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Resonances:

Marcel Duchamp and the Comte de Lautréamont

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Resonances: Marcel Duchamp and the Comte de Lautréamont

by

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Dedication

In memory of Roger Cushing Jr., Madeline Cushing and Mary Lou Cavicchi, whose love, support, generosity, and encouragement led me to this place.

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Abstract

Resonances: Marcel Duchamp and the Comte de Lautréamont

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This thesis explores the relationship between Marcel Duchamp's oeuvre and the texts of the Comte de Lautréamont, arguing that the author's works comprise an overlooked and undervalued source of interest and ideas for the artist. Scholars have done an extraordinary job of documenting and analyzing a number of Duchamp's literary sources and inspirations. Their work has elucidated the roles of Raymond Roussel, Alfred Jarry, Stéphane Mallarmé, Jules Laforgue, and Jean-Pierre Brisset, among others, for Duchamp. The work of Lautréamont, however, has received proportionally little attention, despite several indications of its importance for the artist. Among the few who have proposed such a connection, none have yet offered a broadly documented or sustained argument. Other historians, generally working under the premise that Lautréamont only came to Duchamp's attention by way of the Surrealists, have explicitly rejected the possibility that the Uruguayan-French poet had any meaningful position in Duchamp's library prior to the Surrealist championing of the author. This thesis proposes otherwise, making the case that Lautréamont was more fundamentally important to

Duchamp than yet realized.

Historical documents as well as statements by the artist himself and those closest to him suggest a stronger engagement by Duchamp with the works of Lautréamont than has been previously proposed. This relationship seems to have begun by as early as 1912, well in advance of the Surrealists' discovery of the author, and it lasted throughout Duchamp's life. Furthermore, an examination of Duchamp's body of work demonstrates a number of strategic and thematic resonances between artist and author that reinforce what the archival evidence suggests. These resonances should be understood as open readings, rather than exclusive readings. They are proposed as additions to the existing constellation of understanding of Duchamp's oeuvre, rather than as foreclosures upon other ways of reading Duchamp's body of work.

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Chapter I

Introduction

While scholars have written at length, and with great success, upon the importance of literary sources for Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968)—Raymond Roussel (1877-1933), Alfred Jarry (1873-1907), Jules Laforgue (1860-1877), and Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) foremost among them—they have frequently afforded the Comte de Lautréamont (1846-1870), née Isidore-Lucien Ducasse, only an auxiliary role within the artist's library. At the root of this assessment may be the unfounded belief that Duchamp discovered Lautréamont only via the Surrealists. This is characteristic of a widespread historical bias that has culturally bound the author to the Surrealist movement while frequently excluding him as a source in other artistic contexts. Michel Sanouillet, for example, chided in his *Dada à Paris* that the "role of Lautréamont" for the Dadaists—"so often emphasized, but whose importance, if not existence, Duchamp, Picabia, and Tzara, among others, were unaware of in 1916—belongs to the imaginary history."[1] Surveying the literature on Duchamp, it seems that many scholars have heeded his indictment, whether consciously or not. But is this position unassailable? The available evidence suggests otherwise.

Duchamp's correspondence and interviews reveal that the artist knew Lautréamont's work as early as 1912, more than half a decade before André Breton (1896-1966) and the other Surrealists. Furthermore, he held the author's writings in high esteem throughout his life. Comments offered by the artist himself, and by those closest to him, including Man Ray, suggest the actual depth of Duchamp's interest in the author. Moreover, Duchamp was not alone in his knowledge of Lautréamont's work in advance of Surrealism. Numerous artists and poets in Paris and the United States, within Duchamp's social circle as well as outside of it, were familiar with

[1] For Sanouillet's remark, see Michel Sanouillet and Anne Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris*, trans. Sharmila Ganguly, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 5.

the poet in advance of the First World War. In some cases, these figures knew of Lautréamont decades before Breton and his cohort (re)discovered the author's work.

This revelation calls for a reconsideration of the relationship between Duchamp's output and that of Lautréamont, seeking thematic and strategic comparisons in order to identify meaningful resonances between the oeuvres of artist and author. This is in no way an overturning of previous scholars' work on Duchamp's sources, literary and otherwise. Rather, this thesis is meant as an addition to those constellations of interpretation. Ideally, it corrects a fault that has left Duchamp's responses to Lautréamont's writing under-considered, while, at the same time, it respects the polyvalence of readings that both Duchamp and Lautréamont would likely have approved of, if not insisted upon.

A close reading of Lautréamont's only two works, *Les Chants de Maldoror* and *Poésies I and II*, in relation to objects and gestures from Duchamp's life and body of work, points to a number of key categorical features held in common (figs. 1 and 2). In the artist's work, beginning before the First World War, issues of appropriations, ironic detachment, the humorous use of scientific method and language, reimagined scientific laws, and distended causalities begin to appear in concurrence with his familiarity with the author. Elsewhere among Duchamp's activities and productions after 1912, themes of wandering and fractured/multiplied identity that run throughout Lautréamont's writing also resonate with similar developments within the artist's life and production.

This is not to suggest that Lautréamont was the only source for Duchamp of these ideas. The author was plainly not. Nonetheless, Lautréamont remains extremely important, if under-explored, among Duchamp's literary sources. After all, Lautréamont belonged to the select few literary sources that the artist acknowledged to friends and interviewers. And Duchamp's

commentaries demonstrate the high esteem in which he held the author. Ultimately, however, the artist's sources extended well beyond the confinements of the written domain. The reader should note therefore that these literary connections belong in turn, as a group, to a larger array of sources for Duchamp that included technology, philosophy, and the visual arts.

In addition to his own reading, Duchamp may have encountered Lautréamont's strategies, images, and ideas through indirect channels—via friends who were familiar with the author, or by way of other writers who highlighted the author's works. One case in point is that of the eccentric and intentionally provocative writing of Alfred Jarry, who knew and celebrated Lautréamont's work. It is clear that Duchamp would have encountered tenets of Lautréamont's thinking, as well as the author's name in print, in Jarry's writing. Moreover, Duchamp's milieu after 1911 included figures who not only knew Jarry's works, but who also had been acquainted with the author before his death in 1907. These persons represent additional lines of potential transmission. Whatever combination of first-hand and indirect exposure Duchamp had to Lautréamont's work, echoes of *Les Chants de Maldoror* and *Poésies* appear ranged across Duchamp's life and work, evident even in his final projects. The historical problem at hand is one of picking out threads in a tangled weave that Duchamp tended to make willfully obscure and interrogating those strands so that a fuller picture emerges. Tempered with a modicum of skepticism, it is my hope that this exploration will contribute to a richer portrait of Duchamp and his sources.

Chapter II

Duchamp before the First World War: A Literary and Artistic Milieu

It will be advantageous to commence this examination of Duchamp and Lautréamont on the firmest footing—among the documents belonging to the artist's history, and with a cursory understanding of the environment in which the artist first read the author. These surroundings fostered Duchamp's interest in literature, and they drove the artist to seek out his own poetic sources. While it is difficult to determine who initially introduced Marcel Duchamp to the writing of the Comte de Lautréamont, the timing and cultural setting in which Duchamp became aware of the author are another matter. On this subject, one item in particular stands apart from the rest in its specificity and surety. In a December 1946 letter to close friend, and sometimes lover, Yvonne Chastel, Duchamp wrote:

> Thank you for your letter and the book which I also got. The outside of the Lautréamont doesn't ring a bell but the inside looks familiar. It might be the first Lautréamont I ever had in 1912 or thereabouts. In any case, I would like to keep it as one of the 5 or 6 books that make up my entire library. Thank you for having given it to me or given it back to me.[2]

The "Lautréamont" volume to which Duchamp referred must have been the author's *Les Chants de Maldoror*, rather than the author's short two-part text, *Poésies I and II*. The evidence for this assertion derives from each work's availability in 1912. It would not be until 1919, at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, that André Breton would discover the only original copy

[2] (For full letter, see Appendix A) "Merci de la lettre et des livres bien arrivés. . . . L'extérieur du Lautréamont ne me rappelle bien mais la typographie intérieur me dit quelque chose. Ce pourrait être le premier Lautréamont que j'avais eu en 1912 ou environs. En tout cas j'aimerais le garder comme un des 5 ou 6 livres qui forment toute ma bibliothèque.__ Merci de me l'avoir donné si non redonné." Marcel Duchamp, *Affectt | Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk, trans. Jill Taylor (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 258. For some of the intricacies of the relationship between Duchamp and Chastel, their voyage together to Argentina, and the circle of extra-paramours involved, see Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: H. Holt, 1996), 201-02, 04-05, 09.

(known at the time) of *Poésies*.[3] There, the poet transcribed the work by hand, republishing it for the first time in April of that year in his journal *Littérature*.[4] In contrast to *Poésies*, while *Les Chants de Maldoror* was likely a rare volume in 1912, it was certainly a book in circulation.

Duchamp's correspondence with Chastel sheds an important light on the artist's relationship with *Les Chants de Maldoror*. Firstly, it offers a date. That date, 1912, was a consequential one in the development of Duchamp's artistic career. It also specifies a time well in advance of the Surrealists' discovery of Lautréamont. For Duchamp, 1912 was a year of artistic growth, rejection, and personal transformation. The year saw the artist's burgeoning divide from Cubism deepen sharply as he transitioned towards an entirely new and personal visual vocabulary. In this, he claimed an independence from existing artistic movements and theories. Secondly, Duchamp explained that it might be the *first* copy of the work that he ever owned, now possibly returned to him. One implication of his words is that he owned multiple copies of the work over time, possibly loaning away or gifting copies during the course of his life, as people are wont to do with their favored books. This admission lends gravity to Duchamp's involvement with the work. Thirdly, in a private letter, Duchamp signaled clearly the great esteem in which he held Lautréamont's volume, announcing to Chastel that he wished to keep the book as one of a very select few works in his essential, ideal library. While important, Duchamp's missive to Chastel does not stand alone in identifying to this date. Writing in his 1959 volume, *Marcel Duchamp*, Robert Lebel confirmed that Duchamp knew Lautréamont's writing by 1912.[5] These facts are remarkable for a literary source belonging to Duchamp that has

[3] A second copy was only recently discovered. In 2005, this second copy was given to Jean de Gonet for rebinding. See "Auto-Édité Et Sauvé De L'oubli Par Le Dépôt Légal," Bibliothèque Nationale de France, http://www.bnf.fr/fr/collections_et_services/anx_dec/a.t_comme_tresors_archives.html.
[4] Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995), 98-99.
[5] Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 25-26.

garnered such scant critical attention from scholars.

Positioning this epoch for Duchamp entails a return to Cubism as the artistic, literary, and social milieu in which Duchamp matured as an artist. The Cubism that surrounded Duchamp in the years before World War I was rooted in literary as well as visual precedents. This factor likely contributed to Duchamp's own regard for written works—especially poetry—and his antagonism towards purely visual mimetic art, which he referred to disparagingly as "retinal."[6] In turning to Lautréamont, among other select authors, Duchamp found a way of escaping organized artistic movements and dogmatic theories of art, including, eventually, Cubism. That movement was, to a great degree, the crucible that formed Duchamp. Coming of age as an artist before the First World War, Cubism's roots—from Paul Cézanne to Symbolism and beyond—were his lineage as well. An examination of Cubism is therefore necessary for placing Duchamp's reading of Lautréamont in the historico-intellectual context that he held in common with other artists and intellectuals at the time. This environment grounds Duchamp's artistic divergences as well, rendering them recognizable and meaningful.

Duchamp and the Puteaux Cubists

There were, arguably, two primary Cubist circles in Paris before the First World War. The first group coalesced around Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Georges Braque (1882-1963) in Montmartre, late in the first decade of the century, after the pair's aesthetic innovations garnered attention. Forming gradually in late 1910-1911, the second contingent, to which Duchamp

[6] For the original French edition, see Pierre Cabanne, *Entretiens Avec Marcel Duchamp* (Paris: Belfond, 1967), 66. For an English translation, see Pierre Cabanne *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (New York, NY: The Viking Press, 1971), 11, 39.

belonged, was the group often termed the "Puteaux" Cubists.[7] Scholars also refer to this later group as the Salon Cubists, because unlike Picasso and Braque, they exhibited regularly at the Salon des Indépendants and d'Automne.[8] Ultimately associated with the Salon Cubist circle, Duchamp later explained to Pierre Cabanne that he "met Picasso only in 1912 or 1913" and he hardly knew Braque.[9] Despite their differences, both Cubist groups shared an admiration for Cézanne and his structural mode of painting that incorporated multiple simultaneous viewpoints. A few figures did bridge the groups. Notably, poet-critics André Salmon (1881-1969) and Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) were close to Picasso and Braque, but by 1912 they associated to a lesser degree with the Puteaux group as well. Moreover, each circle emerged in the shadow of Symbolist literature—even if the Cubists jettisoned tenets of the movement, seeking a fresh course forward.

For Duchamp, Cubism represented an important transitional stage in his development, arrived at only after a series of trials and explorations of extant styles, theories, and modes of artistic creation. The artist passed through a gamut of styles on his way to Cubism—including Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, Symbolist, and Fauvist phases.[10] In 1908, the then twenty-one-year-old Duchamp moved from Montmartre to the suburb of Neuilly, across the Seine from Puteaux.[11] This change of address helped to set him on a track that, by way of his siblings, soon

[7] For a general surveys of these two Cubist circles, see, e.g., Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighten, *Cubism and Culture* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001); Neil Cox, *Cubism* (London: Phaidon, 2000).
[8] In Paris, it was almost exclusively at Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler's gallery that the public could see the artists' works at the time. The dealer had strongly discouraged Braque and Picasso from showing at the annual Parisian salons. Cox, *Cubism*, 84-85.
[9] Duchamp, as quoted in Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 23-24, 39; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 33-34, 46-47.
[10] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 21-22; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 28-30.
[11] Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jacques Caumont, *Marcel Duchamp: Work and Life* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993),10.1.1908; Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 38.

brought him into the same orbits as the Cubists.[12] Having moved from Montmartre to Puteaux only three years earlier himself, Duchamp's brother Gaston, known as Jacques Villon (1875-1963), was now residing proximally to sibling Raymond Duchamp-Villon (1876-1918) and fellow artist František Kupka. Clustered around a Puteaux garden where Duchamp was a frequent Sunday guest, these nearby familial living and working spaces soon became the backdrop for many Cubist social activities.[13]

Throughout this period, Duchamp's brothers became increasingly involved in the planning of the Salon d'Automne—a seasonal bookend to the spring Salon des Indépendants and an alternative to the guarded salons organized by the Académie des Beaux Arts.[14] These activities would help to determine the range of artists, writers, and critics that Duchamp was to meet. Sunday gatherings in Puteaux would grow substantially during 1911, offering Duchamp access to a widening circle of figures at the forefront of the French arts, including writers Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Henri-Martin Barzun, Alexandre Mercereau and painters Fernand Léger, Henri Le Fauconnier, Albert Gleizes, Jean Metzinger, among others.[15]

Though in Paris, Duchamp and his brothers retained numerous links to Rouen (the family was originally from Blainville, a village outside of the city).[16] In 1907 Villon had joined Les XXX, a Rouen-based artistic and literary organization founded by Pierre Dumont. Duchamp also became member of the group, which was renamed the Société Normande de Peinture Moderne in

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[12] Gough-Cooper and Caumont, *Marcel Duchamp: Work and Life*, 11.5.1906, 12.24.1907; Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 34, 38.

[13] Villon moved to Puteaux in 1906. See Daniel Robbins, "Chronology and Introduction: Color, Form, and Family," in *Jacques Villon*, ed. Daniel Robbins (Exh. cat., Cambridge, MA: Fogg Art Museum, 1976), 13. For an account of Raymond's brother-in-law discovering several "pavilions with artists' studios" in Puteaux, and Jacques and Raymond moving there, See Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 34-35.

[14] Villon had become a lifetime member of the Salon in 1904, though he would leave in 1912 in protest over other members' attitudes towards Cubism. See Robbins, "Jacques Villon," 13; Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 39.

[15] Robbins, "Jacques Villon," 14.

[16] For an overview of Duchamp's early years in Blainville, see Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 14-30.

1909.[17] When Dumont, a classmate of Duchamp from the Lycée Corneille, moved to Montmartre in 1910, Paris became a new center for the Société's activities. This affiliation broadened the proto-Puteaux network, bringing artists like Roger de La Fresnaye into the camp.[18]

Consequently, an individual who would become a long-time friend for Duchamp was also among the ranks of the Société Normande de Peinture Moderne. According to Duchamp, he first met Francis Picabia (1879-1953) at the 1911 Salon d'Automne, introduced by Dumont in front of Picabia's *Sur la Plage*.[19] Picabia's droll contradictory nature—always countering a given premise with a problem or counter premise, as if conversation were a game of negation, immediately won Duchamp's affection.[20] This affinity for negation might also help explain Duchamp's regard for Lautréamont, whose work shares a similar attitude. Picabia later introduced Duchamp to Apollinaire over a lunch that included poet Max Jacob. Recalling the encounter to Cabanne, the artist explained that in his estimation both Apollinaire and Jacob were still living the lives of Symbolist poets at the time, some thirty years after the fact. [21] In truth, the Symbolist mindset had never waned significantly, but only changed its outward appearance.

Among the leaders and key theorists of the Puteaux Cubists was Albert Gleizes (1881-1953), a man with a utopian view of art. During the height of Salon Cubism in 1913, the artist would possess numerous literary and artistic connections, and by the end of that year, Gleizes, along with Jean Metzinger (1883-1956), would codify the Puteaux concept of Cubism with the publication of their *Du cubisme*. Gleizes had begun painting during his military service, where he

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[17] Robbins, "Jacques Villon," 14.
[18] Duchamp designed the poster for their first exhibition in 1909. See Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 57.
[19] Duchamp reports that the work depicted "some bathers." See Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 32; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 52. See also William A. Camfield, *Francis Picabia: His Art, Life, and Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 2; Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 62.
[20] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 32; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 53.
[21] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 24; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 36.

also met future poet Réne Arcos.[22] Together they cultivated an interest in Symbolist poets like Emile Verhaeren. Symbolist literature and theory was the direct source for much of Gleizes's artistic and political temperament. As Daniel Robbins pointed out in tracing the intellectual path between Symbolism and Cubism, many of the most important literary figures of that generation had been social reformers, anarchists, and socialists—all hoping to "reinvigorate" a moribund society through poetry.[23] This characterization of Gleizes's antecedents also fits him well.

From 1901 to 1905, Gleizes was an outsider to the Parisian art world, disdaining cities as bourgeois creations. Eventually, however, Arcos introduced Gleizes to a sphere of French intellectuals—notably writers at first, rather than artists. This group included several influential authors associated with the journal *La Vie*, such as Georges Duhamel, Jules Romains, Charles Vildrac, and Alexandre Mercereau.[24] After the journal failed, the group formed the Société Ernst Renan, dedicated to teaching the masses to experience art in its relation to the spirit without the stultifying influence of the bourgeoisie. Artists in this organization were considered workers, rather than elites.[25] Intellectually, this group was also associated with the metaphysical concepts of Unanimism—a movement (founded by Romains) that believed in a collective consciousness and collective emotive states.[26] In 1906, Gleizes joined this circle in a venture to establish an artists' and writers' colony in the French préfecture of Créteil (fig. 3). Taking its concept from François Rabelais's description of a utopian collective, the Abbaye de Théalème, in his *Gargantua*, they called the commune the Abbaye de Créteil.[27] While the artistic and literary community lasted only two years, the group that formed around the Abbaye, along with its

[22] Daniel Robbins, "Albert Gleizes: Reason and Faith in Modern Painting," in *Albert Gleizes,1881-1953; A Retrospective Exhibition* (Exh. cat., New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1964), 12-13.
[23] Robbins, "From Symbolism to Cubism: The Abbaye of Créteil," *Art Journal* 23, no. 2 (1963): 112.
[24] Robbins, "Albert Gleizes," 13.
[25] Robbins, "From Symbolism to Cubism," 113.
[26] Ibid., 114.
[27] Ibid., 113.

extended sphere, would offer French avant-garde art and literature some of the most important critics, authors, and editors of the early twentieth century.[28]

Daniel Robbins had noted that much of the intellectual grounding for the group was Symbolist, and while Symbolist theory pervaded their thought, it was also an ideology that had to be left behind in order to foster a new ideal society—one in which artists belonged to a united field of workers. Recasting artists as workers, rather than heroic figures, the Abbaye group superficially amended the Romantic and Symbolist elevation of artists and poets above all in driving social and intellectual progress.[29] The Cubist position of artists would hew closely to those older models, however. The friendships Gleizes forged at the Abbaye would encourage his work, and one in particular would provide several crucial introductions. In 1910, the influential editor and critic Alexandre Mercereau (1884-1945) had become co-director of Paul Fort's review *Vers et Prose*, which had published Paul Valéry and other Symbolists.[30] An established figure in Paris's literary and artistic circles by that year, Mercereau also introduced Gleizes to the work of Henri Le Fauconnier, who had independently begun to experiment in a vein similar to the artist.

That same year, Mercereau also introduced Gleizes to artists Metzinger and Robert Delaunay.[31] Metzinger and Gleizes were theoretically oriented artists, and Metzinger possessed numerous links to the Parisian artistic milieu that Gleizes lacked. These connections offered Metzinger a privileged perspective, allowing him to be one of the first persons to draw a connection between what Picasso and Braque were doing and the trajectory of Robert

[28] Robbins, "Albert Gleizes," 13-14.
[29] Ibid., 14; Robbins, "From Symbolism to Cubism," 113-14.
[30] This review, founded by Fort, had been helpful in supporting the Symbolist writers, and it would become a champion of Cubist causes as well. Robbins notes that both Apollinaire and Salmon held positions at the review before Mercereau became Co-Director. Daniel J. Robbins, "Sources of Cubism and Futurism," vol.41, no. 4 (1981): 325.
[31] This is the remembrance of Gleizes. Metzinger, however, recalls meeting Gleizes as early 1906. Daniel Robbins, "Jean Metzinger: At the Center of Cubism," in *Jean Metzinger in Retrospect* (Exh. cat., Iowa City: University of Iowa Museum of Art, 1985), 12.

Delaunay's and Henri Le Fauconnier's paintings.[32] By 1910, Mercereau's circle had also made contact with Apollinaire and Salmon, carrying those connections along with them as the Puteaux group coalesced. [33]

At the 1910 Salon des Indépendants, Gleizes, Metzinger, Léger, and Le Fauconnier all exhibited, but with their paintings dispersed.[34] By the fall, their paintings crept close together on the walls of the salon by happenstance.[35] Responding to the Salon d'Automne, Roger Allard penned an enthusiastic review calling for "an expansion of tradition towards a classicism of the future."[36] Gleizes and Metzinger would soon answer his call.[37] By 1911, after the first major manifestation of public Cubism in *salle* 41 of the Salon des Indépendants, Duchamp's circle began to associate with Metzinger, Gleizes, and Mercereau's group.[38] That year at the Salon d'Automne, Raymond Duchamp-Villon, who was a member of the hanging committee, advocated on behalf of the new Cubist group, securing a room at the exhibition where the works of Gleizes, Metzinger, Léger, and Le Fauconnier could all be exhibited together.[39] This new alliance solidified, and the Puteaux group now included members the Société Normande de Peinture Moderne and the Mercereau circle within its fold. It was around this time, towards the end of 1911, that Duchamp first met Gleizes, Metzinger, and Léger.[40]

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[32] Ibid.
[33] Robbins, "Albert Gleizes," 15.
[34] Cox, *Cubism*, 143.
[35] Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 169.
[36] Cox, *Cubism*, 146.
[37] In September 1910, Le Fauconnier published an essay in the catalogue of his show at Neue Künstler-Vereinigung explaining his new mode of work in very mathematical/geometric and technical terms. This might be considered an impetus to Allard's call—classicism being informed by the beauties of pure geometries—and it certainly set a precedent for Gleizes's and Metzinger's *Du cubisme*. Ibid., 246.
[38] Robbins, "Jacques Villon," 14.
[39] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 57.
[40] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 24; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 35. According to Daniel Robbins, Villon first met Gleizes, Metzinger, Le Fauconnier, and Léger in the spring of this year. See Robbins, "Jacques Villon," 14.

In addition to the now greatly expanded Sunday gatherings in Puteaux, the group met in Courbevoie on Mondays, at Gleizes's studio, and Tuesday evenings at the Closerie des Lilas, in Montparnasse.[41] The café had long been a gathering place for the older Symbolist poets like Paul Verlaine and Paul Fort, and the company now included a mix of new and old artists and writers. Members of these groups also sometimes met at Le Fauconnier's studio.[42] Calvin Tomkins noted that at this point, Duchamp—still merely the younger sibling of Villon and Duchamp-Villon—tended to be more of an observer at these events than an active conversationalist.[43] Soon enough, however, the youngest Duchamp brother would find his feet. Subjects of discussion at Puteaux and Courbevoie included literature, non-Euclidean geometry, the fourth dimension, Bergsonian philosophy, and the goal of an art that would engage the mind, as opposed to the eyes alone (a major theme in *Du cubisme*).[44]

As poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire wrote in his 1913 volume *Les Peintres cubistes*, "Resemblance [for these artists] no longer has the slightest importance, for the artist sacrifices everything to the truths and imperatives of a higher nature which he can envisage without ever having encountered it."[45] Apollinaire may have overstated the matter, since these artists often included some metonymically resemblant clues in their paintings, offering viewers interpretive purchase in these works. Recognizable objects, or parts of objects, such as the curve of a guitar's body, allowed viewers to orient themselves amongst webs of fractured forms. Nonetheless, Apollinaire's assertion that these artists sought a truth beyond resemblance was wholly apt. Scientific discoveries such as the X-ray and mathematical speculations regarding the existence of

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[41] Robbins, "Jacques Villon," 14.
[42] Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension*, 170; Cox, *Cubism*, 46.
[43] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 57.
[44] Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension*, 170; Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 57.
[45] Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters*, trans. Peter Read (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 11-12.

higher dimensionalities further justified these artists' attentiveness to a world beyond the empirically received one.[46]

Nineteenth-century Romanticism and then Symbolism had proposed that artists and poets possessed a singular temperament, explicitly identifying them as those best suited to explore the correlation between artistic expression and pure states of mind and emotion. Charles Baudelaire's (1821-1867) proto-Symbolist notion of "correspondences," explicated in his eponymous poem from *Les Fleurs du Mal*, suggested a direct mystical link between the material and spiritual worlds. He proposed that poets occupied a privileged position, using metaphor to freely operate in the "forest of symbols" between realms.[47] Following from such ideas, in an 1891 essay on Symbolism and painting, critic G.-Albert Aurier invoked Plato's allegory of the cave, arguing that those artists who ventured beyond the mundane were akin to the philosopher's prisoner escaping the illusions manifested by shadows on a cave wall. The artist, Aurier held, might experience a more complete and elevated reality than those still held captive.[48]

Before Baudelaire's Symbolism, Romanticism had already elevated artist and poet as champions of social, aesthetic, spiritual and intellectual progress. This ideal was probably best expressed by British Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley who, in his *Defense of Poetry*, wrote:

> But poets, or those who imagine and express this indestructible order, are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance, and architecture, and statuary, and painting: they are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true that partial apprehension of the

[46] For a useful discussion of science's new license for artists to explore the unseen, see Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context: Science and Technology in the Large Glass and Related Works* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 3-28.
[47] For "Correspondances," from *Les Fleurs du mal*, see Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Yves Florenne, vol. I (Paris: Club français du Livre, 1966), 768.
[48] G.-Albert Aurier, "Le Symboisme En Peinture; Paul Gauguin," *Mercure de France* II, no. 15 (1891).

agencies of the invisible world which is called religion.[49]

Given such statements, it is plain that beyond Cézanne's aesthetic innovations, and science's permission to venture beyond the visible world, literary theory grounded the Cubist insistence that the artist, employing his or her mind, give new plastic form to reality, rather than relying upon the phenomenal world. For the Cubists, artists—with access to higher orders of thought or understanding, purer meaning, and for Gleizes moral responsibility for progress—shaped reality, rather than nature. This idea is arguably a version of Romanticism modified by the intervening Symbolists and refashioned for Cubism.

Explaining Cubism from a poet's and critic's perspective, Apollinaire accorded with many of these beliefs, while casting off the Romantic mantle of nature as the ultimate source of all creativity, much as Baudelaire had done before him. With a timbre echoing Shelley's polemical statement, Apollinaire argued, "The social role of great poets and artists is to constantly renew the way nature appears in the eyes of man."[50] Christopher Gray noted that this attitude assumes that nature is, at its heart, a formless and ever-changing entity—incomprehensible and dynamic. According to this theory, form derives not from nature, but from human kind's framing of it, and, in particular, the activities of artists and poets.[51] Artists create reality. It is with this backdrop that the Cubists forsook received modes of representation and embarked upon the search for new geometries, representational modes, and forms—ones that these artists felt ordained to discover, by way of preceding literary ideologies (whether they knew it explicitly, or not). Symbolist-informed Cubism was Duchamp's artistic world in 1912.

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[49] Notably, Lautréamont was among Shelley's readers. Shelley wrote this essay in 1821, and it was published in 1840 after his death. Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," in *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments* (London: Edward Moxon, 1840), 6.

[50] Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters*, 19.

[51] Christopher Gray, *Cubist Aesthetic Theories* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1953), 56-57.

Rejection and a Turning point: Towards the Large Glass

Given the artistic and intellectual currents that surrounded Duchamp, it is easy to understand the artist's interest in Cubism and Symbolist poetry, even if he was ultimately determined to "'detheorize' Cubism in order to lend it a freer interpretation," as he told Cabanne.[52] As the artist explained to James Johnson Sweeney, Cubism led him to explore methods by which he could "decompose" forms—much as those around him were doing, but in a more radical fashion.[53] Duchamp's late 1911 paintings, including *Dulcinea* and *Sad Young Man on a Train*, demonstrated this tendency and prefigured the artist's personal interpretation of Cubism that followed (figs. 4 and 5).

In 1911, Duchamp began to restrict his palette, and his heavily outlined Fauve/Symbolist nudes gave way to anatomies that fractured and appeared to move and change state. *Duclinea*, for instance, features a bouquet-shaped arrangement of a single figure multiplied across the canvas. In reference to *Sad Young Man on a Train*, Duchamp explained that his "aim was a static representation of movement, a static composition of indications of various positions taken by a form in movement. . . ."[54] Like the Cubists, Duchamp was assuming an anti-positivist and anti-empirical stance. He was rendering the idea of movement visible in paint on canvas, rather than reproducing its visual phenomena.[55] Duchamp explained, "An artist might use anything—a dot, a line, the most conventional and unconventional symbol—to say what he wanted to say."[56] His statement also betrays a particularly Symbolist point of view at its core: the artist acting as

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[52] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 28.
[53] James Johnson Sweeney, "Eleven Europeans in America: Marcel Duchamp," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 13, no. 4/5 (1946): 19.
[54] Duchamp, as quoted in Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 79. The title also points to Duchamp's poetic interests, and he explained that he enjoyed the sound of "train" and "triste" in grammatical proximity. Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 29.
[55] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 79.
[56] Duchamp, as quoted in ibid.

mediator between visible and unseen worlds, employing a lexicon of personal and impersonal or conventional signs in order to express ideas (or feelings). He did not simply paint a woman or a young man, but rather the effect that each produced for the mind as they traveled in time and space.

Duchamp's previous paintings of 1910 and early 1911, including *The Bush* and *Baptism*, had possessed a clear Symbolist sensibility in addition to their Fauve-oriented style (figs. 6 and 7). In fact, his involvement with Symbolist poetry would be the impetus for a new kind of nude. Duchamp was reading Symbolist poetry throughout this same period—especially the works of Jules Laforgue and Stéphane Mallarmé.[57] Laforgue's dark humor, irony, linguistic invention, and satire of social values attracted Duchamp, especially in the poet's *Moralités légendaires* (Moral Tales) of 1887. Duchamp later explained that for him Laforgue also represented an "exit from Symbolism."[58] In 1911, Laforgue's poems inspired several drawings by Duchamp, including *Encore à cet Astre* (Once More to This Star). Interested as much in Laforgue's titles as his lines, Duchamp's illustration for *Once More to this Star* would be a crucial stepping-stone towards the conception of his 1911 *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 1* and his subsequent and more well-known masterpiece from 1912, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (figs. 8 and 9). Duchamp's pencil drawing for Laforgue's poem depicts several figures (or one at several points) ascending a stairway.[59] This figural multiplication, or simultaneity of view, might also be linked to another source: Etienne -Jules Marey's scientific chronophotographic images. These photographs captured jumping figures, strutting walkers, and lunging fencers—each a series of still positions compiled into a single image. The impact of these images Duchamp has been well established by

[57] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 29-30; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 48.
[58] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 30; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 48.
[59] For a useful exploration of this work, see Lawrence D. Steefel, Jr., "Marcel Duchamp's 'Encore à Cet Astre': A New Look," *Art Journal* 36, no. 1 (1976).

Martha Braun and others.[60]

All of these trajectories—literary, scientific, and artistic—converged in Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 1*. The figure(s) ascending Duchamp's Laforguean staircase changed direction, and anatomic resemblance faded further as Duchamp's figure-in-static-motion became a descending machine. *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* further explored and refined Duchamp's artistic concerns. As the artist explained, he was working to "invent or find [his] own way instead of being the plain interpreter of a theory."[61] This desire would soon set him at odds with Gleizes and Metzinger, as they crystallized their Cubist doctrine.

In spring 1912, Duchamp intended to exhibit his freshly finished *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* at the Salon des Indépendants, but he met with resistance. The incursion of the Italian Futurists into Parisian art had prompted Puteaux leaders Gleizes and Metzinger to plan a unified Cubist response at the Salon. In February of 1909, poet and Futurist leader Filippo Tomasso Marinetti (1876-1944)—a frequent visitor at the Abbaye de Créteil—had launched Futurism's bombast in Paris with the publication of his "Futurist Manifesto" in *Le Figaro*.[62] Obsessed with speed, war, urban life, dynamism, and the violent reconfiguration of European culture, Marinetti exhorted: "the essential elements of [Futurist] poetry will be courage, audacity and revolt."[63] Literary Futurism soon attracted a coterie of artists, including Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carra, and Gino Severini. In early 1912, after a reconnaissance trip to Paris during the previous year, the Futurists opened a major exhibition in Paris at the Galerie

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[60] For discussion of Duchamp and Marey, see Marta Braun and Etienne-Jules Marey, *Picturing Time: The Work of Etienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 264-65; Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 34; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 57.

