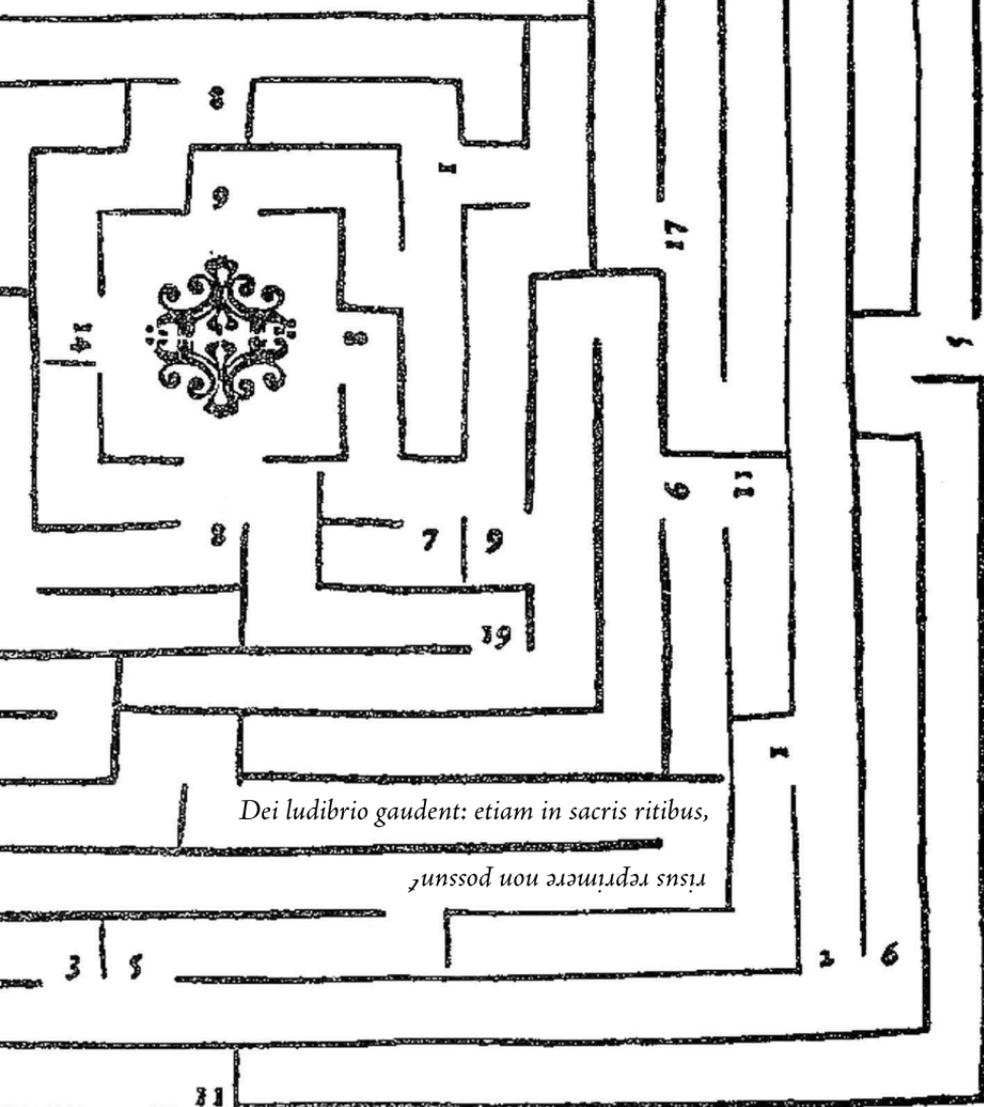


GAZITION



*Dei ludibrio gaudent: etiam in sacris ritibus,*

*risus reprimere non possunt*

Gods enjoy mockery: it seems they cannot suppress laughter even during holy rites.

—Nietzsche

The *absence of God* is no longer a closure: it is the opening up to the infinite. The absence of God is greater, and more divine, than God [...]. 'Night is also a sun,' and the absence of myth is also a myth: the coldest, purest, the only true myth.

—Bataille

Let us place at the end of every chapter of metaphysics the two letters used by the Roman judges when they did not understand a pleading: N.L.—non liquet (it is not clear).

—Voltaire



## ENCOMIUMS

“With this new novel, Hanshe reinforces his growing reputation as one of today’s most original and thought-provoking novelists.”

—Keith Ansell-Pearson

“*The Abdication* is an extraordinary mythic delirium-philosophy, rich with erudition and wit, chronicling the exploits of a Heraclitean prophet ushering in nothing less than the Age of Heterology. Long may it unnerve.”

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—Stuart Kendall, author of *Georges Bataille*

