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## LETTER OF ABDICATION

I HAVE done all I could for you, but the only consequence is that you are the same as always. I had the alternative of ordering a general massacre, but I should then have had to go away anyhow. It is simpler to abdicate. It certainly makes no difference to the situation whether I leave you behind dead or alive. Therefore I will leave you behind alive, to afford myself the bitter satisfaction of telling you what I think of you. You will not listen any more than you would if you were dead, but I should not address you if you were dead. Therefore I will leave you behind alive, to afford myself the bitter satisfaction of telling you what I think of you.

You are not gay. You are sticky instead of rubbery. You represent yourself with priggish sincerity instead of mimicking yourself with grotesque accuracy. Because you are photographs you think the photographs are originals. You think seeing is being.

You do not know what you are. I will tell you, though it will not make the least difference to you,

## ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

since you do not know what you are. You are a conceit. You are what you are not. You are a very fine point of discrimination. But since you do not discriminate, since you are not gay, since you think what you are is what you are, therefore you are not: this indeed is why massacre was unnecessary. You are blind, from seeing; you cannot appreciate the identity of opposites. You are feeble, from a loutish strength of doing; so that you cannot surpass doing, let doing instead of yourselves do; so that you cannot repose. You are cowards, afraid to be more than perfect and more than formal; so that you are only what you are; you have the perfection of mediocrity, not the irregularity of perfection. You are superstitious; you will season the dish with salt, but you will not taste salt itself. You are ignorant; not only do you not know what you are; you do not know what you are not. You are lazy; you will do only one thing at a time; you will act; but you will not act and not act. You are criminal; what you do is all positive, wicked, damaging; you make no retractions, contradictions, proofs of innocence. You are without honour; over-sincere; hypocritical.

I will tell you a story which is in my mind at the moment and may therefore have some bearing on the question. There was once a woman whose mind was as active as her body. And there was once a man who was constituted in the same way. And the

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## LETTER OF ABDICATION

combination of them produced a child which was all mind and no body. And no one knew about it. She was, naturally, a woman. Her parents gave her no name but referred to her in a historical manner as 'The Deliverer.' Whenever anything went wrong in any part of the world she put it right because she was all mind. But no one knew about it and so it made no difference. When they became quite hopeless her parents referred to her merely as 'The Angel.' In the end she was plain 'she' to them. At her death she became all body, and her parents, frenzied with disappointment, drove her out. And no one knew about it. Her parents gave her no name but referred to her in a historical manner as 'The Destroyer.' Whenever anything went right in any part of the world she put it wrong again because she was all body. But no one knew about it and so it made no difference. When they became quite hopeless her parents referred to her merely as 'The Beast.' In the end she was plain 'she' to them. At her death she became all mind, and her parents, frenzied with disappointment, took her in again. And no one knew about it.

This is the story which was in my mind and which may have some bearing on the question. The point of it is, I think, that we are all in an impossible position; which you handle by making less, myself more, impossible. For example, it is unlikely that the

## ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

story that I have just told you would ever have occurred to you. Or if it had, you would have broken down in the middle and called it the end. You stop half-way round the circle in order to spare yourself the humiliation of missing the true end, which is not perceptible in the ordinary way. Indeed if it is not perceived, it makes no difference, the circle goes round and round upon you. On the other hand, it makes no difference even if it is perceived, except the difference of perceiving it, which makes the position, as I have said, more rather than less impossible. So do as you like.

But I shall abdicate if you do, and since you do, I abdicate. You are all asleep, because being awake means being dreamless, and you can only be awake by dreaming to be awake, by dreaming to be dreamless. You turn your back on your own non-existence and are therefore non-existent. When you love, you turn your back on what you love. When you sweep, you turn your back on the dirt. When you think, you turn your back on your mind. Well, keep looking the other way so that I can kick you where you deserve to be kicked. And you will not turn on me but flatter yourselves that you are having spasms of profundity.

