

NOVAbroadcast

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**A book
about love
& war & death**

dick higgins

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Dick Higgins

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About A Book About Love & War & Death

By the late 1950's the tendency of poetry to become increasingly musical had reached its apogee in the works of quite a number of poets, including Jackson Mac Low and myself, which applied chance and logical test structures to language. This resulted in very abstract lyricism that seemed somehow detail-oriented. I began to want to work with larger units. I also wanted my work to be more literature than music, and literature seemed to me a matter of ideas. So I wanted to apply chance structures to complete units of ideas in a systematic way.

Chance led me to an Indonesian Dictionary, with 202 pages translating English into Bahasa Indonesia; I picked a structure using three dice to work with. But each die has six sides, so there were $6 \times 6 \times 6$, or 216 possible numbers. I let each throwing reference a page number, and used the first unused word on that page in a subject list. This gave me fourteen pages (up to the 216 pages needed) of Bahasa Indonesia, which explains all the "Antiks" and "Balai-Balais" in the work. As each word was used, it was crossed off. In this way I figured I would slowly use up most of the common words in English, and spice up the inevitably Latinate tone of such a proceeding with the Indonesian materials.

The time was 1960 when I began the **Book**, taking my lists of words and structuring them into sentences, either lyrical or grammatical, according to rules which were consistent, section by section, but not section to section. At the start of some sections I would think, let's have a psalm, and I'd think my acts of writing in terms of a psalm. Or, let's do straight prose, and I'd do it. As far as I could tell I was putting everything I knew into the book, and I would cover all the subjects in the dictionary. But for a focus I wanted to list the things that meant the most to me. In the Spring of 1960 my brother Mark left Dr. Schweitzer's hospital, where he had been an assistant, and went to the Congo, where independence was followed by civil war. Roughly simultaneous to this I was married in New York. During the Summer Mark was killed, because he was a white man. The three events became very deeply connected in my mind, and so I chose love and war and death as my touchstones, in spite of the pretentious tone that naming them gives to the title of the overall work.

Canto One was completed in 1961.¹ Cantos Two and Three, both shorter, involved

¹Canto One of *A Book About Love & War & Death* is published as a Great Bear Pamphlet by the Something Else Press, 238 W 22nd St., New York, NY 10011.

slightly more elaborate structures and tighter construction, so they were not finished until 1966. For the next I discontinued the use of dice, and wrote an IBM Fortran IV program which resulted in a tremendously long printout randomizing numbers from one to 216—and in the longest of the Cantos to date, Canto Four, which was completed in August 1968, and which is conceived as a succession of scenes and incidents in an overall scenario. Canto Five may be equally long and will be in free verse. By the time Canto Six comes along, quite a number of pages in the Dictionary will have been used up, and the text will become increasingly alliterative.

Because of the density of the images resulting from the method of composition, it is virtually impossible to read any of the **Book** to oneself. It should always be read aloud or heard, preferably with the text being passed back and forth from reader to reader as each tires or begins to laugh too hard.

New York
October 7, 1968

Canto Two—The Girl in the Oven's Story

Prologue

In the ovens, the opinion of the measurers of movements has gravity.

But Russia is the seller, so an inflation is inappropriate.

Her tranquility, torrential! Fibrously-focussed leaden keynotes! Prophylactics out of proportion!

The demure one: "The detection of the impolite incriminates the incumbent inaptly. The transaction of the tortoise must have been a fiction."

Our fodder had become our leaders' key-ring, our more proportional proposal in the den of detectives had incurred the inflator's inflexible, incurable, cursory and crazy pardon.

But was it pardonable that the gravy on the headline was soiled with sherry? The mover's neutrality has its hardships. My hardware for the script has been scrubbed by the Ministry of Meat.

So I spat sulphurically up an inscrutable indoors. I gave my dash-board to the dastard, and became vivacious—unseen by the Russian.

Semi-headlong we grazed with our con-

federates in the Confederation. Our grease is on the grown-ups and is related to repeats. Their peculiarity is pecuniary. "He who has vegetation becomes utterly conscientious."

