



4 Dada Suicides: Selected Texts of Arthur Cravan, Jacques Rigaut, Julien Torma, and Jacques Vaché

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This book collects together works by four "writers" on the fringes of the Dada movement in 1920's Paris. These four took the nihilism of the movement to its ultimate conclusion, their works are remnants of lives lived to the limit and then cast aside with nonchalance and abandon: Vache died of a drug overdose, Rigaut shot himself, Cravan and Torma simply vanished, their fates still a mystery. Yet their fragmentary works - to which they attached so little importance still exert a powerful allure and were a vital inspiration for the literary movements that followed them. Vache's bitter humour, Cravan's energetic invective, Rigaut's dandyfied introspection, and Torma's imperturbable asperity: all had their influence. This collection contains biographical introductions to each author as well as personal recollections by their contemporaries.

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tENTATIVELY, cONVENIENCE says

Suicide on the 'lunatic fringe'. A subject dear to my wrists. & arms. & legs. I always hope that the most talented, the most sensitive, will make it & live a long & happy life. But sometimes the odds seem against it. Esp as the robopathic society supresses the individual more & more. Here are 4 who gave the big fuck-you to what passes as 'life'.

Andrew says

I wish that someone would discover a trunkful of unpublished Arthur Cravan texts. Or that there would be a massive biography devoted to his exploits. This will have to do in the meantime. Essential reading.

C. Quabela says

I really enjoyed this collection. The biographies at the start of each section are fantastic, drawing from personal accounts of subsequent writers of that time. Although some of the "anti-art" pieces begin to lose their effect when drawn out for too long, the euphorisms of torma and fragments from Rigaut are brilliant. Even though I love Tzara these men are important to read to really feel Dada before it became the secularized (and thus self defeating) image that it gets portrayed as retrospectively.

Paul Osgerby says

The biographies of these artists is more interesting than the their writings. But their letters, essays, etc allow a glimpse into their personalities.

Most interesting characters: Cravan and Rigaut

Best writings: Torma and Vache

Tosh says

When suicide was an artform of some sort. These four nutty and wonderful poets had the flair of looking at death's door and thinking 'hmmm, why not?" Arthur Cravan is a film in the making. A prize fighter, a nephew of Oscar Wilde, hardcore trouble-maker, legendary poet-writer and a guy who went off to the sea by himself. The others are just as dramatic. And can they all write? Yeah, they can and they do it well. DADA is

and was a beautiful moment in the arts.

Matthew says

Quite an amazing anthology here. The book takes writings from four poets/writers tied to the Dada movements and looks at them through the lens of suicide. They discuss suicide in ways normal to the bizarre, where the act of suicide is a form of poetry and theatre in its own right. Unlike so many other anthologies of Dada writings, this one really holds together as a whole, largely because of the theme. Each set of writings is introduced by an essay that is scholarly in quality but still quite readable and relatively jargon-free. These essays really help set the stage for each writer, giving important pieces of their lives and relating them to the work that follows. I got this through the interlibrary loan service at my library, but I enjoyed it so much I think I'll try to find a copy for my own shelves. Still provocative and edgy today, this one is a must read for anyone with an interest in experimental or transgressive literature.

Sean says

While the title of this impressive volume is an arresting one, it's somewhat of a misnomer for a couple of reasons. First, only one of these fellows can properly be called a Dadaist. That would be Jacques Rigaut, though even he is said to have spent more time on the sidelines than actively participating. The others either prefigured Dadaism or were only loosely associated with it. However, their lives came to embody the spirit of Dadaism, perhaps even more so than its later proponents. Second, only one of the four is a confirmed suicide. That would once again be Jacques Rigaut, whose fictional final days were captured on film in *Le Feu Follet*, based on the novel written by Rigaut's friend Drieu la Rochelle. As for the others, Jacque Vaché overdosed on opium, the intentionality of which remains in dispute, while Cravan and Torma both simply disappeared, appropriately so, as they were certainly the most cryptic of the bunch.

Jacques Rigaut was obsessed with suicide so the nature of his end perhaps did not come as a surprise. He also hardly wrote at all and was generally silent for the last seven years of his life. Most of the writing that his reputation hinges on was published after his death. His piece *Lord Patchogue* is one of the most intriguing ones included in this collection.

Poet-boxer Arthur Cravan was a fascinating character who, like his contemporary B. Traven, was obsessed with obscuring his personal identity (one theory about Cravan's true identity even connects him with Traven). Nephew of Oscar Wilde, Cravan may have at one time made a living by forging Wilde manuscripts, which may also in turn have inspired his impersonation habit. Literary researchers are still sorting out the various strands of his life. Cravan was clearly a skilled writer, but perhaps too distracted by living life to devote enough time to his craft. His selections here are somewhat uneven in quality.

Julien Torma refused to align himself with anyone and barely wrote or published anything. Pursued by René Daumal and Roger Gilbert-Lecomte as a promising potential recruit for *Le Grand Jeu*, he rebuffed their offers and later disparaged their efforts in letters to Robert Desnos and to Daumal himself. In addition to a few letters to Daumal and others, he is represented here by the second of his two published books, *Euphorisms*, a collection of notes and observations characterized by a condescending, world-weary nihilism sprinkled liberally with word play, some of which was apparently too complex to translate. The only writer

Torma appeared to respect is Alfred Jarry, whose various pataphysical writings he often references.

Jacques Vaché was a good friend of and influence on André Breton, but died before Dadaism even came into being. Prone to dressing up in costume, he spent several resentful years serving in the military as a translator during WWI. His writing here is solely restricted to letters, which Breton later collected and published after his death. Overall they express Vaché's feelings of boredom and futility in the face of the war, but also his self-entertaining efforts to mitigate these feelings. Like Torma, Vaché was quite taken with Alfred Jarry and frequently integrates Jarry references into his writing.

These four men subverted the status quo more through how they lived than by what they wrote. And this seems appropriate given the emphasis that Dadaism placed on action. While there are definite highlights among the included selections, the strength of this volume is in the biographical portraits that form of these writers' (or anti-writers') lives.

LemontreeLime says

I remember that I read this, and i remember thinking it was fun, but I can't remember anything more than that and the one quote i used to have on my bulletin board that Cravan had written.

Gary Cummiskey says

This book gets 5 out of 5 from me! The only quibble I have is with the title: Of the four writers represented, only one of them - Riguat - was a confirmed suicide. Vache's death might have been an accidental overdose, while Cravan and Torma disappeared. Even then there is speculation that Cravan resurfaced in the 1920s (during which he posed as Andre Gide's secretary while trying to con people into buying forged Oscar Wilde manuscripts) and there is also speculation Torma never even existed!
