



# Romantic Anarchism: Asceticism, Aestheticism, and Education

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## Abstract

Many anarchists of the late 19th and early 20th expressed a deeply anti-romantic – one might even say chauvinistic – attitude marked by hostility toward artists, intellectuals, bohemians, and other “sentimentalists”; an unwavering commitment to austerity and personal self-denial; and contempt for non-political feelings and relationships, including family relationships. To this extent, many anarchists were simultaneously “romantic” (in the sense of being idealistic) as well as “anti-romantic” (in the sense of being austere, pragmatic, and opposed to sentimentality). In this essay, I argue that the “anti-romantic” tendency exemplified by some anarchists – which I will call “Romantic asceticism” – is actually profoundly Romantic (upper-case ‘R’) insofar as it draws upon various political and philosophical ideas associated with 19th-century Romanticism. At the same time, I will explore the existence of an alternative and countervailing tendency – which I will call “Romantic aestheticism” – which, although it is at least as indebted to Romanticism, stands in fundamental opposition to the former tendency. Further, I will argue that the latter tendency is not only more prevalent among the anarchists of this period but also more influential and significant in the history of anarchist thought and practice.

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## I.

The revolutionary of popular imagination is a violent zealot whose single-minded devotion to his cause trumps all other concerns. In contrast, the romantic of popular imagination is a gentle, sensitive soul; a lover and a dreamer; a poet and a mystic; and a sentimentalist and a sensualist. As such, it is perhaps a bit ironic that the term “romantic” – when taken to mean “idealistic” or “utopian” – is applied, albeit in a mostly dismissive and condescending way, to anarchists and other revolutionaries. Radical zealots may have idealistic or utopian beliefs, but gentle and sensitive souls they are not.

The historical record lends a certain credibility to this stereotype. Many anarchists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries did express a severe, aggressive, deeply anti-romantic – one might even say chauvinistic – attitude, marked by hostility toward artists, intellectuals, bohemians, and other “sentimentalists”; an unwavering commitment to austerity and personal self-denial; and contempt for non-political feelings and relationships, including family relationships. One finds these sentiments expressed, among other places, in the writings and speeches of various anarchist-communists, Russian nihilists, assassins and illegalists, and so forth. To this extent, many anarchists were simultaneously “romantic,” in the sense of being idealistic, as well as “anti-romantic,” in the sense of being austere, pragmatic, and opposed to sentimentality.

Such a conceptualization of romantic revolutionary subjectivity is difficult to reconcile with the anarchists’ traditional emphasis on education – particularly of the “humanistic” sort – which takes for granted the importance of engaging with, rather than renouncing, the things of this world. Mikhail Bakunin, for example, insists that it is necessary for oppressed people to

acquire learning and seize knowledge, this powerful weapon without which [they] may make revolutions but without which the equality, justice, and liberty which form the very basis of their political and social yearnings, could never establish themselves on the ruins of bourgeois privileges (*Basic Bakunin* 81).

This knowledge, however, is not to be achieved through the partial and specialized education afforded by the public schools but from what Bakunin calls

*all-round education* ... *total education* as full as the intellectual development of time allows, so that in the future no *class* can rule over the working masses, exploiting them, superior to them because it knows more (111).

It goes without saying that “all-round education” – by which Bakunin means comprehensive education in the arts, humanities, and sciences as well as technical and vocational training involving “a combination of industrial and intellectual labor” (115) – requires a sustained engagement with precisely the kinds of things that the anti-romantic tendency repudiates.

A markedly different approach is evident in the writings of the Italian anarchist poet, playwright, theoretician, and activist Pietro Gori (1865–1911), who understands the disclosure of the “Ideal” in precisely these terms – that is, as a product of learning about (and from) the world *vis-à-vis* the mediation of daily life. Using Gori as an example, I will discuss this alternative and countervailing tendency (which I will call “romantic aestheticism”) in contrast with the aforementioned “anti-romantic” tendency (which I will call “romantic asceticism”). I will argue that the former tendency is more conducive to understanding the traditional anarchist goal of liberatory education.