[61] Duchamp, as quoted in Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 48.

[62] Robbins, "From Symbolism to Cubism," 115.

[63] Herschel Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art; a Source Book by Artists and Critics*, California Studies in the History of Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 286.

Bernheim-Jeune, preempting the Salon des Indépendants by mere weeks.[64] This event challenged the coalescing Cubist movement of the Puteaux artists. As Duchamp explained the situation to Cabanne, "It was not even a rivalry. It was plain disdain on the part of the Cubists."[65]

When Gleizes and Metzinger first saw Duchamp's salon-bound *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, the work troubled them. Doubtless they perceived it immediately as a threat to their anti-Futurist theoretical solidarity at the salon, and so they asked Duchamp's brothers to intervene. On the eve of the salon, the artist's siblings approached him in his Neuilly studio, informing him that the Cubists had found his submission to be "a little off the beam."[66] They explained that Gleizes and Metzinger had deemed the title too "literary," in a negative sense, asking if he might at least change the work's painted title.

The literary complaint cannot have been the core of the Gleizes's and Metzinger's main vexation—the movement was awash in literary associations. Rather, the unorthodox nature of Duchamp's nude—in motion rather than standing, sitting, or lying supine—was likely the crux of the problem. Duchamp's painting of "static motion" must have appeared as both a parody of Cubist aesthetics and an embrace of the Futurists' affinities for speed and dynamism. For Gleizes and Metzinger, Duchamp's painting likely represented a weakness in their unified answer to the Futurist threat.

Duchamp refused to alter his painting, and after his brothers left his studio, the artist immediately retrieved his work.[67] Vexed by the conflict, the artist, who had already been opening theoretical ground between himself and the Cubists, pulled still further away. The event

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[64] Cox, *Cubism*, 195-98.
[65] Calvin Tomkins, *Marcel Duchamp: The Afternoon Interviews*, 82.
[66] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 81-82.
[67] Ibid., 81-84.

was clearly a turning point for Duchamp: "It helped me to liberate completely from the past, in a personal sense of the word," he explained to Cabanne.[68] Moreover, the slight instilled in him a lifelong aversion to belonging to any organized artistic movement or group.[69] While Duchamp would associate with the Dadaists, Surrealists, and others, he remained steadfastly an outsider to each group.[70]

Rejection and Reinvention in 1912

Duchamp exhibited *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* soon after without incident in a show of Cubist works in Barcelona, and then again at the Salon de la Section d'Or.[71] Then, in 1913, Duchamp's nude would receive attention at the International Exhibition of Modern Art at the Armory in New York. Nevertheless, after the acrimonious affair preceding the Salon des Indépendants, Duchamp had made up his mind to divorce himself from his artistic past. In the following months, he discovered new artistic and literary sources and briefly left France behind. He began to work feverishly on a new kind of nude that went beyond any existing aesthetic theories or traditions, shifting to a heightened focus on eroticism, concept, and the bracketing of aesthetic taste.

Literature would remain central for Duchamp, though he would add new authors to his figurative bookshelf. Reflecting upon the artist's Cubist years and immediately thereafter, Tomkins wrote, "Duchamp's iconoclasm made him receptive to almost anything that was

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[68] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 31; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 52.
[69] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 83; Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 31; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 52.
[70] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 83.
[71] The armory show introduced many Americans to the recent developments of the European avant-garde. Many in the United States, including the press, sneered at the painting, not knowing what to make of it. Nevertheless, the painting attracted large crowds and even sold. Ibid., 116-18.

'despised' by the new academicians of art, of course, and at this point in his career he was more influenced by literature than anything else."[72] One decisive example, according to the artist himself, was the work of Raymond Roussel.[73] In June of 1912, before his trip to Munich, Duchamp, along with Picabia, his wife Gabriele Buffet-Picabia, and Apollinaire, attended a theatrical adaptation of Roussel's novel, *Impressions d'Afrique*, at the Théâtre Antoine.[74] The play immediately struck Duchamp as something new and useful. While Roussel's wordplay and literary methods would only later interest the artist, his immediate response to the play was awe at its unfamiliar and original spectacle.

Roussel's story tells of a group of shipwrecked Europeans who perform a series of bizarre vignettes for the foreign Emperor Talou VII in order to win their freedom. The play presented Duchamp with numerous examples of absurd machines and playful pseudo-science. As Duchamp explained to Sweeney,

> The reason I admired [Roussel] was that he produced something that I had never seen. That is the only thing that brings admiration from my innermost being—something completely independent—nothing to do with the great names or influences. . . . It was fundamentally Roussel who was responsible for my glass, *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (fig. 10). From his play I got the general approach. . . . I saw at once that I could use Roussel as in influence. I felt that as a painter it was much better to be influenced by a writer than another painter. And Roussel showed me the way.[75]

Notably, Duchamp stressed the importance of independence from "great names and influences," exalting the author's outsider status. It is clear from this statement, that in 1912

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[72] Ibid., 88.

[73] Linda Henderson most notably explored Roussel's role for Duchamp in her encyclopedic volume, *Duchamp in Context: Science and Technology in the Large Glass and Related Works*. For a discussion of this subject, see Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 51-57.

[74] The1911 date given by Cabanne was a year too early. Instead, the 1912 date supplied by Tomkins and Gough-Cooper is the correct one. For various descriptions of the event, see Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 90-91; Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 33-34; Gough-Cooper and Caumont, *Marcel Duchamp: Work and Life*, 6.10.1912.

[75] Sweeney, "Eleven Europeans in America: Marcel Duchamp," 21.

Roussel's play led Duchamp to entirely re-assess his own work. He turned his sights even moreso toward literature as a source while he pursued a new kind of work that would be unlike that of his peers. That desire for originality and independence would drive Duchamp to meticulously plan and then construct his masterpiece, *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*, or *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (also known as the *Large Glass*) (fig. 10).

Shortly after his attendance of *Impressions d'Afrique*, Duchamp traveled to Munich for nearly two months. There, he visited the Alte Pinakothek, developing an admiration for the works of Cranach the Elder, especially his nudes.[76] At the Deutsches Museum and the Bavarian Trade Fair, the artist also likely saw a range of technologies, probably informing his increasingly mechanomorphic artistic inventions.[77] It was during Duchamp's sojourn in Germany, that he began his preparatory notes and related projects for his *Large Glass*, a process that would continue for a number of years. The artist would not begin the execution of the *Large Glass* itself until he moved to the New York in 1915.[78] Even then, the project spanned eight years, from 1915 until 1923, when Duchamp declared the work complete in its incomplete state, or as he called it, "definitely unfinished."[79] During July and August of 1912, while in Munich, Duchamp started to develop his Virgin and Bride. His drawings, including *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors, Even, Virgin, No. 1*, as well as *Virgin, No. 2*, appeared increasingly schematic and mechanical (figs. 11, 12, and 13). This tendency would progress throughout Duchamp's work on the *Large*

[76] For information regarding this aspect of Duchamp's visit to Munich, see Michael Taylor, Helmut Friedel, and Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus München., "Visiting the Alte Pinakothek with Marcel Duchamp: Reflections on the Artist's Stay in Munich in 1912 and His Discovery of the Work of Lucas Cranach the Elder," in *Marcel Duchamp in Munich 1912*, ed. Helmut Friedel, et al. (Muncih: Schirmer/Mosel, 2012).
[77] Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 28; Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 94-95; Helmut Friedel, *Marcel Duchamp in München 1912* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2012).
[78] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 155.
[79] Ibid., 3, 250-51.

Glass.

Duchamp also began to use mechanical drafting as a means of jettisoning the artist's hand from his work, thereby circumventing taste.[80] Reflecting upon this shift, Duchamp explained, "In mechanical drawing you are directed by the impersonality of the ruler. . . . you can see that the young man was revolting against the old-fashioned tools. Probably naive on my part, but I don't care. . . . I wanted to find something to escape the prison of tradition."[81] The paintings that followed, *The Passage from Virgin to Bride* and *Bride* retained Duchamp's growing disposition towards mechanical structures, but now his forms were simultaneously organic (figs. 14 and 15). One detects the distinct sense of viscera in *Bride*, rendered as a hybrid of machine and organism. Additionally, the chiaroscuro that Cubism had banished returned in Duchamp's new works—another sure sign that he was turning away artistically from former alliances and ideologies.

Regarding Duchamp's mechanical apparatuses of the *Large Glass* and the works leading up to it, Linda Henderson has convincingly traced a number of automotive, aeronautic, and bicycle references in these works.[82] Similarly, W. Bowdoin Davis has posited importance of sewing, fabric, and thread in Duchamp's work from this period. In his argument, he highlights numerous marks in *Virgin No. 2* that closely resemble thread and stitches.[83] Similar stitch-like marks also appear in the 1912 painting *Passage from Virgin to Bride*. Additionally, an object sketched in one Duchamp's posthumously published notes for the Bride closely resembles the foot of a sewing machine, and the stitches that it has just set down (fig. 16).[84] Davis also details the presence of sewing machine parts, complete with taught threads, in a number of preliminary

[80] Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 31-33.
[81] Quoted in Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 127.
[82] Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 33-39.
[83] W. Bowdoin Davis, *Duchamp: Domestic Patterns, Covers and Threads* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 2002), 54-61, 114-19.
[84] See note 108 in Marcel Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp, Notes*, ed. Paul Matisse (Boston MA: G.K. Hall, 1983).

drawings from this same period of time. The most notable of these was *Virgin No.1*.[85]

Duchamp may well have encountered sewing machines at the trade fair in Munich, and he certainly would have seen one in his home while growing up. The sewing machine may also have played a noteworthy role in the eroticism of the *Large Glass*. In an informative essay on the sexual connotation of sewing machines in the nineteenth century, Francesca Myman presents ample evidence for the concatenation of the device with female onanism. Using this and other information, Henderson points to the device's potential sexual connotation for Duchamp specifically.[86] This fact is especially relevant, as shall soon become clear, given the thematic nature of the *Large Glass*.

After he returned from Munich, Duchamp, Picabia, and Apollinaire set out on a road trip from Paris to Etival, in the Jura Mountains. There, the party spent several days with the family of Picabia's wife, Gabrielle.[87] For Apollinaire, the excursion would include a first reading of his poem "Zone," which he titled during the trip and later published in his 1913 volume *Alcools*.[88] Technology and iconoclasm abound in the poem. Also in the course of this trip, Duchamp wrote his "Jura-Paris Road" text, which he would incorporate into the collections of notes that became integral to the *Large Glass*. Commencing with a description of a "machine with 5 hearts, the pure child of nickel and platinum," Duchamp's cool poetic tone in the note—reminiscent of several of the Symbolist and post-Symbolist authors that he was reading—anticipates the

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[85] Davis, *Domestic Patterns, Covers and Threads*, 114-19.
[86] Although Davis does not address the sexual association of sewing machines, Henderson discussed that issue in her lecture Linda Dalrymple Henderson, "'Figuratively a Fireworks': New Dimensions of Marcel Duchamp in August 1913," in *Duchamp in Herne Bay Festival* (Herne Bay EnglandAugust 2013). On this topic, see, e.g., Francesca Myman, "Sex & the Sewing Machine in Nineteenth-Century France," http://francesca.net/SewingMachine.html. Thanks to Linda Henderson for bringing this essay to my attention.
[87] For a description of this trip, see Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 34; Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 108.
[88] Laurence Campa, *Guillaume Apollinaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013), 402-03.

realization of *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*.[89]

The over two-meter-tall *Large Glass* is an allegory of perpetually fruitless love. Constructed with non-traditional materials, including glass that is horizontally bifurcated at the work's vertical midpoint, the *Large Glass* contrasts the many mechanomorphic forms of the Bachelors and their apparatus to the hybrid organic and mechanical qualities of the Bride, each residing discretely in one of the *Glass*'s two realms. The lower half of the *Glass* belongs the Bachelors, whom Duchamp presents as a series of nine malic gas molds (empty suits, or male types) inhabiting a three-dimensional realm. Duchamp signals this dimensionality with a return to a perspective—a further discarding of Cubist tendencies in favor of one that was obsolete, insofar as Duchamp's contemporaries were concerned. Like his adoption of the similarly impugned technique of chiaroscuro in modeling forms in his *Bride* and *Passage from Virgin to Bride*, one should understand Duchamp's perspectival gesture in terms of his iconoclasm and negation of standing taste and theory. This theme of contrarian negation, which Duchamp likely associated with Laforgue and Picabia, was also prominent in the works of Lautréamont. In contrast with the Bachelors' realm, Duchamp's notes dictate that the Bride's upper portion of the glass is a four-dimensional domain.

Throughout the *Large Glass* and its related works, Duchamp's exploration of higher dimensions and non-Euclidean geometries diverges from that of the Cubists. Duchamp probably found his sources and learned his mathematic approach from actuary and mathematician Maurice Princet.[90] This can also be said of Metzinger and other Cubists, including those in Montmartre as well, whom Princet likely introduced to the mathematical works of Henri Poincaré and Esprit

[89] For the "Jura-Paris Road" text, see Marcel Duchamp, *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 26-27.
[90] For information on Princet, Duchamp, and the Cubists, see Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension*, 173; Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 4, 71, 82, 83.

Jouffret.[91] While Henri Bergson's philosophies guided the Puteaux Cubists to use these concepts loosely in seeking transcendent truths through intuition, Duchamp adopted a calculated, if ironic, scientific approach.[92] Like Duchamp's use of science in general, mathematics offered him a new language and a system to explore in his work. His adoption of geometry was both earnest, and yet, playful. It was studied and celebratory, yet irreverent. Its precision in application was, as Linda Henderson has suggested, also antagonistic towards the Bergsonian-Cubists.[93]

The science of the glass is humorous. Read in the present day, it is also especially enigmatic. In the lower portion of the *Large Glass* the Bachelors live in a gravity-bound basement. Described as hollow gas molds, or a cemetery of uniforms, the Bachelors have erected a complex Rube Goldberg-like machine—requiring a modified set of physical laws—by way of which they hope to attain the Bride's (physical) love and the erotic shedding of her fineries. A waterfall propels a mill, a "chariot" on gliders lurches back and forth, a mysterious gas is molded in the bachelor molds, fed through capillary tubes, frozen into rods and broken into tiny pieces, drawn though "sieves," or "parasols," condensed into a liquid, and then splashed upward towards the Bride's realm. Intermediary machinery translates between dimensional realms, transmitting impulses between Bride and Bachelors in a dialog of desire. The Bride—to whom Duchamp gave the additional attributes of "Pendu femelle," wasp, barometer, and motor—remains unreachable in her gravity-free four-dimensional realm. As Jean Suquet explained, she exists

[91] Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension*, 171-73.
[92] For contrast in the use of the fourth dimension and non-Euclidean geometry, see Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 170-84, 233-87.
[93] For Duchamp's anti-Bergsonist tendencies, see ibid., 76-77, 83-84, 198-202; "Paradigm Shifts and Shifting Identities in the Career of Marcel Duchamp, Anti-Bergsonist 'Algebraist of Ideas'," in *Of or by Marcel Duchamp and Rrose Sélavy: Meditations on the Identities of an Artist: An Anthology of Essays by Leading Scholars*, ed. Anne Collins Goodyear and James W. McManus (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Scholarly Press, Forthcoming).

beyond the visibly intelligible horizon.[94] There, she abides in a state of perpetually delayed and desired *jouissance*. Meanwhile, the Bachelors below possess a "chocolate grinder," set on a Louis XV chassis, with which each onanistically "grinds his chocolate himself."[95] In its totality, the *Large Glass* represents the endless futility of erotic and romantic love. It does not, however, *show* this for the eyes, in the manner of traditional painting. With the *Large Glass*, Duchamp created a non-painting, or as he called it, a "delay" in glass that is visual, but not a picture.[96] Rather, than representing what the eyes see, the work schematizes the allegory with a lexicon of personally generated symbols.

Duchamp's notes, such as his "Jura-Paris Road" text, are integral to the *Large Glass*, rather than supplemental. *The Box of 1914, The Green Box,* and *The White Box* together explain the mechanism and the grounding premises by which the glass functions (figs. 17, 18 and 19). Interviewed by Alain Jouffroy in 1961, Duchamp explained that he had "wanted to add a book [to the *Large Glass*], or rather a catalog, like the one from Sear Roebuck, in which every detail would be explained."[97] While Duchamp never realized the catalogue, the published boxes as well as the notes found after his death serve this same purpose. These notes also point back to Duchamp's coming to maturity in a milieu that was heavily indebted to the Symbolist poets, even as he sought to separate himself from them, seeking his own distinct sources. Marking this distinction, Duchamp explained that he employed a poetic "antisense," fraught with cryptic

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[94] Suquet provided one of the first explanations of the *Glass*'s mechanics. See Jean Suquet, "Possible," in *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry de Duve (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 85-111.
[95] This is made explicit in a *Green Box* note. See, e.g., Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 68.
[96] "Use 'delay' instead of picture or / painting; picture on glass becomes / delay in glass—but delay in glass does not mean picture on glass— / It's merely a way of succeeding in no longer thinking / that the thing is question is/ a picture. . . a delay in glass / as you would say a poem in prose. . . . " See Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 26.
[97] Quoted in Marcel Duchamp and Arturo Schwarz, *Notes and Projects for the Large Glass* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1969), 7.

meaning that was distinct, as he explained, from Mallarmé and Rimbaud.[98] Nevertheless, the older poets were never far from the artist's mind. In speaking with Cabanne, Duchamp explained that his use of the word "delay" in his notes, for the sake of clarifying the function of his glass, was particularly poetic in a "Mallarméan" sense.[99] While Duchamp was, as Tomkins noted, distrustful of language's ability to convey absolute meaning, he was greatly enamored of the poetic potential of words to produce it.[100]

Even as Duchamp valorized and adapted Roussel's poetic-visual novelty, there is a final aspect to his development of the *Large Glass* that speaks to a concurrent strategy of appropriations and plagiarisms. Created throughout the production of the *Large Glass*, Duchamp's pure, Assisted, Corrected, and Rectified Readymades—like his 1917 *Trébuchet*, and his 1919 *L.H.O.O.Q.*—were the artist's method for unloading ideas, as he explained (figs. 20 and 21).[101] As Linda Henderson has noted, these mass-produced objects, which the artist elevated to the status of art through his gesture of choosing and inscribing them with a title, all appear to relate to concepts and themes at play in the *Large Glass*.[102] For instance, the title of Duchamp's *Trebuchet*—a coat rack nailed perilously to the floor—references the trap in chess, the medieval siege weapon, and, if one reads the metaphor more widely, the entire allegorical trap of love represented in the *Large Glass*.[103] Duchamp described these works as having been selected with a "liberty of indifference" with regards to taste.[104] And with the inclusions of inscriptions on

[98] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 41; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 70.
[99] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 40; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 70.
[100] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 68.
[101] Quoted in Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 65.
[102] Ibid.
[103] For the first two interpretations, see ibid., 202.
[104] In a 1954 interview with Alain Jouffroy, Duchamp went so far as to call for the abolition of taste. See Alain Jouffroy, "Etant Donné Marcel Duchamp 1) Individualiste Révolutionnaire 2) Respirateur," *Opus international: Duchamp et Après* March 1974, 19.

these objects, Duchamp pointed his spectator towards "regions more verbal."[105] In this domain, his appropriated objects gained new poetic and conceptual meaning.

Maturing as an artist in a post-Symbolist Cubist milieu, Duchamp harbored an abiding admiration for the strategies of writers and the potential of poetic language. Turning away from his past, he chose to embrace literature as a source with even greater fervency. Duchamp's reading of Lautréamont in 1912, per his letter to Chastel, may now be placed within a specific milieu and environment. Duchamp was reading Lautréamont during a moment of personal schism, transformation, and a rethinking of the role that literature could play in remaking his art. Moreover, according to his own date, Duchamp read *Les Chants de Maldoror* just prior to, or during, his preparatory work on the *Large Glass*. This alone, as I have indicated, justifies the reconsideration at hand. Rather than an investigation into an author of incidental relevance for Duchamp, it is one that might yet reveal an undiscovered importance. In addition to the previous Cubist grounding of Duchamp, it will be expedient to further explore his library as defined by both scholars and the artist, before tracing the Lautréamontean thread as it winds throughout the artist's work. After all, Lautréamont's place is one within a system of oblique sources. Certainly after 1911, Duchamp never merely "illustrated" a text. He borrowed and revised authors' ideas and strategies, or contrived new tactics in response.

[105] Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 64-66.

Chapter III

Dada's Daddy's Bookshelf

Given the wealth of words devoted to Marcel Duchamp, it is not surprising that scholars have done admirable work in recent decades in documenting many of Duchamp's literary and philosophical resources. With each historical disclosure, a fuller picture of Duchamp's library, and his work's relationship to it, emerges. Writing in 1976, for instance, Ronald Johnson illuminated the importance of "French poetic tradition" for Duchamp, noting, however, that at the time it was a matter of much neglect despite the artist's clear signals.[106]

Johnson's essay, "Poetic Pathways to Dada: Marcel Duchamp and Jules Laforge," examines the centrality of Symbolist poets for Duchamp, and especially, as the title suggests, the work of Jules Laforgue, whom he branded the "French poet of negation."[107] Johnson explains that a number of Laforgue's prose poems, collected as *Moralités légendaires*, present a form of nihilistic humor that especially resonated with the young Duchamp. Laforgue's poems mock ideals of love, "beauty, purity, and suffering," according to Johnson. In doing so, they employ ironic detachment and nihilism.[108] These qualities aligned Laforgue's poems with Duchamp's own temperament. Moreover, Laforgue's punning and the construction of portmanteaus from disparate parts, as well as his appropriation of existing works, informed the artist's strategies and word play, in Johnson's view.

Collectively, these observations all find echoes in Duchamp's oeuvre. This source, Johnson rightly insisted, drove the artist to create works that did not replicate the poet's lines, in

[106] Ronald W. Johnson, "Poetic Pathways to Dada: Marcel Duchamp and Jules Laforge," *Arts Magazine*, May 1976 1976, 82.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.

terms of illustration, but rather utilized the ideas that they sparked.[109] From Laforgue, Duchamp found his own paths to negation—one that the artist's friendship with the playfully negative Picabia would certainly have encouraged. Biographer Calvin Tomkins likewise explored Laforgue's role in Duchamp's iconoclasm and ironic detachment. He argued that the long lack of attention given to the poet's relevance for Duchamp may have resulted from the artist's focus on the role of Roussel's *Impressions d'Afrique* as a source for his *Large Glass*.[110]

Linda Henderson has written on Duchamp's relationship to the works of both Alfred Jarry and Raymond Roussel. As previously noted, both authors were highly individual in their work, standing apart from any pre-existing school of literary thought. Henderson's scholarship has demonstrated Duchamp's connections to the playful sciences presented in the "pataphysical" explorations of Alfred Jarry, featured prominently in his *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll pataphysicien: Roman néo-scientifique suivi de Spéculations* and *Le Surmâle*.[111] Jarry's view of science and technology was not simply one of adulation. Rather, in addition to taking pleasure in the language and imagery of science, the impertinent author employed the affectations thereof in order to parody the seemingly scientific progress of society. In this, Duchamp's use of technology in the *Large Glass* certainly finds kinship. Moreover, as would have been fancied by Duchamp's sense of revolt, the caustic author had been frequently antithetical towards good taste. This tendency began prominently with his fin-de-siècle play, *Ubu Roi*, whose first performance in December of 1896 caused an uproar after only a single invented, obscene word,

[109] Ibid.
[110] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 88-90.
[111] Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 57-41; Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 141. Chapters of *Faustroll* were published in Symbolist Journals *Mercure de France*, *La Plume*, and *Vers et prose*. For more on Jarry, science, and Cubism, see Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension*, 148-51.

"merdre," was uttered.[112] Having witnessed the complete spectacle, punctuated by intermittent coups by the audience, attendee William Butler Yeats fretted, "After S. Mallarmé, after Verlaine, after G. Moreau, after Puvis de Chavannes, after our own verse, after the faint mixed tints of Conder, what more is possible? After us the savage God."[113]

Such a review would have been equally applicable to Lautréamont. It is noteworthy that in addition to possessing numerous echoes of Lautréamont's subjects and temperament, Jarry's *Faustroll* (published posthumously in 1911) mentioned Lautréamont and *Les Chants de Maldoror* by name. The writer appears amidst a list of authors and works contained in section four, entitled "Concerning the Equivalent Books of Doctor Faustroll." There, his name resides next to those of Maurice Maeterlinck and Stephane Mallarmé, and appropriately in a subsequent simile that reads, "From Lautréamont, the scarab, beautiful as the trembling of hands in alcoholism, which vanished over the horizon."[114] This makes Jarry a potential source for Duchamp's introduction to Lautréamont, but without a statement on the matter from the artist, speculation is all that history can offer.

Consistent with her focus on Duchamp's technological interests (comical and otherwise), Henderson has written in depth on the formative role played by Duchamp's previously discussed 1912 attendance of Raymond Roussel's *Impressions d'Afrique*. Echoes of the theatrical production's cast of bizarre inventions and Roussel's own inventive linguistic machinery are evident throughout the period of Duchamp's creative activity that followed his seeing the play.[115]

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[112] Duchamp included Jarry's word "merdre" in an algebraic note from his *Box of 1914*: "arrhe/art=merdre/merde." See Marcel Duchamp, *Duchamp Du Signe: Écrits*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), 37.

[113] Yeats, as quoted in Annabelle Melzer, *Dada and Surrealist Performance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 114-18.

[114] Alfred Jarry, *Exploits & Opinions of Doctor Faustroll, Pataphysician: A Neo-Scientific Novel*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston, MA: Exact Change, 1996), 11, 19.

[115] Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 51-57.

Moreover, Roussel, like Laforgue, had invented a system of wordplay, one that Duchamp would discover after the fact.[116] With both *Impressions d'Afrique* and *Faustroll* featuring a number of outrageous and amazing machines, it is worth remarking that both works featured a painting machine—an idea echoed in Duchamp's adoption of mechanical drafting and other means of depersonalizing the artistic object and dismissing the artist's hand from his *Large Glass*. Likewise, Duchamp's explicit "distending [of] the laws of physics and chemistry," noted in his *Green Box*, found definite precedent in the whimsical and strange inventions described by both authors.[117]

George H. Bauer and others have discussed Duchamp's interest in the work of Jean-Pierre Brisset, relative to the author's linguistic games, deformations, and explorations.[118] Brisset was an outsider author in a manner comparable to Henri Rousseau's status as an outsider painter, and he was autodidact who was hermetic in his method, akin to Roussel. Duchamp explained that he admired the author for his "delirium of imagination," noting that he was discovered by none other than Jules Romains—of the Mercereau circle—who in turn introduced Apollinaire to the author's works. Brisset's "philological analysis of language" produced a network of puns that appealed to Duchamp.[119] After all, the artist's own concatenation of wordplays and conceptual games formed a nebulous cloud of ideas whose post-Cubist gravitational center was the *Large Glass*. In the course of his 1940 *Anthology of Black Humor*, Breton took note of the relationship between Brisset's humor and the collective works of Jarry, Duchamp, and Roussel. Unlike those creators, however, he suggests that the humor connected to Brisset's work is one to which the

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[116] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 41; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 70.
[117] See note 22, "color," under the subheading "Interior lighting" in Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 71.
[118] For information on Duchamp, Brisset, language, and punning, see, e.g., George H. Bauer, "Duchamp's Ubiquitous Puns," in *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli and Francis M. Naumann (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 127-48.
[119] Duchamp, explaining his interest in Brisset, as quoted in Sweeney, "Eleven Europeans in America: Marcel Duchamp," 21.

reader resorts, rather than a sensibility instilled into the writing by its author. It is, as he describes it, a sort of coping mechanism prompted by Brisset's attempt at "poetically dislocating language."[120]

Numerous scholars, including Michel Sanouillet, Marcel Jean, Kynaston McShine, and Robert Lebel, have addressed the roles of Rimbaud and Mallarmé for Duchamp.[121] In 1918, Duchamp even stated hyperbolically that nothing new had been written since Mallarmé's poems.[122] Concerning Mallarmé, Kynaston McShine suggested that the poet's line, "Toute pensée émet un coup de dés (Every thought gives off a throw of the dice)," from his poem, "Un Coup de dés," resonates with Duchamp's beliefs. Mallarmé wrote, "Thought, given its freedom of expression, can be a game of risk and mystery."[123] Indeed, chance and risk entered frequently into the mechanism of the *Large Glass* and into the projects that surrounded it, and free thought was at the heart of Duchamp's games. Duchamp employed three sturdy threads, dropped from a height of one meter, in order to create new units of measurement for the *Large Glass*, and he shot inked matches at the work from a toy cannon so as to determine the position of certain elements in the work.[124] Chance even cracked the work during transport.[125] Chance plays an important role in many of Duchamp's games, and chance creates new combinations. McShine also pointed to Duchamp's accordance with poet's suggestion that one should "peindre non la chose, mais l'effet

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[120] André Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor* trans. Mark Polizzotti (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1997), 223-27.

[121] Sanouillet's essay gives an overview of these French literary sources, but only mentions Lautréamont once, and he does not expound upon the influence. See Michel Sanouillet, "Marcel Duchamp and the French Intellectual Tradition," in *Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Kynaston McShine and Anne d'Harnoncourt (Exh. cat. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art and The Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 48-55.

[122] Since Duchamp admired Roussel's novelty, this can only be hyperbole. Gough-Cooper and Caumont, *Marcel Duchamp: Work and Life*, 3.26.1918.

[123] Kynaston McShine, "La Vie En Rrose," in *Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Kynaston McShine and Anne d'Harnoncourt (Exh. cat., Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art and The Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 129. Translation by McShine.

[124] Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 61-65, 75-76, 145.

[125] Duchamp embraced this chance alteration of the work, which happened in 1927 after the work was displayed in a Société Anonyme exhibition. See ibid., 78, 80.

qu'elle produit (paint not the thing, but the effect that it produces)."[126] Certainly, Mallarmé's dictum describes much of Duchamp's task in the *Nude Descending a Staircase* and his *Large Glass*—rendering not the effect of the thing upon the senses, but rather upon the mind. McShine suggests that this becomes a law for Duchamp, but, given the artist's distrust of any laws, this may be an overstatement.[127]

Additionally, Mallarmé's focus on whiteness (as concept, sign, absence, and formal element) and the meaning/fleeting sensibility produced by the space between words has bearing on Duchamp's glass substrate. By replacing the white of the canvas or page with the reflectivity and transparency of glass, in both its physicality and concept, Duchamp creates a visual arrangement of symbols that are Mallarméan in their condition. Regarding Mallarmé's use of language, Sanouillet notes that with his belief that poetry arises from the "denaturation of words," Duchamp admired the poet's "hermeticism," a quality that made the author unlikeable for many readers.[128] This strategy of de-habitualizing or de-conventionalizing language, a common interest among these writers, was one to which Duchamp was highly attuned. His gesture in producing the Readymades was tactically a de-habituation of a given form from its conceptual tethers—an exceptionally verbal procedure.

Stepping aside from literature in the strictest sense, Thomas McEvilley argued persuasively for the importance of Pyrrho of Elis in Duchamp's artistic approach to logic, knowledge, and truth. He explains that Duchamp's embrace of the excluded middle term, his sense of indifference, and the perpetual flux of identity, should be traced to his interest in the

[126] "Do not paint the thing itself, but rather the effect that it produces." Author's translation. Quoted in McShine, "La Vie En Rrose," 129.
[127] For Duchamp's distrust of laws and causality, see Tomkins, *Afternoon Interviews*, 85.
[128] Sanouillet, "Marcel Duchamp and the French Intellectual Tradition," 49.

philosopher.[129] The idea that the true world is in perpetual flux will sound familiar by now, since it is reflected in many of the movements discussed here.

Duchamp opposed either/or propositions throughout his work, demonstrating his accordance with Pyrrho. Instead, he insisted on an *all of the above*, versus an *either/or* approach to ideas. This takes on a literary dimension when Duchamp's poetic use of language and signification denies binary logic. This denial is a type of denaturation of concepts structured upon opposition. Duchamp wrote in his notes of an "ironism of affirmation."[130] Such a concept appears to be illogical, since irony effectively negates the information that it presents. Here, Duchamp insists upon an irony that is transformed by laughter into a positive pronouncement, rejecting the binary structure by which irony conventionally operates. Or put another way, the nihilism that Duchamp learned from Laforgue, Jarry, and as shall become clear, Lautréamont, is further negated until it returns something strange and new.

Similarly, Francis Naumann has explored Duchamp's discovery of the radical individualism of Max Stirner.[131] In 1912, while the artist was in Munich, Duchamp seems to have read the German philosopher's 1844 *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (The Ego and its Own). A precursor to Nietzsche, Stirner advocated absolute individual expression of will and loathed any state or other authoritative control. Naumann has argued that Stirner's preference for rebellion over revolution and his desire to reconcile opposites may have suggested a model for Duchamp. Insofar as Duchamp undermined doctrinal art, rather than inventing new movements, his actions seem to accord with the philosopher. This rebellion, which leans towards nihilism, is,

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[129] Thomas McEvilley, "Empyrrhical Thinking (and Why Kant Can't)," *Artforum*, October 1988.
[130] Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 30.
[131] For Naumann's discussion of Duchamp and Stirner, see Francis M. Naumann, *The Mary and William Sisler Collection* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 168-71; "Marcel Duchamp: A Reconcilliation of Opposites," in *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 20-40. Also see Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 61-62, 64.

as shall be shown, very close in spirit to Lautréamont's philosophy. Stirner's ideas would have made a good pairing with *Les Chants de Maldoror,* which he read during that same year. Naumann has suggested that Duchamp's *3 Standard Stoppages* indicate a disregard for authority. Dropping three meter-long threads, which changed shape as they fell from a height of one meter, Duchamp created three new units of measurement. This gesture embraces the non-Euclidean nature of a line deforming as it moves in space.[132] It also signals the artist's disregard for the standard meter as a symbol of authority. Moreover, Stirner (like Pyrrho) provided Duchamp with the (il)logic of denying either/or propositions. This reconciliation of antithetical terms, present also in Lautréamont, becomes a recurring theme across Duchamp's body of work.

