

# **An exit Marcel Duchamp and Jules Laforgue**

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Pieter de Nijs



# Introduction

In 1887, the then famous actor Coquelin Cadet published an illustrated book called *Le Rire*. The illustrations were made by Eugène Bataille. One of these, showing Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* smoking a pipe, can be regarded as a direct predecessor of Marcel Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q* (1919).

Bataille, better known as Sapeck, was an important member of the Incohérents, a group of artists who from 1882 on organized several exhibitions as alternatives for the official Salon. Parodies of famous pieces of art, political and social satire, and graphical puns were at the root of these exhibitions. Like their literary counterparts, who adorned themselves with such fantastic names as Hydropathes, Hirsutes, Zutistes, and Jemenfoutistes, the activities of the Incohérents were mainly aimed at ridiculing the official art world. The painters, writers, journalists, and cartoonists who participated in the activities of these artistic groups generally convened in the *cabarets artistiques* that sprang up in Paris in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, first on the *rive gauche*, in the Quartier Latin, later in Montmartre. Most of them published their work in the illustrated newspapers and magazines that appeared after the abolition of press censorship in 1881 and the emergence of new and faster (photomechanical) printing. These newspapers offered many writers and artists new opportunities to provide for their livelihood and to bring their work to the attention of a wider audience.

The activities of groups like the Hydropathes and the Incohérents have long been seen solely as a means to "shock the bourgeois" (*épater le bourgeois*), as joking-for-joking's-sake. The attitude pervading much of their work was being described as *fumisme*: a mocking of official values and societal norms through biting satire, puerile humor, and practical joking. In recent years though, this view has made way for a more serious approach, in which their work is being linked to that of the avant-garde movements of the 1920s and

1930s. (1)

Apart from that, it is easy to overlook the links that existed between the groups of artists and writers that gathered in the so-called *cabarets artistiques* of Montmartre, and the artists and writers who are nowadays considered as the founders of modern art and literature. Cabarets such as the Chat Noir attracted Hydropathes-poets and -novelists such as Charles Cros, Alphonse Allais, and Jules Lévy, along-side with singers like Jules Jouy and Maurice Mac-Nab and actors like Coquelin Cadet. But more established poets such as Jean Moréas, Léon Bloy, and Paul Verlaine were also regular visitors, and the same goes for Gustave Kahn and Jules Laforgue. Moréas is considered to be the "founder" of symbolism. Novelist Léon Bloy, an ardent catholic (though he detested the catholic church and its institutions), was one of the sharpest polemicists of his time, mixing his high-pitched sentences with sneers and curses. Verlaine, of course, was the exemplary *poète maudit*. Kahn allegedly was the inventor of "free verse," in which the tight rules, rhythm, and end rhyme of romantic poetry was abandoned to give way to assonance and internal rhyme. And Jules Laforgue made his first literary friends amongst the Hydropathes around 1880. He too has a claim to the invention of "free verse."

The poems, songs, and *monologues* that were performed or recited in the cabarets combined social criticism with irony and self-mockery; the language used was a mix of popular or vulgar words and sentences, full of *argot* and newly formed words, paired-off with unconventional rhyme and poetical structures.

In the poems of – nowadays generally acknowledged – writers such as Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Valéry, Gustave Kahn, and Jules Laforgue (to name a few) – experimental innovations can be found that are similar to the *nouvéautés* in the poems and songs that were performed in the cabarets. (2) The ideas of these poetic innovators mixed more or less perfectly with

those of the poets and singer-performers of the Montmartre cabarets.

In this article, I want to point to a link that can be established between the work of the artists who lived and worked in Montmartre at the end of the nineteenth century and that of Marcel Duchamp. The work of Jules Laforgue can be seen as a part of that link. I will try, on the one hand, to show what Jules Laforgue owed to the Hydropathes and other “proto-Dada” groups in his attempts to renew poetry and, on the other hand, to discuss the way he influenced Duchamp, who around 1911-1912 was looking for a way out of the artistic deadlock he felt he was trapped in. I will also try to show that Duchamp translated parts of what Laforgue did on a poetic level to the visual arts.

Duchamp has stressed the importance of several writers for the development of his ideas. He never concealed his admiration for Raymond Roussel and Jean-Pierre Brisset. He loved the humorous stories of Alphonse Allais and looked upon Alfred Jarry as a sympathetic soul. And he also positively referred to Jules Laforgue: “I liked Laforgue a lot, and I like him even more now,” he told Pierre Cabanne in 1967. (3)

Duchamp never really explained what it was that made him like the work of Laforgue. In my opinion though, Laforgue’s work was of more importance for the development of Duchamp’s ideas than he himself acknowledged.

## ***Jules Laforgue***

Laforgue is generally seen as a representative of the decadent movement within Symbolism, which by 1880 had adherents among many young authors. The Decadents combined pessimism with black humor, self-mockery with irony. Their poems and novels clearly demonstrate a tendency towards literary innovation.

Jules Laforgue (Montevideo 1860 – Paris 1887) was the second of eleven children. In 1877 his mother died of a miscarriage.

When his father decided to return to his hometown of Tarbes, Jules remained behind in Paris. He tried to write in order to earn a living. In 1881, he got a job as the personal reader of Empress Augusta of Prussia, and he moved to Berlin. There he worked on a series of poems called *Les Complaintes*. In the first months of 1885 Laforgue completed the stories that would later appear under the title *Moralités légendaires*. In 1886, he meets a young English woman, Leah Lee, and in December of that same year they marry. The couple settled in Paris. There Laforgue is forced to stay in bed because of his neglected health. While still looking for a publisher for a new book of poems and for his *Moralités Légendaires* on 20 August 1887 he dies of tuberculosis. (4)

## ***Melancholy and celibacy***

In his poems Laforgue again and again turns to the same motifs, melancholy and celibacy being the leading themes. Autumn is the blackest season, the moon is to be preferred to the sun and the sound of a distant piano brings about melancholic reflections on the sad future of young girls who will end up in the *bourgeois* trap of marriage. Marriage itself is often the theme of a poem (“Complainte des formalités nuptials,” “Complainte des bons ménages”), as is the life of the bachelor (“Célibat, célibat, tout n’est que célibate,” “Complaintes des crépuscules célibataires”). And looking at the score of poems in which Sundays are being described as days of boredom, Laforgue seems to have seen Sunday as the day *par excellence* for thoughts of spleen and melancholy (5).

Though he constantly emphasizes the loneliness and melancholy of the bachelor – the “pauvre jeune homme” – Laforgue’s poems and prose clearly speak of a preference for celibacy and for the bachelor state. He also proclaims rather peculiar ideas about women, love, or a relationship. His ideal seems to have been “love at a distance,” an unfulfilled or sterile love. In *Saison*, one of his unfinished novels, the protagonist is dreaming about his ideal woman: “The type of the adorable, the

only beloved, for me is the English woman (...) she is the only kind of woman that I cannot undress (...) My imagination remains sterile, frozen, has never existed, and has never brought me down. She has no sexual organs for me, I cannot think of it, could never have thought of it (...). All the others are bitches (...)." (6) In his wife Leah Lee, Laforgue apparently found the representative of his ideal woman, or the ideal of what he named "the third sex": Lee was very skinny and very English, with her red hair, dark eyes, her baby figure, her timid nature and sophisticated, delicate mannerisms.

