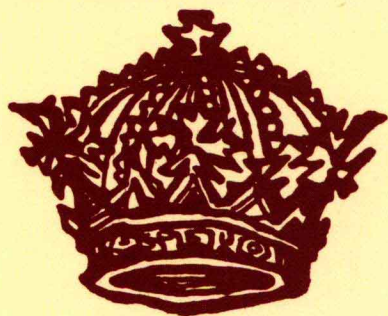
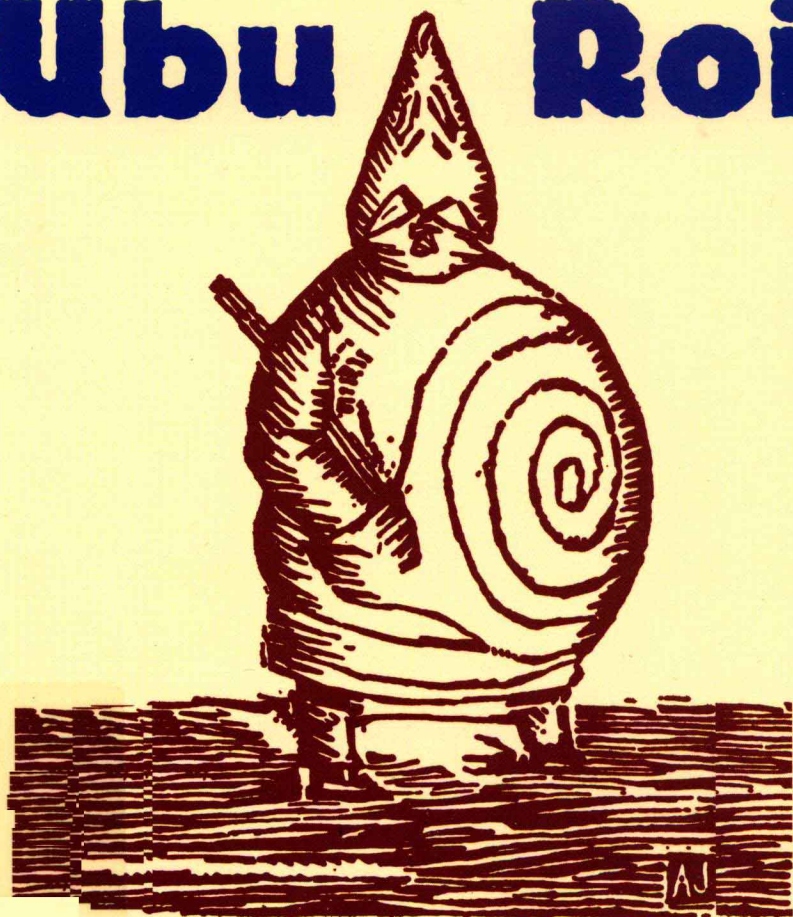


DOVER · THRIFT · EDITIONS

Alfred Jarry

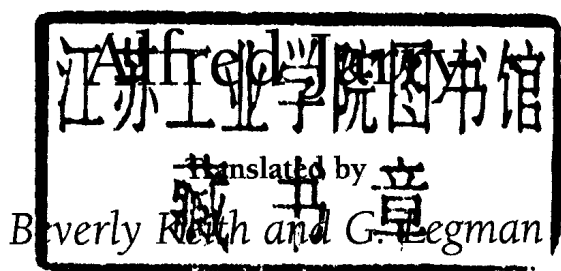


Ubu Roi



DOVER · THRIFT · EDITIONS

UBU ROI



DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC.
MINEOLA, NEW YORK

DOVER THRIFT EDITIONS

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Bibliographical Note

Variations of the text of *Ubu Roi* were published in 1893 and 1894. The text performed at the premiere was first published in 1896. The play was first performed—with scenery painted by Vuillard, Bonnard, Serusier, and Toulouse-Lautrec—in December 1896.