*Also by* Rainer J. Hanshe

*The Acolytes*

*Shattering the Muses*

# THE ABDICATION

RAINER J. HANSHE



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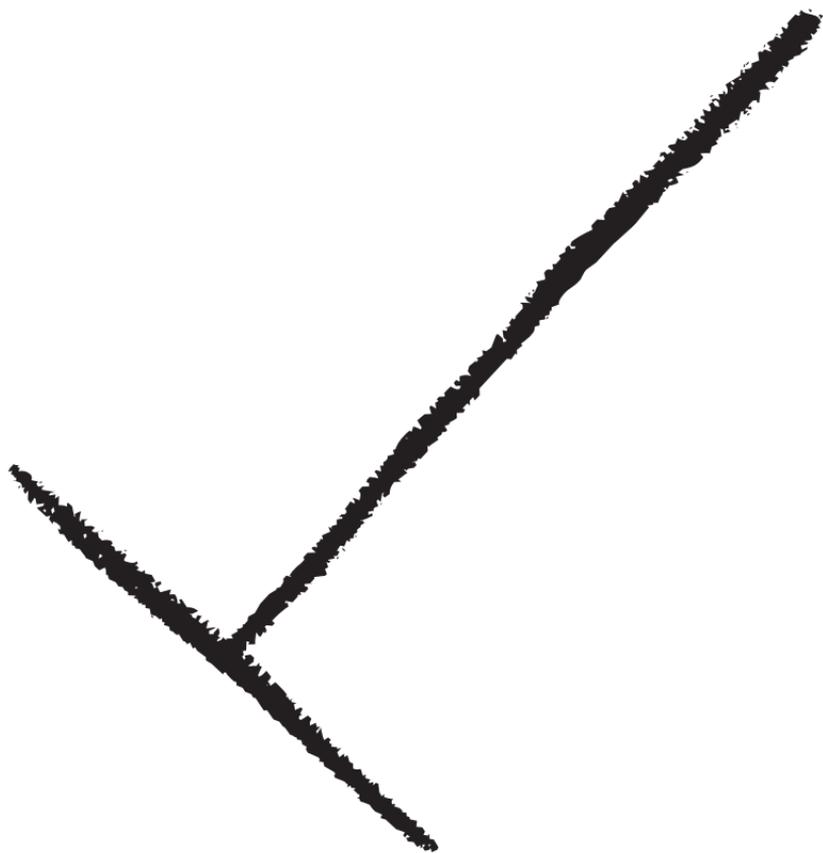
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THE  
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When the kids first began circling Circo Massenzio, it was with a degree of order and harmony, but as they continued circling it, they became more and more disordered, perhaps provoked by the wildly hot, almost violent temperature which, despite the fact that it was just spring, seemed to increase as they played, perhaps provoked by the thrill of their discoveries, or by sheer glee, and due to the disorder, they could not remember when they first began circling Circo Massenzio, so it seemed as if they had never begun circling it, but were always circling and circling it, dust billowing into the air in tiny whorls as they turned to and fro, rocks shooting hither and thither, jettisoned by their tumultuous feet as they scurried here, there, and everywhere, unearthing various treasures, laughter and shouts echoing throughout space as they eventually converged before the remnants that they'd collected during their circling, and picking up piles of them, each of the kids began laying out the eclectic pieces as if they were archeologists, displaying the debris in as ordered a fashion as kids would conceive, all of which happened seemingly spontaneously, as if guided by some inexorable force, and on the ground were displayed grommets and bezels and arbors, cuckoos and pinions and count wheels, chime blocks and bellows and cam-gears, as well as clock-faces of every shape, size, and kind, which they used to line both the outer wall and central island of the Circo, and as they continued laying out the pieces, Circo Massenzio came to resemble a colossal clock graveyard, or the warehouse in which temporality itself was made, or *dissembled* once and for all, for they seemed to have gathered together an endless array of time pieces, though how they ended up in the Circo wasn't

known, but, clearly, thousands upon thousands of clocks from different eras had been dismantled and scattered there, and as the kids knelt before their exhibit they began sailing split washers through the air and rolling escape and drive wheels across the ground and squeezing suspension springs at one another while others banged together blocks and weights and held bells in the air and rang them with hooks and rings and forks, knocking pendulums into one another as if in and of themselves they were becoming clocks, and they placed the cranks and click wheels and double swingers over their bodies as if the objects were actually organs they required to subsist and when one of them would collapse from laughter or exhaustion, another would take a clock key and turn and turn it over the heart of the kid until he or she rose from the ground and began moving again, for even, as such clocks illustrated, time could come to an end, or so some believed, but it could begin again from that still point, exploding from nothing into something, from inertia into *ertia*, and finally they gathered the last of the pieces, such as verges and bushing and chains, all of which were brought together in one final frenzied series of delirious gestures, and as if completing some diabolical puzzle, micrometers, hex nuts, and commutators were arranged in some arcane, inexplicable order that to them was very logical though, clearly, the pieces were not arranged according to any logic of mechanics, however precise the arrangement was, but, finally, the mass of hour and minute and second hands were pinned to the ground with escutcheon and tapered pillars and pins, with each of the kids giggling as they spun the hands round and round and round, now in this direction, now in

that, with many of the pillars and pins coming loose and the different hands spinning and spinning into the wildly hot air, sailing here and sailing there, shooting like arrows in countless directions ...

As the kids lay on the ground before the detritus and the tumult of the laughter and the dust began to settle, one of them whispered: Now hear! and all listened to the sharp, high, shrill sound of bees just beginning to lead out a storm.

At that moment, the branches of the *ficus* shot forth, its tender shoots appearing and breaking into leaf.

And another kid whispered: Now hear! and in perfect stillness, they hearkened to the coarse, deep bass roaring of the swarm before it began to cluster—the sharp cutting sound of bees calling together their colony.

*Thwarp, thwarp, thwarp; thwarp, thwarp, thwarp.*

Further along the road, in a field not too far from the Chiesa del Domine Quo Vadis, while awaiting the return of their bandleader, a troupe of musicians were sounding off as goats and monkeys frolicked about them.

And then another kid whispered: Now hear! as the shrill hissing sound of the escort leading the swarm to the woods reached their attentive ears, blending with the roar of the rear part of the swarm, a strange compound only heard from absconding bees.

*Thwarp, thwarp, thwarp; thwarp, thwarp, thwarp.*

Soon, the *Blastophaga psenes* would come and sacrifice themselves to the fruit of the *ficus*, losing their wings and almost the entirety of their antennae, dying as the fruit consumes each minuscule corpse, its bruised purple rotundity bursting with death and pleasure.

*Thwarp, thwarp, thwarp; thwarp, thwarp, thwarp.*

And the animals delighted in the sounds of the instruments, which echoed across the field, a cacophony of bells, whistles, drums, and wind instruments of every kind.

*Thwarp, thwarp, thwarp; thwarp, thwarp, thwarp.*

And numerous men and women of the troupe, costumed like satyrs and maenads, danced, vigorously leaping to and fro, straining their bodies to their utmost limits, a fluid plasticity evident in their every kinetic gesture, gestures often punctuated with ecstatic yelps.

Turning about, abruptly, the animals tensed up, herding closer together—distressed, anxious, excited.

*Thwarp, thwarp, thwarp; thwarp, thwarp, thwarp.*

*Thwarp, thwarp, thwarp; thwarp, thwarp, thwarp. Thwarp, thwarp, thwarp; thwarp, thwarp, thwarp.*

Suddenly, a helicopter approached from out of the clouds: as it descended, lightning flashes erupted all through the sky and continued to flash and flash from east to west, coloring the firmament red, ochre, umber, and blue.

Upon hearing the helicopter approach, the kids grew excited, and when seeing the lightning explode in the sky, they were seized with delight and raced toward the site, their energy completely renewed.

