

Tristan Tzara and the plays of the Douanier Rousseau

by NANCY IRESON

AS ANDRÉ SALMON remarked in 1927, Henri Rousseau was not visually illiterate: 'He could decipher nature's muddled handwriting just as well as the capital letters of great painting.'¹ But when it came to the actual writings of his late friend, the critic was rather less sympathetic: 'Rousseau having been a painter and not a poet, no one has ever supported the idea that [he] was a complete genius and I have written about the flaws in his talent with a clear conscience.'²

However, even if the idea were unacceptable to the majority of the Douanier Rousseau's avant-garde admirers, the fact remains that his range of creative activities might lend credence to the idea of his being an all-round artist. Undoubtedly, his most successful works were his paintings and drawings, but he was also a musician and a writer and in later years organised celebrated musical and literary gatherings in his studio (Fig.24). Rousseau's friend, the painter Max Weber, recalled these concerts when the old man would sing and play the violin with a distinctly 'Rousseau-esque' technique (Fig.25).³ But, although eccentric, the artist's musical activities did

generate some income: he gave music lessons and he published a waltz of his own composition.⁴ The same cannot be said of his writing. The poems which accompanied his exhibits in the Salon des Indépendants met with laughter, and the plays he wrote in the last years of the nineteenth century – *L'Etudiant en goguette*, *Une visite à l'exposition de 1889* and *La vengeance d'une orpheline russe* – fell into obscurity. Unperformed, the incomplete text of *L'Etudiant en goguette* came to be owned by the artist's landlord, a Monsieur Quevel.⁵ Similarly unknown, the texts of the other two pieces came into the possession of Robert Delaunay, one of Rousseau's closest friends and earliest admirers (Fig.26).⁶ Unpublished, and rarely mentioned, the plays were virtually ignored for the first half of the twentieth century.⁷

It is all the more surprising, then, that when Tristan Tzara published an important new assessment of the Douanier Rousseau in 1947, he chose to do so in conjunction with publishing and analysing two of the forgotten plays – *Une visite à l'exposition de 1889* and *La vengeance d'une orpheline russe*. This project is one that he must have contemplated for some time, for, in the 1920s and 1930s, Tzara published excerpts from *La vengeance* in the review *Orbes*, and unpublished letters exchanged between him and Robert and Sonia Delaunay show that he had attempted to buy the manuscripts in 1921.⁸ However, in 1945 – the plays having possibly had another owner in the interim period – Tzara at last secured the texts.⁹ They were printed as two limited edition volumes two years later, and



24. Henri Rousseau (seated at far left) and friends in his studio, rue Perrel, Paris. c.1909. Photograph. (Fonds Delaunay, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris).



25. Henri Rousseau with his violin in his studio, rue Perrel, Paris. May 1906. Photograph. (Whereabouts unknown).

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¹ 'Il savait lire, déchiffrant aussi bien le graphisme confus de la nature que les majuscules d'imprimerie de la grande peinture'; A. Salmon: *Henri Rousseau dit le Douanier*, Paris 1927, p.21.

² 'Rousseau ayant été peintre et non poète . . . Personne n'a jamais soutenu que Rousseau fût un génie complet et j'ai tranquillement écrit de son défaut de talent'; *ibid.*, pp.35–36.

³ M. Weber, cited in S.E. Leonard: *Henri Rousseau and Max Weber*, New York 1970, p.39.

⁴ Rousseau's waltz, *Clemence*, named in honour of his first wife, was published in 1904 by L. Barbarin, 17 Boulevard de Clichy, Paris.

⁵ Correspondence I have discovered in the Fonds Delaunay (box 30) in the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, between Sonia Delaunay and Tristan Tzara, reveals that the text of *L'Etudiant en goguette* belonged to Quevel. On 28th October 1945 Delaunay wrote: 'Mon cher Tzara, Par un extraordinaire hasard, en rangerant dans l'atelier . . . J'ai trouvé . . . des lettres de Mme Quevel, la veuve du propriétaire de Rousseau, c'est elle qui possède le 3ème manuscrit qui s'appelle 'le Nichon Rose' ou 'l'Etudiant en goguette'.'

⁶ M. Terrier: 'Le Portrait du Douanier Rousseau par Robert Delaunay au Musée du Laval', *Bulletin des Musées* 4 (May 1949), pp.103–04, suggests that the plays were given to Delaunay as payment for a posthumous portrait that Rousseau's daughter had commissioned from the artist. Alternatively, Tzara writes that she presented them to Delaunay as a gift, in recognition of his devotion to her father's memory; see T. Tzara, preface to H. Rousseau: *Une visite à l'exposition de 1889*, Geneva 1947, p.30.

⁷ In 1922 Delaunay published extracts from *La visite à l'exposition de 1889* in *Le Bulletin de la Vie artistique*. A few sections of *La vengeance d'une orpheline russe* were printed by T. Tzara in *Orbes* 2 (1929), pp.41–57; 3 (1932), pp.101–06; and 4 (1933), pp.49–67. As Noël Arnaud has commented, the appearance of these extracts was largely ignored; see N. Arnaud: *Henri Rousseau: Théâtre*, Paris 1984, p.14. Extracts of *La vengeance d'une orpheline russe* also appeared in R.H. Wilenski: *Modern French Painters*, London 1940, pp.372–75, although as no new information is included, it seems that these were taken from *Orbes*.