## II.

Romanticism, as Arthur Lovejoy famously argued, “has come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing” (124). This is perhaps most evident in the area of political philosophy. In *Political Ideas of the Romantic Age*, for example, Isaiah Berlin argues that romantic thought “both generated and counteracted” the French Revolution (1). While some romantics (e.g., Herder, Chateaubriand, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle, and Novalis) occasionally expressed conservative and even reactionary ideas, others (e.g., Paine, Godwin, Wollstonecraft, Keats, Byron, and Shelley) embodied a distinctive radicalism marked by “a new and restless spirit, seeking violently to burst through old and cramping forms” (92). Even more conservative Romantics, including Coleridge and Wordsworth, expressed sympathy for radical ideas in their early work. In any case, both tendencies contribute in their own way to the development of romanticism’s fundamental political archetypes, chief among them what I will call the “hero-martyr.” At the highest level of generality, the hero-martyr is an individual who forsakes mundane attachments and commits himself body and soul to an improbable, even impossible, Ideal. It is a radical concept, on the one hand, insofar as the hero-martyr affirms her individuality and stands opposed to the limitations of convention. It is conservative, on the other hand, insofar as the hero-martyr’s self-sacrificial quest is always and already situated in, and validated by, a tradition of hero-martyrs who fought and died for the Ideal before him.

The ideal of the hero-martyr is vividly illustrated in the early pages of Alexander Berkman’s *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (1912), where the “true revolutionist” is described as austere and almost masochistically selfless. Berkman goes so far as to attack his cousin Fedya for having spent 20 whole cents on a meal as “not a mere extravagance,” but “positively a crime” (73). For Berkman, the “true revolutionist” affirms his radical individuality by rejecting conventional bourgeois comforts and embracing the “The Cause” or “The Revolution” – a far-off Ideal

always described in abstract terms. At the same time, the revolutionist must lose herself in the Ideal in the same way that a sensible object participates in a Platonic form: by denying both her own and others' independent reality. For the young Berkman, the Ideal alone is real because it is transcendent; it does not manifest itself immanently in particular people or places or things or relationships, whether past or present. This transcendence demands the revolutionist's detachment and self-denial. In an uncanny forewarning of the more severe and doctrinaire "lifestyle anarchism"<sup>1</sup> of our own day, Berkman rejects the things of this world as an absolute barrier to revolutionary commitment. I call this construction of the hero-martyr ideal "romantic asceticism," defined by the individual's radical renunciation of bourgeois self-indulgence but also of engagement with and investment in the world more generally. The romantic ascetic denies the present world in favor of an Ideal future world. As hero-martyr, she is absorbed into and takes the whole of the Cause into herself, sacrificing her life even to the point of self-destruction. We find this hero-martyr throughout romantic literature: the death of the solitary Poet-figure of Percy Shelley's *Alastor*, or the recalcitrant, self-destructive individualism of Byron's Manfred.

The Italian anarchist Pietro Gori provides a different conceptualization of the hero-martyr ideal. Few contemporary anarchists outside of Italy are likely to regard Gori as anything but obscure and marginal, yet during his all-too-brief lifetime, he was widely regarded as a figure of towering importance among the most celebrated revolutionaries of his generation. Among Italian anarchists, he was, and remains, a beloved bard and folk hero feted with honors usually reserved for saints, more highly regarded than even perhaps the famous Errico Malatesta (1853–1932). He was called the "poet," the "golden tongue," the "knight errant," and the "luminous archangel" of anarchy.<sup>2</sup> This brief discussion cannot adequately describe or summarize Gori's remarkable and influential life and thought. Instead, I want to focus on features, constitutive of what I call Gori's "romantic aestheticism," relevant to this essay's historical understanding of romantic revolutionary subjectivity in the context of the anarchist movement. Gori's commitment to the anarchist Ideal was exemplified through his deeply emotional and personal commitment to everyday life as expressed in songs, poems, and plays, as well as revolutionary activities. Against the romantic asceticism of the young Berkman, Gori's romantic aestheticism provides the most fruitful understanding of the role of education in classical anarchism.