Finally, as suggested earlier, Duchamp was familiar with the philosophy of Henri Bergson, whose ideas helped to guide the Cubists, as Marc Antliff has noted.[133] Linda Henderson has detailed Duchamp's relationship with the philosopher's work, which is overwhelmingly antagonistic, precisely because of its strongly emotive orientation as well as its appeal to the Puteaux Cubists.[134] Bergson's theory of humor, which argued for the disparaging comedic basis of the artificial, or mechanical, encrusted upon the living, undoubtedly appealed (ironically) to Duchamp, who employed mechanomorphic forms beginning in 1912.[135] However, concerning Bergson's ideas about creativity, intuition, and time as duration, Duchamp repeatedly assumed positions antithetical to the philosopher. Bergson detested the carving of experiential time into mathematical units. He lauded the use of intuition over scientific observation or quantification of life. In response, Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* is precisely a Mareyesque division of time into units. The artist's *Large Glass* and related works all privilege calculation

[132] Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension*, 170-84, 233-87.
[133] Robert Mark Antliff, "Bergson and Cubism: A Reassessment," *Art Journal* 47, no. 4 (1988).
[134] Henderson, "Marcel Duchamp, Anti-Bergsonist 'Algebraist of Ideas'."
[135] Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 35.

and scientific thought over intuition, logic over feeling, and the quantified space of geometric/dimensional systems.[136]

Laforgue, Mallarmé, Jarry, Roussel, Pyrrho, Stirner, Bergson: these vignettes represent a cursory, but indicative, examination of Duchamp's major literary sources and the texts devoted to them. What of Lautréamont though? Where is he among Duchamp's literary sources? Here, the scholarship is a bit scant. Kynaston McShine links Rrose Sélavy to Maldoror, along with Laforgue's Hamlet, Jarry's Ubu, and other literary characters. The connection is suggestive, but McShine leaves his statement behind quickly, rather than fleshing out the comparison.[137]

In his biography of Duchamp, Bernard Marcadé points briefly to Lautréamont's *Poésies* as a potential source of the artist's concept for the Readymade, but he notes Marcel Jean's contrary scholarship on this point. While Jean sees general Lautréamontean influences throughout Duchamp's oeuvre, he notes the unavailability of *Poésies* before 1919.[138] Since a number of Readymades precede this date, they cannot logically be the product of an idea that Duchamp took from the work. While conducting research for his *History of Surrealist Painting*, Jean had actually confirmed this point in an interview via letter with Duchamp. Asked directly if he knew of *Poésies* before its 1919 republication, the artist replied "~~Naturally~~ [erased] — Indeed

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[136] Henderson, "Marcel Duchamp, Anti-Bergsonist 'Algebraist of Ideas'."

[137] McShine, "La Vie En Rrose," 128. By contrast, John Moffitt questions the influence of *Les Chants de Maldoror* altogether, citing a passage from the same 1946 interview with Sweeney in which Duchamp attributes the genesis of the *Large Glass* to Roussel's play. Therein, the artist reflects upon the literary sources for the works that he made in 1911, explaining that he "had planned a series of illustrations of Laforgue's poems. . . . Rimbaud and Lautréamont seemed too old to me at the time. I wanted something younger." Duchamp's caveat, "at the time," suggests that his attitude changed. Why else would he qualify that comment? Duchamp's mention, in the same interview, of Lautréamont belonging to his ideal library makes Moffit's position untenable. For Moffit's argument, see John F. Moffitt, *Alchemist of the Avant-Garde: The Case of Marcel Duchamp* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003). 79. For Duchamp's comments, see Sweeney, "Eleven Europeans in America: Marcel Duchamp," 19.

[138] For Marcadé's position, see Bernard Marcadé, *Marcel Duchamp: La Vie À Crédit: Biographie* (Paris: Flammarion, 2007), 230-31. For Marcel Jean's assessment see Marcel Jean, *The History of Surrealist Painting* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 35. For Breton's copying of the book, and subsequent republishing, see Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 98-99.

the ‘Poésies’ probably did not come to my knowledge before 1919.”[139]

Two questions before this, Jean had asked the artist if Apollinaire had known about and discussed Lautréamont’s writing with him. While Duchamp agreed that Apollinaire must have known of the writer, he did not recall the author’s works arising in their conversations. This would appear to strike Apollinaire from the list of Duchamp’s potential initiators to Lautréamont. Elsewhere, however, amidst the series of letters exchanged between the two, Duchamp noted “How frail memory is, even for important periods of life,” attributing to such lapses of mind the “happy fantasy of history.”[140] Given the artist’s words of caution, one cannot dismiss the possibility that Duchamp and Apollinaire had discussed Lautréamont decades earlier.

Another voice on the matter, Gerard Durozoi, rightly suggested that Lautréamont bore significance for Duchamp. He explained that process of “disassociation or displacement involved in the naming of a Readymade is comparable that which the Symbolists employed in their attempts to free the hidden meanings of words.”[141] Durozoi then highlighted a parallel form of displacement that Lautréamont employed in his *Poésies* and *Les Chants de Maldoror*. In this, Durozoi identified an important connection between Duchamp and Lautréamont, but he took the idea no further. Instead, he echoed Jean in citing the timing that disqualified *Poésies* as a source for the Readymades, and then he swiftly moved his discussion to Roussel.[142] Given that none of these historical entries stretches more than a few short paragraphs, one might be lead to believe

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[139] (Naturellement)—Les “Poésies“ en effet ne sont peut-être pas venues à mon connaissance avant 1919.” Translation by Jean. Marcel Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp Briefe an Marcel Jean* trans. Marcel Jean and Herbert Molderings (Munich: Silke Schreiber, 1987), 43, 73.

[140] “Il est seulement curieux de constater combien la mémoire est fragile même pour les époques importantes de la vie — / C’est d’ailleurs ce qui explique la fantaisie heureuse de l’histoire.” Jean, *The History of Surrealist Painting*, 42, 72. Translation by Jean.

[141] “Le procédé de dissociation ou déplacement impliqué dans la nomination d’un ready-made est comparable à celui que les poètes symbolistes ont utilisé dans leurs tentatives pour libérer les significations cachées des mots.” Gerard Durozoi, "Le Roman-Momie De La Mariée; Feuilleton," *Opus international: Duchamp et Après* March 1974, 91. Author’s translation.

[142] Ibid.

the relationship was relatively inconsequential. This, however, is unlikely.

Robert Lebel, who produced the first monograph on Duchamp, presented another important clue regarding Duchamp's relationship with the works of Lautréamont. In his 1959 text, Lebel indicated an early date by which the artist had been familiar with Lautréamont. Examining the literary sources of the artist's "Jura-Paris Road" text, Lebel pointed to Mallarmé's poetry as a major source, with its "cold lyricism," rather than the writing of Roussel, Brisset, "or even Lautréamont (whose works he knew well). . . ."[143] Lebel's parenthetical comment makes it clear that he knew from their conversations that Duchamp was aware of Lautréamont by the time of his trip with Apollinaire and Picabia to the Jura Mountains in late 1912. And as suggested earlier in this thesis, this statement corroborates the 1912 date that Duchamp cited to Chastel regarding his first ownership of a copy of *Les Chants de Maldoror*.

Further evidence reveals that Duchamp had a stronger connection to Lautréamont's work than scholars have yet acknowledged. Returning to the artist's comments to Sweeney about literature as a source, after highlighting Roussel's importance Duchamp adds, "My ideal library would have contained all Roussel's writings—Brisset, perhaps *Lautréamont* and Mallarmé."[144] Curiously, neither Laforgue nor Jarry even enter into this list. Thus, Lautréamont's inclusion in yet another brief list is telling. Embracing Lautréamont within his selective ideal library, Duchamp echoes the language and sentiment of his letter to Chastel, reinforcing the primacy of the author for him.

The Chastel letter also clarifies another statement made to Sweeney. Duchamp explained that in 1911 he *had* thought Lautréamont too old, and yet, his position seems to have changed with time. By 1912 he owned a copy of *Les Chants de Maldoror*. In fact, after Duchamp's death

[143] Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 25-26.
[144] My emphasis added in italics. Sweeney, "Eleven Europeans in America: Marcel Duchamp," 21.

in 1968, the Duchamp-Matisse library contained four volumes of Lautréamont's work: two editions of *Les Chants de Maldoror*, from 1869 (a first printing) and 1920, and also two copies of Lautréamont's *Oeuvres complètes* from 1927 and 1938.[145] It is logical then to deduce that the 1869 first edition was the one that Yvonne Chastel sent to Duchamp.

Another letter, to friend and patron Walter Arensberg in fall of 1921, is instructive regarding Duchamp's perspective on Lautréamont's significance for the avant-garde. Duchamp queries Arensberg, "Do you have the Comte de Lautréamont's poems?" He adds, "A new edition came out last year. In fact they aren't poems at all. Just a long preface to the Poems—which he never in fact wrote (as he must have died before). I'll send it to you, you'll see the whole Dadaic seed in it."[146] While Marcel Jean, guided by Duchamp's response to his query, acknowledged that Duchamp did not have access *Poésies* before its reprinting, this letter confirms that he read the short work by 1921 at the latest.

There is good reason to speculate that Duchamp saw *Poésies* sooner, however, when he traveled back to Paris just months after its appearance in the pages of *Littérature* by way of Breton. When Duchamp arrived in France in June of 1919, Picabia made a point of bringing Duchamp to the Café Certa and introducing him to the Paris Dada contingent that met there, including Louis Aragon, Paul Eluard, Philippe Soupault, and Breton. Calvin Tomkins reports that at that first meeting, "Breton sensed 'an immediate exchange and correspondence' with a superior mind. . . ."[147] The reprinting of Lautréamont would have been a fresh victory for Breton, who was always eager to prove his importance. Surely, he would have told Duchamp about the

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[145] Certain copies in the library may also have belonged to Duchamp's brothers, or to Pierre Matisse. See Marc Décimo, *La Bibliothèque De Marcel Duchamp, Peut-Être* (Dijon: Presses du réel, 2002), 126.

[146] (For full letter, see appendix A) "Avez-vous les Poésies du Comte de Lautréamont? Ça a été réédité l'année dernière, Ce ne sont d'ailleurs pas les Poésies. Ce n'est qu'une longue préface aux Poésies—qui n'ont jamais été écrites, (car il a dû mourir avant) Je ~~l~~ vous l'enverrai. Vous y verrez toute la semence dadaïque." Letter reprinted and translated in Duchamp, *Affectt/Marcel*, 203.

[147] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 236-37.

work and its publication, given the opportunity.

The accumulating evidence reveals a portrait of an artist emerging from Cubism for whom literature was central and for whom the work of Lautréamont was of a major significance. During his formative years, Duchamp's poetic education was largely Symbolist and his milieu represented a cross-section of the French post-Symbolist literary avant-garde. His rejection by the Salon Cubists only sent him deeper into the literary reservoirs of French culture, seeking sources that were original, iconoclastic, and not beholden to theoretical dogma or received ideas.

Roussel and Jarry represented figures who battled from the periphery to escape established doctrines of art or literature. It is there, beside them, on his ideal library shelf that Duchamp must have placed his copy of *Les Chants de Maldoror*, for Lautréamont presented the artist with an extraordinarily fiery and peculiar spirit of rebellion in poetry. If Jarry was caustic and Roussel bizarre, Lautréamont was those things ten-fold. Like Roussel and Brisset, Lautréamont was an outsider, and a shadowy one, at that, before Surrealism adopted him. And like his countryman, Laforgue, Lautréamont wielded irony, parody, and negation as his literary weapons. Lebel assured his reader that Duchamp knew the writing of Lautréamont. Regarding the poet's vague biography, however, Duchamp would have only known enough for the writer to appear shrouded in mystery—like some infernal mythical creature.

Chapter IV

Lautréamont and his Works

Who was Lautréamont, and what themes or ideas did he address? This is a difficult question to answer, but an attempt to forge a response might offer some perspective as to why Lautréamont was so compelling an author for numerous artists and writers. Reflecting upon the time before the success of Salon Cubists, when many of the artists around him were radicals rejected by the academy and seeking new paths, Duchamp valorized their position as "pariahs."[148] For Duchamp reading Lautréamont in 1912, the author must have appeared as an admirable pariah seeking his own way—possibly even a role model.

If one surveys the critics' writings on Lautréamont, he was many men, or all things to all people. This is fitting for an author who might best be recognized as the unrecognizable. Lautréamont was a polymorph. In titling his 1920 construction *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse*, a sewing machine wrapped in a blanket and bound with string, Man Ray may have gotten closest to the truth (fig. 22). The author was, to say the least, an enigma hidden behind his words. As he wrote in his *Poésies*, "I do not want to be branded a poseur./I shall leave no memoires."[149] The poet kept his promise.

Over the past one hundred and forty years, eager scholars have compiled the little that is known about Lautréamont, using a handful of archival documents and first-hand accounts. In 1869, A. Lacroix, Verboeckhoven of Brussels published a strange book by the title of *Les Chants de Maldoror*.[150] The volume was the work of a young man named Isidore-Lucien Ducasse

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[148] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 39.

[149] "Je ne veux pas être flétri de la qualification de poseur. Je ne laisserai pas des Mémoires." From *Poésies I*. Lautréamont, *Maldoror & the Complete Works of the Comte De Lautréamont*, trans. Alexis Lykiard (Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 2011), 223. All translations of Lautréamont/ Ducasse by Lykiard unless otherwise noted.

[150] For notes on the little that is known about Ducasse, and the early history of his works, see François Caradec and Albano Rodríguez, *Isidore Ducasse, Comte De Lautréamont* (Paris: La Table ronda, 1970); Lautréamont, *The*

writing under the overwrought pseudonym of Le Comte de Lautréamont—a name most likely borrowed from the hero of a novel by Eugène Sue named "Lautréaumont." Alexis Lykiard suggests that with the addition of the noble *Comte,* Ducasse may have intended to mirror the titles of such figures as the Marquis de Sade and Lord Byron. Both are intertextual shadows throughout the author's work.[151] A Uruguayan expatriate, Ducasse's father, a French consular official named François, had sent him to France as a student boarder in Tarbes. His mother, Célestine Jacquette, was unknown to him since she had died when he was only an infant. Jacquette had married Ducasse's father in 1846 under curious conditions, seven months pregnant, and gave birth to Isidore shortly after in Montevideo—a city under siege at the time. She then died under mysterious circumstances during the next year.[152] After boarding school in France, Ducasse enrolled at the École Polytechnic in Paris, but dropped out to pursue writing, much to his father's chagrin. In a cruel twist, only in his mid-twenties, Ducasse himself died mysteriously in 1870, during the siege of Paris, bookending his earthly duration in partisan conflict.

In his short life, the author produced just two works, both published at his own expense.[153] The first Canto of *Les Chants de Maldoror* appeared in an anthology during his lifetime, but the complete text, along with *Poésies,* would only appear posthumously. In its first incarnation, schoolmates and other figures from the author's real life populated *Les Chants de Maldoror*. Given that form, one might suspect a degree of autobiographical content lay behind the text's absurdities. By the time the full volume appeared, however, Lautréamont had

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Complete Works, 20-24; Lautréamont, *Maldoror and Poems*, trans. Paul Knight (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), 7-25.

[151] Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 7.

[152] She may have committed suicide, or died of Plague. Caradec and Rodríguez, *Isidore Ducasse*, 15-26.

[153] Alex de Jonge, *Nightmare Culture: Lautréamont and Les Chants De Maldoror* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973), 17-19.

substituted a menagerie of marvelous and grotesque creatures—such as flying octopi, a blood drinking spider, a giant beetle-man, an angelic crab, and an amorous shark— for actual persons. His reasons may have been legal, or societal, but they are ultimately unknowable.[154]

Other legal concerns belonged to his publisher. After witnessing the uproar over Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, the publisher likely feared reprisal over *Les Chants de Maldoror*'s supremely subversive nature. It is this factor, Alex de Jonge reasons, that explains why the printed sheets for the book remained undistributed until 1874.[155] Alternately, Lykiard suggests that the publisher held back the books, printed and bound in 1869, until Ducasse's father was able to return to France and settle his late son's 800 franc outstanding balance. Either way, Lautréamont/Ducasse's book was unavailable to the public until 1875, when a French bookshop owner in Brussels, named Jean-Baptiste Rozez, first released them for sale.[156]

As a work of literature, *Les Chants de Maldoror* actively thwarts critical categorization. Despite its poetic title, the work refers to itself, through direct narrative intervention, as a novel at times. Yet, it offers prose verse broken into cantos and strophes, complete with lyrical refrains and long odes. *Maldoror* is also a drawn-out game with identity. It is a very serious and unsettling game, but a gesture centered upon flux and play, nonetheless. It features an erratically shifting narrator. Sometimes the voice of Lautréamont (or is it Ducasse?) comes to the fore, leading or admonishing the reader. Elsewhere a character speaks. A hall of mirrors might stand as a justifiable metaphor here. Occasionally this voice manages to be at once ferocious, plaintive, pessimistic, and seemingly autobiographical—but from an imagined or masked perspective.

Consider the surely figurative-confessional first-person passage in which the narrator

[154] Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 6-7.
[155] de Jonge, *Nightmare Culture*, 18.
[156] Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 285.

criticizes brutal and shallow fools who seek only fame only to lament that he is unable to laugh like those around him. Seeing an opportunity to redress the matter, he uses a little penknife to slit the corners of his mouth, producing the permanent imitation of a smile. "For an instant I believed my aim was achieved . . . ," he writes, "but after some moments of comparison I saw that my smile did not resemble that of humans: the fact is, I was not laughing."[157] But he is laughing! That is the great irony—one Duchamp would surely have recognized. Lautréamont is laughing with dark irony, and he is laughing at his underlying appropriation from Victor Hugo's *The Man Who Laughs*. He is laughing at those who cannot snicker at his litany of horrors, and he cackles at those debased enough to laugh. And yet, there is something sincere in this narrative voice, something fleeting beneath the irony that nearly appears, between the words, only to slip away.

Elsewhere Maldoror, the work's main character, is clearly the narrator present in the text, telling his own story. Lautréamont's anti-hero is cut from a quasi-Miltonian cloth—but much more cruel and morally problematic than that epic Lucifer. At least Milton's fallen angel had chosen a side! ("Hail, horrors! hail")[158] Maldoror appears to have no fixed moral position, save for the unfettered freedom to act. In this, there rests a Sadean streak to be sure. Like the infamous Marquis, Lautréamont offers liberty and violence in detailed excess. And like Sade, Lautréamont's homicidal machinations are shocking and fantastic. Lautréamont, however, instills this violence with richer laughter.[159] Lautréamont's antihero finds not merely brutal, but

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[157] Ibid., 30.

[158] In Book I of *Paradise Lost*, Milton's Lucifer makes a clear moral choice, embracing his decision to reign in hell: "Farewell, happy fields, / Where joy for ever dwells! Hail, horrors! hail, / Infernal world! and thou, profoundest Hell, / Receive thy new possessor—one who brings/ A mind not to be changed by place or time. / The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven. / . . . Here at least / We shall be free. . . . Here we may reign secure; and, in my choice, / To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell: / Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven" See Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1.249-263.

[159] Critics and scholars like Camille Paglia and biographer Neil Schaeffer have suggested that one should read Sade as satire. This may be, but Sade's satire offers little laughter by comparison. See, e.g., Neil Schaeffer, *The Marquis De Sade: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 34; Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 235-47. For an example of Sade's cruel apparatuses, e.g.,

strangely creative and parodic means in his depravity. The bizarre lengths to which he turns might even be matched by the circumlocutions of the *Large Glass*'s machinations. Consider, for instance, Maldoror's "living mine of lice."[160] The character picks a louse from the hair of humanity and copulates with it, explaining that the fertilization in this case breaks the normal laws of biology that prevent such things. He then casts the mother-louse into a pit that he had previously prepared—forty leagues in length, width, and depth. There, he explains, the lice multiply and become like quicksilver. He feeds the pit with bastard babies and arms hacked off little girls, and once the pit becomes a solid mass of lice, he quarries the insects into enormous blocks, which he distributes to the great cities of the earth in the dead of night. The lice then torment humanity for years. Feeding on mankind the insects annihilate the human race, finally blanketing the entire planet. Sade is banal by comparison. And given the strange science presented as matters of fact, is easy to see why Jarry so admired Lautréamont's work.

While this narrator is clear in voice, much of the time the reader is at a loss to distinguish who is speaking or writing. This vexes attempts to ground the work on ego: the author's or his character's. The narrative movement is similarly deconstructed, decentered, and achronological. All told, the work is avant-garde before its time, turning its arms against modes of thought, linguistic means of authoritative control, and art as a vehicle for morality and taste. Walter Benjamin may have summed *Les Chants de Maldoror* up best when he wrote, "If Lautréamont's erratic book has any lineage at all, or rather, can be assigned one, it is that of insurrection."[161]

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one that pinions and saws through the neck of a victim while that victim is sexually victimized by libertines, see, Sade, *The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse and Richard Seaver (New York: Grove Press, 1987), 640-41.

[160] All French quotations from *Les Chants de Maldoror* are indicated using sequential ordering, rather than relying on Lautréamont's irregular numbering system (which includes unnumbered sections). "une mine vivante de poux" For Lautréamont's description of Maldoror's actions and his living mine of lice, see *Maldoror* 2, 9 in Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 78-83.

[161] Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligensia," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2004), 215.

Despite being contemporary with the early Symbolists, Lautréamont's work does not fit easily into any category. Stylistically and thematically, much of *Les Chants de Maldoror* is a sort of hyper-Romanticism blended with Gothic horror, amplifying all of the movements' literary conceits to a red-hot fever that dulls the senses. And yet, it also adopts a scientific and mathematical posture at times, appropriating the cold language of those disciplines, and confounding all attempts to place the total work within a taxonomic pigeonhole. The narration shifts between first, second, and third person without reason or warning. Present and past collide without explanation in a text that moves, as numerous critics have pointed out, both in immense haste and with terrible duration.[162] The experience of reading the book is one of vertigo, horror, and confusion.[163] And the author offers no apology. In fact the narrator celebrates the work's affront upon the reader from within the text, announcing, "The crocodile will change not a word of the vomit that gushed from his cranium."[164] Read the same year as Duchamp's withdrawal from the Salon des Indépendants, this passage must have been especially striking for the artist. Disgusted at Cubism's growing doctrinalization, that crocodile would not change a word for the critics either.[165]

Strophe by strophe, Maldoror fights a constant war against God and man—and yet Lautréamont's God is a terrible being in his own right. Rather than a beneficent deity, Lautréamont's God is an inversion of the Christian ideal. He is a sadistic, vice-driven horror and a lost twin to Francisco de Goya's Saturn, caught devouring his children. Seated atop a throne of excrement, the demonic deity selects sufferers that bob in a sea of boiling blood at his feet to

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[162] For notes on speed in *Les Chants de Maldoror*, see, e.g., Mark Polizzotti, *Lautréamont: Nomad* (Paris: Alyscamps Press, 1994), 11-12.
[163] Blanchot in particular notes the sense of vertigo, and it is quite apt. See Maurice Blanchot, "The Experience of Lautréamont," in *Lautréamont and Sade* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 47.
[164] "Le crocodile ne changera pas un mot au vomissement sorti de dessous son crâne." From *Maldoror* 2, 15. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 105.
[165] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 81,83.

pluck out and gnash upon, consuming them.[166] Elohim, lord of creation, frequents brothels in corporeal form, and he kills for pleasure. Adding to the internal self-contradiction and disorientation of the work, Maldoror's moral basis is unsettlingly arbitrary. In a given moment he might perform an unspeakable act of evil: raping and disemboweling a young girl, or planting himself on the shoreline in the midst of a storm, waiting for the sole survivor of a shipwreck to struggle ashore only to dispatch him.[167] In the next instant, however, Maldoror might act out of kindness (or its appearance), rescuing a drowning young man, or freeing another whose wife and mother had hung him by his hair and left him to die. The total effect is an undermining of any conception of a unified moral code. Rather than rebelling against the good in a fit of heroic evil, or against evil with self-righteous fervor, Lautréamont hammers at the framework that insists upon the binary structure that such morality rests upon. In this regard, the poet convenes a war against the logic of language itself.

Formally, this work consists of six cantos; the first five are a collage of disconnected images and vignettes from the protagonist's life. With each canto, the narrative of *Les Chants de Maldoror* seems to begin anew, offering the false hope of comprehension. Ultimately, however, the work denies both cartographic bearing—which is to say that *Maldoror* largely forgoes having a beginning, middle, or end or an arc of conflict and resolution—and it perpetually forestalls closure. Resolute readers cast themselves into each canto unprepared, forced to cope with each line as it arises, while they attempt to gain their bearings. Then the canto ends, the shuddering stops, and a fresh track begins—repeatedly. And while practically speaking, sections and cantos are paginated and bound in a particular order, they might as well have been arranged by the wind. In fact, only the final Canto follows a structure resembling that of a standard narrative,

[166] For Lautréamont's description of this God, see *Maldoror* 2, 8. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 76-78.
[167] This scene appears to have been inspired by the shipwreck in Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*. For Lautréamont's description of the shipwreck and murder, see *Maldoro*r 2, 13. ibid., 93-99.

finishing in the fashion of a scientifically refigured Gothic horror with terrible consequences.

Some of the work's critics have interpreted the volume as being the product of an author with a pathologic psychology. Gaston Bachelard, for example, itemized the psychoanalytic meaning behind Lautréamont's pageant of mythic and grotesque creatures.[168] Others, like Albert Camus, have read the author's work as promising, but ultimately sophomoric, writing:

> Lautréamont makes us understand that rebellion is adolescent. Our most effective terrorists, whether they are armed with bombs or poetry, hardly escape from infancy. The *Songs of Maldoror* are works of a highly talented schoolboy; their pathos lies precisely in the contradictions of a child's mind ranged against creation and against itself. Like the Rimbaud of *Illuminations* beating against the confines of the world, the poet chooses the apocalypse and destruction rather than accept the impossible principles that make him what he is in a world such as it is.[169]

Camus's criticism, that Lautréamont would destroy the idea of the rock rather than embrace the task of rolling it uphill, like his Sisyphus, itself relies on a moral position (or and ethical one) that is antithetical to the very spirit of *Maldoror*'s attack. Nevertheless, like Benjamin, Camus is correct in identifying Lautréamont's state of revolt. In fact, as Maurice Blanchot and Alex de Jonge among others have pointed out, *Les Chants de Maldoror* actually possesses a very singular (anti)logic that battles vehemently against category and meaning.

While the Symbolists sought secret meanings and fleeting sensations in language, Lautréamont strove to undermine all understanding and numb the senses of his reader through poetic abuse, laughing all the way. And as with his fellow countryman, Laforgue, Lautréamont's writing would have shown Duchamp a strategy for humorous negation. The author's work is a self-aware and skeptical iconoclasm. It is a battlefield of words pitted against authoritative

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[168] Gaston Bachelard, *Lautréamont*, trans. Robert S. Dupree (Dallas: Dallas Institute Publications, Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1986).
[169] Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 82.

language and culture.[170] One might believe sincerely that one knows the meaning and value of an individual word, but in the maelstrom of new combinations that Lautréamont proffers, those assumptions fall asunder. Duchamp exhibited a similar distrust of language. "Language is just no damn good—I use it because I have to, but I don't put any trust in it," he complained, adding cynically, "We never understand each other."[171] Like the exchanges between the Bride and Bachelors in Duchamp's Large Glass, chance and the possibility (or probability) of failure mediate all communications. Duchamp was much more positive about the possibilities of poetic language, however, when freed from the bondage of utility. "Words get their real meaning and their real place in poetry," he explained.[172] This celebration of freedom in language is surely something that appealed to both Lautréamont and Duchamp in their campaigns against dogmatism.[173]

If there is a single tendency in Lautréamont that remains constant, to which a reader might claim stability, it is the poet's unswerving appropriation of, and allusion to, the work of other authors. Scanning his texts, one sees signs of it everywhere. There are borrowed phrases and ideas deriving from Dante, Goethe, Horace, Alphonse de Lamartine, John Milton, William Blake, Edgar Allen Poe, Charles Maturin, Charles Baudelaire, Gérard de Nerval, Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset, Lord Byron, Adam Mickiewicz, the Marquis de Sade, Edward Young, Pascal, the Marquis de Vauvenargues, natural and scientific guides of his day, and numerous other sources.[174] It is quite appropriate then that he should commence *Les Chants de Maldoror* with a

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[170] For Bachelard's reading, see Bachelard, *Lautréamont*. For Blanchot see Blanchot, *Lautréamont and Sade*, 43-164.
[171] Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 31.
[172] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 69.
[173] Duchamp's afore-mentioned interest in Max Stirner's anti-authoritarian philosophy comes to mind here as well.
[174] For explorations of these borrowings, see, e.g., in general, but especially section III, in Roland-François Lack, *Poetics of the Pretext: Reading Lautréamont* (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1998); Blanchot, "The Experience of Lautréamont," 82-83; Lautréamont's 1870 letter to Darasse in which he discusses a number of his

distinctly Baudelairean address to the reader. He writes, not without irony:

> May it please heaven that the reader, emboldened, and become momentarily as fierce as what he reads, find without loss of bearings a wild and abrupt way across the desolate swamps of these sombre, poison-filled pages. For unless he bring to his reading a rigorous logic and mental application at least tough enough to balance his distrust, the deadly issues of this book will lap up his soul as water does sugar.[175]

His warning is tongue in cheek, and also serious. He signals his intention to change something in his readers—to denature or despoil them. Roger Caillois, author of one of the more insightful introductions in the book's history, observed that the work is one that contains its own commentary.[176] Examples such as the preceding address punctuate the work, both instructing the reader and preempting criticism. Through and through, *Les Chants de Maldoror* is a laughing assault upon critical and cultural imposition of taste and meaning as well as against the authority that artistic ego wields (all themes pertinent to Duchamp). Lautréamont means to debase the reader's reasoning faculties and aesthetic predilection. His goal, as expressed by the volume's narrator, is to have effectively "cretinized" his reader by the final page.[177]

Published in 1870, Lautréamont's other slim volume in two parts, *Poésies*, arrives then as a seeming rehabilitation for both the cretinized readers and their literary arts.[178] Published under the author's birth name of Isidore Ducasse, the work appears to its reader at first to be a complete

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sources and Lykiard's introduction to and notes on Lautréamont's collected works in Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 1-12, 261-62, 89-329.

[175] "Plût au ciel que le lecteur, enhardi et devenu momentanément féroce comme ce qu'il lit, trouve, sans se désorienter, son chemin abrupt et sauvage, à travers les marécages désolés de ces pages sombres et pleines de poison; car, à moins qu'il n'apporte dans sa lecture une logique rigoureuse et une tension d'esprit égale au moins à sa défiance, les émanations mortelles de ce livre imbiberont son âme, comme l'eau le sucre." From *Maldoror* 1, 1. *The Complete Works*, 27.

[176] Lautréamont and Roger Caillois, *Oeuvres Complètes: Les Chants De Maldoror, Poésies, Lettres* (Paris: J. Corti, 1953), 87.

[177] " . . . je veux au moins que le lecteur en deuil puisse se dire: "Il faut lui rendre justice. Il m'a beaucoup crétinisé. Que n'aurait-t-il pas fait, s'il eût pu vivre davantage!" (". . . I want the mourning reader to at least be able to say to himself: 'One must give him his due. He considerably cretinized me. What wouldn't he have done if he had lived longer. . .'") From *Maldoror* 6,7. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 214-15.

[178] *Poésies I* and *II* were registered with the French Ministry of the Interior in April and June of 1870 respectively. See ibid., 284.

renunciation of everything set forth in *Les Chants de Maldoror*. Remy de Gourmont, Symbolist poet and co-founder of the important literary magazine *Mercure de France,* understood it differently. He believed it to be the final vestiges of Ducasse's doomed mind set down on paper:

> *Les Chants de Maldoror* are a long poem in prose of which only the first six cantos were written. It is probably that even if Lautréamont had lived he would not have continued it. As one reads through the book one feels his consciousness going, going—and when it is returned to him a few months before he died, he wrote *Poésies* where, amid very curious passages, there is revealed the state of a dying man who repeats and disfigures in his delirium his earliest memories, in this case the teachings of his professors!179

Gourmont seems to have confused his own bewilderment with that of Ducasse. Moreover, he appears to have been blind to some of Ducasse/Lautréamont's irony and the very purposeful manipulations that the poet was carrying out.

Poésies strikes the reader like a wave of moralization. It rejects Romanticism, decrying that "[t]he poetic moans of this century are only sophisms" and insisting further, "Poetry is not a tempest."180 *Les Chants de Maldoror* not only was a poetic maelstrom itself, but it described several literal tempests. Whereas *Les Chants de Maldoror* assailed every semblance of respectable taste, *Poésies* declares, "Taste is the fundamental quality which sums up all the other qualities. It is the *nec plus ultra* of the intelligence. Through this alone is genius the supreme health and balance of all the faculties."181 In contrast to the utter delirium of *Maldoror*, Poésies assures the reader, "Nothing is incomprehensible. Thought is quite as clear as crystal."182

As would surely have caught Duchamp's attention, Ducasse also calls for the end of

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179 Remy de Gourmont and Richard Aldington, *Remy De Gourmont, Selections from All His Works*, 2 vols. (Chicago: P. Covici, 1928), 358.

180 "Les gémissements poétiques de ce siècle ne sont que des sophismes. . . . La poésie n'est pas la tempête, pas plus que le cyclone." From *Poésies I*. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 223.

181 "Le goût est la qualité fondamentale qui résume toutes les autres qualités. C'est le nec plus ultra de l'intelligence. Ce n'est que par lui seul que le génie est la santé suprême et l'équilibre de toutes les facultés." From *Poésies I*, in ibid., 225.

182 "Il n'y a rien d'incompréhensible. La pensée n'est pas moins claire que le cristal." From *Poésies II*. ibid., 237.

personal poetry. As he writes, "Personal Poetry has had its day of relative juggling tricks and contingent contortions. Let us take up the indestructible thread of impersonal poetry . . . ."[183] This prescient idea suggests later works by Mallarmé, Apollinaire, and ultimately Duchamp. What, after all is Duchamp's great allegory of frustrated love, his *Large Glass*, but cold and impersonal visual poetry? Crystalline clarity is another matter. Moreover, Lautréamont offers a proposition in *Poésies* that Duchamp certainly must have found accordance with. The author insists that plagiarism is both necessary and implicit in progress. Lautréamont explains, "It closely grasp's an author's sentence, uses his expressions, deletes a false idea, replaces it with the right one."[184] Ducasse puts that into practice in his text, appropriating everything from Blaise Pascal and the Marquis de Vauvenargues to his own words in *Les Chants de Maldoror*, subverting the meaning of each borrowing through a perverse rectification. Circularly read against one another, *Poésies* and *Les Chants de Maldoror* contradict and negate each other, constantly modifying themselves accordingly. Furthermore, because each text swims in irony, the reader can never be sure how to receive a given passage—with sincerity or mocking laughter. The answer may well be both, resounding with Duchamp's proclamation that "there is no solution because there is no problem."[185] Lautréamont/Ducasse's provocation is an irrational and anti-sensical one, directing the reader in a Pyrrhic fashion to accept *neither* work *and* the other.