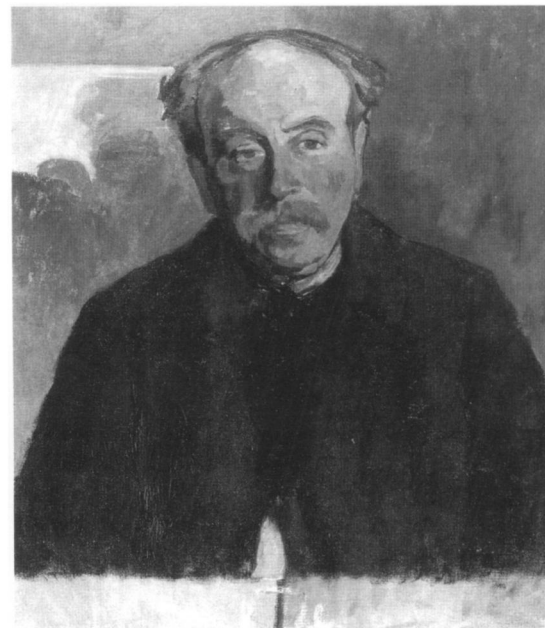
⁸ Tzara wrote to R. Delaunay, 29th July 1921: 'Le sans pareil se trouve actuellement dans les grandes difficultés matérielles, il lui sera donc difficile de vous payer le somme que vous demandez pour la pièce de Rousseau. J'ai demandé aussi à Lafitte qui est directeur de la "Silène?" (qui édite en ce moment un livre de moi) – il m'a dit qu'il voudrait voir le manuscrit, mais qu'il ne croit pas à un grand succès de librairie pour la pièce de Rousseau. – Je crois

Tzara took the opportunity to air his views on the Douanier at length, in a preface to *Une visite*. It was here that, albeit with a degree of irony, he set about considering Rousseau as a modern 'Renaissance man'. He noted that parallels could be drawn between this lofty humanist ideal and the all-round artist of 'popular' tradition. For both, he explained, technique is merely a means to an end, expression being the ultimate aim. Technique, he argued, was simply something to learn 'like any other skill'. If 'naïve' art has 'craft' qualities, it is because 'the act of painting is reduced to a method, applied in order to express an initial vision or feeling'.¹⁰ This incongruity between the means of expression and the chosen subject-matter in 'naïve' works had caused them to meet with criticism; audiences were accustomed to judging artists upon their ability to choose an appropriate technique for their subject. Radically different, and no doubt informed by the restraints of this convention, was Tzara's new proposal: that it might be desirable to consider technique as outside the realm of artistic activity.¹¹ In such a way, a painter might come closer to presenting 'reality itself', rather than the 'imagined reality' of the Surrealists. To see Rousseau as technically maladroit was, in his opinion, to subscribe to intellectual snobbery. Rejecting 'the new clichés that are being constructed upon the ruins of traditional academicism', Tzara set about praising the Douanier's ingenuity.¹²

The novel construction of Rousseau's paintings, Tzara argued, could be illuminated by a study of the organisation of the scenes and action of his plays. Analogies could be drawn between the narrative in *Une visite* and *La vengeance* and the compositional strategies underlying the Douanier's images on canvas. In view of the wide circulation of Rousseau's paintings, it may well have seemed fitting to use the relatively unknown plays to reassess the artist. However, to free the Douanier from stereotypical views held about him by contemporaries was no simple task. Even those writers who were sympathetic to Rousseau's painting had been guilty of 'mixing their admiration with a gentle irony'; the quotation from Salmon cited at the beginning of this article is representative of many.¹³ By doing so, Tzara believed that they had failed to see the artist's true brilliance – a controversial statement in view of the fact that many of their number were his friends or acquaintances. Being aware of the previous critical responses Rousseau had provoked, and knowing that many of their authors would read his interpretation, may well have caused Tzara to marshal his material with care. In this light, his decision to publish only two of Rousseau's plays is of considerable interest. He omitted the third work, *L'Etudiant en goguette*, because it was 'light'; it was, he claimed, less original than *Une visite à l'exposition de 1889* and *La vengeance d'une orpheline russe*. Furthermore, he claimed that 'it does not aid our attempt to free the spirit of the Douanier from his legend'.¹⁴

In the absence of a manuscript of *L'Etudiant en goguette* – the piece having long been considered lost – it has so far been impossible to judge the accuracy of Tzara's assessment. However, following the present writer's discovery of two typed copies of the play in the Fonds Tristan Tzara, this can now be undertaken.¹⁵ It becomes clear that *L'Etudiant* is not without merit and that Tzara – having gone to the trouble of finding and transcribing the manuscript – must have given it careful consideration. But the plebeian theme of the play, its surprising language and use of slang would undoubtedly have made Tzara's task more difficult. To publish *L'Etudiant en goguette* alongside *Une visite à l'exposition de 1889* and *La vengeance d'une orpheline russe* might well have reinforced the conventional views about the Douanier which the writer hoped to overcome, and lessen the impact of his reassessment.

