

The Cult of Carrion and other texts

Albert Libertad

1898–1925

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Germinal, at the Wall of the Fédérés (1898)

Near their tomb, in the middle of the gaudy wreaths and bouquets showily brought there, in the grass, in black letters on a red background, someone wrote one word: Germinal.

This person knew how to give the correct tone to this anniversary.

Germinal! This wasn't a banal remembrance of the dead, this was a call to the living; it wasn't the pointless glorification of the past, it was a call to the future.

On the tomb of these men who died for freedom, this word called their children to liberating rebellion.

The wreaths, the bouquets, the speeches, were vain palliatives. Germinal was the still living fight, rising up, terrible, calling the workers, the rebels to the imminent harvests.¹

To the Resigned (1905)

I hate the resigned!

I hate the resigned, like I hate the filthy, like I hate layabouts!

I hate resignation! I hate filthiness, I hate inaction.

I feel for the sick man bent under some malignant fever; I hate the imaginary sick man that a little bit of will would set on his feet.

I feel for the man in chains, surrounded by guardians crushed under the weight of irons on the many.

I hate soldiers who are bent by the weight of braids and three stars; the workers who are bent under the weight of capital.

I love the man who says what he feels wherever he is; I hate the voter seeking the perpetual conquest by the majority.

I love the savant crushed under the weight of scientific research; I hate the individual who bends his body under the weight of an unknown power, of some "X," of a God,

I hate, I say, all those who, surrendering to others through fear or resignation a part of their power as men, not only keep their heads down, but make me, and those I love, keep our heads down, too through the weight of their frightful collaboration or their idiotic inertia.

I hate them; yes I hate them, because me, I feel it. I don't bow before the officer's braid, the mayor's sash, the gold of the capitalist; morality or religion. For a long time I have known that all of these things are just baubles that we can break

¹ First published in *Le Droit de Vivre*, no. 7, June 1-7, 1898. The wall of the Fédérés is the site at Père Lachaise Cemetery where the Paris Commune made its last stand.

like glass...I bend beneath the weight of the resignation of others. O how I hate resignation!

I love life.

I want to live, not in a petty way like those who only satisfy a part of their muscles, their nerves, but in a big way, satisfying facial muscles as well as calves, my back as well as my brain.

I don't want to trade a portion of now for a fictive portion of tomorrow. I don't want to surrender anything of the present for the wind of the future.

I don't want to bend anything of mine under the words fatherland, God, honor. I too well know the emptiness of these words, these religious and secular ghosts.

I laugh at retirement, at paradises the hope for which hope holds the resigned, religions, and capital.

I laugh at those who, saving for their old age, deprive themselves in their youth; those who, in order to eat at sixty, fast at twenty.

I want to eat while I have strong teeth to tear and crush healthy meats and succulent fruits. When my stomach juices digest without problem I want to drink my fill of refreshing and tonic drinks.

I want to love women, or a woman, depending on our common desire, and I don't want to resign myself to the family, law the Code; nothing has any rights over our bodies. You want, I want. Let us laugh at the family, the law, the ancient form of resignation.

But this isn't all. I want, since I have eyes, ears, and other senses, more than just to drink, to eat, to enjoy sexual love: I want to experience joy in other forms. I want to see beautiful sculptures and painting, admire Rodin or Manet. I want to hear the best opera companies play Beethoven or Wagner. I want to know the classics at the Comedie Française, page through the literary and artistic baggage left by men of the past to men of the present, or even better, page through the now and forever unfinished oeuvre of humanity.

I want joy for myself, for my chosen companion, for my friends. I want a home where my eyes can agreeably rest when my work is done.

For I want the joy of labor, too; that healthy joy, that strong joy. I want my arms to handle the plane, the hammer, the spade and the scythe.

Let the muscles develop, the thoracic cage become larger with powerful, useful and reasoned movements.

I want to be useful, I want us to be useful. I want to be useful to my neighbor and for my neighbor to be useful to me. I desire that we labor much, for I am insatiable for joy. And it is because I want to enjoy myself that I am not resigned.

