

## CHRISTIAN BÖK / Flarf, Arf, Arf, Arf!

We are not high on LSD anymore—so we need to start making sense. If life is fair, then Elvis must be alive—and all his impersonators must be dead. An imitator dooms himself to hopeless mediocrity. An inventor, however, does his work, because it is natural to him, and so it has a charm. It has the charm of a child, yet it is better than the old standby of “Holy cow!” because nobody says “Holy smokes!” anymore. It is forgotten. It is undiscovered. We imagine that a bottle of cleaning fluid must be totally fucking clean on the inside. We imagine that, when a man is anxious to stick out a glad hand in kindness, he probably has something up his sleeve. It is possible that the universe exists only for me—and if so, it sure is going well, I must admit. If I jump into my time-machine, then I can easily go back to the twelfth century and ask the vampires to postpone their ancient prophecy for a few days, while I take in dinner and a movie. We know that there is a good reason why nobody studies history—it just teaches you too much. My song is copyrighted in America, under the Seal of Copyright #154085, for a period of 28 years, and anybody caught singing my song without my permission is a mighty good friend of mine, because “I don’t give a darn.” If you say, “I love you,” then you have already fallen in love with language itself—which is already a form of infidelity. I scream: “It’s just passion—I ain’t angry at culture; I ain’t angry at fashion!” I write a script, and I give it to a guy who reads scripts, and he reads it, and he says that he really likes it, but he thinks that I need to rewrite it—so I

say: “Fuck you, I’ll just make a copy.” I mean, the word “pre-heated” is a meaningless fucking term!—kind of like “pre-recorded,” as in, “This program has been pre-recorded,” to which I say: “Well, of course it has been pre-recorded!—because, when else are you going to record it, afterwards?” I mean: “That’s the whole purpose of recording; to do it beforehand!—otherwise, it doesn’t really work, does it?” I mean: “English is the best language of all—but in the hands of others, it becomes like the scene in *Fantasia*, when Mickey Mouse gets the wand.” I steal the letter M, because the letter M seems like it must weigh the most—and now, I have a gold M, so I ask a guy if he wants to buy a gold M, and he says: “No, what the fuck do I want a gold M for?”—to which I ask: “Well, what about a gold W?”



We have chosen our profession in defiance of the monarchy. We do not live for the sake of taxes to fatten the pockets of the noblemen. We have chosen to live the only life available to those who long for freedom. We are thieves. We may never know, in what sense, the poet means what he says, for poets do not write to be understood—but it is true that, if we look closely enough at a glass of wine, we see the entire universe. In fact, another person, whom we ourselves do not know, tends, at the moment of creation, to supplant the person whom we believe ourselves to be. In fact, to speak the unspeakable, without the proper rhetorical flourishes, is to perform the unspeakable. We keep inventing new ways to celebrate mediocrity. O! from this time forth, my thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth! I write a few sincere lines—and

then I have to make fun of them. I think to myself that the letter X has never been given enough to do, so we have to promise it more work: “Okay, you may not start a lot of words, but we can give you a co-starring role in tic-tac-toe, and you can mark the spot, and you can dabble with hugs and kisses, and you can make writing out the word ‘Christmas’ a lot easier, and incidentally you can start the word ‘xylophone’—are you happy now, you fucking X?” I have left orders to be awakened at any time in the event of a national emergency—even if I happen to be in a cabinet meeting. I have made these rules very simple: scissors cut paper, paper covers rock, rock crushes lizard, lizard poisons Spock, Spock smashes scissors, scissors decapitate lizard, lizard eats paper, paper disproves Spock, Spock vaporizes rock, and as it always has, rock crushes scissors. I look at you, and no speech is left in me, and my tongue breaks, then fire races under my skin. I tremble and grow pale, for I am dying of such love—or so it seems to me. A plagiarist is always suspicious of being stolen from—just as pickpockets are commonly observed to walk with their hands in their pockets.



First, they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win. Never memorize what you can look up in a book. Never forget that certain clues at a crime scene do not lend themselves, by their very nature, to being collected or examined—for how does one collect love or hate? There is, between them, a Great Wall of China with armed sentries, posted every twenty feet. Where then is good English to be found? Not among those who might be expected to write well. I do not

hold discussions with the monkey when the organ grinder is in the room. I do not date the lumberjack. I am, in fact, a software engineer, striving to build an idiot-proof program, bigger and better than the one before, but the universe is striving to build bigger and better idiots—and so far, the universe is winning. A creature low in intellect may conceive of thoughts, so long as it can recognize the same experience over and over again, and thus even a polyp might be a conceptual thinker if a feeling darts through its mind, saying: “Hello again, thingumabob!” If most of those who have taken part in this one-dimensional debate are really honest with themselves, they must admit that they do not, in principle, believe that any of us can do any good for anyone overseas. I know that this tree is a part of our history, if not the backbone of our economy, so we must get the tree back—or choke their rivers with our dead. I know that the most beautiful thing in Tokyo is McDonald’s, and the most beautiful thing in Stockholm is McDonald’s, and the most beautiful thing in Florence is McDonald’s—but Peking and Moscow do not yet have anything beautiful. I have tried here to groan, “Help! Help!”—but the tone that has come out is that of polite conversation. I have put in a long, hard day at work, and I finally get to go home, to go to bed, where I close my eyes—and immediately I wake up and realize that my whole day at work has, in fact, been a dream, in which you sell all of your waking life for minimum wage, while they get your dreams for free. Take sides! Take sides! You may sometimes be wrong—but the poet who refuses to take sides must always be wrong....