

CHAPTER A

for Hans Arp

Awkward grammar appals a craftsman. A Dada bard as daft as Tzara damns stagnant art and scrawls an alpha (a slapdash arc and a backward zag) that mars all stanzas and jams all ballads (what a scandal). A madcap vandal crafts a small black ankh – a hand-stamp that can stamp a wax pad and at last plant a mark that sparks an *ars magna* (an abstract art that charts a phrasal anagram). A pagan skald chants a dark saga (a Mahabharata), as a papal cabal blackballs all annals and tracts, all dramas and psalms: Kant and Kafka, Marx and Marat. A law as harsh as a *fatwa* bans all paragraphs that lack an A as a standard hallmark.

CHAPTER E

for René Crevel

Enfettered, these sentences repress free speech. The text deletes selected letters. We see the revered exegete reject metred verse: the sestet, the tercet – even *les scènes élevées en grec*. He rebels. He sets new precedents. He lets cleverness exceed decent levels. He eschews the esteemed genres, the expected themes – even *les belles lettres en vers*. He prefers the perverse French esthetes: Verne, Péret, Genet, Perec – hence, he pens fervent screeds, then enters the street, where he sells these letterpress newsletters, three cents per sheet. He engenders perfect newness wherever we need fresh terms.

Relentless, the rebel peddles these theses, even when vexed peers deem the new precepts 'mere dreck'. The plebes resent newer verse; nevertheless, the rebel perseveres, never deterred, never dejected, heedless, even when hecklers heckle the vehement speeches. We feel perplexed whenever we see these excerpted sentences. We sneer when we detect the clever scheme – the emergent repetend: the letter E. We jeer; we jest. We express resentment. We detest these depthless pretenses – these present-tense verbs, expressed pell-mell. We prefer genteel speech, where sense redeems senselessness.

Westerners revere the Greek legends. Verse-men retell the represented events, the resplendent scenes, where, hellbent, the Greek freemen seek revenge whenever Helen, the new-wed empress, weeps. Restless, she deserts her fleece bed where, detested, her wedded regent sleeps. When she remembers Greece, her seceded demesne, she feels wretched, left here, bereft, her needs never met. She needs rest; nevertheless, her demented fevers render her sleepless (her sleeplessness enfeebles her). She needs help; nevertheless, her stressed nerves render her cheerless (her cheerlessness enfetters her).

Whenever Helen feels these stresses, she trembles. She frets. Her helplessness vexes her. She feels depressed (even when her cleverest beekeepers fetch her the freshest sweets). She feels neglected (even when her shrewdest gemseekers fetch her the greenest jewels). She regrets her wretchedness, her dejectedness; nevertheless, she keeps her deepest regrets secret. She never lets herself express her *echt Weltschmerz*. She never vents spleen. She feels tense whenever she keeps her vehemence repressed; hence, she seeks lewd revelment (*les fêtes de ses rêves*), where revellers lend her cheer.

Whenever Helen dresses herself *en fête*, her sewn vestments reflect her resplendence. Whenever she needs new ensembles, her sempstresses sew her ten velveteen dresses, then hem her red checkered sleeves. Her jewelers bevel gems, then bejewel her sceptre (*l'emblème des régences célestes*). Her eldest helpers preen her tresses; then her effete servers serve her dessert. The empress prefers sweetened preserves; hence, her serfs get her the best gels ever jelled: *les pêches gelées* – blended sherbet, served fresh. The scented dessert smells even sweeter when served ere the sweetness melts.

Whenever Helen needs effervescent refreshments, she tells her expert brewer: 'brew me the best beer ever brewed'. Whenever she lets her fermenters ferment the perfect beer, revellers wreck the kegs, then feed themselves the lees. Retchers retch; belchers belch. Jesters express extreme glee. Wenches then sell these lewd perverts sex. The lechers leer whenever svelte negresses tempt the perverted gentlemen. The empress revels. She sheds her velvet dress; then she lets repellent men pet her tender flesh. Her lewdness renders even these lechers speechless. She resembles the lewdest jezebel.

Whenever Helen seeks these perverse excesses, her regretted deeds depress her; hence, Helen beseeches Ceres (the blessed Demeter): 'let sweet Lethe bless me, lest these recent events be remembered' – then the empress feeds herself fermented hempseed, her preferred nepenthe. Whenever she chews these hell-bred seeds, the hempweed skews her senses. The hemp, when chewed, lessens her tenseness (hence, she feels serene); nevertheless, the weed, when needed, renders her dependent. She enters the deepest sleep – the nether sphere, where sleepers delve the secret depths.

