

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



Cesare Lombroso  
Anarchy and its Heroes  
1897

Retrieved on December 28, 2011 from [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org)  
Alexandre Bérard, *Les mystiques de l'anarchie*. Lyon, A.-H.  
Storck, 1897. Translated by Mitch Abidor

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)**

# Anarchy and its Heroes

Cesare Lombroso

1897

In nature the law of inertia dominates, and even more so in the human world, which is *misonéique*, i.e., has a horror of the new. In politics, every violent effort against the established order, against the *old*, is punishable for it wounds the majority's opinions and sentiments. Even if it constitutes a necessity for an oppressed minority, judicially it is an anti-social fact and consequently a crime, often a useless crime, for it awakens a *misonéistique* reaction.

And it is here that the distinction appears between revolutions properly speaking, which are slow, prepared, necessary effect, that are at the very most rendered more rapid by some neurotic genius or some historical accident, and revolts or seditions, which are the precipitous, artificial incubation at exaggerated temperatures of embryos that due to this fact are doomed to a certain death. Revolution is the historical expression of evolution. Its movement is slow and gradual, another guarantee of success.

Revolutions are more or less extended, general, and followed by an entire people. Seditions respond to causes of little importance, often local or personal. They are frequent among the least advanced peoples, like in Saint-Dominique, in the small

republics of the Middle Ages and in those of South America. Criminals participate in them much more than do honest people. Revolutions, on the contrary, rarely appear, and always for serious causes and an elevated ideal; and passionate men, i.e., criminals or geniuses more often take part than do criminals.

It follows from this that it is easy to understand that the anarchist movement is composed for the most part (except for a very few exceptions, like Reclus and Kropotkin) of criminals and madmen, and sometimes of both together, for I have demonstrated that the most honest men and the greatest geniuses, the flower of the nation, take part in revolutions, while on the contrary in rebellions, where *misonéisme* is in total opposition to the dominant idea, there only appear madmen and criminals who are led by their morbid state to feel and to think differently from everyone else and who, in order to arrive at their ends, don't feel the trouble that other men would feel while accomplishing violent and criminal acts, such as regicide, arson, etc...

It suffices to take a look at the portraits I gave in my *Crime Politique* to see how much the anarchists and the rebels who are the anarchists of the past, present the perfect type of criminal, like Kammerer, Steilmacher, Brady, Fitzharris.

Modern anarchists provide the occasion for the same observations. A distinguished magistrate, M. Spingardi, who was kind enough to furnish me with numerous materials for this article, said to me: "As far as I'm concerned, I have never seen an anarchist who was not either crippled, a hunchback or whose face wasn't asymmetrical." Ravachol and Prady presented the perfect type of born criminal, not only in their faces, but in their passion for evil, their absolute lack of ethical sense, their hatred of the family, and their indifference to human life. And I would like to observe that Pini and Kammerer were true brigands, like Ravachol.

Is this any different with Vaillant?

In the first place I'd like to say that his physiognomy was not at all that of a criminal, except perhaps for his too large and widely spaced ears. But he was a hysteric.

He was of a gentle and timid character, and had a quite particular characteristic: he was unable to look in the eye those people who were either nervous or who have any kind of magnetic strength in their gaze. In these cases Vaillant fell into a kind of ecstasy, from which he was awakened with difficulty.

This is the essential character of hysteria (hypnotic sensibility).

The natural hatred of parties and the tendency of procurators to exaggerate things depict him as a vulgar evildoer. he appears to me as simply an unbalanced individual who gave a few signs of criminality in his childhood and youth (the crime of fraud), but even more than a born criminal, he was a true passionate fanatic, whose hatreds are explained by heredity and misfortune.

As or heredity, his birth was owed to a half-guilty love and to degenerate parents. He was born of a former liberated Zouave who had seduced a young domestic. Both of them, heartless, abandoned him along the way.

Another cause resides in his futile struggle against misfortune. As a young man he was raised with difficulty, and was forced to resort to being a cobbler to earn his living. From this point on he was a rebel. After having been a cobbler he was in succession a furrier, a grocery agent, a French teacher, a plaster worker, a metal worker. But his dreamy, ecstatic temperament made him inapt for all serious labor. He passed several months in the direst poverty.

At twelve he was placed as an apprentice confectioner. Impatient for his freedom, the child fled and his mother, who had remarried, refused to receive him.

The gendarmes arrested him on the road. They telegraphed his father, and M. Vaillant responded:

I had the mother of said Auguste Vaillant as a mistress. She comported herself poorly and I left her. She has since remarried, I believe. I ask that you have him taken to her home.

Despite this, since he calls for me, I am sending twenty franc so that he can return to his mother.

I do this as an act of charity and not one of recognition.

As for Vaillant's mother, she answered:

It is impossible for me to receive the child. My husband would throw me out of the house.

And it is thus that this unhappy child of fourteen wandered from city to city, arrested here for having begged for a morsel of bread, condemned there for having, on a day when he was dying of hunger, taken without paying a meal that was worth 90 centimes.

He tried everything, without success. His boss in Choisy-le-Roi gave him 20 francs a week, for himself, his wife and his child. They lacked bread almost every day.

The great mobility, the instability proper to hysterics, which he had demonstrated in his various métiers, he also brought to his convictions.