In 1890, Gori was arrested for organizing May Day demonstrations and spent a year in prison.<sup>3</sup> During his incarceration, he composed many of the poems that would be published a year later in his first major collection, *Prigioni e Battaglie*. What is remarkable about these poems, especially when contrasted with Berkman's *Prison Memoirs*, is the unique way in which Gori constructs the concept of "*L'Ideale*" (The Ideal) as well as his own relationship to it. For Gori, the longing for Anarchy (which he calls *l'ideale bello* and, elsewhere, *l'ideale immortale*) is always and already an expression or manifestation of deep emotional connections to and relationships with real people and places and objects. The Ideal is immanent, inseparable from ourselves and everything we love and hold dear in life. Like Tolstoy's kingdom of God, it is within and around us yet also transcendent, a sign of what could be standing above and apart from all that is not yet. For example, in "To My Mother (On Her Name Day)," from his 1905 *Ideali e Battaglie*, Gori writes:

Oh Mother, this morning I was recalling  
 My crimes and your long suffering,  
 And to my young heart I asked:  
 "Why don't you stop your bellowing, old man?"  
 "Why don't you stop proclaiming the holy"  
 Utopias that smile in the face of pain?  
 You should return instead to the patient  
 Love of your mother, oh old heart (17)<sup>4</sup>

Here, Gori describes the all-too-familiar conflict that arises between personal and political life and between revolutionary ideals and love for a “mother [who] cries and waits in vain” (17). But he comes to recognize that the “sweet dream of Mother’s singing” and the “serene Ideal whose fiery face shines upon the people and the future” are one and the same (18, 19).

Although Gori feels guilty for leaving his mother behind to pursue his dangerous and illegal revolutionary activities, he also realizes that it is precisely because he loves his mother that he must recommit himself to the Ideal, which in that moment expressed itself most acutely in the conflict between filial devotion and the injustice of imprisonment. Unlike the young Berkman, for whom alienation is a virtue and affection a vice, for Gori, the Ideal is nothing more than these relations with others we constitute and are constituted by – the recognition of what they are and the precognition what they otherwise could be. This is one sense in which Gori embodies romantic aestheticism – the pursuit of revolutionary ideals in the context of loving, celebrating, and learning from life in its particularity. Similar ideas can be found in Percy Shelley, who describes love as

that powerful attraction towards all we conceive, or fear, or hope beyond ourselves, when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void, and seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves (71)

as well as Keats, who yearns for “a life of sensations rather than of thoughts” (54).

Because Gori’s poetry enumerates at great length the particular people, places, and things that he loves – mother, sister, hometown, and the Tyrrhenian Sea (that portion of the Mediterranean that borders the western coast of Tuscany) – from the ascetic standpoint, Gori might appear to be a bourgeois sensualist, a decadent. From the aesthetic standpoint, however, he radically identifies anarchy with everyday life in order to disclose the authentic content of the Ideal. As the love of, and willingness to learn from, particulars, anarchy is thus coextensive with, immanent to, and inherent in the particulars of life as we’re living them. And this love of life is coupled with the knowledge of and desire for everything life could be. This education provided by everyday life automatically situates one in a tradition of seekers and inculcates a sense of connection to all people living and dead, born and to be born, who have sought justice. To this extent, Gori thus lays the foundation for a kind of affective or even “humanist” anarchism, one that rejects bourgeois individualism in favor of an organic politics rooted in emotional and sensual experience. Not surprisingly, Gori was revered for his charming, affable, and unaffected personality and his compassionate dedication to workers and the poor. Gruff, cheerless, and suspicious of all things bourgeois, the young Berkman, otherwise obsessed with “the People,” would have had little patience for Gori’s elegant, almost foppish clothes; the twinkling eyes, the delicate hands strumming a mandolin, and the melodious voice greeting the “*compagni*,” who adored him, before erupting into song. But for Gori, being a revolutionary does not mean pretending to be other than who or what one is. He was a well-educated bourgeois attorney, not a member of the industrial proletariat, and never proclaimed otherwise.