When the bandleader touched ground, in the distance, a dense bolt of blue lightning stretched from the highest cloud in the sky and struck a cypress tree, and then another bolt shot from out of the clouds, this time striking a pine tree, and a third bolt struck, this time shattering perfectly in half a cedar tree, the crack, rumble, and boom of the bolt echoing through

Rome as the trees were felled, bending in every direction, their roots violently torn from the ground with swift velocity.

A piercing trumpet blast erupted as the bandleader, whose face was concealed by a strange, haunting mask, walked from the field to the Appia Antica, accompanied by a cackle of hyenas.

When the kids finally approached and began to gather round the troupe, laughing, the bandleader threw coins to them, tossing the objects in the air, delighting in the sound they made when striking the ground and bouncing to and fro as the kids chased the relics, running about to collect as many of them as they could, even digging between the crevices of the Appia to retrieve the coins that fell between the cracks.

Standing in the middle of the road, the bandleader knelt down on the thick polished cobblestones and, facing north, as if peering directly into the heart of Rome, placed a pestle and mortar before him. Taking a small seed from the pocket of his wide black cloak, he held it aloft, stretching his arms above his head and peering directly into the sky, then placed it in the mortar.

Glancing about, he watched as the troupe drew closer and closer and began to surround him, the animals following in tow, the goats and monkeys edging their way to the inner ring of the circle, the hyenas closing in, accompanied by the kids.

In silence, he held the pestle aloft. Instantly, a deathly quiet pervaded the air—all were transfixed, even the frolicking kids. Gazing at those around him, slowly, he lowered the pestle into the mortar then, gently, *pulverized the seed ...*

Removing another seed from his pocket, he turned southeast, then prostrated himself completely over the mortar and, upon rising, dropped the seed into the bowl; after it settled in the center, gently, he pulverized it, too ...

Turning east-southeast, he removed another seed from his pocket, began swaying to and fro like the flame of a candle, then, upon smelling some spices suddenly drift to him through the air, he ceased moving and, in perfect stillness, pulverized the third seed ...

Finally, he took a handful of the seeds from his pocket and, one by one, cracked each of them between his fingers, emptying into the mortar the broken remnants, which cascaded from his hand like blackened snowflakes.

Staring into the bowl as if into a vortex or some infinitely contracting horizon, he took the pestle and began turning about, whirling and whirling in a circle, his right palm facing the earth, his left the sky, pivoting on his right foot with perfect agility, each revolution increasing in intensity and velocity. With ceremonial finality, he began chanting, then soon ceased whirling, removed his black cloak, revealing a resplendent burgundy costume, and, kneeling before the mortar, methodically crushed the mass of cracked remnants until they were triturated.

O, bold ones! O searchers, tempters, and experimenters, who of you loves danger? Or to sail upon terrifying seas, venturing into, what—*nothingness*? Are we not those who find riddles intoxicating? Are we not those who delight in questioning, in dissecting, in ... *shattering*? But in shattering, are we not seeking—something else? Who can fathom this riddle

of the seeds? Who interpret the gestures? Do you not thirst to know? I thirst ...

*Thwarp, thwarp, thwarp, thwarp, thwarp, thwarp.  
Thwarp, thwarp, thwarp, thwarp, thwarp, thwarp.*

The powdered remains billowed into the air, disappearing with the dust and the wind, swirling away as the helicopter rose and vanished amidst the clouds.

*I thirst ...*

Knocking the mortar, he gently tapped out a rhythm with the pestle that the troupe began to repeat, not only with each percussion instrument, but with their bodies, and the circle began to widen and expand as they varied the rhythms and intensified the force with which they struck their instruments and their bodies, and with each new rhythm members of the troupe would break from the circle and begin dancing frantically, and as more and more of the troupe broke from the circle to dance, each of them moving in a style particular to their body, for the troupe consisted not only of lithe and limber figures, but rotund and malformed ones, he began juggling, casting fiery torches, winnowing-shovels, and wooden blocks, each in the shape of a different diacritical mark or letter, high into the air, and as they marched along the Appia toward Chiesa Quo Vadis, he altered with his juggling the rhythm of the music, and the saxophonists began to breath out sounds, and then the bassoonists, and the trumpeters, and the flank hornists, who summoned everyone onward, the stout, soft, dark sound of their wide conical bores resonating in the air, a sound pleasing to the goats, monkeys, and hyenas.

As the troupe stood before the church and the bandleader continued to juggle, he asked: Is this not the sacred *campus* dedicated to Rediculus, the Roman ‘God of the Return’?

One of the troupe shouted: Varro called him Tutanus!

And the twirlers rejoined: We’d like to toot on your anus!

And one of the midgets asked: Isn’t it where the famous talking crow is buried?

No! It’s the site of a vision!

Balls! It’s a vision of nothing, you bozos! Let’s march on!

But our journey will be long and hard—should we not make an offering to Rediculus?

Just eat a steak!

Inside there’s a marble slab with the imprint of the feet of Jesus!

Is it true? he said, and he threw each of the torches that he was juggling to those before him, and then the winnowing-shovels, which enabled him to juggle the wooden blocks with even greater velocity and variation.

At certain points, it seemed as if some of the blocks almost momentarily *h o v e r e d* in the air, and to those who watched closely, and whose eyes were keen enough, it was clear that he actually began *to form words* in the air, that he was juggling the blocks in a certain order, that, in fact, *he was forming an entire sentence* with the blocks.

He continued juggling and was amused by the kids attempting to imitate him, tossing as they did each of the coins that they had collected into the air.

The feet ... of *Jesus*?

That don't beat Topkapı Palace—they have the beard of Mohammed!

The *whole* beard?

No! Just a piece, but sure as shit it's Mohammed's, and they've got his feet, too, and one of his teeth!

Where's Sappho's clitoris?!

Where's Beelzebub's rectum?!

Where's Jesus's foreskin?!

Where God?

On St. Catherine's finger!

Did they bury it with her?

What? God?

No, the foreskin!

God is the foreskin, and the foreskin is God!

It's not buried; it's in a charred abbey in western France. Charlemagne's golden gift of gifts!

No it ain't—it's in a jail in Calcuta.

Not anymore! Thieves stole it from the priest's wardrobe closet!

Is that when the Carmelite nun found it?

