by EVERETT CARTER

member of English Department, University of California; former writer and lyricist for Universal Pictures. He is currently working on a book on American realism.

The Haymarket Affair in Literature

ART is often not so much for art's sake as it is for humanity's sake. This assertion is not part of the controversy about the relation of literature to social problems or about the place of ideas in fiction. It is a statement of fact. More sensitive than the rest of us, artists are affected more deeply by the inhumanity we show each other. They have often found the impulse to create and the materials for creation in their almost physical revulsion against the facts of social iniquity. Literature — good literature as well as cheap and sentimental literature — inevitably comes out of the crucible of a national injustice; this is the truth demonstrated in our times by the case of Sacco and Vanzetti; and for the nineteenth century it was the lesson taught by the literary reaction to the hanging of four anarchists after a bomb exploded in Haymarket Square, Chicago, on May 4, 1886.

The overture to the Haymarket drama had been playing for twenty years before 1886; the discords of the strife between organized capital and organizing labor had made the public suitably jumpy; the squeals of the newspapers and magazines about conspiracies of socialists, anarchists, and "walking delegates" had been supplemented by the deeper resonances of antilabor novels like *The Stillwater Tragedy* and *The Breadwinners*, and together the whole orchestra of fear and hatred had prepared the American audience for the rising of the curtain on the Chicago tragedy.

The first act took place at the McCormick reaper plant on May 3, 1886, when police fired into a mob of disorderly strikers. The next

day, a crowd of twelve or thirteen hundred gathered to hear denunciations of the shooting. As Sam Fielden, an acknowledged anarchist, spoke, a platoon of police, led by Captain John Bonfield, marched on the crowd. From somewhere behind the speakers' wagon a bomb was thrown. It exploded between the second and third ranks of the police, killing one, Matthias Degan, and wounding a number of others, variously estimated from twelve to seventy.

When word was flashed to the country, its newspapers called for blood. The public demanded vengeance. Chicago authorities answered the cry by rounding up eight anarchists. The eight men were tried for the murder of Matthias Degan, convicted in August 1886, and after several unsuccessful appeals, Louis Lingg committed suicide in his cell, and Alfred Parsons, Adolph Fischer, George Engel, and August Spies were hanged on November 11, 1887. The other three were sentenced to long prison terms. On June 26, 1893, Governor Louis Altgeld pardoned the surviving anarchists, bluntly declaring that the evidence at the trial had not proved the defendants guilty, and Altgeld's findings have not been seriously challenged by any historian.

But at the time of the trials and the execution, the duty of almost every American seemed clear. Our way of life was endangered by foreign radicals; these men might not have been directly guilty, but their political philosophy called for the use of force in abolishing our institutions; therefore, as James Russell Lowell declared, and John Greenleaf Whittier seemed to agree, "the rascals are well hanged."

There were a few who dissented. Petitions for clemency were published in the *New York Times* on November 4, 1887, and in the *Chicago Tribune* on November 9. Moncure David Conway, author of two novels and biographer of Paine, Hawthorne, and Carlyle, was one of the signers of the *Times* petition. Thomas Davidson, author, philosopher, and educator, was another. Among the names at the bottom of the letter to the *Tribune* was that of B. F. Underwood who, with Paul Carus, his successor on the Chicago *Open Court*, was one of the very few editors in America who protested the hangings. These men — Underwood, Carus, Davidson, Conway — were led in their dissent from prevailing American opinion by two more prominent writers, and the story of the different modes of protest chosen by Steele MacKaye and William Dean Howells provides an en-

lightening study of the quite different ways an author may conduct himself when he has decided to take an unpopular stand. Howells threw his life and his work upon the scales of justice. MacKaye, the outstanding actor-manager and dramatist of his day, spoke up as a private individual, but declined to risk his professional reputation by his protest.

MacKaye was writing a new play when he read of the trial and conviction of the anarchists. He was convinced that an injustice had been done. Privately, he denounced the verdict with "wrathful fervour," and cited "instances . . . of police brutality." Publicly, he opened his appeal for clemency with the "let's-not-make-martyrs-out-of-them" gambit. He called upon the American people to refrain from throwing around the anarchists' mania "the seductive glamor of heroism" and declared that it was upon these grounds that he protested against the execution of the Chicago radicals "as a national folly and a national disgrace."