Yes, yes I want to produce, but I want to enjoy myself. I want to knead the dough, but eat better bread; to work at the grape harvest, but drink better wine; build a

house, but live in better apartments; make furniture, but possess the useful, see the beautiful; I want to make theatres, but big enough to house their me and mine.

I want to cooperate in producing, but I also want to cooperate in consuming.

Some dream of producing for others to whom they will leave, oh the irony of it, the best of their efforts. As for me, I want, freely united with others, to produce but also to consume.

You resigned, look: I spit on your idols. I spit on God, the Fatherland, I spit on Christ, I spit on the flag, I spit on capital and the golden calf; I spit on laws and Codes, on the symbols of religion; they are baubles, I could care less about them, I laugh at them...

Only through you do they mean anything to me; leave them behind and they'll break into pieces.

You are thus a force, you resigned, one of those forces that don't know they are one, but who are nevertheless a force, and I can't spit on you, I can only hate you...or love you.

Above all my desire is that of seeing you shaking off your resignation in a terrible awakening of life.

There is no future paradise, there is no future; there is only the present.

Let us live!

Live! Resignation is death.

*Revolt is life.*²

May Day (1905)

The national and international holiday of the organized proletariat.

The Bastille Day of the unionized working class, the replay of the holiday of the Bistros.

The tragi-comic anniversary of something that will be taken away ...

May Day 1905: Prologue

In the archiepiscopal church the grand ceremony takes place: the high priests, who have been delegated to other places, are absent.

The tribune is filled. The office is invaded. The strangest looking faces appear there. An assessor, delegate and secretary of I-don't-know-what, who has decorated his breast with a large tie, with his decoration and his lit up mug, set the appropriate tone.

² First published in *l'anarchie*, April 13, 1905

Appearing in a curious parade, all alone come the eternal bit players and the future stars. In the wings we can imagine the presence of influential directors falsifying the system.

Alcohol overflows in smelly burps from almost every mouth.

A few ordinary workers, a hundred at most, have come in a spirit of combativeness, or though obligation. There are a few who are sincere, thinking they are working for their emancipation, and who are sickened and disillusioned by the drunken events around them.

A bizarre salad where the words "Organized proletariat," "workers demands," "Eight hour day," dance about. "All arise in 1906," "The Bosses," "The Exploiters," "The Exploited," "My Corporation," "Delegates," "The Union of..." etc. are seasoned before us.

One has the impression of listening to a constantly wound up phonograph, but whose worn out notches allow only a few words to escape.

Any attempt at serious debate is impossible. We are in the hall not to learn but – it appears – to impress the bosses.

We must all be in agreement, *all friends, all brothers*, so that the press can't say there was any disagreement.

We are working for the gallery.

Should the press say tomorrow how many drunks there were at the tribune? Should it speak of the exceptional receipts at the bistros within a kilometer of the Labor Exchange? Should it count the number of men who came home at night with their bellies full of alcohol and their pockets empty?

Across from the Labor Exchange a group decorated in red is drinking... I pass by...a man detaches himself and gives me two *sous* "for good luck," taking me for a poor devil and so as to get a laugh. Pieces of silver fall to the ground, rolling from his pockets.

Working class emancipation through union organization!

But let's go back...Nevertheless, a few notes are interesting and throw a bit of light on this milieu. Two navvies speak with a simplicity, a great sobriety and please quite a few; a man who keeps his hat on and at whom the union crowd shouts: "Your hat!" says some true things; Gabrielle Petit, with her raw eloquence, maintaining her impulsive character, breaks up the disgusting monotony of the dogmatic ritual.

After an incident where we – the best as well as the worst – take on grotesque forms in the rapidity of our gestures, where can be felt the irritation of disgust and fatigue of some, of alcohol among others, afterwards, we must sing.

Sing the ditty that fits the circumstance.

It's a family from Bercy, former owner of a special cabaret for snobs and the neurotic near Clichy that has made up the words and the music.

It's not so much the ignorant crowd that wants the song, it's the leaders: the director Pouget forgets himself so much as to leave the wings. One has to sing to the people. And the woman, with a certain courage, incidentally, not caring about our more or less correct shouting, waits for the right moment to emit her note. One must live, after all.