She didn't find it; it *appeared* in her mouth and she said it tasted like honey!

If holy prepuces taste like honey, is not honey made of holy prepuces?

Prepuces? Bah! Let's pray to the holy pussy! The immaculate womb of Mary! *Virginitas in partu!* *Pray-pusses!*

What? Did she birth Him like Zeus birthed Dionysos?

Forget the Holy Grail!

Let's find the Golden Ring of St. Caterina!

What about her placenta—did they save that, too?

Yeah, and it's on Mt. Ségur.

No it ain't—it's in the *fundus uteri, inter faeces et urinam!*

What do you want with virgins? Give me sweet, ripened fruit—there is nothing more succulent. Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires!

Stopping, the bandleader placed the blocks on the ground and walked toward the entrance of the church.

Hey, where are you going? the revelers enjoined, laughing.

*I'm going to Rome to ...*

Rome? We're in Rome.

I'm going to—*see if my feet are the same size.*

But are you circumcised?!

Turning as if to remove his mask, the bandleader answered: I've been told I taste like honey ... but instead of revealing his face, he firmly affixed the mask to his head and turned back.

Let's play on, others shouted, and they continued beating out rhythms, though more and more savage ones, as he walked into the church and the doors closed behind him.

Gathering the torches, the figures in maenad costumes formed a circle with them in the middle of the street; once joined together, the flames of the torches grew hotter and brighter, flickering and snapping in the air as the women approached the church and some of the kids once again tossed their coins into the air, attempting to juggle them while others ran around one another in opposite directions, as if

replicating a clock gone haywire, and still others played with the animals.

When at last the doors to the church were opened, the bandleader strode toward the flames, gathered the wooden blocks, and stacked them on top of the torches, at which point they began to burn, prompting him to dance about the torches in a slow, concentrated state, circling them, staring into the conflagration, which his eyes reflected, making it seem as if the fire emerged from his body itself, and as he approached the torches and retrieved the burning blocks, handling them with perfect ease, the fire and his body did, it appeared, begin to blend, so much so that his hands were like flames and the flames were like hands, and the fire, intensifying in degree, was so blistering that the blocks finally disintegrated, and gazing around him, with a gesture, he invited the others to dance, his movements becoming more vigorous, his body twisting and turning with glee as if he had been released from some primordial bond, his body physically articulating his consciousness, as too did the bodies of the women, whose movements became frenzied as the vibrations of the drums and of the other malformed bodies around them coursed through their flesh, their heads snapping back and thrusting forward and side to side as they let down their hair and their shirts slipped from their shoulders, their breasts glistening with sweat, their stomachs expanding and contracting the faster they breathed while others belted animal skins to their waists and brandished serpents, which hissed in the air, their long thin red tongues shooting in and out, almost in tandem with the flames, as if they were but an extension of the conflagration.

Crowning themselves with ivy and oak and smilax in full flower, the women on the periphery of the circle called out to him in unison chanting: Triboulet, Triboulet, lead us on; let's go, let's go, to the center of the city with our songs.

Then paper the city! Let them know, tell one and all, put up posters and hand out bills till the people spill into the streets at your beck and call ... Draw them on! Let us begin!

Crashing cymbals resounded in the air and parade drums boom, boom, boomed.

As his retinue of costumed maenads and corpulent sileni encircled him, Triboulet drew a *salpinx* from the thyrsi with which they danced, and blasting the horn he produced a piercing sound and announced:

Friends! I send you out to gather those of our tribe, the searchers and seekers both bold and brave, the wanderers and nomads, too, go to the farthest ends of the earth and call forth our band—the time has come for us to gather: we alone know what is possible with this troupe!

And so some went forth to gather the infamous brethren as Triboulet commanded, and he continued onward with the remainder of his retinue into the heart of Rome, frolicking along the Appia, releasing people from their homes with the sound of the siss, boom, bang, enticing, seducing, entrancing, drawing one and all on and on as they crossed the Via Cilicia and then the Porta Ardeatina until they reached Parco Scipioni and they circled round and round, the music intensifying with every snaking turn, a burst of drums, cymbals, bells, and double flutes, all commingling into explosive crescendos and points of ecstatic rupture, as if sound itself burst, and

it seemed as if they almost entirely *s u s p e n d e d* the rhythms of the music, extending time signatures to points of near collapse till Triboulet burst into guffaws, at which second the tempo of the music increased and a raging cacophony commenced, horns screeching, wailing, almost shouting, straining to cracking points, echoing human cries, animal noises, and eerie distorted tones, like the sounds of planets spinning at high velocity, all of which intensified even more when Triboulet blew on two and then three horns simultaneously, sounding certain haunting notes that were signals for tempo changes and rhythmic shifts, with the cacophony morphing back into more melodic and mellifluous lines.

Hypnotized by such potent music, all those within its reach began to dance wildly, and even those not prone to dancing were seized by the music and felt not only stimulated but that their consciousness began to alter, their perception sharpen, with everything around them radiating as if aglow with nimbuses, and more acute senses of reality were gained as the sound waves seeped into their pores and entered their muscles till it felt as if a physical force or warm, steady, powerful fluid coursed through their bodies, altering their inner stratifications, for the music moved on another plane, a plane where matter did not exist and everything was interconnected, where only interrelations of probabilities existed, and new probabilities were what they sought, to penetrate with sound to subatomic levels where continual exchanges of matter and energy, tongue and brass, human and goat, body and body, sound and flesh, bone and air, a real exchange of the photons and electrons of everything around, and as these exchanges were

occurring and each body was transformed just as each thing, element, and more, Triboulet united everyone again and as the flank hornists blew, his retinue continued on and from Via di Porta San Sebastiano they crossed Numa Pompilio Piazza and proceeded up Terme di Caracalla toward Circo Massimo, where they settled and from where numerous members of the troupe went parading forth into the outlying streets of Rome, papering the city, stringing banners here and there, drawing in the piazzas and alleys, marking the streets with chalk and paint, wandering from Monte Aventino to the Colosseum and Monte Esquilino, and from the Quirinale to Salario, Monte Pincio and Piazza del Popolo to Vatican City, with each member of the troupe returning in full regalia, jestering about with magnificent codpieces, bells on their feet, their asses exposed, disrupting the regular affairs of the day, seducing legions of people, embracing the downtrodden and lost, who they cavorted with back toward Circo Massimo across Via Cavour, Via Nazionale, and Viale Trastevere, from Via Conciliazione to Corso Emanuele II, and from Piazza del Popolo down Via del Corso to Piazza Venezia, which they slithered around, splitting into every street, spidering about the Musei Capitolini causing a joyous melee or general tumult, for many were incensed and outraged by the antics of the troupe, especially since scores of them were considered immoral, incivists not suited to a world of prigs and conformists, yet even the puritans felt some strange irresistible sensation whenever hearing the troupe's music.