These were Steele MacKaye's sentiments; at the time he held them he was one of the influential writers for a greatly influential medium — the American stage. Did he attempt to use this medium, in any way, to awaken his audience's sense of justice? If he had decided to do so, the opportunity lay at hand, for the play on which he was working and which was performed when the Haymarket hysteria was at its height, carried marked overtones of allusion to contemporary events. It was a drama of the French Revolution at the stage of the Terror, entitled *Paul Kauvar, or Anarchy*, and describes the fulfillment of love despite political and social distinctions.

The theme of the play, as MacKaye himself declared, is contained in Kauvar's assertion: "The torch of liberty which should light mankind to progress, if left in madmen's hands, kindles that blaze of Anarchy whose only end is ashes." And whenever the word "anarchist" is spoken, it is associated with phrases like "slaughter hundreds of defenseless women," "outrage little children," "ravishing the poor," "shouting fraternity and committing fratricide," and with adjectives and appositives like "libertine," "assassin," "vulture," and "toad." At the end of the first New York performance the audience "roared and rose" as if it were "one enormous being, deep-lunged and myriad-armed," and a contemporary reviewer declared that "the wildly enthusiastic crowd in front made one think that a

pandemoniac delirium had usurped the place of reason . . ." What the American public needed least was a play which encouraged the usurpation of reason by hysteria, but that is what Steele MacKaye gave it. While privately espousing the cause of justice to the anarchists, MacKaye, as a dramatist, did not risk the sacrifice of one "bravo" from that "enormous being, deep-lunged and myriad-armed," which so enthusiastically greeted his diatribe against anarchy.

At a meeting in the home of Judge Roger A. Pryor, the counsel for the Haymarket defendants, MacKaye caught the eye of the short, squat, gentle dean of American letters and leader of the movement toward realism in American fiction. William Dean Howells, a most unlikely candidate for martyrdom, past editor of the *Atlantic*, under contract to a conservative publishing house at ten thousand dollars a year, had made up his mind to protest the treatment of the anarchists and was, at the time of his meeting with MacKaye, deep in the struggle. He had tried to enlist the support of other writers for the condemned men; he had written an open letter to the *New York Tribune*, appealing for clemency; and when the men were executed, his feelings overflowed in a series of letters to his relatives and friends in which he spoke of "the hideous scene," "the thing forever damnable before God and abominable to civilized man," as a "civic murder" and "an atrocious piece of frenzy and cruelty."

At the time he expressed these opinions, Howells had more to lose than the average man. To the usual burdens of married life was added a hopelessly invalided daughter. Although his fears turned out to be unfounded, he expected that his stand might cost him his position with the house of Harper. He felt, with reason, that he was "risking his reputation and livelihood" in defending the Haymarket radicals. Yet defend them he did, and not only as a private citizen. For the following six years, he devoted his talents to the writing of a series of novels of social criticism, the most important of which was *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1888).

The fortunes which are hazarded in the novel are those of Basil March, the pseudonym under which Howells had previously represented himself in *Their Wedding Journey* (1871) and its sequel *A Chance Acquaintance* (1872). In *A Hazard of New Fortunes* March is the editor of a new magazine, *Every Other Week*, and at the be-

ginning of the novel, he and his wife have come to New York and are house-hunting. As they walk through the city's streets, Mrs. March presses her husband's arm; together they watch a man hungrily rifle through a garbage can. March gives him a coin, and when he rejoins his wife, she announces her solution to such problems — they will return to Boston where one doesn't see these things. March has a better idea; they will go to the theater and forget them.

And so they put the garbage-grubber and what he represents out of their minds, until the disjointedness of society is brought home to them through the fate of old Lindau, a German socialist whom March hires to do some translations for his magazine. Into the new venture in publishing are also drawn Colonel Woodburn, a courtly representative of southen agrarianism, Fulkerson, a dynamic entrepreneur, and Dryfoos, a millionaire social climber and "angel" for *Every Other Week*. March, Howells, America, watch while the bewildered millionaire strikes out blindly against European radicalism, embodied by the maimed but magnificent Lindau; against nostalgic American feudalism in the person of Colonel Woodburn; against Christian socialism, represented, ironically enough, by his saintly son Conrad. And there is no solution, no easy way out of the terrible impasse in which Dryfoos finds himself. The end of the book finds Lindau dead, a victim of the society which he has fought to save, and Conrad killed in the same labor violence which claimed the life of Lindau. The elder Dryfoos turns with a cry of animal pain from the corpse of his son, for on Conrad's face there is the mark of a blow which his father had dealt him in anger; and the old man flees with his wife and daughters to Europe, away from a society which had given him everything only to have given him nothing.

