

THE MESSENGERS

The development of the avant-garde in Romania was facilitated by the contribution of several personalities who played the part of **messengers** of the new art. Those messengers' names: Tristan Tzara, Constantin Brancusi, B. Fundoianu/Benjamin Fondane, Marcel Iancu/Janco, Victor Brauner. They were all Romanian and they all left their native country, at different times, for periods that ranged from a few years (Marcel Iancu returned to Romania after five years and left again, never to come back, twenty years later, to go to Israel), to the rest of their lives (Tzara, Brancusi, Fondane, Brauner). Brauner traveled several times between Bucharest and Paris in 1930-1938, and Brancusi came back to Romania more than once, especially to build his monumental complex at Targu-Jiu (the *Endless Column* and the *Table of Silence*), but the others did not return in any significant manner, except in their books published by friends: Fondane in 1930, with *Privelisti* (*Landscapes*), Tzara in 1934 with *Primele poeme* (*The First Poems*). During the first three decades of this century, from far away or from near-by, directly or indirectly, they were a catalyzer of novelty in the Romanian artistic and literary environment.

TRISTAN TZARA (1896-1963)

Samuel Rosenstock was the son of a Jewish bourgeois family of Moldavia, in eastern Romania. He was educated in the Romanian cultural and literary climate of the early 20th century, dominated by the confrontation of two models: on the one hand, there was the traditionalist tendency, preached by historian Nicolae Iorga, who had founded the *Samanatorul* magazine, and who wanted a literature "inspired" by the oral traditions of a nation of peasants, which had to enlighten the masses; on the other hand,

there was modernism, essentially urban, and which used a different language. These are some representatives of the new tendencies: Alexandru Macedonski, who introduced the symbolist aesthetics to Romania with his *Literatorul* magazine and literary circle, poet Ion Minulescu, who had already written by 1908 a collection called *Romante pentru mai tarziu* (*Romances for Later*), of a flamboyant symbolism, and Tudor Arghezi, who achieved in his poetic work a synthesis between tradition and modernism, being, however, strongly inclined to the renewal of the poetic language. Obviously, for the young people who were growing up during the first two decades of the century, familiar with French poetry in general and fed with French and Belgian symbolist poets, the symbolist aesthetics responded best to their need for originality and non-conformity in their relationship with the values of the past. Therefore, it was “ordained” that, when a group of young men, educated in a Bucharest high-school, decided in 1912 to start their own literary magazine, they should choose for it the name *Simbolul* (*Symbol*). Those young men’s names were Samuel Rosenstock, Eugen Iovanache (the future Ion Vinea) and Marcel Iancu: they were 16 (the first one) and 17 (the other two). The texts and drawings published on that occasion are not particularly interesting, but their action is: they were all involved in a quest for a voice and for an identity and they were at the starting point of a process that later accelerated.



DADA Phone, 7 (Paris)

As early as 1913, Samuel Rosenstock wrote poems to be published in Romania through the efforts of his friend Ion Vinea by the time he left for school, when the war was in full swing, to a neutral country, in Zurich. Those poems sometimes preserve the sound of the poet’s native rustic universe – which also marked *Landscapes* by Fundoianu/Fondane; Rosenstock’s poems were in fact published by Vinea in *Noua Revista Romana* (*The New Romanian Review*) and *Chemarea* (*The Call*), 1915, and, after 1922, in *Contimporanul*. They were published in a Romanian edition of 1934 and in two French editions after the death of Tristan Tzara, by Claude Sernet and Serge Fauchereau¹, respectively. Which proves, of course, their interest in the young poet before Dada, but, also, their hope of finding signs that announced Dada, some sort of a Dada archeology, in Tzara’s first signed texts.

In fact, there are such signs, but very low-key, very far from the manifestos and from the Dadaist texts proper, the “noisy”, “simultaneous” texts that only came three years later. What these early texts prove is a certain freedom from poetic conventions, a displacement of lyricism in favor of humor, irony, anti-lyricism and anti-sentimentalism. The syntactic relationships began to be abandoned and the text is built by juxtaposition, like in this vari-

ant of *Hamlet*, entitled *Tristete cosmica* (*Cosmic Sadness*) in the Sasa Pana edition:

*the horse is eating the night serpent
the garden has put on imperial decorations
the starry wedding dress – let me
kill in infinites, the night, the faithful flesh
the village madwoman is hatching clowns for the palace.*

More, in these poems there is something like a wish, a precognition of the departure, like in *Insereaza* (*Nightfall*), translated into French by Tzara himself, and read in the first Dada evening in Zurich, at the Cabaret Voltaire:

Come on, Mama, let's go, let's go

In the manuscripts of these first poems one can also notice the poet practicing his pen name, which he never abandoned from then on. During the ephemeral adventure at *Simbolul*, he had just barely deviated his first name, Samuel (his parents called him

Sami) – to Samyro, but in 1913 he found his

real pen name: Tristan Tzara. His manuscripts show

the various stages of his research: Tr. Tara (in Romanian pronounced *tsara*), Tristan Tara, and, finally, Tristan Tzara, which is based on: *Trist* (sad) *e in tara* (in this country) – “it is sad in this country.” So, his pen name is a synonym of melancholy, of a perceptible boredom and desire to leave.

“I do not write as a professional writer and I have no literary ambitions. I would have become a great adventurer, with sophisticated gestures, if I had had the physical strength and the psychological stamina to achieve this single goal: not to be bored.” *Open Letter to Jacques Rivière*, in *Littérature* (*Literature*), December, 1919.

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Tristan Tzara left Romania in 1915 and invented Dada in Zurich in 1916, as a remedy for the boredom his epoch was making him experience.