Tzara was certainly justified in his claim that *L'Etudiant en goguette* was a light work, for its theme – the sexual escapades of a medical student in Paris – is more obviously comic than those of *Une visite à l'exposition de 1889* and *La vengeance d'une orpheline russe*. But when Tzara chose to discuss the contemporary relevance of the other plays in order to demonstrate the period feel of Rousseau's writing, he could well have introduced the work. That *Une visite* relates to a specific moment in time is, of course, clear from the title: the play follows a group of country visitors on their trip to Paris to see the famous exhibition, of which details in the play reveal that Rousseau had himself been an attentive visitor.¹⁶ Likewise, although set in the



26. Portrait of Henri Rousseau, by Robert Delaunay. 1914. 71 by 60 cm. (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris).

d'ailleurs aussi qu'une seule édition de luxe, à tirage limité, aurait un succès. Or pour cela le prix que vous demandez est beaucoup trop haut. Vous devriez peut-être vous arranger avec le sans pareil, pour recevoir les droits d'auteur – les plus hauts qu'on paie sont de 17% sur le prix fort. Le sans pareil imprimerait le livre et vous donnerait 2 fois par an le pourcentage sur les exemplaires vendus. Ecrivez-moi si cette solution vous conviendrait, je le proposerai au Sans Pareil, elle me paraît juste et avantageuse.' Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Fonds Delaunay, box 30, Tzara dossier. Yann Le Pichon saw the manuscript copies of the two complete plays at the Tzara household and recalls that they had been sold to Tzara by S. Delaunay; conversation (Sèvres, 27th August 2003), following the present writer's discovery in June 2003 of the dactyl copies of the play at the Fonds Tristan Tzara, Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris.

⁹ S. Delaunay wrote to Tzara, 25th May 1945, offering him 'les 2 manuscrits d'Henri Rousseau, que j'ai achetés cet hiver, trouvant qu'ils étaient dans les mains de gens qui ne sauraient rien en faire. Je crois que cela vous ferait plaisir et pour les manuscrits ils seraient dans de bonnes mains'; document cited at note 5 above.

¹⁰ 'L'art, à la lumière de cette figuration, est une entité indivisible, les moyens par lesquels il prend forme n'en étant que les accidents fortuits. L'artiste réagit ainsi contre toute spécialisation dans les domaines différents de l'art, la technique pouvant s'apprendre comme tout autre méti-

er. De là le caractère artisanal des peintures dites naïves: l'action de peindre se réduit à un moyen appliqué à l'expression d'une vision ou d'un sentiment préalable'; Tzara, op. cit. (note 6), p.9.

¹¹ '... cette manière de considérer la technique comme détachée de l'activité de l'artiste, peut aussi constituer un but en soi'; *ibid.*, p.10.

¹² '... [les] nouveaux poncifs qui sont en train de s'édifier sur les ruines de l'académisme traditionnel'; *ibid.*, p.11.

¹³ 'C'est toutefois dans la peinture que Rousseau s'est élevé jusqu'à un éclat incomparable que peu de ses contemporains – qui souvent mêlaient à leur admiration le sentiment d'une légère ironie – ont vu briller de ses feux véritables'; *ibid.*, pp.11–12.

¹⁴ '“L'Etudiant en goguette”, comédie en deux actes et trois tableaux, que nous ne publions pas dans la présente édition, est une pièce légère moins originale que les deux premières. Elle nous a paru ne pas apporter à notre essai de dégager de sa légende l'esprit du Douanier, un élément d'information suffisamment fondé'; *ibid.*, p.30.

¹⁵ H. Rousseau: *L'Etudiant en goguette*, unpublished typescript, Paris, Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet Littéraire, Fonds Tristan Tzara, T2R762.

¹⁶ Numerous guidebooks to the exhibition were produced, and the exhibits listed correspond with those that Rousseau describes in his play; one such guide is *Guide du visiteur à l'exposition Universelle de 1889*, Paris 1889.



27. *The football players*, by Henri Rousseau. 1908. 100 by 91 cm. (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York).

1840s, *La vengeance d'une orpheline russe* (a melodrama about deception and comeuppance in love) can also be seen to have close connections to the time in which it was written. As Tzara remarked, the handwritten date that appears on the cover of the manuscript is 1899, the year that the Tsar Nicholas II visited Paris.¹⁷ However, if it lacks the 'sophistication' of its counterparts, *L'Etudiant en goguette* also reflects its era.¹⁸ Much of the action in the work takes place in the notorious *fin-de-siècle* bar Le Chat Noir, well known in the narrative of the Parisian avant-garde of the late nineteenth century. In addition, the slang that Rousseau uses in writing the dialogue given to its clientele was undoubtedly fitting. For example, the student Jolibois fils (wearing only his underpants) exclaims upon seeing the prostitute Nichon Rose undress: 'Yes, let's hurry, there's nothing to say, you have a pair of tits like balloons, and an arse like a brewer's horse. He slaps her behind and says: Oh, my, that's good.'¹⁹ Clearly, even if this language was 'authentic of an era', it would have been difficult for Tzara to publish it while maintaining that the Douanier deserved serious consideration.