It is clear that Howells took his enormous personal anguish over the Haymarket Affair and sufficiently objectified it; his novel became much more than a personal purgation; it became an imaginative invention which caught the bewilderment of millions of Americans at the nightmarish turn their Dream was taking. But the artistic distance at which Howells placed his materials contracts occasionally, and the identity of March and the Howells of the Haymarket Affair becomes tensely apparent. March, like Howells, is compelled to make a serious personal choice between principle and expediency. Dryfoos has insisted that March fire Lindau because of the Ger-

man's radicalism. March must decide whether to run the risk of sacrificing everything he has worked for. Fearful for his position and sick at heart over the grief he will cause his family, he nevertheless refuses to discharge the old socialist. After March makes his decision, he feels "the misery of the man who stakes security and plenty and peace of home upon some cast, and knows that losing will sweep from him most that most men find sweet and pleasant in life." Things turn out as well for March as they did for Howells, but not before both have had their horizons "indefinitely widened."

It is a pleasant coincidence that Robert Herrick, one of Howells' disciples in realism, was another author who kept the memory of the Haymarket injustice alive. And in Herrick's hands, as in Howells', the material is shaped for artistic ends. The bombing becomes a part of the events which make up the lives of Van Harrington in Herrick's *Memoirs of an American Citizen* (1905) and of Millie Ridge in *One Woman's Life* (1913). Although Herrick's sympathy with the Haymarket victims is apparent, he completely assimilates the tragic event into his story, showing its impact upon his characters, demonstrating its importance as a social phenomenon, but wisely estimating its relative unimportance to the daily average of life in the United States.

Van Harrington, the rising, self-made businessman whose lot it is to sit on the hanging jury, is not significantly altered by his unusually close connection with the tragedy. He describes the bombing, tells about the hysteria, is frank about the rigged trial and entirely sure that justice has been seriously mangled. A lesser novelist might have sentimentalized Harrington and turned him into an idealist and a reformer. Herrick, however, describes how Harrington, released from the jury after doing his duty, is congratulated by his employers for his patriotism and uses the event as one more step on his climb to the top. Millie Ridge, too, is drawn into the orbit of the Haymarket Affair and is startled into a brief awareness of social problems by the "vivid lightning" of the bomb. Her awakening lasts long enough for her to be keenly interested in the trial, to wangle a place among the spectators in the courtroom, and to be sentimentally attracted to the handsome, fair Louis Lingg who makes a glowing speech about liberty and justice. Then, a year later, "the young blue-eyed anarchist, in whom Millie had been interested, blew off

the top of his head with a bomb. But Millie was very busy at that time with other matters."

The unfortunate Lingg had proved attractive to another author and is the hero of *The Bomb* by Frank Harris, biographer of Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw and author of a more lurid autobiography. Harris looks out at you from his portrait with small, round eyes under black brows; his dark hair is plastered flat over a high round head, a black mustache curls boldly above large lips; a man, one would think, who was more at home behind a Victorian bar than in the ranks of the crusaders. And yet this international mountebank wrote the only full-length novel which deals exclusively with the Haymarket bombing.

Harris revisited America in 1907, read the newspaper files, and "came to the conclusion that six out of seven men punished in Chicago were as innocent as I was, and that four of them had been murdered — according to law." He determined to tell the world about his discovery and used the story of Rudolph Schnaubelt as his medium. Schnaubelt comes to America and meets "the greatest man that ever lived . . . a born rebel, murderer and martyr," Louis Lingg. With Lingg, he watches the Chicago police shoot and club assemblies of workingmen. He hears the young, fair-haired, blue-eyed anarchist assert: "Either the police must be allowed to do whatever they please, or we must strike back. Submission or revolt." Schnaubelt agrees, consents to throw the bomb which Lingg manufactures, and hurls the explosive which sets the Haymarket tragedy into motion. Then from exile in England and Switzerland, Schnaubelt reads the newspaper accounts of the martyrdom of Lingg, Fielden, Parsons, Spies, Engel, and Fischer.