And, generally, in those they encountered, the troupe produced a sense of overwhelming delight and relief, for the

world was beset with famines and earthquakes and nation was warring against nation, which some interpreted as the first birth pangs of a new aeon, for there were many nights when the sun darkened, the moon did not give light, and there were continual meteor showers as if the cosmos itself were at war. Some also thought that a cataclysmic geological shift as devastating as a new lava or ice age was to occur on earth and many around the world were possessed by pervasive and dreadful fears, while several self-proclaimed prophets kept predicting that the end of the world was nigh, though whenever that end neglected to occur and the promised rapture proved not to be, they quickly recalculated their predictions, stated that they'd misconstrued the "signs," and, unabashed, despite the fact that numerous people had committed suicide in fear of the end of the world they'd predicted, heedlessly made renewed prognostications, with no skepticism ever even slightly rupturing their benighted faith. Because of the terrorist attacks that had continued throughout the last two decades, many were beset with disabling paranoia, which, though it abated from time to time, was continually provoked anew through billboards, radio broadcasts, television reports, and announcements on subways and in depots and at airports instructing people to remain constantly vigilant and to beware of suspicious persons and suspicious packages and suspicious actions and to report all such nefarious and threatening suspiciousness to the authorities, for having a "safe day" was a sanctioned imperative, so much so that no one felt free to ruminate or brood or aimlessly loaf about, and tensions between Christians and Muslims had been escalating for the last twenty years and

were recently exacerbated to an unprecedented degree when the crosses atop both domes of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the Old City of Jerusalem were reported as having been violently knocked from their bases, were nowhere to be found, and the side of the ceiling of one of the domes was pierced ...

At first, the Israeli government was hesitant to divulge the extent of the crime, but finally capitulated to international pressures and the demands of the foreign press, religious organizations, heads of state, and the Papacy and further news reports revealed that the acts of vandalism were even more heinous, for not only was every crucifix within the church missing, but the frescos of the crucifixion had been erased, and even the ancient graffiti of crosses scratched by medieval pilgrims on one of the stairwells within the church had been carved into a maze, while the cross hanging above the altar of the crucifixion—believed to be the site of Golgotha itself—had also been violently wrenched from the wall. Catholics of all persuasions were outraged and staged protests and demonstrations, decrying the act “an abomination of desolation,” with many calling for vengeance, that is, justice, and others, though profoundly wounded, for pity and compassion. Although several extremist Islamic organizations claimed responsibility for the desecration, Israeli police had yet to determine whether it was, though still exceedingly grievous and morally offensive, merely the senseless and ignorant act of a band of “hopelessly degenerate juvenile delinquents” completely devoid of ethics, or something more dire, a politically or religiously motivated gesture, possibly the onset of a series of attacks that

might continue and were indicative of a potential religious war. Whatever the case, the world was on tenterhooks—when the dust from the devastation had finally been cleared away, it was discovered that the icon of Christ Pantocrator in the dome of the church had been permanently defaced. The image of the savior’s visage had been entirely eliminated and was now nothing but an ashen gray circle which, in its center, contained a large forbidding

?

In Circo Massimo, the troupe, which had been trailing behind it an enormous ship on wheels, began to unload various items from the vehicle and, much like the kids in Circo Massenzio, display the objects on the ground before them, putting pieces here and there as if haphazardly, ordering them in a way no one could follow or discern, but which possessed to them its own peculiar logic, as if they were agents of chaos, flourishing only in discombobulated states, provoked by such even, inspired by disarray, by frenetic scurrying and pandemonium, though some thought that they were deliberately masking each of their acts, which they engaged in with knowing mischievousness, if not perhaps *metis*. From a rag tag troupe of misfits, musicians, and performers of this stripe, what was one to expect but some form of hijinks and trickery? What they resembled most in their gestures was an orchestra tuning up that, although not wholly discordant, produced the sensa-

tion of discord, or something amorphous, an unshaped mass whose many inevitable forms was undetectable but whose energy was mesmerizing, for in the tumult there was nothing staid or ossified, only desire or force in motion, a sense of searching, aimless play, and freedom, an escalating, excited tension of *something* on the verge. And all of the people that the troupe gathered and led to Circo Massimo congregated around it, watching as various members of the troupe began assembling different structures and others enthralled the crowd with musical performances and acrobatic acts.

When seeing the placement of the numerous triangular structures throughout the field, the kids realized that the troupe was constructing enormous swing sets, and when the chains were strung to the overhead poles and the leather seats at last affixed, the kids streamed wildly into the arena exclaiming and exulting, many of them shouting what sounded like A-OH! A-OH! A-OH! and something to the effect of *Pix!* but their almost violent utterances were considered mere gibberish, the sheer delight of kids playing with words and letters as if they were nothing but sounds to be rolled upon the tongue with orbicular pleasure, which is all the sounds may have been, gibberish, but the musicians listened attentively to their aural ejaculations and several of them picked up their utterances and began chanting them as the kids leapt into the swings and were being rocked back and forth, delighting in the sensation of hovering in mid-air in a kind of euphoria, approaching the sky with each forward arc, feeling as if they could seize the sun or the moon with each oscillation, and as they continued swinging, they developed a rhythm with the musicians, with

everyone chanting A on the upswing and OH! on the downswing, and after three full oscillations they all shouted: PIX! the word bursting from their mouths, the X extending into a long, protracted sssssssssssssssssssss that sounded like rain issuing from their lips and which culminated in monstrous giggling, and when the cackling frenzy dissipated, they began chanting in unison again:

A-----OH!

A-----OH!

A-----OH!

PIXss! till even the adults on the sidelines began to join in the chanting, provoked by the musicians, who wandered through the crowd, prodding them with gestures and taunts and aural commands to involve them directly in the festivities until there was no longer any clearly demarcated boundary between the troupe and the crowd.

