

## CHRISTIAN BÖK

Christopher Dewdney and Christian Bök have maintained a professional friendship since their first encounter four years ago at a poetry reading sponsored by the Experimental Writers Group in Ottawa. Research for Bök's dissertation on the theoretical relationship between science and poetry has since cemented their friendship and has offered numerous occasions for them to keep in close touch over the years. Dewdney has certainly provided one of the primary sources of inspiration for Bök's own poetic projects, since he has always enjoyed the way that Dewdney's work has tried to intersplice two discourses that have historically antagonized each other. Dewdney has also provided supportive criticism for the work that Bök has occasionally shown him in the course of their acquaintance. The poems "Crystals" and "from *Diamonds*" are excerpts from a book in progress entitled *Crystallography*, a book that, like the work of Dewdney, explores the relationship between science and poetry.

Crystallography is an ironic pun: poetry as a form of "lucid writing" — since the text resorts to an obscure vocabulary, the scientific lexicon of crystallography, in order to develop the conceit that language is a kind of crystalline formation. The text attempts to exhaust the poetic potential of a scientific domain, not only by interpreting lived experience through the metaphor of crystallography, but also by presenting the principles of crystallography in aesthetic terms. The text is encyclopaedic in structure and explores the natural history of the word "crystal" by resorting to a syncretic variety of aesthetic sensibilities, derived mostly from surrealist writing, concrete poetry, and L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E writing. The form of the text attempts to reflect the content of the text, in that the structure of each poem is intended to convey the contradictory ambiance of crystals, both their elegant simplicity and their baroque complexity, the flawed conjunction of two kinds of perfection. The text is intended to function as a scientific treatise on an imaginary subject — a 'pataphysical textbook on crystallographic principles.

## Christian Bök / TWO POEMS

### CRYSTALS

A crystal is an atomic tessellation, a tridimensional  
jigsaw-puzzle in which every piece is the same shape.

A crystal assembles itself out of its own constituent  
disarray: the puzzle puts itself together, each piece  
falling as though by chance into its correct location.

A crystal is nothing more  
than a breeze blowing sand  
into the form of a castle  
or a film played backwards  
of a window being smashed.

A compound (word) dissolved in a liquid  
supercooled under microgravitational  
conditions precipitates out of solution  
in (alphabetical) order to form crystals  
whose structuralistic perfection rivals  
the beauty of machine-tooled objects.

An archaeologist without any mineralogical  
experience  
might easily mistake a crystal  
for the artificial product of a precision  
technology.

A word is a bit of crystal in formation.

## FROM *DIAMONDS*

1)

C is for diamond

the one gem

made of one

my father

was a sad

gemcutter

element: carbon

chimney soot

crushed coal

charred wood

fire at its core

he made jewels more precious

by smashing them, spoke only

words pared down to the edge

of their silence, and strove

to break into (break out of)

each house

of mirrors

held at the tip of his tongs

my father

taught me

precision

he retired, nerves

shot by the threat

of a slipped razor

2)

a diamond is  
a darkness  
so intense  
the eye sees  
through it

transparent charcoal:

under pressure  
all things are  
clear, just be

sure you  
remember

my father once  
gave me a gift

diamond dust is black

an apache tear  
a black pebble

opaque till you held it  
up against direct light

then the smoke  
trapped inside  
became visible

after hours of solitude  
when drunk, he recalled

the indian widow  
who lamented her  
loss for so long  
the great spirit  
transfigured her  
tears into drops  
of black crystal  
thus bequeathing

my father  
too broke  
to be wed  
never got  
my mother  
a diamond

to all who fall in love  
keepsakes of her sorrow

he claimed to adore her  
too much to profane her  
with gems made of ashes

3)

blowtorch  
a diamond

organic stone

not sterile  
but burning

enkindled  
when ruby

crystals made

from the same  
thing as life

it blazes

just as  
melting  
dry ice

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

vaporizes

my father opened the field  
guide to crystals to pages  
with fine print to show me  
how to decipher a language

as breath

he gave me his gemcutter's  
eyepiece and left me alone  
to revel in detail: edges  
of serifs, fibres in paper

only later did he teach me  
how to sound out the words

life: the percentage of light that a diamond  
reflects back towards its viewer

fire: the degree to which a diamond refracts  
light into its component colours

life x fire = brilliance: (all this is true)



4)

plato was  
the first  
to regard

a diamond as  
frozen quintessence

a soul in  
suspended  
animation

a vestige of heaven  
within earth

my father  
taught me  
precision

he studied  
minerology  
at antwerp

tended saw  
for a firm  
in brucken

saw  
one  
gem

take two  
years to  
be split  
into two

all his life an attempt  
to see the free point  
trapped in perfection

dei mundi

my father  
put faith  
in no god

5)

a member of the cubic  
crystal system

a diamond denotes  
the highest  
state of symmetry

an ideal array  
of cuts, acute angles

crystal:           d  
                      i n  
                     a m o  
s(hard)s           i n  
                      d

a diamond is an equilateral triangle  
that mirrors itself through one side

over drinks after hours  
of stress over diamonds

an expert in the making  
of fake gems bet no one  
was able to tell of two

gems which was the true  
one, which was the copy

without use of either  
scratch plate or lens

platonic solids

nature needs  
no tool  
and die  
to make

its octahedrons

no jeweller  
won the bet  
but the one

who let           gems  
the two           drop  
                     into

his creme  
de menthe

the one that sank  
slower was a fake

6)

adamas means invincible

no known jewel  
in the mineral kingdom  
rivals diamond

king of stones  
adamant in the silence  
no words break

in(di)visible as a star

only diamonds  
scar diamonds

sawyers thought  
my father crazy

the his was  
day eye cut

open by a stray  
chip of diamond

his mind making  
his hand finish  
its adjustments  
to the sawblade

before breaking  
out in a scream

afterwards  
his regret

his sight was saved  
but not the diamond