¹⁷ Tzara, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.32.

¹⁸ It is likely that *L'Etudiant en goguette* was written before *Une visite à l'exposition de 1889* and *La vengeance d'une orpheline russe*. Although no historical source is available to suggest a dating, it is likely that the work was written in the 1880s during the heyday of *Le chat noir*, and the theme of the piece (the provincial visitor in Paris) seems to anticipate the more resolved working of that scenario in *Une visite à l'exposition de 1889*.

¹⁹ 'Jolibois fils en caleçon: Oui, hâtons-nous, il n'y a pas à dire, tu as une paire de nichons on dirait des ballons, tu as une paire de fesses comme une jument de brasseur. Il lui tape sur les fesses en disant Oh que c'est bon'; Rousseau, document cited at note 15, act 2, scene 1.

²⁰ 'Rigolette (entrant avec Jolibois fils): Tu vois, mon petit chaton, voici ma chambre, elle est coquette et nous y serons bien pour faire l'amour. Jolibois fils: Oui, ma nymphe, c'est chic chez toi, ici l'on peut le dire. (Il renifle et fait la réflexion) Ça sent la cocotte ici. Rigolette: Oui certainement, et cela sent aussi la femme chic, on y respire l'odeur des diverses plantes qui

L'Etudiant en goguette was also unsuited to Tzara's argument because, in dealing with a sexual theme (albeit in an unsophisticated way), the play introduced the possibility of double entendre:

Rigolette enters with Jolibois fils: You see, my kitten, here's my bedroom, it's stylish and we'll be happy here making love.

Jolibois fils: Yes, my nymph, you can say that again. (He sniffs and ponders) It smells like a perfume factory in here.

Rigolette: Certainly, and that's what stylish women smell like, you can smell the scents of the many plants that breathe out their sweet perfume to chase away the polluted air of these hotel rooms.

Jolibois fils moves towards the unmade bed and says: But this bed has a strange smell; is it that of love, mixed with all the other scents we can smell here? Yes, it smells of love, love that's beautiful and good.²⁰

Such dialogue is surprising and suggestive, especially when its language is considered in relation to the fact that, for a time, Rousseau shared his lodgings with Alfred Jarry.²¹ Of course, the treatment of sexuality in *L'Etudiant en goguette* is far from avant-garde, but the fact that Rousseau broached it in his writing suggests his awareness of contemporary trends in literature.²² The idea of there being several levels of meaning in the Douanier's writing may well have intrigued Tzara intellectually, but it was fundamentally at odds with the picture he had created of Rousseau as a logical artist who, though not 'simple', nonetheless 'called things by their name'.²³ The artist was sincere, he explained, and recognised the proper value of each incident or item he depicted. It was this working method, Tzara proposed, that connected Rousseau with the Italian artists of the quattrocento, as well as creating visual affinities between his work and that of 'popular' painters. But the context in which Rousseau lived and worked – late nineteenth-century Paris – revolutionised the implications of such an approach. The visual information offered by modernity was overwhelming and unprecedented. To impose a personal order on all this required pictorial synthesis; accordingly, the Douanier simplified and condensed what he saw to convey his experience within the boundaries of the picture plane.²⁴ It was his success in doing so that, for Tzara, tied the artist 'to the blueprint of modern life'.²⁵ Accordingly, Rousseau's modernity was not only visible in works where he chose to incorporate flying machines or other conspicuously new motifs. More important, beyond such literal examples, this 'synthesis of movement' was present in quotidian scenes, as in *The football players* (Fig.27), 'where the stripes of the jerseys transmit a poignant moment of great feeling'. Similarly, he continued, 'the telegraph wires that cross some of his landscapes stamp the rhythm of a modern optimism on the distant solitude of the countryside'.²⁶

This 'simultaneity', as Tzara dubbed it, was clearer still in Rousseau's plays, because here the synthesis of movement was less successful.²⁷ In the Douanier's writing, the importance placed on conveying vision in its entirety overtook the practical constraints of

répandent leur suave parfum pour chasser l'air trop souvent vicié de ses chambres d'hôtel. Jolibois fils (s'en va ensuite vers le lit découvert et dit): Mais de ce lit il s'exhale une drôle d'odeur; est-ce que ce serait celle de l'amour mêlée à tous les autres parfums que nous respirons ici? Oui, ça sent l'amour, ce bel et bon amour'; ibid.

²¹ Jarry, who had known the Douanier since about 1894, stayed with Rousseau between August and November 1897, following his eviction from his home on the boulevard de Port-Royal; see J. Fell: 'Alfred Jarry: an imagination in revolt', Ph.D. diss. (University of Bristol, 1997), pp.225–34. Perhaps Rousseau, so eager for fame, was inspired by the creator of Ubu and *L'amour en visites* when he chose to write his own plays.