Whenever Helen sleeps, her essence enters the ether – the deep well, where she feels herself descend deeper, deeper. Her descent seems endless; nevertheless, she lets herself be swept wherever the gentle breeze sweeps her. She regresses. She sees levels never seen except when men enter the seven hells (*les enfers éternels des gens désespérés*): the fell dens where beetles creep, the deep fens where leeches dwell – there, the sewers reek. The stench repels; nevertheless, the sleek green eels feed themselves the excrement (the expelled feces, the excreted dregs); then the serpents breed themselves.

Whenever Helen enters Hell's deepest recesses, she sees Hell's meekest dwellers. She meets the repenters, never redeemed. She greets her decedent elders. The elder seers, when greeted, tell her: 'repent, repent – never let the tempters here tempteth thee' – then these helpless wretches tell her three spells best kept secret, lest the tempted empress reverse these hexes, then set free demented spectres, held here, bespelled. The three spells, when reversed, sever these hexed fetters; hence, the berserk efreet, when freed, screech 'hell's bells', then flee these endless deserts, where the embers swelter.

Whenever Helen sleeps, her fevered rest meekens her; hence, she re-emerges enfeebled – her strength, expended; her reserves, depleted. The extended fevers, when severe, entrench her enfeeblement. She clenches her teeth, then exerts herself; nevertheless, she feels strengthless (her meek self rendered even meeker). Her strengthlessness dejects her. She sneezes; she wheezes – then she spews phlegm; nevertheless, she rejects her self-centred meekness. She begs her defenders: ‘defend me’; she begs her redeemers: ‘redeem me’ – then she decrees: ‘never desert me – lend me renewed verve’.

Hermes, the messenger, tells her the news: 'Thebes sends the fleet'. The Hellene freemen seek redress. The steersmen steer the xebecs between steep, sheer clefts, where reefs prevent sheltered berth; there, the tempests whelm the decks, then wreck the keels – the helms, left crewless whenever the elements beset these crewmen. The December sleet drenches the tethered nets, then threshes the fettered pegs; hence, the deckmen wedge the kevels, then check the kedges; nevertheless, these vessels teeter. The lee sheets, when drenched, get reft, then rent. The wheelmen, when wet, wrest the wheel.

Mermen help these helmsmen berth the wrecked vessels; then the Greek crews erect well-defended shelters wherever the fleet gets berthed. Men erect mess tents, then feed sheds. The settlers dredge the kelp beds, then extend the levees. The wreckers heft sledges; then the hewers hew the evergreens when the evergreens get felled. The trestlemen erect trestles; the smeltermen erect smelters. Men smelt the steel; then the deftest welders weld the tempered sheet steel wherever men screw the screws. The best sled ever hewn gets erected. The shell, when welded, resembles the fleetest steed.

Greek schemers respect shrewdness; hence, the shrewd rebels enter the sled's secret recess, the sled's nested crèche, where these few men keep themselves secreted. Then the sled gets sent wherever the nemeses dwell; there, the Greek pretenders pretend: 'the well-hewn steed represents the perfect present'. The wedded regent sees these presenters present the steed; hence, he decrees: 'the plebes express excellent reverence'. He never detects the pretense; hence, he errs when he lets the presented steed enter the crenelled keep. The rebels never get detected when the keep gets entered.

Greek schemers seek egress *en ténèbres*, then enter the melee – the welter where berserk tempers seethe whenever men’s mettle, then men’s fettle, gets tested; there, the Greek berserkers sever men’s thews, then shred men’s flesh. When the rebels beset defended trenches, the defenders retrench themselves, then strengthen the embedded defences. The strengthened deterrence deters the rebels; nevertheless, these men esteem relentlessness; hence, the rebels expend themselves, then reject détente. We see them repel retrenched defencemen, then render the bested men defenceless.

Épées, when hefted, skewer the fencers; then wrestlers wrestle these skewered men (men's knees get threshed; men's necks get wrenched). Deft fletchers whet steel-edged reeds, then fletch these whetted skewers. When the helmeted men get pelted, the slender needles (*les fléchettes*) dent the crested helmets. The steel vests deflect even these keen edges; nevertheless, the steel sheen gets etched, then dented. The deserters defect. The men flee these entrenchments, where lepers get trench fever; there, legless men bleed. The welts fester. The severed members, strewn helter-skelter, redden the cerements.

