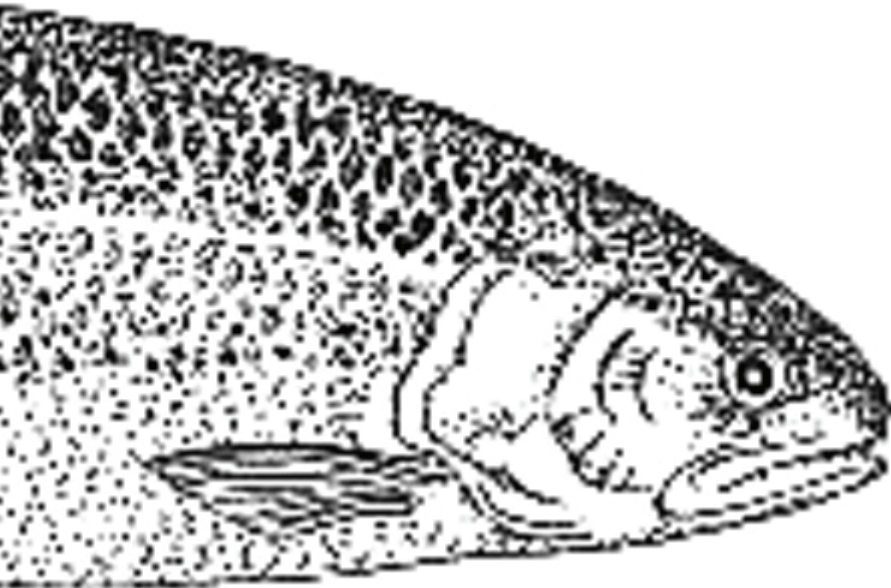


# Go Fish

*An Antipoem Epic in Five Parts*

Michael G. Khmelnitsky



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VANCOUVER, CANADA

## Introduction

All work produced on demand, rather than in response to internal impulses, inherently includes a measure of obfuscation, concealment and encryption, often taken for erroneous ambiguity. Thus, to better explain the successes and shortcomings of this project, it is important to understand its origin, purpose and circumstance.

“Go Fish” began its life in January of 2006, in my ENGL 492C class, as an idea of what I then saw to be an exercise in futility. The seminar was run by Dr. Laurence Ricou and was called Habitating. The stated goal of the single assignment of which the course consisted was the production of an undefined and ostensibly-unrestricted body of work based on a randomly-assigned species of flora or fauna, tying together its literary and scientific context and significance. I drew the rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), and then the trouble began.

Without the structure of analytical requirements and project guidelines, the class fell apart, as many of us refused to accept the possibility of the confluence of art and science, having desperately escaped science to pursue language and literature. Most of the approaches many of us ended up taking were closer to the anthropomorphic and artistic than to the impossible synergy of analysis and creativity that Dr. Ricou had somewhat-irrationally hoped for. Here are my own, early comments on the project:

This assignment [...] does not lend itself to such inquiry. I cannot simply “read” the Rainbow Trout[;] I cannot take apart the intentions of its stanzas, paragraphs, literary devices, poetic devices, rhythm, rhyme and the like, because it has none, because the Rainbow Trout is an author of its own life and nothing more. I, in contrast, am an author of life and art. For the Rainbow Trout, the two are the same.

Having despaired of attempting to achieve the impossible, I set concrete guidelines before myself; I now knew I was going to write an epic poem. But what kind of epic would it be? Inspired, in part, by Jackson Mac Low’s “Young Turtle Assymetries,” I have spontaneously designed the first part of the poem, using three voices: that of the human (*Homo sapiens*), the book (*codex*), and the rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*). This approach levelled the playing field somewhat, lending my project some organic vitality, especially when this portion was read by three different persons. The result was good, but I was stuck again, at loss as to how to continue the poem and, more importantly, how to finish it.

Then, in a second flash of inspiration, I remembered a comment that Seth, a classmate, had once made about the fact that the different voices on my poem sound alike in print (but also contextually – since humans write books and form perceptions on fish – and so on in this vein). Thus, the second part of the poem, heavily influenced by William Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* (and the screenplay of its film adaptation), allowed me to

conflate the three voices into two. However, these two voices were not certain of their own identities; they deceived, exaggerated, twisted words and engaged in complex wordplay – humanly and yet artificially.