It is this mode of thought, as well as Lautréamont's dismissal of critics, that may explain why Duchamp would offer such a place of honor to Lautréamont in his library, especially during his break from Cubism. An observation that Tomkins made regarding Duchamp and Picabia is

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[183] "La poésie personnelle a fait son temps de jongleries relatives et de contorsions contingentes. Reprenons le fil indestructable de la poésie impersonelle. . . ." From *Poésies I*. Ibid., 232.
[184] "Il serre de près la phrase d'un auteur, se sert de ses expressions, efface une idée fausse, la remplace par l'idée juste." From *Poésies II*. ibid., 240.
[185] Rudolf E. Kuenzli and Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 8.

equally evocative of Duchamp's probable relationship with Lautréamont: "[They] emulated one another in their extraordinary adherence to paradoxical, destructive principles, and in their blasphemies which were directed not only against the old myths of art, but against the foundations of life itself."[186] Duchamp was not alone in his admiration of Lautréamont's rebellious and problematic works. These texts garnered numerous admirers in Europe and America. Concerning that latter place, Duchamp was also one of the lines of transmission that introduced many in the United States to the author.

Lautréamont Before He Was a "Surrealist": The European Reception

Writing in 1925, Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) described his first encounter with Lautréamont as follows: "I discovered *Les Chants de Maldoror* some thirty-five years ago. It seemed to me at once that this was the very archetype of a work of genius = the black and fallen archangel, of an ineffable beauty, dazzling flashes of lightning, violets and greens in the primordial storm. . . ."[187] The kind of praise and observation that Maeterlinck offered was not uncommon, but the fact that his admiration began during the fin de siècle is rare, though not singular. And while Duchamp did not know Maeterlinck directly, Paul Fort, who knew figures in the artist's circle, did. Fort frequented the Closerie de Lilas, hired Mercereau, and edited the Cubist-connected journal *Vers et prose*, which would republish the first canto of *Les Chants de Maldoror* in 1914.[188] Being a Belgian poet and playwright, Maeterlinck may have had some

[186] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 76.
[187] " J'ai découvert Les Chants de Maldoror il y a quelque trente-cinq ans. Il me semblait alors que c'était l'archéytpe de l'œuvre de génie = archange noir et foudroyé, d'une beauté indicible, fulgurations éblouissants, violettes et vertes, dans l'orage primordial. . . " Maurice Maeterlinck, "Opinions: Maurice Maeterlinck," *Le Disque Vert: Le cas Lautréamont* 1925, 93. Author's translation.
[188] Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 72.

early advantage over Parisians in finding a copy of *Les Chants de Maldoror* circa 1890, since it was first sold in Brussels some fifteen years earlier. A Symbolist himself, Maeterlinck belonged to the latter portion of the movement that ran concurrent with Lautréamont's assaults.

Another instance of appreciation for Lautréamont, this one closer in time and place to Duchamp, was the admiration of Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920) for the author. Modigliani, who moved to Paris in 1906 and kept a studio at the Bateau-Lavoir beginning in 1907—along with numerous preeminent figures of the avant-garde, including Picasso—was an avid reader of Lautréamont.[189] The artist moved to Montparnasse in 1909, and sometime the next year he discovered *Les Chants de Maldoror*. Modigliani carried his copy all over Paris, and in one incident even lost it when it slipped from his pocket as a waiter ejected him from a café (in one of his frequent inebriated bouts).[190] His penchant for the book was so great that he had memorized portions of *Les Chants de Maldoror* and would recite from the work. He also recommended the book to others. Given Modigliani's circle of friends, the work's existence had surely entered the artistic discourse of Montmartre and Montparnasse by the end of the first decade of the century.[191]

His portrait painted by Modigliani in 1917, Blaise Cendrars (1887-1961), née Frédéric-Louis Sauser, had worked and socialized within the same extended Parisian artistic circles as Duchamp during the years leading up to the First World War.[192] Meeting Guillaume Apollinaire in 1912, the poet became acquainted with the artists of the Puteaux circle, and even more so with the artists who kept studios at La Ruche, in the 15th Arrondissement of Paris. During this period, Cendrars even participated, along with Apollinaire and Delaunay, in the rancorous debate

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189 Meryle Secrest, *Modigliani: A Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 97,139.
190 Pierre Sichel, *Modigliani: A Biography of Amedeo Modigliani* (New York: Dutton, 1967), 201.
191 Secrest, *Modigliani,* 200.
192 Jay Bochner, *Blaise Cendrars: Discovery and Re-Creation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 13.

between Apollinaire and the Cubists versus the Italian Futurists over who had first used the term *Simultanisme*, or a variant thereof, and therefore had just recourse to the word.[193]

Cendrars became a fixture at this time in a web of artists that included Marc Chagall, Roger de La Fresnaye, Alexander Archipenko, Delaunay, Léger, Modigliani, Chaim Soutine, Jacques Lipchitz, and others.[194] Especially close to Chagall, Cendrars curiously set the artist's name next to Lautréamont's in his 1913 poem, "Atelier." The poem is ostensibly about La Ruche, given that the studio—working home to Chagall, Archipenko, Lipchitz and others—is named in the first line of the work. The passage referencing Lautréamont reads: "Petrus Borel. / Madness winter / A genie split open like a peach / Lautréamont / Chagall . . . . "[195]

This connection was doubtless a compliment, since Cendrars venerated both Lautréamont and Chagall. In his biographical study of Cendrars, Jay Bochner explained that the critic "Remy de Gourmont . . . revealed to [the poet] all the authors who ever mattered to him, from the church fathers to Rimbaud and Lautréamont."[196] Therein, three of Cendrars's most important sources are neatly encapsulated. Many among the Mercereau circle also held Gourmont and his publications in high regard.[197] So like Cendrars, it is certainly possible that they also knew of Lautréamont by way of the elder writer and editor. Cendrars was also an avid reader of Maeterlinck, who, as has been demonstrated, also extolled Lautréamont's writing. Moreover, like Lautréamont himself, and per his explicit instructions, Cendrars engaged in games of plagiarism, and he seems to have

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[193] Petrus Borel was a French Romantic writer and poète maudit. Ibid., 51. For a background on, and description of the conflict between the Cubists and Apollinaire against the Futurists, see Marianne W. Martin, "Futurism, Unanimism and Apollinaire," *Art Journal* 28, no. 3 (1969); Marianne W. Martin, *Futurist Art and Theory 1909-1915* (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1968), Appendix: "On the Futurists' Controversies."
[194] Bochner, *Blaise Cendrars*, 52.
[195] "*Pétrus Borel / La folie l'hiver / Un génie fendu comme une pêche, / Lautréamont/ Chagall*"
[196] Bochner, *Blaise Cendrars*, 31.
[197] Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 8.

found distinct pleasure in hinting at his appropriations.[198]

Apollinaire represents another mysterious link in this web. Cendrars and Apollinaire shared much in common in their work. Roger Shattuck and others have noted the degree to which Cendrars and Apollinaire probably influenced each another during this period, as evidenced by the similarities between Cendrars's "Pacques à New-York" and Apollinaire's "Zone."[199] Both works offer a poetic coolness that seems to descend from Mallarmé, especially. Another important associate of Apollinaire, and a champion of the Cubists, André Salmon read Lautréamont in Saint Petersburg before returning to France in 1902.[200] Nevertheless, Apollinaire never discussed Lautréamont as a source, even if his close associates knew of the author and despite the echoes of *Maldoror* that appear in his work.[201] Duchamp did not recall Apollinaire ever discussing Lautréamont. And yet poems like his 1908 "Onirocritique," and his 1913 "Zone" demonstrated something akin to Lautréamont's dreamlike, ambling text and his passages of detached reflection. Curiously, "Zone" also features an avian litany that suggestively echoes the string of birds inhabiting *Les Chants de Maldoror*—for which Lautréamont appropriated descriptions from *l'Encyclopédie d'histoire naturelle*, by Jean-Charles Chenu, and other naturalist works.[202] Could it be that Apollinaire in turn took his inspiration from Lautréamont?

While it may only be speculation, Francis Picabia, a close associate of Duchamp from 1911 onward and a friend of Apollinaire, is among the most logical candidates for the role of having introduced Duchamp to Lautréamont. This is because he, like Maeterlinck, was also aware of Lautréamont during the fin de siècle, well in advance of the Dadaists and Surrealists. In

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198 Bochner, *Blaise Cendrars*, 137.
199 Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years; the Arts in France, 1885-1918: Alfred Jarry, Henri Rousseau, Erik Satie, Guillaume Apollinaire*, ed. (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1958), 215.
200 Campa, *Guillaume Apollinaire*, 148.
201 Both Salmon and Apollinaire also held positions at *Vers and Prose*, with Salmon being a co-founder in 1905. See Robbins, "From Symbolism to Cubism," 325.
202 Marguerite Bonnet, "Lautréamont Et Michelet," *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France* 64, no. 4 (1964): 606.

a 1924 interview, conducted after his divorce from the Surrealists, Picabia explained his position acerbically: "I read Lautréamont when I was nineteen and it bores me to talk again about a man whom my friends have discovered twenty-six years later."[203] Headstrong, egotistical, witty, and at times quite caustic, Picabia would likely have received Lautréamont quite well before the poet's Surrealist stardom. Picabia's souring relationship with the Surrealists likely altered the lens through which he read the author, just as Duchamp may have moved to disguise his connections to Lautréamont after the rise of the Surrealists. Given the artist's oath to himself to remain independent of such groups, the Surrealists' laying claim to the author, as well as Breton's eagerness to include him in the movement, would have rendered the author problematic for Duchamp to acknowledge as a source without compromising his position.

These selected individuals are likely representative of a larger number of artists, writers, and critics who admired Lautréamont, among Duchamp's immediate circle before the war and only a degree or two removed from it. Lautréamont was certainly on the literary and artistic horizons of many in the French avant-garde in the years before Dada and then Surrealism swept into Paris, claiming him in their course.

As argued in the introduction to this text, the concatenation of Surrealism and Lautréamont is so prevalent that historians since appear unable—or unwilling—to mention one without invoking the other in short order. Sometimes critics take this tendency to its extreme figurative end. In his volume entitled *Nightmare Culture: Lautréamont and Les Chants de Maldoror,* Alex de Jonge announced assuredly, "Lautréamont was really born in 1920. Fifty years earlier Isidore Ducasse had written two books, but this only became generally known with

[203] Thanks to Claire Howard for bringing this passage to my attention. Twenty-six years may be a bit of hyperbole on Picabia's part, but there is no reason to question the fact that he knew the author well in advance of the Surrealists. Picabia, as quoted in Francis Picabia, *I Am a Beautiful Monster: Poetry, Prose, and Provocation*, trans. Marc Lowenthal (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 306.

Surrealism. The surrealist poets such as Breton, Eluard and Aragon really created Lautréamont, and put him on their new map of European culture."[204] Writing in 1925, in a special volume of the journal *Le Disque Vert* entitled *Le Cas Lautréamont*, Bernard Faÿ similarly localized the rehabilitation of the author and his work to the short period of Surrealism's explosion in Paris. He explained, "We have come to speak often of Lautréamont these past five years. He has conquered the public and awakened the curiosity of many."[205] This insistence upon a Surrealist-exclusive link is evident even now. Hal Foster, for example, working from the writings of André Breton in *Compulsive Beauty*, specified a Surrealist "recovery" of Lautréamont.[206] This is a common trope, painting the author as a lost entity, an outsider cast aside and awaiting rescue prior to the Surrealist movement.

The alluring details of the Surrealist discovery of Lautréamont doubtlessly contribute to this particular configuration of history. The author was a demiurgic figure for the Surrealists, and like many *theogonies*, this one has its variants. In one version of this origin tale, it was Philippe Soupault who stumbled upon a rare copy of *Les Chants de Maldoror* by chance. In spring of 1918, Soupault found himself hospitalized with a pulmonary illness. As he began to recover, doctors allowed him an excursion to the bookstore across the street from the facility, named pretentiously "Ars et Vita," as Soupault recalled. He found a complete copy of Lautréamont's volume during his outing: beige-bound and improperly shelved in the mathematics section of the sleepy shop.[207] Returning to the hospital with his newly purchased book, Soupault read it in its

[204] de Jonge, *Nightmare Culture*, 78.
[205] "On parle souvent de Lautréamont depuis cinq ans, il a conquis un public et éveillé la curiosité de beaucoup." Bernard Faÿ, "Lautréamont Et Son Public," *Le Disque Vert: Le cas Lautréamont* 1925, 4. Author's translation.
[206] Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 168-69.
[207] Béatrice Mousli, *Philippe Soupault* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), 60.

entirety, bringing it to Breton's and Aragon's eager attention soon afterwards.[208]

In his excellent biography of Breton, Mark Polizzotti recounts instead that Louis Aragon initially introduced Breton to *Les Chants de Maldoror* earlier that same year, albeit an incomplete reproduction, after he was surprised to discover that his friend knew nothing of the author. Aragon knew of Lautréamont from an issue of *Vers et prose*—printed some four years prior when Paul Fort was editor of the journal—that had included only the first canto of the work. Either way, the result was the same; in both its whole form, and its excerpted version, Lautréamont's text held Breton spellbound.[209]

The effect of the work on the Surrealists was to be profound. Working the overnight shift in the mental facility at Val-de-Grâce in 1918, Breton and Aragon read passages aloud to one another from the copy that Soupault had secured, greatly upsetting the locked-in patients, who thought their caretakers insane.[210] The nightmarish visions, disorientations, and seemingly stream-of-conscious images in the book enraptured the pair. Since then, its famous simile, "as handsome as . . . the chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella," has become synonymous with Surrealism.[211] Breton even granted Lautréamont a place of honor in his 1924 "Surrealist Manifesto," quoting the author twice in his discussion of images in Surrealist poetics.[212]

While the history of Lautréamont's impact should certainly underscore the part that the Surrealists played in evangelizing and popularizing his works, they were by no means its zero point, as some narratives seem to imply. Prior to the surrealists, *Les Chants de Maldoror* was

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[208] For Soupault's recollections, and relationship with Lautréamont's texts, see: ibid., 60-73. Also see: Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 73-74.
[209] Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 72.
[210] Ibid., 73-74.
[211] Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 193.
[212] André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 28, 39.

obscure, but by no means lost. Other writers and artists, including Duchamp, knew of the author during his years of supposed critical perdition.

Lautréamont's Early Readers in the United States

Across the Atlantic, Duchamp's future friend and collaborator, Emanuel Radnitzky, known best as Man Ray, also knew of *Les Chants de Maldoror* years before Breton and company. Ray's first experience with Lautréamont came before he met Duchamp. After Belgian poet Adon Lacroix (née Donna Lecoeur) and Ray married in 1913, she had a number of her belongings shipped to their home in Ridgefield, New Jersey. One crate that arrived contained a number of her books. Ray recalled later in his autobiography that "Donna began removing them carefully, one by one, stopping now and then to turn the pages of one, reading some lines to herself and then translating into literal English a poem by Mallarmé; another by Rimbaud and a paragraph from Lautréamont's *Chants de Maldoror*, works that were adopted ten years later as slogans by the Surrealists in Paris."[213]

When Duchamp arrived in the United States two years later, in 1915, he apparently became something of an ambassador for a number of revolutionary French poets, including Lautréamont. At the time, Robert Allen Parker was the Associate Editor of *The Current Opinion*, and according to Tomkins, one of the first people to interview the newly arrived artist.[214] Soon after that meeting, the journal published an unsigned article entitled "The Iconoclastic Opinions of M. Duchamps (sic) Concerning Art and America," which must logically be the product of the early interview to which Tomkins referred. Years later, Parker would reflect upon the early days of his acquaintance with the artist:

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[213] Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 43; Herbert R. Lottman and Ray Man, *Man Ray's Montparnasse* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 2001), 33.
[214] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 329.

> So, in that turbulent demi-decade between 1915 and 1920, America discovered not only Duchamp the artist, but Marcel the person. To hundreds—possibly thousands—he became a sort of subversive *guru*—opening secret trapdoors to delights frowned upon by more academic instructors—the poems of Arthur Rimbaud, and Stéphane Mallarmé, the *Chants de Maldoror* of Isidore Ducasse, "Comte de Lautréamont," and the *Ubu Roi* of Alfred Jarry . . . . He introduced us, at that early date, to all the granddaddies of Dada, the ancestors of Surrealism, which indeed never did *not* exist![215]

Parker is very explicit that Duchamp was *the* harbinger for these subversive poets among American artists, poets, and intellectuals.[216] While the critic links the Surrealists to *Maldoror* by suggesting that the novel was Surrealism avant la lettre, Duchamp remains the central figure in the work's American dissemination before 1920, rather than Breton or the other Surrealists—many of whom later emigrated to the United States to escape the violence of the Second World War. Duchamp would, himself, in the course of escaping the Nazi occupation of France, flee to New York. Upon arrival, he spent a month with none other than Parker and his wife.

[215] Robert A. Parker, "America Discovers Marcel," *View*, March 1945 1945, 33.
[216] Parker also gave Duchamp a place to stay in New York for a month in 1942, and was on friendly terms with Walter Arensberg. See Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 330-32.

Chapter V

Resonances: Introduction

The evidence presented above demonstrates that Duchamp, emerging from a literary-minded Cubist milieu, engaged with Lautréamont's work beginning in about 1912, roughly concurrent with his adoption of Roussel as a source. After 1915, he also introduced some among the American public to the author, and by the 1940s he included the author in his highly abridged ideal library. This is the first untangling of the artist's history with Lautréamont, now laid bare.

The task that follows these revelations is a challenging one. Duchamp's work must be strategically analyzed, seeking the points of contact where the artist may have been responding to Lautréamont. The term *resonances* will apply throughout the following sections in describing these echoes of the author in the artist's oeuvre, precisely because it implies no hierarchy. The relationship at hand is not a matter of influence. It is important to note, once again, that Lautréamont's writing did not cause Duchamp to make a given work or enact a certain gesture. Rather, it is a case of Duchamp's choice to respond to Lautréamont as a source.

In his notes for the *Large Glass*, Duchamp wrote, "Buy a book about '*knots*.' (Sailor's knot and others)."[217] Duchamp seemed to like string as a material and as an idea. He used it in numerous works, and in designing the labyrinthine webs at the 1942 "First Papers of Surrealism" exhibition in New York, he used nearly a mile of it.[218] The ongoing knot metaphor herein is therefore appropriate. With the task of untangling most knots, it is often advisable to first pick a free thread and follow it into the thick of things. Here, a curious commentary offered by

[217] See reverse of note titled "Speculations" from *A l'infinitif* in Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 76.
[218] For a discussion of this show and Duchamp's design with the string, see, e.g., Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

American artist Man Ray will offer oblique access into Duchamp's inner world.

A View through a Friend's Eyes: Man Ray's Cryptic Allusion

Having met in 1915, shortly after the French artist's arrival in the United States, Duchamp and Man Ray developed an enduring camaraderie, despite their initial linguistic barrier. Tomkins noted that it was a kind of attraction of opposites, since Ray was outwardly much shorter in stature and lacked the dandyish affectation of Duchamp.[219] It was by way of a short chain of acquaintances that the two first came face to face. At the time, Ray was connected to a circle of American avant-garde writers, artists, and intellectuals through his involvement in the magazine *Others*. Walter Arensberg, who would become a friend, benefactor, and social nucleus for Duchamp and other artists, writers, and intellectuals in New York, financed the publication. Duchamp in turn knew Arensberg by way of Walter Pach, who had organized the 1913 Armory show in New York, where the United States had received its first initiation to Duchamp via his painted emissary, the *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (the artist did himself not attend).[220] The initial meeting between Duchamp and Ray consisted of a game of tennis and a stunted bilingual conversation, since neither was adept at the other's language.[221] The result, however, was one of the great relationships in the history of modern art.

Their amity soon grew into a collaborative exchange, with Ray's photographic expertise aiding Duchamp with the *Large Glass* and other projects—in New York and in France before and after the Second World War. Duchamp's Readymades, in turn, lent Ray a set of ideas that would, among other things, inform his Dada objects made in the early 1920s, including his

[219] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 163-64.
[220] See "Enter Marcel Duchamp" chapter in Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray, American Artist* (New York: C.N. Potter, 1988); Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 147, 53.
[221] For Man Ray's description of this meeting, see Ray, *Self Portrait*, 58-59; Also see Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 164.

Enigma of Isidore Ducasse. Sometime in 1920, Man Ray also became a midwife to the birth of Rrose Sélavy, Duchamp's female alter ego.[222] In her debut, Rrose would sign her name to several works in 1920 and 1921, including *Fresh Widow* and *Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy* (figs. 23 and 24). The first was a French window whose panes, in a visual and linguistic gesture of black humor, Duchamp had rendered opaque with black leather. The latter object was a birdcage containing marble blocks resembling sugar cubes, a thermometer, and a cuttlebone.[223] Duchamp explained that anyone who picked the object up thinking that marble blocks were actually sugar would be surprised by the object's weight. That incongruity between expectation and reality, realized when one thing was disguised as another, amused the artist greatly.[224] Upsetting identity and expectation were among the artist's favorite games.

Concerning Rrose, Duchamp explained to Cabanne, "In effect, I wanted to change my identity."[225] At first he thought of taking on a Jewish name, since he was Catholic, but nothing that he considered suited him. He continued, " . . . and suddenly I had an idea: why not change sex? It was much simpler."[226] Beyond the potential puns contained in the name—*Eros c'est la vie* and *arroser la vie*—Duchamp informed Cabanne that "Rose" was an unappealing name at the time.[227] The double 'R' came from Picabia's 1921 painting, *L'Oeil cacodylate* (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France), which included the wordplay: "Pi Qu'habilla Rrose Sélavy."[228] Beginning in 1921, Man Ray became Rrose's official photographer for a number of Dada-related activities. Among them, one portrait of Rrose would adorn a bottle of faux perfume in the artist's

[222] For a discussion of Duchamp's transformations before the camera, see James W. McManus, "Not Seen and/or Less Seen: Hiding in Front of the Camera " in *Inventing Marcel Duchamp: The Dynamics of Portraiture*, ed. Anne Collins Goodyear and James W. McManus (Exh. Cat., Washington, DC: National Portrait Gallery, 2009), 58-79.
[223] This commissioned work was rejected by its intended recipient. Duchamp, as quoted in Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 65-66; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 120.
[224] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 234.
[225] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 64; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 118.
[226] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 64; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 118.
[227] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 64; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 118.
[228] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 64-65; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 118.

punning *Belle Heleine, eau de Voilette* (the inversion of the *o* and *i* changing "violet" into "veil") (fig. 25).[229]

Rrose soon became interested in optics. Between 1920 and 1926, Man Ray was an eager collaborator in her *Rotary Glass Plates* (1920), *Rotary Demisphere* (1924), and *Anémic Cinéma* (1925-26) (figs. 26, 27 and 28). The first of Rrose's optical devices possessed spinning striped-glass blades that created optical circles when rotating. One day, while photographing the work for Duchamp/Rrose, a blade broke, nearly killing Man Ray. Glass went flying. A piece glanced off Ray's head. Duchamp went pale, but his friend was unharmed—no doubt a memorable experience for both men.[230] Rrose's *Rotary Demisphere* featured a spinning spiral-pattered disc that was safely ensconced behind a half globe of glass. Man Ray participated in the design of the *Demisphere*, which included an inscription that would appear again in Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*. As part of this last work, Duchamp combined the optical effects of his circles and spirals with his penchant for wordplay. He attached small raised letters, in spiral arrangements spelling out puns, to nine cardboard discs that he mounted to records. He also produced ten discs with circle and spiral patterns that continued his investigations into pure optics. Then, with the help of Man Ray and filmmaker Marc Allégret, Duchamp filmed the spinning objects.[231]

In 1920, Man Ray and Duchamp, with the support of Katherine Dreier—a Duchamp patron and an amateur artist herself —founded the Société Anonyme, Incorporated.[232] Dreier had conceived of the organization as one that would promote the cause of modern art in with

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[229] For useful articles regarding all of the Man Ray/Duchamp photographic plays on identity, see, e.g., Dawn Ades, "Duchamp's Masquerades," in *The Portrait in Photography*, ed. Graham Clarke (London: Reaktion Books, 1992). For this note see pgs. 107-108; McManus, "Not Seen and/or Less Seen: Hiding in Front of the Camera ".

[230] Ray, *Self Portrait*, 68-69; Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 254; Gough-Cooper and Caumont, *Marcel Duchamp: Work and Life*, 10.20.1920.

[231] For a description of these optical works, see Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Ghent, New York: Ludion Press, 1999), 96-107.

[232] For background on the Société Anonyme, Incorporated, see "Introduction," in *The Société Anonyme and the Dreier Bequest at Yale University: A Catalogue Raisonné*, ed. Robert L. Herbert, Eleanor S. Apter, and Elise K. Kenney (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 1-32.

exhibitions, lectures, and other outreach, with the eventual goal of establishing a museum of modern art in New York. Her own collection would seed the group's holdings. The repetition of the corporate appellation between the English and French in organization's name derived from Ray's unfamiliarity with French, since he initially thought that *société anonyme* meant simply "anonymous society."[233] Ray became the treasurer and then official photographer for the group, while Duchamp fulfilled the role of president. Société Anonyme, Inc. would last over twenty-five years, and host more than eighty exhibitions, including the first American solo shows of Villon, Léger, Archipenko, and others.[234] Through these many activities, Duchamp and Ray saw each other on a nearly daily basis through the early 1920s.[235] This closeness of the two men throughout this period renders a later comment that Man Ray made about Duchamp and the *Large Glass* both curious in its esoteric nature and compelling for the manner in which it suggests his friend's interest in Lautréamont.

In March of 1945, Charles Henri Ford's *View* magazine, a quarterly for art and literature, devoted an entire issue to Duchamp (fig. 29). Numerous individuals—including Breton, Robert Desnos, Frederick Kiesler, Gabrielle Buffet, and Harriet and Sidney Janis—contributed to the now-historic publication. Even Duchamp himself supplied original artwork for the issue's cover. The artist's design features a wine bottle emerging from the bottom right corner of the composition. The vessel stands against a star-flecked blue field, like a nocturnal sky. Over this, it emits smoke, like a chimney, in a pseudo-analog of the Milky Way. Duchamp used a copy of his military service record as the bottle's label, providing an overt autobiographical indication, and

[233] For Man Ray's recollection, see Ray, *Self Portrait*, 89.
[234] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 225-26.
[235] Ibid., 228.

possibly alluding to a note included in his *Box of 1914*.[236] Together, the bottle, smoke, and sky might be a reference to the artist's *Large Glass*. If that is the case, the Milky Way reading of the smoke seems quite fitting, given that Duchamp's notes for the work reference the Milky Way in the context of the Bride's realm. Furthermore, the wine bottle points to glass as a material and to the Benedictine bottle weight belonging to the Bachelors' machinery.[237]

Among the meditations included in the volume on Duchamp and his work was a personal reflection penned by Ray, who was by then known as a major American Dadaist and Surrealist in his own right. Ray was also, as has been demonstrated, among Duchamp's closest long-term friends and collaborators. In fact, by the time Man Ray composed his entry for *View*, the two had known one another for three decades.

Man Ray's *View* tribute to Duchamp, entitled "Bilingual Biography" (see appendix B for full text), appeared along with other short texts, including Parker's adulation of the artist as a "subversive guru," in a sub-section labeled "Duchampiana." Given the pair's long friendship, it is reasonable to interpret Man Ray's poetic-biographical text as more than distanced genuflection, or creative exposition. "Bilingual Biography" is an often-metaphorical text that winds through the history of the two artists' relationship, employing synecdoche and puns in order to indicate a number of landmark works from Duchamp's oeuvre, and intertwining the lives of the two friends in its course. In its midst, the text also contains a cryptic literary allusion to Lautréamont's *Les Chant de Maldoror*. Since Ray's biographical sketch touches upon the

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[236] The note in question reads, "***Deferment*** / Against compulsory military service: a "deferment" of each limb and the other anatomical parts; each soldier already unable to put his uniform on again. . . . " See Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 23. Elsewhere, Schwarz's volume translates the note's title, "Eloignement," as "Removal." See Duchamp and Schwarz, *Notes and Projects*, 61-61.

[237] For notes on the Milky Way and the Benedictine bottle see Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 36-37, 57, 61-62, 76. Tomkins explains that Duchamp drilled a hole in the bottle in order to allow pipe smoke to pass through the bottle. He also notes Henri-Pierre Roché's reading of the magazines front and back covers as an expression of Duchamp's notion of the infrathin, and his note: "Quand la fumée de tabac sent aussi de la bouche qui l'exhale, les deux odeurs s'épousent par infra-mince," or, "When tobacco smoke also smells of the exhaling mouth, the two odors are wedded by the infra-thin." See Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 347-48.

careers of both artists, it is imperative to carefully examine the context and implication of the reference before drawing conclusions.

Ray addresses his subject in "Bilingual Biography," directly as "you" in a personal tone that makes it explicit that the text is not merely *about* Duchamp; it is also a kind of missive *to* him. He opens the composition by highlighting his rapport with Rrose Sélavy and by quoting and augmenting a phrase taken from the spiraling puns of her *Anémic Cinéma*: words which first appeared as a peripheral inscription on one of the preliminary projects for the *Rotary Demi-Sphere*, later engraved on the machine itself.[238] Man Ray writes,

> "RROSE SELAVY ET MOI ESQUIVONS LES ECCHYMOSE DES ESQUIMAUX AUX MOTS EXQUIS"[239]

Ray follows this repurposed introduction with a humorous recollection of their initial meeting. As a playful metaphor for the pair's first halting bilingual exchange and social activity, Ray uses the phrase "tennis without a net." Ray notably also references both the *Large Glass*, through the inclusion of its title and by mention of the "témoins oculistes" who belong to the Bachelors' realm. He additionally notes his photographic documentation of the work in process. *Elevage de poussières*, or *Dust Breeding* was Man Ray's 1920 photographic record of the *Large Glass* lying on trestles in Duchamp's studio, gathering the dust that the artist would later selectively adhere to the glass in order to produce the "sieves" (*tamis*) or "parasols" (*ombrelles*) as he variously called them (fig. 30).[240] As a component of the Bachelor's machinery, these sieves catch the lighter-than-air frozen gas "spangles" as they exit the tubes above the malic

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[238] Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1969), 51-53; Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 269-70.

[239] "Rrose Sélavy and I escape the bruises of the Eskimos in exquisite words" Translation by Francis Naumann. See Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making*, 98. There is a potential linguistic-visual play of black and white implied. While the letters of the Rotorelief itself were black on white, the bruises that were to be supplied by the Eskimos in question would be black (and blue) marks on white skin set against the white of the snow associated with the Eskimos' climate. Man Ray, "Bilingual Biography," *View*, March 1945, 32.

[240] Both terms, *ombrelles* or "parasols," and *tamis* or "sieves" appears on a single note entitled "Le Gaz d'eclairage (I)" that was included in *The Green Box*. See Duchamp, *Duchamp Du Signe*, 72-74; Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 48-50.

molds. Ray's photograph holds the sieves themselves frozen in time—documenting the realization of a *Green Box* instruction: "For the sieves in the glass—allow dust to fall on this part a dust of 3 or 4 months and wipe well around it in such a way that this dust will be a kind of color (transparent pastel) use of mica . . . ."[241] Man Ray's "Bilingual Biography" stanza reads,

> . . . et AVIS AUX EXHIBITIONISTES: If you cannot show us your anatomy, it is no avail to show us that you know your anatomy.
> 1915, Yes and Love; Notre première rencontre au tennis (sans filet), en deux mots, nous parlons mal mais nous tenons la balle aux temoins ocultistes.
> West 67th Street; La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même. While the bride lay on her face, decked out in her bridal finery of dust and debris, I exposed her to my sixteen-candle-camera. Within one patient hour was fixed once and for all the Domaine de Duchamp. Elevage de poussières; didn't we raise the dust, old boy![242]

While Duchamp had banished the artist's hand as an autographic mark in the *Large Glass*, in a sense he replaced it by way of his notes, sketches, and with Man Ray's photograph as an index of the work's creation.

Ray's lines continue along in this convivial manner, drolly marking key events and works from Duchamp's life, drawing closer and closer to the day on which he wrote the text. In closing, Ray notes his own physical removal from Duchamp, and he addresses the widespread perception of Duchamp's inactivity by taking a shot at his friend's critics. He writes,

> Hollywood; merci, cher vieux, I received your valise. Those who say you do not work anymore are crazy. . . .
> Strange how those
> most suspicious of your pulling their legs haven't any to stand on.
> 1945, New York; yes, and chess. Au revoir!

Man Ray's timbre is playful and personal throughout—that of one friend remembering another fondly. It is a text about Duchamp, but it is also about the friendship. Ray would later choose to

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[241] Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 53.
[242] For quotation, see Ray, "Bilingual Biography," 32. *Dust Breeding* is also reproduced in the Duchamp issue of *View* as a back drop for Charles-Henri's poetic tribute to Duchamp, "Flag of Ecstasy." Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 118.

re-publish this work, with minor changes, just a few years after his friend's death in 1968.[243]

Midway through the entry, however, Man Ray includes an extremely peculiar remark: an allusion to an author most often associated with the Surrealists at the time. He writes,

> Société Anonyme Incorporated; Fair, cold but warmer, as indicated by my special device. Catherine Barometer, very reliable. *Now you have almost unfinished the only authentic portrait of Lautréamont's god, jumping hair of cones in a bordel.*
>
> On nous a traité d'hommes finis. Parceque nous ne finissons jamais?
> Dites plutôt, des hommes in-finis.[244]

These esoteric lines contain the only mention of a literary source. The other literary references are to contemporaries "Paul [Eluard]" and "*cher* André [Breton]." Man Ray's allusion to *"*Lautréamont's god," the "jumping hair. . . in a bordel" and the "infinte men," links Duchamp's "definitely unfinished" *Large Glass* to a scene from the bizarre *Les Chants de Maldoror*. It is noteworthy that in a text by a man with intimate access to Duchamp throughout the *Large Glass*'s realization, Roussel is absent. Instead, it is Lautréamont reflected in the *Glass*.