We do all we can so as not to sing, fully understanding how ridiculous this graceless song is between these four walls, giving this struggle a soppy character...But in France everything ends in a song. And we stop, vanquished not by the force of these men, whose cunning masters, slipping slander in, order them to respect us, but rather by their thoughtlessness, their blindness, by the atmosphere of alcohol that we can no longer breathe.

And here is the final scene.

Lepine has given his police clique the order to hold itself back... To let this religious crowd enjoy its icon, its idol, its flag The doorways are clear; the policemen are behind the metro worksites, waiting for the opportune moment.

The Labor Exchange, squeezed in between two houses, in this narrow corridor, is ugly. Its base is covered in posters, its upper floors are slashed by a red band with gold lettering for 1906. A red flag with a black crepe (colors authorized by the law) recalls the tragedy of Limoges. Nothing is missing; neither the hosanna, nor the remembrance of the martyrs.

They're going to raise the red flag at the window! The ditty was good, but the sight of the icon...that's sublime! I look and I see once again... the scenes where to the cry of "God wills it," brandishing the cross, the Peter the Hermits led the crowd to their death. Only here the preachers chew their tobacco and let the crowd leave on their own...In any event, the crowd's enthusiasm is only on the surface.

A large mass heads toward the red flag, and a "Ca Ira," broken up with hiccups, can be heard... It's pure delirium.

The cops!

The anger calms. The honest worker reappears... and flees, followed by the policemen's boots.

The comedy is over... They have to disperse and the crowd flees, hiccupping and stumbling, while exasperated comrades, wanting to resist orders and shoves, shout "anarchy" in the face of the police workers as a challenge.

And in the distance...the cabarets, the bars, the thousand tentacles of that terrible octopus, alcohol, suck out and breathes in all this worker blood.

It's the holiday of the organized proletariat.

It's May Day.³

³ First published in *l'anarchie*, May 4, 1905

To the Electoral Cattle (1906)

Under the impetus of interested individuals the political committees are opening the awaited era of electoral quarrels.

As usual, they will insult each other, slander each other, fight each other. Blows will be exchanged for the benefit of third thieves, always ready to profit from the stupidity of the crowd.

Why will you go for this?

You live with your kids in unhealthy lodgings. You eat — when you can — food adulterated by the greed of traffickers. Exposed to the ravages of alcoholism and tuberculosis, you wear yourself out from morning to night at a job that is always imbecilic and useless and that you don't even profit from. The next day you start over again, and so it goes till you die.

Is it then a question of changing all this?

Are they going to give you the means of realizing a flourishing existence, you and your comrades? Are you going to be able to come and go, eat, drink, breathe without constraint, love with joy, rest, enjoy scientific discoveries and their application, decreasing your efforts, increasing your well-being. Are you finally going to live without disgust or care the large life, the intense life?

No, say the politicians proposed for your suffrage. This is only a distant ideal...You must be patient...You are many, but you should also become conscious of your might so as to abandon it into the hands of your 'saviors' once every four years.

But what will they do in their turn?

Laws! What is the law? The oppression of the greater number by a coterie claiming to *represent* the majority.

In any event, error proclaimed by the majority doesn't become true, and only the unthinking bow before a legal lie.

The truth cannot be determined by vote.

He who votes accepts to be beaten.

So why then are there laws? Because there is property.

So it is from the prejudice of property that all our miseries, all our pain flow.

So those who suffer from it have an interest in destroying property, and so the law.

The only logical means of suppressing laws is not to make them.

Who makes laws? Parliamentary arrivistes.

On closer analysis, it is thus not a handful of rulers who crush us, but the thoughtlessness, the stupidity of the herd of those sheep of Panurge who constitute the electoral cattle.

We will fight without cease for the conquest of “immediate happiness” by remaining partisans of the only scientific method and by proclaiming together with our abstentionist comrades:

The voter — that is the enemy!

And now, to the voting urns, cattle.⁴

Fear (1906)

The bourgeois were frightened!!!

The bourgeois felt pass over them the wind of riot, the breath of revolt, and they feared the hurricane, the storm that would unleash those with unsatisfied appetites on their too well garnished tables.