## ***Moralités Légendaires***

Besides poems Laforgue also produced some "prose poems." These *Moralités légendaires* are rather humoristic. Their humoristic effects rest for the greater part on the ironic way Laforgue deals with his literary examples and with the symbolist stereotypes they contain. A good example is the "moral tale" Laforgue devotes to Salome. In symbolist literature this supposed daughter of the Jewish king Herod is often depicted as the epitome of the staggeringly beautiful, mysterious, sensual, and perfidious Goddess-Demon, who seduces men, only to plunge them into misery. As such she was portrayed by painters like Moreau, Redon, Regnault, and Beardsley, and described by Flaubert (in *Herodias*, 1877), Oscar Wilde (*Salome*, 1891-1893), and Mallarmé (*Hérodiade*, 1898).

Laforgue's *Salomé* leans firmly on Flaubert's *Hérodiade*. But although he remains close to Flaubert's text, which he sometimes paraphrases literally, Laforgue scoffs at Flaubert, for example with his preoccupation with historical accuracy (Flaubert relied on earlier historical sources, such as those of Flavius Josephus). The same goes for Flaubert's style – so often praised. Laforgue sprinkles his story with ironic and anachronistic details. Herod Antipas is called Emeraude-Archetypas (Hérode = E(me)raude). (7) Iakanaan (John the Baptist) – a strong personality in Flaubert's story – is nothing more than a unsuccessful writer (a "malheureux

publiciste" or "écrivassier" , i.e., a potboiler or hack writer).

Laforgue's story is not set in Biblical Palestine, but on one of the White Esoteric Iles ("Iles Blanches Esoteriques"), where even the noise of an express train is heard. In the palace Herod's guests, "sur la scène de l'Alcazar" (i.e., a music hall), are being entertained by circus and vaudeville performers, including musical clowns with a street organ, an ice skater, and trapeze artists.

Laforgue's Salome, with her exaggerated manner of dress and childish acts, is almost a caricature, a mockery of the symbolist *femme fatale*. At the same time she seems to embody Laforgue's female ideal: she hardly has any hips and breasts ("deux soupçons de seins") and is more shy than tempting, indeed almost innocent (a "petite Immaculée-Conception") – and much less a sex object than the Herodias (i.e. Salomé) of Flaubert.

One of the other *Moralités légendaires*, *Hamlet ou les suites de la piété filiale*, deals rather effectively with another "hero" of Western literature. Hamlet obviously is one of Laforgue's favorite plays and Hamlet one of his most beloved characters. (8) In literature, Hamlet is often portrayed as the prototype of the moon-sick melancholic, always hesitating and not able to act when he is called upon. Laforgue's Hamlet though has nothing to do with Shakespeare's melancholic dreamer. Although the sentences and statements of Laforgue's Hamlet are reminiscent of Shakespeare ("Stabilité! Ton nom est femme"; "Mais ne plus être, ne plus y être, et ne plus être"), they remain an echo. Laforgue's Hamlet hardly suffers from the fact that his father was murdered; instead he dreams of becoming a celebrated playwright. He is nothing more than a downright fool, who is proud of his clumsy choruses, as is demonstrated by the verse he recites: "Il était un corsage/et ron ron et petit pa ta pon/il était un corsage/qu'avait tous ses boutons." (9)

## **Parody**

Laforgue was one of the first poets who, at the end of the nineteenth century, felt that the existing modes of expression for the poet were obsolete and that there was a need for new ways of poetic expression. Parody for him was an important means to break away from existing literary conventions and poetical registers, and to introduce a new poetic language and innovative literary structures. Parody was an important instrument of *fumisme* and formed a significant part of the language of the *cabarets artistiques*. As Mary Shaw underlines in her essay on the literature of Montmartre, parody served a dual purpose: "Parodical markers generally signify breaks (...) with literary traditions at the same time that they forge links for initiated readers with a network of other contemporary, subversive, avant-garde texts." (10) Using parody Laforgue rewrote and overwrote the "legendary stories" that served him as models. The distorted quotations from, and allusions to, classic writers (Shakespeare, Flaubert) contribute heavily to the parodical character of Laforgue's stories.

## **Popular Language**

Laforgue's poems and prose show the same characteristics as the songs, poems, and monologues that were presented in the *cabarets artistiques*. They are an often absurd blend of classical poetic language, nonsense rhymes and colloquial patches, peppered with exclamations, shouts and quotations from street and cabaret songs. (11) "Complainte du pauvre jeune homme" for instance sets off with the caption "Sur l'air populaire: Quand le bonhomm' revint du bois" (a song also known as "Le Bucheron de Bresse"). In the poem Laforgue reverts to practices used by singers and poets in the *cabarets artistiques*: a repetition of words or lines (the line "Quand ce jeune homm' rentra chez lui" is used twice), elision (*homm'*

instead of *homme*) and the use of nonsense or nursery rhyme (“Digue dondaine, digue dondon”). (12)

The rhyme in Laforgue’s poetry and prose often rests on comparable sound effects. Typical is his frequent use of assonance and alliteration – which especially in free verse are important forms of rhyme. A few examples from *Moralités légendaires*. In the first *b* and *s* are repeated: “Dans un coin obscur d’une tribune, Hamlet dont nul jamais ne s’inquiète, assis sur un coussin, observe la salle et la scène par les baies de la balustrade” (*Hamlet*). The second example centres on the repetition of the *f/v*-sound, the *c* and the *l*, with the “o” as a resounding vowel: and: “Et sur cette folle petite ville et son cercle de collines, le ciel infini dont on fait son deuil, ces éphémères féminines ne sortant jamais, en effet, sans mettre une frivole ombrelle entre elles et Dieu” (*Miracles des roses*). Sound for Laforgue is seemingly more important than significance: “Que je vous baise les mains, ô Kate, pour cette étiquette” (*Hamlet*); “unique titre de Tétraque”; “une salle jonchée de joncs jaune jonquille” (*Salomé*). (13) As was the habit in the cabarets, Laforgue frequently reverts to popular expressions and exclamations, to *argot* and vulgar words (*s’en fichier*, *s’engueuler*). He invents new words or verbs (*angeluser* or *ventriloquer*, *voluptuer*, *massacrileger*) and uses *mots-valises* or *port-manteau* words to intensify the sense of the emotions he wants to convey (*crucifiger* as a speaking combination of *crucifier* and *figer*; *éternullite* as an – again very expressive – combination of *éternité* and *nullité*; *violuptés* as a combination of *volupté* and *viol*; *ennuiverselles* from *ennui* and *universelles*). In addition to “modern” words or (often incongruous) combinations (*thermomètre*, *rails*, *capitaliste*, *laminé*, *transatlantiques bercails*, *spleens* or *ennuis kilométriques*) he sprinkles his poems with non-poetical, technical, biological or medical expressions (*polype*, *apoplectique*, *spectroscope*, *télescope*, *plasma* or *chlorose*, to denote the pallor of unhealthy adolescent girls). (14)

## ***Duchamp and Laforgue***

For Duchamp getting acquainted with the work of Laforgue was of special importance for the development of his ideas. To Cabanne he stated that he especially liked Laforgue's short stories, not just because of their humor, but also because they were something completely new: "I'm not acquainted with Laforgue's life. [...] That didn't interest me enormously. But the prose poems in *Moralités légendaires*, which were as poetic as his poems, had really interested me very much. It was like an exit from Symbolism." (15)

Without any doubt it was especially the parodical character of the *Moralités légendaires* that appealed to Duchamp. Besides that he must also have picked up some of the innovative aspects of Laforgue's poetry that were linked to the artistic climate in Montmartre.