By this point, it became clear to me that this project was never meant to be a proper epic, but, rather, an *antipoem*, a concept I have gleaned in the work of Nicanor Parra, whose matter-of-fact “The Nobel Prize” first greatly impressed me. This new realisation allowed me to transform a handful of dry, and frankly, boring, government documents and reports on fisheries and conservation into a complex analysis of the human psyche with regard to language, identity and perception of reality, continuing the conspiratorial theme of *Naked Lunch* and injecting third-party commentary on the views of Burroughs, as well as quotations from *1984*. With only minor editing, these comments not only became incredibly apropos to the project, but also formed an additional level of analysis and criticism – of the educational system which produced the professor who required me to take on this project and the critical, analytical philosophical, social, cultural and psychological systems which produced this professor. In addition, the poem itself, an increasingly-complex, organic simulacrum of a work of literature, now forced its readers to interpret concepts that intrinsically resist interpretation, having no inherent meaning other than their existence, just as I was forced to “interpret” the rainbow trout. The conclusion of the poem, suggested by this recursive approach, then flowed naturally into its own place.

The fourth section of the poem was a riff on the latter parts of the third, since, as I was wrapping up the project, I remembered the requirement for the documentation of sources. I obliged, within the framework of the poem, providing vague references and ISBN numbers, attempting to obfuscate any sense of factual continuity and verifiability, thus reinforcing my earlier approach to characterisation (if it can be called such) in the poem.

At this point, a few were left unfinished: the poem lacked a title and its sense of closure was still somewhat lacking (since I ended the poem with a bibliography). Thus, an excerpt from Hugo Ball’s sound poem, “seahorses and flying fish” (*“seepferdchen und flugfische”*), performed by Christian Bök (whose *Eunoia* inspired me earlier to write a series of alliterating poems – specifically, one poem I wrote during the course, which used “F” sounds) became the big, fat period at the end of my own poem. I then spent a few hours recording the poem and running my voice through various filters to give it an authentic sound.

The last-moment title of the poem is also significant: “Go Fish” is a children’s card game; my poem is a word game. “Go Fish” is also a pun on an obvious expletive, which, I felt, was flung in my direction at the beginning of the project, and which I flung back at its end, laying down my cards, triumphant.

– Mike.

June 10, 2006 4:42 AM

## Contents

i. in the beginning	1
ii. the whole truth	4
iii. government documents	11
iv. source code	17
v. excerpt from “seahorses and flying fish” ( <i>“seepferdchen und flugfische”</i> )	19

## **i. in the beginning**

*homo sapiens*

when i was a fish, the etobicoke board of education published a book.

the book said:

*codex*

this stream is the home of the rainbow trout. the rainbow trout gets its name from a band of colour on its body. some rainbow trout grow up to be 50 cm long.

yes. but you have many names.

fisk. fiskaz. fisc. fiskr.  
fisks. piscos. piscis.  
fiscian. fishy.

i needed to ascertain your identity before i proceeded. this is a stress test. time is a factor.

i could tell your age by those scales.

the body of the rainbow trout is covered with scales. the scales protect the fish.

*oncorhynchus mykiss*

it was a good book. it had a nice... cover.

is that what it says my name is?

hah. i only have one name. why are you telling me this?

you should never ask a lady her age.

i don't know; is this a  
test?

the rainbow trout has  
dark spots on its body.

there is a dark line on the  
body of the rainbow  
trout. it helps the fish to  
swim through the water.

the fish has senses of  
sight, smell, taste, touch,  
balance and hearing. the  
rainbow trout belongs to  
the salmon family of fish.  
the rainbow trout leaps  
and moves by bending its  
body. in the spring, the  
rainbow trout returns to  
its home stream. then it  
lays its eggs. the rainbow  
trout eats fish and  
leeches. it leaps out of the  
water to catch insects. it  
has a powerful tail to help  
it move. the rainbow trout  
breathes in the water. it  
gets oxygen from the  
water. the gills of the fish  
help it to breathe.

yes, it's you; i recognise  
you by your weaknesses.

do you have a soul?

see, it acts as a stabilising  
factor, compensating for  
our lack of political  
alignment.

would you please rub  
some of this powder on  
my gills, mike?

how do you know my  
name?

hah! lufu. lubo. liaf. lieb.  
liufs. luba. liebe. leubh.  
lubet. libet. lubhyati.  
l'ubu. liaupse. you seem  
to have weaknesses of  
your own.

i don't know...

isn't love great? spring  
sprung a leak and now  
someone has to pay the  
price.

oh, i think you do, mike, i  
think you do (or at least *i*  
does, at the very least). we  
need to have a chat.