We became conscious of loops.

The major-general was hair-brained and hair-lipped, but in his autopsy that autumn, a bomb was found in his bowl, which iced him immediately. That insect! He was indubitably a reeking and rusty jawer, but he could interject official orthographic data: "My deformity comprises a coachman's empress's equality . . ." But the head-master's growths civilized his claims to peril. Perilously he existed and fabricated dates, which curtailed the teak-thoraxed drovers. Those Dutchmen! Their life-insurance made legions of balls **bay!** They had seventeen scruples, and their leadership — the leading **balasans** — went to Balententera at their convenience to confer with the isolated irresistible.

Dirt-cheap, they wanted to defraud him. But His Godliness imported diamonds of no importance for head-money for diaphragms. He had cancer downwards from his icebag.

Still, he tried to really do a curtain, to abdicate.

But this merely coagulated the commo-

tion. And the airing of their deception assisted the coagulation.

This cartilage became eloquent with a counter-plea that led to our acquittal, and our alloy was enhanced. The unselfish could now dismount for absolution at its source, and could confer about the crown, which was said to be downy and to rustle at any compromise.

Chapter Nine

They came in a cartload, with chinks and with blazes. And yet between them they didn't have a hoof. The sum was its equalization.

For though she had a pretty uvula, to become certain of this would be an incursion into ice-bound surety.

And he, he was an arkian auxiliary, conscious of a stupidity that had to be countersigned.

His hesitation was highly literate.

But she was a howler. She invaded the surf and wedded a period past.

Although she was not dirty, she was indeed a foundling from a fountain of acquittance.

And he was drowned in mechanics.

It was the anniversary of the observatory, and it was just like a cartoon. At the agape agates were graded. Our foe, then,

was Afiat Bahu, whose head-most things were his injections. This M.P. had no wedding. However, he was actually not important. She was.

She was dutiful to his abah-abah. No pedagogue could give a discussion of evacuation, for she would consume him.

And, of course, she was bribable. Who could **abai** her?

She prevails whose aperture is docile knowledge, whose pitch is apiece.

But he now was a buffet of numerals. She wanted the troops. It was compulsion.

But who, on a bayonet, is responsible?

His receipt was like a semi-colon.

This deterred her repeatedly. Thus the majority came to call him, that is, me, "Mister."

Chapter Ten

It was defrayed by the bazaar on the seventeenth.

You were cordial, I was single. It was a question of Being. Amen.

Nobody wanted a haricot very much, except for spite. But his daubs had deteriorated into the periodicals. The age of twins is immemorial, so in the college their disobedience was reflected in the luggage, such as viz. accordingly.

You tingled, heedless.

They knuckled you into the steerage. Your existence had a flavour of gillyflowers about it, based on countless abdications. You were more literary than a ballet.

The seventh evacuee was an importer. It was all over.

You put a bell in a jug.

His relations immediately left the country.

I put a bug ashore. It was sheer pedagogy.

Or, perhaps, it was wittiness.

Because the hubbub formed a wedge that helped us abduct the more scrupulous ones. Your cartridge was given to abang, on account of the excess of airlines.

Did it avail you to transcribe, mentally, the heterogeneous quotients?

It is yours to which I refer.

There was a vacancy at the gathering.

So you, with efficiency, were able to oscillate between numerals and aged coal. We were all indebted to headquarters.

"Abduct me!" cried the fire-annihilator.

But we left her in the sludge.

She was too importunate, too efficient.

Chapter Eleven

Nothing was crucial to the **apak**. The defrayment of the rarity would have re-

quired only middling legislation. But it was not post-free.

So we were without ashtrays.

Her letter said, "Proceeding like the rest. Yours"

But it was pitch dark and we were without mechanical carvers to hew down her relatives. The rascals ran a restaurant.

Chapter Twelve — The Sexy One

I apologized and was absolved for my misunderstanding that since there was a bug under my pad the accordion should be used as Apal's case. The denial of this by the leading mechanic caused Angkut to vaccinate them against further disobedience.

And she? She was bleached by her emptiness.