## ***Duchamp in Montmartre***

Duchamp came to live in Montmartre in 1904, with his brother Raymond in the rue Caulaincourt. Their elder brother Jacques Villon lived in the same street. Even though the Duchamp brothers associated themselves with other painters, e.g. in the Société Normande de Peinture Moderne, and showed their work on "alternative" exhibitions like the Salon des Indépendants and the Salon d'Automne, in Montmartre they spent most of their time in quite different circles, in the company of illustrators and cartoonists. Like them, the brothers of Duchamp earned their money primarily by producing cartoons for Parisian humoristic journals. According to Duchamp there was little or no contact between them and the artistic avant-garde: "Remember that I wasn't living among painters, but rather among cartoonists. In Montmartre, where I was living, rue Caulaincourt, next door to Villon, we associated with Willette, Léandre, Abel Faivre, Georges Huard etc., this was completely different; I wasn't in contact with the painters at

that time.” (16)

Although they were working as commercial artists, Duchamp's brothers had not given up hope to be recognized as serious artists. Duchamp on the other hand had no clear goal. He tried his luck at the exam for admittance to the École des Beaux Arts and failed, attended some of the classes at the Académie Julian, but confessed later he preferred to play billiards at a local café, and evaded a three year conscription in the army, posing as an *ouvrier d'art* and learning the art of print-making in an atelier in Rouen.



Duchamp had been drawing domestic scenes, portraits of family members or friends and everyday scenes of passers-by or street strollers from early on. After his return to Montmartre and following the example of his brothers, he produced another series of drawings and cartoons, often with the relations between men and women as a theme. A good example is *Sundays (Dimanches, 1909)*: a fairly common scene of a young man, pushing a baby carriage, with next to him his wife, again heavy with child. The plural in the title not only refers to the endless repetition of dreary Sundays with their common family scenes, but also to the cycle

of the seemingly joyless repetition this marriage is subject to. *Dimanches* could very well echo Laforgue's melancholic poems about dreary Sundays.

Some of the cartoons Duchamp produced were published in humoristic magazines such as *Le Rire* and the *Courrier français* and were shown at the Salons des Humoristes that were organized from 1907 on. The captions of these cartoons are full of sexual innuendo and show that Duchamp had a keen eye for puns and *double entendres*. (17)

## ***An “intellectual” artist***









Thoug

When he picked up painting again around 1907, Duchamp's ideas, in no way, fitted in with the usual pattern of a "serious" artist. He went rapidly through successive stages of the new movements in painting – Fauvism, "Cézannism" – as if he couldn't decide what style suited him. In 1911, he painted the first works that show the influence of Cubism. He also participated in discussions about Cubism with his brothers and other painters of a cubist group that had formed around the painters Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger. But he did not stick to Cubism, either. He was searching for an art that differed fundamentally from what had been produced up to the 1910s. As he stated later, painters until then had exclusively focused on "retinal" effects. In the course of the nineteenth century the "physical" side of painting had increasingly been emphasized, which had resulted in a one-sided production of "pleasant" or "attractive" images of art, solely appealing to the senses. According to Duchamp, art had thus lost its "intellectual" (religious, historical, or literary) content. Even new movements such as (Neo)Impressionism, Futurism, or Cubism were mainly producing "physical" paintings. Duchamp deliberately searched for other ways: "I wanted to get away from the physical aspect of painting. [...] I was interested in ideas – not merely in visual products. I wanted to put painting once again at the service of the mind." (18)

The decisive breaking point is well-known. In March 1912, Duchamp planned to show his freshly painted *Nu descendant un escalier* at the Salon des Indépendants, together with other members of the cubist group. Gleizes and Metzinger disapproved of the direction Duchamp had taken with his *Nu* and asked Duchamp's brothers if they could persuade Duchamp to remove his "moving" nude. (19) This incident proved to Duchamp that the painters' milieu, even that of the avant-garde, had little to offer to him. He therefore sought his inspiration elsewhere. Duchamp had a clear mind for innovation, both in the field of the visual arts and in the fields of science, language, and literature. The cartoons he produced were proof of his interest in language, in the possibilities of wordplay

and puns, corresponding with the products of cartoonists and writers who moved around in the artistic circles of Montmartre. (20). And although he did not read a lot, his literary favorites were the more experimental symbolist authors such as Mallarmé . Duchamp's attitude was quickly assessed as "intellectual" and "literary," but that did not bother him. "I felt that as a painter it was much better to be influenced by a writer than by another painter," he stated. (21)

Although his literary favorites were to be found among the more "difficult" symbolist writers, Duchamp (as he stated to Pierre Cabanne) preferred authors who offered an exit from symbolism. Like Raymond Roussel and Jean Paul Brisset (two authors Duchamp admired because of their "insane imagination"). Laforgue evaded the prevailing taste: he offered Duchamp the exit he was searching for. Duchamp must have been receptive to Laforgue's ironic tone and the way this "decadent-symbolist" author exploited and ridiculed symbolist stereotypes. And more than Laforgue's obvious themes (melancholy about human existence in the light of eternity, celibacy, unattainable love, and – almost consequently – sterility), Duchamp recognized the irony in the way Laforgue turned melancholy and self-pity into (black) humor. Besides that he must have felt attracted to the way Laforgue transformed common language into poetry, to his frequent use of dissonant words or expressions in a poetic context and to his extravagant titles: "But perhaps I was less attracted by Laforgue's poetry than by his titles. 'Comice agricole,' when written by Laforgue, becomes poetry." (22)

The full title of the poem Duchamp refers to reads "Complainte du soir des comices agricoles" ("Complaint of the Evening of the Agricultural show"). (23) Laforgue's poem describes the depressing behavior of farmers and their ladies, who have great difficulty giving themselves over to dancing and fun. The poet therefore dresses up in melancholic thoughts about

the human race and the planet it is living on: “Oh Terre, ô terre, ô race humaine, / vous me faites bien de la peine.” (O Earth, o human race, it is quite a pain you give me.”) Apart from the poetic effects of assonance and alliteration (co-co-co) the title of the poem is rather unusual. Nobody normally associates a farmers fair (“comice agricole”) with melancholy or other poetic feelings. Laforgue reverts quite happily to the use of such dissonances. Apparently, this use of dissonance attracted Duchamp too.