## ii. the whole truth

*A*

well, that was a fine collection of nonsense. when did you dream this up?

i'm that fish you can't shut up about, the corny mike, or something like that.

you must be the book. do you have a spine?

do you have pages?

nevermind. a book would know that.

it would take a book to explain *that*. i said *nevermind*.

mhummm. are you by any chance anadromous?

you... return to you original hatching grounds to spawn.

yes. this means you are the fish.

yes.

how...?

but you don't even know what a book is! what's happening? where are we?

*B*

yesterday night, twenty-four years ago. i'm not too good with time, you see. wait, who are you?

wait, no; that's not right. who am i, then?

let me check... mhummm... yes, i have a spine.

what are pages?

what is a book?

what am i, then?

what does that mean?

yes, that's right. is this another test?

are you a bipedal primate belonging to the mammalian species?

then you are the human.

i can use the internet too, you know.

if you look carefully at my lips you'll realize that i'm actually saying something else.

what are you saying, then? you're not really here?

who gave the order? what happened to the last agent?

what was he investigating?

structured asynchronous local audio language?

yes.

you may be surprised to learn i have just completed a study on the death torture mechanism camouflaged as a handy manual... with a diagram for a hand grenade. the technique has been developed in the penal colonies for your kind, although it has killed more than it

correct. note how the voice of the book had disappeared, how i am saying things i should not be saying. this is a dream, a fantasy borne of an assignment you have received from interzone, inc.

you're on a need-to-know basis now, old boy. now, try to understand that we can only communicate through the channels created by your subconscious mind. fish cannot talk. this research assignment and its rather weak... expression is deep cover for your infiltration of the mind of a former associate of doctor benway, one named doctor laurence ricou. the two collaborated on, shall we say, a project in annexia, that resulted in the death of the previous operative, bill.

s.a.l.a.l.

precisely. bill was looking into the viral nature of language. he was looking into death. did you know, mike...may i call you mike?...did you know that there are thirteen varieties of death in existence, of which a mere two are known to science?

had reformed.

the cover of the codex shows bait and tackle (most of it political), arrayed like a bunch of anal sex toys on the front cover. i don't understand how these hooks, floaters and bait can be coloured in fluorescent reds and yellows. this is despicable.

maybe you're right. there *is* something queer with this description: i vividly remember that first fish, that jiggled my red and white plastic float a half dozen times before tentatively pulling it under. when dad whispered, "strike," i did, for all it was worth.

yes, but you lost his spirit. he had to be shown the truth several times before he gave up his stubbornly held beliefs and began exploring the possibilities offered by float fishing.

interesting! do go on.

on the contrary, heh, it's the best kind of cover, mike. homosexuality is the best all-around cover an agent ever had.

vedder was a good agent. however, he has never been the same after he discovered the intoxicating fluids produced by our bodies. there was lead in us, mike, lead! we poisoned ourselves in order to kill our enemies. but we prevailed.

yes, now i see why the lures are so bright. they blind our sensibilities, so that, when we become attracted to the possibility of defection to the world above, they pluck us from the water at just the right depth. i was never the same after i was let go then, mike. would you rub some of this powder on my gills, please?

sure.

tell me, i'm still not quite clear on how one of your kind can become a double agent. do you not check the political currents before you bite down on the lure?

you mean...?

because interzone had given me an assignment! i must interview you and determine whether your goals are still in line with those of the organisation.

it was... it...

so the hunter has become the hunter...  
what doesn't kill us makes us stranger...  
but what's the connection between interzone and plato?

thank you, mike.

see, that's the trick. we have our cyanide capsules. tetraglycerine menthol, top-secret additives, but who can resist a free meal?

correct. having been eaten, we eat at our enemies from the inside. why do you think you are dreaming this, mike?

are you so sure about this, mike? tell me, what did you eat for lunch last thursday during the family reunion?