Gori’s romantic aestheticism thus embraces and affirms rather than rejects and negates, constructing revolutionary identity in terms of what a person does rather than what she fails to do. To this extent, romantic aestheticism does not necessarily require the revolutionary to abandon her home or reject her friends or previous life. She is not only allowed to love the things of this world without shame or embarrassment but also actively encouraged to do so as part of her education in the anarchist Ideal. This commitment to the Ideal presupposes seeing herself and her relationships in a new light, valuing the same things but for radically different reasons, so long as she recognizes the Ideal as something “here” and “now” in everything she does, something to be learned, discovered, and cultivated, not (or not just) created out of whole cloth. That is to

say, the romantic aesthete acts out of a sense of obligation to the past as a venerable tradition of martyr-saints who must be honored, learned from, and ultimately redeemed. One finds this romantic, even crypto-religious tendency in anarchist writings and practices after the 1886 Haymarket tragedy (Green 121–46), especially among Italian anarchists like Gori. By the late 19th century, Italy's long history of secular romanticism existed alongside its deeply entrenched cultural Catholicism, both of which influenced anarchists like Gori, Luigi Fabbri (1877–1935), and Malatesta, to which the Italian anarchist movement sought in many ways to offer a non-religious alternative (see LaGumina 523–31).

For example, in the last verse of his famous 1911 “May Day Hymn,” Gori enjoins us to “give flowers to the fallen rebels / while gazing toward the dawn” (*Inno del Primo Maggio* 4). Gori's writings frequently use the motifs of flowers as a symbol of past, tradition, and memory and the sun as a symbol of the future and the revolutionary Ideal, as in the title of his poetry collection *Aspettando il Sole!* (“Expecting the Sun!”). The latter suggests how anarchists, like romantics, are often described as dreamers and utopians. The future figures prominently in Gori's understanding of the anarchist Ideal, as in the title of another collection, *Alla Conquista dell'Avvenire* (“To the Conquest of the Future”), but for Gori, the Ideal future isn't a remote, mysterious *eschaton* so much as a beacon that shines on and illuminates the present from a foreseeable distance. Furthermore, Gori insists that the reality of the Ideal is inseparable from the history of struggle in its name. In struggling toward the future, anarchists construct a history, a memory, not just to honor or mourn the dead (“flowers for the fallen”) but to maintain and reinforce a historical, political, moral, and *pedagogical* relationship with and connection to them and their efforts. As I note above, for Gori, anarchists must recognize, appreciate, and most importantly learn from those men and women who devoted and even martyred their lives to the Ideal. To learn from the dead is to impose a moral obligation to redeem the lives of present and future comrades by redeeming the lives and deaths of past comrades. Gori's reference to anarchist “tradition” thus refers to the etymology of *tradition* as that which is literally past rather than some comprehensive ideology. To belong to tradition is not a matter of belief but of morally, emotionally, and even spiritually committing oneself to the Ideal, to see oneself as student of those who have made this commitment in the past, and thus to stand in continuous historical solidarity with them. For Gori, this deeply felt, historically informed, and ultimately pedagogical commitment makes one an anarchist because one is part of the anarchist tradition.