Educated by priests he became a socialist, paying with his body, organizing all the elements needed to form groups of the extreme avant-garde.

Not being able to make his way or play a leading role among the socialists, he became an anarchist and perhaps given time would have become a monarchist. But above all he was vain. The graphologist who examines his signature finds there vanity, pride, and energy as the dominant characteristics. The large "T," the rising writing, the enormous initials are a striking proof

“For too long a time,” he said, “our voice is responded to with prison, the rope or the fusillade, but don’t delude yourselves: the explosion of my bomb is not only the cry of Vaillant in rebellion, but is the cry of an entire class that calls for its rights and will soon join its acts to its words.”

of this. The directing, the leading of a collection of individuals was his strongest tendency.

But at all times he was an exaggeratedly passionate altruist.

One of the things that have most profoundly surprised me is to have found this characteristic in many anarchists even more criminal than him. Everyone knows that he and Ravachol bragged of having spent the fruit of their thefts on their companions or their cause. According to what has been written to me about Chicago, Spies was venerated as a saint by all of his comrades.

He only earned 19 francs a week, but he still gave two to a friend who had fallen ill. He even helped a man who had outrageously offended him. His companions said that if the revolution were ever to triumph it would be necessary to put him in prison in order to prevent him from harming the revolution through sentimentality...

In order to explain this...we must recall what occurs among hysterics like Vaillant.

Hysteria, which is the sister of epilepsy, and which is in a like fashion connected with the partial loss of affectivity, any times demonstrated along with an exaggerated egoism, certain bursts of excessive altruism, which is an outgrowth of moral madness and is dependent upon it – and reveals to us the morbid phenomenon within the warmest charity.

In speaking of hysterics Legrand du Saulle wrote that there are those of them who while remaining in the world loudly espouse all the good works of their parish, asking charity for the poor, working for orphans, visiting the sick, giving alms, watching over the dead, ardently soliciting the beneficence of others. Hysterics create charitable works with as much ardor as the knights of industry launch a financial affair with hyperbolic dividends...

Devotion has become a need for these sick individuals, an occasion for necessary expenditure and, without any doubt, they

pathologically play the role of virtue, and everyone is taken in by this.

In principle I am not opposed to the death penalty when that penalty guarantees the life of many people. Nevertheless, I think it would be better not to apply it in the case of anarchists. If it is necessary to suppress born criminals or criminals like Navaho, who hide behind the anarchist mask, on the other hand we must avoid the application of the death penalty to anarchists like Vaillant, among whom the tendency to evil is cloaked in an altruistic form and who, even with their violent thirst for the new, can render service to humanity.

In any event, the suppression of anarchists would have no practical effect, for fanatics and neuropaths don't retreat before punishment. On the contrary, it is punishment that enflames their imagination and as we saw after the attacks in Barcelona and Paris, the too-severe punishment of anarchists was always followed by crimes even more violent and dangerous.

An even more radical measure, especially in France, would be to cover them in ridicule. Martyrs are venerated, but madmen never.

As for international agreements, of which much has been said, they are worse than useless, for the anarchists have no center that can be seized.

In order to demonstrate the uselessness of ferocious penalties it suffices to see that even the death of Ravachol, who was a trueborn criminal, completely unworthy of the pity of honest men, far from being intimidating was followed by an apotheosis.

After his execution certain individuals discovered a supreme — anarchist — logic in his diverse crimes. It was decided that he was a *symbolic* assassin, tomb raider, dynamiter, guillotine.

The cult of Ravachol was born.

Even prior to this the anarchists had their martyrs: those hung in Chicago, those garroted in Xeres, the Germans Reinsdorf and Kuchler, executed with an axe. French revolutionaries

needed, despite their internationalism, a national martyr, executed by the guillotine.

And he was more than a martyr, he was *Ravachol-Jesus* as a party rhymer, Paul Paillette wrote.

A photograph showing him standing with his crazed look, in the clogs of a prisoner between two gendarmes was reproduced in thousand of copies.

Pamphlets to his glory were published: *Ravachol Anarchiste*, *Ravachol et Carnot in Hell*, etc. we even have the hymn, *La Ravachole*.<sup>1</sup>

Just as we can't pass definitive judgment during his life on a great man, a generation can't with certainty judge the falsity of an idea, whatever it might be an, consequently, it doesn't have the right to inflict a penalty as radical as the death penalty on the partisans of that idea. It is for this reason that I proposed for all political criminals — apart born criminals — temporary punishments.

I don't care to discuss briefly the prophylaxis of anarchist crime, but I nevertheless would like to establish the following:

Just as we see cholera strike the poorest and most filthy quarters, anarchy strikes in all places the least well governed. Its presence can thus serve as an indicator that all is not for the best in countries that suffer from it, just as wherever it appears cholera indicates that there are improvements to be made in the domain of hygiene.

In the presence of anarchist crimes one should not forget that painful exclamation of Vaillant's that, though coming from an hysteric, nevertheless deserves to be retained:

---

<sup>1</sup> It has been objected that I wouldn't show such mercy towards anarchists if they had blown up my home. It is true that my home has not yet blown up, but in my career as an alienist I have many times suffered from the sometimes serious wounds caused by these madmen, and it has never occurred to me either to suppress them or to correct them through severe penalties.