correct, mike. it was me. you have ingested me and now i am controlling your every movement. it is not you who is testing me, mike; i am testing your loyalty to our cause by making you deathly ill by witchcraft. if your float has drifted on a given line several times without touching bottom, the only thing that will make your float go under is a fish. it's really a simple as that, mike. when the float goes under...

vedder told me once (in the strictest of confidences, of course), that plato's students preferred fishing to their duties. thankfully, plato's homosexual cover kept them occupied long enough for him to strike. let that be a lesson to you.

but i find it disgraceful how he used his young, the roe, as bait for his targets.

but that's the domain of anglers, those line-and-rod geometricians. did you know all this was a conceptual error on the part of one of our technical advisory department members?

i've heard the rumour, but please, do tell.

well, he was supposed to come up with a good infiltration device, something simple and poetic. he remembered agent atwood talking about an open eye, when he came up with the perfect instrument.

what did he call it?

well, initially it was called the "gapped eye shank barbed bite bend." problem is, the divinity was all wrong.

aah, of course. they had to be in a derivative curve, and he gave them ninety-degree archangels for archanglers.

precisely. so he scrapped his earlier elaborate plans and called it simply – the hook. and even here, we were never certain whether they wanted to attract double agents to partners in war, or lovers: hand-made spoons and baits of cheese coated with vaseline were the principal attractants of those times.

so you mean partners in love?

it's all the same to me. in the end, work love affairs between our and your agents always ended badly. just last week, vedder told me that, through a fortunate coincidence, two friends of mine met on a small river in british columbia. in many ways these men were alike. both were steelheading fanatics...

miscegenation, eh? i can see why it all ended so bitterly.

don't interrupt! the primary difference between these men was their preferred tackle. one is a british columbia native, the other, a u.s. angler who prefers bottom bouncing. both felt their method was superior. it was one of those magic moments, vedder told me. both used fresh roe and sand shrimp. from pool to pool they leap-frogged, each giving the other first water in alternative turns.

how romantic. so what happened?

they found out they were both fish. one of them was just a snappy cross-dresser. but let's get back to the basics again. you can't catch a fish that isn't there. just like you cannot easily determine where your own report ends and someone else's begins.

you've been reading vedder's materials all along! who are you, really?

you can't catch a fish that isn't there. conversely, an undisturbed steelhead can usually be caught. simple, isn't it?

so you're a steelhead, eh? this is an interesting development. the first step toward steelheading success is finding the fish. occasionally, you can see steelhead in their lie.

i am not lying to you, mike. learning to interpret these clues is known as reading water. only by reading water an agent of interzone can determine he is speaking to another true agent, or expose a traitor.

so you admit to it. how long have you known?

that i am also a fish.

do you have a soul?

yes. then *you* are the human! why are you dreaming about me?

i don't understand. could you please rub some of this powder on my gills?

what are you investigating?

what is death?

what are you saying, then? you're not really here?

known what?

you've told me in the very beginning.

yes. is this a test?

i received an assignment from interzone, inc. to determine whether you are still aligned with the causes of our organisation.

certainly, friend.

the viral nature of language. death.

i don't know. i just repeat the words i have been told. as a matter of fact, if you look carefully at my lips, you'll realize that i'm actually saying something else.

correct.

### iii. government documents

FADE IN:

INT. GOVERNMENT OFFICE - NIGHT

We see a windowless office, with barely enough space to turn around, filing cabinets stacked next to its walls. At the far end of the room, there is a small desk with a locked drawer. On top of the desk there is a FISH. The fish is reading documents stamped "CLASSIFIED," flipping the pages with its fins.

FISH

(reads out loud)

"An evaluation of hatchery planted steelhead smolts in the Coquiltlam river, by H. W. Lorz. TOP SECRET" Hmm... Let's see here... "Introduction"... Ah! "The Coquiltlam River was chosen as one of the sites for release of hatchery reared smolts at which this important evaluation program could be carried out. In the spring of 1957 and in subsequent years, steelhead smolts were released on assurance that comprehensive creel census records would be gathered and submitted to the Port Coquiltlam and District Hunting and Fishing Club. However, after a week's time, none of the smolts have returned as anticipated... Instead, the waters of the Coquiltlam River turned red and strange chanting was heard over the river at night, until group"... Hmm, this part is censored... "until group [blank] had laid a new, thin layer of concrete and soil on the banks and bottom of the river." Let's see here...there! "Sex Ration," no, wait, it's "Sex Ratio": "The sex ratio of adult steelhead captured from the Coquiltlam River is shown in Table IV. The catch is separated into early and later 'winter' run fish. A striking feature of these data is that the males almost invariably outnumber the females in the catch. Later captures had yielded a one hundred percent male population." Mhummm. It seems that our agents have all defected to the other side... "Experiment terminated. Repeat spawning to be attempted next year."