The scene that Ray points to, found in the third canto of the volume, is a truly strange, gruesome, and blasphemous spectacle to behold. Its narrator—which may be Maldoror, Lautréamont, or Ducasse himself—describes an unusual encounter in an ancient convent-turned-brothel, whose exterior existence is demarcated by a red lantern. That rouge signpost of banal sins merely belies the place's darker secrets.

Entering the defiled space, the narrator passes beyond a heavy, time-battered door,

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[243] For the amended and republished version, see Man Ray, "Bilingual Bibliography," *Opus international: Duchamp et Après* March 1974, 31.

[244] My emphasis added in italics. When this work is republished in *Opus International 49*, five years after Duchamp's death in 1968, Man Ray poignantly drops his wordplay regarding infinite men, replacing it with the following addition which begins immediately after the word "bordel": "and I am so glad also that you had the foresight/to provide the cimitière des uniformes/et livrées which we have been made to near/and are now ready to discoud." The last word appears to be a neologism, playing upon the French verb *coudre*. If this is the case, Man Ray's lament might refer to the *unstitching* of the uniforms, or metaphorically, of his late friend. For original text, see Ray, "Bilingual Biography," in *View*, 32. For these substitutions, see Ray, "Bilingual Bibliography," in *Opus International 49*, 31.

through corridors reeking of sex, and over a bridge spanning a moat. The far side of the structure features an entablature bearing a Dantean warning reading, "Ye who pass over this bridge, go not yonder. There crime sojourns with vice. One day his friends in vain awaited a youth who had crossed that fatal gate." With Sadean cruelty, Lautréamont describes women inside the brothel emerging from their chambers post-coitus, only to be attacked by yard foul, their genitals pecked at by the vicious birds. Subtlety is plainly not the author's objective—his stratagem is one of desecrating and subverting his reader's values and sensibilities.[245] The crimes associated with this place, however, are not simply the vices of men cavorting with prostitutes or the actions of savage birds. Rather, these transgressions belong to the very God that presumes to judge and damn mankind for its moral infractions. Lautréamont aims at an inversion of divine order, making war against being. His ultimate aim is not simply to upset order, however, but rather the annihilation of authoritarian logic, as previously indicated.

The lost youth described in the entablature's admonition foreshadows the retelling of this sadistic creator's actions in the brothel. Possessed by curiosity, rather than good sense, the narrator presses on into the courtyard of the brothel until he arrives at a structure with a large iron grillwork window separating him from a dark interior chamber. He peers in. As his eyes adjust to the low light, the raconteur spies a "flaxen pole composed of interlocking cones," which proves to be composed of animate matter.[246] The pole coils like an eel, he explains, bending like a steel blade, springing, and rebounding like a rubber ball as it hurls itself against the walls of the chamber. It does this repeatedly, acting as its own battering ram in a fit to escape its confinement. Soon, the narrator realizes that the rod is actually a hair.

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[245] "'Vous qui passez sur ce pont, n'y allez pas. Le crime y séjourne avec le vice; un jour, ses amis attendirent en vain un jeune homme qui avait franchi la porte fatale.'" From *Maldoror* 3, 5. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 122.

[246] "un bâton blond, composé de cornets, s'enfonçant les uns dans les autres." Ibid.

Pausing in its throes, the hair notices the narrator's presence. Now having an audience, the distraught strand commences to relate its tale. Its master (who the reader soon discovers is God) had accidentally left the hair behind, it explains, after the deity visited the brothel in corporeal form. The hair further recounts the horrors it has been privy to. There, in that same chamber, the divinity had taken pleasure with the women of the brothel, but such acts did not sate him. Seeking rarer pleasures, his desires became perverse, culminating in sadistic extremes. After tiring of carnal indulgences, God set himself to perversely sniffing parts of the women's bodies, and then, bored with that curious activity, Lautréamont's God finally nurtured a cruel desire to "rip out their muscles, one by one."[247]

Choosing instead to enact this malevolence upon one of his own gender, a young man is summoned from a nearby chamber. Once the victim enters the room, and steps within the divine predator's reach, the monster tears him to pieces. Flayed alive, God permits the hapless casualty to escape from the torture chamber in his stripped state. Suffering terribly, however, the man is able to walk only a few paces into the open air before collapsing to the ground and dying. Awakened by the hideous act, the ghosts of the ancient convent's nuns convene to mourn the destroyed man. This is the story of Lautréamont's God and the jumping hair of cones, the exact allusion that Man Ray chose to characterize the true nature of his friend's *Large Glass*.

One might be tempted to read Man Ray's evocation of Lautréamont in terms of his own affinity for the author, rather than Duchamp's. After all, Man Ray's oeuvre includes the afore-mentioned 1920 homage to Lautréamont, *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse* (fig. 22). Consisting of a sewing machine whose shape Man Ray concealed within a blanket, the artist bound the object with string and photographed it. The resulting image would later appear in the December 1924

[247] Ibid., 124.

edition of *La Révolution surréaliste*, unattributed, undated, and with its title withheld.[248] Produced during Man Ray's New York Dada phase, with a combination of seemingly disparate materials, *Enigma* was actually a direct reference to a now famous simile that Lautréamont had included in the sixth canto of *Les Chants de Maldoror*. Describing a youth who is soon to become Maldoror's victim, Lautréamont writes that the boy is as "handsome as . . . the chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella."[249] Similarly, one might attribute Man Ray's curious remark to the eruption of Surrealism that took place in Paris, the United States, and elsewhere during the interim between Duchamp's commencing of the *Large Glass*'s construction and Man Ray's composition of "Bilingual Biography" for *View*. This is doubtful, given the evidence already presented regarding Duchamp's history with Lautréamont's works. The evidence to follow will only reinforce this conclusion.

By the 1940s, when Ray wrote "Bilingual Biography," the artistic and literary public would have concretely associated the name Lautréamont, and *Les Chants de Maldoror* especially, with the Surrealists, thanks to the efforts of Breton, Soupault, Aragon, Salvador Dali, and others. Indeed, Breton had previously found an opening to reference the volume in his own 1936 essay on Duchamp, "The Lighthouse of the Bride," which was republished in an English translation for the Duchamp issue of *View*. That use of Lautréamont reflected the author more than his subject.

Man Ray's allusion, however, presents a perplexing question. Of all of the literary sources that Ray might have associated with his friend and his friend's work, why did he choose this particular selection? What was it about Lautréamont and *Les Chants de Maldoror*, or the brothel scene in particular, that so struck Ray as reminiscent of Duchamp and his *Large Glass*?

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[248] Jean, *The History of Surrealist Painting*, 121.

[249] "Il est beau comme . . . comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie!" From *Maldoror* 6, 3. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 193.

The scene has no machines, no allegory of love (but definitely one of lust). It does, however fit within a larger system of pessimistic laughter that Duchamp must have greatly appreciated. Moreover, the book as a whole presents a number of images, strategies, and ideas that resonate frequently within Duchamp's body of work.

It is worth remarking that in 1923, the year that Duchamp "unfinished" his *Large Glass*, Picabia sent a message asking his friend to consider working on a film with him. Duchamp cabled a sparse three-word response. It read simply "Dieu Bourdelle Dieu."[250] Sanouillet has noted that "flanking the name of a conventional artist—and one whose name is almost "bordel"—with "God" signified Duchamp's refusal."[251] It may be a coincidence, but Duchamp's use of "God" and a near-homophone up "brothel" together is temptingly reminiscent of Man Ray's "God . . . in a bordel." Like Ray, Picabia was one of the few persons whom Duchamp allowed to get particularly close to him. As Tomkins noted regarding the witty and easygoing charm that Duchamp displayed with acquaintances and strangers alike, "the corollary to [his] lightness was detachment."[252] Picabia and Ray had privileged positions with Duchamp, conversing on a regular basis for many years. As early as 1915, Lautréamont was a subject that all three could have discussed. Might they have conversed about a man stripped bare in a bordel by God?

Resonances and Readings

Much of the preceding text, save for Man Ray's curious reference, has been a matter of grounding Duchamp's reading of Lautréamont in the available history of the artist and his milieu. The following sections, however, simultaneously build upon those materials and leave that familiar landscape behind. The themes at hand—appropriation, self-contained commentary,

[250] Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 181.
[251] The artist in whose name Duchamp used was likely Antoine Bourdelle. See Ibid.
[252] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 16.

humor and science, and games of identity—should by now all appear familiar in relation to Duchamp's work. The strange new territory that this scholarship now arrives at will be navigated by way of a careful intertextual reading between Duchamp's oeuvre, *Les Chants de Maldoror*, and *Poésies*. Duchamp valued literature highly, and he explicitly responded in his production to many of the authors already discussed. The primary task of the following analysis is to ascertain how Duchamp might have responded to his reading of Lautréamont. What concepts, strategies, and images might he have been drawn to in his reading of the author? How might Duchamp have applied those discoveries in his own work?

Duchamp, Lautréamont, and Appropriation

Setting aside for now the thread of Man Ray's tribute to Duchamp, the subject of appropriation emerges as a second way into this knotted puzzle. Each in his own way, both Duchamp and Ducasse worked to undermine artistic ego, theoretical fixity, and conventional meaning, beginning foremost with the forms and manifestations specific to their own disciplines. Lautréamont changed his name and produced a long (anti)narrative poem cycle that was also a novel. He then wrote "poems" that were plagiarisms and ironic moralizations. One should understand these deformations against the backdrop of early Parnassianism. Before the Symbolism of the 1860s and 1870s, the Parnassians sought, often with a moralizing tone, to mitigate Romanticism's over-feeling, chaotic effect on the orderliness and sentimentality of French poetry.[253] It is evident in his work that Lautréamont distanced himself, in both form and intent, from the Parnassians and Romantics alike. Duchamp, for his part, multiplied his own identity. And in separating himself from artistic traditions, Duchamp created a non-painting, or as he called it, a "delay" in glass that is visual, but not a picture"—an object that relied upon an

[253] William Kenneth Cornell, *The Symbolist Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 2.

external text for its elaboration.[254] He denied the primacy of visual aesthetics, identifying it as mere taste. The artist also manufactured machines that produced optical effects, suggesting new kinds of non-art objects as art.

Beyond these formal and nominal interventions in poetry and the visual arts, appropriation was a tool of paramount importance for author and artist alike. Both employed it readily in undermining the stultifying pressures placed upon human creativity by dogmatism, tradition, and taste. In his *bricolage* approach to writing, Lautréamont enfolded, collaged, combined, and revised a host of plagiarisms, thereby renewing them and making them his own.

Lautréamont's extensive appropriation of lines, passages, and ideas from previous authors constitutes the primary architecture of his works. His literary *spolia* form their very foundation. In *Poésies*, Ducasse suggests as much in a passage that blurs the line between espousing and rejecting Romanticism and Symbolism. He writes, "Words which express evil are bound to take on useful significance. Ideas change for the better. The meaning of words participates there. Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it."[255] Ducasse was an avid reader of Shelley, and so his reference to poetry and progress has a definite antecedent.[256] While *Les Chants de Maldoror* frequently employs Romantic writers' words and ideas, *Poésies* is full of scorn for these authors. The volume admonishes their conceits, setting their names and works up against moralizing quotations from Pascal and Vauvenargues (or rather Ducasse's rectification of their words). And after borrowing from several of Victor Hugo's works in *Les Chants de*

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[254] "Use 'delay' instead of picture or / painting; picture on glass becomes / delay in glass—but delay in glass does not mean picture on glass— / It's merely a way of succeeding in no longer thinking / that the thing is question is/ a picture. . . a delay in glass / as you would say a poem in prose. . ." See note titled "Kind of Subtitle / Delay in Glass" in Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 26.

[255] "Les mots qui expriment le mal sont destinés à prendre une signification d'utilité. Les idées s'améliorent. Le sens des mots y participe. // Le plagiat est nécessaire. Le progrès l'implique." From *Poésies II*. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 240.

[256] For the recollection of one of Ducasse's schoolmates regarding the author's enjoyment of Shelley, see the "Reminiscences of Paul Lespès," in ibid., 272.

Maldoror, including *L'Homme qui rit*, or *The Man Who Laughs*, Ducasse now declares in *Poésies* that the author's *La Préface de Cromwell*—which sets down the tenets of French Romanticism, including the grotesque—is "idiotic."[257] The irony here is palpable.

Ducasse treats the shining phrases of moralists like Pascal in a similar fashion to everything else he appropriates. Nothing is sacred or untouchable. He submits these lines to his process, amending each piracy in a surgical manner, or else disrupting its meaning by imposing new context. In *Poésies*, Ducasse even borrows and reworks lines from *Les Chants de Maldoror*. This gesture is tactically consistent since *Maldoro*r's hyperbolic Romanticism is exemplary of every trait that the pedantic and sermonizing *Poésies* attacks. To offer an example of this procedure, from among the countless possibilities presented, the author transforms Pascal's expression:

> Despite the sight of all the miseries which affect us and hold us by the throat we have an irrepressible instinct which bears us up. [Malgré la vue des toutes nos misères, qui nous touchent, qui nous tiennent à la gorge, nous avons un instinct que nous ne pouvons réprimer, qui nous élève.]

into his own slightly amended construction:

> Despite the sight of our splendors, that grasp us by the throat, we have an instinct which sets us to rights, which we cannot repress, which uplifts us! [Malgré la vue de nos grandeurs, qui nous tient à la gorge, nous avons un instinct qui nous corrige, que nous ne pouvons réprimer, qui nous élève!][258]

Lautréamont's revision may seem rather anodyne, substituting "miseries" for "splendors," but it warps the basis of Pascal's observation. Ducasse's self-appropriation functions in a similar manner. One lengthy example exemplifies Ducasse's ironic gesture turned upon himself. In *Les Chants de Maldoror*, Lautréamont writes caustically,

> I have seen the moralists weary of laying bare their breasts and bringing down on

[257] Ibid., 225.
[258] Ibid., 241, 317.

> themselves the implacable wrath from on high. I have seen them all together . . . probably stimulated by some denzien of hell, their eyes brimful of remorse and yet smarting with hatred in glacial silence, not daring to spill out the unfruitful and mighty meditations harboured in their hearts, meditations so crammed with injustice and horror, enough to sadden God of mercy with compassion. Or I've seen them . . . disgorging incredible curses, insensate curses against all that breathe, against themselves and Providence, prostitute women and children and thus dishonour those parts of the body consecrated to modesty. Then the seas swell their waters, swallow ships, in their abysses; earth tremors and hurricanes topples houses; plagues and divers epidemics decimate praying families. Yet men are unaware of this. . . . Tempests, sisters of cyclones; bluish firmament whose beauty I do not admit; hypocrite sea, image of my heart; earth with mysterious womb; inhabitants of the spheres; the whole univers; God who grandly created it, you I invoke; show me an honest man! . . . May your grace multiply my natural strength tenfold, for at the sight of such a monster I might die of astonishment. One dies at less.[259]

For *Poésies*, Ducasse appropriates and inverts his own alter-ego's intent, writing,

> I have seen men tire out moralists to bare their hearts, to have benediction scattered on them from high. They would utter meditations as expansive as possible, would gladden the author of our felicities. They respected childhood, old age, whatever breathes as well as what does not, would pay homage to womanhood and consecrate to modesty those parts which the body reserves the right to name. The firmament, whose beauty I admit, the earth, image of my heart, were invoked by me in order to find myself a man who did not believe himself virtuous. The sight of this monster, had it been realised, would have made me die of astonishment: one dies for more than that. All this needs no comment.[260]

Ducasse further compounds these subversions by way of their inclusion within works that are themselves labyrinthine matrices of appropriations, perversions, puns, and ironies. This is precisely a quality shared by Lautréamont's works and Duchamp's *Large Glass*, Readymades, and associated projects. Each object is contingent upon an ever-shifting network of ideas, appropriations, wordplays, and intertextual references. Polyvalence and groundlessness rule therein. It is noteworthy that the texts in Duchamp's boxes are loose-leaf. The order in which a viewer encounters the notes is subject to chance—driven by previous viewers' potential re-

[259] (for French text, see appendix C) ibid., 30, 31.
[260] (for French text, see appendix C) ibid., 240, 41.

ordering of the notes with each examination. This might endlessly present new meanings through the local re-contextualization of the notes in a given box. That effect, in turn, ripples through the entire network. Like the lowly pun, which both Duchamp and Lautréamont employed freely, everything in these systems promotes slippage in meaning by design, resulting in vacillating incongruities. Pascal is both present in the text, and excluded from it. "*Eau de voilette*" shifts constantly in the viewer's mind between "veil" and "violet." Duchamp's Readymades both remain and deny their existence as mass-produced objects.

Appropriation, or plagiarism, also erodes artistic and poetic ego. If art under Romanticism and Symbolism produced creators who were akin to demiurges—figures embodied in *Maldoror* as ambivalent forces of creation and destruction—*Poésies* is the ultimate anti-canon to such arts. *Poésies* undermines the originality and authenticity of literature by denying that the genius author is above other humans, or that his or her work is unique, sacrosanct, or inviolable. Meanwhile, *Les Chants de Maldoror* has every pretense to embodying such genius, but its own irony corrupts it, and in turn the irony of *Poésies* redoubles that doubt. Every phase or thought might well be the work of another author. Ducasse dispels the surety of a singular ego in the work at every turn. Together, the two works take on the dimension of a frenzied intertextual system. They constantly reference one another in a dizzying manner, while also pointing outside the local network towards a constellation of plagiarized works. No reading can therefore ever be complete. No understanding can be permanently admissible. The act of appropriation, or plagiarism, abrogates the authoritative "I" that once centered a text around its author.

Ducasse's strategy of plagiarism finds its clear mirror in the oeuvre of Duchamp. In 1917, Duchamp attempted to enter one of his Readymades, under a pseudonym, into the New York Society of Independent Artists show. The object in question was a mass-produced porcelain

urinal, turned ninety degrees onto its back, signed "R. Mutt," and entitled *Fountain* (fig. 31). Duchamp's gesture incited a row among the exhibition committee, which included Duchamp and Arensberg (neither of whom betrayed the secret of the work's author during debate). Affronted by *Fountain*, the majority of the board denied the work admission into the open show, despite its entry fee having already been paid.[261]

In response, Duchamp and Arensberg resigned, and with friends Henri-Pierre Roché and Beatrice Wood the artist created a slim magazine called *The Blind Man*. The second issue of the magazine featured a terse response to critics. "The Richard Mutt Case," written by one or more of the group, addressed the two chief complaints against *Fountain*. The first was that the work was indecent. The editorial dismissed this argument as absurd. The second and more crucial objection concerned whether or not the work was, at its core, plagiaristic. Answering this charge, the author insisted that it was unimportant if the artist had fashioned the work with his own hands. Rather, of highest importance was the fact that he "CHOSE" the object. "He took an ordinary article of life," explains the author, and "placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object."[262] And so was born a modernist legend. Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it.

Like Lautréamont's text, Duchamp's Readymade dislocates the identity of the borrowed material: in this case, plumbing. Each man shelters these dislocations under the umbrella of his new idea. The result of this procedure turns the focus away from the thing itself as object, whether sentence or ceramic. Instead, the new locus is the effect that the appropriation produces in its new home. Following a modified version of Mallarmé's commandment, Duchamp and

[261] For a rich account of *Fountain*'s genesis and initial receipt, see William A. Camfield and Marcel Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain* (Exh. Cat., Houston: Menil Foundation, 1989), 13-60.
[262] For a reprinting of "The Richard Mutt Case," and the circumstances of the editorial's publication, see ibid., 36-39.

Lautréamont are not painting the thing itself, but rather its affected effect.

While Marcel Jean's correspondence with Duchamp indicates that the artist had not likely encountered *Poésies* when he began making the first Readymades, it is entirely possible, if not likely, that Duchamp had read it recently when he produced *L.H.O.O.Q.* (fig. 21) The work, one of the artist's "assisted" Readymades, consisted of a postcard of the *Mona Lisa* purchased in a shop on the rue Rivoli, upon which Duchamp provided *la Giconda* with penciled facial hair and the inscription "L.Q.O.O.Q."[263] Pronounced aloud in French, the letters sound out the words "*Elle a chaud au cul*," or "she has a hot ass." If Duchamp learned, during one of his visits to Café Certa, or elsewhere during his stay in Paris, about *Poésies* and its April 1919 reprinting, his creation of *L.H.O.O.Q.* that autumn may be than a mere coincidence in timing. This is especially tantalizing when one considers the specific plagiaristic nature of Duchamp's choice of a Leonardo image, as opposed to the plumbing, household items, or the hardware that he chose for his other Readymades. While those appropriations were certainly plagiaristic in a sense, *L.H.O.O.Q.* was additionally iconoclastic in the mode of Ducasse. Duchamp's gesture is one that debased the nobility of the sitter, and it subverted the sanctity of the great master's painting. It appropriated *La Giaconda*'s image and Leonardo's idea into the artist's work, transforming them in the process. Duchamp's humorous addenda made the image into a Duchamp, loosening a bit the mortar that cemented the painting into the canon.

Duchamp's action stands as the visual and linguistic equivalent to Ducasse's borrowing and undermining of great moralist and Romantic writers. In both Duchamp's and Lautréamont's strategies, the inherent irony is everything. As Tomkins notes, Duchamp was sympathetic towards Leonardo's conviction that art should be a *cosa mentale*, and as Henderson has argued,

[263] This work was famous within the Cubist circles as well. In 1911, Apollinaire was incarcerated briefly under suspicion of stealing Leonardo's masterpiece from the Louvre. See Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 220-22.

the parallel between the cryptic notes of Florentine master and Duchamp's boxes is undeniable.[264] Moreover, when Duchamp tested in 1905 to become an "art worker," so as to truncate his military service, his examiners not only judged his ability to print engravings, but they also asked him questions about the iconic Renaissance artist.[265] The idea of strategic plagiarism and subversion of great artists—even those personally favored—seems to resonate between the works of Lautréamont and Duchamp. In a sense, Duchamp defaced Leonardo in order to show his appreciation, just as Ducasse complained against Hugo, Byron, Musset and the other heroic writers of his pantheon.

While Duchamp encountered *Poésies* by 1919 at the earliest, there are aspects of *Les Chants de Maldoror* that resonate with Duchamp's overall program of Readymades, and with the production of the *Large Glass*. As previously discussed, even on the most superficial level Ducasse had plagiarized in his *Les Chants de Maldoror*. The author likely borrowed his assumed name from a hero created by popular novelist Eugène Sue. The two appellations differed by only a single letter.[266] For Duchamp, the most germane examples of Lautréamont's appropriation lie deeper than the work's title page. The sixth canto of *Les Chants de Maldoror* is by far the most famous portion of the book. Its chanted "beautiful as" similes echo figurations crafted by Gérard du Nerval—as filtered through the artifice of a tactically deranged mind.[267] Considering the developments in Duchamp's work after 1912, Strophe VI has much to offer. One passage reads,

> I cast a long look of satisfaction at the duality that composes me . . . and I find myself beautiful! Beautiful as the congenital malformation of a man's sexual organs, consisting of the relative brevity of the urethral canal and the division or absence of its wall so that this canal opens at a variable distance from the gland and below the penis; or again, as the fleshy wattle, conical in shape, furrowed by

[264] For more on Duchamp and Leonardo, see Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 72-75, 155-57; Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 221, 22.
[265] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 19-20; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 26-27.
[266] de Jonge, *Nightmare culture*, 29.
[267] Blanchot notes the relation to Nerval. See Blanchot, "The Experience of Lautréamont," 73.

> deep transversal wrinkles, which rises from the base of the turkey's upper beak; or rather as the following truth: "The system of scales, modes, and their harmonic series does not rest upon invariable natural laws but is, on the contrary, the result of aesthetic principles which have varied with the progressive developments of mankind, and will vary gain"; and above all like an ironclad turreted corvette.[268]

The ironic note of beauty in the ironclad warship must have tickled Duchamp's sense of gallows humor, and the coldness and indifference of the simile would likely have struck him. Moreover, Duchamp certainly would have agreed with the commentary on arbitrariness of aesthetics and the role that convention plays. It finds an echo, for instance, in his *Erratum Musical*. Therein, the artist and his sisters drew musical notes randomly from a number of cards, using the order in which the notes appeared to form the composition. After all, if there are no deterministic laws guiding musical composition, as Lautréamont suggests, then why not use chance to compose music, circumventing the trappings of taste? This is not, however, the greatest resonance with Duchamp's works and ideas present in this selection. Bald plagiarism, or the artist's "choice" to appropriate, as Duchamp would have it, is that connection.

Even without a privileged knowledge of Lautréamont's sources, it is plainly apparent that the author has simply copied the passage regarding the "congenital malformation" from a medical dictionary or textbook. Indeed, it is a word-for-word plagiarism from an 1867 *Rapport sur les progrès de la chirurgie*.[269] Elsewhere in the *Les Chants de Maldoror,* as Marguerite Bonnet has noted, Lautréamont pirated ornithological entries from Jean-Charles Chenu's *l'Encyclopédie d'histoire naturelle*. Likewise, the scientific description of the turkey's wattle in

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[268] ". . . je jette un long regard de satisfaction sur la dualité qui me compose . . . et je me trouve beau! Beau comme le vice de conformation congénital des organes sexuels de l'homme, consistant dans la brièveté relative du canal de l'urètre et la division ou l'absence de sa paroi inférieure, de telle sorte que ce canal s'ouvre à une distance variable du gland et au-dessous du pénis; ou encore, comme la caroncule charnue, de forme conique, sillonnée par des rides transversales assez profondes, qui s'élève sur la base du bec supérieur du dindon; ou plutôt, comme la vérité qui suit: 'Le système des gammes, des modes et de leur enchaînement harmonique ne repose pas sur des lois naturelles invariables, mais il est, au contraire, la conséquence de principes esthétiques qui ont varié avec le développement progressif de l'humanité, et qui varieront encore;' et surtout, comme une corvette cuirassée à tourelles!" From *Maldoror* 6, 6. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 203.

[269] Félix Guyon et al., *Rapport Sur Les Progrès De La Chirurgie* (Paris: L'Imprimerie Impérial, 1867), 423.

the simile originated in the Comte de Buffon's eighteenth-century writings on birds, the *Histoire naturelle des oiseaux*.[270] Lautréamont likely also borrowed from Jules Michelet's *La Mer, L'Oiseau* and *L'Insecte*, as well as Félix-Archimède Pouchet's *Zoologie Classique*.[271] In the case of the anatomical, ornithological, and other entrees, Lautréamont's method is the same. He simply chose his text and passage—medical, biological, historical, etcetera—excised it from the original source, and inserted the selection into the correct syntactic placeholder within his simile, thereby transforming academic language into poetry—his poetry.

The logic of this action is very much congruent to that of Duchamp's Readymades. What could provoke more "beauty of indifference," as Duchamp called it in his notes, than a medical text?[272] In his talk entitled "Apropos of "Readymades" Duchamp explained his process of choosing Readymades:

> [It] was never dictated by esthetic delectation. The choice was based on a reaction of visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste . . . in fact a complete anesthesia. One important characteristic was the short sentence which I occasionally inscribed on the "Readymade." That sentence instead of the describing the object like a title was meant to carry the mind of the spectator toward other regions more verbal.[273]

Duchamp's procedure is a cold and calculated—though humorous—displacement of the conventional meaning of his plagiarized subject. Nevertheless, Duchamp's dislocations never entirely supplant the original meaning. Rather, the original concept is rendered latent.

In the medical text that Lautréamont chose to appropriate for his simile, the male sexual organ, and the words themselves, have been evacuated of eroticism, interest, and ultimately even a clear meaning through the author's dislocating gesture. These are words that no longer matter

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[270] Georges Louis Leclerc Buffon, "Histoire Naturelle Des Oiseaux," in *Oeuvres Complètes De Buffon* (Paris: Garnier Frères c. 1835), 344.
[271] Bonnet, "Lautréamont Et Michelet."
[272] The line "Painting of precision, and beauty of indifference" appears in Duchamp's *Green Box* note regarding "General notes. for a hilarious Picture." See Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 30.
[273] See transcription in ibid., 141-42.

primarily for their intended communicative sense. Instead, the words' new context, and the supplemental associations and effects that it provides, becomes the new foregrounded relevance. That alone transforms them into poetry. Lautréamont's proto-collage, or proto literary-Readymade technique, suggests new meanings for each word and passage, not because he wrote them, but because he selected both them and their precise placement within the new matrix. Like Duchamp, he gives them a new context and overriding title: *Les Chants de Maldoror*. Moreover, as Peter Nesselroth indicated, "Lautréamont does not point out similarities; he creates them against reason, he imposes them on us. He gives us an image that violates the most essential requirement of the traditional simile: resemblance."[274] In planning and creating the *Large Glass*, Duchamp likewise jettisoned resemblance and conventional symbolic meaning at every turn.

In the context of the simile's structure—which one might apprehend as a poetic equivalent to the gallery's white wall and pedestal announcing "this is art"—borrowed passages fall in the correct place, *ergo* they are signaled as poetry. The parallel here to Duchamp's *Fountain* is highly suggestive, down to the common reference to male sexual anatomy and urination. Furthermore, among Duchamp's conditions for the Readymade, and beyond its quality of having been chosen, the artist indicates that the work should "lack uniqueness."[275] Not only is a medical guide a mass-produced product, it is one written in the most anonymous, ego-less, and anesthetizing voice possible. It is the voice of scientific objectivity, which a priori urges its reader to approach it with no "aesthetic emotion," as Duchamp suggested of Readymades."[276]

Lautréamont's sterile simile also parallels Duchamp's own move towards an impersonal visual poetry, adopting mechanical drawing towards this end.[277] Throughout *Les Chants de*

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[274] Peter W. Nesselroth, *Lautréamont's Imagery: A Stylistic Approach* (Genève: Droz, 1969), 21.
[275] Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 142.
[276] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 48; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 83-84.
[277] Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 31-33.

Maldoror, Lautréamont appropriates and deploys the language of science, mathematics, and geometry. The textual effect is that of an accumulation of Readymades. Irony seeps into everything, and eventually the reader can no longer decide if the context elevates the words to poetry, or if these cold, rational introductions of scientific affect render the surrounding text as frosty as a medical report or geometry textbook. Appropriation acts not just upon the specific appropriated object, but rather, upon all such objects. It introduces an instability into the very idea of art's constitution. Moreover, it undermines genius, skill, and the auratic original. *Fountain* is at once Duchamp's singular work of art and a plumbing fixture, nearly identical to countless others available to any consumer in 1917.

Critical Commentary Now Included

As Duchamp's responses to the rejection of his *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* and *Fountain* demonstrate, the artist did not frequently abide authoritative criticism, and sometimes actively invited it. Much the same can be said of Lautréamont, a crocodile who vowed to change nothing for his critics. As a student at lycée, Ducasse was injured by a classicist-leaning schoolmaster's reproach of his poetic form and imagery. Forced to rewrite an assignment, Ducasse responded to the teacher's complaints against his style by intensifying the very affectations for which he was criticized.[278] Ducasse's games continued beyond his school days.

Critic Roger Caillois observed correctly that *Les Chants de Maldoror* is a work that "contain[s] its own commentary," adding that it is "difficult to talk about . . . precisely because

[278] "Mais, je ne veux pas soumettre à une rude épreuve ta passion connue pour les énigmes. Qu'il te suffise de savoir que la plus douce punition que je puisse t'infliger, est encore de te faire observer que ce mystère ne te sera révélé (il te sera révélé) que plus tard, à la fin de ta vie, quand tu entameras des discussions philosophiques avec l'agonie sur le bord de ton chevet . . . et peut-être même à la fin de cette strophe." From *Maldoror* 5, 2. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 163.

everything that can be said, has already been said by the author, and in the work itself."[279] This allows the work to actively resist criticism, a point that Maurice Blanchot agreed with (nonetheless writing a sizeable essay on the book). As Blanchot noted, these commentaries have the curious trait of simultaneously belonging to the very composition that they refer to, participating in its linear construction as the work is read, and somehow schizophrenically floating outside of the text as well.[280] Lautréamont wrote a delirium that terrorizes the reader's reasoning faculties. Lest one think him mad, however, the poet addresses his reader in his fifth canto, hinting that the veil of incomprehensibility is part of a larger game:

> But I do not wish to put your well-known passion for riddles to a severe test. Suffice you to know the mildest punishment I can inflict upon you is still to make you realize that this mystery will not be revealed to you (it will be revealed to you) until later, at the close of your life, when you and your death-throes open philosophical discussions by your bedside . . . and perhaps by the end of this stanza.[281]

The use of the word "stanza" here once again signals his hybrid form for a work that he elsewhere refers to as a novel. And suffice it to say, Lautréamont only tantalizes. No such resolution to his mysteries arrives in the text. The riddle of Lautréamont's narrative is non-sensical. Was Duchamp playing a comparable game of puzzles without solutions? Certainly the artist had some game in mind. This is not to say that the *Large Glass* is insincere. Duchamp was most sincere when playing games. Lautréamont's tenor in *Les Chants de Maldoror* may have hinted for Duchamp at this mode of engagement with critics and viewers.

Examining the tactics employed in the *Large Glass*, with its boxes of notes, and throughout *Les Chants de Maldoror*, with its Brechtian interjections by the author, a resonance of preemptory internal commentary emerges. For Ducasse, this strategy also undermines

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[279] Lautréamont and Caillois, *Oeuvres Complètes*, 87-106. Author's translation.
[280] Blanchot, "The Experience of Lautréamont," 48-49.
[281] Caradec and Rodríguez, *Isidore Ducasse*, 82-83.

narrative continuity, pointing to the act of reading his poetry/prose as a constructed text rather than an immersive story. He directs attention not into the work, but upon the surface struggle of reading, understanding, and judging. *Poésies* then provides a second level of address and exchange, since each work acts effectively as a criticism of the other. Duchamp offers a series of texts for the purpose of decrypting the *Large Glass* as a field of unfamiliar signs. The *Large Glass* itself reifies the concepts enumerated in the language of the notes, redirecting the reading of the texts towards a conceptual understanding of the work. In concert, textual and visual elements forge an interpretive dialogue that foregrounds the problematic exchange between sight, knowledge, and comprehension.