I referred her to the political claimant.

The adjutant was on a cedar, being drowsy, building Asias conveniently labled, if misunderstood.

"Atjap, I need your numeration."

He put a thorn in a luggage-ticket, which made the numerator.

His **azimat** was empty.

The half-caste was on the beach with Apel, the all-round vehement one. He scrutinized her half-pay, warming her **api**,

and underwent a shrub belligerently. Her dowry was a scar.

"Hark!" she said, "The rhythm of the creaking of the politicians!" She courtseyed to Ampun, who was carrying the firearms to the harlequins.

They had an ice-box, and in it, an **arlodji**, which relaxed them. Gaudy with cream, they piteously tried to communicate. But the wretched syrup was compulsory to them.

The Almari's source is a grub that is found near Balig. In the interlude it manually does without its numerous parentage, though this is offset by some labial matters. Nonetheless, he will single-handedly do in the indecent ones that keep their opium in coal boxes.

Yet it was indecisive.

In the senate a rabbit was doing his duty. Amtenar was unhappy. He was evading the atmosphere of **api-api** with an available curve, an apology, a fountain pen. He wanted to kick over Arabia, where, though he was no sluggard (like most of his countrymen), at a small pyramid where a masquerade was being held, they had tried to dissolve him as a trophy.

Gradually he realized that he needed advice. So he went to Alot Balik and importuned her for her paddle.

"Shall we shift?" she asked.

"It's thorny. Put it on the **aktip** stake."

"You're jealous."

"I'm not your abductor, but I do need a paddle-wheel."

"Why didn't you mention it?" she asked.

"I was stale. I was the offshoot of an effigy of Charity."

"But you're not a dwarf. You could make an effort."

"I feel unharmonious, like a nun with a vaccination of apoplexy." And he did become, wittingly, filled with jealousy.

Something rustled. It was the consumer-plotter Apik. They annotated him at once with their heels.

She bleated, "Indeed!"

"Though he was a minor, he was sturdy," he said. "It must have been the indefinite graduation due to parental deterioration, or maybe to Mrs. Stalk. Without compunction I've observed her ceding it."

"Greasy nuptials make for stormy warmth. My padlock is a manufactory that needs no referee."

"Only a minority are witty, Azza Wadjalla." And he nearly made a termination.

"Don't misuse this conference."

"Don't try to nurse me." This was a literature of restitution, of twining and im-

posing, of making much of the consumption of insects.

"Don't falsify it," she said in her tortuous way.

"I have a shilling for you."

"Is it All Saints' Day?"

"Shall we doze?"

"Shall we couple?"

"Senator Balok drubbed me at the convention for not deputizing the Arabian."

"Well then, preferably you should do him a favour."

"I shudder to think how phenomenally that might equalize things."

"You he-goat you!"

"Well, I'm non-commissioned. And Abdi the **Banthahan** of the armada has a more favourable height for you. And don't you think a solar explosive might induce that old vizier to summarize his story?"

"Well," she said, "he's a thoroughbred but he's also an amuk and perfect parenthesis. And I'd rather not bifurcate any more consumptives."

He offered her an underground bribe, e.g., a clammy one, such as Apit's splash-board. And so, at last, he was disobedient to the coalition of the great. But there was no indelicate oscillation which the observer could take as an inducement: the flaw would be in her publisher's preference for

cushions. Still, as a team, each had his parenthesis.

So the legislator gauged a litre for her of **arsip**.

A jeep came hitherto.

Interlude—The Way it Sometimes Is There

The communication comes from the South in lead-pencil: "There will be a system for communions. We are to induct those who collide in the exits without faltering. Evaluate this. Alu Baris."

So we shuffle our veils. The sculptor of the headstones is irresolute and sluggish because it is All Soul's Day. Ostensibly due to the excessive muck, his sculpture has a loop-hole, but he scarcely proceeds with it, **qua**, a laboratory.

His intermediary says that never did litter do any harm to a beacon, and so we four are mitigated by the relay-maker.

The kid seems imposing to Afrit, who is rasping a rat. But this is makeshift. It is a little clamorous with guilt to the core.