Anyway, this is how it is, little wise-bottoms. There is Cleopatra, Rome, Napoleon and so forth on one side, and there is the future on the other side,

## LETTER OF ABDICATION

and there you are in the middle alive. There is that great churning, that continuous tossing up and making of a middle, that bright ferment of centrality; and it is you. My o my o my o, what a thing! But when it was Cleopatra, Rome, Napoleon or any of them of then, or when it will be who it will be, my o my o my o, what a thing. It was not, it will not be you. And what was you and what will you be? You was and you will be dead. And why? Because you are alive now. But come a little closer, darlings, that I may kick you a little harder. Listen: if you was dead and if you will be dead, each of you, then you must be dead now, each of you, you must be dead and alive. Now o now o now o, pumpkins, don't cry. For just think: there is that great big live middle and it is nice and warm and it is you. But it may also be it. And what would become of you then out in the cold if you didn't take yourselves in, if you weren't also you, if you weren't each of you dead as well as alive? And what difference does it make? None whatever, pets, except the difference of a difference that makes no difference.

I will argue further against what I am arguing for. The you which is you is only you, and not only dead but invisible. And you can never be this you unless you see the you which is it and every one hard round the circle to the end, where you can no longer see, and are you alone. And the result, if

## ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

you do this? You will be so alive that you will be deader than ever; you will have achieved the identity of opposites; you will have brought two counter-processes to rub noses, the you which you are not, which is you alone, and the you which you are, which is it, every one, not you – and much good may it do you, except to make you deader than ever. And the result, if you do not do this? You will save that much life from death, and much good may it do you – enough to wipe your nose on, when it runs with nervousness at the thought that you will have to die anyway.

Yes, I once knew a woman who spent all her time washing her linen, in order to be always fresh and sweet smelling. But as she was always washing dirty linen and thus making the linen she wore dirtier than it might have been if she had washed less, she smelled of nothing but dirty linen. Any why? Because she was over-sincere and a hypocrite. She got stranded in the fact of clean linen instead of moving on to the effect of clean linen, which is the end of the circle. And you are all like that.

And again. Believing it to be you alone and that you are only what you are, think what a small, mean, cosy, curly, pink and puny figure you cut when you set out to be it at a party of it's, naked as in your own bath. Whereas, ladies and gentlemen, if you understood the identity of opposites, your naked-

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## LETTER OF ABDICATION

ness would be an invisibility which you would have to dress large, from the point of view of visibility. And to this it-ish rather than you-ish exterior you would add an even larger and looser-fitting social skin, a house in most it-ish order, a most it-ish interior, in fact. But you do not understand. 'Boo-hoo!' you cry. 'What, hide our naked hearts, paralyse our heroic breasts, sit upon our grave bottoms, swallow back our great acts?' 'Hush-a-bye,' I reply, 'there is enough going on for you forrard without your great acts: drinks free, if you will only drink, scenery on view, if you will only look, music keeping step for you if you will only supply the feet. Instead of spending money on what you can only get for nothing. Life, lads, is a charity feed the fun of which is in everybody pretending to be a swell and everybody treating everybody else like a swell and everybody knowing everybody is a fraud and no matter. No matter because of death, in which each may be rich and proud, and no fooling. And your great acts? When you are bursting with fraud and charity and can stand no more, sneak aft and do your great acts, like private retchings and acts of death. If they will not come on, repeat to a point of mechanical conviction some formula of dreary finality, such as, 'The fathers of our girl friends are lecherous,' or 'Philosophy is teetotal whisky.'

But you are all sluts, your efforts are not biggish,

## ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

and so your fine points are only untidy and trivial. If you would neatly calculate, you must calculate grossly the whole pattern of it, which is the making of the middle; you must conceive first tremendously, then accurately; you must grasp the general initiative which is it not you. From this, if your application be fine enough, the fine points will resolve themselves. But remember you are no fine small point yourself; you are more and less than one; you are the littlishness of biggishness; you are no fine small point but a fine small point of discrimination. My o my o my o, what a thing, poor beastie, to be but dainty when you would be statistical. The best of you are the worst of you: they over-discriminate, put their hand to their chin, stand upon taste, pick the highest and most delicately scorched plum, and then choke over the stone, dying the death of an æsthlete. For what is a single plum, too fine for the eye and not fine enough for the throat?

I might advise you to think; but you are over-eager, all for gain. And thought is just a power of potentiality; as you are of it; as death is of life; without gain. You would make potentiality where there is none, in order to have more thought than is possible; you would turn the future into a bank, as you now do the past, from greed of time.