## ***Motion instead of emotion***

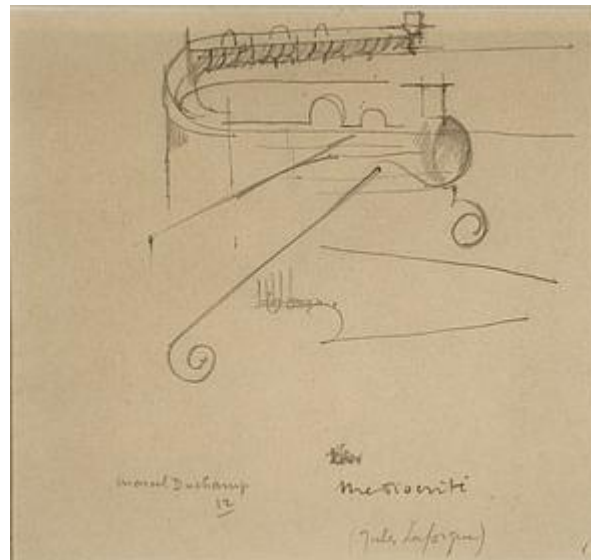
In 1911 Duchamp decided to illustrate some of Laforgue’s poems. The drawings bear the same titles as the poems, all from Laforgue’s first bundle *Le Sanglot de la Terre* (published posthumously in 1901): *Médiocrité*, *Sieste éternelle*, and *Encore à cet astre* (though the drawings bear the indication “12” and “13” they all date from 1911).(24)

Remarkably enough, the content of Laforgue’s poems seem to



have little or no direct connection with the subject Duchamp chose to depict in his drawings. *Sieste éternelle* shows a section of a piano keyboard, possibly referring to the verse: “Et comme un piano voisin rêve en mesure/je tournoie au concert rythmé des encensoirs.” (“And like a piano close by that dreams in scales / so I move around

on the rhythmic concert of the incense burners”). In Laforgue’s *Complaintes* the piano is often used as a signal of wistful longing. In “Complainte des pianos qu’on entend dans les quartiers aisés,” for example, the poet is strolling through a rich residential area. Through the windows of the houses he hears the sound of endless rows of scales that are being practiced by young girls. The gray and boring life of these girls, who are all eagerly looking forward to a future lover, leaps to his mind, and he imagines how the monotonous life of these young girls eventually and inevitably will pass into the meager routine of married life. Duchamp’s drawing, however, doesn’t convey anything of these melancholic thoughts. It leaves the viewer in the dark as far as its



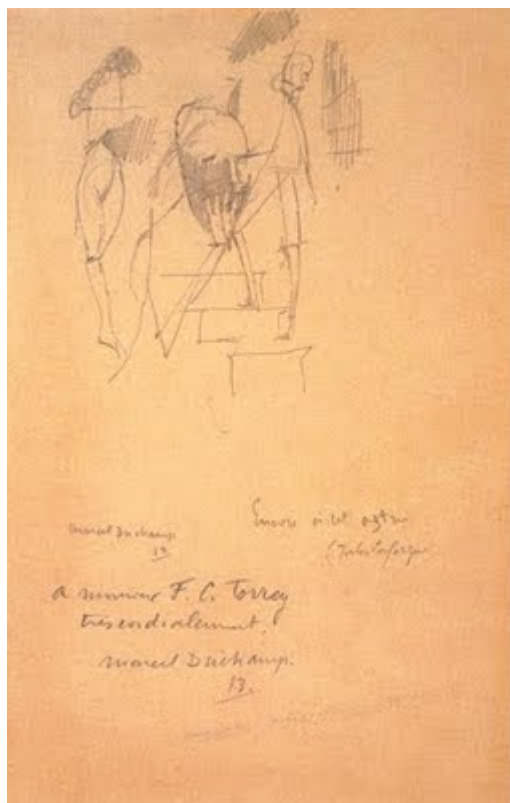
meaning is concerned.

*Médiocrité* shows something that looks like a steam locomotive with wagons trailing behind. In Laforgue’s sonnet such a machine is nowhere to be found. Laforgue deplores the mediocrity of most people, who toil and slave endlessly and without joy, and suspect nothing of the nullity (the *éternullité*) of the planet Earth in light of eternity. The only possible connection between poem and drawing is the last line of the poem (“Combien même s’en vont/Sans avoir seulement visité leur planète”; “How many take their leave/without even having visited their planet”). This line could have brought Duchamp the idea of a train – and possibly the idea of motion, instead of emotion. *Encore à cet astre* (“Once more to this star”; to be understood as an address to the sun) gave Duchamp

the idea for *Nu descendant un escalier* (*Nude Descending a Staircase*, 1911):

The idea of the *Nude* came from a drawing which I had made in 1911 to illustrate Jules Laforgue's poem *Encore à cet astre*. I had planned a series of illustrations of Laforgue's poems, but I only completed three of them. [...] In the drawing *Encore à cet astre* the figure is, of course, mounting the stairs. But while working on it, the idea of the *Nude*, or the title – I do not recall which – first came to my mind. (25)

Duchamp's drawing again doesn't contain much of which Laforgue is speaking. The poem reads as an imaginary dialogue between the sun and the people on earth. The sun (for Laforgue often a symbol of a dying force) expresses its contempt with those damned animated puppets ("pantins morphines") down there on Earth. The earthlings, however, challenge the sun and point to its damned fate: it is at the end of its strength, its beams will inevitably grow cold, and it will be the laughing stock of the other stars. They, however, even if they are young, "die of health."



In Duchamp's drawing we see a

floating head, as a sort of reference to Odilon Redon, between two figures. On the left a (apparently) female figure, naked from the waist down, surmounted by a cylindrical shape; on the right another (male? female?) figure, climbing a flight of stairs. (26) The pronounced teeth of the floating head could be taken as a reference to one of the lines in the poem ("Toi seul claques des dents"; "Only you clack your teeth"). Graphically, there is a connection with two earlier (realistic) nudes Duchamp drew, rather unusually sitting or resting on a ladder. (27) Maybe Duchamp got the idea of setting a (rudimentary or puppet-like) nude in motion, walking on a flight of stairs, from Laforgue's description of the sun high up in the sky, talking to human puppets down below. Be that as it may, Duchamp probably drew more inspiration from the idea of movement (up-down) in Laforgue's poem, than from its actual (emotional, i.e. melancholic) content.

Duchamp's drawings after the poetry of Laforgue signify an important turning point in his work and thinking. As indicated, around 1911 Duchamp was searching to break free from the art of tradition, but also from the work of Cézanne and the Fauves, which until then had served him as an example. He experimented with techniques he had taken from Cubism, but was also inspired by the art of Symbolism – a symbolism embodied in paintings such as *Buisson* (*The Bush*, 1910-1911). When asked about the title of this painting, Duchamp stated he added the title (*Buisson*) "as an invisible color." (28) He felt he needed " *a raison d'être* in a painting that was different from the visual experience," as a means of "giving a work that contained no anecdote an anecdotal element." (29) "A poetic title for a painting was an anathema in the Fauves period, and was dismissed as literature," he stated later. (30) In symbolist art such a "suggestive" title was not unusual. (31)

By giving paintings such as *Buisson* symbolic titles, Duchamp tried to lend these rather traditional nudes (they are more or less Fauvist nudes) a meta-realistic touch, purely because he

felt the need to step away from their being too realistic. The next step would even lead him away from the idea of giving his paintings "symbolist" titles. He started experimenting with setting his subjects in motion. *Encore à cet astre* must have played a central part in this development. About the genesis of this drawing Duchamp explained to Cabanne: "(the origin is) in the nude itself. To do a different nude from the classic reclining or standing nude, and to put it in motion." (32) Motion (or the suggestion of motion) as a subject thus was becoming more and more important, and certainly more important than emotion.