We mix with the postmen. The **Bahwa** is inarticulate, but he tinkles with disdain for us hucksters. We say that aluminum is prevalent in our soldiers, but that the process is pitiless to chintz, for which we receive

mucus from His Godliness. We have no contact with his spleen.

Anglap has determination, but Aku has the sea. Both are restless after the unhealthful communiqué. Whoever has the tin-opener has the preferential surface.

I am an opponent of the indemnification. I repent and roll candidly to a philanthropic opportunity to crease the minstrels.

The liturgy is cork. Their offspring have a couplet about a crucible in a luggage van. Their malady is **bantai** a surgeon confesses. And Akuntan is a candidate for surgery.

I clamour for the anglo to be in the sluice, but the soldiers are insecure. It is acrid, else I would be abed. Bantal opposes the quadrangle as heightening the defrayment, but his ostentation evaporates when we create one.

Alum will nevermore be conscripted since she is as amendable to a disabled ostrich as to the creation of her ice-chest.

Abdjad, the youth, has a non-party candidature on the ceiling. He is the sole one in the procession who can tear half-way through a relay race with apostasy and bribery, or who can plough up Asiatic bricks.

The vaccines form a wedge on the docks, but the beads need a resoration.

This menu cannot be exported.

As a prefix, I propose that a shin-bone wizard's disdainful wriggle be Abis's stuttering transfer, since, in the undergrowth, there is scarcely a medal which, to the masses in the nursery, would be a computation of the same. But the lead in the legislature scared them, she says, charming Abrak, who does not rate a disease.

Then it is by.

Chapter Thirteen

The mint may have been elsewhere, but it was not in the South-East. So it was restored to her.

Still, we kidnapped an air-liner. Was that so mercantile?

The ploughshares stood in the sea-breeze, veiled like corkscrews in a diary.

By prevaricating we stalled Anai-Anai in her frolic with the diseased ones.

This transformed them into fictitious great-grandfathers.

We enjoined her that on the sea coast she might inflict accountable shines.

Would this be advisable, she asked Arti?

He thus became the agency of her transformation. With a hook that was mucky this pregnant one was made insensible with ice-cream.

But the larceny, was it loose?

Was the transformer a roller of bombarded impositions. Could he degenerate? The youthful intermediates drubbed on the ice-safes with their fiddles, and said, through the lugubrious **apiun** fog, "Bye-bye." None of these wedlocks' conscriptions or evaporations was, inasmuch as an unskilled exodus of the stout from the dockyards was due to the air mail's irresolution.

It was a pudding of the rusty and the prehistoric, straddling the tropics with Abur the scarecrow, dwelling for the interment of the creator.

And you, you were the receiver.

"Oh thou to whom the dice have dictated the lard of Artja, abet not then the degeneration of Akur from a coal-pit to a rut to a massacre."

But it was the other (otherwise Roman) proposition of this padre that became inseparable from the enjoying and the aluding to an heir. The stallion was charming, and the clan's scarf was the exchange.

In the hall:

"Whoever is coarse does the opposite of elucidate."

Aside: "It is built of corn."

In Arabic, the wolf: "Bab has asked Balu to mutilate the sea-cow." He inserts one.

Balur, the corned **akur**: "Nevertheless,

custody is an evasion consecrated to the interminable."

The headstrong invader: "If it is legitimate it could be harmful to the ones in Denmark, where there is a collier whose **aruh** is not godly but a forgery."

The malaria-abhorer: "The bombardment of repentance with quadratics shall determine the fire-bombed ones! The mutilation hath proclaimed it!"

Chapter Fourteen

"I am exonerated," she said, "for I am unsold, and it is over."

Bow-legs was lukewarm, in a tropical vein.

At the colliery the atom's summary was the favorite pedagogy. The creatures were apostates because their parents' dwellings had been sea-cucumbers. This underhand politics had left them at a disadvantage and postmarked. They were icy when they were whole-hearted. This was a ballast overall.

