and in 1900 she supposedly walked out of an international anarchist conference in Paris after she was prevented from presenting a paper on sexuality (Goldman and Shulman 1998, 9).

88 “What distinguishes anarchists from others,” writes David Porter in the introduction to a collection of Goldman’s writings on the Spanish Civil War, “is their unusual sensitivity precisely to the essential interrelationship of the several liberation goals, to that potential corruption of ends by the means, to the dangers of compromise” (Goldman and Porter 2006, 28–29, my emphasis).

89 Despite her contempt for suffrage campaigns, Goldman was a vocal admirer of the Pankhursts, for the form of their activism if not its object, and referred to Emmeline Pankhurst as “brilliant” (Goldman and Shulman 1998, 199). “All honor to the heroism and sturdiness of the English suffragettes,” she wrote in 1910, “Thanks to their energetic, aggressive methods, they have proved an inspiration to some of our own lifeless and spineless ladies” (Goldman and Shulman 1998, 198).

90 Frankel (192) mentions Joseph Ishill’s Emma Goldman: A Challenging Rebel (1957) translated by Herman Frank and originally published in 1944 in Freie Arbeter Stimme, a New-York-based Yiddish-language anarchist paper; Charles Madison’s “Emma Goldman; Biographical Sketch” from his collection Critics & Crusader: A Century of American Protest (1959); and Ethel Mannin’s Red Rose: A Novel Based on the Life of Emma Goldman (1941), which I shall come to later in this chapter.

91 This focus on ambivalence follows from a desire for political change: “Attending to ambivalence as a continuous political and affective reality for those who want to intervene in gendered, raced, and sexual meanings and structures in order to ameliorate their harms shifts the nature of historical and contemporary inquiry” (Hemmings 2018, 5).

92 “...the notion of personhood and the ideologies of identity constitutive of it are so internalized (personally and culturally) that they seem ‘natural’ and ‘universal’ characteristics of persons.” (Smith and Watson 2010, 62).

93 Comparing the opening of the autobiography to Sister Carrie, Theodore Dreiser’s 1900 novel about a young girl who moves to the big city, Wexler concedes that she “may have underestimated the importance of such literary models for the autobiography” (Wexler 1992, 38). Frankel remarks that: “[T]he book was written in a simple yet colorful English for an American audience and featured many ingredients of an ‘American story’ [...] European writers, whether Simone de Beauvoir or Virginia Woolf, could not appeal to the same cultural sensibilities” (Frankel 1996, 923).

94 For instance, a lengthy description of her arrival in America in 1885, her time spent in Rochester and her unhappy marriage to Jacob Kershner are revealed to be her reflections on the events of her life thus far, after a sleepless night in New York. The break of the new day in the Minkin flat [where she is living in New York] still found me awake,” she writes, “The door upon the old had now closed for ever. The new was calling, and I eagerly stretched out my hands towards it. I fell into a deep, peaceful sleep” (Goldman 1970, 25).

95 While in Chicago she visits one of the martyrs in prison and lays a wreath on the grave of those buried in Waldheim Cemetery (220–22); in prison herself she wonders at the discovery that she has the same guard as “Parsons [one of the martyrs] and his comrades” (306); she visits the cemetery again at the death of the anarchist Voltairine de Cleyre who has been buried near the martyrs (505); and is emotionally affected by the twenty-fifth anniversary of their martyrdom, which “intensified my feeling for the men I had never personally known, but who by their death had become the most decisive influence in my existence” (508).

96 For instance, describing her relationship with her anarchist mentor Johann Most, Goldman moves from emancipated rejection of him, and his attempts to contain her, to a rejection of her gender. After her first successful public speaking experience she reflects that the experience has cured her “of my childlike faith in the infallibility of my teacher [Most] and impressed on me the need of independent thinking” (53) and later that “I had awakened to independent thinking, I had slipped out of his reach” (65). When Most is uninterested in hearing about her speech, treating her as his lover rather than his comrade, Goldman objects: “Now he wanted only to feel me near – his Blondkopf, his little girl-woman. I flared up, declaring that I would not be treated as a mere female” (53, emphasis mine). Elsewhere she expresses shock “to discover in myself such ordinary female vanity” (503) or makes herself unpopular with groups such as the Women’s City Club in Los Angeles, where she is branded “an enemy of women’s freedom” (556) after lecturing on the inconsistencies of my [Goldman’s] sex...” and “woman’s inhumanity” (557).

97 Quarrelling with her lover Ed Brady she reports that: “He [Ed] said he had always credited me with being able to reason like a man, objectively; now he felt I was arguing subjectively, like all women. I replied that the reasoning faculties of most men had not impressed me to the point of wishing to imitate them, and that I preferred
to do my own thinking as a woman” (340). Being a woman is positioned as a cerebral action, carried out by the mind rather than the body.

98 She chides herself when expressing the intensity of her love for Ben Reitman: “Fool, lovesick fool that I was, blinded by passion not to see what everyone else saw. I, Emma Goldman, to be carried away like any ordinary woman of forty by a mad attraction for a young man...” (440).

99 Goldman is first called a “dangerous woman” (101) by the press after speaking in defence of Berkman’s attempted assassination of Henry Clay Frick but goes on to reclaim and revel in this description, employing the heading “The kind of dangerous anarchist I am”.

100 She is sent a Chinese magazine with her picture on the cover (660), in Kiev she finds some old copies of *Mother Earth* (839). However, Goldman also complains about the limitations of her fame. Exiled in England she struggles to find an audience and notes that “In America Sasha and I were well known, but it was different in England, my friends replied. Here people moved in a herd, at the direction of their shepherd, and this applied alike to party organizations, societies, clubs. We must have backing to reach the public ear” (966).

101 “I found it an extremely difficult job and hellishly painful. It is bad enough to dig into the dead past, still worse to relive it all, especially Alexander Berkman’s and my correspondence which amounts to thousands of letters... You need not think that I am making a thorough job. That would take months” (Goldman 1939a).

102 It is unclear why Goldman writes “autobiography” here rather than “biography”, but perhaps can be taken as evidence of the intensity of her connection to Berkman and her sense of their shared destiny.

103 *Living My Life* makes it clear that Goldman was already called ‘Red Emma’ during her lifetime. In her own account, this moniker originated with the press, who used it to stir up fearful feelings towards Goldman. Although her friend Ethel Mannin suggests “it was the colour of her hair, not of her politics, as commonly assumed, which originally started the nickname ‘Red Emma’” (Mannin 1941, 5). Either way, ‘Red Emma’ does not appear in *Living My Life* to have been a name used by any of Goldman’s friends or sympathisers at the time of her activism. Indeed, in the preface to *Love, Anarchy and Emma Goldman* Candace Falk describes Goldman’s old comrades’ aversion to the name, given that the anarchist colour – as far as they were concerned – was black (Falk 1990, xvi).

Yet, perhaps following Goldman’s own frequent allusions to this title in her autobiography, it went on to become an affectionate nickname used by those recalling her notoriety in familiar first name terms.

104 This tendency includes more recent readings that contrive to see her Jewishness as proof of her intersectionality. See Hemmings (2018, 103–4).

105 In 1972 Shulman published *Red Emma Speaks*, a substantial collection of Goldman’s writing which included several essays from *Anarchism and Other Essays* (1910), the afterward to *My Disillusionment in Russian* (1923), some scenes from *Living My Life* (1931), arranged into thematic sections – “Organization of Society”, “Social Institutions”, “Violence” – each with prefaced by a note by Shulman.

106 Both released in 1984 *An Intimate Life* and *Love, Anarchy* do not count each other as sources. Falk’s book does not mention Wexler, but Wexler refers to Falk in her acknowledgements. She thanks her for drawing her attention to Goldman and Reitman’s correspondence, recommends her biography and notes that “[e]xchanges of insights with Falk were helpful in the development of my thinking about the Goldman-Reitman relationship and its importance in Emma Goldman’s life” (Wexler 1984, xi). Given this, it seems likely that Falk published before Wexler.

107 The very power of Goldman’s name is a recurring motif in *An Intimate Life*. Wexler, for example, opens by recalling the physical effect of a name that was “‘enough in those days to produce a shudder,’ recalled her friend Margaret Anderson, editor of the avant-garde Little Redview. ‘She was considered a monster, an exponent of free love and bombs.’” (xv).

108 *To the Barricades* does include a selected bibliography at the end in which Shulman lists work by Frank Harris, Hippolyte Havel, Rebecca West, Joseph Ishill, Ethel Mannin and Floyd Dell under the heading “Works about Emma Goldman” (2011, 147–48). Of this list Joseph Ishill’s *Emma Goldman: A Challenging Rebel* appears to be the only work entirely dedicated to Goldman. (Harris, Havel and West’s are introductions of biographical sketches. Dell and Mannin’s works about broader topics that contain mention of Goldman.)

109 Despite his biography’s more limited circulation, Wexler and Falk also indicate Drinnon as a central source and inspiration. Wexler describes *Rebel in Paradise* as “the essential foundation for my own efforts” (Wexler 1984, xi). Falk thanks Drinnon on the first of her nine pages of acknowledgments and imparts that he warned her “when Emma Goldman steps into your life, she really takes over!” (Falk 1990, 424).


111 The letters – in which Goldman’s vulnerability, her obsessive desire and her possessiveness towards Reitman are indisputably apparent – appeared to show her struggles “within rather than against patriarchal values” (Hemmings 2018, 62, emphasis my own).
“The problems of individualism, dissent, minority voice, authority, hierarchy, which were at the heart of the movement’s quarrel with the world, with its own adherents, and with writers, were examined by Emma in essay after essay, event after event” (2012, 142).

Falk describes this in anecdotal terms which heighten the sense of chance and contingency: “He disappeared into the storeroom of the shop while Lowell [her partner], Emma, and I went next door to get some ice cream. After a ten-minute search, he came running after us, shouting, ‘I found them!’ Sure enough, there was an old boot box holding hundreds of yellowing letters” (Falk 1990, xii).

Steimer’s letter echoes the language of those second-wave feminists who considered Goldman a role model. “...she [Goldman] proved once again her strength of character [in eventually leaving Reitman]”, she writes, “that she was, is and will always be: THE GREAT EXAMPLE!” (Falk 1990, xvi).

“I cannot help pondering how much my own thought changed, in part as a result of the work on Goldman, but also in response to contacts within various feminist and intellectual communities, to the political climate of the Reagan years, and to the changing discourse of feminism itself” (Wexler 1992, 36). For example, she was critical of Goldman’s anticommunism at the time of publishing, but describes how, in the years since (1984–1992), the collapse of the USSR and sense of crisis on the international Left caused her to consider that perhaps she “had overstated the case against Emma Goldman” (Wexler 1992, 42).

“With the flowering of feminism in the early 1970s,” Wexler writes, “Emma Goldman in particular became a new heroine. Her outspoken sexual radicalism and her brief brush with Freud in Vienna (echoes of my own family’s involvement with psychoanalysis) further enhanced her appeal for me” (Wexler 1992, 37).

Later in the chapter Wexler suggests that women biographers find their mothers in their biographical subjects. She explains that, eerily, her mother eventually died on May 14th: the same day Goldman had died.

Interestingly, Wexler is not the only Goldman scholar to make use of this quotation. In the 2011 work Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets, Ferguson opens with Wolff’s words and refers back to them in a later chapter in order to ask: “What sort of foremother is Goldman for us now?” (Ferguson 2011a, 177). The reuse of this quotation shows the sense of intimacy that is characteristic of many of those involved in Goldman’s afterlives.

“What attracted me from the start were the conflicts and contradictions that Goldman saw at the center of her own character [...] I have always imagined that, in revealing her emotions so fully and in raising so many questions about her own motives, Goldman wished to invite the collaboration of future biographers in sorting out her complexities” (Wexler 1984, xix).

Falk and her colleagues actively sought out additions to the collection from around the world; eager for the EGPP to reflect the internationalism of Goldman’s activism and life. They found, for example, Japanese translations of Goldman’s writing on women and marriage published by a women’s movement in the 1920s (Falk, Cole, and Thomas 1994, 6). The archive also includes microfilm copies of the holdings of the Emma Goldman Papers from the IISH and large quantities of government and legal documents, including material out of police files from Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, Russia, Japan, and Canada).

“Indeed,” she writes, “the human connections around the world and across time have been among the most rewarding experiences of working on the papers, and added a vibrancy and freshness befitting the life of Emma Goldman” (Falk, Cole, and Thomas 1994, 11).

Encompassing the full range of the EGPP’s collection, the volumes once more contain material from sources both sympathetic and antagonistic towards Goldman: surveillance documents are set alongside shining tributes from anarchist publications. They also include extensive forewords and appendix materials, with detailed accounts of Goldman’s activities on a near day-to-day basis; and images which range from posters for meetings and lectures, to anti-anarchist cartoons, to the covers of Mother Earth.


Searching ‘Emma Goldman’ in the archives of two prominent British newspapers (from the year of her birth in 1869 to the archives’ limit in 2003), The Guardian and The Times, produces 145 results from The Guardian and 75 from The Times. The iAnalyzer tool, which produces graphs of intensity and duration from these results,
finds two peaks in The Guardian archive: one around her death and another in the early 1970s. The Times archive shows only a small peak around the year of her death. The available articles are predominantly reviews: of historical work, biographical work but, more often, of fictional work in which Goldman appears, in particular the film Reds and the novel and musical Ragtime. Goldman’s memory within social movements does not appear prominently in this corpus.

126 They fit descriptions of historical novels wherein “[A]s novels, they are written under the aegis of the fictionality convention whereby the individual writer enjoys the freedom to make-believe in the existence of a world ‘uncommitted to reality’. As historical novels, however, they also link up with the ongoing collective attempts to represent the past and invite comparison with what is already known about the historical world from other sources” (Rigney 2000, 19).

127 In this vein, Ragtime is read to indicate that history is a form of fiction, and one which in the popular imagination is tinted by sentimentality and nostalgia, so that the novel “is not so much about the ragtime era as about the received discourse about that era” (Sánchez 1997, 18). Alternately, as in Fredric Jameson’s Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Ragtime negates the specificity of the historical: “Ragtime remains the most peculiar and stunning monument to the aesthetic situation engendered by the disappearance of the historical referent” (2005, 25).

128 Frankel cites Goldman’s presence in Ragtime as an example of her canonisation, while keeping a close watch on the extent to which such depictions “combined deceptively benign and nostalgic textual surfaces with potentially threatening undertones that indicated a lingering cultural unease with women’s power and with sex and sexuality despite, or because of, the early successes of feminism and the sexual revolution…” (Frankel 1996, 925).

129 This fictionalised meeting includes both Ben Reitman, publicly calling Goldman “my momma” (141), and Sasha Berkman, with whom he clashes.

130 She appears first as a friend of Reed. We see her speaking out against the First World War, in prison before her deportation, and finally in the USSR, where she fulfils the crucial role in the film’s ultimately romantic narrative of reuniting the protagonists.

131 My most fruitful visits were to Housmans and Freedom Press in London, Libraire Publico and Quilombo in Paris, and Het Fort van Sjakoo in Amsterdam.

132 Outside the building of Freedom Press in East London, the oldest surviving anarchist publishing house in the English-speaking world, a cartoon image of Goldman appears on a plaque alongside 35 other anarchists — including Louise Michel. However, it seems that the plaque is not a commemoration of anarchists who lived in London but a broader celebration of historical anarchists.

133 Porter is another mnemonic stakeholder who is open about the role of his political allegiances in his attachment to Goldman. “I have not sought to hide my own anarchist perspective,” he writes, “and hope that in doing so the overall purpose, nature and readability of the book are much more consistent with Goldman’s own intent” (Goldman and Porter 2006, 10).


