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CHRISTIAN BÖK

CHAPTER I

for Dick Higgins

Writing is inhibiting. Sighing, I sit, scribbling in ink this pidgin script. I sing with nihilistic witticism, disciplining signs with trifling gimmicks – impish hijinks which highlight stick sigils. Isn't it glib? Isn't it chic? I fit childish insights within rigid limits, writing shtick which might instill priggish misgivings in critics blind with hindsight. I dismiss nit-picking criticism which flirts with philistinism. I bitch; I kibitz – griping whilst criticizing dimwits, sniping whilst indicting nitwits, dismissing simplistic thinking, in which philippic wit is still illicit.

Pilgrims, digging in shifts, dig till midnight in mining pits, chipping flint with picks, drilling schist with drills, striking it rich mining zinc. Irish firms, hiring micks whilst firing Brits, bring in smiths with mining skills: kilnwrights grilling brick in brickkilns, millwrights grinding grist in gristmills. Irish tinsmiths, fiddling with widgeits, fix this rig, driving its drills which spin whirring drillbits. I pitch in, fixing things. I rig this winch with its wiring; I fit this drill with its piping. I dig this ditch, filling bins with dirt, piling it high, sifting it, till I find bright prisms twinkling with glitz.

Hiking in British districts, I picnic in virgin firths,
grinning in mirth with misfit whims, smiling if I find
birch twigs, smirking if I find mint sprigs. Midspring
brings with it singing birds, six kinds (finch, siskin, ibis,
tit, pipit, swift), whistling shrill chirps, trilling *chirr
chirr* in high pitch. Kingbirds flit in gliding flight,
skimming limpid springs, dipping wingtips in rills
which brim with living things: krill, shrimp, brill –
fish with gilt fins, which swim in flitting zigs. Might
Virgil find bliss implicit in this primitivism? Might
I mimic him in print if I find his writings inspiring?

Fishing till twilight, I sit, drifting in this birch skiff,
jigging kingfish with jigs, bringing in fish which nip
this bright string (its vivid glint bristling with stick
pins). Whilst I slit this fish in its gills, knifing it, slicing
it, killing it with skill, shipwrights might trim this jib,
swinging it right, hitching it tight, riding brisk winds
which pitch this skiff, tipping it, tilting it, till this ship
in crisis flips. Rigging rips. Christ, this ship is sink-
ing. Diving in, I swim, fighting this frigid swirl, kick-
ing, kicking, swimming in it till I sight high cliffs,
rising, indistinct in thick mists, lit with lightning.

Lightning blinks, striking things in its midst with blinding light. Whirlwinds whirl; driftwinds drift. Spindrift is spinning in thrilling whirligigs. Which blind spirit is whining in this whistling din? Is it this grim lich, which is writhing in its pit, lifting its lid with whitish limbs, rising, vivific, with ill will in its mind, victimizing kids timid with fright? If it is – which blind witch is midwifing its misbirth, binding this hissing djinni with witching spiritism? Is it this thin, sickish girl, twitching in fits, whilst writing things in spirit-writing? If it isn't – it is I; it is I ...

Lightning flicks its riding whip, blitzing this night with bright schisms. Sick with phthisis in this drizzling mist, I limp, sniffing, spitting bilic spit, itching livid skin (skin which is tingling with stinging pin-pricks). I find this frigid drisk dispiriting; still, I fight its chilling windchill. I climb cliffs, flinching with skittish instincts. I might slip. I might twist this infirm wrist, crippling it, wincing whilst I bind it in its splint, cringing whilst I gird it in its sling; still, I risk climbing, sticking with it, striving till I find this rift, in which I might fit, hiding in it till winds diminish.

Minds grim with nihilism still find first light inspiring. Mild pink in tint, its shining twilight brings bright tidings which lift sinking spirits. With firm will, I finish climbing, hiking till I find this inviting inn, in which I might sit, dining. I thirst. I bid girls bring stiff drinks – gin fizz which I might sip whilst finishing this rich dish, nibbling its tidbits: ribs with wings in chili, figs with kiwis in icing. I swig citric drinks with vim, tipping kirsch, imbibing it till, giggling, I flirt with girl-ish virgins in miniskirts: *wink, wink*. I miss living in sin, pinching thighs, kissing lips pink with lipstick.

Slick pimps, bribing civic kingpins, distill gin in stills,
spiking drinks with illicit pills which might bring bliss.
Whiz kids in silk-knit shirts script films in which
slim girls might strip, jiggling tits, wiggling hips, in-
citing wild shindigs. Twin siblings in bikinis might kiss
rich bigwigs, giving this prim prig his wish, whipping
him, tickling him, licking his limp dick till, rigid,
his prick spills its jism. Shit! This ticklish victim is
trifling with kink. Sick minds, thriving in kinship
with pigs, might find insipid thrills in this filth. This
flick irks critics. It is swinish; it is piggish. It stinks.

Thinking within strict limits is stifling. Whilst Viking knights fight griffins, I skirmish with this riddling sphinx (this sigil – I). I print lists, filing things (kin with kin, ilk with ilk), inscribing this distinct sign, listing things in which its imprint is intrinsic. I find its missing links, divining its implicit tricks. I find it whilst skindiving in Fiji; I find it whilst picnicking in Linz. I find it in Inniskillin; I find it in Mississippi. I find it whilst skiing in Minsk. (Is this intimism civilizing if Klimt limns it, if Liszt lilts it?) I sigh; I lisp. I finish writing this writ, signing it, kind sir: NIHL DICIT, FINI.

OISEAU

VOYELLES

by Arthur Rimbaud

A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu: voyelles,
Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes:
A, noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes
Qui bombinent autour des puanteurs cruelles,

Golfes d'ombre; E, candeurs des vapeurs et des tentes,
Lances des glaciers fiers, rois blancs, frissons d'ombelles;
I, pourpres, sang craché, rire des lèvres belles
Dans la colère ou les ivresses pénitentes;

U, cycles, vibrations divins des mers virides,
Paix des pâtis semés d'animaux, paix des rides
Que l'alchimie imprime aux grands fronts studieux;

O, suprême Clairon plein des strideurs étranges,
Silences traversés des [Mondes et des Anges]:
– O l'Oméga, rayon violet de [Ses] Yeux!

VOWELS

by Christian Bök

A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: the vowels.
I will tell thee, one day, of thy newborn portents:
A, the black velvet cuirass of flies whose essence
commingles, abuzz, around the cruellest of smells,

Wells of shadow; E, the whitewash of mists and tents,
glaives of icebergs, albino kings, frostbit fennels;
I, the bruises, the blood spat from lips of damsels
who must laugh in scorn or shame, both intoxicants;

U, the waves, divine vibratos of verdant seas,
pleasant meadows rich with venerary, grins of ease
which alchemy grants the visages of the wise;

O, the supreme Trumpeter of our strange sonnet –
quietudes crossed by another [World and Spirit]:
O, the Omega! – the violet raygun of [Her] Eyes ...