Or I might say: 'Have shame.' But you would

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## LETTER OF ABDICATION

only expose yourselves a little more outrageously and hang your heads a little lower. You would not understand that only truly abandoned boldness breeds truly abandoned decorum. Your interpretations are ignoble and indecent. You begin with contradictions instead of ending with them; efface them instead of developing them. As, for example, with sex: you seize upon it at the beginning, tease it, worry it, transform it, until you think you have ironed it out thoroughly, whereas you have only ironed yourselves out thoroughly. While if you had not seized upon it, you would have found it at the end of the circle, had you reached the end, an achieved confirmation of the impossibility that makes things possible.

This is one of my favourite subjects; if I were not abdicating I might discuss it elaborately, for your good. Since I am abdicating, I will discuss it simply, for my own good; for it is one of my favourite subjects. The balance of interest in man, I should say, is with the making, with it, with life; in woman, with the breaking of the making into the you which is you alone, into death. Woman is at the end of the circle, she has only to rearrive at herself; man has first to learn that there is an end, before he can set out for it. And the learning he scorns as childish and the setting out as a deathbed rite. Woman he counts passive because she is at the

## ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

end, and inferior because, being there, she turns round and starts all over again, to rearrive at herself. He adores her when she remains passive, that is his inferior; and despises her when she becomes his equal, that is, his superior. Well, they are worthless, both orders, when they are no more than they are. And when they are more than they are they are of no use to anyone but themselves; which is right but sudden and perhaps too mean for these mean times. For myself, I might confess to you, now that we are parting, that my happiest hours have been spent in the brotherly embrace of a humbug, not from want of womanliness in me or humbuggery in him, but because I was queen and needed repose. Ah me ah me ah me, what is this all about?

And such stickiness. How am I better than the rest of you? Because I have converted stickiness into elasticity and made myself free without wrenching myself free like a wayward pellet of paste. And what of so-and-so, your popular idol and my late consort? He was a strong man, powerfully sticky but not elastic; when he moved, he carried you along with him, he could not have moved otherwise, freely. And so he had great moments but not free moments. He was terribly alive but too terribly, never more than alive. He was merely monstrous, without the littlishness of biggishness. And what of

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so-and-so, my sometime lover? He was indeed a darling but an insufferable fop, washing away the stickiness till there was nothing left of him. And many others were darlings, of a sticky gracefulness and rhythm. But send me no more candidates, their embraces are either too heavy or too feeble; and I am light, hollow with death, but strong, of a tough, lively, it-ish exterior.

That is the trouble. You have no comprehension of appearance, what it is. Appearance is everything, what you are, what you are not. But your reach is sticky, not elastic; and so you get no further than reality, a pathetic proportion. Appearance is where the circle meets itself, where you live and do not live, where you are and are not dead. Appearance is everything, and nothing; bright and uppermost in a woman, to be sunk darkly inward; dumb, blind, darkly imbedded in a man, to be thrust brutally outward.

No, I am not confused, my blinking intelligences, but understand too clearly, and that is the trouble. I am unnecessary to you and therefore abdicate. Nor do I deny that blinking is sufficient for your purposes, which are sincere rather than statistical. Or that it would be for mine, for that matter – if I had purposes instead of queenliness. Which is my weakness, if you like – the tiresomeness of insisting upon the necessity of what is not necessary. I admit

## ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

all; I am not wise but insistent, I am an unpaid hack of accuracy. I was queen from tiresomeness, and I abdicate from tiresomeness. I am not enjoying myself.