This Dover edition, first published in 2003, is an unabridged republication of the "King Turd" section of *King Turd*, published by Boar's Head Books, New York, in 1953. Translation is by Beverly Keith and G. (Gershon) Legman. The Note was prepared especially for this edition.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Jarry, Alfred, 1873–1907.

[*Ubu roi*. English]

Ubu Roi / Alfred Jarry ; translated by Beverly Keith and G. Legman.
p. cm. — (Dover thrift editions)

ISBN-13: 978-0-486-42687-7 (pbk.)

ISBN-10: 0-486-42687-4 (pbk.)

1. Keith, Beverly. II. Legman, G. (Gershon), 1917– III. Title.

PQ2619.A65 U313 2003

842'.8—dc21

2002034821

Manufactured in the United States by Courier Corporation

42687404

www.doverpublications.com

NOTE

The original production of *Ubu roi ou les polonais* (*King Ubu or the Poles*) was staged December 9, 1896 (a dress rehearsal before an invited audience), and December 10 (the premiere and, as it turned out, last performance). Commotion, though not quite the “riots” of legend—arguments, shouted insults, puzzled or annoyed departures—broke out at both performances. Accounts of the production sometimes confuse or conflate the events of the two nights, but all agree that they were memorable evenings in the theater.

Ubu Roi derived from a precocious satire by the teenaged Jarry and some school friends. Its various sources may also include *Macbeth*, the character of the politician Thiers, Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*, Chabrier’s *Le roi malgré lui*, Brillat-Savarin’s *Physiologie du goût*, and undoubtedly others. It is a preposterous farce, an anarchic parody, an energetically violent and scatological gesture against propriety, smugness, and stupidity in general, as well as against the tame theatrical conventions of the time. The character Ubu originated as a burlesque of a much unloved teacher, the unfortunate M. Hébert, a fat, ineffectual professor at the lycée at Rennes, who later became a reactionary local politician. Over the years Jarry worked on the play, Ubu came to embody every despicable quality: he is pompous, vain, cruel, stupid, murderous, cowardly, greedy, and authoritarian—together an exemplary authority figure.

Ubu Roi’s literary significance lies in its poetic quality. Its uninhibited tastelessness is practically sublime, and it is a lot funnier than *Hamlet* (another possible source), in which corpses also pile up. For the Théâtre de l’Oeuvre, which mounted the 1896 production, *Ubu Roi* was, in Steegmuller’s words, “the catastrophe that made it famous.” The occasion became legendary, a high point of the pre-1914 avant-garde.

Alfred Jarry (1873–1907), writer, philosopher, pistol-packing midget bicyclist, was a prominent, strangely beloved figure in the advanced artistic and literary circles of Paris from the mid-1890s until his death. Only twenty three when *Ubu* was staged, Jarry went on to create a corpus of straight-faced comic essays, plays, poems, novels, and speculative philosophical prose. Among his better known works today are the second and third plays of the *Ubu* cycle, *Ubu Enchaîné* (*Ubu Bound*, 1900) and *Ubu Cocu* (*Ubu Cuckolded*, 1901); the collection *Minutes de sable mémorial* (1894); the novels *Les jours et les nuits* (1897) and *Le surmâle*, 1902; *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien* (1898, published 1911); and the famous essay “How to Construct a Time Machine” (1900). He has been seen as an ancestor of Dada, Futurism, Surrealism, Artaud’s Theater of Cruelty, the Theater of the Absurd, even of Brecht, and continues to influence artists, writers, and thinkers today.

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The present translators have chosen to render the title character’s name as “King Turd,” which is certainly in keeping with the grossness of his character and the language of the play, but the reader should know that “Ubu” is in origin a nonsense word, not specifically scatological. (The derivative “Ubuesque,” has come to mean, in French and English, “ludicrous” or “absurd.”)