135 Apart from Goldman’s tombstone in Chicago, this is the only physical site commemorating Goldman to date. Many thanks to Angela Shpolberg for drawing my attention to this monument.
The Unsettled Afterlives of Sylvia Pankhurst

“It’s been a real saga!” Philippa Clark, a member of the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee, told me, “But genuinely I thought, well, Sylvia has never given up, and nor have we. […] I think of all the individuals who have sent us five pounds and that’s as much to us as fifty pounds or five hundred pounds. Because they say, this is right, she should be remembered. […] Because Sylvia kept on and on and on as a campaigner!” The saga she is referring to is the Committee’s campaign of over twenty years to erect a statue of the lifelong agitator Sylvia Pankhurst (1882–1960). Since 1998, they have raised funds from within the labour movement and elsewhere, speaking at trade union events across the United Kingdom. The committee does not just want to erect the statue, they want the process of getting there to be important. Through their “memory activism” (Gutman and Wüstenberg 2021), they want people to learn more about Sylvia Pankhurst’s life.

However, along the way, the Memorial Committee has been faced with obstacle after obstacle. First, their campaign for the statue to be placed outside the Houses of Parliament in London was met with resistance from the House of Lords, who claimed that the statue was “not of sufficient artistic merit” and that Pankhurst did not have “sufficient connection” to parliament. After ten years of lobbying, the committee’s planning permission to erect the statue in Westminster expired and they settled on an alternate placement in Clerkenwell Green, a historic site of radicalism and home of the Marx Memorial Library. The statue was cast but the local council decided to refurbish the green before the statue could be installed. When I spoke to Clark in September 2020, the refurbishment of the statue’s intended site was on hold as a result of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, with the statue itself still sitting in the foundry where it had been for eighteen months. The committee continued to raise money to pay for the statue’s completion and transportation and for the rent to keep it in the workshop. But after such a lengthy and hard-fought campaign, the situation was far from ideal. All the same, Clark was adamant: the members of the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee “would like to see it raised before we all die”. Despite a succession of bureaucratic hurdles, the campaign will march on, inspired by its indefatigable subject, and the process itself will demonstrate the power of collective struggle in the face of establishment adversaries.

So why do a group of women union organisers care so much about Sylvia Pankhurst? What inspires such laborious, yet potentially marginal, acts of memory activism? What might a statue of Sylvia Pankhurst achieve? In their campaigning material, the Memorial Committee
refer to a shared message of “Sisterhood, Socialism and Solidarity” (‘The Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee’ n.d.), three concepts that align Pankhurst with a left-wing feminist political imaginary, an association that has been pivotal to her remembrance. Yet over the course of the sixty-plus years since her death, Pankhurst has had relatively few mnemonic actors claiming ownership of her reputation.

Unlike the other cases which make up this study, there has been no work to date that seeks to understand Pankhurst’s cultural memory. This chapter shows that Pankhurst’s remembrance is essentially the outcome of the reparative memory work of several interlinked and overlapping groups of mnemonic stakeholders. These include those who express an explicitly political stake in her remembrance, those who claim a more personal stake and those who intertwine the two. The committed individuals and small groups who respond to and remediate the story of Pankhurst’s life include herself, her family, a number of socialist feminist historians and other, more disparate, remembering subjects. Pankhurst’s portrait adorns a pub in Bow, East London, where she has been celebrated for her involvement in the local community (Vlessing forthcoming). In Woodford Green, Essex, where she lived for many years, Pankhurst has been remembered through exhibitions and performances that often treat her as something of a local eccentric. In Ethiopia, where she spent the final years of her life, Pankhurst has been widely and openly commemorated as an ally of the Emperor Haile Selassie and a significant anti-fascist and anti-colonialist figure. Distinctive versions of Pankhurst are not circulated by prominent social movements, political parties or nation states but by small numbers of mnemonic stakeholders.

Each of these groups comes close to supporting well-defined representations of Sylvia Pankhurst, yet she emerges as an outlier, who troubles clear classifications. She is simultaneously an outsider as a public-facing woman in a deeply patriarchal society, an insider by virtue of her famous family and place within the suffragette movement, and an outsider in her rejection of both. The content and form of her activism have often provoked questions of definition for later remembering subjects. Given that she was involved in many causes should she be remembered primarily as a feminist or as socialist, as an anti-imperialist or anti-racist? Pankhurst is variously seen as innovative and ahead of her time and/or as a stubborn maverick incapable of cooperation or compromise. In some mediations, her involvement in many causes is seen as a random demonstration of indecisiveness. In others it is proof of a strong commitment to a specific and cohesive series of ideological concerns.
This relatively small-scale circulation means that diverging versions of Pankhurst rarely come into contact, combine or compete. As a result, the mediations that make up Pankhurst’s afterlives are clearly identifiable, and the carriers of her memory take a predominantly narrative form as they attempt to find and present a salient version of Pankhurst’s life. This limited recognition also means that there are very few shortform “reminders” (Rigney 2021) of Pankhurst’s story in circulation as she has not come to ‘stand for’ any cause in particular.

This chapter argues that, despite the hard work of mnemonic stakeholders like the Memorial Committee, Pankhurst’s cultural memory has not been territorialised. She is not remembered with readily identifiable associations and characteristics either as a myth, like Michel, nor as a historical character, like Goldman. Despite readily available material from her lifetime, there is no single work in which she presents herself as a singular political actor. The many movements she was part of, and the apparent challenge of identifying a guiding ideology to unify these movements, seem to have made characterisation more difficult. Throughout her cultural afterlives, Pankhurst has never come to stand for the values and ideas of a clearly identifiable social movement in the way Michel and Goldman have for communism, anarchism or radical feminism.
Roadmap

This chapter provides a roughly chronological account of Sylvia Pankhurst’s cultural afterlives from her death in 1960 up until the time of writing in 2023. Given the smaller scale of, and absence of previous work on, Pankhurst’s remembrance, it is more comprehensive than the previous two: I have created a corpus that contains the majority of the representations of Pankhurst produced since her death.

After a brief account of Pankhurst’s life, I assess her symbolic availability at the time of her death in 1960. This section considers material from Pankhurst’s lifetime that has been consistently available since, both in terms of published writing and the ephemera that would go on to make up her archive. I go on to look at material that corresponds with Jansen’s second phase, covering the period from around 1960 to 2018 in two parts. The first of these parts looks at mediations of Pankhurst’s life in the form of auto/biographical texts, the second at other types of media including film, television, theatre and artistic installations. This twofold approach demonstrates the ways in which Pankhurst’s remembrance developed at different rates in historical writing and scholarship and in more entertainment-based or artistic media.

In the final section of this chapter – corresponding to Jansen’s third phase – I suggest that, since 2018, Pankhurst’s remembrance has gained greater cohesion, although it remains relatively diffuse, not yet clearly territorialised. This section looks at the ways Pankhurst has been mediated in recent years and provides an interview-based overview of contemporary understandings of Sylvia Pankhurst. As an interviewer looking for a version of Pankhurst with an identifiable and consistent set of associations, I am myself undertaking memory work and explicitly contributing to her cultural afterlives. Throughout the chapter, I pay close attention to the rhetoric which remembering subjects make use of in order to understand why they remember Pankhurst.

Sylvia Pankhurst’s Life Story

I have drawn from texts that I shall in due course examine critically (E. S. Pankhurst 1911; Mitchell 1967; R. Pankhurst 1979; Castle 1987; Romero 1987; Bullock 1992; E. S. Pankhurst and Dodd 1993; Winslow 1996; Davis 1999; Harrison 2003; Purvis 2008; Connelly 2013;
Holmes 2020), to map out the events which have been pivotal to her remembrance and the foundations of her symbolic availability.

Estelle Sylvia Pankhurst was born in 1882 Manchester, to Dr Richard Marsden Pankhurst (1834–1898) and Emmeline Pankhurst (née Goulden) (1858–1928). She was their second daughter.138 Pankhurst grew up in an activist milieu. Her family were friends with a number of prominent left-wing political figures, including Keir Hardie (1856–1915), William Morris (1834–1896), Annie Besant (1847–1933) and Louise Michel (1830–1905). As a young adult, Pankhurst was a passionate artist and she studied both in the UK and in Italy. In 1903 Emmeline Pankhurst set up the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), the militant arm of the campaign for women’s suffrage that came to be known as the “suffragettes”. Pankhurst was a part of the WSPU from the very start, designing its logo, banners, badges, and pamphlets, acting as the organisation’s first honorary secretary and writing the movement’s first history, The Suffragette (1911). By the summer of 1912, Pankhurst gave up making art in order to give her attention fully to the suffragette’s cause. She engaged in direct action, was imprisoned, went on hunger strikes reportedly more times than any other suffragette and was repeatedly and violently force-fed.

However, in 1914, Pankhurst was dismissed from the WSPU due to disagreements with her mother and sister about tactics and political direction. Pankhurst believed, for instance, that the organisation needed more emphasis on the experiences of working-class women and that the vote should be extended to all women, while her mother and sister focused only on the upper and middle classes. She set up her own organisation in the East End of London, the East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS), with a commitment to working women’s welfare and in strong opposition to the First World War. She also edited and published a paper called first the The Woman’s Dreadnought and later The Workers’ Dreadnought, and set up a number of initiatives and welfare schemes in the area. These ranged from organising a People’s Army to setting up a toy factory (in an effort to provide well-paid work for local women), a crèche and a cost-price restaurant.

During this time Pankhurst’s politics shifted further to the left and she became a vocal supporter of the Russian Revolution, a stance that separated her from the mainstream British labour movement of the time. She travelled extensively around Continental Europe meeting left-wing leaders and, in August 1920, she went to Moscow (as a stowaway) for the Second Congress of the Third International, where she met Lenin. Pankhurst helped set up the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), although she was dismissed shortly afterwards for...
her refusal to conform to the party line – rejecting suggestions that they should align themselves with the Labour Party and using the *Dreadnought* to criticise the CPGB.

In 1924, Pankhurst and her partner, an Italian anarchist named Silvio Corio, moved out of the East End to Woodford, Essex, where they opened a workers’ tearoom, dubbed the Red Cottage. Pankhurst continued to write prolifically and increasingly addressed the threat of fascism. She gave birth to her first and only child, Richard Pankhurst. The fact that this child was born out of wedlock ostracised her further from her family and when her mother died Pankhurst was side-lined from commemorations of Emmeline’s life. She continued to write extensively, publishing her best-known work *The Suffragette Movement* in 1931 and became increasingly involved in anti-fascist and, soon after, anti-colonial activity.

Pankhurst was particularly active in her opposition to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and, subsequently, British intervention in the area. In line with this growing concern, she launched another newspaper, *New Times and Ethiopia News* (NT&EN). Following the Second World War she remained active in campaigns to reconstruct Ethiopia. In 1954 the British finally withdrew troops from Ethiopia and two years later, accompanied by her son Richard and his partner Rita, Sylvia accepted an invitation from the Ethiopian government to live there. Sylvia Pankhurst died in Addis Ababa on 27 September 1960 at the age of 78. She received a state funeral, held in the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Addis Ababa, was termed an ‘honorary Ethiopian’ by Haile Selassie and buried in the Holy Trinity graveyard, the only foreigner with a grave there at the time. (Pankhurst’s tomb remains outside the Cathedral. Her son Richard is now buried there too. Addis Ababa further commemorates her through a Sylvia Pankhurst Street that runs through the centre of the city and a Sylvia Pankhurst café on that same street.)

This story gives the clear impression of a life driven by a never-ending string of campaigns, engagements and causes. It raises questions about the relationship between a life cycle and the cycle of a social movement, demonstrating “how the same person can be both dissenting and consenting, insider and outsider, as they live through the life cycle of a movement” (Jolly 2011, 5) and survive the cycles of different movements. Attempts to narrativize Pankhurst’s life therefore tend to compartmentalise her actions into a series of chronological parts. These sections crystallise around several different causes: a) her time in the WSPU, b) her socialism and experience during the First World War, c) her communism and d) anti-fascism and Ethiopia. Some works on Pankhurst’s life use a categorisation that precedes this list with a section on Pankhurst as an artist (Connelly) or draw attention to a
period of renewed interest in women and suffrage in the 1930s between sections on her communism and anti-fascism (Dodd). The effect of this compartmentalisation is multi-fold. It means that prominent causes that do not easily fit into any compartment, such as Pankhurst’s campaign for Home Rule in Ireland around 1912, are often overlooked. Furthermore, the unequal distribution of time over these different sections – with Pankhurst’s experience in the WSPU spanning around eight years and her involvement with anti-fascism and Ethiopia the better part of thirty – puts a disproportionate emphasis on the early years of her life. Because of the dispersed nature of Pankhurst’s remembrance, attempts have rarely been made to fit this story into broader historical patterns.

Symbolic Availability
Following news of Pankhurst’s death, she was widely celebrated in her adopted homeland and broadly neglected in her original one. The Ethiopian Observer published a special issue on her which drew heavily from Pankhurst’s account of her own life in The Suffragette Movement and elsewhere (Estelle Sylvia Pankhurst Papers). Meanwhile, it appears that the Guardian was the only prominent British newspaper to contain an obituary to her. This obituary sets the tone for versions of Pankhurst’s life that attempt to align her character and her political resistance and find the results paradoxical. On the one hand she is seen as admirably tenacious and unyielding; on the other she is always on the edge of being taken seriously, close to being dismissed for her consistent “wrong-headedness”.

Such depoliticising obituaries suggest a form of cultural remembrance that focuses on an unconventional public personality as much as a lifelong agitator.

This characterisation persists through Pankhurst’s afterlives (for instance, as I shall go on to discuss, in Patricia Romero’s biography), although it stands in contradistinction to that which emerges from the wealth of material traces Pankhurst left behind. Given Pankhurst’s limited visibility in Europe at the time of her death, her symbolic availability depends more on her own commemorative efforts than the representational work of others. What follows surveys Pankhurst’s own attempts to define her life and politics, often in an explicit attempt to affect her future remembrance, and identifies the work of early mnemonic stakeholders in building the symbolic significance of that material.
Pankhurst’s Published Writing

Much of Pankhurst’s political activity took the form of writing, particularly in the later stages of her life, from around the time of her move to Woodford. As both founder and editor of The Woman’s Dreadnought (18 March 1914–21 July 1917), The Workers’ Dreadnought (28 July 1917–14 June 1924), New Times and Ethiopia News (9 May 1936–5 May 1956) and the Ethiopia Observer (1956–1960) she contributed to and developed political journalism for the better part of fifty years. Outside of her own newspapers, she wrote prolifically and produced publications on an impressive range of subjects, from the necessity of forming soviets in the United Kingdom, to Romanian poetry, to the importance of creating an international language. These publications vary considerably in their approach. Soviet Russia as I Saw It (1921), for instance, is a highly personal account that lingers on Pankhurst’s particular experience. Whereas India and the Earthly Paradise (1926) is an indictment of imperialism and an analysis of Indian history and traditions with a particular focus on the treatment of women, which appears to be entirely based on research Pankhurst undertook from London. She never visited India. Despite the range of subject and the variety of approach, however, a consistent version of Sylvia Pankhurst emerges from this writing, earnest, industrious and conscientious to a fault. Whether personal or historic, there is also a thread running through most of these works, with an emphasis on the fate of the downtrodden, vulnerable and oppressed.

Within her vast oeuvre, Pankhurst’s writing is best known for her histories of the suffragette movement. In producing the first official history of the movement, The Suffragette. The History of the Women’s Militant Suffrage Movement 1905–1910 (1911) and The Suffragette Movement. An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideas (1931), Pankhurst made a major contribution to the remembrance of the WSPU. Furthermore, in writing The Life of Emmeline Pankhurst. The Suffragette Struggle for Women’s Citizenship (1935) she staked a specific claim in the shaping of her mother’s cultural afterlives. These texts have remained central, if oft-disputed, resources for later stories of the movement and have formed the basis for much subsequent life writing on Pankhurst.

