Voyelles
Arthur Rimbaud

A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu: voyelles,
Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes:
A, noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes
Qui bombinent autour des puanteurs cruelles,

Golfes d’ombre; E, candeurs des vapeurs et des tentes,
Lances des glaciers fiers, rois blancs, frissons d’ombelles;
I, pourpres, sang craché, rire des lèvres belles
Dans la colère ou les ivresses pénitentes;

U, cycles, vibrements divins des mers virides,
Paix des pâtis semés d’animaux, paix des rides
Que l’alchimie imprime aux grands fronts studieux;

O, suprême Clairon plein des strideurs étranges,
Silences traversés des [Mondes et des Anges]:
—O l’Oméga, rayon violet de [Ses] Yeux!
“Vowels” is a semantic translation of “Voyelles” by Arthur Rimbaud, preserving the rhyme scheme of the original, while enforcing the rigorous, syllabic contours of the alexandrine line.

Vowels

Christian Bök

A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: the vowels. I will tell thee, one day, of thy newborn portents: A, the black velvet cuirass of flies whose essence commingles, abuzz, around the cruellest of smells,

Wells of shadow; E, the whitewash of mists and tents, glaives of icebergs, albino kings, frostbit fennels; I, the bruises, the blood spat from lips of damsels who must laugh in scorn or shame, both intoxicants;

U, the waves, divine vibratos of verdant seas, pleasant meadows rich with venery, grins of ease which alchemy grants the visages of the wise;

O, the supreme Trumpeter of our strange sonnet—quietudes crossed by another [World and Spirit], O, the Omega!—the violet raygun of [Her] Eyes....
“Veils” is a homophonic translation of “Voyelles,” preserving, from the original, the sequence of the sounds, but not the meanings of the words—the two poems sound alike when read aloud.

Veils
Christian Bök

Anywhere near blank rage
you veer, oblivial.

Jade array, calico azure
evanescent talents.

Unaware, corrosives flow
to my shackled hand.

Key bombing an auto tour
to paint her colour.

Gulfs of amber contours
evaporate the tint.

Linseed glass or oblong
freezing dumbbells.

Upper pressing cashiers
do deliver verbals.

Dance the clear, elusive
rinse of paintings.
Icicle fibre meant divine
daymares varied.

Pity paid to see my dynamo
poised to rid us.

Cool chimes, a primal green
for studios.

Spur my clear plan astride
a stranger.

Cylinders versus diamonds
a decision.

Hollow, my gray ovule does
decide you.
Phonemes
Christian Bök

Phantoms, infernal,
without refuge or return—phonemes.
We will hark if such
resurgent souls ordain a dreamt verse:
A (offspring of perfect
murders, so unseen that stranglers
fulfill no crime, and thus
mourners must call the unjust schemes

overdoses); E (charmed
slumber that engulfs the sleepers,
cradled by dreamlike
Sirens who sing mankind, forlorn themes);

I (corrupted archangel,
shriven when mercy redeems
all shadowy spectres
who plunder shipwrecked believers);
U (the Sphinx, beheld
by disciples, then by infidels:

a riddle that grieves
a king; a truth that crippled minstrels

must bewail in epics,
like staunch martyrs whom Furies spurn);

O (untempted Saint,
who lends this typewritten utterance

its fervency
—an endless cycle of perseverance).

O, how the Bards
abolish symbols, when the letters burn....
Vocables
Christian Bök

Eternal, you beguile love or ruin—vocables.
Jejune vassals quote ten codas in reliquaries:
A (the ceaseless verses at occult monasteries;
requiems of dust, bound to nebulous particles:

Embers of gold); E (graven urns in sanctuaries;
brass bells, unsold, decreed priceless for our canticles);
I (a senseless verse—a spell, garbled in pentacles;
choruses, deemed perverse in desolate nurseries);

U (a universe, expressed as a murmur of tides,
all its perplexing maxims, exquisite suicides;
dim minds, transcended by vivid, hexadic prisms);

O (a vesper, stressing serenades or solitudes;
a clever muse, to generate endless interludes).
O, my elegiac ode, ends in paroxysms...
“AEIOU” literalizes the referent to the title of “Voyelles” by removing from the original everything that is not itself a vowel (including consonants, punctuation, and letterspaces).

**AEIOU**

Christian Bök

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EIAIUEUEOUOAIAXAEAE
AOIOEEUEOUXEEAE
UIOIEAUUEUEUUEEE

OEOEEAUEAEAUEEEEE
AEEAIEIEOIAIOOEE
IOUEAATEEEEE
AAOEEQUEIEEEEIEE

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QUEUEAIOEIEIEUEAE
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