As Jarry explains in his curtain speech, the action of *Ubu Roi* “takes place in Poland—that is to say, nowhere.” This is not a Polish joke but a reference, in 1896, to the Polish state’s nonexistence, having been wiped off the map a hundred years before after a series of partitions by its more powerful neighbors.

The illustrations that accompany the text, including the frontispiece, are by Jarry himself.

PREFACE

[Spoken by Jarry before the curtain at the first performance of UBU ROI at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, Paris, 10 December 1896.]

Ladies and Gentlemen : It would be superfluous – aside from a certain absurdity in an author's speaking of his own play – for me to come here and preface with a few words this presentation of UBU ROI, after such famous critics have cared to discuss it : among whom I must thank – and with these few all the others – MM. Silvestre, Mendès, Scholl, Lorrain and Bauer ; if I did not feel that their benevolence had found Ubu's belly big with more satirical symbols than we can possibly pump up tonight.

The Swedenborgian philosopher, Mésès, has excellently compared rudimentary creations with the most perfect, and embryonic beings with the most complete, in that the former lack all irregularities, protuberances and qualities, which leaves them in more or less spherical form, like the ovum and M. Ubu, while the latter have added so many personal details that they remain equally spherical, following the axiom that the most polished object is that which presents the greatest number of sharp corners. That is why you are free to see in M. Ubu however many allusions you care to, or else a simple puppet – a schoolboy's caricature of one of his professors who personified for him all the ugliness in the world. It is this aspect that the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre will present tonight.

Our actors have been willing to depersonalize themselves for two evenings, and to act behind masks, in order to express more perfectly the inner man, the soul of these overgrown

puppets you are about to see. The play having been put on prematurely, and with more enthusiasm than anything else, Ubu hasn't had time to get his real mask – which is very inconvenient to wear anyway – and the other characters will be fitted out, like him, somewhat approximately.

It seemed very important, if we were to be quite like puppets (Ubu Roi is a play that was never written for puppets, but for actors pretending to be puppets, which is not the same thing), for us to have carnival music, and the orchestral parts have been allotted to various brasses, gongs and speaking-trumpet horns that we haven't had time to collect. We don't hold it too much against the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre. Mainly we wanted to see Ubu incarnate in the versatile talent of M. Gémier, and tonight and tomorrow night are the only two performances that M. Ginisty and his production of *Villiers de l'Isle-Adam* have been free to relinquish to us.

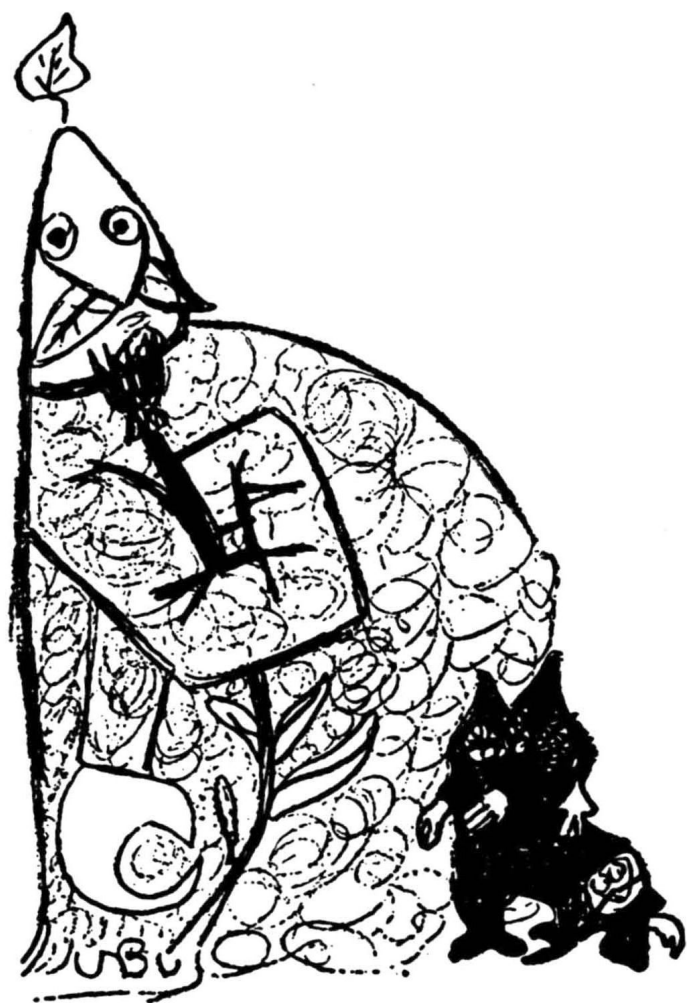
We will proceed with the three acts that have been rehearsed, and two that have been rehearsed with certain cuts. I have made all the cuts the actors wanted, even cutting several passages indispensable to the meaning and equilibrium of the play, while leaving in at their request certain scenes I would have been glad to cut. For however much we'd like to be marionnettes, we haven't hung all our actors on strings, which, even if it weren't absurd, would have complicated things badly. In the same way, we haven't been too literal about our crowd scenes, whereas in a puppet-show a handful of strings and pulleys will serve to command a whole army. You must expect to see important personages like M. Ubu and the Czar forced to gallop neck-and-neck on cardboard horses that we've spent the night painting in order to supply the action. The first three acts, at least, and the final scenes, will be played complete, as they were written.