The Suffragette Movement is in many ways the closest Pankhurst came to writing an autobiography, although its presentation and identification as an objective history of the movement means that any insights into Pankhurst’s feelings must be indirectly gleaned. The text is written in the first person but without much reflection on the internal experiences of the narrated Pankhurst. When describing her imprisonment and hunger strike, for example,
Pankhurst is detailed but detached, her emphasis always on a higher cause: “I was racked with pains, my legs ached, my feet were swollen and burning. I thought of the martyrs of the past who walked on red-hot plough shares for their faith. The pain in my back was overwhelming, my throat was parched” (Pankhurst and Dodd 1993, 175). Starting with a description of Pankhurst’s childhood, it moves through her time in art school, her early involvement with the WSPU and describes her split with her mother and sister. The Suffragette Movement is highly critical of Christabel and Emmeline in a way that her earlier work is not. It has been viewed as a “specifically socialist challenge” to early histories of the campaign for women’s right to vote (Pankhurst and Dodd 1993, 21), which either downplay the role of the militants in winning the vote or display them as aggressive or autocratic. Subsequently, the text has been considered by many a definitive history of the movement and was reprinted in 1977 by the feminist press Virago.

Discussions of Pankhurst’s motivations in writing The Suffragette Movement and questions about the veracity of her account have been generally fraught, reflecting many of the same fault lines as the splits in the suffragette movement itself. Later histories have suggested that it side-lines the work of earlier suffrage campaigners, plays up the role of the Pankhurst family and, perhaps as an act of revenge, is unnecessarily critical of Emmeline and Christabel (Pugh 2001). Such debates around the The Suffragette Movement demonstrate the central role of Pankhurst’s writing both in shaping her own afterlives and the cultural memory of the “social movement organisations” (Zald and Gamson 1987) that she was a part of, both the WSPU and the ELFS. It remains a central departure point for most, if not all, later mediations of her life. However, despite autobiographical elements, the framing of these texts has been first and foremost as histories of those movements. Whereas elements of the cultural memory of Goldman and Michel are linked to social movements, such as anarchism, they are never so specifically connected to their particular organisations. These texts serve to embed Pankhurst within the legacy of the WSPU rather than to individualise or distinguish her from it.

Archival Work
The rest of the material that Pankhurst left behind when she died, and the choice of location for that material, situates her memory firmly within a tradition of transnational radical movements. The bulk of Pankhurst’s archive is held in the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam. The collection was donated to the IISH by Richard Pankhurst in 1961, with a smaller addition in 1976. The choice of the IISH is perhaps an indication of
Pankhurst’s own wishes and is certainly an indication of the intention of her son Richard and daughter-in-law Rita. The family’s decision to house the collection in the IISH – where it sits alongside not only Goldman and Michel’s papers but also the collections of the Red Army, Trotsky and active international movements like Amnesty International – and so to separate it from the suffragette archives or those of the British Labour movement, emphasises Pankhurst’s status as a figure of international significance outside of these movements. It sets her apart from her famous family and moves the focus beyond her involvement with the WSPU. By placing this material in the IISH, rather than alongside that of British feminists or socialists, Pankhurst is aligned with a pantheon of international radicals. Furthermore, the placement of Pankhurst’s papers in the IISH has given the material relative stability, by contrast to which the official and collective suffragette archive has been moved around extensively, partially due to financial difficulties (Crozier-De Rosa and Mackie 2018, 25). Pankhurst’s collection in the IISH can therefore be seen as a natural continuation of her campaigning, whereby she sits alongside prominent left-wing figures from around the world who fought for multiple causes; an extension of the internationalism that she supported throughout her life.

The Estelle Sylvia Pankhurst Papers at the IISH constitute a sizeable collection. The archivists’ note mentions that the most frequently consulted section is that containing the minute books of the ELFS, suggesting that it is the running of the movement rather than the actions of an individual that have been of most interest to later subjects. All the same, the Pankhurst Papers form the basis for almost all of the biographical accounts of Pankhurst’s life discussed in the course of this chapter. ( Supplementing this collection, researchers have drawn from material held in the Women’s Library, now part of the London School of Economics; correspondence now in the Labour History Archive in the People’s History Museum, Manchester; and police reports in the National Archive in Kew.) The many locations of Pankhurst’s archive present some of the challenges that have continued to characterise her afterlives: the intense memory work that has gone into recording her life; the potential for tension between national and international emphases; the distinction between versions of her that exalt her singularity as an individual and those that embed her within a social movement or social movement organisation; and the complexity of representing all the causes she was involved in.
Writing Pankhurst’s Life, 1960–2018

Starting from the period after Pankhurst’s death in 1960, the auto/biographical accounts of her life that are considered in this section reach up to 2018, at which point a slightly different version of Pankhurst seems to develop.\textsuperscript{146} Published life writing on Sylvia Pankhurst provides an important step in the trajectory of her reputation. These texts not only reinterpret and rearticulate the primary sources mentioned in the account of her symbolic availability – her archive, own writing, etc. – but go on to inform and influence the other mediations of her life explored in the following part of this chapter and to affect the contemporary understandings of her life set out in the final section.

Despite their very different accounts of why Sylvia Pankhurst is important and what she should be, or is, remembered for, these textual mediations of her life are connected in a myriad of ways. The IISH archive forms the underlying basis for the majority of these works and, through a combination of affirmation or contestation, each new text builds on previous biographical knowledge. Elsewhere (Vlessing 2021), I have surveyed all of the published life writing on Pankhurst to argue that, over time and through repeated acts of reinterpretation, she is reimagined in different guises, moving from an emphasis on her as a Pankhurst above all, through a period in which she is positioned as a complicated and maverick individual, and onto a clear characterisation as a socialist feminist – with changing emphasis on aspects of her own writing at each stage. In what follows, I reconsider these three main biographical representations in order to explore the rhetorical claims of attachment made by respective remembering subjects and their role in Pankhurst’s afterlives.

In the first of these characterisations, Pankhurst is seen through the prism of the suffragette movement and in relation to her famous family.\textsuperscript{147} Following Emmeline Pankhurst’s death in 1928, the Pankhurst surname quickly became synonymous with the WSPU.\textsuperscript{148} This entailed that Sylvia, and for that matter her sisters Christabel and Adela, became memorable by association as much as individually. Drawing heavily from The Suffragette Movement as a chronicle of events, a consistent version of Pankhurst emerges, with little contestation between accounts. Seen in relation to her relatives, Sylvia Pankhurst was routinely characterised as the “pale and overconscientious” (Mitchell 1967, 40) Pankhurst sibling. Her early commitment to art is central to this characterisation and her socialism is often rendered in personalised terms as the logical conclusion of her sensitivity. On the whole, these works cover little of Sylvia’s life after the WSPU. Even those that do are inclined to frame her as the Pankhurst who remains an activist for the longest, representing her life as a continuation
of her family’s activity. The key events in her story are presented as those that expose tensions in the Pankhursts’ familial relationships: her expulsion from the WSPU and the birth of Richard Pankhurst, the former figured in terms of family drama rather than ideological split.\textsuperscript{149} Despite the stakes these writers have in remembering her – particularly in the case of Richard Pankhurst who is evidently closely concerned with his mother’s legacy – these remembering subjects tend to position themselves as objective historians, with little active explanation or reflection about why they think Pankhurst is worth remembering. Given her family’s historical prominence, her importance as a historical figure is assumed.

This sense of cohesion was disrupted by the publication of the first full-scale biography of Pankhurst, Patricia Romero’s \textit{Portrait of a Radical} (1987), which shifted representations of her life story. Spanning more than three hundred pages, Romero’s book stands as a definitive monument to Pankhurst’s life. Romero takes a critical stance towards Pankhurst and justifies her work through intertextual antagonism. Pankhurst is presented as impulsive, contrary and emotional. Indeed, the historian Brian Harrison wrote a detailed comparison of the work of Barbara Castle (which is far more supportive) and Romero, which questions whether so clearly an “unsympathetic biographer” (1987) can produce a good biography. Romero’s biography has a corrective tone, as it seeks to undercut what she perceives as a tendency to idealise her subject and presents Pankhurst as a difficult nonconformist. Romero’s account frequently jars with Pankhurst’s own descriptions of events, often with an explicit judgement of Pankhurst’s feelings as false. Such psychologising is especially pertinent where Pankhurst claimed political motivation for actions which Romero attributes to family competition or self-importance rather than genuine ideological drive.

The overall effect of this account is to individualise and depoliticise Pankhurst. And \textit{Portrait of a Radical} has provided a source for much subsequent controversy: a year after its publication, Rita Pankhurst (Sylvia’s daughter-in-law) published an extensive response which rebuts any suggestions that the Pankhurts disapproved of Romero’s biography purely on the grounds of familial pride and asserts that allowing the biography to go unchallenged would do a “disservice to scholarship” (1988, 245). Romero, she contends, has “no background knowledge of any aspect of Sylvia’s life” and instead relies on “selective quotation and poor guess work” (245). The complaints set out in the letter range from intricacies – misspellings of people’s names or of the names of organisations — to factual errors — an apparently entirely invented trip to Europe, the claim that Richard Pankhurst was for a long time unemployed, etc.
Rita Pankhurst suggests that Romero gets some big issues wrong, making misleading innuendos about the state of Pankhurst’s finances or showing a consistent disregard for political context. It concludes: “Romero’s book cannot be relied upon as an authoritative source because of the numerous factual errors and distortions it contains […] Sylvia Pankhurst still awaits a definitive biography” (261) and notes that the Pankhursts have compiled a list of factual errors which they have sent to several institutions with an interest in Sylvia Pankhurst’s legacy.

Such reactions reveal the central role played by the Pankhurst family in Pankhurst’s remembrance. Indeed, the next full-scale biography to be published, Shirley Harrison’s Sylvia Pankhurst: A Crusading Life (2003), is in many ways a counterpoint to that of Romero. It, too, represents her as a maverick but, countering Romero’s work, describes itself as the first “comprehensive biography of Sylvia Pankhurst to have had the full co-operation of the Pankhurst family and access to a number of previously unpublished documents” (blurb, emphasis my own).150 Indeed in Richard Pankhurst’s writing, and his wider involvement in the writings and activities of other stakeholders, there is a clear sense that he sees himself as the custodian of his mother’s legacy. His name, often alongside that of Rita, appears in the acknowledgements of almost every one of her biographies. He describes his own attachments as a blend of personal and political, opening Counsel for Ethiopia with a quotation from a 1932 article in which Sylvia Pankhurst writes: “When my end comes I shall be content to pass the torch on to my successor: Richard Pankhurst…” (2003, 7). In relation to Sylvia Pankhurst’s auto/biographies Richard Pankhurst emerges as a (if not the) key remembering subject.

The centrality of the Pankhurst family in shaping Sylvia Pankhurst’s remembrance may have diminished over time. Yet, Pankhurst’s granddaughter Helen Pankhurst remains actively involved in projects for the commemoration of her foremothers, Sylvia and Emmeline, thereby strengthening the link between Pankhurst’s memory and that of the suffragette movement she was once a part of.151 Overall, the active involvement of the family in her remembrance and the sense conveyed that they have been entrusted to continue Pankhurst’s legacy stands as further demonstration of the path dependent nature of her cultural afterlives.

In the development of writing on Pankhurst’s life and ideas, another influential category of mnemonic stakeholders can be broadly characterised as British, feminist and left-wing. The memory work of this group fits in the context of wider trends within socialist feminism in the course of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.152 This was a period that saw the emergence of a series of textual representations of Pankhurst’s life that represent her as a socialist feminist.153 Over time these more recent mediations give a sense of the logic behind
Pankhurst’s involvement in multiple causes; a sense that what might have appeared to be a series of random campaigns should be seen as a whole, motivated by a particular ideology and a consistent set of driving ideas. For instance, as in earlier biographies that consider Sylvia Pankhurst as a Pankhurst sister/suffragette above all, her split with the WSPU is treated as a central moment. However, this time that split is seen as the culmination of her political awakening rather than of familial infighting. These texts positively reformulate the remembrance of Pankhurst as “unconventional” into an image of her as “innovative”, seeing novel intersections between different forms of oppression and new means to fight against them. Often, they take a practical approach to Pankhurst’s political activity. Katheryn Dodd’s A Sylvia Pankhurst Reader (1993), as an example, suggests that Pankhurst’s political writing holds information which is not only of use to historians but also to contemporary political researchers and activists.

A rhetoric of repair thus characterises this later series of works. Several of these biographers reflect explicitly on Pankhurst’s legacy. They take a self-conscious approach to their memory work, reflecting on their own political subjectivity, particularly in relation to Pankhurst’s understanding of the relationship between gender and class. In this respect they differ from the slightly earlier American feminists who ‘repaired’ Goldman’s memory, for whom a focus on gender tended to overshadow discussions of class. In this vein, Barbara Winslow registers the ambition to understand Pankhurst’s political ideology and motivations in a way that shows their relevance for contemporary socialist feminism. Ultimately, Winslow laments that Pankhurst was not allowed to make a more notable contribution to communist politics but nonetheless promotes her as “an intellectual foremother of today’s socialist feminists” (1996, 193). In Sylvia Pankhurst: A Life in Radical Politics (1999), Mary Davis ends by asserting several points of importance to be taken from Pankhurst’s life: not only is she an “icon for socialist feminists” (1999, 117), but she tackled issues from a leadership perspective, was virtually alone among white people in making a link between fascism and racism and she herself lived by her politics, especially her feminism. On this final point Davis refers to Pankhurst’s decision to have a child out of wedlock as an example of her commitment to women’s liberation, not only as a theoretical position, but as a “testimony to its lived meaning” (1999, 120). Positing Pankhurst’s unconventional personal life as its own form of activism exalts her as a second-wave, or even more contemporary, feminist who acknowledges and acts upon the mantra that the personal is political. Nonetheless these works do not use the
intimate tones of equivalent auto/biographies of Goldman. Both Winslow and Davis’s books are framed as analytical works rather than biographies and their focus is predominantly on Pankhurst as a political subject. Because they are produced slightly later than those of Goldman, by academics rather than activists – and perhaps because they come from the different political culture of the UK rather than the US – Pankhurst is never referred to with the same level of familiarity as Goldman.

These mediations of Pankhurst’s life reveal a changing set of concerns. Different characterisations of her dominate at different times: first as a member of a famous suffragette family, then as an interesting and unconventional historic figure and finally as a socialist feminist. Of these three clusters, that which characterises her as a socialist feminist has become and remains the most prominent. It is perhaps because the group supporting this version have the clearest motivation in remembering her. During a period when socialist feminist imaginaries waned (Fraser 2020), those who were heavily invested in bringing socialist ideas to feminist thought turned to the past for inspiration.

Despite the emergence of more consistent salience and ownership across these texts – so that, for instance, different instances of Pankhurst’s activism are shown as underpinned by consistent support for the oppressed – significant differences remain. Pankhurst’s valence fluctuates: she is alternately presented as deeply unpractical (as in Mitchell’s account) or praised for her practical approach (as in Dodd). This contrast appears to come from the fact that these two commentators have different measures of what constitutes practical success. Mitchell is effectively commenting on the fact that Pankhurst attached herself variously to lots of different organisations and, in his view, never clearly shaped any particular one. Dodd, on the other hand, identifies ‘practicality’ in Pankhurst’s broad practical support, the support her campaigns provided for many individuals and the ideas laid out in her prolific writing. It could be argued that while Mitchell’s version of practical success evokes a top-down structure, Dodd’s is more based on a more bottom-up arrangement in which facilitating other people’s needs is particularly important.

