



The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader

Voltairine de Cleyre (Editor), A.J. Brigati (Editor)

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“God is a lie, / and Faith is a lie, / And a tenfold lie is Love; / Life is a problem without a why, / And never a thing to prove.”—Voltairine de Cleyre

Never as infamous as Emma Goldman, Voltairine de Cleyre distinguished herself as a leading intellectual, activist, speaker and writer with a tremendous impact on American anarchist, feminist and labor movements. Combined into a fully annotated volume are her classic works and writings that have not been widely available since her death in 1912. She reveals the scope and depth of her activism and study through her prose. Her poetry speaks powerfully of the issues closest to her heart.

“The most gifted and brilliant anarchist woman America ever produced.”—Emma Goldman

The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader Details

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From Reader Review The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader for online ebook

Lornd says

In Voltairine de Cleyre writings radical inquiry meets poetic eloquence in perfect unity. I know of no writer who manages to express dangerous, unpopular ideas so concisely and so evocatively as this author.

I would like to point out that one of the most relevant essay for any person alive today would probably be: "They Who Marry do Ill". I am extremely skeptical that one can get people to critically view politics, and The Leviathan, but I think that they might be more open to scrutinize their feelings, and their most basic relationships.

There will always be quite a things I disagree with that were said here in this collection of essays, but it is exactly why I will have to re-read them at some point in the future. I do not think that there is a more constructive way of testing one's ideas than putting them in opposition to such a well written text; not only would this exercise help forge ideas, but it would be a sheer joy.

KimNica says

A collection of fascinating and thought-provoking essays that leaves you wondering why a woman with such a beautiful mind is not better known.

While many of the essays are outstanding simply because of the logic of the argument, the precision of the language and the moral force of the message, some of them also provide an interesting look into the lives of the people at the turn of the century and the events that moved them more than a hundred years ago. This collection provides thus more than just an overview over the various aspects of anarchist thought, it also provides insights into the political struggles of that time and leaves you pondering the significance of political skirmishes today.

I felt that the essays *Anarchism and American traditions*, *Francisco Ferrer*, *Sex slavery* and *The making of an anarchist* are especially strong in this regard.

However, in some rare cases de Cleyre also loses herself in overly bloomy language, does not really get to the point and strains one's patience. *The drama of the nineteenth century* is such a case.

While the prose and poems are well written, AK Press could have done a better job editing this collection. The works do not follow any particular order and jump a lot in terms of topic and time they were written. Most annoying is also that all the explanatory notes are assembled at the end rather than being in the form of footnotes and that they are not even denoted by a page number (!). Additionally, the historical context these notes provide is often rather minimal and generally there is not much information with regards to de Cleyre or even where further information could be found.

These are issues that should be fixed in a newer edition.

Benjamin says

With one foot in the time it was written, end of the 19th Century beginning of the 20th Century, and another foot in a possible future, the book routinely startles not with its anarchism but with its anachronism. It just feels really weird to read such forward thinking ideas, presented both logically and passionately, in a language that evokes horse-drawn carriages and dudes in top hats beating newsboys with their walking sticks while making harrumph sounds.

De Cleyre is one of the greatest, I think, because she was someone who constantly considered and reconsidered. The essays and speeches especially reveal a woman who fearlessly questioned, thought about the consequences and employed a fierce emotional intelligence as well. It is also wonderful to recognize that these writings were not always preaching to the choir, the strange and lyrical essay "the Drama of the 19th Century," framing history as a struggle for individual freedom, is a series of strange and shifting images. I can see her reading this to a history club or something, and maybe getting through to one or two harrumphers.

I don't know much about poetry, and would probably appreciate more of it if I did, but I was a little disappointed, I guess, with the poems here. I liked best the ones that didn't rhyme, and there was more than one that used the metaphor of waves and storms and water for "the People" that I enjoyed. There were a few others that I tried to imagine as doom metal lyrics that I also liked. The poems that stumble through "thou"s and "thee"s and bounce along like a ballad seemed more Hallmark than hip hop, though.

This book is intended as a "best of" collection and I wonder what was left out. I dimly remember that an academic publisher also released a collection of her work at roughly the same time and I had assumed that AK Press did the better job of presenting the full range of her thinking. She was definitely close to Tucker and a kind of individualist anarchism but there are too many references here to sharing the land and the plight of the working class to dismiss her socialism.

When she wrote this stuff, anarchists were assassinating people, especially kings, queens and presidents, and I felt that de Cleyre does a better job than some of her contemporaries at finding her place in the discussion about that. She sympathizes with the assassins but does not advocate violence and often opposes it. I think her attitude might seem hypocritical but it rang true for me, it was kind of like, judge not lest ye shall be judged when it is someone oppressed lashing out but definitely do judge when it is the oppressor doing his thing in the form of prisons, torture, war, etc. Where exactly self-defense ends and aggression begins is hard to say in a system like the one we find ourselves in, she seems to mean, and I guess at that time it was even harder for an individual, even one with a sharp intelligence like de Cleyre, to find that line in oneself, and yet she did.

It is terrible that she died so young because I do not doubt that had she lived her thinking and writing would have continued to evolve and enrich.

Suni Jo says

This collection of talks by Voltairine De Cleyre showcases her brilliance, independent thinking, and fearlessness to push boundaries and go against ideas that I can only imagine was atypical for her time.