The Romanian poets and artists kept in touch with Tzara, as shown by the letters in the Tzara funds of the Jacques Doucet Literary Library – *Bibliothèque Littéraire “Jacques Doucet”*, Paris, published by Henri Béhar in *Manuscriptum*, Bucharest, numbers 2 and 3/1982. He exchanged letters with Ion Vinea first and later with Marcel Iancu, B. Fundoianu/Fondane, Ilarie Voronca, Claude Sernet, Jacques Costin, Sasa Pana. To them, Tristan Tzara was undoubtedly the model of an incomparable international success story, but he was still **one of them**, a spokesman, the man who histed their

flag in the middle of the continent. And, when they started their own avant-garde movement in Romania, with magazines and manifestos, they authorized themselves to borrow several concepts from their elder brother, as if they were drawing their sources from a common background:

(1)

"The new artist protests: he no longer paints (symbolic and illusionist reproduction), but he creates directly in stone, in wood, in iron, and in tin rocks, engine-organisms that can be turned around on all sides by the limpid wind of a transient sensation."

(2)

"...commercials and business are poetic elements, too."

(3)

"We need powerful, straight, precise works, forever incomprehensible."

Tristan Tzara, *Manifeste Dada 1918* (*Dada Manifesto* 1918), read on July 23, 1918 in the Zur Meise hall, Zurich, published in *Dada* 3, December 1918.

(1 bis)

"The true artist creates directly, without symbols, in earth, wood, or in verb, living organisms, machines that rip roads, cries violently starting, like roofs in a storm."

Ilarie Voronca, "Gramatica" (*Grammar*), *Punct*, No. 6-7, 1924.

(2 bis)

"... The most beautiful poem: the dollar fluctuation"

Ilarie Voronca, *AVIOGRAMA* (*Planegram*) – *Instead of a Manifesto*, 75HP, single issue, October, 1924.

(3 bis)

"The artist is never interested in the degree to which his work is comprehensible. On the contrary: the more incomprehensible it is, the more it will achieve greater value in art."

Ilarie Voronca, *Glasuri* (*Voices*), *Punct*, no. 8, 1925.



L. KASSAK, Cover TZARA (1924)

Tristan Tzara

Tn. Tzara



Marcel IANCU, Tristan Tzara Cavaret Voltaire (1916)

Tristan Tzara himself had stated that Dada belonged to everybody. A declaration reiterated in the authorization addressed to Man Ray, who wanted to start a Dada publication in New York City.

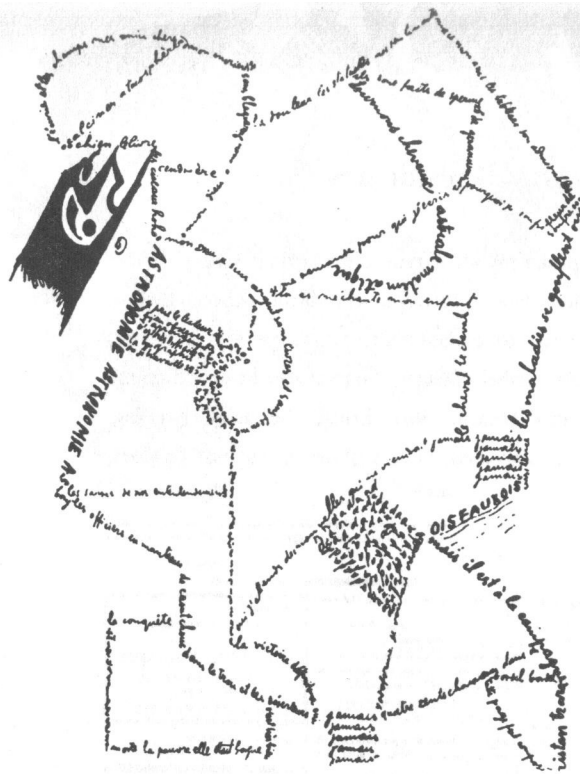
Tzara wrote to him, saying Dada belonged to everybody. He knew wonderful people whose names were Dada – Mr. Jean Dada, Mr. Gaston Dada; the Pope, in a piece by Ribemont-Dessaignes, was also named Zizi Dada – Tzara could provide dozens of examples. Dada belongs to everybody. Like the idea of God or that of toothbrush. There were very Dada people, more Dada people, there was Dada everywhere, all over the world, and in each individual. Like god the toothbrush (which was, in fact, an excellent idea), etc.

The text was published under the title *Eye-cover Art-cover Corset-cover Authorization* in the *New York Dada*, April, 1921.

Translated from French
by Monica VOICULESCU

NOTE

1. Sasa Pana, *Primele poeme ale lui Tristan Tzara urmate de insurectia de la Zürich* (*The First Poems of Tristan Tzara Followed by the Zurich Insurrection*), Bucharest, Unu, 1934; Tristan Tzara, *Les premiers poèmes* (*His First Poems*), translated from Romanian into French by Claude Sernet, Paris, Seghers, 1965; Tristan Tzara, *Poèmes roumains* (*Romanian Poems*), translated from Romanian into French, Foreword by Serge Fauchereau, Paris, Ed. de la Quinzaine littéraire, 1974.



Tristan TZARA, *Astronomy*-calligram
(1916)

LAPREMIÈRE
AVENTURE.CE
L'EST DE M. AN
TYPYRINE.PAR
T.TZARA.AVEC
DES.BOIS.GRA-
VÉS.ET.COLORI-
ÉS.PAR.M.IANCO
COLLECTION.DADA. F.