

Etherial Bride and Mechanical Bachelors: Science and Allegory in Marcel Duchamp's Large Glass.

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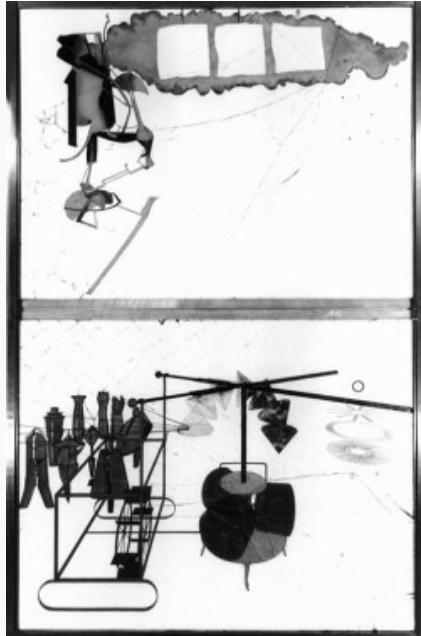
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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

**Etherial Bride and Mechanical Bachelors:
Science and Allegory in Marcel Duchamp's "Large Glass"**

Linda Dalrymple Henderson (bio)

Figures



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Figure 1.

Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915–1923, 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, tinfoil, and a wood and steel frame, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Bequest of Katherine S. Dreier (Photo: Philadelphia Museum of Art).

Begun in 1915 and left in an unfinished state in 1923, Marcel Duchamp's nine-foot-tall composition on glass, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even or Large Glass* (Fig. 1), was the major work of his career. In an effort to get away from his fellow artists' preoccupation with painterly touch, Duchamp experimented in the *Large Glass* with such unorthodox materials as lead wire, lead foil, and dust, in addition to the more conventional oil paint and varnish. The cracks in the *Glass* were the result of the shattering of the two panels during shipment by truck from New York to Connecticut following its exhibition in 1927, an accidental effect that, Duchamp later declared, completed the work and made it "a hundred times better."¹ Although the theme of *The Bride Stripped Bare*

by *Her Bachelors*, Even is sexual interaction, Duchamp recasts his protagonists as biomechanical or purely mechanical creatures: a tubular “Bride” in the upper panel hovers over the “Bachelors” below, centered on the “Nine Malic Molds” at the left, along with accessory organs such as the “Chocolate Grinder” at the right. In the end, however, no physical contact ever occurs between the Bride and the Bachelors; their relationship, according to Duchamp, is characterized by onanism and imagined orgasms.² [End Page 91] Fig. 1

Between 1912 and 1915 Duchamp wrote hundreds of preparatory notes for the *Large Glass*, most often on loose scraps of paper. He published a selection of these notes in facsimile in three sets or “boxes” during his lifetime: the *Box of 1914* (16 notes), the 1934 *Green Box* (94 documents, including 83 notes and drawings), and the 1966 *White Box* (79 notes). More than a decade after his death in 1968, a final group of 289 previously unknown notes was published in 1980 by the Centre Georges Pompidou under the title *Marcel Duchamp, Notes*.³ Among other new insights, these previously unknown notes reveal the degree to which Duchamp was engaged with contemporary science and technology in his creation of what he termed the “Playful Physics” of the *Large Glass*. He was determined, as he said, to “put painting once again at the service of the mind,”⁴ and in both his interest in science and technology and his not making itself, he was fashioning himself in part on the model of Leonardo da Vinci, whose own notes had been published in facsimile in the 1880s. Closer in time to Duchamp, two French writers, Alfred Jarry and Raymond Roussel, had also alerted him to the humorous possibilities of science and technology. Works such as Jarry’s *Le surmâle* of 1902 and *Gestes et opinions du Docteur Faustroll*, published in 1911, and Roussel’s novel/play *Impressions d’Afrique*, which Duchamp attended in 1912, demonstrated that turn-of-the-century science could serve as a rich source for literary or artistic invention and wordplay.⁵ [End Page 93]



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Figure 2.

Marcel Duchamp, “Notice,” note for the *Large Glass* project: reproduced in the *Green Box*

Duchamp considered his notes to be an essential complement to the *Glass*—a kind of “guide-book” or Sears Roebuck catalog, as he later termed his goal.⁶ In a *Green Box* note headed “Preface” or “Notice” (Fig. 2) he set forth in geometrical and scientific-sounding language the conditions for the *Bride Stripped Bare* project:

Given: 1. the waterfall [and] 2. the illuminating gas, *in the dark*, we shall determine (the conditions for) the extra rapid exposition (=allegorical appearance/ allegorical Reproduction) of several collisions seeming strictly to succeed each other according to certain laws, *in order to* isolate the *Sign of...*



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