

Ten Little Anarchists Searching for a New World

Marius Mason

2025

a review of

Ten Little Anarchists by Daniel de Roulet. Autonomedia, 2023

Daniel de Roulet's novella, *Ten Little Anarchists*, is a masterful weave of fantasy and fact, history and histrionics, ideology and imagination.

It is a blend of feminist thought, pragmatic practice, and an open dialogue about strategy and priorities for the anarchist movement.

It is told through the dynamic conversations and lives of ten anarchist women who strike out on their own and leave the old world behind in their effort to create a truly anarchist community in a foreign land.

The story is based loosely on a real group of women watchmaker workers who leave Switzerland in the late 19th century from the Swiss village of Saint-Imier.

The idea comes to the women following a visit by Mikhail Bakunin, who tells them of the 1871 Paris Commune and inspires them to try to live a different life, far from the conventions of home. The group travels by ship to Patagonia at the tip of South America, though not on purpose. They are driven by winds and find themselves abandoned there. And, so begins the adventure.

This tiny but powerful book is translated from French by Joycelyn Genevieve Barque and John Galbraith Simmons. I always am aware that the author may have used different ways of getting his point across, but the translation is breezy and conversational in the way the story's narrator, Valentine, describes the others and the situations they encounter.

It is an impressive device to drag the reader into the story, to relate the commonality of human problems (food, shelter, love, raising children) that connects us all and uses it to introduce themes and ideas that go far beyond the ordinary.

There is an element of magic in how serendipity benefits the small crew of women over and over in the story, including the appearance of the Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta at opportune moments.

But these are not helpless or hapless women who rely on others for their rescue. They are a committed band of feminists and non-traditionalists who are talented, resourceful, and courageous.

They suffer the rage and harassment of government officials and police, jilted lovers and stodgy society patrons, but through it all, use their ingenuity and intelligence to form a watchmaking collective that sustains them and provides the necessary capital to stake their claim to an island community to form a state-less state.

And, hilariously, their fragile community almost implodes over the goofiest of domestic reasons, but are saved from that final argument by a timely introduction of magic mushrooms into the shared dinner fare.

Having been in anarchist collectives that broke down over people not doing their own dishes, this was a comedic high-point of the book.

Unfortunately, the ten little anarchists are whittled away, one by one by the trials and troubles they encounter. The last one, Valentine, describes her internal struggle with the question of political violence and makes her decision with resolve.

I ended the book wondering what might happen next, as Valentine faces her future alone, but unbowed.

Marius Mason, an anarchist, vegan, trans federal prisoner, has been confined since 2008 for acts in defense of the environment. He was an integral part of the Detroit anarchist community before being convicted and we look forward to welcoming him back when he is released. Solidarity with and information about Marius is at **support-mariusmason.org**.



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