As the chants resounded in the air, echoing it was later reported to the Colosseum and even across the Tevere, at the southern end of Circo Massimo, other members of the troupe were constructing a strange nine meter high single swing whose arms were not made of chains or rope but steel, and ivy and garlands were wound about the structure, and sitting atop the columns were birds about to take flight. When the troupe finished assembling it, Triboulet mounted the swing in silence and began to gather momentum by squatting and standing up, the swing oscillating higher and higher in each direction. Never having seen such a swing before, not even being able to recollect such a swing existing in ancient Rome, or even

amongst the intrepid Minoans, those present found the object both intriguing and fascinating if not, because of its extreme height, dangerous, and they watched Triboulet with awe, alarm, and trepidation, wondering how far he would swing in either direction, and, if he went too far, if he would fall from such a height, for the object seemed designed to enable one to circle the swing completely. While on their swings the kids remained bound within one domain, never truly leaving the terrestrial realm, Triboulet seemed on the verge of vaulting into the celestial realm, or of *uniting* the terrestrial and the celestial realms—he did not believe that they were actually separate—through his swinging, and the anticipation mounted as he thrust himself further and further in either direction, soaring backwards and forwards, perfectly poised, every now and then emitting a deep guttural grunt, like a samurai harnessing *chi*. As he continued to swing, the midgets of the troupe were decanting from giant beehive shaped barrels that they'd wheeled into the Circo a light golden liquid into clay flagons, and after filling each flagon, the midgets would distribute them throughout the crowd, partaking themselves and encouraging others to consume the nectar, a gently sparkling drink neither dry or sweet made of fermented thyme honey, quinces, and water sunned for forty days at the time of the early rising of Sirius, a star Triboulet revered.

*Console yourselves in your distresses! Drink fresh if you can come by it!*

*First with melikratos, then with sweet wine!*

And so the flagons were passed around, with everyone imbibing the refreshing drink, consuming it as they watched

Triboulet continue to swing, and the more of the nectar that they drank, the more they chanted Triboulet on, for they admired such daring and longed to witness impossible feats, and challenging the very force of gravity, Triboulet at last swung beyond the normal oscillating point of the arc of a swing and made a full 180° turn, soaring from one direction to the other, completing an entire half-circle, then soaring backwards 220° and as he projected himself forward again, squatting and standing with greater speed and force, at last, he swung completely over the spindle of the swing and, momentarily, hovered directly above the top of it as if gravity itself were suspended ~ it produced a sense of weightlessness: and as he hovered there, still as a hummingbird, *everyone* seemed to hover with him, to at least *feel* as if they were hovering between one realm and another, as if they had somehow surmounted the ground, then, swiftly: — he soared backwards again until jettisoning himself forward with prodigious velocity, completing a full 360° turn, swinging and swinging round the spindle several times, uniting earth and sky in one fluid continuous motion, prompting everyone to exult in Triboulet's feat, chanting:

A-----OH!

A-----OH!

A-----OH!

PIXss!

When Triboulet dismounted the swing, he seized a megaphone from the ship-car and declaimed through it, inviting the crowd to join the troupe on the field and to participate in the swinging, for aside from the smaller swings the troupe had

erected for the kids, there were larger swings of various types for adults to swing in, too, and so as the troupe carried around Circo Massimo crashing cymbals, booming parade drums, and sounding off with trombones and trumpets and instruments of every kind, the spectators playfully jostled their way to the swings and rocked back and forth, swinging one another with great pleasure, but while several people attempted to mount Triboulet's swing, no one could span an arc even half that of his arcs, nor swing for more than two minutes, and peering at them through his haunting mask, he blew upon his *salpinx* and released himself into the fray and a general euphoria suffused everyone in the Circo, and as that state of becoming overtook them, that which originally isolated each of them from one another began to dissipate and instead of being like disparate, isolated stars in the cosmos, they felt like integral elements of a constellation, if not like dust in the cosmos, and that they were not separate either from the goats, monkeys, and hyenas that surrounded and wandered amongst them, but were all of a piece, folded together like entrails, though the animals may even have been of a higher plateau, and they expressed themselves not through speech but through gestures, and as they danced, their movements conveyed enchantment, their limbs fluid, graceful, rhythmic, uncanny sounds emanating from them as they exulted in their euphoria, night engulfing the culmination of day and turning toward the future.

In the midst of the darkness, Triboulet led several of the women to the southern end of Circo Massimo and kneeling before the tower, he took a goat by the front legs, lifted it into the air, and kissed it, after which the women seized the animal

and brought it to the ground, firmly holding it in place and softly caressing its body to instill in it a degree of calmness; then, in one expeditious gesture, the goat was beheaded: — when its stately head fell to the earth, Triboulet lifted it by the horns and gazed into its eerie face as the women continued to hold the body of the animal, which trembled and convulsed in their hands, the viscous fluids gushing out into a bowl they had placed beneath it, the organs straining to emerge from the severed neck as if it were a womb. Once it ceased twitching, the women held the goat aloft and Triboulet slowly cut its belly open, then tore away the skin to divest the beast of its organs, which were collected in another bowl. Removing the entrails from the vessel, Triboulet gently placed them on the ground and by torchlight, stared at them, studying them under the flames, examining the folds, color, and texture, and he began envisioning something as he meditated on the turns within the coils of the intestines—gazing back at the stately head of the goat, he was transfixed by its hieratic smile as the women cleaned the animal and then, after beheading several others, began cooking them to end their acts with a feast.