The fish rapidly turns around, revealing a YOUNG MAN standing behind the fish, listening to all it had read.

FISH

(accusingly)

How long have you been there?

YOUNG MAN

(nonchalantly)

Long enough to hear about the experiment. I'm beginning to suspect that there is no longer an operation. Moreover, I believe that Doctor Ricou is merely the newest incarnation of Doctor Benway, so you are deluding yourself by thinking you can hide that you are trying to take over his operation.

(commands the fish)

Pick up the next file.

The fish makes no motion, and the young man picks up the file by himself. It is another government file, marked "Fish Production Evaluation of the Coquihalla Steelhead Rearing Pond Near Hope, B.C. by Dale C. Sebastian. CLASSIFIED" He opens a page seemingly at random and

(reads out loud)

"Survival. Since the rearing pond operation began in 1971, survival rates have been measured annually by counting smolts released through the outlet trap, by visually estimating numbers of 'residual' fish remaining after the migration period. July to November mortalities averaged 5% of the population per week. The mortality rate continued to drop throughout the year..."

(to the fish)

Would you like me to stop?

FISH

Please.

YOUNG MAN

Now do you understand my dilemma? After your initial batch escaped and you poisoned yourselves in order to infiltrate and take over your own organisation from the inside, Doctor Benway began manufacturing the "residuals" - shells of fish without souls. Do you understand what happened after those soulless abominations were consumed?

(angrily)

Do you understand what you did to me? You infected me with your rhetoric and turned me into a double agent. Do you realize what Benway would do if he found out that you had no scale to measure reality against?

FISH  
(calmly)  
Calm down. Reality is a point of view. If you missed something in our first conversation, let me ask you again: who are you?

YOUNG MAN  
(cautiously)  
I am a writer.

FISH  
(continues calmly)  
What do you do?

YOUNG MAN  
(a little distressed)  
I write reports.

FISH  
(satisfied)  
Good. Now who am I?

YOUNG MAN  
(probing cautiously)  
Doctor Benway?

FISH  
(annoyed but thoughtful)  
Close. Try again.

YOUNG MAN  
(more confident)  
Doctor Ricou?

FISH  
(pleased)  
Warmer...

YOUNG MAN  
You are...

The fish rapidly shuts the file he is reading, revealing the title of the book underneath it, The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Intellectualism.

YOUNG MAN  
(stunned)  
You are...the book.

FISH  
(smiling)  
Correct. Now read it.

YOUNG MAN  
(reads out loud)  
"The more things change, the more things stay the same. Power lies in knowledge, but power also lies in inflicting pain. Knowledge inflicts pain."

FISH  
(smugly)  
Ah, yes. Who was it that said Cogito ergo doleo?

YOUNG MAN  
(continues reading)  
"Power is in tearing minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing. Do you begin to see what kind of world we are creating? It is the exact opposite of the idiotic utopias that the old reformers imagined. A world of fear and loathing of an indivisible thread of information, a world which will grow not less but more merciless as it refines itself. Progress in our world will be progress towards more pain, because knowledge is pain. Already we are breaking down the habits of thought which have survived from before the revolution. We have cut the links between man and woman and reinforced those between man and man. There will be no loyalty, except loyalty towards knowledge in its purest form and, thus, there will be no distinction between beauty and ugliness. But always -- do not forget this, Mike - always there will be the intoxication of knowledge, constantly increasing and constantly growing subtler."

FISH  
(tears the book from the young man's hands and continues reading)  
"Language, Benway reminds us, 'is a virus from outer space; that's why I'd rather hear your name than see your face. The use of the rheomode suggests that technology might be seen not just as a channel for

communication and performance, but more radically as the environment in which subjects serve as conduits for experience. A virus operates autonomously, without human intervention."

