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## Ahead And Behind

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## Francis Picabia

### AHEAD AND BEHIND

I had a friend once, a Swiss fellow, Hans Bonkers by name. He was living in Peru, twelve thousand feet up. He had gone there exploring a few years before, and had lost his heart to the charms of a strange Indian woman, who had driven him utterly out of his mind with love unrequited. Little by little he had begun to waste away until, finally, he was too weak even to leave his cabin. A Peruvian doctor who had accompanied him on his travels treated him as best he could for a *dementia praecox*, which he felt, however, to be quite incurable.

One night, a sudden influenza epidemic struck the little Indian village where Hans Bonkers was being cared for. Every one of the natives contracted the disease, without exception. In a few days, of the original two hundred, one hundred seventy-eight were dead. In a panic, the Peruvian doctor hurried back to Lima ... My friend, stricken like all the rest, lay languishing with fever.

Now, it happened that all of the Indians had one or more dogs, who soon had no choice, if they were to survive, but to eat their dead masters. And so they proceeded to dismember their cadavers. One of them came trotting into Hans Bonkers' hut, carrying in its mouth the head of the Indian woman he adored ... He recognized it at once. The shock, I imagine, was so intense that it jarred him back to his senses, curing him of both his fever and his madness. He took the head in his hands and, with renewed vigor, playfully threw it across the room, telling the dog to "go fetch!" Once, twice, three times . . . And the beast would dutifully retrieve it, clutching it by the nose, in its teeth.

But the third time Hans Bonkers bowled a little too hard, and the head smashed against the wall. As the brain rolled out he was delighted to observe that it consisted of two smooth, rounded hemispheres, that looked for all the world like a pair of firm buttocks ...

From *Jésus-Christ Rastaquouère*  
Translated from the French by  
**Norman R. Shapiro**