The next day, the troupe began gathering masses of imperial porphyry and transporting it to Circo Massimo and Villa Pamphili. There was such an abundant volume of the igneous purple rock that it was startling, and the continuous conveyance of it was almost more of a spectacle than the troupe's customary parading through the streets, perhaps due in part to the fact that no one expected such a rag tag band of musicians, jongleurs, and acrobats—or whatever it was they were—to engage in such laborious activities, but they seemed

to thrive on difficult tasks and exhibited the resilience and resourcefulness of pioneers forging entirely new terrain, which gained them the respect of the more orthodox Romans, who found their regular antics unsettling if not immoral. When questioned who they were and where they hailed from, they rejoined that they were just strangers and pilgrims, wandering here and there as impulse saw fit, guided by their instincts, propelled almost seemed by the wind, or some unarticulated aim discerned by Triboulet. What was most impressive was when they began assembling large portions of the porphyry in Circo Massimo into some jagged incomprehensible mass, lifting through a system of pulleys and winches one piece of the rock on top of another till it resembled some monumental misshapen blob, the plagioclase crystals glistening in the spring sun, the rock's dark purple hue a stark contrast to the blasted dirt and trampled grass of the arena. As they continued to construct the mass, it was found even more astonishing, for over time it grew in height to 160 meters, which made some wonder if they were building a new Tower of Babel, a view rejected by the Vatican and other religious authorities but which many of the public retained for several weeks, hoping in fact that, as with that ancient structure, this one too would meet its doom, for more than being incensed by an ambitious and grandiose act, many people were unsettled by the structure because they found it enigmatic, incomprehensible, a monument to absurdity all too characteristic of the senseless, bland, academic art that dominated the latter half of the twentieth century, the con-art of conceptualizations that could never be animated into form but only theorized in explanatory placards

placed adjacent to a work as if it were a cripple yearning for a crutch. Although many expected the troupe to construct something absurd if not outrageous, no one reckoned that they would have spent so considerable an amount of time devoted to building an entity that insipid and jejune. But their efforts were only just beginning, and what many finally realized was that they were not building a Babelean Tower let alone sculpting—if one could even refer to such a collocation of material as sculpting—some arid monument to mediocrity before which fatigued cynics could stand in plain awe, worshipping ordinariness, interpreting it as sublime so as to feel as if the monumental is actually within their grasp. No. Like those of a medieval guild, the members of the troupe were slowly, anonymously, carefully giving form to something, were not merely collocating material, but actually shaping it, molding it, giving it definition, patiently birthing something that, eventually, would be completely animated, would that is be given dynamic arresting life, like a species evolving, mercilessly shedding its primitive, archaic layers in its struggle to become what it is, in its drive for futurity, to destroy all that retards its continuous and often necessarily violent transformation. One sensed in their devotion to the sculpture the burgeoning of something terrible, something tremendous, if not perhaps even cataclysmic, as if the truly new were on the verge, ready to burst forth from the rock, to split reality into pieces or rather, to obliterate a millennium of obfuscating encrustations as they were pitching the rock with their chisels and mallets and roughing out the general shape of the sculpture, which remained beyond everyone's discernment yet was still utterly bewitching.

And in the midst of this revelation, as the monumental purple edifice was emerging into an early stage of its destined form, news flashes hurriedly reported that, unbeknownst to the local residents of Kent, England, and to the Archbishop of the church, who was elsewhere at the time, Canterbury Cathedral had been completely covered in thin folds of black polyamide "in the dead of night." The unknown perpetrators of the bizarre act, which locals found perplexing if not incendiary, were unfortunately aided the police said by the entirety of the county of Kent having suffered from an unexpected blackout. When the prank was reported, power had still yet to be restored. Once the fire department finally arrived and attempted to remove the fabric, the firefighters were jolted by high levels of static electricity, and when rippled by a small breeze, electrical charges continued to emerge from the fabric as it billowed, undulating against the building, popping and crackling in a frenetic dance, the jolts streaming around the old edifice like elongated electric snakes, actually searing parts of the fabric and, as was soon realized, much of the building, too, making it seem like thin black snakes wound themselves around the entire structure as if to strangle it. Once finally neutralized, the firemen began to unravel the fabric, and as they were removing it from the building and more and more bystanders began to gather round, gazing at the seemingly innocuous but beguiling spectacle both with awe and trepidation and not sure whether to admire or fear it, one of them noticed that, when held at a certain angle and the sun streamed through the fabric and made it shimmer, the material appeared to contain rows and rows of script. Under closer examination,

the fabric it was revealed resembled a patchwork of sewn together broadsheets, not actual broadsheets, but a simulacrum of hundreds and hundreds of 18<sup>th</sup> century style broadsheets; however, no one at the site could decipher the script, nor did they know what language it was written in, but it was presumed by the police to be “something ancient.” Soon, it was discovered that an even more disconcerting and mysterious event had occurred—as layer upon layer of fabric was unwound from the cathedral, everyone present was terribly alarmed by the strange occurrence that, at 8:00 AM, Kent was silent. Bell Harry, the oldest bell in the church, normally rung every morning at exactly 8:00 AM to signal the opening of the church, did not sound. It was the first time since the 12<sup>th</sup> century that such a silence pervaded Kent: — the deathly quiet was in and of itself terrifying, a haunting, inhuman silence, bringing even atheists, agnostics, and the lukewarm apathetic horde to the scene of the crime. After the fabric was at last removed and the Archbishop and the police finally entered the cathedral, they discovered to their disbelief that not only was Bell Harry gone, but that every single one of the 21 bells of Canterbury Cathedral were “missing.” Oxford Tower, Arundel Tower, and Angel Steeple, commonly known as the Bell Harry Tower, were, astoundingly, all somehow divested of their bells, which ranged in weight from nearly two to three and a half tons each. Once the news reached those outside, a vagrant turned to the crowd and, laughing, regaled them with a tale, proclaiming that, “while all ye were sleepin’ I saw the culprits, O yes, true fable true, and them great bells were hanging from a mares neck, ’tis right as day is night, but it was loaded with

brie and fresh herring and sausages, too, and I canted away for I wanted some of that hoggish stuff, beleeve for a truth, for I saw where they gathered together, sulfured, hopurymated, moiled and bepiſt,” and he started micturating, unleaſing a flood at their feet, proclaiming he “juſt wanted to ſhare with you my wine, but only in ſport, for there’s nuthin’ like drawing out your *mentul* into the open aire,” and he was quickly ſhut-tled away, though his unruly laughter echoed through the crowd, and his laſt peculiar words hung in the air like circling crows: It was Aesma-Daeva, good ol’ Modo-Mahu you right attenuated aſſes! Dem bells dangled from ‘is mare and ‘is hair!” but no one knew what in the name of Chriſt he was talking about. As preſs releases inſtantly ſhot around the world, it was recounted that Dunſtan, Mary, Crundale, Elphy, Thomas, and Jeſus were all miſſing, though not the original Jeſus, which led to bizarre and comical inquiries becauſe ſome believers around the world actually thought that it was being reported that Jeſus himſelf—Himſelf—had returned but it was not the original Jeſus but another Jeſus and they were perplexed firſt by how it was poſſible for Jeſus to get loſt and ſecond by how it was poſſible to determine whether Jeſus was actually Jeſus and not another Jeſus yet, ſince there was only one Jeſus, anyone claiming to be Jeſus that waſn’t Jeſus was clearly not Jeſus, though the Mexicans did make that confuſing, and others argued that ſince Jeſus was the incarnation of God that what muſt have happened was that both God and Jeſus had returned at the ſame time and when ſeeing God ſome people thought He was Jeſus and when ſeeing Jeſus ſome people thought He was God, while others couldn’t tell