²² I discussed the relationship between Rousseau and Jarry, and the 'cinematic' composition of the Douanier's work, in a paper entitled 'Rousseau and Jarry; fragmentation and spectacle' given at a seminar at Wolfson College, Oxford University, in July 2001.

²³ '... je ne dis pas simples, mais en tout cas disposés à nommer les choses par leur nom et à

the *mise-en-scène*. If, as a painter, the Douanier ignored conventions of perspective, making figures larger or smaller depending on their importance and regardless of their actual size, as a writer he was untroubled by the practical constraints of theatrical space. For example, when two of the characters elope at the end of the first act of *La vengeance*, there is an exchange of letters written as actual correspondence, with no scenic notations from the author. An actual escape in a horse-drawn carriage follows suit. Of course, this train of events would have been impossible to stage; the Douanier's first biographer explained that the Théâtre du Châtelet rejected one of Rousseau's plays for this very reason.²⁸ But, as Tzara explained, the artist's ability to express a wealth of information so succinctly reflected the way modernity demanded new concepts of time and movement. For him, the artist's 'economy of action' was symptomatic of new ways of seeing, making Rousseau's work a natural precursor to film. Broken up into frames, the viewer's mind and eye are forced to connect the tableaux that the Douanier describes: 'Having become accustomed to a scene', Tzara wrote, 'the swift movement which is imposed on us, from past to future or to a different location, demands an effort of abstraction, analogy and deduction by our intelligence which, like a ladder as opposed to a staircase, removes all that is unnecessary, forcing us to accept the same principle of continuity that lies at the very heart of cinema.'²⁹

L'Étudiant en goguette also offers examples of condensed information that could be read in this 'cinematic' way. For example, at one point in the second act, the characters appear in different costumes without having undressed or left the stage. This action, quite alien to theatrical practice, might make sense if the scene were conceived of as broken into frames. But it is a less appropriate illustration of Tzara's theory than the passage he selected from *La vengeance*, for, rather than suggesting a disregard for a conventional approach to composition, this part of *L'Étudiant* was potential evidence that 'naïve' Rousseau was ignorant of the playwright's craft. The piece seems hurriedly written; the presence of such oddities in this work is more confusing than suggestive.

The problems posed by Rousseau's use of language in *L'Étudiant en goguette* go beyond his apparent haste of execution. Here, on occasion, the use of slang by the Douanier's characters extends to his own stage directions. Tzara would have been aware that this could bring the artist's creative authority into question. Rousseau's use of informal language in this context might even have encouraged readers to make literal associations between the painter and the characters in his plays, as some admirers had already done. Robert Delaunay, for example, reflecting upon the rural family in *Une visite*, observed that 'Rousseau knew them and depicted them well; didn't he himself arrive, via the same railway station, from his village, attracted by city life?'³⁰ When the details of Rousseau's biography are considered, it is clear that Delaunay's image of his friend was romanticised. The Douanier, who depicted himself as every inch the *artiste-peintre* in his famous self-portrait (Fig. 28), did not



28. *Myself, portrait-landscape*, by Henri Rousseau. 1890. 143 by 110 cm. (Národní Galerie, Prague).

consider himself as sharing the same status as the country visitors in his play. Indeed, this is suggested in *Une visite*, for here the artist gives caricatured accents to the Breton family he describes, while writing the rest of the piece in more or less correct French. In *La vengeance*, a similar distance is imposed between the writer and the comic servants whose speeches contrast with the tone of the work and with the artist's stage directions. But the same is not true of *L'Étudiant en goguette*. Here, the writer shares a common dialect with his characters, a language removed, as one of them puts it, from 'that of [...] classical books'.³¹ The reader is left wondering whether there really is much difference between the characters and the author responsible for them.³² At one point in his directions, Rousseau describes a character as shouting at 'screaming pitch', his notes adopting the style of the action itself.³³ In this instance, the language is unmistakably that of 'les petits gens', the people of Rousseau's social class. Of course, Tzara was aware that many of the artist's admirers had made

se contenter de leur évocation, se scarifier, s'envelopper d'une coque imperméable aux influences de l'extérieur'; Tzara, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 24.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²⁵ 'Rousseau s'y trouvait intimement lié et quoique situé sur le plan strict de la vie moderne'; *ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁶ 'Je pense non seulement à la représentation de l'avion et du dirigeable dans une de ses toiles, . . . , mais surtout à l'admirable composition des Joueurs de Football où les rayures des maillots servent à rendre à un instantané la valeur vécue d'un moment pathétique, comme les fils télégraphiques qui parcourent certains de ses paysages, impriment le rythme déterminé d'un modernisme optimiste jusque dans la solitude éloignée des campagnes'; *ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁸ W. Uhde: *Henri Rousseau*, Paris 1911, p. 15.