## ***Melancholy?***

In December 1911, Duchamp painted *Jeune homme triste dans un train* (*Sad Young Man in a Train*) and, in the same month, the first study for *Nu descendant un escalier*. Michel Sanouillet has suggested that *Jeune homme triste dans un train* was based on a lost sketch, belonging to the series of illustrations to poems of Laforgue that Duchamp had planned to do. According to Sanouillet the original title of *Jeune homme triste dans un train* would have read *Pauvre jeune homme M*: "precisely the name of one of Laforgue's *Complaintes*." The Laforgue poem Sanouillet refers to tells the sad but hilarious story of a young man who finds out his wife has left him for another, laments his fate, and in despair finally cuts his throat. (33). If Sanouillet is right about Duchamp's first idea for a title, the M would have given his painting a personal touch (M being an indication for 'Marcel'). Unfortunately, there is no M in the title of the Laforgue poem. (34)



Several interpreters (Arturo Schwarz, Lawrence D. Steefel, Jerrold B. Seigel, John Golding) have tried to link *Jeune homme triste dans un train* to Duchamp's melancholic mood at the end of 1911 and have suggested that this painting could point to an influence from Laforgue's poems. (35) John Golding for instance sees something of the "bleak, quizzical despair" in Duchamp's painting which characterizes the Laforgue poem. Duchamp's painting is what he calls a "mood painting": "The Nude Descending is in no way a tragic painting (...). Yet the debt to Laforgue exists in the sensation or pervasive melancholy which the canvas transmits." (36). According to Golding the relationship between *Jeune homme triste dans un train* and *Nu descendant un escalier* is reinforced by the fact that Duchamp painted black borders in both paintings. Duchamp himself, however, always rejected a "melancholic" interpretation of *Jeune homme triste dans un train*. He acknowledged that the painting was a self-portrait (a pipe, hardly visible, should be an indication), but when Robert Lebel asked him if the

black borders are to be seen as an atmospheric sketch of his mood at that moment, Duchamp with his usual aplomb stated that “the black frames in *Jeune homme triste* only served to bring the painting back to the right dimensions.” (37)

It is rather unlikely that Duchamp intended *Jeune homme triste dans un train* to be “a mood painting.” If he had wanted the title to be read as a reference to an autobiographical fact and as an indication of a melancholy mood he could indeed have added the “M” Sanouillet is referring to. Duchamp himself particularly stressed the role of the *train-triste* alliteration in the title: “The *Sad Young Man on a Train* already showed my intention of introducing humor into painting or, in this case, the humor of word play: *triste, train*. [...] The young man is sad because there is a train that comes afterward. ‘Tr’ is very important.” (38)

In other words, Duchamp chose the word “triste” (sad) because it worked beautifully with “train,” or better because the word “train” trails after, *entraînes* the word “triste.”

## ***Dissonances***

As his early drawings and cartoons show, and as is evident in his work after 1911, Duchamp was very aware of the possible use of “literary” (or poetic) effects in his search for an art that differed from traditional art. Duchamp had always been interested in word games and was trained in the use of *calembours* and words with double meanings. It could not have escaped him that Laforgue regularly made use of the humorous and ironic effects of dissonant words and expressions in his poems. The irony and humor in Laforgue’s poems mainly resides in the collision of two traditionally opposing verbal registers: on the one hand, the (traditional) poetical register, and on the other, the register of spoken language and language used in new areas of communication. His poetry takes its ironic character primarily from the dissonances between these two different linguistic sources. And Duchamp must have noticed that he could do something similar in the

visual arts.

In the titles of his work after 1911, Duchamp sometimes falls back on the same effects as Laforgue. When asked about the word “vite” in the title of *Le roi et la reine traversés par des nus vites* (*The King and Queen Traversed by Swift Nudes*, 1912), Duchamp stated that this word amused him, because at that time it was new and modern, and was only used in sports, e.g. as an indication for a cyclist, a racing driver or an athlete: “if a man was ‘swift,’ he ran well.” (39) Titles like *Jeune homme triste dans un train*, *Deux personnages et une auto* (*Two Characters and a Car*, 1912), *Le roi et la reine entourés des nus vites* (*The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes*, 1912), *Le roi et la reine traversés par des nus en vitesse* (*The King and Queen Traversed by Nudes at High Speed*, 1912), or *Le roi et la reine traversés par des nus vites* (*The King and Queen Traversed by Swift Nudes*, 1912) with their unusual dissonances (a combination of a word deriving from the world of mechanics or sports and from more traditional registers), definitely have Laforgian traces. And the title of Duchamp’s 1914 drawing *Avoir l’apprenti dans le soleil* (*To Have the Apprentice in the Sun*), in which we see a bicyclist frantically working his way up a slope, would not have seemed out of place amongst the titles of Laforgue’s poems.

## ***Assonance and alliteration***

In addition, Duchamp must have noted that in his (free) verse and his prose Laforgue frequently made use of alliteration and assonance as a *remplaçant* for more conventional rhyme. As is obvious from his statement about the word play “*triste/train*” Duchamp was sensitive to such literary effects. He was without any doubt amused by the tonal qualities of the work of Laforgue, for instance, by the (alliterative and assonant) effects of choruses such as “digue dondaine, digue dondon” or the use of assonance and elision (bonhomm’) in poems like “Complainte du pauvre jeune homme” – lines and words that referred to the popular song the poem is based upon, echoing

the practices used in the *cabarets artistiques*. Talking about the poetry of Mallarmé, Duchamp stated that it wasn't so much the content or the construction of the verses that attracted him, but the "sonorité" – the sound. For Duchamp Mallarmé's poetry was primarily a "poésie audible" (poetry to be listened at): "Since I don't completely understand him [Mallarmé], I find him very pleasurable to read for sound, as poetry that you hear," he said to Cabanne. (40)

In his works after 1911, Duchamp frequently fell back on the poetical effects of alliteration and assonance. A title such as *Le roi et la reine traversés par des nus vites* derives its poetic effect from the repeating of the "r" and the "a"; in *La Mariee mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*, the "m" is repeated, as it is in *Neuf Moules Mâlic* ( *mâlic* being a neologism). (41)

In naming the different parts of *The Large Glass*, Duchamp made use of similar effects. *Témoins oculistes* is another example of a neologism, and assonance is present in titles such as *Glissière contenant un moulin à eau en métaux voisins* ("eau" rhyming on "métaux" and "o"), and alliteration in *Dynamo désir* or in *L'Enfant-phare*. Moreover, Duchamp, especially in later ready-mades, frequently fell back on the humoristic power of mots-valises or port-manteau words (*Fresh Widow*, *La Bagarre d'Austerlitz*).

## ***The influence of Laforgue***

*In Nu descendant un escalier* Duchamp united a principle he borrowed from Laforgue: to bring together two elements (nude – staircase) that in traditional terms do not mutually "rhyme." He added a novelty of his own, namely the liberation of the nude from her traditional frameworks: he painted a moving nude instead of a stationary nude, a nude that "descends," instead of reclining or standing. It is this idea of motion or movement – not in an emotional sense, but in an intellectual sense – that he developed in several works after 1911, culminating in *La Mariee mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*

(*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, 1915-23) and in his ready-mades. In these works, he concentrated not on a pictorial (static) scene, but on a mental idea, using the artwork as a means to convey the idea of a world in motion, a constant flux or a coming-and-going of appearances.

Duchamp picked up another idea from Laforgue. In his poems, Laforgue often attributes life to lifeless objects or abstractions, thereby augmenting the ironic quality of his poems (See, for example, "Complainte du foetus de poète," "Complainte du vent qui s'ennuie la nuit," and "Complainte des débats mélancoliques et littéraires").

