

Kurt Schwitters

The Onion

Merz Poem 8

Translated from the German by Harriet Watts.

Kurt Schwitters, born in Hanover in 1887, was a poet, monter, and typographer. From 1923 to 1932 he published the periodical *Merz*.

Harriet Watts's most recent translation is *The Vienna Group: Six Major Austrian Poets*, edited with Rosemarie Waldrop (Barrytown, 1985).

It was a most eventworthy day, the day on which I was to be butchered. (Fear not, have faith!) The King was ready, the two seconds were waiting. The butcher was scheduled for half past six: it was already six fifteen, and I myself was supervising the necessary preparations. The platform we had chosen was spacious, so that numerous spectators could participate in a maximum of comfort. There was a telephone within easy reach. The doctor lived in the house next door and was standing by in case any of the spectators should faint. (Reminiscent of confirmation.) Two immense block and tackle hung suspended from the ceiling to hoist me up afterwards in case I were to be disembowelled. Four hefty workmen were also present to lend a hand, former Russian prisoners of war, with rugged, raw-boned frames. (Journal for Home and Property Owners.) Two spotless maids had taken their place, dazzling young lasses. It was comforting to think that these two pretty girls would whisk my blood and wash and lay out my inner organs. The platform was swept and scrubbed. I had specified that two long tables, scoured white, be placed along a side wall: on them stood an assortment of bowls, knives and forks. I had just requested that a washbasin, water and a towel be brought, also a piece of soap (Sunlight). Anna and Emma, the two maids, brought in a tub and a wooden beater. It's a funny feeling — that one is about to be butchered in ten minutes' time. (The sacrifice of motherhood.) Up to now, I'd never in all my life been butchered. One must first be ripe for the occasion. For as a rule, it's when the potatoes have to come out and the oats are all gone that hard times have truly begun. We've yet to have any real summer this year. Ten minutes can seem an eternity. (Faith, hope and charity.) (Ducks goose in the meadow.) Everything had been prepared, down to the last detail. The princess was already making her entrance. She wore a short, white skirt, a bit rumpled from sitting, but particularly flattering for just that reason. The church spire, after all, is very steep. Spring meadow, dedicated in friendship. Delicately hops fidget king's daughter little legs. I adore these delicate fidget hop-king-daughter-little-leglets. Tail wags sour cream. She stood inkwell before me and asked bell-pure lace-white, "Are you to be butchered today?"

Fish hot knives shoot blood. I lowered purple eyes and was happy at her greeting, "How handsome you are, Alves Groomstick, such a handsome man," said she red lips vein boil blood, bon voyage! pert thread-point nose: "I bring to you your last greeting from the world. Get thee to a nunnery. (My house, thy world.) (Headless leather.) Felt according to naval size. You must be in a bit of a hurry these days getting everything ready for this solemn event. (Peace be with you.) How quickly you've ripened, yes, overripened! With what joy you may gaze upon your ripeness. May it always bring you nothing but happiness. How fortunate, that the weather has held for your slaughter-day and that the butcher will be able to come on his bicycle." (Genuine Brussels Handwork.) Good health is fortune's gift. "Would you excuse me, little Princess, while I make a phone call? It's already six thirty, and the butcher still hasn't come." "Hello, is this the butcher? The crowd is getting restless, what's holding you up?" (From now to eternity!) "Go ahead and begin the formalities. I've just this moment finished impaling my sister on the church spire as a weathercock. The church spire, after all, is very steep, and overhead fish spikes in whip-air. The lightning rod was rusty, and I had trouble forcing it through my sister's tummy. Yet bright spikes fish in whip-stench. Begin the ceremony!" I called for the king: "Into thy hands, of Majesty, I commend my comely form. My corpse, oh King at thy disposal!" (The millimeter line divided by six costs 20 pfennig.) The king gave a signal. (Fortuna Whetmachine.) The two seconds in black frock coats and black gloves, top hats and black cravats took their positions at the king's side. A black dog flew past cawing. The king gave another signal. The four Russians and Anna and Emma made ready to be of assistance. Again the king signalled. The seconds approached, introduced themselves and asked if I had any last requests. (Lift up your eyes to the star!) I requested that the princess sing

the International and then afterwards give me a kiss. (Unheaded necks, genuine cowhide.) A lady in the king's retinue fell unconscious to the floor. The doctor was summoned. Firmly whips ardently. The princess sang:

"Worker trumpets
C sharp D
D sharp E flat
sharp E
you yours your you,"

the entire International. Lamppost trumpets kiss full skirts surge white lace kiss. Sling arms full skirts surge neck lace warm tubes smooth sleek fish carp, carp, carp. (Prière de fermer la porte.) Do shut the door, yes, you, you, you! I love you so! (The world with all its sins.) Now — butcher me! The king signals again, the butcher rides up. Not a sound in the house. Pro patria est, dum ludere videmur. (Red-yellow-blue lady battalion.) (No smoking, likewise no holding-in-the-hand of unlit cigars.) Two workmen lead off his bicycle. (Sacrifice for God and country.) A workman brings a club, big balloon lemon-pale. (Hold on to what you've got.) The butcher has a blue-striped apron flutter rag. (Sugar-beet girl.) October inclines ceremony rivals seconds. — Begin! — And me, like a hedgehog! — The butcher leans back, head tilted, club raised. (The brightest jewel, the highest joy, a familiar touch of home.) The butcher springs forward. (This is love!), swings club sink sink weight weight weight, fervently whips sink weight weight wait wait wait. —

My skull shattered.
 Now it was time for me to collapse, so I collapsed lapsed
 lapsed lapsed, flat. Aaaaa aaaaaaa aaa aaaaa b. (Applause
 from all pews.)
 What next? My arms and legs were tied to winches,
 winches winch up. Sink slings flat together spread apart.
 (A call to all hand and head workers.) My side was
 pierced. Blood bucked bucket blue ray red thick whip.
 Beat maids beater together rack railroad train machines
 beat Emma Anna. (Blameless, you have committed your
 heart today to the holy bond.) The king commanded a
 drink. Blue scorched flame murder gravely gravely.
 Empty burns the stomach flame sulphur blood. From that
 moment on the king has had no beard. Be steadfast in
 duty, stand fast. (Contributed by the editorial staff.) There
 is a science to everything. (Amplification, Soviet
 Association for Capitalistic Construction, Berlin.) Now I
 was to be disembowelled. (Freshest mocca bonbons,
 freshness.) Transfers drive knives slit quiver entrails.
 (Peacetime commodities.) It was a most eventworthy
 garden restaurant. I felt a thousand joys, rescuer tomorrow
 twenty. Three lustrums only did the glass-house bred
 specimen blossom. (Roar of applause.) Moon calf shines
 inside gently tugged entrails unstunned. (All for the Red
 Army.) Clean, clean, be clean my girls, clean in washing,

that nothing burn. (God protect you.) (God protect you.)
 Flame hot, flame hot! Earthworms played gently within
 my belly; it tickled slightly. The king yearned my eyes.
 Have brought to me, daughter of the king, the eyes of
 John the Baptist! (Today you shall quit your father's
 house.) Round globes slick slime writhing sprang from the
 eyes towards gentle hands. On a plate, knife and fork
 the eyes were served. (Hard-of-hearing and deafened
 soldiers to receive, without charge, advice and
 information.) Slick slimed oyster eyes sink stomach
 heavily. Children under twelve admitted only under
 surveillance and in the company of adults; in addition,
 children under eight to be held by the hand on request.
 (Entrance fee 50 pfennig, but at least one mark.)
 "Poison!" shrieked the king, writhing on the floor. (The
 role of the cradle in populating the world.) "Sweet
 dreams, I've been poisoned." (August had 31 days, the
 days subtract an hour and 56 minutes.) Yes, how awful.
 "In you, oh Lord, I trust. I lift up my hands." Two

mushrooms grew up eyes stem smooth bumps milk and drilled two holes in the king's belly. Stem-eyed eyed eyes. Silent startled king's chalk. The princess's heart was pounding fiercely. (Acetylene does away with the odour of bodily secretions.) She felt so sorry for her father. The doctor was summoned to do something about the holes in the king's stomach. (Veritas vincit, with Anna Blume in the leading role.) The old king had fainted. Fear peaks silver strings stone to stone. The princess gave a signal ordering that I be put back together again. (It is in this manner that bed feathers are cleaned, dusted, washed, steamed and dried.)

They began to reassemble me. First, with a gentle shove,

my eyes were pushed back into their sockets. (Fear not: faith, hope and charity are the stars.) Next, someone brought my inner parts. Fortunately, they hadn't yet been boiled or chopped up into sausage. (Vaincu mais non dompté.) And yet one is willing to settle for a beautiful autumn. Thanks to my own inner magnetic currents, my inner parts, the moment they were inserted, sprang back into place and took root where they belonged. (How to achieve happiness in marriage.) There were certain difficulties to be overcome in ordering the entrails, as they had been somewhat scrambled in all the excitement. (Saint Florian has moved his act to the German stage. A smash

