

Dada: The Painters and Poets, Ed. Robert Motherwell (Cambridge: Belknap P, 1981). Print. xxvii

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Moholy-Nagy writes that without "trying to define Schwitters' peculiar poetic quality, it can be said that most of his writing is emotional purgation, an outburst of subconscious pandemonium. But they are fused with external reality, with the existing social status. His verbal 'collages' are good examples of this. There the current of his thoughts is mixed with seemingly random quotations from newspapers, catalogues and advertising copy. With this technique—like Gertrude Stein—he uncovers symptoms of social decay known to all, but neglected or dodged in a kind of self-defense. The scene is Germany. Inflation after the war; corruption, waste, damage to material and man. An abortive social revolution makes the situation even more hopeless. Schwitters' writings of that time end with a desperate and at the same time challenging cry.

"In one of his demonstrations, he showed to the audience a poem containing only one letter on a sheet [1924]:



Then he started to 'recite' it with slowly rising voice. The consonant varied from a whisper to the sound of a wailing siren till at the end he barked with a shockingly loud tone. This was his answer not alone to the social situation but also to the degrading 'cherry-mouthed'—'raven-haired'—'babbling-brook'—poetry.

"The only possible solution seemed to be a return to the elements of poetry, to noise and articulated sound, which are fundamental to all languages. Schwitters realized the prophecy of Rimbaud, inventing words 'accessible to all five senses'. His Ursonata (1924) ['Primordial Sonata'] is a poem of thirty-five minutes duration, containing four movements, a prelude, and a cadenza in the fourth movement. The words used do not exist, rather they might exist in any language; they have no logical, only an emotional context; they affect the ear with their phonetic vibrations like music. Surprise and pleasure are derived from the structure and the inventive combination of the parts."