

About this issue

Fifth Estate Collective

When we set out to produce an issue on and of literature, we had wide eyes and wild ideas. Ideas like Thoreau suggested, “In literature it is only the wild that attracts us. Dullness is but another name for tameness.” Guided by these instructions, we set out searching for the same sense of “uncivilized free and wild thinking” that Thoreau found “in Hamlet and the Iliad, in all the scriptures and mythologies, not learned in the schools.” Rather than see books as stuffy culture, we would endorse Thoreau’s claim: “As the wild duck is more swift and beautiful than the tame, so is the wild-mallard-thought, which ‘mid falling dews wings its way above the fens. A truly good book is something as natural, and as unexpectedly and unaccountably fair and perfect, as a wild-flower discovered on the prairies of the West or in the jungles of the East. Genius is a light which makes the darkness visible, like the lightning’s flash, which perchance shatters the temple of knowledge itself ...”

When the idea for this issue was born, one colleague suggested some challenging questions: “If a book/poem/play is by an anarchist—even if it’s about something like drinking a lot and playing poker—is that an anarchist work?” He also wonders, “What would be the role of literature in an anarchist society?” Since so much of our words comprise a chilling critique, it’s difficult to imagine what we’ll write after the capitalist meltdown. As we talked, our general descriptions resisted “anarchist literature” as a label only because we didn’t want to endorse yet another subculture marketing category like cyberpunk.

But it’s anarchy proper in the Ursula Le Guin sense that we went looking for. Le Guin articulated her anarchism in “The Day Before the Revolution”—the short story seed that grew the great anarchist novel *The Dispossessed*:

“Odonianism is anarchism. Not the bomb-in-the-pocket stuff, which is terrorism, whatever name it tries to dignify itself with; not the social-Darwinist economic ‘libertarianism’ of the far right; but anarchism, as pre-figured in early Taoist thought, and expounded by Shelley and Kropotkin, Goldman and Goodman.”

For Le Guin, anarchism can be a kind of godless mysticism, as she explained in the 1990s: “Taoism is still an underlayer in my work. It begins talking about what we can’t talk about—an old mysticism that intertwines with Buddhism and is practical and not theistic. Before and beyond God. There’s a humorous and easygoing aspect to it that I like temperamentally and that fits in with anarchism. Pacifist anarchism and Lao-tzu have a lot in connection with each other, especially in the 20th century.” We’re thrilled to count Le Guin among the contributors for this issue, featuring a new poem in our centerfold. There, she shares space with Diane Di Prima and the art of Viva Bonobo. Di Prima’s *Revolutionary Letters* remains an amazing and inspirational work today, a vibrant womanifesto of courage and defiance.

With vast ambitions, this FE could have filled volumes. The choices for inclusion reflect the issue editor’s passions and proclivities. The content’s dynamic tension commences a dance between utopia and dystopia, between poems and poetics, between science fiction and primitivist fantasy. Careful readers of this magazine won’t be surprised to see so many references to Gary Snyder or a new work on Allen Ginsberg’s “poetics of psychedelic anarchism.” In addition to commentary, we’re especially pleased to present so much original, creative writing. Beyond the poems by Le Guin, Di Prima, Peter Wilson, we’re also sharing new short fiction by Merrill Mushroom and Cara Hoffman.

When some of us moved South and made our humble hollow (“hippie hovel,” as one reader claims) a publishing hub, we we’re initially pleased with the outpouring involvement from an emerging “Tennessee Collective.” Of late,

the collective has been a much smaller core of folks here on the land. With this issue, though, I'm pleased to share more voices from our rural neighborhood. With Mushroom's story, Maxzine's interview with Rafael Mutis, and the excerpt from Sandy Katz's new book, the hills of central Tennessee are well-represented. While I hope to produce another issue from Tennessee sometime next year, in the meantime, I look forward to what our friends in the New York area will do with the next issue.

—Anu Bonobo

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