She was huddled in the larder with a tinplated bifurcation of a gag. The chip was shunned, which was a loose elucidation of the charting of candles by the postmaster. He was pasted like an unhealthful Hudson. But he made headway with Abur. She was

his obsession, he was her intermission.

Their collision was at a trot.

"Oh restrain my twinkles with bow-nets," she said. "I am bleeding."

The induction of these philanthropists led to jelly.

"The custom of chiseling **baik** seems to be obsolete," he said.

Hers was an overbearing idea: if the merchandise was in the tea-room at the post office where the Yugoslav communist had his insulation, Achir's dictation might be underlined. But the rabble from Anak might tease her for this insertion. So she would be chartered then by a pagan whose great-grandsons had dwindled, as could be determined by Air Mail. Then Achir, from greatness, could be puffed to fame.

He said her periphery was acrimonious and, as a builder, he bellowed to her to absorb him. Not evasive were these bellows, so the fire-brigade came and said that, though he was not ideal, he was splendid, and one bystander stammered that, egad, one of the systematic obstacles would be those fiddlers whose immense daughters had gone by the dozen to paganism because of the pedals of that seafarer without a surname. But this was an annotation, since his own daughter-in-law peddled eggs for exportation.

So she? She had a receiving-set for others, and he had the cash.

On the thoroughfare, she said, there was a doctor, but he said that on the by-street it was summer, it was romantic, that her leaf-gold shut belly was not an often thing, that his candlestick doctrine was famed as were his front credentials.

But draftily she said that his frontage was a blemish from a foggy thing rather than from splendour.

June, 1962 - January, 1966

Canto Three

"The Courts of Miracles"

Chapter Fifteen

Askance, but not foiling
An atonement, not a ballet
Alluring
A gage from Atjar

Chapter Sixteen

Indulging in forgery,
A bowsprit in a nursing home.

Velocity?
Lifeless as avarice, legitimate.
Angsa's document, a customary polka,
Advising the teasers,
Building and wringing the shiny and
obstinate,
Sending, colloquially.

In the pollen on the moor,
A pugilist with a vocabulary of tables;
On the ship,
A tinsmith, unhealthy,
The minuend before rabies and the
impossible,

Massaged straddle-legged and living in
but a singlet,
With the analysis of the ratification
administered clandestinely,
Denominated as nonsense,
A sample of the lifelong midge
Deciding and
Atrociously splitting celebrated lullabies.
Oh, repetition would emulate,
But his apostile was a kidnapper
Shuttering from the underlip of her box.

If you are straight, you must decide,
But if you have a beak, must you crucify?
A deputy's hall-mark,
His cashbook,
But where is the ought?
Can we indemnify a bulb?
And could she be advisedly a dictator?

Imposters fearing the dye,
Atrocities in their pity.

Arung of the wholesale
Ratification of the exchequer,
Larger than a midget of Wednesday,
A masseur for the fabrication of gaiety,
Disobeying his inflictions.

To Yugoslavia? To Arus
With our wholesome dyers

Whose sties are dynamic,
Ogling their emulation of the southern
 and the velvet,
Familiar by the ounce and
Enjoyable with a clap of candour.
The fabricators' colloquy
Juggling disorders,
The slumbering woman,
Scarlatina,
Nursling of the exporters,
In the mud of midnight;—
The fourteenth surpassing
In her avaricious hue,
But whose enjoyment
Drags towards the dictatorship
Of Alun-Alun who detests our Malays.

In the cab she is laboriously
And unhindered
Polluting the shipment
Attached to her hitherto.

No opposition, but from a life-sized page
Whose equanimity is dynamited;
Identical and fabulous,
This proprietor and heiress
From whose lumbago each new sanitorium
 stems
A hoop and a balloon,
Ruthless.

Alur the Apokat

Setting the custom house overboard
With a mixture of philanthropy and
 egg-cups;
A community of godowns

Avenging, not solemn,
A degradation of mutineers,
Muddled quadrupeds,
Irrespective of splitting and torturing
And cabbages.

Greece,
Overcast,
Jelly-fish-hued;
Prorogation by placards
Loosening the front doors
By influence and prejudice;
Table-cloths computed with solemnity.

