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Hippolyte Havel

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Born in 1869 in Burowski, Bohemia, and educated in Vienna, Hippolyte Havel was a prominent organizer, essayist, publisher and raconteur within the international anarchist movement. Now a largely forgotten figure, even among anarchist circles, Havel was, during his time, at the center of the artistic and political avant-garde in Greenwich Village.

A flamboyant character whose flowing hair and fondness for drink suggested the stereotypical bohemian, Havel was much more to his associates. Fluent in at least six languages, with an expansive knowledge of anarchist history, Havel had been expelled from Austria-Hungary, Germany and France for his political activism.

In 1899 Havel met, and began a relationship with, Emma Goldman. The two traveled to Paris to organize the International Anarchist Congress, a non-authoritarian alternative to the Socialist International, in 1900. His “Biographic Sketch” is still published as the introductory essay in Goldman’s influential collection *Anarchism and Other Essays*.

Joining Goldman in New York, Havel quickly established himself a key contributor to anarchist publications, meetings and public events. Havel became a tireless contributor to Goldman’s journal *Mother Earth*, arguably the most important anarchist journal in America between 1906 and 1918, and the alternative educational institution the Ferrer Center.

Among Havel’s innovations was the development of creative spaces in which anarchist ideas could be presented and discussed, beyond the didactic form of political speeches. Influenced by the salons and cabarets he had experienced in Paris, Havel set about establishing such venues in New York, on an anarchist basis. Havel gave particular attention to nurturing performances of various types. Havel viewed such spaces as crucial to the creation of anarchist solidarity and community. Indeed, this emphasis on the development of a sense of anarchist community distinguished him both from individualist anarchists, who stressed personal

uniqueness, and anarchist communists who focused on class struggle.

For Havel, cafes, salons, dinner parties and theater were crucial for the development of solidarity among and between anarchists and artists. Havel viewed artists and anarchists as natural allies who challenged the bounds of conventional thought and action, a challenge necessary both for creative development as well as social change. He advocated the idea that art was revolutionary, not strictly on a realist basis, as would be the case for the socialist realists who would follow, but through experimentation and abstraction as well.

Havel established three significant anarchist journals, *Social War*, *The Revolutionary Almanac* and *Revolt*. These journals served as critical venues for the engagement of modernist art and radical politics and their dissemination across the boundaries separating art and politics. Eugene O'Neill served a brief apprenticeship with Havel at *Revolt* before the paper was closed down after only three months for its opposition to US involvement in World War One. This apprenticeship served to place O'Neill at the cultural center of anarchist activity in the US, furthering his own intellectual and political development.

While it is conceivable that O'Neill and Havel crossed paths as early as 1909 when O'Neill shared a studio with anarchist painters at the Lincoln Arcade Building or certainly by 1915 when the playwright studied at the Ferrer Center, their friendship was cemented during the days at *Revolt*. Havel is portrayed as Hugo Kalmar in *The Iceman Cometh*, in what one commentator identifies as "a rather nasty caricature" (Porton, 1999:12). Kalmar (Havel) is given to jovial, inebriated rants, as in his "soapbox denunciations" ("Capitalist swine! Bourgeois stool pigeons! Have the slaves no right to sleep even?," *Iceman*, 11) which begin as wild declamations and wind down into sound and sudden sleep. He offers this view of the anarchist future: "Soon, leedle proletarians, ve vill have free

picnic in the cool shade, ve vill eat hot dogs and trink free beer beneath the willow trees!" (*Iceman*, 105).

O'Neill draws attention to Kalmar's concern with maintaining a fashionable and neat appearance, "even his flowing Windsor tie (*Iceman*, 4)," and the actual poverty of his material existence as reflected in his "threadbare black clothes" and shirt "frayed at collar and cuffs (*Iceman*, 4)." Havel's life displayed the duality that has often characterized anarchist existence. In Havel, the aesthetic dreams of a new world, reflected in the cafes and salons was juxtaposed with the reality of poverty and precarious work as a dishwasher and short order cook. He died in 1950 having lived the final years of his life in poverty and obscurity during a period in which anarchist movements had suffered marked decline.

Further Reading

- Alexander, Doris. 2005. *Eugene O'Neill's Last Plays: Separating Art from Autobiography*. Athens: University of Georgia Press
- Antliff, Allan. 2001. *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics and the First American Avant Garde*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Porton, Richard. 1999. *Film and the Anarchist Imagination*. London: Verso