

celebrity, the gift of seeming to be almost anything his audience wanted him to be.

But if luck played its part, so did Einstein himself. He had both the personality and the will to create a public persona. Others simply did not. Marie Curie was the one other scientist of their day as well-known worldwide as Einstein—and she had been famous for much longer. Yet she never earned the cult status that Einstein gained almost immediately. Media attention always burdened her, at times becoming a vicious assault, as in 1911, when the Paris newspapers vilified her for her affair with the married physicist Paul Langevin. Einstein met her at the first Solvay Conference, just as she was enduring the worst of her drubbing by the press. He commiserated with her, writing that he had become “quite enchanted” with Curie, and that “the horror story peddled in the newspapers is nonsense.” He found the whole notion of Curie as a *femme fatale* a little ridiculous—“despite her passionate nature, she is not attractive enough to represent a danger to anyone.”²⁴

Here, Einstein was mistaken. She and Langevin had been involved, at least until the weight of public vitriol overcame them.²⁵ But still, he had recognized the tenor of Curie’s personal style. As he rather cruelly put it, “Madame Curie is very intelligent, but has the soul of a herring.” According to Einstein, she displayed what emotions she had by “railing at things she does not like,” hardly a congenial public style.²⁶ After the Langevin witch hunt and other, equally brutal snubs, Curie withdrew as much as possible from the public stage. Her devoted volunteer work for France during the Great War restored her reputation, but she did not respond to the admiration that came her way. After the war she traveled to the U.S. and the American crowds turned out, donating the money needed to buy her a precious gram of radium. But they failed to love her, and she in her turn had little to offer them but thanks. She appeared on that tour as a rather grim woman in black, shielded by her acknowledged and almost feared greatness. In the dichotomy of being and doing, Curie simply was—in contrast to Einstein, who was happy to perform on his own behalf.

Einstein joked, expressed grand thoughts, mused about the universe or war and peace or progress or almost anything else. He was gregarious, visibly capable of enjoying himself in the company of others, whatever he might say about solitude. He wrote well, with an eye to