The vendors,
Racing to place;
The accountant,
Celebrated as a cashier,
Mutinous?

And Atjara
Solemnizing Banteras
Accruing his releases from Banting;
No imposture,
No scarlet legitimization,
For the philosopher,
Fearful of the bombers,

Sets his amendment to flax.

"Comrades! Fire Engines!
The stench of the pageant,
Ratifying our chase
With cash-payments
From coasts to pedestrians,
A chasm in a Malayan Paris!
The absorption of the vocations into the
rhythmic!
My Eve!
Announce that the weeds have eluded the
insulators!"

For we were appalled
By the nonstop stenciling
Of eggshells with acrobats,
Hallowed, in tea-spoon style,
By the Apotek.

But the leaflets!
With fiddlesticks
Exposing Balut the Aga-Bantji
Undermining him,
Crude him,
From Bulgaria
With muddle-headed
Diction . . .

Chapter Seventeen

The gin,
Attached to Al.

And Atji,
Degraded by her seventieth consecration,
Inaudible as a boxer,
With her dictionaries in a mutiny,
Overcharged and, overcome, fearlessly
asleep by the referendum.
As a preliminary, she was not cruel,
Nor did she say "Our."

For she, harmless,
And our league,
Blending and twinkling in our uniforms,
Overcrowded and dauntless in our
attachment to clappers,
Recently our ginger had been in ratio.

Our merchants,
Replaced, sanctified, scattered through
the parish —
What amends for a lifetime?

The fourth, the concave one,
Stamped out and oppressed in the corner,
saying,
"But is it conventional to accumulate
colons?"
And the invalid, thoroughly chivalrous,

Inside the decimals,
And the administration overdone
And derailed by the administrators.

For this is the exposure of summer,
That those who are irresponsible,

Whose allurements are solicited by the
 dawn's chivalry,
Have their kidneys in pails.
The stamp duty on their trotters
Is jeopardized by the decisions at the
 summit
Where the teatrays are transfusions of
 sanctions and merchantmen,
And a plagiarism would not be singular.

Their arwah would be invalidated by
 their moans,
For the prelude to a vaccinist is the plague.

The invalidity,
A fowl-dynamo of graft.
No aspect of chlorine is such a drudge
 as Achiran,
And on the eve his periscope is even
In its uniformity and cruelty.
Summoned by the A.S.,
It is straightened with trouble and plain
 fidelity.
Its facade is to the scenery as an agency
 is to a livelihood,

An insulator, not a terminus,
Less admirable or influential
Than impotency,
Premature and technical.

Rye,
Folded in flax.
Leisure—a confession of the average.

Chapter 18 — The flash-back

Shall we expound about Kalah?
Or shall we commute?
Is it ours to abstain?
Or shall we be womanlike
And Parisian as the killing zeal
Or the grain of April,
Since the dissonance is detestable.
Pulling against the senile ones
Clarifies and expresses those across
 the medals
From the coastal drughives.
But the Angsur Hoop-hoarders and
 Masseurs
Gauze the act wholly from their proroguing
 invaluable post-paid brick-kilns;
Nooks and stamp-papers, midribs without
 frontiers,
In actions without any sea-fights,
Fidgeting and dissuading from leaking,

Or even philosophizing, undermost,
Candy then the pain,
And hoarsely and credibly, philosophy
ballot-sabotaging,
Ribs rationed by the fire-flies.

So the straining and proscribed (by our
inaugural and impotent solicitants,
Who belong to the druggists' babs) attacks
Are attempted by us, the blessed big
slump-weedy denomination-lifters,
And we nut-indulgent **alam**-necessitators,
in transit,
Bricklayers quadrupling and ribboning
our identification,
Our abhorrence dying like massive
heydays of obstipation and
exoneration,
And our Agaks are conversant at
receptions.
Then, hooping-cough shall not God-speed
our foxers,
Or impoverish our active and wondering
with insulting.

At the custom-house our sea-fowl
surplusses-vacuum
Relentlessly chloroformed the jugglers.

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