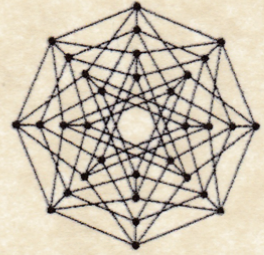


THE NOCTURNE OF ORPHEUS
(for 'the maiden in her dark, pale meadow')



Christian Bök

THIS COVENANT OF LOVE IN A DIRGE FOR A GOD
HAS DELIGHTED AN ANGEL WHO OBEYS MY PLEA,
EACH SONNET, A RHYTHM FOR HER TO DECIPHER,
MAKING LEGIBLE A KEY IN HER DREAM OF DUSK:
A REDNESS THAT DARKENS THE HUE OF A TULIP
IS RICHENING HER VIEW ON THE HILL OF A LEA,
DAPPLING HER VISTA AT THE END OF MY VIGIL,
EVEN IF HAVOC CALLS FORTH RUIN TO KILL ME.
NO CHURCH, NO CHAPEL, IS A REFUGE IN A STORM,
IF WE BEG TO BE WARM, YET LET DIE THE CANDLE.
NO HERDER, NO HERMIT, ENCHANTED BY THE SEA,
HAS HITHERTO KNOWN THE ENNUI OF A COWARD,
EVEN WHEN INFERNOS IN HELL BURN THE HERO:
RADIANT AS FLINT, BE THE ACHE OF MY SORROW.



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Cover linocut by Clara Daneri, after a 5th-century Egyptian tapestry of Orpheus and Eurydice.

“The Nocturne of Orpheus” is a love-poem — an alexandrine sonnet, written in blank verse, with 33 letters in each line, all of which create a perfect, double acrostic of the dedication; moreover, the poem is also a perfect anagram of the sonnet “When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be” by John Keats (transforming his meditation about the mortality of love into a mournful farewell by the poet before he enters Hell).

"The Nocturne of Orpheus" has originally appeared in *The Xenotext* (Book 1) from Coach House Books (2015).

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.