Likewise, Pankhurst is variously placed in relation to national and international traditions. She is described as representing a specifically British version of a socialist feminist tradition but also as having pursued an “un-English revolutionary path” (Pankhurst and Dodd 1993, 4). The distinction between these characterisations seems to come down to the proximity Pankhurst is afforded to the British labour movement, so that in an account such as Davis’s she is viewed in close relation to that tradition, while for others (such as Dumas, her recent French
biographer) she appears alongside an international cohort of revolutionary women. This equivocation in Pankhurst’s remembrance plays out differently depending on whether her opposition to gender-based oppression is seen as an aspect of her socialism, or whether opposition to class-based oppression is considered as an aspect of her feminism. Although there are clear patterns across these representations, they do not lead to the formation of a unified image of Pankhurst.

**Non-textual Mediations, 1960–2018**

A small number of non-textual mediations sit alongside the mediation of Pankhurst’s remembrance in texts in the years between 1960 and 2018. While written accounts of Pankhurst’s life and actions – in histories, biographies and academic works – form a backbone that runs through her cultural afterlives, other mediations emerge more sporadically. The limited mediations discussed in this section give a sense of the progression of Pankhurst’s memory throughout a period in which Pankhurst’s afterlives have oscillated between peaks and troughs of greater and lesser intensity, within which different elements from Pankhurst’s life come to the fore.

In the 1960s and 1970s Pankhurst occupied a place in historical reflections on the period around the First World War. Pankhurst’s representation as a pacifist and feminist appeared in tune with the radical movements of the moment. However, during the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s – fertile periods for writing on Pankhurst – I found limited material, suggesting that this was a fallow time for other, perhaps more popular, representations. What follows does not claim to be a totally comprehensive account of representations of Pankhurst, but it does strive to give an overview of some central patterns within her afterlives, showing the similarities to and differences from her characterisation through writing.

**Dramas of the 1960s and 1970s**

Sylvia Pankhurst makes a brief but memorable appearance in one of most famous historical fictions of the British 1960s: Joan Littlewood and her ensemble Theatre Workshop’s musical *Oh, What a Lovely War!*, which was adapted into a 1969 film (*Oh! What a Lovely War*) and directed by Richard Attenborough. This musical offers a satire on the events of the First World War, surreally blending fantasies of what the war was ‘meant to be’ with the realities of trench warfare. It features popular songs from the time of the war and is deeply critical of Britain’s
involvement in the war. Subsequently *Oh, What a Lovely War!* has been considered a turning point in British remembrance of the First World War. Serving as an attack on the ineptitude of the ruling elite, the musical is seen as a manifestation of a new and more oppositional orientation of cultural attitudes. Pankhurst’s appearance in the film updates her. Much like Goldman’s appearance in *Ragtime*, it shows how pertinent her ideas were for a new generation of anti-war activists.

As a popularisation of a new kind of history of the war, the sources of *Oh, What a Lovely War!* are well documented. The scene featuring Sylvia Pankhurst appears to have its origins in Leon Wolff’s book *In Flanders Fields: The 1917 Campaign* (1959) which itself is based on a journalistic account of one of Pankhurst’s meetings in the East End of London during the war (Paget 1990, 125), offering a clear genealogy that elevates the musical’s relation to historical ‘truth’. The scene shows a band playing as Pankhurst and her supporters hold banners with messages such as “Our Men Are Being Sacrificed in Vain” and “Women Vote for Peace”. From a podium, Pankhurst addresses a small audience, telling them that men are being sacrificed by those who simply love war and warning that the masses should not believe everything they read in the newspapers. She is met by jeers from the crowd and eventually heckled off the stage. The scene closes with Pankhurst and her supporters walking away, pursued by a crowd of people singing “Rule Britannia” (Attenborough 1969).

As such, Pankhurst is portrayed as one of the few voices of reason in a production which sets out to highlight the misjudgements of the past. In a further twist, Pankhurst is played by the actress Vanessa Redgrave (1937-), herself a lifelong activist who has campaigned for numerous pacifist and other causes. Redgrave’s representation of Pankhurst as passionate but frustrated by her audience implies a continuity with Redgrave’s own activism and, by implication, brings Pankhurst into the context of the 1960s, so that she comes to embody the lively anti-war sentiment of that later time.

Other mediations of the era also promote Pankhurst as a forward-facing or relatively ‘modern’ figure. While it has not achieved the notoriety of *Oh, What a Lovely War!* the BBC television drama *Shoulder to Shoulder* (1974), which centred around the history of the WSPU, held an important place in the cultural imagination of its time. The series’ creation demonstrates what Krista Cowman has referred to as “the prominence of suffrage in first-wave feminism and a developing need for second-wave feminism to situate itself in relation to its predecessor” (2010, 198). *Shoulder to Shoulder* is made up of six 75-minute-long episodes, each revolving around an aspect or member of the suffragette movement. Sylvia Pankhurst,
played by Angela Down, appears in five of these, including the final episode, in which she is the central character. The ‘Sylvia Pankhurst’ episode is a lovingly detailed recreation of the period, with characters in elaborate costumes and props closely based on archival material (Hussein 1974). It covers the period from around 1912, with growing tensions within the Pankhurst family, to the Representation of the People Act of 1918, and charts Sylvia Pankhurst’s dismissal from the WSPU. It evidently takes much of its inspiration from Pankhurst’s writing, especially *The Suffragette Movement*.

Much of the episode’s drama is derived from the dynamics within the Pankhurst family, wherein Christabel is depicted as charismatic, Sylvia as sensitive and both sisters and their mother are shown to be extraordinarily single-minded. The episode reaches its climax in a dramatic scene, also described in *The Suffragette Movement*, that fuses political commitment with personal sacrifice: Pankhurst is released from prison and demands to be taken – while still on hunger strike – to the steps of parliament, where she says she will remain until Asquith agrees to meet with a deputation of women from the East End. Although the last parts of the episode centres around the arrival of the First World War, the very final scene returns to Sylvia Pankhurst, standing across the Thames from the Houses of Parliament with Norah Smythe. She appears saddened: “It’s not just the vote that matters,” she says, “It’s how they vote […] with open progressive minds. […] We went to war and won and never killed an enemy, and when you remember all the years we fought that’s something to remember” – a statement of pride that combines pacifism with success.

*Shoulder to Shoulder* uses Sylvia Pankhurst as the final voice of the suffragette movement. Dedicating the closing episode of the series to her, not to mention her last line, holds the suggestion that she will continue the struggle, that the vote is not the end of the line and that there remain big issues for future generations to fight for. Pankhurst is positioned as a forward-facing figure, providing a version of the suffragette movement that was motivating to the group of 1970s feminists who fought for *Shoulder to Shoulder*’s creation.

**Singling Out Sylvia in the 21st Century**

Despite *Shoulder to Shoulder*’s apparent popularity, the years following its release appear devoid of any further wide-reaching depictions of Sylvia Pankhurst. In the 1980s and 1990s Pankhurst’s remembrance was predominantly the provenance of academic and activist spheres. Referring to such quiet years, the journalist Martin Kettle noted that, in 1969 Pankhurst was
more celebrated in Ethiopia than in the United Kingdom, but that in the “left-wing world” in which he grew up:

We knew that Sylvia became a communist, and met Lenin in Moscow, and that she was later denounced by the Soviet leader for refusing to support parliamentarism in Britain and joining the newly formed Communist party in 1920. The elderly communists I talked to about her half a century ago all seemed to agree with Bernard Shaw’s comparison of her with his own Saint Joan: often magnificent yet sometimes impossible.”

(Kettle 2018)\(^{160}\)

This comment suggests the presence of political collectives (presumably active in the mid to late twentieth century) wherein Pankhurst’s memory had been germinating in the years following her death and which are still present today.

Pankhurst’s presence as a symbol of historic struggle in left-wing circles during the 1980s and 1990s can be intuited from the places she then reappears. For instance, a 2004 episode of The Mark Steel Lectures tells the story of her whole life (Cumming 2004).\(^{161}\) Although Steel himself is primarily a comedian, he has had a longstanding interest in politics, including taking part in local elections as part of the London Socialist Alliance (Steel 2000). He is a vocal fan of Sylvia Pankhurst and, although the Lectures episode on her is only half an hour long and much of the time is spent making jokes, it gives a thorough account of her life. Pankhurst’s appearance here is the result of Mark Steel’s long-standing expressions of attachment to her story and commitment to keeping her political memory alive.\(^{162}\)

The turn of the twentieth century also saw the emergence of mediations of Pankhurst’s life that were less clearly linked to radical politics. For example, there was a knot of commemorative activity based around the home in Woodford Green, where she lived for the better part of thirty years. Some of this activity has revolved around the ‘stone bomb’ anti-air war memorial that Pankhurst commissioned and which stood outside her old house, Red Cottage. The monument was a point of anti-nuclear interest in the 1980s and for some years an annual peace picnic was held beside it (Wright 2001). Woodford was also the site of an exhibition on Pankhurst at the Redbridge Museum and, in 2007, the Sylvia Pankhurst Trust was formed there. With funding from the UK Heritage Lottery Fund, the Trust organised a festival weekend of activities in Woodford in 2008 to commemorate Pankhurst. They also set up a website, sylviapankhurst.com, which was reactivated in 2021.

The 2008 version of the website was described as being for “anyone who would like to learn more about Sylvia Pankhurst” and professed that it preferred “to avoid political affiliations” (‘Sylvia Pankhurst: Homepage’ n.d.). It contained a wealth of information about
Pankhurst as a historical figure: links to archival material; information about Shirley Harrison’s textbook on Pankhurst (which was produced with the Trust’s funding); articles by Richard and Rita Pankhurst; and information about amateur theatrics based on Pankhurst’s life. The website also contained, and continues to contain, a section on ‘Modern Perspectives’ which featured testimonies from prominent public figures, such as the poet Benjamin Zephaniah and activist Peter Tatchell, alongside Woodford residents who personally remember Pankhurst as a local eccentric. Despite this active memory work, these mnemonic stakeholders are sometimes muted in their claims of attachment and indeed, in professing to avoid political affiliation, appear to run in contrast to many of those invested in Pankhurst’s commemoration. They deploy similar reparative language, insisting that Pankhurst should be remembered, but often this is more on the grounds of her singularity and the importance of maintaining a record of local history than her mobilising potential.

The display of Pankhurst’s art at an exhibition in London’s Tate Britain in 2010 provides a further example of the ways in which Pankhurst’s remembrance is promoted by small networks of ‘attached’ remembering subjects. The exhibition was created in response to the lobbying of an artist collective, ‘The Emily Davison Lodge’, consisting of Hester Reeve and Olivia Plender. Named in honour of the suffragette who threw herself under the king’s horse, ‘The Emily Davison Lodge’ “research and make artworks to re-historicise [...] the suffragettes, in particular looking at the artists involved in the campaign and the role of militancy” (Reeve 2014). With a determination to reinscribe radical aspects of British history in cultural remembrance, the pair carried out research at the Women’s Library in London and became interested in the idea of artwork as an expression of activist agency. The display in the Tate featured a number of Pankhurst’s designs, borrowed from the family’s collection, alongside information about suffragette attacks on art and work by Plender and Reeve that had been inspired by the suffragettes. For example, the exhibition included a number of ‘imagined photographs’ of Sylvia Pankhurst, capturing moments in her life that the duo felt needed honouring.

Through the exhibition, these artists hoped to counter any suggestion that Pankhurst ‘gave up’ art but rather to posit the importance of her artistic training in informing her activism. They state that their ambition was to “insist on an ambiguous line between her artistic and political labour” and, in the process, “to challenge the continued underrepresentation of women artists in galleries today” (Reeve 2014). Although the exhibition was temporary, they also
lobbied the Tate to obtain some of Pankhurst’s paintings, leading to the acquisition of four of Pankhurst’s watercolours in 2018 (Tate n.d.). This instance of Pankhurst’s commemoration was once again the result of an active campaign to reinscribe historic women in a public imagination. Reeves and Plender recognise, or at least suggest, a continuity between their own artistic practice and Pankhurst’s. Their project demonstrates the importance of Pankhurst’s own creative work to her cultural afterlives. But, as in the reclamation of Goldman or Michel as writers, this memory work provokes questions about whether Pankhurst’s remembrance as an artist aids or occludes her remembrance as a revolutionary.165

**Centennial Changes, 2018–2023**

More recently, Sylvia Pankhurst has gained greater visibility. The 2018 celebrations of the centenary of the Representation of the People Act, in which for the first time some British women were granted the right to vote, marked the start of a flurry of fresh attention to the Pankhurst family and on Sylvia Pankhurst in particular. These mediations promoted the idea of Pankhurst as a suffragette for modern times, predicated on her awareness of the ways in which forms of oppression combine. In a lecture to celebrate the centenary, Rachel Holmes, Pankhurst’s latest biographer, spoke about Sylvia Pankhurst as a way of redressing the awkwardness of celebrating a moment when only “some women” gained the vote (Holmes 2018). In a BBC radio programme, Pankhurst’s grand-daughter, Helen Pankhurst, spoke about Pankhurst’s Ethiopian legacy (‘BBC Radio 4 - Sylvia Pankhurst: Honorary Ethiopian’ n.d.) – effectively rescuing her from the legacy of first-wave feminism. And in one of the most unlikely mediations of Pankhurst’s cultural memory, she became the subject of a hip-hop, funk and soul musical, *SYLVIA*, performed at the Old Vic Theatre in London (which has, at the time of writing, just been reinstated for a longer run).

Composed by choreographer Kate Prince, *SYLVIA* revisited moments from Pankhurst’s life in the years leading up to the 1918 Representation of the People’s Act, with a particular focus on her disagreements with, and eventual alienation from, her mother and sister. The musical’s representation of Pankhurst centres on her awareness of the intersection of issues of gender with issues of class and therefore on the idea that she was fighting for a wider social cause than others in her immediate circle. Those involved in the production were keen to assert these differences between Sylvia and the rest of her family as proof that their protagonist was “outside” or even “ahead of” her time; writer and director Prince argued that “she’s more relatable to a modern, liberal-minded audience [than her mother or sister]” (Crockett 2018).
The musical was considered notable for its diverse casting, with black actors in the majority of the roles. The attention (both positive and negative) that this casting decision invited offers an explicit indication that the struggles that Pankhurst fought for have a strong continuing salience that extends beyond the particular details of female suffrage.

By implicitly and explicitly drawing upon recent and historic issues of gender, class and race, the musical revealed an interactive connection between the struggles of different groups. Black Sylvia Pankhurst both rearticulated and radically altered the cause of white Sylvia Pankhurst. As in Michael Rothberg’s conception of “multidirectional memory” (2009), the play sought the productive interaction and transfer between different places, times and experiences. However, Rothberg’s version of multidirectionality tends to work through the transference and variation of memories of suffering or trauma, whereas SYLVIA stands as a demonstration of the transference and variation of memories of hope and potential change. In this way, the performance of SYLVIA reached beyond the theatre to establish a line of continuity between Pankhurst’s activism, the granting of suffrage in 1918 and feminist events and movements in 2018. Interviews with the cast contain frequent references to the contemporary movements of #metoo and #timesup. The musical constitutes a performative life narrative which retains many of the features of the reparative remembrance that previously characterised Pankhurst’s memory. However, the musical’s formal break with expectations about the past (the introduction of hip-hop into an Edwardian setting or casting of actors of colour in ‘white’ roles) can be seen to extend, or even move beyond, a rhetoric of repair so that the act of remembering Pankhurst’s political actions prompts broader conversations about structural equality today.
Furthermore, Rachel Holmes’s biography *Sylvia Pankhurst: Natural Born Rebel* (2020), by far the most extensive account of Pankhurst’s life to date and published by the well-established press Bloomsbury, suggests a revived interest in Pankhurst’s life. In the United Kingdom the *Natural Born Rebel* was widely promoted in established outlets. It appeared in trade bookshops, was discussed on the radio and Holmes was involved in a number of events with high-profile public figures. Across these mediations there was a continued focus on Pankhurst’s contemporary relevance, often citing her attention to the relationship between different forms of oppression as visionary. The biography itself brings to light new material, including works Pankhurst wrote from prison on toilet paper. But in many respects, it tells a story familiar from previous works and draws heavily from Pankhurst’s own writing. Its novelty seems to hinge on the introduction of Pankhurst’s story to a new and larger audience, who would be able to see her salience to the present: Holmes describes her as a “teen radical” like Greta Thunberg and Malala Yousafzai (2020, xii).