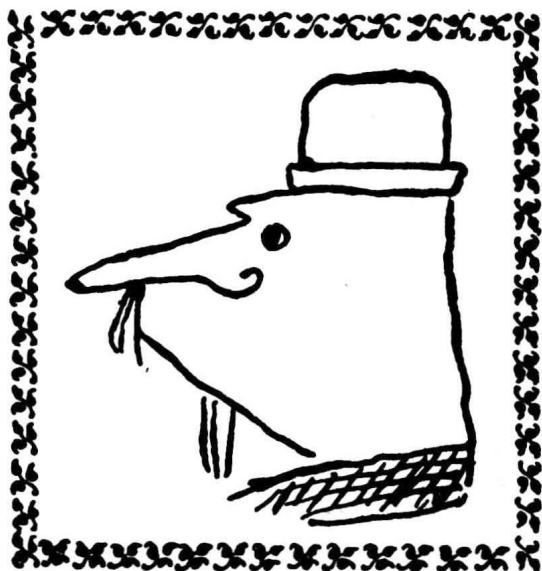
Our stage setting is very appropriate, because even though it's an easy trick to lay your scene in eternity, and, for instance, to have someone shoot off a revolver in the year one-thousand-and-such, here you must accept doors that open

out on plains covered with snow falling from a clear sky, chimneys adorned with clocks splitting open to serve as doors, and palm-trees growing at the foot of bedsteads for little elephants sitting on shelves to munch on. As to our orchestra that isn't here, we'll miss only its brilliance and tone. The themes for UBU will be performed offstage by various pianos and drums. As to the action which is about to begin, it takes place in Poland – that is to say, nowhere.

COMPOSITION
OF
THE ORCHESTRA

Oboes
Pipes
Sausages
Flageolets
Big Bass
Transverse Flutes
Little Bassoon
Grand Flute
Big Bassoon
Triple Bassoon
Shrill white Trumpets
Little black Trumpets
Horns
Sackbutts
Trombones
Green Oliphants
Bagpipes
Fipple-flutes
Drum
Tubas
Kettledrums
Bass Drum
Grand Organ