But perhaps you would like to know a little of my history, before I retire finally. My mother imagined that she suffered from bad eyesight; and to make it worse she wore a stocking round her eyes whenever possible: at home, a white stocking; abroad, a black stocking; and occasionally, to depress circumstances completely, a grey sock of my father's, fastened at the back of her head with a safety-pin. From which, our house was full of small oval rugs made by my mother out of the mates of the stockings which she wore round her eyes and which she was always losing. And these rugs made by my mother were not well made, because she imagined that she suffered from bad eyesight. From which my mother, whose character was all dreariness, acquired in my mind a hateful oddness. From which, I resolved to outdo her in oddness, so that I not only imagined that I suffered from good eyesight: I did actually suffer from it. And with this effect, that by the time I was of age I had no more than one rug, and this was very large and square, and it was well made, and not by me, though I suffered extremely from good eyesight. I lived far away from my mother, having no connection with

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## LETTER OF ABDICATION

her except to insist that she live far away from me; and my rug was composed of many small squares; and the pattern of each square was different; and yet the whole harmonious because the stuff was provided by me – the finest silk and velvet rags that I could command from others, and which I sorted and returned to them to be made into squares, a square by each of them. And so each who made a square was my subject. And so I became Queen. Perhaps now you will understand me better. But I am determined to abdicate, however you dissuade me. Before I was in reach of your praise, and liked neither your praise nor lack of it. It would not improve my feelings to put myself in reach of your pity. It was not for this that I told you my story. I told you my story to make my abdication irrevocable.

Yes, even now, it is painful to leave you. Not because I love you but because I am still untired; and after I leave you there will be no more to do. I shall indeed be more untired than ever. For while I was with you I worked hard (as you will not deny) and achieved a certain formal queenly tiredness from being unable to tire myself out no matter how hard I worked. But now concealment will be impossible: my insistence, that before I tried to make pleasant to myself (and to others) by trying to interest it in your affairs, will in the future

## ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

be plainly horrible, as everything is horrible if sufficiently disinterested, that is, insistent. But the horror of my insistence will not be known to you, because I am abdicating. Nor am I to be dissuaded. The stroke that puts me in reach of your pity puts me out of reach of it as well.

I have said more than enough to satisfy my contempt of you. But I once loved you; and I have not punished myself sufficiently for that. What do I mean when I say that I once loved you? That I knew that being alive for you and me meant being more than alive. But you were afraid to admit it, though I was willing to take all the responsibility upon myself. Then I tried pretending to be just alive, I became for a time a partisan of timidity, in order to show you that being just alive was just pretending to be just alive. But when, aside, I reached for your hand, to press it, you dishonourably misunderstood me, you put me in the loathsome position of flirting with you. Then I tried extorting from you everything by means of which you lived, to show you that when you did not live you still lived. But again you wilfully misunderstood me and over-exerted yourself to supply me with what you thought to be my needs and what you assumed to be yours; and stubbornly refused to not live; and were disappointed when I did not applaud your inexhaustibility. And then once more

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## LETTER OF ABDICATION

I tried. I loaded you with favours in order to show you that nothing made any difference; that the most as well as the least that you could endure by belonged to being just alive; that you were more than alive, dead. But you repulsed me with praise and gratitude; as you would now with pity and ingratitude if I permitted.

Then I said: 'I will leave them alone. I will content myself with being queen. Perhaps if I play my part conscientiously, at no time abandoning my royal manner, they will admit everything of their own accord, like a good, kind, though stupid, timid people.' But my grandeur you interpreted meanly as the grandeur of being just alive, instead of grandly, as the showy meanness of being just alive. You watched me act and admired my performance, but credited me with sincerity rather than talent; you refused to act yourself, paralysed by the emotions of an audience. My challenge, my drastic insistence, made you if anything more timid than you already were. You were hypnotized with admiration, you were, from the vanity you took in watching me, less than just alive. The men behaved more disgracefully than the women because to be a woman requires a strong theatrical sense: requires of one who is more than man to be less than man. For this reason I took many lovers, to humble back as many as possible into activity. And this brought all of us to

## ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

where we were in the beginning. And so I abdicate, leaving you once more to your heroism. With it you were intolerable to me; without it you were not only intolerable to me, but you would have eventually become intolerable to yourselves, especially after I had left you.

You know only how to be either heroes or cowards. But you do not know how to outwit yourselves by being neither, though seeming to be both. 'What,' you say indignantly, 'would you have us be nothing?' Ah, my dear people, if you could you would all shortly become Queens.

But perhaps it is best that you cannot. For if you became Queens you would in time find it necessary to abdicate, as I have; and you would, like me, be left extremely unhappy, of having succeeded in yourselves but failed in others.