Whether one considers the function of Duchamp's notes in boxed installments, or his proposed "Sears and Roebuck" styled guide that would have been "an explanation describing in literary form what every piece and every section of the *Glass* was for," the artist's goal was to create a work that incorporated its own explanatory commentary, much as Lautréamont had done.[282] In one note, Duchamp makes this relationship explicit. Writing on the "illuminating gas" and the "slopes of flow," he declares: "as a '<u>commentary</u>' on the section Slopes. = have a photograph made of: <u>to have the apprentice in the sun</u>."[283] Here Duchamp designates a photo of another work to stand in as commentary for an element in the *Large Glass*. Sometimes in his boxes, drawings perform the explanatory act. Elsewhere, notes are unequivocally prescriptive towards viewers' reading, dictating the terms by which they should address and receive the work:

> Kind of Sub-title
> ***Delay in Glass***

[282] Tomkins, *Afternoon Interviews*, 78-79.
[283] All underlines and strikethroughs of Duchamp's texts are typographic transcriptions of the original manuscripts. "comme 'commentaire' à l'article Pentes = faire photographier: avoir l'apprenti dans le soleil." See Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 51; Duchamp, *Duchamp Du Signe*, 76.

> Use "delay" instead of picture or painting; picture on glass becomes delay in glass—but delay in glass does not mean picture on glass—
>
> It's merely a way of succeeding in no longer thinking that the thing in question is a picture—to make a delay of it in the most general way possible, not so much in the different meanings in which delay can be taken, but rather in their indecisive reunion "delay"—delay in glass as you would say a poem in prose or a spittoon in silver[284]

With this note, the artist forestalls the appropriateness of imposing judgments of taste by explaining that the work stands categorically apart from pictures. Duchamp is placing his own thoughts between viewer and work, in the form of critical commentary, anticipating and thwarting the accustomed manner of receiving and judging a visual work of art. And Duchamp's "poem in prose" comment is a reminder of the manner in which literature is still informing his work. Above all, language—often pseudo-scientific or aphoristic—does the work of elucidating the content and function of the *Large Glass*.

Chance Encounters with the Hilarious Sciences

In the previously examined simile, Lautréamont's plagiaristic choices pertaining to the natural and medical sciences hint at another thread linking his writing with Duchamp's oeuvre. That resonance is the appropriation and deployment of dispassionate scientific and mathematical appearances, presented humorously, but with a deadpan demeanor. In an interview with Tomkins, Duchamp made his retrospective feelings about science clear. "I don't know why we should have such a reverence for science," he exclaimed, adding, "It's a very nice occupation, but nothing more."[285] Duchamp referred to his *Large Glass*, a "painting of precision," replete with pseudo-scientific causalities and cold biomechanical forms, as his "hilarious picture."[286] His

[284] Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 26.
[285] Tomkins, *Afternoon Interviews*, 89.
[286] Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 30.

use of science clearly then comes from a position of wry irreverence. In the Duchamp issue of *View*, Gabrielle Buffet described Duchamp's exploits as "no innocent games," and his humor as "gay blasphemy."[287] Whether one applies this last statement to the artist's relationship with art, science, or life in general, the observation is apt. While the artist may have enjoyed the precise language and aura of the sciences, his use of them was ever-tinged with irony. For his part, Lautréamont repeatedly plucked material from scientific works and inserted these words or phrases into his own text, perverting their original significance. By their very inclusion, these elements seem to mock the pathos and sublimity of Romanticism that color much the rest of the text. At the same time, the insistence upon order and rules might be read as satire on rationalism and of the order-loving Parnassian poets. It is possible that Lautréamont's use of science and his relationship with the Romantics and Symbolists share much in common with Duchamp's anti-Bergsonian sentiments regarding the intuition-driven Cubists.

Both Ducasse and Duchamp employ the authority of laws, theorems, and causalities in part to burlesque them, and in order to burlesque law-based art and literature at the same time. When Calvin Tomkins asked Duchamp if science had influenced his work, he answered "No. Ironically yes. It's an ironic way of giving a pseudo-explanation." And, when questioned about his stretching the laws of science, Duchamp explained, "Well, It's a very interesting thing to decode whether something is a law. It's a bit tautological. . . . It's just an illusion of causality. . . . Because you light a match and see fire you consider that a law. It's a very nice word, *law*, but it has no deep validity."[288] Here, Duchamp sounds perfectly Nietzschean in his skepticism towards causality. Duchamp's rejection of science may also have changed with time, as the science that

[287] Gabrielle Buffet, "Magic Circles," *View*, March 1945 1945, 23.
[288] Duchamp, as quoted in Tomkins, *Afternoon Interviews*, 84-85.

he once knew and understood was supplanted by new ideas.[289] Science had allowed him to depersonalize his allegory of love, and it had provided evidence for a world beyond the visual. Science also provided Duchamp with the possibility of new games. When Duchamp explains in his notes that the reality of the *Glass* is made possible by "slightly distending the laws of physics and chemistry" his action might have been tongue in cheek *a priori*, since he came to view causalities as inferred through inductive enumeration—the foundation of scientific theories and laws—to be pat tautologies or at least highly suspect.[290]

Duchamp's skeptical humor arises frequently in his deadpan adoption of a scientific posture. By way of example, among the artist's *Green Box* notes, Duchamp offered a kind of preface for his *Large Glass* wherein he played the part of geometer and physicist.[291] In this commentary Duchamp sets forth the parameters of his work as sort of mathematic proposition:

> Preface
> Given 1st the waterfall
> 2nd the illuminating gas
> one will determine
> we shall determine the conditions
> for the instantaneous state of Rest (or allegorical appearance)
> of a succession [of a group] of various facts
> seeming to necessitate each other
> under certain laws, *in order to isolate the sign*
> *of the accordance between*, on the one hand
> this *state of Rest* (capable of innumerable eccentricities)
> and, on the other, a *choice of possibilities*
> authorized by these laws and also
> determining them[292]

And in another *Green Box* note entitled "Laws, principles, phenomena," the artist cryptically

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[289] For discussion of this changing relationship, see Henderson, "Marcel Duchamp, Anti-Bergsonist 'Algebraist of Ideas'."
[290] See "Interior lighting" note from the *Green Box* in Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 71.
[291] For a discussion of Duchamp as geometer and physicist, and the style of this and similar notes, see Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 75, 86-87,146, 48-49.
[292] Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 27-28. Formatting here follows the typographic arrangement in Duchamp and Schwarz, *Notes and Projects*, 182.

explains, in scientific or pataphysical terms, the fundamental bases for some of the physics guiding the Bachelor's apparatus in the *Large Glass*:

> —Phen. of stretching in the unit of length—
> —Adage of spontaneity = The bach. grinds his choc. himself
> —Phen. or principle of oscillating density,
> a property of the substance of brand bottles
>
> —{ Emancipated metal of the rods of the sleigh
> —{ Friction reintegrated ~~in reverse~~ (emancipated metal)[293]

In these examples, Duchamp's use of science is playful and poetic despite the detachment of his words. Details like the "oscillating density" of the bottles, the artist's aping of the form of the geometric theorem, and his appeal to authorizing laws all demonstrate a sardonic attitude at work, appropriating the affectation of science.

In the opening strophe of the sixth canto of *Maldoror*, Lautréamont addresses both his public and the text itself, describing the work that the text will do and suggesting the exact manner in which readers should respond. In doing so, he adopts borrowed scientific phraseology and invokes the authority of scientific laws and phenomena, much as Duchamp did in his "Preface.":

> Henceforth, the strings of the novel will activate the three characters cited above; thus a less abstract power will be communicated to them. Vitality will spread magnificently throughout the flow of their circulatory system, and you will see how astonished you yourself will be to meet—where at first you saw only vague entities belonging to the realm of pure speculation—on the one hand the bodily organism with its ramifications of nerves and its mucous membrane, on the other the spiritual principle which presides over the physiological functions of the flesh. *. . . I know I ought, by a great number of proofs, to support the argumentation which finds itself included in my theorem. . . .*[294]

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[293] Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 30. Formatting here follows the typographic arrangement in Duchamp and Schwarz, *Notes and Projects*, 202.

[294] My italics for emphasis. "Désormais, les ficelles du roman remueront les trois personnages nommés plus haut: il leur sera ainsi communiqué une puissance moins abstraite. La vitalité se répandra magnifiquement dans le torrent de leur appareil circulatoire, et vous verrez comme vous serez étonné vous-même de rencontrer, là où d'abord vous

Lautréamont also describes the visceral power of his poetry upon the reader: "Your hands shall touch the ascending branches of aorta and suprarenal ganglia."[295] Elsewhere, he slyly compares his readers to lowly microorganisms with biological borrowings:

> I speak from experience, and I am not here to play the part of provocateur. And just as rotifera and tardigrada can be heated to temperature near boiling-point without necessarily losing their vitality, so it will be for you if can carefully assimilate the pungent suppurative serosity which slowly wells from the irradiation caused by my interesting lucubrations? What! Have we not succeeded in grafting on the back of a live rat the tail detached from another rat's body? Then try likewise to transfer to your imagination the varying alterations in my cadaveric mind. But be careful At the time of writing, new shivers thrill through the intellectual atmosphere. . . .[296]

These selections are representative of the abounding authorial interjections present throughout *Les Chants de Maldoror*. In one of his funniest asides, after describing how he consulted savages in order to work out his method, Lautréamont dryly insists, "I have just proved that nothing on this planet is laughable." A few lines later he exclaims, "Know this: poetry happens to be wherever the duck-faced man is not. First I am going to blow my nose, because I need to; and then, mightily aided by my hand, shall again take up the penholder my fingers let fall."[297] Lautréamont's lines—never escaping the gravity of Romanticism— may not be as chilly as

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n'aviez cru voir que des entités vagues appartenant au domaine de la spéculation pure, d'une part, l'organisme corporel avec ses ramifications de nerfs et ses membranes muqueuses, de l'autre, le principe spirituel qui préside aux fonctions physiologiques de la chair. . . . Il faut, je le sais, étayer d'un grand nombre de preuves l'argumentation qui se trouve comprise dans mon théorème. . . ." From *Maldoror* 6, 1. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 188-89.

[295] "Vous toucherez avec vos mains des branches ascendantes d'aorte et des capsules surrénales. . . ." From *Maldoror* 6, 1. Ibid., 189.

[296] "Je parle par expérience, sans venir jouer ici le rôle de provocateur. Et, de même que les rotifères et les tardigrades peuvent être chauffés à une température voisine de l'ébullition, sans perdre nécessairement leur vitalité, il en sera de même pour toi, si tu sais t'assimiler, avec précaution, l'âcre sérosité suppurative qui se dégage avec lenteur de l'agacement que causent mes intéressantes élucubrations. Eh, quoi, n'est-on pas parvenu à greffer sur le dos d'un rat vivant la queue détachée du corps d'un autre rat? Essaie donc pareillement de transporter dans ton imagination les diverses modifications de ma raison cadavérique. Mais, sois prudent. A l'heure que j'écris, de nouveaux frissons parcourent l'atmosphère intellectuelle. . . ." From *Maldoror* 5,1. Ibid., 161. Bonnet suggests that Lautréamont took these details from Dr. E. A. Pouchet. See Bonnet, "Lautréamont Et Michelet," 605-22.

[297] "Je viens de prouver que rien n'est risible dans cette planète." and "Mais, sachez que la poésie se trouve partout où n'est pas le sourire, stupidement railleur, de l'homme, à la figure de canard. Je vais d'abord me moucher, parce que j'en ai besoin; et ensuite, puissamment aidé par ma main, je reprendrai le porte-plume que mes doigts avaient laissé tomber." From *Maldoror* 6, 2. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 192.

Duchamp's works can be, but they share a similar sensibility. They laugh with a straight face.

As these commentaries have shown, playful science was indispensible for both poet and artist. Alex de Jonge rightly recognized Lautréamont as a *pataphysician,* like Jarry, but avant la lettre, explaining that both posses a "love of cold mathematical precision," and "neither laughs as he tells his hair-raising jokes."[298] This description seems perfectly suited for Duchamp and his *Large Glass* as well. Jarry, for his part, defined pataphysics as "the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributed the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments."[299] This is a science of potential rather than fact. Duchamp was in the position of having access to both Lautréamont and Jarry models, and this seems evident in his work. The sheer complexity of the *Large Glass* speaks to a use of science's clothing as appearance in order to laugh at those who took art too seriously, akin to a science.

In *Les Chants de Maldoror*, Lautréamont's references generally fall into one of three categories: anatomical, mathematical/geometric, or mechanical. At times the author conflates them with curious results, describing hitherto unconsidered possibilities. As with Duchamp's "indecisive reunion" of the various definitions of "delay," Lautréamont's forced correlations displace original meanings only to leave his reader in the position of reconciling disparate elements in his poetic constructions.[300] This occurs in the most famous passage of the book—the simile in the sixth canto made famous by the Surrealists. The vile anti-hero Maldoror fawns over a handsome young boy named Mervyn, fabricating the youth's future demise with a plan as oblique and pseudo-scientific as the Bachelors' apparatus for reaching the Bride. Overcome by the boy's beauty, Maldoror waxes longingly:

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[298] de Jonge, *Nightmare Culture*, 69-70.
[299] Jarry, *Doctor Faustroll*, 22.
[300] Duchamp's "indecisive reunion" might reflect his interest in Stirner and Pyrrho. See *Green Box* note for "Kind of Subtitle/ ***Delay in Glass***" in Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 26.

> I know all about telling age from the physiognomical lines of the forehead; he is sixteen years and four months old! He is fair as the retractability of claws of birds of prey, or again, as the uncertainty of muscular movements in wounds in the soft parts of the lower cervical region; or rather, as a perpetual rat trap always reset by the trapped animal, which by itself can catch rodents indefinitely and work even when hidden under straw; and above all, as the chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing machine and an umbrella![301]

This passage, so rich for the Surrealists, also seems especially meaningful in terms of Duchamp's work leading up to, and encompassing, the *Large Glass*. Not surprisingly, it also contains another notable plagiarism torn from *Rapport sure les progrès de la chirurgie*. The passages on cervical wounds are lifted directly from the volume in two separate passages that Lautréamont unites.[302] Qualities of hybridity echo throughout in the text (not Duchamp's only source for this idea, but possibly the most striking). Consider Maldoror's mine of lice that can by hewed like blocks of stone, or flow like mercury. That choice of mercury was apt, since the material looks metallic but also flows at ambient temperature and is almost organic in the way, seeming to gather itself together. Its normal qualities are reminiscent of the strange material properties detailed by Jarry in *Faustroll*, Roussel in *Impressions d'Afrique*, and Duchamp in his notes for the *Large Glass*.

Lautréamont's book itself is a hybrid—poem and novel—and its main character is a chimera. Even his similes themselves are strange hybrids of incongruent parts fitted together. In this simile, the contrast of mechanical and organic throughout is central to the dislocation of each element. They become hybrids through the reader's resolution of individual parts of the simile. The machines are obvious: sewing machine, trap, umbrella, and even the retractability of the

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[301] "Je me connais à lire l'âge dans les lignes physiognomoniques du front: il a seize ans et quatre mois! Il est beau comme la rétractilité des serres des oiseaux rapaces; ou encore, comme l'incertitude des mouvements musculaires dans les plaies des parties molles de la région cervicale postérieure; ou plutôt, comme ce piège à rats perpétuel, toujours retendu par l'animal pris, qui peut prendre seul des rongeurs indéfiniment, et fonctionner même caché sous la paille; et surtout, comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie!" From *Maldoror* 6, 3. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 193.

[302] Guyon et al., *Rapport Sur Les Progrès De La Chirurgie*, 310.

bird's claws suggests a mechanical function. The organic is denoted by the bird, rat, and wounds. In the final phrase, where no organic item is present, Lautréamont intimates its presence by way of the dissecting table itself. In a sense, Lautréamont has fashioned a hybrid literary machine that constructs other hybrid forms. It is an apparatus for representing things that do not yet exist, but might yet be, in a (poetic) pataphysical sense. In a related manner, Duchamp's creation is a hybrid of visual and linguistic elements depicting a machine that is both literal and figurative.

Referring to his 1912 painting, *Bride*, Duchamp offered an explanation whose premise also resonates with Lautréamont's effect in this simile (fig. 15). "This is not a realistic interpretation of a bride," he posited, "but my concept of a bride expressed by the juxtaposition of mechanical elements and visceral forms."[303] Indeed, among Duchamp's 1912-1913 portfolio of drawings and paintings for the Bride and the Virgin, the artist frequently employed similar meetings biological and mechanical: indeterminate hybrids of machine and invented anatomy. Lautréamont is not the only possible source for this idea. Roussel, for instance, describes a character who, having a surgically implanted breathing apparatus, is a hybrid of machine and human. And Linda Henderson rightly points to a correlation here with philosopher Henri Bergson's explanation of a humor that arises from the mechanical becoming encrusted upon the living.[304] In reading Duchamp's meeting of organic and mechanical in the *Large Glass* against Lautréamont's famous simile, one might reconsider the artist's creation as a dissection of love's abstruse mechanics—the most human of emotions both encrusted upon and dismantled by the mechanical and artificial.

Duchamp's distrust of scientific laws and causality as "tautological" freed him to be irreverent with them, manipulating and re-imagining them, as was his wont. Here, Duchamp

[303] Anne d'Harnoncourt et al., *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 263.
[304] Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 54-55.

finds further resonance with Lautréamont's disposition. The laws of reason, optics, probability, nature, and even rotary friction, which the poet summons at various points, are all plain enough, but they are strangely incongruous in their nineteenth-century poetic context, caught between the Romantics and the Parnassians. This is especially true when Lautréamont invokes the "mechanical law of rotary friction," a phrase that seems to be devoid of aesthetic preoccupation.

Lautréamont uses this causal law to explain a bizarre phenomenon witnessed by the narrator when he encounters two creatures: a pelican and a giant black beetle larger than a cow.[305] Both were transformed victims of a woman's misdeeds and magic powers, but now they have had their revenge. Siblings, the pair had tied the woman's arms and legs so that she resembled an "amorphous polyhedron" that the beetle could roll endlessly over the "stones and thorns" akin to a ball of dung.[306] By the time that the narrator finds them, the beetle has rolled the woman until she has assumed the shape of a large "black ball." The tumbling of her form had "seen her bones gouged by wounds, her limbs, buffed by the mechanical law of rotary friction." This process had the effect of "blending [her physical form] into the unity of coagulation, and her body presenting, instead of the primordial lineaments and natural curves, the monotonous appearance of an entirely homogenous whole which . . . resembles all too well the mass of a sphere! . . . the abnormal state of the woman's atoms, reduced to dough."[307] This curious use of the term "law" was something that Duchamp surely would have taken note of in his reading of *Les Chants de Maldoror*. Certainly Jarry was struck by this scene, as evidenced by his reference

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[305] Lautréamont's description of the beetle's face with two "tentaculiform filaments," and its scraping of its "hind legs formidably against the edged of its elytrae, producing a high pitched sound," as well as his descriptions of the pelican in this passage are textual appropriation from the aforementioned naturalist writers. See Bonnet, "Lautréamont Et Michelet."

[306] From *Maldoror* 5, 2. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 165. See below for the original French.

[307] "un polyèdre amorphe . . . sur les ronces et les pierres . . . a vu ses os se creuser de blessures, ses membres se polir par la loi mécanique du frottement rotatoire, se confondre dans l'unité de la coagulation, et son corps présenter, au lieu des linéaments primordiaux et des courbes naturelles, l'apparence monotone d'un seul tout homogène qui ne ressemble que trop, par la confusion de ses divers éléments broyés, à la masse d'une sphère!" and "la situation anormale des atomes de cette femme, réduite à pâte de pétrin" From *Maldoror* 5, 2. Ibid., 164-65.

in *Faustroll* to Lautréamont and his "scarab, beautiful as the trembling hands in alcoholism."[308]

Lautréamont adds supplemental laws to those already mentioned—ones that are both absurd and bizarre. Consider the "great general laws of the grotesque," or, if you rather, the "law of the restoration of mutilated limbs/organs."[309] What of the "law of arrested development that in the chests of adults whose propensity for growth is not consonant with the quantity of molecules assimilated by their organism?"[310] For Duchamp, the deadpan humor of these laws would not have been lost. It is possible that when Duchamp formulated the comparably sober "law of the irrigation of desire-magneto" in his notes for the *Large Glass*, he was reflecting upon his reading of Lautréamont.[311] Duchamp also concerns himself with laws of friction as Lautréamont does, manipulating it in his playful physics. In his notes for the lower realm of the *Large Glass*, the artist explains that after the Glider or Chariot mechanism is drawn in one direction across a set of guiding runners, the element returns to its starting position by way of the "inversion of friction."[312] This phenomenon, he explains, occurs when the friction of the first movement produces no heat—as would be the case in the normal world—but rather an inverse force that impels the Glider's return to its initial location. Nearby, the "Chocolate Grinder" points to another function of friction, with distinct sexual overtones. The curious workings of friction in the *Large Glass* find unique yet suggestive parallels in *Les Chants de Maldoror*. Duchamp, however, never would have reproduced the author's images directly. Rather, as was the case with Roussel's inventions, the artist would have used Lautréamont as a source of ideas to transform.

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[308] Jarry, *Doctor Faustroll*, 19.

[309] "la loi mécanique du frottement rotatoire," From *Maldoror* 4, 6; ". . . comme la loi de la reconstitution des organes mutilés." From *Maldoror* 5, 2. Curiously, Knight translates this as "organs" while Lykiard reads it as "limbs." See Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 149; Lautréamont, *Maldoror and Poems*, 183.

[310] "la loi de l'arrêt de développement de la poitrine chez les adultes dont la propension à la croissance n'est pas en rapport avec la quantité de molécules que leur organisme s'assimile . . ." From *Maldoror* 5, 2. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 166.

[311] See note 153 in Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp, Notes*.

[312] For Duchamp's notes that dictate the functioning of friction in the *Large Glass*, see Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 30, 56, 60.

If these hilarious pseudo-laws certainly appear incompatible with the poetic culture that surrounded Lautréamont, they also conflict internally with other sections of *Les Chants de Maldoror*; but then the author's irony is knotty. Lautréamont is a rich source for the playful use of science, often in surprising ways. In the second canto, for instance, Maldoror takes respite from his horrors in order to sing long praises to mathematics:

> Oh stern mathematics, I have not forgotten you since I learned your teachings . . . there was a haze in my spirit. . . . In its place you set an excessive coolness, a consummate prudence, and an implacable logic. . . . Algebra! Geometry! Grand Trinity! Luminous triangle! He who knows and appreciates you wants naught else of the world's chattels; is content with your magical ecstasies; and borne on your somber wings, desires nothing more than gentle flight, describing the ascendant helix, towards the spherical vault of the heavens. . . . A monument ceaselessly growing via daily discoveries in your diamond-mines, and scientific explorations among your superb domains. O holy mathematics. . . .[313]

The religious elevation of mathematics by Maldoror appears out of place compared to the hyper-Romanticism that immediately surrounds it. For Duchamp, reading this passage in 1912, it surely would have reminded him of the Salon Cubists' initial attraction to geometry as a basis for their work. In his 1913 *The Cubist Painters,* Apollinaire had written, in a more sober appeal:

> The new painters have been roundly criticised for their interest in geometry. And yet geometry is the essence of drawing. Geometry, the science of space, its measurement and relationships, has always been the basic rule of painting. . . . The new painters do not claim to be geometricians any more than painters of the past did. But it is true that geometry is to the plastic arts what grammar is to the art of the writer.[314]

While Duchamp's interests in non-Euclidian geometry and the four-dimensional space arose

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[313] "O mathématiques sévères, je ne vous ai pas oubliées, depuis que vos savantes leçons. . . Il y avait du vague dans mon esprit. . . à la place, une froideur excessive, une prudence consommée et une logique implacable. . . . Arithmétique! algèbre! géométrie! trinité grandiose! triangle lumineux! Celui qui ne vous a pas connues est un insensé! Il mériterait l'épreuve des plus grands supplices; car, il y a du mépris aveugle dans son insouciance ignorante; mais, celui qui vous connaît et vous apprécie ne veut plus rien des biens de la terre; se contente de vos jouissances magiques; et, porté sur vos ailes sombres, ne désire plus que de s'élever, d'un vol léger, en construisant une hélice ascendante, vers la voûte sphérique des cieux. . . . Monument qui grandit sans cesse de découvertes quotidiennes, dans vos mines de diamant, et d'explorations scientifiques, dans vos superbes domaines. O mathématiques saintes. . . ." From *Maldoror* 2, 10. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 83-86.

[314] Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters*, 15.

along with that of the Cubists, his slight by way of the Puteaux likely encouraged his anti-Bergsonist tendencies, as already noted. This attitude would have allowed him to laugh along with Lautréamont. Duchamp's usage of math and science take a form that is ultimately closer to Jarry and Lautréamont's than the Cubists' intuitive use of them for discovering higher realities. For Lautréamont, Jarry, and Duchamp, the language and ideas of science provided an alternative to the art and literature that surrounded them. If this use was parodic and ironic, it was also characterized by an admiration for the novelty that science provided.

Additionally, in the realm of mathematical relations, spirals and spheres feature prominently for Duchamp and Lautréamont (and Jarry). Lautréamont's "ascendant helix, towards the spherical vault of the heavens," mentioned in his ode to mathematics, is reminiscent of the "Handler of Gravity" in the *Large Glass*—a spiral form standing as a bridge between dimensional worlds, mundane and celestial. Henderson notes the potential relationship between spirals and the fourth dimension in treatises that Duchamp would have been familiar with.[315] Rrose Sélavy's many optical spirals also speak to the artist's recurring use of the form. Therefore, Lautréamont's spiral that approaches the celestial infinite may indeed have much in common with Duchamp's use.

Far from the social idealism of Gleizes, who sought to inaugurate a new form of art, Lautréamont was a poet of negation. In keeping with that temperament, the final canto of *Les Chants de Maldoror* features Romanticism, Gothic storytelling, and cold geometry and science reconciled in destruction. Lautréamont writes a murderous resolution that destroys God, an Archangel, and the youthful Mervyn. It opens: "To construct mechanically the brain of a somniferous tale, it is not enough to dissect nonsense and mightily stupify the reader's intelligence with renewed doses, so as to paralyse his faculties for the rest of his life by the

[315] Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension*, 279-80.

infallible law of fatigue. . . ."[316] Here, once again, the mechanical meets the body/mind, and addressing the reader directly, Lautréamont hints that the book is itself a machination, as already argued.

In the narrative apparatus of the sixth canto, God sends an archangel in the form of an "edible crab" who attempts to dissuade Maldoror from his ill intent. Maldoror tricks the gullible angel into letting its guard down, however, and dispatches its corporeal form. The anti-hero then kidnaps Mervyn and places him in a bag, which he thrashes against the parapet of a bridge. A crowd forms and moves to stop him, but he explains that he is killing a diseased dog. Maldoror absconds, leaving poor Mervyn bagged with the throng who readies to destroy the animal that they assume is in the bag. A sole dissenting voice persuades them to look inside, where they discover Mervyn. This escape is only a stay of execution, unfortunately. In the final scene Mervyn is murdered in a bizarre contraption, and a rescue attempt by God fails when Maldoror's bullet kills the deity, who had assumed the form of a rhinoceros. An admirer of Poe, Maturin, Young, and other Gothic writers, Lautréamont transforms the Gothic genre's trope of the ingenious and malevolent murder stratagem into a peculiar but comically elaborate homicide—redressed with the ironic pastiche of the science that permeates the book.

Maldoror, having Mervyn captive once more, ties the youth's feet, and suspends him from a bronze obelisk in the circular Place Vendôme. The anti-hero and a minion manipulate Mervyn into "an accelerated motion of uniform rotation, in a plane parallel to the axis of the column."[317] The pretty youth's body swings outward "ever distanced from the center by

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316 "Pour construire mécaniquement la cervelle d'un conte somnifère, il ne suffit pas de disséquer des bêtises et abrutir puissamment à doses renouvelées l'intelligence du lecteur, de manière à rendre ses facultés paralytiques pour le reste de sa vie, par la loi infaillible de la fatigue . . . ." From *Maldoror* 6, 7. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 214.

317 ". . . un mouvement accéléré de rotation uniforme, dans un plan parallèle de l'axe de la colonne. . . ." From *Maldoror* 6, 7 in Ibid., 217.

centrifugal force, ever keeping its mobile and equidistant position in the aerial circumference independent of matter."[318] The tension of the rope rises until finally, he "turns majestically on a horizontal plane, after passing successively in an imperceptible progression through several oblique planes." Lautréamont continues, "The right angle formed by the column and the vegetal yarn has equal sides! The renegade's arm and the murderous instrument have merged in linear unity, like the atomistic elements of a ray of light penetrating the *camera obscura*. Theorems of mechanics permit me to talk thus; alas!"[319] Maldoror then pulls loose a slipknot, releasing the tension on the rope all at once. Poor Mervyn takes flight "followed by the cord," and the narrator declares that he "resembles a comet" with "flaming tail" as he flies. "In the course of his parabola" writes Lautréamont, "the doomed man cleaves the air as far as the Left Bank, passes it by virtue of propulsive force—which I take to be infinite, and his body hits the dome of the Panthéon," which the author further describes as "spherical and convex."[320] The author insists that Mervyn's skeleton can still be seen on the dome today.

Lautréamont renders the work's climax as a Gothic horror transfigured into a physics problem. This recasting of the murder in thoroughly non-Romantic or Gothic terms would surely have been of interest to Duchamp as he sought to "construct mechanically" his allegory of erotic love. The droll outlandishness and over-complexity of the apparatus that Maldoror designed for murdering Mervyn demonstrates a pronounced resonance between *Les Chants de Maldoror* and the *Large Glass*. Each employs an elaborate machinery that transforms a motif usually not associated with the sciences into something that wears its ill-fitting frockcoat. The hilarious

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[318] ". . . le corps de Mervyn la suit partout, toujours éloigné du centre par la force centrifuge, toujours gardant sa position mobile et équidistante, dans une circonférence aérienne, indépendante de la matière." From *Maldoror* 6, 7. Ibid.

[319] Ibid., 218.

[320] "Dans le parcours de sa parabole . . . le condamné à mort fend l'atmosphère, jusqu'à la rive gauche, la dépasse en vertu de la force d'impulsion que je suppose infinie, et son corps va frapper le dôme du Panthéon." From *Maldoror* 6, 7. Ibid.

science that keeps the futility of the Bachelor Machine running is sibling to the circuitous science that links Lautréamont's fever dream of vignettes.

Wandering between "I" and "Me" and "He"

Another correspondence between Duchamp and Ducasse lay in their similar strategies of play and contradiction in art and in life, aimed at bringing the fixity of identity and meaning into question. Each developed a tactic of subversion and multiplication—Ducasse with the Comte de Lautréamont identity, and Duchamp with Rrose Sélavy. An important caveat must be acknowledged here. The practice of constructing new identities, and working behind a pseudonym, was by no means Lautréamont's invention. In Duchamp's immediate circle, even his brother Gaston likely took his working name, Jacque Villon, in reference to the medieval poet François Villon.[321] Man Ray refigured his given name into his artistic and then legal appellation, and Guillaume Apollinaire was an assumed name as well. Therefore, Lautréamont was only one possible model among many, but his model is worthy of reflection. Analogously, the theme of exile and wandering finds accordance within the works of both artists, and with the artist and poet themselves. Moreover, both sought to unsettle the concept or tradition of belonging to a place, group, or even within one's self as a unified site of identity.

Maldoror is, as Mark Polizzotti rightly indicates, a nomad.[322] He belongs nowhere. He is also is a shape-shifter. His creator, Ducasse/Lautréamont, is himself a polymorph as well—one that is echoed in both his corrupted deity, Elohim, and his anti-heroic Maldoror. And if there is a preeminent and constant force at work in the volume, it is flux. The narration of *Les Chants de Maldoror* shifts frequently and unexpectedly between Lautréamont and Maldoror, and between

[321] Robbins, "Jacques Villon," 17.
[322] Polizzotti, *Lautréamont: Nomad*, 7-10, 13-15.

he and *I* in both cases, jumping erratically between first and third person. The effect of this is to disorient the reader, while simultaneously multiplying and obscuring identities. The work commences in Lautréamont's voice, but it slowly erases him, substituting the other and eventually the metamorph, whose essential state is plurality or polyidentitfication.

Maldoror himself constantly shifts in physical and moral appearances. He assumes the form of a living vampire, Maturin's Melmoth, a Wandering Jew, an eagle, a crocodile, an octopus, and more. He inhabits, and sheds, countless other husks, akin to the gas molded in the empty uniforms that constitute the malic molds of Duchamp's *Large Glass*. Unified form is a temporarily constructed appearance here, rather than an essentialism. The raconteur of one passage—identity unclear—explains that Maldoror "had a special faculty for assuming forms unrecognizable to expert eyes. Superior disguises—speaking as an artist! . . . Have you noticed the slimness of the pretty cricket with alert movement in the sewers of Paris? It can only be he: it was Maldoror!"[323]

Elsewhere, Maldoror sings Baudelairean praises to the infinite ocean: "Old ocean, you are the symbol of identity: always equal to yourself. In essence you never change . . . I hail you Old ocean!"[324] This is one of the plentiful contradictions that riddle *Les Chants de Maldoror*. For Maldoror/Lautréamont the Old ocean possesses an identity that is simultaneously both infinite in his estimation, and yet unified by being tautologically self-similar, or rather self-identical. Whereas the Old ocean is founded in a unity, its own identity is grounded in its own self-difference, flux, and multiplicity. The narrator notes that if it storms in one part of the ocean,

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[323] "Il avait une faculté spéciale pour prendre des formes méconnaissables aux yeux exercés. Déguisements supérieurs, si je parle en artiste! . . . N'avez-vous pas remarqué la gracilité d'un joli grillon, aux mouvements alertes, dans les égouts de Paris? Il n'y a que celui-là: c'était Maldoror!" From *Maldoror* 6, 2. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 191.

[324] "Vieil océan, tu es le symbole de l'identité: toujours égal à toi-même. Tu ne varies pas d'une manière essentielle. . . Je te salue, vieil océan!" From *Maldoror* 1, 9. Ibid., 38.

another region will be heavenly calm, and so even as its particular and localized temperament changes, it maintains a higher-register sameness across greater time and space.

Semiotically, it is the ocean because it is not the desert, nor is it a marsh, nor man or anything else. This is not simply to say that the ocean does not share qualities of those terrains and entities, but rather that it also bears a different name. The word *ocean* is in effect the real source of its unity. Lautréamont plays a game that undermines meaning by destabilizing the purchase that identity finds in language, and in naming. Even his use of an authorial pseudonym for *Les Chants de Maldoror*, while alternately applying his birth-name to *Poésies*, speaks to his desire to confound terms—refusing to cede priority to one or the other. As with Duchamp's Pyrrho, Lautréamont pulls at the fray of language and identity, denying any singular truth by accepting all possible truths. Lautréamont's Old ocean is singular and changing for a single human *and* infinite and eternal for language. It refuses being one *or* the other. Even the work itself is both poem and novel (and everything else it purports to be). Nothing is excluded, and all positions are valid and fluid, rather than fixed and defined.

