



A NOCTURNE FOR EURYDICE

Christian Bök

*for
the maiden
in her
dark, pale meadow*

Twilight through the roof of a rainforest
 shatters like a chandelier of green glass,
the shrillness strafed by keening cicadas
 and unseen flocks of cockatoos that caw
their catcalls at the meltdown of the sun.

Dimming of the day bronzes a pathway
 that we follow under vaults of booyong
down a terraced stairway to this canyon
 of warm mist, where a waterfall loiters,
draped in a grotto, like a soaked sarong.

Shadows deepen the tinges of each fern
 to jade, while we descend into the nave
of this cavern where paramours gather,
 unmournful, by the cascade to witness
the arrival of bright nymphs at nightfall.

Prattle, muttered by the gentle shower
 in its pool of shade, softens our voices
while we wait, rebuking the ruby glow
 from a camera, its lamplight forbidden,
a red ray doused to darken the drama.

Lovers who kiss near the railing confess
 their joy upon seeing the mossy shine
of dew, luminescent on the black walls
 of rock, these blurry photos of bijoux,
mimicking shimmers on radium clocks.

Umbral, the day-glo from every fey fly
 stipples the cave, pinpricking crevices
with a spray as numinous as absinthe,
 the basalt hung with threads of saliva,
like dewdrops bedewing a spiderweb.

Wonder spins a tinsel that embroiders
our mood as we marvel at this roomful
of minuscule creatures, each flea as far
from us as a star, whose constellations
loom over us, guiding us to our doom.

Glyphs, unreadable by the wispy gleam
of foxfire, foretell no fortunes for souls
who appear with their private oracles
to view these tapestries, then file by us,
like a queue of lanterns leaving a mine.

Bereft of our path when left in the dark,
we take delight that, blind at the entry
to this shrine, we find a dim dot of red
taking flight, a matchhead lit in a waft
of perfume, its spark lifted like a kite.

Adrift, the speck is our distant galleon
with sails ablaze at night upon a black
ocean, a feeble beacon whose glimmer
disputes the puniness of living things
that strain to remain afloat in the void.

Clouds of pollen, orbiting the orchids,
ignite, then cavort, alongside the banks
of the cataract, each downslope aglow
with muddled smudges from luciferin
in green fungi, blemishes of limelight.

Unease amid this awe that consoles us
still impels me to grope for a guardrail,
retaking your hand in mine to guide us,
like a blindman, up a cliffside staircase,
unseeing in the blackness what awaits.

Lovers know that, of all demons in Hell,
 love is the most dire, dutybound to tear
all spirits to tatters, to spare no thought
 for the remnants of misspent romances,
which defy the gods but end in despair.

Deeper than this ravine with its river
 flows a duller stream of forgetfulness,
our dream, like some oasis from chaos,
 where devils avow that, if love is woe,
best then to dwell alone in the cosmos.

Regret is the ember that calls the moth
 to burn in the spittle of a glow-worm.
Let me keep my faith aloft, like a flame,
 my firm gaze, unreturning to this rift
behind us at the blindspot of my loss.

*Let me promise bravely to uphold you,
though we falter at the threshold when we cross....*



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"A Nocturne for Eurydice" is a sequel to "The Nocturne of Orpheus" from *The Xenotext (Book 1)*. The work is a love-poem, written in fifteen pentastichs, with each line composed in pentameter, according to a euphonic, syllabic constraint.

"A Nocturne for Eurydice" has originally appeared in *Metamorphic: 21st-Century Poets Respond to Ovid* (eds. Nessa O'Mahony and Paul Munden) from Recent Work Press (2017). The poem is going to appear in *The Xenotext (Book 2)* from Coach House Books. RRRR

Christian Bök is the author of *Eunoia* (Coach House Books, 2001), a bestselling work of experimental literature that has gone on to win the Griffin Prize for Poetic Excellence (2002). *Crystallography* (Coach House Press, 1994), his first book of poetry, has been nominated for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award (1995). *Nature* has interviewed Bök about his work on *The Xenotext* (making him the first poet ever to appear in this famous journal of science). Bök has also exhibited artworks derived from *The Xenotext* at galleries around the world, including (among others) the Bury Art Gallery in Bury, the Olga Korper Gallery in Toronto, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Denver, the Power Plant in Toronto, and the Broad Art Museum in East Lansing. Bök teaches students of Creative Writing in the School of Creative Arts and Humanities at Charles Darwin University.