them apart, and then complicated theological discussions ensued as to how it would be possible to distinguish between God and Jesus if both returned at the same time and, if it took 2000 years for him—Him—to return, which was unlikely since he promised that “his generation” would live “to see it all,” meaning those of his time would witness the very passing away of heaven and earth, but just to hypothesize, if he did return, would he look older (did he age in the interim between leaving and returning, or did he remain perpetually 33 as Mary remained perpetually intact, both vaginally and—of course—anally?), would he still have a beard and the same clothes, or would he be in modern dress, though still have the crown of thorns, stigmata, etc., a confusion that arose simply because the news reports neglected to include the important detail that Dunstan, Mary & alia were not actually “missing persons,” abducted employees that is of the cathedral, but bells, the names of but some of the missing bells of Canterbury Cathedral and that the original Jesus was not actually missing for the original Jesus—the bell—was destroyed in an earthquake when the campanile of the cathedral fell and the Jesus that was rehung was not in fact the same Jesus of course but another Jesus entirely, although some still referred to it as Jesus, despite the fact that there is not two Jesuses, just one, though in the age of the *Überdoppelt*, few seemed to be concerned with the value of originals and were perfectly satisfied with near-exact replicas and thus wouldn’t mind a virtual savior, too. Aside from discovering the enigma of the missing bells, initial local reports also stated that the dean, canons, and other employees of the cathedral were all dead, with journalists speculating

upon the motive for their possible murder, and hints of some anti-Catholic conspiracy began to arise and spread like a contagion. The employees though were not dead but, doctors diagnosed, in deep catatonic stupors which, it was predicted, they would eventually waken from, at which point the police hoped to be able to gain much needed information about what had happened the night of the crime. In the midst of the outrage, confusion, and perplexity, the police first thought the strange incident to be an art school prank, or a group of eco-terrorists imitating the work of a long-forgotten and insignificant “environmental artist” as a statement and act of homage, but the stunt was, they believed, too elaborate and complicated for mere art students to “pull off,” whereas it seemed far too uncharacteristic to be the act of eco-terrorists, who, they didn’t think, would use the simulacra of broadsheets to make a statement since they were far more overt and prone to obsessively composing all of their proclamations in Helvetica, so the actual culprits remained unidentified. Although nothing in the church was physically destroyed, the incident brought to mind the recent vandalism in Israel and while various authorities speculated as to who the possible culprits were, everyone from the members of England’s black magic sects to terrorists, radical protestant reformers, and the acolytes of the newly revived Abbey of Thelema all claimed responsibility for the event. As police began to investigate further, linguists were enlisted to decipher the strange script embedded in the fabric which, at last, was reported to be an ancient form of Aramaic, thus definitively ruling out the art students and eco-terrorists as possible suspects. Although the linguists could discern the script

was Aramaic, they were not able to actually read it, thereby further delaying the resolution of the riddle, which would only be solved once the Aramaic scholars that were newly summoned arrived, or so they presumed. Over the course of the ensuing days, as more facts were being unveiled, county officials declared that there was not in fact an “organic power outage” but that the incident was actually a load shedding or “rolling blackout” and that, most probably, whoever was behind the theft of the bells also intentionally engineered the power outage in order to facilitate their crime. When electricity was at last restored, the Archbishop went to the Norman crypt to meditate upon the disturbing affairs and saw to his consternation that the statue of St. Augustine, the first Archbishop of Canterbury, was hanging by his feet from one of the high arches in the east end of the crypt.

With the occurrence of such worrying events, it was no wonder that Triboulet and his troupe were welcome relief from the unsettling inexplicabilities besieging the world, events to which few people knew how to respond, except, generally, with outright rage, but outbursts of that sort proved to be indicative of nothing but impotence. Laughter, Triboulet thought, was the powerful and liberating response. Yet no one in Circo Massimo was thinking of such affairs and after admiring the initial genesis of the troupe’s monumental sculpture and relishing the perplexity it provoked, unbeknownst to all, Triboulet left the scene to climb Arco di Giano. When he reached the top of the arc, he spread several goat skins on the ground, then laid down on the animal bedding, remaining completely still. In that motionless, silent state of becoming,



## COLOPHON



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THE

ABD

Spring 2032: an enigmatic band-leader named Triboulet arrives by helicopter in Rome, where his carnivalesque troupe awaits with a legion of animals and unruly kids. When provoking states of joyous panic through their ritualistic frenzies, the troupe's arrival proves restorative, for the world is beset with famines, plagues, & religious conflicts, which Triboulet seeks to neutralize with freeing laughter.

As Triboulet and his troupe begin constructing strange edifices in the Eternal City, sacred sites around the world suffer terrible, often beguiling forms of vandalism, and rumors abound that the Christ has actually finally returned. Although radical Islamic sects claim responsibility for the vandalism, the culprits remain unknown: is it the Jihadists, anarcho-atheist intel-

lectuals, or eco-terrorists? Religious and political authorities grow leery of the troupe & suspicious of Triboulet, whose true identity remains a mystery. The very future of the world is at stake, & while touring Israel during Christmas, Triboulet & his raucous band of pranksters bear witness to the world's pivotal crossing into a new reality.

Albert Camus noted that 'the metaphysics of the worst' expresses itself in a literature of damnation and argued that 'we have still not yet found the exit' from such literature. With his second novel, Hanshe has found the way out, offering in fact something not only promising, but astounding, a pathway that is into a new reality, into a 'physics of the best.' *The Abdication* is a true ero(t)omic epic.

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