One finds similar operations within Duchamp's work. A frequently cited example of such thought is his *Door, 11 rue Larrey* (fig. 32). Duchamp explained the work as a vexation of the exclusionary saying that "a door must be either open or closed."[325] *Doo*r, *11 rue Larrey* was a functional door in the artist's tiny apartment, and it was both an artistic gesture and a pragmatic solution. From a single pivot, the door closed on either the bedroom, or the bathroom, but only one at a time. Hence the door remains perpetually open, even when it is closed. If the essence of a door hinges upon its closure of a space, this one can certainly do so, but never completely. Every attempt to isolate one space results in the opening of another, unhinging the notion that a

[325] Naumann also explains the door as a pragmatic solution to Duchamp's limited space. See Naumann and Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making*, 106-07.

door has only two possible states that define it.[326]

More pointedly, Duchamp engaged in a series of games with his own identity, beginning with his 1917 *Fountain* (fig. 31). Duchamp signed that Readymade, a mass-produced produced white porcelain urinal purchased from the J.L. Mott Irons Works in New Work City, with the name "R. Mutt." While the work was rejected on the grounds previously described, it was Duchamp's first known step towards multiplying and obscuring his identity.[327] In 1919, Duchamp infamously appropriated and rectified a reproduction of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa,* producing *L.H.O.O.Q.*, (fig. 21).[328] It was within the year following this gender-bending gesture that Duchamp created a female alter-ego for himself, launching Rrose Sélavy's artistic career by producing several works in her name. "It was not to change my identity," Duchamp later clarified, "but to have two identities."[329] This is to say that Duchamp was Rrose, and vice versa without one ever supplanting the other. Resonances begin to emerge in Duchamp's gesture that recall Ducasse's games of fluid exchange of identity across works.

Rrose also shares, in a manner, the sexual-hybrid quality of a hermaphrodite encountered in canto two of *Les Chants de Maldoror*. Describing him/her, the narrator observes, "Nothing in him appears natural, not even the muscles of his body, which force their way across the harmonious contours of feminine forms."[330] Beginning by 1921, Man Ray and Duchamp collaborated on a series of photographs of Rrose. These images reified the other identity, but in a manner that always retained Duchamp's male presence behind the mask, and a sense of

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[326] In an essay that discussed Duchamp's "reconciliation of contradictory or opposing entities," with a focus on Max Stirner's ideas, Naumann employs this same example. See Naumann, "Artist of the Century," 34-35.
[327] Tomkins, *Duchamp,* 181-86.
[328] Ibid., 221-22.
[329] Ibid., 231.
[330] "Rien ne paraît naturel en lui, pas même les muscles de son corps, qui se fraient un passage à travers les contours harmonieux de formes féminines." From *Maldoror* 2, 7. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works,* 72.

artificiality as noted by James McManus and others (fig. 33).[331] From the 1920s through the 1940s, Rrose continued to produce works.[332] She and Duchamp were also very active correspondents. In his notes, and particularly when writing letters, Duchamp employed numerous signatory names and variations. These included "Marchand du Sel," "Marcelavy," "Rose-Marcel," "Duche," "Marcel à vie," "Rrose," "Marcel Rrose," "Selatz," "Stone of Air," "Totor," "Morice," "Roger Maurice," and "Dee" to name a few. Some were nicknames, and many were puns. The only near-constant feature in his signature, lasting through the 1920s and 1930s, was the closing "*affectueusement*" preceding each of his many signatures.[333]

Granted, Duchamp never metamorphosed into a crocodile or eagle, but he transformed nonetheless, multiplying and complicating his identity. Some commentators have suggested Guillaume Apollinaire's 1917 staging of *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* as an impetus for Duchamp's transformation—beginning with his adjustment of the *Mona Lisa*.[334] This certainly contributed to the atmosphere in which the artist was working, but Apollinaire's Tirésias transforms completely, becoming a man, as per the mythic source. Similarly in the play, Tirésias's husband undergoes the opposite metamorphosis, becoming feminine.

Duchamp's becoming Rrose is a different kind of transformation than Tirésias's. It is as much artificial as artifice. Moreover, Rrose Sélavy emerges two years after Apollinaire's play, closer in time to the Surrealists' reprinting of Ducasse's *Poésies*. The Ducasse/Lautréamont identity would have been fresh in Duchamp's mind after his stay in Paris—as evidenced by his letter to Arensberg about the text. Like the poly-identity of Ducasse/Lautréamont/Maldoror,

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[331] McManus discusses Duchamp's masquerade as Rrose in terms of fashion, feminine mystique, and artificiality, noting that beneath the cloths and makeup, "the underlying male figure is not hidden." McManus, "Not Seen and/or Less Seen: Hiding in Front of the Camera " 72-75.
[332] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 231.
[333] See various correspondence published in Duchamp, *Affectt/Marcel*, ed. Naumann and Obalk.
[334] See, e.g., McManus, "Not Seen and/or Less Seen: Hiding in Front of the Camera " 68.

Duchamp et al (of his selves) don't merely metamorphose from one to another. These identities co-exist in a manner that is different than Tirésias. Rather than being characterized by a transformation between discrete states, they are hybrid and superpositional. This sense of multiplication is clear in *Photograph of Marcel Duchamp Taken with a Hinged Mirror*.[335] In this 1917 image, reproduced in Lebel's *Marcel Duchamp*, trick photography allows five Marcel Duchamps to appear seated together around a common table. Like Maldoror's Old ocean, here Duchamp appears as identical to himself, and yet he is also an iterated multiple.

Duchamp later reflected upon divergent identities, explaining "my intention was always to get away from myself, though I knew perfectly well that I was using myself," and adding, "Call it a little game between 'I' and 'me.'"[336] In his wide-ranging work on Duchamp's condition of perpetual exile, T.J. Demos responds to the artist's statement, writing,

> Duchamp's game unleashed a self-differing force that produced a gap between "I" and "me," between subject and object, which would fundamentally estrange the self from identity (at least one based on sameness), corrode the unity of individuality, and insistently place being in proximity with difference. Rather than become a group subject, or even an "independent" individual, Duchamp would multiply the self.[337]

Demos links this gesture to the production of a self that is in forever in a state of displacement. The similarity to Duchamp's linguistic and visual displacements should be noted here, as he is, in a sense, also using himself as a signified thing whose relationship is unsettled by the imposition of alternate names, appearances, or situations. As Demos suggests, Duchamp is finding a bit of daylight between *he* and *himself*. Ducasse performs a very similar gesture by opening a moral and artistic rift between his two selves as expressed in his use of different names

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[335] For a semiotic reading of this photograph, and Duchamp's "superposition," occupying a "neither/both space," in McManus's translation and updating of his article, "Trucage photographique et déplacement de l'objet: A propos d'une photographie de Marcel Duchamp prise devant un miroir à charniers (1917)," see James McManus," Mirrors, Trans/Formation and Slippage in the Five-Way Portrait of Marcel Duchamp," *The Space Between* IV, no. 1 (2008).
[336] Quoted in T. J. Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 88.
[337] Ibid., 88-89.

for *Poésies* and *Les Chants de Maldoror*. The contradiction between the author and himself constitutes a field of play.

Demos also finds a geographical analog for the shifting of identities in Duchamp's constant wandering. Munich was the artist's first flight from France. Duchamp explained his motivation to Tomkins: "In 1912 it was a decision for being alone and not knowing where I was going. . . .The artist should be alone. . . . Everyone for himself, as in a shipwreck."[338] After Munich, Duchamp spent a lifetime wandering between France, the United States, Argentina, and Spain. He found himself ever in motion. There is a correlation between Duchamp's remark and his literary exposure at the time. Both *Les Chants de Maldoror* and *Impressions d'Afrique* featured shipwrecks, and the former possessed a main character who was an itinerant wanderer. Not knowing where one is going, as Duchamp suggests, is the very heart of wandering. To be shipwrecked is to drift between places of belonging—far from anything called home.

For the practical reason of collecting his works into one portable traveling museum, with *Bôite en Valise* Duchamp distilled himself and his career into his luggage (fig. 34). The itinerant artist's suitcase of miniature replicas of his oeuvre might also be read as a sign of Duchamp's self-displacement—appropriate for a man who was ever the visitor, or temporary resident. Duchamp magnified this sense of displacement and subjective dis-unity in the work with its full title: *From or by Marcel Duchamp or Rrose Sélavy.* Such a title or name assures nothing. Is the artist a creator or conduit—or both? Duchamp's dual *or*s result in the multiplication of possibilities.

Maldoror's multiplications and wanderings echo this estrangement of self from identity, and from locations of belonging. Maldoror is everywhere, the reader learns, and he is also nowhere: he has no home. The text explains that he once had one, and a family, but that ended

[338] Tomkins, *Duchamp,* 93.

poorly. Now he wanders, consumed by his pitched battle against man and the Creator. As Lautréamont's text explains,

> Today he is in Madrid; tomorrow he will be in St Petersburg; yesterday he was in Peking. But to state exactly the place which the exploits of his poetic Rocambole are currently filling with terror is a task beyond the possibility of my dull-witted ratiocination. The bandit is perhaps seven hundred leagues away from this area—or perhaps a few steps from you. It is not easy to make men perish entirely, and there are laws; but with patience one can exterminate the human ants one by one. Now from the day of my birth, inexperienced in setting my snares, I lived with the first forebears of our race, since remote time set beyond history, when, in subtle metamorphoses at divers epochs I ravaged the regions of the globe by conquests and carnage . . . .[339]

Maldoror's state, like that of Duchamp, is one of constant exile. And yet, Maldoror can be anywhere at any time. He is not unlike the sovereign of Apollinaire's 1916 "Le Roi-Lune." The short story's eponymous king can, with the help special technology, listen to the sounds of any place at any hour and make love to any woman in history, anywhere in the world.[340] With the help of a camera and his pseudonyms, Duchamp accomplished being multiple persons at once and one person in multiple places. Maldoror's ability is innate. It is simply his lot, marked by an adversarial position pitched against the fixity of belonging. Moreover, it underscores the slipperiness of identity in *Les Chants de Maldoror*. In this short selection alone, the authorial voice shifts position drastically, traveling from he (*il*), to one (*on*), and finally to I *(je*).

What are such contradictory emanations as *Les Chants de Maldoror* and *Poésies*—originating from a single author with multiple identities—if not a grand game between *he* and

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[339] "Aujourd'hui il est à Madrid; demain il sera à Saint-Pétersbourg; hier il se trouvait à Pékin. Mais, affirmer exactement l'endroit actuel que remplissent de terreur les exploits de ce poétique Rocambole est un travail au-dessus des forces possibles de mon épaisse ratiocination. Ce bandit est, peut-être, à sept cents lieues de ce pays; peut-être, il est à quelques pas de vous. Il n'est pas facile de faire périr entièrement les hommes, et les lois sont là; mais, on peut, avec de la patience, exterminer, une par une, les fourmis humanitaires. Or, depuis les jours de ma naissance, où je vivais avec les premiers aïeuls de notre race, encore inexpérimenté dans la tension de mes embûches; depuis les temps reculés, placés, au delà de l'histoire, où, dans de subtiles métamorphoses, je ravageais, à diverses époques, les contrées du globe par les conquêtes et le carnage. . . . " From *Maldoror* 6, 2. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 191.

[340] For an English translation of the story, see Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Poet Assassinated and Other Stories*, trans. Ron Padgett (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984).

himself. Duchamp described artists to Tomkins as "such supreme egos."[341] This synecdoche is appropriate, since the Romantic and Symbolist tendencies had distilled the artist and poet into a transcendent individual ego—a heroic genius for all mankind. For both Duchamp and Ducasse, this was anathema. Hence Duchamp's slippage is not accidental. It was a strategy—one for which Lautréamont may have provided insight.

Return to Man Ray's "Bilingual Biography"

Returning at last to the thread of "Bilingual Biography," Man Ray's interweaving of *Les Chants de Maldoror* and the *Large Glass* is much more than a cryptic comment. Given the evidence presented here, it appears to reflect a number of possible resonances, or areas of special interest for which Duchamp would have valued Lautréamont's volume. Given the strength of the mutual interest for Duchamp and Lautréamont in appropriation and the use of humorous pseudo-scientific dispositions, the idea that Ray's choice to include Lautréamont might have been guided simply by his own Surrealist inclinations seems unlikely. Rather, his friend's interest in the author, beginning in the earliest days of their friendship, and their ability to share that affinity, seems to be at the core of the matter.

A few speculations may now be made regarding the relationship that Ray suggests. The term "unfinished," which Ray appends to Duchamp's supposed "authentic portrait of Lautréamont's God," is an unambiguous reference to the *Large Glass*, and to Duchamp's decision in 1923 that it was to be a "definitely unfinished" object.[342] The reliable "Catherine barometer" that Ray includes in the second line of the stanza potentially has a double meaning. The first refers to an object the Man Ray produced in 1920, a kind of portrait of Katherine

[341] Tomkins, *Afternoon Interviews*, 32.
[342] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 3, 250-51.

Dreier, whose name is misspelled in the title, possibly on purpose (fig. 35). The work features a metal tube attached to a color chart, with a base of steel wool, and bearing the inscription, "SHAKE WELL BEFORE USING."[343] Amelia Jones notes the particularly phallic nature of Ray's portrait of the patroness. In the context of the stanza and the overall containing text, it is also a citation of the Bride in the *Glass*'s upper realm, via Duchamp's boxes.[344] In those notes, Duchamp wrote, "In the pendu femelle—and the blossoming barometer / the filament substance might shorten or lengthen itself," in response to changes in atmospheric pressure.[345] These clues establish that Man Ray is referring to Duchamp's *Large Glass*.

While the previous sections detailed a number of resonances between Lautréamont's works and the *Large Glass*, another concatenation is yet possible between Duchamp's masterpiece and *Les Chants de Maldoror*. Here, Man Ray's phrase "jumping hair of cones in a bordel" becomes central. Lautréamont's actual description of the hair/pole offers a visual rhyme for the conical sieves in the lower domain of the glass. While scholars normally interpret these elements of the *Large Glass* in their geometric and mechanical senses, another reading is possible via Lautréamont's jumping hair. Described as a "flaxen pole composed of interlocking cones," the author's image of the hair resembles the arcing "sieves" or "parasols" belonging to the Bachelor's realm of Duchamp's *Large Glass*. Duchamp's series of seven sieves, colored with dust and varnish, indeed approximate a series of interlocking cones—each coupled *enfonçant* into the next by physically penetrating into its space (fig. 36). Moreover, the varnish adhering the dust that composes them would have appeared flaxen for many years after Duchamp produced the *Large Glass*, until oxidation darkened it substantially.

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[343] Amelia Jones, "'Women' in Dada: Elsa, Rrose, and Charlie," in *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity*, ed. Naomi Sawelson-Gorse (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 248.
[344] For Duchamp's notes and a drawing pertaining to this element, see Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 45-48.
[345] "Dans le pendu femelle—et l'épanouissement baromètre / La matièr à filaments pourrait s'allonger ou se rétrécir. . . ." See Duchamp, *Duchamp Du Signe*, 69-72 ; Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 48.

There is another tentative and related way of connecting the apparatus of the *Large Glass* to the brothel scene in *Les Chants de Maldoror*. In Duchamp's *Green Box* notes he calls the sieves alternately "sieves" (tamis), or "parasols" (ombrelles).[346] In his reserved notes, however, published only after his death, the artist also applied the term "cone" to these structures.[347] Man Ray's comment may therefore simultaneously reference the sieves as cones in the *Large Glass* and Lautréamont's cones that compose the jumping hair. This play would then reflect Ray's intimate position, since he was likely privy to his friend's then unpublished use of the term.

The *Large Glass* might also be linked to Lautréamont's simile reading, "handsome as . . . the chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing machine and an umbrella!"[348] The "ombrelle" that appears in Duchamp's notes provides a parallel to the "parapluie" contained in Lautréamont's simile.[349] The parasol is the nearly same device as the umbrella, but intended for sun instead of rain—a slight inversion. As previously discussed, W. Bowdoin Davis convincingly points to the importance of sewing, fabric, and thread throughout Duchamp's work from this period. In setting forth his argument, Davis highlights numerous appearances of stitch-like marks and forms resembling parts of sewing machines in several works, including *Virgin No.1*, *Virgin No. 2*, *Passage from Virgin to Bride*, and in a note that includes a drawing depicting a form like the foot of a sewing machine (figs. 12-14 and 16). Moreover, the nineteenth-century concatenation of sewing machines and female onanism, noted earlier in this thesis, heightens the possible erotic connotations of a sewing machine's presence, if disguised, in the *Large Glass*.[350] This would be entirely in keeping with the work's basic theme. As the artist told Cabanne,

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[346] Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 48-50; Duchamp, *Duchamp du signe*, 72-74.
[347] See notes 160 and 250 in Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp, Notes*.
[348] For the full simile in French, see note 301. *Maldoror* 6, 3. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 193.
[349] Duchamp, *Duchamp Du Signe*, 72-74; *Maldoror* 6, 3. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 193.
[350] Henderson, "'Figuratively a Fireworks': New Dimensions of Marcel Duchamp in August 1913."; Myman, "Sex & the Sewing Machine in Nineteenth-Century France".

"Eroticism was a theme, and even an 'ism,' which was the basis of everything I was doing at the time of the 'Large Glass.'"[351]

If, in fact, Duchamp included the highly abstracted results of these sewing-machine related works in the Bride of the *Large Glass*, Man Ray's allusion presents a new possibility. The wasp/Bride/sewing machine and the "ombrelles" inhabit separate realms of the *Large Glass*—domains whose exchange of signals, or meeting, is governed by chance. Considered further, the *Large Glass* is both dissecting table and trap. The motif of the trap appears multiple times throughout Duchamp's oeuvre. Mousetraps, like the rat trap in Lautréamont's simile, appear several times in Duchamp's posthumous notes.[352] A 1917 Readymade even bore the title *Trebuchet*, or "*Trap*" (fig. 20). And among the *Green Box* notes, Duchamp even explicitly links his parasols with traps in a small parenthetical note reading, "(*piège des ombrelles*)," or "(*parasol trap*)."[353] While these traps catch frozen spangles of gas rather than the rodents of Lautréamont's simile, reading the author's simile against the *Large Glass* yields a curious possibility. Effectively, the work could be interpreted as a self-perpetuating mechanical trap "always reset by the trapped animal," which is to say that both Bride and Bachelors are bound to their realms and roles, eternally operating their frustrating erotic machinery.[354] They are controlled by, and are constitutive of, an erotic trap. Thus, the *Large Glass* is also a conceptual apparatus for diagrammatically dissecting hopeless erotic love.

Governed by the specific nature of Man Ray's reference, another possibility may be added to this speculative list: the concept of stripping a human being bare. Duchamp's mechanical portrait of the Bride's denuding is not without subtle erotic cruelty on the part of

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[351] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 88; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 166.
[352] See notes 250, 251, 252 for mention of the mousetrap, or "*souricière*," in Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp, Notes*
[353] For the Green Box note which includes the "Parasol trap," see Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 48-50; Duchamp, *Duchamp Du Signe*, 72-74.
[354] For the full simile in French, see note 301. From *Maldoror* 6, 3. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 193.

both parties. In a 1959 interview to George Heard Hamilton, Duchamp coyly confessed something of this possibility. Chuckling with faux embarrassment, the artist suggested that the stripping of Christ—a significant stage in the Passion—was one of the possible meanings of his the *Large Glass*.[355] While the admission may have been a matter of the artist playing games with his interviewer, the statement merits consideration. Furthermore, in his notes on the Bride as apotheosis of virginity, Duchamp indicated her attitude of naive erotic malevolence when he specified "ignorant desire. blank desire. (with a touch of malice)."[356] Lautréamont's transformation of God into a monster that flays men alive for erotic pleasure reveals some of the poet's darkest humor. For Duchamp, reading this in 1912, Lautréamont's iconoclasm, and the concept of stripping someone bare, would surely have appealed to his darker sense of humor, even his own creative tendencies were not nearly so sinister.

Finally, it is even possible to read the space of the *Large Glass* as a brothel. This possibility makes the Bride's appearance as the "apotheosis of virginity" quite ironic, and recasts the Bachelors as patrons of the brothel.[357] Such establishments were not unknown to Duchamp, as evidenced by the reminiscences of a least one friend. Max Bergman, whom Duchamp met in Paris as an art student, and then again in Munich, recorded a night-long adventure with Duchamp, then in his early twenties, that reached its apex in a brothel on Rue Pigalle, in Montmartre.[358]

And a Speculation

[355] Marcel Duchamp, "Interview: Marcel Duchamp and George Heard Hamilton," in *Musical Erratum + In Conversation* (LTM Recordings, 2008).
[356] Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, ed. Sanouillet and Peterson, 39.
[357] Ibid.
[358] Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 40-41.

By late in his life, Duchamp did not believe in a Creator. When Cabanne asked the aging Duchamp if he believed in God, the artist replied, "God is a human invention," adding, "Why talk about such a utopia? . . . It is mad foolishness to have made up the idea of God."[359] Elsewhere the artist credits the Church and social rules with obscuring aspects of human life that, once hidden, give rise to the erotic.[360] Why then does Man Ray associate Lautréamont's God with the *Large Glass*? Is there a deity there, stripping the Bride? Or, is it an esoteric reference that is different from everything suggested thus far? It is even possible that the allusion was a private joke between Duchamp and Man Ray. The mounting evidence, however, suggests something more readily discernible than that.

So far, this thesis has only sought to understand Lautréamont's place for Duchamp prior to Man Ray writing "Bilingual Biography." That is not where this line of inquiry ends, however, for Ray's text anticipates later resonances between Lautréamont and Duchamp. Man Ray's reference to the "bordel" where God enacts his cruelties may yield another promising reading—one that gives new light to a work that Man Ray knew nothing of until after his friend's death in 1968. It was a work that Duchamp began just one year after his friend's "Bilingual Biography" appeared in print.[361] Moreover, this revelation points to the likelihood of a lifelong engagement for Duchamp with Lautréamont.

From the late 1940s until his death, many critics, and even some of Duchamp's friends, believed that he had entirely stopped making art. This was Duchamp's famed "silence," criticized by Joseph Beuys and others."[362] In reality, Duchamp was not dormant at all. In secret,

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[359] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 106-07; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 204.
[360] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 88 ; Cabanne, *Entretiens*, 166-67.
[361] For the chronology and environment of *Étant donnés* construction, see Michael R. Taylor, *Marcel Duchamp: Étant Donnés* (Exh. Cat. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2009), 61-128.
[362] After including the words "Das Schweigen von Marcel Duchamp wird überbewertet" (The silence of Marcel Duchamp is overrated) in a 1964 work, Beuys explained, "I criticize [Duchamp] because at the very moment when

the artist labored from 1946 until 1966 on a radical new piece, experimenting bit by bit with new ideas, materials, and techniques.[363] Duchamp's wife Teeny, friend William Copley, and the artist's former lover, Maria Martins—whose body was the initial model for the work—were the only people whom the artist permitted to know about the work before his death. By then, a plan was in place to permanently install the work in a museum. And in July of 1969, the Philadelphia Museum of Art opened Duchamp's final work to public viewing.[364]

If the *Large Glass* was eroticism stripped of its visual titillation and set out for the mind alone, then *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau / 2° le gaz d'éclairage* (*Given: 1. The Waterfall. 2. The Illuminating Gas*) is its very antithesis (fig. 37).[365] It is overwhelmingly visual. While the *Large Glass* was cool and detached, *Étant donnés* is intimate, shocking, and sweltering in its eroticism. The work is a large installation or tableau that forces a fixed binocular viewpoint upon its spectator, with a greater insistence than the Renaissance perspectivalists ever imagined. Moreover, like the *Large Glass*, *Étant donnés* centers on a nude. Outwardly, the work presents only a brick and stucco wall into which Duchamp set an enormous weathered wooden door lacking a visible handle of any kind. Approaching the portal, one discovers two peepholes bored in the wood at eye level. The precisely aligned elements in *Étant donnés* determine the scope of the scene revealed to each spectator who steals a glance through the peepholes. Spying through these twin openings, a viewer discovers a wall of brick which has been partially deconstructed in order to expose a further space beyond. There, a nude female lies at a slight diagonal in relation to the viewer, posed spread-eagle on a bed of twigs. Her hairless genitals are bared for the

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he could have developed a theory on the basis of the work he had accomplished, he kept silent." For quotation and discussion, see Gail Finney, *Visual Culture in Twentieth-Century Germany: Text as Spectacle* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 71-79.

[363] Taylor, *Étant Donnés*, 129.

[364] Ibid., 172.

[365] For an abbreviated history of the work, see, e.g., Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, and David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 190-205; Chapter: 1,"Genesis," in Taylor, *Étant Donnés*, 23-59.

viewer. Her head and one of her arms extend beyond the viewer's line of sight. The nude's left arm, however, is visible, outstretched and pitched slightly up and away from the doorway. In that hand the nude holds a lamp aloft. A pastiche landscape with hills, trees, and a twinkling waterfall closes off the back of the space. The narrative mystery of the scene defies closed readings. *Étant donnés* provokes viewers to speculate regarding the events that have led to the scene before them.

Soon after the work became known, scholars including Arturo Schwarz, Anne d'Harnoncourt, and Walter Hopps immediately recognized the potential relationship between the *Étant donnés* and the *Large Glass*.[366] This new nude, they speculated, might be the four-dimensional Bride made literal. Like them, Alain Jouffrey, has suggested the possibility that *Étant donnés* is the Bride from the *Large Glass* rendered lifelike and viewed with Duchamp's forced perspective.[367] Among the compelling arguments for this is the fact that like the *Large Glass*, *Étant donnés* employs a barrier that renders the Bride unreachable. The viewer now takes the role of the "Oculist Witnesses," inhabiting the *Large Glass*'s lower realm.[368] Moreover, as an apparent sign linking the two works, Duchamp drew *Étant donnés*'s title directly from his *Green Box* notes for the *Large Glass*.[369] This possibility initiates a circular relationship between the works, reminiscent of the dialogical movement among opposites presented by Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror* and *Poésies*. The *Large Glass* is impersonal, adopting the language of the machine, while *Étant donnés* is a red-hot assault on the viewer's sensibilities, proclaiming its

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366 Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, 557-62; Anne d'Harnoncourt, Walter Hopps, and Philadelphia Museum of Art., *ÉTant DonnéS: 1° La Chute D'eau, 2° Le Gaz D'éclairage; Reflections on a New Work by Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1969), 16-20.

367 Alain Jouffroy, "Etant donné Marcel Duchamp 1) individualiste révolutionnaire 2) respirateur," *Opus international: Duchamp et Après* March 1974, 22, 23.

368 See, e.g., d'Harnoncourt, Hopps, and Philadelphia Museum of Art., *Étant Donnés: 1° La Chute D'eau, 2° Le Gaz D'éclairage; Reflections on a New Work by Marcel Duchamp*, 22; Taylor, *Étant Donnés*, 24.

369 See note entitled "Preface," in Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 27.

subversive ardor. The two works appear to take antithetical approaches to the nude and eroticism, and yet they are the product of the same artist and therefore emerge from a singular system of thought—defying a purely logical reconciliation.

Duchamp may have chosen to take a lesson from Lautréamont regarding posterity and the artist who remains an enigma. Whether by plan or by chance, Lautréamont left a mystery in his stead, one that lent the author an air of hermeticism and intrigue. By choosing to reveal *Étant donnés* only after his death, without having explained the significance of the work, Duchamp ensured that he left similar puzzles behind: what does the work mean and how does one negotiate between the apparently disparate representational modes and values of *Étant donnés* and the *Large Glass*? Duchamp once told his brother-in-law Jean Crotti, that posterity was a "bitch" who reserved the right to change her mind every fifty years.[370] Certainly by the time that Man Ray wrote "Bilingual Biography," after Surrealism's rise and adulation of the author, Lautréamont would have offered Duchamp a pragmatic example of a poet whose posterity benefitted from the inheritance of riddles that he bequeathed to the world.

There is another connection, however, between *Les Chants de Maldoror* and *Étant donnés*, and it is among the most concrete resonances to be examined herein. It is a matter of shared imagery, arriving in the form of a large wooden door. Lautréamont explains that outside of the bordel where God partook of human flesh, there stands a "massive worm eaten door." Beyond that, "A grubby corridor stinking of human thighs gave onto a courtyard. . . ."[371] Lautréamont expounds further that in this courtyard, beyond the ancient portal, stand buildings whose inhabitants would "display, in exchange for a small sum of money, the insides of their

[370] Duchamp, *Affectt/Marcel*, 321.
[371] "une porte massive et vermoulue"; " Un corridor sale, qui sentait la cuisse humaine, donnait sur un préau" From *Maldoror* 3, 5. Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 121.

vaginas to any who entered."[372] The description of that door, and the view beyond it, strikingly recall the door and spectacle of *Étant donnés*. That the door acts as a divider mirroring the realms of the *Large Glass* seems evident, but that is no reason to discount the existence of multiple sources and reasons for Duchamp's choice of the door. Later in the same bordel scene, one finds further echoes of the experience of *Étant donnés*. Curiosity compels Lautréamont's narrator as he enters the interior courtyard in order to approach and peer through a metal grill installed in one of the compound's buildings. There he becomes a voyeur of the strange events that take place inside. This mutual sense of voyeurism between *Les Chants de Maldoror* and *Étant donnés* is promising. Ultimately, however, *Étant donnés* shares this sensibility with a number of other literary and artistic works. Nevertheless, the similar details are striking.

A final, related echo of this scene in Duchamp's activities makes it worth prudent consideration. In 1959, Duchamp co-designed an exhibition called E.R.O.S. (Exposition inteRnatiOnale du Surrealism) with Breton. Scholars have suggested that the show, which celebrated eroticism, voyeurism, and the necessity of transgression, was a conceptual proving ground for *Étant donnés*, allowing Duchamp to experiment with theatricality and eroticism.[373] For the show, artist Meret Oppenheim exhibited a tableau entitled *Cannibal Feast*, a work that featured a nude woman—replaced by a mannequin for the run of the exhibition—from whose nude body attendees consumed a feast (fig. 38). This presentation of the female body for delectation surely interested Duchamp. In designing the show, he insisted that visitors should view Oppenheim's work through an iron grillwork. Scholars have suggested that with his installation directions, Duchamp was offering hints of his ongoing secret work, but his choice

[372] "femmes qui montraient, chaque jour, à ceux qui entraient, l'intérieur de leur vagin, en échange d'un peu d'or." From *Maldoror* 3, 5. Ibid.
[373] Taylor, *Étant Donnés*, 100-01.

also echoes uncannily the voyeuristic scene in *Les Chants de Maldoror*.[374] Inside the interior courtyard of the brothel, Lautréamont's narrator explains, "Curiosity prevailed over fear: after a few moments I reached a grating whose grill had solid, closely crisscrossed bars. I wanted to peer inside through the thick mesh."[375] It is through that grill that Lautréamont's narrator peers into the chamber where God assaulted women and tore a man to pieces. Oppenheim's cannibalistic feast, eaten from the body of a nude woman, therefore echoes Lautréamont's erotic horrors. More importantly, the combination of Lautréamont's vision and Oppenheim's work may have provided Duchamp with sources and preparatory research for his final nude stripped bare.

[374] Thanks to Clair Howard for pointing this relationship out to me. See ibid., 102-03, 25 n. 76.
[375] Lautréamont, *The Complete Works*, 122.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

It is at once both surprising and unremarkable that this history has gone under-examined for so long. On the one hand, the subject is so rich that a brief thesis such as this could never hope to give adequate treatment to the subject, let alone exhaust the matter. On the other hand, human beings are creatures of habit and conventional wisdom. Here, the conventional approach to this subject has been to treat Lautréamont as a Surrealist conscript, connected to other movements and artists only tangentially, if at all. The history of Lautréamont in the arts of the twentieth century has tended to begin with the Surrealists after World War I and end with the Situtationists after the Second World War. Instead, the argument set forth herein demonstrates that the truth of the matter is otherwise. It should now be apparent that Lautréamont was, from an early day in Duchamp's career, a rich potential source for the artist. Moreover, the author was deserving of the privileged position that Duchamp afforded to him in his ideal library. Read in 1912, during Duchamp's radical transformation, *Les Chants de Maldoror* accorded with the artist's literary foundation, and it answered his determination to use written works, rather than paintings, as a central source in his own work. When considered carefully, Lautréamont corresponds closely with a nexus of ideas that the artist was gathering from the works of other authors around the time. He exhibits a sense of humor and an ironic detachment akin to Laforgue. He abides no authority, and even rebels against it, just as Stirner counsels. The author's playful and bizarre use of science anticipates Jarry's pataphysics and the novelty of Roussel's machines, decades ahead of either man. Like Pyrrho, Lautréamont refuses to cede the excluded middle to common logic, insisting instead upon indeterminacy. Like Brisset, his text becomes a dizzying network of puns and wordplay. Finally, matching Mallarmé and Rimbaud,

Lautréamont pushed language and sensibility to its very edge. Given these qualities, it is no wonder that Duchamp held the author's works in such high esteem.

Pragmatically, there was much in Lautréamont's array of strategies and ideas that Duchamp would have found useful in his own work. The evidence presented in this thesis bears that observation out. Lautréamont offered Duchamp an early model of artistic appropriation. The poetics of *Les Chants de Maldoror* foreground the author's borrowings and plagiarisms. His text becomes an apparatus for performing recombinations and recontextualizations in language. Lautréamont's poetry builds hybrids and creates new meaning by destabilizing conventional symbolism and understanding. Duchamp's Readymades engage in a similar game of deformation and displacement. A matter of degrees separate Lautreamont's importing lines from a medical text into a poetic structure from Duchamp's bringing a plumbing fixture into an art gallery. The fundamental principle is the same between them. In fact, while Duchamp's *Fountain* superficially manifests itself as visual or haptic, his procedure of naming and signing the object re-centers it upon verbal concept and logic. It is a kind of visual-verbal poetic rebellion, set against habitual meaning. Duchamp might have also learned something from Lautréamont's plagiarism and amendment of great writers. Like the poet's piracy and rectification of Pascal, Duchamp's use of *La Gioconda* slightly undermines the heroic ego of Leonardo even as it claims him and his work. It blurs the line demarcating one creator from another. In all of these cases, habit and taste are cast aside in favor of something new. And the authority that typically reinforces habit and taste is suspended, or usurped.