As I suggested above, anarchists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries often take for granted this tradition of honoring and remembering the dead in stone, stanza, and song. At the same time, ascetics like the young Berkman reject this “romanticism” as sentimental and self-indulgent because it prioritizes emotion and inner feeling over rationality and objectivity. For them, there are more efficient and practical ways to spend one's time than mourning long-dead comrades. Gori likely second-guessed his poetry for the same reasons yet resolutely affirmed the emotional appeal of connecting memory to politics because this speaks to a deeply felt need to belong to something older and greater than oneself. For the romantic aestheticism of Gori's anarchism, this is not *just* about emotion or sentiment. To learn about and ultimately know the Ideal, one must concern oneself not only with the practical and expedient but also with the beautiful, holy, profound, and joyful. To know “what is to be done,” one must first know what is worthwhile and loveable, which requires an emotional engagement with both past and present.

### III.

To this point, I have been discussing the difficulty of reconciling the traditional anarchist emphasis on education with romantic asceticism, which scorns both the present and the past as

possible sources of learning. In this final section, I want to discuss the extent to which this emphasis can be understood in the context of romantic aestheticism. One fundamental difference between Marxian socialists and anarchists of the 19th and the early 20th centuries concerns their views on the origins of political, social, and economic oppression. “The German Communists,” writes Bakunin,

want to see in all human history ... in all the intellectual, moral, religious, metaphysical, scientific, artistic, political, juridical, and social developments which have been produced in the past and continue to be produced in the present, nothing but the reflections or the necessary after-effects of economic facts (*Selected Writings* 85).

Anarchists, he continues, “also recognize the inevitable linking of economic and political facts in history ... but we do not bow before them indifferently” (85). For anarchists, it is precisely because of the historical fact of tyranny that

a people ... loses at length the salutary habit of revolt and even the very instinct of revolt. It loses the feeling of liberty, and once a people has lost all that, it necessarily becomes, not only by its outer conditions, but in itself ... a people of slaves (89).

Thus, tyranny and oppression are always “abominable” in the present even if their historical emergence appears “very natural, logical, [even] inevitable” in hindsight (88).

But if oppression is always experienced in the present as “abominable,” why are there not more spontaneous uprisings against the oppressors? One partial, and obvious, answer is that the lower classes are afraid of the *de facto* power of the ruling classes. Yet although fear is a necessary condition for pacifying the masses, it is not sufficient since the ruling classes of most countries neither want nor need to use force to instill fear. Instead, anarchists suggest a reciprocal relationship between political, social, and economic domination, on the one hand, and lack of access to educational opportunities, on the other. As Pierre-Joseph Proudhon writes:

It is necessary in order to maintain the subordination of the masses, to restrain the flowering forth of ability, to reduce the too numerous and too unmanageable attendance at colleges, to keep in systematic ignorance the millions of workers doomed to repugnant and painful labor, to make use of instruction by not making use of it, that is to say, by turning it toward the brutalization and exploitation of the lower classes. (58)

To put things simply, the ruling classes maintain power largely by keeping the lower classes in a perpetual state of ignorance. Deprived of education, workers and other oppressed people are ill-equipped to criticize their oppressors, promote and organize on behalf of their interests, and articulate viable alternatives to the status quo. At best, ignorance encourages obedience and passivity and at worst, unfocused rage that can be easily crushed through brute force.

Not surprisingly, anarchists are notable early critics of public education, which for them reinforces the State and its class system. The early romantic anarchist William Godwin (1756–1836), for example, takes public education to task for inculcating students into “certain fixed ideas” and teaching them “creeds [and] catechisms” rather than the critical thinking skills necessary for a “career of enquiry” (231). Similarly, Bakunin later argues that

just as Catholicism once sanctioned the violence perpetrated by the nobility upon the people, so does the university, this church of bourgeois science, explain and condone the exploitation of the same people by bourgeois capital (*Basic Bakunin* 124).



