

Cambridge, March 6.

Dear Margaret,

Thank you for your letter, which, since I had not expected it, was all the nicer a surprise. Perhaps I am too sentimental in my appreciation of mail; perhaps it is a reflection of my dabbling in comparative literature. But your letters are always so eloquent in what they say and what they do not say that they are a good substitute for your words and your silences when you are here, and not nearly so unbalancing for me.

I hope you will not exhaust yourself to the point of illness, and very serious diseases are contracted through such exhaustion. Apart from this danger, I have much sympathy for you and I believe that the experience is not altogether bad. Consciously or unconsciously you have the desire to lose yourself. We must pour ourselves out every day until nothing is left but the shell, in order that we might not become stagnant.

Just as the tissues of the body are constantly dying, so the soul also longs to die. Something in us desires to die anew every day, in order that something else might be born again. In my paper I am using a quotation from Zwingli: "Vor allem ist deshalb das nötig, dass du dich selbst verleugnest und täglich stirbst." (Above all it is therefore necessary, that you deny yourself and die each day.) It was also a favorite concept of Nietzsche: "Ich liebe den, der über sich selber hinaus schafft, und daran zu Grunde geht." (I love him who is active beyond himself and perishes in his activity.)

This is a very beautiful thing, which binds together this life with death in a meaningful symmetry, and one of the most common mistakes is the attempt to remove death from the pith of our lives, where it belongs and to hide it behind green iron fences and marble obelisks. There is an art in dying greater than that in living, and we must practice it every day, in order that our death might not be something cheap and common. Modern deaths, you know, are wholesale. One signs up for them at the insurance company's, and having prepared for them economically, one goes about trying very hard to forget their existence.

You must not say that I am pessimistic, or even nihilistic, because this death which you and I must practice is not destructive. Rather it teaches us to fear neither life nor death and to take the sweetest essences of this life and lift them out of their banal environment. That which must die in us daily is like the weed which must be plucked that the flower might grow. Most people cannot distinguish between weeds and flowers and think ~~that~~ the confusion in their gardens ~~is~~ to be a virtue. Some of them even brag about it very foolishly.

But you were good to write me so frequently, and I hope you take no offence at my replies. What I want to say I cannot always say as simply as I would like to. Now I must read more Aeschylus. This morning I heard my first lecture by a flesh and blood (no soul, however)

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anthropologist. What he had to say reminded me very much of Greek mythology. If anthropologists would only be consequent in their relativism and consent to have their own position in modern society contrasted with more "primitive" classical society, I think they would find that they are believed by people as if they were oracles, with the main difference that they study the bones of animals, while the priests of Apollo examined the entrails.

Your aunt seemed dismayed at my theory, but she had no reply. Her emigrant sister is staying in the guest room and cutting off my supply of fresh air. If I open the window, the whole room gets quite cold, and now I cannot have the door open at night. Also she used my wash-cloth, but I let her have it and took a clean one. The children are very depressing at times; yesterday Danny was cutting his toenails at the dinner table, - and worse..

I must not think of these things, they depress me so. I think of you very often, though sometimes with thoughts which would trouble you very much. These I shall keep to myself. Don't work too hard, please, and don't make yourself ill, because then... to whom would I write such letters as this.

Just as the diseases of the body are constantly dying, so the soul also is constantly dying. Something in us desires to die anew every day, in order that something else might be born again. In my paper I am using a quotation from Zwingli: "Vor allem ist das menschliche Leben ein ständiges Sterben und Wiedergeborenwerden." (Above all it is a constant dying and being reborn.) It is therefore necessary, that you deny yourself and die each day. It was also a favorite concept of Nietzsche: "Ich lebe den, der über sich selber hinaus schreift, und daran zu Grunde geht." (I love him who is active beyond himself and perishes in his activity.)

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