

from *Eunoia*

In addition to a number of other constraints—thematic, syntactic, typographic—Christian Bök's *Eunoia* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2001) is a serial lipogram, restricting each of its five main chapters to only one of the five vowels. What makes the work decidedly conceptual, however, is that it attempts to incorporate all of the eligible univocalics (in the end, Bök manages around 98 percent of the potential univocal lexicon). The following excerpts permit a comparison of the opening passages from each of the main chapters.

Awkward grammar appals a craftsman. A Dada bard as daft as Tzara damns stagnant art and scrawls an alpha (a slapdash arc and a backward zag) that mars all stanzas and jams all ballads (what a scandal). A madcap vandal crafts a small black ankh – a hand-stamp that can stamp a wax pad and at last plant a mark that sparks an *ars magna* (an abstract art that charts a phrasal anagram). A pagan skald chants a dark saga (a Mahabharata), as a papal cabal blackballs all annals and tracts, all dramas and psalms: Kant and Kafka, Marx and Marat. A law as harsh as a *fatwa* bans all paragraphs that lack an A as a standard hallmark.

Enfettered, these sentences repress free speech. The text deletes selected letters. We see the revered exegete reject metred verse: the sestet, the tercet – even *les scènes élevées en grec*. He rebels. He sets new precedents. He lets cleverness exceed decent levels. He eschews the esteemed genres, the expected themes – even *les belles lettres en vers*. He prefers the perverse French esthetes: Verne, Péret, Genet, Perec – hence, he pens fervent screeds, then enters the street, where he sells these letterpress newsletters, three cents per sheet. He engineers perfect newness wherever we need fresh terms.

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.

Loops on bold fonts now form lots of words for books. Books form cocoons of comfort – tombs to hold bookworms. Profs from Oxford show frosh who do post-docs how to gloss works of Wordsworth. Dons who work for proctors or provosts do not fob off school to work on crosswords, nor do dons go off to dorm rooms to loll on cots. Dons go crosstown to look for bookshops known to stock lots of top-notch goods: cookbooks, workbooks – room on room of how-to books for jocks (how to jog, how to box), books on pro sports, golf or polo. Old colophons on schoolbooks from schoolrooms sport two sorts of logo: ob-long whorls, rococo scrolls – both on worn morocco.

Kultur spurns Ubu – thus Ubu pulls stunts. Ubu shuns *Skulptur*: Uruk urns (plus busts), Zulu jugs (plus tusks). Ubu sculpts junk *für Kunst und Glück*. Ubu busks. Ubu drums drums, plus Ubu strums cruths (such hubbub, such ruckus): *thump, thump; thrum, thrum*. Ubu puns puns. Ubu blurts untruth: much bunkum (plus bull), much humbug (plus bunk) – but trustful schmucks trust such untruthful stuff; thus Ubu (cult guru) must bluff dumbstruck numbskulls (such chumps). Ubu mulcts surplus funds (trust funds plus slush funds). Ubu usurps much usufruct. Ubu sums up lump sums. Ubu trumps dumb luck.