The bourgeois were frightened!!!

The bourgeois, fat and tranquil, beatific and peaceful, heard the horrifying grumble of the painful and poor digestion of the thin, the rachitic, the unsatisfied. The Bellies heard the rumblings of the Arms, who refused to bring them their daily pittance.

The bourgeois were frightened!!!

The bourgeois gathered together their piles of money, their titles; they hid in holes from the claws of the destroyers, the bourgeois stored their movable property, and they then looked around to see where to hide themselves. The big city wasn't very safe with all those threats in the air. And the countryside wasn't either... chateaus were being burned down there when the evening came.

The bourgeois were frightened! A fear that gripped their bellies, their stomachs, their throats, without any means of attenuating this presenting itself.

And so the bourgeois put barricades of steel and blood up in front of the of the workers, cemented with blood and flesh. . They tried to be joyful at seeing the little infantrymen and the heavy dragoons parade before their windows. They swooned before the handsome Republican Guards and the fine cavalrymen. And still, fear invaded their being. They were frightened.

That fear seemed to have something of remorse in it. One could believe that the bourgeois felt the logic of the acts that included everyone and everything that they alone had possessed up till then.

The bourgeois were afraid that suddenly, in a great movement, the two sides of the scale that had always inclined in the direction of their desires would suddenly be balanced. They believed the moment for disgorgement had finally come. Since

⁴ Written: February 1906

their lives were made of the deaths of other men they believed that on this day the lives of others would be made of their deaths.

O anguished dream! The bourgeois were frightened, really frightened!!

But the hurricane passed over their heads and Bellies and didn't kill. The lightning rods of sabers and rifles sufficed for the few gusts that blew forgotten over society.

The worker again took up his labor. He again bent his back over the daily task. Today like yesterday, the slave prepares his master's swill.

The hurricane has passed...the bourgeois have little by little raised their heads. They looked upon their faces convulsed with fear... and they laughed. But their laugh was a snigger; their laugh was a bark.

Since he didn't know how to do his work himself, the hyenas and jackals were going to fall on the lion, caught in the trap of his ignorance and confidence.

The females who, in 1871, poked out the eyes of communards with their parasols, have had children. These children are now in the magistracy, in the administration, in the army. They wear the kepi or the robe, they kill by the Code, regulations, or the sword, they kill without pity.

The bourgeois were frightened.

They are taking revenge for having been frightened!!! Like a club, the jackhammer of justice is descending on the vanquished. The Magnauds and the Bulots, the Séré de Rivières and the Bridoisons, all of them are in agreement in striking the troublemakers.

Never have those who do not labor been overcome by such respect for those who labor. The hindrances to the freedom to work have been struck with months and month of prison. Men have been condemned until the healing of their wounds, children to reform schools, and adolescents to the slammer. Those who reason must be put down.

The bourgeois were frightened!!!

But those who must be struck the hardest are then enemies of all the bourgeois, the reactionary bourgeois and the socialist bourgeois: the anarchists.

Other men are vanquished by the weight of their own ignorance; it will still be quite a while before they free themselves from their foolishness. But the anarchists are vanquished by the ignorance and the passivity of others, so they work every day to instruct them, to make rebels of them. It is thus they who are the danger; it is they who must be struck.

The bourgeois want to avenge themselves, but they are cowards and so it is the bystanders they strike. They fear the might of anarchist logic and they know that the sophistry of their reasoning will burst like soap bubbles in the sun. They can crush us with the dead weight of the brutal force of number, but they know that we will always win in reason's combat.

“That man had an anarchist paper in his pocket! — That one had pamphlets on sociology. — That one had needles on him.” And they strike even harder whoever dares read anything but *La Croix*, *La Petite République*, or *Le Petit Journal*.

Why don't you strike the authors, the publishers of these publications? Are they untouchable, above all laws, or are you afraid of finding yourselves confronting the truth, viscous Berengiers of politics?

Bourgeois, you were frightened!!!

And it was nothing but a shadow that passed across the heaven of you beatitude. But be on you guard: you will only see the storm that will swallow you up when it will be imminent. It will only be announced by tiny lightning bolts. It will surge around you and you will be no more.