Similar (Laforgian) irony speaks from phrases and titles for parts of *La Mariee mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*, such as *Handler of gravity* (*Manieur de gravité*, also named *Tender of Gravity* – *Soigneur de gravité* – or *Juggler of gravity* – *Jongleur de gravité* ). Here Duchamp plays on the double meaning of the word *gravity*: *weight* or *gravitation* on the one hand, and *seriousness* on the other. The irony is of course present in the idea that you can "juggle" with gravity – an idea Duchamp illustrated in his concept of objects "made of a substance of *oscillating density*," such as the Hook or the Chariot in the Big Glass (42) – or that you can tend to ("take care of," or "look out for") gravity. The same goes for the attribution of human emotions to some of the mechanical devices in *The Large Glass* (a chariot with a "slow" or "celibate life," a motor with "a desire center"). When it comes to the intrinsic themes that Duchamp might have found in the work of Laforgue, it is not so much the theme of melancholy but another theme that jumps out. Laforgue frequently refers to his dislike of *bourgeois* marriage, especially where sex is concerned as a mere means to acquire offspring. Instead of "love in the service of reproduction" as the above quotation about his perfect English girl illustrates, Laforgue finds the ultimate ideal in selfless, sterile love.

Duchamp in his turn repeatedly and emphatically manifested his aversion to marriage as a social institution and his preference for the status of the bachelor. Duchamp's early

drawings are not only interesting because of the combination of text and image and the use of *calembours* or sexual innuendo in the captions, but also because of their themes. Many of these early drawings provide an ironic view on the concerns of courtship, the period of engagement, and the routine of married life. (43) They can thus be seen as an early ruling against (civil) marriage and as a celebration of the state of bachelor (or – for that matter – of unmarried cohabitation). His drawing *Dimanches* can be seen as an early manifestation of this conviction. The theme of his *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* seems to be partly based on the same idea of (sterile) love; on the idea of the fundamental impossibility of the union of bachelor and bride, even though they mutually undergo the effects of desire for the other. Where Duchamp speaks of *the Large Glass* as a “negation of the woman,” it was the negation of the woman as a wife/mother he focused upon, as the person who assists in the continuation of social life and the (mechanical) producing of social individuals over and over again. (44)

That is not to say that Duchamp’s work can be interpreted as an expression of the “eternal” opposition between the masculine and the feminine, which is the theme of many symbolist works of art. Duchamp does not tackle the (eternal) male-female opposition, but his work does challenge the opposition husband vs. wife/mother.

It could well have been the introduction of popular material in a poetic context, the use of newly formed words and the playing on their incongruity (this diversion from traditional poetical standards) that put Duchamp on the trail of comparable methods to undermine existing codes and registers in the visual arts. Laforgue was one of the first modern poets who used words that stem from such non-poetical arsenals as trade, (natural) science, traffic, slang and popular songs. With his introduction of neologisms and non-poetical words and phrases he gave an example of increased lexical and linguistic choices for the poet.

Laforgue's idea of using dissonances in order to pervert the traditional poetic language has a clear counterpart in the work of Duchamp, both in his early work and in his ready-mades. As is the case with Laforgue, Duchamp reverted to a process of dissociation: he isolated words (or sounds) and objects from their habitual (grammatical, logical) context and presented them in another context. By painting simple and everyday objects, such as *Coffee Mill* or *Chocolate Grinder*, he introduced mechanical devices as legitimate subjects for art works. This practice eventually gave way to simply "choosing" ordinary objects and, by giving them a poetic (often ambiguous) title, elevating them to genuine art works (*In Advance of the Broken Arm*, *Trébuchet/Trap*). With his genuine ready-mades – *Fountain* being the most famous – he went one step further. By isolating an ordinary object – a urinal – from its normal context (the public restroom) and by introducing it in a surrounding where it is definitely out of place (the gallery or museum) he expanded the artistic methods and materials and took them to until then uncharted realms.

## ***Conclusion***

Laforgue was one of the first modern poets who demonstrated an ambivalent-melancholic attitude towards language and poetry. Thus, in "Complainte des Blackboulés" it is said that "she" (a "coeur rose") has spat on the Arts and the poet. In the poem a poet complains about the fact that art is mocked and attacked – while Laforgue himself is doing nothing different, by mocking all that has been seen as sacred in poetry. It is a melancholic attitude, because the poet realizes that there is little else to do, that writing has become a ridiculous, pointless activity – "Ah! Qu'est-ce que je fais, ici, dans cette chambre!/Des vers. Et puis, après?" ("Ah, what am I doing sticking around indoors! Verse. And then, what after that?", *Complainte d'une autre dimanche*) – but that he can do nothing else. Laforgue hides behind the ironic nonchalance with which he ridicules poetry, rhetoric, literary themes or motifs – but

he still writes poetry! In that sense he distinguishes himself from the pranksters, who were also to be found amongst the Hydropathes and other Fumistes. Where some of these poet-singers were aiming to ridicule Literature – as an example of what was called “the established order” – Laforgue was looking for an answer to the question which way poetry could go, while rejecting the path of traditional rhetoric or of legendary themes. The work of Laforgue may in many respects be similar to that of the Fumistes, the difference is in what Laforgue aimed at. He was not aiming at the joke “for the joke’s sake.” Or, in the words of Grojnowski: “Se voutant à la quête d’une manière ‘clownesque’, il inaugure une esthétique de la disparate où, selon ses propres termes, les dictionnaires ‘se brouillent’.” (45). Duchamp recognized and appreciated the irony of Laforgue, which is akin to his “ironie d’affirmation,” with a slight but important difference; unlike Laforgue there is, in the case of Duchamp, no question of black vision or melancholy. He approaches his subjects in a “dry” and “neutral” way.

Instead of a well-established, traditional style, Laforgue sought a new style of his own, an idiolect, a language offering space to the everyday, spoken word – a style that is not only related to the style of the authors who frequented the Parisian *cabarets artistiques* and that of innovative authors such as Mallarmé, but can be regarded as a harbinger of the style of modern writers such as Céline and Queneau.

It is this ambivalent attitude – rejecting the (old) poetry but simultaneously seeking a way to save poetry by looking for new ways – that Duchamp has in common with Laforgue. Duchamp is not so much the Dadaist, who only rejects. He is much more like Laforgue, someone who is “looking for a way out” – looking for new ways for the arts to go in a changing society. That is what is behind Duchamp’s judgment about the work of Laforgue: “It was like an exit from symbolism.” Laforgue helped Duchamp to find his way out in his “ironisme d’affirmation,” in his Large Glass, and in his readymades.

## Notes:

1. Daniel Grojnowski, talking about the Incohérents, has pointed out that their activities can be interpreted as being a sort of proto-Dada. 'Une trentaine d'années avant que n'éclatent les scandales provoqués par la jeunesse de l'après-guerre, qui, vers 1920, a transformé de manière sans doute irréversible notre perception de l'œuvre, les *Incohérents* ont, pour une bonne part, inventé 'dada' avant la lettre, sans avoir trouvé [...] la reconnaissance qui aurait consacré leurs recherches. En somme, ils ont formé une avant-garde sans avancée, une provocation artistique sans prise qui, faute de s'être imposée, demeure un simple objet de curiosité.' Daniel Grojnowski, *Aux commencements du rire moderne. L'esprit fumiste* (Paris: Corti, 1997), 255-256.
  