Bells knell when the keep gets levelled; then Greek rebels cheer when Helen enters her Greek temple (the steepled glebe where jewelled steeples shelter her epebes); there, the reverends bless the freed empress. The Greek sects revere her gentleness, her tenderness; hence, these prefects help her seek self-betterment. The zen seers tell her: 'greed begets greed – never be self-centred: be selfless'. She defers. Her deference seems reverent. The empress kneels, then keens her vespers. The pewter censer spews the sweetest peppered scent. She feels refreshed; she feels perfected.

Helen remembers Crete – the Eden where senescent shepherds (*les bergers des bêtes*) herd bellwether sheep; there, Helen sees the pebbled steppes (the eskers where chert scree bestrews the ledges). Helen treks wherever herdsmen trek. She sees the veldts where ewes, when fleeced, chew the sedges. She sees the glens, then the dells, where elk herds chew the vetch. She helps the herders erect fenced pens where hens peck feed; then she helps the shepherdesses sell the eggs. The sheepherders mend fences; the sheeptenders tend hedges. The sheepbreeders even breed steer, then geld them.

Helen sees the September breezes bend the elm trees
(the perches where the egrets, then the grebes, perch
themselves); there, the petrels, then the tercel, nest.
Helen lets the geese peck seedlet kernels (except when
ferrets pester the mews). The kestrels screech. The
wrens peep: *tweet, tweet*. The terns keen: *cheep, cheep*.
The peewee peetweets tweedle: *tweedledee, tweedledee*.
The creeks wend between beech trees, then end where
freshets feed the meres (there, the speckled perch teem;
there, the freckled newts rest). The leverets, then the
shrews, chew the nettles. The dew bedews the ferns.

When Vermeer sketches *les belles femmes de Delft*, he remembers Helen, then lends these sketches her extreme serenity. When the sketchers (Erté, Ernst, Klee, Léger – even Bellmer) render *les événements des rêves*, these esthetes get felt pens, then sketch her presence. She seems sexless; nevertheless, men esteem her pert svelteness (her slender legs, her perfect feet); she represents perfectness; hence, we never see her defects (the speckles, the freckles). Men see her elven slenderness, then pledge themselves her serfs. She resembles Eve, the temptress – hence: *elle régné éternellement*.

CHAPTER I

for Dick Higgins

Writing is inhibiting. Sighing, I sit, scribbling in ink this pidgin script. I sing with nihilistic witticism, disciplining signs with trifling gimmicks – impish hijinks which highlight stick sigils. Isn't it glib? Isn't it chic? I fit childish insights within rigid limits, writing shtick which might instill priggish misgivings in critics blind with hindsight. I dismiss nit-picking criticism which flirts with philistinism. I bitch; I kibitz – griping whilst criticizing dimwits, sniping whilst indicting nitwits, dismissing simplistic thinking, in which philippic wit is still illicit.

CHAPTER O

for Yoko Ono

Loops on bold fonts now form lots of words for books. Books form cocoons of comfort – tombs to hold bookworms. Profs from Oxford show frosh who do post-docs how to gloss works of Wordsworth. Dons who work for proctors or provosts do not fob off school to work on crosswords, nor do dons go off to dorm rooms to loll on cots. Dons go crosstown to look for bookshops known to stock lots of top-notch goods: cookbooks, workbooks – room on room of how-to books for jocks (how to jog, how to box), books on pro sports: golf or polo. Old colophons on schoolbooks from schoolrooms sport two sorts of logo: oblong whorls, rococo scrolls – both on worn morocco.

CHAPTER U

for Zhu Yu

Kultur spurns Ubu – thus Ubu pulls stunts. Ubu shuns *Skulptur*: Uruk urns (plus busts), Zulu jugs (plus tusks). Ubu sculpts junk *für Kunst und Glück*. Ubu busks. Ubu drums drums, plus Ubu strums cruths (such hubbub, such ruckus): *thump, thump; thrum, thrum*. Ubu puns puns. Ubu blurts untruth: much bunkum (plus bull), much humbug (plus bunk) – but trustful schmucks trust such untruthful stuff; thus Ubu (cult guru) must bluff dumbstruck numbskulls (such chumps). Ubu mulcts surplus funds (trust funds plus slush funds). Ubu usurps much usufruct. Ubu sums up lump sums. Ubu trumps dumb luck.