Bourgeois, you experience the frisson of fear, and you are savoring the joy of revenge...But don't be in such a hurry to celebrate. Don't exaggerate too greatly the reprisals of your victory, for the upcoming revolt could very well not leave you the time to be frightened...

The bourgeois were frightened!!!⁵

Down With the Law! (1906)

“The anarchists find to be logically consistent *with their ideas* M. de La Rochefoucauld and all those who protest without worrying about legality,” Anna Mahé tells us.

This is obviously not exact, as I am going to show.

All that is needed is one word to travesty the meaning of a phrase, and so the two words underlined suffice to entirely change the meaning of the one I quote.

If Anna Mahé was the leader of a great newspaper she would hasten to accuse the typographers or the proofreader of the phrase and everything would be for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

Or else she would think it wise to maintain an idea that isn't a manifestation of her reasoning, but rather the act of her pen running away with itself.

But on the contrary, she thinks that it is necessary, especially in these lead articles that are viewed as anarchist, to make the fewest errors possible and for us to point them out ourselves when we take note of them.

It is to me that this falls today.

The Catholics, the socialists, all those who accept at a given moment the voting system, are not logical with themselves when they rebel against the consequences of a law, when they demonstrate against its agents, its representatives.

⁵ First published in *l'anarchie*, May 17, 1906

Only the anarchists are authorized, are logically consistent *with their ideas* when they act against the law.

When a man deposits his ballot in the urn he is not using a means of persuasion that comes from free examination or experience. He is executing the mechanical operation of counting those who are ready to choose the same delegates as he, to consequently make the same laws, to establish the same regulations that all men must submit to. In casting his vote he says: "I trust in chance. The name that will come from this urn will be that of my legislator. I could be on the side of the majority, but I have the chance of being on the side of the minority. More the better, and too bad."

After having come to agreement with other men, having decided that they will all defer to the mechanical judgment of number, there is on the part of those who are the minority, when they don't accept the laws and regulations of the majority, a feeling of being fooled similar to that of a bad gambler, who wants very much to win, but who doesn't want to lose.

Those Catholics who decided for the laws of exception of 1893–4 through the means of a majority are in no position to rebel when, by means of the same majority, the laws of separation are decided.

Those socialists who want to decide by means of the majority in favor the laws on workers retirements are in no position to rebel against the same majority when it decides on some law that goes against their interests.

All parties who accept suffrage, however universal it might be, as the basis for their means of action cannot revolt as long as they are left the means of affirming themselves by the ballot.

Catholics, in general, are in this situation. The gentlemen in question in the late battles were "great electors," able to vote in Senatorial elections, some were even parliamentarians. Not only had some voted and sought to be the majority in the Chambers that prepare the laws, but the others had elaborated that law, had discussed its terms and articles.

Thus being parliamentarists, voters, the Catholics weren't logical with themselves during their revolt.

The socialists are no more so. They speak constantly of social revolution, and they spend all their time in puerile voting gestures in the perpetual search for a legal majority.

To accept the tutelage of the law yesterday, reject it today, take it up again tomorrow, this is the way Catholics, socialists, parliamentarists in general act. It is illogical.

None of their acts has a logical relation with that of the day before, no more than that of tomorrow will have one with that of today.

Either we accept the law of majorities or we don't accept it. Those who inscribe it in their program and seek to obtain the majority are illogical when they rebel against it.

This is how it is. But when Catholics or socialists revolt we don't search for acts of yesterday; we don't worry about those that will be carried out tomorrow, we peacefully look on as the law is broken by its manufacturers.

It will be up to us to see to it that these days don't reoccur.

So the anarchists alone are logical in revolt.

The anarchists don't vote. They don't want to be the majority that commands; they don't accept being the minority that obeys.

When they rebel they have no need of breaking any contract: they never accept tying their individuality to any government of any kind.

They alone, then, are rebels held back by no ties, and each of their violent gestures is in relation to their ideas, logical with their reasoning.

By demonstration, by observation, by experience or, lacking these, by force, by violence, these are the means by which the anarchists want to impose themselves. By majority, by the law, never!⁶

Weak Meat (1906)

We in Paris, almost without our knowledge, were threatened with a great revolution.