Nonetheless, Pankhurst’s has not garnered anything like the same attention as her mother, nor that of other campaigners for women’s suffrage. When a statue was commissioned to stand outside parliament as part of the centenary celebrations, it was not of Sylvia Pankhurst but of the suffragist Millicent Fawcett, a moderate rather than a radical. Holmes wrote an article describing the choice of Fawcett as a “crashing disappointment” and representative of “the kind of airbrushing of history that makes the fight for women’s suffrage palatable in a contemporary context where populism of the nationalist right is tolerated and appeased but only so-called ‘moderation’ and ‘gradualism’ are allowed in support of the cause of greater equality” (Holmes...
2017). At the same time, an open letter to the Guardian newspaper, signed by Helen Pankhurst among others, urged that Sylvia Pankhurst be made “central” to the celebrations on the grounds that, unlike others in the suffragette movement, she “was aware of the link between feminism and other forms of oppression” (Letters 2018). These mediations suggest Pankhurst’s reclamation as a twenty-first century, fourth-wave feminist. But although the centenary celebrations appear to have provoked some reopening the debate about Pankhurst’s place in the commemoration of the suffragette movement, she is still recalled mainly in connection with that movement, rather than in ways that recognise the wider scope of her activism.

**Contemporary Mnemonic Stakeholders**

Pankhurst’s commemoration continues to rest on the activity of small numbers of remembering subjects, who are themselves partly reliant on their successful petitioning of powerful institutions, such as the Tate, the UK Heritage Lottery Fund, the House of Lords, etc. What inspires this determined memory work and what do the stakes of these subjects reveal about the dynamics behind Pankhurst’s cultural remembrance? In a bid to understand the motivations and mechanisms that inform the current state of Pankhurst’s collective remembrance and to gain some idea of what her future afterlives will look like, I undertook interviews with nine people who, in various ways and to various extents, had set out to remember Pankhurst.167

The range of interviewees reflect the different directions in which Pankhurst’s afterlives have developed. Connelly, Dumas, Davis and Holmes are all biographers who have had an active public role in Pankhurst’s commemoration. Clark (alongside Davis, Megan Dobney and Barbara Switzer) is a founding member of the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee, who hold annual lectures on Pankhurst and campaign for the erection of her statue. Helen Pankhurst works on international development issues, particularly regarding global feminism, and has been active across campaigns and events commemorating her grandmother, Sylvia Pankhurst, her great-grandmother, Emmeline Pankhurst, and the suffragette movement more generally. Behailu Shiferaw is a journalist, who has also worked in global development. In 2018 he wrote a blog for the London School of Economics (LSE) website discussing Sylvia Pankhurst from an Ethiopian perspective. Jerome Davenport is a street artist whose 2018 mural of Sylvia Pankhurst adorns the outside wall of the Lord Morpeth pub in East London. Finally, Hester Reeve forms one half of the ‘Emily Davison Lodge’, the artist collective who produced the
Tate exhibition inspired by the suffragettes and incited the Tate to buy Sylvia Pankhurst’s work.\textsuperscript{168}

These interviews began with questions about Sylvia Pankhurst’s life such as ‘How would you characterise her activism?’ or ‘How effective do you think her activism was?’ and after a discussion of the nature of Pankhurst’s political activity they turned to questions about her afterlives and the interviewee’s own involvement in her remembrance, including: ‘how did you first become interested in Sylvia Pankhurst?’ and ‘tell me more about the process of writing a biography on her/setting up a memorial committee/etc’. At the end of each interview I asked, ‘what other historical figures might you group Sylvia Pankhurst with?’ – giving interviewees the opportunity to reflect on Pankhurst’s placement within the broader context of their “mnemonic imagination” (Pickering and Keightley 2012).

Here, I consider their responses in three main themes: 1. the reparative contention that Pankhurst has been ‘left out’ of history and deserves greater recognition than she has received; 2. interviewees’ sense of their own beliefs or affiliations in relation to Pankhurst’s; and 3. Pankhurst’s vision or politics, and the issue of where it sits within broader historical and political narratives. In asking interviewees about their motivations and processes, these interviews reveal my own stake, my presence as a remembering subject who contributes to the rhetoric of attachment that has been observed throughout this study. The interviews might be read as proof of my own attempts to find, and wish for, a more firmly territorialised version of Pankhurst’s cultural memory. However, the interviewees’ responses frustrate that desire in their repeated divergence, heterogeneity and contestation of Pankhurst’s significance.

1. A starting point for many of my interviewees was the notion that, on the basis of both her gender and her radicalism, Pankhurst had been unjustly overlooked and excluded from the historical record. This sense was more extreme in some cases than in others. For instance, speaking from within a French context, Dumas stated that we “know so little about her” and “she’s been pushed out of public memory”. Whereas Shiferaw noted that Sylvia Pankhurst’s name was a ubiquitous one in Ethiopia,\textsuperscript{169} although he felt she had been overlooked in the United Kingdom.

Following on from the claim that Pankhurst was inadequately remembered, many posited reasons for this state of affairs. Often, they specified that Pankhurst had not been commemorated because she “did not conform to the establishment” (Shiferaw), “she doesn’t go down well with the establishment” (Clark), “she never made her peace with the status quo” (Connelly) or was “too rebellious […] she will never be mainstream” (Dumas). Connelly
described Pankhurst as somebody who “falls through the gaps”: she was never going to be commemorated by the British state but neither, given her falling out with the CPGB, has she found a place in Communist histories. Davis noted that, long before writing a book on Pankhurst, she felt acutely that the story of the campaign for women’s right to vote was incomplete, because it was told by bourgeois feminists who identified with individualism rather than with a collective and class-based approach to struggle. For these biographers, Pankhurst’s story stands as a rejoinder to such histories. A rhetoric of repair infused the responses to my questions, as interviewees affirmed that Pankhurst’s apparent omission from historical narratives was the catalyst for their own memory work. But this characterisation of their motivations only goes so far, leaving unanswered the question of why they work to repair the record.

2. Interviewees were consistent in connecting their own political subjectivity to a sense of Pankhurst’s and describing this relation as an impetus for their memory work. Often this sense of connection relied on a combination of left-wing values with a feeling of political rootlessness. Dumas, who described herself as an “écologiste radicale”, said that she was a political outcast and has never felt comfortable in any political party. Clark worked in trade unions for many years as a researcher, with a particular focus on women’s and equality issues. She has also been active in feminist and anti-racist movements and described herself as “on the left, very much so” but not a member of any political party. Clark’s narrative of her own involvement in Pankhurst’s legacy through the work of the Memorial Committee (as described at the start of this chapter) demonstrates the incredible commitment made by some memory workers and the grounding of that work in a specific political milieu. Davis too remembers agreeing that the campaign for a statue was a “labour movement issue”.  

Correspondingly many of my interviewees spoke about how relevant they think Pankhurst is for contemporary, especially feminist, politics and emphasised the mobilising potential of remembering her. Helen Pankhurst explained how she used the example of the breakup of the WSPU in order to talk about schisms in feminism more generally. In these discussions, Helen Pankhurst explained that she likes to ask a series of questions that she feels are provoked by Pankhurst’s life, thus setting her up as a figure that contemporary activists might learn from. Connelly’s depiction of her own activism provides one such example of looking to Pankhurst for guidance. She described how she felt dismayed by the British political landscape in the early 2000s and was “looking for socialists” when she became interested in
Sylvia Pankhurst. She placed the act of writing a biography of Pankhurst within an activist context: “The last political biography of her was Mary Davis’s, which was published in 1999. And you know obviously big things had happened since then which had certainly shaped me as a writer and political activist and which I felt justified a new biography”. Writing a biography is explicitly linked to wider socio-political developments that, she suggests, require Pankhurst’s remembrance.

Discussions of Pankhurst’s relevance to the present day in these interviews often revolved around the perceived ‘intersectionality’ of her feminism as an element that made her appealing to contemporary feminists. Helen Pankhurst described her as more “palatable” than Emmeline, Christabel or Adela, and suggested that this had a lot to do with “what we’re calling intersectionality now”. Dumas said that she was motivated to write her book because she recognised Pankhurst’s intersectionality: she admired her prescient realisation that there was “no point fighting one thing and not the other one” and noted that ‘intersectionality’ seems like something we have only discovered but Pankhurst was already “completely into that, that’s what interested me the most”. This characterisation of Pankhurst as an ‘intersectional feminist’ appears to address the ambivalences, shown particularly in Pankhurst’s biographies, about the relationship between gender and class in her politics, offering a model in which neither struggle takes priority. However, this view was not held by all my interviewees. Davis was disturbed by the idea that anyone might be commemorating Pankhurst for her intersectionality. She noted that the term had been misunderstood. “Is Sylvia straddling more than one struggle intersectional?” she asked, “Or is it just thorough?” In this interpretation, referring to Pankhurst as ‘intersectional’ wrongly reduces her view of class as being simply one aspect of identity, rather than seeing class oppression as the basis for all acts of oppression.

Some of these wider discussions around ‘intersectionality’ present the potential limitations of this as a perspective from which to remember Pankhurst’s activism. Debates about the usefulness or appropriateness of intersectional analytics have given rise to what Jennifer Nash has called the “intersectionality wars” (2019), with battles waged around claims that various historical figures are intersectional forerunners. The concept of “intersectionality” (Crenshaw 1991) was first rooted in black women’s experience, linked to an analysis of political and structural powers. Efforts to place figures like Pankhurst – who was herself white and middle class, remembered until recently as a socialist feminist – in a speculative intersectional memoriescape have understandably been met with resistance and the charge that the term’s unhelpful expansion minimises the importance of race (see for example Bilge’s 2013
work on whitening intersectionality). The discussion of Pankhurst’s perceived intersectionality raises wider questions about the motives, efficacy and consequences of reclaiming progressive figures as historical precedents for contemporary feminism.

But many of my interlocutors also related to Pankhurst in less traditionally political ways, often highlighting the importance of her gender or her creativity in fostering their sense of attachment. Connelly explained that she first heard about the Pankhursts through childhood conversations with her mother, who encouraged her to look into the suffragettes rather than idolising queens and princesses. Connelly described how, from that point on, she was hooked and read everything she could about the suffragettes because she was drawn to the drama of the Pankhurst family. Reeve explained that she had become interested in suffragette art and in the empowering friendships within the suffragette movement and that this interest was catalysed into artistic creation when she met Olivia Plender. 173 The close relation Reeve draws between the importance of friendship in her own artistic/activistic practice and that of the suffragettes, deploys a rhetoric of empathy to evince a continuum of associative female creation across time. Interviewees had learnt about and grew interested in Pankhurst through contingent events and for different reasons. The range of their stories of encounter attests to the scope of Pankhurst’s cultural afterlives. Pankhurst has never become a symbol for a prominent social movement. Instead, she is remembered as a historical individual in conjunction with certain ideas or by particular groups.

3. The interviewees all agreed that Pankhurst’s activism was unusual, special or important – particularly, for many of them, because of its practical and bottom-up nature. 174 They frequently praised her energy and unrelenting commitment, suggesting that they were drawn to her ability to keep pursuing and connecting multiple causes, which they frequently characterised as “ahead of her time” (Shiferaw, Dumas, Reeve). They identified various moments in Pankhurst’s life as particularly noteworthy, effective or worthy of evaluation. 175 Pankhurst’s split with the WSPU stood out as central moment. Several drew attention to the impact of Pankhurst’s anti-racism, which they felt was exemplified by her employment of the Haarlem Renaissance writer Claude McKay to write for the Dreadnought (Clark, Davis, Dumas). Others pointed to moments where they felt Pankhurst had done the wrong thing: Davis, for instance, felt she should not have fought so vehemently against parliamentary involvement and collaboration with the Labour Party. In their readiness to express personal
admiration or criticise isolated moments in Pankhurst’s story, they treated her as an individual whom they knew – communicating an attachment to her as an equal, even a friend.

There was never much consensus among my interviewees about how to characterise Pankhurst’s life, what sort of political traditions she might be seen in or who might be considered her forebears and ancestors. This was starkly demonstrated in their responses to my final question – ‘what other historic figures might you group Pankhurst with?’ – to which no two interviewees gave the same response. Clark identified Pankhurst alongside Nelson Mandela and Angela Davis; Dumas with a set of women artists including Anna Akhmatova, Germaine Dulac and Hannah Hoch; Connelly with figures such as Keir Hardie, James Connolly and William Morris; Reeve with the physicist David Bohm, because he was a “true radical” who believed in the “art of resistance”; Helen Pankhurst with Rosa Luxemberg and Annie Besant; Davis with Clara Zetkin, Dora Montefiore, Helen Crawfurd and Alexandra Kollontai; and Holmes with Eleanor Marx. Despite sharing many of the same sources for their understanding of Pankhurst’s life and the same ideas about why her activism is important, these mnemonic stakeholders were variously able to see her in an anti-racist context, an artistic context or alongside contemporary women revolutionaries. The answers to this question show that Pankhurst is not closely associated with any particular movement or historic grouping. Attesting to her malleability, interviewees responses were individual, even personal, reflecting their particular interests and concerns. Although it is evidently becoming more coherent, even for this distinct collective involved in remembering her, Pankhurst’s cultural memory has still not been successfully territorialised.

Conclusion
This chapter has shown how over the years, Sylvia Pankhurst has been variously remembered as a feminist, a socialist, a pacifist, a communist, an anti-racist and an anti-imperialist, often in line with changing political contexts. The most prevalent of these associations is with socialist-feminism – of a sort that grew in popularity in UK in the late twentieth century and has had a particular presence in academia in from the 1980s onwards. Yet Pankhurst’s identification with a socialist-feminist tradition has sometimes been fraught, undermined for instance by her disavowal of so much of the British Left over the course of her lifetime. Instead, many mediations of Pankhurst’s life celebrate her political activity in more general terms: for the relentless desire to help those most downtrodden in society and her ability to challenge the prevailing status quo at every juncture; for the grassroots nature, the innovation, creativity and
performativity of her activism. These characterisations stress Pankhurst’s originality at the cost of seeing her as part of larger patterns in contentious politics.

Pankhurst’s remembrance has been both aided and hindered by that of her mother and, to a lesser degree, her sister Christabel. On the one hand, her initial symbolic availability has been heightened by the “satellite effect” (Lang and Lang 1988, 95) of their substantial commemoration. Early biographers, for example, position her in relation to her other family members. On the other hand, over time the remembrance of Pankhurst in more intricate terms has been repeatedly occluded by her mother’s iconicity. In our interview, Helen Pankhurst was clear that her grandmother was “a little bit in the margins because the world can only really cope with one leader, and so it becomes Emmeline”. She wondered whether this showed a particular intolerance for multiple women leaders.176 The idea that Sylvia Pankhurst has in part been forgotten because her mother has been so widely remembered, speaks to notions of “scarcity” (Rigney 2016) in memory. It suggests that the remembrance of the suffragette movement can only really accommodate a single protagonist and that, since widely commemorated women are already an exception to the rule, one is already enough.