²⁹ 'Après avoir été imprégnés d'une scène, le brusque transport qu'on nous impose dans le passé ou l'avenir ou dans un endroit différent, suppose de notre intelligence un effort d'abstraction,

d'analogie et de deduction qui, pareil à une échelle par rapport à un escalier, supprime ce qui n'est pas essentiellement nécessaire, tout en nous contraignant à accepter le principe de continuité sur lequel est basée la fonction même du cinéma'; Tzara, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 14.

³⁰ 'Rousseau les connaît et les dépeint bien; lui-même n'est-il pas venu par la même gare, de son patelin, attiré par la vie de la cité?'; R. Delaunay: 'Mon ami Henri Rousseau', *Tous les Arts* (21st August 1957), pp. 11–12.

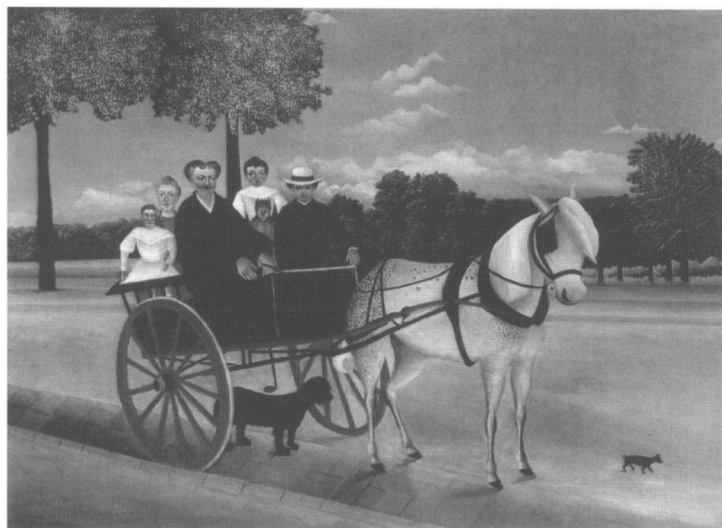
³¹ Jolibois fils, responding to Nichon Rose's heated advances, says: 'Oh que me dis-tu là, quel est ce langage, ce n'est pas celui de mes livres classiques'; Rousseau, document cited at note 15, act 2, scene 1.

³² In a fight at the start of *ibid.*, act one, the prostitutes Titine and Nichon Rose exchange a stream of insults, in a tone that is typical of the play: 'sale chipie, vieille saucisse ravageuse [. . .], sale cholera, vieux boudin à resort.'

³³ At the end of *ibid.*, act one, Jolibois père is described as calling for his manservant at 'tue-tête'.

much of the fact that Rousseau had been of a different standing from his avant-garde peers.³⁴ The critic Alfred Basler, for example, claimed that both the artist's life and art were imbued with features typical of 'the little people from the suburbs'.³⁵ This was precisely the kind of reading that Tzara wished to surpass by looking beyond the prejudices of the 'so-called greats' who described Rousseau and his kind as 'little people'.³⁶ By denying exposure to *L'Étudiant en goguette*, Tzara deprived admirers such as Basler of ammunition to reinforce their class-driven reading of his work. However, in doing so he also protected his own argument about the artist's approach to composition, for it could be said that when in *L'Étudiant en goguette* the characters' voices and the voice of the author overlap, 'content' and 'technique' – those two separate entities that Tzara recognises in Rousseau's painting – become inseparable.

Tzara's fear of supporting analogies between the Douanier's life and his works might have been a further reason behind his disregard of *L'Étudiant*. One other critic who knew the play, Tzara's associate Philippe Soupault, had already invoked it to support correspondences between the play and Rousseau's works on canvas, in an analogy of exactly the kind Tzara wished to avoid. In 1926, Soupault had concluded an article for *L'Amour de l'art* by explaining how Rousseau had 'left unfinished a charming comedy that brings to mind [his] paintings of weddings, and the one known as *M. Junier's cart*'.³⁷ For Tzara, *Père Junier's cart* (Fig. 29) was, like *The football players*, a prime example of Rousseau's 'simultaneity', a perfect demonstration of how the artist was able to synthesise information in his painting, rather than giving an illustration of a particular social group. By omitting *L'Étudiant en goguette*, Tzara made his point and avoided openly contradicting Soupault.



29. *Père Junier's cart*, by Henri Rousseau. 1908. 97 by 129 cm. (Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris).

³⁴ See C. Green: 'The "Otherness" of Rousseau', lecture given at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, in 2001; to be published as 'The Great and the Small: Picasso, Henri Rousseau and "The People"', in C. Green: *Picasso. Architecture and Vertigo*, New Haven and London, forthcoming. Green argues that, in the early twentieth-century art world, Rousseau was regarded as one of the 'petites gens' to the avant-garde's 'grands hommes' such as Picasso.

³⁵ 'Notre Douanier, ne se confondait-il pas avec les petites gens du faubourg qui fuient, le dimanche, à la belle saison, leur morne quartier pour aller s'étendre sur l'herbe, aux talus des fortifs, dans les bois de Vincennes ou de Clamart? Le rêve de Rousseau ne dépassait pas celui de ces humbles. C'était leur vision du paysage qu'il réalisait sur la toile'; A. Basler: 'Le "Douanier" Henri Rousseau', *L'Art Vivant* (15th October 1926), p. 778.

