

# The Cover Story

## Famous Authors: First of a Series

by Jason Wells

In the spirit of the iconic 1940 U.S. commemorative Famous Americans series (shown on front cover, 5 authors), I present five authors on stamps who shaped my world view. In future months I will do a feature on poets, educators/philosophers, scientists, composers, artists and inventors. Our first author [Figure A1], Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) lived in Florence, at the time, a city-state in northern Italy. He was known primarily for *The Prince*, the first work of modern political science. Still controversial to this day, the book

asked the question “Is it better for a leader to be loved or feared?”. Machiavelli was commemorated on Italy Scott# 269.



Figures A1

asked the question “Is it better for a leader to be loved or feared?”. Machiavelli was commemorated on Italy Scott# 269. Other countries issuing stamps of him were Monaco and Angola. I read the book around 1993/1994 at the behest of my supervisor and mentor with the admonishment “Read between the lines, take what applies to you, and you will never worry about losing your job!”. I found the book illuminating, though sometimes disturbing. It was certainly helpful in navigating the snake-pit that is retail management.



Figures A2

Our next author [Figure A2] is George Orwell (1903-1950), while spending time in Spain during the Spanish Civil War; he also traveled to Burma and France while living in Great Britain. A journalist by trade, the world

knows him by his literary classics *Animal Farm* and *1984*. Both books, indeed his entire creative output, spoke of the perils of authoritarian government and how language can be manipulated to suit such authoritarian governments. Orwell was commemorated on the striking souvenir sheet from Guinea Michel #7731/BI.1855. The Czech Republic and San Marino also had issues commemorating George Orwell. I read both *Animal Farm* and *1984* in high school. To say that both books resonate today would be an understatement.



Figures A3

Robert Heinlein (1907-1988) became an author [Figure 3] after a stint in the navy that was shortened due to poor health. He was considered one of the premier science fiction writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (along with Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke, known collectively as “the big 3”). Themes explored by Heinlein include the struggle between individualism and obligations to society and the impact of space travel to humanity and its culture. San Marino issued a souvenir sheet (Scott 1429) featuring Heinlein and other science fiction authors. Heinlein was 1429k. The depiction on the San Marino stamp is of his stunning novel *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

I am currently re-reading an anthology of Heinlein short stories called *The Past through Tomorrow* and read *Starship Troopers* when I was a teenager. The martial spirit of *Starship Troopers* seems like the product of a bye-gone era but seemed quite natural in the future.

Figures A4



Another member of “the big 3 of science fiction”, Isaac Asimov (1920-1992) was born in Russia but immigrated to the United States when he was 3. An incredibly prolific writer, Asimov [Figure A4] has the distinction of having his works in 9 of the 10 Dewey Decimal Classification. He is known for his *Robot*, *Galactic Empire*, and *Foundation* series of books. Besides the “Three Laws of Robotics”, Asimov coined the word psychohistory, the prediction of mass movements of humanity through mathematics. Along with Guinea, San Marino and Russia, Djibouti issued a stamp honoring Asimov, seen here as a young man. The stamp was issued in 2010. I found the *Foundation* series especially fascinating for its conflict between human will and the “invisible hand of history”.

Our last author (with apologies to Arthur C. Clarke, because *2001: Space Odyssey* was an incredible movie) is Frank Herbert (1920-1986). Like Orwell, Frank Herbert [Figure A5] was a journalist who wrote novels, the most well-known

being the *Dune* series. Written over a number of years (inspired by a study of sand dunes in Oregon) *Dune* and its sequels revealed how history, politics and ecology were intertwined. San Marino and Djibouti issued stamps honoring Frank Herbert. Shown here is San Marino #1429n. I spent the summer reading the entire *Dune* series in one fell swoop. A very rewarding experience, it gave me a profound apprehension about religious fanaticism.

In the next article, I will explore Poets on stamps.

Figures A5