Yes, it is true that I concealed from you the colour of my eyes. But the distance at which I kept you from myself was precisely the distance between being just alive and being more than alive. I was giving you a lesson in space, not a rebuff. Since we are at the end of things, you may come close to me and look well into my eyes; but since you have not learned your lesson, you will still remain ignorant of their colour. Good-bye. I am going back to my mirror, where I came from.

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# T H E M Y T H

WHEN the baby is born there is no place to put it: it is born, it will in time die, therefore there is no sense in enlarging the world by so many miles and minutes for its accommodation. A temporary scaffolding is set up for it, an altar to ephemerality - a permanent altar to ephemerality. This altar is the Myth. The object of the Myth is to give happiness: to help the baby pretend that what is ephemeral is permanent. It does not matter if in the course of time he discovers that all is ephemeral: so long as he can go on pretending that it is permanent he is happy.

As it is not one baby but all babies which are laid upon this altar, it becomes the religious duty of each to keep on pretending for the sake of all the others, not for himself. Gradually, when the baby grows and learns why he has been placed on the altar, he finds that he is not particularly interested in carrying on the pretence, that happiness and unhappiness are merely an irregular succession and grouping of moments in him between his birth and his death.

## ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

Yet he continues to support the Myth for others' sake, and others continue to support it for his. The stronger grows the inward conviction of the futility of the Myth, the stronger grows the outward unity and form of the Myth. It becomes the universal sense of duty, the ethics of abstract neighbourliness. It is the repository for whatever one does without knowing why; it makes itself the why. Once given this function through universal misunderstanding, it persists in its reality with the perseverance of a ghost and continues to demand sacrifices. It is indifferent what form or system is given to it from this period to that, so long as it be given *a* form and *a* system by which it may absorb and digest every possible activity; and the grown-up babies satisfy it by presenting their offerings as systematized parts of a systematized whole.

The Myth may collapse as a social whole; yet it continues by its own memory of itself to impose itself as an æsthetic whole. Even in this day, when the social and historical collapse of the Myth is commonly recognised, we find poets and critics with an acute sense of time devoting pious ceremonies to the æsthetic vitality of the Myth, from a haunting sense of duty which they call classicism. So this antiquated belief in truth goes on, and we continue to live. The Myth is the art of living. Plato's censorship of poets in the interests of the young sprang from

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## THE MYTH

a realization of the fact that poetry is in opposition to the truth of the Myth: I do not think he objected to poetry for the old, since they were nearly through with living.

Painting, sculpture, music, architecture, religion, philosophy, history and science – these are essentially of the Myth. They have technique, growth, tradition, universal significance (truth); and there is also a poetry of the Myth, made by analogy into a mythological activity. Mythological activities glorify the sense of duty, force on the individual a mathematical exaggeration of his responsibilities.

Poetry (praise be to babyhood) is essentially not of the Myth. It is all the truth it knows, that is, it knows nothing. It is the art of not living. It has no system, harmony, form, public significance or sense of duty. It is what happens when the baby crawls off the altar and is 'Resolv'd to be a very contrary fellow' – resolved not to pretend, learn to talk or versify. Whatever language it uses it makes up as it goes and immediately forgets. Every time it opens its mouth it has to start all over again. This is why it remains a baby and dies (praise be to babyhood) a baby. [In the art of not living one is not ephemerally permanent but permanently ephemeral.] *salute impermanence*



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## ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

Because most people are not sufficiently employed in themselves, they run about loose, hungering for employment, and satisfy themselves in various supererogatory occupations. The easiest of these occupations, which have all to do with making things already made, is the making of people: it is called the art of friendship. So one finds oneself surrounded with numbers of artificial selves contesting the authenticity of the original self; which, forced to become a competitive self, ceases to be the original self, is, like all the others, a creation. The person, too, becomes a friend of himself. He no longer exists.

*Restraint of individuality  
by society*

Words have three historical levels. They may be true words, that is, of an intrinsic sense; they may be logical words, that is, of an applied sense; or they may be poetical words, of a misapplied sense, untrue and illogical in themselves, but of supposed suggestive power. The most the poet can now do is to take every word he uses through each of these levels, giving it the combined depth of all three, forcing it beyond itself to a death of sense where it is at least safe from the perjuries either of society or poetry.

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