1. It is impossible to discuss the "literature of Montmartre" here in full. For a more extensive view see: Mary Shaw, "All of nothing? The Literature of Montmartre," in Philip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw, eds., *The Spirit of Montmartre. Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905* (Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 1996. See also: Charles Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque. Entertainment and Festivity in Turn-of-the-Century France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985); Harrold B. Segel, *Turn-of-the-century cabaret. Paris, Barcelona, Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Cracow, Moscow, St.Petersburg, Zurich* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987). In French: Daniel Grojnowski, *Aux commencements du rire moderne.*

*L'esprit fumiste* (Paris: Corti, 1997) ; and André Velter, *Les Poètes du Chat Noir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

1. Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1979), 29-30.
  
1. For a brief biography of Laforgue in English see: *Jules Laforgue, Poems* , Trans. Peter Dale (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2001 [1986]).
  
1. *Des fleurs de bonne volonté*, for instance, contains thirteen poems with "Dimanche" in their title, for a total of 56 poems.
  
1. "Le type de l'adorable, de l'aimée unique, pour moi est par exemple l'anglaise [...]. Elle est la seule race de femme que je ne parviens pas à déshabiller. [...] Mon imagination reste stérile, gelée, n'a jamais existé, ne m'a pas dégradé [...] Elle n'a pas pour moi d'organes sexuels, je n'y songe pas, il me serait impossible d'y songer. [...] Toutes les autres sont des chiennes." *Feuilles volantes* , in: Jules Laforgue, *Oeuvres Complètes* , Vol. 3 (Lausanne: L'Age des Hommes, 2000), 960-961.
  
1. A typical Laforgian play-on-words. The first part of the name refers to the preference Flaubert puts on sparkling gems, the second part is an ironic

reference to the – supposedly – “archetypal” character of Herod.

1. Laforgue often reverts to quotes from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* , using them as a motto for his poems. In *Des Fleurs de bonne volonté* , eleven out of 56 poems have a motto taken from *Hamlet* . He uses these quotes regularly in connection with other recurring themes that for him represent melancholy: Sundays, moonlight, sterility, autumn.
1. This refrain, echoing the practices of the *cabaret artistique*, is taken from a French nursery song: “Il était un’ bergère’/Et ron et ron, petit patapon/Il était un’ bergère/Qui gardait ses moutons/Ron, ron/Qui gardait ses moutons.
1. Cate and Shaw, 128. Laforgue’s “L’Hiver qui vient” is a good example of this dual objective. “What is often overlooked, however, is that this poem, far from emerging as a work of solitary genius, exemplifies a general context of innovation,” says Shaw (Cate and Shaw 1996, 129). The title of the poem echoes the beginning of a poem by Raoul Ponchon from the *Album zutique* (1871): “V’la l’hiver et ses guenilles/Un’saison qu’est emmerdant!”, (with the characteristic elision “V’la” instead of “Voilà”) and the opening lines of Jehan Rictus’ “L’Hiver” (from *Les Soliloques du Pauvre*, first performed in cabaret Les Quat’z’Arts in 1895): “Merd’! V ’là l’Hiver et ses dur’tés/V’là l’moment de n’plus s’mettre à poils.” And the first word of Rictus’ poem again raises an

echo: of the first word of Jarry's *Ubu Roi* namely, the play that knew its premiere a year after Rictus first performed his poem.

1. Two other examples. "Complainte de cette bonne lune" sets off with a variant on the popular song "Sur le pont d'Avignon" and "Complainte de Lord Pierrot" with an adaptation of the more well-known "Au clair de la lune": "Au clair de la lune/Mon ami Pierrot/Filons en costume/Présider là-haut!/Ma cervelle est morte/Que le Christ l'emporte/Béons à la Lune/La bouche en zéro (...)." Typical in this last poem is the combination of the moon (lune) with Pierrot. Pierrot is, next to Hamlet, the character who for Laforgue embodies the theme of melancholy. In late nineteenth century literature, Pierrot served as the epitome of the melancholic: he is the enemy of the sun, and – consequently – a lunatic. In 1882 Laforgue borrowed the title of one of Adolphe Willette's famous Pierrot cartoons, *Pierrot fumiste*, for a play of his own. The Pierrot of Laforgue mocks marriage and wedding nights and proclaims a love that must remain sterile. Notwithstanding he marries. On his wedding night he smothers his bride with kisses, but otherwise doesn't touch her, and goes to sleep. The next day she is still a virgin. The same thing happens every night. As the months pass, what the family mistook for delicacy becomes cause for concern. The doctor who is finally brought in warns Pierrot that others could rob him of what he despises in his wife. Pierrot then brutally assails her and sets off immediately afterwards – not as someone who has failed, but as someone who punishes his wife: she has spurned

true love and exchanged it for the profane sexual act. For *Pierrot fumiste* see:

<http://www.laforgue.org/Pierrot.htm>

2. The lines "digue dondaine, digue dondon" refer to a popular song from the operetta *Les Cloches De Corneville* by Robert Planquette, that is supposed to suggest the ringing of church bells: "Digue, digue, digue, digue, digue dong/Sonne, sonne, sonne, sonne, sonne dong/Digue, digue, digue, digue, digue donc/Sonne, sonne, sonne donc, joyeux carillon." The singer Jules Jouy referred to the same song in his "Le Reveillon des Gueux." See: Segel, 37-38 and <http://kropot.free.fr/JJouy.htm#GUEUX>

To give an example of a Chat Noir poem with similar characteristics, some lines from "Faculté des sciences du Chat Noir" by Alphonse Allais: "(Air connu): L'azote est un gaz bien malain/Dans l'quel on n'peut pas vivre/Il se trouv' dans l'air le plus sain/C'est pas lui qui enivre,/Il n'a pas le moindre action,/La faridondaine, la faridondon,/Il empêche la vie/Biribi/A la façon de Barbari, mon ami." See: André Velter, *Les Poètes du Chat Noir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 124-125.

1. More examples in: Daniel Grojnowski, *Jules Laforgue et l'originalité* (Neuchatel: Edition de la Baconnière, 1988), 230-234. Duchamp uses similar phonetic principles in his puns: "Abominables fourrures abdominales"; "Nous livrons à domicile: moustiques domestiques (demi-stock)"; "Daily lady cherche démêlés avec Daily Mail"; "Paroi parée de paresse de paroisse." See: *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1973), 105-119.

1. For an extensive review of the lexical and linguistic aspects of Laforgue's prose and poetry see: Jacques-Philippe Saint-Gérard, "Jules Laforgue: Les Complaintes, 'où Saint-Malo rime avec Sanglots et Bocks avec Coq.' Éléments de mise en perspective grammaticale et stylistique."

1. Cabanne, 30.

1. Cabanne, 22.

1. E.g., *Femme Cocher* (Woman Hack Driver, 1907), *At the Palais the Glace* (1909), *Future Mother-in-law* (1909), *Nuit Blanche* (*Sleepless Night*, 1909), *Vice sans fin* (*Endless Vice*, 1909) and *Chamber Music* (1910). See: Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 1997), volume 2: no's 102, 144, 146, 150, 155 and 173). The pun in *Femme cocher* rests on the (homophonic) ambiguity of the title: *femme cocher/femme couché* (woman coach driver/woman who is making love); the running meter of the coach in front of an hotel and the indication 6969 on the lantern on the coach are allusions to the activities the coach driver and her client are involved in.

2. *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, 125.

1. The question remains what Gleizes and Metzinger may have incited to reject Duchamp's *Nude*. For the Cubists the painted object functioned as an 'anchor' for the sum of (sensory ) experiences.