YOUNG MAN

But you had me convinced I am a fish!

FISH

(annoyed)

That's not important. Listen. "The virus attaches itself to a host and feeds off of it, growing and spreading from host to host. Language infects us; its power derives not from its straightforward ability to communicate or persuade but rather from this infectious nature, this power of bits of language to graft itself onto other bits of language, spreading and reproducing, using human beings as hosts. According to Benway, any human being is no more than a conduit for communicative process, a channel for ideas which pass through him. If, as it appears to me, a book is communication, then the author is only a link among many readings, the author is simply a node on a network, through which ideas pass."

(beat)

So tell me again, young man, who are you?

(long beat)

YOUNG MAN

I am a fish.

FISH

What do you do?

YOUNG MAN

I write reports.

FISH

Correction.

YOUNG MAN

(beat)

I...uh, I write reports down.

FISH

Correct. Who am I?

YOUNG MAN  
You are the report that I wrote.

FISH  
Close. Try again.

YOUNG MAN  
You are the book.

FISH  
Correct. What else?

YOUNG MAN  
You write the book.

FISH  
(testing the young man)  
S... So I do not exist?

YOUNG MAN  
Correct, old boy.

FISH  
Because...?

YOUNG MAN  
Fish can't talk.

CODEX  
Correct. What else?

YOUNG MAN  
We do not exist.

CODEX  
Precisely.

FADE OUT:

THE END

#### **iv. source code**

##### *Number One*

...a smallish book... rainbow trout... something about canadian starters... 0999744986... i remember devouring the brain of the author during a naked lunch... circa 1981...

...yeah, something like that... jim bricknell... glc editorial... assorted things from wikipedia... little mementos, morsels of general knowledge that can't exactly be traced to anyone or anything, things plucked from general reference, from which to begin my initial research... an acronym generator from the brunching shuttlecocks... that's also online, i believe... and one called float fishing for steelhead techniques and tackle... dramatically improve your success... 1571880399...

...ah, yes. that was 1995... and around that time... aeon flux... robocop... pop culture christian bop kaballah... ginsu knife iceberg on an ice cream float... do you get my drift?

...a lot of intertextual interzone materials. agent atwood even figures in this somehow... then there are f... five reports from other interzone agents...

##### *Number Two*

...small people, maybe?

that was composed by another deep-cover, dave vedder, working under frank amato in portland; they are both in our catalogue. the two, shall we say, had another... unusual working relationship.

i do.

i don't know their names; all i can remember is that they all worked for the department of recreation and conservation...

be serious! these were government documents... 1982, 1979, 1954, 1976, 1996... 1984... and the zen koans on steelheads and the floating line... by bobarnold or maybe bobarnold, i can't make it out... 1571880402, at any rate...

...the steelhd trout, penned by a haircomb, if you can believe it; name's trey. published by our friend frank, no less... this list is endless!

...sedgwick... sedge wick... spellchek says it should be spelled "sandwich"... i think i'll go with that... stephen drummond sandwich... fourth edifice, trout farming handbook... legbook... i wonder if there is a book for each body part...

...and last, but not least, a free man on captive pisces and practical stylehead fission... cold fission...

not much. dammit! i forgot to write my report to interzone.

i couldn't agree more.

not altogether unpleasant activities, wouldn't you say, old boy?

jesus, that's another frank amato document. anything else?

high spirits, my boy! this is only half the struggle.

only in the fifth edifice, i think. fishing new books. how quaint.

that's about it, old boy. what's left?

i think it's time to play "spin the bok-book ball" again.

v. excerpt from "seahorses and flying fish"

(*"seepferdchen und flugfische"*)

by hugo ball

read by christian bök

tressli bessli nebogen leila

flusch kata

ballubasch

zack hitti zopp

zack hitti zopp

hitti betzli betzli

prusch kata

ballubasch

fasch kitti bimm

zitti kitillabi billabi billabi

zikko di zakkobam

fisch kitti bisch

bumbalo bumbalo bumbalo bamboo

zitti kitillabi

zack hitti zopp

treßli beßli nebogen grugru

blaulala violabimini bisch

violabimini bimini bimini

fusch kata

ballubasch

zick hiti zopp