

Le Guin's Anarchism & Mine

Andrew William Smith

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The idea of an “anarchist saint” might seem kind of silly at first, but that did not stop Autonomedia publishers from starting its annual jubilee calendars of radical saints, now in its 26th year. If anyone who has recently died qualifies for the status of anti-authoritarian saint, I would nominate the author, Ursula K. Le Guin, who is featured on the calendar with prominent and lesser known anarchists.

After working on the *Fifth Estate* for more than 30 years, I collaborated on my last issue in 2010, the special literary issue that featured Le Guin on the cover. One of the questions we struggled with then and still face, concerns the paradox of living in capitalist and authoritarian society, but trying not to be of it.

This journal has held fiercely to its anti-copyright ethos, a protest against the privatization of words and the cult of celebrity. However, featuring the Le Guin essay the editors chose for that issue, her publisher required us to include a copyright. As often happens in FE editorial decisions, this prompted significant debate.

Mainstream obituaries of Le Guin do not focus on her anarchism. Yet, one of the most compelling anarcho-utopian visions ever written is her 1974 novel *The Dispossessed*. This text takes readers to another planet to envision the profound sacrifices and stunning possibilities of stateless living.

This quote by the novel's protagonist Shevek captures a whiff of the wonder with which this particular science fiction articulates anarchist dreams. He says:

“We have nothing but our freedom. We have nothing to give you but your own freedom. We have no law but the single principle of mutual aid between individuals. We have no government but the single principle of free association. We have no states, no nations, no presidents, no premiers, no chiefs, no generals, no bosses, no bankers, no landlords, no wages, no charity, no police, no soldiers, no wars. You cannot make the Revolution. You can only be the Revolution. It is in your spirit, or it is nowhere.”

Today's science fiction is dominated by dystopias rather than utopias. Remembering Le Guin has prompted me to ponder why I tried to retire from anarchism eight years ago and why this miserable world prompts me to periodically revisit anarchism for the audacious alternative it provides.

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Related, in this issue: “Ursula K. Le Guin” by Paul J. Comeau



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<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/400-spring-2018/le-guins-anarchism-mine>
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