³⁶ Tzara, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 25.

³⁷ 'Il laissa inachevée une charmante comédie qui fait penser aux tableaux des Noces et à celui que l'on intitule La Cariole de M. Junier'; P. Soupault: 'La légende du Douanier Rousseau', *L'Amour de l'art* 7 (October 1926), p. 377.



30. *City of Paris*, by Robert Delaunay. 1910–12. 267 by 406 cm. (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris).

Another friendship may have shaped Tzara's writing of his preface. The issue of Rousseau's 'simultaneity' was potentially incendiary in the light of Tzara's friendship with Sonia Delaunay. The ideas that Tzara recognised in Rousseau's art – and in particular his interest in presenting a seen reality – connected with those that Robert and Sonia Delaunay had explored in the years following their friendship with the Douanier. As a young painter, Robert Delaunay had clearly been influenced by Rousseau. He frequently acknowledged his greatness as a painter, vowing to do all that he could to perpetuate his friend's memory, and even quoting from Rousseau's self-portrait in his own *City of Paris* (Fig. 30). But, as is revealed in a letter he sent to August Macke in 1913, Delaunay believed that his artistic endeavours at that time were the fruit of his own initiatives: 'Rousseau, my old friend, in the *Snake-charmer*, didn't he arrange the stars in the sky according to his own free will? Our vision reaches the stars. We can see the whole universe simultaneously'.³⁸ Delaunay, it would seem, saw the new generation of artists as inspired by Rousseau, but not necessarily as followers of his particular practice. Tzara, in contrast, believed that Rousseau had had a far more profound effect on the young avant-garde: 'From the oil lamp of Rousseau to the guitar, the newspaper, playing cards and tobacco-packet of Picasso, Braque and Gris, the route . . . passes the "Eiffel Tower" of Delaunay and his "Windows"'.³⁹ However, the 'simultaneity' that critics recognised in Delaunay's art of about 1913 – a theoretical approach to painting incorporating Chevreul's law of the simultaneous contrast of colours – was not the same as that which Tzara identified in Rousseau in 1947.⁴⁰ There was, of course, more to Delaunay's art than a mere aping of the Douanier's methods. Thus, although he might have been tempted, Tzara bare-

³⁸ 'Rousseau, mon vieil ami, n'a-t-il pas dans la *Charmeuse*, selon sa volonté, distribué les étoiles dans le ciel! Nous voyons jusqu'aux étoiles. Nous pouvons voir tout l'Univers Simultanique'; undated letter from R. Delaunay to A. Macke, [1913], quoted in G. Bernier and M. Schneider-Maunoury: *Robert et Sonia Delaunay, Naissance de l'art abstrait*, Paris 1982, p. 122.

³⁹ 'De la lampe à pétrole de Rousseau à la guitare, au journal, aux cartes à jouer et au paquet de tabac de Picasso, de Braque et de Gris, le chemin . . . passe par la "Tour Eiffel" de Delaunay et ses "Fenêtres"'; Tzara, *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 17.

⁴⁰ For examples of contemporary reactions to the Delaunays' 'simultaneity', see P. Rousseau: 'Anthologie', in exh. cat. *Robert Delaunay 1906–1914: de l'impressionnisme à l'abstraction*, Paris (Centre Georges Pompidou) 1999, pp. 238–64.

⁴¹ For the Delaunays at the Bal Bullier, see P. Rousseau: 'La Parisienne de Robert Delaunay: La mode simultaniste ou les couleurs de la modernité', in exh. cat. *Robert Delaunay, Saint Tropez* (Musée de l'Annonciade) 1997, esp. pp. 95–104.

ly mentions Delaunay's work in his appreciation of Rousseau and his discreet references to the 'Eiffel Tower' and 'Windows' series are sufficient to evoke a possible connection between two kinds of 'simultaneous' painting. Surprisingly, he makes no mention of Delaunay's *Cardiff team*, despite its similarity to Rousseau's *Football players*. Perhaps he omitted this in order to avoid any suggestion of mimicry; Robert Delaunay had only recently died and Tzara had acquired the Rousseau manuscripts solely with the help of Sonia Delaunay.

Sensitivity towards this friendship may thus have added weight to Tzara's decision to leave *L'Etudiant en goguette* unpublished. As well as rendering Rousseau a potential disservice, the third play might also have brought the novelty of Robert and Sonia Delaunay's art into question. Notably, the last act of *L'Etudiant en goguette* invokes a location that had become closely associated with the formation of the couple's artistic originality: the Bal Bullier. Here, where Rousseau's imaginary characters revel, in real life the Delaunays later danced, wearing their self-designed outfits to the delight of the

Parisian avant-garde.⁴¹ In doing so, they considered themselves to be living as 'all-round artists' – as more sophisticated versions, it could be said, of Tzara's 'Renaissance' Rousseau. Clearly though, even if the Delaunays had been introduced to this popular location by Rousseau (and it is worth remembering that for Robert Delaunay, part of Rousseau's appeal was his authentic 'popular' character), their activities there after his death were far removed from those of the cast of *L'Etudiant en goguette*. The play's company takes the opportunity to drink and sing comic songs at the Bullier; Tzara would not have wanted to suggest that the Delaunays simply followed their lead.