CHARACTERS

PAPA TURD

MAMA TURD

CAPTAIN BORDURE

KING WENCESLAUS

QUEEN ROSAMUNDE

BOLESLAUS
LADISLAUS
BUGGERLAUS

} *their sons*

THE GHOSTS OF THEIR ANCESTORS

GENERAL LASKY

STANISLAS LECZINSKI

JAN SOBIESKI

NICHOLAS RENSKY
THE EMPEROR ALEXIS
GYRON
PILE
COC CYX } *Champions*
CONSPIRATORS AND SOLDIERS
PEOPLE
MICHAEL FEODOROVITCH
NOBLES
MAGISTRATES
COUNCILLORS
FINANCIERS
LACKEYS OF PHYNANCE
PEASANTS
THE WHOLE RUSSIAN ARMY
THE WHOLE POLISH ARMY
THE GUARDS OF MAMA TURD
A CAPTAIN
THE BEAR
THE MONEY-GO-MARE
THE DEBRAINING MACHINE
THE CREW
THE SEA-CAPTAIN

THIS BOOK
IS DEDICATED
TO
MARCEL SCHWOB

y thenne Papa Turd
shooke the peare-tree
long sithens named
SHAKES-PEARE by y^e
Englysshe, and under
thatte name hadd frō
it manie ffine maniu-
script tragædies.

UBU ROI
OR
THE POLES

UBU ROI

ACT I

SCENE I

[Poland – that is to say, nowhere.]

PAPA TURD, MAMA TURD

PAPA TURD. Pshit !

MAMA TURD. Oh ! that's a fine thing. What a pig you are, Papa Turd !

PAPA TURD. Watch out I don't kill you, Mama Turd !

MAMA TURD. It isn't me you ought to kill, Papa Turd, it's someone else.

PAPA TURD. Now by my green candle, I don't understand.

MAMA TURD. What ! Papa Turd, you're content with your lot ?

PAPA TURD. Now by my green candle, pshit, Madam, certainly yes, I'm content. I could be content with less. After all, I'm Captain of Dragoons, Privy Councillor to King Wenceslaus, Knight of the Red Eagle of Poland, and formerly King of Aragon. What more do you want ?

MAMA TURD. What ! After being King of Aragon, you can settle down to reviewing fifty flunkies armed with cabbage-cutters, when you could put the crown of Poland on your head where the crown of Aragon used to be ?

PAPA TURD. Ah, Mama Turd, I don't understand a word you're saying.

MAMA TURD. You are so stupid.

PAPA TURD. Now by my green candle, King Wenceslaus is still alive. And suppose he croaks – hasn't he got loads of children ?

MAMA TURD. What prevents you from massacring the whole family and putting yourself in their place ?

PAPA TURD. Ah ! Mama Turd, you do me wrong. Watch out you don't end up in the soup.

MAMA TURD. Poor unfortunate, when I'm in the soup who'll patch the seat of your pants ?

PAPA TURD. Is that so ! And if you don't, then what ? Isn't my ass just like everybody else's ?

MAMA TURD. If I were in your place, that ass – I'd want to plant on a throne. You could make lots of money, and eat all the sausages you want, and roll through the streets in a carriage.

PAPA TURD. If I were King, I'd have a big wide-brimmed hat, the kind I had in Aragon, the one those dirty Spaniards went and stole.

MAMA TURD. You could even get yourself a great big umbrella and a magnificent cape that would hang to your heels.

PAPA TURD. Ah ! I yield to temptation. Buggerly pshit, pshitterly bugger, if I ever run into him in a corner of the woods, I'll give him a bad half hour !

MAMA TURD. Good, Papa Turd ! Now you're talking like a man.

PAPA TURD. No, no ! Me – Captain of Dragoons – massacre the King of Poland ? I'd sooner die !

MAMA TURD (*aside*). Oh, pshit ! – (*Aloud.*) So you're going to stay poor as a rat, Papa Turd ?

PAPA TURD. Bluebelly ! by my green candle, I'd rather be poor as a thin honest rat than rich like a wicked fat cat.

MAMA TURD. And the broad-brimmed hat ? And the umbrella ? And the great cape ?

PAPA TURD. And then what, Mama Turd ?

[*He leaves, banging the door.*]