

MYTHMAKERS & LAWBREAKERS

anarchist writers on fiction

part six

JIMMY T. HAND

edited by
Margaret Killjoy

This zine is an excerpt from the book *Mythmakers & Lawbreakers*, published in 2009 by AK Press. The book consists of a series of interviews with various anarchist fiction writers, as well as extensive appendices with biographies and reading lists of anarchist writers. We are making the work available in zine format, in the spirit of creative commons, but are of course indebted to AK Press for publishing the book in the first place.

The rest of the book can be downloaded in zine form from us at www.tangledwilderness.org or bought from AK Press at www.akpress.org

Mythmakers and Lawbreakers: Anarchist Writers on Fiction
Edited by Margaret Killjoy, 2009

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JIMMY T. HAND

Jimmy T. Hand isn't well-known. He's an activist who writes fiction and non-fiction that I help publish in zine form with my zine publishing collective Strangers In A Tangled Wilderness. We've published In the Hall of the Mountain King and The Road to Either-Or, two autobiographical novellas, as well as a few zines of short stories, including The Seduction of the Wind, As The Day is Long, The World Below, and Here Comes The Fucking Circus. I spoke to him about the role of storytellers in anarchist culture.

Margaret: *What are your thoughts about the intersection of fiction and anarchism?*

Jimmy: Oh hell, what a question. Start with something else. Let's come back to that one.

Margaret: *When I interviewed a representative of CrimethInc., they mentioned that they felt that fiction bore a certain amount of honesty, in that "non-fiction" isn't always as non-fictional as people might claim.*

Jimmy: I like that. It's something I've written about myself, in *The Road to Either Or*; people can claim that things are actually history, but are they? The example I used was quoting people. Those quotes are from my memory, and of course, my memory is flawed. I see things through my own lens.

One thing I've been thinking about recently is fiction and... not really anarchism, but about living your life fully. I've been thinking about how stories need conflict to keep the reader interested. I used to be really against that. It just seemed so fabricated, to have every story rotate around some kind of "plot." But then I started thinking about my own life... I became significantly more interested in my own life once I acquired a nemesis: the state. I still read fantasy books, sci-fi books, but I don't do it with the same sense of *longing* that I used to. Do you know what I mean? I used to read books like the *MYTH Inc.* series [by Robert Asprin], or even *Lord of the Rings* [by J.R.R. Tolkien]. Or the *Borderlands* books by Will Shetterly. I used to read those books and I felt like I would give anything to live that way, to have some kind of motivation, to live in a time of fantasy and mystique. But then, when I ran away from home, I discovered that fantastic world, and it was the real world.

Margaret: *What are your thoughts on self-publishing?*

Jimmy: I don't have time to self-publish. [*Laughs*] I'm glad that you take care of all that crap.

Margaret: *I mean about DIY publishing instead of mainstream publishing.*

Jimmy: Yeah. I mean, I guess I can't really fault people either way. Well, maybe it depends on what the book is about. Would I sell my fantasy stories to a mainstream publisher? Probably not. Would I sell my autobiographical stories to a mainstream publisher? Fuck that. With the fiction, it's a different thing, because it's not me telling someone else's story for money. I can understand how authors want to make a living off of what they do; I'm tempted from time to time. But what kind of bastard would I be if I wrote about my story, which is completely inseparable from the stories of my friends and my lover, and then sold it?

I think that all that fantasizing about escape I did when I was younger was probably good for me. Because I recognized it when I found it. It felt the same way, you know? Being washed over in magic. Only this time it was unmediated, because it was me, hopping freight trains, organizing, falling in love every other week. I guess I've calmed down some since then, but it's still there, that feeling. Reading those books was probably good for me. So I guess I could see the case for our *fictional* scenarios and ideas to filter out to the mainstream.

But if the *real* magic, the *real* scenarios filtered out to the mainstream, it would kill them. Because instead of people learning and discovering things

on their own, or through their friends, or the shadowy affiliations of the zine world, they would just recreate exactly what they've read, and we'd have a homogenous culture. Even if that homogenous culture was "anarchist," it really wouldn't be. Besides which, the scenarios *I* fantasize about don't involve mainstream publishing houses existing at all. So wouldn't a story about a fantastic real life be undermined by its own distribution method?

Margaret: *Why do you write fiction? Is there something you hope to accomplish by writing fiction? Can you point to anything you've accomplished?*

Jimmy: Why do I write fiction? I write fiction because I've always wanted to write fiction. Well, and I have all of these ideas floating in my head, of other planets and magical worlds and simple tragic tales—and everything, really—and I really want to express them. I can't draw, I don't have enough friends (or time) to make movies or plays, so I write them down. I like telling stories aloud too. I guess that kind of gets to your second question... what I want to accomplish?

I have this concept in my head of a world where story-tellers, or bards or whatever, wander around and tell bedside stories and fireside stories to people, and recreate a kind of folklore. I mean, I guess anarchist culture does it already, but it seems like it's always shoplifting stories or trainhopping stories, or occasionally, and these are more fun, war stories of our resistance. But then, most of *those* stories shouldn't be told, because if no one has been caught for a crime, no one should admit to doing it. And besides, I like stories about hobgoblins who climb trees looking for their lost siblings, wandering through forests filled with unintelligible tourists. You know, *fiction*. So I want to see that culture exist, and the only way I know how to is to just... do it.

Can I point to anything I've accomplished? Honestly? No. Maybe someone, somewhere, has read my stories and thought differently about something, and that would be nice, but if they have, they haven't told me about it yet. And that's alright; it's not about my ego. I mean, creation should be just that: creation. You make something, you give it to the world, and maybe it comes back to you somehow and maybe it doesn't.

So, the intersection of anarchism and fiction. I guess it goes both ways: what are anarchist approaches to fiction? First of all, just like punk rock: never put authors on pedestals. Most of us writers are pretty anti-social, and it's almost like writing and fiction are the only ways we can participate in the anarchist debate. Also, for me, it's like... don't just be an author. It's not enough. In the gift-economy anarchist society I'd like to live in, it wouldn't really be enough to say, "Well, I write books" or, "Well, I tell stories at night in the dance hall." So? Do you grow food? Organize recycling? Dig up concrete? Fight against capitalism? It's like, lots of people play music. That's one thing that is awesome about our scene: most people play music. So at night when our work is done, we all

play music together, or maybe we take turns, but there aren't stars. Storytelling should be the same way.

As for the other way around, what fictional, or I guess fantastical, approaches to anarchy could be... I like to think that for one thing, fiction is a good way to work through various scenarios without losing the reader's—or writer's—interest. I hate reading theory, and I know I'm not alone in that. But I love learning about the history of anarchism, or how it could be practiced in the future. Fiction is great for that. And not just real concrete stuff, like anarchy, but for metaphorically exploring so much of the human—or non-human—condition.

And also, a lot of anarchists aren't as social as others. Sometimes we're kinda ostracized. We don't always go to the parties. Sometimes we're more intimidated by the crowds at protest marches than we are by the cops. This doesn't even necessarily make us individualists or not, it just means we need to spend more time alone than a lot of people. So that's what books are for. While you all are dancing and playing music and singing together, maybe I'm in my room or tent or tree or something reading. But just like it's best to relax to music by your friends and comrades, it's best to read escapist work by people who you feel are your peers. 🍷

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put authors on pedestals.”

—Jimmy T. Hand

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