

Dadaism 1915 – 1925

The first half of the twentieth century was a confusing time. The political turmoil that led to two world wars in three decades was rarely higher. Meanwhile, everyday life also changed dramatically due to the fast technological developments.

Poets and writers have obviously responded to this turbulence, especially in the period called the “world wars” between the First and the Second World War.

There are two main movements in the literature of our time: Modernism and the Avant-Garde. The more radical movement is called the “historical avant-garde.” This term is a collective term for a number of related movements such as Dadaism, Cubism, expressionism, futurism and constructivism.

The authors of the historical avant-garde found that the new world demanded a new art. First poetry was not so much reflect the “higher” or the feelings of the poet, but the new reality itself. Not only that they had to deal with different topics, the form and content, changed both.

Not only the form and content, the role of literature in society had to change. Instead of exclusive and unworldly, the avant-garde



imagined an art which went on the streets and prefer to stop pretending being art. Especially the Dada movement went far in this.

Dada, in 1916 originated in Zurich, was a movement that stood for “anti-art”.

Dadaists were not connected by their styles, mediums, or techniques. Instead, they were connected by their uniform practices and beliefs. They saw themselves as crusaders against rational thought, which they believed to be responsible for the declination of social structures, the growth of corrupt and nationalist politics, and the spread of violence and war.

The Dadaists had chosen for disruptive technologies, which meant:

- choice of literature for collage
- using ready-mades
- automatic writing
- exquisite corpse, what is a method by which a collection of words or images is collectively assembled,
- and other forms of improvisation, for example performances where they walk and move around and pronounce random words in different rhythms and volumes.

Every meaning of the words will be undermined. Their poems are “word salads” containing obscenities and every imaginable waste product of language.

Dadaism was, like Futurism, a short but intense art movement. The Dadaists mocked the values of that time. They threw the opinions about good taste in art and literature in the trash. Those opinions they regarded as cultural characteristics of a society composed of greed and materialism, war and misery as a result.

The Dadaist goal of art was not to have art be “an end in itself, but [to be] an opportunity for the true perception and criticism of the times we live in.”