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“I Have Always Been an Anarchist”

Louis-Ferdinand Céline

1936

(After the fascist riots of February 6, 1934 the great novelist Louis-Ferdinand Céline was called upon by the art historian Élie Faure to denounce the right-wing threat. He sent Faure two responses to his request.)

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March 18, 1934

Dear friend:

You know how much I admire, how enthusiastic I am, how I venerate all you have thought, given, and written. I have made much use of your oeuvre. I have read closely, pillaged, and learned from your texts. I still do so and always will. You are one of my rare teachers, and undoubtedly the closest, the most direct. It is not a question of any of this when I rebel against your current directives. I absolutely refuse to line up on this side or that. I am an anarchist to the tip of my toes. I always was one and I will never be anything else. Everyone has spit on me, from Izvestia to the official Nazis,

M. de Regnier, Comodia, Stavisky, president Dullin, all of them in almost the same exact terms have declared me unacceptable, unspeakable. I haven't done this on purpose, but it's a fact. I'm fine with this, because I'm in the right. Every political system is an enterprise of hypocritical narcissism which consists in projecting the personal ignominy of its adherents onto a system or onto "others." I admit that I live quite well; I proclaim loudly, emotionally, and strongly all of man's common disgustingness, on the right and the left. I will never be forgiven for this. Since the death of the priests the world is nothing but demagoguery, shit is constantly flattered, and responsibility is rejected through ideological and verbal artifice.

There is no more contrition; there is nothing but chants of revolt and hope. But hope for what? That shit will start smelling good?

My dear friend, I betray no one, I ask nothing of anyone. Perhaps I'll be executed (they'll be taking numbers to do this).

Both Lenin and Napoleon failed in their affairs. They applied heated rods and shouted a cure had been effected. Nonsense. All this revolutionary cynicism (NOT YOURS) is nothing but vulgar, eternal selfishness armed with new subterfuges. If it organizes itself as communism then you'll really see something. More sordid than the former ones. I know them well, the apostles and the heroes, on the right and the left. I have lived with them day and night for thirty years. Revolution. Right away. But first of themselves. Not these lazy souls and spirits, cocktail or Picon aperitif. Why choose?

LFC

April 1934

Dear friend:

I have always been an anarchist: I've never voted and I'll never vote for anything or anyone. I don't believe in man. Why would you want me to suddenly start playing the bigophone just because

twelve dozen failures play it around me, I who play the grand piano pretty well? Why? So that I can be the same height as these shrunk, constipated, envious, hateful bastards? That's really a joke. I have nothing in common with these castratos who shout their clumsy suppositions and understand nothing. Do you see yourself thinking and working under the authority of the super-asshole Aragon, for example? That's the future? The one everyone wants me to cherish is Aragon? Ptooeey! If they were all less lazy, if they were of such good will as they say they are, they'd do what I've done instead of bothering everyone with their wrong notes. They're pushing their revolution further into the future instead of bringing it closer. They resemble those males who no longer have any instincts, who wound women and never make them come. Don't you feel, my friend, the hypocrisy, the unspeakable Tartufferie of all these ventriloquist's slogans? The inferiority complex of all these leaders is palpable. Their hatred of everything that outshines them, of everything they don't understand can be clearly seen. They are as avid to belittle, to destroy, to soil, to prune the very principle of life as the lowest priest of the Middle Ages. Perhaps one or the other of them will execute me. The Nazis hate me as much as the socialists, and the communists as well, not to mention Henri de Regnier and Comodia and Stavisky. They're all in agreement when it comes to hating me. Everything is permitted except doubting man. Then no fooling around is allowed. I am the proof of this. But I shit on all of them.

Affectionately yours:

L-F Céline.

(In the margins: I ask nothing of anyone. The young are unaware and go wherever their lyricism tells them to go.