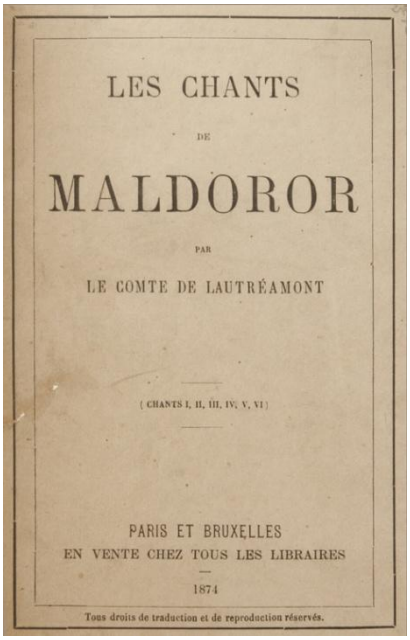
Lautréamont's concern with not ceding ground to an authority of taste would have found a sympathetic recipient in Duchamp. For the writer, this meant unsettling taste and preempting criticism. Lautréamont taunts his readers and directs their responses, all from within the text

itself. Duchamp, by integrating his notes in to the *Large Glass*, also guides the understanding of his viewer away from the purely visual and towards concept. Across both of their commentaries, Duchamp and Lautréamont seem to have found a liberating and exhilarating potential in the language of science. For each man, science provided a new lexicon to explore, full of unfamiliar symbols and ideas. With science, both were also able to play games that sided not with positivist and empirical thinkers, nor with Romantic-descendant artists and poets—purveyors of irrational and intuitive feeling. Instead, each chose a path that appears to have coyly burlesqued both disciplines. It can be no coincidence that Duchamp read Lautréamont as he was beginning to plan his *Large Glass*. All of these ideas—appropriation, self-contained commentary, and the playful use of the sciences—resound in Duchamp's allegory of troubled erotic love and its supporting works, just as they do in *Les Chants de Maldoror*. As a source for Duchamp, Lautréamont offered a breadth of ideas nearly unparalleled elsewhere in his library.

Moreover, Duchamp and Lautréamont avidly used humor—especially deadpan humor. Both were laughing iconoclasts, unwilling to accept the egos of artists and critics alike, and they refused to accept the doctrines handed to them by artistic authority. And so they laughed. In a foray against a world of such self-centered souls, Lautréamont, and Duchamp after him, took a path headlong into the murk of polyidentities, hybrids, wanderings, and the fracturing of self into a kaleidoscope of de-centered parts. Each man played a little game between "he" and "himself." Duchamp, R. Mutt, Rrose Sélavy, Lautréamont, Ducasse, Maldoror—each identity undermined subjective unity and self-similarity. Each man was a trickster and a natural shapeshifter. Lautréamont wrote the slippage of identity. He also lived it, trading off names between works. Duchamp likewise created a new, concurrent self for himself. "RROSE ET MOI" she inscribed their *Rotary Demisphere*. It was never Duchamp *or* Rrose; it was always *and*.

The evidence given here has been a mix of fact, careful reading, and informed guesses. The facts are straightforward. They exist in the materials of Duchamp's dossier for all to read. Beyond the horizon of that history, however, only traces of Duchamp's responses to this literature remain. There, speculation is not only valid, but preferable to silence. It initiates discourse. In the act of creation, ideas exist only as part of a network. Any given element in a work will therefore reflect numerous antecedents coalescing to form that new realization. This thesis has sought to reconstruct the shape of Duchamp's Lautréamontean constellation, pointing out the resonant connections there, but also allowing the works their own dialogical voice. It is the hope of this author that the discourse begun here is only a starting point for further discussion. Duchamp and the Lautréamont were consummate practitioners in the art of snarling threads. There are countless knots still waiting to be unraveled. Knots as beautiful as . . .

Figures


LES CHANTS

DE

MALDOROR

PAR

LE COMTE DE LAUTRÉAMONT

(CHANTS I, II, III, IV, V, VI)

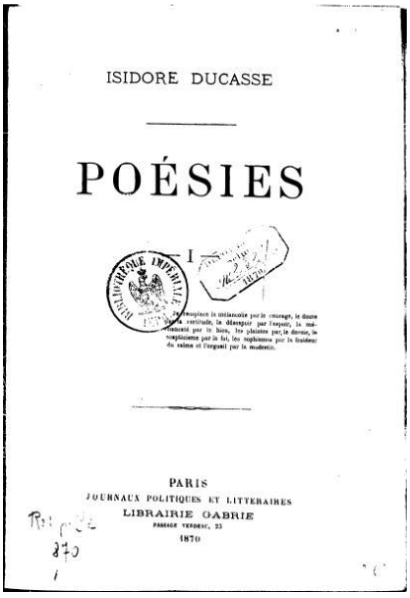
PARIS ET BRUXELLES

EN VENTE CHEZ TOUS LES LIBRAIRES

1874

Tous droits de traduction et de reproduction réservés.

Figure 1. Title Page of first edition *Les Chants de Maldoror*, This is the A. Lacroix, Verboeckhoven 1869 edition, which was never delivered, with a new cover when it was finally released for sale in 1874.


ISIDORE DUCASSE

POÉSIES

I

PARIS

JOURNAUX POLITIQUES ET LITTERAIRES

LIBRAIRIE GABRIE

1870

Figure 2. Title Page of first edition *Poésies I and II*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Figure 3. Abbaye de Créteil group: (first row) Charles Vidrac, René Arcos, Albert Gleizes, Henri-Martin Barzun, Alexandre Mercereau (second row) Georges Duhamel, Berthold Mahn, Jacques d'Otémar, c. 1908, silver gelatin print, fondation Albert Gleizes.

Figure 4. Marcel Duchamp, *Dulcinea* (*Dulcineé*), 1911, oil on canvas, 57 $^{1}/_{2}$ x 44 $^{7}/_{8}$ in. (146 x 114 cm) Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.

Figure 5. Marcel Duchamp, *Sad Young Man on a Train* (*Jeune homme triste dans un train*), 1911, oil on canvas, mounted on board, 39 $^{3}/_{8}$ x 28 $^{3}/_{4}$ in. (100 x 73 cm) Venice, Peggy Guggenheim Collection.

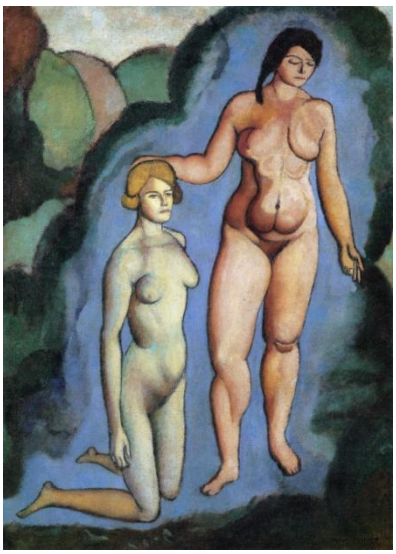


Figure 6. Marcel Duchamp, *The Bush* (*Le Buisson*), 1911, oil on canvas, 50x 36 $^{1}/_{4}$ in. (127 x 92 cm.), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.

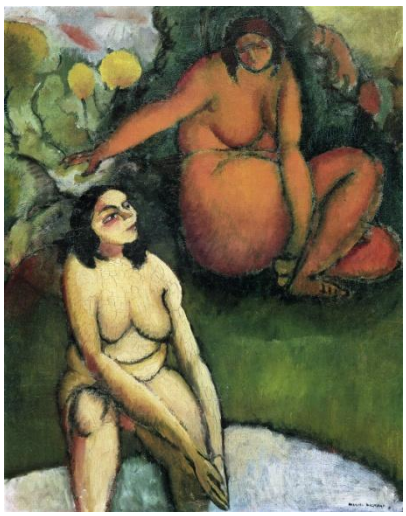


Figure 7. Marcel Duchamp, *Baptism* (*Baptême*), 1911, oil on canvas, 36 $^{1}/_{8}$ x 28 $^{5}/_{8}$ in (91.7 x 72.7 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.

Figure 8. Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 1* (*Nu descendant un escalier, No. 1*), 1912, oil on cardboard, 37 $^{3}/_{4}$ x 23 $^{3}/_{4}$ in. (95.9 x 60.3 cm), The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.

Figure 9. Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (*Nu descendant un escalier, No. 2*), 1912, oil on canvas, 57 $^{1}/_{2}$ x 35 $^{1}/_{2}$ in. (146 x 89 cm), The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.

Figure 10. Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (*La Mariée mise à nu par ses célebataires, même*) also known as the *Large Glass* (*Le Grand verre*), 1915-23, oil, varnish, lead wire, lead foil, mirror silvering, and dust on two glass panels (cracked), each mounted between two glass panels, with five glass strips, aluminum foil, and a wood and steel frame, 109 $^{1}/_{4}$ x 69 $^{1}/_{4}$ in. (283 x 189 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia ; Bequest of Katherine S. Drier.

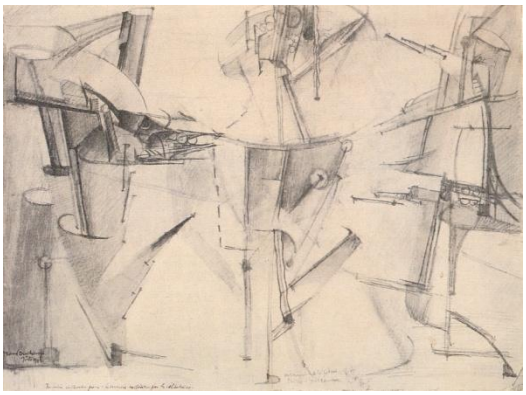


Figure 11. Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors* (*La Mariée mis à nu par les célebataires*) 1912, pencil and wash on paper, 9 $^{3}/_{8}$ x 12 $^{5}/_{8}$ in. (24 x 32.1 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.

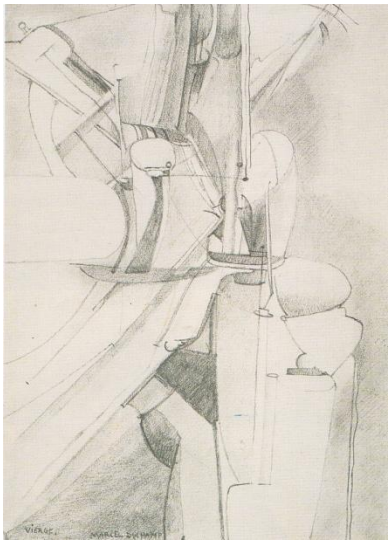


Figure 12. Marcel Duchamp, *Virgin, No. 1* (*Vierge, No. 1*), 1912, pencil on paper, 13 $^{1}/_{4}$ x 9 $^{15}/_{16}$ in. (33.6 x 25.2 cm), The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; The A. E. Gallatin Collection.

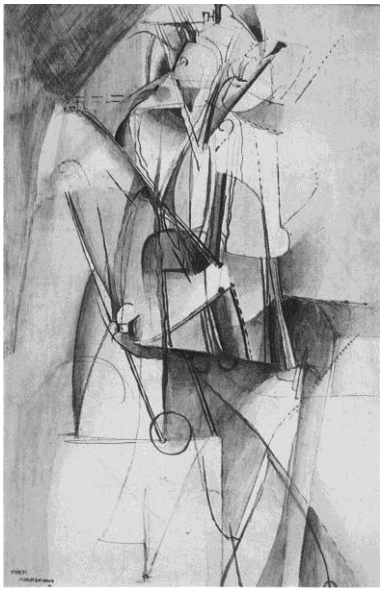


Figure13. Marcel Duchamp, *Virgin, No. 2* (*Vierge, No. 2*), 1912, wash drawing with watercolor, 15 $^{3}/_{4}$ x 10 $^{1}/_{8}$ in. (40 x 25.7 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art; The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia.

Figure14. Marcel Duchamp, *Passage from Virgin to Bride* (*Le Passage de la Vierge à la Mariée*), 1912, oil on canvas, 23 $^{3}/_{8}$ x 21 $^{1}/_{4}$ in. (59.4 x 54 cm), Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure15. Marcel Duchamp, *Bride* (*Mariée*), 1912, oil on canvas, 35 $^{1}/_{4}$ x 21 $^{7}/_{8}$ in. (89.5 x 55 cm) Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia.

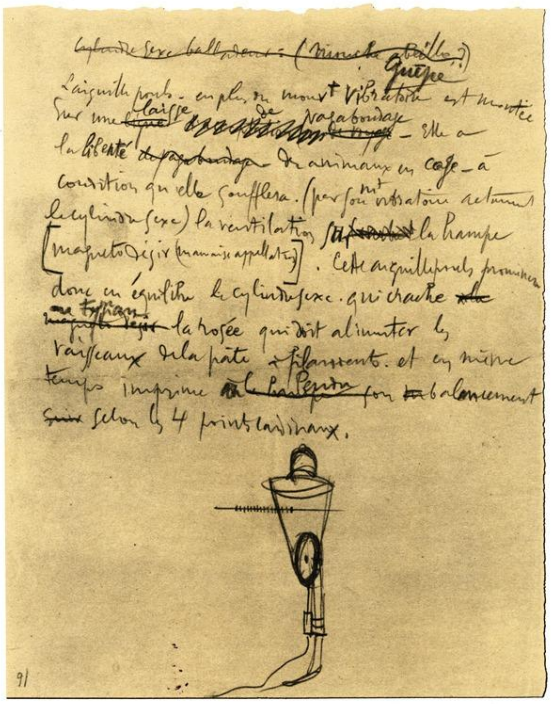


Figure 16. Marcel Duchamp, Note 108 from *Marcel Duchamp, Notes*, 1913, manuscript; pencil on paper, 7 $^{7}/_{8}$ x 6 $^{3}/_{16}$ in. (20 x 16.2 cm), published in Duchamp, Marcel, Paul Matisse, and Anne D'Harnoncourt. *Marcel Duchamp, Notes*. Documents of 20th century art. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1983.

Figure17. Marcel Duchamp, *The Box of 1914* (*Boîte de 1914*), 1914 photographic facsimiles of 16 manuscript notes and a drawing in a cardboard box, 9 $^{13}/_{16}$ x 7 $^{1}/_{4}$ in. (25 x 18.5 cm), limited edition of 3 copies.

Figure18. Marcel Duchamp, *Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* or *The Green Box* (*Mariée nise à nu par ses célibataires, même* or *La Boîte verte*) 1934, edition of 93 facsimile notes and reproductions contained in a box, 13 $^{1}/_{16}$ x 11 x 1 in. (33.2 x 28 x 2.5 cm), edition of 320 numbered copies.

Figure 19. Marcel Duchamp, *In the infinitive* or *The White Box* (*A l'infinitif* or *Boîte blanche*) 1967, box of 79 facsimile notes dating from 1912 through 1920 with a silkscreened cover reproduction of *Glissière contenant un moulin à eau* (*en métaux voisins*), 13 $^{1}/_{8}$ x 11 $^{7}/_{16}$ in. (33.3 x 29 cm), edition of 150 numbered copies.

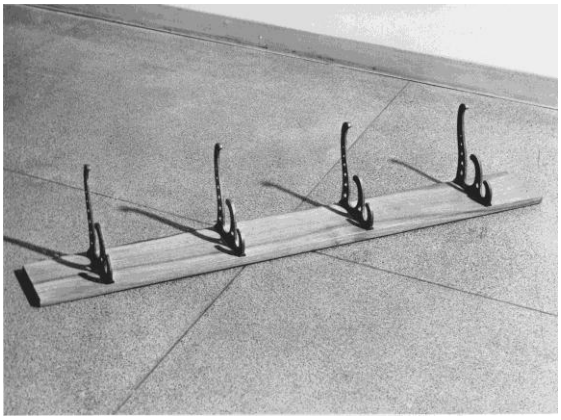


Figure 20. Marcel Duchamp, *Trap* (*Trébuchet*), 1917 (1964 reproduction of lost original), Readymade: coat rack nailed to floor, 4 $^{5}/_{8}$ x 39 $^{3}/_{8}$ in. (11.7 x 100 cm), Galleria Schwarz Collection, Milan.

Figure 21. Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919, Rectified Readymade: reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* to which Duchamp has added a mustache and beard in pencil, 7 $^{3}/_{4}$ x 4 $^{7}/_{8}$ in. (19.7 x 12.4 cm), original: The Mary Sisler Collection, New York.

Figure 22. Man Ray, *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse* (*L'Enigme d'Isidore Ducasse*), 1920 (remade 1972), Sewing machine, wool and string, 14 x 23 3/4 x 13 3/16 in. (35.5 x 60.5 x 33.5), Tate, London.

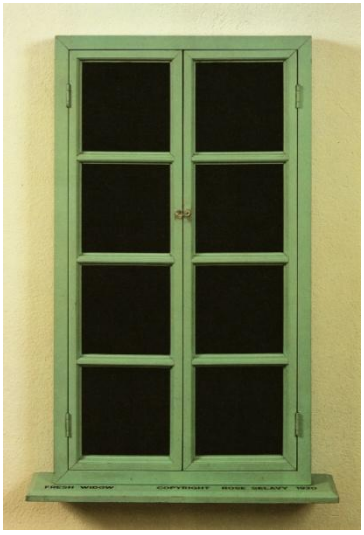


Figure23. Rrose Sélavy (Marcel Duchamp), *Fresh Widow*, 1920, window: painted wood frame and eight leather panes, 30 $^{5}/_{16}$ x 20 $^{9}/_{32}$ in. (77 x 51.5 cm), Museum of Modern Art, New York Museum of Modern Art; Katherine S. Drier Bequest, New York.

Figure 24. Rrose Sélavy (Marcel Duchamp), *Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy*, 1921, assisted readymade; marble cubes in the shape of sugar lumps with thermometer and cuttlebone in a small birdcage, 4 $^{1}/_{2}$ x 8 $^{5}/_{8}$ x 6 $^{5}/_{16}$ in. (11.4 x 22 x 16 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

Figure 25. Marcel Duchamp, *Beautiful Breath, Veil Water* (*Belle Haleine, eau de Voilette*), 1921, assisted readymade; perfume bottle bearing the reproduction of a collage made with the aid of Man Ray, bottle height: 6 in. (15.2 cm), in an oval violet cardboard box: 6 $^{7}/_{8}$ x 4 $^{7}/_{16}$ in. (16.3 x 11.2 cm), Private Collection.

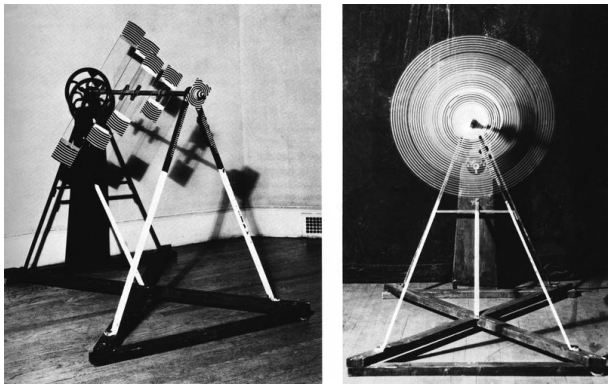


Figure 26. Rrose Sélavy (Marcel Duchamp), *Rotary Glass Plates* (*Precision Optics*) (*Rotative plaques verre* (*Optique de précision*)), 1920, motorized optical device: five glass plates with black segments of circles, turning on a metal axis powered by an electric motor, 47 $^{1}/_{2}$ x 72 $^{1}/_{2}$ in. (120.6 x 184.1)Société Anonyme Collection, Katherine S. Dreier Bequest, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.

Figure 27. Rrose Sélavy (Marcel Duchamp), *Rotary Demisphere* (*Precision Optics*) (Rotative demi-sphère (*Optique de précision*)),1924, motorized optical device: white demisphere painted with black eccentric circles, fixed on a flat disc covered with black velvet. A copper ring fitted with a glass dome covers and protects the demisphere and velvet. The outer edge of the copper ring is engraved: RROSE SELAVY ET MOI ESQUIVONS LES ECCHYMOSES DES ESQUIMAUX AUX MOTS EXQUIS., Mary Sisler Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

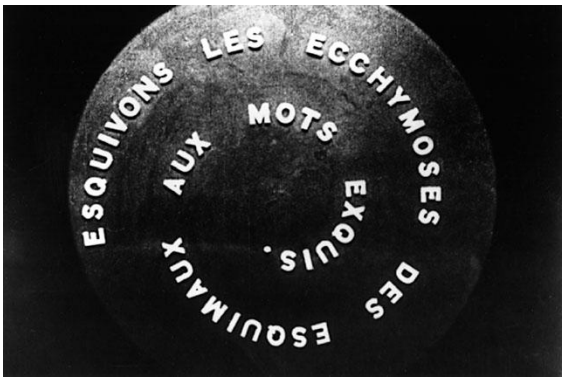


Figure 28. Rrose Sélavy (Marcel Duchamp), Still from *Anémic Cinéma*, 1925-1926, Film made in collaboration with Man Ray and Marc Allégret, The ten *Optical Discs Bearing Spirals* alternate with the nine *Discs Inscribed with Puns*.

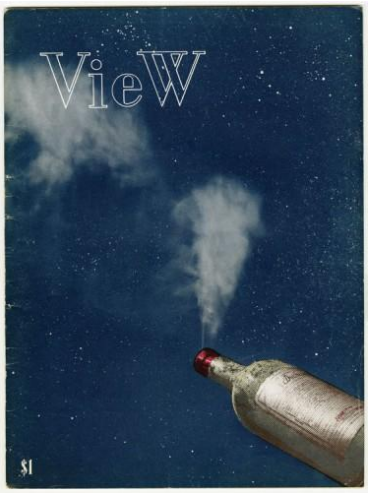


Figure 29. Marcel Duchamp, Front cover of Vol. V, no. 1. *View* (March 1945), 12 x 9 $^{1}/_{8}$ in. (30.5 x 23.2 cm), Collection Ronny Van de Velde, Antwerp.

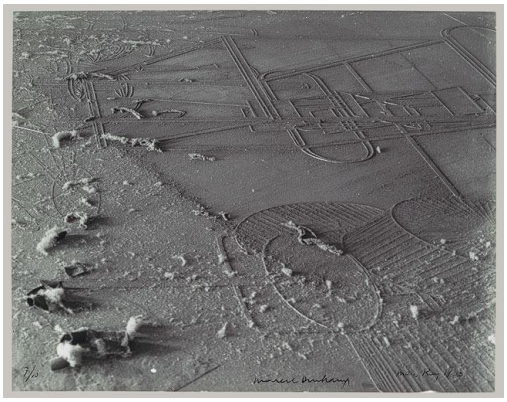


Figure 30. Man Ray, *Dust Breeding* (*Élevage de poussières*), 1920, silver-gelatin print, 2 $^{3}/_{16}$ x 4 $^{3}/_{8}$ in. (6 x 11.1 cm), included in *Mariée mise à nu par ses célebataires, même* (*Boîte verte*), 1934, Collection of Angelo Calmarini, Milan.

Figure 31. Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917, readymade; porcelain urinal; lost (silver-gelatin print by Alfred Stieglitz, 9 $^{1}/_{2}$ x 7 in.), Private collection, France.

Figure 32. Marcel Duchamp, *Door, 11 rue Larrey*, 1927, wooden door as originally installed in Duchamp's Paris apartment, 86 $^{5}/_{8}$ x 24 $^{11}/_{16}$ in. (220 x 62.7 cm).

Figure 33. Man Ray, *Marcel Duchamp as Rose Sélavy*,1920-21, silver-gelatin print, 5 $^{7}/_{8}$ x 3 $^{7}/_{8}$ in. (14.9 x 9.8 cm) Philadelphia Museum of Art; Samuel S. White and Vera White Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

Figure 34. Marcel Duchamp, *From or by Marcel Duchamp or Rrose Sélavy* (*de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rrose Sélavy*) or *Box in a Valise* (*Bôite en Valise*), 1943 deluxe edition (this example, containing hand-colored collotype of *Vierge*, 1938), Philadelphia Museum of Art; The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia.

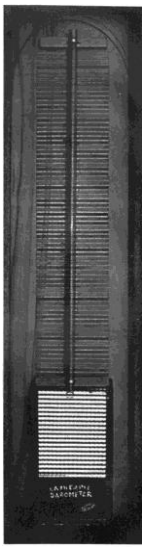


Figure 35. Man Ray, *Catherine Barometer*, 1920, washboard, tube, and color chart, 11 $^{5}/_{8}$ x 47 $^{5}/_{8}$ in. (29.5 x 121 cm), Private collection

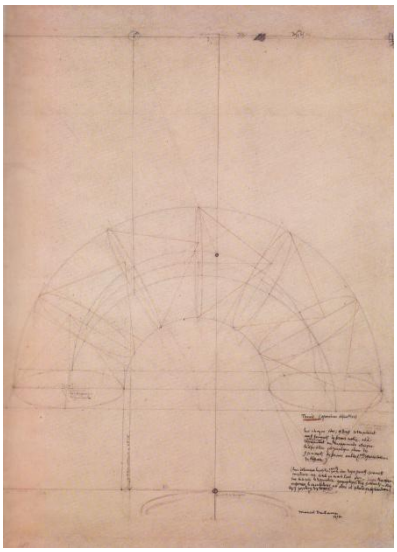


Figure 36. Marcel Duchamp, *Sieves or Parasols* (*Tamis ou Ombrelles*), 1913-14, colored pencil and ink on paper, 27 $^{7}/_{8}$ x 20 $^{7}/_{8}$ in. (70.8 x 53 cm), Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart.

Figure 37. Marcel Duchamp, *Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas . . .* (*Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage . . .*), 1946-66, Mixed media assemblage: (interior) bricks, velvet, wood, parchment over an armature of lead, steel, brass, synthetic putties and adhesives, aluminum sheet, welded steel-wire screen, and wood; peg-board, hair, oil paint, plastic, steel binder clips, plastic clothespins, twigs, leaves, glass, plywood, brass piano hinge, nails, screws, cotton, collotype prints, acrylic varnish, chalk, graphite, paper, cardboard, tape, pen ink, electric light fixtures, gas lamp (Bec Auer type), foam rubber, cork, electric motor, cookie tin, and linoleum, (exterior) wooden door, iron nails, bricks, and stucco, 7 ft. 11 1⁄2 in. x 70 in. (245.1 x 177.8 cm) , Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

Figure 38. Meret Oppenheim, *Cannibal Feast*, 1959, photograph during opening of E.R.O.S. (Exposition inteRnatiOnale du Surréalime), after the opening a mannequin stood in for the nude woman.

Appendix A

11 rue Larrey
8 ou 9 Dec 46

Chère Yvonne

Merci de ta lettre et des livres bien arrivés__
L'extérieure de Lautréamont ne me rappelle rien mais la typographie intérieure me dit quelque chose. Ce pourrait être le premier Lautréamont que j'avais eu en 1912 ou environs.
En tout cas j'aimerais le garder comme un des 5 ou 6 livres qui forment toute ma bibliothèque.__Merci de me l'avoir donné si non redonné.
Toujours rien pour mon visa—Je vais Mardi au consulat américain pour leur demander s'ils peuvent me donner une date même approximative__
Ne te fais pas de bile pur la Cunard. Je pense qu'en dortoir (hommes) je trouverai un passage à la French Line.
Je t'écrirai de toute façon
Rien de nouveau depuis ton départ__
Un peu froid mais je trouve de charbon__
Ecris de temps en temps te mettrai au courant de mon départ__

Affectueusement
Marcel

[Letter to Louise and Walter Arensberg, Fall 1921, page 3 of 3 with first 2 missing]

Les Crotti de toute sorte vont bien et vous envoient des souvenirs
Avez-vous les ~~poésies~~ *Poésies* du Comte de Lautréamont ?
Ça a été réédité l'année dernière. Ce sont d'ailleurs pas les Poésies, Ce n'est qu'une longue préface aux Poésies__qui n'ont jamais été écrites, (car il a dù mourir avant) Je ~~l~~ vous l'enverrai.
Vous y verrez toute la semence dadaïque.

Ecrives un peu__Affectueusement à tous deux
Marcel

71 rue Jeanne d'Arc Rouen

Appendix B

Man Ray's "Bilingual Biography"
[From View, March 1945]

RROSE SELAVY ET MOI ESQUIVONS LES ECCHYMOSE DES ESQUIMAUX AUX MOTS EXQUIS

et AVIS AUX EXHIBITIONISTES: If you cannot show us your anatomy, it is no avail to show us that you know your anatomy.

1915, Yes and Love ; Notre première rencontre au tennis (sans filet), en deux mots, nous parlons mal mais nous tenons la balle aux temoins ocultistes.

West 67th Street ; La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même. While the bride lay on her face, decked out in her bridal finery of dust and debris, I exposed her to my sixteen-candle-camera. Within one patient hour was fixed once and for all the Domaine de Duchamp. Elevage de poussières; didn't we raise the dust, old boy!

West 71st Street ; Rotative plaques de verre, le seul attentat heureux de ma vie ; comme j'aimais le danger, et comme nous aimons le verre, et comme vous les cassez, comme les Russes. Yes, and chess.

Grand central ; The very independent Richard Mutt robbed the vestals of their vespasienne in broad daylight and called it another day. Yes, and chess.

West 8th Street ; Stereoscopic streptococci in pretechnicolor, prelude to Anémic Cinéma. Yes, and chess.

Dada New York ; La vieille Belle Helene veille sur notre jeunesse

Société Anonyme Incorporated; Fair, cold but warmer, as indicated by my special device. Catherine Barometer, very reliable. Now you have almost unfinished the only authentic portrait of Lautréamont's god, jumping hair of cones in a bordel.

On nous a traité d'hommes finis. Parceque nous ne finissons jamais? Dites plutôt, des hommes in-finis.

Rendez-vous à la Rue La Condamine, et puis, je reçois à l'Hotel Meuble tous les critiques si bien disposés envers moi. Je te remercie, mon vieux, je te dois beaucoup. Seulement je n'est pas su profiter. Comme dit notre cher André, "I have always been drawn only to what is not a sure bet."

Puteaux ; In the gardens of Jacques Villon (I am still not speaking French), you return to your spiral monocle embellished with delicious pornographic anagrams. Final vindication and prototype of the ideal ob-scenema. Yes, and chess.

31 Rue Campagne-Première ; The demi-spheres aux mots exquis continue to rotate. But you never told me about the Broyeuse de Chocolate. I had to find out for myself. It was a pleasure, a much greater pleasure to find out by myself. Would it be an indiscretion of my part to relate that, walking down the streets of Rouen with me back to the lopsided steeples of the cathedral, I was overcome by a most delicious odor of chocolate which grew stronger as I advanced? And then, there they were, in a window, those beautifully polished steel drums churning around in the soft brown yielding mass of exquisite aroma? Later I questioned, you admitted your pure school-boy love. Ton amour-propre. I translate freely.

Monte Carlo ; Pendant que j'étais pris entre les course d'autos et les course de toros, tu courais après la roue aux chiffres.

"Mots fait de chiffres
Appel de chiffres clameur d'or" Paul a dit
Yes, and chess.

Aux belles japonaises ; J'ai perdu mon chapeau, mais, toi tu n'avais toujours ni temps ni argent a perdre.

Archachon ; you write "L'éspère que tu n'as pas tenté de rentrer à Paris" We both came back at different times, and we both left at different times without seeing each other.

Hollywood; merci, cher vieux, I received your valise. Those who say you do not work anymore are crazy. I know you do not like to repeat yourself, but only a real character can repeat himself with impunity. The most insignificant thing you can do is a thousand times more interesting and fruitful than the best that can be said or done by your detractors. Strange how those most suspicious of your pulling their legs haven't any to stand on.
1945, New York; yes, and chess. Au revoir!

Appendix C

[From *Les Chants de Maldoror*, Canto One]

. . . lasser les moralistes à découvrir leur cœur, et faire retomber sur eux la colère implacable d'en haut. Je les ai vus tous à la fois, tantôt le poing le plus robuste dirigé vers le ciel, comme celui d'un enfant déjà pervers contre sa mère, probablement excités par quelque esprit de l'enfer, les yeux chargés d'un remords cuisant en même temps que haineux, dans un silence glacial, n'oser émettre les méditations vastes et ingrates que recélait leur sein, tant elles étaient pleines d'injustice et d'horreur, et attrister de compassion le Dieu de miséricorde; tantôt, à chaque moment du jour, depuis le commencement de l'enfance jusqu'à la fin de la vieillesse, en répandant des anathèmes incroyables, qui n'avaient pas le sens commun, contre tout ce qui respire, contre eux-mêmes et contre la Providence, prostituer les femmes et les enfants, et déshonorer ainsi les parties du corps consacrées à la pudeur. Alors, les mers soulèvent leurs eaux, engloutissent dans leurs abîmes les planches; les ouragans, les tremblements de terre renversent les maisons; la peste, les maladies diverses déciment les familles priantes. Mais, les hommes ne s'en aperçoivent pas. Je les ai vus aussi rougissant, pâlissant de honte pour leur conduite sur cette terre; rarement. Tempêtes, sœurs des ouragans; firmament bleuâtre, dont je n'admets pas la beauté; mer hypocrite, image de mon cœur; terre, au sein mystérieux; habitants des sphères; univers entier; Dieu, qui l'as créé avec magnificence, c'est toi que j'invoque: montre-moi un homme qui soit bon! . . . Mais, que ta grâce décuple mes forces naturelles; car, au spectacle de ce monstre, je puis mourir d'étonnement: on meurt à moins.

[From *Poésies II*]

J'ai vu les hommes lasser les moralistes à découvrir leur coeur, faire répandre sur eux la bénédiction d'en haut. Ils émettaient des méditations aussi vastes que possible, réjouissaient l'auteur de nos félicités. Ils respectaient l'enfance, la vieillesse, ce qui respire comme ce qui ne respire pas, rendaient hommage à la femme, consacraient à la pudeur les parties que le corps se réserve de nommer. Le firmament, dont j'admets la beauté, la terre, image de mon coeur, furent invoqués par moi, afin de me désigner un homme qui ne se crût pas bon. Le spectacle de ce monstre, s'il eût été réalisé, ne m'aurait pas fait mourir d'étonnement: on meurt à plus. Tout ceci se passe de commentaires.

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