Anticipating Antonio Gramsci, he goes on to describe academics as “modern priests of licensed political and social quackery” (74) who are “by their very nature inclined to all sorts of intellectual and moral corruption” (*Statism and Anarchy* 134) – paid functionaries of the bourgeoisie whose sole purpose is to construct intellectual apologies on its behalf and train the next generation of exploiters. As noted above, Bakunin insists it is necessary for oppressed people to “acquire learning and seize knowledge” (*Basic Bakunin* 81), not through partial, specialized public education, but through “all-round education” (111) – that is, comprehensive education in the arts, humanities, and sciences as well as technical and vocational training (115).<sup>5</sup> The goal is seamlessly to integrate the theoretical and practical aspects of education into a unified whole so that “Everyone shall work and everyone shall be educated” (115).

Arguably, the most important function of education for the anarchists, however, is its capacity to demystify authority. Demystification threatens the ruling classes because they are

‘[O]paque’ (or ‘closed’) authorities, who simply stand on their position or station ... [or] appeal to a conventional rule or procedure (‘that is how things are done’ or ‘have always been done’) without being able to step beyond some rule book ... which has been enacted (for reasons not open to, or bearing, examination) by a further substantially opaque authority (Sylvan 221).

Because State and Capital lack legitimate moral or rational justification, a fact that the anarchists claim is easily ascertained by educated persons, especially those who suffer disproportionate political and economic oppression, the ruling classes conceal to the masses the closed and arbitrary nature of their power through superstition, propaganda, and other distractions instead of education. Hence, why anarchist educational discourses often describe the State and its ruling classes in terms of the Father: “The government idea sprang from family customs and domestic experience: no protest arose then: Government seemed as natural to Society as the subordination of children to their father” (Proudhon 106). That is to say, a powerful father’s command provides its own reason for obedience independently of what it is actually commanding the children to do: “His will is their law and all, mother and children, have confidence in it” (133). And this self-justification in turn creates a moral obligation and duty to obey. Both aspects assume children are unable (and do not need) to think and act for themselves, so that their only real choice is to obey their father’s commandments for the sake of their own good. Thus, the State’s “benevolent yoke of wisdom and justice ... is imposed from above” on people who are assumed to be “incapable of governing themselves” (Bakunin, *Selected Writings* 98), a “principle of authority” that takes for granted laws are to be obeyed not because they are just, practical, or socially beneficial but only because the State issues them. Because “Daddy knows best,” the only choice is between obedience and punishment.

To become an adult, however, is to conceive of oneself as an individual who thinks, desires, chooses, and act independently of the Father’s will, by demystifying the illusion of his authority, but also by *respecting* authority, including paternal authority, on the basis of its “intelligence ... character ... [and] knowledge,” never *deferring* to authority except one’s own reason and conscience (Bakunin, *Selected Writings* 98). The goal of anarchist education, then, is to replace blind adherence to authority with individual responsibility in the name of collective action. But how does this happen? At this point, it is worth recalling Gori’s “To My Mother (On Her Name Day),” which intimates that Gori’s mother, rather than a paternalistic authority, has taught him the most valuable lessons in his life. Whereas the State has only taught him to love authority, his mother has taught him first and foremost to love the things of the world, the people, places, and things with which he has the most immediate and intimate relationships. Having learned their value, he is all the more willing to fight for them. In this way, Gori’s mother has indirectly provided him with an anarchist education.

On the rare occasions when they actually discuss it, most classical anarchists usually minimize the importance of this “maternal education.” For example, Proudhon writes:

[the French counter-revolutionary, philosopher, and politician] M. Bonald [1754–1830] was able to say, and rightly, that the family is the embryo of the State, of which it reproduces the essential classes: the king in the father, the minister in the mother, the subject in the child (106).

Proudhon suggests that the Mother, by teaching children conventional morality, like a priest who teaches religion to justify the absolute authority of the king, merely justifies and reinforces paternal authority (*Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets* 82). Because 19th-century and early 20th-century European children often received their initial education (which, in many cases, was their only education) at home from their mothers, it is shortsighted to suggest that this was a mere function of paternal authority. In Gori's specific case, education by his mother was qualitatively different from that of State or Church. Rather, she provided an *experiential* education that emphasized concrete engagement with everyday life against the routinized, abstract pedagogy of formal schooling. Perhaps this kind of education fails *directly* to challenge paternal authority on behalf of children (and admittedly sometimes serves to justify and reinforce it), but at the very least, it problematizes the notion that people are totally inert, passive beings incapable of thinking, acting, and choosing for themselves. To this extent, however limited, the mother's pedagogy exists in uneasy tension with State authority, providing the conditions of possibility for the State's eventual collapse.