The novel is best when it deals with Schnaubelt, a character who comes to life occasionally; and when he does one realizes with a shock of recognition that Schnaubelt is Harris himself. The scenes of fumbling amorosity in which a pure young girl entreats Schnaubelt to end her uneasy virginity might have been taken from the pages of Harris' autobiography. The other characters are stereotypes. Harris admitted that he "idealized Lingg beyond life-size. . . . No young man of twenty ever had the insight into social conditions which I attribute to him." What the character of Lingg is, by the author's admission, the other characters are in double measure. Harris' ser-

mon on the Haymarket Affair justly failed to reach a sizable audience in America, and it remained for a didacticist of our own generation to tell the story to a wider public.

From *The Bomb* to Howard Fast's *The American* is a matter of thirty-eight years; it is also a matter of infinite change in the temper of English and American radicalism. The potpourri of "Socialism, Christianity, anarchy, and hero-worship," which was *The Bomb*, was typical of American radicalism in the first ten years of the century. The uncomfortably single-minded explanation of most social phenomena in terms of the class struggle, which is *The American*, is representative of much of the proletarian literature of the 30s and 40s. Humanitarianism in Fast is so strong that his work becomes not so much art as social tract for humanity's sake. The "American" is supposedly John Peter Altgeld, the brave Illinois governor who pardoned three of the anarchists and cast retrospective shame upon his state for its execution of the other defendants at the Haymarket trial. But in reality the hero becomes not Altgeld, but Albert Parsons, the handsome and idealistic anarchist who gave himself up to the authorities in the certainty that he would be exonerated and who was then so tragically included in the list of those condemned to death.

Parsons begins to dominate the book on page 72, and from then on, the novel about Altgeld becomes not the portrayal of men, but of causes. Altgeld is never realized; he has no chance to be; his life, essentially the life of an honest, middle-of-the road humanitarian, populist, and free-silverite, would not seem to lend itself to the preconceptions of the author. So Altgeld is submerged in the story of the Haymarket martyrs. Fast leaves him at the funeral of the anarchists and skips the intervening years, the years when Altgeld became a great political force in America and won the governorship of Illinois. He picks him up at a scene in his home when his secretary, George Schilling, comes in and says, with the affectedly colloquial rhythm which, Norman Corwin has convinced us, is the speech of the common man: "It's about the Haymarket people, about Fielden and Schwab and Neebe." Schilling then goes on to describe the Haymarket episode to the governor; his is the consciousness through which the affair is filtered, and a somewhat prejudiced point of view it is.

To Schilling, of course, i is obvious who threw the bomb, and his judgment is not seriously challenged: "They — our enemies — they threw the bomb. Look at all that has happened since, and see if it could have been any other way." And when Lingg is found dead in his cell — his face destroyed by the detonation of a percussion cap, the governor's secretary insists: "Five days ago they murdered Louis Lingg. . . . Suicide! Has a man ever in this world committed suicide by putting a dynamite fuse in his mouth and igniting it, so that with half his face torn away he suffered the tortures of the damned before he died?"

Fast insures his readers' opinion upon this key historical point by having Altgeld ask a wise political boss to tell him the truth. "Did the police murder Lingg?" the governor asks Joe Martin. Martin avoids the question, then finally says: "I'll tell you what I think; I think that before a man killed himself by putting a dynamite charge in his mouth, you'd have to club him quiet and pry his jaws open." What has happened to Mr. Fast is clear. With the best intentions in the world to right the injustice done to the Haymarket anarchists, he has tampered with the record; and when a novelist juggles the accounts of life, his final total may come out the way he wants it, but it also comes out melodrama.

And the Haymarket Affair was material not for melodrama, but for drama — for tragedy of the highest sort, with all the implications of individual as well as social responsibility, all the contradictions between man's aspirations and his immediate material necessities. Like great tragedy, too, the Haymarket Affair is timeless, ageless, and forever recurrent. The names of the characters may change — from Quaker and Puritan to abolitionist and slaveholder, from Parsons and Fielden to Sacco and Vanzetti. But the plot is the same. And part of this recurrent drama is the literary activity which it inspires. The Haymarket tragedy gave Steele MacKaye the opportunity to satisfy his audience's prejudices and gave Frank Harris and Howard Fast a stick with which to belabor American capitalism; but it gave Robert Herrick material which he absorbed into his fine novels, and it provided William Dean Howells with the impetus to produce his most impressive work.