We were threatened with great perturbations in sales from the slaughterhouses of La Villette.

A few snatches of reasons for this reached indiscrete ears. Hoof and mouth was spoken of. But what is this alongside other reasons, ones we should be ignorant of.

Only dead meat should leave the slaughterhouses of the city, and only living meat should enter.

But go see. Beasts enter, pulled on, pushed against. They must enter alive, with a breath, only a breath, a nothing.

And the contaminated carrion is sold, served to the faubourgs of Paris from Menilmontant to Montrouge, from Belleville to La Chapelle.

Go, workers of the slaughterhouses, defend your "rights." Go, butcher boys, defend "your own." You must continue to slaughter, to serve poisoned meat.

Go beef drivers, turn and return your fever-bearing meats, from the Beauce to Paris, from Paris to all the workers from the north, the west, and the east? Go ahead,

⁶ First published in *l'anarchie*, February 15, 1906

come to Paris, contaminate your animals or bring here the poison contracted elsewhere.

What do evil gestures, useless gestures, poisonous gestures matter? One must live. And to work is to poison, to pillage, to steal, to lie to other men. Work means adulterating drinks, manufacturing cannons, slaughtering and serving slices of poisoned meat.

Working means the rotten meat that surrounds us, that meat that should be slaughtered and pushed into the sewers.

August 2, 1906

The Cult of Carrion (1925)

In a desire for eternal life, men have considered death as a passage, as a painful step, and they have bowed before its “mystery” to the point of veneration.

Even before men knew how to work with stone, marble, and iron in order to shelter the living, they knew how to fashion matter to honor the dead.

Churches and cloisters richly wrapped their tombs under their apses and choirs, while huts were huddled against their sides, miserably sheltering the living.

The cult of the dead has, from the first moments, hindered the forward march of man. It is the original sin, the dead weight, the iron ball that humanity drags along behind it.

The voice of death, the voice of the dead has always thundered against the voice of universal life, which is ever evolving.

Jehovah, who Moses’ imagination made burst forth from Sinai, still dictates his laws. Jesus of Nazareth, dead for almost twenty centuries, still preaches his morality. Buddha, Confucius, and Lao Tzu’s wisdom still reign. And how many others!

We bear the heavy responsibility of our ancestors; we have their defects and their qualities.

So in France we are the children of the Gauls, though we are French via the Franks and of the Latin race when it comes to the eternal hatred of the Germans. Each of these heredities brings with it obligations.

[We are the oldest children of the church by virtue of who knows which dead, and also the grandchildren of the Great Revolution. We are citizens of the Third Republic and we are also devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. We are born Catholics or Protestants, republicans or royalists, rich or poor. We are always what we are through the dead; we are never ourselves. Our eyes, placed atop our heads, look

⁷ This pamphlet, published in 1925, is taken from articles that originally appeared in *l’anarchie*. The sections in brackets were in the original articles but not in the pamphlet.

ahead and, however much they lead us forward, it is always towards the ground where our dead repose, towards the past where the dead lived that our education allows us to guide them.]⁷

Our ancestors...the past...the dead...

Whole peoples have died from this triple respect.

China is exactly where it was thousands of years ago because it has guarded the first place in their homes for their dead.

Death is not only a germ of corruption due to the chemical disintegration of man's body, poisoning the atmosphere; it is even more the case because of the consecration of the past, the immobilization of the idea at a certain stage of evolution. Living, it would have evolved, would have been more advanced. Dead, it crystallizes. Yet it is this precise moment that the living choose to admire it, in order to sanctify it, to deify it.

Usages and custom, ancestral errors are communicated from one person to another in the family. One believes in the god of his fathers, another respects the fatherland of his ancestors...Why don't we respect their lighting system, their way of dressing?

Yes, this strange fact is produced that while the externals and the daily economy improve, change, are differentiated, that while everything dies and is transformed, man, man's spirit, remains in the same servitude, is mummified in the same errors.