The modern State cannot keep the lowest classes in total darkness because, paradoxically, the system cannot function without all of its citizens receiving at least a rudimentary education, even if only the sort that Gori's mother provided him. This implies that political mechanisms of domination *reinforce* this “maternal” mechanism of education, which means that the State indirectly contributes to the conditions of its own undoing. This is why, as Proudhon says, the State must always ensure that non-propagandistic education be “slight or none at all” for the people who stand to benefit the most from it (58). Here, Proudhon echoes Gramsci, who contends that every socio-economic class organically generates a network of intellectuals who administer and organize that class in order to construct its cohesive, uniform identity within and across social, economic, and political fields (1138). Thus, capitalist society organically generates a “stratum of administrators, etc., scholars and scientists, theorists, non-ecclesiastical philosophers, etc.” in order to organize, promote, and maintain its “social hegemony and state domination” (1143). This hegemony requires institutionalized education within the bourgeois classes to train its next generation of functionaries, as well as among the working classes to inure workers to their oppression while simultaneously ensuring they understand their nature and function as a productive class. The challenge for the ruling class is to contain and domesticate the potentially revolutionary power of education, especially among the working classes. In Gori's case, it appears, this did not happen.

Compare this with the alternative dynamic of romantic asceticism, which moves from the experience of pervasive injustice (as when the young Berkman experienced the injustice of the 1892 massacre of steelworkers in Homestead, Pennsylvania) to the conclusion that everyday life is corrupted by mechanisms of domination and control. Once this life is revealed as a bourgeois lie – at best a distraction, at worse a reinforcement of powerlessness – the newly enlightened revolutionary subject assumes her individual responsibility, expressed as the willingness and ability to think and act for oneself out of a desire for the truth (i.e., the Ideal), which serves as a ground for its decisions going forward. But the Ideal can only be realized through active renunciation (in effect, annihilation) of the fraudulent bourgeois world. The Ideal is thus a pure negation that, lacking any positive content, cannot be known in itself. If the revolutionary requires education,



which in turn requires a source of knowledge, how could one cultivate individual responsibility through romantic asceticism? All of this is by way of saying that what I have called the “aestheticism” of Gori’s romantic anarchism – its deeply personal and emotional engagement with the past as well as with the lived experience of the present – provides a clearer understanding of the nature and function of education in anarchism. In an anarchist context, education demystifies paternalistic authority and inculcates individual responsibility, and this requires learning to love and appreciate life, as well as to recognize one’s place in a tradition, yet independently of authority. This learning opens the door to independent thought, which in turn leads to the skepticism toward and, ultimately, a transvaluation of the concept of authority itself.

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<sup>1</sup> The term “lifestyle anarchism,” which refers to a tendency to ground anarchist practice in personal lifestyle choices rather than organized class struggle, was coined by the late Murray Bookchin in *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism* (1995).

<sup>2</sup> Monuments to Gori’s memory were constructed in Rosignano Marittimo, Livorno, Castagneto Carducci, Piombino, Portoferraio, Hilario, Capoliveri, and Porto Azzuro, among other places. Streets and plazas were named in his honor in dozens of towns, villages, and cities. In South America, where he lived for several years near the turn of the century, Gori was and continues to be held in enormous esteem.

<sup>3</sup> Gori discusses his arrest, trial, and imprisonment in the introduction to *Prigioni* 1–23.

<sup>4</sup> All translations of Gori are mine from the original Italian.

<sup>5</sup> See also Kropotkin, *Fugitive Writings* 22.

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