Throughout her cultural afterlives, mnemonic stakeholders describe Pankhurst as overlooked or forgotten. Even Natural Born Rebel opens by calling her “one of the greatest unsung political figures of the twentieth century” (Holmes 2020, xii). Yet, despite the repeated insistence that she deserves more, that her omission from the historical record is a disservice of one sort or another, her remembrance remains small-scale. Pankhurst’s cultural memory is atomised and individualised, reflecting a subtly different set of priorities and concerns for each remembering subject. Unlike the afterlives of Louise Michel or Emma Goldman, who become akin to historical celebrities with consistent referents that enable their stories to travel through shorthand reminders, that of Pankhurst lacks symbolic cohesion. Pankhurst is known to a relatively small number of people who tend to know her well, but her remembrance has not taken on its own momentum. The unsettled nature of Pankhurst’s remembrance suggests that, even where there is a strong attachment between remembering subject and remembered subject and active memory work, this can only stimulate circulation under certain socio-political conditions. Building on the previous two, this chapter shows that the remembrance of revolutionary women depends on such reparative memory work catching a social movement wave.
Does our contemporary moment have the right conditions for Sylvia Pankhurst’s cultural memory to flourish? In 2018, she seemed to offer an attractive antidote to the highly institutionalised centenary celebrations of the Representation of the People Act, with discussions of her representation, inclusion and omission recurring throughout the commemoration. The suggestion of a sea change in her popularity echoed through my interviews: Mary Davis felt suffrage history has been “put on the map”; Helen Pankhurst was optimistic that people were finding out about her grandmother because the world was moving more in that “direction”; Katherine Connelly felt that Pankhurst’s heightened visibility is due to more and more people searching for a “version of history that they cannot get through state channels”. After years of relatively peripheral commemoration, it does seem that the tide is turning on Sylvia Pankhurst. Fourth-wave feminism, with its emphasis on the relationship between different vectors of oppression, could yet be for Pankhurst’s remembrance the force that second-wave feminism was for Goldman’s. Pankhurst’s memory might be mediated into new forms, reach new audiences and inspire future remembering subjects, transforming her from an outlying into a popular figure.

Mapping her cultural afterlives in their nascent stages, this chapter has shown the ways in which Sylvia Pankhurst can be seen in relation to wider patterns in the remembrance of individual women revolutionaries – reliant on bottom-up initiatives that often stand in contradistinction to formalised or institutional forms of memory-making. “You can understand why, in this day and age, it feels very disempowering for people if they are not getting the grants, or the book doesn’t come out or the monument takes years to fund,” said Hester Reeve during our interview, “But actually, maybe what people don’t realise is happening is that there is a living monument, sort of set up by those people. And maybe at the end of the day that’s far more valuable.” Although Pankhurst’s afterlives may not be territorialised, the persistence with memory work on her continues indicates stakeholders’ belief that understanding the life and times of this figure is essential for the creation of a radical future.

136 Based on conversation 12/09/20 – see section on “Centennial Changes, 2018–2023” for interview details.
137 There is reason to believe that interest in Pankhurst’s anti-colonial activities is growing (see for instance Neelam Srivastava’s recent article “The intellectual as partisan: Sylvia Pankhurst and the Italian Invasion of Ethiopia” (2021)), offering a fruitful avenue for future research.
138 Sylvia followed Christabel Pankhurst (1880–1958) and was followed by Henry Francis “Frank” Pankhurst (1884–1888), Adela Pankhurst (1885–1961) (later Adela Walsh) and Henry Francis “Harry” Pankhurst (1889–1910).
139 For instance, the Sylvia Pankhurst Papers in the IISH are arranged under the headings: the suffragette movement, WW1, socialism and communism, antifascism and Ethiopia. Whereas Kathryn Dodd’s 1993 A Sylvia Pankhurst Reader (which uses the headings: “Women, Class & Politics, 1907–16”, “Revolutionary Communism,

In the obituaries to Pankhurst that appeared across North America this balance is all the more stark. The Star-Phoenix (16), for instance, describes her as the “most militant of the three Pankhurs – a mother and two daughters” (no mention of Adela), suggests that she campaigned for three notable causes “votes for women, care of unmarried mothers and Ethiopian independence” and that she disapproved of “lipstick and make-up”. Her imprisonment and decision to have an illegitimate child take centre stage in most of these accounts: “She went on hunger strike, was jailed many times and even gave birth to an illegitimate child when she was 45 years old to prove her point that women were being treated unfairly” (The Bridgeport Post, 74). One describes her as a “Spinster Mom” and a “Ballot and Love Crusader” (Detroit Free Press, p. 2).

In “A Constitution for British Soviets. Points for a Communist Programme” (1920), for example, – in which she lays out an argument for women forming collectives for domestic labour – she describes her unease at watching women factory workers: “After that, I felt very uncomfortable – everyone else was working and I had nothing to do” (Pankhurst and Dodd 1993, 107).

Although Pugh (2001) argues that coming on top of Emmeline’s ghost-written autobiography My Own Story (1979 [1914]), Pankhurst’s work added little to what was already known.

June Purvis, an eminent historian of the movement, argues in a 2008 article that Pankhurst’s socialist credentials and the desire of eager left-wing academics in the late twentieth century to “find out about their foremothers in the past” have meant that her writing has been more thoroughly considered than that of other suffragettes (2008, 84). Purvis goes on to argue that Pankhurst’s account has led to an inaccurate depiction of the movement as a whole, such as following her depiction of Emmeline Pankhurst as an inadequate leader, in more recent historic accounts.

Pankhurst’s main collection was moved twice: first with Pankhurst herself when she moved from Woodford to Addis Ababa in the 1950s and later from Addis Ababa to Amsterdam shortly after her death. As Rita Pankhurst notes, the decision to move the archives out of Ethiopia was based on the country’s state of agitation: “because of earthquakes and unrest in Ethiopia, it had become necessary to send the archives out of that country quickly, and the Dutch had been more helpful than the British in this enterprise” (R. Pankhurst 1988, 246).

The Pankhurst Papers contain the papers of relatives (her father, mother, Christabel and Silvio), letters (in particular to Keir Hardie and to the Pethick-Lawrences, campaigners for women’s suffrage and close friends of Pankhurst’s), official documents such as press passes and visas, the archives of her organisations (such as minute books from the ELFS), manuscripts for works both published and unpublished, copies of the many different newspapers Pankhurst wrote for and edited and much of Pankhurst’s art and poetry. The IISH also hold a number of photographs from Pankhurst’s collection, although these are for the most part filed separately to her papers. The papers, recently digitised, are accompanied by an archivist’s inventory (made by M Wilhelmina H. Schreuder and Margreet Schrevel), which explains that, from the apparently disorganised state in which the institute inherited them, they have been ordered to reflect different stages in Pankhurst’s life.

There are five biographies to date that cover Pankhurst’s entire life (Romero 1987, Harrison 2003, Connelly 2013, Palomo Cermeñó 2015, Dumas 2019, Holmes 2020). Additionally, there are a number of biographical works that focus on elements of Pankhurst’s activism (R. Pankhurst 1979, Franchini 1980, Castle 1987, Taylor 1993, Winslow 1996, Davis 1999) or that consider Sylvia Pankhurst as part of a group biography of the Pankhurst family (Mitchell 1967, Pugh 2001). There are also published works that cannot be neatly categorised as biography – such as collections of Pankhurst’s writing that are accompanied by accounts of her life – but contain biographical extracts or elements (Bullock 1992, Dodd 1993, Connelly 2019). With the notable exception of Franchini’s Sylvia Pankhurst, 1912–1924: dal suffragismo alla rivoluzione sociale, Palomo Cermeñó’s Sylvia Pankhurst, Sufragista y Socialista and Dumas’ recent Sylvia Pankhurst : féministe, anticolonialiste, révolutionnaire, respectively written in Italian, Spanish and French, all of these texts were written in English. Mitchell’s group biography of the Pankhurs has been translated into French but none of the others appear in translation.


Emmeline Pankhurst’s commemoration as the iconic leader of the suffragette movement was set on its path shortly after her death in 1928 with a hagiographic funeral celebration (complete with suffragette colours and WSPU banners), a portrait in the National Gallery and a statue outside parliament unveiled in 1930 (Pugh 2001, 408–10).

This psychologising characterisation includes a dramatis personae that includes the doting mother, the bossy elder sister and the second sister struggling to find her own role. In this version of events having a child out of wedlock is seen as an act of rebellion by Sylvia against her mother. The fact that Richard Pankhurst’s birth was soon followed by the publication of The Suffragette Movement, critical of Emmeline and Christabel, cements this act.
Supplementing this biography, Harrison has written two other short works on Pankhurst’s life: Sylvia Pankhurst: Citizen of the World (2009) and Sylvia Pankhurst: A Classroom Companion (2009) both of which are a product of the 2009 Celebrating Sylvia Pankhurst Project.

For an example of Helen Pankhurst’s engagement with her grandmother and great-grandmother’s legacies, see her recent article in the Guardian newspaper entitled “My Suffragette Grandmothers Are Now Seen as Heroes. Today’s Climate Protesters Will Be Too” (H. Pankhurst 2022).

An account of this ebb and flow is expressed in Nancy Fraser’s work on the development of feminism and its relationship to the recent history of capitalism, set out in her 2013 collection of essays Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis, and more specifically in her 2009 essay “Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cuning of History”.


As Derek Paget writes: “The front-line soldier’s version of the war was at last rising to the surface of cultural debate in the 1960s, having been deleted and denied in previous accounts from official sources. The play articulated what was fast becoming a key modern attitude in the UK – that of suspicion of the old English upper class” (1990, 119). It has been lauded as an expression of the vulgarity of war.

Paget notes Leon Wolff’s In Flanders Fields (1959), Alan Clark’s The Donkeys (1961), and Barbara Tuchman’s August 1914 (1962).

In a further layer to this connection, a quote from Redgrave adorns the cover of Pankhurst’s most recent biography, Rachel Holmes’s Sylvia Pankhurst: Natural Born Rebel (2020). It reads “I have fallen in love with Sylvia Pankhurst. This is a masterpiece.”

The mini-series was created by script writer Midge Mackenzie, actor Georgia Brown and producer Verity Lambert in response to the shortfall of substantial roles for women on television. The three devised this dramatization of the fight for women’s rights to vote and successfully pitched it to the BBC. Mackenzie has subsequently explained that the project was in part inspired by her experience filming the fiftieth anniversary of the Representation of the People Act in 1968, during which she discovered the extent to which the campaign for women’s suffrage had been erased from history (McCabe and Ball 2014).

At points the episode lifts whole phrases from Pankhurst’s writing. For instance, Christabel Pankhurst is described as “not like other women” because she is not easily led by her affections. In The Life of Emmeline Pankhurst Sylvia Pankhurst writes that her mother often told her “Christabel is not like other women; not like you and me; she will never be led away by her affections!” (E. S. Pankhurst 1935, 47).

Despite its originality, Shoulder to Shoulder has seldom been repeated on television and has not been released on DVD. However, the whole series is available to view in the British Film Institute’s archive and clips from episodes have appeared on YouTube. In 2014 the cast and crew reunited and spoke at an event held at Birkbeck College, with some members of the cast speaking about how little they had known about the figures they were playing before filming the series. A corresponding blogpost grounds Shoulder to Shoulder in the context of British feminism in the 1970s. And notes a discrepancy between the series’ status as a monumental BBC drama and the fact that it is buried in the archives and not easily accessible to the general public. “Remembering Shoulder to Shoulders isn’t only about reclaiming our stories, but about who has the power to tell them” (McCabe and Ball 2014). This incitement for the series to be circulated becomes a call to remember its creators in their pivotal role as memory activists, as much as a call to remember the suffragettes themselves.

In an extraordinary act of patronisation, George Bernard Shaw apparently once referred to Pankhurst as: “an idiot genius […] the most […] deadly, wilful little rapscallion-condottiera that ever imposed itself on the infra-red end of the revolutionary spectrum” (Romero, blurb).

First a radio show and then a television programme, the Mark Steel Lectures ran from 1999 to 2006 with each episode presenting the argument for the importance of a particular historic figure in a light-hearted and humorous fashion (including Oliver Cromwell, Karl Marx, Charlie Chaplin and Albert Einstein). Pankhurst is one of a minority of women, alongside Billie Holiday, Harriet Tubman and Mary Shelley. Arguably, she was much more obscure a historic figure than any of the above.

The episode has been uploaded in its entirety on to YouTube several times. Interestingly, some of the uploads contain comments from an Ethiopian user who laments that the depiction of Pankhurst (which does involve some highly absurd moments) does not treat her with sufficient “respect”.


Similarly, the only existing documentary on Pankhurst’s life is the hour and a half long Sylvia Pankhurst: Everything is Possible (2011), which has a similarly grassroots origins and reparative function. It was produced
by WORLDWRITE, an educational charity that provides free film and media training to young people. The documentary gives an account of Pankhurst’s entire life, much of it through interviews by the charity’s young presenters of various experts on Pankhurst’s activism. Starting from the basis that Pankhurst is an important historic figure who has been overlooked, it opens with the question of why, unlike her mother and sister, Sylvia has no memorial outside parliament.

165 There is some suggestion that this version of Pankhurst as a creative is once again gaining traction. See for instance Katy Norris’s 2019 book on Pankhurst’s art or Marion Wynne-Davies chapter on “Sylvia Pankhurst: Poetry and Politics” (2021).

166 For instance, Holmes discussed Pankhurst’s story in a BBC radio show on radicalism (‘BBC Radio 4 - Start the Week, The Radical Agenda’ n.d.) and did a series of talks with prominent human rights campaigner Shami Chakrabarti (‘Sylvia Pankhurst: Natural Born Rebel’ n.d.).

167 I identified interviewees on the basis of the research presented in the previous sections of this chapter. These interviews were conducted over conference calling software or, in some instances, over the phone. All interviewees were supplied with an information letter and signed informed consent forms. These interviews lasted roughly an hour and were of a semi-structured nature, drawing from DeWalt and DeWalt’s account of this practice, in which the interviewer guides the conversation using “a list of questions and prompts in order to increase the likelihood that all topics will be covered in each interview in more or less the same way” (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 139). As such, the flow of conversation was allowed to develop so that interviews might reveal aspects that had particular salience for interviewees. The discussion and analyses that followed were formed from audio recordings and notes taken during the interviews.

168 The interviews took place with participants on the following dates: Katherine Connelly (10/09/20), Helen Pankhurst (10/09/20), Philippa Clark (12/09/20), Marie-Hélène Dumas (15/09/20), Mary Davis (15/09/20), Behailu Shiferaw (18/09/20), Jerome Davenport (22/09/20), Hester Reeve (08/10/20) and Rachel Holmes (09/10/20). This study is limited. Some key subjects – such as Kate Prince and Shirley Harrison – were not available for interview, others – such a Patricia Romero, Richard Pankhurst and Sylvia Ayling – are no longer alive. With the exception of Dumas and Shiferaw, all of these stakeholders are based in the United Kingdom.

169 Shiferaw compared Pankhurst’s symbolic weight in Ethiopia to that of Karl Marx: “There are just some names that you grow up hearing about or reading about. […] Sylvia was just like that, you heard about her. You didn’t know how much she meant”. Later in the interview Shiferaw expanded on the extent of Pankhurst’s communism in Ethiopia, noting that she is buried with all the “greats”. During his childhood, videos of her with Haile Selassie appeared so frequently on Ethiopian television that pretty much anyone with a television might have encountered her as a figure of some historical importance.

170 In 1998 Clark noticed that there was no mention of Sylvia Pankhurst on the monument to the suffragettes near parliament. At a Trades Union Congress (TUC) conference later that year she mentioned Pankhurst’s omission to Mary Davis, who was already writing her book on Pankhurst, and they decided to “get a statue for Sylvia”. Davis recalls how, in the early days of the committee, the campaigners did “stunts such as getting mates to chain themselves [outside the houses of parliament] wearing suffragette colours, but with red because that was Sylvia’s thing”. Clark is confident that the process of campaigning for it has also been productive, teaching many people about Pankhurst and her historical importance. Alongside collections at trade unions across the country and events associated with Pankhurst’s memory, the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee has also organised an annual lecture on Pankhurst, held at Wortley Hall in Yorkshire (a former stately home the hall is now used by trade unions that contains a library named after Sylvia Pankhurst).