Although *L'Etudiant en goguette* is of interest to those studying Rousseau today, at the time of writing his preface, Tzara had more to lose than gain by its release. This curious comedy would have jeopardised the reputation of the Douanier, but more importantly, it would have softened the impact of Tzara's reassessment of Rousseau. In its ability to illuminate the artist's creativity, Tzara's preface far surpasses the Douanier's long-forgotten play.

Francis Picabia's 'Américaine' from the cover of '391', July 1917

by MARIEA CAUDILL DENNISON

DURING THE 1910S AND 1920S Francis Picabia often appropriated images from the realm of science and technology to construct his Dada creations, and in some of these works he associated electricity with women.¹ A corset in the shape of a woman's torso was integrated into the electrical system of an automobile in his *De Zayas! De Zayas!* (1915), and an American woman was presented as a spark plug in *Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité* (1915).²

In 1917, Picabia was in New York City where he published several issues of his journal 391. For the July cover of the magazine, the artist again linked women to electricity when he acquired a (readymade) photograph of a light bulb, modified it by adding the words 'flirt' and 'divorce', and entitled it *Américaine* (Fig. 31).³ The work has generally been interpreted as a depiction of an American type. Wanda Corn argued that Picabia perceived American women as athletically muscular, sexually robust figures who were independent decision makers, and she suggested that the artist equated these characteristics with the stocky, energy-filled bulb published on

the cover of 391.⁴ William Camfield asserted that in *Américaine* Picabia was drawing parallels between the "on/off" action of a light bulb' and the terms that the artist inscribed on the photograph.⁵ Researchers have overlooked additional words on the bulb that are key to understanding the illustration.

In *Américaine*, Picabia used a widely known and aggressively advertised American product to symbolise American women. If the illustration on the cover of 391 is inverted, characters that were etched in the glass of the bulb can be discerned near its metal base. They are the first letters of the words Edison and Mazda, registered trademarks. A portion of the famous GE (General Electric) logo is also visible on the lamp, the term used for a light bulb in the early twentieth century.

The Edison Lamp Works began manufacturing light bulbs in the 1880s.⁶ Trademarks on the lamps shown in Edison advertisements of 1914 and 1915 make clear the source of the lettering on Picabia's bulb (Figs. 32 and 33). The squat proportions of the globe and the distinctive configuration of the filament confirm the identification of the image as an Edison Mazda of the type that was manufactured in the mid-1910s (Fig. 34).

In 1909, the Mazda trademark was registered by the General Electric Company. The word was derived from the name of a Persian mythological figure who was associated with light and knowledge. To understand Picabia's use of the bulb, it is necessary to recognise that Mazda was not a product; it was the name of a service.

¹ W.A. Camfield: 'The machinist style of Francis Picabia', *Art Bulletin* 48 (1966), pp.309–22; see also M.C. Dennison: 'Automobile parts and accessories in Picabia's machinist works of 1915–17', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 143 (2001), pp.276–83.

² Both works by Picabia were published in the July–August issue of 291.

³ W.A. Camfield: *Francis Picabia: His art, life and times*, Princeton 1976, p.104. Picabia included English words in *Américaine*, but the French title suggests that he was depicting a European view of the American woman.

⁴ W. Corn: *The great American thing: modern art and national identity, 1915–1935*, Berkeley 1999, p.66; the words 'Edison Mazda' appear more clearly in Corn's fig.47 than in most published reproductions of *Américaine*. According to Corn (p.66), the words 'flirt' and 'divorce' refer to the American woman's 'sexuality and her independence from the conventions surrounding marriage'. Comments published in popular magazines of the day suggest that Europeans were astonished by young American women's ability and willingness to flirt. In 1903, Mrs Philip Gilbert Hamerton remembered that in the early 1860s 'flirtation – even as a word – was

unknown in France'; see 'The modern French girl', *Scribner's Magazine* (June 1903), p.757. 'What the European women denounce in the young American is the abuse of flirtation', explained Juliette Adam in 'Those American girls in Europe', *North American Review* (October 1890), p.401. The French writer C. de Varigny, who visited the United States to observe American women, devoted a full chapter to flirtation in his book *La femme aux Etats Unis*, Paris 1893; see 'Girls American and French', *Littell's Living Age* (August 1893), p.443. Picabia's inverted reflection of the words 'divorce' and 'flirt' could suggest the contrary views or behaviour of French and American women. Even some US writers criticised the young American woman for 'the lightness with which she enters marriage', and one noted: 'We throw up our hands to Heaven at the increasing divorce statistics'; see 'The American girl', *Ladies Home Journal* (May 1908), p.5.

⁵ Camfield, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.104.

⁶ J.W. Howell and H. Schroeder: *History of the incandescent lamp*, Schenectady 1927, pp.64–65.