Just as in the century of the torch, in the century of electricity man still believes in tomorrow's paradise, in the gods of vengeance and forgiveness, in hells and Valhallas as a way of respecting the ideas of his ancestors.

The dead lead us, the dead command us, the dead take the place of the living.

All our festivals, all our glorifications are the anniversaries of deaths and massacres. We celebrate All Saints Day to glorify the saints of the church, the Feast of the Dead so as not to forget a single dead man. The dead go to Olympus or paradise, to the right of Jupiter or God. They fill "immaterial" space and they encumber "material" space with their corteges, their displays, and their cemeteries. If nature didn't take it upon itself to disintegrate their bodies and to disperse their ashes, the living wouldn't today know where to place their feet in the vast necropolis that would be the earth.

The memory of the dead, their acts and deeds, obstruct the brains of children. We only talk to them about the dead, we should only speak to them about this. We make them live in the realm of the unreal and the past. They must know nothing of the present.

If secularism has dropped the story of Mr. Noah or that of Mr. Moses, it has replaced it with those of Mr. Charlemagne or Mr. Capet. Children know the date of death of Madame Feregonde, but don't have the least notion about hygiene. Some young girls of fifteen know that in Spain a certain Madame Isabelle spent an entire

century wearing one blouse, but are strangely upset when their first menstrual period comes.

Some women, who have the chronology of the kings of France at the tip of their fingers without a single mistake don't know what to do with a child who cries out for the first time in its life.

While we leave a young girl next to he who is dying, who is in his final throes, we push her away from she whose belly is opening to life.

The dead obstruct cities, streets, and squares. We meet them in marble, in stone, in bronze. This inscription tells us of their birth, and that plaque tells us where they lived. Squares bear their titles or those of their exploits. Street names don't indicate their position, form, altitude or location; they speak of Magenta or Solferino, an exploit of the dead where many were killed. They recall to you Saint Eleuthere or the Chevalier de la Barre; men, incidentally, whose only quality was that of dying.

In economic life it is also the dead who trace the lives of all. One sees his entire life darkened by his father's "crime," another wears the halo of the glory, the genius, the daring of his forefathers. This one is born a bumpkin with the most distinguished of spirits, that one is born noble with the most vulgar of spirits. We are nothing through ourselves; we are everything through our ancestors.

And yet...in the eyes of scientific criticism, what is death? This respect for the departed, this cult of decrepitude, by what argument can it be justified? Few have asked this, and this is why the question is not resolved.

And in the center of cities, don't we see great spaces that the living piously maintain: these are cemeteries, the gardens of the dead.

The living find it good to bury, right next to their children's cradles, piles of decomposing flesh, carrion, the nutritive element of all maladies, the breeding ground of all infections.

They consecrate great spaces planted with magnificent trees and depose typhoid-ridden, pestilential, anthracic bodies there, one or two meters deep. And after a few days the infectious viruses roam the city seeking other victims.

Men who have no respect for their living organism, that they wear out, that they poison, that they put at risk, are suddenly taken with a comic respect for their mortal remains when they should be rid of them as soon as possible, put them in the least cumbersome, the most usable form.

The cult of the dead is one of the most vulgar aberrations of the living. It's a holdover from those religions that promised paradise. The dead must be prepared for the visit of the beyond: give them weapons so they can participate in the hunts of Velleda, some food for the trip, give them the high viaticum, prepare them to present themselves to God. [Religions depart, but their ridiculous formulas remain. The dead take the place of the living.]

Whole groups of workingmen and women employ their abilities and energy at maintaining the cult of the dead. Men dig up the earth, carve stone and marble, forge grilles, prepare a house for all of them in order to respectfully bury in them the syphilitic carrion that has just died.

Women weave the shroud, make artificial flowers, fashion bouquets to decorate the house where the pile in a just-ended tubercular decomposition will repose. Instead of hastening to make these loci of decomposition disappear, of using all the speed and hygiene possible to destroy these evil centers whose preservation and maintenance can only spread death around them, everything possible is done to preserve them as long as possible. These mounds of flesh are paraded around in special wagons, in hearses, through the roads and the streets. When they pass, men remove their hats. They respect the dead.