171 “It makes you have to think about the issues: what is the link between feminism and class politics? What it is the link between social norms and cultural beliefs in certain countries and feminism? How would you have responded at the time of the war when you were involved in this other conflict? Do you include men or don’t you? […] So, as well as commemorating them and those issues I am really keen on using that as a backdrop for us to be talking about what are the important issues today. What do we still need to be doing? What, if she was here, would she be saying?”

172 When I pressed Connelly on what she meant by “big things” she spoke about the rise of internationally coordinated social movements in the early 2000s, a shift from the perception in the 1990s that class was no longer an issue and a sense that mainstream commentators were once again speaking about anti-capitalism: “It raised interesting questions about how social movements should operate and what the strategy should be. And I thought lots of the debates from the suffrage movement kind of became more urgent.”

173 “Her [Plender’s] work wasn’t about the suffragettes either. But we met and we just hit it off. After the talk [at Reeve’s university] she missed her train back to London, and we had an hour and a half to sit on a cold platform with hot chocolate and biscuits. And we ended up not talking about either of our art practices but talking about how we were both becoming fascinated by the suffragettes. Our collaboration was born from that really. And, like the suffragettes, a really special friendship.”

174
Connelly expressed the idea that, throughout her activism, Pankhurst consistently wanted “working class people to be able to articulate their own emancipation”. Both she and Helen Pankhurst emphasised the combined practical and strategic importance of Pankhurst’s work in the East End during the First World War. “She had all these ideas for schemes which should be implemented and she’s always trying to turn them into practical things,” said Connelly, “As well as seeing the big picture and the big political argument, she took up individuals’ cases.”

Helen Pankhurst and Shiferaw, undoubtedly the two with the closest ties to Pankhurst’s time in Ethiopia, indicated that Pankhurst was both extraordinarily prescient and successful in her fight for Ethiopian independence. “She was our spokesperson,” Shiferaw asserted. He considered that she helped Ethiopia when others had let it down; the emperor was doing his job, but it was mainly Sylvia Pankhurst’s activism that helped Ethiopia gain independence, including her fight against British desires to turn the country into a colony.

Musing on this subject Helen Pankhurst continued, “I wonder whether that’s a traditionally male historical way in which leadership has been portrayed. I mean here we have a family of three women and a man in the background and that’s the story and it’s an unusual story. But if we looked back in history would we really ever say that it was X male leader who did it all on their own? I mean what about their wife, what about their sister?”
Conclusion

I visited Louise Michel’s grave on Tuesday 7 December 2021. It was a cold grey morning and the Parisian suburb of Levallois-Perret – also home to Michel’s statue, her eponymous metro station, a rue Louise Michel, even a Maison Louise boulangerie – was quietly busy, peopled by shoppers and bedecked with Christmas lights. On my walk from the metro to the Cimetière Levallois-Perret the crowds thinned and the large graveyard itself was mostly empty. At its entrance an enthusiastic attendant handed me a map with directions to find Michel and the cemetery’s other famous inhabitants: Gustave Eiffel, Maurice Ravel, Léon Zitrone and Michel’s fellow communard Théophile Ferré. Michel’s grave sits at the corner of two wide treelined paths. It is flanked by boxes of well-tended plants and made from the same gleaming stone as those around it. Someone had put a necklace of cowrie shells around the neck of her bust, which had the surreal effect of making her look like a castaway on a tropical island (perhaps recalling her years in New Caledonia). But otherwise, the grave was unassuming.


It was hard to imagine the throngs of mourners who had passed through at Michel’s funeral, to picture the annual commemorative marches led by the Parti Communiste through
the 1920s, 30s and 40s that had inspired such fervent anarchist opposition, or to connect with the fantastical lyrics of Michèle Bernard’s 2002 ode to Louise Michel “Au cimetière de Levallois”. I wondered whether I might feel similarly underwhelmed at Goldman’s tombstone in Chicago – which has for many years been a site of pilgrimage and is graffitied with messages of support and love – or Pankhurst’s in Addis Ababa – which, despite the pageantry of her funeral, has not been given the same treatment. This slightly peripheral graveyard, with its suggestions of religiosity and decorum, seemed disconnected from Michel’s vibrant cultural afterlives: her symbolic weight, radicalism, subversiveness, her capacity to inspire and mobilise. And yet, in contrast to this institutional site, the small string of shells around her neck appeared to me to offer a hint of her alterity, proof of someone’s knowledge of and attachment to Michel’s story.

**Remembering Louise Michel, Emma Goldman and Sylvia Pankhurst**

‘Remembering Revolutionary Women’ has analysed the cultural remembrance of three “revolutionary intellectuals” (Traverso 2021, 219–333), Louise Michel (1830–1905), Emma Goldman (1869–1940) and Sylvia Pankhurst (1882–1960), bringing these figures together for the first time. This comparison is based on similarities between their lives: the multiple causes they pursued, their longevity, their copious writing, their misogynistic demonisation by contemporary detractors, even the similarities in their fraught relations with contemporary women’s movements. All three fought for society’s most downtrodden, acknowledged the compounding effects of different forces of oppression and insisted that existing capitalist structures must be dismantled for radical change to take place. Their principles and ideas overlap and, to a large degree, they saw themselves as part of the same revolutionary tradition. Indeed, both Goldman and Pankhurst met Michel (Goldman in London in 1899 and Pankhurst in her family home in the same city at a similar time) and went on to write about their encounters in rapturous terms (Goldman 1970, 166; Pankhurst 1977, 91). As with their lives, Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s afterlives hold important similarities, marked by the prominent influence of their writing and their uptake by feminist movements.

The first chapter, on Louise Michel, illustrates that her cultural memory is sustained by a consistent antagonism between mythologising and de-mythologising accounts of her person and of her life – with both versions endeavouring to prove her salience to different causes. As a myth, Michel is represented by both her supporters and detractors as the spirit of
revolutionary power, superhuman and enigmatic, she undermines any claims to personal attachment. It is in this guise that she was remembered by rival left-wing movements in the early twentieth century. A turn to a reparative mode of remembrance in the late twentieth century, epitomised by Edith Thomas’s 1971 biography Louise Michel: la Velléda de l’anarchie, questioned the foundations of that myth and sought to de-territorialise Michel’s remembrance. The period saw a new focus on Michel’s status as a woman, casting her as a personable figure who might be capable of inspiring forms of attachment that are less hierarchical and more intimate. But in the years since, Michel has again been mythologised, albeit with a set of different characteristics that places greater emphasis on her ‘exceptionality’ as a woman and render her larger than life. She appears on street signs and public institutions and through the republication and recasting of her writing as literary works. There is no clear ownership of the kind set out in Jansen’s model, and the chapter concludes by showing that, despite repeated attempts to claim Michel as belonging to a particular group or cause, a mythological status that was established even during her lifetime leads to the evasion of successful or total appropriation.

The following chapter, ‘Remembering ‘Red Emma’’, establishes that a rhetoric of repair has played a more consistent role in Emma Goldman’s afterlives than in the case of Michel or Pankhurst. Expressions of attachment to Goldman on the basis of her gender characterised her adoption by second-wave feminists, whose memory work has secured her continued availability as a mobilising symbol for later movements. While Michel is remembered as a myth, Goldman is territorialised into the form of a historic character (Jasper et al. 2020), associated with a set of established ideas and qualities that fuse private details and public persona, in a way that resonated powerfully with second-wave feminists. Unlike Michel, whose remembrance was often carried by her association with the Paris Commune, or Pankhurst, whose memorability was largely derived from that of the suffragette movement, Goldman’s connection to historic events and movements did little to shape her afterlives. Instead, I argue that Goldman’s self-fashioning, particularly through her 1931 autobiography Living My Life, played a central role in this process, thereby challenging suggestions that Goldman’s reclamation effectively came out of nowhere. I have shown how the autobiography has been formative for later mediations of Goldman’s life, many of which put great emphasis on her knowability and the sense of intimacy that remembering subjects experienced with her. Given that she is an important agent in her own remembrance, the repair of Goldman’s remembrance is a particularly interactive process, working off the premise of both her own autobiographical
work and the memory work of later subjects. This chapter underlines the importance of symbolic availability to Goldman’s afterlives.

In the case of Pankhurst, the absence of a consistently crafted myth or public character signals the limitations to what a small, determined group of remembering subjects can achieve without catching the upsurge of a wider social movement. Pankhurst’s remembrance is never territorialised; her afterlives are unsettled, and her commemoration has essentially remained the preserve of invested individuals and small collectives who respond to and remEDIATE the story of her life. Several versions of Pankhurst emerge from this memory work – as a suffragette, an artist, an anti-imperialist – but this work is always carried out self-consciously and these versions have rarely coalesced. Pankhurst has not been fixed into a symbolic or coherent figure in the way of Goldman or Michel, and her remembrance has yet to take on its own momentum. The chapter suggests that, with the rise of fourth-wave feminism and an increasingly popular reading of her as an intersectional feminist, this might be changing. But it remains to be seen whether Pankhurst’s popularity will indeed continue to grow in correspondence with broader developments in twenty-first century feminism.

Over the course of these chapters, I show three interacting conditions based on which these figures are culturally remembered. 1. The work of mnemonic stakeholders. 2. The availability of symbolic resources. 3. Their appeal to a social movement.

**Remembering Revolutionary Women**

Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s cultural afterlives move between moments of greater acceptance by mainstream audiences and moments of reduced visibility, in which they effectively remain the preserve of small groups of committed subjects. Each case study reveals the presence of anarchist or communist groups who developed radical versions based on the theoretical and practical contributions Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst made to these movements. But the limited access of these groups to powerful cultural institutions, and their wariness of them, has affected the wide circulation of these versions. Conversely, periods of greater popularity, tend to occur at the cost of any thorough engagement with the revolutionary ideas that Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst propounded. As they are re-territorialised and move from being the concern of a few committed comrades to becoming more wide-reaching symbols of resistance and liberation, details of their politics fall by the wayside.
Memory work, this study shows, is frequently a gendering process as, over time, figures are moored and unmoored from a changing set of tropes, in which gender is both “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes” and “a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (Scott 1986, 1067). Despite their own wishes to be remembered as revolutionaries first and foremost, Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s gendering has been essential to their cultural remembrance and the afterlives of all three have been significantly shaped by second-wave feminism. Alongside their identification as oppositional figures, readings of their gender have undoubtedly furthered their exclusion from official histories and public commemorations (indeed as revolutionary women they are often seen to disrupt conventional boundaries between public and private spheres). It has also led to their exclusion from memory making within the movements they were once a part of so that, for example, Pankhurst’s institution of the East London Federation of Suffragettes is largely missing from histories of the labour movement. In the absence of more official or public modes of commemoration, auto/biographies have come to hold a central position as “portable monuments” (Rigney 2004) to Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s lives. Life writing by Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst, produced against the odds in prison cells or from exile, circulates to this day and continues to make their politics and experiences available to new remembering subjects. Meanwhile life writing about these figures combines with their own writing to reframe Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst for new audiences, playing a central role in the continued circulation of their remembrance.

Gendering these figures, viewing them as exceptional women, furthers a process of abstraction and decontextualization. As Marina Warner writes, the “female form tends to be perceived as generic and universal, with symbolic overtones; the male as individual, even when it is being used to express a generalized idea” (1996, 12). The categorisation of these figures as women has often led to the obscuring or ignoring of a reckoning with their militancy. All three espoused violence and were victim to it, but both of these elements are mostly missing from Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s remembrance. Their exposure to violence is mostly evoked in order to demonstrate their success in overcoming adversity, thereby building their remembrance as symbols of resistance. A similar point can be made regarding the regular sanitisation of these women’s revolutionary ideas and the, often subsidiary, place these ideas take in their remembrance. Even those who are sympathetic to them have obsessed over their romantic or private lives, sometimes at the cost of an engagement with their public actions.
However, there are also clear instances in which this same process of gendering individualisation or generalisation has facilitated the circulation of their memory. The ease with which Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst have been cast and uncast from a series of all-purpose gendered stereotypes, initially negative (harridan, mad woman, spinster) and then increasingly positive (saviour, mother, sister), causes productive dissensus. It provides shorthand modes with which to recall them, like *la vierge rouge*, and prompts counteraction. Emphasis on their status as women has smoothed their absorption into certain kinds of national histories, in which they take on “symbolic overtones” as markers of progress, regardless of their radicalism – see for instance Michel’s appearance on a stamp to celebrate International Women’s Day in 1982.

Crucially, the ways in which these figures have disrupted and campaigned against the gendered boundaries of their day has, since around the 1970s, inspired their celebration as feminist and (in the case of Goldman and Michel) queer role models. This study demonstrates the constitutive role of those who remember individual revolutionary women *reparatively*. Following a feminist “reparative turn” (Stuelke 2021) in the late twentieth century, remembering subjects self-consciously emphasised the necessity of remembering Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst on the basis of their singularity, their radicalism and above all their gender. They expressed intimate attachments to remembered subjects that accentuated the similarities between past and present political struggles. Auto/biography presented a means with which to repair a gap in historical records and a way of generating connections between reader, remembered subject and writer that might propel the former to political action.

**Memory and Activism**

This thesis has contributed to the study of cultural memory by proposing a new approach to understanding the intersection of memory and activism. In developing this, I have built on existing conceptualisations of “memory work” (Kuhn 2002, Jelin et al. 2003, Kuhn 2010), taking the process of remembering as active, self-conscious and *multi-agential*. I have shown how the memory work behind the afterlives of my three figures is spread across individuals, collectives and cultural carriers in different media (ranging from gravestones to musicals to re-enactments of their speeches) and how circulation then prompts further memory work. Over the course of this study, I have argued that Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s cultural remembrance endures through an encounter between three interconnected factors: the
commitment of later memory workers, the presence of significant representational resources from their lifetimes and the affirmation of their salience by later social movements.

To take each of these conditions in turn firstly, the remembrance of these figures depends on the work of those I have called “mnemonic stakeholders” and the stake they claim in remembering. Remembering subjects are necessary to any act of remembrance, but in the case of individuals – who inspire expressions of interpersonal connection in a way that is not possible when remembering an event, movement or object – their stake is often expressed through claims of attachment. Mnemonic stakeholders play a particularly important role in the remembrance of oppositional figures for whom there appears to be little moral imperative or state agenda to ensure their sustained cultural remembrance, and this is further compounded if those figures are women. I have charted the ways in which, over time, changing claims of ownership bring both moments of cohesion and stasis and periods of dissensus, antagonism and fragmentation, so that historical figures are territorialised, de-territorialised and re-territorialised. This is an iterative process through which these figures are successively set apart from the collectives and contexts that they were once part of in which, for example, Banksy’s boat named after Louise Michel does not necessarily provoke echoes of the Paris Commune or other events of her life. My focus has been on the memory work through which the afterlives of oppositional figures are constructed and through which they are made salient to contemporary social movements.

Secondly, I have shown that the successful remembrance of oppositional figures depends on their “path-dependency” (Jansen 2007) and so on the availability of resources from their lifetimes to later remembering subjects. These resources may be material (archival collections, representations in the press, autobiographical writing) but they may also be immaterial (tropes, narratives, associations to other historical figures or events). In all cases I have demonstrated that the self-inscription of these figures provides essential conditions for their remembrance. Considered contentious, both as revolutionaries and as women, Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst could not necessarily depend on anyone else to record their stories. Writing or collecting their own stories – often in attempts to protect the positive valence of their reputations from their detractors – they play a conscious role in shaping their posthumous reputations.

Finally, this study demonstrates the centrality of broader developments in contentious politics to the remembrance of oppositional figures. Social movements catalyse the work of mnemonic stakeholders, generating new attention to the availability of symbolic resources and
bringing awareness of a remembered subject to a broader audience of potential remembering subjects. Over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, there has been a consistently close relationship between interest in Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s remembrance as revolutionaries and the ebb and flow of social movements with which they had some association – notably anarchism, communism and feminism. It is on this basis that Michel’s memory was kept alive by the Parti Communiste in the early twentieth century, that Goldman was resurrected by radical feminists in the 1970s, and that political conditions since the late 2010s seem to be leading to growth in Pankhurst’s popularity. The wide circulation of the cultural memory of contentious figures relies on their catching a wave of contention. Their salience to wider political shifts is therefore essential to their remembrance.

