

## Merzbau\*

On the second floor of Kurt Schwitters's house No gleam of Indian ivory and inlaid gold, a door led to a rather large room. No radiance of marble underfoot, In the centre of this room The earth not mocked by the earth's profusion; stood an abstract plaster sculpture Rather a thicket of husked straw on a willow frame, which he called his "column" New clay pots, the hasty products of cheap wheels.

It was a daily-changing, living, A tank for the soft water-drops, evolving, growing, monument Tough platters of wickerwork, honouring Kurt and his friends. A wine-stained cup. An aggregate of hollow space, The walls around were a stiff structure of concave and convex forms. Of dry straw and random mud Each of these jagged forms had a meaning. On them, a scattering of rustic nails, There was a Mondrian cavity, And hanging there a slim broom of green rushes. and there were also Arp, Gabo, etc., cavities. The provisions of the humble place He cut off a lock of my hair Hung from its smoky beam: and put it in my cavity. Bland sorb-apple In others, there were a half smoked cigarette, Dried savoury and raisins in bunches, a nail paring, a dental bridge Twined in sweet-smelling wreaths. with several teeth on it, In such a hut on Attic ground a little bottle of urine. Lived Hecale,

Kurt collected every tram-ticket, hostess worthy of heaven, every envelope, cheese wrapper Whom in the years of eloquence or cigar-band, old shoe soles The Muse of old Battiades described or shoelaces, wire, feathers, dishcloths. For posterity's admiration. You could always see him there, washing his feet

Oenothea said: "All visible things obey me. in the same water as his guinea-pigs, At my wish the flowering earth warming his paste-pot on his bed, grows dry, the sap sluggish. feeding his tortoise Rocks and jagged cliffs in the rarely-used bathtub, gush out Nile waters; assembling bits of broken furniture, The rivers obey me, building his monstrous column. Hyrcanian tigers, and dragon sentinels.

The column burst the room apart at the seams, Such power have words. so he expanded upwards. The hot breath of bulls is quenched Since he owned the house, by the rites of virgins; he evicted the tenants of the flat above his, I will root Idaean trees in the sea, made a hole in the ceiling, plant rivers instead and continued the column at the summit." on the upper floor.

\*© Prose poem composed by Pascual Delgado in Montréal on February 9<sup>th</sup> 2003. The description of Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau, circa 1925 is in Calibri font. All the quotes from Encolpius and Oenothea's Poems are from Gaius Petronius, *The Satyricon*, (pp. 153-155) translated by John Sullivan (1965).