

# A Brief History of Anarchist Fiction

Excerpts

Margaret Killjoy

2018

**Excerpted and reprinted from *Fifth Estate* #385, Fall, 2011.**

Without even knowing it, you've read anarchist fiction. There are literary greats like Leo Tolstoy ("The Anarchists are right in everything ... They are mistaken only in thinking that Anarchy can be instituted by revolution." ["On Anarchy," 1900]), Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Henry Miller ("[An anarchist] is exactly what I am. Have been all my life." [*Conversations With Henry Miller*, 1994]), Dambudzo Marechera ("If you are a writer for a specific nation or a specific race, then fuck you."), Ba Jin, Carolyn Chute, J.M. Coetzee ("What is wrong with politics is power itself." [*Diary of a Bad Year*, 2007]), Jorge Luis Borges, and William Blake, and other popular fiction authors like Alan Moore, Ursula K. Le Guin, Michael Moorcock, Robert Shea, Norman Spinrad, B. Traven, Kurt Vonnegut, Ethel Mannin, and Edward Abbey.

Widely read authors who didn't identify explicitly as anarchists have had close ties and sympathies to our cause. William Burroughs wrote *Cities of the Red Night*, a homoerotic anarchist novel. Albert Camus wrote extensively for anarchist papers and used his literary clout to help anarchist prisoners.

Franz Kafka participated in anarchist meetings and demonstrations in Prague and helped found an anarchist journal.

One of Philip K. Dick's first novels was an anarchist story, *The Last of the Masters*. (FE note: as were many others of his novels, several of which were made into films including *Bladerunner*).

George Bernard Shaw, the playwright and novelist, flirted with anarchism early in life before settling as a social democrat and he included sympathetic anarchists in his work and was published by anarchist papers.

[Sci Fi writer] Frank Herbert [author of *Dune*] was intensely critical of government and law and lived on a sustainable land project. Upton Sinclair wrote *Boston* to defend anarchist prisoners, Sacco and Vanzetti. JRR Tolkien wrote his son, "My political opinions lean more and more to Anarchy (philosophically understood, meaning abolition of control not whiskered men with bombs)."

Historically, a number of anarchist activists, theorists, and militants have been fiction authors: authors: Voltairine DeCleyre, Federica Montseny, Fredy Perlman, Eugene Nelson, Joseph Dejacque, Eduard Pons Prades, William Godwin, Louise Michel, and Antonio Penichet, all wrote fiction in addition to theory, or in addition to taking up arms against fascism and the state. Very few exceptional anarchist novels exist, or at least are widely distributed. By far the most well-known anarchist novel then that passes both of these tests, is Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*.

Other notable books to portray anarchist societies are Starhawk's *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, PM's *Bolo'Bolo*, Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars Trilogy*, and M. Gilliland's *The Free*.

Anarchists have made it in as sympathetic (though often misguided or idealized) characters in any number of books, such as Rick Dakan's *Geek Mafia: Black Hat Blues*, Cory Doctorow's *Someone Comes to Town, Someone Leaves Town*, Wu Ming's *54*, Grant Morrison's *The Invisibles*, and Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day*.

...

[A]narchist fiction isn't limited to portrayals of the societies we envision or the struggles we undergo. What is useful about anarchists writing fiction is just the ability to normalize our world views: non-hierarchy, anti-authoritarianism, egalitarianism, etc.

We can normalize stories told from the working class point of view, and we can normalize people who are usually "othered" by society and [mainstream] fiction.

The complete article is available at [fifthestate.org](http://fifthestate.org); tap Archive; go to issue #385

Between issues, visit us at [FifthEstate.org](http://FifthEstate.org), or on Facebook, and register for our email list at [fe — AT — fifthestate — DOT — org](mailto:fe-AT-fifthestate-DOT-org).

# fifth Estate

Margaret Killjoy  
A Brief History of Anarchist Fiction  
Eccerpts  
2018

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/401-summer-2018/a-brief-history-of-anarchist-fiction>  
Fifth Estate #401, Summer 2018

**[fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net)**