

TaTa Dada: The Real Life and Celestial Adventures of Tristan Tzara (MIT Press)

By Marius Hentea

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Tristan Tzara, one of the most important figures in the twentieth century's most famous avant-garde movements, was born Samuel Rosenstock (or Samueli Rosen?tok) in a provincial Romanian town, on April 16 (or 17, or 14, or 28) in 1896. Tzara became Tzara twenty years later at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, when he and others (including Marcel Janco, Hugo Ball, Richard Huelsenbeck, and Hans Arp) invented Dada with a series of chaotic performances including multilingual (and nonlingual) shouting, music, drumming, and calisthenics. Within a few years, Dada (largely driven by Tzara) became an international artistic movement, a rallying point for young artists in Paris, New York, Barcelona, Berlin, and Buenos Aires. With *TaTa Dada*, Marius Hentea offers the first English-language biography of this influential artist.

As the leader of Dada, Tzara created "the moment art changed forever." But, Hentea shows, Tzara and Dada were not coterminous. Tzara went on to publish more than fifty books; he wrote one of the great poems of surrealism; he became a recognized expert on primitive art; he was an active antifascist, a communist, and (after the Soviet repression of the Hungarian Revolution) a former communist. Hentea offers a detailed exploration of Tzara's early life in Romania, neglected by other scholars; a scrupulous assessment of the Dada years; and an original examination of Tzara's life and works after Dada. The one thing that remained constant through all of Tzara's artistic and political metamorphoses, Hentea tells us, was a desire to unlock the secrets and mysteries of language.

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TaTa Dada: The Real Life and Celestial Adventures of Tristan Tzara (MIT Press) By Marius Hentea Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1343050 in Books
- Published on: 2014-09-12
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 1.13" w x 7.00" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 368 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

Tristan Tzara, the daddy of Dada, the French communist, and the involuntary Kabbalist, emerge reconciled in this well-researched and engaging biography. An adult scholar has written with sympathetic integrity about the enfant terrible of the 20th century, and has revealed the golden thread linking the many faces of Tzara: poetry. Marius Hentea's attention to poetry compellingly places Tzara in the company of the greatest French poets.

(Andrei Codrescu, author of *The Posthuman Dada Guide: Tzara and Lenin Play Chess*)

In the past decades, there have been dozens of books on Dada, but its founder, Tristan Tzara (born Samueli Rosenstock in the Romanian town of Moine?ti) remains elusive. In this, the first Tzara biography in English, Hentea brilliantly recaptures Tzara's various incarnations -- from Jewish *shtetl* boy to sophisticated *Gymnasium* student, to Dada provocateur and nihilist, to reluctant Surrealist, Stalinist, and finally, in the post-World War II years, to ardent student of medieval poetry. The picture of virulent anti-Semitism in turn-of-the-century Romania is especially striking and provides a new perspective on the deeper motives that brought Dada into being. Anyone interested in the avant-garde will want to read this superb book!

(Marjorie Perloff, Professor Emerita of Humanities, Stanford University; author of *The Futurist Moment* and *Unoriginal Genius*)

Marius Hentea has provided us with a richly researched and fluently written biography of Tristan Tzara, which closely follows this complex poet and avant-garde activist through a myriad of displacements and changes of direction. With an impressive command of published and archival sources in both French and Romanian, Hentea not only enriches our knowledge of the most familiar period of Tzara's career, the years of Zurich and Paris Dada, he also motivates new interest in several less-known episodes of his life: Samuel Rosenstock-Tristan Tzara's origins in pre-World War I Romania, his engagements during the Spanish Civil War, his activity in hiding as a foreign-born Jew in France during World War II, his fraught relations with the Communist Party over the 1956 Hungarian uprising, his role in the scholarly canonization of Dadaism, his obsessive research into poetic anagrams late in his life, and much more. *TaTa Dada* marks a major achievement in modernist and avant-garde studies.

(Tyrus Miller, Professor of Literature, University of California, Santa Cruz)

Hentea's biography succeeds in capturing the effervescence of its subject, without being willing to take Tzara invariably at his own word; rarely succeeding, thankfully, in pinning him down, it does catch, in flashes, his essence like lightning in a bottle as he speeds by on his celestial adventures.

(*Bookslut*)

It is rather shocking that it took almost a 100 years after the 'official' 1916 start of Dada in Zurich for a first

comprehensive biography to be published in English on its main instigator Tristan Tzara. Beautifully designed and with a title worthy of this poet that points to his first ever published book *La Première Aventure céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine*, it makes for a truly enticing read.

(Edith Doove *Leonardo Reviews*)

The antics of the Dadaists, at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1916 and after the war in various European cities, are notorious. What they actually signified is more problematic, and there is much to be learnt from this carefully documented and extensively illustrated biography of the Rumanian-born Tristan Tzara, who played a key role in the movement.

(Ian Birchall *Review 31*)

Marius Hentea has gone into a great deal of detail to tell Tzara's story and his book is well-researched (there are fifty pages of notes) and is a mine of information about Dada and surrealist events, little magazines, small-presses, and a variety of ephemeral publications.

(Jim Burns *The Northern Review of Books*)

TaTa Dada offers a treasure trove of local insights (including the old riddle of the origins of the "Tristan Tzara" moniker), but the book comes into its own as a reassessment of the history of Dada itself -- of the movement's origins, as well as of its often contradictory artistic aims. Besides its considerable merits as a biography and an astute historical account of Dadaism, Hentea's book offers a much-needed re-evaluation of the place of the Central European avant-gardes in the development of what we have come to call, in reductive shorthand, "modernism."

(*Modernism/Modernity*)

Marius Hentea has given us what will probably be the book in English on Tristan Tzara for some time: splendidly written, thoroughly researched, balanced and sophisticated, and infected by his subject's creative energy. With its eye-catching design and generous illustrations, there is also something distinctly Dada about *TaTa Dada,* for which the publishers deserve their fair share of praise.

(*Times Literary Supplement*)

About the Author
Marius Hentea, a Romanian-born literary scholar, is an Associate Professor of English Literature at the University of Gothenburg. He is the author of *Henry Green at the Limits of Modernism.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Consuelo Collier:

As people who live in often the modest era should be change about what going on or info even knowledge to make all of them keep up with the era and that is always change and progress. Some of you maybe will

probably update themselves by looking at books. It is a good choice for yourself but the problems coming to anyone is you don't know which one you should start with. This TaTa Dada: The Real Life and Celestial Adventures of Tristan Tzara (MIT Press) is our recommendation to help you keep up with the world. Why, because this book serves what you want and wish in this era.

Mary Sylvester:

Typically the book TaTa Dada: The Real Life and Celestial Adventures of Tristan Tzara (MIT Press) has a lot of knowledge on it. So when you make sure to read this book you can get a lot of benefit. The book was published by the very famous author. The author makes some research prior to write this book. This kind of book very easy to read you may get the point easily after perusing this book.

Sandra Lowe:

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