**Further Research**

Over the course of this thesis, tools from auto/biography studies have given me the resources to analyse the crafted and reflexive relationship between remembering and remembered subjects as they develop and change over time. In collaboration with ideas from reputation studies – identifying the importance of the valence, salience and ownership of individuals – these tools have enabled me to draw out, for instance, the types of rhetoric used in memory work on these three figures.

Bringing these fields together again could test whether auto/biography studies, which has its roots in feminist analysis, is equally useful for understanding the afterlives of figures who have been less readily heralded as feminist foremothers. A starting point for developing this research might be to consider the remaining nine on Traverso’s list of defiant and border-crossing “revolutionary intellectual” women. None among Bryant, Figner, Fischer, Kollontai, Léo, Luxemburg, Tristan, Zasulich or Zetkin have been subject to work from within the field of memory studies. It is interesting to consider how the same approach would play out for a figure like Rosa Luxemburg, who did not live as long those covered here. Would her direct association with the 1919 Spartacus Uprising work in a similar way to that of Michel with the Paris Commune? Given her keen commemoration in the Soviet Union, how has the Cold War affected the development of her remembrance? Analysis of the cultural afterlives of these women could further elucidate the findings of this study, compounding or challenging my investigation into the elements that are formative in the remembrance of revolutionary women.
In this first comparative study of the cultural afterlives of revolutionary individuals, I have focused on gender as a category of analysis, exploring the ways in which Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s identification as women has helped and hindered their remembrance. Taking the ways in which remembrance genders historic figures as a starting point, there is similar work to be done on the afterlives of male revolutionaries – whose gendering is so often taken for granted or unexplored. It also remains to be seen how attention to different vectors of identification (such as race, sexuality or ability) might affect the conclusions I have come to. In what ways, for example, have Michel and Pankhurst’s remembrance as effective and engaged anti-colonialists reinforced or complicated representations of their whiteness? As well as exploring these alternate vectors, I believe that future studies can usefully bring the approach I have taken to look at contentious individuals from different periods, nationalities and political sensibilities. Further research might track how these figures have been selectively remembered over time and understand their territorialisation, de- and re-territorialisation in accordance with the needs and desires of later mnemonic actors and the trajectory of relevant political movements.

Furthermore, this study has identified the 1970s as a particularly important period for the remembrance of revolutionary women in the West. There is more to be said, from the perspective of cultural memory studies, about feminist memory production in that era and, more broadly, about the narratives and rhetoric through which social movements have crafted historical women as role models. Who, for instance, are the historic women cited as inspirations for contemporary feminism? Have movements like #metoo helped to select a new inventory of women who should be remembered? What about the presence of non-Western revolutionary women in Western feminism (such as Kanno Sugako (1881–1911), Petra Herrera (1887–1916), Celia Sánchez (1920–1980) or Leila Khaled (1944–))? How have their cultural afterlives developed?

**Coda**

As the study of memory develops further in its consideration of figures of resistance, the field must find approaches that encompass oppositional or marginal forms of memory work. Altunay and Pető situate their work on gender, memory and war, within “efforts to ‘unsilence’ women as historical subjects” (2016, 9). They build on a longstanding discourse that condemns the silencing of past women, laments their absence from the historical record and advances the obligation to provide them with a voice. This discourse follows a logic in which historical
women are defined by their absence rather than their presence: emphasising the fact that they have been forgotten rather than looking for the remembrance that is there. Countering such tendencies, this study has demonstrated the importance of researching cultural memory by starting with women’s voices. Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s voices have been crucial to their remembrance. Their own records of their struggles and their hopes provide a basis for cultural afterlives which are rarely monumental or institutionalised but are instead contingent and hard-won. Once we have the appropriate tools to identify this different form of remembrance – one in which the unsuccessful campaign to build a monument is as important than the monument itself – we will be better positioned to analyse the relationship between gender, contention and cultural memory.

177 “Au cimetière de Levallois
Drôle de belle au bois
Tu dors depuis cent ans, c'est fou
Comme le temps creuse son trou !” (Bernard 2002).
178 Sheila Rowbotham’s Women in Movement (2013 [1992]) is the only instance I have found of the three being mentioned more or less in combination. In a chapter on “Anarchism and Rebel Women”, Rowbotham briefly compares Goldman and Michel – as those who “supported feminist demands but would not join the suffrage movement” (2013, 152) – and goes on to mention Pankhurst a few paragraphs later.
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Echt heel erg bedankt!
Summaries

English

‘Remembering Revolutionary Women’ contributes to a growing body of scholarship, positioned at the intersection of cultural memory studies and social movement studies, that shows the importance of memory to activism. Understanding the remembrance of oppositional figures, for whom there appears to be little moral imperative or state agenda to ensure their sustained remembrance, requires a new approach to the workings of cultural memory. I argue that the remembrance of contentious individuals depends on their salience to subsequent social movements and demonstrate how that salience is brought out through an interaction between the work of “mnemonic stakeholders”, on the one hand, and the availability of symbolic resources created during a figure’s lifetime, on the other. This argument is developed through a comparative analysis of the cultural afterlives of Louise Michel (1830–1905), Emma Goldman (1869–1940) and Sylvia Pankhurst (1882–1960); three revolutionaries who were remarkable for their energetic pursuit of many causes and campaigns over an extended period.

My sources include biographical works, artistic installations, performances, portraits and archives, with a focus on those longform versions of Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst’s lives in which a prevailing representation is in some way challenged and changed. I make use of methods drawn from cultural memory studies, alongside insights from studies of auto/biography and reputation, to analyse narrative and rhetorical patterns across mediations and remediations of these figures’ lives. Using a model of path-dependency (which shows how the choices available to mnemonic actors in each period are bound by the previous uses to which a figure has been put) I consider variations in how Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst have been remembered along axes of salience, valence and ownership, tracing their territorialisation, de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation in accordance with the needs and desires of later actors and movements.

Each chapter examines the remembrance of a different figure, moving chronologically from the past to the present. ‘The Mythologisation of Louise Michel’ starts with texts and images from Michel’s lifetime to explain the nature of her reputation at the time of her death and the symbolic associations that have gone on to characterise her afterlives. Noting that her memory is de- and re-territorialised in the 1970s, I consider her cultural afterlives in three parts: the first from 1905 to 1971, accounting for the early years of her remembrance in France; the second covering the period from 1971 to the present; and the third looking at her contemporary
remembrance outside of France. The chapter illustrates how Michel’s cultural memory is sustained by a consistent antagonism between mythologising and de-mythologising accounts of her person and her life, in which each version endeavours to prove her salience to different causes. As a myth, Michel is represented as the spirit of revolutionary power, superhuman and enigmatic. Her de-mythologisation comes about through attempts to humanise her, casting her as a personable figure who is capable of inspiring intimate forms of attachment. Centrally, I argue that this dynamic is fuelled by a high level of equivocation around her gender; Michel’s status as a woman informs the ways in which remembering subjects attempt to deconstruct her myth, as well as enabling her construction as a mythical symbol of revolution.

The following chapter ‘Remembering ‘Red Emma’’ makes the case that Emma Goldman’s cultural memory has been dominated by a set of concerns established by feminists in the 1960s and 70s and has rarely been de-territorialised. The chapter presents the resources that these feminists drew from. It provides an overview of Goldman’s remembrance and explains the origins and after-effects of her feminist reclamation, before considering some of the exclusions and omissions from this characterisation. The circulation of Goldman’s story is largely thanks to the work of a small number of mnemonic stakeholders who emphasised their attachment to her on the basis of her gender and her radicalism, and the conjunction of this memory work with broader historicising impulses in second-wave feminism. However, I argue that Goldman’s self-fashioning (particularly through her 1931 autobiography) also played a central role in shaping her afterlives. Her memorability is generated through the interaction between her own autobiographical work and the memory work of later individuals and groups.

The final chapter ‘The Unsettled Afterlives of Sylvia Pankhurst’ takes the same approach to a less well-remembered figure. I assess the basis of Pankhurst’s afterlives through an overview of her published works and archives and consider her remembrance from her death until the late 2010s. In the final section I show a renewed interest in Pankhurst since 2018. The chapter argues that Pankhurst’s remembrance is never territorialised, her afterlives are unsettled, and her commemoration has essentially remained the preserve of invested individuals who respond to and remediate the story of her life. The circulation of Pankhurst’s cultural memory is limited by the fact that it has not been caught by a social movement wave. This case signals the limitations to what a small, determined group of remembering subjects can achieve without being part of a wider upsurge in contentious politics.
The argument that builds over the course of these chapters gives a new understanding of the hard-won remembrance of figures of resistance. I demonstrate the multi-agential cultural memory work whereby Michel, Goldman and Pankhurst come to be remembered as individuals, as revolutionaries and as women. The cultural afterlives of individual revolutionary women endure because of an encounter between significant representational resources from their lifetimes and the commitment of later memory workers. That memory is only likely to grow further if its salience to a social movement is proved.

Dutch

‘Revolutionaire Vrouwen herinnerd’ past binnen een groeiend corpus van wetenschappelijke studies op het snijvlak van cultural memory studies en social movement studies, en toont aan hoe belangrijk culturele herinnering is voor activisme. Het formuleert een nieuwe methode voor onderzoek naar de culturele herinnering aan subversieve individuen. De herdenking van deze figuren word niet als morele plicht of als staatsbelang ervaren, en valt daarom buiten gangbare methoden van reputatieonderzoek. Dit proefschrift stelt dat de culturele herinnering aan subversieve activisten afhangt van hun relevantie voor daaropvolgende sociale bewegingen, en laat zien hoe deze relevantie tot stand komt in de interactie tussen, enerzijds, de belanghebbenden bij de herinnering, anderzijds, de representatiehulpbronnens over de activist die bij leven beschikbaar kwamen. Ik toon dit aan door middel van een vergelijkende analyse van het culturele voortleven van Louise Michel (1830–1905), Emma Goldman (1869–1940) en Sylvia Pankhurst (1882–1960): drie revolutionairen die zich onderscheidden door hun intensieve en langdurige inzet voor een uiteenlopend scala van maatschappelijke doelen en campagnes.

Het bronmateriaal van dit onderzoek omvat biografische werken, kunstinstallaties, voorstellingen, afbeeldingen en archieven. De focus ligt met name op portretten van de levens van Michel, Goldman en Pankhurst waarin een tot dan toe heersend beeld van hen wordt bestreden en gereviewd. Ik pas methoden uit cultural memory studies en nieuwe inzichten uit auto/biography - en reputation studies toe om tot een analyse te komen van de narratieve en retorische patronen in (na)vertellingen in verschillende media.

Het principe van padafhankelijkheid stelt dat de handelingsvrijheid van herinneringactoren wordt beperkt door de vertellingen die eraan vooraf gingen. Ik gebruik dit principe als model om in kaart te brengen hoe Michel, Goldman en Pankhurst werden geterritorialisert, gedeterritorialisert en gereterritorialisert naar gelang de behoefte en
verlangens van latere actoren en bewegingen. Relevantie, resonantie en eigenaarschap dienen hierbij als pijlers om variaties in de culturele herinnering te kunnen beschrijven en verklaren.

De hoofdstukken zijn chronologisch geordend en behandelen elk de herinnering aan één figuur. Hoofdstuk 1, ‘De mythologisering van Louise Michel’, behandelt eerst de teksten en beelden uit Michel’s eigen tijd die zowel haar reputatie ten tijde van haar overlijden, als de symbolische associaties die haar voortleven kenschetsen, verklaren. Aangezien Michel’s nagedachtenis in de jaren ’70 onderhevig was aan de- en reterritorialisatie, beschouw ik haar culturele voortleven in drie delen: het eerste deel (1905-1971) beschrijft de vroege jaren van de herdenking van Michel in Frankrijk; het tweede beschouwt de periode 1971 tot het heden; en het derde bespreekt de hedendaagse herdenkingspraktijk buiten Frankrijk. Het hoofdstuk laat zien hoe de culturele herinnering aan Michel wordt gevoed door een continue tegenstand tussen mythologiserende en demythologiserende voorstellingen van haar leven en persoon, die Michel steeds bij verschillende maatschappelijke doelen betrekken. De Michel-mythe stelt haar voor als revolutionaire oerkracht, bovenmenschelijk en enigmatisch. Pogingen om haar menselijker en vriendelijker te maken, en als onderwerp voor te stellen van intieme gehechtheid, demythologiseren haar juist. Ik stel in dit hoofdstuk dat dubbelzinnigheid rondom Michel’s gender een doorslaggevende rol speelde in deze dynamiek: Michels vrouw-zijn wordt door belanghebbenden ten tonele gevoerd zowel om haar verering als mythisch symbool van de revolutie mogelijk te maken, als om haar mythische status te deconstrueren.

Het tweede hoofdstuk, ‘Rode Emma herinnerd’, stelt dat Emma Goldmans culturele herinnering in de ban is geweest van feministische politieke belangen uit de jaren ‘60 en ‘70, en zelden is gedeterritorialiseerd. Het hoofdstuk bespreekt de bronnen waar deze feministen uit geput hebben, en geeft een overzicht van Goldmans nagedachtenis. Ik verklaar de oorsprong en gevolgen van haar feministische toe-eigening, en behandel daarna enkele tekende omissies bij deze karakterisering van Goldman. Een klein aantal belanghebbenden benadrukten hun persoonlijke gehechtheid aan Goldman, en weten die aan haar gender en radicalisme. Hun herinneringswerk viel samen met de bredere impuls tot historiseren binnen de tweede feministische golf en heeft een doorslaggevende rol gespeeld in de verspreiding van Goldman’s verhaal. Toch blijkt dat Goldman’s eigen actieve beeldvorming (met name haar autobiografie in 1931) ook een centrale rol speelde in haar culturele voortleven. Ik stel dat haar gedenkwaardigheid in stand werd gehouden door de interactie tussen haar eigen autobiografische werk en het herinneringswerk van latere belanghebbenden.
Het laatste hoofdstuk, ‘De onbesliste culturele herinnering aan Sylvia Pankhurst’, past dezelfde aanpak toe op een figuur die minder vaak herdacht wordt. Aan de hand van Pankhurst’s publicaties en archieven inventariseer ik de basis voor haar culturele voortleven. Ik bespreek de periode vanaf haar dood tot de late jaren 2010, en toon aan dat er sinds 2018 sprake is van een hernieuwde interesse in Pankhurst. Pankhursts nagedachtenis is nooit geterritorialiseerd, haar afterlives bleven onbeslist en haar herdenking is vooralsnog beperkt tot een aantal belanghebbenden die haar levensverhaal in verschillende media vormgeven. De culturele herinnering aan Pankhurst heeft niet kunnen meedrijven op een protestgolf en is daardoor beperkt gebleven. De casus van Pankhurst geeft inzicht in de beperkingen van het voorleven onder een kleine vastberaden groep herinneringsactoren wanneer zij geen onderdeel wordt van een breed gedragen opleving in activisme.

Samen geven deze hoofdstukken nieuw inzicht in de moeizaam verworven culturele herinnering aan subversieve activisten. Het proefschrift toont hoe de culturele herinnering aan Michel, Goldman en Pankhurst, als individuen, als revolutionairen, en als vrouwen, tot stand is gekomen dankzij het herinneringswerk van verschillende actoren. Het culturele voortleven van revolutionaire vrouwen blijft in stand dankzij het samenspel tussen de representatiehulpbronnen die tijdens hun leven beschikbaar kwamen, en de toewijding van latere herinneringsactoren. Deze herinnering zal echter alleen gedijen als haar relevantie voor een bestaande sociale beweging wordt aangetoond.
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