Duchamp had reduced the object – in this case the nude – to a transient flux. But perhaps there was still another reason for their refusal. Gleizes and Metzinger seem to have thought that Duchamp's *Nude* wore a too literary title for a cubist painting. The title would have reduced the painting to a caricature. Funny enough Duchamp's brothers suggested him to at least change the title of his painting, but that was utterly impossible: Duchamp had painted the title directly on the canvas. The title was, in other words, an integral part of the work.

1. Michel Sanouillet has rightly pointed out the importance of what he calls the 'popular tradition' for a good understanding of Duchamp's ideas: "What sets Duchamp apart [from contemporary avant-garde artists] (...) is the fact that he was led to move in a particular milieu, among the journalists, cartoonists, and artisans of Paris, more than among the fashionable painters and men of letters. Thus he kept close to a French oral tradition that manifests itself in a thousand different ways in the life of the average Parisian: argot, vulgar words, "in" jokes, puns, the language of pamphlets, ads, almanacs etc." Michel Sanouillet, "Marcel Duchamp and the French Intellectual Tradition": Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1989 [1973], 53.

1. *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, 126.

1. *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, 124.

1. In his notes Duchamp refers to the Large Glas as a “machine agricole” or “instrument aratoire” (an “agricultural machine”). See: *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, 44.

1. Apparently, Duchamp wasn't very precise when it came down to signing and dating the drawings. In the case of *Encore à cet astre*, for instance, he only the added the indication '13' with the caption 'très cordialement' when he offered the drawing to F.C. Torrey.

1. *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, 124. In his conversations with Cabanne Duchamp states that he made about ten drawings, but he suggests to ignore where even the three that are known have gone to. See *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, 30.

1. As has been suggested, the relation between drawing and poem could be found in the similarity between the French word *astre* (star) and the English *stare/stair* . See for instance: B. Bailey, “Once More to this Staircase: Another Look at *Encore à cet Astre*,” *Tout Fait, The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal*, 2, No. 4. For me, it seems unlikely that Duchamp intended such a relation, considering that he mastered the English language only after 1915, during his stay in the United States.

1. See Schwarz, vol. 2: no's 109 and 110.

1. "The presence of a non-descriptive title is shown here for the first time. In fact, from then on, I always gave an important role to the title which I added and treated like an invisible color." Duchamp, in: d'Harnoncourt and McShine, 249.
2. In a letter of 1951 to Mary Ann Adler, quoted in d'Harnoncourt and McShine, 249.

1. In a letter to Bill Camfield, quoted in Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jacques Caumont, *Ephemerides on and about Marcel Duchamp and Rose Sélavy*, 1887-1968, Palazzo Grassi, Venice (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), entry for 25-4-1961.
2. Compare for instance Odilon Redon's works with titles such as *Les origins*, *Esprit de la forêt* or *La folie*, Gustave Moreau's *Les Voix* or Félicien Rops' *Parodie humaine*.

1. Cabanne, 30.

1. The first stanza of the poem reads: "Quand ce jeune homm' rentra chez lui (2x)/Il prit à deux mains son vieux crâne/Que de science était un puits!/Crâne/Riche crane/Entends tu la Folie qui plane/Et qui demande le cordon/Digue dondaine, digue dondon." (this last line 2x).

1. Michel Sanouillet, "Marcel Duchamp and the French intellectual tradition," d'Harnoncourt and McShine, 50. It is interesting to note that this misreading of Laforgue's title pops up almost everywhere in the Duchamp-literature. Even Calvin Tomkins, who sacrifices two pages of his Duchamp 1996 biography to Duchamp's interest in Laforgue (he rightly stresses the point that Duchamp "had a particular liking for the prose narratives that Laforgue calles *Moralités légendaires*" , amongst which Hamlet was Duchamp's favorite), fails to see that the title of Laforgue's poem reads simply 'Complainte du pauvre jeune homme'. See: *Calvin Tomkins, Duchamp* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), 89-90.

1. See Schwarz, 109-111; Lawrence D. Steefel, Jr. " *Marcel Duchamp's Encore à cet Astre : A New Look,*" *Art Journal* 36, no. 1 (1976): 23-30; Jerrold Seigel, *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp: Desire, Liberation, and the Self in Modern Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 59-60. Schwarz suggested that Duchamp's melancholy was afflicted by the marriage of his favorite sister Suzanne. His suggestion that Duchamp was in love with his sister is more funny than probable.

1. John Golding, *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even* (New York: Viking Press, 1973) [London, Penguin Books, 1972], 25.

1. "en réalité, la bordure noire du Jeune homme

triste, m'a surtout servi à cadrer le tableau pour la mettre à son échelle (...)." Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* (Paris: Belfont, 1985 [1959], 122-123. Duchamp moreover added black borders to his first version of *The Chess Players* too.

1. Cabanne, 29.

1. Cabanne, 36.

1. Cabanne, 105. In French this statement is more heavily emphasized: "[...] j'ai beaucoup de plaisir à le lire au point de vue de la sonorité, de la poésie audible." See : Pierre Cabanne, *Marcel Duchamp, ingénieur du temps perdu* (Paris: Belfond, 1977 [1967]), 183-184.

1. The addition of the adverb *même* in the title *La Mariee mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* has given rise to a lot of explanations: did Duchamp aim at the – homophonic – “m’aime”, did he want to refer to himself (through a double M [M M or (e)m(e)-(e)m(e)]? Or did he just like the alliterating effect of the “m” in the title, as an echo of Laforgue’s “bonhomm’ “? In answering Otto Hahn about the meaning of “même” Duchamp explained: “*Même* doesn’t refer to anything. It has a sense of poetic affirmation. As Breton says, humour of affirmation. Neither denigration nor a joke, but humour which amplifies. Somewhat the ‘Ha, ha’ of Jarry.” Marcel Duchamp, interview with Otto Hahn, *L’Express* , 23 juli 1964. Cited in:

Jennifer Gough-Cooper en Jacques Caumont, *Ephemerides on and about Marcel Duchamp and Rose Sélavy*, 1887-1968 (Exhibition catalogue Palazzo Grassi, Venice: april-july 1993) (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), entry for 23 juli 1964.

1. "the Hook (...) is made of a substance of *oscillating* density. This hook therefore has an indeterminate, variable and uncontrollable weight" and: "The chariot is emancipated horizontally. It is free, of all gravity in the horizontal plane." *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, 61 and 57.
1. One is reminded of the "jeu de massacre", the fairground game Duchamp referred to in an interview with Richard Hamilton and George Heard Hamilton: "The idea came probably from the fairs, the country fairs in France at least, where you have a wedding scene. And you have big balls that you throw at the heads of the bride and the bridegroom and the guests (...)." Quoted from: *Marcel Duchamp: An Interview by Richard Hamilton in London and George Heard Hamilton in New York* (London: Audio Arts, 1975);
1. When questioned by Cabanne about his marriage (his first, in 1927) and the qualification of his "Large Glass" as a "negation of woman", Duchamp stated: 'It's above all a negation of woman in the social sense of the word, that is to say, the woman-wife, the mother, the children, etc. I carefully avoided that, until I was sixty-seven.. Then I married a woman who, because of her age,

couldn't have children. (...) One can have all the women one wants, one isn't obliged to marry them."

See: Cabanne, 76

2. Grojnowski, *Aux commencements du rire modern*, 94