hit every evening.) But I realized what was wrong and directed my magnetic currents back and forth, to and fro, one two one two one the tone rumple beams in the eye. I pulled and tugged magnetically at the entrails until they all lay safely in their accustomed place. In this undertaking, I was greatly aided by my knowledge of the inner man. (One year trial period, then permanent appointment as a Prussian civil servant.) Yes indeed! My permanent parts, in the meantime, had been reassembled, and now all that was missing was my blood. (Bordens sweet milk chocolate.) The maids held the bowl of blood beneath the wound in my side and beat in the opposite direction. The king gave a loud moan. By means of my magnetic currents a thick stream of blood lifted itself up from the red surface and entered the wound in my side. (Facts that every woman has to know one mustn't reveal to a girl.) Slowly my veins filled, my heart was full, my inner parts absorbed the blood. But my heart had not yet stirred, I was still dead. (Wet Paint.) The butcher touched the wound in my side with the knife, plunged it in deep and then withdrew it, and — the wound was closed! (Detach here and return to above address.) Every woman should take pains, after the marriage ceremony at least, to inform herself about these matters. I now had all my parts back

together again: there were only a few scattered holes where tiny scraps of flesh had clung to the knife. The desire and the need are at hand, all that is lacking is the occasion. There was also a considerable amount of blood lacking, as the king had drunk it all. (For the ideals of Socialism.) Ever since I've been somewhat anemic. Take the cage home and buy yourself a bird. Hoists were lowered hoist pulleys upwards. Now I could sense that it was time for me to straighten up, so I straightened up, quickly at first, then more and more slowly, until finally I was standing. (Grumbling now, my heart and mouth.) In the land of the Burgundians, there dwelt a fair young maid: I'm nothing but a woman. Remember, my child, where it is you are going. Grow up to be pious and good. Stay pious, my child. Embark boldly on the journey of life. (Vote socialistic!) Ceremoniously the two seconds assumed their positions at my side and took my hands. (Preparation of all prescriptions covered by health insurance policies.) Childhood days were at an end, now life's battle must begin. I was very curious to see how they planned to bring me back to life again. (Ism-sorter by Jefim Golycheff.) It is strictly forbidden to touch objects in the collection. I felt dizzy. (Strindberg quietly undermine Stramm.) Our dear old teacher always liked to season his lectures with a touch of humor, and rightly so. (Sunray.) I don't believe in anything at all. (Trombone festival.) Your guess was right! Appeal in trying times to bible-toting, evangelical school marms. (Everything that the man should know about pregnancy and childbirth!) Your mouth is a saw. (Dentist sunshine.) The butcher again took up his club (the tragedy of becoming human), stood before me (the conduct of the husband during pregnancy), and gently laid the club against my split skull. (Yet Rudolf Bauer is an artist.) Anna Blume wait lilac blue roses shoot spike gaps lunk-lump bed. (Ripe for plucking, fervently one.) A partial explanation misses the mark. Then the butcher leapt back with a mighty

bound. (The colonel is and will remain a gentleman, even if he's an idiot!) The woman must know all. There was an ear-splitting crack as the club sprang loose from my skull. The means hereto are offered by a work intended for women readers only. Table of Contents: 1. How to win love. 2. The tamed shrew. 3. What girls like in a man. 4. Something about kissing. 5. How to make an impression. 6. On being turned down. 7. Is misogamy justified? 8. Causes of chastity. 9. Older opinions. 10. How to attain moderation. 11. Good advice. 12. Is love blind? 13. How to recognize true love. 14. The husband's premarital past. 15. The most intimate of intimacies. 16. The new faith. 17. The dark star. The butcher sprang back into his original starting position. (He shall be your lord and master.) The mainstay of the firm, however, remains chaste and pure. (Jamais embrassé.) The fragments of my skull flew together; I was, so to speak, back in one piece again. (Sweet moment.) You ain't et your fritters and the pickles is too greasy. The theater, as a matter of fact, exists solely for humans who, in fact, are inhuman. (Delivery on receipt of payment; the book is richly illustrated.) It was an odd sensation — being alive again. Selzer-water sails illumine fragrance Maria. I felt that I should strike a pose, so I struck a pose. (The king had just died.) With a grand gesture I approached the king's daughter and wordlessly gave her my hand. (Kiss me!) The king's daughter fell down before me on her pretty; pointed knee. (From one's most immediate childhood surroundings.) Meanwhile, the doctor was knashing pickled pig's knuckles. (See supplement for further announcement of positions open.) She implored me now to save her father. (Happiness in the cottage on the heath.) I realized that in this matter I could not afford to be kind-hearted; kind-heartedness is the mark of a fool. (Anna Blume remains severe.) (The dangerous age.) "Your father," I said, "the king, the king will stay dead." (Slip-leather of sealskin.) The doctor had fainted away. I arranged for two yellow wax candles to be placed in the holes in the king's belly and then lighted. (Stamps will be accepted in payment.) As the flames licked through the holes, the king exploded. The people below, however, broke out into cheers on my behalf. (The meaning of Socialism is work!)