The amount of effort and matter expended by humanity in maintaining the cult of the dead is inconceivable. If all this force were used to receive children then thousands and thousands of them would be spared illness and death.

If this imbecilic respect for the dead were to disappear and make room for respect for the living, we would increase the health and happiness of human life in unimaginable proportions.

Men accept the hypocrisy of necrophages, of those who eat the dead, of those who live off the dead; from the priest, giver of sacred water, to the merchant of eternal homes; from the wreath seller to the sculptor of mortuary angels. With ridiculous boxes that lead and accompany these grotesque puppets, we proceed to the removal of this human detritus and its distribution in accordance with the state of their fortune, when a good transport service, with hermetically sealed cars and a crematory oven constructed in keeping with the latest scientific discoveries would suffice.

[I will not concern myself with the use of ashes, though it would seem to me more interesting to use them as humus rather than carrying them around in little boxes. Men complain about work, yet they don't want to simplify those gestures that overly complicate occasions of their existence, not even to do away with those for the imbecilic — as well as dangerous — preservation of their cadavers. The anarchists have too much respect for the living to respect the dead. Let us hope that some day this outdated cult will have become a road management service, and that the living will know life in all its manifestations.]

As we've already said, it is because men are ignorant that they surround a phenomenon as simple as death with such religious mumbo jumbo. It also worth noting that this is only the case with human death: the death of other animals and vegetables doesn't serve as the occasion for similar demonstrations. Why?

The first men, barely evolved brutes, devoid of all knowledge, buried the dead man with his living wife, his weapons, his furniture, his jewels. Others had the

corpse appear before a tribunal to ask him to give an account of his life. Man has always misunderstood the true meaning of death.

And yet, in nature everything that lives dies. Every living organism falls when for one reason or another the equilibrium between its different functions is broken. The causes of death, the ravages of the illness or the accident that caused the death of the individual are scientifically determined.

From the human point of view then, there is death, disappearance of life, that is, the cessation of a certain activity in a certain form.

But from the general point of view death doesn't exist. There is only life. After what we call death the transformative phenomena continue. Oxygen, hydrogen, gas, and minerals depart in different forms and associate in new combinations and contribute to the existence of other living organisms. There is no death; there is a circulation of bodies, modifications in the aspect of matter and energy, endless continuation in time and space of life and universal activity.

A dead man is a body returned to circulation in a triple form: solid, liquid, and gaseous. It is nothing but this, and we should consider and treat it as such.

It is obvious that these positive and scientific concepts leave no room for weepy speculations on the soul, the beyond, the void.

But we know that all those religions that preach the "future life" and the "better world" have as their goals causing resignation among those who are despoiled and exploited.

Rather than kneeling before cadavers it would be better to organize life on better foundations so as to get a maximum amount of joy and wellbeing from it.

People will be angered by our theories and our disdain: this is pure hypocrisy on their part. The cult of the dead is nothing but an insult to true pain. The fact of maintaining a small garden, of dressing in black, of wearing crepe doesn't prove the sincerity of one's sorrow. This latter, incidentally, must disappear. Individuals should react before the irrevocability and the inevitability of death. We should fight against suffering instead of exhibiting it, parading it in grotesque cavalcades and false congratulations.

This one, who respectfully follows a hearse, had the day before worked furiously at starving the deceased; that one laments behind a cadaver who did nothing to come to his assistance when it would have been possible to save his life. Every day capitalist society spreads death by its poor organization, by the poverty it creates, by the lack of hygiene, the deprivation and ignorance from which individuals suffer. By supporting such a society men are thus the cause of their own suffering, and instead of moaning before destiny they would do better to work at improving their conditions of existence so as to allow human life its maximum of development and intensity.

How could we know life when the dead alone lead it?

How can we live in the present under the tutelage of the past?

If man wants to live, let him no longer have any respect for the dead, let him abandon the cult of carrion. The dead block the road to progress for the living.

We must tear down the pyramids, the tumuli, the tombs. We must bring the wheelbarrows into the cemeteries so as to rid humanity of what they call respect for the dead, but which is the cult of carrion.

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Albert Libertad
The Cult of Carrion and other texts
1898–1925

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